

## CRIME AND JUSTICE

# FIREARM CERTIFICATE STATISTICS, SCOTLAND, 2014-15

This bulletin presents statistics on the number of Firearm and Shot Gun Certificates on issue under the Firearms Act 1968 (as amended), covering certificates issued by the police in Scotland over the last ten years. The definitions of a firearm and of a shotgun are given in the [Annex](#). The bulletin also provides information on the number of registered firearm dealers in Scotland.

This will be the last Official Statistics publication by the Scottish Government on the number of Firearm and Shot Gun Certificates in Scotland. Police Scotland will take responsibility for future reporting of these statistics.

## Key Points

As at 1 April 2015;

- There were 26,112 Firearm Certificates on issue. This is practically unchanged since the end of March 2014 and has remained broadly stable since 2006.
- There were 48,941 Shot Gun Certificates on issue. This is slightly lower (down 0.5%) than the 49,165 Shot Gun Certificates on issue as at the end of March 2014. Since 2006 the number of Shot Gun Certificates has reduced by 1,033 or 2.1%.
- There were 346 registered firearm dealers in Scotland. This is twelve fewer than the 358 reported as at the end of March 2014.

As at 1 October 2015;

- There were 54,435 unique firearms possessed on certificates, and there were 107,646 unique shotguns possessed on certificates.

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# 1. Background

- 1.1. Statistics on Firearm and Shot Gun Certificates are used to inform [National Outcome 9](#) – ‘we live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger’ as well as [The Strategy for Justice in Scotland](#). They can also be used by a range of stakeholders to monitor trends, for policy research and development, and for research purposes.
- 1.2. The Police Service of Scotland (referred to throughout this bulletin as Police Scotland) is responsible for operational policing in Scotland. The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 changed the policing landscape in Scotland, replacing the previous eight police forces, the Scottish Police Services Authority and the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency from 1 April 2013. The statistics set out in this bulletin cover the second year following the establishment of Police Scotland.
- 1.3. With the establishment of Police Scotland, significant resource has been deployed to develop a new centralised database of Firearm and Shot Gun Certificates, known as SHOGUN. This replaces the previous approach whereby data was collected and held by the eight separate Scottish police forces. SHOGUN is the first national-level firearm licensing system in Scotland and, as such, can be considered to be the source of a new data collection.
- 1.4. This system has led to positive benefits for both the accuracy and depth of information available on firearm licensing in Scotland. When licensing was previously split across the eight legacy police forces, it could be difficult to identify cases where more than one person had access to the same firearm or shotgun if they lived in different force areas. With the establishment of the new SHOGUN system means this uncertainty is removed (alongside other improvements to remove duplicate information and improve data accuracy). The [Annex](#) provides an estimate of the number of duplicate firearms and shotguns that were removed through the introduction of a national-level firearm licensing system.
- 1.5. As a result of the SHOGUN-related improvements to data quality, this bulletin presents snapshot information on the number of shotguns and firearms in Scotland rather than time series analysis. This snapshot is based on the position as at 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015. As in previous bulletins, traditional time series statistics on the number of Shot Gun and Firearm Certificates, and the number of firearm dealers in Scotland is included.
- 1.6. As Police Scotland have devoted time to develop the new SHOGUN database and are the experts on this information, it has been agreed that responsibility for future statistical updates on Firearm Certificates in Scotland will transfer from the Justice Analytical Services division of the Scottish Government to Police Scotland. Users were notified of this change through a

SCOTSTAT update on the 5th October 2015. Going forward Police Scotland will consider on an ongoing basis the best way to produce information on Firearm Certificates, in consultation with users.

- 1.7. With these recent changes to the data collection process and the plan to transfer responsibility for future publications to Police Scotland, the UK Statistics Authority has agreed to a recommendation from Scotland's Chief Statistician that these statistics be published as Official Statistics, rather than National Statistics.
- 1.8. Users are advised to direct any future queries for statistical information on Firearm Certificates to Police Scotland via their contact point at the following link, where requests will get forwarded to the relevant analytical team: <http://www.scotland.police.uk/contact-us/contact-us-form>. In addition to this, if users want to raise any queries with a Scottish Government analyst, they can contact us at the following email address: [JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot](mailto:JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot).

## 2. Commentary

### Firearm and Shot Gun Certificates

- 2.1. There were 26,112 Firearm Certificates on issue as at 1 April 2015. This is practically unchanged compared to the 26,101 Firearm Certificates on issue as at the end of March 2014. The number of individuals who hold a Firearm Certificate has remained broadly stable since 2006.
- 2.2. There were 48,941 Shot Gun Certificates on issue as at 1 April 2015. This is slightly lower (down 0.5%) than the 49,165 Shot Gun Certificates on issue as at the end of March 2014. The number of individuals who hold a Shot Gun Certificate has reduced by 1,033 (or 2.1%) since 2006.

### Number of Firearms and Shotguns

- 2.3. As at 1st October 2015, there were 54,435 unique firearms possessed on certificates, and there were 107,646 unique shotguns possessed on certificates.
- 2.4. This is the first year of reporting on the number of firearms and shotguns in circulation through the new SHOGUN firearm licensing system.
- 2.5. A Firearm or Shot Gun Certificate may permit the holder to possess, purchase or acquire one or more weapons. Therefore, changes in the number of certificates will not necessarily reflect changes in the number of weapons held legally.
- 2.6. As outlined in the [Background](#) note, it has been accepted that previous data collections included an element of double counting on the total number of firearms covered by certificates. Estimates of this duplication are available in the [Annex](#).

### Firearm Dealers

- 2.7. There were 346 registered firearm dealers in Scotland as at 1 April 2015. This is twelve fewer than the 358 reported as at the end of March 2014.

## 3. Annex

### Definitions

- 3.1. Within the definition of the Firearms Act 1968 (as amended), a "**firearm**" means a lethal barrelled weapon of any description from which any shot, bullet or other missile can be discharged. It includes any prohibited weapon, any component part of such a weapon and any accessory to such a weapon designed or adapted to diminish the noise or flash caused by the firing of the weapon.

It is, with certain statutory exceptions, an offence to possess, purchase, or acquire any firearm or ammunition to which Section 1 of the Firearms Act 1968 applies without holding a Firearm Certificate. Section 1 of the 1968 Act applies to all firearms except a shotgun or an air gun.

- 3.2. A "**shotgun**" is defined as a smooth-bore gun (not being an air gun) which:
- (i) has a barrel not less than 24 inches in length and does not have any barrel with a bore exceeding two inches in diameter;
  - (ii) either has no magazine or has a non-detachable magazine incapable of holding more than two cartridges; and
  - (iii) is not a revolver gun. Other smooth-bore guns may require a Firearm Certificate.

It is, with certain statutory exceptions, an offence for a person to possess, purchase, or acquire any shotgun without holding a Shot Gun Certificate.

### Data Quality Statement

- 3.3. This is the first year that statistics from the SHOGUN system have been used to generate firearm information for the Scottish Government. The quality of the data provided by the new system is an improvement on previous practice and can be considered to produce exact counts of Firearm Certificates, Shot Gun Certificates, and items on these certificates.
- 3.4. SHOGUN is a live operational system, and so, on any given day, new applications, renewals, variations or cancellations are at different stages of being processed through the system. The total number of firearm and Shot Gun Certificates on issue, as presented within this bulletin and accompanying tables, are accurate as at the date on which data were extracted from the SHOGUN system.

3.5. The implementation of the SHOGUN system has resulted in greater availability of information on:

- the types of people that own firearms and shotguns in Scotland;
- where in Scotland Firearm and Shot Gun Certificates are issued; and
- greater accuracy in the number and types of weapons owned by individuals in Scotland.

For more information about these data, please contact Police Scotland at: <http://www.scotland.police.uk/contact-us/contact-us-form>.

3.6. As outlined above, the new system has also highlighted and resolved a small number of data quality issues with the previous data collection:

On merging the data from the eight legacy force systems, it was quickly identified that in the migration from eight legacy force systems into one, SHOGUN had allocated each individual gun a unique 'weapon identifier' (WID) serial number. This exercise showed that, under the legacy force recording system, a large number of duplicate guns were created when weapons were shared. Duplicates also arose if two certificate holders resided in different legacy force areas but shared a weapon, as each force reported a single gun within their own return. This has now been rectified with each unique gun allocated a unique WID.

#### Duplication of 'items held on a certificate'

- it was found that approximately 12% of firearms on record across the eight legacy Police Forces (around 11,000 weapons) were duplicate firearms owned by two or more certificate holders (i.e. two or more people each hold a Firearm Certificate to permit access to the same weapon).
- it was found that approximately 16% of shotguns on record across the eight legacy Police Forces (around 21,000 weapons) were duplicate shotguns owned by two or more Shot Gun Certificate holders (i.e. two or more people each hold a Shot Gun Certificate to permit access to the same weapon).

#### European Firearm Passes

- The data on European Firearm Passes were not included as part of the transition to the SHOGUN system, as they were stored differently. Data is only available at this stage on those records that have subsequently been updated (e.g. renewal, or variation), which comprises only a small percentage of all records. Police Scotland anticipate that accurate data on European Firearm Passes will be available in due course.

## **An Official Statistics publication for Scotland**

Official and National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Both undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs and are produced free from any political interference.

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### **How to access background or source data**

The data collected for this statistical bulletin:

- are available on the Scottish Government website.
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact [JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot](mailto:JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot) for further information.

### **Complaints and suggestions**

If you are not satisfied with our service or have any comments or suggestions, please write to the Chief Statistician, 3WR, St Andrews House, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG, Telephone: (0131) 244 0302, e-mail [statistics.enquiries@gov.scot](mailto:statistics.enquiries@gov.scot).

If you would like to be consulted about statistical collections or receive notification of publications, please register your interest at [www.gov.scot/scotstat](http://www.gov.scot/scotstat)  
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