



Statistics on firearm and shotgun certificates, England and Wales: April 2019 to March 2020

This release presents statistics on firearm and shotgun certificates issued by police forces in England and Wales under the Firearms Act 1968 (as amended).

As at 31 March 2020, there were:

- **159,483 firearm certificates on issue** – 0.2% decrease, ending the year-on-year increase seen over the past 3 years.
- **567,358 shotgun certificates on issue** – there has been little variation in numbers over the last 10 years.



Firearm and shotgun certificates on issue as at 31 March 2020

- **586,351 people held a firearm and/or a shotgun certificate**, a 0.8% decrease of 4,951 since last year.

In the year ending 31 March 2020, there were:

97%
Granted

- **7,962 new applications for firearm certificates**, of which 97% were granted and 3% were refused.
- **18,857 new applications for shotgun certificates**, of which 97% were granted and 3% were refused.

- **371 firearms certificates were revoked – a decrease of 1% (-5)** compared with the previous year and 0.2% of the total firearm certificates on issue.
- **1,141 shotgun certificates were revoked – an increase of 2% (+25)** compared with the previous year and 0.2% of the total shotgun certificates on issue.



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1 Introduction

A firearm or shotgun certificate is a type of licence, issued by the police, which allows the holder to possess firearms or shotguns and associated ammunition in Great Britain. Firearm and shotgun certificates are valid for 5 years.

This release covers certificates on issue as at 31 March 2020, as well as historical trend data and police force comparisons. The release also provides information on certificates granted or refused for new and renewal applications, certificates revoked, registered firearms dealers, visitors' permits, European Firearms Passes (EFP) and Article 7 Authorities issued. It also includes figures on the number of people that hold a firearm and/or shotgun certificate, broken down by age and gender, and breakdowns of firearm and shotgun types.

The statistics in this release were extracted from the National Firearms Licensing Management System (NFLMS). The system is continually updated as it is a live operational database, so these statistics are a snapshot of a point in time.

NFLMS:

This system is a register of all people who have applied for, or have been granted, a certificate to possess or acquire a firearm or shotgun and includes registered firearms dealers.

Firearm and shotgun licensing

All persons acquiring, or in possession of, a firearm or shotgun must hold a certificate issued by the chief officer of the police force area in which they reside unless they are otherwise exempt.

To obtain a firearm or shotgun certificate, the chief officer must be satisfied that:

- (i) the applicant has good reason for having the firearm;
- (ii) the applicant is fit to be entrusted with a firearm; and
- (iii) the public safety or peace will not be endangered.

Types of firearms:

Firearms are categorised as rifles, handguns, muzzle-loading handguns, Section 1 shotguns, and other firearm types.

Section 1 shotguns in general are weapons that contain a magazine holding more than two rounds. Section 1 shotguns are held on firearm certificates.

Types of shotguns:

Shotguns are categorised as Section 2 shotguns and other shotgun types.

Section 2 shotguns in general are weapons that may have a magazine restricted to no more than two rounds.

The [user guide](#) provides additional information on this release. It includes the coverage of the data, a glossary of weapon definitions, terms and information on the conventions used in the statistics, and legislation and regulations.

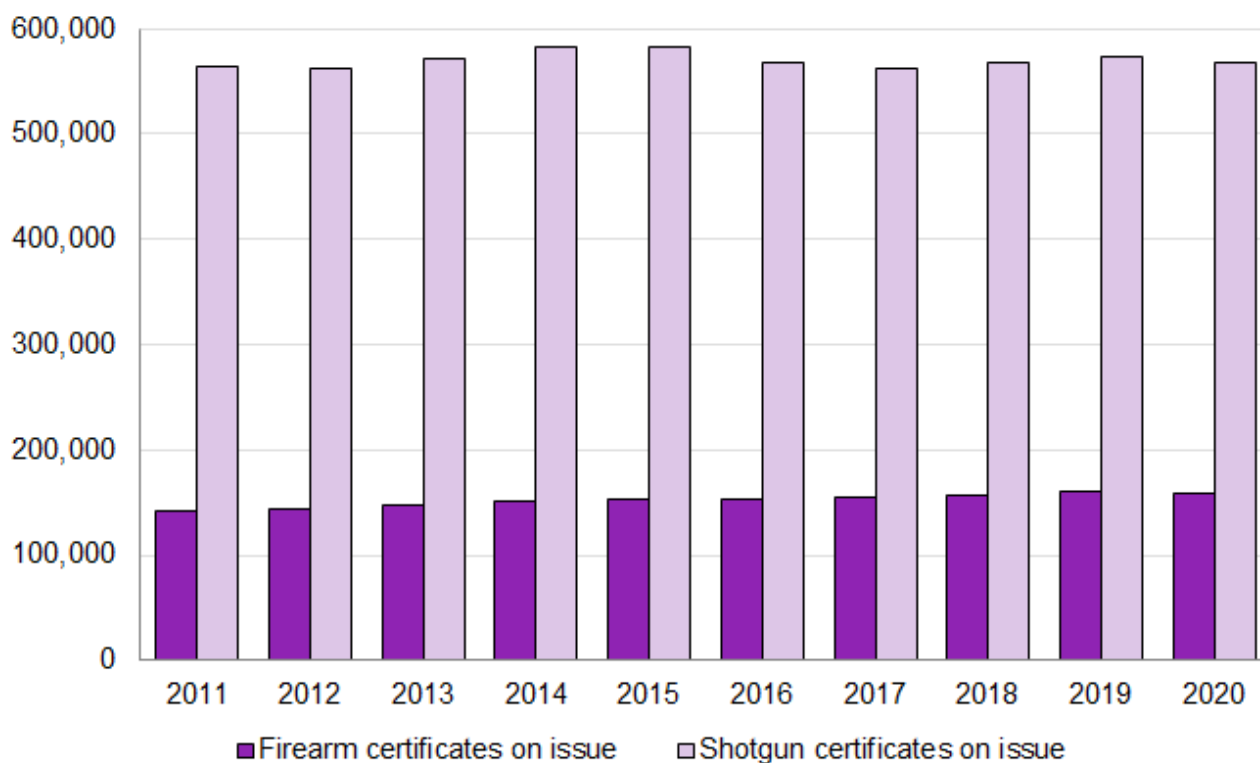
The [accompanying data tables](#) for this statistical release can be found on GOV.UK.

2 Firearm and shotgun certificates on issue

There were 159,483 firearm certificates on issue as at 31 March 2020, a 0.2% decrease of 262 compared with the previous year (159,745) which was the highest number of firearm certificates on issue since comparable records began following the introduction of the NFLMS (138,728 as at 31 March 2009).

There were 567,358 shotgun certificates on issue as at 31 March 2020, a 0.9% decrease of 5,130 compared with the previous year (572,488). As shown in Figure 1, the number of shotgun certificates on issue over the past 10 years has shown small fluctuations (between 561,413 and 582,923) whereas the number of firearm certificates has had a small but steady rise followed by a slight decrease.

Figure 1: Firearm and shotgun certificates on issue as at 31 March 2011 to 2020, England and Wales



Source: [Home Office, Statistics on Firearm and Shotgun certificates data tables, Tables 1 and 3.](#)

Data on firearm and shotgun certificates on issue by police force area are in [Table 1 and Table 3.](#)

3 Weapons covered by firearm and shotgun certificates

As at 31 March 2020, an average of 3.8 firearms were held on a firearms certificate, an increase of 0.1 compared with the previous year. The average number of firearms held on a certificate has shown a steady increase over the past 10 years.

As at 31 March 2020, an average of 2.4 shotguns were held on a shotgun certificate. This has remained stable for the past 12 years.

Types of weapon held on firearm certificates

Of the 604,920 firearms (covered by firearm certificates), the majority (58%) were rifles, followed by 'other' (33%); these proportions have remained stable over the last 5 years. Almost all (94%) of the 201,376 'other' weapon types were sound moderators (189,859).

Rifles are typically used for target shooting or for the control of vermin.

Sound moderators are an accessory subject to certificate control as "items designed to reduce the noise or flash of a firearm".

Types of weapon held on shotgun certificates

Of the 1,383,777 shotguns (covered by shotgun certificates), almost all (over 99%) were Section 2 shotguns. Other shotgun types and shotguns for which no type had been recorded on the NFLMS both accounted for less than 1% (0.3% and 0.07%, respectively).

A Section 2 shotgun may have a magazine restricted to no more than two rounds and is held on a shotgun certificate. The main usage of these types of weapons is vermin control, clay pigeon shooting and sporting purposes.

The [user guide](#) provides further definitions for the other firearm and shotgun types held on certificates.

Data on weapons held on firearm and shotgun certificates by police force area are in [Table 2, Table 4 and Table 15](#).

4 Certificate holders

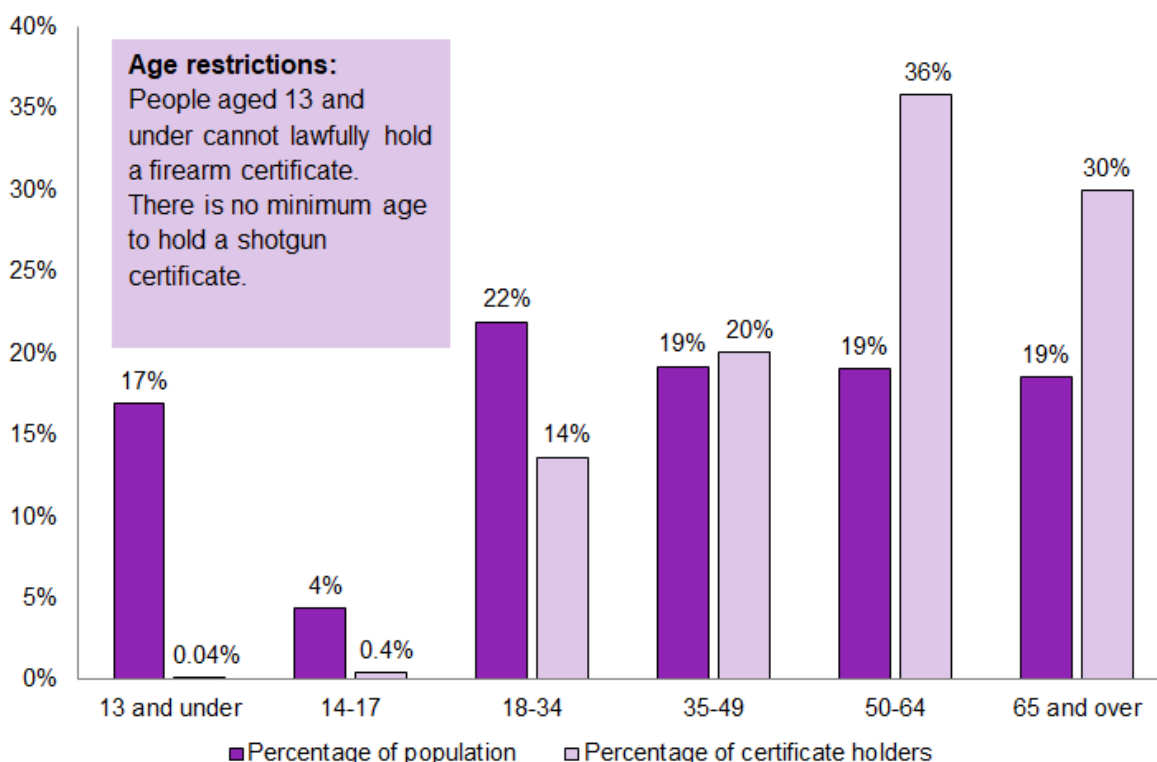
As at 31 March 2020, 586,351 people held a firearm and/or shotgun certificate, a decrease of 0.8% (-4,951) compared with the previous year. Within this total figure are those that only hold a firearm certificate, those that only hold a shotgun certificate and those that hold both types of certificate. A person is only counted once if they hold both firearm and shotgun certificates.

Of the 586,351 certificate holders:

- 94% (550,298) were male.
- 70% (407,872) were aged 18 to 64.
- 0.5% (2,770) were aged 17 years and under.
- The youngest shotgun certificate holder as at 31 March 2020 was aged 7.

For young people under age 14, certain exemptions apply under the Firearms Acts which allow them to possess a firearm or shotgun in certain circumstances. For example, for sporting purposes, for use at a rifle/pistol club or cadet corps, or at a miniature rifle range. Appendix 4 in the Home Office [Guide on Firearms licensing law](#) provides further detail on the laws and exemptions for young people holding certificates.

Figure 2: Firearm and/or shotgun certificate holders as at 31 March 2020 by age group, and proportion of age group in population in England and Wales



Source: [Home Office, Statistics on Firearm and Shotgun certificates data tables, Table 14.](#)

Population estimates - Office for National Statistics, [Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland 2018.](#)

Figure 2 shows that, 50 to 64-year olds are more likely to hold a firearm and/or shotgun certificate than those in younger age groups. Over a third (36%; 210,245) of firearm and/or shotgun certificate holders were aged 50 to 64. However, this age group accounts for only 19% of the total population of England and Wales.

There has been little variation in the number of people that hold a firearm or a shotgun certificate since comparable figures have been available (March 2016).

- As at 31 March 2020, 159,602 people held a **firearm** certificate, a 0.01% decrease of (-15) compared with the previous year.
- As at 31 March 2020, 567,706 people held a **shotgun** certificate, a 0.8% decrease of (-4,379) compared with the previous year.

The characteristics of those that hold a firearm and those that hold a shotgun are very similar, as displayed below in Table 1.

Table 1: People who held a firearm and/or shotgun certificate as at 31 March 2020, by age and gender, in England and Wales

| | People who held a firearm certificate | People who held a shotgun certificate |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Male | 97% (154,030) | 94% (533,441) |
| 13 and under | N/A | 0.04% (247) |
| 14 to 17 years | 0.2% (282) | 0.4% (2,482) |
| 18 to 64 years | 73% (115,905) | 70% (396,290) |
| 65 years and over | 27% (43,413) | 30% (168,687) |

Source: [Home Office, Statistics on Firearm and Shotgun certificates data tables, Table 14.](#)

Notes: People aged 13 and under cannot lawfully hold a firearm certificate.

Firearm and shotguns held on certificates by police force area

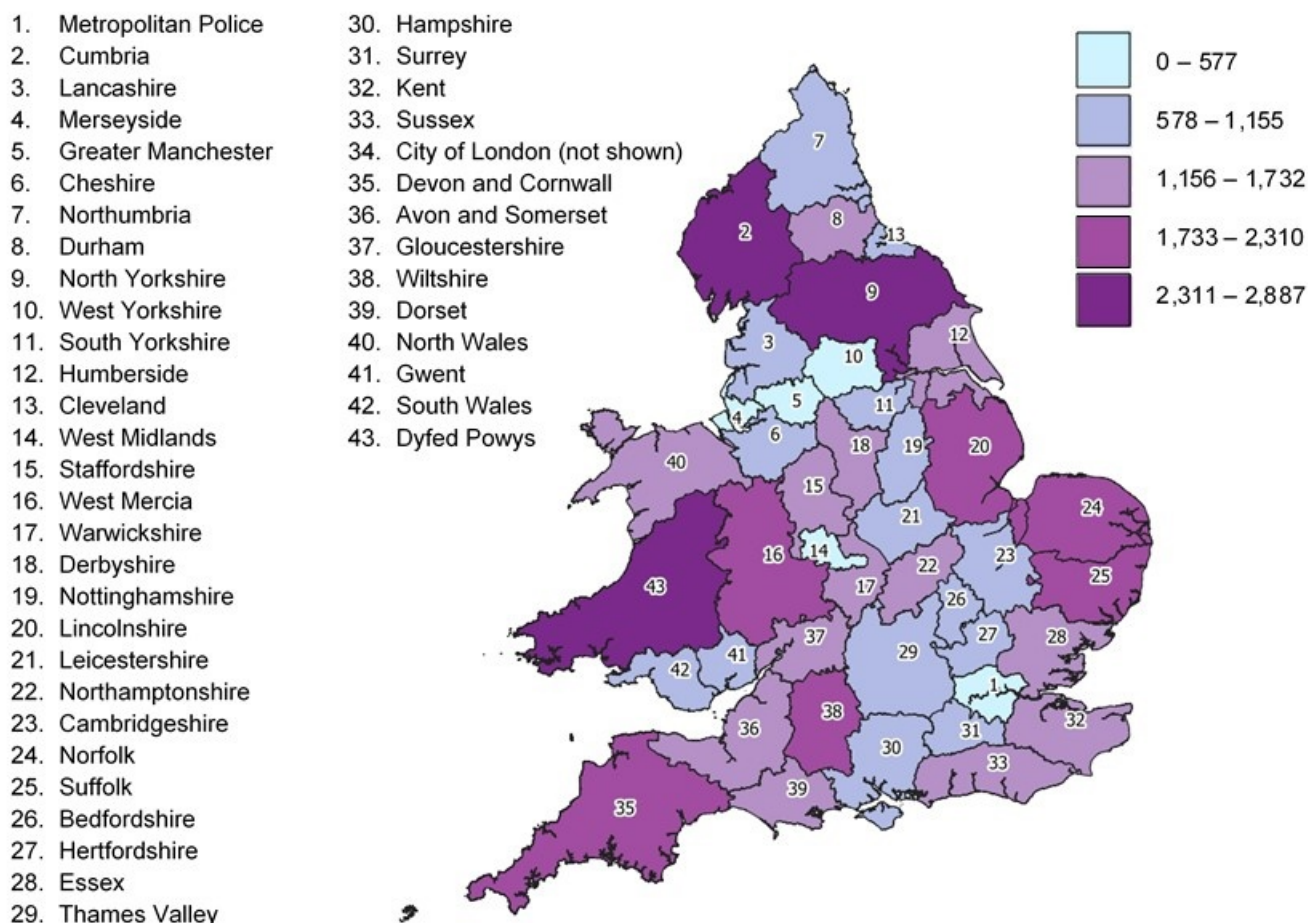
As shown in Figure 3, the areas with the highest number of firearms (held on certificates) per 100,000 people are the rural areas of North Yorkshire (2,887), Dyfed-Powys (2,675) and Cumbria (2,565).

These areas are consistently the police force areas with the highest number of firearms and/or shotguns per 100,000 people. The population in rural areas are often lower than police force areas that cover cities, and firearms and/or shotguns owned here are likely to be used for employment purposes (for example game keeping and farming) and leisure activities (for example target shooting and game shooting).

Areas with the lowest number of firearms (held on certificates) per 100,000 people tend to be in large metropolitan areas in England, as the lowest are in the Metropolitan Police (213), West Midlands (315) and Merseyside (343).

The police force areas correspond to the certificate holder’s primary address. Therefore, it should be noted that the weapon may be stored and used in another police force area.

Figure 3: Firearms per 100,000 people by police force area as at 31 March 2020, England and Wales



Source: [Home Office, Statistics on Firearm and Shotgun certificates data tables, Table 2](#)

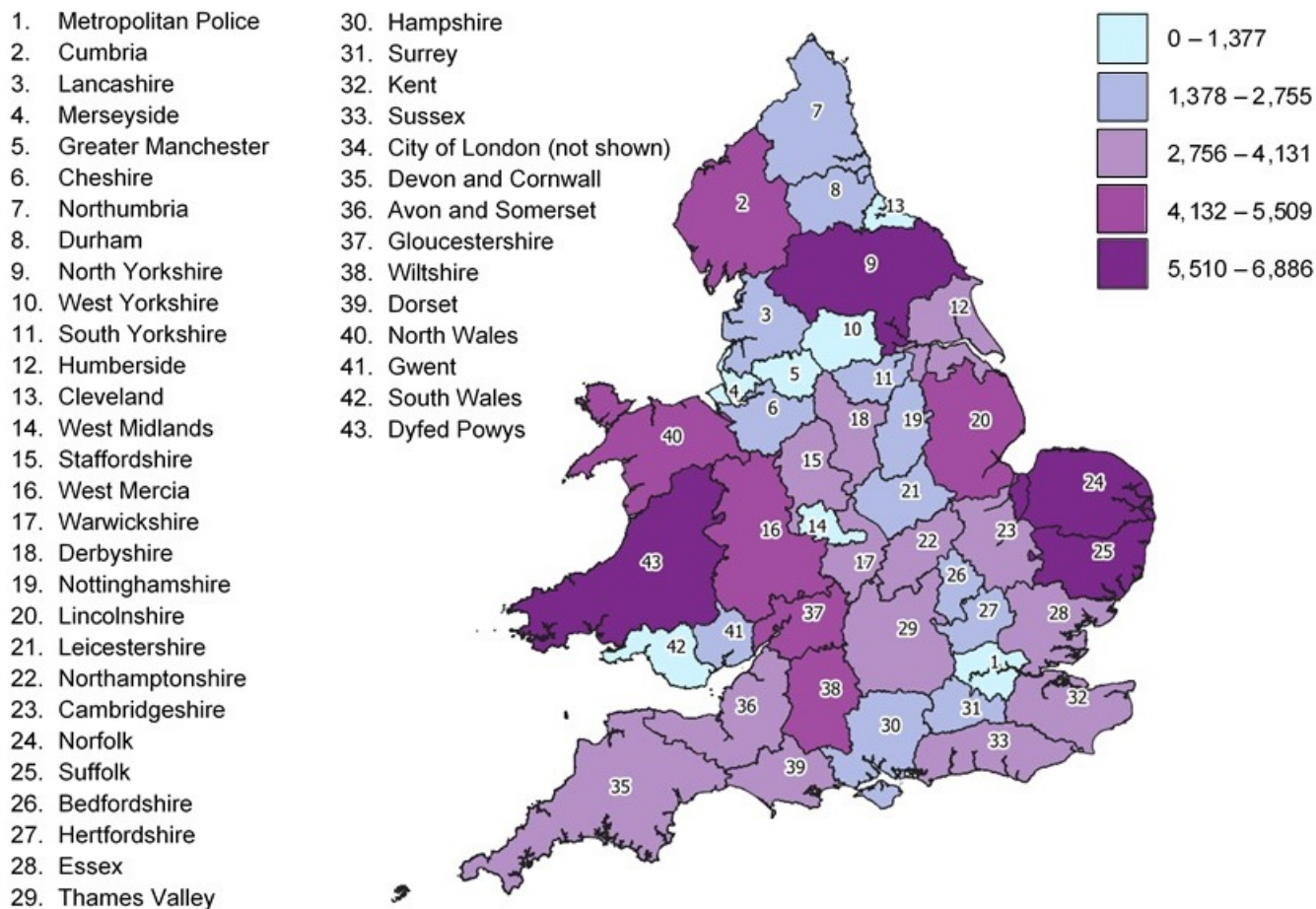
Source for population figures used to produce figures per 100,000 people by police force area: [Office for National Statistics](#). Shape file source: [ONS Geo-portal](#)

Notes: City of London is not included as its mid-2018 population estimate is less than 100,000.

Similar to the geographical patterns seen in Figure 3, the areas with the highest number of shotguns (held on certificates) per 100,000 people as at 31 March 2020 (Figure 4) are also rural areas, with the highest numbers in Dyfed-Powys (6,886), Norfolk (6,569) and Suffolk (5,837).

This is also true for the police force areas with the lowest number of shotguns (held on certificates) per 100,000 people, as the lowest numbers are in Merseyside (549), the Metropolitan Police (565) and Greater Manchester (614).

Figure 4: Shotguns per 100,000 people by police force area as at 31 March 2020, England and Wales



Source: [Home Office, Statistics on Firearm and Shotgun certificates data tables, Table 4](#)

Source for population figures used to produce figures per 100,000 people by police force area: [Office for National Statistics](#).

Shape file source: [ONS Geo-portal](#)

Notes: City of London is not included as its mid-2018 population estimate is less than 100,000

Data on certificate holders by police force area can be found in [Table 13 and Table 14](#).

5 New applications, renewals and revocations

In the year ending 31 March 2020, there were:

- 7,962 **new applications for firearm certificates**, of which only 3% (217) were refused; a slightly higher proportion than the previous year and the highest proportion since the record began.
- 18,857 **new applications for shotgun certificates**, of which only 3% (619) were refused; a slightly higher proportion than the previous year and the highest proportion since the record began.
- 20,786 **firearm certificate renewal applications**, of which almost all (20,736), were granted and just 0.2% (50) were refused.
- 52,635 **shotgun certificate renewal applications**, of which almost all (52,506), were granted and just 0.2% (129) were refused.
- 371 **firearm certificates** were **revoked**, a 1% decrease of (-5) from 376 in the previous year.
- 1,141 **shotgun certificates** were **revoked**, a 2% increase of 25 from 1,116 in the previous year.

Refusals:

An application may be refused if the chief officer of police is not satisfied that the applicant can fulfil the criteria for the grant or renewal of a certificate. Any reason to refuse an application must be clearly justified and explained.

Firearm and shotgun certificates can be revoked by the chief officer of police for the force concerned if they have reason to believe that the holder:

- can no longer be entrusted with firearms in accordance with the [Firearms Act 1968](#),
- is of unsound mind or is otherwise unfit to be entrusted with a firearm and/or shotgun,
- can no longer be permitted to have the firearm and/or shotgun or ammunition to which the certificate relates in their possession without danger to the public safety or to the peace,
- no longer has a good reason for having in their possession, or for purchasing or acquiring, the firearm or ammunition which they are authorised.

Data on new applications, renewals and revocations by police force area are in [Table 2 and Table 4](#).

6 Additional statistics

Registered Firearms Dealers

There were 3,317 registered firearms dealers in England and Wales as at 31 March 2020. This represents a decrease of 3% (-91) compared with the previous year. In the year ending March 2020, there were 1,127 renewal applications from dealers, a 51% increase compared to the previous year but a similar level to the year ending March 2017 (1,280). This follows the 3-year renewal period where dealers must renew their licence.

A firearms dealer wishing to carry on business, including exhibiting at game fairs, arms fairs and other temporary events, in their own or another police force area, must be registered by the chief officer of police as a firearms dealer for that police force area. Therefore, within the total figure of registered firearms dealers, the same dealer may appear more than once if registered in more than one police force area.

Data on registered firearm dealers by police force area are in [Table 6 and Table 7](#).

Visitor's permits

In the year ending 31 March 2020, 1,831 people were covered by individual or group visitors' permits for firearms, representing a 9% decrease of (-185) compared with the previous year. In the same period, there were 6,891 people covered by individual or group visitors' permits for shotguns representing a 4% decrease of (-286) compared with the previous year.

Data on visitors' permits by police force area are in [Table 8, Table 9 and Table 10](#).

European Firearms Pass (EFP)

The EFP is a form of passport for firearms held by EU residents intending to take their certificated firearms or shotguns to another EU Member State. A person must be in possession of a valid firearms and/or shotgun certificate to acquire an EFP.

As at 31 March 2020, 15,914 EFPs were on issue in England and Wales, representing a 1% decrease of (-200) compared with the previous year.

Data on EFPs by police force area are in [Table 11](#).

Article 7 Authorities

Article 7 of the Weapons Directive requires any EU resident wanting to purchase certain types of firearms, or ammunition for such firearms, outside their state of residence must obtain prior authority from their own state. There were 9 applications by firearm and shotgun certificate holders for Article 7 Authorities in the year ending 31 March 2020, compared with 5 in 2019 and 6 in the year ending 31 March 2018.

Data on Article 7 Authorities by police force area are in [Table 12](#).

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