



## Serious Further Offences (SFO) 2020

### Key guidance notes

#### SFO convictions

This bulletin reports SFO conviction figures by the **date of SFO notification** (triggered by the offender's charge and first court appearance for the SFO) and as at **15 September 2020**. For example, 2018/19 SFO conviction figures refer to SFO notifications received in 2018/19 that went on to result in SFO convictions by 15 September 2020. This means that conviction figures are generally **provisional** as a small proportion of cases are yet to conclude.

#### SFO Notification and Reviews

Similarly, figures for SFO notification and reviews completed are by date of SFO notification.

### Main points

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<b>324 SFO convictions from 2018/19 notifications</b>	The number of SFO convictions received to date, suggests numbers have been relatively stable in 2017/18 and 2018/19 and lower than in 2016/17, likely associated with annual decreases in SFO notifications in the last few years
<b>577 SFO notifications received in 2018/19 537 SFO notifications received in 2019/20</b>	Number of annual SFO notifications continues to decrease.
<b>502 SFO reviews from 2018/19 notifications 473 SFO reviews from 2019/20 notifications</b>	The number of SFO reviews completed also continues to decline, in line with decreases in SFO notifications.
<b>Approximately 50% of SFO notifications result in SFO conviction</b>	The number of SFO notifications is not the same as the number of SFO convictions in any period as the SFO may have been committed on a date before the period in question. In any year, in about 50% of notifications either the charge is dropped, or the offender is acquitted; or the offender is convicted of a less serious offence.

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This is the 2020 Serious Further Offence bulletin. It provides statistics covering SFO convictions from 2014/15 to 2018/19 and SFO notifications and reviews from 2014/15 to 2019/20.

Users should see the [background notes](#) in this bulletin and refer to the '[2012 Compendium of Reoffending Statistics and Analysis](#)' for further definitions of the terms used in this bulletin.

## Statistician's comment

“Between 2014/15 and 2016/17, annual SFO notifications and resulting convictions increased markedly as a result of the implementation of the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) 2014<sup>1</sup>.

However, since then, overall numbers of SFO convictions have been relatively stable and lower than the figure for 2016/17.

Although overall convictions figures have stabilised, murder SFO convictions have continued to increase yearly since 2015/16, and this appears to be in line with increases in overall murder convictions (non-SFO and SFO) in the last few years seen at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2019>

The number of SFO convictions related to rape and associated offences have shown a noticeable decrease in the last three years to 2018/19, and this also follows the decreasing pattern seen in rape related convictions generally (link above).

It is likely there has been some impact of COVID-19 on reported number of SFO convictions as a number of cases will not have concluded in court as expected between March 2020 and September 2020. This will be assessed further in future releases.

Annual SFO notifications have also been going down in number since 2016/17, and this is likely to have downward impact on the number of SFO convictions in the next few years.”

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<sup>1</sup> Under the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) 2014 offenders serving short prison sentences are now released on licence and a period of post sentence supervision. Offences which would not have previously been counted as offenders were not subject to probation supervision, now come in to scope and are counted as SFOs

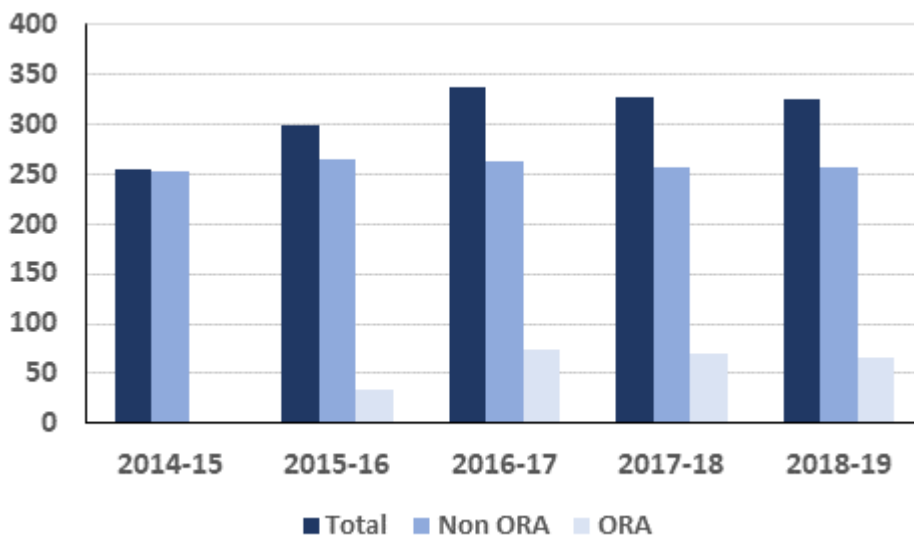
# 1. SFO Convictions

As at 15 September 2020, the number of SFO convictions resulting from SFO notifications received in 2018/19 was 324, of which 91 were for murder and 66 were for rape and associated offences.

The total number of SFO convictions received to date has been relatively stable in the last two years to 2018/19 and slightly lower than the figure for 2016/17.

The introduction of ORA in 2015 led to a noticeable increase in the number of offenders who became subject to post-release supervision. Where those offenders were charged with an SFO, their cases fell to be considered under the SFO Review Procedures. Consequently, there was a marked increase in the number of SFO notifications and marked annual increases in the number of SFO convictions from 2014/15 to 2016/17. However, since 2016/17, annual conviction figures appear to have plateaued, mainly as a result of relatively stable numbers of ORA SFO convictions.

Figure 1: Number of SFO convictions by notification period as at 15 September 2020



## Convictions

About 50% of SFO notifications result in SFO convictions, in other cases, charges are dropped, the offender is acquitted, or the offender is convicted of a less serious offence.

The number of SFO convictions involving murder has been increasing since 2015/16, whereas the number of SFO convictions involving offences related to rape and associated offences has been decreasing since 2016/17.

**Table 1. SFO conviction offences by notification period as at 15 September 2020 for England and Wales**

<b>SFO Conviction Offence</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
<b>Total SFO convictions</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>324</b>
<i>of which ORA</i>	<b>2</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>67</b>
Murder	46	41	54	76	91
<i>of which ORA</i>	1	6	12	18	22
Attempted murder or Conspiracy to commit murder	14	24	15	19	28
<i>of which ORA</i>		6	5	4	4
Manslaughter	12	16	33	30	33
<i>of which ORA</i>	1	2	11	4	7
Rape /Assault by penetration /Assault by penetration of a child under 13 / Attempted rape /Rape of a child under 13	89	106	115	91	66
<i>of which ORA</i>		13	24	19	15
Arson with intent to endanger life	9	12	8	15	11
<i>of which ORA</i>			5	5	3
Kidnapping /Abduction/False imprisonment	21	9	21	21	14
<i>of which ORA</i>		3	2	5	4
Death involving driving or vehicle taking	5	9	7	11	18
<i>of which ORA</i>			1	3	3
Other serious sexual/violent offences	58	81	85	64	63
<i>of which ORA</i>		4	14	12	9

Table notes:

1. "Other serious sexual/violent offences" refer to other serious violent or sexual offence which carries a maximum custodial penalty of more than 10 years.
2. These conviction figures are provisional and subject to change as outstanding cases are completed.
3. Figures include cases where the offender committed suicide or died prior to any trial, where a Court has ruled that they were responsible.
4. Data Sources and Quality. The data have come from administrative IT systems which, as with some large-scale recording systems, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing and may be amended as part of data cleansing or updates.

## **Index Sentence**

A majority of SFO convictions involve offenders who were being supervised having been sentenced to either community supervision or a determinate sentence (their index sentence). Prior to ORA, a majority of SFO convictions involved those sentenced to community supervision; since 2016/17, about 60% of these convictions involve offenders released from prison on a licence, including those on a period of Post Sentence Supervision introduced by ORA, and a small number of indeterminate sentence offenders.

About 5% of all SFO convictions involve an offender whose index sentence was a life sentence (life) or indeterminate sentence for public protection (IPP). (Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 2. Number of SFO convictions by the type of index sentence**

<b>Index Sentence</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
<b>All Index Sentences</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>324</b>
Community Supervision	143	149	140	128	127
Determinate Prison Sentence	99	134	185	176	179
Life	5	6	6	15	7
IPP	7	9	7	8	11

Table notes:

1. These figures are provisional and subject to change as outstanding cases are completed.
2. Index sentence refers to the sentencing disposal imposed by the court which led to probation services supervision of the offender
3. Data are based on the year the notification of the SFO was received by HMPPS and not the date of conviction.
4. Figures include cases where the offender committed suicide or died prior to any trial, where a Court has ruled that they were responsible.
5. Data Sources and Quality. The data have come from administrative IT systems which, as with some large-scale recording systems, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing and may be amended as part of data cleansing or updates

**Table 3. Number of murder SFO convictions by the type of index sentence**

<b>Index Sentence</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
<b>All Index Sentences</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>91</b>
Community Supervision	24	21	24	33	34
Determinate Prison Sentence	21	17	26	35	53
Life Licence	1	2	2	5	0
IPP	0	1	2	3	4

Table notes:

1. These figures are provisional and subject to change as outstanding cases are completed.
2. Index sentence refers to the sentencing disposal imposed by the court which led to probation services supervision of the offender
3. Data are based on the year the notification of the SFO was received by HMPPS and not the date of conviction.
4. Figures include cases where the offender committed suicide or died prior to any trial, where a Court has ruled that they were responsible.
5. Data Sources and Quality. The data have come from administrative IT systems which, as with some large-scale recording systems, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing and may be amended as part of data cleansing or updates

## 2. SFO Notifications and Reviews

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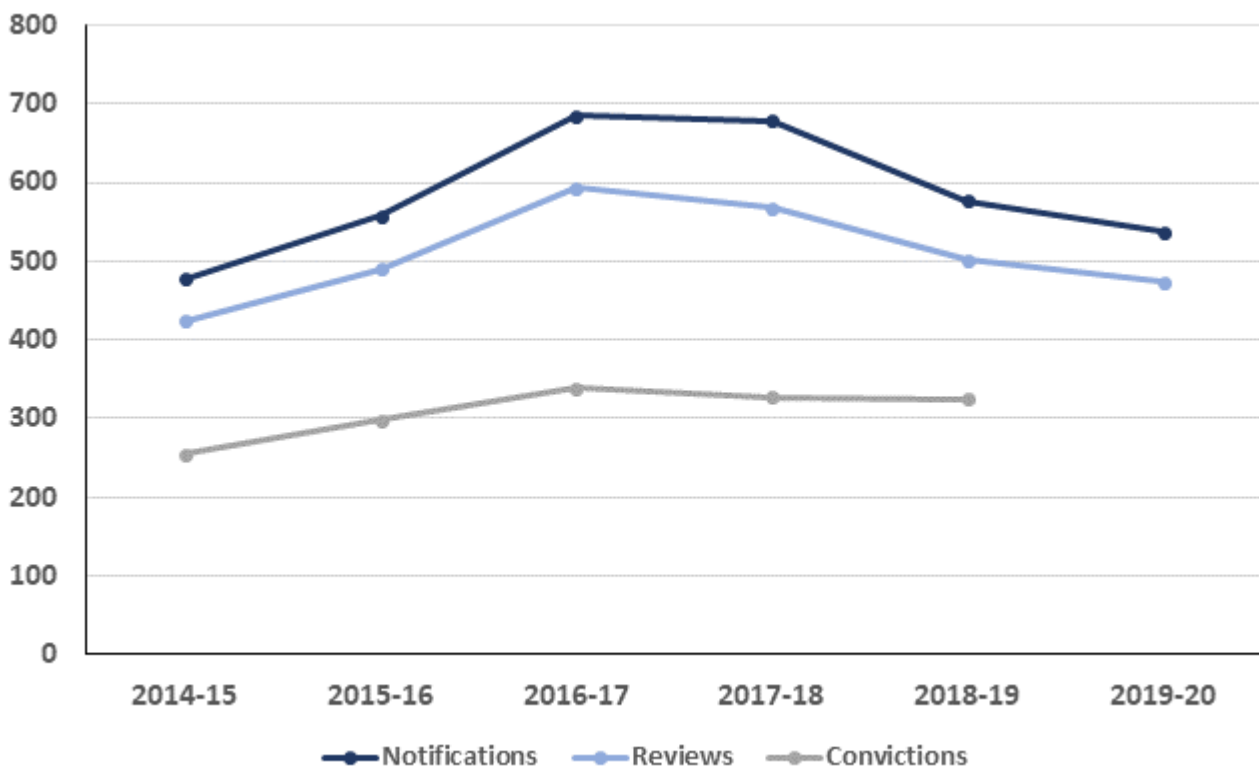
The number of SFO notifications received in 2019/20 was 537, and 473 of these resulted in an SFO review being completed.

Not all SFO notifications result in a review, and about 50% of these notifications eventually result in SFO conviction. (Figure 2 and Table 3). Numbers of notifications and completed reviews in 2019/20 were the lowest they have been in the last five years.

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After increasing from 2014/15 to 2016/17, due to the introduction of ORA, the numbers of SFO notifications and resulting reviews have continued to decrease, and this may explain the corresponding decrease in SFO convictions in recent years. The number of notifications in 2019/20 has decreased by 22% since 2016/17.

**Figure 2: Number of SFO notifications, reviews and convictions as at 15 September 2020**



**Table 4. SFO cases by supervision body. Figures as at 15 September 2020**

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<b>Total notifications</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>685</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>577</b>	<b>537</b>
<i>of which ORA</i>	<b>3</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>116</b>
NPS	332	317	385	392	346	336
<i>of which ORA</i>	1	35	90	76	76	68
CRC	145	240	300	285	231	201
<i>of which ORA</i>	2	27	72	68	45	48
Other	0	1	0	1	0	0
<b>Total reviews</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>568</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>473</b>
<i>of which ORA</i>	<b>2</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>102</b>
NPS	289	270	329	320	291	283
<i>of which ORA</i>	1	29	75	59	65	56
CRC	135	219	264	247	211	190
<i>of which ORA</i>	1	24	66	57	43	46
Other	0	1	0	1	0	0
<b>Total convictions</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>324</b>	
<i>of which ORA</i>	<b>2</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>67</b>	
NPS	179	174	197	186	187	
<i>of which ORA</i>	1	16	40	37	37	
CRC	75	123	141	140	137	
<i>of which ORA</i>	1	18	34	33	30	
Other	0	1		1	0	

Table notes:

1. These figures are provisional and subject to change as outstanding cases are completed.
2. Index sentence refers to the sentencing disposal imposed by the court which led to probation services supervision of the offender
3. Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) occurred in June 2014. The cases that were previously Probation Trust cases prior to TR have been included in NPS data
4. Figures include cases where the offender committed suicide or died prior to any trial, where a Court has ruled that they were responsible.
5. Cases designated as 'other' relate to cases who were released on temporary licence (RoTL) at the time the SFO was committed and the SFO review was completed by the prison
6. Data Sources and Quality. The data have come from administrative IT systems which, as with some large-scale recording systems, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing and may be amended as part of data cleansing or updates

### 3. Description of the Probation SFO Review Procedures

Since 1 December 2008, an SFO review will be triggered when an offender is charged and appears in court for a qualifying offence alleged to have been committed within the probation supervision period or within 28 working days of the supervision period terminating. The list of SFO qualifying offences is based on, but not identical to, Schedule 15A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (now repealed), and can be found as Annex A in the SFO Procedures.

Mandatory SFO reviews are triggered in the following circumstances:

- any eligible offender who has been charged and appears in court for one of the most serious SFOs – murder, manslaughter, other offence causing death, rape, assault by penetration or a sexual offence against a child under 13 years (including attempted offences); and,
- any eligible offender who has been charged and appears in court for another offence on the SFO list and is or has been assessed as high/very high risk of serious harm during their current supervision period or has not been subject to a risk assessment during that period.

A review may be carried out on a discretionary basis in the following circumstances:

- any eligible offender who has been charged and appears in court for an offence, irrespective of whether that offence is a qualifying offence, and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the supervising probation provider have identified public-interest reasons for conducting a review.

The SFO Review Procedures require a notification when an offender is charged and first appears in court for a qualifying offence. The National Probation Service (NPS) or Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) who supervised the offender complete an internal management report, known as an SFO review. Not all notifications result in a review, if the charges are dropped/discontinued or if the offender is acquitted prior to the review being completed. Not all cases which are notified as an SFO will result in a conviction. In any year, in about 50% of cases either the charge is dropped, or the offender is acquitted; or the offender is convicted of a less serious offence.

Users should refer to the '[2012 Compendium of Reoffending Statistics and Analysis](#)' for further definitions of the terms used in this bulletin, and for commentary to help interpret these.



## Further information

### Contact

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office:

Tel: 020 3334 3536

Email: [newsdesk@justice.gov.uk](mailto:newsdesk@justice.gov.uk)

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to the Justice Statistics Analytical Services division of the Ministry of Justice:

Nick Mavron, Head of Prison, Probation, Reoffending and PbR Statistics

Ministry of Justice, 7th Floor, 102 Petty France, London, SW1H 9AJ

Email: [ESD@justice.gov.uk](mailto:ESD@justice.gov.uk)

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