



Serious Further Offences (SFO) 2022

Key guidance notes

SFO convictions

This bulletin reports SFO conviction figures by the **date of SFO notification**, (that is, the date on which the supervising probation region notifies HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) that an offender under its supervision has appeared in court charged with an offence which qualifies for an SFO review). It reports on the number of cases notified in 2020/21 and of those the number which have resulted in SFO convictions, as notified to HMPPS as at **30 September 2022**. This means that conviction figures are **provisional** as a proportion of cases have yet to reach a definitive outcome.

A more detailed description of SFO notifications and reviews is in the [glossary](#) section.

Main points

As at 30 September 2022, there were 245 offenders convicted of an SFO, resulting from 498 notifications received in 2020/21	The number of offenders convicted of an SFO and notified to HMPPS by 30 September 2022, has decreased since 2017/18. The latest figure is likely to reflect the impact of known delays at court.
Total SFO notifications received in 2021/22 was 529. By 30 September 2022, a review had been completed in 425 of these notifications.	The number of SFO notifications received in 2021/22 increased by 6% to 529 compared to the previous year. However, the latest figure is 23% lower than notifications received in 2016/17.
In most years, between 50% to 60% of SFO notifications have resulted in a conviction of an SFO.	For the remaining cases, charges are dropped, the offender is acquitted, or the offender is convicted of a less serious offence.

This bulletin and [associated tables](#) are part of the [Proven Reoffending statistics: October to December 2020](#), and they provide statistics on SFO convictions received by 30 September 2022 and relating to notifications received from 2014/15 to 2020/21, as well as statistics on notifications received from 2014/15 to 2021/22 and their resulting completed reviews. The lag between notification period and publication date for conviction figures is to allow time for most cases to complete the criminal justice process.

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 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) 2014¹. The number of notifications has since trended downwards, the latest figure being a decrease of 23% from 2016/17. However, there was an increase of 6% in the latest year from the year before, likely due to pick up in court activities following relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions.

Latest conviction data indicates a continuing decrease in the annual number of SFO conviction figures since 2017/18. And this is likely a reflection of the decreasing number of notifications received.

We have seen a decrease in the number of offenders convicted for an SFO of murder for a second year (this conclusion holds even if all the outstanding cases that have yet to conclude at court were to result in a guilty plea). This follows the increases we saw in SFO convictions for murder from 2015/16 to 2018/19, partly as a result of the introduction of ORA and [increases in the overall murder convictions \(non-SFO and SFO\)](#) in the same period.

The number of offenders convicted for SFO offences related to rape and associated offences has trended downwards in the last three years to 2019/20, and this also reflects the general [decreasing](#) rape-related convictions generally.

The number of annual SFO notifications has been decreasing since 2016/17. There is likely to be a corresponding decrease in the number of SFO convictions as cases progress through the courts.

We are proposing to not include in future bulletins (1) separate SFO figures for ORA cases due to the amount of time that has passed since ORA was introduced in 2015 and (2) breakdowns by National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) due to the unification of the Probation Service on 26 June 2021. A consultation running until 30 November 2022 has been published alongside this bulletin inviting users' feedback.”

For feedback related to the content of this bulletin, please contact us at:
statistics.enquiries@justice.gov.uk

¹ 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 into scope and are counted as SFOs.

1. SFO convictions

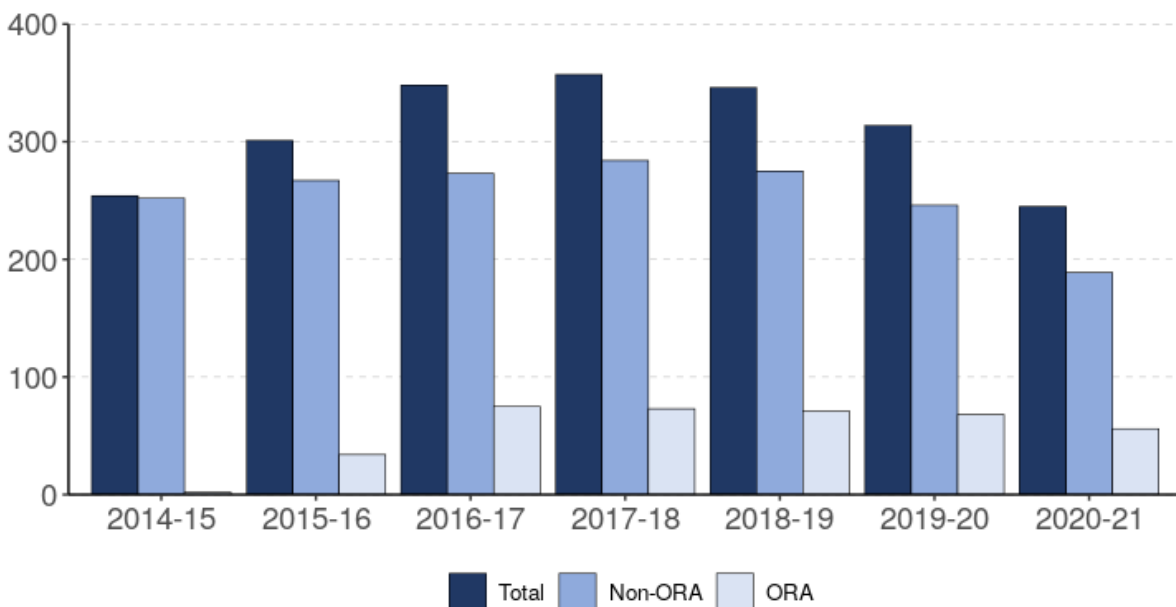
As at 30 September 2022, there were 245 offenders convicted of an SFO, resulting from 498 notifications received in 2020/21 (compares with 271 convictions as at 30 September 2021 out of 536 notifications received in 2019/20)

The number of offenders convicted of an SFO, per notification year, has been decreasing since 2017/18. The latest figure is likely to reflect the impact of known delays at court.

The introduction of ORA in 2015 led to a significant increase in the number of offenders who became subject to post-release supervision. Where those offenders were charged with an SFO, their cases came into scope 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 offenders convicted of an SFO from 2014/15 to 2017/18.

There are 20 cases for 2019/20 and 72 cases for 2020/21, as at 30 September 2022, where HMPPS is yet to be informed of an outcome following court proceedings. In most instances, these cases have not yet concluded at Court.

Figure 1: Number of SFO convictions by year of notification as at 30 September 2022
[Source: Table 1]



Convictions as a Proportion of Notifications

In most years, about 50% to 60% of SFO notifications result in conviction for an SFO. In the remaining cases, either charges are dropped, the offender is acquitted, or the offender is convicted of a less serious offence.

Of the 245 offenders convicted of an SFO, resulting from 498 notifications received in 2020/21, 55 offenders were convicted for murder and 49 were convicted for rape and other serious sexual offences, as at 30 September 2022

The number of offenders convicted for murder increased from 2015/16 to 2018/19, partly as a result of the introduction of ORA and [increases in the overall murder convictions \(non-](#)

[SFO and SFO](#)) in the same period. However, available data suggest successive decreases in the number of SFO murder convictions in the last two years.

The number of offenders convicted for offences related to rape and other serious sexual offences has been on a downward trend since 2016/17, mirroring the decreasing pattern in [overall rape-related convictions](#) in the same period.

Index sentence

The majority of SFO convictions involve offenders who were being supervised either on a community sentence or a determinate custodial sentence (their index sentence). Prior to ORA, those sentenced to community supervision made up the majority of SFO convictions; whereas since 2016/17, about 60% of SFO 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.

Consistently fewer than 10% of all SFO convictions involve an offender whose index sentence was a life sentence (life) or indeterminate sentence for public protection (IPP) (Source: Tables 2 and 3).

2. SFO notifications and reviews

Total SFO notifications received in 2021/22 was 529. As at 30 September 2022, reviews were completed for 425 of these notifications.

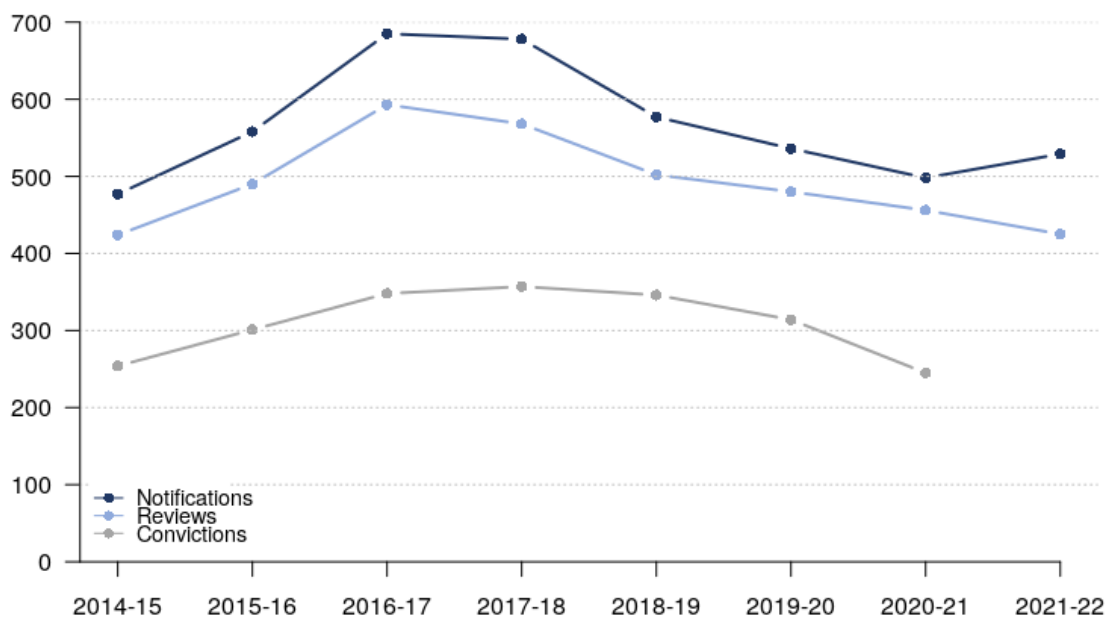
The number of SFO notifications received in 2021/22 increased by 6% to 529 compared to the previous year. Numbers of notifications and completed reviews in 2021/22 have broadly decreased since 2016/17.

In most years, about 50% to 60% of SFO notifications have resulted in a conviction of an SFO.

For the remaining cases, either charges are dropped, the offender is acquitted, or the offender is convicted of a less serious offence. (Figure 2 and Table 4).

After increasing from 2014/15 to 2016/17, in part due to the introduction of ORA, the number of SFO notifications and resulting reviews has since trended downwards, and there is a corresponding decrease in SFO convictions in recent years. The latest notification figure for 2021/22 is a decrease of 23% from 2016/17 but an increase of 6% from the previous year (partly due to relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions).

Figure 2: Number of SFO notifications, reviews and convictions by year of notification as at 30 September 2022 [Source: Table 4]²



² We publish SFO conviction figures with a one-year lag to allow time for most cases to complete the criminal justice process.

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 18 of the Sentencing Code and can be found as Annex A in the Probation Service Serious Further Offence procedures Policy Framework.

SFO reviews are automatically triggered and must be completed (formerly known as mandatory reviews) in the following cases:

- any eligible supervised individual who has been charged with (including ancillary and inchoate offences such as attempt, conspiracy to commit, incitement to commit and encouraging or assisting commission): murder, manslaughter, other specified offences causing death, rape or assault by penetration, a sexual offence against a child under 13 years of age, or qualifying offences under terrorism or anti-terrorism legislation during a period of management by Probation

A review is conditionally triggered and must be completed (formerly known as discretionary reviews) in the following cases: -

- any eligible supervised individual who has been charged with another offence on the SFO qualifying list committed during a period of management by Probation who is or has been assessed as high/very high risk of serious harm during the current sentence; and
- any eligible supervised individual who has been charged with another offence on the SFO qualifying list committed during a period of management by Probation, prior to completion of an initial risk assessment.

The SFO Review Procedures require a notification when an offender is charged and first appears in court for a qualifying offence. The organisation which supervised the offender completes an internal management report, known as an SFO review. Not all notifications result in a review, e.g. where 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 40% to 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.

4. Glossary

SFOs

The HMPPS SFO Review Procedures require the Probation Service to complete an internal management report, known as an SFO review when an offender is charged with a qualifying offence alleged to have been committed during a period of probation supervision or within 28 working days of the supervision period terminating.

SFO Notification

The Probation Service will complete an SFO notification when an offender, who meets the criteria for an SFO review appears in court for the first time having been charged with an eligible offence under the SFO review procedures.

SFO notification date

The date the supervising probation region submits the paperwork to HMPPS to notify that an offender under supervision has been charged and appeared in court for an offence which qualifies for an SFO review.

SFO Review

Following the submission of an SFO notification, the Probation Service completes an SFO review which considers whether the action taken by probation to supervise the offender was reasonable and defensible and to identify any further action to promote good practice or address any areas for improvement.

Further information

Contact

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General enquiries about the statistical work of the Ministry of Justice can be e-mailed to: statistics.enquiries@justice.qsi.gov.uk

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URL: www.gov.uk/government/collections/proven-reoffending-statistics

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