

# Firearms – Possession of prohibited weapon

## **Possession, purchase or acquisition of a prohibited weapon or ammunition**

Firearms Act 1968 (section 5(1), 5(1A))

Indictable only:

Section 5(1)(a), (ab), (aba), (ac), (ad), (ae), (af), (c)  
Section 5(1A)(a)

Triable either way:

Section 5(1)(b)  
Section 5(1A)(b), (c), (d), (e), (f), (g)

Maximum: 10 years' custody

Offence range: [To come]

This offence is subject to statutory minimum sentencing provisions.  
See STEPS TWO AND THREE for further details.

**STEP ONE**  
**Determining the offence category**

The court should determine the offence category with reference **only** to the factors listed in the tables below. In order to determine the category the court should assess **culpability** and **harm**.

**Culpability A – Type of weapon**

Use the table below to identify an initial culpability category based on the **type of weapon** only. This assessment focuses on the nature of the weapon itself only, not whether the weapon was loaded or in working order.

Where the weapon or ammunition does not fall squarely in one category, the court may need to adjust the starting point in STEP TWO.

<b>Type 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Automatic weapon or other weapon (including component part) that is capable of being immediately lethal to more than one person</li> </ul>
<b>Type 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All other weapons (including component part) falling between Type 1 and Type 3</li> <li>Ammunition (where not at Type 3)</li> </ul>
<b>Type 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stun gun or other weapon (including component part) that is [usually non-lethal / not designed to be lethal]</li> <li>Very small quantity of ammunition</li> </ul>

### Culpability B – Other culpability factors

The court should weigh all the factors set out below in determining the offender's culpability.

**Where there are characteristics present which fall under different levels of culpability, the court should balance these characteristics to reach a fair assessment of the offender's culpability.**

<b>Culpability</b> demonstrated by one or more of the following:	
<b>High culpability:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firearm discharged</li> <li>• Firearm loaded</li> <li>• Firearm/ammunition used or intended for use for criminal purpose</li> </ul>
<b>Medium culpability:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firearm/ammunition produced (where not at High culpability)</li> <li>• Firearm held with compatible ammunition</li> <li>• Firearm/ammunition intended for use (where not at High culpability)</li> </ul>
<b>Lower culpability:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firearm/ammunition not produced</li> <li>• No use or intention to use</li> </ul>

### Final culpability category

Identify the final culpability category in the table below, considering both **A – Type of weapon** and **B – Other culpability factors**.

		<b>A – Type of weapon</b>		
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>B – Other culpability factors</b>	<b>High</b>	Culpability category A	Culpability category A	Culpability category B
	<b>Medium</b>	Culpability category A	Culpability category B	Culpability category C
	<b>Lower</b>	Culpability category B	Culpability category C	Culpability category C

<b>Harm</b>	
The court should consider the steps set out below to determine the level of harm that has been <b>caused or was risked</b> .	
This step is assessed by reference to the <b>risk of injury/death or disorder</b> occurring and/or <b>actual alarm/distress</b> caused.	
When considering the risk of harm, relevant considerations may include the number and vulnerability of people exposed, especially children, accessibility and visibility of the weapon, and the location of the offence.	
<b>Category 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serious alarm/distress caused</li> <li>• Offence committed in circumstances where others put at high risk of serious injury or death</li> <li>• Offence committed in circumstances where there is a high risk of serious disorder</li> </ul>
<b>Category 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited alarm/distress caused</li> <li>• All other cases falling between category 1 and category 3</li> </ul>
<b>Category 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No/minimal alarm/distress caused</li> <li>• Offence committed in circumstances where others put at no/minimal risk of serious injury or death</li> <li>• Offence committed in circumstances where there is no/minimal risk of serious disorder</li> </ul>

**Where there are characteristics present which fall under different levels of harm, the court should balance these characteristics to reach a fair assessment of the harm.**

<b>STEP TWO</b>			
<b>Starting point and category range</b>			
Having determined the category at step one, the court should use the corresponding starting point to reach a sentence within the category range below. The starting point applies to all offenders irrespective of plea or previous convictions.			
Table 1 should be used if the offence is subject to statutory minimum sentencing provisions, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Table 2 should be used for all other cases. See STEP THREE for further details on the minimum sentencing provisions and exceptional circumstances.			
<b>TABLE 1</b>	<b>Offences subject to the statutory minimum sentence (Section 5(1)(a), (ab), (aba), (ac), (ad), (ae), (af), (c), section 5(1A)(a))</b>		
<b>Harm</b>	<b>Culpability</b>		
	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
<b>Category 1</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>
	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>
<b>Category 2</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>
	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>
<b>Category 3</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>
	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>

<b>TABLE 2</b>	<b>Offences not subject to the statutory minimum sentence</b>		
<b>Harm</b>	<b>Culpability</b>		
	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
<b>Category 1</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>
	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>
<b>Category 2</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>
	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>
<b>Category 3</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>	<b>Starting point</b>
	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>	<b>Category range</b>

The table below contains a **non-exhaustive** list of additional factual elements providing the context of the offence and factors relating to the offender. Identify whether any combination of these, or other relevant factors, should result in an upward or downward adjustment from the sentence arrived at so far. In particular, relevant recent convictions are likely to result in an upward adjustment. In some cases, having considered these factors, it may be appropriate to move outside the identified category range.

### Factors increasing seriousness

#### **Statutory aggravating factors:**

- A1. Previous convictions, having regard to a) the **nature** of the offence to which the conviction relates and its **relevance** to the current offence; and b) the **time** that has elapsed since the conviction
- A2. Offence committed whilst on bail

#### **Other aggravating factors:**

- A3. Offence was committed as part of a group or offender has contact with criminal associates, including through the purchase or supply of drugs (except where already taken into account at step one)
- A4. Commission of offence whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- A5. Firearm/ammunition kept as part of a large-scale accumulation of weapons
- A6. Firearm modified to increase lethality and/or to conceal, or firearm under section 5(1)(b) able to be converted to live firing weapon
- A7. Abuse of position of registered firearms dealer
- A8. Offender prohibited from possessing weapon or ammunition because of previous conviction (where not charged separately)
- A9. Offences taken into consideration
- A10. Failure to comply with current court orders
- A11. Offence committed on licence or post sentence supervision

### Factors reducing seriousness or reflecting personal mitigation

- M1. No previous convictions **or** no relevant/recent convictions
- M2. Good character and/or exemplary conduct
- M3. Firearm incomplete or incapable of being discharged
- M4. Came into possession involuntarily
- M5. Voluntary surrender of firearm/ammunition
- M6. No knowledge or suspicion of presence of firearm/ammunition
- M7. Unaware firearm/ammunition is prohibited
- M8. Genuine mistake about whether covered by lawful authorisation
- M9. Held on behalf of another through coercion, intimidation, or exploitation

- M10. Serious medical condition requiring urgent, intensive or long-term treatment
- M11. Age and/or lack of maturity
- M12. Mental disorder or learning disability
- M13. Sole or primary carer for dependent relatives
- M14. Co-operation with the police

**STEP THREE**  
**Minimum Terms**  
 [To come]

**STEP FOUR**  
**Consider any factors which indicate a reduction for assistance to the prosecution**  
 The court should take into account sections 73 and 74 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (assistance by defendants: reduction or review of sentence) and any other rule of law by virtue of which an offender may receive a discounted sentence in consequence of assistance given (or offered) to the prosecutor or investigator.

**STEP FIVE**  
**Reduction for guilty pleas**  
 The court should take account of any reduction for a guilty plea in accordance with section 144 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and the *Guilty Plea* guideline.

Where a **mandatory minimum sentence** has been imposed under section 51A of the Firearms Act 1968, the court must ensure that any reduction for a guilty plea does not reduce the sentence to less than the mandatory minimum.

**STEP SIX**  
**Totality principle**  
 If sentencing an offender for more than one offence, or where the offender is already serving a sentence, consider whether the total sentence is just and proportionate to the overall offending behaviour in accordance with the *Offences Taken into Consideration and Totality* guideline.

**STEP SEVEN**  
**Ancillary orders**  
 In all cases the court should consider whether to make ancillary orders.

***Forfeiture and destruction of firearms and cancellation of certificate***  
 The court should consider ordering forfeiture or disposal of any firearm or ammunition and the cancellation of any firearms certificate. Section 52 Firearms Act 1968 provides for the forfeiture and disposal of firearms and the cancellation of firearms and shotgun certificates where a person is convicted of one or more offence under the Firearms Act 1968 (other than an offence relating to an air weapon) and is given a custodial sentence or a community order containing a requirement not to possess, use or carry a firearm. The court may order the forfeiture or disposal of air weapons under paragraphs 7 and 8 Part II to Schedule Six Firearms Act 1968.

**Serious Crime Prevention Order**  
 The court may consider the criteria in section 19 of the Serious Crime Act 2007 for the imposition of a Serious Crime Prevention Order.

**STEP EIGHT**

**Reasons**

Section 174 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 imposes a duty to give reasons for, and explain the effect of, the sentence.

**STEP NINE**

**Consideration for time spent on bail**

The court must consider whether to give credit for time spent on bail in accordance with section 240A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003.