

Firearms – Possession with intent to cause fear of violence

Possession with intent to cause fear of violence

Firearms Act 1968 (section 16A)

Indictable only

Maximum: 10 years' custody

Offence range: [To come]

This is a specified offence for the purposes of section 226A (extended sentence for certain violent or sexual offences) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003.

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.

The categorisations below are indicative only and should not be applied mechanistically. Courts should take care to ensure the categorisation is appropriate for the specific weapon by moving up or down a category where necessary. Where the weapon or ammunition does not fall squarely in one category, the court may need to adjust the starting point in STEP TWO.

Type 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firearm or shotgun prohibited under section 5 (whether or not the mandatory minimum sentence applies) (where not at Type 2)
Type 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weapon prohibited under section 5(1)(b) • Firearm, shotgun or air weapon for which a certificate is required • Realistic imitation firearm¹ or readily convertible imitation firearm²
Type 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air weapon that is not prohibited and for which no certificate is required • Imitation firearm (where not at Type 2)

¹ Drop-down box to link to relevant legislative definitions.

² Drop-down box to link to relevant legislative definitions.

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.

Culpability demonstrated by one or more of the following:	
High culpability:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intention falling just short of intent to endanger life • Conduct intended to maximise fear or distress • Sophisticated nature of offence/significant planning • Leading role where offending is part of a group activity • Firearm discharged • Prolonged incident
Medium culpability:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firearm produced with threats of violence (where not at high culpability) • Firearm loaded or held with compatible ammunition but not discharged • Significant role where offending is part of a group activity • Some degree of planning • Other cases falling between high and lower culpability
Lower culpability:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No use • No intention to cause injury to persons • Other cases where firearm produced or visible • Lesser role where offending is part of group activity • Little or no planning or unsophisticated offending • Conduct limited in scope and duration

Culpability category

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

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

<p>Harm</p> <p>The court should consider the steps set out below to determine the level of harm that has been caused or was risked.</p>	
<p>This step is assessed by reference to the risk of injury/death or disorder occurring and/or actual harm caused.</p> <p>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.</p>	
<p>Category 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serious physical and/or psychological harm caused • Offence committed in circumstances where person(s) put at high risk of serious physical injury or death • Offence committed in circumstances where there is a high risk of serious disorder
<p>Category 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less serious physical harm and/or serious alarm/distress caused • Serious property damage caused • All other cases falling between category 1 and category 3 because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Factors in both 1 and 3 are present which balance each other out; and/or ○ The harm falls between the factors as described in 1 and 3
<p>Category 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited alarm/distress caused • Limited property damage caused • Offence committed in circumstances where person(s) put at no/minimal risk of serious physical injury or death • Offence committed in circumstances where there is no/minimal risk of serious disorder

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.

Where separate charges apply, for example in relation to any injury caused, the court should have regard to totality (see step seven).

STEP TWO			
Starting point and category range			
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.			
Harm	Culpability		
	A	B	C
Category 1	Starting point	Starting point	Starting point
	Category range	Category range	Category range
Category 2	Starting point	Starting point	Starting point
	Category range	Category range	Category range
Category 3	Starting point	Starting point	Starting point
	Category range	Category range	Category range

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:

Factors reducing seriousness or reflecting personal mitigation

STEP THREE

Minimum Terms

[To come once finalised]

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

Dangerousness

The court should consider whether having regard to the criteria contained in Chapter 5 of Part 12 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 it would be appropriate to impose an extended sentence (section 226A).

STEP SIX

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 SEVEN

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 EIGHT

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 NINE

Reasons

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

STEP TEN

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.

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