

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Police Recorded Drug Seizures and Arrests in Northern Ireland: Monthly Update to 31 March 2017

(Providing final figures for 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017)

Published 17 May 2017

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This bulletin provides the final figures on drug seizures and arrests recorded by the police in Northern Ireland during the financial year 2016/17, which runs from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. It includes details of the number of drug seizure incidents, the weight or quantity of drugs seized by drug type and format and the number of persons arrested for drug offences.

All statistics referred to in this bulletin, along with supplementary information are available in the accompanying [supporting spreadsheet](#) which can be downloaded from the [PSNI Drug Seizure Statistics website](#).

Definition of a drug seizure incident: The definition of a drug seizure is a drug controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971) which is seized, recovered, found by the PSNI (including intercepted in the post), found on the person, in a vehicle etc. It also includes drugs found in a public open space or elsewhere and which are handed into the police. Please note that the drugs seized by the Border Force are reported by the Home Office and therefore are excluded from the PSNI figures in accordance with national guidance and also in order to avoid duplication of the statistics when collated at UK level.

Belfast City policing district breakdown: While being only one policing district, Belfast City accounts for approximately 30 per cent of all drug seizure incidents recorded in Northern Ireland. It includes four local policing teams based in Lisburn Road (South), Tennent Street (North), Strandtown (East) and Woodbourne (West). To assist in the understanding of the statistics, drug seizure incidents have been captured at this geographic level from the start of 2016/17 and are presented as part of this bulletin. Such disaggregation prior to 2016/17 is not available.

Contents

	Page
Overview	3
Section 1 Seizure Incidents	3
Section 2 Quantity of Drugs Seized: Comparison of 2016/17 with 2015/16	5
Section 3 Commercial Cannabis Cultivation Statistics	6
Section 4 Drug-Related Arrests	7
Appendices	8
Notes	10

Figures, Tables and Charts

	Page
Table 1 Key statistics for drug seizure incidents, commercial cultivation of cannabis and drug arrests, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16	3
Figure 1 Drug Seizure Incidents since 2006/07	3
Figure 2 Number of drug seizure incidents by month, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16	3
Figure 3 Number of drug seizure incidents by drug type, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16	4
Figure 4 Number of drug seizure incidents by policing district, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16	4
Table 2 Incidents involving the seizure of cannabis, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16	6
Table 3 Cannabis farm discoveries by policing district, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16	6
Figure 5 Drug-related arrests since 2006/07	7
Figure 6 Number of drug-related arrests by month, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16	7
Table 4a Drug seizure incidents by type and format, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16	8
Table 4b Quantity of drugs seized by type and format, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16	9
Table 5 Number of drug seizures and arrests by policing district, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16	10

Overview

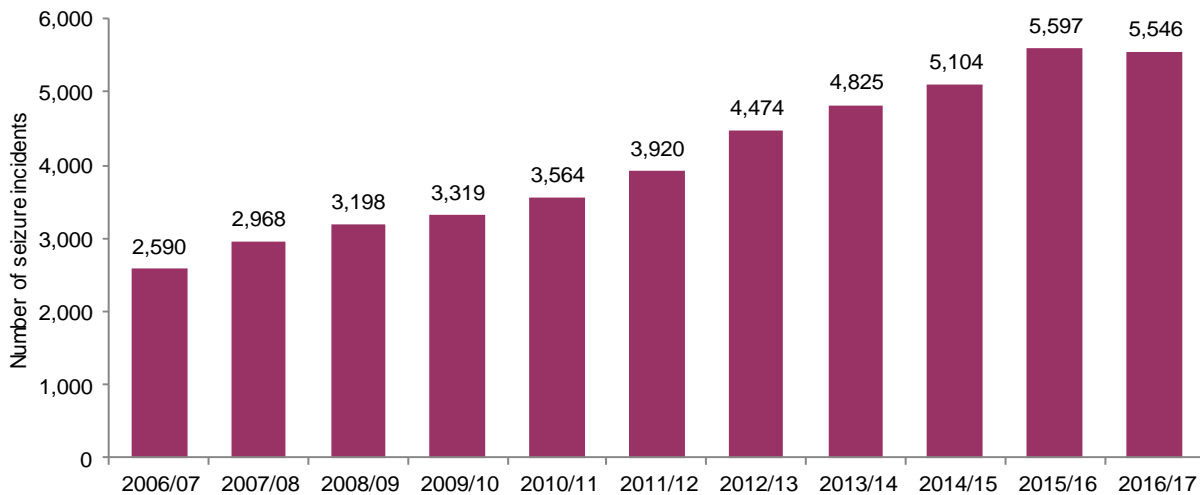
Table 1 Key statistics for drug seizure incidents, commercial cultivation of cannabis and drug arrests, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16

	2015/16	2016/17	Change
Drug seizure incidents	5,597	5,446	-51 (-0.9%)
Incidents classified as cannabis farms	52	39	-13 (-25.0%)
Drug-related arrests	2,953	2,702	-251 (-8.5%)

Section 1 – Seizure Incidents

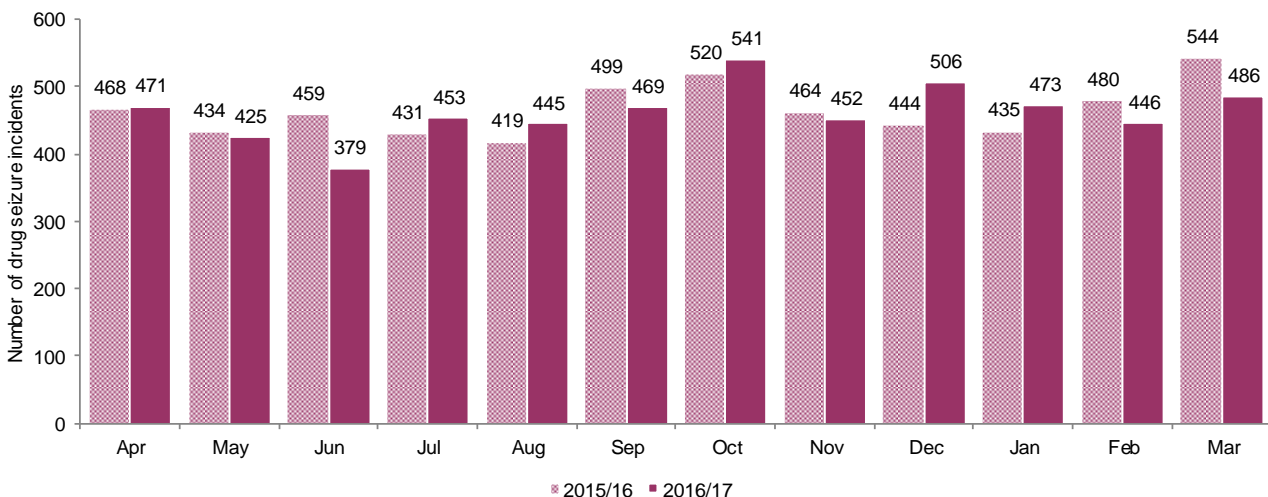
- There were 5,446 drug seizure incidents during 2016/17 in Northern Ireland, a decrease of 0.9% (51 seizure incidents) on the 5,597 seizure incidents recorded in 2015/16 and the second highest level recorded since 2006/07.
- The number of drug seizure incidents increased year on year from 2006/07 to reach 5,597 seizure incidents in 2015/16, more than double the number of incidents recorded in 2006/07. The fall in the number of seizure incidents between 2015/16 and 2016/17 is the first seen in ten years; the last decrease occurred between 2005/06 (2,767 seizure incidents) and 2006/07 (2,590 seizure incidents).

Figure 1 Drug seizure incidents since 2006/07



- Seizure incidents in 2016/17 have ranged from 379 in June 2016 to 541 incidents in October 2016. Monthly levels in 2016/17 have been higher than the equivalent month in 2015/16 on six occasions. The largest variations were observed between December 2015 and December 2016 (+62) and between June 2015 and June 2016 (-80). The number of drug seizure incidents in June 2016 (379 incidents) was the lowest in the past 24 months and the only time a monthly level was lower than 400.
- Monthly fluctuations can be affected by specific targeted campaigns, such as Operation Torus which concentrates on the issue of street level drug dealing. This campaign was run during September / October and February / March in 2015/16 and 2016/17 and may have contributed to the levels seen in these months.

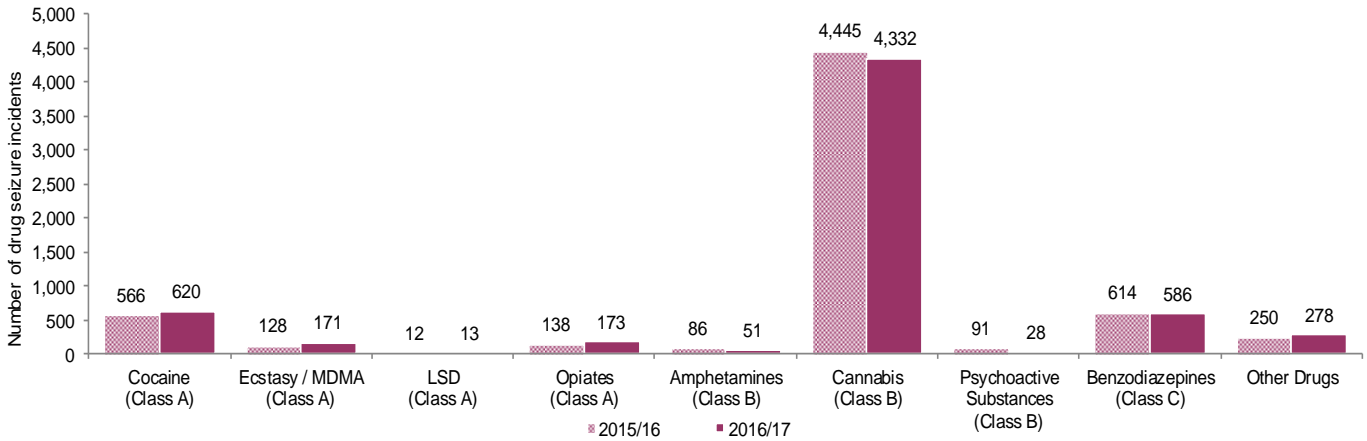
Figure 2 Number of drug seizure incidents by month, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16



Seizure Incidents by Drug Type: Comparison of 2016/17 with 2015/16

- Cannabis was the most commonly seized drug during 2016/17, with 4,332 seizures involving cannabis being recovered. This is 113 fewer than the number of seizure incidents in 2015/16, a decrease of 2.5%.
- The second most commonly seized drug was cocaine. There were 620 incidents involving the seizure of cocaine in 2016/17, up from 566 during 2015/16 (an increase of 9.5%).
- Benzodiazepine seizures accounted for the third largest number of seizure incidents in 2016/17 with 586 seizures, 28 fewer than during 2015/16 when 614 incidents were recorded. The most commonly seized benzodiazepine was diazepam (525 incidents).
- Further information of seizure incidents by drug type is available in the [supporting spreadsheet](#).

Figure 3 Number of drug seizure incidents by drug type, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16

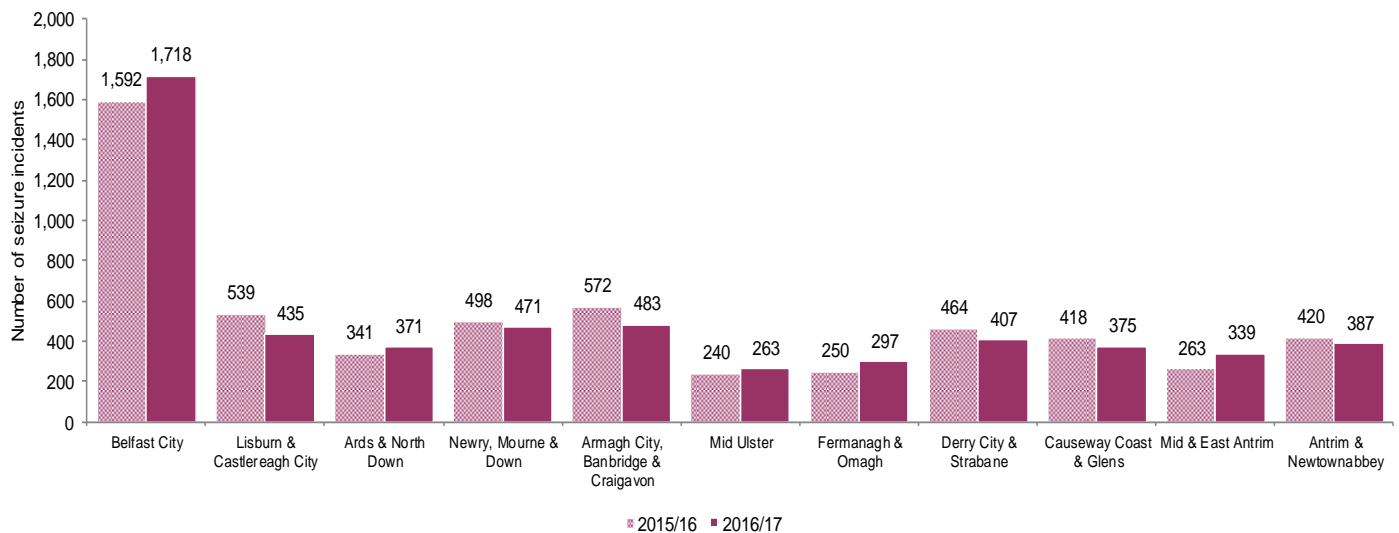


Note: A seizure incident can involve more than one drug type, seizure figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.

Seizure Incidents by Police District: Comparison of 2016/17 with 2015/16

- The largest number of seizure incidents occurred in Belfast City policing district with 1,718 incidents recorded, followed by Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon (483 seizure incidents), Newry, Mourne & Down (471 seizure incidents) and Lisburn & Castlereagh City (435 seizure incidents).
- The largest falls in the number of seizure incidents were encountered in Lisburn & Castlereagh City (-104) and Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon (-89), while the largest increases were observed in Belfast City (126) and Mid & East Antrim (76).
- Of the 1,718 drug seizure incidents that took place in Belfast City policing district in 2016/17, 650 were made in South (the local policing team based in Lisburn Road), followed by 496 in North (based in Tennent Street). West (based in Woodbourne) and East (based in Strandtown) showed respective levels of 296 and 276 seizure incidents.

Figure 4 Number of drug seizure incidents by policing district, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16



Section 2 – Quantity of Drugs Seized: Comparison of 2016/17 with 2015/16

Class A

- The weight of cocaine powder seized in 2016/17 (67.1kg) was higher than that seized in 2015/16 (46.0kg), an increase of 46.0%.
- There were 5,980 ecstasy tablets recovered by the PSNI in 2016/17 compared with 10,435 ecstasy tablets seized in 2015/16, a decrease of 42.7%. The weight of ecstasy powder seized in 2016/17 was 1.7kg, a 37.9% decrease on that seized during 2015/16 (2.7kg).
- In 2016/17, there were 2,060 LSD microdots seized, a decrease of 20.3% on 2015/16 when 2,586 LSD microdots were recovered.
- The amount of opiate powder seized by the PSNI in 2016/17 was 5.1kg, up from 0.8kg in 2015/16. The volume of liquid opiates seized in 2016/17 was 480.8mls, the same as that recovered in 2015/16. Quantities of opiates in tablet formats also dropped, decreasing from 502 tablets seized in 2015/16 to 73 in 2016/17. Opiates in wraps format saw an increase from 163 wraps recovered in 2015/16 to 456 in financial year 2016/17.

Class B

- The weight of herbal cannabis recovered during 2016/17 (266.6kg) was 14.4% higher than that in 2015/16 when 233.2kg were seized. Over a third of this quantity was seized in Belfast City policing district (89.4kg).
- There was a 52.5% decrease in the quantity of cannabis resin seized in 2016/17 when compared with 2015/16 (86.7kg down from 182.4kg). More than half of the cannabis resin was recovered in Mid Ulster policing district (52.0kg), including a single seizure of 49.8kg in November 2016.
- There were 2,461 cannabis plants recovered in 2016/17. This represents a 59.5% decrease on 2015/16 when 6,081 plants were seized.
- The amount of amphetamine powder seized by the PSNI in 2016/17 was 1.8kg, a 94.2% decrease on that seized during 2015/16 (31.7kg). There were 68 amphetamine tablets recovered in 2016/17, compared with 445 tablets in 2015/16.
- The weight of controlled psychoactive stimulants powder seized during 2016/17 (3.2kg) was much less than that seized in 2015/16 when 13.8kg were recovered. Mephedrone accounted for 0.04kg all of the overall weight of controlled psychoactive stimulants powder seized in 2016/17, compared with 0.1kg in 2015/16. Other controlled psychoactive substances seized during 2016/17 amounted to 3.2kg, down from 13.7kg in 2015/16.

Class C

- There were 168,500 benzodiazepine tablets seized in the course of financial year 2016/17, a drop of 20.0% from the 210,668 tablets seized in 2015/16.
- The majority of benzodiazepine seizures during 2016/17 consisted of diazepam tablets (151,903). This was 19,017 fewer tablets than that seized in 2015/16, a decrease of 11.1%.
- The quantity of 'other' benzodiazepine tablets recovered in 2016/17 was less than half of the number seized in 2015/16 (16,597 tablets, down from 39,748). The majority of this fall related to alprazolam tablets; while the number of seizure incidents of these tablets increased from 7 to 57, the quantity of tablets seized fell from 36,771 in 2015/16 to 15,354 in 2016/17. Other benzodiazepines seized in 2016/17 included phenazepam (1,045 tablets seized), temazepam (157 tablets) and nitrazepam (37 tablets).

Other controlled drugs

- Some of the controlled substances recovered are classified to 'Other Drugs' due to having been less commonly seized in Northern Ireland or because of their novelty nature. Overall, the amount of 'other' drug tablets seized in financial year 2016/17 was less than a fifth of that seized in 2015/16, dropping to 19,815 tablets from 114,489 tablets. Of those substances seized during 2016/17, noticeable seizures included 6,340 tablets of Zopiclone tablets (Class C), 6,283 Tramadol tablets (Class C) and 1,009 tablets of 2C-B (Class A).
- There was an overall drop in the number of 'other' drug ampoules seized from 6,051 in 2015/16 to 1,289 ampoules in 2016/17. The majority of ampoules seized in 2016/17 consisted of class C anabolic steroids (1,279 ampoules); there were also 5,199 anabolic steroids tablets seized, up from 3,345 in 2015/16.
- Not all drugs are tested to authenticate substances. When testing is not applied, the drug seizure statistics are classified in accordance with the investigating officer's assessment of the drug type seized based on their experience and knowledge of the illegal drug trade in Northern Ireland. At the time of compilation of the data, around 35 seizures were pending forensics examination and as a result were not included in the seizure incident figures.

Section 3 – Commercial Cannabis Cultivation Statistics

Incidents Involving the Seizure of Cannabis Plants by PSNI: Comparison of 2016/17 with 2015/16

- Of all incidents involving the seizure of cannabis plants or cannabis cultivation equipment in 2016/17, 39 were classified as a cannabis farm as per the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) definition¹. This is a 25.0% decrease on 2015/16, when 52 incidents were classified as a cannabis farm.
- During 2016/17, 24 of those incidents involved the recovery of 25 plants or more, while 15 incidents involved the discovery of less than 25 plants but in locations that were deemed, due to the equipment recovered, to be qualified as cannabis farms as per the NPCC definition.

Table 2 Incidents involving the seizure of cannabis, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16

Cannabis farms ¹	2015/16	2016/17	Change
Cases where 25 plants or more were seized	32	24	-8
Cases where no plants or less than 25 plants were seized and factory equipment was recovered	20	15	-5
Total number of incidents classified as cannabis farms	52	39	-13

Cannabis Farm Discoveries by Policing District: Comparison of 2016/17 with 2015/16

- The highest number of cannabis farms discovered by the PSNI during 2016/17 was in Belfast City policing district with twelve discoveries, followed by Ards & North Down policing district with six discoveries and Causeway Coast & Glens policing district with five discoveries.
- Six policing districts have seen a decrease in the number of cannabis farms discovered during 2016/17 when compared with 2015/16 whereas three policing districts showed an increase. Lisburn & Castlereagh City and Antrim & Newtownabbey policing districts had the same number of discoveries in both 2015/16 and 2016/17 (with three and two discoveries respectively).
- There were no cannabis farms uncovered in either Mid Ulster or Fermanagh & Omagh policing districts during 2016/17.

Table 3 Cannabis farm discoveries by policing district, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16

Policing district	2015/16	2016/17	Change
Belfast City	13	12	-1
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	3	3	0
Ards & North Down	2	6	4
Newry, Mourne & Down	4	3	-1
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	5	1	-4
Mid Ulster	4	0	-4
Fermanagh & Omagh	2	0	-2
Derry City & Strabane	3	4	1
Causeway Coast & Glens	4	5	1
Mid & East Antrim	10	3	-7
Antrim & Newtownabbey	2	2	0
Northern Ireland	52	39	-13

¹ 2012 NPCC definition: *Cultivation of cannabis should be regarded as 'commercial' if:*

Twenty-five or more cannabis plants, at any stage of growth, are being or have been grown OR Any premises shall be deemed a cannabis farm if the premises, or part therein, have been adapted to such an extent that normal usage would be inhibited and usually present within the premises, or part therein, are items solely concerned for the production of cannabis, i.e.: hydroponics system, high intensity lighting, ventilation/extraction fans, any other associated equipment, and/or abstraction of electricity.

Section 4 – Drug-Related Arrests

A **drug-related arrest** is counted when a person is arrested and processed through custody for one or more drug-related offences. This is a count of custody records and not persons; a person may have been arrested on more than one occasion during the time periods presented in this section.

- During 2016/17 there were 2,702 drug-related arrests. This constitutes a decrease of 8.5% on 2015/16 when 2,953 arrests for drug-related offences were recorded.
- The number of arrests for drug offences increased year on year from 1,726 in 2006/07 to 2,867 arrests in 2013/14, before decreasing slightly to 2,831 in 2014/15. The number increased again to 2,953 during 2015/16, the highest level recorded since 2006/07. The current level of 2,702 drug-related arrests during 2016/17 is 251 lower than the 2015/16 level, and the lowest in the past five years.

Figure 5 Drug-related arrests since 2006/07

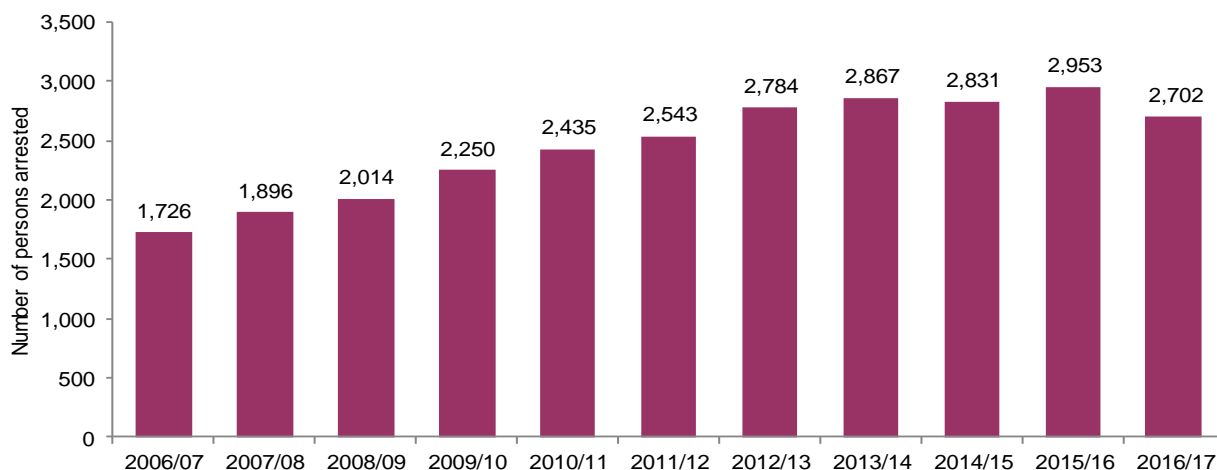
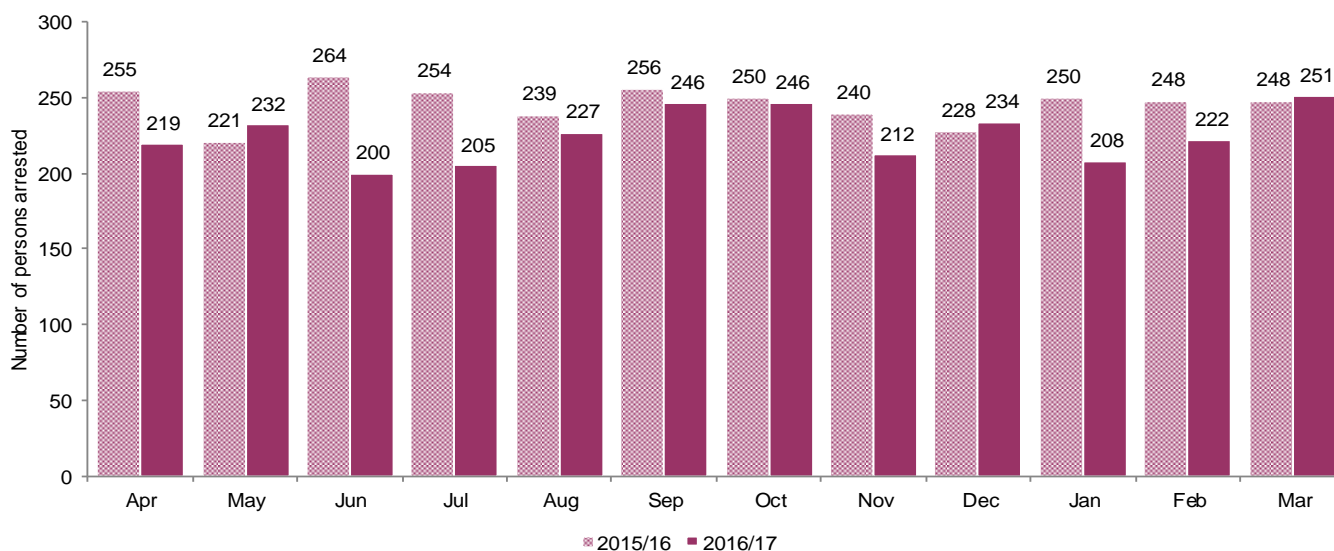


Figure 6 Number of drug-related arrests by month, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16



- The number of drug-related arrests during 2016/17 ranged from 200 in June 2016 (the lowest level over the past two years) to 251 in March 2017. By comparison the number of arrests during 2015/16 ranged from 221 in May 2015 to 264 in June 2015 (the highest level in the past two years).
- Overall, the number of drug-related arrests was lower for nine of the months during 2016/17 when compared with the corresponding months in 2015/16, with only May 2016 (+11), December 2016 (+6) and March 2017 (+3) showing increases.
- The number of arrests for drug offences in 2016/17 varied across the policing districts, ranging from 97 drug arrests in Mid Ulster policing district to 921 in Belfast City policing district. Within Belfast City policing district during 2016/17 there were 361 arrests for drug offences in South (local policing team based in Lisburn Road), followed by 247 in North (based in Tennent Street), 159 in West (based in Woodbourne) and 154 in East (based in Strandtown).

Appendices

Table 4a Drug seizure incidents by type and format, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16

Drugs Seized ¹ – Number of Incidents ³		2015/16	2016/17	Change
Cocaine (Class A)	Powder	532	594	62
	Wraps	42	34	-8
Ecstasy (Class A)	Powder	40	39	-1
	Tablets	93	137	44
	Wraps	1	0	-1
LSD (Class A)	Microdots	7	8	1
	Powder	0	1	1
	Tablets	5	4	-1
Opiates (Class A)	Ampoules	0	1	1
	Millilitres	17	17	0
	Patches	2	3	1
	Powder	53	77	24
	Tablets	7	8	1
	Twists	7	8	1
	Wraps	59	67	8
Amphetamine (Class B)	Powder	73	43	-30
	Tablets	8	3	-5
	Wraps	6	5	-1
Cannabis (Class B)	Capsules	0	1	1
	Herbal	3,723	3,602	-121
	Joints	474	413	-61
	Oil	1	11	10
	Plants	155	147	-8
	Resin	535	584	49
Psychoactive Stimulants (Class B)	Millilitres	2	0	-2
	Powder	87	28	-59
	Tablets	2	0	-2
	Wraps	1	0	-1
Benzodiazepines (Class C)	Powder	7	4	-3
	Tablets	623	607	-16
Other Drugs ²	Ampoules	21	18	-3
	Crystals	0	0	0
	Herbal	3	1	-2
	Microdots	1	1	0
	Millilitres	2	8	6
	Patches	1	5	4
	Powder	78	75	-3
	Psilocin	4	8	4
	Tablets	165	188	23
	Wraps	3	3	0

¹ Not all drug seizures are subject to forensic testing to officially confirm the drug type seized. When testing is not applied, the PSNI's drug seizure statistics are classified in accordance with the investigating officer's assessment of the drug type seized based on their experience and knowledge of the illegal drug trade in Northern Ireland.

² Other drugs include anabolic steroids, buprenorphine, GHB, ketamine, khat, piperazines, tramadol, zopiclone and magic mushrooms.

³ As each seizure incident can involve more than one drug type, seizure figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.

Table 4b Quantity of drugs seized by type and format, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16

Drugs Seized ¹ – Quantities		2015/16	2016/17	Change
Cocaine (Class A)	Powder (kg)	46.0	67.1	21.1
	Wraps	75	56	-19
Ecstasy (Class A)	Powder (gms)	2,688.2	1,669.4	-1,018.8
	Tablets	10,435	5,980	-4,455
	Wraps	1	.	-1
LSD (Class A)	Microdots	2,586	2,060	-526
	Powder (gms)	.	0.5	0.5
	Tablets	20	8	-12
Opiates (Class A)	Ampoules	.	1	1
	Millilitres	480.8	480.8	0.0
	Patches	2	28	26
	Powder (kg)	0.8	5.1	4.2
	Tablets	502	73	-429
	Twists	12	20	8
	Wraps	163	456	293
Amphetamine (Class B)	Powder (kg)	31.7	1.8	-29.9
	Tablets	445	68	-377
	Wraps	16	7	-9
Cannabis (Class B)	Capsules	.	182	182
	Herbal (kg)	233.2	266.6	33.5
	Joints	648	533	-115
	Oil (gms)	2.0	720.7	718.7
	Plants	6,081	2,461	-3,620
	Resin (kg)	182.4	86.7	-95.8
Psychoactive Stimulants (Class B)	Millilitres	0.2	.	-0.2
	Powder (kg)	13.8	3.2	-10.5
	Tablets	138	.	-138
	Wraps	1	.	-1
Benzodiazepines (Class C)	Powder (gms)	12.59	8.2	-4.4
	Tablets	210,668	168,500	-42,168
Other Drugs ²	Ampoules	6,051	1,289	-4,762
	Crystals (gms)	.	.	0.0
	Herbal (gms)	446.01	9.6	-436.4
	Microdots	24	6	-18
	Millilitres	21.0	656.0	635.0
	Patches	3	12	9
	Powder (kg)	13.9	0.4	-13.5
	Psilocin	38	546.4	508
	Tablets	114,489	19,815	-94,674
	Wraps	6	4	-2

Note: In this table, where the weight of drugs seized is 0.0, this means the weight seized was less 0.05 grams, Mls or kgs while '.' indicates that no drugs were seized. More detailed information on the drugs and quantities seized is published in the supporting spreadsheet.

¹ Not all drug seizures are subject to forensic testing to officially confirm the drug type seized. When testing is not applied, the PSNI's drug seizure statistics are classified in accordance with the investigating officer's assessment of the drug type seized based on their experience and knowledge of the illegal drug trade in Northern Ireland.

² Other drugs include anabolic steroids, buprenorphine, GHB, ketamine, khat, piperazines, tramadol, zopiclone and magic mushrooms.

Table 5 Number of drug seizures and arrests by policing district, 2016/17 compared with 2015/16

Policing District	Seizure Incidents			Arrests		
	2015/16	2016/17	Change	2015/16	2016/17	Change
Belfast City: of which	1,592	1,718	126	944	921	-23
<i>East</i> ¹	-	276	-	-	154	-
<i>North</i> ¹	-	496	-	-	247	-
<i>South</i> ¹	-	650	-	-	361	-
<i>West</i> ¹	-	296	-	-	159	-
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	539	435	-104	233	221	-12
Ards & North Down	341	371	30	121	123	2
Newry, Mourne & Down	498	471	-27	185	168	-17
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	572	483	-89	249	235	-14
Mid Ulster	240	263	23	137	97	-40
Fermanagh & Omagh	250	297	47	175	168	-7
Derry City & Strabane	464	407	-57	282	282	0
Causeway Coast & Glens	418	375	-43	285	193	-92
Mid & East Antrim	263	339	76	134	136	2
Antrim & Newtownabbey	420	387	-33	208	158	-50
Northern Ireland	5,597	5,546	-51	2,953	2,702	-251

¹ *Belfast City policing district has four local policing teams based in Lisburn Road (South), Tennent Street (North), Strandtown (East) and Woodbourne (West).*

Notes

Statistics on drug seizures are based on electronic and paper returns that are completed by police officers when they make a drug seizure. The statistics are checked for completeness with local districts and with the PSNI Organised Crime Branch and are also cross-referenced against other internal records of drug seizures. Not all drugs are tested to authenticate substances. When testing is not applied, the PSNI's drug seizure statistics are classified in accordance with the investigating officer's assessment of the drug type seized based on their experience and knowledge of the illegal drug trade in Northern Ireland.

The statistics contained in this bulletin are based on drug seizures that were recorded by the police. As a result, increases or decreases in the quantity and type of drugs seized along with drug-related arrests can be affected by specific targeted police operations thus accounting for some of the year on year variations (i.e. increased police enforcement action can result in increased seizures and arrests). Also, not all drug use will come to the attention of the police and therefore these statistics should be considered along with other measures of drug prevalence in Northern Ireland for users to get a more comprehensive overview of the drug situation in Northern Ireland. Copies of this bulletin are available from the [PSNI website](#).

Change to policing boundaries as a result of implementing the Review of Public Administration: As part of the Review of Public Administration which came into effect on 1 April 2015, PSNI moved from eight to eleven policing districts, with the new policing model becoming fully operational at the end of September 2015.

Publications: Annual reports are available back to 2003/04 on the [PSNI website](#) and during the financial year, drug seizure statistics are published on a monthly basis and are provisional and may be subject to change. Statistics on drug seizures by type and format at policing district level are published separately in the accompanying [supporting excel spreadsheet](#).

We welcome comment and feedback on these statistics. If you would like to forward your views, receive notification of new publications, be kept informed of developments relating to PSNI statistics or for further information about drug seizure statistics for Northern Ireland, contact PSNI Statistics Branch: Email - statistics@psni.police.uk; Write to - Drug Seizure Statistician, PSNI Statistics Branch, Lisnasharragh, 42 Montgomery Road, Belfast, BT6 9LD; or Telephone - 028 9065 0222 ext. 24135.