

Police Service of Northern Ireland

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

Published 17 January 2018



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This bulletin provides the most recent statistics on drug seizures and arrests recorded by the police in Northern Ireland to 31 December 2017. Figures from 1 April 2017 are provisional and will be subject to change until the finalised 2017/18 figures are published in May 2018. The bulletin 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 and arrests have been captured at this geographic level from the start of 2016/17 and the figures for the latest 12 months are presented as part of this bulletin. Such disaggregation for the previous 12 months is not available.

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## Overview

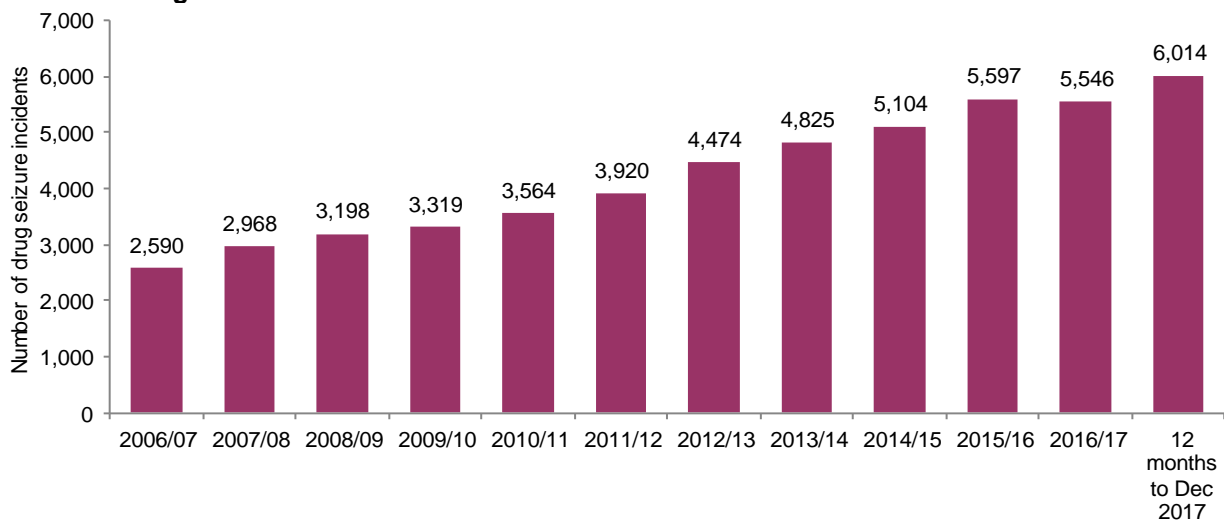
**Table 1 Key statistics for drug seizure incidents, commercial cultivation of cannabis and drug arrests in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 compared with the previous 12 months**

	12 months to 31 December 2016	12 months to 31 December 2017	Change
Drug seizure incidents	5,600	6,014	414 (7.4%)
Incidents classified as cannabis farms	42	28	-14 (-33.3%)
Drug-related arrests	2,767	3,008	241 (8.7%)

## Section 1 – Seizure Incidents

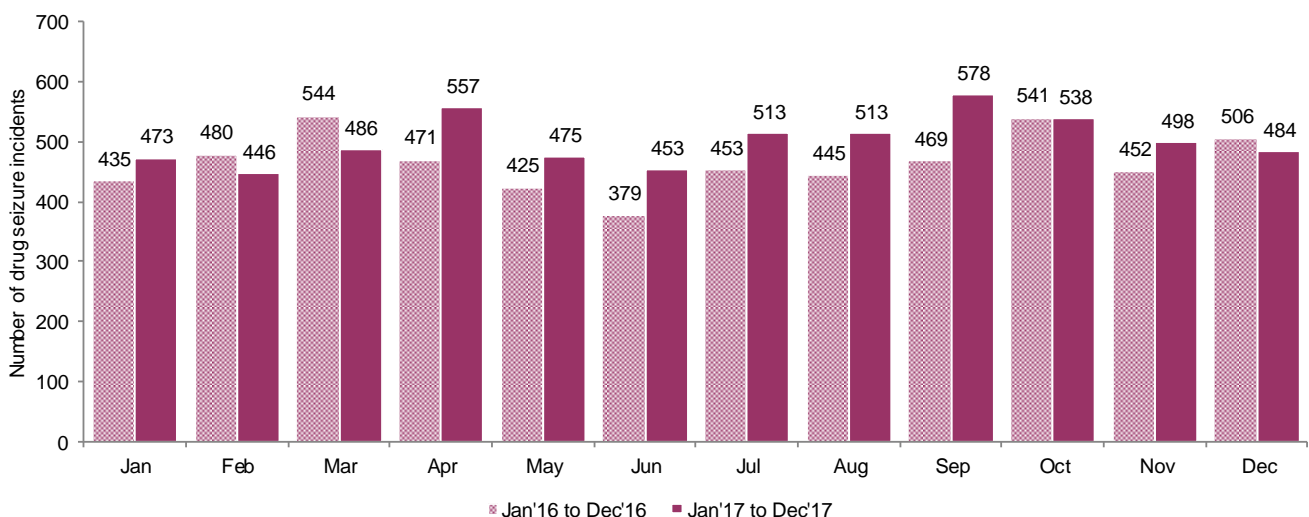
- In the 12 months from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017, there were 6,014 drug seizure incidents in Northern Ireland, an increase of 7.4% on the 5,600 seizure incidents recorded in the previous 12 months.
- The number of drug seizure incidents increased year on year from 2006/07 to reach 5,597 seizure incidents in 2015/16, more than double the number of incidents recorded in 2006/07, before falling to 5,546 in 2016/17. At 6,014, the number of seizure incidents in the latest 12 months represents an increase of 8.4% on the 2016/17 level.

**Figure 1 Drug seizure incidents since 2006/07**



- Seizure incidents from 1 April 2017 are provisional, as there will be records still undergoing the validation process. As a result, further incidents may be added to the current figures, in particular for December 2017, the latest month on record.
- 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.

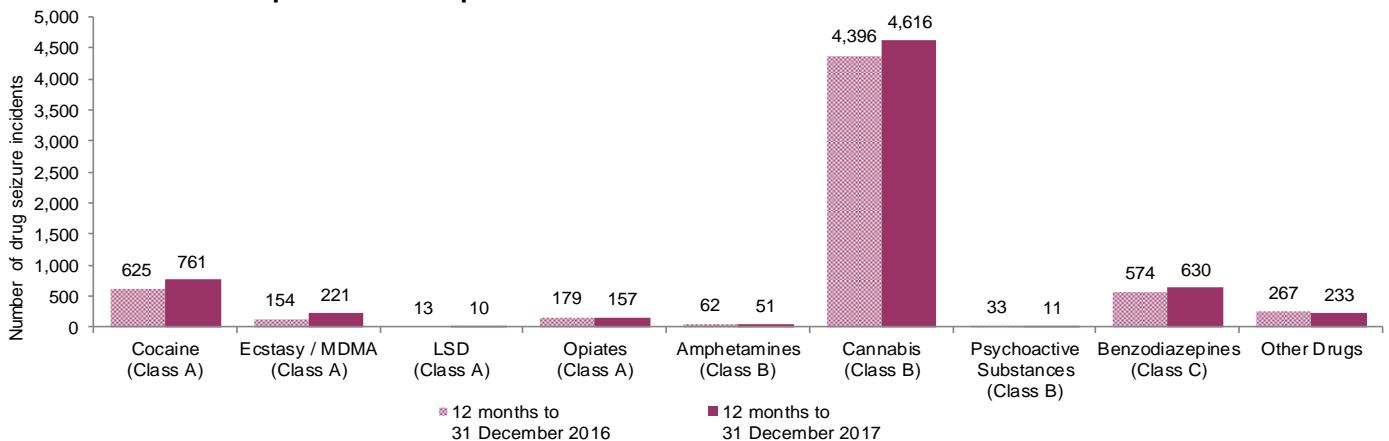
**Figure 2 Number of drug seizure incidents by month in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 compared with the previous 12 months**



## Seizure Incidents by Drug Type: Comparison of the 12 months to 31 December 2017 with the 12 months to 31 December 2016

- Cannabis was the most commonly seized drug over the past 12 months, with 4,616 seizures involving cannabis being recovered. This is 220 more than the number of seizure incidents in the 12 months to 31 December 2016.
- The second most commonly seized drug was cocaine. There were 761 incidents involving the seizure of cocaine in the 12 months to 31 December 2017, up from 625 during the previous 12 months, a 21.8% increase.
- Benzodiazepine seizures accounted for the third largest number of seizure incidents in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 with 630 seizures, 56 more than during the previous 12 months when 574 incidents were recorded. The most commonly seized benzodiazepine was diazepam (503 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 in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 compared with the previous 12 months

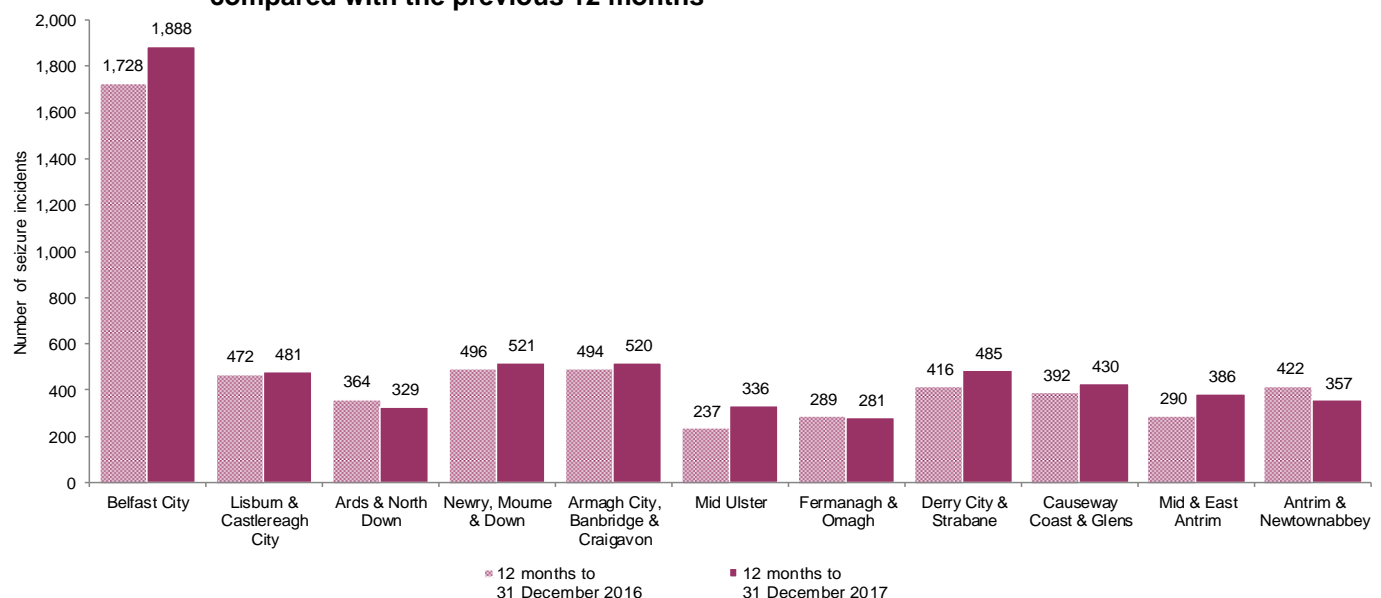


Note: A seizure incident can involve more than one drug type, seizure figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.

## Seizure Incidents by Police District: Comparison of the 12 months to 31 December 2017 with the 12 months to 31 December 2016

- The largest number of seizure incidents occurred in Belfast City policing district with 1,888 incidents recorded, followed by Newry, Mourne & Down (521 seizure incidents) and Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon (520 seizure incidents).
- Antrim & Newtownabbey, Ards & North Down and Fermanagh & Omagh policing districts were the only policing districts showing a fall in the number of seizure incidents. Amongst the eight other policing districts the largest increase was observed in Belfast City (160).
- Of the 1,888 drug seizure incidents that took place in Belfast City policing district in the latest 12 months, 753 were made in South (the local policing team based in Lisburn Road), followed by 525 in North (based in Tennent Street). West (based in Woodbourne) and East (based in Strandtown) showed respective levels of 338 and 272 seizure incidents.

**Figure 4** Number of drug seizure incidents by policing district in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 compared with the previous 12 months



## Section 2 – Quantity of Drugs Seized: Comparison of the 12 months to 31 December 2017 with the 12 months to 31 December 2016

### Class A

- The weight of cocaine powder seized in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 (42.4kg) was lower than that seized in the previous 12 months (56.1kg), a decrease of 24.4%.
- There were 2,924 ecstasy tablets recovered in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 compared with 5,328 ecstasy tablets seized in the period ending 31 December 2016, a decrease of 45.1%. The weight of ecstasy powder seized in the latest 12 months was 0.5kg, less than a quarter of that seized during the previous 12 months (2.2kg).
- In the 12 months to 31 December 2017, there were 53 LSD microdots seized, a decrease of 97.5% compared with the quantity seized during the previous 12 months when 2,133 LSD microdots were recovered.
- The amount of opiate powder seized by the PSNI in the past 12 months was 0.8kg, down from 5.4kg in the 12 months to 31 December 2016. The volume of liquid opiates seized in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 was 232.2mls, compared to 401.8mls recovered in the previous 12 months.

### Class B

- The weight of herbal cannabis recovered during the 12 months to 31 December 2017 (144.9kg) was 60.5% lower than that in the previous 12 months when 366.4kg were seized. Over a third of this quantity was seized in Belfast City policing district (55.4kg).
- There was a decrease in the quantity of cannabis resin seized in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 when compared with the period ending 31 December 2016 (35.3kg down from 89.2kg). Over four fifths of the cannabis resin recovered was seized in four policing districts: Fermanagh & Omagh (11.6kg), Belfast City (7.7kg), Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon (6.3kg) and Derry & Strabane (4.8kg).
- There were 3,942 cannabis plants recovered in the 12 months to 31 December 2017. This represents a 21.9% increase on the previous 12 months when 3,233 plants were seized.
- The amount of amphetamine powder seized by the PSNI in the latest 12 months was 0.6kg, a decrease on the quantity seized during the previous 12 months to 31 December 2016 (4.3kg). There were 26 amphetamine tablets recovered in the latest 12 months, compared with 134 tablets in the previous 12 months.
- The weight of controlled psychoactive stimulants powder seized during the 12 months to 31 December 2017 (0.1kg) was less than that seized in the period ending 31 December 2016 when 3.2kg were recovered. Mephedrone accounted for 0.01kg all of the overall weight of controlled psychoactive stimulants powder seized in the latest 12 months, compared with 0.05kg in the previous 12 months.

### Class C

- There were 92,023 benzodiazepine tablets seized in the 12 months to 31 December 2017, a drop of 56.5% from the 211,722 tablets seized in the 12 months to 31 December 2016.
- The majority of benzodiazepine seizures in the latest 12 months consisted of diazepam tablets (76,254). This was 88,695 fewer diazepam tablets than that seized in the 12 months to 31 December 2016, a decrease of 53.8%.
- The quantity of other benzodiazepine tablets (including temazepam) recovered in the latest 12 months was just over a third of the number seized in the previous 12 months (15,769 tablets, down from 46,773).

### 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 between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2017 was just over three times that seized in the previous 12 months, increasing to 56,666 tablets from 16,944 tablets. Of those substances seized in the latest 12 months, noticeable seizures included 3,339 Tramadol tablets (Class C), 2,116 Zopiclone tablets (Class C) and 1,000 tablets of Dipipanone (Class A), as well as a single seizure of 39,970 tablets of clenbuterol (Class C).
- All but one of the ampoules seized in the latest 12 months within the 'Other Drugs' category consisted of class C anabolic steroids (5,536 ampoules), including a single seizure of 5,000 ampoules in October 2017. There were 8,892 anabolic steroids tablets seized, including a single seizure of 6,470 tablets in July 2017.
- 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.



## Section 3 – Commercial Cannabis Cultivation Statistics

### Incidents Involving the Seizure of Cannabis Plants by PSNI: Comparison of the 12 months to 31 December 2017 with the 12 months to 31 December 2016

- Of all incidents involving the seizure of cannabis plants or cannabis cultivation equipment in the 12 months to 31 December 2017, 28 were classified as a cannabis farm as per the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) definition<sup>1</sup>. This is a 33.3% decrease on the previous 12 month period ending 31 December 2016, when 42 incidents were classified as a cannabis farm.
- In the past 12 months, 22 of those incidents involved the recovery of 25 plants or more, while six 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 in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 compared with the previous 12 months**

Cannabis farms <sup>1</sup>	12 months to 31 December 2016	12 months to 31 December 2017	Change
Cases where 25 plants or more were seized	26	22	-4
Cases where no plants or less than 25 plants were seized and factory equipment was recovered	16	6	-10
<b>Total number of incidents classified as cannabis farms</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>-14</b>

### Cannabis Farm Discoveries by Policing District: Comparison of the 12 months to 31 December 2017 with the 12 months to 31 December 2016

- The highest number of cannabis farms discovered by the PSNI during the period ending 31 December 2017 was in Belfast City policing district with six discoveries.
- Seven policing districts have seen a decrease in the number of cannabis farms discovered in the past 12 months when compared with the previous 12 months. Three districts (Lisburn & Castlereagh City, Newry, Mourne & Down and Fermanagh & Omagh) have seen an increase while the level in Mid Ulster policing district was unchanged.

**Table 3 Cannabis farm discoveries by policing district in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 compared with the previous 12 months**

Policing district	12 months to 31 December 2016	12 months to 31 December 2017	Change
Belfast City	13	6	-7
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	2	4	2
Ards & North Down	5	4	-1
Newry, Mourne & Down	2	4	2
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	3	1	-2
Mid Ulster	1	1	0
Fermanagh & Omagh	0	1	1
Derry City & Strabane	4	2	-2
Causeway Coast & Glens	7	2	-5
Mid & East Antrim	3	2	-1
Antrim & Newtownabbey	2	1	-1
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>-14</b>

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

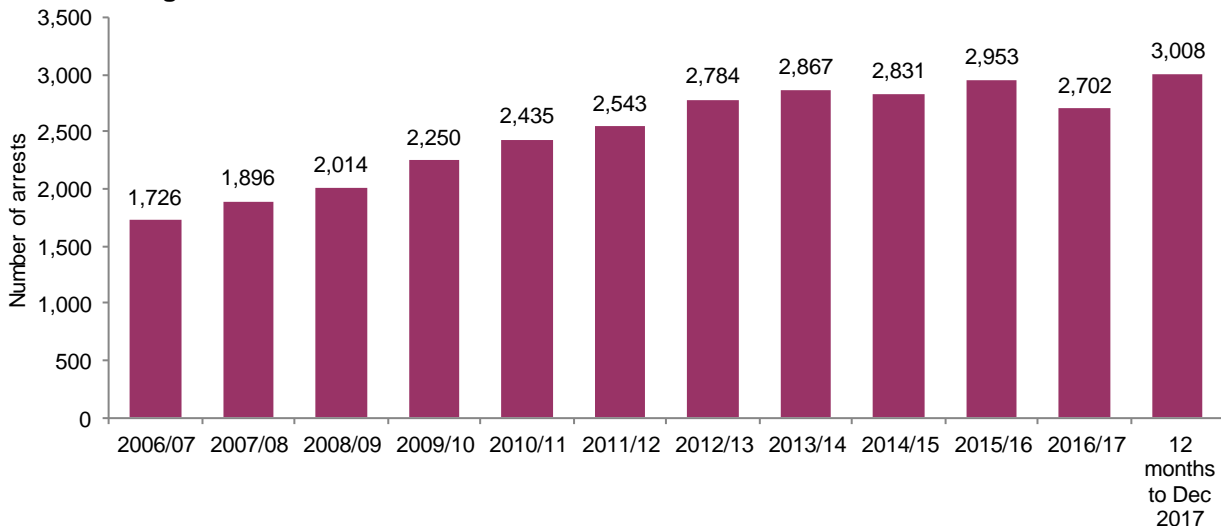
*Twenty-five or more cannabis plants, at any stage of growth, are being or have been grown OR Any premises shall be deemed a cannabis farm if the premises, or part therein, have been adapted to such an extent that normal usage would be inhibited and usually present within the premises, or part therein, 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

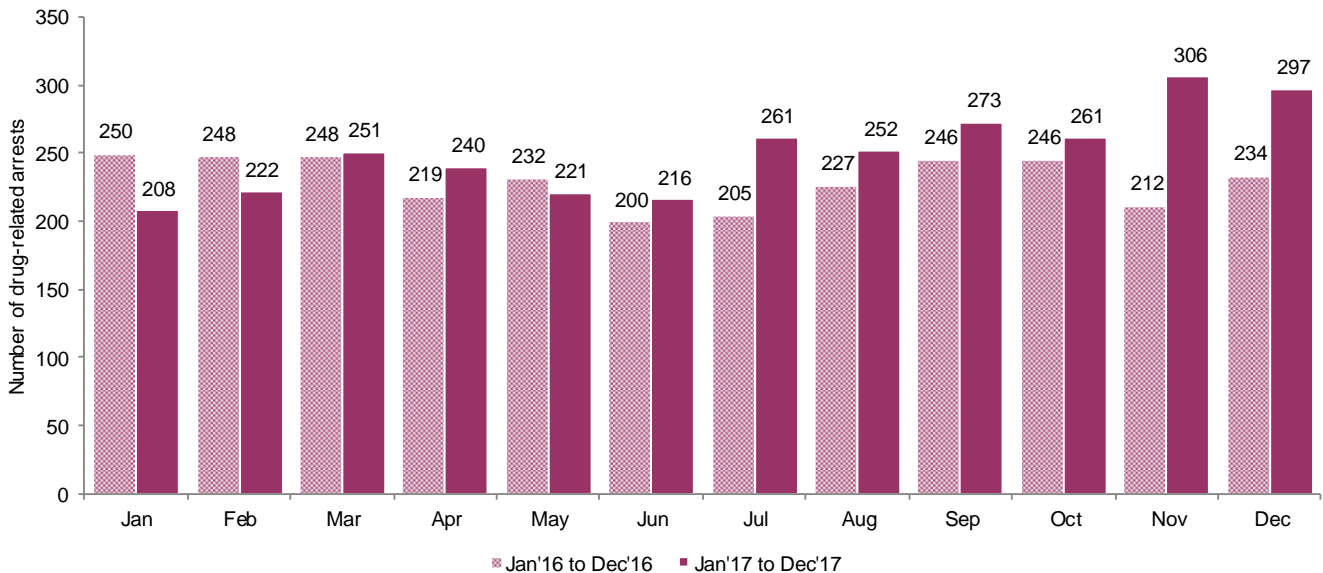
A drug-related arrest is counted when a person is arrested and processed through custody for one or more drug-related offences. This is a count of custody records and not persons; a person may have been arrested on more than one occasion during the time periods presented in this section.

- In the 12 months to 31 December 2017, there were 3,008 drug-related arrests. This is an increase of 8.7% (241 arrests) on the level recorded during the previous 12 months to 31 December 2016.
- 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 before falling to 2,702 arrests in 2016/17, the lowest recorded in the past five financial years. The current level of 3,008 drug-related arrests in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 is 306 arrests higher than the 2016/17 level.

**Figure 5 Drug-related arrests since 2006/07**



**Figure 6 Number of drug-related arrests by month in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 compared with the previous 12 months**



- The number of drug-related arrests in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 ranged from 208 in January 2016 to 306 in November 2017, the highest monthly level in the past 24 months. By comparison, the number of arrests during the previous 12 months ranged from 200 in June 2016 to 250 in January 2016.
- Overall, the number of drug-related arrests was higher for nine of the months of the period ending 31 December 2017 when compared with the corresponding months in the previous 12 months, with the three remaining months showing decreases. In particular, there were increases in the number of arrests for each consecutive month from June to December, the largest of which occurred between November 2016 and November 2017 (+94).
- The number of arrests for drug offences in 2016/17 varied across the policing districts, ranging from 119 drug arrests in Mid Ulster policing district to 1,040 in Belfast City policing district. Within Belfast City policing district during 12 months to 31 December 2017, there were 450 arrests for drug offences in South (local policing team based in Lisburn Road), followed by 284 in North (based in Tennent Street), 157 in West (based in Woodbourne) and 149 in East (based in Strandtown).

## Appendices

**Table 4a Drug seizure incidents by type and format in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 compared with the previous 12 months**

Drugs Seized <sup>1</sup> – Number of Incidents <sup>3</sup>		12 months to 31 December 2016	12 months to 31 December 2017	Change
Cocaine (Class A)	Powder	595	726	131
	Wraps	37	43	6
Ecstasy (Class A)	Powder	40	62	22
	Tablets	119	166	47
	Wraps	0	2	2
LSD (Class A)	Microdots	9	6	-3
	Powder	0	1	1
	Tablets	4	3	-1
Opiates (Class A)	Ampoules	1	1	0
	Millilitres	16	16	0
	Patches	3	3	0
	Powder	77	54	-23
	Tablets	10	0	-10
	Twists	10	3	-7
	Wraps	73	86	13
Amphetamine (Class B)	Powder	54	44	-10
	Tablets	5	3	-2
	Wraps	3	5	2
Cannabis (Class B)	Capsules	1	0	-1
	Herbal	3,658	3,750	92
	Joints	430	486	56
	Oil	10	5	-5
	Plants	147	131	-16
	Resin	586	655	69
Psychoactive Stimulants (Class B)	Millilitres	0	0	0
	Powder	33	11	-22
	Tablets	0	0	0
	Wraps	0	1	1
Benzodiazepines (Class C)	Powder	4	5	1
	Tablets	588	650	62
Other Drugs <sup>2</sup>	Ampoules	19	13	-6
	Crystals	0	3	3
	Herbal	1	1	0
	Microdots	1	0	-1
	Millilitres	7	4	-3
	Patches	5	0	-5
	Powder	80	57	-23
	Psilocin	7	3	-4
	Tablets	175	164	-11
	Wraps	4	1	-3

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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 in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 compared with the previous 12 months**

Drugs Seized <sup>1</sup> – Quantities		12 months to 31 December 2016	12 months to 31 December 2017	Change
Cocaine (Class A)	Powder (kg)	56.1	42.4	-13.7
	Wraps	60	89	29
Ecstasy (Class A)	Powder (gms)	2,178.9	514.5	-1,664.4
	Tablets	5,328	2,924	-2,404
	Wraps	.	2	2
LSD (Class A)	Microdots	2,133	53	-2080
	Powder (gms)	.	0.5	0.5
	Tablets	8	40	32
Opiates (Class A)	Ampoules	1	1	0
	Millilitres	401.8	232.2	-169.6
	Patches	13	20	7
	Powder (kg)	5.4	0.8	-4.5
	Tablets	114	.	-114
	Twists	26	3	-23
	Wraps	409	375	-34
Amphetamine (Class B)	Powder (kg)	4.3	0.6	-3.7
	Tablets	134	26	-108
	Wraps	4	7	3
Cannabis (Class B)	Capsules	182	.	-182
	Herbal (kg)	366.4	144.9	-221.6
	Joints	551	594	43
	Oil (gms)	546.65	314.0	-232.6
	Plants	3,233	3,942	709
	Resin (kg)	89.2	35.3	-53.9
Psychoactive Stimulants (Class B)	Millilitres	.	.	0.0
	Powder (kg)	3.2	0.1	-3.1
	Tablets	.	.	0
	Wraps	.	1	1
Benzodiazepines (Class C)	Powder (gms)	11.1	18.2	7.1
	Tablets	211,722	92,023	-119,699
Other Drugs <sup>2</sup>	Ampoules	1,250	5,537	4,287
	Crystals (gms)	.	45.0	45.0
	Herbal (gms)	9.6	68.0	58.4
	Microdots	6	.	-6
	Millilitres	646.0	82.0	-564.0
	Patches	12	.	-12
	Powder (kg)	0.4	0.4	-0.1
	Psilocin	544.4	24.5	-520
	Tablets	16,944	56,666	39,722
	Wraps	8.0	1	-7

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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 in the 12 months to 31 December 2017 compared with the previous 12 months**

Policing District	Seizure Incidents			Arrests		
	12 months to 31 December 2016	12 months to 31 December 2017	Change	12 months to 31 December 2016	12 months to 31 December 2017	Change
Belfast City: of which	1,728	1,888	160	943	1,040	97
<i>East</i> <sup>1</sup>	-	272	-	-	149	-
<i>North</i> <sup>1</sup>	-	525	-	-	284	-
<i>South</i> <sup>1</sup>	-	753	-	-	450	-
<i>West</i> <sup>1</sup>	-	338	-	-	157	-
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	472	481	9	241	225	-16
Ards & North Down	364	329	-35	116	146	30
Newry, Mourne & Down	496	521	25	168	194	26
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	494	520	26	252	221	-31
Mid Ulster	237	336	99	98	119	21
Fermanagh & Omagh	289	281	-8	155	196	41
Derry City & Strabane	416	485	69	267	348	81
Causeway Coast & Glens	392	430	38	226	200	-26
Mid & East Antrim	290	386	96	124	150	26
Antrim & Newtownabbey	422	357	-65	177	169	-8
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>5,600</b>	<b>6,014</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>2,767</b>	<b>3,008</b>	<b>241</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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](mailto: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.