

Police Service of Northern Ireland

# Police Recorded Drug Seizures and Arrests in Northern Ireland: Monthly Update to 31 March 2018

(Providing figures for 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018)

**Published 17 May 2018**



# Police Recorded Drug Seizures and Arrests in Northern Ireland

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This bulletin provides the most recent statistics on drug seizures and arrests recorded by the police in Northern Ireland for the financial year 2017/18. 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 published quarterly by the Home Office as [Border Force transparency data](#), with Border Force seizures in each of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland presented separately. Border Force seizures within Northern Ireland are not presented in this bulletin.

**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.

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## Overview

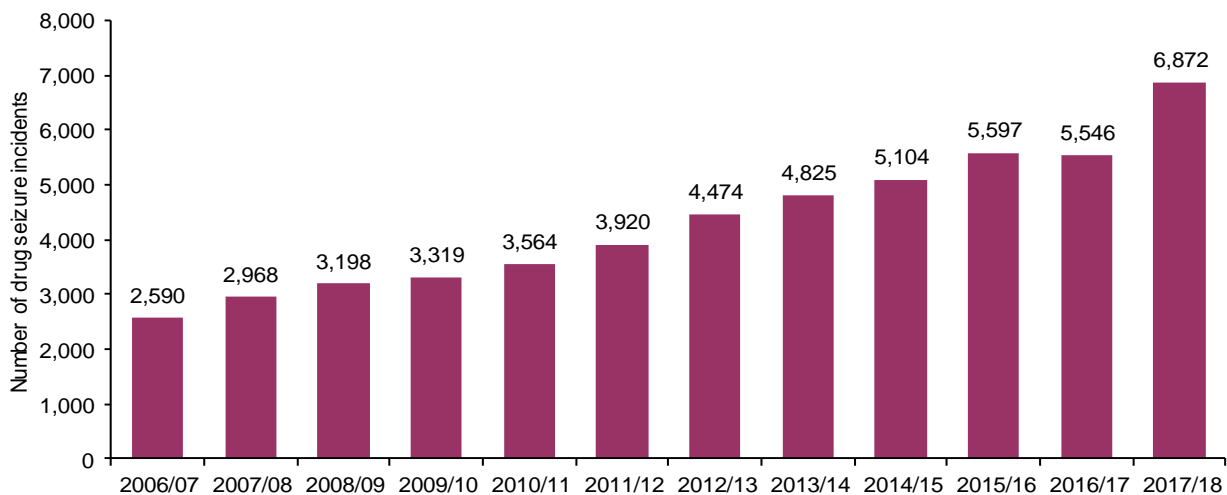
**Table 1 Key statistics for drug seizure incidents, commercial cultivation of cannabis and drug arrests, 2017/18 compared with 2016/17**

	2016/17	2017/18	change between years	% change between years
Drug seizure incidents	5,546	6,872	1,326	23.9
Incidents classified as cannabis farms	39	22	-17	-43.6
Drug-related arrests	2,702	3,121	419	15.5

## Section 1 – Seizure Incidents

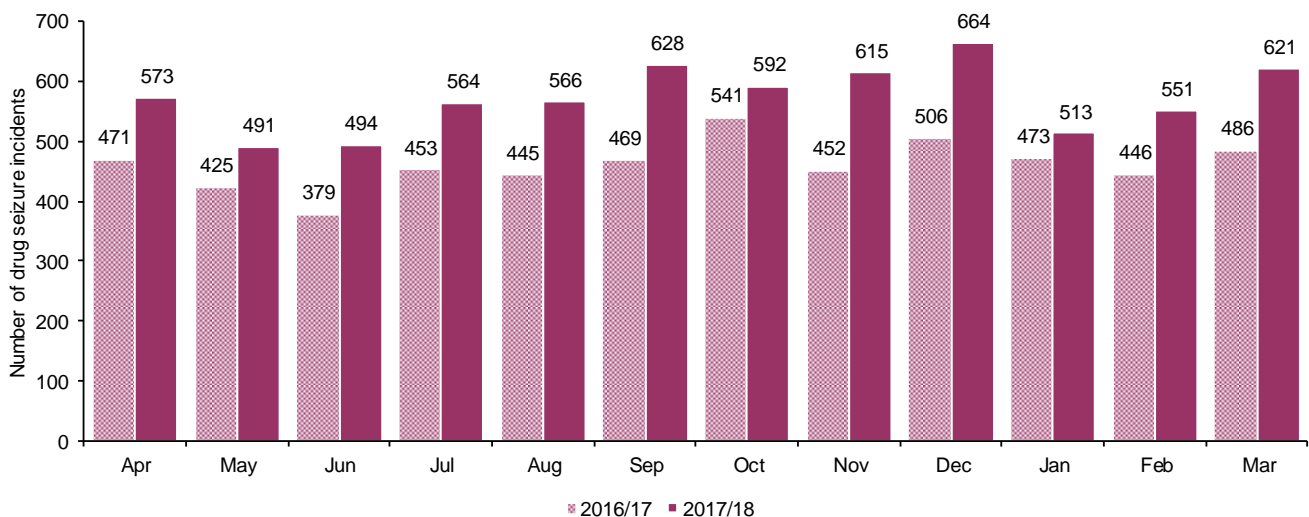
- There were 6,872 drug seizure incidents recorded by PSNI during 2017/18, the highest level recorded and an increase of 23.9 per cent when compared with 2016/17.
- The number of drug seizure incidents increased year on year from 2006/07 to reach 5,597 seizure incidents in 2015/16 followed by a slight fall to 5,546 in 2016/17. The number of drug seizure incidents has more than doubled in the last ten years.

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



- During 2017/18 there were only two months where the number of drug seizure incidents fell below 500 (May and June 2017). This compares with the previous year when only two months recorded drug seizure incidents in excess of 500 (October and December 2016). Each month during 2017/18 recorded a higher level of drug seizure incidents when compared with the same month the previous year.
- The higher number of seizure incidents recorded during 2017/18 reflects an increase in proactive work by all elements within PSNI in response to community concern about drugs. It may also be an indication of a change in the nature of the drugs market, including increased accessibility to drugs, for example postal delivery and dark web purchase.

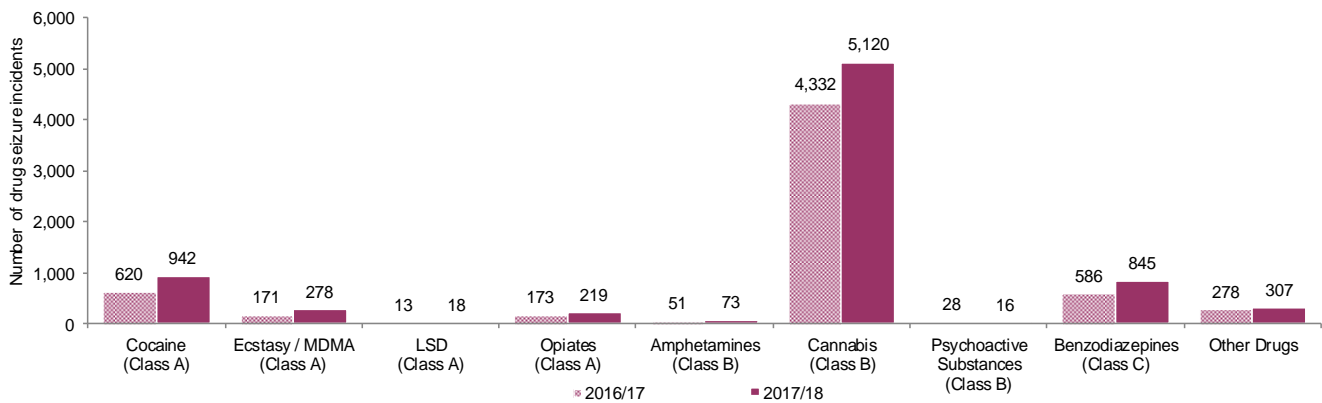
**Figure 2 Number of drug seizure incidents by month, 2017/18 compared with 2016/17**



### Seizure Incidents by Drug Type: Comparison of 2017/18 with 2016/17

- Cannabis (Class B) was the most commonly seized drug over the past 12 months, with 5,120 seizures involving cannabis being recovered. This is 788 more than the number of seizure incidents in the previous 12 months.
- The second most commonly seized drug was cocaine (Class A) at 942 incidents, a 51.9% increase on the 620 seizure incidents recorded during 2016/17.
- Benzodiazepine seizures (Class C) accounted for the third largest number of seizure incidents with 845 recorded, 259 more than during 2016/17. The most commonly seized benzodiazepine was diazepam.
- Further information of seizure incidents by drug type is available in the [supporting spreadsheet](#).

**Figure 3** Number of drug seizure incidents by drug type, 2017/18 compared with 2016/17

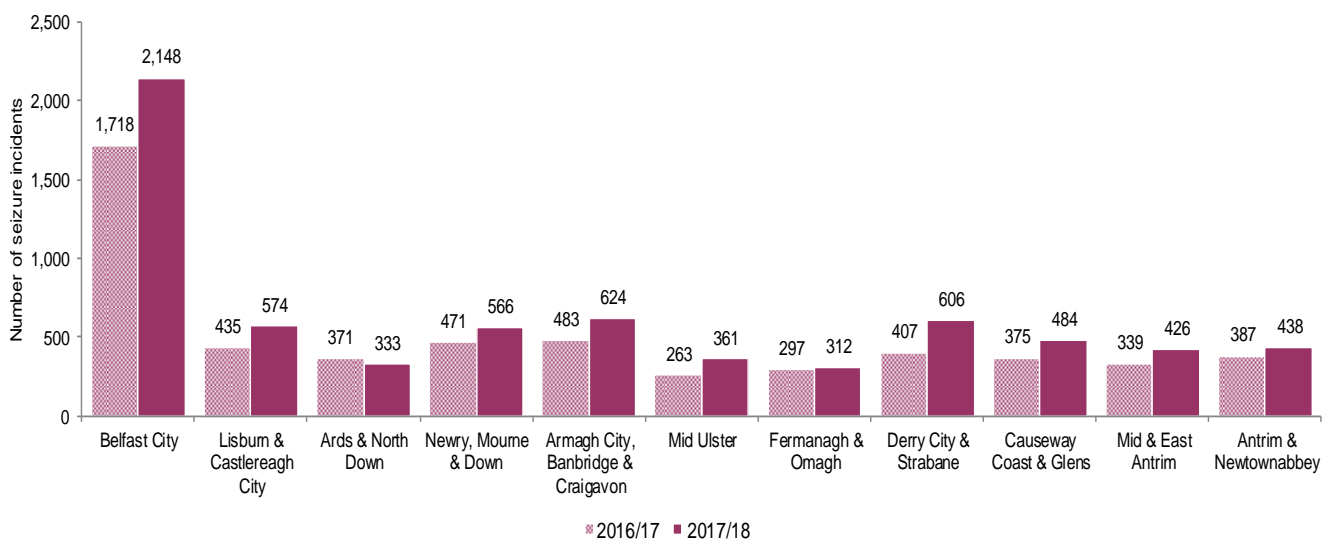


*Note: A seizure incident can involve more than one drug type, seizure figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.*

### Seizure Incidents by Police District: Comparison of 2017/18 with 2016/17

- The largest number of seizure incidents occurred in Belfast City policing district with 2,148 incidents recorded, followed by Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon (624 seizure incidents) and Derry City & Strabane (606 seizure incidents).
- Ards & North Down was the only policing district to show a fall in the number of seizure incidents. Amongst the other policing districts the largest increases were observed in Belfast City (430) and Derry City & Strabane (199).
- Drug seizure incidents in each of the local policing teams in Belfast City showed an increase between 2016/17 and 2017/18; South (the local policing team based in Lisburn Road) increased by 213 from 650 to 863, North (based in Tennent Street) increased by 110 from 496 to 606, West (based in Woodbourne) increased by 71 from 296 to 367 and East (based in Strandtown) increased by 36 from 276 to 312.

**Figure 4** Number of drug seizure incidents by policing district, 2017/18 compared with 2016/17



## Section 2 – Quantity of Drugs Seized: Comparison of 2017/18 with 2016/17

While the number of drug seizure incidents increased across most drug types between 2016/17 and 2017/18, lower quantities of drugs seized were recorded across many drug types.

### Class A

Quantities of drugs seized during 2017/18 fell across most of the Class A drug types and formats when compared with 2016/17.

- The weight of cocaine powder seized fell by more than half, from 67.1kg to 30.8kg.
- The weight of ecstasy powder seized fell by more than two thirds from 1.7kg to 1.05kg. The number of ecstasy tablets recovered fell from 5,980 to 5,632, a fall of 5.8%.
- The number of LSD microdots seized fell by nearly half, from 2,060 to 1,111.
- The amount of opiate powder seized decreased from 5.1kg to 0.6kg. There was also a fall in the volume of liquid opiates seized, from 480.8mls to 222.4mls.

### Class B

Class B drugs showed a more mixed picture than Class A when comparing quantities seized during 2017/18 when compared with 2016/17.

- Cannabis: The number of cannabis plants recovered increased by nearly two thirds from 2,461 to 3,980, although Section 3 of this bulletin shows the falling number of cannabis farm discoveries. Increases were also seen in quantities of cannabis oil and cannabis joints seized. The weight of cannabis resin seized fell by more than half from 86.7kg to 35.4kg; 2016/17 included a single seizure of 49.9kg while the largest seizure in 2017/18 was 11.1kg. The quantity of herbal cannabis recovered fell from 266.6kg to 252.2kg (5.4%); the figure of 252.2kg included a single seizure of 68.6kg compared with the largest seizure in 2016/17 of 15.0kg.
- There was an increase in the amount of amphetamine powder seized from 1.8kg to 6.9kg, 6.0kg of which was attributed to a single seizure. There was a slight fall in the number of amphetamine tablets recovered, from 68 to 63.
- The weight of controlled psychoactive stimulants powder seized fell from 3.2kg to 0.4kg. Mephedrone accounted for 0.02kg of the overall weight of controlled psychoactive stimulants powder seized during 2017/18, compared with 0.04kg during 2016/17.

### Class C

Class C drugs showed an increase in the overall weight of powder seized and a fall in the number of tablets seized during 2017/18 when compared with the 2016/17.

- The weight of benzodiazepine powder seized increased from 0.01kg to 2.1kg.
- The number of benzodiazepine tablets seized fell from 168,500 to 129,348, a drop of 23.2%.
- While diazepam tablets accounted for the majority of benzodiazepine tablets seized in the latest 12 months, the number seized was less than half of that in the previous 12 months (67,681 compared with 151,903).
- The quantity of other benzodiazepine tablets (including temazepam) more than trebled, from 16,597 to 61,667 (one seizure accounted for half of the quantity seized).

### Other controlled drugs

There were general increases seen across most of the drug types and formats within the 'Other Drugs' classification when comparing 2017/18 with 2016/17.

- Some of the controlled substances recovered are classified to 'Other Drugs' due to having been less commonly seized in Northern Ireland. Overall, the quantity of 'other' drug tablets seized in 2017/18 was more than five times that in the previous year (111,590 compared with 19,815). Two seizures accounted for more than 80% of the total quantity of tablets seized, a seizure of 53,150 anabolic steroid tablets and a seizure of 39,970 Clenbuterol tablets.
- The number of ampoules seized increased from 1,289 to 14,154 including two separate seizures of 8,390 and 5,000 ampoules; with the exception of 1 ampoule all of those seized were steroids.
- 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 2017/18 with 2016/17

- During 2017/18 there were 22 incidents involving the seizure of cannabis plants or cannabis cultivation equipment that were classified as a cannabis farm as per the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) definition<sup>1</sup>. This is a 43.6% decrease on the 39 incidents classified as a cannabis farm during 2016/17.
- During 2017/18, 17 of the incidents identified as cannabis farms involved the recovery of 25 plants or more.

**Table 2 Incidents involving the commercial cultivation of cannabis, 2017/18 compared with 2016/17**

Cannabis farms <sup>1</sup>	2016/17	2017/18	Change
Cases where 25 plants or more were seized	24	17	-7
Cases where no plants or less than 25 plants were seized and factory equipment was recovered	15	5	-10
<b>Total number of incidents classified as cannabis farms</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>-17</b>

### Cannabis Farm Discoveries by Policing District: Comparison of 2017/18 with 2016/17

- The highest number of cannabis farms discovered during 2017/18 was in Belfast City policing district with six discoveries.
- Seven policing districts saw a decrease in the number of cannabis farms discovered, two showed an increase and two showed no change.

**Table 3 Cannabis farm discoveries by policing district, 2017/18 compared with 2016/17**

Policing district	2016/17	2017/18	Change
Belfast City	12	6	-6
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	3	2	-1
Ards & North Down	6	2	-4
Newry, Mourne & Down	3	3	0
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	1	1	0
Mid Ulster	0	2	2
Fermanagh & Omagh	0	1	1
Derry City & Strabane	4	1	-3
Causeway Coast & Glens	5	2	-3
Mid & East Antrim	3	1	-2
Antrim & Newtownabbey	2	1	-1
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>-17</b>

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

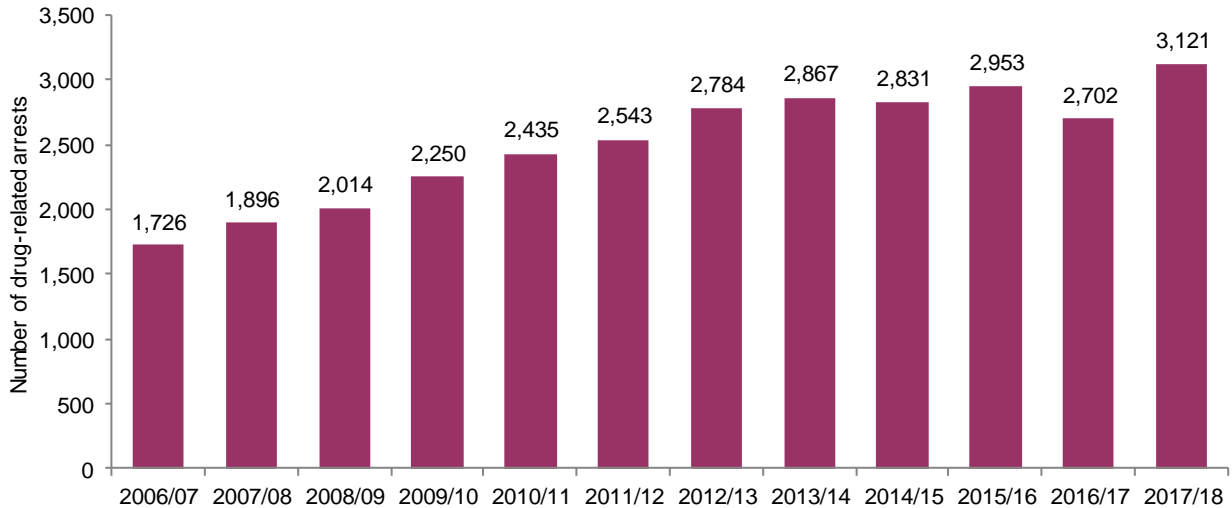
*Twenty-five or more cannabis plants, at any stage of growth, are being or have been grown OR Any premises shall be deemed a cannabis farm if the premises, or part therein, have been adapted to such an extent that normal usage would be inhibited and usually present within the premises, or part therein,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

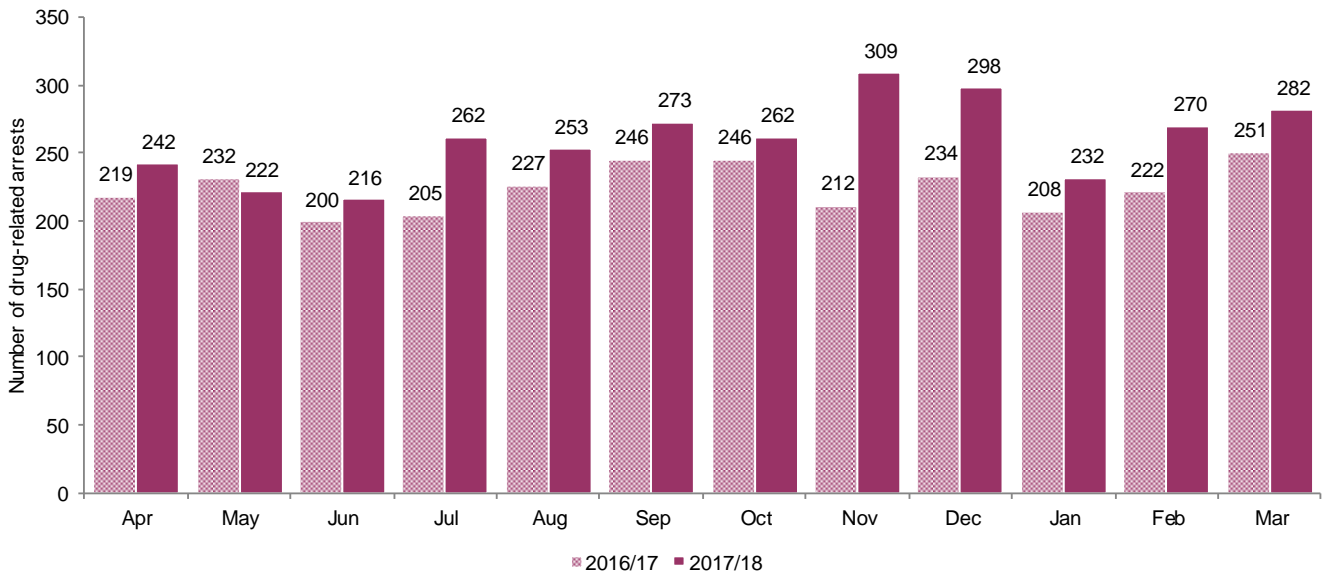
A **drug-related arrest** is counted when a person is arrested and processed through custody for one or more drug-related offences. This is a count of custody records and not persons; a person may have been arrested on more than one occasion during the time periods presented in this section.

- There were 3,121 drug-related arrests during 2017/18, an increase of 419 (15.5%) on 2016/17.
- The number of arrests for drug offences has increased in most years since 2006/07; a fall was experienced in 2016/17. The level of 3,121 in 2017/18 is the highest recorded since 2006/07.

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



**Figure 6 Number of drug-related arrests by month, 2017/18 compared with 2016/17**



- During 2017/18 the number of drug-related arrests ranged from 216 in June 2017 to 309 in November 2017.
- Overall, the number of drug-related arrests in 2017/18 was higher in all months except for May when compared with the corresponding months in 2016/17. The largest change was seen when comparing November 2016 and November 2017 (+97).
- There were increases in the number of drug-related arrests during 2017/18 across all policing districts apart from Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon (which recorded one less arrest than in 2016/17). The largest number of arrests was seen in Belfast City policing district; South (local policing team based in Lisburn Road) showed an increase of 123 from 361 to 484, North (based in Tennent Street) increased by 42 from 247 to 289 and East (based in Strandtown) increased by 5 from 154 to 159. West (based in Woodbourne) recorded 14 fewer arrests, from 159 down to 145.

## Appendices

**Table 4a Drug seizure incidents by type and format, 2017/18 compared with 2016/17**

Drugs Seized <sup>1</sup> – Number of Incidents <sup>3</sup>		2016/17	2017/18	Change
Cocaine (Class A)	Powder	594	897	303
	Wraps	34	55	21
Ecstasy (Class A)	Powder	39	101	62
	Tablets	137	197	60
	Wraps	0	2	2
LSD (Class A)	Microdots	8	11	3
	Powder	1	0	-1
	Tablets	4	7	3
Opiates (Class A)	Ampoules	1	1	0
	Millilitres	17	17	0
	Patches	3	14	11
	Powder	77	74	-3
	Tablets	8	3	-5
	Twists	8	4	-4
	Wraps	67	121	54
Amphetamine (Class B)	Powder	43	63	20
	Tablets	3	5	2
	Wraps	5	6	1
Cannabis (Class B)	Capsules	1	1	0
	Herbal	3,602	4,162	560
	Joints	413	520	107
	Oil	11	13	2
	Plants	147	116	-31
	Resin	584	766	182
Psychoactive Stimulants (Class B)	Millilitres	0	0	0
	Powder	28	16	-12
	Tablets	0	0	0
	Wraps	0	1	1
Benzodiazepines (Class C)	Powder	4	16	12
	Tablets	607	885	278
Other Drugs <sup>2</sup>	Ampoules	18	17	-1
	Crystals	0	0	0
	Herbal	1	7	6
	Microdots	1	1	0
	Millilitres	8	5	-3
	Patches	5	3	-2
	Powder	75	84	9
	Psilocin	8	2	-6
	Tablets	188	225	37
	Wraps	3	3	0

<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, 2017/18 compared with 2016/17**

Drugs Seized <sup>1</sup> – Quantities		2016/17	2017/18	Change
Cocaine (Class A)	Powder (kg)	67.1	30.8	-36.3
	Wraps	56	108	52
Ecstasy (Class A)	Powder (gms)	1,669.4	1,053.5	-615.9
	Tablets	5,980	5,632	-348
	Wraps	.	2	2
LSD (Class A)	Microdots	2,060	1,111	-949
	Powder (gms)	0.5	.	-0.5
	Tablets	8	23	15
Opiates (Class A)	Ampoules	1	1	0
	Millilitres	480.8	222.4	-258.4
	Patches	28	46	18
	Powder (kg)	5.1	0.6	-4.5
	Tablets	73	64	-9
	Twists	20	5	-15
	Wraps	456	394	-62
Amphetamine (Class B)	Powder (kg)	1.8	6.9	5.1
	Tablets	68	63	-5
	Wraps	7	9	2
Cannabis (Class B)	Capsules	182	30	-152
	Herbal (kg)	266.6	252.2	-14.4
	Joints	533	635	102
	Oil (gms)	720.65	1169.8	449.1
	Plants	2,461	3,980	1519
	Resin (kg)	86.7	35.4	-51.3
Psychoactive Stimulants (Class B)	Millilitres	.	.	0.0
	Powder (kg)	3.2	0.4	-2.8
	Tablets	.	.	0
	Wraps	.	1	1
Benzodiazepines (Class C)	Powder (gms)	8.2	2073.3	2065.1
	Tablets	168,500	129,348	-39,152
Other Drugs <sup>2</sup>	Ampoules	1,289	14,154	12,865
	Crystals (gms)	.	.	0.0
	Herbal (gms)	9.6	2763.4	2753.7
	Microdots	6	121	115
	Millilitres	656.0	72.0	-584.0
	Patches	12	5	-7
	Powder (kg)	0.4	1.4	1.0
	Psilocin	546.4	22.6	-524
	Tablets	19,815	111,590	91,775
	Wraps	4	8	4

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, 2017/18 compared with 2016/17**

Policing District	Seizure Incidents			Arrests		
	2016/17	2017/18	Change	2016/17	2017/18	Change
Belfast City: of which	1,718	2,148	430	921	1,077	156
<i>East</i> <sup>1</sup>	276	312	36	154	159	5
<i>North</i> <sup>1</sup>	496	606	110	247	289	42
<i>South</i> <sup>1</sup>	650	863	213	361	484	123
<i>West</i> <sup>1</sup>	296	367	71	159	145	-14
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	435	574	139	221	231	10
Ards & North Down	371	333	-38	123	137	14
Newry, Mourne & Down	471	566	95	168	184	16
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	483	624	141	235	234	-1
Mid Ulster	263	361	98	97	119	22
Fermanagh & Omagh	297	312	15	168	182	14
Derry City & Strabane	407	606	199	282	392	110
Causeway Coast & Glens	375	484	109	193	218	25
Mid & East Antrim	339	426	87	136	152	16
Antrim & Newtownabbey	387	438	51	158	195	37
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>5,546</b>	<b>6,872</b>	<b>1,326</b>	<b>2,702</b>	<b>3,121</b>	<b>419</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

**Data collection and Data quality:** 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 investigating officers and property managers 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.

At the time of processing the data for 2017/18, 29 potential drug seizure incidents were unable to be included in the figures as insufficient information was available to identify the nature of any drugs seized. An additional 107 seizure incidents included drugs that are currently pending forensic examination, 55 incidents where all the drugs seized are waiting for testing and 52 incidents where some drugs have been included in the seizure data and some drugs are in the process of being tested.

**Points to be considered when using the drug seizure statistics:** 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](#).

**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.