

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Trends in Police Recorded Drug Seizures and Arrests in Northern Ireland 2006/07 to 2019/20

Annual Bulletin published 09 October 2020



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Things you need to know about this release

Coverage

This release is produced in accordance with the pillars and principles set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) publishes figures on the levels and trends in police recorded drug seizures and arrests. The statistics are collated and produced by statisticians seconded to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

This release presents statistics relating to drug seizures and arrests recorded by the police between 2006/07 and 2019/20. Supplementary data are available from the PSNI website in the [accompanying spreadsheet](#).

Drug Seizure Incidents

Statistics in this publication relate to incidents in which a drug controlled under the [Misuse of Drugs Act \(1971\)](#) (MDA) is seized, recovered or found by police. This includes drugs intercepted in the post and drugs which are handed in to the police.

Also included within this publication is information on seizures of substances within the scope of the [Psychoactive Substances Act 2016](#) (PSA).

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. A more detailed definition is provided in Section 5 Trends in Drug-related Arrests.

Points to be aware of

- As these statistics are based on drug seizures that have been recorded by the police, changes in the quantity and type of drugs seized, and also in the number of drug-related arrests, can be affected by police activity.
- Not all drug seizures are subject to forensic testing to officially confirm the drug type seized. When testing is not applied, the seized drugs 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.
- Not all drug use will come to the attention of the police.
- These statistics should not themselves be considered a measure of drug prevalence in Northern Ireland. Other sources of information relating to drug misuse are provided in the [User Guide](#) which accompanies this publication, and may be considered alongside this publication to obtain a more comprehensive overview of the drug situation in Northern Ireland.

Points to note

Border Force seizures: 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 publication.

Recording Practice: Drug seizures often involve the seizure of multiple classes and types of drugs. This means that seizure figures for individual drug classes or types cannot be added together to produce totals, as this can exceed the overall number of seizures. Further details are available in the [User Guide](#).

Geographic breakdown: Seizure incidents and arrests are provided at policing district level; policing districts are analogous to District Council areas. Belfast City policing district accounts for approximately 30 per cent of all drug seizure incidents and up to 40 per cent of drug-related arrests 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 for Belfast City policing district have been captured at this geographic level from the start of 2016/17, while this breakdown is available for drug-related arrests from 2006/07.

Classification of Drug Types

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 divides drugs into three categories, Class A, B and C, according to the harmfulness they cause to the user or to society when they are misused. Class A drugs are considered to be the most harmful. Further information on drugs covered under the MDA is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/controlled-drugs-list--2>

Class A	Class B	Class C
Cocaine	Amphetamines	Anabolic Steroids
Ecstasy	Cannabis	Benzodiazepines
Heroin	Mephedrone	Other Class C ³
LSD	Other Class B ²	
Methadone		
Morphine		
Other Class A ¹		

¹ Other Class A drugs include fentanyl, oxycodone, psilocin (magic mushrooms) and methamphetamine (crystal meth).

² Other Class B drugs include cathinone derivatives, codeine/dihydrocodeine, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), ketamine and synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists.

³ Other Class C drugs include tramadol, buprenorphine, GHB/GBL, 'Z-class' drugs (zolpidem, zopiclone and zaleplon), pregabalin and gabapentin. Pregabalin and gabapentin were reclassified as Class C controlled substances in April 2019.

Application of conversion factors to the quantity of drugs seized

Most drugs can be seized in a range of formats or preparation types. In order to present seized quantities within a given drug type in terms of one comparable unit (kilograms, doses or plants), conversion factors were developed by the Home Office. These conversion factors have been applied to the main drug types in this publication in order to provide comparable estimates of the overall quantity seized for that drug (Section 3 of this publication).

The conversion factors were last updated in 2005 and the Home Office note that it is possible that some quantity data (especially for those drugs where quantity is reported in terms of doses) is not entirely accurate. However as the same conversion factors are used throughout the entire time series, the trends data can be considered reliable (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/seizures-of-drugs-in-england-and-wales-user-guide>, Table 1: Limitations and implications of drug seizures data)

The spreadsheet which accompanies this bulletin presents drug seizure quantities with the conversion factors applied. Drug seizure quantities are also available for the full range of formats/preparations recorded ([accompanying spreadsheet](#), pivot tables - seizure incidents and quantities seized).

Conventions used in figures and tables

'0' indicates where the weight/volume of drugs seized was less than 0.5 grams or 0.5 millilitres respectively.

'.' Indicates that no drugs were seized

Values are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Contact Details

We welcome comment and feedback on these statistics. If you would like to forward your views, receive notification of new publications or be kept informed of developments relating to PSNI statistics, please email your contact details using the email address provided below.

For further information about the drug seizure incident and arrest figures recorded by the police in Northern Ireland, or to contact the PSNI Drugs Statistician please:

Email: statistics@psni.police.uk;

Write to: Statistics Branch, Lisnasharragh, 42 Montgomery Road, Belfast, BT6 9LD; or

Telephone: 028 9065 0222 ext 24135

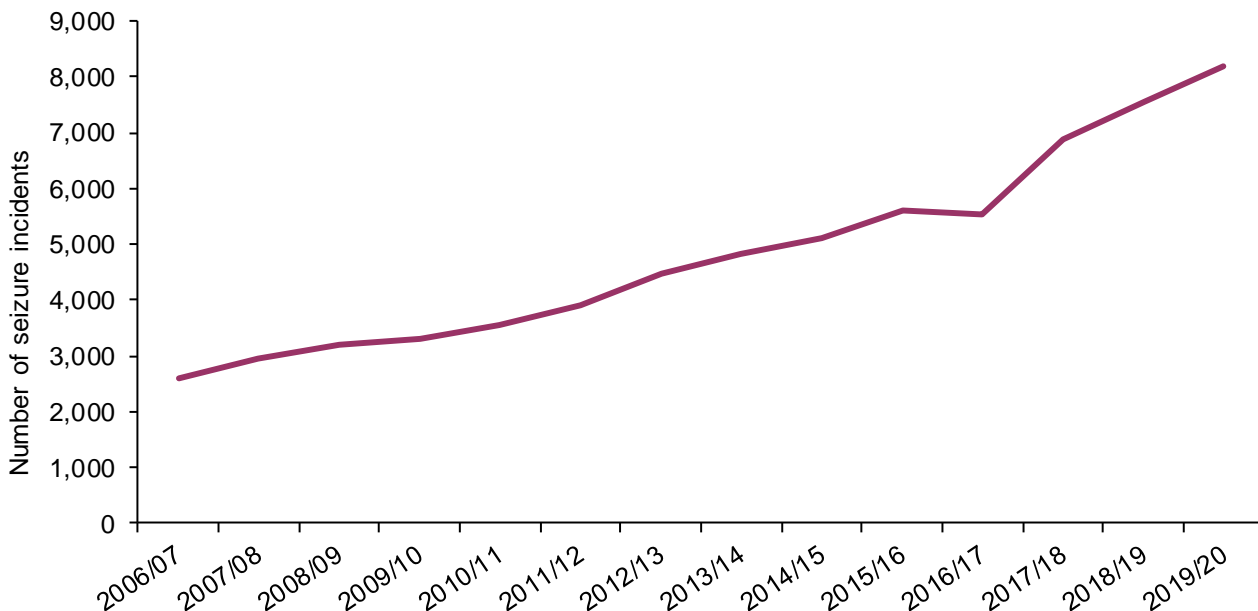
Key Points

- The number of drug seizure incidents recorded in 2019/20 (8,186) showed an increase of 625 (8.3 per cent) when compared with 2018/19 and is more than three times the level recorded in 2006/07 (2,590).
- Since 2012/13 seizures involving Class A drugs have almost trebled (from 625 to 1,655), Class C seizures have more than trebled (from 564 to 1,869) and Class B seizures are 1.5 times higher (from 3,725 to 5,781).
- Cocaine is the most commonly seized Class A drug and the number of seizures involving cocaine has shown the largest increase of all Class A drugs, from 375 in 2012/13 to the highest level of 1,114 in 2019/20.
- Cannabis (Class B) is the most commonly seized drug overall, with herbal cannabis being the most commonly seized cannabis format. The number of herbal cannabis seizures reached their highest level in 2019/20, approaching twice the number recorded in 2012/13.
- Benzodiazepines are the most commonly seized Class C drug and, in 2019/20, they were the second most commonly seized drug across all drug classes. The number of seizure incidents involving benzodiazepines in 2019/20 is more than twice that recorded in 2012/13.
- The reclassification of Pregabalin and Gabapentin as Class C controlled substances in April 2019 resulted in a large increase in the number of seizures of 'Other Class C' drugs, from 185 seizure incidents in 2018/19 to 922 in 2019/20. There were 762 seizures involving Pregabalin and Gabapentin during 2019/20; in 329 of these seizures Pregabalin and Gabapentin were the only drugs seized, while 433 involved the seizure of Pregabalin or Gabapentin along with other Class A, B or C drugs.
- The number of drug-related arrests recorded in 2019/20 (3,829) showed an increase of 511 (15.4 per cent) when compared with 2018/19 and is more than twice the number recorded in 2006/07 (1,709).

1 Overview of Trends in Drug Seizures and Arrests

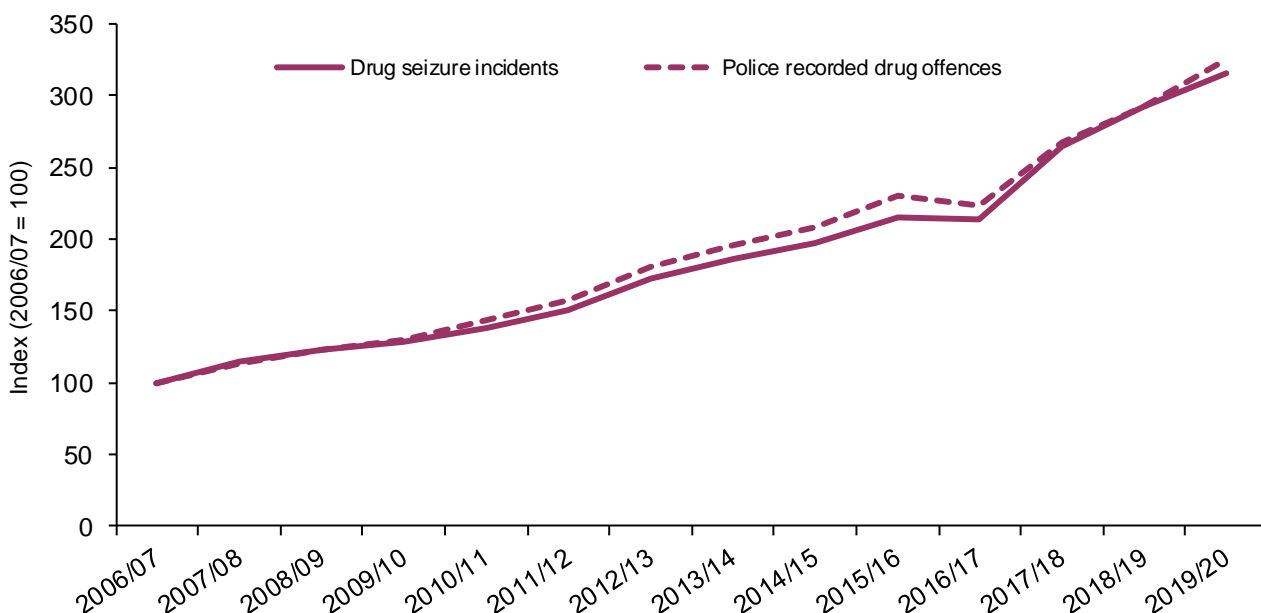
The number of drug seizure incidents has increased each year since 2006/07, with the exception of a slight fall in 2016/17. The level recorded in 2019/20 (8,186 seizure incidents) showed an increase of 625 (8.3 per cent) when compared with 2018/19 and is more than three times the level recorded in 2006/07 (2,590 seizure incidents).

Figure 1.1 Drug seizure incidents, 2006/07 to 2019/20



Levels of drug seizures can be influenced by policing activities and priorities in response to community concern about drugs. Changing levels of drug seizures may also be reflective of a change in the nature of the drugs market, including increased accessibility from sources such as dark web purchase and postal delivery. The influence of policing activities and priorities can also be seen in the police recorded crime figures relating to drug trafficking and possession offences. Figure 1.2 shows how closely the drug seizures trend follows the police recorded drug offences trend.

Figure 1.2 Police recorded drug offences and drug seizure incidents, 2006/07 to 2019/20, indexed to 2006/07=100



As with drug seizure incidents, the number of arrests for drug offences¹ has increased in most of the years since 2006/07. The number recorded in 2019/20 (3,829) showed an increase of 511 (15.4 per cent) when compared with 2018/19 and is more than twice the number recorded in 2006/07 (1,709).

Figure 1.3 Drug-related arrests¹, 2006/07 to 2019/20

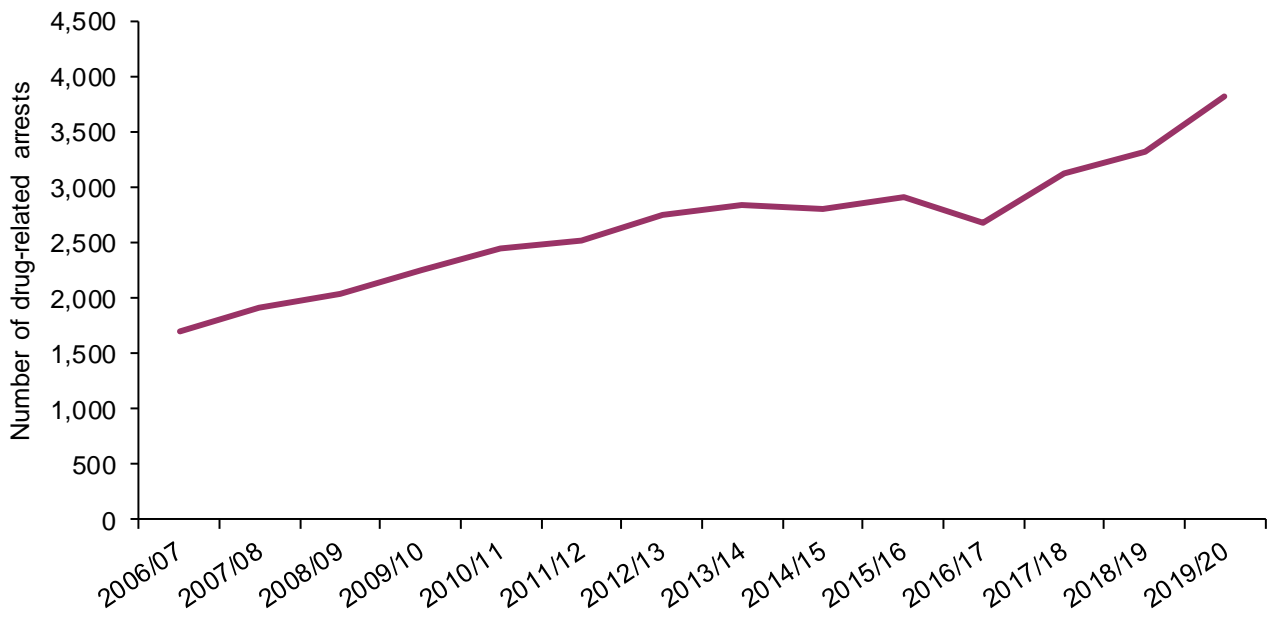


Table 1.1 Drug seizure incidents and drug-related arrests since 2006/07

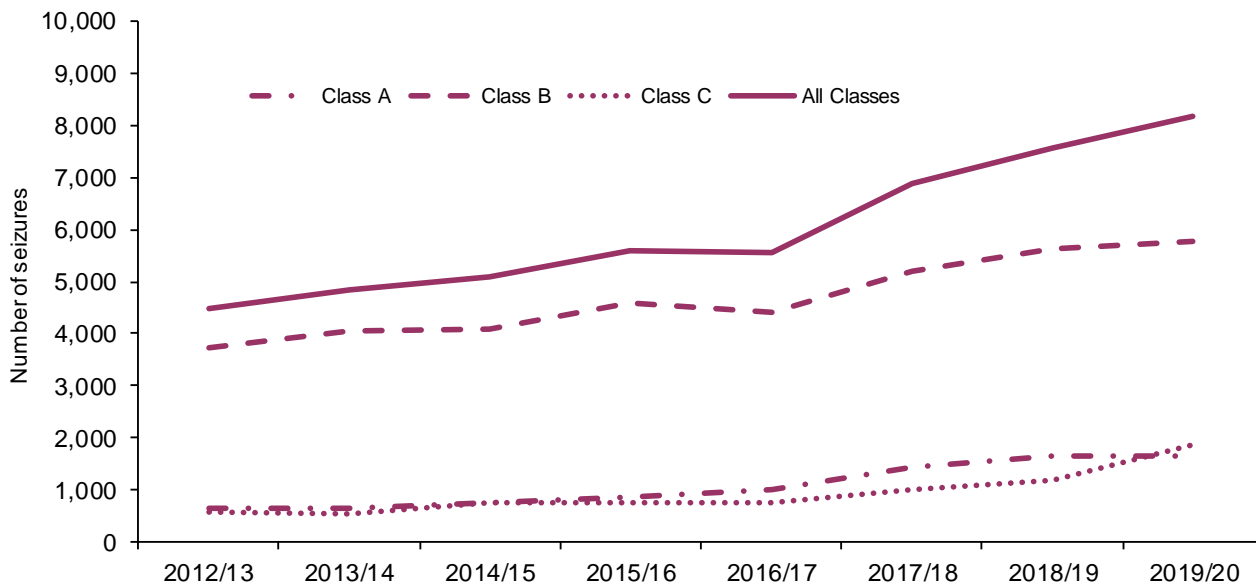
	Drug seizure incidents	Drug-related arrests ¹
2006/07	2,590	1,709
2007/08	2,968	1,911
2008/09	3,198	2,044
2009/10	3,319	2,262
2010/11	3,564	2,448
2011/12	3,920	2,531
2012/13	4,474	2,763
2013/14	4,825	2,838
2014/15	5,103	2,801
2015/16	5,597	2,924
2016/17	5,546	2,685
2017/18	6,872	3,122
2018/19	7,561	3,318
2019/20	8,186	3,829

¹ Arrests for offences related to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

2 Trends in Drug Seizures by Class and Type of Drug

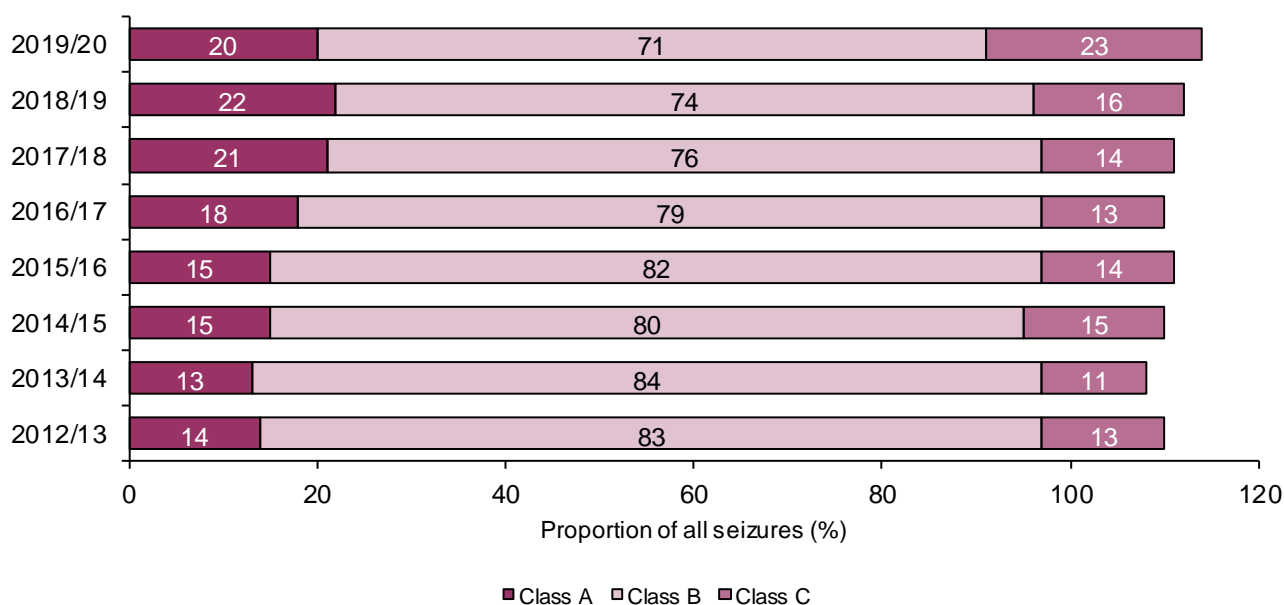
The number of drug seizure incidents has increased by 83 per cent between 2012/13 and 2019/20; seizures involving Class A drugs have almost trebled (from 625 to 1,655), Class C seizures have more than trebled (from 564 to 1,869) and Class B seizures have increased by 55 per cent (3,725 to 5,781). As the majority of seizures involve the Class B drug Cannabis, changes in levels of Cannabis seizures have the biggest impact on the overall trend.

Figure 2.1 Number of seizures of Class A, Class B and Class C drugs, 2012/13 to 2019/20



The proportion of seizures involving Class A drugs has generally increased since 2012/13 and has remained at 20 per cent or more since 2017/18. The proportion of Class B drug seizures has gradually fallen, from 84 per cent in 2013/14 to 71 per cent in 2019/20. The proportion of seizures involving Class C drugs saw an increase to its highest level of 23 per cent in 2019/20. The reclassification of Pregabalin and Gabapentin as Class C controlled substances in April 2019 resulted in a large increase in the number of seizures of Class C drugs during 2019/20 and an increase in the proportion of seizures involving Class C Drugs. With the inclusion of these drugs in the seizure incident figures from April 2019, the distribution of seizures in the most recent year is not directly comparable with previous years. Figure 2.2 compares the distribution since 2012/13.

Figure 2.2 Distribution of seizures involving Class A, Class B and Class C drugs², 2012/13 to 2019/20



² As a seizure may include more than one class of drug, the number of seizures for each class of drug will sum to more than the total number of seizures and the proportions for each year will sum to more than 100%.

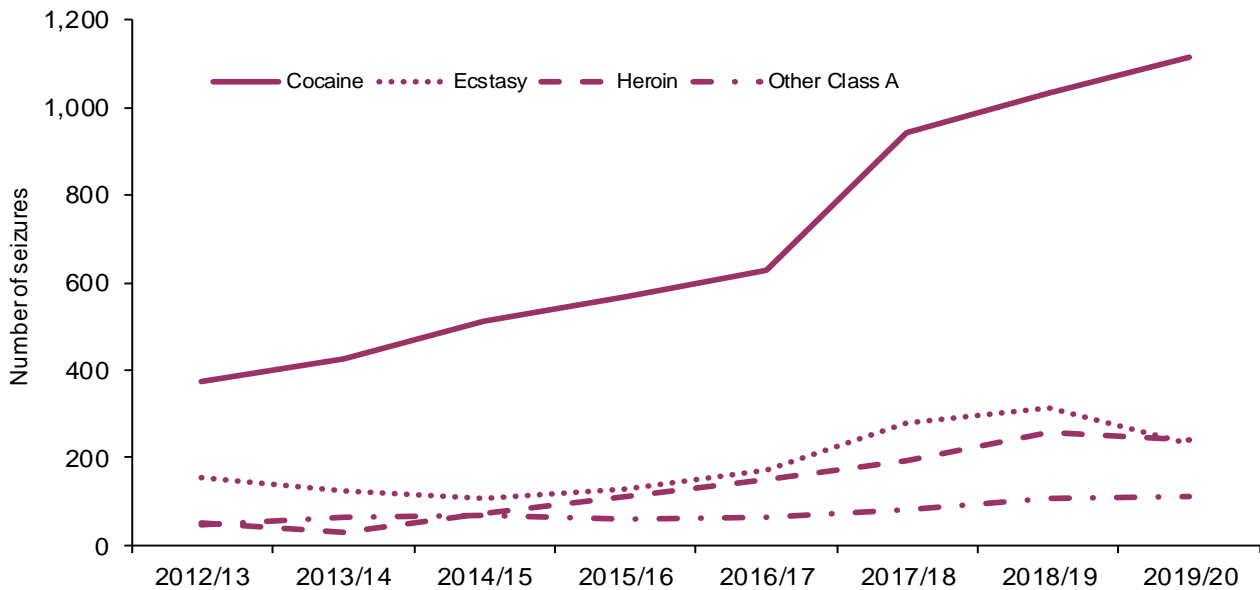
Class A Drugs

Cocaine is the most commonly seized Class A drug. The number of seizures involving cocaine has shown the largest increase of all Class A drugs, from 375 in 2012/13 to the highest level of 1,114 in 2019/20. Between 2016/17 and 2018/19 cocaine was the second most commonly seized drug across all classes, while from 2012/13 to 2015/16 and in 2019/20, it was the third most commonly seized drug.

Seizures involving Morphine and Other Class A drugs³ recorded their highest levels in 2019/20, with 16 and 110 seizures respectively. The number of seizures involving Ecstasy, Heroin and LSD reached their highest levels in 2018/19 (315, 259 and 20 seizures respectively), with a lower number of seizures recorded in 2019/20.

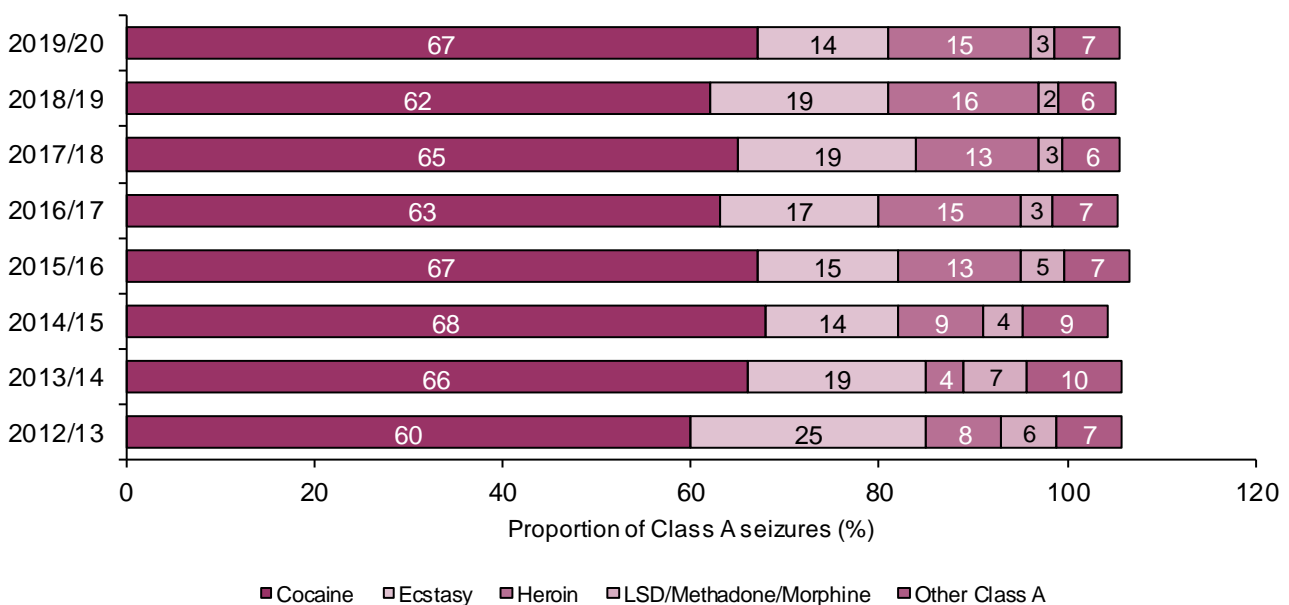
The number of seizures involving Methadone has generally fallen since 2012/13 with 5 in 2018/19, the lowest number recorded. There were 11 such seizures in 2019/20.

Figure 2.3 Number of seizures involving the main Class A drugs⁴, 2012/13 to 2019/20



The proportion of Class A seizures involving Heroin has generally increased since 2012/13, while the proportion of seizures involving LSD, Methadone and Morphine has fallen slightly in recent years.

Figure 2.4 Distribution of seizures involving Class A drugs⁵, 2012/13 to 2019/20



³ Other Class A drugs include fentanyl, oxycodone, psilocin (magic mushrooms) and methamphetamine (crystal meth).

⁴ The numbers of LSD, Methadone and Morphine seizure incidents are too small to be presented in Fig 2.3.

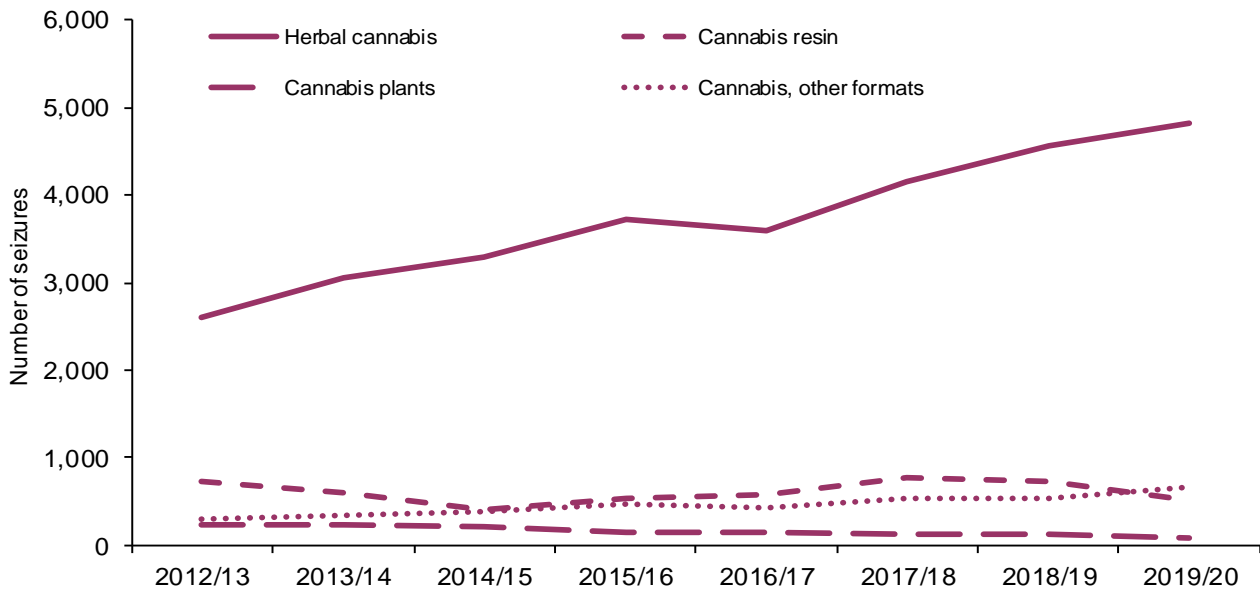
⁵ As a seizure may include more than one type of Class A drug, the number of seizures for each type of Class A drug will sum to more than the total number of Class A seizures and the proportions for each year will sum to more than 100%.

Class B Drugs

Cannabis is the most commonly seized drug across all classes, with herbal cannabis being the most commonly seized cannabis format. The number of herbal cannabis seizures reached their highest level in 2019/20 (4,816), approaching twice the number recorded in 2012/13 (2,605). Seizures involving cannabis resin have tended to fluctuate, with the level in 2019/20 (507) lower than that recorded in the previous year (735). Seizures of cannabis plants have declined from 245 in 2013/14 to 94 in 2019/20. As with herbal cannabis, seizures of cannabis in other formats have steadily increased since 2012/13 (301 seizures) to reach 671 in 2019/20.

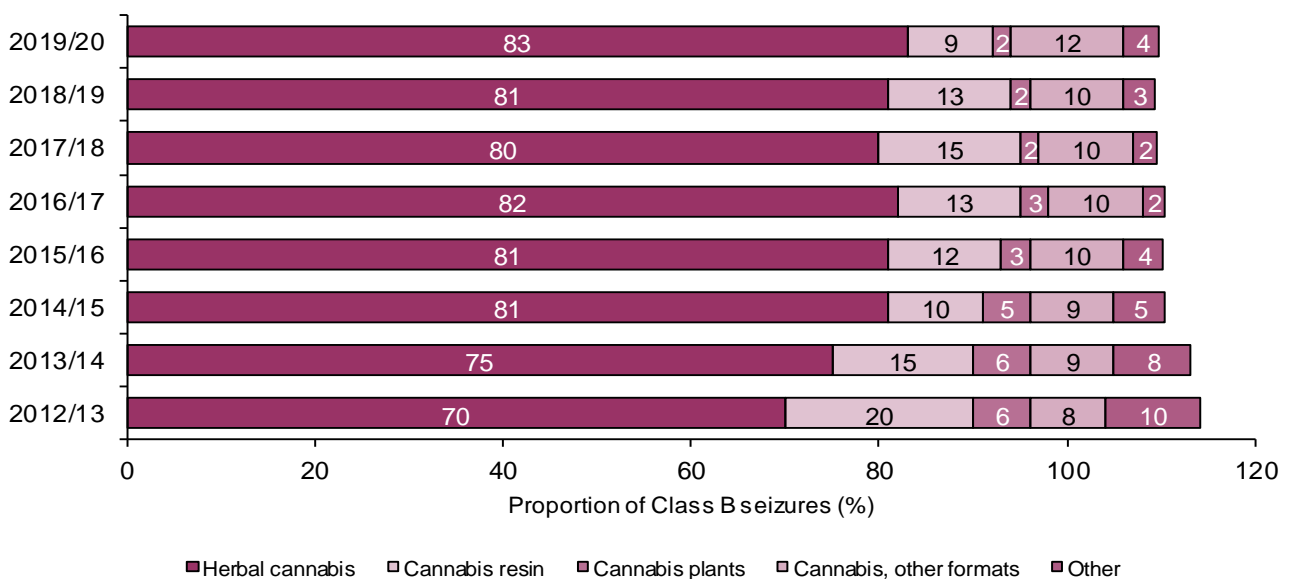
Seizures involving Other Class B drugs⁶ have increased over the last few years from 41 in 2016/17 to 120 in 2019/20. Mephedrone seizures have fallen since 2012/13 (130 seizure incidents), with 2 seizures recorded in 2018/19 and 14 recorded in 2019/20. Amphetamine seizures have shown no real trend, with levels ranging from 51 in 2016/17 to 94 in 2012/13; there were 89 seizures recorded in 2019/20.

Figure 2.5 Number of seizures involving Cannabis in its various formats, 2012/13 to 2019/20



The distribution of seizures of Class B drugs has remained reasonably consistent since 2014/15.

Figure 2.6 Distribution of seizures involving Class B drugs^{7,8}, 2012/13 to 2019/20



⁶ Other Class B drugs include cathinone derivatives, codeine/dihydrocodeine, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), ketamine and synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists.

⁷ As a seizure may include more than one type of Class B drug, the number of seizures for each type of Class B drug will sum to more than the total number of Class B seizures and the proportions for each year will sum to more than 100%.

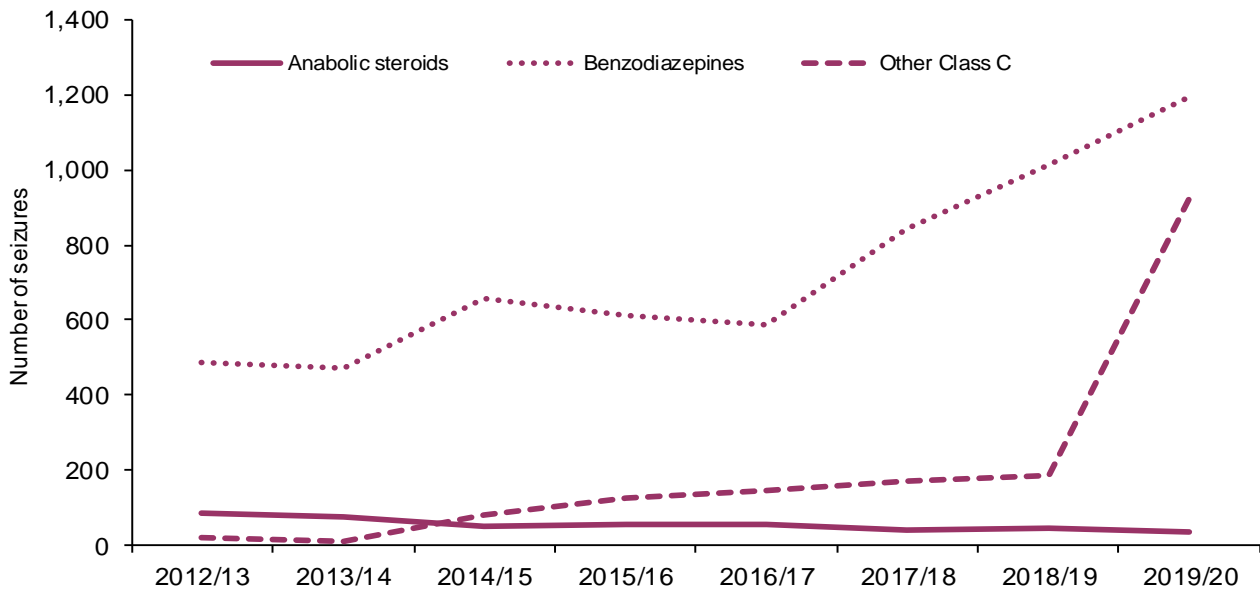
⁸ Other includes Amphetamines, Mephedrone and Other Class B drugs.

Class C Drugs

Benzodiazepines are the most commonly seized Class C drug. The number of seizure incidents involving benzodiazepines reached its highest level of 1,197 in 2019/20, more than twice the number recorded in 2012/13. Between 2012/13 and 2015/16, and in 2019/20, benzodiazepines were the second most commonly seized drug across all classes.

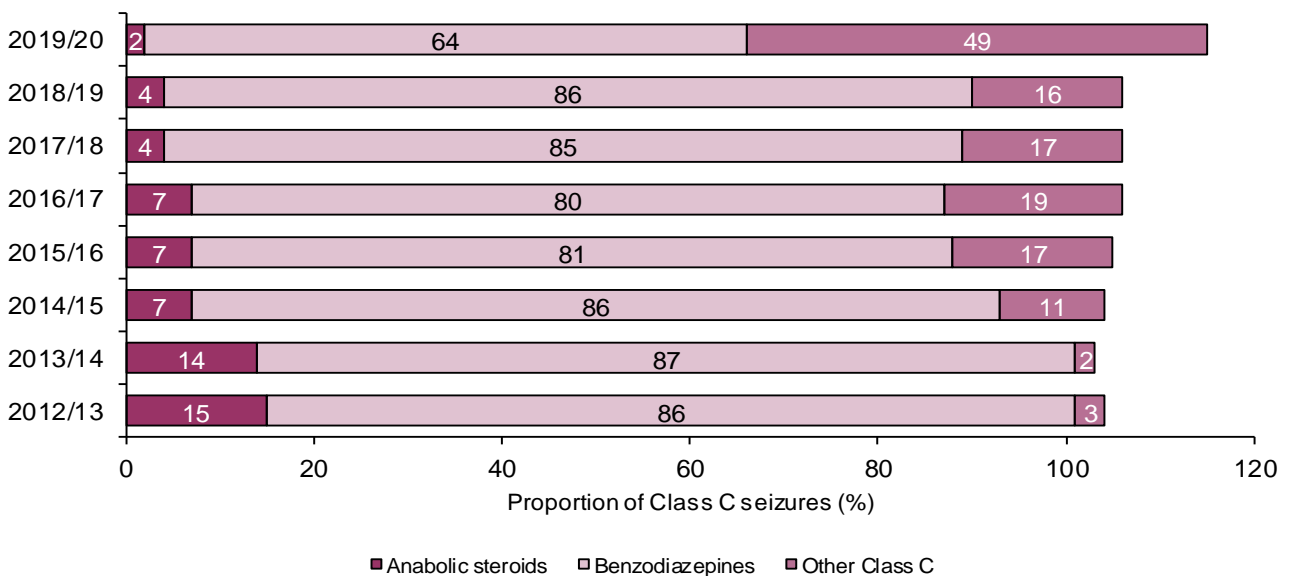
The reclassification of Pregabalin and Gabapentin as Class C controlled substances in April 2019 resulted in a large increase in the number of seizures of Other Class C drugs, from 185 seizure incidents in 2018/19 to 922 in 2019/20. There were 762 seizures involving Pregabalin and Gabapentin during 2019/20; in 329 of these seizures Pregabalin and Gabapentin were the only drugs seized, while 433 involved the seizure of Pregabalin or Gabapentin along with other Class A, B or C drugs.

Figure 2.7 Number of seizures involving Class C drugs, 2012/13 to 2019/20



The inclusion of Pregabalin and Gabapentin within the seizure incident figures from April 2019 has had an impact on the distribution of Class C seizures. The proportion of seizures involving Other Class C drugs increased from 16 per cent in 2018/19 to 49 per cent in 2019/20, while the proportion involving Benzodiazepines fell from 86 per cent to 64 per cent over the same time period. As a result of this change, the distribution of seizures within Class C in 2019/20 is not directly comparable with previous years.

Figure 2.8 Distribution of seizures involving Class C drugs⁹, 2012/13 to 2019/20



⁹ As a seizure may include more than one type of Class C drug, the number of seizures for each type of Class C drug will sum to more than the total number of Class C seizures and the proportions for each year will sum to more than 100%.

New Psychoactive Substances

The [Psychoactive Substances Act 2016](#) (PSA) came into effect in May 2016, in response to the emergence of an increasing number of substances which were not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (MDA). This act created a blanket ban on the production, distribution, sale and supply of psychoactive substances in the UK for human consumption. Psychoactive substances that are within the scope of the PSA are referred to as New Psychoactive Substances (NPS).

A psychoactive substance is defined as any substance intended for human consumption that is capable of producing a psychoactive effect. In general, NPS are drugs designed to replicate the effects of other illegal substances. Before the PSA was introduced they were commonly referred to as 'legal highs'.

Seizure Incidents

The number of seizure incidents involving NPS in 2019/20 was 166, an increase of 138 when compared with 2018/19. The majority of NPS seizures in 2019/20 were of Flualprazolam which was first recorded as a New Psychoactive Substance in April 2019.

Cannabis Cultivation

In the latest guidance from the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC), commercial cultivation of cannabis is defined as:

- Twenty-five or more cannabis plants, at any stage of growth (germination), are being or have been grown; or
- There is evidence of a cannabis farm.

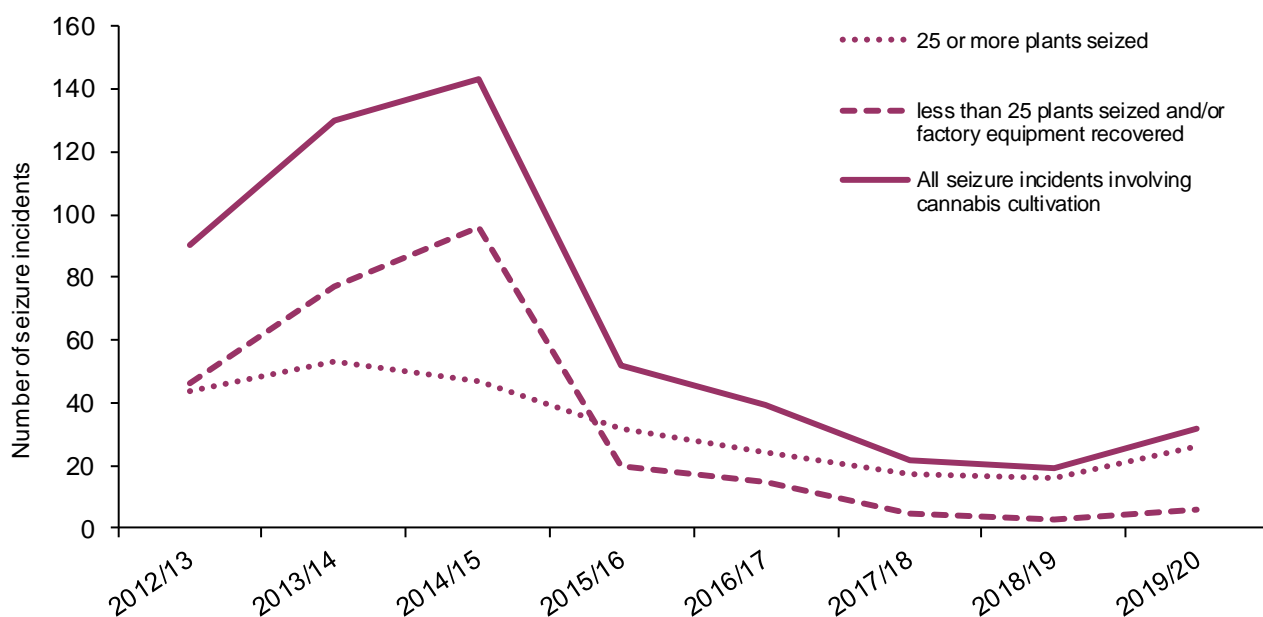
The definition of a cannabis farm is:

- The premises, or part therein, has 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 electricity meter bypassed (abstraction of electricity).

In addition to the above, the overall appearance of the venue, together with available intelligence also indicates if the site was, is, or is intended to be a cannabis farm, irrespective of the number of plants present on the site. For example there may be no plants but the site has been made ready to commence cultivation.

While the overall number of seizure incidents involving cannabis cultivation reached 143 in 2014/15, the number has since fallen, with 32 recorded in 2019/20.

Figure 2.9 Cannabis cultivation, 2012/13 to 2019/20



3 Trends in Drug Seizures by Quantity of Drugs Seized

Most drugs can be seized in a range of formats. In order to present seized quantities within a given drug type in terms of comparable units (kilograms, doses or plants), conversion factors developed by the Home Office have been applied to estimate the overall quantity of drugs seized.

In this section, drug seizure quantities with the conversion factors applied are presented as estimated totals, summarised in kilograms, doses and plants. The raw, unconverted quantities for each drug type and format are available in the [accompanying spreadsheet](#) pivot tables - seizure incidents and quantities seized.

Totals for the quantities of drugs seized can be greatly influenced by small numbers of large seizures. Quantities seized should not be taken as an indication of drug prevalence or availability.

Class A Drugs

Conversion factors have been applied to the following Class A drugs and they are summarised as follows:

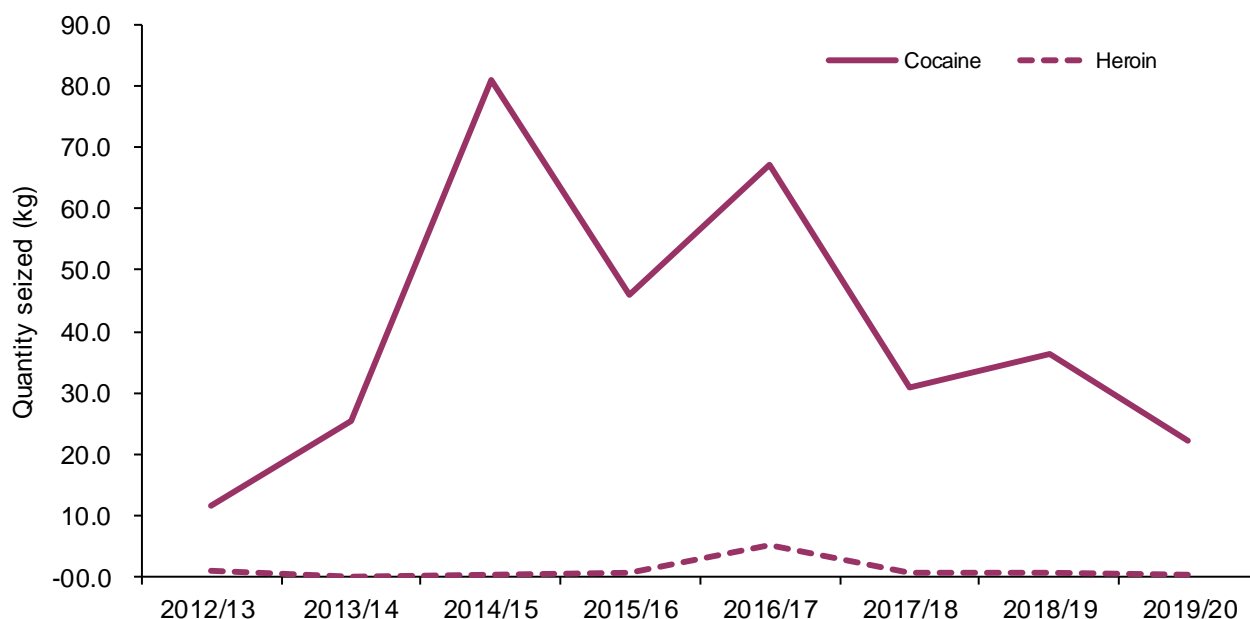
Summarised in kilograms	Summarised in thousands of doses
Cocaine	Ecstasy
Heroin	LSD (weighed amounts excluded)
	Morphine

Class A, weights seized (converted amounts)

Cocaine: Seizures of cocaine have ranged in weight from 11.6kg in 2012/13 to 81.0kg in 2014/15. There was 22.2kg seized in 2019/20, a decrease when compared with 2018/19 (36.3kg) and the second lowest weight seized since 2012/13.

Heroin: The quantity of heroin seized is much lower than that for cocaine, ranging from 0.1kg in 2013/14 to 5.1kg 2016/17. The figure for 2016/17 is the only year since 2012/13 when the weight of heroin seized has exceeded 1kg; this is mainly attributed to one seizure accounting for around three quarters of the total weight seized in that year. There was 0.4kg of heroin seized in 2019/20, down from 0.6kg in 2018/19 and the third lowest weight seized since 2012/13.

Figure 3.1 Quantities of Cocaine and Heroin seized (kg), 2012/13 to 2019/20



Between 2017/18 and 2019/20 four fifths of cocaine seizures involved quantities less than 5g in weight. During the same period, just over 70 per cent of heroin seizures involved quantities of less than 1g (Figure 3.2).

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 present the distribution of cocaine and heroin seizures since 2012/13, showing both the number of seizure incidents and the smaller proportions where the quantity seized is 5g or more.

Figure 3.2 Distribution of the quantities of Cocaine and Heroin seized by weight (kg), 2019/20

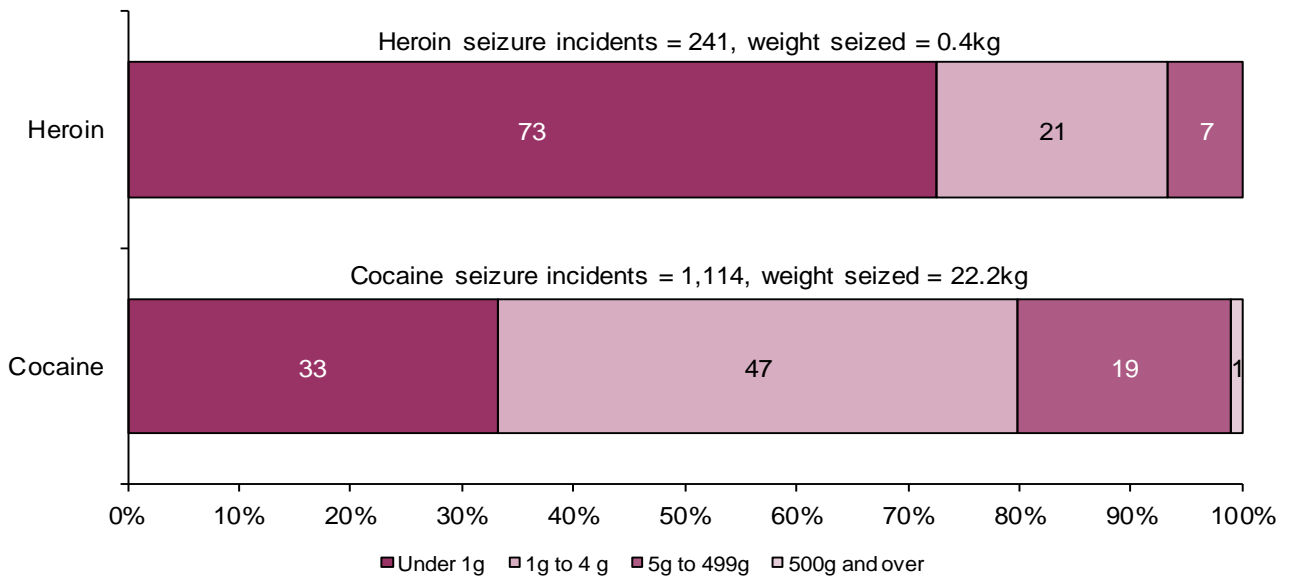


Figure 3.3 Number of Class A Cocaine seizure incidents by weight seized, 2012/13 to 2019/20

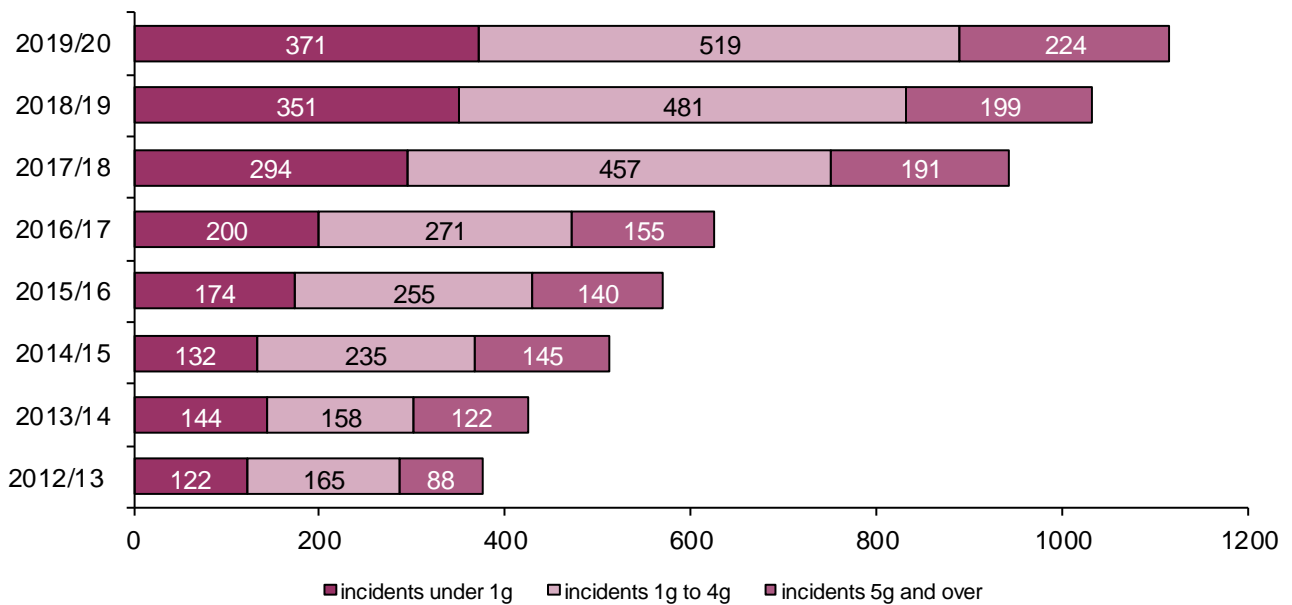
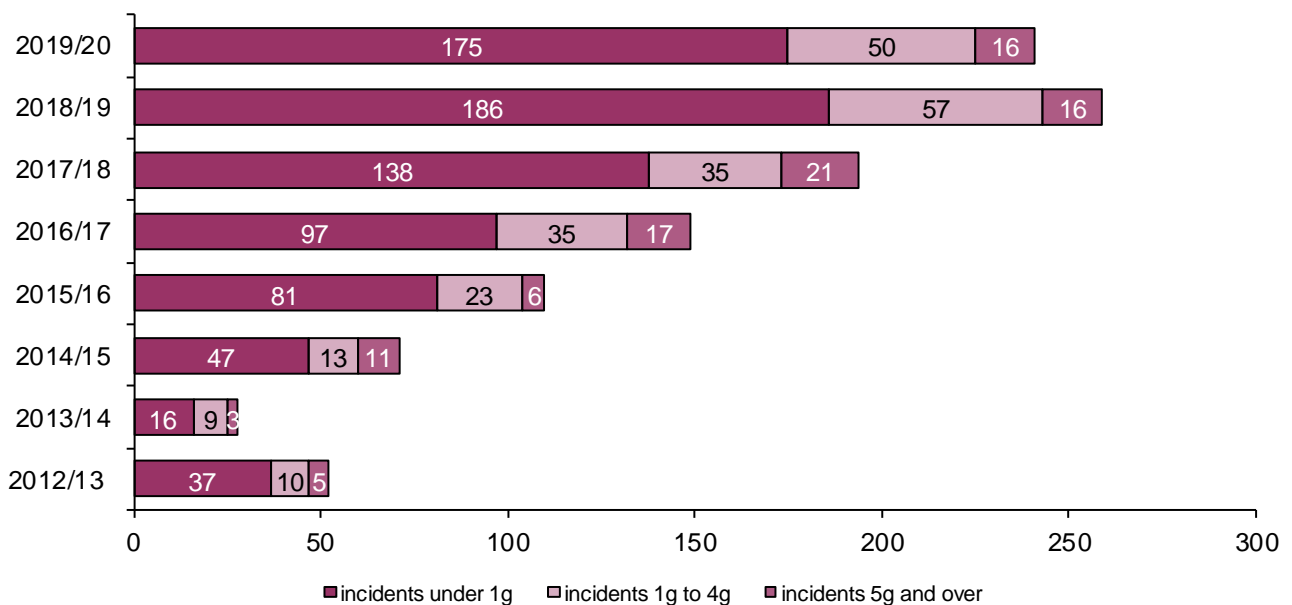


Figure 3.4 Number of Class A Heroin seizure incidents by weight seized, 2012/13 to 2019/20



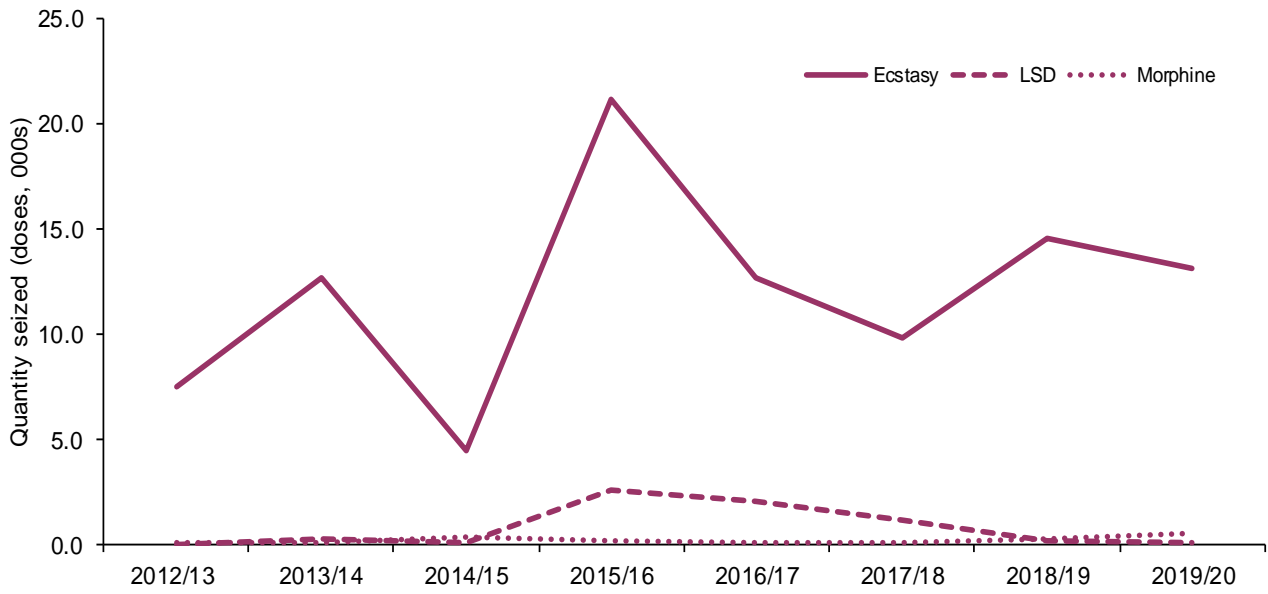
Class A, doses seized (converted amounts)

Ecstasy: Seizures of ecstasy have ranged from 4,500 doses in 2014/15 to 21,200 doses in 2015/16. In 2019/20 there were 13,100 doses seized, a decrease on the 14,600 doses seized the previous year and the third highest number of doses seized since 2012/13.

LSD: Since 2012/13 there have been 89 seizures of LSD (excluding weighed amounts)¹⁰, adding to an estimated 6,420 doses in total and ranging from fewer than 10 in 2012/13 to 2,610 in 2015/16. There were approximately 100 doses seized in 2019/20, a decrease from the 190 doses seized in 2018/19.

Morphine: There have been 67 morphine seizures since 2012/13, amounting to an estimated 1,530 doses in total and ranging from around 60 in 2012/13 to approximately 510 in 2019/20.

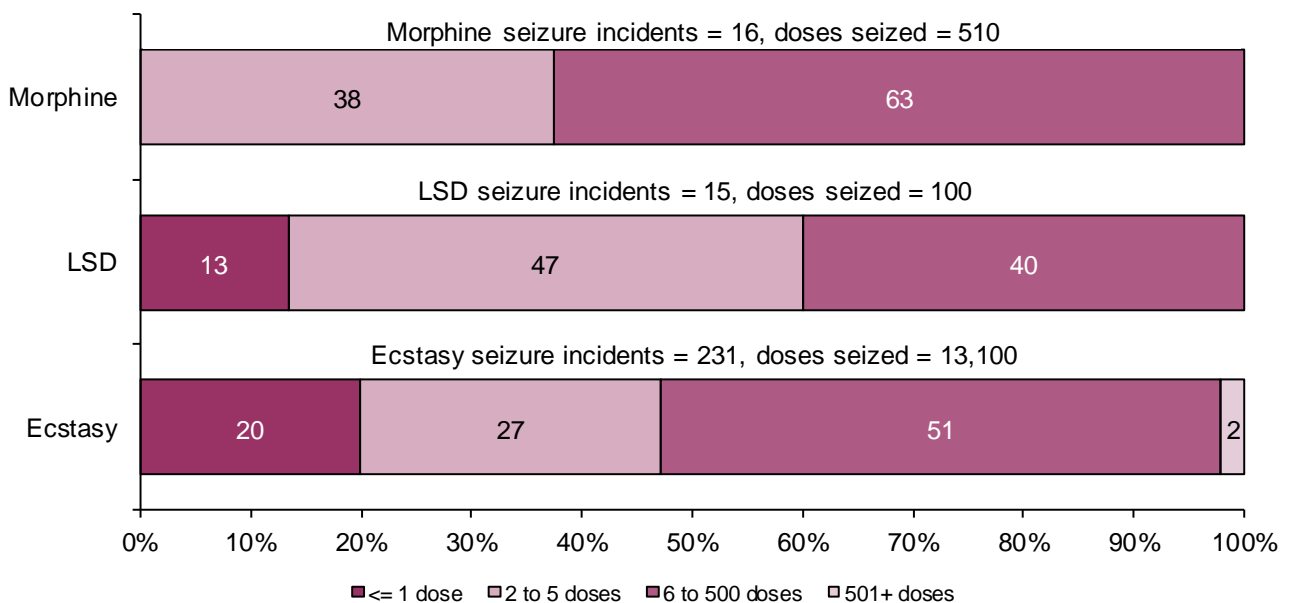
Figure 3.5 Quantities of Ecstasy, LSD and Morphine seized (doses, 000s), 2012/13 to 2019/20



More than four fifths of ecstasy and morphine seizures involve quantities of 50 doses or less, except for 2014/15 when the proportion for morphine was two thirds. In 2019/20 all LSD seizures involved doses of 50 or less, while ecstasy was the only one of these drug types to have seizures of more than 500 doses (Figure 3.6).

Figures 3.7 to 3.9 present the distribution of ecstasy, LSD and morphine seizures since 2012/13, showing both the changing number of seizure incidents and the smaller proportions where the quantity seized is 51 or more doses.

Figure 3.6 Distribution of the quantities of Ecstasy, LSD and Morphine seized (doses), 2019/20



¹⁰ Weighed amounts of LSD are not included in the figures; this is in line with Home Office presentation of this drug type.

Figure 3.7 Number of Class A Ecstasy seizure incidents by doses seized, 2012/13 to 2019/20

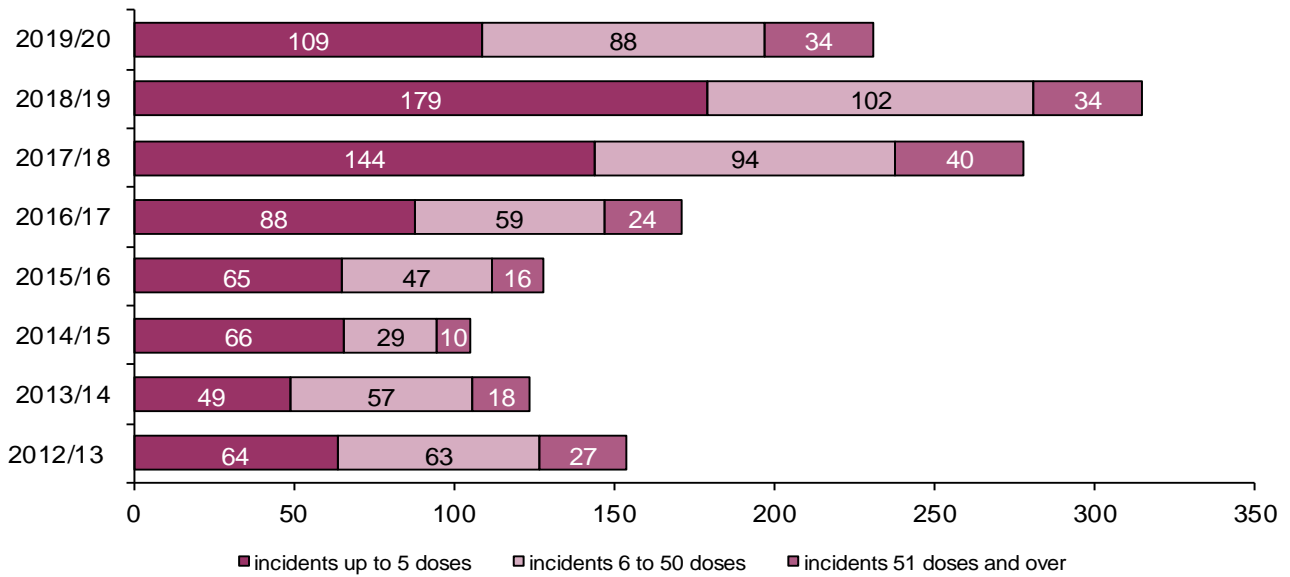


Figure 3.8 Number of Class A LSD seizure incidents by doses seized, 2012/13 to 2019/20

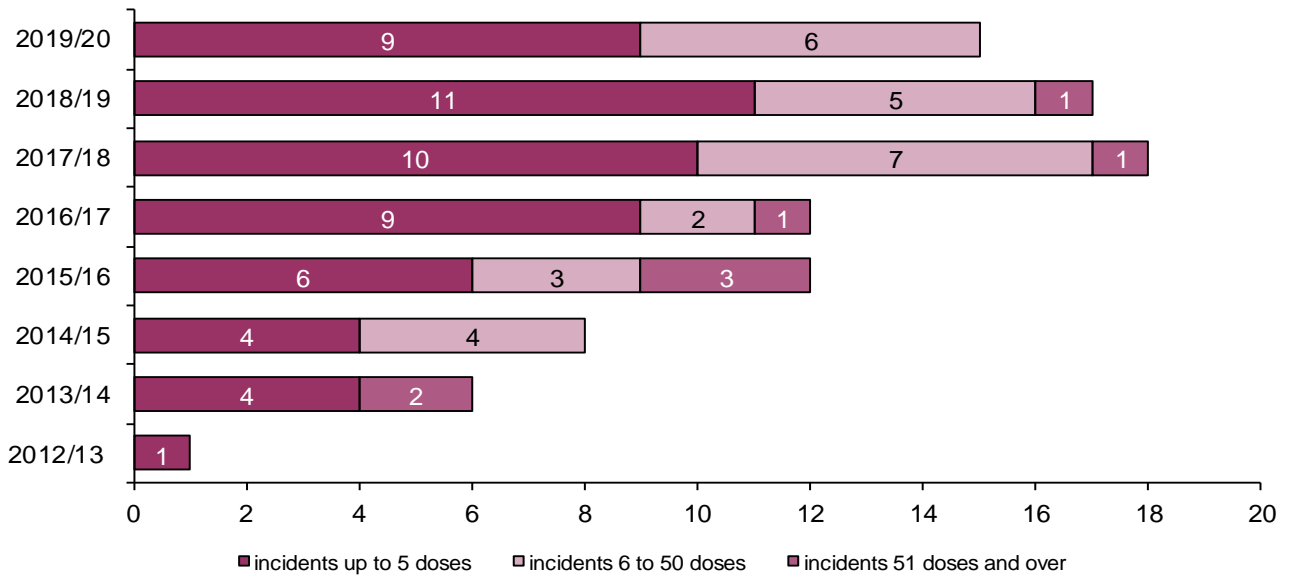
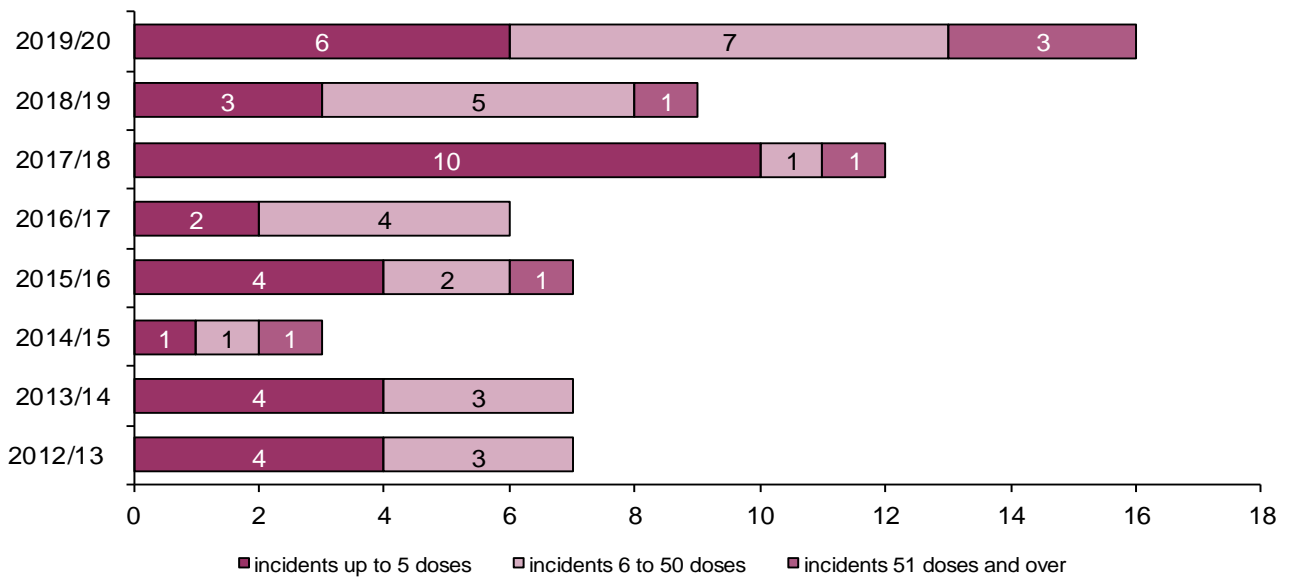


Figure 3.9 Number of Class A Morphine seizure incidents by doses seized, 2012/13 to 2019/20



Class B Drugs

Conversion factors have been applied to the following Class B drugs and they are summarised as follows:

Summarised in kilograms	Summarised in thousands of plants
Herbal cannabis	Cannabis plants
Cannabis resin	
Amphetamines	

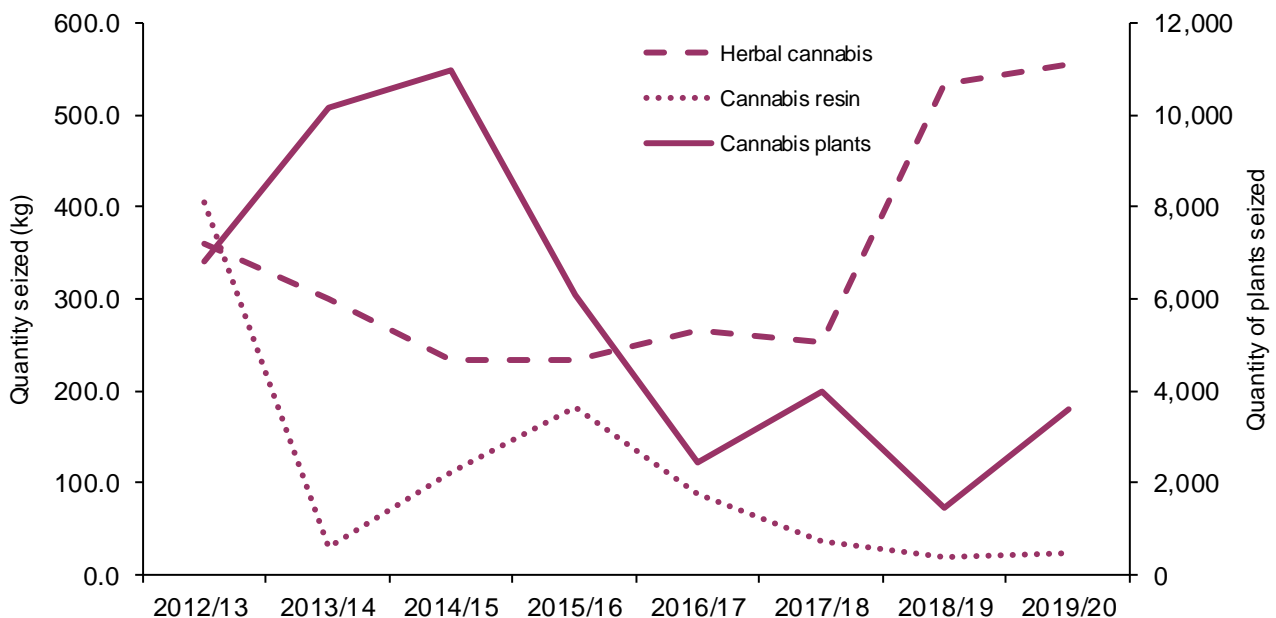
Class B, cannabis weights and plants seized (converted amounts)

Herbal cannabis: The weight of herbal cannabis seized was at its lowest in 2014/15 (232.5kg) before generally increasing to reach 555.8kg in 2019/20. The weight seized in 2019/20 was slightly higher than that seized the previous year (533.0kg) and the largest weight seized since 2012/13; this included 10 herbal cannabis seizures of 10kg or more, with one of these seizures being approximately 38kg.

Cannabis resin: The weight of cannabis resin seized has fallen in most of the years since 2012/13. In 2012/13 the weight of cannabis resin seized (404.5kg) was higher than the weight of herbal cannabis seized (360.3kg), although this pattern is reversed in each subsequent year. The higher levels seen in 2012/13 and 2015/16 were influenced by a small number of large seizures. Two seizures in 2012/13 accounted for close to three quarters of the total seized in that year, while one seizure in 2015/16 accounted for 90 per cent of the total seized. There was 23.1kg seized in 2019/20, compared with 19.1kg in 2018/19 and the second lowest amount seized since 2012/13.

Cannabis plants: Seizures of cannabis plants increased from 2012/13 (6,813 plants) to reach 10,974 plants seized in 2014/15. The number of plants seized has fallen since then, with 3,595 plants seized in 2019/20, the third lowest number seized since 2012/13.

Figure 3.10 Quantity of Cannabis seized in its various formats (kg and plants), 2012/13 to 2019/20



Since 2012/13 at least three quarters of the herbal cannabis seizures each year have involved weights less than 5g. Around three quarters of cannabis resin seizures in 2018/19 and 2019/20 involved weights less than 5g. Three fifths of cannabis plant seizures in 2019/20 involved at least 6 plants, with one seizure involving more than 500 plants (Figure 3.11).

Figures 3.12 to 3.14 present the distribution of herbal cannabis, cannabis resin and cannabis plant seizures since 2012/13, showing the increasing proportion of herbal cannabis seizure incidents of less than 1g and the decreasing proportion of cannabis plant seizures where more than 50 plants were seized.

Information on the commercial cultivation of cannabis can be found on page 11.

Figure 3.11 Distribution of the quantities of Cannabis seized (kg and plants), 2019/20

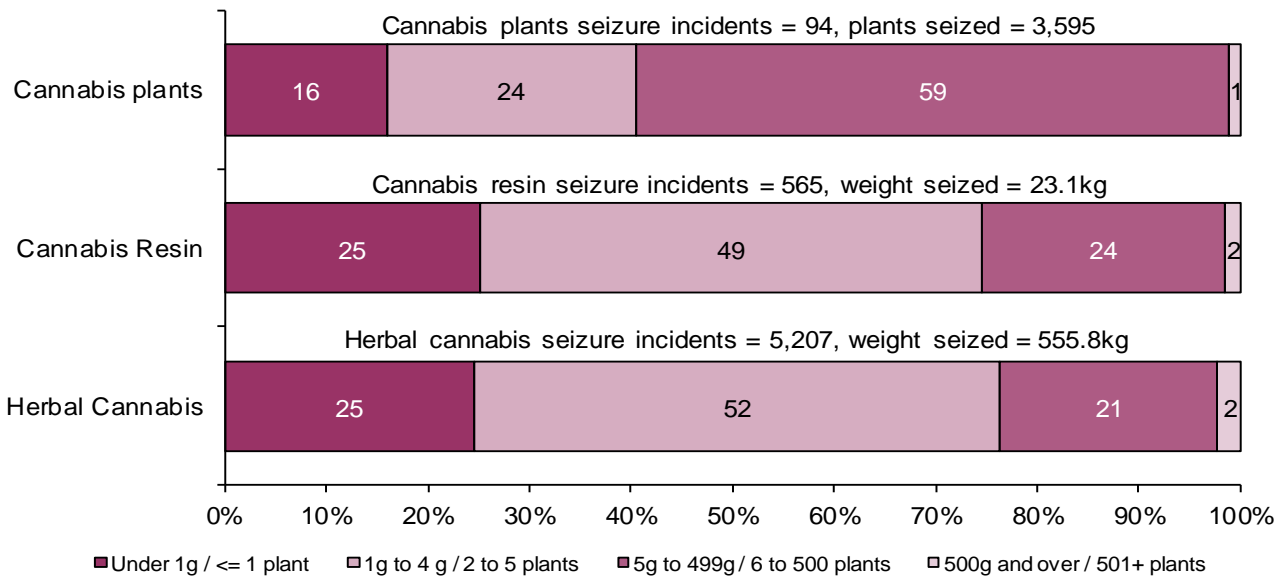


Figure 3.12 Number of Class B Herbal cannabis seizure incidents by weight seized, 2012/13 to 2019/20

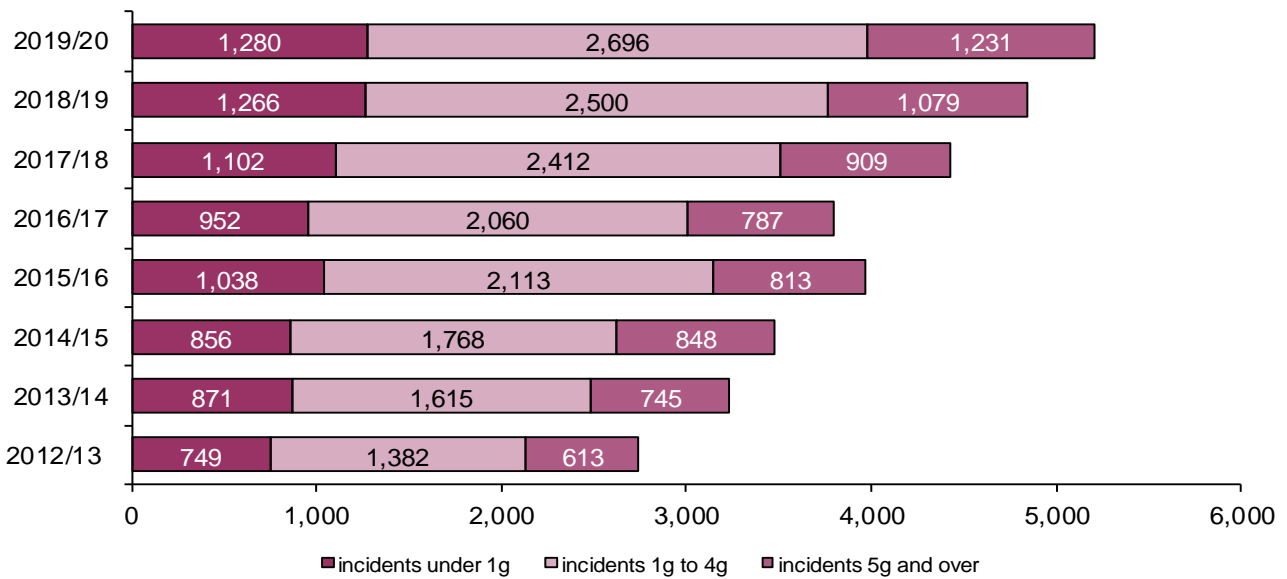


Figure 3.13 Number of Class B Cannabis resin seizure incidents by weight seized, 2012/13 to 2019/20

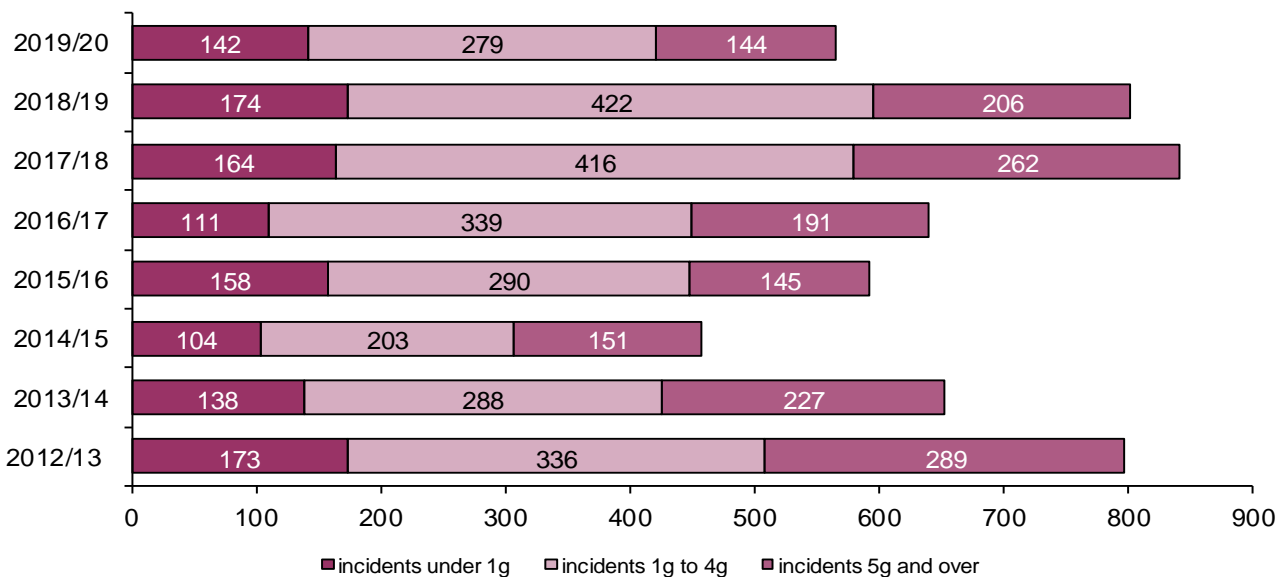
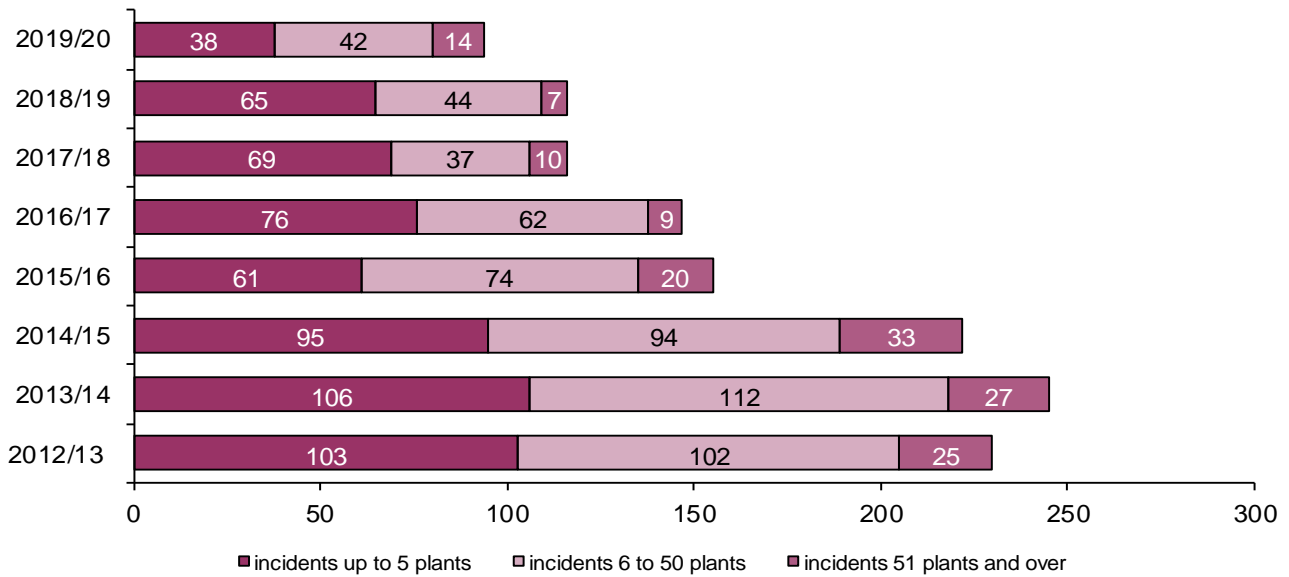


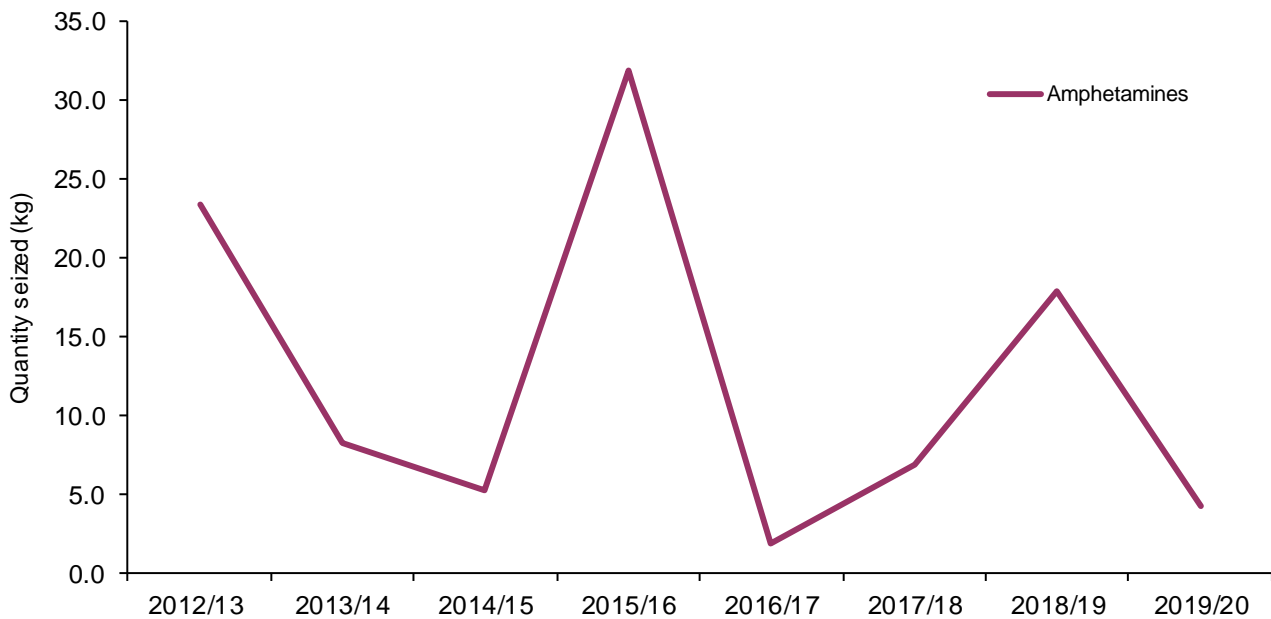
Figure 3.14 Number of Class B Cannabis plant seizure incidents by number of plants seized, 2012/13 to 2019/20



Class B, amphetamines seized (converted amounts)

Amphetamines: Seizures of amphetamines have not shown a consistent trend over the years since 2012/13. A small number of large seizures have contributed to the higher quantities recorded in 2012/13, 2015/16 and 2018/19. In 2012/13 one seizure accounted for 85 per cent of the total, in 2015/16 two seizures accounted for 87 per cent of the total seized and two seizures in 2018/19 accounted for around 75 per cent of the total seized.

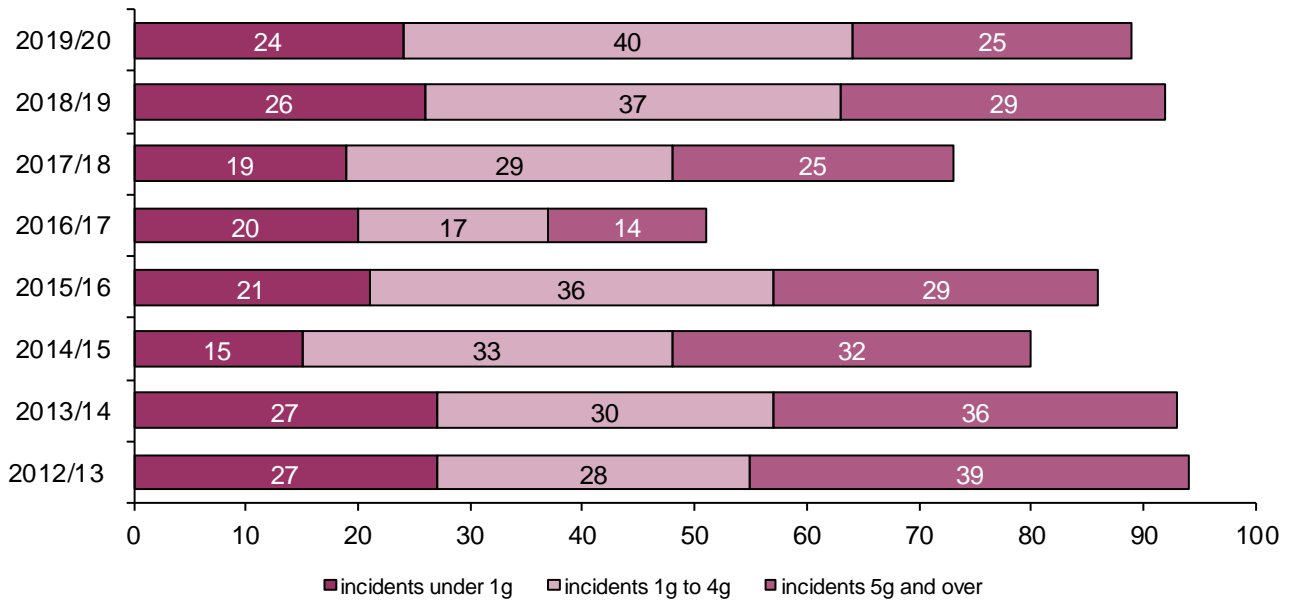
Figure 3.15 Quantity of Amphetamines seized (kg), 2012/13 to 2019/20



In 2019/20 more than four fifths of seizure incidents involved weights less than 10g.

Figure 3.16 presents the distribution of amphetamine seizures since 2012/13, demonstrating the variability of amounts seized.

Figure 3.16 Number of Class B Amphetamine seizure incidents by weight seized, 2012/13 to 2019/20



Class C Drugs

Conversion factors have been applied to the following Class C drugs and they are summarised as follows:

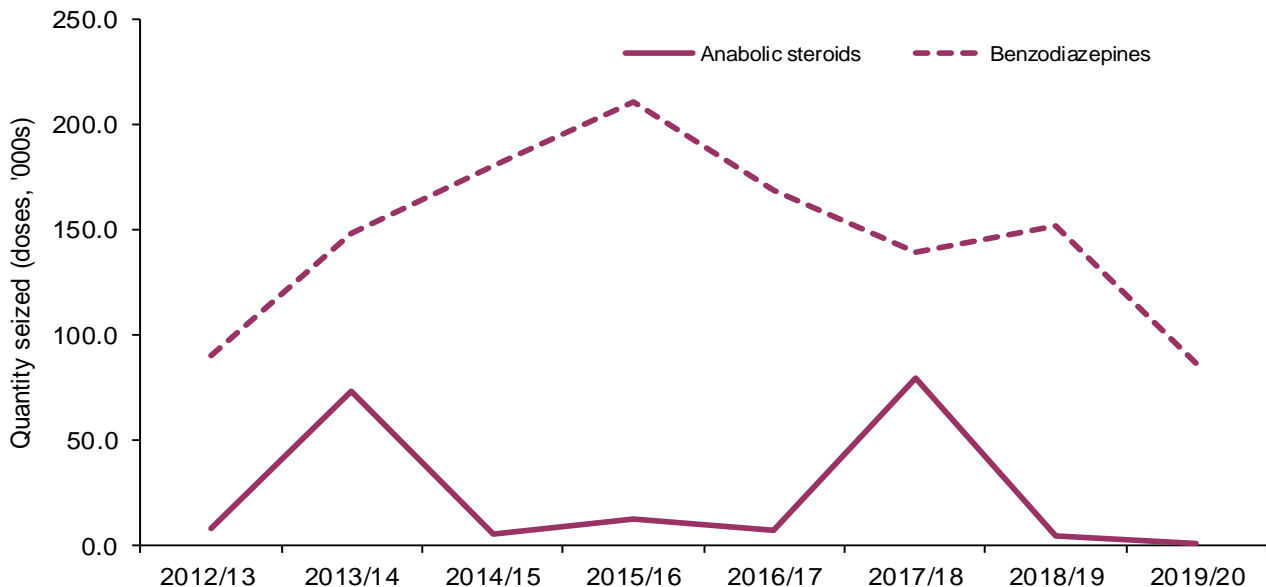
Summarised in thousands of doses
Anabolic steroids
Benzodiazepines

Class C, doses seized (converted amounts)

Anabolic Steroids: There were 73,400 doses of anabolic steroids seized in 2013/14, with two seizures accounting for 70 per cent of the total. In 2017/18 there were nearly 80,000 doses seized, with two thirds of this total attributed to one seizure. The number of doses seized in all other years was much lower, with the lowest level of 700 doses seized in 2019/20.

Benzodiazepines: The number of doses of benzodiazepines increased each year from around 90,600 in 2012/13 to 210,700 in 2015/16. Seven seizures accounted for 61 per cent of the total quantity of benzodiazepine seized in 2015/16. Levels have fallen in each year since 2015/16, with 86,600 doses seized in 2019/20, the lowest level since 2012/13.

Figure 3.17 Quantity of Anabolic Steroids and Benzodiazepines seized (doses, '000s), 2012/13 to 2019/20



Since 2012/13 more than three fifths of anabolic steroid and benzodiazepine seizures have involved more than 5 doses (Figure 3.18). Figures 3.19 and 3.20 present the distribution of anabolic steroid and benzodiazepine seizures since 2012/13.

Figure 3.18 Distribution of the quantities of Benzodiazepine and Anabolic Steroids seized (doses), 2019/20

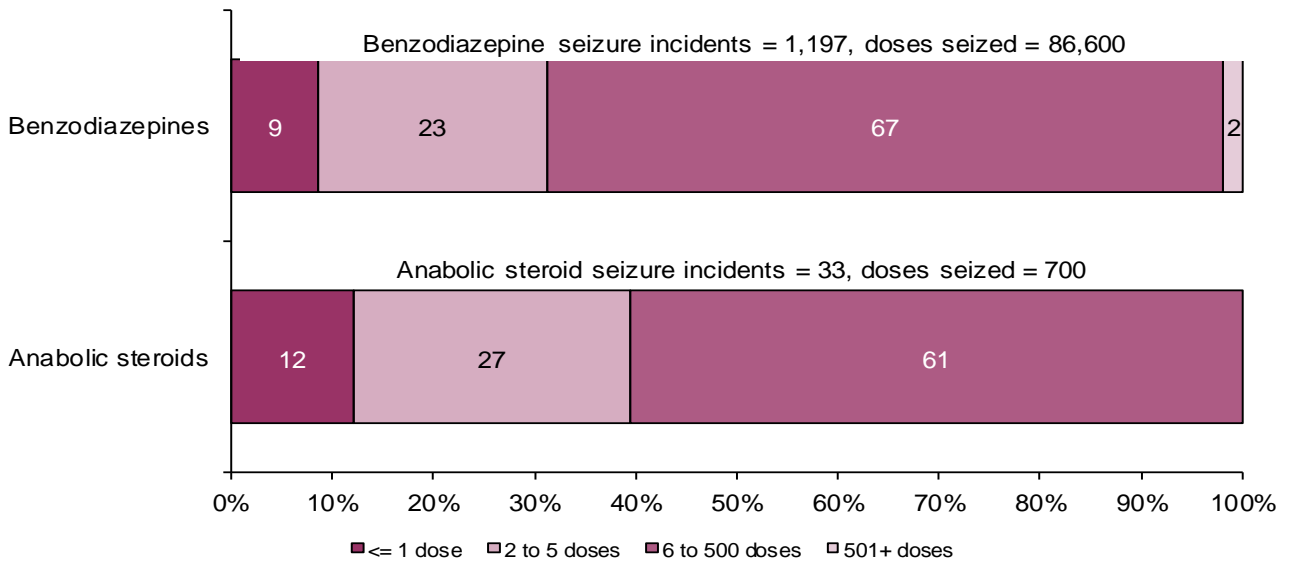


Figure 3.19 Number of Class C Anabolic steroids seizure incidents by doses seized, 2012/13 to 2019/20

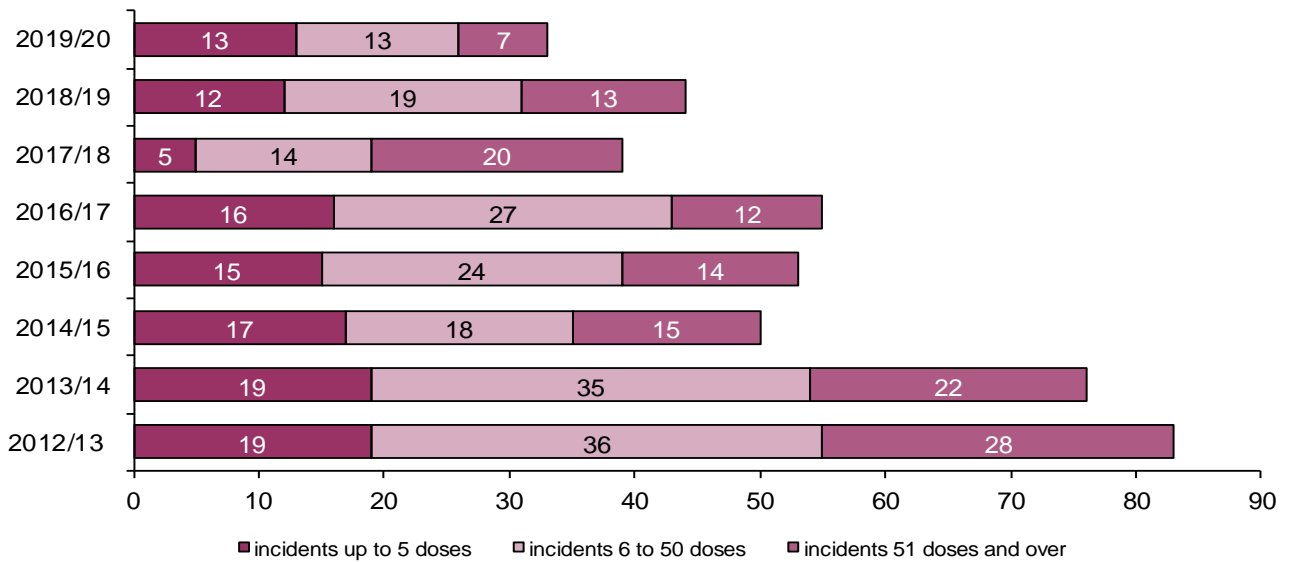
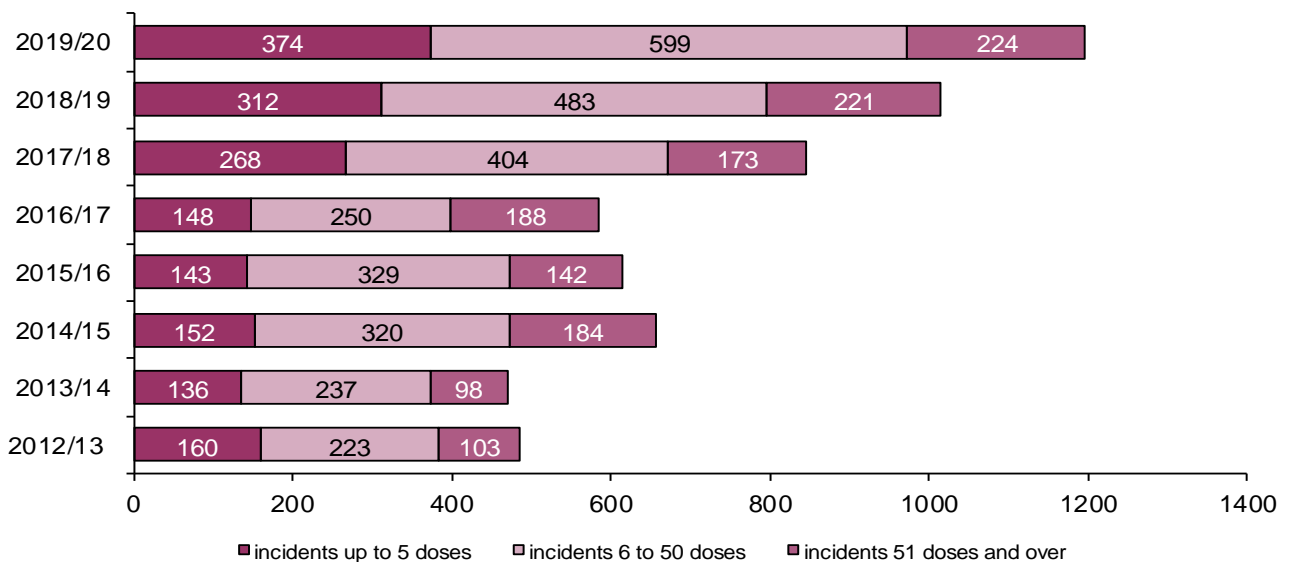


Figure 3.20 Number of Class C Benzodiazepines seizure incidents by doses seized, 2012/13 to 2019/20



4 Geographic Patterns of Drug Seizures

Drug seizure incidents are allocated to the policing district in which the seizure occurs. The distribution of seizures across policing districts has remained largely unchanged since 2012/13.

Nearly a third of seizure incidents occur in Belfast City Policing District. To assist in understanding the distribution of seizure incidents, a breakdown of Belfast City Policing District into the four local policing teams is available from 2016/17. The four local policing teams are based in Lisburn Road (South Belfast), Tennent Street (North Belfast), Strandtown (East Belfast) and Woodbourne (West Belfast).

Figure 4.1 Distribution of seizure incidents by policing district, 2019/20

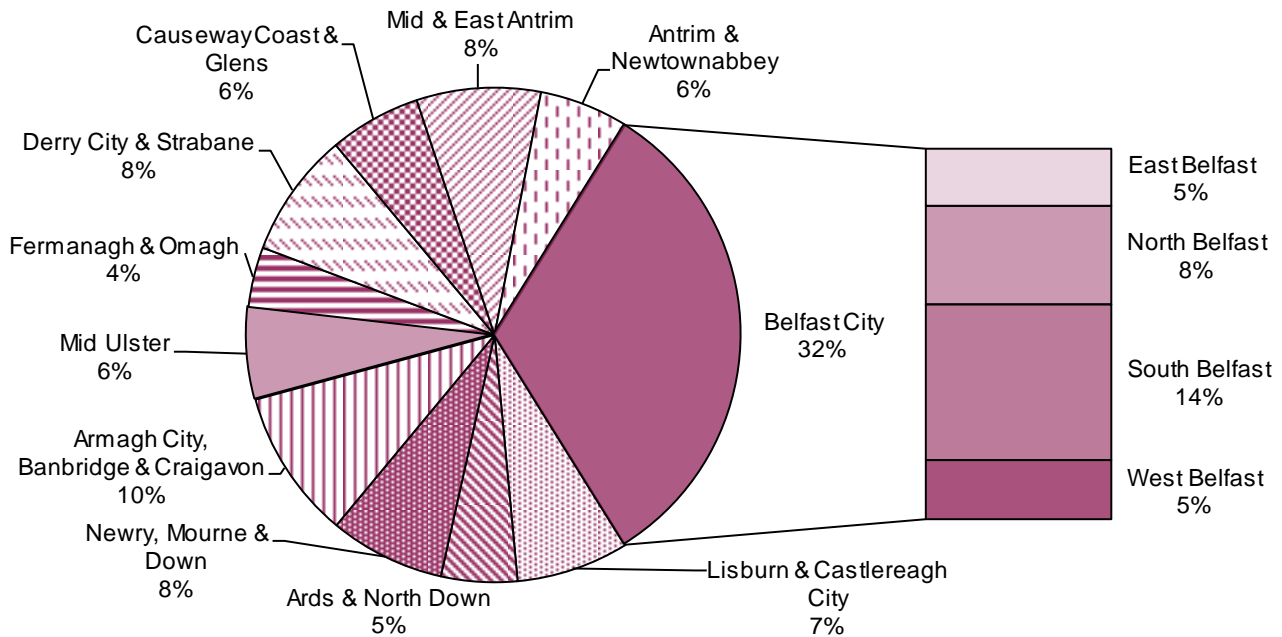


Table 4.1 Drug seizure incidents by policing district over the last five years¹

Policing District	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Belfast City	1,592	1,718	2,148	2,444	2,644
<i>East Belfast</i>	-	276	312	387	412
<i>North Belfast</i>	-	496	606	696	692
<i>South Belfast</i>	-	650	863	963	1,115
<i>West Belfast</i>	-	296	367	398	425
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	539	435	574	694	603
Ards & North Down	341	371	333	391	407
Newry, Mourne, & Down	498	471	566	586	617
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	572	483	624	721	799
Mid Ulster	240	263	361	403	493
Fermanagh & Omagh	250	297	312	333	322
Derry City & Strabane	464	407	606	593	670
Causeway Coast & Glens	418	375	484	454	490
Mid & East Antrim	263	339	426	466	663
Antrim & Newtownabbey	420	387	438	476	478
Northern Ireland	5,597	5,546	6,872	7,561	8,186

¹ The complete time series from 2012/13 is available in the [accompanying spreadsheet](#).

5 Trends in 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. The figures presented are a count of custody records rather than a count of persons arrested. Where a person has been arrested on more than one occasion during a financial year, each occasion on which they have been arrested will be counted separately.

The arrest figures do not include persons who are street-bailed but are not later processed through custody.

Arrests relating to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

The number of drug-related arrests has increased in most of the years since 2006/07, with the level recorded in 2019/20 (3,829) more than twice that recorded in 2006/07 (1,709).

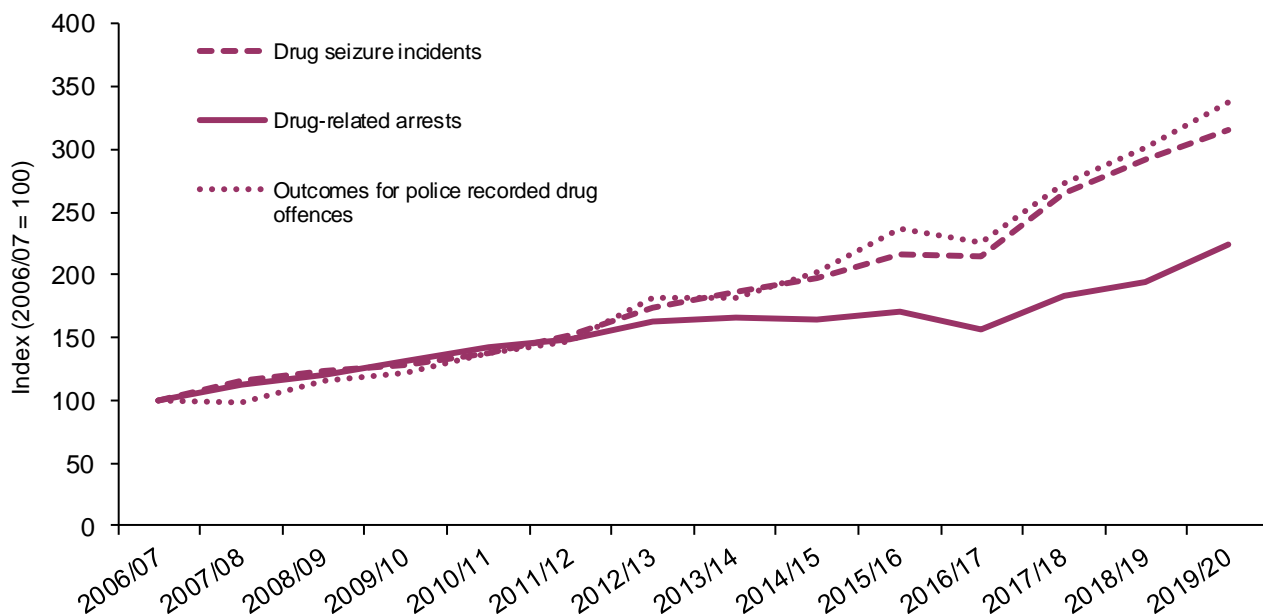
Following arrest, further police action may be taken against the arrested person or they may be released with no further action being taken. People may also be dealt with by police without first being arrested.

The rate of increase in drug-related arrests has not kept pace with that seen in drug seizure incidents. The outcome figures for police recorded drug offences can provide some clarity on this.

Each police recorded drug offence can be allocated a crime outcome including those where police have taken action against the person involved, such as charge, summons, caution/informed warning or community resolution notice (CRN).

CRNs were introduced as a crime outcome disposal during 2011/12. In their first year there were 174 CRN outcomes recorded in respect of police recorded drug offences, rising to 2,419 in 2019/20. Since 2017/18 they have represented the highest proportion of crime outcome disposals allocated to drug offences, followed by summons, charge and then caution. With the introduction of community resolutions, the number of caution outcomes allocated to drug offences has fallen.

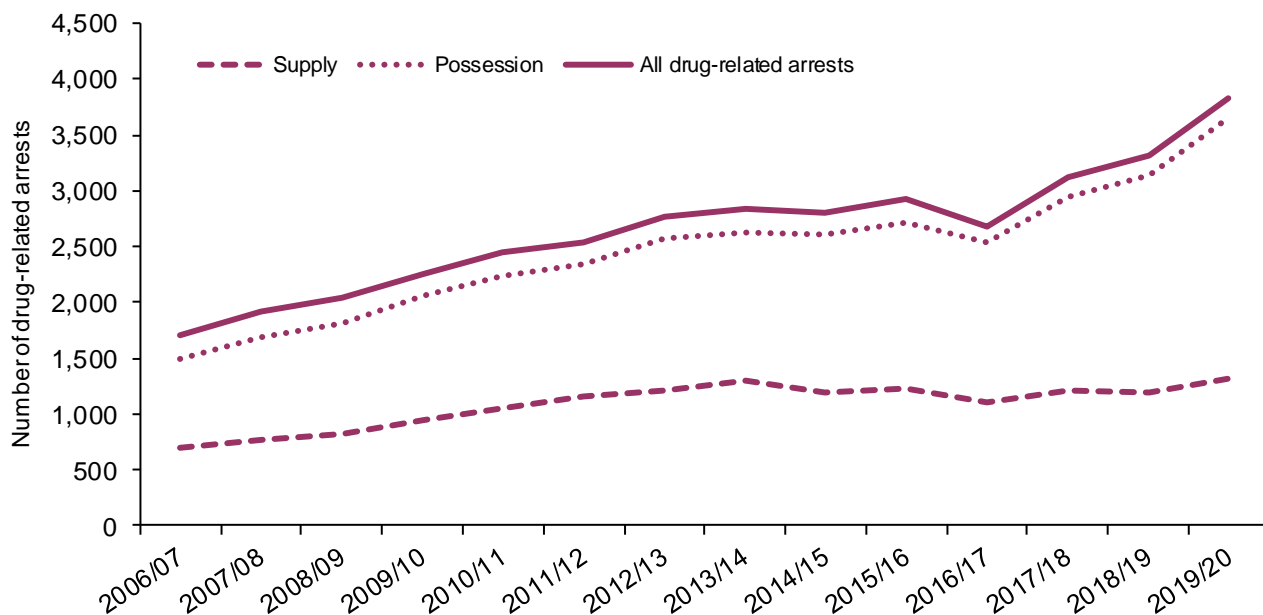
Figure 5.1 Drug-related arrests, drug seizure incidents and outcomes¹¹ for police recorded drug offences, 2006/07 to 2019/20, indexed to 2006/07=100



The increase in drug-related arrests is mainly influenced by arrests related to possession offences. Possession-related arrests have more than doubled since 2006/07 (1,500), with the highest number recorded in 2019/20 (3,646). Arrests involving supply offences have nearly doubled, increasing from 705 in 2006/07 to 1,315 in 2019/20. Arrests involving drug-related offences (not supply or possession) are small in number.

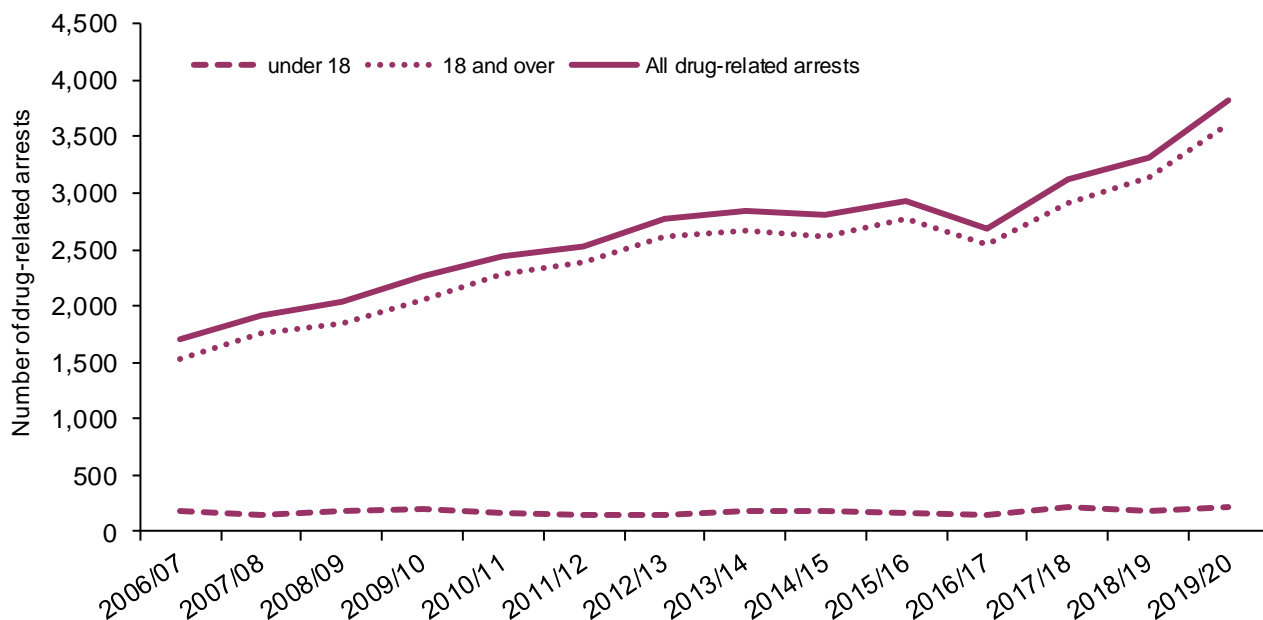
¹¹ Outcomes for police recorded drug offences include charge, summons, caution and community resolution. Community resolutions were introduced as a crime outcome disposal during 2011/12.

Figure 5.2 Drug-related arrests by type of arrest offence¹², 2006/07 to 2019/20



The number of arrests for a drug-related offence where the person was under 18 at time of arrest have remained fairly consistent since 2006/07, with the lowest level of 144 recorded in 2016/17 and the highest level of 210 recorded in both 2017/18 and 2019/20. As the number of drug-related arrests has increased, the proportion of those who were under 18 at time of arrest has fallen. Drug-related arrests where the person was 18 or over at time of arrest have more than doubled since 2006/07 (1,523), with 3,619 recorded in 2019/20.

Figure 5.3 Drug-related arrests by age at time of arrest, 2006/07 to 2019/20



Arrests under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016

There have been 31 arrests under the Psychoactive Substances Act between the introduction of the legislation in 2016 and the latest financial year 2019/20. There were 11 arrests in 2016/17, 10 in 2017/18, 4 in 2018/19 and 6 in 2019/20. Around one third of the arrests (11 of the 31) have occurred in the Belfast City policing district.

¹² As a person can be arrested for more than one type of drug offence, arrest figures by type of arrest offence will sum to more than the total number of drug-related arrests. The number of arrests for 'Other' drug offences are too small to be presented in Figure 5.2.

6 Geographic patterns of Drug-related Arrests

Drug-related arrests are allocated to the policing district in which the person was arrested.

Forty per cent of drug-related arrests occurred in Belfast City Policing District in 2019/20. To assist in understanding the distribution of drug-related arrests, a breakdown of Belfast City Policing District into the four local policing teams is presented in this section. The four local policing teams are based in Lisburn Road (South Belfast), Tennent Street (North Belfast), Strandtown (East Belfast) and Woodbourne (West Belfast).

Drug-related arrests in Belfast City policing district have increased in most years since 2006/07, with the highest level recorded in 2019/20. Lisburn & Castlereagh City, Derry City & Strabane and Mid & East Antrim also saw their highest drug-related arrest levels in 2019/20.

Figure 6.1 Distribution of drug-related arrests by policing district, 2019/20

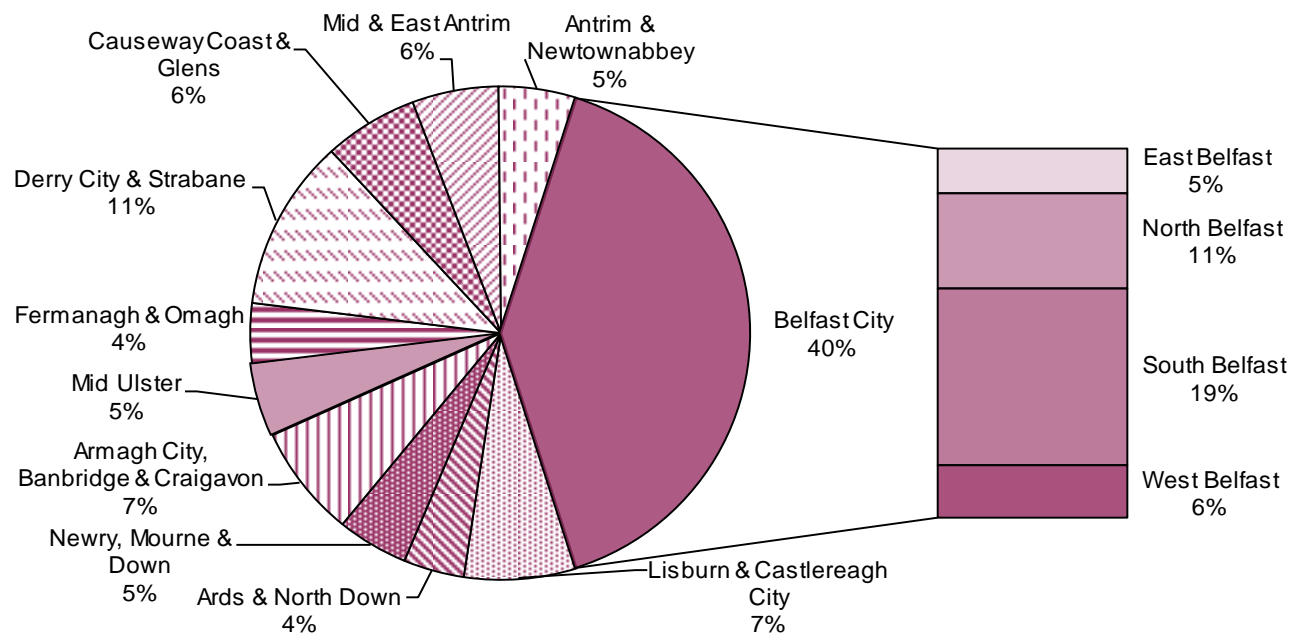


Table 6.1 Drug-related arrests by policing district over the last five years¹

Policing District	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Belfast City	946	918	1,080	1,320	1,541
<i>East Belfast</i>	130	155	160	188	186
<i>North Belfast</i>	281	246	293	359	403
<i>South Belfast</i>	362	360	484	564	736
<i>West Belfast</i>	173	157	143	209	216
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	228	218	230	248	278
Ards & North Down	121	124	137	153	150
Newry, Mourne, & Down	183	168	188	187	176
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	245	233	229	260	280
Mid Ulster	135	97	119	143	185
Fermanagh & Omagh	171	168	181	140	150
Derry City & Strabane	280	277	395	332	430
Causeway Coast & Glens	282	192	218	204	233
Mid & East Antrim	133	135	154	167	213
Antrim & Newtownabbey	200	155	191	164	193
Northern Ireland	2,924	2,685	3,122	3,318	3,329

¹ The complete time series from 2012/13 is available in the [accompanying spreadsheet](#).

7 Wider Context (Comparison with England and Wales)¹³

Figure 7.1 below provides a comparison of trends in drug seizure incidents in Northern Ireland compared with those in England and Wales. As the number of seizures in England and Wales far exceed those recorded in Northern Ireland, the trends are shown relative to the levels recorded in 2006/07. Border Force seizures have been excluded from the England and Wales total.

While the trends were similar between 2006/07 and 2008/09, they started to diverge in 2009/10 with an increasing trend observed in Northern Ireland and a falling trend in England and Wales.

Figure 1.2 (Section 1 Overview) shows how closely the drug seizures trend follows the police recorded drug offences trend in Northern Ireland. It should be noted that the same is also observed in England and Wales¹⁴.

Figure 7.1 Drug seizures in Northern Ireland compared with England and Wales (index 2006/07=100)

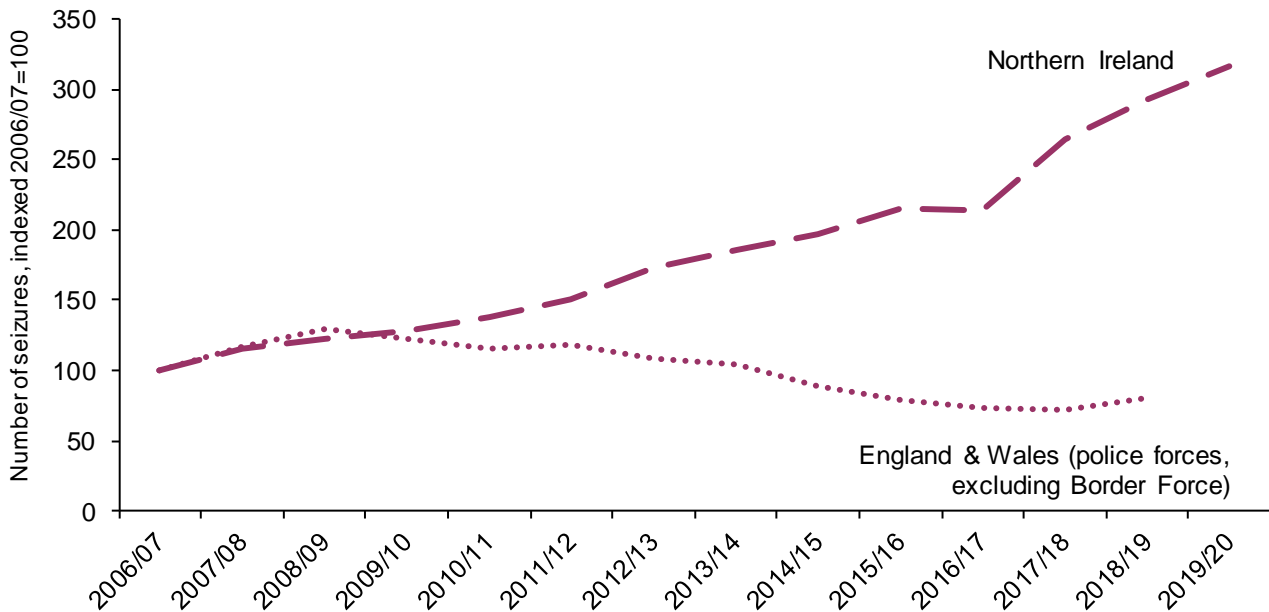
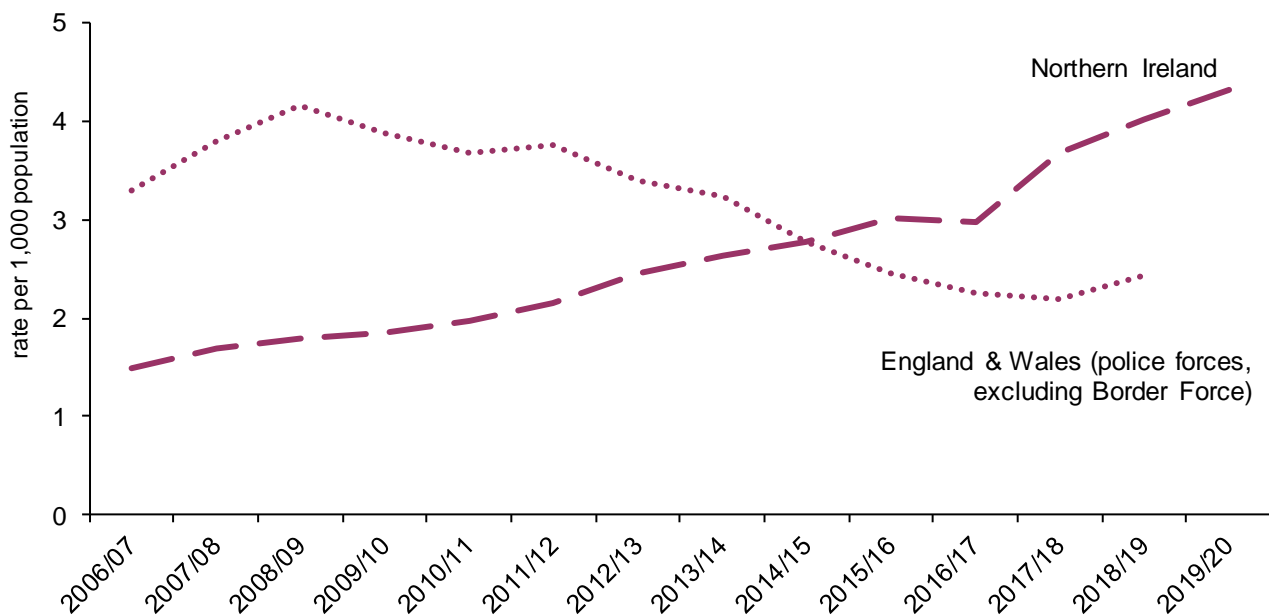


Figure 7.2 Drug seizures per 1,000 population in Northern Ireland compared with England and Wales



¹³ The England & Wales details have been sourced from the publication *Seizures of drugs in England and Wales, financial year ending 2019*. At time of publication these were the most up-to-date figures available for England & Wales. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seizures-of-drugs-in-england-and-wales-financial-year-ending-2019>

¹⁴ [Seizures of drugs in England and Wales, financial year ending 2019](#), Figure 2.2.

Appendix 1 Background and Data Quality

1 Methodology

1.1 Data Collection

When a drug is seized by police there are procedures in place that cover the handling, management, storage and disposal of seized substances. One requirement of these procedures is that the details of the seized substances are added to PSNI's record management system. Statistics on drug seizures are based on information extracted from PSNI's record management system and separately collated on a bespoke database. In order for a seizure to be included in the published statistics a range of information is required including, but not limited to, drug type, drug format, estimated weight or quantity seized and any details relating to forensic examination.

Drug-related arrests are extracted from custody data, where a person has been arrested and processed through police custody for one or more drug-related offences (ie related to the Misuse of Drugs Act or the Psychoactive Substances Act). Persons arrested and street-bailed, dealt with by other means or whose detention was not authorised are not included in these statistics.

1.2 Data Quality

A quality assurance process is in place to ensure that the data is fit for purpose and published to the highest possible standard. A set of checks have been written to identify incidents that indicate drugs may have been seized. Where there are no drugs details are available, each record will be followed up to confirm seizure and ensure the required details are input. A range of data quality checks are regularly conducted on the seizure data to identify incomplete or inconsistent records, potential duplication of records and input errors. Large seizures are also checked.

Further details on Police Recorded Drug Seizure and Arrest statistics are available in the [User Guide](#).

2 Further Information

2.1 Data Use

The drug seizures and drug-related arrests statistics are mainly used within PSNI as management information and to monitor performance on drug crime targets against the policing plan. The figures are also used by government departments and other voluntary and statutory agencies to inform debate and policy development regarding drug crime in NI.

2.2 Data Availability

A consistent data series at the overall level of drug seizure incident and drug-related arrest is available dating back to 2006/07, while a consistent data series at the level of individual drug type and format is available for the period dating back to 2012/13. The number of seizure incidents involving new psychoactive substances is available from 2017/18.

Previously published annual reports for the financial years dating back to 2000/01 are available in the [drug seizure statistics archive](#) on the PSNI website. Caution should be taken when looking at previously published reports as there will have been changes in drug classifications and categories and improvements in recording practices and systems over time.

2.3 Publication

A [publication schedule](#) is available on the PSNI website.

Tables and charts in this bulletin are available on the PSNI website in the form of an accompanying spreadsheet, which also provides additional levels of detail. It is available in both [excel](#) format and [open document](#) format.

2.4 Related information available on the PSNI website

Police Recorded Crime Statistics: These statistics are updated on a monthly basis and a trends report is published annually, with publication dates available in the [publication schedule](#).

Crime Outcomes: The latest publication presenting the wider outcomes framework within PSNI and summarising the outcomes that have been assigned to crimes recorded by the police between 2015/16 and 2018/19 was published on 29 November 2019.

These publications can be accessed through: <https://www.psnipolice.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/>