Police Service of Northern Ireland

Police Recorded
Drug Seizure and Arrest Statistics

Annual Report covering the period
1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015

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Background

This bulletin provides the final figures on drug seizures and arrests recorded by the police in Northern Ireland during the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015. It includes details of the number of drug seizure incidents, the weight or quantity of drugs seized by drug type and format, the estimated street value and the number of persons arrested for drug offences.

The statistics are presented at the Northern Ireland level and are also disaggregated by Police District and Police Area; all statistics referred to in this bulletin are available in a supporting spreadsheet which can be downloaded from the PSNI Drug Seizure Statistics website: http://www.psni.police.uk/directory/updates/updates_statistics/updates_drug_statistics.htm

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.

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</table>
Summary of Key Results

Overview

- The number of drug seizure incidents in Northern Ireland increased by 5.8% from 4,825 in 2013/14 to 5,104 in 2014/15 (see figure 1).

- In 2014/15, 2,831 persons were arrested for drug offences, 36 fewer than the 2,867 arrested in 2013/14, a decrease of 1.3% (see figures 3 and 4).

- The drugs that accounted for the majority of seizures incidents in 2014/15 were cannabis with 3,925 seizure incidents, benzodiazepines with 656 incidents and cocaine with 512 incidents (see figure 2).

- **Class A Cocaine:** during 2014/15 there was an increase in the amount of cocaine recovered, with over three times as much cocaine powder recovered in 2014/15 with 80.9kg than in 2013/14 with 25.2kg (see table 3).

- **Class A Opiates:** The volume of opiates in liquid form seized in 2014/15 (2,434.6mls) increased compared with 2013/14 when 419.0mls was recovered (see table 3). Similar to last year, methadone accounted for the majority of opiate seizures in terms of quantity, although the number of seizure incidents involving methadone fell from 30 in 2013/14 to 19 in 2014/15. In 2014/15 heroin accounted for the majority of seizure incidents, increasing from 28 seizure incidents the previous year (see tables 5 and 6 in supporting spreadsheet).

- **Class A Ecstasy:** There was a decrease in the quantity of ecstasy tablets seized in 2014/15 when compared with the previous year; 8,263 ecstasy tablets were seized by the PSNI in 2013/14 compared with 4,368 tablets in 2014/15 (see table 3).

- **Class B Cannabis:** The amount of cannabis resin seized in 2014/15 (111.0kg) was over three and a half time higher than that seized in 2013/14 (30.7kg). In contrast, the quantity of herbal cannabis seized decreased from 299.3kg in 2013/14 to 232.6kgs in 2014/15 (see table 3).

- **Class B Psychoactive substances:** Seizures of psychoactive stimulants fell between 2013/14 and 2014/15, from 193 seizure incidents to 125 seizure incidents (see table 5 in supporting spreadsheet). In terms of quantities, the amount of mephedrone powder being seized decreased by 88.6%, from 3.6kg in 2013/14 to 0.4kg in 2014/15, while that of methylethylcathinone (4-MEC/NRG2) decreased by 91.3%, down from 6.7kg in 2013/14 to 0.6kg in 2014/15 (see table 6 in supporting spreadsheet).

- **Class C Benzodiazepines:** There was a 39.3% increase in the number of incidents involving the seizure of benzodiazepines in 2014/15 with 656 incidents compared with 2013/14 with 471 incidents (see table 5 in supporting spreadsheet). In terms of quantity, the amount of benzodiazepines tablets seized increased by 21.6% between 2013/14 (148,366 tablets) and 2014/15 (180,345) (see table 3). The majority of those tablets were diazepam, with a total of 176,513 tablets seized (see table 6 in supporting spreadsheet).

- The PSNI has regularly run high profile operations specifically targeted at street level drug dealing since 2012 (Operation Torus). This will be reflected in the monthly variations of drugs seizures reported.

Note: 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.
In 2014/15 there were 5,104 drug seizure incidents in Northern Ireland, an increase of 5.8 per cent on the 4,825 seizure incidents recorded during 2013/14.

The number of drug seizure incidents has increased year on year since 2006/07 and in 2014/15 reached the highest level seen in the past ten years. The level in 2014/15 is almost twice as high as that recorded in 2006/07 when 2,590 seizure incidents occurred.

Figure 1 – Number of Drug Seizure Incidents from 2005/06 to 2014/15

### 2014/15 Seizure Incidents by Drug Type

- **Cannabis** was the most commonly seized drug, with 3,925 seizures involving cannabis being recovered. This is 96 more than the number of seizure incidents in 2013/14, an increase of 2.5%.

- **Benzodiazepine seizures** accounted for the second largest number of seizure incidents in 2014/15. Just over one in every ten seizure incidents (656) in 2014/15 involved the recovery of benzodiazepine tablets. This is an increase of 39.3% from 2013/14 when 471 incidents involved benzodiazepines being seized. The most common benzodiazepine seized was diazepam; indeed, 635 incidents involved the seizure of diazepam.

- The third most commonly seized drug was **cocaine**. There were 512 incidents involving the seizure of cocaine in 2014/15, up from 424 in 2013/14 (a 20.8% increase).

- Incidents involving the seizure of **amphetamines** (80), ecstasy (105) and psychoactive stimulants (125) in 2014/15 were down compared with 2013/14 (with 93, 124 and 193 incidents respectively). In contrast, the number of incidents where LSD (10) and opiates (96) were seized was higher than in 2013/14 (when 6 incidents involved the seizure of LSD and 81 the seizure of opiates).
**Heroin** was the most commonly seized opiate in 2014/15 with 71 seizure incidents involving heroin being seized, up from 28 incidents in 2013/14. There were 19 incidents where methadone was seized and three incidents where morphine was seized in 2014/15 down from 30 and seven incidents in 2013/14 respectively.

In terms of psychoactive stimulants, mephedrone was involved in 56 incidents in 2014/15 compared with 134 incidents in 2013/14, a decrease of 58.2%. Methylethylcathinone (4-MEC/NRG2) was seized during 44 incidents and other controlled psychoactive stimulants were seized during 26 incidents.

**2014/15 Seizure Incidents by Police District and Area**

- There were 5,104 drug seizure incidents in 2014/15. The most seizure incidents occurred in E District (955), an increase of 90 seizure incidents from 2013/14 (see table 4).

- The number of seizure incidents also increased in B district (756 incidents, up from 643 in 2013/14) and D District (771, up from 655), while the number of seizure incidents in A District was unchanged with 569.

- The number of drug seizure incidents in 2014/15 decreased compared with 2013/14 in C District (588 incidents, down from 590), F District (343, down from 359), G District (628, down from 629) and H District (494, down from 515).

- In terms of the 29 Police Areas, South Belfast (554) had the highest number of drug seizure incidents followed by Lisburn (428) and Foyle (402) (see Map 1 below).
Map 1 – Number of Drug Seizure Incidents by Police Area (2014/15)
Section 2 – Quantity of Drugs Seized

Class A

- The weight of cocaine powder seized in 2014/15 (80.9kg) was over three times as much as in 2013/14, when 25.2kg were seized by the PSNI. The largest amount of cocaine powder recovered in 2014/15 was seized during one incident in Dungannon police area (F District) in November 2014 (50.0kg).

- The number of ecstasy tablets recovered by the PSNI has generally decreased since a peak of over 244,000 in 2007/08. There were 4,368 tablets seized in 2014/15, the lowest quantity recorded in the past decade, and just over half of that seized in 2013/14 (8,263 tablets).

- The amount of opiate powder seized by the PSNI in 2014/15 was 355.0g, up from 271.2g in 2013/14. The volume of liquid opiates form seized in 2014/15 was 2,434.6mls, nearly six times as much as that recovered in 2013/14 (419.0mls). Most of the opiates seized in liquid form were methadone (2,431.0mls).

- The quantity of LSD seized in 2014/15 was lower than the level of 2013/14, with 55 tablets and 20 microdots recovered compared with 97 tablets and 130 microdots in the previous financial year.

Class B

- The weight of herbal cannabis seized has decreased from 2013/14. The level of 232.6kg for this financial year is 22.3% lower than that in 2013/14 (299.3kg). Most of the herbal cannabis was seized in D District (56.3kg), followed by E District (42.6kg).

- There was a sharp increase in the quantity of cannabis resin seized in 2014/15 (111.0kg). This was over three and half times more than the weight seized in 2013/14 (30.7kg). More than half of the cannabis resin seized this financial year was during a single incident in Lisburn police area (D District) where over 59.2kg were seized in April 2014.

- The number of cannabis plants seized has increased over the last 12 months with 10,974 plants recovered in 2014/15. This was an 8.1% increase on the 2013/14 level (10,155 plants). Over a fifth of all plants seized were recovered in E District, with the biggest single seizure made in Banbridge police area in April 2014 (900 plants seized).

- The amount of amphetamine powder seized by the PSNI in 2014/15 (5.3kg) is the lowest in the past decade; it represents a decrease of 35.1% on 2013/14.

- The amount of psychoactive stimulants powder seized in 2014/15 (2.4kg) is 85.7% lower than that seized in 2013/14 when 17.1kg were recovered. In particular, the quantity of mephedrone powder went from 3.6kg in 2013/14 to 0.4kg in 2014/15, a decrease of 88.6%. Similarly, the weight of methylmethcathinone (4-MEC/NRG2) seized in 2014/15 (0.6kg) was less than a tenth of the level seized in 2013/14 (6.7kg).

Class C

- The majority of benzodiazepine seizures consisted of diazepam tablets (176,513). Almost half of all those were seized in A District (83,880 tablets). Other benzodiazepine tablets recovered were alprazolam (2,250 tablets), lorazepam (1,250 tablets) and temazepam (332 tablets); with the former two having been seized during one single incident in Lisburn police area (D District) in August 2014.
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.

Of those that were forensically tested, the most commonly identified substances seized by the PSNI were:

- Methamphetamine, methylamphetamine and psilocin (classified as Class A);
- Dihydrocodeine, Ketamine\(^1\), Methadrone and Methedrone (classified as Class B); and
- Anabolic Steroids, Buprenorphine, TFMPP (piperazines), Tramadol\(^2\), Zolpidem and Zopiclone\(^3\) (classified as Class C).

The quantities and weights of other drugs recovered in 2014/15 have decreased compared with 2013/14 when a very high volume of anabolic steroids were seized in ampoules (26,004 units) and tablets/capsules (46,207 units) formats. In comparison, there were 1,670 ampoules and 3,050 tablets of anabolic steroids seized in 2014/15.

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1. Ketamine was previously a Class C controlled drug but was reclassified as a Class B drug under Schedule 2 to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 on 10\(^{th}\) June 2014.
2. Tramadol was classified as a Class C drug under Schedule 2 to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 on 10\(^{th}\) June 2014.
3. Zopiclone was classified as a Class C drug under Schedule 2 to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 on 10\(^{th}\) June 2014.
Section 3 – Commercial Cannabis Cultivation Statistics

Incidents Involving the Seizure of Cannabis Plants by PSNI

- Of all incidents involving the seizure of cannabis plants or cannabis cultivation equipment in financial year 2014/15 to 31st March 2015, 143 were classified as a cannabis farm as per the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) definition.

- This is a 10.0% increase on 2013/14 when 130 cannabis farms were uncovered, and 58.9% on 2012/13 when 90 farms were uncovered.

- Of those incidents in 2014/15, 47 incidents involved the recovery of 25 plants or more, while 96 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 ACPO definition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Newry &amp; Mourne</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
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</table>

Table 2 – Cannabis Farm Discoveries by Policing Area 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15

Cannabis Farms Discoveries by Policing Area

The highest number of cannabis farms discovered by the PSNI between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015 was in East Belfast (20), followed by North Belfast (19).

4 2012 ACPO 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

- In 2014/15, 2,831 persons were arrested for drug offences. This is 36 (1.3%) fewer than in 2013/14 when 2,867 persons were arrested, but 47 (1.7%) more than in 2012/13.

Figure 3 – Number of Persons Arrested for Drug Offences 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15

- Over the past ten years, the number of persons arrested for drug offences has been increasing year on year until 2013/14. The level in 2014/15 is almost twice that recorded in 2005/06 when 1,440 persons were arrested and processed through custody for drug-related offences.

Figure 4 – Drug-Related Arrests from 2005/06 to 2014/15

- The number of persons arrested for drug offences in 2014/15 varied across the Police Districts, ranging from 226 drug arrests in F District to 502 in B District. South Belfast and Foyle Police Areas accounted for the largest number of persons arrested for drug offences (385 and 240 respectively).

- The police can deal with persons involved in either trafficking drugs or possessing drugs in a range of ways that would not result in an arrest, for example persons may be reported to PPS, cautioned or dealt with by means of discretionary disposal. Some contextual information on police recorded crime outcomes by method of disposal for drug offences can be found in table 5 of the latest Police Recorded Crime Statistics summary tables spreadsheet. This shows that of those outcomes for drug offences achieved during 2014/15, 61.3% were by means of charge/summons, 26.4% were by means of caution and 12.4% were by means of discretionary disposal.
## Appendices

Table 3 – Drug Seizures by Type and Quantity 2013/14 and 2014/15

<table>
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<th>Drugs Seized</th>
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<th>2014/15</th>
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<td></td>
<td>No. of Seizures by Type and Format</td>
<td>Amount Seized</td>
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<td>Powder (kg)</td>
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<td>Wraps</td>
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<td>Ecstasy (Class A)</td>
<td>Powder (gms)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tablets</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSD (Class A)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Powder (gms)</td>
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<td>Opiates (Class A)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Millilitres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cannabis (Class B)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joints</td>
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<td>Oil (gms)</td>
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<td>Resin (kg)</td>
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### Total Seizure Incidents 3

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<td>Estimated Street Value</td>
<td>£9,832,584</td>
<td>£12,736,626</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persons Arrested</td>
<td>2,867</td>
<td>2,831</td>
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</table>

Note: In this table, where the quantity of drugs seized is 0.0, this means the quantity 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 accompanying spreadsheet.

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

2 Other drugs include anabolic steroids, GHB, ketamine, piperazines and magic mushrooms.

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

4 Small revisions have been made to some of the previously published 2013/14 figures relating to seizures of opiates, cannabis and other drugs as a result of data quality checks. These have not altered the total number of seizure incidents for 2013/14.
Table 4 – Number of Drug Seizures and Arrests by Police Area and District 2013/14 and 2014/15

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<th>Seizures Incidents</th>
<th>Arrests</th>
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NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED
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 Internet site:

Annual reports are available back to 2003/04 on the PSNI internet site 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 at Policing Area level are published separately in an accompanying excel spreadsheet which is also available on this internet page.

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 drug seizure statistics for Northern Ireland, or to contact PSNI Statistics Branch:

Email: statistics@psni.police.uk;

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

Telephone: 028 9065 0222 ext. 24135
Map 2: PSNI Policing Districts from 1st April 2007

BELFAST
A District covers North and West Belfast
B District covers East and South Belfast