

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Police Recorded Drug Seizure and Arrest Statistics: Monthly Update to 31 December 2015

Published 20 January 2016

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This bulletin provides the most recent statistics on drug seizures and arrests recorded by the police in Northern Ireland to 31 December 2015. Figures dating back to 1 April 2015 are provisional and will be subject to change until the finalised 2015/16 figures are published in May 2016. The bulletin includes details of the number of drug seizure incidents, the weight or quantity of drugs seized by drug type and format and the number of persons arrested for drug offences.

Change to policing boundaries as a result of implementing the Review of Public Administration: As part of the Review of Public Administration which came into effect on 1 April 2015, PSNI has moved from eight to eleven policing districts. The geographic breakdown presented in this bulletin and in the accompanying spreadsheet is on the basis of these new boundaries and the figures presented here have been compiled from the new policing model accordingly.

All statistics referred to in this bulletin, along with supplementary information for the previous and current financial year to date time periods are available in the accompanying [supporting spreadsheet](#) which can be downloaded from the [PSNI Drug Seizure Statistics website](#).

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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Overview

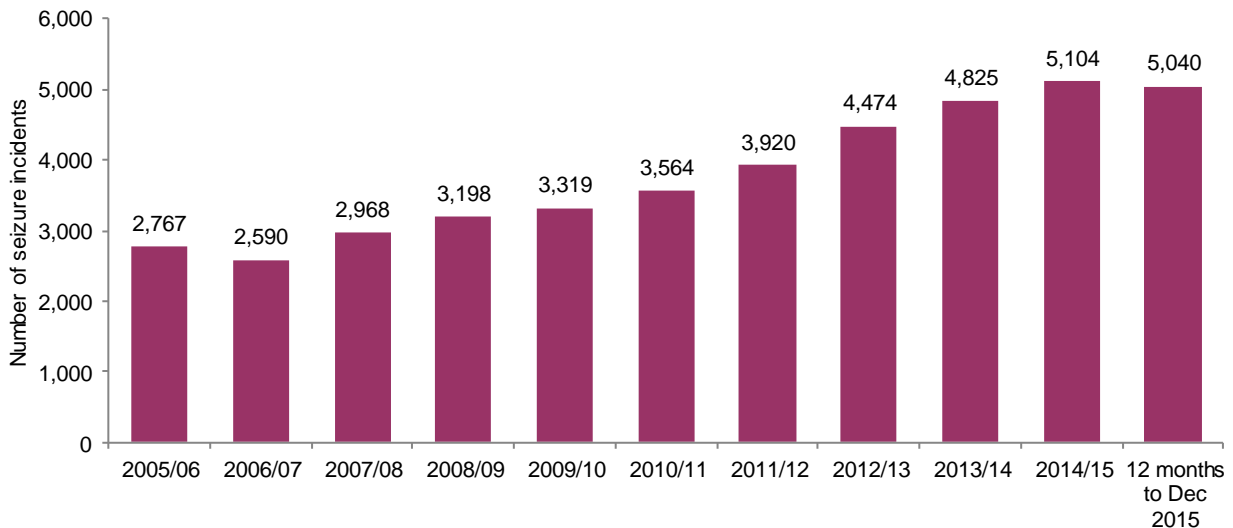
Table 1 Key statistics for drug seizure incidents, commercial cultivation of cannabis and drug arrests in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 compared with the previous 12 months

| | 12 months to 31 December 2014 | 12 months to 31 December 2015 | Change |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Drug seizure incidents | 5,016 | 5,040 | 24 (0.5%) |
| Incidents classified as cannabis farms | 148 | 56 | -92 (-62.2%) |
| Drug-related arrests | 2,853 | 2,875 | 22 (0.8%) |

Section 1 – Seizure Incidents

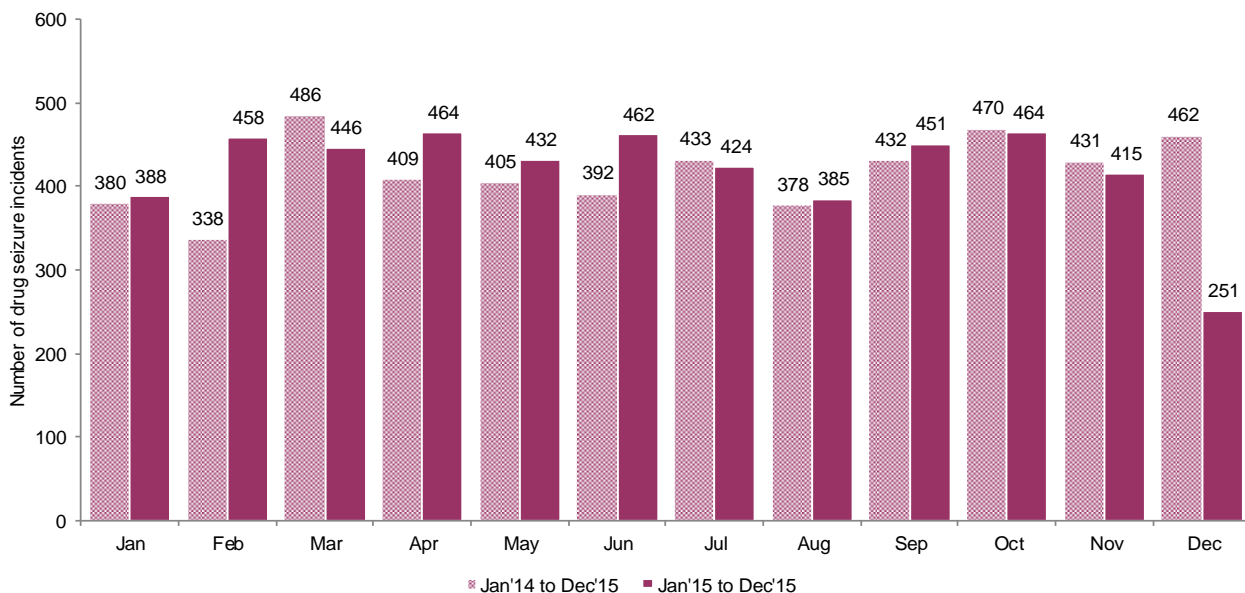
- In the 12 months from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015, there were 5,040 drug seizure incidents in Northern Ireland, an increase of 0.5% on the 5,016 seizure incidents recorded in the 12 months to 31 December 2014.
- The number of drug seizure incidents increased year on year from 2,590 in 2006/07 to 5,104 seizure incidents in 2014/15. At 5,040, the number of seizure incidents in the latest 12 months represents a 1.3% decrease on the 2014/15 level.

Figure 1 Drug seizure incidents since 2005/06



- Seizure incidents from 1st April 2015 are provisional, as there will be records still undergoing the validation process. As a result further incidents may be added to the current figures, in particular for December 2015, the latest month on record.

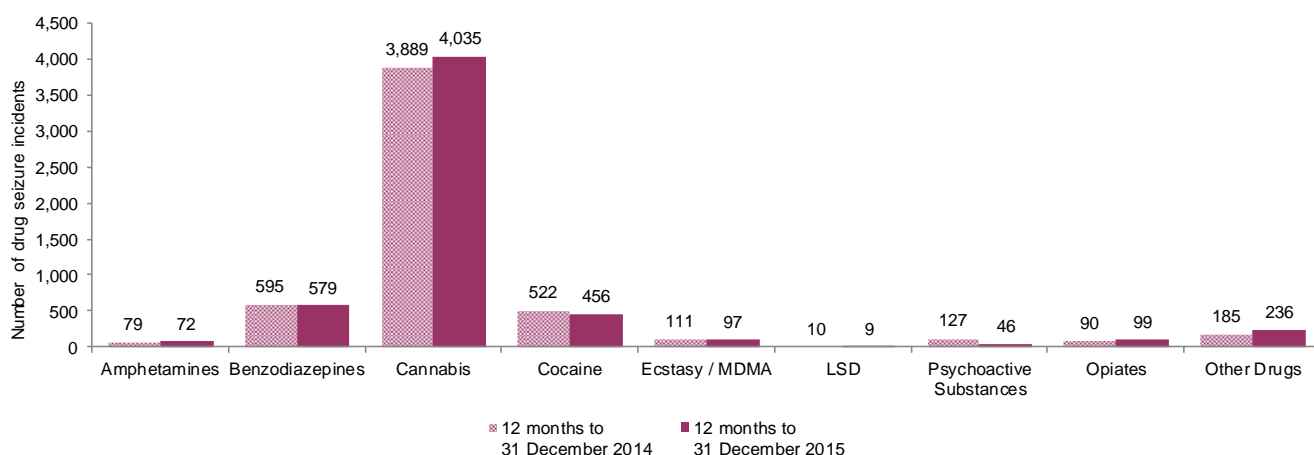
Figure 2 Number of drug seizure incidents by month in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 compared with the previous 12 months



Seizure Incidents by Drug Type

- Cannabis was the most commonly seized drug over the past 12 months, with 4,035 seizures involving cannabis being recovered. This is 146 more than the number of seizure incidents in the 12 months to 31 December 2014, an increase of 3.8%.
- Benzodiazepine seizures accounted for the second largest number of seizure incidents in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 with 579 seizures, 16 fewer than during the previous 12 months (595 incidents). The most commonly seized benzodiazepine was diazepam (569 incidents).
- The third most commonly seized drug was cocaine. There were 456 incidents involving the seizure of cocaine in the 12 months to 31 December 2015, down from 522 during the previous 12 months (a decrease of 66 incidents).
- Further information of seizure incidents by drug type is available in the [supporting spreadsheet](#).

Figure 3 Number of drug seizure incidents by drug type in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 compared with the previous 12 months

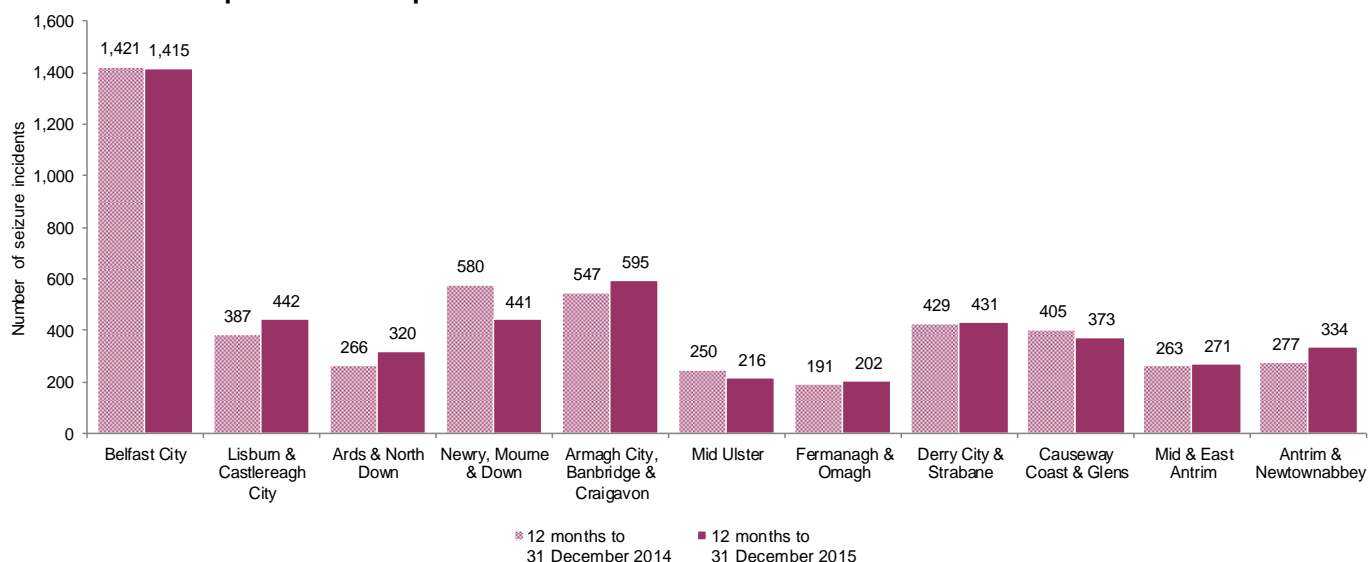


Note: A seizure incident can involve more than one drug type, seizure figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.

Seizure Incidents by Police District

- The largest number of seizure incidents occurred in Belfast City policing district with 1,415 incidents recorded, a decrease of 6 seizure incidents (0.4%) compared with the 12 month period to 31 December 2014. This was followed by Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon policing district where 595 drug seizure incidents were recorded, an increase of 48 incidents on the level recorded during the previous 12 months.
- Over the same time period, Newry, Mourne & Down policing district saw a fall of 139 in the number of seizure incidents recorded.

Figure 4 Number of drug seizure incidents by policing district in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 compared with the previous 12 months



Section 2 – Quantity of Drugs Seized

Class A

- The weight of cocaine powder seized in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 (29.7kg) was less than half that seized in the previous 12 months, when 76.1kg were seized by the PSNI.
- There were 7,607 ecstasy tablets recovered by the PSNI in the 12 months to 31 December 2015, down from 9,001 in the period ending 31 December 2014 (a decrease of 15.5%). The largest amount of ecstasy tablets recovered in the past 12 months was seized during one incident in Antrim & Newtownabbey policing district in July 2015 (5,000 tablets)
- In the 12 months to 31 December 2015, there were 2,199 LSD microdots seized, an increase on the previous 12 months when the seizures of 21 LSD microdots were recorded. This increase is mostly down to one single seizure incident in June 2015 in Causeway Coast and Glens policing district (2,163 microdots).
- The amount of opiate powder seized by the PSNI in the past 12 months was 123.6g, down from 424.6g in the 12 months to 31 December 2014. The volume of liquid opiates seized in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 was 435.5mls, a decrease from that recovered in the previous 12 months (2,434.5mls).

Class B

- The weight of herbal cannabis seized in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 (182.1kg) was 24.7% lower than that in the previous 12 months when 241.8kgs were recovered. Most of the herbal cannabis was seized in Belfast City policing district.
- There was a sharp increase in the quantity of cannabis resin seized in the past 12 months when compared with the previous 12 months (185.2kg up from 109.2kg). More than three quarters of the cannabis resin seized from January 2015 to December 2015 was seized in Newry, Mourne and Down policing district where 165.6kg of resin were recovered.
- There were 4,844 cannabis plants recovered in the 12 months to 31 December 2015. This represents a 60.8% decrease on the previous 12 months when 12,370 plants were seized.
- The amount of amphetamine powder seized by the PSNI in the past 12 months was 2.3kg, down from 11.2kg seized in the previous 12 months to 31 December 2014. The quantity of amphetamine tablets recovered in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 was over thirty times higher than that seized in the previous 12 months (380 tablets, up from 11).
- The amount of psychoactive stimulants powder seized in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 (0.4kg) is lower than that seized in the previous 12 months when 2.9kg were recovered. The quantity of mephedrone powder seized fell from 0.9kg between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2014 to 0.4kg the following 12 months, a decrease of 61.7%.

Class C

- The majority of benzodiazepine seizures in the past 12 months consisted of diazepam tablets (104,215). This was 99,124 fewer tablets than that seized in the 12 months to 31 December 2014, a decrease of 48.7%.

Other / Unknown

- 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.

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 the 12 months to 31 December 2015, 56 were classified as a cannabis farm as per the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) definition¹. This is a 62.2% decrease on the previous 12 months period ending 31 December 2014, when 148 incidents were classified as a cannabis farm.
- In the past 12 months, 22 of those incidents involved the recovery of 25 plants or more, while 34 incidents involved the discovery of less than 25 plants but in locations that were deemed, due to the equipment recovered, to be qualified as cannabis farms as per the NPCC definition.

Table 2 Incidents involving the seizure of cannabis plants in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 compared with the previous 12 months

| Cannabis farms ¹ | 12 months to 31 December 2014 | 12 months to 31 December 2015 | change |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| Cases where 25 plants or more were seized | 54 | 22 | -32 |
| Cases where no plants or less than 25 plants were seized and factory equipment was recovered | 94 | 34 | -60 |
| Total number of incidents classified as cannabis farms | 148 | 56 | -92 |

Cannabis Farm Discoveries by Policing District

- The highest number of cannabis farms discovered by the PSNI between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2015 was in Belfast City policing district (18), followed by Mid & East Antrim (7).
- All policing districts have seen a decrease in the number of cannabis farms discovered in the past 12 months compared to the previous 12 months, with the exception of Lisburn & Castlereagh City which had the same numbers of farms discovered during both periods (4)

Table 3 Cannabis farm discoveries by policing district in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 compared with the previous 12 months

| Policing district | 12 months to 31 December 2014 | 12 months to 31 December 2015 | Change |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| Belfast City | 56 | 18 | -38 |
| Lisburn & Castlereagh City | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Ards & North Down | 13 | 3 | -10 |
| Newry, Mourne & Down | 17 | 6 | -11 |
| Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon | 16 | 6 | -10 |
| Mid Ulster | 4 | 3 | -1 |
| Fermanagh & Omagh | 8 | 2 | -6 |
| Derry City & Strabane | 5 | 4 | -1 |
| Causeway Coast & Glens | 7 | 2 | -5 |
| Mid & East Antrim | 11 | 7 | -4 |
| Antrim & Newtownabbey | 7 | 1 | -6 |
| Northern Ireland | 148 | 56 | -92 |

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

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

Section 4 – Drug-Related Arrests

- In the 12 months to 31 December 2015, 2,875 persons were arrested and processed through custody for drug offences. This constitutes an increase of 0.8% on the previous 12 months to 31 December 2014 when 2,853 persons were arrested.
- The number of persons arrested for drug offences increased year on year from 1,440 in 2005/06 to 2,867 arrests in 2013/14, before decreasing slightly to 2,831 during financial year 2014/15. The number of persons arrested for drug offences has since increased to a current level of 2,875 from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015. This is 44 arrests higher than the 2014/15 level.

Figure 5 Drug-related arrests since 2005/06

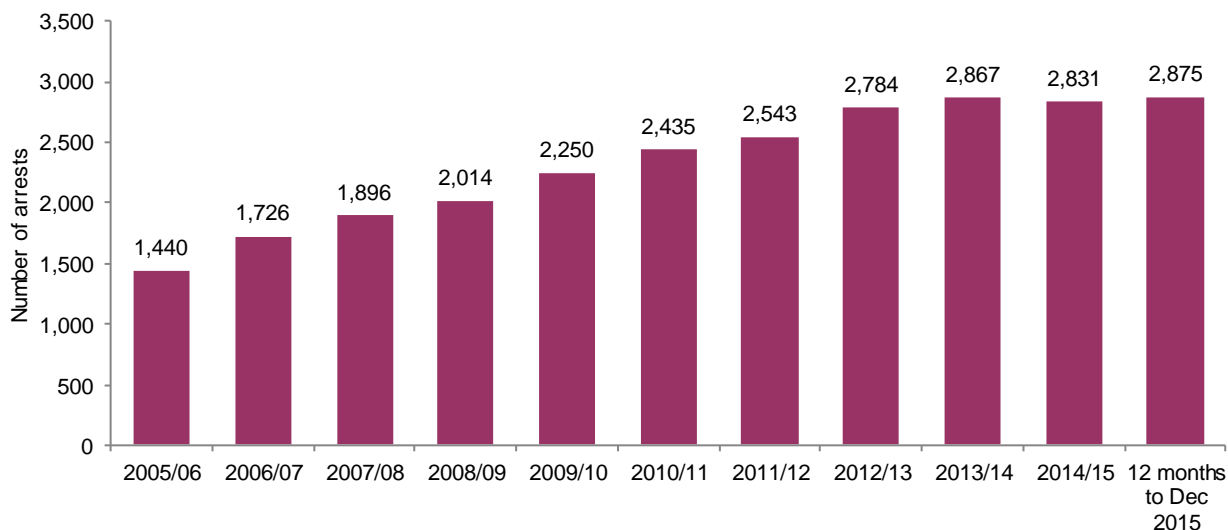
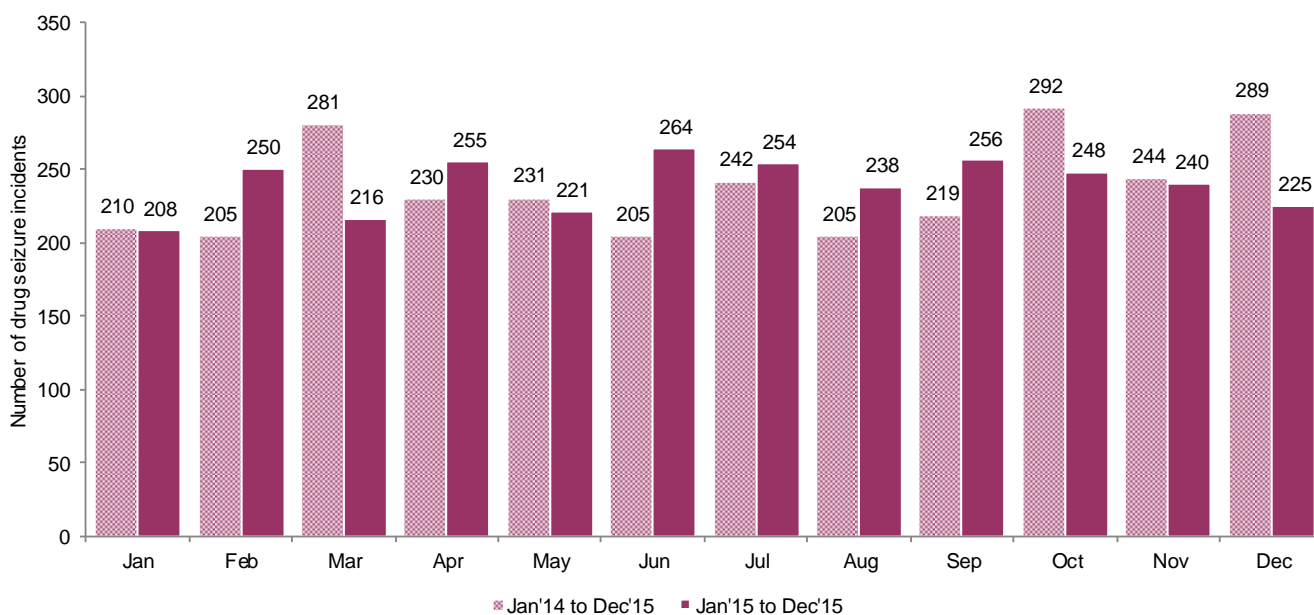


Figure 6 Number of drug-related arrests by month in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 compared with the previous 12 months



- There were 225 persons arrested and processed through custody in December 2015, 64 fewer than during the same month in 2014, when 289 persons were arrested for drug offences.
- The number of persons arrested for drug offences in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 varied across the policing districts, ranging from 128 drug arrests in Mid Ulster policing district to 902 in Belfast City policing district.

Appendices

Table 4a Drug seizure incidents by type and format in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 compared with the previous 12 months

| Drugs Seized ¹ – Number of Incidents ³ | | 12 months to 31 December 2014 | 12 months to 31 December 2015 | Change |
|--|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------|
| Cocaine (Class A) | Powder | 504 | 426 | -78 |
| | Wraps | 27 | 37 | 10 |
| Ecstasy (Class A) | Powder | 20 | 26 | 6 |
| | Tablets | 95 | 78 | -17 |
| LSD (Class A) | Microdots | 4 | 3 | -1 |
| | Powder | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| | Tablets | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| Opiates (Class A) | Ampoules | 1 | 0 | -1 |
| | Millilitres | 12 | 13 | 1 |
| | Patches | 1 | 0 | -1 |
| | Powder | 43 | 38 | -5 |
| | Tablets | 7 | 2 | -5 |
| | Twists | 6 | 3 | -3 |
| | Wraps | 26 | 49 | 23 |
| Amphetamine (Class B) | Powder | 74 | 62 | -12 |
| | Tablets | 1 | 6 | 5 |
| | Wraps | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| Cannabis (Class B) | Herbal | 3,257 | 3,374 | 117 |
| | Joints | 373 | 438 | 65 |
| | Oil | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Plants | 237 | 146 | -91 |
| | Resin | 392 | 499 | 107 |
| Psychoactive Stimulants (Class B) | Powder | 127 | 45 | -82 |
| | Tablets | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Wraps | 3 | 1 | -2 |
| Benzodiazepines (Class C) | Powder | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| | Tablets | 598 | 589 | -9 |
| Other Drugs ² | Ampoules | 20 | 13 | -7 |
| | Crystals | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Herbal | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| | Microdots | 2 | 0 | -2 |
| | Millilitres | 9 | 4 | -5 |
| | Patches | 1 | 0 | -1 |
| | Powder | 80 | 86 | 6 |
| | Psilocin | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| | Tablets | 90 | 144 | 54 |
| | Wraps | 0 | 4 | 4 |

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.

Table 4b Quantity of drugs seized by type and format in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 compared with the previous 12 months

| Drugs Seized ¹ – Quantities | | 12 months to 31 December 2014 | 12 months to 31 December 2015 | Change |
|---|----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| Cocaine (Class A) | Powder (kg) | 76.1 | 29.7 | -46.4 |
| | Wraps | 45 | 77 | 32 |
| Ecstasy (Class A) | Powder (gms) | 368.6 | 1,756.0 | 1,387.3 |
| | Tablets | 9,001 | 7,607 | -1,394 |
| LSD (Class A) | Microdots | 21 | 2,199 | 2178 |
| | Powder (gms) | 0.1 | 3 | 2.9 |
| | Tablets | 58 | 320 | 262 |
| Opiates (Class A) | Ampoules | 2 | . | -2 |
| | Millilitres | 2434.5 | 435.5 | -1,999.0 |
| | Patches | 2 | . | -2 |
| | Powder (kg) | 0.4 | 0.1 | -0.3 |
| | Tablets | 390 | 63 | -327 |
| | Twists | 13 | 4 | -9 |
| | Wraps | 160 | 102 | -58 |
| Amphetamine (Class B) | Powder (kg) | 11.2 | 2.3 | -8.8 |
| | Tablets | 11 | 380 | 369 |
| | Wraps | 9 | 15 | 6 |
| Cannabis (Class B) | Herbal (kg) | 241.8 | 182.1 | -59.7 |
| | Joints | 503 | 741 | 238 |
| | Oil (gms) | . | 11.0 | 11.0 |
| | Plants | 12,370 | 4,844 | -7526 |
| | Resin (kg) | 109.2 | 185.2 | 76.0 |
| Psychoactive Stimulants (Class B) | Powder (kg) | 2.9 | 0.4 | -2.5 |
| | Tablets | . | . | 0 |
| | Wraps | 9 | 1 | -8 |
| Benzodiazepines (Class C) | Powder (gms) | 1 | 7.43 | 6.4 |
| | Tablets | 207,169 | 104,589 | -102,580 |
| Other Drugs ² | Ampoules | 568 | 7,511 | 6,943 |
| | Crystals (gms) | . | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| | Herbal (gms) | . | 8.0 | 8.0 |
| | Microdots | 112 | . | -112 |
| | Millilitres | 252.1 | 163.2 | -88.9 |
| | Patches | 1 | . | -1 |
| | Powder (kg) | 1.2 | 2.2 | 1.0 |
| | Psilocin | 35 | 43 | 8 |
| | Tablets | 12,953 | 8,223 | -4,730 |
| | Wraps | . | 6 | 6 |

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

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

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

Table 5 Number of drug seizures and arrests by policing district in the 12 months to 31 December 2015 compared with The previous 12 months

| Policing District | Seizure Incidents | | | Arrests | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|
| | 12 months to 31 December 2014 | 12 months to 31 December 2015 | Change | 12 months to 31 December 2014 | 12 months to 31 December 2015 | Change |
| Belfast City | 1,421 | 1,415 | -6 | 855 | 902 | 47 |
| Lisburn & Castlereagh City | 387 | 442 | 55 | 185 | 207 | 22 |
| Ards & North Down | 266 | 320 | 54 | 126 | 130 | 4 |
| Newry, Mourne & Down | 580 | 441 | -139 | 233 | 184 | -49 |
| Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon | 547 | 595 | 48 | 285 | 261 | -24 |
| Mid Ulster | 250 | 216 | -34 | 141 | 128 | -13 |
| Fermanagh & Omagh | 191 | 202 | 11 | 147 | 161 | 14 |
| Derry City & Strabane | 429 | 431 | 2 | 272 | 277 | 5 |
| Causeway Coast & Glens | 405 | 373 | -32 | 301 | 280 | -21 |
| Mid & East Antrim | 263 | 271 | 8 | 154 | 157 | 3 |
| Antrim & Newtownabbey | 277 | 334 | 57 | 154 | 188 | 34 |
| Northern Ireland | 5,016 | 5,040 | 24 | 2,853 | 2,875 | 22 |

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 website](#).

Annual reports are available back to 2003/04 on the [PSNI Internet 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 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:

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