



Police Service
of Northern Ireland



Trends in Police Recorded Drug Seizures and Arrests in Northern Ireland

2006/07 to 2023/24

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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 on the cover page.

Things you need to know about this release

Coverage

This bulletin is an Official Statistics publication meaning it complies with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) as follows:

- Trustworthiness: the statistics are impartial, independent and released in an open and transparent manner in accordance with a pre-announced publication schedule
- Quality: the statistics are produced using robust and relevant data sources which undergo continuous quality improvement and assurance checks
- Value: the statistics strive to meet user needs informed by ongoing feedback, providing sufficient detail which is widely accessible.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards by emailing statistics@psni.police.uk. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the [OSR website \(opens in a new window\)](#).

Statistics on police recorded drug seizures and arrests in Northern Ireland 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 2023/24. Supplementary data are available from the PSNI website in the [drug seizures and arrests annual trends spreadsheet \(opens in a new window\)](#). Figures were compiled on 4 September 2024; as of that date 96.6% of seizure incidents for April 2023 to March 2024 have been fully validated.

Drug Seizure Incidents

Statistics in this publication relate to incidents in which a drug controlled under the [Misuse of Drugs Act \(1971\) legislation \(MDA\) \(opens in a new window\)](#) 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 legislation \(PSA\) \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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 [Drug Seizures and Arrests User Guide \(opens in a new window\)](#) which accompanies this publication, and may be considered alongside this publication to obtain a more comprehensive overview of the drug situation in Northern Ireland.
- The number of drug-related arrests may be subject to change as records for previous financial years are reviewed and reconciled with live custody data on an annual basis.

Points to note

Other Agency Seizures: Drugs seized by the Border Force are published quarterly by the Home Office as [Border Force transparency data \(opens in a new window\)](#), with Border Force seizures in each of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland presented separately. Border Force and National Crime Agency 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 [Drug Seizures and Arrests User Guide \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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 around 34 per cent of all drug seizure incidents and up to 41 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 in this [controlled drugs list \(opens in a new window\)](#).

Class A	Class B	Class C
Cocaine	Amphetamines	Anabolic Steroids
Ecstasy	Cannabis	Benzodiazepines ⁵
Heroin	Mephedrone	Pregabalin ³
LSD	Other Class B ²	Gabapentin ³
Methadone		Other Class C ⁴
Morphine		
Other Class A ¹		

¹ Other Class A drugs include fentanyl, oxycodone, psilocin (magic mushrooms), methamphetamine (crystal meth) and nitazenes. Nitazenes were reclassified as Class A controlled substances in March 2024.

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

³ Pregabalin and gabapentin were reclassified as Class C controlled substances in April 2019.

⁴ Other Class C drugs include tramadol, buprenorphine, GHB/GBL, 'Z-class' drugs (zolpidem, zopiclone and zaleplon) and Nitrous Oxide. Nitrous Oxide was reclassified as a Class C controlled substance in November 2023.

⁵ Flualprazolam, flunitrazolam and norfludiazepam were classified as Class C controlled substances in August 2021 and are recorded as Benzodiazepines.

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 ([Seizures of drugs in England and Wales user guide \(opens in a new window\)](#), 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 ([drug seizures and arrests annual trends spreadsheet \(opens in a new window\)](#), 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

Unconverted quantity data is rounded to the nearest whole number.

Converted quantity data is rounded to the nearest 100 grams where the unit of measurement is kilograms.

Converted quantity data is rounded to the nearest 10 doses in the case of Morphine and LSD, and the nearest 100 doses in the case of Ecstasy, Anabolic Steroids and Benzodiazepines.

Time periods presented in charts

Throughout this bulletin and in the accompanying spreadsheet, where charts show the latest ten years only, the full underlying data series is made available in the associated tables.

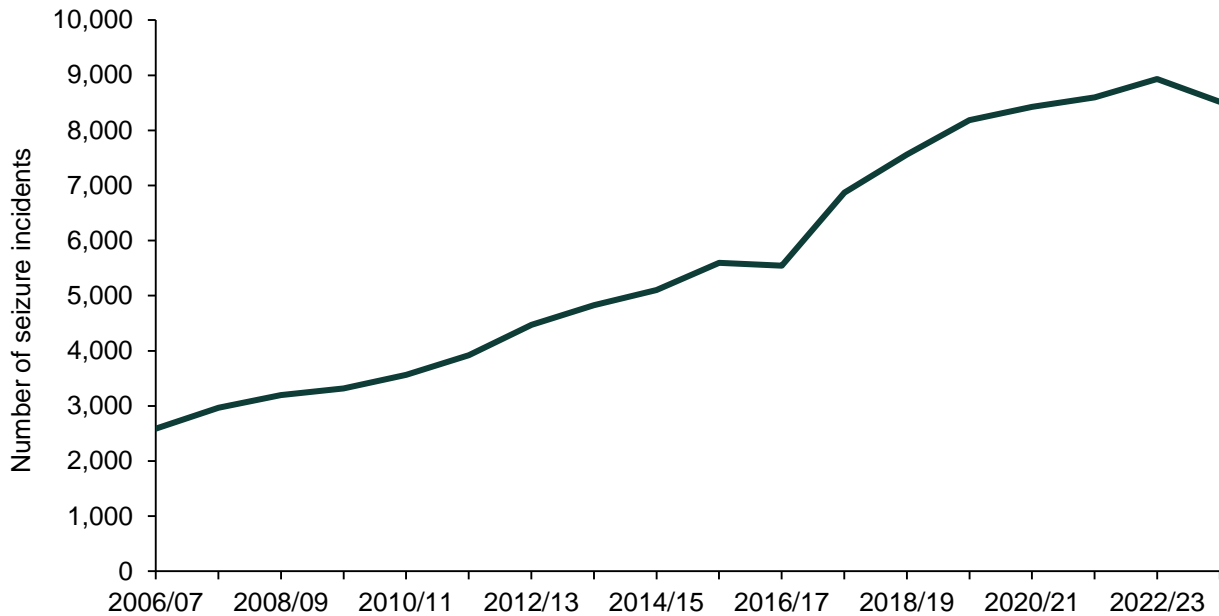
Key Points

- The number of drug seizure incidents has increased each year since 2006/07, with the exception of two falls in 2016/17 (51 fewer seizure incidents) and in 2023/24 (414 fewer seizure incidents).
- The number of drug seizure incidents recorded in 2023/24 (8,519) showed a decrease of 414 (4.6 per cent) when compared with 2022/23; it remains more than three times the level recorded in 2006/07 (2,590).
- Over the last ten years:
 - Seizure incidents involving Class A drugs are 2.5 times higher, with 752 seizure incidents in 2014/15 and 1,911 in 2023/24 which is the highest number of Class A seizure incidents recorded.
 - Class B seizure incidents are almost 1.5 times higher, with 4,078 seizure incidents in 2014/15 and 5,617 in 2023/24. This latest figure represents the first fall in Class B seizure incidents since 2016/17 and is also the lowest number of Class B seizure incidents in the last six years.
 - Class C seizure incidents have tripled, with 764 seizure incidents in 2014/15 and 2,312 in 2023/24 which is the highest number of Class C seizure incidents recorded.
 - 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 512 in 2014/15 to 1,599 in 2023/24. During 2023/24 cocaine was the second most commonly seized drug across all drug classes.
 - 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 has fallen for the second year in a row to 4,710 a decrease of 746 (-13.7%) from the previous year. This is nearly 1.5 times the number recorded in 2014/15 (3,291).
 - Cannabis resin was the second most commonly seized cannabis format between 2014/15 (417 seizure incidents) and 2018/19 (735 seizure incidents). The number of cannabis resin seizures have subsequently fallen in most years since 2018/19 to 187 seizures in 2023/24.
 - Benzodiazepines are the most commonly seized Class C drug and, from 2018/19, they have been either the second or the third most commonly seized drug across all drug classes. The number of seizure incidents involving benzodiazepines in 2023/24 was 1,218, a rise of 79 (6.9%) from the previous year and is nearly twice as high as that recorded in 2014/15 (656).
- Since Pregabalin was reclassified as a Class C controlled substance in April 2019 it has become the second most commonly seized Class C drug with 726 seizure incidents recorded in 2019/20, rising to 1,190 seizure incidents in 2023/24. Gabapentin, which was also reclassified as Class C controlled substance in April 2019, has seen a lower level of seizure incidents. The number of Gabapentin seizures in 2023/24 was 68, a fall of 18 from the previous year and a rise of 9 from the number of seizures recorded in 2019/20 (59).
- The number of drug-related arrests increased each year between 2006/07 (1,708 arrests) and 2019/20 (3,834 arrests), with the exception of falls of 37 and 239 in 2014/15 and 2016/17 respectively. The number of drug-related arrests fell to 3,143 in 2021/22, but have risen in the latest two years with 3,584 arrests recorded in 2023/24. This most recent figure is twice that recorded in 2006/07.
- Lockdown measures in relation to Covid-19 were first introduced on 23rd March 2020, with all Covid-19 legal restrictions replaced by guidance from 15th February 2022. There may have been an impact on the number of drug seizure incidents and drug-related arrests recorded while these measures were in place.

1. Overview of Trends in Drug Seizures and Arrests

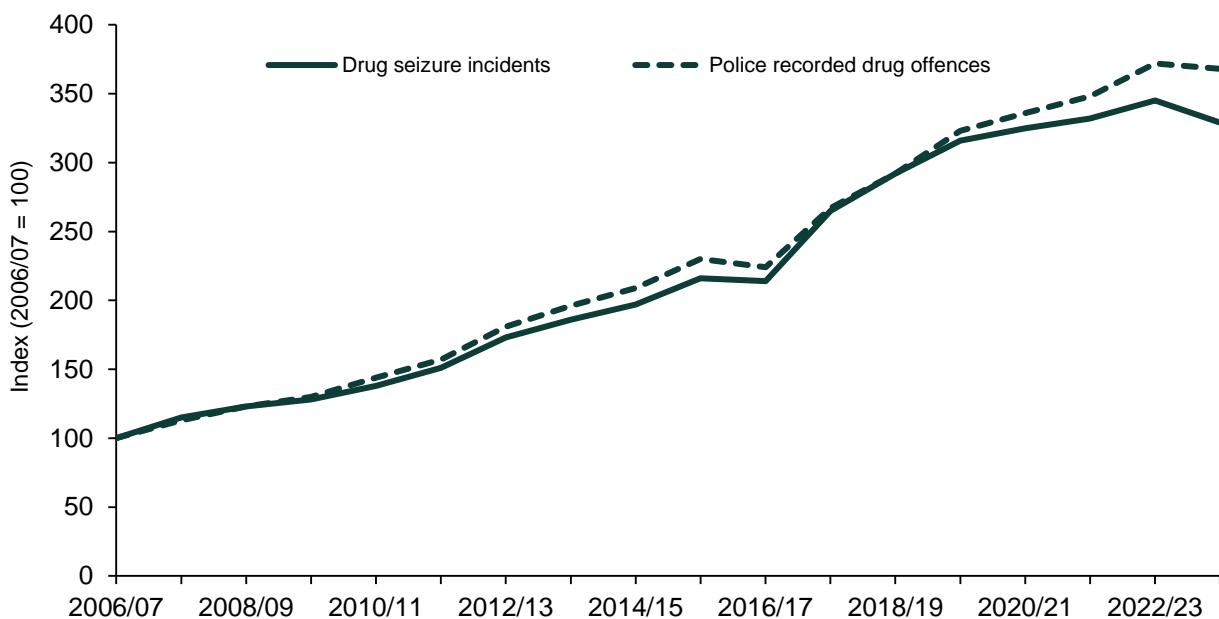
The number of drug seizure incidents has increased each year since 2006/07, with the exception of two slight falls in 2016/17 (51 fewer seizure incidents) and in 2023/24 (414 fewer seizure incidents). The number of drug seizure incidents recorded in 2023/24 (8,519) showed a decrease of 414 (4.6 per cent) when compared with 2022/23; it remains more than three times the level recorded in 2006/07 (2,590).

Figure 1.1 Drug seizure incidents, 2006/07 to 2023/24



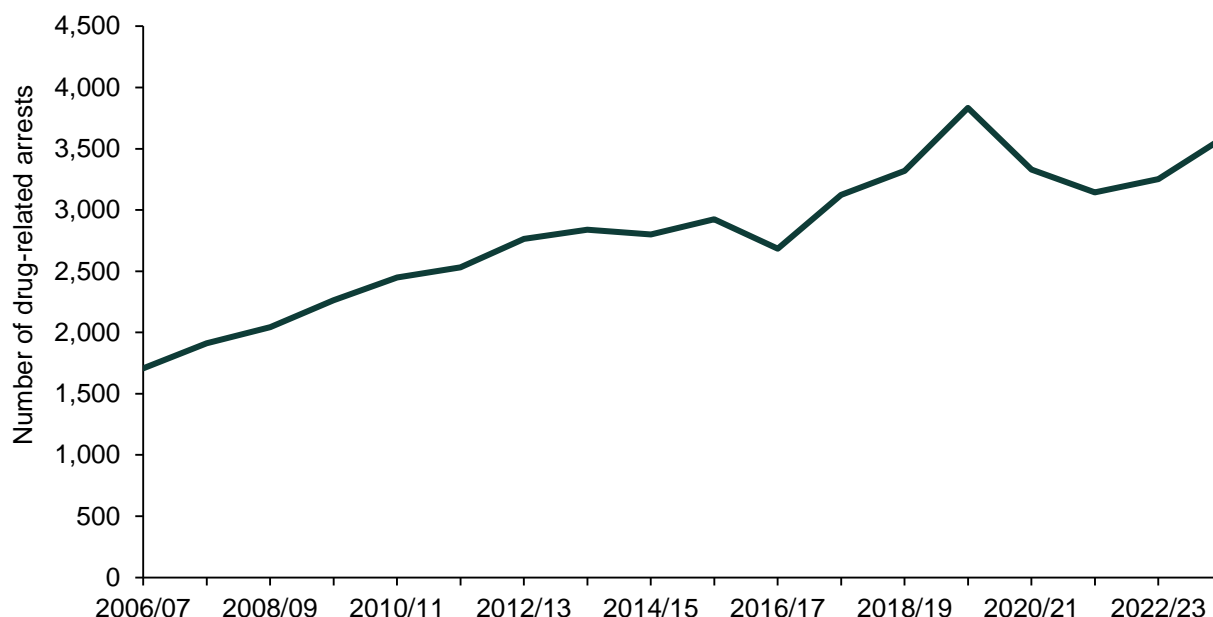
Levels of drug seizures can be influenced by policing activities and priorities in response to community concern about drugs. Changing levels of drug seizures may also be reflective of a change in the nature of the drugs market, including increased accessibility from sources such as dark web purchase 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, as previously described, follows the police recorded drug offences trend.

Figure 1.2 Police recorded drug offences and drug seizure incidents, 2006/07 to 2023/24, indexed to 2006/07=100



The number of drug-related arrests increased in most years between 2006/07 (1,708 arrests) and 2019/20 (3,834 arrests), with the exception of falls of 37 and 239 in 2014/15 and 2016/17 respectively. The number of drug-related arrests fell to 3,143 in 2021/22, but have risen in the latest two years with 3,584 arrests recorded in 2023/24. The latest figure is twice that recorded in 2006/07.

Figure 1.3 Drug-related arrests¹, 2006/07 to 2023/24



Lockdown measures in relation to Covid-19 were first introduced on 23rd March 2020, with all Covid-19 legal restrictions replaced by guidance from 15th February 2022. There may have been an impact on the number of drug seizure incidents and drug-related arrests recorded while these measures were in place.

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

	Drug seizure incidents	Drug-related arrests ¹
2006/07	2,590	1,708
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	3,320
2019/20	8,186	3,834
2020/21	8,428	3,331
2021/22	8,596	3,143
2022/23	8,933	3,253
2023/24	8,519	3,584

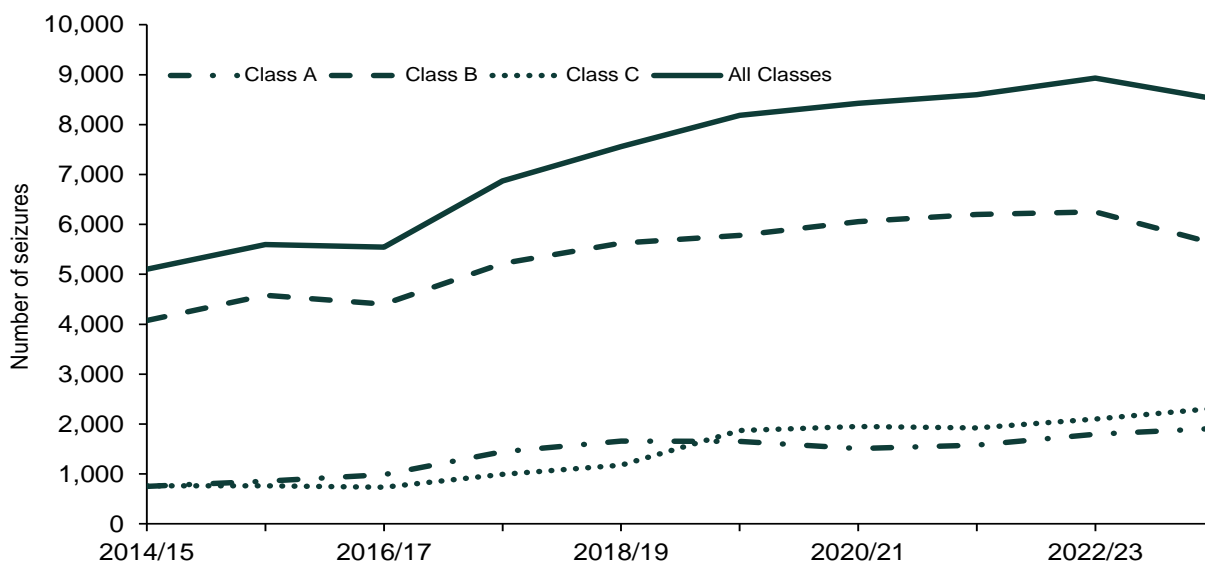
¹ Arrests for offences related to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

2. Trends in Drug Seizures by Class and Type of Drug over the last ten years

While the latest ten years only are presented in this section, the complete time series from 2012/13 is available in the [drug seizures and arrests annual trends spreadsheet \(opens in a new window\)](#).

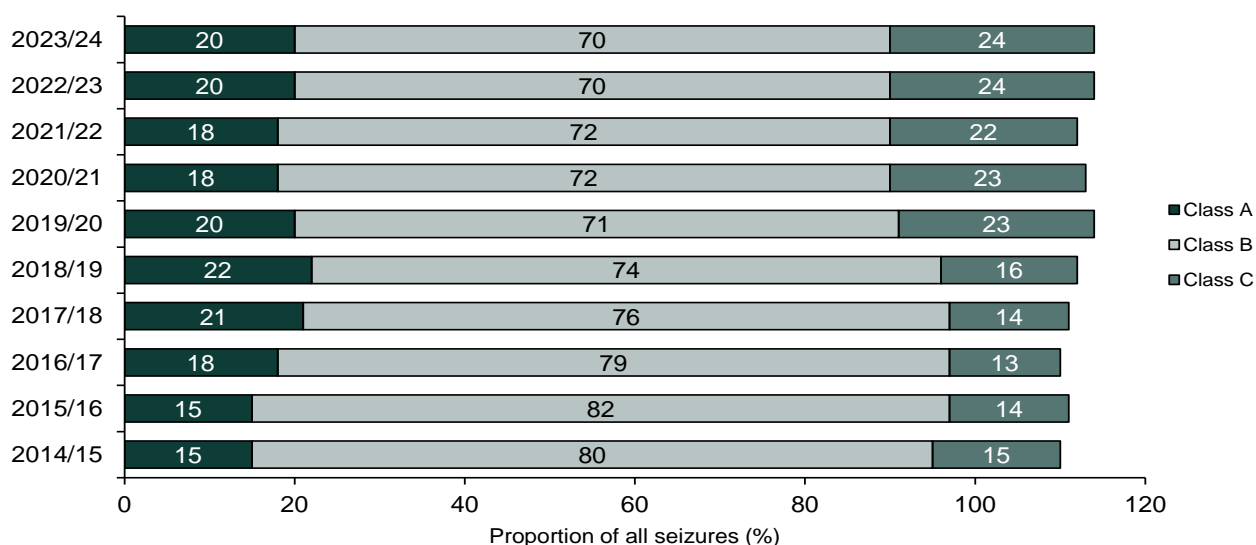
The number of drug seizure incidents in 2023/24 is more than 1.5 times the level recorded ten years ago; the number of seizure incidents involving Class A drugs is 2.5 times higher, those involving Class B drugs (and those involving Cannabis) are 1.5 times higher and those involving Class C drugs are three times higher. 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 drugs², 2014/15 to 2023/24



The proportion of seizures involving Class A drugs increased from 15 per cent in 2014/15 to 22 per cent in 2018/19, with a proportion of 20 per cent seen in each of the latest two years. The proportion of Class B drug seizures has fallen from 82 per cent in 2015/16 to 70 per cent in both 2022/23 and 2023/24. The proportion of seizures involving Class C drugs ranged from 13 per cent to 16 per cent between 2014/15 and 2018/19. 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 and an increase in the proportion of seizures involving Class C Drugs from this date, reaching 24 per cent in 2022/23. With the inclusion of Pregabalin and Gabapentin in the seizure incident figures from April 2019, the distribution of seizures from this date is not directly comparable with previous years. Figure 2.2 compares the distribution since 2014/15.

Figure 2.2 Distribution of seizures involving Class A, Class B and Class C drugs², 2014/15 to 2023/24



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%.

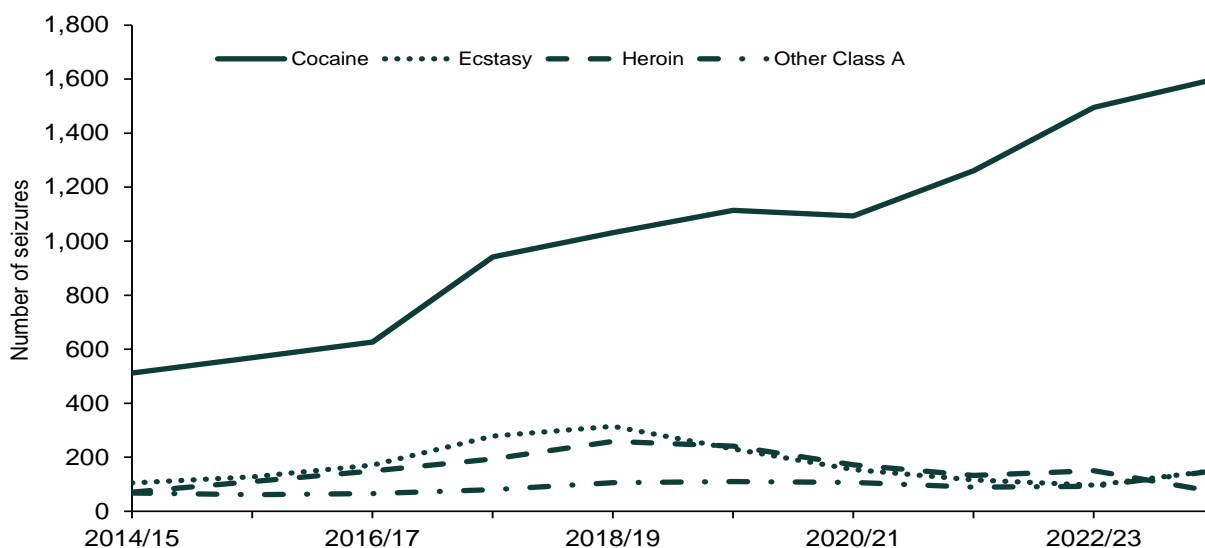
Class A Drugs

Cocaine is the most commonly seized Class A drug and over the last ten years seizures involving cocaine have shown the largest increase of all Class A drugs, from 512 in 2014/15 to 1,599 in 2023/24. During 2023/24 cocaine was the second most commonly seized drug across all drug classes.

Seizures involving LSD reached their highest level in 2021/22 (26 seizures), with 19 seizures recorded in 2023/24. Morphine seizures were highest in 2020/21 (19 seizures) with 12 recorded in 2023/24. Ecstasy seizures reached their highest level in 2018/19 (315), with the number of seizures falling in subsequent years to a low of 96 in 2022/23; there were 150 ecstasy seizures in 2023/24. The number of seizures involving Heroin also reached their highest level in 2018/19 (259) followed by an overall downward trend to 73 seizures recorded in 2023/24.

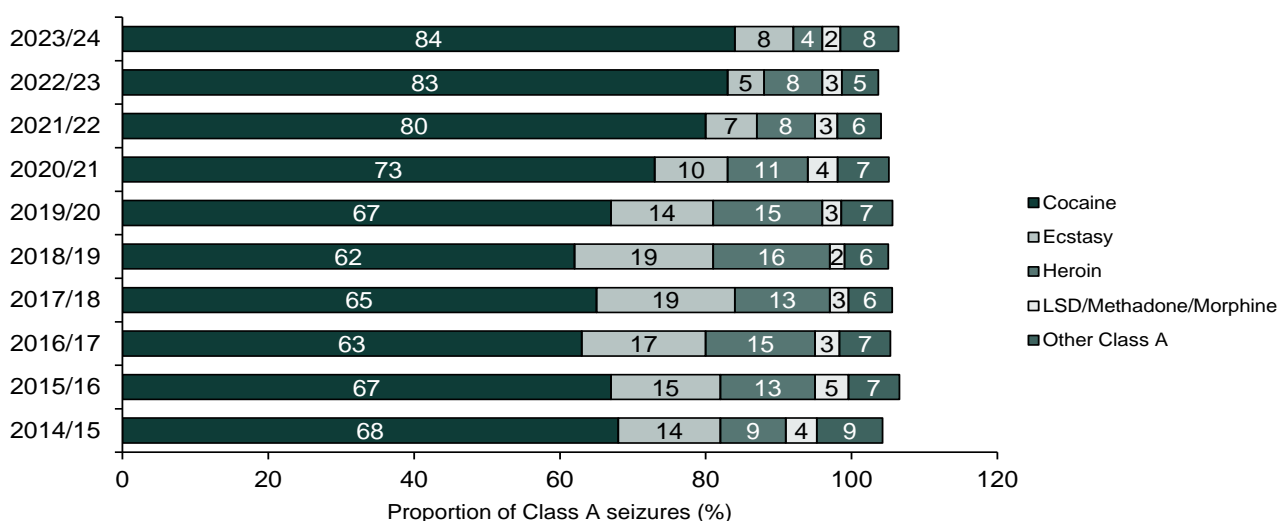
The number of seizures involving Methadone has fluctuated over the last ten years, ranging from 5 recorded in 2018/19 to 22 seizures in 2020/21; there were 16 methadone seizures in 2023/24. The number of seizures of Other Class A drugs has increased in most years, with the number of seizures ranging from 61 in 2015/16 to 149 in 2023/24.

Figure 2.3 Number of seizures involving the main Class A drugs^{3,4}, 2014/15 to 2023/24



In 2014/15 two out of every three Class A seizures included Cocaine, with the proportion increasing to more than four in every five Class A seizures in 2023/24. The proportion of Class A seizures involving Ecstasy has shown a general decline from more than one in five Class A seizures in 2014/15 to fewer than one in ten since 2021/22. Heroin has been present in fewer than one in ten Class A seizures since 2021/22. This same proportion was previously seen in 2014/15, with proportions of at least one in ten between 2015/16 and 2002/21.

Figure 2.4 Distribution of seizures involving Class A drugs⁴, 2014/15 to 2023/24



³ The numbers of LSD, Methadone and Morphine seizure incidents are too small to be presented in Fig 2.3. See Table 2.1 in the [drug seizures and arrests annual trends spreadsheet \(opens in a new window\)](#).

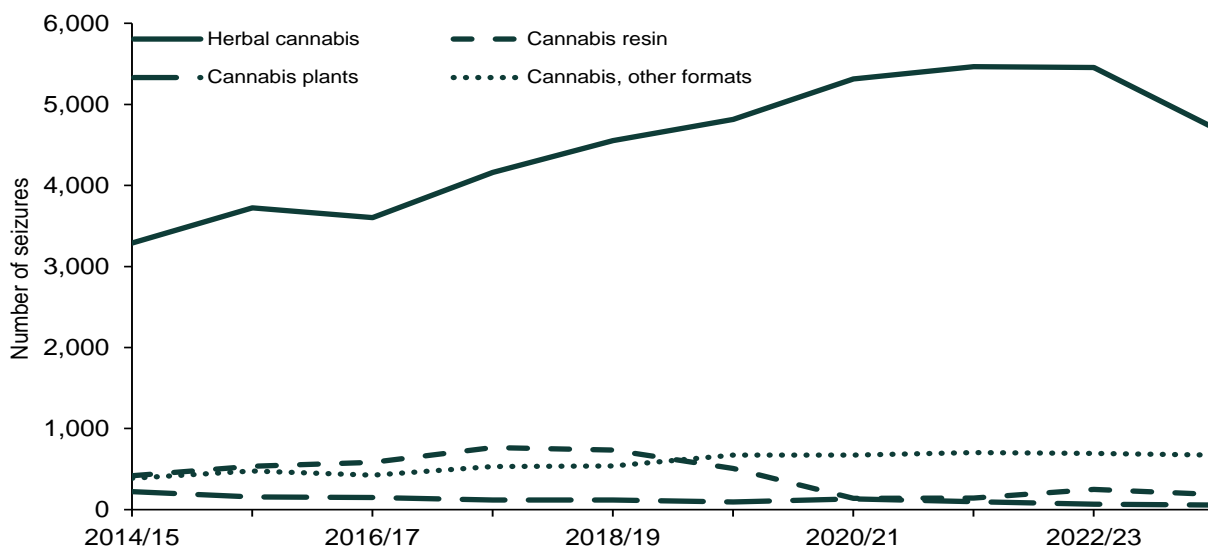
⁴ As a seizure may include more than one type of Class A drug, the number of seizures for each type of Class A drug will sum to more than the total number of Class A seizures and the proportions for each year will sum to more than 100%.

Class B Drugs

Cannabis is the most commonly seized drug across all classes, with herbal cannabis being the most commonly seized cannabis format. Herbal cannabis seizures increased in most of the last ten years to reach their highest level of 5,466 in 2021/22, more than 1.5 times the number recorded in 2014/15 (3,291). Lower levels were recorded in 2022/23 (5,456) and 2023/24 (4,710). Cannabis resin was the second most commonly seized cannabis format between 2014/15 (417 seizure incidents) and 2018/19 (735 seizure incidents). The number of cannabis resin seizures have subsequently fallen in most years since 2018/19 to 187 seizures in 2023/24. Seizures of cannabis plants have generally declined over the last ten years, from 222 in 2014/15 to a low of 56 in 2023/24. Seizures of cannabis in other formats generally increased from 387 seizures in 2014/15 to the highest level of 702 in 2021/22, with lower levels recorded in both 2022/23 (694 seizures) and 2023/24 (672 seizures).

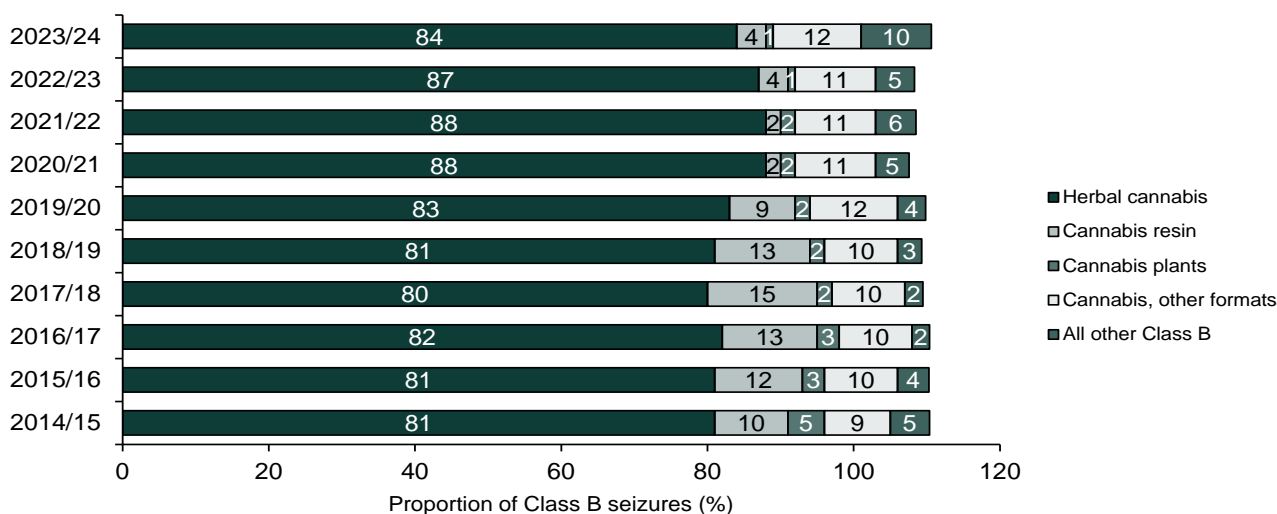
Seizures involving Other Class B drugs⁵ have generally increased from 2016/17 (41 seizures) with 423 recorded in 2023/24, nearly twice the number recorded in 2022/23. Mephedrone seizures have fallen over the last ten years, with four of the last five years recording fewer than 10 seizures. Amphetamine seizures increased from 51 in 2016/17 to 131 seizures in 2020/21, the highest level recorded; there were 114 Amphetamine seizures in 2023/24.

Figure 2.5 Number of seizures involving Cannabis in its various formats⁶, 2014/15 to 2023/24



In the last ten years more than four in every five Class B seizures involved Herbal Cannabis. The proportion of Class B seizures involving Cannabis Resin has fallen from 15 per cent in 2017/18 to less than 5 per cent since 2020/21.

Figure 2.6 Distribution of seizures involving Class B drugs^{6,7}, 2014/15 to 2023/24



⁵ Other Class B drugs include cathinone derivatives, codeine/dihydrocodeine, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), ketamine and synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists.

⁶ 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%.

⁷ Other includes Amphetamines, Mephedrone and Other Class B drugs.

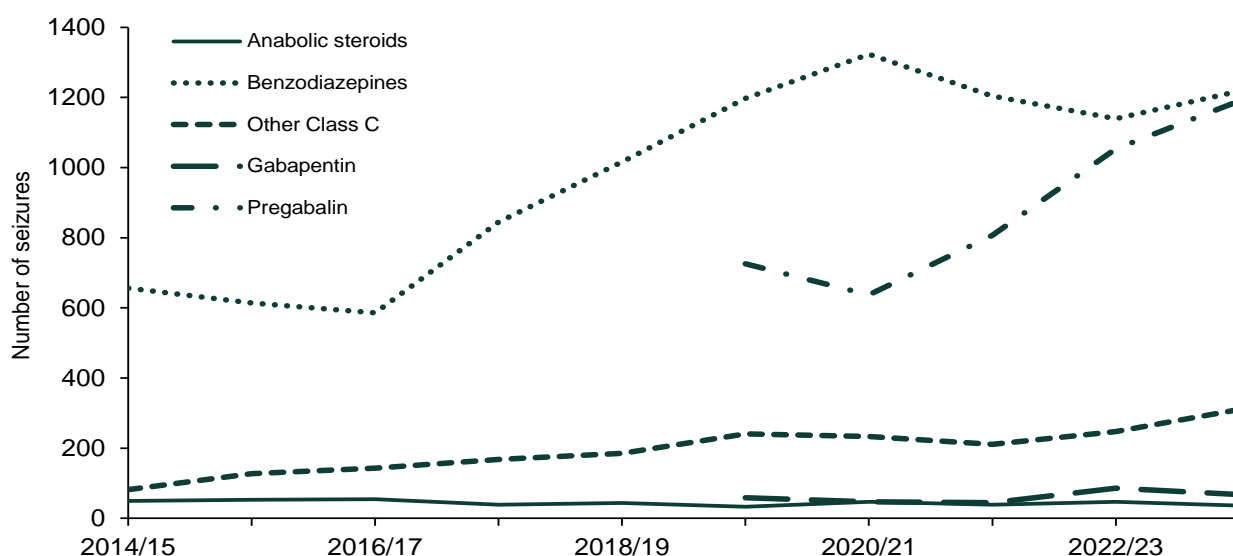
Class C Drugs

Benzodiazepines are the most commonly seized Class C drug. The number of benzodiazepine seizure incidents reached its highest level of 1,323 in 2020/21, twice the number recorded in 2014/15 (656). Benzodiazepine seizures were the third most commonly seized drug across all classes during 2023/24, with 1,218 seizures recorded.

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 from this date. In 2022/23 and 2023/24 Pregabalin seizures have accounted for half of Class C seizures. Gabapentin seizures account for between 2 per cent and 4 per cent of Class C seizures. Since reclassification in April 2019 Pregabalin has become the second most commonly seized Class C drug with almost as many seizures as benzodiazepines in 2023/24 (1,190).

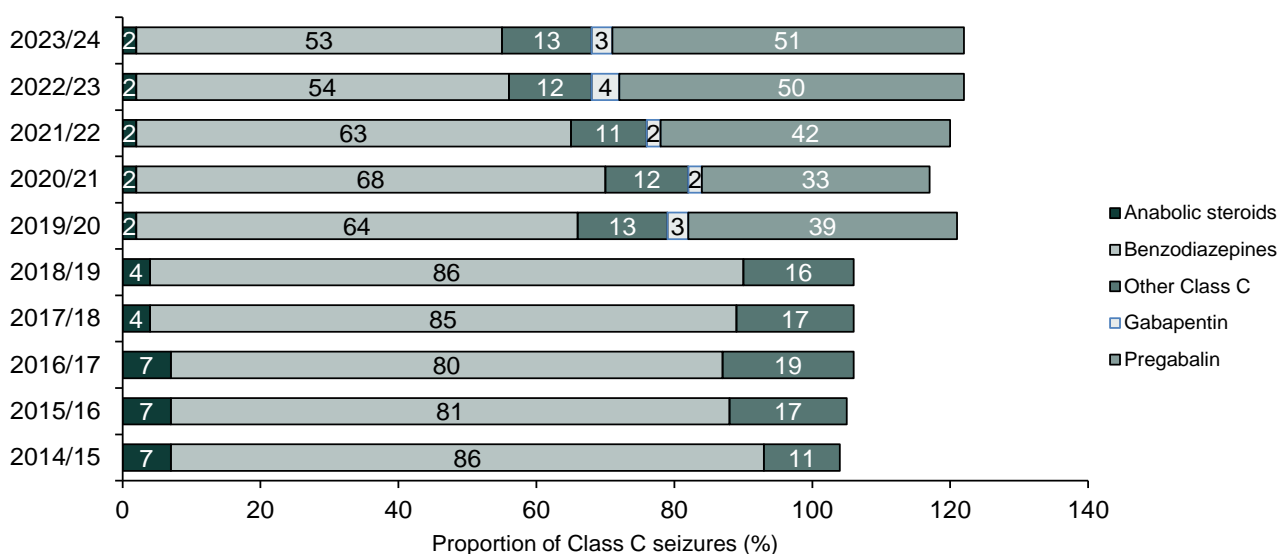
Flualprazolam was reclassified from a New Psychoactive Substance to a Class C Benzodiazepine in August 2021.

Figure 2.7 Number of seizures involving Class C drugs⁸, 2014/15 to 2023/24



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. As a result of this change, the distribution of seizures within Class C prior to 2019/20 is not directly comparable with that seen between 2019/20 and 2023/24. The distribution of drug types within Class C seizures has remained relatively consistent since 2019/20, with the past two years showing the rise in Pregabalin seizures.

Figure 2.8 Distribution of seizures involving Class C drugs⁸, 2014/15 to 2023/24



⁸ 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 \(opens in a new window\)](#) (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

There were 166 seizure incidents involving NPS in 2019/20, falling to 147 in 2020/21 followed by further decreases in 2021/22 and 2022/23 with 63 and 21 seizures respectively. In 2023/24, there were 27 seizures involving NPS. At least 90 per cent of seizures in both 2019/20 and 2020/21 were of Flualprazolam, which was first recorded as a New Psychoactive Substance in April 2019. Flualprazolam was subsequently reclassified as a Class C (Benzodiazepine) in August 2021, resulting in the drop in NPS seizure incidents seen between 2020/21 and 2022/23. Almost half of seizures in 2023/24 involved Nitrous Oxide, which was reclassified as a Class C drug in November 2023.

Cannabis Cultivation

Guidance from the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) defined commercial cultivation of cannabis 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.

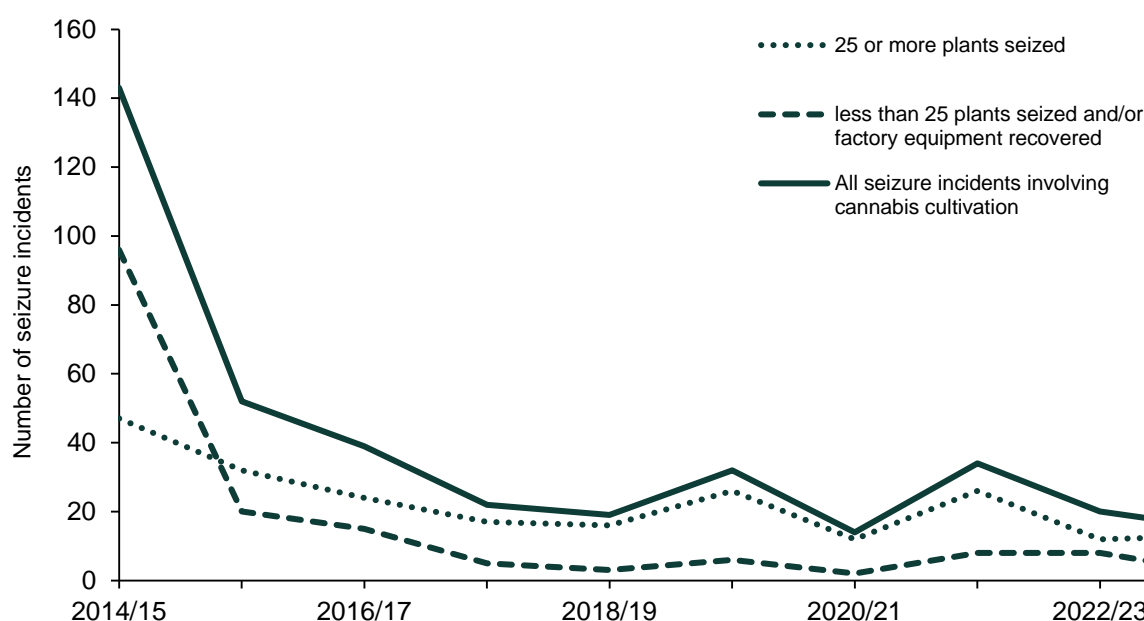
They defined a cannabis farm as:

- 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.

The level of cannabis cultivation based on this definition is shown in Figure 2.9. While the overall number of seizure incidents involving cannabis cultivation reached 143 in 2014/15, the number has since fallen, with 20 recorded in 2022/23 and 15 recorded in 2023/24.

Figure 2.9 Cannabis cultivation, 2014/15 to 2023/24



3. Trends in Drug Seizures by Quantity of Drugs Seized over the last ten years

While the latest ten years only are presented in this section, the complete time series from 2012/13 is available in the [drug seizures and arrests annual trends spreadsheet \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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 [drug seizures and arrests annual trends spreadsheet \(opens in a new window\)](#) pivot tables - seizure incidents and quantities seized, with the complete time series from 2012/13 also available.

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:

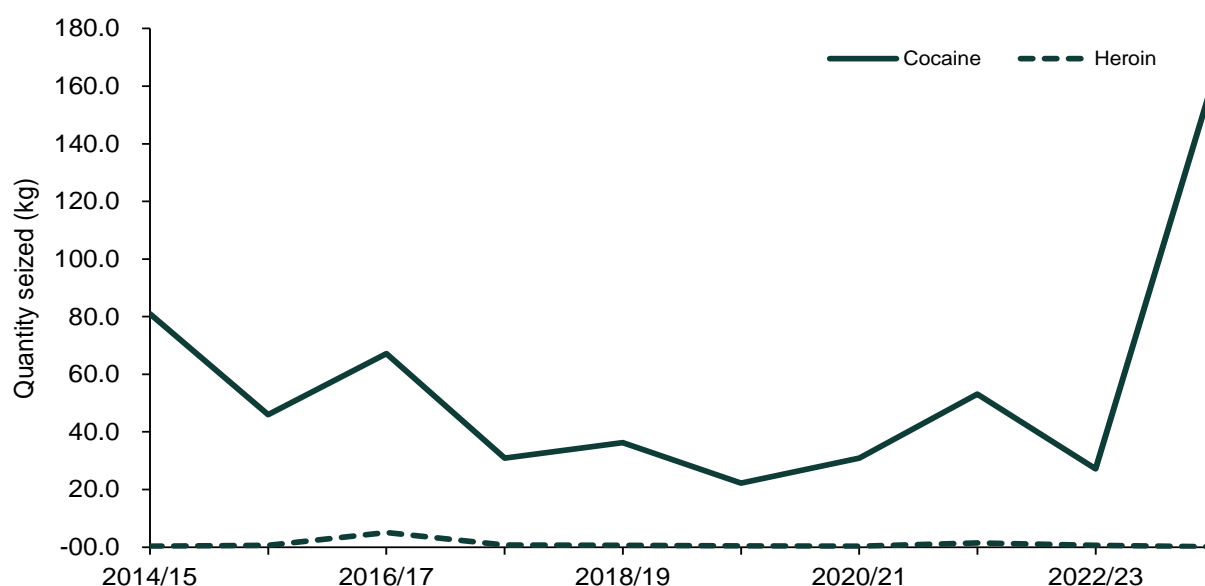
Summarised in kilograms	Summarised in thousands of doses
Cocaine	Ecstasy
Heroin	LSD (weighed amounts excluded)
	Morphine

Class A, weights seized (converted amounts)

Cocaine: The latest financial year 2023/24 saw the largest amount of cocaine seized (162.7kg), with one seizure accounting for more than 70 per cent of the total weight seized. The second highest amount seized in the last ten years was 81kg in 2014/15, half of that seized in 2023/24. Between 2015/16 and 2022/23 the amounts of cocaine seized ranged from 22.2kg in 2019/20 to 67.2kg in 2016/17.

Heroin: The quantity of heroin seized is much lower than that for cocaine, ranging from 0.1kg in 2023/24 to 5.1kg in 2016/17. The only years in which the weight of heroin seized has exceeded 1kg are 2016/17 and 2021/22. One seizure accounted for around three quarters of the total weight seized in 2016/17.

Figure 3.1 Quantities of Cocaine and Heroin seized (kg), 2014/15 to 2023/24



In 2023/24, four out of five cocaine seizures involved quantities of less than 5g in weight, with almost two out of every five seizures involving quantities less than 1g. During the same period, two thirds of heroin seizures (67 per cent) involved quantities of less than 1g (Figure 3.2).

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 present the distribution of cocaine and heroin seizures since 2014/15, showing both the changes in the number of seizure incidents and the larger proportion of low weight seizures.

Figure 3.2 Distribution of the quantities of Cocaine and Heroin seized by weight (kg), 2023/24

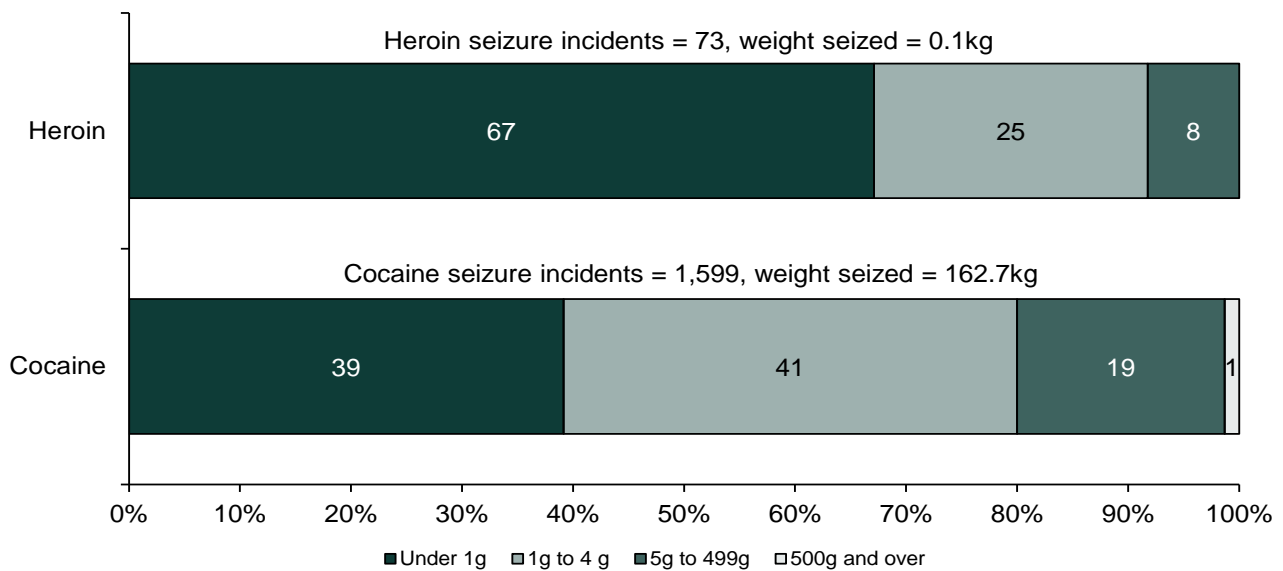


Figure 3.3 Number of Class A Cocaine seizure incidents by weight seized, 2014/15 to 2023/24

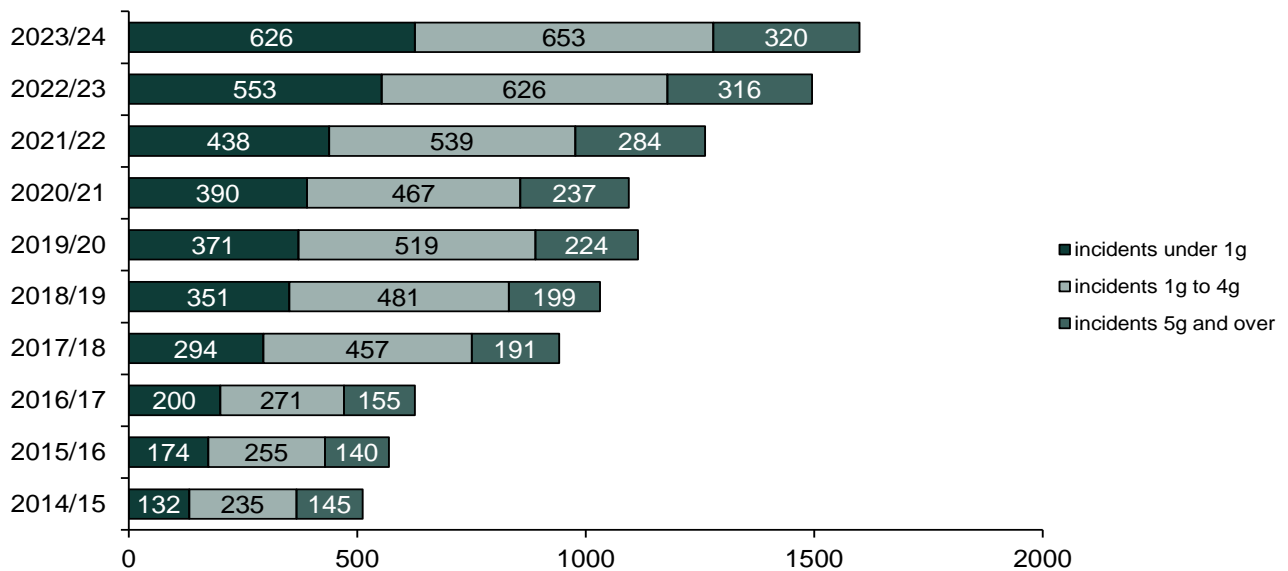
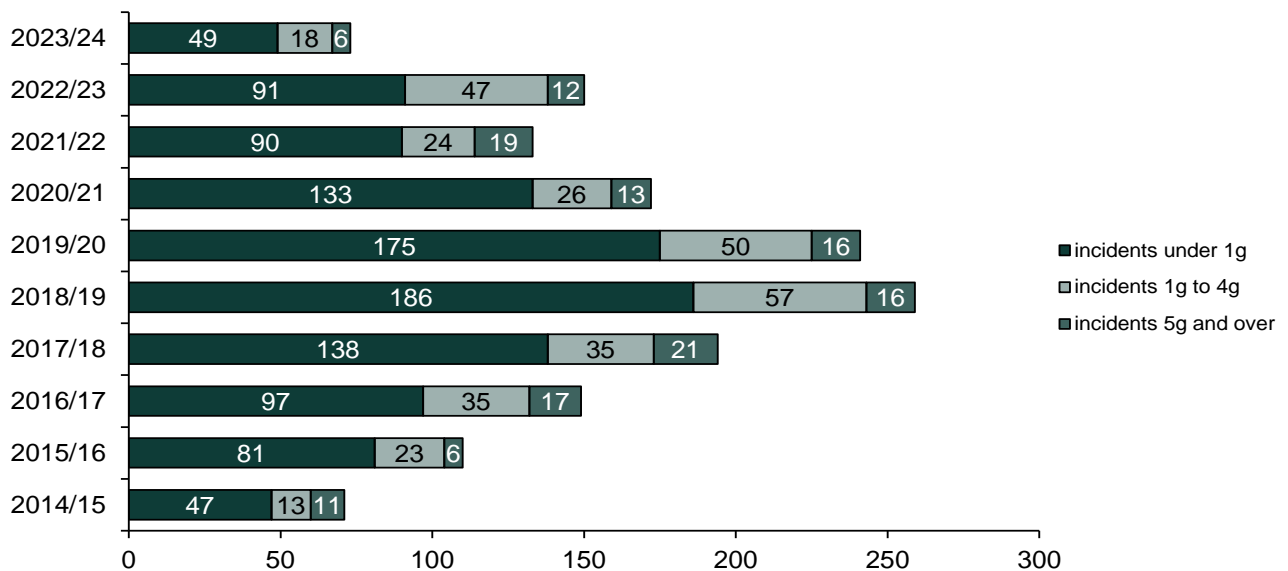


Figure 3.4 Number of Class A Heroin seizure incidents by weight seized, 2014/15 to 2023/24



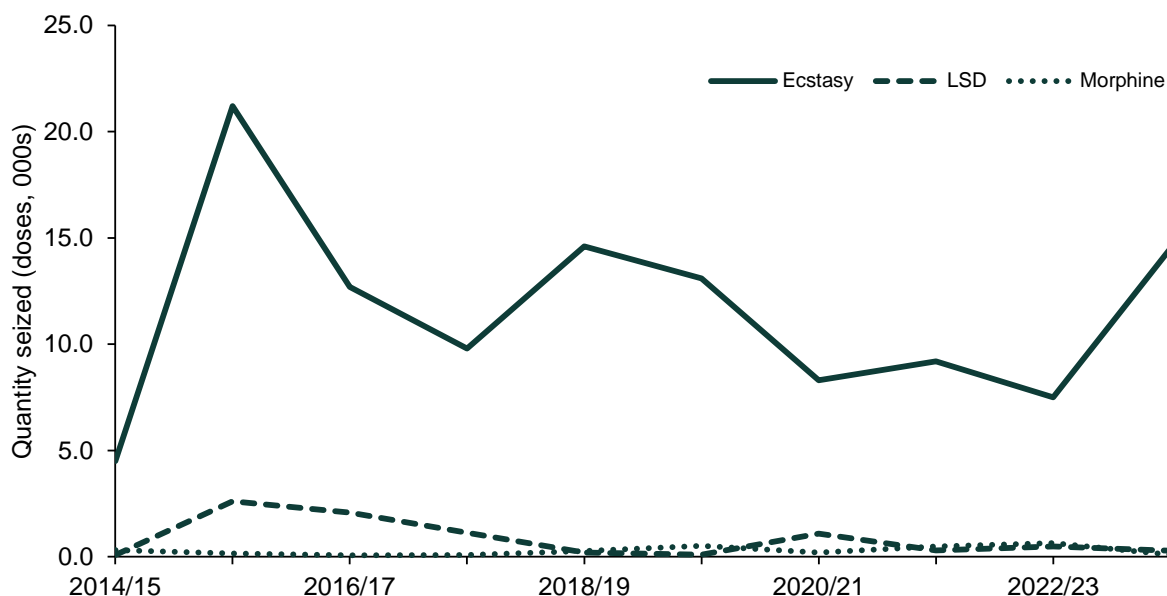
Class A, doses seized (converted amounts)

Ecstasy: Seizures of ecstasy have ranged from 4,500 doses in 2014/15 to 21,200 doses in 2015/16. In 2023/24 there were 14,500 doses seized, an increase on the 7,500 doses seized the previous year and the third highest number of doses seized in the last ten years.

LSD: In the last ten years there have been 164 seizures of LSD (excluding weighed amounts)⁹, adding to an estimated 8,330 doses in total and ranging from 80 doses in 2014/15 to 2,610 in 2015/16. There were approximately 280 doses seized in 2023/24, a decrease on the 480 doses seized in 2022/23.

Morphine: There have been 116 morphine seizures in the last ten years, amounting to an estimated 2,800 doses in total and ranging from around 70 in 2016/17 to approximately 640 in 2022/23. There were 100 doses seized in 2023/24.

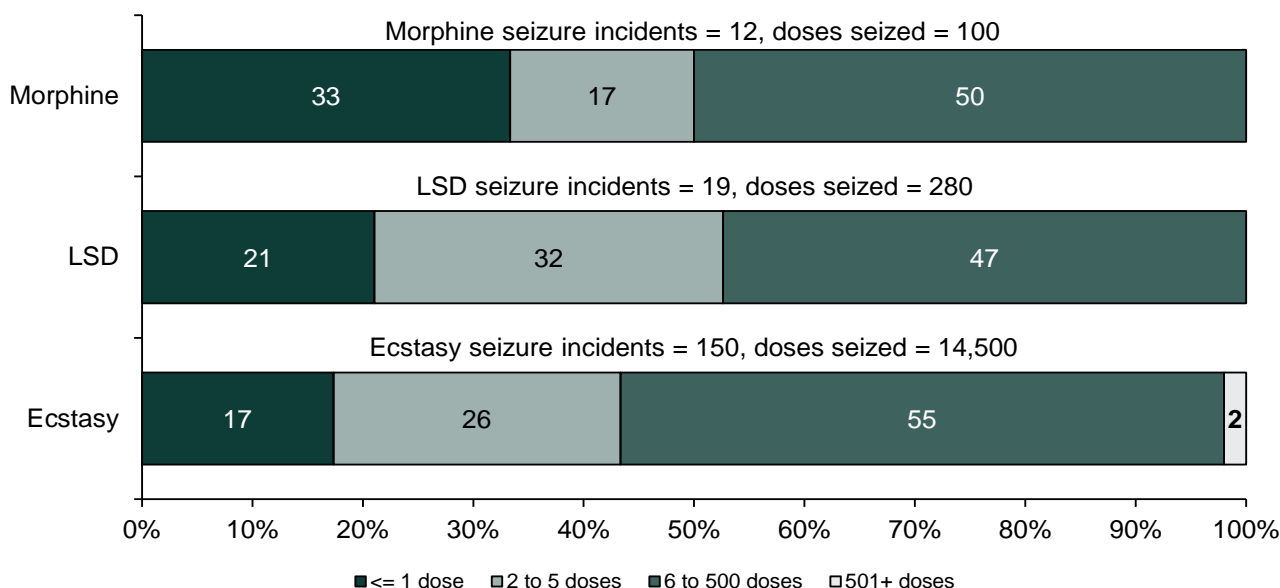
Figure 3.5 Quantities of Ecstasy, LSD and Morphine seized (doses, 000s), 2014/15 to 2023/24



In 2023/24 approximately half of all seizures involving Ecstasy, LSD and Morphine, involved more than 5 doses (Figure 3.6).

Figures 3.7 to 3.9 present the distribution of ecstasy, LSD and morphine seizures since 2014/15, showing both the changing number of seizure incidents and the smaller proportions where the quantity seized is 51 or more doses. In most years, more than four fifths of ecstasy, LSD and morphine seizures involve quantities of 50 doses or less.

Figure 3.6 Distribution of the quantities of Ecstasy, LSD and Morphine seized (doses), 2023/24



⁹ 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, 2014/15 to 2023/24

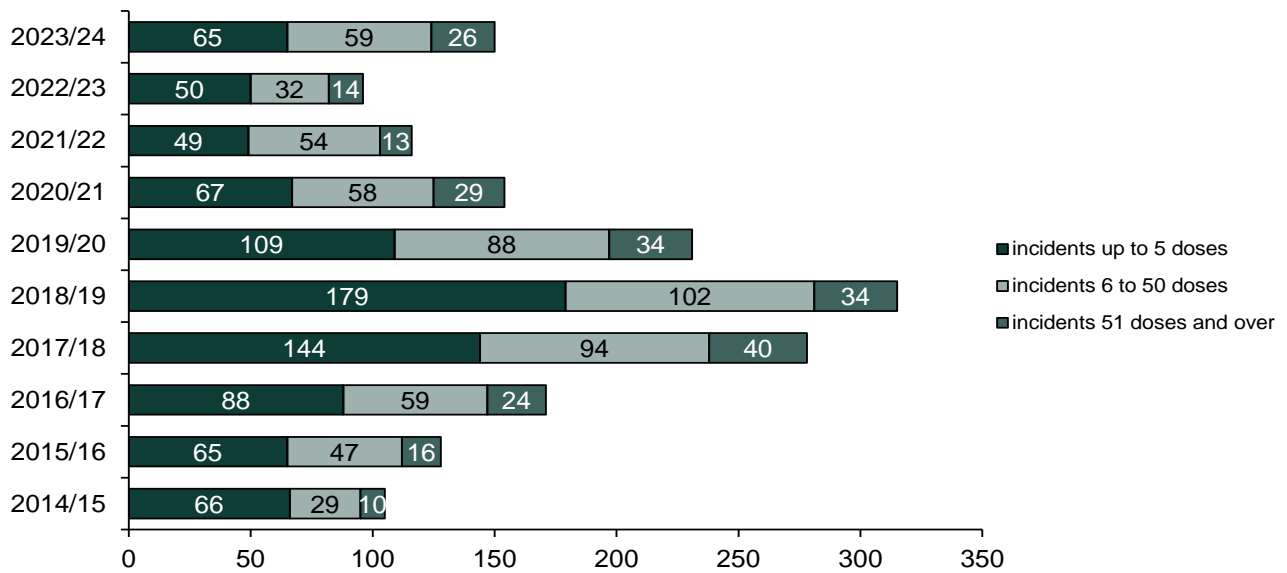


Figure 3.8 Number of Class A LSD seizure incidents by doses seized, 2014/15 to 2023/24

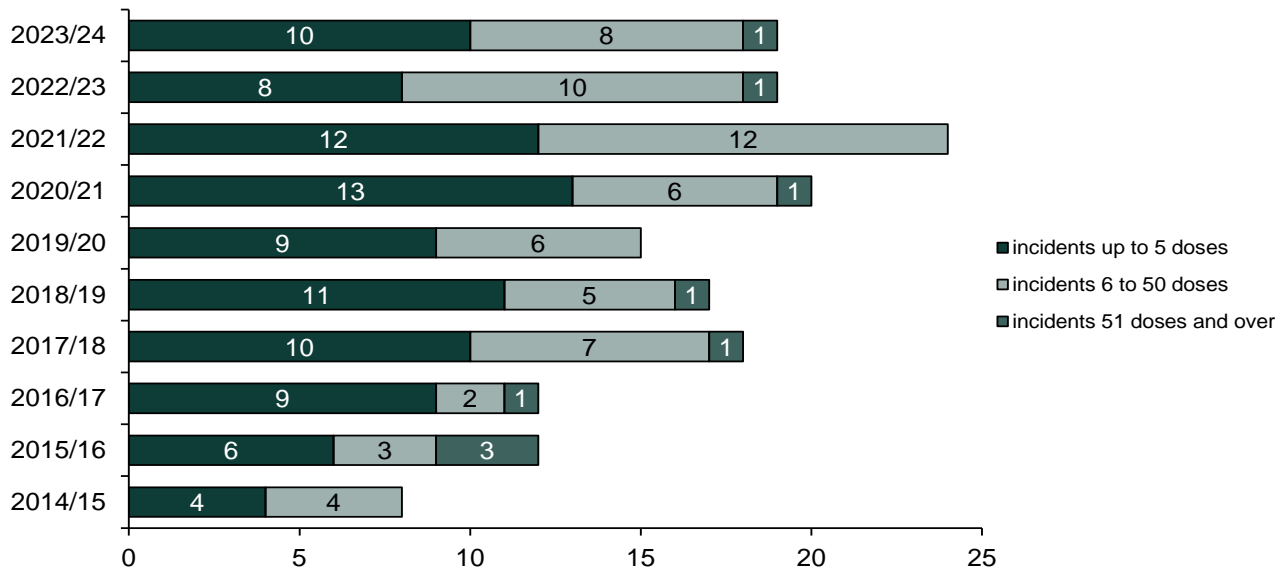
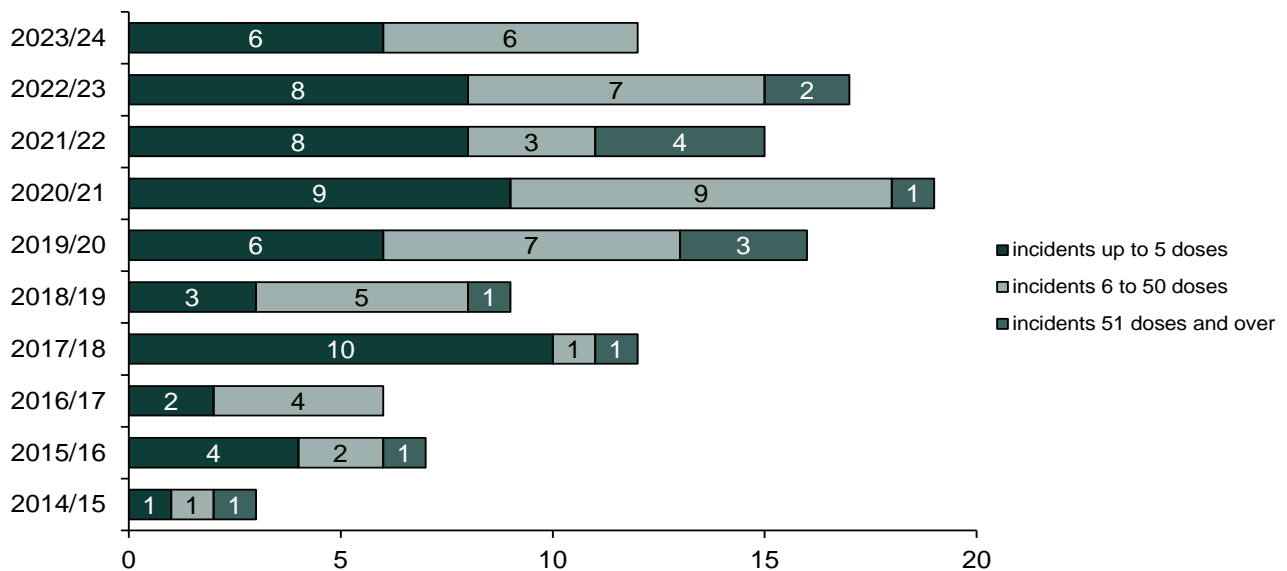


Figure 3.9 Number of Class A Morphine seizure incidents by doses seized, 2014/15 to 2023/24



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	

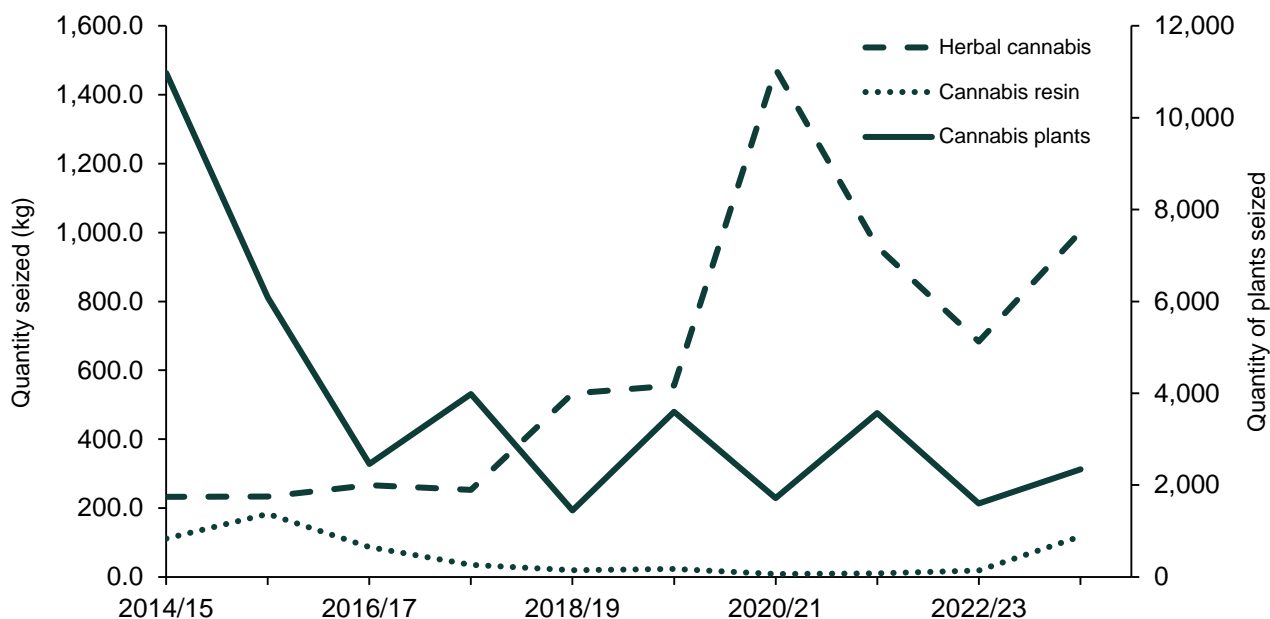
Class B, cannabis weights and plants seized (converted amounts)

Herbal cannabis: The weight of herbal cannabis seized was at its lowest in 2014/15 (232.5kg) before generally increasing to reach 1,475.5kg in 2020/21. The weight seized in 2023/24 was 1003.0kg, the second highest weight seized in the last ten years; this included 20 herbal cannabis seizures of 10kg or more.

Cannabis resin: The weight of cannabis resin seized fell each year from 2015/16 (182.5kg) to 2020/21 (8kg). Increases have since been seen in each year 2021/22 (10.4kg) to 2023/24 (117.3kg). The higher levels seen in 2015/16 and 2023/24 were influenced by a small number of large seizures. One seizure in 2015/16 accounted for 90 per cent of the total seized and one seizure in 2023/24 accounted for 92 per cent of the total seized.

Cannabis plants: Seizures of cannabis plants were at their highest in 2014/15 (10,974 plants). Since 2016/17, the number of plant seizures has fluctuated between 1,450 plants seized in 2018/19 and 3,980 plants seized in 2017/18. There were 2,342 plants seized in 2023/24, an increase of 46 per cent on the previous year.

Figure 3.10 Quantity of Cannabis seized in its various formats (kg and plants), 2014/15 to 2023/24



Nearly three quarters of herbal cannabis seizures and close to two thirds of cannabis resin seizures in 2023/24 involved weights less than 5g. Almost half of cannabis plant seizures in 2023/24 involved 5 or fewer plants (Figure 3.11).

Figures 3.12 to 3.14 present the distribution of herbal cannabis, cannabis resin and cannabis plant seizures since 2014/15 and the changing levels of seizure incidents.

Over the last ten years around three in four herbal cannabis seizures involved less than 5g. The number of seizures of 10kg and over ranged from 4 in 2017/18 to 20 in 2023/24.

The proportion of cannabis resin seizures involving less than 5g is generally slightly lower than for herbal cannabis, ranging from 60 per cent in 2021/22 to 76% in 2015/16. There were three seizures of 10kg and over in 2014/15, with 1 seizure of 10kg and over in each of 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2023/24. Figure 3.13 also shows the lower numbers of cannabis resin seizures recorded after 2019/20.

Information on cannabis cultivation can be found on page 12.

Figure 3.11 Distribution of the quantities of Cannabis seized (kg and plants), 2023/24

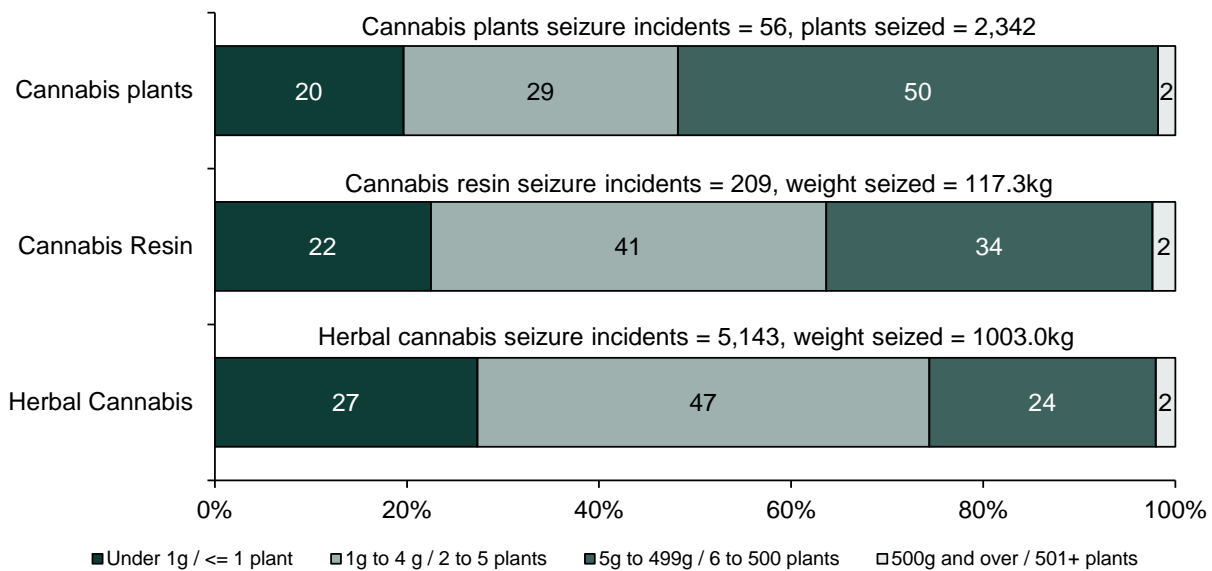


Figure 3.12 Number of Class B Herbal cannabis seizure incidents by weight seized, 2014/15 to 2023/24

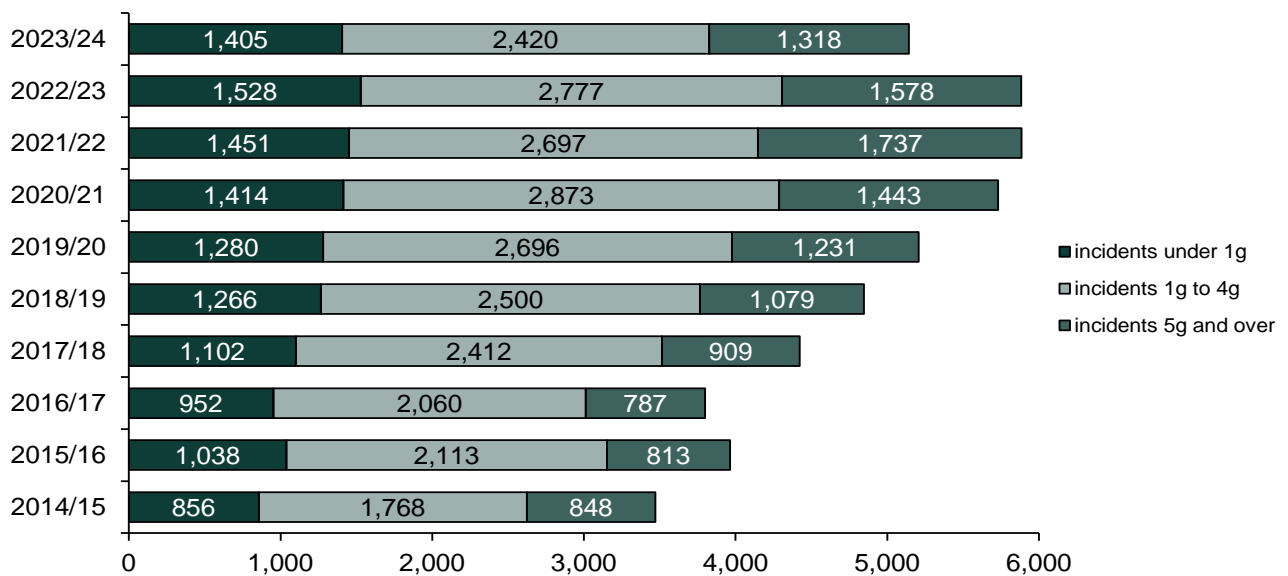


Figure 3.13 Number of Class B Cannabis resin seizure incidents by weight seized, 2014/15 to 2023/24

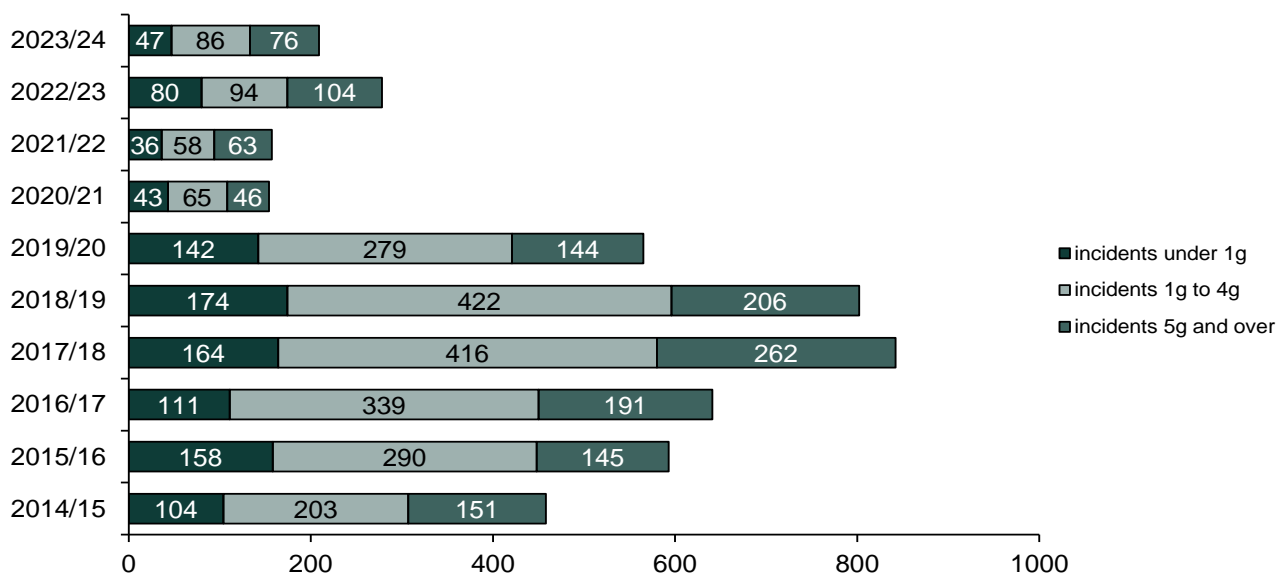
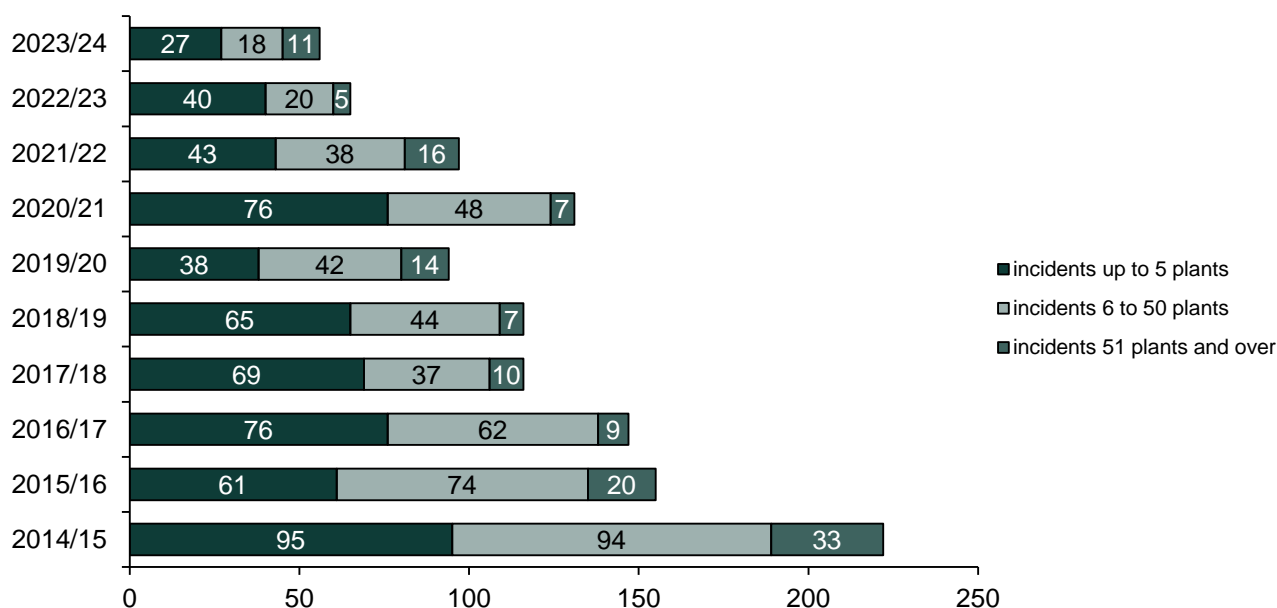


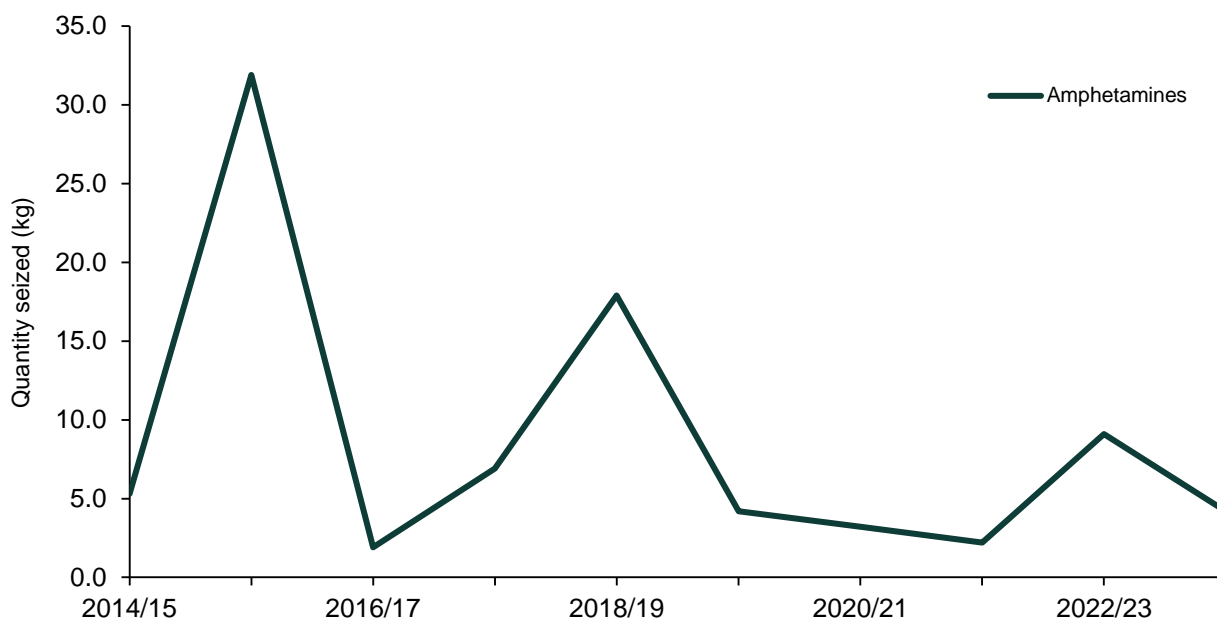
Figure 3.14 Number of Class B Cannabis plant seizure incidents by number of plants seized, 2014/15 to 2023/24



Class B, amphetamines seized (converted amounts)

Amphetamines: Seizures of amphetamines have not shown a consistent trend over the last ten years. A small number of large seizures have contributed to the higher quantities recorded in 2015/16 and 2018/19. 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.

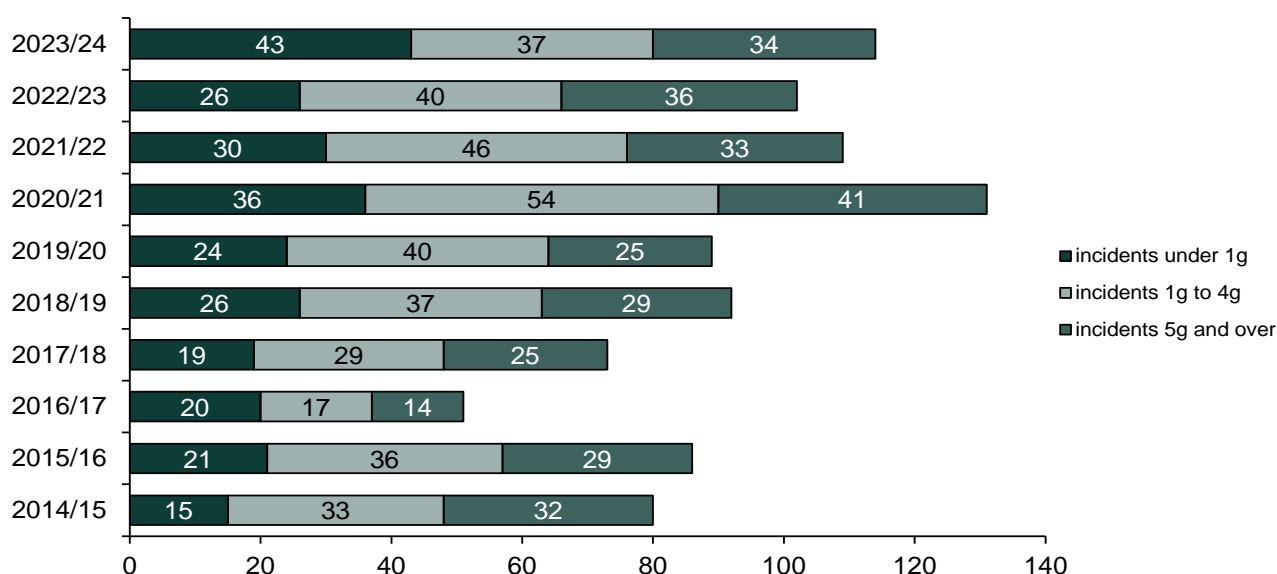
Figure 3.15 Quantity of Amphetamines seized (kg), 2014/15 to 2023/24



In 2023/24 approximately four in five amphetamine seizure incidents involved weights of less than 10g.

Figure 3.16 presents the distribution of amphetamine seizures since 2014/15, demonstrating the variability of amounts seized.

Figure 3.16 Number of Class B Amphetamine seizure incidents by weight seized, 2014/15 to 2023/24



Class C Drugs

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

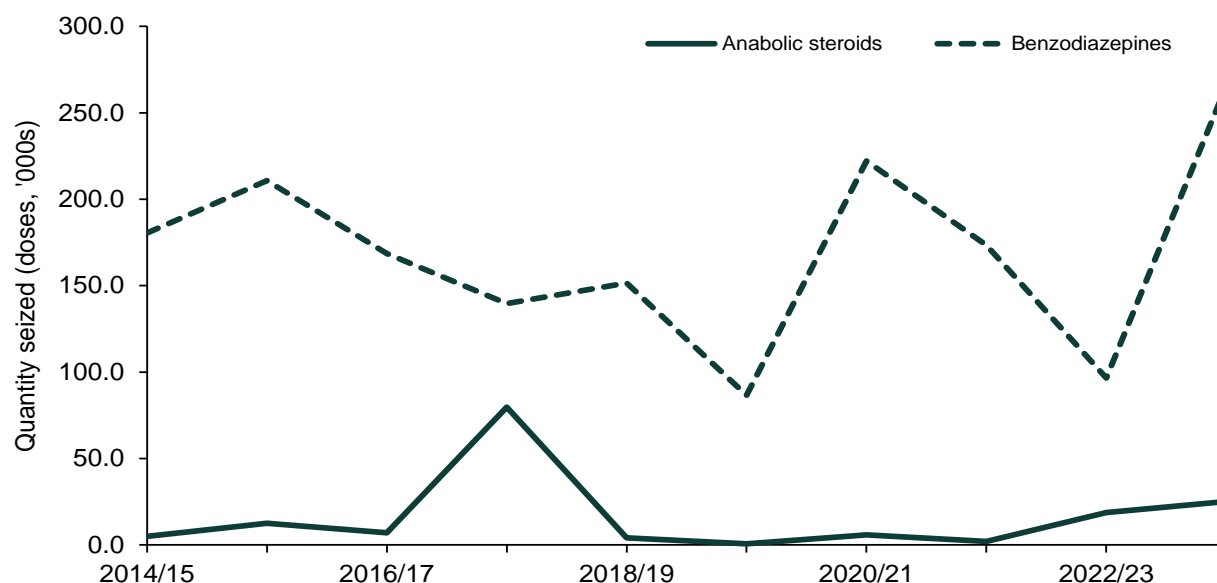
Summarised in thousands of doses
Anabolic steroids
Benzodiazepines

Class C, doses seized (converted amounts)

Anabolic Steroids: In 2017/18 there were nearly 80,000 doses of anabolic steroids seized, with two thirds of this total attributed to one seizure. The number of doses seized in all other years between 2014/15 and 2023/24 was much lower, with the lowest level of 700 doses seized in 2019/20. There were 25,100 doses seized in 2023/24.

Benzodiazepines: Over the last ten years the number of doses of benzodiazepines seized has ranged from 86,600 in 2019/20 to 265,000 doses seized in 2023/24. In some years a small number of seizures has accounted for a sizeable proportion of doses seized. Seven seizures accounted for 61 per cent of the total quantity of benzodiazepine seized in 2015/16, two seizures accounted for 45 per cent of the total quantity seized in 2020/21 and two seizures accounted for almost half of the total quantity seized in 2023/24.

Figure 3.17 Quantity of Anabolic Steroids and Benzodiazepines seized (doses,'000s), 2014/15 to 2023/24



In 2023/24, 86 per cent of anabolic steroid and 71 per cent of benzodiazepine seizures involved more than 5 doses (Figure 3.18). Figures 3.19 and 3.20 present the distribution of anabolic steroid and benzodiazepine seizures since 2014/15; in most years at least two thirds of the seizures have involved more than 5 doses.

Figure 3.18 Distribution of the quantities of Benzodiazepine and Anabolic Steroids seized (doses) 2023/24

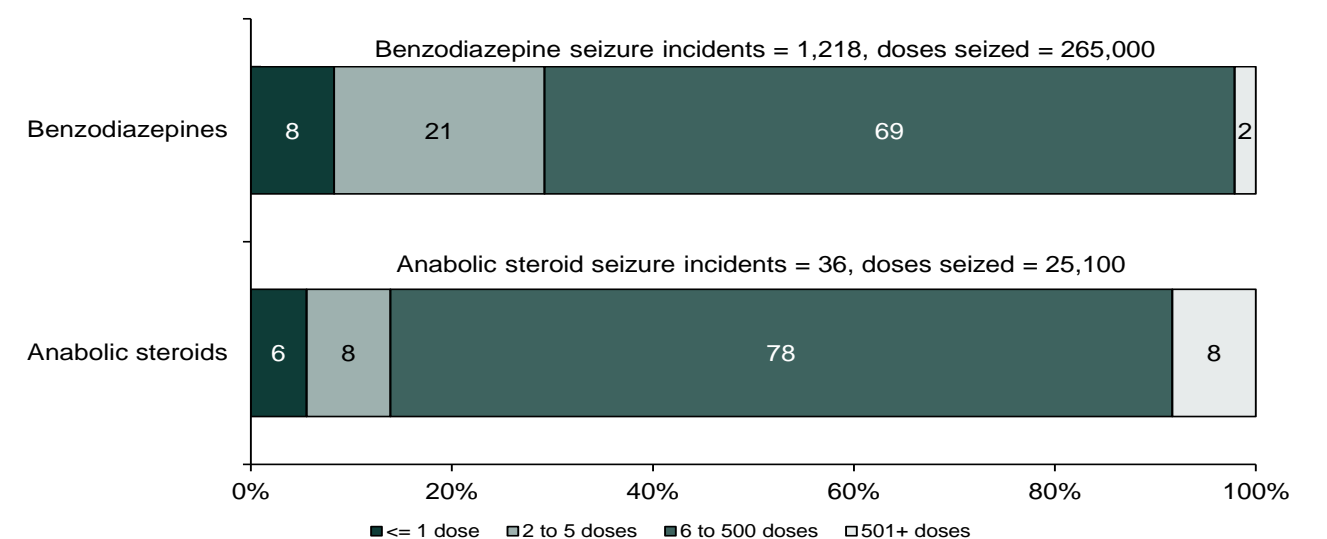


Figure 3.19 Number of Class C Anabolic steroids seizure incidents by doses seized, 2014/15 to 2023/24

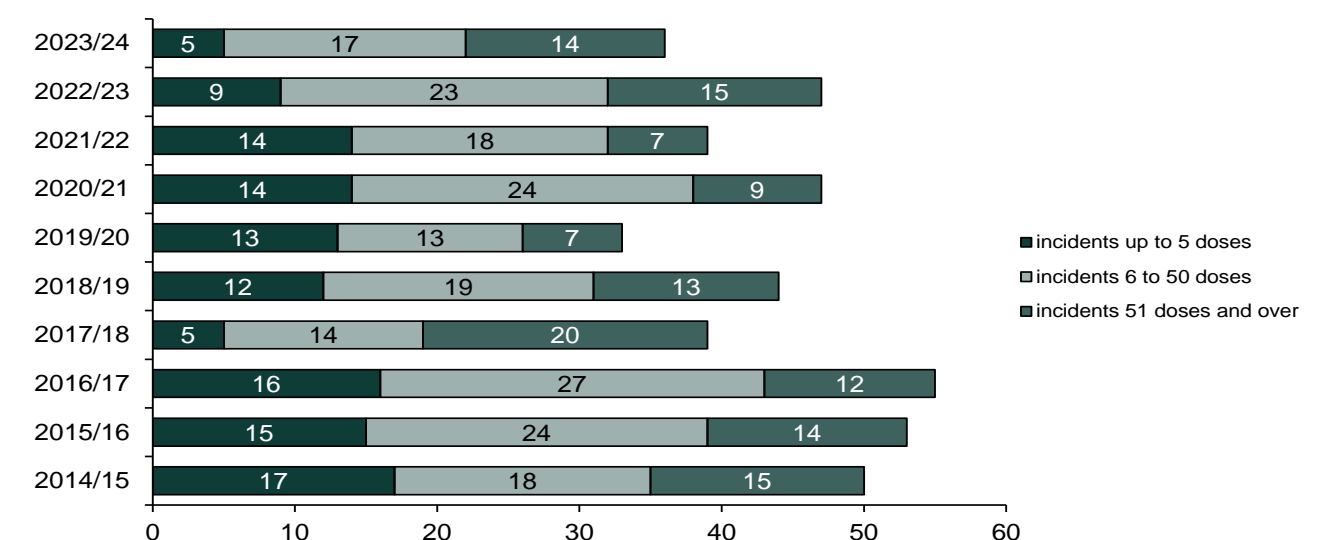
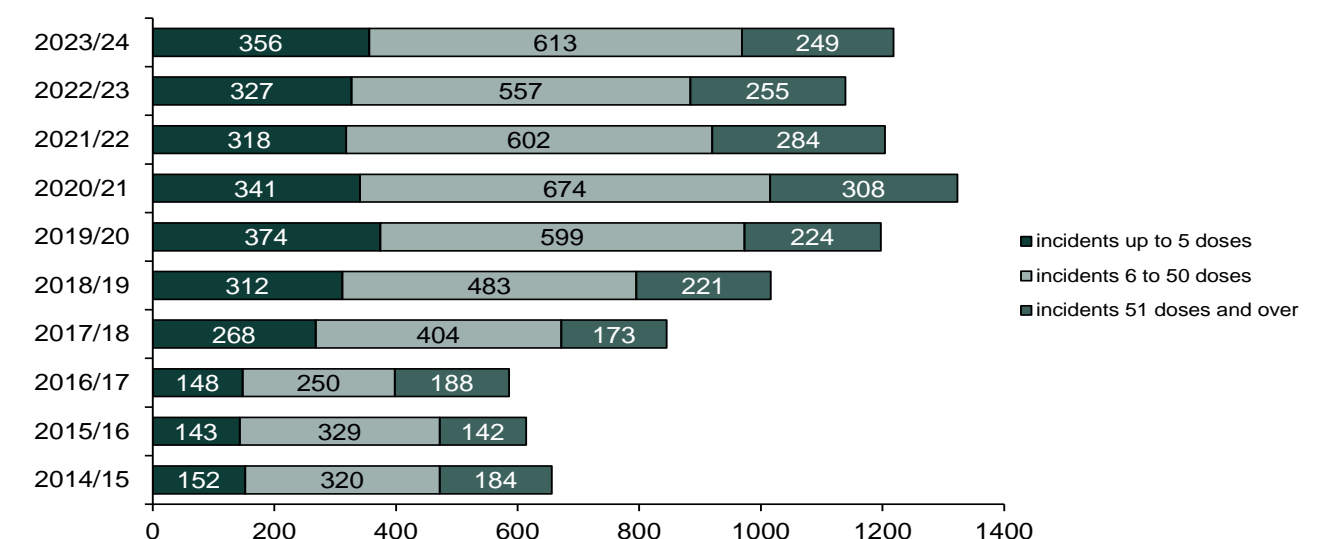


Figure 3.20 Number of Class C Benzodiazepines seizure incidents by doses seized, 2014/15 to 2023/24



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.

In 2023/24, 34 per cent of seizure incidents occurred in Belfast City Policing District compared with 32 per cent in the previous financial year. 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, 2023/24

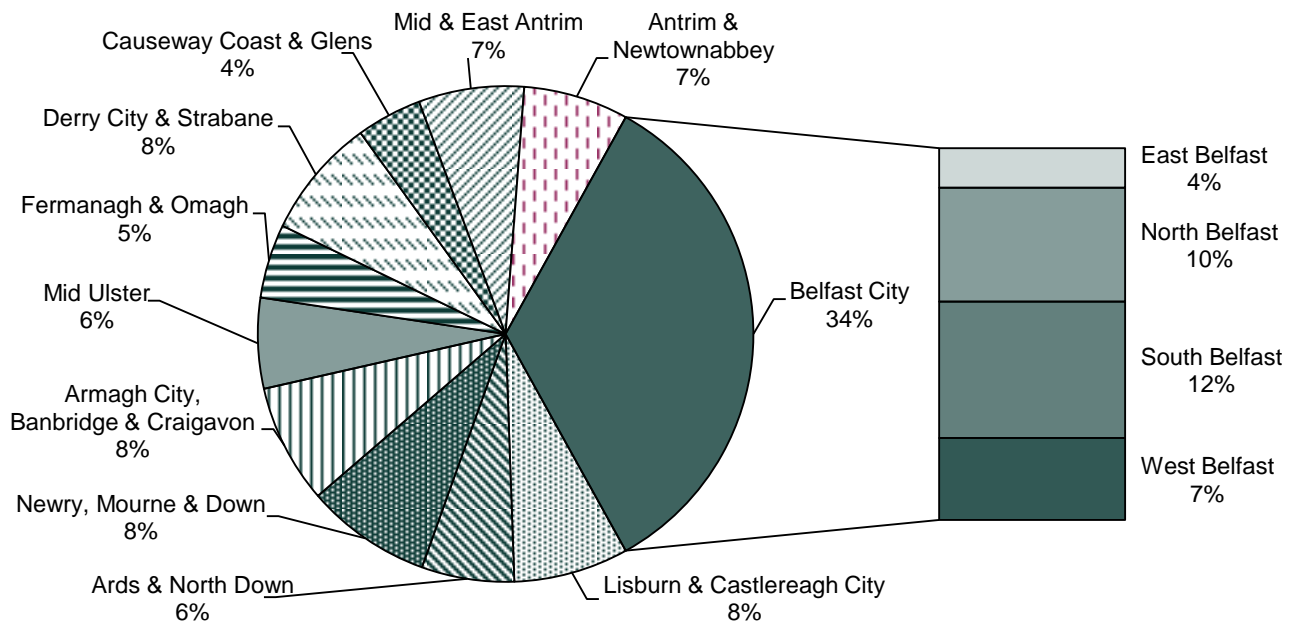


Table 4.1 Drug seizure incidents by policing district over the last five years¹⁰

Policing District	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Belfast City	2,644	2,483	2,526	2,851	2,886
<i>East Belfast</i>	412	445	376	322	307
<i>North Belfast</i>	692	739	677	877	886
<i>South Belfast</i>	1,115	829	998	1,082	1,058
<i>West Belfast</i>	425	470	475	570	635
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	603	668	721	767	639
Ards & North Down	407	317	335	435	515
Newry, Mourne, & Down	617	699	639	778	698
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	799	806	797	742	662
Mid Ulster	493	504	546	530	503
Fermanagh & Omagh	322	294	375	370	412
Derry City & Strabane	670	826	885	789	670
Causeway Coast & Glens	490	557	450	491	364
Mid & East Antrim	663	787	879	638	586
Antrim & Newtownabbey	478	487	443	542	584
Northern Ireland	8,186	8,428	8,596	8,933	8,519

¹⁰ The complete time series from 2012/13 is available in the [drug seizures and arrests annual trends spreadsheet \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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 increased each year between 2006/07 (1,708 arrests) and 2019/20 (3,834 arrests), with the exception of falls of 37 and 239 in 2014/15 and 2016/17 respectively. Drug-related arrests subsequently fell in 2020/21 (3,331 arrests) and 2021/22 (3,143 arrests), with higher numbers of arrests seen again in the most recent two financial years. The number of drug-related arrests recorded in 2023/24 (3,584) showed a rise of 331 (+10.2 per cent) when compared with 2022/23. This latest figure is twice that recorded in 2006/07. Lockdown measures in relation to Covid-19 were first introduced on 23rd March 2020 with all Covid-19 legal restrictions replaced by guidance from 15th February 2022, and there may have been an impact on the number of drug-related arrests recorded while these measures were in place.

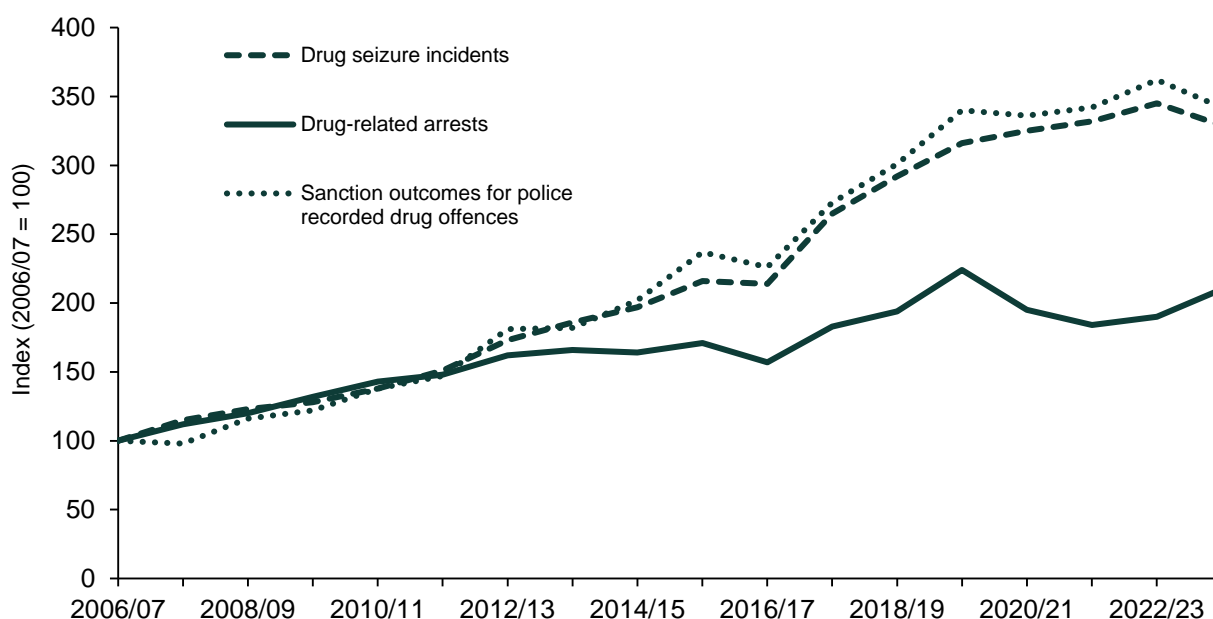
Following arrest, further police action may be taken against the arrested person or they may be released with no further action being taken. People may also be dealt with by police without first being arrested.

The rate of increase in drug-related arrests has not kept pace with that seen in drug seizure incidents. The sanction 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 sanction outcomes 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 3,279 in 2022/23. In 2023/24 there were 2,997 CRN outcomes recorded in respect of police recorded drug offences, an 8.6 per cent decrease on the previous year. Since 2017/18 they have represented the highest proportion of sanction outcome disposals allocated to drug offences, followed by summons, charge and then caution. With the introduction of community resolutions, the proportion of drug offences allocated a caution outcome has fallen.

Figure 5.1 Drug-related arrests, drug seizure incidents and sanction outcomes¹¹ for police recorded drug offences, 2006/07 to 2023/24, indexed to 2006/07=100



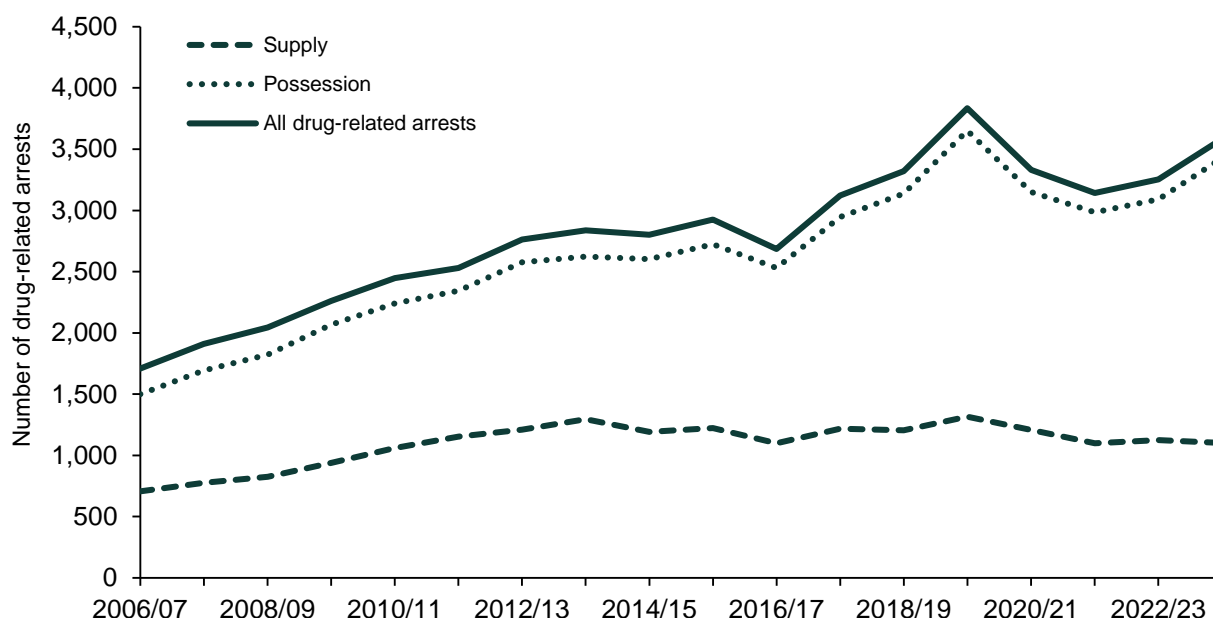
¹¹ Sanction outcomes for police recorded drug offences include charge, summons, caution and community resolution. Community resolutions were introduced as a crime outcome disposal during 2011/12.

Changing levels of drug-related arrests are mainly influenced by arrests related to possession offences. The highest number of possession-related arrests was recorded in 2019/20 (3,652), more than double the number seen in 2006/07 (1,499). The number was lower in 2020/21 and 2021/22 before rising again in 2022/23 (3,091 arrests) and 2023/24 (3,426 arrests).

Arrests involving supply offences nearly doubled between 2006/07 (707) and 2019/20 (1,317) before falling to 1,102 in 2023/24.

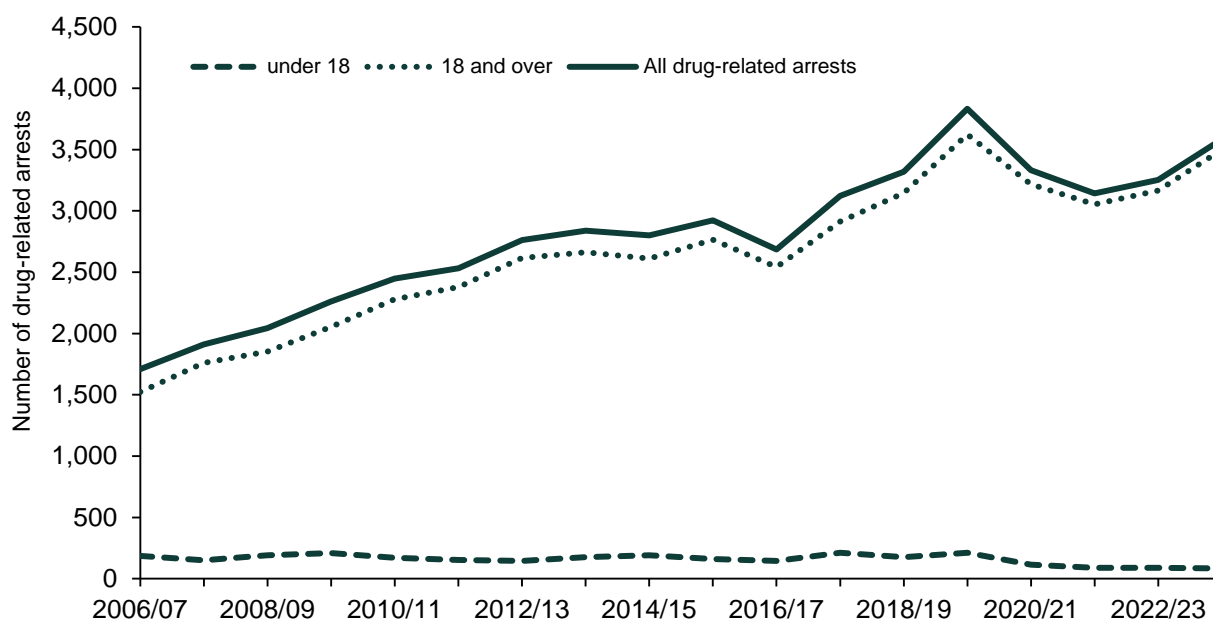
Arrests involving other drug-related offences (other than supply or possession) are small in number, averaging less than 30 each year.

Figure 5.2 Drug-related arrests by type of arrest offence¹², 2006/07 to 2023/24



The number of arrests for a drug-related offence where the person was under 18 at time of arrest fell to its lowest level of 84 in 2023/24, less than half the number recorded in both 2017/18 and 2019/20 (210). Drug-related arrests where the person was 18 or over at time of arrest have more than doubled since 2006/07 (1,522), reaching 3,624 in 2019/20; there were 3,500 such arrests recorded in 2023/24. As the number of drug-related arrests has increased, the proportion of those who were under 18 at time of arrest has fallen from 10.9 per cent in 2006/07 to 2.3 per cent in 2023/24.

Figure 5.3 Drug-related arrests by age at time of arrest, 2006/07 to 2023/24



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.

Arrests under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016

Table 5.1 presents the number of arrests made under the Psychoactive Substances Act since the legislation was introduced.

More than half of the arrests (34 of the 61) have occurred in Belfast City Policing District.

Table 5.1 Arrests made under the Psychoactive Substances Act since 2016/17

Financial Year	Psychoactive Substances Act Arrests
2016/17	11
2017/18	10
2018/19	4
2019/20	4
2020/21	13
2021/22	2
2022/23	7
2023/24	10

6. Geographic patterns of Drug-related Arrests

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

Just over two in five drug-related arrests occurred in Belfast City Policing District during 2023/24. 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 increased in most years between 2006/07 and 2023/24, with 1,482 arrests recorded in 2023/24, the second highest level recorded. Representing around one in ten drug-related arrests, Derry City & Strabane Policing District saw their highest level (477) recorded in 2020/21.

Figure 6.1 Distribution of drug-related arrests by policing district, 2023/24

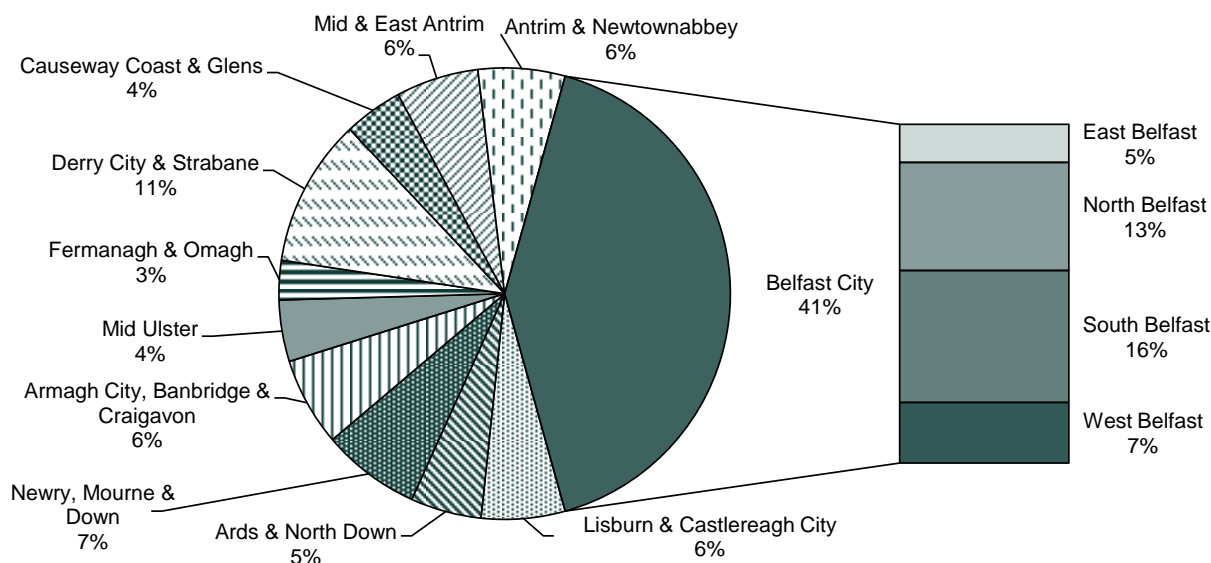


Table 6.1 Drug-related arrests by policing district over the last five years¹³

Policing District	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Belfast City	1,541	1,207	1,238	1,339	1,482
<i>East Belfast</i>	186	188	182	154	167
<i>North Belfast</i>	403	352	327	391	473
<i>South Belfast</i>	736	447	523	551	577
<i>West Belfast</i>	216	220	206	243	265
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	278	245	166	239	215
Ards & North Down	150	121	126	141	182
Newry, Mourne, & Down	178	208	202	217	253
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	280	257	263	233	227
Mid Ulster	185	135	131	135	158
Fermanagh & Omagh	151	109	122	78	101
Derry City & Strabane	432	477	392	356	380
Causeway Coast & Glens	233	211	152	162	151
Mid & East Antrim	213	185	197	163	212
Antrim & Newtownabbey	193	176	154	190	223
Northern Ireland	3,834	3,331	3,143	3,253	3,584

¹³ The complete time series from 2012/13 is available in the [drug seizures and arrests annual trends spreadsheet \(opens in a new window\)](#).

7. Wider Context (Comparison with England and Wales)

Figure 7.1 below provides a comparison of trends in drug seizure incidents in Northern Ireland compared with those in England and Wales¹⁴. 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. The trend in England & Wales started to increase in 2018/19, but fell again in 2021/22.

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 Wales¹⁵.

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

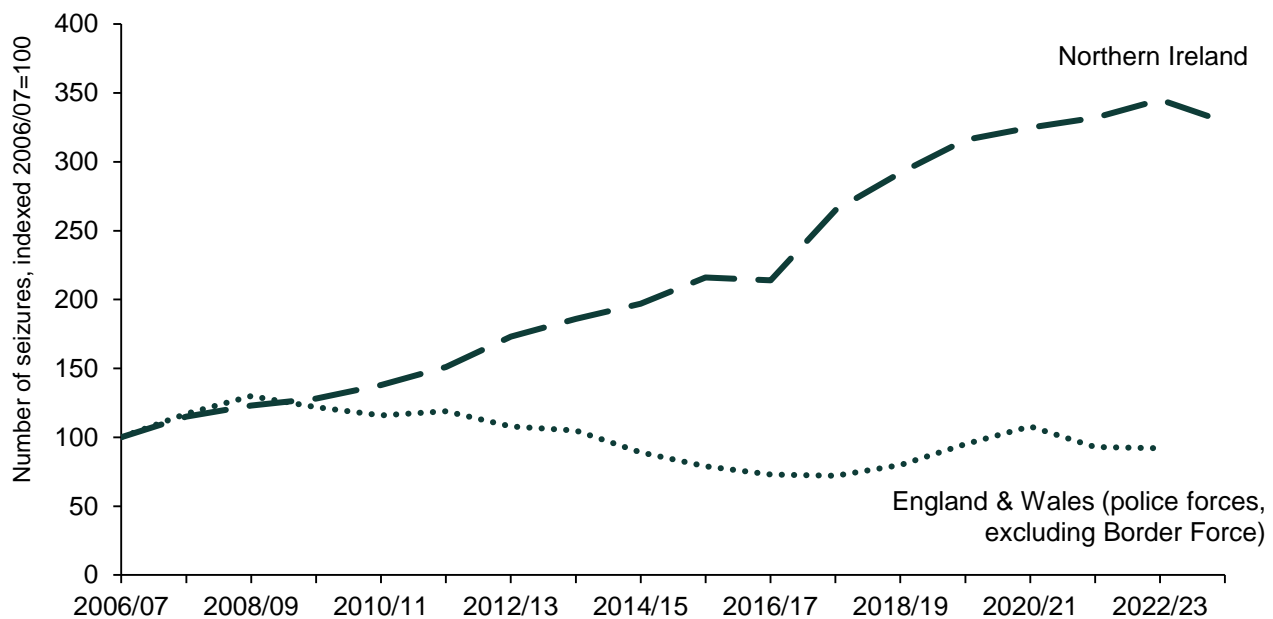
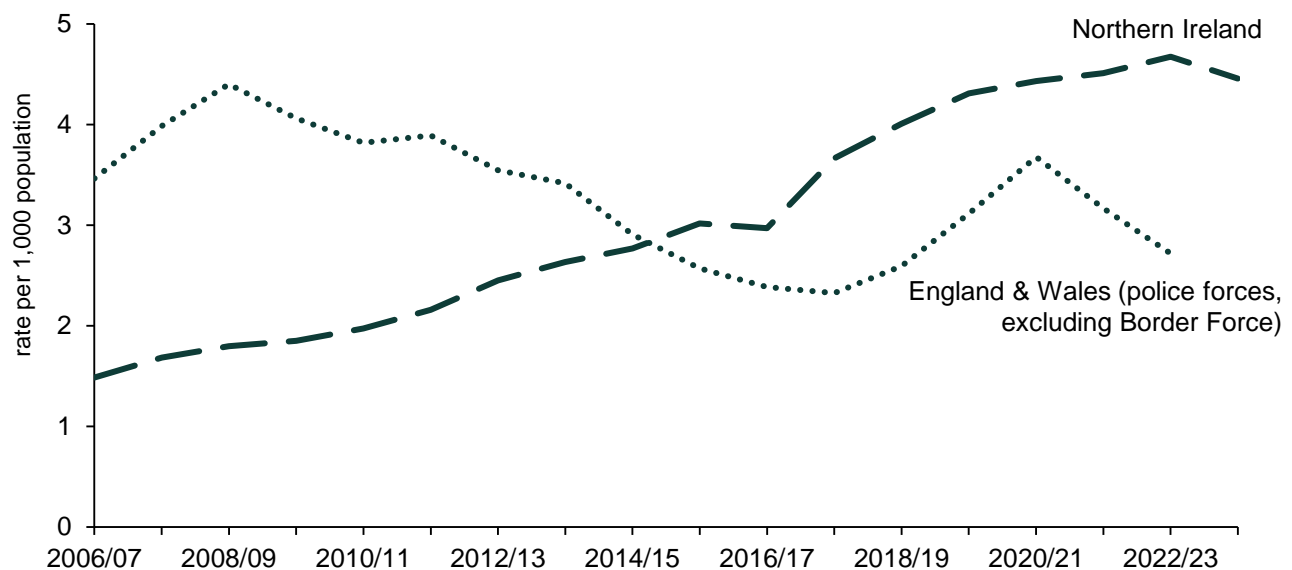


Figure 7.2 Drug seizures per 1,000 population in Northern Ireland compared with England and Wales



¹⁴ The England & Wales details have been sourced from the publication [Seizures of drugs in England and Wales, financial year ending 2023 \(opens in a new window\)](#). At time of publication these were the most up-to-date figures available for England & Wales.

¹⁵ [Seizures of drugs in England and Wales, financial year ending 2023 \(opens in a new window\)](#), Figure 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 [Drug Seizures and Arrests User Guide \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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 presented from 2019/20.

2.3 Publication

The PSNI website has a full [publication schedule \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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 [excel spreadsheet format and open document spreadsheet format \(opens in a new window\)](#).

2.4 Related information available on the PSNI website

[Police Recorded Crime Statistics \(opens in a new window\)](#). These statistics are updated on a monthly basis and a trends report is published annually

[Crime Outcomes \(opens in a new window\)](#). This annual publication summarises the outcomes that have been assigned to crimes recorded by the police since 2015/16.

Copies of other PSNI publications are available from the [PSNI website \(opens in a new window\)](#).