

Police Service of Northern Ireland

# Police Recorded Drug Seizures and Arrests in Northern Ireland: Monthly Update to 31 March 2016

Published 12 May 2016

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This bulletin provides the final figures on drug seizures and arrests recorded by the police in Northern Ireland during the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. It includes details of the number of drug seizure incidents, the weight or quantity of drugs seized by drug type and format and the number of persons arrested for drug offences.

**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 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

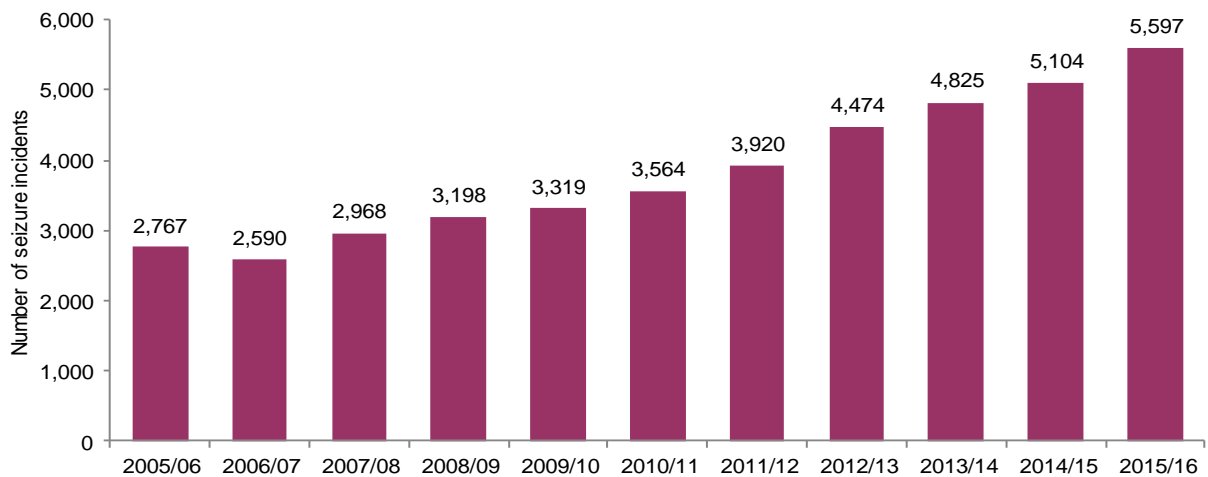
**Table 1 Key statistics for drug seizure incidents, commercial cultivation of cannabis and drug arrests in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 compared with the previous 12 months**

	12 months to 31 March 2015 (FY 2014/15)	12 months to 31 March 2016 (FY 2015/16)	Change
Drug seizure incidents	5,104	5,597	493 (9.7%)
Incidents classified as cannabis farms	143	52	-91 (-63.6%)
Drug-related arrests	2,831	2,953	122 (4.3%)

### Section 1 – Seizure Incidents

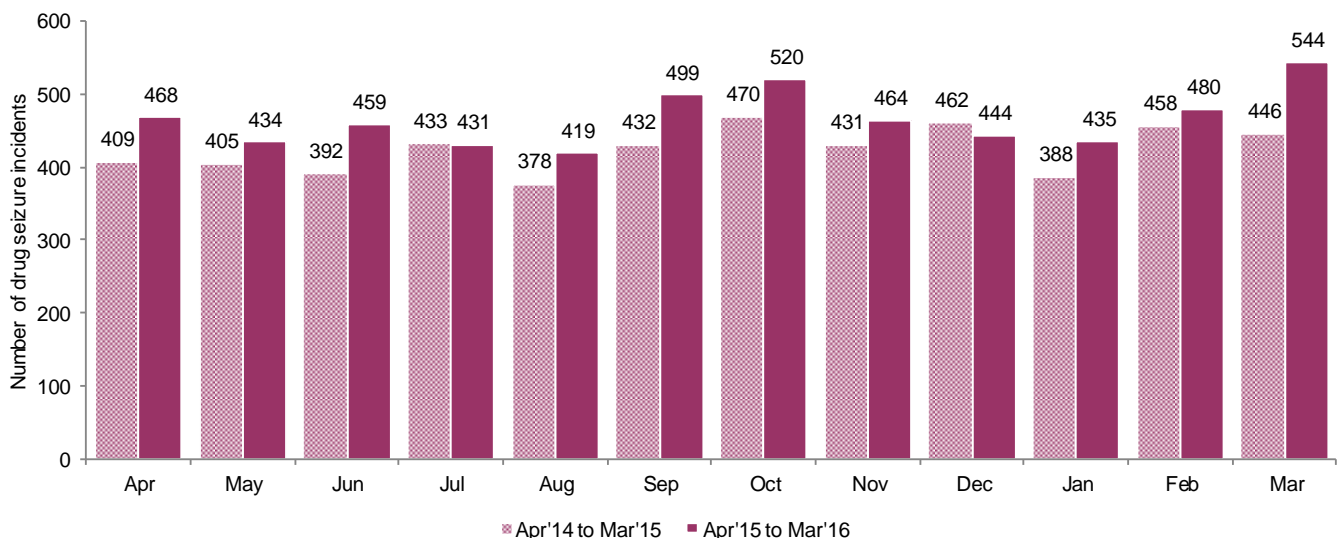
- In the 12 months from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, there were 5,597 drug seizure incidents in Northern Ireland, an increase of 9.7% on the 5,104 seizure incidents recorded in the 12 months to 31 March 2015.
- The number of drug seizure incidents has increased year on year since 2006/07 to reach a ten year high of 5,597 seizure incidents in 2015/16. This is more than double the number of incidents recorded in both financial years 2005/06 and 2006/07.

**Figure 1 Drug seizure incidents since 2005/06**



- Seizure incidents in that last 12 months have fluctuated from 419 in August 2015 to a two year high of 544 incidents in March 2016. Each calendar month in 2015/16 has seen higher levels of seizure incidents than the equivalent month in 2014/15, with the exception of July 2015 (431 seizure incidents recorded compared with 433 incidents in July 2014) and December 2015 (444 incidents down from 462 in December 2014).
- Monthly fluctuations can be affected by specific targeted campaigns, such as Operation Torus, which ran in the latest financial year from 7 September to 31 October 2015 and from 1 February to 14 March 2016 and focussed on the issue of street level drug dealing.

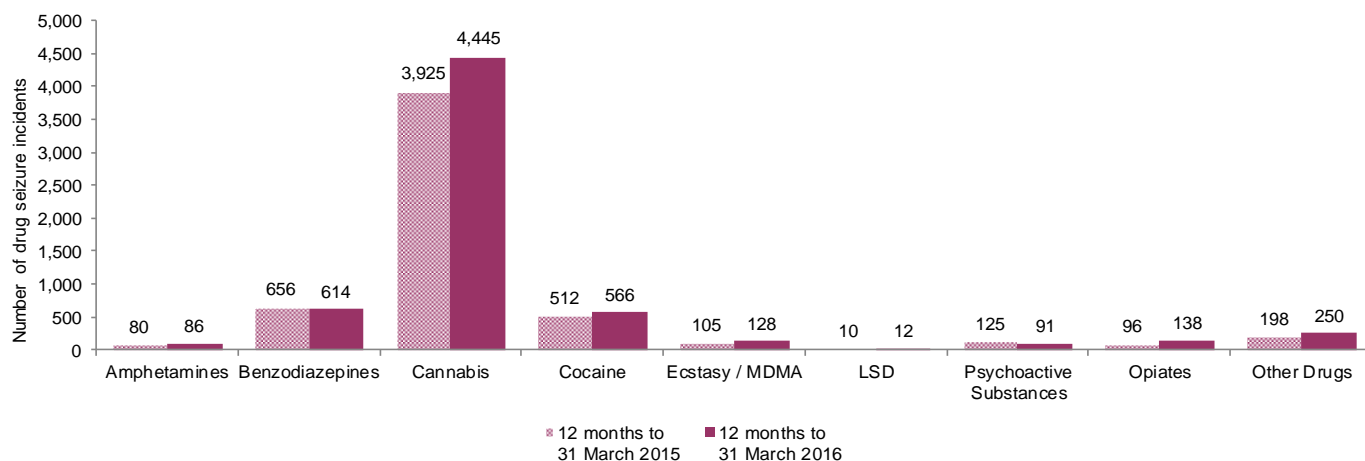
**Figure 2 Number of drug seizure incidents by month in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 compared with the previous 12 months**



## Seizure Incidents by Drug Type

- Cannabis was the most commonly seized drug over the past 12 months, with 4,445 seizures involving cannabis being recovered. This is 520 more than the number of seizure incidents in the 12 months to 31 March 2015, an increase of 13.2%.
- Benzodiazepine seizures accounted for the second largest number of seizure incidents in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 with 614 seizures, 42 fewer than during the previous 12 months (656 incidents). The most commonly seized benzodiazepine was diazepam (590 incidents).
- The third most commonly seized drug was cocaine. There were 566 incidents involving the seizure of cocaine in the 12 months to 31 March 2016, up from 512 during the previous 12 months (an increase of 54 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 March 2016 compared with the previous 12 months

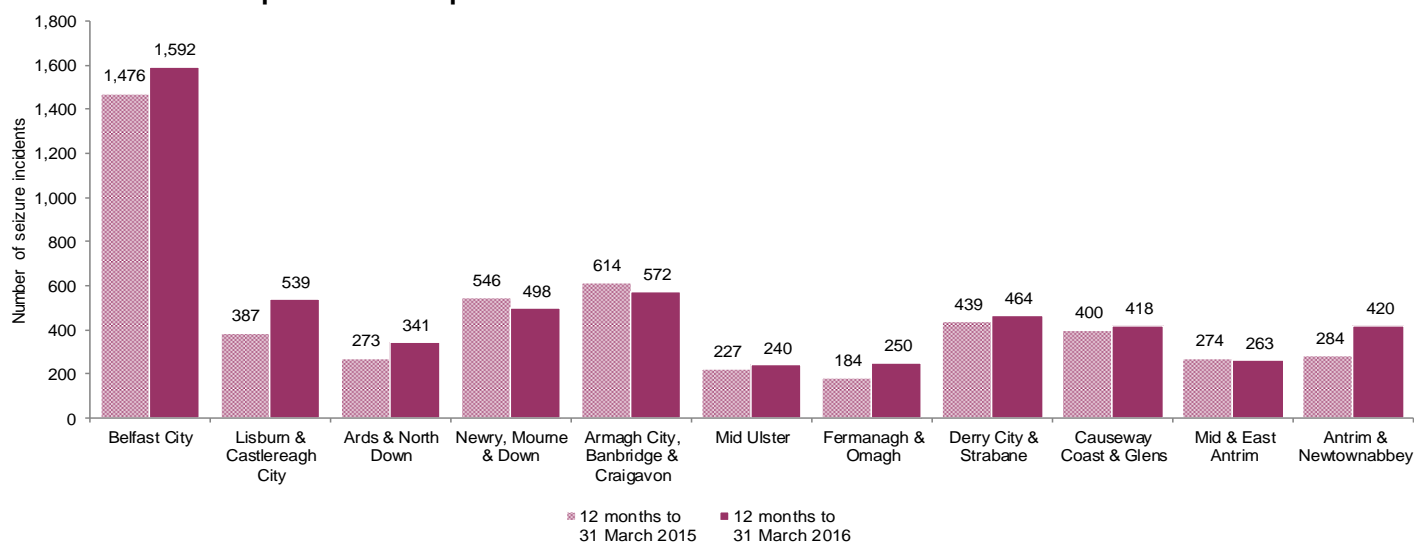


*Note: A seizure incident can involve more than one drug type, seizure figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.*

## Seizure Incidents by Police District

- The largest number of seizure incidents occurred in Belfast City policing district with 1,592 incidents recorded, an increase of 116 seizure incidents (7.9%) compared with the 12 month period to 31 March 2015. This was followed by Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon and Lisburn & Castlereagh City policing districts where 572 and 539 drug seizure incidents respectively were recorded.
- Over the same time period, the largest increases in the number seizure incidents were encountered in Lisburn & Castlereagh City policing district (152) and Antrim & Newtownabbey policing district (136). The only policing districts having seen a decrease in seizure incidents in 2015/16 compared with 2014/15 were Newry, Mourne & Down (48), Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon (42) and Mid & East Antrim (11) policing districts.

**Figure 4** Number of drug seizure incidents by policing district in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 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 March 2016 (46.0kg) was just over half of the weight seized in the previous 12 months (80.9kg).
- There were 10,435 ecstasy tablets recovered by the PSNI in the 12 months to 31 March 2016, more than twice as many as in the period ending 31 March 2015 when 4,368 tablets were seized. 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). The weight of ecstasy powder seized in financial year 2015/16 was 2,688.2g, an increase from the 45.0g seized in 2014/15.
- In the 12 months to 31 March 2016, there were 2,586 LSD microdots seized, an increase on the previous 12 months when the seizures of 20 LSD microdots were recovered. 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 825.9g, up from 355.0g in the 12 months to 31 March 2015. The volume of liquid opiates seized in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 was 480.8mls, a decrease from that recovered in the previous 12 months (2,434.6mls).

### Class B

- The weight of herbal cannabis seized in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 (233.2kg) was 0.3% higher than that in the previous 12 months when 232.6kg were recovered. Most of the herbal cannabis was seized in Belfast City policing district (83.4kg).
- There was a sharp increase in the quantity of cannabis resin seized during financial year 2015/16 when compared with the previous financial year (182.4kg up from 111.0kg). One seizure incident in April 2015 accounted for over 90% of the total cannabis resin seized this financial year with 164.3kg recovered in Newry, Mourne & Down policing district.
- There were 6,081 cannabis plants recovered in the 12 months to 31 March 2016. This represents a 44.6% decrease on the previous 12 months when 10,974 plants were seized.
- The amount of amphetamine powder seized by the PSNI in the past 12 months was 31.7kg, nearly six times as much as that seized in the previous 12 months to 31 March 2015 (5.3kg). Most of the amphetamine powder in 2015/16 was recovered during two separate incidents, one in Belfast City policing district in June 2015 (16.5kg) and one in Antrim & Newtownabbey policing district in August 2015 (11.2kg). The quantity of amphetamine tablets recovered increased from two in financial year 2014/15 to 445 tablets in 2015/16.
- The weight of psychoactive stimulants powder seized in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 (13.8kg) is more than that seized in the previous 12 months when 2.4kg were recovered. While mephedrone powder accounted for 0.1kg in 2015/16, down from 0.4kg in 2014/15, other substances accounted for 13.7kg of the psychoactive stimulants powder seized in the course of 2015/16. One in particular was pentylone powder; more than 12.8kg of this substance was seized in September 2015 in Antrim & Newtownabbey.

### Class C

- The majority of benzodiazepine seizures in the past 12 months consisted of diazepam tablets (170,920). This was 5,593 fewer tablets than that seized in the 12 months to 31 March 2015, a decrease of 3.2%. The quantity of temazepam tablets seized increased from 332 in 2014/15 to 358 in 2015/16, a level that represents less than 0.2% of all benzodiazepine tablets seized. Indeed, a variety of other products accounted for 18.7% of all benzodiazepine tablets recovered, with such substances as alprazolam (36,771 tablets), clonazepam (1,480) or phenazepam (1,006) being seized in the course of 2015/16. Seizures of these other benzodiazepine tablets were more than eleven times the number seized in 2014/15.

### Other controlled drugs

- Some of the controlled substances recovered do not fall under one of the categories reported on in this publication due to having been less commonly seized in Northern Ireland or because of their novelty nature. Of those substances seized in 2015/16, noticeable seizures included 11.9kg of class A powder, including such products as chloroamphetamine and fluoromethamphetamine and 100,000 tablets of class C zopiclone. The majority of ampoules seized consisted of class C anabolic steroids (6,050 ampoules).
- Not all drugs are tested to authenticate substances. When testing is not applied, the drug seizure statistics are classified in accordance with the investigating officer's assessment of the drug type seized based on their experience and knowledge of the illegal drug trade in Northern Ireland. At the time of compilation of the data, around 30 seizures were pending forensics examination and were not included in the incident figure as a result.



## 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 March 2016, 52 were classified as a cannabis farm as per the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) definition<sup>1</sup>. This is a 63.6% decrease on the previous 12 month period ending 31 March 2015, when 143 incidents were classified as a cannabis farm.
- In the past 12 months, 32 of those incidents involved the recovery of 25 plants or more, while 20 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 March 2016 compared with the previous 12 months**

Cannabis farms <sup>1</sup>	12 months to 31 March 2015 (FY 2014/15)	12 months to 31 March 2016 (FY 2015/16)	Change
Cases where 25 plants or more were seized	47	32	-15
Cases where no plants or less than 25 plants were seized and factory equipment was recovered	96	20	-76
<b>Total number of incidents classified as cannabis farms</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>-91</b>

### Cannabis Farm Discoveries by Policing District

- The highest number of cannabis farms discovered by the PSNI between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 was in Belfast City policing district (13), followed by Mid & East Antrim (10).
- All policing districts have seen a decrease in the number of cannabis farms discovered in financial year 2015/16 compared with 2014/15, with the exception of Mid Ulster and Causeway Coast & Glens policing districts in which the same numbers of farms were discovered during both periods (each with four farms discovered).

**Table 3 Cannabis farm discoveries by policing district in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 compared with the previous 12 months**

Policing district	12 months to 31 March 2015 (FY 2014/15)	12 months to 31 March 2016 (FY 2015/16)	Change
Belfast City	55	13	-42
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	5	3	-2
Ards & North Down	15	2	-13
Newry, Mourne & Down	14	4	-10
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	14	5	-9
Mid Ulster	4	4	0
Fermanagh & Omagh	8	2	-6
Derry City & Strabane	6	3	-3
Causeway Coast & Glens	4	4	0
Mid & East Antrim	11	10	-1
Antrim & Newtownabbey	7	2	-5
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>-91</b>

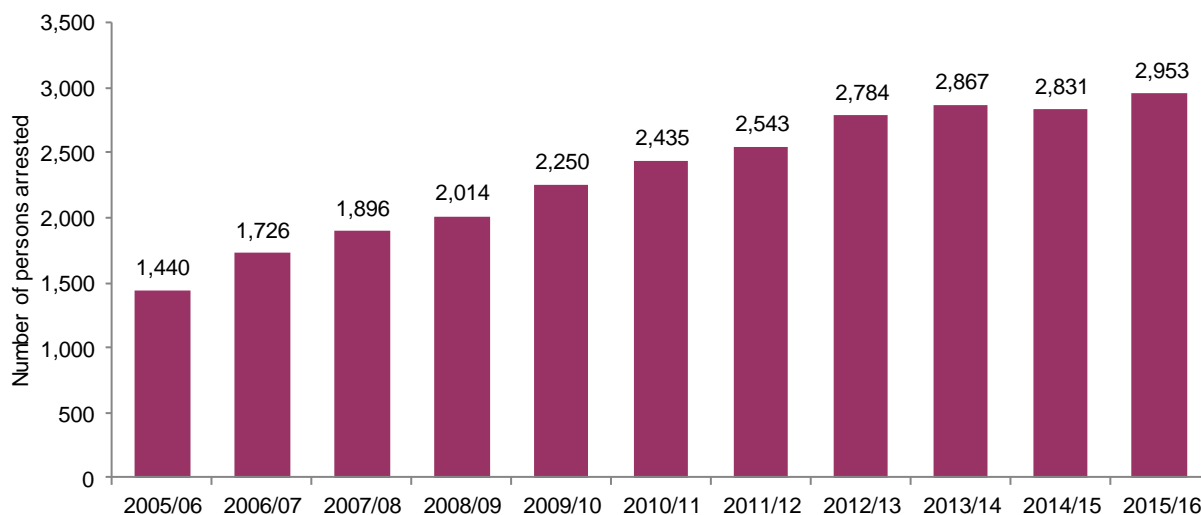
<sup>1</sup> 2012 NPCC definition: *Cultivation of cannabis should be regarded as 'commercial' if:*

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

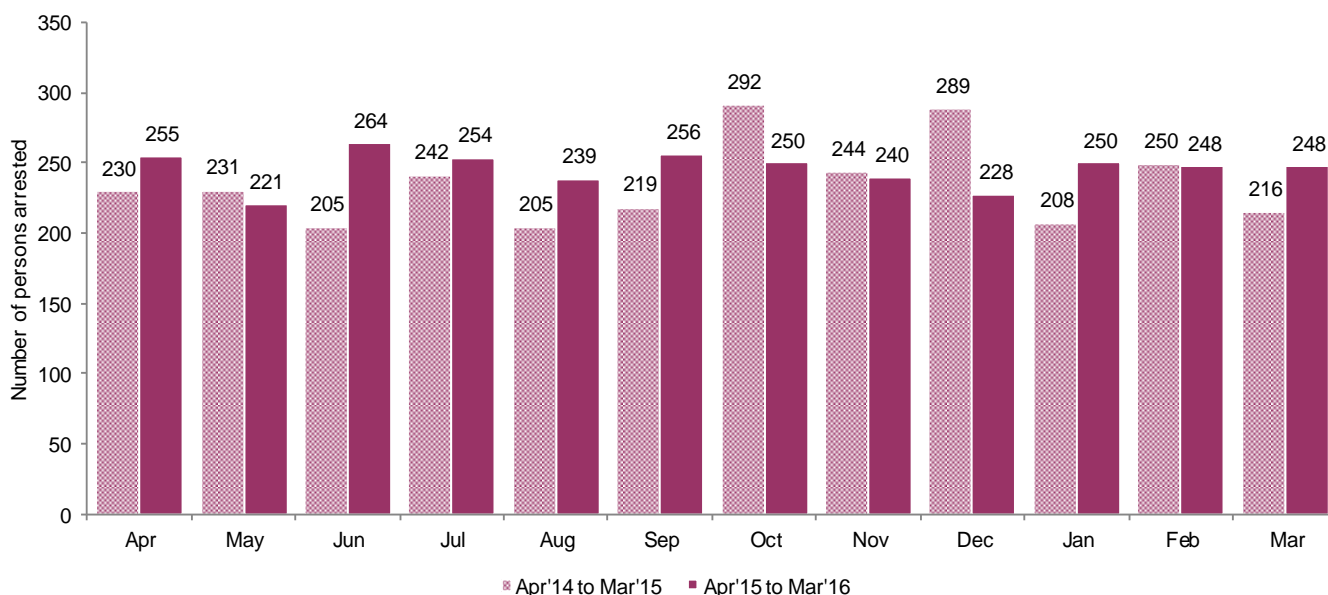
## Section 4 – Drug-Related Arrests

- In the 12 months to 31 March 2016, 2,953 persons were arrested and processed through custody for drug offences. This constitutes an increase of 4.3% on the previous 12 months to 31 March 2015 when 2,831 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 the current level of 2,953 during financial year 2015/16, the highest level recorded in over ten years, and more than double the level recorded in 2005/06.

**Figure 5 Drug-related arrests since 2005/06**



**Figure 6 Number of drug-related arrests by month in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 compared with the previous 12 months**



- The number of persons arrested for drug offences in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 showed less monthly variation than during the previous 12 months. Indeed, the number of persons arrested during 2015/16 ranged from 221 in May 2015 to 264 in June 2015, compared with a range in 2014/15 fluctuating from 205 persons arrested in both June 2014 and August 2014 to 292 in October 2014.
- The number of persons arrested for drug offences in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 varied across the policing districts, ranging from 121 drug arrests in Ards & North Down policing district to 944 in Belfast City policing district.

## Appendices

**Table 4a Drug seizure incidents by type and format in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 compared with the previous 12 months**

Drugs Seized <sup>1</sup> – Number of Incidents <sup>3</sup>		12 months to 31 March 2015 (FY 2014/15)	12 months to 31 March 2016 (FY 2015/16)	Change
Cocaine (Class A)	Powder	498	532	34
	Wraps	22	42	20
Ecstasy (Class A)	Powder	22	40	18
	Tablets	89	93	4
	Wraps	0	1	1
LSD (Class A)	Microdots	3	7	4
	Powder	2	0	-2
	Tablets	5	5	0
Opiates (Class A)	Ampoules	1	0	-1
	Millilitres	14	17	3
	Patches	1	2	1
	Powder	41	53	12
	Tablets	5	7	2
	Twists	5	7	2
	Wraps	35	59	24
Amphetamine (Class B)	Powder	77	73	-4
	Tablets	1	8	7
	Wraps	3	6	3
Cannabis (Class B)	Herbal	3,292	3,723	431
	Joints	386	474	88
	Oil	1	1	0
	Plants	222	155	-67
	Resin	417	535	118
Psychoactive Stimulants (Class B)	Millilitres	0	2	2
Powder	Powder	126	87	-39
	Tablets	0	2	2
	Wraps	2	1	-1
Benzodiazepines (Class C)	Powder	2	7	5
	Tablets	661	623	-38
Other Drugs <sup>2</sup>	Ampoules	15	21	6
	Crystals	1	0	-1
	Herbal	0	3	3
	Microdots	2	1	-1
	Millilitres	9	2	-7
	Patches	0	1	1
	Powder	72	78	6
	Psilocin	2	4	2
	Tablets	110	165	55
	Wraps	2	3	1

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

<sup>2</sup> Other drugs include anabolic steroids, GHB, ketamine, khat, piperazines and magic mushrooms.

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



**Table 4b Quantity of drugs seized by type and format in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 compared with the previous 12 months**

Drugs Seized <sup>1</sup> – Quantities		12 months to 31 March 2015 (FY 2014/15)	12 months to 31 March 2016 (FY 2015/16)	Change
Cocaine (Class A)	Powder (kg)	80.9	46.0	-34.9
	Wraps	40	75	35
Ecstasy (Class A)	Powder (gms)	45.0	2,688.2	2,643.2
	Tablets	4,368	10,435	6,067
	Wraps	.	1	1
LSD (Class A)	Microdots	20	2,586	2,566
	Powder (gms)	3.1	.	-3.1
	Tablets	55	20	-35
Opiates (Class A)	Ampoules	2	.	-2
	Millilitres	2,434.6	480.8	-1,953.8
	Patches	2	2	0
	Powder (kg)	0.4	0.8	0.5
	Tablets	381	502	121
	Twists	12	12	0
	Wraps	177	163	-14
Amphetamine (Class B)	Powder (kg)	5.3	31.7	26.4
	Tablets	2	445	443
	Wraps	7	16	9
Cannabis (Class B)	Herbal (kg)	232.6	233.2	0.6
	Joints	640	648	8
	Oil (gms)	11.0	2.0	-9.0
	Plants	10,974	6,081	-4,893
	Resin (kg)	111.0	182.4	71.5
Psychoactive Stimulants (Class B)	Millilitres	.	0.2	0.2
	Powder (kg)	2.4	13.8	11.3
	Tablets	.	138	138
	Wraps	8	1	-7
Benzodiazepines (Class C)	Powder (gms)	4.3	12.6	8.3
	Tablets	180,345	210,668	30,323
Other Drugs <sup>2</sup>	Ampoules	1,670	6,051	4,381
	Crystals (gms)	1.0	.	-1.0
	Herbal (gms)	.	446.0	446.0
	Microdots	112	24	-88
	Millilitres	232.1	21.0	-211.1
	Patches	.	3	3
	Powder (kg)	1.0	13.9	12.9
	Psilocin	35	38	3
	Tablets	4,138	114,489	110,351
	Wraps	2	6	4

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Other drugs include anabolic steroids, GHB, ketamine, khat, piperazines and magic mushrooms.

**Table 5 Number of drug seizures and arrests by policing district in the 12 months to 31 March 2016 compared with the previous 12 months**

Policing District	Seizure Incidents			Arrests		
	12 months to 31 March 2015 (FY 2014/15)	12 months to 31 March 2016 (FY 2015/16)	Change	12 months to 31 March 2015 (FY 2014/15)	12 months to 31 March 2016 (FY 2015/16)	Change
Belfast City	1,476	1,592	116	899	944	45
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	387	539	152	178	233	55
Ards & North Down	273	341	68	129	121	-8
Newry, Mourne & Down	546	498	-48	210	185	-25
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	614	572	-42	304	249	-55
Mid Ulster	227	240	13	126	137	11
Fermanagh & Omagh	184	250	66	133	175	42
Derry City & Strabane	439	464	25	259	282	23
Causeway Coast & Glens	400	418	18	270	285	15
Mid & East Antrim	274	263	-11	165	134	-31
Antrim & Newtownabbey	284	420	136	158	208	50
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>5,104</b>	<b>5,597</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>2,831</b>	<b>2,953</b>	<b>122</b>

## 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:

Email: [statistics@psni.police.uk](mailto:statistics@psni.police.uk);

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

or

Telephone: 028 9065 0222 ext. 24135