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Seizures of Drugs England and Wales 2004

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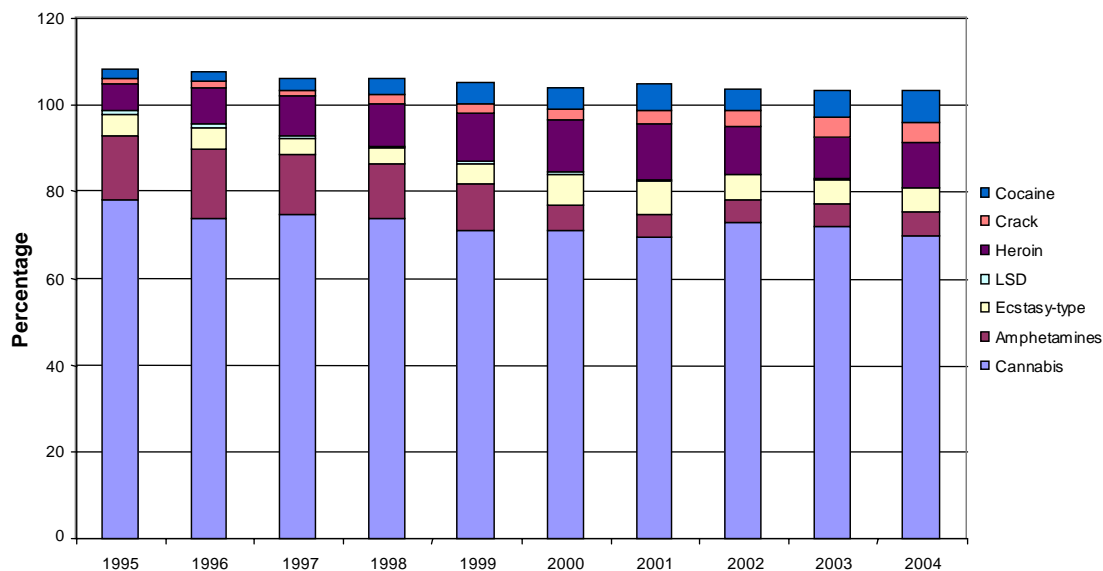
SUMMARY

- There were 107,360 drug seizures by police and HM Revenue and Customs in England and Wales in 2004 – two per cent down on the previous year (109,410).
- Seventy-one per cent of seizures in 2004 involved class C drugs, almost all (98 per cent) of which involved cannabis. Cannabis has been the most commonly seized drug in each year since 1995 and in 2003, before being reclassified as a class C substance, accounted for 94 per cent of all class B seizures.
- Twenty-seven per cent of seizures involved class A drugs in 2004. Seizures of cocaine and heroin rose by 14 and six per cent to 7,895 and 11,074 respectively.
- Six per cent of seizures involved class B drugs, made up almost entirely by amphetamine seizures which rose by six per cent, from 5,862 in 2003 to 6,240 in 2004.
- Although the proportion of seizures involving anabolic steroids reported the highest increase for all drugs (51%), they accounted for only 0.1% of all seizures.

The quantity of drugs seized by police and HM Revenue and Customs in 2004 was lower compared to 2003, and included:

- 4.6 tonnes of cocaine
- 2.1 tonnes of heroin
- 4.6 million tablets of ecstasy
- 1.2 tonnes of amphetamines
- 83.5 tonnes of cannabis (resin and herbal) and 88,600 cannabis plants (99 tonnes and 80,000 plants in 2003, down 16% and up 11% respectively).

Figure 1 Contribution of the main drug types to the total number of seizures, England and Wales, 1995 to 2004



Note: A seizure may involve more than one drug and will be counted once under each type of drug seized. Totals by drug type sum to more than 100 per cent.

1 Introduction

This publication presents figures for drug seizures made by law enforcement agencies in England and Wales during 2004. The statistics in this publication relate to drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which divides drugs into three categories (classes A, B and C) according to their harmfulness. These statistics cover seizures made during the year by police (including the British Transport Police), together with information from HM Revenue and Customs¹ and the National Crime Squad. On 29 January 2004 cannabis was reclassified from being a class B to a class C drug. For the purpose of this bulletin it has been considered as a class C for the whole year. Data for classes B and C in 2004 are therefore distorted and should not be directly compared to those of earlier years.

¹ Seizure data from HM Revenue and Customs, formerly HM Customs and Excise, for years earlier than 2000 were collected only from airports regional to London (Heathrow, Gatwick, Luton and Stansted), and are unavailable for 1995. Caution must be exercised in drawing comparisons in the level of drug seizures over time.

2 Number of drug seizures (Tables 1, 2 and 3)

Police and HM Revenue and Customs made 107,360 drug seizures in England and Wales in 2004, a fall of two per cent or 2,050 seizures compared to 2003.

Class A drugs

There were 29,330 seizures in England and Wales involving class A drugs in 2004, two per cent less than in 2003. Heroin was the most commonly seized class A drug in 2004 (11,070 seizures, up five per cent since 2003), followed by cocaine (7,900 seizures, up 14 per cent), ecstasy (5,940 seizures, down three per cent since 2003) and crack (4,900 seizures, up three per cent). There were also a small number of seizures involving methadone and LSD (600 and 140 seizures respectively).

Class B drugs

In 2004, 6,350 seizures involved class B drugs: 92 per cent less than in 2003. This is almost entirely due to the reclassification of cannabis. There were 6,240 seizures of amphetamines, a rise of six per cent from the previous year.

Class C drugs

Overall, there were 76,030 class C drug seizures in 2004, up from 1,380 in 2003. The rise was due to the reclassification of cannabis. The vast majority of class C seizures in this year were of cannabis, 74,610 seizures, down five per cent (3,910 seizures) compared to 2003 when they were class B drugs. Ninety-eight per cent of all the class C seizures in 2004 involved cannabis. Other class C seizures were benzodiazepines (800 seizures, down eight per cent since 2003), anabolic steroids (270 seizures, 51 per cent rise from 2003), and temazepam (200 seizures, up from 190 in the previous year).

3 Quantity of drugs seized (Tables 3 and 4)

There can be considerable fluctuation in the quantities of drugs seized over time. Whilst most drug seizures consist of relatively small quantities (for example, between a third and a half of heroin, crack and cocaine seizures involve quantities of less than one gram), annual totals of drugs seized can be greatly influenced by a small number of large seizures, generally made by HM Revenue and Customs.

Class A drugs

4.6 tonnes of cocaine and 4.7 million tablets of ecstasy-type drugs were seized in 2004; 33 and 31 per cent falls over the previous year respectively. This follows a two-fold increase in cocaine seizures in 2003 when there were 10 seizures involving quantities of more than 100kg, whereas in 2004 there were more seizures involving amounts of less than 1g. Just over 2.1 tonnes of heroin was seized, a 21 per cent fall from 2003. The quantities of other class A drugs seized in 2004 were considerably smaller: 130 kg of crack (just under half compared to 2003), 60 kg of methadone (a one per cent rise from the previous year) and 36,000 doses of LSD, a three-fold increase since 2003 (Table 5).

Class B drugs

The overall quantity of class B seizures was significantly smaller compared to the previous year, due to the reclassification of cannabis from a class B to a class C drug.

The quantity of amphetamine seizures tends to fluctuate but they have been generally higher since 1999. There were 1.2 tonnes of amphetamine seized in 2004, a 21 per cent fall over 2003. Less than 0.2 kg of other class B drugs were seized in 2004.

Class C drugs

Apart from cannabis, which was reclassified from a class B to class C drug in January 2004, the quantity of class C drugs seized each year prior to 2004 was relatively small and varied considerably year on year.

83.5 tonnes of herbal cannabis and cannabis resin and 88,600 cannabis plants were seized in 2004. The amount of herbal cannabis seized fell by 27 per cent in 2004 to 21.4 tonnes from 29.5 tonnes in 2003, while 62 tonnes of cannabis resin were recovered, a ten per cent fall from the previous year. The number of cannabis plants seized showed a ten per cent rise compared to 2003.

The quantity of anabolic steroids seized rose by 254 per cent, from 160 kg in 2003 to 560 kg in 2004, following a 60 per cent decrease in the previous year. Relatively small quantities of GHB and benzodiazepines were seized: 1.2 kg and 0.6 kg respectively.

4 Purity of drugs (Tables 6 and 7)

Data on the average purities of different types of drugs are obtained from the Forensic Science Service (FSS) and are based on the average of all analysed drug samples submitted to the FSS. In general, the purity from HM Revenue and Customs seizures is higher than that of the police force seizures, reflecting the fact that their seizures will tend to be made higher in the supply chain and before 'cutting' occurs. The average purity of most drugs decreased between 2003 and 2004 (Table A), with the exception of crack seized by HM Revenue and Customs and heroin. The heroin seized in 2004 was considerably purer than that seized in 2003.

Table A Average purity* of drug seizures analysed by the Forensic Science Service by drug type and agency for 2003 and 2004

Drug type	Authority	Percentages	
		2003	2004
Amphetamines	HM R&C	40.0	30.0
	Police	11.0	9.0
Cocaine	HM R&C	69.8	67.9
	Police	50.5	42.6
Crack	HM R&C	75.5	80.1
	Police	69.5	63.5
Heroin	HM R&C	36.5	45.4
	Police	32.8	39.9

Notes: *Purities are expressed in percentages. The table above is based on average purities by taking figures from each quarter from summary tables 6 and 7.

5 Who seized what?

Number of seizures (Table B)

Overall, 96 per cent of drug seizures in 2004 were made by local police forces, four per cent by HM Revenue and Customs and less than one per cent by the National Crime Squad (NCS). Police forces accounted for 95 per cent of all class A and 96 per cent of all class C seizures, and 99 per cent of class B seizures.

Seizures by the NCS were more likely to involve class A drugs: 73 per cent of NCS seizures involved class A drugs, compared with 29 per cent of seizures by HM Revenue and Customs and 27 per cent made by local police forces. Seizures by police forces and HM Revenue and Customs were more likely to involve class C drugs: 71 per cent of police force seizures and 69 per cent of HM Revenue and Customs seizures involved class C drugs, compared with 35 per cent of seizures by the NCS.

Table B Number⁽¹⁾ and percentage of drug seizures by class, drug type and agency⁽²⁾, England and Wales, 2004

	Police Forces		National Crime Squad		HM Revenue and Customs		Totals
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
<i>All Seizures</i>	102,757	96	137	0	4,465	4	107,359
Class A drugs							
Cocaine	6,724	85	63	1	1,108	14	7,895
Crack	4,884	100	3	0	11	0	4,898
Heroin	10,949	99	31	0	75	1	11,055
LSD	132	98	-	-	3	2	135
Ecstasy-type	5,857	99	15	0	34	1	5,906
Methadone	598	99	-	-	5	1	603
Other	516	91	-	-	50	9	566
All class A	27,935	95	100	0	1,296	5	29,331
Class B drugs							
Amphetamines	6,089	99	19	0	66	1	6,174
Other	173	96	-	-	7	4	180
All class B	6,262	99	19	0	72	1	6,353
Class C drugs							
Cannabis	71,696	96	48	0	2,869	4	74,613
Benzodiazepines	649	82	-	-	143	18	792
Temazepam	192	95	-	-	11	5	203
Anabolic steroids	147	57	-	-	112	43	259
GHB	20	100	-	-	-	-	20
Other	177	90	-	-	20	10	197
All class C	72,881	96	48	0	3,097	4	76,026
Unknown	584	99	5	1	-	-	589

1. Figures are rounded. As a seizure can involve more than one drug, figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals.
2. Seizures from joint operations involving HM Revenue and Customs and the police are recorded against the lead agency.

Quantity of seizures (Table C)

Whilst local police forces made the greatest number of seizures in 2004, most were quite small in volume. Seizures by HM Revenue and Customs made up the majority of the volume of drugs seized. The exceptions to this were seizures of crack, methadone and cannabis plants, where police seizures accounted for the majority of total volumes seized.

Eighty-three per cent of LSD (quantity) was seized by HM Revenue and Customs, as was 72 per cent of cocaine, 46 per cent of the heroin, 64 per cent of ecstasy-type drugs and 23 per cent of amphetamines. NCS seized significant quantities of cocaine and heroin (12 per cent and 27 per cent) and five per cent of ecstasy-type drugs.

Table C Quantities⁽¹⁾ and percentage of drugs seized by class, drug type and agency⁽²⁾, England and Wales, 2004

Drug type	Police Forces		National Crime Squad		HM Revenue and Customs ⁽³⁾		Totals ⁽⁴⁾
	Quantity	%	Quantity	%	Quantity	%	
Class A drugs							
Cocaine	695	15	571	12	3,306	72	4,571
Crack	128	96	2	1	4	3	133
Heroin	556	26	574	27	978	46	2,109
LSD	6,194	17	-	-	30,031	83	36,225
Ecstasy-type drugs	1,440	31	236	5	2,973	64	4,649
Methadone	59	100	-	-	-	-	59
Other class A	9	60	-	-	6	40	14
Class B drugs							
Amphetamines	650	54	280	23	276	23	1,207
Other class B	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Class C drugs							
Cannabis herbal	1,226	6	1,563	7	18,595	87	21,384
Cannabis plants	77,124	87	11,550	13	0	0	88,674
Cannabis resin	14,968	24	6,707	11	40,387	65	62,062
Cannabis liquid	1	33	-	-	2	67	3
Benzodiazepines	1	100	-	-	-	-	1
Temazepam	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Anabolic steroids	2	0	-	-	555	100	557
GHB	1	100	-	-	-	-	1
Other class C	2	8	-	-	23	92	25

1. All quantities are in kilograms except for LSD and ecstasy-type (thousands of doses), and cannabis plants (numbers).
2. Seizures from joint operations involving HM Revenue and Customs and the police are recorded against the lead agency.
3. Totals are rounded to the nearest whole number.

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Summary tables (available online as Excel spreadsheets)

- 1 The number of seizures of controlled drugs by class of drug and year, England and Wales
- 2 The number of seizures of controlled drugs by authority, area and year, England and Wales
- 3 The number and quantity of seizures of class A drugs by drug type and year, England and Wales
- 4 Number and quantity of seizures of class B and C drugs by drug type and year, England and Wales
- 5 Seizures of controlled drugs by drug type and amount seized, 2004, England and Wales
- 6 Average purities of drugs analysed by the Forensic Science Service by drug type and year for seizures by England and Wales police
- 7 Average purities of drugs analysed by the Forensic Science Service by drug type and year for seizures by HM Revenue and Customs

Supplementary tables (available online as Excel spreadsheets)

- S1 Seizures of controlled drugs by class of drug, seizure-making organisation and year, England and Wales
- S2 Number and quantity of seizures of class A drugs made by HM Revenue and Customs by drug type and year, England and Wales
- S3 Number and quantity of seizures of class A drugs made by police by drug type and year, England and Wales
- S4 Number and quantity of seizures of class B and class C drugs made by HM Revenue and Customs by drug type and year, England and Wales
- S5 Number and quantity of seizures of class B and class C drugs made by police by drug type and year, England and Wales
- S6 Seizures of controlled drugs made by HM Revenue and Customs by drug type and amount seized, 2004, England and Wales
- S7 Seizures of controlled drugs made by the police and other authorities by drug type and amount seized, 2004, England and Wales

Area tables (available online as Excel spreadsheets)

- A1 The number of seizures of controlled drugs by authority and year
- A2 Rates of seizure of controlled drugs by police forces and year
- A3 The number of seizures of controlled drugs by police force area and other organisation and drug type, 2004
- A4 Rates of seizures of controlled drugs by police force area and drug type, 2004
- A5 Quantities of controlled drugs by police force area and other organisations and drug type, 2004

NOTES

1. The statistics in this bulletin and accompanying tables relate to the misuse of drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which came into force on 1 July 1973. The Act divides drugs into three categories according to their harmfulness. A full list of drugs in each category is given in Schedule 2 to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, as amended by Orders in Council.
2. The statistics of seizures cover seizures made during the year by police (including the British Transport Police) that have been submitted to the Home Office, together with information from HM Revenue and Customs. More detailed figures are given in the associated Area and Supplementary tables. Seizures involving more than one drug are counted as a single seizure in the total number of seizures but are counted separately against each individual drug or drug class involved. Annual movements in quantities are often heavily affected by a small number of very large seizures.
3. Seizures by HM Revenue and Customs have historically accounted for about five per cent of the total number of seizures but for the majority of the quantities seized. However, in the last few years the police, especially the National Crime Squad, have been making larger seizures of certain drugs such as heroin, crack and amphetamines. Each HM Revenue and Customs case is counted as a single seizure even where it includes seizures made on a number of separate occasions. The characteristics of the first seizure in the case are taken as the characteristics of the combined seizure. Some of the totals for quantities of drugs seized by HM Revenue and Customs included in the statistics in this bulletin may differ slightly from their own published figures, especially for earlier years. The differences reflect differences in the treatment of information, mainly revisions to weights, which became available after these statistics had been issued by HM Revenue and Customs.
4. Information on average (arithmetic mean) drug purities for cocaine, crack, heroin and amphetamine has been provided by the Forensic Science Service (FSS), whose laboratories analyse seizures made by most police forces and HM Revenue and Customs. Such averages do not adequately describe the overall average purity. Not all seizures are sent for analysis, particularly in cases where the offender pleads guilty to possession of a small amount of cannabis for personal use. However, arrangements exist for the police to send for analysis all potential cocaine samples, including crack. FSS data refer to the year that information on the analysis was provided rather than the year of seizure.
5. The quantity of LSD and ecstasy-type drugs (including MDMA) seized has been listed as the number of doses seized rather than as a weight; this is because (a) the effective dose is very small (micrograms in the case of LSD and milligrams for MDMA) and (b) the drugs are almost always encountered in the form of capsules or tablets (MDMA) or impregnated squares or "microdots" in the case of LSD. The typical number of doses in a kilogram of LSD is about 10,000; a kilogram of ecstasy usually equates to about 4,000 doses. All quantities of these drugs in this bulletin have now been converted to doses.
6. Referring to the total amount of methadone seized in terms of kilograms is misleading since the majority of seizures involve methadone in the 1g/L liquid, i.e. 1 gram in weight is the equivalent of 1 litre in liquid form. The amounts given in this bulletin have been calculated by converting the liquid amounts to grams, that is, by multiplying the liquid quantity by 0.001.

7. The method of collecting the statistics for England and Wales changed from 1 January 1993; seizures were reported on a simplified form no longer linked to an offender. All seizures of controlled drugs are included, whether or not there is an offender, and whether the case results in either court proceedings, in a caution, or no further action. In England and Wales, total seizures were about 22 per cent higher in 1993 using the new method of collection (form Crimsec38) than in 1992 using the old method (form Crimsec19). Although this increase is only slightly larger than the average annual increase since 1987 (about 21 per cent) it is possible that some of the increase may result from more timely receipt of seizures information; this part of the increase may be of the order of 5 per cent of the overall increase.
8. A new database of drug seizures made by the police was developed between 1999 and 2000, coming on line in September 2000. There are some differences between the way in which this database counts seizures compared to the two databases it replaced. It was discovered that figures previously published for the period 1993-9 were undercounting the number of seizures. The historic tables in this bulletin have been updated to take this into account.
9. Not all drugs that come into the possession of the police have been “seized” in the strictest sense of the word. For example, a member of the public may hand in what appear to be drugs that have been found in the street. These items will be recorded at individual police stations in a paper ledger or electronic database and then destroyed.
10. There have been a number of changes which have affected the statistics in this bulletin over the period covered in the tables, the more significant of which are as follows:
 1. 1.93 Introduction of Crimsec 38 in England and Wales to collect seizure information; England and Wales offender information now obtained from court appearance data. New codes introduced for main drug offences in England and Wales.
 1. 1.94 Separate offence codes for crack introduced in England and Wales.
 1. 4.95 Separate offence codes for methadone introduced in England and Wales.
 1. 4.95 Separate seizure code for temazepam introduced.
 1. 6.96 MDMA definition for seizures and offenders broadened to include ecstasy-type drugs.
 1. 9.96 Separate seizure code introduced for anabolic steroids across UK, and separate offence code for England and Wales.
 - 29.1.04 Re-classification of cannabis from a class B to a class C drug under the Criminal Justice Act 2003.

DATA QUALITY ISSUES

11. Although care is taken in completing and analysing the returns used to compile the figures in this bulletin, the figures are subject to the inaccuracies of any large-scale recording system involving different organisations. So that the reliability of data could be ensured, a reconciliation exercise was conducted where each police force or authority was asked to check their own data and supply revised figures where necessary.
12. Although the figures in the tables in this bulletin are generally shown to the last digit in order to provide a comprehensive record of the information collected, the figures are not necessarily accurate to the last digit shown. In some tables components may not add to totals (or the total) because they have been rounded independently. In the text, numbers have been rounded to the nearest 100 (or 10 for numbers less than a thousand). The following symbols are used in the tables:

* = not applicable .. = not available - = nil 0 = less than a specified amount

PREVIOUS AND RELATED HOME OFFICE STATISTICAL PUBLICATIONS

'Seizures of drugs in England and Wales, 2003' was issued as Findings 165 in August 2005.

'Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics UK, 2001 & 2002' was issued as Home Office Statistical Bulletin 08/04 in September 2004.

'Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics UK, 2000' was issued as Home Office Statistical Bulletin 04/02 in May 2002.

Statistics on drug offenders are now published separately. The most recent publication was 'Drug Offenders in England and Wales 2004', issued as Home Office Statistical Bulletin 23/05 in December 2005.

These publications, and the detailed tables used to produce them, are available on the Home Office RDS website at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pubsintro1.html>.

Acknowledgements and contact details

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Queries about this publication, or crime statistics, should be emailed to crimestats.rds@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk or forwarded to Strategic Data Flows, RDS (CRCSG), 5th Floor Peel, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF.

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