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Drug offenders in England and Wales 2003

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This Findings presents data on known drug offences and offenders in England and Wales in 2003. These statistics report on police cautions, court proceedings and HM Customs and Excise compounding for drug offences ('compounding' is where payment is made of a compound settlement in lieu of prosecution for minor cannabis possession offences).

Key points

- In 2003 the total number of drug offences in England and Wales rose 5% from the 2002 level to 133,970. Class A offence numbers rose 6% to 35,610, Class B rose 5% to 94,520 whilst Class C offences decreased 2% to 1660.
- In total, 110,640 people were found guilty or were cautioned for drug offences in 2003. Among this group of known drug offenders:
 - 90% were known to have committed possession offences. 70% of all drug offenders in 2003 had committed cannabis possession offences; 7% heroin possession; and 5% cocaine possession. The most common disposals used for known possession offenders (i.e. possession only and not possession with intent to supply) in 2003 were cautions (45%), fines (26%) and absolute or conditional discharges (11%).
 - About 10% of all drug offenders in 2003 had committed dealing offences. Cannabis and heroin dealing each accounted for 3% of all drug offenders, whilst cocaine dealing accounted for 2% of all drug offenders. The most common disposals used for known dealing offenders in 2003 were immediate custody (60%), and Combination, Community Rehabilitation or Community Punishment Orders (19%).
- Fewer women than men were cautioned or found guilty for drug offences. Among those found guilty or cautioned for drug offences, possession offences tend to be committed by younger people (63% committed by those under the age of 25); dealing offences by slightly older people (71% committed by people aged over 25); and production/import/export offences by much older people (63% committed by people aged 30 or over).

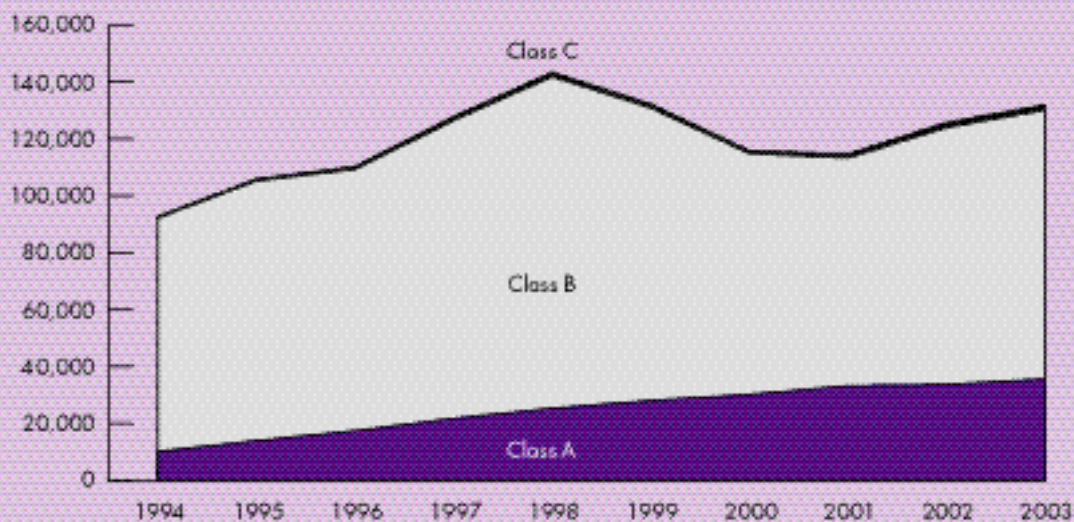
Drug offences in England and Wales in 2003

In 2003, the total number of drug offences dealt with in England and Wales by the police, courts and HM Customs and Excise rose to 133,970, a rise from 127,410 in 2002.

Drugs are divided into three classes (A, B and C) according to their harmfulness. Over the past decade, the number of known Class A offences has increased steadily, whilst the number of Class B offences has fluctuated. More recently:

- Numbers of **Class A drug offences** have increased from 33,660 in 2002 to 35,610 in 2003. (Figure 1).
- **Class B drug offences** made up the bulk of all drugs offences in 2003 (as has been the case throughout the last decade). There were 94,520 such offences in 2003, a rise from 90,270 in 2002.
- Numbers of **Class C drug offences** are comparatively low. There were 1,660 Class C offences in 2003; similar to the level in 2002 (1,680).

Figure 1 Number of known drug offences by class in England and Wales, 1994 to 2003



Drug offenders in England and Wales in 2003

In total, 110,640 people were found guilty or were cautioned for drug offences in 2003. Trends in the number of offenders by type of offence between 1994 and 2003 are presented in Figure 2.

In 2003, the vast majority of drug offenders (90%) had been found guilty or were cautioned for possession offences. The number of possession offenders increased slightly between 2002 (96,200) and 2003 (99,360).

About one in ten drug offenders in 2003 were found guilty or cautioned for dealing offences, that is of “possession with intent to supply unlawfully” and “unlawful supply”. The number of dealing offenders increased slightly from 9,910 in 2002 to 10,630 in 2003.

In 2003 there were 3,980 offenders (4% of the total) found guilty or cautioned for unlawful production and unlawful import/export offences. This was broadly unchanged since 2002 (3,760 offenders).

Class A offenders

- **Cocaine:** in 2003, 6% (6,970) of all drugs offenders had been found guilty or cautioned for cocaine offences. In 2003 cocaine possession offenders made up 5% of all drug offenders; cocaine dealing made up an additional 2%.
- **Crack:** in 2003, 2% (2,260) of all drugs offenders were crack offenders. Crack possession represented one per cent of all drug offenders.
- **Heroin:** accounted for 10% of all drug offenders in 2003 (10,520). Heroin possession accounted for 7% of all drug offenders and heroin dealing for 3%.
- **LSD:** fewer than one per cent of drug offenders in 2003 had been found guilty of, or were cautioned for, offences relating to LSD.
- **Ecstasy-type:** there were 5,530 ecstasy-type drug offenders in 2003, accounting for 5% of all drug offenders. Ecstasy-type possession offenders represented 4% of all drug offenders; ecstasy-type dealers represented 1%.

Figure 2 Number of known drug offenders by offence type, England and Wales

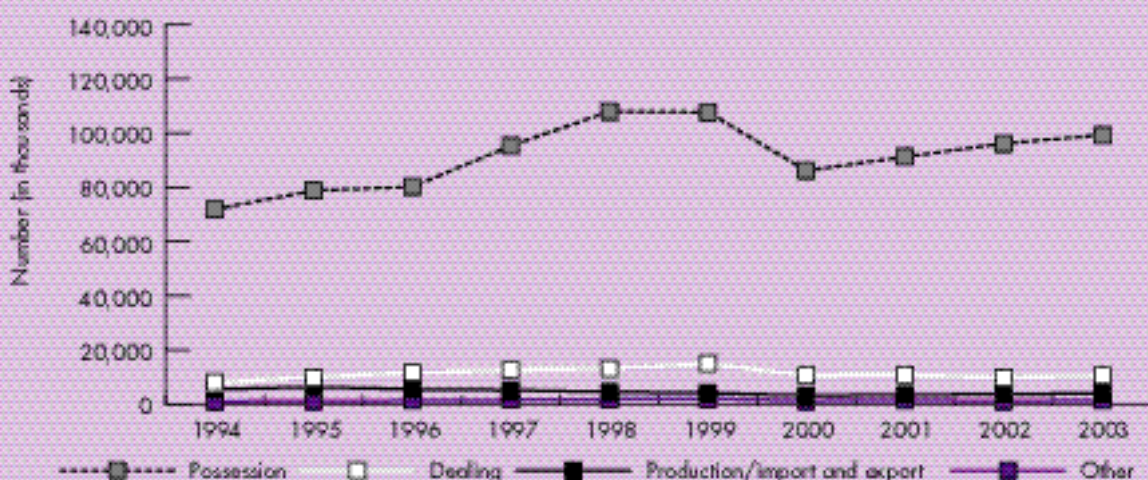


Table 1 Number of known drug offenders by type of drug in England and Wales, 1994 to 2003

Type of drug	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Class A										
Cocaine (excl. crack)	1,570	1,840	2,170	2,880	3,980	4,620	4,240	4,690	5,780	6,970
Crack	370	520	480	530	910	1,130	1,210	1,460	1,800	2,260
Heroin	2,750	3,930	5,660	8,200	10,060	10,790	10,680	11,100	10,670	10,520
LSD	1,660	1,140	780	660	510	410	230	170	120	150
Ecstasy-type	1,760	3,080	3,680	3,710	2,750	3,800	5,910	6,800	6,050	5,530
Methadone	10*	20*	390	670	720	630	540	540	450	430
Class B										
Amphetamines	7,800	9,650	12,270	12,410	13,200	10,620	5,880	4,620	5,550	5,940
Cannabis	67,180	71,950	69,070	80,910	90,480	81,090	70,160	66,410	78,050	82,060
Class C										
Anabolic steroids	20	30	30	30	10	370	640	570
Other**	3,670	7,340	7,870	9,020	8,810	8,270	6,920	7,180	7,710	7,440
All drugs	82,890	90,640	91,230	107,500	122,440	112,780	99,060	96,520	106,640	110,400

Notes: As the same person may be found guilty, cautioned or dealt with by compounding for offences involving more than one drug, cells cannot be added together to produce sub-totals or totals. * From 1994 to 1995 figures for dipipanone and methadone are included in 'other'. ** Includes unrecorded drug type. The base for this table excludes 240 offenders for whom data was unavailable.

Class B offenders

Class B offenders, particularly for cannabis, made up the majority of all offenders for the period under consideration (cannabis was reclassified as a Class C substance after the period reported here).

- **Amphetamine:** there were 5,550 amphetamine offenders in 2003 (5% of all drug offenders). Most of the amphetamine offenders in 2003 were possession offenders.
- **Cannabis:** there were 82,060 cannabis offenders in 2003. 70% of all drug offenders were cannabis possession offenders, 3% of all drug offenders were cannabis-dealing offenders.

Class C drug offenders

In general, very few people are found guilty or cautioned for Class C drug offences.

- **Anabolic steroids:** became controlled drugs in 1996 when there were 20 offenders. The number of these offenders continues to be low, with 570 in 2003.

Measures used against drug offenders

A range of measures can be used against drug offenders (see box).

In 2003, 87,730 drug offences were dealt with at court, an increase of 8% on 2002. Of the drug offences dealt with at court in 2003, 35% were Class A offences, 61% were Class B offences and 2% were Class C offences. In total 73,170 people were dealt with at court for drug offences in 2003.

Of these 64,090 (88%) were found guilty and 9,090 (12%) were found not guilty.

47,240 drug offences were dealt with by caution in 2003, an increase of 2% on 2002. Of the drug offences dealt with by caution in 2003, 11% were Class A offences, 88% were Class B offences and fewer than 1% were Class C offences. In total, 46,310 people received cautions for drug offences in 2003.

Measures which can be used for drug offences

By courts after a finding of guilt

1. Custodial sentences include:

- immediate custody
- suspended sentence
- youth sentence
- secure training order.

2. Community sentences consist of:

- Community Punishment Orders (Community Service Order prior to 1 April 2001)
- Community Rehabilitation Orders (Probation Orders prior to 1 April 2001)
- a combination of these for the years reported herein.

3. Other disposals include:

- a fine, absolute or conditional discharge, drug treatment and testing orders and so on.

By police after an admission of guilt

- a caution to an appropriate offence.

By HM Customs against personal use cannabis offences

- a small number of people are dealt with by compounding – an administrative sanction involving a financial penalty.

Table 2 Custodial sentences awarded for drug offences by type of drug in England and Wales in 2003

	Number sentenced to custody	% of offences receiving a custodial sentence	Average sentence length in months
Cocaine	1,270	16	36
Crack	560	25	31
Heroin	3,010	28	28
Ecstasy-type	740	13	26
Cannabis	1,810	2	8
All drug offences			
of which:	10,120	9	29
Possession	4,020	4	4
Dealing	6,370	60	37
Production	240	9	20
Import/export	1,090	93	67

8,770 drug offenders were sentenced to immediate custody in 2003, with an average sentence length in 2003 of 29 months. Class A drug offences (such as cocaine) were likely to attract more and longer custodial sentences (Table 2).

Drug possession

Generally, Class A possession offences tended to be dealt with more harshly than less serious drug possession offences. The most common disposals used for known possession offences in 2003 were cautions (45%), fines (26%) and absolute or conditional discharges (11%). Only 4% were sentenced to immediate custody and 7% were given a Combination, Community Punishment or Rehabilitation Order. The main ways of dealing with possession cases are shown in Figure 3 by individual drug: small numbers of cases for drugs such as LSD and methadone are not included.

Cocaine possession offences:

- 32% were cautioned
- 31% were fined
- 10% were sentenced to immediate custody.

Crack possession offences:

- 35% were fined
- 20% received immediate custody
- 25% were given a Combination, Community Punishment or Community Rehabilitation Order.

Heroin possession offences:

- 23% were fined
- 17% were sentenced to immediate custody
- 20% were given a Combination, Community Punishment or Community Rehabilitation Order
- 16% were given an absolute or conditional discharge
- 14% were cautioned.

Ecstasy-type possession offences:

- 35% were cautioned
- 27% were fined
- 6% received immediate custody (a smaller proportion than for other Class A drug possession offences).

Cannabis possession offences:

- 49% were cautioned
- 25% were fined
- 2% received immediate custody.

Drug dealing

Generally, dealing in Class A drugs was dealt with more harshly than dealing in Class B and C drugs. The most common disposals used for known dealing offences in 2003 were immediate custody (60%), and Combination, Community Rehabilitation or Community Punishment Orders (19%). Only 8% were cautioned. The main disposals for dealing offences in 2003 are shown in Figure 4 by individual drug: drugs with small numbers of offences such as LSD and methadone are not included.

Cocaine dealing offences:

- 83% received immediate custody
- 7% were sentenced to a Combination, Community Rehabilitation or Community Punishment Order
- 3% were cautioned.

Crack dealing offences:

- 69% received immediate custody
- 21% were cautioned.

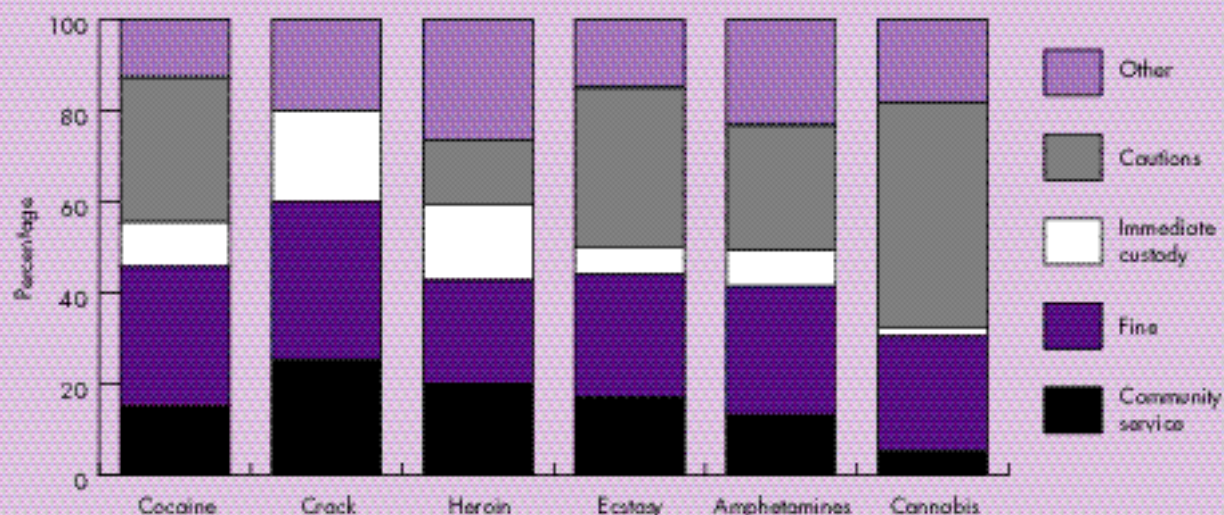
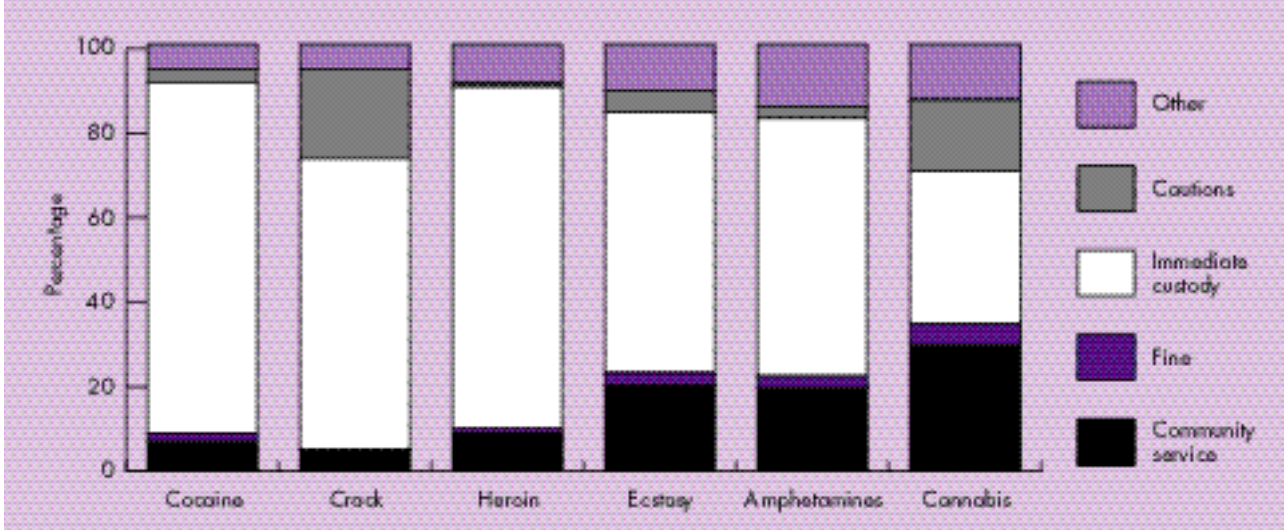
Figure 3 Disposal of drug possession offences by type of drug, England and Wales in 2003

Figure 4 Disposal of drug dealing offences by drug, England and Wales in 2003



Heroin dealing offences:

- 81% received immediate custody
- 9% were given a Combination, Community Rehabilitation or Community Punishment Order.

Ecstasy dealing offences:

- 61% received immediate custody
- 20% were given a Combination, Community Rehabilitation or Community Punishment Order.

Cannabis dealing offences:

- 36% received immediate custody
- 29% were given a Combination, Community Rehabilitation or Community Punishment Order
- 16% were cautioned.

Detailed tables for other offences are available at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/

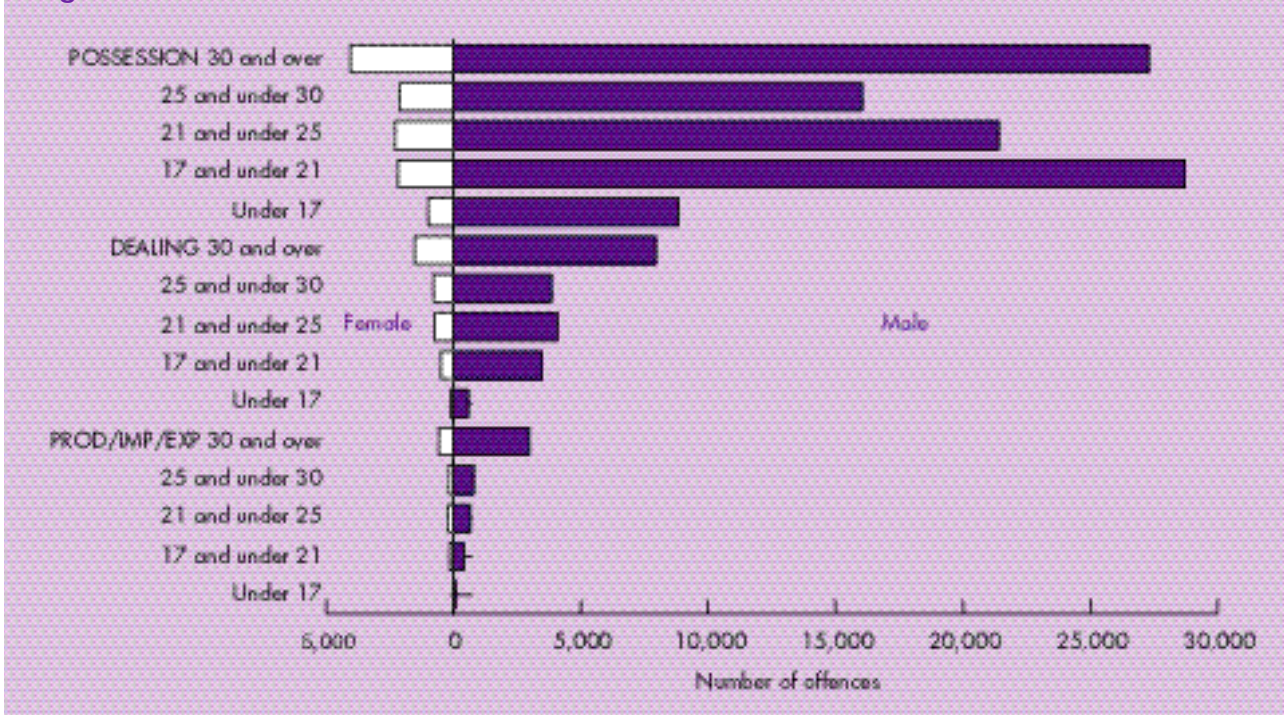
Offender characteristics

As was the case in previous years, most drug offenders in 2003 were men – 10% of possession offences, 15% of dealing offences and 8% of production/import/export offences were known to have been committed by women in 2003.

The distribution of known offenders by age (Figure 5) shows that:

- possession offences tend to be committed by younger people (63% committed by those under the age of 25)
- dealing offences by slightly older people (71% committed by those over the age of 25)
- production/import/export offences by much older people (63% committed by people aged 30 or over).

Figure 5 Possession, dealing and production/import/export offenders by age and sex in England and Wales in 2003



Reprimands and warnings

In 2003 92% of reprimands and 86% of warnings were given for Cannabis possession. Cannabis dealing attracted 2% of reprimands and 5% of warnings. No other offences attracted more than 1% of reprimands, but Ecstasy-type possession attracted 3% of warnings.

The majority of those receiving reprimands and final warnings were male, reflecting the characteristics of drug offenders overall, although a third of the warnings given for ecstasy-type possession offences were given to females. The number of reprimands and final warnings given increase with age, with the majority given to those aged 16 and 17.

Table 3 Reprimands and warnings by age and offence, 2003

	Age								Sex		Total
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Male	Female	
Reprimands											
Heroin possession	0	0	0	1	0	3	3	10	10	7	17
Ecstasy possession	0	0	0	1	3	7	25	45	65	16	81
Cannabis possession	8	19	44	227	564	1,176	1,779	2,403	5,546	674	6,220
Other cannabis	0	2	5	16	19	30	37	52	136	25	161
Other offences	0	0	3	9	24	47	66	107	209	47	256
All reprimands	8	21	52	254	610	1,263	1,910	2,617	5,966	769	6,735
Warnings											
Heroin possession	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	4	5	4	9
Ecstasy possession	0	0	0	1	6	13	30	36	57	29	86
Cannabis possession	1	6	22	72	246	538	839	981	2,471	234	2,705
Other cannabis	1	0	6	17	33	39	49	28	152	21	173
Other offences	1	0	2	9	23	30	42	64	135	36	171
All warnings	3	6	30	100	308	621	963	1,113	2,820	324	3,144

Methodological note

UK drug seizure and offender statistics were previously published together as a Statistical Bulletin. Changes arising from recommendations in the National Statistics Quality Report No. 29 Review of Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics (Home Office, 10 March 2004) have been implemented and include separate publication of offences and seizures; hard copy publication of summary statistics with detailed tables available on the website; Home Office publication of England and Wales data: other jurisdictions publishing data for their countries.

This Findings presents data on police cautions, court sentences and HM Customs and Excise compounding (a penalty involving a payment of a compound settlement in lieu of prosecution for minor personal use cannabis drugs offences) in England and Wales for years up to and including 2003. Cannabis was reclassified from a Class B to a Class C drug in January 2004. The effects of this change will be reported with the 2004 data. Offences recorded in this Findings do not equate to crimes recorded by the police because (a) they include crimes pursued by HM Customs and (b) they represent offences brought to justice. Seizure data for England and Wales up to and including the financial year 2003/04 will be published early in 2005.

As one offender can commit multiple offences, figures for individual drugs or types of offence cannot be added together to produce totals: offences are reported in this Findings in all sections except for the final section on offender characteristics. The Offender characteristics section also includes data on reprimands and warnings which replaced cautions for persons aged under 18 in pilot sites from 1998 and nationwide from 1 June 2000. Reprimands and warnings are included with cautions in all other tables and charts within and accompanying this Findings.

Trends in drug offences over time must be interpreted with caution as changes in the overall number of offences recorded could be the result of fewer offences being committed, or fewer offences being dealt with by the criminal justice system.

Detailed tables used to produce this document are available on the Home Office website <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/>

Lungowe Mwenda and Kavita Kumari are members of the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (Crime Reduction and Community Safety Group).