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## Seizures of Drugs in England and Wales, 2005

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## SUMMARY

- There were 161,113 drug seizures by police and HM Revenue and Customs in England and Wales in 2005 – 50 per cent up on the previous year. This increase is largely accounted for by an increase in cannabis seizures with 114,202 seizures involving cannabis in 2005, an increase of 47 per cent compared to 2004. This increase is thought to be associated with the introduction of cannabis warnings from April 1 2004 (see box below on warnings for cannabis possession).
- In 2005 there were 38,605 seizures of class A drugs (up 31 per cent since 2004); 6,807 seizures involving class B drugs (up seven per cent since 2004); and 117,297 seizures involving class C drugs (up 54 per cent since 2004).
- Heroin and cocaine were the most commonly seized class A drugs in 2005; there were 13,331 seizures of heroin (up 20 per cent since 2004) and 11,913 seizures of cocaine (up 51 per cent since 2004).

### **Note: Warnings for cannabis possession**

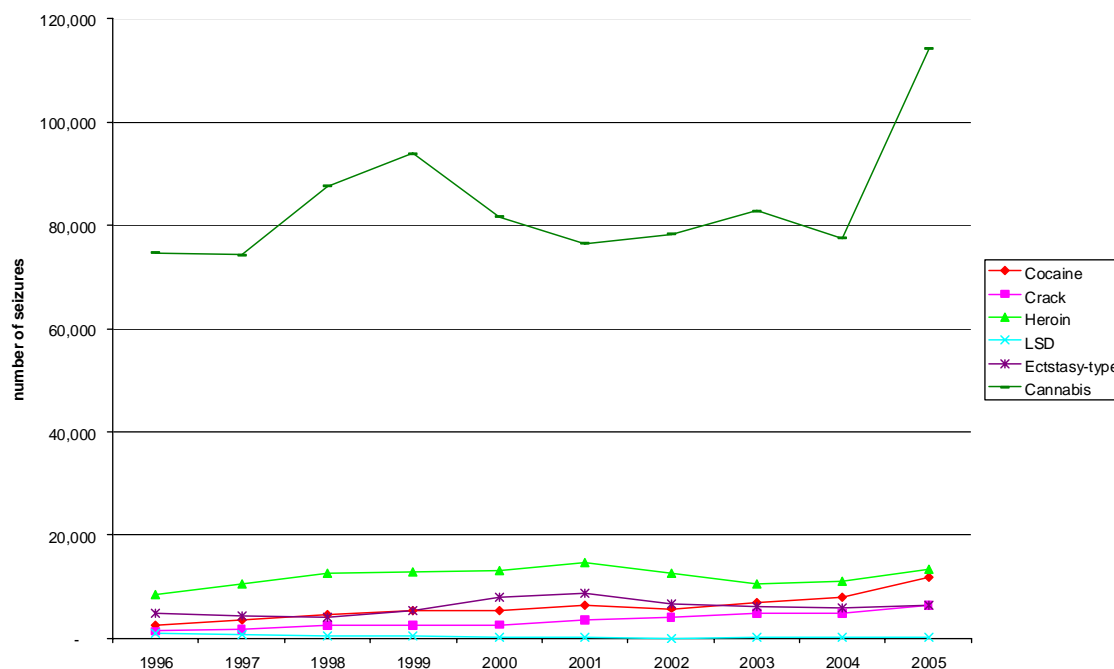
With effect from 1 April 2004 the Home Office issued guidance to all police forces in relation to the recording of formal warnings for cannabis possession which was in line with Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidance. This gave an additional disposal option of a formal warning for cannabis possession. Whereas a simple caution involves processing an individual at a police station, a formal warning (now 'street warnings') could be completed on the street.

The number of simple cautions decreased from 37,738 in 2004/05 to 27,570 in 2005/06 (a 27 per cent decrease), whilst the number of formal warnings increased from 39,256 in 2004/05 to 63,331 in 2005/06, a 61 per cent increase (data on a calendar year basis is unavailable). The widespread and growing use of this new disposal is thought to have been a likely contributory factor in the increase in the number of police seizures for cannabis in 2005.

### **Note: Drug Offenders in England and Wales**

Consultation on withdrawal of Drug Offenders statistical bulletin– refer to page 12

**Figure 1 The number of seizures for the main drug types, England and Wales 1996 to 2005**



## 1 Introduction

This publication presents figures for drug seizures made by law enforcement agencies in England and Wales during 2005. 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 Customs<sup>1,2</sup> and the National Crime Squad<sup>3</sup>. 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 drug for 2004 and 2005. Data for classes B and C in 2004 and 2005 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 Stanstead). Caution must be exercised in comparing the level of drug seizures over time.

2. In 2005, HM Revenue and Customs historical numbers data for 1996 to 2004 have been adjusted in line with counting rules applied to the Police data.

3. From April 2006, the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) absorbed the National Crime Squad (NCS) and part of HM Revenue and Customs.

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

Police and HM Revenue and Customs made 161,113 seizures in England and Wales in 2005, an increase of 50 per cent compared to 2004. This increase is thought to be associated with the introduction of cannabis warnings from 1 April 2004 (text box on page 1).

The total number of seizures fluctuates from year to year. Although the 2005 figure of 161,113 seizures is the largest in ten years, there was a second peak in 1998 of 126,426 seizures.

### **Counting Rules**

#### **Single or multiple seizures**

A single seizure involves a seizure of one drug quantity within one drug type (for example: 10g of cocaine). Where a seizure involves multiple drug types and / or preparation type, counting rules are applied to this multiple seizure (for example: 10g of cocaine and 5g of crack).

#### **Three counts of seizures: total, by drug type and by class**

Multiple 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 type or drug class involved.

Example: A seizure is made of: 1kg cocaine; 100g cannabis resin and 350g herbal cannabis. This seizure would be counted as:

- Total:  
One seizure in the overall total for the number of seizures by that agency [quantity not applicable]
- Drug Type:  
One seizure of cocaine [1kg]; one seizure of cannabis resin [100g]; and one seizure of herbal cannabis [350g]
- Class:  
One seizure of class A and one seizure of class C [quantity not applicable]

#### **Avoiding Double Counting**

Where more than one agency (for example: a police force and HM Revenue and Customs) was involved in a particular seizure, it is only recorded by the agency that made the final seizure.

#### **Seizures in England and Wales**

Although HM Revenue and Customs and some police forces may be involved in seizures outside England and Wales, those seizures are not included in this publication.

### **Class A drugs**

There were 38,605 seizures in England and Wales involving class A drugs in 2005, 31 per cent more than in 2004. Heroin was the most commonly seized class A drug in 2005 (13,331 seizures, up 20 per cent since 2004), followed by cocaine (11,913 seizures, up 51 per cent since 2005), crack (6,350 seizures, up 30 per cent since 2004), and ecstasy (6,336 seizures, up seven per cent since 2004). There were also a small number of seizures involving methadone and LSD (894 and 193 respectively).

### **Class B drugs**

In 2005 there were 6,807 seizures involving class B drugs, a seven per cent increase compared to 2004. There were 7,425 seizures of amphetamines, 20 per cent more than in 2004.

### **Class C drugs**

There were 117,297 seizures involving class C drugs in 2005, a 54 per cent increase compared to 2004. This increase is mainly due to increases in seizures of cannabis (see text box on front page). In particular, herbal cannabis seizures in 2005 were 72,252 seizures, a rise of 76 per cent since 2004. Seizures of other class C drugs in 2005 included: benzodiazepines (1,699 seizures, up 114 per cent since 2004), temazepam (201 seizures, down one per cent since 2004), anabolic steroids (394 seizures, up 51 per cent from 2004), and GHB (27 seizures, up 35 per cent from 2004).

## **3 Quantity of drugs seized (Tables 3 and 4)**

### **Quantities of drugs**

*There are considerable fluctuations in the quantities of drugs seized over time. Whilst most drugs seizures consist of relatively small quantities annual totals of drugs seized can be greatly influenced by a small number of large seizures, generally made by HM Revenue and Customs.*

*The quantities of drugs seized are summarised in terms of kilograms, doses or plants (for cannabis plants only). Most drugs can plausibly be seized in a preparation form other than kilograms or doses. Therefore in order to present all seized quantities within a given drug type in terms of one comparable unit (either kilograms or doses), conversion factors are applied in order to estimate the overall quantity of drugs seized.*

### **Comparing 2005 quantities data with previous years**

*The conversion factors have been revised for the 2005 publication to reflect current trends in average drug preparations. Some drugs that were previously presented in kilograms are presented in doses from 2005. All revisions to quantities conversion factors and units for presentation have been made on the advice of the Forensic Science Service. As the basis for these calculations has changed, figures for seizure quantities for 2005 are not directly comparable with historical data.*

### ***Class A drugs***

In 2005, there were 3.8 tonnes of cocaine, 1.9 tonnes of heroin and 0.05 tonnes of crack seized. There were also seizures of 2.9 million doses of ecstasy, 1.1 million doses of LSD and 0.6 million doses of methadone in 2005.

In 2005 most weighed class A seizures were under one gram in weight (61 per cent of cocaine seizures; 70 per cent of crack seizures and 74 per cent of heroin seizures). Similarly, most un-weighed class A seizures in 2005 were less than 50 doses: 91 per cent of ecstasy seizures, 88 per cent of LSD seizures, 74 per cent of methadone seizures and 84 per cent of morphine seizures.

### ***Class B drugs***

There were 2.0 tonnes of amphetamines and less than a thousand doses of barbiturates seized in 2005.

In 2005, just under half of all amphetamine seizures were under one gram (47 per cent), and just over a half the amphetamines seizures were between one and 500 grams (51 per cent).

### ***Class C drugs***

In 2005, 69.6 tonnes of cannabis herbal and resin (of which 20.4 tonnes was herbal cannabis and 49.2 tonnes was cannabis resin) and 208,357 cannabis plants were seized. In 2005 most cannabis resin and herbal cannabis seizures weighed between one and 500 grams (83 per cent and 78 per cent respectively). Eighty-two per cent of seizures of cannabis plants were for seizures of less than 50 plants.

The quantity of anabolic steroids and benzodiazepines seized in 2005 were 2.5 million doses (plus an additional 205 litres) and 2.7 million doses respectively. In previous years anabolic steroids and benzodiazepines were presented in kilograms and not doses.

There were 21,300 doses of temazepam seized in 2005, and a relatively small quantity of GHB seizures (0.6 kg).

## **4 Purity of drugs (Tables 6 and 7)**

Data on the average purities of different types of drugs has been 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 addition of active agents to increase profit margins). The average purity of drugs has increased between 2004 and 2005 for amphetamines and heroin whilst there has been reductions in the purity of crack seized by HM Revenue and Customs.

**Table A Average purity<sup>1</sup> of drug seizures analysed by the Forensic Science Service by drug type and authority for 2004 and 2005**

Drug type	Authority	Percentages	
		2004	2005
Amphetamines	HM Revenue and Customs	30	50
	Police	9	11
Cocaine	HM Revenue and Customs	68	68
	Police	43	43
Crack	HM Revenue and Customs	80	73
	Police	63	65
Heroin	HM Revenue and Customs	45	49
	Police	40	47

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Purities are expressed in percentages. Data derived from 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 all seizures in 2005 (155,140 seizures) were made by local police forces, four per cent by HM Revenue and Customs (5,869 seizures) and less than one per cent by the National Crime Squad (104 seizures).

Police forces accounted for 96 per cent of all seizures of class A, 99 per cent of all seizures of class B and 96 per cent of seizures of class C. There has been very little change in the proportions of seizures made by police relative to HM Revenue and Customs for 2005 compared to 2004.

HM Revenue and Customs seized 10 per cent of all cocaine seizures and 15 per cent of seizures of other class A drugs, but only one per cent of all LSD, heroin and ecstasy-type seizures, and less than one per cent of seizures for crack. The National Crime Squad seized two per cent of all LSD seizures in 2005. Of seizures for other class B drugs, 16 per cent were made by HM Revenue and Customs.

Ninety-six per cent of class C seizures were made by police forces in 2005, the majority of which were cannabis seizures.

HM Revenue and Customs seized large proportions of the total benzodiazepines, anabolic steroids and other class C seizures in 2005 (50 per cent, 38 per cent and 57 per cent respectively).

**Table B Number<sup>(1)</sup> and percentage of drug seizures by class, drug type and agency<sup>(2)</sup>  
England and Wales, 2005**

	Police Forces		National Crime Squad		HM Revenue and Customs		Totals
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
<i>All Seizures</i>	155,140	96%	104	0%	5,869	4%	161,113
<b>Class A drugs</b>							
Cocaine	10,666	90%	44	0%	1,202	10%	11,912
Crack	6,334	100%	5	0%	11	0%	6,350
Heroin	13,222	99%	21	0%	88	1%	13,331
LSD	190	98%	3	2%	1	1%	194
Ecstasy-type	6,274	99%	8	0%	54	1%	6,336
Methadone	888	99%	0	0%	6	1%	894
Other	583	84%	1	0%	107	15%	691
<b>All Class A<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>37,093</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1,442</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>38,605</b>
<b>Class B drugs</b>							
Amphetamines	7,348	99%	12	0%	65	1%	7,425
Other	197	84%	0	0%	38	16%	235
<b>All Class B<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>7,561</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>7,671</b>
<b>Class C drugs</b>							
Cannabis	111,168	97%	44	0%	2,990	3%	114,202
Benzodiazepines	857	50%	0	0%	842	50%	1,699
Temazepam	197	98%	0	0%	4	2%	201
Anabolic Steroids	243	62%	0	0%	151	38%	394
GHB	27	100%	0	0%	0	0%	27
Other	359	43%	0	0%	468	57%	827
<b>All Class C<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>112,822</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>4,431</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>117,297</b>
Unknown	838	100%	1	0%	1	0%	840

1. As a seizure can involve more than one drug, figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals. See note on counting rules for multiple seizures on page 3.

2. Seizures from joint operations involving HM Revenue and Customs and the police are recorded against the lead agency.

## Quantity of seizures (Table C)

Although local police forces seized 96 per cent of all seizures in 2005, most of these seizures were quite small quantities. Of all 2005 class A seizures, HM Revenue and Customs made up the majority of total quantities seized for cocaine, heroin and ecstasy; police forces seized the majority of total quantities of crack, LSD and methadone. Of class B seizures, HM Revenue and Customs seized the majority of total quantity of amphetamines.

In 2005, HM Revenue and Customs seized the majority of total quantities of herbal cannabis, cannabis resin, temazepam and anabolic steroids. Police forces seized the majority of cannabis plants. The National Crime Squad seized large proportions of the total quantities of cannabis resin, ecstasy, amphetamines, heroin and LSD (43 per cent, 27 per cent, 26 per cent, 24 per cent and 20 per cent respectively) in 2005.

In 2005 there were nine times as many seizures of cocaine made by police (including NCS) than HM Revenue and Customs (10,710 and 1,202 seizures respectively). However, HM Revenue and Customs seized two and a half times the quantity of cocaine compared to police (1,006 kg by police compared to 2,759 kg by HM Revenue and Customs).

**Table C Quantities and percentage of drugs seized by class, drug type and agency <sup>(1)</sup>, England and Wales, 2005**

Drug Type	Police Forces		National Crime Squad		HM Revenue and Customs		Totals
	Quantity <sup>(3)</sup>	%	Quantity <sup>(3)</sup>	%	Quantity <sup>(3)</sup>	%	
<b>Class A (weighed - Kg)</b>							
Cocaine	474	13%	532	14%	2,759	73%	3,765
Crack	45	91%	3	6%	2	3%	49
Heroin	323	17%	447	24%	1,094	59%	1,864
Other Class A	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
<b>Class A (unweighed)</b>							
LSD (1000s doses)	862	80%	215	20%	0	0%	1,077
Ecstasy-type (1000s doses)	508	17%	803	27%	1,635	55%	2,946
Methadone (1000s doses)	62	100%	0	0%	0	0%	62
<b>Class B (weighed - Kg)</b>							
Amphetamines	437	21%	528	26%	1,074	53%	2,038
Other Class B	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
<b>Class B (unweighed)</b>							
Barbiturates (1000s doses)	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1
<b>Class C (weighed - Kg)</b>							
Cannabis (herbal)	1,957	10%	948	5%	17,515	86%	20,420
Cannabis resin	3,738	8%	21,307	43%	24,145	49%	49,190
GHB	1	100%	-	-	0	0%	1
Other Class C	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
<b>Class C (unweighed)</b>							
Benzodiazepines (1000s doses)	916	34%	0	0%	1,756	66%	2,672
Cannabis plants (plants)	203,374	98%	4,983	2%	-	-	208,357
Temazepam (1000s doses)	7	31%	0	0%	15	69%	21
Anabolic steroids (1000s doses)	853	26%	0	0%	2,481	74%	3,334

(1) Seizures from joint operations involving HM Revenue and Customs and the police are recorded against the lead agency.

(2) Totals are rounded to the nearest whole number.

(3) Drugs are seized in a variety of forms but where possible, for the purpose of this table, amounts have been converted to weights (kg), doses or plants; previous to 2005 only LSD and Ecstasy were in thousands of doses. To present all seized quantities within a given drug type in terms of one comparable unit, conversion factors are applied to estimate the overall quantity for that drug. From 2005 new conversion factors have been applied. Quantities data for 2005 cannot be compared to quantities data previous to 2005. Seizures of unspecified quantities are not included.

## 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 four 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 crack, ecstasy, amphetamines and cannabis resin.
4. For consistency between police and HM Revenue and Customs data, the rules for counting multiple seizures for HM Revenue and Customs have been revised in line with the counting rules applied to the Police historical data, affecting the historical data for HM Revenue and Customs data from 1996 to 2004.
5. Some of the totals for quantities of drugs seized by HM Revenue and Customs included in this bulletin may differ slightly from their own published figures, especially for earlier years. The discrepancies 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.
6. Information on average (arithmetic mean) drug purities for cocaine, crack, heroin and amphetamine have 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.
7. The conversion factors used to estimate quantities of seizures from the Police and HM Revenue and Customs have been revised for 2005 in line with recommendations from the Forensic Science Service. Average seizures of quantities for valid preparation types by drug type are used as conversion factors to present each drug quantity as one unit (kilograms, doses or plants). From 2005, for approximately half the main drug types the quantities of these seizures are presented in doses rather than kilograms. In previous years only LSD and ecstasy were presented in doses.

8. 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 than in 1992 using the old method. 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.
9. 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.
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 new collection method 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.
1. 7.03	GHB became a controlled drug.
29.1.04	Re-classification of cannabis from a class B to a class C drug under the Criminal Justice Act 2003.
11. 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.
12. Although care is taken in completing and analysing the returns used to compile the figures in this bulletin, the figures are of necessity subject to the inaccuracies of any large-scale recording system of this kind, involving different organisations. So that the reliability of data could be ensured a reconciliation exercise was conducted, where each police force or other authority was asked to check their own data and supply revised figures where necessary.

13. 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, 2004' was issued as Home Office Statistical Bulletin 08/06 in May 2006

'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.

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>.

### **Drug Offenders in England and Wales**

We are proposing to withdraw this National Statistics series on the following grounds:

- Demand for drug offender statistics within the Home office has dwindled.
- Resources for the production of the statistical bulletin have been cut.
- Sentencing statistics for all offences will continue to be published by the Ministry of Justice. These statistics are published on a 'principal offence' basis at a more aggregate level, but more detailed drug offender statistics by type or class of drug would be available on an ad hoc basis.

Under National Statistics guidance, we have obtained approval from the Home Secretary [pending favourable response to submission] and the statistics Head of Profession within the Home Office [already received] to proceed in this way. The next stage in the process is to consult externally, and we are using the drug seizures bulletin as a way of seeking the views of potential users of drug offender statistics.

Please send comments by the end of February 2008 to the email address. A announcement on the future of the bulletin will be made in the spring.

Email comments to: [david.povey@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:david.povey@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk)

### **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](mailto:crimestats.rds@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk) or forwarded to Strategic Data Flows, RDS (CRCSG), 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Peel, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF.