



Home Office



Seizures of drugs in England and Wales, financial year ending 2018

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Further information

This statistical release presents figures for drug seizures made in 2017/18 in England and Wales by the police (including the British Transport Police) and Border Force. The data relate to all drugs controlled under the [Misuse of Drugs Act 1971](#) (MDA), which divides drugs into three categories – Classes 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. This statistical release also presents figures for the first time relating to drugs within scope of the [Psychoactive Substances Act 2016](#) (PSA).

The annual *Seizures of drugs in England and Wales* publication, and other Home Office statistical releases, are available from the [Home Office pages](#) of the GOV.UK website.

The dates of forthcoming publications are pre-announced and can be found via the [GOV.UK publication hub](#).

For further information about the statistics in this publication, email crimeandpolicestats@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk, or write to: Crime and Policing Analysis Unit, 6th floor Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF

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NATIONAL STATISTICS STATUS

These statistics have been designated as National Statistics, following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate and the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.



This statistical bulletin is produced to the highest professional standards and is free from political interference. It has been produced by statisticians working in the Crime and Policing Analysis Unit in accordance with the Home Office's [statement of compliance](#) with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, which covers Home Office policy on revisions and other matters. The Chief Statistician, as Head of Profession, reports to the National Statistician with respect to all professional statistical matters and oversees all Home Office National Statistics products with respect to the Code, being responsible for their timing, content and methodology.

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Summary

This statistical release presents figures for drug seizures made in 2017/18 in England and Wales by the 44 police forces (including the British Transport Police) and Border Force. The data relate to all drugs controlled under the [Misuse of Drugs Act 1971](#) (MDA), which divides drugs into three categories (Classes 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.

In 2017/18, figures for seizures of drugs in scope of the [Psychoactive Substances Act 2016](#) (PSA) are presented in this publication for the first time. This is the first year that data on these substances, referred to as new psychoactive substances (NPS), have been recorded systematically across police forces and Border Force. These data have therefore been designated as Experimental Statistics, as they are not yet fully developed and do not meet the rigorous quality standards of Official Statistics.

One police force (Kent) were unable to provide fully accurate data for the 2016/17 and 2017/18 period. As a result, imputation methods have been used to estimate data for this force. Data from the 2015/16 period suggests that Kent accounts for 3% of all drug seizures made by police forces in England and Wales. All comparisons in this publication include the estimated values.

The number and quantity of seizures made can be affected by police activity and changes in recording practices, therefore the number and quantity of drug seizures each year should not be taken as a measure of drug prevalence in England and Wales. Prevalence is addressed in the Drug Misuse publications, based on results from the Crime Survey for England and Wales¹. Further information on these statistics can be found in the [user guide](#).

Key findings

- Police forces and Border Force made a total of 135,728 drug seizures in England and Wales in 2017/18, a 2% decrease compared with the previous year (139,019). This is the sixth consecutive annual fall and the lowest number of seizures since 2004, when there were 107,359 seizures.
- Seizures by police forces decreased by 2% between 2016/17 and 2017/18 (from 132,283 to 129,183) whilst there was less than a 1% decrease in the number of police recorded drug offences², a measure which tends to be highly correlated with the number of drug seizures³. Over the same time period, seizures made by Border Force decreased by 3% (from 6,736 to 6,545).
- Cannabis was the most commonly seized drug, which was involved in 72% of all drug seizures in England and Wales in 2017/18. The second most commonly seized drug was cocaine, which was involved in 11% of all seizures.
- The majority of all seizures (95%) were made by police forces in England and Wales; however, Border Force seizures tended to be for larger quantities. In terms of quantity, Border Force seized 94% of anabolic steroids, 92% of all cannabis resin, 89% of herbal cannabis, 79% of cocaine, and 68% of ecstasy.

Class A

- Seizures of Class A drugs decreased by 1% between 2016/17 and 2017/18, from 29,807 to 29,441 seizures. Cocaine was the most commonly seized Class A drug, with 52% of all Class A seizures involving this substance in 2017/18.
- There were 15,257 seizures of cocaine in 2017/18, up 2% on the previous year (14,892 seizures). However, the quantity of cocaine seized fell by 39% compared with the previous year, from 5,516 kilograms in 2016/17 to 3,359 kilograms in 2017/18.

¹ See the latest edition of 'Drug Misuse: Findings from the 2017/18 Crime Survey for England and Wales', available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/drug-misuse-findings-from-the-2017-to-2018-csew>

² Includes offences for possession of controlled drugs, trafficking in controlled drugs, and other drug offences.

³ Statistics on the number of police recorded drug offences are published on a quarterly basis by the [ONS](#).

Class B

- Seizures of Class B drugs decreased by 2% between 2016/17 and 2017/18, from 104,300 to 102,721 seizures. Cannabis was the most commonly seized Class B drug, with 95% of all Class B seizures involving this substance in 2017/18.
- Approximately 88% of cannabis seizures involved herbal cannabis. Between 2016/17 and 2017/18 the number of seizures of herbal cannabis fell by 2%, from 87,588 to 85,966 seizures.
- The quantity of herbal cannabis seized rose by 142% compared with the previous year, from 11,861 kilograms in 2016/17 to 28,666 kilograms in 2017/18. This was the second largest quantity of herbal cannabis seized since 2008/09.
- There was an increase of 33% in the quantity of cannabis resin seized (from 5,838 kilograms to 7,781 kilograms) while the number of cannabis plants seized increased by 10% from 318,988 plants in 2016/17 to 351,881 plants in 2017/18.

Class C

- Seizures of Class C drugs increased by 1% between 2016/17 and 2017/18, from 5,016 to 5,088 seizures. The most commonly seized Class C drug in 2017/18 was benzodiazepines with 1,986 seizures, an increase of 2% from the previous year.
- Between 2016/17 and 2017/18, there was a 66% decrease in the quantity of anabolic steroids seized, from 5.2 million to 1.7 million doses.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

- There were 1,523 seizures of NPS in 2017/18. This is the first time that data on NPS have been included in this publication.
- The most commonly seized types of NPS were synthetic cannabinoids (858 seizures), other NPS (448), NPS powders (135) and nitrous oxide (96).

1 Introduction

This publication presents figures for drug seizures made in 2017/18 in England and Wales by the police (including the British Transport Police) and Border Force. Although Border Force will have made seizures outside the land territory of England and Wales (e.g. Scotland, Northern Ireland), such seizures are excluded from figures presented in this publication.

The figures presented are correct at the time of extraction from the data system, and include revisions submitted by police forces and Border Force for the years covered by, and received since, the publication of, '[Seizures of drugs in England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2017](#)'.

Drug seizures often involve the seizure of multiple types of drugs. This means that the sum of seizures by each drug type will exceed the overall number of seizures. For example, if cocaine and cannabis resin were both seized in one seizure, this would be counted as one seizure in the overall total, but would be counted twice in the breakdown by drug type (one seizure of cocaine plus one seizure of cannabis resin).

One police force (Kent) was unable to provide fully accurate data for the 2016/17 and 2017/18 periods. As a result, imputation methods have been used to estimate data for this force. Data from the 2015/16 period suggests that Kent accounts for 3% of all drug seizures made by police forces in England and Wales. All comparisons in this publication include the estimated values.

Data on the number of seizures and quantity of drugs seized in England and Wales can be found in the accompanying Excel [tables](#).

Substances covered by this release

The statistics covered by this release relate to all drugs controlled under the [Misuse of Drugs Act 1971](#) (MDA), which divides drugs into three categories – Classes 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. Given the large number of drugs covered by the MDA, it is not feasible to publish seizure statistics in detail for every drug type. While all drugs are included in the totals, only those shown below are covered in detail within this bulletin⁴. This bulletin also captures the number of seizures where the substance, and therefore its classification, were unknown.

Table 1.1 Drugs and their classifications under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

Class A	Class B	Class C
Cocaine	Amphetamines ^a	Anabolic steroids
Crack	Barbiturates ^a	Benzodiazepines
Ecstasy	Cannabis ^b	GHB
Heroin	Ketamine ^c	Temazepam
LSD	Mephedrone	
Methadone		
Morphine		

a. Amphetamines and barbiturates are Class A drugs if prepared for injection.

b. Cannabis was reclassified from a Class B to a Class C drug in January 2004, and then classified back to a Class B drug on 26 January 2009. Cannabis is counted as a Class B drug for the entire time series in this publication.

c. Ketamine was reclassified from a Class C to a Class B drug on 10 June 2014. Ketamine is counted as a Class C drug for the entire time series in this publication.

This is the first year that information on seizures of substances within scope of the [Psychoactive Substances Act 2016](#) (PSA) are covered in this publication.

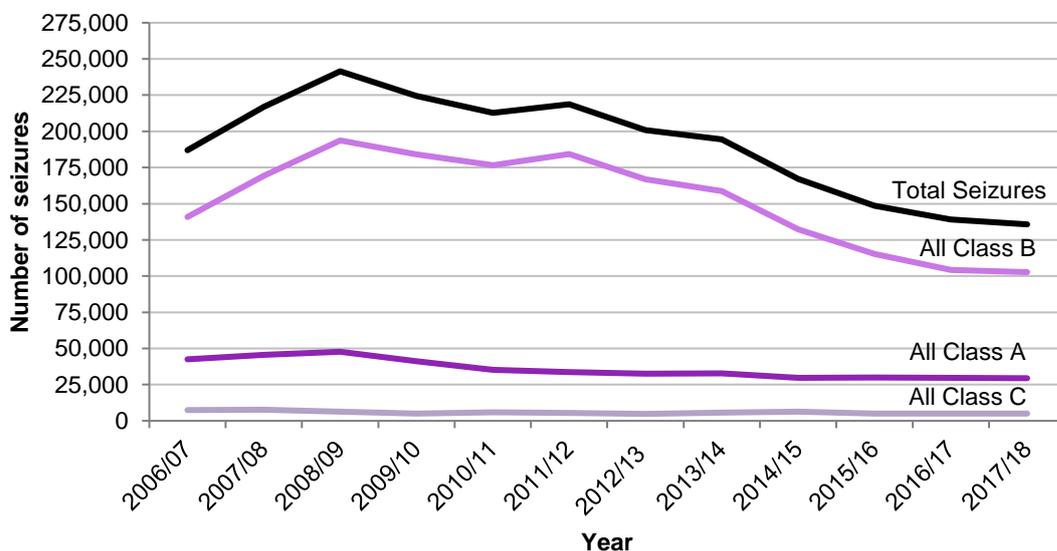
⁴ Where a seizure is made of a drug that is not listed in the above, it is aggregated into an 'other' class category. Further information on drugs covered under the MDA is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/controlled-drugs-list-2>.

As with previous years, Border Force have been unable to separately identify some of the drugs included in the above table from their recording system. This has resulted in Border Force seizures of methadone being included within the 'other Class A' grouping, barbiturates within 'other Class B', and benzodiazepines and temazepam within 'other Class C'. Border Force have resubmitted data on ketamine seizures in 2014/15, 2015/16, and 2016/17, therefore the number of seizures and quantities for ketamine, all Class B and total seizures will differ from previous publications.

2 Number of seizures

- In 2017/18, there were 135,728 seizures of drugs in England and Wales, a 2% decrease since 2016/17, when there were 139,019 seizures⁵.
- The number of drug seizures peaked in 2008/09 at 241,473 seizures, and has since declined by 44% down to 135,728 seizures in 2017/18 (Figure 2.1). This decline has largely been driven by cannabis seizures, which have fallen by 47% over the same period. The number of seizures in 2017/18 is the lowest since 2004, when there were 107,359 seizures.
- As in previous years, the majority of seizures were for Class B drugs, and in particular cannabis. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of all seizures involved cannabis (herbal, resin or plant).

Figure 2.1 Number of seizures of Class A, Class B and Class C drugs, 2006/07 to 2017/18, police forces and Border Force¹



Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 1](#).

Chart notes

1. For consistency, drugs are counted in their current classification for the entire time series shown.

The number of seizures made can be affected by police activity and changes in recording practices. Therefore, the number of drug seizures each year should not be taken as a measure of drug prevalence in England and Wales. Prevalence is presented in the Drug Misuse publications, based on results from the Crime Survey for England and Wales⁶.

The total number of drug seizures per year is generally highly correlated with the number of police recorded drug offences (Figure 2.2)⁷. In 2017/18 the police recorded 136,355 drug offences⁸, a decrease of less than 1% since the previous year (136,945). Over the same period, the number of seizures by police forces alone, excluding Border Force, fell by 2%. Since the peak in 2008/09, the number of drug offences recorded by the police has decreased by 44% (from 243,536 to 136,355), and the number of drug seizures by police forces has decreased by 45% (from 233,793 to 129,183).

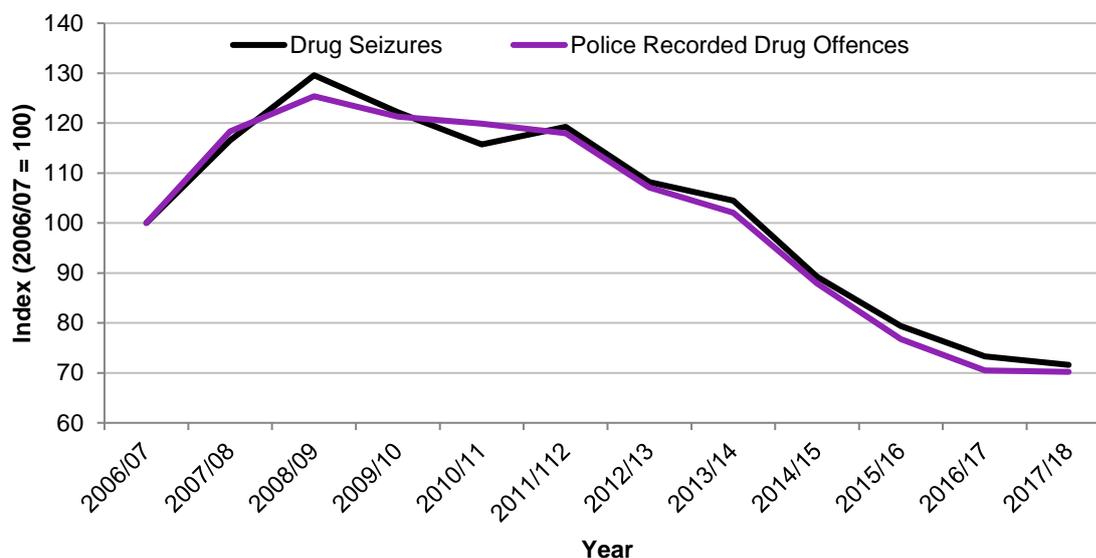
⁵ Figures include estimates for Kent in 2016/17 and 2017/18.

⁶ See the latest edition of 'Drug Misuse: Findings from the 2017/18 Crime Survey for England and Wales', available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/drug-misuse-findings-from-the-2017-to-2018-csew>

⁷ Statistics on the number of police recorded drug offences are published on a quarterly basis by the [ONS](#).

⁸ Includes offences for possession of controlled drugs, trafficking in controlled drugs, and other drug offences.

Figure 2.2 Index of police recorded drug offences and the total number of drug seizures by police forces, 2006/07 to 2017/18



Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 1](#).
ONS, [Crime in England and Wales, year ending June 2018](#), Appendix Table A4.

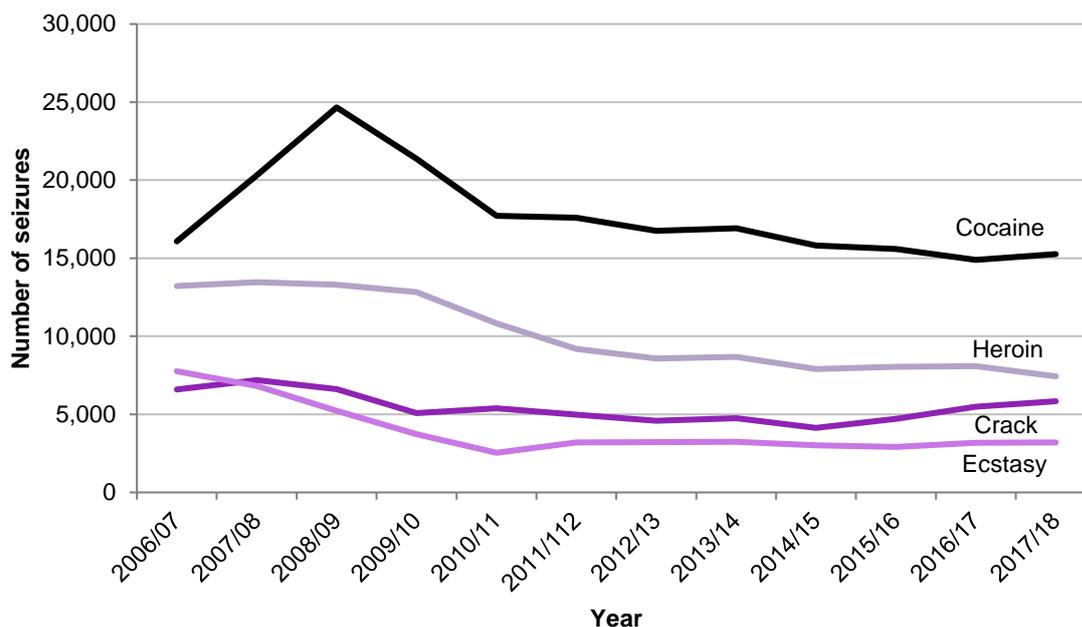
Class A drugs

In 2017/18, there were 29,441 seizures of Class A drugs, a decrease of 1% since 2016/17 (29,807 seizures). In 2017/18, just over two-fifths (22%) of all drug seizures involved at least one Class A drug. Since 2006/07, cocaine has been the most commonly seized drug in this classification group; prior to 2006/07, heroin had been the most commonly seized Class A drug⁹.

- Over half of all seizures of Class A drugs involved cocaine, with 15,257 seizures of the substance in 2017/18, a 2% increase on the 2016/17 figure (14,892). As shown in Figure 2.3, the number of cocaine seizures has previously followed a downward trend since the peak in 2008/09.
- After cocaine, heroin was the second most commonly seized Class A drug, with 7,435 seizures in 2017/18 (25% of all Class A seizures). This was an 8% decrease on the 2016/17 figure of 8,092 seizures.
- There was an increase in the number of seizures of crack cocaine, up 6% from 5,484 in 2016/17 to 5,833 in 2017/18, the highest number since 2008/09. There were also increases in the number of seizures of ecstasy (up 1% from 3,174 to 3,190) and LSD (up 4% from 139 to 145).
- There was no change in the number of seizures of morphine (189 in both 2016/17 and 2017/18).
- There was a decrease in the number of seizures of methadone, down 7% from 498 to 463, the lowest number since 1992, and 'Other Class A' drugs, down 14% from 1,301 to 1,121.

⁹ Statistics on historical seizures of drugs in England and Wales can be found at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/hosbarchive.html>.

Figure 2.3 Number of seizures of the main Class A drug types, 2006/07 to 2017/18, police forces and Border Force



Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 1](#).

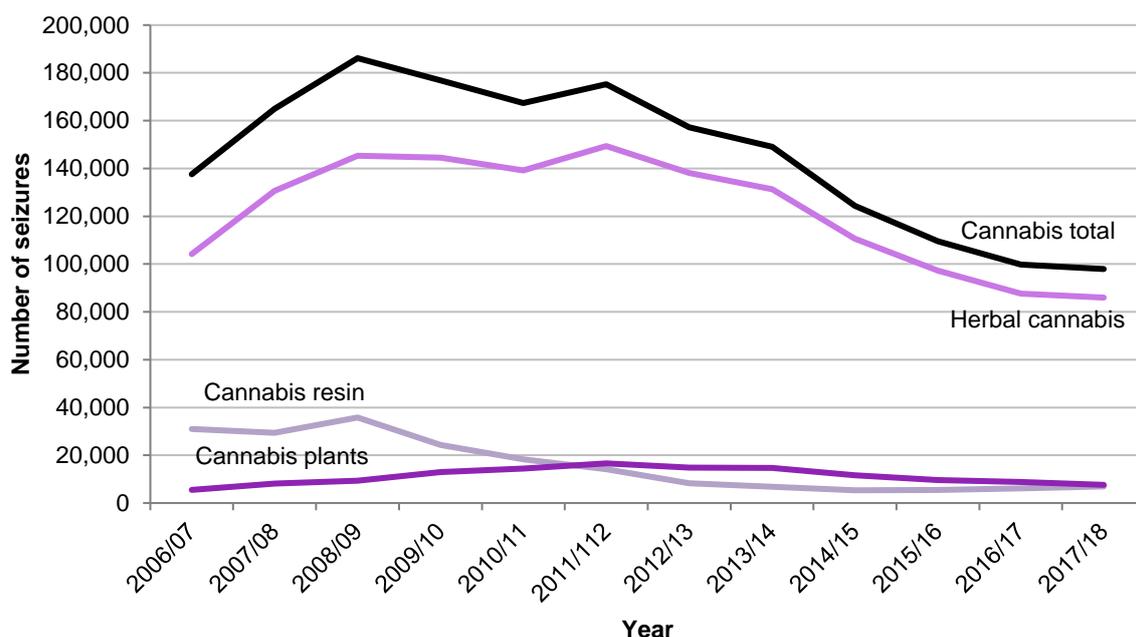
Class B drugs

In 2017/18, there were 102,721 seizures of Class B drugs, a 2% decrease compared with the previous year (104,300 seizures). As in previous years, the great majority of Class B seizures were for cannabis, with 95% of all Class B seizures involving at least one form of cannabis (97,914).

Cannabis

- There were 97,914 seizures of cannabis in 2017/18, a 2% decrease from 2016/17 (99,779).
- This is the lowest number of cannabis seizures since 2004 (77,482 seizures), and it continues the general decline in cannabis seizures since 2008/09, as shown in Figure 2.4. This decline was initially driven by a decrease in cannabis resin, before seizures of herbal cannabis and cannabis plants also began to fall from 2011/12.
- Seizures of herbal cannabis (which dominate seizures of cannabis) fell by 2% between 2016/17 and 2017/18 (from 87,588 to 85,966). Seizures of cannabis plants decreased by 13% (from 8,753 to 7,618), and seizures of cannabis resin increased by 15% from 6,078 to 6,976.

Figure 2.4 Number of cannabis seizures, 2006/07 to 2017/18, police forces and Border Force



Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 1](#).

Other Class B drugs

- Amphetamines were the second most frequently seized Class B drug with 3,484 seizures in 2017/18, a 9% decrease since 2016/17, when there were 3,820 seizures. This is the lowest number of seizures in 29 years.
- In 2017/18, there were 726 seizures of ketamine, a 27% increase on the previous year, when there were 572 seizures¹⁰. This increase is mostly driven by police force seizures, which accounted for 90% of all ketamine seizures in 2017/18.
- The number of seizures of mephedrone fell by 67%, from 202 in 2016/17 to 66 in 2017/18. This continues the longer-term decline since 2012/13, when there were 3,850 seizures.
- The number of seizures of 'Other Class B' drugs in 2017/18 (1,861) was 53% higher than in 2016/17 (1,218).

Class C drugs

There was a 1% increase in the number of seizures of Class C drugs in 2017/18 compared with the previous year, from 5,016 to 5,088 seizures.

- 39% of all seizures of Class C drugs involved benzodiazepines, with seizures of this drug increasing by 2% between 2016/17 and 2017/18 (1,945 to 1,986).
- In 2017/18 there were 2,279 seizures of 'Other Class C' drugs, a 4% increase compared with 2016/17 (2,185).

Unknown substances

In 2017/18, the number of seizures of unknown substances decreased by 4% compared with the previous year, from 8,715 to 8,387. This is the second highest number of seizures of unknown substances on record, after 2016/17.

¹⁰ Border Force have resubmitted ketamine data for 2014/15, 2015/16, and 2016/17, therefore the numbers for ketamine seizures, all Class B seizures and total seizures will differ from previous publications.

3 Quantity of drugs seized

The quantity of drugs seized tends to fluctuate from year to year, and trends do not necessarily move in line with the number of seizures made. Annual totals of the quantity of drugs seized can be greatly influenced by a small number of large seizures. As with the number of drug seizures, any large quantity of drugs seized should not be taken as an indication of drug prevalence or availability.

The quantities of drugs seized are summarised in terms of kilograms, doses (in thousands) or plants, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Drugs summarised in kilograms, doses and plants

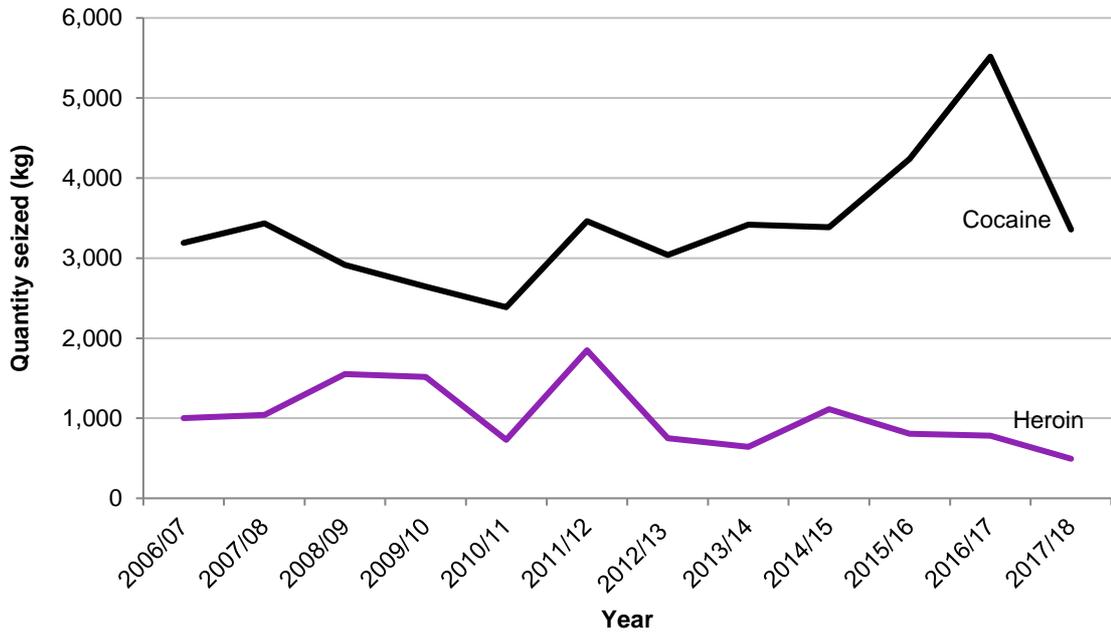
Summarised in kilograms	Summarised in thousands of doses	Summarised as plants
Amphetamines	Anabolic steroids	Cannabis plants
Herbal cannabis	Barbiturates	
Cannabis resin	Benzodiazepines	
Cocaine	Ecstasy	
Crack	LSD	
GHB	Methadone	
Heroin	Morphine	
Ketamine	Temazepam	

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 to estimate the overall quantity of drugs seized. See page 11 of the [user guide](#) for more information.

Class A drugs

- In 2017/18, 3,359 kilograms (kg) of cocaine were seized by the police and Border Force. This represents a 39% decrease on the previous year (5,516 kg), which was the largest quantity of cocaine seized since 2003. As shown in Figure 3.1, the quantity of cocaine seized in 2017/18 is similar to the quantities that were seized each year between 2011/12 and 2014/15.
- In 2017/18 the quantity of cocaine seized by Border Force decreased by 41% compared with 2016/17 (from 4,503 kg to 2,660 kg), while the quantity of cocaine seized by police forces decreased by 31% (from 1,013 kg to 699 kg).
- In 2017/18, 494 kg of heroin were seized by police forces and Border Force, a 37% decrease on 2016/17 when 783 kg were seized. There were 64 kg of crack seized in 2017/18, 25 kg more than in 2016/17 (a 64% increase).

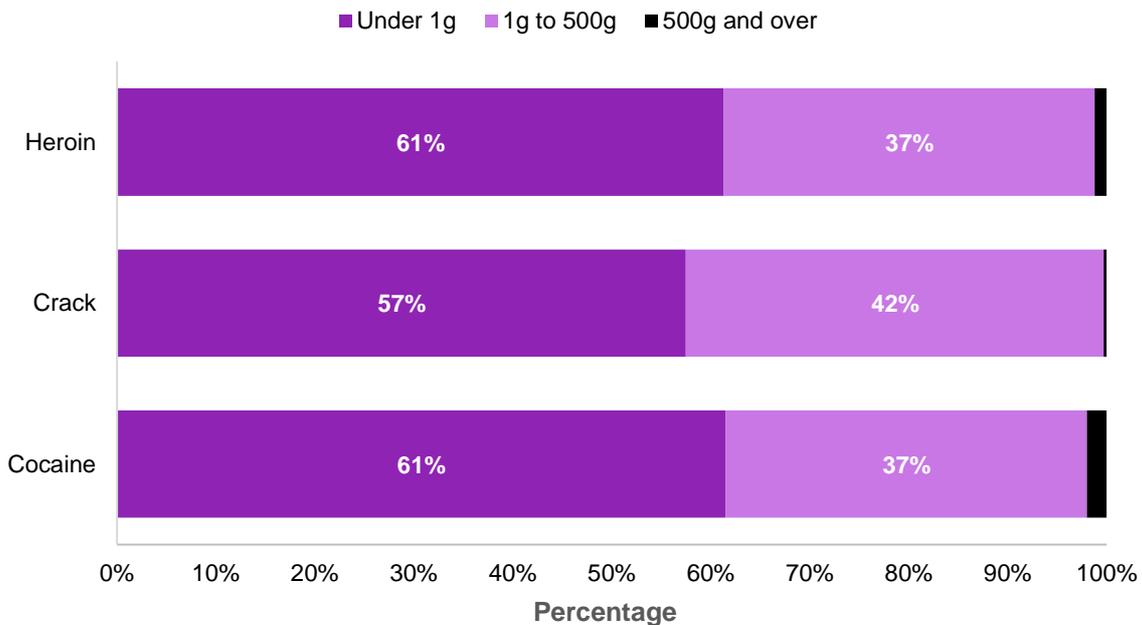
Figure 3.1 Quantity of cocaine and heroin seized, 2006/07 to 2017/18, police forces and Border Force



Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 2](#).

- As shown in Figure 3.2, 61% of heroin seizures in 2017/18 weighed under one gram, 37% weighed between 1g to 499g, and the remaining 2% weighed 500 grams or more. The distributions of crack and cocaine seizures by weight were similar, with 57% and 61% weighing less than one gram each respectively.

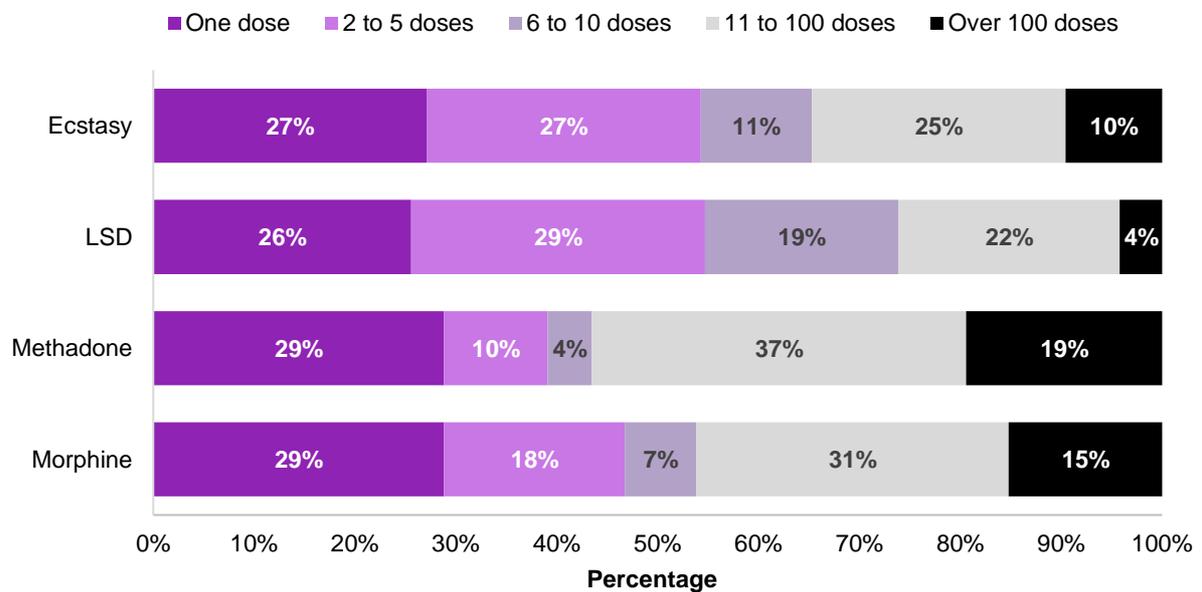
Figure 3.2 Distribution of quantities of Class A drugs seized, summarised in grams, 2017/18, police forces and Border Force



Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 3](#). Numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- There was an increase of 37% in the quantity of ecstasy seized in 2017/18 compared with 2016/17, from 498,331 doses to 682,864 doses. As shown in Figure 3.3, 65% of ecstasy seizures in 2017/18 involved 10 or fewer doses, and 10% involved over 100 doses.

Figure 3.3 Distribution of quantities of Class A drugs seized, summarised in doses, 2017/18, police forces and Border Force



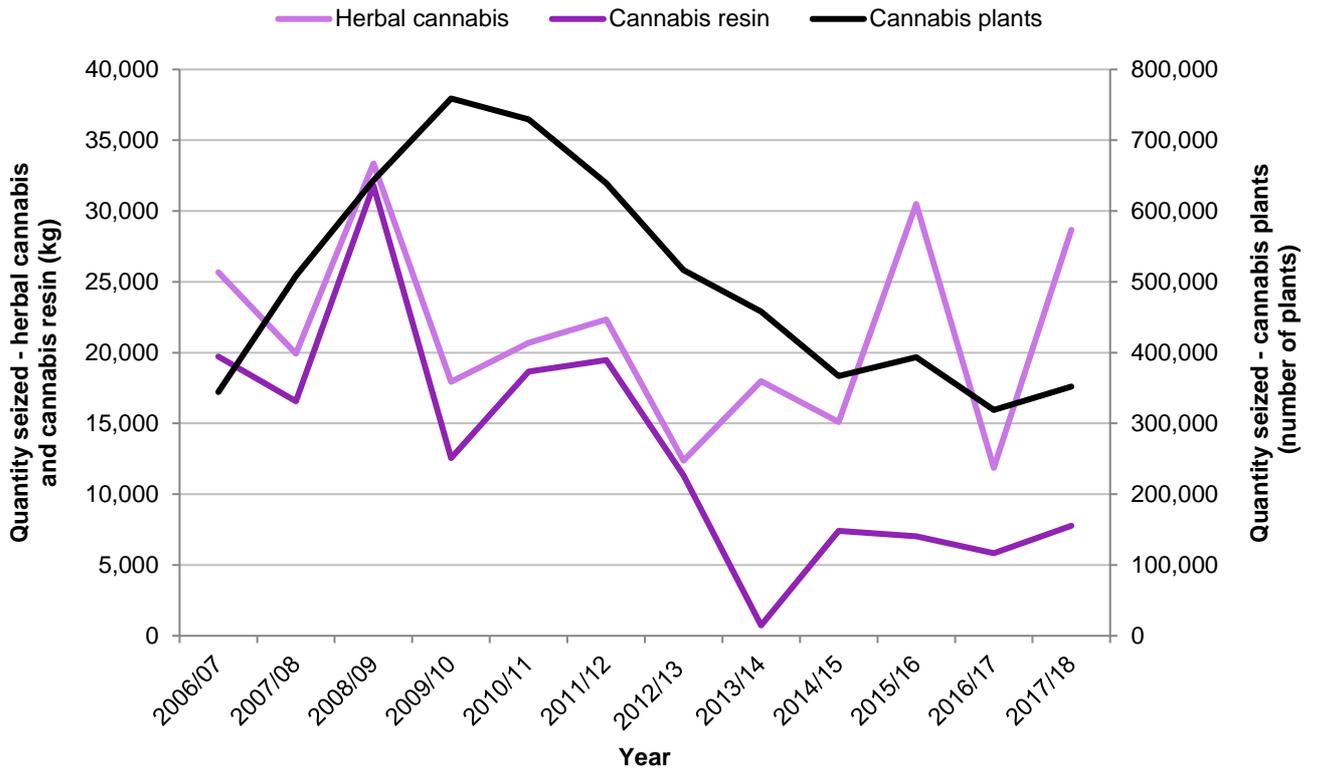
Source: Home Office, [Supplementary Table 2](#). Numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Class B drugs

Cannabis

- The total quantity of herbal cannabis seized in 2017/18 rose by 142% from the previous year, from 11,861 kg to 28,666 kg. As shown in Figure 3.4, this is after a considerable fall in the quantity of herbal cannabis seized in 2016/17 compared with 2015/16 (from 30,493 kg to 11,861 kg, a fall of 61%).
- The increase over the last year is driven by Border Force seizures of herbal cannabis, which rose by 206% over this period, from 8,370 kg to 25,585 kg. This was due to an overall increase in the average quantity per seizure, rather than being due to one or two particularly large seizures (the largest two seizures in 2017/18 were for 1,060 kg and 847 kg).
- The quantity of cannabis resin seized increased by 33% compared with last year, from 5,838 kg to 7,781 kg. The quantity of cannabis resin seized by Border Force increased by 61%, (from 4,414 kg to 7,126 kg), compared with a decrease of 54% for police forces (from 1,423 kg to 655 kg).
- In 2017/18, a total of 351,881 cannabis plants were seized, an increase of 10% since 2016/17 when 318,988 plants were seized. This was driven by an 18% increase in large seizures of over 100 plants, from 629 seizures in 2016/17 to 742 in 2017/18.

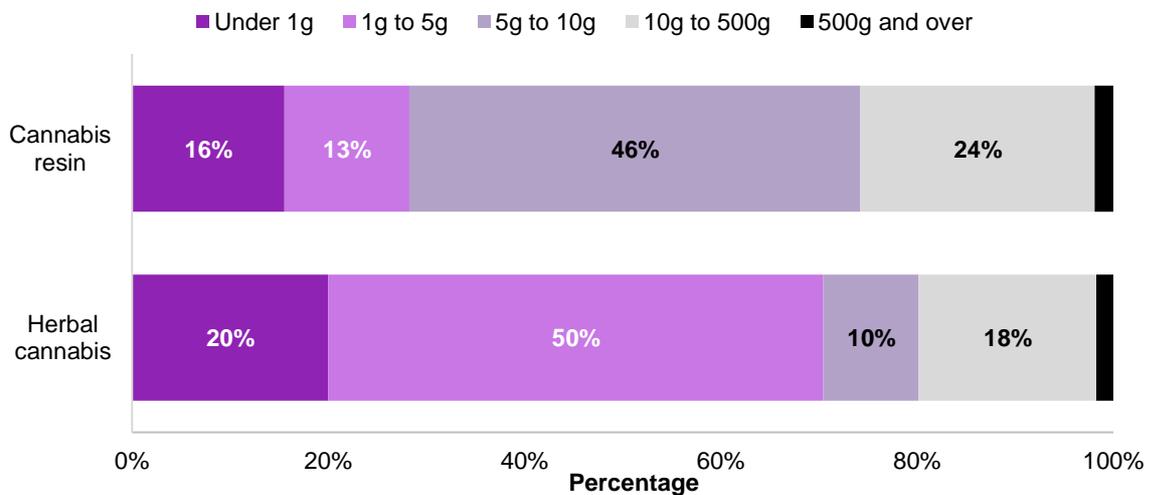
Figure 3.4 Quantity of cannabis seized, 2006/07 to 2017/18, police forces and Border Force



Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 2](#).

- As shown in Figure 3.5, 16% of cannabis resin seizures in 2017/18 weighed less than one gram, 13% weighed between 1 gram and 5 grams, and the remaining 71% weighed 5 grams or more.
- In contrast, 20% of herbal cannabis seizures weighed less than one gram, 50% weighed between 1 gram and 5 grams, and the remaining 30% weighed 5 grams or more.

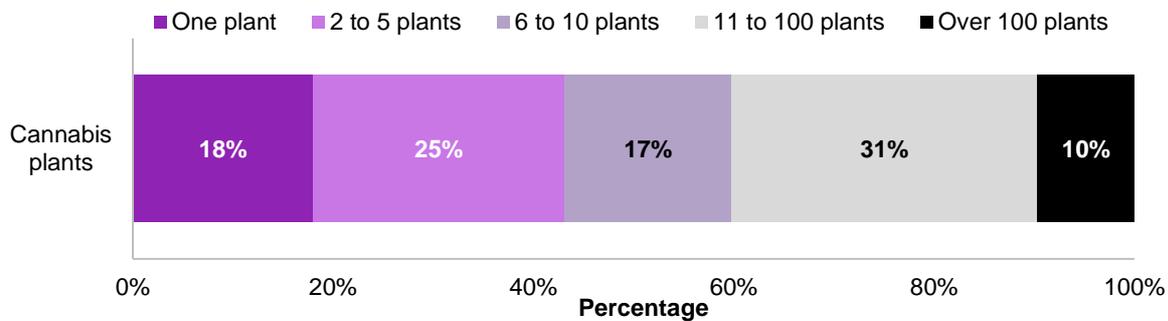
Figure 3.5 Distribution of quantities of herbal cannabis and cannabis resin seized, 2017/18, police forces and Border Force



Source: Home Office, [Supplementary Table 2](#). Numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- As shown in Figure 3.6, 43% of cannabis plant seizures involved five plants or fewer in 2017/18, 17% involved 6 to 10 plants, and the remaining 41% involved 11 plants or more.

Figure 3.6 Distribution of quantities of cannabis plants seized, 2017/18, police forces and Border Force



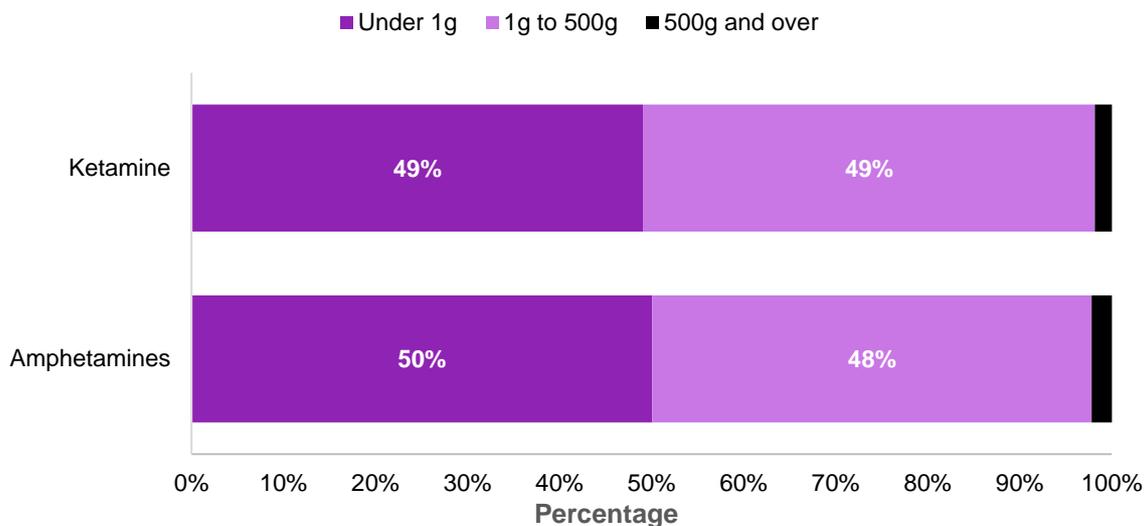
Source: Home Office, [Supplementary Table 2](#). Numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Other Class B drugs

- There were 247 kg of ketamine seized in 2017/18, a 3% decrease from 2016/17 when 253 kg were seized¹¹. This was driven by a fall in the quantity seized by Border Force (from 198 kg to 114 kg), while there was an increase in the quantity seized by police forces (from 55 kg to 132 kg). Three-quarters of the total quantity of ketamine seized by police forces was made in a single seizure (100 kg) by Derbyshire police force.
- In 2017/18, there were 1,593 kg of amphetamines seized, a 28% increase on 2016/17, when 1,242 kg were seized. This is the highest quantity of amphetamines seized since 2008/09, when 2,939 kg were seized.
- As shown in Figure 3.7, the majority of seizures of ketamine and amphetamines weighed less than 500 grams; with 49% of ketamine seizures and 50% of amphetamines seizures weighing less than one gram.

¹¹ Border Force have resubmitted ketamine data for 2014/15, 2015/16, and 2016/17, therefore the quantities for ketamine, all Class B and total seizures will differ from previous publications.

Figure 3.7 Distribution of quantities of ‘Other Class B’ drugs seized, 2017/18, police forces and Border Force

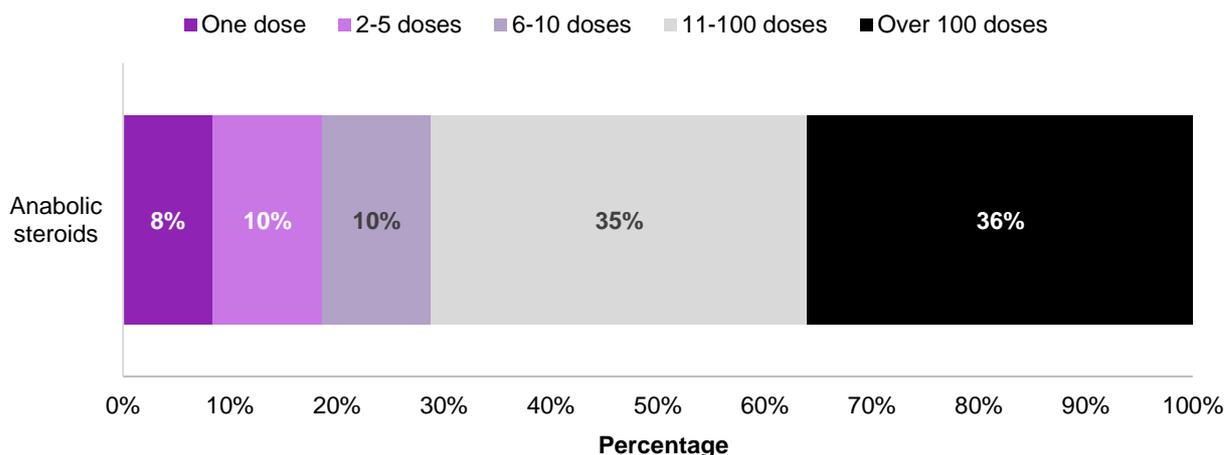


Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 3](#). Numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Class C drugs

- The total quantity of anabolic steroids seized decreased from 5.2 million doses in 2016/17 to 1.7 million doses in 2017/18, a fall of 66%. However, the quantity of anabolic steroids seized in 2016/17 was the second highest since 2007/08.
- As shown in Figure 3.8, 28% of seizures involved 10 doses or less of anabolic steroids in 2017/18, 35% involved 11 to 100 doses, and the remaining 36% involved over 100 doses.

Figure 3.8 Distribution of quantities of anabolic steroids, 2017/18, police forces and Border Force



Source: Home Office, [Supplementary Table 2](#). Numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- The total quantity of benzodiazepines seized decreased by 3% between 2016/17 and 2017/18, from 567,438 doses to 547,963 doses.
- The quantity of GHB seized decreased from 10 kg in 2016/17 to 1 kilogram in 2017/18.

- There were 4,085 doses of temazepam seized in 2017/18, a 297% increase from 2016/17 when 1,029 doses were seized. This was largely driven by one seizure of over 2,500 doses made by Durham police force, which accounted for nearly two-thirds of all police seizures of temazepam in 2017/18.

4 Seizures by authority

This chapter looks at the seizures of drugs by authority, separating seizures made by Border Force from those seizures made by the police. Seizures from joint operations involving Border Force and the police are recorded against the lead agency that takes possession of the seized drugs. Although Border Force will have made seizures outside the land territory of England and Wales (e.g. Scotland, Northern Ireland), such seizures are excluded from figures presented in this publication.

Number of seizures

Table 4.1 shows the number of seizures made by police forces and Border Force for each class of drug. In 2017/18, 95% of seizures were made by police forces (129,183); the remaining 5% (6,545) were made by Border Force.

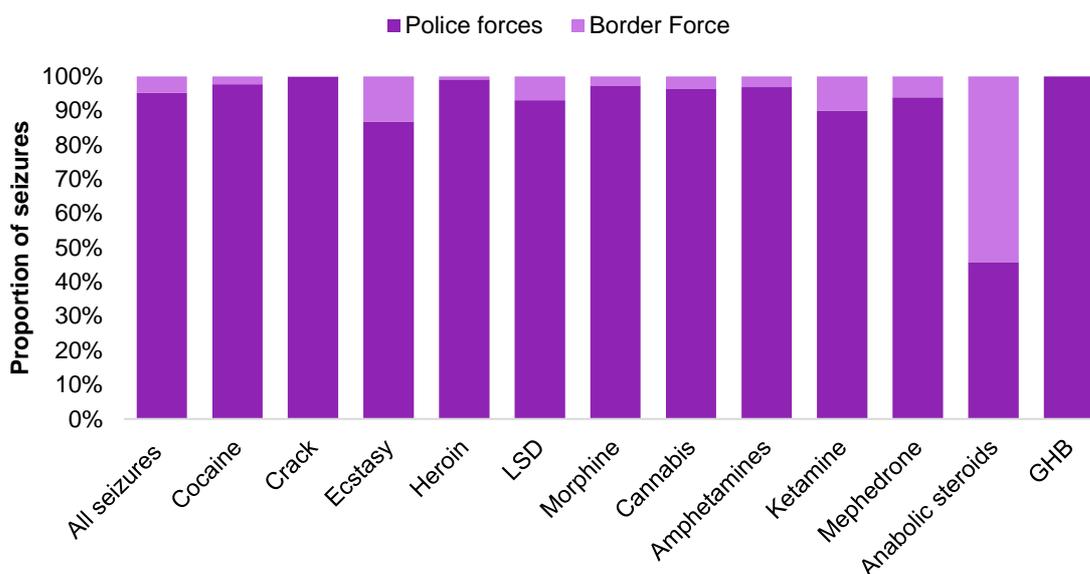
Table 4.1 Number of seizures made by police forces and Border Force, 2016/17 to 2017/18

	Police forces			Border Force		
	2016/17	2017/18	% change	2016/17	2017/18	% change
Class A	28,125	28,217	0	1,682	1,224	-27
Class B	100,693	98,829	-2	3,607	3,892	8
Class C	3,501	3,601	3	1,515	1,487	-2
All	132,283	129,183	-2	6,736	6,545	-3

Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 2](#).

- The total number of seizures made by police forces in England and Wales fell by 2% in 2017/18 compared with 2016/17, whilst the total number of seizures made by Border Force over the same time period fell by 3%.
- Police forces accounted for 96% of all seizures of Class A drugs, 96% of all seizures of Class B drugs and 71% of seizures of Class C drugs, which is similar to previous years.
- For Class A seizures, police forces were responsible for almost 100% of crack cocaine seizures, and the majority of heroin (99%), cocaine (98%), morphine (97%), LSD (93%) and ecstasy (87%) seizures, as shown in Figure 4.1.
- For Class B seizures, police forces were responsible for 96% of cannabis and 97% of amphetamine seizures.
- For Class C seizures, Border Force were responsible for 54% of anabolic steroids seizures and 45% of seizures of "Other Class C" drugs (including Benzodiazepines and Temazepam).

Figure 4.1 Proportion of drug seizure numbers by drug type and authority, 2017/18



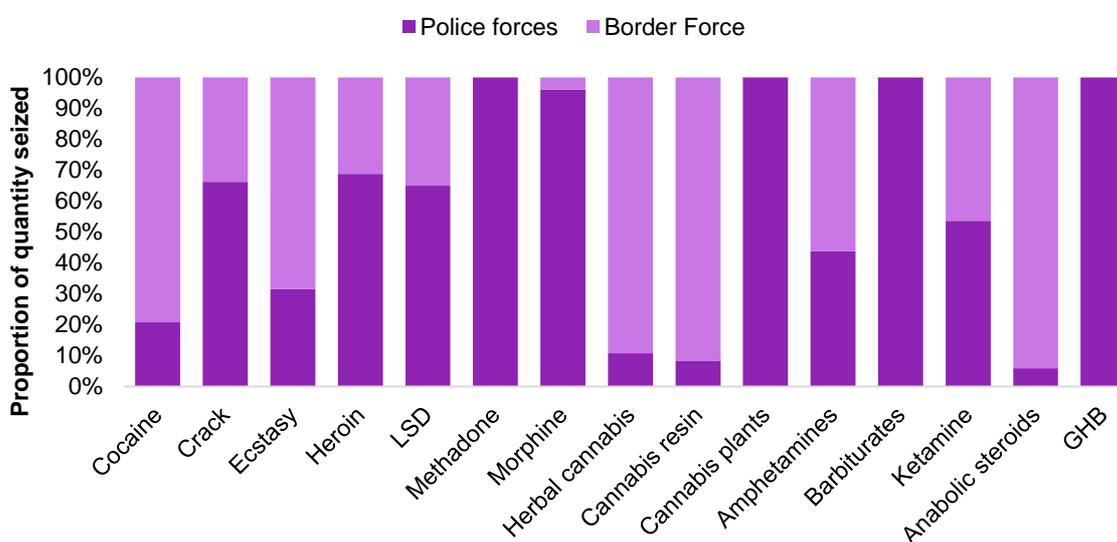
Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 4](#).

Quantity of seizures

Although Border Force accounted for just 5% of drug seizures in 2017/18, the proportion they seized in terms of quantity was much larger. This is because the agency is often involved in operations where large quantities of drugs are seized, for example at airports or ferry ports.

- For Class A seizures, Border Force seized 79% of cocaine (2,660 kg), 68% of ecstasy (467,194 doses) and 31% of heroin (154 kg), as shown in Figure 4.2.
- For Class B seizures, Border Force seized 89% of herbal cannabis (25,585 kg), 92% of cannabis resin (7,126 kg), and 56% of amphetamines (894 kg).
- For Class C seizures, Border Force seized 94% of anabolic steroids (1.6 million doses).

Figure 4.2 Proportion of drug seizure quantities by drug type and authority, 2017/18



Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 5](#).

In general, Border Force seized much larger quantities of drugs, per seizure, than police forces. For drugs measured in grams, 31% of seizures by police forces weighed under one gram, compared with 2% of seizures made by Border Force. For drugs measured in doses, 84% of seizures by police forces involved fewer than 50 doses, compared with 28% of seizures made by Border Force. A further breakdown by drug type is provided in Figure 4.3 to Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.3 Distribution of drug seizure quantities of cocaine by authority, 2017/18

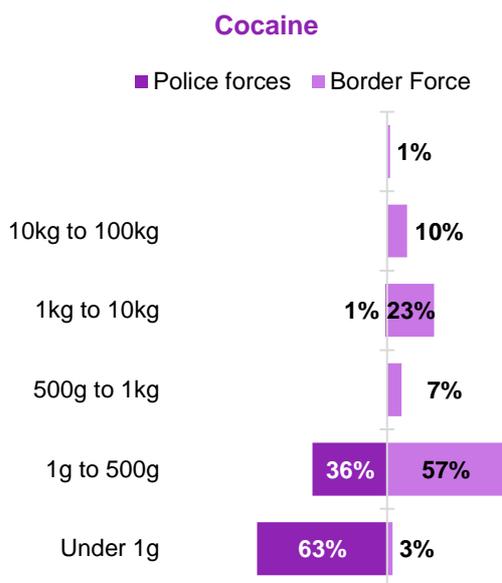


Figure 4.4 Distribution of drug seizure quantities of heroin by authority, 2017/18

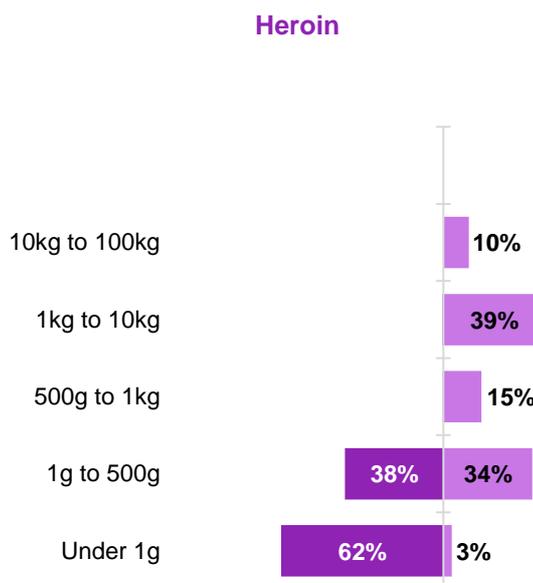


Figure 4.5 Distribution of drug seizure quantities of herbal cannabis by authority, 2017/18

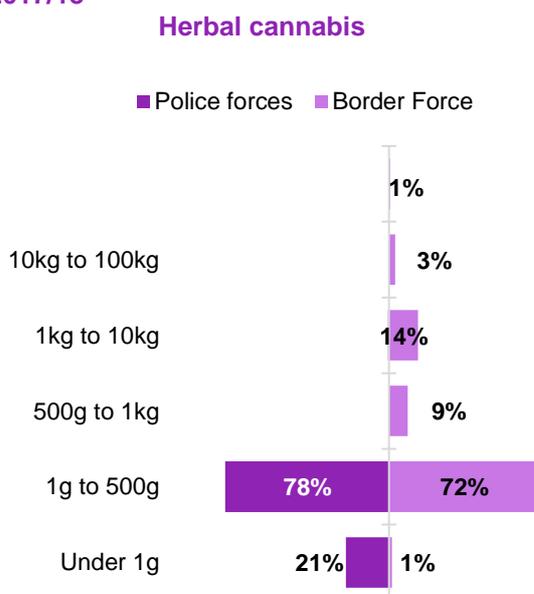
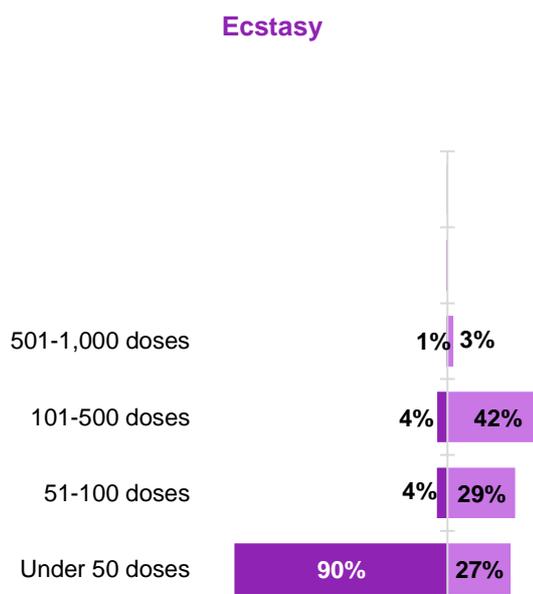


Figure 4.6 Distribution of drug seizure quantities of ecstasy by authority, 2017/18



Source: Home Office, [Summary Table 3](#). Numbers may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

5 New Psychoactive Substances

Psychoactive Substances Act 2016

The [Psychoactive Substances Act 2016](#) (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). The PSA created a blanket ban on the production, distribution, sale and supply of psychoactive substances in the United Kingdom for human consumption.

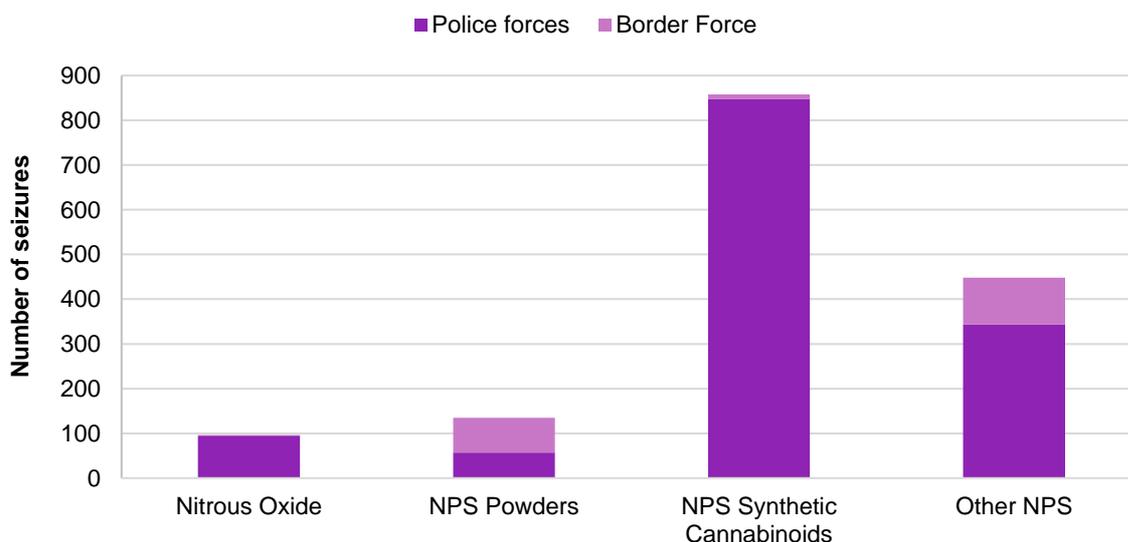
In 2017/18, figures for seizures of drugs in scope of the PSA are presented in this publication for the first time. This is the first year that data on these substances, referred to as new psychoactive substances (NPS), have been recorded systematically across police forces¹² and Border Force. These data have therefore been designated as Experimental Statistics, as they are not yet fully developed and do not meet the rigorous quality standards of Official Statistics.

Seizures of NPS have been grouped into four categories: nitrous oxide, NPS powders, synthetic cannabinoids and other NPS (including pills). Since the PSA was introduced, the 'third generation' of synthetic cannabinoids has been controlled as Class B substances in December 2016¹³. This means that seizures of synthetic cannabinoids may have been recorded as NPS, or may alternatively have been recorded as 'Other Class B' substances, so these figures should be treated with caution.

Number of NPS seizures

- In total, there were 1,523 seizures of NPS in 2017/18. As shown in Figure 5.1, synthetic cannabinoids were most often seized (858 seizures¹⁴), followed by other NPS (448 seizures), NPS powders (135 seizures) and nitrous oxide (96 seizures).
- Police forces were responsible for 99% of nitrous oxide seizures, 99% of synthetic cannabinoid seizures, 77% of other NPS seizures and 42% of NPS powder seizures.

Figure 5.1 Number of NPS drug seizures by drug type and authority, 2017/18



Source: Home Office, [Appendix Table 1](#).

¹² Hampshire and Kent police forces were unable to supply data on NPS seizures for 2017/18.

¹³ [Explanatory Memorandum](#), Home Office, 2016.

¹⁴ This is the number of synthetic cannabinoid seizures that were recorded as NPS. An additional 853 seizures were recorded by police forces as Class B synthetic cannabinoids.

Quantity of NPS seizures

The quantities of drugs seized are summarised in terms of kilograms (kg) for NPS powders and synthetic cannabinoids, and are summarised in doses for nitrous oxide. Because 'other NPS' consists of a range of different substances it could not be summarised into one overall unit, so separate figures for kilograms and doses have been provided for this category.

- As shown in Figure 5.2, a total of 23,157 doses of nitrous oxide were seized by police forces in 2017/18¹⁵, of which 42% (9,642 doses), were seized by the Metropolitan Police.
- A total of 511 kg of NPS powders were seized, of which almost 100% was seized by Border Force, with police forces seizing under 1 kg.
- A total of 100 kg of synthetic cannabinoids were seized, of which 98% (98 kg) were seized by police forces.
- A total of 2,884 doses of other NPS were seized, of which 95% (2,744 kg) were seized by police forces. A total of 585 kg of other NPS were seized, of which almost 100% (583 kg) were seized by Border Force.

Figure 5.2 Quantities of NPS drugs seized by drug type and authority, summarised in doses, 2017/18

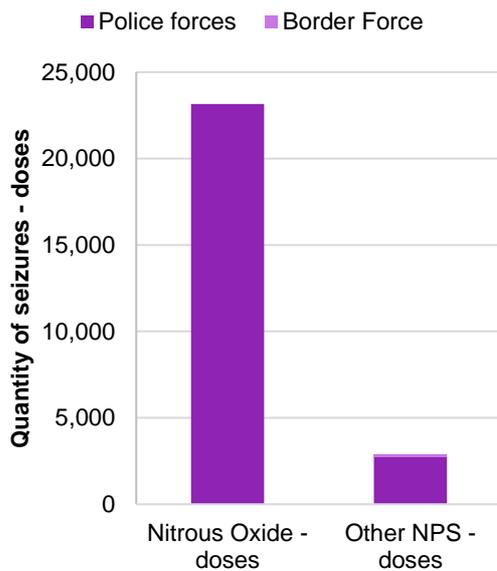
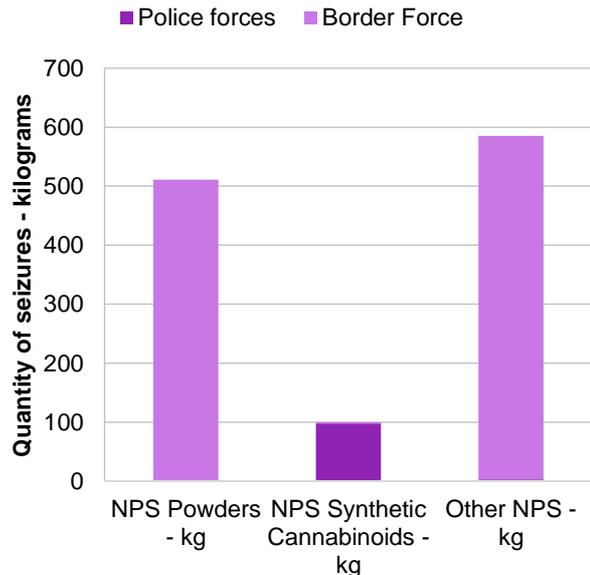


Figure 5.3 Quantities of NPS drugs seized by drug type and authority, summarised in kilograms, 2017/18



Source: Home Office, [Appendix Table 2](#).

¹⁵ Border Force were unable to supply quantity data for nitrous oxide in 2017/18.

6 Data quality and interpreting the figures

The statistics in *Seizures of drugs in England and Wales* relate to the seizures of drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) 1971, which came into force on 1 July 1973, and the Psychoactive Substances Act (PSA) 2016, which came into force on 26 May 2016. They cover seizures made during the year by police forces in England and Wales (including the British Transport Police) and Border Force (formerly part of the UK Border Agency). Although Border Force will have made seizures outside the land territory of England and Wales (e.g. Scotland, Northern Ireland), such seizures are excluded from figures presented in the publication. Seizures from joint operations involving Border Force and the police are recorded against the lead agency that takes possession of the seized drugs.

Where a seizure is made of a drug not separately listed in this bulletin, it is aggregated into an 'other' category based on its class, for example 'Other Class A' for Class A drugs. Further information on drugs covered under the MDA, including a link to the full list of drugs covered, is available at: [Misuse of Drugs Act 1971](#). Information on the scope of the PSA is available at: [Psychoactive Substances Act 2016](#). Details about the counting rules used for calculating numbers of seizures in this bulletin are included in the [user guide](#).

Imputation

One police force (Kent) was unable to provide fully accurate data for the 2017/18 period. As a result, data and imputation methods have been used to estimate data for this force. Further information on estimations, including those made in previous years, can be found in the introduction of the [user guide](#).

Revision policy

Police forces have the opportunity to resubmit historical data whenever they wish. All figures quoted in this release are correct at the time of publication and reflect the latest revisions made by police forces; therefore, figures published in this release supersede all previous published data. Data for Border Force is only revised once (the year after the period they refer to). However, this year revisions for ketamine were submitted by Border Force for 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Since the 2016/17 release, it has been identified that Summary Table 3 and Supplementary Table 2 did not include imputed data for Kent police force. Revised tables which include the imputed figures for Kent have therefore been included in the tables for this year's release.

Further information on the data collection process, and quality assurance of the data, can be found in Appendix A of the [user guide](#).

7 Other data sources

Seizures by police in Scotland and Northern Ireland

As well as providing a comparison to seizures in England and Wales, drug seizure figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland give a more complete UK-wide picture. Data relating to seizures of drugs by the police in Scotland are collected and published by the Scottish Government¹⁶.

Prior to 2014/15, the Scottish Government used the same counting rules and broad methodology as for England and Wales. However, since then they have changed the data collection process, splitting seizures into supply and possession offences, and using extrapolation methods to estimate the latter from a sample. As a result, the figures from Scotland are not directly comparable with those from England and Wales.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland¹⁷ (PSNI) collects and publishes data on drug seizures by police in Northern Ireland, and they are also presented on the same basis as those for England and Wales.

Border Force seizures

Seizures made by Border Force officials outside England and Wales (e.g. Scotland, Northern Ireland) are excluded from figures presented in this statistical release. A quarterly breakdown of Border Force seizures in the UK is available online as part of their regular key performance indicators¹⁸.

Misuse of drugs

The extent and trends in illicit drug use among adults aged 16 to 59, measured by the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), are published separately by the Home Office¹⁹. According to the 2017/18 CSEW, around 1 in 11 (9.0%) adults had taken any illicit drug in the last year, similar to 2016/17 (8.5%) and similar to a decade ago (9.4% in the 2007/08 survey).

¹⁶ Latest drug seizure statistics for Scotland were published in March 2018 and are available online at: [The Scottish Government website](#).

¹⁷ Latest drug seizure statistics for Northern Ireland are published monthly, and are available online at: [Police Service of Northern Ireland website](#).

¹⁸ Border Force publishes data on its key performance indicators at [Border Force transparency data](#).

¹⁹ See the latest edition of 'Drug Misuse: Findings from the 2017/18 Crime Survey for England and Wales', available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/drug-misuse-findings-from-the-2017-to-2018-csew>

Statistical Bulletins are prepared by staff in Home Office Crime and Policing Statistics under the Official Statistics Code of Practice and can be downloaded from GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office/about/statistics>

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