

# **Knife Possession Sentencing Quarterly Brief January to March 2013 England and Wales**

Ministry of Justice  
Statistics Bulletin

Published 6 June 2013

# Contents

Introduction	3
Key findings	6
Appendix A: Statistical Tables	12
Explanatory notes	22
Glossary	24
Contact points for further information	27

## Introduction

This bulletin presents key statistics describing the trends in cautioning and sentencing, probation supervision and the prison population for possession of a knife or offensive weapon in England and Wales. This bulletin does not cover all knife crimes (offences involving a knife) as published by the Office for National Statistics<sup>1</sup>. Details of other official statistics publications regarding knife related statistics can be found on page 27 of this bulletin.

The information presented combines both offences of possession of an article with a blade or point and offences of possession of an offensive weapon (which could be a knife). The detailed offence codes used in this bulletin are outlined in the glossary section.

Also included in this bulletin for the first time are the recently introduced offences of aggravated possession of a knife or offensive weapon. These are included in their own separate table and are not included in other totals to ensure consistent comparisons.

### Recent Developments

- **Revision to published figures**

Since the last release of this bulletin, an error has been identified within some of the data recorded on the Police National Computer (PNC) by Essex police force for offences involving the possession of a knife or offensive weapon. The specific error was related to offences dealt with at Stansted airport and resulted in a number of instances where CS gas was found in outbound travellers' baggage being incorrectly recorded on the PNC. These offences should have been recorded on the PNC as a firearms offence but were incorrectly recorded as knife/offensive weapon possession.

Essex police force have now corrected the information held on the PNC for the affected cases and, as a result, the number of knife and offensive weapon offences included within this bulletin has decreased by around 20 to 60 cases per quarter. The recording error was found prior to Q1 2013 data and the information for this quarter is correct. The data prior to this point has been amended accordingly. In addition, there has been a small reduction of around 0.5 to 1 percentage point in the proportion of possession offences resulting in a caution and a compensatory increase in the proportion resulting in custody.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-sept-2012/stb-crime-in-england-and-wales--year-ending-sept-2012.html#tab-Offences-involving-knives-and-sharp-instruments](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-sept-2012/stb-crime-in-england-and-wales--year-ending-sept-2012.html#tab-Offences-involving-knives-and-sharp-instruments)

- **New Offence of aggravated knife Possession (Table 11, page 20)**

From 3 December 2012, new offences of aggravated knife possession came into force as part of the provisions introduced in the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012. Initial disposals given for offenders dealt with against these new offences are included for the first time within this bulletin.

- **Methodological change introduced in Q4 2012**

From the fourth quarter of 2012 the figures presented in this bulletin were based on new estimates of the number and breakdown of disposals given for the possession of a knife or an offensive weapon. The estimates were introduced following a detailed analysis that tracked changes in the disposal figures from those initially published for each quarter to those released over the following year as data held on the PNC was updated with new information.

The background to and methodology used to derive these estimates was published in the previous release of this bulletin – [click here for link](#) – and we will continue to monitor the method use to estimate the final disposal outcomes in future editions to this bulletin to ensure that the estimated figures are realistic.

This statistical brief, along with the full tables (including both current and estimated figures) are available from the Ministry of Justice Website at:

[www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/criminal-justice/knife-possession](http://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/criminal-justice/knife-possession)

The key events that might be expected to affect the statistics were:

- On 21 May 2008, the Court of Appeal issued the judgment in *Povey*<sup>2</sup> that said, because of prevalence, magistrates should normally sentence those convicted of knife crime possession offences at the top end of the range.
- The Sentencing Guidelines Council issued an update to the magistrates' courts guidelines, with effect from 4 August 2008, which set out the effect of the Court of Appeal judgment and made it clear that the starting point for the lowest level of knife possession amongst adults should be 12 weeks' custody.
- This applies in cases where a first time offender pleads not guilty to possession of a knife in non-dangerous circumstances. A guilty plea would attract a discount in the normal way, as would any personal mitigation, and could take the sentence below the custody threshold.

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<sup>2</sup> *Povey & Ors, R. v, Court of Appeal - Criminal Division, May 21, 2008, [2008] EWCA Crim 1261.*

- Since September 2008 all probation areas have been able to provide intensive delivery of 300 hour Community Payback sentences for unemployed offenders convicted of knife crime offences, who are on the brink of custody. In January 2009 this offer of intensive delivery of a minimum of 18 hours per week over three days was extended to Community Payback sentences of any length imposed for an offence of knife crime, when an offender is unemployed.
- **From 3 December 2012 a new offence of aggravated knife possession came into force. Anyone who uses a knife or offensive weapon to threaten and endanger others will face a mandatory custodial sentence.**

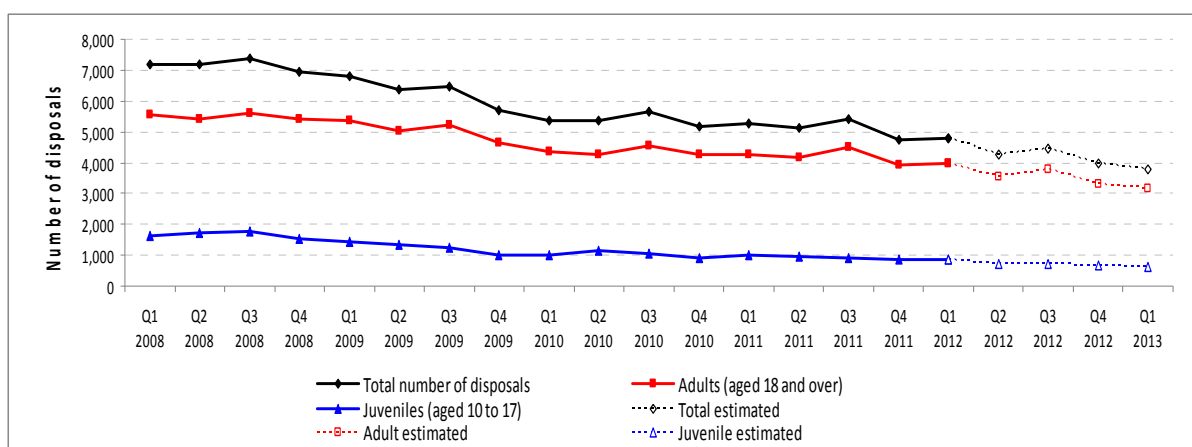
This publication has been prepared by Justice Statistics Analytical Services. If you have any feedback, questions or request for further information about these statistics, please direct them to the appropriate contact given at the end of this report.

## Key findings

Estimates indicate that the final disposal figures for Q1 2013 will show:

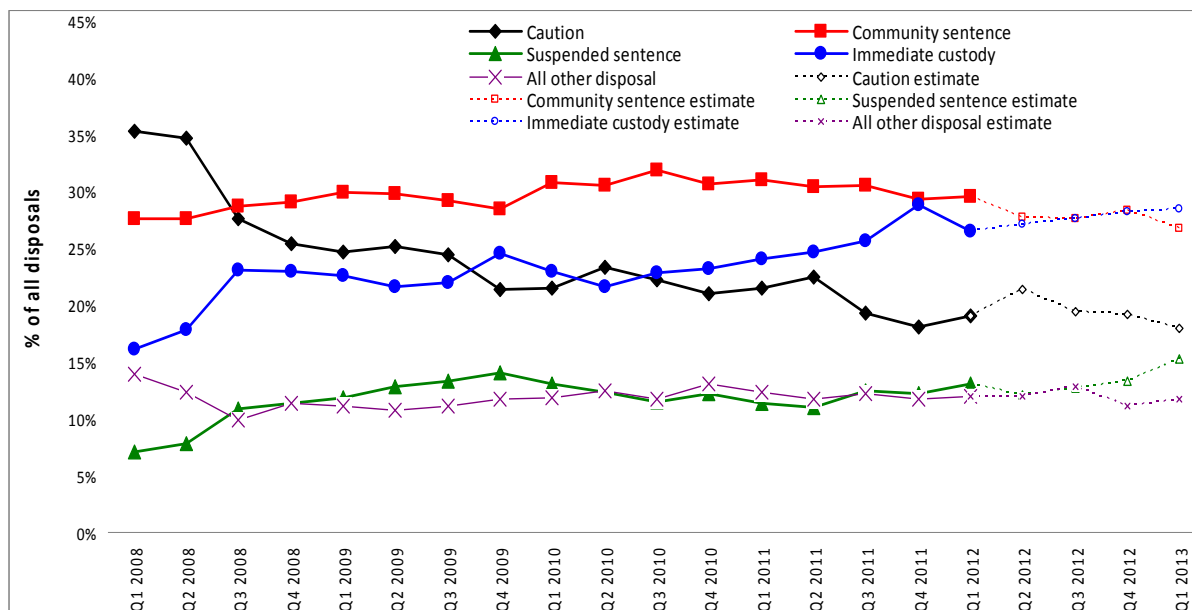
- 3,793 disposals were given for possession of a knife or an offensive weapon, 21 per cent lower than in Q1 2012. The latest result continues the downward trend for the number of cautions or convictions given for these offences over the last four years.

**Figure 1: Number of disposals given for knife and offensive weapon possession by age, in England and Wales, between Q1 2008 and Q1 2013**



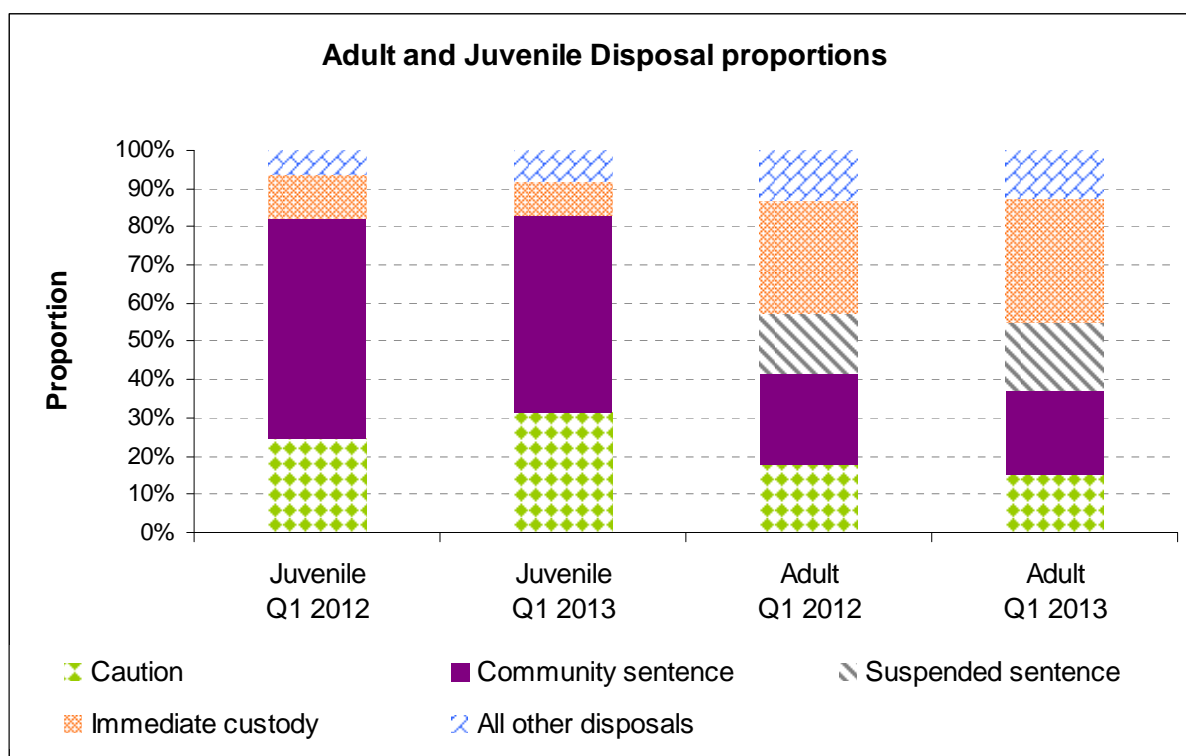
- The most common methods of disposal for possession of a knife or an offensive weapon were an immediate custodial sentence (28 per cent) followed by a community sentence (27 per cent). This is the first quarter where a custodial sentence was the most common disposal.
- The proportion of possession offences resulting in immediate custody has increased since Q1 2012 (from 26 to 28 per cent) as has the proportion resulting in suspended prison sentences. Offsetting this, the proportion of offences resulting in community sentences and cautions have decreased. However, figures for the latest quarter are estimated so may change slightly once final outcomes are known.
- Over the longer term, the proportion of possession offences resulting in an immediate custody has increased since 2007 - particularly during 2008 when changes were made to the sentencing guidelines for knife possession as outlined earlier in this bulletin. Contrasting to this, the proportion of possession offences resulting in a police caution has fallen since the end of 2007.

**Figure 2: Proportion of type of disposal given for knife and offensive weapon possession in England and Wales, between Q1 2008 and Q1 2013**



- Around 5 times as many adults (3,170) were cautioned or convicted for possession offences than juveniles (623) - a ratio that has generally been increasing over the last 4 years as the number of juveniles cautioned or convicted has fallen at a faster rate than for adults. Since Q1 2012, the number of disposals given to juveniles for possession offences dropped by 26 per cent while, for adults, the number fell by 20 per cent.
- Over half of all juveniles (51 per cent) receiving disposals for possession offences were given a community sentence, while a further third (32 per cent) were given a reprimand or a warning. 9 per cent were given an immediate custodial sentence, down 3 percentage points since Q1 2012 but unchanged from Q1 2011. The proportion of community sentences given to juveniles is at its lowest point for 2 years while the proportion of reprimands and warnings given are at their highest level for 2 years.
- Amongst adult offenders, nearly a third were given an immediate custodial sentence (32 per cent) following a steady increase since Q1 2010 (26 per cent). Proportions of both community sentences and cautions have fallen in the last year - 22 per cent of offenders were given a community sentence, while 15 per cent were given a caution.

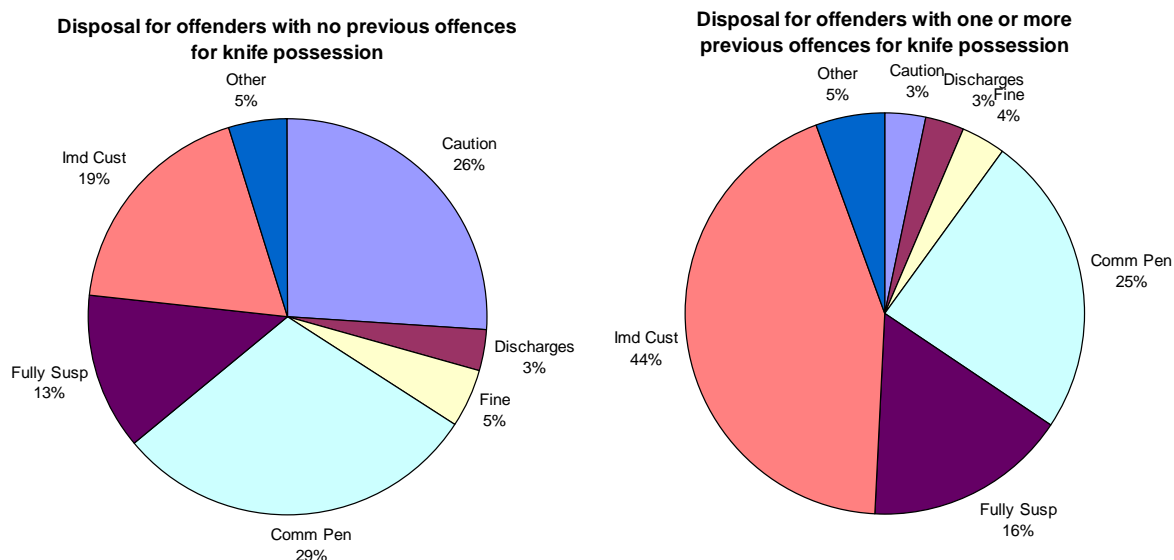
**Figure 3: Proportion of type of disposal given for knife and offensive weapon possession for juveniles and adults, in England and Wales, Q1 2012 and Q1 2013**



- The types of disposal given for possession are correlated with the number of previous possession offences offenders have been convicted or cautioned for. For offenders with no previous offences for possession of a knife or offensive weapon, 26 per cent received a caution in the 12 months ending March 2013 whereas 29 per cent received a community sentence and 19 per cent were given immediate custody. However, for offenders with at least one previous possession offence on their record, 44 per cent were sentenced to immediate custody in 2013, while only 3 per cent received a caution.
- Juvenile offenders having more than one previous knife possession offence on their record are most likely to receive a community sentence (59%) or immediate custody (27%). Only 2 per cent of those juvenile offenders with one previous offence received a caution.
- The custody rate of adult offenders rises in line with their number of previous possession offences, with 60 per cent of those offenders with 3 or more previous offences receiving an immediate custody sentence compared to 22 per cent for those with no previous offence.

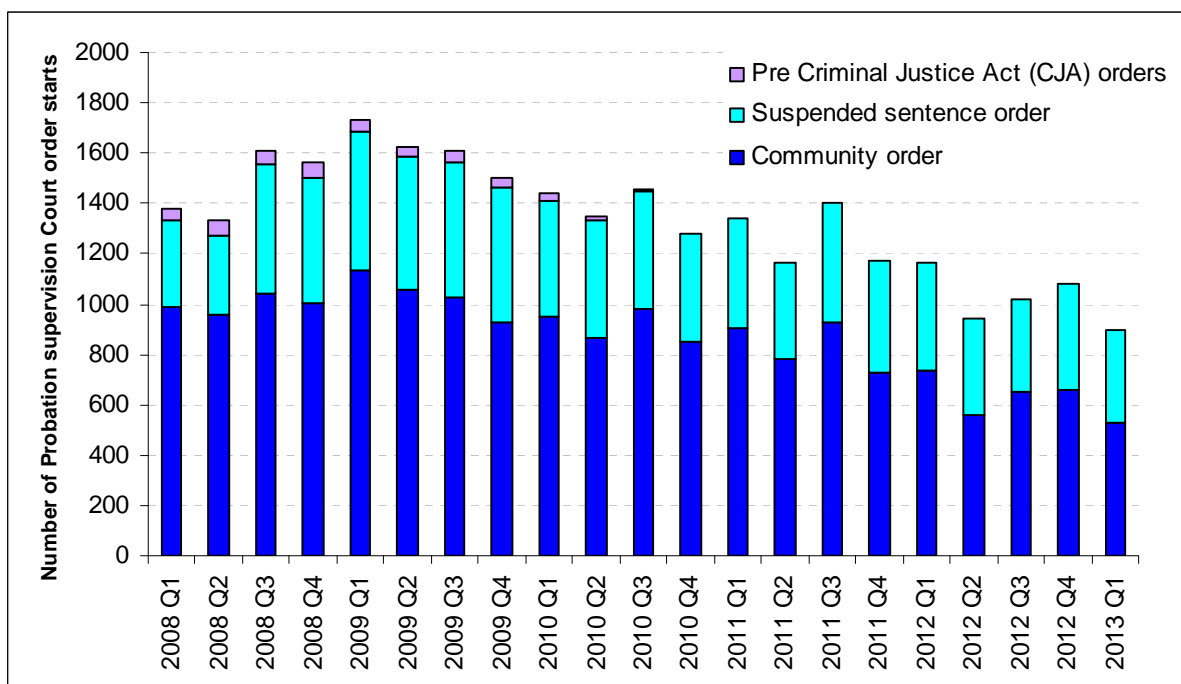


**Figure 4: Number of previous convictions or cautions for the possession of a knife or offensive weapon for offenders convicted or cautioned for the possession offences, in England and Wales in 12 months ending March 2013**



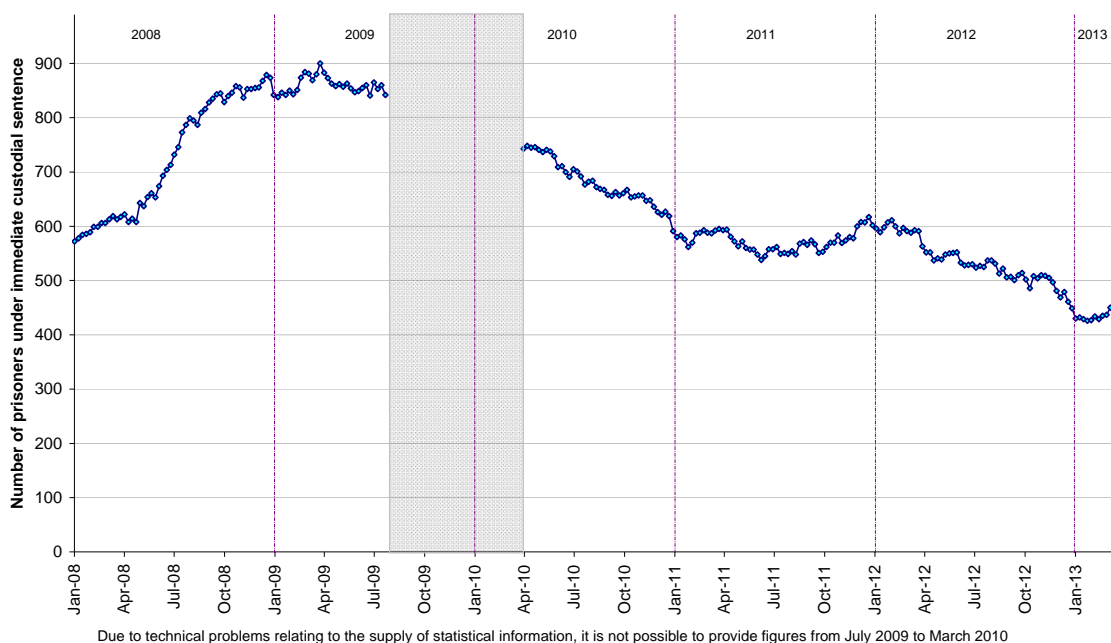
- Immediate custodial sentences given for possession offences were for 235 days, or 7.7 months, on average. This is 17 per cent longer than average sentence lengths given in Q1 2012 and continues the increasing trend seen over the last 4 years. Average sentence lengths for possession offences are now around 78 per cent, or over 3 months, longer than they were at the end of 2007.
- 895 offenders started a court order under probation supervision for possession offences. This is down 23 per cent from Q1 2012 and 33 per cent from Q1 2011 and is likely to be related primarily to the reductions in the number of possession offences dealt with over this period.

**Figure 5: Number of offenders commencing a court order under probation supervision for possession of an offensive weapon, in England and Wales from Q1 2008 to Q1 2013**



- The most common requirements placed on offenders starting court orders for possession offences were supervision - 36 per cent of suspended sentence orders (SSOs) and 35 per cent of community orders (COs) - and unpaid work - 24 per cent of SSOs and 30 per cent of COs. The use of unpaid work as a requirement has fallen over recent years – down 3 percentage points for SSOs since Q1 2011 and 4 points for COs over the same period.
- Where unpaid work requirements were placed upon those starting a community order for possession offences, 40 per cent were for less than 80 hours and 41 per cent were for 81 to 150 hours. For those starting suspended sentence orders, 25 per cent were for under 80 hours and 51 per cent were for 81 to 150 hours.
- 445 offenders were in prison serving a sentence for possession of an offensive weapon on 31 March 2013, down 21 per cent from 563 a year ago and continuing the reductions seen in the prison population for this offence since early 2009. This trend comes despite the generally increasing use and length of custodial sentences for possession offences, and is likely to be primarily related to the reductions in the total number of offences dealt with over the period.

**Figure 6: Prison population under sentence for possession of an offensive weapon<sup>3</sup> (excludes recalls) in England and Wales, between 2008 and March 2013**



**New aggravated knife or offensive weapon possession offences:**

- At present, 18 offenders (7 juveniles, 11 adults) have been dealt with in relation to one of the new aggravated knife possession offences that came into effect from 3 December 2012.
- Of those juveniles dealt with, 2 received a reprimand or warning, while 2 received an immediate custodial sentence. Amongst the 11 adults, 6 received a custodial sentence.
- Due to the small number of completed cases, it is not possible to make any further comparisons of these data.

<sup>3</sup> Includes having an article with a blade or a point.

## Appendix A: Statistical Tables

**Table 1: Offences involving the possession of a knife or offensive weapon resulting in a caution or sentence, in England and Wales**

Disposal Category	Number of offences and percentage change							% change, estimated Q1 2013 to Q1 2012
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012 <sup>E</sup>	Q3 2012 <sup>E</sup>	Q4 2012 <sup>E</sup>	Q1 2013 <sup>E</sup>	
<b>Number of offences</b>								
<b>England and Wales<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>5,293</b>	<b>5,234</b>	<b>4,801</b>	<b>4,274</b>	<b>4,462</b>	<b>3,994</b>	<b>3,793</b>	<b>-21%</b>
Caution <sup>2</sup>	1,095	1,090	915	910	863	764	678	-26%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	217	217	175	138	176	112	122	-30%
Fine	221	213	201	185	189	153	170	-15%
Community sentence	1,641	1,633	1,418	1,182	1,232	1,128	1,015	-28%
Suspended sentence	699	596	628	516	564	533	577	-8%
Immediate custody	1,227	1,264	1,268	1,156	1,231	1,127	1,077	-15%
Other disposal	193	221	196	187	207	177	154	-21%
<b>percentage of total offences</b>								
Caution <sup>2</sup>	21%	21%	19%	21%	19%	19%	18%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	3%	3%	
Fine	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	
Community sentence	31%	31%	30%	28%	28%	28%	27%	
Suspended sentence	13%	11%	13%	12%	13%	13%	15%	
Immediate custody	23%	24%	26%	27%	28%	28%	28%	
Other disposal	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	

<sup>1</sup> England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

<sup>2</sup> Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

<sup>E</sup> Denotes where estimated figures have been used. The estimates are based on historical data changes. Please see explanatory notes of bulletin for further details.

**Data Source and Quality**

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information becomes available.

**Table 2: Offences involving the possession of a knife or offensive weapon resulting in a caution or sentence by age group, in England and Wales**

Disposal Category	Number of offences and percentages							% change, estimated Q1 2013 to Q1 2012
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012 <sup>E</sup>	Q3 2012 <sup>E</sup>	Q4 2012 <sup>E</sup>	Q1 2013 <sup>E</sup>	
<b>Number of offences</b>								
<b>Aged 10 to 17</b>	<b>999</b>	<b>993</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>701</b>	<b>667</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>-26%</b>
Reprimands & warnings	308	289	207	229	197	173	197	-5%
Absolute/conditional discharge	21	24	20	9	11	14	21	*
Fine	3	4	2	2	0	1	3	*
Community sentence	545	541	481	386	387	360	320	-33%
Immediate custody	92	93	100	73	76	79	54	-46%
Other disposal	30	42	30	38	30	40	28	*
<b>percentage of total offences</b>								
Reprimands & warnings	31%	29%	25%	31%	28%	26%	32%	
Absolute/conditional discharge	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%	
Fine	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Community sentence	55%	54%	57%	52%	55%	54%	51%	
Immediate custody	9%	9%	12%	10%	11%	12%	9%	
Other disposal	3%	4%	4%	5%	4%	6%	4%	
<b>Number of offences</b>								
<b>Aged 18 and over</b>	<b>4,294</b>	<b>4,230</b>	<b>3,961</b>	<b>3,537</b>	<b>3,761</b>	<b>3,327</b>	<b>3,170</b>	<b>-20%</b>
Caution	787	799	708	681	666	591	481	-32%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	196	192	155	129	165	98	101	-35%
Fine	218	209	199	183	189	152	167	-16%
Community sentence	1,096	1,091	937	796	845	768	695	-26%
Suspended sentence	699	596	628	516	564	533	577	-8%
Immediate custody	1,135	1,170	1,168	1,083	1,155	1,048	1,023	-12%
Other disposal	163	179	166	149	177	137	126	-24%
<b>percentage of total offences</b>								
Caution	18%	19%	18%	19%	18%	18%	15%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	
Fine	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	
Community sentence	26%	26%	24%	23%	22%	23%	22%	
Suspended sentence	16%	14%	16%	15%	15%	16%	18%	
Immediate custody	26%	28%	29%	31%	31%	31%	32%	
Other disposal	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	

<sup>1</sup> The difference between the totals in Table 1 and the adult/juvenile breakdowns is where there is no age recorded on the system. For Q1 2011 five offenders had no age recorded. Two people receiving a caution, one person receiving a custodial sentence.

<sup>E</sup> Denotes where estimated figures have been used. The estimates are based on historical data changes. Please see explanatory notes of bulletin for further details.

\*Indicates that one or more of the comparative numbers are less than 50. For small numbers this could give misleading percentage changes.

**Data Source and Quality**

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information becomes available.

**Table 3: Offences involving the possession of a knife or offensive weapon resulting in a caution or sentence by type of offence, in England and Wales**

Disposal Category	Number of offences and percentages							% change, estimated Q1 2013 to Q1 2012
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012 <sup>E</sup>	Q3 2012 <sup>E</sup>	Q4 2012 <sup>E</sup>	Q1 2013 <sup>E</sup>	
<b>Number of offences</b>								
<b>Possession of an article with a blade or point</b>	<b>2,730</b>	<b>2,835</b>	<b>2,711</b>	<b>2,419</b>	<b>2,520</b>	<b>2,319</b>	<b>2,146</b>	<b>-21%</b>
Caution <sup>1</sup>	409	442	402	404	377	349	281	-30%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	144	139	113	86	98	73	74	-35%
Fine	120	107	123	109	121	93	101	-18%
Community sentence	925	920	828	712	743	686	618	-25%
Suspended sentence	370	358	378	317	332	319	340	-10%
Immediate custody	670	734	750	700	733	693	645	-14%
Other disposal	92	127	117	91	116	106	87	-26%
<b>percentage of total offences</b>								
Caution <sup>1</sup>	15%	16%	15%	17%	15%	15%	13%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	
Fine	4%	4%	5%	5%	5%	4%	5%	
Community sentence	34%	33%	31%	29%	29%	30%	29%	
Suspended sentence	14%	13%	14%	13%	13%	14%	16%	
Immediate custody	25%	26%	28%	29%	29%	30%	30%	
Other disposal	3%	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	4%	
<b>Number of offences</b>								
<b>Possession of an offensive weapon</b>	<b>2,563</b>	<b>2,399</b>	<b>2,090</b>	<b>1,855</b>	<b>1,942</b>	<b>1,675</b>	<b>1,647</b>	<b>-21%</b>
Caution <sup>1</sup>	686	648	513	506	486	415	397	-23%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	73	78	62	52	78	39	48	*
Fine	101	106	78	76	68	60	69	-12%
Community sentence	716	705	590	470	489	442	397	-33%
Suspended sentence	329	238	250	199	232	214	237	-5%
Immediate custody	557	530	518	456	498	434	432	-17%
Other disposal	101	94	79	96	91	71	67	-15%
<b>percentage of total offences</b>								
Caution <sup>1</sup>	27%	27%	25%	27%	25%	25%	24%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	2%	3%	
Fine	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	
Community sentence	28%	29%	28%	25%	25%	26%	24%	
Suspended sentence	13%	10%	12%	11%	12%	13%	14%	
Immediate custody	22%	22%	25%	25%	26%	26%	26%	
Other disposal	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	4%	4%	

<sup>1</sup> Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

<sup>E</sup> Denotes where estimated figures have been used. The estimates are based on historical data changes. Please see explanatory notes of bulletin for further details.

\*Indicates that one or more of the comparative numbers are less than 50. For small numbers this could give misleading percentage changes.

**Data Source and Quality**

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information becomes available.

**Table 4: Custodial sentence proportions for knife and offensive weapon possession offences, by sentence length, in England and Wales<sup>1</sup>**

Sentence length	Proportion of sentence lengths						
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012	Q1 2013
	<b>percentage of total offences</b>						
Up to and including 3 months	35%	40%	37%	37%	39%	32%	34%
Over 3 months and up to and including 6 months	31%	32%	28%	26%	25%	32%	26%
Over 6 months	34%	28%	34%	36%	36%	36%	40%

<sup>1</sup> England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

**Data Source and Quality**

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information becomes available.

**Table 5: Average sentence length of immediate custodial sentences for knife and offensive weapon possession offences, in England and Wales**

	Average Sentence length							% change, Q1 2013 to Q1 2012
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012	Q1 2013	
	<b>average sentence length (days)</b>							
<b>England and Wales<sup>1</sup></b>	207	186	201	231	229	219	235	<b>17%</b>

<sup>1</sup> England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

**Data Source and Quality**

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information becomes available.

**Table 6: Number of previous convictions or cautions for the possession of a knife or offensive weapon for offenders convicted or cautioned for a possession offence in 12 months ending March 2013, in England and Wales**

Disposal Category	Number of previous convictions/cautions				Total <sup>3</sup>
	0	1	2	3 or more	
	<b>number of offenders</b>				
<b>England and Wales<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>11,498</b>	<b>2,328</b>	<b>764</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>15,157</b>
Caution <sup>2</sup>	3,007	98	18	7	3,130
Absolute/Conditional discharge	392	76	21	14	503
Fine	526	103	16	13	658
Community sentence	3,412	638	175	85	4,310
Suspended sentence	1,466	391	127	77	2,061
Immediate custody	2,168	897	366	337	3,768
Other disposal <sup>3</sup>	527	125	41	34	727
	<b>percentage of offenders</b>				
Caution <sup>2</sup>	26%	4%	2%	1%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	3%	3%	3%	2%	
Fine	5%	4%	2%	2%	
Community sentence	30%	27%	23%	15%	
Suspended sentence	13%	17%	17%	14%	
Immediate custody	19%	39%	48%	59%	
Other disposal <sup>3</sup>	5%	5%	5%	6%	

<sup>1</sup> England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

<sup>2</sup> Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

**Data Source and Quality**

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information becomes available.



**Table 7: Number of previous convictions or cautions for the possession of a knife or offensive weapon for offenders convicted or cautioned for a possession offence 12 months ending March 2013, split by age group in England and Wales**

Disposal Category	Number of previous convictions/cautions				Total <sup>3</sup>
	0	1	2	3 or more	
<b>number of offenders</b>					
<b>Aged 10 to 17</b>	<b>2,260</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2,516</b>
Caution <sup>2</sup>	759	4			763
Absolute/Conditional discharge	44	4	1	1	50
Fine	3	1		1	5
Community sentence	1,214	125	23	3	1,365
Immediate custody	150	52	12	5	219
Other disposal	90	19	4	1	114
<b>percentage of offenders</b>					
Caution <sup>2</sup>	34%	2%	*	*	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	2%	2%	*	*	
Fine	0%	0%	*	*	
Community sentence	54%	61%	*	*	
Immediate custody	7%	25%	*	*	
Other disposal	4%	9%	*	*	
<b>number of offenders</b>					
<b>Aged 18 and over</b>	<b>9,234</b>	<b>2,122</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>12,636</b>
Caution <sup>2</sup>	2,248	94	18	7	2,367
Absolute/Conditional discharge	348	72	20	13	453
Fine	523	102	16	12	653
Community sentence	2,196	512	152	82	2,942
Suspended sentence	1,466	391	127	77	2,061
Immediate custody	2,016	845	354	332	3,547
Other disposal	437	106	37	33	613
<b>percentage of offenders</b>					
Caution <sup>2</sup>	24%	4%	2%	1%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	4%	3%	3%	2%	
Fine	6%	5%	2%	2%	
Community sentence	24%	24%	21%	15%	
Suspended sentence	16%	18%	18%	14%	
Immediate custody	22%	40%	49%	60%	
Other disposal	5%	5%	5%	6%	

<sup>1</sup> England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

<sup>2</sup> Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

<sup>3</sup> The difference between the totals in Table 9 and the adult/juvenile breakdowns is where there is no age recorded on the system.

**Data Source and Quality**

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information becomes available.

**Table 8: Offences involving threatening with a knife or offensive weapon resulting in a caution or sentence, in England and Wales in Q1 2013**

Number of offences and percentage change			
Disposal Category	Total	Juveniles	Adults
<b>England and Wales<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>
Caution <sup>2</sup>	2	2	0
Absolute/Conditional discharge	0	0	0
Fine	0	0	0
Community sentence	2	2	0
Suspended sentence	2	0	2
Immediate custody	8	2	6
Other disposal <sup>3</sup>	4	1	3

<sup>1</sup> England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

<sup>2</sup> Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

<sup>3</sup> Other disposals may represent cases where an offender has been convicted, but is awaiting further sentencing

**Data Source and Quality**

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information becomes available.

**Table 9: Offenders commencing a court order under probation supervision for possession of an offensive weapon<sup>1</sup>, in England and Wales**

Court order starts	Number of starts and percentages							Percentage change Q1 2012 to Q1 2013
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012	Q1 2013	
<b>number of starts</b>								
<b>England and Wales</b>	<b>1,438</b>	<b>1,343</b>	<b>1,168</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>1,018</b>	<b>1,084</b>	<b>895</b>	<b>-23%</b>
Community order	947	906	735	563	648	662	530	-28%
Suspended sentence order	465	435	432	377	368	422	365	-16%
Pre CJA orders	26	2	1	0	2	0	0	*
<b>percentage of total starts</b>								
Community order	66%	67%	63%	60%	64%	61%	59%	
Suspended sentence order	32%	32%	37%	40%	36%	39%	41%	
Pre CJA orders	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	

<sup>1</sup> Includes having an article with a blade or a point.

\*Indicates that one or more of the comparative numbers are less than 50. For small numbers this could give misleading percentage changes.

**Data Source and Quality**

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. All data is provisional.

**Table 10: Requirement starts for possession of offensive weapon<sup>1</sup>, in England and Wales**

Number of requirements and percentages								
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012	Q1 2013	Percentage change Q1 2012 to Q1 2013
<b>number of requirements</b>								
<b>Community order</b>	<b>1,507</b>	<b>1,512</b>	<b>1216</b>	<b>911</b>	<b>1065</b>	<b>1049</b>	<b>869</b>	<b>-29%</b>
Unpaid Work	554	514	388	274	312	335	259	-33%
Supervision	491	470	389	308	381	345	301	-23%
Curfew	131	156	120	87	71	57	66	-45%
Accredited program	101	91	76	61	66	49	59	-22%
Specified activity	84	143	117	88	114	37	94	-20%
Drug treatment	52	49	29	29	39	95	23	*
Alcohol treatment	48	42	50	31	44	93	34	*
Mental health	19	14	12	13	9	16	9	*
Exclusion	7	4	8	7	2	4	5	*
Residential	7	4	5	2	8	4	7	*
Attendance centre	7	20	17	10	13	10	9	*
Prohibited activity	6	5	5	1	6	4	3	*
<b>percentage of total requirements</b>								
Unpaid work	37%	34%	32%	30%	29%	32%	30%	
Supervision	33%	31%	32%	34%	36%	33%	35%	
Other requirements	31%	35%	36%	36%	35%	35%	36%	
<b>number of requirements</b>								
<b>Suspended sentence order</b>	<b>824</b>	<b>787</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>672</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>-15%</b>
Unpaid work	223	213	210	170	157	193	156	-26%
Supervision	316	288	281	237	246	274	232	-17%
Curfew	74	74	65	78	61	75	66	2%
Accredited program	81	71	73	49	64	57	64	-12%
Specified activity	42	58	64	64	67	78	56	-13%
Drug treatment	26	28	21	21	20	26	11	*
Alcohol treatment	35	32	24	31	33	35	33	*
Mental health	6	2	4	5	3	2	8	*
Exclusion	8	6	2	5	1	3	3	*
Residential	6	10	7	5	2	16	7	*
Attendance centre	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	*
Prohibited activity	5	2	3	4	2	6	4	*
<b>percentage of total requirements</b>								
Unpaid work	27%	27%	28%	25%	24%	25%	24%	
Supervision	38%	37%	37%	35%	37%	36%	36%	
Other requirements	35%	36%	35%	39%	39%	39%	40%	

<sup>1</sup> Includes having an article with a blade or a point.

\*Indicates that one or more of the comparative numbers are less than 50. For small numbers this could give misleading percentage changes.

**Data Source and Quality**

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. All data is provisional.

**Table 11: Unpaid work requirements started by length of requirement given for possession of offensive weapon<sup>1</sup>, in England and Wales**

	Number of requirements and percentages							Percentage change Q1 2012 to Q1 2013
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012	Q1 2013	
<b>number of requirements</b>								
<b>Community order</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>624</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>-37%</b>
<b>0-80 hours</b>	225	230	159	124	139	144	108	-32%
<b>81-150 hours</b>	274	273	176	116	128	165	112	-36%
<b>151-199 hours</b>	32	39	21	17	21	21	12	*
<b>200-250 hours</b>	74	75	67	42	34	36	34	*
<b>251-300 hours</b>	7	7	3	1	1	2	4	*
<b>percentage of total requirements</b>								
<b>0-80 hours</b>	37%	37%	37%	41%	43%	39%	40%	
<b>81-150 hours</b>	45%	44%	41%	39%	40%	45%	41%	
<b>151-199 hours</b>	5%	6%	5%	6%	7%	6%	4%	
<b>200-250 hours</b>	12%	12%	16%	14%	11%	10%	13%	
<b>251-300 hours</b>	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	
<b>number of requirements</b>								
<b>Suspended sentence order</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>-24%</b>
<b>0-80 hours</b>	49	53	56	64	36	51	43	*
<b>81-150 hours</b>	127	128	108	83	93	106	86	-20%
<b>151-199 hours</b>	15	16	15	14	10	8	14	*
<b>200-250 hours</b>	34	36	40	18	26	38	25	*
<b>251-300 hours</b>	4	4	2	2	2	3	1	*
<b>percentage of total requirements</b>								
<b>0-80 hours</b>	21%	22%	25%	35%	22%	25%	25%	
<b>81-150 hours</b>	55%	54%	49%	46%	56%	51%	51%	
<b>151-199 hours</b>	7%	7%	7%	8%	6%	4%	8%	
<b>200-250 hours</b>	15%	15%	18%	10%	16%	18%	15%	
<b>251-300 hours</b>	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	

<sup>1</sup> Includes having an article with a blade or a point.

\*Indicates that one or more of the comparative numbers are less than 50. For small numbers this could give misleading percentage changes.

**Data Source and Quality**

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. All data is provisional.

# Explanatory notes

## Data quality and sources

### Tables 1 to 8

The statistics presented in tables 1 to 5 in this Bulletin are drawn from an extract of data held on the Police National Computer (PNC) as at 3 May 2013.

The PNC is a large administrative database containing information about police cautions and court convictions held by individual offenders in England and Wales. As an administrative system, the PNC is regularly updated as new information about particular individuals becomes available. For example, an offender with previous convictions may have recently been charged with another offence, appeared in court against this charge and then been subsequently convicted of this offence. This information would then be updated accordingly against that individual's record in the PNC.

As these updates involve some element of manual data entry alongside more automated systems, there can be delays in the database becoming updated with the latest information about an offender's convictions. As such, the number of cautions/convictions recorded in the PNC extract for knife possession offences in recent quarters, in particular for the most recent quarter included in this bulletin, is likely to be lower than the actual number of cautions/convictions given in the period.

In addition, the different disposals recorded in the PNC extract for knife possession offences in recent quarters are also subject to some change. This is partly due to the delays in updating recent court outcomes on the PNC, but is also due to the fact that, while some individuals will have been convicted of a knife possession offence in a magistrate's court during the quarter, information about the disposal they received is not yet available as the case has been passed to the Crown court for sentencing at a later date. These cases will be updated when information about the final sentence given for the offence becomes available.

As a result of these updates, the statistics presented in this bulletin are based on estimates of what the final sentencing outcomes will be for the latest period once all data updates have been made.

The estimates were introduced from the previous edition of this bulletin and followed detailed analysis that tracked changes in the disposal figures from those initially published for each quarter to those released over the following year as data held on the PNC was updated with new information.

The background to and methodology used to derive these estimates was published in the previous release of this bulletin – [click here for link](#) – and we will continue to monitor the method used to estimate the final disposal outcomes in future editions to this bulletin to ensure that the estimated figures are realistic.

### Tables 6 to 8 and Figure 3

The probation data has been processed from data collected and held centrally by the Ministry of Justice. The data are drawn from the local probation administrative IT systems from each of the 35 probation trusts in England and Wales. The figures showing the numbers starting court orders relate to the number of *offenders* starting probation supervision in a given period. The numbers drawn from the PNC data in tables 1 to 5 relate to the total number of *offences* committed by offenders given particular disposals, which are likely to be greater than the number of offenders. Also, the probation data shows offenders convicted of the more general offence of 'possession of an offensive weapon'. This will include possession of knives, as well the particular offence of 'possession of an article with a blade or point', but these cannot be separately distinguished in the probation data.

Prison population data presented in this brief are drawn from the prison administrative IT systems. The figures showing the numbers under sentence refer to the number of *offenders* serving a custodial sentence. Figures drawn from PNC data refer to the number of *offences* committed by offenders given particular disposals. Prison establishments routinely provide records of the numbers of persons held in custody at the end of each month, broadly subdivided according to age, sex, custody type and sentence length. The records are collated and processed centrally. However, data recorded by prisons only show the numbers serving a sentence for the general offence of "possession of an offensive weapon". This offence includes the possession of a knife but can also include possession of other dangerous weapons (excluding firearms).

Due to technical problems relating to the supply of data for statistical purposes it has not been possible to provide data relating to the prison population for specific offence types from July 2009 to March 2010.

## Glossary

This glossary provides a brief description of the main terms used in the Commentary section of this report. For further information, please contact the Justice Statistics Analytical Services division using the details provided in the contacts section at the end of this bulletin.

**Adult:** An offender aged 18 and over.

**Caution:** A warning given to adults offenders who admit guilt and agree to be cautioned. They are issued on the instructions of a senior police officer where there is sufficient evidence for a conviction and it is not considered to be in the public interest to institute criminal proceedings.

**Community sentence:** An alternate to custodial sentence (sending offenders to prison) which allows offenders to make amends for their crimes. For juveniles the main community sentence used are the referral order and the Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO). With a community sentence there are specific things the offender can, can't and must do while serving their sentence. Elements of custodial sentence include;

- Supervision,
- Unpaid work,
- Specified activities,
- Prohibited activities,
- Accredited programmes,
- Curfew, exclusion,
- Residence,
- Mental health treatment,
- Drug rehabilitation,
- Alcohol treatment and attendance centre requirement for under 25s

**England and Wales** – Total figures for England and Wales now include all police forces in England and Wales and the British Transport Police (BTP). The Home Office is responsible for policing the 43 police forces in England and Wales. There are also other authorities who prosecute offenders such as:

- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP),
- HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC),
- Ministry of Defence (MOD) and



- British Transport Police (BTP).

Previously only the 43 police forces governed by the Home Office were reported on, but now, as the BTP is part of TKAP, they are included in the total figures for England and Wales.

**Immediate custody:** Unsuspended imprisonment for adults aged 21 or over and detention in a young offender institution for those aged 18 to 20. The maximum sentence available is 4 years for possession of a bladed article in a public place or an offensive weapon. Juveniles aged 12 to 17 may receive a detention and training order of 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 18 or 24 months

**Juvenile:** An offender between the ages 10 and 17.

**Offences included:** The PNC data (tables 1 to 5) produced in this brief are the number of offences committed **not** the number of offenders. The offences relate to possession offences rather than offences where a knife was used. The offence codes included in the dataset are as follows:

- **00811** – Possession of offensive weapons without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. Prevention of Crime Act 1953 Section 1.
- **00828** – Possession of offensive weapons without lawful authority or reasonable excuse on school premises. Criminal Justice Act 1988 Section 139 A (2) as amended by Offensive Weapons Act 1996 Section 4 (1).
- **00826** – Having an article with a blade or a point in a public place. Criminal Justice Act 1988 Section 139 (1) as amended by Offensive Weapons Act 1996 Section 3 (1).
- **00827** – Having an article with a blade or a point on school premises. Criminal Justice Act 1988 Section 139 (2) as amended by Offensive Weapons Act 1996 Section 4 (1).

**New offence codes include:** The PNC data used to produce table 8 in this brief are the number of offences committed **not** the number of offenders. The offences relate to threatening offences rather than offences where a knife was used. The offence codes included in the dataset are as follows:

- **00861** – Threaten with an offensive weapon in a public place.
- **00862** – Threaten with a blade/sharply pointed article on a school premises
- **00863** – Threaten with an offensive weapon on a school premises.
- **00864** – Threaten with a blade/sharply pointed article in a public place.

**Offensive weapon:** Any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person, or intended by the person having it with him for such. Examples includes: a swordstick, a hollow walking-stick or cane containing a blade.

**Reprimand and warning:** Issued to juvenile first time offenders for minor offences. Reprimands and warnings for juveniles are the equivalent of cautions for adults.

**Suspended Sentence:** A custody sentence of less than 12 months, suspended for a period ranging from six months to two years available for **adult** only.

## Contact points for further information

Current and previous editions of this publication are available for download at [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/series/knife-possession-sentencing](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/series/knife-possession-sentencing)

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office:

Tel: 020 3334 3536

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to:

**Ministry of Justice**  
**Justice Statistics Analytical Services**  
7th floor  
102 Petty France  
London SW1H 9AJ

General enquiries about the statistical work of the Ministry of Justice can be e-mailed to: [statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

General information about the official statistics system of the UK is available from [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

### Other knife and sharp object related statistical releases

Other government departments also release statistics relating to knives and sharp objects. Below are some links and brief outlines of other available sources.

- The Home Office provide a guidance document regarding the law for knives and offensive weapons:

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/186911/Knives\\_and\\_offensive\\_weapons\\_information\\_GDS\\_FAQ.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/186911/Knives_and_offensive_weapons_information_GDS_FAQ.pdf)

- The Home Office also publish statistics of offences involving knives and sharp instruments. This is contained within the *Crime in England and Wales* statistical bulletin and has a section called *Offences involving knives and sharp instruments*.

[www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-december-2012/stb-crime-in-england-and-wales--year-ending-december-2012.html#tab-Offences-involving-knives-and-sharp-instruments](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-december-2012/stb-crime-in-england-and-wales--year-ending-december-2012.html#tab-Offences-involving-knives-and-sharp-instruments)

- The Department for Health release hospital admission data for assaults on an ad hoc basis. Within this data there is a category for *X99 - Assault by sharp object*. The link for the most recently released publication is listed below and the data can usually be found in the *Monthly HES data – Monthly topic of interest* section of the HES online website.

[www.hscic.gov.uk/hes](http://www.hscic.gov.uk/hes)

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