



Ministry of
JUSTICE

Knife Possession Sentencing Quarterly Brief January to March 2012 England and Wales

Ministry of Justice
Statistics Bulletin

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Knife Possession Sentencing Statistics January to March 2012

Introduction

This bulletin contains 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.

The information presented generally 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). A breakdown for the separate offences is given for disposals in Table 3 but is not available for probation and prison data. The sources of data used do not enable other offences involving a knife, such as wounding offences, to be separately identified, and these offences are not included in the statistics. Full details on data quality and definitions are given in the notes at the end of the text.

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

- On 21 May 2008, the Court of Appeal issued the judgment in *Povey*¹ that said that, 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.
- 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.

¹ Povey & Ors, R. v, Court of Appeal - Criminal Division, May 21, 2008, [2008] EWCA Crim 1261.

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All statistics quoted in this quarterly brief are provisional and subject to change.

To enable a fuller comparison over time the tables in this bulletin with data from Q4 2007 onwards, are available for download from the Ministry of Justice website <http://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/criminal-justice/knife-possession/knife-possession-editions>

This publication has been prepared by Justice Statistics Analytical Services.

Key points

Note on all comparisons

Comparisons are presented between the latest quarter (January to March, Q1 2012) and Q1 2011 to provide an indication of changes over the last year. Longer term comparisons comparing Q1 2012 with the same period two years ago are also shown.

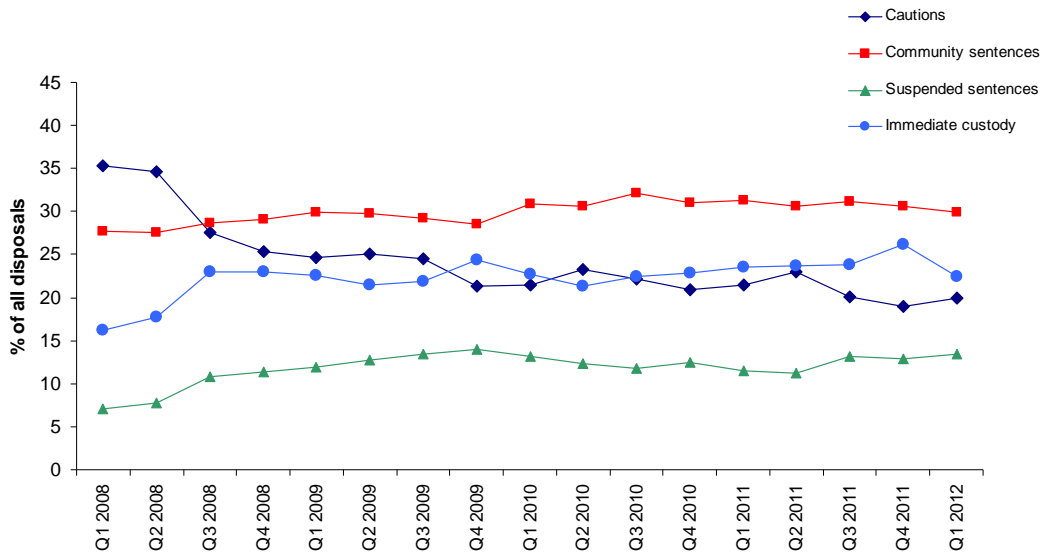
Cautioning and sentencing statistics (Tables 1 to 5)

- **Between Q1 2012 and Q1 2011 the total number of disposals given for knife or offensive weapon possession has decreased by 8 per cent from 5,266 to 4,821.**
- **The proportion of offences receiving cautions, community sentences and immediate custodial sentences for knife or offensive weapon possession decreased slightly, while the proportion of suspended sentences increased slightly between Q1 2011 and Q1 2012²:**
 - In Q1 2012 20 per cent (960) of all possession offences resulted in a caution³ in England and Wales; compared to 21 per cent (1,128) in Q1 2011.
 - In Q1 2012 30 per cent (1,442) of all possession offences resulted in community sentences; compared to 31 per cent (1,646) in Q1 2011.
 - In Q1 2012 13 per cent (645) of all possession offences resulted in suspended sentence orders; compared to 12 per cent (607) in Q1 2011.
 - In Q1 2012 22 per cent (1,080) of all possession offences resulted in immediate custody compared to 24 per cent (1,242) in Q1 2011.

² Immediate custody, suspended sentence and community sentence figures are likely to be revised upwards in later editions of the bulletin as final decisions regarding deferred sentences are recorded by the police. Other disposals include 'deferred sentences' and this means that the figures for this category will be higher for the latest quarter.

³ Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

Figure 1: Disposals for knife and offensive weapon possession in England and Wales, between Q1 2008 and Q1 2012



- Where immediate custodial sentences are given for these offences the proportion receiving longer sentences has increased:**

 - In Q1 2012 37 per cent (396) of sentences were recorded as being over six months compared to 28 per cent (352) in Q1 2011.
 - The average length of a custodial sentence was 214 days (7.1 months) in Q1 2012, compared to 188 days (6.3 months) in Q1 2011.
- For offences committed by juvenile offenders the proportion of offences receiving reprimands and warnings has decreased from 29 per cent (289) to 25 per cent (206).** This was balanced by an increase in the proportion receiving community sentences from 55 per cent (546) to 60 per cent (501).
- For offences committed by adult offenders the proportion of offences receiving a caution, community sentence or immediate custodial sentence has decreased.** For cautions, the decrease has been from 20 per cent (837) in Q1 2011 to 19 per cent (754) in Q1 2012, for community sentences from 26 per cent (1,099) to 24 per cent (941) and for immediate custodial sentences from 27 per cent (1,149) to 25 per cent (1,003). The proportion of suspended sentence orders has increased from 14 per cent (607) to 16 per cent (645).

Q1 2012 compared to Q1 2010

- **The total number of disposals (cautions and sentences) given for knife or offensive weapon possession has decreased by 10 per cent between Q1 2010 and Q1 2012 (5,341 to 4,821).** This drop was higher for juvenile offenders where the decrease was 16 per cent (999 to 836), than for adult offenders where the decrease was 8 per cent (4,342 to 3,985).
- **The proportion of offences receiving cautions⁴, community sentences and immediate custodial sentences for knife or offensive weapon possession decreased, while the proportion receiving a suspended sentence remained stable between Q1 2010 and Q1 2012:**
 - In Q1 2012 20 per cent (960) of all possession offences resulted in a caution in England and Wales. This compares with 21 per cent (1,144) in Q1 2010.
 - In Q1 2012 30 per cent (1,442) of all possession offences resulted in community sentences compared to 31 per cent (1,643) in Q1 2010.
 - In Q1 2012 13 per cent (645) of all possession offences resulted in suspended sentence orders, no change from Q1 2010 (700 offences).
 - In Q1 2012 22 per cent (1,080) of all possession offences resulted in immediate custody; the figure in Q1 2010 was 23 per cent (1,219).
- **Where immediate custodial sentences are given for these offences there has been an increase in the proportion of longer sentences:**
 - In Q1 2012 37 per cent (396) of sentences were recorded as being over six months compared to 34 per cent (412) in Q1 2010.
 - The average length of a custodial sentence was 214 days (7.1 months) in Q1 2012. This has increased from 207 days (6.9 months) in Q1 2010.
- **For offences committed by juvenile offenders the proportion of offences receiving community sentences rose from 55 per cent (545) to 60 per cent (501).** This was balanced by a decrease in the proportion receiving reprimands and warnings (from 31 per cent (308) to 25 per cent (206)).

⁴ Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

- **For offences committed by adult offenders the proportion of offences receiving community sentences and immediate custodial sentences decreased slightly and cautions and suspended sentences remained stable.** The proportion of community sentences decreased from 25 per cent (1,098) in Q1 2010 to 24 per cent (941) in Q1 2012, and the proportion of immediate custodial sentences decreased from 26 per cent (1,128) to 25 per cent (1,003).

Probation supervision statistics (Tables 6, 7 and 8; these figures cover offenders aged 18 or over)

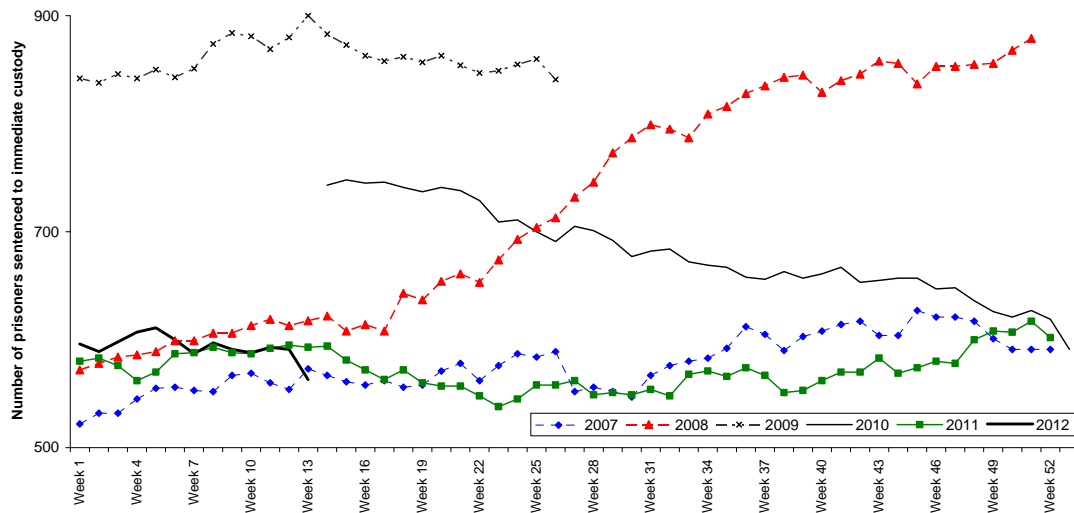
Q1 2012 compared to Q1 2011 and Q1 2010

- **In Q1 2012 there were 1,168 court order starts under probation supervision** for possession of an offensive weapon, this represents a decrease of 13 per cent (1,343) from Q1 2011; the decrease from Q1 2010 was 19 per cent (1,438). Community orders decreased by 19 per cent over the past year, whereas suspended sentence orders decreased by 1 per cent.
- **The proportion of those given unpaid work for community orders (32 per cent) as a percentage of all requirements has fallen over the past year (from 34 per cent). For suspended sentence orders this proportion increased from 27 to 28 per cent.**
- **Where unpaid work requirements were started under community orders and suspended sentence orders, there has been an increase in the proportion of longer requirements over the past year:**
 - For community orders, in Q1 2012, 17 per cent of unpaid work requirements were recorded as being 200 hours or longer, compared to 13 per cent in Q1 2011.
 - For suspended sentence orders, in Q1 2012, 19 per cent of unpaid work requirements were recorded as being 200 hours or longer, compared to 18 per cent in Q1 2011.

Prison population

- The population in prison serving a sentence for possession of an offensive weapon was 563 on 30 March 2012, down by 5 per cent from a year ago (595).

Figure 2: Prison population under sentence for possession of an offensive weapon⁵ (excludes recalls) in England and Wales, between 2007 and 2012



Due to technical problems relating to the supply of statistical information, it is not possible to provide figures from July 2009 to March 2010

⁵ 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

Disposal category	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q2 2011	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Number of offences and percentages	
							Percentage change Q1 2011 to Q1 2012	Percentage change Q1 2010 to Q1 2012
number of offences								
England and Wales¹	5,341	5,266	5,180	5,477	4,788	4,821	-8%	-10%
Caution ²	1,144	1,128	1,191	1,096	908	960	-15%	-16%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	217	216	187	207	146	159	-26%	-27%
Fine	221	212	222	243	190	183	-14%	-17%
Community sentence	1,643	1,646	1,586	1,704	1,468	1,442	-12%	-12%
Suspended sentence	700	607	583	717	616	645	6%	-8%
Immediate custody	1,219	1,242	1,224	1,307	1,256	1,080	-13%	-11%
Other disposal ³	197	215	187	203	204	352	64%	79%
percentage of total offences								
Caution ²	21%	21%	23%	20%	19%	20%		
Community sentence	31%	31%	31%	31%	31%	30%		
Suspended sentence	13%	12%	11%	13%	13%	13%		
Immediate custody	23%	24%	24%	24%	26%	22%		

¹ England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

² Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

³ Other disposals include 'deferred sentences' and this means that the figures for this category will be higher for the latest quarter. Immediate custody, suspended sentence and community sentence figures are likely to be revised upwards in later editions of the bulletin as final decisions regarding deferred sentences are recorded by the 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 is recorded by the police.

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

Disposal category	Number of offences and percentages						Percentage change Q1 2011 to Q1 2012	Percentage change Q1 2010 to Q1 2012
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q2 2011	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012		
number of offences								
Aged 10 to 17	999	994	978	911	842	836	-16%	-16%
Reprimands & warnings	308	289	289	231	203	206	-29%	-33%
Absolute/conditional discharge	21	24	25	24	13	18	*	*
Fine	3	4	2	1	2	0	*	*
Community sentence	545	546	528	515	519	501	-8%	-8%
Immediate custody	91	92	108	104	83	77	-16%	-15%
Other disposal ¹	31	39	26	36	22	34	*	*
percentage of total offences								
Reprimands & warnings	31%	29%	30%	25%	24%	25%		
Community sentence	55%	55%	54%	57%	62%	60%		
Immediate custody	9%	9%	11%	11%	10%	9%		
number of offences								
Aged 18 and over	4,342	4,267	4,199	4,565	3,944	3,985	-7%	-8%
Caution	836	837	901	865	704	754	-10%	-10%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	196	191	162	183	133	141	-26%	-28%
Fine	218	208	220	242	188	183	-12%	-16%
Community sentence	1,098	1,099	1,057	1,189	949	941	-14%	-14%
Suspended sentence	700	607	583	717	616	645	6%	-8%
Immediate custody	1,128	1,149	1,116	1,202	1,173	1,003	-13%	-11%
Other disposal ¹	166	176	160	167	181	318	81%	92%
percentage of total offences								
Caution	19%	20%	21%	19%	18%	19%		
Community sentence	25%	26%	25%	26%	24%	24%		
Suspended sentence	16%	14%	14%	16%	16%	16%		
Immediate custody	26%	27%	27%	26%	30%	25%		

¹ Other disposals include 'deferred sentences' and this means that the figures for this category will be higher for the latest quarter. Immediate custody, suspended sentence and community sentence figures are likely to be revised upwards in later editions of the bulletin as final decisions regarding deferred sentences are recorded by the police.

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

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

Disposal category	Number of offences and percentages						Percentage change Q1 2011 to Q1 2012	Percentage change Q1 2010 to Q1 2012
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q2 2011	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012		
number of offences								
Possession of an article with a blade or point	2,731	2,832	2,852	3,015	2,600	2,692	-5%	-1%
Caution ¹	409	441	482	407	329	398	-10%	-3%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	144	139	118	130	98	103	-26%	-28%
Fine	120	107	137	133	114	112	5%	-7%
Community sentence	926	936	935	1,017	883	853	-9%	-8%
Suspended sentence	370	361	347	415	353	393	9%	6%
Immediate custody	668	725	720	800	701	634	-13%	-5%
Other disposal ²	94	123	113	113	122	199	62%	112%
percentage of total offences								
Caution ¹	15%	16%	17%	13%	13%	15%		
Community sentence	34%	33%	33%	34%	34%	32%		
Suspended sentence	14%	13%	12%	14%	14%	15%		
Immediate custody	24%	26%	25%	27%	27%	24%		
number of offences								
Possession of an offensive weapon	2,610	2,434	2,328	2,462	2,188	2,129	-13%	-18%
Caution ¹	735	687	709	689	579	562	-18%	-24%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	73	77	69	77	48	56	*	*
Fine	101	105	85	110	76	71	-32%	-30%
Community sentence	717	710	651	687	585	589	-17%	-18%
Suspended sentence	330	246	236	302	263	252	2%	-24%
Immediate custody	551	517	504	507	555	446	-14%	-19%
Other disposal ²	103	92	74	90	82	153	66%	49%
percentage of total offences								
Caution ¹	28%	28%	30%	28%	26%	26%		
Community sentence	27%	29%	28%	28%	27%	28%		
Suspended sentence	13%	10%	10%	12%	12%	12%		
Immediate custody	21%	21%	22%	21%	25%	21%		

¹ Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

² Other disposals include 'deferred sentences' and this means that the figures for this category will be higher for the latest quarter. Immediate custody, suspended sentence and community sentence figures are likely to be revised upwards in later editions of the bulletin as final decisions regarding deferred sentences are recorded by the police.

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Data Source and Quality

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Table 4: Custodial sentence for knife and offensive weapon possession offences, by sentence length

Sentence length	Number of offences and percentages						Percentage change Q1 2011 to Q1 2012	Percentage change Q1 2010 to Q1 2012
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q2 2011	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012		
	number of offences							
England and Wales^{1,2}	1,219	1,242	1,224	1,307	1,256	1,080	-13%	-11%
Up to and including 3 months	422	495	517	525	414	373	-25%	-12%
Over 3 months and up to and including 6 months	383	394	337	362	366	310	-21%	-19%
Over 6 months	412	352	367	417	475	396	13%	-4%
	percentage of total offences							
Up to and including 3 months	35%	40%	42%	40%	33%	35%		
Over 3 months and up to and including 6 months	31%	32%	28%	28%	29%	29%		
Over 6 months	34%	28%	30%	32%	38%	37%		

¹ England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

² Total figures include offences where sentence length was not recorded by the 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 is recorded by the police.

Table 5: Average sentence length of immediate custodial sentences for knife and offensive weapon possession offences

Sentence length	Average sentence length						Percentage change Q1 2011 to Q1 2012	Percentage change Q1 2010 to Q1 2012
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q2 2011	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012		
	average sentence length (days)							
England and Wales¹	207	188	187	198	226	214	14%	3%

¹ England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

* Offenders with sentence length recorded as zero have not been included in this analysis.

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 is recorded by the police.

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Table 6: Offenders commencing a court order under probation supervision for possession of an offensive weapon¹

Court order starts	Number of starts and percentages						Percentage change Q1 2011 to Q1 2012	Percentage change Q1 2010 to Q1 2012
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q2 2011	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012		
number of starts								
England and Wales	1,438	1,343	1,168	1,401	1,172	1,168	-13%	-19%
Community order	947	906	781	924	727	735	-19%	-22%
Suspended sentence order	465	435	385	475	445	432	-1%	-7%
Pre CJA orders	26	2	2	2	0	1	*	*
percentage of total starts								
Community order	66%	67%	67%	66%	62%	63%		
Suspended sentence order	32%	32%	33%	34%	38%	37%		
Pre CJA orders	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%		

¹ 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.

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Table 7: Requirement starts for possession of offensive weapon¹

	Number of requirements and percentages						Percentage change Q1 2011 to Q1 2012	Percentage change Q1 2010 to Q1 2012
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q2 2011	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012		
number of requirements								
Community order	1,507	1,512	1,248	1,515	1,246	1,216	-20%	-19%
Unpaid Work	554	514	413	474	399	388	-25%	-30%
Supervision	491	470	405	509	415	389	-17%	-21%
Curfew	131	156	117	129	132	120	-23%	-8%
Accredited program	101	91	74	80	69	76	-16%	-25%
Specified activity	84	143	115	151	103	117	-18%	39%
Drug treatment	52	49	42	46	38	29	*	*
Alcohol treatment	48	42	39	57	51	50	*	*
Mental health	19	14	17	28	11	12	*	*
Exclusion	7	4	1	6	7	8	*	*
Residential	7	4	4	6	7	5	*	*
Attendance centre	7	20	18	22	8	17	*	*
Prohibited activity	6	5	3	7	6	5	*	*
percentage of total requirements								
Unpaid work	37%	34%	33%	31%	32%	32%		
Supervision	33%	31%	32%	34%	33%	32%		
Other requirements	31%	35%	29%	35%	29%	29%		
number of requirements								
Suspended sentence order	822	788	682	898	770	758	-4%	-8%
Unpaid work	223	213	187	220	205	210	-1%	-6%
Supervision	316	288	242	315	269	281	-2%	-11%
Curfew	74	74	72	99	89	65	-12%	-12%
Accredited program	81	71	51	86	61	73	3%	-10%
Specified activity	42	58	49	88	73	64	10%	*
Drug treatment	26	28	16	27	21	21	*	*
Alcohol treatment	35	32	32	38	25	24	*	*
Mental health	6	2	8	3	3	4	*	*
Exclusion	8	6	7	5	2	2	*	*
Residential	6	10	5	6	12	7	*	*
Attendance centre	0	4	7	5	5	4	*	*
Prohibited activity	5	2	6	6	5	3	*	*
percentage of total requirements								
Unpaid work	27%	27%	27%	24%	27%	28%		
Supervision	38%	37%	35%	35%	35%	37%		
Other requirements	34%	36%	37%	40%	38%	35%		

¹ 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.

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Table 8: Unpaid work requirements started by length of requirement given for possession of offensive weapon¹

	Number of requirements and percentages						Percentage change Q1 2011 to Q1 2012	Percentage change Q1 2010 to Q1 2012
	Q1 2010	Q1 2011	Q2 2011	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012		
number of requirements								
Community order	612	624	446	512	440	426	-32%	-30%
0-80 hours	225	230	190	204	174	159	-31%	-29%
81-150 hours	274	273	164	213	191	176	-36%	-36%
151-199 hours	32	39	28	30	21	21	*	*
200-250 hours	74	75	62	63	48	67	-11%	-9%
251-300 hours	7	7	2	2	6	3	*	*
percentage of total requirements								
0-80 hours	37%	37%	43%	40%	40%	37%		
81-150 hours	45%	44%	37%	42%	43%	41%		
151-199 hours	5%	6%	6%	6%	5%	5%		
200-250 hours	12%	12%	14%	12%	11%	16%		
251-300 hours	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%		
number of requirements								
Suspended sentence order	229	223	237	205	219	224	0%	-2%
0-80 hours	49	53	51	42	49	56	*	14%
81-150 hours	127	128	95	117	122	108	-16%	-15%
151-199 hours	15	16	17	17	17	15	*	*
200-250 hours	34	36	40	41	31	40	*	*
251-300 hours	4	4	2	2	5	2	*	*
percentage of total requirements								
0-80 hours	21%	24%	22%	20%	22%	25%		
81-150 hours	55%	57%	40%	57%	56%	48%		
151-199 hours	7%	7%	7%	8%	8%	7%		
200-250 hours	15%	16%	17%	20%	14%	18%		
251-300 hours	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%		

¹ 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

All the data are drawn from administrative sources. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the data, the detail is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large-scale recording system. While the figures shown have been checked as far as practicable, they should be regarded as approximate and not necessarily accurate to the last whole number shown in the tables. They are fit to be used for purposes of looking at trends and for comparing the relative magnitude of components.

Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) Phase II finished in March 2010. An assessment of TKAP Phase II was published by the Home Office on 24 May 2010 and can be accessed from:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/horr53/>

Reports up to the period January to March 2010 have included a breakdown of the data by areas that were part of TKAP. However, due to the completion of TKAP Phase 1 and 2 in March 2010, a breakdown for these areas is not given in this bulletin but statistics up to the end of Phase 2 can be found in 'Knife Possession Sentencing quarterly brief, January to March 2010'.

Tables 1 to 5

The data presented in tables 1 to 5 in this Bulletin are drawn from an extract of data held by the Ministry of Justice taken from the Police National Computer (PNC).

The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information is recorded by the police. Police forces tend to record cautions more promptly on the PNC than court sentences, so that the cautions figures for the latest quarter shown in the tables will tend to be more complete than the sentencing figures. In addition, in some areas, the police may record a 'deferred sentence' which will be updated at a later date when the final outcome is known. 'Deferred sentences' appear in the tables as 'other disposals', which means that the figures for this category will be higher for the latest quarter. Immediate custody, suspended sentence and community sentence figures are likely to be revised upwards in later editions of the bulletin as final decisions regarding deferred sentences are recorded by the police. Figures for all quarters and all sentences may be revised in later editions of this Bulletin.

As an estimate for the change in figures, the table below shows the number of offenders recorded for each disposal at the time of publication for Q1 2011 compared with the latest figures available for Q1 2012.

Table 9: Change in the number of disposals for Q1 2011 between the time of publication and the most recent data available

Disposal Category	Figures for Jan - March 2011 at time of Q1 2011 publication	Current figures recorded for Jan - March 2011	Percentage change Q1 2011 to Q1 2012
number of offences			
England and Wales¹	5,228	5,266	1%
Caution ²	1,121	1,128	1%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	209	216	3%
Fine	198	212	7%
Community sentence	1,716	1,646	-4%
Suspended sentence	617	607	-2%
Immediate custody	1,014	1,242	22%
Other disposal ³	353	215	-39%
percentage			
England and Wales¹	100%	100%	
Caution ²	21%	21%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	4%	4%	
Fine	4%	4%	
Community sentence	33%	31%	
Suspended sentence	12%	12%	
Immediate custody	19%	24%	
Other disposal ³	7%	4%	

¹ England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

² Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

Tables 6 to 8 and Figure 2

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.

Definitions

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.

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).

Juvenile – A juvenile offender is aged between 10 and 17.

Adult – An adult offender is aged 18 and over.

Offensive weapon – there are three classes of offensive weapons: those made for causing injury; those adapted for such a purpose; and those not so made or adapted, but carried with the intention of causing injury. These consist of all listed on the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons)

Order 1988 as amended, some examples include: a swordstick, that is, a hollow walking-stick or cane containing a blade which may be used as a sword; the weapon sometimes known as a "belt buckle knife", being a buckle which incorporates or conceals a knife.

Caution – given by, or 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. Cautions are given to **adult** offenders only, who must admit guilt and consent to a caution.

Reprimand and warning – available for **juvenile** offenders only. Reprimands can be given to first-time offenders for minor offences. Any further offending results in either a warning or charge. The warning triggers immediate referral to a local youth offending team. Reprimands and warnings for juveniles are the equivalent of cautions for adults. Therefore in the tables reprimands and warnings are counted under the 'cautions' disposal category.

Community sentence – for **adults** the main community sentence, which is supervised by the Probation Service, is the community order introduced by the Criminal Justice Act 2003 for offences committed on or after 4 April 2005. The court must add at least one (but could potentially add all 12) of the following requirements: 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. For **juveniles** the main community sentences used are the referral order, for first-time offenders who plead guilty on their first court appearance and do not merit a discharge or custodial sentence, and the Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO) which was introduced in November 2009. The YRO has replaced nine previous orders including the curfew order, action plan order, attendance centre order, supervision order, community rehabilitation order, community rehabilitation and punishment order, exclusion order, community punishment order and the drug treatment and testing order. The YRO is only available as a sentence if the offence was committed on or after 30 November 2009; for offences committed prior to this date the previous orders will be applicable.

Suspended Sentence – available for **adults** only. It is a sentence of custody of under 12 months, suspended for a period ranging from six months to two years. During the suspension period the court sets a number of requirements, from the same options as are available for the community order, and these are supervised by the Probation Service.

Immediate custody – **adults** aged 21 or over may receive sentences of unsuspended imprisonment and those aged 18 to 20 may be sentenced to detention in a young offender institution. 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. The order is served partly in custody (in local authority children's homes, secure training centres or prison service young offender institutions) and partly in the community under the supervision of a probation officer, social worker or member of a youth offending team.

Contact points for further information

Current and previous editions of this publication are available for download at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/criminal-justice/knife-possession>.

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