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| Ministry of Justice | March 2017 |

**Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request –** 110769

You asked for the following information from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ):

**I am requesting for the statistics on the number of people given official police cautions for drug possession in the last calendar year, compared with previous years, within Gloucestershire.**

**I would particularly like to know the number of people given official police cautions for cannabis possession in the last calendar year, and how many people were given more serious consequences for possessing cannabis.**

**I am interested in the different types of discipline given towards drug possession, particularly cannabis, and so would like to know what you base your discipline on. For example, is there a certain amount someone has to have before they are punished rather than just given an official warning or even just a talking to.**

**If you could get back to me with some figures on conviction rates for drug abuse and how these are broken down into punishments, I would be very appreciative.”**

Your request has been handled under the FOIA.

I can confirm that the MoJ holds all of the information that you have requested.

However, some of the information is exempt from disclosure under section 21 of the FOIA, because it is reasonably accessible to you, at the below link.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2015>

Your request for figures for drug abuse has been interpreted as a request for those proceeded against for and found guilty of all offences labelled as being ‘drug offences’. Those figures for England and Wales can be found in the CJS outcomes by offences data tool by selecting ’06 drug offences’ from the drop down box labelled as offence group. Conviction ratio can be calculated by dividing the number found guilty by the number proceeded against.

The remaining statistics relating to your request are available in the attached tables:-

* Table 1 provides the number of offenders found guilty and sentenced (with sentencing outcomes) at all courts for possessing cannabis, England and Wales from 2005 to 2015
* Table 2 provides the number of offenders found guilty and sentenced (with sentencing outcomes) at all courts for possessing cannabis in the Gloucestershire Police Force Area from 2005 to 2015
* Table 3 provides the number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts and found guilty and sentenced (with sentencing outcomes) at all courts for drug offences in the Gloucestershire Police Force Area from 2005 to 2015

The link below provides ACPO guidance on cannabis possession for personal use – revised intervention framework, which provides information on how punishment frames should take place. This followed the reclassification of cannabis from Class C to Class B in January 2009.

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:0E3UMGA-Py8J:library.college.police.uk/docs/acpo/ACPO-Cannabis-Guidance-28Jan09.doc+&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk>

Information covering 2016 is exempt from disclosure under section 44(1)(a) of the FOIA, which refers to prohibitions on disclosure ‘by or under any enactment’ of the FOIA. In this case, the information you are seeking is prohibited by the Statistics and Registration Services (SRS) Act 2007 and the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008.

The information you have requested is a subset of the Criminal Justice Statistics data held in its final form which we routinely publish. It is intended for publication in May 2017. As such we are required to consider your request in a manner compliant with the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008 further to sections 11 and 13 of the (SRS Act 2007).

The MoJ is obliged under section 13 of the SRS Act to continue to comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (the Code) for statistics designated as National Statistics. Section 11(3) of the SRS Act regards the Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Order as being included in the Code. Protocol 2 of the Code reflects the requirements of the Pre-Release Access to Statistics Order. Specifically, it requires producers of official statistics to ensure that no indication of the substance of a statistical report is made public, or given to the media or any other party not recorded as eligible for access prior to publication. I can confirm that the MoJ does publish information on court proceedings and sentencing for drug offences, for 2016, as part of National Statistics. Therefore, to now disclose as part of your FOI request, will violate the provisions of section 13 of the SRS Act and the Pre-Release Access Order to Official Statistics 2008 and as such engages the exemption under section 44(1)(a) of the FOIA.

Section 44 is an absolute exemption and does not require a public interest test.

The information for 2016 is also exempt from disclosure under section 22(1) of the FOIA, because it is intended for future publication. Please note that whilst quarterly court proceedings and convictions headline data are published and are currently available up to end September 2016, these data are subject to revision as later quarters are published, and are finalised only when the annual publication is made publicly available. To ensure consistency of data released to users, further breakdowns (in this case by specific offences under certain legislation) of 2016 quarters 1 to 3 (January to September) data are not available until the annual criminal statistics publication is published in May 2017.

This is a qualified exemption which means that the decision to disclose the information is subject to the public interest test. When assessing whether or not it was in the public interest to disclose the information to you, we took into account the following factors:

**Public interest considerations favouring disclosure**

* Disclosure would improve transparency in the operations of Government, and of the justice system in particular.

**Public interest considerations favouring withholding the information**

* It is in the public interest to adhere to the existing publication process for official statistics, which includes time for the data to be collated and properly verified.
* It is in the public interest to ensure that data used in the compilation of official statistics comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and that resulting outputs are produced to the highest quality. Statistics of high quality are produced to sound methods, with all users having easy and equal access that is fair and open, and are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest. Premature publication could undermine the principle of making the information available to all at the same time through the official publication process.

We reached the view that, on balance, the public interest is better served by withholding this information under section 22 of the FOIA at this time.