

CRIME AND JUSTICE

Drug Seizures and Offender Characteristics, 2018-19 and 2019-20

This bulletin presents Official Statistics on drug seizures made by the police in Scotland and the characteristics of those found in possession of drugs. These statistics relate to drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which divides drugs into three classes, namely A, B and C. For the purpose of this bulletin, the drug classifications at the end of the reporting periods, to 31 March 2019 and 2020 respectively, have been applied to the data.

Key Points

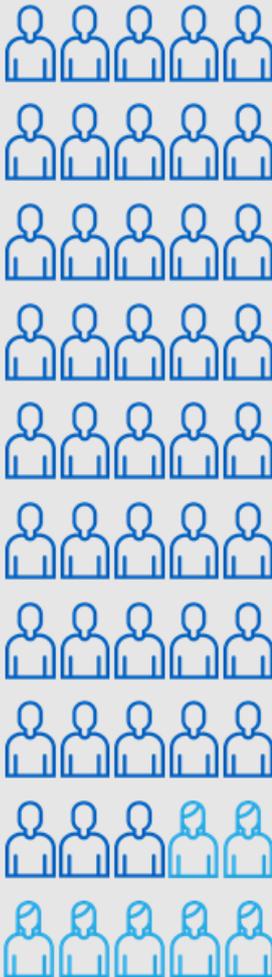
- The quantity of drugs seized can fluctuate considerably each year and does not necessarily move in line with the number of seizures made. Whilst most drug seizures consist of relatively small quantities (usually possession-related crimes), annual quantities of drugs seized can be greatly influenced by a small number of large seizures (usually from supply-related crimes).
- For crimes of drug supply, the main Class A drugs seized by Police Scotland in 2019-20 were heroin (223 kilograms) and cocaine (131 kilograms). Police Scotland also seized approximately 28,800 ecstasy-type tablets.
- Again for crimes of drug supply, the main Class B drugs seized by Police Scotland in 2019-20 were herbal cannabis (921 kilograms), cannabis resin (649 kilograms) and amphetamines (143 kilograms). They also seized more than 33,000 cannabis plants.
- For Class C drugs, the main drugs seized were 4.9 million benzodiazepine tablets (the vast majority of which were etizolam).
- A sample of drug possession crime for 2019-20 estimated that 49% of drug possession crimes involved herbal cannabis or cannabis resin, with 14% for etizolam, 9% for cocaine and 8% for heroin.

- In 2019-20, the vast majority of drug possession offenders were male (85%). The median age of an offender was 29 years old, with almost two thirds (63%) being between 20 and 39 years old.

DRUG POSSESSION CRIME IN SCOTLAND, 2019-20



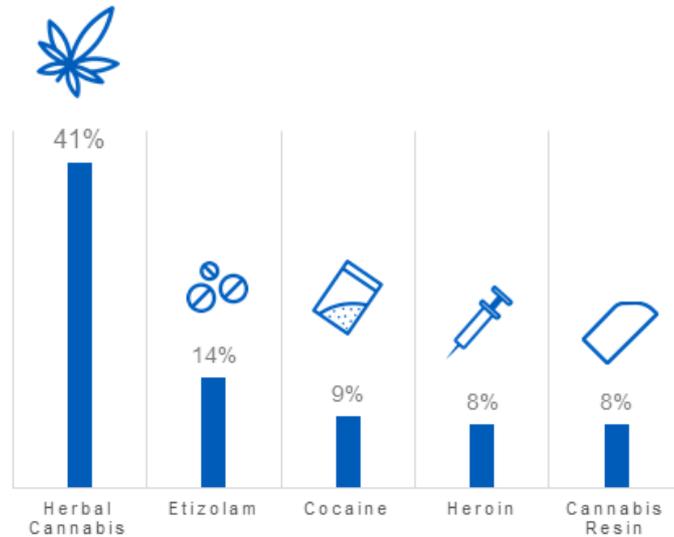
► Who were the offenders



85%
Were male

29
Average
(Median) age

▼ What type of drugs were seized?



► Where were the drugs seized?



58%

In the street or other open space



24%

At home

► Other information from police records



40% On patrol and suspicion of drugs

30% Responding to a report of a drugs or non-drugs related activity

15% Warrant search

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Background

This bulletin presents Official Statistics on the number and type of drug seizures made by Police Scotland during 2018-19 and 2019-20. It does not include information on drugs seized by the UK Border Force or British Transport Police, or as a result of Police Scotland activity which led to drugs being seized out-with Scotland.

The production of these statistics was paused earlier due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the need to meet increased demand for associated analysis (including through the introduction of new monthly Official statistics on crimes recorded by the police). As a result, this bulletin presents statistics for two reporting years (2018-19 and 2019-20), with a return to single-year bulletins to follow in 2022 (for 2020-21).

The data collection process for this bulletin is split into two parts, looking at seizures relating to drug supply and drug possession crimes separately. Police Scotland manually check drug supply-based crimes each year, with these records accounting for the clear majority of drugs seized in terms of quantity. This is supplemented by a sample led by Scottish Government statisticians of the remaining and far more numerous crimes of drug possession. The sample consists of a random selection of 400 crime records per year, stratified by police division to reflect the distribution of drug possession crimes across Scotland. This sample-based approach avoids the need to manually extract data for every crime record relating to a drugs possession crime, which would be a very resource intensive process. The information from the sample is then used to estimate the number of seizures and quantities seized in relation to possession crimes for the most commonly identified drug types for Scotland as a whole. This is done by multiplying the average quantity seized per crime by the estimated total number of seizures for that drug type.

For the drug types where quantities seized from possession-related crimes can be estimated, a figure for total amount seized has been produced by adding the quantity seized from supply crimes to the estimated quantity seized from possession crimes. For those drug types where the possession amount cannot be reliably estimated, only the quantity seized from supply crimes is available. However, as these drug types only appear in very small numbers within the sample, it can be assumed that the quantity seized from possession crimes is relatively low.

As well as using the sample to record information on the drugs seized from crimes of possession, information about the offender and the circumstances of the crime has also been recorded so that additional analysis on offender characteristics can be presented.

It should be noted that care must always be taken when making comparisons on this topic as there can be very large fluctuations in the quantity of drugs seized from one year to the next. Data on the quantities of drugs seized prior to 2014-15 can be found in the [2013-14 publication](#).

There are two statutory requirements for the UK to provide data on drug seizures, which are managed by the [UK Focal Point on Drugs](#), based at Public Health England. The UK Focal Point on Drugs collate drug seizure statistics from England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for the UK Focal Point's annual report. This is then submitted to the [European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction](#) (EMCDDA) and the [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC). These data inform the EMCDDA's annual report and the UNODC's annual World Drugs Report.

The minimum data requirements to satisfy these two obligations are to submit data on the number of drug seizures and the quantity of drugs seized for each of the following types of drugs: cocaine, crack, ecstasy-type substances, heroin, LSD, methylamphetamine, amphetamines, herbal cannabis, cannabis resin and cannabis plants. In addition to these ten drugs, this bulletin contains seizures data on methadone, morphine, barbiturates, ketamine, mephedrone, anabolic steroids, GHB, temazepam and benzodiazepines. Benzodiazepines include etizolam, a 'designer' benzodiazepine, which was classified as a Class C drug under a 2017 amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971¹.

The statistics on drug seizures are used to inform the [Communities National Outcome](#) – 'We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe' as well as the Scottish Government's [Justice Vision and Priorities](#). These statistics are also used by a wide range of stakeholders to monitor trends, for policy research and development, and for research purposes.

The 'Drug Seizures and Offender Characteristics' annual statistical bulletin series forms part of a series of bulletins produced by the Scottish Government on the

¹ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/634/pdfs/ukxiem_20170634_en.pdf

criminal justice system which can be found at: [Scottish Government statistics - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot).

Number of seizures and quantities of drugs seized

The quantity of drugs seized can fluctuate considerably each year and does not necessarily move in line with the number of seizures made. Whilst most drug seizures consist of relatively small quantities (usually possession-related crimes), annual quantities of drugs seized can be greatly influenced by a small number of large seizures (usually supply-related crimes).

Drug supply crimes

Intelligence-led operations against known drug dealers tend to result in a low number of seizures, but conversely the quantity of drugs seized and their value will be high. These high profile operations may result in greater disruption to the illicit drugs trade which, whilst having a positive effect, may reduce the number of seizures made. As such, care should be taken when comparing quantities of drugs seized over time.

A significant proportion of drugs seized in terms of quantity come from seizures related to supply crimes, despite making up a relatively small proportion of the overall number of seizures.

This section covers drugs seized where the crime was one of drug supply, drug production or illegal importation of drugs.

Class A drugs seized from drug supply crimes

[Table 1b](#) shows that in 2018-19, Police Scotland reported that they seized 125 kilograms (kg) of heroin, 386 kg of cocaine and 5 kg of crack cocaine from drug supply crimes. In 2019-20, Police Scotland seized 223 kg of heroin, 131 kg of cocaine and 4 kg of crack cocaine.

Approximately 5,200 ecstasy-type tablets were seized in 2018-19 and approximately 28,800 were seized in 2019-20.

7 litres of methadone was seized by Police Scotland in 2018-19, with 3 litres seized in 2019-20.

Compared to other types of Class A Drugs, relatively small amounts of LSD and morphine were seized in 2018-19 and 2019-20.

In addition to the information in Table 1a, there were 7 supply-based seizures of 'Other' Class A drugs in 2018-19 and 25 in 2019-20.

Table 1a: Number of Class A drug seizures by Police Scotland from supply crimes, by drug type, 2014-15 to 2019-20¹

Drug	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Cocaine Powder	366	506	488	543	558	634
Crack Cocaine	3	25	85	70	128	149
Ecstasy-type Substances	89	148	150	143	120	178
Heroin	553	737	815	826	731	678
LSD	3	6	9	3	4	9
Methadone	34	11	12	9	8	5
Morphine	3	18	3	6	5	11

Table 1b: Quantity of Class A drugs seized by Police Scotland from supply crimes, by drug type, 2014-15 to 2019-20¹

Drug	Units	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Cocaine Powder	kg	75.7	82.7	120.3	74.4	386.1	130.8
Crack Cocaine	kg	0.0	4.2	5.2	6.7	5.3	4.4
Ecstasy-type Substances	tablets (000s)	15.1	13.4	8.6	25.4	5.2	28.8
Heroin	kg	106.1	74.0	54.1	118.6	125.3	222.5
LSD	tablets/other units (000s)	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Methadone	litres	8.1	4.3	1.1	1.1	7.4	2.5
Morphine	litres	0.1	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.3

1. Data for 2014-15 is based on an estimated 85% of all drug supply-related crimes. The equivalent figures for the following years are 92% (2015-16), 100% (for both 2016-17 and 2017-18), 89% for 2018-19 and 94% for 2019-20 (see [Annex: Data Quality Statement](#) for further information).

Class B drugs seized from drug supply crimes

[Table 2b](#) shows the quantities of Class B drugs seized in 2018-19 and 2019-20.

The quantity of cannabis-related drug seizures from drug supply crimes in 2018-19 included 671 kg of herbal cannabis, 190 kg of cannabis resin and 25,933 cannabis plants. In 2019-20, Police Scotland seized 921 kg of herbal cannabis, 649 kg of cannabis resin and 33,295 cannabis plants.

There were 81 kg of amphetamines seized in 2018-19 and 143 kg in 2019-20. There was 0.1 kg of ketamine seized in 2018-19 and 7 kg seized in 2019-20. There were no mephedrone seizures from drug supply crimes in 2018-19 and just one seizure of less than 0.1 kg in 2019-20.

In addition to the information in Table 2a, there were 21 supply-based seizures of 'Other' Class B drugs in 2018-19 and 40 in 2019-20.

Table 2a: Number of Class B drug seizures by Police Scotland from supply crimes, by drug type, 2014-15 to 2019-20¹

Drug	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Herbal Cannabis	731	905	849	918	849	984
Cannabis Resin	268	400	329	334	221	153
Cannabis plants	594	655	683	648	421	485
Amphetamines	124	135	151	102	71	98
Barbiturates	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ketamine	2	2	7	7	11	29
Mephedrone	2	11	22	-	-	1

Table 2b: Quantity of Class B drugs seized by Police Scotland from supply crimes, by drug type, 2014-15 to 2019-20¹

Drug	Units	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Herbal Cannabis	kg	165.4	413.9	347.9	553.4	671.1	920.8
Cannabis Resin	kg	153.4	570.4	322.1	625.0	189.8	649.0
Cannabis plants	plants	13,022	31,398	18,310	16,346	25,933	33,295
Amphetamines	kg	118.4	71.8	109.9	68.3	80.5	142.9
Barbiturates	tablets (000s)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ketamine	kg	0.0	0.0	10.0	0.1	0.1	6.6
Mephedrone	kg	0.0	0.9	14.6	-	-	0.0

1. Data for 2014-15 is based on an estimated 85% of all drug supply-related crimes. The equivalent figures for the following years are 92% (2015-16), 100% (for both 2016-17 and 2017-18), 89% for 2018-19 and 94% for 2019-20 (see [Annex: Data Quality Statement](#) for further information).

Class C drugs seized from drug supply crimes

[Table 3b](#) shows the quantities of Class C drugs seized from drug supply crimes.

Most Class C seizures were benzodiazepines, with almost 1.8 million tablets seized in 2018-19 and over 4.9 million tablets in 2019-20. Whilst it is not possible to present figures for diazepam, etizolam and other benzodiazepines separately, the vast majority of tablets seized from crimes of drugs supply are likely to have been etizolam, including an estimated 94% of benzodiazepine tablets seized in 2019-20.

Etizolam is a 'designer' benzodiazepine, which was classified as a Class C drug under a 2017 amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971².

Approximately 5,400 anabolic steroid tablets were seized in 2018-19 and 5,500 tablets in 2019-20. Fewer than 50 temazepam tablets were seized in 2018-19, with approximately 300 tablets seized in 2019-20.

Table 3a: Number of Class C drug seizures by Police Scotland from supply crimes, by drug type, 2014-15 to 2019-20¹

Drug	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Anabolic Steroids	3	5	52	3	1	8
GHB	0	2	-	-	-	1
Temazepam	2	4	2	1	3	2
Benzodiazepines ²	419	382	316	322	307	414

Table 3b: Quantity of Class C drugs seized by Police Scotland from supply crimes, by drug type, 2014-15 to 2019-20¹

Drug	Units	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Anabolic Steroids	tablets (000s)	0.3	0.3	12.1	0.4	5.4	5.5
GHB	litres	0.0	0.0	-	-	-	-
Temazepam	tablets (000s)	0.0	1.3	34.2	0.1	0.0	0.3
Benzodiazepines ²	tablets (000s)	1,182.7	1,276.1	2,165.4	583.8	1,762.9	4,929.1

1. Data for 2014-15 is based on an estimated 85% of all drug supply-related crimes. The equivalent figures for the following years are 92% (2015-16), 100% (for both 2016-17 and 2017-18), 89% for 2018-19 and 94% for 2019-20 (see [Annex: Data Quality Statement](#) for further information).

2. Prior to 2017-18, the vast majority of the tablets seized in this category are likely to have been diazepam. Etizolam, a 'designer' benzodiazepine, was classified as a Class C drug under a 2017 amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. It is estimated that etizolam represented 94% of the total quantity of benzodiazepines seized from supply crimes in 2019-20.

² http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/634/pdfs/ukxiem_20170634_en.pdf

Drug possession crimes

The majority of seizures of controlled drugs are from drug possession crimes (in terms of the number of seizures), however by their nature these incidents involve a relatively small quantity of drugs being seized. As a result, drug possession crimes account for only a small proportion of all drugs seized in terms of quantity, despite accounting for the vast majority of seizures.

The data presented below for drug possession crimes is based on a sample of 400 records per year. As this analysis is drawn from a sample of records, users should treat the following information as a broad indication of the characteristics of drug possession rather than as an exact measure. All figures are presented at a national level as the sample size is too small to provide robust estimates for geographies below this.

Number of drug possession crimes by drug classification

Recorded crime statistics show that in total, there were 30,469 drug possession crimes recorded by the police in 2019-20, compared to 29,843 drug possession crimes in 2018-19 and 27,171 in 2017-18. Further information can be found in [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2019-20](#).

[Table 4a](#) shows the distribution of the classification of drugs seized in the sample for 2014-15 to 2019-20. [Table 4b](#) shows the resulting estimate of the total number of possession crimes involving each class of drug.

In both 2018-19 and 2019-20, more than half of all drug possession crimes were estimated to involve Class B drugs (59% in 2018-19 and 54% in 2019-20). A further 19% of all drug possession crimes in 2018-19 were estimated to involve Class A drugs, with an equivalent figure of 23% for 2019-20. Around a fifth of all drug possession crimes involved Class C drugs in both in 2018-19 (19%) and 2019-20 (21%). It should be noted that the changes in proportions between 2018-19 and 2019-20 were not statistically significant.

Between 2014-15 and 2019-20, the proportion of drug possession crimes that were estimated to involve a Class B drug fell from 68.0% to 53.8%. The changes for Class A and Class C possession crimes (between 2014-15 and 2019-20) were not statistically significant.

Table 4a: Percentage of drug possession records in the sample by drug classification, 2014-15 to 2019-20

Drug Class	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Class A	15.8%	17.5%	22.5%	21.8%	19.3%	23.0%
Class B	68.0%	67.5%	62.5%	57.5%	59.3%	53.8%
Class C	15.8%	14.5%	14.0%	16.5%	18.5%	21.3%
Unclassified ¹	0.5%	0.5%	1.0%	4.3%	3.0%	2.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4b: Estimated number of drug possession crimes by drug classification, 2014-15 to 2019-20²

Drug Class	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Class A	5,000	5,200	6,200	5,900	5,700	7,000
Class B	21,500	20,200	17,400	15,600	17,700	16,400
Class C	5,000	4,300	3,900	4,500	5,500	6,500
Unclassified ¹	200	100	300	1,200	900	600
Total	31,632	29,929	27,766	27,171	29,843	30,469

1. In a small number of cases the drug type could not be classified due to lack of information or no controlled drugs were seized.

2. As these figures are estimates they have been rounded to the nearest 100.

Quantity of drugs seized from drug possession crimes

In 2018-19, cocaine, heroin, herbal cannabis, cannabis resin and etizolam accounted for 86% of all drug possession seizures. They accounted for 79% of all drug possession seizures in 2019-20.

In both 2018-19 and 2019-20, herbal cannabis was the most commonly seized drug by a considerable margin, with etizolam the second most commonly seized drug. In 2018-19, 58% of all possession-related seizures involved these two drug types, with the equivalent figure of 55% for 2019-20.

[Table 5c](#) provides estimates of the quantity of drugs seized from 2014-15 to 2019-20 for particular drug types. To ensure the value of these estimates, they have only been carried out where there were at least 15 observations of a drug found in the sample. Following year-on-year decreases between 2014-15 and 2017-18, diazepam did not reach this required level to be reported in 2018-19 and 2019-20. This suggests that by those latest two years, diazepam accounted for only a very small proportion of seizures for drug possession crimes.

The quantity has been estimated by multiplying the average quantity seized in the sample by the estimated number of drug possession seizures involving that drug.

Table 5a: Percentage of drug possession records in the sample, by drug type, 2014-15 to 2019-20

Drug	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Cocaine	7.8%	8.3%	10.3%	10.0%	11.3%	8.8%
Heroin	4.8%	6.0%	7.5%	8.8%	5.3%	7.8%
Herbal Cannabis	43.0%	46.8%	41.8%	39.5%	44.3%	40.8%
Cannabis Resin	21.0%	16.8%	18.3%	14.0%	11.8%	7.8%
Diazepam	14.5%	12.3%	9.8%	5.5%	n/r	n/r
Etizolam ¹	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.5%	13.3%	14.0%

Table 5b: Estimated number of drug possession crimes, by drug type, 2014-15 to 2019-20²

Drug	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Cocaine	2,500	2,500	2,900	2,700	3,400	2,700
Heroin	1,500	1,800	2,100	2,400	1,600	2,400
Herbal Cannabis	13,600	14,000	11,600	10,700	13,200	12,400
Cannabis Resin	6,600	5,000	5,100	3,800	3,500	2,400
Diazepam	4,600	3,700	2,700	1,500	n/r	n/r
Etizolam ¹	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,500	4,000	4,300

Table 5c: Estimated quantity of drugs seized by Police Scotland from drug possession crimes, by drug type, 2014-15 to 2019-20

Drug	Units	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Cocaine	kg	4.1	6.1	5.2	4.7	6.6	4.6
Heroin	kg	0.8	2.1	2.1	3.8	1.5	2.9
Herbal Cannabis	kg	36.2	36.8	39.6	61.2	33.1	58.5
Cannabis Resin	kg	14.8	17.6	32.6	28.1	29.5	8.3
Diazepam	tablets (000s)	151.3	63.2	71.8	33.2	n/r	n/r
Etizolam ¹	tablets (000s)	n/a	n/a	n/a	61.7	308.0	335.1

1. From 2017-18 onwards, separate figures are presented for etizolam, a 'designer' benzodiazepine, which was classified as a Class C drug under a 2017 amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

2. As these figures are estimates they have been rounded to the nearest 100.

n/r = Due to the low number of observations in the sample of drug possession crimes (fewer than 15 out of 400) estimates have not been reported.

Overall quantity of drugs seized

[Table 6](#) shows the total quantity of drugs seized for the drug types where an estimate of the quantity seized from possession crimes has been made. The figures shown in the table are the sum of the quantities seized from supply-related crimes and the estimated quantity seized from possession crimes.

For those drug types not shown in Table 6, there were fewer than 15 observations in the sample of possession crimes for each year, and therefore the total quantity seized from possession crimes is likely to be very small. Due to this the quantity seized from supply-related crimes shown in [Tables 1b](#), [2b](#) and [3b](#) should provide a reasonable estimate of the total quantity seized.

For all of these drug types the quantity of drugs seized from possession crimes is relatively small when compared to the quantity seized from supply crimes.

In 2018-19, 393 kg of cocaine was seized in total, with 136 kg seized in 2019-20. There were also 127 kg of heroin seized in 2018-19, with 225 kg seized in 2019-20.

In total, just over 700 kg of herbal cannabis was seized in 2018-19, with 902 kg seized in 2019-20. The quantity of cannabis resin seized was 219 kg in 2018-19 and 657 kg in 2019-20.

Approximately 2.1 million benzodiazepine tablets were seized in 2018-19, with approximately 5.3 million seized in 2019-20. The vast majority of tablets seized in 2019-20 (an estimated 94% of supply and possession crimes combined) were etizolam. As noted above, etizolam is a 'designer' benzodiazepine, which was classified as a Class C drug under a 2017 amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971³.

³ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/634/pdfs/ukxiem_20170634_en.pdf

Table 6: Estimated total quantity of drugs seized by Police Scotland, by drug type, 2014-15 to 2019-20¹

Drug	Units	Drug Class	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Cocaine	kg	A	79.8	88.8	125.5	79.1	392.7	135.5
Heroin	kg	A	106.9	76.1	56.2	122.4	126.8	225.4
Herbal Cannabis	kg	B	201.6	450.7	387.4	614.6	704.2	979.3
Cannabis Resin	kg	B	168.2	588.0	354.7	653.1	219.3	657.3
Benzodiazepines ²	tablets (000s)	C	1,334.0	1,339.3	2,237.3	617.0	2,070.9	5,264.2

1. Data for 2014-15 is based on an estimated 85% of all drug supply-related crimes. The equivalent figures for the following years are 92% (2015-16), 100% (for both 2016-17 and 2017-18), 89% for 2018-19 and 94% for 2019-20 (see [Annex: Data Quality Statement](#) for further information).

2. Prior to 2017-18, the vast majority of the tablets seized in this category are likely to have been diazepam. Etizolam, a 'designer' benzodiazepine, was classified as a Class C drug under a 2017 amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (link below). It is estimated that etizolam represented 94% of the total quantity of benzodiazepines seized from drug crimes (including both supply and possession together) in 2019-20.

Analysis of the characteristics of drug possession crimes

Information about the offenders of drug possession crimes and how they came to the attention of the police was also recorded in the sampling process.

Characteristics of offenders

- In both 2018-19 and 2019-20, the vast majority of drug possession crimes were committed by one offender, with only 3% of crimes having multiple offenders (these situations can occur where offenders collectively admit to ownership of the seized drugs, or if no one admits to ownership).
- The vast majority of drug possession crimes were committed by males or all male groups (85% in both years).
- The median age of a drug possession offender was 29 years old in both years and almost two thirds (64% in 2018-19 and 63% in 2019-20) of offenders were in the 20-29 and 30-39 years age groups. Offenders are far more likely to come from these two age groups than would be expected based solely on their size within the general population (27% for both years). Tables [7a](#) and [7b](#) show the age distribution of the offenders in the sample for each year.

Table 7a: Age distribution of the offenders of drug possession crimes in 2018-19

Age group of offender	Percentage of offenders	Percentage of total population ¹
0-19	15.0%	21.2%
20-29	37.0%	13.5%
30-39	27.3%	13.0%
40-49	15.3%	12.7%
50+	5.5%	39.6%

1. Population figures are based on the National Records of Scotland 2018 mid-year estimates. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates>

Table 7b: Age distribution of the offenders of drug possession crimes in 2019-20

Age group of offender	Percentage of offenders	Percentage of total population ¹
0-19	14.5%	21.0%
20-29	36.8%	13.4%
30-39	25.7%	13.2%
40-49	18.1%	12.5%
50+	4.9%	42.3%

1. Population figures are based on the National Records of Scotland 2019 mid-year estimates. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates>

How Police Scotland became aware of drug possession crimes

The circumstances leading to a drug possession seizure have been recorded based on the details of the event within the crime record. As crime records have not been created specifically for this purpose, it has been necessary on occasion to make assumptions around certain aspects of what happened. As such this information should be seen as a broad illustration, rather than a precise measure.

In 2018-19, it is estimated that half of drug possession crimes in the sample were detected by police while on routine patrol. The majority of these were cases where police officers on patrol had a suspicion or observed that the offender was in possession of drugs, with this category accounting for 38% of all records reviewed. A further 12% of records involved police on patrol dealing with another crime, offence or incident and finding drugs while doing this.

Around a third (32%) of drug possession crimes were detected as a result of police responding to a report of a crime, offence or another reported incident, either in relation to the drugs offence or for another matter (either criminal or non-criminal). One-in-ten drug possession seizures (10%) were made by police whilst carrying out a search warrant (likely due to the receipt of intelligence that an individual was involved in drugs crime).

In 2019-20, it is estimated that almost half (48%) of drug possession crimes in the sample were detected by police while on routine patrol. The majority of these were cases where police officers on patrol had a suspicion or observed that the offender was in possession of drugs, with this category accounting for 40% of all records reviewed. A further 9% of records involved police on patrol dealing with another crime, offence or incident and finding drugs while doing this.

Almost a third (30%) of drug possession crimes were assessed to be found as a result of police responding to a report of a crime, offence or another reported incident, either in relation to the drugs offence or for another matter (either criminal or non-criminal). A further 15% of drug possession seizures were made by police whilst carrying out a search warrant (likely due to the receipt of intelligence that an individual was involved in drugs crime).

Other information about the drug possession crimes

- In 2018-19, the most common days of the week for drug possession crimes to take place were a Saturday and a Thursday, with 18% and 17% of seizures respectively. The least common day was a Monday, with only a tenth of seizures occurring on this day of the week.
- In 2019-20, there is a fairly even distribution over the weekdays, however a fifth (20%) of possession crimes occurred on a Saturday with just under a tenth (9%) occurring on a Sunday.
- In both 2018-19 and 2019-20, the most common location for drug possession crimes to take place was the street or other open space, with 56% of records reviewed having this locus in 2018-19 and 58% in 2019-20. Dwellings were the next most common locus in both years, where 21% and 24% of drug possession crimes took place in 2018-19 and 2019-20 respectively.

Annexes

Data Quality Statement

To produce this annual release on drug seizures, the Scottish Government requests data on drug supply-related crimes from Police Scotland's Analysis and Performance Unit (APU). APU, in turn, requests this information from divisions across Police Scotland which still maintain aspects of their own Crime Management Systems defined by the previous legacy force areas.

It was not possible to obtain data for every drug supply crime in the latest two years presented in this bulletin. Two divisions were unable to provide a return for 2018-19 and one division was unable to provide a return for 2019-20. As such, the figures provided for drug supply crimes relate to an estimated 89% of drug supply-related crimes in 2018-19 and 94% in 2019-20. It should be noted that as with any data collection that requires the manual review of a significant volume of administrative records, there is always a risk that a degree of human error may occur in the transferring of this information to an analysable form. To ensure the data is as accurate as possible, we have combined the figures for etizolam within the benzodiazepines category (for crimes of drug supply), rather than present them separately.

The current collection process for drug seizures data remains a transitional one. We will re-visit this in future years, in line with Police Scotland's plan to roll out a new national IT system for recording crime, which may offer opportunities to further improve the data collection process for these statistics.

Data from drug possession crimes is collected via a random sample of 400 drug possession crime records per year. This sample is stratified by police division so that the sample's geographic distribution reflects the distribution of drug possession crimes across Scotland. These records are reviewed by Scottish Government statisticians.

As part of the sampling process, the quality of the recording of drug possession crimes was checked and found to be very good, with nearly 100% of records classified correctly across 2018-19 and 2019-20.

We always welcome feedback on the content of our statistical bulletins and users are welcome to submit their comments to: JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot.

Police Scotland Management Information

In addition to the Official Statistics on drug seizures, Police Scotland publish management information on drug crimes recorded by the police (including the number of recorded crimes of drug supply & production, possession of drugs and other drug crimes). This is presented within their Quarterly Management Information Reports, which are available from the 'Our Performance' section of Police Scotland's website: <http://www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/our-performance/>

These reports are produced to demonstrate Police Scotland's commitment to transparency (alongside other regular reporting activity to the Scottish Police Authority). The information within these reports is presented on a cumulative quarterly basis, with the first quarter of a reporting year containing 3 months of data (from April to June), the second containing 6 months of data (from April to September) etc. The reports are typically published within 2 months of the period to which they refer.

Other notes

In addition to drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, the Psychoactive Substance Act 2016 made it an offence to produce, supply, offer to supply, possess with intent to supply, possess on custodial premises, import or export psychoactive substances. The number of crimes of production, supply or possession in custody of a psychoactive substance was 2 in 2018-19, 10 in 2019-20 and 8 in 2020-21.

An amendment⁴ was made to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 which means that from 1st April 2019, gabapentin and pregabalin are controlled as Class C drugs under this act. Due to the low number of seizures involving these drugs in 2019-20, they are not presented separately within the publication.

Clearly, only a limited selection of tables can be included in any statistical bulletin. Further analysis of Drug Seizures in Scotland can be supplied on request. In certain cases a fee is charged. For details of what can be provided, please contact JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot.

⁴ [The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 \(Amendment\) Order 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uk/2018/1100)

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How to access background or source data

The data collected for this statistical bulletin

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available on the Scottish Government website
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

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If you are not satisfied with our service or have any comments or suggestions, please write to the Chief Statistician, GR, St Andrews House, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG, Telephone: (0131) 244 0302, e-mail statistics.enquiries@gov.scot.

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