

Drug use in jail now at 8-year high

18 Jul 2017



The number of prisoners disciplined for taking drugs in jail has now hit an eight-year high, figures have revealed.

Official statistics show 1164 inmates were caught either taking drugs or administering them to others last year, the equivalent of more than three a day.

This comes 6 months after the Scottish Conservatives highlighted the worrying upward trend of substance abuse in prisons.

Today's figures are nearly double the 634 caught four years ago.

The Scottish Conservatives have said the ever-increasing use of illegal substances in the country's prisons is undermining any attempts being made to rehabilitate criminals and cut reoffending rates.

And these figures don't include those convicts who have taken drugs and managed to get away with it.

In recent years the Scottish Government has introduced measures such as signal jamming trials to reduce the illegal use of mobile phones inside.

But no such progress has been made on drug-taking, with last year's the highest number of incidents since 2008-09, when 1257 were caught.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

"Yet again, we see offenders continuing their criminality within prison walls, an environment which is supposed to be completely secure.

"For the second year running, more than three inmates are being caught using drugs every day, and these figures indicate it's getting worse year after year.

"Detecting and recording these incidents isn't enough – it's crucial the SPS cracks down on this problem and stops these substances slipping through the net.

"All political parties agree that rehabilitation of offenders is critical if we want to reduce stubbornly high reoffending rates.

"But how can this be expected to take place while drug-taking remains so prevalent in prisons?"

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- **1164 prisoners were caught 'Administering, or allowing to be administered, a controlled drug to oneself' in 2016-17.** It's the highest drug use has been at since 2008-09. (*Scottish Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts 2016-2017*, Appendix 5, p76, link; previous annual reports are available at [link](#)).

Below are the numbers for prisoners disciplined for taking drugs in the last nine years: 2008-09 – 1257 2009-10 – 863 2010-11 – 664 2011-12 – 638 2012-13 – 634 2013-14 – 869 2014-15 – 1003 2015-16 – 1133 2016/17 – 1164 All previous reports can be found here:

<http://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Publications/Publications.aspx>

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18 Jul 2017



The SNP want to water-down the requirement for playing fields for new schools, it has emerged.

At the moment, playing fields have to be a minimum size.

A consultation document published yesterday by the Scottish Government proposes changing the regulations, with new rules for synthetic pitches.

These plans would allow synthetic pitches which are much smaller than grass pitches – up to half the size:

- The average secondary school of 850 pupils, for example, currently has to provide 3.2 hectares of grass pitches – but in the new rules, would have to provide just 1.7 hectares of synthetic area.
- A primary school of 450 pupils would only have to provide 0.3 hectares of synthetic area, compared to 0.6 hectares of grass.

The proposed rules would also allow new schools to ignore the minimum size for grass pitches, if they are developing mixed grass and synthetic pitches.

The consultation refers to guidance from SportScotland to support this change – but almost all of the new regulations for secondary schools would

allow playing fields smaller than the SportScotland guidance. A secondary school of 1200 pupils is recommended by SportScotland to need 3.9 hectares of mixed pitches, for example – but under the new regulations, would be allowed to go below the existing minimum of 3.6 hectares. In practice, the regulations mean that most new school playing fields will be smaller than under the previous guidance, and many will be smaller than recommended.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“Safety is paramount, but before any decisions are taken, the Scottish Government must pay attention to the Sport Scotland recommendations – and there must be no attempt use this consultation to diminish the playing space available.

“The cross-party Sport committee at Holyrood and the Health and Sport Committee have both heard evidence that points to the diminished number of playing fields available across Scotland.

“That comes at the same time as there is rising obesity and worrying signs of poor health amongst too many of our young people.

“This consultation is an opportunity to review matters properly, and ensure that all our schools are safe and have campuses fit for the 21st century.”

The consultation can be found [here](#). The difference between the existing and proposed regulations is as follows: **Primary**

Size	Existing regulations	New regulations (grass only, hectares)	New regulations (synthetic only, hectares)
60 or less	$\frac{1}{4}$ acre = .1ha	0.1	0.1
61-140	$\frac{1}{2}$ acre = .2ha	0.2	0.3
141-215	$\frac{3}{4}$ acre = .3ha	0.3	0.3
316-450	1 acre = .4ha	0.4	0.3
451 or more	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres = .6ha	0.6	0.3

Secondary

Size	Existing regulations	New regulations (grass only, hectares)	New regulations (synthetic only, hectares)	SportScotland recommendation (typical mix of pitches, hectares)
320-500	4 acres = 1.6 ha	1.6	1.7	2.5 (for 500 pupils)
501-750	6 acres = 2.48 ha	2.4	1.7	2.5 (700)

751-1000	8 acres = 3.2 ha	3.2	1.7	3.2 (1000)
1001-1200	3.6	3.6	2.5	3.9 (1200)
1201-1400	4	4	2.5	3.9 (1400)
1401-1600	4.4	4.4	3.2	4.5 (1600)
1601-1800	4.8	4.8	3.2	–
1801-2000	5.2	5.2	3.2	–

SportScotland guidance calculates the area required for an average mixture of activities and timetabling for schools of different size, with typical mixes of grass and synthetic pitches.

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14 Jul 2017



A Scottish council has warned it may have to call in nursery teachers to take primary school classes if the nationwide recruitment crisis doesn't improve.

In a briefing note, Clackmannanshire council set out a number of bleak scenarios facing the local authority as it prepares for staff shortages when children return in autumn.

As well as moving teachers out of nurseries and into the classroom, it warned some schools in the area may be "unable to run classes for certain year groups".

In addition, some children with the right catchment areas may be turned away, while class size limits would likely be breached, with some even breaking the 30-child limit.

The warning was sent from the council's chief education officer Anne Pearson.

She said schools across Clackmannanshire would have to find room for 90 extra pupils, and would need to employ 13 extra teachers to meet that demand.

However, it already brought in 25 teachers in February as part of a process in which the council "appointed all applicants who met our minimum standard".

The report adds: "We have carried out a risk assessment and identified that there could be a major impact on school improvements and closing the gaps.

"Senior managers in schools will have to cover for absences, which would take them away from their leadership roles.

"It could be the case that some schools may have to turn catchment children away and offer alternative places in other schools.

"Ultimately, a level of teacher absence beyond the norm could lead to some schools unable to run classes for certain year groups.

"The service may have to move nursery teachers out of nursery classes into primary classes."

The paper stated that actions to address the shortage could include "exploring recruitment beyond Scotland".

Yesterday, the Scottish Conservatives revealed how teacher shortages were leading to secondary schools reducing the number of subjects offered to Higher pupils.

In some councils, schools just miles apart had a huge variation in the number of options available.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

"We've heard warnings for many years about the possible impact of teacher shortages.

"Now we have hard-hitting predictions which could happen within a matter of months, and there will undoubtedly be negative consequences for children.

"Parents will be alarmed that things have got so bad nursery teachers may have to be drafted in, and entire age groups in some primary schools may have to be sent elsewhere.

"This is the consequence of an SNP government which has had a boom and bust approach to teacher training.

"The nationalists have planned disastrously, and really left councils in the lurch when it comes to dealing with the impact.

"The SNP must take serious heed of these warnings, and act urgently to ensure these scenarios coming down the track don't play out."

Notes to editors:

To see the briefing note, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/22-June-2017-Primary-School-Teacher-Shortage.docx>

[Huge gulf exposed in number of subjects offered in schools](#)

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13 Jul 2017



Schools which are only a few miles apart are offering pupils a vastly different number of subjects to study, new research has found.

Figures have revealed that in some local authorities there is a significant difference between the school offering the greatest number of Higher subjects to pupils and the school offering the least.

For example, in Edinburgh, the gap between schools with the most and the least subjects on offer is 21, while in the Highlands it's as high as 24.

And in Glasgow, schools that are relatively close together vary from 13 subjects on offer up to 27.

The statistics were obtained through Freedom of Information by the Scottish Conservatives, who said teacher shortages in some areas were likely to have a direct impact on the subjects on offer.

The figures come as some councils become increasingly concerned about their inability to fill vacant posts, and as fears grow about the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“There will always be some very understandable variation in subject choice across different schools of rural and urban differences, depending on the size of school and different pupil cohorts.

“But parents will be alarmed to see the extent of the variation in some local authorities, particularly between similar types of schools.

“They will be even more concerned when they learn that there is some correlation between lower choice options and those local authorities experiencing higher teacher shortages.

“Subject choice is clearly critical when it comes to SQA qualifications and entry to college, university and the workplace.

"It's therefore a very important part of any pupil's education.

"This has always been a problem, but it's being exacerbated as a result of problems with teacher recruitment.

"John Swinney knows only too well a few schools in his own Perthshire constituency have had real problems with recruiting teachers, including in key subjects like maths.

"That is completely unacceptable. The SNP must address this issue head on before more young people are adversely affected."

Notes to editors:

Below is the variation between the most and the least Higher subjects offered by schools in each local authority. Those councils not included either didn't hold the information, or refused to respond:

Aberdeen – 13

Aberdeenshire – 11

Angus – 7

Argyll and Bute – 15

Clackmannanshire – 4

Dumfries and Galloway – 11

Dundee – 16

East Ayrshire – 6

East Dunbartonshire – 8

East Lothian – 5

Edinburgh – 21

Eilean Siar – 12

Falkirk – 9

Glasgow – 14

Highland – 24

Inverclyde – 7

Midlothian – 7

Moray – 9

North Ayrshire – 7

Perth and Kinross – 15

Renfrewshire – 8

Scottish Borders – 12

Shetland – 1

South Ayrshire – 8

South Lanarkshire – 6

Stirling – 5

West Dunbartonshire – 3

West Lothian – 10

A school-by-school breakdown is available here:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Highers.xlsx>

For individual FoI responses, contact the Scottish Conservative press office.

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12 Jul 2017



The Scottish Government reinstated the website domain name it used during the 2014 referendum, despite polls showing no increased support for separation.

It has emerged the rights for website scotreferendum.com were updated last October by civil servants – at taxpayers' expense – just three days after the SNP conference.

The Scottish Conservatives said this was further evidence the SNP continued to obsess about independence, even when the First Minister claimed she respected the result and her priorities lay elsewhere.

The domain name was first registered in January 2012 by the Scottish Government, shortly after the UK Government confirmed it would grant a section 30 order for a referendum on independence to be held.

This was then renewed on October 17, 2016, just two days after the party's

autumn conference in Glasgow.

The website itself, despite being owned by the Scottish Government, contains only a link to a thankyou message from Nicola Sturgeon to Yes voters following the 2014 defeat.

Scottish Conservative MP Ross Thomson said:

“It’s clear SNP ministers came home from conference and made getting the separation website up-and-running again a priority.

“The conference finished on the Saturday, and that renewal took place on the Monday – it was literally the first thing they did when they got back to the office.

“This is despite polls clearly showing no public appetite for the break-up of Britain, and the First Minister herself stating it was matters like education that were her priority.

“It goes to show the SNP can never be trusted on this issue.

“The break-up of Britain always has, and always will, be its one and only true cause.”