

# **Knife Possession Sentencing Quarterly Brief July to September 2012 England and Wales**

Ministry of Justice  
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## 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 of National Statistics<sup>1</sup>.

Comparisons are presented between the latest quarter (July to September, Q3 2012) and Q3 2011 (July to September 2011) to provide an indication of changes over the last year. Longer term comparisons comparing Q3 2012 with the same period two years ago are also shown.

Care should be taken when interpreting small changes in the statistics between quarters. **In particular, it should be noted that the latest figures presented for immediate custody are likely to be revised upwards in later editions of the bulletin as additional data regarding deferred sentences become available.**

The **explanatory notes** section presented towards the end of this bulletin gives an indication of the likely scale of these revisions, and highlights plans to include estimates of the complete Q4 2012 figures in the next publication of this bulletin in February 2013.

**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.

This statistical brief, along with the Excel tables 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

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

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

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.

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

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.

## Executive summary

This brief 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.

### Main points

In Q3 2012:

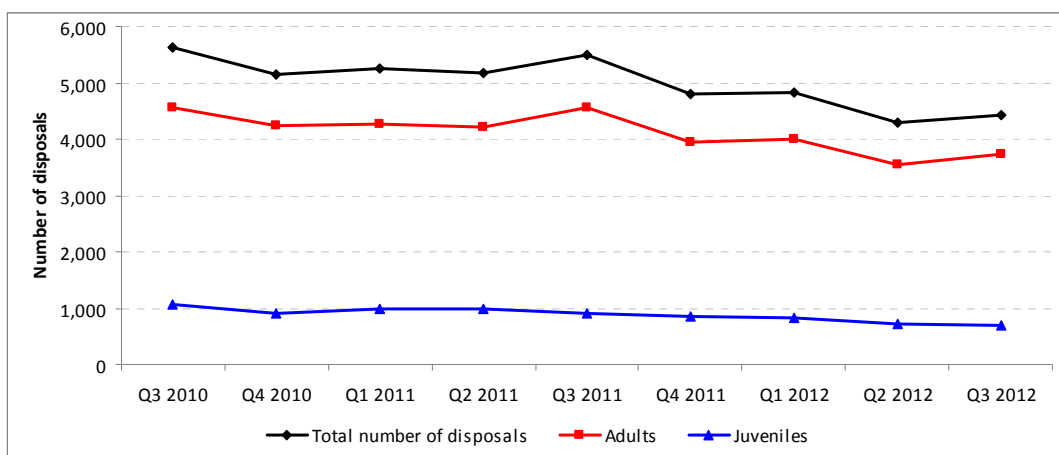
- 4,433 total disposals were given for knife or offensive weapon possession - a decrease of 19 per cent compared to Q3 2011.
- As in previous quarters the most common methods of disposal for possession of a knife or offensive weapon are community sentence (29 per cent) and immediate custody (23 per cent). (Table 1)
- The proportion of offences receiving caution, community sentence, suspended sentence and immediate custody remained relatively stable when compared to Q3 2011. (Table 1)
- The number of offences for aged group 10 to 17 fell by 24 per cent to 696, while offences for those aged 18 and over fell by 18 per cent to 3,736. (Table 2)
- The proportion of juvenile offenders receiving a community sentence increased by four percentage points to 59 per cent from Q3 2011
- For adult offenders, the proportion receiving a caution, immediate custodial sentence or community sentence decreased while the proportion of offenders receiving a suspended sentence increased.
- 64 per cent of offenders received a community order and 36 per cent a suspended sentence order for possession of an offensive weapon continuing the relative proportion as in previous quarters.
- The proportion of adults sentenced to immediate custody in Q3 2012 was 25 per cent down from 27 per cent in Q3 2011.
- The average length of a immediate custodial sentence was 237 days up from 194 days in Q3 2011

## Main points

### Cautioning and sentencing statistics July to September 2012 (Tables 1 to 5)

In Q3 2012 there were 4,433 disposals given for knife or offensive weapon possession, a decrease of 19 per cent (from 5,484) on Q3 2011.

**Figure 1: Number of disposals given for knife and offensive weapon possession in England and Wales, by age, between Q3 2010 and Q3 2012**



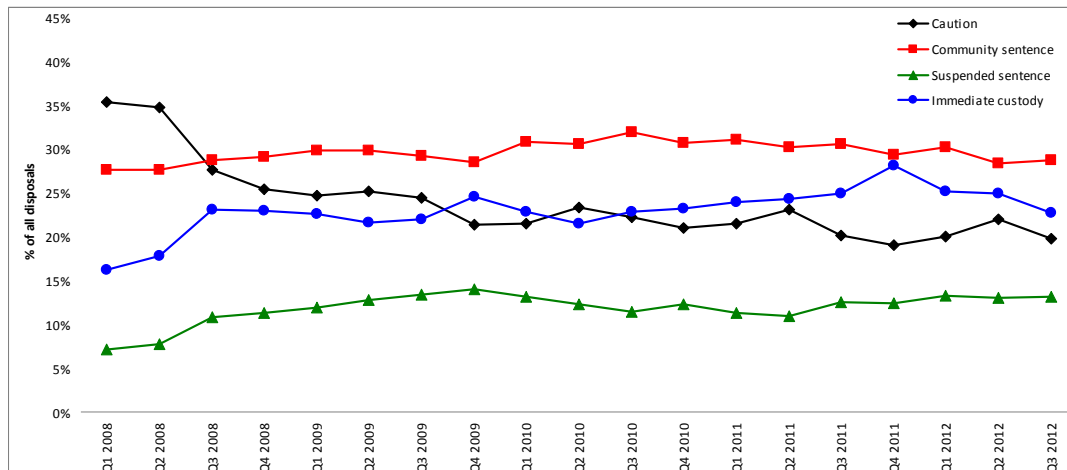
- **The proportion of offences receiving community sentences and immediate custodial sentences for knife or offensive weapon possession decreased, while the proportion of cautions and suspended sentence orders remained the same between Q3 2011 and Q3 2012<sup>3</sup>.**
- In Q3 2012:
  - 20 per cent (875) of all possession offences resulted in a caution<sup>4</sup> compared to 20 per cent (1,101) in Q3 2011.
  - 29 per cent (1,274) of all possession offences resulted in community sentences compared to 30 per cent (1,672) in Q3 2011.
  - 13 per cent (579) of all possession offences resulted in suspended sentence orders; compared to 13 per cent (689) in Q3 2011.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

- 23 per cent (1,008) of all possession offences resulted in immediate custody compared to 25 per cent (1,362) in Q3 2011.

**Figure 2: Proportion of type of disposal given for knife and offensive weapon possession in England and Wales, between Q1 2008 and Q3 2012**



- **Where immediate custodial sentences are given for these offences the proportion receiving longer sentences has increased.**
  - 38 per cent (383) of sentences were recorded in Q3 2012 as being over six months compared to 31 per cent (423) in Q3 2011.
  - The average length of a custodial sentence was 237 days (7.8 months) in Q3 2012, compared to 194 days (6.4 months) in Q3 2011.
- **For offences committed by juvenile offenders the proportion of offences receiving reprimands and warnings and community sentences has increased.**
  - Reprimands and warnings increased from 25 per cent (233) in Q3 2011 to 28 per cent (192) in Q3 2012, and community sentences increased from 55 per cent (505) in Q2 2011 to 59 per cent (409) in Q3 2012.
  - This was balanced by a decrease in the proportion receiving immediate custodial sentences from 12 per cent (112) to 8 per cent (58).

**For offences committed by adult offenders the proportion of offences receiving a caution, community sentence or immediate custodial sentence has decreased.**

- 18 per cent (683) of adult offenders received cautions in Q3 2012 compared to 19 per cent (868) in Q3 2011.

- 23 per cent (865) of adult offenders received a community sentence in Q3 2012 compared to 26 per cent (1,167) in Q3 2011. Immediate custodial sentences decreased from 27 per cent (1,249) to 25 per cent (949).
- The proportion of suspended sentence orders has remained the same at 15 per cent and respectively for Q3 2011 and Q3 2012.

### **Comparison between Q3 2010 and Q3 2012**

- **The total number of disposals (cautions and sentences) given for knife or offensive weapon possession decreased by 21 per cent from 5,632 to 4,433 between Q3 2010 and Q3 2012.**
  - Juvenile offenders fell by **35** per cent (1,063 to 696), compared to adult offenders which fell by **18** per cent (4,569 to 3,736).
- **The proportion of offences receiving cautions<sup>5</sup> and community sentences for knife or offensive weapon possession decreased, while the proportion receiving a suspended sentence increased**
  - 20 per cent (875) of all possession offences resulted in a caution, in Q3 2012 compared to 22 per cent (1,252) in Q3 2010.
  - 29 per cent (1,274) of all possession offences resulted in community sentences in Q3 2012 compared to 32 per cent (1,794) in Q3 2010.
  - 13 per cent (579) of all possession offences resulted in suspended sentence orders in Q3 2012 compared to 11 per cent (642) in Q3 2010.
  - 1,008 of all possession offences resulted in immediate custody in Q3 2012 compared to 1,285 in Q3 2010, both at 23 per cent.
- **Where immediate custodial sentences are given for these offences there has been an increase in the proportion of longer sentences:**
  - 38 per cent (383) of sentences were recorded as being over six months in Q3 2012 compared to 31 per cent (401) in Q3 2010.
  - The average length of a custodial sentence was 237 days (7.8 months) in Q3 2012, an increased from 194 days (6.4 months) in Q3 2010.

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<sup>5</sup> Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

- **For offences committed by juvenile offenders**
  - The proportion of offences receiving community sentences were 58 per cent (409) in Q3 2012 compared to 56 per cent (593) in Q3 2010. The proportion receiving an immediate custodial sentence decreased from 11 per cent (112) in Q3 2010 to 8 per cent (58) in Q3 2012.
- **For offences committed by adult offenders**
  - The proportion of offences receiving cautions, immediate custodial sentences and community sentences decreased, while the proportion of offences receiving suspended sentences increased.
  - Cautions decreased from 21 percent (958) in Q3 2010 to 18 per cent (683) in Q3 2012
  - Community sentences decreased from 26 per cent (1,201) in Q3 2010 to 23 per cent (865) in Q3 2012.

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

**Q3 2012 compared to Q3 2011 and Q3 2010**

- **1,018 offenders commenced a court order under probation supervision** for possession of an offensive weapon, a decrease of 27 per cent on Q3 2011 and 30 per cent on Q3 2010. Community orders fell by 30 per cent between Q3 2011 and Q3 2012 and by 34 per cent between Q3 2010 and Q3 2012, whereas suspended sentence orders decreased by 23 per cent when compared to Q3 2011 and 21 per cent compared to Q3 2010.
- **The proportion of those given unpaid work for community orders (29 per cent) as a percentage of all requirements has fallen over the past year (from 31 per cent). For suspended sentence orders this proportion also decreased from 25 per cent to 24 per cent.**
- **Where unpaid work requirements were started under community orders, the proportion of longer requirements has decreased over the past year. For suspended sentence orders there has been a fall in the proportion of longer requirements and a rise in the shorter requirements:**
  - 11 per cent of unpaid work requirement for **community orders** were recorded as being 200 hours or longer in Q3 2012 down from 12 per cent in Q3 2011.

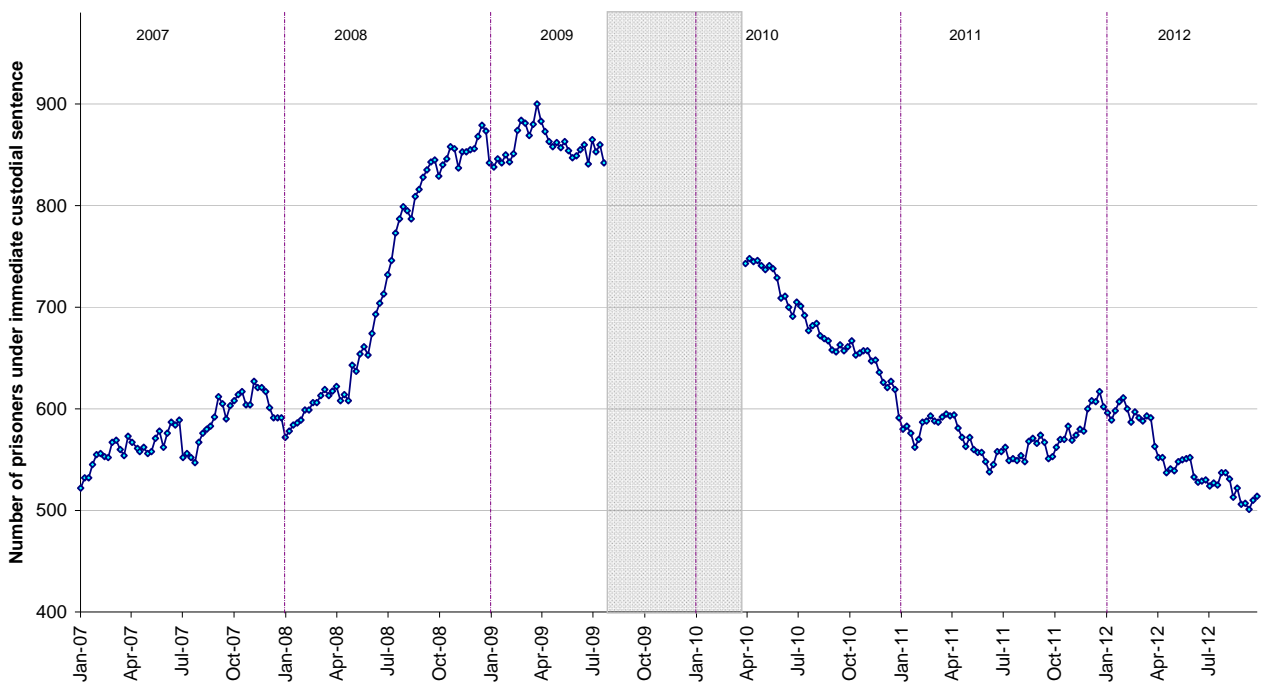


- 17 per cent of unpaid work requirements for **suspended sentence orders** were recorded as being 200 hours or longer compared to 20 per cent in Q3 2011. Unpaid work requirement recorded as being 80 hours or less was 22 per cent in Q3 2012 compared to 19 per cent in Q3 2011.

### Prison population

- The population in prison serving a sentence for possession of an offensive weapon was 514 on 28 September 2012, down 7 per cent from 553 a year ago.

**Figure 3: Prison population under sentence for possession of an offensive weapon<sup>6</sup> (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

<sup>6</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**

Disposal Category	Q3 2010	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Number of offences and percentages	
							Percentage change Q3 2011 to Q3 2012	Percentage change Q3 2010 to Q3 2012
<b>number of offences</b>								
<b>England and Wales<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>5,632</b>	<b>5,484</b>	<b>4,803</b>	<b>4,840</b>	<b>4,282</b>	<b>4,433</b>	<b>-19%</b>	<b>-21%</b>
Caution <sup>2</sup>	1,252	1,101	912	968	939	875	-21%	-30%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	233	210	148	168	135	158	-25%	-32%
Fine	225	245	193	197	179	175	-29%	-22%
Community sentence	1,794	1,672	1,409	1,457	1,213	1,274	-24%	-29%
Suspended sentence	642	689	594	638	559	579	-16%	-10%
Immediate custody	1,285	1,362	1,346	1,216	1,065	1,008	-26%	-22%
Other disposal <sup>3</sup>	201	205	201	196	192	364	78%	81%
<b>percentage of total offences</b>								
Caution <sup>2</sup>	22%	20%	19%	20%	22%	20%		
Community sentence	32%	30%	29%	30%	28%	29%		
Suspended sentence	11%	13%	12%	13%	13%	13%		
Immediate custody	23%	25%	28%	25%	25%	23%		

<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 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

**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

**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 Q3 2011 to Q3 2012	Percentage change Q3 2010 to Q3 2012
	Q3 2010	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012		
<b>number of offences</b>								
<b>Aged 10 to 17</b>	<b>1,063</b>	<b>916</b>	<b>841</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>732</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>-24%</b>	<b>-35%</b>
Reprimands & warnings	294	233	203	208	229	192	-18%	-35%
Absolute/conditional discharge	29	25	13	19	10	9	*	*
Fine	2	1	2	2	1	1	*	*
Community sentence	593	505	497	492	401	409	-19%	-31%
Immediate custody	112	112	96	90	62	58	-48%	-48%
Other disposal <sup>2</sup>	33	40	30	29	29	28	-30%	-15%
<b>percentage of total offences</b>								
Reprimands & warnings	28%	25%	24%	25%	31%	28%		
Community sentence	56%	55%	59%	59%	55%	59%		
Immediate custody	11%	12%	11%	11%	8%	8%		
<b>number of offences</b>								
<b>Aged 18 and over</b>	<b>4,569</b>	<b>4,567</b>	<b>3,960</b>	<b>4,000</b>	<b>3,549</b>	<b>3,736</b>	<b>-18%</b>	<b>-18%</b>
Caution	958	868	708	760	710	683	-21%	-29%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	204	185	135	149	125	149	-19%	-27%
Fine	223	244	191	195	178	175	-28%	-22%
Community sentence	1,201	1,167	912	965	811	865	-26%	-28%
Suspended sentence	642	689	594	638	559	579	-16%	-10%
Immediate custody	1,173	1,249	1,250	1,126	1,003	949	-24%	-19%
Other disposal <sup>1</sup>	168	165	170	167	163	336	104%	100%
<b>percentage of total offences</b>								
Caution	21%	19%	18%	19%	20%	18%		
Community sentence	26%	26%	23%	24%	23%	23%		
Suspended sentence	14%	15%	15%	16%	16%	15%		
Immediate custody	26%	27%	32%	28%	28%	25%		

<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 Q3 2012 one person received immediate custody with no age recorded, likewise for Q3 2011. In Q4 2011 there were two people with no age recorded, one for caution and one for an other disposal, while for Q2 2012 one person had a community penalty with no age recorded. In Q1 2012, there were no individuals with a missing age.

<sup>2</sup> 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

\*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

**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 Q3 2011 to Q3 2012	Percentage change Q3 2010 to Q3 2012
	Q3 2010	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012		
<b>Possession of an article with a blade or point</b>								
	<b>number of offences</b>							
	<b>2,917</b>	<b>3,021</b>	<b>2,611</b>	<b>2,704</b>	<b>2,408</b>	<b>2,502</b>	<b>-17%</b>	<b>-14%</b>
Caution <sup>1</sup>	431	409	333	401	402	371	-9%	-14%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	142	131	100	110	85	88	-33%	-38%
Fine	126	134	115	121	105	112	-16%	-11%
Community sentence	1,002	992	850	865	740	775	-22%	-23%
Suspended sentence	369	400	335	384	335	352	-12%	-5%
Immediate custody	736	839	758	714	646	593	-29%	-19%
Other disposal <sup>2</sup>	111	116	120	109	95	211	82%	90%
	<b>percentage of total offences</b>							
Caution <sup>1</sup>	15%	14%	13%	15%	17%	15%		
Community sentence	34%	33%	33%	32%	31%	31%		
Suspended sentence	13%	13%	13%	14%	14%	14%		
Immediate custody	25%	28%	29%	26%	27%	24%		
<b>Possession of an offensive weapon</b>								
	<b>number of offences</b>							
	<b>2,715</b>	<b>2,463</b>	<b>2,192</b>	<b>2,136</b>	<b>1,874</b>	<b>1,931</b>	<b>-22%</b>	<b>-29%</b>
Caution <sup>1</sup>	821	692	579	567	537	504	-27%	-39%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	91	79	48	58	50	70	-11%	-23%
Fine	99	111	78	76	74	63	-43%	-36%
Community sentence	792	680	559	592	473	499	-27%	-37%
Suspended sentence	273	289	259	254	224	227	-21%	-17%
Immediate custody	549	523	588	502	419	415	-21%	-24%
Other disposal <sup>2</sup>	90	89	81	87	97	153	72%	70%
	<b>percentage of total offences</b>							
Caution <sup>1</sup>	30%	28%	26%	27%	29%	26%		
Community sentence	29%	28%	26%	28%	25%	26%		
Suspended sentence	10%	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%		
Immediate custody	20%	21%	27%	24%	22%	21%		

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

<sup>2</sup> 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

**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

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

Sentence length	Number of offences and percentages						Percentage change Q3 2011 to Q3 2012	Percentage change Q3 2010 to Q3 2012
	Q3 2010	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012		
	number of offences							
<b>England and Wales<sup>1,2</sup></b>	<b>1,282</b>	<b>1,360</b>	<b>1,346</b>	<b>1,215</b>	<b>1,061</b>	<b>1,008</b>	<b>-26%</b>	<b>-21%</b>
Up to and including 3 months	488	557	465	447	390	369	-34%	-24%
Over 3 months and up to and including 6 months	393	380	390	347	276	256	-33%	-35%
Over 6 months	401	423	491	421	395	383	-9%	-4%
	percentage of total offences							
Up to and including 3 months	38%	41%	35%	37%	37%	37%		
Over 3 months and up to and including 6 months	31%	28%	29%	29%	26%	25%		
Over 6 months	31%	31%	36%	35%	37%	38%		

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

<sup>2</sup> 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

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

Sentence length	Average sentence length						Percentage change Q3 2011 to Q3 2012	Percentage change Q3 2010 to Q3 2012
	Q3 2010	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012		
	average sentence length (days)							
<b>England and Wales<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>194</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>22%</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

**Table 6: Offenders commencing a court order under probation supervision for possession of an offensive weapon<sup>1</sup>**

Court order starts	Number of starts and percentages						Percentage change Q3 2011 to Q3 2012	Percentage change Q3 2010 to Q3 2012
	Q3 2010	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012		
<b>number of starts</b>								
<b>England and Wales</b>	<b>1,457</b>	<b>1,401</b>	<b>1,172</b>	<b>1,168</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>1,018</b>	<b>-27%</b>	<b>-30%</b>
Community order	980	924	727	735	563	648	-30%	-34%
Suspended sentence order	467	475	445	432	377	368	-23%	-21%
Pre CJA orders	10	2	0	1	0	2	*	*
<b>percentage of total starts</b>								
Community order	67%	66%	62%	63%	60%	64%		
Suspended sentence order	32%	34%	38%	37%	40%	36%		
Pre CJA orders	1%	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 7: Requirement starts for possession of offensive weapon<sup>1</sup>**

Number of requirements and percentages								
	Q3 2010	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Percentage change Q3 2011 to Q3 2012	Percentage change Q3 2010 to Q3 2012
<b>number of requirements</b>								
<b>Community order</b>	<b>1,518</b>	<b>1515</b>	<b>1246</b>	<b>1216</b>	<b>911</b>	<b>1065</b>	<b>-30%</b>	<b>-30%</b>
Unpaid Work	571	474	399	388	274	312	-34%	-45%
Supervision	481	509	415	389	308	381	-25%	-21%
Curfew	147	129	132	120	87	71	-45%	-52%
Accredited program	87	80	69	76	61	66	-18%	-24%
Specified activity	90	151	103	117	88	114	-25%	27%
Drug treatment	54	46	38	29	29	39	*	*
Alcohol treatment	49	57	51	50	31	44	*	*
Mental health	20	28	11	12	13	9	*	*
Exclusion	3	6	7	8	7	2	*	*
Residential	7	6	7	5	2	8	*	*
Attendance centre	7	22	8	17	10	13	*	*
Prohibited activity	2	7	6	5	1	6	*	*
<b>percentage of total requirements</b>								
Unpaid work	38%	31%	32%	32%	30%	29%		
Supervision	32%	34%	33%	32%	34%	36%		
Other requirements	31%	35%	35%	36%	36%	35%		
<b>number of requirements</b>								
<b>Suspended sentence order</b>	<b>824</b>	<b>896</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>672</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>-26%</b>	<b>-20%</b>
Unpaid work	219	220	205	210	170	157	-29%	-28%
Supervision	297	315	269	281	237	246	-22%	-17%
Curfew	96	99	89	65	78	61	-38%	-36%
Accredited program	94	86	61	73	49	64	-26%	-32%
Specified activity	43	88	73	64	64	67	-24%	*
Drug treatment	21	27	21	21	21	20	*	*
Alcohol treatment	33	38	25	24	31	33	*	*
Mental health	4	3	3	4	5	3	*	*
Exclusion	6	5	2	2	5	1	*	*
Residential	4	6	12	7	5	2	*	*
Attendance centre	3	3	3	3	3	3	*	*
Prohibited activity	4	6	5	3	4	2	*	*
<b>percentage of total requirements</b>								
Unpaid work	27%	25%	27%	28%	25%	24%		
Supervision	36%	35%	35%	37%	35%	37%		
Other requirements	37%	40%	38%	35%	39%	39%		

<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 8: Unpaid work requirements started by length of requirement given for possession of offensive weapon<sup>1</sup>**

	Number of requirements and percentages						Percentage change Q3 2011 to Q3 2012	Percentage change Q3 2010 to Q3 2012
	Q3 2010	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012		
<b>number of requirements</b>								
<b>Community order</b>	<b>604</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>-37%</b>	<b>-47%</b>
<b>0-80 hours</b>	220	204	174	159	124	139	-32%	-37%
<b>81-150 hours</b>	267	213	191	176	116	128	-40%	-52%
<b>151-199 hours</b>	39	30	21	21	17	21	*	*
<b>200-250 hours</b>	70	63	48	67	42	34	*	*
<b>251-300 hours</b>	8	2	6	3	1	1	*	*
<b>percentage of total requirements</b>								
<b>0-80 hours</b>	36%	40%	40%	37%	41%	43%		
<b>81-150 hours</b>	44%	42%	43%	41%	39%	40%		
<b>151-199 hours</b>	6%	6%	5%	5%	6%	7%		
<b>200-250 hours</b>	12%	12%	11%	16%	14%	11%		
<b>251-300 hours</b>	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%		
<b>number of requirements</b>								
<b>Suspended sentence order</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>-24%</b>	<b>-27%</b>
<b>0-80 hours</b>	48	42	49	56	64	36	*	*
<b>81-150 hours</b>	116	117	122	108	83	93	-21%	-20%
<b>151-199 hours</b>	18	17	17	15	14	10	*	*
<b>200-250 hours</b>	42	41	31	40	18	26	*	*
<b>251-300 hours</b>	5	2	5	2	2	2	*	*
<b>percentage of total requirements</b>								
<b>0-80 hours</b>	21%	19%	22%	25%	35%	22%		
<b>81-150 hours</b>	51%	53%	54%	49%	46%	56%		
<b>151-199 hours</b>	8%	8%	8%	7%	8%	6%		
<b>200-250 hours</b>	18%	19%	14%	18%	10%	16%		
<b>251-300 hours</b>	2%	1%	2%	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 5

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 2 November 2012.

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 figures presented in tables 1 to 3 about the number of cautions/convictions for knife possession offences in recent quarters, in particular for the most recent quarter shown, are likely to be lower than the actual number of cautions/convictions given in the period.

In addition, the figures presented in the tables about the different disposals given 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 are currently included in the 'other disposal' category but will be reallocated when information about the final sentence given for the offence becomes available.

As shown in the table below, these changes have the main effect of increasing the number/proportion of offences reported as having been dealt with through immediate custody and reducing the number/proportion reported as other disposals.

**Table A1: Change in the number of disposals reported for knife possession offences in Q3 2011 between the time of publication and the most recent PNC data available**

Disposal Category	Jul - Sept 2011 published 1 <sup>st</sup> December 2011	Jul-Sept 2012 revised, published 6 <sup>th</sup> December 2012	Difference	Percentage change
<b>number of offences</b>				
<b>England and Wales<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>5,466</b>	<b>5,484</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0%</b>
Caution <sup>2</sup>	1,090	1,101	11	1%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	196	210	14	7%
Fine	233	245	12	5%
Community sentence	1,686	1,672	-14	-1%
Suspended sentence	718	689	-29	-4%
Immediate custody	1,132	1,362	230	20%
Other disposal <sup>3</sup>	411	205	-206	-50%
<b>percentage</b>				
<b>England and Wales<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>		
Caution <sup>2</sup>	20%	20%		
Absolute/Conditional discharge	4%	4%		
Fine	4%	4%		
Community sentence	31%	30%		
Suspended sentence	13%	13%		
Immediate custody	21%	25%		
Other disposal <sup>3</sup>	8%	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>3</sup> Includes deferred sentences.

While we currently present data about the scale of change to expect in the reported figures for the most recent quarter for the reader's information, we intend to supplement the published headline tables in future releases of this bulletin with estimates of the final figures.

These estimates will be calculated by identifying the extent to which the historic published figures about cautions/convictions for knife possession offences changed after their initial release, and applying these changes proportionately to the latest quarter of published information.

As an example, at the time of initial publication, the figures presented for Q3 2011 were as shown in the left-most column in the table above. As also shown above, we now know that the total number of disposals given in the quarter was actually slightly higher than originally published. In addition, we also now know that a much larger number of disposals were for immediate custody than when these were first published.

When the Q3 2011 figures were initially published, information was already available about the extent to which the Q1 2010, Q2 2010 and Q3 2010 figures had changed from their original published values. This information is shown in the table below along with the average change when compared to the figures published a year later for all three quarters.

**Table A2: Change between figures initially published for Q1 - Q3 2010 and revised figures published a year later**

	Q1 2010	Q2 2010	Q3 2010	Average
Caution	1.6%	0.7%	0.8%	1.0%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	11.4%	9.0%	6.3%	8.9%
Fine	3.3%	6.8%	5.2%	5.1%
Community sentence	-0.2%	-1.8%	-3.9%	-2.0%
Suspended sentence	2.3%	-1.5%	-3.6%	-0.9%
Immediate custody	17.5%	20.0%	21.6%	19.7%
Other disposal	-48.6%	-47.8%	-44.8%	-47.0%

Clearly the biggest impact is an increase in the figures for immediate custody. The table also demonstrates that the direction and scale of change for each of the three quarters is consistent providing confidence that the figures will change similarly for future quarters.

Through applying these average change values for the previous 3 quarters to the Q3 2011 figures as at the time of their initial publication, we can estimate what the final figures will be. These estimates are shown below along with the actual revised values as they have been published within this release.

**Table A3: Difference between initial figures published for Q3 2011, the revised figures published within this bulletin and the figures that would have been projected under the proposed method**

	Q3 2011 (initially published)	Q3 2011 (projected)	Q3 2011 (revised in this bulletin)	% change - revised vs initial	% change - revised vs projected
Total	5466	5496	5484	0%	0%
Caution	1090	1101	1101	1%	0%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	196	213	210	7%	-2%
Fine	233	245	245	5%	0%
Community sentence	1686	1652	1672	-1%	1%
Suspended sentence	718	711	689	-4%	-3%
Immediate custody	1132	1355	1362	20%	1%
Other disposal	411	218	205	-50%	-6%

As can be seen from the above table, the figures that would have been estimated for Q3 2011 are substantially closer to the complete figures published in this bulletin. In particular, the projected number sentenced to immediate custody is much closer to the revised numbers – a difference of just 1 per cent rather than the 20 per cent undercount in the original figures. In addition, the 50 per cent over-estimate of the numbers in the other disposal category would have been become a 6 per cent under-estimate in the projected figures. We have concluded that using this estimation method gives better estimates of the actual rates for disposals than using the unadjusted estimates.

### 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).

**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 sentence of custody of under 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.justice.gov.uk/statistics/criminal-justice/knife-possession](http://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/criminal-justice/knife-possession)

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)

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