

Drugs - Cannabis

Driver – Political

Related Drivers – Anti-Social Behaviour, Neighbourhood Policing, Organised Crime, Violent Crime – Gun and Gang Violence, Asset Recovery, Collaborative Working Between Police Forces, Criminal Legislation, Public Perceptions of Crime, Public Perceptions of the Police, Data Mining, Advances in Technology, Information Sharing, Human Trafficking, Stop & Search, Youth Crime

Background

Public Service Agreement (PSA) Target 25, *Reduce the harm caused by Alcohol and Drugs*, laid out in the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2008-2011 sets out cross department action to deliver on this target.¹ The actions toward achieving this PSA are underpinned by the relevant strategies on drugs and alcohol. Details on alcohol strategies and provisions are covered in the Political Driver – Alcohol.

The previous ten-year drug strategy came to an end in April 2008 and was replaced by the *Drugs: Protecting families and communities 2008-2018 Strategy*. Key strategy actions in the protection and enforcement work streams include the following:

- Use multi-agency and intelligence-based approaches to identify the drug-misusing offenders at greatest risk of causing the most harm and improve our responses to divert them out of crime
- Embed action to tackle drugs within the Neighbourhood Policing approach, responding to community concerns about drugs, acting on intelligence provided by the community and giving feedback on how such intelligence was used
- Support communities who wish to take action against drug dealing
- Police powers to seize cash and assets belonging to suspected drug dealers on arrest rather than on conviction to avoid dispersing goods
- A greater range of goods will be subject to the asset recovery programme and the 12 year time limit currently affecting asset recovery will cease to exist
- Extend international agreements to intercept drugs being trafficked to the UK and negotiate asset seizure agreements with other countries so dealers cannot channel proceeds abroad. This will start with the United Arab Emirates in April 2008
- Anti-social behaviour orders to be imposed on drug dealers after conviction which could ban them from entering certain areas or engaging in behaviour linked with drug dealing
- Increase drug screening at airports
- Encouraging the use of the police powers to close crack houses.²

A report published by the independent UK Drug Policy Commission has claimed that the Government's strategy to combat the UK's drug problem has failed. '*An Analysis of UK Drugs Policy*' reports that the range of government actions has had a limited impact on preventing drug use. Some statistics used to back up the report's claim includes:

- The UK has the highest level of problem drug use in Europe and the second highest number of drug related deaths
- One quarter of 26-30 year olds have tried a Class A drug at least on one occasion
- The cost of drug related crime is £13 billion.³

'*Tackling drug markets and distribution networks*' sets out the main findings from a review of the recent literature on strategies to tackle illicit drug markets and distribution networks in the UK. The report was commissioned by the UK Drug Policy Commission and make suggests that:

- Drug markets have proven to be extremely resilient. They are highly fluid and adapt to law enforcement interventions
- The available evidence suggests that street-level drug law enforcement should focus on forging productive local partnerships and not rely solely on police crackdowns.⁴

Cannabis

Cannabis remains the most widely cultivated and used drug around the world, although estimates are less precise. Data also show that it is more harmful than commonly believed. The average THC content (the harmful component) of hydroponic marijuana in North America almost doubled in the past decade. This has major health implications as evidenced by a significant rise in the number of people seeking treatment. Cannabis production and trading is likely to be more organised than supposed, especially in relation to hydroponically grown cannabis and distribution across large areas and borders. In contrast to other drugs, trafficking in cannabis herb continues to be mostly intra-regional.

The UN Office On Drugs and Crime said there was clear evidence that cannabis use was falling in the UK. The report found that there was now a "clear downward trend", in the use of cannabis among young people in the UK. It found that in the year to April 2008, just over 7% of the population had used cannabis, down from almost 11% in 2002-03. Britain had the highest number of "problem" drug users – as opposed to those who use drugs occasionally – in Western Europe.⁵

The *2009 Drug Report* provides a number of recommendations on how to improve drug control.

- Drug use should be treated as an illness. People who take drugs need medical help, not criminal retribution. There should be universal access to drug treatment. Since people with serious drug problems provide the bulk of drug demand, treating this problem is one of the best ways of shrinking the market.

- Governments must enforce international agreements against organized crime. International crime-fighting instruments like the United Nations Conventions against organized crime and corruption are not being used. "Therefore, too many states have crime problems of their own making," said the head of UNODC. In particular, he said "current instruments to tackle money laundering and cyber-crime are inadequate."
- Greater efficiency in law enforcement. Police should focus on the small number of high profile, high volume, and violent criminals instead of the large volumes of petty offenders. In some countries, the ratio of people imprisoned for drug use compared to drug trafficking is 5:1.⁶

The Home Secretary in a statement to the House of Commons announced that cannabis be reclassified back to a class B drug. The statement has come despite the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs' (ACMD) Review, commissioned by the Prime Minister saying it should remain a class C. The reason for the reversal of the classification was two-fold:

- There was 'uncertainty at least' on the impact young people's health from cannabis and because of that doubt they must err on the side of caution
- Since cannabis has been downgraded there has been widespread concern about the prevalence of skunk varieties which are said to be 3 times stronger than other types of cannabis and which now accounts for between 70% and 80% of samples seized by the police.⁷

However in the report, '*Cannabis: Classification and Public Health*' the advisory council said that it should remain a class C drug, as the risks were not as serious as those of other class B substances such as amphetamines and barbiturates. Although the council did describe cannabis as a significant public health issue; it said that the evidence suggested only a weak casual link between cannabis used psychotic in relation to the population as a whole, cannabis use only played a modest role in the development of such conditions.⁸

Taking effect from early 2009, the reclassification will mean:

- More robust enforcement against cannabis supply and possession and those repeatedly caught with the drug would not just receive cannabis warnings
- A new strategic and targeted approach to tackling cannabis farms and the organised criminals behind them
- Introducing additional aggravating sentencing factors for those caught supplying cannabis and other illegal substances near further and higher education establishments, mental health institutions and prisons
- Working with ACPO to look at how existing legislation and powers can be used to curtail the sale and promotion of cannabis paraphernalia.⁹

The Centre for Policy Studies published its report '*The Phoney War on Drugs*' which finds that the UK has one of the most liberal drugs policies in Europe, combined with one of the worst enforcement and drug use records. The report suggests that a successful UK drug

policy include a tougher, better-funded enforcement programme to reduce the supply of drugs, similar to programmes in the Netherlands and Sweden.¹⁰

The report cites the Netherlands as an example of a country with effective drugs policies. For example, the Netherlands spend three times more on its drugs policies than the UK (as a proportion of GDP); and it also spends a far higher proportion of its drugs budget on enforcement. Special police enforcement units have been set up to fight the production and the trafficking of all major categories of illegal drugs. Police have a considerable degree of discretion and local regions have considerable autonomy. Their enforcement efforts focus on dealing and trafficking as opposed to use (66.3% of all drug offences compared to 13.6% of all drug offences in the UK).¹⁰

Potential Skills Needs

Analytical skills – to visualize, articulate, and solve complex problems and concepts, and make decisions that make sense based on available information

Community policing skills – working with communities to identify drug dealers and drug related crime

Information sharing skills – to provide effective information to partner agencies

Inter-agency working skills – to work effectively with two or more governmental agencies

Intelligence analysis skills – make the links between information gathered and intelligence / problem solving

Intelligence gathering skills – to scan multiple data sources and follow leads

Intelligence information sharing skills between police forces, other intelligence and security agencies, communities and local partners

Observation skills – in the local area, channelled into the intelligence picture

Partnership working skills – to work effectively with other agencies to a common goal and standards

Relationship building skills – build effective relationships within the community to gather intelligence

Source handling skills – to identify sources of drugs and organised criminal behind them

¹ [HM Treasury \(2007\). Meeting the Aspirations of the British People: 2007 Pre-budget report and Comprehensive Spending Review. London: HM Treasury.](#)

² [HM Government \(2008\) Drugs: Protecting families and communities 2008-2018 Strategy. London: Home Office.](#)

³ [Reuters, P., & Stevens, A. \(2007\) An Analysis of UK Drug Policy: A monograph prepared for the UK Drug Policy Commission. London: UK Drug Policy Commission.](#)

⁴ [McSweeney, T., Turnbull, P.J., & Hough, M. \(2008\) Tackling Drug Markets and Distribution Networks in the UK: A review of recent literature. London: UK Drug Policy Commission.](#)

- ⁵ [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Press Release 'World Drug Report 2009 Highlights Links Between Drugs and Crime'](#)
- ⁶ [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime \(2009\) 2009 World Drug Report. Geneva: United Nations Publications.](#)
- ⁷ [Home Secretary Statement to Parliament, 7 May 2008](#)
- ⁸ [Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs \(2008\) Cannabis: Classification and Public Health. London: Home Office.](#)
- ⁹ [Home Office statement from website](#)
- ¹⁰ [Gyngell, K. \(2009\) The Phoney War on Drugs. Surrey: Centre for Policy Studies.](#)