

UK Drug Policy

The UK's drug problem is getting worse [1]. Many people believe that the current “hard on drugs” policy is not working including Police Chiefs [2] and the general public [3] [4] [5]. Our failure to deal with our drug problem has many bad effects in our own country, and also in other countries in the supply chain. We are exporting misery to countries like Afghanistan [6] where drug warlords threaten the nascent democracy.

And yet the policy continues. The reason for this is that any alternative to “hard on drugs” is often assumed to mean “soft on drugs”. If we're not keeping drugs illegal we must be “legalising drugs”. If drugs are decriminalised then the government seems to be saying that drugs are ok and is accused of risking chaos.

At present the distinction between legal and illegal activity is based on the type of drug. For example consumption of any amount of alcohol is legal, but recreational consumption of any amount of cannabis is illegal. One of the main reasons for focussing on drug type is that it is easy to draft laws, and easy to apportion blame and punishment. However we have learned that this does not solve the problem.

The key to changing to a more effective drug policy is to switch from policy based on drug type to a policy based on drug effect. Quacr has developed a plan as follows:-

1. The government presents the message that the controlled consumption of some recreational drugs (by which we include alcohol and nicotine) is ok, but the abuse of any drugs is not. Abuse means anything that leads to dangerous or antisocial effects – accidents, relationship problems, secondary smoking, illness, loss of productivity, alcoholism, other mental health problems, child neglect, theft, domestic and other violence, addiction, loss of employment, death etc.
2. The government adopts the objective of reducing the level of drug abuse (NOT of reducing the level of drug usage). The government establishes a drug control minister and a dedicated government department. The government regularly publishes a single blended statistic that indicates the current level of drug abuse in the country. The government compares this statistic with estimates for other countries and encourages other countries to adopt the same measure.

3. The government takes action to reduce drug abuse (again, NOT drug usage). This may mean better coordination and support of existing activities or it may mean taking new actions.
4. Once item 1 to 3 have been established and it is clear that the message from the government is that drug abuse is NOT ok, then it is possible to reduce the legal restrictions on some drugs without risking political fall-out. This has multiple positive effects including:-
 - Closing the gateway to hard drugs,
 - Allowing taxation,
 - De-glamorising drug usage,
 - Allowing regulation and guaranteeing quality,
 - Controlling advertising and sales messages,
 - Allowing association of health messages,
 - Putting global criminal networks out of business.

At present in 2021 the drug problem sometimes seems to be intractable. But this is because our laws are stupid. Once we have laws that the public has some belief in we will have more success.

References

[1]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/897786/2SummaryPhaseOne+foreword200219.pdf

[2]<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24320717>

[3]<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/health/survey-results/daily/2019/07/30/dadb5/2>

[4]<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/public-attitudes-drugs-policy>

[5]<https://www.drugwise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-people-on-drugs.pdf>

[6]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/882953/Review_of_Drugs_Evidence_Pack.pdf

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