

Written evidence submitted by George Entecott

Personal thoughts for consideration for the Psychoactive Substances Bill

Author and background information

George Entecott

I am a recovering addict. I have smoked cannabis since 1993, used to take Ecstasy tablets between 1997 - 2001 at illegal raves. Have also tried Cocaine, LSD, Ketamine and Speed (Amphetamine) during that period. After that period I continued to smoke cannabis, mainly in 'Skunk' form. In 2011 I became involved in Heroin, Crack Cocaine on a very infrequent basis. This escalated into IV use of Mkat (Methylmethcathinone - also known as Meow or Cat), this became very serious and with the aid of local drug services I have been able to reduce and stop use of that drug. I tried Crystal Meth once in late 2012. I have also tried some legal highs but only of the cannabis analogues, whilst noting that Mkat started life as a Legal Cocaine substitute.

I enjoy the recreational use of coffee, tobacco, chocolate, alcohol and cannabis.

I have experience of drug support services in my home town.

I am not a health care professional.

My personal view on Legal Highs

I found that the IV use of Mkat was so strong that long term heroin users would choose to take that drug over heroin (widely regarded as a very addictive drug which provides quite a long lasting high for the money). Whilst heroin kills early users or relapsing users where the tolerance has not built up sufficiently, Mkat kills heavy users. IV users of Mkat can forget to eat, sleep and with daily use can require ever increasing doses until a toxic level is reached.

I have had borderline psychotic episodes after smoking Damneasia (a strong smoked legal high) which lead to me not wanted to reuse that product.

Legal product development

It is well known that McDonald's Cheeseburgers and Pringles are very moorish. They have been designed by food scientists to be pleasurable to make money. The illegal drug industry and Legal High industry have similar aims. It is only the Misuse of Drugs Act which prevents the sale of Cannabis Chocolate or Cookies - that product may have none, or maybe just a lot less of, the health side effects of smoked use.

One is done by a legal company such as Coca-cola, Cadbury, McDonalds or Procter & Gamble and others are done by criminals to make money. My point is that similar aims are shared - it is the pleasure for money business - which includes many other forms of product too.

Effects of the drugs trade

There is a massive scale to the economy of the drugs trade. Unlike any other industry users can obtain drugs in any town, city or country in the world. There is a massive parallel economy going on. When this 'employs' people and contributes to the legal economy it could be seen as providing

some benefit to UK PLC.

I have strong concerns about IS or other terrorist organisations using the drug trade to stifle our economy, damage our children (and therefore our country) purposefully or raise money to fund terrorist action against us. This is a very important point. I feel that regardless of those at the top perhaps feeding back to overseas drug kingpins, having UK dealers doing business on UK soil has benefits to the UK economy. You can not have no drug dealers - you want the correct ones in place. There should be certain standards on the sale of drugs, the quality of drugs. Making drugs only available to over 18s or more expensive than on the black market would not work. That is why I fall short of calling for Legalisation of all drugs.

My dream solution

I feel that cannabis should stand alongside with alcohol, tobacco, and chocolate on the legal side of the fence. It is an ancient drug of choice, I suspect it was made illegal as a way of preventing certain countries from being able to compete on an even footing. I would love to 'free the weed', if you can and want to consider this it would be ideal. However for the purpose of this paper I have not built such a move in, if you would consider such a move then such view cannabis along with the legalised highs such as alcohol and take this paper to refer to the rest. I made no special allowance for cannabis (except where mentioned).

As a long term cannabis user, I would love for places like Afghanistan to take it's place on the world stage as the grower of some of the best weed in the world (along with the UK and Netherlands).

I also view Spice (the smoked legal high) as being a worrying development I would like to make illegal (where that fits into a proposed solution below).

Potential solutions - summary

- Decriminalisation of all illegal substances - i.e. Portugal's approach
- Legalisation of cannabis, with criminalisation of replacement substances - Amsterdam's approach or America's approach
- Changing how the Misuse of Drugs Act works so it is easier to add substances to the bill without requiring as much work. i.e speed up the ability for the Police to prevent sale of an unwanted product
- Changing how the homeless and addicts are supported (similar to decriminalisation but keeping the current legal structure)

Option 1 - Decriminalisation of all illegal substances - i.e. Portugal's approach

Allows sale and use of all substances, which should allow for products such as Skunk and Hashish to be sold alongside current Legal highs (smoked varieties). The hope being that given the choice between classic drugs such as cannabis that the legal high would not continue to be selected by users.

However legalisation would potentially allow for shop based sale or even advertising - this I warn very strongly against. I see decriminalisation as levelling the playing field with these legal highs and as knowledge of production methods and chance for profit to be made from from them, there production and sale is likely to continue despite the relevant value of the product. Therefore the goal of this move would be to reduce the desire for the population to want to use drugs, by reducing the stigma and punishment of the user. This also has cost savings in terms of policing and prison costs, a long term reduction in the cost of providing support to addicts (with initial

potential for a short term increase in spend) and a benefit to the economy from a better workforce / increased use of the legal economy.

Portugal has found that decriminalisation has allowed for a reduction in use. But this has been paired with investment in the treatment of addicts.

I recommend this [ted.com](http://www.ted.com/talks/johann_hari_everything_you_think_you_know_about_addiction_is_wrong) talk on the subject of addiction as this is influential on my thoughts.
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Option 2 - Legalisation of cannabis, with criminalisation of replacement substances - Amsterdam's approach or America's approach

I propose that certain towns (by local decision) could allow for the sale of cannabis; for instance Brighton, Aylesbury, Leeds, Manchester. Which would create a certain type of tourist / centralisation of users to those areas. In affect allowing those that choose to live in certain lifestyles to do so together.

This does not help define a method of removing legal highs from sale and it may not be beneficial to allow subcultures to take over certain areas. I feel that mixing up and living alongside each other and mutual respect and co-operation is more beneficial to society as a whole.

But this could allow for the recreational sale and use of cannabis to be explored as is being seen in the USA.

Option 3 - Changing how the Misuse of Drugs Act works so it is easier to add substances to the bill without requiring as much work. i.e speed up the ability for the Police to prevent sale of an unwanted product

The cat and mouse game of making new products illegal is limited by defining which substances are illegal and the time that takes to do.

The difficulty from a legislative perspective is that minor chemical changes can allow for new substances to be created which are not legally restrictive. The default in law is I can do anything I want apart from what you say I can not.

You could allow for easy addition of new substances, so the process of making substances becomes much quicker (i.e. within a month or even a week). Create a body with Police, Health care, Drug Services and local authorities feeding into the process of making new chemicals illegal almost as quick as they are created.

However there is the cost of administering this process and reviewing mistakes (i.e. accidentally preventing the sale of bleach or making, I dunno, toast illegal in some unexpected way).

Option 4 - Changing how the homeless and addicts are supported (similar to decriminalisation but keeping the current legal structure)

I am often reminded of the cost of housing criminals in Category A Prisons and the fact that for some users this temporary rest can extend and improve the quality of their lives. Similar to the Portugal and American approach I suggest that that addicts should pay the price for crimes such as burglary, shoplifting, theft or assault - these are serious transgressions (Murder is murder and should continued to be treated as such). Also annoyances such as begging should be addressed. However simple possession of a drug with no other worrying factors should not be a offence that places someone in prison. I suggest that this is a waste of resources.

I would like to tackle the homeless problem by focusing on improving the quality of life for those worst affected. With reference to the Rat Park experiment - happy contented people are less likely to use drugs, but drug lords fear not because a certain type of person in society will continue to use drugs to a lesser extent. I feel that measures which improve the quality of life - most importantly those that increase community involvement will have benefits.

I propose focusing on chronic homeless problems - it is easy to discount this community as being trouble makers.

In my view, recent changes to Crack House closures to House closures for nuisance reasons merely moves the problem on. Temporary incarceration encourages bigger binges with less respect for society in the worst cases. Deal with improving the lives of some trouble makers will improve the quality of life for those that live around them.

That said my hometown does not have a ghettoised gang culture and maybe those areas require advice from those in the know there. I am not thinking of criminal gangs fighting for the same patch. I am talking about a professional shoplifting addict which goes inside, comes back out to kick off on a massive drug binge until he is locked up. This self-destructive cycle should be addressed by helping that addict to find a better life.

You can never impose self-improvement upon an addict, you can only support them to resolve problems themselves. I feel that systems will support some more than others, that is why I propose that drug addicts face compulsory rehab (no option to leave but with the option to not take part in activities if they wish). The aim is to spend less on producing a better outcome but I suggest that this as un-budget focused as possible - the primary aim in development of this solution should be the addicts themselves, for their own benefit.

Done right you take an addict which causes social problems and create a functioning member of society, one that is happy and has what they need. i.e. home, food, partner, job and a voice.

Proposed solution

Unless you wish to look at full legalisation, I would:

I would make it a lot quicker to add unwanted substances to the Misuse of Drugs Act. Aim for 4 weeks to make a new drug illegal. Sale of such in shops should be prohibited.

I would decriminalise simple possession of all drugs.

I would do more to support addicts.

I would prioritise support for the chronic and vulnerable homeless (regardless of drug use).

I would continue to lock up those that commit crimes such as burglary, shoplifting or other drug use caused offences.

I would make compulsory rehab for those criminals.