

# **The Christian Institute**

## **Submission to the Home Affairs Committee**

### **The Christian Institute**

1. The Christian Institute is a charity which seeks to promote the Christian faith in the UK. We have a particular concern for family life which is to an increasing extent affected by the problems of drugs. We have well over 10,000 supporters, a significant number of whom work in health care and education.
2. This memorandum has been specifically prepared for the inquiry being carried out by the Home Affairs Committee.

### **Does existing drugs policy work?**

What constitutes existing drugs policy?

3. Drugs policy includes treatment, education and the criminal law. We believe the Government's Drugs policy has been undermined by the use of harm reduction approaches in drugs education.

#### **'Harm reduction' with addicts**

4. 'Harm reduction' was invented for use with addicts. In tandem with seeking to help the users overcome their addiction, addicts are taught how to use drugs more safely.
5. This approach is now seriously questioned. The use of methadone, for example, as a substitute for heroin appears to cause more problems that it solves.

#### **'Harm reduction' amongst school children and others**

6. Five years ago the harm reduction approach spread from the treatment of drug addicts to general drugs education.
7. Whatever role harm reduction may have with addicts, we are very concerned that today prevention approaches have been almost completely abandoned in work with teenagers in the context of education and youth groups.
8. Government also uses the language of prevention in the area of drugs, but the agencies delivering the drugs strategy generally do not agree. In the USA there has been a more consistent approach which has been very successful.
9. It is ironic that prevention approaches are now being successfully deployed once again in the UK to stop young people take up smoking.
10. Drugs professionals overwhelmingly support a blanket 'harm reduction' approach for young people who are not users.
11. One academic study concluded that UK drugs workers are "virtually united in rejection abstention as a policy". British Social Attitudes (BSA) used a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the most liberal and 5 the most restrictive. It looked at opinions on eight key issues. Whilst the British public scored an average of 3.5, UK Drugs workers scored an average of 2.0. Swedish drugs workers scored 3.8. BSA

concluded that unlike the public UK drugs workers have “a very liberal approach towards drugs”<sup>1</sup>.

12. Harm reduction has now become the dominant approach to general drugs education amongst audiences who are overwhelmingly not drug users. It has become so entrenched that some drugs education resources for use with secondary and even primary school children rely entirely on this approach.
13. The Introduction to *The Primary School Drugs Pack*, produced by Healthwise, and recommended for use by the Scottish Executive, says this: “Teachers sometimes feel under a lot of pressure to teach from an ‘anti-drug’ perspective. We suggest you resist this pressure and are clear about the full range of legal and illegal drugs that are commonly used and the fact that you, and the parents of the children you teach, are probably drug users yourselves.” This pack trivialises drug use by likening coffee and aspirin to crack and heroin.
14. The secondary school equivalent, also produced by Healthwise, is called Taking Drugs Seriously. It makes similar statements: “This pack starts from the position that drug use is a part of some young people’s lives and will not be prevented by education.” In one lesson plan, children are asked to role-play being a drug dealer and to rank drugs according to which is the ‘best’. There tips on what to do if arrested for drugs possession by the police. Pupils hear advice that smoking heroin is better than injecting it, that LSD does not cause brain damage and that crack cocaine, one of the most addictive substances known to man, is not necessarily addictive.

#### The use of the criminal law

15. There are wide variations in the use of cautioning for possession of cannabis.
16. For England and Wales, cautioning is now the most common way of dealing with drug offenders<sup>2</sup>. This contributes to the belief that the law is not working when in fact the law is not actually being applied.

### **The likely effect of decriminalisation on:**

#### **(a) the availability of and demand for drugs**

17. The supply of drugs would be greatly increased if any of them were ever legalised. This in turn would drive up demand. Young people who, despite peer pressure, are currently put off buying drugs because of the stigma and/or the prospect of prosecution, would no longer be deterred.

#### **(b) drug-related deaths**

18. Such deaths are caused directly through drug poisoning but also indirectly through drug users injuring themselves or other people. There is already a problem with cannabis-related deaths on the road. One government survey found almost as many drivers were killed on the roads through cannabis as through alcohol.<sup>3</sup> If this is the case whilst cannabis is illegal, the problem would undoubtedly get much worse if cannabis were ever legalised.

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<sup>1</sup> Gould A, Shaw A and Ahrendt D, *Illegal Drugs: liberal and restrictive attitudes*, British Social Attitudes: The 13<sup>th</sup> Report, SCPR, 1996, pp 93 and 104

<sup>2</sup> Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Issue 25/96, Research and Statistics Directorate, 28 November 1996, p 18, para. 16

<sup>3</sup> Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Press Notice 149/Transport, 27 June 1997

19. Given that the flashback effects of cannabis can impair driving for up to 30 days there is no safe way of allowing drivers to take cannabis.

**(c) crime**

20. If some drugs were ever decriminalised drug pushers would simply set up 'legitimate' businesses and sell even more drugs in order to keep their profits up as the price drops. A greater market for the remaining illegal drugs would be created.

21. Since it is impossible for most addicts to hold down a job, addicts will still steal money to buy *legal* drugs.

22. Drug users also commit crimes, including violent crimes, whilst intoxicated on drugs. This will not be changed by decriminalisation.

Colin Hart B.Sc, PGCE  
Director  
The Christian Institute  
26 Jesmond Road  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE2 4PQ

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