

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**EMBARGOED for 06:00H Wednesday 18th April**

### **Launch of the UK Drug Policy Commission**

Today a new organisation called the UK Drug Policy Commission launched in Westminster and published a report it has commissioned from leading US and UK drug policy analysts.

Chair Dame Ruth Runciman said today,

**"The UK Drug Policy Commission is an independent organisation that will provide objective analysis of issues of drug policy in the United Kingdom. The Commission does not start from the position that all UK drug policy has failed, but rather that we do not know enough about which elements of policy work, why they work and where they work well.**

**The debate on drugs is often sensationalised and polarised. Our mission is to improve political, media and public understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of this country's policies for tackling drug misuse."**

UKDPC is independent of any political or vested interest and has been set up to provide objective, evidenced based analysis of UK drug policy:

- The UK lacks a truly independent, objective and rigorous arena for the analysis of drug policy evidence. The Commission fills that gap and hopes thereby to improve political, media and public understanding of the options for achieving a mature, rational and effective policy response to the problems caused by the supply of and the demand for illegal drugs. The Commons Science & Technology Committee has been critical of the Government recently for the lack of investment in evaluating the impact of drug policies.<sup>1</sup>
- UKDPC is funded by the backing of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation - a leading charitable foundation with a long history of supporting independent and innovative work in the field of public policy.
- UKDPC brings together leading experts from the drug treatment and medical research fields along with senior figures from policing, public policy and the media to provide an independent analysis of drug policy in the UK. The breadth and depth of experience of the Commission is considerable (see list of Commissioners below)

*'An analysis of UK Drug Policy'* was commissioned by the UKDPC to provide an independent overview of UK drug policy to inform their work. The report's authors are Professor Peter Reuter and Dr Alex Stevens, and the conclusions of the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the UKDPC. Key findings include:

#### **The United Kingdom has the highest level of dependent drug use and the second highest level of drug-related deaths in Europe.**

- Prevalence rates of dependent or problematic drug use in the UK are virtually double those found across Europe: 0.85% in UK; over 0.4% in Sweden & France and around 0.3% in Germany & Netherlands.
- The UK has the second-highest rate of drug-related death in Europe, at about 34 per million population aged 16 or over.
- The annual socio-economic cost of drug-related crime in England and Wales alone has been estimated at over £13 billion.

**There are some successes in UK drug policy but, we simply do not know enough about which elements of drug policy work, why they work and where they work well.**

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- The level of HIV among users in the UK is much lower than most other comparable European countries because of needle exchange and methadone substitution schemes, however levels of Hepatitis C among injecting drug users are high
- Certain types of drug treatment have been shown to be cost effective with cost savings in the order of over £3 for every £1 spent-mainly through less crime costs.<sup>ii</sup>
- We have very little evidence about the effectiveness of many enforcement interventions. What we know is not encouraging because street prices for most drugs have been steadily decreasing.
- There is little consistent and reliable evidence from this country or elsewhere that drug education and prevention programmes bring about less drug use.<sup>iii</sup>

### **List of UKDPC Commissioners:**

**Dame Ruth Runciman (Chair)**, Chair of the Central & NW London Mental Health NHS Trust & previously Chair of the Independent Inquiry into the Misuse of Drugs Act and former member of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD)

**Professor Haleh Afshar OBE**, Professor of Politics & Women's Studies, University of York

**Professor Colin Blakemore**, Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council

**David Blakey CBE QPM**, formerly HM Inspector of Constabulary, President of ACPO & Chief Constable of West Mercia

**Annette Dale-Perera**, Director of Quality at the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse

**Professor the Baroness Finlay of Llandaff**, Professor of Palliative Medicine at Cardiff University & President of the Royal Society of Medicine

**Daniel Finkelstein OBE**, Comment Editor at "The Times" newspaper

**Jeremy Hardie CBE**, Trustee of Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

**Professor Sally Macintyre CBE**, Director of the MRC Social & Public Health Sciences Unit at Glasgow University

**Professor Lord Kamlesh Patel OBE**, Head of the Centre for Ethnicity & Health at University of Central Lancashire & Chairman of the Mental Health Act Commission

**Adam Sampson**, Chief Executive of Shelter

**Professor John Strang**, Director of the National Addiction Centre (Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London)

**Observer**, Dawn Austwick OBE (Director, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation)

**Chief Executive**, Roger Howard, formerly Chief Executive of Crime Concern & DrugScope and previously a member of the ACMD

## **ENDS**

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<sup>i</sup> "The lack of investment in research and consequent weakness of evidence base on drug abuse and addiction is a severe hindrance to policy making..... We do not underestimate the challenges involved in undertaking scientific studies concerning the misuse of illegal drugs, but the Government must not use this as an excuse for not fulfilling its obligations to undertake proper evaluations of the impacts of its policies and to fund research for the public good. (7<sup>th</sup> Science & Technology Committee Report on Scientific Advice, Risk & Evidenced Based Policy Making November 2006)

<sup>ii</sup> National Treatment Outcome Research Study 2007

<sup>iii</sup> "A lack of UK evaluation studies means it is difficult to deliver evidenced-based prevention programmes in this country" (NICE January 2006-Drug use Prevention among young people).