

PRESS BRIEFING



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Employer concerns and stigma jeopardise plans to get recovering drug users into jobs

A review and research findings published today by the UK Drug Policy Commission (UKDPC) concludes that Government efforts to get drug users into jobs through welfare reform proposals announced last week may not work unless more radical steps are taken to support employers.

- **Two thirds of employers surveyed would refuse to employ a former heroin or crack cocaine user, even if they were otherwise suitable for the job.**
- **Up to 80% of those in drug treatment are out of work, yet employment can increase the chances of successful treatment.**
- **Employers need practical support and perhaps even modest financial incentives to help bridge the gap between recovering drug users and the labour market.**
- **The forthcoming Equality Bill may be an opportunity to tackle discrimination against former drug users and those who are impaired because of drug addiction.**

Research for the UKDPC found that employers are concerned about recruiting someone if they have a history of drug problems or are taking prescribed medicine, such as methadone, for their addiction. Employers identified the need for practical support and help to manage 'risks'. More radical measures such as incentives and legislation may also be needed to reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by recovering drug users trying to re-enter the labour market.

The report considers the range of barriers to work faced by problem drug users and how these can be overcome. It also criticises the lack of evidence of 'what works'. Despite some promising practice, there are no evaluations to demonstrate effectiveness of national initiatives such as 'progress2work', the Government programme accessed by 13,000 recovering drug users in 2007/08 at a cost of £20 million.

John Varley, UKDPC President and Group Chief Executive of Barclays, said:

"This review suggests that, if we are going to make serious headway in reducing drug misuse, employers need to be prepared to consider hiring suitable candidates who are recovering from a history of drug problems. Employment is a key source of rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The UKDPC is committed to helping the Government, employers and the support agencies help those who are recovering from drug abuse back into work."

Jeremy Hardie, UKDPC Commissioner and former Chairman of WHSmith Group, said:

"Welfare sanctions and support alone are not enough to get recovering drug users into work. As unemployment levels rise, the problem of engaging employers with this group will become even more acute. There are some excellent programmes already in place where recovering drug users are getting work and employers are very happy with the results. However, more needs to be done to evaluate what works and apply it across the country."

Some key facts:

- It is estimated that there are about 400,000 heroin and crack users in the UK and that about 80% of them are not in employment.
- There were over 200,000 people in contact with structured drug treatment services in England in 2007/08.
- A DWP report suggests up to 240,000 problem drug users in England may be receiving out-of-work benefits - representing about 7% of Jobseekers Allowance and Incapacity Benefit recipients.
- Just under 50,000 (less than 2%) of incapacity benefits claimants have drug abuse recorded as their primary medical condition, with a cost of £45 million. However, more than 85,000 IB claimants are actually thought to be problem drug users.
- Last year about 13,000 people with drug problems entered the progress2work programme, and there were 2,700 'job outcomes'.

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Notes to editors

For more information including case studies and interview requests please contact Ben Lynam (Head of Communications) on 020 7297 4752, 07988 054241, blynam@ukdpc.org.uk.

- The UKDPC report published today, "**Working towards recovery: getting problem drug users into jobs**", will be available online at www.ukdpc.org.uk/reports.shtml. It reaches a number of conclusions as to how governments, employers and those providing support services can more effectively work to help problem drug users into employment.
- Also published today by the UKDPC are two research reports commissioned from the University of Manchester: Part One examines social security and relevant aspects of employment law and policy. Part two uses desk research, qualitative interviews and a survey of employers focused on barriers to employment and on effective support structures and mechanisms. These can also be found on our website.
- The Part Two University of Manchester research included:
 - Interviews with service providers (30), service users (26) and employers from Glasgow, Manchester and London.
 - Further telephone interviews with 52 employers from the three cities.
 - An online survey completed by 135 employers.
- In the online survey, 90 out of 135 employees would not offer a job to a former crack-cocaine or heroin user even if they were "otherwise suitable for the position".
- John Varley, Honorary President of the UKDPC, is Group Chief Executive of Barclays Bank Plc. He is also Chair of Business Action on Homelessness and President of the Employers' Forum on Disability.
- Jeremy Hardie, UKDPC Commissioner, is Treasurer of the Institute for Public Policy Research and a trustee of Somerset House and International House. He has previously served as Chairman of WHSmith Group plc from 1994-1999.
- The UKDPC commenced its three year programme in April 2007. It is an independent specialist "think-tank" funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and aims to provide objective analysis of 'what works' to tackle drug problems and encourage a more informed public debate.
- The UKDPC is formed of 12 Commissioners who bring together a broad range of expertise from the fields of drug treatment, medical research, policing, public policy and the media. For more information on the UKDPC and its commissioners please visit www.ukdpc.org.uk
- The Department for Work and Pensions' white paper "*Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future*" was published on 10 December. It describes "a new regime for problem drug users" where failure to engage in the programme, including drug treatment, will lead to sanctions. See www.dwp.gov.uk/raisingexpectations
- Progress2work is a Jobcentre Plus programme which started in 2002 to help people recovering from drug problems with support to help them get into work. See http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/stellent/groups/jcp/documents/websitecontent/dev_011997.pdf

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