



THE BECKLEY FOUNDATION

SUBMISSION TO 'DRUGS: OUR COMMUNITY, YOUR SAY' (DRUGS STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2007)

INTRODUCTION

In response to concerns that national and international drugs policy is insufficiently informed by a growing evidence base, the Beckley Foundation has developed over the last five years a programme of research and policy analysis to help inform future drugs strategies. This programme produces regular reports based on current research and policy-focused seminars which are intended to improve drugs policy, both through their content and in the manner of multi-disciplinary consultation through which they are developed.

Whilst we welcome this review of drugs strategy, we feel that it would benefit from a greater focus on the fundamental purpose of drugs policy: to minimise the harm caused by all psychoactive drugs. Our submission therefore highlights the need for a more evidence based drugs policy. To achieve this, the new drug strategy should have clear goals, be accompanied by a more extensive evaluation of the strategy's success and what policies contribute the most to promoting such success, and should comprise a better balanced allocation of resources between enforcement, treatment and research. The development of such a policy should be open and transparent, and should engage as wide a community of relevant parties as possible, including both national and international partners.

1. GOALS FOR A DRUGS POLICY

The Beckley Foundation echoes the stated aims of the Governments drug strategy, as outlined in 1998¹ and 2002², that of 'reducing the harm that drugs cause to society'. We have identified the key targets for any drugs strategy as being³:

- To reduce the levels of crime and public nuisance associated with the production, supply, purchase and use of drugs
- To reduce the numbers of deaths that result directly from the production, supply, purchase and use of drugs

¹ 'Tackling Drugs to Build a better Britain' The Government's Ten-Year Strategy for Tackling Drugs Misuse (1998)

² 'Updated Drug Strategy' (2002)

³ 'Towards a review of global policies on illegal drugs' Beckley foundation drug policy programme report (2004)

- To reduce the number of people suffering physical health problems as a result of the use of drugs, and particularly fatal and non-fatal overdose, HIV and hepatitis infections
- To reduce the number of people suffering mental health problems and addiction as a result of their use of drugs
- To reduce the social costs of drug use, including the impact on families and children and the numbers of people failing in education and employment as a result of their use of drugs
- To reduce the damage to the environment as a result of the production, supply, purchase and use of drugs

Whilst many of these targets are broadly similar to those stated in the consultation paper, we feel that meeting these targets will be much harder and more resource intensive to achieve without a reconsideration of the government's current approach to implementing its drug strategy, as shall be outlined below. It should be highlighted that several of these targets will require international co-operation if they are to be met. Whilst this may seem too general for a national drugs strategy, this is very deliberate as the use of drugs depends upon a global market, and actions taken by the UK government and its citizens will have far reaching implications around the world. Moreover, national drugs policy is largely constrained and determined by the need to adhere to the relevant United Nations Conventions.

2. EVALUATION

The success of the government's drug strategy will be hugely influenced by the quality of assessment of the extent to which targets are being met and of the efficacy of particular policy initiatives. Such assessments enable the optimal allocation of resources to ensure the most expedient implementation of drugs strategy. Again, we have identified six basic constituents of an objective, evidence-based approach to drug policy⁴:

- Policy makers should articulate clear, achievable and realistic policy objectives at the outset (ideally on the basis of debate amongst, and approval by, the relevant professionals and the general public)
- Policy-makers should set a clear time frame, with dates at which progress will be reviewed
- Policy makers should establish independent mechanisms for evaluating and reporting on progress against these objectives
- Policy makers should ensure that independent reviews are conducted to the highest professional standards
- Policy makers should be committed to communicating the results of reviews to professionals and the general public effectively, and to promoting and encouraging open debate on their implications
- Policy makers should be willing to review and, where necessary, revise drug policy in the light of emerging evidence on effectiveness

⁴ 'Assessing drug policy principles and practice' Beckley foundation drug policy programme report (200?)

It is our belief that the way forward on drug policy is not the subject of an existing political consensus (nationally or internationally), in part due to a lack of consistent evidence pointing in a clear direction. This therefore highlights the need for on-going research, data collection, experimentation and evaluation, to provide the evidence on which policy can be based. Establishing best policy will depend upon an open consideration of options that is informed by the best available evidence from across the world. At the moment, too much policy debate is characterised by suspicion, misinformation, poor reasoning and entrenched and polarised views. A greater willingness on all sides to review successes and failures openly can only lead to more effective policy.

The issue of transparency and independence of drug policy evaluation is crucial to ensuring public confidence in, and encouraging adherence to, drugs regulations. This point was acknowledged in the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee's report: 'Drug classification: making a hash of it?', which highlighted a lack of transparency in the workings of the Government's scientific advisory committee on drug classification and policy, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), as well as a need for the government to be more open about its evaluations of drug policy, and to acknowledge initiatives that have failed as well as those that have succeeded.

Furthermore, this report identified a perceived lack of independence in the workings of the ACMD, citing the ACMD's failing to undertake a review of the classification of Ecstasy despite a wealth of evidence indicating that the relative dangers of Ecstasy are out of all proportion when compared with other class A drugs. This failing is attributed to the Government not asking the ACMD to undertake such a review, and their stated intention of dismissing any calls for a change in the classification of ecstasy. This highlights a particular weakness in the government's development of evidence-based policy. 'The Government's total reliance on the ACMD for provision of scientific advice on drugs policy gives the Council a critical role to play in ensuring that policy in this area is evidence based'⁵. **We therefore reiterate the committee's concern about the lack of clarity in the ACMD's remit and how it determines its work programme. We recommend that the ACMD be granted full autonomy in its workings.**

One possible consequence of a more open and independent evaluation of drug consumption is recognition of some of the perceived benefits of drug use. According to Prof. Robert MacCoun, there may be advantages to acknowledging some benefits of drug use, both in terms of harm reduction and for the promotion of an open and honest debate within society⁶. One such advantage would be to indicate reasons why people use drugs as a form of self-medication, and find safer agents to meet these needs. Taking benefits seriously means testing for benefits with scientific studies, such as research into the apparent medicinal uses of marijuana. This type of research must form part of the expansion of the evidence base on which drug policy should be founded. Testing benefits might also render drug policy more credible, with reduced demonization of drug users and hypocrisy that could lead to an overall improvement for drug prevention efforts.

⁵ 'Drug classification: making a hash of it?' House of Commons Science and Technology Committee report (2006), p.16.

⁶ Beckley Foundation Global Drug Policy Seminar 2005

3. POLICY INITIATIVES

The prevalent approach to drug policy over the last forty years, the so called ‘war on drugs’ approach, has emphasized the reduction of the scope and scale of drugs markets. This has been pursued through various supply-side initiatives, in particular, tough and uncompromising law enforcement as well as the promotion of a strong anti-drug social consensus. There are grave concerns as to the efficacy of this approach, with increasing recognition that supply-side interventions have a limited role in reducing harm⁷. Whilst alternative policy approaches run the risk of being criticised as being ‘soft on drugs’, **we feel all initiatives should be evaluated in a transparent way on a cost effective basis if the overall aim of the drug strategy, that of harm reduction at all levels between the individual and society as a whole, is to be achieved.**

At the moment, such an approach is limited by a lack of evidence in key areas. In order to establish effective evidence based policy, we believe a greater empirical understanding is required of:

- The extent and nature of drug problems
- Which interventions are most effective in preventing or treating these problems
- How such interventions can be effectively delivered

The Beckley Foundation actively pursues providing answers to some of these questions. It has produced over 20 reports and briefing papers evaluating different approaches to policy, law enforcement, reducing drug related harms to health, and drug related crime. An index of these reports can be found in appendix A.

In addition to these reports, the foundation has organised a seminar series, ‘Society and Drugs: A Rational Perspective’, to promote informed debate into how best to manage drugs within our society (proceedings documents detailing the outcome of these seminars are available from the foundation, the titles of which can be found in Appendix B). Out of these seminars came the recent Lancet paper developing a new rational scale of harm by professors Nutt and Blakemore et al⁸. The ideas contained in this paper were first put forward by Professor Colin Blakemore at the Beckley Foundation seminar entitled: ‘An interdisciplinary perspective on alcohol and other recreational drugs’ organised in collaboration with the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit in 2003.

The Beckley foundation is currently working on the production a Global Cannabis Commission report, reviewing the multi-dimensional issues associated with cannabis consumption in an effort to facilitate evidence-based policy in this area. It is being prepared by the world’s leading experts and will be presented to governments to clarify the underlying problems associated with cannabis consumption, and make recommendations on control of its use.

⁷ No. 10 Strategy Unit Drugs Project: Phase 2 Report: ‘Diagnosis and Recommendations’ (2003)

⁸ ‘Development of a rational scale to assess the harm of drugs of potential misuse’

We believe that these seminars and the Global Commission provide possible paradigms to follow in the development of evidence based policy through multi-disciplinary engagement with the academic, medical and law enforcement communities, as well as other interested parties. The need for such engagement was highlighted in the Science and Technology Committee's report, and was acknowledged by Vernon Coaker, the minister with the drugs brief, in his response to this report⁹.

In order to further the collection and dissemination of information about the use of controlled substances and the evaluation of policies to control these substances, the Beckley Foundation has initiated the formation of two organisations: The International Society for the Study of Drug Policy¹⁰ and the International Consortium for Drug Policy¹¹, reports from which will soon be available for consultation. It is hoped that the future will see useful collaboration between these and other organisations, and the government.

There is still however, a great need to undertake new research to fill gaps in the evidence base, without which drug strategy is necessarily based more on superstition than fact. Prof. Colin Blakemore highlighted in 2005 how drug policy should be informed by an understanding of toxicology and the effects of psychoactive substances on the human brain. He also recognised that 'many strongly held opinions in this area are not based on evidence and better evidence is needed on the risks of recreational drugs'¹². The Beckley Foundation is actively involved in trying to fill this gap, sponsoring various studies that seek to determine what the effects of certain drugs on the brain are. In particular, we are preparing an experiment to investigate what the effects of cannabis are on neural electrophysiological activity through electroencephalogram (EEG), cerebral circulation using magnetic resonance imaging, and neurotransmitter functioning using single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT). It is hoped that this research will enable the relation of physiological effects to their phenomenological counterparts, and so further understanding of why cannabis exerts some of the effects it does. This could be vital if we are to understand why cannabis can promote anxiety and, worse, paranoid delusions in some, but relaxation and calm in others. **Financing such research to provide the necessary evidence base must be included in the budgeting of any future drug policy, and indeed should be included as a core component of any such policy.**

As previously stated, it is our belief that drugs policy should be evidence-based and reflect the relative harm of different drugs. Such an approach considers illicit drugs alongside alcohol and tobacco. This enables the most informed understanding of the dangers of drugs, as well as recognition that there is a toleration of consumption of certain drugs within society. This has implications for the allocation of resources within a drug strategy, as it recognises the distinctions between drug use and misuse, with the vast majority of drug related disorder stemming from a relatively small number of drug misusers. As Prof. Mark

9

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070614/halltext/70614h0007.htm>

¹⁰ <http://www.issdp.org>

¹¹ <http://www.idpc.info/>

¹² Beckley Foundation Global Drug Policy Seminar 2005

Kleiman has highlighted, substance abuse tends to be relatively rare and hidden, whereas substance use is much more common and open. This leads him to the conclusion that evidence relevant to the harms of substance abuse should look away from the general population and towards sub-populations where abuse is more concentrated¹³. Interventions might therefore be best focused on treating this minority of problem drug users.

A further benefit of considering illicit substance use alongside that of alcohol and tobacco is that it provides a model for how markets of psychoactive substances can be controlled and regulated. For substances whose use has been determined by society as acceptable, this would enable the overturning of the current status quo whereby control of such markets largely belongs to organised criminal networks.

Focusing on the relative harm of substances also necessitates an overhaul of the current ABC classification system which does not match with scientific understanding of the harms of such substances to the individual and society¹⁴. Particular criticisms of the current classification system are that it is inconsistent with regard to the classification of individual drugs, as illustrated above, and in the motivations behind these classifications, to the extent that it has been deemed 'not fit for purpose'¹⁵.

One pertinent criticism of the debate over the policy initiatives required to achieve the aims of any drug strategy is that it has been too dichotomous. Dr. Marcus Roberts, head of the policy and parliamentary unit at MIND, criticises drug policy debate for being excessively polarised, and encourages recognition of a range of possible drug policy configurations balancing supply-side measures and demand reduction in different ways¹⁶. Whilst the evidence that supply reduction measures are not generally effective at reducing prevalence or harms¹⁷ emphasises the need for a clear shift in resources from enforcement activities to those that address specific harmful consequences, it does not follow that this is an either/or choice. Instead, it implies that a rebalancing of the current emphasis on enforcement compared to harm reduction and treatment initiatives is required. This approach is complimented by the work of Dr. Charles Schuster, ex-director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse in the US, who highlighted how different initiatives are appropriate for different stages of a drug abuse epidemic. Again the overall picture that emerges is of the importance of gathering and evaluating the relevant evidence to enable the adoption of the best strategy.

CONCLUSIONS

This submission focuses on the need for developing an evidence based drug strategy, and makes certain recommendations as to how such a policy might be implemented. Our main conclusions are:

¹³ Beckley Foundation Global Drug Policy Seminar 2005

¹⁴ Dr Andrew Jackson from the UK Government Office of Science and Technology in Beckley Foundation Global Drug Policy Seminar 2005

¹⁵ 'Drug classification: making a hash of it?' House of Commons Science and Technology Committee report (2006), p.3.

¹⁶ Beckley Foundation Global Drug Policy Seminar 2005

¹⁷ 'An Analysis of UK Drug Policy' Reuter, P. & Stevens, A., (2007)

- The new drug strategy must be based on clearly defined goals, focussed on minimising the harm associated with drug use
- Drug strategy should be accompanied by rigorous, transparent evaluations of the extent to which the goals of the strategy are being met and which policies promote or hinder this success, carried out by independent assessors, and the results of these assessments be communicated to the public
- Drug policy should be evidence based. This necessitates a great expansion of the evidence base on which drug policy is founded, greater independence for the government agencies responsible for scrutinising the evidence on which policy is founded, and greater collaboration both within government and between government and relevant NGO's and institutions
- Drug strategy should comprise a better balance between enforcement, treatment and research in terms of resource allocation if the stated aim of minimising the harms associated with drugs use is to be achieved

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these considerations, we make the following specific recommendations:

- That the government undertake a review of the cost effectiveness of supply-side initiatives, particularly in comparison to initiatives that focus on reducing the harmful consequences of drug use and markets, and the results of such a review be made publicly available
- To include in any drug strategy budget sufficient allocation to enable the necessary research, information accumulation and analysis which is required to produce evidence based policy
- To adopt the recommendations included in the Science and Technology committee's report 'Drug classification: making a hash of it?' for the promotion of co-ordination within government departments and between government and the wider community with relevant drugs expertise, in the development and implementation of drugs policy
- To adopt the Science and Technology committee's recommendations for increasing the independence with which the ACMD operates
- To review the current ABC classification system and consider its replacement with a system based on a relative scale of harm
- To review the focus on penalising all drugs use to maximising the help available to problem drug users

A more detailed elaboration of the proposals recommended here can be found from the reports and briefing papers of the Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Programme, as described in Appendix A, and from the proceedings of the Beckley Foundation's seminar series: 'Society and Drugs: A Rational Perspective', as described in Appendix B.

APPENDIX A

BECKLEY FOUNDATION REPORTS

The Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Programme commissions reports and briefing papers on subjects relevant to the consideration of national and international drug policy. The first products of this programme of work were published and distributed in April 2004, and subsequent papers are being produced on a quarterly basis. These materials will be disseminated around the world, promoting a balanced and evidence-based debate.

The reports are commissioned and published in order to cast light on the key policy questions:

- Is the international community making progress in its stated aim of significantly reducing the use of illicit psychoactive substances?
- Are there any new approaches to reducing the supply of drugs that can be more effective in the future?
- Can widespread drug use be managed without severe health and social damage?
- What policy frameworks are likely to be most effective in the future?

BFDPP Report 1: Towards a Review of Global Policies on Illegal Drugs

http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/report_globalpolicy.pdf

This report discusses the global drug control system - particularly the role of the United Nations - and the challenges confronting drug policy. It argues that the current system is not achieving its stated objective: to eradicate completely - or even substantially reduce - illicit drug markets.

BFDPP Report 2: Assessing Drug Policy: Principles & Practice

http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/report_drugspolicy.pdf

This report considers good practice in objective setting and evaluation. It argues that drug policies should be evaluated against their successes and failures in reducing drug-related harm; and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of some existing evaluation frameworks.

BFDPP Report 3: Law Enforcement and Supply Reduction

http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/report_lawenforce.pdf

This report looks at the approach to drug policy that has dominated the field for much of the past 40 years, and is sometimes characterised - and, to some degree, caricatured - as the 'war on drugs' approach.

BFDPP Report 4: Reducing Drug Related Harms to Health: A Review of the Global Evidence

http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/report_drugrelatedharms.pdf

This report looks at the various ways in which the use of illegal drugs causes harm to individual and public health. It then attempts to summarise the current state of the global evidence base for the effectiveness of programmes designed to reduce these harms, and focuses on some key challenges for policymakers in areas of the world facing high levels of HIV and Hepatitis infection, and accidental overdose deaths.

BFDPP Report 5: [Reducing Drug Related Crime: An Overview of the Global Evidence](http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/reportfive.pdf)
<http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/reportfive.pdf>

This report looks at the global evidence base for the reduction of drug related crime. The report looks at three types of drug related crime (violence associated with illegal drug markets, crimes committed by individuals under the influence of drugs, and petty crime committed by drug users to pay for their drug purchases), and attempts to summarise the current research knowledge on which policies and actions have (or have not) been effective in reducing their impacts on society. The report concludes that many drug policy initiatives that have been designed to reduce drug related crime have had little or no impact, but there are some promising signs of success with treatment based, or general crime reduction approaches .

BFDPP Report 6: [Facing the future: The Challenge For National and International Drug Policy](http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/Report_06.pdf)

http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/Report_06.pdf

This report draws together the findings from the series of reports and briefing papers produced under the Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Programme in the last 18 months. It concludes that there are significant limitations in the achievements and likely future progress of current drug policies that focus on supply reduction and law enforcement, but that there is much that governments and international agencies can do to address the consequences of widespread drug use amongst their citizens. The report sets out a series of challenges and recommendations to policymakers that they must confront, if we are to see a reduction in drug related harm in the coming years.

BFDPP Report 7: [The International Narcotics Control Board: Watchdog or Guardian of the UN Drug Control Conventions?](http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/Report_07.pdf)

http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/Report_07.pdf

The International Narcotics Control Board is charged with monitoring the implementation of the three United Nations Conventions and of alerting member states and the international community to weaknesses in the system. There is growing discontent with the unbalanced nature of its contribution to the sensitive debates surrounding the issue of illegal drug markets and how best to respond to them. Critics have pointed out that the Board has moved away from its intended mandate as the watchdog of the conventions to become more of a guardian of the purity of the conventions, and is challenging any policy or activity that does not correspond with what it perceives as the original vision of the control system.

BFDPP Report 8: [Cannabis and Mental Health Responses to the Emerging Evidence](http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/Report_08.pdf)
http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/Report_08.pdf

This report reviews the global situation regarding Cannabis cultivation and use, with particular reference to recent debates around the variable THC content of Cannabis products, and the link between use of the drug and mental health problems such as schizophrenia and psychosis. Having analysed the prevalence and potential for health and social problems arising from Cannabis use, the authors then move on to consider the various policy and programme options available to governments in their attempts to minimise the harm arising from the use of this particular drug.

BFDPP Report 9: Monitoring drug policy outcomes: The measurement of drug related harm
http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/Report_09.pdf

This latest Report from the Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Programme looks at the various attempts by governments and academic institutions to develop a methodology for assessing and measuring the level of drug related harm, in order to better understand the impact of illegal drug use on society, and of policies and programmes that aim to reduce that impact. The authors find that several current initiatives have the potential to develop workable methodologies, but that there is currently little methodological consistency or sharing of best practice between experts. They therefore call on the authorities responsible for drug policy monitoring and evaluation to establish an international working group to improve co-operation in this promising area.

BFDPP Report 10: Treatment for dependant drug use.
<http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/Report10.pdf>

This report aims to give policymakers an accessible summary of the current evidence available on the effectiveness of treatment, and suggestions on how treatment services can be expanded and integrated into a co-ordinated system. The authors explain why treatment for dependent drug use is a good investment in any country with significant numbers of dependent drug users, in that it has been shown to achieve significant reductions in the health and social harms that are associated with drug problems. The major treatment modalities are described, and a summary given of the global research evidence into their effectiveness. The current major debates in the treatment field are also briefly summarised.

BFDPP Report 11: The funding of the united nations office on drugs and crime; an unfinished jigsaw.

http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/Beckley_Report11.pdf

This report aims to provide a broad and accessible summary of the UNODC funding situation since 2002. It includes an outline of the budget process, sources of funding and recent spending patterns. The authors also explore some of the negative consequences resulting from the current funding dynamic and argue that problems associated with limited UNODC funding from the UN regular budget are being exacerbated by donor's increasing proclivity to earmark their voluntary contributions. Within this context the report draws some conclusions and offers some recommendations that may go some way to assist the UNODC to reach its full potential as an efficient channel for multilateral action on drugs.

BFDPP Report 12: Prisons and Drugs

http://www.beckleyfoundation.org/pdf/Beckley_RPT12_Prisons_Drugs_EN.pdf

The latest report from the Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Programme describes the high rates of drug problems in all prison systems, summarises the current state of global knowledge and research evidence, and provides a guide for policymakers on how to develop effective policies and programmes in this area.

The reports can also be downloaded from our policy website:

www.internationaldrugpolicy.net

BECKLEY FOUNDATION BRIEFING PAPERS

Accompanying these reports are briefing papers (factsheets) that explain recent policy initiatives in particular countries. The overall aim is to produce credible materials that can be used to inform a debate that is, all too often, guided by ideology rather than evidence. International agencies, such as the United Nations and the European Union, and most individual countries are torn between the growing scale of the problem, and the need to claim that current programmes are successful. In our view, the time has come to begin an objective search for solutions that are more effective in reducing the vast scale of human misery associated with this global phenomenon. A system of evaluation that can verify the usefulness of the policies currently in place should be introduced, in order to ensure that future policy does not just repeat the mistakes of the past.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 1: [Reclassification of Cannabis in the UK](#)

On 29 January 2004, an amendment to the drug laws came into effect in the UK that moved cannabis and its derivatives from Class B to Class C under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, the primary drug control legislation in the UK. The paper discusses the motivations for this policy change and the complex manner of its implementation.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 2: [Drug Policy and the HIV Pandemic in Russia and the Ukraine](#)

Over the past three years Russia and Ukraine have experienced one of the fastest growing HIV pandemics in Europe. In contrast to other parts of the world, the main driver behind the rate of infection is injecting drug use. Recent government policies have placed a heavy emphasis on reducing availability and on harsh punishments for drug users. This approach has not succeeded in significantly reducing the level of drug use.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 3: [Drug Consumption Rooms](#)

The defining characteristic of Drug Consumption Rooms is that they are legally sanctioned environments where people can take illegal drugs. Their purpose is to reduce drug-related harms. The underlying assumption is that if problem drug users are provided with safe private environments within which to administer drugs there will be a reduction in unsafe public drug use.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 4: [Upheavals in the Australian drug market: heroin drought, stimulant flood](#)

Australia experienced extraordinary and unprecedented changes to its illicit drug market from the end of 2000. A 'heroin drought' made the media headlines and grabbed the attention of drug policy specialists across the world. Less widely publicised was the flood of cocaine and methamphetamine into the country the same time.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 5: [Thailand's War on Drugs](#)

The Thai 'war on drugs', which commenced in February 2003 in response to an explosion in methamphetamine use in this region of East Asia, has resulted in thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of arrests. This paper provides insights into the strengths and limits of enforcement as an instrument of drug policy, by examining what is perhaps the toughest and most uncompromising recent manifestation of this approach.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 6: [Decriminalization of Drugs in Portugal: a Current Overview](#)

In July 2001, Portugal's government implemented a notable change in drug policy. From that date, users of any illegal drug apprehended by police were brought not before the courts, but before special commissions composed of health, legal, and social work professionals, whose aim was to give drug users the opportunity to access treatment for addiction and other problems related to drug use. This paper presents an overview of the current Portuguese experience since the 2001 reforms.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 7: [Incarceration of Drug Offenders: Costs and Impacts](#)

This paper looks at the pros and cons of pursuing a policy of large-scale arrest and incarceration of drug users. Taking the USA as the main example of this approach, the authors examine the costs of incarceration in terms of public expenditure, and consequential impacts on health and social cohesion, and the impact on drug use prevalence and markets through incapacitation of users, access to treatment, and deterrence. The paper concludes that, while harsh penalties can have a marginal impact on the number of drug users, this is likely to be outweighed by the costs involved.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 8: [The Rise of Harm Reduction in the Islamic Republic of Iran](#)

This paper looks at changing approaches to the drug problem in Iran where there is growing recognition of the limits of an enforcement driven approach, and the importance of the medical and social dimensions of drug misuse. This has resulted in improvements in drug treatment and expansion of harm reduction services including: HIV prevention, substitution treatment, outreach, and the development of treatment and infection prevention services for drug users in prison. It is encouraging that in Iran such challenges are being confronted directly and that the Islamic Republic of Iran has followed broadly the same course as secular governments elsewhere in the world, despite the cultural differences. As in other parts of the world, the urgent need to do something about the spread of HIV/AIDs is helping to overcome ideological barriers to harm reduction work.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 9: [UNAIDS & the Prevention of HIV infection through injecting Drug Use](#)

This paper describes the problems caused by injecting drug use as a mode of transmission of HIV, and the need for the global community to find effective methods of minimising that risk. Although there are proven harm reduction measures for reducing the incidence of HIV there has been continuing controversy about the morality of such an approach and the fear that providing such support might encourage the continuance of injecting behaviour. The paper chronicles the debate at the United Nations (UN) through 2004 and 2005, and the struggle for the consensus opinion to prevail, culminating in a statement from the June 2005 UNAIDS meeting in Geneva stating that harm reduction measures are the most effective response to emerging epidemics. A UN strategy was approved that called for urgent expansion of harm reduction measures, and it is to be hoped that this will now be translated into effective prevention on the ground.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 10: [Drug Policy in India: Compounding Harm?](#)

This briefing paper looks at the history of the use of psychoactive drugs in India, and particularly the use of Cannabis and Opium derivatives in religious and social rituals. The authors argue that, for centuries, such use was closely constrained by social and cultural norms, and few problems of addiction, crime or public health related to these patterns of use have been recorded. Since the Indian government introduced criminal laws on drug production and consumption in the 1980s (in order to comply with its responsibilities under the UN Conventions), more harmful and extensive patterns of drug use have developed in India. While it is unlikely that this is a direct result of the legal and policy changes, it is argued that current drug policy and programmes in India are ill-equipped to respond to the likely growth in addictive and dangerous patterns of use that have been experienced in other Asian countries.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 11: [Report of the Third Beckley International Drug Policy Seminar](#)

The Beckley Foundation organised its third annual international seminar on drug policy in the House of Lords, Palace of Westminster, London, United Kingdom, on 4 December 2006. The objective of the seminar was to examine the preparations for the forthcoming global review of the international drug control system.

- BFDPP Briefing Paper 12: [The Australian "heroin shortage" six years on.](#)

What, if any, are the implications for drug policy? This briefing paper summarizes the results of research into the consequences of the so-called Australian "heroin shortage" in 2001 and reviews the continuing debate about its causes and policy significance.

APPENDIX B

The Beckley Foundation is currently organising a series of seminars, '*Society and Drugs: A Rational Perspective*,' to address the issue of drug use in society from a multi-disciplinary perspective. The aim of the series is to achieve a rational overview of the scientific, medical, social, political and economic issues surrounding the use and abuse of drugs, both legal and illegal, promoting evidence-based practice in all jurisdictions.

These seminars bring together experts from a wide range of disciplines to examine the latest evidence on:

- The effects of different drugs on the brain, behaviour and health.
- The effectiveness of different methods of informing and educating the public (particularly young people) about drugs and the consequences of their use.
- Issues in prevention and treatment of addiction, including the relative merits of education and rehabilitation versus penalties and incarceration.
- The likely consequences of changes in legislation, and their implications for public health, law and order, and the economy.

In 2002 the first seminar in this series was held at Magdalen College, Oxford. It was entitled '[Drugs and the Brain](#)', and was organised in conjunction with Prof. Colin Blakemore, now Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council. Events in 2003 included a meeting at the Royal Society to discuss, '[The Role of Drugs in Society](#)' and a seminar held at Admiralty Arch, London, organised in association with the UK Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, entitled '[An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Alcohol and other Recreational Drugs](#)'. In October 2004, The Beckley Foundation hosted the seminar entitled '[Global Drug Policy - Future Directions](#)'. This event, held in the magnificent surroundings of the Moses Room in the UK Houses of Parliament, was our first attempt to focus on international issues. At this seminar we also launched two new initiatives: [The International Society for the Study of Drug Policy](#) and [the International Drug Policy Consortium](#).

Following the success of the House of Lords seminar on global drug policy in 2004, we are now planning to bring together a small number of high level policymakers, academics and NGOs on an annual basis, to review the latest evidence and debate future policy options in an atmosphere of mutual respect and confidentiality. The *Beckley Foundation Global Drug Policy Seminar 2005* consisted of a number of interlinked meetings that took place across a three day period - Sunday 20th November to Tuesday 22nd November. The main seminar on Monday 21st November brought together senior politicians and policy officials, academics and NGOs, in order to review and debate the latest evidence and experience on illegal drug use, and the policies and programmes designed to respond to these issues. It also covered the effects that current regulations have on scientific and medical research.

In addition to the Monday seminar, The Beckley Foundation also hosted a special event on Tuesday 22nd November in conjunction with [Foresight](#), a UK Government programme, which aims to produce challenging visions of the future in order to ensure effective strategies

now. The purpose of this gathering was to review the future policy challenges that will arise from the rapid development of new substances and technologies in the drugs field. The Proceedings Documents from both seminars will soon be available to download from this website.