

Consultation Paper - 'Drugs: Our Community, Your Say'

A Brief Submission by the Maranatha Community

I. A SOCIAL CRISIS

During the past 40 years we have seen the remorseless growth of one of the most sinister and destructive influences ever known in our society.

Highly organised, very wealthy and often violent criminal groups have targeted our nation, and particularly the young, to gain profit without any consideration being given to the consequent damage.

This multi-billion pound criminal activity has inflicted enormous damage on the lives of millions especially the young and has been actively encouraged by leading figures in the entertainment industry and by libertarian campaigners.

The damage inflicted has caused immense harm on the careers and lives of the young and has generated criminal activity to sustain habits. Families and communities have been blown apart. Huge sums of money which could have been devoted to community enrichment have been diverted into the pockets of criminals.

The rule of law has been seriously undermined as the young have established close contact with criminal gangs and their puppet distributors who are often themselves seriously addicted.

In spite of countless efforts and unparalleled levels of public expenditure we have as a nation largely failed to prevent the growth of this national scourge.

2. A CONSPIRACY

The drugs industry is a worldwide conspiracy embracing well established drug gangs operating in places such as Colombia and Afghanistan, Holland and the Middle East. These gangs can only ultimately be defeated by combined action rooted in international cooperation.

The money paid by children and young people in Britain has gone directly into the pockets of the most unscrupulous criminal elements, almost invariably wedded to violence, including knife and gun crime.

Beyond doubt the encouragement of a drug culture has been professionally orchestrated by the suppliers and dealers over many years

The escalation from so-called 'soft-drugs' to so-called 'hard-drugs' was carefully planned, contrary to the views of some commentators who were, and are, largely uninformed about the operational strategies of the drug barons.

Many distributors freely admit that the strategy has been to convince the young that cannabis is fun, acceptable and harmless and then to lead them to using a broad

range of other dangerous substances. The distribution networks are in fact largely the same irrespective of the drugs being sold. The foundation of the strategy of the drug gangs is the development of dependency and addiction, to create substantial long term markets.

An enormous amount of wrong and misleading information has been circulated among the young. The use of cannabis was glamorised in popular culture, in media and entertainment. It was presented as a normal activity invariably in the context of teenage and student life.

The signal given to the young by the reclassification of cannabis was extremely damaging. Large numbers of young people were led to the false conclusion that cannabis is harmless, legal and acceptable. It will take very considerable effort to change these wrong and dangerous perceptions.

3. MARANATHA

The Maranatha Community has been very deeply involved in helping those whose lives are being damaged by involvement in substance abuse. We have consistently endeavoured to warn those in authority of the extremely grave consequences of allowing drug abuse to get out of control. For this reason a broad range of initiatives has been taken between 2001 and 2007 in which factual information has been presented. These are therefore included in the attached nine appendices to this submission. They largely focus upon cannabis because of its role as an introduction to the overall drug scene. This information is particularly significant in view of the current scourge of 'skunk' which is substantially more dangerous than previous forms of cannabis.

Before the reclassification of cannabis Maranatha endeavoured on several occasions to arrange an urgent meeting between a team of some of the world's leading authorities on cannabis and the then Home Secretary. Unfortunately this was turned down.

On a number of occasions The Maranatha Community has, together with other bodies, expressed strong deep concern about the constitution of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. We believe this constitution should be reviewed and radically changed.

Over many years the Maranatha Community has been in direct contact with a very wide spectrum of individuals and organisations with deep involvement in the care for those with substance abuse problems. With them we are unanimous in concluding that as a matter of the greatest urgency cannabis should immediately be reclassified.

We believe that the whole issue of the abuse of drugs which continues unabated, should now be driven to the top of the political agenda in the United Kingdom.

See also the nine appendices attached to this Submission and also the duly completed Consultation Response Form.

19th October 2007

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Appendices to Maranatha Community's Submission

Factual evidence of direct relevance to the Consultation Paper on cannabis presented through the Maranatha Community during the past six years

1. November 2001

'Cannabis a Warning' - A submission to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Health, the leaders of the major political parties, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster and leaders of the Free Churches.

2. November 2002

'Cannabis – A cause for concern?' - A Consultation at the House of Lords

Participants:

Professor John Henry, Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, London
Professor Heather Ashton, School of Neurosciences, University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Professor Colin Drummond, St George's Hospital Medical School, London
Frans Koopmans, Director, DeHoop Drug Rehabilitation Centre, Dordrecht, The Netherlands
Torgny Peterson, Director Hassela Nordic Network, Sweden
Dr Ian Oliver, Consultant to the UN Drug Control Programme, University of Teeside
HM Coroner Hamish Turner, Coroner for the Torbay and South Devon District
Mrs Mary Brett, Head of Health Education, Dr. Challoner's Grammar School, Amersham
Mrs Liz Paver, Past President, National Head Teachers Association
Mrs Jan Berry, Chairman, Police Federation
Paul Diamond, Barrister, Bracton Chambers, London
Peter Stoker, Director, National Drug Prevention Alliance
David Partington, General Secretary, International Substance Abuse and Addiction Coalition

Sponsors

Professor The Lord Alton of Liverpool, The Lord Mackenzie of Framwellgate
The Rt. Rev. Nigel McCulloch, Bishop of Wakefield,
The Lord Hylton, Alistair Burt, MP, Gerald Howarth MP

3. October 2003

'What you need to know about Cannabis' – Information sheets :

'Ten facts confirming that Cannabis should not be reclassified'; 'Negative effects of Cannabis on Mental Health, Learning and Social Behaviour'; 'Ten medical reasons why cannabis should NOT be reclassified: The adverse health effect of cannabis'; 'Cannabis and Driving?'; 'What do they mean by Harm Reduction and Cannabis?'; 'Decriminalise Cannabis?';

'Cannabis the Lies & the Truth'(for young people)

4. May 2004

'Drug Prevention and Education: A Challenge' - A consultation in the House of Commons –

Participants:

Malou Lindholm, Swedish ex-MEP and Executive of HNN (Hasella Nordic Network)
Nick Seaton, Founder, Campaign for Real Education
Alistair Lang, Chief Executive of DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education)
Peter Stoker, director, NDPA (National Drug Prevention Alliance)
Mary Brett, Head of Health Education, Dr. Challoner's Grammar School

Sponsors

Jim Dobbin MP, Sir Teddy Taylor MP, Bob Russell MP,
Cheryl Gillan MP, Kate Hoey MP

5. December 2004

'UK Drug Policy – Why is it Failing?' - Parliamentary Briefing

Participants

Kent Martin, Director, Betel of Britain
Barry Evans, Drug Education DRED
Nick Seaton, Chairman, Campaign for Real Education
Patsy McKie, Mothers against Violence
Dr Clare Gerada, Royal College of General Practitioners
Dr A Majid Katme, Islamic Medical Association and Muslim Council of Britain
David Raynes, Former Assistant Chief Investigation Officer, HM Customs and Excise
Dennis Wrigley, Leader, Maranatha Community

Sponsors

Cheryl Gillan MP, Jim Dobbin MP, Bob Russell MP,
Kate Hoey MP, Andrew Selous MP, Rev Martin Smyth MP,
Bill Tynan MP, Professor The Lord Alton, Professor The Lord Chan,
Earl Howe, Lord Bishop Nigel McCulloch, Lord Mackenzie

6. September 2005

'Cannabis Re-Classification': A submission to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs

7. March 2006

'Substance Misuse – Public Health Interventions' – A submission to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence on the scope of Public Health Interventions

8. January 2006

'An Inquiry into Scientific Advice and Evidence': How Government handles them – A submission to the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology

9. 'Significant Developments about Cannabis' September 2007

A selection of relevant reports and news items.

See also the completed Consultation Response Form.

19th October 2007

Cannabis use in young Britons worst in Europe

The annual survey from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction has shown that about 7 percent of British 15-year-olds use cannabis at least 40 times a year and 40 percent of 15 year-olds have experimented with it, that's more than anywhere else in the EU. Cannabis use among 15-34 year olds ranked England and Wales second highest after Denmark. The survey estimates around 3 million daily cannabis users in the EU. Between 1 and 10 percent of young Europeans have taken cocaine. In Britain and Spain between 5 and 7 percent of people aged 15 to 24 admitted to using cocaine regularly. Britain and Spain have the highest use with 2 percent of 15 – 24 year olds using compared to the European average of 1 percent. In Britain the number of mentions of cocaine on death certificates rose eightfold from 1993 to 2001 but was lower for heroin. The survey ranked Britain top of 5 countries for "problem drug users" reporting 6 to 10 cases for every 1000 adults. Caroline Flint the Home office Minister responsible for the drug policy pointed out the report was based on data two years old and said more recent trends have seen the steady fall in the use of cannabis amphetamines and Ecstasy.

(The Times 26/11/2004)

Smoking cannabis causes deaths

Two boys aged 16 & 17 died while a 15 year old boy has been left paralysed after 'binge' smoking of cannabis. Teenagers are being warned by doctors that binge smoking can lead to fatal strokes and neurologist, Professor Thomas Geller one of the doctors from St. Louis University School of Medicine who treated the youngsters said the drug caused a different kind of brain damage in children to adults. They appear to have died after a stroke was triggered from a clot in the brain or a constricting of blood vessels in a wide area. Professor Geller was writing in the medical journal Paediatrics. Professor John Henry of Imperial College London, one of the UK's leading drugs experts said this report was very disturbing "I have also seen cases of stroke due to cannabis use, but fortunately none of my patients have died ... I only wish the government took the risks more seriously". *(Daily Mail 04/05/2004)*

Confusion over downgrading of cannabis

The downgrading by the Government of cannabis from Class 'B' to a Class 'C' drug has led to widespread confusion. Even Lady Runserman who chaired the influential study that prompted the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, to change the status of cannabis has warned that the policy is being made unworkable by the growing muddle surrounding it. John Dunford, General Secretary of the Secondary Heads Association, said "There is considerable confusion on the part of head teachers as to the effect that this will have, particularly on school discipline". Glen Smyth, Chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation has said "We certainly know from talking to people on the streets that there is a widespread belief that it will be legal". Solicitor, Mark Haslam said "Most of the public would say cannabis is no longer illegal. They think – wrongly – that it has been decriminalised. It would not be wrong to use the word 'shambles'". Marcus Cliff-Hedges, Assistant Headmaster at Hammersmith Latymer Upper School, said "I think the changes have confused people. I have heard adults say they believe it is legal to smoke cannabis in Brixton. There's a mixed message". Kate Griffin, headteacher of Greenford High School said "The only thing I can envisage is that it will become even more confusing for the youngsters". Head teacher Rod Stafford of Mellow Lane School in Hillingdon said that the established drug prevention programmes "Are being subverted by the changes to the law. We are having these debates now and pupils are turning to the teachers and saying 'that's all very well but the law is changing so it's OK'. After more than 40 years working at the frontline I can't support this change. The downgrading in the eyes of young people says, whatever the law might state, it is ok. Whatever the so-called experts say, I have first-hand knowledge of many cases where it has been the first slide down the slippery slope". *(Evening Standard 12/01/2004)*

Psychiatrist's warning about cannabis

Robin Murray, Professor at the Institute of Psychiatry, says of cannabis "I would say this is now the number one problem facing the mental health services in inner cities – we are near to using the word crisis".

(The Times 08/01/2004)

Cannabis drought reduces hospital patients

Senior Health Worker Consultant Nurse, Mark Holland, has reported that a cannabis drought in Manchester has led to a drop in mental health patients being admitted to hospitals. He sees dozens of patients each week at different clinics and believes that a drug shortage may be linked to an improvement in their well-being. The Health Worker who has 26 years of NHS experience is a senior member of the Manchester Mental Health & Social Care Trust. Speaking of cannabis he said "Although it is a class 'C' and seen a recreational drug it can bring on added difficulties for people who have already got a mental illness. I have definitely noticed a change in many of my clients. Their

Cannabis – An apology – Front page full page retraction by National Newspaper

In 1997 the Independent on Sunday launched a national campaign to decriminalise cannabis. In its leading article the newspaper now says "the growing evidence of the risk of psychological harm posed by cannabis, means that the time has come for us to reverse one of the positions with which....this newspaper was most identified". It said that the number of cannabis users on drug treatment programmes has risen 13-fold since their campaign was launched, and nearly half of the 22,000 currently on such programmes are under the age of 18. Statistics from the NHS National Treatment Agency show that the number of young people in treatment almost doubled from about 5,000 in 2005 to 9,600 in 2006 and that 13,000 adults also needed treatment. The number of teenagers treated for cannabis addiction last year was 10,000 which is double the figure for 2005 and ten times the figure for 1997. (*Independent on Sunday 18/03/2007*)

Growing danger of violence rooted in cannabis

Marjorie Wallis, Chief Executive of the charity SANE, has said that skunk cannabis addicts will kill more people unless the government takes tougher action against super-strength cannabis. Marjorie Wallis, said at least a third of murders committed by addicts of skunk cannabis were preventable. She called for an education campaign to teach young people that skunk was highly dangerous and for special health units to treat users suffering from schizophrenia. The warning comes after a spate of killings linked to the drug. Mrs. Wallis said "The latest figures showed 79% of schoolchildren think cannabis is both harmless and legal, but we clearly need to have a much stronger message that it can devastate the mind". She said "It's like giving schoolchildren a loaded guns". Last year an 18 year old cannabis user was jailed for a frenzied murder of two school friends and early this week a teenager addicted to skunk admitted to stabbing a grandmother to death. Mrs. Wallis said the killings could have been prevented if there was more rigorous control of the drug. A Home Office spokesman said the Government had recently launched a £1.8m anti-drugs campaign and that police had seized 28,000 cannabis plants in raids to shut cannabis factories. In 2004 cannabis was down-graded from a class 'B' to a class 'C' drug, a reflection of the softening of political attitudes towards 'dope'. A record number of people are now seeking treatment for cannabis addiction and there has also been an increase in the number of patients treated in NHS hospitals for mental illness and behavioural problems linked to cannabis. (*Daily Telegraph 06/04/2007*)

Violent criminals avoiding jail

Violent criminals are avoiding jail as the Police issue more Cautions. Home Office figures show a 17% rise in violence against persons and nearly 2000 for sex offences. Almost half of 588 people accused of conspiracy to murder received a caution. (*The Times 24/11/2006*).

Youth court urge Home Secretary to tighten up laws regarding cannabis

50 out of the 51 youth courts in England and Wales have written to Jacqui Smith, the Home Secretary urging action by the government to reclassify cannabis. Since David Blunkett changed the classification, the youth offending teams (YOTs) claimed that they have cannabis use soar amongst offenders. In a national survey two-thirds of the teams are reported to have found that use of the drug has risen by a quarter and three-quarters. In some areas 9 found that 25% of young offenders in the city had turned to crime to fund their habit. Across the country YOT's deal with around ten thousand under 17's a year who come before the courts. Darren Johnson, the Secretary of the Association of YOT Managers said "cannabis use was out of control" in some areas. (*DailyTelegraph 17/09/2007*).

Evidence

Schoolboy died after taking cannabis

A schoolboy high on cannabis stabbed himself to death in front of his father. 16 year old, James Hynard had no history of mental illness, but plunged a pair of scissors through his heart in front of his father and called out "Look Dad!" He died an hour later. The psychiatrist, Dr. Paul Courtney, told the inquest in Winchester that cannabis use could trigger 'mental illness' in 'dramatic fashion' even in apparently healthy people. He said "The use of marijuana in people who are vulnerable adds an extra stress to the system." (*Daily Mail 28/02/2002*).

Dangers of drugs and driving

Home Office reports have warned that more than 80% of clubbers have driven under the influence of illegal substances. Between the 1980's 1990's the number of people involved in fatal road accidents who tested positive for cannabis increased four-fold from a 3% to 12%. The British Medical Association fears that this number will rise given the increasing use of drugs. Cannabis is the most frequently detected illicit drug in accident fatalities and is known to impair co-ordination, vision and vigilance. Drugs expert, Professor John Henry of St. Mary's Hospital in London warned that most illegal substances can drastically impair a person's ability to drive safely. The BMA said that only drastic action will reverse the growing carnage as more and more people drive cars while intoxicated. They are pressing for special tests for drugs to cut the toll of crashes caused by cannabis and Ecstasy users. The BMA's head of Science and Ethics, Dr. Vivienne Nathanson, said "we need to tell people about these dangers and deter people from driving under the influence to cut death and destruction on our roads. People generally accept that you should not drink and drive but probably have no idea about the effects of drugs on their driving ability". Kevin Delaney, Road Safety Manager of the RAC said "We have been saying for years that if you effectively tackle this problem you would see a major reduction in deaths on our roads". He said that research in the US suggesting that sweat or saliva tests could detect drug use should be followed up with greater urgency". (*Daily Express 12/03/2002*)

Teenagers at risk with cannabis

According to a study published by the British Journal of Psychiatry teenagers who use cannabis are more likely to indulge in hard drugs, alcohol abuse and smoking. They are also at greater risk of depression and delinquency. Young cannabis users are more than three times as likely to dabble with other illegal substances including cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and amphetamines than non users. They are nearly twice as likely to suffer depression, with girls facing the highest risk. The findings showed children who use cannabis are five times more likely to drink under age and 13 times more likely to smoke, sowing the seeds for liver damage, heart disease and cancer later in life. They are also more likely to come from single parent families, pointing to family breakdowns as a risk factor for drug abuse in children. The study was carried out in Australia at the University of Sydney and researchers questioned more than 1200 children between 13 & 17. The report's author, Professor Michael Rey said "The problem of children using cannabis is happening all over the world. This study shows a malignant pattern that may ultimately lead to further negative outcomes because of an association between cannabis use, depression, conduct problems, tobacco smoking, excessive drinking and use of other illicit drugs. The fact is that children who use cannabis have more emotional and behavioural difficulties, and are more likely to smoke cigarettes, get intoxicated with alcohol and try harder drugs. It's a vicious cycle which can only make things worse for them". The research found children who smoked cannabis regularly were more depressed and 15% had committed suicide. 10% had

attempted it. Aggressive behaviour and attention problems were 50% more likely in cannabis smoking children. Addiction expert, Dr. Michael Farrell of The Maudsley Hospital in London said "The findings would heighten concerns about children being sucked into widespread abuse of illegal and lethal substances". He said "If you are consuming cannabis you are more likely to consume a range of other substances. The dangers are documented. People who are what we call 'substance involved' have higher rates of psychiatric disorders and depression. It is a cumulative effect. The message is there is a link between alcohol, cannabis and tobacco. If teenagers are consuming one, they are likely to be consuming the others and they are risking their physical and mental health". (*Daily Mail 01/03/2002*)

Teenage gang on rampage in estate

A gang of teenage thugs brought terror to a housing estate and magistrates banned them from a cluster of streets in Wallsend. Superintendent Peter Gauden said "There was a gang of 20-30 kids just running wild on the streets causing mayhem". Last May 7 members of the gang collapsed after overdosing on a cocktail of alcohol, cannabis and anti-depressants. Mr. Gauden said "Firefighters and police used to be stoned when we turned up. Playing cat and mouse was all part of the thrill for them". The police applied for an anti-social behaviour order on the youths, one of whom, a 17 year old, had 34 previous convictions. (*Daily Telegraph 22/03/2002*)

Cannabis linked to mental illness

Cannabis increases the risk of schizophrenia or depression, new studies have shown. A long-term follow up of a 1960s study of Swedish Army recruits shows that, broadly, using cannabis doubles the risk of schizophrenia, and using it 50 times increases the risk about sevenfold. The link persisted after correcting for cigarette smoking, social background and the use of other drugs. A New Zealand study shows that 10% of those who use cannabis by the age of 15 developed schizophrenia, compared with 3% of nonusers. The authors of the report, from King's College London and the University of Dunedin, says: "our findings suggest that cannabis use among psychologically vulnerable adolescents should be strongly discouraged". An Australian study of 1,600 students from 44 secondary schools found that frequent cannabis use was linked to later depression and anxiety, particularly in girls. Daily use increased the risk fivefold. Weekly use doubled the risk. The results are published in the British Medical Journal. (*The Times 22/11/2002*).

Teenage drug experimentation leads to death

Zoe Sherriff, 18, arrived at Reading University as a "well adjusted student", but only 6 weeks later she was found hanged in her bedroom. Her friends said her problems started after she smoked cannabis and then took cocaine and also Ecstasy. She started hearing voices and sunk into depression. (*Daily Mail 05/03/2003*).

Cannabis just once a week can cause addiction

According to a study published in the British Journal of Psychiatry by a team led by Carolyn Coffey of the Centre for Adolescent Health in Victoria, Australia, a third of teenagers who smoke cannabis every week become dependent on it by their 20's. Among less regular users, who also started taking it in their teens, one in five was addicted by 21. (*Daily Mail 02/04/2003*)

Young drug baron jailed (534.3)

Anthony Pereira, aged 29 of Stretford set up a base in Holland to flood the British mainland with £50m worth of cocaine and heroin. His customers in Britain included the notorious Gooch Glose mob in Moss Side which has been involved in bloody turf wars with other gangs dating back two decades. Police and customs officers seized £20m worth of cocaine, heroin, amphetamine and cannabis inside a lorry entering the country at Dover docks and a total of £50m worth of drugs was recovered during the investigation. In October last year the gang's leader Gregory Rothwell was jailed for 21 years and ten members of his gang were jailed for a total of 123 years. (*Stretford & Urmston Messenger 05/08/2004*)

The cannabis time bomb

A study by Professor Robin Murray, Head of Psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry in London and one of the world's leading authorities on mental illness, has discovered that cannabis users are seven times more likely to develop mental illness. The drug affects the brain so seriously that it is already

recognised as being one of the leading causes of psychosis in the UK. Professor Murray warned “The link is now clear. It’s something society needs to think about very carefully”. He also warned “The more cannabis that is consumed, the more psychiatrists we are going to need”. Addressing the Annual Meeting of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Edinburgh he stated that 80% of the patients he assessed with their first episode of psychosis had been taking cannabis. Professor Murray pointed to earlier studies in Holland, Israel, Scotland and New Zealand, which found that people taking more cannabis as teenagers and young adults were more likely to suffer mental illness in later years. “These findings were largely ignored” Professor Murray told the conference. Marjorie Wallace, Chief Executive of the mental health charity SANE said “Smoking cannabis is a bit like playing Russian Roulette”. (*Daily Mail 02/07/2003*).

Death from cannabis overdose

A 36-year-old father smoked an average of six cannabis joints every day for more than a decade. The Pembrokeshire Coroner, Michael Howells, recorded a death by misadventure and the medical cause of death as cannabis toxicity. (*Daily Mail 21/01/2004*).