

Scottish Drug Policy Conversations (SDPC)

Working Document

Purpose

SDPC offers a space for people with varied views to discuss drug policy in Scotland, an exchange involving fresh ideas and questions, research findings, developments in policy and practice in other countries and the changing picture of drug use and harms. The concept of SDPC resulted from discussions among policy stakeholders which identified three underlying factors:

- (i) the need for continued discussion about appropriateness and effectiveness of Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, partly prompted by international organisations' declarations and by initiatives in other countries;
- (ii) the context of debate about devolution, constitutional change and the uncertain scope and extent of policy autonomy in respect of drugs in Scotland;
- (iii) a new politics centred on deliberative discussion and engagement with wide range of stakeholders from all parts of civic society

Our aim is to articulate the above by reflecting on options for change in drugs policy in Scotland and test the viability of a civic-led, multi-agency policy network. In hosting the conversations, the Academy of Government based at The University of Edinburgh provides an ideal setting and ethos for such enquiry.

Participation

Participants became involved with the process through an ad hoc basis resulting from their current or previous involvement with Scottish drug policy. The 30 current participants reflect a wide range of stakeholders with different interests and institutional positions.

After two conversations there has been increasing awareness of the SDPC and requests to take part in the process. In order to create a space for inclusive conversation it is felt that the initial group should not extend beyond 30 participants. On this basis thought is being given to creating other avenues of participation in spring 2016.

Process

The inaugural conversations have been facilitated by John Sturrock, Senior Mediator and Chief Executive, Core Solutions. The key to the process is respect for different viewpoints, openness to understanding other views, and starting discussion from a basis of non-controversial agreement rather than from different positions.

SDPC is happening at a time in Scotland of unprecedented and widespread experimentation with deliberative techniques (such as Art of Hosting and Ulabs), civic-led policy-influencing networks (e.g. Common Weal's A Book of Ideas, 2015) and co-production mechanisms involving all stakeholders including national and local government (e.g. the Rural Parliament). SDPC aims to contribute to this in respect of drugs policy by using deliberative techniques and testing the viability of a civic-led policy network.

SDPC Discussion so far

The range of views raised so far go from the polarity of examining more closely how current prohibition laws and policy work and could be improved to the other extreme of replacing

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MDA71 with a legal regulatory framework. In addition issues were raised about the effects of inequality, individual morality, societal culture and the quality and availability of treatment. Also, the balance between criminal justice, health and social approaches was questioned and likewise the balance between policies addressing illegal drugs and those for alcohol and tobacco. Finally, due to the complex nature of substance use and harms, important impacts are to be seen on other important areas such as child care and the economy.

Relevant Literature

Whilst SDPC has not sufficient time to go into depth about every issue raised and is not resourced to produce a substantively researched report, it may nevertheless usefully locate its discussions with reference to selected publications from similar enquiries. SDPC participants and those remitted to write up conversations into a working paper can be informed by, build on and perhaps add to these other enquiries. The aim of this section is to create a working document with articles and publications being added/suggested by the group.

Among publications, the following are particularly relevant:

Scottish Government - Current Policies

- The Road to Recovery, 2008 (Drug Strategy)
 - <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/224480/0060586.pdf>
- Changing Scotland's relationship with Alcohol, 2009 (Alcohol Strategy)
 - <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/262905/0078610.pdf>
- Scottish National Framework for Problem Drug Use and Recovery (2015)
 - <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00487035.pdf>

Independent Enquiries - Critique of Current Policies

- Drugs - facing facts, 2007, RSA pp. 10-20 Executive Summary
 - <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/illegal-drugs-report/>
- Approaches to Alcohol and Drugs in Scotland, 2008, Scotland's Futures Forum
 - <http://www.scotlandfutureforum.org/assets/files/report.pdf>
- Melting the Iceberg, 2010, Independent Enquiry
 - http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/docs/The_Whole_Population_Report.pdf
- A Fresh Approach to Drugs, 2012, UKDPC pp. 8-24 Executive Summary
 - <http://www.ukdpc.org.uk/publication/a-fresh-approach/>

An Innovative Local Strategy

- 4 Pillars Drug Strategy, 2001, Vancouver City
 - <http://donaldmacpherson.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Framework-for-Action-A-Four-Pillars-Approach-to-Drug-Problems-in-Vancouver1.pdf>
- Preventing Harm from Psychoactive Substance Use, 2005, Vancouver City
 - <http://cfdp.ca/van05.pdf>

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Evolution of Scottish Drug Strategy

- Controversies in Drugs Policy and Practice, 2011, N. McKeganey
 - <http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/controversies-in-drugs-policy-and-practice-neil-mckeganey/?isbn=9780230235946>
- Drugs, 2012, R. Hammersley, P. Dalgarno
 - <http://jsw.sagepub.com/content/14/3/336.1>
- Alcohol, 2012, K. Barrie
 - <http://www.dunedinacademicpress.co.uk/page/detail/Alcohol/?K=9781906716318>

The Global Context

- The Globalisation of Addiction, 2008, B. Alexander
 - <http://www.brucekalexander.com/>
- Drugs, Intoxication and Society, 2009, A. Bancroft
 - <http://www.polity.co.uk/book.asp?ref=9780745635330>
- Chasing the Scream: The first and last days of the way on drugs, 2015, J. Harri
- UNU Report, 2015. What Comes After the War on Drugs – flexibility, fragmentation or principled pluralism?
 - http://i.unu.edu/media/unu.edu/news/72569/UNU_Drug_Policy_Online_Final.pdf?utm_content=buffer0523c&utm_medium=social&utm_source=unutwitter&utm_campaign=buffer

The Role of Experts in Drug Policy

- Strang & Babor et al (2012) Drug Policy and the public good: evidence for effective interventions.
 - <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2811%2961674-7/abstract>
- McGregor, Singleton and Trautmann (2014) Towards good governance in drug policy: Evidence, stakeholders and politics
 - <http://www.ijdp.org/article/S0955-3959%2814%2900168-6/abstract>
- MacGregor, s (2013) Barriers to the Influence of Evidence on Policy: Are politicians the problem?
 - <http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/doi/abs/10.3109/09687637.2012.754403#.Vlbpcb8Xblc>
- Lancaster (2014) Social construction and the evidence-based drug policy endeavour
 - <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24491356>
- Lancaster, Santana, Madden and Ritter (2015) Stigma and subjectivities: Examining the textured relationship between lived experience and opinions about drug policy among people who inject drugs.
 - <http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/doi/full/10.3109/09687637.2014.970516>

Some or all the cited publications may usefully inform an SDPC report and the list will be added and changed as a result of recommendations from the group. However, UKDPC, 2012, (page 11) seems to offer a very good fit with the process adopted by SDPC in that it proposes two higher level questions as a basis of discussion on the way forward for a fresh approach to drug strategy. The two questions could serve as the non-controversial basis of discussion acceptable to all participants irrespective of the different strategies they might espouse:

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- (i) How can society and government enable and support individuals to behave responsibly? This relates to population-level interventions, societal culture and individual morality.
- (ii) How can society and government enable and promote recovery from entrenched drug problems? This relates to individual pathways to recovery, including treatment services, as well as recovery friendly communities.

It is of note that these two questions mirror the approach taken by Melting the Iceberg, which made recommendations for

- (i) a broad population approach to melt the iceberg (i.e. reduce the harms of Scotland's substance use culture) and
- (ii) the creation of circles of care drawn from the community to support individuals in their recovery.

SDPC 3, 4 & 5 structure for discussion

There was broad agreement that the next 3 conversations focus on identifying the problems, starting afresh, looking at options/recommendations available under the current system and identifying ways in which the public and policy makers have access to 'what works'. In addition the themes arising from the last two sessions identified that clarification on terminology and the goals of Scottish drug policy is needed in order to reach common agreement on ways forward.

While not straying from the process and themes it is our understanding that by addressing the two questions highlighted by the UKDPC's Executive Summary many of them will be answered along the way. For example, by exploring how government and society can encourage individuals to behave responsibly we will inevitably have to discuss what it means to behave responsibly, and in doing so this will elicit discussion on the goals of drug policy; drug free society or acceptance of drug use and a focus on reduction of harm.

If this approach is accepted, we propose that during SDPC 3 we spend part of it eliciting the fundamental issues with current Scottish drug policy and then, taking into account the findings whether the two UKDPC questions could serve as the basis of discussion.

SDPC 4 could discuss and refine the latest iteration of the working paper and then address the second high level question.

SDPC 5 could discuss the latest working paper in order to finalise integration of all conversations with findings and proposals. It is possible, if the group feel it is appropriate, that Roger Howard (former director of UKDPC) could be involved in SDPC 5, or earlier, as chair.

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Final Thoughts

This is a working document and shall be updated after each conversation, as a paper co-produced by all participants to reflect the evolving discussions and aims.

We hope to produce a final document for presentation in March/April with a view to holding a larger SDPC event which involves the wider stakeholder community. This will be agreed and discussed by the group.