

Home Affairs Select Committee Vote to Liberalise Illegal Drug Use

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In its "Drugs: Breaking the Cycle" report the Home Affairs Select Committee has thrown its substantial weight behind the case for drugs liberalisation - a process which in time may lead to the legalisation of all drugs in the UK. In doing so the committee have chosen to ignore the evidence and push for the greatest change in drug policy that the UK has seen in at least the last fifty years.

According to the 2012 English and Wales Crime Survey we are seeing some of the lowest levels of illegal drug use since we began recording such matters. In this survey 15.7% of 16 to 24 year olds reported having consumed cannabis in the last year compared to 26% in 1996. In the case of LSD 0.5% of young people reported having used the drug in 2012 compared to 4.5% in 1996. Ecstasy was reported as having been used in the last year by 3.3% of young people in 2012 compared to 6.8% in 2001. Heroin 0.4% in 1996 down to 0.1% in 2012. Only cocaine use shows signs of increasing in levels of use over the last few years.

One does not need rosy spectacles to conclude the UK is making significant progress in tackling its drug problem by focussing on the tri-partite approach of investing in treatment, enforcement and prevention. The last thing we need to do now is to dilute the role of enforcement and in doing so risk making illegal drugs even more widely available to young people.

And yet bizarrely that is exactly what the Home Affairs Committee seems determined to do. They want a Royal Commission to look at the alternatives to drugs prohibition and they want the laws on cannabis to be softened. They have not though presented a single good argument as to why the UK should risk its most recent achievements in reducing the size of the drug using population by flirting with the policies of decriminalisation or legalisation.

The Home Affairs Select Committee has, it seems, swallowed the arguments of the drugs legalisers and in doing so they have sold short all of those who are working to discourage young people from experimenting with illegal drugs. The committee has seen failure or inadequacy when what they should have seen is the biggest drop in the levels of drug use ever recorded in the UK. What we should be doing on the back of that reduction is investing massively in drugs prevention to maximise the momentum that we are seeing so plainly in the statistics from the national crime survey.

Instead what we have is a report from an influential body that seems somehow to have given up on the very idea of effectively tackling the problem of illegal drugs implying instead that the best we can do is to somehow accommodate to the fact of illegal drug use. In doing so the committee have provided a massive boost to those who choose to promote the use of illegal drugs.