



Findings of the British



Police Foundation Concerning Reform of Marijuana Laws¹

"Our conclusion is that the present law on cannabis produces more harm than it prevents. It is very expensive of the time and resources of the criminal justice system and especially of the police. It inevitably bears more heavily on young people in the streets of inner cities, who are also more likely to be from minority ethnic communities, and as such is inimical to police-community relations. It criminalizes large numbers of otherwise law-abiding, mainly young, people to the detriment of their futures. It has become a proxy for the control of public order; and it inhibits accurate education about the relative risks of different drugs including the risks of cannabis itself. Weighing these costs against the harms of cannabis, we are convinced that a better balance is needed and would be achieved if our recommendations were implemented.

Under our proposals, the normal sanctions for offenses of cannabis possession and cultivation for personal use would be out-of-court disposals, including informal warnings, statutory cautions or a fixed fine on the model of the Scottish fiscal fine. Prosecution would be the exception, and only then would a conviction result in a criminal record. We understand that if the sanctions for cannabis possession and cultivation, both in the law and its enforcement, were to be substantially reduced there would be a risk that more people would use it. But the international evidence does not suggest that this is inevitable or even likely. Given the current widespread availability and use of cannabis, we judge that more would be gained in terms of credibility, respect for the law and the police, and accurate education messages than would be lost in potential damage to public and individual health by the control regime which we recommend. We also believe that our proposed regime would promote the targeting of enforcement resources on those drugs and activities which cause the greatest harm in line with the objectives of the national strategy. It would also accord with public perceptions of where policing priorities should lie."

Can We Learn From Others?

For more information visit: www.csdp.org.

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¹"Drugs and the Law: Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Misuse of Drugs Act of 1971." The Police Foundation, Chairman: Viscountess Runciman DBE, April 4, 2000. The Police Foundation, based in London England, is a non-profit organization that promotes research, debate and publication to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of policing in the UK.