

RELEASE

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The Rt. Hon. Charles Clarke MP
House of Commons
London
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By post & email (clarkec@parliament.uk)

16 December 2005

Dear Home Secretary

In January 2004, the government reclassified cannabis to Class C on the basis of the following stated assumptions:

- ◆ That the UK's drugs laws should accurately reflect the relative harms of drugs in accordance with the available scientific and medical advice.
- ◆ That cannabis is not as harmful to health as other Class B drugs like the amphetamines.
- ◆ That the reclassification would help the Government to convey an effective and credible message - to young people in particular - about the dangers of misusing drugs.
- ◆ That all controlled drugs, including cannabis, are harmful and that no one should take them; and that having the law reflect the relative harmfulness of drugs accurately is vital to this message being open, honest and balanced.
- ◆ That reclassification would continue to deter use of the drug (because of its continued illegality) while providing the police with an opportunity to focus greater resources on priority areas like dealing in Class A drugs, which do most harm.
- ◆ That, following reclassification, the presumption against using the power of arrest for simple cannabis possession offences committed by adults, would save police time for use in tackling more serious offences.



Advice Line 0845 4500215 (office hours)

During the general election campaign in March 2005 you announced that, due to increasing concerns about links between cannabis use and the onset of psychotic symptoms, you were referring this matter back to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. We understand that the ACMD has now submitted its advice, confirming that it continues to hold the view that cannabis is significantly less harmful than the substances currently listed in Class B, and should therefore remain in Class C.

The evidence gathered since the reclassification indicates its relative success to date, based on the government's stated objectives:

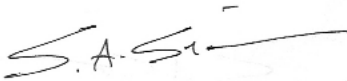
- ◆ In the first year since reclassification, arrests for cannabis possession fell by one third, saving an estimated 199,000 hours of police time, equivalent to an extra 150 police officers on the streets.
- ◆ Over that period, the use of cannabis in the UK has not increased, as some had feared. In fact the downward trend since 1998 has continued.

Problems remain with the continued availability of cannabis to young people, the inconsistent application of the law in different areas, and the uncontrolled use of cannabis by a minority of users. None of these problems would be addressed by a return of cannabis to Class B. Such a move would simply add to public confusion, inconsistency, and the waste of police resources, without delivering any health or social benefits.

“Toughening” the law will not lead to improved public health. Instead, the government should concentrate on improving health education and services to minimise the harm that cannabis can cause.

The professional advice you have received suggests that cannabis should be maintained as a Class C drug. We urge you to respect this advice and confirm the current classification.

Yours sincerely



Sebastian Saville

Director

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- cc. The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister
The Rt. Hon. Patricia Hewitt MP, Secretary of State for Health
The Rt. Hon. Paul Goggins MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Home Dept.
The Rt. Hon. Caroline Flint MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept. of Health

Please see list of co-signatories overleaf.



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Co-signatories:

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