



Home Office

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Chair of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs
Dr Owen Bowden-Jones

c/o Zahi Sulaiman
Secretary to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD)
Home Office Science Secretariat
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Dear Owen,

**REDUCING OPIOID-RELATED DEATHS IN THE UK REPORT – FURTHER
RESPONSE REGARDING DRUG CONSUMPTION ROOMS**

It was a pleasure meeting you on Monday 19 March to discuss the current work being undertaken by the ACMD. As I mentioned I am very grateful for the work carried out by the ACMD and value its importance in providing independent expert advice to government.

We discussed the ACMD report on *'Reducing Opioid-Related deaths in the UK'* and the recommendation to consider the introduction of Drug Consumption Rooms ("DCR"). I agreed to provide further details on the Government's reason for not considering the introduction of DCRs in the UK.

As you will know, the Government's position on this matter has been consistent for some time: we have no intention on introducing DCRs. Whilst I recognise and support the need to reverse trends that we have seen in drug related deaths, I remain concerned about the challenges that DCRs place on law enforcement agencies as well as the implied acceptance of wider criminality.

There is extensive involvement in the drugs trade by organised crime gangs, with over half of all organised crime groups operate in the UK involved drug-related crime¹. We estimate that around 45% of all acquisitive crime is committed by regular users of heroin and/ or crack cocaine, and that these crimes cost society approximately £6 billion a year². Individuals that are active in the supply of drugs are often linked to very serious acts of violent crime. The Government spends an estimated £1.6 billion in 2014/2015 on law enforcement activity aimed at tackling the criminal activity linked to the trade in illicit drugs³.

The Government is not prepared to sanction or condone activities that support organised trade that facilitates the availability of drugs and causes harms to individuals and communities⁴. It is important that the Government continues to send a clear message that drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and their supply present such harms that possessing them under any circumstances must be subject to a commensurately strict regime.

There are also practical difficulties that the establishment of DCRs in the UK may pose. The Home Office's International Comparators report⁵ has previously considered the international evidence on DCRs and has concluded that DCRs have often been legally problematic, pose ethical issues for medical professionals and difficulties for law enforcement. The report gave an example of one facility in Switzerland in which low-level dealing was permitted on the premises. While this example may be unique to the model in operation in the facility in question, it highlights the difficulties the police in the UK may face when enforcing the law.

The report also found that DCRs have the potential to attract users from wide distances: in a facility in Copenhagen, Denmark some users of the facility come as far as the Jutland peninsula and from Sweden. The Government remains concerned that the creation of DCRs in one part of the UK may pose difficult law enforcement questions for police forces other than the one hosting the facility.

¹ HM Government, Serious and Organised Crime Strategy, 2013

² Home Office, Understanding Organised Crime: estimating the scale and the social and economic costs, 2013

³ HM Government, An evaluation of the Government's Drug Strategy 2010, 2017

⁴ The Government's concerns about the potential for the creation of such facilities condoning organised crime are also shared by the UN's International Narcotics Control Board, as set out in its 2016 Annual Report:

https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2016/English/AR2016_E_ebook.pdf

⁵ Home Office, Drugs: International Comparators, 2014.

The Government shares the ACMD's concerns on the increases in opioid related deaths. I can assure you that we remain committed to exploring alternative options available, within our legislative framework, to support individuals with drug dependence into treatment and sustained recovery.

I hope this provides the further clarification and reasoning you were seeking for the Government's decision not to introduce DCRs in the UK.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Victoria', written in a cursive style.

Victoria Atkins MP