

# ACMD

## Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs

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Rt. Hon. Theresa May MP,  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
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17<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Dear Home Secretary,

Thank you for your letter of 2 February 2011 in which you set out the Government's priorities for the forthcoming financial year. I had the opportunity to present these to the ACMD membership on the 7 February. After consideration by the ACMD, this letter sets out the ACMD's work programme by subject area.

The ACMD consider that your suggestion of writing to the ACMD with your priorities on a yearly basis would be a positive step and give greater transparency to our agenda setting. In this way, the ACMD can plan its work effectively with due regard given to the Government's priorities and those matters that the ACMD consider of importance. With reference to the recent review of the ACMD by Sir David Omand, the ACMD welcome the recommendation for it to plan its work in a three year programme which would be placed on the ACMD website. I intend to discuss our progress on developing such a programme with you in due course, with a prospective date for publication, with indicative timelines. I will write further to the Omand report in the near future to you and Professor Bernard Silverman.

The ACMD recently had a very productive meeting with the Minister for Crime Prevention and the Minister for Public Health. The main agenda item concerned the working protocol. This document will 1) support our continuing engagement 2) provide a basis for expertise that the membership of the Council should be drawn from and 3) provide a framework within which the ACMD will provide advice concerning the proposed Temporary Class Drug Orders (TCDOs). The ACMD has been pleased with the level of consultation and engagement there has been over this document and wish to thank the Minister and yourself for your continued support in preparing the draft.

Below the ACMD have indicated how it best considers acceding to your priorities. This is based upon the resource we have available and the priority attributed.

### **New Psychoactive Substances ('legal highs')**

The ACMD are fully supportive that the government see the issue of new psychoactive substances as an area that needs addressing and one that should be a priority. This is a technically complex area that, as you note, requires a multi-faceted and strategic approach. The ACMD recognise the importance of providing advice where government may use the range of tools available to reduce harms to the public. The ACMD will continue to provide

advice on individual substances that includes recommendations concerning education, enforcement, legislation, supply side activities, research, treatment etc.

The ACMD are grateful that the Minister for Crime Prevention sought consultation with the ACMD over the Government's proposed Temporary Class Drug Orders (TCDO) through the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill. The ACMD replied to the Minister's consultation letter last September, concluding that it was supportive of the proposals subject to the Minister's consideration of a number of issues as indicated. The ACMD is content that due consideration has been given to the issues and that one of the central concerns of the ACMD – the need for statutory consultation with the ACMD – is a matter that you and the Minister for Crime Prevention have given attention to.

The ACMD recognise that there is a need to consider broadly how the issue of 'legal highs' is addressed. We are now finalising advice to you which will consider the wider implications of the 'legal highs' phenomenon and outline to you its advice concerning tackling supply, markets demand etc. This report will consider a wide range of options and draw on international evidence. I will very much welcome discussing the key areas of evidence we have drawn upon when I meet with the Minister for Crime Prevention on March 24th. The ACMD aims to provide you with its final advice by May 2011.

One area that the ACMD believe needs strengthening is the evidence base around 'legal highs'. The ACMD understand that the Home Office is co-ordinating some work in this area and would encourage joined up working across Departments, agencies and competent organisations that work in this field. The proposed TCDOs will require a readily available evidence base. Such a project co-ordinating activities and knowledge would benefit both the consideration of TCDOs and inform the strategic perspective.

The field of 'legal highs' continually presents new compounds for which there is an almost total lack of an evidence base. It will therefore be important that there is research resource available so that basic research (for example analytical chemistry, pharmacology) can be carried out. Research resource, in tandem with a joined up working approach, will allow us to reach the shared objective of the ACMD providing you with robust, evidence based advice upon which you may be guided to make sound policy decisions.

#### **Drug specific advice – cocaine and khat**

The ACMD has previously indicated that it would initiate a review of cocaine and that this review would be focussed on the nature of the trade, its prevalence in the UK and the harms of the drug – not classification issues. As you are aware, the substantial work the ACMD has undertaken on the legal highs agenda has prevented it from having resource to initiate this review, however, the ACMD is now in a position to start this with immediate effect. It is intended that the ACMD discuss progress on this review at its forthcoming meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> April.

You recently requested a review of khat. The ACMD responded to you and indicated that it would be pleased to accede to this request. However, at its meeting of the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2010 the ACMD concluded, after much discussion, that there was a greater need for a review of cocaine. This was based on a number of factors, the key one being the high prevalence of cocaine use, despite its harms.

The ACMD fully acknowledge representations made by members of the public regarding the need for a review of khat and, as you request, fully intend to undertake this work at the earliest opportunity. The work the ACMD is presently conducting on New Psychoactive Substances will be complete in May and I therefore envisage the khat review will commence at this time.

### **Polysubstance (or multi-substance) abuse**

The ACMD consider that the issue of polysubstance misuse is substantial. Many drugs are not misused in isolation, often including multiple drugs and frequently with alcohol. The ACMD intend to provide you with advice on this issue late 2011 / early 2012. The findings of this report will have key implications for the Department of Health who are charged with providing credible public health messages which are of vital importance. The Working Group has held its first meeting, and identified expert witnesses to invite for future meetings.

### **Promoting Recovery**

The ACMD have been considering treatment as part of a working group and envisage that it will provide you with advice and the final report into its consideration by late summer. I am grateful to your officials for providing some guidance on those areas most pertinent to Government now that you have published the new drugs strategy. You have requested that the ACMD discuss the report at its forthcoming April Council meeting to inform delivery of your policy agenda that is set around a recovery based approach. The Council would be pleased to have this as a discussive agenda item. In addition, the ACMD have convened a meeting with your policy officials, including those from other Government Departments, in early May to give a steer on early findings so that it may better assist you in delivering the drug strategy. We anticipate sending a final report and recommendations to you in the fourth quarter of 2011.

### **Other areas of interest**

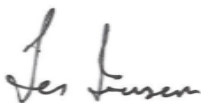
In considering the significant number of issues that the ACMD will be providing advice upon in the forthcoming period we support your thinking that the issue of cognition enhancing drugs should not take precedence over those described above. However, ACMD will continue to keep updated with developments in this field should there be evidence of harms and intend to provide you with advice on this issue should there be developments in this field.

### **Advice**

The ACMD has recently provided reports concerning the provision of foil as an intervention to reduce the harms of heroin injecting (October 2010) and on anabolic steroids (September 2010). Both reports have recommendations that are relevant to policy areas in a number of government departments, particularly the Department of Health and the Home Office. I would be grateful if you would be able to provide the ACMD a response to the advice above at the earliest opportunity, or a prospective date of your response.

Throughout the work of the ACMD it will provide the Minister for Crime Prevention with regular updates of respective reviews and seek to keep your officials apprised of developments. I am mindful that events portrayed in the media may often obfuscate the good work that the ACMD has achieved. I fully intend to ensure the ACMD continue to provide high quality advice to the government on all matters relating to the misuse of drugs. I am very keen that we continue the good engagement that we have fostered through communications with you, the Minister for Crime Prevention and Ministers of other Government Departments. I look forward to meeting you again later this month and apprising you of progress.

Yours sincerely



**Professor Les Iversen**

Cc:  
Minister for Crime Prevention  
Minister for Public Health