

**Department for Transport**  
**Drug Driving Strategic Research**  
29<sup>th</sup> September 2014

## **Background**

**Who we spoke to**

**Executive summary**

**An overview of drug driving behaviour**

**Attitudes to driving after drugs**

**The perceived risks of getting caught**

**Response to the drug swab**

**Response to the legislation change**

**Conclusions and recommendations**

# Solving the problem of drug driving

## The problem

There is very little data on the impact of drug driving on our roads. But it is estimated to be a significant problem.

The North Report (June 2010) estimated there are as many as 200 drug driving fatalities per year.

## The solution

1. The law is changing so that it only takes a blood test to get a conviction for drug driving.
2. Screening devices are being introduced so that the police can detect drugs at the roadside.

# Objectives for research

## Understand current perceptions

An overview of behaviour and attitudes.

Particular focus on the perceived risks of getting caught.

## Understand potential for communication

The potential for communicating each part of the solution.

Recommendations for communicating it most effectively.

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# Methodology: friends together

## Pairs of friends

To make sure everyone felt comfortable sharing their experiences.

## Mini-groups of four

To make sure we had a good exchange of ideas and opinions.

## Mostly drivers

To have driven after taking drugs in the last 12 months.

Friends recruited could have been a passenger.



# Considerations for the sample

Type of  
drug taken

Smoking  
cannabis

Taking  
class A drugs  
(mainly cocaine,  
ecstasy, MDMA)

Age

Mostly  
18 – 24

But also  
25 -34

Gender

All male

Type of  
area

Suburban

Rural

SEG

BC1C2

# Sample structure

Age	Type of drug	Gender	Type of area	SEG	Location
18-24	Cannabis	Male	Suburban	BC1C2	Brighton
18-24	Cannabis	Male	Rural	BC1C2	Leeds
18-24	Class A	Male	Suburban	BC1C2	Leeds
18-24	Class A	Male	Rural	BC1C2	Birmingham
25-34	Cannabis	Male	Suburban	BC1C2	Birmingham
25-34	Class A	Male	Rural	BC1C2	Brighton

Research conducted: 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> September



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# Executive summary

Most of the participants in this research saw drug driving as much more acceptable than drink driving.

When they made the decision to drug drive they didn't really consider the reasons why they shouldn't.

However, the one reason that was consistently mentioned was being caught by the police.

Even this threat was less immediate because they weren't sure whether police would detect drugs at the roadside or not.

The most impactful information we researched was the drug swab, because it immediately removed any doubt about detection.

The limited number of drugs detected, and the roll out across the country, diluted this message but didn't undermine it completely.

The change to law didn't have the same impact.

Whilst participants responded to the idea of being more likely to be convicted, the change in the law tended to cause confusion.

This was mainly because it was already assumed that a blood test would be all that was required for a conviction.

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# 1. Cruising on cannabis

## Chilling out with mates

A relaxed occasion with a small group of friends.

Hanging out at home, or sometimes in the car.

Cannabis often secondary to what else is happening (e.g. playing Xbox)

## A calmer atmosphere in the car

Only one or two people in the car

A relaxed atmosphere: chatting listening to the radio



I was at a friend's house just the two of us. We ended up smoking a spliff together. Chilled and played Xbox. I always knew I was going to drive. I was feeling slightly hazy but nothing out of the ordinary. (Male, 25-34, Cannabis, Birmingham)

# Different approaches to cruising on cannabis

## The lighter drug drivers

Not smoking as often. Now and again they decide to drive.

Much more cautious, and paranoid, while driving.

Round at a friends. The plan was to stay over. We knew we were going to smoke. The guy didn't feel very well and he said you guys can't stay anymore. This was after midnight. So we thought now what? We didn't want to get a taxi and leave the car. So we thought why not? We were checking for police the whole way. (Male, 18 -24, Cannabis, Leeds)

## The heavier drug drivers

Regularly smoking then driving, often smoking *and* driving.

Driving carefully, but see it as a completely normal thing to do.

We do it every day. We just roll one for the way back [from work] and share it as we go along. We know it is wrong, but you know it isn't that wrong. It seems normal.  
(Male, 18 -24, Cannabis, Brighton)

## 2. Keeping focus with cocaine

### A sociable night in pubs and bars

An energetic occasion having a good time with mates.

Often meeting other people, and in particular meeting girls.

Cocaine taken discretely alongside a few drinks.

### A rowdier atmosphere in the car

3 or more people in the car

Potentially a more drunken atmosphere with music turned up louder.



We played football on the Sunday, went to the pub, just ended up having a few too many. Started doing cocaine in the pub. The more we drank the more we were like 'yeah lets get some, lets go for it'. Then it gets to home time and obviously some of us have our cars outside. (Male, 25-34, Class A, Brighton)

# Different approaches to keeping focus with cocaine

## The lighter drug drivers

Not going over the limit when drinking, and taking some cocaine to stay in focus.

Feel completely confident behind the wheel of the car.

There have been times when I have been pulled. If all I've had is drink and a bit of coke I'm obviously not what they are looking for.  
(Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

## The heavier drug drivers

Drinking over the limit, and taking cocaine to sober up.

Feel that the cocaine has helped them keep things under control.

When you take drugs you can drink more and get away with it. The drugs help your body cancel the alcohol out (Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)

### 3. Driving from the party

#### A big night out involving music

A bigger event at a night club or a festival.

A night of music, dancing, socialising with a much wider group.

Ecstasy/MDMA (and other drugs) integral to everyone's night.

#### An extension of the party

3 or more people in the car

Playing music to keep the party going, or to wind things down.



I was at a well known rave. MDMA, a few pills, a bit of cocaine. End of the night everyone in a good mood didn't think anything of it. Jumped in the car and drove home. Taxis are £60 from Birmingham, my car was there. Loads of people stood in the cold waiting for taxi's I just jumped in the car. (Male, 18 -24, Class A, Birmingham)



# Different approaches to driving from the party

## The lighter drug drivers

Waiting till it's all over.

Friends winding down, and driver being cautious.

I think if you've come down it's not so bad. You're aware of what's going on around you. Everyone wants to get home. There's no other cars around. You're just getting home. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)

## The heavier drug drivers

Driving in the middle of the action

Friends in the throws of the party, driver often not sure what is happening.

I was at a New Years Eve party. Everyone on drugs: MDMA, ecstasy and cocaine. If finished at 10am and there was a New Year's Day party in Birmingham. I thought I want to carry on. I got a taxi home I showered got changed and got in the car. I didn't comprehend what I was doing at the time I just wanted to go and I was screwed out of my brain. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

# Summary

	<b>Cruising on cannabis</b>	<b>Keeping focus with cocaine</b>	<b>Driving from the party</b>
<b>Light drug drivers</b>	Occasional smokers who are cautious when driving.	Drinking and taking cocaine within limits and feel fine driving.	Waiting to come down from drugs and driving carefully.
<b>Heavy drug drivers</b>	Regular smokers who see driving as completely normal.	Drinking too much and taking cocaine to keep in control.	Driving recklessly whilst high on drugs.

**These two groups were significantly more reckless in their driving behaviour.**

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# Reasons not to drive rarely mentioned in the decision to drive

## Assessing the situation

Often make an assessment of the journey...

More likely to drive if it's a short distance.

More likely to drive if the roads are quiet.

It wasn't that big a deal really. It was late. It was one or two. And quite a quiet area. I don't know if I could do city rush hour driving.  
(Male, 18 -24, Class A, Birmingham)

## Assessing the alternative

Usually the only alternative is a taxi...

The price of a taxi often seen as too much.

The hassle of waiting for one, and coming back for your car is too much.

We were out in Brighton, planning to stay with friends because I live further away. Idea was to stay at a friends but we lost him over the course of the night. I thought 'screw it, I'll drive back'. (Male, 25 -34, Class A, Brighton)

# The main reasons not to drive aren't really considered

1. They don't think their driving is seriously impaired

2. Their friends see it as an acceptable thing to do

3. They don't think about the consequences of crashing

4. They haven't thought about the potential penalties

5. They're vague about the threat of being caught



Whilst vague, the threat of being caught was still far more salient than the other reasons not to drive.

# The main reasons not to drive aren't really considered

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# Generally felt to be less impairment than alcohol

**Cannabis keeps you relaxed**

Feeling calm and relaxed synonymous with driving well.

You need a spliff because otherwise you are a bit more anxious, a bit more ratty at the wheel, whatever. You have a spliff, you just chill out, you are like 'whatever' (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Brighton)

**Cocaine keeps you alert**

Alertness key to driving and cocaine often seen to make you a better driver.

Coke is like adrenalin. It lifts you up. You're more aware. Whereas drink drags you down. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

**MDMA etc. are more questionable**

Most accepted impairment, still some argued a degree of clarity.

I know what being drunk is like and that is different to MD. Drunk you are out of control, you can't put your foot on the pedal. Alcohol is complete oblivion but drugs you are still there, you know what is going on (Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)

# No-one was completely sure

## Using their own judgment

Not aware of any information on the effects of drugs on driving.

Mostly making an assessment based on how they are feeling at the time.

Partly looking to mates who are there for some reassurance.

## But they were open to persuasion

By their own admission, their judgment isn't particularly clear when they've taken drugs.

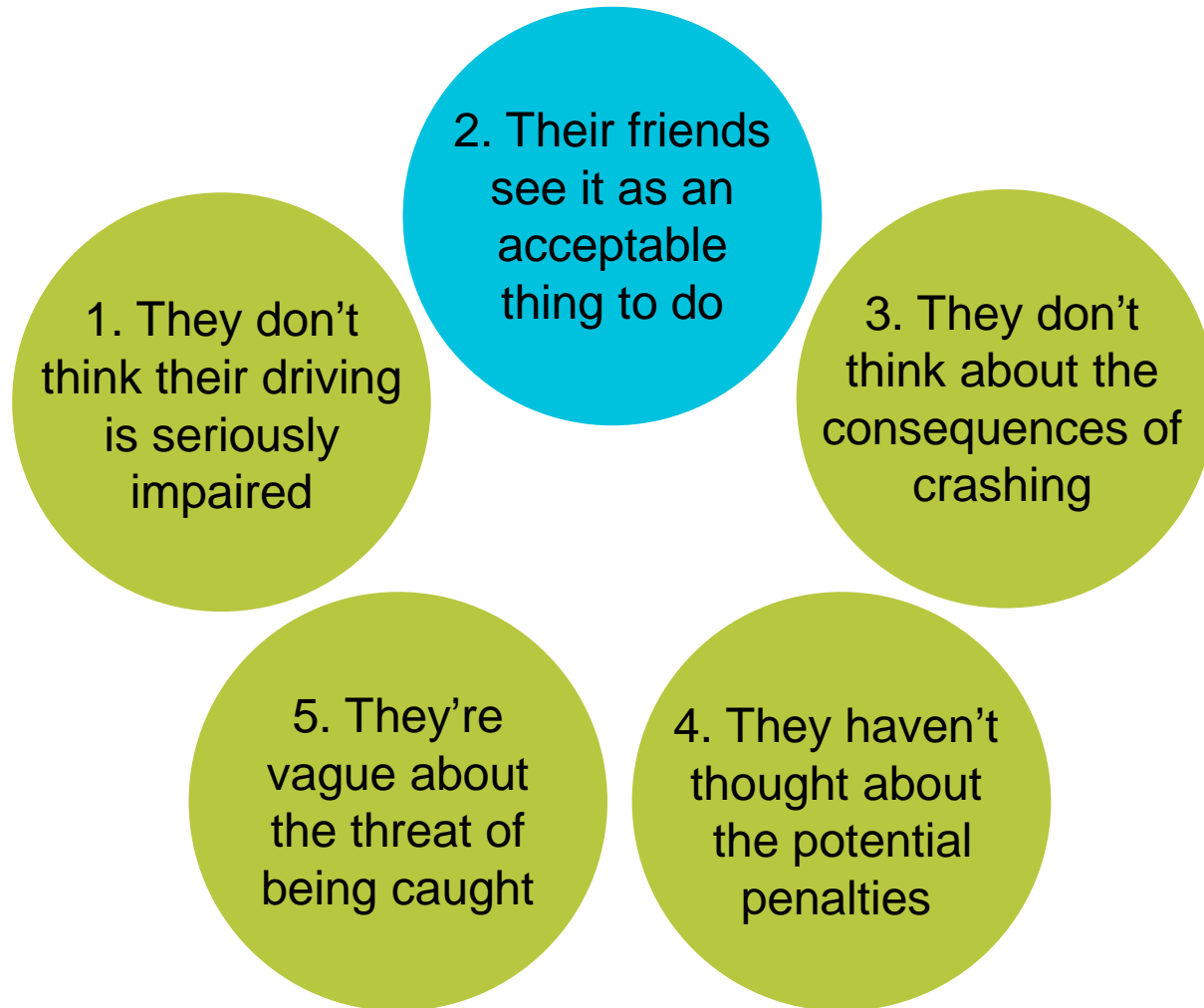


You are looking over your shoulder you feel more reactive everything is like that split second faster... Perhaps it's not, you do get a warped perception of time when you are on it. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)

**There is an opportunity to communicate the way that drugs impair driving, particularly reaction times.**



# There isn't a strong enough reason not to drive



# There is a wider social stigma to taking drugs

## Something that has a wider social stigma

It's fine for your close friends to know.  
Some of your wider social group might not be into it.

Your family would be disappointed or upset.

Your work colleagues would think badly of you.

## And might be seen as worse than drink driving

Often felt they'd be more comfortable with the stigma of drink driving.



If I got done for drugs I would say it was drink as people just see drugs as this evil thing that ruins your life (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)

# But amongst friends it's an acceptable thing to do

## Drink driving

Driving recklessly.

A selfish act.

Separates you from the group.

If you were drink driving your mates would look down on you, like 'what are you doing?' Not for drug driving.  
(Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)

## Drug driving

Driving carefully.

A sociable act.

Appreciated by the group.

When I am on MDMA I feel really helpful. I was offering to drive my friends and I was excited about it. And they were happy to be in the car.  
(Male, 18 -24, Class A, Birmingham)

**There is an opportunity to position driving as reckless, selfish, and socially unacceptable.**

# There isn't a strong enough reason not to drive

1. They don't think their driving is seriously impaired

2. Their friends see it as an acceptable thing to do

3. They don't think about the consequences of crashing

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4. They haven't thought about the potential penalties

# No-one crashes, no-one gets hurt

**They associate drink driving with crashing**

Public information campaigns and sometimes know of people who have been hurt in crashes.

**But it never happens with drug driving**

Not aware of any public information campaigns, and it hasn't happened to anyone they know

**Older Class A drivers in Brighton were the exception**

A little bit older, more settled, and more likely to consider others.



With drink driving the crash is what I think about. If you knew someone who had crashed from drug driving you'd think it might happen. But you don't know anyone. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

# In particular, an absence of the thought of killing someone else

## The idea of killing themselves almost never considered

At an age when they're feeling invincible and don't consider they're own mortality.

## The idea of killing someone else had more resonance

Killing a passenger in the car and surviving yourself.

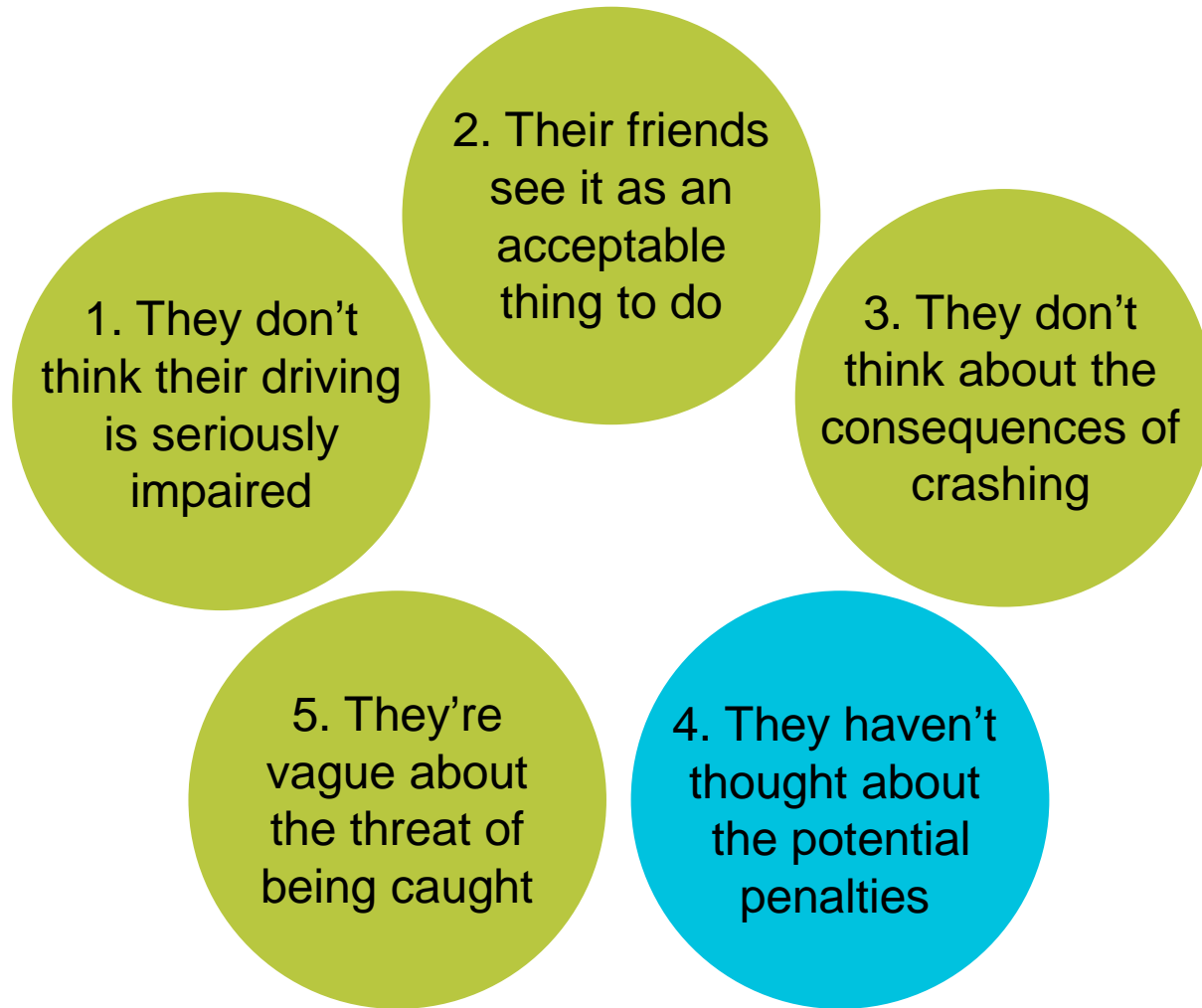
Or killing an innocent bystander on the road.



You get in the car, you think 'I think I'll take my chance'. There's not that moral level. You don't think about hurting someone else. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds).

**There is an opportunity to highlight the deaths on the roads caused by drug drivers**

# There isn't a strong enough reason not to drive



# No awareness of the potential penalties

## There was no awareness of the penalties for drug driving

No spontaneous awareness of of potential penalties (some weren't even sure if was illegal).

On prompting assume it might be...

Points on license and a fine; a driving ban for about a year.

It's funny that no-one knows about this. There's no education about it. I haven't got a clue.  
(Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)

## Something similar to drink driving makes sense

The most obvious comparison to make.

Some argued that the impairment is usually less.

But balanced by the fact that drugs are illegal in the first place.

Should be the same. It's all driving under the influence. They do affect you in different ways, and marijuana affects you less. But it's illegal to smoke marijuana anyway. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)



# A mark against you for life was most compelling



Labeled on your license for 11 years

Criminal record

Loss of opportunity devastating for a young person with a fledgling career.

If I'd have thought about a criminal record, I'd have said to my mates 'I'm not doing it, I'll have a criminal record, I'm not doing it'. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)

Minimum 12 month driving ban

Loss of independence would seriously damage social and particularly work life.

The ban, having your independence removed, ruins your life. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)

An increase in insurance

Fine of up to £5000

Would rather avoid financial penalties, but felt they could accommodate them.

You're not happy with it. But you accept it. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

**There was clearly an opportunity to highlight the penalties for drug driving: the mark against you for life was often the most compelling information we showed.**

# There isn't a strong enough reason not to drive

1. They don't think their driving is seriously impaired

2. Their friends see it as an acceptable thing to do

3. They don't think about the consequences of crashing

5. They're vague about the threat of being caught

4. They haven't thought about the potential penalties

The one thing that entered everyone's mind as a reason not to drive was the fear of being caught by the police...

# An instinctive fear of people stopped

## A fear that is mostly instinctive

Going from a safe environment where everyone is accepting of drugs.

Venturing out into a space where police will take a very different view.

## Particularly when you're on your own

Much more conscious of a change in atmosphere, and being in a different space.



That is something that goes through your mind. I have only done it that one time but that was the main thing I was thinking about. I felt I was competent to drive but I was worried about getting stopped. (Male, 25-44, Class A, Brighton).

# But they're not really sure what would happen

## Don't really know what happens

No-one we spoke to had any real understanding of what would happen.

Very few stories of people being stopped for drug driving.

Notably all of these stories involved the driver being breathalyzed then let go.

## Most often assume they'll be OK

It's a grey area that no-one feels particularly confident about.

They often concluded they might be able to get away with it somehow.



With drink you know where the line in the sand is and if they get pulled over they are basically f\*\*\*\*d. With weed it's the unknown. You don't know what you can get away with. (Male, 25-34, Cannabis, Birmingham).

# Summary

It was clear from this research that the audience hadn't really considered the reasons why they shouldn't drive after drugs...

- 1. They didn't think their driving was seriously impaired**
- 2. Their friends saw it as an acceptable thing to do**
- 3. They didn't think about the consequences of crashing**
- 4. They hadn't thought about the potential penalties**

Any of these areas would be a legitimate focus for communications.

However the immediate opportunity is to remove uncertainty about another reason not to drive...

- 5. They were vague about the threat of being caught**

Fear of the police was consistently raised as a reason not to drive after drugs, but it was undermined by the fact that no-one was really sure what would happen.

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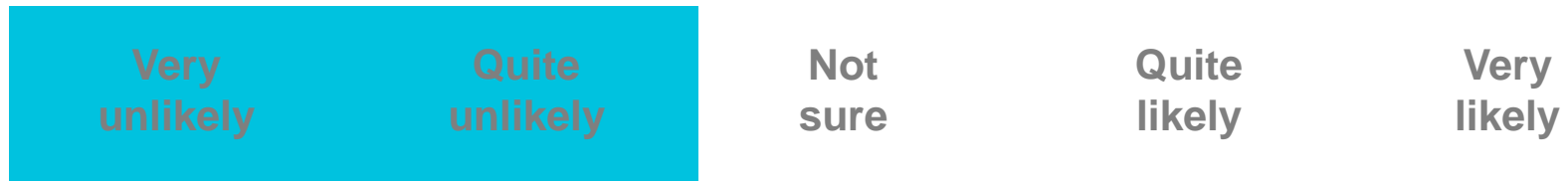
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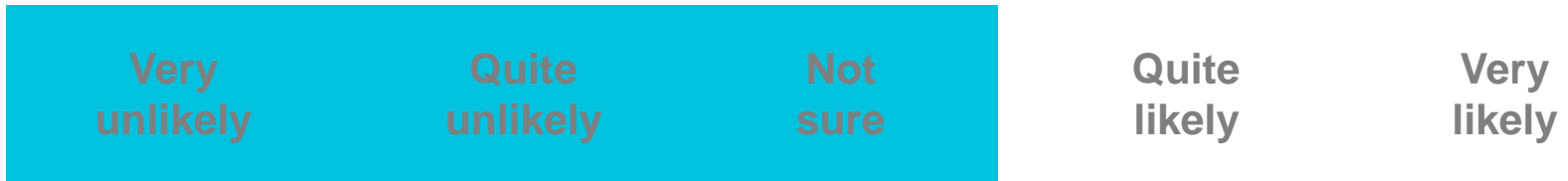
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# We asked them to think how likely each stage in the process would be

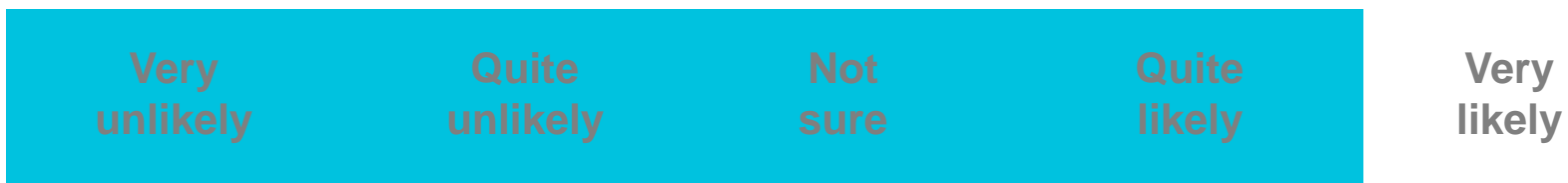
1. The car is pulled over by the police in the first place



2. Having been pulled over, the police detect you've been taking drugs



3. Having been detected, you are convicted of drug driving





# 1. They feel it is *quite unlikely* they'll be stopped

## It's unlucky to pass a police car

Expecting that they'll complete the journey without seeing any police.

## Not likely to drive in a conspicuous way

Not driving recklessly, and if anything might be driving too cautiously.

## Might be picked up for other reasons

Police more likely to pull over a small car, full of young men, driving late at night.



I think you are likely to get pulled if it is late at night, and you've got five in the car, or it could be the car you drive. I used to have a Corsa it is known as a young boy racer car.  
(Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)

## 2. They are *not sure* if they'll be detected

### Uncertainty about the process of detection

Unsure about what might happen, and whether they'll be detected.

Might be given away by telltale signs: dilated pupils, car smelling of cannabis.

Might be given away by how they act, particularly if they're anxious.

Might have to complete physical tests by the road side.

**Often felt they might get through all of this undetected.**

### Uncertainty about the attitude of police

If the police did detect drugs, unsure if they'd decide to take it further.

Might be something a particular policeman decides to be lenient about.

Might be something that the police don't consider to be a priority.

**Often felt the police would let them go with a warning.**

# In their own words...

## Uncertainty about the process of detection

When you take drugs people gurn. Out of all my friends I am the only one whose jaw doesn't move. That is why I think I could get away with it. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)







I think I'd probably give myself away. I'd probably be nervous. I've been stopped for speeding and that was nerve-wracking enough. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)

## Uncertainty about the attitude of police

You don't know what a hassle it's going to be for them. You hear of people being let off for speeding. They've got more important things. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)

If you are polite with a copper they let you go, they can't be bothered. If you say 'I'm sorry' you've got half a chance. It depends what mood they're in. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)

# More of a grey area for some than for others

	Cruising on cannabis	Keeping focus with cocaine	Driving from the party
Light drug drivers			
Heavy drug drivers			

Light and Heavy drivers felt there was good chance they wouldn't be detected, or would be let off by the police because it was only cannabis.

Lighter drivers imagined they'd pass breathalyzer and cocaine would go undetected.

Heavy drivers felt a failed breathalyzer would mean they were taken in.

Lighter drivers felt they might be in enough control to go undetected.

Heavy drivers accepted they'd be in no fit state to get away with anything.

### 3. They would be *quite likely* to be convicted

For most detection would lead automatically to conviction

Most assumed that once the police decide to prosecute there is very little the driver can do.

Some felt they might still get away with it because of a loophole in the law, but not entirely sure how.

Expecting it to only require one blood test at the station

On prompting they were very close to the current law.



If they've decided to take you to the station that's it. You're not getting off. (Male, 25-34, Cannabis, Birmingham)

# Summary

This research would suggest that uncertainty around being caught for drug driving stems from uncertainty about detection by the roadside.

Participants were clear about the chances of being pulled over...they mostly felt it was *quite unlikely* to happen.

And they were clear that once detected it was *quite likely* they'd face a conviction of some sort.

But they were *not sure* what the chances of them being detected by the roadside would be.

This was partly because they didn't know what the process would be: they suspected there would be some tests that they could possibly pass.

This was partly because they didn't know what attitude of the police would be: even if they detected drugs they might make a pragmatic decision to let the driver go.

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As with drink driving, now there is a roadside test for drugs.

To aid enforcement, the police have mobile drug screening devices available, designed to detect certain illegal drugs in the blood from the side of the road via a saliva swab.

It will initially test for cannabis and cocaine but more drugs will be added over time.

All drugs will be detected by the blood test taken at the station.



# Participants immediately understood what was being talked about

## The idea was easily understood

Not exactly sure what the test would involve.

Many assumed a swab or blood test.

But immediately grasped it as a simple idea.

## Immediately made a comparison with drink driving

Often described as a breathalyzer for drugs.



That is a good thing. That will automatically stop people thinking how are they going to tell? If you have had some drugs that takes it away you are going to get found out plain and simple like drink driving. A very good deterrent. (Male, 25-34, Cannabis, Birmingham)

# Addressed all the uncertainty about detection

## Uncertainty about the process of detection

No longer any uncertainty about the process.

Other judgments aren't needed: telltale signs, acting strangely, physical tests.

**Assume there would be no way of getting out of this undetected**

## Uncertainty about the attitude of police

No longer any uncertainty about the attitude of the police.

Clearly signals the police are taking this seriously

Recorded evidence means there's not chance of them letting you go.

**Once drugs are detected there's no chance of the police letting you off**

# In their own words...

## Uncertainty about the process of detection

It's comprehensive. You can't get away with it. With the test they'll probably mark you out of ten for things. This is definitive.  
(Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

They could stop you but you could talk your way out of it and think 'thank god for that'. Now there is no getting out of nothing. (Male, 25-34, Class A, Brighton)

## Uncertainty about the attitude of police

I think that in the past they possibly could have turned a blind eye to it, it's less hassle for them. Sometimes they'll let you off if they catch you speeding. But they don't let you off if they get you with the speed gun. This is the same. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)

# Best expressed as an end to ambiguity

Best expressed as “you definitely won’t get away with it”

Played on the insight that drug drivers are uncertain about detection.

“Now there is no escape” sometimes felt to be a little bit over the top.

“Now there are no ifs or buts” and “Not there is no talking your way out of it” were stimulus for the change in the law, but often interpreted as talking about drug swab.

The new drug swab means now there is no escape.

Now there are no ifs or buts.

Now there is no talking your way out of it.

You have no escape, that is it. Once you get caught, and they pull that out, you are done. Boom.  
(Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Brighton)

# A very positively received intervention

## A surprisingly positive reaction

Almost everyone we spoke to described the drug swab as a good idea.

## Appreciate objective justice

The removal of subjectivity was seen to be a very good thing.

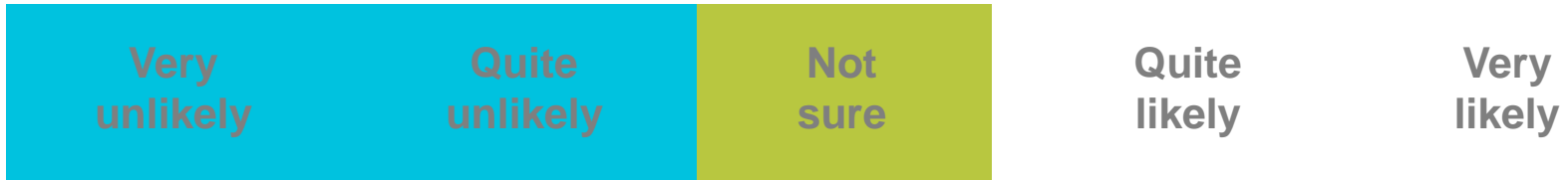
And the removal of performance anxiety was almost a relief.



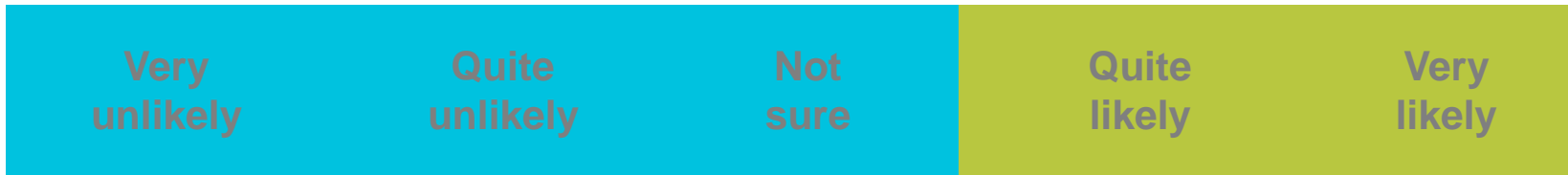
That is what I want to hear. As long as you have got evidence that I have taken drugs. As long as it is not done on suspicion. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)

# The change in likelihood to be caught...

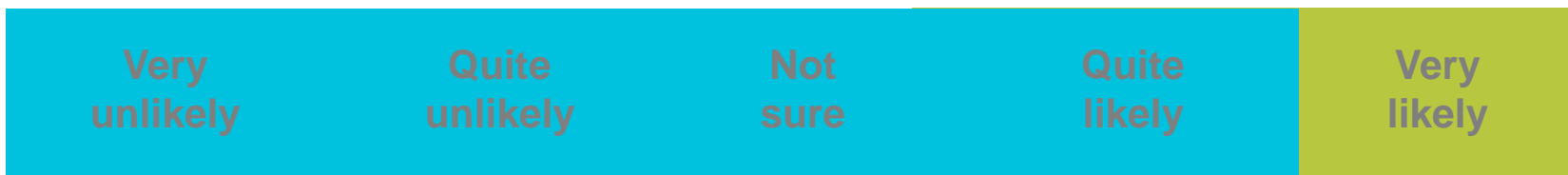
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# Suddenly the chances of being caught were taken more seriously

## 1. The police will be pulling over more cars

There's a new push from the police.

They'll want to use the new bit of kit.

They are going to love to get that out. A new weapon. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Brighton)

## 2. Detection is a certainty

There's not doubt that you'll be detected.

I hear that and I think 'oh I am f\*\*\*\*d'. They have got the breathalyzer for alcohol. If you have 6 pints you think 'if the police pull me over and breathalyze me I am f\*\*\*\*d' and this is the same for drugs. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

## 3. A conviction will almost certainly happen

A positive test means you will almost certainly be convicted.

The technology does it, if you get caught doing drugs, you're going to get convicted. You don't need any more convincing that you're going to get convicted. (Male, 25-34, Cannabis, Birmingham)

# Those who saw detection as a grey area immediately considered changing their behaviour

	Cruising on cannabis	Keeping focus with cocaine	Driving from the party
Light drug drivers			
Heavy drug drivers			

It makes it like drinking for me. And I said in this scenario when I drove, I wouldn't have driven if I'd been drinking. It changes it for me, I wouldn't do it. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)

It is ruining my party. I'm on a downer right now. But in the scenario when you're on drugs you're not really thinking about it. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)



There are three other aspects of the new initiative that will need to be considered as a secondary part of the communication...

# 1. Providing clarification on the level detected

## Not about a specified limit

Much harder to know your limits for drugs than it is for drink.

And counterintuitive to set a legal limit.

## Not about detecting any trace

Widely believed that drugs will stay in someone's system for a long time.

Would be unfair if drugs were detected from days before.

## Detecting drugs taken before driving

Needs to be detecting any level of drugs.

Taken a matter of hours before driving.

**Communications will need to point out that the drug swab is designed to detect any amount of drugs taken in (for example) the last 12 hours.**

## 2. Explaining which drugs are detected

Some objected to the inconsistency

Couldn't see why it would test for cannabis and cocaine and not others.

Imagined scenarios where people would be let off because they'd only taken e.g. MDMA.

Most felt it wasn't such a serious issue

Made sense because it was starting with the most prevalent drugs.

Imagined that if they police were doing these tests, they'd be more vigilant about other drug use too.

**At some point communications will need to mention that the drug swab will initially test for the most prevalent drugs: cannabis and cocaine.**

**Inevitably this will reduce the impact for some, but didn't completely undermine the message.**

### 3. Pointing out that it will be rolled out across the country

**Most felt it would still be enough to make them think**

Clearly imagining what it would be like.

Just knowing it was out there would make them think.

A gradual roll out didn't greatly change the impact.

**Some felt it undermined the initiative**

Engaged in theory but wanted to see it in practice.

If it wasn't in their area they wouldn't worry about it.

A gradual roll out diminished the impact it would have.

**At some point communications will need to mention that the drug swab is being rolled out across the country.**

**This diluted the message but didn't seriously undermine it.**

# Everyone felt it needed to be communicated

## Despite the caveats it was still a powerful message

Sending a clear message that police are going to be detecting drug drivers.

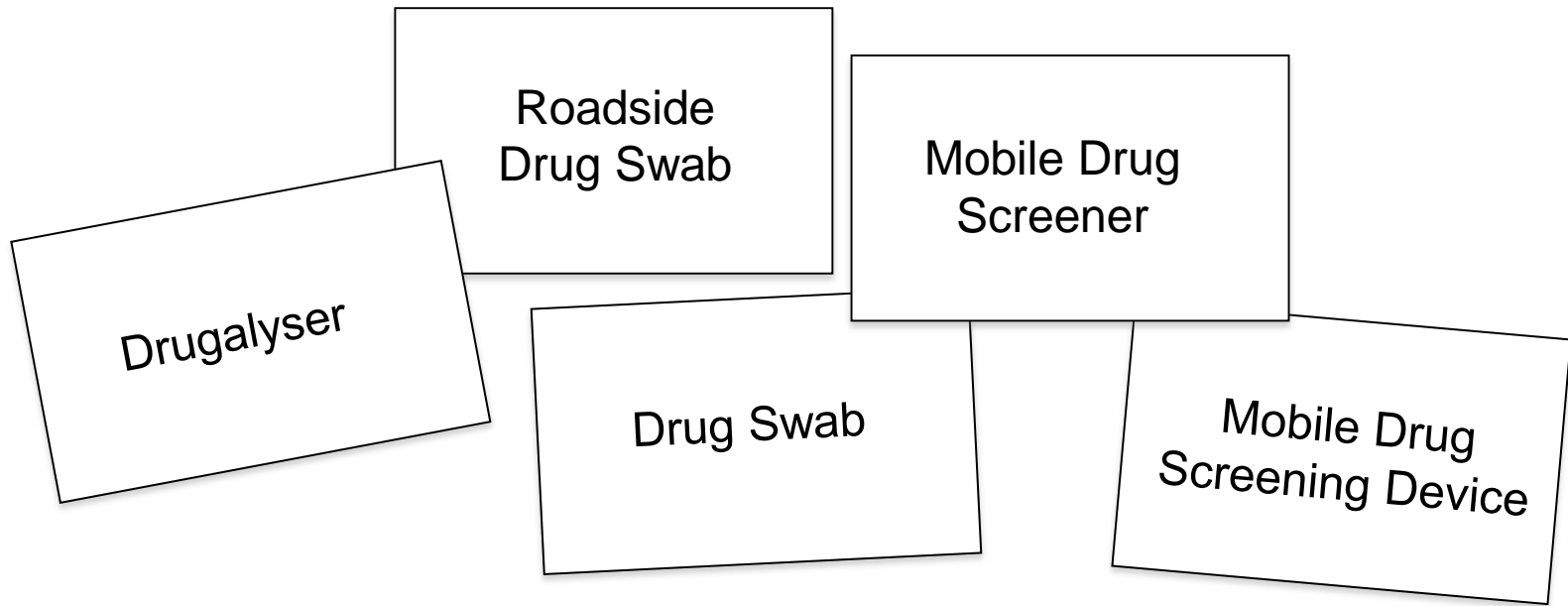
## And felt that it was important to let people know

All agreed that it was better to let people know before it was introduced than to wait.



They should make people aware of it before they do it. Like they tell you there's a speed camera. They have to tell people, warn people that they can get done. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)

We briefly discussed a number of options for names...



# It was best described as a Drug Swab

Explain  
what it is

All of the names made it clear what this was.

Although it wasn't always necessary to point out it would be mobile or roadside.

All policemen are going to call it a drug swab. Call it what it is. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Brighton)

Keep it  
short

Longer names (e.g. Mobile Drug Screening Device) were usually dismissed, or shortened to acronyms.

You'd have to call it the MDSD. Which sounds a bit like MDMA. (Male, 25-34, Cannabis, Birmingham)

Sound  
serious

It was important to have a name that felt serious. Names such as "Drugalyser" sounded too silly.

People don't want to be swabbed. And that's a good thing. It's not a nice thing to be swabbed. (Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Leeds)

# Summary

This research would suggest that communicating the introduction of a drug swab has a lot of potential.

It immediately addressed the main uncertainty that participants had around being caught: the likelihood of detection at the roadside.

This meant that those participants who saw detection as a grey area reconsidered their behaviour.

It was most effectively communicated as an end to ambiguity. E.g. “Now you definitely won’t get away with it”.

Three aspects are worth bearing in mind for communications:

It’s important to point out that it is designed to detect for drugs taken before driving (e.g. within 12 hours).

Pointing out that it tests only tests for cannabis and cocaine caused a lot of debate, but because they are the most prevalent drugs it was accepted.

Mentioning that this will be rolled out will lessen the impact for some, but didn’t seriously undermine the message.



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**Response to the drug swab**

**Response to the legislation change**

**Conclusions and recommendations**

A change to the law means it's now easier to be convicted of drug driving.

The drug driving law is changing, making it easier for the police to enforce against.

In the past the police have had to prove that suspected drug drivers were not only on drugs, but impaired by them.

From March 2015, if a driver is found to have over the specified limit for illegal drugs in their blood they will be prosecuted. There is a zero tolerance approach, so the limits will be very small.

Penalties will remain the same as drink driving.

# The idea that they were more likely to be convicted had an impact

## Carried a threat of the police clamping down

Currently not sure about the approach the police take to drug driving.

This suggested that drug driving was being taken more seriously, and they'd be arresting more people.

Changing the law means that something is happening, things are in motion. They're cracking down.  
(Male, 25-34, Class A, Brighton)

## Although not as immediate as the drug swab

Participants were most engaged by addressing uncertainty about the moment at the roadside.

Once the news of the drug swab was introduced it tended to dominate the discussion.

They need something on the roadside if they are going to test it. They'll end up wasting police time otherwise.  
(Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)

# A key issue was that participants felt confused by the explanation of the change

## Initially it wasn't clear what had changed

Current assumption is that a positive blood test is all that is needed for a conviction.

Presenting it as a change to the law usually caused confusion.

I sounds the same as it is now to me. I am not sure what the changes are. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

## The explanation of the change could get complicated

The previous requirement of impairment added a layer of complication.

Participants often became tangled up in the legal complexities.

I don't like that in the past police had to prove not only on drugs but impaired by them, surely they are committing a crime or they are not. (Male, 25-34, Cannabis, Birmingham)

# Overall it was much less positively received

## Some questioned the fairness

The drug swab seen as objective, introduced to settle the issue fairly.

This sometimes seen as settling the issue by giving the police more power.

I think they [police] are bullies. It sounds like they can make an allegation and not have to prove it.  
(Male, 25-34, Cannabis, Birmingham)

## Many questioned what might have prompted it

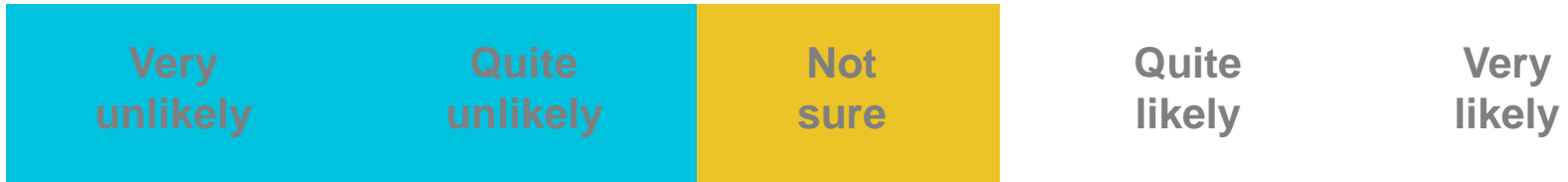
The drug swab seen as introducing technology as it becomes available.

Not clear what might have prompted this change in the law.

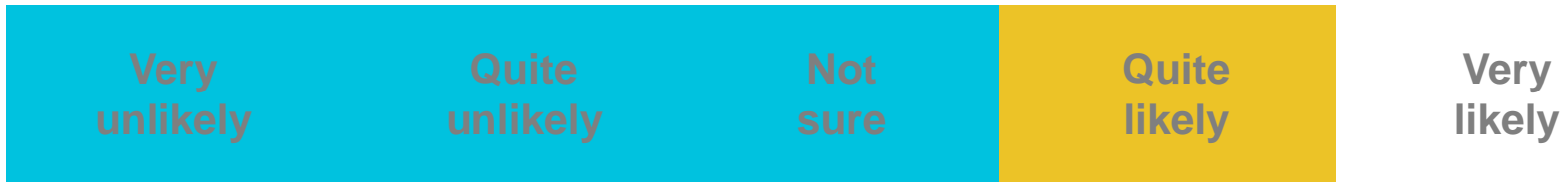
I don't see why it is necessary, unless there is some information to say that drug drivers are actually killing a lot more people, if it was something we didn't know was a major problem.  
(Male, 18-24, Cannabis, Brighton)

# Ultimately the likelihood to be caught increased

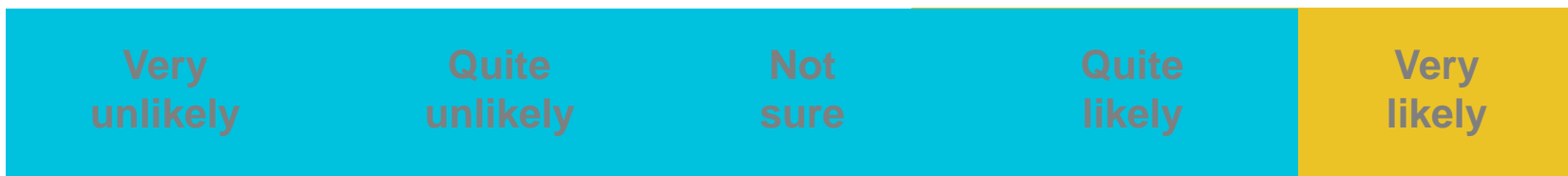
1. The car is pulled over by the police in the first place



2. Having been pulled over, the police detect you've been taking drugs



3. Having been detected, you are convicted of drug driving



# Increased the chances of being caught overall

## 1. The police might pull over more cars

Assumed to prompt a push to get more convictions.

They'll have quotas and targets so the police are going to go out looking for people. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)

## 2. Detection taken more seriously

Detection made more likely by police being more vigilant.

But without drug swab didn't completely remove uncertainty.

As soon as it comes in in March they will be like lets give it a shot so they will crack down. I can't see how they are going to test it differently but they'll be cracking down. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

## 3. Emphasises that conviction will happen

Added a bit more emphasis to the chance of conviction.

I think you would be very likely to be convicted, but you were always quite likely to be convicted. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Birmingham)

# Less likely to prompt a change in behaviour

## Rarely mentioned at the end of the discussion

Majority cited the swab test as the thing that made them think.

Followed by the seriousness of the penalties (particularly criminal record).

When mentioned it was seen in terms of a police clamp down, rather than the specific change to the law.

## And less clear about how it might change their behaviour

Tended to be a lot more vague about whether it would actually change their behaviour.



It's a change to the law. So many things have happened, new laws and stuff. Nothing changes. People are still going to take drugs and drive.  
(Male, 18-24, Class A, Brighton)



# There may be some (limited) potential in explaining the law

Often caused confusion when presented as a change in the law

As discussed, most had assumed this was the current law.

But served as a reminder that they could be convicted

Clarified what the process would be.

And underlined that this being taken seriously.

One blood test is now all it takes to be convicted for drug driving.

Makes you aware- I don't want to go down there and give blood- last thing you want. (Male, 25 -34, Class A, Brighton)

# But a better approach might be to explain the context

## A mixed response to the statistic

Could sounds significant but...

Weren't sure whether 1 in 8 deaths would be a lot.

Weren't sure whether the deaths were *caused* by drugs or just *involving* drugs.

## But gave the justification for clamping down

Answered the questions that everyone had about why it was happening, and was often explanation enough.

With an estimated 1 in 8 deaths on the road involving drugs, it's now easier to get convicted for drugs.

It talks about the death and that is the real reason they're doing it. (Male, 18-24, Class A, Leeds)

# Summary

Overall this research would suggest that the change to the law doesn't have as much potential for communications as the drug swab.

The ultimate impact on drug drivers had some potential: "Now you're more likely to be convicted of drug driving".

It clearly suggested that police were taking this more seriously and might start clamping down, but wasn't as immediately relevant as roadside testing.

And the change to the law itself often caused confusion: most assumed that the current law only required a blood test for conviction.

As such it was rarely something that left an impression on participants, and might not have a significant impact on behaviour.

If it was communicated it might be better to put more focus on the context behind the law, rather than the details of the change.

Participants were often most interested in knowing what had prompted the change, and were more accepting of it when they were told about deaths on the road.

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This research would suggest there are three potential options for a drug drive campaign...

# Option 1: Focusing on the drug swab

## Proposition

Now you definitely won't get away with it.

## Support

Now the police have a drug swab that they can use at the roadside to tell if you've taken drugs.

## Secondary information

The drug swab will detect drugs taken within the last 12 hours.

It will initially test for the most prevalent drugs (cannabis and cocaine) but other drugs will be added later.

The first police forces to introduce drug swabs will do so in March 2015.

The recommendation from this research would be for communications to focus on the drug swab.

It addresses the key issue for drug driving: uncertainty around being detected by the roadside.

The majority of participants were still drug driving because of this grey area, and the drug swab made them reconsider their behaviour.

It tended to have an immediate impact, but secondary information will need to be provided.

Whilst this information weakened the impact for some, the drug swab was still the most effective message we researched.

# Option 2: Focusing on the law change

## Proposition

Now you're more likely to be convicted of drug driving

## Support

The number of deaths on the road caused by drug driving has prompted a change in the law.

Now if a policeman suspects you've taken drugs it will be a much simpler process to convict you.

## Secondary information

One blood test is now all it takes to convict someone of drug driving.

In the past the police had to go through a complicated process of proving the drugs impaired driving. But not anymore.

There would seem to be less potential to focus on the law change.

It tended to work as a vague threat that the police would be convicting more people.

And the explanation caused a lot of confusion because it wasn't clear what had changed.

Ultimately it wasn't seen to have such an impact on behaviour as the drug swab.

There was a lot of interest in knowing what had prompted the law change which might be a better focus for communications.

The details of the law change would still need explaining for those who want to know, but could be secondary.

# Option 3: Focusing on the consequences of conviction

## Proposition

Drug driving will leave it's mark on you for life.

## Support

If you're convicted of drug driving it will stay on your license for 11 years and the criminal record will stay with you for life.

## Secondary information

Now the law has changed so that you're more likely to be convicted of drug driving.

One blood test is now all it takes for you to get a conviction that lasts for life.

It was clear that there was a lot of potential for messaging to help inform drug drivers about their behaviour.

One thing that came out consistently strongly from the stimulus was the threat of being marked for life, particularly the criminal record.

If it weren't possible to communicate the drug swab this would be worth considering.

It might then be possible to introduce more information about the law change at a secondary level.



# Appendix

The police now have more tools to tell if you're on drugs.

Now there are more ways than ever before to detect drug drivers:

- New roadside drug swab
- Station blood test
- Impairment assessment tests

'More tools' was much less specific than a drug swab.

Felt much less clear what the police would do.

Lost the sense that there was a definitive test.

It's now as easy to be tested for drugs as it is for drink.

A statement that was often picked out.

The comparison with drink driving made perfect sense.

Immediately says there will be a test by the roadside, and that it will be taken seriously.

Now there is scientific technology that can detect drugs in your system from the roadside.

Assumed that they would be using scientific technology.

But expected to be standard technology rather than anything particularly advanced.

Wasn't necessary to point out that it was scientific technology.

If you fail the drug swab test your conviction stays on your driving license for 11 years.

The thought of a conviction on your license for 11 years was powerful.

And often picked out for that reason.

But seen as a separate message from the introduction of the drug swab.

The law is tightening around drug drivers

Had a mixed response.

It summed up the way most participants interpreted the law change: the police will start clamping down.

But without any explanation, or any context, it often felt a little draconian.

In Germany where similar drug testing equipment is already being used, convictions for drug driving are 30 times higher than in England and Wales.

The idea of convictions increasing had an impact.

Response was dominated by the statistic

Some were instinctively impressed by something being 30 times higher.

Others picked apart the comparison with Germany, and the vagueness of the number.



**bigisland**