

# UK DRUG SCENE TIMELINE: 1960–1994

While *Druglink* did not start even as a newsletter until 1975, here is a simplified overview of the UK drug scene as it developed up to the point where we had, for the first time in 1995, a cross-government strategy for dealing with drugs. The timeline continues in the next issue. Compiled by **Harry Shapiro** and **Geoff Monaghan**.



PREVENTION, TREATMENT  
AND REHABILITATION

LAW ENFORCEMENT

DRUG POLICY

LEGISLATION  
AND CASE LAW

DRUG TRENDS

**1960**  
Metropolitan Police (MP) Dangerous Drugs Office (set up in 1954) – comprised four officers.

**1961**  
Report of Interdepartmental Committee on Drug Addiction published. Chaired by Sir Russell – later Lord – Brain  
  
The Committee concluded: “the incidence of addiction to dangerous drugs is still very small... no cause to fear that any real increase is at present occurring.

**1963**  
Metropolitan Police report revealed officers believed a number of doctors were overprescribing to addicts and that the surplus was being sold.

**1964**  
The first year when more whites than non-whites were convicted of cannabis related offences in the UK. The total number of convictions, 544, was a little lower than in the previous two years.

1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
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**1960**  
At the time, the main drug control legislation in force was the **Dangerous Drug Act 1951**.

**1960**  
First heroin addict under the age of 20 years appeared on the Home Office files.

**1960**  
**Number of known notified users: 437**



**1964**  
**Dangerous Drugs Act 1964**  
Introduced a main new offence of permitting premises to be used for the purpose of smoking cannabis.  
  
**Drugs (Prevention of Misuse) Act 1964**  
Banned the unauthorised possession of amphetamine to counter misuse (particularly Drinamyl – ‘purple hearts’) by various youth sub-cultures, mainly ‘mods’.  
  
**The 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs ratified by the UK**

# RELEASE

# 1960s



**1967**  
Release founded [George Harrison donated £5,000 to Release in 1969].



**1968**  
First NHS drug clinics opened.

Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence (ISDD) founded.

First therapeutic communities opened in the UK – Alpha House and the Coke Hole Trust.

**1968**  
Arrest of Dr John Petro for failing to keep a drugs register. He was one of a small group of so-called 'junkies' doctors' and was struck off later that year.

Police recommendation that Regional Drug Squads be formed or drug squad officers be attached to the Regional Crime Squads predating similar recommendation by ACPO in 1985.

**1965**  
Pytch, became the first police dog in Britain to detect a controlled drug (cannabis) during a search of a house in London's East End.

**1965**  
Publication of the influential Interdepartmental Committee on Drug Addiction (known as the 2nd Brain Committee report).

### Key Recommendations

- Limitations on the rights of doctors to prescribe heroin or cocaine (only doctors holding a special licence could prescribe either of these drugs to addicts);
- The setting up of specialist out-patient NHS clinics;
- Compulsory notification of addicts to Home Office.



**1967**  
Arrest of Keith Richards and Mick Jagger on minor drugs charges prompted the famous *Times* editorial, 'Who breaks a butterfly on a wheel' suggesting the arrests were more about who the defendants were than the severity of the crime.

Full page advertisement appeared in *The Times* paid for by Paul McCartney and signed by academics, politicians, pop stars etc calling for cannabis law reform.

First UK seizure of non-pharmaceutical 'Chinese' heroin by the Metropolitan Police.

**1969**  
Publication of the Report by the Advisory Committee on Drug Dependence – more widely known as the Wooton Report.

The main recommendation that caused a media and political storm was that possession of a small amount of cannabis should not normally be regarded as a serious crime to be punished by imprisonment.

Also that there should be a new system for penalties based on evidence of harm. This became the ABC classification in the Misuse of Drugs Act.

1965

1966

1967

1968

1969

**1966**  
**Drugs (Prevention of Misuse Act (Modification Order)**  
Possession of LSD brought under control.



**1967**  
**Dangerous Drugs Act 1967**  
Power for the police to search and detain persons suspected of having committed an offence under drug laws.

**1968**  
**Dangerous Drugs Act: R v Finnigan**  
A journalist was writing an article on drug misuse which highlighted how easy it was for young people to obtain them. In order to acquire material for the article, she went to a flat and bought cannabis. She pleaded guilty to possession and was sentenced to nine month's imprisonment. She had no previous convictions. On appeal, it was held that the sentence was wrong and was changed to an absolute discharge.

**1968**  
**Medicines Act**  
Powers to govern the control of medicines for human and veterinary use.



**1965**  
**Number of known notified users: 927**

**1967**  
**Number of known notified users: 1729**

# 1970s

PREVENTION, TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION



**1973**  
Standing Conference on Drug Abuse founded. Set up to represent non-NHS treatment services.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

**1970**  
Publication of the Report by the Advisory Committee on Drug Dependence (ACDD) *Powers of Arrest and Search in Relation to Drug Offences* (also known as the Deedes report) – set up to 'review the existing powers of arrest and search in relation to drug offences'.

**Main recommendations:**

- The retention of the stop and search provisions of the Dangerous Drug Act 1967;
- That it was neither practicable or desirable for the law to define 'reasonable grounds';
- That police should accept and enforce the principle that particular modes of dress or hairstyle should never by themselves or together constitute reasonable grounds to stop and search.

**1972**  
The *Sunday Times* published an expose of the Metropolitan Police Drugs Squad and two days later Detective Chief Inspector Vic Kelaher was charged with conspiring to pervert the course of justice along with DS 'Nobby' Pilcher and three other detectives.

**1973**  
The Drugs Intelligence Section of the Central Research Establishment was notified of two cases involving seizures of Methylene-dioxy-amphetamine (MDA).

**1974**  
The Central Research Establishment analysed 20 'Chinese Heroin' samples seized by British Customs and police and found that in 14 (70%) cases, they contained strychnine. In some cases the level of strychnine was 'surprisingly high'. Strychnine had long been used in the manufacture of so called 'red pills' or heroin 'anti-opium' pills in China and other Asian countries.

DRUG POLICY

1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
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LEGISLATION AND CASE LAW



**1970**  
Number of known notified users: 2661

DRUG TRENDS

**1973**  
**Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA)**

- Established the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD);
- Introduced a classification system for controlled drugs: A, B and C;
- Created the new offence of possession with intent to supply a controlled drug;
- Increased the penalties for trafficking offences (e.g. production, supply and importation and exportation).

**1974**  
Chaotic use of barbiturates (and methaqualone – mandrax) mainly in London  
During February and March, five regional laboratories reported seizures of clear, pale blue capsules containing phencyclidine (PCP – also known as 'Angel Dust') and saccharine. One seizure (Metropolitan Police Laboratory) involved 3,460 such capsules. But PCP never had a sustained presence on the UK drug scene.

**1975**  
ACMD initiates the Campaign on the Use and Restriction of Barbiturates (CURB).



**1978**  
City Roads in London opened as the first crisis intervention centre set up to deal with the revolving door of barbiturate users going in and out of A&E.

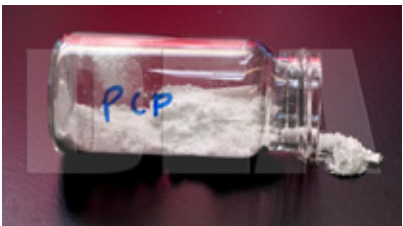
**1979**  
First Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meeting in the UK.

**1978**  
The largest ever seizure, 32 kgs of heroin (20% purity) in Britain, was made by HM Customs and Excise in September. The heroin was found concealed in car tyres.

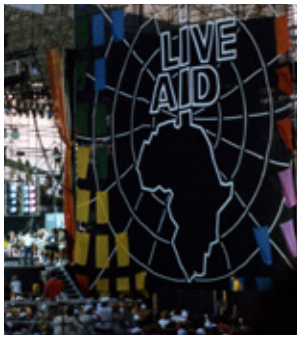
**1978**  
ACMD Cannabis Working Group recommended that cannabis be reclassified to a Class C drug.

**1977**  
**Operation Julie**  
Following a 14 month investigation by a team of police officers from 11 police forces, raids by 800 police officers throughout the UK resulted in the arrest of 119 persons and the discovery of two clandestine LSD laboratories.

<b>1975</b>	<b>1976</b>	<b>1977</b>	<b>1978</b>	<b>1979</b>
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**1979**  
Smokable heroin from the Middle East making an impact on the UK drug scene for the first time. The start of what became the heroin epidemic that only began to abate in the past few years.



PREVENTION, TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION

**1982**  
Publication of the *Treatment and Rehabilitation Report* by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD).

The Report made a number of recommendations covering:

- Central and local responsibilities;
- Development of services;
- Prescribing safeguards;
- Training;
- Research;
- Funding.

Specifically, it recommended the setting up of Drug Advisory Committees (DACs) comprising representatives from health and local authorities and other statutory and non-statutory agencies. The Report also recommended further restrictions on the prescribing of dipipanone (Diconal).

**1982**  
Customs & Excise pilot 'compounding' schemes at Heathrow and Gatwick airports. Persons caught with 10 grams or less of cannabis or cannabis resin, were given the choice of accepting an automatic penalty of £50 in lieu of prosecution.

**1983**  
Chief of the Narcotics Squad, Amsterdam, warned delegates attending the annual ACPO Drugs Conference of the harms associated with 'free-basing' cocaine.

Largest cannabis shipment ever seized by British Customs – 11 tons.

**1984**  
Publication of the *Prevention Report* by the ACMD.

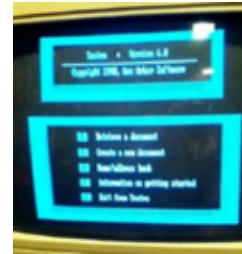
The Report re-defined the 'prevention' in the following terms:

- (a) Reducing the risk of an individual becoming involved in drug misuse
- (b) Reducing the harms associated with drug misuse

The Report made a number of recommendations including:

- Drug education should not concentrate solely on factual information about drug misuse; a balanced approach is needed which focuses more on social and cultural factors;
- National campaigns aimed specifically at reducing the incidence of drug misuse should not be attempted;
- Media coverage of drugs matters needs to be better informed.

Publication of first clinical guidelines attempting to establish what is (and isn't) good practice in the treatment of addiction.



**1984**  
MP officers arrested a British heroin and cocaine trafficker in London. The man described how he prepared cocaine for smoking using both the 'free-basing' and 'crack' production techniques. One of the earliest documented examples of the production and use of crack in the UK.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

**1980**  
Publication of the ACMD Report on Drug Dependents within the Prison System in England and Wales.

**Key recommendations included:**

- Further therapeutic units for dependency on the lines of those at Holloway or Wormwood Scrubs should be established.

**1982**  
ACMD Expert Group on the Effects of Cannabis report was inconclusive on health effects and called for more research. Government used this report as part of its reason for rejecting previous ACMD cannabis report calling for regrading.

**1983**  
Following on from the ACMD treatment report, Department of Health established the Central Funding Initiative (£17.5m to 1989) to improve treatment provision.

DRUG POLICY

1980



**1980**  
Beginnings of what became the widespread use of solvents (generally known as 'glue sniffing') among mainly younger teenagers.

1981

**1981**  
Forfeiture orders were made under the MDA against those convicted in the Operation Julie trial.

On appeal, the House of Lords ruled against the forfeiture orders and 'with considerable regret' found itself compelled to allow the appeals on the grounds that section 27 only applied to things shown 'to relate to the offence'.

1982

**1983**  
**R v Aramagh (1983) 76 Cr. App. R. 190** laid down sentencing guidelines based on the value of the drug involved.

1983

**1985**  
**Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985**  
The Act made it an offence to supply or offer to supply, to a person under 18 years of age, a substance other than a controlled drug, if he knows or has reasonable cause to believe that the substance is or its fumes are, likely to be inhaled by the recipient for the purpose of intoxication.

1984

**1984**  
Barbiturates controlled under the **Misuse of Drugs Act**.

**Controlled Drug (Penalties) Act 1985**  
Increased the penalties for certain offences relating to controlled drugs:

- Life imprisonment for all supply, importation, production and exportation offences relating to Class A drugs;
- 14 years' imprisonment for the same offences relating to Class B drugs.

LEGISLATION AND CASE LAW

DRUG TRENDS

1984

Number of known notified users: 5869

**1985**

In 1985, the DHSS asked Regional Health Authorities to establish multi-agency Drug Advisory Committees (DACs) in every Health Region and District. This request followed the advice of two earlier ACMD reports which had envisaged a key role for DACs in ensuring the coordinated development of drug services suited to local needs.

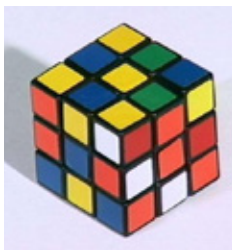
The first government anti-drugs campaign launched – ‘Heroin screws you up’. Overall evaluation suggested that it only impacted on those who never intended to use in the first place.

First cases of drug-related HIV reported in Scotland

**1985**

The National Drugs Intelligence Unit (NDIU) was set up.

First prosecution of shopkeeper selling solvents.



**1985**

Publication of *Tackling Drug Misuse: A Summary of the Government's Strategy*

The Government's objective was to 'attack the problem by simultaneous action on five main fronts':

- Reducing supplies from abroad;
- Making enforcement more effective;
- Maintaining effective deterrents and tight domestic controls;
- Developing prevention;
- Improving treatment and rehabilitation.



**1986**

McLelland Report was the first official document to champion harm reduction as a response to drug-related HIV and recommended setting up needle exchange schemes (NEX). The first formal NEX was opened in Peterborough.

**1987**

DHSS formally endorses NEX.

**1988**

First ACMD report on AIDS and drugs states that stopping the spread of the disease was more important than getting people off drugs. This inaugurated an eventual change in clinic practice away from almost universal short term methadone detox to more longer term prescribing.



**1989**

Media campaign designed to discourage needle-sharing.

**1989**

Robert Stutman speech to ACPO warning of the dangers of crack (see pages 21-22).

Southwark in south London started a drug referral scheme.

October: the Metropolitan Police Service Force Crack Intelligence Coordinating Unit (FCICU) was set up.



**1989**

*Crack: the threat of hard drugs in the next decade* (Interim Report). The Home Affairs Committee published its report on Drug Trafficking and Related Serious Crime.



**1985**

**1986**

**1987**

**1988**

**1989**

**1986**

On 1 January the **Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984** became law. The Act made sweeping changes to policing powers and practices including those relating to stop and search, entry, search and seizure, arrest and detention and the treatment and questioning of detainees.

UK ratified the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Section 9A of the MDA 1971 came into force prohibiting the supply of articles for use in the unlawful administration of controlled drugs. Hypodermic syringes and needles were specifically excluded from the provisions. Other injecting-related items have been excluded over the years, the most recent being foil.

**1987 Drug Trafficking Offences Act (DTOA)1986** came into force.

The Act introduced sweeping and radical changes in the law to enable the courts to to recover the proceeds of drug trafficking.

**1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 1988**

**1985**

First mention of MDMA in a UK publication – *The Face*, a pop culture/style magazine.

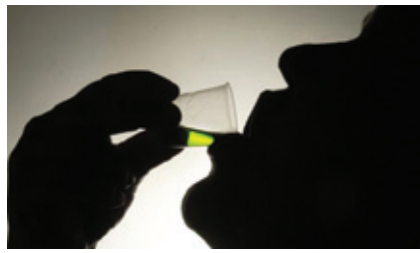
**1986**

First recorded MDMA death: Claire Leighton from Liverpool.

**1988**

**Number of known notified users: 12,977**





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DRUG TRENDS

**1990**  
First international harm reduction conference, Liverpool.

**1990**  
NHS and Community Care Act made local authority social services responsible for the funding of drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation services.

**1990**  
The total weight of heroin seized by Customs during the last quarter of 1990 was 320.6 kg, bringing the total weight for 1990 to 540.8 kg. This was the largest weight ever seized in a single year, and represents a 60% increase on the record figure of 331.5 kg for 1989.



**1991**  
Publication of the ACMD's report *Drug Misusers and the Criminal Justice System Part I: Community Resources and the probation Service*.

The report made many recommendations, including the following:

- Agencies dealing with drug misusing offenders should adopt the principles of harm reduction so as to avoid setting unrealistic goals;
- Adequate resources should be made available to ensure access to drug services for convicted misusers;
- Probation Services should establish links with as many treatment agencies as possible, and take steps to dispel and reluctance on their part to work with the criminal justice system;
- Those considering the training and information needs of sentencers should give high priority to drug issues.

Second edition of the Clinical Guidelines published.

Supported harm reduction interventions while re-asserting abstinence as the ultimate goal and advising GPs not to undertake methadone maintenance without specialist advice

**1992**  
ACMD report on CJS Part II.

**1992**  
Publication of the Release White Paper on Reform of the Drug Laws to mark the 25th anniversary of its founding.  
According to Release, the aim of the White Paper was to 'provide a concrete basis for debate and consultation' on the reformulation of Britain's drug laws in 'ways which safeguard and promote individual and community welfare'.

**1991**  
Publication of *Drugs and the Law: a report by JUSTICE*.  
Chaired by Judge Peter Crawford QC, the Committee, the objective was to consider all aspects of the law relating to drugs that might require revision and improvement. The Committee made a number of recommendations including the following:

- Extending section 8 (d) of the MDA 1971 (allowing certain drug activities on premises) to cover all controlled drugs not just cannabis, cannabis resin and prepared opium;
- Defining the word 'premises' in section 8 of the MDA 1971;
- Encouraging police services in appropriate cases, to caution drug offenders regardless of the class of drug involved;
- A new section 5A should be added to the MDA 1971 to allow a distinction to be made between commercial and social supply.

1990

1991

1992



**1991**  
UK ratified the **United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 1988**

**Criminal Justice Act 1991**  
The Act made substantial amendments to the Powers of Criminal Courts Act (PCCA) 1973 which enabled the courts to link probation orders to treatment for drug and alcohol dependency.





**1993**

At the ACPO Annual Drug Conference, DCS Tony White, NCIS, pointed out the weaknesses in the law which discouraged police officers from taking on controlled delivery operations involving precursor chemicals. The law was subsequently amended.,

Commander John Grieve, Director of Intelligence, MPS, made his 'Think the unthinkable' speech to delegates at the same event 'We are at the crossroads. Either we go to war on dealers across the globe, or we have to come up with new options. We need to think the unthinkable.' He suggested a liberal licensing system for all controlled drugs be introduced but would not be drawn as to how such a system might work in the UK.



**1993**



**1994**

Publication of *Tackling Drugs Together* A consultation document on a strategy for England 1995-1998.

The 'Green Paper' set out the Government's 'new approach to strategic thinking on drugs issues'.

The proposed strategy was driven by the following Statement of Purpose: To take effective action by vigorous law enforcement, accessible treatment and a new emphasis on education and prevention to:

- Increase the safety of communities from drug-related crime;
- Reduce the acceptability and availability of drugs to young people;
- Reduce the health risks and other damage related to drug misuse.

**1994**

**1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) 1994**

Amended the Prison Act 1952 to enable prison authorities to require prisoners to produce samples of urine for drug testing.

Also tried to control rave events by defining raves in terms of 'repetitive beats' and forbidding gathering of more than 100 people or even three people if the police had reason to believe that eventually more than 100 would turn up.

