

# Research into the views and perceptions of drug dealers

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*Final Report*

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## Foreword

Reducing the harm caused by illegal drugs is a key priority of the Government and the Updated National Drug Strategy (2002) continues to drive activity. The Drug Intervention Programme (DIP) has proved to be very successful in engaging drug users within the Criminal Justice System and enabling them to get out of crime and into treatment. In order for the success of treatment to be maximised it is essential that work continues on tackling drug availability, as this allows us to address both the demand and supply sides of drugs markets.

The work to tackle the illegal drugs markets that drive crime and damage communities takes place on many levels of the supply networks. The Government has developed strong links with the authorities in countries that are acknowledged as being the source or major transit routes of Class A drugs to the UK and this impacts on the drug supply at its source. A new agency is being created, the Serious and Organised Crime Agency, which will enable us to tackle the drug importers who are often extremely sophisticated in their methods of carrying out their illegal business transactions. The National Policing Plan 2005-08 directs the police to continue tackling the supply of drugs at all levels and powers such as those introduced in the Proceeds Of Crime Act 2002 and the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 have enabled the police and other agencies in the UK to have greater impact on dealing with drug markets at a local level.

Despite multi-agency operations led by the police, often there is only a temporary disruption to the supply of drugs at street level, as the gaps led by arrested dealers are quickly filled. In order to have a greater impact on these street level markets we need to better understand how drug dealers operate and the networks they use. It is recognised that there is a paucity of research on this topic and therefore GOEM commissioned what appears to be the first U.K. study on this subject, concluding with this report to help us gain a better insight into how we can more effectively understand the drug markets we must disrupt.

I hope you find this report provides you with key issues to consider when tackling drug markets.

Jane Todd, Director, Government Office for the East Midlands  
October 2005

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Finally we would like to thank those convicted drug dealers who spared time to speak to us and share their experiences; they did not have to do so.

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Despite the size of the UK drugs market there is very limited research on dealers or traffickers in this country. Although much is known about drugs markets across the United States this is not necessarily wholly applicable to the UK and there is a requirement for further research into dealing. In March 2005, Perpetuity Research and Consultancy International (PRCI) were awarded a contract to deliver a consultation exercise with a sample of drug dealing offenders in the East Midlands. While there was no intention in this study to answer all of the gaps in knowledge, it is hoped that the insights provided from these findings will help our understanding of how the drugs supply market operates in the UK and will inform future strategies to reduce short-term demand.

This report presents the findings from consultation with dealers captured over a three month period<sup>1</sup>. The research investigated the following six key areas:

- Dealers initial and on-going motivation
- Recruitment into dealing and career progression
- Job specific techniques and skills, what they are and how they are sustained over time
- Risks perceived by dealers and their strategies to manage those risks
- Response to law enforcement, with a focus on whether and how they adapt their approach to police tactics
- Dealers' perceptions of gaps in service provision and their opinions on methods of preventing dealing

## The Offenders

In total 44 interviews were conducted with offenders on remand for, or those convicted of, drug supply/ drug trafficking offences. The cohort, of whom six were female, was aged between 18 and 49 years. The majority of interviewees were White British and male, the largest minority ethnic group was Black Caribbean. Almost three quarters of the offenders were from the East Midlands, most of which came from Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. A quarter of the offenders were from other regions across England, one trafficker was from outside of the UK. The vast majority of offenders were from urban areas; over half (57 per cent) were from cities and almost a third from towns.

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<sup>1</sup> Dealers were interviewed in a sample of prisons and YOIs across the East Midlands between June and August 2005.

## Key Findings and Conclusions

This section will present a summary of key findings and conclusions and is structured under the six main areas of investigation highlighted above; key issues to note and recommendations are highlighted in bold.

### Initial and on-going motivation

Offenders were asked to describe their initial reasons for becoming involved in the drug supply network. For a significant proportion of offenders, friends and to a lesser extent family were common reasons for becoming involved in the supply of drugs. For these offenders, social networks often consisted of individuals involved in the supply of drugs and to a lesser extent drug trafficking.

Other offenders who were using drugs prior to dealing had been encouraged by or offered a job by their supplier; this would work to the advantage of the supplier who would then develop a circle of existing customers buying in larger quantities, rather than selling much smaller amounts for personal consumption. On the other hand several offenders had approached their own suppliers and other respected dealers to embark on a career in the drug supply market. For one trafficker who was interviewed in this study, his recruitment into the drug supply network followed similar stages to that of a legitimate career, for example he was interviewed and tested for suitability by the employer.. Similarly in some American studies, research has highlighted that reasons for starting drug dealing were comparable to those of a legitimate business person starting a career.

It is worth noting that some interviewees became involved in the drugs supply network as a result of coercion – this was the case for half of the women interviewed. Two had been persuaded by partners or ex partners to smuggle drugs into prison, the third had been forced to store drugs for a dealer to clear a debt under the threat of verbal and physical violence. Coercion to clear a debt was also evident in male interviewees.

In several cases resettlement on release had failed to break the associations with criminal activity. Inappropriate aftercare greatly increases the likelihood that offenders will relapse into drug misuse and re-offending on release from prison and therefore prisoners may return to dealing. **Clearly there is a window of opportunity for programmes like the Drugs Intervention Programme to work with prisoners coming up to the end of their sentence and those recently released from prison.**

Existing research evidence notes that the main motivational factors for dealing include financial gain, an alternative to low paying jobs, greed, or the need to support a drug habit. The dealers interviewed in this study supported these findings. For a number of offenders, personal drug debt (and the need to repay it to their dealer) was a major contributory factor for becoming involved in drug supply. Offenders often found themselves in a situation where they felt that they had no choice other than to work for their dealer to repay their debt.

Funding personal drug use was often a primary motivator to supplying illegal drugs; offenders sold drugs in order to make sufficient profit to purchase their own drugs for free. It is important to note that although funding personal drug use was referred to as the initial reason, in some cases this turned to financial gain.

Other offenders openly admitted that their initiation into dealing was purely based on greed, financial gain and to make a profit. This included those arrested for trafficking who had couriered cocaine into the UK with the sole purpose of making money.

A number of offenders commented that the lack of employment opportunities in their area had resulted in drug dealing becoming their only option to successfully earn money. A review of demographic information showed that over 50 per cent of those interviewed were unemployed and seven per cent were sick/ disabled and unable to work; 34 per cent had no qualifications on leaving school. Some interviewees had previously held jobs but lost them through redundancy, only becoming involved in the drugs supply market as a last resort and ostensibly as a temporary method to pay bills.

In considering their options, some offenders stated that they chose dealing over other offences because they considered that dealing was an easier crime to commit and a simpler way to make money compared to other offences e.g. dwelling house burglary. They were also of the opinion that drug dealing was a lesser offence which did not cause as much grief to victims as other crimes.

**There is clear support here for key elements of the National Drug Strategy, primarily in terms of the young people's theme and providing alternatives through education, training and employment opportunities. There is also evidence to reinforce the work around resettlement of those convicted of dealing offences in terms of retraining and education support whilst in prison, sustained on release to provide alternative and legitimate opportunities. The importance of throughcare and aftercare can not be over stated, several important factors, such as housing, employment, education and training opportunities, rebuilding family relationships and so on are crucial to the resettlement of offenders.**

### **Recruitment into dealing and career progression**

Offenders discussed their experience of recruitment patterns and career progression and commonly they entered dealing at a lower level and typically described themselves as user dealers, earning enough money to fund their own drug use. Supplying at this level rarely earned massive profits; most user dealers discussed how they sold enough to fund their own habit, although there were some who managed to control their personal use in order to create a profitable business.

Most offenders who entered the drug supply market as a dealer (14 per cent) were street level dealers. Other paths into dealing included driving for other dealers, storing drugs to repay debts, drug trafficking or assisting friends or family who were dealers. Most reported dealing to friends and acquaintances at the start of their career; this was generally through social networks.

Running through this theme is the reminder that for many offenders dealing can be seen as the only viable source of income. From the basic personal details taken from the interviewees, the majority lived in urban areas, and had low levels of academic attainment and employment. **The Government have long supported the renewal of disadvantaged neighbourhoods through the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. Significant funding has been targeted at these areas through Single Regeneration Budgets and New Deal for Communities programmes to name but two. Given the harm that dealing and drug use causes to communities there is a need to ensure that the resources that come through these funding streams consider these issues when regenerating local communities.**

Offenders were asked to discuss whether their dealing behaviour ever changed. The majority of dealers did not progress up the dealing hierarchy and their dealing behaviour did not change because they were dealing to fund their own drug use. However, for the minority of offenders who did progress, their role often developed over a period of time, for example selling drugs in higher quantities to earn more money.

Once again this is consistent with previous research which indicates that once connections are made with suppliers the dealer can acquire their own regular customer base. Some offenders interviewed in this study had entered the drug supply market during their late teens/ early twenties working as a runner or a deliverer for other dealers. Their career then progressed so that they too become a dealer controlling the market. For offenders who had changed their dealing behaviours some had moved up the hierarchy because they were of the opinion that it reduced the likelihood of getting caught.

Offenders sold a range of illegal drugs, most commonly heroin, crack cocaine and cannabis, and to a lesser extent, ecstasy, amphetamine, cocaine, ketamine (less so), LSD (less so), GHB (one person) and methadone (one person). Often dealers dealt in more than one substance, the most popular combination being heroin and crack cocaine. Although low in numbers, some offenders sold up to six types. Offenders dealing in 'recreational drugs', such as ecstasy, amphetamine and cocaine, tended to sell a wider variety of substances than those dealing with crack cocaine and/ or heroin.

There were several explanations given for why these particular drugs were chosen. By and large the level of demand and profitability of the drug were cited. Other reasons included personal use/ addiction, drug availability and to repay debts. Offenders who worked for other dealers acknowledged that it was their supplier's choice over which they had no influence. Some offenders reported that they would not deal in crack cocaine or heroin because they disliked the effect these substances had on users.

Offenders' dealing careers varied substantially from those who had drugs in their possession with intent to supply for the first time and those who dealt on one occasion and got caught, to offenders who had been dealing on and off for three to five years. Several offenders had been dealing for over ten years. For longer term dealers, the majority had continued to deal the same drugs.

A small number of offenders in this study had either changed or added to the drugs they sold, this often reflected their personal drug(s) of choice or their customers' request for drugs. One offender noted the growing demand for crack cocaine amongst heroin users, whereby some dealers had responded to this and dealt both heroin and crack cocaine. One offender reported changing from dealing in Class A drugs to cannabis because it was less risky. On the other hand although small in number, some offenders switched from selling cannabis to Class A drugs, in some cases because it was deemed more profitable.

Frequency of dealing drugs varied by offender; however over half of the offenders were dealing on at least a daily basis. Some offenders confined their dealing to once or twice a week or weekends only. One offender chose to do this because in his experience that was when demand was at its highest. This offender also continued to sell heroin during the week. What is clear from these findings is that some dealers sell drugs to users involved in the recreational drug scene, whereas others are explicitly involved in supplying Class A drugs such as heroin and crack cocaine to



more problematic drug users with drug addictions. The latter tended to deal more frequently, often daily, while those who were dealing in recreational drugs such as cocaine, amphetamine and ecstasy tended to get more business between Thursday and Monday. One dealer also reported that demand depended on other factors such as bank holidays and the season. On the other hand most cannabis dealers reported that they dealt on a daily basis.

### **Job specific techniques and skills**

When asked to explain techniques and skills used by dealers, the general rule applied by most was not to sell to strangers unless they were introduced by an existing customer who could vouch for them. Conversely there were some offenders who sold to strangers; a significant majority of whom had been selling to undercover police officers who they were introduced to by friends/ acquaintances who did vouch for them.

For some offenders there appeared to be a moral code in that they did not deal drugs to children. This was reinforced later in the interviews when some offenders stated that they would take action against dealers who specifically targeted young people and children. **Whilst there is a growing body of evidence of drug use by young people in this country, what is less well researched is the supply of drugs to children and young people. This study prompts the need for further research into this area.**

Offenders were asked to estimate roughly how many customers they supplied to. This varied substantially from as few as five or six customers to as many as 200 to 300 (although this was rare amongst this sample of offenders). Of those that admitted to regular dealing, just under half of the offenders had between 20 and 60 customers. Some offenders preferred to serve to a limited number of people because they considered that the lower the number of customers, the less risk involved. Offenders reported that a growth in clientele tended to occur naturally through social circles and networks. Others actively increased the number of clients by passing their phone number to users, or approaching the homeless.

For those who sold directly to other dealers, various approaches were employed; mobile phones were commonly used as the initial communication to arrange business, followed by the organisation of a meeting place, often a public place such as a car park. Some dealers delivered on foot, others preferred to travel by car. Offenders who were involved in supplying drugs in large amounts appeared to take greater care with the planning and organisation over how the transaction would take place well in advance of the meeting.

A small number of offenders delivered directly to their customers' homes; however the majority preferred to do business in a public place on neutral territory. A minority of offenders would deal from their own homes or from the home of a friend, and store the drugs elsewhere.

Offenders operated at different localities, some confined their business to local neighbourhoods and surrounding estates, others operated city wide. What emerged from consultation with offenders in this study is that some dealers have a 'comfort zone' and confine their dealing to locations they consider to be safe. That said, although dealers operated in distinct markets, some purchased their supply from outside of their local area travelling to larger towns and cities e.g. London, Birmingham and Nottingham, although as later findings will show trusting the supplier is fundamental.

Offenders were asked to explain their approach to drug dealing in terms of how they set up business and how they retained customers. There were no examples of offenders targeting non users to develop a market and the general consensus was that drug dealing was demand led, some offenders spoke about the constant demands from users highlighting that there were more people requesting drugs than they could deal with.

Generally the number of regular suppliers was often limited to one or two. Some offenders who worked for themselves often had multiple suppliers and chose one supplier over another particularly if they were offering poor quality drugs. Some offenders made it clear that they used several suppliers for different types of drugs; suppliers were chosen for a variety of reasons including quality, trust and reputation of the supplier, reliability, convenience and availability, price and value for money.

Any introductions to new suppliers were usually through friends and acquaintances and as mentioned previously some offenders who used drugs had been encouraged by their own suppliers to set up their own empire.

**Whilst it was not the intention of this study to explore dealing in prison, several comments were made that suggested that prison provided a conducive environment for those who both used and dealt drugs. Offenders discussed how they met new suppliers and built networks in prison. This provides clear challenges to the efforts of those seeking to address drug use in prison and supporting them on release. There is a lack of research into dealing in prison and these findings prompt the need for such a study.**

How regularly offenders purchased drugs from suppliers varied considerably. Some purchased drugs once a week, others daily. Frequency of purchase greatly depended on the role of the dealer, if the offender was working for the supplier as a dealer, collections would often be made daily, if on the other hand offenders were supplying to other dealers, they would buy less frequently in larger quantities. Supplies were collected in similar ways to how offenders operated their own dealing business.

The price that offenders reported paying for drugs varied substantially, for example one offender reported purchasing cocaine for £450 an ounce, whilst another paid £500 for half an ounce. It is likely that this was dependent upon the quantity purchased, frequency of purchase, relationship with supplier and drug quality.

Offenders reported that the quantity of drugs purchased varied depending on a range of factors such as the number of orders the dealer had from buyers: again demand led.

Offenders were asked how they operated and maintained their business. Whilst the majority of interviewees were user dealers working alone, a handful of offenders had runners working for them, sometimes trusted friends; these offenders dealt with business over the phone and had very little or no direct contact with drugs or cash.

This suggests that more sophisticated methods are being used by dealers who are working at a higher level who adopt a 'hands off' approach and pay others to become involved in the supply network. Offenders who were dealing with larger quantities of drugs had a number of recruits working for them. Offenders who defined themselves as user dealers usually did not have anyone working for them; often they could not afford to recruit anyone and were dealing to fund their own use or to pay outstanding debts.

In terms of the overall competitiveness of the drugs market, the general consensus was that competition was not considered a major issue in the local drugs market. However, when offenders did feel the impact of competition from other dealers, a number of strategies were imposed to respond to this. These included reducing prices to match other dealers' prices, and offering 'freebies' or deals to users, (although this did not happen very often). Prices would also be reduced if it became apparent that other dealers were offering more competitive prices or when the market became flooded. If customers bought in larger quantities, they would get discounts. When the views of older dealers who have been in business for longer are compared against younger dealers, strategies for managing competition appear to become more sophisticated with age.

The majority of offenders reported that cash in hand was the main form of payment they accepted for drugs. A proportion of offenders allowed buyers to accumulate a tab (within set limits) but this was usually restricted to people that were trusted friends or those who bought in weights; others would charge extra for the privilege.

Some offenders accepted goods instead of cash e.g. jewellery – particularly gold, others were more reluctant because they were usually stolen items and dealers did not want to draw unnecessary attention to themselves. Offenders reported offers of sex in lieu of cash payment; with the exception of one or two offenders, interviewees claimed they did not accept such offers.

### **Risk management**

Interviewees were asked to comment on which aspect of drug dealing posed the biggest risk. For the majority getting caught and sent to prison was their biggest worry. On the other hand were offenders who argued that prison was the least of their worries and that violence, for example getting shot, was the main threat.

Whilst the media portray the drugs world as one of violence, interestingly when asked about techniques to respond to risks, few interviewees referred to the use of violence. There appears to be certain scenarios when violence (or the threat of) was considered, for example in situations when dealers stepped on other dealers' territory or tried to establish themselves in the same area. For bigger dealers, violence and the threat of violence is at the fore when negotiating deals with new customers. For some offenders, the risks involved justified the carrying of firearms and protective clothing.

Although firearms did not alarm a significant proportion of offenders; being robbed was their biggest fear, particularly for those working for other dealers who would have to find the money on time to repay their employer.

Other concerns included:

- Getting into debt and not being able to pay the dealer/ supplier
- Safety of family and upsetting family
- Using the drugs instead of selling them
- Safe houses/ crack houses being raided
- Putting people in danger who you are selling to
- Bad reputation
- People overdosing
- Getting bad gear you can't get rid of

A variety of methods were employed by offenders to manage the risks they identified, usually to prevent detection. A minority of offenders avoided frontline work and therefore never came into contact with drugs or money; they dealt with all arrangements over the phone and employed workers to carry out the transactions. Some offenders stressed the importance of becoming streetwise to police tactics; examples given were to be aware of the local police operating in the area including being able to recognise individual officers and unmarked vehicles.

Other methods used to avoid detection were as follows:

- Carry only a small amount of drugs/ money in person.
- Hide drugs in the garden.
- Hide money under the floorboards.
- Hide drugs at other people's houses without criminal records (legitimate families).
- Don't deal from the house.
- Change meeting places regularly.
- Avoid dealing with strangers.
- Operate and maintain a legitimate business as a cover for dealing and to avoid confiscation orders.
- Keep a low profile – including no involvement in other criminal activity.

Offenders also ensured that the tools of their trade - mobile phones and cars - were changed regularly.

Researchers sought to elicit information regarding the use of firearms in the drugs supply network. The majority of offenders were aware of the use of firearms,<sup>2</sup> however, only a small minority admitted to ever having firearms in their possession or were aware of other dealers who owned them. Some offenders talked about their experiences of threats of violence involving the use of firearms; although small in number certain offenders had been victims of shootings and stabbings. Offenders operating on a larger scale were more likely to have come across firearms.

Firearms were more commonly associated with larger cities but the general consensus was that firearms had become more common over time and were now carried by more people, particularly since crack cocaine had become popular on the drug scene. Specifically, the majority of offenders recognised an increase in the possession of firearms during the last three to seven years. Several of the older dealers were concerned that firearms were becoming increasingly popular among the next generation of dealers.

**Firearms were repeatedly associated with gang culture, image and power; some offenders argued that guns were more strongly affiliated with gangs than drugs. However, when researchers attempted to probe into the rules and relationships of gangs, offenders became reluctant to disclose any details even though confidentiality was assured. This suggests that there are clear codes within gangs and loyalty is key. This reluctance to share information presents a real barrier in terms of understanding gang culture in this country.**

Similar to the reluctance to share information on gangs, the majority of offenders either did not know or were not prepared to discuss how firearms were obtained in

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<sup>2</sup> Handguns, shotguns and machine guns including reconditioned guns (reactivated firearms) and the use of replica guns were all mentioned by offenders as firearms that they were aware of. Names .Smith and Western and Glock 9mm were given.

the drugs market; however the general understanding amongst those who were prepared to comment suggested that although the networks may be the same, the suppliers were often different.

Offenders were asked whether the use of firearms concerned them and how (if at all) that affected the way they operated. The repercussion of an automatic five year sentence if offenders had previously served a custodial sentence was often a deterrent to possessing firearms.

In line with earlier findings, a small minority of interviewees were concerned about getting shot, and therefore carried their own gun for protection. When major deals took place, one offender talked about how he had a convoy of vehicles following him with people armed with firearms. Even then, there appears to be general reluctance to use the firearm and their use is limited to circumstances where other risk management tactics have failed.

### **Response to law enforcement**

Offenders were asked about their response to various law enforcement measures with a focus on whether and how they adapted their approach to different police tactics.

The first provisions implemented under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 included new powers for police and customs officers to investigate and seize the money that criminals make from, and intend to use, in crime. The provisions are considered by law enforcers as a valuable tool in the fight against drug supply and as such the research sought to assess the provision from the perspective of the offender. Offenders were asked if they had heard of the Proceeds of Crime Act; the majority of offenders had heard of the Act, more commonly referred to as a confiscation order.

Offenders were asked to describe any changes in how profits from drugs were dealt with in order to respond to the provisions of the Proceeds of Crime Act. Offenders had developed a variety of tactics in order to avoid personal belongings being repossessed, whereby offenders buried money in fields, opened offshore accounts, items such as houses and cars were purchased in other people's names and several dealers operated and maintained a legitimate business.

Interestingly information on the sample showed that less than ten per cent of offenders owned their own property. Given the number of user dealers, we can assume that the majority of offenders were not making sufficient profits to invest money into property. Indeed some of the dealers reported that they did not make much money from dealing, and for many of the user dealers any money that was made was spent on funding their own habit. Even for those that were not addicted to substances several reported 'blowing' all their money on nights out or shopping.

**Few saw the Proceeds of Crime Act as a deterrent and the indication that the Act may encourage dealers to work more prolifically on release is of grave concern and prompts the need for appropriate, targeted and sustained work around resettlement for those with dealing offences.**

Offenders described how they were made aware of police tactics. Some offenders claimed that they had direct links with the local police or had acquaintances that had connections with the police who passed information on. There were also reports of dealers paying the police for information. Some dealers only became aware of police tactics when they discovered that dealers had been arrested or houses had been raided. Several dealers heard about specific operations through the local media.

Offenders discussed some of the police tactics used in the areas they operated and how they got caught. The majority of offenders had been arrested as a result of undercover police officers posing as drug users, befriending users and accompanying them to score from dealers. Offenders also reported the use of stop and search, increased police presence, house raids and the installation of CCTV cameras in areas they operated.

In line with risk management, offenders and users developed a range of tactics to respond to law enforcement methods. Some offenders hid drugs on or in the body, 'plugged' them, in case of stop and search. Several offenders reported that dealers regularly changed meeting places so that there was no continuity or pattern in their approach, therefore reducing the likelihood of police observation resulting in detection.

Law enforcement can also temporarily displace markets, dealers were reported to either stop dealing or pay someone else to continue dealing on their behalf.

**Interestingly, there appears to be local co-operatives of dealers. Far from seeking to wipe out the competition there is some evidence of dealers sharing information about police tactics amongst themselves. Offenders talked about how intelligence regarding police tactics was commonly shared amongst the dealing network.**

The research findings offer some indication that avoidance of the police improves with age and experience. For higher level dealers, they are further removed from the front line and so appear more able to avoid detection by the local police.

There appeared to be a general sense that police tactics at the local level had achieved success in terms of removing lower level, street dealers. Some offenders noted that their approach, particularly the use of undercover officers who were posing as drug addicts, was very successful, although several offenders commented that the way the police operated was borderline entrapment. Offenders also reported on the relationships the police were building with users. **This suggests that the drive on tackling drug supply at the local level through initiatives like Operation Crackdown has been a success.**

That said others were of the opinion that these tactics were not effective because whilst street dealers were removed from the streets, the causes of the dealing behaviour were not adequately addressed and because of the sheer number of users with habits to fund, those who were removed were soon replaced.

**Criminal justice interventions such as the Drugs Intervention Programme should be beginning to address problems faced by user dealers by working with them from the point of arrest to sentence and beyond to address their substance misuse and therefore, to eliminate the need to deal drugs to fund their habit. As we have seen earlier in these findings the throughcare and aftercare elements of the DIP programme are critical points in the success of breaking the drugs and crime cycle.**

**The Prolific and other Priority Offender programme by its very nature will encapsulate a significant number of offenders who are drug misusers. Given the comments above and elsewhere in the full report, the programme is key to tackling current and future drug supply and demand.**

**Through its prevention strand the programme has much to offer in terms of deterring future dealers by targeting work at those at risk in priority neighbourhoods. Similarly, the programme needs to ensure that rehabilitation and resettlement is appropriate to the needs of the user dealer.**

Finally dealers were less positive about current responses to tackle higher level, cross border drug offences that could disrupt supply routes into the country.

Researchers went on to ask offenders for their opinions of what they thought law enforcers could do differently to tackle drug supply. There was a degree of consistency within their responses in that interviewees argued that efforts should be targeted at higher level suppliers including those who traffic drugs into the county and focus on increasing and improving treatment.

A number of offenders put their argument forward from the treatment perspective arguing that the only way to impact on supply was to focus on taking away the demand for drugs. These findings question whether prison is the most effective method of rehabilitating drug using offenders. Offenders in this and other studies have highlighted that drug users often commit crime (including dealing) to fund their drug use and therefore if a holistic approach can be adopted and expanded (such as DIP) to tackle drug related crime including a package of treatment, housing support, benefit support and support for people with mental health issues, this may be a more effective method of dealing with drug users/ dealers rather than putting them through the criminal justice system without support to tackle their drug use.

Other suggestions to tackle the drugs supply were all related to increased levels of enforcement as follows:

- Increase the number of police on the street
- Increase the number of undercover officers
- Increase the number of surveillance operations
- Continue to use informants

Offenders were asked for their views on informing. They were given three scenarios and were asked if they would be prepared to give information to the police about dealers if (a) they supplied to children, (b) they led to serious competition and (c) they made threats to their family. In most cases offenders were not prepared to give information to the police under any circumstances if dealers led to serious competition; however, approximately one quarter of offenders declared that they would give information to the police if dealers were selling to children. Several offenders argued that supplying to children rarely goes on because other dealers would cut off supplies.

**This is of interest and begs the question as to how the supply of drugs to children and young people occurs. Research shows that young people are more likely to use cannabis than Class A drugs and there is an assumption made that young people choose to experiment with lower class substances before higher class ones. Is this the case, or are children and young people simply not offered higher class substances because of this moral code amongst dealers? As highlighted previously, little is known about dealing to and amongst children and young people in this country and these findings prompt the need for further exploration into this area.**

In most cases, offenders were of the opinion that information is not passed to the police, because people are aware of the potential repercussions they may face. Some offenders stated that they had been offered reduced sentences to pass information to the police, however, the general consensus was that people don't 'grass'.

### **Perceptions of services and opinions on methods of prevention**

Almost all offenders had wanted to stop supplying/ dealing drugs at some point during their drug dealing career. For many offenders using drugs and dealing drugs were interrelated; they often wanted to abstain from drugs and as such would then in turn cease drug dealing. Many offenders argued that if they did not need to raise the income to support their own drug use, they would not need to supply drugs.

Offenders had very different histories with regard to their patterns of use and their drug dealing experiences. Some offenders acknowledged that they had regularly considered bringing their dealing careers to an end, but the need to clear drug debts or to feed a habit often took precedence. **A small number of offenders remarked that the moment they were arrested and given a prison sentence was the time they thought about stopping. This again stresses the importance of this time as a window of opportunity to intervene and change the behaviours of these user dealers.**

A proportion of offenders had never given thought to ending their drug dealing careers and it is worth noting that there are a number of factors of similarity amongst this group. All were relatively young and had been dealing for only a few years. Two of them were single with no children/ family commitments and for all this was their first custodial sentence. As such this combination of factors may have led them to perceive that the risks involved with their dealing behaviour were outweighed by the benefits.

Several offenders had been through periods in their life when they had stopped dealing. Some stated that they had stopped temporarily during prison sentences or when they were receiving treatment for their drug use. Some offenders confessed that even if they temporarily stopped dealing, they often started again with the sole purpose to earn money or to fund their own personal use.

**These findings again emphasise the need for effective and sustained treatment programmes both in custody and within the community. Resettlement of offenders that meets their multiple needs in terms of treatment, housing support and employment/ training is essential to prevent relapse into drug use and dealing.**

Some interviewees claimed that they had ceased dealing when they were aware that the police were observing or carrying out surveillance operations in their area. A small number of offenders claimed that they had stopped dealing a few months prior to being arrested, but police video evidence of them dealing months before had resulted in their arrest.

**This suggests that awareness raising of current operations and tactics to target dealers does provide an effective method to (albeit) temporarily halt activity.**

Offenders were asked to consider what they thought would stop them supplying/ dealing drugs. Although small in number, some offenders believed that nothing would ever stop them from dealing.



The majority of offenders however did have motivations to stop dealing; family was a major factor, particularly for those who had children and grandchildren who they had never seen. Many offenders returned to the argument that using and dealing went hand in hand and believed that if they did not use drugs they would not supply them. Offenders stressed the importance of starting a new life on release, a fresh start in a new area where they were anonymous – again clear links to effective and appropriate resettlement strategies for user dealers.

The risk of prison and longer sentences were presented as possible reasons which would help some offenders to stop dealing drugs. Employment opportunities which paid comparable or competitive wages were also discussed.

Age was also an important factor for some offenders who raised the importance of being more responsible and setting an example for their own children. Some offenders argued that there needed to be a focus on reducing the demand for drugs by treating drug users for their addiction; this they considered would remove the need to deal drugs.

Offenders were also asked to discuss their experiences of programmes that sought to address dealing behaviour. The overall conclusion was that there were no targeted programmes to address dealing behaviour in custody or in the community; however, a number of offenders had attended courses which concentrated on addressing their substance misuse and/ or offending behaviour.

The majority of offenders who had participated in programmes had attended courses in prison; far less had attended courses in the community. Whilst those interviewed spoke positively about the range of interventions they had received, it is difficult to comment with any authority on the relative strengths and weaknesses of each approach in terms of preventing dealing behaviour however, it is clear there does not appear to be any programmes or interventions that are targeted specifically at dealers.

**At present there appears to be no specific programme either in prison or in the community that addresses dealing behaviours with a view to rehabilitation. There is a need to review and evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of current rehabilitation schemes that are undertaken by those convicted of dealing offences with a view to improving their applicability and success.**

Offenders were asked to offer comment on what they believed would prevent people first getting involved in dealing and supplying drugs. Some felt that nothing would prevent people getting involved in dealing/ supply. For those who were able to identify options, these tended to focus on a number of core themes, these were as follows:

Better job opportunities and prospects: for several interviewees the route to prevention lay in the provision of greater opportunities for education, training and employment to provide legitimate alternatives to dealing.

Regeneration of deprived communities: similarly, for some their dealing behaviour and drug use was simply a symptom of a wider problem – that of a neighbourhood in severe decline that failed its community. For these interviewees solutions to dealing were part of a wider package of neighbourhood renewal and regeneration.

Focus attention on tackling supply: as seen earlier, several offenders were critical of efforts to address the supply of drugs into the UK.

Treatment for drug users: the other key factor raised was the need for improved services around treatment.

Education: for several interviewees the key to long term prevention lay in education for children and young people. There was a strong sense in peoples' responses that education programmes needed to be realistic for young people.

There was strong criticism from many about the use of prison for offenders with a drug habit. It was felt that prison provided an environment where drugs were available, as were other dealers and users who could provide guidance and information on improving skills and techniques.

Although most offenders were very negative towards prison, some felt that it had had a positive impact on their lives, for example through addressing their drug addiction and giving them a respite from the chaotic life of a drug user/ dealer.

**What is worthy of note here is that these core themes could readily be reordered under the heading of the updated National Drugs Strategy, these findings place strong emphasis on preventing and stopping problematic drug use and reducing the harms from drug misuse through its four primary aims. As such it is reassuring to know that the aims of the NDS and related programmes such as DIP and PPO schemes are addressing the issues that are identified by those currently engaged in dealing and user dealing.**



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