



Ministerial Meeting of the Sectoral Group on the Misuse of Substances

Life Sciences Hub Wales, Cardiff

21 September 2017

Communiqué

The Welsh Government today hosted the 10th Ministerial meeting of the British-Irish Council on the Misuse of Substances in the Life Sciences Hub, Cardiff. The meeting was chaired by Catherine Byrne TD, Minister of State for Health Promotion and the National Drugs Strategy in the Irish Government. A full list of delegation members is attached.

Ministers received a report entitled “Drugs Strategies and Policy Developments”, which focused on key developments in the drugs strategies of Member Administrations in the past three years. They welcomed the public health focus of the drug strategies, which acknowledges the importance of reducing demand as an effective response to tackling the misuse of drugs, while maintaining efforts to restrict the supply of drugs.

Delegates were updated on the emerging challenges faced by Member Administrations in responding to substance misuse, including rising rates of drug-related deaths, an ageing population of drug users, and the ever present threat of new psychoactive substances (NPS).

Ministers acknowledged the positive impact of recent legislative initiatives by Member Administrations to reduce access to NPS through head shop outlets, but agreed on the need

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for continued cooperation between law enforcement agencies to monitor online markets, such as the darknet which can facilitate the trafficking of these harmful substances into these jurisdictions. Ministers highlighted the benefits of the British-Irish Council as a mechanism for collaboration in this area and agreed on the importance of keeping NPS under continuous review by making this issue a standing item on the agenda of future meetings of the work sector.

Other harmful patterns of substance misuse discussed at the meeting included the increasing use of image and performance enhancing drugs (IPEDs), and the inappropriate use of prescription medicines, which is contributing to rising rates of drug-related deaths. Ministers highlighted the need for targeted harm-reduction education and prevention measures tailored towards groups engaged in harmful patterns of drug use.

Ministers also had the opportunity to discuss interventions used by Member Administrations to reduce the harmful consequences of drug misuse and support recovery. They recommended that the future work programme should include discussion among relevant members on the role medically supervised drug consumption centres could play in reducing harm among hard-to-reach drug users. They also agreed that there was potential for co-ordinated research activity across the Council's administrations focusing on areas of mutual interest, including harm reduction, drug-related deaths, recovery and the development of health-led person-centred services.

Ministers concluded that the Work Programme for 2017-18 should focus on interventions to reduce harm and support recovery, changing policy directions, legislative developments, and emerging trends and patterns of drug use. They also considered there would be a benefit in focusing on performance and outcome measurement in order to assess the impact of drugs policies and interventions on health and social outcomes for service users.

Acknowledging the value of the informal links that have built up between Member Administrations, the Ministers looked forward to continued collaboration in order to exchange information and monitor the effectiveness of interventions in the Misuse of Substances Work Sector.

It was agreed that Ministers would meet again in the latter part of 2019.

British-Irish Council - Misuse of Substances

21st September 2017

Note to Editors

The British-Irish Council was established under the Strand Three Provisions of the 1998 Multi-Party Agreement as a forum for its members to exchange information, discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of relevant Member Administrations. The Irish Government is the lead administration within the Council on the issue of Misuse of Substances.

List of Delegates

Irish Government	
Minister of State for Health Promotion and the National Drugs Strategy	Ms Catherine Byrne T.D.
UK Government	
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability	Sarah Newton MP
Scottish Government	
Minister for Public Health and Sport	Aileen Campbell MSP
Welsh Government	
Minister for Social Services and Public Health	Rebecca Evans AM
Government of Jersey	
Minister of Health and Social Services	Senator Andrew Green MBE
Government of Guernsey	
President: Committee for Health & Social Care	Deputy Heidi Soulsby
Government of Isle of Man	
Minister for Department of Health and Social Care	Kate Beecroft MHK