

NCIS on trafficking

The National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) reports that an estimated 70 tonnes of heroin and cocaine and more than 100m ecstasy tablets, with a total street value of £6bn, were brought into the UK last year by organised gangs.

NCIS warned that the figures probably 'understated the threat' from drug traffickers, and said the number of seizures by police and customs accounted for a fraction of the growing market. Only two tonnes of heroin and three tonnes of cocaine were seized by police.

The report, *The United Kingdom threat assessment of serious and organised crime 2001*, states: 'The amounts of drugs seized, compared to the amounts trafficked, suggest the risks for those involved are low ... there is every likelihood that more [organised crime] groups will join in this activity, and that organised crime's sphere of influence and overall impact will grow as a result.'

The survey notes that 'UK prices of certain drugs have dropped substantially' and that the average wholesale price of a kilo of heroin reached 'an all-time low'.

NCIS estimated that up to 30 tonnes of heroin and 40 tonnes of cocaine were smuggled into the UK last year.

John Abbott, the director general of NCIS, denied the war against the traffickers was lost. 'We are certainly having a huge difficulty getting on top of it, but we are having some success. Law enforcement is not going to be able to do that alone.'

The report is at the NCIS website www.ncis.co.uk/threat_assessment.html

Portugal moves on law reform

The new Portuguese drugs law, which came into effect on 1 July, removes the threat of prison for possession of small amounts of any drug.

Critics say that it opens Portugal to drug tourism – addicts or casual visiting to use drugs without risking imprisonment.

But drugs remain illegal in Portugal, their use is punishable by fines or community service – just not prison. Being caught with even one joint could send you to the anti-addiction commission.

'We're trying a sort of third way between the hard approach you have in the United States and the soft approach some countries have, like Holland,' said Vitalino Canas, Portugal's drug policy czar. 'We are not allowing any legal use of drugs. It's not the same as in Holland.'

The new law presumes that possession of up to 10 'daily' doses is for personal use, which is not punishable by imprisonment. But holding more is evidence of dealing, which still carries the threat of jail.

The amounts defined for a 'daily dose' are less than what heavy users may consume, so an addict with more than a few days' supply may still risk prison.

The law requires that anyone caught with even a minimal quantity of drugs appear before one of the country's 18 'drug use dissuasion commissions' within 72 hours. These can impose fines or administrative punishments such as revocation of a driver's

license. Even if users are considered to be 'guilty' of drug use by these commissions this is not recorded in a criminal record.

Commissions also provide medical help and counselling about the dangers of drug use.

Punishment is usually suspended for first offenders of possession within the 10-dose limit. The law allows fines only for casual users, not addicts, because of concerns that addicts would steal to pay the fines.

Foreigners caught with drugs must also appear before the commissions. Vitalino Canas was clear that while it may prove difficult to enforce sanctions against foreign visitors, police in their own countries might be notified of action taken.

Canas said that so far, he is aware of only 'one or two cases' involving foreigners. 'We didn't notice any increase of people coming to Portugal to use drugs,' he said.

Drug trafficking remains punishable by up to 25 years' imprisonment. The sale of even a single dose of a drug to a friend is considered dealing, according to Vitalino Canas.

'We think most people who try ecstasy or hashish will not try other drugs, but some will, so the system should not leave these people alone. The commission should warn them and threaten them with sanctions,' he said.

'We think the drug users are not the criminals but are the victims of a crime, and should be helped like other victims of crimes.'

Oscar Janiger 1918 - 2001



Oscar Janiger, psychiatrist and pioneering advocate of the use of psychedelic drugs, has died at the age of 83 of kidney and heart failure at Little Company of Mary Hospital in Torrance, California.

Between 1954 and 1962 'Oz', as he was known to friends, administered almost 3,000 doses of LSD to 1,000 volunteers, among whom were actors Cary Grant, Jack Nicholson and Rita Moreno, author Aldous Huxley and musician Andre Previn.

The drug was legal at that time. Oscar Janiger's work predated that of

LSD guru Timothy Leary, but he never gained widespread recognition for it.

Oscar Janiger was interested in LSD's link to creativity and what he called the ability to access a state of crazy consciousness without losing control of one's surroundings.

He once said: 'It really took me out of a state in which I saw the boundaries of myself and the world around me very rigorously prescribed, to a state in which I saw that many, many things were possible.'

He abandoned his LSD studies in 1962 after the US government began investigating researchers.