

Oswin Baker

# Czar czar galore

**They've effectively been in post for three months and even the most hardened cynics have their wishlists for them to tackle. But what exactly does it mean to be the UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator or his deputy? What do Keith Hellowell and Mike Trace think they can do? For our first issue of the New Year, Druglink took the exclusive and unique opportunity to question the men charged with cajoling us into 'tackling drugs together' - again**



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**W**hether you agreed with it or not, Tony Blair's election promise that he would create a British version of the American 'Drug Czar' was seen as a significant step along (if not 'off') the policy road. But after the initial excitement, people began to ask what this new person was actually meant to do. With a government minister specifically charged with coordinating drug policy, with the Central Drugs Coordination Unit (CDCU) already in place and with a universally supported national strategy into its third year, what was the point of introducing yet another tier of bureaucracy? Unless, of course, the Drug Czar was going to come fully-equipped, emblazoned all over with *Made in America*.

"With the best will in the world, George Howarth in the Home Office will concentrate on Home Office issues, and Ann Taylor does not have the time to go and see things in the way that we can", says Keith Hellowell. "And neither has the lifetime experience steeped in the field as we have."

#### **Making friends . . .**

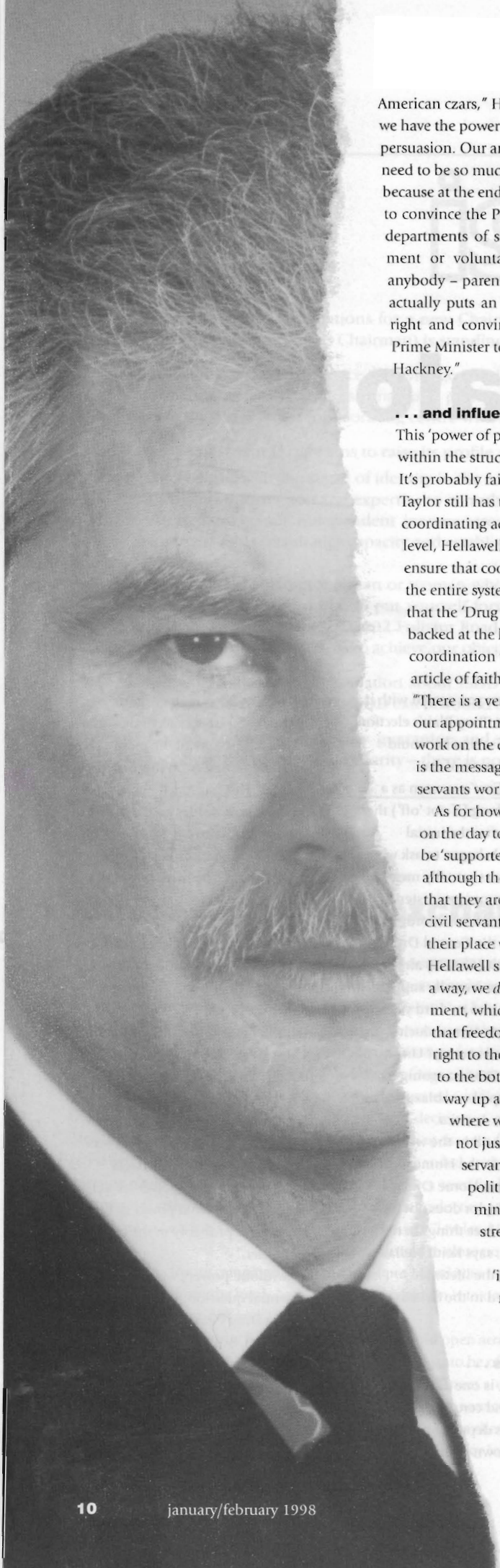
Experience, then, is one of the fundamentals, and certainly Keith Hellowell and his deputy, Mike Trace, are both well-known figures in the UK

drug field. And the use of 'experts' - rather than of four-star generals - may provide a clue to one of the main points of departure from the 'American model'. This approach, which has granted the post holder with their own staff, agency and budget, has nevertheless gone through four czars in less than eight years. The first czar, William Bennett resigned after only a year, citing frustration with a 'lack of power'. The current czar, General Barry McCaffrey, has likened the process of gaining coordination to "herding ducks with a broom".

Hellowell recognises the shortcomings of such a position. "If anybody approaches anything with a view to power, then to my mind that's the wrong approach. And I'm saying that having been Chief Constable of two forces for eight years with what is perceived to be a lot of power - but I don't really know what power is. I think power is probably in the eye of the beholder."

But without 'power', we return to the essential question: what's the point of a Drug Czar? In answering this question, both Hellowell and Trace paradoxically see their lack of visible power as the key to their real power.

"The fundamental difference between us and the



American czars," Hellowell says, "is that we have the power of influence and persuasion. Our arguments and advice need to be so much more convincing, because at the end of the day, we have to convince the Prime Minister, or the departments of state or local government or voluntary organisations or anybody – parents, teachers. And so it actually puts an onus on us to get it right and convince people from the Prime Minister to the case worker in Hackney."

#### ... and influencing people

This 'power of persuasion' may work within the structures of government too. It's probably fair to say that while Ann Taylor still has the responsibility for coordinating action at the ministerial level, Hellowell and Trace's job is to ensure that coordination runs through the entire system. Civil servants know that the 'Drug Czar Project' is heavily backed at the highest level and that coordination within Whitehall is 'an article of faith'. As Mike Trace puts it, "There is a very explicit commitment in our appointments to interdepartmental work on the drug issue and that really is the message that affects how civil servants work."

As for how they will actually work on the day to day level, both men will be 'supported' by the CDCU, although they take pains to point out that they are neither ministers nor civil servants. Admitting that finding their place will be a tricky business, Hellowell still views it positively. "In a way, we *don't* fit in with government, which is unique and we have that freedom and ability to go literally right to the top and also literally right to the bottom and influence all the way up and down. Our vision of where we'd like the strategy to be is not just coloured by ministers or civil servants supporting them – or political advisers supporting the ministers – but by people out on the streets."

Maintaining this position of being 'in this world, but not of this world' makes Hellowell and Trace the ideal bridge between politicians and the civil service. "We're semi-detached from the CDCU, and we're not located in any of the spending departments," Mike Trace confirms. That said, he continues, "There is nothing

in the operation of our jobs that has constrained us. The impression I get from the last few weeks is that there's a mood in the civil service, in the departments and amongst the politicians that they want to receive the best advice – and that makes it very worthwhile to come into a job like this."



#### Pounds, shillings and pence

This mood in government for advice is intrinsically linked to the comprehen-

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sive spending review, already underway. Mike Trace outlines his and Hellowell's role in the review. "There are two phases to the review. The first one is to find out what are we spending and what are the mechanisms by which that money is spent, and to tease out some view of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness against objectives. Phase two is to start considering and making suggestions for moving around resources, and it's when we're getting to that stage that our creative involvement will be particularly needed."

But Hellowell is adamant on one point, a point that has already sent ripples through the field – "What I'm determined we won't do is have an open bidding battle of 'we keep what we've got' or 'we need more of that'. That's why I think the strategy is so crucial to this – that we don't have these crude 'one per cent goes from here to there' arguments. Once we have a vision of tomorrow and we know how effective our spending is today, we will be able to see the way forward in an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary way." Essentially, this 'vision' integrates the concept of 'coordination' into the whole process of structural reform – if the people are coordinated, so too is the money: "Rather than saying we want to put one per cent more into treatment so

we'll take one per cent from the police, agencies could achieve that shift in a more evolutionary way." If we all work together, the argument seems to go, we don't need our own pots of money.

### Strategic development

This attitude of cautious reform springs from the enormity of the immediate task facing both Hellawell and Trace – the re-writing of *Tackling Drugs Together*. "People will be invited to directly make their comments on what they think the new strategy should contain, and that process has already started. Everything from day one is consultation-driven," assures Mike Trace. "There's no clear picture on a new set of objectives – that's the stage we are in now. The thing we have agreed is that the strategy will be objective-driven: we want to get to the position where all government action, all local action, is explicitly working towards the national objectives."

Nothing new there then. Nothing new also in the fact that, for now at least, 'national' means England. "That document is talking about England," Trace explains. "Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have complementary but distinct strategies, and the process of renewing those strategies is on a different timescale. When the

with the real power to make a difference are the people who are actually out there working, and therefore for me, if their job is made easier, if they can see that there's clarity in what they are doing and in what they are contributing to, and if they can feel that their work is being recognised by others, then for me that would be the criteria for success." Taking it one step further, he readily admits that "as an individual, I'd be very happy if nobody ever knew that I'd been and done this job, if there was a real improvement out there on the streets. Success in a way is to build in your own obsolescence."


### On the streets and in the field

Hellawell defines this 'real improvement on the streets' as "to mobilise the dynamism and real desire to contribute to society – and this is not only the people who are paid to do it or who devote their lives to it, but parents and 'normal' people who want to do something." As for the drug field, "it's to pull together what is the best in the field as of today, not to put some limits on it and say 'that's it', but to say that these sort of measures have the greatest success in these circumstances, so people can actually have some check on what's best. I think if we can only do that, we'll have a quantum leap forward compared to what we've got today."

Their lack of an American-style 'cabinet collective responsibility' may also provide Hellawell and Trace with a fresh(er) perspective when touring the country. "We've the freedom – the privilege in a way – to look across what is being done and what has been done, and bring all that together," Hellawell told us. "One of the things I've picked up from my visits to the regions is that people are doing their best within fairly narrow confines – they perhaps have an idea of what is being done in needle exchanges, or what is being done in arrest referral schemes, but no one has that overall view. And I think we've got a tremendous opportunity to look at that."

All well and good in theory, but what has the reaction been when they've been out and about?

"They've been very polite so far!" he continues. "They want us to be honest about the situation. To a person, they're anxious to know that their



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new English one is out, how that actually effects the review of the other ones will be determined at that point." As for the much-touted international aspect, "it will be in there somewhere."

What both men see as perhaps the most important aspect of TDT MkII is, however, closer to home. "We are to some extent a bridge between the civil service, committees and the ministers," Trace accepts, "but we're also a bridge to the field, and we want to get out as much as possible and provide that line of communication."

This is central to Hellawell's conception of his role. "The people

