

Peter Nash
Drug Strategy Manager,
Merton DAAT,
c/o Housing and Social Services,
London Borough of Merton,
2nd floor, Merton Civic Centre,
London Road,
Morden, Surrey, SM4 5DX
Tel. No. 020 8545 3439
Fax 020 8545 4185
e-mail peter.nash@merton.gov.uk

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Dear Colleague,

NATIONAL ALCOHOL HARM REDUCTION STRATEGY: CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above document which was discussed at the meeting of the Merton Drug & Alcohol Action Team on 10th December 2002. Set out below are the concerns raised at that meeting and in subsequent discussions.

1. While the DAAT welcomes the opportunity to comment, the continuing delay in implementation of this strategy means that the harms related to the misuse of alcohol continue to go unaddressed. This is a cause for concern in its own rights. But, it also means that the delivery of the National Drugs Strategy is hindered. The USA and Australian evidence base on Education and prevention shows that such activities work best when they run across substances and particularly alcohol, illegal drugs and tobacco. In the UK, the absence of an implemented and funded national alcohol harm reduction strategy could mean that projects like BLUEPRINT will fail. At the street and community level the lack of a national strategy to tackle the misuse of alcohol means that it can be more difficult to challenge a young person's use of cannabis when society and Government are not challenging that young person's or an adults misuse of alcohol.
2. The current draft strategy appears to have been written from a very Euro-centric point of view e.g. "drinking plays a mostly enjoyable part in our culture". This is not the case for Muslims, Buddhists, members of the Salvation Army and a number of other Faith and cultural groups. In the major urban centers of this country, the apparent tone of the draft consultation document, if implemented, could result in additional risks to community cohesion.

SU/DoH Consultation,
Room 4.6
Admiralty Arch
The Mall
London
SW1 2WH
SENT BY e-mail to: su-dohconsultation@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

3. Unlike illegal drug use/misuse at the moment, alcohol misuse is something that very much tends to affect both people in their 40s and 50s and Older People. In Public Health terms it is essential that any future, implemented, national harm reduction strategy has a strong focus on people in Middle Age and Older People and is not dominated by a focus on young people who binge drink. Although that will clearly need to be one element to the strategy.
4. The draft document does not consider how it will link with the proposed new licensing arrangements, the new roles for local authorities and the police. It is to be hoped that this joining up will not result in further delaying the implementation and funding of a national strategy to tackle the harms caused by the misuse of alcohol.

If you would like to discuss any of these issues further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Nash
Drug Strategy Manager

c.c. Kieran Lynch Drugs Adviser GOL