

the video still resonated with the audience. Viewers felt an authentic, human connection with the Royal Family, and the Prince and Princess retained control of a deeply personal message. It was a masterclass in controlling the narrative whilst remaining vulnerable, delivering a clear message and demonstrating what Kensington Palace offers modern society.

5. It helps with recruitment.

When I was applying for pupillage, I spent hours researching different chambers. Once I'd shortlisted the sets I was interested in, I spent hours more repeatedly reading individual barristers' profiles. I studied where they had gone to university, what scholarships they'd been awarded and, importantly, what their interests and hobbies were. What was I looking for?

Variety.

I have nothing against countryside pursuits, opera and Italian cooking. But those aren't my interests. So, I decided to apply to chambers where members talked openly about raising a family or pursuing different interests outside court.

Now, rather than being confined to two sentences (with a light joke and an exclamation mark!) at the bottom of a profile page or a dynamic conversation during a mini-pupillage, social media profiles offer students the opportunity to learn a huge amount about their prospective colleagues.

Individuals can showcase their achievements, post photos, and share links to blog posts and articles. Not only that, but candidates can see other



barristers and solicitors engaging with those posts. From that, they can ascertain where work likely comes from, who their instructing solicitors are likely to be, and what their own future career might look like. Perhaps even more importantly, candidates can see their achievements being celebrated by the legal community.

Students can also filter their searches by topic (and authors can invite engagement) using hashtags and group membership. Those might be as important as #womeninlaw or #socialmobility, or as simple and effective as #legalbakeoff or #barristercats. I'm not sure if that last one is real, but you get the idea...

6. Reach

The potential reach of each social media post is unfathomable. Picture Wembley Stadium and its 90,000-seat capacity. How much value would you place on being able to speak to an

audience of that size about a topic of your choosing at a time of day that suits you? A single social media post can reach an audience that size (or greater) without its author leaving the house or spending a single penny on marketing.

It isn't just the size of the audience that is important, but the individuals within it. Who are your next instructing solicitors and lay clients? Where will Gen Z find their divorce lawyer? Or surrogacy expert? Or personal injury solicitor?

7. Opportunities.

Careers are often built on the connections between humans. Those connections can exist online too. And they can result in speaking opportunities, networking events and briefs.

How did this article come to be? A direct invitation on LinkedIn. And what an honour it is.

Please do feel free to connect. Online, in real life, or both.

Anna Yarde, Barrister, Harcourt Chambers

'It is an offence for a juror to research a case during the trial, which includes seeking information about the judge or any person (including a lawyer) involved in the case: see s.20A Juries Act 1974.



Let's talk about drugs

Thinking upon my reflections of 2024, what a year it was; a former criminal barrister and head of the DPP now running the show in the UK, Donald J Trump back in the Whitehouse, being brought to the brink of WW3 and of course our crumbling criminal justice system.

By **Mark Robinson, Barrister**, Garden Court Chambers

In May of 2024 Rishi Sunak's Conservative government launched Operation Early Dawn, followed by Labour's early release scheme. Both schemes highlighted just how bad things had gotten within the male prison population in England & Wales, full to the brim and lest we forget as of May 2024 according to the National Audit Office there were 67,573 cases waiting to be tried in the Crown Court and as of December 2023 and according to the Law Society as of November 2023¹ there were 370,090 case waiting

to be heard in the Magistrates Courts.²

Releasing inmates early may ease up some of the overcrowding issues in prisons but it seems to me at least, the Elephant in the Room is something that Sir Kier and co will need to "grow a pair to do", in addition to stop pandering to the right wing press, the court of public opinion in the Daily Mail and perhaps do something that is glaringly obvious and stop sending so many people to prison in the first place.

It's way past time that we have a grown up conversation about our antiquated drugs policies in the UK, whilst the rest of the Western hemisphere finally "gets it", including many states in the USA, especially NYC that I visited in the summer of 2023, where there are now cannabis outlets on every corner, the same place, where you'd be taken down to Central Booking a few years earlier has now legalised cannabis, into a multi-billion dollar business and generated much needed revenue by way of taxes and dispensary licences, and guess what, the sky hasn't fallen in.

However, my humble article (and humble opinion for that matter) isn't about legalising the Ganja; it's about serious reform to our half a century old drugs laws that maybe, just maybe would go some way into reducing the court backlog and overcrowded prisons, so I am going to say something really controversial now; it's time to remove custody as a punishment for simple possession offences.

Now I've got the controversial bit out of the way, let's take a look at the sentencing guidelines. For possession of Class A (cocaine and heroin) on indictment the starting point is a Band C fine with a maximum penalty of 51 weeks custody, the starting point for Class B (cannabis) is a Band B fine with the maximum penalty 26 weeks custody, and the starting point for Class C (anabolic steroids) is a Band A fine with a maximum penalty of a medium level community order. Possession of a controlled drug is an either way offence with the maximum penalty in the Magistrates 26 weeks custody, although as of 18 November they can now bang you up for 12 months.³ A discharge is also an available disposal for both Class B and Class C on indictment.

Now, I'm certainly not condoning the use of drugs but the reality is if you're going to do a line of the ol' snortski on a Friday night, pop some pills in your favourite tech-house festival or smoke the reefa in the privacy of your own home, no matter what laws the government impose there will be little to prevent or deter you from consuming your chosen high. If you are arrested and charged for "simple possession" in the eyes of the law, you are a drug user, and it may be that you need some sort of help with addiction.

If doing the same thing over again and again, without anything changing is an act of lunacy, surely, we are at the point where we can all agree that our laws for possession are simply not working. If you are a drug addict you probably need help and if you take recreational drugs and have the money to do so, a hefty fine, for possession of Class A may be more appropriate. I'm not for a second suggesting loosening the laws against those that are dealing drugs, but possession is exactly what it says on the tin, and we are achieving nothing by putting these people through the criminal justice system and potentially prison.

Bringing people before the courts for possession is a complete waste of time, and regardless of quantity that is recovered, if the prosecution accept that the drugs are for personal use or some other valid reason, they have concluded that you are not involved in the supply of drugs so prison should be completely off the table at that point.

My proposal would be Operation New Dawn (pun intended) with the following:

- 1) Immediate scrapping of all custodial sentences for simple possession offences.

2) Police to have powers to fine and take payment from people in the custody suite for possession.

3) Police to have powers to divert addicts to treatment centres as an alternative to fines.

4) All simple possession offences are summary only.

5) Community penalties only used for repeat offenders.

6) Super fines for Class A 'powder cocaine' users with the rationale being that a certain demographic of society uses powder cocaine and so much in the same way the latest Labour administration added VAT on those attending fee paying schools, a super fine could be slapped on cocaine users and this would be used to fund state of the art treatment/rehabilitation centres for those addicted to non-recreational drugs such as crack cocaine, heroin and other amphetamines.

Home Office Official Statistics in England and Wales 2023 to 2024 reveals that the majority of drug possession offences recorded in the year ending March 2024 related to cannabis with 90,405 compared to around 35,517 offences of all other drug types. Cannabis possession had a much lower charge/summons rate (16%) than for other drug offences (31%). This reflects the fact that possessions of small amounts of cannabis for personal use will often be dealt with through a Cannabis Warning or a Community Resolution, but the suspect must admit guilt for such outcomes to be applied.⁴

Whilst no data is available for those arrested for powder cocaine, if we take a guestimate of 20,000 and apply a £500 super fine that still equates to £10 million that could be used to fund treatment centres. A further proposal could be a modest surcharge of £10/£20 for those who receive a cannabis warning or a community resolution and this could be used for additional funding for treatment and rehabilitation centres.

Whilst nothing I have suggested is rocket science, we simply cannot continue as we are, the backlog in the courts is not reducing and our adult population of those consuming illicit substances is not reducing. According to the Office of National Statistics In the year ending March 2023, an estimated 9.5% of people aged 16 to 59 years (approximately 3.1 million people) reported using a drug in the last 12 months; 7.6% reported using cannabis (around 2.5 million people) and 3.3% reported using a Class A drug (around 1.1 million people)⁵.

In a recent possession with intent to supply Class A case that I was involved in, the judge questioned why my client was charged with the offence, having only been found with 6 wraps of cocaine, and no other supporting evidence. My client had wisely chosen to elect a Crown Court trial, and this led to the judge being slightly more persuasive than I could be with prosecution counsel, who after a very quick call

to the CPS reviewing lawyer, decided to accept a guilty plea to simple possession and the judge imposing a £100 fine. One detects a sense of apathy coming from the judiciary with these types of cases.

What I have proposed is not radical by any means and for the record I am in favour of the legalisation of cannabis and other recreational substances but what I have set out is perhaps baby steps where it is hoped would incur the least resistance and be viewed as nothing more than common sense. But indulge me for a second if you will, imagine a criminal justice system in England & Wales, where all drugs are controlled by the state, where there are state of the art drug rehabilitation centres in every city in the country, mental health from neurodiverse to severe psychiatric conditions are taken seriously, all treatment centres and SEN in schools are properly funded and then think of how many people would actually be in the prison population. A former practising barrister once said, "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime", I totally agree with the latter part of his statement...

Mark Robinson, Barrister, Garden Court Chambers

¹<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/reducing-the-backlog-in-the-crown-court-summary.pdf>

²<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/contact-or-visit-us/press-office/press-releases/scant-progress-in-tackling-huge-court-backlogs>

³<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2024/1067/regulation/1/made>

⁴<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2023-to-2024/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2023-to-2024#section1-3>

⁵<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/drugmisuseinenglandand-wales/yearendingmarch2023>

