

# INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF DRUG LAWS

## The allegation

According to Liberal Democrats, Conservative members of the coalition government delayed the publication of a Home Office review of drug laws in thirteen countries.<sup>24</sup>

## Timeline

- Dec 2010 Coalition government published its drug strategy, including a commitment to “review new evidence on what works in other countries and what we can learn from it.”<sup>25</sup>
- Mar 2013 - summer 2014 Home secretary Theresa May ordered an international study of drugs laws in March 2013.<sup>26</sup> In May 2013, ministers began a review of drug laws in thirteen countries, including Portugal, Denmark and various states in the USA that have decriminalised possession of some drugs.<sup>27</sup>
- Oct 2014 Home Office minister Norman Baker accused the government of “suppressing” the report, claiming it had been ready for publication since July.<sup>28</sup>
- Oct 2014 Home Office published its review, concluding there is no clear correlation between the severity of punishment under drug laws and the prevalence of drug use.<sup>29</sup>
- Nov 2014 Norman Baker resigns as Home Office minister.<sup>30</sup>

## How were government policy and public debate affected?

The government made a commitment to reviewing drug laws in other countries, and appears to have delayed the publication of that review because the findings were politically challenging for the dominant coalition partner. It is unlikely that timely publication would have prompted a change in legislation or even a more formal review of UK drugs policy (both had already been ruled out by the Conservatives). However, it would have allowed fuller public scrutiny of the home secretary’s claims that the UK’s approach to drug regulation is working, and a better-informed public debate on how the UK can learn from the way drugs are regulated elsewhere.

<sup>24</sup> Wintour, P and Travis, A (2014)

<sup>25</sup> HM Government (2010)

<sup>26</sup> Travis, A (2013a)

<sup>27</sup> Travis, A (2013b)

<sup>28</sup> Morris, N (2014)

<sup>29</sup> Home Office (2014)

<sup>30</sup> Watt, N (2014)