

Neil: Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. In this programme we talk about a story in the news and learn some new vocabulary while we're doing it. I'm Neil and joining me today is Jen. Hi there, Jen.

Jen: Hello Neil.

Neil: Now, we have a very controversial topic this week – drugs.

Jen: Yes, that's a subject which usually provokes some strong opinions.

Neil: A new report published in the UK is suggesting that by taking away the criminal penalties for some illegal drug use, you can reduce the number of people who get sent to court for drug crime every year.

Jen: This sounds like an introduction to our quiz question...

Neil: Yes you're right! I want to know how many people get sent to court in the UK every year for drug-related offences. Is it:

- a) 4,200
- b) 42,000
- c) 420,000

Jen: Well I think it might be quite high. I'll go with c) 420,000.

Neil: OK then, we will find out at the end of the programme. Now Jen, what do you think is more harmful: illegal drugs or junk food?

Jen: My reaction would be to say illegal drugs. Am I right?

Neil: Let's listen to the first part of this report from the BBC's John McManus. What does the study from the UK Drug Policy Commission say about drug use and social problems?

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Monday's report from the UK Drug Policy Commission says the way to reduce this number is to make some offences less serious. It says that drug use doesn't always lead to social problems, and that taking illegal substances can sometimes be tolerated by society, in the same way that gambling and eating junk food are.

- Neil:** The report says that drug use doesn't always lead to social problems and that taking illegal substances can sometimes be **tolerated** – meaning accepted – by society.
- Jen:** The report compares taking drugs to other **vices**, such as **gambling** and eating junk food. Can you explain what a 'vice' is?
- Neil:** Yes, a vice is a bad habit or type of behaviour: things such as smoking, drinking too much alcohol, swearing... gambling or betting. Oh and taking drugs, of course.
- Jen:** So, the argument is that a limited amount of drug taking is **on a par with** other bad habits which are not usually considered as dangerous as drug taking.
- Neil:** Yes, that's right. Now, what are the **implications** of this report? Implications are the conclusions you can draw from something, such as a piece of research like this.
- Jen:** The implications of this report are that a lot of money could be saved if we didn't send so many people to court for small-scale drug use. Do you know how much the UK spends on tackling drugs every year?
- Neil:** Hang on here, Jen, I'm the quiz master!
- Jen:** Go on, have a guess! Millions or billions?
- Neil:** OK, I'll go high like you did - billions?
- Jen:** Yes, billions of dollars is spent. Here's the UK Drug Policy Commission's Chief Executive, Roger Howard. What does he think the UK should do to save money and send fewer people to court?

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We do say that if you look at other countries like the Czech Republic, if you look at Switzerland, if you look at Portugal and if you look in places in South America, these... a number of countries have taken away the criminal penalties for the possession of small amounts of drugs. Now we think that can be tried in this country, and to keep within the international conventions you can replace that with civil penalties.

- Neil:** He thinks that criminal penalties for the possession of small amounts of drugs should be removed.
- Jen:** He says it's worked in the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Portugal and South America and that it should be tried in the UK.
- Neil:** But in order to keep within international **conventions** – meaning agreements - **civil** penalties should be introduced.
- Jen:** But does everybody agree?

Neil: Good question! Listen to the last part of this report from the BBC's John McManus.

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The report, which recommends replacing jail sentences with fines or drug treatment orders, says that much official government policy towards drug users has been formulated without any real evidence as to whether it works. The authorities though, say that their approach has led to drug use dropping to its lowest levels since records began.

Neil: No, not everybody agrees. The report recommends replacing jail sentences with fines or drug treatment orders. It also says that there's no real evidence that current drug policy has worked.

Jen: But the authorities disagree. They say their approach has led to drug use dropping to its lowest level since records began.

Neil: No doubt the debate about how to reduce drug use will carry on for a long time. We'd be interested in hearing your opinion. Why not check out our Facebook page and leave a comment?

Jen: Before we go, Neil, aren't you going give the answer to the quiz?

Neil: Oh yes, of course. I asked how many people get sent to court in the UK every year from drug-related offences. Is it:

- a) 4,200
- b) 42,000
- c) 420,000

Jen: I thought it was quite high: I said c) 420,000.

Neil: Well, you must have a very low opinion of the British population. It is high but it's not that high. The answer is b) 42,000. Just time now for a recap of some of the words we heard in today's programme:

Jen: tolerated, vices, gambling, on a par with, implications, conventions, civil.

Neil: Join us again soon for more 6 Minute English from bbclearningenglish.com.

Vocabulary and definitions

tolerated	accepted
vices	bad or unhealthy habits and behaviour
gambling	betting money
on a par with	equal to
implications	conclusions you can draw from something
conventions	agreements
civil	relating to punishment within society rather than prison

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