‘Legal highs’ Campaign Briefing

Developments in legislation for so-called ‘legal highs’

Update to Social Policy Briefing “The Ins and Outs of Legal Highs” and briefing to accompany Crazy Chemist campaign materials

September 2010
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legislative developments</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislation changes prior to 2010</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- GBL (gamma-butyrolactone), BZP (Benzylpiperazone), and Synthetic</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cannabinoids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mephedrone and related derivatives</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naphyrone</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline of legislative developments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current drugs advertised as legal alternatives</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The making of legal highs</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing drugs</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionable legality of substances</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How drug producers get round the law</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health risks (specifically)</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported risks and short- and long-term effects</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What the government is doing?</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campaigning on legal highs</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What students’ unions can do</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media tools</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some examples of students’ union campaigns</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of materials/resources sent to students’ unions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>References</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please direct any queries or feedback concerning this briefing, the content therein or campaign action planned to Mark McCormack at mark.mccormack@nus.org.uk.
What are legal highs?

Introduction

Some of the content in this briefing repeats content in the previous Social Policy Briefing on ‘Legal Highs’.

The term “Legal highs” has come-about to describe legal recreational drugs which mimic the effects of illegal drugs. As such ‘legal highs’ have become increasingly popular as a seemingly safer alternative to illegal methods of getting “high”.

In this briefing we aim to update the student movement on changes to legislation concerning previously legal substances, heighten the awareness in the student movement on risks to new drugs available, and suggest campaign-work to raise awareness amongst students.

Although advertised as ‘legal’ (and hence imply being ‘safe’), since new legislation many of the supposedly-legal ‘highs’ have shown to contain illegal substances once tested. Furthermore, not all students may be aware that drugs laws have changed or comprehend the reasons behind the government acting so quickly to illegalise substances; that so-called legal highs may cause damage to health.

The rising popularity of legal highs will undoubtedly have made its way into the lives of many students in the UK. It is reasonable to suggest that a large number of students may lead hedonistic lifestyles where experimenting with drugs is part of their university experience.

1 “To get high” in this sense means to administer drugs and become intoxicated.
2 ‘Highs’ refer to substances used ‘to get high’ (see above footnote)
It’s important for all students to know the facts about drugs so they can make their own decisions. If students choose to take any drugs they should be aware of the legal status of substances and the implications of using such substances: health risks, positive and negative effects, and the impacts if they are caught breaking the law.
What recent “legal” drugs have been made illegal?

Summary

- GBL
- BZP
- Synthetic cannabinoids
- Mephedrone and related derivatives
- Naphyrone

Legislation change prior to 2010

‘Legal highs’ were thrown into the media limelight in 2009 after a University of Sussex student died after ingesting Gamma-Butryolactone (GBL). After months of media attention, the then government prohibited the consumption, possession and distribution of a number of so-called ‘legal highs’, namely GBL, Benzylpiperazine (BZP) and synthetic cannabinoids under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. These drugs became illegal on 23rd December 2009.

GBL / Gamma-butyrolactone

GBL (gamma-butyrolactone) is closely related to the illegal drug gamma-hydroxybutrate (GHB); both are dangerous drugs with sedative and anaesthetic effects; GBL converts to GHB shortly after entering the body. GHB is otherwise known as the ‘date rape’ drug.
GBL is a liquid used in products like paint strippers and stain removers; it is colourless, oily, doesn’t smell very strong and tastes slightly salty. A teaspoon or a capful is a normal dose although the strength of GHB varies so it can be very difficult for people to know how much they’re taking.

The effects start within an hour and can last up to seven hours. It produces feelings of euphoria, reduces inhibitions and makes users feel sleepy. The drug has been known to cause nausea, reduced heart rate, drowsiness, coma, hypothermia, seizures, unconsciousness and death. Like GBH, it is particularly dangerous when used with depressants (eg alcohol) or sedatives.

GBL is now an illegal Class C drug under the 1971 Act with possession and supply limited where they are intended for human consumption. GHB is a Class C drug also; it’s illegal to have, give away or sell. It is also illegal to supply for human consumption under medicines legislation.

Possession can lead to two years in jail and/or an unlimited fine. Supplying someone else with GHB, even friends, can lead up to 14 years in jail and/or an unlimited fine.
The Sexual Offences Act 2003 states that it is an offence to administer a substance to a person with intent to overpower that person to enable sexual activity with them. Therefore, if GBL (and GHB) are linked to drug assisted sexual assault, it is punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment.

**BZP / Benzylpiperazine**

BZP is also known as Party Pills, Fast Lane, Silver Bullet, Smiley’s, Happy Pills and beans pep or pep love.

BZP pills are sometimes sold as "ecstasy" and may come as a tablet, capsule or an off-white powder.

The drug is a derivative of piperazine, which is used as an anti-helminthic drug as an anti-worming agent for farm animals, though BZP is not used in this way and is an anti-depressant. Users report effects as similar to, though less potent as, amphetamines.

Effects can last between 6 and 8 hours depending on the dose. BZP can cause decreased appetite and insomnia. The next day, some users may feel headachy and tired, though at present there are few reliable reports fully detailing possible adverse side effects.

BZP and related compounds (such as mCPP, TFMPP and others) are now illegal Class C drugs with possession and supply offences under the 1971 Act. Human consumption of BZP was
also included in medicines legislation by the UK Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency in March 2007.

**Synthetic cannabinoids**

There are a number of brand names, though the most common is Spice (and of which there a number of other types, eg Spice Egypt, Spice Diamond etc).

Synthetic Cannabinoids agonists (drugs which mimic actions of naturally occurring substances to provoke chemical reactions in the body) are herbal, cannabis-free mixes of tobacco and various "inert" plant ingredients, which have synthetic cannabinoids sprayed onto them. Synthetic cannabinoids mimic the psychoactive effects of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the chemical in cannabis which gets people ‘high’.

Due to the cannabis-like effect legislation was instigated as mixes of cannabinoids may pose a serious health risk. Though there is little direct evidence about their harms, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) conclude that it is very likely that these synthetic cannabinoids will produce harmful effects similar to those associated with THC. The ACMD also advise that the substances containing the synthetic cannabinoids have the potential to be more harmful than cannabis due to their method of manufacture and that the compounds present and their quantity (and hence potency) is unknown to the user.
Synthetic cannabinoids were made illegal under the 1971 Act as Class B drugs (same category and rationale as cannabis classification) with possession and supply offences under the 1971 Act. The 1971 Act has used a generic definition of synthetic cannabinoids to future-proof legislation and keep one step ahead of illicit manufacturers who will move to other “non-controlled” compounds to get around the law. It is also illegal to sell, supply, or advertise for human consumption under medicines legislation.

**Mephedrone and related derivatives**

Mephedrone is the most talked-about ‘new’ drug, which was **outlawed in April** this year along with other substituted cathinones. Mephedrone had been increasing in popularity since it appeared in 2007.

Substituted cathinones are a chemical class used in many legal highs which stimulate, or have psycho-effective effects, when ingested. Self-reported effects include the following:\(^3\):

- Feelings of empathy (openness, love, closeness, sociability, well-being)
- Stimulation / alertness / rushing
- Euphoria / mood lift / appreciation of music; and
- Awareness of senses

\(^3\) [ACMD report on the consideration of cathinones](#), March 2010; point 3.18, page 10
There are a number of drugs with similar effects and names to Mephedrone which are often branded under the same name, such as “Meow meow” or “MKAT”. Of these, the three substances illegalised with Mephedrone as relative derivatives (in particular) were Methedrone, Methylone and MDPV.

Methylone is also referred to as Arlone in the UK.

All drugs are similar to each in effects and chemical structure, and in turn, have similar structures to other drugs, most noticeably MDMA. Effects have been compared to cocaine and speed/ecstasy; they all share stimulant and psychoactive qualities.

Due to fractional differences in chemical make-up, the drugs do differ slightly in their effects, mainly in levels of stimulation, psycho-active qualities, and length and acceleration of high. For example, MDPV has been known to be much stronger (and last longer) in smaller doses, whereas Methedrone has been referred to as a ‘lighter’ version of MDMA.

Please note that Methadone is not a drug of the substituted cathinone variety; it is an anti-addictive pain-killer usually used to treat heroin addicts.
Naphyrone

The possession and supply of Naphyrone became illegal on 23\textsuperscript{rd} July 2010.

Naphyrone produces psycho-stimulant effects and has a close structural resemblance to cathinones such as Mephedrone and MDPV, however, remained “outside the generic definition in which a number of cathinones, including mephedrone and MDPV were controlled...on 16th April 2010.” The ACMD noted Naphyrone’s high potency as a main factor for illegalisation (to prevent overdose).

Once the ‘mephedrone batch’ of substituted cathinones were made illegal, Naphyrone gained momentum in the market being described as “The replacement for mephedrone”\textsuperscript{4}.

NRG-1 (or ENERGY-1) is a popular brand which uses Naphyrone as the main ingredient as well as other cathinones or legal substances and stimulants (eg caffeine).

\textsuperscript{4} ACMD Naphyrone report, July 2010; page 5
A timeline of legislative developments
concerning so-called legal highs

March 2009  Concerns raised about new psychoactive substances (synthetic cannabinoids, not mephedrone specifically); the then Home Secretary asked the ACMD (Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs) to look into legal highs.

23rd December 2009  GBL, BZP and synthetic cannabinoids become controlled substances.

March 2010  ACMD provides advice on mephedrone to Government. Government places an immediate ban on the import of mephedrone and related derivatives into the country. ACMD also inform the Home Secretary that they will provide further advice on naphthyl pyrovalerone analogues of cathinone (naphyrone).

April 2010  Mephedrone and related cathinone derivatives brought under the control of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The ACMD reported that mephedrone and the family of cathinone derivatives are dangerous drugs and recommended they be controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 as Class B. The ACMD expressed concern about the harms on the health and wellbeing of users; they cited evidence that mephedrone consumption can cause hallucinations, blood circulation problems, anxiety, paranoia, fits and delusions.

16th April 2010  Mephedrone and related cathinone derivatives become controlled as Class B substances.
12th May 2010
The government published its Coalition Agreement for Government stating "We will introduce a system of temporary bans on new 'legal highs’ while health issues are considered by independent experts. We will not permanently ban a substance without receiving full advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs".

7th July 2010
ACMD provides advice on naphyrone to the government and recommend it become controlled as a Class B substance. The government accepts this advice. The ACMD concluded that the high potency of naphyrone by comparison with other cathinones like mephedrone suggests that it is likely to be associated with a higher risk of accidental overdose. It is also thought that the use of naphyrone could;
• have an adverse effect on the heart and blood vessels
• bring on hyperthermia
• impact adversely on mental health causing anxiety and psychosis
• lead to psychological dependence

23rd July 2010
Naphyrone and related derivatives become controlled as class B substances.
What are the new and/or ‘still legal’ drugs?

**Salvia**

Salvia is another substance currently not included in the Misuse of Drugs Act, however, selling the substance for human consumption is illegal.

Salvia is derived from the plant Salvia divinorum, a member of the mint family. The dried leaf of the plant may be smoked or the fresh leaf chewed; the active compound is absorbed through the mouth (not through swallowing); the leaves are dark-green. Effects include causing hallucinations.

**Ivory Wave**

*Ivory Wave* is sold as a ‘legal high’ and is the latest drug to receive a lot of media attention (during August to September 2010). Like Mephedrone, the product combines the effects of ‘Speed’ and MDMA.

Contrary to popular belief, Ivory Wave has (in some/previous batches) contained *MDPV* – a substituted cathinone made illegal in April 2010. This is likely to have been the reason for its
reputation as a drug that lasts a long time (effects sometimes reaching into days afterwards with drawn-outs come-downs) and increased sex drive. Anecdotal feedback about the drug expresses wide concern about heightened heart rate.

Ivory Wave has also been reported to contain the local anaesthetic Lignocaine\(^5\). The ingredients of Ivory Wave have changed over time and, more recently, has shown to include the legal drug 2-DPMP (a psycho-stimulant drug, reportedly similar to Ritalin).

\(^5\) [http://217.115.117.164/downloadDocs/Poster.pdf](http://217.115.117.164/downloadDocs/Poster.pdf)
The making of ‘legal highs’

Summary

- Drugs are often designed to get round the law and create either the same high as an existing drug or ‘the ultimate high’
- The legality of the ‘legal high’ is often unknown until the product is tested
- We just don’t know what’s in them
- Many drugs advertised as legal actually contain illegal substances

Designing drugs

The term ‘designer drug’ is used for drugs which are marketed or designed in order to get around existing drug laws or obtain the ‘ultimate high’. If ‘designed’, this may include modifying the molecular make-up of an existing illegal substance (so that the law covering the original drug does not apply to the new drug) or finding an alternative legal substance which has similar effects to a drug.

In the figure overleaf, taken from the ACMDs report to the government on Naphyrone, its shown how drugs are altered/added-to slightly to get round the law and elaborate on the effects of a substance. Starting with the molecular make-up of Pyrovalerone, it’s easy to spot how the other substances modify to get around existing laws.\(^6\)

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\(^6\) [ACMD Naphyrone report](#), July 2010; page 6
Are they legal?

The legality of the 'legal high' is often unknown until the product is tested. Ivory Wave has repeatedly shown to include illegal drugs over the past twelve months.

The question over their legality enforces the point that we just don’t know what’s in them.

NRG-1 is a branded drug based on the substance naphyrone. The substance was a legal high until July 2010 when the government banned the drug (announcement made 7th July, law came into effect on 23rd July).

In "The confusing case of NRG-1", a research study from Liverpool John Moores University into the legally branded drug ‘NRG-1’ (published before naphyrone was made illegal), varying compounds of varying illegal drugs were found in NRG-1.

According to the researchers, only one of the ten products tested and labelled as "NRG-1" actually contained naphyrone. After tests and laboratory analysis, of the compounds found in the product many were identified as substituted cathinones made illegal in April 2010:
MDPV, flephedrone, mephedrone and butylone. The table on the following page is from a letter to the British Medical Journal\(^7\) concerning the research and adequately represents how substances varied within the same products sold\(^8\).

The table shows NRG-1 and NRG-2 products purchased online from UK-based websites during the six weeks immediately after mephedrone became illegal in the UK.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website No</th>
<th>Label*</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>NRG-1</td>
<td>Butylone + MDPV (3,4-methylenedioxypyrovalerone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NRG-1</td>
<td>Flephedrone (4-fluoromethcathinone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>NRG-1</td>
<td>Flephedrone + MDPV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>NRG-2</td>
<td>Methyl-N-ethylcathinone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NRG-1</td>
<td>Flephedrone + MDPV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>NRG-1</td>
<td>Caffeine + traces of mephedrone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>NRG-1</td>
<td>Naphyrone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>NRG-1</td>
<td>Butylone + MDPV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>MDAI</td>
<td>Inorganic composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>NRG-1</td>
<td>Mephedrone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>NRG-1</td>
<td>Inorganic composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>NRG-2</td>
<td>Mephedrone + benzocaine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>NRG-1</td>
<td>Mephedrone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>NRG-2</td>
<td>Mephedrone</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>DMC</td>
<td>Caffeine + lidocaine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>MDAI</td>
<td>Mephedrone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>NRG-2</td>
<td>4-Methyl-N-ethylcathinone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*DMC=dimethocaine, MDAI=5 6-methylenedioxy-2-aminindoanide

\(^7\) [http://www.bmj.com/content/341/bmj.c3564.extract](http://www.bmj.com/content/341/bmj.c3564.extract)

In the letter to the BMJ, Simon D Brandt, the Senior Lecturer in Analytical Chemistry at Liverpool John Moores who led the NRG-1 study, noted\(^9\):

“One of the earlier studies suggested that **consumers think that they are more likely** to be of **higher purity than street drugs**, carry a **lower risk of physical harm**, and **not be liable for the criminal sanctions** associated with drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act.”

**Getting round the law**

Though some substances and designer drugs may not be controlled by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 – for example, in the same way as cannabis and cocaine are - it can still be illegal to sell, supply or advertise them under medicines legislation.

If a product is illegal for human consumption in medicines legislation, this also means it is illegal to produce, advertise and sell for human consumption. That means if a drug states “not to be ingested” or and is sold as something else (eg a souvenir) then selling the product is lawful.

Many suppliers use descriptions such as bath salts, plant food, research chemicals, fertiliser and cleaning fluid, or statements such as ‘not for human consumption’ in order to try to get around the law.

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\(^9\) [http://www.bmj.com/content/341/bmj.c3564.full?sid=4879fe27-2321-411f-88ba-b2db0d31cafe](http://www.bmj.com/content/341/bmj.c3564.full?sid=4879fe27-2321-411f-88ba-b2db0d31cafe)
Health risks

Summary

- Many legal highs have similar effects to stimulant or depressant drugs that are controlled by the Misuse of Drugs Act.
- Little is known about the effects of taking the drugs in the short, medium and long term – or the safety implications of substances.
- Students may not know the risks with certain mainstream and illegal drugs, nevermind those advertised as legal.
- There is heightened safety risks with ‘unknown’ [and perceived legal] drugs that producers, suppliers and consumers are all unaware of and unprepared for.
- The ACMD report adverse effects on the heart and blood vessels, hyperthermia, dependence liability, and psychiatric effects as negative impacts of ‘legal highs’ drugs.
- “The fact that something is branded as a legal high implies that it is safe.”
- Users can inadvertently take huge overdoses, leading to psychosis and delusions.
“Just because a drug is legal to possess, it doesn’t mean it’s safe”

This is the government’s line on so-called legal highs. The Home Office advises that some legal highs can have similar effects to stimulant or depressant drugs that are controlled by the Misuse of Drugs Act, such as euphoria and reduced inhibitions. The same legal highs also share a range of adverse side effects such as anxiety and paranoia, palpitations, and over-stimulation of the heart and nervous system which can lead to seizures and fits.

By far the biggest concern with ‘legal highs’ and designed drugs is that little is known about the effects of taking the drugs both in the short and long term and many users do not know what is in the drugs; students who are not aware of this may put their safety at risk.

If someone is admitted to hospital with complaints which may or may not be related to drug-use, hospitals generally know how to deal with regular drugs from experience and testing. However, this is not the case for many ‘legal highs’, not least because it is unknown what chemicals and products make-up the drugs, especially whether some are known illegal substances which may have adverse affects to medication.

Similarly, in the long-term there is no research about what harm new variations of drugs can have on individuals.

The Ultimate High

The aims of producers to maximise the effects of drugs; to create the ‘ultimate high’, often mean producers attempt to create a mixture of feelings and responses in the user – in the
same way that many users taking one drug will likely mix it with another. For example, it’s known for users who take ecstasy or speed to then administer cannabis to achieve both stimulant and relaxed states.

In the **Student Survival Guide** we stated that “some drugs will make you want to dance, acting as a stimulant to the mind and body (Ecstacy (Es, MDMA), Speed, Chrystal Meth, Cocaine), and some will make you go off into a world of your own (Heroin, GHB (GBL), Ketamine, magic mushrooms).”\(^\text{10}\)

As such, the norm for drug designers of late is to attempt to create drugs that are stimulants for the mind and body, and often, include analgesic qualities or substances.

To take the above as an example, Ketamine and GHB (including previously legal high GBL) have anaesthetic effects and due to this have proven fatal when mixed with alcohol. The effects also mean users feel very little – and so don’t feel pain, which can seriously effect a user’s safety whilst ‘tripping’ on the drug.

The over-riding health consideration with the above example is not only that students may not know the risks with certain mainstream and illegal drugs, but that there is **heightened safety risks with ‘unknown’** [and perceived legal] drugs that producers, suppliers and consumers are all **unaware of** and unprepared for.

There are serious health risks to meddling with substances and very little is known, or shared with users, on basic information such as how the substances react with alcohol, other drugs or

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existing medication; nor the side-effects, the length of the high and whether the drug is sociable, unsociable or simply anti-social.

**Reported risks and short- and long-term effects**

Of all the related cathinone drugs (e.g., mephedrone and naphyrone), the ACMD have repeatedly reported that they may induce:

"**adverse effects on the heart and blood vessels**, hyperthermia, dependence liability, and psychiatric effects including psychosis and anxiety. In extreme cases amphetamine-like drugs can cause death due to cardiovascular collapse or heat shock"\(^{11}\)

In their report on Naphyrone, the AMCD reported the following risks\(^{12}\):

"Firstly, the users of ‘legal highs’ may be at least partially motivated by a desire to buy a legal psychoactive substance rather than an illegal one.

"Secondly, and of considerable concern as mentioned above, is the potential for overdose: users who purchase a named product, when purchasing that product for a subsequent time, may receive a product of different composition to their first purchase.

"Differences in potency between the apparently identical branded products could give rise to risk of overdose or unexpected pharmacological effects. This is particularly significant in the case of NRG-1: whilst analyses suggest that NRG-1 is currently likely to

\(^{11}\) [ACMD Naphyrone report](#), July 2010; page 11, point 6.4

\(^{12}\) [ACMD Naphyrone report](#), July 2010; page 14
contain varying mixtures of controlled substituted cathinones, if this changes to naphyrone (of much higher potency than substituted cathinones), the risk of overdose is much higher."

In a recent response to a debate question at Westminster Hall, the Minister for Crime Reduction conceded “the fact that something is branded as a legal high implies that it is safe.” Combined with the ACMDs statement above, this highlights the fact that, in addition to users not being entirely clear on the ingredients of drugs they are taking and an assumed legality, users may also be blind to the potency of the drugs they are buying and how much they may vary from legal or illegal products and alternatives.

The Guardian reported a similar risk with MDPV stating: "It is active at extremely low doses – as low as 5mg, as compared to around 100mg for other, similar stimulants – meaning users can inadvertently take huge overdoses, leading to psychosis and delusions."
What the government is doing?

As well as acting on recommendations from the ACMD, the coalition government identified ‘legal highs’ as a priority in their Coalition Agreement.

The Minister for Crime Prevention, James Brokenshire MP, announced plans to introduce a twelve-month, temporary ban on new substances believed to be of risk to public health (subject to parliamentary approval).

“The drugs market is changing and we need to adapt current laws to allow us to act more quickly.

“The temporary ban allows us to act straight away to stop new substances gaining a foothold in the market and help us tackle unscrupulous drug dealers trying to get round the law by peddling dangerous chemicals to young people.

“However, anyone tempted to try a legal high must understand it is not safe or sensible to take a substance when you do not know what it is or what is in it - especially when some are claimed to be pond cleaner or bath salts.”

If passed, the new legislation will cover supply offences only; the temporary ban will enable police to confiscate suspected substances and the UK Border Agency to seize shipments entering the country. The penalty for supply will be a maximum of 14 years in prison and an unlimited fine. Possession of a temporarily banned substance for personal use would not be a criminal offence so as to prevent the unnecessary criminalisation of young people.
Substances would be temporarily banned following initial consideration by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD). The ACMD will then conduct a comprehensive review of the harms of the substance and advise whether it should be permanently banned.

Should this legislation be passed, the temporary ban will be effective from the end of 2011. In the meantime, the Minister’s office has already implemented a number of measures and actions to limit public use of legal highs:

- Working with the Association of Chief Police Officers “and other agencies” in mis-selling of illicit substances as legal highs (ie targeting headshops and supplier warehouses) and in distributing guidance to police forces
- Requesting trading standards teams refer suppliers to the police enforcing offences under the Consumer Protection for Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 legislation.
- Gaining intelligence from schools, youth and drug treatment agencies
- Closing websites – the Serious and Organised Crime Agency closed 113 websites that offered mephedrone and naphyrone since respective bans came into force
- Writing to music festival organisers in June asking them to review measures
- **Writing to University Vice-Chancellors to raise awareness of the issue within campus environments**
- Delivering FRANK class-room packs to schools, charities, youth services
- And As of 1st September 2010, authority was given to School Heads to stop and search pupils for legal highs (as they are permitted for weapons).

Why a student campaign on ‘legal highs’

NUS encourages students’ unions to run campaigns and/or distribute information to students on so-called legal highs so that students can make informed choices about the decisions they make.

The Home Office’s Crazy Chemist campaign, in partnership with NUS, provides a relatively easy way to distribute advice in an engaging way and sign-post students to further information, for example the FRANK website, www.talktofrank.com.

Directed at students specifically, it aims to increase knowledge and awareness of the risks associated with the use of substances addressed in this briefing.

Resources and materials will be sent/made available to Higher Education students’ unions and officers who want to run their own campaigns in the week of the campaign launch. Resources will include posters, fact cards, student survival guides and a legal highs factsheet.

The campaign will launch on the 15th of September at Roehampton Students’ Union and run through to December 2010. Specifically, the information materials received by Higher Education unions will:

- Educate students on the health risks associated with the use of ‘legal highs’
- Inform students on the possible illegalities of the use of ‘legal highs’, as many so called ‘legal high’s contain banned substances
- Influence student attitudes and behaviour on ‘legal highs’
What can student’s unions do?

- Distribute the **Crazy Chemist** campaign material at events, popular student venues and/or around the Union.

- Incorporate key messages in **union communications** (i.e. student info leaflets, advice centre notices, student paper, news emails and union websites etc).

- Be innovative: come up with **your own campaigns**
  - For example, you may choose to create a fake amnesty drug box (ie made of see-through plastic and closed at the top to prevent vandalism). Shown in the box could be bath salts, rabbit food, etc highlighting the absurdity of many “legal high” products.

- Ensure welfare services at the union are **prepared with knowledge and advice** on all kinds of drugs, their effects and risks.

- Get **clued up about** the range of ‘legal highs’ that are out there so that you feel confident in responding to questions from your students.

If you have a particular issue at your institution/in your area with legal or illegal drugs and would like to highlight an initiative, or ask for help in coming up with one, please contact **Mark McCormack** at NUS (mark.mccormack@nus.org.uk).

Likewise, contact Mark if you’ve any specific ideas you’d like NUS to help with.
Social media

Utilising Social Networking is an important aspect of campaigning. Should students’ unions want to set up their own page on Facebook (or other media outlet) unions are at liberty to use the following to build content:\n
- Make the Crazy Chemist your profile picture for the day and encourage others to do the same
- Share a link on Facebook to talktofrank.com
- Share our Youtube interview with a real expert on ‘Legal highs’
  www.youtube.com/ukhomeoffice
- Share a new message from the Crazy Chemist each day for a week
  - “Just because the Crazy Chemist says it’s legal it doesn’t mean it’s safe”
  - “The Crazy Chemist won’t care while you’re in A&E having heart palpitations”
  - “The Crazy Chemist is busy mashing up his next batch of ‘legals’ but even he’s not sure what they are”
  - “Just because the Crazy Chemist tells you it’s legal it doesn’t mean it is”
  - “Get clued up with FRANK before you decide to become the Crazy Chemist’s latest lab rat”

\* Make sure pictures are made bigger or smaller using the corner points (ie do not stretch images using horizontal and vertical points)
Examples from other students’ unions?

Bath Students’ Union

Historically, Bath have run annual awareness campaigns on drugs and alcohol. Student volunteers have worked with the university’s security team to distribute information (and signpost to advice) on effects of different drugs as well as the negative effects on studying experiences, such as students’ health and what happens if students are caught in possession on campus.

From freshers 2010 bath will be running a ‘Think…’ week to theme the advice and incorporate it with other messages during the Freshers period.

Northumbria Students’ Union

Northumbria helped raise awareness of legal highs in their student body in February 2010 by running a joint initiative with their Raising and Giving Society (RAG). As well as posters from FRANK, wristbands were distributed and messages were publicised under a RAG banner. The message for the week was “RAISE and GIVE…Awareness to Legal highs”

Liverpool Hope Students Union

During Freshers Liverpool Hope will be holding a ‘rave’ themed night where they plan on having drug awareness posters up around the union bar. The Officer hopes to have posters warning against taking research chemicals and mephedrone to address concern that students may take unknown chemicals sold as mephedrone.
Examples of materials/resources sent to student’s unions

The Crazy Chemist concocted mephadrone in his lab last year to mimic ecstasy and coke. This ‘legal high’ was sold as ‘plant food’ as a way of getting around the law. It was a nice little earner until it was found to bring on paranoia, overstimulation of the heart and nervous system and even fits, so the government banned it.

The Chemist is mashing up different chemicals and is flogging them under different names as ‘Bath Salts’ or ‘Food Cleaners’. Trouble is you don’t know what’s in them, whether they’re really ‘legal’ or safe, and you can’t know how they are going to affect you. One thing is for sure, he won’t be worried while you’re in A&E having heart palpitations.

Back in his lab, Crazy Chemist came up with a new ‘legal chemical’, naphycone, which can be sold as NRG-I, which was also found to bring on paranoia and fits, that’s why the government banned it too. But NRG-I wasn’t always what it seemed, as the mucky devil was actually offloading old stock of banned substances and pretending they were still legal.

Produced by the CCO on behalf of the Home Office 403963 September 2010 © Crown copyright 2010
the crazy chemist needs human lab rats

The Crazy Chemist concocted mephedrone in his lab last year to mimic ecstasy and coke. This 'legal high' was sold as 'plant food' as a way of getting around the law. It was a nice little earner until it was found to bring on paranoia, overstimulation of the heart and nervous system and even fits, so the government banned it.

The Chemist is mashing up different chemicals and is flogging them under different names such as 'Bath Salts' or 'Funk Cleaner'. Trouble is you don't know what's in them, whether they're really legal or safe, and you can't know how they are going to affect you. One thing is for sure, he won't be worried while you're in A&E having heart palpitations.

TALK TO PRANK.COM OR TEXT YOUR QUESTION TO 821111
References

**ACMD report on the consideration of cathinones**

In March 2009, the then Home Secretary requested advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) on so called ‘legal highs’. This is the ACMD's report on the consideration of the cathinones.

*Published March 2010*

**ACMD Naphyrone report**
Consideration of the naphthylpyrovalerone analogues and related compounds.

This report is a consideration of naphyrone (also known as NRG-1, Energy1, or O-2482; or naphthylpyrovalerone), a naphthyl analogue of pyrovalerone, which acts as a triple monoamine reuptake inhibitor, producing psychostimulant effects (hereafter referred to as naphyrone). Internationally, it is controlled under Schedule IV of the 1971 UN Conventions.

*Published July 2010*

"The confusing case of NRG-1" by researchers at Liverpool John Moore’s University – extracts, letter and stubs only.

‘Control to legal highs’, debate arranged by James Brokenshire MP (Minister for Crime Reduction), held at Westminster Hall on 9th September 2010 at 2.30pm and Chaired by Mr Philip Davies.

“**Ivory Wave drug implicated in death of 24-year-old man**”, published on www.guardian.co.uk on Tuesday 17th August 2010; Sam Jones and Mike Power.