

How are the UK's drug laws enforced?

There are a number of UK legislative controls to restrict the supply and use of drugs in the UK. The following agencies are responsible for enforcing them.

Enforcement agencies

Serious Organised Crime Agency

The [Serious Organised Crime Agency](#) (SOCA) was set up in April 2007 to focus on the so-called "Mr Bigs" who make fortunes from drugs, human trafficking, major fraud and counterfeiting.

The Agency has been formed from the amalgamation of the National Crime Squad (NCS), National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS), that part of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) dealing with drug trafficking and associated criminal finance, and a part of UK Immigration dealing with organised immigration crime (UKIS).

SOCA is an intelligence-led agency with law enforcement powers and harm reduction responsibilities. Harm in this context is the damage caused to people and communities by serious organised crime such as drug trafficking and related offences.

Police squads

There are 43 police forces and more than 127,000 police officers in England and Wales. Policing is the joint responsibility of the Home Secretary, Chief Constables and police authorities.

Police contribute to the Government's drugs strategy by:

- enforcing the law on controlled drugs as set out in the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Controlled drugs are divided into three classes according to their potential for harm. Class A drugs (eg heroin, cocaine) are believed to be the most dangerous and so carry the highest penalties.
- tackling drug-related crime. Drug-related crime falls into three types: crimes of supply, crimes committed as a consequence of dependency or intoxication (drug-related offending) and crimes of possession of illegal substances. Police work is key to the strategy areas of communities and availability.

Police action within these strategy areas includes:

- operating arrest referral schemes in police custody suites.
- targeting middle level dealers or importers and local networks of supply.
- continuing activity against individual suppliers, based on intelligence from sources and surveillance.
- working with local crime and disorder reduction partnerships and drug action teams to disrupt local drugs markets.

Prisons

The Prison Service is responsible for preventing drugs being used and smuggled into prisons. All operational prison staff are trained in search techniques with the use of drug dogs, closed circuit television (CCTV) and drug testing among prisoners.

Controlling medicines

MHRA

The [Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency](#) (MHRA) is an executive agency of the Department of Health.

It aims to safeguard the health of the public by ensuring that medicines and medical devices work and are acceptably safe.

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Related Links:

How much crime is drug related? When we think of the links between drugs and crime we usually think about dependent users of drugs like heroin and crack cocaine...

What are the UK drug laws? There are two main statutes regulating the availability of drugs in the UK: the Misuse of Drugs Act, and the Medicines Act.
