

Book review

Toby Seddon reviews *Drugs and Crime* by Philip Bean. Willan Publishing, 2002

In the last few years, a striking feature of the criminal justice policy landscape has been the apparently inexorable ratcheting up of the political profile of drug-related crime (and the accompanying heavy investment in programmes to tackle it). The need for a cool detached analysis of the issue, one which cuts through the reams of nonsense written about it, is more urgent than ever. Policy-makers and researchers alike would benefit from a single scholarly work which synthesises all the available research evidence in a concise, accessible and authoritative way and which draws out clear-sighted incisive arguments for improving policy responses. Philip Bean's book is, unfortunately, not this work. It is nevertheless an interesting and useful contribution to the area.

Bean has been publishing work on drugs and crime since the early 1970s and is one of the few criminologists who have made sustained contributions to the literature over time (the other principal contributors being Howard Parker, Nicholas Dorn and Geoffrey Pearson). The criminological perspective that runs through this latest work by Bean is a welcome change from much current, often government-sponsored research which tends to be written as if in a historical and theoretical vacuum.

A number of nails are hit squarely on the head in this book. That resilient old canard that 'drugs cause crime' in a simplistic sense is once again shot down. One wonders how many more times this has to happen before policy-makers start getting the message. Bean is also correct in his judgment that the government's flagship Drug Treatment and Testing Order (DTTO) is likely to fail. He is spot-on too in identifying the critical question for all programmes which involve drug testing, namely, what happens when someone tests positive?

I was less convinced by his arguments for introducing US-style drug courts but, given some of the unpromising programmes that get a try these days, his call for some properly evaluated pilots is not unreasonable. He is right in any case to suggest that collaboration between treatment services and the criminal justice system (whether through drug courts or not) cannot move further forward until some fundamental issues are addressed head-on. What are

the aims of treatment in the criminal justice system? What levels of coercion into treatment are necessary and appropriate?

In terms of coverage, Bean touches most bases. Particularly welcome are the chapter on gender (although it is rather thin) and the three which cover trafficking and related issues — areas which do not always get an adequate look in. I would have liked a more detailed and critical analysis of the research that lies behind the 'treatment works' slogan, especially the National Treatment Outcome Research Study (NTORS) and recent work on methadone prescribing by Jeremy Coid and colleagues. This work forms the bedrock for much policy on drug-related crime but has yet to be very carefully scrutinised. Issues of ethnicity are also largely ignored despite their importance for a range of aspects of treatment and policing. The other main weakness of the book is the final chapter, in which Bean seems to duck the challenge of setting out a clear blueprint for policy development. Some interesting points are made but the preceding analysis might have sustained a bolder and more precise set of recommendations. His final words offer some wise counsel, however, and certain politicians would do well to note them: "There are no easy solutions and, of course, a reduction in drug-related crime will not produce solutions to the crime problem... Aims, therefore, should be modest and realistic".

This book is not then the definitive overview of the drug-crime debate that is so needed - there remains a major gap in the market here (Messrs Parker, Dorn and Pearson, please note!). It is though a text that will be invaluable to students and a useful reference point for researchers and policy-makers.

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