

**THE TURMOIL OF EVIDENCE: RESEARCH
UTILISATION IN UK DRUG CLASSIFICATION**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the thorny relationship between evidence utilisation and policy making in a heavily politicised policy area. Expectations for the conflux of research and policy formulation have been consolidated in the last decade under the banner of 'evidence-based policy'. In recent times, the debate over the nature and utility of evidence-based policy has become much more sophisticated. No longer can the connection between evidence utilisation and policy formulation be conceived in terms of evidence shaping policy outcomes or, conversely, policy being evidence-free, where evidence has no impact. Such conceptualisations persist, however, in heavily politicised policy areas, where there is intense media scrutiny of decision-making, a lack of consensus on its direction, prolonged conflict between competing interest and stakeholder groups and a permeating sense of crisis. These tend to relate to more 'macro' policy areas, not usually the remit of evidence-based policy-making and evaluative research.

Using recent and ongoing developments in UK drug classification policy as a case-study, an explanatory framework of the complex role and nature of evidence in heavily politicised policy areas is developed. Central to this, is the use of a methodological approach that can account for the role of conflict in the policy process. A modified version of the Advocacy Coalition Framework is employed to this end. This, in turn, allows for a range of data-collection methods to be used, including observation and documentary analysis of Parliamentary Select Committee hearings alongside qualitative interviews with a wide-range of key policy actors involved in the decision-making process. From this a nuanced account of the evidence and policy relationship in such contexts is ascertained, which departs from the more established models explaining the evidence and policy nexus.

Traditionally, such explanations have been conceived as models of research utilisation. In this research it is suggested that these do not translate effectively as models of evidence-based policy-making. This is because they are beset with some, or all, of the following problems: a) they focus more on 'research' rather than the broader concept of 'evidence'; b) they operate with a static view of the policy process where there is a direct connection between research and policy; c) they restrict the role of evidence to one of policy outcomes, rather than viewing the role of evidence in the process of decision-making; d) they assume that research is the defining influence on the decision-making process; e) they operate at a high level of abstraction, offering little account of how research is selected for use in decision-making. Consequently, a newer addition to the literature is developed, which, it is claimed, avoids these shortcomings.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACMD – Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs

EU – European Union

MP – Member of Parliament

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

QUANGO – Quasi-autonomous Non-Governmental Organisation

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

USA – United States of America

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Authors Declaration

Publications arising from this work

- Monaghan, M. (2008) 'The Evidence-Base in UK Drug Policy: The New Rules of Engagement', *Policy and Politics*, 36 (1) 145-50
- Monaghan, M. (2008) 'Appreciating Cannabis: The Paradox of Evidence in Evidence-Based Policy Making', *Evidence and Policy* 4 (2) 209-31

‘You say “evidence”. Well, there may be evidence. But evidence, you know, can generally be taken two ways’.

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1866) *Crime and Punishment*

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis develops an explanatory framework for the role and nature of the use of evidence in the context of a highly politicised policy area; that of UK drug classification policy. Policy-making is subject to ever-changing forces and fashions. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the relationship between research and policy formulation. The relationship between applied social research and policy-making has a long history in the UK and elsewhere. Indeed, Parsons (1995) suggests that it is as old as the State itself. Early examples of the relationship include the work of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law 1832-4, through to that of philanthropists such as Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree, whose pioneering studies of London and York, respectively, saw the development of the social survey method and an attempt to 'scientifically' measure the nature and extent of poverty in Victorian society. Continuing into the twentieth century, studies by Sydney and Beatrice Webb along with the influence of A.L. Bowley gradually saw the institutionalisation of social research and social science in academia and within government (Bulmer 1982).

This link was consolidated in the twentieth century. Indeed, Booth (1988:224) comments that:

In both the UK and the USA at roughly the same time, and prompted by roughly the same motives, there occurred a quickening of official interest in the use of social science for policy-making. Government funds were channelled into the expansion of the social sciences; there was a rapid increase in expenditure on social research; and social scientists were drawn into government. For a while optimism ran high that a new partnership was in the making. Before long, however, strains began to show as the overblown expectations of each side were dashed. Social scientists complained that nobody listened to them and their work was ignored. Policy-makers chuntered about the irrelevance of the research they commissioned. Both retreated into their bunkers.

The bunkers, chunterings and strains highlighted here find their way into the present study. Additionally, the complex and fluctuating relationship between research and policy-making can also be seen in the changing conceptualisation of the way the link between the two phenomena has been conceived. In the 1960s, it was claimed that social experiments could shed light on, and inform, programmes of

social reform (Campbell 1969). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the relationship was contextualised in terms of models of 'research utilisation' (Bulmer, et al. 1986; Weiss 1977; Weiss 1986; Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980b) and evaluation research (Cook and Campbell 1979; Guba and Lincoln 1989; Pawson and Tilley 1997; Rossi and Freeman 1985). Into the 1990s, policy-oriented learning, a close relation of evaluation research was *en vogue* (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993b). From the 1990s onwards, starting in the UK, there has been a slight change of emphasis as 'evidence-based policy' has become the accepted label (Cabinet Office 1999b).

The current focus is on this latest incarnation, although the role of the other manifestations is recognised within this. Arguably, the most (in)famous and undoubtedly the most frequently cited example of the origins of evidence-based policy was made by then Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, to the Economic and Social Research Council:

This government expects more of policy makers... better use of evidence and research in policy making and better focus on policies that will deliver long term goals (Cabinet Office 1999a:6).

In effect, the incumbent Government on assuming power promised more accountability in the policy-making arena, as part of the 'modernising agenda' (Bullock, et al. 2001; Cabinet Office 1999a; Cabinet Office 1999b). Evidence-based policy-making, the development of policies devoid of ideology, was to be one of the main vessels by which this could be realised. The commitment to evidence-based policy became enmeshed with ensuring government policy provided value for money, for example, through evaluation. In this sense, Government departments are continuously required to:

...review policies...to determine when the time is right to modify a policy in response to changing circumstances so that it remains relevant and cost-effective; and departments may need to terminate policies if they are no longer cost effective or they are not delivering the policy outcomes intended (National Audit Office 2001:12).

The modernising agenda, for Solesbury (2001:6), was part of a process of the 'opening up' of government. In turn, this called into question, Keynes' well cited lament, that 'there is nothing the government hates more than to be well-informed;

for it makes the process of arriving at decisions much more complicated and difficult' (cited in Mulgan 2005:216). Nutley and Webb (2000:20) provide a useful overview of what the modernising agenda entails:

The Modernising government White Paper (CM 4310, 1999a) promises changes to policy making to ensure that policies are strategic, outcome focused, joined-up (if necessary), inclusive, flexible, innovative and robust. One of the changes identified as important was making sure that in future policies were evidence-based. Two subsequent publications have sought to identify how such a goal could be achieved. *Adding it up* (Cabinet Office 2000) calls for a fundamental change in culture to place good analysis at the heart of policy-making. *Professional policy-making* (Cabinet Office 1999b) examines what modernised policy-making should look like and how it might be achieved.

Solesbury (2001), further suggests that the move towards evidence-based policy and practice was initially a British phenomenon, characterised first and foremost by a shift towards a 'utilitarian turn' in research, whereby researchers were required to produce research that was not only 'useful' but 'useable'. In other words, this is research that helps 'not just to understand society but offers some guidance on how to make it better' (Solesbury 2001:6). This process was driven largely by the funders of social science who, keen to draw on practices established in economic research, stressed the benefits of cumulating knowledge in the research enterprise. This model was also typical of the medical research process under the aegis of evidence-based medicine.

It is, therefore, no coincidence that emphasis on evidence-based policy has brought to the fore a specific methodology; that of the systematic review. This is the strategy of collating all bygone, hopefully good quality evidence in any given field (Harden, et al. 2004; Oakley 2003; Pawson 2006; Petticrew and Roberts 2006). Organisations such as the Campbell Collaboration have developed with this in mind. A second aspect of the movement towards evidence-based policy-making is, for Solesbury (2001:6), witnessed with the propensity of practitioners and policy-makers to seek evidence from research knowledge in a bid to recover some of the loss of public confidence in their activities that most have suffered in recent years. Traditionally, professionals operated like a 'priesthood', reliant on the unquestioning faith of their followers. Increasingly, however, patients, parents, students, clients and customers of all kinds are less and less inclined to take professional views on trust.

Frequently, the 'informed consent' of the public is needed with the implementation of any intervention, which means that professionals must be ready to explain not just what they advise and why it is appropriate, but also what they know of its likely efficacy (Solesbury 2001:6). This development is now manifested in the commitment to finding out 'what works' in various policy arenas, which has become synonymous with the New Labour Government's view of evidence-based policy.

Although initially well received by the research and policy communities alike, the first signs of enthusiasm for the evidence-based policy agenda have been replaced with increasing scepticism, based around a number of unresolved issues. These include: a) continuing concerns over the correct methodology in producing and synthesising evidence for policy (e.g. Oakley 2004; Pawson 2006) and; b) the increasing recognition of the limited compatibility between the conventions of the research process and those of policy-making. Mulgan (2005:224-5), for example, contends that the problematic nature of research and evidence utilisation and policy-making, is a product of significant issues relating both to the nature of government and also factors pertaining to the nature of social science knowledge.

With regard to the former, these revolve around three main themes and can be seen as established criticisms of the evidence-based policy agenda. The first issue relates to the nature of 'democracy'. Politicians have every right to ignore evidence and to follow their instinct. Mulgan (2005) cites the example of the paucity of evidence for increasing police numbers 'on-the-beat' in reducing the amount of crime in an area. He suggests that this is frequently ignored by politicians as it is the public's perception that this is the ideal way to solve the problem. Elsewhere, Pitt (2000:10) and Melrose (2006:31) have suggested that this is symptomatic of the 'politics of electoral anxiety'. Here, political concerns are seen to 'trump' the evidence-base. The second aspect relates to the 'ambiguity' of evidence production. Rationally produced evidence has little impact in policy debates comprised of groups with opposed views, precisely because these are so deeply held. The final point is 'temporal' and refers to the limited compatibility between the conventions of evidence production (in-depth, detailed and time consuming analyses of problems), something Pels (2003) refers to as the 'unhastening of science', alongside those of policy-making (quick-fix solutions to problems).

These issues reoccur throughout the thesis and will be returned to in due course. They are, however, particularly acute when the research in question is social scientific as opposed to scientific. Mulgan (2005) comments that because all social scientific knowledge is historically contingent and reflexive, it is not always conducive to producing definitive solutions to specific policy problems. This has led to antagonism between the 'two communities' of policy and research (Caplan 1979) and is compounded by the disciplinary organisation of the social sciences where there are frequently large gaps in the knowledge base, precisely in areas of interest to policy-makers. It is fair to comment, however, that understandings of the natural and physical sciences too are changing. Young, et al. (2002) mention the increasing 'uncertainty' of scientific evidence arising from ecological issues such as the emergence of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, more commonly known as BSE. In a similar vein, social theorists such as Beck (1992) suggest that under the conditions of what he terms the 'risk society', scientific evidence is increasingly employed to correct the effects of previous scientific endeavours and innovations.

For certain thinkers, this critique of the nature of science has gone unnoticed by the government in their quest for finding out 'what works and why', the leitmotif of the evidence-based policy agenda. Campbell (2002:89), for instance, suggests that evidence-based policy-making has, in fact, been used by the government as a way of neglecting the scepticism that exists within the public towards the scientific community. Such scepticism manifests itself in the public's fears over a perceived tyranny of technocracy (Albaek 1995; Parsons 2002). Clarence (2002:4) drawing on the work of Rüdiger (1993:18-9) also suggests that through the 'what works' mantra, the government has ignored decades of theory emerging from the sociology of science, highlighting the existence of scientific controversy. That is, the fallibility of scientific evidence and how this is actually an 'intrinsic element of the scientific process' (Rüdiger 1993:19). To lay this charge solely at the door of 'government' is, however, misleading and serves to disguise the fact that the policy-making process actually consists of a much broader range of actors who share a similar perspective.

The current concern is, however, on the interplay between politics and evidence. To all intents and purposes, the established criticisms of the evidence-

based policy movement, mentioned above, focus on the impact that politics has on the policy process. With this in mind, consummate sound bites, such as those which suggest that ‘policy based evidence’ is actually more characteristic of the relationship between research and policy in certain policy areas (e.g. Marmot 2004), have become commonplace. By the same token, accusations of ‘cherry-picking’ evidence, and the blurring of boundaries between the scientific community and policy-making fraternity (Hope 2004), lead to the frequent conclusion that much public policy is, ‘un-evidenced’ or evidence-free. This pessimistic view of the research evidence and policy relationship also has a long history (Finch 1986; Heinemann, et al. 1990; Weiss 1998).

It is suggested here that these issues are particularly acute in heavily politicised policy areas. Although on some level all policies are to an extent politicised, for the sake of this discussion the term refers to those issues when the political stakes are high and when there are ‘powerful constituencies’ to face down (Tonry 2004:23). Heavily politicised areas are, therefore, those where there is intense media scrutiny of policy, a lack of consensus on its direction, prolonged conflict between competing interest groups and a permeating sense of crisis. They are characterised by the three Cs of competition, conflict and controversy. In this sense, the notion of competition draws on Mannheim’s (1952a; 1952b) sociology of knowledge. For Mannheim (1952a:198), competition is one of the principle ways in which the ‘social’ is structured. ‘Different interpretations of the world for the most part correspond to particular functions that various groups occupy in their struggle for power’. As we shall see, in policy debates, this struggle for power is manifested in a determined bid to shape the agenda of the particular subsystem so that it is consistent with the perspective of a particular individual or group. Following logically from the notion of competition is that of conflict. This refers to policies based on competing world views or perspectives. These are often simultaneously controversial and are the subject of sensationalist reporting in the media.

In addition, the three Cs of politicised policies, are related to other issues. Central to this notion is the view that politicised policy areas are not typical of the evidence-based policy initiative, which has been inextricably linked to evaluation research. Here the evaluation of policy is seen as one stage in the overall cycle of

policy-making (Bridgman and Davis 2000). Heavily politicised policy areas, it is suggested, are more *ad hoc* or 'muddled through' (Lindblom 1959). They are often not made with recourse to identifiable Key Performance Indicators and thus it is more difficult to ascertain the impact of evidence in the decision-making process.

One issue that remains is to consider some examples of heavily politicised policy areas. It is claimed in this thesis that the drugs issue and its links to crime serves as an exemplar. Referring to this, Sutton and Maynard (1993:455-6) previously lamented that in the illicit drugs field policy design and execution is 'conducted in an almost data free environment where, because of ignorance, it is impossible to set sensible policy targets, let alone measure the success of spending hundreds of millions of pounds across the Whitehall Departments'. Similarly, but referring to the area of criminal justice policy, Tonry (2004:146) has lamented that 'on the small issues, evidence sometimes counts' although, when it comes to the big issues 'politics is the order of the day'. In both scenarios politics is juxtaposed to evidence. This manifests itself in entrenched positions relating to the evidence and policy relationship. In politicised areas, characterised by the three Cs, critics frequently claim policies to be evidence-free. This is, however, often met with the opposite assertion that a policy area formulated with recourse to research evidence, in some form, is 'evidence-based'.

Central to the argument presented here, is that such understandings of the evidence and policy relationship are underpinned by a holistic conceptualisation of the relationship. It is accepted, however, that arguments which come to the aforesaid zero-sum conclusions are understandable. This is primarily a product of the fact that there is a fixed understanding about what constitutes evidence in such debates. In heavily politicised policy areas, it is argued that the concept of evidence should not be taken at face value and requires more sophisticated analysis. The frequent retreat into the more comfortable terrain of a linear view of the evidence and policy relationship is problematic and inaccurate. It views the union through a restrictively narrow lens. In this scenario, policies are seen to be either wholly evidence-based or wholly evidence-free. The former position represents a positive, zero-sum stance and the latter a negative, zero-sum stance. Such conceptualisations, however, restrict the

domain from where evidence can have an impact on the policy decision-making process.

It is not advocated that policies are, or can be free of political motivations (Leicester 1999), this is just one aspect of the explanatory mix. In essence, evidence is embedded in policy decision-making and thus a more nuanced account is needed of the role and nature of evidence in politicised policy areas that moves beyond the linear conceptualisations discussed above. In recognition of similar issues, other authors have adopted alternative maxims to explain the evidence and policy relationship. For example, 'evidence-informed' policy (e.g. Chalmers 2005), or 'evidence-inspired' policy (Duncan 2005) to highlight potential discrepancies between evidence production and policy-making. By contrast, it is advocated here that the 'evidence-based policy' label will suffice although it must be treated with caution.

This thesis, then, takes umbrage with the notion of policy, in this case UK drug classification policy, being made in a 'data-free' environment. In doing so, it casts doubt on the claim that 'evidence' will be discarded in policy areas that are highly politicised. It also suggests that the riposte, which states that policy that engages with evidence on any level is 'evidence-based', is problematic. This is because it is premised on the same logic as those which claim heavily politicised policies to be evidence-free. Undoubtedly, because of their very nature, conceptualisations of the evidence and policy relationship in politicised areas have typically progressed on an unremittingly rationalist and linear conception of the link between evidence and the policy-making process. The foundations of this perspective have been increasingly eroded more recently. Black (2001) suggests that this linear view factors out of the equation the commonly held view detailing the interactive relationship of evidence and policy. Similarly, there is an assumption in the linear perspective of the certainty of scientific evidence. There are further problems with this understanding. The linear view restricts the role of evidence to one of policy outcomes. This equates to 'analysis of policy'. It is claimed here, however, that evidence also needs to be considered as part of the process of policy-making, or as 'analysis for policy' (Gordon, et al. 1993:5).

Using the recent developments in UK drug classification as a case study, starting with the reclassification of cannabis under the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, this thesis can be read as a critique of this conceptualisation of the evidence and policy relationship. Ultimately, much of the argument is directed towards Tonry's (2004) assertion that when the subject under investigation involves a 'big issue' by which he means one that is politicised, politics and not evidence is the order of the day. The idea is that in highly politicised policy areas, policies are made with recourse to ideological standpoints and consequently cannot be evidence-based. This, it is contended, unnecessarily creates opposites out of two unrelated concepts. A more fruitful line of inquiry is to consider the mechanisms of evidence use in the context of the heavy politicisation of the issue. This issue has been recognised by various depictions of the evidence and policy relationship, in the form of models of research utilisation. Some of these have their origins in the political science literature, particularly in the work of Weiss (1977; 1986) and colleagues (Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980b) and have been adopted by various thinkers over the years. In recent times, however, there has been a revived interest in this area and more recent additions to the literature (e.g. Stevens 2007a) can also be identified. These are referred to in Chapter Nine.

The first step in the argument here is that the bolder claims of evidence-based policy need to be muted. This proposition is not new. Indeed, Nutley, et al. (2002:76-7) suggest that when the expectations of evidence are toned down, that is the expectation that evidence production will lead to more effective policies, there is more cause for optimism over the way research findings can be incorporated into policy-making (e.g. Pawson 2006; Weiss 1999). Pawson (2006), drawing on the ideas of Lindblom (1990), has likened this to flying the 'tattered flag' of enlightenment. Some issues that remain, and that will be discussed in due course, concern the notion of what counts as, or constitutes, 'evidence', in effect, what is its nature? The other issue concerns where evidence fits into the policy-making process; that is, what is its location? These two interlinked questions represent the main aspects of the turmoil of evidence that subsequent analysis will explore and explain.

As a precursor to this, Davies, et al. (2000), suggest that a useful way of conceiving evidence is as "research" broadly defined'. On one level, there is some

sympathy for this view, as evidence is frequently equated to research. It must be stressed, however, that evidence, is broader. A discussion relating to the concept of evidence forms a central aspect of the analysis and is returned to in Chapter Eight. A second point to note concerns the nature of policy. As will become clear, to explore issues relating to the nature and role of evidence in this context, requires a particular perspective on the nature of the policy process, one that is consistent with the 'opening up' initiative. These are best explained by the broad term 'pluralist' understandings and further comment on these are also detailed. With this in mind, the thesis is divided into the following sections.

Chapter Two introduces the substantive aspects of the case in question, the case of UK drug classification. This has its origins in issues arising out of the then Home Secretary David Blunkett's decision, in 2004, to reclassify cannabis. Discussion commences with a brief history of UK drug policy, focusing on the nature of conflict from competing coalitions claiming 'ownership' of the 'drug problem'. The debate then turns to consider how this power struggle has continued, charting this from the 1970s with the passing of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, through the 1980s and 1990s and up towards the present day with the election of the Labour Government. Debate then turns to the 2004 cannabis reclassification. One main point to emerge is that the conflict over ownership has never been fully resolved and has left a legacy in almost all aspects of UK drug policy, as debates over the evidence-base for the classification testify.

Chapter Three leaves the substantive aspect of the case study to consider theories of the policy-making process. It commences by continuing the background literature review, via a general discussion on the way policy has been conceptualised. Consideration is then given to what Colebatch (2002:23) has termed the 'two great models of policy-making'. As will become clear, one of these understandings, the horizontal model, is of more relevance due to the nature of the case study under consideration. Attention then turns to 'pluralistic models' of the policy process with, where appropriate, examples from aspects of UK drug policy to illustrate their operation. It is suggested that pluralistic models are useful in understanding the turmoil of evidence precisely because they offer an inclusive perspective of the nature of the policy process and the role of evidence therein. This is a theme that is

followed throughout. The utility of one particular model, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993b; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999), is introduced and then expounded. There is an immediate fit between this model of the policy-making process and the substantive findings of earlier chapters. Subsequent empirical work explores this further and thus provides the platform on which subsequent chapters are developed.

Chapter Four thus considers a plethora of issues pertaining to research methodology and methods continuous throughout the duration of the research. This section commences with an overview of the interplay of theory, method and substantive issues when researching a 'live' policy issue in 'real-time'. Specific methods of data collection are then discussed, including the issues arising from interviewing 'influential' respondents. The sampling strategy is then elaborated, in this case theoretical sampling, before discussing the significance and difficulty of ensuring confidentiality when researching a divisive policy area with interconnected actors. Finally, attention is given to the concept of triangulation, more specifically, the interplay between theory building, refinement and methodology. In essence, this chapter offers some consideration of the substantive, methodological and theoretical issues relating to researching a contemporary policy issue in a constant state of flux.

Chapter Five, although presented as one, can be read in two parts. Initially, discussion reverts back to the Advocacy Coalition Framework as a means of continuing the methodological considerations of the thesis. It suggests that certain modifications are required, a product of real-time events and because of prevalent criticisms of the model in the literature. Foremost among these changes is a movement away from talking about 'coalitions' to talking of 'perspectives'. The reasoning behind this movement is expounded and the perspectives central to the analysis are then introduced. The 'second' part of the chapter provides some context for the remainder of the thesis by addressing issues that are unique to the case in question. Drawing on some emerging findings from the empirical investigation, it discusses the impact of politics and the media on policy issues, such as drugs classification, the knock-on effect this has for data production in the area, and how this can distort the true picture of the role and nature of evidence in the policy process.

Chapters Six and Seven present the predominant empirical findings emerging from the research. The former, draws on the platform of the previous one by using the modified Advocacy Coalition Framework to explore appreciations of evidence use in the 2004 cannabis reclassification. Underpinning this discussion is a commentary on recent developments in UK cannabis policy, occurring alongside the current research. This is the first instance of substantive, exogenous factors impacting on the direction of the research. In exploring the 2004 cannabis reclassification and subsequent events, the first dimension of the turmoil of evidence; the tumultuous, or confused and disorderly nature of evidence, is considered. Central to the argument presented at this stage, is the manner in which various perspectives contribute to the contestation surrounding evidence. This is a result of how the three-tiered belief system of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (based primarily on ideological standpoints) provides the bedrock for their understandings. Key to the debate here, is the notion that the principle of evidence-based policy is a desirable, but problematic phenomenon, whose potential has been curtailed as a consequence of the widespread prevalence of the zero-sum understanding. Overall, it is suggested that this understanding is actually paradoxical because it draws zero-sum conclusions whilst simultaneously recognising the contested nature and plurality of evidence in this subsystem.

In the continuing spirit of real-time research, Chapter Seven widens the substantive focus to incorporate more contemporary discussions about the evidence-base for the UK drug classification system in general. This, it is suggested, acts as a good case study for viewing the second part of the turmoil of evidence; the role or location of evidence in the decision-making process. This discussion is inextricably linked to issues concerning the struggle for power in the policy process. The chapter originates with a discussion of more recent developments in UK drug policy, which resulted in the broadening of the substantive focus. This is followed by detailed consideration of the various perspectives' appreciations of the role of evidence in the policy process, highlighted with recourse to their appreciations of the nature of drug harm. Two key issues arise from the chapter. First, different understandings of the location of evidence, cast doubt on the assumption held by pluralist accounts that all evidence brought to policy, competes on a level playing field. This provides context

for the widely held zero-sum positions and highlights how they are understandable. The second point is that by focusing on the role of evidence, another paradox is raised, detailing the issue that evidence, as a concept, can be both contested but can have simultaneous traces of consistency.

Chapter Eight, begins the process of explaining this situation. Central to this endeavor, is the quest to ascertain clarification on the nature of evidence in politicised policy areas. This involves recourse to philosophical and social scientific discussions of concept formation. It is suggested that focusing on the fluctuating nature of concepts offers the best platform to explain the conceptual certitude and contestability of evidence, highlighted in the previous analysis.

Armed with this understanding of evidence, Chapter Nine begins the process of producing a model of research utilisation in politicised policy areas. It is suggested that all existing models have shortcomings in this particular context. Consequently, a newer 'processual' model of evidence utilisation is tentatively advocated from critically engaging with the literature and by drawing on the data from previous chapters. Ultimately, the processual model comes into its own by building into its analysis the role of power, which is particularly prevalent in conflicting policy areas, but also by operating with a non-teleological understanding of the policy process.

Chapter Ten provides the conclusion, first in the form of an overview of the key findings of the previous chapters and then by offering some remarks on the nature of the utilisation debate in this area. In doing so, it shows how although there is undoubtedly a pluralism of evidence in debates characterised by competing perspectives, this does not mean, however, that all have the same potential to influence the policy agenda. Comments on the implications of this study for theory and method, as well as policy, precede some extended final comments.

It should be clear from the above discussion that this investigation rests on a number of assumptions. First and foremost, it is supportive of the overall evidence-based policy-making endeavour, but is critical of the way this is manifested both within sections of academia and outside. It is particularly critical of polemics that dismiss the aims of evidence-based policy as unworkable in areas of policy,

characterised by competition, conflict and controversy. This thesis makes no claims that these criticisms are wholly inaccurate, instead it suggests that they operate through a narrow and therefore unrealistic lens of what 'evidence-based policy' is and can do. By contrast, the current goal is to show how the role and nature of 'evidence' in the context of 'evidence-based policy' needs clarification particularly in politicised policy areas, and it is to this end that the discussion now turns.

2. THE UK DRUG CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM: EVIDENCE-BASED OR EVIDENCE-FREE?

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the substantive case study through which the tumultuous nature of evidence will be explored. As a brief summary, this entails issues relating to recent changes in UK drug classification policy and legislation. It is fair to say that overall this represents a small cog in the bigger wheel of UK drug policy. The classification issue is treated with a degree of antipathy by many involved in other areas of the drug policy arena. It is, however, an intensely topical area and one that has, in recent years, received endless attention. For now, the purpose is to highlight the constituencies involved in the policy debate and to show how it has emerged as a highly politicised policy arena. In what follows, the notion that UK drug policy is characterised by competing coalitions, made up of interdependent groups and individuals, each claiming 'ownership' of the 'drug problem', is introduced.

Ultimately, the chapter argues that the origins of the schism in the UK drug classification debate dates back to legislation passed at the time of the First World War which has a continuing legacy. The chapter commences with a discussion of the ongoing struggle for ownership of the problem through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, culminating with a discussion of the New Labour drug strategy. Finally, attention switches to an infamous example of New Labour policy change, the recent reclassification of cannabis. This places the policy in its historical and cultural contexts by drawing on international and national developments that have impacted upon it. Finally, a summary illustrating the contested nature of 'evidence' in this particular debate is offered.

2.2 Competing Coalitions: Key Developments in British Drugs Policy

The history of UK drug policy has traditionally been shaped by two opposing sides, each with a claim to possession of the issue (Berridge 1984; Berridge and Edwards 1981). On the one hand, there is the Department of Health-influenced, treatment-

focused, medical profession lobby. This places specific emphasis on the public-health aspect of the drug problem. On the other, there is Home Office inspired criminal justice, law-and-order lobby, which stresses the criminal element of the drug issue. The medical foothold in British drug policy has a long history despite inauspicious beginnings. This stemmed from an early public mistrust of medicine which gradually eroded throughout the nineteenth century (Hodgkinson 1968). Around this time, the diagnostic abilities of the medical profession became widely appreciated, particularly in times of epidemiological crises, such as the cholera epidemic of 1853-4. This coincided with an expanding middle-class and thus, equipped with its stock of scientific knowledge, the medical profession was able to establish itself, for some, as a prominent player in public and social affairs. It must be stressed that for others, it represented an agent of social control (Cohen 1985). Early drug legislation in the UK is indicative of the former view. For example, the 1868 Pharmacy Act 'removed morphine and opium derivatives from the shelves of general stores' and gave the pharmacy profession the monopoly of dispensing the drug (Barton 2003:11).

Legislation passed under the conditions of the First World War saw a shift in the power base between the medical and criminal justice professions. This rupture can be traced to the passing of the 1916 Defence of the Realm Act, particularly section 40B. The origins of this legislation point to various moral panics surrounding certain issues (Cohen 1972) - including prostitution and homosexuality - deemed to be a possible threat to national security (Davies 1990). Drug use, too, was considered in this light. Indeed, it was in this context that it first fell under the jurisdiction of the law-and-order institutions, as panic spread over the use and abuse of cocaine and opiates by British and Canadian servicemen. This then spread to concern over rising drug use in the general public, which, in turn, could affect production in the munitions factories (Barton 2003:16).

By December 1916, the Home Office had the ascendancy in control of drug use. Strang and Gossop (1994:343) contend that the Home Office 'used its influence' to try to push Britain towards a similar system as the United States and 'a reliance upon an entirely penal approach with criminal sanctions against both users and prescribing doctors'. It was at this time that the origins of drug prohibition emerged.

Indeed, commentators such as Smart (1984:35) have remarked that the Defence of the Realm Act established 'British drug prohibition' because for the first time, it was 'a criminal offence to be in possession of drugs without professional authorisation'. Although a law-and-order initiative, however, authorisation of possession could only be granted from responsible individuals within the medical profession.

After the end of hostilities, the Treaty of Versailles contained a clause, as a condition of accession, requiring 'all signatories to introduce domestic legislation to deal with their respective drug problems' (Barton 2003:16). In the UK, this led to the 1920 Dangerous Drugs Act, although the making of this legislation actually preceded the 1916 legislation and was intrinsically bound up with pre-war global concern over the problems associated with opium. The early 1920s legislation arguably shaped the debate over drug legislation in Britain for the next forty years. Barton (2003:17) states that the Dangerous Drugs Act 'set in train a still unresolved dilemma as to which arm of the state should "own" the drug problem'.

The medical profession's foothold in UK drug policy persisted and was further established with the meeting of the Rolleston Committee in 1926. Named after its Chairman, Sir Humphrey Rolleston, President of the Royal College of Physicians, this committee reported that morphine and heroin 'addiction' did not and should not necessarily mean drug 'abuse'. The committee recommended allowing for the prescription of heroin and morphine to enable gradual withdrawal or to 'maintain' a regulated supply to those judged unable to break their dependence, or those whose lives would otherwise suffer serious disruption (South 1997:927-8). The outcome of this was the consolidation of the medical profession's involvement in drug regulation. This created a 'British system' of drug control as opposed to an American stance of outright criminal prohibition (Barton 2003; Shiner 2003; Stimson and Lart 1994).

The extent to which there are two 'competing' sides is, however, open to some debate. For some commentators, the British system constituted a 'dual approach' to the UK 'drug problem' based on a relationship of co-operation rather than conflict (Berridge 2005). Lart (1998) questions the extent to which there has been a dichotomy between the two institutions, suggesting instead that these are two

sides of the same regulatory coin. Stevens (2007b) similarly states that although historically UK drug policy discourse has been shaped by a continuing struggle between the criminal justice and public health responses to the drug problem, both conceive drug use to be a deviation from the norm. In turn, these perspectives have silenced, especially within political and academic discourse, a more marginal ‘politically challenging position’ that drug use is, *sui generis*, a ‘largely unproblematic – not deviant’ phenomenon (Stevens 2007b:86).

In agreement with Barton (2003) and South (1999b), it is a central contention of this thesis that the relationship between the relevant constituencies has been one of controversy, competition and conflict. Although the medical profession, in whatever guise, has had a prominent position in UK drug policy-making, its relationship with the criminal justice system is fundamentally not one of equality. Indeed, South (1999a:89-90) argued that the Rolleston philosophy did not constitute a ‘British system’ *per se* as the report’s framework was ‘ultimately regulated by the Home Office and the police’ and ‘its parameters if not its everyday practice were, at the end of the day, marked out by controls not treatment’. This has led to commentators such as Blackman (2004) to suggest that the British system is actually a ‘myth’.

Overall, in the field of illicit drug use, public health, treatment-focused initiatives operate within a framework overseen by the punishment and enforcement-orientated Home Office. This was especially so in the aftermath of the enactment of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. What follows is a brief review of the power struggle between the two main agents of social control in the UK drug arena from 1970 to the present. These have provided the platform for the competing coalitions that are visible in the debate about the regulation of cannabis, and subsequently, the debate over the efficacy of the overall classification system.

2.3 The Continuing Struggle for Ownership of the ‘Drug Problem’ and Key Debates in UK Drug Policy

British drug legislation enacted throughout the 1960s prior to the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act emerged from, and was heavily influenced by, the events detailed above but also events occurring on the international stage. Central to the latter, was the

1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, otherwise referred to as the Geneva Convention. This proffered a now classically hard-line approach to drug use. It aimed to standardise the control of narcotics across nations so that certain drugs could be used only for scientific, medical, and in some cases, industrial purposes. This was achieved by arranging drugs into schedules and applying appropriate controls based on their harm and toxicity. Any article in contravention of the convention was a punishable offence, with a custodial term for serious breaches (Fortson 2005). Crucially this meant that possession of what later came to be called 'recreational' drugs, such as cannabis and amphetamines (substances seen to be less harmful than 'hard' drugs such as heroin and cocaine) almost invariably became a criminal offence within the signatory states.

2.3.1 The 1970s

In the UK, the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act replaced the various drug control acts of the 1960s; the 1964 Drugs (Prevention of Misuse) Act, and the 1965 and 1967 Dangerous Drugs Acts. On one level it reflected the times and the global concern over opium dependence. According to Fortson (2005:327), the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act was drafted: a) to include restrictions on the importation and exportation of drugs specified by the statute; b) to create an offence directed against occupiers and persons concerned in the management of premises to permit (now 'permit or suffer') the smoking of prepared opium; c) to make it an offence to unlawfully possess prepared opium; d) to prohibit the possession of utensils for smoking opium and to make such an act an offence and; e) to punish the performance of acts in this country that resulted in the commission of an offence contrary to a 'corresponding law' abroad.

Another important aspect of the legislation was that it established Britain's first legal advisory body on illicit drugs, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), who have come to assume a central role in reviewing British drug policy. According to Levitt, et al. (2006:2), the ACMD 'carries out in-depth inquiries into aspects of drug use that are causing particular concern in the UK, with the aim of producing considered reports that will be helpful to policy makers, practitioners, service providers and others'. It is now common practice that the government

responds to the recommendations made by the ACMD. The statute states that it is the purpose of the council:

...to keep under review the situation in the UK with respect to drugs which are being or appear to them likely to be misused and of which the misuse is having or appears to them capable of having harmful effects sufficient to constitute a social problem, and to give to any one or more of the Ministers, where either Council consider it expedient to do so or they are consulted by the Minister or Ministers in question, advice on measures (whether or not involving alteration of the law) which in the opinion of the Council ought to be taken for preventing the misuse of such drugs or dealing with social problems connected with their misuse, and in particular on measures which in the opinion of the Council, ought to be taken (cited in Science and Technology Committee 2006:13).

In addition the act goes on to stress what the measures actually involve. It lists the following, as actions that should to be taken:

- a) restricting the availability of such drugs or supervising the arrangements for their supply;
- b) enabling persons affected by the misuse of such drugs to obtain proper advice, and for securing the provision of proper facilities and services for the treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare of such persons;
- c) promoting co-operation between the various professional and community services which in the opinion of the Council have a part to play in dealing with social problems connected with the misuse of drugs;
- d) educating the public (and in particular the young) in the dangers of misusing such drugs and for giving publicity to those dangers and;
- e) promoting research into, or otherwise obtaining information about, any matter which in the opinion of the Council is of relevance for the purpose of preventing the misuse of such drugs or dealing with any social problem connected with their misuse (cited in Science and Technology Committee 2006:13).

It must be stressed that although the consultation must take place between Government and the ACMD, the former is still able to act unilaterally if it deems it necessary to do so. The work of the ACMD is primarily based on clinical expertise and, where possible, they are driven by the clinical evidence-base. This work is often sub-contracted to various sub-committees made up of agents with relevant expertise. Overall this emphasis on clinical evidence is reflected in its membership:

Members of the ACMD, of whom there should be not less than 20, are appointed by the Secretary of State for a term of 3 years and in accordance with the guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Nominations come from a wide range of sources including

relevant professional bodies, Public Appointments Unit of the Cabinet Office and self-nomination. Under the terms of the MDA [1971 Misuse of Drugs Act] 1971 the ACMD is required to include representatives of the practices of medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and pharmacy, the pharmaceutical industry, and chemistry (other than pharmaceutical chemistry); and members who have a wide and relevant experience of social problems connected with the misuse of drugs (cited in Science and Technology Committee 2006:17).

Although proffering a unique approach to the control of drugs, the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act was, on implementation, denounced by critics as being based on drug-war rhetoric commonplace, in policy-making circles, across the Atlantic at this time (e.g. Young 1971). This is a prevention-oriented approach, favouring prohibition and has shaped international drug control policies since the 1960s. Duke and Gross (1993) state of the drug issue that it is America's 'longest running war', although the notion of 'war' is something of a misnomer, as the resources mobilised against drugs 'are not comparable to efforts during wartime (Husak 1992:9). Robson (1999:247-8) illustrates how the drug war is, nonetheless, an expensive undertaking, with £1.4 billion spent by the British government combating drugs in 1997. 62 per cent went to enforcement agencies and a further 13 per cent went on international initiatives targeting cultivation and supply.

For current purposes, the defining tenet of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act was its instigation of a strict classification system. Drugs were now placed in one of three categories, A, B or C. On the passing of the legislation, then Home Secretary James Callaghan, stated that based on evidence stemming from the World Health Organisation and that presented in the deliberations of the 1961 Single Convention, 'we have taken those lists and attempted to put them into the Bill in the order we think they should be classified in terms of harmfulness and danger' (cited in Levitt, et al. 2006:5). The category into which each particular drug is placed is determined by the extent of harm its misuse inflicts. Section 1.2 of the Act states that drugs are divided between classes based on: a) whether the drug is being misused; b) whether it is likely to be misused and (c) whether the misuse in either case is having or could have harmful effects sufficient to constitute a social problem (cited in Levitt, et al. 2006:15).

These issues are difficult to quantify and there is, therefore, an in-built ambiguity in the Act, which placed heroin and cocaine in class A, cannabis into class B along with amphetamines and barbiturates, and anabolic steroids (subsequently) in class C. The 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act placed great stock in punishment as opposed to treatment and compounded in law the continuing prohibition of drugs. Within government, from this point on, except for a brief hiatus in the Cabinet Office towards the end of the 1990s, the drugs portfolio in the UK has remained the property of the Home Office.

It is important to stress at this stage that it was a widely held view that prior to, and in the immediate aftermath of, the enactment of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, the UK did not really have a drug problem *per se*. According to Webster (2007:151), at the start of the 1970s the ‘addict’ population known to the authorities was stable, numbering 4,067 and mainly centred in London. Newcombe (2007:26), through a more historical lens, suggests that the numbers were lower:

Statistics for notified drug addicts go back to 1935, and show that, for the first two decades, numbers dropped fairly steadily – from about 700 in 1935 to 290 in 1953. Annual numbers then began rising slowly again, up to 927 in 1965, before rising more sharply to 2881 in 1969, and then falling again, down to 1406 in 1973.

The overarching point is that the number of registered addicts of heroin or morphine was low and fluctuating. Also, at this time cannabis use was restricted to certain sections of the population, for example, students and certain immigrant groups. Consequently, Downes (1977:89) has characterised British drug policy at this time as a period of ‘masterly inactivity’, referring to the fact that draconian policies were implemented to combat what was, at this time, a relatively minor problem.

2.3.2 The 1980s

The drug situation at the start of the 1980s can be characterised as a time of rapidly rising drug use. At this point, events occurring internationally and domestically meant that the period of inactivity gave way to the increased ‘politicisation’ of the drug phenomenon, in some sense constructing a ‘drug problem’ *per se*. On the

international stage, in the 1970s, the Dutch had diverted from the rest of Europe in their response to the perceived drug problem. This occurred under the auspices of the Hulsman Committee's review of the drugs laws.

Broadly, this changed the emphasis from a policy based on a philosophy of prohibition to one of minimising the impact of drug related harm. Primarily, the Hulsman Committee was guided by a liberal philosophy believing in minimum state interference in behaviour that is inherently personal, with limited consequences for society. This stance drew heavily on the philosophy of Mill (1974). In sociological terms, the Hulsman Committee reported that much drug use was a sub-cultural phenomenon and that space must be granted in society for 'alternative' lifestyles, which 'need not conform to the norms of the so-called respectable citizen' (Barton 2003:153). In one sense, the Hulsman philosophy was also consistent with that of the philosopher Baruch Spinoza who held the view that those who try to restrain personal behaviour by force of law are more likely to arouse vices than to reform them (Robson 1999:249).

The practical consequence of this, in policy terms, was a general shift towards harm reduction on a large part of the continent. Harm reduction is a hugely contested term (see Section 7.3) but in this sense is thought to be based on the realist principle of containment as opposed to the idealism of outright prohibition and the utopia of a 'drug free society'. The policy of reducing drug related harm began to permeate more areas of Dutch drug policy into the 1980s and beyond. Around this time, a culture of controlled use of heroin, in the form of needle exchanges, became widespread, as the threat of HIV/AIDS spread amongst many intravenous drug users. This was often a result of needle sharing with those already infected. This harm reduction approach was not restricted to the controlled use of so-called harder drugs, however. From the 1980s and into the 1990s, the widespread popularity of 'dance culture' saw the introduction of pill testing kits outside night-clubs, to facilitate the safe use of ecstasy and amphetamines, an integral aspect of this scene (Gourley 2004; Measham, et al. 2000; Redhead 1997). In essence, this signalled a public-health response to the drug problem within the broader criminal-justice paradigm.

On the domestic front, the year 1979 represents a watershed in British drug policy and problems (Pearson 1991). It would be inaccurate to say that the election of the Thatcher administration was a causal factor in the onset of the drug problem, but Buchanan and Young (2000:410) maintain that certain policies, informed by a New-Right, neo-liberal agenda certainly confounded the problem in a particular way. Indeed, they state of the 1980s that 'it was during this period that de-industrialisation ravaged labour-intensive industries, as factories and shipyards closed down'. Consequently, whole communities were destabilised by mass long-term unemployment. In the 1980s, for the first time in the post-war period, a generation of school leavers who would otherwise have found secure employment in apprenticeships, factories or semi-skilled positions found themselves surplus to requirements. Work was not available and the long-standing concept of 'a job for life' was being rapidly eroded. Heroin, for many, provided a means of escape (Buchanan and Young 2000:410).

These societal changes had a knock-on effect for the drug situation, as heroin use and associated problems, became a more high-profile social issue (Dorn and South 1987; Parker, et al. 1988; Pearson 1987). Shiner (2003:773) contends that from the 1980s onwards 'central government took on a more active role, the debate about drugs became politicised'. Increased emphasis was placed on law enforcement, and medicine, arguably already subservient to the criminal justice system in the UK, was initially further disenfranchised in its attempt to control the drug problem. Other key features of the 1980s drug situation were: a) its size and scale, there was a four fold increase in the numbers of registered addicts, arguably a conservative reflection on the total number of drug users as most would be unregistered with agencies; b) the spread of serious drug use from its base in London to include large Scottish cities and mainly large urban areas west of the Pennines; c) the fact that unlike in the United States, most heroin users were white and not ethnic minorities and; d) the development of global trafficking patterns as heroin was imported from the 'golden triangle' of south-west Asia; Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran (Pearson 1987:67; Seddon 2007).

All of these factors contributed to what was seen as a heroin 'epidemic' and prompted renewed vigour for the war-on-drugs policy in political circles. Juxtaposed

to this, however, and a by-product of the 1980s heroin epidemic was the outbreak of HIV/AIDS amongst many intravenous users, as illustrated above. According to Buchanan and Young (2000:411), this eventually seriously called into question the policy of outright prohibition from the medical profession who had remained sceptical about the effectiveness of using the criminal justice system as a deterrent. HIV/AIDS was deemed more dangerous than heroin use, forcing a 'pragmatic shift in UK drugs policy towards a public-health inspired, 'harm reduction' approach designed to establish contact with the hidden drug-using population'. The policy was pragmatic in that it was intended to 'protect the non drug-using society from the risk of HIV infection' yet the harm reduction approach closely monitored by the Home Office sat uneasily with its crime reduction ideology of punishment (Buchanan and Young 2000:411). The medical profession in the UK was once again exercising its muscles. This move arguably reflects the ambiguity built into the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, which is not solely about prohibition, although it was the Home Office who controlled the licensing arrangements for the safe use of heroin.

2.3.3 The 1990s

Throughout the 1990s, these harm reduction measures were embraced on a scale never before witnessed, albeit still within a criminal justice paradigm. Although the numbers of known heroin users continued to rise, overall prevalence rates remained low. Towards the turn of the millennium, one per cent of 16-29 year olds reported heroin use, within the last year (Ramsay, et al. 2001). While heroin remained a political problem, around this time, the UK drug situation began to change markedly. It became apparent that drug use was not restricted to problem users of hard substances and that the current drug situation was radically different from anything that had preceded it (Parker, et al. 1998). Cannabis use remained popular but the onset of the Acid House movement and the subsequent expansion of dance culture (Collin 1997; Hammersley, et al. 2002) established recreational drug use as a key component of leisure. This development contributed to the notion that drug use among certain sections of the population had in fact become 'normalised'. For many young people certain kinds of recreational drug use became culturally accommodated (Aldridge, et al. 1999; Parker, et al. 1998; Parker, et al. 2002). The 'normalisation' of drug use is anathema to those who support the war-on-drugs, as the rhetoric

associated with the drug-war and the perceived dangers of drugs did not correspond with many young people's experiences of illicit drugs (MacCoun and Reuter 2001b).

These changes were reflected in a subtle policy change occurring around this time. For Barton (2003:136), the key development was the publication of an independent report commissioned by the Department of Health (Howard, et al. 1993) calling for a 'greater level of co-operation across all agencies involved with illicit drug policy and practice' (Barton 2003:137). This, in turn, led to the fulfilment of the Conservative election promise to make sure that action aimed at tackling drug misuse was effectively co-ordinated. The upshot of these developments was that the publication of the Conservative Party's 1995 Drug Strategy *Tackling Drugs Together* (Department of Health 1995) had a profound influence on the thinking surrounding UK drug policy, which continues to this day. This is despite the fact that the document only related to policy in England. The Conservative Party, traditionally in favour of more draconian solutions to drug problems, amended their drug policy so that it attempted to take effective action via law enforcement, accessible treatment and a new emphasis on education and prevention. Overall it was the aim of the 'Tackling Drugs' strategy to: a) increase the safety of communities from drug-related crime; b) reduce the acceptability of drugs to young people and; c) reduce the health risks and other damage related to drug misuse (Department of Health 1995:1).

This initiative received support across the political spectrum and, according to Barton (2003:138), represented a partial broadening of the scope of the drug problem. By focusing on problems associated with communities, the Government of the time were able to pursue the aforementioned two-pronged approach to tackling the problem through an attempt to foster 'joint working' between the public health and law-and-order constituencies. This multi-agency co-ordination, both at local and national levels would focus on problems associated with crime and public health with particular regard to young people (Department of Health 1995:1).

Barton (2003:138) also highlights various issues concerning the institutional structure and allocation of resources. Part of this process saw the establishment of a Ministerial Sub-Committee of the Cabinet on the Misuse of Drugs. In the spirit of joint-working, this was comprised of figures from interested departments. Also in the

spirit of togetherness, the government set up Drug Action Teams, the remit of which was to tackle drug related issues at the local level. These were also multi-agency arenas comprising 'senior representatives from the police, probation services, local authorities (including education and social services) and health authorities' (Department of Health 1995:5). The intention was to foster links with voluntary sector organisations with a vested interest in drug issues. In terms of organisation, the policy arena had opened up, moving away from central government. This created a more nuanced approach to the problem. Ultimately, this allowed for greater 'outside' involvement as more agents became embroiled within the policy process.

The approach still operated, nonetheless, in terms of the aforementioned dual paradigm debate. Consistent with the hitherto dominance of law-and-order, emphasis remained on supply reduction, but 'police forces, probation areas and prisons, were all required to develop their own drug misuse strategies' (Barton 2003:138). The health initiative, was one that ensured that drug users, primarily those whose use was chaotic or problematic, had 'easy access' to services. This was facilitated by the establishment of the National Drugs Help-Line in April 1995 (Department of Health 1995:3). According to Barton (2003:138), the Government's actions stopped well short of accepting the normalisation thesis of illicit drugs for certain sections of the population. Harm reduction policies were couched in terms of a step towards the 'somewhat unrealistic' goal of 'drug free states'. Drug abstinence was 'the ultimate aim'. Indeed, the twin goals of abstinence and resistance, especially for young people, were the messages sent by the drugs education literature. This was boosted by the allocation of an extra £5.9 million for training programmes for teachers to enrol on 'innovative drug education programmes' (Barton 2003:138). Furthermore, drug education became part of the National Curriculum (SCODA 1998).

On the whole, for Barton (2003:138), the strategy was not a radical departure from anything preceding it. As a useful summary, Barton (2003:138-9) highlights five main issues significant to the approach of *Tackling Drugs Together*. First and foremost, it removed the Government's drug policy away from the Home Office to the Cabinet Office. Second, it acted as a catalyst for a policy explosion in the field of illicit drug policy and practice. Drugs came to be identified as a 'major problem' thus further politicising the issue. Third, it began to create a climate where law-and-order

and medical approaches could be combined and operate together under a banner of harm reduction. Fourth, this placed joint working at the forefront of policy, forcing previously unilateral agencies into collaboration. Finally, it gave guarded recognition to the fact that isolated law-and-order approaches based on supply reduction alone were failing and there needed to be education-based demand reduction approaches to tackling drug misuse.

In his detailed critique of the strategy, Howard (1997:13) highlighted numerous positive and negative aspects. On the desirable side, it provided national leadership and co-ordination. The leader of the ministerial sub-committee was the Lord President of the Council, thus ensuring some semblance of neutrality in that no department could, in theory, dominate proceedings. The formation of the Drug Action Teams also served to cement joint working in areas where it was already established, providing a model of good practice for elsewhere. In addition, it gave recognition to the work of specialist drug service providers and highlighted the value of the demand reduction paradigm. In this sense, 'harm reduction' became associated with demand reduction within a hitherto supply reduction dominated paradigm. The approach also catered for the provision of additional resources and countenanced a more realistic approach to the drug scene. This was viewed as providing a counter-balance to the more sensationalising and demonising deluges from the press and its associated drug war rhetoric.

There were, however, in turn, a number of problems and criticisms voiced about the strategy. Not least, the various problems associated with joint working stemming from institutional animosity and suspicion (Colebatch 2002; Crawford and Jones 1996). Allied to this, there was still concern over the power struggle between law-and-order and public-health, this time over the allocation of resources. Indeed, Howard (1997) indicates that the allocation of resources for supply reduction, that is, the cause of the law-and-order lobby outnumbered by two to one those allocated to the demand reduction initiatives of treatment and prevention. Barton (2003:139) suggests that this was probably related to the fact that the strategy placed greater emphasis on the protection of communities from harm rather than the protection of the individual and, in doing so, maintained the ascendancy of law-and-order responses to drug problems.

Overall, the framework provided by *Tackling Drugs Together* was successful in recognising that, until this point, there had been a lack of coherency in UK drug policy. By association, as the goal of a drug-free society was proving elusive, the aim was to create a new philosophy with which to deal with the drug problem. In this respect, it was successful, but only to a point. By reorganising local services, the strategy provided a green light for some pioneering means of addressing the problems of illicit drug use, thus opening of the door for other voices to be heard in the debate. This process continued with the election of New Labour in 1997.

2.3.4 The Present: New Labour and ‘Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain’

New Labour came to power on the back of a huge majority, offering the potential platform for sweeping reform in many areas of social and public policy. Toynbee and Walker (2001:17), for example, claim that in the field of welfare reform, policy advisers such as Frank Field were given the mandate ‘to think the unthinkable’. Conversely, in spite of early indications to the contrary by MPs Clare Short and Mo Mowlam, public pronouncements about the direction of drug policy, revolved around familiar notions that ‘all drugs were harmful’. In effect, it became clear that thinking the unthinkable, in this area, was actually unthinkable. If anything, there seemed to be a tide of continuity flowing from the Conservative approach to drug policy with that of New Labour. Indeed, Bean (2002:56) observed that the New Labour approach laid out in *Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain* (Cabinet Office 1998) ‘largely reiterated the themes of the 1995 document whilst adding performance indicators for drug reduction in the next decade’.

Barton (2003:141) however, points out that this claim is something of an oversimplification and, whilst conceding that the New Labour approach carried many similarities with what had gone before, it also offered some new initiatives. It was, then, perhaps a quirk of the electoral system and the actions of the electorate that the groundwork put in place by the Conservative drug strategy only bore fruit under New Labour. With the benefit of hindsight, though, New Labour was able to address some of the more noticeable shortcomings in the 1995 document and attempt to iron out these deficiencies in their strategy. According to Barton (2003:142), this has meant

that multi-agency work has started to become more 'meaningful' as more 'concrete projects' were put in place.

The more significant changes, however, related to the organisation of the drug issue within government, rather than the substance of the policy itself. In terms of substance, the main policy areas were concerned: a) to help young people resist drug misuse in order to achieve their full potential in society; b) to protect communities from drug-related anti-social behaviour; c) to enable people with drug problems to overcome them through drug treatment and to live healthy and crime free lives and; d) to stifle the availability of illegal drugs on the streets. This was consistent with the Conservative approach. As regards administrative organisation, at the national level, the organisational structure remained in tact with the continuation of the Ministerial sub-Committee on Drug Misuse. This kept its brief to ensure that individual departments, with an interest in illicit drug use, contributed to the overall vision and strategy.

One major area of change was with the appointment of Keith Hellawell, the former chief constable of West Yorkshire Police as a new 'anti-drugs co-ordinator' - or 'Drug Tsar' - with Mike Trace as his deputy. Barton (2003:141) suggests that both were seen as 'prepared to think radically about drug policy' and part of Hellawell's remit was to head up the UK Anti-Drugs Strategic Steering Group, a new body comprised of government officials, local government representatives, representatives of independent bodies and voluntary sector agencies (Barton 2003:141). In addition, the Drug Tsar was required to:

...scrutinise rigorously the performance of departments and agencies - individually and collectively - against the actions, objectives and performance indicators set out in this report; and produce a National Anti-Drugs Plan for implementation in each succeeding year (Cabinet Office 1998:2)

In this way UK drug policy-making was opened up even further. Policy appraisal and a more inclusive consultation process were also key aspects of this process as the following discussion of the reclassification of cannabis illustrates.

Although the Conservative and Labour strategies did signal a slight shift in policy, the treatment/punishment dichotomy still shaped the boundaries of the debate. With wider involvement in the decision-making process, the treatment/punishment paradigm became fuzzy and new voices in the debate could be seen. For Barton (2003:142) the New Labour approach did, however, recognise that a unilateral law-and-order approach was not deemed to be the sole solution to the 'drug problem'. In doing so, it kept open the door for policies based on the principles of harm reduction to play a key role in the drug strategy. The upshot of such developments was the perception of more proactive policies that could address the realities of the drug situation in the twenty-first century; a situation characterised by a continuing rise in the numbers of recreational drug users throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium (Parker, et al. 1998).

2.4 The Cannabis Reclassification in Context

There have been many calls for a relaxation of the drugs laws in the UK before and since the enactment of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. Some have been more vociferous than others, and many by powerful and not so powerful individuals and groups. By the same token, the call to resist change has also been just as vocal, if not more so, and it is this lobby that has traditionally won out. Towards the end of the twentieth, and into the twenty-first century, there was a tacit realisation that with new knowledge of drugs emerging, the current classification system may not be fit for purpose. It was increasingly clear that some substances may be in the wrong category on the grounds that the harms associated with them were not equivalent to other substances in that group. Cannabis and ecstasy, in particular, were two examples (Police Foundation 2000). In effect, the perceived normalisation of drugs was calling into question the validity of the current ABC system.

From the 1990s onwards there had been an increasingly widespread clamour for a change in the laws controlling drugs, with cannabis the most plausible candidate for reform (MacCoun and Reuter 2001a). This was one premise, amongst others, that led to the reclassification of cannabis in 2004 and the debate thereon. To fully comprehend the event of cannabis reclassification, it is necessary to consult the

origins of its prohibition and simultaneous campaigns for legislative change, various cultural issues surrounding its use and various happenings on the international stage.

2.4.1 The Origins of Cannabis Prohibition and Law Reform Campaigns

Cannabis was first outlawed in the 1920s, although the reasons for this remain unclear. According to Mills (2003:216), the Home Office had carefully monitored stories about cannabis use in the UK throughout the 1920s and saw ‘no reason for the cannabis initially to be included in the Dangerous Drugs Acts’. Medical opinion on cannabis was divided and commonly ill informed. Significantly for Mills (2003:217), those that could claim to have actually followed debates about drugs in general, and cannabis in particular, over a whole career, were adamant that it had no place alongside opium in the regulatory system of the UK at this time. Consequently, during the early part of the twentieth century, the British government paid little attention to cannabis as a domestic issue, yet it would not be long before the British press began reporting on the effects on cannabis on the population of the UK.

By and large, although there was no real domestic cannabis use in the 1920s, the drug did enter the statute books in that decade through two routes. Firstly, as a direct result of the international opium conference in Geneva, then secondly, and significantly for the autonomy of the medical profession, via the Pharmaceutical Society and its power to identify substances listed under the 1908 Poisons Act (Hayes and Shapiro 1998:13). According to Mills (2003:217), the only reason given by the Pharmaceutical Society, for nominating cannabis in 1924, was that it had come to their attention because of criminal cases relating to its use. Yet for Mills (2003:217), reports from the time show that the police were ‘unable to identify cannabis’ and wrongly thought it to be similar in its properties to opium. Its subsequent portrayal in the press as a ‘plague’ about to sweep London, that was directly comparable to heroin and cocaine and ‘would induce insanity’ was the clinching issue for the authorities (Mills 2003:217).

Mills (2003:202-3) thus identifies the 1920s as the start of a moral panic concerning cannabis. He claims that overall it was ‘caught up in a web of concern spun out of little more than aspersions and inferences’. This related to high profile

cases from India and Egypt where it was stated that cannabis use was the cause for insanity and that the majority of inmates of the Asylums were hashish smokers. Initially, it was perceived that the prevalence of cannabis use, in the UK, was restricted to the immigrant communities mainly in the seaports. Subsequently, allegations of a serious growth in the traffic of cannabis and its association as a drug which induces madness became commonplace in the media of the day. It was no surprise, therefore, when the issue was raised in parliament in February 1924. In spite of a lack of hard data concerning the dangers - either real or potential - of the drug, the 1925 Dangerous Drugs Act was passed which finally outlawed cannabis possession in the UK (Dorn, et al. 1992).

According to Shapiro (1999:192), up to the start of the 1960s, cannabis use in the UK remained restricted to certain sections of the population. In particular, 'the West Indian blues and rent party scene and the West End jazz clubs with only a small band of white musicians, students and sundry bohemians indulging in pot'. Indeed, it was only by 1964 that prosecutions for cannabis possession by whites outstripped those for blacks (Shapiro 1999:192). By the middle of the decade, however, cannabis 'exploded out of its narrow confines' to the extent that by 1970 upwards of four million people had tried the drug in England (Robson 1999:71). This was very much the origin of the permeation of cannabis use into the mainstream of British society and at this time widespread clamour for changes in the legal status of the drug were apparent (Shapiro 1999).

It was also the first sign of a potential movement of cannabis use beyond the realm of working-class or immigrant subcultures (Young 1971), whilst still falling far short of the levels experienced today. This trend emerged despite the fact that, for many years, cannabis had been the subject of significant 'deviance amplification' (Wilkins 1964), through continued sensationalist reporting in the tabloid press. The first detailed report into cannabis since the Indian Hemp Drug Commission (1894), was conducted by the Wootton Committee (Home Office 1969). According to one of its members, the report concluded by stating that most cannabis users were 'law abiding and industrious' and that 'psychosis or psychological dependence' were uncommon (Schofield 1971:99). It was claimed, therefore, that most of the public fears about cannabis were groundless and that innately, there was little linking the

drug to violent or aggressive behaviour, as had been claimed by certain sections of the press and in the drug-war rhetoric.

Shapiro (1999:195), comments that on publication the report was roundly condemned. The then Home Secretary James Callaghan suggested that the committee had been 'nobbled by the pro-pot lobby'. In spite of this, much of what was recommended found its way into the new 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. Thus, whereas internationally the UK had committed itself to treating cannabis as a dangerous drug, the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act positioned it in Class B, with lesser penalties for possession. In doing so, the Government deflated the vibrant cannabis law reform movement, stirring at this time, but not irrevocably.

The main sense of failure, according to critics of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act was that its commitment to the prohibition of drugs was a policy that was destined to fail (Young 1971). As illustrated, there is increasingly widespread critique of prohibitionist policies (Bennett 1990; Bertram, et al. 1996; MacCoun and Reuter 2001b; McWilliams 1991; Rolles, et al. 2006; Rosenberger 1996), Robson (1999:248) backs up these assertions with some recent historical, empirical evidence. He comments that:

The illicit production of opium has increased year on year from 2,242 tonnes in 1987 to 5,000 tonnes in 1996, whilst that of coca leaves is thought to have doubled between 1985 and 1994. Customs and police officers in the developed world seem to accept that only 10 per cent or so of illicit drugs entering a country are intercepted or seized on the street.

Additionally, 'despite heroic expenditure on enforcement over three decades, the real price of street drugs has fallen steadily while access, especially for young people in their teens, gets easier and easier' (Robson 1999:248). The fact that seizures have risen is no index that the war is being won, it merely confirms for detractors of the drug war, that seizures only represent 'the tip of the iceberg' (Robson 1999:248). This has not, however, led to a widespread abandonment of the policy, although recent cultural changes and changes in Europe are now starting to challenge the philosophy of the current system.

2.4.2 Cannabis and Culture

To equate policy changes (and this particular one is no exception) solely with trends in the nature of policy-making, serves to underestimate how various cultural changes impact on the process. A useful way of viewing the culture and policy relationship is as a duality. Policy change shapes and is shaped by cultural developments. Cannabis occupies a unique status in British society for a number of reasons. It is widely documented that cannabis has for some time been the most widely used illicit substance in the UK (Pearson and Shiner 2002; Police Foundation 2000; Ramsay, et al. 2001; Ramsay and Partridge 1999; Roe 2005). In this capacity, it represents the drug of choice for a vast number of people. The significance of cannabis, however, goes much further than this, entailing a specific cultural dimension. In this sense, cannabis use has become a benchmark for gauging morality.

Cannabis use is a misdemeanour that captures the imagination like no other and the issue over its legal status divides public opinion. Throughout the previous century, issues of morality, at various junctures came to the attention of the political community, whereby activities once widely frowned upon became the subject of much less coercive legislation. Pornography and homosexuality along with drug use represent good examples of behaviours commonplace in the so-called permissive society (Davies 1990; Newburn 1992). Unlike pornography and homosexuality, drugs have, however, until recently remained free of liberalising impulses. Indeed, Shapiro (1999:92) says of the 1960s that ‘in a decade of unprecedented liberalising legislation which saw controls relaxed on gambling, censorship, abortion, homosexuality, the laws against drug use...were tightened’.

The notion of cannabis use as a measure of morality can be illustrated by the fact that one question asked of nearly every politician of the baby-boom generation, those born in the aftermath of World War II, is a variant of, ‘have you ever smoked dope?’ Bill Clinton, when confronted with this question stated, somewhat timorously, that as a student at Oxford, he ‘smoked’ cannabis with fellow students but never actually inhaled! Tony Blair, on becoming the leader of the Labour Party in 1994 was also asked the same question and replied in a light-hearted fashion, mimicking his soon to be close friend and political ally, that he had not ever smoked

dope, but if he had, ‘he would have inhaled!’ (cited in Stephens 2004:9). Interestingly, this is a vastly different sentiment to those made on gaining power where an ideological commitment to the drug-war was the chosen stance (Stimson 2000). Such is the interest in this issue and the potential for it to blacken a political name, that on rising to power, Blair’s political aides, knowing the media would want to dig into his past, contacted his old acquaintances to inquire about any potential skeletons in his closet and that if the cannabis question arose it would be met with a quip at Clinton’s expense (Stephens 2004:9).

Somewhat jocularly, this episode illustrates the continuing significant media and public interest in the cannabis issue. It does, however, also show how cannabis occupies a unique position in that it is no longer the subject of outright vilification that it was hitherto. May, et al. (2002:6-7) provide a neat summary of the changing cultural status of cannabis:

It is clear that cannabis has lost that set of social meanings that it had 30 years ago, to do with social protest, counter culture and opposition to the mainstream. It is present in the fabric of everyday life for most young people, regardless of whether they themselves use it.

2.4.3 International Trends and Developments

Current British drugs policy cannot be fully comprehended without considering changes occurring on the continent, a phenomenon often referred to as ‘benchmarking’. In this sense, policy change in one jurisdiction provides transferable lessons for another. To briefly elaborate, Mulgan (2005:216) suggests that the ‘Western’ world is currently in an era where the demand for knowledge is paramount and where today’s citizens are ‘far more educated, knowledgeable and confident than their predecessors’. This manifests itself in the fact that they use scientific knowledge to inform a range of choices, for example, from business decisions to dietary preferences. This scientific knowledge is tied in with the notion of ‘best practice’. In various policy spheres, the search for ‘best practice’ has become paramount.

For Mulgan (2005:216), government’s are often cajoled into searching for this by the increasing influence of various trans-national bodies such as the United

Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Union. As regards the European Union, co-ordination of policy between various European countries is essential for its continued survival as a viable political entity and it is in this context that recent changes in the UK drugs legislation can be seen. This search for best practice and spirit of co-ordination is leading to the creation of similar policies, where once there was divergence.

According to Blackman (2004:183-4), in various European countries more relaxed policies towards cannabis possession were implemented towards the start of the twenty-first century. Although prohibition still remains the overarching strategy, consistent with United Nations regulations, new ways of monitoring the problem are now apparent with some going as far as decriminalisation. As illustrated previously, for some time, the Netherlands has pursued a policy of 'normalisation' for soft drugs, such as cannabis. Although there have been amendments to Dutch drug policy over recent years, and cannabis is still illegal under the 1976 Opium Act, there is now great emphasis on keeping drug use and users away from the criminal justice system within the 'socio-medical field'. In terms of the substances themselves, this meant that licensed premises, which morphed into the coffee shop system, sprang up in many Dutch towns where cannabis could be consumed in a controlled environment. These premises prohibited the sale of harder drugs on site as well as alcohol.

Blackman (2004:184) states that this policy was 'taken up in a variety of ways by Switzerland, Portugal, Italy, Spain and certain states within Germany'. In addition, Belgium has also recently altered its legislation. Drugs are still illegal in these countries, as legalisation is not an option for signatory states to the United Nations conventions. Thus, they remain within a prohibitionist framework but there is an increasing recognition that there is room for manoeuvre where international laws are concerned (Boister 2001; Dorn and Jamieson 2001). According to Blackman (2004:184-5), the report produced by Dorn and Jamieson (2001) confirms how the development of drug normalisation policies in Europe gives legitimacy to legislative change that occurs within the United Nations conventions. In this respect, 'normalisation' constitutes a new 'paradigm' in understanding contemporary drug use in a cross-national context. It presents a new package of ideas and beliefs, which

become influential as they structure and determine the terms of the political discourse.

Bell (1997:24) describes a similar process at work with the disillusionment in the 1980s of the Keynesian influenced post-war consensus. In terms of cannabis legislation, however, the aforementioned European countries were seeking to move away from custodial prison sentences for possession and small-scale supplier offences. This highlights recent convergence in this area of European drug policy, in contrast to ten years ago when the legal status granted to the use of drugs, without any aggravating circumstances, or to possession of drugs for personal use, was significantly divergent in the 'older' countries of the EU (Bergeron and Griffiths 2006:117-8).

It is apt to point out at this stage that by convergence the authors do not mean now that policies across the fifteen original member states of the European Union are the same. This is palpably not the case. There is a history of divergence in the drug policies of some European states. For example, the Dutch and Swedish approaches are often held up as examples of more liberal and conservative approaches respectively. Instead, the analogy of language translation summarises the situation, in that a word in one language is not strictly identical to that in another, but has an equivalent. This perhaps applies to national drug policies in Europe in that they are far from identical but follow equivalent paths (Bergeron and Griffiths 2006:115). Informal warnings and/or civil fines became increasingly the chosen policies to deal with possession for small amounts of cannabis on the continent around this time. These were deemed to be a 'proportionate response' (Blackman 2004:185). It was in this international context that David Blunkett's decision to reclassify cannabis can be seen, but this was not the determining factor.

2.5 Cannabis Reclassification and Evidence-Based Policy-Making

The reclassification of cannabis from class B to class C heralded a subtle, but significant change in UK drug policy. The consequences of the legislative change are on-going as cannabis has once again resurfaced on the political agenda (see Section 7.2). The policy issue is therefore 'live', but the current concern is with events

originating at the turn of the millennium, running up to March 2005. It will suffice to suggest that although a relatively minor substantive change, symbolically, the impact of cannabis reclassification has been wide-ranging. It represents the first instance in the UK whereby a widely used illicit substance has had penal sanctions lightened. This is, however, an over simplification of the situation.

Initially perceived in terms of liberalisation, this view was called into question as other legislation was subsequently amended to counter the effects of downgrading cannabis. For example, the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act was altered so that cannabis assumed a unique status as a class C drug as the police maintained the power of arrest for those caught in possession. Additionally, the 2003 Criminal Justice Act introduced more draconian punishments for supply of class C substances from five years to fourteen years, on a par with those of class B.

Although around this time there was renewed interest in the use of cannabis-based substances in the treatment of certain illnesses, this did not form part of the justification for the initial reclassification, and consequently is not central to the later analysis. There were two initial triggers for this change. Firstly, a number of high-profile inquiries into drug policy and legislation which occurred in and around this time, both domestically and internationally (Boister 2001; Dorn and Jamieson 2001) highlighted the relatively benign nature of cannabis vis-à-vis other prohibited substances. As regards the domestic situation, the Police Foundation (2000) inquiry into the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, also known as the Runciman Report, suggested that in terms of its toxicity or harmfulness, it was not comparable with either class A or B drugs. This was supported by the subsequent inquiries of Home Affairs Committee (2002) and the ACMD (2002).

The second trigger was a Governmental concern with public management and efficiency. The Police Foundation Report (2000) also recommended that cannabis be reclassified from a class B to a class C drug, making cannabis possession a non-arrestable offence (except in aggravated circumstances). It was perceived that this would reduce the number of 'otherwise law abiding, mainly young people' being criminalised and potentially receiving a custodial sentence to the detriment of their futures (Police Foundation 2000:7). It was also perceived that this could remove a

considerable source of friction between the police and the wider community of cannabis smokers and that this would free up police time, enabling them to concentrate on problems posed by class A drugs such as (crack) cocaine and heroin, in line with the updated drug strategy (Home Office 2002). In the UK, throughout the 1990s, for the most part, cannabis-related offences increased as a result of stop-and-search policies. This was combined with a general upturn in the prevalence of frequent use (May, et al. 2002:14). This placed significant pressure on the police in terms of time and resources.

Running contemporaneously to the political deliberations of the legal status of cannabis was a pilot project of policing cannabis in Brixton, South London. The 'Brixton Experiment' as it became known, effectively replaced the threat of arrest with informal disposal and a formal on-the-spot warning for those caught in possession of cannabis. This would not form part of a national record. There is some debate as to the origins of this initiative (Crowther-Dowey 2007) and to its success in reducing bureaucracy (PSS Consultancy Group 2002). It was, however, subsequently evaluated and judged a success by both the Metropolitan Police Authority (Metropolitan Police Authority 2002) and the local community (MORI 2002). On the back of these findings, the then Home Secretary David Blunkett, told the Home Affairs Committee in October 2001 that he was 'minded' to downgrade cannabis and would seek advice from the ACMD, on the possibility of reclassification. Both parties reported back in early 2002, that cannabis should be reclassified (May, et al., 2002). In July 2003, it was announced that cannabis would be reclassified to a class C drug, coming into force in January 2004 and remaining unchallenged until March 2005.

For some commentators, the cannabis reclassification has been heralded as one of the first examples of UK drug policy being developed with recourse to significant evidence (Levitt, et al. 2006). Hence the episode can be considered as an explicit conjoining of UK drug policy with the principles of evidence-based policy-making. It can be seen also that the two main triggers reflect the different evidence-bases and are linked to the two main traditions in the UK drug policy debate.

Although the change was considered in light of the movement towards evidence-based policy-making, it needs to be stressed that no in-built evaluation of the impact of reclassification was ordered by the Home Office and no Key Performance Indicators were identified through which to gauge its impact. Ultimately this resulted in confusion as to what was the purpose of the policy change and opened up the possibility of continuing debate as to the efficacy of UK drug policy and its associated evidence-base. This adds credence to the notion that politicised policy areas are characterised by *ad hoc* or 'muddled through' policy-making (Lindblom 1959), which are often in conflict with those typically referred to in the remit of evidence-based policy, as Tonry (2004) conceives it. It is suggested here that for Tonry (2004), evidence-based policy-making is consistent with a cyclical view of policy (see Figure 3.1 and Section 3.2). According to Bridgeman and Davis (2000:27) this entails the following: issue identification, policy analysis, policy instruments, consultation, co-ordination, decision, implementation and evaluation. As more *ad hoc* policies do not conform to this sequence, the view of evidence in such policy areas is complex and nuanced. This is far removed, however, from the zero-sum suggestions that the policy was evidence-free and conversely that it was evidence-based. This notion is explored in more detail in subsequent chapters.

2.6 Summary

The above discussion has shown how the history of UK drug policy is characterised by conflict, primarily stemming from ownership of the drug problem. This conflict is ongoing and pervades all aspects of UK drug debate, the efficacy of the classification system being just one example. For the purposes of the current discussion, this chapter has suggested that the episode of cannabis reclassification initiated the fusion of two main areas of concern: the conjoining of UK drug policy with the principles of evidence-based policy-making. It must be stressed, however, that this is a controversial reading of the event and it makes certain assumptions about the policy-making process. In essence, the episode of cannabis reclassification provides the making of a critical case for examining the use of evidence in a controversial policy area.

In subsequent chapters, a closer look at the understandings of 'evidence' in the initial cannabis reclassification reveals a range of different understandings about the evidence-base for the decision. For now, however, what this chapter has illustrated, and what is argued throughout, is that evidence clearly has a role in the decision-making process. This is not to suggest, however, that the products of research have had a direct impact on policy-making, only that there is an increasing emphasis on policy analysis as being central to the policy-making process. By way of a conclusion, as the above discussion illustrates, a solid case can be made for the cannabis reclassification initiating a scenario whereby, in the area of drug policy, many interested parties' involvement in the process can be ascertained. The relationship between research and policy-making has been a widely contested area in policy analysis and it is to the nature of policy analysis that the discussion now turns.

3. THE NATURE OF POLICY-MAKING: STAGES OR PROCESS?

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the substantive aspects of this investigation: firstly, by illustrating how UK drug policy can be characterised as a continuing struggle over ownership of the drug problem and; secondly, by showing how significant changes in UK drug policy coincided with the election of New Labour and their modernising agenda. Evidence-based policy-making was a key aspect of this. It was suggested that the cannabis reclassification can be seen as a case study fusing both strands of the debate. By means of continuing the background literature review, this chapter commences with a discussion of the ‘policy’ side of the evidence and policy relationship. Accordingly, the chapter is organised in the following way. A general discussion of the way policy has been conceptualised is presented before some consideration is given to the ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ models of policy-making, which for Colebatch (2002:23), represent the ‘two great models’. Discussion then turns to pluralistic models of the policy process, developing the idea presented in the previous chapter, of multiple recognisable views engaged in the process of policy-making in the area of drug classification policy. Various manifestations are identified but the Advocacy Coalition Framework is highlighted as being of significant utility in the context of the thesis. This is because of its focus on conflict in the policy process. The remainder of the chapter is concerned with providing a detailed synopsis of this model. Some criticisms and counter-criticisms of the approach are discussed in subsequent chapters.

3.2 What is Policy?

Policy is undoubtedly a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Comprehending the nature of policy is, therefore, a troublesome enterprise. For the purpose of this thesis, the focus is on policies that are made at the level of central government. In this sense, the kind of policy-making in mind is that variously described as ‘social’ or ‘public’. Deciphering this is still a problematic past-time. Gordon, et al. (1993) contend that it is misleading to view policy analysis as the study of identifiable things called

'policies', which are produced, or crystallise, at a particular stage in the decision process. For these thinkers, ultimately, such views of the policy process are ones that stress that policy is an artefact, that is, an object created by policy-makers. Hill and Bramley (1986) also suggest that policy should not be treated as self-evident or a static, motionless phenomenon and that any attempt to define policy will be artificial in that what is actually being defined is inherently contested.

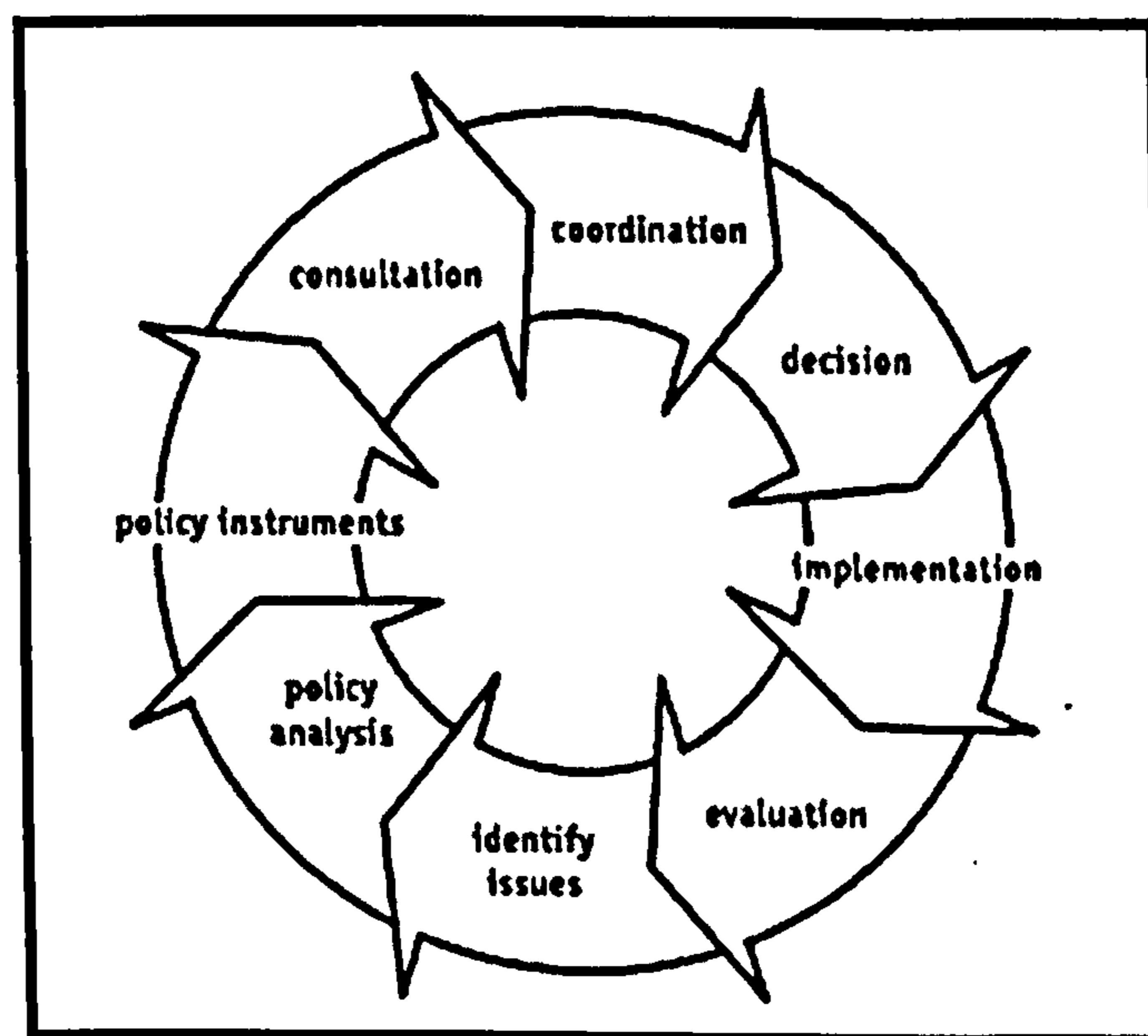
Bridgman and Davis (2000:6) further define policy as 'a course of action by government designed to achieve certain results'. This definition comes closer to the one advocated in this thesis, however, it neglects the notion that policy-making is not always the sole domain of the government or State and could involve various external actors and stakeholders. In this sense, Jenkins (1978:15) suggests that key to deciphering the nature of public policy is to view the phenomenon as 'a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or a group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them'. This occurs within specified situations and 'where these decisions should, in principle, be within the powers of these actors to achieve' (Jenkins 1978:15). As we shall see, this more inclusive understanding is pivotal to the following discussion.

There is, however, an assumption here that policies are tangible phenomenon and that policy-making is a rational process. Anderson, et al. (1984:4) comment that policy is a 'purposive' course of action. This perspective has a significant lineage. Friedrich (1963:70) previously stated that 'it is essential for the policy concept that there be a goal, objective or purpose' and Laswell and Kaplan (1950:71) suggested that policy is 'a projected program of goals, values and practices'. In contrast, policy-making entails various issues. The nature of administration, management, the organisational process, structure, regulation and governance all play a part in policy decision-making. Additionally, the spectre of politics looms large in policy. In this respect, Lindblom (1959) has famously pointed out that policy is actually about 'muddling through'. In effect, there is little agreement on the nature of policy, which raises significant issues for how it is to be analysed. There are, however, numerous schools of thought on how best to address this issue. For the sake of clarity, two are introduced here and expounded below.

3.3 Exploring Policy-Making: The Two ‘Great Models’

Jones and Newburn (2005:60) comment that ‘there is a large body of work within political science that has analysed policy-making by dividing it up into distinct stages’ and has then proceeded by ‘undertaking detailed examinations of each’. This is taken as a ‘common-sense’ aspect of the nature of policy. Research into this kind of policy-making also has a long history and follows a rigid process involving ‘problem definition, formulation of alternative solutions, consideration of implications of alternatives, to experimentation with the preferred choice’ (Jones and Newburn 2005:60). This general idea is not dissimilar to that of the policy cycle model illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: A Policy Cycle Model



(source: Bridgman and Davies 2000:27)

Nutley, et al. (2007) suggests that this represents a ‘linear-rational’ understanding of the research and policy relationship that has recently fallen into disrepute. By contrast, the second school of thought starts from the premise that this is an over simplistic mechanistic and sequential outlook to the process which is, in reality, much more arbitrary. Here the decision-making process is more diffuse or ‘horizontal’. Colebatch (2002) has likened the former to a ‘vertical’ model of policy-

making, which he contrasts with the more horizontal variety. Colebatch (2002:23) suggests that the two models view the policy-making process as occurring either along a vertical axis characterised by 'authorised decision-making' or a horizontal axis characterised by a 'process of structured interaction'. As a result of the complex nature of the policy-making process, these are ideal-types. Both of Colebatch's models provide an alternative answer to the thorny question of where policies are made.

3.3.1 The Vertical Model

Influenced by thinkers such as Lasswell (1951) and Easton (1965), the vertical model divides the policy process into neatly packaged and logically ordered stages. These specify the 'functioning of input, throughput, output and feedback mechanisms operating within broader "environments"' (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993:1). Such depictions have been described variously as the 'Stages Model' or 'Stages Heuristic' and the 'textbook approach' (Nakamura 1987). Commonplace throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the vertical model has facilitated a multitude of research and analysis at the various levels of policy decision-making. This has aided the development of a whole movement of policy analysis around the various stages. The burgeoning discipline of evaluation research, for example, has progressed as a stage focused research outlook.

The stages approach has obtained significant longevity as an explanation of the policy-making process. It has been suggested that this is a result of its resemblance to how powerful decision-makers also understand the policy process. According to Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993a:2-3):

Bureaucrats find it attractive because it portrays a rational division of labor between the executive and legislative institutions of government, thereby legitimizing the role of the bureaucracy within representative systems.

In addition, policy-makers view the stages model as being in concurrence with democratic theory, as it draws on the inputs of the broader society to make policy, which is, in turn, handed over to other government players for

implementation. For detractors, as we shall see, this represents a somewhat idealist account of the operation of the policy process.

As illustrated, this model is consistent with what is often referred to as the 'common-sense' understanding of the way that policy is made. Broadly speaking, for Colebatch (2002:38), this understanding of policy rests on many assumptions. Foremost among them, is that policy-making involves some sort of hierarchical structure whereby policy is 'made at the top and passed down the line' (Colebatch 2002:38). This, in turn, can involve a specialised division of labour amongst policy-makers, for example, in a Cabinet where one minister is responsible for education, another for health, another for transport and so on. In this regard, there is delegation downwards to a plethora of 'subordinate individuals' who deal with less pressing matters. The caricature presents a 'single chain of authority' in decision-making. In relation to the above question of where policy is made, the answer is at 'the top'.

This vertical model, then, is often associated with 'Westminster' style of political decision-making. For Colebatch (2002:40) there is here:

...an elaborate procedure which involves framing policy proposals which filter up the bureaucratic hierarchy, receive the approval of ministers, are discussed with other departments and finally go before the Cabinet. Once they are approved, there, all ministers are committed to support them and they become "government policy".

The above quotation is the epitome of the vertical model. A significant strength of this is the explicit recognition that the political domain is not homogenous. The most powerful figures are not always government agents, even though the focus is on more centralised government decision-making. In the UK, a Minister is unlikely to remain in the same position for more than a few years and so, consequently, there is a scenario where they are in charge of a portfolio of which they know very little about. In this regard, there is a tacit reliance on the expertise of others, often officials with specific expertise in any given area.

The usual scenario then is that a Minister presides over a body of officials who are in reality likely to have more knowledge and expertise in the area. Colebatch (2002:40) comments that although political leaders will probably have ideas of their

own about the direction in which they want policy to go, the officials will 'have more ideas, more specific ideas and more sense of which ideas will work'. This does not mean that the vertical model is to be abandoned. It merely means that the level of officials must be included in the explanation.

Within the vertical model, it is necessary to make a distinction between the Westminster style of politics, as typified in the UK, and that of elsewhere. Other systems of government, or intergovernmental bodies, like the EU, operate with a contrasting organisational structure, albeit one with similar traits. In this sense, it is possible for political activity to take place outside the political domain. This is often the case in Federal administrations. Here, a great deal of policy activity takes place out of the Cabinet Office as the legislature and the legal process take centre stage.

According to Colebatch (2002:40-1), this view is most common in the United States. In such circumstances there is a 'sharp constitutional distinction between the executive and the legislature', which advances the view that the 'legislators are making the broad policy choices, which executives then put into practice, and that it is the legislators who are the policy-makers'. In Australia - another federal administration - an example of this can be witnessed in the Mabo ruling in the Supreme Court. This granted hitherto unobtainable land rights to the indigenous population and resulted in a fundamental restructuring of this area of domestic policy. Additionally, tribunal courts have come to play an increasingly prominent role in the formation of policy. Fields such as immigration and trade are two examples.

Again this is an oversimplification as policy is still debated by the executive. Colebatch (2002:41) provides the following caveat suggesting that in those parliamentary systems, where party discipline normally ensures the legislation passed is that of which the executive approves, it is not really plausible to speak of legislators as policy-makers as they are trumped by the political process. However, governments in federal administrations often do not have overall majorities and policies made by the legislature are frequently the subject of much negotiation. Those which are passed can rightfully claim to have been 'made' by the legislature. It is also necessary to point out, where the making of policy is concerned, where the

relationship between law and politics crosses over. Colebatch (2002:41) points out that a great deal of policy is often made in the courts, particularly in federal systems.

In sum, although the best example of the vertical perspective can be seen in its Westminster guise, the vertical perspective is not restricted to this understanding. Unsurprisingly however, this model of policy-making is seen by many authors as being flawed. In most instances, policies transcend a number of disciplines, areas or government departments and thus it is not always transparent where the top is. In UK domestic drug policy, and this is a recurring theme, there are a range of interested participants. Focusing just on Government, although the Home Office has the lead, the Department of Health is a key player, as illustrated previously, not to mention the predominance of advisory bodies such as the ACMD. Consequently, although the model assumes policies are made at 'the top', this is too general an account as it is unclear which actors occupy this position. In light of this, an alternative view of the policy process has become noticeable in recent years. Its advocates are essentially critics of the vertical account (e.g. Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Hill 1997; Kingdon 1984; Ostrom 1990).

3.3.2 The Horizontal Model

In contrast to the vertical model in its Westminster guise, the horizontal model suggests that policy-making is not characterised by direct diffusion from the top, filtering down through subordinate levels. Instead, it involves negotiation and the 'dispersal of authority' through various spheres of the political arena. Accordingly, attention can also be focused on regional and local government involvement in the process instead of restricting policy-making to the national level. Also, as emphasis is placed on the nature of negotiation, the horizontal model allows further consideration of other agents' roles in the process, for example, agents of state apparatus, such as the police and those from non-state agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and think-tanks. The horizontal model can, for current purposes, be seen as an umbrella term linking together various alternative views of the nature of policy-making.

In terms of the relationship between research and policy, March and Olsen's (1976) notion of the 'garbage can model' is of the same lineage as the horizontal model. The same can be said of the widely referenced incremental model, as both cast doubt on rational views of the policy-making process. According to Nutley and Webb (2000:27):

Incrementalism, as a model, was born out of dissatisfaction with the rational view of decision-making. As a result of an analysis of decisions in public sector organisations, proponents...argued that decisions are not made as a movement towards predetermined goals, based on a thorough analysis of the situation. Instead, the process is more piecemeal.

The proponents of incrementalism include Dahl and Lindblom (1953), Lindblom (1959) and Braybrooke and Lindblom (1963). They advocate a much more diverse role for how research can enter the policy-making process. Here, multiple interests are said to impact on the policy-making process via 'a process of mutual adjustment to achieve consensus' (Nutley and Webb 2000:27). For now, however, the primary concern is with the nature of policy *per se* rather than the relationship between research and policy.

The horizontal model takes as its starting point the 'pronouncements of authorised decision-makers', but suggests that these can only be understood with recourse to the 'continuing interaction which makes them possible' (Colebatch 2002:42). The horizontal model accounts for the mobilisation of actors both inside and outside government who potentially or actually come to engage with the policy process. This is consistent with the evidence-based policy agenda (Solesbury 2001). It illustrates how the policy process, in this scenario, is far more complex than that envisaged by the vertical model, particularly the Westminster version. Furthermore, the horizontal approach does not perceive the policy-making process as a closed system. Lindblom (1968:5) has suggested that policy-making is an extremely complex process without beginning or end, and whose boundaries remain most uncertain. Somehow a complex set of forces, including unintended consequences, produce effects called 'policies'. In essence, it offers a more long-term view of the policy process than the vertical model, which has a knock-on effect for how evidence is used, as will become clearer throughout the thesis.

Colebatch (2002:43) also contends - and the case of UK drug policy backs up the assertion - that the horizontal model shows that 'policy is only part of governing' as opposed to the act of governing. What is more, it is able to extend the analysis of the process 'to take in a wide area for interaction' by focusing on who actually participates. There is, thus, a significant amount of crossover between the concept of the horizontal model and pluralist models of policy-making (Haas 1992; Hecllo 1978; Kingdon 1984; Rhodes and Marsh 1992; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993b; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999).

3.4 Pluralist Models of Policy-Making

Pluralist models of the policy-making process are consistent with Solesbury's (2001) view of evidence-based policy-making as involving the 'opening up' of Government. They are concerned with the role played by a wider range of actors in the decision-making process, beyond a central administration. As we saw in the above discussion, the horizontal model, with its emphasis on inclusion and participation, is consistent with this perspective. Benson (1982:148) succinctly describes pluralist perspectives as 'a cluster or complex of organizations connected to each other by resource dependencies and distinguished from other clusters or complexes by breaks in the structure of resource dependencies'. In addition, pluralist approaches mirror a tangible shift in the nature of government in contemporary society. Many labels have been attached to this, including the concept of governance (Cope 2001:2-3), which according to Pierre (2000:3) has a dual meaning:

...on the one hand it refers to the empirical manifestations of state adaptation to its external environment as it emerges in the late twentieth century. On the other hand, governance also denotes a conceptual or theoretical representation of co-ordination of social systems and, for the most part, the role of the state in that process.

This initial explanation is somewhat ambiguous and Pierre, in a separate article with Stoker, later adds some points of clarification. They suggest that governing any advanced western democratic state, such as the UK, has become a 'matter of multi-level governance'. In effect:

...the challenge of governing requires a focus on multiple levels of decision-making – in both spatial and sectoral terms – and the way in which exchanges in those locations are conducted and managed (Pierre and Stoker 2000:29-30).

Kooiman (1993:41) similarly contends that governance ‘takes place in interactions between actors on micro, meso and macro levels of social-political aggregation’. Here, the act of governing is extended beyond Government to incorporate other disparate groups. In this sense, the words ‘government’ and ‘Government’ can be exchanged for ‘policy-making’ and ‘policy-makers’ so that the process of policy-making now incorporates a greater range of players than those traditionally labelled ‘policy-makers’. Kooiman’s (1993) account of the various sectors of society involved in governing is linked closely to the view of the policy-making process expressed in this thesis. Drawing on the sociology of Elias (1978), this involves ‘figurations’ of diverse interdependent actors, articulating their own values, ideas and beliefs and engaging in the policy process by offering advice, making arguments, and importantly, in the context of this thesis, by producing and supplying evidence (Haas 1992; Heclo 1978; Kingdon 1984; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993b).

Before we consider this in more detail, it is necessary to highlight some examples of the nature of pluralist models of policy-making in the form of Policy Communities, Policy Networks and the Advocacy Coalition Framework, with the full recognition that this is a sample and not an exhaustive list. These are effectively introduced by Nutley, et al. (2007:106) who suggest that:

Pluralist approaches to understanding the policy process suggest that decision making may be diffuse rather than centralised, operating outside formal channels and emerging through pressure from different groups who are themselves involved in setting agendas and developing policy solutions.

3.4.1 Policy Communities

Kingdon (1984) provides an early example of a pluralist explanation of the policy process. He claims that a useful way to view the policy process is to focus on its two main constituent parts. These are the ‘policy process’ (the ‘how’) and the ‘substantive level’ of policy (the ‘what’). The former is, in turn, split into three distinct ‘streams’. The ‘problem stream’ refers to the ways in which particular

problems or issues emerge that require attention of policy-makers. The 'policy stream' refers to the process of deciphering 'compelling' problems that require responses from policy-makers and politicians. Finally, there is the 'political stream' which refers to the outcome of elections, developments in the 'public mood' and interest group campaigning, amongst other things. Of particular note, is the notion of the policy stream, which can be analysed quite distinctly from the generation of policy ideas and proposals that float around continuously in what Kingdon (1984) terms the 'policy primeval soup'. Some of these come to the surface and become attached to certain 'problems'. In essence, the key is that policy formation is not always a 'rational' process. Policy-making occurs on various levels, and to uncover the nature of this, it is necessary to understand 'how' and 'why' certain ideas arise and become promoted. In addition, consideration is given to the circumstances in which they become linked with a particular problem.

Jones and Newburn (2005:61) state of Kingdon's (1984) theory that these three groups operate independently of each other most of the time but do 'converge at critical times'. At such junctures, solutions become joined to problems and when joined to favourable political forces, 'a policy window' is created. In effect, policy windows are created by developments in the political stream, or the emergence of a particular compelling problem(s), which often, in turn, creates opportunities for a 'policy entrepreneur' to champion a specific policy. Kingdon's general understanding is that the activity of policy-making is not a singular phenomenon, or something that occurs in isolation. By contrast, it contains a processual dimension, that is, it is a 'set of processes involving a number of analytically distinct 'stages' or 'streams'. Jones and Newburn (2005:60) go on to suggest that by uncovering and understanding the policy process, in terms of the 'structure of the streams and the way they interact with one another', analysts are able to grasp the nature of the policy in question at the substantive level.

As this is the case, at the substantive level, Jones and Newburn (2005:61) contend that typically empirical research has tended to focus on the outcomes, or the 'formal policy statements or legislation'. Substantively, however, policy formation can, and must, be considered on a number of levels. These range from the 'the more symbolic elements, such as ideas and rhetoric to the more concrete manifestations,

such as policy instruments and practices' (Jones and Newburn 2005:61). It is, therefore, a multifaceted and intensely complex phenomenon. Bernstein and Cashore (2000:70) suggest, furthermore, that this has occurred, and is necessary, because policy decisions in the form of statutes or other kinds of legislation capture 'the actual choices of government'. It is not the intention to explore these in great detail, only to highlight them as a means of illustrating the multi-faceted character of 'policy'. In addition, as Jones and Newburn (2005:62) contend, it is important (and necessary) to 'draw a distinction between policy styles, symbols and rhetoric' that often underlie the concrete manifestations of policy-making. Importantly, in the context of this thesis, these signal how policy-making has a very substantial political dimension.

The two main elements of policy, highlighted by Kingdon (1984) (the process and the substance), converge at critical times, when a policy window opens. One benefit of considering the 'process' of policy-making is that the substantive aspect of policies are often shaped not only by the latter stages of political decision-making, but are negotiated continuously in the earlier problem, definition, legislation, regulation, and court decisions, and again in the subsequent decisions made by practitioners and 'street-level' bureaucrats; the 'policy community' (Jones and Newburn 2005:60). In sum, for Kingdon, the policy community is made up of a range of professionals and specialists in any given area. Coleman and Skogstad (1990), in particular, have pointed out how there are usually two tiers within a policy community, which they term the 'sub-government' and an 'attentive public'. The former, are a core of officials who tend to dominate the process, and the latter, are various participants who hold an interest in the particular policy debate.

In this sense, being on the periphery does not necessarily mean limited influence. The existing literature recognises that level of involvement is not a simple dichotomy of participation and non-participation but actually resembles a scale. This process of negotiation and renegotiation occurs in the 'policy community' and is often missing from more vertical definitions of the policy-making process. Also the process, to reiterate, is not linear. It is inherently iterative to the extent that it can be chaotic. This notion is problematic for other authors such as Bennett (1991) who previously ascertained that in fact a number of distinct aspects of policy can be seen

in any policy change, including content (statutes, administrative rules, and regulations), policy instruments (institutional tools to achieve goals such as regulatory, administrative, judicial tools) and policy style (consensual, confrontational, incremental) (cited in Jones and Newburn 2005:62).

Although the model of policy-making expressed in Kingdon's (1984) analysis of policy communities is one that shares many similarities with this thesis, it does have particular drawbacks. Ultimately, little account is given to the actual minutiae of the decision-making process and, in particular, the conflict that occurs in the arena of agenda setting. These are issues which are central to the emerging theory in this thesis.

3.4.2 Policy Networks

A more recent example of a pluralist model of the policy process and one that underpins the notion of a policy community, albeit in a modified way, is portrayed in the 'policy networks' literature (Rhodes and Marsh 1992; Ryan, et al. 2001). Networks are becoming an ever-increasing, prominent and fashionable concept in a variety of spheres including the analysis of social, political and economic life. Castells (1996:469) has noted that 'as a historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the information age are increasingly organized around networks', the Internet being an obvious example. The emergence of policy networks, as a unit of analysis in policy research can be considered in light of the aforementioned switch from government to governance. Although examples of the policy networks approach have been frequently employed in political science, and are entrenched in this discipline (Knoke 1990; Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Marsh and Smith 2000; Rhodes and Marsh 1992; Smith 1993), they are a recent development in the study of policy analysis within the disciplines of sociology and social policy. That said, one area of policy where networks analysis has been widely employed, is in criminal justice policy (Duke 2002; 2003; Ryan, et al. 2001; Savage and Charman 2001).

Policy networks are heterogeneous. Duke (2003:9) highlights how they 'emphasise the interaction and patterns of association between various actors in particular policy areas'. In this respect, a contrast can be drawn between the concept

of network and those of hierarchy and markets. Networks are based on the principles of co-operation stemming from shared interests and the latter based on command and competition, respectively (Cope 2001:1). In reality, it is likely that any system shares, at the very least, one or more of the aforementioned principles often with one being more dominant.

Central to the policy networks literature is the work of Rhodes (1988) and Rhodes and Marsh (1992). Table 3.1 illustrates an early conceptualisation of the varieties of policy networks portrayed by these thinkers. They are conceived as a continuum characterised by integration and variety of membership.

Table 3.1: Types of Policy Networks

Type	Characteristics
Policy community	Stability, highly restricted membership, vertical interdependence, limited horizontal articulation.
Professional network	Stability, highly restricted membership, vertical interdependence, limited horizontal articulation, serves interest of profession.
Intergovernmental network	Limited membership, limited vertical interdependence, extensive horizontal articulation.
Producer network	Fluctuating membership, limited vertical interdependence, serves interest of producer.
Issue network	Unstable, large number of members, limited vertical interdependence.

(source: Cope 2001:6, adapted from Rhodes and Marsh 1992:183)

It is not necessary at this juncture to offer a comprehensive account of all types. Referring directly to different kinds of policy networks, Nutley, et al. (2007:108) suggest that they:

...differ in terms of their level of integration and the basis for their membership. They will vary across policy sectors and between states, and their different forms will affect policy development and implementation, and the ways in which research is accessed and considered as part of this process.

It will suffice to say that, for the above authors, policy communities are the most integrated type of policy network. They are characterised by 'limited membership of policy actors, involving perhaps a single government agency and a few privileged "insider" interest groups' (Cope 2001:6). These groups are often sheltered from

outsider involvement (i.e. from the public) and 'are based on the major functional interests in and of government' (Rhodes 1990:304).

In terms of policy formulation, for Rhodes (1988:390), there is 'much continuity of policy' primarily a result of 'consensus between actors'. There is a 'positive-sum game' whereby all policy actors increase their influence in the policy community. Consequently, policy is made in a stable and regulated environment within which policy communities 'routinise relationships by incorporating the major interests to a "closed" world' (Rhodes 1988:390). Judicial policy-making, according to Cope (2001:7), is a fine example of a policy community in operation as policy is made by an 'exclusive and small set of actors, namely the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Home Office, the courts' system, the Crown Prosecution Service and the legal professions'. What is more, this is only rarely open to outsiders and even then to those with some privileged link, often institutional, to the other groups such as the police, prison, probation and social services.

At the opposite end, issue networks are the least integrated type of policy networks. They are characterised by a 'large number of participants and their limited degree of interdependence' (Rhodes 1990:305). In these cases, membership is fluid, with few restrictions, and members are free to participate and leave almost at leisure. An issue network often displays:

[A] lack of continuity of policy, erratic interactions between participating actors, a low degree of consensus between actors, a limited exchange of resources between actors and a 'zero sum-game' with some policy actors gaining influence at the expense of others (Cope 2001:7).

The relationship between the government and various lobby groups has often been characterised on such criteria. Cope (2001:7) uses the example of the aftermath of the Dunblane massacre in the 1990s to illustrate this. Here, a campaign was launched by many of the parents of the children involved to restrict the possession and use of guns. The campaign, titled 'Snowdrop', received considerable popular support and media attention but also had the ear of the Home Office, police service and parties spanning the political spectrum, as well as gun, sports and civil liberties lobbies (Cope 2001:8). This issue network was typified by a variety of conflicting

goals of many of those involved, and subsequently some disappeared from the political scene as the Labour Government implemented some limited gun reform measures when assuming office (Cope 2001:8). The differences between the two ends of the spectrum are illustrated in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Characteristics of Policy Networks

Dimension	Policy Community	Issue network
<i>Membership</i>		
Number of participants	Very limited, some conscious exclusion	Large
Type of interest	Economic/professional	Wide range of groups
<i>Integration</i>		
Frequency of interaction	Frequent, high quality	Contacts fluctuate
Continuity	Membership, values, outcomes persistent	Fluctuating access
Consensus	All participants share basic values but conflict present	A degree of agreement
<i>Resources</i>		
Distribution of resources within network	All participants have resources. Relationship is one of exchange	Some people have resources but limited
Distribution of resources within participating organisations	Hierarchical leaders can deliver members	Varied and variable distribution and capacity to regulate members
<i>Power</i>	There is a balance among members. One group may be dominant but power is positive-sum	Unequal power. Power zero-sum

(source: Marsh and Rhodes 1992 cited in Cope 2001:8)

Duke (2003:9) points out that analysis of policy networks is particularly useful as it illustrates how groups ‘both influence the policy process and reflect the relative status and power of the various interests in particular areas of policy’. Typically, this can involve analysis of the types of relationship that can evolve in the context of the policy-making process. For example, between civil servants, politicians, lobby group representatives or other key stakeholders and thus has significant usage in policy analysis.

For Wilks and Wright (1987), policy networks revolve around the varying nature of interpersonal relationships involved in the policy-making process. In this

respect the 'network' is one of three levels of association along with the 'policy universe' and 'policy community'. According to Duke (2003:10), the policy universe refers to the large population of actors or potential actors who share a direct or indirect interest in a particular policy area, and interact with one another to shape policy. Policy communities are more disaggregated systems of actors drawn from the policy universe, who share a common interest in a particular area and interact with one another to shape policy. The policy network is the linking process or the outcome of the interaction within a policy community or between a number of policy communities over particular policy issues, problems or functions. In essence, policy issues, problems and functions provide the platform on which a policy network emerges.

It is fair to comment, however, that the notion of policy networks have received significant criticism, a primary issue being the fact that the concept of policy network or community is not used consistently in the literature. Rhodes and Marsh (1992), however, equate policy networks with 'meso-level' analysis, providing a link between the micro-level analysis concerning the role of interests, and the macro-level analysis of the corridors of power, with a typical focus on the way the power is distributed. According to Cope (2001:9), it is Rhodes and Marsh's terminology that has now become common currency in the discussion of policy networks. The defence of networks is vociferous. Advocates accuse detractors of confusing relativism with epistemological and ontological schisms. In this sense, the development of formal models is inappropriate if one accepts that the social reality is very complex, characterised by ontological depth and occupied by reflexive actors (Marsh and Smith 2001).

Another main criticism, however, concerns the confused nature of the policy networks literature. Dowding (1995:137), for example, suggests that the term policy network is 'essentially metaphorical' and therefore relates to phenomena that, quite simply, do not exist. Duke (2003:11) also highlights numerous criticisms commenting that: firstly, a network approach fails to provide an account of why these relationships form and change between the various actors and how power is exercised. Secondly, they fail to provide an adequate account of the role of the state and institutions and also the impact of political discourse, ideology and cognitive

frameworks of network members. Thirdly, there are problems with boundary issues in that there is no clear demarcation over who is excluded and included. Fourthly, there is the issue that policy networks tend to focus on whole policy sectors. Fifthly, issues tend to overlap with other issues and solutions and therefore analysis may have to span more than one network.

On the whole, policy networks, like Kingdon's (1984) analysis of policy communities offer significant potential for studying the policy process when research questions focus on an area of policy characterised more by consensus than conflict. As the previous chapter illustrated, however, the history of UK drug policy is characterised more by discord (Berridge 1984; Berridge and Edwards 1981) and is thus of limited utility for present purposes. Although the view of the policy process advocated in this thesis is ontologically consistent with the policy networks literature, another approach is required, capable of explaining conflict in policy debates. This is not to suggest that the policy networks model is incapable of this, but that others models are more explicit in this aim.

3.4.3 The Advocacy Coalition Framework

Like Kingdon's (1984) notion of policy communities and Rhodes and Marsh's (1992) policy networks analysis, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, initially developed by Sabatier (Sabatier 1987; 1988) and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993b), can also be read as a critique of the vertical approach of policy-making. However, Sabatier and his colleagues do not completely dismiss the ideas expressed in the textbook approach. They suggest that it has made some significant contributions to our understanding of the policy process.

For these thinkers, however, the contribution made by pluralist models and, by association, lacking from the stages approach, is the recognition in the former that the policy-making process operates 'across the various institutions of government' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993a:2). In doing so, it provided an alternative to the 'institutional approach' of more traditional political science focusing analyses on 'top down' policy-making from the point of view of those in positions of power. The Advocacy Coalition Framework can also be read as addressing many of the problems

raised by Duke (2003:11) regarding the utility of policy networks. In particular, it promotes to the fore a consideration of the role of conflict and power differentials within a policy arena. In addition, it also promotes a discussion of the use of policy analysis in policy decision-making, as will become clear.

3.5 Inside the Advocacy Coalition Framework

Whereas for Kingdon (1984) the 'process stream' is the unit of analysis, and in the policy networks literature it is 'the network' in the form of the interplay between different groups in the process, in the Advocacy Coalition Framework, the unit of analysis is the 'subsystem'. This is made up of identifiable 'advocacy coalitions' actively concerned with a specific policy issue. The Advocacy Coalition Framework has undergone a number of iterations, resulting in small but noticeable differences between early versions (Sabatier 1987; 1988) and later ones (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999). Below, using recent developments in UK drug policy by means of illustration, some of the fundamental aspects of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (most pertinent to the present discussion) are expressed. These are akin to what Lakatos (1970) calls the 'core' aspects of a scientific programme. As will become apparent, in outlining the key features of the Advocacy Coalition Framework, its creators inadvertently borrow their terminology from Lakatos. In particular, the criterion for conceptualising the nature of belief system structures, in the former, overlaps with the nature of research programmes for the latter.

Central to the understanding of the Advocacy Coalition Framework are the nature of subsystems, the nature of coalitions, the role of belief systems, the role of policy-oriented learning and the nature of collective action. It is also clear that the Advocacy Coalition Framework is consistent with an Eliasian (Elias 1978) perspective by showing how those actors involved in the policy process are interdependent with one another.

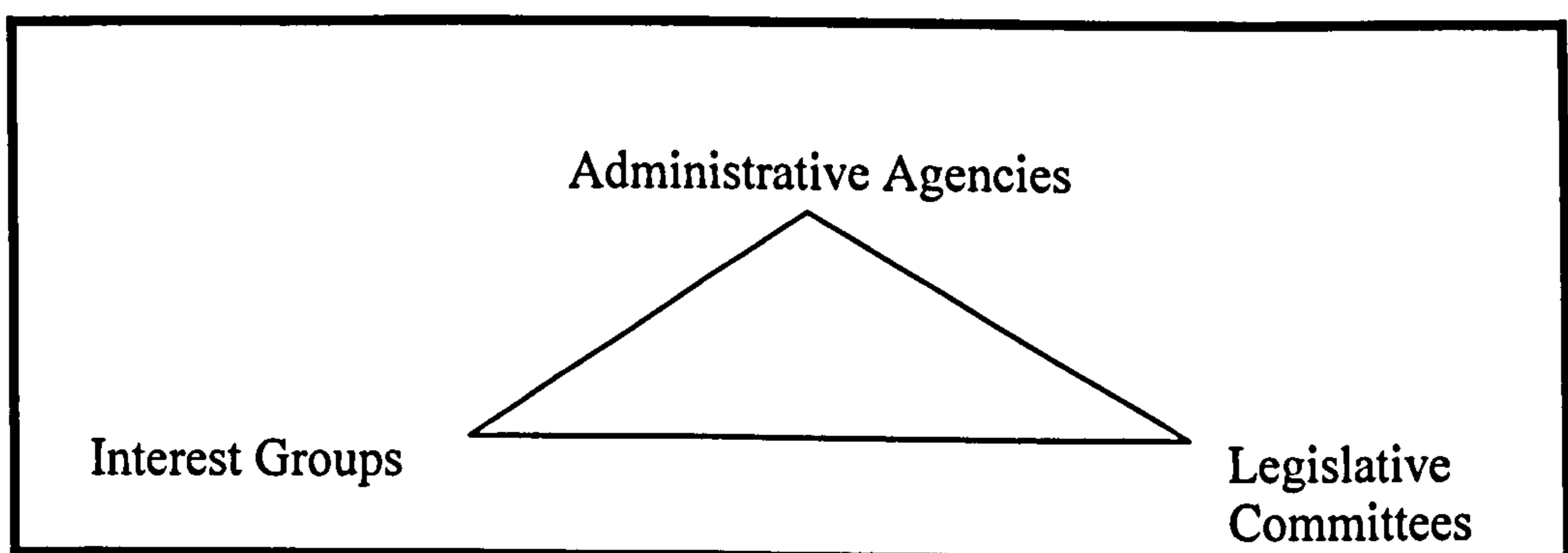
3.5.1 The Nature of Subsystems

Broadly speaking, the subsystem refers to the policy issue under discussion. Sabatier (1993:24) states that the 'policy subsystem' consists of 'a set of actors who are

involved in dealing with a policy problem'. Within the broader context of UK drug policy, there are a number of sub-policy issues. For example, those concerning drugs education, drugs prevention and drug treatment. In the context of this thesis, the policy in question is equated with the efficacy of the UK drug classification system thus signalling the conflation of 'law' and 'policy'. It is this breaking down of policy into more specific areas that allows for a fuller comprehension of how the Advocacy Coalition Framework can be applied in relation to the evidence and policy debate.

In the Advocacy Coalition Framework, a degree of specialisation is required on the part of actors, due to the complex nature of policy issues. An actor, for instance, may need knowledge of relevant laws or regulations, the nature and scale of the problem, as well as the influence of various potential causal factors which may or may not impact on the issue in hand. The Advocacy Coalition Framework thus assumes that the policy subsystem should move beyond traditional notions of iron triangles (see Figure 3.2 below) traditionally associated with the stages explanation. Journalists and policy analysts and researchers must be added into this configuration (where appropriate) as these play an important role in the generation, assimilation and evaluation of policy ideas.

Figure 3.2: A Sketch of Iron Triangles in Policy Formulation



(adapted from Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999)

In addition, actors at all levels of government are often active in policy formulation, implementation and brokering. International treaties, for example, United Nations conventions and European Union legislation, have also increasingly provided an international dimension in many policy areas. A policy subsystem is, therefore,

complex but some analytic space is needed for how actors become embroiled in the policy process, or, in other words, why subsystems form and emerge.

For Sabatier (1993:24), the most likely reason for a subsystem to emerge is when a group of actors in an existing subsystem become dissatisfied to a significant extent with the neglect of a particular problem that they form their own subsystem. In UK drug policy, the 1980s heroin epidemic serves as a useful example (see Section 2.3.2). Towards the end of the 1980s, a significant treatment-focused 'harm reduction alliance' emerged. This consisted of various actors, mainly external to government, who lobbied the administration to take a more pragmatic policy stance towards many intravenous drug users in many cities in the UK. This involved giving access to needle exchange schemes, making health education more available, supplying free condoms and introducing flexible prescribing of methadone in order to reduce the threat posed by high levels of HIV/AIDS amongst their number (Robertson 1987). This was the first sign of a movement away from the heavily moralistic stance adopted by the Conservative Government at the time, on the grounds that the HIV/AIDS outbreak came to be seen as a greater public health threat than drug use itself (Buchanan and Young 2000). This stance 'demonised' and criminalised the drug-using population, deeming them to be unworthy of public support

Critics have claimed that this was as much a move to maintain the 'health' of law-abiding members of society as it was a sympathetic gesture, by a government committed to the drug war, to help those addicted to drugs whom they saw as 'criminals'. In terms of policy formulation, this movement involved a minority coalition breaking away from a larger subsystem, concerned with a drug policy based on prevention, to form a large, powerful and specialised subsystem. The legacy of this remains, and is highlighted by the central position of drug treatment in the current UK drug strategy. This new outlook then changed the way other coalitions viewed the problem and established a new playing field on which future policy discussions would be held. Pivotal to this process was policy-oriented learning. This is discussed in due course but basically refers to the use of evidence to impact on the perspective of those from alternative coalitions.

3.5.2 The Nature of Coalitions

As noted, for Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999:120), within any policy subsystem, a number of advocacy coalitions or groups can be identified. These have specific, and often competing belief systems over what they perceive to be the most appropriate policy outcome in any given area. Advocacy coalitions are comprised of:

...people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers etc.) who share a particular belief system – that is, a set of basic values, causal assumptions and problem perceptions – and who show a nontrivial degree of co-ordinated activity over time .

According to Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999), there are usually between one and four identifiable coalitions in any subsystem. The Advocacy Coalition Framework does, however, build into its explanatory framework the notion that the policy process is not neatly packaged. This is characterised by the fact that it highlights how it is possible for some actors to be engaged in the process, at any particular stage, who do not belong to any coalition. Also, it is possible that the boundaries between coalitions may not be clearly delineated; giving rise to the notion that certain actors could span coalitions. Thus, although the Advocacy Coalition Framework is a neat categorisation of the policy process, there is some recognition on behalf of the authors that the true picture is somewhat opaque. It will suffice to say, however, that irrespective of their origins, subsystems consist of actors grouped together to attempt to influence the policy agenda.

Adherents of the Advocacy Coalition Framework suggest that in most policy subsystems, there are usually at least fifty and often upwards of a hundred organisations at several levels of government and outside organisations, that are active over time. Sabatier and Pelkey (1987) have pointed out that it is an extremely complex task to develop a model that could involve changes in the positions and patterns of association of the many units involved over the time-span of a decade. This is the specified time in which this analysis best works. Heclo (1978) has commented that institutional models have huge difficulty in accounting for variations in the behaviour of individuals within the same organisation or institution. It would be difficult, for example, to explain the different outlook of a Member of Parliament (MP) who was an outspoken advocate of legalising drugs when their party line was

that prohibition, through rigorous enforcement of the law, should be the chosen policy. It is, therefore, a central task when identifying coalitions to consider the often 'neglected role of ideas in shaping policy choices' (Goddard 1997:413). This is done via an analysis of belief systems.

3.5.3 The Nature of Belief Systems

Belief systems are the building blocks for the explanation of the nature of evidence in a politicised policy area. It is only over the course of the last few decades, however, that commentators on the policy process started to focus on their impact on policy formulation (Heclo 1978; Majone 1989). This is particularly the case from the perspective of those not usually considered to be 'normal institutional actors', that is, those outside administrative agencies (e.g. Jordan and Richardson 1987; Marsh and Smith 2000; Rhodes 1988; 1990). Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993b; 1999) have developed this perspective more than others by integrating a belief systems approach into pluralist analysis. In doing so, they have a strong focus on ideas and beliefs, which prompts an incorporation and appreciation of 'the role of research and the development of policy proposals among the academic community, in pressure groups and in policy formulation groups (for example, think tanks and advisory bodies)' (Goddard 1997:414). In turn, this is valuable in drawing our attention to the important role that such groups and their ideas and beliefs play in the long term development of policy.

Fundamental to understanding the operation of the Advocacy Coalition Framework is that policy change is regarded as the outcome, via a multiplicity of routes, of groups or individuals (coalitions) attempting to implement different normative beliefs. These beliefs often become neatly packaged as small programme theories (Pawson 2006) and, therefore, at the most elementary level, in the Advocacy Coalition Framework, it is ideas that generate policies. The Advocacy Coalition Framework is ultimately a tool for highlighting how these ideas come into fruition (Sabatier 1988:132). One question that must be addressed is how is this achieved? By and large, the Advocacy Coalition Framework operates on the premise of a hierarchical tripartite, Lakatosian structure of 'Deep Core', 'Policy Core' and 'Secondary Aspects'. Here, the higher levels (Deep Core) constrain the more specific

(secondary) beliefs. For Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999:191-2), the Deep Core refers, in essence, to an ontological perspective or 'world view'; a set of standard beliefs and values or the 'basic ontological and normative beliefs' of coalition actors, and these shape the 'perceptual filters' through which coalitions view the social world. A good example of this could be whether one's political outlook favours policies geared towards valuing individual freedom over the pursuit of social equality. This is also the level at which the traditional right/left scale of politics operates.

At the opposite end, the Secondary Aspects are a large set of narrowly held beliefs that are often not held by all members of the coalition. This can be manifested in the way that administrative agents or agencies, within a coalition, often hold 'less extreme' positions than, for example, a campaigning NGO and could be a product of institutional constraints, such as, a politician's need to be re-elected, for example. In the middle-range lies the 'Policy Core'. This contains various dimensions including 'basic normative commitments and causal perceptions of the problem' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999:122). Returning to a previous example, a typical set of contrasting values in drug policy relates to whether harm reduction approaches should be adopted as a treatment strategy for heroin addiction, or whether complete abstinence should be the policy goal. Further issues in the Policy Core relate to basic perceptions concerning the 'general seriousness of the problem and its causes'. In terms of the current investigation, this can be seen in the debate over various coalitions relating to issues surrounding the efficacy of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, and its associated evidence-base.

As these represent basic normative and empirical commitments within the domain of specialisation of policy elites, it is the Policy Core and not the Deep Core that provides the 'fundamental glue' of coalitions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999:122). Overall, the more deeply held the belief is, the less resistant it is to change. Indeed, a change in Deep Core beliefs is considered to be akin to a religious conversion. Changes in the Policy Core are also unlikely as many of the Policy Core beliefs are 'exclusively normative', thus where change does occur, it is usually in the Secondary Aspects of a coalition's belief system (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999:122). Implicit in this, is the notion that coalitions adopt various strategies as a

means of altering the behaviours of other coalitions and thus shaping the policy agenda. This can result in significant conflict, for example, through the process of policy-oriented learning, which broadly refers to the production, supply and dissemination of evidence supporting the claims of a particular belief system.

Policy change is usually a slow process of gradual change in the Secondary Aspects and to a lesser extent the Policy Core of a coalition. This raises the question of the role that 'evidence' and research play in the policy process. Indeed, one aspect of coalition solidarity, and arguably the most pertinent for this thesis, concerns the role of 'policy-oriented learning'. This refers to the way coalitions back up their assertions with recourse to relevant research and use emerging data to consolidate or refine their views. The link between the Advocacy Coalition Framework and the evidence-based policy initiative is cemented through the promotion of policy-oriented learning as a key aspect of the explanation of policy analysis.

3.5.4 The Nature of Policy-Oriented Learning

Drawing on the work of Heclo (1974:306), Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999:123) are of the view that policy-oriented learning 'refers to relatively enduring alterations' of thought or behavioural intentions that result from experience and/or new information and that are concerned with the attainment or revision of policy objectives. In this sense, the nature of learning involves a kind of *zweck-rational* action, in that it is specifically conducted 'for the actor's own rationally calculated ends' (Weber 1968:24). The learning is instrumental in the sense that members of particular coalitions seek to influence those in others, including those in position of power, that their evidence is the most applicable and should be called on to alter or continue the direction of policy. In essence, a better understanding of the world serves to further their policy objectives (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999:123).

Theories of the policy process or policy change must consider the role played by technical information, especially that detailing the scale and nature of the problem, its causes, and the likely impact of various potential solutions. This information is of primary importance in the making of administrative agency (governmental) decisions. Most legislators want or demand some knowledge of the

severity of any problem and any potential benefits associated with possible solutions, primarily on fiscal grounds. In the UK, for example, the National Audit Office is charged with the task of ensuring that policies deliver value for money (e.g. National Audit Office 2001). By association, there has been a discernable rise in the volume and use of think tanks and policy analysis units both within and outside government, suggesting that there is a growing market for technical analysis or, in other words, 'evidence'.

It must be stressed, however, that policy-oriented learning is only one means by which the direction of policy can be influenced. Linking in with the current issue of evidence-based policy in a politicised policy area, the authors suggest that changes in the real world, for example in related socio-economic conditions, can also have a direct impact on policy change, as can a change in the political landscape of a particular country, such as the election of New Labour in 1997 and their associated modernising agenda. These are exogenous factors impacting on the policy subsystem. Furthermore, changes internal to the subsystem can also have a direct bearing on the nature of policy change. For example, the death or retirement of a significant policy actor 'can substantially alter the political resources of various coalitions and thus policy decisions' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999:123).

For the authors, this means that major policy change is unlikely to be the sole product of policy-oriented learning, but minor policy change is possible. This is because such learning is unlikely to alter the Deep and Policy Core beliefs of rival coalitions but could affect their Secondary Aspects. Major social change, for the authors, is usually the product of significant turbulence external to the subsystem, for example in the realm of politics. This is consistent with the argument presented here, and introduces a dose of realism into the role played by evidence.

It will suffice to say that the Advocacy Coalition Framework assumes that evidence does not directly impinge on policy resulting in change, but it is the gradual accretion of evidence that is of significance. This view of the evidence and policy relationship is akin to what Weiss (1977; 1986) has termed the 'enlightenment model' of research utilisation (see Section 9.2.2). In other words, it is the gradual permeation of evidence into the debate that is paramount. In the context of the

ongoing example, this can be seen with the adoption of pragmatic harm reduction approaches, such as the aforementioned needle exchange schemes implemented in the 1980s by the Conservative government, which were, in part, the product of the gradual accretion of evidence as to their utility and efficacy in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS.

3.5.5 The Role of the Individual and the Nature of Collective Action

In contrast to many other theories and models of the policy process, the Advocacy Coalition Framework places less stock in an actors' organisational affiliation, as a decisive characteristic determining, or at least influencing, individual action. Alternatively, it encourages us to think of agency officials along with other policy actors as a coalition of individuals and groups who share a specific belief system. As illustrated, this can range from a general world view to many smaller beliefs about the desirable or undesirable aspects of certain policies and, in turn, this leads to a 'non-trivial degree of co-ordinated activity over time' on behalf of coalition members (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993a:25). As expressed, the subsystem comprises actors from a variety of public and private organisations who are interdependent on one another and are actively concerned with a policy problem or issue. In this sense it is a figuration (Elias 1978) of those who seek to influence policy in any way in that domain. It is necessary to decipher the Advocacy Coalition Framework's assumptions of the individual as this provides a platform for understanding the nature of coalitions and the issue of collective action, in particular.

It is fair to say that there is a taken-for-granted assumption within the Advocacy Coalition Framework that actors are 'instrumentally rational' (Weber 1930; 1968). In terms of the policy process, and looking at ways of influencing policy change, this would manifest itself in a commitment towards searching for information or evidence to either inform policy, in one way or another, or at the very least to support a personal policy stance. Although instrumental rational action plays a key role in much economic theory, the action under consideration here relates more to a body of theory from social psychology. It is worth highlighting that in this understanding of the 'individual', there is a tacit assumption that goals are highly multifarious and that in achieving goals, that is in providing admissible 'evidence'

for their policy stance, individuals are not free agents as such but are constrained by various cognitive, structural and institutional predilections, which serve to limit the actual degree of co-ordinated activity.

The notion of policy goals, furthermore, is linked intricately to issues relating to the Policy Core. To reiterate, there is an assumption that actors are driven by a set of 'policy-oriented goals'. In this sense, actors within a subsystem are not necessarily egoistical, acting in terms of material self-interest, but action is shaped and shapes the action of the coalition. As will become clear, in relation to the nature of evidence, the very act of understanding the nature of 'evidence' involves cognitive biases linked to coalition membership. Through coalition solidarity, actors view the world in a certain way, that is, they share the same ontological perspectives. Interpretations and perspectives of 'evidence' reflect this, fostering epistemological solidarity. For the purposes of this thesis, it also reinforces the view presented in this thesis that the Advocacy Coalition Framework provides a solid buttress on which to develop ideas concerning the plight of 'evidence'. It is fair to say that overall, this understanding of the policy process has also not been accepted uncritically and in light of various criticisms, the creators have undertaken some points of clarification, which are significant in the context of the current discussion, as we shall see in Chapter Five

3.6 Summary

As indicated at the end of the previous chapter, it is a central theme of this thesis that under the conditions of evidence-based policy-making, there has been an 'opening up' of the policy-making process. As a consequence, the groundwork for exploring the issues described above is prepared by pluralist understandings of the policy process. In effect, these are consistent with evidence-based policy-making, as they offer a more inclusive understanding of the nature of policy-making. This moves away from the notion of iron triangles. Schaffer (1977:148) provides a useful illustration of pluralist models, with specific resonance for current purposes, suggesting that:

The public policy process is...a multi-person drama going on in several arenas, some of them likely to be complex large-scale organisational

situations. Decisions are the outcome of the drama, not a voluntary willed, individual, interstitial action. Drama is continuous. Decisions are convenient labels given post hoc to the mythical precedents of the apparent outcomes of uncertain conflicts.

In this sense, Schaffer's analysis is consistent with Lindblom's (1959) previous assertion of policies being 'muddled through'. It can also be seen as a formative influence on the Advocacy Coalition Framework and its emphasis on conflict in the policy process. On the whole, pluralist models of the policy process depict a multifarious web of inter-connections. Lindblom (1980:5) thus suggests that policy, in this sense, is 'an extremely complex process without beginning or end, and whose boundaries remain most uncertain'. It is this understanding of the policy process that shapes the subsequent analysis. In addition, precisely because the substantive area of investigation here concerns a heavily politicised policy area, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, as a result of its focus on the nature of conflict in the policy arena, offers the best framework through which to illustrate the turmoil of evidence.

The Advocacy Coalition Framework is, however, used in a specific way in the context of this thesis. It is fair to comment that it was designed as a means of explaining policy change, but is employed here more as an explanatory tool of analysis. The point of departure in this thesis is that emphasis is not so much on explaining social change as much as offering a tool for the analysis of the nature of evidence in a policy area, characterised by the three Cs of conflict, controversy and competition. These issues are explored in the following chapters. For now, it is also necessary to illustrate various other methodological issues that underpin a study such as this.

4. RESEARCHING POLICY IN REAL-TIME: FLEXIBLE METHODS AND METHODOLOGY FOR COMPLEX PROBELMS

4.1 Introduction

Although presented here as a discrete section, issues pertaining to research methods and methodology are continuous throughout the duration of the thesis. This section, in part, details some personal reflections on key issues faced by a researcher when involved in research design and in what Denzin (1970) has termed, the 'research act'. The chapter starts with a broad introduction to the interplay of theory, method and methodology in the context of 'real-time' research. This is followed by a more specific discussion of methodology and methods of data collection, including a discussion of interviewing 'influential' respondents. Generally, 'influential respondents' refer to the subjects of the research. The term 'influential' is preferred to 'elites' or 'the powerful' as it avoids labelling respondents in a way that some would find uncomfortable. This discussion does, however, draw on the literature of elite interviewing and researching powerful groups.

Moving on, the sampling strategy is then outlined by considering the notion of theoretical sampling. Details of the sample itself and some reflexive comments on the conduct of the research are then highlighted. Contained within this, is a discussion of negotiating and maintaining access and the process of leaving the field. Issues relating to what Goffman (1959) refers to as the 'Presentation of Self' in the research act, are also highlighted as are the significant and difficult issues of ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, when researching a well-defined, but small policy subsystem. Finally, attention is given to the concept of triangulation in real-time research. The focus is specifically on the interplay between theory building and refinement, and how this is actually a key aspect of the methodology. In what follows, some consideration of a selection of the key substantive, methodological and theoretical issues relating to researching a contemporary policy issue are offered. Such issues are described by Hirsch (1995) as 'critical decision moments'.

4.2 Theory, Methods and Methodology in Real-Time Research

Real-time research refers to researching a 'live', contemporary policy issue, in a constant state of flux. It can be epitomised by drawing on a famous quotation from politics. When asked what the greatest challenge for a Statesman was, the one time British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan asserted, in a somewhat languorous fashion: 'Events, my dear boy, events' (Bering 2005) and so it is with researching a contemporary policy issue. Central to real-time research, then, is the notion that various exogenous factors continuously impact on the research process, which can have the effect of changing its direction.

Throughout the duration of this research, the emergence of new organisations (e.g. the 'United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission' and the 'Drugs-Health Alliance') altered the shape of the policy subsystem. This occurred alongside changes in personnel in the governing administration, for example, the change of Home Secretaries (four times) and the change of Prime Minister (one time). Additionally, new policy deliberations (the renewal of the ten-year drug strategy in 2008) and new knowledge and ideas concerning the nature of evidence were continuously entering the public domain. Various publications (e.g. Levitt, et al. 2006; Nutt, et al. 2007; Reuter and Stevens 2007; Royal Society of Arts 2007; Science and Technology Committee 2006) were indicative of this. These were produced in the aftermath of the 2004 cannabis reclassification, with a focus on the evidence-base on the wider drug classification system.

These developments meant that the scope of the research had to be modified when already underway. This manifested itself in a movement away from a sole interest in evidence use in the cannabis reclassification, to consideration of the evidence base for the wider drug classification system (see Sections 6.2 and 7.2). In addition, these substantive changes impacted on the methodology and the theory. The emergence of 'new' actors in the wider drug classification debate gave added credence to the emerging theories underpinning the research that heavily politicised areas are characterised by long-standing conflict between competing groups trying to shape the agenda. In addition, these different groups have differing ideas over what counts as evidence in this particular policy arena. Consequently, the Advocacy

Coalition Framework offers best way to analyse, explore and explain this imbroglio and key methods of data collection are required that can account for the understandings of evidence from those who are engaged in the process, on some level.

There are, however, few hard-and-fast rules when it comes to conducting research with advocacy coalitions in the policy process. Goddard (1997:416), in a similar vein, has used the Advocacy Coalition Framework to research the belief systems of various actors involved in post-war criminal justice policy-making. This was achieved by using a variety of methods and techniques, similar to Downes (Downes 1982; 1988), in his study of criminal justice systems in Western Europe. These provide a useful model to emulate, and in some ways adapt, as advances in technology, particularly the Internet, have made sources such as those from official bodies and coalition statements much more accessible.

4.3 Multiple Methods of Data Collection

Central to Goddard's (1997) and Downes' (1982; 1988) research was the use of: a) official sources including Government White Papers and Bills, Acts of Parliament, Advisory Committee Reports and other minor official documents; b) advocacy coalition statements including evidence to official and semi-official bodies from various members of the criminal justice policy subsystem, alongside the pamphlets, letters and publications of groups and significant individuals; c) sources on structural and policy change including analyses of structural factors, such as the development of pressure groups and academic research and changes in bureaucratic structure and practice.(the use of advisory committees, etc.) that affect the level of influence of such factors. Also, insider accounts and biographical material for more precise explanation of the mechanisms through which information and ideas alter perceptions and practice over time and; d) interviews with key participants and observers.

4.3.1 Observation and Documentary Analysis

It must be stressed at this stage that observation played a more pragmatic role in the methodology of this thesis. By carrying out observation at the Science and Technology Select Committee (2006) oral evidence sessions, access was gained to the policy subsystem (see Section 4.5.1). Attendance at these meetings was also used to: a) network; b) identify some key stakeholders and; c) look at the nature of evidence that gets selected in research and the methodological implications of this. Table 4.1 provides an overview of these. This data is in the public domain and therefore pseudonyms are unnecessary.

Table 4.1: Timetable of Meetings Attended and Observed

Date	Time	Witnesses
Wednesday 26 April 2006	9:00	Professor Colin Blakemore , Chief Executive Medical Research Council and Professor of Physiology, University of Oxford; Professor John Strang , Professor in Addiction Research and Director of the National Addiction Centre; Mr Andy Hayman , Chair, Association of Chief Police Officers Drugs Committee
Wednesday 26 April 2006	10:15	Mr Steve Rolles , Information Officer, Transform Drug Policy Foundation, Mr Martin Barnes , Chief Executive, Drugscope, Mrs Lesley King-Lewis , Chief Executive, Action on Addiction
Wednesday 14 June 2006	9:00	Joan Ryan , a Member of the House [of Commons], Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for nationality, citizenship and immigration, Mr Vernon Coaker , a Member of the House [of Commons], Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for policing, security and community safety

(cited in Science and Technology Committee 2006).

Observation was also useful in terms of gaining a valuable insight into how evidence is obtained from this medium. When discussing these evidence sessions, in the aftermath of one interview, it was suggested by the respondent, that he was aware of at least one occasion when those giving evidence to the committee, may have felt the need to exercise some caution. This was on the grounds that they were, or could potentially be, the recipients of funding from the organisations they were discussing and that representatives from funding organisations were observing in the public gallery. This confirms the maxim that data never speaks for itself, and must always

be critically evaluated. Data used in this thesis from transcripts of these sessions is done with this in mind.

In terms of documentary analysis, a variety of documents including both written and oral evidence, provided to Parliamentary bodies such as those of the Home Affairs Committee (2002) and the Science and Technology Committee (2006), proved a vital source of data. Similar coding techniques were employed to these documents as to the interview transcripts (see Section 4.3.2). Confidentiality and anonymity, were however, not necessary as this information was also in the public domain. Although the final report of the latter committee was published as the current research was underway, the process of data gathering for the report was concurrent with it, hence researching in real-time. The minutes from the various evidence sessions were available on the Internet, prior to the publication of the final report and could, therefore, be built into the methodology.

The objective was not so much to test one kind of data (such as documents) against another (interviews) but to use them in conjunction with one another. In essence, to ascertain the way different appreciations of evidence were apparent in UK drug classification decisions. This related to the emerging theory that the UK drug policy debate is characterised more by conflict than consensus and that recognisable coalitions are apparent in this policy area. As indicated, records of the recent Science and Technology Committee Report (2006) and oral evidence sessions were particularly useful. The following exchange, relating to the utility of the wider drug classification system, in light of the 2004 cannabis reclassification, is indicative of how this worked in practice. It is between Dr Brian Iddon MP, a member of the Science and Technology Committee, Steve Rolles, a member of a leading NGO advocating drug legalisation and Martin Barnes, the Chief Executive of a principal drug information service:

Q461: Dr Iddon:...is cannabis in the right classification system?

Mr Rolles: The problem with the ACMD's deliberations were not that they did not look at all the evidence...but that their decision...was based on an assumption that re-classification has some impact on levels of use. ...so you can argue until you are blue in the face about which category it should be in. I have been trying to think of a metaphor for this and the best one I can come up with is that it is like arguing over what colour to paint a square

wheel. Even if all the experts agree it should be blue it does not matter because that wheel does not turn. The classification system does not do what it is supposed to do, it does not reduce harm, it does not reduce misuse, it does not reduce mental health problems. In fact it seems to do the exact opposite so the whole thing is an exercise in distraction.

Mr Barnes: Yes, but let us keep it under review (cited in Science and Technology Committee 2006:95)

Here we see contrasting philosophies about the cannabis issue and what the drug classification can do. For Rolles, the system is redundant and even counter-productive. The insinuation is that not only has it not achieved its aim of reducing the harms of drugs, but that the current system has actually made these worse. The cannabis question at this stage is unanswered. For Barnes, however, there is simply no suggestion that the current system is problematic, but the cannabis issue is addressed. Ultimately, this has a knock-on effect for appreciations of what evidence is in this particular subsystem and it is this developing theory that is explored in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. For present purposes, to get a further insight into these different qualitative appreciations of evidence, it was necessary to talk to those involved in the policy subsystem. In this regard, the method of qualitative interviews was central to the methodology.

4.3.2 Qualitative Interviewing

Qualitative interviews were used to explore the views of evidence from a range of key policy actors engaged in the policy process. In all, 24 semi-structured interviews were carried out between June 2006 and April 2007. Further details of the sample are discussed in due course (see Section 4.5). All interviews were recorded on audiotape and transcribed verbatim by the author. They were then analysed using thematic coding, assisted by an Nvivo computer software package. The codes primarily related to key themes ascertained in the process of interviewing.

In terms of research design, external events influencing the research process, such as the changing scope of the thesis impacted more directly, in terms of research design, on the interview schedule. In essence, the purpose of continuously amending the interview schedule related to the significant methodological, theoretical and substantive developments occurring contemporaneously to the project. Appendices I

and II provide examples of, respectively, earlier and later versions of the interview schedule and Appendix III explains the continuities and changes that brought these about, reflecting the tumultuous nature of doing real-time research.

Substantively, the most noticeable difference, as mentioned, was the change of emphasis from the episode of cannabis reclassification, to the process of renewed interest in the wider drug classification system. In later iterations, therefore, more stress is placed on 'the turmoil of evidence', with this in mind. On the whole, however, looking at how belief systems (based primarily on ideological standpoints) provide the bedrock for different understandings of 'evidence' from perspectives which are often incompatible with one another, but share certain similar features, was a consistent theme. The interview schedule gradually covered the key themes of the way that: a) evidence is conceptualised by various players in the process, in particular, considering the key issue of the intricacy of evidence; b) it also addressed whether there were recognisable coalitions or perspectives in this particular policy debate and how these shape the evidence that is produced and used in policy. This involved some consideration of the role of competing and conflicting ideas and beliefs and; c) the issue of power, which subsumed the debate over different appreciations relating to the location of evidence in the policy process and whether there is a recognisable, or a prevailing understanding of 'evidence' where drug classification policy is concerned. These key themes are central to exploring the 'turmoil of evidence' and form the crux of the analysis in subsequent chapters.

It is recognised that there are grounds for criticism of this aspect of the methodology in terms of reliability. In response, it is argued that this is frequently the nature of exploratory, theory-driven research:

The methods used to conduct exploratory research need to be flexible and do not need to be as rigorous as those used to pursue other objectives. The researcher may need to be creative and resourceful in gaining access to the information required (Blaikie 2000:73).

This provides some vindication for the approach adopted here. The implication that to be 'creative' and 'resourceful' is to somehow compromise on rigour, however, is open to debate. The nature of qualitative interviewing is such that everything

depends on context. Thus, questions and sections become interchangeable throughout the course of the interview. The benchmark for rigour in this kind of research is, therefore, different to what is required in research with a more inflexible research strategy and design.

4.4 Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is also a useful technique in real-time research as it allows sufficient flexibility to enter the research process. Here, all sampling decisions do not have to be taken at the outset. On completion of each interview, respondents were asked to recommend some names and contact details of those they thought it would be worthwhile talking to. This yielded some interesting data in its own right and was also useful in ascertaining the individual's location within the policy subsystem, in terms of coalition membership, for example. Walford (1994) suggests that this aspect of research involves the 'personal sponsorship' of the researcher by the researched and is important for identifying and accessing potential respondents with whom the researcher has no prior links.

Theoretical sampling represents an ongoing process throughout the research. Somewhat similar to Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 1992), the process continues until the point of theoretical saturation is reached. Here, the chosen method of data collection creates and confirms the importance of the categories developed to the extent that:

- a) no new or relevant data seem to be emerging regarding the category;
- b) the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and;
- c) the relationships among categories are well established and validated (Strauss and Corbin 1992:212).

In the context of this thesis, theoretical saturation provided the primary reason for curtailing the sample at 24.

Following on from this, the next stage is to generate hypotheses or develop theories out of the categories, with the process of data collection then starting again. This process ensures that the researcher is fully familiar with the data and thus is able to hone in on the 'best' data available in relation to the research problem. As with

every chosen method of sampling, there are drawbacks. These are well rehearsed and often take the form of discussions of reliability and validity.

A key danger of the ‘personal sponsorship’ approach alluded to above, is that there is the risk of bias creeping into the sample. A snowball may incorporate colleagues or acquaintances of respondents who share similar view-points. Critical self-awareness, on behalf of the author, was a way of overcoming this. In effect, the process of theoretical sampling is described by Bryman (2004:334) as an iterative approach ‘where there is movement backwards and forwards between sampling and theoretical reflection’. This is consistent with the process of theory building and refinement, a decisive, if not definitive, factor in the methodological approach adopted here.

4.5 The Sample

In the UK drug classification subsystem there is a diversity of actors. At the international level, numerous agencies, including the International Narcotics Control Board are influential and were critical of the 2004 cannabis reclassification, without managing to influence it. The current focus, though, is at the domestic level. Here, interested parties are the Government, in particular, the Home Office (and Ministry of Justice) and the Department of Health. From the perspective of organisational structure, within government, there are MPs, Ministers, advisers of various types and civil servants of various ranks. There is the ACMD, in turn, comprised of a range of professionals from a variety of backgrounds. Away from government, there are agencies concerned with (drug) law enforcement such as the Police, in the guise of the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Board of Customs and Excise. Agencies advocating drug treatment and those advocating drug prevention and education are also prevalent. Legal experts, medical experts, QUANGOs and NGOs, Research Councils, institutes and sections of academia, along with representatives of the mass-media (journalists and writers) are also interested actors, and this is by no means an exhaustive list.

To explore the views of a wide-range of key policy actors involved in the policy-making process in UK drug classification policy, qualitative interviews were

conducted with various participants. Different respondents had differing degrees of involvement in the policy process. None were involved in direct decision-making, but most were involved in consultation, either directly or via their occupational organisation. The selection criteria required participants to have significant knowledge of the evidence and policy relationship, in relation to the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. This links into the notion of respondent's being 'influential'. Many respondents did not see themselves as influential within the wider policy debate, although some of them were. All could, however, be considered key actors within their own coalition as we shall subsequently see. Table 4.2 offers an overview of the final sample.

In all, 34 requests for interviews were made, with 24 successful, a response rate of around 71 per cent. Of the unsuccessful attempts, in six cases, no answer to the inquiries was forthcoming. Of the remaining four, one was declined as a result of time constraints and two on the grounds that they felt, on hearing the nature of the research, that they would be either unable or unwilling to co-operate. The final unsuccessful approach, related to an occasion when a potential respondent was identified and contacted, only to subsequently receive an email back from a close family member, that the respondent would have been very pleased to participate, but was recently deceased.

As mentioned, all interviews were carried out between June 2006 and April 2007, 22 face-to-face and two telephone-based. Although grateful of the data yielded from the non face-to-face interviews, the advantage of face-to-face interviewing, relates to issues of control. Knowing when to 'probe' is a much more precise science in this scenario. For instance, it is easier to ascertain when a respondent is comfortable, or not, with a specific line of questioning. This is, though, a relatively costly method in terms of logistics as all the interviews involved significant travel within the UK.

Table 4.2: The Final Sample

Interviewee Code	Sex (M/F)	Occupation	Institutional/Organisational Affiliation(s)
RAD1	M	Media and Information Officer, NGO	Member of Drugs-Health Alliance
RATL1	M	Forensic Scientist; Government Adviser	ACMD Technical Committee
RATL2	F	Independent Consultant Pharmacist	ACMD Main Committee; Pharmaceutical Society; Royal College of GPs
RAD2	M	Member of Parliament	N/A
RATL3	M	Forensic Scientist	ACMD Technical Committee
CON1	M	GP	Coalition Against Cannabis
CON2	M	Researcher, NGO	Coalition Against Cannabis
RAD3/RATL4	M	Director of Research, NGO	UK Harm Reduction Alliance; Drugs Health Alliance
CON3	F	Teacher (Retired), Campaigner	Member of EURAD (Europe Against Drugs); Coalition Against Cannabis
RATL5	M	Academic/Psychiatrist	ACMD Main Committee; ACMD Technical Committee
RATL6	M	Lawyer, Author	N/A
RATL7	M	Academic; Chief Executive, Drug Service Provider; Former Government Adviser	International Drug Policy Consortium;
RATL8	M	Head of Publishing	International Drug Policy Consortium, International Harm Reduction Alliance
RATL9	F	Director of Leading Drug Treatment QUANGO	N/A
RATL10/CON4	M	Academic; Drug Misuse Researcher; Former Government Adviser	N/A
RATL11	F	Former Member ACMD	UK Drug Policy Commission
RATL12	M	Civil Servant, Home Office	N/A
CON5	M	Chief Constable (retired); Independent Consultant United Nations	International Task-Force on Global Drug Policy;
RATL13	M	Director, NGO	International Harm Reduction Alliance, UK Harm Reduction Alliance; Action on Hepatitis C
RAD4	M	Author, Journalist	Transform Drug Policy Foundation
CON6	M	Customs Officer (retired); Independent Anti-Corruption Consultant	National Drug Prevention Alliance;
CON7/RATL14	M	Local Government Officer (South East)	National Drug Prevention Alliance
CON8	M	Director, NGO	National Drug Prevention Alliance
RATL15	M	Chief Executive, NGO	UK Drug Policy Commission

On making initial contact with respondents, the opportunity was presented for them to view the schedule prior to the interview. This was not always taken up but was done primarily on the grounds of expediency. As respondents were squeezing me into their daily diaries, where possible, this was to decrease the intrusion into their schedules. This process of arranging and conducting interviews was a constant reminder of the relatively powerless position of the post-graduate researcher. Throughout, sufficient flexibility was required to fit around the respondent's schedules.

As can be seen, a code has been assigned to each respondent as a means of protecting identities in line with relevant ethical commitments in conducting social research. The former (alphabetical) part of the code relates to the coalition within the subsystem to which the respondent belongs. Three are central to the analysis, the 'radical', 'rational' and 'conservative'. The latter two, have their origins in the aforementioned history of the UK drug policy debate, concerning 'ownership' of the drug problem. The radical perspective is an additional, increasingly powerful voice in legislative debates.

The latter (numerical) aspect is a means of identifying the respondent within the perspective or coalition. For the sake of confidentiality, the name of the employer with which the respondent is currently employed or affiliated, is not supplied as this could lead to identification. The institutional or organisational affiliation could either be a product of individual choice and/or occupational function. This affiliation may, or may not correspond to the occupation. In other words, the role of a position in an NGO listed in 'occupation' may not necessarily be specifically referring to the one identified in the 'institutional or organisational affiliation'.

It is to be noted that certain respondents span coalitions. This relates to the fact that various Secondary Aspects on the nature of the drug problem crossover perspectives. Where appropriate to the narrative, these are made clear. With regard to cells with absent information, in the final column, a number of reasons account for this. In the case of 'RAD2', the respondent's occupational status was their determining characteristic and including this information could lead to identification. For 'RATL9', this was a result of the fact that the characterisation of the policy

subsystem employed in this research was not necessarily shared by the respondent and that their particular employer actively networked with a range of other organisations as part of the nature of their work. 'RATL6', 'RATL10/CON4' and 'RATL12' all placed great stress on their 'independence' within this policy subsystem and had no 'official' ties with any organisation.

4.5.1 Negotiating and Maintaining Access and Leaving the Field

The label 'influential respondents', is seen as a preferable description to that of 'elites' in the context of this research. Similar themes do relate to both kinds of research. For example, gaining access can undoubtedly be problematic. Often there are various levels of gatekeepers to negotiate; including personal secretaries or other colleagues within an organisation. Duke (2002:45) notes how elites have the power to 'create barriers, shield themselves from scrutiny and resist the intrusiveness of social research'. A similar issue was encountered during the early part of the fieldwork when undertaking observations at the Science and Technology Select Committee oral evidence sessions. Although this eventually led to entry into the policy subsystem, this was a less than successful means of gaining access to those in positions of power (for example, politicians). Indeed, access was literally blocked to these actors by the 'army' of staff at their disposal before, during and after the evidence proceedings. Oral evidence sessions took place on Wednesday mornings, usually concluding around half-past eleven as Prime Ministers Questions were due to commence. At this point most, if not all, would make their way to the House of Commons flanked by civil servants and/or special advisers. This left little opportunity for interaction.

More figuratively, access was also blocked due to the conventions of the sessions. In the case of the Science and Technology Select Committee, like most Parliamentary Select Committee hearings, public involvement in the proceedings is nil. On Gold's (1958) scale of participant observer roles in research, it was the role of 'complete observer' that best characterised the role of the researcher at this point. Access is granted to 'observe', but in no way to 'participate', or engage with those contributing to the official session. In Eliasian terms, through necessity, the researcher is more detached than involved at this stage (Elias 1956). On completion

of proceedings, however, there was an opportunity for increased involvement with respondents and the chance to change status from a 'complete observer' towards 'observer-as-participant'. This provided initial access to the sample, albeit with a respondent who was a self-confessed 'peripheral figure' in the policy-making process, but who later transpired to be a key member of the policy subsystem.

Having a gatekeeper is undoubtedly a valuable commodity in any research project, arguably more so when researching the influential. In the current research, this was particularly true when dealing with the civil service. Requests often went unanswered for a number of weeks before dates were offered that were inflexible and frequently reneged on. Consequently, alongside attendance at Select Committee meetings, access to the sample was established with participation at conferences and, in one scenario, a personalised telephone 'cold-call' to the office of a potential respondent (Useem 1995). Through this combination, access was somewhat serendipitously established to a broad range of respondents.

To develop the sample, the process of 'chaining' was employed. This was usually in the form of an email requesting potential participants' co-operation. Towards the beginning of the correspondence, where appropriate, this included the name of prior respondents who had recommended them. For additional reassurance, the chance of obtaining further details of the research in a letter on 'official university paper' was offered. This was, however, never taken up although frequent requests were made for more information, and these were granted in email form with a link to a summary of the project on the School of Sociology and Social Policy webpage.

Drawing on the advice of Duke (2002) and Thomas (1995), within all emails, an attempt was made to 'personalise' the research problem by making it clear that the current interest was in their views and experiences, rather than those of the institution, organisation or department to which they belonged. Duke (2002) describes this as 'getting beyond the official line'. Personalising the research problem also enabled the avoidance of being diverted elsewhere within an organisation, to another person whose experience, in the context of this research, may not have been as exhaustive or appropriate.

When access was established, Hirsch's (1995) notion of demonstrating one's 'street-smart' was paramount. In other words, it was necessary to explicitly portray relevant expertise. Although certain skills are applicable to all kinds of research, such as the need for preparation and planning, some issues are more acute when researching influential actors or elites. For example, interviewing elites can entail the possibility that the respondent is not only sufficiently knowledgeable about the substantive aspect of the research, but also, that they are often familiar with the research process itself, adding another level to the requirement of professionalism.

4.5.2 The Presentation of Self in the Research Act

Professionalism in the research act is also linked to the process of 'checking out' the researcher by the respondent (Cookson 1994; Olander 1995). There are numerous dimensions to this. One aspect is linked to the 'presentation of self' in the research situation (Goffman 1959). In the current research, one manifestation of this concerned the nature of knowledge, and the way respondent's were frequently trying to decipher the extent and variety of the author's familiarity with the topic. There were instances when it was necessary to concede to respondents that certain documents, to which they were referring, or which they identified as being of significance, had not been read and these were subsequently followed up. This process required careful monitoring so that the direction of the research was not unduly influenced by the respondents.

In this sense, a delicate balancing act was required as to what 'learner role' was to be portrayed (Lofland and Lofland 1984). A snap decision was often needed about whether to play an 'insider' or 'outsider' role. The former, is characterised by in-depth knowledge of certain issues and topics, and a clear familiarity with the world of the respondent. The latter, involves honesty about gaps in knowledge, and a willingness to draw on the expertise of respondents. This is also consistent with the notions of involvement and detachment (Elias 1956). It became apparent, however, that these were not mutually exclusive and were best seen as a scale. Quite often, it was not necessary to pick one role and maintain it through the duration of the project, as is often the case with ethnographic research designs, for instance. Indeed, within

the course of a single interview, greater insider and outsider roles were interchanged, depending on how well the interview was progressing and the topics being discussed. For the most part, the notion that honesty was the best policy guided the interviewing technique, and clarification was sought for unfamiliar issues or themes. This reduced the chance of becoming a hostage to fortune by pretending to be knowledgeable of certain subjects when this was not the case, thus, risking personal credibility, the candour of the respondents and potentially jeopardising the future sample.

On the whole, the interviewees were sufficiently candid and few proved to be reluctant respondents, although there were some hurdles to overcome in this respect. For example, one respondent took umbrage with the perceived assumptions behind a certain question by commenting on the naiveté of the author's interpretation of the cannabis reclassification, and its associated evidence-base. By contrast, some respondents required more cajoling than others. Those who were the recipients of central government funding, or those that referred to themselves as 'critical friends' of government, often felt that they were not best placed, or at liberty, to provide responses to some lines of questioning. Examples included those asking for some reflection on the motivations for political decisions taken in relation to changes to UK drug classification, or those involving comparisons between the current and previous administrations. This was in contrast to respondents from NGOs, whose primary task is, in many cases, to critically engage with government policy (and to try and change it). These issues are, however, indicative of researching a topic characterised by competition, conflict and controversy.

There are also some institutional considerations to take into account when thinking about data collection, especially when interviewing members of the civil service. Once more, Duke (2002:49) offers some useful advice in this respect stating that:

Civil servants are prevented by the terms of their employment from disclosing information gained during the course of their service without official sanction. At the extreme, some disclosures might amount to a breach of the Official Secrets Act.

Additionally Ball (1994:110) suggests that:

Civil servants are socialized to present their absence from the processes of policy-making. They are clearly often decisively influential but are almost always unwilling or unable to account for such influence.

Duke (2002:49) offers some conclusive comments remarking that:

I was often reminded by civil servants in the interviews that they were not responsible for 'making' policy. They always underemphasised their own roles in the policy process, even though other members of the policy network saw them as clearly influential.

The latter part of the final quotation was certainly a familiar scenario. The civil servants, although a small part of the sample, offered some interesting insights, where possible, into the nature of evidence-based policy-making.

Another issue encountered in the research, concerned the difference between the conventions of Sociology and Social Policy and those of the respondents. Quite often, this manifested itself in the need to adapt language to the target informant. For example, when discussing ideas in the thesis with academics, academic language proved unproblematic. This was particularly noticeable when discussing issues relating to the policy analysis literature, such as Policy Networks and Advocacy Coalitions (see Appendices I to III). On the other hand, this often required some adaptation and unpacking when dealing with respondents from outside academia. Careful attention had to be taken here as to not shape the data in anyway. The use of semi-structured interviews, enables these changes to be incorporated, and is part of the process of 'packaging' or 'customising' the research. Hirsch (1995:7) suggests that this is necessary because respondents are often unfamiliar with the theoretical categories driving research, and for the most part, these are largely irrelevant to their interests.

There was a further dimension to the subtleties of language, relating to what is 'acceptable' when discussing issues of a sensitive nature. Sociology, as a discipline, can consider itself reasonably well advanced in its avoidance of abusive language. In a minority of cases, the standards accepted as 'normal' in this discipline seemed alien to those not familiar with it. In the course of responding to certain

questions, the language used by respondents, by the standards of sociology, bordered on racism, homophobia and stigmatising of disability. Although the motivations for this were not considered to be untoward, it was, nonetheless, problematic. In such instances, Aldridge's (1995:118) description of the research act requiring the social scientist to successfully negotiate 'relations of prestige, of deference, acceptance, and derogation' was brought to mind. Here, careful negotiation was required by simultaneously not wanting to condone the sentiments, however much unintended, and not wanting to be confrontational and jeopardising the current interview and potential ones. In the end, in dealing with such issues, the answer of the respondent was rephrased in the next exchange into more 'acceptable language' to try and show unease without detracting from the flow of the interview.

Explicit in the previous discussion has been the notion that researching the influential, like researching elites and the powerful, entails acute problems but that these can be overcome with constant critical self-reflection. This involves recurring consideration of personal behaviour throughout the research process by the researcher. Goffman (1959) refers to this as 'impression management'. The significance of impression management, it is suggested here, is a vital part of the researcher's armour when the sampling technique involves personal sponsorship of existing respondents. Impression management is linked to the control of emotions. Creating a good impression relies on the avoidance of portraying any number of negative emotions. Giving the impression of laziness, naiveté, being unprepared or unorganised, could endanger the chances of continuing the sample.

With this in mind, in the early stages of fieldwork, the interview schedule was made clearly visible in the interviews. As the research progressed and confidence grew, there was less cause to have the schedule clearly visible. Also as the interviews were semi-structured, there was sufficient flexibility for an exploration of ideas, themes and theories and for respondents to discuss any matters they deemed pertinent to the topic in hand. A flexible interview schedule also allowed changes to be made when external factors impacted on, and needed to be incorporated into, the research programme.

4.5.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

A further aspect of 'checking out' the researcher, and one also encountered by Duke (2002; 2003), is that respondents frequently asked a variant of the question; 'who else you have spoken to?' (Hunter 1995), qualified with reasons for why this was necessary. Such examples from the current research included; 'they have been around for a long time in this field' (RAD2), or 'they will be well placed to help and are very approachable' (RATL6) and 'you could try them but they are very busy!' (CON4). This also required significant management. When confronted with this in her research, Duke (2002:47) stated that:

I tried to give vague answers because I felt that any information of this nature would be breaking my assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. But in many cases, the respondents already knew whom I had interviewed and had discussed my research and its value with each other, often placing me in a very awkward and apparently foolish position.

Faced with a similar problem in this research, a balance was struck between too much disclosure and over-evasiveness. It was felt that the motivation for respondents wanting this information was less idle curiosity and more wanting to be helpful and supplying names and contacts that may not otherwise have come up. Alternatively, in some cases the reasons may have been less altruistic and the intention was, in some way, to try and shape the direction of the research by trying to influence the sample. These issues raise the question of how far one can achieve one's goal, as a researcher, of ensuring confidentiality and anonymity as certain things remain beyond a researcher's control. This caused Duke (2002:47) to question rhetorically, without conclusion, how far respondents should have a commitment to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, as part of the research bargain. It is suggested here, that even though total anonymity and confidentiality may be impossible to guarantee, this is insufficient grounds to not try.

Another common theme when researching a sensitive topic is that respondents frequently requested statements they made to be 'off-the-record'. More often than not, these related to the personal opinions, and sometimes, animosity of certain respondents towards other members of the policy subsystem. This served to reinforce the point that this research was undertaken within a policy area

characterised by conflict. Very little management of this data was required as anything that was requested to be un-attributed, was left out of the final analysis. A more pressing concern, however, concerned the need to manage data given by respondents, which mirrored that already in the public domain. The commitment to establishing the informed consent of the respondents, under the conditions of anonymity and confidentiality, meant that regular cross-checking between personal interview data, and data in the public domain (such as *Hansard*), was an iterative requirement and was undertaken with due diligence.

4.6 Triangulation: Method and Theory

The methodological approach adopted here underscores a commitment to what Denzin (1978) terms ‘methodological triangulation’; that is, the use of multiple methods of data collection. Although often taken to refer to ‘multiple methods’, there are actually a variety of different kinds of triangulation. Methodological triangulation is the most common understanding of the term. For Seale (1999:53), it represents one of four ways (along with the search for negative instances; analytic induction and member validation) of assuring the quality of data obtained from social research. This stems from the realisation that data generated from one method is likely to be less comprehensive than data from multiple sources. In essence, it is a means of establishing validity. It draws on ideas established by Campbell and Fiske (1959), relating to the convergent and discriminant validation of measurement instruments.

This understanding of triangulation, according to Seale (1999:53), evokes an ‘analogy with surveying or navigation’:

People discover their position on a map by taking bearings on two landmarks, lines from which will intersect at the observer’s position. If only one landmark were taken, the observer would only know that they are situated somewhere along a line. Triangulation used in this way assumes a single fixed reality that can be known objectively through the use of multiple methods of social research (Seale 1999:53).

There is, however, little agreement on the efficacy of triangulation as a means of ensuring the validity of research. Other thinkers have questioned whether criterion such as reliability and validity should actually apply when assessing, in particular,

the quality of qualitative research, as it is perceived that these are linked to more 'positivist', quantitative methodology (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Furthermore, ethnomethodologists (e.g. Cicourel 1964; 1974) highlight 'constructivist objections' to the 'inherently positivist assumptions' of triangulation. Drawing on lessons from the linguistic turn in philosophy, these stem from the unproblematic use of language, which assumes single interpretations of complex phenomena.

This debate gets right to the heart of methodological issues concerning ontology and epistemology. There is an assumption that methodological triangulation, by its nature, enhances validity in research, but this is open to significant debate. Seale (1999:61) offers pragmatic advice concerning triangulation stating that if used with 'due caution' it can enhance the 'credibility of a research account by providing an additional way of generating evidence in support of key claims as well as deepening and enriching understanding of particular settings and events'. This notion of triangulation represents a commitment to the use of multiple methods with the purpose of aiding the objective of theory adjudication and testing. In this sense, triangulation relates to more than just validation, it is part of the iterative process of interplay between theory and methods in relation to the substantive issues.

On this path, the goal is as much theoretical triangulation as methodological triangulation but the two are interlinked. Theoretical triangulation is often considered to be the process whereby a researcher approaches their data with various hypotheses in mind to see how they fare in relation to the data (Denzin 1978). In essence, this is akin to the process of eliminating alternative explanations of the data. The use of multiple methods is a useful way of undertaking this endeavour, but theory development also constitutes a key aspect of methodology in its own right. The emergence of the Advocacy Coalition Framework, in light of the theory that there is significant conflict of ownership of the drug problem in the history of UK drug policy, is indicative of this.

This discussion of methodology and methods is contextualised by the consideration that flexible methods were required, precisely to cater for the fluctuation of theories and substantive issues that result from researching a topic in

real-time. With this in mind, the nature of the research adopted in this project is inspired by Wright-Mills' (1959:139) suggestion that 'in actual practice, every working social scientist must be his own methodologist and own theorist'. As illustrated, the process of theory development and refinement, in relation to the turmoil of evidence, was aided by the use of various methods. The commitment to using multiple methods in this research, then, is not down to a technical preference for combining favourable research techniques but is driven by the emerging theory.

4.7 Summary

As politicised policy-making does not occur in a vacuum, research design should factor in any significant developments that emerge concurrently with the research process. Broadly speaking, they refer to the widespread renewed interest in wider classification issues in light of the initial cannabis reclassification and the recognisable conflict of perspectives that both developments entailed. In terms of research design, these were accounted for with the changing nature of the interview schedule; the primary method of data collection.

Overall, the data yielded from the sample of interview respondents and documents selected, enables some lessons to be learned with regard to the nature of evidence in politicised policy subsystems. This, in turn, fulfils one of Hammersley's (1992:68) pre-requisites, that effective social research should be 'relevant to some legitimate public concern'. In terms of theory, what emerges is an analysis of the tumultuous nature of evidence in politicised areas that focuses on the role and nature of evidence therein. Ultimately, it is the methodological buttress of the Advocacy Coalition Framework that enables an initial exploration of this and it is to a more detailed appreciation of this view of the policy-making process that the discussion now turns.

5. COALITIONS, APPRECIATIONS AND PERSPECTIVES: JUSTIFYING AND MODIFYING THE METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter documented in detail some quandaries when researching policy issues in real-time. Various substantive, theoretical and methodological factors were discussed in relation to the changing nature of this project. These were primarily a product of various occurrences external to the thesis that explicitly impacted on its overall direction. The current chapter continues and extends this discussion. In light of this, the current chapter is best read in two parts. It is the link between the more methodological aspects of the thesis and the more substantive findings, and is organised in the following way. Based on the platform provided by Chapters Three and Four, first, a revised version of the Advocacy Coalition Framework is presented. To reiterate, as the substantive area of investigation - UK drug classification concerns the three Cs of competition, conflict and controversy - it was deemed that the Advocacy Coalition Framework offers the most effective model of policy analysis to illustrate the turmoil of evidence. This is a result of its focus on conflict in the policy arena. It has, however, been the subject of much criticism. Based on emerging findings from the research, it is claimed that modification of the Advocacy Coalition Framework is necessary. This is because first and foremost, it is a model used to explain policy change. The current analysis is less concerned with explaining policy change but is concerned with the role of conflict in the policy process and the impact this has for 'evidence'. Clarification is, therefore, given to the organisation of the current subsystem via the introduction of the 'perspectives' that are central to the remaining analysis.

With the organisation of the subsystem outlined, the second part of the chapter serves as an introduction for the analysis of subsequent chapters. Central to this thesis, as will become clear, is the notion that in politicised policy areas, evidence is frequently embedded in the decision-making process, but because of the impact of politics and the knock-on effect it has for data production, this nuance is often overlooked. It is ultimately suggested that politics impacts on the evidence, especially in a heavily-politicised policy subsystem, but that this does not preclude

the inclusion of evidence in the decision-making process. Data from the current research is also used to illustrate this.

5.2 Modifying the Framework

Reviewing a significant proportion of their own work and others (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993b; Sabatier and Zafonte 1995; 1999; Zafonte and Sabatier 1998), Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999:128) suggest that by developing a range of techniques such as systematic coding of testimonies given to legislative hearings, they have been able to 'confirm the existence of advocacy coalitions'. This statement was made in response to numerous commentaries on the framework, which in its original form has been the subject of much criticism.

Schlager (1995:261) has particularly questioned the efficacy of the Advocacy Coalition Framework Model of policy analysis. She states that there are clear issues which mitigate the ability for actors to engage in meaningful co-ordinated action, one of the central tenets of the model (see Section 3.5.5). She lists three of these: first that the transaction costs involved in coming to a common understanding of the policy problem are often greater than the pull of co-ordinated activity; second, the difficulty of finding policies that fairly address distributional conflicts among coalition members are few and far between and; finally, there is a temptation for an individual or group to free-ride (adapted from Schlager 1995:261-2). The upshot of these criticisms is that for detractors they serve to erode the cohesion of a coalition's co-ordinated activity or even the potential for this. Furthermore, it is suggested by Schlager (1995:262) that there is no reason why actors who share the same beliefs in regard to particular policy issues will coordinate activity because of this. There is a distinct possibility that this may occur regardless.

In effect, Schlager (1995) questioned the extent to which the pioneers of the approach had empirically tested whether coalitions actually shared similar beliefs, and thus engaged in meaningful co-ordinated behaviour. This is particularly pertinent because a defining tenet of the Advocacy Coalition Framework is that coalitions are glued together by adherence to a set of causal and normative core beliefs (Sabatier 1987; 1998; Sabatier and Pelkey 1987). Logically, it follows that if there is no such

commitment to the belief system, then coalition membership cannot be sustained, and ultimately the framework becomes redundant.

Schlager's (1995) main point is that an actor is often actually constrained by the requirement of the organisation to which they belong and this is a stumbling block for co-ordinated activity. This could be a result of the fact that first and foremost, many individuals or organisations have a commitment to increase their 'visibility and welfare'. Thus, although they may share similar beliefs with other groups, they are actually in competition for resources with them and this becomes the defining tenet of the relationship.

In response, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) point out how their understanding of individual motivations is premised on a different set of criteria. They also claim that the costs of 'co-ordination' are smaller than Schlager (1995) conceives and that Schlager's understanding of the individual draws on Ostrom's (1990) theory of Institutional Analysis and Development. Broadly speaking, this understanding of the individual is as a rational and 'self-interested' actor. In contrast, and as will become more apparent, the Advocacy Coalition Framework understands the individual as 'not necessarily preoccupied with maximising their material self-interest' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999:139).

Consequently, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, in its later guises, makes a distinction between 'material' and 'purposive' groups. Jenkins-Smith and St. Clair (1993:151) offer an explanation of these, suggesting that purposive groups attract members usually on the grounds of ideology or policy orientation which they claim will benefit society as a whole. On the other hand, material organisations 'pursue more narrowly the interests of their members'. This manifests itself in profits for shareholders, for example. Distributional conflicts and free riding are more associated with material groups whereas policy debates usually relate to purposive groups. That said, the authors concede that developing a set of policy proposals that negate these issues 'can no longer be assumed away' (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999:138).

Additionally, Zafonte and Sabatier (1998) have subsequently made a distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' types of co-ordination which are of more significance in this thesis. Strong co-ordination requires a 'common plan of action, the communication of that plan to potential coalition members, the monitoring of member compliance, and the imposition of sanctions for non-compliance' (Zafonte and Sabatier 1998:480). By contrast, weak co-ordination simply requires organisational actors to monitor each others political behaviour and then alter their actions 'to make their political strategies complementary with respect to a common goal' (Zafonte and Sabatier 1998:480). There is clear overlap here with the policy networks literature, in particular, the recognition that integration within a coalition or network is fundamentally on a scale, as opposed to a zero-sum basis. At its most basic level, weak co-ordination presupposes that actors share Policy Core beliefs and it is this understanding that is employed in this research.

In light of the criticisms, however, recent iterations of the Advocacy Coalition Framework, in contrast to its earlier incarnations, no longer assume that that 'beliefs' are identical across entire coalitions and that the boundaries between them are more fluid than early iterations suggested. This is particularly significant for the way the Advocacy Coalition Framework is employed in this thesis. It is advocated here, therefore, that there is scope for a range of beliefs within a coalition. Notwithstanding that some limitations of the Advocacy Coalition Framework approach are effectively shown via primary data from the current research, it is suggested that these do not necessarily constitute insurmountable problems.

In this research, for the most part coalition members did share a set of core beliefs, which in turn impacted on their understanding of 'evidence'. A solid belief system, however, was not necessarily the sole reason why they adhered to a certain evidential perspective, as Schlager (1995) suspects. An actor could just as easily be part of a recognisable coalition for more pragmatic reasons, such as occupational function. According to one journalist and writer on the history of drug use and frequent expert witness in criminal proceedings:

I wouldn't frame it so much in terms of core-beliefs; this is maybe because I've been around for ten-years and if you stay involved in this for ten years how are you paying the rent? I mean I am doing it on a sort of voluntary

basis...I have known many people in this field, for quite a long time and...I often find it hard to identify a real core of moral beliefs there...Some are real expert operators in terms of forming coalitions and seeing where the money is going and I think a lot of the people in that central block are like that. I don't think that they are there because of any particular core belief (RAD4).

For current purposes, 'that central block' corresponds broadly to the rational position in this research. It is suggested here, however, that this does not make the visibility of coalitions any less valid. There is still a recognition that the system is internally differentiated and it is this that is of prime significance, not the manner in which this occurs.

Although there can be little doubt that the drug classification system debate is characterised by competing perspectives with recognisable adherents (see Chapter Two), there were further issues which concerned the utility of the framework. In particular, there were disagreements in the minds of the respondents in the research over whether: a) the policy-making process is as rational as that underpinned by the Advocacy Coalition Framework and; b) coalitions are comprised in the manner briefly introduced in the previous chapter and expounded below.

The following exchange between the author and a Director of research from a leading Drug Treatment QUANGO is indicative of this.

MM: My hunch is, with regard to the cannabis reclassification, there were three different coalitions involved in the policy debate and you can get a perspective of what each coalition was arguing, in relation to where they stood with regard to the UN conventions and also the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act.

RATL9: I don't think policy-making is a rational process in the way that you are describing it at all.

MM: No?

RATL9: I see it as reactionary, driven by anything from something happening 'out there'...Reactions to media stories, or fear reactions from politicians about being elected. They need to be seen to be doing something...but basically I don't think that particularly rational policy development happens...It's messy, it is really messy and it doesn't quite work like that. The Government runs with half ideas and pointers in that direction or they will go and try something to fill a gap and what have you. You have got to kind of run with something sometimes even if you haven't got the evidence.

Similarly, it was the view of a Chief Executive of a drug prevention policy NGO that:

I wouldn't necessarily use a categorisation, a simple three-tiered approach. I think what you are illustrating is that there is a continuum of views and perceptions about how we deal with this and that people position themselves along that in different ways. I think it is more nuanced than just a simple set of three boxes and again I think that is partly a view about moral, cultural and philosophical debates with Transform having the Libertarian view in contrast to Peter Stoker [chairman of the National Drug Prevention Alliance], for example, but also I think there is a pragmatic approach needed as to how policy development and change works (RATL13).

Here, 'Transform' relates to the Transform Drug Policy Foundation (hereafter 'Transform'), a key organisation within the radical position, with the National Drug Prevention Alliance central to the conservative group. For the most part, however, these were the minority positions. The following exchange between the author and a Director of a drug service provider with experience of Whitehall is indicative of this:

MM: My understanding of the whole process is that you can really see coalitions at work in the process as a result of the cannabis classification and review. Where you have got the conservative minded Coalition Against Cannabis, as they called themselves, and then on the other side there are groups like Transform who are arguing another radical point of view and a broader group in the middle. What is your view on this?

RATL7: The mass are arguing the middle ground who state that this is broadly sensible, it's not a step on the route to legalisation. That is what I call the groundswell. If you spoke to most university departments, most people who had done research in this area and most people who provided services to drug users and other public health bodies they broadly say that on balance this is not the biggest risk in the world and it is broadly sensible in terms of the evidence that we had. At the two ends you had this conservative coalition and at the other ends you said you had the Danny Kushlicks [Director of Transform] who said well "absolutely but the real thing is to take the law away all together".

In response to whether there were recognisable coalitions in the field, along the lines of the ones alluded to above, according to one leading academic in the drugs research field and adviser to the Scottish Government on drug matters:

I think my sense is, although I wasn't really privy to the discussions of the ACMD, my sense is there are distinct groupings each of which in a sense lay claim to evidence most of which to a degree that is not at all clear and are being driven by other sets of ideas and ideologies and it is a bit of a melting pot of very different groups (CON4).

There is one final, pivotal point in the demarcation of the current research from the conventional Advocacy Coalition Framework approach. This relates to the notion of 'coalitions'. As illustrated above, 'coalitions' assume a significant degree of co-ordinated activity. In the current research, this was open to significant debate. In essence, other explanations were given and had more credence as to why recognisable perspectives were noticeable in the policy process, which relate more to occupational necessity and political manoeuvring. Thus, although there was some notion of a sharing of resources and interdependence, this was not necessarily the glue which held them together, as the Advocacy Coalition Framework maintains.

To speak of 'coalitions' is, therefore, inherently problematic. As an alternative, the term 'perspectives' is favoured here as an explanatory mechanism. Perspectives do not presuppose the same amount of co-ordinated activity from actors. In this regard, they more accurately reflect the muddled through, *ad hoc* nature of policy-making in this area. The notion of perspectives is informed by what Vickers (1965) has termed 'appreciative systems'. These involve:

...making a judgement of fact about the 'state of the system', both internally and in its external relations. I will call these reality judgments. These include judgements about what the state will be or might be on various hypotheses as well as judgements of what it is and has been. They may be thus actual or hypothetical, past, present or future. It also involves making judgments about the significance of these facts to the appreciator or to the body for whom the appreciator is made. These judgments I will call value judgments. Reality judgments and value judgments are inseparable constituents of appreciation...(Vickers 1965:40).

The incorporation of appreciations is intended to pacify critics of the Advocacy Coalition Framework who are troubled by its rationalist assumptions. Appreciations and perspectives build into the analysis the aforementioned notion that there are 'fuzzy' boundaries between groups in the policy subsystem. In essence, actors could be located in a certain perspective in terms of Deep and Policy Core beliefs but Secondary Aspects may be consistent with other groups. As will subsequently become apparent, similar appreciations of 'evidence' can be ascertained across the policy subsystem.

It is then to illustrate the nuances of ‘evidence’ that ‘appreciations’ and ‘perspectives’ form the basis of the reworking of the Advocacy Coalition Framework. The three-tier belief system structure of the Advocacy Coalition Framework is maintained, however, as a key aspect of the analysis. The advantage of pursuing this path is that it helps to incorporate the inevitable spectrum of views on topics from within the various perspectives, and also provides a useful tool for highlighting similarities across the subsystem.

As a result of such issues, the Advocacy Coalition Framework is utilised here as a middle-range theory (Merton 1968) explaining the role of conflict in policy debates, in this case about evidence. This differs from the approach adopted by the creators of the framework, and selected followers, who have put its assumptions to empirical test in a bid to ascertain a literal explanation of the nature of the policy process and the conditions that result in policy change. The framework used here also combines the existing and emerging theory of weaker co-ordinated activity between individuals in a coalition with the emerging data, in the spirit of what Layder (1998) has termed ‘adaptive theory’. Grouping together certain organisations with others often involves some arbitrary distinction and may lead to unions that are uncomfortable on the part of those involved. This latter problem is particularly acute in highly polemical policy debates such as illicit drug policy. With this re-working, it is claimed that as a mechanism for highlighting the conflicting nature of policy debates within a wider environment of inclusion, the Advocacy Coalition Framework cannot be surpassed amongst its pluralist peers.

5.3 The Organisation of the Subsystem

Along with recognition of the three-tiered belief system structure, an explanation is required of the actual participants of this particular subsystem. Interested parties in UK drug classification issues have previously been identified, but how these fit into the framework is our present concern. Adapting the work of Goddard (1997), the various actors in this particular policy subsystem are split into two identifiable parts: ‘interest groups’ and ‘official organisations’ (see Tables 5.1, 5.3 and 5.5). For the purposes of this research ‘interest groups’ refer to any organisation (usually not for profit), ranging from the tightly to the loosely organised. They are determined to

impact on policy through advocacy, whilst remaining independent of the political arena. An 'official organisation' shares many of the same traits but is answerable to, or linked with, certain agencies of the 'State' in some manner, most obviously through being the beneficiary of central funding.

Goddard's (1997) work on belief systems in post-war criminal justice policy-making, incorporated Political Parties into the analysis. One paradox of the UK drug classification debate, however, is that although it is highly politicised, the stances of Political Parties are non-partisan. In effect, differences within Political Parties are frequently greater than those across the political spectrum. In the subsequent discussion, mention is given to how certain perspectives have an affinity with 'traditional' Party political stances, with the caveat that there are caveats in this. There is correspondence between the sample of interviewees and the formation of perspectives. Without revealing too much information that could jeopardise anonymity, the respondents were in some way affiliated to at least one of the key organisations cited in Table 4.2, either directly or in partnership within a wider organisation.

Perspective membership, as has been alluded to previously, was identified from a sample of statements (both written and oral) given to previous UK Parliamentary Select Committee Reports covering similar terrain to the current inquiry, namely the Home Affairs Committee (2002) and the Science and Technology Committee (2006). In substantive terms, belief system structures relate to appreciations of the role of evidence in the cannabis reclassification (Chapter Six) and also in the broader drug classification system (Chapter Seven). All perspectives start from the premise that the relationship between evidence and policy in this area is disorderly because alcohol and tobacco, the most widely used substances (along with caffeine) and generally regarded as the two substances which cause the most harm, (for example by causing drug-related deaths), are absent from the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. In this regard, all perspectives are, to varying degrees, critical of the 'official' Government line with regard to the efficacy of the UK drug classification system and its associated evidence base.

A recent statement on the Government position in relation to the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act is expressed by Vernon Coaker MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Home Office, who has suggested that:

The Government maintain that the classification system has withstood the test of time and that it continues to discharge its function fully and effectively. Its single purpose is to provide a legal framework in which criminal penalties are set by reference to the harmfulness of a drug to the individual and to society, and to the type of illegal activity undertaken...Our tri-partite classification system allows clear and meaningful distinctions to be made between drugs. Its familiarity and brand recognition should not be dismissed (Hansard 2007, June 14).

This position - that the current system is fit for purpose - is understandable and to be expected in that countenancing any radical change to drug legislation, in the current climate, is not, for a politician, conducive to furthering ones career. As we shall see, this kind of pragmatism is the crux of the issue in this area.

All the perspectives, then, are founded on general ontological or philosophical ideas and beliefs about the nature of the drug problem and what it is that the classification system is supposed to do. These ideas and beliefs can be described as 'ideological' (Deep Core). There is also significant debate as to whether the reclassification of cannabis was evidence-based and whether the overall classification system is evidence-based (Policy Core). The Deep and Policy Core beliefs of each perspective are presented in table form (see Tables 5.2, 5.4 and 5.6). Each perspective, as indicated, also entails a range of opinions or appreciations (Secondary Aspects) on the kinds of evidence that were or ought to have been used in the cannabis and wider drug classification decisions. An illustration of these is considered throughout the analysis. Bearing this in mind, it is to each perspective that we now turn.

5.3.1 The Radical Perspective

The radical perspective is comprised of various NGOs and supporters concerned with significantly reforming UK drug legislation. Their aim is the abandonment of the prohibition of illegal substances. Table 5.1 highlights the key players in this group. In terms of the sample, four respondents were located in this perspective, with one

respondent (RAD3/RATL4) leaning towards the rational position. The appreciations of this perspective are consistent with the smaller political parties in the UK such as the Green Party and, in a partial way, the Liberal Democrats, with fringe support in the main Parties. No 'official organisation' is located in this perspective as, historically, advocating the legalisation of drugs has precluded organisations from receiving large sums of public money; a product of the politics of electoral anxiety. Conversely, it has traditionally been the way to achieve widespread vilification in the media.

The radical perspective occupies a position in the drug policy debate that was at one time considered extreme. Consequently, its adherents occupied a pariah status and this stance is still unpalatable for most decision makers in positions of power. In recent years, there are signs that this is changing, typified by the increasing media profile of members of the group and a space opening up for informed debate as to the opportunity to deregulate certain illicit substances, both domestically (Home Affairs Committee 2002) and internationally (see Section 2.4.3). This is compounded by the fact that as of August 2007, 'Transform' were granted consultative status at the United Nations.

Table 5.1: Radical Perspective Composition

Interest Groups	Official Organisations
Transform, Release, Parents Against Lethal Addictive Drugs,	None

Table 5.2: Overview of the Radical Perspective Belief System Structure

Deep Core	Policy Core
Minimise drug related harm via a humane and useful regulatory system of drug control culminating with the abolition of prohibition. Less emphasis on enforcement as drugs an inevitable feature of daily life for many	Cannabis reclassification not 'evidence-based' but broadly a step in the right direction for UK drug classification; wider classification (1971 Misuse of Drugs Act) system primarily not evidence-based

Transform are the leading NGO concerned with law reform on the basis of legalisation and regulation of all illicit substances. Sharing a similar outlook towards the drug problem, it was the view of one Labour MP that the origins of the problem with the current drug legislation were clear:

One thing you can guarantee in politics is that when all parties agree on something they are almost certainly wrong...They did agree in 1971 that they needed to have a crackdown on the use of illegal drugs. This was promoted by the United Nations and by the United States of America and the great dream was that by having harsh laws against the use, manufacture and selling of illegal drugs, they would reduce their use. In Britain, we tackled this by producing a classification of illegal drugs and that was irrational and omitted the dangerous legal drugs. The classification was an abject failure and was counterproductive in that when it was introduced in 1971, there were a thousand addicts of heroin and cocaine and after 35 years of the classification, the number had grown to 280,000 and there was certainly a causal link between those two events (RAD2).

The respondent went on to say:

There was a recent meeting in Maastricht...supported by the international Red Cross and Red Crescent organisations. [It said] that we have got to drop the prohibitionist policies – they don't work. Most of Europe and the rest of the world are not ready for the pragmatic policies of the Benelux countries and so we have got to find a middle way through this which concentrates on health, and we've got to get universal support. At the moment we are signed up, all the United Nations countries are signed up to a policy set in 1998, that we will work towards the elimination of the use, or a very substantial reduction in the use, of illegal drugs and this was a ten-year strategy. Those ten years are up in 2008 and we haven't made an inch of progress towards that aim. Let alone eliminating drugs, we haven't reduced them in any way.

The situation is very much the same, if anything slightly worse than it was in 1998, so the United Nations and all the countries that are signed up to its policies are on a course that is completely impossible (RAD2).

The pragmatism of the Benelux countries is actually the compromise position for the radical perspective. The starting point of their analysis is that drug use is an inevitable part of existence for certain individuals predisposed to this activity. This has the outcome that there is some inevitability about the place of drugs in society. This is an interesting point of comparison between the perspectives. Much of the core beliefs of the radical perspective relate to the futility of the current 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act framework, stemming from the view that the current system does not effectively carry out its deterrent function. The radical group are not alone in surmising this, but are unique in their suggestion that the cause of this state of affairs relates to the ineffectiveness of using a criminal justice mechanism to control what is, essentially, a public-health issue. For thinkers in this perspective, this is the epitome of a prohibitionist paradigm, which is itself an 'evidence-free zone' (Rolles, et al. 2006:6). With this in mind, the Deep Core beliefs of this perspective are expressed by a journalist and writer with a long-standing interest in the drugs debate:

I think it is a curious warping effect that the health debate has because, as far as I am concerned, it is not about arguing that drugs should be legal because they are safe, that is kind of back-to-front. If there are more concentrated and different forms of cannabis on the street, that is precisely because we have an illegal market in which we can't intervene and which is driven by, in the case of Skunk, those people who are growing a dozen plants in their back bedroom. And you get five-times as much money out of a very strong Skunk plant than you do out of a mellow old-school weed, and that is why we have got stronger stuff on the street. But there is a moral and ideological debate in disguise where politicians pass the buck to health professionals and...ACMD become the kind of arbiters of this. Ministers, instead of taking a moral stand, say "well we act on the advice of our medical authorities" (RAD4).

Thus, for the radical perspective, a new framework is required that would enable State regulation of the currently illicit drugs market. This solution equates to a policy position that states not only is the current system an ineffective deterrent, but it actually causes many problems associated with drugs, as alluded to above. Consequently, policy reformulations that involve existing tweaks to the legislation, such as cannabis reclassification, do not radically alter the framework of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. Ultimately, this means that the current system cannot be

‘evidence-based’. Again, this is linked to the evidence surrounding the deterrent effect. The above respondent continues:

...As regards questions about what is the evidence-base for the classification system acting as a deterrent. The answer is there is no evidence base for that. But the government response was “yes we are a bit short of evidence for that and we will go out and get some evidence supporting that view and we will get back to you” so, you know, I think it is difficult for drug policy to be evidence-based if it is not prepared to countenance a profound rethink (RAD4).

In this sense, the radical perspective has a clear line on the nature of evidence in this subsystem. There is some acceptance that analyses of the risks associated with the drugs themselves, for example, in terms of toxicology, is a necessary development and played a role in the proceedings. Ultimately, though, the system is seen as being evidence-free. This will become clearer in subsequent chapters, when the issue of cannabis reclassification and drug classification are discussed in more detail. Overall, however, there is also a more definite understanding that ‘evidence’ should be of the evaluative kind relating to the overall efficacy of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act as a deterrent, or at least, evidence relating to the efficacy of the current policy.

5.3.2 The Rational Perspective

Comprising of actors from a range of backgrounds and disciplines, the rational perspective is the broadest in the subsystem. This is reflected in the sample, with thirteen respondents affiliated to this group, one of whom had conservative leanings (RATL10/CON4). In the words of a senior figure in a leading drug treatment NGO (RAD3/RATL4), it constitutes, although not solely, the drug policy ‘establishment’, and ‘critical friends’ of government. Table 5.3 highlights how it also includes many members of the ACMD and a number of official organisations and other NGOs, often the recipients of central funding. These include ‘DrugScope’, the ‘National Treatment Agency’ and the ‘Association of Chief Police Officers’, amongst others. Additionally, more independent bodies such as the Royal Society of Arts and the newly formed United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission share, to a degree, the same philosophical standpoint.

This is a perspective that promotes, as Table 5.4 illustrates, a Deep Core view that drug treatment is as an effective way of managing the drug problem. In party politics, support for this stance has usually been linked with Liberal Democrat policy, but has also been shared by some of the Labour Party and less of the Conservative Party. Within most administrations, before and since 1971, this has been the favoured policy direction of the Department of Health. Many members of this perspective also come from ‘academic scientific’ backgrounds. Table 5.4 also indicates a set of Policy Core beliefs focusing on anomalies in the location of certain drugs within the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, which undermines its credibility.

Table 5.3: Rational Perspective Composition

Interest Groups	Official Organisations
UK Harm Reduction Alliance, International Harm Reduction Association, The Beckley Foundation, DrugScope, United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission,	ACMD, National Treatment Agency, Association of Chief Police Officers, Traditionally the Department of Health

Table 5.4: Rational Perspective Belief System Structure

Deep Core	Policy Core
Promotion of human rights and public health placing treatment at the centre of the drug strategy (Harm Reduction) as drug use is an inevitable part of everyday life for many. Using evidence to inform policy by ironing out anomalies of existing framework	Cannabis reclassification primarily ‘evidence-based’ as a step towards ironing out 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act’s anomalies; wider classification system increasingly evidence-based

Further features of the rational perspective reveal that this group sees the cannabis reclassification as a broadly 'evidence-based' decision, signalling an attempt to eradicate one such anomaly. The core beliefs of this perspective reflect its composition of leading figures in the drug policy establishment, such as the ACMD and the National Treatment Agency. In this sense, the starting point for what constitutes the 'drug problem' demarcates them from their conservative counterparts, and links them to the radical perspective, in that drug use is inevitable for certain individuals. According to one Head of Publishing for a leading drug information charity:

We start from a position that...the reality is that as a species we have got a very long history of a desire to alter consciousness and take mood enhancing drugs whatever they are, and you ain't never going to stop that from happening. Therefore, if you are never going to stop it from happening, what's the next thing that you do? Well, you try and mitigate the risks and dangers that people will be putting themselves through, as a result of using both as individuals and for communities and society at large, and in the process of doing that you have to weigh up all sorts of different things. Community safety against human rights, and all of that kind of stuff, which is why we sign up to a harm reduction agenda, so that is where we come from (RATL8).

Different manifestations of what constitutes harm reduction are discussed in Chapter Seven. For now, this understanding maintains that drug harms can be reduced by introducing public-health responses to the drug problem, such as methadone maintenance programmes for heroin users, whilst simultaneously maintaining the criminal-justice framework and prohibiting other kinds of substance use and possession. It is clear that this view has an impact on the actual minutiae of the Deep Core belief of this perspective, which is succinctly described by the Director of a Leading Drug Treatment QUANGO:

I think it is very rare that the law is based on evidence actually. I don't think we quite know what we are trying to achieve, which doesn't help. Are we trying to contain? Are we trying to punish? Are we trying to prevent harm?..I think that the only bit that is evidence-based is around drug treatment actually, because if you look at the four strands of the drug strategy, the only one where there is any real coherent evidence of any quality is around drug treatment having an impact on health and crime (RATL9).

On one level, such a statement is to be expected when its origins are taken into consideration. A particular appreciation on the nature of evidence, however, emerges from this perspective. Although not directly linked to the goal of drug treatment, it advocates a similar use of evidence. This concerns that which makes the current system as efficacious as possible, without implementing a radical overhaul of the legislation. It was the view of one forensic scientist and member of the ACMD technical committee that:

...one of the problems is the historic drug classification system is riddled with anomalies. So there are two aspects to it; one is looking at the evidence which surrounds any particular drug which is being considered at the moment, to establish the degree of harm or potential harm. But you have then got to calibrate that against, a not quite random, but a good scatter in terms of where the existing classified drugs actually sit in a harm classification status spectrum. One of the initiatives which the current head of the ACMD technical committee has taken on board is to take a root and branch look at how classifications look. To start to build up a firm evidence base because the classification system came through a whole raft of historical issues. And when you take a cold, hard look at it, there are some spectacular anomalies in there. Why is something a class A? Why is something else only a class C? It just doesn't seem to fit. So Professor Nutt, one of his initiatives when he took over the role of chairman was to say "we really need to start looking at this and can we get some kind of more structured approach as to how drugs are classified?" (RATL3).

The work of Professor Nutt, et al. (2007), (hereafter referred to as the 'Nutt, et al. matrix') is also explored in more detail subsequently. It was, however, a key development in real-time research, as it was published alongside other critical studies of the current operation of the UK drug classification; namely the Royal Society of Arts report (2007). The Nutt, et al. matrix proposed an alternative to the current classification system. Here, all legal drugs, along with tobacco and alcohol would be placed in a scale according to the harm they cause drug users. This would, in turn, be decoupled from the associated penalties.

The authors identified three main categories of harm. These include: a) physical, which is an assessment of the propensity of the drug to cause physical harm, for example, damage to organs and systems. There are three separate aspects to this. First, acute physical harm this is the immediate effects linked to the notion of overdose. Second, chronic physical harm this is the health consequences of repeated use, such as the link between cannabis and psychosis and, finally, specific problems

associated with intravenous drug use; b) dependence, which entails the relationship between the pleasurable effects of the drug and its propensity to induce dependent behaviour both psychologically and physically and; c) social harms, which occur in various ways, for example with intoxication impacting on family, community and social life through costs to systems of health and social care and the police (Nutt, et al. 2007).

As a brief snapshot, the Nutt, et al. matrix provides a contrast to the current location of certain drugs in the ABC system of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Acts. According to another forensic scientist and current member of the ACMD technical committee:

From the work we did in this risk assessment exercise, starting in 2000, what we did was we looked at 20 substances over a period of a couple of years, we usually examine a few substances at each meeting. This process was presented as evidence to the [Science and Technology] Select Committee...Without going into the details of the risk assessment process we scored these 20 substances in a single dimension of scale and came out with the conclusion that the rank order had no correlation with the status of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. Notable exceptions were ecstasy which we scored fairly low yet it's a class A drug and there were some anomalies in the other direction as well we felt that barbiturates were under classified and far more dangerous but the situation is that barbiturates are a pretty unusual substance these days but overall there was no good correlation with the classification in the act. That didn't come as too great a surprise to us as we knew that the original classifications were not really evidence-based we also have to say that the evidence on the toxicology, pharmacology and all the rest of it of these drugs has built up over the years (RATL1).

A more detailed picture of the Nutt, et al. matrix is included in Appendix IV. It will suffice to say here that although there are many similarities between the work of Nutt, et al. and the Royal Society of Arts report, there are numerous differences. Indeed, the former operates within the broader substantive framework of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act but suggests that it needs amending, whereas the latter is more explicit in advocating its repeal and replacement with a Misuse of Substances Act:

The new Misuse of Substances Act should acknowledge that, whether we like it or not, drugs are and will remain a fact of life. On that basis, the aim of the law should be to reduce the amounts of harms caused to individuals, their friends and family, their children and their communities, certainly by alerting people to the risks of using potentially harmful drugs as far as that is

possible. The use of criminal sanctions should be confined to the punishment of those offences connected with drugs that cause the most harm, and only the most serious drugs-related offences should attract custodial sentences – and those sentences should be long rather than short (Royal Society of Arts 2007:14-5).

The Royal Society of Arts report also offers some novel suggestions for the direction of UK drug policy such as ‘requiring ministers to take into account the best available scientific evidence relating to drugs and their use’ and if this is not done then for ministers to ‘state formally and publicly’ their reasons (Royal Society of Arts 2007:15). Both reports are, however, consistent with the rational perspective, in that evidence is linked to the working out of the toxicological properties of certain substances, which are then calibrated against other ones to show where they should fit into a system of drug control legislation that maintains the prohibition of drugs.

The philosophy underpinning this perspective is one that operates within the paradigm of prohibition. For the radical perspective, as we have seen, this is not the best platform on which to deal with the drug problem. The terrain marked out by the rational perspective differs, then, in many respects from the radical one, even though there is an acceptance by both that drug use is an inevitable feature of contemporary society. The primary difference is that the rational perspective operates within the current prohibitionist 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act framework, whereas the radical perspective wishes to transcend this. An alternative perspective is provided by the conservative contingent, who stress that more emphasis on drug prevention is a desirable policy direction.

5.3.3 The Conservative Perspective

The conservative perspective consists primarily of actors advocating drug prevention, education messages. They also have a strong emphasis on determined law-enforcement as the most effective means of dealing with the drug problem. Table 5.5 illustrates that members include the ‘National Drug Prevention Alliance’ and the ‘Coalition Against Cannabis’, amongst others. In terms of the fieldwork sample, seven respondents were allied to this perspective, one of whom had leanings towards the rational perspective (CON7/RATL14).

Politically, the philosophy of this group corresponds with that of the mainstream of the two main political parties, although there are signs that this is wavering and this does not translate into widespread support via central funding. The Home Office's law-and-order philosophy is particularly consistent with this perspective, although recently there are signs that this also is beginning to change. Table 5.6 suggests that the conservative perspective holds a set of beliefs within this subsystem farthest away from the radical perspective, although there are a few common threads that can be identified between them. Key to both perspectives is the belief that the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act is fundamentally flawed and more specifically that the decision to reclassify cannabis was fundamentally not 'evidence-based'. For the conservative perspective, however, this is because the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act is too complex and needs to go back to basics. This requires a much simpler system such as the Swedish approach, still based on prohibition where, broadly speaking, the only distinction between substances is those that are legal and illegal and where drug education is premised on the principles of harm reduction, which equates to drug prevention.

Table 5.5: The Conservative Perspective Composition

Interest Groups	Official Organisations
The Coalition Against Cannabis, National Drug Prevention Alliance, Europe Against Drugs,	(Traditionally) Home Office,

Table 5.6: The Conservative Perspective Belief System Structure

Deep Core	Policy Core
To promote drug free healthy and wholesome lifestyles through drug enforcement/prevention and education (Harm Reduction). Drug use not an inevitable aspect of daily life	Reclassification of cannabis fundamentally not evidence-based nor a step in the right direction; classification system not evidence-based

The first point to note about the conservative perspective is that unlike the other groups, there is a reluctance to accept that drug use is an inevitable aspect of social life. Therefore, drug prevention should be the overall, and most desirable, direction for drug policy. This, in their own words, puts them at odds with the rest of the policy subsystem and even from the Parliamentary process which is increasingly sympathetic to this view. The Deep Core beliefs of this perspective are best illustrated in the following quotation from a retired senior officer in Customs and Excise and leading figure from an established UK drug prevention NGO:

I have a feeling that drugs are harmful, illegal drugs are harmful, so Government, ACMD and senior police officers, indeed everyone, ought to be very careful about what they say and do less they make the situation worse and Blunkett made the situation worse. [Reclassifying cannabis] [f]rom B to C was damaging (CON6).

This is supported by data from an ex-Chief Constable and current consultant to the United Nations on drugs and security who stated:

...you have got to ask the question in the first place, why are we classifying drugs, what is the purpose of classifying them? Is it by the nature of their harm? Is it by their ingredients? Is it by the commonality of their use? Is it by the way that they are marketed?...maybe I am being simplistic but I don't know why in enforcement terms, which is what we are talking about primarily...why you need to classify drugs because police officers don't go out and say "right today I am going to investigate class A drugs", you go out saying that you suspect somebody is trafficking drugs so let's see what they are up to? And if it turns out to be a class C drug or a class A drug the procedures and the consequences and penalties are very similar. Maybe the classification influences judges and they say that this is a particularly horrible drug and you get an extra two years in jail but I don't think so and I don't think it matters. I think each case needs to be considered individually and the judge and the jury are capable of deciding the nature of the harm in the context of the case (CON5).

As a result, it is a commonly held view that the understanding of 'evidence' related to this position, is not considered in debates about UK drug policy that occur at the level of central Government. This is reflected in the Deep Core views of the perspective. According to one GP and committee member of a Christian campaigning group:

In my submission [to a Parliamentary Select Committee] I basically mentioned the Swedish approach, which basically has just one group of illegal drugs, rather than saying A is more dangerous than B or C because I think it is very problematic, like comparing apples and pears. You end up with endless debates about whether cannabis is more dangerous than amphetamines or amphetamines are more dangerous than cannabis and I think it also leads to confusion and in the end you need to give a clear message that drugs are dangerous and if you have a certain amount of drugs, a small amount is for personal use and if you have a large amount then you are a potential drug dealer and have penalties associated with that. That is the approach they use in Sweden and looking at the data it seems to work (CON1).

Another key concern for the conservative perspective, then, is that the current system has the propensity to send out misleading messages to drug users about the dangers of drugs. This is a particularly acute issue when there are calls for a reclassification downwards of drugs within the existing framework.

I was against it because I thought the downgrading was going to send mixed messages to young people and indeed the government accepted that when they did their review and went back to the ACMD, you have got Charles Clarke effectively saying “we fucked up”. We made a mistake. He wasn’t in sympathy with it. The intelligence that reaches me is that it was sold to [Tony] Blair on the basis of a package of things, one of which would be reducing crime through more prescription of heroin...I don’t have any particularly strong views about the drug classification system, I don’t think it is that important. I think it is much more important about clear messages. Moving things up or down does send a signal (CON6).

The problem of down classifying drugs, within the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, from the conservative perspective, is that it is contrary to the emerging evidence-base relating to the substances themselves. This is a key distinction that marks this perspective out from the radical group, for example. For the conservatives, the harm of drugs stems from the innate properties of the substances themselves. For the radical group, the main dangers of drugs are a product of their (il)legal status. According to the UK representative of international Drug Prevention NGO:

...they [the Government] just don’t take the evidence on board. I mean I wish they would just do what Sweden does. All drugs are the same because cannabis, for somebody with one of these genes, is more dangerous than probably even heroin, heroin can be prescribed in a hospital safely, you are never going to get a proper hierarchy of harms. There must be hours and hours and hours spent arguing this amongst people who, half of them don’t

know what they are talking about anyway. It would just be so simple if you said that all drugs are the same (CON3).

This relates to the point mentioned previously concerning how this position is frequently neglected in recent drug policy debates. Similarly, when the deliberations for the report of the influential United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission (Reuter and Stevens 2007) were taking place, these were viewed with some scepticism on behalf of the conservative perspective. In the words of a previous respondent:

My expertise is in the drugs market and she [the Chair of the Commission] has never taken evidence from me, I am pretty noisy and well known. Nobody has invited me and I am not difficult to find. Nobody has taken evidence from [our organisation's Director] and he knows about treatment and he knows about Prevention. They say that prevention doesn't work, well it does work because ultimately drug use occurs because of peer pressure and we need to give people confidence to resist peer pressure (CON6).

It is clear, therefore, that the conservative perspective has a clearly demarcated set of core beliefs. On the whole, there are many more differences and conflicts that have been made visible here.

From the overview of the structure of the subsystem, it is apparent that central to each perspective is a range of views about the nature of evidence in this particular area. It must be stressed, however, that although lines of demarcation between the perspectives have been illustrated in the above discussion, there are also lines of consensus within the subsystem over certain issues, in particular, the context in which the debate takes place.

5.4 The Impact of Politics, the Media and Public Opinion: Contextualising Evidence Utilisation in Heavily Politicised Areas

As has been alluded to throughout and will be explored subsequently, in politicised areas, evidence is frequently conceived in zero-sum terms. It is suggested here that this is because the omnipotence of politics looms large over this area. It is intrinsically linked to sensationalist media reporting which is a product of, but also impacts on, public perceptions. Despite being a policy area characterised by the three Cs, the impact of politics on policy, somewhat ironically, constitutes on one level, an

area of consensus across this particular policy subsystem. Even though politics is prevalent, a further claim of this research is that evidence is still embedded in the decision-making process. This nuance is, however, not necessarily realised by those engaged in the policy process. This is intriguing because by recognising the centrality of politics in decision-making, there is recognition of other factors, other than evidence, impacting on the decision-making process. The following exchanges offer a glimpse of the differing appreciations of these issues.

In response to a question concerning agenda setting in the area of drug classification, it was the view of one member of the radical perspective, the Director of a leading NGO in the treatment sector that:

There is not a simple answer to that but...you have got basic science that changes our understandings about risks and harms and that, in turn, can change the agenda. But in turn that requires the Cabinet Office or the Home Office to take note of that and is contingent on the media. So it is a sort of constellation of those things. So science, media and advisers, but if that doesn't fit with the broader political process then you are still not going to get it [desired policy change], those different components are all necessary but alone are not sufficient (RAD3/RATL4).

Similarly, when asked whether the respondent thought the decision to reclassify cannabis drew on the available evidence at the time, as stated by the Levitt, et al. (2006) report – produced for the Science and Technology Committee Report - it was the view of a colleague of the then Home Secretary David Blunkett that:

They are probably right, but the decision was still a politician's decision. Certainly the evidence was there. I supported it at the time and it was a rare event where the Home Secretary was in possession of an intelligent idea (RAD2).

There is an assumption from the radical perspective that evidence of some variety fought for attention alongside the politics of the issue. Members of the rational perspective, in contrast to those of a more radical persuasion, are more optimistic about the use of evidence in drug classification policy formulation, although the impact of the political process was not lost on them either. Witness the following exchange between the author and a Director of a leading Drug Treatment QUANGO:

MM: Your understanding of the evidence-base for the classification system would be along the lines of...getting the right science behind the harms and matching it to where they should be in the system?

RATL9: Yeah, but I don't think it is possible actually.

MM: You don't?

RATL9: The principle is good though but I just don't think that we have got the evidence and I don't think that we look at it the right way and because people are frightened around drugs, or lots of people are frightened around drugs, there is lots of politics involved because it is the kind of thing that the media pick up on and the general public pick up on and it wins and loses elections.

Correspondingly, in response to a question detailing the relationship between evidence and policy with recourse to the overall classification system, it was the view of a one time senior government adviser that:

...you know, when evidence needs to be taken into consideration and political realities have to be taken into consideration, politics almost always wins. But that is not to say that the system that was set up for classifications was designed as an evidence-based system...There is a scientific process either internal or external and at any one time there are committees and researchers saying "well the evidence behind a certain substance justifies class A or justifies class B or justifies class C" that is a process that is happening but fundamentally that evidence-based process then gets put into a political process and if the politics doesn't fit then the change won't be made. But it is actually structured in the law and through the ACMD as an "evidence-based" process (RATL7).

For the conservative perspective, the politics behind the initial reclassification of cannabis was the decisive factor in its eventual implementation. For this perspective, the decision to initially reclassify cannabis was completely devoid of evidence. However, in response to a question concerning the evidence presented from the ACMD to the government in the initial classification decision, the following respondent, a retired Customs Officer and leading figure in a drug prevention organisation, suggested that there was certain selectivity in the evidence utilised. The implications of this are discussed in the following chapter. For now, in this scenario, the respondent is referring to a group of scientists who had put forward a contrary case to the Home Secretary from that of the Government's advisory council:

All the other people were just as eminent...and the Home Office refused to see them so they wrote a letter to which there were six signatories. The Home Office weren't interested in evidence. You are asking about evidence, it is inconceivable that what happened with the downgrading would have

happened under Jack Straw because of the fuss about Jack Straw and his son and so on and so on. So it is inconceivable. So Blunkett gets in and within weeks says to the ACMD, well really strangled the ACMD didn't he? I mean he may have known he was getting a sympathetic hearing from the ACMD and he knew the way the chairman thought. Well he really drove the policy of the ACMD? (CONS6).

As a consequence, their more prevention-based evidence was not deemed to be consistent with a predetermined policy direction and was thus ignored by those more central to the decision-making process. There are similar misgivings about the role of the then Home Secretary David Blunkett, and the advice he was getting at the time from other members of this perspective. In reply to whether the respondent agreed with the Levitt, et al. (2006) research that the decision to reclassify cannabis was 'evidence-based', a retired senior police officer and current independent consultant to the United Nations stated that:

I would think, and again I would have no first-hand knowledge that I can point to, but based on my professional experience and the way that politics was operating at the time I am absolutely convinced that Blunkett had made his mind up in advance and he wanted cannabis reclassified for his own reasons, and I suspect that that had a lot to do with winning the popular youth vote and going with the tide of public and media opinion that is now being persuaded that the only way to deal with drugs is to legalise them (CONS5).

In sum, there is, then, a general acceptance across the policy subsystem of the role that politics plays in the creation of policy in this area. In turn, this has a knock-on effect for the nature of 'evidence' which is particularly complex and relates to broader problems with the production of data; that is data that can be used as evidence in policy-making. In other words, the arena in which the drug debate takes place can lead to significant problems of data gathering in this area. For example, data relating to the actual effects of certain drugs is often stifled for ethical reasons (Adler 1995). The following extract from the oral evidence sessions of Science and Technology Committee (2006) between the Chairman, Phil Willis MP, and the Chairman of the ACMD, neatly summarises this issue:

Q242 Chairman: Our frustration...is that time and time again you seem to have responded to Members of the Committee that there is a lack of evidence or you have agreed that there is a lack of evidence to make certain decisions. We want to know why the ACMD has not done more to promote research in those areas where there is a lack of evidence. Do you think it is

your job to do it or have we misjudged what the purpose of the committee is?

Professor Sir Michael Rawlins: It is arguable whether it is our job. This is an area in which it is extraordinarily difficult to do research, not just for legal reasons but for real reasons. Would I, for example, be prepared to do volunteer studies with Ecstasy? Would I be prepared to give volunteers Ecstasy? I could probably get the Home Secretary's approval...it is possible. I am not sure I would. I do not know what an ethics committee would think about it, but how would I think about it? We start getting into very real problems of doing research in this area. It is all very well people saying, "You should promote research" but you have to promote research that can be done, not research that we would just like to see (Science and Technology Committee 2006:77).

Drug classification is not the only aspect of the area that is beset with research difficulties. Similar problems of data gathering span many research enterprises and are often, although not solely, related to the way the activity, event, behaviour, person or group being researched are stigmatised (Goffman 1963). The consequence of this is that the phenomenon is often hidden. Such areas have been described as 'sensitive topics' (Lee 1993). Research into sex work (Day and Ward 2007; Sanders 2006); sex offenders (Levinson and D'Amora 2007) and sexual violence (Schwartz 1997) provide some other examples.

For the current discussion, however, the more pressing concern is measurement issues surrounding drug data, which adds another level to the complexity of evidence use in this area. Indeed, a current member of the ACMD technical committee with a background in forensic science suggested that:

...there are real issues there with controlled drugs as by its very nature...it is a hidden activity. So it is very difficult to get well-founded evidence, which isn't biased by, for example, taking a particular group of people, self-declared drug users, in which case, how representative are they of the general community? There are a lot of pressure groups active in this area, how representative are their views? So getting unbiased results is quite difficult and it is not uncommon for the ACMD and its committee's to find that there is a gap in the research base. There are things they would like to know but there is no published data. I think there will, in the future, be more of a drive towards freeing up funds to commission that and certainly the indications are that there will be a drive to fill in those research gaps. Historically, if the gap was there you had to work with what you got (RATL3).

The fact that drug use is primarily a hidden activity poses significant problems for researchers and contributes to doubts about the evidence-base for

policy-making, in this scenario. In terms of general prevalence figures, Newcombe (2007) concedes that although more recently technologies for undertaking such a task have greatly improved (Frischer, et al. 2001; Stimson, et al. 1997), they are still beset with difficulties. For example, they are too narrow in their focus and require, but are yet to have agreed upon, 'standardised definitions and conceptual frameworks' (Newcombe 2007:32). There is also a need to 'go beyond the established concepts of lifetime, past-year and past-month prevalence of individual drugs to examine the prevalence and incidence of different patterns of drugs consumption as they occur in real-life' (Newcombe 2007:32). In addition, consistent with the phenomenological critique of measurement in social research (Blumer 1956; Cicourel 1964), Newcombe (2007:33) continues:

Another key issue is the use of commonsense notions and everyday terms as theoretical concepts and research variables. Although this is common practice, ordinary language terms are typically laden with value judgements and subjective connotations, and so adopting them for scientific usage requires that they be given standardised operational definition, ideally within a broader conceptual framework. For instance, in the early days of drug prevalence research, it was common for surveys to produce estimates/rates of "recent" or "current" drug users, without any clear definitions of these terms.

It is important to stress, as Newcombe subsequently does, that recently such terms have been replaced with clearer definitions including life-time, past month and past year measurements. The juxtaposition of ambiguous measurements alongside more precise ones has meant that estimating long-term trends in the nature of drug prevalence is, inherently, an inexact science as there is clear disparity over what constitutes a 'regular' drug user. Indeed, regular users have been variously defined in surveys, as any cases which use between at least three times per year, at least once a week, or at least once a month (Newcombe 2007:34).

There is clear recognition, and consistency of views, of the problems associated with drug data across the policy subsystem. All measures and data of this kind filter into the decision-making of policy makers along with anecdotal research of people presenting at hospitals, rather than through formalised studies on drug effects. Consequently, often the only available data in this area is anecdotal and lacking in scientific rigour. This goes some way to explaining the prevalent view-

point that UK drug policy is made in a data-free environment. It is argued here, though, that this reasoning is problematic as it suggests that the policy area is data-free whilst recognising that data of some variety is present in the decision-making process. By the way of a neat summary, the complexity of drug data is neatly summarised by one current member of the ACMD and an independent consultant pharmacist who suggested that:

...when it is related to drugs and policy, the classification and legislation, it's incredibly foggy to sort out the evidence from what is an opinion or something that is in the back of your brain because you heard it once and you couldn't remember if it was a scientific journal or the *Daily Mail* (RATL2).

5.5 Summary

The Advocacy Coalition Framework is conventionally employed in the analysis of policy-making over the time-span of a decade or more. This is the time it takes to complete the 'policy cycle'. Although, in part, there is a current concern with the issue of policy change - in the form of cannabis reclassification - the primary focus is on the role and nature 'evidence', as understood by various individuals and groups in the policy arena. Allied to this point, is the view that even though the origins of the cannabis reclassification can be traced back to the aforementioned Police Foundation Report (2000), the renewed interest in drug classification is a more recent occurrence. Furthermore, it has already been suggested that the policy cycles relate to a more conventional view of the policy process. This is not consistent with the nature of politicised policy areas, which do not conform to this.

From this overview of the structure of the subsystem, it is apparent that central to each perspective is a range of views about the nature of evidence in this particular area. There is, however, some consistency as to the relationship between politics and the evidence, with the general recognition that evidence is not the only player in the decision-making process. Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980a cited in Booth 1988:240) make a similar point:

People in official positions of power often do not catalogue research separately in their minds. They interpret it as they read it in the light of their

other knowledge, and they *merge* it with all the information and generalisations in their stock.

From the quotations detailed in the final section of the chapter, two key issues can be ascertained that are central to the emerging theory. First, there is a general acceptance that politics is central to the decision-making process and that this raises difficulties for the nature of evidence-based policy-making, as it has a knock-on effect for the kind of data that is available for policy-makers. This makes the zero-sum views understandable. Second, there is a clear appreciation that despite the politicised nature of the policy area, evidence is embedded in the decision-making process, in spite of views to the contrary by certain groups. In effect, this means that politics and evidence are not juxtaposed but that the notion of heavy politicisation provides the context in which appreciations of evidence are explored and explained. This appreciation is, however, absent from most of the appreciations of the relationship illustrated here.

Overall, the term 'evidence' is, however, often used without caution by members of the policy subsystem. This is in spite of the fact that there are already noticeably different appreciations over what should count as evidence in the area of drug classification policy (a product of differing appreciations of the nature of the policy arena) stemming from their core beliefs. In the following chapter, discussion turns to the issue of cannabis reclassification to illustrate these claims and also to illustrate the complexity and nuance of the relationship between evidence and policy in this area. This is achieved with recourse to the re-working of the Advocacy Coalition Framework, established at the outset of this chapter. This re-working ultimately suggests that the model should be the basis of a middle-range theory (Merton 1968), highlighting the significance of conflict in the policy process. It is, then, an organisational tool for viewing the conflicting and contrasting ways in which 'evidence' is perceived by various members of the UK drug policy subsystem.

6. THE NATURE OF EVIDENCE

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter extended the discussion of Chapters Three and Four by highlighting how the turmoil of evidence will be explored in this thesis. That is, via a modified version of the Advocacy Coalition Framework. This chapter follows on by detailing the relationship between the Advocacy Coalition Framework, the UK drug classification system and evidence-based policy-making. Although substantively, this thesis is generally concerned with issues relating to the wider UK drug classification system, this chapter has a 'narrower' focus on the event of cannabis reclassification. By focusing on this episode, the concept of evidence is brought to the fore and placed under analytical scrutiny. In doing so, the first dimension of the turmoil of evidence is introduced; the intricate and disputed nature of evidence in policy.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, it is contended that evidence is multifaceted and that a plurality of it is frequently 'embedded' in policy discussions. To illustrate this, the chapter begins – again in the spirit of real-time research - by documenting more recent developments relating to the regulation of cannabis in the UK. A discussion of the three perspectives' understandings of evidence with regard to the cannabis reclassification then follows. This entails an account of the various appreciations of what evidence did and did not get used in this particular episode and what should have been used. The possibility of the different appreciations of the nature of evidence being linked to issues of methodology, under the aegis of a discussion of a hierarchy of evidence, is then raised. Finally, some concluding remarks are offered. It is the central claim of this chapter that in politicised policy areas, zero-sum conceptualisations of the evidence and policy relationship by stakeholders and other interested parties are widespread, but these are paradoxical and premised on contradictory logic.

6.2 Later Developments in the Cannabis Episode

Whereas an overview of the history of UK drug policy culminating with the 2004 cannabis reclassification was presented in Chapter Two, this section charts the events that occurred in the aftermath of this policy change. The overview of the initial cannabis policy change, indicated that for some time, there has been a feeling from various stakeholders and others that policy design and implementation, in UK drug policy, have been conducted in ‘an almost data free environment’ (Sutton and Maynard 1993:456). It was suggested, though, that the cannabis change represented the conjoining of evidence-based policy with UK drug policy. This was, however, a controversial reading of the event. The general concern about the perceived lack of evidence in this area of public policy can be witnessed in an extract of a speech given in 2002 by Bob Ainsworth MP, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Home Office and Minister with the drugs brief:

In 1998 it was decided that a strategic overview was required in an attempt to marry together the different elements of government activity relating to drugs...Despite the frustration among practitioners caused by the absence of pure evidence-based policy formulation some advance was achieved by focusing on a holistic approach...As a result of the thin evidence-base, many of the targets set were unrealistically optimistic...The growing evidence-base should result in more realistic targets and more effective policies (Beckley Foundation 2002:41).

From this a number of other issues can be inferred. In particular, there is a tacit suggestion that, prior to 1998, drug policy was not based on ‘evidence’ but on something else. It is suggested here, by contrast, that actually it was at this stage that the relationship between evidence and policy in this area became formalised.

The 2004 reclassification of cannabis, from class B to class C, is an interesting episode in this respect. To recap, the two main triggers for the reform of the cannabis laws were the Police Foundation Report’s (2000) assertion that cannabis reclassification would free up police time, as part of a public management provision. This was allied to the ‘Brixton Experiment’. The second trigger stemmed from the same report’s conclusion that cannabis should be reclassified on the premise that, in terms of its toxicity or harmfulness, it is not comparable with either class A or B drugs. On the back of these findings, the then Home Secretary David Blunkett,

advised the Home Affairs Committee that he was 'minded' to downgrade cannabis. It is also necessary to comment here that there was no in-built evaluation of the impact of reclassification by the Home Office and no Key Performance Indicators identified through which to gauge its impact. This resulted in confusion on the purpose of the policy change.

Media reports in the aftermath of the reclassification illustrated that in light of the change, arrests initially dropped by a third (BBC 2005a). Bennetto (2004:13), commented that 'in the five months since the law changed, the number of people arrested in London for cannabis possession dropped by 53 percent from 6,231 to 3,307, compared with the similar period the year before'. Contemporary data from the British Crime Survey, furthermore, suggested that cannabis use had actually decreased (Roe 2005). More recent figures suggest that since reclassification in 2004, the numbers of people using cannabis has fallen from 24 per cent to 21 per cent (Guardian 2007). On this measure, it would appear that the change had 'worked'. Caution is required, however, because of the absence of Key Performance Indicators. Consequently, although more cannabis was being seized, this was a product of more interactions between the police and the public relating to cannabis. There was, thus, little celebration of this by the Government.

Another significant development, following reclassification, was the (re)discovery by various charities and academics of the link between cannabis use and mental illness. This association between cannabis use and mental illness has a long, but uncertain, history (Mills 2003). A study by New Zealand scientists (Fergusson, et al. 2005) suggested that smoking, particularly virulent strains of cannabis - 'skunk' - virtually doubled the risk of developing mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, for those with a family history, and significantly increased the risk for those without. This was backed up by similar findings from the Netherlands (Henquet, et al. 2004) and the UK (Arseneault, et al. 2004). Such was the public and media attention of this issue that in March 2005, the then Home Secretary Charles Clarke announced that the reclassification, undertaken by his predecessor David Blunkett, would be placed 'under review'. In doing so, Clarke asked the ACMD to return to the issue.

Justifying this move, the Home Secretary cited further evidence from the continent to back up his proposals. He stated that the Dutch government was recently looking into the issue of whether skunk above certain strength, should be given a higher classification (BBC 2005b). This move was welcomed by many, but also treated with caution by others. According to Moreton, et al. (2005), there was publicly a great deal of cynicism surrounding the Government's decision to review the reclassification of cannabis at this time. It was perceived that they were trying to head off a challenge from the Conservative party that it was 'soft on drugs' in the run-up to a General Election. The perception was that the review was as much about political gerrymandering as evidence-based policy-making, posing serious questions about the latter. In January 2006, the ACMD (2005) published its review, stating that the initial reclassification should remain, thus maintaining cannabis as a class C substance.

In replacing David Blunkett as Home Secretary, Charles Clarke kept the cannabis issue in the spotlight. Such changes in Government represent a good example of exogenous factors impacting on the research process in real-time research. Prior to this, one other significant development relating to cannabis reclassification was also significant; the resignation of the 'drug-tsar' Keith Hellawell and subsequent dissolution of the post. According to Blackman (2004:183), in the aftermath of the initial reclassification, newspapers including the Sun, the Daily Mail and the Daily Express - all Conservative-leaning papers - were 'triumphant with glee' over Hellawell's public announcement of his resignation, as he expressed exasperation over from where the Home Secretary had got his advice.

Blackman (2004:183), however, describes Hellawell's resignation - done live on the Radio 4 programme 'Today' on Wednesday July 10, 2002 - as a 'piece of theatre', revealing that he had actually tendered his resignation a month earlier but requested that this information be held back from the public. Blackman (2004:183) also stressed that by claiming not to know where the policy of reclassification stemmed from, the drug tsar 'made a fool out of himself' as 'government drug advice comes from numerous official sources; the Police Federation, the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, medical experts, DrugScope and lawyers' (Blackman 2004:183).

Additionally, Levitt, et al. (2006:2) state that work produced by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction is also pertinent and other sources of evidence include the annual British Crime Survey, the Health Statistics Quarterly, the Home Office Research Programme and the Government's drug strategy. Additionally, organisations such as the Association of Chief Police Officers and various other government department research units play a key role (Science and Technology Committee 2006). The main source of government advice, however, is from the ACMD.

For present purposes, this brief overview illustrates that David Blunkett and Charles Clarke had different understandings over what 'evidence' could trigger potential policy changes, which also typifies the understanding of policy advocated here as being complex and messy. Acevedo (2007:178) summarises the cannabis episode, stating that initially the debate centred on a 'neo-liberal' approach of improving public services, by the more efficient use of resources. This subsequently morphed into a matter of mental health and criminality over the period of the following year, with the emergence of aforementioned scientific reports detailing the dangers of skunk, alongside increasing media reports of the drug being a contributory factor in many high-profile crimes. These crimes included the murder of Scottish teenager Jodi Jones in 2004 and the attempted murder of Abigail Witchalls in 2005. Paradoxically, this shift in emphasis occurred in spite of the fact that, as mentioned, in light of the reclassification, figures suggested that cannabis use had actually decreased.

This chapter is concerned with the initial reclassification and the first review. It is clear from the above discussion that the political justifications given for initially reviewing the cannabis reclassification were informed by different priorities and concerns. This is significant as it illustrates that there was inconsistency in the evidence-base used to justify the decisions taken at the political level. This has had a profound effect on the interpretations of the evidence and policy relationship in this area, as we shall see. What is beyond debate, however, is that there was very little agreement by interested spectators of, and those involved in, this particular policy process over the evidence-base for the decision and whether this was evidence-based at all. It is to this debate that we now turn.

6.3 Perspectives of Evidence Utilisation in the Cannabis Reclassification and Review

An insight into the complex nature of evidence in the drugs area serves as a useful introduction to understanding the problematic nature of evidence in the cannabis episode. This is illustrated succinctly in the following quotation from a former senior government adviser who stated that:

...because it is a complex field and it cuts across health policy, crime policy, education policy and ideology, it is not a field where you can assemble the evidence to prove the case...I don't think we will ever be able to say "the evidence clearly says we should do this"...and in that situation you never have something strong enough that you can plonk in front of a minister or public and say we are following the evidence-base. It is always open to question (RATL7).

In what follows, the relationship between evidence and belief systems, with respect to each perspective, is considered. Continuities and change are deliberately sought. The nuance of evidence is explored by ascertaining from each respondent, appreciations of whether the reclassification was 'evidence-based' (Policy Core) and what evidence was used in the decision-making process (Secondary Aspects). The secondary aspects range from the very abstract to the less abstract and more definitive. This data is presented in table form (see Tables 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3). The core beliefs, detailed in the previous chapter (see Tables 5.2, 5.4 and 5.6), provide the necessary context for this, and also and shape the understandings of evidence of each perspective. A summary of each perspective's view of the cannabis reclassification is presented in Table 6.4.

6.3.1 The Radical Perspective

Table 5.2, revealed a Deep Core view that for the rational perspective, the most effective way to regulate drug use is through the abolition of prohibition, thus placing less emphasis on the enforcement of unworkable laws. Applying this directly to the debate in hand, this underscores a wish for the abandonment of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act and the system of classifying drugs with an arbitrary hierarchy of harms. It was maintained in the previous chapter, that the radical perspective is

particularly sceptical as to whether the prohibition of drugs has any deterrent effect on their use. As we shall subsequently see, this criticism is actually taken further, with the claim that prohibition not only fails to solve the drug problem but actually makes the problem more acute, as it serves to concede control of the market to illegal syndicates (Rolles, et al. 2006:6). It was the view of one member from a leading UK-based NGO advocating drug law reform that an evidence-based policy in this area would involve:

Basing policy on science rather than ideology. It's about having effective evaluation procedures in place...you decide what you want your policy to achieve, you assign a series of Key Performance Indicators to measure whether it is achieving that, you look at evidence from other countries or other regions to see which policies have been effective there. Then you come up with a balanced scientific view on which is going to be the most effective policy for achieving the aims that you want as measured by your indicators. Then once a policy is put in place you evaluate, measure and monitor it properly in a scientific and consistent way to see whether it is doing what it is supposed to do, and if it isn't you either change it or abandon it altogether and try something else entirely (RAD1).

In the above quotation, 'evidence' is equated with policy evaluation and appraisal. On these grounds, it is possible to anticipate the answer this group offered as to whether the cannabis reclassification was evidence-based. The same respondent continued:

I think you could paint it as that...if you accept the [premise of the] classification system, clearly cannabis was misclassified...I'd refer you to the ACMD report on cannabis which was really a high quality meta analysis of a load of research concluding that cannabis is not without risks, of course, and for a small number of people those risks are very significant but for the majority of people, in terms of relative harms compared with other drug using populations with other drugs it was relatively less harmful than other class B drugs and should therefore go to class C which is, within the classification paradigm, perfectly sensible (RAD1).

The 'high quality meta-analysis' refers to aforementioned work carried out by the ACMD (2002; 2005) detailing risks associated with cannabis by looking at epidemiology, acute and long terms risks to human health (physical and mental), and issues of potency in the form of a systematic review of available research. Although there is a hint here that some form of evidence did have a role to play in this policy decision, this is not the conclusion that is drawn:

Whether that was an evidence-based policy, I would argue clearly not, clearly not. The fact is that cannabis was criminalised in the first place as a political decision back in whenever it was...The ACMD was calling for cannabis to be reclassified for more than 20 years...It has systematically been ignored, ignored and ignored. Not because they were wrong or the evidence wasn't good enough but because it wasn't politically the moment to do it. The decision to reclassify cannabis made by Blunkett; it wasn't that they suddenly went "oh look there is all this new evidence and cannabis is misclassified", that had been known for years...It was always political. (RAD1).

The initial criminalisation of cannabis, documented by Mills (2003) and highlighted in Section 2.4.1 showed that, in effect, cannabis initially became prohibited almost by default. It was an unintended consequence of political manoeuvring by various states, in particular Egypt, with support from the United States, in negotiations over what to do with the problem of opium, towards the beginning of the previous century (McAllister 2000). Ultimately, what can again be witnessed here is the juxtaposition of evidence and politics.

The politicised nature of drug policy-making is clear in the cannabis reclassification and is a theme that resonates with the radical perspective. Politics is viewed as inherently detrimental to the nature of evidenced-based policy-making. In the words of the aforementioned Labour MP, regarding the initial reclassification:

David Blunkett was impressed by a group of parents that he saw who said to him that their children, having taken cannabis, decided that the warnings that they had were baseless...The warnings they had were [that cannabis was] a wicked, dangerous drug. But having tried cannabis, they realised it was nothing of the sort and it was just like having a couple of pints of bitter beer. They stopped believing those warnings and they also stopped believing the warnings about heroin as well. They thought that if someone is deceiving us on cannabis they are probably deceiving us on heroin as well (RAD2).

Here, evidence is more anecdotal. There is some discrepancy in the literature as to whether this constitutes 'evidence'. In one sense, it is more akin with 'polling' the views of constituents by politicians. This is ruled out of the evidence reckoning by Pawson (2006:4-6), but constitutes a significant kind of evidence for other thinkers (e.g. Culyer and Lomas 2006). For current purposes, anecdotal evidence serves as an appreciation of the kind of evidence that was used in the cannabis reclassification according to the radical perspective.

Up to this point, a prevailing zero-sum position on the nature of evidence in the cannabis classification can be seen. For adherents of the radical perspective, this is illustrated in the way that they perceive the policy change to be broadly evidence-free. A more moderate view is put forward by one respondent who, although a member of the radical group, shares many appreciations of the situation with the rational perspective. In response to a question detailing why the conditions were right for a change in the cannabis legislation in 2004, it was stated by the Director of Research from a UK based drug-treatment, NGO that:

...you had got a change in society where more and more people are smoking cannabis and general trends are in that direction and the government reciprocated with a series of reports, you know Runciman and so forth, that were all pointing in the same direction and this allowed them to more strongly assert that they were just following 'expert guidance'. So, you know, obviously we have had that sort of thing before. There is a strong history to this sort of stuff and I think this time the voices were clearer, stronger and included the establishment, you know ACMD, Runciman Report for the Police Foundation, and I think that made it easy for the Government...(RAD3/RATL4).

This respondent suggests that the cannabis reclassification was not made in an evidence vacuum, hinting that various high-profile studies had contributed to the legal change. By association, a key aspect of the Police Foundation Report (2000) was that reclassifying cannabis would free up police time. This appreciation of evidence is summed up as a 'public management issue' and is, therefore, included in the radical perspectives appreciation of evidence used in the cannabis reclassification.

As mentioned, although it is acknowledged that some form of 'evidence' played a role in the government's decision, this is not enough for the policy to be considered 'evidence-based'. This line of argument can be seen from another respondent, a journalist and writer, and frequent expert witness in court proceedings concerning 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act offences:

I think there has been an enormous accretion of evidence supporting the contention that the prohibition of cannabis is ineffective and unjustified and Commission after Commission from the '60s onwards has found relatively little evidence of harm...So I think for those who wanted to say that the

evidence is now that cannabis is less harmful than we thought there was an enormous amount of evidence to point to (RAD4).

As a consequence, in respect of whether the cannabis reclassification was an evidence-based change, the respondent goes on to suggest that:

...some bits of evidence get much, much more media play and public debate than others. I mean a good example in the cannabis debate is the question of evidence as to whether cannabis is stronger now than it used to be in the 1960s. I mean this is a complete “non-evidence” really. I mean who is comparing what with what? Are people altering their doses? So if it is stronger they use less of it... So that whole body of evidence has been given an enormous amount of publicity and airplay and I would argue that that is not evidence at all (RAD4).

Ultimately, this is the crux of the zero-sum view of evidence that is evident from this perspective. The appreciation here is that the evidence that shows the futility of prohibition is left out of the decision-making process. An overview of this is presented in Table 6.1. This amalgamates the data in Table 5.2 with the data presented above.

By way of a summary, it is clear that for members of the radical perspective, the maintenance of the existing legislative framework means that the policy cannot be providing value for money (Deep Core). However, implicit in the argument here is that evidence was not entirely absent from the policy discussion, as the final column in Table 6.1 illustrates. Overall, for the radical perspective cannabis reclassification, although nominally a step in the right direction in terms of the reduction of criminal penalties, ultimately changes little. No matter what research, scientific or otherwise, is produced to support a policy change, this is not the defining tenet of what it means for a policy to be ‘evidence-based’, if this occurs within the existing paradigm. In this context, the maintenance and futility of prohibition means that until this changes, UK drug policy remains ‘evidence-free’ despite being made with recourse to some evidence.

Table 6.1: The Radical Perspective's View of the Nature of Evidence in the Cannabis Reclassification

Deep Core	Policy Core	Selected Secondary Aspects/Appreciations
<p>Minimise drug related harm via a humane and useful regulatory system of drug control culminating with the abolition of prohibition. Less emphasis on enforcement as drugs an inevitable feature of daily life for many</p>	<p>Cannabis reclassification not 'evidence-based' but broadly a step in right direction for UK drug classification; wider classification (1971 Misuse of Drugs Act) system primarily not evidence-based</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciation of the risks and harms of substances (toxicological and social) and the weak link to mental health problems • appreciation of anecdotal evidence from parents of drug users • appreciation of the role of high-profile reports in the drug legislation field • appreciation of public management issues, with the saving of police time

6.3.2 The Rational Perspective

As indicated in the previous chapter, Table 5.4 revealed Deep Core beliefs that advocate drug treatment for the most chaotic drug users. This is a public-health-inspired approach that operates within the wider criminal justice paradigm of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. For the rational perspective, there is great emphasis on the nature of substances themselves. This constitutes a key aspect of what 'evidence-based policy' means to this group and is linked to the notion of scientifically assessing the risks of all substances of abuse. The increasing significance of risk assessment, as a key aspect of the evidence-base in this area, was augmented by the publication in the *Lancet*, in March 2007 of the Nutt, et al. matrix. This had its origins in the Police Foundation Report (2000). The matrix questioned the validity of the current classification system under the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, advocating instead a hierarchical system, placing the major illicit drugs, along with alcohol and tobacco, into a scientific scale of harm. This, it was claimed, would more accurately reflect the relative harms and dangers of substances.

It is suggested, furthermore, that the matrix should be used as the basis for criminal justice responses to the drug problem, in effect, determining the extent of

the criminal sanctions with regard to offences relating to particular substances. In this sense, the rational perspective operates with a similar philosophical outlook to that of the Government. This is underpinned by a view of harm reduction, which suggests that drug use is an inevitable aspect of social life and that to reduce the impact of drugs on individuals and society, drugs should be located in the correct place in the framework. This should also form the basis of more accurate drugs education. There is a clear stress for the rational perspective that the most up-to-date research should direct the framework. In this context, the key distinction between members of the rational perspective and those of the radical perspective are that the former advocate modifying the existing legislative mechanism but, ultimately, criminal sanctions should still apply to certain drug offences. For the radical perspective, this is precisely the cause of the problem.

For the purposes of this discussion, it is the maintenance of a hierarchy of drug harms allied to the continuing prohibition of substances that shapes the rational perspective's understanding of evidence. Thus, in response to whether the cannabis reclassification was an evidence-based decision, it was the view of a one-time senior government adviser that:

If you are going to invest tax payers money in enforcing drug laws you should target that investment at the most harmful behaviours and we weren't targeting that investment at all but by proxy, all that investment was going on very minor people who shouldn't be in the criminal justice system in the first place so, in that sense, it was evidence-based (RATL7).

There was a clear consensus among many members of the rational perspective, that the evidence-base for efficient management of public services, in this case, policing, was pivotal. A senior academic psychiatrist and member of the ACMD suggested that:

I think he [David Blunkett] thought the law was stupid, was being flouted widely, the Brixton experiment had shown that in practice you could save a lot of police time by not arresting people for smoking or dealing in small amounts and I think he thought it was a sensible policy, and I respected him for it (RATL5).

The conclusion that the cannabis decision was evidence-based, in terms of targeting investment of taxpayer's money to ensure policies provide value for

money, relates to the appreciation of evidence as policy evaluation, and this is consistent with the appreciations of the radical perspective. These similar understandings, however, lead to different conclusions. For the radical perspective, the cannabis reclassification was, ultimately, evidence-free. By contrast, for the rationalist perspective, it was primarily evidence-based in that by highlighting how cannabis is not as harmful as other substances, the overall drug policy is rationalised, via reclassification and by directing criminal justice resources towards the drugs that do the most damage. A similar sentiment was expressed by a co-opted member of the ACMD technical committee, and an expert in Forensic Science:

The evidence was very closely examined...There was a groundswell I think building up...particularly highlighted in south London where the issues had come up with local policing priorities and that had brought things to the fore. The police had been signalling for a long time that given the broad range of things they are supposed to be responsible for, policing cannabis was increasingly coming to be seen as a bit of an embarrassment. So I think the time was right to look at it and the Home Secretary was right as well (RATL3).

Other schisms between the radical and rational perspectives can be seen in the nature of evidence used to rationalise the current system. Another member of the ACMD technical committee and current adviser to a major Government spending department, stated of the cannabis reclassification that:

...we had a couple of days reviewing cannabis, [it] was almost entirely on the work done...on cannabis potency, that work...published in 2004 was done for the European Agency in Lisbon who saw at that stage the need to review the information because of a lot of conflicting information in the press on what high-strength cannabis actually meant and what were the facts, so that was quite timely...it was 2005 when ACMD were asked to review cannabis and one of the areas of concern was the appearance of high potency cannabis one of the other ones, of course, was the mental health issues (RATL1).

The published work referred to in the above quotation, relates to that carried out by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA 2004). This study concluded that based on the available evidence, contemporary cannabis is no more potent than in previous times. There is the suggestion here that the potency issue, in this sense the lack of evidence to suggest that contemporary cannabis is of a higher strength than in previous years, was a major aspect of the

evidence-base for the eventual reclassification. As we have seen, this appreciation contrasts with that of the radical perspective, where this was referred to it as 'non-evidence', and as we shall see, the conservative perspective's appreciation of this particular aspect of the evidence-base is different again.

The health issue surrounding cannabis potency is particularly contested. According to a one-time ACMD member (when the initial cannabis decision was undertaken) and current Chairperson of an NGO specialising in drug policy analysis, it was the consideration given to such issues that typified why the cannabis reclassification was evidence-based:

Well I think that there was a lot of assessment in terms of the relative health harms, we were fully aware of some of the stuff around the mental health problems so there was no discounting that. One looked at the relative risk, the known risk assessment across the harm domains, one looked at those, had what material was available and in that sense used that to weigh up a proportionate response of which seemed to suggest that its alignment was not right in class B (RATL11).

Similarly, a former senior ministerial adviser questioned rhetorically:

...does the science around an issue such as cannabis use indicate that its potential risk to individuals is of a lower class C order?...I think that that is evidence-based as well. The sorts of things you need to look at are acute effects, acute neurological effects. In which case, in the global evidence on cannabis, it is hard to find any trend or body of evidence showing the harmful impact of cannabis. 160 million people use cannabis world-wide and nobody has ever died from an over-dose. There is not an acute reaction in the brain that could cause an immediate dysfunction and it doesn't cause violence and all that sort of thing. So clearly it can't be called a dangerous drug on these fronts (RATL7).

This appreciation is the epitome of the Deep and Policy Core views of the rational perspective. There is clearly an acceptance that a plethora of evidence was included in the debate over cannabis reclassification, although there was also clear recognition that this takes place in a heavily politicised context, as illustrated in the previous chapter. The above respondent states:

Well I think these things are partly to do with personal opinions of powerful people such as David Blunkett, second of all political realities, third of all the institutional, Whitehall, professional politics and fourthly the evidence-base. And the evidence-base was pointing pretty strongly that in this country

under the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, over 80 per cent of arrests made under the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act were for possession of cannabis and in over 50 per cent of all those arrests, we arrest, we record, we confiscate and we give a caution. So the evidence had been developed to say that whatever you think about policy this is a monumental waste of money, we don't deter anyone from cannabis use (RATL7).

Similarly, when asked if the cannabis reclassification was an evidence-based decision, a Chief Executive of a leading drug policy NGO stated:

Oh very much so on the grounds of the Ruth Runciman work [Police Foundation Report 2000], the Home Affairs Committee and I know, being a member of ACMD, we looked through the evidence base. I think there was a...collision of opportunities and windows and doors opening and it provided a match between the evidence and the policy aspiration of the Home Secretary and I think, in that sense, the planets were aligned temporarily (RATL15).

The lack of evidence for the deterrent effect of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act represents an area of consensus between the radical and rational perspectives. The conclusions drawn from this are, again, much different. This final appreciation also reveals the importance of high-profile reports to the Government in their decision-making process. A summary of the rational perspectives' appreciations of the cannabis reclassification subsystem is provided in Table 6.2. This amalgamates the data from Table 5.4 with the data presented above.

In sum, the rational perspective has misgivings over the operation of the current classification system. This is because there are anomalies in the location of certain drugs, which distort the messages it gives out. The solution is that science and evidence should inform policy to create a holistic drug policy that promotes public health and human rights by accurately assessing the risks of all drugs and coordinating criminal justice responses accordingly. The key feature of the Policy Core reveals that the cannabis reclassification was broadly an 'evidence-based' decision in that it signalled an attempt to do precisely this. The significance of this is that politics and evidence are not necessarily juxtaposed to one another. There is, however, a tacit acceptance that evidence is diverse, but this still yields a zero-sum conclusion.

Table 6.2: The Rational Perspective's View of the Nature of Evidence in the Cannabis Reclassification

Deep Core	Policy Core	Selected Main Secondary Aspects/Appreciations
<p>Promotion of human rights and public health placing treatment at the centre of the drug strategy (Harm Reduction) as drug use is an inevitable part of everyday life for many. Using evidence to inform policy by ironing out anomalies of existing framework</p>	<p>Cannabis reclassification primarily evidence-based' as a step towards ironing out 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act's anomalies; classification system increasingly evidence-based</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciation of risks and harms of substances (toxicological and social) and the unproven link to mental health • appreciation of the potency issue and the lack of data to prove contemporary cannabis is stronger • appreciation of wider policy outcomes, with policies providing value for money (ironing out anomalies of 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act) • appreciation of the role of influential reports in the drug legislation field • appreciation of public management issues, the saving of police time

6.3.3 The Conservative Perspective

Table 5.6 reveals a Deep Core perspective that more rigorous drug prevention and enforcement can result in drug-free lifestyles. To recap, unlike the radical and rational perspectives, there is no assumption from the conservative group that drug use is an inevitable aspect of social life for many people. For the conservative perspective, then, the decision to reclassify cannabis was devoid of evidence on the grounds that it compromised the goal of more rigorous enforcement of drug laws as a means of addressing the drug problem and, therefore, sent out the wrong messages regarding the dangers of the substance. In addition, where cannabis is concerned, there is a major preoccupation with the medical issue, in particular, the potential harm cannabis use can cause. For this perspective, this moves beyond effects on the brain, to encapsulate a range of medical dangers associated with the substance. Regarding whether the reclassification was evidence-based, it was the view of one GP and committee member of a national Christian organisation that:

The policy issue, I think is not evidence-based...you have the entire issue of the health effects of cannabis, the issue of the adverse effect on the respiratory system, the increase in cancer rates, the increase in chronic lung disease. Then there is the entire issue of mental health, with a number of studies linking cannabis to schizophrenia, depression, anxiety and other mental health issues and all this evidence was there and I thought it extremely problematic for them to say that it is actually less dangerous (CON1).

The view here is that there was evidence relating to the negative impact of cannabis on human health, but that this was ignored. Of all the medical issues, the subject of mental illness was fundamental. The submission by the Maranatha Community - a Christian charity group and lobbying organisation and a key member of the Coalition Against Cannabis - to the Science and Technology Committee also illustrates this point:

When the downgrading of cannabis from a Class B to a Class C drug was debated in both Houses of Parliament in October and November 2003, strong scientific evidence was available linking cannabis to serious mental illness including schizophrenia, psychosis and depression. This link between cannabis and serious mental illness has prompted the current Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, to review the classification of cannabis (cited in Science and Technology Committee 2006: appendix 6)

Futhermore:

Sufficient evidence existed at the time to seriously question the downgrading of Cannabis,

— This evidence should have at least served to delay any decision to reclassify, if policy is based on the precautionary principle, and

— In this instance, any mechanism that does exist to ensure policy is based on evidence failed, with grave consequences for the mental health of thousands of young people (cited in Science and Technology Committee: appendix 6).

In a similar vein, in response to whether the cannabis decision was evidence-based, a UK representative of an International Drug Prevention Organisation stated:

No. The worst thing with cannabis is the mental illness and there have been papers around on that since the '60s and '70s and even before, warning of mental illness. So it goes back in history that people were warned about mental illness and so they [the Government] didn't look at the evidence, they really didn't (CON3).

The absence of evaluative research into the harms of cannabis and its potential to cause schizophrenia was problematic. This belief is compounded further in relation to a question detailing why a political decision was taken, by Charles Clarke, to review the initial reclassification of cannabis made by David Blunkett. The above respondent continues:

[It was] about mental illness because people like Robin Murray then started really campaigning. This is the trouble with research scientists, they are not campaigners, but Robin Murray is. He is not an out and out table thumping campaigner, but he has spoken out a lot more than a lot of the others have and he started saying things in the press and on the radio and got through to people about the problems, and then there were lots of people who wrote in to papers, there was a great flood of things like "My son's life was destroyed by cannabis" or "My son has schizophrenia". Loads and loads of articles came out there and I think all that had an influence, even journalists (CON3).

Likewise, the significance of the health issue is reinforced in the views of a retired senior Customs Officer:

Well certainly the downgrading sent a signal to potential users...that cannabis was less harmful than when the list had been drawn up, pre- '71 and that isn't the case. We now know that it is actually more harmful, all the evidence is there and the evidence was there in the 1997 WHO report...all the thing about schizophrenia is in there, couched in strong language about whether it is causative, causal or you know...all the evidence coming out was that some people are genetically disposed to be damaged by cannabis. So it was all there and the Government ignored that at the time the classification was being thought through (CON6).

There is again a shared understanding of what the evidence should be in regard to cannabis reclassification, between the conservative and rational perspectives. That is, that the decision should have been based with recourse to the mental health evidence. However, the conclusions reached are diametrically opposed. For the rational group, this formed a key part of the decision-making process with the conclusion that cannabis was not as harmful as other drugs. For the conservative perspective, this evidence was not taken into consideration, because if it had been, the reclassification would have been impossible. All the evidence, for the conservative perspective, pointed to increasing medical harms linked to cannabis use.

A similar line of argument can be seen with the potency issue. Already considered as either 'non-evidence' (radical perspective) or a key aspect of the evidence-base, in that there was no evidence for increased potency (rational perspective), for the conservative perspective, by contrast:

Now you have fairly high concentration cannabis available that wasn't available 20 years ago or so. The genetically modified cannabis and hydroponic cannabis that can have THC contents of thirteen, fourteen, maybe even 20 percent. In the '60s it would have been maybe a maximum of five percent average so it is much stronger now than it has been in the past (CON1).

THC, or Tetrahydrocannabinol, is the main psychoactive ingredient found in cannabis. The assumption is that the higher the THC content, the greater the likelihood that the drug will alter the users brain function. In the majority of cases this is temporary but in the most extreme scenarios it can result in chronic mental illness such as schizophrenia. The conclusion, is that this aspect of the evidence-base was also ignored. In the words of a one-time Chief Constable of a Scottish police force and current Independent Consultant to the United Nations:

I can point to lots of research that was not taken into account when that decision was arrived at. The ACMD went into a great deal of explanation as to why they had reclassified cannabis, I emphasise 'reclassify' and not 'downgraded' because they said that cannabis remains a dangerous substance. But they were anxious that people would not get the impression that other drugs in class B were not of a similar nature to cannabis and by that I mean that you can smoke a joint and it can have absolutely no effect whatever but, you know as well as I do, that the modern forms of cannabis are significantly more potent than they were 30 years ago, and the average strength now is around eleven and a half percent THC and the Skunk and Nederweed is as much as 35 percent. So the UN world drug report and the head of the UNODC [United Nations Office of Drug Control] has said that they regard cannabis as being as dangerous as the other botanically based drugs; cocaine and heroin (CON5).

That cannabis potency and mental illness issues were not given due weight in the discussion was not the sole reason as to why the decision was seen, by the conservative perspective, to be evidence-free. One other body of evidence base linked to the cannabis reclassification, was the public management variety. This relates to the freeing up of police time. For the conservative perspective, this was also problematic:

One further point I would like to make about evidence-base and this refers to the Brixton experiment and what the downgrading did, is that it pretty much nationalised the Brixton experiment, in saying that we are not going to focus on cannabis now. And I think the result in Brixton was catastrophic because you had an increase of drug misuse and an increase in hard drug misuse; there was an increase in drug dealers there. And so I think the experiment in Brixton was a disaster, it led to more police time being saved and blah, blah, blah but I'm not really convinced (CON1).

Additionally, a Director of a leading NGO in the drug prevention field suggested that:

We were told from Westminster sources...Blunkett bought the idea that if he gave the Libertarian camp something they would back off and stay quiet, but as a politician this was absolutely crass because it was completely obvious to us, having lived in that atmosphere for 20 years, that if you give these guys something that will encourage them to ask for the next thing and the next thing which is exactly what has happened (CON8).

The critique of politics triumphing over the evidence is again apparent here. The overall conclusions drawn from this are, like those of the radical perspective, of the zero-sum variety that the cannabis reclassification was evidence-free. The rationale though is much different. A summary of the conservative perspectives appreciations of the cannabis reclassification subsystem is provided in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: The Conservative Perspective's View of the Nature of Evidence in the Cannabis Reclassification

Deep Core	Policy Core	Selected Main Secondary Aspects
To promote drug free healthy and wholesome lifestyles through drug enforcement/prevention and education (Harm Reduction). Drug use not an inevitable aspect of daily life	Reclassification of cannabis fundamentally not evidence-based nor a step in the right direction; classification system not evidence-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

From this perspective there is clear sense that 'cherry-picking' evidence is a significant issue and one that ultimately means that for this perspective the cannabis

reclassification was completely devoid of evidence. There is no appreciation here that any relevant evidence was used when the decision was taken to reclassify cannabis because all the existing evidence that should have been used would have made the policy change unworkable.

6.4 Evidence Utilisation in the Cannabis Subsystem: A Summary

It is worthy of note that to a lesser extent within, and to a greater extent between perspectives, there are clear discrepancies over what constitutes evidence in this particular subsystem, but at the same time there are clear crossovers. This is consistent with the modified Advocacy Coalition Framework methodology used here. Cross referencing these findings with the Deep and Policy Core views of each perspective, in terms of whether the decision to reclassify cannabis was evidence based, provides some intriguing data. To recap, for the radical and conservative perspectives, the answer was negative, but for the rationalist perspective it was affirmative. Based on the evidence presented earlier, it is possible to summarise the nature of evidence in the cannabis reclassification subsystem, in relation to what each perspective deems was present, but to highlight the complex nature of evidence, appreciations of evidence deemed to be absent are also identified. This is particularly revealing when it is remembered that all perspectives adhere to a zero-sum position, in one way or another. A summary of the key findings are presented in Table 6.4.

The three perspectives illustrated above are all, to differing degrees, critical of the Government position with regard to the overall drugs debate. We see that on the issue of cannabis reclassification, however, the rational perspective shares much the same view as the Government. Its appreciations relate directly to the aforementioned reports and their key findings (e.g. Police Foundation 2000; Home Affairs Committee 2002). This is a key distinction as it takes us down the ladder of abstraction for what constitutes evidence.

Table 6.4: Evidence Utilisation in the Cannabis Subsystem: A Summary

Perspective	Present Evidence	Absent Evidence
Radical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciation of the risks and harms of substances (toxicological and social) and the weak link to mental health • appreciation of anecdotal evidence from parents of drug users • appreciation of the role of high-profile reports in the drug legislation field • appreciation of public management issues with the saving of police time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciation of wider policy outcomes with policies providing value for money (efficacy of prohibition)
Rational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciation of risks and harms of substances (toxicological and social) and the weak link to mental health • appreciation of the potency issue and the lack of data to prove contemporary cannabis is stronger • appreciation of wider policy outcomes with policies providing value for money (ironing out anomalies of 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act) • appreciation of the role of high-profile reports in the drug legislation field • appreciation of public management issues, the saving of police time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Conservative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciation of medical risks and harms of substances (general health effects) • appreciation of the risks and harms of substances (toxicological and social) and the strong link with mental health • appreciation of the potency issue and growth of data to prove contemporary cannabis is stronger • appreciation of wider policy outcomes that reclassifying cannabis provides a contradictory message to prevention which 'works'

This demonstrates the two key points established at the outset, that evidence is a complex concept and, by association, that zero-sum perspectives on the evidence and policy relationship in politicised areas are understandable but problematic. The radical perspective shares with the rational perspective many of the same appreciations of evidence. These are also less abstract than the Government position. Ultimately, however, their conclusion is different in that the cannabis reclassification was not evidence-based. It is this perspective which typifies the paradoxical nature of zero-sum assertions. Their conclusion that the cannabis reclassification was evidence-free was made in spite of the recognition that the government did draw on a range of evidence in its decision-making. Decisively, for the radical perspective, because there is no appreciation given in this instance to the futility of prohibition as a means of regulating the drug problem, the cannabis decision, although a step in the right direction, ultimately achieves little in terms of the bigger picture of UK drug policy. The change cannot be evidence-based as, in their appreciation, the evidence points to the legalisation of cannabis and all other substances as the most effective means of dealing with the drug problem.

The conservative perspective, like the radical one, departs from the Government and rationalist view by stating fundamentally that the cannabis reclassification was not evidence-based. This is primarily because the reclassification sent out the wrong signals. In their eyes, for a policy change to be evidence-based it would have to move in the opposite direction. This would entail more emphasis on prevention and not something that tacitly suggests certain drugs are less harmful than others. Unlike the radical position, there is no paradox here, as in their eyes, no appreciations of evidence were used in the decision. There are, though, clear similarities between the conservative perspective and the others over what kinds of evidence should have been used in the decision-making process in this scenario.

It is suggested that descending down the ladder of abstraction in relation to the concept of evidence reveals some interesting issues. On one level, the perspectives have a general understanding of the same kinds of evidence but offer different interpretations of this, as seen in the slightly different wording of some of the appreciations in Table 6.4. The cannabis potency issue and the link with mental

health are indicative of this. In turn, this casts some doubt on Government claims to evidence-based policy-making in these areas and sheds light on why such announcements are treated with scepticism by interested parties. On another level, there are clearly discrepancies between the perspectives over what should count as evidence in this subsystem.

One outstanding question concerns how the plethora of appreciations of evidence, in this subsystem, is to be explained. In other words, what are the origins of the key differences between the different perspectives' understandings of what is evidence-based policy-making in this context? The hypothesis at this stage is that the different appreciations exist precisely because of the different core beliefs of each perspective in relation to the issue. In other policy areas (those more akin with the principles of evidence-based policy-making), the concept of a hierarchy of evidence has been applied to explain the predominance of particular kinds of evidence when a plurality of evidence is apparent. This has an impact on why different accounts of the nature of evidence are visible. One question to consider, then, is whether this serves as a plausible explanation in this scenario.

6.5: The Plurality of Evidence as a Hierarchy of Evidence?

The notion of a hierarchy of evidence has emerged in evidence-based policy from evidence-based medicine. In the latter, in light of Cochrane's (1972) radical critique of medical procedure, it refers to how a shift in medical practice based on 'expert opinions' of doctors and clinicians, should be replaced with research from experiments and demonstrations. Culyer and Lomas (2006) provide a broad overview of the notion of a hierarchy of evidence, which details a three-tiered account of the different manifestations of evidence, visible in policy-making.

Referring to the area of health policy, they contend that a clear distinction can be made between scientific and non-scientific varieties of evidence. Non-scientific, or 'colloquial evidence', they note, 'is broader than the more restricted scientific view' (Culyer and Lomas 2006:360). Generally speaking, colloquial evidence is reduced down to the opinion of stakeholders on a given subject. This helps to provide

the best kind of evidence short of the scientific variety. As regards scientific evidence, they suggest:

Even within this more restricted, scientific view of evidence there are two distinctive manners of study relevant to healthcare decision-making...One, relating mostly to medicine and the biological sciences and evaluating the efficacy of interventions, uses methods that try to exclude contextual “contaminants” (such as the natural variability in the skills and attitudes of doctors, the symptom presentation of patients, or the organisational and funding circumstances of service delivery). This type of science employs randomised control trial methods in its ideal form to uncover, as far as is epistemologically possible, “context-free knowledge”. The other, relating far more to the social sciences and the environments in which decisions will be implemented, uses methods that describe and evaluate the contextual factors that might influence the practical impact of an intervention once it is deployed. This type of science employs a wide variety of methods, usually tailored to the nature of the implementation concern – the impact on the effectiveness of the intervention elucidated by surveys of provider or patient attitudes, cost-effectiveness analyses of funding regimes or healthcare technologies, forecasts of demographics and so on. This science is designed to provide “context-sensitive” results that appraise the facilitating or attenuating circumstances surrounding a particular decision (Culyer and Lomas 2006:361).

This view of evidence in policy is consistent with the concept of a hierarchy of evidence, now firmly established in the mind-set of both the policy-making and evidence-producing communities. It is typically constructed as in Table 6.5 below and a more detailed account is provided in Appendix V. Culyer and Lomas’ (2006) account can be superimposed on to Table 6.5. Here ‘context-free’ scientific evidence equates to the first three levels. ‘Context sensitive’ evidence can be found in levels four to seven and colloquial evidence in levels eight to ten. This particular hierarchy, furthermore, mirrors one outlook of the nature of evidence-based policy, that of the Campbell Collaboration. Launched in 2000, the Campbell Collaboration is a non-profit organisation ‘that aims to help people make well-informed decisions about the effects of interventions in the social, behavioural and educational arenas’ (Nutley, et al. 2007:17).

Table 6.5: The Hierarchy of Evidence in Evidence-Based Policy

Level	Methodology
1	Systematic reviews and meta-analyses
2	Randomised controlled trials (RCT) (with concealed allocation)
3	Quasi-experimental studies (using matches)
4	Before and after comparisons
5	Cross sectional, random-sample studies
6	Process evaluation, formative studies and action research
7	Qualitative case study and ethnographic research
8	Descriptive guides and examples of good practice
9	Professional and expert opinion
10	User opinion

(adapted from Pawson 2006:49)

This hierarchy has not been accepted uncritically, particularly in terms of whether meta-analysis and systematic review should be the gold standard. These debates need not concern us here. It is suggested, however, that the cannabis reclassification and its aftermath, because it is a controversial area, is an un-typical example of evidence-based policy-making and thus the hierarchy is not a comprehensive explanation for the plurality of appreciations of the nature of evidence, in this particular scenario. This is primarily a product of the fact that as stressed before, no in-built evaluation of its implementation, with recourse to any possible and relevant Key Performance Indicators, was undertaken. In this sense, it shares many similarities with other examples of the crime policy agenda:

Anecdotal evidence, program favourites of the month and political ideology seemingly drive much of the crime policy agenda. As a result, we are left with a patchwork of programs that are of unknown potential in preventing crime. Crime prevention programs may or may not work or worse may provide iatrogenic results. We are not suggesting that the public is being intentionally misled by law makers and policy makers who are funding programs with no scientific evidence but rather law makers and policy makers are shirking their responsibility to the taxpaying public by not funding only those programs with evidence of effectiveness in crime prevention (Welsh and Ferrington 2001:159).

In the above quotation, the word 'crime' could, where appropriate, be substituted with 'drug' or 'drug misuse'. In this sense, the kind of evidence associated with the UK drug classification issue is primarily colloquial. However, this only broadly explains what kind of evidence is used in the subsystem and not why. In essence, it is suggested here that the hierarchy of evidence offers an account of the pluralism of evidence that is primarily methodological. In UK drug classification, issues surrounding the methodology of evidence were not the sole concern of those in the subsystem. Other criteria appear to be pressing:

My impression is that there is a huge amount of selectivity [of evidence] but it is blurry. There is some sense of a hierarchy of a research quality. Not sort of strictly in terms of a Cochrane hierarchy sense but people will pay more attention to studies that include larger samples, or that are more culturally applicable or relevant. I think there is some of that going on there but there is a huge amount of selectivity as well (RAD3/RATL4).

The notion of selectivity is frequently linked to the consultation process when new or reworked policy ideas are championed. The expectation of consultation on behalf of the government with key stakeholders is increasingly commonplace in the development of policies in many areas, including the drugs field. The respondent continues:

The government, within a consultation, is often just an expediency thing. You have got to consult; you are committed to consulting. How do you decide between 50 or 60 or whatever the number is of possible groups you want to consult? Or do you say: "well who do we think are the main ones?" And approach them. There is a bit of a judgement made there and sometimes they get it wrong but I do think it can have a bearing and that is the way it happens (RAD3/RATL4).

The general idea here is that the cherry-picking of evidence is commonplace but in this particular subsystem this is not based on methodological considerations. A similar sentiment is expressed by members of the rational perspective. When asked whether there was a hierarchy of evidence in this subsystem, one experienced denizen of the bar, with expertise in criminal drug trials, commented that:

My impression is that government has called for a great deal of evidence about all kinds of matters relating to drugs. What happens to that evidence is another matter. My belief is that some of it is "lost" (given that there is so much of it) and that other information simply does not speak loudly enough.

The Runciman Inquiry [Police Foundation Report] was highly influential... but that is my view. It had the advantage of collating a wealth of material and then authoritatively speaking its recommendations. This led to intense public debate during the course of which some issues (more than others) were brought into sharp focus. I am not convinced that there exists a structured "hierarchy of evidence". I have no doubt that the voice of the law enforcement agencies carries much weight with government, particularly if it appears to chime with public opinion (RATL6).

Likewise, the conservative perspective proved equally sceptical as to whether the widely accepted cherry-picking of evidence was based on a preference for a certain kind of methodological evidence. One researcher for a leading NGO in the Drug Prevention field commented:

I wouldn't say that, I wouldn't say there was a hierarchy based on those things...If you look at other debates going on, for example, sexual orientation discrimination, all those regulations that are being proposed are based upon very, very small-scale incidences of what is deemed to be homophobia so they have drawn up far reaching regulations based on a handful of instances when a homosexual couple have not been able to get a hotel room together or something like that...I think there is an ideology that is determining the cherry picking as opposed to any other kind of idea that it is methodological (CON2).

What is not in question here is the fact that the selectivity takes place. In this sense some kind of hierarchy is applicable to the selection of evidence in politicised policy areas in that the evidence is usually found from the last few rows of the hierarchy. Unlike the hierarchy of evidence shown above, it is suggested that in this circumstance the bases of selection are not methodological but more a product of the standpoints of each perspective. Therefore, although there is a perceived significant degree of selectivity in the use of evidence in this area, the origins of this are as much ideological as methodological and relate to the Government preference for particular kinds of evidence in this manner.

6.6 Summary

It has been an aim of this chapter to explore the different appreciations of evidence in the cannabis episode. Where politicised policy areas are concerned, the principles of evidence-based policy-making are less applicable as policies are much more *ad hoc*. Although the hierarchy of evidence is useful for indicating various different

appreciations of evidence in terms of methodology, it does not account for issues of ideology, which are more prevalent in politicised areas.

The potential of evidence-based policy-making in politicised areas is called into question by constructing evidence and politics as binary opposites. This has manifested itself in the widespread prevalence of the zero-sum understanding where politics, not evidence, is the order of the day where the big issues are concerned. With regard to the cannabis reclassification, it is claimed that the decision was taken on the back of various cerebral reports (e.g. Police Foundation 2000). This has, however, led to the opposite zero-sum claim, which the Government do not deny, that the policy was evidence-based.

On the whole, if we accept, as pluralist models do, that all perspectives make a legitimate claim to evidence, it is interesting to note how, despite a plethora of understandings over what constitutes evidence, as the Policy Core beliefs of each coalition show, zero-sum conclusions are common-place. This reasoning is paradoxical because it draws zero-sum conclusions, whilst simultaneously recognising the contested nature of evidence. The paradox of this position is clearly striking for the radical perspective, as they accept that some evidence was used in the decision-making process but do not accept that it was evidence-based. All parties, however, make zero-sum claims whilst recognising the diversity of evidence and all are guilty of employing paradoxical logic. This logic either claims policies to be evidence-free whilst accepting that some form of evidence played a role in the decision-making process. Conversely, the other side of the argument claims the policy to be wholly evidence-based, whilst accepting that certain kinds of evidence were not considered in the decision-making process and that there is significant contestation as to the nature of evidence in this area.

This raises a number of issues when trying to explain the role and nature of evidence in politicised policy areas. First and foremost, the pluralist appreciations of the nature of evidence call into question the wisdom of taking the concept of evidence at face value. It can be concluded from the above discussion that evidence means different things to the different perspectives. It is, therefore, not completely

uncontested. The implications of this conceptualisation of the evidence and policy relationship are explored in more detail in the following chapters.

Second, zero-sum views restrict the role of evidence to policy outcomes. In this sense, policy decision-making is seen to be static. A policy that is evidence-based will remain so and one that is un-evidenced will likewise. These appreciations neglect the fact that policies and the associated evidence are always in a constant state of flux and hence require real-time research methods. In effect, zero-sum views are contrary to the dynamic nature of real-time issues, which as has been illustrated, are continuously changing.

A third and related point is that zero-sum views that restrict the role of evidence to policy outcomes are linked to the view of the role of evidence as one of policy evaluation. In contrast, based on the data presented in this chapter, it is suggested that evidence also has a role to play in the process of policy decision-making, as the rational perspective, in particular, show. This is consistent with the view of policy-making advocated throughout this thesis. Indeed, the location of evidence in the decision-making process is central to the following discussion.

7. THE ROLE OF EVIDENCE

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the way in which the episode of cannabis reclassification is a useful case study through which to explore the tumultuous nature of the evidence and policy relationship, in a politicised policy area, was illustrated. Such policy areas are characterised by a significant degree of internal conflict between rival perspectives over the direction of policy, which has a knock-on effect for appreciations of, in particular, the nature of evidence. This chapter highlights how similar trends can be ascertained with regard to the broader picture of UK drug classification. One consequence of broadening the substantive focus of the project, from the event of cannabis reclassification to the process of the wider drug classification system, however, is the introduction of another key focus in the turmoil of evidence. This concerns data relating to appreciations of the location of evidence in the policy process, which, in turn, stem from different understandings of the nature of ‘drug harm’.

There are certain issues that have been central to the analysis thus far, some of which are called into question here. Foremost, is that because of the highly politicised nature of the policy process, the cyclical understanding of the policy process (Figure 3.1) seen in more ‘conventional’ evidence-based policy debates, does not apply in this circumstance (Chapter Two). In other words, politicised policy areas are more *ad hoc* and suited to pluralist analyses of the policy process. Allied to this, because this particular subsystem is fortified by significant conflict, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, with its in-built ability to analyse conflict, is the most effective means of conceptualising the debate (Chapter Four), but this required modification (Chapter Five).

The impact that politics has on decision making in this area is widely acknowledged and this influences the way various perspectives view the nature of UK drug classification policy. Indeed, because there are recognisable perspectives within this policy subsystem, there are a range of views over the nature of evidence

in this particular debate (Chapter Six). For some, this means that policies are ultimately evidence-free (radical and conservative perspectives), whereas as others diametrically oppose this stance and maintain that the policies are evidence-based (the Government and the rational perspective). As we shall see, also underpinning these standpoints are differing appreciations on the role of evidence in policy-making. These have become particularly noticeable in light of factors occurring alongside the research, the product of researching in real-time (Chapter Four).

This chapter documents another such instance and what follows is thus organised accordingly. First, consideration is given to more external events running contemporaneously with the current research that impacted significantly on its course. Discussion then turns towards appreciations of the role of evidence in the policy process. A closer look at the mechanism through which the Government receives its information and an appreciation of the notion of drug harm is used to illustrate this. The data presented here is ultimately viewed through the lens of considering the location of evidence in the decision-making process. In one sense, this also serves to reinforce the findings of the previous chapter concerning the enigmatic nature of evidence, but as we shall see, some semblance of certitude is also brought to the understandings of the concept. Finally, some summarising comments are given, detailing the complexity and nuance of evidence in politicised policy areas.

7.2 A Consequence of Real-Time Research Part 2: Recent Developments in UK Drug Classification

In the aftermath of cannabis reclassification and review, several other events occurred, each affecting, to a greater or lesser degree, the substantive aspect of the research. This process started with the Parliamentary debate over the passing of the 2005 Drugs Act. This Act was subsequently the subject of much criticism, in particular, the inclusion of magic mushrooms as a class A substance. The primary significance, however, was the wider interest in the drug classification system that this fostered.

As an *aide-memoire*, towards the end of 2006 and into 2007, the debate between various constituencies concerning the efficacy of current UK drug policy and legislation, specifically relating to the evidence for the efficacy of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, became more widespread (e.g. Levitt, et al. 2006; Nutt, et al. 2007; Reuter and Stevens 2007; Royal Society of Arts 2007; Science and Technology Committee 2006). The publication of the Science and Technology Report (2006) was particularly central to this. In addition, early in 2007, on a number of occasions, the famous ‘pips’ of Radio 4’s *Today* programme, gave way to news headlines announcing (usually a few items in) that a major overhaul of the system for classifying illegal drugs has been proposed by a group of leading academics in a report to be published later this week, or that UK drug policy will today be revealed as not fit for purpose by a major report released later today, and that a report by the a new commission set up to look at the evidence for UK drug policy will today reveal that Government policies have had limited impact on rates of drug use.

Respectively, these related to: the Nutt, et al. matrix published in March; a report, also published in March, of a two year study by the Royal Society of Arts (2007), examining various aspects of public policy and the use and abuse of illegal drugs and; the establishment, in April, of the aforementioned United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission with the brief of providing objective analysis of UK drug policy on the grounds that the rigorous use of evidence has, in this area, thus far been found wanting. The work of Reuter and Stevens (2007) is related to the emergence of the United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission, an independent commission which provides critical analysis of the Government’s drug policy. It has already been stressed how there is cross-over between all these publications and the outlook of the rationalist perspective. In essence, the interest in the evidence-base for UK drug classification, more generally, gained such momentum that the cannabis reclassification could not be considered in isolation from these subsequent events and was actually the trigger that brought them about.

Later in 2007, cannabis once again became a pressing issue, however. Within weeks of assuming office, the Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced at Prime Minister’s Questions that, in light of continuing interest in the link between cannabis use and mental health (e.g. Moore, et al. 2007), and as part of the run-up to the

review of the 2008 Drug Strategy, the classification of cannabis would be referred back to the ACMD (Woodward 2007). Also that same week, the Home Secretary Jacqui Smith announced, along with five Cabinet colleagues including the Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling, that she too had tried cannabis as a student but welcomed the call to revisit the classification. In early April 2008, Prime Minister Gordon Brown highlighted his support for cannabis to be reclassified back up to class B (Winnett 2008), although early indications were that this would be contrary to the advice of the ACMD (BBC 2008b).

In May 2008, against the prevailing advice from the ACMD (2008), the Government signalled its intention to reclassify cannabis back up to a class B drug, stating that it had considered 'the evidence' and that this would send a message out to users and potential users about the dangers of the drug (BBC 2008a). The most recent review by the ACMD concluded that:

The Council is still very concerned about the widespread use of cannabis among young people. Although the number of users has decreased over the past few years, cannabis still poses a real threat to the health of those who use it...The Council hopes that the government, parliament and the public appreciate that the use of cannabis is, ultimately, a public-health problem; and that it requires a public health response if current use and the associated harms are to be substantially reduced. Although the criminal justice and classification systems have a role to play – especially in reducing supply – the major emphasis must be directed at ways that drastically reduce demand (ACMD 2008:33).

The accompanying recommendation was that cannabis should remain a class C drug. This is premised on the fact that although there is recognition of a 'consistent (though weak) association, from longitudinal studies, between cannabis use and the development of psychotic illness', there was little evidence of the social harms associated with cannabis use, particularly its association with 'acquisitive crime and anti-social behaviour' (ACMD 2008:34). Furthermore, it is stated that decisions about classification are ultimately 'based on the Council's collective judgement of substances within and between classes' (ACMD 2008:34). As this is the case, the report suggested that cannabis currently resides in the correct class, as class C, as the harms caused by cannabis are 'not considered to be as serious as those of drugs in class B' (ACMD 2008:34). It was one conclusion of this latest ACMD study that the cannabis classification issue should, however, remain under review, with the council

returning to the issue in 2010. This is a product of the likelihood of new data emerging over the next few years. This latest development does, however, highlight the centrality once again of evidence, particularly from the ACMD, to the decision-making process although this is a significant point of contention.

7.3 Classification Perspectives and Appreciations of ‘Evidence’ of ‘Drug Harms’

In the latest cannabis debate, the notion of drug harm was central to the decision-making process. Additionally, the concept of drug harm is a significant, even defining feature, of the perspectives’ positions on the efficacy of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. This section is concerned with the various perspectives’ appreciations of the efficacy of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, as a means of addressing the drug problem. At present, the Government, and the majority of Parliament, are alone in arguing that the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act has withstood the test of time and that the tri-partite structure is currently fit for purpose.

As was the case with the initial cannabis reclassification (see Chapter Six), there are noticeable differences between perspectives and their view of evidence in this area. The central concept of drug harm in relation to the classification system is indicative of this. In a neat synopsis of what follows, a Local Government Officer in the South East of England, with an interest in drugs education, suggested that:

...it is this definition of harm that has been fought over so very much. Harm from the social point of view? Harm from the physical point of view? Harm from a mental point of view? Harm from an emotional point of view? Everyone clearly comes at this from a different perspective (CON7/RATL14).

7.3.1 The Radical Perspective

In the previous chapter, it was claimed that for the radical perspective, the cannabis reclassification was not an evidence-based change. This was in spite of the fact that it did involve the use of some particular bodies of evidence. Central to this perspective is the view that it is not the intrinsic properties of the substances themselves that produce the greatest harm, but the manner in which they are regulated (Deep Core). Moving the debate on to consider the wider drug classification system, when asked

about the relationship between evidence and policy in this sense, it was the view of a Director of Research for a leading drug treatment NGO that it was:

Weak, laughable, you know we have got the silly international history to it with the American influence...There are also lots of messages in there...the idea that a three-category system [based on drug harm] is meaningful has proved a dubious enterprise in its own right so there is a weak relationship – but obviously there is some area of ramification with cannabis at one end and heroin at the other end – there is something in that (RAD3/RATL4).

In terms of drug harms, the key point here is that in its present guise, there is some semblance of order to the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, but that within this, certain drugs are misplaced. This appreciation shares an affinity with that of the rationalist perspective. Looking at the bigger picture, for the radical perspective, the framework is rendered meaningless by what is excluded; alcohol and tobacco, as these are widely perceived to cause the most harm.

The concept of drug harm was also a key aspect of the Science and Technology Select Committee hearings. The nature of drug harm, particularly the thorny issue of social harm, provides a good example. The following excerpt is between Liberal Democrat committee member, Dr Evan Harris, MP and the chairman of the ACMD:

Q188 Dr Harris: In this matrix you include under “social harms” intoxication, health care costs, and other social harms. Included under “other social harms” do you include the harm that stems from criminalisation itself?

Professor Sir Michael Rawlins: Yes.

Q189 Dr Harris: You do not spell that out but that is understood?

Professor Sir Michael Rawlins: Yes and whether this leads to acquisitive crime... (Science and Technology Committee 2006:72)

For the radical perspective, this is the crux of the reason as to why the current classification system is not evidence-based. According to one respondent from a leading NGO advocating drug law reform:

There is this bizarre...you know it does your head in...bizarre circularity and [the next question] basically said “well why don’t you classify alcohol, it’s a dangerous drug that kills loads of people” and the response was “well you know the problem is we tried that in America and loads of gangsters took over and everyone was selling hokey moonshine and people were dying

of it” and the chairman [Phil Willis] was going well “isn’t that what happened with all the other drugs?” And Rawlins (sheepishly) goes “well now you mention it, yeah it is”. You know, honestly some of those responses from Rawlins, respect to the guy for being really straight and honest and I don’t think they [ACMD] are unprincipled scum bags or anything, they are doing their job within a system. Their failing on my part is that they haven’t challenged the system that I think they deep down know is flawed...They work in the system and they are too scared to challenge it...Our role is to be that voice that challenges by asking those difficult questions and saying, you know, “hang on, if the system that you are advocating is creating the harms that you then use to define the system, is that not a bit weird?” (RAD1).

In terms of the themes of the chapter, we see here certain misgivings about the philosophy of the ACMD, the main vehicle through which the Government receives its evidence. The following passage gets to the crux of the problem for what the evidence should be for the radical perspective, in relation to the wider classification system. Here, as with the cannabis issue, drug harms are caused primarily by the legal status of the drugs themselves. As we shall see, this is in contrast to not only the government perspective, but also that advocated by the ACMD and thus the rational perspective. In relation to the overall classification system, the above respondent continues:

It’s methodologically flawed and the evidence for it is that it has achieved the exact opposite of what its supposed to. [For] any scientist coming at this objectively, it would be laughed out of town, it fails every single test, and yet...we just waltz blithely on. I think in a way the debate about the classification of cannabis and the scientific evidence for that really suits the government because we’ve been arguing this boring bull shit debate about cannabis classification for four years now, you know it dominates the media. Does cannabis cause mental health problems? Does cannabis turn you into – you know, a gecko? Does cannabis...whatever it is that day...does it cause schizophrenia? And the answer to those things is yes it probably does, it’s a dangerous drug, all drugs are harmful especially if you have mental health problems before you do them. Or, you are fourteen and you are smoking bongos everyday for breakfast, yes of course cannabis is bad for you...But we knew that anyway, it’s actually nothing new. Any drug, if you use it the wrong way, it is going to harm them, but in the meantime, whilst we have been arguing over this, the tiniest policy tweak i.e. the reclassification of cannabis hasn’t made much difference at all, or not a particularly significant one. The bigger picture...is the apocalyptic failure of prohibition and all the harm it causes and the fact that the classification system is ridiculous, scientifically laughable (RAD1).

The understanding of ‘science’ here is particularly illuminating. Here, we witness a certain understanding of the way an intervention works. In this sense, the

intervention is the implementation of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act (the independent variable), and the desired outcome is the eradication of the drug problem (the dependent variable). For the radical perspective, the intervention has not only failed to achieve the desired outcome and then must be considered to have not worked, it has actually made the problem worse, hence the above reference to the 'apocalyptic failure of prohibition and all the harm it causes'. For the radical perspective, for the policy to be considered to be evidence-based, it must transcend the wider paradigm of prohibition, as one journalist and writer points out:

If your policy really is evidence-based, then I think it really all points one way, and you can't include the evidence that says the system of classification and prohibition works and exclude the evidence which shows abundantly that it doesn't work. So I think that they have made themselves a bit of a problem by declaring that they are going to have an evidence-based drug policy because they obviously haven't got one and we saw that quite clearly in the Science and Technology Committee hearings (RAD4).

In a similar vein, it is also suggested that:

I think that the classification system is incredibly vague. If you look at the various vectors of drug harms, in terms of different types of users, different drugs, different drug using patterns, modes of administration, different users predispositions, different doses, it's actually incredibly complex and there is a whole series of variables which are translated into a whole series of short, medium and long term harms for the individual, or for the community. To boil all that down for an individual drug into A,B,C, I really do think is almost completely meaningless. If you're a potential drug user or a current drug user, if you want proper, useful information on drugs, about how harmful they are, or about how to reduce risk or anything like that, ABC gives you no information at all – none (RAD1).

Consequently, this has a knock-on effect for how the perspective views the efficacy of the overall system and is problematic when trying to accurately depict what is meant by drug harm, especially using science to depict drug harm:

Something...said in one of the select committee sessions was that for some people ABC becomes a sort of quality guide so its like A is only for special occasions, you know the good stuff, and B is for week days and C. But a class A drug, something like cocaine...used occasionally in small doses its relatively un-harmful. People who have a line of coke at a party... Sir Ian Blair's middle-class cocaine snorters, you know, its not a problem for them, it doesn't do them any harm, they enjoy it, its not giving any physical, personal or community harm, really aside from the argument about illegal markets which are intrinsically harmful, but again that is a factor of prohibition (RAD1).

Similarly it is the view a journalist and author that:

There is a lack of clarity about harm because people don't distinguish between the harm caused by prohibition and the harm caused by drugs and I think this is skewed rather by alcohol...In terms of drug harm, what most people see in real life is alcohol, leery people fighting in the street, but because the assumption is that alcohol is safe because it is legal and all other drugs are worse than alcohol, then there is an assumption that all these other drugs are very dangerous and harmful in the way that alcohol is, except worse. And in public health terms, alcohol is really quite conspicuously harmful and the harm caused by cocaine, for example, is really hard to identify. I mean the odd soap star may damage their nasal septum but cocaine deaths are pretty low. Most people go through a period of cocaine use where they make arse-holes of themselves and come out the other end with their wallets a bit lighter, but not much harm done otherwise. So I think that drug harms are radically misperceived because of the illegal activities associated with them (RAD4).

There is a clear recognition within this perspective that their concept of evidence does not sit comfortably with that of the Government. This is most apparent in the different appreciations of harm and views on what constitutes 'harm reduction'. The concept of harm reduction, for this perspective, involves removing the damage caused by the legal status of the drug. This renders the current system as evidence-free because it is doing the exact opposite of its original intention. That is, the introduction of a hierarchical system of drug regulation with associated punishments, as in the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, has not only failed to solve the drug problem, but is actually a contributory factor to the problem and has actually made it worse.

For now, the key point is that for the radical perspective, scientific and methodological propriety are key considerations in the drug debate. However, these are contextualised at a higher level of abstraction. In terms of evidence-based policy, this restricts the role of evidence to an evaluation of the outcome of the overall policy, which is evidence-free. This is a short-term view of the policy process and is similar to the policy cycle understanding of policy discussed previously.

7.3.2 The Rational Perspective

The key feature of the Policy Core of the rational perspective reveals that the cannabis reclassification is broadly conceived as an ‘evidence-based’ decision. It signalled an attempt to apply a scientific understanding to, or ‘rationalise’, the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. When asked about the relationship between evidence and policy with regard to the current UK drug classification system, a one-time member of the ACMD, and Chief Executive of a leading drug policy NGO commented that:

The short-hand answer to that is, if you look at Colin Blakemore and David Nutt’s work [Nutt, et al. matrix] and if you look historically there isn’t a huge relationship. I think, in a way there is a crude relationship between these historically. In terms of nuancing and finessing, not a huge amount, though that is not to say it is hugely wrong but rather it is a nuancing and you look at things like Ecstasy and Magic Mushrooms and stuff like that and there isn’t the evidential base, I would suggest personally...that I wouldn’t think this particular classification is warranted in terms of the harms and the risks (RATL15).

Like the radical perspective, there is recognition that certain drugs are misplaced within the framework. Unlike the radical perspective, it is eradicating these discrepancies from the current framework that typifies the understanding of evidence for this perspective. The mechanism through which this is achieved is written into the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. This states that the Government must seek advice from the ACMD when entertaining the possibility of amending the legislation. A discussion of these issues is detailed by the chair of the ACMD, Professor Sir Michael Rawlins, who stated in oral evidence to the Science and Technology Committee that:

When we look into a particular area we usually set up a small working group. That small working group undertakes or usually commissions a systematic review of the public evidence, the chemical, the basic science and the social science evidence. That is supplemented by a search for unpublished material from all sorts of sources, not only from scientists we know are working in the field but through our national and international contacts, and then we interact with experts in the field, seeking their written evidence, seeking oral evidence from them and seeking their views on the systematic review and whether we have left anything out. That then forms the basis of a draft report which is looked at by the Technical Committee and then finally goes to the Council for further discussion and consideration

and sometimes a bit of iteration between the Council and the Technical Committee (Science and Technology Committee 2006:66).

It was the view of a current government adviser and member of the ACMD technical committee, in response to a question detailing understandings of the government's favoured kind of evidence in this area, that:

This comes down to the sort of evidence that ACMD might collect and present and in the case of the cannabis review last year that was very much based on published academic work...Peer-reviewed work...but in other cases it is not always possible to do that, I'm thinking of the Khat review of a year or so ago. There is not much evidence base for Khat, partly because it's restricted to a narrow ethnic group of people, partly because there is not a lot of academic work on it and certainly not a lot of hard scientific toxicological information on it. So it's just got to grasp at whatever evidence it can there really. So, I don't know that the government is at all thinking in any detail about the sort of evidence it's getting. If it's getting something from ACMD, which it trusts is the best synthesis of evidence that's out there, it probably doesn't question it too much. I don't think there's any questioning of ACMD it's just going into a bigger melting pot (RATL1).

From the above discussion, a number of issues are identifiable. There is a confirmation of the core beliefs of the perspective. That is, the current problems with the overall 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act framework stem from a concatenation of causes internal to it. Another key point relates to how, for the rational perspective, there is great emphasis on the nature and properties of substances themselves. In this sense, there is not the same view that the current system has not worked, only that it can be improved. As a result, we get, at this stage, an insight into what constitutes evidence. This takes the form of systematic reviews of known toxicological and pharmacological data, for example. In addition, there is also an indication of where, ideally, this evidence should come from (peer-review) and how it is synthesised (by the ACMD), all of which can improve on the existing framework. The significance of 'peer-review' and 'published academic work' is apparent only to the rational perspective. This shares an affinity with the government understanding and contrasts with both the radical and conservative perspectives, who make no mention of these manifestations of evidence. This will be returned to in due course.

This discussion again highlights the significance of the ACMD to UK drug policy-making. However, it is necessary to suggest that the work of the ACMD is not

accepted uncritically by members of the policy subsystem. As we shall see, the conservative perspective is particularly sceptical of this organisation, even within the rational perspective there are voices of concern. A central figure from a leading drug information charity was of the view that:

I think they have been guilty - and this came out in the Science and Technology report - of keeping their deliberations secret and there has not been an awful lot of transparency about how decisions have been reached. Mainly what you see is the final report, but not how you got to that final report. I mean we are on the ACMD and when the papers turn up here for a meeting, I mean I am not joking, they can be off the floor. Just the cannabis reclassification thing, it was hundreds of individual scientific papers, you know, the "evidence-base" turned up on your desk and we were expected to read it. So I think also they have got virtually no budget and so they are actually quite limited in what they can do... (RATL8).

Similarly one former member of the organisation was of the view that:

I don't know the current round but I would say that when I was a member of it, I was a member of what I would call the purple patch because drugs and crime was a big issue and Harm Reduction was a big issue so we all got excited about it and wrote reports about it and there was a culture, like in the profession, of "what do we need to do? Let's get on and do it". I resigned from ACMD [to take up another role]...and my feeling of ACMD was that they got lost in relevant debates, I am not sure that anyone tried to move it that way and I suppose they would say that they were knocked sideways by the drug tsar and didn't know what their role was. So it kind of lost its edge in the mid to late '90s and I am not sure where the culture or group within that impacted. All I know is that there are some very good people some very expert people within that who haven't been all that focused either because they are very cleverly manipulated, or they are being naïve. It has been a bit disappointing (RATL11).

Although there are some voices of concern, there is also general satisfaction with the way the ACMD operates, as a rounded institution. The above respondent from a leading drug information charity continues:

Yeah, you'll have differences of opinion and scientists who come at it from one perspective and other scientists who'll come from another. So I don't think...the idea of total objectivity, even within clinical medicine is true, everyone has got their own agenda. But yes, I have never found ACMD reports anything other than a pretty thorough and balanced view of whatever situation they happen to be investigating...they are certainly not as proactive as they used to be and that is often down to the personalities in charge but I have never had any sense that they are biased in any way and if there is a bias in their deliberations it seems to get ironed out when the reports come out and I think some of the stuff they have written over the years has been

some of the best stuff written on drug policy that we have had so I've always been a great admirer of ACMD (RATL8).

The lack of bias identified above, highlights the affinity between the rational perspective and the outlook of the ACMD. The following exchange between the author and the Director of a leading international drug treatment NGO testifies the effective nature of the ACMD and the scope of its deliberations:

RATL13: I think it probably still does a good job. Although it was marginalised for a long time, I still believe in that sort of committee that isn't executive and is outside of government. Rawlins didn't take on many challenges in his first period but certainly moved into some fairly risky areas and perhaps having, as is traditional, the chairman of ACMD to be from science is a strength. Generally it has been a Psychiatrist or a psychopharmacologist or someone in that area and that is quite a strength.

MM: Does that shape the kind of evidence they produce?

RATL13: Well it does, in my experience they were always more interested in the social evidence and the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act requires them to take into account the social impact and social harms.

The 'risky areas' referred to here relate to developing policies based on the principles of harm reduction as it applies to this perspective. Referring back to the belief system structure of this perspective (Table 6.4), harm reduction is considered primarily in terms of drug treatment. To summarise, this involves catering for the most problematic drug users in a public-health setting as opposed to applying criminal justice sanctions on such behaviour. It also begets a view of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, which contrasts with both the conservative and radical perspectives.

The thorny issue of drug harm is approached from a particular angle within this perspective, which as stated, focuses more on the properties of the drugs themselves. The following quotation serves to clarify the issue. In reply to a question asking whether applying science into the current framework to accurately place drugs in relevant categories, based on harm, is what should constitute 'evidence' in this debate, it was the view of a Director of an international drug treatment NGO:

Well, I think one of the problems is how we decide what the harms are and what causes the harms. Because if you take an argument that I imagine Danny [Kushlick] would put forward for Transform, that a lot of the harms stem from the control mechanisms themselves, so you take some of the control mechanisms away and regulate the market...So, at one level, you

can say what are the inherent harms and I suppose on a health basis that would be pretty easy to do, once you start looking at social harms you are then in a bit of a circle because it is hard to decide where the social harms originate, whether they are inherent in the drug itself. Well, certain drugs possibly, yes, because certain drugs have a deleterious effect on behaviour but very often culture mediates those behaviours and very often there is a risk environment, which is a whole constellation of things coming together which determines whether people suffer harms or not so that becomes rather complex to tease out. So yes, but a qualified yes, in answer to your question (RATL13).

Part of the rationalising process involves introducing ‘science’ into the control of substances, by attempting to equate levels of harm with levels of punishment. In effect, this constitutes ‘evidence-based policy’ for members from this perspective. In an overlap with some of the themes mentioned previously, in particular the significance of the peer-review process, the following exchange from the Science and Technology Committee (2006) oral evidence sessions is informative. It is between Dr Evan Harris MP, the chair of the ACMD technical committee Professor David Nutt and the chair of the main committee Professor Sir Michael Rawlins:

Q177 Dr Harris: ...Professor Blakemore [Co-author of Nutt, et al. matrix] has argued for a scientifically-based scale of harm for all drugs with alcohol and tobacco included in some form of calibration. I am curious as to your thoughts on that.

Professor Nutt: I think it is a very sensible idea.

Professor Sir Michael Rawlins: I think, inevitably, as David says, it will inform the decision but it will not determine it. These things cannot be entirely algebraic.

Q178 Dr Harris: You have not done that. You have got this matrix that you sent us, which you did not send us originally, but you kindly supplied it later, which is very interesting and I think it is possibly among your interesting memorandum the most interesting. If you did this scale and you put in tobacco and alcohol then that would be a useful thing. I cannot understand, since you have agreed it would be useful, why you have not done it, unless it would show that the current ABC would not—

Professor Sir Michael Rawlins: We can send to you the paper that David has been preparing.

Professor Nutt: We have done this.

Q179 Dr Harris: Has it been published?

Professor Nutt: No, it has not but the plan is to send it to *The Lancet*, get it peer-reviewed, and hopefully have it in the public domain.

Q180 Dr Harris: Has there been a delay? If you have done it, why not publish it?

Professor Nutt: Because it takes some time. It is an iterative process. There are four authors and it has taken some time. It is not trivial writing a quality paper for *The Lancet*.

This paper was, as stated, finally published in March 2007 and such discussions have come to dominate the ACMD understanding of requisite evidence in this field. According to one member of the ACMD technical committee:

It's only since we've taken on board the risk assessment processes in the last six years or so that we've really made any effort in changing that early policy [of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act], because all the time that the act has been in existence, very few substances have been removed and very few substances have been reclassified. Some that were removed had to go back in again later because misuse then grew once they came out of the act and so the feeling with time was that it was dangerous to tinker with the Act because it caused all sorts of problems, so the feeling was that we should leave things where they were, or at least other people felt that. It's only been in the last few years to say that the scientific base doesn't really support the classification we've got today, I feel that very strongly now (RATL1).

From the current discussion, it is clear that the Nutt, et al. matrix, and its associated understanding of the nature of drug harm, sees evidence as part of the decision-making process and does not restrict evidence to one of policy evaluation as is the case with the radical perspective (as we have seen), and as is the case with the conservative perspective (as we shall see).

The general understanding of drug harms is equated to the substances themselves in this perspective, but this has numerous dimensions, including toxicological harm and social harms. Reducing harm, however, does not require a radical overhaul of the current framework but can be done by keeping it in tact. It suggests that by accurately depicting the harmful nature of drugs, in relation to one another, within the framework, drug users should be able to make informed choices about the risks they take. For those that do come into difficulties, drug treatment is a means of reducing the harms associated with drug use instead of some form of legalisation or emphasis on prevention, which are policy goals seen as unrealistic for advocates of this perspective.

There is, here, a clear indication of a general acceptance that the ranking of drugs in some form of scale of harm is a desirable enterprise and is thus central to the general understanding of evidence. The Nutt, et al. matrix is an example of this but there is some recognition that it may not necessarily be the most efficacious solution.

Additionally, it was the view of one director of a leading NGO in the drug policy sector and former member of the ACMD that:

There is no doubt that in the long-run it might help to have categorisation for classification more rigorously and scientifically based...I am not necessarily sure that David Nutt and Colin Blakemore's contribution is the only one because it was a Delphi Group, and it was a Delphi Group particularly around psychiatrists who will have a view of the world. If you had done that exercise with a bunch of coppers it may have worked out very differently. So what is 'science' in that sense? Science has got values and professional inputs clouding it and shaping it. I think the choice of evidence, inevitably, is always shaped by the people coming to it. What [my organisation] wants to do is to try and marry very, very different disciplines into its work and analysis and to try and stand back so it is not coming from any particular viewpoint or issue and it will try and synthesise some of the available evidence to try and reach a conclusion like that as best it can. But I will go back to the fact that there is limited evidence about what is happening so that everyone, everyone is driving half-blind (RATL15).

There is a claim to objectivity here, but this is open to question. It is stressed here that one of the subtleties of the rational perspective is its claim for this ground, but when applied to the drug debate, this is actually another standpoint and not 'the' solution to the problem, for example. Overall, the causal explanations of the defects of the current system, via understandings of drug harm, do reveal an interesting point of comparison, which results in a broader view of the evidence and policy relationship than is identifiable in either the radical and conservative perspectives or the Government. This stems from the rational perspective having a more long-term view of the policy process than either the radical or conservative perspectives. In short, this views the role of evidence in decision-making, not just in terms of outcome but also process. In other words, the relationship between evidence and policy is conceptualised in the various ways evidence is used and engaged with in policy discussions, and not just in terms of the impact it may or may not have on the final policy that is made, as in the policy cycle model.

7.3.3 The Conservative Perspective

The key feature of the conservative core belief structure (Table 5.6) shows a specific concern with the deleterious properties of the drugs themselves. These statements are consistent with the Deep Core beliefs of promoting wholesome and healthy lives

through abstinence. In this sense, underpinning the appreciation of evidence here is a medical philosophy. For their part, when asked about the relationship between evidence and policy with regard to the current UK drug classification system, a typical response of members of the conservative perspective was to point out the futility of the current system. For example, one former UK government, and current adviser for the Scottish Parliament stated that:

I don't think that it is enormously shaped by evidence. I think that in certain senses it is a bit of a mystery as to why certain drugs are placed in some categories and others are in a different one. I think that one can envisage that the classification system is something that should be much more evidence-based. Devoting an enormous amount of time to placing drugs in their right position, in their right relative position as well as their right absolute position...in a sense...is rather fiddling while Rome burns...Actually the classification system is neither here nor there, whether it is right or wrong, it is something of an irrelevance in terms of the choices and decisions that people make over whether to use or not use illegal drugs. So I don't actually have a huge degree of sympathy with the investment of considerable effort in trying to work out where certain drugs sit within the classification system. I think it is a bit outmoded actually and I don't know that it serves any more useful function, for example, to seek to differentiate between heroin and cannabis but that is where the classification system takes you (RATL10/CON4).

There is here, then, a sense that the initial implementation of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act has done little to address the drugs problem. In this sense, there is some overlap with the radical perspective. In causal terms, the intervention has not achieved what it set out to do and that is solve the 'drug problem'. For the conservative perspective, however, it is not the Act itself that produces the problem *per se*. The overarching criminal justice philosophy is generally considered to be sound, but more enforcement is needed and more emphasis should be placed on prevention. At present, the current framework does not target the correct areas and a three-tiered, ABC structure only confuses the issue.

Associated to this perspective, is a noticeable critical view of the mechanisms by which the government receives its evidence. The efficacy of the ACMD as a body capable of synthesising the evidence is called into question, particularly the extent of its objectivity. It does not require any reading between the lines to ascertain that it is the view of the respondent below that the ACMD's deliberations and reports, although for the most part significantly cerebral, are shaped by a particular

philosophy. According to an ex-Chief Constable from Scotland and a current adviser to the United Nations:

The ACMD is not an organisation I have a particularly high regard for and I don't think it is as impartial, as independent and as professional as it could be. There are an awful lot of experts that ought to be on that committee that aren't and I mean genuine qualified people from well established universities and the like, but nevertheless the ACMD has made some good reports (CON5).

A more damning criticism of the ACMD comes from the following respondent, a current representative of an International Drug Prevention Organisation. It ultimately raises serious doubts about the mechanism through which the Government receives its advice. Regarding initially the cannabis reclassification, she suggests:

It certainly wasn't scientifically based because if they'd even looked, as I say, at some of these papers and papers going back...OK some scientific research is faulty, you'll always get that but if you take the complete volume of papers you'll see that the bulk of it is warnings of psychological and mental damage (CON3).

Similar sentiments are expressed in relation to the wider drug classification system:

The ACMD are not a proper scientific body. There are only a few proper scientists and even they are libertarian types...The ACMD is government appointed, everything is skewed...There was one paper by a chap called MacLeod and others on mental illness. I think it was dated 2004 and they [ACMD] looked at that and that bucked the trend of all the papers that had been written and it sort of downplayed it. I was asked to look at that paper and I did, and I did a criticism of it...To begin with, two of the co-authors were on the ACMD, they looked at a whole load of papers, obscure papers that I have never seen. I wrote a paper on psychosis and schizophrenia with 76 references. They included, I think it was two...They just downplayed everything and I mean they didn't look at the main research of people who had been in the research field for years and years and years, really prominent people and they just ignored all that research and downplayed it because two of the authors were on the committee. They were asked to look definitely at that paper and about four others, but of course, it obviously had a lot more influence – it was a faulty paper (CON3).

Overall, allied to the views that the ACMD is not a completely objective organisation and that the concept of harm has become distorted, is the assumption from this perspective, in line with their Policy Core beliefs, that the platform on

which the evidence debate takes place is misleading. According to one retired Customs Officer and Independent Anti-Corruption Consultant for the UN:

I think that whole thing about that new list [Nutt, et al. matrix] is a con job...Where is the advantage in discussing it? I would just rather have they are legal or they are not legal and the hierarchy of harm...it is used by law enforcement and it is used by the Courts but I actually think that a better determinant would be scale and size of operation and profitability and I think we have got ourselves locked in a debate splitting hairs... (CONS6).

In public debates about the relationship between evidence and policy, with regard to the drug classification system, it has been precisely the endeavours of Professor Nutt and colleagues that has come to assume a dominant status. For those who adhere to the conservative standpoint, this is problematic. Other respondents were more concerned that the understanding of harm within the drug policy debate was actually too narrow. Thus, according to one Director of a leading Drug Prevention Organisation:

In general when people talk about harm and harm reduction they tend to talk about harm to the user, they tend to talk only about physical harm and I am including brain damage in that, rather than the use of the brain cells, and they tend to think that it is only in the stages of addiction that it occurs but this is wrong in all three senses. Lots of other people are affected by drug users and you could do a bulls-eye if you like of the drug user in the middle and you get family, friends, and siblings and then you go out to work mates and ambulance drivers, police and so on, and so any one drug user actually affects a lot of other people, that is the first of the three points. The second one is that if you are looking at health damage it isn't just physical and these things include physical but also mental, intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual and environmental and I didn't invent those, the World Health Organisation uses those and actually if you look in biblical readings or in Buddhism or in Jewish you'll find pretty similar things that it is not just the physical. Thirdly, there is the issue of costs to people. This can start from day one. Using an unlikely example, but one that is easy to explain, someone uses cannabis for the first time, they are stoned and they get in their car and they wrap it around another car and bump off a number of people. I am not saying that that will happen with every cannabis user, that is patently stupid, but I am trying to illustrate that harms can happen from day one (CON8).

Additionally, for the same respondent, this has a knock-on effect for the measurement of harm and the way it is discussed in policy debates:

People are not measuring these other harms when they are assessing or not how harmful a particular drug is. We do know, if you take, for example,

siblings and other relatives, in the drug agency work we did - face to face work with alcohol and street drug abusers - time and again it came up that it was the people around the user who were suffering more or were harmed more. Until the drug or alcohol user got to the real stage of addiction, then they were suffering a lot, but up until that point they were fine. They were getting all the stuff they wanted and they weren't getting 'nicked' by the police because they were lucky and they had ways of getting it or maybe they had a job (CON8).

These harms are generally considered to be social harms and, for the conservative perspective, they are downplayed. In contrast to the rational perspective, there is clear scepticism concerning the utility of basing policy on a rationally developed scale of harm. The key point is that the intervention of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act unnecessarily complicates the issue, and that tweaking the mechanism internally does not get to the route of the problem. In essence, drug classification does not accurately depict that all drugs are dangerous and should be given equal weighting in the legislation. Consequently, a reworking of policy is advocated which places both more emphasis on prevention mechanisms and more stringent enforcement in a model that mirrors, as mentioned, the Swedish approach.

This is in many ways, the antithesis of the rational model of informed choice based on receipt of accurate information about the nature of drug harms. In this regard, there is an affinity in appreciations of the location of evidence in evidence-based policy-making between the conservative and radical perspectives, in that the focus is on the overall efficacy of the policy. This equates evidence with policy evaluation and is restricted to the outcomes of policy. In effect, policy outcomes are seen as the correct location for considering the role of evidence in policy-making. In this sense, the conservative perspective also has a short-term appreciation of the nature of policy. This, too, is a departure from the view of evidence advocated by the Government and the rational perspective.

7.4 The Complexity and Nuance of Evidence in a Politicised Policy Area

A detailed interrogation of the various perspectives on the nature of drug harm also reveals that like in the cannabis reclassification (see Chapter Six), there are also discrepancies in appreciations of the nature of evidence with regard to the wider drug classification system. Of more pressing concern, however, have been the schisms in

appreciations over the way the Government receives its information; that is, via the ACMD. This manifests itself in a debate over the role or purpose of evidence in the decision-making process. In this regard, despite the numerous differences, there are also elements of consistency over the way the various perspectives view the location of evidence.

By taking the location of evidence in policy as a key theme, a dominant understanding of evidence emerges in this context. This view of evidence is that of the rationalist perspective, whose appreciations share a significant overlap with those of the Government. This view suggests that evidence can have an impact in the process of policy-making and is not necessarily equated with evaluations of current policies, or with policy outcomes. Focusing on the location of evidence, ultimately, casts the doubt on the pluralistic explanations of evidence in the UK drug policy debate, which are premised on the notion that all actors in the policy process are equal. The inequality in this particular subsystem stems not from a preference of the Government towards the rational perspective's kind of evidence, which shapes its policy outcomes, it is more that this appreciation of the location of evidence is consistent with that of the Government and it is thus a powerful explanation.

The question that remains is how to explain this impasse? In response, it is suggested that three main, interrelated issues need to be given consideration. The first explanation is temporal and relates to causality. Referring, once again, to the core beliefs of each perspective, the radical group wish to repeal the current prohibitionist legislation and replace it with a system of legalised regulation. Drug harms are a product of the legal status of the drugs, which means that because control of the market is surrendered to illegal producers and distributors, drug purity and potency, for example, go unregulated and left to chance. In other words, the harms associated with drug use have occurred as a result of the intervention and the main danger, for the individual drug user, according to the radical perspective, has arisen because of, or after, the implementation of the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act.

By contrast, the conservative perspective wishes to significantly alter and simplify the current legislation so that the true dangers of substances are more accurately depicted. This involves switching to a system that is similar to the

Swedish approach. This places emphasis on drug prevention and drug enforcement. For the conservative perspective, the current system fails to invest in the former aspect to a satisfactory degree, thus the main danger for drug users occurs before the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act can have any impact.

To reiterate, these are also the origins of their negative, zero-sum appreciations of the evidence and policy relationship in this area. In other words, why for both perspectives the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act drug classification system is evidence-free and why it will remain so unless there is a significant alteration to its operation. In effect, both perspectives' solutions to the drug problem involve much speculation as to how their chosen direction for policy would represent an improvement on the current deadlock. This defies empirical test and is linked to the above point that the radical and conservative perspectives are not concerned with peer-reviewed, 'scientific' evidence and are more pre-occupied with the broader notion of policy evaluation.

In contrast again, the rational position works within the current framework. In doing so, they suggest that any defects in the current system can be overcome by making it more scientifically valid. The rationale is that individuals can make informed choices on the use of drugs if supplied with accurate information. This does not require drastic change but minor tweaks to the legislation. The conceptualisation of evidence cited by the rational perspective is, therefore, contemporaneous and consanguineous to the legislation. In other words, it occurs in real-time, and is intrinsic to the legislation to which it refers. In terms of evidence, there is some speculation as to what a policy would look like if all the 'evidence' in the debate was truly considered but this could be put to empirical test by rearranging the drugs in the framework, in line with the findings of the Nutt, et al. matrix for example. Furthermore, it is this privileged vista that means that for the rational perspective there is significant emphasis placed on the role of evidence in the process of policy formulation, whereas the radical and conservative perspectives conceptualise the evidence and policy relationship in terms of the policy outcomes. In essence, the fact that the radical and conservative positions do involve a degree of speculation, compromises their evidence-based credentials, as rational measurement (via peer-reviewed material) is typical of the evidence-based policy movement.

The second, related explanation is structural. Although there was recognition that the decision was political in that it was designed to combat the problems of harder drug use, the rational perspective, for the most part, supports the claim that the decision to reclassify cannabis was evidence-based. This represented the first instance of an acceptance that the classification system may not be scientifically valid and was the first attempt to iron out one of the anomalies of the existing classification system by reducing some of the regulations around the drug. Consequently, the notion of 'scientific' evidence was pushed to the fore and there were indications about how this evidence should be produced.

Earlier (see Section 7.3.2 and above), the significance of 'peer review' and 'published material' were mentioned as significant aspects of the evidence-base by members of the rational perspective, alongside obtaining 'expert advice' from relevant bodies. Again, this conceptualisation of 'evidence' includes that used in the process of policy-making and shares similarities with that of academia and the Government when discussing the notion of evidence-based policy-making. Indeed, in the run up to the passing of the 2005 Drugs Bill, then Home Secretary Charles Clarke, pointed out:

Of course, when we look at the analysis of the banding classification system, it is appropriate and right to consider the advice of the professionals who make the medical assessment before coming to a view. That is precisely what we will do... (cited in Levitt, et al. 2006:3).

Such appreciations are absent from both the radical and conservative perspectives, because their view of evidence, as mentioned, is restricted to the higher level of abstraction of policy outcomes. These include notions of providing value for money via legalisation (radical perspective) and more rigorously enforcing the law and increasing awareness of the dangers of drugs (conservative perspective), respectively. The data for such proposals is currently non-existent. No trials of such policy directions have been forthcoming. Hence, peer-reviewed published data is not the primary concern for these groups. It is, however, central to the wider evidence-based policy movement.

This issue is linked to the final point, which concerns the notion of semantics and returns to the issue of drug harm, prevalent throughout this chapter. Referring back to the Deep Core beliefs of the rational perspective, it is clear that a promotion of public health by placing treatment at the centre of the drug strategy is central. This is to be achieved by making the existing framework internally valid. In turn, this underscores their view of harm reduction. Generally, this perspective finds favour with the Government. Indeed, Vernon Coaker, in oral evidence to the Science and Technology Committee (2006:105), highlighted the centrality of the Nutt, et al. matrix to the government decision-making process:

We have a matrix which we use. That matrix is part of the way we determine which drug should be in which category. Of course, we always look at the evidence that people give us; we always look at the opinions that they give to us...we have a scientific basis for determining harm. The ACMD refer to that when they classify drugs.

Consequently, the concept of harm is related to the concept of drug treatment, within the broader criminal justice framework. Treating problematic drug users can reduce the impact of drugs on communities. Coaker continues:

We massively increased the spending on drugs, on trying to tackle the harm which drugs are causing in our communities. The drug treatment programmes, the establishment of the various projects that we have, have seen a massive increase in spending (Science and Technology Committee 2006:106).

This appreciation of harm reduction is in contrast to both the radical and conservative perspectives. For the radical perspective, reducing the harm of drugs requires a removal of the legal mechanism controlling drugs. Ultimately, harm reduction is drug legalisation and the creation of a regulated market. For the conservative perspective, harm reduction relates to preventing the harm that drugs can cause communities. In effect, harm reduction is drug prevention.

7.5 Summary

Until this point the objective of this inquiry has been primarily exploratory. It has looked into the nature and role of evidence in a politicised policy area, such as UK drug classification policy. Confirmation has been sought, and found, for the claim

that some form of evidence is embedded in the decision-making process (regardless of ones feelings towards this). This does not necessarily determine the policy direction, however. 'Evidence', as a concept, has been shown to be primarily, but not wholly contested; there are vestiges of consistency in the way evidence is conceived, for example, in the similarities between appreciations over the location of evidence in the policy process.

It is suggested here, that the recognition that there is a dominant appreciation of evidence in this subsystem goes some way to explaining the predominance of the zero-sum explanations of the evidence and policy relationship in this context. These are still, at best problematic, and at worst inaccurate. One question that remains is how to explain the nature of evidence in a policy subsystem characterised by the three Cs of competition, conflict and controversy. The remainder of the thesis addresses this question. It starts by attempting to ascertain if a plausible account for the nature of evidence, that is both contested and certain, can be ascertained and, if so, whether this is consistent with existing models of research utilisation that have been typically used to explain the relationship between research use and policy formulation. Chapters Eight and Nine, respectively, are devoted to these issues.

8. THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF EVIDENCE

8.1 Introduction

Focusing on issues relating to the wider drug classification system, the previous chapter highlighted how again there were various appreciations on the nature of evidence. This was manifested in the discussion of drug harm. It also highlighted, however, another aspect of the turmoil of evidence. By concentrating more specifically on the location of evidence in the policy process, certain vestiges of similarities in the appreciations of evidence were also apparent, and that a dominant appreciation of evidence, in the wider debate, could also be ascertained. Consequently, there is a potential impasse where there is a large degree of contestation, but also a significant element of certitude relating to the concept of evidence in this particular subsystem.

There is, however, an additional issue to consider. Recent developments in UK drug classification policy, discussed in the previous chapter (see Section 7.2), illustrated how evidence in this subsystem, because it is live, is in a constant state of flux. This is a product of new data trickling into the public arena. Numerous examples could be given to illustrate this. For consistency, the one used here that has been used in previous discussions, concerns the issue of cannabis potency. The most recent ACMD (2008:31) report states:

The Council considers that, since its last review...there is evidence to suggest users of cannabis are now exposed to products with a higher THC content than previously...This has occurred largely because of the substantial increase in the market share of sinsemilla [high potency cannabis]. The Council is therefore concerned at the dominance of sinsemilla in the market because of its greater potency.

In addition, referring to the issues of drug classification, the report also states that 'since the Council's last review, further evidence has become available about the harmfulness of cannabis to both individuals and society' (ACMD 2008:33). In spite of this, the Council remained unconvinced that cannabis should be reclassified as a

Class B drug. Adjoined to this recommendation, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was the statement that:

The Council anticipates that additional data will become available within the next few years specifically relating to the causal association between cannabis use and psychoses. The Council therefore proposes to undertake a further review of the evidence in 2010 (ACMD 2008:34).

The task now faced is how to explain this. In undertaking this, it is necessary to get to grips with the key tenets of evidence-based policy-making in heavily politicised areas. To fully explore this, it is helpful to split the concept into its constituent parts. Chapter Three has already completed the task of analysing the ‘policy’ aspect; suggesting that the evidence-based policy movement is consistent with more pluralist models of policy-making. The current chapter proceeds by applying the analytical lens to the concept of evidence, in a bid to clarify its role and nature in politicised policy areas. This is achieved by first introducing the key issues in conceptual analysis, drawing on the sociology and philosophy of science literature. An overview of four traditions of conceptual analysis (c.f. Pawson 1989), then follows. The final section considers the notion of ‘conceptual flux’ as a means of synthesising the traditional understandings of concepts in the social sciences.

8.2 Key Issues in Conceptual Analysis

Blumer (1969) provides a useful way of understanding the significance of concepts to science, by claiming that ‘to speak of a science without concepts suggests all sorts of analogies – a carver without tools, a railroad without tracks, a mammal without bones, a love story without love’ (cited in Blaikie 2000:128). Bulmer (1984:43), meanwhile, likens concepts to ‘categories for the organisation of ideas and observations’. In addition, Bryman (2004:65) suggests that ‘concepts are the building blocks of theory and represent the points around which social research is conducted’. Essentially, they are a ‘label that we give to elements of the social world that seem to have common features and strike us as significant’.

Bryant (1995:52-3) identifies numerous themes central to conceptual investigation. These issues concern matters relating to the nature of the natural and social world and, by association, the nature of open and closed conceptual systems,

which, in turn, is linked to the potential for concepts to be contested or consistent. These issues are, however, inextricably linked to other pressing concerns in the study of conceptual analysis. Consideration of the notion of primary and secondary concepts, developed by Schutz (1962a) is also significant, as are issues of the incommensurability and translation of language. This last aspect is a product of the increasing interest in language in the philosophy of science.

On a crude level, the central themes identified by Bryant (1995) stem from issues arising from the hermeneutic critique of the positivist orthodoxy in social science. This has its origins in nineteenth century German thought. There were two key aspects to this development. First, the onset of linguistic constructivism, with its emphasis on language as the basic structure of society, was a fundamental departure from the methodological individualism of positivism. Secondly, there was the increased emphasis on the notion of intersubjectivity. This is the hermeneutical notion that interpretation implies an intersubjective relationship between science and its object, as opposed to a relationship of correspondence. Ultimately, the hermeneutical conception of science implies cultural construction (Delanty 1997:40). As the focus is primarily on the thorny issue of conceptual contestability or certitude, of pressing concern are issues relating to open and closed understandings of the natural and social world.

8.2.1 The Natural and Social World and Open and Closed Systems

It is suggested by Bryant (1995:52), that social scientists and natural scientists have 'different situations' to contend with when forming concepts. This revolves around the fact that the social world, in contrast to the natural world, is 'preconstituted and pre-interpreted by the objects of which it is composed (ordinary and not so ordinary men and women)'. The outcome of this is that there is no possibility of objects in the natural sciences changing their behaviour in light of what is said about them, which is a distinct possibility in the social world. Giddens (1984) refers to this as the 'double hermeneutic'. These issues also get to the heart of issues of epistemology and ontology in the philosophy and sociology of science and knowledge, and it raises the question over how the social world is to be studied.

Pawson (2006:18-9) offers a succinct overview of this, suggesting that social systems are the product of endless components and forces. Thus, when social science tries to focus on a uniform pattern of behaviour, or regularity, it realises that it is shaped by historical and institutional forces. The former, concern circumstances where the regularity may occur in one culture but not in another. The latter, is where different organisational arrangements and political structures render behavioural patterns susceptible to change. There is also the notion of the volition and choices of people where behavioural patterns are influenced by the choices people make. Additionally, people can modify their behaviour in relation to additional stimuli. The most fundamental issue this raises is that the research act itself can impact on the behaviour being researched.

Various solutions have been touted. One has been to ignore the problem. This is Parsons' (1937) solution. In terms of method, experimental closure in Randomised Control Trials and even quasi-experiments are also indicative of this. The closure here is artificial, but such methods are seen to offer validity and thus findings can be generalised to other scenarios. The second solution, typical of the critical realist school (Archer, et al. 1998; Bhaskar 2002), suggests that there are an over-abundance of explanatory possibilities for any regularity. As this is the case, the goal of social research should be to find a privileged vantage point to unmask the assumptions of lay thought and actions that are behind false explanations. Although often seen as being contrary perspectives in the social sciences, this approach is not far removed from deconstructionism (Delanty 1997). Another alternative comes from methodological realism (Carter and New 2004; Pawson 1989; Williams 2000). These thinkers accept that there are going to be alternative explanations of any given regularities but that it is worth trying to adjudicate between them even with the possibility that further explanations may be available within the unrelenting open social systems (a more detailed analysis of this can be seen in the formalist tradition of theories of meaning in Section 8.3.4 below).

The debate over the nature of open systems and closed systems is arguably more of an acute issue in the social, rather than the natural sciences. This is particularly so for those who wish to hold on to the possibility of empirical measurement in social research, rather than an outright abandonment of this pursuit.

Advocates of closed conceptual systems suggest that these provide the only way forward for the social sciences to develop law-like generalisations and explanations that are the hallmark of the natural sciences. In contrast, there are numerous thinkers who suggest that advocating closed conceptual systems is misleading and wrongly imposes meaning on phenomena in the social world, which by its very nature is open and has an endless capacity for reconstruction (Bryant 1995:53).

8.3 Traditions of Conceptual Analysis

The issues identified above as being central to understanding the nature of concepts have been discussed by various different traditions in the literature. Pawson (1989) identifies four main ones, also referred to as theories of meaning. These are; the operationalist tradition, the contestabilist tradition, the reconstructionist tradition and the formalist tradition.

8.3.1 The Operationalist Tradition

Central to the operationalist tradition is the view that there is a clear affinity between theory and concepts. This is expressed in Hempel's (1965) model of science, where concepts are employed:

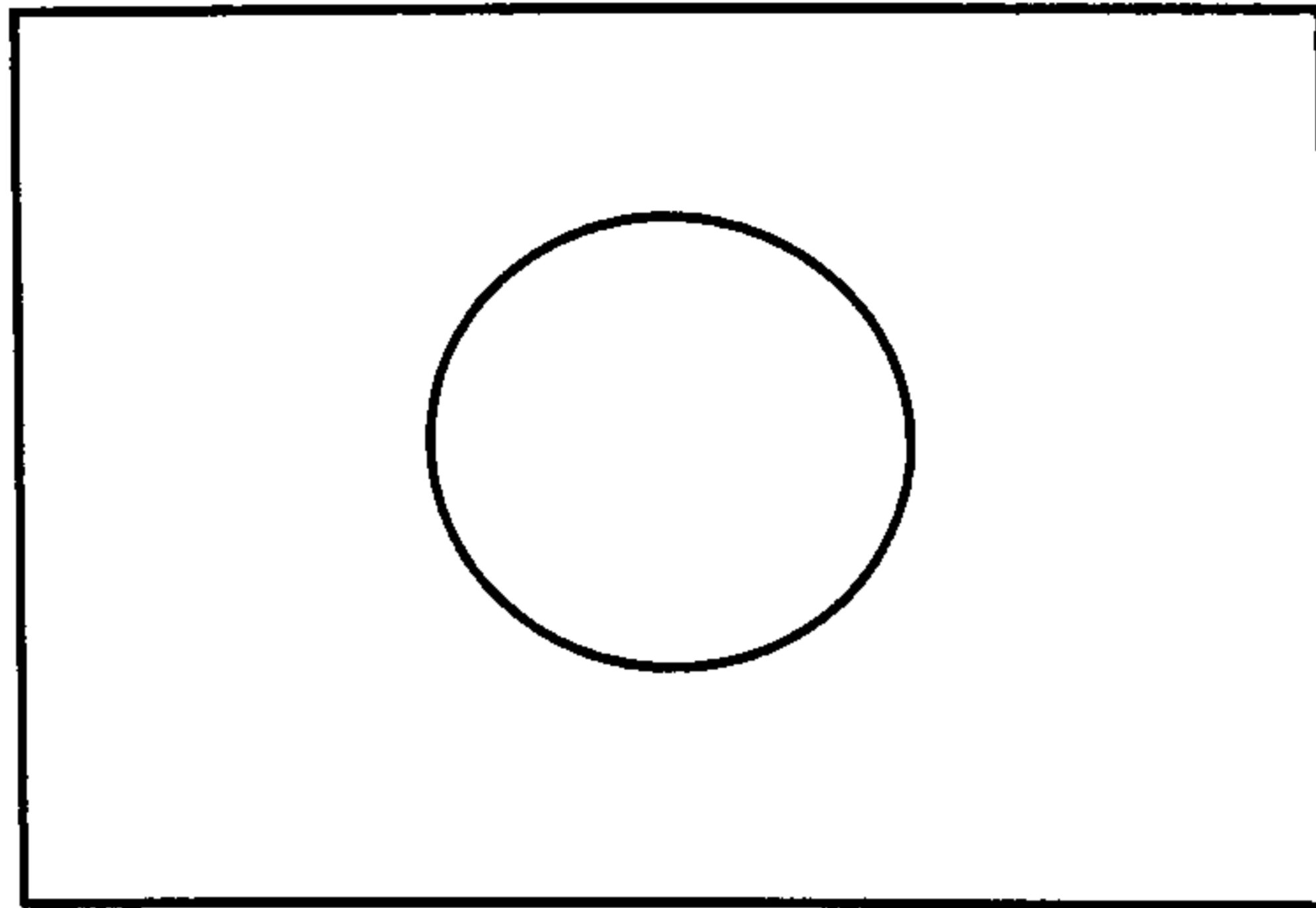
First, to permit an adequate description of the things and events that are the objects of scientific investigation; second, to permit the establishment of general laws and or theories by means of which particular events may be explained and predicted and thus scientifically understood; for to understand a phenomenon scientifically is to show that it occurs in accordance with general laws or theoretical principles (Hempel 1965:139).

In order to fulfil these criteria, it is necessary for concepts to be consistently employed:

Science aims at knowledge that is objective in the sense of being intersubjectively certifiable, independent of individual opinion or preference, on the basis of data obtainable by suitable experiments or observations. This requires that the terms used in formulating scientific statements have clearly specified meanings and be understood in the same sense by all who use them (Hempel 1965:141).

The view of concepts from the operationalist tradition can be depicted in diagram form as in Figure 8.1 below.

Figure 8.1: The Operationalist Theory of Meaning



(adapted from Pawson 1989:229).

Here general scientific discourse is depicted by the oblong and the clearly defined scientific concept is depicted by the circle, which is understood in exactly the same manner by all who use it. Although he claims to the contrary, the sociology of Parsons (1937) is ultimately indicative of this. This is manifested, in particular, in his view that there is correspondence between an external world and the concepts used to understand it. Parsons (1937:730) stated:

As opposed to the fiction view, it is maintained that at least some of the general concepts of science are not fictional but adequately 'grasp' aspects of the objective real world. This is true of the concepts here called analytic elements. Hence the position taken here is, in an epistemological sense, realistic. At the same time it avoids the objectionable implications of empiricist realism. These concepts correspond, not to concrete phenomena, but to elements in them which are analytically separable from other elements. There is no implication that the value of any one such element, or even of all those included in one logically coherent system, is completely descriptive of any particular concrete thing or event.

Championing a position he termed 'analytical realism', Parsons rejects the empiricist assumptions of those who proclaimed that concepts are actually reflections of reality but suggests that they accurately depict certain aspects of social life (Bryant 1995:25). In this sense, he offers a perspective of the social world as a closed system. Parsons' (1937) revised empiricism is the epitome of the operationalist view of

concepts. For Blumer (1969:143) there is also an affinity between theory and concepts:

Theory is of value in empirical science only to the extent to which it connects fruitfully with the empirical world. Concepts are the means, and the only means of establishing such connection, for it is the concept that points to the empirical instances about which a theoretical proposal is made. If the concept is clear as to what it refers, then sure identification of the empirical instances may be made. With their identification, they can be studied carefully, used to test theoretical proposals and exploited for suggestions as to new proposals. Thus, with clear concepts theoretical statements can be brought into close and self-correcting relations with the world.

Blumer also indicates the centrality of concepts in the conduct of social research, highlighting their significance before, during and after the research act:

Throughout the act of scientific inquiry concepts play a central role. They are significant elements in the prior scheme that the scholar has of the empirical world; they are likely to be the terms in which his problem is cast; they are usually the categories for which data are sought and in which the data are grouped; they usually become the chief means for establishing relations between data; and they are usually the anchor points in interpretation of the findings. Because of such a decisive role in scientific inquiry, concepts need especially to be subjected to methodological scrutiny (Blumer 1969:29).

It is difficult to disagree with the sentiments expressed by Blumer, but this does portray a somewhat one-dimensional view of the research process, based on a primarily empiricist and naturalist view of social science, a view similar to Hempel (1965). This was the orthodoxy at Blumer's time of writing, but it was one he sought to transcend by advocating the use of sensitising concepts in research. Sensitising concepts are context sensitive and are used to guide an investigation. These are in contrast to the more commonplace operational concepts which have a fixed meaning, ascertained at the outset of an investigation.

The issue of the open-ended nature of the social world and its relation to concepts, identified by hermeneuticians and discussed more below, is ignored here. In relation to this, Bryant (1995:25) identifies three main problems with the operationalist understanding of concepts, directing much of his ire towards Parsons. The basic premise is that there are various inexhaustible sources of conceptual

variation in the social sciences, this due to the inherently open nature of the social world. The first major point is that Parsons is guilty of neglecting the multifaceted character of human acts and social relations. These enable both those whom social scientists study, and social scientists themselves, to conceive, constitute and interpret the 'same' act or relation differently. For example, in this thesis, we have seen the radical and conservative perspectives suggest that the cannabis reclassification and wider classification system are 'evidence-free'. Their appreciations of evidence are, however, at odds with one another and differ again from the rational group.

Drawing on the findings of what has become known as the 'linguistic turn' in the social sciences, the second source of variation concerns the 'possibilities of innovation and invention inherent in all natural languages (Bryant 1995:27). Finally, there is 'the unending variation in the forms of social life' as each new form, does not just 'provide sociology with a new object of inquiry, it also presents it with a new opportunity for theorising' (Bryant 1995:27). In contemporary social science, the operationalist view of science has, as a consequence, been rendered extremely problematic. It rests on a crude logic which has not only been widely discredited by developments in the hermeneutic tradition (see Section 8.3.2) but it has also been criticised by those who wish to hold on to the possibility of an empirical social science, whilst moving away from crude empiricism (Bhaskar 1979; Pawson 1989). This widespread critique of science has led to the emergence of numerous alternative explanations.

8.3.2 The Contestabilist Tradition

Although not generally seen as a member of this tradition, Max Weber is undoubtedly a formative influence on this style of thought. In an essay on objectivity, Weber (1904:105-6) suggested that 'the greatest advances in the sphere of the social sciences are substantively tied up with the shift in practical cultural problems and take the guise of a critique of concept-construction'. Concepts are, in turn, central to the production of social science data. Key to comprehending Weber's use of concepts is to consider the role of values in social science. Referring to the nature of 'objectivity' Weber (1904:84) suggested:

The choice of the object of investigation and the extent or depth to which this investigation attempts to penetrate into the infinite causal web, are determined by the evaluative ideas [*Wertideen*] which dominate the investigator and his age. In the *method* of investigation, the guiding “point of view” is of great importance for the *construction* of the conceptual scheme which will be used in the investigation.

By ‘evaluative ideas’, Weber is referring to values. In essence, Weber suggests that the ‘objectivity’ of any account is contingent on the context in which it takes place. Although, in a subsequent article, Weber (1948) is keen to defend a version of value-free social science, in this way concepts do become open to contestation. In terms of social research, it is thus unavoidable that values enter into the process and impact on the nature of concepts and thus not all concepts are of the same variety.

In the twentieth century, various thinkers took up this line of thought, including Gallie (1956), MacIntyre (1973) and Connolly (1974; 1983) who all stressed the ‘essentially contested’ nature of concepts. An essentially contested concept equates to more than a mere disagreement about the meaning of a particular term. Bryant (1995:35-6) states:

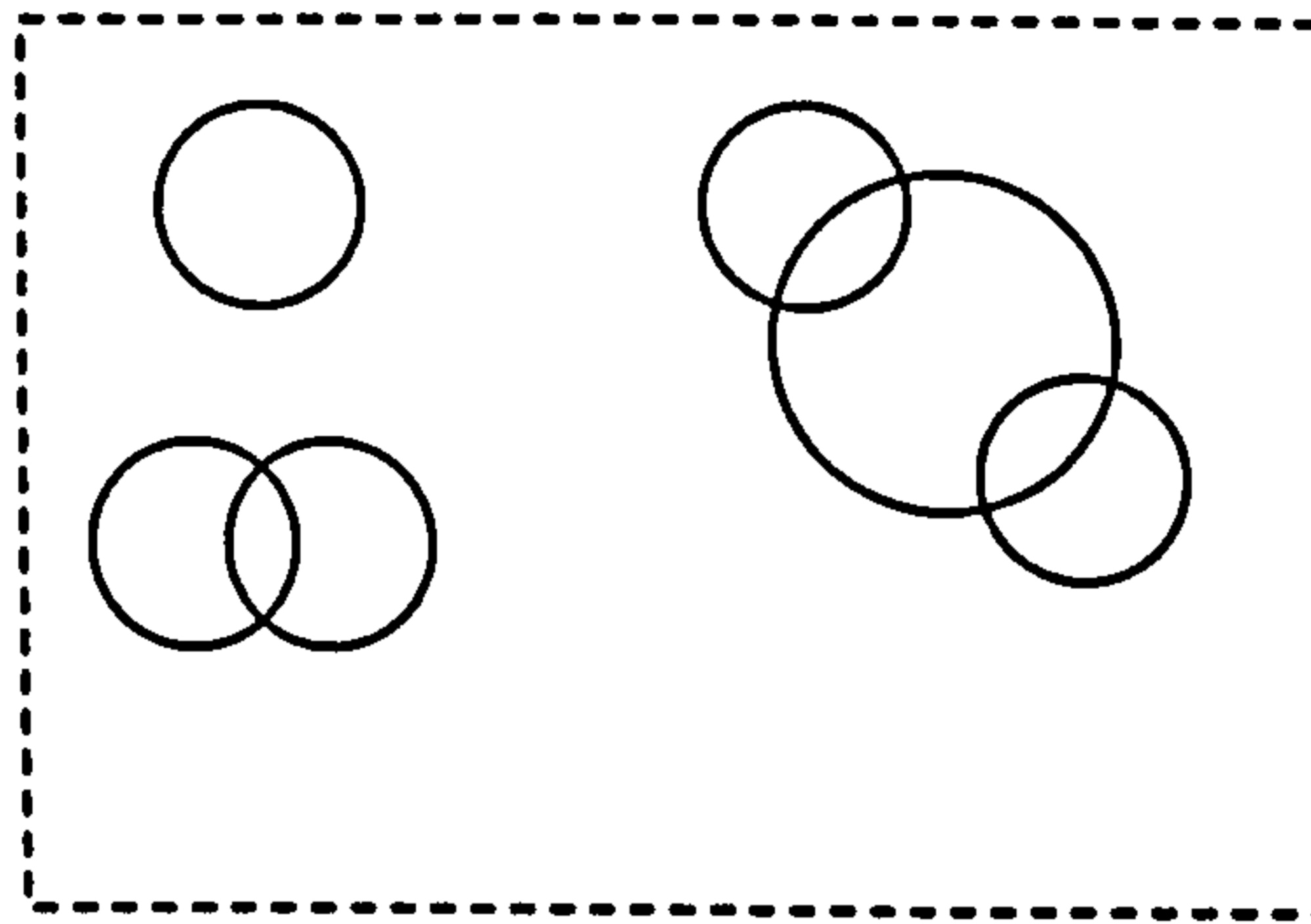
The literature on the essential contestability of social and political concepts is about what makes closure in the use of such concepts impossible to obtain – impossible because we are confronted with an essential, and not a contingent, characteristic of such concepts.

For Gallie (1956), essentially contested concepts relate to those concepts over which there is some agreement concerning general understanding but limited agreement over usage. Gallie (1956:169) states, therefore, that there are ‘endless disputes about their proper use’ and that there is ‘no one clearly definable and general use of [them]’. The concept of drug harm is indicative of this. At first glance, the various appreciations of evidence discussed thus far could be considered in this way.

Gallie (1956:171-2) maintains that for a concept to be essentially contested it must ‘approximate sufficiently’ five initial criteria which constitute the phenomenon. These state it must be: a) appraisive (refer to a valid achievement); b) internally complex; c) variously describable; d) open ended and; e) used aggressively and defensively. After some critical discussion of these criteria, Gallie expounded two further pre-requisites. Thus, an essentially contested concept: f) must be the

derivative of an original exemplar; and g) suggests ‘that continuous competition for acknowledgement as between the contestant users of the concept allows the achievement to be sustained or developed in optimum fashion’ (Gallie 1956:180). For Gallie, these criteria entail that the contestants, on some level, are referring to the same thing, alongside promoting the search for its ideal realisation. The contestabilist theory of meaning is depicted in Figure 8.2 below.

Figure 8.2: The Contestabilist Theory of Meaning



(adapted from Pawson 1989:229)

For contestabilists, the application of any particular term can be made in a number of ways. Pawson (1989:234) states that some of these may share ‘common ideas’ (represented by overlapping circles) but others may not (independent circles). Gallie’s examples of essentially contestable concepts include; democracy, religion, art, science and social justice. Taking the concept of democracy, Oppenheim (1981:183) states:

One may define “democracy” by a combination of criteria such as periodic elections, competitive parties, representation, freedom of expression, diffusion of political power, implementation of collective preferences; but the presence of all these traits is neither necessary nor sufficient to characterize a given political system as democratic.

Pawson (1989:234) develops this by illustrating how both ‘Western’ and ‘Soviet’ applications of democracy might share the notion that the role of elections is a significant aspect of the democratic process. The purpose of elections in each sphere is, however, divergent. In Western democracies, elections fulfil the function of electing a government from a competition between different political parties

within the electoral system. In Soviet democracies, elections served as the final aspect of the implementation of preferences within a collective, centralised state.

Pawson (1989:234) goes on to suggest that these properties may become redundant when it comes to 'conceptual contestation on democracy within a particular political system'. Using the example of 'representation', he suggests that one viewpoint may equate this with 'following the majority view'; however, another equally plausible notion could be the 'toleration of minority views'. These manifestations, for contestabilists, must be considered fallible and restricted to certain periods of time. In a time of war, for example, many or all of the basic tenets of democracy may be deemed inoperable with even the ultimate 'need for democracy being called into question'. There is then scope for meanings to change as the 'context of the discourse' shifts (Pawson 1989:234), hence the dashed oblong in Figure 8.2.

MacIntyre's (1973) study can be read as an exercise in clarifying some of Gallie's more normative assertions. He makes the distinction between natural and social scientific concepts. Social scientists must debate the nature of concepts because not everyone shares the same ontological and epistemological assumptions. For MacIntyre (1973), essential contestedness reflects the constitution of the society to which the concept refers. In this sense, it is plausible for natural scientists to speak of conceptual closure 'because they are not involved in a debate over what the natural world should be like' (Bryant 1995:36), and consequently the concepts that they use play no part in its constitution. According to MacIntyre (1973), this is a luxury that is not afforded to social scientists, although his reasons for this are unclear.

Similarly, Connolly's (1974; 1983) central concern is to understand and explain how concepts used in academic discourse impact on the social world. Connolly (1974:36) states that 'actions and practices are constituted in part by the concepts and beliefs the participants themselves have'. This is played out in the use of language. This statement was made in response to Broadbeck's (1968:396) claims, (from which Connolly had taken significant pique) that if language is to be descriptive it must be put to effective use by indicating 'what there is in the world, no

matter how we talk about it'. Broadbeck (1968) believed that it was possible for concepts to be open-textured even if the social world was not. Connolly (1974) highlights, however, how the world is open textured and illustrates how the use of concepts reflects this but also, in part, constitutes it. Thus, the social scientist is part of the social process.

It is, however, subsequent ideas developed in the second edition of the 'Terms of Political Discourse' (Connolly 1983) that provide the most intriguing, but somewhat paradoxical, development in Connolly's analysis. According to Bryant, (1995:39) Connolly in this edition 'enlists' the help of Foucault (1982) (although Bryant suggests that more accurately this should be Foucault and Derrida), via the methods of genealogy and deconstructionism to support his claim for contestability. This is in light of the open-ended nature of the social world:

Deconstructionists show how every social construction of the self, truth, reason, or morality, endowed by philosophy with a coherent unity and invested with a privileged epistemic status, is actually composed of an arbitrary constellation of elements held together by powers and metaphors which are not inherently rational. To deconstruct these established unities is to reveal their constructed character and to divest them of epistemic privilege. Genealogy is a mode designed to expose the motives, institutional pressures, and human anxieties which coalesce to give these unities the appearance of rationality or necessity (Connolly 1983:231).

For Foucault (1982), concepts play a part in social practices but, social practices are better thought of as 'discursive practices'. Discursive practices shape the way things appear. Phenomenon can only be understood in relation to the language (often specialist language), which it not only describes, but also constitutes. In Derrida's (1978) hands, this process of deconstruction is continuous. For Derrida, everything can be seen as a text of which there is no correct meaning. There are only interpretations of interpretations (Delanty 1997:99). Meaning, or at least 'objective' meaning, cannot be attached to concepts because this would assume some sort of foundation. Derrida (1976) refers to this as 'logocentrism'. This suggests that there is a 'truth' that can be uncovered by science or religion, a view he is highly critical of.

Concepts will always be contestable because of the context in which they are viewed, which will be different by all people. However, for Derrida (1976), concepts such as truth, science or reality do not exist objectively but are in fact products of language and are not fixed ideas. In this way they are relative because language involves interpretations and everything becomes contestable as the process of deconstruction is continuous.

Bryant (1995:41) highlights a fundamental contradiction in Connolly's engagement with Foucault (and Derrida). Through discursive practice, Foucault (1982) 'decentres the subject', the actor, as the self becomes a product of modernity 'with a circumscribed view of the possible'. In this sense, the actor becomes an artefact of power. This renders Connolly's view of contestable concepts problematic because this relies on the empowerment of the subject to contest them as his criticism of Broadbeck (1968) implies. Generally speaking, for contestabilists there is ultimately a duality between concepts and reality and both are essentially open and contestable. This view goes against the view of evidence presented earlier, whereby there was not complete contestation in the view of the concept, as illustrated in the discussion about its location in the decision-making process.

The contestability thesis is, in part, a useful way of conceptualising the concept of evidence in politicised areas, but it only tells half the story. It explains the dangers of taking the concept at face value as in the zero-sum assertions of the evidence and policy relationship, it does not, however, fully explain the complexity and nuances associated with the concept. The limitation of Gallie's (1956) thesis, in particular, is that just about any concept used in the social sciences from *anomie* to *zeitgeist* could, by his definition, be seen to be contested. Applied to the concept of evidence, the contestability thesis is a holistic explanation of its nature. This downplays elements of conceptual certitude advocated by the other theories of meaning illustrated here.

8.3.3 The Reconstructionist Tradition

So far, we have witnessed one tradition advocating conceptual closure in closed systems and another stressing the inherent openness of scientific, particularly social

scientific discourse, and hence the essential contestability of concepts. The work of Schutz (1962b; 1962c) provides an interesting counterbalance to both:

The world of nature as explored by the natural scientist does not “mean” anything to molecules, atoms and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist – social reality – has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the beings living, acting, and thinking within it. By a series of common-sense constructs they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their daily lives. It is these thought objects of theirs which determine their behaviour by motivating it. The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men, living in their daily-life within the social world (Schutz 1962c:59).

Schutz’s analysis starts from the premise that that there is often some discrepancy between the use of concepts in social science and those in ‘everyday’ language. This has been a primary concern of a number of thinkers broadly grouped under the umbrella of the interactionist tradition of social science. For Schutz (1962b; 1962c), then, all knowledge of the world involves ‘constructs’. However, according to Bryant (1995:28) he seeks to demark constructs used into two spheres. Those used in everyday life are termed ‘first-order constructs’ and are understood by all and are relevant to the ‘daily-life world’, whereas those formed by social scientists are ‘second-order constructs’.

Social scientists can grasp first order constructs and use them in their research in a bid to explain social phenomena. This is possible on the grounds that interaction is a central aspect of social life. Second-order constructs, however, are formed in relation to, and are a product of, the discipline in which they are produced. In this sense, they must adhere to a number of rules, or as Schutz (1962b) calls them, ‘postulates’. There are three of these: ‘logical consistency’ and the avoidance of non-sequiturs and contradictions; ‘subjective interpretation’ where scientific explanations must have recourse to the ‘subjective meaning of the actions of human beings from which reality originates’ and; ‘adequacy’ where an act attributed to an actor in the real world, perhaps via an ideal-type or model, must be understandable to that actor and his or her fellows (cited in Bryant 1995:28).

In essence, Schutz's view is that the constructs developed by science should play no part in the life-world. In advocating this, Schutz discredits one of Marx's more famous assertions that the point of philosophy is to change the world. It also questions the entire discipline of social policy, and more recently, evidence-based policy which is founded on the premise that scientific and social scientific research can play a role in the improvement of society. For Schutz, the goal of social science is not to make generalisations about social phenomenon but to typify it. The inadequacy of Schutz's position is manifest if we consider again Giddens' (1984) notion of the double hermeneutic (which was developed in response to this.)

What Schutz's theory does achieve, however, is a vocabulary of scientific explanation. In this sense, there is an affinity between thinkers like Schutz (1962b; 1962c) and Sartori (1984) and Oppenheim (1981) whose aim is to arrive at standard concepts which all social scientists will use (Bryant 1995:28). Bryant (1995:28) labels Oppenheim and Sartori as 'definitive reconstructionists'. To fully contextualise their view, it is necessary to detour into the philosophy of science to consider issues relating to incommensurability and translation of language and the work of Kuhn (1970b).

Bryant (1995:32) claims that the issue of conceptual variation has an intended and unintended place in Kuhnian philosophy of science. The unintended aspect relates to the variations of the manifestation of 'paradigms', the central concept in Kuhn's (1970b) theory of science. It is the intended aspects, however, that are of current concern. Referring to the notion of progress in science, Kuhn's main thesis is that science proceeds neither inductively or deductively but in the movement from 'normal' science to 'revolutionary' science. According to Delanty (1997:34), in the course of normal science scientists attempt to resolve problems or puzzles whose solutions are contained in the paradigm in which they operate, for paradigms also influence the questions as well as the answers'. Normal science does not look for anomalies but is content to remain with the problems the paradigm is capable of dealing with. The paradigm promotes a consensus that constitutes accepted wisdom, in any given field. Sometimes, however, an anomaly persists and, in such a scenario, 'a period of crisis' ensues in which 'extraordinary science' occurs, characterised by a plurality of views which marks the onset of a new paradigm (Delanty 1997:34).

Central to Kuhn's (1970a; 1970b) analysis, is the notion of the non-availability of a theory-neutral language, stemming from insights garnered from the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy. This, he claims, presents science with serious problems that other philosophers of science, in particular Popper (1959), tend to neglect:

The point-by-point comparison of two successive theories demands a language into which at least the empirical consequences of both can be translated without loss or change. That such a language lies ready to hand has been widely assumed since at least the seventeenth century when philosophers took the neutrality of pure sensation-reports for granted and sought a "universal character" which would display all languages... Ideally, the primitive vocabulary of such language would consist of pure sense-datum terms plus syntactical connectives. Philosophers have now abandoned any such hope of achieving any such ideal, but many continue to assume that theories can be compared by recourse to a basic vocabulary consisting entirely of words which are attached to nature in ways that are unproblematic and, to the extent necessary, independent of theory. This is the vocabulary in which Sir Karl's [Popper] basic statements are framed. Feyerabend and I have argued at length that no such language is available (Kuhn 1970a:266).

In his criticism of Popper, Kuhn aligns himself with Feyerabend (1975) who, in turn, has argued that science is inherently an irrational phenomenon. For Kuhn, a key issue neglected by Popper, amongst others, is the notion that in the conversion from one theory to another there is the possibility for words to 'change their meanings' (Kuhn 1974:473). Citing various concepts including 'force, mass and element', Kuhn is of the opinion that this renders successive theories incommensurable. He likens this to similar problems faced by those charged with the task of translating manuscripts from one language to another. Kuhn suggests that this is not impossible only that it can frequently lead to distortion. This does not, however, preclude comparison but renders the process hugely problematic.

For Kuhn (1970b), conceptual clarity is only possible within the confines of 'normal' science, but conceptual clarity also constitutes 'normal' science. This view of science relies on a notion of a closed conceptual system. A prime example of such an outlook can be seen with the establishment, in 1970, by Sartori (along with colleagues Riggs and Teune) of the Committee on Conceptual and Terminological

Analysis (COCTA) under the aegis of the International Political Science Association. These are referred to as the 'conceptual thought police' by Bryant (1995:43). Although this represents a sophisticated attempt at advocating conceptual closure, there is not the room for a detailed exposition of Sartori's analysis. Here, the focus is on a similar attempt advocated by Oppenheim.

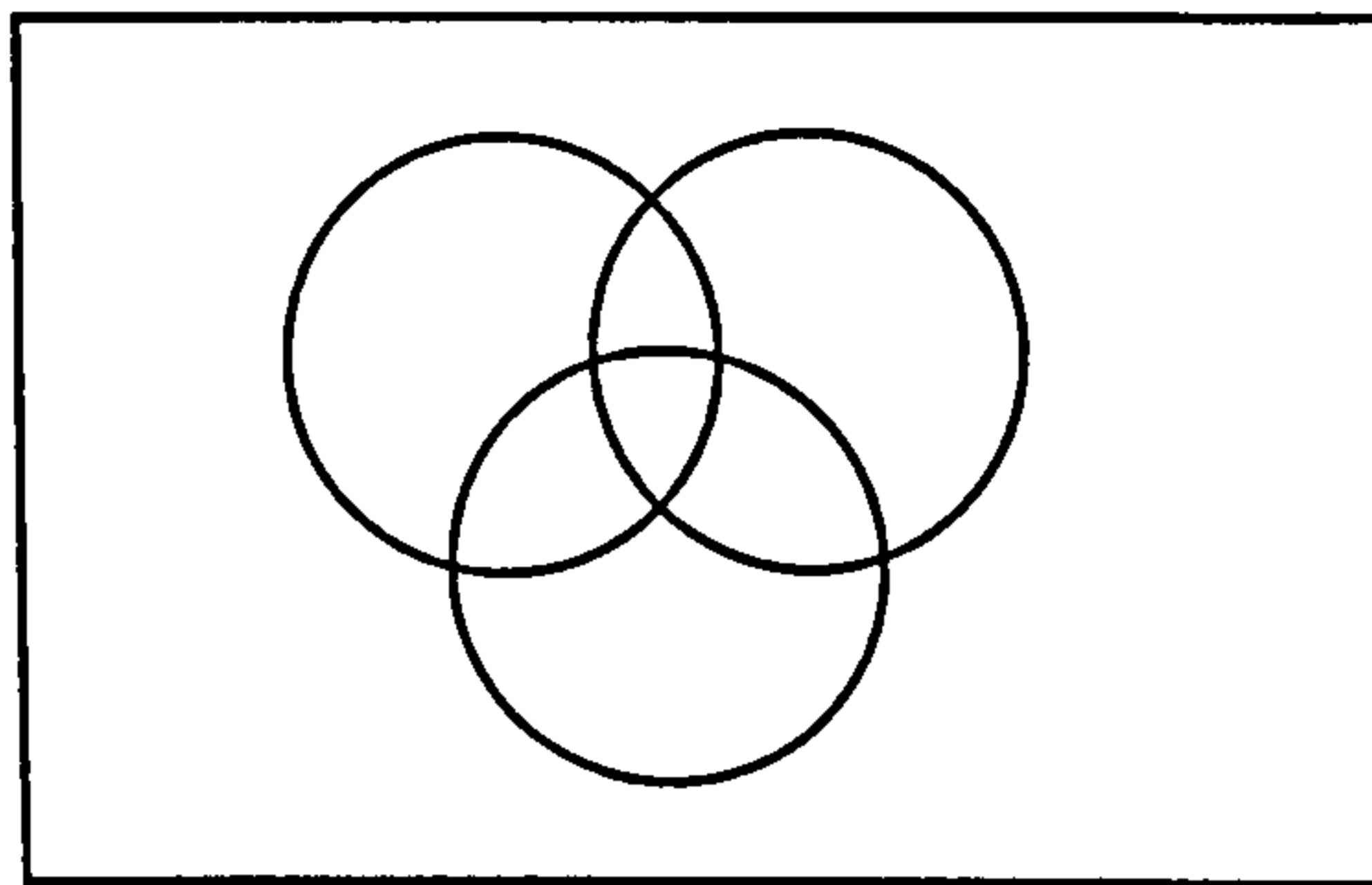
Oppenheim (1981) draws on the philosophy of Wittgenstein (1921) to show the 'explicative' nature of concepts. These are similar to Wittgenstein's notion of 'stipulative' definitions in that they defy empirical verification. They can, however, be judged by an alternative criteria. Oppenheim states (1981:179):

Like stipulative definitions, explications are not verifiable as either true or false; but unlike the former, they can be appraised as good or bad in terms of their suitability for scientific communication.

Rather than focusing on the abstract notion of 'truth' as a means of evaluating the nature of concepts, for reconstructionists emphasis is instead placed on their 'utility'. In effect, this bypasses the whole deconstructionist debate that pre-occupied contestabilists such as Connolly (1983) in his explanation of the nature of concepts.

Oppenheim (1981) does, however, concede that his reconstructions could yield different results from others undertaking the same quest, which is something of an oxymoron. He states that certain social scientific concepts can be open textured and are thus difficult to define or pigeon-hole based on the conditions of their application. He also cites the idea of 'democracy' which can be a 'combination of criteria such as periodic elections, competitive parties, representation, freedom of expression, diffusion of political power, implementation of collective preferences' (Oppenheim 1981:183). He also states, however, that even if all these traits are present, this is 'neither necessary nor sufficient to characterise a given political system as democratic'. For Bryant (1995:43), this begs the question why? Answering this, he muses that 'it could have to do with the use of a cluster of concepts, or it could be that the criteria are contestable', before concluding that Oppenheim does not give a reason. The Reconstructionist theory of meaning is depicted in figure 8.3.

Figure 8.3: The Reconstructionist Theory of Meaning



(adapted from Pawson 1989:229).

At its most general level, the aim is conceptual closure. Reconstructionists assume that ‘most fields are plagued with conceptual ambiguity and inconsistency’ (Pawson 1989:236). Their point is that the way out of this morass is to try and recover as useable a concept as possible from the existing list. In Figure 8.3, the overlapping circles represent the various concepts, the area where all circles overlap represents the shared theme. This can be reconstructed and made available for further use.

According to Bryant (1995:42), ultimately the goal is to ‘establish certain principles of reconstruction, common respect for which will keep conceptual variation within manageable bounds’. Bryant claims that, broadly speaking, they refer to ‘clarity, internal consistency, external systematicity, avoidance of redundancy and empirical sensitivity’ (Bryant 1995:42). Bryant is, however, highly critical of this categorisation in that it is untenable because Giddens’ notion of the double hermeneutic cannot be circumnavigated. According to this theory, social science concepts must have some connection with natural language concepts. In other words, social science concepts in their use ‘always have some capacity, actual or potential, mediated or not, to inform ordinary discourses and practices’ (Bryant 1995:54).

In terms of the concept of evidence, all existing manifestations are employed before seeing where there are any possible areas of overlap. We have seen from

previous discussions that in politicised areas, this is a particularly difficult issue because of the context in which debates take place. These are highly ideological. Taking the concept of 'drug harm', there is an overlap of appreciations of evidence for this because there is huge discrepancy about what it entails. In effect, reconstructing a concept from numerous alternatives does not always help to more accurately depict its nature as contestation is not always eradicated. In other words, there are broad areas of consistency, particularly about whether the current UK drug classification system and the cannabis reclassification were evidence-based or not. Within this, however, there are a plethora of different reasons. This makes the task of arriving at a reconstructed understanding of evidence all the more problematic.

Overall, social scientists, by their very activity or engagement in social research 'have a practical interest' in the object of their study, as well as a cognitive one. This practical interest 'may be tangible or it could be a potential interest' (Bryant 1995:54) but it is a practical interest nonetheless. This casts doubt over the view of science expounded by the reconstructionists, concerning the privileged role of social scientific concepts, based on a philosophy of science failing to engage with post-Kuhnian paradigms. These are the linguistic turn in philosophy, represented by Wittgenstein (1921) and, most significantly, Giddens' (1984) double hermeneutic. For Bryant, this issue bedevils all adherents of closed systems, although one final alternative aims to transcend this argument.

8.3.4 The Formalist Tradition

Pawson (1989:239) uses concepts typically associated with physics, such as the concept of 'speed' to introduce formalist reasoning. This, he claims, has meaning in 'everyday contexts' when something falls or a 'race is run'. In science, though, 'the concept takes its meaning as part of an extended or postulate system'. Speed, in its guise as 'average velocity', is comprehended as the ratio of distance over time. Pawson (1989:239), goes on to suggest that with the invention of differential calculus it becomes tied to other concepts such as 'instantaneous' speed which, in turn, is associated with concepts like acceleration. In essence, the meanings of terms become established by their place within a broader frame of reference.

Pawson (1989:230-1) suggests, then, that in mathematical models key concepts are defined in terms of 'abstract calculus', but they are interpreted by deciphering their location within 'specific physical systems'. Physical systems are reduced to a geometrical structure in which 'forces are depicted as lines or arrows applying at particular points in a spatial diagram. Simple mechanics are then used to describe the resultant forces applying in the system' (Pawson 1989:231). Pendular motion can be explained this way; that is, as a 'system of forces acting along the arc of a circle. The vector addition of forces is used to describe the variation in the inward acceleration of the bob' (Pawson 1989:231). This can then serve as a blueprint to describe other forms of motion.

In terms of concepts, however, the end result is that in a formalist theory of meaning:

when interpreting concepts like "temperature of a gas" or the "oscillation of a pendulum", all reference to ordinary language conceptualisation is dropped in favour of elucidations using such notions as "kinetic energy of gas molecules" and "point acceleration", which are in turn traceable to the elemental units of the same mathematical (mechanical) system (Pawson 1989:231-2).

Thus, although the substantive focus is on different phenomenon in diverse contexts, 'it is quite possible to traverse the network because the various components share (often quite distantly) this same formal substructure of discourse' (Pawson 1989:232). This is in contrast to the view of language advocated by the contestabilists.

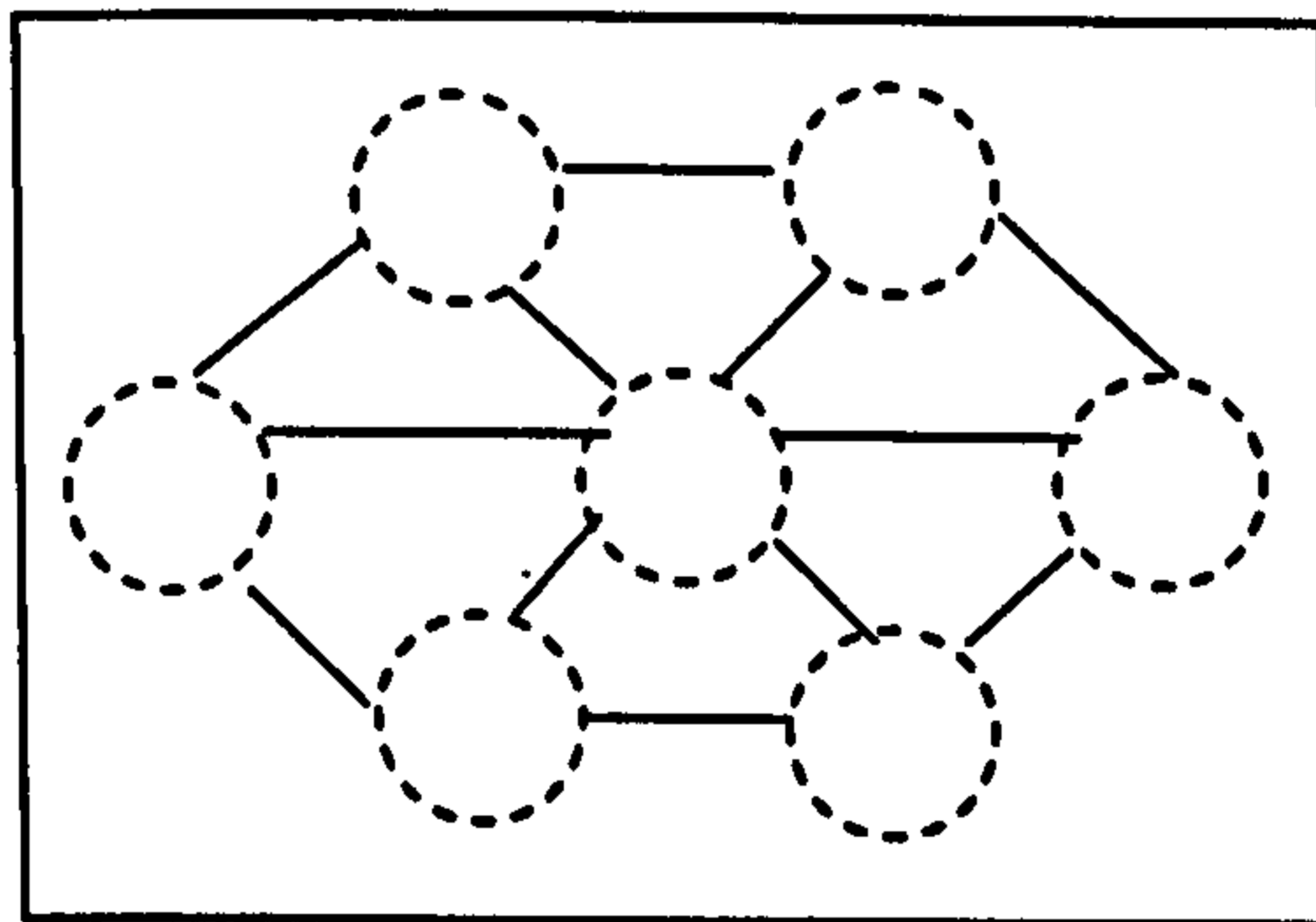
Pawson (1989) offers an alternative theory of meaning in the social sciences. He suggests that the critique of the contestabilists, that all concepts are open-ended and open to interpretation, is actually aimed at those who are in the reconstructionist tradition (in particular Oppenheim and Sartori). The debate between these two positions, for Pawson (1989:236), 'misrepresents the real choice':

Operationalism and reconstructionism only have any currency because of the misplaced belief that they provide the path to conceptual rigour and consensus which are assumed to be the building blocks of the scientific method. However...conceptual certitude, measurement, empirical validity and all the other hallmarks of the scientific method cannot be achieved by

attention to singular terms, be they relatively empirical or relatively conceptual. Scientists are confident in their usage of particular terms, not because they have some once-and-for-all anchorage, but because they are entrenched in a formal network of concepts. Faced with a plausible rival theory of meaning (namely formalism), we can judge many of the contestability arguments for what they are (namely an excuse for sloppy thinking).

In this sense, those advocating formalism, such as Pawson, would agree with the contestabilists that complete agreement on concepts is not desirable. For Pawson (1989:236), complete agreement on concepts, particularly in science, is dangerous because 'it would bring science to a close'. This is not a desirable state of affairs for the formalist tradition whose view of science rests on a notion that 'all the major concepts have enjoyed continual metamorphosis' (Pawson 1989:237). The formalist theory of meaning is depicted in Figure 8.4 below.

Figure 8.4: The Formalist Theory of Meaning



(adapted from Pawson 1989:229)

For Pawson (1989:230), this only depicts the origins of formal thinking. This is because the 'laws of physics' are 'not simply postulates, that is they cannot be taken for granted'. Like all regularities, they are the product of underlying generative mechanisms being triggered in specific contexts which produce a pattern, or outcome, of recognisable physical behaviour. This is very significant in this context of this thesis, as the discussion at the outset of the chapter indicated. Pawson (1989:237) cites Bachelard's (1968) discussion of the 'epistemological profile' of the concept of mass as being indicative of this process. This provides an index for assessing the underlying suppositions of scientific discussions on the grounds that

networks of theories are required to explain phenomena rather than one single all-encompassing effort.

With this in mind, the application of concepts in science can become, in the words of contestabilists, 'unpredictable'. Whereas this is taken as highlighting the problematic nature of concepts for the former group, for the formalists this is not a new discovery nor is it necessarily problematic. Pawson (1989:237) describes the debate thus:

When a contestabilist says something like "it is in the nature of argument that innovatory and unpredictable conceptual moves can occur", a formalist can only reply "I told you so". To be sure a formalist has a couple of particular innovatory moves in mind. One is the application of the same formal system in new substantive fields...The other possibility is the extension of the formal system by mathematical innovation...Such innovatory moves cannot be predicted in advance, and are in fact largely driven by the interests and competitive situation facing particular groups of scientists.

For Pawson (1989:237), formalism is a way of transcending the argument concerning conceptual openness or closure by giving 'genuine appraisal of the conceptual structure of sociological theory'. For Bryant (1995), this is problematic and he is reluctant to offer formalism this favourable vista of conceptual analysis. Drawing on Barnes' (1981; 1982) theory of finitism, closely linked to the work of Hesse (1974), Bryant (1995: 28) denies that the 'inherent properties and meanings' can be attached on to concepts, regardless of where they fit in a postulate system. The central contention of finitism is that the proper usage of a concept:

...is developed step by step, in processes involving successions of on-the-spot judgements. Every instance of use, or of proper use, of a concept must in the last analysis be accounted for separately, by reference to specific, local, contingent determinants. Finitism denies that inherent properties or meanings attach to concepts and determine their future correct applications; and consequently it denies that truth or falsity are inherent in properties of statement (Barnes 1982:30-1).

Barnes' critique can be seen not only as a critique of formalism but also as a critique of reconstructionism. Finitism casts doubt on the possibility of networks of concepts being possible, as each new application of a concept in a new area carries with it, its own subjective baggage. In other words, there is always a judgment

required that the similarities outweigh the differences when a concept is applied in a new situation. What is more, this judgement continues *ad infinitum* because the definitive features of a concept can never be established. In this sense, he advocates conceptual openness, not on the grounds of contest, but that closure is not possible in the last instance. Definitive agreement on the applicability of concepts is impossible both within and between different traditions.

Pawson's (1989:146) notion of 'knot concepts' provides a retort to this reasoning. Knot concepts are 'a point of access from one physical system to another' and which 'have roots traceable to some elemental social process which ultimately connects to all others' (Pawson 1989:237). They work within an entrenched network of scientific knowledge. In this sense, the knot concept is akin to Lakatos' (1970) notion of the 'hard core' of scientific theory. These occupy a central and sheltered place within scientific practice, upon which there is strong agreement. A knot concept cannot be considered in isolation, its significance rests with the way it relates to other concepts in a similar domain or 'within an entrenched network of scientific knowledge' (Pawson 1989:146). It is the fallacy of all the other traditions that this premise is unrecognised as concepts are treated in isolation. This understanding of the relationship between concepts is not far removed from Elias' (1978; 2000) understanding of the social world, inspired by his sociology of knowledge, which also relies on a network model of explanation, as we shall see.

8.4 Conceptual Flux and the Potential of Synthesis

In relation to key themes highlighted at the outset, the view of concepts expressed in the traditions above, are summarised in Table 8.1. It shows that there are three schools of thought who advocate the possibility and necessity of conceptual consistency. Yet the issue of contestation has proved stubborn. The question that remains is whether social science discourse is essentially open-ended in the manner in which the contestabilists state. Taking the example of 'evidence' in this thesis, there are reasonable grounds for assuming so. There is also a case to be made that evidence constitutes a knot concept. It applies as a statement of fact, in terms of what people do as well as what people think.

Table 8.1: Truth Table of Conceptual Nature by Theories of Meaning

Issue/Theory of Meaning	Operationalist	Contestabilist	Reconstructionist	Formalist
Openness	X	✓	X	✓
Closure	✓	X	✓	✓
Contestability	X	✓	X	✓
Certitude	✓	X	✓	✓

It is necessary to build a picture of how evidence is conceptualised in politicised policy areas in order to be able to produce a model thereon. In the summary of his discussion of conceptual analysis, Bryant (1995:53) concludes that the way forward is to 'move beyond' claiming conceptual contestability and certitude in the use of concepts in social research. He claims that an acceptance that concepts are both is the path to follow. The substance of this conclusion is difficult to refute and mirrors the view of evidence expressed in this study. Bryant's strategy for moving on, however, is that there should be dialogue between rival traditions. It is suggested here, by contrast, that this is likely to be a futile pursuit. This is because it requires dialogue between groups with opposing, deeply held views and as has been illustrated throughout, in debates where deeply held views are apparent, there is limited opportunity for the Deep Core of that view to alter through the process of dialogue. This is because, in Lakatosian (1970) terms, the Deep Core is protected and provides identity for groups who advocate such stances.

If dialogue is unlikely, then a good argument can be made that the contested and certain nature of concepts represent two polar positions which defy synthesis, if synthesis can only be achieved in this manner. Highlighting that concepts are both contested and certain sticks within the parameters of the debate. Ultimately, if this is the case, it becomes necessary to place one's foot firmly in a camp, depending on one's ontological and epistemological preference. This involves deciding whether one's view of science adheres to a view characterised by conceptual contestability or certitude. It is suggested here, however, that Bryant's analysis is rooted in a philosophy of science logic, based around long-standing dichotomies, where one is

forced to choose how one sees particular situations. Such instances include: structure and agency; society and individual; macro and micro (Kilminster 1998). To this list can be added; open or closed systems and contested or certain concepts.

It is maintained that synthesis is possible if a modified version of the formalist account is followed. The strength of this approach lies in its circumnavigation of thinking in terms of dichotomies, in this case how the open and closed system debate impacts on the contested or certain nature of concepts. The version of formalism advocated here takes as its starting point, one tenet of Pawson's (1989) version. This is that concepts are susceptible to metamorphosis. In effect, it is possible for concepts to show signs of both contest and certitude primarily because they are in a constant state of flux as are the contexts in which they apply. This has also been demonstrated throughout with recourse to the nature of evidence in UK drug classification policy decisions. Starting from this position, it is suggested that some form of synthesis is possible, which can provide a useful context for viewing the role of evidence in politicised policy areas. With this in mind, it is necessary to consider the issues of synthesis and flux. Following the lead of Kilminster (1998), this is to be achieved with recourse to the sociology of knowledge rather than the philosophy of science.

In his overview of the climate of sociology towards the end of the previous century, Kilminster (1998) suggests that since 1945, the discipline can be split into three recognisable phases. These are: the 'monopoly phase' circa 1945-65; the 'conflict phase' circa 1965-80 and; the 'concentration phase' circa 1980 to the present. For present purposes, it is the final epoch that is of concern. For Kilminster (1998:165-9), this era of sociology is characterised by a shift in power gradients between advocates of theoretical synthesis and those of theoretical pluralism, the former currently being in the ascendancy.

Advocates of theoretical pluralism tend to accept sociological knowledge as inherently fallible. For adherents of this school of thought, research findings produce, at best, tentative suggestions for the direction of practice or policy, in any given area. This is a consequence of the fact that sociology is characterised by a multitude of competing schools of thought and perspectives, on any given issue, that defy fusion.

Advocates of theoretical pluralism would, therefore, be more inclined towards the contested nature of concepts in science. This is problematic in terms of explaining the role and nature of evidence in politicised areas as it heads down the road of solipsism.

Theoretical synthesis, by contrast, underscores a commitment to conceptual clarity, vital for explanation building. By definition, the nature of theoretical synthesis involves traces of what went before. In social theory, synthesis has frequently been conflated with 'eclecticism'. Citing the work of Sanderson (1987), Kilminster (1998:115) comments that:

...eclecticism involves a mechanical juxtaposing of elements of research traditions, whereas theoretical synthesis combines elements in such a way that the recombination produces a novel fusion, structurally distinct from any of the combined components.

Bryant's (1995) idea of synthesis, mentioned earlier, is inherently problematic as this involves trying to establish dialogue between two diametrically opposed positions. This will struggle to combine components because dialogue is, at best, unlikely when deeply held beliefs are concerned. The charge of eclecticism, it is suggested, could be targeted at this reasoning. The synthesis advocated here, via a modified formalist account of the nature of concepts, recognises the simultaneous nature of contestability and certitude involved in concepts. It does not treat these things holistically, though, and moves around the either/or reasoning of Bryant's (1995) analysis. The theoretical basis for this way of thinking can be found in the sociology of Elias (1978):

Few controversies are as unattractive as that in which two groups of antagonists run around in circles, each defending its own speculative and untestable thesis by attacking another that is equally speculative and untestable on the grounds that no third alternative is possible (Elias 1978:73).

Elias (1978:112) was concerned that the means of speaking and thinking available to sociologists at his time of writing, for the most part, were unequal to the task asked of them. Drawing on Whorf's (1956) philosophy of language, he develops this point by referring to the nature of wind:

We say, “The wind is blowing”, as if the wind were actually a thing at rest which, at a given point in time, begins to move and blow. We speak as if the wind were separate from its blowing, as if a wind could exist which did not blow (Elias 1978:112).

It is, then, a bi-product of the lexicon of the social sciences which, for Elias, means that numerous technical terms, ‘which convey the impression of referring to isolated motionless objects’, on closer scrutiny, refer to people or phenomena who are constantly moving and constantly relating to other people or phenomena (Elias 1978:113). For Elias:

The very concept of society has this character of an isolated object, in a state of rest, and so has that of nature. The same goes for the concept of individual. Consequently, we always feel compelled to make quite senseless conceptual distinctions, like “the individual *and* society”, which makes it seem that “the individual” and “society” were two separate things, like tables and chairs, or pots and pans. One can find oneself caught up in long discussions of the nature of the relationship between these two apparently separate objects. Yet on another level of awareness one may know perfectly well that societies are composed of individuals, and that individuals can only possess specifically human characteristics such as their abilities to speak, think, and love, in and through their relationships with other people – “in society” (Elias 1978:113).

Elias’ sociological project can, on one level, be seen as a concerted attempt to move beyond the circular debates described above. In this spirit, a reading of the debate which views evidence as either a contested or reconstructed concept is rendered plausible only if the concepts under consideration are seen as static entities. Elias’ key notion is that concepts are dynamic because they avoid the trap of falling into the dichotomies associated with philosophical, metaphysical reasoning. Using a modified version of formalism, and taking conceptual flux as the starting point, provides an opportunity for synthesis and that evidence can be seen as a knot concept and understood and utilised in heavily politicised policy areas. The question that remains is how? To be able to answer this question, it is necessary to consider the general origins of the nature of evidence as a concept.

Writing from a health policy perspective, Culyer and Lomas (2006:359) state that ‘evidence is anything that claims to be an empirical fact’. Tracing the jurisprudential origins of the term, they claim that ‘evidence is to do with the facts of

a case', before continuing that 'the kind of evidence that is relevant in any situation consists of material facts that help establish the truth of someone's assertions or the cause of a consequence' (Culyer and Lomas 2006:360). They conclude, however, that this 'will not serve' their purposes. This is a result of the fact that jurisprudential evidence is retrospective, whereas health evidence is concerned with 'forecasting, prediction and prognosis'. Other conceptualisations of evidence also depart from the jurisprudential definition:

When non-scientists in the clinical, management or policy world are asked what they consider as evidence they also depart from the legal view. They typically come up with a complex mixture of both scientifically general and locally idiosyncratic types of information – "colloquial" evidence...They define evidence broadly...Clinical or programme effectiveness data compare with assertion (sometimes claimed to be expert assertion), cost-utility algorithms sit alongside political acceptability and public or patient attitude data are combined with vivid recollections of personal encounters. What Ministers call evidence is what they get from their constituents at Saturday surgery (Culyer and Lomas 2006:360).

Variations on this theme have been witnessed throughout this research and a sample of some similar, but varied, conceptualisations of the nature of evidence illustrates the point. A current member of the ACMD main committee and independent consultant pharmacist suggests in relation to the government's conceptualisation of evidence, that:

I don't think they necessarily understand what they mean by evidence and I think that comes from the House of Commons [Science and Technology Committee] review because...there is more than one type of evidence, there is the hard number crunching science and there is the social science as well and it's very easy to say "where is the evidence?" Actually sifting through the evidence is much more difficult and getting unbiased evidence...and until probably the last ten to fifteen years it was often quite difficult to get negative evidence about anything because generally it was not published so that there was always bias. I think things are now improving and that evidence is becoming much more balanced... (RATL2).

Similarly, in relation to the organisation of this particular policy subsystem:

I think that what you then see are discrete bodies of evidence being used to support disparate and political viewpoints. So I think that we don't really have much in the way of a mechanism to sift evidence and to differentiate between that which is reliable and that which may be quite persuasive but which is not fundamentally sound. So I think there is rather a volatile

mixture of evidence, with people citing different forms of evidence to support their own view and in opposition to other people's view (RATL10/CON4).

There is a further dimension to this as evidence is always open to interpretation:

... the Home Affairs Select Committee...took evidence literally from all sides of the debate on the drugs policy, for, against, neutral or whatever, so the idea that there is a thing called the "evidence-base" is, I suppose, naïve basically. There is a pile of stuff that comprises the evidence-base but what interpretations you put on that evidence-base and what nuances you read into research evidence and all the rest of it means that what you finish up with, particularly if you are an organisation like us, you have to look pretty widely and you have to come to some pretty general conclusions about things...You have to have some basis on which to make political and policy decisions otherwise it is people's complete personal prejudices and biases and all the rest of it so you have to have something that says "alright we are going to do this, on the basis of this body of evidence. We have conducted this research, here is 27 literature reviews; whatever it is, our best guess is this, this will work, this won't or whatever". Exact science it ain't (RATL8).

The fundamental issue is that by relying on this reasoning there is always the potential for zero-sum views of evidence to prevail, particularly in policy areas, because one person or group's understanding of the term is at odds with someone else's. On one level, however, there are traces of continuity between jurisprudential evidence and evidence in science and policy. If the notion of flux is taken as the starting point for analysis as advocated here, then jurisprudential evidence need not always be retrospective. There is always the possibility for 'new' evidence to come to light in criminal trials which can lead to the re-opening of criminal investigations, for example. As has been suggested, and will be explored again in the following chapter, this is the same premise on how evidence should be viewed for policy.

Formalist reasoning highlights further areas of crossover. Central to this view is not how isolated concepts are conceived but how they relate to other phenomena. To recap, Pawson (1989:237) suggests that this entails the 'genuine appraisal of the conceptual structure of sociological theory'. In effect, social theories should not strive to be all encompassing, but should operate at a middle-level of abstraction, and take their meanings from other theories operating in other spheres, as should the concepts that are central to them. Taking the concept of evidence, then, any argument made with recourse to this, on some level, shows signs that it has been thought about in relation to other phenomenon. Davies, et al. (2000:2) suggest that the unifying

theme in all the definitions is that evidence, ‘can be independently observed and verified, and that there is broad consensus as to its contents (if not its interpretation)’. In effect, it is the result of ‘systematic investigation towards increasing the sum of knowledge’ (Davies, et al. 2002:2).

This definition draws on that from the *Chambers Dictionary*, which provides the following list as being indicative of the concept of evidence: ‘a means of proving an unknown or disputed fact; support for a belief; an indication; information in a law case; testimony; witness or witnesses collectively’ (cited in Davies, et al. 2000:3). In short, evidence is the phenomenon used to buttress an argument; the physical manifestation this takes depends on the topic in question. We can, however, isolate its applicability if we consider other terms such as proof, confirmation or substantiation.

A modified formalist account of conceptual explanation is, therefore, advocated here. There are, then, traces of both certitude and contestability in the concept of evidence. It is suggested here, however, that these should not be seen as the defining tenets of what the concept is and what it constitutes. Instead, the reason why both traces are found in the concept of evidence is that it is in a constant state of flux. Taking this as the starting point and recognising that contestability and certitude are apparent can be a good platform for developing a model to explain the role of evidence in politicised areas.

8.5 Summary

Chapter Six addressed the issue of how the axiomatic view of evidence is problematic. On the other hand, as Chapters Seven illustrated, there is not evidential anomie in areas characterised by *ad hoc* policy formulation and some semblance of order is apparent. To build up a useful model of evidence utilisation in politicised policy areas, an understanding of the concept of evidence is required that can account for both certitude and contestability. This concerns the fact that because politicised policy areas are ‘live’, the ‘evidence’ part of evidence-based policy, like its policy counterpart, must also be seen as a process. In this way, its role is not restricted to

policy outcomes, but can be more wide-ranging. In essence, it must be seen as dynamic.

Evidence, in this sense, is still a knot concept but one that is dynamic and in flux. The pace of change can be slow or quick, which although difficult, makes analysis possible. This chapter sets up the discussion for the following one by arming us with a suitable conceptualisation of evidence in politicised policy areas that can then be applied to a new model of evidence utilisation. With this conceptualisation of evidence in hand, the explanatory quest of the nature and role of evidence in politicised areas can be continued, via a discussion of the established models of research utilisation. By way of a sneak preview, however, it will suffice to say that this understanding of evidence, with its origins in Eliasian sociology, provides the bedrock for a new model, particularly useful in politicised areas; the processual model.

9. THE MODELLING OF EVIDENCE

9.1 Introduction

It was stated in the previous chapter how a modified version of the formalist theory of concept formation offered the most potential in deciphering the 'nature' of evidence in politicised policy areas. This chapter subsequently takes this notion of evidence and applies it to the other main area of concern; the 'role' of evidence. This completes the explanatory goals of the thesis and does so via a discussion of models of research utilisation. Harré and Secord (1972:72) provide justification for this approach stating that 'the key to understanding of the epistemological and logic of creative science is to be found in the logic of the model'.

This chapter takes the following format. At the outset, brief comments relating to the nature of modelling evidence are highlighted. Drawing primarily, but not solely, on the work of Weiss (1977; 1986), this is followed by a detailed account of what are termed the 'established models' of research utilisation, widely cited in the literature. Although Davies, et al. (2000:3) suggest that where evidence for policy and practice is concerned, it equates to "research", broadly defined', it is suggested here, that this is problematic. This is the result of when the established models of research utilisation are applied as models of evidence-based policy, they do not contemplate the turbulent nature of the concept of evidence, and how it can equate to more than research. In effect, the concept is frequently and often misleadingly taken at face value. For this reason, and others, the established models are found wanting in the context of this discussion. Consequently, two newer models are introduced which offer a potential way out of this morass.

Of the newer additions to the literature, it is suggested that the evolutionary model, introduced by Stevens (2007a), is an important addition to the literature. This is a result of its explicit commitment to highlighting what Bulmer (1986:11) terms the 'content of negotiations' in the evidence and policy relationship. These relate to the actual mechanisms of selection of evidence in policy decision-making. Ultimately, it is concluded, however, that in terms of its explanatory logic, the evolutionary model is not far enough removed from the linear variety; the most

problematic of all models. With this in mind, a newer processual model is developed which, in the spirit of synthesis, combines the strengths, and avoids the pitfalls, of all the other models in its explanatory quest.

9.2 Modelling the Research and Policy Relationship: The Established Models

It is worth pointing out that although phrased in terms of models of research utilisation, the connection between research/evidence and policy has a long history, as illustrated in Chapter One. The connection has also been conceived in other ways by other thinkers. For example Nutley, et al. (2003), drawing on the work of Weiss (1998), demarcate ‘types’ of research utilisation from ‘models’ of research utilisation. There are four main types: a) Instrumental Use, where research feeds directly into decision-making for policy and practice; b) Conceptual Use, where even if practitioners are blocked from using findings, research can change their understanding of a situation, provide new ways of thinking and offer new evaluative insights into particular courses of action. In this way conceptual use can become instrumental; c) Mobilisation of Support, where research becomes an instrument of persuasion or the act of research is a tool to legitimate particular courses of action or inaction and; d) Wider Influence, where research can have an influence beyond the institutions studied.

There is significant overlap between the ‘types’ and ‘models’ of research utilisation, as will become apparent. The latter are favoured here on account of their prevalence in the wider literature. Stevens (2007a), by drawing on the work of Weiss (1986) amongst others, has produced a four-tier model of the evidence-based policy-making process. He suggests that the evidence and policy relationship can be divided into the following models; the ‘linear model’, the ‘enlightenment model’, the ‘political/tactical’ model and finally, the ‘evolutionary model’, for which he claims superiority. Although not mentioned by Stevens (2007a), Weiss (1986) also refers to an ‘interactive model’ and the model of ‘research as part of the intellectual enterprise of society’ as plausible accounts of the research and policy connection. All are expounded below, with the exception of the evolutionary model, which is reserved for subsequent discussion. Bryant (1995), in his review of this area of the literature, covers much the same ground, but uses a slightly different lexicon. Of prime

significance, for current purposes, is his mention of the ‘dialogical model’, which can be added to Steven’s (2007a) list. With the exception of Stevens’ (2007a) evolutionary model, these constitute the established models of research utilisation. In general, and more specifically in the context of highly politicised policy areas, they all have their relative strengths and weaknesses.

In what follows, the models are judged as to their effectiveness based on criteria that have emerged in the discussion thus far. The criteria for what counts as a problematic, and conversely, an effective model, relate to various issues of the research and policy relationship discussed in previous chapters, and above. For the sake of clarity, they are produced in table form alongside a brief description of the key tenets of each, as Table 9.1 illustrates. Allied to this, some consideration is given to the nature of evidence associated with each model, if and when appropriate:

Table 9.1: Key Issues for Models of Research Utilisation in Heavily Politicised Policy Areas

Issue	Description
Outcome	The role of evidence is equated to policy outcomes (analysis of policy), either by shaping these or in the form of policy evaluation.
Process	The role of evidence is equated to the process of policy decision-making (analysis for policy) in policy formulation.
Static View of Policy-Making	A view of the policy process that assumes a direct link between evidence and policy; this is a short-term perspective on the relationship between evidence and policy, where policy-making is straightforward and sequential.
Dynamic View of Policy-Making	A view of the policy process that assumes an indirect link between evidence and policy; this is often accompanied by a long-term view of the relationship between evidence and policy, where policy-making is ad hoc and complex.
Evidence Central to Policy	Only considers the role of evidence (and research) in the policy-making process and factors out other issues such as the role of politics and the media.
Mechanisms of Evidence Selection	Gives a full account of how evidence is utilised in policy-making and how it is selected.

9.2.1 *The Linear Model*

Also referred to as the 'rational model', as the name suggests, the linear model portrays a direct link between evidence production and policy decision-making. This understanding can be read as an amalgamation of what Weiss (1986) terms the 'knowledge-driven model' and the 'problem-solving model' of research utilisation. For Weiss, the knowledge-driven model is derived from the natural and/or physical sciences and assumes a linear application of research findings to policy-making. This occurs along the lines of the following sequence: basic research → applied research → development → application (Weiss 1986:31-2). In this formulation, basic research highlights an opportunity, applied research is then conducted to define and test these findings, appropriate technologies are then formulated, and finally, application occurs. This model is premised on the assumption that because knowledge exists, it will subsequently come to be used in policy-making. Booth (1998:238) refers to this as a 'purist' model stating that:

It is firmly grounded in a rational view of the policy-making process. In Britain, it is most closely associated with the Fabian Tradition in social administration...[and] draws parallels with industrial research and development techniques and the process of technological innovation.

Also premised on a linear sequence of the research-policy relationship, the problem-solving model suggests that research is used to fill gaps in knowledge where problems have arisen. This research can be of any variety. In this model, there are two main ways in which research enters the domain of the policy maker. First, the research antedates the policy problem and can then be drawn on if required, a notion not dissimilar from Kingdon's (1984) 'primeval soup' (see Section 3.4.1). In this respect, policy-makers, or their associates, may go and search for, happen upon, or be familiar with, prior existing research from a variety of different sources. Secondly, there is also the notion that research may be specially commissioned to fill the knowledge gap. This is based on the assumption that 'decision-makers have a clear idea of their goals and a map of acceptable alternatives and that they have identified some specific informational needs to clarify their choice' (Weiss 1986:32). In this scenario, social scientists are purposively contacted to fill the knowledge gap. This process takes the following sequence: definition of pending decision → identification

of missing knowledge → acquisition of social science research → interpretation of the research for the decision context → policy choice (Weiss 1986:32). In this model, it is perceived that research directly influences policy choices and decisions by providing evidence, information and knowledge which help to solve and illuminate a particular policy problem.

In sum, Young, et al. (2002:216) distinguish between the two manifestations of the linear model by suggesting that in the knowledge-driven variety research ‘leads’ policy with the role for the expert ‘on top’. By contrast, in the problem-solving model, research follows policy and the expert is ‘on tap’. The most common manifestation of this model lies in evidence-based medicine. The Cochrane Collaboration is premised on this as is the social science equivalent; the Campbell Collaboration, with its experimental approach to social inquiry. The leitmotif for this is the aim of finding out ‘what works’ in any given policy area.

For Stevens (2007a), underpinning this model is an ‘instrumentally rational’ approach for choosing the means to arrive at pre-determined ends. This point was also recognised by Richardson and Jordan (1979:19) who suggest that its potential influence stems from the way it clearly points to a clear direction in which research can shape policy:

The concept of rationality has actively influenced a whole range of attempts, particularly in the USA and UK, to improve the quality of the policy-making system. Policy-makers have become aware of the weaknesses of the policy machinery and have therefore looked for ways of improving the processes and institutions of policy-making.

As a result, the linear model has enjoyed significant longevity:

The power and survival ability of the “rational system” model is surprising given that its assumptions have been undermined by empirical studies of the policy process, and that its predictive record is uneven. The main explanation for its continued existence must lie in its status as a normative model and as a “dignified” myth which is often shared by the policy-makers themselves. Acceptance of the rational model helps the researcher towards a comfortable life; it enables him or her to appear to engage in direct debate with policy-makers on the basis that information provided by researchers will be an aid to better policy-making (Gordon, et al. 1993:8).

According to Linblom (1980:11), the linear model represents the ‘typical’ understanding of the relationship between research and policy. This stems from the fact that there is a general view that to make policies more effective, it is necessary to bring ‘more information, thought and analysis into the policy-making process’. This is, however, a static view of the evidence and policy relationship. It is questionable, however, as to how well, or poorly, this model describes data produced in the natural and physical sciences, let alone the social sciences:

Social science knowledge is not apt to be so compelling or authoritative as to drive inevitably towards implementation. Social science knowledge does not readily lend itself to conversion into replicable technologies, either material or social. Perhaps most important, unless a social condition has been consensually defined as a pressing social problem, and unless the condition has become fully politicized and debated, and the parameters of potential action agreed upon, there is little likelihood that policy-making bodies will be receptive to the results of social science research (Weiss 1986:32).

It is important to remember that the evidence involved in UK drug classification, as illustrated in Chapters Six and Seven, is both scientific and social scientific or, as Culyer and Lomas (2006) suggest, ‘context-free scientific’, ‘context-sensitive scientific’ and ‘colloquial’. As this is the case, the linear conceptualisations are problematic.

As has been stated throughout the thesis, there is, in politicised areas, conflict between groups with competing interests, which impacts on the nature of evidence production. As a result, the insights gained from this research suggest that evidence utilisation involves issues of power, a point which is neglected in the linear account. Bulmer (1986:9) takes up this theme, contending that ‘one of the principle characteristics of the policy-making process in industrial countries is that it is a process of adjustment between competing pressures exercised through the political process’. In essence, policy-making involves a range of different interests, illustrated by pluralist models of the policy process. Bulmer (1986:10) continues that a feature of both British and American social policy ‘has been the production of competing analyses of the same policy domain’ because social research is not the sole preserve of, or controlled by the State and is, therefore, often filtered into different parts of the system.

This notion of diverse interests, then, is in direct contrast to the one-size-fits-all approach of the linear model. Research undertaken by Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980b) on the nature of policy-making supports this. In their research, concerning the minutiae of the policy-making process in the mental-health field at the Federal, State and local level, they found that most policy-makers viewed their job somewhat mechanically. In addition, they suggest that they actually had little autonomy in which to individually shape policy formulation. In short, there was little in what the policy-makers perceived their job to be that actually constituted 'making policy':

[Policy-makers] see little opportunity for rational calculation and little need for it. They seldom engage in explicit formulation of problems, seldom undertake directed searches for information, seldom canvass the range of alternatives available, or calculate the relative merits of each alternative. They rely on what they already know to guide their pattern of workaday activities (Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980b:266).

Alongside the criticism that the policy-making process is rarely characterised by rational decisions made on the basis of the best information (Young, et al. 2002:18), there is no account in this model of other factors explaining policy formulation such as political or media imperatives. There is, however, an assumption within this model that both researchers and policy-makers share a common outlook on the relationship between research and policy. The main contribution of social science research is to help identify and select appropriate means to reach the goal. As illustrated, in the previous chapter, there are very prominent schools of thought that show that social research is inevitably contested (Connolly 1974; Gallie 1956; MacIntyre 1973), or part-contested (Pawson 1989), and that there are inevitable discrepancies between the evidence producers and the requirements of the policy-makers (Caplan 1979).

Consequently, Weiss (1986:34) suggests that history shows that for a study to have a direct bearing on policy, it takes an 'extraordinary concatenation of circumstances'. Not least, among these is that social research can be produced in sufficient time to be applicable (Mulgan 2005). The popular adage in political circles that 'a week is a long time in politics' does not ring true for social scientists. Social research, in most cases, is arduous and is often typified by lengthy, verbose reports,

which are frequently of little use for policy-makers who require clarity and concision with the key recommendations clearly obtainable. This is because politicians spend very little time in their working day actually reading (Weiss 1987) and for Weiss (1986:34), a great deal 'depends on the efficiency of the communications links' from research community (often via policy-makers staff) to policy-makers. In effect, there is a significant element of luck involved in having relevant social research on hand for use in policy-making.

9.2.2 The Enlightenment Model

For its supporters (Janowitz 1972; Pawson 2006; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993b; Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980b; Young, et al. 2002), the enlightenment model represents a more 'sophisticated' explanation of the evidence and policy relationship. Given one of its first expressions in the work of Weiss (1977), it refers to the arbitrary way research can enter the policy arena. Duke (2003:17) claims that the relationship between research and policy, in this model, is characterised by the process of 'indirect diffusion'. Thus, it offers a more dynamic perspective of the research and policy relationship. In this scenario, social science research 'percolates' into the 'informed public's consciousness' and comes to shape the way they see the world (Duke 2003:17). According to Weiss (1986:38):

Social science research diffuses circuitously through manifold channels – professional journals, the mass media, conversations with colleagues – and over time the variables it deals with and the generalizations it offers provide decision-makers with ways of making sense out of a complex world.

In effect, the enlightenment model supplies conceptual tools to policy-makers. It is important to stress that within this model, single pieces, or even an entire body of research rarely, if ever, have a direct impact on policy. Instead, the process of cumulating research and information over time, serves to sensitise policy-makers to new issues. In this way research influences the way policies are defined and framed and can thus help to reshape the policy agenda. Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980b), suggest that this is the model that most closely typifies the relationship between research and policy formulation. It also highlights how research can be

conceived as part of the process of policy-making, as opposed to just helping to shape the outcomes, as in the linear approach.

For Weiss (1986:38), enlightenment is a two-way process. In one respect 'research sensitizes decision-makers to new issues and helps turn what were non-problems into policy problems'. In this regard, the vast work carried out in the 1960s by Richard Titmuss, amongst others, helped to establish the subject of poverty and inequality firmly on the policy agenda, whilst simultaneously documenting the failures of the welfare state (Banting 1986:42). On the other hand, research can turn what were once pressing problems into issues of less consequence. A good example can be seen in the changing status of cannabis, in the twentieth century, especially in the United States. Demonised in the 1950s and 1960s as being an 'assassin of youth', until successive research reports demonstrated that, in effect, cannabis use was actually relatively benign and rational. This was particularly the case when considered from the perspective of the drug-takers themselves (Becker 1963). By the 1970s, then, there were widespread calls for, and the eventual decriminalisation of, cannabis within eleven States in the USA. This was subsequently reversed in the 1980s, but it does serve to highlight how research evidence has the potential to 'drastically revise the way the policy-makers can define issues' (Weiss 1986:38). In addition, it also shows how research can 'change the parameters within which policy solutions are sought' (Weiss 1986:38). Unlike the linear model, there is no assumption that the fruits of the research enterprise must resonate with the values and goals of the policy decision-maker.

Although the enlightenment model offers a most promising opportunity for research evidence to influence the policy agenda, critics of this model highlight various problems. Firstly, there is no filtration process by which inadequate or invalid research is siphoned out. This means that the notion of the 'indirect diffusion' of evidence that typifies the enlightenment model, can lead to 'distortion' and 'oversimplification'. The end result can be that policies become 'endarkened' by research (Weiss 1986:39). Secondly, it can take a long time for research to reach its intended audience, in the policy domain, which can serve to detract from its utility and relevance. In this sense, research could be neglected and this can be a wasteful process.

Thirdly, as Duke (2003:18) points out, 'the more research that is conducted on a particular subject or issue, the more complex the implications become for policy decisions'. This is partly to do with the nature of social research. Findings frequently relate to bodies of theory that can often be complex and contradictory. Furthermore, findings rarely converge on a point that could be used as a barometer to guide policy. The different appreciations of the UK drug classification debate, discussed throughout the thesis, are indicative of this. In effect, these issues relate to the absence of the mechanisms of selection of evidence. Fourthly, there is also little consideration of the fact that evidence is often not the only factor in policy formulation. For Stevens (2007a), a related and final shortcoming of this model revolves around the notion that there is an assumption that all kinds of research, regardless of theoretical standpoint and methodological preference, have equal chance of influencing the policy agenda. As indicated in Chapter Seven, the ability to shape, or affect the agenda is not an equal playing field and in actual fact, it involves a myriad of power relations (Lukes 1974). In effect, it helps to be consistent with those charged with making policy. Overall, it can be said that the enlightenment model is characterised by its explanatory under-ambition.

9.2.3 The Political/Tactical Model

The political/tactical model is characterised by the selective use of evidence to satisfy the 'short-term' interests of policy-makers. Weiss (1986) also distinguishes the two aspects of this model. In the 'political model', various interests and ideologies coalesce to pre-determine the position of policy-makers on particular issues or problems. It is claimed that new research is unlikely to have a bearing on these positions and, instead, has a legitimising or justificatory function for a particular policy decision. Duke (2003:17) illustrates how often research that confirms existing arguments, is used by advocates as 'ammunition', to attempt to neutralise opponents and persuade those who doubt the wisdom behind certain decisions. This is achieved even if the research is 'ripped out of context' (Weiss 1986:36). This model serves to illustrate: a) the problematic nature of social scientific evidence and; b) that using research to support a pre-determined position or

discourse still qualifies as a type of research utilisation (probably much to the chagrin of many academics).

In the 'tactical model', the findings of research are less significant than the actual process of research taking place. Duke (2003:17) refers to this as playing the 'research card'. In this scenario, policy-makers are able to procrastinate on policy formulation by stating that they are awaiting the results of ongoing research activity. The following excerpt of oral evidence from the Science and Technology Committee (2006), between the Chairman, Phil Willis MP, and Vernon Coaker MP, illustrates this:

Q1205 Chairman: In January [2006] the then Home Secretary Charles Clarke announced that a consultation paper on the ABC classification system would be published within a few weeks. There was obviously a concern about it at that time. Why has it not happened?

Mr Coaker: Two things. First of all, the Home Secretary [John Reid] - in post for four weeks - has not yet taken a decision on how to proceed with the review of the classification system. With respect to the consultation document which is in draft form in the department, the view is that we will need to wait until such time as we decide how to proceed with respect to the review of the classification system and also, similarly, wait for the report of this Committee, which we want to take into account in determining the best way forward (Science and Technology Committee 2006:105).

In the tactical model, research findings are also used strategically. Social researchers and the research they produce can 'deflect criticism' away from the government in relation to policies that have proved unsuccessful and unpopular (Weiss 1986:37). Tizard (1990) claims that, as a result, many research reports remain unread and are left collecting dust on the shelves of government departments. Young, et al. (2002) refer to this process as the 'politicisation' of evidence.

The political/tactical model, in contrast to the linear and enlightenment versions, does start to descend the ladder of abstraction to consider the ways in which evidence is (or is not) selected in policy decision-making. There is also some recognition that political imperatives, along with evidence, are central to the policy-making process. The logic underpinning this position is, ultimately, rational and in the political version, it is linear. It also offers a static, short-term view of the policy-making process. It factors out the potentially unintentional or serendipitous ways

evidence can come to be used in policy-making and suggests that if evidence survives political manipulation, it will be used in decision-making. In short, it offers a restrictively narrow vista of the research and policy relationship. There is little consideration of issues pertaining to the often contested nature of research. Of all the established models, Stevens (2007a) is most supportive of the political/tactical variety and sees an affinity between this and his evolutionary version, as will become clear. The main shortcomings of this approach, and one that the evolutionary model seeks to rectify, is the way it does not descend the ladder of abstraction far enough and does not provide a sufficiently detailed account of how evidence is used politically or tactically.

9.2.4 The Interactive Model

On one level, the interactive model is consistent with pluralist models of policy analysis. Here, information is sought not only from social scientists, but from a range of actors in the policy process. These include politicians, civil servants, journalists, interest groups, practitioners, planners, friends, aides and clients. As a result, research is not the only factor influencing the decision-making process. There is also no linear relationship from research to policy decision. Instead, the process, according to Weiss (1986:35), consists of a 'disorderly set of inter-connections and back-and-forthness that defies neat diagrams'. Social scientists are just one of a multitude of actors who can have an impact on policy. This is highly unlikely to happen as a result of some of their own research impacting directly on policy, but it is more likely that they can engage in 'mutual consultations' that eventually move towards a policy response to a potential problem. The interactive model offers, then, a dynamic and long-term understanding of the evidence and policy relationship. Weiss (1986:35-6) draws on Donnison's (1972:527) experience of the legislative process, to illustrate how policy-makers cannot always rely on the findings of research, when considering certain policy responses:

Research workers could not present authoritative findings for others to apply; neither could others commission them to find the 'correct' solution to policy problems: they were not that kind of problem. Those in the four fields from which experience had to be brought to bear [politics, technology, practice and research] contributed on equal terms. Each was an expert in a

few things, ignorant about most things, offered what he could, and generally learnt more than he could teach.

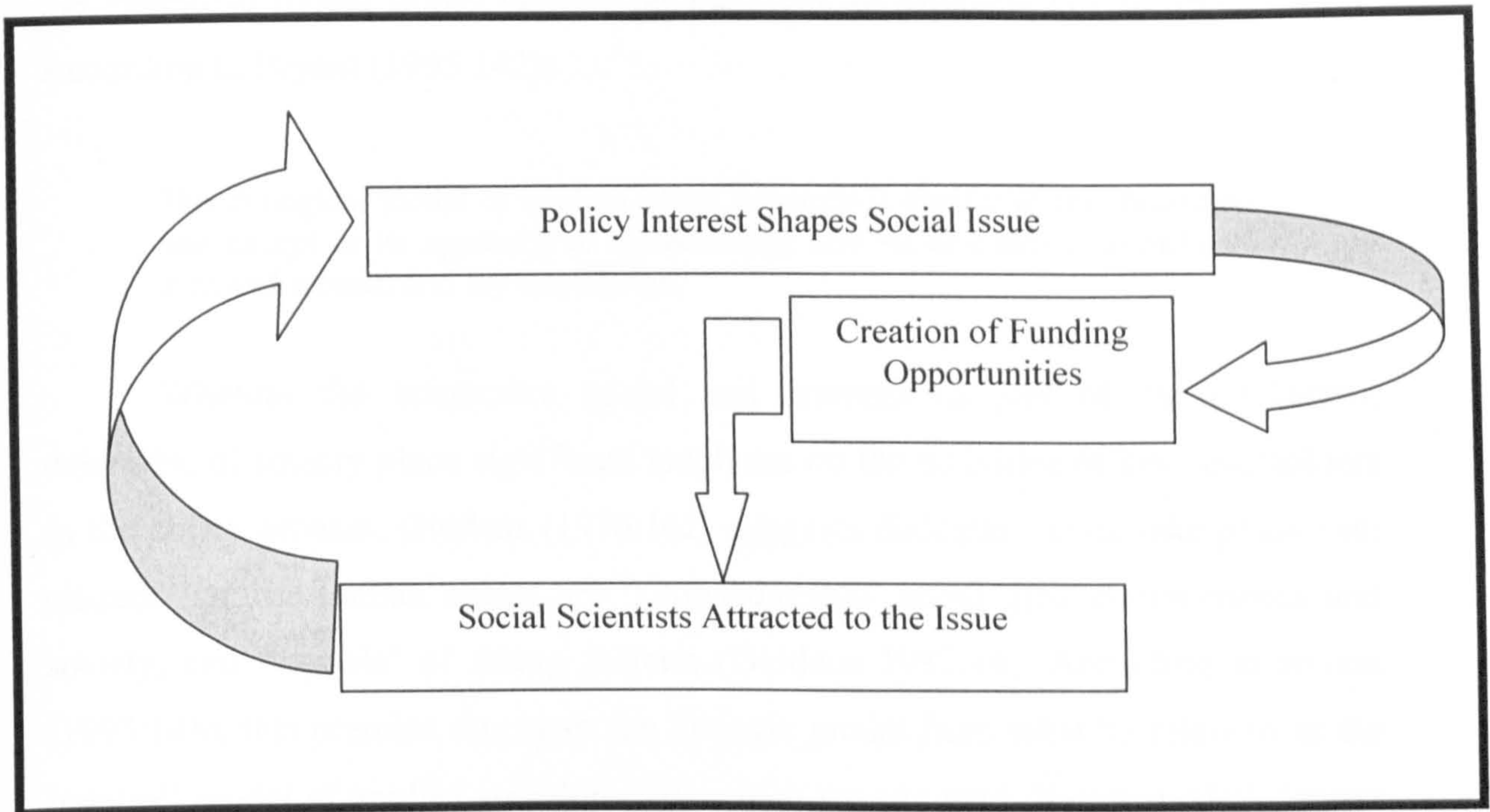
In this account, research is just one element of a process. Researchers can play an important role in promoting and acting as partisans for their research. There are, however, clear barriers to research entering policy. Tizard (1990:438) describes these as 'crucial gateways', which need to be navigated by 'micro-political activism' on behalf of researchers. In essence, researchers must act as policy champions to get their research noticed by policy makers, particularly at the macro level of policy-making. There is, though, no information about how this happens and so the mechanisms of selection of research in this model also remain under developed.

9.2.5 Research as Part of the Intellectual Enterprise of Society

In a similar vein to the interactive model, according to this view, research is one of many 'intellectual pursuits' in society. Consequently, there is again recognition of other factors involved in the decision-making arena. Unlike all the other models, in this scenario, research is not characterised as an independent variable affecting the policy process, but is another 'dependent variable running side by side with policy and philosophy, journalism, history, law and criticism etc' (Weiss 1986:39). Weiss (1986:39) suggests that in such cases 'social science and policy interact, influencing each other and being influenced by the larger fashions in social thought'.

This view of the research and policy relationship shares a conceptual understanding of evidence with the interaction model, but offers a different view of the research policy relationship. If the interaction model defies neat diagrams, the notion of research as part of the intellectual enterprise of society can be expressed precisely in this manner, as illustrated in Figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1: Research as Part of the Intellectual Enterprise of Society



The feedback loop from the foot of the diagram to the top highlights how the relationship between the research community and the policy community can be one of reciprocal influence. In this way, funds created for research may be a product of policy-makers' interest in existing research, as well as the research community tendering for potential funding from policy makers. In both the interactionist model and the view of research as part of the intellectual enterprise of society, because the focus is on research per se, there is little concern with the vagaries of evidence. The view of the policy process is one of long-term trends and is, therefore, dynamic. There are, however, no appreciations of the mechanisms of selection concerning what research plays a part in policy discussions, and the way it is selected.

9.2.6 The Dialogical Model

As indicated earlier, in addition to the models identified by Weiss (1986), Bryant (1995) highlights a dialogical model of the research and policy relationship. For Bryant (1995:142), the dialogical model offers a departure from all the previous ones, which he suggests are 'unambiguously empiricist'. This is consistent with their understandings of research, which all involve, in one way or another, conceptual closure. The dialogical model offers a 'post-empiricist' view of social science, where

the double hermeneutic highlights its essentially contestable character. In this sense, the dialogical model draws heavily on the work of Giddens (1976; 1982; 1987). According to Bryant (1995:142):

The dialogical model of applied social research is similar to the interactive one except in its approach to methodology and its orientation to ordinary men and women and lay knowledge.

Whereas the interactive model and research as part of the intellectual enterprise of society place significant emphasis on the activities of key stakeholders in the policy process, Giddens (1976:162) suggests dialogue should take place with citizens because human agents are 'knowledgeable' about their circumstances and society, and 'capable' of acting thereon (Giddens 1982:14). According to Bryant (1995:146), this premise sets apart the dialogic model from what he refers to as the 'control' model of applied sociology, for which we can read, 'linear model'. Bryant (1995:146) continues:

Like so many others, Giddens argues that much of the post-war development of sociology has been accompanied by a belief that it would underpin better policy-making, and that much of the disillusionment with sociology stems from a recognition that all too often it has failed to do so. But the research that has failed has, for the most part, conformed to a model of social science that Giddens believes to be increasingly rejected. This model is based on what natural science is assumed to be like. It aims at a unified conceptual structure and of universal laws and ever-increasing incontrovertible knowledge, and it believes objectivity to be indispensable to their achievement.

Key to the dialogical model, then, is Giddens (1987:47) view that research will most effectively inform policy through 'an extended process of communication between researcher, policy-makers and those affected by whatever issues are under consideration'. There is also a re-framing of the temporal framework of research and policy as research helps to highlight 'where the most urgent practical questions cluster' and offers 'frameworks for seeking to cope with them' (Giddens 1987:47). This is not dissimilar from the notion of research as part of the intellectual enterprise of society.

For Bryant (1995:147), there are three central assumptions of the dialogical model. First, social research cannot just be 'applied' to an independently given

subject matter. Instead, it has to be aimed at persuading actors to expand or modify the forms of knowledge or belief that they draw on upon in organising their action. This should include 'direct consultation of a prolonged kind where feasible' (Bryant 1995:147). Second, there is the 'mediation of cultural settings'. This involves the 'communication, via social research, of what it is like in one cultural setting to those in another' (Bryant 1995:147). This requires conceptual innovation because the desire to make positive changes involves positing 'possible worlds' of what might become, via programmes of social reforms. For Giddens (1987:48), novel conceptual frameworks open up possible fields of action previously unperceived either by policy-makers or by the agents involved. Third, there are the practical issues of the double hermeneutic. These mean that social research produces:

...not sets of generalisations which facilitate instrumental control over the social world but, rather, the constant absorption of concepts and theories into that "subject matter" they seek to analyse, constituting and reconstituting what the subject matter is (Giddens 1987:48).

The dialogic model, thus, offers a dynamic view of the policy process. Little account is, though, given about the outcomes of consultations with stakeholders, only that they are necessary. Ultimately, it casts doubt on evidence being able to inform policy unless there is a commitment to dialogue between policy-makers, researchers and the wider community. As has been suggested previously, it is difficult to have fruitful dialogue over issues, such as required policy directions in heavily controversial areas, because deeply held views are rigid. Often, the best that can be hoped for is consensus over the less stringently held views, or Secondary Aspects; changes to which do not significantly alter the overall direction of policy. Taking the example of drug harm, there is general agreement by the agents involved in the policy process that the required direction of UK drug policy should be to reduce the harm caused by drugs to society and individuals. There is, however, little agreement over what drug harm actually constitutes.

9.3 An Overview of the Established Models of Research Utilisation

Table 9.2 serves as a summary of the relative merits and weaknesses of all the established models of research utilisation, based on the criteria introduced at the outset in Table 9.1:

Table 9.2: An Overview of the Applicability of Existing Models of Research Utilisation in Politicised Policy Areas

Model/Criteria	Outcome	Process	Static View of Policy-Making	Dynamic View of Policy-Making	Evidence Central to Policy	Mechanisms of Evidence Selection
Linear	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X
Enlightenment	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X
Political/Tactical	✓	X	✓	X	X	✓
Interactive	X	✓	X	✓	X	X
Intellectual Enterprise	X	✓	X	✓	X	X
Dialogic	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓

Based on the findings of previous chapters, it is suggested that what is required in explaining the role and nature of evidence in a heavily politicised policy area, is a model that can account for a dynamic, long-term view of the policy-making process, which locates evidence not only at the level of outcomes, but also at the level of the decision-making process. Furthermore, it must be a model which does not restrict the nature of policy-making to the use of evidence in some way, shape or form, but rather sees how evidence is only one part of the policy mix. In other words, this relates to the multi-faceted nature of evidence and how it cannot be taken at face value. Finally, some account must also be given of the way the evidence comes to play a role in policy decision-making, not just what its role is. This involves a journey down the ladder of abstraction in relation to the concept of evidence.

As Table 9.2 illustrates, of all the established models, the dialogical variety assumes all these criteria, with the others lacking at least one or more. In the context of this discussion, and based on the findings of the previous chapter, the dialogical model is problematic, because of its view of research (and evidence) as relentlessly contested. In this light, two newer additions to the literature are discussed which offer alternative explanations of the evidence and policy relationship. The first is a recent addition to the existing literature and the second is an original contribution based on the shortcomings of other models, especially in the context of politicised areas.

9.4 The Evolutionary Model

Unlike the previous models, the evolutionary model was conceived as a model of evidence-based policy, rather than as a model of research utilisation. Influenced by the ideas of John (1999), the evolutionary model is, according to Stevens (2007a), able to explain the pattern of selection of evidence used in policy-making by descending the ladder of abstraction to look at how evidence is used and selected in policy decision-making. For Stevens (2007a), this does not rely on a deterministic explanation equating the phenomenon with the deliberate manipulation of evidence by policy-makers. The pattern of selection is premised on Darwinian, 'classic' evolutionary social theory and the notion of 'survival of the fittest' (Spencer 1891). It suggests that the most effective way of understanding the evidence and policy relationship is to focus the analysis at the level of ideas or perspectives:

It starts from the assumption that a variety of ideas...compete for attention in policy, as genes arise and compete for survival. The ideas may be facts, findings or recommendations that have been produced by academics, journalists, think tanks, pressure groups or others. Some of these ideas fit the interests of powerful groups and some do not. Ideas that do fit will find powerful supporters. Others will not. Those ideas that fit will therefore have groups and individuals that can carry them into policy, as would a gene be reproduced if it finds a place in organisms that survive. The ideas that do not fit will tend not to be picked up by people who have the power to translate them into policy. This evolutionary advantage leads to the survival of the ideas that fit (Stevens 2007a:28).

By focusing the analysis at the level of ideas, a broader appreciation of evidence can be ascertained in this model. Stevens (2007a:28) states that ideas, and

thus evidence, can be ‘facts, findings, or recommendations that have been produced by academics, journalists, think tanks, pressure groups or others’. Like the dialogical model, the evolutionary model is also premised on aspects of Giddensian social theory (Giddens 1984), most noticeably, the theory of structuration. Both structure and agency are defining tenets of the explanation. Issues of power are also predominant. There is a reciprocal relationship between the idea and the carrier (the powerful supporter). The idea exists within certain structural conditions that are partly created by the agents. The conditions under which an idea either flourishes or flounders, are shaped in terms of what Stevens (2007a) calls the ‘mechanisms of selection’. These are similar to ideas expressed in the political/tactical model of research utilisation but are ultimately more advanced and detailed. Stevens (2007a) identifies four main ones, which can be illustrated with data from the current research and elsewhere.

The first mechanism focuses on how policy-makers or other powerful groups may ‘fish’ or ‘trawl’ for evidence. Here, they haul in the bits they require and throw back those not needed. A common tactic employed, in this regard, is the use of ‘repetition’. Powerful actors are able to focus the attention of potential critics towards evidence that supports a said policy, even if the evidence has been taken out of context (Weiss 1986). In doing so, this evidence becomes a key part of the knowledge-base, justifying the ‘validity’ of the policy to which it equates.

It was suggested in previous chapters that a widely held view, from the rational perspective, and one shared by the Government, was how treating problematic drug users and steering them away from the criminal justice system, represents an evidence-based drug policy. To recap, it was the view of a Director of a leading drug treatment QUANGO that:

...the only bit that is evidence-based is around drug treatment actually, because if you look at the four strands of the drug strategy, the only one where there is any real coherent evidence of any quality is around drug treatment having an impact on health and crime (RATL9).

Data from the conservative perspective, however, cites how the figures for drug treatment, compiled by the Government agency responsible for this, are indicative of fishing or trawling for evidence:

They [the National Treatment Agency] are another organisation that we are not happy about. We are happy that they exist but we don't like the fact that if you go on their website there is a big sign that says "we are not a treatment agency"! This is the National Treatment Agency! "We just advise people and collect figures". I don't like the figures that they collect because they say "things are looking a lot better because we have got a lot more people in treatment". But, their definition of treatment can be somebody who goes to a treatment centre once and then jacks it in...So the number who drop out are immaterial. The figures also include those on methadone, well methadone during the time I worked in a treatment agency was a bridge to cessation, not a bridge to long-term, endless therapy. So suggesting that the situation has got better because we are now giving people an addictive and dangerous substance without limitation doesn't impress me at all (CON8).

There is no surprise in the finding that a member of the conservative perspective is sceptical of evidence propounded by, what is in effect, a rationalist position. A similar theme can be seen from the radical perspective:

Treatment has historically been cash starved and they are now a big beneficiary of central funding...evidence-based policy tells us that money is more effectively spent on treatment than enforcement and we...have our own take on that. So there is a lot of cash flooding into people on the basis that the kind of coercive treatment, Home Office criminal justice intervention, forced detox works. But it doesn't, the evidence-base is extraordinarily poor but the people who are receiving that money are not going to focus on that evidence (RAD4).

Interestingly, there is also an acceptance that trawling occurs, in this respect, from within the rational perspective; a perspective generally in favour of the role of drug treatment within the drug strategy:

I am sure that some of the big treatment providers like 'Adaction' and 'Turning Point' were playing the "treatment card". You know, "that for every pound spent on treatment"...and this is a good bit of evidence, useful evidence, "three pounds is saved or nine pounds is saved". It is pretty flimsy evidence but it is a good catchphrase. We are reducing crime by getting people into treatment so there is a constellation between rehab and treatment (RATL7).

In a somewhat similar vein, the second mechanism suggests that powerful groups can 'farm' for, or cherry-pick evidence. Here, research is specifically commissioned to provide evidence for the proposed policy, although only that which actually supports the policy is published. The drugs debate is awash with examples

of where this has happened. In 2003, the Prime Ministers Strategy Unit, produced a report detailing the (lack of) progress of the current drug strategy. Chaired by Sir John Birt, the report amounted to a damning failure of the current approach, and was consequently unpublished. The detail of the report became public knowledge when it was leaked to the *Guardian* newspaper. This was cited as a key reason for the radical perspective as to why current UK drug policy is evidence-free:

I also think an awful lot of people have sweated blood producing reports which have been ignored, so these people sound as if they are in a position of power because they are consultants and have the ear of the Prime Minister. But as we know from the number 10 Strategy Unit report, that was an expensive and serious piece of work done for the Prime Minister and it was a really good piece of work, but it was presented once, and as far as we know, was never heard of again. So are people doing that in powerful positions? In some ways you could say they are... (RAD4).

Drawing on the ideas of Chomsky and Herman (1988), a tactic of creating 'flak' is the third mechanism. Here, a significant amount of disquiet is created over evidence that enters the public arena that is detrimental to the chosen policy direction. In heavily politicised policy areas, this is a tactic employed by all perspectives in relation to the data produced by others. The media plays a powerful role in this regard. The overall aim is to discredit the troublesome evidence relating to a controversial policy. This primarily occurs via sensationalist reporting. Prideaux (2004:18), drawing on the ideas of Bennett and Åsard (1995:5), suggests that the mass-media, via specific kinds of 'journalistic philosophy', has a regulatory effect when it comes to policy through the reportage of selected information about certain policies. It can, therefore, help to set the 'agenda of political discourse in society' (Prideaux 2004:18). The reception of evidence relating to the abandonment of the prohibition of legal drugs and that advocating more rigorous drug law enforcement have, typically, been the victim of flak, on the grounds that they are contrary to the principles of evidence-based policy-making (see Chapter Seven).

There is also a methodological dimension to this. In his speech given to the Economic and Social Research Council concerning the use of social research by government, former Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett (2000), stated that he 'felt frustrated' by the tendency for research:

...when it does try to be directly relevant to the main policy and political debates, to be seemingly perverse, driven by ideology paraded as intellectual inquiry or critique, setting out with the sole aim of collecting evidence that will prove a policy wrong rather than genuinely seeking to evaluate or interpret impact. A number of studies have tried to claim evidence of poor outcomes when policies have barely been implemented...we need to be able to rely on social science and social scientists to tell us what works and why and what types of policy initiatives are likely to be most effective. And we need better ways of ensuring that those who want this information can get it easily and quickly (Blunkett 2000: para 7).

Blunkett (2000: para 7) suggests that this is to be achieved by research that paints a coherent picture of how society works, and not by 'worthless correlations based on small samples from which it is impossible to draw generalisable conclusions'. He goes on to suggest that studies which combine 'large scale, quantitative information on effect sizes, which allow us to generalise, with in-depth case studies which provide insights into how processes work,' are welcome. In response to this article, Hodgkinson (2000) highlights that Blunkett's understanding of social research, is inherently positivist, and neglects the widely accepted point that social research involves the 'double hermeneutic' (Giddens 1984).

For Stevens (2007a), the final mechanism of selection involves the ability to impose 'strain' on organisations or individuals who produce and advocate 'unhelpful' evidence (Chambliss 1976). This signals a return to the thorny issue of funding. As Chapter Five illustrated, groups and agents making up the rational perspective were more likely to be the recipients of central funding (a consequence of the politics of electoral anxiety). Indeed, based on the findings of Chapter Seven, it was suggested that this was a product of the rational perspective being in a structurally and favourable position in the debate, and sharing a similar outlook on the nature of the problem to that of the Government.

To phrase it another way, the rational perspective's appreciation of evidence is consistent with the Government's picture; hence its barriers to central funding are greatly reduced. This is illustrated in the following quotations. According to one journalist and writer on the drugs issue:

It is kind of obvious that most of the social, economic and criminal harms are caused by the illegal activity around drugs, rather than the drugs

themselves, but it is very hard to find criminologists who will stand up and say that. So I recognise that [there is a] centre ground [in the drug policy debate]... that is a centre ground of people who are making livings and careers out of working in the drug field, and clearly certain things get funded and certain things don't and certain positions that you take, won't get funding (RAD4).

These positions are those akin with the Deep Core beliefs of the radical perspective. This contrasts slightly with the view of the following respondent who states:

I have heard that they have attached a Home Office figure to the new [United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission] group. Now I don't know whether that is true, but I am told that it is a woman and I am told that she is fairly senior, which means that she must be at least a Principle, Senior Principle. The funding has come from the Esmee Fairburn Foundation and you have got to ask why that is, because Drugs Policy in Britain has been driven by legalisation and the legalisation lobby, which it has for 10-12 years... (CON6).

This comment is somewhat confusing. It is the view of the above respondent, that the goals of the rationalist perspective - of which members of the United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission are key players - are actually the same as the radical perspective. That is, that the desired direction of UK drug policy is drug legalisation. This is open to debate, but what is not, is that those in the centre ground are capable of securing central Government funding, whereas the other groups struggle. The respondent continues:

DrugScope are funded by the British govt...and [they] got the cut of all the funding from there and we struggled for a time before a millionaire helped us out, but it costs money to run the office and keep the website etc (CON6).

This point is accepted by members of the rational perspective. The following quotation, from a Director of a leading drug-treatment QUANGO, in relation to the implementation of the New Labour drug strategy is testament to this:

They were inclusive and used bodies like the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs in a very similar way really and they use organisations and NGOs like DrugScope...who get core funding from government, via the Department of Health, to act as critical friends and to comment on policies and whatever... (RATL9).

Overall, the ability to control the agenda, according to Stevens (2007a:29), depends on the relative power and status of the controlling group in shaping the dominant discourse:

Those groups with the most power in society will be most able to implement these mechanisms, and so bring attention to research that suits them, and encourage the ignorance of research that does not. This does not mean that their power dominates the use of evidence entirely. Weaker social groups, including trade unions, environmental pressure groups, other campaigning bodies and self-organisations of the poor and socially marginalised may also attempt to make these mechanisms work for them. However, they have less access to the sources of research and its dissemination; they are less able to impose their interpretations of research evidence on a wider public. They have less opportunity to trawl or farm research, to create flak, to repeat favourable evidence or to impose strain on those who produce or disseminate unhelpful research. And they have less of a role in framing policy (Stevens 2007a:29).

As a result, ideas that make it into the policy arenas are those that are fit enough to survive the filtration process and those that gain powerful sponsors. Evidence that is not used is that which cannot get a powerful sponsor. In this respect, there is, again, recognition that the existence of evidence alone is not the determining factor in policy-making. The manipulation of evidence is not merely a product of policy-makers tampering with 'pure' evidence, although undoubtedly, this does happen.

It has been suggested that, in understanding the role of evidence in politicised policy areas, such as UK drug legislative change, the evolutionary model therefore has much to its credit. It starts from the premise, advocated throughout this thesis, that evidence is embedded in policy debates and, unlike most of the established models, highlights how it plays a role. This understanding suggests that evidence can play a role at the level of process and, albeit less frequently, in policy outcomes. Taking just one example, for evidence to play a role in policy, it needs to be consistent with the view of what research ought to be from powerful groups, in this case, central Government and policy-makers. As a result, the notion of flak, in particular, is useful in highlighting the primacy of the rational perspective's evidence which fulfils this criterion. There are, however, significant issues with the model which need to be addressed. Ultimately, these criticisms make the model problematic as an explanation for the role and nature of evidence in politicised areas.

9.5 An Appraisal of the Evolutionary Model and the Potential of the Processual Model

The evolutionary model shares many similarities with, but also departs from, the established models of research utilisation. In a similar vein to the enlightenment model, the evolutionary model has an understanding of the relationship where evidence plays a role in the process of decision-making and not just in the outcome of policy formulation. In this sense, the model is realistic. In contrast to the enlightenment view, the evolutionary model offers an analysis of the power relationships in the policy-making process, which are particularly acute in politicised policy areas. It also highlights the filtration process by which certain kinds of evidence play a role in policy-making, whereas others do not. Like the political/tactical model, however, it does not manage to move beyond a static view of the policy-making process.

Drawing on ideas of the interaction model and the model of research as part of the intellectual enterprise of society, which detail an expansive understanding of research, the evolutionary model likewise employs a broad understanding of evidence. This views evidence produced from social research as primarily unproblematic when applied to policy formulation. This is in contrast to the dialogical model which stresses the essential contestability of evidence and hence how it is problematic when applied to policy-making. The dialogical model understands evidence, as being essentially contested, contrasts with the findings of this thesis and it is suggested, therefore, that the evolutionary model is more applicable. Like the dialogical model, however, the evolutionary model descends the ladder of abstraction in focusing on how evidence comes to be used in policy decision-making. Also, both illustrate, along with the political/tactical model, how evidence is not the only player in policy decision-making, a particularly pertinent issue in politicised policy areas. These themes represent the ultimate strength of the dialogic and evolutionary models.

The evolutionary model, therefore, offers much potential in explaining the nature and role of evidence in politicised policy areas, but there are significant

problems with the model in its current form. Indeed, three main criticisms of the evolutionary model can be garnered from the above discussion, all of which centre on its outlook of the process of policy-making. First, it places great stock in the role of ideas, which create a market place and need to be adopted by powerful agents for them to be part of the policy process. It is less clear, though, on the epistemological question of where these ideas come from, how they come into fruition, and whether they exist *a priori*? The evolutionary model makes no claims as to their origin. There is little recognition that new ideas that come to assume a role in policy could be old ideas resurfacing, often in a new context (Kingdon 1984), as more long-term views of the policy process often illustrate.

Second, there is also an assumption that ideas that survive the filtration process will somehow be used in producing policy. This line of argument, it is suggested, is too close to that of the linear model. Indeed, it is premised on a linear causal connection between evidence production and policy-making. This logic is usually restricted for appreciations of the policy process that restrict the role of evidence to policy outcomes. In the evolutionary model, the assumption that evidence that survives filtration will apply in policy-making is, in the last instance, a static and deterministic perspective. This kind of logic has been shown to be problematic, in that the relationship between evidence and policy is much more *ad hoc*, and that the policy process is inherently dynamic.

Finally, the connotations associated with the concept of evolution are untenable, in particular, the teleological idea of continuous progress associated with the notion of the survival of the fittest. At its most simple level, the evolutionary model assumes that ideas survive because of their utility to powerful groups. This moves policy towards some fixed point which, in turn, provides the platform for zero-sum views, which have already been shown to be beset with problems. To stress again, this is untenable in politicised areas where evidence is embedded in the process, but does not necessarily shape outcomes.

It is suggested here, therefore, when explaining evidence use in the context of politicised policy areas, that despite being an improvement on the established models, the evolutionary model is not a radical enough departure from these. Its

strength lies in its specific analysis of the content of the negotiations that take place in evidence debates. This manifests itself in a consideration of the mechanisms of selection, which show the relationship between evidence and policy to be complex because of other factors impacting on the policy process. Consequently, a modified version of the evolutionary model is tentatively advocated here. This synthesises the key strengths of other models and avoids their shortcomings. It is closest to the evolutionary model, adhering to the mechanisms of selection and content of negotiations outlined in this approach. It does, however, depart on other grounds. It is here introduced as the 'processual model', and its key aspects are succinctly illustrated in Table 9.3, alongside those of the evolutionary model:

Table 9.3: The Key Aspects of the Evolutionary and Processual Models

Model/Criteria	Outcome	Process	Static View of Policy-Making	Dynamic View of Policy-Making	Evidence to Central Policy	Mechanisms of Evidence Selection
Evolutionary	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓
Processual	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓

From the data presented above and in Table 9.2, the processual model is best thought of as a synthesis of the enlightenment and evolutionary models. With the former it shares a dynamic view of the policy-making process, where there is no assumption that evidence will have a direct link with policy formulation, particularly in terms of policy outcomes. This is, to reiterate, a view of the policy process that assumes an indirect link between evidence and policy and a long-term view of this relationship. The processual model accepts that evidence is embedded in the policy process and could percolate into decision-making but this is by no means a foregone conclusion. With the latter it accepts that evidence is not the only player in this process and, importantly, accepts the premise of the evolutionary model's mechanisms of evidence selection, as data from the current research has illustrated. It departs from the evolutionary model on the grounds that this assumes a direct link

between evidence use and policy decision-making that is premised on a rationalist, sequential logic of the policy process.

The processual model is, therefore, premised on a dynamic, non-sequential and long-term view of the decision-making process, which sees the role of evidence primarily in the process of policy decision-making. This issue is returned to subsequently. Being a model of evidence-based policy-making, and not a model of research utilisation, however, it also advocates a view of evidence and policy that is consistent with the modified version of formalism expressed in the previous chapter. It therefore expects that the parameters of any policy debate are continuously changing. This was illustrated with recourse to the conclusions and recommendations of the most recent ACMD (2008) report on cannabis.

The fluctuating nature of policy, in this area, is also illustrated by various respondents, particularly in relation to the UN Conventions, which provided the blueprint for the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. These, to reiterate, require all signatory States to apply criminal sanctions to actions such as drug possession and supply. According to the previously mentioned journalist and writer:

I don't expect politicians at that top level to say anything apart from the fact that drugs are evil, they are a scourge and we must fight them because in a way saying that gives cover for people locally to operate quite different drug policies. Have you looked at Plymouth? Has anyone talked about what is going on down there in terms of Plymouth DATs [Drug Action Teams]? I mean they are pretty much moving towards what you would call a post-prohibition system, in the sense that they have had heroin proscribing doctors down there and Drug Action teams and social workers are sitting on the burglary committees and working with the police. The police are basically following their lead in terms of stepping back and allowing them to deal with a really grim drugs problem, as a public health issue, with the role of criminal justice rolled back and so that is going to be very, very effective and increasingly locally people are going to start doing that but I don't expect the top level of political rhetoric or ideological commitment to change. I expect the first thing we will hear about that is in twenty years or so time when they say "oh we decided to opt out of the UN convention". The type of conversation you get at that level is not really going to change, it is going to follow the water downhill very slowly, very gradually (RAD4).

It is important to consider, however, that the pace of change can be slow or quick and can occur on different levels of the policy process. The same respondent goes on to state:

I think from where we are standing everything is slowly moving in our direction. That sounds a bit smug but it has kind of been the case over the years, so what we now call the 'centre ground' isn't always regarded as liberal or radical as it was five or ten years ago. Most people had come to a settled view, based on evidence and experience, that the war on drugs has long since failed and there was no way it could possibly succeed because of the economics of supply and demand or whatever. Most of the people who are working in the drugs field commuted that position into harm reduction, because it was kind of the best you could do under prohibition; reduce the harms that prohibition was causing. But I think, and I have this conversation many, many times with people, if you are serious about that, then why mop up the floor when you can turn off the tap? Why not address the problem? I think within the harm reduction movement...people are probably feeling a bit more emboldened about saying that and the next International Harm Reduction Conference will probably have a lot more plenary stuff on control and regulation and ways forward, post prohibition paradigms and so on, and so that is my sense that the centre ground has moved (RAD4).

The radical outlook is one of optimism. It remains to be seen whether the drug policy debate is moving in the direction stated above, although history advises that the outlook is not good. This optimism is, however, a clear contrast to that of the conservative perspective, which has a different take on the future:

The British government says it doesn't want changes to the UN conventions and changes to the UN Conventions are up for review in 2008 and it is not going to happen. The Americans are the biggest funders, we don't want it, they don't want it, Australia doesn't want it, Canada are a bit flaky, it isn't going to happen but that wont stop people lobbying for it...(CON8)

They do, however, also recognise the fluctuating nature of policy and the need to adapt to this:

...so many people including the media want to talk about what is hot news. Now and again you manage to get something in...I did a three-article series me vs. Howard Marks he did his bit and I did my bit so I had half a page of the *Guardian* times three, that is quite a good space, you can actually get into talking about prevention, but I think that one of the ways forward that we need to go...would be to get a better appreciation of what can be done with prevention. If I can qualify that, that is prevention that is much closer to health promotion, in normal parlance, than anything else. It is not what our opponents like to call it; prohibition which is something that you may be getting into – semantics – fundamental to this whole arena and we are lousy at it on our side (CON8).

It is revealing that the rational perspective says very little about the future of drug policy. This is primarily a product of the fact that they are in a privileged position in the wider debate. There is, consequently, no appreciation of the need to adapt. This does not mean, however, that they do not see policy-making as a dynamic process. It is worth reminding ourselves, at this juncture, of the goals of the ACMD, a central group within the rationalist perspective. It is their aim:

...to keep under review the situation in the UK with respect to drugs which are being or appear to them likely to be misused and of which the misuse is having or appears to them capable of having harmful effects sufficient to constitute a social problem, and to give to any one or more of the Ministers, where either Council consider it expedient to do so or they are consulted by the Minister or Ministers in question, advice on measures (whether or not involving alteration of the law) which in the opinion of the Council ought to be taken for preventing the misuse of such drugs or dealing with social problems connected with their misuse, and in particular on measures which in the opinion of the Council, ought to be taken (cited in Science and Technology Committee 2006:13).

This notion of policy flux is the crux of the main difference between the processual and evolutionary models. It is suggested that policies, particularly heavily politicised ones, are multi-dimensional but also multi-directional. In this sense, it becomes difficult to conceive as policies as wholly evidence-based or evidence-free as these are static conceptualisations. It is this that underpins the view of the policy process of the processual model, and which demarks it from the evolutionary model.

Another significant departure of the processual model from the evolutionary model concerns, then, the notion of teleology. The analogy of evolution, in this sense, assumes culmination in a fixed point and a neat, sequential form of policy-making. Instead, a model is required that can account for the back-and-forthness of policy decision-making. The blueprint for this can be found in the sociology of knowledge of Elias (1978; 1991; 2000); in particular, Elias' (2000) notion of the 'civilising process', which can incorporate a simultaneous decivilising process. This calls into question the uni-directional assumptions of the progress of knowledge and human society. Kilminster (2007:135) effectively makes this point, comparing this view of the history of science with that of Darwin, on whose theory the evolutionary model is premised:

It is obvious that for Elias, evolutionary theory is not to be identified solely with Darwin's version. He clearly regards this as incomplete and representing an early stage of elaboration. Anticipating the accusations of evolutionary determinism or teleology, he draws the crucial distinction...between largely irreversible biological evolution and potentially reversible social development. The life cycle of stars and the development of societies are not of the same kind: unlike a star, it is possible for social development to go into reverse and go back to an earlier stage, say, to feudal social relations or to a stage where mutual identification is less. With this point in mind, Elias thought of civilizing and decivilizing processes, for example, as going hand in hand.

Although Kilminster (2007) is referring to Elias' (2000) discussion of large-scale, macro social processes, in this instance, it does provide a useful model or analogy for policy development and the evidence and policy relationship. The key phrase in the quotation above is 'potentially reversible social development'. It has been stressed throughout that policy subsystems are made up of interconnected groups and individuals. In effect, they are social phenomena. As this is the case, there is always the potential for policy to metamorphose, which could see a reversal of previous developments, or a move forward, in light of any subsequent evidence, new or reworked, that emerges. It is this nuance that is ultimately absent from the evolutionary model, but it is in this context that the mechanisms of selection of evidence must be seen.

9.6 Summary

The established models of research utilisation have been vital in conceptualising the troublesome relationship between research and policy and have rightly enjoyed significant longevity in the policy-making literature. Most depart from the linear conceptualisation discussed above, albeit to differing degrees. It is contended, however, that none is capable of explaining in enough detail the role and nature of evidence in politicised areas and, as a consequence, a newer version; the processual model is tentatively advocated. It has been argued here, that the established models do not translate successfully into models of evidence-based policy-making, in politicised areas, for various reasons. First and foremost, they say little about the tumultuous nature of evidence itself. In addition, they operate at too high a level of abstraction and pay scant attention to the way that evidence comes to play a role in the policy-making process, merely describing what the relationship looks like. In this

regard, some newer additions to the literature offer significant potential. These illustrate not only what the link is between evidence and policy-making, but precisely how this relationship is consolidated.

Whereas the evolutionary model pioneered the journey down the ladder of abstraction to explain how evidence comes to be used in policy, it is ultimately premised on teleological logic and has a short-term outlook on the relationship. By contrast, the processual model advocates analysis at the same level of debate but stops short of making teleological assumptions. In doing so, it advocates a view of the policy process that is characterised by *ad hoc*, back and forth decision-making, typical of highly politicised areas. The case of UK drug classification, in particular, the legislation surrounding cannabis, is indicative of this.

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 Introduction

A central claim of this thesis has been that in highly politicised policy areas, the role and nature of evidence is tumultuous. The episode of cannabis reclassification and the subsequent debate between various constituencies concerning the efficacy of current UK drug policy and legislation is testament to this. Here, the evidence and policy relationship is frequently, but paradoxically, contextualised in terms of a zero-sum, linear relationship. Previous chapters illustrated how actors frequently reverted to entrenched positions when discussing the role and nature of evidence in the policy process. Supporters of current UK drug policies claimed they were (wholly) evidence-based, whilst detractors suggested they were, in fact, evidence-free. These zero-sum positions were maintained, in spite of the fact that a plethora of understandings of evidence are visible in this policy subsystem.

In the aftermath of the Science and Technology Committee Report (2006), which specifically focused on the government's use of evidence in the policy-making process, with particular reference to the drug classification system, derivatives of these two positions emerged. Independent research commissioned for the inquiry suggested that 'recent evidence is feeding into new policy' (Levitt, et al. 2006:xvi). By contrast, based on its findings MacDonald and Das (2006) claimed with some assertiveness that the UK drug classification system is an 'un-evidenced-based mess'. It has been advocated, however, that a more nuanced picture of the evidence and policy relationship is required, which explains not only what the connection is between evidence and policy, but how and why this is manifested. It is suggested that the existing models of research utilisation fall short in this regard, but that a more recent addition to the literature - the processual model - offers significant potential in this endeavour. This concluding chapter explains how this has come into fruition. It starts with a general overview of each chapter, before moving on to consider various implications of the study in terms of theory, method and policy. Finally, some summarising and final comments are provided.

10.2 Overview

Chapter One served as an introduction to the thesis, highlighting its substantive scope. It also provided some historical background on the relationship between research, evidence and policy-making, setting the scene for the subsequent analysis. Chapter Two suggested that the history of UK drug policy is characterised by competing perspectives, each with a valid claim for ownership of the drug problem. This was a relic of when issues relating to drugs first fell under State control. Remnants of these could be found in the debate over cannabis reclassification in 2004. It was suggested, furthermore, that the episode of cannabis reclassification is a good case study for exploring the opening up of government, consistent with the principles of evidence-based policy-making. This was a product of the fact that reclassification, arguably the most significant change to UK drug policy in over 35 years, was related to the New Labour Government's commitment to making policies devoid of dogma.

Chapter Three provided the structure for the subsequent analysis by introducing various models of policy-analysis. Here, it was suggested that the conditions of the opening up of government, were consistent with more pluralist understandings of the policy process. These highlight the multi-layered, multi-directional and dynamic nature of policy-making, moving away from the view of policy as being neatly sequential, static and rational. Within these, the Advocacy Coalition Framework was identified as being best suited to the task of illustrating the nature and role of evidence, in politicised policy areas. This is primarily a product of the fact that the nature of conflict is central to this analysis of the policy-making process.

Chapter Four continued this discussion and also introduced the fundamental methodological principles underlying the study. In addition, it documented the challenges that arise when conducting research on a 'live' policy issue, under the aegis of a discussion of real-time research. This considered how various external factors can impact on the direction of the research, once underway. These issues are

also particularly acute in heavily politicised areas because they are never off the political agenda, and are thus in a constant state of flux.

Initially, Chapter Five explored these issues in further detail, showing how the Advocacy Coalition Framework is utilised in the current context. The basic structure of the framework was maintained and three identifiable coalitions in the UK drug policy subsystem, the rational, radical and conservative groups, were introduced. In the context of politicised areas, it was suggested, however, that the framework requires significant modification. Here, Vickers' (1965) notion of 'appreciative systems' formed the backbone of the key change; the replacement 'coalitions' with 'perspectives'. Perspectives do not assume as great a degree of co-ordinated activity on behalf of the various policy actors, as became apparent throughout the course of the research.

The latter part of the chapter illustrated how by identifying the various perspectives, a number of important factors were raised, which contributed to differentiation of the various perspectives from one another. There were, however, areas of consensus amongst the groups. All recognised that in heavily politicised policy areas, other factors play a role in the decision-making process, including politics and the media, which has a knock-on effect for the kinds of evidence that are available. It was stated, though, that these were not necessarily stumbling blocks to the utilisation of evidence as these things should not be juxtaposed. A more fruitful line of inquiry is to see how evidence is embedded in policy decision-making and to look at the way it is considered in the context of a heavily politicised area.

By concentrating on the issue of cannabis reclassification, Chapter Six explored the first aspect of the turmoil of evidence by focusing on the nature of evidence in politicised areas. It illustrated significant discrepancies over what kind of evidence was, and should have been, used in the cannabis reclassification. Contrasting views between perspectives over this issue were clearly apparent as they were over whether the cannabis reclassification was an evidence-based policy. To recap, for the radical perspective the answer was negative, as it was for the conservative perspective, albeit for different reasons. For the rational perspective, the change was primarily evidence-based, constituting the first significant attempt to iron

out anomalies within the existing legislation. This view was based on the emerging data relating to relative harms and dangers of substances. Despite a plethora of understandings over what constitutes evidence in this debate, members of perspectives still resorted to zero-sum conclusions about the relationship. It was argued here that this reasoning is paradoxical, as zero-sum positions frequently recognise the diversity of evidence embedded in political decision-making, whilst drawing all or nothing conclusions. Zero-sum conclusions are also premised on an understanding of conceptual certainty, in relation to evidence, whilst simultaneously recognising its part-contested nature.

Chapter Seven suggested that the data presented in the main body of the chapter could be read as providing further support to the claims made in the previous chapter concerning the paradoxical appreciations of evidence. By focusing on the wider issue of the evidence-base for the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act's tri-partite classification structure, it viewed the data through a different lens. At this stage, appreciations of the role of evidence in the policy process were central to the discussion. This constitutes the second aspect of the turmoil of evidence. Focusing on the location of evidence, more detailed appreciations of the nature of the concept emerged, but this also raised the spectre of the issue of power in the policy decision-making arena.

The assumption, as in many models of pluralism, that all kinds of evidence have an equal chance of influencing the decision-making process, was called into question. What emerged was a dominant view of evidence shared by the Government and the rational perspective. This appreciation highlighted the role of evidence, not only in terms of outcomes, but also in the process of policy-making. By contrast, the radical and conservative perspectives restricted their appreciation of evidence to the outcomes of policy. Focusing on the location of evidence also provided further confirmation of the notion that evidence is embedded in policy-making, despite not appearing to be so for many engaged in the policy process.

The remaining chapters explained the complex nature and role of evidence in the policy process, in the form of a model of evidence-based policy-making in heavily politicised policy areas. Chapter Eight initiated this task by addressing the

first aspect of turmoil; the nature of evidence. It concluded that evidence in this context, is best seen as a knot concept, and, in doing so, advocates a modified version of the formalist theory of meaning to illustrate this. The account of formalism is 'modified' on the grounds that conceptual flux is seen as the best starting point for understanding both evidence and policy in politicised areas. This is because they are often 'live' and susceptible to various exogenous factors impacting on them.

Armed with this conceptualisation of evidence, Chapter Nine continued the goal of explaining the nature and role of evidence in politicised policy areas by critically evaluating the established models of the research and policy relationship. It highlighted a number of criteria which are central to this explanatory quest, based on issues arising out of the research. It was suggested that all existing models, in one way or another, fall short of what is required. A more recent addition to the literature was singled out for particular mention; the evolutionary model, developed by Stevens (2007a). The strength of this approach lies in its explanation of how 'evidence', as opposed to research, is used in policy, offering more than just a description of what the connection is. The evolutionary model is, however, beset with problems, based around its teleological underpinnings and static view of the decision-making process.

As a consequence, the newer processual model is advocated as the most effective way of contextualising the role and nature of evidence in a politicised policy area. This model is premised on a long term, dynamic view of the policy process, which sees the policy-making process as being multi-layered and multi-directional. Furthermore, it focuses on the complexity of the concept of evidence and underscores a view of decision-making that does not restrict the role of evidence to one of policy outcomes, but looks at the role of evidence as being embedded in the decision-making process. It does not assume a teleological direction of evidence-based policy-making. The processual model can, therefore, account for the many perturbations that impact on the policy process. It is necessary to consider some of the implications of this in terms of theory, methods and policy, before providing some extended final comments.

10.3 Reflection on Method and Theory

In this thesis, the main methodological choices were influenced by emerging theories. Researching issues relating to UK drug classification required a degree of methodological inspiration. The key findings from the earlier phases of the research provided confirmation of the theory, that in politicised policy areas, zero-sum appreciations of the evidence and policy relationship were widespread. To initially explore this area, a particular methodological approach that could account for the nature of conflict within the policy-making arena, was required. The Advocacy Coalition Framework is one such model, but as illustrated, it required modification. By way of a brief overview, it is fair to comment that the Advocacy Coalition Framework was designed as a means of explaining policy change, but is employed here as an explanatory tool of analysis. Drawing on the work of Merton (1968), the framework was used here as a middle-range theory, highlighting the role of conflict in a politicised policy area.

Data collection was also dictated by the emerging theory. Drawing on the findings of earlier chapters, which suggested that the UK drug classification policy area is characterised more by conflict than consensus, it was clear that there were also different appreciations of what did and should have counted as evidence in heavily politicised areas. Consequently, key methods of data collection were required that could account for the understandings of evidence from those who were engaged in the process, on some level. In this case, analysis of relevant documents and qualitative interviews provided the bedrock of the methods of data collection.

Particularly challenging were the impact of exogenous factors on the research process. These were numerous and well-documented throughout and could not be ignored. In essence, it was important to build these into the analysis. With this in mind, the concept of real-time research was conceived and employed. This primarily refers to researching a live, contemporary policy issue, in a constant state of flux and highlights the travails of doing this. Of prime importance, was the need for flexibility, particularly in the qualitative interviews. As a way forward, it is suggested that there is mileage in both the modified version of the Advocacy Coalition Framework and the notion of real-time research both of which provide avenues for

further research especially in similar policy domains; that is those characterised by the three Cs of competition, conflict and controversy.

The conclusion of this research is that resorting to the established models of research utilisation does not provide an adequate explanation of the nature and role of evidence in partisan policy areas. With the exception of the linear view, it is claimed that various aspects of the established models could be synthesised, and a new processual model developed thereon. Currently, the efficacy of the processual model is tentatively advocated. The tentativeness stems from the realisation that generalising from one case study to other areas of policy is problematic. This is typical of any Small *N* analysis. Generalisation must, however, be the goal of research. Hammersley (1992:68) has pointed out how research should provide ‘information that is both true and relevant to some legitimate public concern’. In this sense, it is intended that the processual model be put to empirical test in other, similar areas of policy. In effect, the full theoretical implications remain to be seen, but it is contended here, that the processual model offers some potential for further use in the research utilisation and evidence-based policy literature, particularly in the context of politicised areas.

10.4 Comments on Policy Implications

Consistent with the processual model, it is envisaged that the policy implications of this study will occur by attrition rather than via a direct causal link. This thesis is broadly supportive and optimistic about the future of evidence-based policy-making, providing it remains realistic about what can and cannot be achieved. In effect, it is suggested that the main policy implications could stem from an initial (and hoped for) reframing of the role of evidence in politicised areas. It is suggested that the zero-sum conceptualisations are no longer tenable and that more sophisticated analysis of the evidence and policy relationship is required from commentators and academics in the drugs and broader criminal justice fields. It is these fields where zero-sum views originate and predominate.

The processual model is put forward as a stepping stone in this endeavour. It recognises that many other factors are involved in the decision-making process.

These include the impact of politics and the media. To reiterate, the processual model warns against drawing the conclusion that these are somehow obstacles to the utilisation of evidence in policy. In effect, it challenges the widespread assumption that heavily politicised policies are evidence-free, but also challenges supporters of the said policies to refrain from claiming them to be wholly evidence-based. The quest is to show the role and nature of evidence in the decision-making process and to contribute towards a toning down, and more realistic appreciation, of what evidence-based policy is and can be. It is argued that well-thought out analysis will be particularly beneficial in politicised policy areas because, as indicated, these are precisely the ones where zero-sum views thrive. In essence, it is hoped that the current research could contribute towards more reasoned debate over the use of evidence in this context.

10.5 Final Comments

Returning to Tonry's (2004) assertion at the outset that on the small issues, evidence sometimes counts, but on the larger issues, politics is the order of the day, raises a number of key points. This can be seen as the epitome of the zero-sum view. It has been suggested throughout and is further illustrated below how such statements are understandable. Even though this is the case, however, this does not make them useful or, indeed, accurate.

It is clear from previous discussions that appreciations of whether the current system is evidence-based, depend heavily on appreciations of the chosen direction of policy. The Government position on drug policy, emerging in the aftermath of cannabis reclassification and alongside external interest in the classification system, was one that was consistent with the rational perspective. In many ways this is to be expected, as the mechanism of the way drug policy should be made is laid out in the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. This requires the Government to at least consult the ACMD when countenancing changes to the current legislation and the outlook of the ACMD is, for the most part, consistent with the rational perspective. Consequently, this perspective of evidence has become the platform on which the debate now operates. According to one senior civil servant from the Home Office:

I think David Nutt's work [Nutt et al. matrix] was probably the dominant evidence-base and the ACMD did a sort of review of the literature with colleagues from Department of Health and that fed into it. I was closer to the more recent work looking at whether it should have been reclassified back from C to B, which was Charles Clarke's clear instinct at the time. That was really what he wanted to do. That wasn't supported by the evidence and was driven largely by concerns on the impact of mental health, particularly among young people, that was one of the things the ACMD was asked to look at specifically and the evidence that supports that view. In that case you have got clear evidence of a Home Secretary accepting and listening to the evidence despite his instinct, you know he was pretty clear about that. He thought it had been a mistake and that it should have been reclassified back up to B (RATL12).

It must be stated, however, that the Government is under no obligation to accept the findings of the ACMD deliberations. The relationship between the ACMD and the Government is neatly summarised by Vernon Coaker MP:

We put great store in what they say. We listen carefully to the comments that they make. However, it is not a cosy relationship; it is a challenging relationship. They will challenge us in a whole variety of areas. I think that is as it should be. It is an independent body. It is a body whose opinions we respect, and we try to work closely with them (cited in Science and Technology Committee 2006:106).

Although Coaker is at pains to point out that the relationship is challenging, it is premised on a shared appreciation of the nature of evidence. From this and the findings of previous chapters in particular, the zero-sum conclusions of the perspectives become clear. For the radicals and conservatives this stems from the fact that their ideal policy direction and associated evidence is not consistent with the view of Government, consequently the current UK drug classification and the cannabis reclassification were evidence-free. By contrast, the rational perspective and the Government have a different standard of what evidence-based policy is, occurring not solely at the level of policy outcomes, but also at the level of process. In this sense they can make the claim that policies are evidence-based.

All perspectives' appreciations of evidence do not start from the same platform. It is apparent, then, that the rationalist understanding of evidence, in this particular subsystem, has emerged, not so much triumphant, but certainly powerful and central to the understanding of evidence *per se*. The basic point is that there is an unequal use of evidence in the policy process by those in positions of power. As a

consequence, the pluralist understandings of the nature of evidence, prevalent thus far, require some modification. This does not require a radical rejection of pluralism, however. The illustration of how certain kinds of knowledge and evidence have attained ascendancy in recent drug policy debates is akin to what Bachelard (1972) has termed ‘sanctioned’, as opposed to ‘lapsed’, knowledge.

A useful way of contextualising this shift is in a switch from pluralism to bounded pluralism (Hall, et al. 1975). This is similar to Etzioni’s (1967) criticism of more incrementalist models of the policy-making process, which focused on the power differentials in the policy process, where some individuals and groups tend to dominate. In essence, we are left with a view of the policy process that was neatly depicted over 30 years ago by Hall, et al. (1975:150-1):

Our proposition is a simple one: that the making of day-to-day policy on social issues in Britain does operate within a distinctly pluralist *process*, but that the limits of policy-making are set by elites...a ruling class. Social policy is not simply limited by class interests for it can clearly serve class interests as well...but it can also serve the purposes of many other vested interests and social groupings...The policy process is not neutral, but nor is it wholly closed and unresponsive to groups outside the ruling classes. The preservation of economic and social privilege sets limits and influence the content of much policy, but there is also a relatively open and often unpredictable competition for influence among many other interests drawn from different...sectors of society...we have chosen to characterize the policy process as *bounded pluralism*.

Although it is necessary to stop short of considering the ACMD, and more generally, the rational perspective as ‘elites’, the sentiment expressed in the above paragraph can be endorsed. Overall, this thesis has explored and explained the nature and role of evidence in politicised policy areas. Confirmation has been sought and found for the claim that some form of evidence is embedded in the decision-making process (regardless of ones feelings towards this). This does not mean that evidence will determine the policy direction. In effect, Tonry’s (2004) statement reintroduced at the beginning of this section misses this key point.

With this in mind, it is advocated that although problematic, the term, ‘evidence-based policy’ is, at least, not inaccurate when used with caution. It has been argued throughout that to talk of evidence-free policy is a paradox, however,

because evidence is intrinsic to the policy process. Ultimately, then, the question should be not whether such policies are wholly 'evidence-based' or 'evidence-free', but in what way or how evidence is utilised. By paying specific attention to the concept of evidence in terms of its nature and location, within a dynamic policy decision-making process, the processual model provides a more nuanced understanding of the research and policy relationship that is capable of answering this question.

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Appendix I: Early Interview Schedule

Description of Thesis

This thesis is concerned with evidence-based policy-making and the overall use of research in policy-making. Using the recent reclassification of cannabis as a case study, this study focuses on the extent to which this has occurred, if at all, in one area of drug policy, namely that relating to the drug classification system.

General

0-1 What is your role/title/job description? In effect in what capacity are you involved in the policy process?

0-2 This Government's commitment to evidence-based policy making, it has been suggested, has opened up policy making in Whitehall to more 'outsiders' to what extent do you see your involvement in the policy process a result of this development?

1. How do certain stakeholders in the policy process see their role in the development of drug policy?

1-1 How did you come to be involved in the policy process, in effect how did you become to be involved in giving evidence to the government/select committee?

1-2 What level of involvement do you think you have in the formation of policy where drug classification is concerned?

1-3 Do you see yourself as a central actor/figure in the process or more on the edge of the process?

1-4 Based on your experience and dealings with the Government do you perceive there to be a visible policy network or community that has arisen over the issue of drug classification?

1-5 Can you explain in further detail your relationship with who you see as the key players in the drug policy arena, be they lobby groups, ACMD, civil servants, politicians, police, media etc. Based on your experience is there a sense of 'working together' to achieve policy aims, if not what are the stumbling blocks?

1-6 Who do you think sets the agenda where drug classification is concerned?

2. What is the relationship between evidence/research and policy formation where the cannabis reclassification is concerned?

2-1 Based on your own experience how do you see the relationship between evidence and policy where regard to the classification of drugs is concerned?

2-2 The reclassification of cannabis, in 2004, from class B to class C under the MDA was, according to some academic writers, an 'evidence-based' policy change. Based on your experience/knowledge to what extent, if any do you agree with this claim?

- 2-3 Do you see the reclassification of cannabis as a significant development in the history of UK drug policy?
- 2-4 For many commentators the timing of both the decision to reclassify cannabis and the decision to review the reclassification were 'politically motivated.' What is your view on this?
- 2-5 It was stated in the Select Committee oral evidence session that the 2005 drugs Bill was rushed through prior to an election, based on your knowledge and experience is this claim fair, or were its findings i.e in particular those concerning Magic Mushroom's evidence based?
- 2-6 Based on your knowledge/experience, what problems, if any can you identify with the way government uses research and/or evidence?
- 2-7 In your experience of the policy process, do you accept that there is a lack of clarity where the classification of drugs is concerned primarily concerning the nature of harm?
- 2-8 In your view, have the policy-making conditions noticeably changed under New Labour so that now an increasing number of 'experts' are able to voice their opinions in the process regardless of whether they are taken into consideration?

3. How is power exercised in the policy network?

- 3-1 Do you see your work and the way it is handled as having any influence on policy? If so why, if not why not?
- 3-2 Based on your knowledge and experience of the policy process which groups/organisations are the most powerful in shaping government drug policy in the area of classification?
- 3-3 In your understanding, do you believe the government operates with the notion of a 'hierarchy of evidence' in that the evidence they use to support policy is selected on scientific credentials i.e. RCT's more valid than qualitative small-scale case studies
- 3-4 In your opinion/experience how transparent do you perceive policy decision-making to be?

Appendix II: Later Interview Schedule

This thesis explores the use of evidence in one area of UK public policy. Using the recent reclassification of cannabis and its aftermath as a case study, it focuses on the role and nature of evidence in UK drug policy-making from the perspective of those involved.

General

- 0-1 What is your role/title/job description? In effect in what capacity are you involved in the policy process?
- 0-2 Are you affiliated to any other organisation concerned with drug policy?
- 0-3 How significant do you see the United Nations conventions and their impact on UK drug policy?
- 0-4 This government's commitment to evidence-based policy making, it has been suggested, has opened up policy making in Whitehall to more 'outsiders': to what extent do you see your involvement in the policy process a result of this development? And/Or do you feel that is the case?
- 1. What is the relationship between evidence/research and policy formulation where drug classification is concerned?**
- 1-1 Based on your own experience how do you see the relationship between evidence and policy where regard to the classification of drugs is concerned?
- 1-2 Do you see the reclassification of cannabis as a significant development in the history of UK drug policy?
- 1-3 In light of the fact that the ACMD has for 25 years being advocating the downgrading of cannabis, in your view why were the conditions right for a change in the policy relating to cannabis in 2004 as opposed to any other previous time?
- 1-4 The reclassification of cannabis, in 2004, from class B to class C under the MDA was, according to RAND 2006, an 'evidence-based' policy change. Based on your experience/knowledge to what extent do you agree with this claim?
- 1-5 In your view what counts as evidence here?
- 1-6 For many commentators the timing of both the decision to reclassify cannabis and the decision to review the reclassification were 'politically motivated.' What is your view on this?
- 1-7 Based on your knowledge/experience, overall what problems, if any, can you identify with the way government uses research and/or evidence?
- 1-8 In your experience of the policy process, do you accept that there is a lack of clarity where the classification of drugs is concerned primarily concerning the nature of harm?
- 1-9 It was stated in the Select Committee oral evidence session that the 2005 drugs Bill was rushed through prior to an election, based on your knowledge and experience is this claim fair?
- 2. How do certain stakeholders' beliefs affect their role in the policy process? Are there recognisable coalitions or perspectives?**

- 2-1 How did you come to be involved in the policy process?
- 2-2 What level of involvement do you think you have in the formation of policy where drug classification is concerned? Do you see yourself as a central actor/figure in the process or more on the edge of the process?
- 2-3 Do you see your work (individual or organisation) and the way it is handled as having any influence on policy? If so why, if not why not?
- 2-4 Based on your experience do you perceive there to be visible policy networks or coalitions/perspectives that have arisen over the issue of drug classification?
- 2-5 Where drug classification is concerned I see that there are three different coalitions/perspectives who present a viewpoint; the 'radical' coalition who wish to abolish the MDA, the 'rationalist' coalition who strive for more consistency and the 'conservative' coalition who are broadly speaking satisfied with its operation, but would prefer a more simplistic model like that of Sweden to what extent would you agree with this and where would you position yourself?
- 2-6 The drugs debate in the UK is typically characterised as entailing certain conflicts between emphasis on treatment and emphasis on punishment, do you see that this dichotomy is typical of the current situation?
- 2-7 Based on your experience is there a sense of 'working together' between various groups to achieve policy aims, if not what are the stumbling blocks?
- 2-8 In your understanding, do you believe the government operates with the notion of a 'hierarchy of evidence' in that the evidence they use to support policy is selected on scientific credentials i.e. RCT's more valid than qualitative small-scale case studies

3. How is power exercised in the policy subsystem and what effect does this have for the role of 'evidence' in policy?

- 3-1 Based on your knowledge and experience do you see any problems with the way the ACMD operate?
- 3-2 Based on your experience, to what extent is ACMD a 'neutral' body or are its deliberations shaped by a specific philosophy or outlook?
- 3-3 In your view, have the policy-making conditions noticeably changed under New Labour so that now an increasing number of 'experts' are able to voice their opinions in the process regardless of whether they are taken into consideration?
- 3-4 Can you explain in further detail who you see as the key players in the drug policy arena, be they lobby groups (NGOs), ACMD, civil servants, politicians, police, media etc?
- 3-5 Based on your knowledge and experience of the policy process which groups/organisations are the most powerful in shaping government drug policy in the area of classification?
- 3-6 For pressure groups – do you think the fact that you have a certain perspective or motivations for getting involved in the policy process has an effect on the way your evidence is used?
- 3-7 Based on your experience has the so-called 'opening up' of government created conditions where the lobbying powers of some groups have been weakened?
- 3-8 Who do you think sets the agenda where drug classification policy is concerned?
- 3-9 In your opinion/experience how transparent do you perceive policy decision-making to be?
- 3-10 Are there any 'hidden' or other influences on policy-making?

Appendix III: Continuity and Change in the Interview Schedule

A comparative look at Appendices I and II illustrates the fluctuating nature of the interview schedule used throughout the duration of the fieldwork. It is suggested that this reflects the turbulent nature of real-time research. The interview schedule was amended in light of emerging theoretical, substantive and methodological developments that impacted on the research process. Six interviews with respondents were carried out in 2006. The remainder took place in 2007. What follows can be read, therefore, as a discussion of the changes occurring between 2006 and 2007. Nevertheless, it must also be stated that there were also clear lines of continuity. It is on these grounds that the current discussion is organised.

Prior to offering an explanation on the nature of the thesis (if this had not already been covered in the planning and initial contact stage with respondents), the opening exchanges were used to discuss the ethical issues arising from the research process. In particular, the notion that the respondent's consent is an ongoing process, running throughout the duration of the research and that they were free to withdraw it at anytime. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity were also ensured here. This aspect of the research has remained stable throughout. In the early stages the opening sequence stated:

This thesis is concerned with evidence-based policy-making and the overall use of research in policy-making. Using the recent reclassification of cannabis as a case study, this study focuses on the extent to which this has occurred, if at all in one area of drug policy, namely that relating to the drug classification system.

To reiterate, at the outset of the research (September 2005), the focus was on the cannabis reclassification as a singular event. However, various factors external to the research, led to a tangible reshaping of the nature of the discussion. It will suffice to say at this stage that the origin of this development was Charles Clarke's decision, in 2005, to ask ACMD to review the initial cannabis reclassification. This was followed by the subsequent inquiry and publication of the Science and Technology Committee (2006) report along with the publication of the Nutt, et al matrix (2007); the Royal Society of Arts (2007) report and that of the newly formed United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission (Reuter and Stevens 2007). These developments meant that the focus on the cannabis episode alone was untenable and could not be separated from more widespread concerns of the evidence for the efficacy of the classification system in general.

In effect, the renewed interest in the overall classification system provided verification for the notion that studying a contemporary policy issue requires flexibility. This is precisely because it does not occur in an information vacuum. Events occurring in the real world, in real time, can significantly distort or date aspects of the research. It is necessary to state that these substantive changes coincided with theoretical and methodological developments in the project. Despite these external factors impinging on the research, the overall aims, to an extent, have remained stable, in that exploring the role and nature of evidence within the subsystem has remained a primary concern. However, as the project developed, the lens through which evidence was viewed was slightly amended. In general, the

schedule underwent various iterations but generally maintained the same structure. As regards the latter, there are four discrete sections starting with some general background questions before moving on to discuss the main research questions of the thesis via a number of sub-questions. In light of these developments, the opening statement used for the majority of the interviews morphed into:

This thesis explores the use of evidence in one area of UK public policy. Using the recent reclassification of cannabis and its aftermath as a case study, it focuses on the role and nature of evidence in UK drug policy-making from the perspective of those involved.

The background questions followed and set the scene, providing the context as to how the respondent viewed evidence in the policy-making process. The earlier schedule was influenced by a more general appreciation of pluralist models of policy-making, of which the policy networks literature was initially deemed pertinent. These were amended as the Advocacy Coalition Framework became consolidated in the research in conjunction with the broader substantive scope. This also resulted in a changing of the overall running of the interview. A comparison of questions 0-1 to 0-2 in Appendix I and 0-1 to 0-4 in Appendix II reveal these developments. The question concerning affiliation is useful in placing subjects within one coalition/perspective and the reference to the UN conventions is a related issue. These provide the blueprint for domestic legislation, but are the source of much debate as to the overall efficacy of the legislation.

In addition, there is also a noticeable attempt here to challenge the assumption as to whether recent changes in the policy-making process actually constituted evidence-base policy-making in the context UK drug classification. This resulted in the revised hypothesis, central to the notion of 'turmoil.' In short, this was concerned to discover if there were recognisable coalitions/perspectives visible in this particular policy subsystem, which broadly speaking, share a similar ontological and epistemological outlook as to what constitutes evidence in this debate. Asking whether respondents felt changes in policy-making actually constituted 'evidence-based policy' and how they viewed their own involvement in the process as a consequence of this, was designed to yield data on the discrepancies that occur within this debate regarding the nature of evidence. Subsequent developments in the remainder of the interview schedule reflect this development.

A comparison between Question 1 (and sub questions 1-1 to 1-6) in Appendix I and Question 1 (and sub questions 1-1 to 1-9) in Appendix II reveals a clear change in the running order of the interview as well as changes in the nature of the questioning. Table A.1 illustrates the more fruitful points of comparison based on themes identified above.

Table A.1 Points of Comparison in the Fluctuating Interview Schedule

Theme	Appendix I	Appendix II
The Intricacy (Conceptualisation) of Evidence	Question 2	Question 1
The Nature of Coalitions/Perspectives	Question 1	Question 2
The Issue of Power and Associated Themes	Question 3	Question 3

A more useful comparison is between question 2 (2-1 to 2-8) in Appendix I and Question 1 (1-1 to 1-9) in Appendix II, under the heading of 'The Intricacy of Evidence: UK Drug Classification.' These reflect the way that evidence is conceptualised by various players in the process; in particular, considering the key themes of what evidence is used and should be used in this particular debate. Looking at the main research questions of the relevant appendices (Question 1 Appendix I and Question 2 Appendix II) illustrates the aforementioned switch from cannabis reclassification to the classification system more generally. Ascertaining these different understandings became central to the turmoil of evidence and questions designed to explore this were thus promoted to the start of the interview. This data formed the background to the discussion of the tumultuous nature of evidence in this particular policy area, another central tenet of the turmoil of evidence.

The switching of the running order also saw a change from thinking in terms of policy networks to those of advocacy coalitions. This relates to the second theme of whether there were recognisable coalitions in this particular policy debate and how these shape the evidence that is produced. Comparisons need to be made between Question 1 Appendix I and Question 2 Appendix II. The goals Question 2 Appendix II have a slightly different emphasis from those in Question 1 of Appendix I. This is most apparent in the questions concerning 'working together,' 'joint working' (Sub-question 2-7, Appendix II) The significance of the 'joint working' question stems from the assumption that most respondents were in some way dissatisfied with the current operation of the UK drug classification system but that the solutions proposed about the most suitable direction for policy change were radically different. 'Joint working', or lack of it, has formed a key part of the recent history of UK drug policy which has typically seen conflict between competing coalitions/perspectives. The inclusion of the word 'coalition/perspective' in certain questions (Sub-questions 2-4 and 2-5, Appendix II) relates to the emerging theme that there are actually three identifiable coalitions/perspective within this policy subsystem, each with a particular appreciation of the problem of the classification system and associated evidence that should be used to overcome this problem. This provided the data for how coalitions/perspectives were identifiable, forming the crux of the way the analysis was organised.

The final question concerning power in the policy process has remained consistent. A comparison of Question 3 in Appendices I and II reveals that in later iterations the wording has changed slightly reflecting the influence of the Advocacy Coalition Framework literature. The added emphasis on the role of evidence in later versions reflects developments discussed above relating to the turmoil of evidence in particular the notions of power and agenda setting that can have a significant bearing on the way 'evidence' is understood, in terms of its location in the policy process.

There is further confirmation here that the line of questioning that influenced the initial schedule was in need of reworking, in light of emerging theories this is highlighted by the removal of the question of a 'hierarchy of evidence' (question 3-3 Appendix 1) which became subsumed in later incarnations within a broader question of what counts as evidence in this particular subsystem.

As illustrated in Chapter Three, advocacy coalition analysis locates some actors at the 'core' and some at the 'periphery' which, in turn, impacts on participants feel they get their ideas and beliefs on the agenda. Emerging from this data was the view of evidence as being embedded in the debate in contrast to the more widespread zero-sum appreciations of the role of evidence in this policy subsystem. Further issues covered at this stage include the notion that the Government may take advice or share a similar view of evidence from certain groups which inevitably means that some evidence is seen as more pertinent than others. This is reflected in questions 3-4 to 3-7 of Appendix II. In turn, it addresses the hypothesis that UK drug policy is heavily ideological and therefore evidence that corresponds with the dominant ideology (i.e. that of the most powerful coalition) is that which finds its way into policy.

The strength of the Advocacy Coalition Framework, particularly the way it is applied in this thesis, is that it builds this into the analysis. It is from such questioning that ideas relating to the processual model of research utilisation were determined. A further strength is that by focusing on belief systems the Advocacy Coalition Framework is able to build into the analysis 'hidden factors' which may shape policy (question 3-10). Although, for the most part, these were few and far between, it must be stressed that one significant issue did emerge from this. Generally, this related to how the nature of 'evidence' used in a policy debate is not evenly contested but is shaped by the dominant coalition/perspective within the policy debate. That is, those who have the power to set the agenda. In this thesis, this constitutes the coalition/perspective that incorporates or has close ties to the relevant legislator or policy-makers. This, in turn, is central to the zero-sum conceptualisations of the evidence and policy connection that are widespread in heavily politicised policy domains.

Appendix IV Key Findings from the Nutt et al Matrix

Table: Mean independent group scores in each of the three categories of harm, for 20 substances, ranked by their overall score, and mean scores for each of the three subscales

	Physical Harm					Dependence					Social				
	Mean	Acute	Chronic	Intravenous	Mean	Pleasure	Psychological Dependence	Physical Dependence	Mean	Intoxication	Social Harm	Health Care Costs			
Heroin	2.78	2.80	2.50	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.54	1.60	3.00	3.00			
Cocaine	2.33	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.39	3.00	2.80	1.30	2.17	1.80	2.50	2.30			
Barbiturates	2.23	2.30	1.90	2.50	2.01	2.00	2.20	1.80	2.00	2.40	1.90	1.70			
Street															
Methadone	1.86	2.50	1.70	1.40	2.08	1.80	2.30	2.30	1.87	1.60	1.90	2.00			
Alcohol	1.40	1.90	2.40	N/A	1.93	2.30	1.90	1.60	2.21	2.20	2.40	2.10			
Ketamine	2.00	2.10	1.70	2.10	1.54	1.90	1.70	1.00	1.69	2.00	1.50	1.50			
Benzodiazepines	1.63	1.50	1.70	1.80	1.83	1.70	2.10	1.80	1.65	2.00	1.50	1.50			
Amphetamines	1.81	1.30	1.80	2.40	1.67	2.00	1.90	1.10	1.50	1.40	1.50	1.60			
Tobacco	1.24	0.90	2.90	0.00	2.21	2.30	2.60	1.80	1.42	0.80	1.10	2.40			
Buprenorphine	1.60	1.20	1.30	2.30	1.64	2.00	1.50	1.50	1.49	1.60	1.50	1.40			
Cannabis	0.99	0.90	2.10	0.00	1.51	1.90	1.70	0.80	1.50	1.70	1.30	1.50			
Solvents	1.28	2.10	1.70	0.00	1.01	1.70	1.20	0.10	1.52	1.90	1.50	1.20			
4-MTA	1.44	2.20	2.10	0.00	1.30	1.00	1.70	0.80	1.06	1.20	1.00	1.00			
LSD	1.13	1.70	1.40	0.30	1.23	2.20	1.10	0.30	1.32	1.60	1.30	1.10			
Methylphenidate	1.32	1.20	1.30	1.60	1.25	1.40	1.30	1.00	0.97	1.10	0.80	1.10			
Anabolic Steroids	1.45	0.80	2.00	1.70	0.88	1.10	0.80	0.80	1.13	1.30	0.80	1.30			
GHB	0.86	1.40	1.20	0.00	1.19	1.40	1.10	1.10	1.30	1.40	1.30	1.20			
Ecstasy	1.05	1.60	1.60	0.00	1.13	1.50	1.20	0.70	1.09	1.20	1.00	1.10			
Alkyl Nitrates	0.93	1.60	0.90	0.30	0.87	1.60	0.70	0.30	0.97	0.80	0.70	1.40			
Khat	0.50	0.30	1.20	0.00	1.04	1.60	1.20	0.30	0.85	0.70	1.10	0.80			

Table: Mean harm scores for 20 substances (Max = 3.0)

	Mean Overall Score	Class in MDA	Comments
Heroin	2.77	A	crude diamorphine
Cocaine	2.30	A	Includes crack cocaine
Barbiturates	2.08	B	
Street Methadone	1.94	A	Diverted prescribed methadone
Alcohol	1.85	Not Controlled	
Ketamine	1.74	C	If Over 18 Years or Over in UK
Benzodiazepines	1.70	C	As of January 2007
Amphetamines	1.66	B	e.g. Valium (diazepam)
Tobacco	1.62	Not Controlled	
Buprenorphine	1.58	C	If Over 16 Years or Over in UK e.g. Tamgesic, Subutex
Cannabis	1.33	C	Back up to B May 2008
Solvents	1.27	Not Controlled	Sales restricted
4-MTA	1.27	A	4-methylthioamphetamine
LSD	1.23	A	Lysergic acid diethylamide
Methylphenidate	1.18	B	e.g. Ritalin
Anabolic Steroids	1.15	C	
GHB	1.12	C	Gamma 4-hydroxybutyric acid
Ecstasy	1.09	A	Essentially methylenedioxy-N-methamphetamine (MDMA)
Alkyl Nitrates	0.92	Not Controlled	
Khat	0.80	Not Controlled	

Appendix V: The Hierarchy of Evidence

Level:	Methodology	Brief Description
1	Systematic reviews and meta-analyses	<p>Systematic reviews review of a body of data of all the existing research of a particular kind of intervention</p> <p>Meta-analysis is the sum-total of analysis, the analysis of all previous analysis. Goes through stages of: a) Hypothesis formation - proposing a relationship between an implementation (I) and an outcome (O); b) Data collection – Collecting data from all studies that have investigated I and O relationships; c) Pools together findings from all previous analysis of the relationship between I and O; d) Hypothesis appraisal – Stating the confidence in the causal relationship between I and O</p>
2	Randomised controlled trials (RCT) (with concealed allocation)	In the social science format individuals are randomly allocated to a control group and a group who receive a specific intervention (experiment group). Otherwise the two groups are thought to be identical for any significant variables. They are followed up for specific end points.
3	Quasi-experimental studies (using matches)	Used in situations when it is impossible to randomly apply subjects to experiment and control groups but based on the same principles as the RCT but lacking in equivocal internal validity
4	Before and after comparisons	‘Cases’ with the condition are matched with ‘controls’ without, and a retrospective analysis used to look for differences between the two groups.
5	Cross sectional, random-sample studies	Survey or interview of a sample of the population selected purely by chance at one point in time
6	Process evaluation, formative studies and action research	<p>Process evaluation/formative studies are often built into the design of any implementation. They struggle to inform policy because they are retrospective.</p> <p>Action research is a process whereby the researcher and client collaborate in the diagnosis of a social problem and come to a mutual agreement in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis.</p>
7	Qualitative case study and ethnographic research.	<p>Qualitative case study is research based on a detailed examination of a single case or small number of cases. They are beset with problems of generalisation</p> <p>Ethnographic research is where the researcher</p>

		immerses oneself in the social setting for an extended period of time refers to both method of research (usually qualitative) and also the written output (narrative)
8	Descriptive guides and examples of good practice	Evidence taken from similar interventions seen as a beacon for other similar future interventions
9	Professional and expert opinion	A consensus of experience from key figures in the field (the good and the great)
10	User opinion	Primarily anecdotal based on reflections of those usually the recipient of any given intervention

(adapted from Pawson 2006)