

<b>Institution:</b> University of the West of Scotland		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 20: Social Work and Social Policy		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Transforming understanding of drug-related harms		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2011 - 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Aileen O’Gorman	Senior Lecturer	2014 - 2020
Dr Iain McPhee	Senior Lecturer	2000 - 2020
Dr Claire Harkins	Lecturer	2014 - 2020
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016 - 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Drug-related harms and deaths are a public health crisis in Scotland (with the highest level of drug deaths in Europe) and globally. Research conducted by the Contemporary Drug and Alcohol Studies (CDAS) programme staff has transformed understandings of drug-related harms from a narrow focus on risk behaviours towards a broader analysis of the risk environment and the role of policy, practice, and corporate influences in shaping harms. Their work makes visible the unequal distribution of drug-related harms and deaths and has pioneered a drugs policy shift towards human rights, equality and harm reduction in Scotland, Ireland, and at the European level.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning Research</b>		
<p>Overall, CDAS research findings demonstrate at an international level that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drug-related harms and deaths are disproportionately distributed in areas of deprivation and shaped by deficits in policy and practice <b>[3.1-3.4]</b>.</li> <li>• Policy induced harms (i.e. through welfare restructuring and budget cuts, drug prohibition and law enforcement) produce and reproduce the unequal distribution of harms and deaths <b>[3.1-3.4]</b>.</li> <li>• Addressing drug-related harms and deaths requires an integrated and resourced public health, social policy and human rights-based approach <b>[3.1-3.6]</b>.</li> <li>• Drug-related harms are mediated positively by harm reduction, and civil society and rights-based advocacy approaches of participation and inclusion; and harmfully by corporate/market interests <b>[3.1-3.6]</b>.</li> <li>• The lived experience of drug-related harms at individual, family and community level are embedded within broader socio-economic and health inequalities <b>[3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5]</b>.</li> </ul> <p>More specifically, the innovative body of community-based and participatory research by <b>O’Gorman</b> traces the lived experience of drug use and related harms at a community level to the production of inequality and risk environments at a national policy level. Her commissioned research in Ireland <b>[3.1, 3.2]</b> employs a collaborative approach with peer researchers to democratise knowledge production on inequalities. Her findings demonstrate the centrality of addressing upstream structural issues in tandem with community development and partnership approaches (between state and civil society) to address the unequal distribution of drug-related harms.</p> <p>The ground-breaking analysis of drug-related deaths (DRD) data in Scotland by <b>McPhee</b> evidenced the significantly higher prevalence of deaths in areas of greater deprivation <b>[3.3]</b>. Their 2019 narrative review of AUDIT Scotland’s reports linked an increased risk of DRD among marginalised communities to budget cuts to alcohol and drug services <b>[3.4]</b>. In 2018, their in-depth evaluation of a rights-based advocacy service (which led to the establishment of the National Recovery Advocacy Network and training of Rights-based Advocacy Practitioners) identified the positive impact of human rights approaches to the quality of life experienced by people in recovery from drug and alcohol use <b>[3.5]</b>.</p>		

**Harkin's** innovative research [3.6] shaped the findings of the internationally influential ALICE RAP project (Addiction and Lifestyles in Contemporary Europe - Reframing Addictions Project). This major research project, financed by the European Commission, ran for five years (from 2011-2016), bringing together **200 scientists** from more than **25 countries** and **29 different disciplines** to strengthen scientific evidence on addictions. The synthesised scientific outcomes of the project (the 12-point ALICE RAP policy frame) were adopted via Decision Makers' Dialogues at national (England & Latvia), European (EC) and International (WHO) level.

These research findings are significant because they have successfully challenged the dominant discourses in media and political debates that stigmatise, problematise and frame drug use as an outcome of individual or family dysfunction. By highlighting the role of policy in shaping inequality and risk factors for drug-related harms, and the influence of ideology and austerity over evidence in policy, they have shifted policy discourses and strategies in Scotland and Ireland to focus on wider issues of health and social inequalities and human rights. It is in this area of work that CDAS achieves considerable impact.

### 3. References to the research

**3.1: O'Gorman, A.,** Driscoll, A., Moore, K., and Roantree, D. (2016). *Outcomes: Drug harms, policy harms and the needs of community*. Dublin: Clondalkin Drugs Task Force. This is a commissioned research report publically available at: <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/25577/>

**3.2: O'Gorman, A.,** (2020) *Community Drug Projects: Responding to drug-related harms through a community development approach*. Dublin: CityWide. This is a commissioned research report publically available at: <https://www.citywide.ie/resources/community-drug-projects-responding-to-drugrelated-harms-from-a-community-development-approach/>

**3.3: McPhee, J.,** Sheridan, B., O'Rawe, S., (2019) 'Time to look beyond ageing as a factor? Alternative explanations for the continuing rise in drug related deaths in Scotland', *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, 19(2): 72-85. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DAT-06-2018-0030>

**3.4: McPhee, I.,** Sheridan, B., (2020) 'AUDIT Scotland 10 years on: explaining how funding decisions link to increased risk for drug related deaths among the poor', *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, 20(4): 313-322. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DAT-05-2020-0024>

**3.5: McPhee, I.,** Sheridan, B., O'Rawe, S., (2019). *Rights Based Advocacy as Intervention: A Mixed Methods Study of Reach Advocacy: A Recovery-oriented Advocacy Service Based in North Lanarkshire*. Glasgow Council on Alcohol. This is a commissioned research report available at: <https://www.elevate-glasgow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Reach-Advocacy-Report-final-III-docx.pdf>

**3.6:** Miller, D., **Harkins, C.,** Schlogl, M. and Montague, B., (2017) *Impact of Market Forces on Addictive Substances and Behaviours*. Oxford University Press. (Output is listed in REF2)

### 4. Details of the impact

CDAS research has transformed drug policy and practice discourses; and informed the development of new national drug strategies in **Ireland** (*Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery*, 2017); in **Scotland** (*Rights, Respect and Recovery*, 2018) as well as the work of the **European Commission** and World Health Organisation (**WHO**). Through staff's public engagement and participation in policy fora, CDAS research has pioneered reforms in policy and practice and influenced civil society and public debate on human rights and harm reduction responses to drug-related harms.

#### Identifying policy-induced harms and risk environments

In May 2016, O'Gorman's research report [3.1] was cited in Leaders' Questions in the Dáil [**Irish Parliament**] after being launched at a national conference to an audience of 120 stakeholders - policy-makers, service providers, service users and representatives from community and statutory

agencies [5.1]. The report was cited again during the Dáil hearing of the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill 6 July 2016. The findings of the research report and the conference shaped the public discourse on poverty, inequality and drug-related harms via media reports and impacted directly on the public consultation process for the development of the new National Drugs Strategy [5.1 & 5.2]. In addition, the research provided the basis for the commissioning NGO's published strategic plan and their subsequent work programme in addressing drug-related harms at the individual and community level [5.3].

McPhee's research identifying the concentration of drug deaths in areas of deprivation [3.3] and linked to funding cuts [3.4] informed public engagement and debates in the Scottish and Westminster parliaments. [5.4]

Research in this area has also been cited in a range of media reports, in publications such as The Herald (circulation: 28,900), The Scotsman (print readership: 78,000; circulation: 14,417) and The Daily Record (circulation: 83,133), particularly relating to the report in Drug and Alcohol Today, titled: 'AUDIT Scotland 10 years on: explaining how funding decisions link to increased risk for drug related deaths among the poor'. A Scotland on Sunday (circulation: 6,843), journalist also cited the research as part of a column examining drug death tolls in relation to government policies. [5.11]

### **Influencing practice-based responses to drug-related harms**

The research on community development approaches to drug-related harms by O'Gorman [3.2] was presented at a public engagement event in Dublin at which all seven former government Ministers with responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy attended to sign a statement of support for this approach to drugs policy. The event received extensive media coverage across all the print media and RTE [the state broadcaster] news and led to policy change to re-adopt this approach in the aftermath of COVID-19 [5.5].

Furthermore, the Scottish Government has changed its position to include a commitment to acknowledge human rights in alcohol and drug policy as a result of McPhee's research on rights-based approaches to recovery [3.5], following its dissemination through the Scottish Recovery Commission conferences. This led to a change in government policy and led to the commissioning of training for rights-based advocacy workers in local authorities throughout Scotland [5.6 & 5.7].

### **Contributing to the strategic development of drug policy & practice**

The Scottish Government's 'refresh' of their drug strategy towards a public health and rights-based approach (published as *Rights, Respect and Recovery*, November 2019) stemmed from both O'Gorman and McPhee using their evidence-based research to shape drug policy debates via various policy fora.

In 2017, the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Alcohol and Drugs sought O'Gorman's expertise on risk environments to input to their session on developing the new drugs strategy. In May 2018, the Scotland's Futures Forum (the Scottish Parliament's think-tank) sought both McPhee and O'Gorman's input to the consultative seminar and the consequent seminal report *Drugs In Scotland* which informed the new drugs strategy [5.8]. Subsequently, McPhee was invited to give evidence to the 2019 Scottish Affairs Committee 'Inquiry into Drug Misuse in Scotland' at the UK Parliament in Westminster Palace [5.9].

O'Gorman's written submissions to the **Scottish Affairs Committee** Inquiry on the social and structural determinants of drug-related deaths and PRAXXIS: Policy Research Action with Women in Scotland steered policy towards a focus on risk environments and women's differential experience of drug-related harms. In May 2019, as a member of the steering group of the Scottish Drugs Policy Conversation (SDPC), she co-organised over 20 third sector groups and stakeholders to participate in a roundtable policy discussion on the impact of inequality and risk environments with members of the Scottish Affairs Committee.

In 2018, O’Gorman’s research led to her appointment to the Scottish Government’s Drugs Research Network (DRNS) steering group and lead for Harms research. DRNS’ strategic role in influencing policy is explicitly acknowledged by the Scottish Government in its drugs strategy (2019:37) [5.8].

### Corporate influences on addictions policy

Commercial Determinates of Health have become a key area of policy at the **European Commission** and **WHO** as well as at national level due to Harkins’ research on the politics of public health policy-making, and on the role of the non-elected operating within policy circles in relation to public health. Her ALICE RAP research [3.6] has impacted on the public and political dialogue on current and alternative approaches to addictions throughout Europe and the work of the European Commission and the European Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction [5.10].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

**5.1:** Dillon, L. (2016) ‘Outcomes: drug harms, policy harms, poverty and inequality’. Drugnet Ireland Issue 59, <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/26228/>

**5.2:** Dillon, Lucy (2018) Reclaiming community development. Drugnet Ireland, Issue 66, Summer 2018, pp. 5-6. <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/29584/>

**5.3:** Testimonial from Clondalkin Drug and Alcohol Task Force, Dublin, Ireland

**5.4:** Testimonial from the Labour MSP for Lothian’s

**5.5:** Testimonial from Citywide Drug Crisis Campaign, Dublin, Ireland

**5.6:** Testimonial from Reach Advocacy Scotland

**5.7:** Testimonial from Scottish Recovery Consortium

**5.8:** Testimonial from Scottish Drugs Forum

**5.9:** [McPhee’s evidence to the SAC on stigma, criminalisation and is quoted ten times in the] Inquiry report House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee: Problem Drug Use in Scotland: First Report of Session 2019: Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report, (2019) Wishart, P., Brock, D., Duguid, D., Gaffney, H., Killen, G., Lamont, J., Masterton, P., Rowley, D., Sheppard, T., Stone, J., Thomson, R., Jardine, C. & McPhee, I., 29 Oct 2019, London: House of Commons. 77 p.: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmsscota/44/44.pdf>

**5.10** Addiction and Lifestyles in Contemporary Europe: Reframing Addictions Project (ALICE RAP) Decision Makers’ Dialogues. Deliverable 20.3, Work Package 20, March 2016.

[file:///D:/A%20REF/Impact/CDAS%20Impact/5\\_Sources%20to%20corroborate%20the%20impact/ALICE%20RAP\\_D20.3\\_Decision%20Makers%20Dialogues.pdf](file:///D:/A%20REF/Impact/CDAS%20Impact/5_Sources%20to%20corroborate%20the%20impact/ALICE%20RAP_D20.3_Decision%20Makers%20Dialogues.pdf)

**5.11** Media Coverage:

a) <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/claims-snps-refusal-fund-drug-23162832>

b) <https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/euan-mccolm-drug-deaths-toll-entirely-due-snps-failed-policies-3074021>

- c) <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/14032530.top-drug-expert-says-the-war-on-drugs-is-just-a-war-on-the-poor/>