CRDG Government Asks

Policy Roundtable Summary & Priority Actions | December 2025

Prof Trevor Jones, Chair

The Opportunity

Following the 4 December policy roundtable (attended by DHSC, Home Office, MHRA and Office for Investment), CRDG has identified five critical government actions to remove regulatory barriers, unlock investment, and accelerate the UK's position as the global leader in cannabinoid R&D.

CRDG Members

Artelo Biosciences

Brains Bioceutical

Curaleaf International

Kingdom Therapeutics

NW Pharma Tech

Sonas Pharma

Five Immediate Government Asks

CRDG has developed a comprehensive set of policy recommendations designed to transform the UK's cannabinoid research landscape. These five priority actions address the most critical regulatory bottlenecks currently hindering innovation and investment in this rapidly growing sector.

01

Streamline Schedule 1 Licensing

Reduce approval delays and enable research flexibility

02

Clarify MHRA Guidance

Establish clear standards for cannabinoid NCEs

03

Fast-Track Funded Projects

Exempt Innovate UK projects from standard delays

04

Establish Dedicated Pathway

Create accelerated regulatory framework

05

Issue Interim ACMD Guidance

Provide clarity on Schedule 1 exemptions

Ask #1: Streamline Schedule 1 Licensing for Cannabinoid Research

Lead Department

Home Office / DHSC

Key Actions Required

- Reduce current 6–9 month licensing approval delays to ≤3 months
- Establish binding timelines for all controlled drug research licence approvals
- Enable import/export flexibility for small-scale cannabinoid research samples

These changes will dramatically accelerate the pace of cannabinoid research in the UK, allowing researchers to compete effectively with international counterparts and attract global investment.

Ask #2: Clarify MHRA Guidance for Cannabinoid New Chemical Entities (NCEs)

Lead Department

Home Office/MHRA

Toxicology & Abuse Liability Standards

Issue explicit guidance on toxicology, abuse liability, and GMP expectations for cannabinoid-derived NCEs

THC Purity Thresholds

Clarify acceptable THC purity thresholds for CBD-focused research

International Harmonisation

Harmonise UK standards with FDA and EMA approaches

Clear regulatory guidance will provide certainty for researchers and investors, reducing development costs and timelines while maintaining rigorous safety standards.

Ask #3: Fast-Track Innovate UK-Funded Projects

Lead Departments

Home Office / NIHR

Priority Actions

- Exempt Innovate UK-funded controlled drug research from standard licensing delays
- Implement a cross-government single point of contact (DHSC, MHRA, Home Office) for cannabinoid research queries

By prioritising government-funded research projects, the UK can demonstrate its commitment to cannabinoid innovation and ensure taxpayer investments deliver maximum impact without unnecessary bureaucratic delays.

Ask #4: Establish Dedicated Cannabinoid R&D Regulatory Pathway

Lead Departments

MHRA / DHSC

Accelerated Framework

Create accelerated regulatory framework (similar to Orphan or Advanced Therapy designations) for high unmet-need areas

Adaptive Licensing

Enable adaptive licensing for cannabinoid-based therapies where appropriate

A dedicated pathway recognises the unique characteristics of cannabinoid therapeutics and the urgent medical needs they address, positioning the UK as a pioneer in this emerging field.

Ask #5: Issue Interim ACMD Guidance on Schedule 1 Research Status

Lead Departments

Home Office / ACMD

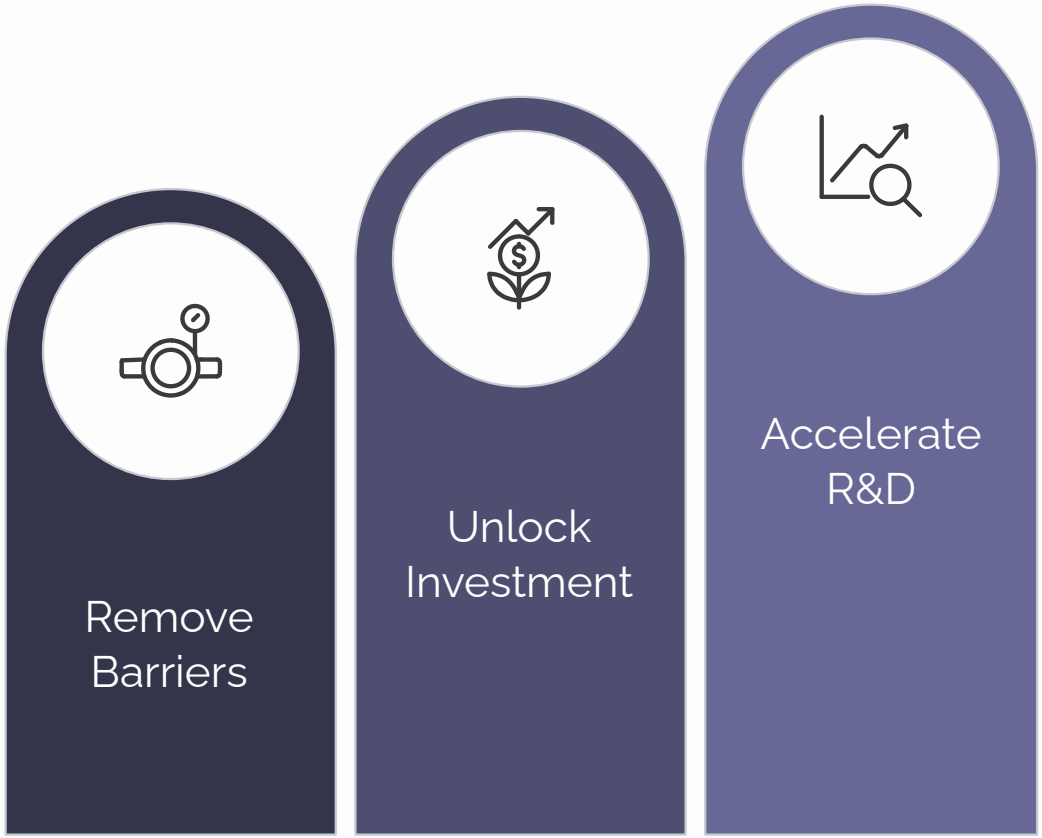
> Regulatory clarity is essential for researchers and investors to confidently commit resources to cannabinoid R&D in the UK.

Critical Guidance Needed

- Provide regulatory clarity on Schedule 1 exemptions for approved research organisations
- Publish definitive guidance on CBD research eligibility as investigative therapeutic agent

Interim guidance from ACMD will bridge the gap while longer-term legislative changes are developed, providing immediate relief to the research community and signalling government support for this sector.

Impact of These Actions



Implementation of these five government asks will create a virtuous cycle of innovation, investment, and international leadership. By removing regulatory barriers, the UK can unlock billions in private investment, accelerate life-saving research, and establish itself as the premier destination for cannabinoid R&D globally.

Next Steps

CRDG welcomes engagement with DHSC, MHRA, Home Office, and Office for Life Sciences to confirm timelines and departmental ownership.

Stakeholder Engagement

Schedule follow-up meetings with key government departments

Timeline Confirmation

Establish clear milestones and delivery dates for each action

Departmental Ownership

Confirm lead departments and accountability structures

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