The global aim of the QUALECT study is to provide an outcome evaluation of the Ghent DTC project with specific attention to improvements in various life domains of drug dependent offenders whether or not a DTC-trajectory was present. This outcome study can be considered supplementary to the recidivism study executed by the Service on Criminal Policy. In addition to the outcomes of the DTC-project, stakeholders’ perspectives on the project are studied. A multi-method research design, in particular a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, is used in the QUALECT study. In the quantitative research part a systematic review of the literature is conducted, using (inter)national databases. This literature study focuses on effects and outcomes of drug treatment courts regarding recidivism, drug use and other drug related life domains. These international results are compared to the outcomes of the Ghent DTC project. The latter outcomes are gathered through a file study. Furthermore, the cost and workload of the DTC-project on the criminal justice system are studied. In the qualitative research part, semi-structured interviews provide information on treatment trajectories of drug users diverted to mental health care (DTC-clients) and on the workload and experiences of mental health care providers regarding this kind of judicial compulsion (the DTC project). Besides, DTC- and non-DTC-clients are interviewed with respect to their perception on the influence of the criminal justice procedure on their lives (criminal behaviour, drug use and other drug related life domains) and on their view concerning the criminal justice system and mental health care. The QUALECT study aims to contribute to an evidence-based drug policy in Belgium by 1) performing an outcome study regarding a specific judicial intervention, 2) comparing this intervention with an existing alternative measure (probation), and 3) focusing on the question whether this intervention works and why and how it works. In addition, the QUALECT study will provide insight in the relationship between the criminal justice system and mental health care (impact on the workload of mental health care, attunement of files and registration between the criminal justice system and mental health care). Policy recommendations, based on the results of the QUALECT study, will be formulated to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the DTC project and the relationship between the criminal justice system and mental health care, and to possibly extend the Ghent DTC project to other judicial districts in Belgium.

Scientific discipline(s) involved: Criminology, Legal sciences, Sociology

Initial identified needs:
In Belgium, several alternatives to divert drug dependent offenders to treatment are present at every level of the criminal justice system. A Belgian effect study showed that levels of offending and drug use decreased after the imposition of an alternative sanction (at sentencing and court level) and that all drug related life domains improved. Unfortunately, the lack of a control condition precluded a point of comparison with non-diverted offender (De Ruyver et al., 2007). At sentencing level, the pilot project ’Drug Treatment Court’ (DTC) was introduced in May 2008 at the Ghent Court of First Instance as the first DTC in Belgium. The DTC handles all drug related cases and focuses on problematic drug users who committed drug-related offences. During the first year of operation, the Ghent DTC project was evaluated by the Ghent University and the Service on Criminal Policy (Colman et al., 2011; Vander Laenen, 2012a, 2012b). The current research is aimed at studying the outcome of the Ghent DTC-project.