

Drug Strategy 'culture change' welcomed by the Centre for Social Justice

Since its foundation the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) has identified drug and alcohol addiction as a core 'pathway to poverty'. For too many people in the UK, abusing alcohol and drugs leads to chaotic lifestyles, health problems and criminal convictions. This entrenches disadvantage. In relation to addiction we have long-argued there are crucial failures in the three areas of prevention, enforcement and treatment. In particular, our treatment system is fatalistic and prevention is not taken seriously enough. In our 2007 publication *Breakthrough Britain* we set out our analysis of this issue, alongside a wealth of policy recommendations to combat these points.

In this context, we welcome the Coalition Government's 2010 Drug Strategy, *Reducing demand, restricting supply, building recovery*, as a step in the right direction towards a more innovative and effective addiction policy. The paper, which marks a cultural change for recovery in Government, is couched in the arguments the CSJ has consistently made for an integrated approach to tackling substance abuse. The attention in the strategy to confronting the huge range of root causes of addictions from family breakdown to mental ill health builds on all our work. What is more, many of the paper's proposals clearly echo the recommendations we have made in *Breakthrough Britain*, in our *Green Paper on Criminal Justice and Addiction*, and in various submissions we have made to government departments.

We are particularly pleased to see the Strategy's emphasis on recovery, and we wholeheartedly agree that 'full recovery is possible and desirable'. We fully support the promise to develop 'recovery-focused services in the community', especially the proposed pilots of 'abstinence-focused services in prisons'. We have always advocated a fiscal and cultural emphasis on recovery and abstinence for many more people, delivered through the community. To this end we are encouraged by proposals for 'Recovery Champions' and by the strategy's support of Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous (something we have explicitly endorsed in our policy recommendations). Peer support in the community is absolutely vital if Britain is to deal with addiction in the long-term.

Alongside these heartening steps, however, we would advise an even clearer stance on recovery: by far the most satisfactory result for addicts is a totally drug-free lifestyle, rather than dependency on substitute prescription. What is needed is a wholesale cultural shift – at both national and local level – towards a belief that full recovery, while it certainly is 'ambitious', is absolutely achievable.

The CSJ also welcomes the new Drugs Strategy's consideration of the role effective policing, successful voluntary sector initiatives, and powerful education of young people on the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. These are all areas we have frequently

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highlighted as essential elements of a successful drugs strategy. We are pleased to see our special concerns for children and young people reflected in the paper, particularly in the focus on early intervention and protecting families. We hope this aim can be matched by provision at a local level, which has been missing for too long.

Nonetheless, we are disappointed by the Strategy's renewed support for the educational Talk to FRANK service. As we have repeatedly warned, this service has proved ineffectual and even damaging, to the point of giving information as to the 'cost' and immediate physical effects of drugs more prominently than driving home the danger. Access to clear information is imperative if we are to prevent young people from engaging in drug and alcohol abuse so we urgently call for wholesale reform of Talk to FRANK and the messaging within it.

With cuts on the horizon, we were pleased to see attention to 'outcome-focused' provision and value for money, but note with caution the concerns of many in the treatment sector that payment by results could create perverse incentives. We will publish our own report on Social Return on Investment in early 2011, which will outline further recommendations for maximising social value in this field and others.

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