

NEWS from the UK Drug Policy Commission

Date: for 7 January 2010

FAO: PA, social affairs, local government, third sector correspondents

T: 020 7812 3792 or 07866 757 389

Commission wins grant to examine drug shame

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation has awarded £60,450 from its Social Justice programme to the UK Drug Policy Commission (UKDPC) to identify for the first time the scale of stigma and prejudice towards recovering drug users.

The commission research will examine public attitudes and the nature of media reporting towards recovering drug users, as well as the experiences and negative impact of stigma on drug users and their families.

Through the research, the commission hopes to galvanise drug treatment service providers and the government into action to help dismantle the barriers recovering drug users face in rebuilding their lives.

Drawing on the lessons from other 'marginalised' and vulnerable groups, the research will provide a benchmark against which government and service providers measure the success of efforts to tackle stigma to help re-integrate recovering drug users back into society.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation 'social evils' public consultation (2008) showed drug misuse is seen as 'very damaging' to society because of the connection between drug misuse, anti-social behavior and crime. However, efforts to tackle the problem through treatment and rehabilitation may be hampered by negative attitudes to drug users – the UK Drug Policy Commission's own research (2009) found two-thirds of employers would not employ a former heroin or crack addict, even if they were otherwise suitable for the job. Further anecdotal evidence suggests local opposition to treatment facilities can mean services struggle to establish themselves in the community.

The commission plans to involve a wide range of drug treatment service users and their families, experts, practitioners and campaigners in the research, to ensure tackling the stigma experienced by recovering drug users becomes embedded across all sectors and communities.

Chief Executive of the UK Drug Policy Commission, Roger Howard, said: "We hope our research will be the important first step in getting the evidence in place, to empower others later on to challenge stigma and prejudice towards recovering drug users. In the mental health, disability and other fields solid evidence of stigma has provided the bedrock for subsequent campaigns for equality and inclusion."

UKDPC Commissioner, Professor Colin Blakemore - renowned for his work on the furtherance of public understanding of science - will be leading the research. The first phase of the research, including a national public attitudes survey based on parallel questions used in the government's annual attitudes to mental illness survey, is expected by September 2010.

Liz Cadogan, Grants Officer for the Paul Hamlyn Foundation said: "There's a huge need to increase awareness and understanding among the public and professionals about the stigma faced by recovering drug users. The shame and distress experienced by young people can make it hard for them to speak out. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation is committed to helping marginalised young people have a voice and play a part in society."

- Ends -

Notes to editors

For further information and media interview requests on the **UK Drug Policy Commission** contact the press office on 020 7812 3792 or vsilver@ukdpc.org.uk

For further information and media interview requests on the **Paul Hamlyn Foundation** contact Dan Watson, Communications Manager on 0207 227 3513 or press@phf.org.uk

1. The UK Drug Policy Commission research will include:

- a study of the experiences of recovering drug users and family members
- a public attitudes survey
- a media analysis (including a comparative analysis with other stigmatised groups)
- expert analysis and commentary
- a policy briefing

2. **Colin Blakemore FRS** is Professor of Neuroscience at the Universities of Oxford and Warwick. He is also Chair of the Food Standard Agency's General Advisory Committee on Science, and of the Electromagnetic Fields Discussion Group of the Health Protection Agency. He is President of the Motor Neurone Disease Association. Until October 2007 he was Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council.

3. **UKDPC** will be holding a seminar in February (2010) for stakeholders to kick-start the research programme - to attend the seminar contact UKDPC on 020 7812 3792

About the UK Drug Policy Commission - The Commission (UKDPC) is an independent, registered charity providing objective analysis of UK drug policies. The UKDPC has 12 Commissioners who bring together a broad range of expertise from the fields of drug treatment, medical research, public policy and the media. For more information on the UKDPC please visit www.ukdpc.org.uk

About Paul Hamlyn Foundation - Paul Hamlyn Foundation is one of the largest independent grant-making organisations in the UK. It operates three programmes in the UK – the Arts, Education and Learning and Social Justice – and a programme of support for NGOs in India. Founded in 1987 by the publisher and philanthropist Paul Hamlyn (1926–2001), the Foundation works through a combination of responsive grant-making (Open Grants) and targeted funding and research (Special Initiatives) to enable people to realise their potential and enjoy a better quality of life. More information is available at www.phf.org.uk

Background facts - The United Kingdom remains at the top of the European ladder for drug use and drug dependence. The UK has the second-highest rate of drug-related death in Europe. Professor Peter Reuter & Alex Stevens (2007)