

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
ORAL EVIDENCE  
TAKEN BEFORE THE  
HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

**DRUGS**

TUESDAY 24 APRIL 2012

RUSSELL BRAND and CHIP SOMERS

MARY BRETT, KATHY GYNGELL and PETER HITCHENS

Evidence heard in Public

Questions 237 - 294

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is an uncorrected transcript of evidence taken in public and reported to the House. The transcript has been placed on the internet on the authority of the Committee, and copies have been made available by the Vote Office for the use of Members and others.
2. Any public use of, or reference to, the contents should make clear that neither witnesses nor Members have had the opportunity to correct the record. The transcript is not yet an approved formal record of these proceedings.
3. *Members* who receive this for the purpose of correcting questions addressed by them to witnesses are asked to send corrections to the Committee Assistant.
4. *Prospective witnesses* may receive this in preparation for any written or oral evidence they may in due course give to the Committee.

## Oral Evidence

Taken before the Home Affairs Committee

on Tuesday 24 April 2012

Members present:

Keith Vaz (Chair)  
Nicola Blackwood  
Michael Ellis  
Lorraine Fullbrook  
Dr Julian Huppert  
Steve McCabe  
Alun Michael  
Bridget Phillipson  
Mark Reckless  
Mr David Winnick

---

**Examination of Witnesses**

*Witnesses:* **Russell Brand**, Comedian, Actor, Columnist, Singer, Author, Radio/Television Presenter, and **Chip Somers**, Chief Executive, Focus 12, gave evidence

**Q237 Chair:** Good morning, Mr Brand.

**Russell Brand:** Good morning.

**Chair:** Please have a seat. Mr Brand, Mr Somers, thank you for giving evidence to the Committee's inquiry into drugs. Mr Russell Brand, you gave written evidence to this Committee, which Members of the Committee have read. Could I start with a point about what you say in your evidence that you disagree with the legalisation of drugs because you think that a deterrent effect is necessary, is that right?

**Russell Brand:** I don't feel entirely qualified to talk about legislation. For me, what is more significant is the way that we socially regard the condition of addiction. It is something that I consider to be an illness and, therefore, more a health matter than a criminal or judicial matter. As I said, I don't think legalisation is something that I am particularly qualified to get into. In fact, I can see areas where decriminalisation might be considered useful and more efficient in countries, like Portugal or Switzerland, where there have been trials. It seems to have had some efficacy. But for me it is more important that we regard people suffering from addiction with compassion and that there is a pragmatic rather than symbolic approach to treating it. The legislative status of addiction, and the criminalisation of addicts, is kind of symbolic and not really functional. I don't see how it especially helps, but I am not saying, "Let's have a wacky free-for-all, let people go around taking drugs". It didn't help me much.

**Q238 Chair:** You are a former heroin addict.

**Russell Brand:** Yes.

**Q239 Chair:** Briefly, could you tell us how you got on to drugs and then how you managed to come off it, and how many years you were on hard drugs?

**Russell Brand:** I see you have incorporated the word "briefly" now into the question. As you already know, it is my propensity for verbosity. I became a drug addict, I think,

because of emotional difficulties, psychological difficulties and perhaps a spiritual malady. For me, taking drugs and excessive drinking were the result of a psychological, spiritual or mental condition, so they are symptomatic. I was sad, lonely, unhappy and detached, and drugs and alcohol for me seemed like a solution to that problem.

Once I dealt with the emotional, spiritual, mental impetus, I no longer felt the need to take drugs or use drugs. Actually, I got clean at Chip Somers' facility, Focus 12, which is abstinence-based recovery. That is what we essentially believe in: if you have the disease or the illness of addiction or alcoholism, the best way to tackle it is to not use drugs in any form, whether it is state-sponsored opiates, like methadone or illegal street drugs, or a legal substance like alcohol. We see no distinction between these substances. What we believe in is that abstinence-based recovery is the best solution, for people suffering from this condition, and that support structures exist to get people to maintain recovery—abstinence-based recovery. What we want is more research and funding into abstinence-based recovery and to be able to filter people towards this new lifestyle where, actually, criminalisation becomes less of an issue, in my view, because it takes people that have to indulge in criminal activity to fund their habits and gets them into being valuable members of society.

Was that brief enough?

**Q240 Chair:** Very brief, thank you. You were arrested, roughly, 12 times—

**Russell Brand:** It was rough, yes.

**Chair:** —by the police and the justice system. Do you think that when you were arrested that you had the kind of support that you needed, and people like you who were arrested, being involved in drugs, the rehabilitation and the support that was needed to get you off drugs? How did the criminal justice system react to you after your arrests?

**Russell Brand:** From my experience, speaking to people in the criminal justice system, and from my own personal experience being arrested, there is some confusion and ignorance around addiction. That is quite understandable because a lot of drug addicts—speaking personally—are anti-social. They are a strain on society. They necessarily engage in criminal activity. They are a public nuisance in many ways.

I felt when I was arrested that the police were doing a necessary job of enforcing the laws of this country, and that they were doing what they had to do. It wasn't until I had access to abstinence-based recovery that I was able to change my behaviour and significantly reduce—all but obliterate—my criminal activity, apart from the occasional skirmish.

**Q241 Chair:** The final question from me on this section is the issue of legal highs. We have been very concerned in the evidence that we have received about the number of legal highs that are available, and young people who seem to be able to take legal highs. Whenever they are banned or proposed to be banned a new legal high emerges. Do you think this is something that does affect young people? Is this now the drug of choice for young people?

**Russell Brand:** I don't know because I am not young enough anymore. I know that young people will always want to get high, and I think that what we need is a pragmatic approach to this. For me, in a way—as I said before, Keith—it is not significant the substance they are using, whether it is alcohol or illegal street drugs. The legal status of a drug is irrelevant to a drug addict. If you are a drug addict, you are getting drugs, that's it, you are going to get them. So in a way it is probably best to make it simple.

As for legal highs, what I think we need to do is address the social, mental and spiritual problems that are leading young people, or people of all ages, into taking drugs. So I think what we need is research into abstinence-based recovery and more awareness around it.

**Chair:** We will come on to some of those points with other questions.