

Sir David Durie Chairman RIGT

Shortly before I joined the Trust, the then Trustees in written evidence to John Greenway's Scrutiny Committee said " The Trustees recognise that there is a prospect that some of the Government's proposals (as they then stood) will lead to an increase in problem gambling. There are conflicting views among them about the likely size of any increase". Much has happened since then – both to the Government's proposals and to the Trust itself. I propose this morning to talk principally about the latter, but before I do, I want to say something about the predictions of the levels of problem gambling.

This is a personal view and not a formal view from the Trust since we are still in the middle of a fast evolving situation and it is difficult to put pegs in the ground and say with confidence where matters now stand and the direction in which they are moving. I have to say that I have no confidence in any of the predictions that I have seen, whether they assert that there will be a large increase in the number of problem gamblers or that there will be no increase. We simply do not know with any certainty what will happen, whether the increased safeguards that are being built into the bill coupled with increased action from the Gambling Commission, Gamcare or even the Trust itself will be enough to prevent any increase or whether further efforts will be needed. That is why it is so important that there should be a good quality prevalence study soon and that it should be repeated at regular intervals. I therefore welcome the Government's assurance that it intends to arrange for a baseline prevalence study before the Bill is implemented and its support for further studies to be conducted by the gambling Commission at 2 – 3 year intervals thereafter. I hope that when the Minister speaks later this morning, he will be able to enlighten us as to the timing of the next study. My own view is that the earlier the better so that if it uncovers any unexpected developments in either the nature or the scale of problem gambling these can be taken into account either as the Bill passes through Parliament or under the regulations to be made or the codes to be drawn up by the Gambling Commission.

As matters now stand following the Report of the Scrutiny Committee and the Government's amended proposals in response, there are more safeguards than before and, as John

Greenway has reminded us, the prominence given to issues of social responsibility has increased. Both of these give hope that that any increase in problem gambling as a result of the Bill, as opposed to technical and social developments, will be less than previously seemed likely but as I said earlier whether they are sufficient to secure the Government's intention that there should be no "increase in the numbers of persons who encounter problems in gambling" remains to be seen. That is why the theme of today's conference "Prevention in Preference to Cure" is so important. I want to turn therefore to the role which the Trust intends to play in this.

First, let me rehearse the developments in the Trust itself in the last few months. There has been a number of major transitions – in our name, in our aim, in the number and makeup of Trustees and in the amount of money at our disposal. We have commissioned a major review of research into problem gambling and have reviewed or are reviewing all the activities we support and we will shortly be ready to move forward on all fronts.

Our name, The Responsibility in Gambling Trust, reflects our new aim which is "to make it less likely that people will become problem gamblers and more likely that those who do will be able to seek and secure effective help". This aim we believe very neatly encapsulates precisely what the Trust is about and gives us a benchmark against which to judge what we do and what activities to support.

The Trust also now has a majority of independent Trustees. In addition to the existing independent Trustees and myself, the Trust has appointed – Rachel Lampard who will be speaking this afternoon in her capacity as Secretary for Parliamentary and Political Affairs for the Methodist Church and who coordinated the Churches' evidence to the Scrutiny Committee, Professor Nick Tarrier, Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Manchester and David Grayson, who has many feathers in his cap and who, among other things, is a Director of Business in the Community as well as being an expert on corporate social responsibility.

On money, we have continued to gather growing support from the different components of the gambling industry. The Trust has received cash or promises of support to the extent of some £2.4M

this calendar year almost twice as much as last year and with high expectations that this will continue into the future. I want to make three points about the rise in the Trust's income. First, it comes from across the industry. It is important that it should. Everyone in the industry needs to be conscious of the issue of problem gambling and to put their hands in their pockets to help tackle the problem. In the latter half of this year, I will be actively campaigning to get as close to this as possible. Second, I believe that this greater willingness to contribute to the Trust is a result of a growing sense of social responsibility within the industry. Such social responsibility cannot and should not be dependent on precisely what form the Gambling Bill takes. The issue of problem gambling is too important and too central to the way that the industry is viewed by public and politicians alike for it to be ignored or downplayed by the industry in consequence of what happens to the Bill. Third, although the Trust has more funds at its disposal, I am determined that the Trust should use them only where we can do so cost-effectively to secure our aims. I have heard it said that the charitable sector should not be so hardheaded in its approach. I disagree. Securing value for money is if anything more important if you are using other people's money than it is if you are using your own.

I will turn now to what the Trust has been and is doing. First, we have reached agreement with both Gamcare and the Gordon House Association about the level of funding from the Trust for until next Spring. In both cases, this is at a higher level than for the past year. We have also asked Gamcare for proposals, which we have now received, to make their helpline available 24 hour a day and 7 days a week. Conscious of the need to be ready to face the changes that are likely in the future, the Trust, with the full support of Gamcare and Gordon House, appointed management consultants to look closely at the way we operate. The Trust wants to be sure that if there is an increase in problem gambling there is a ready-made and good quality capacity to handle problem gamblers and their families and friends effectively and sympathetically. The consultants are due to report shortly. I am sure that they will come up with a number of practical recommendations to help bring this about in ways which will serve even better the needs of problem gamblers as well as providers. The Trust will need to work closely with the providers and their Trustees to take this forward. It will be important that we approach this with goodwill and cooperation on all sides. We want both

Gordon House and Gamcare to thrive. We want to work with them so that together we are able to offer a better service to the problem gamblers.

Second, we have commissioned an international team of academics to review all available research to see what really is known about the causes, the nature, prevention and treatment of problem gambling. I was very struck by Peter Collins' remarks in his report last year to the Trust about how little reliable research is available. This is what he then said:

“Research into problem gambling is in its infancy as are strategies for treating and preventing it.

For these reasons it is not possible to anchor our recommendations in an evaluation of best practice elsewhere because nobody yet knows what best practice is. Consequently our recommendations do not flow from detailed consideration of what is spent on what activities in what areas in what jurisdictions. They reflect rather our judgements about what is sensible to do in the absence of firm knowledge and in the light of the fact that there is a very large number of things which it would be possible to do and only a limited number of things which it is practicable to do given that material and human resources are in finite supply”

I expect Peter Collins will update us in a moment about the latest research and the extent to which he believes that this changes the overall picture. What we expect from our academics when they report shortly is some good pointers as to what our research priorities should be. I am keen that we should get on with this further research quickly because unless we have a sound foundation for our activities, both the Trust and our providers will continue to be guessing what is best to do and we risk misdirecting ourselves as to what best practice really is. One point to bear in mind, particularly when looking at experience overseas is the extent to which both gambling itself and problem gambling are culturally dependent. I expect the academics to comment on this when they report to the Trust. It will be important to ensure that we take full account of this in our follow up work.

Finally, I want to turn to education issues. This is the area to which the Trust has given least attention to date – despite the fact that Peter Collins in his report last year said that we should devote a third of the Trust's resources to it. In that, I think he was right as did the Trustees who accepted that recommendation in principle.

But it has been difficult to know where to begin. That is why we asked our management consultants to look particularly closely into this area. They have looked at how a number of bodies in similar fields have approached the issue. There is much experience elsewhere which we can draw on. They include the Drug and Alcohol Foundation, Alcohol Concern/Drugscope, the Personal Finance Education Group and the Portman Group. Although we do not yet have the final outcome of this work, I know that the consultants are picking up a number of valuable pointers which will help us drive this work forward – work which is very much to the point of the theme of this conference – Prevention in Preference to Cure.

So, you can see that the Trust is embarking on a major programme of work and change. This year can therefore be seen as a year of transition for the Trust. Although the fruits of the work we commission in the research area will take time to come through, I am sure that by this time next year, we will be able to say that we really are making good progress towards achieving the Trust's aim of making it less likely that people will become problem gamblers and more likely that those who do will be able to seek and secure effective help.