

# Evening Echo

## New decriminalisation campaign

THE decriminalisation debate comes as a campaign called **Help Not Harm**, supported by the Irish chapter of the Students for Sensible Drug Policy, is launched.

The campaign, which seeks the decriminalisation of drugs, is fronted by Corkman Graham de Barra from Glasheen; Fr Peter McVerry and one of the founders of Bebo, Paul Birch, who is also one of the founders of a UK political party called Cannabis is Safer than Alcohol.

Graham de Barra was the founder of the UCC branch of the Students for Sensible Drug Policy and was instrumental in developing the Irish chapter's submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality on drugs decriminalisation.

The submission to the Oireachtas Committee included a section entitled Beyond Decriminalisation and stated:

"We firmly believe that it is time for Ireland to explore the option of full regulation of the drugs market like in the State of Colorado or in Uruguay. This is the only way to really cripple the black market drug trade, to control who can purchase drugs and to ensure people who use drugs are not using contaminated drugs of unknown purity."

It added: "Only by regulating each drug based on these factors can a government truly start to reduce its country's drug demand, right from the righter to the criminal gangs importing the drugs from abroad. This would be a bold step by the Irish government, but like the smoking ban and the recent gay marriage referendum, it could prove to be another proud achievement where we were world leaders in a difficult and important field."

Recovering addict Mossie (not his real name), who is currently on a scheme run by the Churchfield Community

Trust on Cork's northside, also believes that the current system of prohibiting drugs like cannabis is not working.

He says: "It leads to organised crime. I do not want to see people not being able to get jobs because of convictions they have for drugs. I think cannabis should be legalised.

There is not the same stigma around alcohol - weddings etc all revolve around drink. Addiction is addiction - it does not matter what colour you are or what job you have. It will destroy you. Support is what people need to help them. I took heroin for nearly 10 years but I never injected, but I did see people injecting it in the most horrible of places. There should be places where people can inject in medically-supervised environments. If there is more support for people through the health and education system, people will know better."



Graham de Barra, of the Irish chapter of the Students for Sensible Drug Policy, who is one of a number of people fronting a campaign seeking the decriminalisation of drugs for personal use.