

IDS think-tank criticises coalition on family policies



The Centre for Social Justice said more needed to be done to tackle relationship breakdown. The government's record on supporting marriage and preventing family breakdown have been dubbed a failure.

A think-tank set up by Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, gave the coalition just two out of 10 for its efforts in this area.

The Centre for Social Justice said pre-election pledges for tax breaks for married couples had "moved off radar".

However, it gives the coalition eight out of 10 for its efforts after a year in power to end welfare dependency.

The critical assessment of the coalition's first year in power by the CSJ scored the government on the five key areas it believes are pathways to poverty: family breakdown, economic dependency, serious personal debt, drug and alcohol addiction and educational failure.

Family breakdown was given the lowest mark by the think-tank, which was set up in 2004 when the Conservatives were in opposition.

Marriage tax break

The report said promises by Prime Minister David Cameron to reinstate a tax break for married couples had slipped away as a result of the deals done with the Liberal Democrats.

CSJ MARKS OUT OF TEN	
Family breakdown	2/10
Educational failure	6/10
Economic dependency	8/10
Addiction	7/10
Serious personal debt	6/10

"Some of the vital measures committed to by the Conservative Party in opposition appear to have been watered down during Coalition negotiations," the report said.

The report criticised the government's "lack of ambition" on relationships, saying much of its work

centred on picking up the pieces of breakdown, rather than preventing it.

The CSJ also noted the "unfortunate and unfair anomaly" in the plan to scrap child benefit for couples where one parent earns more than £42,475 a year, while households where both parent earn just under this amount continue to receive the benefit.

Education

The CSJ gave ministers six out of 10 for their efforts in tackling educational failure.

It welcomed plans to reduce red tape and bureaucracy in order to equip heads and teachers to improve discipline in their schools.

But it said it was disappointed with the implementation of the free schools programme and said their organisers should be allowed to make a profit.

"The restriction on the formation of for-profit free schools is holding back the programme's drive to improve educational standards."

Welfare

The CSJ report said the plans to "incentivise work" by introducing universal credit and to involve charities and private firms in retraining the unemployed was laudable.

But it warned that plans to cap benefit payments at an average annual household income of £26,000 will bring hardship to some 50,000 large families.

The report also said that the government was not taking prevention seriously enough in the fight against drug and alcohol misuse.

And it said ministers had not set out a new vision for helping those in serious debt.

CSJ executive director Gavin Poole said the government's first year of action had been mixed.

"Pioneering progress in pursuing welfare reform and an encouraging new direction for drug and alcohol policy has been undermined by poor implementation of bold education plans, and compromise-driven inaction in tackling our devastating culture of family breakdown."

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