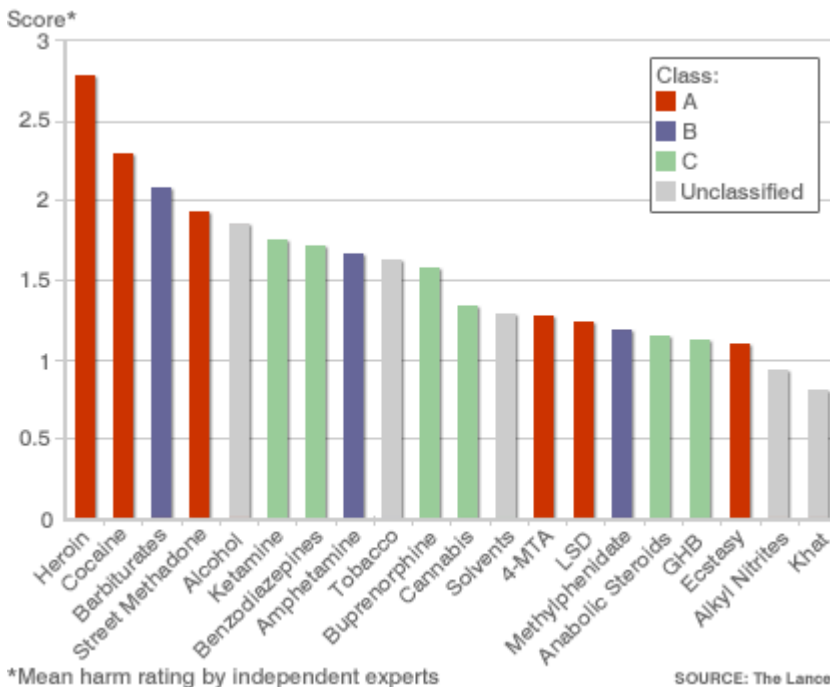


## The hard truth about hard drugs

In early 2007 a study was published in The Lancet that classified drugs by the actual harm they do. As you can see from the accompanying graph this study places alcohol and tobacco in the upper half of the league table, ahead of cannabis and several Class A drugs such as ecstasy.



The classification system was developed by a team led by Professor David Nutt, from the University of Bristol, and Professor Colin Blakemore, chief executive of the Medical Research Council and it rates the different types of drug by the harm they do to the individual, to society and whether or not they induce dependence.

In order to provide familiar benchmarks, five legal drugs, including tobacco and alcohol were included in the assessment. Alcohol was rated the fifth most dangerous substance, and tobacco ninth. Heroin was rated as the most dangerous drug, followed by cocaine and barbiturates. Ecstasy, however, rated only 18th, while cannabis was 11th.

There are two obvious conclusions that can be drawn from reading the results of this study. (1) the results seem to be very clear and (2) there is absolutely no chance that our gutless politicians will act upon it.

It is a self evident truth that if Alcohol was invented today it would be banned and the hypocrisy of the current system is obvious. Drugs are prevalent throughout our schools and the vast majority of Police Officers will tell you that we have lost the 'war on drugs' years ago (indeed one ex head of the CPO recently told the UKIP National Conference, in Bristol, just that).

The situation at the moment is the equivalent to our children being sold 100% proof, home distilled alcohol at the school gates. This 'moonshine' would have been brewed in dubious conditions, by dubious individuals, from dubious ingredients and the profits from this exercise would go direct to organised crime. By allowing the legal sale of alcohol the government ensures that the product is clean from poisons, it is sold at regulated strengths (e.g. 5% = beer, 15% = wine, 40% = spirits) at regulated times and places and its use is factored into things like, for example, drink-drive laws. The ability to raise taxes on alcohol is not a minor side issue either. The same is true of other drugs. Yes, Cannabis use may cause brain dysfunction but it is about time a serious study was undertaken into the relative dangers of using different strengths of Cannabis. It is likely that, as with alcohol, there are safer levels and there are more dangerous levels. The strongest legal alcohol is about 40% proof and that is strong enough so that nobody goes round making 100% proof alcohol to drink. The same is likely to be true of Cannabis. If the level of 15% THC (tetrahydrocannabinol, the active ingredient in Cannabis) in powerful 'skunk' cannabis causes dysfunction but a lower level does not, then selling packaged lower level cannabis cigarettes in an off licence should be all that is required. As with alcohol the Tax revenues from legalising other drugs would be a major boost to the exchequer and the revenue loss would cut organised crime off at the knees.

Generally the same logic that is applied to alcohol should now be applied to other drugs. It is time that politicians brought some consistency and practical realism into drugs legislation and this study would be a good basis to build new laws on. For a start, all drugs less dangerous than alcohol should be legalised. The safest levels and methods of use need to be researched, along with methods of detection and updates to the drink drive laws and then they should be taxed, controlled and sold in the same way as alcohol. Whether the law should go the whole hog and legalise all drugs should be considered but even if they are not their use must be decriminalised. A Heroin addict needs help and society

does not benefit from treating addicts like criminals. Did you know that pure pharmaceutical heroin can be taken indefinitely without any negative effects? It isn't poisonous like alcohol. If an alcoholic continues to drink indefinitely, the alcohol itself will destroy the liver and kill whereas heroin just rapidly makes you completely dependent on getting more heroin. Street heroin screws addicts up badly because it is mixed with all sorts of junk. While the addiction alone is a good reason why anybody would be very foolish to start using Heroin, once you have started you will do anything to get it. That is why when the Swiss started proscribing free heroin to junkies it cut the overall crime rate by nearly 20% and street crime by about 70%. The benefits of proscribing won't just include reducing the cost of your home contents insurance and reduce the chance that you will get mugged, it will also dramatically increase the quality of life for the addicts and the chance of getting them off drugs (and also provide legitimate trade for some very poor countries, including undermining the Taliban in Afghanistan)..

We have a blind spot for alcohol because our culture has used it to provide clean drinking water for a thousand years and our ancestors must have spent half their lives under the influence. So don't let us get hung up on the headlines of a lazy press and that panic of useless power hungry politicians. This is an issue that has obvious logic and socially is currently a cancer in our society.

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