

# alcohol

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**ALERT**

... Cabinet rift over licensing shake-up is exposed, a ...

**Night of mayhem**

**Daily Mail**

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2005 40p

**24-HOUR DRINKING:**

**THE GREAT REBELLION**

**DRUNKEN MADNESS**

**POLICE CHIEFS: WE'RE AGAINST 24-HOUR PUBS**

**Blair buries report on how a million drunks a year besiege A & E wards**

**BOOZING BRITAIN: ANOTHER**

**Jowell forced to climb down over rowdy pubs levy**

**Policing of 24-hour pubs will mean higher council tax**

**LEADERSHIP**

**THE GREAT REBELLION**

**DRUNKEN MADNESS**

**POLICE CHIEFS: WE'RE AGAINST 24-HOUR PUBS**

A collage of newspaper headlines and a photograph of a woman holding a beer mug. The headlines are from the Daily Mail and focus on the issue of 24-hour drinking and pub licensing. The woman in the photo is smiling and holding a beer mug with a logo on it.

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# The Licensing Act

**T**he government is beset by fierce opposition to the concept of twenty-four hour drinking allowed for in the Licensing Act. The medical establishment and the police have late in the day come out against the Act and there has been a vigorous campaign in the press, led by the Daily Mail. Just for good measure, the BBC conducted an opinion poll which showed two thirds of the population believe that the licensing changes will increase anti-social behaviour.

In these circumstances DRINKING RESPONSIBLY: The Government's Proposals, a consultation arising from the widespread apprehension that the Licensing Act will cause more problems than it solves, was issued jointly by the DCMS, the Home Office, and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Has any government before today been in the humiliating position of having to seek advice to mitigate the problems expected to result from a piece of their legislation yet to come into force? This is accompanied by disingenuous and contradictory statements from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media,

and Sport, Tessa Jowell and the new Home Secretary Charles Clarke. Either they are ignorant of what their own legislation says or they were seeking to defuse the situation by misleading the public. For example, the Act, which came into force on 7th February, specifically forbids local authorities from staggering closing time when granting licences. However, Ms Jowell was able to say on a radio broadcast that the Act "has been grossly misrepresented. It is not and never has been about twenty-four hour drinking, so to talk about flexible opening rather than twenty-four hour drinking is not a U-turn." No doubt she

had forgotten what she had to say in a letter to MPs when the Licensing Bill was introduced: "National 'permitted hours' relating to alcohol sales will be abolished with the potential for up to twenty-four hours opening seven days a week, subject to consideration of the impact on local residents and provided that steps are in place to prevent anti-social behaviour and nuisance." Not to be outdone Charles Clark said, "If you can phase – as the new licensing law gives the power to – the times at which the pubs and clubs close and, say, have one closing at one or two, others at two or three, you have a much easier situation to deal with."

**What the Guidance to the Act actually says:**  
 "Licensing authorities should also not seek to engineer 'staggered closing times' by setting quotas for particular closing times of 11.00pm, 12 midnight, 1.00am, 2.00am, 3.00 am etc. to specific premises."

**Police against the Act**  
 In the run up to the implementation of the Act, a survey commissioned for ITV1's Tonight with Trevor McDonald revealed, that almost two thirds of police officers are opposed to the Government's plans for 24-hour drinking. Unsurprisingly, they believe it will inevitably lead to an increase in alcohol-fuelled violence.

The survey of rank-and-file officers showed that 62 per cent were not in favour of all-hours licensing, whilst 69 per cent said it would create more alcohol-related disorder.

The Daily Mail campaign struck accord with people across the country



**Daily Mail**  
 WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2005 www.dailymail.co.uk 40p

**24-HOUR DRINKING: THE GREAT REBELLION**

**Daily Mail CAMPAIGN**

By David Hughes and Steve Boughy  
**PLANS for round-the-clock drinking are facing a devastating backlash from police chiefs, doctors and MPs.**  
 It comes as the Daily Mail launches a campaign to persuade the Government to think again about changes which will fuel the epidemic of binge drinking that has hit Britain.  
 Only a few weeks ago leading police had issued a stark warning that Britain's "pubs and clubs" were facing the worst of England's "revolving and dangerous" binge drinking at night, and the proposed 24-hour availability of alcohol would make things worse.  
 Judge Charles Davis was warning three days ago that on a violent January after hours of drinking, "the Daily Mail" plans a "backlash" of "revolving" and "dangerous" binge drinking at night, and the proposed 24-hour availability of alcohol would make things worse.  
 Now the Daily Mail's campaign and other senior police officers, MPs from all parties and well-known experts are warning that Britain's "pubs and clubs" are facing the worst of England's "revolving and dangerous" binge drinking at night, and the proposed 24-hour availability of alcohol would make things worse.  
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Streets of danger: Police deal with a drunken youth after another outbreak of alcohol-fuelled violence

**POLICE CHIEFS: WE'RE AGAINST 24-HOUR PUBS**

By Ben Taylor and David Hughes  
**POLICE chiefs across Britain attacked plans for round-the-clock drinking last night.**  
 In an unprecedented display of opposition, more than 100 police officers in England and Wales attacked "unsustainable" central plans for the proposed 24-hour availability of alcohol.

**The majority of Britain's police**



The research also found that a majority of the general public, doctors and nurses were also opposed to the new licensing laws. Half of the public said they did not support the idea, as did 57 per cent of doctors and 59 per cent of nurses.

The majority of all three groups also agreed that longer drinking hours would cause more alcohol-fuelled violence.

Publicans were the only group of people who took part in the survey who did support round the clock drinking. 75 per cent said they favoured longer opening hours, although 29 per cent admitted that they thought it would cause more alcohol-related violence.

The police officers' survey was carried out by Jane's Police Review, the public poll by YouGov, the doctors and nurses by Medix UK and the publicans by The Publican trade magazine.

Commander Chris Allison, of the Metropolitan Police, speaking on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), said, "We believe on the basis of the evidence, (on the) basis of what we see every night of every week, that if you allow people to drink for a longer

period of time they will drink more," he told the Tonight programme. "If they drink more that will lead to more disorder, more violence, more anti-social behaviour and we as the police service will have to deal with it".

### Doctors oppose the Act

The Royal College of Physicians added its considerable weight to the argument against the Act by warning that excessive drinking was the cause of major problems relating to violence and illness. Professor Ian Gilmore of the College said he wanted to add his concerns about the extension of licensing hours to those recently expressed by Sir John Stevens, the outgoing Metropolitan Police Commissioner. Professor Gilmore said that allowing pubs to remain open twenty-four hours a day would add to alcohol-related health problems. Professor Gilmore said that evidence from abroad also showed that violence would rise. To imagine that Britain could instantly transform its drinking habits to mirror responsible attitudes on the Continent was "fanciful". Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme he

further said: "We are facing an epidemic of alcohol-related harm and to extend the licensing hours flies in the face of common sense as well as the evidence."

He added that plans to vary the times that people left pubs were an attempt to manage drunkenness rather than prevent it. Reducing the availability of alcohol and raising its price were the ways to tackle binge drinking.

The Royal College's warning came after Sir John Stephens said that the move to allow pubs to stay open twenty-four hours a day needed to be slowed down and given more consideration.

The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police said that if forces had to "man-up" the streets when people left pubs at about three in the morning, it would take officers away from other duties.

Steve Green, the Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire and licensing spokesman for the Association of Chief Police Officers, who wrote about his concerns in Alert last year, said: "If we want twenty-four hours of hell, let's keep on the way we're going."

Colin Drummond, a government adviser and Professor of Addiction Psychiatry at St George's Medical School in South



London, said: "The more a country drinks, the bigger its problems are. All the evidence suggests that in order to reduce the harm caused by alcohol, you have to reduce the availability and increase the price."

### Government's defence

Richard Caborn, the Culture Minister, attempted to defend the Government's plans as part of a flexible approach to drinking that reflected changes in society. "Life has changed," he said. "You don't just get alcohol now from those licensed premises." He added that the changes would be brought in alongside moves to reduce alcohol

consumption. How hugely extending the hours in which alcohol may be consumed on licensed premises would help achieve this, he did not say. "It is about dealing with the cause and not just the symptoms," he said. "We will be giving the police and local authorities and other enforcement agencies much more powers to deal with those who act irresponsibly in the licensed trade." There would also be a big educational programme.

Government ministers in the DCMS have consistently dismissed fears over twenty-four hour drinking, despite leaked memos which showed that former Home Secretary David

## Policing of 24-hour pubs will mean higher council tax

# DRUNKEN MADNESS

By James Slack  
Home Affairs Correspondent

LABOUR'S fightback against drunken yobs descended into chaos last night. Police and job bosses said panic measures to cope with widespread alarm about 24-hour drinking were unworkable. Town hall chiefs warned that the cost of policing the expected wave of alcohol-fuelled violence would lead to soaring council tax bills. And ministers who drew up the plans were dismissed as "morons". After months of tough-talking, the Government stopped short of imposing a compulsory 9p front levy on bars plagued by trouble. Instead, they pinned their hopes on preventing the mayhem on 50p on-the-spot fines for barmen and under-age drinkers and a "three strikes and you're out ban" for louts. Last night Britain's biggest licensing authority, Westminster Council

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## Drinking death

In 20 years, the number of people killed by alcohol soars

By Jenny Hope  
Medical Correspondent

THE number of deaths caused by drinking has trebled in 20 years, according to research. The findings are based on a study of death certificates from a population of 2.7 million people in a programme part of 'Muckle Meggie'.

But public health specialists say they mirror a national problem at a time when the Government is looking to decide to close pubs and bars to open around the clock for the weekend.

The new study, published in the British Medical Journal, shows that the number of deaths caused by alcohol has risen from 1,000 in 1980 to 3,000 in 2000. The researchers at Oxford University's department of epidemiology and public health also discovered that the majority of police officers cited alcohol as the main cause of death in 1999. The change in the law could prove disastrous. In the latest study, researchers at Oxford University's department of epidemiology and public health also discovered that the majority of police officers cited alcohol as the main cause of death in 1999. The change in the law could prove disastrous. In the latest study, researchers at Oxford University's department of epidemiology and public health also discovered that the majority of police officers cited alcohol as the main cause of death in 1999. The change in the law could prove disastrous.

excited death certificate from four counties - Cheshire, Berkshire, Hants and West Yorkshire. They singled out those which named alcohol as the underlying cause, as well as those which mentioned alcohol as a contributory factor. They also included anyone killed by chronic liver disease - because the majority of cases are due to heavy drinking.

**Daily Mail CAMPAIGN SAY NO TO 24-HOUR PUBS**

As Cabinet rift over licensing shake-up is exposed, a terrifying look at the

# Night of mayhem

## Jowell adds to Labour 'chaos and confusion' on pub reform

PLANS to allow pubs and clubs to open for 24 hours were in danger last night after Tessa Jowell revealed she is against round-the-clock drinking.

The Culture Secretary's contradictory intervention came as leaked documents exposed serious splits in the Government over the licensing reforms.

It emerged that when David Blunkett was told Home Secretary Tessa Jowell was against 24-hour opening, he was in the dark. She stated: "I was not aware of the fact that the Home Secretary was against it."

Mr Jowell said: "I am not a member of the Cabinet and I am not a member of the Government. I am a member of the Labour Party and I am a member of the House of Commons."



Blunkett warned it risked worsening violent crime.

The leaked documents also showed that Government reports played down the link between drink and almost 20,000 sexual assaults a year.

Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell insisted: "Pubs are not going to open around the clock. Flexible opening is being introduced because the police said it would help them handle problems more easily."

"One of the things that fuels alcohol-related violence is people drinking up when they know it's near closing time."

Former Health Secretary Frank Dobson would have none of this. He said that reforms of opening times would not stop the British drinking heavily, adding: "The English - maybe the British - have been binge drinkers since time immemorial. I don't think we'll turn into Tuscany just because the hours have changed."

Conservative Shadow Home Secretary David Davis, accused ministers of ignoring concerns. He said: "The Government should immediately delay 24-hour opening

until it has got a grip on binge drinking.

"It is all very well for the minister to claim she is against 24-hour opening but it is her department that is going ahead with it. The Government's position is chaos and confusion."

### What pubs will do

Two-thirds of pubs and clubs in England and Wales are expected to exploit new licensing laws and stay open into the early hours, leaked Whitehall documents reveal. The government analysis of the impact of 24-hour drinking laws estimates that more than 35,000 pubs will seek to extend their licences beyond eleven o'clock at night.

The document, written by one of Ms Jowell's top officials at the DCMS, also expects 10,000 new pubs, clubs and off-licences to open every year for the next three years. This indicated the possibility of a 50 per cent rise in the number of pubs and clubs across the country.

The internal projections for

the boom in drinking in England and Wales appear in a report marked "restricted-policy, restricted-commercial". It was written by Andrew Cunningham, head of licensing at the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport, who has played a very active role in promoting the new Licensing Act. He has also been severely criticised for being too close to the drinks industry. Former Health Secretary Frank Dobson said: "We need to take a look at the way the drinks industry has burrowed its way into the heart of the Government. And we should look at the role played by Mr Cunningham".

According to the Daily Mail another official pointed out that Andrew Cunningham had "a very aggressive style. No-one from the drinks industry bothers much with Tessa, they go straight to Andrew because that is where the power is." Cunningham, whilst being obliged to make what has been described as "a grovelling apology" for portraying opponents of the Bill as "nanny-staters", denied that there has been any discussions off job offers from the industry.

Mr Cunningham's report says: "We estimate... that about 65 per cent of applications during the transitional period may include a request to vary the hours." This was confirmed in a survey of more than 30,000 pubs by the British Beer and Pub Association, which found that 50-60 per cent planned to open late, most until two in the morning, which hardly suggests that licensed holders will somehow institute a staggered system of closing, as fondly expected in the Act.

The report further states that there could be up to 10,000

applications for new premises licences and club premises certificates annually. This estimated rise represents an explosion in the number of licensed outlets. This contrasts with the 4,200 increase between 1989 and 2001.

David Davis, who is leading the Tory attack on the measures imposed by the Licensing Act, said: "Contrary to the government's claims this demonstrates that this law will have a massive impact on the peace and tranquillity of the lives of many hundreds of thousands of British citizens. And far from solving the binge-drinking problem, it will extend it deep into the night."

### Press attacks on the Act

It was The Sunday Times which exposed serious divisions between ministers over the issue. David Blunkett attempts last year to stop the changes because of fears of a surge in alcohol-related.

Crime, were initially overruled but Ms Jowell was eventually forced into a U-turn, announcing measures including compulsory levies on pubs in "alcohol disorder zones" in city centres and pub bans on disorderly drunks after opposition from police, doctors and local councils. Until now the DCMS has opposed any suggestion of the principle of polluter pays. Almost immediately before the U-turn this line was still being peddled. Culture minister Richard Caborn said he knew of "no plans" for a levy.

Further leaked documents indicate that Andrew Cunningham wrote last year to Carol Sweetenham at No.10's strategy unit, saying: "If the industry choose voluntarily to provide more for policing, we have



no objection whatsoever, but there is a grave risk that opponents will describe the proposal as a compulsory "stealth tax" on the industry." This statement has a strong echo of the ploy by which Sir Humphrey Appleby in BBC's Yes Minister prevented his political master taking a course to which he himself was opposed: "That would be a brave decision, Minister."

### Tory Party against the Act

The Government may have stuck to the industry's line, but at least one major party has promised to abandon the most harmful measures in the Licensing Act. The Conservative Party's policy shows that it has taken note of the arguments deployed by critics of the Act. They promise to revise the guidelines with a view to giving local councils



greater say in licensing matters. As part of that process, the Conservatives would remove the overall presumption in favour of later opening hours. Local circumstances should be fully taken into account before a licence is granted.

The Conservatives also promise to end irresponsible promotions, arguing that this kind of price competition fuels alcohol abuse among young people. To this end, they would allow local councils to attach explicit conditions to licences.

They also make the point that the saturation of pubs and clubs in one area often creates disorder hotspots due to the sheer number

In an attempt to mitigate the problems of cumulative impact – the proliferation of licensed premises in a particular area – the Government has, with effect from April, changed the use class orders which are part of the planning process. By putting all premises which are primarily concerned with the sale of alcohol into their own class, ministers hope to prevent the “slippage” which occurred before when restaurants, for example, could transform themselves into drinking establishments. Any hope that local residents or authorities might have that this would give them control of the number of licensed premises through the planning process will be lessened by the fact that the new use class of “drinking establishment” applies only to new licence applications.

of inebriated drinkers who can dominate the streets. The Tories say that they would strengthen the powers of councils to block late licence extensions in such problem areas.

They would also allow

parish councils and local councillors to register an objection to the granting of a licence, just as they can with planning applications. At the moment this is not permitted under the new Act. ■

# MPs attack the Licensing Act

**The Government’s Licensing Act and its expected consequences has failed to impress the influential House of Commons Home Affairs Committee. Chaired by John Denham, the greatly respected former Health Minister, the Committee reaches conclusions which puts it in the opposite camp to Secretary of State Tessa Jowell and other enthusiasts for the high-risk reforms.**

The Government, despite the consistent advice of experts, has insisted on focusing its strategy on irresponsible individual drinkers and individual premises, the precise position from which the industry and its mouthpiece, The Portman Group, would wish it to approach the problem. The

Government has introduced new powers in relation to both these individuals and irresponsible outlets. The Committee notes this approach but goes on to say that “we conclude that, on their own, these measures will not solve the problem of alcohol disorder”.

The Government, at the

urging of the industry has turned its face on “the polluter pays” principle. John Denham’s Committee says: “We recommend that pubs and clubs in designated areas should pay a mandatory contribution to help solve local problems of alcohol-related disorder”.

One of the Government’s boasts has been that the Licensing Act will give more power to local communities. The Committee agrees with the many critics of the Act that this is clearly not the case. It says: “We were concerned to hear that licensing authorities will be unable to make use of their saturation policies unless they receive an objection to an

application. This flies in the face of logic and runs the risk of exacerbating problems in the very areas that are struggling the most with disorder. We recommend that the Government legislates to reverse this situation before the Licensing Act 2003 comes fully into force. We recommend further that the Government publicises clearly to members of the public what their rights are under the Act and how they can object to licence applications”.

The Committee rightly concludes that “there is no clear-cut evidence as to whether more flexible licensing hours will make current problems worse or will improve the situation”. It is, of course, equally unclear as to whether flexible hours will result from the legislation and its guidance as local authorities are specifically forbidden to impose them (see page 3). “We accept that there is unlikely to be wholesale moves towards 24 hour opening as such, but it is to be expected that many licensed premises will after a time apply to stay open longer, and in some cases much longer than currently. Moreover, once one place does extend its opening hours then others in the area are likely to follow suit because of competition. Staggered drinking hours may reduce some flashpoints, but the changes may make it more difficult for the police in an operational sense to predict where and when officers need to be deployed. We recommend that local licensing authorities work closely with police to ensure that this is addressed. In the meantime, we urge the Government to monitor the situation on the ground extremely closely and to seek to change the law if necessary.”

The drink industry is already testing the act by proceeding against councils which have formulated policies concerning density of outlet and closing

times. The Committee anticipated this problem: “We are concerned also about the legal robustness of the Licensing Act 2003. We have heard of potential for challenges in relation to saturation and diversity and believe that there may be a possibility of legal challenges to decisions about closing hours. We welcome the Government’s commitment to keep the Licensing Act 2003 under review, and urge it to act quickly and decisively if there is any evidence that there are difficulties in these areas.”

Although the Committee concedes that some aspects of the new licensing regime, such as the role to be played by local authorities, will have a useful contribution to make, it has grave reservations about its ability to get at the root of the problem. “However, we agree with witnesses that the ability of the licensing regime to change fundamentally the nature of town and city centres is likely to be limited. This is because the central problem does not rest in individual premises, but in public space. As Professor Hobbs mentioned (at paragraph 284), research has shown a correlation between city centre licensed capacity and street assaults.”

Professor Richard Hobbs, who holds a chair in sociology at Durham University and who has made intensive studies of the nighttime economy said in evidence to the Committee: “During the late 1980s, in response to de-industrialisation and the loss of traditional sources of employment, local government administrations in Britain began to acknowledge the potentially important role that leisure activities could play in urban regeneration. As a result, the nighttime economy is now a major feature of economic life in Britain. In England and Wales alone, the



licensed trade employs around one million people, and creates one in five of all new jobs. Each year, brewers, leisure companies and entrepreneurs invest around £1 billion within the sector, which is currently growing at a rate of 10% per annum. The pub and club industry presently turns over £23 billion, equal to 3% of the UK



*Gross Domestic Product. This new night-time economy is based upon the consumption of alcohol, and is aimed almost exclusively at young people. This economic boom has been accompanied by a rise in violence and disorder. In every research site across the country analysed by the Durham researchers, it was found that violence and disorder was exacerbated in direct proportion to the number of drinkers coming into the town or city. Further, we were able to trace the spread of violence and disorder that accompanied the development of new drinking circuits adjacent to established drinking routes."*

Throughout the formulation of the Act and its guidance, the Government and the senior civil

servant responsible for this area in the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport, Andrew Cunningham, worked closely with the drink industry – indeed Cunningham was censured for his apparent partisanship. This may account for the emphasis put on voluntary regulation and the unwillingness to pursue “the polluter pays” principle. The Committee was concerned about aspects of the industry’s responsibility: “Although sections of the alcohol industry are working to try to improve the contribution of local pubs and clubs to tackling local disorder and to reduce the number of irresponsible promotions, we conclude that there are still far too many examples of pubs and clubs acting irresponsibly. We were particularly concerned to hear from the Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire that little has changed in the last six years in this regard.” The Chief Constable of Nottingham, Steve Green, has been prominent among those concerned about the Licensing Act and its likely consequences (see Alert, issue 3, 2004).

As far as “polluter pays” is concerned, the Committee expressed reservations about the robustness of Government intentions – despite indications from Government ministers when, to their surprise, they were confronted with public outrage at the threat to local communities implicit in the Licensing Act’s measures: “We welcome the acceptance of the principle that clubs and pubs ought to contribute more to the cost of disorder in some circumstances, as contained in the proposals for alcohol disorder zones. However, we are concerned that these proposals may be difficult to operate in practice. They seem to rest on the premise that individual licensed premises must be at fault for

surrounding disorder; however, it is clear to us that problems of disorder can occur even if all the surrounding licensed premises are operating perfectly responsibly.”

The Committee, in its conclusions, makes the obvious point that “the extension of licensing hours works in the industry’s favour and is likely to increase its profits”. It goes on to support unequivocally the idea that the polluter should pay: “In return, we believe that pubs and clubs in areas designated by local authorities, in conjunction with the police, should pay a mandatory contribution to help solve local problems of alcohol-related disorder. Local authorities should have the discretion to decide whether this should be used to contribute towards the cost of local policing, the cost of late-night transport or other necessary facilities linked to the effects of night-time drinking. We believe that the size of the contribution should vary according to the size of the premise. It should be completely unrelated to issues of fault: the principle should be that licensing mechanisms will be used to maximum effect to require every pub and club in the area to act responsibly, and a mandatory contribution will be taken to help pay for the aggregate effect of large-scale drunkenness in public space.”

The fact is that an important committee of the House of Commons, chaired by a respected ex-minister with a deep knowledge of the public health issues involved, has come to conclusions totally at variance with the principles on which the Government’s Licensing Act are based. The report adds further to the picture of confusion over this issue and emphasises the dangers inherent in the indiscriminating liberalisation of licensing. ■

## Brewery claims warning labels will help create ‘continental’ drinking culture

**B**ritain’s largest brewer, Scottish Courage, is intends to introduce health warning labels, or as the brewery is calling it “responsible drinking messages”, on its drink products. William Crawshay, a spokesman for Scottish & Newcastle Brewery, has claimed his company intends to use these labels to create more of a “continental” culture of drinking in the United Kingdom.

The labels will warn drinkers as to how many units are contained in cans and bottles of beer, followed by the information that male drinkers should not consume more than four units of alcohol a day, while female drinkers should only drink up to three units a day. The famous Newcastle Brown Ale, the typical drinkers of which brew might not be expected to be among those most likely to heed warnings of any kind, will be the first product to sport the labels.

The move to introduce information on labels on beer has occurred at the same time as the Portman Group, which, of course, is funded by the drink industry, has launched a website which promotes safe drinking levels along government guidelines.

Speaking to BBC One’s ‘Breakfast’, Mr Crawshay said: “It’s the right thing to do to take a lead and show responsibility in labelling and marketing. We’ve done it because people are increasingly comfortable with the notion of unit labelling for alcohol”.

He further explained: “I think what we’re trying to do is create a culture in this country rather like on the continent of Europe, where drinking isn’t concentrated into a few hours in the week, so we can spread our enjoyment and leisure time throughout the week. Then we all benefit.”

Labels will also soon be placed on other popular brands such as John Smiths, Kronenbourg, and Fosters.

However, Dr Jean Harvey, a psychologist at the University of Newcastle, has warned that a new move to label beer could lead to a new drinking challenge ‘cult’, in which people drink more alcohol units than recommended.

Also on BBC One’s ‘Breakfast’, Dr Harvey commented, “Whether people take notice or not is a bit more debatable. I would be worried about young people because the warnings on cigarette packets haven’t made much of an effect there.

“Whether people will stop at one-and-a-half pints of Newcastle and Brown, and say I’ve had enough and go back to the orange

juice, is actually quite debatable.”

Instead, she warned: “In fact some of this could be looked upon as a bit of a challenge. It could become a bit of a cult, amongst at least some of the population, to challenge how many units you’ve had.”

She stressed: “I think we’ve got to make a much bigger attack on binge drinking than simply putting labels on bottles”. ■



# Gerry Cott speaks out

**Gerry Cott was a founder member, with Bob Geldof, of the Boomtown Rats. He gave up the life of a pop star and almost accidentally fell into a career as an animal behaviourist and animal filming consultant. His clients including 20th Century Fox, Disney, BBC, ITV, CH4 and many international advertising brands. He lives with his wife, Cathy, and their children in a Surrey village.**



A comfortable, pleasant life you might think but the idyll was shattered by the noise coming from the local pub which is right next to the Cott's house. It is easy to think of the problem of alcohol-related nuisance being an urban phenomenon and it may be that the majority of trouble is experienced in inner cities but increasingly the

by-products of the binge drinking culture are being felt in the countryside.

Gerry Cott had never particularly thought about alcohol policy and its effect on the everyday life of the citizen but, in launching into a campaign to deal with the problem in his own Surrey village, he quickly became well-informed on the subject and an articulate and tireless critic of the corporate might of the drink industry.

*"I've lived adjacent to a pub in the past. It was well-run and there was no issue but this particular pub was run as a cheap beer, bottom of the barrel operation. It was cheap and cheerful with lots of promotions. It's what they call a value outlet allowing huge amounts of alcohol to be consumed on the premises. The manager gets a very attractive bonus if he meets ever increasing targets. The owners of this pub in my village, Greene King, if a manager was not meeting his target for so many weeks, he was sent a warning letter. Get two of them and you might be out, losing your home. So the standards of what is appropriate and what is not get blurred."*

In conversation with the

editor of Alert, Gerry Cott shared his thoughts on the problems alcohol causes in the community: *"What we are seeing is corporate bullying and greed at the expense of the nation's living environment. I think that's a key issue. Many people see a few drunks getting sick and urinating all over the place and they think that's the beginning and end of it. I see the problem in a different light."*

Cott quickly came to the view that the problem has to be addressed from the top, in the boardrooms of the brewers and drink companies, not from the bottom, where those drunks are. He speculated that in many ways what we are seeing is a legacy of the Thatcher years, which he characterised as the "I'm going to get mine" culture.

*"So how does binge drinking occur?"* asks Cott. *"It happens from the top down. It's a matter of investment and return in the form of profit."*

*"If you're in the boardroom you're looking at the market in purely market terms. You're looking at your level of turnover and at the opportunities. Those opportunities are there for the taking because there's a captive audience out there that will go bananas for two for one or happy hours or "as much as you can drink" offers. At first when I became involved I didn't get it but you have to remember that in the big pub companies the pressure is on the house managers and area managers. If they raise their profits the package they get is very attractive, but if they don't then it is punitive."*

Cott goes on to point out that the big operators are funded by the big banking and insurance houses. *"All the boys are in there because they are making something like 22 or 23 per cent on their investment. Unbelievable profits!"*

Gerry Cott at first met with indifference when he tried to deal with the alcohol-related nuisance near his home. His councillor said, *"Well, Greene King are very powerful."* The local policeman comforted Cott with the thought that the situation was much worse in Guildford.

*"Over the years I think we wrote about a hundred and fifty letters to David McCall, CBE, the Chairman of Greene King. Not one reply so I started to write to David McCall but copying the letters to the chairman of ACPO [Association of Chief Police Officers], the Home Office, the DCMS, and to the Chief Constable of Surrey. Finally Greene King sent an operations director to my home and I showed him all the stuff I had taken from the street – the broken bottles and the rest – and eventually, very slowly they begin to take action. This is after three years. I was told by a senior manager at Greene King that most people just give up. He was looking me straight in the face when he said this and that's when I realised that how much I had always disliked bullies. They're just the same as bullies in the playground but they grow up and become bullies in the boardroom."*

By sticking to his guns and by thorough research, Cott

came to understand how corporate alcohol works. He looked at the investors in Greene King, finding that they have been lent £1.2 billion by Lloyds TSB, the most recent tranche being £650 million to buy another 435 pubs.

*"Once you get your eye in you begin to understand what's going on"* says Cott. *"Greene King have decided that it's a bit hot in the High Street so they're expanding in the suburbs."*

*"Then I wrote to all the major investors [in Greene King] – Legal and General, Scottish Widows, Merrill Lynch. It turns out that all these very respectable financial institutions make great play of their ethical investment policies but, despite that, they are happy to fund a sector of business in the UK that is turning our streets into Armageddon."*

Cott and his wife bought some shares in Greene King which allowed them to attend an extraordinary general meeting to approve the purchase of 435 pubs for that £650 million.

Attending the Greene King's 2004 AGM, when the chairman uttered those magic "AGM Words" 'has anybody any questions' Cott says

*"I stand up and ask, 'Do you have a corporate responsibility policy around the running of your business?' David McCall CBE looked at me as though I was totally mad. He didn't understand what I was getting at. He waved his hand at me in a dismissive, squirish way. Well, that's how it still is in part of the pub industry. The lords of the manor, the big groups, and the serfs, the managers and the local authorities. It's very feudal."*

Cott came to the view that Big Alcohol, and by Big Alcohol he means the part of

the Alcohol business that exercises no social responsibility in its business operations, is not looking at social consequences but at the sales and profit targets year on year.

*"They're looking at return on investments – so bullying here in the boardroom is at its most pervasive level."*

According to Cott, Big Alcohol is a greater threat than the drug barons. Like others before him, he was quick to spot the connection between the rave culture of the eighties, with the proliferation of drugs such as ecstasy and amphetamines, and the alcohol industry's promotion of alcopops, designer drinks, and the habit of drinking shots of spirits. This was a calculated tactic to appeal to a generation which was threatening to look at other sources than alcohol for excitement and that was why the drink industry played to the psychoactive element of its new products.

Gerry Cott was led into the field of alcohol policy by the particular difficulties he was facing in his home. In the process he was led to conclusions about the problems posed by the industry to society in general.

*"Tony Blair says binge drinking is the new British Disease". "Wrong Tony", says Cott! "Government sponsored corporate greed from Big Alcohol is the new British Disease – Binge drinking is just a symptom of that disease. Think again Tony, before you destroy the country!"* ■

# Liver disease on the increase

**H**ospital admissions of men and women with alcoholic liver disease in England have more than doubled in just thirteen years, according to a report to the Annual Scientific Meeting of the British Society of Gastroenterology in Birmingham.

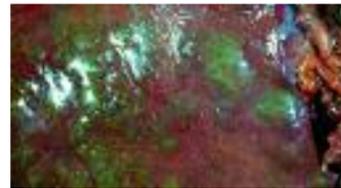
In the thirteen years 1989 to 2002 admissions for alcoholic liver disease in men rose by 116 per cent, while for women there was a 108% rise. There was a rise in admissions in people of all ages, including young adults.

The research by a team from the Department of Gastroenterology at St George's Hospital, London, the Office for National Statistics and the Department of Primary Care and Social Medicine, Imperial College, London, was conducted to look at trends for

hospital admission rates for liver disease. Data on admissions for liver diseases was obtained from the Hospital Episodes Statistics Service.

The report comes at a time when licensing hours are being extended and the behaviour and health of excessive drinkers are being put under the spotlight.

Dr Mark Fullard, clinical research fellow in gastroenterology at St George's Hospital, said: "The research findings highlight an important problem in public education and



*health planning and how we are going to manage alcohol related problems in this country. If it doubles again, it is going to have tremendous implications for the future burden of care in hospitals."*

Dr Fullard, who headed the research said: "In this day and age when hospitals are overflowing, we are looking at a potentially huge problem. I am flagging up the problem."

"The actual number of women admitted with alcoholic liver problems is about half that of men, but the rate of rise has been about the same in women and men."

The diseases included in the study range from mild alcoholic hepatitis - mild inflammation of the liver - through to very severe cirrhosis and liver cancer secondary to alcohol. Said Dr Fullard: "If you are young and have alcoholic liver disease and carry on drinking, then you will get severe alcoholic liver disease."

The report concludes: "A very worrying trend is the large increase in admission rates for alcoholic liver disease in younger subjects as well as older individuals." It draws attention to the implications of many more people needing liver transplants. ■



# Focus on youth drinking

**T**he biennial ESPAD Report 2003, Alcohol and Other Drug Use Among Students in 35 European Countries, has recently been published and shows continued disturbing trends among young people of school age. The target group were those who would become 16 during the year of data collection and the figures for the United Kingdom indicate that this country is one of those with the biggest problem.

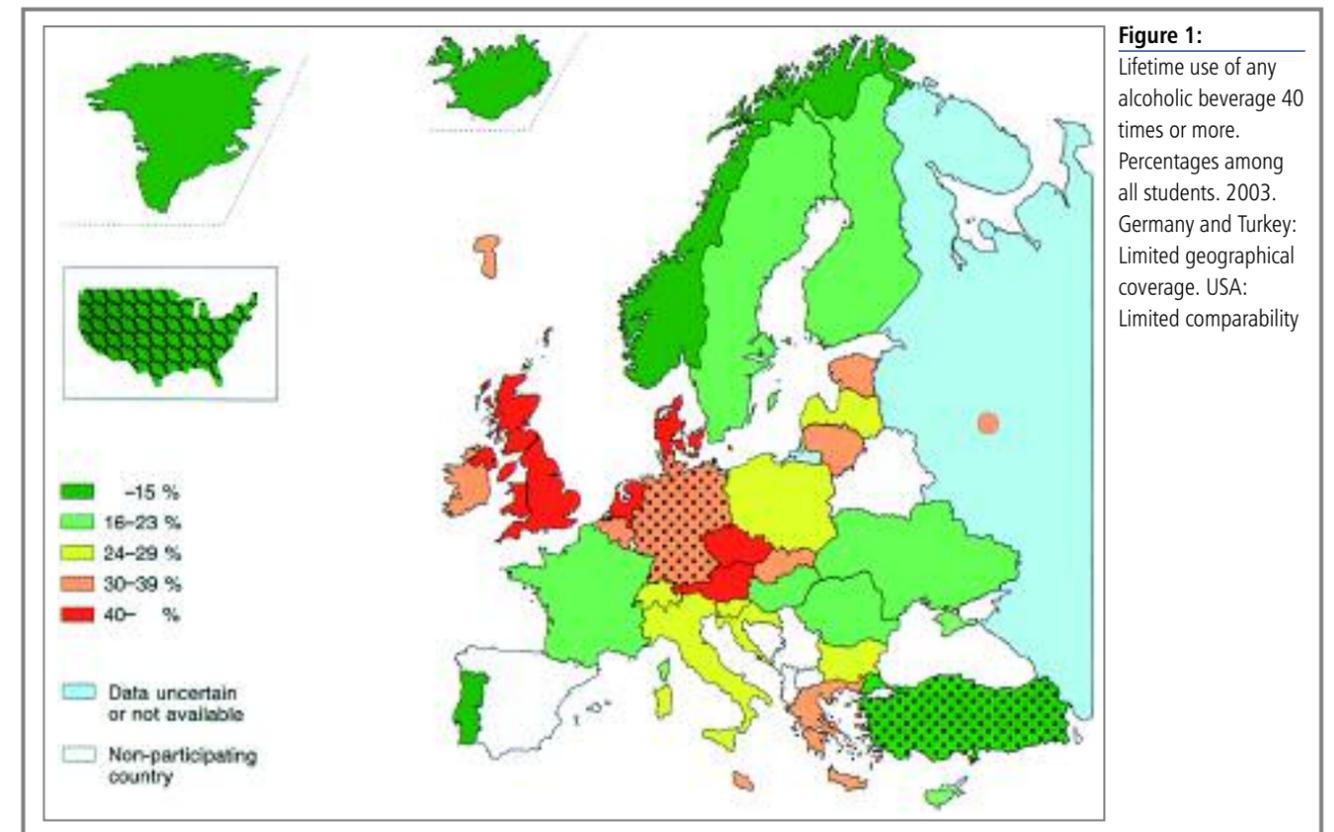
In two thirds of the ESPAD countries the vast majority (90 per cent or more) have drunk alcohol at least once in their lifetime. Not all these, of course, drink on a regular basis. The

report states that "a student who has been drinking at least 40 times can be labelled as more of a regular customer".

The highest number reporting use of alcohol 40 times

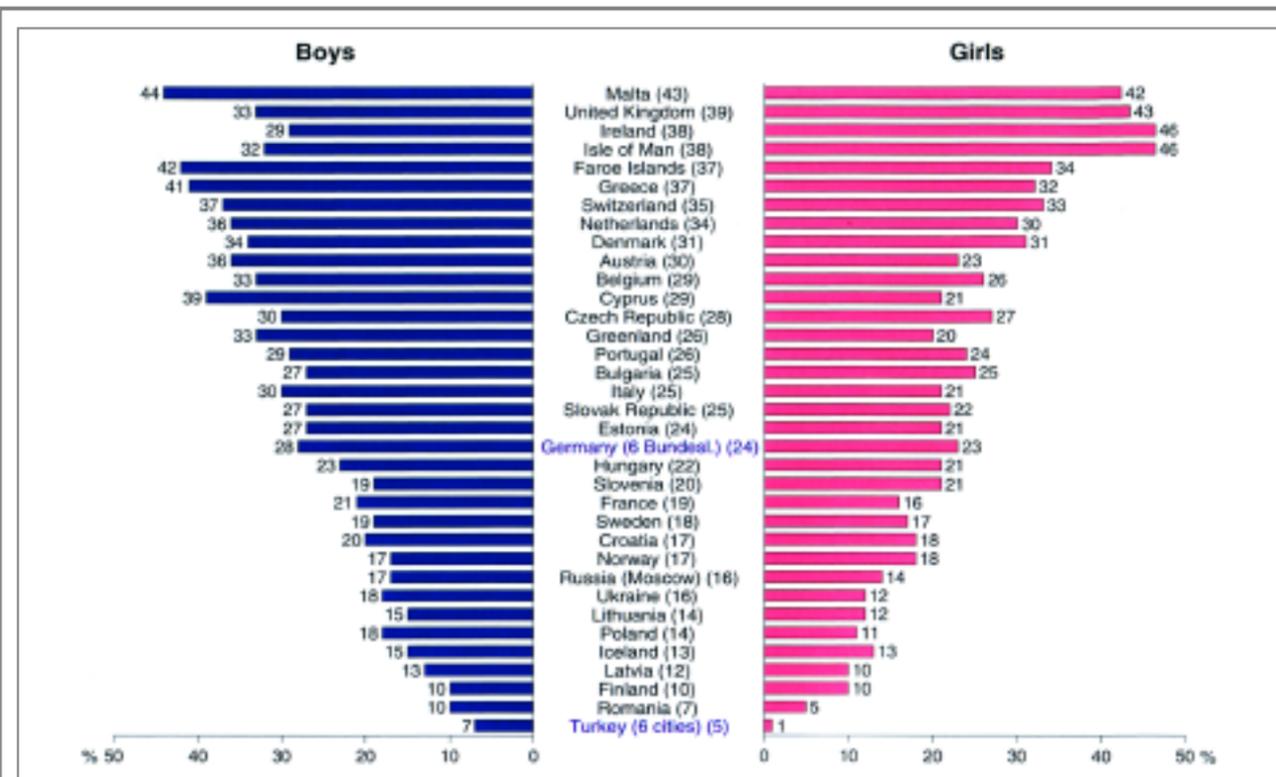
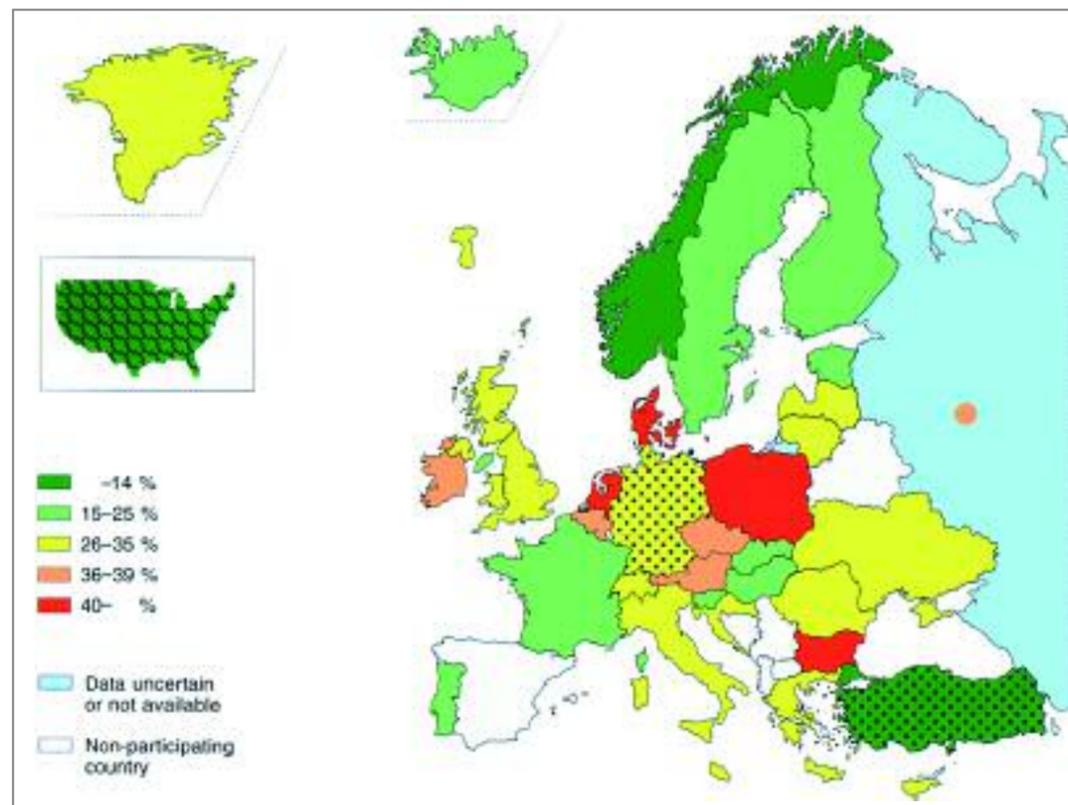
or more in a lifetime include Denmark, Austria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (43-50 per cent). The lowest proportion is reported in Turkey (7 per cent), followed by Greenland, Iceland, Norway, and Portugal (13-15 per cent) (Fig 1).

More boys than girls report this level of alcohol consumption. Although in a few places (the Isle of Man, Finland, and Norway) the gender distribution is about equal, no country reports a prevalence rate



**Figure 2:**

Beer consumption 3 times or more during the last 30 days. Percentages among all students. 2003. Germany and Turkey: Limited geographical coverage. USA: Limited comparability



**Figure 3:**

Consumption of spirits 3 times or more during the last 30 days. Percentages among boys and girls. 2003. Values within brackets refer to all students. Data sorted by all students. Germany and Turkey: Limited geographical coverage. The Netherlands: Pre-mixed drinks not included.

among girls exceeding that of boys.

A higher frequency of alcohol use is shown among students who had consumed alcohol ten times or more during the last thirty days, that is at least every third day on average. About one quarter of the respondents in the Netherlands and about one fifth in Austria, Belgium, Malta, and the United Kingdom (17-21 per cent) reported this frequency of alcohol use. On the other hand, in some countries this frequency is hardly reported at all. Very low prevalence rates are mainly concentrated in the Nordic countries.

Many of the respondents report frequent beer drinking. The proportions of students who had consumed beer three times or more during the last thirty days varies between 10 and 44 per cent. The highest figures are found in Denmark, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, and Poland (40-44 per cent). The smallest figures were reported from Norway and Turkey (10 and 14 per cent respectively).

The report goes on to point out that drinking beer “is a predominantly male behaviour in most ESPAD countries”. The only exceptions are Iceland and Greenland where girls drink roughly the same amount of beer as girls. (Fig 2)

A smaller group of the respondents had been drinking wine and beer during the last thirty days. In most cases the proportion is lower than 20 per cent, although Malta is an exception at 35 per cent. Other high prevalence countries include Austria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, and Slovenia (21-23 per cent).

The number of respondents who had been drinking spirits

during the last thirty days varies considerably. The Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom figure prominently in the higher frequency group, although they concede top place to Malta where the figure was 43 per cent. Ireland, the United Kingdom, the Faroe Islands, Greece all report figures of between 37 and 39 per cent.

In about half the countries, more boys than girls report such frequent consumption of spirits. Conversely, the same number of countries report prevalence rates which are equal or almost so between the sexes. The report says that “only three countries report proportions among the girls that exceed those of the boys. These countries are all high frequency countries and they are all part of the British Isles, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the Isle of Man. (Fig 3)

Some of the respondents have a limited experience of getting drunk, whilst others become intoxicated more frequently. However, in thirty of the thirty-five countries the majority have been drunk at least once. The countries with the highest proportion saying that they had been drunk twenty times or more include Denmark, Ireland, the Isle of Man, the United Kingdom, Estonia, and Finland (26-36 per cent). In other countries only a few reported this high frequency of drunkenness. In Turkey only 1 per cent had been drunk twenty times or more and in Cyprus, France, Greece, and Portugal the figure was about 3 per cent.

In most of the countries there are more boys than girls who report this frequency of drunkenness. In no country are the girls in a majority. However, in a relatively high number of

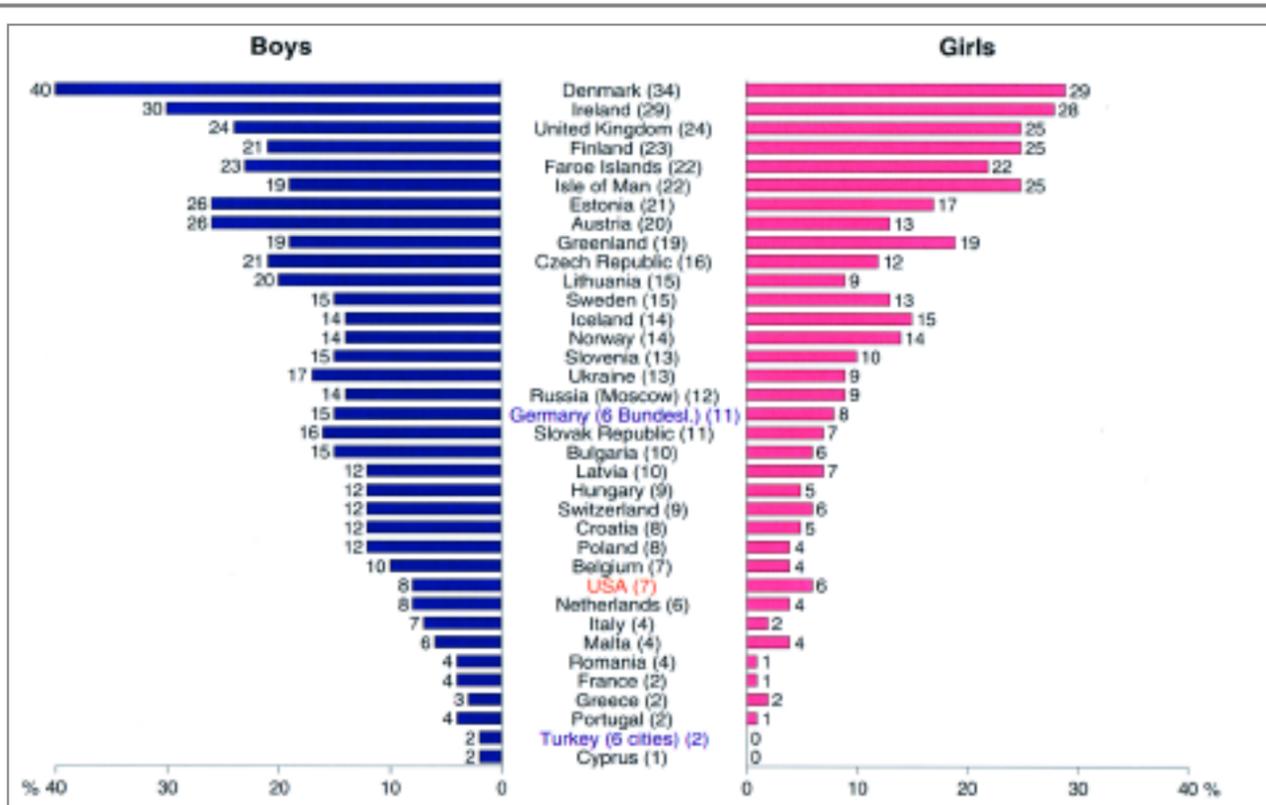
countries the gender distribution is roughly even. These countries include those of the British Isles and most of the Nordic countries. (Fig 4 overleaf)

The number of students who have been drunk during the last thirty days is, of course, much smaller, but the highest ranked countries are in most cases the same. Thus, in Denmark and Ireland about 25 per cent of the respondents had been drunk that often. High prevalence rates were also found in the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man.

The report says: “The frequency of having five or more drinks in a row, sometimes referred to as ‘binge drinking’, provides an alternative measure of heavy alcohol use. The proportion indicating such consumption three times or more during the last thirty days vary [sic] considerably over the ESPAD countries.”

The highest number of young people reporting this pattern of behaviour is found in Denmark, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and the United Kingdom (24-32 per cent). As can be seen, there is a concentration of countries to the north and western parts of Europe, Malta being the only exception. The lowest binge drinking figures were found in Cyprus, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Romania, and Turkey. (Fig 5 overleaf) ■





**Figure 4:** Proportion of boys and girls who have been drunk 10 times or more during last 12 months. 2003. Values within brackets refer to all students. Data sorted by all students. Germany and Turkey: Limited geographical coverage. USA: limited comparability.

# Stands Scotland where it did?

**There is an epidemic of under-age drinking in Scotland with children as young as thirteen admitting regular weekly alcohol consumption. As elsewhere in the United Kingdom drinking among girls is on the increase.**

or cider for boys and spirits or alcopops for girls. Among 13 year olds who drank alcohol in the week before the survey, boys reported drinking alcopops and beer, lager or cider with almost equal frequency while girls were more likely to drink alcopops than any other type of drink. It is clear that alcopop drinks have established a niche in the very youthful market.

SALSUS (Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey National Report) has published in-depth research which indicates the seriousness of the problem north of the border.

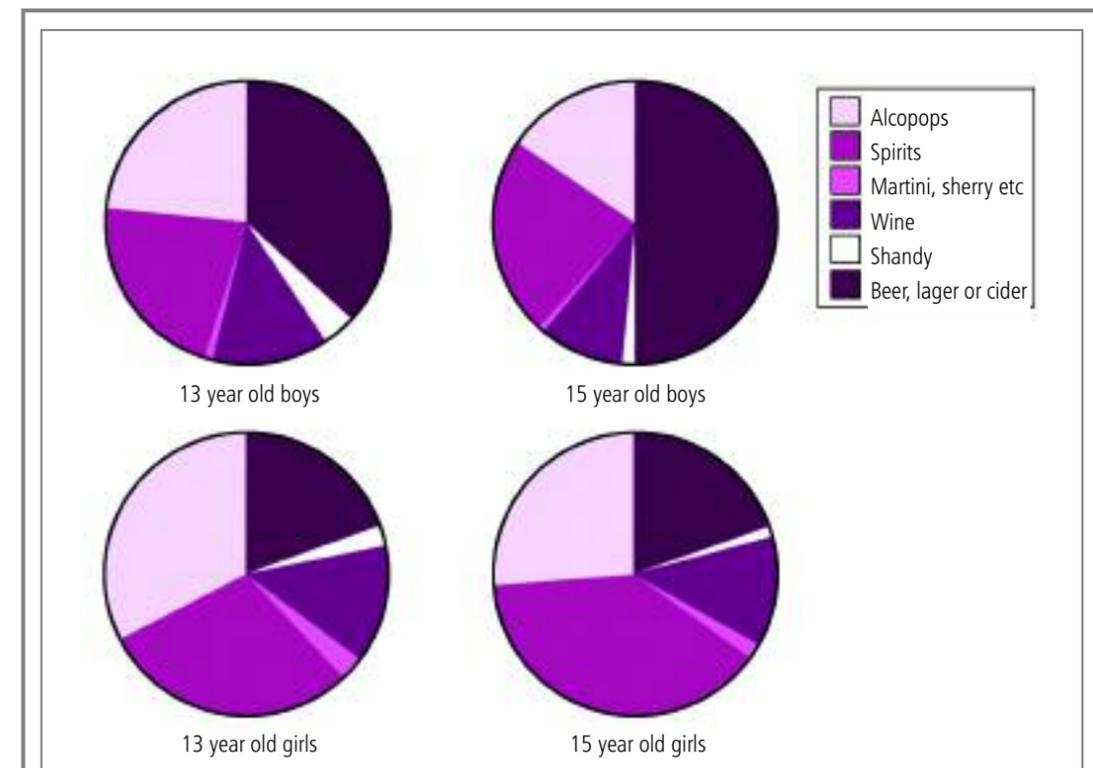
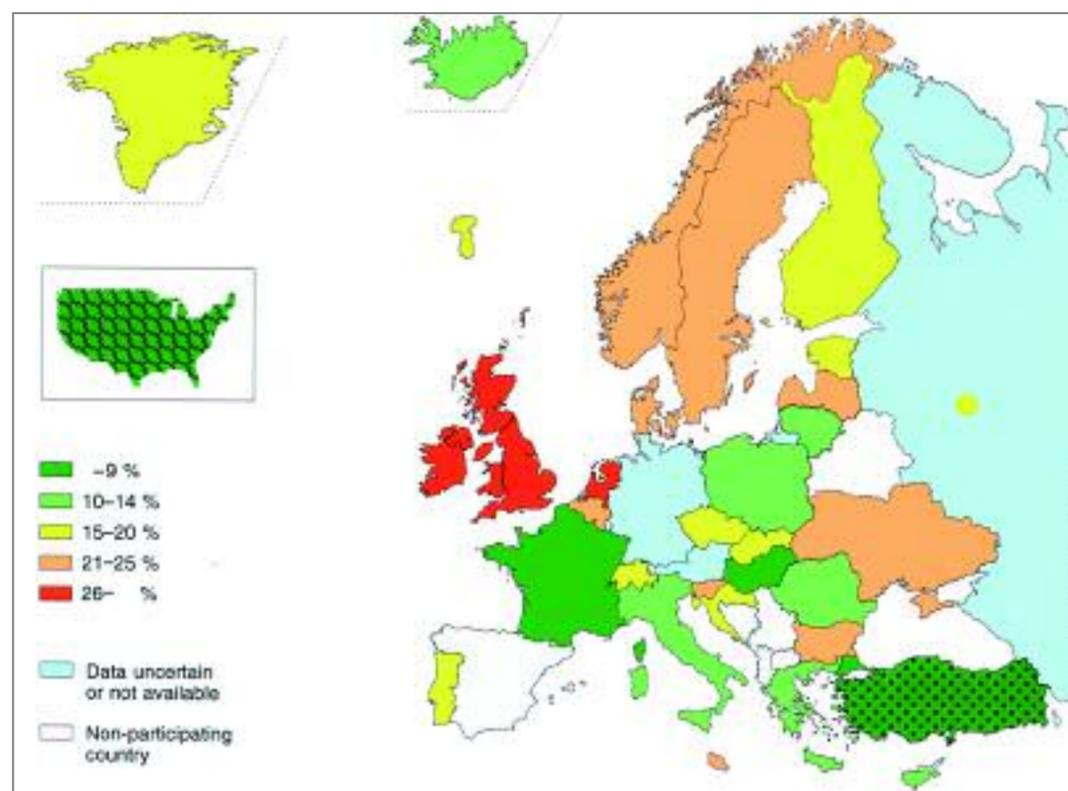
olds had drunk alcohol in the week before the survey. Among the 15 year olds, girls were more likely than boys to report this: 46 per cent of girls compared with 40 per cent of boys.

Among 15 year olds, the average number of units of alcohol consumed in the week before the survey was 13 for boys and 11 for girls, and among

The report shows that a fifth of 13 year olds and over two-fifths (43 per cent) of 15 year

Among 15 year olds who reported drinking in the week before the survey, the most common drinks were beer, lager

**Figure 5:** Proportion of all students who reported 'binge drinking' 3 times or more during the last 30 days. 2003. Turkey: Limited geographical coverage. USA: Limited comparability



Contribution of each drink type to total alcohol consumed in the week before the survey: Scotland 2004. Source: SALSUS 2004

13 year olds, boys consumed an average of 10 units and girls consumed an average of 8 units.

Over half of 13 year olds and around three quarters (74 per cent) of 15 year olds who reported ever drinking alcohol, also said they had been drunk at least once. Among 15 year olds, girls were more likely to have been drunk than boys: over three quarters of girls reported being drunk at least once compared with 72 per cent of boys. However, among 13 year olds there was no gender difference in reported drunkenness. Compared with 2002, a lower proportion of 15 year old boys reported being drunk at least once: 76 per cent in 2002 compared with 72 per cent in 2004. However, there was no similar decrease among 15 year old girls or among 13 year olds. Annual fluctuations are to be expected and these levels remain very high.

Almost a third of 13 year olds and over half of 15 year olds who had drunk alcohol, said they had drunk five or more drinks on the same occasion at least once in the thirty days before the survey. Among 15 year olds, a higher proportion of girls reported having drunk five or more drinks on the same occasion in the last 30 days: 60 per cent of girls compared with 52 per cent of boys.

Among those pupils who said they had drunk alcohol, vomiting was the most commonly reported negative consequence of drinking experienced in the last year. This was reported by around a third of 13 year olds and just under half of 15 year olds. The next most commonly reported consequence of drinking, particularly among girls, was

arguing. This was reported by 29 per cent of 13 year old girls and 47 per cent of 15 year old girls compared with 22 per cent of 13 year old boys and 32 per cent of 15 year old boys. Boys were more likely than girls to report that drinking had led to fighting in the last year: reported by 19 per cent of 13 year old boys and 20 per cent of 15 year old boys compared with 14 per cent of 13 year old girls and 17 per cent of 13 year old boys. About one in five pupils who had ever drunk alcohol reported that they had been in trouble with the police in the last year as a result, with just under one in ten having been taken home by the police. One in five 15 year olds and around one in ten 13 year olds said they had tried drugs in the last year as a result of drinking. Around 10 per cent of pupils reported staying off school during the last year as a result of drinking. Fewer pupils reported having had injuries (2 per cent in both age groups) or having been admitted to hospital (2 per cent of 13 year olds and 1 per cent of 15 year olds) because of drinking.

Over half of 13 year olds and over a third of 15 year olds who had ever had an alcoholic drink reported that they never buy alcohol. Among 15 year olds, shops and off-licences were the most commonly reported source of alcohol. Among 13 year olds, a friend or relative and 'someone else' were reported as frequently as shops. Around one in ten 15 year olds reported buying alcohol from licensed premises (10 per cent from pubs and 7 per cent from clubs/discos) compared with 1 per cent of 13 year olds. Eight percent (8 per cent) of 15 year olds and 3 per cent of 13 year olds had purchased alcohol

from supermarkets. Since 2000, there has been an increase in the proportion of 15 year olds reporting that they bought alcohol in shops or supermarkets and a decline in the proportion of 15 year olds reporting that they bought alcohol in off-licences.

Among 13 year olds, the most commonly reported location for drinking was at home. This was reported by almost half of 13 year olds. Among 15 year olds, parties were a commonly reported drinking venue, particularly among girls: 44 per cent of girls and 37 per cent of boys reported that they drank alcohol at a party with friends. Just under a third of 13 year olds and just over a third of 15 year olds reported that they usually drank outdoors, in streets, parks and the like.

About a third of pupils who reported that they had ever drunk alcohol reported that they never drank with their parents. Pupils were more likely to report drinking with friends, particularly with friends of the same gender than with family: 39 per cent of 13 year olds and 61 per cent of 15 year olds often drank with friends of the same gender and 23 per cent of 13 year olds and 42 per cent of 15 year olds often drank with friends of the opposite gender.

Among pupils who reported drinking in the week before the survey, a third of 13 year olds and 19 per cent of 15 year olds reported that their families did not know that they drank alcohol. Fifty eight per cent of 15 year old boys, 45 per cent of 15 year old girls, and 42 per cent of 13 year old boys, reported that their families did not mind if they drank alcohol. Over 80

per cent of those who reported ever drinking alcohol agreed that they were always or sometimes allowed to drink at home.

### Too much too young

Highlighting the SALSUS report, it has emerged that in Scotland four teenage drunks are being treated in casualty wards every day after drinking themselves into oblivion. Figures issued recently by the Scottish Executive show that 1122 under-age children were taken to hospital in 2004 after heavy drinking sessions. At the same time, 63 under-14s were treated for acute alcohol poisoning. Experts fear that it will get worse this year.

Dr Laurence Gruer, of Health Scotland, said: "The number of admissions of teenagers because of alcohol has increased over the past 10 years, not just in cities but rural areas. Most have acute poisoning. There is not much you can do but let them dry out and make sure they are in no danger if they vomit.

"Education in school does not have much effect. It's best to be stricter in enforcing the refusal of sale of alcohol to young people. Children are also sensitive to the price of alcohol and increasing the price would affect adults too.

"Unless the Government takes radical action, I can't see things improving."

Staff on duty in accident and emergency units over Christmas and New Year said they were shocked by the number and ages of children who had joined the binge drinking cult.

Nanjappachetty Doraiswamy, an A&E consultant at the Sick Kids Hospital in Glasgow, said he had seen drunk children as young as ten. "When children see

*mum and dad drinking alcohol, it makes them think about doing it too. It is also down to peer pressure from their friends. Children need to be educated that if they continue drinking there could be liver problems. And adults must not tempt them by having lots of alcohol in the house."*

A senior nurse in Glasgow said: "In twenty years of working at the festive period, this was the worst I've seen for young kids being admitted with alcohol poisoning."

Sally Haw, an expert in substance abuse with Health Scotland, said it was too easy for children to get cheap booze. "The price of alcohol is about half of what it was in real terms in the 1980s. This increases consumption, particularly among the young.

"The other thing that has happened is a difference in promotion of alcohol through adverts and marketing. Alcohol is being presented in a very positive light and as an exciting thing to do."

A report last year found many children were drinking almost as much as the recommended adult limits.

A spokesman for the Scottish Executive said action was being taken to stop children binge drinking. "Binge drinking can have serious side-effects for all of us but particularly children.

"The Executive is running an advertising campaign aimed at younger people, to make them aware of the effects of alcohol misuse. Protection of young people from the harmful effects of alcohol is a key measure in the Licensing Bill, which is due to be introduced shortly."

### Alcohol Focus Scotland

The national charity for alcohol issues, Alcohol Focus Scotland, has published a manifesto setting out ten key measures essential for tackling the country's problem:

### 10 proposals for change

- Cheap drink promotions which encourage people to buy more alcohol than they intended must be stamped out in shops, off-licences and supermarkets. The relative cost of alcohol has fallen by around a third over the past 20 years. Most of this has been in the off-trade sector and many of the unacceptable promotions in the on-trade are driven by the need to compete with off-sales. Low baseline prices are compounded by the special promotions offering discount for bulk purchase such as 24 cans of beer for £10. Promotions and retail practices such as strategically positioning alcohol throughout stores needs to be tackled.
- Stricter enforcement of the laws relating to alcohol sales. In Scotland there were only 44 prosecutions for under-age sales in a whole year and not a single prosecution for selling alcohol to a drunk person in the last 3 years. These statistics certainly do not accurately reflect the scale of the problem. Licensees must be made to take their legal and social responsibilities seriously with appropriate penalties for those found to be putting profits first.
- All pubs and clubs must offer cheaper soft drinks, free tap water and a wider range of good priced low alcohol drinks. In many bars it is cheaper to purchase a pint of lager than a coke so there is no incentive for people to go out and enjoy themselves without drinking alcohol.

- The unit content should be printed on all alcoholic drink packaging and should be set in the context of daily benchmarks. There should also be unit information at the point of sale in both the on and off trade e.g. on beer pumps in bars and at till points in off-licences. Consumers are entitled to know how strong their drinks are.
- Reduce drink-drive limit from 80mg to 50mg in line with other European countries. The Centre for Transport Studies at University College, London say lowering the limit would save 65 lives per year and prevent hundreds of injuries. The hard hitting drink-driving message should be delivered all year round rather than for two weeks over the festive period. Drink-drive accidents and deaths don't just occur at this time of year so why should the messages only be communicated then?
- Hard hitting national TV campaign to get the message across to the public that excessive drinking is not acceptable and carries serious risk of harm. A sustained campaign is needed to challenge public attitudes of both young drinkers who go to pubs and clubs and also older home drinkers.
- Ban on alcohol advertising for motor sports. Associating alcohol with driving is completely irresponsible and dangerous.
- More funding and support for alcohol counselling services. Over 41,000 counselling sessions are delivered by 30 local alcohol

counselling agencies every year in Scotland with around 70% having a successful outcome. The waiting list for these agencies is typically from 3 days to 3 months yet they are struggling to deliver their service on TOTAL funding of £4.5m.

- Alcohol sponsorship must not target children, for example children's football strips bearing the brands of alcoholic drinks are unacceptable.
- More effective alcohol education, starting at

primary school age. Children are more exposed to alcohol promotion than ever before which makes the need for balanced alcohol information all the more important. The media literacy approach to help children understand alcohol marketing is a particularly valuable tool which should be part of every schools based programme. ■

## Scottish First Minister: by all means get drunk once in while

Just as it was revealed that record numbers of Scottish children, some as young as 10, have been rushed to hospital with alcohol poisoning, Jack McConnell, First Minister at Holyrood, told a group of school children it was all right to get drunk "once in a while". The first minister's remark came during a question and answer session with more than 100 secondary pupils in the Highlands. Nicola Sturgeon of the SNP said it had been an "incredible gaffe", given Scotland's problems with binge and under-age drinking. Alcohol Focus Scotland said any message that drunkenness was normal was "not helpful". Mr McConnell's aides defended him by saying the comment was made in the context of discussing adult drinking, albeit in front of a room full of teenagers.

Jack Law, chief executive of Alcohol Focus, a charity promoting sensible drinking, said: "The message that going out to get drunk is perfectly normal, acceptable behaviour is not helpful when Scotland faces a growing NHS, social work and criminal justice bill caused by our binge drinking culture. We must dispel the myth in this country that the only way to have a good time is to get drunk."

Nicola Sturgeon, the SNP leader in the Scottish Parliament, said that under-age drinking was an issue in Scotland, and "it is quite staggering that any politician, particularly the first minister, should encourage young people to get drunk".

The Scottish Licensed Trade Association, which is fighting Mr McConnell's plans to ban smoking in pubs, said the remarks had been outrageous. A spokesman said: "Doesn't the first minister know it is illegal for publicans to sell alcohol to people under 18 and also illegal to allow anyone to become drunk and incapable on the premises?"



## Further publications available from the Institute of Alcohol Studies

### Counterbalancing the Drinks Industry

Counterbalancing the Drinks Industry: A Report to the European Union on Alcohol Policy

A response to a report published by the European drinks industry and a defence of the WHO Alcohol Action Plan for Europe.

### Alcohol Policy and The Public Good

Alcohol Policy and the Public Good: A Guide for Action

An easy-to-read summary of the book written by an international team of researchers to present the scientific evidence underpinning the WHO Alcohol Action Plan for Europe

### Medical Education

Medical Education in Alcohol and Alcohol Problems: A European Perspective

A review of educational programmes on alcohol and alcohol problems in European medical schools, identifying gaps in provision and proposing guidelines for a minimal educational level within the normal curriculum of under- and post-graduate medical students.

### Alcohol Problems in the Family

Alcohol Problems in the Family: A Report to the European Union

A report produced with the financial support of the European Commission describing the nature and extent of family alcohol problems in the Member Countries, giving examples of good practice in policy and service provision, and making recommendations to the European Union and Member Governments.



### Marketing Alcohol to Young People

Children are growing up in an environment where they are bombarded with positive images of alcohol. The youth sector is a key target of the marketing practices of the alcohol industry. The booklet depicts the marketing strategies of the industry and shows how advertising codes of practice are being breached.

# alcohol

A red rectangular banner with the word "ALERT" in white, bold, uppercase letters, tilted slightly upwards to the right, positioned over the bottom of the word "alcohol".

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