

Drug tests for exam students 'inevitable'

'Academic doping' by students is becoming routine, psychologist warns, By Jeremy Laurence, Health Editor for [The Independent \(UK\)](#)

Thursday, 1 October 2009 (It may be old but it's still relevant!)



- 5 Fears that students are turning to 'smart drugs' to get them through exams have led to calls for universities to introduce testing

The spectre of students queuing to provide urine samples before sitting exams is raised today by a scientist who says "academic doping" is likely to become as routine as in sport.

- 10 "Smart drugs" that are claimed to boost academic performance have proliferated in recent years, making the introduction of routine drug-testing for students inevitable, according to Vince Cakic, a psychologist at the University of Sydney in Australia.

- 15 Ritalin, a stimulant drug best known as a treatment for hyperactive children, has also found a market among students, especially in the US, who are desperate to succeed and are turning to it in preference to traditional stimulants such as coffee and cigarettes. Users say it helps them to focus and concentrate and this has been confirmed in research studies on adults.

Other drugs with potential as "brain boosters" include modafinil (Provigil), a stimulant prescribed for the sleep disorder narcolepsy, donepezil (Aricept), prescribed for Alzheimer's disease to improve memory, and selegiline (Eldepryl), prescribed for Parkinson's disease to increase motivation.

- 20 One in four students at some US universities are reported to have taken stimulants, particularly in colleges with more competitive admissions criteria, Mr Cakic said. Anecdotal reports suggest their use has spread to Britain. Writing in the Journal of Medical Ethics, he said the spread of academic doping posed challenges for society.

- 25 Banning the drugs would be almost impossible, leaving the option of testing students in the same way that elite athletes are tested, but despite the ban on drugs in sport, 95 per cent of elite athletes are said to have used them.

"It is apparent that the failures and inconsistencies inherent in anti-doping policy in sport will be mirrored in academia unless a reasonable and realistic approach to the issue of [brain-boosting drugs] is adopted," he wrote.

- 30 "As laughable as it may seem, it is possible that scenarios [such as urine testing] could very well come to fruition in the future. Given that the benefits of [the drugs] could also be derived during periods of study at any time leading up to the examinations, this would require drug testing during non-exam periods."

But Mr Cakic said it was not clear that using drugs was necessarily wrong. Arguing that they should

35 be banned because they confer an unfair advantage is like suggesting that private tuition should be banned because it favours those who can afford it. Professor John Harris, the director of the Institute for Science, Ethics and Innovation at the University of Manchester, and the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Medical Ethics, agrees.

40 He defended the use of smart drugs on the grounds that it was "not rational to be against human enhancement".

In the British Medical Journal in June, he said that the use of cognitive enhancing drugs should be seen as a natural extension of the education process. He said drug regulatory agencies should assess the benefits and risks as they would any other medical intervention.

45 But the long-term safety of the drugs is unknown. In the US, Ritalin carries the most serious warning because of its high potential for abuse, serious risks to the heart and chance of sudden death. Caffeine, by contrast, carries no warnings and enhances sporting and academic performance. But this form of "cheating" was tolerated because it was relatively harmless, Mr Cacic said.

The following comments are from a similar article appearing in the Huffington Post UK, July 2, 2013:

50 Students continue to clash over [leading neuroscientist Barbara Sahakian advocating drug tests](#) as a way of weeding out those using class B drug Ritalin, and similar substances, which [have been linked to psychosis](#), depression and memory damage, during exams.

55 "Concentration drugs are not comparable to sport performance enhancers as they affect concentration not actual ability, so it should not be tested as such." says one student.

Another student believes using the drugs is completely fair, adding: "It doesn't increase your intelligence, it just helps you concentrate; it's like having a massive cup of coffee.

60 "Concentration drugs are not comparable to sport performance enhancers as they affect concentration not actual ability, so it should not be tested as such." Another student says.



65 ● If there were some magic pill that could make you smarter or concentrate better would you take it?