

REVIEW OF COMMERCIALISATION AND SEXUALISATION OF CHILDHOOD: TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Parents express real concern about children being pressured into growing up too quickly. The Government has therefore made a commitment to take action to protect children from excessive commercialisation and premature sexualisation, as part of the work of the Task Force on Childhood and Families. The purpose of the independent review will be to assess the evidence and provide Government with recommendations on how best to address public concern in this area. In doing so, it will need to consider the findings and recommendations set out in the recent policy reviews by Prof. Tanya Byron and Dr. Linda Papadopoulos, the evidence assessment on commercialisation by an expert panel chaired by Prof. David Buckingham for DCSF and his research on sexualised goods aimed at children for the Scottish Parliament, and other related assessments (see Note below).

2. The review should take a wide-ranging and independent examination of the evidence and provide recommendations that are fit for purpose and meet public concerns. Recommendations should seek to identify measures that are more likely to result in businesses collectively and individually changing their behaviour and which empower consumers to voice their concerns more effectively. As such, the recommendations should be informed by the views of both consumers, particularly parents, and the business community; they should also draw on the expertise of existing regulators.

3. The review should be structured according to the following four themes:

a. Risks of harm and barriers to parenting

Set out an assessment of the evidence base, including from existing reviews, to clarify what risks of harm are associated with excessive commercialisation and premature sexualisation. This should be in terms of harm to children (e.g. self-esteem, mental health, physical health) and creating barriers to parents exercising their parental responsibility in raising their children. In particular, the review needs to establish the kind and scale of public concern in this area and review the extent to which they provide a barrier to parenting or a risk to children. The impact on both boys and girls should be considered equally.

b. Principles – defining and exemplifying boundaries

Define excessive commercialisation and premature sexualisation of children, by drawing on the evidence, including: from the previous reviews stated above, existing regulation, self-regulation and codes of practice, and the views of parents and young people. This should include addressing issues on gender stereotyping and body image, and examine the full range of advertising, marketing (e.g. product placement, sponsorship) and commercial activity. This examination should cover activities directed at children and young people themselves, but also consider activities promoting goods and services not aimed at children

(such as alcohol) but with which children are likely to have contact. These definitions will help inform a set of principles for regulation and practice which are age appropriate and draw on approaches used in the relevant business sectors as appropriate, easily understood by the public and in plain English. The principles should also be informed by and be illustrated through a full range of examples (preferably from the UK)

c. Consumer voice

Identify what systems are currently in place to allow consumers to voice their concern and complaints across sectors, and assess whether there are any barriers to consumers doing so (e.g. lack of awareness, complexity of the system from point of view of consumer, lack of confidence in the system, methods for complaining). Where barriers exist, particularly for parents and young people, the review should examine what steps can be taken to address these. The review should also consider the role of the Big Society - e.g. social networks, communities, youth groups - in influencing change.

d. Corporate social responsibility

Assess how businesses currently fulfil their corporate social responsibility in this area, through the full range of existing measures, and identify whether any changes need to be made to these measures. The review will need to work with consumers, regulatory bodies and business representatives in identifying any possible changes. In particular, the review should:

- i) Set out existing measures across relevant business sectors (e.g. advertising, marketing, press, broadcasting, digital services, trading standards and retail);
- ii) Assess whether these are adequate (sufficient or necessary) in minimising excessive commercialisation and premature sexualisation; and
- iii) Identify what further steps can be taken if existing measures are not adequate, including removing unnecessary measures as well as introducing more effective ones (exercising “one in one out” principle).

4. Though wide-ranging, the scope of the review should not include areas that are either currently being progressed by Government or do not focus explicitly on issues of commercialisation or sexualisation. Thus, the review should not focus on:

- a. The Internet itself and safeguarding in general, as this is currently the focus of a programme of work being undertaken through the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS); though clearly some internet content is within scope.

- b. Wider policies to reduce harm, such as reducing obesity or alcohol abuse, unless evidence emerges during the review of children being exposed inappropriately to promotional activities for such products.
- c. Child performance in the entertainment industry, which is subject to review separately later this year.

5. The review is planned to take five months, starting in December and ending in May 2011 with a published report with recommendations. The independent review lead will be appointed by the Minister for Children and Families, Sarah Teather MP, and will be expected to report interim findings to the Minister, Task Force and Task Force officials group during the review.

Note:

The following are the key policy and evidence reviews:

- Prof David Buckingham, "The impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing",
<http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00669-2009>
- Prof David Buckingham, report to Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee, SP Paper 374, "External research on sexualised goods aimed at children",
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/equal/reports-10/eor10-02.htm>
- Dr Linda Papadopoulos, "Sexualisation of young people review"
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100418065544/http://homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/Sexualisation-of-young-people.html>
- Prof Tanya Byron, "Safer Children in a Digital World: The report of the Byron Review 2008" and "Do we have safer children in a digital world? A review of progress since the 2008 Byron Review", both at
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview/>
- Media Consumption and Viewing Behaviour of Children – unpublished research of DCSF
- Unpublished report by Consumer Focus on the regulation of the use of integrated marketing techniques and digital technology to market products to children
- Ofcom "Guidance Notes - Section One: Protecting the under 18s", (guidance on programme content)
<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/guidance/>
- Ofcom "Social Networking - A quantitative and qualitative research report into attitudes, behaviours and use"
<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/media-literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/socialnetworking/>