

DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Children's Plan: progress so far and next steps on improving outcomes for children, young people and families.

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families (Mr. Ed Balls):

I am today announcing, on the second anniversary of the Children's Plan, the publication of the *Children's Plan 2 Years On: a progress report*, as well as both the publication of an independent assessment of the impact of the commercial world on children's wellbeing, and the appointment of Sarah Thane CBE to develop proposals about the regulation of child performance.

Children's Plan 2 Years On: A progress report

This report demonstrates how the Children's Plan, which puts the child at the centre of all our policy and provision, has significantly changed children's services to the great benefit of children, young people and their families, and all those who work with them. As a result, the Children's Plan has significantly improved outcomes for children and young people. It can be accessed at www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan.

As well as celebrating what has already been achieved, today's *Children's Plan Two Years On* report shows the huge advances that are made for children when families are supported, and whole communities are enabled to work together to overcome the challenges they face.

The report explains that over the next five years we will:

- **Introduce new guarantees setting out what children, young people and their parents can expect from services** through: the new Pupil and Parent Guarantees underpinned by legislation in the Children, Schools and Families Bill; the September Guarantee and, in 2010, the January Guarantee to a suitable place in education post-16; and setting out what support families can expect from the early years onward in a Green Paper concerning families and relationships.
- **Further professionalise the workforce** across all children's services. In the early year's workforce we will have better qualified practitioners, increasingly with graduate leadership; within social work we have accepted the recommendations of the Social Work Taskforce to ensure children, young people and their families receive the highest standards of care; and we will develop a professional status for the youth sector.
- **Develop and support the best leaders** by investing in developing talent and giving our leaders the flexibility to innovate.
- **Be tough on services that fail to deliver.** The early success of National Challenge has shown what can be achieved when support and appropriate intervention is targeted at underperforming schools through local authorities. It

is equally important that we intervene where local authorities are failing to deliver children's services to an acceptable standard.

We are committed to continued investment in the services and other activities required to fulfil the ambitions set out in the Children's Plan and are keen to move to the next stage of reform. But now more than ever, we need to ensure we are getting real value for money from our investment. In this tougher fiscal climate, we need to continue supporting and working with those who deliver services, including those on the frontline, in combining investment and efficiency savings to meet spending requirements, and to deliver our guarantees to pupils, parents and school leavers. We must remain focused on meeting the challenges facing all those working with children. Through a collective effort we believe we can go even further and can move 21st century children's services from being good to outstanding, making England the best place in the world to grow up.

I am also pleased to announce the launch of a new blog site as part of the Children's Plan village (www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan). The website includes case studies and video showing how the Children's Plan has made a positive difference to children and young people, families and practitioners over the past two years.

The Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing

The Government announced in the Children's Plan our intention to "commission an independent assessment of the impact of the commercial world on young people" and later that David Buckingham, Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, would lead this work, supported by a panel of independent experts.

Professor Buckingham and his team conducted an extensive review of the available evidence and spoke to a large number of stakeholders representing the broad spectrum of opinion on this subject. I am today publishing the resultant report. It reflects the fact that Professor Buckingham was asked, first and foremost, to bring together and critically assess all the available research and evidence that exists on this vast subject.

Professor Buckingham's report raises a number of far-ranging issues, from the need to promote greater media literacy to the regulation of new media and the need to safeguard children's television as part of a broadcaster's responsibility to provide public service content. I am very grateful to Professor Buckingham and his colleagues for such a thorough piece of work.

The key messages from this comprehensive piece of work are that

- The children's commercial market is already large, is continuing to grow and is becoming increasingly sophisticated in its activities, in particular through new media. This trend seems set to continue;
- The children's market does not exist in isolation. Notwithstanding considerable social change in recent decades, parents continue to play the pivotal role in how children are affected by the market, although peers also have a considerable influence, especially as children grow into adolescence;

- So far as the impact of the commercial world on children is concerned the evidence shows a complex picture from which it is not possible to draw simple conclusions about cause or effect. The evidence does not validate either the notion that commercialisation is creating a 'toxic childhood', nor the notion that children are highly sophisticated consumers able to navigate with ease through a benign market;
- Children are also increasingly aware of commercial forces in public places and in schools, and there is significant commercial activity going on within schools.

Professor Buckingham's thoughtful report requires a considered response, and we have decided that this should comprise the following elements:

- We will take action to ensure children and their parents are supported to improve their media literacy skills, especially relating to new media.
- As a first necessary step towards this we will shortly establish a panel to assess the place of media literacy within the school curriculum, to help schools to enhance the media literacy of their pupils. We believe our overriding aim should be to ensure children are safe while enjoying the many opportunities that both old and new media have to offer.
- We will also develop materials to help parents guide their children and help them deal with commercial messages transmitted via old and new media.
- It is important that the regulatory framework keeps pace with technical developments and the subsequent new marketing techniques that might be directed at children. In response to these issues the independent advertising regulators recently undertook an extensive public consultation exercise to inform the updating of both the broadcast and non-broadcast media Codes. The revised Codes will be published early in the New Year.
- We are also working with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Health to ensure that the wellbeing of children is given priority, particularly in areas such as food promotion. The Chief Medical Officer is planning this week to issue guidelines on the health effects and risks of children drinking alcohol. We will look at developing a set of voluntary principles to underpin all forms of marketing and promotion of food and drink to children, particularly where established mandatory self-regulatory and co-regulatory regimes do not exist. We also welcome the fact that the Internet Advisory Bureau has developed a set of Good Practice Principles for online behavioural advertising. These came into force in September 2009.
- We want there to be strong links and productive partnerships between schools and businesses, as illustrated in '*Building Stronger Partnerships*, published in December 2008. The best practice principles relating to the commercial aspects of these partnerships have been in place for nine years. We have reviewed these with businesses and school partners and we now plan to update them to provide stronger guidance about the characteristics of good

partnerships and how these are best formed, so both schools and businesses can benefit. The new charity, the Education and Employers Taskforce, will be doing more to coordinate and promote constructive joint working between schools and employers. It has already published some initial online guidance.

- We recognise how important Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is to children. Professor Buckingham's report found that older children are relatively poorly served by PSB and made it clear that there is a need to encourage high quality UK-sourced, original PSB content for children. We strongly agree and we welcome the BBC Executive's recent decision to increase their budget for children's content.

Child Internet Safety

We have also launched the **UK Child Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) strategy** – the first UK strategy on child internet safety and, we believe, the first strategy of its kind anywhere in the world led and owned by an unprecedented coalition of Government, Industry, Charities, Law Enforcement and many others united in working together to help children stay safe online. And we have launched the first stage of the “Click Clever Click Safe” public awareness campaign with our online version of the Green Cross Code: "**Zip it, Block it, Flag it**". We want to see the digital code become as familiar as ‘Stop, Look, Listen.’

For the first time, key players from industry, charities and Government will be **independently reviewed against standards** to keep children safe online. Online safety is already a compulsory part of the National Curriculum for secondary schools and is also being taught in many primary schools. From September 2011, online safety will be a **compulsory part of the curriculum from age 5**.

The regulation of child performance

As Professor Buckingham's report makes clear, the commercial world offers children many exciting opportunities in terms of entertainment, creativity, communication, learning and cultural experience, but it also carries some risks. Both issues can be seen in the specific context of children's participation in television, film and theatre performances.

Our starting principle is that performing is good for children because of the opportunities it offers them to develop their skills and talents, to have these recognised and praised and to develop more self-confidence as a result. Performing is often highly enjoyable for children, while also giving great pleasure to many people beyond children's families and friends.

As a country, we want to continue celebrating the brilliant performances of children in stage shows like Billy Elliott or programmes like Britain's Got Talent, and it is right that our talented children should continue aspiring to appear on those stages.

We also benefit as a country from the careful and sensitive insight into children's lives given by films like Fish Tank or documentary programmes like My First Year.

But where many parents, educators and Ministers become concerned is when programme makers seem determined to keep pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable, to provide shock value for viewers and push up ratings, rather than to do anything positive or meaningful for our children, our culture or our country.

The relevant legislation is set out in the Children and Young Persons Act 1963 and the 1968 Regulations which relate to it. This regulatory regime applies across a huge range of performance activities, from local dramatics and talent shows to popular television programmes and films.

There are a number of difficulties with the 1968 regulations, and also the primary legislation on which they depend. For example, the legislation is highly complex; is interpreted very differently in different places; and is hard to apply to contemporary broadcasting. Concerns have also been raised that the regulations are often misapplied, or sometimes not applied at all. Some have also asserted that the current regulations don't reflect current thinking about the nature of the biggest risks to children, or children's greater maturity today compared to fifty years ago.

Questions have also been raised about whether there is sufficient information and guidance currently available to parents who are considering agreeing to their children taking part in performance activities, or indeed to all of those putting on performances, and of parents.

Increasing technological convergence also means that there is a need to consider these issues in a way that takes fully into account the fact that the boundaries between different forms of communication are blurring – those between television and the internet especially. Unless a modern framework is developed which consciously looks ahead there is a serious risk of it being rapidly overtaken by technological change.

Questions have therefore arisen about the extent to which the current regulatory approach is still fit for purpose today. My Department has lead responsibility for the regulation of child performance. Earlier this year, I asked officials to examine the 1968 regulations with the aim of updating them. The results were discussed informally over the summer with interested parties. These discussions made it clear that simply updating the existing regulations would probably not create the kind of approach that we believe we now need: that is, one that protects children effectively and proportionately from the risk of harm, enables them to make the most of the many exciting performance opportunities now available, and reflects and respects the right to freedom of expression and editorial independence.

I and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport have therefore decided jointly to commission a piece of work to explore these issues in greater detail, with a view to deciding what a modern, effective and proportionate set of arrangements for the regulation of child performance should look like, and we have appointed Sarah Thane, CBE, to lead it. Sarah Thane is a former chair of the Royal Television Society, a former adviser to Ofcom on regulation and content, and a member of the governing board of Teachers TV, and therefore brings considerable, relevant experience and expertise to the task.

Sarah Thane will engage and work with all those with an interest in this area, including organisations representing children and parents; children's charities; broadcasters, programme and film makers; representatives of local arts and drama organisations; theatre organisations and local authorities, among others. Sarah Thane will report her conclusions to us by the end of February 2010.