

Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for an Assessment of the Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing

Evidence suggest that recent years have seen the size of markets for children's products and services increase and that children and young people are becoming more commercially aware. There is some evidence that children begin shopping at earlier ages. Parents tell us they feel pressurised to buy material goods for their children and some feel they need to work longer hours to pay for those goods. Yet parents and children tell us they want to spend more time together.

Some evidence suggests that the combination of a lowering in the age at which children begin to engage with the commercial world, along with an increase in the quantity of commercial messages targeted at children, may have some outcomes which are detrimental for children's wellbeing. Overall, however, this is an area where evidence is not clear. In particular, there is a gap in understanding properly the impact that cumulative exposure to shopping, advertising and commercial messaging may have on children's wellbeing.

We need to examine the best existing evidence both from the UK and abroad and commission new evidence to understand what is happening.

Objectives

The objectives for the assessment are to gather evidence and to reach a consensus based on the evidence on:

- How children's engagement with the commercial world has changed; and
- The impact those changes are having on children's wellbeing.

Wellbeing is defined by the Children's Act 2004 in terms of:

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- physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
- protection from harm and neglect;
- education, training and recreation;
- the contribution made by children and young people to society; and
- social and economic well-being.

These correspond to the 5 Every Child Matters outcomes.

The assessment will focus on developing an understanding of the evidence base. Decisions on policy recommendations will be taken after the evidence base has been established.

The Scope of the assessment

The assessment will examine children's commercial world in the broadest sense, including: products; commercial messages; the children's entertainment business and children's publishing (print, music, new media); shopping; the market for children's goods and services; and any further involvement that children may have. The assessment will not be restricted to advertising.

The assessment will be careful to examine the benefits children and young people gain from engaging with the commercial world. It will examine the economic contribution made by the provision of goods and services for children.

The assessment will take account of the views of children, young people and parents including what they enjoy about shopping and advertising. It will also take account of the views of stakeholders and industry.

The key questions the assessment will address

- What is changing?
 - What are the broad trends in children's commercial world in the

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UK

- How large is the market for children's products and services
- How fast is the market growing
- How much do children and parents spend
- How does the commercial world seek to engage children
- How do changes affect children's wellbeing?
 - What evidence exist about the balance of benefit and harm to children's: health; safety; enjoyment and achievement; contribution to society; and economic wellbeing, as a result of the changes identified
- What do Children and Parents really think?
 - Are parents and children worried about increasing commercial pressures
 - What do children and parents enjoy about engaging with the commercial world

The assessment will conduct a call for evidence and commission literature reviews. It will be for the assessment panel to decide on the framing of the literature reviews and to commission any further research and evidence deemed necessary.

The assessment is not designed to replicate or subsume any other ongoing Government processes:

- The Byron Review looked at the risks to children and young people of harmful and inappropriate material on-line and in video games and reported 27 March 2008. The assessment will take into account Dr Byron's findings where they relate to the wider question of commercialisation, for example in relation to advertising through new media channels.
- It is separate from the BERR's ongoing Review of the Consumer protection Review Regime in the UK, the OFCOM review of HFSS

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advertising restrictions and DCSF's updating of regulations for commercial partnerships with schools.

Governance

It is expected that the assessment will:

- Have external credibility through its independence
- Review existing evidence and commission new research required.
- Provide a mechanism by which children, young people, parents and external bodies can submit relevant evidence.
- Provide interim advice to Ministers in both DCSF and DCMS regarding emerging findings
- Produce a report for Ministers in both DCSF and DCMS which provides a picture of how children's engagement with the commercial world is changing and what that means for their wellbeing

In order to deliver on these expectations Government has convened a panel consisting of academic experts to compile and discuss evidence relating to children's engagement with the commercial world.

The panel will have responsibility for overseeing the assessment: reviewing evidence; supervising the commissioning of new research and calls for evidence; and providing a report for ministers at the end of the assessment that provides a picture of what is happening with regards to the children's engagement with the commercial world.

The panel will consist of a chair and 9 members, covering a range of specialisms.

A full assessment is expected to take a year from launch through to the final report.

Whilst this assessment is independent research it will be for Government to make decisions regarding publication.