

The Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing

Report of an Independent Assessment

For the Department for Children, Schools and Families
and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport



department for
children, schools and families



department for
culture, media
and sport

Contents

Executive summary	3
Key findings and arguments	5
PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE	17
1. Remit and scope of the assessment	17
2. Methods of the assessment	21
3. Framing the issue: the public debate	24
4. The concerns of parents and children	33
PART TWO: CHILDREN AND THE COMMERCIAL WORLD	43
Introduction	43
5. The children’s market	44
6. Consumption and family life	54
7. Children as consumers	64
PART THREE: IMPACT	71
8. Introduction: the evidence of impact	71
9. The benefits of the commercial world for children	76
10. The ethics of marketing to children	84
11. Wellbeing, mental health and materialism	90
12. Consumption and conflict: families and peer groups	97
13. Physical health	104
14. Sexualisation, body image and gender	113
15. Inappropriate content	123
16. Poverty and inequality	128
PART FOUR: THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE	133
Introduction	133
17. Children’s television	134
18. Education	141
19. Play, leisure and public space	149

PART FIVE: TOWARDS POLICY	153
Introduction	153
20. Regulation	154
21. Consumer and media literacy	164
22. What do we need to know?	171
References and evidence consulted	174

APPENDICES

(Available at: <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails>)

- A. Terms of reference
- B. Details of the panel
- C. List of contributors to the assessment
- D. Responses to the call for evidence
 - i) Summary of organisational responses
 - ii) Summary of parents' responses
 - iii) Summary of children and young people's responses
- E. Consultation work
 - i) NSPCC
 - ii) The DCSF Children and Young People's Board
 - iii) Focus group discussions with young people
 - iv) Focus group discussions with parents
 - v) Sherbert research
- F. TV Media Review (Nielsen)
- G. Children and Family Life: Socio-Demographic Changes (Social Issues Research Centre)
- H. Children and Marketing (University of Loughborough)
- I. The Ecology of Family Life (Social Issues Research Centre)
- J. The Effects, Uses and Interpretations of Commercial Messages and Activities by Children (University of Stirling/Open University)
- K. Technical Appendix: Children, Commerce and Obesity: What Role Does Marketing Play?

Executive summary

- Children today are exposed to a growing number and range of commercial messages. These extend far beyond traditional media advertising, and involve activities such as online marketing, sponsorship and peer-to-peer marketing. Commercial forces also increasingly impact on children's experiences in areas such as broadcasting, education and play.
- The commercial world offers children important opportunities in terms of entertainment, learning, creativity and cultural experience. But there are also significant concerns about what many see as harmful impacts on children's wellbeing, especially on their mental and physical health.
- The debate on these issues is polarised and often sensationalised, making it hard to arrive at a balanced view. Commercialism needs to be understood in relation to broader changes in the economy and in family life, without succumbing to nostalgia for a mythical 'golden age'. Simple cause-and-effect explanations do not do justice to the complexity of the issues.
- The evidence, both of risk and harm caused by the commercial world and of its benefits, is rarely conclusive. Overall, it suggests that children are neither the helpless victims imagined by some campaigners nor the autonomous 'savvy' consumers celebrated by some marketing people.
- There is some research that establishes associations between aspects of the commercial world and negative wellbeing among children. However, in most key areas relating to physical and mental health there is very limited evidence of any causal relationship. Few studies have clearly established the importance of commercial factors as compared with other influences, such as parents and peers.
- Equally, the commercial world may have a whole range of positive effects on children; but reliable evidence on specific impacts is very limited, and there is little or no independent evaluation of the claims of businesses in this respect.
- New media and marketing techniques raise some ethical concerns about potential deception and threats to privacy: the public is not currently well-informed about this area, and existing regulation is insufficient in some respects.
- Growing commercial pressures are undermining the production of UK-originated children's television programmes.

- Schools and public spaces are increasingly being used as marketing venues and being affected by privatisation and commercialisation. The implications of these developments for children's wellbeing remain to be identified.
- In these and other areas, commercialisation may accentuate inequalities and place further pressure on those who are already disadvantaged.
- The commercial world is not going to disappear. Children and parents need to understand it and deal with it. Consumer and media literacy, both at home and in schools, offers one important strategy here, although it needs further evaluation.

Key findings and arguments

Remit and methods

1. **Remit of the assessment.** This report follows a commitment made in the Children's Plan in 2007 to undertake an independent assessment of the impact of the commercial world on children's wellbeing. The panel was asked to gather evidence about:

- The changing nature and extent of children's commercial engagement;
- The impact of this on their wellbeing, both beneficial and harmful; and
- The views of parents and children themselves.

This is an assessment, and not a review: the remit is to gather and evaluate evidence, not to make policy recommendations.

2. **Key terms.** Our terms of reference define **the commercial world** in broad terms, to include: products; commercial messages; the children's entertainment business and children's publishing; shopping; the market for children's goods and services; and any further involvement that children may have. **Wellbeing** is defined not merely as a matter of mental or emotional health, but in the broader terms identified in the five outcomes of the Children's Plan, which include: 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. **Children** are defined here as children and young people aged between 0 and 19, in line with the DCSF's responsibilities.
3. **Methods.** Work on the assessment took place between April 2008 and March 2009. A multi-disciplinary panel was convened to oversee the process, which included: a call for evidence; commissioned literature reviews; stakeholder events; and consultations and further research with children and parents. Evidence was gathered from academic researchers, companies and trade associations, regulatory bodies, government departments, NGOs and campaigning groups, and parents and children themselves. Details of this material, the terms of reference, the membership of the panel, and the commissioned reviews and further research, are published as appendices to this report.

Assessing public concern

4. **The public debate.** The assessment took place against a background of public debate about childhood, which has frequently been intense and highly polarised. Debates of this kind are by no means new. Numerous influential commentators have pointed to a crisis in children's wellbeing, for which rising commercialism is regarded as a major cause.

Children are often seen here as passive victims of commercial influences. Meanwhile, others – particularly marketers – tend to present children as active agents, who are empowered through their dealings with the commercial world. In general, we have concluded that the issues involved are very much more complex than is often implied in all of these accounts.

5. **Media portrayals of young people.** How this issue is understood and debated is also likely to be affected by the ways in which the media portray children and young people. Several recent studies have suggested that such portrayals are overwhelmingly negative, especially in the case of teenage boys, and that young people themselves are unhappy about this. However, there is currently insufficient evidence to support any strong conclusions about the impact of this on public attitudes towards young people.
6. **Assessing public concern.** While many organisations involved in this debate are keen to speak on behalf of parents and children, it is hard to gain an accurate picture of the nature, extent and strength of public concern more broadly. Younger adults appear to have more liberal attitudes than older adults; although parents in general are quite ambivalent. They express some concern about the extent and scale of contemporary marketing, its effects on children's desires and expectations, and its impact on family relationships and finances – especially when directly asked about these issues. However, they also recognise many of the positive opportunities the commercial world can offer. Children themselves are generally fairly relaxed about advertising, although they can be highly critical of it in specific contexts. They know a good deal about the strategies of contemporary marketers and advertisers; and they see advertising as significantly less influential than family and friends.

The wider context

7. **The growth of the children's market.** Marketing to children is by no means new, but is part of the general development of a modern consumer society. Children play an increasingly important role, both as consumers in their own right, and as influences on parents. Precise figures in some areas are hard to obtain, but overall spending on children (including childcare and education) appears to be currently of the order of £100 billion per year in the UK. While this market is expanding, it is not clear if it is doing so more rapidly than other market segments; and it is also comparatively volatile and unpredictable. Unfortunately, information about the children's market is not easily available in the public domain or for public scrutiny.
8. **Media and integrated marketing.** Children have growing levels of individualised and unsupervised access to media, both in the home and in the form of mobile devices. They are increasingly exposed to commercial messages of many kinds. Companies are using 'integrated marketing communications', in which promotional activities range across different media platforms. This approach often blurs the distinction between promotional and other content.
9. **New techniques and new media.** Contemporary marketers are using a widening range of techniques. These include established approaches such as advertising, sponsorship

and public relations, as well as new strategies such as viral marketing, advergames, peer-to-peer marketing and behavioural targeting. Many of these techniques rely on the use of new digital media. Expenditure on traditional media advertising appears to be declining relative to other areas of marketing and promotion; expenditure on internet advertising has now overtaken that on television advertising. The new approaches are often more personalised and more participatory, but they also raise justified concerns about potential deception and invasion of privacy.

- 10. Changes in family life.** Children's changing role as consumers should be understood in the context of broader changes in the structure and experience of family life over the past 50 years. The average family size is falling. Despite frequent claims that children are growing up too quickly, young people are on average leaving the family home, joining the workforce, marrying and starting a family later than ever before. Although family structures are changing, three quarters of children still live with two parents (including step-parents). Families are generally more affluent, although high levels of poverty persist among particular groups, notably single-parent families. It is difficult to identify the precise influence of these trends on children and on family relationships; although nostalgia for an imagined 'golden age' of family harmony and togetherness is largely misplaced.
- 11. Family expenditure.** There have been significant changes in how households allocate expenditure. More is spent on services and less on goods. Categories such as communications, leisure, holidays and 'culture' have become proportionately more important, while others such as food, clothing and fuel have become less so. Many goods and amenities formerly seen as luxuries are now regarded as necessities.
- 12. Time and space in the home.** Despite concerns about work/life balance, the proportions of parents' time spent in paid and unpaid work, and on leisure and recreation, have been relatively stable over time. The amount of time that parents say they spend on childcare is increasing; and families are spending more time in the home. Nevertheless, parents are increasingly anxious about the need for 'quality time', and this has become a key motivation for expenditure on products and services for children. More children now have their own (centrally heated) bedrooms, with significantly more individualised access to television and other media. While this may be leading to a fragmentation of family life, activities such as television viewing and play with electronic games can also be a focus for family togetherness.
- 13. Children's income: pocket money.** Long-term studies over the past 25 years suggest that the amount of children's pocket money has increased in real terms, but only slightly. Recent estimates suggest that children now receive an average of £10 per week in pocket money and £16 in ad hoc handouts.
- 14. Children's paid work.** A majority of teenagers engage in part-time paid employment at some point. Much of this work is informal, and on the margins of the economy. Some of it is unregistered, and in some instances there are justified concerns about working conditions. Children from higher-income families tend to use income from work to pay for additional 'luxuries' – and as such, much of this work is motivated by consumption.

By contrast, those from more disadvantaged backgrounds often depend on such income in order to be able to participate in what most would regard as common childhood practices.

15. **Children's influence on family spending.** The influence of children on parental or family purchasing decisions is extremely difficult to quantify. Children appear to have relatively more influence on the purchase of items for their own use, and of food, holidays, entertainment products and services and gifts for friends and family, and less influence on larger investments such as on cars and property.
16. **Children as consumers.** Research on 'consumer socialisation' suggests that children gradually develop a range of skills and knowledge to do with the commercial world that help prepare them for adult life. They are neither the helpless victims imagined by some campaigners nor the autonomous 'media savvy' consumers celebrated by some marketing people. Their engagement with the commercial world is part of their everyday social experience and is very much mediated by other social relationships with family and friends.

The impact of commercial messages

17. **Limits of the evidence.** Reliable research evidence on the impact of the commercial world on children is surprisingly limited in some respects. There is little doubt that marketing can be effective, in the sense that it influences people to buy things; but convincing evidence about its effects on broader attitudes and aspects of behaviour is more difficult to obtain. This applies to evidence of both positive and negative impact, although most of the research to-date relates to harmful effects. There has been a good deal of research on television advertising, but much less on other aspects of promotion or marketing. There is very little research on new digital media. Furthermore, as in other areas of research about media effects, basic issues of theory and method are often highly contested.
18. **Correlations or causes?** In some areas, we do have evidence of associations (or correlations) between exposure to marketing and aspects of negative wellbeing. However, there is a misleading tendency both in research and in public debate for such findings to be presented as evidence of causal connections. For example, it may be possible to show that people who watch a lot of television also have more 'materialistic' attitudes. But this does not in itself prove that television *causes* materialistic attitudes: it might equally be the case that people who are predisposed to be materialistic tend to seek out television as a form of entertainment, or indeed that there are other factors that explain both types of behaviour. Of course, associations between phenomena may be interesting and important to identify; and the fact that causal relationships have not been convincingly identified does not mean that such relationships do not exist, let alone that advertising has no effects.

Positive impact

19. **Choice and opportunity.** It is difficult to find reliable evidence about the positive impact of the commercial world on children, particularly evidence from independent research. Arguments in this area tend to focus on the expanding range of opportunities and choices available to children as compared with earlier times; as well as pointing to the long-term success of the market economy in delivering higher living standards, from which children have benefited, at least in material terms – albeit perhaps at the expense of growing inequality. The commercial world provides, and has always provided, most of the media that children use; and without advertising or subscription revenue, these media would not exist. As such, the commercial world could be seen to offer children many opportunities in terms of entertainment, creativity, communication, learning and cultural experience that they would not otherwise have. However, the benefits of this are hard to separate out and to quantify.
20. **Corporate social responsibility.** Many companies active in the children's market are engaged in a wide range of corporate social responsibility initiatives, of a broadly educational or charitable nature. However, there is again little independent evidence of the positive impact of these activities on children, for example in terms of learning or general wellbeing. Any benefits of this kind should be recognised alongside the potential gain to the companies in terms of public relations or brand recognition.

Ethics

21. **Fairness.** New marketing techniques raise some concerns about the fairness of marketing to children – and indeed to adults. While children can generally recognise the persuasive intentions of television advertising at a fairly young age, this is not necessarily the case with other forms of marketing and promotion, particularly the more 'stealthy' approaches used in new media. There is an urgent need for further research in this area; but evidence suggests that neither children nor parents are yet sufficiently aware of these new techniques, or able to evaluate them critically.
22. **Privacy.** There are also good grounds for concern about the gathering of information from or about children in this arena. While most companies do follow fair practice regulations, the terms of trade are not always well understood by children and parents and key privacy legislation does not make specific provision for children. Many of these ethical issues are being addressed in regulatory reviews that are currently under way.

Harmful impact

23. **Wellbeing and mental health.** Wellbeing itself is defined and measured in various ways. In respect of an alleged decline in children's mental health, the evidence is mixed. Referrals to mental health services have increased, which may indicate a genuine increase in mental health problems; although it may equally reflect the fact that people are more likely to report such problems. Many surveys show relatively high levels of life satisfaction among children, although these are lower in the UK than in other similar countries. The

basis for any historical or international comparison here is very limited; and it is especially hard to assess the contribution of the commercial world in this respect.

24. **Materialism.** Like wellbeing, 'materialism' is defined and measured in diverse ways. The evidence on whether children are more materialistic than in earlier times is mixed and unclear. Materialistic attitudes are associated with lower levels of wellbeing, but it is not clear whether materialism causes poor wellbeing or vice-versa. Children who watch more television tend to be more materialistic; but again, the direction of any causal relationship has not been clearly established. It is highly likely that other factors (such as material deprivation) also play a role here, but the relationships between these factors are as yet poorly understood.
25. **'Pester power'.** Adults still exert much more influence on what children – especially young children – buy and consume than *vice versa*. Even so, children appear to have a growing influence on parents' expenditure. While some see this as a reflection of a more democratic approach to parenting, others argue that children are exerting (and being encouraged by marketers to exert) excessive or unfair pressure. Research suggests that watching television advertising is associated with making more purchasing requests, which in turn is associated with conflict between parents and children. However, this research does not substantiate the claim that exposure to advertising *in itself* stimulates more family conflict than would have occurred in any case, or indeed that such conflict is increasing – although many parents say they believe there is a causal connection here.
26. **Peer pressure.** There is good evidence from recent UK studies that children feel pressured to wear particular brands of clothing, and that this can be crucial to their sense of belonging and status within the peer group. However, there is also some evidence that this phenomenon is slightly declining and that children claim to value individuality. Again, it is often difficult to separate out the influence of the commercial world from other factors. Both peer pressure and 'pester power' may be particularly acute for children in less wealthy families, and these effects are likely to vary with the age and gender of the child.
27. **Regulatory codes.** Regulatory codes on advertising explicitly prohibit the encouragement of 'pester power' and incitement to peer pressure. The Advertising Standards Authority currently receives relatively few complaints from parents about these, or any, child-related issues. However, some new marketing techniques (such as viral marketing, and the recruitment of children as 'brand ambassadors') depend very much on communication among friends and are not covered by current regulations, except insofar as parental consent is required.
28. **Physical health.** There is a large body of research on the influence of commercial messages on children's physical health. All advertising of tobacco, and the advertising to children of alcohol, are now banned in the UK; although there is continuing concern about the effects of other forms of promotion such as sponsorship, branding, packaging and shop displays. There is much less research in these latter areas. In general, the evidence suggests that advertising and promotion are much less important than other factors such as price, availability and family influences.

- 29. Obesity: limits of the evidence.** Obesity was the most hotly contested of the areas addressed in this assessment. Most of the research evidence in this area relates to television advertising rather than marketing more broadly; most of it is from the United States, where television advertising and other types of promotion have historically been at much higher levels than in the UK; and much of the evidence cited in the debate is several decades old. Even here, we found a surprisingly small amount of reliable evidence relating specifically to television advertising (as opposed to television viewing in general) and to obesity (as opposed to children's brand awareness or preference or other aspects of food choice and diet). Much of this evidence comes from laboratory experiments, whose ability to predict real-life behaviour is limited; and from surveys, which have established correlations (or associations) but rarely provide convincing evidence about the causal role of advertising.
- 30. Obesity: the role of marketing.** Expert opinion is divided on this issue. Most experts agree that advertising does have some impact, but the evidence is that the impact is very small. One frequently quoted figure is that exposure to television advertising accounts for some 2% of the variation in children's food choice. However, food choice is only one factor in obesity; and other factors – such as the availability and price of food, the influence of parents, patterns of physical activity, and the lack of access to outdoor play areas – play a much greater role. Focusing attention on television advertising may lead to a neglect of these other, more important factors.
- 31. Sexualisation.** Concerns about the 'sexualisation' of children are not new. The sexual content of mainstream media has increased, and become more explicit, in recent years. However, most of the research on the impact of this relates to adults rather than children. Recent research has found that UK children encounter some very diverse messages in the media about sex and relationships; and while they find some of this material valuable and enjoyable, they can also be quite critical of it. Families play a key role in mediating the influence of the media in this respect, and modelling attitudes and behaviour more generally.
- 32. Body image.** Adults and children – both male and female – in Western societies are prone to be dissatisfied with their physical appearance, although there is no evidence as to whether this is an increasing phenomenon. The media and marketing also tend to show images of slim and attractive people, although again it is not clear whether this has changed over time. It is obviously likely that people will be influenced by dominant ideas about physical attractiveness. Even so, evidence of the effects of this material is mixed and inconclusive; and again, nearly all of it relates to adults rather than children.
- 33. Gender identity.** These issues are also tied up with broader questions about gender identity. While some aspects of the commercial world are significantly more polarised in terms of gender than others, young people also relate to these images in diverse ways. Businesses have little if any incentive to create gender differences where they do not already exist – rather the reverse – but they may have an incentive to reinforce them in some contexts. Much of the debate in this area – and much of the research – focuses on girls, leaving aside key questions about the impact on boys.

- 34. Consequences for children.** The debate on sexualisation and body image is also hotly contested: there has again been a tendency to sensationalise the issue, and to see it in rather moralistic terms. This can make it difficult for children in particular to discuss and come to terms with the range of messages they are bound to encounter.
- 35. Obesity and body image.** Concerns about obesity and about body image seem to pull in different directions: the media are accused both of encouraging people to be thin and of increasing obesity. While these are not wholly incompatible, the processes involved are not straightforward. We have found no evidence that people with eating disorders such as anorexia watch either more or less television, or see different kinds of advertisements, than those who are obese – although they may well respond to them in very different ways. In both cases, such problems are again much more complex than a simple cause-and-effect logic would suggest.
- 36. Inappropriate content.** Concerns about children's access to inappropriate content (principally in the form of sexual and violent material) have a very long history. This assessment has not explored this issue in any depth, partly on the grounds that the commercial dimensions of the issue are difficult to separate out. Little of the available research deals with advertising or commercial messages. This issue was also addressed in relation to the internet and computer games by the recent Byron Review Report to Government, *Safer Children in a Digital World* (2008). While sharing the concerns of the Byron report as regards privacy, this assessment concurs with its judgment that the evidence of a causal relationship between violent media content (for example, in computer games) and violent behaviour is weak and inadequate.
- 37. Poverty and inequality.** Concern was expressed by several of the respondents to our consultation that the commercial world could exert particular impact on disadvantaged children. Although relative poverty among children in the UK has fallen in recent years, child poverty remains higher than in many similar industrialised countries. Poverty is also strongly associated with other aspects of negative wellbeing, including educational under-achievement and physical ill-health and there is good evidence to suggest that higher levels of inequality within societies are associated with lower measures of wellbeing.
- 38. Does commercialism accentuate the effects of inequality?** There is some evidence that the associations between the commercial world and negative aspects of wellbeing – in respect of 'pester power', peer pressure, and mental and physical health – are stronger among less wealthy families. However, the relationships among these factors are complex. Wellbeing is not necessarily lower among poorer children; and disadvantaged children may be more astute in handling money and less materialistic than their more affluent counterparts. Even so, the constant presence of images of those who are wealthier seems unlikely to contribute to such children's psychological wellbeing.
- 39. Limits of the evidence.** In most of the areas we have considered here, it is hard to find convincing evidence about the impact of the commercial world on children. This is not, of course, to imply that there is no such impact. Definitive proof on such issues would be difficult, perhaps even impossible, to obtain. In its absence, we might argue for the

application of the 'precautionary principle' – an approach that is typically applied where there is a likelihood of severe or irreversible harm. However, it is also important to consider the potentially counter-productive consequences of this. In preventing the possibility of harm to children, we may also restrict the positive opportunities they are able to enjoy.

Commercial decisions

40. **From commercial messages to commercial decisions.** Commercial *messages* in the form of advertising or marketing are only one aspect of children's relationship with the commercial world. There are many other areas in which children's lives – and the kinds of goods and services that are available to them – are increasingly governed by commercial *decisions*. Children's broadcasting, education and play are three key areas in which commercial companies have come to play a more important role in recent years, although in each case there is a long history of commercial provision. The increasing ubiquity of commercial messages in public space, the privatisation of public services and the introduction of market-based modes of provision, all have potentially far-reaching consequences for children's wellbeing, although the evidence here is fairly limited.
41. **The case of children's television.** Public service broadcasters are now competing in a market that is much more strongly dominated by global commercial forces. Combined with the advent of new media technologies and the decline in television advertising revenue, this has destabilised the basic funding model of UK terrestrial commercial television in particular. While children now have vastly more programming available to them, most of this is US in origin, and it is in a relatively narrow range of genres (particularly animation). Most of the new specialist children's channels are only available through satellite or cable subscription TV.
42. **The future of commercial public service broadcasting.** Domestic broadcasters are increasingly dependent on overseas sales and on revenue from merchandising. It is becoming harder to fund factual programmes and live action drama. Meanwhile, specific quotas for children's programming have been removed. As a result, commercial PSB channels (particularly ITV1) have steadily cut back on original UK production for children. Although parents and children continue to value the public service tradition of children's television, the future (outside the BBC) appears distinctly uncertain. Meanwhile, there is currently no regulatory requirement or clear business model for commercially-funded public service internet content for children.
43. **Education.** Schooling – and education more broadly – has become an increasingly important arena for children's encounters with the commercial world. Commercial messages and marketing activities are increasingly evident in schools in the form of sponsorship and public relations activities as well as some overt advertising. Many businesses are involved in providing work experience, mentoring and teacher training, mainly on a *pro bono* basis. More and more private companies are involved in the provision of educational services, including the management of schools and local authorities; and market-based models of provision have been very widely adopted in

building and refurbishment, facilities management, catering, and so on. Educational goods and services (including home tutoring and supplementary classes) are also increasingly marketed to children and parents in the home.

- 44. Benefits and losses.** Many of these developments have been relatively invisible to the general public. There has been little if any research on their implications for children's wellbeing (which may be both positive and negative) are particularly hard to identify. While they have had potentially far-reaching consequences for teachers' working conditions, and in some instances for local control and accountability, their positive impact in terms of raising children's achievement has yet to be convincingly demonstrated.
- 45. Play and public space.** Partly in response to the fear of crime, children's play in the street or in public open spaces has been steadily displaced by domestic leisure activities, or play in supervised commercial settings. Outside the home, children are spending increasing amounts of time in commercial indoor play environments and branded locations and events: in these settings, leisure is increasingly blended with shopping and consumption. Most of these activities are much more readily available to children from more wealthy families.

Towards policy

- 46. Regulation.** The introduction of new regulations on the advertising of HFSS (high fat, salt and sugar) foods has led to considerable sensitivity in this area. These new regulations combine with a range of existing codes operated by the Advertising Standards Authority, and through various forms of legislation, some of which relate specifically to children. Although there is a lack of independent monitoring, the ASA's own research suggests that it achieves a high level of industry compliance and public awareness.
- 47. New media.** However, there are some aspects of new media, and some new and emerging marketing techniques, that are not fully covered by the existing regulatory regime. These relate particularly to areas where the boundaries between promotional and other content are unclear or non-existent; and to the gathering and circulation of data relating to children. While we need to know more about how children (and parents) understand these new techniques, there are some potentially serious ethical concerns that should be addressed here. There are several regulatory reviews and initiatives currently under way that are engaging with these issues.
- 48. The consequences of regulation.** Proposals to increase the regulation of advertising need to be assessed both in terms of their likely impact and effectiveness, and in terms of their potential unintended consequences – for example, in justifying the withdrawal of funding for children's content. In addition, a disproportionate focus on advertising is likely to distract attention from other factors which may have more impact on the issue concerned.
- 49. Positive intervention.** There is also a case for positive intervention – that is, intervention that is designed to ensure that children are provided with material that is culturally or educationally valuable, and to guarantee that this is adequately funded. This is a

continuing concern in respect of children's television, but it also applies to the internet, where there is currently very little non-commercial or public service content for children.

- 50. Consumer literacy.** Consumer literacy refers to the skills and knowledge that children need in order to understand and deal autonomously with the commercial world. Various educational initiatives are under way to promote this, most notably in the area of financial literacy. For the most part these are located within the curriculum for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE).
- 51. Media literacy.** Media literacy overlaps with consumer literacy insofar as it addresses the commercial dimensions of media such as television, the press and the internet. While there are various definitions, there is general agreement that media literacy includes understanding the forms and conventions of media, evaluating how media represent the world and the values they contain, and understanding how they are produced and how they target audiences. Media literacy involves both critical thinking and creative participation in media-making, and it also enables children to encounter material that they would not necessarily come across through the mainstream commercial media. Ofcom has a remit to work with others to promote media literacy, and there has recently been an official 'recommendation' on this theme from the European Commission.
- 52. Media education.** Media literacy can be seen as a 'skill for life' that should be acquired both in schools and in the home. Parents have a role to play here, although there have been few initiatives in this area that have addressed them. There is a long history of media education in UK schools, where it features both in the specialist subject of Media Studies and (albeit in a limited way) in the National Curriculum for English. Media literacy has not yet been a significant element of the National Literacy Strategy; although education about moving image media such as film and TV is starting to gain ground in primary schools. There has been some classroom research in this area, but there is a need for more extensive and longer-term studies.
- 53. Teaching about the commercial world.** There are some educational initiatives designed specifically to teach children about commercial messages: these include materials produced by campaign groups as well as the business-funded 'Media Smart' initiative. Media education also includes the study of the media industries more broadly.
- 54. Media literacy and media effects.** Media literacy does not confer immunity to media influence. Indeed, the primary aim of media literacy education is not to reduce the influence of 'bad' media or advertising, any more than the aim of literacy education is to reduce the influence of 'bad' books. Rather, it seeks to enable children to make informed decisions on their own behalf, and thereby to make the most of the opportunities that the media and the commercial world can provide. To this extent, education should not be regarded as an alternative to regulation, but rather as a complement to it.
- 55. The need to share information and extend debate.** Information about the children's market is not easily available in the public domain or for public scrutiny. It would be in the interests both of public accountability and of the public profile of businesses themselves for such information to be more widely shared. At present, companies are somewhat reluctant to become involved in debate, fearing that their motives may be

viewed with suspicion. We currently lack a trusted space in which these issues could be considered in a more balanced and well-informed manner.

56. Further research. In several of the areas identified here, there are significant gaps in knowledge. In some cases, there is a need, not so much for extensive further research, but rather for more focused and better designed studies. In others, there is a need to gather and share new evidence. Our four key priorities for further investigation here are:

- The scope and scale of the children's market, and the changing nature of marketing strategies.
- The extent of children's (and adults') understanding of new marketing techniques, particularly in digital media.
- The consequences for children's wellbeing of commercialised or market-based approaches to public service delivery, for example in education and leisure provision.
- The ways in which children and young people are represented in the media, and the consequences of this for public attitudes and young people's wellbeing.

More broadly, it is vital that the impact of the commercial world on children's physical and mental wellbeing should be studied 'in the round', taking account of the full range of influences in their lives.

PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

1. Remit and scope of the assessment

This report follows a commitment made in the Children's Plan in 2007 to undertake an independent assessment of the impact of the commercial world on children's wellbeing. The panel was asked to gather evidence about:

- The changing nature and extent of children's commercial engagement;
- The impact of this on their wellbeing, both beneficial and harmful; and
- The views of parents and children themselves.

Our terms of reference define **the commercial world** in broad terms, to include: products; commercial messages; the children's entertainment business and children's publishing; shopping; the market for children's goods and services; and any further involvement that children may have.

Wellbeing is defined not merely as a matter of mental or emotional health, but in the broader terms identified in the five outcomes of the Children's Plan, which include: 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.

Children are defined here as those aged between 0 and 19.

This is an assessment, and not a review: the remit is to gather and evaluate evidence, not to make policy recommendations.

- 1.1 Context.** This report follows a commitment made in the government's Children's Plan in late 2007 to undertake 'an independent assessment of the overall impact of the commercial world on children's wellbeing'. The Plan (Sections 2.22-2.26) notes that children today have become more involved in commercial activities than previous generations, and that the size of markets for children's products and services has grown. The amount of money children are spending has increased, while the age at which they begin to engage with the commercial world has fallen. The Plan suggests that there are positive aspects to these developments, as the market provides greater choices and opportunities for children; and it also notes that understanding the commercial world is an important part of growing up and preparing for a future role as a demanding consumer in adulthood. However, it also suggests that there may be aspects that are harmful or detrimental to children's wellbeing – although the evidence in this area is not clear.
- 1.2 Remit.** Accordingly, the assessment panel was asked to gather evidence, both from the UK and abroad, about:
- the changing nature and extent of children's commercial engagement;
 - the impact of this on their wellbeing, both beneficial and harmful; and
 - the views of parents and children themselves.
 - The full Terms of Reference are contained in Appendix A.
- 1.3 The commercial world.** We have deliberately chosen to define 'the commercial world' in a broad manner. Our terms of reference describe this as 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.' As such, the assessment looks beyond well-established concerns about the effects of advertising: it seeks to address the full range of contemporary marketing practices (including those involving new digital media) and commercial activities. It looks both at the impact of commercial messages and at the broader ways in which commercial forces influence the lives of children and families. We acknowledge that children are involved in the commercial world, not just as consumers of goods and services, but also as producers and as employees – although this is one area that we believe is in need of further investigation.
- 1.4 Children.** In line with the remit of the DCSF itself, we are defining 'children' here to include those from birth to the age of 19. We recognize that the issues affecting older teenagers in this area are vastly different from those affecting younger children; and, where possible, we have drawn attention to the importance of age differences (relating both to psychological development and to social experience). We also recognize that children's engagement with the commercial world is generally made possible by adults, particularly parents; and to this extent, it is often difficult to separate children's consumer behaviour from that of adults.
- 1.5 A broad social and historical view.** Contemporary children's engagement with the commercial world is merely one aspect of the broader development of a modern

'consumer society' over the past century. Commercial forces now play a part in children's lives from the moment they are born – and indeed before they are born. It would be misguided to isolate children's involvement in commercial activities from other aspects of their social lives, in the family, in the peer group and in educational settings, or from adults' (and particularly parents') involvement in the commercial world. While the Children's Plan notes some of the changes that have occurred in this respect over the past decade, there is a much longer history to children's involvement in the commercial market. In exploring these issues, therefore, we have sought to address children's commercial involvement in relation to broader shifts in social experiences, and particularly to the changing nature and dynamics of family life.

- 1.6 Wellbeing.** 'Wellbeing' is a contested and rather broad term. This assessment looks beyond a psychological view of wellbeing as a matter purely of *mental health* – a view that in popular usage is often seen as equivalent to 'happiness' or 'feeling good'. By contrast, we regard wellbeing as having important social and economic dimensions; and we regard children as active participants in, and contributors to, society. Our definition of wellbeing is thus in line with that contained in the Children Act (2004), which includes:
- 1.7** 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 aspects also correspond to the five outcomes identified in Every Child Matters (2005): be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing.
- 1.8 Positives and negatives.** It is important to emphasise that the assessment addresses the positive aspects of children's engagement with the commercial world, as well as the negatives – even though it is the latter that tend to dominate the debate. This includes specific benefits for children (in terms of choices and opportunities, as well as enjoyment and pleasure), in addition to the broader economic contribution made by the provision of goods and services for children. As with the government's recent Byron Review on Children and New Technology (2008), we acknowledge that risks and potential benefits in this area are often intertwined.
- 1.9 Other initiatives.** The assessment also takes account of other recent and ongoing government processes. The most relevant of these include the Byron Review Report *Safer Children in a Digital World* (2008), and associated documentation; the Ofcom report *The Future of Children's Television Programming* (2007), which forms part of the broader public service broadcasting review, and various other relevant Ofcom reports such as its bi-annual *Media Literacy Audit* and its earlier work on television food and drink advertising; and the DCSF's guidelines on commercial partnerships with schools. There are also industry initiatives whose outcomes are still awaited, most notably the Digital Media Group report, which will address issues relating to online marketing.

1.10 An assessment, not a review. Finally, it should be noted that this is the report of an *assessment*, and not a *review*. Our remit has been to gather and evaluate evidence, not to make policy recommendations. We have taken an independent, robust and sceptical stance on the research evidence about both negative and positive impacts – and we have found that much of the evidence remains quite limited, both in scope and quality. However, we have also attempted to provide some indications of the implications of this evidence, for example in fields such as media regulation and education, and to offer some account of existing initiatives and experiences in these areas. Decisions on policy outcomes will be taken at a later stage, taking account of this analysis of the evidence we have gathered.

2. Methods of the assessment

Work on the assessment took place between April 2008 and March 2009. A multi-disciplinary panel was convened to oversee the process, which included:

- a call for evidence;
- commissioned literature reviews;
- stakeholder events;
- consultations and further research with children and parents.
- Evidence was gathered from academic researchers, companies and trade associations, regulatory bodies, government departments, NGOs and campaigning groups, and parents and children themselves.

Details of this material, the terms of reference, the membership of the panel, and the commissioned reviews and further research, are published as appendices to this report.

- 2.1 Commissioning.** The assessment was commissioned jointly by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Work on the assessment began in April 2008, and concludes with this report to Ministers completed in March 2009.
- 2.2 The assessment panel.** The assessment has been conducted by an independent multidisciplinary panel of experts in the field. The panel includes psychologists, sociologists, and an historian; as well as specialists in fields such as Education, Marketing, Media Studies and Childhood Studies. Panel members have themselves conducted a range of previous research projects relating to issues such as: children's uses of television, the internet and other media; children's responses to advertising and marketing; parents' views and concerns; the strategies and practices of children's marketers; the history of childhood; and children's social experiences within the family, the peer group and schools. Details of the members of the panel are given in Appendix B.
- 2.3 Call for evidence.** The assessment was launched with an online call for evidence, which was widely circulated to relevant stakeholder groups. This resulted in a range of submissions from businesses, trade associations, NGOs, consumer groups, teacher unions, campaigners, and others. A list of those who contributed or were consulted in the course of the assessment is given in Appendix C. There were separate calls specifically targeted at parents and children; and again, a range of responses was received: summaries of these responses are contained in Appendix D.

2.4 Literature reviews. The panel commissioned four extensive reviews of the research literature, following competitive tender. These reviews cover:

- broad social and demographic changes in childhood and family life (conducted by the Social Issues Research Centre): Appendix G;
- the nature and extent of contemporary marketing and advertising targeted at children (University of Loughborough): Appendix H;
- the changing experience and 'ecology' of family life, in respect of issues such as the use of time and space, and purchasing decisions (Social Issues Research Centre): Appendix I; and
- the effects, uses and interpretations of commercial activities and messages by children (University of Stirling and the Open University): Appendix J.

These reviews draw on relevant academic and market research, social statistics, and previous literature reviews, as well as including some original research. Some also consider mainstream media materials, as well as unpublished or 'grey' literature. A further review was commissioned from the market research company Nielsen relating to expenditure on advertising which children are targeted by or exposed to (Appendix F).

2.5 Stakeholder events. Several stakeholder events were held in order to provide further opportunities for input. These included events for business groups and companies as well as NGOs and other organizations working directly with children. The stakeholders consulted in this way included:

- representatives of major companies, in areas such as food, toys and media
- companies working specifically in the field of business-education partnerships
- trade organizations such as the Advertising Association
- regulatory bodies such as Ofcom and the Advertising Standards Authority
- NGOs with a particular interest in consumer and/or children's issues.

Further opportunities for input were provided in round-table discussions at an Interim Findings meeting held in January 2009. Following several of these meetings, organizations were invited to submit further evidence on specific aspects of the assessment.

2.6 Parents and children. In addition to the online consultation, DCSF staff and panel members conducted a series of stakeholder meetings with parents and children, under the auspices of organizations such as the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Family and Parenting Institute. Additional research with children was commissioned from the research organization Sherbert. Summaries of this material are contained in Appendix E.

2.7 The work of the panel. The panel met and deliberated on several occasions, and much of the work has been carried out collaboratively. Smaller teams have worked on monitoring the literature reviews, conducting stakeholder meetings, assessing evidence in specific areas, and contributing to this report. We have also drawn on international

expertise, by means of a seminar with guest speakers from the United States and Sweden held in July 2008.

2.8 An independent assessment. The issue of children's engagement with the commercial market is intensely politicised. Powerful commercial interests are obviously at stake; and the issue has also been a focus for a wide variety of campaigning organisations, with different political, moral and social agendas. Against this background, we have sought to arrive at an independent and dispassionate judgment of the evidence that will reflect due scientific rigour.

3. Framing the issues: the public debate

The assessment took place against a background of public debate about childhood, which has frequently been intense and highly polarised. Debates of this kind are by no means new.

Numerous influential commentators have pointed to a crisis in children's wellbeing, for which rising commercialism is seen as a major cause. Children are often seen here as passive victims of commercial influences.

Meanwhile, the news media often portray young people in very negative terms, although it is not clear how far this influences public attitudes towards young people more broadly.

Others – particularly marketers – tend to present children as active agents, who are empowered through their dealings with the commercial world.

In general, we have concluded that the issues involved are very much more complex than is often implied in all of these accounts.

- 3.1 Framing.** In assessing the evidence in this area, it is important to take account of the broader social and cultural context of the debate. Historical studies have shown that social issues can be defined in many different ways, which vary over time. A given issue has to be identified and named, and there are often competing definitions and accounts of the issue that vie for attention in the public arena. Social issues are *framed* in particular ways, and this determines the kinds of questions that may (or may not) be asked about them, and what are seen as legitimate (or illegitimate) concerns and explanations. The framing of social issues inevitably reflects much broader social, ideological or moral assumptions, even if these are not always made explicit.
- 3.2 The role of childhood.** This is perhaps particularly the case where the issues in question relate specifically to children – or can be *made* to relate to children. Children occupy a special place in all societies, and the drive to protect and nurture children can be seen as a basic human instinct. However, adults' views of children, and the ways in which childhood is defined, vary significantly both historically and between cultures. For example, children may be seen as naturally innocent and vulnerable, or as inherently sinful and disruptive: they are typically a focus of adults' most intense hopes, desires and fears. Such ideas about childhood often prove a very powerful way of mobilising public concern. If harmful influences in society can be shown to impact specifically on children, the argument for controlling those influences comes to appear much stronger.

By contrast, those who dissent from this view can easily be dismissed as uncaring and neglectful of children's needs, and even as enemies of childhood itself.

- 3.3 Children and media.** This process is often particularly apparent in debates about the impact of media and popular culture. Concerns about the harmful effects of popular culture on children and young people have a very long history, dating back well before electronic technology. These concerns reflect much more general anxieties about the future direction of society; but, as several studies have shown, they can also be inflamed and manipulated by those with much broader political, moral or religious motivations. These concerns occasionally reach the level of a 'moral panic', in which particular social groups and practices are publicly demonised – often on the basis of what are ultimately found to be quite spurious accusations. Perhaps paradoxically, such stories also play well in the media themselves, often receiving extensive and highly sensational coverage.
- 3.4 Wise children?** Responses to such arguments typically define children in a very different way. Rather than presenting children as passive victims of harmful influences, they tend to present them as already knowledgeable, skilful and sophisticated. The innocent child is effectively replaced by the naturally wise child. Such arguments are frequently espoused by marketers, who are understandably keen to refute the allegation of harm or irresponsibility on their part. Defining children as automatically 'savvy' and 'media literate' consumers appears to remove any grounds for further regulation of the market. One result of this is that the debate is exceptionally polarised – and indeed politicised. This can make it very difficult to arrive at a systematic and balanced evaluation of the issues.
- 3.5 Beyond the polarised debate.** Questioning the 'moral panics' that tend to dominate the debate does not imply that there is no cause for concern, nor that the media play a merely benign role in society. Nor is it to suggest that because some of these concerns appear to be perennial, new media do not present new issues: we have not necessarily seen it all before. Yet perhaps particularly in the current climate of rapid social and cultural change, it is vital that researchers and policy-makers look dispassionately at the issues, and take a careful and measured view. It is important to understand the role of the media and consumer culture in the context of other potential influences, which may be much more powerful, and to which they may or may not contribute; to balance the potential risks of these phenomena with the opportunities and potential benefits they provide; and to assess very carefully the likely effectiveness and the potential unintended consequences of any response in social policy.

The loss of childhood?

- 3.6 Narratives of crisis and decline.** Over the past few decades, the public debate about childhood in Britain has come to be dominated by a particular narrative of social decline. Childhood is widely perceived to be 'in crisis'. Anxiety here focuses particularly on the incidence of risky behaviour – the use of drugs and alcohol, teenage pregnancy, and youth crime – as well as the effects of poverty and disadvantage. Children today are seen to be growing up 'deprived of childhood': they are being prematurely encouraged or forced into behaving like adults, and confronting adult experiences and emotions that

they are deemed to be unable to cope with or understand. As a result, they are seen to be suffering from a whole range of mental and physical ailments, and from rising levels of anxiety, unhappiness and emotional stress.

- 3.7 Blaming commercialism.** Advocates of this view tend to attribute the blame for this 'loss of childhood' to a wide range of (what they regard as) undesirable aspects of modern life, including family breakdown and what is seen as poor parenting. Children's growing access to media and technology, and the apparent increase in 'commercialism', are often cited as key reasons for this apparent corruption of childhood innocence. According to this view, childhood used to be a non-commercial experience: children were kept away from the sordid realities of the economy, and from the deceitful appeals of advertisers. But as commercialism has increasingly dominated childhood, and as children have come to be seen as 'fair game' for marketers, the freedom and innocence of childhood have been destroyed.
- 3.8 A history of debate.** These kinds of arguments have been made many times over the years by commentators from a wide range of political, moral and religious persuasions. Indeed, they can be seen as part of a long-standing tradition in Western social thought that dates back at least to the Romantics. This is a long and complex tradition, which has motivated significant reforms in children's lives – for example through the work of writers such as Blake and Dickens and campaigners such as Shaftesbury. However, in some respects it has also entailed a resistance to modernity. Modern technology, urbanisation, consumer capitalism, the pressure to compete, and the 'speed' of contemporary life have all been cited as the villains of the piece; and there is a strong sense of nostalgia for a simpler, slower time, a rural idyll of family togetherness and spontaneous play, in which 'children could be children'.

Childhood in crisis?

- 3.9 Contemporary debates.** This argument has taken on a renewed force in recent years, at least in the UK. We have seen the publication of Sue Palmer's influential best-selling book *Toxic Childhood: How the Modern World is Damaging Our Children and What We Can Do About It* (2006), closely followed by the *Daily Telegraph* launching a campaign to halt the 'death of childhood'. The left-leaning political group Compass and the National Union of Teachers have both published broad-ranging reports in this area, and in early 2009 The Children's Society, a Church of England organisation, published *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age*, the outcome of a two-year public enquiry. International comparisons between children's lives in the UK and in other countries, for example in the form of a 2007 UNICEF report, have also provoked considerable concern. This renewed anxiety is undoubtedly a response to wider social changes, including changes in children's involvement with the commercial world; although the ways in which the issue is typically framed and discussed in these contexts are decidedly traditional.
- 3.10 Toxic childhood.** The book *Toxic Childhood* argues that we are witnessing a mental health crisis among young people, which is manifested in rising levels of binge drinking,

eating disorders, self-harm and suicide; in the prevalence of ADHD, dyslexia and autism; and more generally in increasing depression, anxiety and poor self-esteem. Children's relationships with others are seen to be more competitive and superficial, resulting in a growing incidence of emotional disorders, bullying and violence; and their lifestyles are described as increasingly unhealthy. Children today, the book argues, have a poorer attention span and less ability to tolerate deferred gratification. There has been an erosion of respect for authority, as society has drifted into moral relativism: children are increasingly lacking in discipline, respect for others and good manners. All these symptoms are seen to be particularly prevalent among working-class children, who are 'increasingly feral' and live 'chaotic, dishevelled lives'.

- 3.11 Interlocking causes.** These phenomena are believed to have multiple causes, which are mutually reinforcing. Children's diet is dominated by junk food, high in sugar, bad fat and additives, and low in basic nutrients. Children are more confined to the home, and less able to 'play out' in the open air, because of parents' anxieties about traffic and other risks to safety. Children are sleep-deprived, and hence find it difficult to learn in school. Parents and children no longer talk, interact or play together. Childcare provision is inadequate, and schools are dominated by a tests-and-targets culture which places unfair competitive pressure on parents and children. According to this view, there are some deeper causes underlying these phenomena. Changing family structures, and changing ideas about parenting, are seen to have resulted in confusion about basic values and a failure of discipline. Government policies are accused of reinforcing so-called 'toxic childhood syndrome', through over-protective health and safety legislation, the undue emphasis on testing in schools, the lack of support for family life and the failure to provide adequate childcare.
- 3.12 The role of the commercial world.** Within this wide-ranging account, children's increased access to media and technology – and to consumer culture more broadly – is seen to have damaging effects in a whole range of areas. These include: increasing levels of fear and anxiety; sedentary lifestyles; withdrawal and isolation; pester power, peer pressure and bullying; distractedness, weakened attention spans and sleep deprivation; the demise of family conversation and interaction; disrespectful behaviour and insolence towards adults; and the loss of imagination and creative play. While the internet is condemned for providing a forum for paedophiles, pornographers, psychopaths and terrorists, the media more broadly are accused of promoting aggression, desensitisation to suffering, sexualisation, gender stereotyping, obesity, eating disorders, bad language, 'sleazy' lifestyles, bullying and materialistic values.
- 3.13 A range of positions.** The other reports and publications mentioned above offer different, but overlapping, analyses of this perceived 'crisis' in childhood. The Children's Society report, for example, places the blame on a culture of 'excessive individualism', but seeks to distance itself from nostalgia and challenges views of children as either extremely vulnerable or alternatively as menacing and 'feral'. The NUT and Compass reports focus more on government policy on education, and on the involvement of commercial companies in schools, rather than on changes in family life. Even so, there is a shared view here of the commercial world as a powerful and negative influence on

children; and a view of children as passive victims of an 'onslaught' or a 'bombardment' of commercial media and advertising. The Children's Society report, for example, recognises that the majority of children have never lived so well – that they have more possessions, better homes and more holidays, and enjoy access to technology that provides them with opportunities that were not available to previous generations. However, its account of the role of the media and the commercial world is very much dominated by concerns about their harmful influence in areas such as 'materialism', aggression, and physical and mental health.

Assessing the arguments

- 3.14 The concerns of parents and children.** While this view of 'childhood in crisis' tends to dominate the public debate (at least in certain quarters), it is not entirely clear to what extent it reflects the concerns of parents and children more generally. The views we encountered in the course of our consultations were, in general, much more diverse and much more equivocal. More details of this are provided in Section 4 of this report.
- 3.15 Evidence.** The validity of these arguments can partly be assessed on the basis of evidence. They rest on a series of broad assertions about the changing nature of childhood and family life that are in many cases highly debatable. In terms of the concerns of this assessment, there are also particular assertions about the nature and extent of children's exposure to advertising and commercial messages, and especially about the effects of this (for example in terms of mental health), that need to be carefully evaluated. These issues are addressed at various points throughout this report, particularly in Parts Two and Three respectively. However, there are some general observations that can be made at this stage about the ways in which the issue is typically framed in this account. These are rather more to do with interpretation than with evidence *per se*.
- 3.16 Representing childhood.** Firstly, it is important to consider how children and childhood are represented in this debate. The 'toxic childhood' approach provides an extremely negative representation of contemporary childhood. Children are portrayed here as vulnerable and helpless victims, rather than in any way resilient or competent – or indeed happy. They are seen to be suffering from a litany of ills and problems: the more positive aspects of modern childhood – for example, in terms of the range of opportunities children enjoy – are largely ignored. The potential benefits of the commercial world, or of modern media and technology, for children are effectively marginalised. The possibility that most children (and their parents) are reasonably well-adjusted and doing fairly well is rarely entertained: the glass is very definitely half-empty. This negative representation of childhood also coincides with the kinds of images that often circulate in the mainstream commercial media (see below).
- 3.17 Social class.** The second question here is to do with social class. It seems to be implicitly assumed by most commentators that the problems of modern childhood are particularly prevalent among working-class children. It is working-class families that are almost invariably represented as the most dysfunctional; and it is among working-class children

that the most challenging and socially unacceptable forms of behaviour are apparent. Some of these accounts offer a picture of the 'feral' children of the working classes that is worthy of some Victorian social reformers: they cloak value-judgments about taste and morality in an aura of pity and fear. Obviously, children from poorer families are likely to engage with the commercial world in different ways from affluent children, at least in some respects; although we should recall that buying books, classical music CDs and theatre tickets are all commercial transactions as well. As we shall see in more detail in Section 16, the evidence on these points is much more equivocal than the stereotypes would suggest.

- 3.18 Causal relationships.** The third key problem here is to do with the nature of the causal relationships and explanations that are suggested for the apparent 'crisis' of contemporary childhood. There is a persistent logical confusion in these arguments between correlations and causes. The fact that x and y happened at more or less the same time does not in itself mean that x must have caused y, or indeed vice-versa. Even if we can prove an association between x and y (that is, that more of x coincides with more of y), this does not amount to proof of a causal connection. In these debates, the distinctions between symptoms and causes are frequently blurred; and incompatible or contradictory phenomena are often attributed to the same fundamental cause. Unfortunately, this is also the case with a good deal of the research in this field.
- 3.19 The limits of nostalgia.** Finally, it is important to consider the historical dimension of the argument. There is a very dominant strain of nostalgia here – a looking back to a 'golden age' when childhood and family life were apparently harmonious, stable and well-adjusted. But it is often far from clear when that time was, or the social groups to whom this description applies; and the basis on which historical comparisons are being made is frequently unclear. Historical studies of childhood certainly give good grounds for questioning whether such a 'golden age' has ever existed: if anything, they would suggest that the lives of children in earlier times were significantly harder than they are today.

Media representations of children and young people

- 3.20 Bad news.** The negative representation of children and young people that is apparent in the 'toxic childhood' debate coincides with the kinds of image that often circulate in the mainstream commercial media. Indeed, some have argued that such 'bad news' stories are very profitable for newspapers in particular – which would suggest a rather different form of impact on the part of the commercial world.
- 3.21 Young people's views.** Many of the young people who responded to our consultation complained about the disparaging ways in which children and young people are typically represented in the media. These complaints are echoed by the findings of several larger-scale surveys. For example, National Children's Bureau research in 2008 found that a large majority of young people feel this kind of coverage is unjustified, and contributes to a negative perception of them among older generations. A very recent study commissioned by Women in Journalism focused specifically on teenage boys, and

included a nationally representative online survey of 1000 boys aged 13-19. 85% of the sample felt that newspapers portrayed them in a very or fairly bad light, a much higher percentage than for other media. There is occasionally a somewhat ritualistic aspect to these complaints, but they do point to a high level of concern that should be taken seriously.

- 3.22 Content analysis.** These complaints are also supported by studies of news media content. For example, a 2005 IPSOS/MORI survey that found that 40% of newspaper articles featuring young people focused on violence, crime or anti-social behaviour; and that 71% could be described as having a negative tone. Research conducted at Brunel University during 2006 found that television news reports of young people focused overwhelmingly either on celebrities such as footballers or (most frequently) on violent crime: on the other hand, young people accounted for only 1% of the sources for interviews and opinions across the whole sample. The Women in Journalism study analysed over 7,000 stories involving teenage boys, published in online national and regional newspapers during 2008. 72% of the stories were negative – more than twenty times the number of positive stories (3.4%). Over 75% were about crime, drugs, or police: the great majority of these were negative (81.5%) while only a handful were positive (0.3%). Even for the minority of stories on other topics such as education, sport and entertainment, there were many more negative than positive stories (42% versus 13%). Many of the stories about teenage boys described them using strongly disparaging words such as yobs, thugs, sick, feral, hoodies, louts, heartless, evil, frightening and scum. A few stories described individual teenage boys in glowing terms – model student, angel, or ‘every mother’s perfect son’ – but, without exception, these were all about boys who had met an untimely death during 2008. These findings are also supported by a much smaller scale study undertaken for one of our commissioned literature reviews (Appendix I).
- 3.23 Effects.** There is less convincing evidence about the effects of this material, however. The Women in Journalism study suggests that there could be an impact on how young people are perceived in everyday life. 29% of the sample often or always felt wary when they saw other teenage boys they did not know. Media stories about teenagers were identified as the single biggest reason for this wariness (51%) although both personal experience (40%) and the experience of people the respondent knew (also 40%) were almost as important. 79% also felt that adults were slightly or much more wary of teenage boys than a year earlier. This does not in itself constitute evidence of impact, but it does imply that this negative coverage may have a detrimental impact on young people’s wellbeing, perhaps particularly for boys. This is an area that merits further investigation and debate.

Children as empowered consumers?

- 3.24 The ‘savvy’ child.** While campaigners on these issues often conceive of children as passive victims of commercial manipulation, marketers are inclined to profess a very different view. They tend to construct the child as a kind of authority figure: children (who are almost always referred to here as ‘kids’) are seen as active, competent and ‘media savvy’, and hence as hard to reach and persuade. There is a long history of this kind of

argument, reaching back at least to the 1940s, when retailers began to orient themselves to children rather than their mothers. It is also one routinely invoked by marketers in response to public concern.

- 3.25 Brandchild.** One contemporary example of this approach can be found in the best-selling book *Brandchild* (2003), by the American 'brand futurist' Martin Lindstrom. The book draws on research with 2000 children worldwide conducted by the advertising agency Millward Brown. *Brandchild* focuses primarily on 'tweens', which it defines as 8-14 year olds, arguing that marketers need to recognise and respond to the changing needs of this newly identified 'niche' market. Tweens are described here as a digital generation, 'born with a mouse in their hands'; and they speak a new language, called TweenSpeak. They have anxieties — the stress of growing up, the fear of global conflict, and so on; yet the consumption of brands can help them to enjoy life despite their difficulties. Indeed, tweens are described as having a 'spiritual hunger' that brands and marketers can satisfy. The tactics that are recommended to reach tweens, such as viral and peer-to-peer marketing, rely on the active participation of the peer group — and they are precisely those that alarm the critics of marketing. For the marketers, however, these practices are all about 'empowerment' rather than entrapment — about children registering their needs, finding their voices, building their self-esteem, defining their own values and developing independence and autonomy.
- 3.26 Constructing the 'empowered' child.** Perhaps the most striking contrast between this view and the 'crisis of childhood' argument is the very different image of the child consumer. Far from being innocent and vulnerable, the child here is sophisticated, demanding and hard-to-please — 'they get what they want when they want it'. Tweens, it appears, are not easily manipulated: they are an elusive, even fickle market, sceptical about the claims of advertisers, and discerning when it comes to getting value for money — and they need considerable effort to understand and to capture.
- 3.27 Children's rights – to consume?** Of course, marketers are bound to present children in this way, in order to deflect accusations that they are merely exploiting them. Yet their emphasis on children's competence, knowledge and agency is strikingly different from the view of childhood adopted by the critics of marketing. Indeed, it would appear that the argument for children's rights — the idea that children should have opportunities to participate in society, and that their voices should be heard — is being most enthusiastically mobilised not by the children's campaigners but by the marketers. Of course, there is a significant difference between the form of social and political empowerment espoused by children's rights advocates and that of marketers, who are primarily interested in children's power to *consume*. Yet in the process, the distinction between children's position as citizens (or future citizens) and as consumers may be becoming harder to sustain.
- 3.28 Assessing the evidence.** The theoretical and methodological basis of this argument requires equal critical scrutiny. The generalised view of children as sophisticated, savvy consumers tends to ignore what children do *not* know or understand — an issue that is particularly important in relation to the use of more 'stealthy' marketing techniques. The claim that the market 'empowers' children ignores the fact that children have unequal

levels of access to the commercial world, and that not all needs are equally reflected in what is available to them. This view also obscures the way in which – far from merely responding to pre-existing wants and needs – the market also actively constructs and shapes those wants and needs in the first place.

Aims of this assessment

- 3.29 Beyond the polarised debate.** The assessment we present in this report suggests that there is some truth in both the positions we have sketched here, but also some major limitations in the whole debate. Both positions tend to conceive of the issue as a matter of a dyadic relationship between child and marketer, in isolation from broader social contexts and relationships. Both positions run the risk of undue generalization; and in different ways, both reflect a fundamentally *sentimental* view of childhood – a view that may well say more about adults than it does about children themselves.
- 3.30 From debate to evidence.** The debates we have briefly outlined here are not simply matters for philosophical speculation or critique: they also influence the ways in which questions are identified for investigation by research, and the kinds of evidence that are sought. Research is a process that is inevitably value-laden; and evidence does not simply appear, like fruit on a tree, to be gathered and weighed in the balance. While seeking to evaluate the available evidence in an even-handed and balanced way, it is also important to pay close attention to the theoretical assumptions that frame the research, and particularly the assumptions about childhood itself.

4. The concerns of parents and children

While many organisations involved in this debate are keen to speak on behalf of parents and children, it is hard to gain an accurate picture of the nature and extent of public concern.

Younger adults appear to have more liberal attitudes than older adults; although parents in general are quite ambivalent. They express some concern about the extent and scale of contemporary marketing, its effects on children's desires and expectations, and its impact on family relationships and finances – especially when directly asked about these issues. However, they also recognise many of the positive opportunities the commercial world can offer.

Children themselves generally say they are fairly relaxed about advertising, although they can be highly critical of it in certain contexts. They know a good deal about the strategies of contemporary marketing; and they see advertising as significantly less influential than family and friends.

- 4.1 Assessing public opinion.** As we have seen (Section 3), certain views about the impact of the commercial world on children tend to dominate the public debate. However, it is not clear how far these views are representative of those of the population in general. In the course of our assessment, we received various submissions from NGOs, campaigners, trade associations and business groups that presented data on parents' and children's views about the commercial world. We also issued an online call for evidence specifically targeted at parents, and at children and young people; conducted a series of focus groups; and commissioned an in-depth study of the views of children by the research organisation Sherbert. The results of this work are summarised in Appendices D and E. In addition, we have reviewed a range of further survey evidence, particularly relating to parents' views. In this section, we provide some key insights from this aspect of the assessment.
- 4.2 Reliability of survey data.** Several of the submissions we received from organisations included evidence from larger-scale surveys representing the concerns of parents and (in a few cases) children. However, some of these reports did not provide sufficient details either of their sample or of the questions asked, which significantly compromises their status as evidence. In some instances, we had a strong sense that parents and children were being 'cued' to respond in ways that reflected the concerns of the organisations that had commissioned the surveys (whether these were campaign groups or trade associations). For instance, where parents were asked about their concerns about children more generally, advertising and marketing appeared relatively low on the list. Similarly,

when people were asked about their concerns about advertising, children did not emerge as a major focus. However, other surveys suggested that when parents are asked more directly about the challenges they face in raising children and especially about managing children's behaviour, they cite children's increased expectations, advertising, peer pressure and 'pester power', among other factors; and when they are asked explicitly if they are concerned about commercial influences, they tend to say they are.

The context of parents' concerns

- 4.3 Parenting under scrutiny.** Over the past decade, there has been increasing interest in the role of parents in securing good outcomes for children. Parenting has been a significant focus of public debate and Government policy. The atmosphere of rising anxiety about family life – the sense that families are not functioning well and that parents have lost the art of raising children – may well have had an impact on parents themselves. Parents report that they feel under much greater public scrutiny. In one survey, nearly half of parent respondents said they worry all the time. The appetite for parenting advice on the internet, through books and leaflets and on TV, is considerable: this might itself be seen as part of the commercial world, although the overwhelming majority of parents who have used such advice report that they find it personally helpful.
- 4.4 Challenges of parenting.** It is difficult to make comparisons with previous generations of parents, but surveys suggest that parents consider parenting more challenging now than it was in the past. Two recent surveys, one followed by focus group discussions, indicate that parents consider that their authority and capacity to manage their children's behaviour is compromised by (among other things) children's desires and increased expectations which they see as fuelled by marketing. In one, where parents were asked to identify what made parenting more challenging, advertising, pester power and pressure to buy came top of the list. It is important to put this figure in context, however. A MORI poll, conducted for the Family and Parenting Institute in 2001, showed that the risk to their children from alcohol and drugs was parents' biggest anxiety, worrying 25% of parents surveyed; only 8% of parents mentioned time on computers or watching TV.
- 4.5 Changing family life.** In this latter survey and others, respondents did not see modern family life as all bad and were not nostalgic for earlier times: they described many positives in their own family life and for children generally. They recognised what they saw as the up-sides of more democratic family life – better relationships with their children, more openness and sharing – as well as the down-sides of having more arguments about discipline. They were much more worried about drugs on the streets than marketing pressures, but they did see them as connected in the sense that they saw themselves as having less scope than previously to 'manage' negatives in the overall environment for their children, in which they included media, marketing, and new technologies. Nevertheless, parents are also realistic about the commercial world, and seem inclined to accept marketing and advertising as an inescapable part of their lives.
- 4.6 Financial pressures.** These pressures obviously have an economic dimension. Parents in a research study by SIRC highlighted the significance of children's increasingly influential

role in family consumption as a key shift in terms of increasing the cost of raising children. An ICM survey (2004) for The Lever Faberge Family Report reported that 4 in 10 parents found it difficult to buy the things their children wanted. Parents may increasingly find themselves getting into debt – a recent survey reported a debt burden (after housing costs) averaging more than £8000 per family. The extent of family poverty means that a significant proportion of parents find it hard to buy not only what their children want, but what they need: 14% of parents and 21% of minority ethnic parents in one survey described making ends meet as their biggest challenge. TV advertising before Christmas was reported by poor families to cause particular difficulties. Parents reported that they often felt under pressure to buy things for their children – although this was for many reasons, including their love for and wish to please their children; their desire for status; and their wish for their children to be popular. Nevertheless, parents also complained of the arguments and tantrums that ensue from attempting to resist children's wishes.

Assessing parents' views

- 4.7 Complaints.** One potential measure of the extent of parental concern about advertising could be that of complaints to the regulator. In fact, the Advertising Standards Authority receives relatively few complaints relating specifically to children, as compared with some other issues. In 2008 it received 2,548 complaints which referenced children as part of the complaint, out of a total of more than 26,000. None of these complaints were about advertising generally; 99 were out of remit (some because they related to TV sponsorship credits or TV programme trailers, both of which are regulated by Ofcom). Most complaints were about individual campaigns: for example, the most complained-about campaign as of 2008 was the Barnardo's campaign to raise awareness of domestic child abuse, which attracted 840 complaints that it was distressing to children and victims of abuse (the ASA did not uphold the complaints). Few of the complaints related to the issues typically raised by campaigners; and to this extent, there is something of a contrast between the passionate arguments of some campaigners and the relative lack of complaints to the regulator. However, it is certainly debatable whether the latter can be seen as a more reliable measure of public concern. Indeed, parent participants in the Family and Parenting Institute's research had little knowledge of complaint mechanisms or of the rules and codes governing advertising.
- 4.8 Expressions of public concern.** We, too, received relatively few 'spontaneous' responses to our call for evidence from parents or children and young people, as compared with previous DCSF consultations on other issues (although ours was advertised in similar ways). Of course, the fact that concerns are not 'spontaneously' expressed in such settings does not necessarily suggest that there are *not* significant grounds for concern; but equally, the fact that there may be strong complaints from some, and that these views are widely promoted in the media, does not mean that such concerns are more generally shared. However, as we have seen, parents do express concern about the impact of marketing on children if they are asked quite direct questions about this: 84% of parents in one survey conducted by MORI on a representative sample of 1391 parents throughout Britain agreed that 'companies target children too much in marketing their products'.

When considering the challenges of parenting, parents identify the impact of marketing as a significant source of difficulty. However, as we have noted, if parents are asked more broadly about their concerns, marketing is not top of the list, compared with anxieties about issues such as drugs and alcohol or education.

4.9 The limits of parental control. Given the nature of the public debate, people who wish to be seen as 'good parents' – as concerned for their children's welfare – may want to prove this by strongly condemning the influence of the commercial world. Yet what people say – particularly in the context of a research interview or a public consultation – is likely to be rather different from what they actually do. Thus, there is a good deal of research that points to the gap between parents' expressions of concern, for example about the harmful effects of television or the risks of the internet, and the ways in which they engage with these media in their everyday lives. Studies show that parents (particularly middle-class parents) are inclined to present themselves as responsible regulators, who monitor and control what their children are exposed to; but their accounts of this are often contradicted by those of their own children. Of course, it is likely that children may under-report the extent of parental control – perhaps partly out of a degree of bravado – just as parents may be inclined to over-report it. It may be that children are very good at evading or resisting parental control; or alternatively that parents exercise control without children recognising that this is happening. While parent respondents in the Family and Parenting Institute study saw it as their responsibility to exercise restraint on their children's exposure to marketing, and in responding to their demands for purchases, they said that they found it hard to do so consistently; besides, they claimed to experience and appreciate many benefits from the commercial world, not least in entertaining children. Such findings should alert us to the potential gap between attitudes and behaviour in this area, and the possibility of a 'social desirability bias'.

Parents' concerns

4.10 Evidence from our consultation. The evidence we have been able to gather on parents' and children's views is inevitably somewhat limited and uneven. It was not part of our remit to conduct a systematic national survey, or to probe responses in any depth – although some of the research studies we review in later sections have of course done this. The respondents to our consultation were obviously a self-selecting sample: they cannot be taken as in any way representative. It should also be noted that we were not able to solicit the views of younger children. As such, the data we have tell us about the nature of *some* parents' and children's concerns, but not about the extent to which those concerns are more widely shared.

4.11 Advertising. The main focus for parental concern in this range of data centred on advertising, particularly TV advertising. Some concerns related to specific products, while others were more generic. Concerns surrounding specific products had a tendency to focus on advertising for HFSS (high fat, salt and sugar) foods, which was also the focus of surveys undertaken by both the NUT and Which? Some of the more generic concerns included: the large number of adverts children are exposed to, particularly after school, on Saturday and Sunday mornings and before Christmas; the number of commercial TV

channels; the ubiquity of product tie-ins linked to TV programmes and films; advertising billboards in public spaces; and advertising in new media. In addition, some argued that advertising was becoming more misleading and aggressive, creating desires in children and young people that could lead to 'pester power' and 'peer pressure'. As one parent argued in responding to our call for evidence, '[adverts] encourage pester power. Those targeting adults that are seen by children are sometimes overly sexual (the whole FCUK campaign is an embarrassment)'.

- 4.12 Unrealistic images.** There was also criticism of advertising presenting unrealistic views of the world; containing sexualised images; and glorifying alcohol, fast cars, and so on. Nudity on billboards was singled out as being offensive to parents when in the presence of their children. Advertising images were seen as confirming stereotypes, although there was some acknowledgement that the representation of ethnic minorities had increased. Parents of disabled children pointed out that very few advertisements ever showed images of children with disabilities. Some parents said that the high level of advertising, linked with other pressures, adversely affected their children in more general terms, influencing their attitudes and values, encouraging a 'throwaway' attitude and leading to dissatisfaction.
- 4.13 Beyond advertising.** Some of the surveys we obtained did not consider other forms of marketing, yet in spontaneous responses to our consultation some concerns on this were expressed. Some of these related to newer marketing practices, for example on the internet, or the way in which marketing is integrated with children's programmes or films. Others focused specifically on the lack of commercial-free public space, and particularly on marketing in schools, including the presence of branded materials in schools, school leaflets, uniforms and school photos, and voucher collection schemes. For some parents, these concerns outweighed those relating to advertising: one parent in our consultation said 'Commercial companies being involved in schools/education is my biggest worry'. Some parents argued that all commercial or branded material should be removed from schools, whereas others viewed it as acceptable if it had been endorsed by the school.
- 4.14 Beyond blame.** While some parents felt pressured by the demands and appeals of the commercial world, some also argued that they were being unfairly blamed for any harmful effects it might have on children. To have to resist the full creative and economic might of the marketing world felt like a very unequal struggle to some parents. The argument that 'there is an off switch', and that parents were at fault for not controlling their children, were seen to let businesses 'off the hook' in this respect.
- 4.15 General and specific concerns.** While people are inclined to express concerns about commercial influence in general, their specific concerns are much more localised. Surveys indicate that parents do not like adverts that promote products they consider negative or harmful, but are positive about adverts when they promote a product they like. It is perhaps also worth noting here that members of the public, including parents, now claim to place much higher trust in many leading companies and brands than they do in most politicians and journalists. And as in other areas, people typically express concern about the influence of the media on *other* people (particularly children), while rarely seeing this as a problem for themselves.

The views of children and young people

- 4.16 The commercial world is everywhere.** In addition to our online consultation, focus group interviews and activities were conducted with around 200 young people as part of the assessment. The young people (who were mostly teenagers) were interested to know how we defined 'the commercial world' – because for them the commercial world was clearly everywhere. One group identified the following as 'commercial': adverts; 'only some' music; videos; shopping; art posters; celebrities; magazines; TV; newspapers; and some aspects of education – concluding '...well that's everything'. Another group listed the different locations in which they encountered commercial messages, generating no fewer than 34. In general, they spoke passionately and animatedly about new technologies and media. Commercial media were seen as inextricable from their everyday experiences; and they used media and technology to facilitate their lives – to gossip, learn, socialise, create, explore, flirt, play, build friendships, discover and experiment.
- 4.17 Paying the price.** For some, these encounters with commercial messages were seen as the price they paid for access to free media. For example, some young people explained how they would listen to radio and watch TV through the internet and that advertising was something you had to 'sign up to' when going online. Others argued that advertising on the radio was particularly annoying and intrusive; but again, it was the price they paid for free and constant access to the music they enjoyed. Even so, their experience of the commercial world was by no means wholly positive: the enjoyment and pleasure they gained from it had to be balanced against the disadvantages.
- 4.18 Shopping.** For example, shopping was described by many as pleasurable activity. They said they enjoyed the choice of goods they saw, and that it was rewarding to buy the item they wanted after weeks of saving. Shopping was also seen as a social experience, an opportunity to share time with family or meet up with friends. Large shopping centres were seen as safe places to meet up, as young people felt less likely to be victims of crime than on the high street. For pre-teenagers, being allowed to go shopping without adult supervision was seen as exciting and creating a sense of independence. However, not all shopping was enjoyable. For some young people, shopping centres and shops themselves could be hard to access, and they did not enjoy being the target of suspicion from security guards. Disappointment also arose when they could not afford what they wanted or items were not available in the right sizes.
- 4.19 Advertising.** The young people also said they occasionally found advertising intrusive and irritating. While this was less the case with media such as television, where it seemed to be a routine expectation, it was particularly the case with the internet, and with methods such as direct mail, where marketing material would arrive without being asked for or expected. At the same time, it was recognised that some advertising – particularly on television – could be enjoyable and fun: television was generally seen as the most effective advertising medium. Children and young people could recall adverts readily if they were for a product they were interested in. In some cases, advertising seemed to stimulate creative activity: for example, in one focus group young people talked about putting their own music to TV adverts and uploading re-worked commercial content as entertainment on YouTube.

- 4.20 Consumer power?** The young people also reported that they did not take advertisements and marketing messages at face value, and would want to discuss with their family and friends before acting on the information provided. Value for money was a key consideration, particularly given their limited resources. They also said they would let their peer group know if they were dissatisfied with a product – this included putting messages on the internet, which some felt gave them a sense of power in this respect.
- 4.21 Mobile phones.** Mobile phones are another example of how young people sought to balance out the advantages and the disadvantages of the commercial world. Mobile phones were seen as a necessary, even indispensable, means of enabling them to 'keep up' with friends and family. They enjoyed using the video function on their phones, capturing their 'mucking about' with friends, attempting stunts and then sharing the clips with each other. However, it was recognised that running a phone could be expensive: you needed to be careful with your credit as it could cause problems if it ran out. One widely adopted solution was to use texts rather than calls: not only did this save money, but receiving texts was seen as exciting.
- 4.22 Awareness of persuasion.** The young people in our consultations seemed very aware of the persuasive nature of advertising. They were often critical of marketing techniques and questioned the truthfulness of advertising and marketing claims, especially if they felt they had been let down by a particular brand or product. However, they did not see themselves as particularly vulnerable in this regard. All recognised that adverts could create desires for things they might want but did not necessarily need – but, as one boy said, 'the same could be said of my parents'.
- 4.23 Marketing strategies.** In some focus groups, the young people were given an opportunity to create a simulated advertising campaign for a product of their choice. Their work in developing the products and devising strategies to 'sell' them to peers indicated a clear understanding of the nature of contemporary marketing. While their campaigns were designed to maximise the potential appeal to young people, they also considered the most effective use of different media, and the need to emphasise value for money as well as the 'cool' or desirable qualities of the product.
- 4.24 Privacy.** One specific issue that children and young people were concerned about was the threats to privacy posed by new marketing techniques, particularly in the context of online media. Several expressed worries that marketers seemed to know a lot about them as individuals, asking 'How did they get my email address? How do they know my mobile number? How do they know what I like?' This would suggest that many new marketing techniques being used are less visible to children than conventional advertising, an issue we consider in more detail in Sections 5 and 10. It is striking that this issue was rarely mentioned by parents.
- 4.25 Social marketing.** The young people were also aware of the use of advertising for charitable giving and social marketing campaigns. While mainstream commercial advertising was clearly 'after your money', social marketing campaigns were seeking to change behaviour – although they were still advertising. Some said they had found such campaigns distressing at times – for example, the 'Kill Your Speed' ads, where the imagery

was seen as too graphic, and there was concern about its potential impact on younger children. However, this was tempered by an understanding of the reasons why shock tactics were being used and how powerful they could be.

- 4.26 Influences on children and young people.** The children and young people we interviewed saw TV and the internet in particular as important influences. However, all groups reported that family and friends were the greatest influence on them, much more than marketers. When invited to discuss what was most important to them, family and friends were consistently cited as extremely important, although the balance shifted from family to friends with the older young people. They consistently said they liked spending time with their families and friends, and valued trust, kindness and humour. Equally, when describing aspects of their engagement with the commercial world, much of the discussion focused on relationships with families and friends – for example, playing on games consoles to compete with parents. The children and young people insisted that they judged people on their personalities and not on what they own or wear.
- 4.27 The fragmenting family?** Although most of these young people had a good deal of access to technology or mobiles in their bedrooms, they said that this did not necessarily isolate them from other family members. For example, the Nintendo Wii was seen as a sociable and family-based activity, which could also be more inclusive for girls than other gaming devices. TV viewing was also seen as a family activity: the resurgence of Saturday night 'big shows' seemed to be creating an occasion that children could enjoy with their parents.
- 4.28 Influence on parents.** These children and young people openly recognised that they could and did influence their parents' purchasing decisions, and many reported that parents would buy them what they wanted as a direct result. For some young people, this was more a matter of negotiation than 'pestering', and was motivated by a lack of resources to buy particular goods themselves, especially more expensive products. However, they also recognised that they could not always get what they wanted and would defer to parental decisions in the end. In terms of controlling their own spending, children and young people reported having little influence over some items: much would depend on who was paying the bills. For example, when parents paid for their mobile phone, it was parents who controlled their usage.
- 4.29 Friends and brands.** The importance of friends obviously grows as children get older. The young people we interviewed were quite ambivalent about the influence of friends: they denied that they were subject to 'peer pressure', but they did recognise that friends influenced their purchasing decisions. Some admitted that when they saw friends at school with something desirable it made them want it. At the same time brands were seen to help create a common bond among friends, signifying group cohesion and helping people feel included. Young people recognised they could be 'brand junkies', and for them the brands they associated themselves with were important. The wearing of branded clothing was seen as an outward projection of their values and aspirations and at the same time allowing them to project their identity to others. However, the reasons for following brands were not simply to do with fashion. Brands were seen as giving some reassurance of quality – it was argued that branded trainers were less likely to fall apart,

whereas with unbranded goods you could not be sure of what you were getting, and could be ripped off. This was particularly important to young people because of the limited resources available to them.

- 4.30 Inequality.** In the research we commissioned from Sherbert, the children and young people from lower socio-economic households were less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities outside the home (several of which are commercially provided), and spent the majority of their free time indoors watching TV and playing on the computer. This is consistent with the findings of the government's *Aiming High for Young People: A Ten Year Strategy for Positive Activities*, where cost and opportunity appear to serve as a barrier preventing young people from lower socio-economic groups from participating in organised leisure activities (this issue will be addressed in Section 19).

Differences in view

- 4.31 Differences between children's and adults' views.** Both in our (limited) data and in other surveys, there seem to be clear differences between the views of children and adults, and between those of older and younger adults. For example, a large survey undertaken for the Children's Society's 'Good Childhood' enquiry suggests that children are generally fairly relaxed about commercial pressures: they can be critical of advertising, they know about the importance of healthy lifestyles, and they stress the importance of individuality rather than following fashion. (Similar findings emerge from other studies, for example those cited in Section 11.) However, the adults who responded to the Children's Society consultation (a self-selecting group) generally presented children as vulnerable and subject to a whole range of harmful influences. Meanwhile, the Children's Society's broader survey of adults showed clear differences between older and younger adults, with younger adults generally adopting more relaxed and liberal attitudes on such issues.
- 4.32 Views on regulation.** Many surveys undertaken by campaigning organisations ask specifically about regulation, and parental responses often call for further restrictions. In the case of HFSS foods, this relates to ongoing calls for a ban on advertising before the watershed and on advertising aimed at those under 12. For example, the 2006 Which? Survey found that '86% of parents think the Government should do more to control the way unhealthy foods are marketed to children'. On the other hand, research conducted by ComRes on behalf of Ketchum (a commercial marketing company) found that 75% of adults agreed with the statement: 'instead of limiting certain types of promotional activity, the focus should be on improving the media, and giving guidance to parents and children'. (The contrast here clearly illustrates the importance of how the question is framed.)
- 4.33 The impact of regulation.** In focus groups run for the Family and Parenting Institute, parents were unsure about whether regulation would achieve a great deal, and sceptical about realistically reducing their children's exposure to marketing, although they had some specific suggestions. In its survey, parents were asked to indicate the most and least important policies that Government could bring in to support children and families from

a list of possibilities covering finance, housing, maternity and paternity benefits. While 18% said they considered banning TV advertising important, 21% considered it the least important. Children and young people are not averse to some form of regulatory action, but this is often seen in terms of the impact it would have on children younger than themselves, who are presumed to be more at risk. Ultimately, such surveys provide limited evidence on this issue: there is a need for more in-depth deliberative consultation on public views of likely policy outcomes.

4.34 Conclusion. Our consultation, and the limited survey evidence we have gathered, raises many further questions. There clearly is a need to probe public opinion on these issues in much greater depth. We need more representative surveys that address different social groups; and we particularly need to access the views of younger children. However, we also need to look beyond what people say about that they do (for example in ticking a box on a questionnaire), and look more closely at what they actually do in real life. Fortunately, there is a good deal of research that does precisely this; and it is to this kind of evidence that we turn in the following sections of the report.

PART TWO: THE WIDER CONTEXT

The growth of what some define as a 'consumer society' has been a long-term, uneven development. While the commercial market undoubtedly plays a powerful role in contemporary society, there are many areas of social life that are not 'commodified'. Meanwhile, the problems that affect children, and the opportunities that are available to them, have multiple dimensions and causes: commercial forces may play a role, but they do so in interaction with other influences. Social change is not always uniform or straightforward, and it affects different social groups in different ways. For all these reasons, and others we have explained, we believe it is important to locate children's relationship with the commercial world in the context of broader social, cultural and historical developments.

Accordingly, this part of the report aims to provide an outline of the extent and nature of children's involvement with the commercial world, and to place this within a wider context. The literature reviews that inform this report identify several of the key issues at stake here, and present a range of evidence; and we draw on them in summary form here. Our account focuses on three main areas in turn: the changing nature of the commercial market; changes in the composition and dynamics of families; and changes in the social experience and position of children specifically.

5. The children's market

Marketing to children is by no means new, but is part of the general development of a modern consumer society. Children play an increasingly important role here, both as consumers in their own right, and as influences on parents.

Overall spending on children (including childcare and education) in the UK appears to be of the order of £100 billion per year. This market is expanding, although it is not clear if it is growing faster than other market segments. It is also comparatively volatile and unpredictable.

Children have growing levels of individualised and unsupervised access to media, both in the home and in the form of mobile devices. They are increasingly exposed to commercial messages of many kinds.

Companies are increasingly using 'integrated marketing communications', in which promotional activities range across different media platforms. This approach often blurs the distinction between promotional and other content.

Contemporary marketers are using a widening range of techniques. These include established approaches such as sponsorship, advertising and public relations, as well as new strategies such as viral marketing, advergames, peer-to-peer marketing and behavioural targeting. Expenditure on traditional media advertising appears to be declining relative to other areas of marketing and promotion.

These new approaches are often more personalised and more participatory, but they also raise justified concerns about potential deception and invasion of privacy.

History and context

- 5.1 The history of marketing to children.** Marketing to children is by no means a new phenomenon. Indeed, the targeting of children as a specific market coincides with and parallels the development of modern consumer capitalism. Historical studies have explored the emergence of markets in toys and playthings, specialised clothing, and media (such as books and magazines) dating back to the nineteenth century; but there is an even longer history of parents being targeted as a market for children's goods and services (often of an educational nature) in much earlier times.
- 5.2 Separating and segmenting the children's market.** The gradual increase in the separation of children from the adult world that took place across the late nineteenth century (for example, through the Factory Acts and the advent of compulsory schooling)

was accompanied by a growing recognition of the significance of children as a specific market, and by the emergence of advertising to children, which began to grow quite rapidly in the early twentieth century. This was accompanied by what some have seen as a symbolic 'valorization' of childhood – a view of childhood as a special time, deserving of special attention, and hence also of special expenditure. From around this time, we can also see the appearance of market research agencies specialising in children, followed by the emergence of new 'sub-markets' for specific age groups, such as 'toddlers', 'teenagers' or 'tweens' – terms which themselves typically emerge from market research, and are then manifested in advertising and marketing appeals, the layout of shops, the packaging of products, and so on.

5.3 Contemporary marketing to children. In recent years, the scope and scale of marketing to children have substantially increased. Children are increasingly encountering commercial messages in a wider range of contexts and forms. With the advent of new technologies, the nature of marketing to children has also changed in significant ways. Advertising is now only one aspect of a much broader range of strategies that are being used to reach the children's market. Commercial forces also play an increasingly important role in many areas of children's lives, including recreation, education and play.

5.4 The broader picture. Children's involvement with the commercial world today needs to be understood in relation to broader changes in the operation of markets. Media and popular culture play an increasingly vital role here: media are the key means of targeting children, as well as being important commodities in their own right. The main developments here would include factors such as:

- The role of new digital technologies, and the convergence of previously distinct technologies and media forms
- The increasingly individualised nature of people's access to media, for example in the context of multiple TV sets or computers in homes, or of portable communications devices
- The decline in public service broadcasting, the reduction in state regulation, and the growth and proliferation of commercially-funded media
- The blurring of boundaries between promotional material and 'editorial' content, and the increasing ubiquity of advertising or marketing, both in electronic and print media and in public spaces
- The globalisation of markets, and the rise of transnational companies
- The emergence of new marketing techniques, for example based on 'niche', 'personalised' or 'participatory' marketing, some of which are not covered by existing regulatory regimes.

These developments will be considered in more detail below, but it is important to note that they apply to the media and commercial market much more broadly, and not only to the children's market specifically. The material in this section draws particularly on our commissioned literature review on children and marketing, produced by Loughborough University (Appendix H).

The nature of the children's market

- 5.5 The role of children.** Marketers typically see children as playing three roles here:
- Most obviously, they are consumers in their own right, spending their own disposable income on their own behalf (albeit with the influence of peers and parents).
 - They also act as influences on family purchasing; and while this is sometimes presented as a matter of 'pester power', it is not always a matter of direct appeals, nor is it necessarily about 'pestering'.
 - Finally, they represent long-term 'market potential': marketers may seek to cultivate brand loyalty, in the expectation that this will pay off in the future.
- 5.6 Parents as consumers.** We might add to this that a great deal of younger children's consumption is in fact parents' consumption: it is parents who buy, even if it is children who 'consume' or use what they buy. Much of this does not involve choice on the part of children, or even consultation with them. Babies are 'consumers' of commercial goods well before they can speak; and indeed parents consume on behalf of children when preparing for their birth. Even when it comes to older children, it is important to remember that the large bulk of children's purchasing is actually made possible by gifts from adults. Parents still exert much more influence on what children – especially young children – buy and consume than *vice versa*.
- 5.7 Appeals to children.** These roles are reflected in the whole range of marketing and promotional appeals that target children. They are apparent not only in the advertisements for toys or breakfast cereals on children's television, but also in the many ads for cars or financial services that feature children; and indeed in the intensive marketing of educational goods and services to parents. Children are also of course exposed to a great deal of advertising and promotion that does not directly target them at all, yet may well influence their perceptions of particular brands.
- 5.8 Size and scope.** While there is a general perception that the children's market has grown, we have found it quite challenging to obtain reliable information about its changing size and scope. Children's role as an 'influence market' is particularly difficult to quantify, as is their role as a future market. Some estimates of the overall size of the market approach astronomical proportions: the marketing guru Martin Lindstrom, for example, estimates children's global purchase influence to be \$1.88 trillion. The total cost of bringing up a child has been estimated in 2008 at £193,772, a figure which has increased by 38% over the last five years. On this basis, the cost of bringing up all children in the UK born in 2007 would be £134 billion (not including inflation). Figures on children's discretionary spending are quite variable, although one reasonably conservative set of estimates suggests that children under the age of 16 spend their own money on snacks and sweets (£680m annually), clothing (£660m), music and CDs (£620m), footwear (£400m), computer software and games (£350m), magazines (£250m) and toiletries (£83m). Other figures suggest that spending on children's clothing amounts to £6 billion, and toys £2 billion, per year. These figures should also be set in the context of total UK consumer expenditure, which in 2007 amounted to £875 billion.

- 5.9 Broadcast advertising and beyond.** In some areas, such as broadcast advertising, information is easier to obtain, although the picture is rather complex. The Nielsen report included in Appendix F contains some information on television advertising, which suggests that while overall expenditure in this area has increased over the past ten years, it has begun to decline since a peak in 2004. It has also declined overall (albeit unevenly) in respect of advertisements specifically addressed to children, partly in response to new restrictions on food and drink advertising. However, it is important to distinguish here between advertising specifically targeted at children and advertising that children might see (for example, advertising screened during family viewing time) – although this is far from straightforward to do. In the first half of 2009 internet advertising grew by 4.6% whilst the whole advertising industry declined by 16%. An extra £82 million was spent on internet advertising from January to June 2009 bringing total spending to £1.7 billion. Internet advertising has overtaken TV as the major generator of advertising revenue. It accounts for 23.5% of market share against TV's share of 21.9% – although the majority of internet advertising is paid search and online classifieds rather than display advertising. Online advertising has grown by £2 billion in the past three years and, during 2009, the internet will overtake television as the UK's largest advertising medium – although the majority of internet advertising is paid search and online classifieds rather than display advertising.
- 5.10 Non-media markets.** It is harder to obtain reliable figures for non-media markets, such as those for children's food, toys and clothing. We do not have accurate information about how these markets may be changing, for example in terms of their promotional strategies, the range and nature of products they offer, and the specific 'sub-markets' of children they are seeking to address. There may be several reasons why this information is difficult to obtain, which are partly to do with commercial confidentiality, and also because some industries do not gather or segment data relating specifically to children. However, the lack of such data means we should exercise some caution here: the children's market is certainly growing, but it is not clear whether it is growing faster (or indeed is much more profitable) than other market sectors.
- 5.11 Trends over time.** Within this, it is also hard to know precisely what trends and changes have appeared in the children's market over the years. For example, the terms of reference of our assessment noted the tendency for children to be targeted at an ever-younger age. The increase in the number of television programmes and channels (and their associated merchandise) specifically appealing to this age group might be cited in support of this (see Section 17). However, we do not have definitive figures as regards whether the value of this market has in fact grown in recent years, either in itself, or relative to other age groups. Even television viewing figures, which are available for older age groups, are not gathered for children below the age of five.
- 5.12 A volatile market?** Marketers will frequently suggest that children are a volatile market. They may complain about their unpredictability, representing them as hard-to-reach, and even as fickle and capricious; or they may pay tribute to their discernment and 'media-savvy' skills. Marketers will also point to the high proportion of newly-advertised children's products that apparently fail to gain a market (some estimates range as high as

90%); and to others that – seemingly inexplicably – disappear from view. These assertions are certainly difficult to quantify. Nevertheless, it is clear that a large (and possibly growing) amount of marketers' budgets is spent on market research, some of which uses relatively innovative (some would say intrusive) techniques to gather personal data about young consumers; and, to some extent, this could be seen to reflect the view that understanding the child audience (and hence targeting it) is not necessarily a straightforward matter.

5.13 Mass and segmented markets. Still on a broad level, it would seem that the children's market is caught between two contradictory imperatives. On the one hand, there is an imperative to maximise profit, and hence audience size. This is now most notable on a global scale: while globalisation is by no means a new phenomenon, there is growing pressure to develop mass markets internationally. For example, UK television companies are now increasingly bound to look to overseas markets, which may have particular consequences for the kinds of programmes they produce (see Section 17). On the other hand, the children's market is highly (and perhaps increasingly) segmented, most notably by age and gender. In terms of age, marketers have historically played a key role in the creation of new age-based categories (toddlers, teenagers, tweens); and they are increasingly urged to label products in terms of age-appropriateness (a recent proposal to extend this to children's books in the UK was surrounded with considerable controversy). Likewise, in terms of gender, the market for younger children in particular is highly polarized, as any recent visitor to a mainstream toy shop will confirm; and in the case of television, there have been several proposals to introduce gender-specific channels (although none have yet appeared). The differences that are generated here must coincide to some extent with those that operate in children's own friendship groups; but the market also clearly plays a role in investing these differences with meaning, and hence in constructing or reinforcing particular forms of childhood identity.

Media markets

5.14 Television. Television remains the key medium in terms of children's leisure time: although viewing hours are now generally declining (not least as children move to other screen-based entertainment), this decline is by no means as precipitous as some commentators suggest, and it is quite uneven. Figures typically show that UK children's average weekly viewing has fallen over the past five years from around 21 hours to 17 hours; although recent studies suggest that the decline has slightly reversed of late, particularly for girls. These figures are also higher for children in DE than ABC social classes. Meanwhile, there has been a proliferation of new 'niche' television channels specifically targeting children: there are currently 26 such channels in the UK, most of which are commercially funded and US-owned. Even so, except for very young children, the bulk of children's actual viewing continues to focus on 'adult' or general audience programmes (as it always has done since the 1950s) – although younger children (especially boys) still favour cartoons. Over 90% of UK children live in homes with multi-channel TV (cable, satellite or Freeview). The large majority (over 80%) have private access to a television set in their own room; and in one third of cases, this is a multi-channel set.

- 5.15 New media.** Children and young people are often seen as a key market for new (digital) media technologies; and they have been 'early adopters' of many goods and services that subsequently extend to the broader market (for example in the case of computer games or online social networking services). Television advertising to children is in decline, as marketers move towards the use of new media technologies. New media also serve as commodities in their own right (for example, in the case of computer games hardware and software). The percentage of children who regularly use the internet at home is steadily rising (most current estimates are around 80% or more), as is the number who have their own networked computer (the latest ChildWise Monitor (2009) reports that the number of 7-16 year olds who have access to the internet in their own rooms has gone up from 25% to 40% in the last year). These figures are lower for younger children, and for those in DE social classes. Children's use of the internet is heavily dominated by peer-group communications, games and entertainment, most of which is commercially funded through advertising or subscriptions. Children's preferred internet sites are almost all commercially owned (the main exception being the BBC's sites). A large majority of children own a games console (the average figure is around 87% and rising), with ownership slightly skewed towards boys and towards older children. Ownership of mobile phones is reaching saturation point: over 90% of children aged 11-16 have their own mobile, and figures are rising rapidly among younger children.
- 5.16 Media convergence.** This growing access to media takes place in a context where the media themselves are rapidly converging. Children are using mobile phones, for example, not simply to make calls or send text messages, but also to play games, download and listen to music, watch videos or TV, listen to the radio, access the internet, take photographs and create short video clips. The internet is used for a similar range of activities, including games, music, video and TV, and of course shopping. Children are also increasingly using these media simultaneously: 'media stacking' means that children may well be using two or three media at the same time, or jumping very quickly between them.
- 5.17 Integrated marketing.** One particular consequence of convergence is that properties that prove to be popular in one medium or platform are quickly 'spun off' into other media – computer games become films, or films become computer games, and both form the basis for toys, clothing and other merchandise. Indeed, rather than 'spinning off' products launched on a single platform, media companies are increasingly adopting 'integrated marketing communication' techniques, where campaigns are planned across media from the outset. Television programmes are tied into toys, books, films and games (and *vice versa*), as well as being used in the promotion of non-media goods such as food and clothing. This is by no means a new development – it has been part of the Disney company's strategy since the early 1930s (including through its theme parks), and toys of Muffin the Mule and Sooty were available in the UK in the late 1950s. However, this kind of integrated marketing is now happening on a different scale, as is apparent from the success of multi-media 'crazes' such as Pokemon, Harry Potter or the *High School Musical* franchise. It is perhaps particularly apparent in the younger children's market, where licensed characters (such as Bob the Builder) are used to market a wide range of other

media and merchandise; and, as the global success of the BBC's *Teletubbies* suggests, this can also be a lucrative strategy for public service media companies.

- 5.18 Blurring between advertising and other content.** In this context, the boundaries between promotion or advertising and other content are often very difficult or impossible to identify. Thus, decisions may be made about content – for example, about the number of puppet or cartoon characters who might feature in a television programme, or about the storylines they might generate – at least partly on the basis of the potential for exploitation through toy merchandising. In the case of a phenomenon like Pokemon, the games effectively 'advertise' the films, which advertise the television programmes and the trading cards, and the toys, clothes and other merchandise – indeed, Pokemon itself was never advertised as such. From a marketing perspective, this multi-platform approach may prove to be a high-risk strategy: it certainly requires a higher level of investment than a 'one-off' approach, and the apparent volatility of the children's market means that certain 'crazes' may rapidly fade from popularity (as was indeed the case with Pokemon).

Non-media markets

- 5.19 Toys.** There is relatively little research available in the public domain on non-media markets specifically relating to children, such as toys, clothing and food. There is some evidence that toys are generally purchased as gifts: around half of toy sales occur in the run-up to Christmas. The toy market has also become increasingly tied up with other media markets: the large majority of the most popular toys are licensed or franchised products rather than generic ones. This is also a strongly gendered market, with clear lines drawn between boys' toys and girls' toys, particularly in middle childhood. While there are notable long-running successes, this is also a relatively volatile market, with unpredictable cycles of rise and fall ('crazes' or 'fads').
- 5.20 Clothing.** Recent academic research on the UK children's fashion industry suggests that the significance of this sector may have been exaggerated. While there has been market growth, industry representatives feel that this has not been much greater than in other market sectors. 'Top end' or 'designer' children's clothing only accounts for a very small proportion of the overall market. The rise of supermarkets and discount outlets may be putting particular pressure on 'mid-range' outlets. Girls are generally seen within the industry to become fashion conscious at an earlier age than boys, but the market is not significantly skewed towards girls. Marketers also point to the influence of parents' fashion consciousness here, and the desire of some parents to dress their children like themselves.

New promotional techniques

- 5.21 New techniques and strategies.** 'Integrated marketing' of the kind described above is only one of a range of promotional techniques that are now being applied in the children's market. Others would include:

- Product placement: not in itself a new strategy, but one which the Government is considering legalising in British television (albeit not in children's programmes but certainly in programmes that significant numbers of children are likely to watch), and is also widespread in other media
- Other methods of embedding commercial messages, for example through the use of advertising hoardings in computer sports games or online social worlds
- Viral marketing, whereby commercial messages (in the form of e-mails or SMS texts or images) are forwarded from one user to another
- Advergaming, whereby players are involved in games (most obviously on company websites) using commercial or branded imagery or content
- Social networking – in particular the use of 'applications' that involve users in competitions featuring branded products and services, the use of branded materials (such as 'skins' or backgrounds), and the ways in which users are invited to define and construct their personal profiles in terms of preferences for consumer goods
- Sponsorship: again, a well-established strategy but one that appears to be becoming more widespread, not least in the context of public institutions and services (see Section 18)
- Data mining: that is, the gathering and analysis of data about consumers based on their responses to online requests, or (more covertly) through the use of 'cookies' that track their movements online
- Peer-to-peer marketing, whereby opinion leaders are recruited and paid as 'brand champions' or 'ambassadors' who will actively display and advocate the use of particular products within their contact group (the ubiquitous display of logos on branded clothing might be seen as a 'softer' form of this practice)
- New forms of market research that involve visiting and studying children in their homes, and/or recruiting them to inform marketers about current trends within their peer group ('cool hunting')
- The commercial cultivation of forms of 'fan culture' that involve collecting commodities (often those with a market-induced 'rarity' value), or creating forms of fan 'art' (for example, creating and circulating re-edited video material)
- So-called user-generated content, in which companies recruit consumers to create blogs or online videos (or alternatively masquerade as ordinary consumers to do so) promoting particular brands or products.

Many of these strategies have been particularly adopted in the children's and youth markets; and, as such, they might be seen as a further attempt on the part of marketers to deal with the apparent volatility of such markets. However, they are increasingly being used with adults too; and it is certainly debatable whether children are any more susceptible than adults to persuasion through these kinds of tactics (see Section 10).

5.22 Common factors. These techniques are fairly diverse, and some may ultimately prove much more successful than others – although the expenditure on such approaches is

undoubtedly increasing quite significantly at present. However, they have certain qualities in common:

- They are often about branding – creating a set of values or emotions associated with the brand – rather than the marketing of specific products.
- They depend to a large extent on the use of digital media, with its immediacy of access, its networking capacity, and its apparent 'youth' appeal, as well as its capacity for surveillance of consumer behaviour.
- They are 'personalised', in the sense that they seem to appeal and respond to the individual's wants and needs rather than addressing the individual as a member of a mass market.
- They are often deceptive or 'stealthy', in the sense that their persuasive intentions are not made apparent – for example through commercial messages being embedded in other content, rather than clearly identifiable, as in the case of banner advertising online.
- Many of them are participatory, in that they require the active engagement of the consumer, who may be called upon to engage actively with the communication, to pass it on to others, or to help create the message.

5.23 New questions. Although traditional marketing techniques remain important, the use of these new techniques raises important new questions about children's understanding of commercial motivations and practices. A fair amount is known about children's understanding of television advertising, but relatively little about how they engage with the commercial messages and tactics used in newer media. The use of 'stealth' techniques in particular raises questions about the fairness of targeting children, and about privacy. These issues are addressed in Section 10 below.

Commercial messages and commercial decisions

5.24 Messages and decisions. Much of the discussion in this section has focused on marketing to children. However, as we have argued, the commercial world is about much more than marketing. One distinction we have found very useful in this respect is between commercial *messages* and commercial *decisions*. Advertising is an obvious example of a commercial message, not least because it is generally identified as such; although (as we have noted, and as we discuss in more detail in Section 10) this is not always the case with the forms of marketing and promotion used in new media. By contrast, the notion of commercial *decisions* refers to the extent to which children's lives more generally are determined by commercial forces rather than by other imperatives.

5.25 The case of broadcasting. For example, in the case of broadcasting, the role of the commercial market is not simply to do with advertising *per se*. As we have suggested, television companies' decisions about what kinds of programmes to produce are also based on the potential for selling programmes in international markets, and for generating ancillary revenue through the licensing of franchises to the producers of toys and other merchandise. Furthermore, the work of children's television producers may also

be governed by the use of commercial *models* of organisation and management, that (for example) influence working practices, personnel and training opportunities – or what is described as ‘marketisation’. These kinds of factors are now apparent, not only in commercial broadcasting, but also in public service institutions such as the BBC. The impact of these commercial *decisions* on the child audience may be less immediate or directly observable than the impact of commercial messages, but in some circumstances it may be much more profound. We return to these questions in Part 4 of this report, where we consider their positive and negative implications in respect of three key domains that are particularly relevant to children: broadcasting, education and leisure.

Conclusion

5.26 The need for information. It has been relatively difficult for us to gather definitive information about many of the topics covered in this section. This is in itself cause for concern. While it is important to respect the need for commercial confidentiality, it is also important that consumers (both adults and children) have the knowledge they need to make informed choices. It is also in the interests of marketers that objective and reliable information about their work is available in the public domain, and available for public scrutiny, not least if they wish to avoid being misrepresented.

5.27 Key points. However, on the balance of the evidence available, it seems reasonable to conclude that:

- Marketing to children is not a new phenomenon, and is part of the general development of a modern consumer society.
- Children play a key (and perhaps increasingly vital) role, both as consumers in their own right, and as influences on parents.
- The children’s market is undoubtedly expanding, although it is not clear whether it is doing so at a faster rate than other market segments. It is also a comparatively volatile and unpredictable market.
- Children have growing levels of access to commercial media, and are increasingly exposed to commercial messages of many kinds.
- However, television advertising to children is in decline, as marketers have begun to move towards new media: television remains very important, but new and old media are increasingly converging.
- Children’s media environment is increasingly characterised by ‘integrated marketing’, in which promotional activities range across different media platforms.
- Contemporary marketers are using a widening range of techniques: these approaches are often more personalised and more participatory, but they also raise justified concerns about potential deception and invasion of privacy.
- Commercial forces and models are also playing an increasingly important role in the provision of public goods and services such as broadcasting.

6. Consumption and family life

Children's changing role as consumers should be understood in the context of broader changes in the structure and experience of family life over the past 50 years.

The average family size is falling. Despite frequent claims that children are growing up too quickly, young people are on average leaving the family home, joining the workforce, marrying and starting a family later than ever before. Family structures are changing, although three quarters of children still live with two parents (including step-parents).

Families are generally more affluent, although high levels of poverty persist among particular groups, notably single-parent families.

There have been significant changes in how households allocate expenditure. More is spent on services and less on goods; and categories such as communications, leisure, holidays and 'culture' have become proportionally more important, while others such as food, clothing and fuel have become less so. Many goods and amenities formerly seen as luxuries are now regarded as necessities.

Despite concerns about work/life balance, the proportions of parents' time spent in paid and unpaid work, and on leisure and recreation, have been relatively stable over time. The time they spend on childcare is rising markedly, and families are spending more time in the home. Nevertheless, parents are increasingly anxious about the need for 'quality time', and this has become a key motivation for expenditure on products and services for children.

Larger numbers of children now have their own (centrally heated) bedrooms, with significantly more individualised access to television and other media. While this may be leading to a fragmentation of family life, activities such as television viewing and play with electronic games can also be a focus for family togetherness.

It is difficult to identify the precise influence of these trends on children and on family relationships; although nostalgia for an imagined 'golden age' of family harmony and togetherness is largely misplaced.

- 6.1 The role of families.** The family is obviously the primary context through which children engage with the commercial world in its various forms. While many older children earn some of their own income (see Section 7), most remain dependent upon parents, carers and other family members to provide them with the economic resources they need in order to consume commercial goods and services. We take for granted that both the

family and childhood itself are social phenomena that change over time; and that they take different forms, and are experienced in different ways, by children in different social groups and circumstances. If we are to understand the changing nature of children's engagement with the commercial world, we therefore need to see it in relation to the changing nature, and the diversity, of contemporary family life.

6.2 Topics covered. This section covers three main areas, as follows:

- We begin by tracking broad patterns of socio-demographic change in the composition and structure of families, over approximately a 50-year period.
- We then look specifically at the economic dimensions of family life, in terms of patterns of income and expenditure, again over a similar time period.
- Finally, we attempt to provide more of an 'inside' view of family life, by considering how key resources of time and space are allocated and used within contemporary families.

Section 7 considers some other aspects that are more specifically related to the economic position of children within families, as well as in peer groups. The evidence for this section is largely drawn from the two literature reviews produced by The Social Issues Research Centre (Appendices G and I), where much more detail can be found.

6.3 Identifying historical change. In many areas, it is hard to make definitive statements about the nature and extent of historical changes in family life. There are substantial discrepancies between different datasets with regards to sample size, units and categories of analysis, and the inclusion and definition of key variables. This makes it extremely difficult to compare like with like, even over a relatively short and recent time scale. In addition, the point at which historical comparisons are made is often critical: families in 2008 are certainly different from families in 1958, but they are different again, and in other ways, from families in 1908 or 1858. This in itself should call for a degree of caution about some of the claims that are typically made about the apparent 'crisis' or 'breakdown' of families, or the demise of 'traditional' family life.

Socio-demographic changes in family structures

6.4 Family structures. The structure and composition of families are certainly changing, although perhaps not as radically or as rapidly as many commentators suggest. Key points emerging from our commissioned literature review on this area are as follows:

- Family structures have become longer and thinner: most families contain fewer dependent children (as birth-rates have fallen), but children tend to remain in the family home for a longer time.
- Although alternative forms of family organisation have become more common, over three-quarters of children still live in a nuclear family unit, with two parents (including step-parents).

- Household sizes have generally fallen, with a particular decline in large households – although the latter are more common among some ethnic groups, particularly Bangladeshis and Pakistanis.
- However, average fertility rates have been rising since 2001, and these are also higher in the same ethnic groups.
- Women are having children later in life, and this is correlated with the rise in employment opportunities for women.
- Increasing numbers of children are born outside of marriage (over 40%). Marriage rates have steadily declined since the 1970s; and the age of first marriage has steadily risen.
- Divorce rates have increased overall, but are currently in decline. While a decline in the number of marriages is also likely to result in fewer divorces in absolute terms, contemporary marriages are nevertheless more likely to end in divorce than was the case in the past.
- The number of lone parent families has increased significantly (trebling between 1971 and 2007). The overwhelming majority of single parents are women.
- An increasing number of children live with step-parents (mainly step-fathers): the figure is currently around one in ten.
- The number of people cohabiting has increased, having doubled in the past twenty years to a current figure of around one quarter. However, this figure has fallen for those aged under 25, as young adults increasingly remain living with their parents.
- Legal recognition of same-sex partnerships – through Civil Partnerships – has increased their visibility.
- The number of people living alone has markedly increased, and is currently around 30%: this is partly a consequence of an aging population, although there has also been a six-fold increase among the 25-44 age group since the 1970s.
- Children are now likely to remain in the parental home for longer than in the past: the majority do not leave home permanently until they are well into their twenties. This development can be associated with factors such as the cost of housing, and the later age of marriage. Children's economic dependence on parents may obviously continue beyond the point at which they physically leave home.
- Almost all the above patterns vary between different ethnic groups – although it should be borne in mind that over 92% of the UK population is White British. Lone parent families, for example, are more common among British African-Caribbeans; while marriage rates are higher, and family sizes larger, among British South Asians. However, a number of factors and variations are in play here, and it can be misleading to generalise about particular ethnic groups.

6.5 Interrelated changes. The phenomena identified above are obviously interlinked in several respects; and they also need to be understood in the context of broader social and economic changes. For example, rising property prices have made it much more difficult for young people to set up home independently than in earlier decades. The

growing involvement of women in higher education and in employment has encouraged the tendency to delay marriage and childbirth. The availability of contraception has contributed to lower birth rates, and hence smaller families. The marked decline in religious belief is likely to have had an important impact on views about the significance of marriage, and particularly the need for parents to be married; and it has also contributed to changing views about lone parenting. Social attitude surveys suggest that most young people in particular are accepting of the growing diversity of family structures.

6.6 Implications for commercial engagement. These developments have several potential implications for families and children's engagement with the commercial world. Increasing financial independence for women changes the 'balance of power' within families, in ways that are bound to affect purchasing decisions. The overall reduction in family size means that correspondingly greater economic resources may be allocated to children, and children may have a greater say in family spending; but it also means that children are likely to have fewer siblings available for companionship, and may therefore be more inclined to seek solitary forms of entertainment, or to connect with friends via electronic media. Present-day children have fewer blood relatives (such as aunts and uncles) who might buy things for them; but they are also more likely to have grandparents who may do so (and indeed, this will be correspondingly more the case where parents have divorced and remarried). At the same time, the lengthening of the family form also means that children are dependent upon parents for a greater period of time. The diverse and ambivalent implications of these changes are considered in more detail below.

The economic dimensions of family life

6.7 Patterns of wealth, income and expenditure. Studying families' and children's engagement with the commercial world means looking closely at patterns of wealth, income and expenditure, and how decisions about allocating and spending money are arrived at. In these areas too, there is great diversity among different family structures and social groups; and there have also been longer-term changes. The following key findings emerge from our commissioned literature review in this area:

- Average levels of disposable household income and wealth have risen significantly, albeit unevenly, over the past several decades: despite the reduction in household size, average inflation-adjusted household net wealth more than doubled between 1971 and 2005.
- However, economic inequality has also increased: the rich are becoming relatively richer, while a large minority of people are affected by a relative lack of material resources.
- While there are various definitions of poverty, the number of people living in households below 60% of median income continues to rise. 21% of families report that money frequently runs out before the end of the week.

- Among families with children, married couples have the highest average income, followed by cohabiting couples and then lone parents: the median income of lone mothers is around one third of that of married couples.
- The larger ethnic minority groups in Britain continue to have lower levels of income than the majority White population: Pakistani and Bangladeshi households are particularly likely to have lower incomes, while at the same time being larger in size than average.
- Women work and earn more than they did in previous decades, partly reflecting growing levels of access to further and higher education, and the move away from manufacturing to service industries. They still earn less than men, and this is only partly because they work fewer paid hours – although the gap is slowly narrowing.
- Family spending has increased greatly in the last 50 years: it is currently two and a half times higher than in 1971, taking account of inflation.
- Families with children spend the most: average expenditure among households with two parents and children in 2006 was £700 per week.
- There have been substantial changes in how households allocate expenditure: more is spent on services and less on goods; and categories such as communications, leisure, holidays and 'culture' have become proportionally more important, while others such as food, clothing and fuel have become less so.
- While it could be concluded that 'necessities' now account for a declining proportion of household income, it could also be suggested that goods and amenities formerly seen as 'luxuries' have now come to be regarded as necessities: this might apply to commodities such as television, central heating, freezers, washing machines and cars, as well as new media such as computers and mobile phones.
- The growing expenditure on leisure is unevenly distributed, with lone parent families in particular more likely to go without leisure goods or activities such as holidays and presents at family celebrations that more wealthy families consider as necessities.
- Spending on childcare varies according to income and family type: lower income families are generally less likely to be able to afford formal childcare arrangements.
- Expenditure varies according to ethnicity, with ethnic minority groups spending less on categories such as recreation and culture.
- Lone parents are still most likely to be unemployed and in poverty, although this is improving somewhat as women become more involved in the labour force, albeit often in lower-paid occupations.
- Ethnic minorities also continue to have the lowest paid jobs and the highest rates of unemployment, although there are major disparities between these groups.

- Child poverty has declined over the past ten years, although it remains at one of the highest levels in the developed world. However, there is much debate about the definition and measurement of child poverty, and considerable difficulty in drawing historical comparisons. Qualitative research reports provide evidence that many parents go without new clothes and other consumer goods in order to provide for their children.
- Some other issues relating specifically to the economic position and the consumer activities of children are discussed in Section 7 of this report; while issue relating to poverty and inequality are addressed in Section 16.

- 6.8 Implications for commercial engagement.** These developments have many implications for children's and families' engagement with the commercial world. Broadly speaking, the rising levels of affluence within British society over the past 50 years have led to a general growth in the scope and scale of consumption within families. This is most notably the case in relation to the fields of leisure and recreation, and to what can broadly be called 'cultural' goods. Some have argued that, in this context, consumption – the purchasing, use and display of material goods and services – is bound to serve as an increasingly important marker of social status and identity. This may be the case not just for individuals, but also for families, as they collectively define themselves and negotiate their place in the wider world. However, there is also some evidence that people are becoming less, rather than more, materialistic (see section 11) – that, once a certain level of affluence is attained, people become predominantly 'inner-directed' and *less* concerned with outwardly visible status symbols. Even so, it may be very difficult to separate social relations from economic relations, or to identify domains of family life that are not in some way contingent upon, or affected by, the commercial world.
- 6.9 The cost of raising children.** It is worth noting in this respect that the apparent cost of bringing up children is rising in real terms. One commercial estimate of the current cost of bringing up a child from birth to the age of 21 is £194,000 – equivalent to roughly £25 per day. This figure has risen 38% over the last five years. Other estimates are lower, and of course there is considerable variation here between more and less affluent families. Childcare and education account for over half of this amount. Food and clothing are leading categories of expenditure, with aspects such as leisure activities, media and technology, and fashion accessories coming relatively low on the list.
- 6.10 Inequalities.** However, one of the most striking aspects here is the continuing inequalities in families' wealth and income, and hence in their access to commercially-provided goods and services. These inequalities of course reflect well-established inequalities based on social class, gender and ethnicity; and they are particularly apparent in relation to single-parent families, in which growing numbers of children live. Unequal socio-economic circumstances continue to impact significantly on children's participation in education, but also on their involvement in the range of leisure and cultural activities that constitute contemporary consumer society. The rich and the poor do not live only in different material worlds, but in different cultural and social worlds as well.

Time and space in the home

- 6.11 Family dynamics.** Our focus now shifts to a more 'inside' view of the dynamics of family life, and in particular to the ways in which the resources of time and space are deployed in families. We consider some of the more specific implications of developments in these areas in relation to consumer behaviour in subsequent sections, most notably Section 12 (which looks at questions about 'pester power' and bullying within the peer group). At this point, we remain with the 'big picture', presenting some of the evidence drawn from quantitative and qualitative studies of family life.
- 6.12 Time.** In respect of time, our commissioned literature reviews (see Appendices G and I) report several key findings:
- Despite concerns about work/life balance and the pressures on 'family time', the proportions of time spent in paid and unpaid work, and on leisure and recreation, have been relatively stable over time.
 - There has been a convergence between men and women and between different socio-economic groups in terms of the allocation of time between work and leisure pursuits.
 - Parents are working slightly fewer hours per week than a decade ago, although work continues to be the second most time-consuming activity after sleeping. Flexible working hours arrangements and the rise of part-time work somewhat blur the line between work and family time.
 - Married women are spending more time in paid work, and mothers in particular are increasingly in paid employment. In 2006, 30% of married or cohabiting mothers with children worked full-time, and 30% worked part-time. Rates are higher among professional than unskilled women with children.
 - Many children are also working – an issue discussed more fully in Section 7.
 - Men are doing greater amounts of childcare and housework, but women still do much more, even in dual income families. The amount of time spent on housework is decreasing, but the time spent on childcare is rising (and is reportedly much higher than figures in the US or elsewhere in Europe) – although these data need to be treated carefully. Childcare remains predominantly women's work.
 - Nevertheless, parents – particularly in dual earning households – report experiencing 'time squeeze', with less 'free' time for personal leisure: this applies to men as well as women, although it is more acute for women (a point that is also borne out by the Family and Parenting Institute survey in this area).
 - Families are spending more time in the home, rather than less: in 2005 70% of time was spent in the home, sleeping, doing housework, watching TV or videos, listening to music, and so on – although of course these things are not necessarily done together as a family.
- 6.13 Domestication and safety.** The growing amount of time being spent in the home may reflect the growing domestication of leisure activities, but it is also associated with growing concerns about safety:

- Statistics in this area are notoriously unreliable; but it would seem that, while actual levels of crime have fallen, the fear of crime has declined less dramatically (although it has certainly declined).
- In reality, it is the home, rather than the street, that is the main site for crimes against children. Most child abductions are by family members (particularly estranged fathers); and three quarters of those convicted for violent offences against younger children are family members. (Such crimes are also more likely to be under-reported than crimes committed by strangers.)
- Fear of crime is predominantly focused on protecting the home (for example, in relation to burglary), rather than risks in public space; yet perhaps paradoxically, the home also appears to be widely regarded as a safe refuge from the dangers of the outside world.
- At the same time, young people are especially at risk in public spaces as a result of their ownership of desirable products, particularly electronic goods such as mobile phones and MP3 players: 12% of young people are victims of theft of such products at some point and over half routinely carry items ranging in value from £100 to £500.
- In general, children's independent mobility outside the home has been steadily restricted over the past several decades; although this is particularly the case for girls, for some ethnic groups (such as Bangladeshis), and (perhaps surprisingly) for children living in rural environments, as well as for younger children.
- Fears about traffic and abduction by paedophiles mean that younger children in particular are much more likely to be driven to school; and parents tend to prefer children to be entertained in the home rather than 'playing out' in the street or in open spaces.

6.14 Space. Within the family home, the allocation of space has also changed. Our literature reviews suggest that:

- Partly as a result of the reduction in family size, larger numbers of children now have their own bedrooms: over half of 5-6 year olds do not have to share a room, while 69% of 9-10 year olds and 77% of 12-13 year olds have their own room.
- The widespread availability of central heating means that children are now more likely to spend time in their bedrooms than in shared family rooms.
- On the other hand, houses in the UK (particularly public housing) tend to have smaller rooms than in other countries.
- As we have noted (Section 5), children now have much more individualised access to television and other media in their bedrooms: the large majority now have a television in their bedrooms, and over one third also now have internet access (these figures predictably increase with age).
- Even so, this tendency is less the case in less wealthy households, and in larger families. In particular, there is still a marked 'digital divide' in independent access to the internet between more and less wealthy families.

- 6.15 Family time.** The notion of 'family time' – characterised by collective leisure activities, family meals, celebrations and outings, and the consumption of media – is a relatively modern phenomenon. However, these changes in the use and allocation of time and space have several implications in terms of specific collective family activities. For example, the family meal typically serves as one key symbolic indicator of family togetherness, although it is a relatively recent practice, dating back only to the mid-nineteenth century. There is often seen to be a decline in families eating meals together, although the evidence here is inconclusive. In research for her new programme on *The British Family* which will be broadcast in February 2010, Kirsty Young found that parents now spend three times more hours with their children than they did 50 years ago.
- 6.16 Family viewing.** Family viewing of television – and by extension, other collective uses of media – can also serve a similar role in terms of bringing the family together, and providing opportunities for discussion and negotiation. Data suggest that older children in particular are now watching a good deal of television alone in their bedrooms; but particularly in households where there is only one multi-channel set, family viewing remains common. Similar findings apply to the use of internet-linked computers and games consoles, although some other forms of new media (such as the Nintendo Wii) are being marketed precisely as means of promoting and celebrating family togetherness.

Commercial time and space

- 6.17 The commodification of family time.** The data reported here are in some respects rather paradoxical. Hours spent on paid and unpaid work (such as housework) are in fact slightly declining; and yet parents increasingly report experiencing 'time squeeze'. It may well be that in fact the sensation of 'time squeeze' – or the perceived lack of 'quality time' spent with the family – arises from the growing variety and abundance of leisure activities and consumer products available for families to consume. At the same time, the continuing – and perhaps accelerating – symbolic 'valorization' of childhood means that there is much greater pressure on parents to spend time with their children – and indeed to be seen to enjoy doing so. In this context, one could argue that the notion of 'quality time' spent with children has itself been commodified – that is, seen as something that can be bought and sold. Parents may use purchases as a way of compensating for the feelings of guilt they experience as a result of not spending what they are led to regard as sufficient time with their children – even though the figures suggest that they are in fact spending more time on childcare than previous generations of parents. Indeed, studies of the marketing of toys suggest that commercial goods for children are often promoted in precisely this manner – as a kind of recompense for the real or supposed absence of mothers in particular.
- 6.18 The commodification of fear.** Likewise, one motivation for parents to provide large amounts of media technology for their children to use in the home may well derive from the fear of crime in public spaces – although the data here are not completely straightforward. Yet the advent of media-rich bedroom environments also raises the spectre of new risks to children, as a result of their unsupervised access (particularly in the case of the internet): in a sense, the problem here (at least for some) is that the private

space of the home has been invaded from outside, not least by elements of the commercial world. In this sense, one form of perceived risk has been exchanged for another. This increasingly individualised access to technology may well encourage a degree of fragmentation in family life. However, it is also the case that such technologies – most notably mobile phones and email – allow connections between family members who may be physically separated (which is a major reason why parents purchase mobile phones for their children in the first place). Computers and mobile devices are also predominantly used for communication among friends: for much of the time, these are sociable technologies, not isolating ones.

- 6.19 Commodified safety.** This latter point also applies to children's access to public spaces for leisure and play, which have themselves become increasingly commodified (as well as controlled and supervised by adults). The shopping mall may be perceived by some as safer than the streets, not least because it is monitored by private security staff (whose responses to young people may be especially punitive); but it is also, self-evidently, a commercial space. Meanwhile, playgrounds and sporting facilities are increasingly run by commercial companies, and involve charges for admission that inevitably make them less accessible to economically disadvantaged children. These latter issues are taken up in more detail in Section 19.

Conclusion

- 6.20 Families in crisis?** Some popular commentators have suggested that the contemporary family is 'in crisis' – although such claims themselves have a long history (see Section 3). Among other things, critics point to what they perceive as a widespread failure in parental discipline, a tendency to prioritise the demands of work over those of 'family time', and yet also an unduly protective, even 'paranoid', approach to child-rearing. It is partly because of this apparent crisis or failure on the part of parents that commercial forces are seen to be having an increasingly powerful role in childhood. Our review of the evidence suggests that, while there is some truth in some of these assertions, the role of the commercial world here is more complex and ambivalent.
- 6.21 The role of the commercial world.** The amount of money spent by families on raising children has risen sharply, at least partly because of a broader commercialisation of leisure and entertainment. 'Family time' remains important, but parents feel a growing pressure to both produce and defend it, not least by spending money on shared activities. The rise of media-rich bedroom environments may be leading to a degree of fragmentation; but activities such as family television viewing and play with electronic games can also be a valuable focus for family togetherness. Melodramatic claims about the demise of traditional family life are, to say the least, overstated. While there have certainly been significant changes in family life (which one might see as both positive and negative), nostalgia for an imagined 'golden age' of family harmony and togetherness is largely misplaced.

7. Children as consumers

The amount of children's pocket money has increased in real terms, but only slightly, over the past few decades. Most estimate the average at around £8 per week. Meanwhile, *ad hoc* handouts have become more prevalent.

A majority of teenagers engage in part-time paid employment at some point. Some of this work is unregistered, and in some instances there are justified concerns about working conditions. Children from higher-income families tend to use income from work to pay for additional 'luxuries'; although those from more disadvantaged backgrounds often depend on it in order to be able to participate in what most would regard as common childhood practices.

The influence of children on parental or family purchasing decisions is extremely difficult to quantify. Children appear to have relatively more influence on the purchase of items for their own use, and of food, holidays, entertainment products and services and gifts for friends and family, and less influence on larger investments such as on cars and property.

Research on 'consumer socialisation' suggests that children gradually develop a range of skills and knowledge to do with the commercial world that help prepare them for adulthood.

Children are neither the helpless victims imagined by some campaigners nor the autonomous 'media savvy' consumers celebrated by some marketing people. Their engagement with the commercial world is part of their everyday social experience, and is very much mediated by other social relationships with family and friends.

The economic role of children

- 7.1 Children as economic actors.** As we saw in Section 6, children's consumer behaviour largely takes place in the context of the family. Children also remain economically dependent upon their parents for a longer period today than was the case in the past. However, children have a growing degree of autonomy and independence in their consumer behaviour, and they may exercise a major influence on family purchasing decisions. Many older children in particular also earn income on their own behalf. To this extent, children – and especially older children – can be seen as economic actors in their own right. Our commissioned literature reviews provide some useful indicators of this, in three key areas: pocket money; paid employment; and influence on family spending.

7.2 Pocket money. In respect of pocket money, the key findings are as follows:

- The giving of pocket money is a relatively recent practice, dating back to the mid-twentieth century.
- Pocket money takes a variety of forms, ranging from *ad hoc* payments to formal weekly or monthly allowances, which are received by around two thirds of children. It can be seen to include other forms of support, for example with transport costs or mobile phone top-ups.
- In some cases, it involves no specific obligations, for example in terms of schoolwork or chores, whereas in other cases it can be seen as a 'wage' given in exchange for housework or work in a family business.
- Around half of parents link children's allowances to work around the house, or to good behaviour, although children and parents do not always seem to perceive these 'conditions' in the same way.
- Estimates of the amount of pocket money children receive are rather variable, although recent figures suggest that children now receive an average of about £10 per week in pocket money and £16 in *ad hoc* handouts.
- Long-term studies over the past 25 years suggest that the amount of pocket money has increased in real terms, but only slightly.
- However, there is some evidence that *ad hoc* 'handouts' and gifts from parents may be increasing: some estimates suggests that the total value of these is in the region of £2.1 billion per year.
- Perhaps surprisingly, amounts of pocket money are almost totally independent of family income: pocket money thus represents a higher proportion of the income of less wealthy families, and this would support the argument (see Section 6) that parents in such families are more likely to go without luxuries in order to provide for their children.

7.3 Paid employment. The giving of allowances represents an important shift from former times, when children would have been expected to hand over much of their income from employment. Of course, children are much less involved in paid employment today than in the nineteenth century. However, the majority of older children engage in part-time paid work at some stage:

- Up to 1.5 million 13-16 year olds will have been employed at some point, out of a total population of 2.64 million.
- Almost 40% of 15-year-olds are currently undertaking paid work, compared with 23% of 11-year-olds. By far the majority do so for less than six hours a week, although a quarter of 15-year-olds work more than this.
- Evidence of historical changes in the proportions of young people receiving income from work is unclear, although the variety of jobs available to them would seem to have increased.

- Much of this work is informal, occasional and on the margins of the economy: this may be particularly the case with work in and around the home, and in family businesses. Much of it also takes place in smaller businesses on the fringes of the service sector (for example, in catering and retail).
- Contrary to expectations, it appears that children from higher-income and two-parent families are more likely to work than those from lower-income and lone-parent families.
- Children from higher-income families tend to use income from work to pay for additional 'luxuries' – and as such, much of this work is motivated by consumption. By contrast, those from more disadvantaged backgrounds often depend on such income in order to be able to participate in what most would regard as common childhood practices.
- Overall, income from paid employment is less than money received from parents, relatives and family friends; although older children's earnings can be very significant – a 2004 RBS survey found that 16-year-olds earned around £1000 from working, while receiving only £400 in pocket money.

7.4 Perspectives on children's work. Research suggests that paid employment can have value for young people in terms of developing self-esteem and a sense of responsibility, as well as in the development of more specific vocationally-relevant skills. However, there is evidence that many employers are failing in their legal duty to safeguard children. Under the 1933 Children and Young Persons Act, local authorities have a responsibility to monitor and regulate work undertaken by children of school age, and children can work only if they have obtained a permit from the local authority. However, it appears that very little of such work is registered: in a large-scale Scottish study, only 11% of those under 16 who needed a work permit had one; and as such, they were working illegally. In many instances, there are also justified concerns about working conditions, not least in relation to health and safety: only about 10-15% of employers are undertaking risk assessments as required.

7.5 Savings. It is also worth noting here that *savings* are a major use of children's income: 92% of children in SIRC's research (Appendix I) claimed to save money – in two thirds of cases, in their own bank accounts. This makes an interesting contrast with the finding that adults are less inclined to save than in the past.

7.6 Children's influence on family spending. As we have noted, the influence of children on parental or family purchasing decisions is extremely difficult to quantify, although many marketers claim that it is highly significant, and indeed much more so than the children's market *per se*. Our commissioned literature reviews, and our own evaluation of the evidence, point to the following tentative findings in this area:

- Children appear to have more influence over the purchase of food, holidays, hardware (such as electrical goods) and gifts for friends and family. They are less influential in respect of larger investments such as cars and property.

- Girls have more influence in the purchasing of gifts, while boys play a more important role in choices of electrical goods, music and games.
- The majority of children appear to accept that parents will act fairly in making purchasing decisions, and only a minority feel they are not given sufficient say.

7.7 Pester power or democratic negotiation? This phenomenon is often pejoratively defined as a matter of 'pester power', which suggests that it is perceived as unwelcome and is inevitably a source of conflict. However, this is not necessarily the case. Indeed, it could be argued that ideas about child-rearing have steadily placed a greater emphasis on the need for negotiation, openness and dialogue between parents and children, rather than the mere imposition of parental authority; and to this extent, children's influence over family decision-making could be seen as entirely legitimate. Of course, this is not an either/or issue: both could be true. We will discuss research on this matter in more detail in Section 12.

Learning to consume

- 7.8 The need for learning.** The greater significance of children as economic actors, both within and beyond the family, raises significant questions about learning. Several studies suggest that parents feel a responsibility to educate their children about responsible consumption, and fear that they may be 'reckless' spenders; although young people disagree, believing that they know more about money and finance than previous generations, precisely because of their exposure to the commercial world.
- 7.9 Consumer socialisation.** In this respect, we can refer to a substantial body of research in the field of 'consumer socialisation'. While this concept has been much debated in the literature, many would accept Ward's definition of consumer socialisation as 'the processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace'. Several researchers have drawn on frameworks from developmental psychology to propose a series of 'ages and stages' in consumer socialisation. From this perspective, children's development as consumers is related to the development of more general cognitive skills and capacities, such as the ability to process information, to understand others' perspectives, and to take account of multiple factors that might be in play in decision-making. Influenced by parents and peers, as well as media and marketing institutions, children's consumer behaviour is seen to become gradually more autonomous, consistent and rational. As they get older, they also draw on a greater range of information sources in making purchasing decisions. In all these respects, the period between the ages of seven and eleven years is often seen as a particularly important phase in development.
- 7.10 Some criticisms of consumer socialisation.** However, some researchers have challenged this approach, on the grounds that it neglects the emotional and symbolic dimensions of consumer behaviour; while others argue that consumer socialisation is an ongoing, lifelong process, rather than something that is effectively concluded at the point of entry to adulthood. These issues are particularly important when we consider questions about children's understanding of the persuasive intentions of advertising, and the 'fairness' of

particular marketing techniques, especially in respect of new media. We consider these issues in much greater detail in Section 10.

- 7.11 Knowledge of products and brands.** Psychological research suggests that children's identification and knowledge of commercial brands, and their consumer preferences, develop from a very young age. Children as young as two can recognise familiar packages, logos and licensed characters, and by the age of nine are as familiar with brands and associated slogans as their parents. Very young children start to develop consistent preferences, for example for branded items above generic alternatives, and these become stronger and more sophisticated over time. Children's understanding of the symbolic significance of material goods also develops with age: as they get older, children come to understand how goods are used, for example to signal social status or group membership. Research suggests that by the age of about seven, children also start to draw inferences about other people based on the products they use, and subsequently (by the age of 11-12) also on the basis of brands. Over time, brands come to function not just as perceptual cues (distinguishing one product from another), but are invested with symbolic or conceptual meanings, which can influence children's self-concept and their judgments about others – although it should be emphasised that this is a dynamic and interactive process.
- 7.12 Shopping skills.** Children also develop knowledge and skills relating to shopping from an early age. There is limited research in this area, but it is clear that children's ability and inclination to compare and evaluate the value and quality of products improves with age, as does their ability to understand pricing information and to manage money. It should also be noted that shopping is itself a social activity, that is increasingly carried out with friends rather than parents as children get older: shopping (and 'window-shopping') with friends is a key leisure activity, a source of pleasure and a focus of companionship, perhaps particularly for girls.
- 7.13 Beyond consumer socialisation.** The research on consumer socialisation provides some valuable indications of the nature and development of children's skills and understandings in respect of the commercial world; and this is particularly relevant to potential educational initiatives in this area, and to questions of regulation (see Sections 20 and 21). However, there is a danger in applying a mechanical 'ages and stages' approach, which tends to lead to unhelpful generalisations about the capacities (or lack of them) of children at particular ages. Furthermore, there is insufficient attention here to social differences, particularly in relation to social class. Children in different socio-economic groups are likely to have quite different experiences of the commercial world; and as such, they may develop different orientations towards it, and have different opportunities to learn about it. We bring together some conclusions on this issue in Section 16. Finally, there are complex questions about the relationship between children's knowledge about the commercial world and the kind of impact it may have upon them: more informed or skilled consumers are not necessarily less amenable to influence. This issue is taken up in more detail in Section 10.

Constructing the child consumer

- 7.14 Framing the debate.** As we saw in Section 3, the issue of children's relationship with the commercial world has been framed and debated in various ways; although in the current context, it has come on to the agenda in relation to much more general anxieties about social and moral decline. As we have argued, the issue has become a kind of proxy for much broader – and often much more diffuse – concerns about social change and about the undesirable aspects of modern life. One of the key issues underlying these debates is to do with our understanding of childhood, and hence of the child consumer. The various participants in this debate invoke and employ very different constructions of childhood itself – constructions that also find support from the various ways in which children and young people are represented in the media.
- 7.15 Beyond polarisation.** There are many ironies and dilemmas here. The campaigners who purport to be speaking on behalf of children and defending their interests often tend to present them as powerless; while the marketers, who might be seen as attempting to manipulate them, present them as powerful. The critics of consumerism fall back on conservative constructions of children as helpless innocents, passively socialised by external forces and lacking the skills or rationality adults are assumed to possess; while the marketers appear to espouse more contemporary notions of childhood competence, knowledge and agency. The situation we have described in the three sections of this part of the report – in relation to the activities of marketers, families, and children themselves – suggests that there is some truth in both positions. However, it also suggests that we need to understand children's consumer behaviour in relation to other social forces and influences. In the following sections of the report, where we focus more directly on the question of *impact*, we will be questioning the idea that children are simply helpless victims of consumer culture – although we will equally be challenging the claim that they are somehow 'empowered' by it.
- 7.16 The big picture.** To sum up this part of the report in very broad terms, we can say that:
- Children's engagement with the commercial world, as both consumers and workers, is not a new phenomenon – nor are expressions of concern about it.
 - However, the increasing ubiquity of advertising and marketing and the changing nature of marketing techniques present new challenges.
 - Children have become an increasingly important market in their own right, reflecting rising levels of affluence and the more general development of a modern consumer society.
 - Children also have growing influence on family spending, as a result of broader changes in the structure and nature of family life.
 - Children have growing levels of individualised or unsupervised access to media, both in the home and in the form of mobile devices.
 - Children's media are largely commercially provided or contain commercial messages; and commodities are increasingly marketed across several media platforms.

- Children's relationships with family and friends, and their sense of their identity and place in the world, are inextricably tied up with commercial influences.
- Children gradually develop a range of skills and knowledge to do with the commercial world, that helps prepare them for their role as adult consumers.

7.17 Issues for policy. At the same time, our account thus far has implicitly flagged up some important issues that are relevant to social policy:

- Marketers are using a wide range of new techniques and strategies to reach children, which children (and parents) may not always recognise or understand.
- Digital media are increasingly important in this respect, yet existing forms of regulation and control do not apply to some aspects of these media.
- Information about the children's market is not easily available in the public domain or for public scrutiny.
- The boundary between public and private (or between state-provided and commercially provided) goods and services is blurring and shifting, for example in areas such as broadcasting.
- There are considerable degrees of inequality in children's access to, and ability to participate in, the commercial world.

PART THREE: IMPACT

8. Introduction: the evidence of impact

There is little doubt that marketing is effective, in the sense that it persuades people to buy things; but reliable evidence about its effects on broader attitudes or aspects of behaviour is more difficult to obtain. This applies to evidence of both positive and negative impact, although most of the research to date relates to harmful effects.

There has been a good deal of work on television advertising, but much less on other aspects of promotion or marketing. There is very little research on new digital media.

As in other areas of research about media effects, basic issues of theory and method are often highly contested.

In some areas, we do have evidence of associations (or correlations) between exposure to marketing and aspects of negative wellbeing. However, there is a misleading tendency for such associations to be presented as evidence of causal relationships.

The fact that it is hard to find definitive evidence about the impact of the commercial world on children does not, of course, mean that there is no such impact. Definitive proof on such issues would be difficult, perhaps even impossible, to obtain.

In the absence of proof, we might argue for the application of the 'precautionary principle'; although in preventing the possibility of harm to children, we may also restrict the positive opportunities they are able to enjoy.

- 8.1 Impact.** Having laid out the broad picture of children's changing relationships with the commercial world, this part of the report provides an evaluation of the evidence relating specifically to questions of impact. Most of this evidence relates to the impact of commercial *messages and practices* – for example, advertising, marketing and other forms of promotion. The area of commercial *decisions* is addressed in Part 4. Here again, we

draw on our commissioned literature reviews (particularly Appendix J), on the evidence received in response to our call, our consultations with stakeholders, and our own first-hand assessment of relevant research.

- 8.2 Positives and negatives.** Much of the material considered here relates primarily to questions of *negative* impact. We found it quite difficult to locate reliable evidence relating to *positive* impact, particularly evidence from research. In general, the responses to our consultation from business tended to be somewhat defensive: the emphasis was on disputing or rejecting evidence of harmful impacts rather than providing evidence of positive ones. In our view, this reflects the ways in which the issue is typically framed within the public debate (see Section 3), and the polarised nature of that debate. The first section of this part of the report draws together available evidence on positive impacts; and such impacts are also considered in Part 4. Most of this part, however, concentrates on negative impacts in relation to physical and mental health, social relationships, attitudes and behaviour.
- 8.3 A contested field.** For a variety of reasons, the evidence from research on these issues is quite problematic. There have been long-running and often heated debates among researchers on the issue of media effects, which to some extent recur in research on the commercial world more broadly. Researchers frequently disagree about fundamental issues to do with focus, method and theory – about how the key questions are to be framed, what might count as an answer, and what the implications of these answers might be in terms of what should be done. In this area, there has been a particular ‘stand-off’ between researchers in the tradition of psychological effects research – which is particularly prominent in the United States – and researchers within disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and cultural studies.
- 8.4 Psychological effects research.** Researchers in the psychological effects tradition generally seek to establish evidence of a causal relationship between exposure to media and particular consequences in terms of audiences’ behaviour or attitudes. A classic behaviourist perspective conceives of this process in terms of stimulus and response – of which the most obvious example would be imitation. From this perspective, television advertising would be seen to produce direct effects on viewers – not only in terms of purchasing behaviour, but also in terms of attitudes and values. In practice, most exponents of this approach consider a range of ‘intervening variables’ (such as social class or parental influence) that come between the stimulus and the response, and thereby mediate any potential effects; and there is also some recognition here of individual differences in response. Even so, the basic ‘cause-and-effect’ model continues to apply.
- 8.5 Limited evidence.** Even on its own terms, the evidence of such research is often equivocal and contradictory. Critics of effects research point out that journals tend only to publish studies that show positive results (in this case, studies that claim to prove negative effects). The sizes of effects in such studies are frequently small; although far-reaching claims are often made on the basis of what amounts to quite flimsy evidence. However, there are also some more fundamental methodological and theoretical criticisms that can be made of this kind of research.

- 8.6 Research method.** The two key methods that have been used in this work, laboratory experiments and surveys, have well-known limitations when it comes to proving causal relationships between phenomena in real life. The key problem with *laboratory experiments* is to do with their artificiality: what happens in the context of a laboratory, where one is seeking to maximise potential effects in order to make them observable, cannot be generalised to the real world, where a whole range of other factors may be in play. Furthermore, experiments are generally only capable of measuring short-term effects. *Questionnaire surveys* have different limitations. One of the key problems here is that of self-reporting. Respondents are typically asked to provide estimates of their media use, and to agree or disagree with a series of statements about how they might behave in hypothetical situations; and there are all sorts of reasons why such responses might prove unreliable. As we have suggested (Section 4), there may be a strong 'social desirability bias' in some cases, which might (for example) lead some kinds of people to under-report both their levels of television viewing and their materialistic attitudes.
- 8.7 Correlation and causality.** Perhaps the most significant problem here, however, is the confusion between correlation and causality. For example, it might be possible to show that people who (claim to) watch a lot of television also (claim to) have more 'materialistic' attitudes. But this does not in itself prove that television causes materialistic attitudes: it might equally be the case that people who are predisposed towards materialistic attitudes tend to seek out television as a form of entertainment, or indeed that there are other factors (so-called 'third variables') that explain both types of behaviour. In order to provide definitive evidence in this respect, we would need to establish the direction of any causal relationship, as well as accounting for these other influences. (Several of these methodological issues are considered in much more detail in Appendix K: while the discussion there relates specifically to research about obesity, the points apply to research in many other areas as well.) It is important to be clear about this point. Associations between phenomena may be interesting and important to identify, and they may tell us a great deal. However, they are not evidence of a causal connection, and they should not be presented as such, or mistaken for one.
- 8.8 The limits of proof.** Many researchers who focus on media effects recognise these limitations, although they tend to suggest that the weaknesses of one method can be compensated for by using others, and that the findings can be combined. By contrast, critics argue that no amount of aggregation will make a difference: combining these very different types of research does not in fact provide us with convincing proof. One might perhaps imagine an 'ideal experiment', in which children could be subjected to potentially harmful exposure in realistic conditions over the longer term, but this would raise significant ethical and logistical difficulties. As such, definitive proof of media effects is unlikely to be forthcoming. In this situation, we might adopt a more pragmatic position, and accept that we need to be realistic about what it is possible to prove in the first place. Even so, there remains a need for better designed studies, which would include: surveys that address a wider range of variables, and analyse the relationships between them in a sophisticated way; experiments that come closer to real-world conditions; studies that

use large, representative samples, or which track behaviour longitudinally over time; and research that measures real behaviour rather than simply reported behaviour.

8.9 The problems with 'effects'. However, the broader problem here is a theoretical one: it is to do with the basic notion of 'effects' (or 'impact') itself. Critics of effects research argue that media (in this case, commercial messages) do not have singular meanings that will be the same for all who encounter them, and that they are interpreted in many different ways. They accuse effects researchers of regarding audiences as passive and ignorant victims of media influence. Children in particular are often defined primarily in terms of what they cannot do, rather than what they can; and in the process, researchers typically fail to see issues from children's own perspectives. In a sense, it is the basic framing of the question that is the problem. As Millwood Hargrave and Livingstone suggest:

Society does not ask, for example, whether parents have 'an effect' on their children or whether friends are positive or negative in their effects. Yet it persistently asks (and expects researchers to ask) such questions of the media, as if a single answer could be forthcoming. Nor, when it has shown that parents do have an influence on children do we conclude that this implies children are passive 'cultural dopes', or that parental influence is to be understood as a 'hypodermic syringe', as [is] so often stated of media effects. Nor, on the other hand, when research shows that parental influence can be harmful to children, do we jump to the conclusion that children should be brought up without parents; rather, we seek to mediate or, on occasion, to regulate (2006: 47).

As this comment implies, a more complex, holistic account of the role of the media and consumer culture in children's lives would enable us to move beyond simplistic ideas of cause-and-effect; but it would not necessarily remove any grounds for intervention, or indeed for regulation.

8.10 Alternative approaches. Alternative approaches to studying media audiences – and, by extension, consumer culture – tend to rely on qualitative methods, such as focus group interviews and observation. While this does permit in-depth exploration of people's perspectives and their everyday behaviour, such studies are bound to use small samples, which means that they cannot be claimed as representative. Interviews, however in-depth, are also subject to the limitations of self-reporting that were noted above in relation to surveys; although reports of such research often tend to take what people say in such contexts at face value. Such studies also take place in unique circumstances: they cannot be replicated in the manner of a laboratory experiment or a questionnaire. The methods of analysis such researchers employ depend heavily on interpretation, and are rarely open to inspection. The more fundamental problem in terms of this debate, however, is that such researchers are generally not looking to find 'effects' – and particularly effects at the level of the individual. The focus is more on questions of use and interpretation, which are not easy to align with questions about effects or impact. We can show that people use and interpret media in different ways, and that they make active choices in doing so; but that does not in itself mean that media have no 'effects' on them.

- 8.11 Common ground?** The polarised – and occasionally very intense – nature of this debate about theory and method, and the limitations of the research itself, make it difficult to sum up the evidence. Contrasting types of research cannot simply be added together to create a sum total, as though they were all equivalent; and ‘positive’ impacts do not simply cancel out ‘negative’ ones, or indeed *vice versa*. For example, when we take a widely-debated issue such as the effects of advertising on obesity, there is genuinely little agreement here (see Section 13 and Appendix K). Several apparently definitive reviews of research in this area have been undertaken; and while the reviews themselves are appropriately cautious, the key conclusions contained in the executive summaries (and in some cases in the accompanying press releases) seem quite widely divergent.
- 8.12 The limits of evidence.** In this situation, we feel it is appropriate to adopt a robust and sceptical stance towards the evidence on these issues. In many areas, the evidence of harmful impacts is less than persuasive – although that is not to say that there are no such impacts. Equally, the evidence of beneficial effects is far from convincing either – although again that does not mean that such effects may not exist. Definitive proof is unlikely to be found on many of these issues. So, one might well ask, does research actually tell us anything? Research can help to explore issues in a more systematic and rigorous way than is generally possible in public debate; it can hopefully alert us to *potential* risks that might not have been foreseen; and it can offer evidence of *potential* harms and benefits, which ultimately need to be weighed in the balance. In this field in particular, research can provide a valuable means of consulting with children and representing their perspectives in debates that are often conducted on their behalf but nevertheless ‘over their heads’; and, of course, it can also enable us to access the views and experiences of parents. Ultimately, however, research in this field does not generate findings that can be mechanistically translated into policy. The development of policy should make use of research, but it requires other kinds of judgment as well.

9. The benefits of the commercial world for children

It is difficult to find reliable evidence about the positive impact of the commercial world on children, particularly evidence from independent research.

Arguments in this area tend to focus on the expanding range of opportunities and choices available to children as compared with earlier times; as well as pointing to the long-term success of the market economy in delivering higher living standards, from which children have benefited, at least in material terms – albeit perhaps at the expense of growing inequality.

The commercial world provides, and has always provided, most of the media that children use; and without advertising or subscription revenue, these media would not exist.

As such, the commercial market offers children many opportunities in terms of entertainment, creativity, communication, learning and cultural experience that they would not otherwise have; but the benefits of this are hard to separate out and to quantify.

Many companies active in the children's market are engaged in a wide range of corporate social responsibility initiatives, of a broadly educational or charitable nature. However, there is little independent evidence of the positive impact of these activities on children, for example in terms of learning or general wellbeing. Any benefits of this kind should be recognised alongside the potential gain to the companies in terms of public relations or brand recognition.

- 9.1 Identifying positives.** As we have noted, the public debate about children's engagement with the commercial world is very much dominated by arguments about its negative aspects, in areas such as mental and physical health, social and personal relationships, and overall quality of life. We have found it much more difficult to identify evidence – or even persuasive arguments – about its potential benefits. One of the reasons for this may be that the positive aspects are simply taken for granted and enjoyed: good news typically attracts much less attention than bad news. The bulk of this part of the report (sections 10-16) accordingly focuses on these negative aspects; but before addressing these, we feel it is important to consider some of the positive ones.

Business perspectives

- 9.2 Consultation responses.** Broadly speaking, the responses of business stakeholders to our consultation were somewhat defensive. We received some written responses from trade associations, and a few from individual businesses, in addition to conducting several face-to-face meetings. Three key concerns recurred through these submissions:
- Representatives of businesses and trade associations sought to question the evidence relating to the harmful influence of the commercial world on children: in broad terms, they argued that the overall wellbeing of children was not in fact declining, and that in any case the commercial world was not a major cause of any negative changes. They challenged the validity of the evidence on these points in several key areas, most notably that of obesity and other aspects of physical health. On this basis, they argued that further regulation of marketing and advertising to children was unnecessary and unreasonable. (These debates are addressed in several of the following sections, and obesity is considered specifically in Section 13.)
 - Business representatives in general emphasised that they followed existing regulations and codes of practice relating to children, both those maintained within the industry and those of external regulatory authorities. They pointed out that there would be little advantage for them in gaining a reputation for irresponsible business practice. At the same time, it was recognised by some that there were emerging areas (particularly in relation to digital media) where codes of practice were less clear. (We return to the issue of regulation in more detail in Section 20.)
 - Finally, representatives of businesses and trade associations provided examples of positive initiatives involving children and young people, mostly of a broadly charitable, educational or pro-social nature. Several of these implicitly addressed concerns about negative impact, notably those relating to obesity and physical health. Some of these initiatives are identified later in this section, and some specifically educational activities are discussed in Section 18.
- 9.3 Identifying benefits.** The defensive nature of these responses is perhaps understandable, particularly given the intense debates in recent years surrounding the implementation of restrictions on the advertising of HFSS foods on children's television. However, they fall somewhat short of identifying the positive benefits of the commercial world for children's wellbeing. In the course of our meetings with business stakeholders, this issue was repeatedly raised, and at our request the Advertising Association submitted a report focusing specifically on this area, which they subsequently published. We draw on this report here, and in some later sections (notably Section 10), as well as considering some broader arguments. In general, however, the problem of establishing evidence of benefits remains. This is at least partly because it is extremely difficult to separate commercial influences from other aspects of children's lives: we cannot compare children's actual wellbeing with what it would have been if there were no 'commercial world'.

Children's consumption and positive wellbeing

- 9.4 The consumer society.** Contemporary children's engagement with the commercial world needs to be seen in light of the broader development of a capitalist 'consumer society' over the past century. The rise of industrialised mass production, the accelerating pace of technological change, the growth of global markets and increasing geographical mobility, the increasing significance of mass communications and media, and (in more recent years) the widespread enthusiasm for 'neo-liberal' or 'free market' economic policies are all part of this broader picture. We do not have the space to address these developments here, but they clearly do frame many of the more specific changes in the lives of children and families, and in the operations of the children's market, described in Part 2 of this report.
- 9.5 Positive implications for wellbeing.** It is certainly possible to offer a positive account of the benefits of the commercial world, both for people's wellbeing in general and specifically for children. The commercial world obviously generates employment and profit, which could be seen to create the conditions for economic wellbeing (one of the five dimensions identified in the Children Act). The media and cultural industries in particular are a growing and dynamic sector of the modern economy, and are especially important in sustaining Britain's competitiveness in world markets. Many claim that the commercial world responds more quickly to consumer demand than the public sector, and hence generates innovation. One could argue that the commercial world has played a major role in contributing to rising levels of affluence, and hence to the expansion of choice and opportunity. In a whole series of areas, the range of goods and services available to ordinary consumers has massively expanded; and as we have noted (Section 6), what were formerly seen as luxuries have now become much more widely available to the population at large.
- 9.6 Opportunities and choices for children.** This can be demonstrated by comparing the range of experiences available to children in British society today with those of fifty years ago. The most dramatic illustration of this is in relation to media. By comparison with the era of two television channels, the new media technologies of today offer children a massively expanded range of opportunities in terms of entertainment, communication, education and cultural experience. More books and magazines are published for children than ever before; more music is available, in a wider variety of forms and formats; and many more films, television programmes, games and other products are created specifically to address children's tastes, interests and needs. In the case of television and some other media, content is provided 'free' on the basis that it is funded by advertising. Children are no longer regarded simply as part of the family audience, and specific sub-sections of the children's market – such as very young children – are now much more extensively catered for than was the case in earlier decades. Children are able to access these media in a wider range of settings, at a time of their choice, and through a wider variety of means of delivery. They are also able to use these media to communicate independently in spoken, written and audio-visual forms, to build social relationships, and to express themselves to a wider public audience. While these developments are most apparent in relation to media, they are also evident in many other sectors of the

children's market: the choice of toys, food and clothing available to children today is vastly greater than was the case half a century ago.

- 9.7 Limits to choice.** Of course, there are significant limits to choice: these opportunities are not equally available to all, and 'market logic' means that more lucrative products will be favoured above those that are less immediately profitable. The market provides for some better than for others, and as such it can create or promote forms of inequality and social exclusion. Furthermore, an increase in quantity does not necessarily mean an increase in choice. Some argue that the apparent expansion of choice is illusory, and that all we have is greater freedom to consume more of the same types of things. These issues are addressed in several subsequent sections of this report (notably Sections 16 and 17).
- 9.8 Evidence of benefits.** On the face of it, however, it seems hard to deny that the commercial world offers today's children much greater opportunities in terms of cultural experience, communication, learning, creativity, entertainment and pleasure than was the case in earlier times. Despite serious concerns relating to issues such as physical and mental health, it is reasonable to assert that this also contributes to wellbeing. To return to the definition in the Children Act, the modern media have undoubtedly extended children's opportunities for 'participation in society', and for both education and recreation. Children can and do obviously learn a good deal from their engagement with television, the internet and other media, and from playing with toys. However, we would particularly emphasise the importance of pleasure and enjoyment here. Like adults, children too have a right to entertainment (even 'mindless' entertainment), play and relaxation: not everything they do has to be justified in terms of its educational or cultural value. Even so, it is hard to prove that children would not learn more, or enjoy themselves more, if they were doing other ('non-commercial') things; or that children who do engage in these activities are more creative, motivated or happy than those who do not. There is simply no basis for comparison here, let alone for identifying the causal contribution of the commercial dimensions of these activities.
- 9.9 Children's and parents' perspectives.** It is worth noting here that these general arguments were to some degree supported by the perspectives of children and parents, reported in Section 4. Both groups expressed concern about aspects of the commercial world, particularly in terms of what they saw as its intrusiveness and the 'pressure' it exerted. However, both children and parents recognised the many benefits they felt they enjoyed here: while these were partly about access to goods and services that they might not otherwise have, they were also to do with the ways in which they felt that consumption enhanced their social relationships with family and friends.
- 9.10 Positives and negatives are connected.** As we shall see (Section 10), surveys of children's wellbeing have some significant limitations. Even so, it is clear that many of the things that children typically identify in such surveys as most important in their lives – such as having fun, spending time with friends and family, relaxation, or following their personal interests – are inextricably connected with the commercial world. Of course, it is possible that many of the elements they identify as negative – such as having arguments with friends or family, or doing things that are harmful or injurious to their health – are also tied up with the commercial world. Just as it is difficult to separate the commercial

dimensions from other aspects of children's lives, so too it is often very hard to separate the positives from the negatives. This was a strong emphasis in the Byron Review on Children and New Technology: the potential risks of computer games and the internet (for example in terms of safety, inappropriate content, or mental health) are inextricably connected with their potential benefits (for example in terms of learning, communication and sheer pleasure). Similar arguments can be applied to other commercially-provided goods and services. Mobile phones, for example, are now almost universally used by older children, and are rapidly being taken up by younger children too; and while they may have negative aspects, for example in exposing children to the risk of bullying or intruding on family life, they also have self-evident benefits in terms of safety, communication and entertainment. As we shall see in Part 4 of this report, the 'commercialisation' of public goods and services – in areas such as broadcasting, education and play – has consequences for children's wellbeing that are potentially both positive and negative.

9.11 Evidence. The arguments we have developed here operate at a level of generality that makes it difficult to adduce evidence that would definitively support or undermine them. We can perhaps imagine a world in which goods and services were not provided to children according to commercial principles, but 'pure' examples of this are hard to identify, and would be difficult to compare with our own society. Nor is such a non-commercial world likely to be appearing at any time soon. As we have argued, children's engagement with the commercial world is bound up with much broader social and historical developments: it is very difficult to separate out the specifically commercial aspects of their lives from other aspects, and then attempt to identify the 'impact' of the commercial world on those other aspects. This is the case, we should emphasise, not only with the positive dimensions but also with the negative ones.

Corporate social responsibility

9.12 Company initiatives. The submissions to our consultation, our meetings with stakeholders, and the Advertising Association report, provided numerous examples of positive attempts on the part of businesses to enhance children's wellbeing. Many of these initiatives are run in collaboration with NGOs, charities or public organisations such as schools; while some are officially supported by, or work in collaboration with, government departments. Some involve sponsorship of existing activities, while others are run or managed by companies themselves. Some examples include:

- **Procter & Gamble.** Pampers, in association with UNICEF, runs a campaign to provide tetanus vaccinations for mothers and their babies in developing countries. Ariel runs an initiative to provide safe drinking water to children in developing countries, in association with the Children's Safe Drinking Water Programme.
- **Channel 4 and Bebo.** Battlefront is an interactive project, involving television and social networking aspects as well as face-to-face mentoring, that aims to inspire teenagers to campaign for positive social change in areas that concern them, such as knife crime and body image.

- **Cadbury.** Cadbury World offers a programme of educational talks and school/college visits to provide students with 'an opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding of what businesses do and how they meet their aims and objectives'.
- **Unilever.** The Dove Self-esteem Fund is part of its Campaign for Real Beauty, and provides educational tools and workshops for young girls on issues relating to body image and self-esteem. It works with B-eat, a national charity supporting people affected by eating disorders.
- **Coca-Cola.** Working with the English Schools Football Association, Coca-Cola have created a knockout football tournament, the Minute Maid Schools Cup, for boys and girls aged 12-13. It is supported by the DCSF and the DCMS.
- **Mattel.** Mattel's Barbie has been used to launch programmes bringing ballet to young girls, through competitions, subsidised tickets and workshops; while Hot Wheels sponsors the Beaver Scouts for 6-8 year olds, providing Fun Days and badges.
- **Nickelodeon UK.** Nicktrition is a campaign using TV shorts and website activities as well as events and publications to raise children's understanding of the need to eat healthily and be physically active. Nickelodeon's See Something Say Something is an anti-bullying campaign which has involved a TV documentary, a website and short TV spots.
- **Business4Life.** B4L is an alliance of companies representing different parts of the advertising industry, co-ordinated by the Advertising Association. It works in collaboration with the Department of Health's Change4Life campaign to address issues of overweight and obesity, by promoting messages about healthy eating, as well as initiatives such as Kellogg's support for the non-branded Breakfast Clubs programme.

Further examples of such initiatives are included in the Advertising Association report. Some other educational initiatives of this kind are discussed in Section 18; while Media Smart, an industry-funded initiative to promote media literacy, is discussed in Section 21.

9.13 Social marketing. Some of these initiatives use commercial marketing techniques, and commercial expertise, to create promotional campaigns for specific social benefits or for so-called 'merit goods'. This approach is sometimes termed 'social marketing'. Advocates of this strategy argue that the social, educational and health sectors have much to learn from the commercial sector in developing their own potentially influential brands. This approach has also recently been advocated by both the Better Business Bureau and the EU Pledge in relation to marketing food products to children. Evidence here suggests that such campaigns rarely have a dramatic effect on public behaviour and need careful and sensitive prior research and planning, especially when targeting difficult groups such as teenagers. However, with good planning, public service advertising can change behaviour significantly over time. The Government's current Change4Life campaign, part of the Department of Health's anti-obesity strategy, is an example of an ambitious, medium-term programme based on sophisticated research and planning. Even so, there remains a need for more detailed and reliable evidence of the effectiveness of such campaigns.

- 9.14 Motivations.** According to the Advertising Association report, these activities are largely undertaken out of a sense of 'civic and corporate duty', rather than with the expectation of financial return. They are run 'not by a faceless organisation, but by human beings within a large and highly respected (even loved) company or organisation who believe passionately that they are undertaking something that will improve the wellbeing – emotional, social or educational – of the young people concerned'. By contrast, others who responded to our consultation argued that such activities were merely a form of public relations – at best a means of assuaging corporate guilt, and at worst a surrogate form of advertising or smuggling 'corporate propaganda' into key areas of public life. In some cases, these initiatives can be seen as an attempt to deflect public criticism in particular areas – most notably in the case of food companies promoting sports activities or educational projects relating to health and nutrition.
- 9.15 Costs and benefits.** While this is self-evidently a political debate, some aspects are amenable to investigation, at least in principle. For example, it is likely that McDonalds has done some form of cost-benefit analysis of its Football Association Community Coaching Programme, as it must do in other areas of its activities: it should be possible to assess the economic value both of the services that are delivered (football coaching to children, training for volunteer coaches, and so on) and of the promotional effects (in terms of brand awareness, perceptions of the company, staff recruitment and engagement, and so on). The latter are clearly not easy to identify, but such measures are undoubtedly carried out in respect of promotional activities such as advertising and sponsorship. If the costs outweigh the commercial benefits (or the social benefits exceed the private benefits to the company), it is reasonable to describe the activity as a matter of 'giving something back'; if not, then it would have to be seen as a form of corporate PR. It is unlikely that calculations of this kind are not undertaken; yet evidence of this kind is not generally available.
- 9.16 Evaluating benefits.** A further problem here is that the benefits of these initiatives for children and young people do not appear to be extensively or independently evaluated. Accounts typically provide figures as to the numbers of participants or the numbers of 'free' products distributed, and measures of overall satisfaction, but there is little detailed evidence regarding the quality or effectiveness of the experience itself. This is particularly problematic in relation to educational initiatives: it is one thing to claim that thousands of teaching packs were distributed, but another to claim that they were actually used by teachers and children, and yet another to claim that children learned something that they would not otherwise have learned. If the companies' concern is indeed to do with wellbeing (or with learning), rather than simply with promoting brand awareness as widely as possible, it would seem to be important to have sound independent evidence as regards the benefits of these initiatives for children.
- 9.17 Responsible marketing.** The International Business Leaders Forum has recently launched an initiative on responsible marketing, which aims to develop new codes of practice for digital marketing, as well as promoting corporate social responsibility and social marketing projects. However, they note that companies are somewhat reluctant to become involved in this debate, and to open such activities to public scrutiny. Companies

fear their motives may be viewed with suspicion, and that they will be open to criticism from NGOs, and are therefore less likely to adopt a leadership role in this area. We would agree with them that there is currently 'a lack of a trusted space to discuss these issues in a mature way'; and we would add that such a discussion should be informed by evidence of the kind we have identified above.

Conclusion

- 9.18 Where do the benefits lie?** Corporate social responsibility initiatives of the kind we have described can be seen as more or less beneficial, depending on one's interpretation. Yet either way, they are somewhat peripheral to the core activities of the businesses concerned. The more difficult question is to what extent those core activities themselves can be seen to make a positive contribution to children's wellbeing. For example, short public service announcements about healthy eating or caring for the environment on a commercial TV channel may have a valuable effect (and that in itself largely remains to be established); but the key question is surely whether the channel's service as a whole – including its programmes and its other content, as well as its advertising – has a beneficial impact.
- 9.19 Profit and wellbeing.** Businesses obviously succeed or fail on the basis of their ability to generate profit. The generation of profit may or may not coincide with promoting the wellbeing of children: it is by no means inherently incompatible with it. The commercial world provides, and has always provided, most of the media that children use; and without advertising or subscription revenue, these media would not exist. In the case of television, for example, the programmes would not be possible without the advertising and the other promotional activities that surround them. Quite how we identify the benefits of this, and balance them against the potential risks, remains a difficult question.

10. The ethics of marketing to children

New marketing techniques raise some concerns about the fairness of marketing to children – and indeed to adults. While children can generally recognise the persuasive intentions of television advertising at a fairly young age, this is not necessarily the case with other forms of marketing and promotion, particularly the more ‘stealthy’ approaches used in new media.

There is an urgent need for further research in this area; but evidence suggests that neither children nor parents are yet sufficiently aware of these new techniques, or able to evaluate them critically.

There are also good grounds for concern about the gathering of information from or about children in this arena. While most companies do follow fair practice regulations, the terms of trade are not always well understood by children and parents.

Many of these ethical issues are being addressed in regulatory reviews that are currently under way.

- 10.1 Ethics, privacy and fairness.** The debate about marketing to children typically raises questions about ethics – and in particular about whether different ethical standards should apply to children as distinct from adults. Critics frequently describe marketing to children as deceptive or misleading – and hence as unfair or even ‘exploitative’. Defenders of the practice suggest that, on the contrary, children are knowledgeable, ‘savvy’ consumers, who are well able to understand and to resist the appeals of advertising. Both arguments were frequently expressed by the respondents to our call for evidence. There are also ethical concerns about privacy, which were particularly raised in relation to new media and the use of new market research techniques. To some extent, these issues are addressed within the existing regulatory systems, although there are other areas where new challenges are having to be faced.

Fairness and competence

- 10.2 Competence.** The debate about fair practice raises key questions about children’s competence, both in terms of their ability to understand and evaluate commercial messages (or their level of ‘advertising literacy’), and in terms of their skills as consumers (for example, in taking account of different sources of information about products, or judging value for money). Marketing to children could be deemed unfair if it is seen to take advantage of their ignorance or incompetence. On the other hand, if we can prove that children are able to understand and evaluate commercial messages – or are at least

as competent as adults in this respect – there would seem to be little basis for regulation that specifically addresses them. However, as this section will explain, the relationship between children's competence in dealing with advertising and the effects it may have upon them is fairly complex.

- 10.3 Key questions.** Are children, as some allege, particularly vulnerable to commercial influences, because they lack the cognitive abilities or the knowledge and experience that might help them to evaluate such messages? Clearly, their competence is likely to develop over time; but at what age can we say that children have *sufficient* competence to deal with the range of commercial messages they are likely to encounter? And even if children (or indeed adults) are deemed to be competent in their readings of commercial messages, does this necessarily mean that they are not influenced by them? These are among the issues that have been addressed by research in this area.
- 10.4 New media.** These issues take on particular significance in relation to new media and marketing strategies of the kind identified in Section 5. If these new techniques are less overt and visible – or indeed more 'stealthy' – than more well-established approaches, does this make them particularly unfair? For example, children are generally believed to be capable of understanding the persuasive intent of a television advertisement from about the age of seven or eight; but does that understanding necessarily transfer to practices such as product placement, embedded advertising, or viral marketing? Indeed, to what extent do most *adults* recognise the commercial nature and persuasive intentions of such practices? Given the novelty of many of these techniques, evidence on these questions is unsurprisingly quite sparse.

Children's understanding of television advertising

- 10.5 Understanding persuasive intent.** Most researchers agree that children learn to distinguish between television advertisements and programmes at a fairly early age (around three or four). Some research claims that children can identify persuasive intent by the age of around seven, although other studies suggest that, while this knowledge may be available or understood in principle, it is not necessarily always used, at least until the age of eleven or twelve (and in this respect, there may be a difference between competence and performance). Some of the differences in these estimates can be traced to the research methods employed: studies that use more 'child-centred' methods – such as pictures – that enable children to demonstrate their competence more easily tend to produce lower estimates of the age at which this understanding arises.
- 10.6 Advertising literacy and advertising effects.** Perhaps the most crucial issue here, however, is whether this developing understanding of advertising actually helps to reduce its effects. Some researchers suggest that if children do not understand the idea of persuasive communication, they are unable to use 'cognitive defences' against it – for example, by questioning the credibility of the source, or arguing against it. Some argue that children who recognise adverts as persuasive are therefore less likely to trust them, and to want the products advertised. However, this seemingly commonsense assumption is not consistently supported by the evidence. It is not necessarily the case that older

children (or indeed adults) are less influenced than younger children, nor that higher levels of media or advertising literacy lead to a reduction in media effects. Clearly, we cannot say that adults – who presumably have a firm grasp not only of persuasive intent but also of the specific strategies that advertisers tend to use – are therefore not influenced by advertising.

- 10.7 Understanding persuasion.** The most obvious explanation for this apparent anomaly is of course that advertising (like other forms of persuasive communication) works in different ways in different contexts – and that it can operate at an emotional level, as well as a rational one. The notion that we can rationally control our responses by reminding ourselves that what we are seeing is seeking to manipulate us is clearly simplistic. In addition, it is likely that commercial messages targeting older children will use more complex persuasive techniques, which make greater cognitive demands, or which operate in a less explicit way. It has also been suggested that, as a result of their level of emotional development, older children may be amenable to different kinds of commercial appeals from younger ones: some argue that teenagers have more disposable income and freedom to spend than younger children, but have yet to achieve an 'adult' level of impulse control, and may therefore be vulnerable in different ways. These suggestions remain somewhat hypothetical: relatively little research has explored them in any detail. Even so, they do imply that the psychological notion of 'advertising literacy' as a kind of rational defence mechanism would seem to be misguided.
- 10.8 Mobilising advertising literacy.** A further qualification here goes back to the point about competence and performance. Children (like adults) may know in principle that advertising intends to persuade, but they may not necessarily mobilise this kind of knowledge in specific real-world situations, or use it as a guide to consumer behaviour more generally. There are also a great many factors that can intervene between one's desire for a product (for example as prompted by advertising) and one's action in buying it, or requesting it. As in many of the other areas we consider here, what seems to be required is a more in-depth understanding of how the meanings of commercial messages are interpreted and used in everyday social settings, and how those messages 'play out' relative to other aspects of children's social and material circumstances. Such an approach is bound to undermine the developmental assumption that there is a 'magic age' at which children are somehow fully and consistently aware of persuasive intent (or sufficiently 'advertising literate') – and hence at which ethical concerns no longer apply.
- 10.9 Education and regulation.** In terms of policy, this debate also raises questions about the extent to which education can be seen as an alternative to regulation. If awareness of the persuasive intent of advertising can be shown to reduce its effects, then teaching about advertising might be seen as an effective way of responding to concerns about those effects. However, if it makes little difference in this respect, then the argument does not hold. As we shall see in Section 21, there is relatively little evidence about the effect or effectiveness of media literacy education; although it is worth noting that most teachers in the field would not in any case see their aim as being to reduce harmful effects. Furthermore, there are good arguments for seeing education as a complement to regulation, and not as an alternative to it: this is not an either/or choice.

The ethics of digital marketing

- 10.10 The characteristics of digital marketing.** As we have suggested (Section 5), online and digital marketing raise many new issues in this respect. New marketing techniques potentially blur the boundaries between promotional messages and other content, making it possible to embed advertising in contexts where it is less likely to be recognised as such. These techniques are 'personalised', in the sense that users appear to be receiving commercial messages that are uniquely addressed to their individual needs. They provide new opportunities for 'peer-to-peer' marketing – in effect, for a modern form of 'word-of-mouth', whereby users (rather than companies) are seen as the authors or at least the distributors of commercial messages. And digital media also offer much greater efficiency in terms of gathering information about individual consumers and tracking their behaviour, without them necessarily knowing about this.
- 10.11 Digital marketing to children and young people.** In the case of many digital media, young people are typically seen as 'early adopters' (for example in the case of computer games or social networking sites), and hence as a key market. Ethical and logistical constraints on gathering data about children may be easier to overcome in these new domains. As we have noted, marketing is increasingly moving away from television and into online and digital media; and the stricter regulation of television advertising (at least in relation to HFSS foods) may well have encouraged this (see Section 20). Yet although they may recognise the potential in this respect, marketers themselves are finding out about these new media partly by trial and error, while the technology itself is developing very rapidly. The ability of many key digital services to generate significant income remains to be proven.
- 10.12 Children's competence.** Notwithstanding inflated claims about children's skill and sophistication in relation to digital media, it may be difficult for children (and indeed for adults) to distinguish marketing from other content. The domain of online marketing is relatively new territory in terms of academic research: while some studies have tracked the changing nature and extent of these new practices, there has been very little analysis of how young people (or people in general) understand or relate to them.
- 10.13 Fair game?** A substantial study for the National Consumer Council and Childnet identified numerous areas of concern in this area, such as companies that flout privacy rules, the advertising of goods or services (such as gambling or dating agencies) to children below the prescribed age limit, the use of hidden persuasive techniques, confusing information being provided (for example on data protection policies), and various other potentially misleading practices – although in general it suggested that companies were following fair practice regulations. At the same time, the study provided some more reassuring evidence about children's and parents' ability to cope with this. Children in the study generally seemed aware of (and resistant towards) online advertising and marketing 'scams', although they were less aware of 'stealthy' techniques such as advergames and product placement, and the commercial dimensions of the internet more generally. While parents seemed very aware of safety and privacy issues, they were less aware of (and much less concerned about) the commercial dimensions. In

general, there was a sense here that both parents and children learnt from the mistakes they made in this regard, and that this learning was negotiated between them.

- 10.14 Recognising persuasive intent.** As we have noted, there is a general consensus among researchers as to the age at which children grasp the persuasive intent of television advertising. When it comes to online media, there is much less evidence on the matter. Some campaigners argue that online advertising is unfair for much older children, because it is so much harder to identify as such. Given that promotional messages are now more invisibly embedded in other content, it seems likely that understanding persuasive intent will be a much more complex matter. While the evidence is less than definitive, it is reasonable to assume that children are less likely to understand the commercial dimensions of online marketing than of 'older' media; and yet digital media are less strictly and consistently regulated than media such as television.
- 10.15 Privacy.** The further key dimension of digital media in this regard is their potential for surveillance, and for gathering information about individual consumers. 'Personalised' marketing has advantages, not just for companies, but also for consumers: it means that people are more likely to receive promotional material that is directly related to their needs and interests, and less obliged to wade through large amounts of irrelevant material. However, this can entail forms of data-gathering that are both overt (for example, requiring users to supply personal details) and covert or hidden from the user (for example, in the case of 'cookies'). Children may also be encouraged or required to provide personal information about others, for example parents or friends, without their knowledge. It is not always the case that users are informed about how such data will be subsequently used; or that information about the terms of use are conveyed in a clear and accessible manner, particularly for children. There are also questions about who owns the material that children supply in this context: children's blogs, their contributions to chatrooms, or their 'user-generated content' (the photographs or videos they post on sharing sites) may in fact be owned by the proprietors of those sites, who may be able to sell this material on. Again, the terms of trade of such transactions are often very far from clearly explained. It should also be noted that the two key pieces of privacy legislation (Data Protection Act 1998 and Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003) do not have special provisions for children. This is an aspect of online safety that tends to be overlooked in favour of more 'spectacular' (but much less ubiquitous) risks to children such as those relating to so-called 'stranger danger'. Again, evidence of children's understanding of these commercial dimensions of digital media is very limited; but it seems reasonable to conclude that there is a significantly greater degree of risk here than is the case with 'older' media, which are more strictly regulated.
- 10.16 Market research.** A further dimension of this is the use of potentially intrusive techniques in the conducting of market research with children. While there is a long history of market research in this field, concern has been expressed that children are being recruited for market research at an ever-younger age, that the aims of such research are not always clearly explained, and that there are violations of privacy as researchers are increasingly keen on studying children in their 'natural habitat' of the home or the peer group. The gathering of such data online also raises issues, particularly as data is aggregated and

sorted; and it has been suggested that common practices of data mining undermine children's rights to privacy online.

- 10.17 Regulation.** It is important to acknowledge that these concerns are beginning to be recognised by regulators and by industry, and work in this area is currently ongoing. Key initiatives here would include the review of the CAP and BCAP Codes; the review of market research with children being conducted by the Market Research Society Standards Board; and the report of the Digital Media Group on the future regulation or self-regulation of online marketing, which is due to appear later this year; and the pending review of the Direct Marketing Association Code. This is discussed in more detail in Section 20.

Conclusion: figuring out the arguments

- 10.18 Ethics.** It is important to distinguish between two possible conclusions here, the first of which relates to ethics, the second to impact. The first would argue that, in the online media environment, the fairness argument should be extended to encompass older children and teenagers (and indeed adults). This presumes that if embedded marketing and other 'stealthy' marketing practices cannot be recognised as such, they are by definition unfair. This argument depends upon evidence about the age at which such recognition is deemed to occur – in other words, the age at which children become 'advertising literate' in respect of new media. It also requires us to demonstrate that particular techniques are indeed misleading or deceptive. We do not yet have definitive evidence on this matter; and it may prove to be the case that in fact adults are less likely to develop such knowledge than some more 'media savvy' children. Nevertheless, there are quite strong grounds for concern here, in respect of children's awareness of the existence and persuasive intent of commercial messages, and in relation to privacy.
- 10.19 Harmful effects.** The second possible conclusion is primarily about the effects or impact of commercial marketing, rather than about fairness. This would be to argue that, irrespective of what children understand about persuasive intent, and whether or not they recognise the embedded messages they encounter, marketing to children is inappropriate because it influences them in an inappropriate or harmful manner. As we shall see, this is the argument of those concerned about issues such as materialism, sexualisation and obesity; and it typically leads to calls for the restriction of marketing and advertising *per se*, at least in particular areas. This argument depends upon evidence about the extent of influence – for example, about the contribution of advertising to causing obesity – and about how we evaluate the importance of the concerns themselves. It is to these kinds of issues that we turn in the following sections.

11. Wellbeing, mental health and materialism

Wellbeing, mental health and materialism are defined and measured in various ways.

Referrals to mental health services have increased, which may indicate a genuine increase in mental health problems; although it may equally reflect the fact that people are more likely to report such problems.

Many surveys show relatively high levels of life satisfaction among children, although these are lower in the UK than in other similar countries. The basis for any historical or international comparison here is very limited; and it is especially hard to assess the contribution of the commercial world in this respect.

The evidence on whether children are more materialistic than in earlier times is mixed and unclear. Materialistic attitudes are associated with lower levels of wellbeing, but it is not clear whether materialism causes poor wellbeing or vice-versa. Children who watch more television tend to be more materialistic; but again, the direction of any causal relationship has not been clearly established.

It is highly likely that other factors (such as material deprivation) play a role here, but the relationships between these factors are as yet poorly understood.

Wellbeing

- 11.1 Defining wellbeing.** The concept of wellbeing is increasingly pervasive, but notoriously difficult to define. Some definitions tend to link it with health, and particularly mental health: wellbeing here is effectively equated with happiness, or simply 'feeling good'. Others define the concept negatively, as the absence of illness or pathology. However, such definitions tend to be circular: wellbeing means being well, or not being unwell. The DCSF definition, as located in Every Child Matters, focuses on the five outcomes: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic wellbeing. While this is usefully broad, it is also somewhat circular, and depends very much on what we mean by terms like 'positive' or 'healthy', for example.
- 11.2 Measuring wellbeing.** In order to be accountable, government departments need measurable indicators. Yet wellbeing is abstract, and thus difficult to measure. The fact that the term is used in different ways in different contexts, disciplines and cultures can lead to misunderstandings. Other things become confused with wellbeing, such as 'emotional health', and this leads to ambiguities. However, research on wellbeing tends to be dominated by a rather narrow approach to testing and measurement. One further

criticism here is that the notion of wellbeing tends to be individualistic: it looks for problems and solutions in individuals rather than broader contexts and structures.

- 11.3 Children's wellbeing.** There may also be a mismatch between children's and adults' views of wellbeing. Wellbeing is not a term that children and young people generally use (nor indeed do their parents, nor probably most 'lay' people). Research has found that children's views of what is important to their quality of life or wellbeing may differ from adults' views of what is best for children. Children tend to define wellbeing through feelings: feeling secure, being able to act freely and make choices, having stable relationships and material resources. However, feelings may differ (and be expressed in different ways) according to culture and context; and there could well be differences between 'subjective' and 'objective' wellbeing. This is especially problematic in relation to children, and raises further questions about how children are understood – for example as people with rights, beings in need of protection, or demons out of control.
- 11.4 Wellbeing and the commercial world.** In general terms, we can posit several possible relationships between wellbeing and the commercial world. On the one hand, buying goods or working to earn money can make people feel good: it can generate a sense of belonging and satisfaction. Equally, not having the resources to buy consumer goods, or not being able to work, can make people feel bad or excluded. However, we might also argue that personal relationships are a crucial dimension of wellbeing. In that case, anything that causes people to value material possessions (or indeed money itself) more than people – in other words, 'materialism' – might be seen to conflict with wellbeing. At least in principle, therefore, participation in the commercial world could be seen to generate wellbeing or to undermine it (or indeed both). One pertinent question here is whether there is any difference between children and adults in this respect. Is children's wellbeing particularly fragile or vulnerable to being undermined and, if so, does that vulnerability stem from their lack of experience or from their psychological immaturity?
- 11.5 Subjective wellbeing.** Different aspects of wellbeing contained in the DCSF five outcomes are addressed in various sections of this report. For example, issues relating to personal relationships are explored in Sections 12 and 14; physical health in Sections 13 and 14; safety in Sections 10 and 15; and material or economic wellbeing in Section 16. Our focus here, however, is primarily on the more subjective aspects relating to mental or emotional health and to attitudes, particularly the notion of 'materialism'.

Is children's wellbeing declining?

- 11.6 The bad news.** It has frequently been claimed that the wellbeing of children in the UK is in decline, or at least that it is much lower than in other similar countries. For example, there was widespread publicity for a 2007 UNICEF survey that placed the UK at the bottom of an international league table of children's 'quality of life' in 21 industrialised countries. While this study looked at a range of factors, including education and material deprivation, several of the key indicators related to more subjective aspects such as the perceived quality of relationships and 'feeling good'. As we have seen, claims about a

crisis in children's wellbeing are also central to popular arguments about the 'loss of childhood' – although such claims themselves are far from new.

- 11.7 Assessing the evidence.** Given the difficulties we have noted in defining and measuring wellbeing, it is hard to assess the evidence for these claims. Cross-cultural and historical comparisons are particularly difficult. International comparisons of the kind undertaken in the UNICEF report are obviously problematic, not least because it is hard to translate key terms across languages, and because the social conventions for expressing emotions are likely to vary between cultures. In terms of historical comparisons, it has been claimed that mental health problems among children increased significantly between the 1970s and the late 1990s: over this period, reported problems relating to aggression and anti-social behaviour doubled, while depression increased by 50% – although perhaps surprisingly there was no rise in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Yet the fact that more children are treated by psychiatrists and prescribed medication does not in itself indicate that mental health problems are increasing: it may merely suggest that people are more likely to report them, or indeed that such problems have been 'medicalised'. Some studies suggest that heightened awareness of a mental health 'epidemic' is in fact due to increased levels of diagnosis. While some claim that these problems are caused by rising levels of affluence (the 'affluenza' thesis), others point out that they are more likely to be registered among the economically disadvantaged – which would suggest that if the commercial world plays a role here, it is likely to be a complex one (for further discussion, see Section 16). Interestingly, the incidence of such problems has remained relatively stable over the past decade; as indeed have indices of adults' self-declared 'life satisfaction'.
- 11.8 Glasses half empty?** One further difficulty is that such measurements implicitly invoke normative judgments about what *should* be the case. It may be bad news to discover, for example, from a 2008 survey that 10% of young people have considered suicide (although it is worth noting that another survey in 2003 found that more than a quarter of young people have 'had thoughts' about suicide, and that the actual suicide rate among young men has recently fallen to its lowest level in 30 years). However, one's response to such figures obviously relates to one's expectations – some would find such figures surprisingly low. It may be that the expectation that children *should* live a 'happy' childhood is a relatively modern idea: it would certainly have made little sense to the majority of the population even in the nineteenth century, and certainly before that.
- 11.9 Evidence from the Children's Plan and other surveys.** The DCSF's review of evidence for the Children's Plan provides comprehensive figures on the five key outcomes, and does not need to be summarised here. However, it is important to note that on issues relating to mental health the conclusions are mixed. Mental health referrals have indeed increased, but rates of suicide and self-harm are lower than in other similar countries. 90% of UK children report that they are happy about their life as a whole, although the UK nevertheless performs fairly poorly on international comparisons of life satisfaction. Meanwhile, in the 2008 ChildWise survey, 88% of children said that they were satisfied about themselves, 91% that they felt good about themselves, and 85% that they were able to do things as well as most other people. Youth TGI, a large-scale market research

survey, has also found a slight upward trend over the past 5 years in children expressing optimism about the future – perhaps a surprising finding in light of world events, and media coverage of those events. While figures of this kind have limited value, they do suggest that claims of a major decline in children's overall subjective or emotional wellbeing need to be treated with considerable caution.

- 11.10 The role of the commercial world.** Commentators on this debate frequently claim that the commercial world – or the rise of 'consumerism' – is a key cause of the alleged decline in children's wellbeing. Others (such as the Advertising Association) contend that children's wellbeing has in fact remained pretty much the same alongside the apparent rise in commercialism, and that commercialism therefore cannot be seen to play any role in this respect. Yet there is very little convincing evidence either way here. It may be that the commercial world does undermine children's wellbeing, but that other factors are compensating for this. It may be that children's wellbeing would be higher if they were not exposed to the commercial world. Or it may be that the commercial world is in fact improving children's wellbeing, but that other factors are undermining it. The one area where these issues have been researched rather more rigorously is in relation to the concept of materialism – although the picture here is also less than clear.

Materialism

- 11.11 Defining materialism.** Unfortunately, materialism is another contested, and somewhat ill-defined, concept. Several of the responses to our consultation employed this term, in some cases bemoaning children's 'throwaway attitude' and their ignorance of the more meaningful things in life. Advertising, we were told in one submission, 'cheapens life itself'; while others condemned modern children as merely 'spoilt'. Such complaints obviously have a long history. The accusation of 'materialism' also often reflects normative judgments: some material goods (most often those associated with popular culture, celebrities and fashion) are seen as bad, while others (particularly those associated with high culture, such as books or works of art) are seen as inherently good.
- 11.12 Are we becoming more materialistic?** Researchers have attempted to measure materialism in various ways, and numerous psychological scales have been employed. These scales are not consistent with each other; and the questions are evidently based on self-reported attitudes rather than actual behaviour. If we take materialism (in fairly crude terms) to refer to the tendency to value material things more than people, there seems to be little evidence that children and young people today are becoming more materialistic. Indeed, there is a fairly extensive body of research within Political Science that suggests that the affluence of the post-war period created a generational shift in attitudes, and that young people in particular are now more inclined to espouse 'post-materialistic' values. Others have challenged the idea that the contemporary world is becoming more 'commodified', arguing that non-commodified forms of work and social activity have in fact grown in recent years – particularly among more affluent social groups.
- 11.13 Survey evidence on children.** The Youth TGI survey, in common with others, finds that children say they value 'non-material' aspects of life, and that there has been little change

in this respect over the years. Friendship, love, helping others and leading a healthy life gain significantly higher ratings than having lots of money or possessions. Children rate spending time with family and friends as very important, alongside aspects such as physical health, travelling, music and (interestingly) knowing how to save money. (These figures relate mainly to those aged 11-19.) This survey also suggests that around 25% of children claim to find shopping for clothes boring; while in a 2007 National Consumer Council survey, almost 40% of children disagreed with the statement 'I really like to go shopping' (although the term 'shopping' is bound to have quite different associations for different people). On the other hand, surveys also suggest that the things that worry children tend to be external threats such as knife crime or terrorism, or related to education (such as examinations). This data may not be entirely clear or reliable, but they do suggest that young people regard other things as more important than the mere acquisition or possession of material goods. These surveys to some extent reinforce the conclusion from our own (much less systematic) consultations with children (Section 4).

- 11.14 Materialism and wellbeing.** Whether or not materialism is increasing, there is some indication that it is related to the wellbeing of adults and children – although research in this area uses a range of different constructs such as self-esteem, depression and quality of life. In respect of adults, several global studies have assessed the relationship between the material wealth of a nation and the happiness of its citizens. In broad terms, these conclude that once the majority of a nation's population has risen above the poverty line, an increase in material wealth does not equate to a concomitant increase in happiness (however it is measured). Happiness appears to be more directly related to wealth equality within a country: the happiest countries overall are those with more social equality rather than more money. On a micro level, several psychological studies have suggested that individuals who hold more materialistic values tend to score lower on 'life satisfaction', perhaps because they perceive an unsatisfying gap between their current life status and some ideal to which they aspire. Undue focus on reaching this status is also associated with impaired social relationships, which in turn are associated with reduced wellbeing. While there is much less evidence relating to children, the broad findings of this research are similar.
- 11.15 Measuring materialism.** However, questions have been raised about the validity of measures of 'life satisfaction' and 'happiness', and particularly about the difficulty of applying adult scales to children. Many of the scales used to measure wellbeing were in fact designed for medical practitioners to diagnose disorders such as depression, anxiety and various psychosomatic conditions. When it comes to materialism, various scales have been developed, focusing on factors such as Brand Attachment, Acquisitiveness and Material Dissatisfaction. Whilst Brand Attachment and Acquisitiveness do not seem to be associated with wellbeing measures, Material Dissatisfaction (e.g. 'I wish my parents bought me more stuff') is highly correlated with negative wellbeing (whether measured in terms of self-esteem or a tendency to psychological disorder). This would imply that, as with adult (un)happiness, negative psychological conditions are strongly associated with the perception of a gap between current status and aspirations.

- 11.16 Materialism and insecurity.** Developmental psychologists argue that materialism develops in two ways, as a consequence of insecurities, and through a process of socialisation. These two routes may be related and are not incompatible. In the first route, children come to believe that buying things can solve a number of insecurity issues such as dissatisfaction with appearance, difficulties at school, being bullied, or an unhappy home life. These insecurities are seen to fluctuate with age: some research suggests that self-esteem dips as children hit puberty, which may partly account for an enhanced interest in brands and shopping at this age. By the time they reach the late teenage years, young people's self-esteem improves, and they come to place more emphasis on activities and achievements rather than branded goods as a means of self-definition. However, this would imply that a lack of general wellbeing accounts for a rise in materialism, rather than the other way round: materialism in this sense is a kind of coping strategy, a compensatory response to poor wellbeing, rather than a cause of it.
- 11.17 Materialism, parents and peers.** In the second route, the strength of materialistic beliefs is seen to be reinforced or weakened by the social forces of peers, family and the media. Parenting styles and family communication patterns play an important mediating role here: more materialistic parents are likely to have more materialistic children. Research suggests that highly materialistic children are more inclined to pester their parents to buy things for them, and hence more likely to argue with them. High levels of parent-child conflict are in turn associated with negative wellbeing in children. However, other studies suggest that materialism and happiness are not related. It is also argued that after the divorce of parents, teenagers tend to place more value on material objects, perhaps to compensate for their insecurities. Among older children, it appears that unpopular and insecure children feel most under pressure to conform to peer norms by buying the right brands – in effect, they seek to buy the acceptance and popularity they lack. Here again, it would seem that poor wellbeing results in greater materialism, rather than *vice versa*. These pressures may also be experienced most strongly by children and parents in low-income families. (These issues are discussed in more detail in Sections 12 and 16.)
- 11.18 Materialism and the commercial world.** While the association between materialism and wellbeing in this kind of research is reasonably clear, the contribution of the commercial world is a little harder to assess. One way of empirically measuring this has been to correlate exposure to various media with materialism. Thus, a number of studies both in the UK and elsewhere have shown associations between TV watching, internet usage and advertising exposure and levels of materialism. Children who frequently watch television commercials are more likely to express stronger materialistic values than those who do so less often. Other studies suggest that boys and those in lower income families are more likely to express materialistic beliefs than girls and those from higher income families. However, in some studies, expected relationships between materialism, exposure to advertising and wellbeing do not appear, or are relatively weak; and the overall evidence is somewhat mixed.
- 11.19 Causal relationships.** However, the key problem throughout this body of research is determining the direction of any causal relationship. As we have suggested, it is possible that materialism causes poor wellbeing; but it is also possible that poor wellbeing leads

to greater materialism, as people look to material possessions in order to cheer themselves up. Likewise, it is possible that TV viewing encourages materialistic values; but it is also possible that materialistic children watch more TV because this feeds their aspirations. Of course it would seem very likely that there are other factors in play that contribute to, and mediate, all of these phenomena: in particular, as we shall see in more detail in Section 16, relative levels of affluence play a vital (albeit complex) role. Likewise, research suggests that more materialistic young people are likely to communicate more frequently with their friends, and to be more susceptible to their influence. While it is possible that 'peer pressure' might foster materialism, it is equally possible that children who are more materialistic in the first place may be more inclined to communicate with friends about new purchases. As yet, the research in this field does not provide definitive evidence about the causal connections between these different aspects.

Conclusion

11.20 Inconclusive evidence. On the face of it, it is not unreasonable to assume that children's lives have become more focused around material possessions; and that more materialistic attitudes might be leading to a degree of unhappiness and emotional stress. However, evidence in support of these arguments is very limited. This is for a variety of reasons:

- Several of the key terms at stake (not least materialism and wellbeing) are inconsistently and vaguely defined.
- The available means of measuring these phenomena are diverse and incompatible, or still in development.
- There is no historical or longitudinal data that would enable us to say whether children and young people are becoming more or less materialistic, or whether their wellbeing has declined or improved over time.
- While there are associations between wellbeing, materialism and exposure to commercial influences, the relationships between these different phenomena are not always clear or consistent, and causal connections have not been definitively established.

These limitations reflect the difficulties of research in this area, and the complexity of the issues at stake. There is a need for further definition of key terms, and for more focused, longitudinal studies here.

12. Consumption and conflict: families and peer groups

Adults still exert much more influence on what children – especially young children – buy and consume than *vice versa*. Even so, children appear to have a growing influence on parents' expenditure.

While some see this as a reflection of a more democratic approach to parenting, others argue that children are exerting (and being encouraged by marketers to exert) excessive or unfair pressure.

Research suggests that watching television advertising is associated with making more purchasing requests, which in turn is associated with conflict between parents and children. However, this research does not substantiate the claim that exposure to advertising *in itself* stimulates more family conflict than would have occurred in any case, or indeed that such conflict is increasing – although many parents say they believe there is a causal connection here.

There is good evidence that children feel pressured to wear particular brands of clothing, and that this can be crucial to their sense of belonging and status within the peer group. However, there is also some evidence that this phenomenon is slightly declining and that children claim to value individuality.

Both peer pressure and 'pester power' may be particularly acute for children in less wealthy families, and these effects vary by the age and gender of the child.

Regulatory codes on advertising explicitly discourage 'pester power' and incitement to peer pressure. However, some new marketing techniques depend very much on communication among friends and are not covered by such regulations, except insofar as parental consent is required.

- 12.1 Impacts on social relationships.** We have considered general patterns of change in children's social relationships in previous sections (notably Sections 6 and 7). Here we focus specifically on the issue of *impact*, and address concerns that were raised by several of the responses to our consultation, to do with the effects of children's consumption on their relationships with their parents and friends. As we have noted, there are many positive dimensions that might be considered here: shopping, for example, can partly be understood as an enjoyable sociable experience that helps to build relationships between parents and children, and among friends. However, popular debates tend to represent these effects in negative terms: parents are seen to be suffering from children's ability to mobilise 'pester power'; while commercial pressures are also seen to lead to forms of

intimidation and bullying within the peer group. To what extent are these concerns substantiated by the evidence from research?

- 12.2 Material culture.** Several sociologists and anthropologists have explored the social functions of 'material culture'. The purchasing, giving, exchange and display of material goods serve numerous purposes, for example in terms of demonstrating or asserting social status, deference, intimate love, group membership and family togetherness. This is the case, not only in advanced capitalist societies, but also in non-capitalist and ancient cultures. The goods we buy and display on our person or in our homes help to define who we are, or who we aspire to be. Some contemporary critics, however, suggest that this process is at least distorted by the operations of the commercial market; and that this in turn has harmful consequences for social relationships. This, then, is the question about impact: do commercial influences cause, or at least significantly contribute to, undesirable aspects of children's personal relationships; or do consumer goods merely provide a vehicle, a resource, for processes that would be happening in any case?

Children, parents and 'pester power'

- 12.3 The influence market.** In all sorts of ways, adults continue to exert much more influence on what children – especially young children – buy and consume than *vice versa*. However, as we have noted (section 5), children have been seen by marketers as a major influence on parents' purchasing decisions – although the extent of that influence is almost impossible to quantify. Research suggests that the influence depends upon the expense of the product, and its specific relevance to children themselves: it can be fairly important in the case of food and leisure activities, and even holidays and computers, but is less so in the case of cars or property. This influence can extend from initiating purchases to collecting information on alternatives, or suggesting retailers. Some research suggests that older children exercise greater influence than younger ones, and that children in more affluent families are more influential than those in less wealthy families.

- 12.4 Consulting children.** Some researchers argue that parents today are more likely to consult children about such matters than they were in earlier times. Definitive evidence for this would be difficult to establish, but it would seem likely for several reasons. With more mothers working, tasks such as shopping may be more likely to fall to children. Partly through their exposure to commercial messages, children could well be seen to possess greater knowledge about purchasing and consumption. Indeed, it may be that in many areas (such as technology), children possess greater expertise than their parents, and can introduce them to new trends or products, contribute relevant information, and help them to install or use new products. This can also alleviate parents from complex and time-consuming decision making. This 'consultancy' role appears to be particularly important among mid- to late-teenagers, who often play a key role in family purchasing decisions in particular areas. Teenagers can mobilise knowledge gained from personal and friends' experiences, and from the internet and other media sources, as a means of exercising influence, and this is generally perceived in a positive way by parents.

However, research suggests that children may be less influential, particularly in the final stages of decision making, than they aspire to be.

- 12.5 The democratic – and time-pressured – family.** One other factor here is the perceived democratisation of relationships within families – a development that is partly about changing ideas about child-rearing, as well as a consequence of material changes (such as the reduction in the birth rate). These developments are in turn reflected in the changing uses of the media within family life (see Section 6), and in the role of consumption. The leading marketing researcher James McNeal, for example, describes the modern family as a ‘filarchy’, in which much of the decision making has now been ceded to children. Parents buy things for their children as an expression of loving and giving, and of wanting to please and delight – and this is another facet of parents’ emotional life to which marketers have consistently sought to appeal. At the same time, parents in general are experiencing growing ‘time pressure’: spending less time with their children than they believe they should, they invest more heavily in it, not least financially. Consulting with children about purchasing, and being more inclined to accede to their demands, can thus be seen to provide a form of compensation for parental guilt.
- 12.6 Regulating ‘pester power’.** In the UK at least, the regulatory codes prohibit marketers from directly urging children to ask their parents for purchases: ‘don’t forget the Fruit Gums, mum!’ would now be an unacceptable marketing slogan. Section 7.3 of the BCAP code states that ‘advertisements must not directly advise or ask children to buy or to ask their parents or others to make enquiries or purchases’; while the ICC Code states that ‘marketing communication should not imply that the product being promoted is immediately within the reach of every family budget’. However, this obviously does not prevent indirect influence, and marketers clearly know this; and the codes do not apply to aspects of online marketing such as ‘wish lists’ on internet shopping sites.
- 12.7 Advertising and parent-child conflict.** The question, then, is whether advertising results in children making more requests for purchases – whether in their role as an influence market, or on their own behalf; and whether these requests then cause greater conflict between parents and children. Some research in the US and in the Netherlands suggests that advertising exposure is associated with an increased number of purchasing requests, which is in turn associated with parent-child conflict. This work also suggests that such associations are more likely among younger children: while this may be due to the possibility that younger children are more susceptible to advertising effects, it may also be that they have greater difficulty in delaying gratification – or indeed that older children are simply more sophisticated and effective in their persuasive techniques (and hence less likely to precipitate conflict). Such associations have been shown to be stronger for boys than girls (which would imply that boys are more persistent, or perhaps less subtle, in their approach). They also appear to be stronger among children in lower-income families: this may be because such children tend to watch more television, or that such requests may be more likely to result in parent-child conflict when there is less money to go around. It also appears from some studies that low-income parents are less likely to discuss advertising effects with their children, and it is suggested that they are therefore less well-equipped to resist advertising appeals.

- 12.8 Directions of influence.** This research has identified some associations (or correlations) between media use, purchasing requests and family conflict. However, it does not provide convincing evidence as regards the direction of any causal relationships between these things. Thus, it may be that watching television advertising prompts children to pester their parents to buy things; but it may equally be that children who are inclined to do so anyway are more likely to pay close attention to advertising. It may also be that children who are inclined (for whatever reason) to get into conflicts with their parents about purchases are also inclined to watch more television. As such, this research does not substantiate the key assertion that exposure to advertising stimulates more family conflict than would have occurred in any case: more research is needed in this area.
- 12.9 Children as proxy consumers.** It is also important to note here that children can serve as vehicles for parental consumption, and particularly for the conspicuous display of high-status goods, well before they are able to articulate their own wants or needs. Research in more wealthy societies such as Norway has pointed to the phenomenon of 'trophy children', and the considerable amounts of money spent on items such as high-tech buggies, designer baby clothes and play equipment by affluent parents (and indeed grandparents). Marketers clearly target parents through appealing to beliefs about good parenting, and to their emotional investments in their children. Historical studies have identified the tension here between parents' desire to shelter and nurture their children and their desire to allow children a space for self-expression, in which they can indulge the freedom parents themselves have lost. In this sense, children can serve as proxies or vehicles for parents' consumption.

Consumption and conflict in children's peer groups

- 12.10 Status and power in the peer group.** The consumption and display of material goods also play a role in how identities and power relationships are negotiated in children's friendship groups. The more negative side of this relates to the bullying of children who are less able to claim status through displaying the 'correct' consumer goods – most notably in the form of branded clothing. Equally, it may be that children use branded goods as a means of defending themselves, or of deflecting potential bullying that might occur on other grounds. There has been relatively little research in this area, although there have been some useful recent studies in the UK.
- 12.11 Looking right.** One recent qualitative study conducted at the University of Leicester looked at the role of clothing choices for children aged 6-11. It suggested that clothing is a key area for children's 'identity work', through which they seek to conform to social norms and make claims about their own status or personality. The quality and the brand of clothing are key concerns in this respect, even for quite young children; and some parents and children perceive a strong element of 'peer pressure' here. Gender and age differences are particularly significant in this respect. While some girls in particular expressed a desire for clothing that would 'age them up', parents expressed concern about dress that they regarded as inappropriately sexual and 'adult' (see Section 14). Although boys were generally less interested in fashion than girls, there was an exception in the case of branded sportswear, which was seen to represent an aspirational form of

adult masculinity. Both for boys and girls, having the 'right stuff' – in the form of branded goods, with labels and logos clearly displayed – was critically important in terms of self-image and peer group status. The financial pressure that results from this is obviously likely to be greater for low-income families.

- 12.12 Fitting in and sticking out.** Another recent qualitative study conducted by researchers at the University of Bath and the Open University looked at the role of consumption in the complex and ever-changing world of teenagers' 'style groups'. These groups were typically differentiated in terms of gender, ethnicity and social class, and seen by their members to entail distinctive tastes in terms of music and clothing, as well as particular values, not least in relation to gender identity. The study found a tension between young people's desire to 'fit in' (to demonstrate their affiliation with the group) and their attempts to 'stick out' (to display their individuality). Group membership was frequently demonstrated through the display of particular brands that were often not recognised by others outside the group. It found that young people could be socially ostracised or belittled for wearing the 'wrong' clothes, and that some style groups were very dismissive of others on this basis. The wearing of designer labels was seen to carry complex meanings in terms of gender and ethnic identity, for example with boys being teased for wearing 'girlish' clothes or playing with 'girlish' toys.
- 12.13 Media tastes.** More broadly, there have been numerous studies exploring the ways in which children establish and proclaim their media tastes and preferences, and the functions this serves in terms of their peer group relationships. Here again, claiming expertise in a particular media form or genre can be a powerful means of establishing status and authority within the peer group – although such claims are frequently contested by others. Talk about media serves as an area for 'identity work', in which factors such as social class, gender and age play an important role: in making claims about their media preferences, children are simultaneously defining themselves, for example in relation to established assumptions about masculinity or femininity, or in relation to ideas about what is appropriate for children to see or to know about. Here again, some children can be mocked and even bullied by others for betraying tastes that are regarded as inappropriately 'babyish' or 'uncool' or as associated with the opposite sex.
- 12.14 Constructing child consumers.** Adults frequently suggest that young people are especially vulnerable to 'peer pressure', as though they themselves were somehow uninfluenced by the opinions of their own peers. Some developmental psychologists would argue that this is particularly important in adolescence, when the tension between 'fitting in' and 'sticking out' can be especially fraught. Some campaigners argue that marketers exploit this apparent vulnerability, not least by appealing to concerns about physical appearance and body image (see Section 14). However, many of the processes considered here are by no means unique to children and young people: they apply equally – albeit sometimes in different and more subtle ways – to adults. The research described here also suggests that young people themselves may be very aware – and indeed very critical – of these processes. They are certainly keen to resist the implication that they are 'slaves to the brand' or that they merely follow the crowd (see Section 4) –

although of course that does not necessarily mean that they manage to achieve this degree of independence and individuality in practice.

12.15 Changing attitudes? In this latter respect, some quite interesting trends are noticeable in the 2008 Youth TGI survey. Although there seems to have been an increase in fashion consciousness during the 1990s, this is now in decline. The number of children (11-19) who say they 'like keeping up with the latest fashions', who 'like branded clothing with logos' and who 'prefer to buy things friends would approve of' has fallen somewhat in the current decade. Meanwhile, the proportion of those who say they 'prefer lots of cheaper clothes than a few expensive ones' (*sic*) has risen. As we have seen (Section 11), there is also data from this and other surveys that suggest that children may be becoming less rather than more 'materialistic' in their attitudes. This data has its limitations, however: there may well be a social desirability aspect to such 'anti-materialistic' responses, at least for some children. Whether such evidence attests to the declining significance of commercial influences on children is certainly debatable.

12.16 Regulatory codes. Finally, it is worth noting that existing regulatory codes on advertising also discourage incitement to 'peer pressure'. The BCAP Code (section 7.2.2) runs as follows:

Advertisements must not imply that children will be inferior to others, disloyal or will have let someone down, if they or their family do not buy, consume or use a product or service.

Advertisements must neither try to sell to children by appealing to emotions such as pity, fear, loyalty or self-confidence nor suggest that having the advertised product somehow confers superiority, for example making a child more confident, clever, popular, or successful.

Advertisements addressed to children should avoid 'high pressure' and 'hard sell' techniques, i.e. urging children to buy or persuade others to buy. Neither the words used nor the tone of the advertisement should suggest that young viewers are being bullied, cajoled or otherwise put under pressure to acquire the advertised item.

However, new marketing techniques pose further challenges in this respect. For example, viral marketing and the use of children as brand ambassadors rely on the apparent power of 'word of mouth', and can be construed as a way of preying on children's insecurities within the peer group.

Conclusion

12.17 Assessing impact. Much of the research on children's peer groups is qualitative and uses small samples, although it does provide recognisable, in-depth accounts of the dynamics of children's social relationships. However, it does not directly address the question of the *impact* of the commercial world. It regards children's uses of media and consumption as embedded within their peer group cultures, rather than as something that can be easily separated (let alone quantified) as an external influence. By contrast, some of the research on 'pester power' does directly address impact – although while it does establish

associations, it does not provide clear evidence of causal relationships. The notion of 'pester power' is of course itself a pejorative one: it implies that in the context of purchasing, children should be seen but not heard.

12.18 Consumption in context. From an anthropological or sociological perspective, consumer goods are one of the means that people (both adults and children) use to establish, negotiate and define their social relationships. This makes it hard to separate positive and negative aspects, and to assess any causal influence. Young people may bully each other on the grounds that they are wearing the 'wrong' designer labels, but that does not mean that designer labels *cause* bullying. Likewise, children may persistently ask their parents to buy them particular branded goods, but that does not imply that the existence of such branded goods *causes* conflict between parents and children. Of course, the marketing of such goods may well proclaim their positive status and desirability, and in doing so it may well appeal to broader symbolic values (for example, to do with masculinity or femininity, or with qualities such as sophistication, 'street credibility' or 'cool'); but these values are not solely created by marketers, and the appeals they make may well not be accepted by consumers. Bullying and pestering occur in any case: the question that has yet to be answered is whether marketers implicitly use these means as a way of promoting products.

13. Physical health

There is a large body of research on the influence of commercial messages on children's physical health.

All advertising of tobacco, and the advertising of alcohol to children, are now banned in the UK; although there is continuing concern about the effects of other forms of promotion such as sponsorship, packaging and shop displays. There is much less research in these latter areas; although, in general, research suggests that advertising and promotion are much less important than other factors such as price, availability and family influences.

In respect of food, a surprisingly small amount of reliable evidence relates specifically to advertising (as opposed to television viewing in general) and to obesity (as opposed to children's brand preference or other aspects of diet). There is little research on other aspects of marketing or promotion. There are significant methodological limitations in much of this work.

Most experts agree that advertising does have some impact here, but the evidence is that the impact is very small. Other factors – such as the availability and price of food, the influence of parents, patterns of physical activity, and the lack of access to outdoor play areas – play a much greater role. Focusing attention on television advertising may lead to a neglect of these other, more important factors.

- 13.1 Key issues.** Concerns about the impact of the commercial world on children's physical health were raised by several respondents to our consultation. Obesity in particular was the most strongly contested issue we addressed: this reflects both the growing concern about the phenomenon of childhood obesity, and the fact that the regulation of food and drink advertising is currently a focus of intense debate. This section considers the evidence on this issue, followed by a briefer account of the evidence relating to the promotion of tobacco and alcohol.
- 13.2 Limitations of the evidence.** There is a fairly substantial body of research on the relationship between advertising and physical health. Numerous relevant reviews have been undertaken, and some of these are summarised in the literature review on 'The Effects, Uses and Interpretations of Commercial Messages and Activities by Children' undertaken for this assessment (Appendix J). The panel has also produced a separate technical appendix, which offers our own detailed reading of the evidence specifically relating to obesity (Appendix K). In summary, there are several key limitations with this research:

- Much of the evidence relates specifically to television advertising rather than promotional or commercial activities more broadly, such as sponsorship, retailing and the pricing of goods, or changing product formulations. There is no significant research – at least in the UK – relating to promotion in new media.
- Much of the original research is from the United States. This is an important limitation given the weaker regulatory environment in the US, and the greater intensity of commercial promotion in these areas.
- Much of the evidence is correlational: it establishes associations between exposure to advertising (or, more frequently, overall levels of media use) and specific health problems, rather than causal relationships between them. However, there have been some studies that track relationships over time, mainly in respect of tobacco and alcohol.
- Much of the research considers the effects of advertising in isolation from other factors, or at best considers only one or two other factors (such as parental influence). This makes it difficult to offer definitive conclusions about the *relative importance* of advertising as compared with these other factors. This lack of evidence on effect size is a particular obstacle to the effective formulation of policy.

Food marketing and obesity

- 13.3 The context of debate.** The recent introduction of new regulations on the television advertising of HFSS (high fat, salt and sugar) food and drink products to children has generated considerable controversy. This issue was raised in many responses to our consultation – both by NGOs that are continuing to campaign for further regulation, and by businesses that are seeking to resist it. As with some other aspects of this field (see Section 3), the issue seems to have taken on a much wider symbolic significance, to the point where it seems to be distracting attention away from other, more important concerns. The context of regulation is discussed in Section 20; and the technical appendix (Appendix K) deals with the issue – including some of the complexities of research methodology – in much greater detail.
- 13.4 Advertising content.** Most television food advertising is for HFSS food. Prior to the recent restrictions, in 2004 Ofcom estimated the total UK advertising spend per annum in the categories of food, soft drinks and chain restaurants as £742 million, with £522 million spent on television advertising and £32 million spent in children's airtime. Food advertising on television was found to be dominated by breakfast cereals, confectionery, savoury snacks and soft drinks, with fast-food restaurants making a more recent entry into the market; while advertising for staple items and fresh foods was declining. Ofcom's recent research points to a marked shift following the introduction of the new regulations: children's viewing of HFSS advertising dropped significantly between 2005 and 2007/8 (although the data here can be interpreted in various ways: see section 20.9). Even so, the overall balance in television food advertising generally – to which children of course continue to be exposed – is likely to remain fairly similar.

- 13.5 Baby milk.** A further related issue that should be mentioned here is that of infants' consumption of milk. Submissions to our consultation from Baby Milk Action and the Breastfeeding Network argued that the advertising of infant feeding products could widen health inequalities: younger, economically disadvantaged mothers are more likely to use such products before their babies are six months old, in the belief that they are better than breast milk. While it is not legal to advertise infant formula, the advertising of brands of 'follow-on' milk raises awareness and thus effectively advertises the infant formulae of the same brand – although there is little evidence from research as regards the impact of advertising in this respect. An independent review of this area is currently being conducted through the Food Standards Agency. While this issue is certainly related to childhood obesity, it is essentially a question of parents' purchasing rather than children's.
- 13.6 Advertising and obesity: reviews of the evidence.** There have been several more or less systematic reviews of the research evidence relating to advertising and obesity over the past 10-15 years. Despite some claims that there is an emerging consensus, these reviews disagree – in some cases, quite profoundly – in their overall conclusions. Key reviews commissioned by bodies such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1996), the Food Standards Agency (2003), the Advertising Association (2003), Ofcom (2004 and 2006) and the US Institute of Medicine (2006) tell conflicting stories. While the reviews themselves are careful and qualified, the conclusions contained in the executive summaries are very different. These reviews themselves have all been subjected to considerable critical scrutiny, from a variety of perspectives. Appendix K addresses some of the difficulties in this area in considerable detail. The following sections draw attention to some of the major issues at stake. It should be noted that, since most of the research is concerned specifically with advertising (and indeed television advertising), the observations here do not necessarily apply to marketing more broadly.
- 13.7 Brand preference or category preference?** There is little doubt that television advertising is effective, in the sense that it influences people to buy things; and given that most food advertising is for HFSS foods, it seems fairly logical to suggest that it is likely at least to contribute to the prevalence of 'less healthy' diets among children. Advertisers, however, argue that the influence of advertising is primarily confined to brand preference rather than category preference – that is, for one brand rather than another, not one type of food rather than another. Advertising may encourage us to eat Burger King rather than McDonalds, but not more hamburgers and less broccoli. However, this is a contested point: critics of HFSS advertising argue that advertising influences children in both respects. (We address this issue more fully in Appendix K.)
- 13.8 Food consumption and obesity.** While there has been a fair amount of research on the relationship between the advertising and consumption of food, not all of it is directly relevant to the question of obesity. Research has generally explored food preference, or at best food choice (often under artificial conditions), rather than obesity *per se*. However, the relationship between the food people say they prefer and what they actually eat is not straightforward. They are not always able to eat what they would ideally wish to eat: a whole range of other factors, most notably price and availability, come into play. As such,

an expressed preference for 'unhealthy' foods among children cannot on its own be taken to result in (or be equated with) obesity. Furthermore, it appears that taste preferences and dietary patterns are largely determined by other factors, and are in place from a very young age, well before children become aware of advertising. The early years are especially important: once established, taste preferences and eating habits appear to continue with relatively little change for the rest of a person's life.

- 13.9 Other factors.** Food consumption is, of course, only one contributory factor in obesity. Some people are more genetically disposed towards obesity, or have an inherited preference for sweet food. Aspects of family interaction also play a role: obese children are more likely to have obese or overweight parents, although children may well ask for many things that (for a variety of reasons) they do not get (see Section 12). Lifestyle, and particularly the amount of physical exercise people take, is another key factor. Evidence here suggests that while children's calorie intake has in fact remained more or less steady over the past 30 years, the number of calories they burn through exercise has declined. This may relate to a number of other factors, not least the decline in free access to public space for play (an issue discussed in section 19).
- 13.10 Broader social factors.** All these factors relate in turn to other social factors, including ethnicity and age. The strongest association, however, is with poverty: at least in developed economies, poor people are much more likely to be obese than wealthy people. If advertising does play a role here, it does so in the context of these other factors – factors which themselves interact in complex ways. One of the problems with the research in this field, however, is that it tends to consider the relationship between marketing and obesity (or rather, in most cases, television advertising and food preference) in isolation from these other factors, or to account for these other factors in unduly simplified ways.
- 13.11 Exposure to advertising.** A further problem here relates to the ways in which children's exposure to advertising is measured. In most cases, what researchers measure is in fact the total amount of television viewing (often as estimated by parents). But the total amount of television people watch is not necessarily a reliable measure of their exposure to advertising, especially if there are channels (as in the UK) that do not carry advertising. There are also many possible ways in which television viewing might be associated with obesity. Watching television is a sedentary activity, which does not burn a great many calories. People who watch a lot of television (or indeed, read a lot of books) tend to do less exercise, and are more likely to prefer other sedentary activities. People tend to snack while they watch television, and are less inclined to stop when they are full. Television is also a relatively inexpensive form of entertainment, which is a major reason why it is more heavily watched in less wealthy families, who are also more likely to be obese.
- 13.12 Sorting out the variables.** In considering the potential link between advertising and obesity, then, there are a number of stages or aspects that would need to be distinguished:
- brand awareness, recall or recognition (for example, whether a child remembers or recognises the Coke brand name or logo)

- brand preference (for example, whether the child prefers Coke to Pepsi)
- brand consumption (whether the child actually consumes Coke, which depends on many factors in addition to brand preference)
- category consumption (that is, the child's consumption of all sugary carbonated soft drinks, perhaps including 'diet' varieties – depending on how the category is defined)
- total caloric intake (from carbonated soft drinks and all other foods and drinks)
- net caloric intake, after allowing for exercise
- the impact on obesity (allowing for genetic and other intervening variables).

Unfortunately, most studies in the field ignore these distinctions.

- 13.13 Establishing causality.** Taken together, these factors make it very difficult to establish evidence of the *causal* role of advertising. It may be that advertising encourages people to eat an unhealthy diet, which in turn is one contributory factor in obesity. But it may equally be that people who are disposed (for various reasons) to eat an unhealthy diet – or are unable to afford a healthy one – are also inclined to watch a lot of television. Here again, we encounter the limitations of media effects research, outlined in Section 8. While cross-sectional surveys establish correlations or associations, they do not provide convincing evidence as regards the direction of any causal relationship. Laboratory experiments can provide evidence of such relationships, but tell us little about the ways in which people actually behave in real life. Evidence from these two different approaches cannot just be combined: the advantages of one approach do not simply cancel out the disadvantages of the other.
- 13.14 The lack of relevant and reliable research.** For all these reasons, the evidence from research on this topic is extremely limited. While there is a large volume of research in the general area, there is actually very little that is both *directly relevant* and *reliable*. By directly relevant, we mean that the research should focus specifically on obesity; that it should consider exposure to advertising (as opposed to, say, total TV viewing); and that it should assess the effects on total calorie intake rather than just, say, brand preference. By reliable, we mean that the sample should be representative and large enough for the results to be statistically significant; that the variables should be measured reliably (for example, looking at actual behaviour rather than reported behaviour); that, in the case of correlational studies, due allowance should be made for other factors and the analysis should attempt to address the question of causality; or that, in the case of experimental studies, the conditions should not be too far removed from real-world conditions. Only a handful of studies meet these basic criteria, although the fact that some do so shows that the criteria do not represent an unattainable ideal: some of these studies are discussed in detail in Appendix K.
- 13.15 The Institute of Medicine review.** The 2006 systematic review produced by the US Institute of Medicine is the most recent comprehensive review in this area – although here again, the focus is on television advertising. This report concludes that there is strong evidence that television advertising influences the food and beverage preferences, purchasing requests and beliefs of younger children (aged 2-11), although the evidence

on those aged 12-18 is deemed to be insufficient. Even so, the ultimate conclusion of the report is that there is insufficient evidence to establish a causal relationship between the viewing of television advertising and adiposity; and it also says little about the *relative importance* of different factors. (More detail on this is contained in Appendix K.) This review again confirms the need for more relevant and reliable studies: repeated or new irrelevant or unreliable studies are likely merely to continue to confuse the issues.

- 13.16 The weight of evidence.** So to what extent does advertising (or marketing more broadly) contribute to childhood obesity? It seems reasonable to conclude that advertising does have an impact, but most reviews of the research agree that the impact is small. One frequently quoted figure is that exposure to television advertising accounts for some 2% of the variation in children's food choice. It should be noted that food choice is only one factor in obesity, and as such, the influence on obesity is bound to be even smaller than this; although one could argue that a variation of 2% does make a cumulative difference when multiplied across the population. Even so, we have very little definitive evidence on effect size. For policy purposes, this is a crucial absence: what matters is not so much whether there is *an* effect, but rather whether the effect is large enough to be of practical significance, especially relative to other factors.
- 13.17 Beyond television advertising.** Finally, it should be emphasised again here that most of this research relates only to television advertising – which, as we have seen (Section 5), is only part of the broader marketing environment. As in many other areas, point-of-sale displays, sponsorship, media tie-ins and product placement are all widely used here. In the case of food in particular, it is particularly important to take account of pricing, as well as the distribution and availability of particular types of food in local communities, which may represent an important constraint on diets, especially in low-income families. Beyond this, there is also the issue of marketing via new media. One apparent consequence of the new regulations on television advertising in the UK is that marketers have been encouraged to divert their efforts online (although this was happening in any case). Recent research has drawn attention to some of the strategies that are being adopted by food marketers in this context – which include branded environments, advergames, mobile and viral marketing, and behavioural profiling. Of course, these other forms of promotion might well be seen to amplify the effects of television advertising; although very little is known about how children respond to them, and the effects they may have.

Tobacco

- 13.18 Reviews of evidence.** Several reviews conducted in the US, and one recent British review, have suggested that the promotion of tobacco increases the risk of starting smoking, and of progressing from initial experimentation to regular and continuing use. In general, there is little indication here of the relative importance of promotion as compared with other influences; although one US study showed that young people who were initially 'receptive' to tobacco marketing were more likely to become established smokers subsequently. The UK review argues that what it deems to be 'pro-smoking imagery' in mainstream entertainment and in young people's 'social milieu' also results in the

initiation and continuance of smoking – although it is not entirely clear whether any image of an individual smoking is automatically regarded here as ‘pro-smoking’.

- 13.19 Regulation: from advertising to point of sale promotion.** The Tobacco and Advertising Promotions Act 2002 effectively prohibited the public advertising of tobacco in the UK, as well as event sponsorship, direct mailing and on-pack promotions. As such, the only context in which young people are likely to encounter direct promotion of tobacco is at the point of sale, in the form of pack displays, special offers and occasionally leaflets. Evidence suggests that such practices can be influential, although they were restricted under regulations introduced in 2004, and it is possible that shop displays will be prohibited completely under pending legislation. The minimum age at which tobacco products can be bought was recently raised to 18, and this is enforced by age verification requirements.

Alcohol

- 13.20 Effects studies.** Psychological research on the promotion of alcohol products generally conveys a similar message: promotion results in earlier initiation of drinking, and heavier drinking among existing drinkers. In this case, there are some useful longitudinal studies that support claims about this being a causal relationship; although estimates of the size of the effect vary, and the studies do not always take full account of other potential influences. On the other hand, econometric studies – which track the relationship between expenditure on alcohol promotion and the overall amount of consumption – tend to conclude that advertising does not increase total consumption, although it does have an effect on consumption of particular brands or product categories.
- 13.21 Other influences.** Here again, much of the research tends to neglect the complexity of people's response to advertising, and the ways in which advertising relates to aspects such as drinking knowledge, social attitudes, availability and price, as well as people's actual experience of alcohol consumption. As with smoking and obesity, alcohol consumption is subject to several influences, which are both direct and indirect. Evidence on the relative significance of these influences and – in particular – how they relate to each other is rather limited; although it seems fair to conclude that marketing and advertising are a relatively insignificant aspect of the broader picture, particularly as compared with the influence of family and friends.
- 13.22 Regulation.** Broadly speaking, alcohol promotion is less restricted than tobacco promotion; although action was taken by Ofcom and the Advertising Standards Authority in 2005 to strengthen alcohol advertising codes. While there are regulations relating to the targeting of alcohol advertising to children, these do not apply to adults; and, as such, it is likely that children will be exposed to alcohol advertising. Regulations as regards sponsorship, branding, point-of-sale displays and other forms of marketing are also less prohibitive. On the other hand, there are similar restrictions in place as regards the direct sale of alcohol to children; and new restrictions on pricing promotions of the ‘two-for-one’ variety are due to come into force shortly. The Department of Health and the Home Office are currently working on a new mandatory code for licensed premises that is likely

to address point-of-sale promotions. Evidence on the effects of restrictions on alcohol advertising is somewhat inconclusive: there are some indications that there may be unintended consequences, as marketers refocus their efforts on activities or media that are less strictly regulated.

Health promotion

- 13.23 The potential of social marketing.** There has been growing interest here in the potential of 'social marketing' – that is, the use of marketing techniques to promote positive messages about physical health. Public sector organisations and NGOs have led campaigns on a wide range of health-related issues; and in the case of all the areas considered here, commercial companies have also sponsored similar activities (see Section 9). Evidence of the effectiveness of such work is rather uneven, however: for example, there are some instances where youth smoking prevention campaigns seem to have actually increased the intention to smoke. The 'reverse psychology' in operation here is perhaps easy to understand, particularly when adults are purveying such messages to young people.
- 13.24 Healthy products.** Growing concerns around obesity have also created market opportunities to which businesses have responded, by creating new products which taste as good, or almost as good, as HFSS ones but contain less fat and/or fewer calories. The potential impact of such product innovation appears to have been ignored by those researching and forecasting the increase in obesity. There are certainly issues that are raised here around labelling and health claims: there is a need for clear and agreed standards as regards nutrient profiling, and easily understood advice for consumers. The debate on these issues is beyond our remit; but, in the long term, there is good reason to expect that healthier products might contribute to reducing obesity if there is money to be made by doing so.

Conclusion

- 13.25 Limitations of the evidence.** The relationship between marketing and children's physical health remains a contested issue. While a great deal of research has been undertaken, the evidence is mixed and inconclusive, and there is widespread disagreement about its value. Although few would dispute that marketing plays some role in this regard, there is a lack of clear and agreed evidence about its *relative significance* when compared with other influences. Furthermore, for the reasons explained above, research has generally been unable to establish convincing evidence of a *causal relationship* between exposure to advertising and physical health problems.
- 13.26 Unanswered questions.** In addition to these two points, there are several other issues that need to be addressed by future work in this area. In common with other reviews, most notably Ofcom's recent work on food advertising, we would argue that there is an urgent need to consider consumer behaviour 'in the round'. Rather than looking at the relationship between the advertiser and the child in isolation, it is important to consider the whole range of factors that are in play – for example in the availability, purchasing,

preparation and consumption of food – and the interactions between them. The areas considered here have complex, and often quite contradictory, emotional and social meanings attached to them – and, in this respect, research in this field has much to learn from sociological and anthropological work on the cultural aspects of consumption. Meanwhile, the difficulty that faces health promotion is that people often continue to do things that they know are 'bad' for them; and, indeed, too much warning in this respect can increase their attractiveness (the 'forbidden fruit' effect). Future research needs to explore how people interpret and respond to specific promotional techniques and strategies, rather than dealing simply with quantitative measures of total exposure to advertising.

13.27 Policy implications. Given the significance of this issue in terms of social policy, two further points should be emphasised here. First, the lack of convincing proof about the causal effects of marketing does not in itself mean that such effects do not exist. In this case, it simply suggests that we are dealing with complex issues with multiple causes, and that we need appropriately complex ways of understanding them. More focused research in this field is definitely needed. Second, the fact that the effects of marketing may be much smaller than other influences does not in itself imply that nothing can or should be done about them. A small influence may be none the less significant when multiplied across the population at large. Some potential causes may also be much easier to address at a policy level than others. Even so, it is vital to consider the potential unintended consequences of increasing regulation, and to balance the costs against the potential benefits.

14. Sexualisation, body image and gender

The sexual content of mainstream media has increased, and become more explicit, in recent years. However, most of the research on the impact of this relates to adults rather than children.

Recent research has found that UK children encounter some very diverse messages about sex and relationships in the media; and, while they find some of this material valuable and enjoyable, they can also be quite critical of it.

Adults and children – both male and female – in Western societies are prone to be dissatisfied with their physical appearance, although there is no evidence as to whether this is an increasing phenomenon. The media and marketing also tend to show images of slim and attractive people, although again it is not clear whether this has changed over time.

It is obviously likely that people are influenced by dominant ideas about physical attractiveness. Even so, evidence of the effects of this material is mixed and inconclusive; and, again, nearly all of it relates to adults rather than children.

The issue is also tied up with broader questions about gender identity. While some aspects of the commercial world are significantly more polarised in terms of gender than others, young people also relate to these images in diverse ways. Much of this debate focuses on girls, leaving aside key questions about the consequences for boys.

The debate on sexualisation and body image has been conducted in rather sensationalised and moralistic terms. This can make it difficult for children in particular to discuss and come to terms with the range of messages they are bound to encounter.

Concerns about obesity and about body image seem to pull in different directions: the media are accused both of encouraging people to be thin and of increasing obesity. While these are not wholly incompatible, the processes involved are more complex than a simple cause-and-effect logic would suggest.

Framing the issue

- 14.1 Public concern.** Concerns about the sexualisation of children and about the effects of marketing and media on body image featured in several of the responses to our consultation. These two overlapping issues also frequently recur in the public debate about children and consumer culture. There have been popular books for parents addressing such concerns, and they have also been raised at the level of public policy,

most notably in Australia, where there has recently been a Senate enquiry on the matter. In the UK, there has been a long-standing debate on issues such as the sexual content of teenage girls' magazines, and the role of the fashion and beauty industry in allegedly promoting unrealistic images of female bodies. Concerns are also raised about the sexual content or dimensions of other media and products for children, ranging from the use of sexual innuendo in broadcasting to children's clothing and the body shapes of dolls. The UK Home Office has recently launched an enquiry about domestic violence, in which this issue will also be addressed.

- 14.2 Ideas about childhood.** This is a potentially emotive topic, which invokes broader concerns about childhood itself. Sexuality is a key dimension of the distinction between childhood and adulthood: despite Freud's 'discovery' of infantile sexuality, the image of the sexual (or 'sexualised') child fundamentally threatens our sense of what children should be. Even more disturbingly, it transgresses the boundaries that define how adults are supposed to look at children. It thus represents a particularly acute instance of broader arguments about the disappearance of childhood, or the blurring of boundaries between adults and children (see Section 3).
- 14.3 Who is concerned?** However, as in many other areas of this assessment, it is important not to assume that media commentary represents public concern more generally. This issue is frequently invoked by campaigners with much broader moral, religious or political motivations. However, opinion surveys in the UK (such as those conducted by the former Broadcasting Standards Commission) suggest that British adults say they are increasingly permissive in their responses to sexual content, at least on television. What *counts* as 'sexual' can be defined in different ways by different people, and in different social and historical settings; and it is by no means the case that what adults perceive as sexual will be perceived in the same way by children. If we compare the different ways in which these issues are addressed in the broader European context, it becomes clear that this concern is also quite culturally specific.
- 14.4 History.** Such accounts often present the sexualisation of children as a relatively recent development, but it is by no means a new issue. Research has traced a long history of children and young people being represented as objects for erotic contemplation (and commodification) by adults in literature, the visual arts and cinema. It is also worth recalling that the age of consent for heterosexual sex was only raised from 12 to 16 in the late nineteenth century; and that child prostitutes, some as young as eight or nine, were common in nineteenth century London. While the *public visibility* of the issue, and the terms in which it is defined, may have changed, 'sexualised' representations of children cannot be seen merely as a consequence of contemporary consumerism.
- 14.5 Sexualisation.** The broad concern about sexualisation seems to combine anxieties about the effects on children (the apparent corruption of childhood innocence) with fears about the effects on adults (most spectacularly in the case of paedophilia and child abuse). Exposing children to sexual material is believed by some to create a premature or inappropriate interest in sex, and also to promote unsafe sexual practices. However, it is not always clear whether the concern is with sexual representation of any kind, or with material that is defined as *sexualised* – and indeed what this distinction might mean.

- 14.6 Body image.** The issue of body image overlaps with this: children (particularly girls) are seen to be under pressure to have slender, 'sexy' bodies, invoking concerns about gender stereotyping as well as more specific fears about threats to physical and mental health (as in the case of eating disorders). Such concerns sit awkwardly with concerns about obesity, as campaigns to combat obesity frequently make play of the attractiveness and desirability of fit, slim bodies.
- 14.7 Sorting out the issues.** Some of these concerns relate to physical health and behaviour, some to attitudes, and some to moral values; some are quite specific, while others are much more generalised; some potentially apply to everyone, while others relate to events or conditions (such as anorexia) that may be relatively rare. Some of them relate to specific areas of the commercial world – for example, advertising images, or the fashion, beauty and fitness industries – while others relate to a more generalised concern about the visibility of sexuality within society as a whole. While it would seem important to separate out these issues, doing so is by no means straightforward, particularly in light of the sensitivity of the topic. In many areas also, the evidence of impacts on children is much less than definitive.

Sexualisation

- 14.8 Popular debates.** Popular commentators have argued that children today are being prematurely induced into inappropriate forms of sexual behaviour, particularly as a result of their exposure to media and commercial marketing. The concern relates partly to children's viewing of media material designed for an older audience (such as music videos and pornography), and partly to material explicitly targeting them (such as teen/tween magazines and toys). The primary focus here is on girls, who are seen to be preoccupied with the need to appear sexually attractive at an ever-younger age; although such material is also believed to affect boys' attitudes towards girls, and increasingly boys' own self-image. The sexualisation of childhood is seen to have a range of damaging consequences for children's mental and physical health – leading to depression and suicide, eating disorders, and child abuse – as well as for family relationships. Such popular accounts typically represent children as passive victims of attack by an all-powerful media and consumer culture.
- 14.9 Defining sexualisation.** However, the notion of 'sexualisation' itself is often ill-defined here. On one level, the term seems to imply that children are naturally non-sexual, but that they have been somehow *made* sexual through their exposure to media and marketing: sexuality is being inappropriately imposed upon them, rather than chosen by them. There is an implicit distinction here between 'sexual' and 'sexualised'. Sexualisation is typically seen to entail *objectification*, by which a person's value, or their attractiveness, is equated with their degree of sexual appeal. These 'sexualised' or 'objectifying' representations are contrasted with those that are deemed to be somehow non-objectifying, and therefore 'healthy'. However, in the debate and in much of the research, the distinction between 'sexual' and 'sexualised' is often unclear; and the nature of 'healthy' or 'non-objectifying' representations is vaguely and variously defined. By default,

the implication is that any material that can be read as sexual (by adults) is inherently problematic.

- 14.10 Assessing the research evidence: media content.** The evidence provided by popular commentators is typically anecdotal; but relevant evidence from research on these issues is quite limited. Two main forms of evidence are typically presented here. The first relates to media content, most notably advertising, teenage magazines and mainstream television (particularly soap operas, music videos and sports programmes). Analyses here suggest that there is indeed a growing amount of sexually explicit material, and sexual innuendo, in mainstream media; and that children are increasingly being represented in ways that used to apply to adult models or characters. However, some of the samples used in this research are very selective, and some of the interpretations that are offered are very dubious. Much of the evidence also relates to portrayals of adult women rather than girls or teenagers. However, the key problem is that such research typically fails to differentiate between 'sexual' and 'sexualised' representations: in some instances, it seems that any reference to sex or relationships, and almost any representation of a human body, can be defined as 'sexualised'. This can result in a paradoxical situation where researchers seem to be reading strongly adult connotations into images of children.
- 14.11 Harmful effects: popular debates.** Of course, the analysis of media texts or images does not in itself tell us anything about how they are read, or the influence they may have. Popular commentators typically accuse such 'sexualised' media images of contributing to the apparent increase in 'body dissatisfaction' and eating disorders among young people. They argue that inappropriate attention to physical appearance may detract children's attention away from other important activities (such as learning). They also suggest that the circulation of 'sexualised' material may encourage children to initiate sexual behaviour before they have a full understanding of the consequences, leading to unwanted sexual contact; and that it may also play a role in the 'grooming' of children by paedophiles. While these phenomena are undoubtedly serious, there is less convincing evidence that they have increased in recent years. Despite popular beliefs, young people are not maturing earlier than 50 years ago, although there was a significant fall in the age of menarche in the first part of the twentieth century. There is no real proof of a historical increase in body dissatisfaction; although on the other hand, young people do seem to be engaging in sexual activity at an earlier age.
- 14.12 Assessing the research evidence: effects.** There is little convincing evidence from research that media and marketing play a *causal* role in these phenomena. A recent review for the American Psychological Association concluded that young women exposed to 'objectifying' media were more likely to be dissatisfied with their own bodies, to suffer from depression and low self-esteem, diminished cognitive ability and academic achievement, and to feel pressurised to conform to 'a narrow beauty ideal'. It also suggested that sexualised content could affect boys' views on relationships, making them more inclined to accept sexual harassment and violence. However, there are several limitations to this evidence. The research cited seems to adopt different definitions of what counts as 'sexualised' or 'objectifying'; and in most cases 'sexualised' is simply

equated with 'sexual'. Most of the research relates to influences on college students and adults; and it typically relies on statistical correlations established through surveys, or on laboratory experiments – methods whose reliability and validity in media effects research have been widely questioned (see Section 8). While the authors do note that 'sexualisation' may be a result of other influences (such as parents and friends), there is no indication here of the relative significance of media influence, or of the relation between these factors. Nor is there any discussion of the potentially positive role that sexual content in the media might play, for instance in terms of education or information.

- 14.13 Uses and interpretations.** Much of the research in this field (and in relation to body image) focuses on adults, or on easily accessible groups of college students. The absence of children is particularly crucial here, since what adults perceive to be 'sexual' (or 'sexualised') may not be perceived in the same way by children. However, a large qualitative and quantitative study conducted for UK media regulators in 2002-4 did explore children's responses to representations of love, sex and relationships in mainstream television, film and print media. This covered a range of material, including the display of bodies in advertising and music videos as well as storylines in films and television dramas. Among other things, the study found that:
- Children quite frequently encountered sexual material in the media, although relatively little of this could be considered explicit.
 - This material was quite diverse in terms of the 'messages' it was seen to contain: while sex was sometimes represented as pleasurable and desirable, it was also often surrounded by moral warnings about the dangers it could entail.
 - In general, these respondents valued the media's role as a source of information about sex and relationships, sometimes rating them more highly than parents or (particularly) teachers: they found media such as teenage magazines and soap operas less embarrassing to use, and more attuned to their needs.
 - However, they did not always trust what they found: on the contrary, they made complex judgments about the relationships between media representations and reality, engaged with the moral dilemmas of stories and characters they encountered, and were sometimes extremely critical of what they saw.
 - The younger children (aged 9-10) did not necessarily always understand sexual references or innuendoes, and often ignored or misinterpreted them: they were far from being the sexual sophisticates imagined by some conservative critics.
 - The influence of the media depended very much on the contexts in which it was used, especially in the context of family life: parents were powerful models of adult sexual identity.

These findings are echoed by other recent qualitative studies of children and adolescents. However, it is worth noting that most of the research here focuses primarily on mainstream media: while there has been a good deal of concern about the growing availability of pornography, there has been no significant research about how children and young people in particular respond to it. While this research confirms that children

learn about sexual matters from the media, it suggests that this is very far from the straightforward and wholly negative process that is implied by the notion of 'sexualisation': the formation of an adult sexual identity is a complex, flexible and uncertain process, in which the media and commercial influences play a complex and ambivalent role.

Body image

- 14.14 Defining the issue.** The question of 'body image' overlaps with the issue of sexualisation. Critics such as Naomi Wolf have famously condemned what they call the 'beauty pornography' circulated in women's magazines and advertising, and promoted by the diet, fitness and cosmetics industries. Such material is seen to undermine women's sense of control and self-worth, as well as encouraging rape and other forms of violence against women, and varieties of self-harm such as eating disorders. Such concerns have been extensively rehearsed in media commentary, and explored in academic research – although it should be emphasised again that comparatively little of this work focuses specifically on children.
- 14.15 Assessing the evidence: body dissatisfaction.** By comparison with 'sexualisation', there is much greater clarity about the nature and extent of the phenomenon that is being addressed here. In general, research suggests that notions of the desirable or attractive body image in contemporary Western societies tend to emphasise slenderness: women are generally expected to be slim and shapely, men to be slender and muscular – although there are notable differences here between different ethnic groups. Empirical studies suggest that women are more likely than men to be dissatisfied with their body size and shape: most would like to be thinner than they are. However, men too are dissatisfied – although while some would like to be thinner, others wish to be heavier. This dissatisfaction is seen to have broader implications in terms of depression and self-esteem. In seeking to achieve their ideal body shape, men are more inclined to use exercise, while women rely more on dieting; although men generally seem less motivated to do anything about the matter. While there is much less research on children, it appears that body dissatisfaction can appear in girls as young as eight or nine; and that young boys may also be concerned about being insufficiently muscular. While male adolescents are generally more satisfied than females, their dissatisfaction increases markedly through the teenage years. It is not clear whether such phenomena have increased over time.
- 14.16 Media content.** Content analyses generally suggest that media images of both women and men tend to feature those who are young, slim and attractive, and that these images are 'unrealistic' or at least disproportionate when compared with the population as a whole. Studies suggest that media images of women consistently promote the belief that being thin is the route to happiness and success. Some assert that there have been no significant changes in these respects over the past quarter of a century, although there has been no systematic historical comparison here.
- 14.17 Media effects: experiments.** However, the evidence on the effects of these images is again rather mixed and ambivalent. Laboratory experiments typically involve exposing

subjects to 'physically attractive' media images, and subsequently asking them how they feel about their own bodies, or to estimate their own body shape and size. However, such studies do not consistently show that such exposure increases body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, they can only measure short-term effects: there is no evidence that such effects (which sometimes appear relatively dramatic) are lasting or cumulative. There are some specific problems in these studies as regards the nature of the 'stimuli' (the images or television extracts) and how they are presented; and in how subjects are invited to estimate their body size or shape. Different studies use different measures and approaches, and their findings cannot simply be aggregated. Ultimately, such studies may tell us about what *can* happen in the artificial context of the psychologist's laboratory (when subjects – who are mostly college students – might perhaps be able to guess the kinds of responses that are expected), but they tell us nothing about what *does* happen in real life.

- 14.18 Media effects: surveys.** By contrast, surveys find that, when asked about 'body role models', people are likely to nominate physically attractive actors or actresses – although there is also research that shows that people are often critical of media role models, and indeed of an undue emphasis on physical attractiveness. While some surveys do establish correlations between levels of media use and body dissatisfaction, these studies generally do not isolate exposure to media specifically featuring slender body shapes from exposure to media more generally; and they do not provide sufficient evidence of *causal* relationships between variables. There is also little evidence here about how the influence of the media compares with other potential sources of influence, or how perceptions of body image 'play out' in the context of other social relationships and experiences.
- 14.19 Disappearing children?** Here again, this research has tended to focus on adults or college students. There is little research on children, and nothing relating to young children. Most of the research relates to media, and very little to other aspects of marketing and consumer culture. In these respects, there are some important gaps in our knowledge. The UK's Youth TGI survey (cited in other sections of this report) does provide some indication of attitude changes among children in this area, although these figures do not in themselves tell us anything about the influence of marketing. High and growing numbers of children agree to the statement 'I am happy about how I look': since 1993, figures have risen from 63% to 67% for 11-19-year-olds and 67% to 74% for 7-10-year-olds. Meanwhile, the percentage of 11-19-year-olds agreeing that 'it's important to eat a balanced diet' has risen over the same period from 68% to 79%.

The broader debate

- 14.20 Feminist debates.** It is worth noting here that there is no single 'feminist' position on these issues. Naomi Wolf, for example, sees sexualisation and body dissatisfaction as symptoms of male oppression: women, she argues, are judged almost entirely in terms of their physical appearance and their attractiveness to men, whereas men are judged in terms of their mental abilities, and their engagement in the world of thought and action. However, critics have described this as a form of 'victim feminism', in which women are seen to possess very little agency or power. Young women in particular are presented

here as insecure and consumed with shame and self-loathing; they experience their bodies as alien and worthless, and are therefore induced to spend money on products (cosmetics, fashions and 'beauty treatments') that will alleviate these feelings. In terms of media, this account clearly regards women as 'cultural dupes', deluded by the 'cult' of beauty into a form of false consciousness.

- 14.21 Objectification or agency?** Similar debates have surfaced more recently in the debate around the sexualisation of girls. Some feminists argue that the current trend towards 'sexualised' fashion (for example in the form of 'crop-tops' and thongs) is a manifestation of girls' self-assertion and autonomy. They argue that girls themselves do not necessarily equate nudity (or the revelation of flesh) with sexuality; and they argue that older feminists are hypocritical in seeking to distinguish between the 'good' political style of 1960s miniskirts and the 'bad' consumerist style of modern girls' fashion. However, others see this form of 'girl power' as illusory: far from representing free choice, such styles (along with other aspects of contemporary young women's 'beauty regimes' such as waxing, bleaching and cosmetic surgery) are a consequence of consumerism, which continues to define young women primarily in terms of their sexuality.
- 14.22 The broader context.** While this debate is sometimes seen to reflect a broader conflict between 'older' and 'younger' feminists, it also reflects very different understandings of the broader 'sexualisation' of contemporary culture, which applies to adults as well as children. Some social theorists and historians see the widespread circulation of sexual imagery within popular culture as encouraging a 'democratisation of desire', through which more diverse sexual identities can be represented; although others argue that is merely a renewed form of male oppression, in which women's apparent 'empowerment' has been commodified. While this is not the place to explore these issues, it is important to see the apparent 'sexualisation' of children in the light of these broader social and historical changes.
- 14.23 Children's perspectives.** While there has been a good deal of intense debate, there has been very little empirical research that has explored children's perspectives on these issues. This is partly because of the ethical and methodological difficulties of such research. Some qualitative studies suggest that girls regard the wearing of 'sexualised' clothing in quite ambivalent ways. On the one hand, they argue that they have the right to wear such clothes, and that doing so makes them feel good; but there is also some disagreement among them about the age at which this is appropriate. Some researchers argue that clothes that many adults see as 'sexualised' are not seen as such by children, but rather as merely 'cool' and fashionable. These are very small-scale studies, however.

Gender stereotyping

- 14.24 Learning gender roles.** Finally, it is important to consider the potential influence of commercial messages on children's attitudes towards gender roles more broadly. Content analysis of television advertising indicates that males and females tend to be portrayed in highly gender-specific ways, performing stereotypical roles; and that children's advertising (particularly for toys) is a highly gender-polarised ('pink and blue')

world. Studies show that boys are frequently represented as physically active and dominant, while girls are more likely to appear as passive; and some argue that there has been little change in this respect over several decades. Some research suggests that these portrayals influence children's expectations about appropriate gender behaviour, for example in terms of wanting to play with particular kinds of toys. However, this kind of research has been quite comprehensively criticised, not least for failing to provide strong evidence of the causal role of media and their significance relative to other factors. It also begs questions about the extent to which stereotypes formed in early childhood are lasting – or indeed, whether they are developmentally necessary at this particular stage. (Similar studies have looked at the stereotyping and limited representation of ethnic groups in television advertising, although there is very little evidence on the effects of such material.)

- 14.25 Playing with gender?** However, more recent sociological research suggests that the relationship between gender and consumer culture is more complex, and less easily understood in terms of simple 'cause-and-effect'. Studies of the marketing of 'girl power' – for example in the fashion and cosmetics industries – suggest that it can promote forms of self-expression and creativity. By emphasising the 'performance' and artificiality of femininity, such practices open up a space for girls to play with dominant ideas about femininity rather than adopting them wholesale. Such research also suggests that young girls themselves can be reflexive and aware of their ambivalent relationship with commercial culture.
- 14.26 Selling gender?** Marketers clearly do not *create* gender role differences: the question is whether they respond to these differences in ways that, on balance, reinforce them. The advance of modern marketing has occurred at the same time as significant advances in gender equality. Many children's markets are highly gendered (such as that for young children's toys), but many are not, and it is often in marketers' interest to reduce the differences in the hope of expanding the size of the market. In general, it appears to be easier to persuade girls to buy products associated with boys than *vice versa*, just as it is easier to persuade younger children to buy products aimed at older ones than *vice versa*. As such, the relationship between gender differences and the 'commercial logic' of marketing is far from straightforward.
- 14.27 Missing boys.** Finally, it is important to note that much of this debate (and indeed a good deal of the research) focuses only on girls, leaving aside key questions about the consequences for boys. As we have seen, there is evidence that boys too are prone to experience 'body dissatisfaction'; and eating disorders among young men are rising. Boys may also be influenced by idealised images of feminine and masculine bodies, and the messages about sex and relationships, that they encounter in the media and in marketing. These influences may well 'play out' in terms of how boys and girls relate to each other in their everyday lives. Focusing only, or predominantly, on girls would seem to oversimplify the issues at stake here.

Conclusion

- 14.28 The value of the evidence.** The evidence on the issues considered here is much less than definitive. A great deal of it is methodologically flawed, or rests on problematic assumptions. On many key issues, the evidence is mixed or ambiguous. A good deal is simply irrelevant, in that it does not relate to children – and there is a strong case here for arguing that research on adults cannot simply be taken to prove the case in relation to children as well. The polarised, and often somewhat sensationalised, nature of the discussion only contributes to the general lack of clarity.
- 14.29 Positives and negatives: sexualisation.** It is reasonable to assume that the media and marketing do play a role in children's developing understanding of sexuality. However, the evidence suggests that this role can be positive – and indeed educational – as well as negative. If the media exert 'pressure' on children, this is not simply about imposing inappropriate values: rather, the problem is that children have to find their own way through a diverse range of potentially contradictory or inconsistent messages, deriving both from the media and from other sources. This would imply that they need opportunities to analyse and discuss these issues in a context that is not unduly dominated by moral judgments or by the perspectives of adults.
- 14.30 Body image and obesity.** In terms of body image, there are complex questions about how body dissatisfaction relates to the concern about obesity. There is a paradox here: if the cultural pressure to be thin and sexy is as overwhelmingly powerful as some commentators suggest, how do we then account for the apparent rise in obesity? One could argue that obesity and anorexia are two sides of the same coin – that both are symptoms of a more general contemporary malaise. Indeed, it could be argued that the emphasis in media representations (and in public policy debate) on the need for individuals to take personal responsibility for their physical health, and the playing down of the social and economic dimensions of such phenomena, is likely to contribute to the very problems that it seeks to address.
- 14.31 The role of media and marketing.** Yet if media and marketing play a significant role here (as some argue), they do seem to pull in opposite directions at the same time: the media are accused both of encouraging people to be thin and of increasing obesity. It is possible that people are encouraged by the media to attempt to be slim, and when they fail, are likely to turn to 'comfort eating'; or alternatively that the dual pressure both to eat and to be slim creates a general level of anxiety about food, which is just as harmful as the potential risk to physical health. We have no evidence on these points, and we clearly need further research. We do not know whether anorexics watch different (or fewer, or more) television advertisements than obese people; and how they compare with the many children of average weight, who presumably also watch the same material. Obviously, different people pay attention to different media messages, or interpret them in different ways, which must partly reflect existing predispositions. Here again, the processes involved are more complex than a simple cause-and-effect logic would suggest.

15. Inappropriate content

Concerns about children's access to inappropriate content (principally in the form of sexual and violent material) have a very long history, although they have arguably increased with the advent of new media.

This assessment has not explored this issue in any depth, partly on the grounds that the commercial dimensions of the issue are difficult to separate out. Little of the available research deals with advertising or commercial messages.

This issue was also addressed in the recent Byron Review Report to government, *Safer Children in a Digital World* (2008).

While sharing the concerns of the Byron report as regards privacy, this assessment concurs with its judgment that the evidence of a causal relationship between violent media content (for example, in computer games) and violent behaviour is weak and inadequate.

- 15.1 Kids getting older younger?** As we have noted (Section 3), there has been a long history of concern about the apparent loss or disappearance of childhood. Recent commentators in this vein have accused marketers of a 'hostile takeover of childhood', and of destroying children's 'right to their childhood'. Meanwhile, one of the familiar slogans of children's marketers is that 'kids are getting older younger' (KGOY) – that is, children are expecting to be addressed and treated in ways that used to be considered appropriate for much older children. Some argue that the *end* of childhood is arriving earlier than it used to do, and that children no longer wish to be seen or labelled as 'children'; while others claim that the boundaries between childhood and youth are becoming increasingly blurred.
- 15.2 Changing childhood identities.** Sociological studies of childhood would suggest that the issue is more complex: children act or perform 'childhood identities' in different ways in different contexts. In some settings, their behaviour may be perceived as prematurely adult, while in others they may assert a form of subversive 'childishness'. They may also be subject to contradictory or ambiguous expectations from adults in this respect: the demand to 'act your age' is by no means straightforward. Furthermore, even if we accept that such a development has occurred, there may be many reasons for it. Children do indeed possess an increasingly important status as consumers, but they are also seen to have greater rights and responsibilities in other areas of their lives – for example within families, in education and indeed within the law. On the other hand, it could also be pointed out that young people's period of dependency on their parents, and their involvement in education, have been significantly extended in recent years: as we have

seen (Section 6), children are leaving the family home, entering the world of full-time employment, and getting married or cohabiting and having children later than ever before. As such, it has been argued that the boundaries between childhood and adulthood are being redrawn rather than merely erased, and that consumer culture plays an active role in this respect.

- 15.3 Adult content.** Children's consumption can challenge adults' ideas about childhood – about how children should behave or appear, and about what they should see or know about. In relation to media and consumer culture, this issue becomes particularly apparent in discussions of children's exposure to 'adult' or 'inappropriate' content – which in this context refers primarily to material of a sexual or violent nature. We have considered the issue of sexual content to some degree in Section 14. The issue of inappropriate content in relation to new media – the internet and computer games – has also been comprehensively addressed in the recent Byron Review Report to government (*Safer Children in a Digital World*, 2008); while other reviews have been produced for Ofcom and the Home Office. While much of the material in question is undoubtedly produced by commercial companies, it is not clear how far its 'inappropriateness' can be traced specifically to its *commercial* nature. As such, this issue is on the margins of our remit here; and this is perhaps reflected in the fact that it was raised in relatively few of the responses to our consultation. This section is accordingly relatively brief.
- 15.4 Moral and philosophical judgments.** This issue of course involves much broader moral and philosophical assumptions about childhood itself. What is seen as 'appropriate' for children to see or to know about varies greatly across different cultural settings and across history. Moral judgments of this kind – even if they are cloaked in assertions about children's psychological 'immaturity' – are inevitably contentious. The emotional intensity of the debate in this area often makes it difficult to arrive at a balanced assessment of the issues; and the research evidence itself is also often informed by moral assumptions and judgments.

Effects of inappropriate content

- 15.5 Types of effects.** There is a considerable body of research exploring the harmful effects of 'inappropriate' media content, although by far the large majority of studies have focused on media violence. While some of these relate to specific types of content, others relate to media use more generally; while some focus on short-term, direct effects, others address longer-term and/or indirect effects; and while some relate to behaviour, others relate to attitudes or to emotional responses. The distinctions between these different types of effects are frequently confused in the public debate.
- 15.6 A disputed area.** As we have noted (Section 8), there have been long-running and often heated debates among researchers on the issue of media effects. Research in the North American psychological effects tradition has been seriously challenged on methodological and theoretical grounds, both by researchers in Media and Cultural Studies and by other psychologists. Much of this research relies on laboratory experiments, which measure short-term effects under artificial conditions. There are also

survey studies, although these rarely provide sufficient evidence as regards causality. By contrast, Cultural Studies generally seeks to understand the role of the media in relation to a broader range of factors in young people's lives, rather than in terms of simple 'cause-and-effect'. This research typically uses in-depth, qualitative approaches, which provide a limited basis for generalisation. It is genuinely difficult to find grounds for a consensus – or even a constructive dialogue – between these two competing perspectives.

- 15.7 Limited evidence.** There is little doubt that children (and indeed adults) today are being exposed to more sexually explicit material, and more explicit representations of physical violence, in the media than was the case in earlier decades. In the case of children, recent developments in media technology, and in the nature of family life, have made it much more difficult to control their access to such material. However, the evidence about the effects of this material (whether negative or positive) is weak and inconclusive. Effect sizes are often small, and definitive proof of causality is generally lacking. Of course, this does not in itself mean that such effects do not exist. However, it is fair to conclude that directly harmful effects are much less powerful and less frequent than they are often assumed to be, at least by some of the most vocal campaigners on these issues.
- 15.8 Commercial messages.** Very little of the research in this field focuses specifically on commercial messages. Most of the relevant work focuses on media content rather than on effects. Some studies from the US suggest that children's advertising features an unusually high occurrence of aggressive portrayals, although the definition of 'aggression' here is very broad. Other US studies suggest that the media industries routinely promote age-restricted products (such as computer games) to younger children. However, none of this research explores the potential impact of this (and none apply to UK media). It is also worth noting that relatively few complaints to the ASA about advertising relate specifically to children (see Section 4).
- 15.9 Computer games.** Much of the debate in this area now focuses on the impacts of new media, particularly computer games and the internet. Research on the harmful effects of computer games has focused primarily on the issue of violence. Here again, this research has been significantly disputed on methodological and theoretical grounds: it does not yet amount to a definitive or persuasive body of evidence. On the other hand, many claims have been made about the beneficial effects of computer games, particularly in respect of education; although here too, such claims are far from adequately supported by evidence.
- 15.10 Conclusions from the Byron Review.** The Byron Review report notes the following key conclusions in this area:
- There are some possible negative effects of violent content in games, but these only become harmful when children present other risk factors.
 - There is some evidence of short-term aggression resulting from playing violent (and non-violent) games, but no evidence on long-term effects.
 - There are correlations between violent games and aggressive behaviour, but no evidence of causal relationships.

- While it is possible to speculate about possible psychological risks (for example, from raised levels of stress, or the potential for confusion between fantasy and reality), this remains hypothetical.

It should also be noted here that concerns raised in the Byron Review relating to the age-appropriate advertising and marketing of computer games have been addressed in a recent compliance review by the Advertising Standards Authority.

- 15.11 The internet.** In respect of the internet, most of the research focuses on sexual content. There are clear indications that young people do encounter sexually explicit content online; although evidence about the harmful effects of this is much less clear. Some young people experience unwanted contact, in the form of 'stranger danger' or bullying; although the link between such incidents and actual harm is tenuous. Some also encounter violent or hateful content; and while this undoubtedly causes harm to those at whom it is targeted, it is not clear how far it leads to actual violence – and indeed, there is some evidence that it may provoke the opposite response. Meanwhile, there are many potential benefits of the internet, particularly in respect of learning; although research suggests that such benefits depend very much on the social and educational context in which the medium is used.
- 15.12 Conclusions from the Byron Review.** The Byron Review report notes the following key points in this area:
- Potential risks to children online are closely correlated with potential benefits.
 - Risks include exposure to inappropriate content and contact, as well as commercial appeals and strategies; benefits relate to areas such as learning and creativity.
 - The impact – both positive and negative – is very dependent upon the previous experience of the child and the context of the interaction.
 - The availability of such risks, and the likelihood of children accessing such risks, can be reduced, but it cannot be completely eliminated; and as such, it is necessary to find ways of building children's resilience.

Many of the concerns raised by the Byron Review in this area are being taken forward by the new UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS).

- 15.13 Positive effects.** Finally, it is important to note that exposure to apparently 'inappropriate' material may have positive consequences. Some researchers argue that exposure to risk is a necessary part of healthy development; and that it will be impossible for children to learn about risks unless they experience them. Furthermore, the negative effects of media may be impossible to separate from their positive effects. Apparently 'inappropriate' content may also provide valuable opportunities for learning and identity formation, as well as offering important forms of cultural experience.

Regulation

- 15.14 Regulating inappropriate content.** There is an extensive regulatory apparatus relating to these issues. Ofcom is responsible for ensuring that people under 18 are protected and

they require broadcasters to protect children through, for example, programme scheduling, including abiding by the watershed and not scheduling television programmes that are unsuitable for children before 21.00 or after 05.30 hrs. In relation to advertising, the Advertising Standards Authority operates codes of practice relating to children that includes rules governing material likely to cause 'physical, mental or moral harm', and specifically sexual content (see Section 20).

Emerging issues

- 15.15 New media, new issues.** In addition to established concerns of the kind identified above, new questions and challenges are posed by emerging media forms such as social networking, user-generated content, online communities and social worlds, online gaming and peer-to-peer file-sharing (collectively known as 'Web 2.0'). We have discussed the most relevant concerns here relating to the use of interactive marketing techniques and forms of data-gathering in Sections 5 and 10. In terms of inappropriate content, young people (like adults) are likely to be the unwilling recipients, particularly of sexually-related advertising or commercial 'spam'. Research suggests that a large proportion of young people have indeed received such material at some time; and while a majority report that they are not especially bothered by it, a sizeable minority say that they are offended. However, there is very little detailed research on how they respond to it, or the effects it may have.
- 15.16 Privacy.** New media forms such as social networking sites and blogs possess a form of intimacy, yet they are easily accessible in the public domain. Users may reveal highly personal information in the belief that they are doing so for an audience consisting only of their 'friends' (whether or not these are people they have met face-to-face). They may forget, or fail to fully register, the fact that this information is visible to others – and indeed to parents, teachers or employers as much as to potentially dangerous strangers. This situation provides new opportunities for sexual predators and for bullying by peers, as well as for various forms of deception and 'identity theft'. Again, there is very limited research in this area, but there is some anecdotal evidence that these media have become an arena where young people represent themselves in 'sexualised' ways and are also subjected to forms of sexual bullying.
- 15.17 The role of commercial forces.** To what extent are these concerns about inappropriate content specifically related to the *commercial* dimensions of these media? To some degree, they might be seen to relate to commercial *decisions*: for example, there is an argument that sex and violence 'sell', and hence are more likely to be found in commercially-driven media (although they are clearly not the only things that sell). In terms of commercial *messages*, these issues would seem to be relatively unimportant: aside from concerns about 'sexualisation' and body image (see Section 14), there is no evidence that advertising and marketing are any more likely to contain explicitly sexual or violent material than other areas of media – indeed, it seems more likely that the opposite is the case. At least in respect of mainstream advertising, this would seem to be an area that is already quite strictly regulated; although, here again, there may be new concerns arising in the context of new media.

16. Poverty and inequality

Although relative poverty among children in the UK has fallen in recent years, child poverty remains higher than in many similar industrialised countries. Poverty is also strongly associated with other aspects of negative wellbeing, including educational underachievement and physical ill-health.

Concern was expressed by several of the respondents to our consultation that the commercial world could exert particular impact on disadvantaged children.

There is some evidence that the associations between the commercial world and negative aspects of wellbeing – in respect of ‘pester power’, peer pressure, and mental and physical health – are stronger among less wealthy families. However, the relationships among these factors are complex.

Wellbeing is not necessarily lower among poorer children; and disadvantaged children may be more astute in handling money and less materialistic than their more affluent counterparts. Even so, the constant presence of images of those who are wealthier seems unlikely to contribute to such children’s psychological wellbeing.

- 16.1 Defining the issue.** Children are not a homogeneous group. As we have seen at various points in this report, age, gender, ethnicity, social class and dis/ability all play a part in children’s engagements with the commercial world, and in their wellbeing. In this section, we briefly draw together some evidence on the key issue of poverty and inequality. Several of the submissions to our consultation claimed that children and parents from economically deprived backgrounds are more likely to experience commercial pressure, and hence to suffer damaging consequences, than children from less deprived backgrounds. On one level, this would seem to be fairly self-evident: but to what extent is it substantiated by evidence?
- 16.2 Evidence on poverty and inequality.** There is continuing debate about the definition and measurement of child poverty, and considerable difficulty in drawing historical comparisons. DCSF figures suggest that income in households with children has risen more rapidly than for the population as a whole over the past 15 years, although children are still more likely to live in low income households. The number of children in relative poverty in the UK has fallen by 600,000 (a 17% reduction) over the past decade, although the level remains much higher than other European countries: there are still 2.8 million UK children in absolute poverty, slightly less than one third of the total. (While absolute poverty relates to a fixed standard that applies in all societies and does not change over time, relative poverty refers to a mean level within a society, such as average income, and

thus changes over time.) Controlling for other factors, children born into poverty are more likely to experience health and developmental difficulties, and to achieve less well in education. These gaps are also compounded by ethnic differences, with particular groups such as Bangladeshi and Gypsy or Traveller children significantly more likely to be underachieving, and not to be in training or employment at the age of 19. White working-class boys are also a particular focus of concern in this respect. Despite some improvements, the government's aim of eradicating child poverty by 2020 is both ambitious and challenging.

- 16.3 Markets and inequality.** In broad terms, markets (especially globalised markets) tend to increase inequality within countries, although this is essentially to do with employment and the effect on family earnings, rather than the market in goods and services *per se*. These differences then lead to large differences in how attractive different households are to businesses, especially with marketers' increasing ability to analyse the value of different customers (through customer database analysis) and target the most valuable.
- 16.4 Wellbeing, poverty and the commercial world.** Even so, associations between poverty, wellbeing and the commercial world are somewhat complex. One might expect that children who have less in the way of material possessions would experience lower levels of mental wellbeing (however this is defined), although this is not straightforwardly the case. Some research suggests that the crucial issue is to do with the gap between aspiration and reality: if you want what you cannot have, and if you are constantly reminded that other people have more than you, then you are more likely to be unhappy (see Section 11). In this sense, the issue is not so much absolute poverty as relative poverty – or, in effect, inequality. Insofar as the commercial world offers evidence of inequality – by providing people with images of what they cannot have, and stimulating the desire for such things – then it could be seen to exacerbate the existing pressures of living in poverty. We might then expect that pressure to be manifested, for example, in the form of conflicts within families and peer groups, in lower levels of mental wellbeing, and in various other consequences in terms of physical as well as mental health. We might also expect these factors to reinforce each other, so that (for example) the unfulfilled desire for material possessions leads to reduced wellbeing, which leads in turn to a greater tendency to fantasise about such things, and hence to more materialistic attitudes.
- 16.5 Commercial pressure on poor children.** There is evidence to support some of these ideas, and particularly claims about the impact on family life. As we have noted (Sections 11 and 12), some research suggests that children in poor families are more likely to express materialistic attitudes and to 'pester' their parents for new products – although the causal connections here are difficult to identify. Partly because of the lack of funds and opportunities to take part in leisure activities outside the home – sports, music, drama and so on – children from more economically deprived backgrounds spend more time watching television, which would mean they are more likely to be exposed to advertising. However, there is little evidence that they are more exposed to other forms of marketing than wealthy children; and since wealthier children have greater access to the internet, they are clearly more likely to encounter marketing in that context.

- 16.6 Implications for peer group relationships.** Even so, this nexus of factors may have negative implications for peer group relationships among poorer children. Recent UK studies suggest that children from low income families are likely to prefer expensive branded goods (such as sports shoes) to unbranded ones, and to perceive those who wear branded goods in a more positive light. This group also appears to be quick to ridicule or harass peers who do not have the 'right' footwear, clothing or other goods. Cheaper (counterfeit or unbranded) versions are perceived as markers of 'style failure', which in turn impact upon individual self-confidence. It is not clear whether these phenomena are more prevalent among children from lower-income families than their wealthy counterparts; although they do represent an additional pressure on those with limited resources. In some instances, investments in expensive branded goods may be used to disguise the stigma of poverty and hence defend against bullying or ridicule. These tensions may exist despite schools' attempts to enforce dress codes that are intended to mask social differences.
- 16.7 Moving away from materialism?** On the other hand, the same studies suggest that children also say that 'it's what's on the inside that counts'. As we have noted (Section 11), there is some survey evidence that points to quite strongly anti-materialistic attitudes among children, and a resistance to such pressures. The Youth TGI survey, for example, reports declining numbers of young people saying they like to wear clothes with logos or to keep up with fashion, while only around 25% say that they prefer to buy things that their friends would approve of. However, there may be a social desirability bias here, which may vary between different social groups; and unfortunately the available figures do not consider differences between children in terms of wealth and poverty.
- 16.8 Implications for family life.** Recent UK research suggests that parents are very aware of how children use consumer goods to proclaim social status and membership of peer groups, and that this can be particularly problematic for families on limited budgets. Qualitative research suggests that less wealthy parents may go without new clothes and other consumer goods, or turn to credit, in order to provide for their children. As we have noted (Section 12), there is an association between exposure to television advertising and parent-child conflict, although the causal connection here has not been clearly established. However, other research suggests that children's influence on family spending is greater in more affluent families than in poor families – although that may simply be because poorer families have less money to spend. One key US study also suggests that children living in poverty may be more astute in handling money, because they have to develop the skills to do so. It also suggests that their consumer choices tend to favour practicality, and to be more altruistic rather than self-centred.
- 16.9 Implications for physical health.** Economic inequalities are also reflected in health inequalities; and although child poverty in the UK has declined, the impact of this on health inequalities has been limited and uneven. As we have noted (Section 13), child obesity is disproportionately found among disadvantaged families. This appears to reflect a variety of factors, including the cost and difficulty of obtaining fresh food in low income areas, and the low price of some processed and convenience foods. Some HFSS foods function as 'treats' or rewards, which may compensate for poor emotional or mental

wellbeing. While there is considerable debate about the impact of advertising in this respect, it is clear that any such impact needs to be understood in the context of these other factors.

- 16.10 Complex connections.** While this appears to point to a mutually reinforcing nexus of factors, there are some anomalies in the available evidence. It is by no means consistently the case in existing research that children from economically deprived backgrounds display lower levels of emotional wellbeing. Recent research for the National Consumer Council, for example, did not find significant associations between material deprivation and poor self-esteem (although this study sampled only the most affluent and the most deprived children); while Ofsted's Tellus2 survey found that the more deprived children were actually happier than wealthier children, because they had more friends.
- 16.11 Wellbeing among affluent children.** Meanwhile, research from the US suggests that the wellbeing of more affluent children is actually much lower than that of less affluent children. Studies find higher levels of depression, anxiety, substance abuse and eating disorders among children from wealthy families. This might be because such problems are more likely to be reported, although in fact it appears that wealthy parents are less likely to seek or receive help, and health professionals are less likely to sympathise with the problems of wealthy children. Researchers suggest that this higher incidence of mental health problems may arise for two reasons: parental pressure to achieve, and wealthy children's relative isolation from their parents. This research also suggests that poor people place a greater value on family togetherness, community orientation, mutual support and personal growth; and they value children for who they are, not for what they achieve. By contrast with some UK research, this work effectively suggests that the rich are more materialistic than the poor. While this may be because different measures are being used here, it does indicate that the relationships between poverty, wellbeing and materialistic attitudes are not as straightforward as one might expect.
- 16.12 Conflicting values.** Conflicts between parents and children over material goods also need to be understood in terms of family histories. For example, recent UK research suggests that the association between materialism and parent-child conflict is actually stronger for affluent children, even though materialism is lower here than among poorer children. This may be because deprived children understand that their parents cannot afford to buy them everything they want, and are therefore less likely to be upset when their requests are refused. It may also be to do with processes of generational change, in a context of generally increasing affluence. In households where parents have experienced considerable upward mobility, the children may well expect greater material comfort than their parents enjoyed in their own childhood; yet such affluent young materialists may find their parents more interested in encouraging academic performance than the acquisition of material goods. All this work suggests that we need to be considering relative deprivation rather than absolute deprivation: the significance of material goods (or the lack of them) is likely to depend heavily upon comparison – both with others who are more or less wealthy than oneself, and with one's previous experience, and that of other family members. These issues generally require much further investigation.

- 16.13 Beyond pathology.** However implicitly, discussions of this issue often tend to pathologise the consumption behaviour of poorer families. The poor are regarded as bad consumers, deluded by marketing to want things they cannot have, and to want things that are worthless in any case. If they suffer in this situation, it is essentially their own fault. There is no justification for this view in the evidence we have considered. The evidence does not consistently show that poorer children are more materialistic, or that they experience lower levels of mental or emotional wellbeing; and while such children are generally exposed to greater amounts of television advertising (although not to other forms of marketing), it does not consistently show that this results in them coming into more conflict with their parents over purchasing requests.
- 16.14 Marketing and relative poverty.** Even so, it is most unlikely that marketing and advertising play a *positive* role in this respect: being persistently reminded of what you cannot have is unlikely to contribute to mental or emotional wellbeing. As we have suggested, the problem here is more to do with relative poverty than absolute poverty: being poor feels worse if you know that other people are better off. Put simply, you may be likely to want things more if you know you cannot have them. Insofar as the commercial world provides poorer children with evidence of the lives of those other, wealthier people, it seems bound to exacerbate those feelings. In this sense, the fundamental issue may be not so much about absolute poverty as inequality. There is growing evidence that 'wellbeing' (defined in a range of ways) is lower in countries where there is a large income disparity, and while the commercial world does not create these disparities, it may serve to highlight them by drawing the evidence of them to consumers' attention.
- 16.15 The impact of recession.** During the period of this assessment, the UK has begun to experience the effects of a world recession. The implications of this for children's engagement with the commercial world, and specifically for the issues addressed in this section, obviously remain to be seen. If child poverty increases rather than falls in line with government targets, this might be expected to have a negative impact on children's mental and emotional wellbeing, as well as on inequalities relating to health and educational achievement. Poorer parents and children may feel more exposed, and the stigma of poverty may be harder to disguise through the display of material goods. If fewer children and parents are able to gain access to the offerings of the commercial world, and yet continue to be exposed to commercial messages, the gap between aspiration and reality may widen, and so wellbeing may decline. Even so, the existing evidence suggests that we need to be wary of assuming that the relationships among these factors are simple or straightforward.

PART FOUR: THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE

Thus far in the report, our principal focus has been on the impact of commercial *messages*, in the form of advertising and other promotional appeals and strategies to which children are exposed. However, this is only one aspect of children's relationship with the commercial world, albeit perhaps the one that is most visible for many people. In this part of the report, we shift the focus from commercial messages to commercial *decisions* – by which we mean the ways in which commercial forces and pressures more broadly determine the kinds of goods and services that are available to children.

In particular, we focus on the changing relationships between public and private provision, in three principal areas: broadcasting, education and leisure. In each of these areas, there is a history of commercial involvement; but in the past three decades, commercial companies and commercial forces have come to play an increasingly important role. Public spaces and institutions have increasingly come to be used as venues for the display of commercial messages and for other forms of promotion and marketing. There have also been various forms of privatisation or marketisation here. Public services have been outsourced to private companies; public sector organisations have been increasingly obliged to compete with the private sector; and marketised models of provision have been introduced into the delivery of public goods and services. Some of this has been apparent to the ordinary consumer, for example in the re-branding or re-badging of publicity materials; but much of it has been relatively 'invisible'.

The involvement of commercial companies has been accompanied by other significant changes in policy and practice, to the extent that the specific consequences of commercialisation are difficult to identify. In some areas, most notably education, their consequences for children's wellbeing are likely to be long-term, and are not necessarily easy to establish at this point. These consequences may also, of course, be positive as well as negative – and the positives and the negatives may be inextricably connected. Ultimately, however, these phenomena raise much broader questions about the kind of society we want – and in particular, the extent to which we want a society that is largely governed by commercial imperatives. As such, we are moving into an area where evidence is difficult to identify and evaluate. Nevertheless, this is an important aspect of the remit of this assessment, and one that may in some respects have much more far-reaching consequences for children – and for society in general – than the issues we have addressed thus far.

17. Children's television

Public service broadcasters are now competing in a market that is much more strongly dominated by global commercial forces. Combined with the advent of new media technologies and the decline in television advertising revenue, this has destabilised the basic funding model of terrestrial commercial television in particular.

While children now have vastly more programming available to them, most of this is US in origin, and it is in a relatively narrow range of genres (particularly animation). Most of the new specialist children's channels are only available through satellite or cable subscription TV.

Domestic broadcasters are increasingly dependent on overseas sales, and on revenue from merchandising. It is becoming harder to fund factual programmes and live action drama. Meanwhile, specific quotas for children's programming have been removed. As a result, commercial PSB channels (particularly ITV1) have steadily cut back on original UK production for children.

Although parents and children continue to value the public service tradition of children's television, the future (outside the BBC) appears distinctly uncertain.

Meanwhile, there is currently no regulatory requirement or clear business model for commercially-funded public service internet content for children.

- 17.1 The role of commercial decisions.** Children's television provides a particularly interesting example of the impact of commercial decision-making on the kinds of goods and services provided for children. While public service principles continue to play a role in respect of terrestrial broadcasting, the broader environment has become significantly more commercialised. The growing competition to reach the children's market has had ambivalent consequences for children themselves: while the amount of programming has markedly increased, there are concerns about reductions in UK-produced programming, in less profitable genres such as factual programming and drama, and in the provision for specific age groups.
- 17.2 The broader context.** The increasing significance of commercial pressures in this context is tied up with several broader developments:
- The advent of new media technology, particularly cable and satellite TV;
 - The globalisation of media markets;
 - The decline in traditional advertising, and the growing importance of 'integrated marketing', where income is generated across multiple platforms;

- The weakening of government regulation; and
- The increasing significance of specific sub-sectors of the children's market (see Section 5).

The role of children's television

- 17.3 The public service tradition.** Historically, children's television has been seen as one of the key dimensions of British public service broadcasting. It has been universally available through terrestrial channels, and required to 'educate, inform and entertain'. This accounts for several key characteristics:
- Protected slots in the schedule, when children are most likely to be available to view (for example, late afternoons);
 - A generic range of programming, including factual programmes and live action drama as well as animation and entertainment;
 - A role in reflecting and strengthening national identity through original production, as well as reflecting the diversity of cultures within the UK and beyond;
 - Programmes specifically targeted at distinct age groups, from pre-schoolers to teenagers; and
 - A requirement for high quality programming, monitored by regulation.
- 17.4 The regulated duopoly.** It is important to emphasise that this public service ethos has been manifested both on the BBC and on terrestrial commercial channels. Historically, commercial channels have frequently forced the BBC to innovate and to move beyond what some have seen as a rather staid, paternalistic approach, towards a more forthright – and occasionally controversial – engagement with aspects of contemporary children's lives. However, the commercial channels have also been regulated by a series of government interventions, from the Pilkington Report of 1962 through to the Broadcasting Act of 1990. This regulation has ensured consistent levels of investment in programming that are not necessarily 'justified' in relation to audience size. Among other things, this has in the past fostered the existence of a cohort of programme-makers who are career specialists in children's programming. This public service tradition has given the UK a reputation for producing some of the best children's programming in the world.
- 17.5 The continuing significance of children's television.** As we have noted (Section 5), children's television viewing has declined somewhat in recent years, although this has been by no means as dramatic as some have implied. Children have greater individualised access to a range of media technologies, but television continues to have the highest self-reported rate of consumption. This is particularly the case for younger children and for those in lower socio-economic groups. Since the 1950s, children have always spent more time watching programmes aimed at the general audience than children's programmes, although in recent years viewing in children's airtime has slightly increased as a proportion of total viewing (up to 30% in 2006). There are, of course, broader cultural and educational arguments to be made about the importance of children having programmes that are suited to their developmental needs, and that reflect their unique experiences and tastes.

The contemporary context

- 17.6 A crisis in children's television?** Broader changes in the broadcasting environment have destabilised the basic economic model of children's television, although it remains to be seen whether this is merely a matter of temporary adjustment or a more fundamental, long-term 'crisis', as some suggest. Campaign groups such as The Voice of the Listener and Viewer and Save Kids' TV have drawn attention to some of the issues at stake here; and there has been a series of reports on the area by the former Broadcasting Standards Commission and (most recently) by Ofcom. This section draws particularly on Ofcom's report *The Future of Children's Television Programming* (2007), which forms part of its public service review.
- 17.7 Provision on terrestrial channels.** The quantity of programming for children on both terrestrial and cable/satellite channels has significantly increased, multiplying approximately six-fold over the past ten years: around 120,000 hours of children's programming are currently screened on British TV each year. However, the provision on terrestrial channels has remained relatively constant, and has recently fallen slightly: this has been most notably the case on ITV1 (whose late afternoon children's 'slot' has been steadily reduced) and on Channel 4 (where the focus has shifted more towards young people than children). The overall increase in airtime has inevitably resulted in a considerable rise in the proportion of repeats. More importantly, most of the new material is US in origin, and much of it is closely integrated with toys and other merchandise based on licensed characters: there has been a marked decline in the provision of UK-originated programmes commissioned by the commercial terrestrial broadcasters, whose expenditure on first-run original content halved between 1998 and 2006.
- 17.8 A proliferation of new channels.** Meanwhile, the advent of new technologies, combined with the growing interest in the children's market, has led to a phenomenal proliferation of specialist children's channels, of which there are currently no fewer than 26 in the UK. While some can be accessed via Freeview, most are only available via subscription packages. The BBC has enjoyed considerable success with its two dedicated channels, CBeebies and CBBC, while ITV has entered this market more recently. However, all the other channels are owned by major US-based companies, notably Disney, Turner and Viacom. These channels devote very little funding to original UK-produced material (around 10% of total investment in new programming); and their UK productions are largely produced with an eye to global sales.
- 17.9 Viewing patterns.** Within this competitive market, the children's audience has fragmented: in 2006, no single dedicated children's channel accounted for more than 4% of the total viewing share. However, children have begun to migrate from the terrestrial broadcasters to the new dedicated channels: the latter's audience share among 4-15 year olds grew between 2002 and 2008 from 35% to almost 65%. While households with children are more likely to have cable/satellite (which of course have to be paid for through subscription), there are still around 10% which do not.

- 17.10 Changing income streams.** Children's television has always been a relatively 'protected' area on terrestrial commercial channels, in the sense that more is spent on it than is retrieved in advertising revenue. However, the recent rise in quantity of children's programming has been accompanied by a decline in advertising and subscription revenue, making children's television even less commercially attractive. The high degree of competition between channels and the fragmentation of the audience inevitably drives down the value of each channel for advertisers. Meanwhile, buying in programmes is almost invariably cheaper than original production, because of the economies of scale in the global market; and so the increasing amounts of schedule time available are likely to become ever more dominated by imported programmes and, of course, by repeats. With declining income from broadcasters, producers are also becoming correspondingly more reliant on income from ancillary merchandise and from sales in global markets.
- 17.11 Changing regulation.** Meanwhile, there have been some significant changes in the regulatory regime affecting children's television. The 2003 Communications Act to some extent reflected an acceptance of the challenges facing advertising-funded PSB channels, and this led to a more flexible self-regulatory (or co-regulatory) approach. Among other things, the Act removed the requirement for mandated levels or quotas of children's programming on these channels. As such, broadcasters are now able to decide the amount and the nature of what they deliver in this area, although Ofcom is able to consider whether such channels include a 'suitable quantity and range of high-quality and original programmes for children and young people'. This was followed by the introduction of the new regulations relating to HFSS food advertising, which broadcasters argued was bound to lead to a fall in advertising revenue (see Section 20 for further discussion). In 2008, ITV1 put forward proposals to reduce the amount of children's programmes to be broadcast from four hours per week (plus an hour per week of children's films) to two hours per week (plus an hour per week of films). In response to Ofcom's view that such a substantial reduction was inappropriate, ITV compromised and settled on 2.5 hours per week, with a reduction in children's films, but Ofcom was unable to take any further action on the matter. Cable and satellite broadcasters are of course not subject to regulation in this respect.

Consequences for children's programming

- 17.12 Implications for original programming.** The most dramatic consequence of these developments has been the reduction in investment in original programming among the terrestrial commercial broadcasters. ITV1, in particular, has now effectively abandoned its funding of UK children's programmes. Although it was argued that this was in response to a decline in income following the new HFSS regulations, it has in fact been the latest step in a long-term shift over the past decade (and the figures as regards advertising income are in any case less straightforward than this – see Section 20). Five and S4C are now the only terrestrial commercial broadcasters funding original children's programming, and their budgets are small.
- 17.13 The role of the BBC.** This leaves the BBC in an exposed position, as by far the leading investor in UK-produced programmes, particularly factual programmes and drama. This raises questions about the need for a plurality of providers in the future. The BBC has a

published commitment to broadcast 1500 hours of children's programmes every year on its main terrestrial channels; although it currently provides more children's programming than is required by its service licences, and could in theory reduce its output quite significantly. At the same time, the BBC's channels for children, especially CBeebies, have been very successful – although they have also been accompanied with more aggressive development of commercial revenue and merchandising derived from many of the programmes.

- 17.14 Implications for generic diversity.** All these changes impact in different ways on different genres of programming. Broadly speaking, animation and pre-school programmes are much easier to sell in global markets than live action drama or factual programmes. The more culturally specific a drama programme is, the less likely it is to sell – although there are some exceptions to this. Programmes with significant merchandising or other 'spin-off' possibilities (for example in the form of computer games or educational software) are more lucrative than those with limited potential of this kind. Programmes with a longer 'shelf life', which do not date so quickly, such as pre-school programmes and animation, are also more attractive investments, for example as compared with factual programmes. In addition, some genres of programming (most notably live action drama) are generally more expensive to produce than others. This has resulted in a situation where companies are reluctant to invest, for example, in contemporary non-comedy drama. This also accentuates the tendency to marginalise programmes that reflect specifically British cultural experiences and values.
- 17.15 Implications for different age groups.** Ofcom's 2007 report draws attention to some important differences in the implications here for different age groups:
- Pre-school children are well served by existing programming, which partly reflects the growing significance of this market more broadly.
 - Younger children (aged 6-8), who tend to favour cartoons, are also generally well served, although this is less the case in analogue-only households.
 - Older children (aged 9-12) are more poorly served, especially in respect of original UK drama and factual programmes.
 - Young teenagers (13-15) have even less dedicated output, and tend to rely either on programmes aimed at younger children, or on general adult output.
- 17.16 A market logic?** In broad terms, then, the changing nature of children's programming is coming to reflect a market logic – or, in our terms, is increasingly driven by commercial decisions. If various potential audiences are available to view, the most lucrative audience (in terms of advertising revenue) is more likely to be targeted. Thus, if both children and 'housewives' are available to view, programming for housewives is likely to win out, as has been the case with ITV1's afternoon schedule. Companies are also likely to take the least expensive means to reach a given audience. Thus, if children can be reached using relatively inexpensive imported cartoons, there is little point in investing in expensive home-produced drama. In this context, effects may also become causes. Thus, if teenagers find that there are relatively few programmes specifically addressing them, they may come to prefer other screen media to television; and, in this context,

broadcasters may feel there is little point in providing dedicated programming for them, particularly if they can be reached through mainstream adult output.

The views of industry, parents and children

- 17.17 Industry perspectives.** The 2007 Ofcom report suggests that industry stakeholders perceive the current situation as especially difficult, and are uncertain about the future of children's programming. There is particular concern about the reduction in ITV1's commitment, and whether the resulting 'gap' in provision can be filled. There is also concern about the resulting dominance of the BBC, and the consequences for plurality of commissioning and programme supply. Stakeholders generally agreed that the production of high quality, UK-originated content was vital for British society; and that some form of government intervention would be necessary in order to secure this.
- 17.18 Parents' and children's perspectives.** Ofcom's research suggests that parents have high expectations of children's programming, and feel it has an important social and cultural role. However, they are relatively dissatisfied, particularly with the output of commercial terrestrial channels – the BBC, including its dedicated channels, fared significantly better here. There is particular concern about the limited representation of 'different cultures and opinions from around the UK'. Parents of pre-school and younger children are generally more satisfied, although parents of older children, and older children themselves, feel they are less well served, particularly in respect of drama and factual programmes. While parents want to see more UK-originated programming, this is less of a concern for older children – although these children do feel there should be more programmes specifically targeting their age group.

Unanswered questions

- 17.19 An uncertain future.** The developments described in this section do not point inexorably in a single direction. Some sectors of the children's market – notably pre-schoolers, and to some extent younger children – are being better served in terms of the quantity as well as (more arguably) the range and quality of programming; although others are rather worse off than before. Some UK companies, including the BBC, are major players in the global children's television market. Some US-owned cable/satellite channels also recognise the 'brand value' of UK-originated production. Even so, it is hard to see how the UK children's market can sustain the current level of competition – and especially the ever-growing number of dedicated channels. The consequences of these developments for children's programming are thus in some respects both ambivalent and as yet unclear.
- 17.20 Digital Britain.** These issues are to some extent addressed in the government's recent Digital Britain report, which recognises the risk of 'market failure' in the area of children's television, particularly in respect of UK-originated content and material aimed at older children. The report argues for a plurality of provision, including children's production for all age groups, but especially for those over 10 (who are also identified in Ofcom's research as those most likely to lose out). A revised remit for C4 as a PSB provider could give greater emphasis to providing new specialised programming for older children, as

well as stimulating competition with the BBC for innovation and quality. It is envisaged that this could encourage new forms of educational provision for children and young people, and promote forms of creative participation and content creation by young people themselves.

- 17.21 The role of new media.** Another possibility here is that the internet will come to fill the place once occupied by children's television. However, the potential here is limited. While the BBC's sites are popular with children, they are funded from the licence fee and from income deriving from ancillary merchandise. Beyond this, the internet remains a largely unregulated commercial medium; and there is no clearly sustainable model for funding public service content for children online.
- 17.22 The benefits of children's television.** On the other hand, it should also be noted here that there is relatively little definitive evidence of the benefits of public service television for children. While there has been some qualitative research in this area, much of it has focused on how children interpret and respond to the kinds of material on offer, rather than on questions about 'effects'. This evidence is suggestive of the cultural and educational value of children's television, but it is far from definitive. To put this another way, it is impossible to say what the impact on children would be if UK-produced children's television effectively disappeared, and if the only programmes available were animation series delivered by the US-owned cable/satellite companies.
- 17.23 A debate about cultural values.** In debating these issues, campaigners are almost bound to appeal not to evidence about effects, but to arguments about cultural and educational values. For instance, they argue that British children *should* see representations of British children on their television screens, and that this plays a significant role in the formation of national cultural identity and citizenship. Likewise, they argue that children *should* see a range of different types of programming designed for their age group – including live action drama, news and documentary, rather than merely animation; and they suggest that this is essential for their socialisation and healthy cultural development. These are normative judgments, rather than ones that can be proven by appealing to evidence.
- 17.24 The role of the commercial world.** Finally, it is worth noting that the debate in this area extends beyond the somewhat one-dimensional arguments about 'commercial exploitation' that tend to dominate the discussion in many of the other areas we have considered. One of the most striking aspects of the public service tradition in British children's television is that it has involved both state-funded and commercial provision – and, some would argue, depends upon a dynamic relationship between them. It has also historically depended upon regulation – and, notably, regulation that is more concerned with what children *should* see than with what they should *not*. The commercial market clearly can play an important and necessary role in providing children with cultural experiences that many would see as vital to their wellbeing. The question that is raised here is whether and how the government needs to intervene in order to ensure that this will continue to be the case.

18. Education

Schooling – and education more broadly – has become an increasingly important arena for children’s encounters with the commercial world.

Commercial messages and marketing activities are increasingly evident in schools, in the form of sponsorship and public relations activities as well as some overt advertising.

Many businesses are involved in providing work experience, mentoring and teacher training, mainly on a *pro bono* basis.

More and more private companies are involved in the provision of educational services, including the management of schools and local authorities; and market-based models of provision have been very widely adopted in building and refurbishment, facilities management, catering, and so on.

Educational goods and services (including home tutoring and supplementary classes) are also increasingly marketed to children and parents in the home.

Many of these developments have been relatively invisible to the general public. There has been little research on them, and their implications for children’s wellbeing (which may be both positive and negative) are particularly hard to identify.

18.1 Education and the commercial world. Schooling – and education more broadly – is an increasingly important arena for children’s encounters with the commercial world. This section focuses on four main aspects of this phenomenon:

- the presence of commercial messages and marketing activities in schools;
- work experience, mentoring, and other forms of contact between schools and businesses;
- the role of private companies in the provision of educational services; and
- the commercial marketing of educational goods and services to parents and children in the home.

Our focus here is on state schools, not on the private sector (although this could in itself arguably be seen as part of the commercial world).

18.2 Evidence. Reliable evidence on these phenomena is difficult to obtain. While several of them are far from new, they appear to have grown significantly in scope and scale in recent years. Some are well-known, such as Tesco’s ‘Computers for Schools’ voucher programme, but others – particularly the involvement of private companies in school

management and services – have been much less widely publicised. The privatisation of schools, education authorities, inspection, and training and advisory services for teachers, and even developments such as the Private Finance Initiative, are probably not widely understood by parents.

18.3 Impact. The implications of these developments in terms of children's wellbeing are also particularly difficult to assess. While companies involved in this sector are keen to proclaim the benefits of such activities, there has also been widespread criticism. However, there has been very little independent evaluation of the consequences of involving businesses in this way, particularly in respect of the impact on children.

Marketing in schools

18.4 Aspects of marketing. Schools may be used as venues for marketing and other promotional activities in numerous ways. These include:

- Sponsorship (for example of school events and activities)
- Incentive programmes (such as voucher or token schemes)
- Appropriation of school space (for logos, banners or advertising hoardings)
- Sponsored teaching materials or lesson plans
- Sponsored fundraising (branded programmes or packages to assist schools with fundraising)
- Market research (the use of schools as venues for market research on students)
- Marketing events or programmes (such as commercial book clubs)
- Awards (companies offering prizes or 'kitemarks' for achievement in particular areas)
- Distribution of free samples
- Electronic marketing (the provision of sponsored television or computer equipment or services, sometimes in exchange for the right to advertise).

18.5 Companies involved. Examples of leading companies involved in these kinds of initiatives include Nestle, McDonalds and Unilever; although on a smaller scale, many local businesses are also involved in the sponsorship of school events or activities. A whole range of companies – from financial services and energy companies through to Google and Disney – provide sponsored resources for schools; and there are numerous advertising-supported sites offering teaching materials. Companies such as BT, Total and RBS (Royal Bank of Scotland) offer awards for schools, in the latter case specifically for those nominated by their employees; while others such as Marks and Spencer, BT and Blockbuster are involved in social or cause-related marketing with schools (see Sections 9 and 13). Meanwhile, technology companies like Microsoft, Apple and Promethean frequently provide 'free' equipment and software to schools. There are also companies such as Jazzy Books and Boomerang that produce exercise and record books which incorporate advertising; while Ten Nine specializes in placing advertising posters in

schools. Organizations such as the National Schools Partnership and FEdS Consultancy offer support for companies in this area.

- 18.6 Benefits.** Companies are typically keen to stress the pro-social dimensions of such practices. The provision of corporate resources is often described as a form of 'partnership' that helps to enhance students' understanding of the commercial world. Voucher schemes and sponsorship provide additional material benefits to schools (such as books and other resources), while other initiatives contribute to charitable work and school fund-raising. However, this is by no means only a *pro bono* activity. Company materials also point to the ability of such schemes to reach large numbers of school students, to increase brand awareness and foster good public relations (not least through generating positive media coverage), to improve employee motivation, and ultimately to increase sales.
- 18.7 Controversy.** However, these more 'visible' forms of commercial influence are often controversial. This has been particularly true in the United States, most notably in the case of Channel One – a service in which schools were provided with 'free' television receiving equipment in exchange for the compulsory daily screening of a news programme containing advertising. Research suggests that commercial involvement in US schools has gradually shifted away from such 'hard sell' advertising towards a more subtle, less direct approach, based on branding and 'customer relationship management' rather than advertising *per se*. There is also a Campaign for Commercial Free Education in Ireland, and an International Day of Action Against the Commercialization of Education is apparently being planned.
- 18.8 Commercial messages.** Submissions to our consultation included several reports questioning the commercial provision of teaching materials for schools. In particular, there has been considerable criticism of the involvement of food companies in providing teaching materials relating to nutrition, and of their sponsorship of voucher schemes. A good instance of the sensitivity that surrounds more overt forms of marketing in UK schools in recent years was the controversy surrounding the Cadbury's 'Get Active!' campaign, in which children were encouraged to collect tokens from chocolate bars which could then be exchanged for school sports equipment. While this campaign was quickly discontinued, food companies such as Nestle and Kellogg's continue to sponsor sporting competitions and awards for schools.
- 18.9 The value of promotional schemes.** The value of promotional and incentive schemes for schools is certainly debatable, although there has been little research on this issue. Critics argue that voucher schemes (of the Cadbury's or Tesco's variety) require an investment of time and money on the part of parents and children that is disproportionate to the rewards. A small-scale study of the 'Books for Schools' campaign formerly run by Walker's potato crisps (a division of Pepsi) found that schools were not satisfied that the time and effort involved in gathering, cutting and sorting the tokens was well spent; and the choice of books was relatively narrow, being confined to one publishing house. There was also criticism of the fact that there was no co-operation between the company and teachers or school librarians; although there is no doubt that it increased the numbers of books available in participating schools.

- 18.10 Extent of promotional involvement.** Another recent study focused on commercial activities specifically relating to health promotion in North of England primary schools. Over 50% of the schools that responded had been involved in at least four types of commercial activity – voucher/token collection schemes (the most prevalent, at 85% overall), commercial competitions or contests, business-linked sports coaching and sponsorship. Many of these activities were more commonly found in schools in more economically deprived areas (as is also the case in the US). However, very few of the schools had any clear policies on the issue, which would suggest that decisions are often made on an *ad hoc* basis.
- 18.11 Impact on wellbeing.** Schools would seem to be a particularly important venue for marketers, not least because they contain a 'captive audience' of some of the most elusive and hard-to-reach consumers. The appearance of branded materials and equipment, and of forms of advertising, might be seen to imply endorsement of such products by schools; and while this approach might not necessarily prove effective with all students, it also addresses parents, who may be more inclined to accept it. There may also be a danger of schools appearing to give mixed messages, for example on issues such as nutrition and healthy eating, where corporate sponsorship can contradict the content of lessons. As such, these activities may have an impact on children's wellbeing; although such effects would probably be difficult to identify, and as yet there is little evidence in this area.
- 18.12 Guidance for schools.** Even so, the growing scale of such activities, and the opposition to them, have led the NUT to issue guidance for its members on the use of commercial materials in schools; and the DCSF has also produced its own guidelines, in collaboration with ISBA, the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers. These guidelines encourage schools to assess whether such activities fulfill criteria to do with educational value and relevance – although in practice this may be far from straightforward to ascertain. School staff are urged to make judgments about the appropriateness of branding and sales messages; and to consider (for example in the case of voucher schemes) whether terms of sale are sufficiently explicit. There are also specific guidelines relating to the promotion of HFSS foods, including regulations regarding vending machines in schools. The guidelines recommend that a whole-school policy be adopted and overseen by a senior member of staff; although they place the onus on schools to negotiate with businesses, raising questions about what further information and support they might need in doing so.

School-business links

- 18.13 Aspects of school-business links.** Here we include a range of activities that bring school students and teachers into more direct contact with business personnel. They would include:
- Work experience programmes
 - Careers advice and mentoring
 - Company staff teaching in, or visiting, schools
 - Training for teachers, governors and other school staff.

- 18.14 Companies involved.** Many of these are well-established practices, in which a wide range of major and smaller companies are involved. Notable examples would include the Scottish Power Skillseeker programme, which provides vocational training for young people from socially and economically deprived backgrounds; Marks and Spencer's 'Marks & Start' work experience programme; Compass Group's Junior Chefs Academy; BP's Schools Link programme, which involves mentoring, governor training, work experience, and employees delivering workshops in schools; Standard Life's 'Step Up in Life' careers education programme; and the work of the Personal Finance Education Group.
- 18.15 Benefits and promotional value.** These activities offer benefits to schools by providing professional development opportunities, enabling them to draw on the expertise of business, and more generally to help prepare students for the world of work. For the companies involved, they obviously have a promotional function, at least in terms of increasing brand recognition and good public relations; and they also provide benefits in terms of employee motivation and development. There has been little evaluation of such activities, outside that undertaken by the companies themselves.

Privatisation and marketisation

- 18.16 Aspects of privatisation.** This category refers to the provision of goods and services for schools by commercial companies. While schools and local authorities have always been a key market for goods such as furniture, books, and technology of various kinds, this activity has moved on to a new scale in recent years. Examples would include:
- Outsourcing, via exclusive agreements with companies for the provision of goods and services (often in exchange for a share of profits)
 - The management of schools or school services, and in some cases entire local authorities, by private companies
 - Assessment and testing services run for profit, including examination boards
 - Training (of teachers, governors and other school staff) run by private companies.
- 18.17 Privatisation and marketisation.** The phenomena identified above can be seen as instances of 'exogeneous' privatisation: they involve the participation of the private sector in the design or delivery of aspects of public education on a for-profit basis. These developments are often accompanied by forms of marketisation – or 'endogeneous' privatisation – which involve the importing of techniques and ideas from the private sector in order to make the provision of education more 'market-like'. Examples of marketisation would include an emphasis on competition between schools and on 'consumer choice', and the use of approaches drawn from commercial business in the management and working practices of teaching staff.
- 18.18 The growth of the education services industry.** In terms of privatisation, the UK 'education services industry' has grown at a phenomenal pace in the past ten years. Many of the companies involved are active in several areas: the sponsorship of schools; managing schools, groups of schools and entire education authorities; providing

professional development and 'school improvement' services; school inspections; national programmes and strategies, such as the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies; examinations and assessment; and consultancy on local and national policy. Numerous key government initiatives over the past ten years – such as Education Action Zones, Specialist Schools, the Private Finance Initiative and Academies – have included significant elements of commercial involvement. Key companies specialising in this sector include Serco, Jarvis, CEA, Nord Anglia and Capita, as well as major finance capital corporations such as HSBC and Goldman Sachs. Many of these companies also have interests in other aspects of public service provision, including child care and health services. This is a global phenomenon, both in the sense that it involves global (or multinational) companies (such as Edison, ETS and GEMS), and also in that it is happening in many countries around the world.

- 18.19 Changing educational cultures.** Both privatisation and marketisation are having far-reaching consequences for education. New 'agents' (including managers, consultants and entrepreneurs of various kinds) have emerged in the education marketplace; the working conditions and everyday practices of many teachers have altered dramatically; and there have arguably been much broader changes in what it means to be a teacher and a learner. Advocates of such developments refer to the need to leverage innovation and to create efficiencies; while critics regard them as undermining social justice and fundamental ethical values. Yet hard evidence about whether these developments do in fact 'deliver' what they promise – particularly in terms of children's learning – is in short supply; and the question of what is to be measured (and how) is open to considerable dispute.
- 18.20 Benefits and losses for schools.** Ultimately, commercial companies' involvement in education is driven and made possible by the profit motive. While this may sometimes coincide with providing benefit to the 'customer', it does not necessarily always do so. Initiatives such as the PFI, for example, represent a form of privatisation of public sector facilities and services. PFI has resulted in the improvement of existing schools and the building of new facilities that would almost certainly never have occurred otherwise. On the other hand, buildings that were previously in public ownership are now controlled by commercial companies; and they can be rented out for profit by such companies outside regular school hours. This may well mean that schools have less control over their facilities, and are less able or likely to use them in the evenings and in holiday times. Likewise, commercial involvement in school management has arguably resulted in greater funds being available to schools, although there has also been a loss of local accountability. For example, sponsors of Academies do provide some funding, but in return they enjoy a considerable degree of control (for example, of key appointments, school governance, and to some extent the curriculum).
- 18.21 Implications for children's wellbeing.** Even so, it is difficult to determine the implications of these developments for children's learning. In a recent report for Education International, Ball and Youdell conclude that 'there is no clear-cut research based evidence demonstrating the benefits of programmes of school choice (endogeneous privatisation) or contracting out of schools (exogeneous privatisation) in

terms of raising children's achievement'. A similar conclusion was reached by a House of Commons Select Committee in 2006. Furthermore, there is now considerable evidence that market-driven approaches can lead to the segregation and polarisation of school populations within local education markets, and hence accentuate inequalities; and that competition between schools (a form of endogenous privatisation) has led to an increased emphasis on 'teaching to the test' and on prescriptive forms of classroom pedagogy.

Education outside school

18.22 The market in educational goods and services. There is also a burgeoning market in educational goods and services for direct sale to parents. Key aspects of this would include:

- Home tutoring
- Educational books, magazines, CD-Roms and websites (including revision guides)
- Supplementary classes (both in mainstream curriculum subjects and in areas such as performing arts).

These latter phenomena are often linked to school provision: for example, many schools market revision guides (including those produced by commercially-owned examination boards) or provide additional weekend or holiday programmes for 'gifted and talented' students run by commercial companies.

18.23 A growing market. This is by no means a new development. Historians have traced the growth of the toy market in the early twentieth century, which was partly founded on beliefs about the developmental and educational value of play; and a sub-sector of the publishing and media industries has always subsisted on appealing to parents' educational aspirations for their children. However, in recent years there has been a major expansion in the market for broadly 'educational' toys, software, books and magazines targeted at the domestic consumer. Home tutoring (which is an entirely unregulated commercial market) has grown significantly, and we have seen the rise of lucrative franchises for supplementary out-of-school classes run by private companies such as Kumon and Stagecoach. Even extended schools provision relies on parents' ability and willingness to pay, albeit a small fee; and here again, there is risk that those who are most in need of such services are likely to miss out on them, thus increasing inequalities.

18.24 A consequence of marketisation. The expansion of this market can partly be seen as a consequence of the increasing emphasis on competition between schools and between children. Research suggests that parents are increasingly concerned about their child's ability to pass the tests, and to gain entry to a 'good' school or a 'good' university. These demands have arisen at a time when mothers are increasingly working outside the home, and when families are increasingly reporting 'time pressure' (see Section 6). In this context, paying for additional educational goods and services offers the promise of educational advantage which parents may feel unable to secure on their own behalf, or in their own time. Such arguments are certainly apparent in the marketing appeals for such

products, which emphasise their value as a means of securing children's educational advantage.

18.25 Consequences for wellbeing. Again, the implications of these developments in terms of children's wellbeing are more difficult to assess. Research suggests that middle-class parents in particular may feel compelled to occupy their children's time with apparently worthwhile educational activities, leaving them with little 'free' time; although of course such opportunities are less likely to be available to economically disadvantaged families. When it comes to learning in the home, there is often an awkward negotiation between children's desires for play and entertainment and parents' interest in education – which can be manifested, for example, in struggles over how the home computer is used. There is quite good evidence that the educational promise of computers in the home is very far from being realised.

Conclusion

18.26 Limits of the evidence. This is another area of our assessment in which it seems relatively easy to establish the (growing) scale and nature of commercial involvement, but much harder to identify its implications for children. There is a need for much more independent research here, and for greater public awareness. One could argue that the growing involvement of commercial companies in education has made available a range of new products, facilities and services that might not otherwise have been provided. Yet whether or not they meet the needs of children, parents and teachers, and whether or not they make a positive contribution to learning, is more debatable. Ultimately, as in the case of broadcasting, assessing the influence of commercial forces on education raises much broader political and philosophical questions about the kind of society we want: it is not something that can be assessed simply in terms of whether it is good or bad for individual children.

18.27 A need for public accountability. In this respect, one major cause for concern here is the extent to which many of these developments have been largely 'invisible' to the general public, and thus not open for wider scrutiny or debate. As we have noted (Section 9), commercial involvement may well benefit schools and children, but it also benefits companies, not only in terms of direct profit but also in terms of public relations and branding. In principle, it should be possible to calculate these benefits on both sides, and to weigh them in the balance, as part of a broader regulatory process.

19. Play, leisure and public space

Partly in response to the fear of crime, children's play in the street or in public open spaces has been steadily displaced by domestic leisure activities, or play in supervised commercial settings.

Outside the home, children are spending increasing amounts of time in commercialised indoor play environments and branded locations and events: in these settings, leisure is increasingly blended with shopping and consumption.

Many of these possibilities are much more readily available to children from more wealthy families. While these developments may have implications for children's wellbeing, and particularly their physical health, there is little evidence on this.

The privatisation of play. The various forms of commercialisation discussed in the previous two sections can also be identified in the area of children's leisure and play. It goes without saying that play is an important aspect of the development of children's creativity, social skills and overall wellbeing. For older children, the provision of unstructured leisure opportunities can be seen to perform a similar function. Yet evidence would suggest that play and leisure spaces are increasingly becoming sites for commercial promotion; and indeed that such facilities are steadily becoming privatised. If children's play increasingly takes place in commercialised settings, what are the likely consequences for their wellbeing? Much of the material in this section is drawn from our commissioned literature review on marketing to children (Appendix H).

Outdoor and indoor play

- 19.1 The domestication of leisure.** As we have discussed (Section 6), there is some evidence that children's leisure has become increasingly 'domesticated' or home-based. Children are now much more confined to their homes, and much less independently mobile, than they were thirty years ago. They are now twice as likely to be driven to school as they were in the 1970s (although of course car ownership has also more than doubled over the same period). Since the 1970s, 'playing out' in the street or in open spaces has steadily been displaced by domestic entertainment (particularly via television and computers) and – especially among more affluent classes – by supervised leisure activities such as organised sports, music lessons and so forth.
- 19.2 Fears of the outside world.** There are various mutually reinforcing factors at work here. The fear of crime is certainly a significant one; and while figures suggest that this is in fact slowly declining, fears about 'stranger danger' in relation to children appear to have

become more intense in recent years. The greater reliance on cars may be a cause as well as a solution to the problem: although the risk of traffic accidents has actually decreased over the past two decades, they are still the leading cause of fatalities to children.

- 19.3 Reduction in public space.** Meanwhile, the availability of public play areas has reduced, both in towns – where population density has increased – and in the countryside – where agri-business has rendered large areas less accessible. Formerly public leisure facilities are also being privatised, as services are contracted out, and as private companies are also increasingly the ones providing key services. If children have to ‘pay to play’ outside the home, new social inequalities are bound to emerge.
- 19.4 Generational changes.** A recent survey for Play England asked children aged 7-12 where they experienced adventurous and challenging play. Almost half (48 per cent) said they did so at home and almost as many, 44 per cent, mentioned theme parks. Only 24 per cent mentioned their local streets and 29 per cent outdoor natural spaces. When their parents were asked the same question about their own childhoods, 70 per cent mentioned outdoor spaces and 45 per cent their local streets, but only 27 per cent chose home and 16 per cent theme parks. Not only is the private space of the home becoming a more important location for leisure and play, but when children do go out it is more likely to be to commercial spaces such as theme parks or shopping malls, in which advertising and marketing play a prominent role, rather than unstructured public spaces in the immediate neighbourhood.
- 19.5 Unhealthy screen play?** This is not, of course, to imply that children’s play in the home is somehow inferior – or even necessarily sedentary. The Nintendo Wii console, for example, allows children to engage in a wide range of activities via their computer screen, including things that perhaps they would not have the opportunity to do in real life, such as skiing and snowboarding. Other computer games – such as Guitar Hero, Singstar and Dance Mat – have a similarly active element which is likely to appeal to children especially if they are unable or unwilling to spend time being active outside. All these games have multi-player modes, so they can be played with other children or with parents.
- 19.6 Leisure facilities.** Meanwhile, research has consistently suggested that the provision of leisure facilities for young people is uneven, and often inadequate. Young people themselves frequently express dissatisfaction with this situation: as high as 80% of young people in the recent Make Space Youth Review reported that they had ‘nowhere to go’. These observations are echoed by many parents and professionals. While various government initiatives are under way to address this issue, it remains the case that leisure facilities are increasingly being privatised; and that adult customers are likely to prove more lucrative than young people for commercial providers. Perhaps inevitably, young people may be drawn to ‘hang out’ in commercialised public spaces such as shopping malls – although here they may find that their behaviour is subject to the surveillance and intervention of private security staff.

Branded spaces

- 19.7 Commercialised play spaces.** One contemporary development that is especially relevant to younger children is the expansion of commercialised play spaces that provide soft play areas, 'ball parks', climbing frames and safe surfaces. Corporate providers such as Alphabet Zoo, Charlie Chalks and Wacky Warehouses have been quick to recognise the emerging opportunities to engage children in more challenging forms of play, but in a safe environment. Such commercial play spaces also seek to accentuate their attractiveness to parents, since it is ultimately parents who are the main 'consumers': they may be linked to shops or public houses, or provide coffee mornings where parents can meet each other while their children play. Indeed, it has been argued that children occupy only a marginal role in the production of these play environments, and in contributing to the decision to use them; and as such, these spaces provide more for the needs of adults than those of children.
- 19.8 19.9 Branded locations.** As the Play England study demonstrates, theme parks, the contemporary successors to amusement parks, are now a major leisure destination for families with children. Since 1955 when Disneyland opened its first theme park, with entertainment and fairground rides built entirely around the company's products, corporations are increasingly creating dedicated branded spaces that combine pleasure with promotion. Disneyland Florida now has over 17 million visitors a year; while in the UK the largest theme parks are Blackpool Pleasure Beach (5.5 million visitors in 2007), Alton Towers (2.4 million visitors in 2007) and Thorpe Park (1.7 million visitors in 2007). Two of the best known branded theme parks in Britain are Legoland (Windsor) and Cadbury World (Birmingham). Other brands have secured spaces within larger theme park complexes by sponsoring popular rides and locations.
- 19.9 Retailing.** The combination of entertainment and consumption is also characteristic of major shopping malls. Malls such as Bluewater, the largest complex in the south east of England, typically claim to be 'much more than just a shopping destination'. Bluewater contains a multiplex cinema, numerous restaurants and eating places, together with play areas specifically designed for children, including a climbing wall. This integration of shopping and play is often repeated in stores stocking children's products. The Lego brand stores, for example, provide extensive opportunities for play with their products; while this same logic is applied in other public spaces, as with Electronic Arts' provision of video games for bored children waiting with parents in airport lounges.
- 19.10 Museums.** The restoration of free entry to museums means that children now have greater access to such cultural sites: six of the major London museums featured in the UK's top ten visitor attractions in 2007. However, major exhibitions and attractions at these locations may require sponsorship from companies and brands, meaning that these sites are not insulated from commercial promotion. The Science Museum's current 'Japan Car' exhibition, for example, is partnered with a range of Japanese car manufacturers and other Japanese companies.

19.11 Branded events. Events aimed at young people have also become increasingly branded. The Beck's Beer Fusions events are a case in point. In addition to staging a series of live rock concerts, the campaign offers limited edition bottles bearing work by well known contemporary artists, and a competition to submit and select the artworks that will appear at the concerts. Although users logging onto the site are required to declare that they are of legal drinking age, there is no check on the truthfulness of replies. This multidimensional strategy, designed to foster 'ownership' of the brand, extends to the company's entry on Wikipedia, which invites users 'to be part of who we are' by writing additional material adding 'milestones, accolades or any other fodder we don't even know about'. This phenomenon is clearly part of the broader trends towards integrated and participatory marketing discussed in Section 5.

Conclusion

- 19.12 Consequences for wellbeing.** The consequences of these developments for children's wellbeing are difficult to identify. Most of these commercial leisure activities are much more readily available to children from more wealthy families. As such, it may be that disadvantaged children are more likely to be confined to the home, which could in turn have implications for their physical health, not least in respect of obesity. Alternatively, disadvantaged children might be more likely to resort to playing or socialising with each other in public spaces where they may be more readily perceived as 'causing trouble'. Evidence on these issues is currently lacking.
- 19.13 The consequences of commercial decisions.** The issues addressed in this part of the report are potentially much more broad-ranging than those relating primarily to commercial messages. Commercial forces and commercial decisions are playing an ever more important role in determining the kinds of opportunities and experiences that are now available to children and young people. Commercial companies are increasingly key players in the provision of public services. Even where the private sector is not directly involved, the commercial market has become the model for how such services will be organised and delivered. Children's access to learning, play and leisure experiences is now, more than ever, a market opportunity; and, as such, some children are bound to be more able to enjoy and benefit from these things than others. In the process, notions of the public good – and indeed of children's wellbeing – are effectively being replaced by the principle of customer satisfaction. We have concentrated on only three domains here – education, broadcasting and play – but this analysis could certainly be extended to other domains, such as the provision of health and social care. The consequences of these developments for children's wellbeing are far from clear: there are likely to be gains as well as losses. Ultimately, however, the market is almost bound to accentuate existing inequalities.

PART FIVE: TOWARDS POLICY

It was not part of the remit of our assessment to generate policy recommendations. Even so, the assessment has taken place in a context where there are several ongoing policy initiatives addressing different aspects of children's relationships with the commercial world. Many of the submissions to our consultation explicitly recommended, or sought to forestall, potential policy outcomes. As such, we felt it would be appropriate to identify and assess evidence as regards potential policy responses. These relate to two key areas, considered in the following sections: regulation, particularly of commercial messages and marketing activities directed at children; and education, specifically in the areas of consumer literacy and media literacy. We review evidence on existing activities and initiatives in these areas, and identify some gaps in knowledge.

We should emphasise that we do not see these two areas as mutually incompatible, or as an either/or choice. Education does not make regulation unnecessary, any more than regulation makes education redundant. As a society, we need children to be well-informed, critical consumers (and indeed citizens); but we also need them to be protected in some ways from the operations of the market. Just as the commercial world offers benefits as well as risks, so does regulation: we need children to be protected, but not over-protected, to the point where they can no longer enjoy the potential benefits the commercial world can provide.

20. Regulation

Advertising to children is regulated through a range of codes operated by the Advertising Standards Authority and through various forms of legislation. The ASA's own research suggests that it achieves a high level of industry compliance and public awareness, although there is a lack of independent monitoring.

However, there are some aspects of new media, and some new and emerging marketing techniques, that are not fully covered by the existing regulatory regime. These relate particularly to areas where the boundaries between promotional and other content are unclear or non-existent; and to the gathering and circulation of data relating to children. Various reviews and initiatives are currently under way to address these new forms of marketing.

Proposals to extend the regulation of advertising need to be assessed both in terms of their likely impact and effectiveness, and in terms of their potential unintended consequences – for example, in reducing the availability of funding for children's content.

There is also a case for positive intervention – that is, intervention that is designed to ensure that children are provided with material that is culturally or educationally valuable, for example on television or on the internet.

20.1 Controversy. Perhaps inevitably, following the introduction of the new restrictions on the television advertising of HFSS foods in 2007, the topic of regulation was one of the most controversial and contested issues addressed in our assessment. While some in the industry dispute the need for the new regulations, campaigners continue to press for an extension: indeed, some (including the Children's Society) are now calling for a 9 p.m. watershed on all television advertising to children. As we have noted (Section 13), different parties involved in the debate about obesity and advertising evaluated the evidence on the topic in quite different ways; and the evidence was further 'spun' in the public arena, to the point where it is now very difficult to arrive at a consensus about what the existing research actually says. Nevertheless, against this background, it is important to assess the existing regulatory frameworks for marketing and advertising to children, and what is known about their effectiveness. It is also important to consider the extent to which these frameworks are capable of addressing the changing environment of digital media. This section of the report draws on the literature review undertaken by the University of Loughborough (Appendix H), on the submissions to our consultation, and on meetings with various relevant stakeholders.

20.2 Striking the regulatory balance. The regulatory regime can be seen as the outcome of the balances struck between the requirements of marketers and advertisers, the priorities of government, and the pressure exerted by lobby groups concerned with children's welfare. It is also inevitably influenced by the media coverage of contentious issues such as childhood obesity and teenage binge drinking. Marketers currently feel they are under undue pressure, unfairly blamed for social problems that have multiple causes and faced by demands for increased regulation that are based on incomplete or inaccurate information. In our consultations, they were keen to demonstrate their own corporate responsibility (see Section 9), and to assert the effectiveness of the various statutory and non-statutory systems and voluntary codes which the industry employs. Some such codes of practice are operated by individual companies, while others are promoted by industry-wide bodies operating in particular sectors, such as The Portman Group which represents the drinks industry. In general, government has shifted over the past twenty years towards a 'lighter touch' system, delegating the day-to-day business of enforcing codes of practice to industry and regulatory bodies. At certain points, however, it remains necessary for the government to legislate or intervene, or to help establish new codes or ground rules; and in broadcasting in particular, there is strong statutory regulation in several key areas.

Advertising codes

20.3 The CAP code. The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP), made up of members drawn from the advertising agencies, media owners and the advertisers themselves, operates a Code of Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing. Advertisers are expected to abide by both the spirit and the letter of the Code; and this requirement is enforced by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). The ASA was established in 1962 to act as an independent regulatory body for the advertising industry. It is funded by the industry through levies on the cost of advertising space, which are collected by two separate agencies (Advertising Standards Board of Finance and Broadcast Advertising Standards Board of Finance) to preserve the independence of the ASA. The CAP Copy Advice Team can advise advertisers before they place adverts on whether they are in line with the Code. Getting advice does not preclude the possibility of a later investigation by the ASA, but such complaints are much less likely to be upheld.

20.4 The BCAP codes. Since 2004, Ofcom has contracted out the responsibility for broadcast (TV and radio) advertising to the ASA in a co-regulatory partnership. The Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) which includes broadcasters and advertisers, compiles the TV Advertising Standards Code, the Radio Advertising Standards Code and the Rules on the Scheduling of Television Advertisements. The ASA is responsible for ensuring that adverts comply with these codes, and since 2004 has become a 'one-stop shop' for advertising complaints relating to TV, print, radio, internet display advertising and text messages. Broadcast advertising has a clearance centre, Clearcast, which checks adverts before they are aired to ensure that they abide by the codes. The codes are backed by legislation; and the granting of licences to broadcast is conditional on

compliance with the codes. Ofcom has a range of mandatory sanctions that can be applied here, including fining licensees or revoking licences.

20.5 Fair trading codes. The ASA is also legally recognised as the 'established means' for enforcing the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs) and the Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations 2008 (BPRs) in both broadcast and non-broadcast advertising. The CPRs and BPRs provide protection against unfair and misleading advertisements and unacceptable comparative advertisements. The ASA has backstop powers (through the Office of Fair Trading) against any ad that is unfair and misleading. It also works closely with the Gambling Commission on the enforcement of rules on gambling advertising and with other regulators (the Financial Services Authority, Food Standards Agency and others). Although it is represented as a self-regulatory system, in a number of areas it has statutory backing, and in recent years the authority of the ASA has been upheld by the High Court.

20.6 Codes relating to children. The Codes of Practice have specific sections on children. The rules state that no advert which is aimed at or features children should:

- contain anything that is likely to result in their physical, mental or moral harm;
- exploit their credulity, loyalty, vulnerability or lack of experience;
- make them feel inferior or unpopular for not buying the advertised product;
- encourage children to pester their parents to buy the product; or
- present children in a sexually provocative or sexualised manner.

Adverts which are deemed inappropriate for children can be subject to restrictions on when or where they can be shown. There are also certain products which cannot be advertised to children at all, including alcoholic drinks, medicines, slimming products and anything related to gambling.

20.7 Age appropriateness and harm. When ruling on the application of these codes, the ASA must negotiate contending views of what is appropriate or potentially harmful for children at particular ages. As we have seen (Section 10), there is some disagreement among researchers about the age at which children become fully aware of the persuasive intentions of advertising, although it is generally agreed that some restrictions may be necessary up to the age of seven or eight, perhaps even to the age of twelve. In line with this, some scheduling restrictions apply specifically to advertising in programmes aimed at children up to the age of eight or those attending pre-school or primary school. However, there is some variation in this respect. For example, while the CAP and BCAP codes define children as those under 16, Ofcom defines children as people under the age of 16 years but also issues guidance on protecting the under-18s from harm and offence. In the case of HFSS food advertising, there are different regulations relating to primary school age children and those aged under 16. Some products cannot be advertised to under 16s, such as the lottery; while others, such as slimming products, diet regimes, dating services and alcoholic drinks, cannot be advertised to under 18s. These national variations are compounded by international differences. In the laws relating to online protection and privacy in the US for example, children are defined as those under the age

of 13. As a consequence, websites originating in different countries operate on different assumptions, making global agreements on regulation difficult to achieve.

- 20.8 Defining 'advertising to children'.** One of the abiding difficulties here is in defining precisely what constitutes advertising to children. This expression is sometimes applied to advertisements targeted at children and sometimes to marketing which is more or less likely to be seen by children. For marketing purposes, advertisers and agencies analyse the population by 'segments' and seek to direct their marketing at particular target segments. Marketing opportunities are 'sold' accordingly and so advertisers pay to maximise the 'impacts' on their target audience. Clearly, unless children are sequestered, they will see many promotional messages that are not explicitly targeted at them. In applying restrictions to marketing, there are therefore various approaches one could take. Much effort has been put into developing and applying restrictive rules to those advertisements actually directed at children, whether this is in order to encourage a direct sale or to encourage children to pester parents to buy a particular product (as we have seen in Section 12, rules against overt 'pester power' were introduced many years ago). The Advertising Code rules also aim to protect children from harmful and offensive advertising and to ensure that their credulity, loyalty, vulnerability or lack of experience are not exploited. Any interventions which extend beyond these approaches clearly also inhibit advertising to adults. For example, an advertisement for insurance during a children's programme is likely to have been secured to target a parent or carer: should children be protected from that? An advertisement for a comparatively expensive box of chocolates is likely to be targeted at adults, but is subject to the same advertising restrictions as a cheap chocolate bar. While recognising that children cannot be screened from all marketing messages, some people would like to minimise the totality of all marketing messages likely to be seen by children and this will always therefore raise the question of what kind of regulation would be proportionate to any perceived harm.
- 20.9 HFSS advertising.** As we have noted, new rules have recently been introduced concerning the advertising of HFSS foods to under-16s. In broadcast advertising no advert for HFSS products may be shown during programmes which are likely to have particular appeal to children up to the age of 16, defined as programmes which are watched by 20 per cent more children than the actual proportion of children in society. Promotional offers may not be used in HFSS product advertisements targeted directly at pre-school or primary school children, and promotional offers should not encourage children to eat or drink a product only to take advantage of a promotional offer. Licensed characters and celebrities popular with children may not be used in HFSS product advertisements targeted directly at pre-school or primary school children. In non-broadcast advertising these rules apply to adverts for all food and drink products except fresh fruit and vegetables.
- 20.10 Effectiveness of the HFSS regulations.** As we have noted, the new HFSS regulations have been extremely controversial. Ofcom's research suggests that they have been effective in reducing children's exposure to such advertising on television: between 2005 and 2008, children saw on average 34% less – although another calculation puts the figure at 18%. On the other hand, it is worth noting that advertising on television has in

any case been declining for several years. Ofcom's figures also show that expenditure on HFSS food advertising fell by 5.7% over the same period, while overall TV advertising expenditure was down by 8.4% – which suggests that HFSS advertising is in fact declining less markedly than advertising in general. Meanwhile, Department of Health figures suggest that spending on child-themed food and drink advertising fell by as much as 41% between 2003 and 2007. The figures here are difficult to interpret, although a reduction has clearly taken place – although at the same time, levels of obesity have continued to rise.

20.11 Unintended consequences. Critics such as Which? point out that relatively few of the most popular programmes with children are covered by the regulations, and that children still see advertisements for HFSS foods during mainstream adult programming. On the other hand, others note that it is now impossible to advertise foods such as full-fat milk, cheese and nuts to children. Furthermore, as we have noted (Section 17), some have invoked the new regulations as a justification for ITV1's declining investment in children's television: while Ofcom's analysis shows that this investment was declining in any case, the new regulations may have encouraged or at least retrospectively justified this. In addition, advertising spend in this area now seems to be shifting quite rapidly away from television to other media: the Department of Health figures show that, while child-themed advertising spend on television has fallen, there have been increases in the press (a 42% increase between 2003 and 2007), radio, cinema and the internet. Again, while some of this may have been happening in any case, the new regulations may well have encouraged it. Further discussion in this area clearly needs to take account of this complex, and in some respects quite contradictory, picture. In particular, there remains a need for evidence about the impact of the regulations on levels of *obesity*, rather than simply on exposure to advertising (although this would clearly be difficult to supply).

Effectiveness of the advertising codes

20.12 ASA sanctions. If the ASA rules that an advert breaches any of the codes, they have a number of options available:

- Often the bad publicity from having a complaint upheld is seen as enough to ensure that advertisers comply with the rules in future.
- The ASA can request that an advert does not run again in its current form, media are warned not to carry the advert and the ASA compliance team monitors whether this is adhered to.
- An Ad Alert can be issued which informs the media about a problem advertiser and asks that the Copy Advice team be consulted before any media outlet accepts advertisements from that advertiser.
- Further sanctions can be applied, with advertisers required to have all adverts pre-vetted by either the Copy Advice team or Clearcast for a set period of time.

- If advertisers still persist in running misleading or offensive adverts, then they can be referred to either the Office of Fair Trading or Ofcom for further legal action. Ofcom can potentially revoke a broadcaster's licence, while the OFT can obtain an injunction to prevent the broadcast of misleading adverts.

20.13 Advantages of the system. The ASA's role as a self-regulatory industry body enables it to respond quickly to public concern. It is also able to ensure that advertisers abide by both the 'spirit' and the 'letter' of the Codes, whereas a legalistic system would be likely to have less flexibility. Because the codes are written by the industry and media themselves, they claim to be more willing to abide by them than might be the case with a government-driven system. The sanctions which the ASA applies are generally successful. Of those formally investigated, two-thirds of complaints are upheld. Media companies are generally receptive to ASA requests to change or withdraw adverts which are in breach of the codes. In effect, the industry accepts the need to comply with the self-regulatory system in order to avoid any move to a more rigidly enforced government system – although (as we have noted) the system in relation to broadcasting in particular is also underpinned by government and by legislation.

20.14 The effectiveness of the ASA. The ASA has been successful in maintaining compliance in a number of areas: it monitors adverts itself, particularly in sensitive sectors where potential breaches might arise, and undertakes compliance assessments in relation to specific aspects of the codes. Even so, it generally has to rely on complaints. The ASA's own research suggests that it is effective in promoting its role, and that there is a general satisfaction with the complaints procedure; although there is no independent evidence here. The ASA has also started publishing all of its adjudications online on a weekly basis. However, of the total number of complaints in 2007, 76 per cent were not investigated, on the grounds that the issues raised by the complainant were not covered by the advertising codes. This could be seen to suggest a lack of understanding on the part of the public about what the advertising codes cover. Indeed, parent participants in research for the Family and Parenting Institute had little knowledge of complaint mechanisms or of the rules and codes governing advertising. What does seem to be missing from much of the discussion in this area are the views and perspectives of children. For example, while the ASA undertakes a customer satisfaction survey twice a year, there is no sustained engagement with what children themselves think of the service it provides.

The challenge of new marketing practices

20.15 Beyond advertising. It should be noted that the ASA's responsibility is solely for advertising. As the boundaries between advertising and other content have become increasingly blurred, this is potentially problematic. The ASA has no control over other forms of marketing, such as sponsorship or product placement, which are statutorily regulated by Ofcom for broadcasting (and will be for video-on-demand). The phenomenon of 'integrated marketing' – for example in the case of licensed characters – makes it very difficult to distinguish between marketing and other content. While codes of practice do apply to market research (for example, those maintained by the Market Research Society), these are entirely voluntary; and it is not clear how far they would be

able to deal with what some critics see as more 'intrusive' forms of market research with children. Likewise, the recruitment of children and young people for the purpose of peer-to-peer marketing requires parental permission, but appears to be otherwise unregulated.

- 20.16 New media.** The current regulatory framework focuses primarily on traditional media such as television, radio and print media. Digital media such as the internet, mobile phones and computer games pose significant new challenges. The ASA currently has responsibility for internet banners, pop-ups, paid-for search and e-mail promotions. It cannot control the promotional content which appears on company websites, since this is not clearly defined as advertising; nor can it control whether these sites target children. The use of promotional content in online games and social worlds, advergames, social networking sites, and via e-mail and mobile phones (for example, in the form of viral messages) is another difficult area. The ASA codes cover in-game advertising, advergames (where these form part of a paid-for ad), pre-roll and video display advertising, engagement marketing, tenancies, search listings on pay-per-click price comparison websites and advertising within mobile multi-media services (MMS). However, it cannot regulate forms of marketing or promotion that are not clearly identified as advertising, or more 'stealthy' techniques. Some of the latter might be addressed under the new Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations (2008), which proscribe disguised commercial practices (such as fake blogs). Meanwhile, advertising for 'adult' products such as intimate dating, cosmetic surgery and gambling should be kept away from children's sites. However, National Consumer Council research suggests that such advertising can nevertheless be found on sites used by children: this may be because of non-compliance, because they are outside jurisdiction, or because the ads are not sold in a manner that is related to the content of the site. Overall, this is a growing focus of public concern: the Institute of Sales Promotion has seen a 750% increase in complaints about digital promotions over the last year.
- 20.17 Data protection and intellectual property.** In terms of privacy, many aspects of the gathering and circulation of personal data are regulated through the Data Protection Act 1988; and distinctions are made between Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and aggregated information ('people who bought this also bought that'), which are treated differently in regulatory terms. However, the tracking of people's online transactions (for example through 'cookies') and data mining may be invisible to the user. A further issue here is that large numbers of children appear to be able to evade the age restrictions placed on entry to services such as the social networking sites Facebook and Bebo. Currently the codes rely on children providing parental e-mail addresses so that parental permission can be sought to collect children's data (to the extent permitted by regulation). However, this requirement contravenes the DMA guidelines which state that no company should solicit information about a third party. Finally, the intellectual property laws and terms of trade relating to 'user-generated content' – such as the creative work or promotional ideas that users, including children, are encouraged to submit to companies – are not always clear.

Responding to the challenges

20.18 Regulatory initiatives and reviews. There are several initiatives currently under way within the advertising industry that are seeking to address these developments, and exploring the need to extend the present regulatory system to encompass all types of online media marketing. Internationally, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) is responsible for overseeing advertising codes across the world; while the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA) and the European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA) provide guidelines and best practice principles to self-regulatory bodies in European countries. The recent European Union legislation on Unfair Commercial Practices underpins these guidelines. In October 2008 the EASA produced a Digital Marketing Communications Best Practice Guide applicable across Europe. In the UK the industry's Digital Media Group is due to report shortly: this report will address digital marketing techniques, including those in non-paid-for spaces, and it is reasonable to expect it to be in line with the EASA guidelines. There have been a number of best practice guides (e.g. Network Advertising Initiative) which agree that it should be very clear to consumers what data is being collected about them, where it goes, and how they can opt out of data collection. There have also been some guidelines (e.g. Internet Advertising Bureau) for behavioural targeting which state that it must be clear to consumers that they are being tracked for the purposes of advertising and that they are given the choice to opt out of being tracked. However, none of these guidelines takes children into consideration or make provision for age-appropriate information on children's sites. The UK Internet Advertising Bureau has also recently issued guidelines from its Behavioural Advertising Taskforce which looks specifically at the use of data gathered through cookies: these come into force in September 2009. The CAP and BCAP Codes are also undergoing full review, following an interim review in 2007), with the aim of ensuring that they are fit for purpose in the new digital environment. In addition there are public awareness campaigns, such as the new Children's Web Watchdog; and this area will also be addressed by the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS). Given that marketing increasingly operates across borders and given the current differences in child age definitions and data protection legislation, this is likely to continue to be a challenging area.

20.19 The need for monitoring and public consultation. The outcomes of many of these reviews are still awaited at the point of this report going to press: we trust that the issues raised here will be addressed as a high priority, and that full account will be taken of the views of children and parents in particular. Within the remit of existing organisations, there is good evidence that the current system of regulation is reasonably effective. Even so, there is obviously an ongoing need to monitor the system, particularly in terms of public awareness and satisfaction, and to ensure that it addresses the changing nature of marketing practice. There is some evidence that the principles that inform the system are not sufficiently well known either to the general public or even within the industries that market to children: this must be particularly the case with the wide range of codes and regulations that apply to new media marketing (only some of which we have been able

to mention here). There is a continuing challenge to ensure that children and young people, and parents, are consulted and informed about these issues.

Conclusion

20.20 Restricting television advertising. In the course of this assessment, there have been numerous calls for further restrictions on HFSS advertising on television prior to the 9 pm watershed; while the Children's Society *Good Childhood* report calls for a ban on advertising of any kind to children under the age of 12. While there are many factors that would need to be considered in such a move, there are four relevant points that emerge from our broader assessment of the evidence:

- It is not clear why the age of 12 has been chosen here – rather than, for example, 4 or 8 or 16. The evidence suggests that there is no 'magic age' at which children become somehow immune to the effects of advertising, or at least sufficiently capable of evaluating it (see Section 10).
- It would be practically very difficult to distinguish between advertising that is aimed at children and advertising to which they are likely to be exposed: indeed, the studies we have drawn on here appear to do this in rather different ways.
- Given the move away from television advertising to advertising in other media, the regulation of marketing materials that children might encounter without necessarily choosing to be exposed to them (such as billboards or direct marketing) would also need to be considered.
- As we have shown, advertising per se is only a small part of the wide range of promotional and marketing activities that are targeted at children. Banning advertising would be likely to result in a further increase in spending on these other activities.
- **New media, new challenges.** Furthermore, there are several new challenges now emerging that are potentially much more significant than television advertising. These relate partly to quite well-established practices such as sponsorship, and to areas such as marketing in schools and play spaces (see Sections 18 and 19). However, they relate particularly to the new media and marketing techniques outlined in more detail in Section 5. Regulation needs to adapt to the changing realities of a converged, digital environment, in which marketers increasingly work across multiple platforms. We need to know more about how children (and indeed adults) understand and respond to the commercial dimensions of these practices; but they do potentially raise issues to do with ethics and privacy that need to be more systematically addressed within the regulatory system. Given the global nature of such activities, they also require an internationally coordinated response.

20.21 Positive intervention. In this section, we have looked primarily at what might be called negative regulation – in the sense that it is designed to keep children away from material that might be deemed unfair, inappropriate or potentially harmful. However, there is also an important role for positive intervention – that is, intervention that is designed to ensure that children gain access to material that is seen to be culturally or educationally

valuable. This is to shift the question from one of protection to one of provision – to ask what children should have a right to receive. We have addressed this issue in relation to children's television, where growing competitive pressures and a weakening of government regulation, have contributed to a situation in which children are being less well served in some respects. This issue is to some extent being addressed by current developments such as Ofcom's PSB review and the work around *Digital Britain* (Section 17).

20.22 New media. However, this is also an issue that can and should be extended to other areas, not least that of new media. For example, despite the massive proliferation of online content, there is very little non-commercial content available to children on the internet. Outside public service bodies such as the BBC and Channel 4, there are no public service requirements relating to the internet, and no mechanisms to support the production of public service content. In this context, it may be that some groups are exceptionally well served, while others (who are perhaps less lucrative for advertisers or marketers) may lose out. The question here, therefore, is whether and how the government should intervene or regulate in order to compensate for market failure.

21. Consumer and media literacy

Consumer literacy refers to the skills and knowledge that children need in order to understand and deal autonomously with the commercial world. Various educational initiatives are under way to promote this, most notably in the area of financial literacy.

Media literacy involves understanding the forms and conventions of media, evaluating how media represent the world and the values they contain, and understanding how they are produced and how they target audiences. Media literacy involves both critical thinking and creative participation in media-making.

Parents have a role to play in developing children's media literacy, although there have been few initiatives in this area that have addressed them.

There is a long history of media education in UK schools, although it has not yet been a significant element of the primary school curriculum in particular. There has been some classroom research in this area, but there is a need for more extensive and longer-term studies.

There are some educational initiatives designed specifically to teach children about commercial messages: these include materials produced by campaign groups as well as the industry's 'Media Smart' initiative.

Media literacy does not confer immunity to media influence. The primary aim of media literacy education is not to reduce the influence of 'bad' media or advertising, any more than the aim of literacy education is to reduce the influence of 'bad' books. Rather, it seeks to enable children to make informed decisions on their own behalf, and thereby to make the most of the opportunities that the media and the commercial world can provide.

As such, education should not be regarded as an alternative to regulation, but rather as a complement to it.

- 21.1 The need for consumer literacy.** It is clearly unlikely that the commercial world will be disappearing at any time soon. The question then becomes one of how children learn to deal with it – to prepare for 'a future role as a demanding consumer in adulthood', as the Children's Plan puts it (para. 2.23). It could, of course, be argued that children develop consumer literacy simply through their participation in the commercial world. However, the key issue for policy is to assess what might be gained from explicit attempts to foster and promote it, both in the formal context of schools and in informal settings such as families. This is the focus of this section of the report.

21.2 Key terms. As they grow older, children develop a range of consumer-related skills – for example, in making purchasing decisions, saving and budgeting – as well as knowledge – for example, of brands, information sources and commercial practices (see Section 7). They also develop an understanding of commercial messages – for example, of the persuasive intentions of advertisers, and of the characteristic techniques that are used in marketing (see Section 10). This body of skills, knowledge and understanding is sometimes collectively referred to as *consumer literacy*, although this appears to be a rather inclusive term. Consumer literacy involves *financial literacy*, which relates specifically to understanding how to handle money; and it is also closely related to *media literacy*, in that the large majority of information about the commercial world is conveyed through media of various kinds.

Consumer literacy

21.3 Defining consumer literacy. Ofcom's Consumer Panel (now the Communications Consumer Panel) defines consumer literacy simply as 'the ability to choose and use communications products effectively' – a very broad definition that can potentially be extended to commercial products and services more generally. In practice, however, consumer literacy often seems to come down to the matter of consumer *rights*. Ofcom's approach tends to focus on the need for consumers to deal with various deceptive or intrusive practices, for example in the form of unsolicited mailings, phone calls or digital content, and to know how to prevent or complain about them. It argues that as marketing practices become more diverse and more personalised – and potentially more 'stealthy' – consumer literacy needs to become more sophisticated, as individuals are increasingly having to take responsibility for their own protection.

21.4 Consumer education. The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has defined consumer education as 'a planned intervention to raise consumer skills levels, improve consumer knowledge, and modify consumer attitude and behaviour in making purchase decisions, conducting transactions, managing relations and seeking redress'. In England, consumer education is a dimension of the National Curriculum for Citizenship, where it focuses primarily on consumer rights and responsibilities. In Wales, it forms part of Personal and Social Education (PSE); while in Scotland, there are guidelines, but no statutory curriculum. The OFT sees consumer education as a means of creating 'empowered' consumers, who will demand high standards from business and thereby promote vigorous and competitive markets. It argues that there is a need for more systematic provision, not least in a context of increasingly complex products and services and growing consumer choice. In seeking to develop a national strategy in this area, it has established an Alliance of relevant stakeholders, with separate working groups to produce and evaluate relevant teaching materials. It has also sought to map and evaluate a diverse range of consumer education initiatives; and produced a web-based consumer skills toolkit entitled 'Skilled to Go' for use in further education colleges, which focuses on everyday consumer transactions such as choosing a mobile phone.

Financial literacy

- 21.5 Defining financial literacy.** Financial literacy, or financial capability as it is sometimes termed, generally refers to the ability to retrieve, process, understand and evaluate information about financial products and services. The key organisation in the field in the UK has been the Financial Services Authority (FSA), and internationally the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has played a leading role, not least through its recent establishment of the International Gateway for Financial Education. For the most part, financial literacy initiatives seek to develop the understanding of adult consumers in relation to products such as insurance, banking, investments and pensions. However, concern about low levels of financial literacy (and high levels of personal debt) have led to some initiatives specifically focusing on young people in schools. It is worth recalling that children also save money, and that many are customers of banks (Section 7).
- 21.6 Financial education.** The FSA supports a programme in schools delivered by the Personal Finance Education Group (PFEG); although other charities such as Credit Action and the Citizens Advice Bureaux are also active in this field. PFEG provides programmes for primary and secondary schools ('What Money Means' and 'Learning Money Matters' respectively), as well as consultancy, advice and training for teachers. It is supported by business as well as the FSA, and offers a kitemarking system for teaching materials produced by banks and other financial services companies. Since September 2008, personal finance education has been an explicit part of the English National Curriculum programme of study relating to economic wellbeing and financial capability: this is part of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), although work in this area is also being integrated within a range of other curriculum subjects at primary and secondary level. This area will be included within the DCSF's pending review of PSHE, convened by Sir Alasdair Macdonald.

Media literacy

- 21.7 The policy context.** Ofcom has a statutory responsibility under the 2003 Communications Act to promote media literacy, through supporting research, educational and networking activities. The BBC, Channel 4, the Film Council, Skillset and the British Film Institute are leading a Media Literacy Task Force that has produced a Media Literacy Charter. Internationally, an equivalent European Media Literacy Charter currently has more than 200 signatories; the European Commission has established a Media Literacy Expert Group and issued an official Communication on the theme; while UNESCO has launched a new policy statement on media literacy following a high-profile meeting in Paris in 2007. Media literacy is frequently conceived as a partnership between government, the media industries, teachers, parents and children themselves. In terms of education, it includes work in schools as well as in the home and in other informal settings.
- 21.8 Defining media literacy.** Media literacy is the most broadly framed of the three areas considered here. Ofcom defines media literacy in very general terms as 'the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts'; while the British Film Institute and others argue that education for media literacy should be seen as

combining 'critical, cultural and creative' elements. There are several frameworks that specify the forms of critical understanding that are at stake here, which typically focus on:

- understanding the forms and conventions of media;
- evaluating media representations in terms of ideologies and values;
- understanding how media are produced, and how audiences are targeted and addressed, and for what purposes; and
- accessing a wide range of different kinds of media products, and understanding their capacity for information and creative expression.

While it is by no means incompatible with content regulation or with government intervention more broadly, the focus here is on empowering consumers to make informed choices and judgments about media on their own behalf. Media education typically builds on good practice in literacy and English teaching, and as such may be best placed to address questions about children's emotional engagement with the commercial world.

21.9 The development of media literacy. There is a considerable body of research on the development of media literacy, particularly relating to children's engagement with television. This literature suggests that children's 'functional skills' in using media technologies and accessing media content, as well as their critical understanding of media forms and messages, develop both as a result of their increasing experience, and as a function of their broader cognitive, social and cultural development. The most relevant issue in terms of our concerns here is to do with children's critical understanding of commercial messages and of the implications of commercial decisions. As we have seen (Section 10), there is some debate among researchers about the age at which children's understanding of persuasive intentions and techniques develops, and about the consequences of this in terms of the effects of advertising.

21.10 The role of parents. Research suggests that parental mediation – in the form of shared viewing and discussion – can play an important role in developing younger children's media literacy, and specifically in helping them to understand and evaluate commercial messages, and encouraging discrimination in their choice of media products. Parents with a higher level of education tend to report that they are more likely to intervene in their children's media use. However, the evidence also shows that many parents do not play as great a role in this respect as they like to suggest; and that this is particularly difficult in relation to new media, and as families' uses of media become more individualised. We should also beware of assuming that parents necessarily possess such skills and knowledge themselves, particularly when it comes to new media: Ofcom's research makes it clear that media literacy is an issue for adults too. In the US and Canada, there are several published media literacy 'kits' and websites offering advice to parents, produced by advocacy groups with some quite diverse and sometimes rather narrowly focused motivations; although there is no firm evidence as to the use or effectiveness of such material. In the UK, there have been some useful recent initiatives with parents addressing internet safety, but there has been very little work on the

broader aspects of media literacy: this might usefully feature as an element of local authority parenting strategies.

- 21.11 Media education in secondary schools.** There is a long tradition of media education in UK schools, although until recently it has remained fairly marginal to the mainstream curriculum, particularly in primary schools and at Key Stage 3. Media Studies is a well-established and expanding subject at GCSE and A-Level, although it is not offered in all schools. It has a clear conceptual framework, and a developed set of classroom strategies, which involve both critical study and creative production of media. There are limited references to media education in the National Curriculum for English and for Citizenship; and with the removal of the KS3 SATs, teachers at this level are starting to expand media education within English and humanities subjects. The UK is generally regarded as a world leader in this field, and British approaches have been very influential internationally.
- 21.12 Media education in primary schools.** Media literacy has not been included in the National Literacy Strategy, which might appear to be the logical place for it. However, the new Primary Framework encourages the critical analysis of film as part of literacy, while the UK Film Council and its client organisations are developing initiatives to broaden children's cultural, critical and creative learning about film. Even so, these initiatives focus principally on film, which is a relatively marginal aspect of most children's media experience. There is now an urgent need to develop a more coherent and extended approach, which will ensure learning progression in this field.
- 21.13 Media education in the informal sector.** Media education is also developing in the informal sector, particularly in the form of creative media production projects. National initiatives such as Media Box and First Light have helped to develop this work, although provision is uneven and often takes the form of one-off projects.
- 21.14 Evidence on effectiveness.** While there is a considerable body of professional 'know how' among specialist teachers in this field, there remains a need for in-depth evaluation of the effectiveness of media education, and for a more systematic approach across the age range. Previous research has taken the form of classroom-based case studies, generally with older students: while these are often very useful for practitioners, they are bound to be tentative and suggestive, rather than robust and conclusive. There is also a lack of opportunities and support for specialist training in this area.

Teaching about commercial messages and commercial decisions

- 21.15 Teaching about advertising.** Advertising has always been a key dimension of media literacy education. It is addressed at several levels, through the analysis of persuasive techniques and commercial appeals, and through exploring the workings of the advertising industry. Teaching materials such as the English and Media Centre's award-winning *Advertising Pack*, designed for students from KS3 through to A-level, provide extensive opportunities for the critical analysis of advertising in both 'old' and 'new' media, as well as containing case studies of campaigns, hands-on creative activities and material on the regulation of advertising and controversies about its effects. Other widely-used materials are produced in relation to specific curricula in English and Media

Studies at KS3 and KS4. Most of this material focuses on advertising rather than marketing and promotion more broadly.

- 21.16 Media Smart.** Media Smart is an industry-funded media literacy initiative designed to teach about advertising to children aged 6-11. The Media Smart *Be Adwise 2* pack was designed by leading independent media education experts, and guided by an Expert Group with representation from Ofcom, DCMS and DCSF. The materials are available free, and have been requested by over 9000 schools. The materials cover key aspects of media literacy, including specific advertising appeals and techniques, the targeting of audiences, and the regulation and control of advertising. This pack has been independently evaluated, with generally positive findings both about teachers' responses and students' learning in key areas. A new teaching pack is currently in preparation, focusing on advertising and marketing via new media, including techniques such as product placement, advergames and viral advertising. Media Smart has been controversial, although the objections raised in our submissions and stakeholder events seemed to be based on the general principle of commercial involvement rather than any reading or assessment of the actual teaching materials.
- 21.17 Campaign materials.** Some campaign groups also produce teaching materials designed to challenge aspects of marketing and advertising. For example, *Seeing Through the Spin*, produced by the charity Baby Milk Action, focuses on global public relations, and is mainly targeted at GCSE and A-level; while the website *chewonthis.org*, created by the Food Commission Research Charity, promises 'honest information about the food you eat' for school students at KS3. There is no evidence about how widely these materials are used, or about their educational effectiveness.
- 21.18 Understanding commercial decisions.** The contribution of media education in this area goes beyond the study of advertising. Most Media Studies courses include a component investigating the media industries, which will often include student-led research into particular areas and simulations of industry practice. Such activities are also occasionally adopted at Key Stage 3. This kind of work would seem to provide important opportunities for children to learn about, and to reflect on, the consequences of commercial decisions in selecting, and arguably limiting, the kinds of entertainment and information that are available to them.

Conclusion

- 21.19 The need for evaluation.** This section has pointed to a range of current educational initiatives which address different aspects of children's and young people's relationship with the commercial world. Broadly speaking, we would argue that an educational response to this issue is both necessary and appropriate. The commercial world is not about to disappear: it is vital that children (and indeed adults) understand it critically. As such, initiatives of this kind should be supported and extended. In the case of media literacy in particular, there is a strong case for making this a much more substantial core curriculum entitlement: many of the respondents to our consultation (including some of the young people themselves) argued for this. At the same time, there remains a need for

more evidence about the value and effectiveness of this kind of work, particularly in relation to younger children.

21.20 Media literacy and media effects. Finally, it is important to emphasise that education is not an alternative to regulation, as is sometimes implied. As we have noted (Section 10), people (adults or children) who are more media literate are not necessarily immune to media influence. The primary aim of media literacy education is not to reduce the influence of 'bad' media or advertising, any more than the aim of literacy education is to reduce the influence of 'bad' books. Rather, it seeks to enable children to make informed decisions on their own behalf, and thereby to make the most of the opportunities that the media and the commercial world can provide.

22. What do we need to know?

In several of the areas covered in this assessment, there are significant gaps in knowledge. In some cases, there is a need, not so much for extensive further research, but rather for more focused studies. In others, there is a need to gather and share new evidence.

Our four key priorities here are:

- The scope and scale of the children's market, and the changing nature of marketing strategies.
- The extent of children's (and adults') understanding of new marketing techniques, particularly in digital media.
- The implications of commercialised or market-based approaches to public service delivery for children's wellbeing.
- The ways in which children and young people are represented in the media, and the consequences of this for public attitudes and young people's wellbeing.

More broadly, it is vital that the impact of the commercial world on children's physical and mental wellbeing should be studied 'in the round', taking account of the full range of influences in their lives.

22.1 Gaps in knowledge. Any assessment of this kind is bound to identify gaps in our knowledge. We have identified several of these in the preceding chapters. This concluding section summarises the most significant areas in which we believe further evidence is needed. These do not relate only to academic research, but also to information about the activities of businesses and about the regulatory process.

22.2 Assessing public opinion. Criticisms of the impact of the commercial world on children are often very intense and dramatically expressed. However, we have little consistent sense of how far these strong opinions actually represent those of the public more broadly. Future debate in this area could usefully be informed by more reliable evidence about the opinions of both children and parents; and perhaps also by the use of a more in-depth, 'deliberative' approach, rather than simply attitude questionnaires or one-off focus groups.

- 22.3 Representing children and young people.** There is good evidence that portrayals of young people in the news media are overwhelmingly negative; and the debate on this issue is probably affected by that. However, there needs to be further analysis of how young people are represented within the media more broadly; and of the effects of this on public attitudes, both among adults and among young people themselves.
- 22.4 Business intelligence.** Evidence relating to the scale and scope of marketing to children is uneven and, in some areas, very limited. Given the nature of the public debate on these issues, it would be advantageous to business to provide better information about its activities. While there are constraints to do with commercial confidentiality, there is a great deal of information here that could and should be more widely available.
- 22.5 Corporate social responsibility initiatives.** While the principle of corporate social responsibility is obviously to be applauded, there is a lack of independent evaluation of business initiatives in this area. In particular, there is a need to weigh the benefits to the public (or to specific social groups) against the benefits to the company, in terms of promotion or public relations.
- 22.6 Regulation.** Several submissions to our consultation argued for the need to extend the regulation of commercial activities targeting children – for example, by banning all advertising to children under the age of twelve. As yet, we have no evidence about the effectiveness of the recent regulations on HFSS advertising in terms of their impact on obesity. Existing codes are currently under review, particularly in relation to new media. Further regulation may be necessary, but it should proceed on the basis of strong evidence, and with a clear understanding of potential unintended consequences.
- 22.7 Public accountability.** While there is good evidence that the regulatory regime for advertising is effective, there appears to be no independent monitoring. While there has been effective public consultation in many instances, this needs to be more extensive and more in-depth, both in relation to the current regulatory regime and in debates about potential policy developments.
- 22.8 New marketing strategies.** The changing nature of the commercial world inevitably throws up new areas for research. There is a particular need to research the range of new marketing strategies currently emerging, and to assess their ethical dimensions in terms of fairness and potential threats to privacy. We also need to know much more about children's (and indeed adults') awareness and understanding of such strategies, particularly in the context of new media.
- 22.9 Negative impact.** There is a range of research that establishes associations between the commercial world and aspects of negative wellbeing among children. However, in several key areas – notably in relation to obesity, materialism and sexualisation – there is very limited evidence of any causal relationship. We need more focused studies that actually address the key issues, and acknowledge their complexity. There is a particular need here for longitudinal studies that provide rigorous comparisons over time, and for research that considers the role of consumption in children's lives 'in the round', in relation to other factors and influences in their lives.

- 22.10 Positive impact.** Equally, the commercial world may have a whole range of positive impacts on children; but reliable evidence on this is very limited, and in many areas effectively non-existent. There is little or no independent evaluation of the claims of businesses in this respect. Here again, such claims could be assessed more effectively by means of longitudinal studies, and by more in-depth analyses of how children use commercial goods and services.
- 22.11 Poverty and inequality.** In a period of recession, it is particularly important to assess the *differential* effects of the commercial world on children from more and less wealthy families. The issues here are complex; but if one aim of policy is to address the additional pressures that are placed on poorer families by the commercial world, we need more and better evidence in this area.
- 22.12 The public and the private.** Although we have good evidence on public broadcasting, we have less evidence relating to the role of the commercial world in areas such as education and leisure – and in particular, evidence that relates to the implications of commercial involvement for *children's* wellbeing.
- 22.13 Media and consumer literacy.** While educational interventions do offer some ways of addressing these issues, there is a danger of assuming that they offer an easy solution. There is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of educational initiatives in this area, not least in order to support the work of teachers and other practitioners.

References and evidence consulted

- 1.8** *Safer Children in a Digital World: The Report of the Byron Review* (London: DCSF/DCMS, 2008); Ofcom *The Future of Children's Television Programming: Research Report* (London: Ofcom, 2007); Ofcom *Media Literacy Audit: Report on Media Literacy among Children* (London: Ofcom, 2008); Ofcom *Final Statement on the Television Advertising of Food and Drink Products to Children* (London: Ofcom, 2007); *Working with Schools: Best Practice Principles* (London: DCSF/ISBA, 2008).
- 3.1** Hilgartner, S. and Bosk, C.L. 'The rise and fall of social problems: a public arenas model' *American Journal of Sociology* 94(1): 53-78, 1988; Gusfield, J. *The Culture of Public Problems* (University of Chicago, 1981).
- 3.2** Jenkins, P. *Intimate Enemies: Moral Panics in Contemporary Great Britain* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1992); Critcher, C. (ed.) *Moral Panics and the Media* (Buckingham, Open University Press, 2006); Best, J. (ed.) *Troubling Children: Studies of Children and Social Problems* (New York: Aldine, 1994).
- 3.3** Barker, M. *A Haunt of Fears* (London: Verso, 1984); Barker, M. (ed.) *The Video Nasties* (London: Pluto, 1984); Springhall, J. *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics* (London, MacMillan, 1998).
- 3.6** Scraton, P. (ed.) *'Childhood' in 'Crisis'?* (London: UCL Press, 1997).
- 3.8** Older US examples of this argument can be found in: Postman, N. *The Disappearance of Childhood* (London: W.H. Allen, 1983); Elkind, D. *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley, 1981). See also Hendrick, H. 'Constructions and reconstructions of British childhood: an interpretive survey, 1800 to the present', in James, A. and Prout, A. (eds.) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: Falmer, 1990); and Jenks, C. *Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- 3.9–3.13** Palmer, S. *Toxic Childhood: How the Modern World is Damaging Our Children and What We Can Do About It* (London: Orion, 2006); Compass *The Commercialisation of Childhood* (London: Compass, 2006); National Union of Teachers *Growing up in a Material World* (London: NUT, 2007); Layard, R. and Dunn, J. *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age* (London: Penguin, 2009). UNICEF *Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-being in Rich Countries* (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2007). Alternative views of the state of British childhood may be found, for example, in Brooks, L. *The Story of Childhood: Growing Up in Modern Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006); and Guldberg, H. *Reclaiming Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2009).

3.19 See Cunningham, H. *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London; Longman, 1995) and *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC, 2006); Hendrick, H. *Children, Childhood and English Society. 1880-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

3.20–3.23 This issue was raised in submissions from the youth groups convened by the National Children's Bureau and the NSPCC. See also: IPSOS/MORI *Young People and the Media* (London: IPSOS/MORI, 2004/2006); on the Brunel research, Wayne, M. 'Television news and the symbolic criminalisation of young people' *Journalism Studies* 9(1): 2008; National Children's Bureau *Media Portrayal of Young People: Impact and Influences* (London: NCB, 2008); and Women in Journalism/Echo Sonar Research *Teenage Boys and the Media* (London: Women in Journalism, 2009). The Hansard Society and the House of Lords have recently launched a competition for young people to give their views about how they are represented in the media: *Raw Deal or Truth Told? Young People in the Media*.

3.24 Cook, D.T. 'The other "child study": figuring children as consumers in market research, 1910s-1990s', *Sociological Quarterly* 41(3): 487-507, 2000.

3.25–3.28 Lindstrom, M. with Seybold, P. *Brandchild* (London: Kogan Page, 2003). See also (among others) Del Vecchio, G. *Creating Ever-Cool* (Louisiana: Pelican, 1997); Sutherland, A. and Thompson, B. *Kidfluence: The Marketer's Guide to Understanding and Reaching Generation Y* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003); and Siegel, D., Coffey, T. and Livingston, G. *The Great Tween Buying Machine* (Ithaca, NY: Paramount, 2001).

Section 4 In addition to our commissioned research and responses to our consultation (see Appendices D and E), this section draws on evidence from parent surveys and submissions to the assessment from the Advertising Standards Authority, The Family and Parenting Institute, The Children's Society, National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and Which? Some additional references are provided here.

4.2 Anderson, S., Murray, L. and Brownlie, J. *Disciplining Children: Research with Parents in Scotland*, commissioned by the Scottish Executive, 2002; *Family Life in Scotland*, MORI, 2004; *Teenage Parenting Strategy: Research with Parents*, commissioned by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit (Family and Parenting Institute, 2002).

4.3–4.5 See *Public Attitudes to Parenting* (London: Ipsos MORI, 2006); *Family Life in Scotland*, op cit.; *Disciplining Children*, op cit.; *Happy Families* (London: Ipsos MORI, 2006).

4.6 See Appendix 3; *The Lever Faberge Family Report* (London: IPPR and Unilever, 2004); *Family Life in Scotland*, op. cit.; *Families and the Recession*, (London: YouGov and Family and Parenting Institute, 2008).

4.7 Information supplied by the Advertising Standards Authority. Also *Hard Sell, Soft Target* (Family and Parenting Institute, 2004).

4.8 *The Public's Perception of Advertising in Today's Society* (Advertising Standards Authority, 2002); *Britain – Family Friendly?*, Ipsos MORI, 2003; *Hard Sell, Soft Target* op. cit.

- 4.9** See Buckingham, D. et al. *The Media Literacy of Children and Young People* (London: Ofcom, 2005), Section 2.2.1. Also Livingstone, S. 'Regulating the internet at home: contrasting the perspectives of children and parents', in D. Buckingham and R. Willett (eds.) *Digital Generations: Children, Young People and New Media* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006); and Vittrup, B. (2009) 'What us parents don't know about their children's television use', *Journal of Children and Media* 3(1): 51-67.
- 4.15** Trust in businesses is declining markedly in some countries, especially the US, although it appears relatively stable in the UK, according to the 2009 *Edelman Trust Barometer*. Trust in politicians is lower, and declining: see, for example, the 2008 survey conducted by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. On concerns about the influence of the media, see Perloff, D. 'The third person effect', in Bryant, J. and Zillmann, D. (eds.) *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002).
- 4.31** Children's Society Good Childhood Enquiry, Lifestyle Theme (evidence submitted to this assessment).
- 4.32–4.33** Which? Submission to this assessment; ComRes *Child Protection Survey* (2008), online at: <http://www.communicateresearch.com/page16543821.aspx>.
- 4.33** *Britain – Family Friendly?* (London: Ipsos MORI, 2003).
- Section 5** This section draws on our commissioned review on children and marketing (Appendix H). References may be found in that report: some additional references are given below.
- 5.1–5.3** Cook, D. *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Cross, G. *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Seiter, E. *Sold Separately: Parents and Children in Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993); Kline, S. *Out of The Garden: Toys, TV and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing* (London: Verso, 1993); Zelizer, V. *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); D. Denisoff (ed.) *The Nineteenth Century Child and Consumer Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). On market research, Cook, D.T. 'The other "child study": figuring children as consumers in market research, 1910s-1990s', *Sociological Quarterly* 41(3): 487-507, 2000.
- 5.5** McNeal, J.U. *The Kids' Market: Myths and Realities* (New York: Paramount, 1999).
- 5.8** Total cost of bringing up a child: Liverpool Victoria Friendly Society annual survey 2008 (http://www.lv.com/media_centre/press_releases/lv=%20cost%20of%20a%20child). Estimates of children's markets: Children's Society Good Childhood Enquiry, Lifestyle Theme (submission to this assessment). Total UK consumer expenditure: Office of National Statistics.
- 5.8** Martin Lindstrom with Patricia Seybold, *Brandchild* (London: Kogan Page 2004, p.2).
- 5.9** Ofcom *Trends in Advertising Spend Across Media* (London: Ofcom, 2008).

- 5.9** IAB <http://1abuk.net/media/images/onlinespendfactsheet-H12009forwebsite5253.pdf> (accessed 23 October 2009)
- 5.12** These arguments were made by industry representatives at a consultation meeting for this assessment at the Advertising Association in November 2008. They are also apparent in the child marketing literature: see 3.22-3.25.
- 5.14–5.15** Ofcom *Media Literacy Audit: Report on Media Literacy among Children* (London: Ofcom, 2008); Ofcom *Communications Market Report* (London: Ofcom, 2008); UK Children Go Online final report at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/children-go-online/>; ChildWise Monitor Survey 2008-2009 Report.
- 5.15** ChildWise Monitor Report, 2009, SMRC, Norwich
- 5.17–5.18** Wasko, J. *Understanding Disney* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); Tobin, J. (ed.) *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokemon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). Also Kline, S. *Out of The Garden: Toys, TV and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing* (London: Verso, 1993).
- 5.19** British Toy and Hobby Manufacturers Association submission, and <http://www.btha.co.uk>.
- 5.20** 'New consumers? Children, fashion and consumption', Department of Sociology, University of Leicester: report at <http://www.consume.bbk.ac.uk/research/pole.html>. Also Crewe, L. and Collins, P. 'Commodifying children: fashion, space and the production of the profitable child' *Environment and Planning A* 38: 7-24, 2006.
- 5.21** Montgomery, K. *Generation Digital* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Montgomery, K. and Chester, J. 'Food advertising to children in the new digital marketing ecosystem', in Ekstrom, K. and Tufte, B. (eds.) *Children, Media and Consumption: On the Front Edge* (Goteborg, Sweden: Nordicom, 2007); Quart, A. *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers* (London: Arrow, 2003).
- 5.22** Arvidsson, A. *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006); Jenkins, H. *Convergence Culture* (New York, New York University Press, 2006).
- 5.24** This useful distinction is drawn from the submission to the assessment by Save Kids' TV.
- Section 6** This section draws on our commissioned reviews on demographic changes in childhood and family life, and on the ecology of family life (Appendices G and I). Those reports make use of a range of key statistical sources, including the General Household Survey, the UK Census, the Annual Population Survey, the British Social Attitudes Survey, the United Kingdom Time Use Survey, and others. References may be found in that report: some additional references are given below.
- 6.8** See Section 11 for further references.
- 6.9** Liverpool Victoria Friendly Society annual survey 2008 (http://www.lv.com/media_centre/press_releases/lv=%20cost%20of%20a%20child).
- 6.12** Family and Parenting Institute *UK Family Trends* (2008).

6.13 Valentine, G. *Public Space and the Culture of Childhood* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). See also section 19.

6.15 Speech by Kirsty Young at FPI event, House of Commons, 21 October 2009

6.17–6.19 Martens, L., Southerton, D. and Scott, S. 'Bringing children (and parents) into the sociology of consumption', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4(2): 155-182, 2004.

Section 7 The first part of this section draws on the literature review on the ecology of family life (Appendix I), while the second part (7.8-7.13) draws on the review on the effects, uses and interpretations of commercial messages and activities by children (Appendix J). Further references may be found there.

7.2 ChildWise Monitor Report, 2009, SMRC, Norwich

7.3 The first figure here comes from McKechnie, J. Hobbs, S. and Anderson, S. *Child Employment in Britain* (Glasgow: University of Paisley, 2004). Others are drawn from Appendix I.

7.4 Figures here also come from McKechnie et al., op. cit. and the same authors' report 'The Nature and Implications of the Part-Time Employment of Secondary School Pupils in Scotland', www.openscotland.gov.uk (Nov. 2006); and from the NSPCC submission to the consultation, which is based on their consultations with children and young people. See also Mizen, P., Bolton, A. and Pole, C. 'School age workers: the paid employment of children in Britain' *Work, Employment and Society* 13: 423-438, 1999; Mizen, P. 'A little light work? Children's images of their labour', *Visual Studies* 20(2): 124-139, 2005.

7.9 John, D.R. 'Consumer socialization of children: a retrospective look at 25 years of research', *Journal of Consumer Research* 26: 183-214, 1999.

7.10, 7.13 Ekstrom, K. 'Consumer socialisation revisited', in Belk, R.W. (ed.) *Research in Consumer Behavior Vol. 10* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006); Cook, D.T. 'Commercial enculturation: moving beyond consumer socialisation', in Buckingham, D. and Tingstad, V. (eds.) *Childhood and Consumer Culture* (London; Palgrave MacMillan, in press).

7.15 Buckingham, D. 'Selling childhood? Children and consumer culture', *Journal of Children and Media* 1(1): 15-24, 2007; Cook, D. 'Beyond either/or', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4(2): 147-153, 2004.

Section 8 This section draws on wider discussions of theory and method in media effects research. See, for example, Bryant, J. and Zillmann, D. (eds.) *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002); Buckingham, D. et al. *The Impact of the Media on Children and Young People* (review of the literature prepared for the Byron Review, 2007), at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview/> (Annex G); Millwood Hargrave, A. and Livingstone, S. *Harm and Offence in Media Content: A Review of the Evidence* (Bristol: Intellect, 2006) and *Harm and Offence in Media Content: Updating the 2005 Review* (London: Ofcom, 2007); Barker, M. and Petley, J. (eds.) *Ill Effects: The Media Violence Debate* 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2001); Freedman, J. *Media Violence and its Effect on Aggression: Assessing the Scientific Evidence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

8.9 Millwood Hargrave, A. and Livingstone, S. *Harm and Offence in Media Content: A Review of the Evidence* (Bristol: Intellect, 2006).

Section 9 This section draws on consultation meetings held as part of the assessment, and on the Advertising Association report *Children's Wellbeing in a Commercial World* published in January 2009, and available at: <http://www.adassoc.org.uk>.

9.12 All examples here are drawn from the Advertising Association report.

9.13 Hastings, G. *Social Marketing* (London: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007).

9.17 International Business Leaders Forum *Responsible Marketing in a Digital World: A Thought Leadership Discussion* (report December 2008).

10.5 See Appendix J; Young, B.M. *Children and Television Advertising* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Buckingham, D. *Children Talking Television* (London: Falmer, 1993); Lawlor, M-A., and Prothero, A. 'Children's understanding of television advertising intent', *Journal of Marketing Management* 19(3-4): 411-431, 2003; Oates, C., Blades, M., Gunter, B. 'Children and television advertising: when do they understand persuasive intent?' *Journal of Consumer Behavior* 1(3): 238-245, 2002.

10.6–10.9 Livingstone, S. and Helsper, E. 'Does advertising literacy mediate the effects of advertising on children? A critical examination of two linked research literatures in relation to obesity and food choice'; *Journal of Communication* 56: 560-584, 2006; Fine, C. and Nairn, A. 'Who's messing with my mind? The implication of dual process models for the ethics of advertising to children', *International Journal of Advertising* 27(3): 447-470, 2008. See also the ensuing debate in *International Journal of Advertising* 28(1), 2008, and the commentary by Livingstone, 'Debating children's susceptibility to persuasion – where does fairness come in?', on which this section draws.

10.12 Buckleitner, W. 'Like taking candy from a baby: how young children interact with online environments', Consumer reports WebWatch and Mediatech Foundation, 2008.

- 10.13** Fiedler, A., Gardner, W., Nairn, A. and Pitt, J. *Fair Game? Assessing Commercial Activity on Children's Favourite Websites and Online Environments* (London: National Consumer Council, 2007). Also Nairn, A. and Dew, A. 'Pop-ups, pop-unders, banners and buttons: the ethics of on-line advertising to primary school children', *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice* 9(1), 2007.
- 10.15** *Safer Children in a Digital World: The Report of the Byron Review* (London: DCSF/DCMS, 2008); Buckingham, D. et al. *The Impact of the Media on Children and Young People* (review of the literature prepared for the Byron Review, 2007), at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview/> (Annex G); Nairn, A. and Monkogol, D. 'Children and privacy online' *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice* 8: 294-308, 2007; Livingstone, S. 'Children's privacy online', in Kraut, R. Brynin, M. and Kiesler, S. (eds.) *Computers, Phones and the Internet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- 10.16** See Quart, A. *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers* (London: Arrow, 2003); Chung, G. and Grimes, S.M. 'Data mining the kids: surveillance and market research strategies in children's online games', *Canadian Journal of Communication* 30(4), 2005.
- 11.1** Ereaut, G. and Whiting, R. *What do we mean by 'wellbeing'? And why might it matter?* Report for DCSF (London: DCSF, 2008).
- 11.3** Morrow, V. 'Conceptualising social capital in relation to the well-being of children and young people: a critical review', *Sociological Review* 47(4): 744-765, 1999.
- 11.6** UNICEF *Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-being in Rich Countries* (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2007).
- 11.7** Collishaw, S., Maughan, B., Goodman, R. and Pickles, A. 'Time trends in adolescent mental health', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 45: 1350-62, 2004; see also Layard, R. and Dunn, J. *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age* (London: Penguin, 2009), Chapter 7. James, O. *Affluenza* (London: Vermilion, 2007). A contrary analysis, which suggests that heightened awareness of a mental health 'epidemic' is in fact due to increased levels of diagnosis, can be found in Costello, E.J., Erkanli, A. and Angold, A. 'Is there an epidemic of child or adolescent depression?' *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 47(12): 1263-1271, 2006. On adults' life satisfaction, see ESRC *Society Today*, March 2009.
- 11.8** For the contrasting news reports, see: <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-wellbeing/health-news/one-in-four-young-people-are-so-depressed-they-consider-suicide-745615.html>; and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/7244486.stm>. The study on suicide rates is Biddle, L., Brock, A., Brookes, S.T. and Gunnell, D. 'Suicide rates in young men in England and Wales in the 21st century: time trend study', *British Medical Journal* 39475.603935.25, February 2008.

- 11.9–11.10** *The Wellbeing of Children and Young People in the UK: A Review of Available Evidence* (London: DCSF, 2007). ChildWise Monitor Survey 2008-2009 Report; Youth TGI report 2008 (BMRB) – summary figures in the Advertising Association report *Children's Wellbeing in a Commercial World* (2009). There are some limitations in these data, in that mean scores are not provided, and regression analyses have not been conducted: this makes them less than definitive in terms of identifying time trends. See also *The Wellbeing of Children in the UK* (Save the Children/University of York, 2005).
- 11.11–11.19** See Appendix J.
- 11.12** Ingelhart, R. 'Post-materialism in an environment of insecurity', *American Political Science Review* 75(4): 880-900, 1981; for empirical evidence on this issue, see Ingelhart, R. and Abramson, P.R. 'Measuring postmaterialism', *American Political Science Review* 93(3): 665-677, 1999. Williams, C. *A Commodified World?* (London: Zed Books, 2005).
- 11.13** Youth TGI report 2008 (BMRB) – summary figures in the Advertising Association report *Children's Wellbeing in a Commercial World* (2009); Nairn, A., Ormrod, J. and Bottomley, P. *Watching, Wanting and Wellbeing: Exploring the Links* (London, NCC: 2006).
- 11.15** Layard, R. *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (London, Penguin, 2005).
- 11.16–11.17** Goldberg, M.E., Gorn, G.J., Peracchio, L.A., and Bamossy G. (2003) 'Understanding materialism among youth' *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13; 278-288, 2003; Kasser, T., Ryan, R.M., Couchman, C.E. and Sheldon, K.M. 'Materialistic values: Their causes and consequences', in Kasser, T. and Kanner, A.D. (eds.), *Psychology and Consumer Culture: The Struggle for a Good Life in a Materialistic World* (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2004); and Chaplin, L.N. and John, D.R. 'Growing up in a material world: age difference in materialism in children and adolescents'. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34: 480-493, 2007. See also Schor, J. *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004). Further references in Appendix J.
- 11.19** Nairn et al., op. cit. (note 11.13).
- 12.2** See, for example, Appadurai, A. (ed.) *The Social Life of Things* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Miller, D. *The Comfort of Things* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008); Buchli, V. (ed.) *The Material Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).
- 12.3–12.8** See Appendices I and J for further references.
- 12.5** McNeal, J.U. *The Kids' Market: Myths and Realities* (New York: Paramount, 1999).
- 12.6** 'Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations, 2008', implemented by ASA/OFT

- 12.7** Goldberg, M.E. and Gorn, G.J. 'Some unintended consequences of TV advertising to children' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 5: 22-29, 1978; Buijzen, M. and Valkenburg, P. 'The unintended effects of television advertising: A parent-child survey', *Communication Research* 30: 483-503, 2003; Ekstrom, K. 'Parental consumer learning or "keeping up with the children"', *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 6: 203-217, 2007.
- 12.10** Brusdal, R. 'Little emperors in an affluent society' keynote address, Child and Teen Consumption Conference, Trondheim, Norway, April 2008; Cross, G. 'Children and teens as valves of adult desires', in Buckingham, D. and Tingstad, V. (eds.) *Childhood and Consumer Culture* (London; Palgrave MacMillan, in press).
- 12.11** 'New consumers? Children, fashion and consumption', Department of Sociology, University of Leicester: see Boden, S. et al. 'New consumers? The social and cultural significance of children's fashion consumption' at <http://www.consume.bbk.ac.uk/research/pole.html>. Earlier research on this area can be found in Elliott, R. and Leonard, C. 'Peer pressure and poverty: exploring fashion brands and consumption symbolism among children of the "British poor"', *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 3(4): 347-359, 2004.
- 12.12** 'Consuming Identities: Young People, Cultural Forms and Negotiations in Households', Open University/University of Bath. Final report at: <http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/ViewAwardPage.aspx?ts=1&data=v9XrjLJ6xhGtlcx838oE%2F1rC2HER32HA7IZMDKLjlc%2FQa5ERcjgpxQ%3D%3D>. See Croghan, R. et al 'Style failure: consumption, identity and social exclusion', *Journal of Youth Studies* 9(4): 463-478, 2006.
- 12.13** For example, Buckingham, D. *Children Talking Television* (London: Falmer, 1993).
- 12.14** Prinstein, M.S. and Dodge, K.A. (eds.) *Understanding Peer Influence in Children and Adolescents* (New York: Guilford Press, 2008).
- 12.15** Youth TGI report 2008 (BMRB) – summary figures in the Advertising Association report *Children's Wellbeing in a Commercial World* (2009).

Section 13 References relating to this section may be found in the commissioned review on the effects, uses and interpretations of commercial messages and activities by children (Appendix J), and in the technical appendix (Appendix K). A few additional references are identified here.

- 13.4** 2004 figures: see Appendix H. Ofcom, *Review of the Effects of the HFSS Advertising Restrictions* (London: Ofcom, 2008); Ofcom *Trends in Advertising Spend Across Media* (London: Ofcom, 2008).
- 13.5** Submissions to consultation from Baby Milk Action and the Breastfeeding Network. For information specifically relating to marketing, see <http://www.babymilkaction.org/>.

- 13.6** The key reports are respectively: Young, B., Webley, P., Hetherington, M. and Zeedyk, S. *The Role of Television Advertising in Children's Food Choice* (London: MAFF, 1996); Hastings, G. et al. *Review of Research on the Effects of Food Promotion to Children* (Glasgow: Centre for Social Marketing, University of Strathclyde, 2003); Young, B. *Advertising and Food Choice in Children* (London: Food Advertising Unit, The Advertising Association, 2003); Livingstone, S. *A Commentary on the Research Evidence Regarding the Effects of Food Promotion on Children* (London: London School of Economics, 2004); Livingstone, S. and Helsper, E. *Advertising Foods to Children: Understanding Promotion in the Context of Children's Daily Lives* (London: London School of Economics, 2004); Livingstone, S. *New Research on Advertising Foods to Children: An Updated Review of the Literature Annex 9 of Ofcom Television Advertising of Food and Drink Products to Children* (London: Ofcom, 2006); and McGinnis, J.M., Appleton Gootman, J. and Kraak, V.I., eds. *Food Marketing to Children: Threat or Opportunity?* (Washington DC: National Academies Press, 2006). For a critical commentary on the use of evidence in this debate, see Buckingham, D. 'The appliance of science: the role of research in the making of regulatory policy on children and food advertising in the UK' *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 15(1), 2009 in press.
- 13.17** On new media, see Montgomery, K. and Chester, J. 'Food advertising to children in the new digital marketing ecosystem', in Ekstrom, K. and Tufte, B. (eds.) *Children, Media and Consumption: On the Front Edge* (Goteborg, Sweden: Nordicom, 2007).
- 13.19** Centre for Tobacco Control Research, University of Stirling and Open University *Point of Sale Display of Tobacco Products* (Centre for Tobacco Control Research, 2008).
- 13.20–13.21** See Appendix J, and FDS International and Volterra Consulting *Advertising and the Misuse of Alcohol* (report for the Advertising Association, 2008).
- 13.23** Siegel, M. *Marketing Public Health* (Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett, 2006).
- 13.26** Livingstone, S. and Helsper, E. *Advertising Foods to Children: Understanding Promotion in the Context of Children's Daily Lives* (London: London School of Economics, 2004).
- 14.1** Cook, D.T. and Kaiser, S.B. 'Betwixt and be tween: age ambiguity and the sexualisation of the female consuming subject', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4(2): 203-227, 2004. The Australian Senate enquiry: http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eca_ctte/sexualisation_of_children/tor.htm.
- 14.2** Jackson, S. *Childhood and Sexuality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
- 14.3** See Bragg, S. and Buckingham, D. *Young People and Sexual Content on Television: A Review of the Research* (London: Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002).
- 14.4** Higonnet, A. *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998); Kincaid, J. *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992).
- 14.8** Levin, D. and Kilbourne, J. *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualised Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids* (New York: Ballantine, 2008).

- 14.10** American Psychological Association *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* (Washington, DC: APA, 2007); Rush, E. and La Nauze, A. *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of Children in Australia* (Canberra: The Australia Institute, 2006). The tendency to read 'adult' meanings into images of children is especially – and disturbingly – apparent in the latter report.
- 14.11** Levin and Kilbourne, op. cit. Eveleth, P.B. 'Timing of menarche: secular trends and population difference', in Lancaster, J.B. and Hamburg, B.A. (eds.) *School-age Pregnancy and Parenthood* New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986.
- 14.12** American Psychological Association, op. cit.
- 14.13** Buckingham, D. and Bragg, S. *Young People, Sex and the Media: the Facts of Life?* (London: Palgrave, 2004) and *Young People, Media and Personal Relationships* (London: Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2003). See also Steele, J.R. 'Teenage sexuality and media practice; factoring in the influences of family, friends and school', *Journal of Sex Research* 36(4): 331-341, 1999; and Brown, J.D., White, A.B. and Nickopoulou, L. 'Disinterest, intrigue, resistance: early adolescent girls' use of sexual media content', pp. 177-195 in B.S. Greenberg, J.D. Brown and N.L. Buerkel-Rothfuss (eds.) *Media, Sex and the Adolescent* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1993).
- 14.14** Wolf, N. *The Beauty Myth* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990).
- 14.15–14.18** Frost, L. *Young Women and the Body: A Feminist Sociology* (London: Palgrave, 2001); Grogan, S. *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children* (London: Routledge, 1999); Wykes, M. and Gunter, B. *The Media and Body Image* (London: Sage, 2005). See also Appendix J.
- 14.19** Youth TGI report 2008 (BMRB) – summary figures in the Advertising Association report *Children's Wellbeing in a Commercial World* (2009).
- 14.20–14.21** Duits, L. and van Zoonen, L. 'Headscarves and porno-chic: disciplining girls' bodies in the European multicultural society', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13(2): 103-117, 2006; Gill, R.C. 'Critical respect: the difficulties and dilemmas of agency and "choice" for feminism', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 14(1): 69-80, 2007; Duits, L. and van Zoonen, L. 'Who's afraid of female agency? A rejoinder to Gill', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 14(2): 161-170, 2007.
- 14.22** Weeks, J. *The World We Have Won: The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life* (London: Routledge, 2007); McNair, B. *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratisation of Desire* (London: Routledge, 2002); Giddens, A. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); Attwood, F. 'Sexed up: theorizing the sexualization of culture', *Sexualities* 9(1):77-94, 2006.

- 14.23** Rysst, M. (2008) "'Hello – we are only in the fifth grade!!" Children's rights, intergenerationality and constructions of gender in public childhood discourses', in Buckingham, D. and Tingstad, V. (eds.) *Childhood and Consumer Culture* (London; Palgrave MacMillan, in press); Torell, V.B. 'Adults and children debating sexy girls' clothes', pp. 251-274 in H. Brembeck, B. Johansson and J. Kampmann (eds.) *Beyond the Competent Child: Exploring Contemporary Childhoods in the Nordic Welfare Societies* (Fredericksberg: Roskilde University Press, 2004).
- 14.24** See Appendix J. Also Griffiths, M. 'Blue worlds and pink worlds: a portrait of intimate polarity', in D. Buckingham (ed.) *Small Screens: Television for Children* (London: Leicester University Press, 2002); and Durkin, K. *Television, Sex Roles and Children* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985).
- 14.25** Russell, R., and Tyler, M. 'Thank heaven for little girls: 'girl heaven' and the commercial context of feminine childhood', *Sociology* 36(3): 619-637, 2002; and 'Branding and bricolage: gender, consumption and transition' *Childhood* 12(2): 221-237, 2005.
- 14.28** Buckingham, D. and Bragg, S. 'Opting into (and out of) childhood: young people, sex and the media', in J. Qvortrup (ed.) *Studies in Modern Childhood: Society, Agency and Culture* (London: Sage, 2005).
- 14.29** Julier, A. 'The political economy of obesity: the fat pay all', in Counihan, C. and van Esterik, P. (eds.) *Food and Culture: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2008).

Section 15 This section draws on Appendix J and on Buckingham, D. et al. *The Impact of the Media on Children and Young People* (review of the literature prepared for the Byron Review, 2007), at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview/> (Annex G).

- 15.1** See, for example, Linn, S. (2004). *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood* (New York: New Press); and for further discussion, Buckingham, D. *After the Death of Childhood: Growing Up in the Age of Electronic Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).
- 15.2** See Lesko, N. *Act Your Age: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence* (New York, Routledge, 2001); James, A. *Childhood Identities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993); and Buckingham, op. cit.
- 15.3** *Safer Children in a Digital World: The Report of the Byron Review* (London: DCSF/DCMS, 2008); Millwood Hargrave, A. and Livingstone, S. *Harm and Offence in Media Content: A Review of the Evidence* (Bristol: Intellect, 2006); Boyle, R. and Hibberd, M. *Review of Research on the Impact of Violent Computer Games on Young People* (Stirling: Stirling Media Research Institute, 2005).
- 15.8** Larson, M. 'Gender, race, and aggression in television commercials that feature children', *Sex Roles* 48(1-2): 67-76, 2003. See also Appendix J.
- 15.15** Millwood Hargrave, A. and Livingstone, S. *Harm and Offence in Media Content: A Review of the Evidence* (Bristol: Intellect, 2006).

Section 16 This section draws on Appendices G and J, where further references may be found.

- 16.2** *The Wellbeing of Children and Young People in the UK: A Review of Available Evidence* (London: DCSF, 2007).
- 16.4–16.5**, See studies by Nairn et al. and Buijzen and Valkenburg cited in Sections 11 and 12.
- 16.8**
- 16.6** Croghan, R. et al 'Style failure: consumption, identity and social exclusion', *Journal of Youth Studies* 9(4): 463-478, 2006.
- 16.7** Youth TGI, op. cit.
- 16.8** Ridge, T. *Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion: From a Child's Perspective* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2002); Chin, E. *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
- 16.9** Department of Health *Health Inequalities: Progress and Next Steps* (London: DoH, 2008).
- 16.10** Nairn, A., Ormrod, J. and Bottomley, P. *Watching, Wanting and Wellbeing: Exploring the Links* (London: NCC, 2006); Ofsted *Tellus2: Children and Young People Survey* (London: Ofsted, 2007).
- 16.11** Luthar, S.S. and Latendresse, S.J. 'Children of the affluent: challenges to well-being', *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14(1): 49-53, 2005; Luthar, S.S. 'The culture of affluence: psychological costs of material wealth', *Child Development* 74(6): 1581-1593, 2003.
- 16.12** Burroughs, J.E. and Rindfleisch A. 'Materialism and well-being: a conflicting values perspective' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29; 348-370, 2002.
- 16.14** Layard, R. *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (London, Penguin, 2005).
- Section 17** This section draws on Ofcom *The Future of Children's Television Programming: Research Report* (London: Ofcom, 2007); and Buckingham, D., Davies, H., Jones, K. and Kelley, P. *Children's Television in Britain: History, Discourse and Policy* (London: British Film Institute, 1999).
- 17.6** See also Blumler, J. *The Future of Children's Television in Britain* (London: Broadcasting Standards Council, 1992); and Davies, M. and Corbett, B. *The Provision of Children's Television In Britain* (London: Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1997).
- 17.11** See also Appendix H; and <http://www.savekidstv.org.uk>.
- 17.20** *Digital Britain: Final Report* (London: DCMS/BIS, 2009).
- 17.22–17.23** See the Academic Literature Review by M. Davies with H. Thornham produced for Ofcom's *The Future of Children's Television Programming*; and Kondo, K. and Steemers, J. *Can Television Be Good for Children?* University of Westminster, report commissioned by Save Kids' TV, 2007.

- 18.4** On the US context: Molnar, A. *School Commercialism: from Democratic Ideal to Market Commodity* (New York: Routledge, 2005); and Molnar, A. and Boninger, F. *Adrift: Schools in a Total Marketing Environment* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 2007) at http://epsl.asu.edu/ceru/CERU_2007_Annual_Report.htm. On Australia: Kenway, J. and Bullen, E. *Consuming Children: Education-Entertainment-Advertising* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001).
- 18.5–18.6** Details of some of these initiatives were provided in submissions to the consultation from organisations including Ten Nine, FEdS Consultancy and the National Schools Partnership. See also the Advertising Association report *Children's Wellbeing in a Commercial World* (2009).
- 18.5** On the promotion of technology, see: Buckingham, D., Scanlon, M. and Sefton-Green, J. 'Selling the digital dream: marketing educational technologies to teachers and parents', pp. 20-40 in A. Loveless and V. Ellis (eds.) *Subject to Change: Literacy and New Technologies* (London: Routledge, 2001); and Nixon, H. 'Fun and games are serious business', pp. 21-42 in J. Sefton-Green (ed.) *Digital Diversions: Youth Culture in the Age of Multimedia* (London: UCL Press, 1998).
- 18.7** Molnar, op. cit.; De Vaney, A. (ed.) *Watching Channel One: The Convergence of Students, Technology and Private Business* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994); and the campaign website www.obligation.org.
- 18.9** Waller, J. *Free Books for Schools: An Inquiry into the Commercial Sponsorship of School Resource Materials* MA dissertation, University of Sheffield, 1999. See also comments by Which?: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/1694388.stm.
- 18.10** Raine, G. 'Commercial activities in primary schools: a quantitative study', *Oxford Review of Education* 33(2): 211-231, 2007.
- 18.11** Wilkinson, G. 'Commercial breaks: an overview of corporate opportunities for commercialising education in US and English schools', *London Review of Education* 4(3): 253-269, 2006.
- 18.12** *Working with Schools: Best Practice Principles* (London: DCSF/ISBA, 2008).
- 18.13–18.15** Information for a submission to the consultation by FEdS Consulting. See also Cuban, L. *The Blackboard and the Bottom Line: Why Schools Can't Be Businesses* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
- 18.16–18.21** Ball, S. *Education Plc: Understanding Private Sector Participation in Public Sector Education* (London: Routledge, 2007); and Ball, S. and Youdell, D. *Hidden Privatisation in Public Education* (Brussels: Education International, 2008).
- 18.22–18.25** Buckingham, D. and Scanlon, M. *Education, Entertainment and Learning in the Home* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003); Buckingham, D. and Scanlon, M. 'Selling learning: towards a political economy of edutainment media', *Media, Culture and Society* 27(1): 53-68, 2005; Ireson, J. 'Private tutoring: how prevalent and effective is it?' *London Review of Education* 2(2): 109-122, 2004.

18.25 Facer, K., Furlong, J., Furlong, R. and Sutherland, R. *Screenplay: Children and Computing in the Home* (London: Routledge, 2003); Giacquinta, J.B., Bauer, J. and Levin, J.E. *Beyond Technology's Promise: An Examination of Children's Educational Computing at Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Kerawalla, L. and Crook, C. 'From promises to practices: the fate of educational software in the home', *Technology, Pedagogy and Education* 14(1): 107-125, 2005.

Section 19 This section is largely drawn from the commissioned literature review on children and marketing, Appendix H: full references may be found there. See also: McKendrick, J. H., Bradford, M. G. and Fielder, A. V. 'Kid customer? Commercialization of playspace and the commodification of childhood' *Childhood* 7(3): 295-314, 1999; and Valentine, G. *Public Space and the Culture of Childhood* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). Policy issues are addressed in the DCSF's *Fair Play: A Consultation on the Play Strategy* (London: DCSF, 2008).

Section 20 This section draws on Appendix H, and on submissions to the assessment by the Advertising Standards Authority.

20.8–20.9 Figures on exposure to ads come from Ofcom, *Review of the Effects of the HFSS Advertising Restrictions* (London: Ofcom, 2008): the difference in estimates derives from different ways of defining the foods advertised. The figures on overall spend are from Ofcom *Trends in Advertising Spend Across Media* (London: Ofcom, 2008); and Department of Health *Changes in Food and Drink Advertising and Promotion to Children* (London: DoH, 2008). For competing arguments on this issue, see the Children's Food Campaign (<http://www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodcampaign/>), Save Kids' TV (<http://www.savekidstv.org.uk>), and the Advertising Association (<http://www.fau.org.uk>).

20.13 *Hard Sell, Soft Target* (Family and Parenting Institute, 2004).

20.14 Fiedler, A., Gardner, W., Nairn, A. and Pitt, J. *Fair Game? Assessing Commercial Activity on Children's Favourite Websites and Online Environments* (London: National Consumer Council, 2007).

20.18 Layard, R. and Dunn, J. *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age* (London: Penguin, 2009).

21.3 Bowe, C. 'What is consumer literacy and why does it matter?' (London: Ofcom Consumer Panel, 2007).

21.4 Office of Fair Trading *A Strategy and Framework for Consumer Education* (London: OFT, 2004); Central Office of Information *Consumer Education: Establishing an Evidence Base* (London: COI, 2006).

21.5 Financial Services Authority: http://www.fsa.gov.uk/financial_capability/. International Gateway: http://www.financial-education.org/pages/0,2987,en_39665975_39666038_1_1_1_1_1,00.html.

21.6 <http://www.pfeg.org/>.

- 21.7** Media Literacy Task Force: <http://www.medialiteracy.org.uk/taskforce/>. European Charter: <http://www.euromedialiteracy.eu/>. UNESCO: http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15886&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.
- 21.8–21.13** Buckingham, D. et al. *The Media Literacy of Children and Young People* (London: Ofcom, 2005); Buckingham, D. *Media Education* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003); Burn, A. and Durran, J. *Media Literacy in Schools* (London: Paul Chapman, 2007); McDougall, J. *The Media Teacher's Book* (London: Arnold, 2006).
- 21.10** Livingstone, S. et al. *The Media Literacy of Adults* (London: Ofcom, 2005). Internet safety initiatives here would include the work of the Family and Parenting Institute with Vodaphone, as well as other collaborations between companies and charitable bodies.
- 21.13** Harvey, I., Skinner, M. and Parker, D. *Being Seen, Being Heard: Young People and Moving Image Production* (London: National Youth Agency/British Film Institute, 2002); <http://www.firstlightmovies.com/>; <http://www.media-box.co.uk>.
- 21.15** English and Media Centre *The Advertising Pack and Doing Ads: Approaches for the 21st Century* (London: English and Media Centre): <http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/>.
- 21.16** Media Smart: <http://www.mediasmart.org.uk/>. Buckingham, D., Willett, R., Banaji, S. and Cranmer, S. *MediaSmart Be Adwise 2: An Evaluation* (London: Institute of Education, 2007). For critical responses to MediaSmart, see Eagle, L. 'Commercial media literacy: what does it do, to whom, and does it matter?' *Journal of Advertising* 36(2): 101-110, 2007; O'Sullivan, T. 'Get MediaSmart: a critical discourse analysis of the controversy around advertising to children in the UK' *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 10(3): 293-314, 2007. Neither article offers any analysis or evaluation of the MediaSmart materials.
- 21.17** Baby Milk Action *Seeing Through the Spin: Public Relations in the Global Economy* (Cambridge: Baby Milk Action, 2001); <http://www.chewonthis.org.uk/>.



You can download this publication or order copies online at www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications

Search using ref: DCSF-00669-2009

Copies of this publication can be obtained from:

DCSF Publications
PO Box 5050
Sherwood Park
Annesley
Nottingham NG15 0DJ
Tel: 0845 60 222 60
Fax: 0845 60 333 60
Textphone: 0845 60 555 60

Please quote the ref: 00669-2009 DOM-EN

D16(8547)/1209/22

© Crown copyright 2009

The text in this document (excluding the Royal Arms and other departmental or agency logos) may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context.

The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document specified. Where we have identified any third party copyright material you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

For any other use of this material please contact the Office of Public Sector Information, Information Policy Team, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU or e-mail: licensing@opsi.gsi.gov.uk.