

## HLSG 5 - Promotion of Food to Children

### Issue

To update the HLSG on new evidence which is relevant to any future discussions on issues relating to the marketing and promotion of food, which are to be taken forward in Phase 3 of the Food Network's work programme.

### Latest developments

At the first Food Network meeting in October 2010, it was agreed that the National Heart Forum (NHF) consortium report mapping the landscape in relation to regulatory and voluntary codes for the marketing and promotion of food to children, should be peer-reviewed and published. The report will be published on the DH website shortly and the executive summary from the report is reproduced at Annex 1. An independent review into the commercialisation and sexualisation of children by Reg Bailey (Letting Children be Children)<sup>1</sup> published on 6 June identified a number of themes and principles which could be considered to have potential read across to the promotion of food to children area. These are detailed in Annex 2. In addition, we understand that the British Heart Foundation (BHF) are working with the Children's Food Campaign to research online marketing of unhealthy foods which are aimed at, and/or influences children under 16 years of age, with a view to producing a report later in the year.

### The evidence base

The evidence relating to the impact of food advertising and promotion to children is limited and very little research has been done on marketing and promotion to children outside of TV. It is clear, however, including from focus groups run by the NHF consortium, that many people find the retail environment challenging due to the level of "pester power" it generates in children, and the number of promotions for less healthy food products.

### Key points from the NHF report:

- The NHF consortium report identified a number of areas where there are gaps in the controls on advertising and promotion of food to children; for example the *retail environment* generally and the use of *brand equity* characters (e.g. Tony the Tiger).
- The NHF consortium report identified a growing use of integrated marketing campaigns that use a range of media (for example, messages on-pack that drive consumers to company websites to enter competitions). Many aspects of these integrated campaigns are not covered by the extended non-statutory rules (e.g. packaging).

### Relevant points from the Bailey Review:

- The Bailey Review restated the precautionary principle, that *lack of definitive evidence should not be taken as a reason for continued inaction*. It also highlighted that *retailers do not sell or market inappropriate clothing, products or services for children and that marketers do not exploit any gaps in advertising regulation in order to unduly influence*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM%208078>

*the choices children make as consumers. A further recommendation in this area is to prohibit the employment of children under the age of 16 as brand ambassadors or in peer-to-peer marketing – where people are paid, or paid in kind, to promote products, brands or services.*

## **Issues for HLSG**

It has been agreed that improving the balance of food promoted to children will be a strand of the Food Network's calorie reduction work programme, but the Food Network's broader work stream relating specifically to the promotion of food to children has yet to be determined.

HLSG is asked to consider what action (if any) needs to be taken next, in the context of the findings of the NHF report and the recommendations of the Bailey Review to strengthen the arrangements around promotion of food to (a) children and (b) wider audiences.

- 1. Is lack of definitive evidence of impact a reason for inaction? If not where should action be focussed?*
- 2. Do the gaps identified in the regulations and codes warrant action? If so, what?*
- 3. Is there a need to do more to increase parental and child awareness of marketing techniques as recommended in Bailey Review?*
- 4. Should consideration be given to the development of a set of voluntary principles to underpin all forms of marketing and promotion of foods and drink to children?*
- 5. How should work be taken forward and are there any aspects that could be progressed ahead of Phase 3 of the Food Network work programme (2012/13) as originally planned?*

## Annex 1

### **Executive Summary from National Heart Forum report: An analysis of the regulatory and voluntary landscape concerning the marketing and promotion of foods to children**

See separate attached PDF.

## Annex 2

### **The Bailey Review of the commercialisation and sexualisation of children published 6 June**

In December 2010, the Government commissioned an independent review, led by Reg Bailey, to assess how children in the UK are being pressured to grow up too quickly, and to make recommendations on how to address public concern about this. The review made a wide-ranging and independent examination of the evidence and the recommendations were informed by the views of consumers, particularly parents, the business community and existing regulators.

The main issues drawn out by the Bailey Review are:

- a restatement of the *precautionary principle* - the absence of definitive evidence of the harm to children from premature sexualisation should not be taken as a reason for continued inaction, in particular where parents themselves have clear concerns
- a preference for an approach with balances *protecting* children from premature sexualisation and excessive commercialisation with *giving them the tools to protect themselves* (e.g. through awareness raising and education), and *supporting parents in playing their part*
- placing the main responsibility for action on *business*, but with a call to Government to monitor implementation and review progress in 18 months and to consider regulation if not enough has been achieved by voluntary means.

Four main themes were considered, with detailed recommendations (not rehearsed here) supporting the objectives:

- (1) The wallpaper of children's lives; *that sexualised images used in public places and on television, internet, music videos, magazines, newspapers and other places are more in line with what parents find acceptable, and that the public space becomes more family friendly.*
- (2) Clothing and products for children; *that retailers do not sell or market inappropriate clothing, products and services for children.*
- (3) Children as consumers; *that the regulations protecting children from excessive commercial pressures are comprehensive and effective across all media and in line with parental expectations. That marketers do not exploit any gaps in advertising regulation in order to unduly influence the choices children make as consumers. That parents and*

*children have a sound awareness and understanding of marketing techniques and regulation.*

- (4) Making parents' voices heard: *That parents find it easier to voice their concerns, are listened to more readily when they do, and have their concerns visibly acted on by businesses and regulators.*

The Government has welcomed Mr Bailey's analysis and the thrust of all the recommendations he has made, and has committed to work with industry and regulators to see that these recommendations are implemented as fully as possible. The Government has committed to actively monitor implementation of the recommendations, leading up to a full stock-take of progress in 18 months' time. At this point, the Government will consider what further measures may need to be taken to achieve the recommended outcomes, including considering regulation if voluntary action has not been effective.