



The Advertising Association

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NEWS RELEASE

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ADVERTISING ASSOCIATION DISAPPOINTED AT OFCOM'S RETREAT FROM EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH

Today, the Advertising Association (AA) responded to the publication by Ofcom of its long-awaited decision on new restrictions on food and soft drink advertising to children on TV. The announcement is the culmination of a three-year debate following the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Tessa Jowell MP's instruction to Ofcom in December 2003.

Today, Ofcom has stated it will be imposing tough new content and scheduling restrictions on the TV advertising of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) and soft drinks. Disappointingly, it has extended scheduling restrictions to all children, that goes well beyond creating more protection for primary school aged children – which the Government has said is the main focus of concern*. This will create problems for a new raft of broadcasters for whom teenagers are an important audience.

Speaking on behalf of the Advertising Association, Andrew Brown, Director-General, said:

“We are dismayed that Ofcom as an evidence-based regulator has become vulnerable to pressure and has departed from the first of its stated regulatory objectives, developed after extensive research, which is “to reduce significantly the exposure of younger children to HFSS advertising”.

He added,

“The advertising industry has long accepted that new restrictions on food advertising to younger children are necessary, but only as part of a much wider response to the obesity crisis that promotes healthy lifestyles.”

Ofcom and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) have both published extensive research into the effect of TV advertising on children's food preferences and have concluded that, at best, there is only a modest direct effect, of the order of 2%.

However, the AA also welcomes Ofcom's recognition that it would be disproportionate to extend the ban to the 9pm watershed, as activists have demanded, and Ofcom's acceptance of the tough content proposals that the industry has proposed.

Brown said:

“Ofcom appear to have steered a middle way between polarised viewpoints in which satisfying opinion has become at least as important as meeting the needs of evidence.”

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Notes to editors:

1. The Advertising Association (AA) is a federation of 31 trade bodies and organisations representing the advertising and promotional marketing industries, including advertisers, agencies, the media and support services in the UK. It is the only body that speaks for all sides of an industry that was worth almost £19 billion in 2005. Further information about the AA, its membership and remit is available on our website at: <http://www.adassoc.org.uk/>
2. Ofcom published its consultation “Television advertising of food and drink products to children: Options for new restrictions” on 28 March, with a closing date of 30 June.

* In answer to a Parliamentary Question tabled by Stephen O'Brien MP, Shadow Minister for Health, in May 2006, Caroline Flint MP stated that her concerns were “focused on protecting primary school aged children.”