



## NEWS RELEASE

**For immediate release** Monday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009

Contact - Jonathan Collett - Head of Communications Tel: 0207 3401107

### **Advertising Association report explodes the myth of toxic childhood**

A new Advertising Association Report "*Children's wellbeing in a commercial world*" finds no evidence of a decline in children's overall wellbeing, nor that the net impact of the commercial world on wellbeing has been negative over the past fifteen years. Indeed it finds plenty of evidence that aspects of the commercial world enhance the wellbeing of children.

The report, produced for the panel of academics appointed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to examine evidence on the impact of the commercial world on children's wellbeing, contains an analysis of 15-year trend data and shows:

- **children's fundamental values have remained constant or in some cases strengthened.** (ie what they regard as the really important things in life such as friendship, love, helping others and leading a healthy life)
- **indications of increased media literacy**
- **a decline in the medium term of being 'slaves to fashion' and materialism** (Over the last ten years there has been a decline in numbers who 'like keeping up with the latest fashions', who 'prefer to buy things friends would approve' and 'like branded clothing with logos')
- **positive trends in the role of the family and parental relations** (A high proportion 'get on with their parents' and there is a steady increase in 'enjoying spending time with the family')
- **increased self-esteem** ('there are high and growing numbers agreeing that 'I am happy about the way I look')

Further, a separate and specially commissioned pilot study among 11-15's shows that whilst this group fully embraces the commercial world, they do not view their wellbeing primarily through the lens of materialism.

The results show that commercially-related factors are not in themselves highly rated as important sources of wellbeing. The top six 'wellbeing benefits' were:

1) 'Just having fun' 2) 'Keeping in touch with my friends' 3) 'Relaxation and Entertainment' 4) 'Keep me safe and out of harm' 5) 'Being independent and following my own interests' 6) 'Learning new things, developing new interests'.

Several commercially-related factors were however regarded as powerful enablers of wellbeing, helping to deliver these important benefits. Internet and mobile phones feature strongly in these terms but TV, newspapers and magazines, MP3s, computer games and advertising also emerge as significant wellbeing enablers.

Commenting on the Report, **Baroness Peta Buscombe**, Chief Executive of the Advertising Association said:

"This valuable new research shows that overall wellbeing of children and young people is robust and certainly not in decline despite the changes in the context for childhood in recent years. The picture that emerges is that aspects of the commercial world are important net promoters of children's wellbeing, helping to promote more positive thinking and counterbalancing negative pressures in children's lives.

"It is a timely and vital contribution to the public debate about the impact of the commercial world on children's wellbeing and explodes the myths of emotive sloganeering such as '*toxic childhood*' and '*commercialisation of childhood*'. Indeed it shows that business can and is a force for good as an enabler of children's wellbeing."

[The Full report is available to view here](#)

- ENDS -

**For further information**, contact: Tel: 0207 3401107

Jonathan Collett - Head of Communications

Tim Farrow – Communications Executive  
Tel: 0207 3401100

## **Notes to Editors**

### **About the Advertising Association**

1. The Advertising Association is a federation of trade bodies and organisations representing the advertising and promotional marketing industries including advertisers, agencies, media and support services. It is the only body that speaks for all sides of an industry worth over £19 billion in 2007. Further information: <http://www.adassoc.org.uk/>

### **Development of report**

2. The Advertising Association's report has been produced as an industry contribution to the enquiry by the panel of academics appointed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to assess the impact of the commercial world on childhood (0-19).
3. The report has been prepared following a request by the academic panel, as part of its enquiry, for a coordinated industry report containing evidence about the benefits of the commercial world to children.
4. The academic panel is chaired by David Buckingham, Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, London University. There are nine academics on the panel, covering a range of specialisms.

### **Report Content**

5. The report comprises attitudinal research among children. The Advertising Association commissioned in early December a pilot study from Q-Research, the UK's leading provider of online mobile phone market research ([www.qmobileinsight.co.uk](http://www.qmobileinsight.co.uk)), via mobiles and on-line, among two hundred 11-15 year olds. The questionnaire was constructed to reflect DCSF's own definition of well-being factors, taken from the Children's Act. This research has found some valuable perspective. It puts the more 'commercial' aspects of wellbeing (shopping, finding out about new things kids would like, having the same things as their friends) in context, showing that they are of much lower importance to their wellbeing than having fun, keeping in touch with friends, being independent, and learning new things. It shows that the internet, mobile phones, MP3s, TV, and Games are extremely helpful in delivering wellbeing factors important to them, and it is clear that children are in charge of the technology, not the other way round. But there is no trend data (specifically requested by the panel), and it's a smallish sample.
6. For this reason, data was obtained from BMRB's Youth TGI, a survey among over six thousand 7-19 year-olds each year. This data is highly

complementary to the above research, and provides solid trend data over the past 15 years. This period saw a rapid increase in exposure to media and other commercial elements, and it has been asserted that this has been detrimental to children's values and wellbeing. TGI paints a very different picture: children's fundamental values ('really important things in life') have remained constant or in some cases strengthened; there are indications of increased media literacy and resistance to advertising; a decrease in involvement with TV; a decline in materialism; positive trends in the role of family and parental relations; and increased self-esteem. Taken with the Q data above, this provides a very comprehensive analysis of children's attitudes to life.

7. The Advertising Association's report also contains case studies showing the opportunities and enjoyment that companies provide through a spectrum of different activities and initiatives. This section also includes material on the Advertising Association's ground-breaking business4Life (b4L) initiative, demonstrating how companies can come together in a coordinated way as a genuine force for good for society. This initiative is being developed in partnership with the Department for Health through its Change4Life programme.
8. The report also contains details of the new digital lessons being developed by Media Smart (educational materials for primary schools) as part of the industry's commitment to play its part in empowering children through media literacy.

#### **Details of Department for Children, Schools and Families Enquiry**

9. The DCSF's enquiry was announced in *The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures*, presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families in December 2007 (paragraphs 2.22-2.25, pages 44-45). Available to view <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan/>
10. The terms of reference for the Assessment of the Impact of the Commercial World on Childhood published by DCSF are available to view here <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/TOR.doc>. The scope of the assessment is to examine children's commercial world in the broadest sense, including: products, commercial messages, the children's entertainment business and children's publishing (print, music, new media), shopping, the market for children's goods and services, and any further involvement that children may have. The assessment will not be restricted to advertising. The assessment must examine the outcomes which are detrimental to children's wellbeing, as well as the benefits from engaging with the commercial world. It will also examine the economic contribution made by the provision of goods and services for children.