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## *Advertising and young people*

ASA engagement with young people, parents and teachers

**Prepared for:** Advertising Standards Authority

**Prepared by:** Beaufort Research



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## Foreword

### Rt Hon Lord Smith of Finsbury, ASA Chairman

The UK Advertising Codes contain strict rules to protect children from potentially misleading, harmful or offensive material. The rules prevent ads from undermining parental authority or placing unfair pressure on children to buy products. In recent years, advertising rules for specific products such as food, alcohol and video games have been significantly tightened to afford children a high level of protection – often the changes have been made in response to public concerns.

Society's concerns about the effects of the commercial world on children remain high on the public agenda. There are concerns about the role media might play in the sexualisation and commercialisation of childhood and the potential for moral harm. Whilst advertising is often mentioned in discussions about the media and its potential to influence children and young people, these concerns are not necessarily borne out by the number and type of complaints we receive. In fact the overall levels of complaint we receive about such matters are relatively low.

In response to these issues and to begin a process of actively listening to the views of young people as part of our work, we initiated a programme of activity which took place in the Cardiff area throughout December 2010 and January 2011. The primary aim of this work was to open dialogue with young people, parents and those who work with children and young people, and to receive feedback on our work.

We conducted focus groups and held presentations and discussions at schools and a university. The activity provided us with an excellent opportunity to talk about our work with a key group of stakeholders.

I spent an afternoon at one of the schools talking to fifth- and sixth-formers about our work and the issues advertisements can raise. The reactions we received to some of the ads we showed to them were mixed. Some agreed with the way the ASA normally judged such ads, while others very much disagreed. In many ways these mixed reactions illustrated the challenges we face every day at the ASA when assessing complaints.

I was left with a firm impression of how media literate and savvy these young people were, and how fiercely they felt, as well, about what was acceptable and what wasn't in the ads they encountered every day. It was a reminder of how important our work is.

I have no doubt that the findings contained within this report will be useful in guiding the ASA in its day-to-day work judging ads. It will also provide the basis for further work to help us in our commitment to understanding better the views of parents, teachers and young people.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Smith', written in a cursive style.

**Rt Hon Lord Smith of Finsbury  
ASA Chairman**

## 1. Background and research objectives

### 1.1 Why the engagement was needed

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the UK's independent regulator of advertising across all media, including TV, radio, print, outdoor, cinema, internet, sales promotions and direct marketing. Its role is to ensure ads are legal, decent, honest and truthful by applying the Advertising Codes.

Some of the ASA's key corporate objectives are: to understand better the public's views on advertising and how it influences young people; to feed those views into its work; and to communicate its work.

The ASA places a particular emphasis on protecting young people, and it recognises that there is some public concern about the impact that the commercial world may have on children.

Existing research indicates that it can be difficult for the general public to differentiate advertising from other media when considering possible morally harmful influences on young people. TV and online content, music videos, peer pressure and magazine editorial, for example, can all influence people's perceptions of how advertising affects children and young people.

To help inform its ongoing work protecting young people, the ASA carried out consumer engagement activity in the Cardiff area, in order to open dialogue with young people, parents and those who work with children and young people.

### 1.2 Engagement activity objectives

The overall theme of the activity centred on the potential for moral harm to young people from advertising.

The following objectives were set for the activity:

- Explore the concerns of the target audience in relation to advertising and young people
- Assess the extent to which young people understood what an ad is, including
  - the aim of advertising
  - how ads make them feel
  - how easy it is to spot an ad, for example in a digital space
- Explore understanding of how advertising is regulated
- Gauge awareness, understanding and perceptions of the ASA

- Obtain feedback on the current controls in place, and how the ASA applies them
- Elicit reactions to ASA adjudications which relate to the overall theme of moral harm to young people
- Communicate what the ASA is and the work it does (ASA presentations only)

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Engagement design

The objectives listed above were met via a two-stage approach:

- **First stage** Four focus groups with consumers: two with young people aged 12-15; and two with parents / teachers. The aim of this exploratory qualitative research stage was to elicit the views of parents / teachers / carers and young people in Cardiff against the main objectives.

All the focus groups were conducted in Cardiff. The two groups with young people were divided by age: one with 12-13 year olds and one with 14-15 year olds. This qualitative research stage was conducted according to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, with parental involvement and consent of paramount importance.

The groups took place on 24 and 30 November 2010.

- **Second stage** Five presentations given by the ASA: four at secondary schools, and one at University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). These events involved a presentation from the ASA which introduced the organisation and the work it does, followed by audience discussion of the same example ads as those tested in the first stage (qualitative research). School pupils were primarily aged 14-17 years old, and the number of attendees in each session ranged from 14 to 90.

The school presentations reported in this document took place on 24 and 25 January 2011 at St Joseph's, Newport and Bryn Hafren, Barry (two presentations) respectively.

### 2.2 Discussion approach

The ASA was especially interested in participants' reactions to five ads about which they had received complaints. The ads related to three areas of potential harm to young people (described in detail in section 3), as follows:

- **Sexual imagery / behaviour:** Table dancing club outdoor ad; underwear national press ad
- **Violent imagery / antisocial behaviour:** Fashion / sports brand TV ad; a TV ad for a DVD of a certificate 18 film
- **Commercialisation:** National press ad for mobile phones

The different nature of the two engagement stages meant that different discussion approaches were used.

In the focus groups, the first part of the session covered media habits, general concerns for young people and perceptions of advertising. Participants were then shown each of the five ads individually (rotated in the adults groups) and, before discussion, asked to write down whether they thought the ad was suitable for 12-15 year olds to see, along with any words to describe the ad.

In the ASA school presentations, the discussion of the ads took place after the presentation on the ASA as an organisation, and after examples of other ads had been viewed. These participants made their decisions on the appropriateness of the ads having discussed them first.

### 3. Advertising selection

Given the aims and objectives of this activity, the ASA chose five advertisements which focused on potential issues of commercialisation, sexualisation, anti-social behaviour and violence. The ASA had received complaints from members of the public about each of these ads, and had responded in different ways to the complaints. The ASA deliberately chose ads that would prompt a debate i.e. those around which an obvious and natural consensus could not be drawn.

The ASA found it difficult to find complained-about ads that would fall under the categories of sexualisation and commercialisation. This is partly because there are differing definitions of sexualisation and commercialisation and because these are not topics that generally prompt complaints to the ASA.

#### **Advertisement A**

Date: 2008

Media: National Press

An ad for mobile phones which was headed 'Back2School'. The ASA received a complaint which centred on whether or not the ad should be suggesting that mobile phones were needed in school. In particular the complainant argued that phones were a menace in the classroom and they have the potential to cause disruption to children's learning and classroom discipline.

ASA decision: not upheld

#### **Advertisement B**

Date: 2009

Media: TV

A TV ad featuring numerous celebrities and young people at a house party. The opening scene showed a hand picking up a spray can and a young man on a scooter in front of a large mural. Other young people riding scooters and a skateboard were featured. The ad showed a party scene inside a house, with the crowd dancing and jumping, and with several shots of well-known musicians and athletes at the party. Other party scenes showed people DJing and singing, dancing and jumping on furniture, a poker game and a couple falling into a bath.

The final scene showed a man jumping in a swimming pool fully-clothed and swimming underwater with several other clothed party goers. A viewer objected that the ad condoned and promoted antisocial activities such as spray painting graffiti and dangerous driving on scooters, particularly because it featured celebrities.

ASA decision: not upheld

**Advertisement C**

Date: 2009

Media: TV

A TV ad for the DVD of a film showed a well known actress driving a car in a chase. A male voice-over stated "The coolest movie of the year...". A hand was then shown holding a gun; the actress subsequently held a gun outstretched and fired a bullet towards the viewer. There were further chase scenes and the actress instructs the leading man: "I want you to curve the bullet. Shoot the target"; he then fired shots. The voice-over, stated "Bone-crunchingly brilliant" and "[actress] is blazingly sexy".

The actress was shown from the back and appeared to be naked aside from the towel she held around her middle. Both actors were then shown kissing each other before action scenes featured each holding guns and shooting. A bullet, which had just been fired, moved into the frame and was inscribed with the name of the film and the voice-over stated "Hunt it down. On DVD Monday". A viewer objected that the ad glamorised guns and was unsuitable to be shown at 9 am on a Sunday morning when children were likely to be watching.

ASA decision: upheld

**Advertisement D**

Date: 2010

Media: National Press

National and regional press ads for a retailer showed a model's cleavage with the headline, 'Perfect Fits'. The ad also stated: 'Big or small, we love them all. At [shop], you'll find beautiful bras for every size, at gorgeous prices. If nature has blessed you with more than your fair share, you certainly won't be charged extra for it. That big boob is all in the past. Bra £16. Knickers £6'.

Five people objected to the strapline 'Perfect Fits' which they felt was a play on words for 'perfect tits'. The complainants objected that the ad objectified women. One complainant believed the ad suggested that these particular breasts were perfect and could lead some women to have concerns about their own appearance.

ASA decision: not upheld

### **Advertisement E**

Date: 2010

Media: Poster

A poster (at a bus stop) for a table dancing club featured an image of a woman wearing lingerie posing on her hands and knees on a chaise longue. One complainant, who believed the image was sexist and degrading to women, challenged whether the ad was offensive and inappropriate for public display where it could be seen by children.

ASA decision: not upheld

## 4. Executive summary

### Introduction

- The ASA commissioned Beaufort Research as a partner for its engagement activity with the public in the Cardiff area, which focussed on the ASA's work regulating advertising and protecting young people from inappropriate or misleading ads. Beaufort's role was to carry out four focus groups (two with 12-15 year olds, two with parents / teachers); attend three of the ASA's four presentations to school pupils; and report on both these stages of the engagement activity.

### Young people growing up – concerns held by parents, teachers and young people

- Parents' / teachers' particular concerns about young people were wide ranging, including substance and alcohol use, fitting in with their peers (relationships, body image, fashion, and materialism), sex (attitudes and understanding, STIs) and education. Violence tended not to be a top-of-mind concern although it sometimes became an issue when discussing young people's gaming habits.
- In comparison, young people referred mostly to pressures of education but also mentioned concerns around their image among peers, as well as other topics such as bullying, divorce, girls, money and puberty.

### Factors that influence young people (focus groups with parents / teachers)

- The research indicated that, overall, parents / teachers tended to perceive advertising as less of an influence on young people than other factors they identified. Instead, peer groups, TV programmes and sometimes online content were deemed to have an especially strong influence.

### Current advertising and young people (focus groups)

- In terms of the types of ad with the potential to influence young people, parents / teachers gave examples covering alcohol, toiletries / cosmetics and entertainment (including gaming and gambling).
- However, some parents / teachers acknowledged that they had found it difficult to identify potentially inappropriate ads for young people, prior to taking part in the focus groups. This experience reinforced their view that advertising was not the most influential factor on children and young people.

- Even so, a number of adult participants voiced strong opinions on alcohol and violent gaming ads and, supported by the feedback from the 12-15 year olds, were sometimes concerned about the violence young people were exposed to in certificate 18 games.
- From the examples they provided, parents / teachers were more likely to feel that ads for alcohol (e.g. WKD) and gambling should not be shown.
- Young people picked out similar examples of ads that caught their attention but also identified a range of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) (they liked the products, humour), technology (they desired the products), and financial ads (they found the ads catchy and amusing).
- Examples were given by young people of encountering ads they considered inappropriate while gaming online (e.g. alcohol and 'hot Russian women').
- Young people in the focus groups generally viewed the purpose of advertising as making consumers want to buy the product, and had no difficulty spotting examples of ads in a digital space.

### **Regulation and the ASA (focus groups)**

- Awareness of the ASA was low overall although both parents / teachers and young people assumed that there was a body responsible for regulating advertising. In addition, participants did not know how to make a complaint about an ad.
- Participants generally felt that the ASA must be doing a good job, with parents / teachers referring to the limited number of ads they could think of that would be inappropriate for young people to see.

### **Reactions to examples of ASA adjudications (focus groups and ASA schools presentations)**

- Participants were asked for their views on five ads which had received complaints, and which focused on potential issues of commercialisation, sexualisation, anti-social behaviour and violence.
- The table overleaf summarises the general view on whether or not the ads should have been acted upon by the ASA, with red denoting that the ad should not be shown.

### Reactions to examples of ASA adjudications

	ASA decision	Parents / teachers (focus groups)	Young people (focus groups)	ASA schools presentations
A. Mobile phone ad				
B. Fashion brand (house party) ad				
C. DVD of a film ad				
D. Underwear ad				
E. Table dancing club ad				

#### Key:

-  Advertisement acceptable in present form
-  Advertisement should not be shown, or increased restrictions should apply
-  Some division of opinion within audience

- All types of participant across the focus groups and schools presentations were more likely to disagree with the ASA's adjudication on sexual imagery / behaviour ads than with the other themed ads shown. They were very surprised that E: the table dancing club poster had not been banned or at least restricted in terms of where the ad could appear. Its context (a bus stop), as well as the 'seedy' imagery, were key areas of concern.
- The issue of body image came to the fore when discussing the sexual imagery / behaviour ads. D: the underwear print ad divided opinion on this subject. Adults and some young people thought that it might make girls feel inadequate and insecure about their bodies; but other young people (female / male) could see nothing wrong with what was described as 'just a bra ad'.
- Other than the sexual imagery / behaviour ads, young people tended not see anything very wrong with the remaining ads tested.

- A: the mobile phone print ad was not, in the main, seen as potentially harmful to young people. Some parents / teachers and pupils at the schools presentations, however, took exception to the 'Back2School' headline. They felt that it was irresponsible because it placed pressure on parents to purchase an expensive product and suggested a mobile phone was an essential school item.
- Parents / teachers objected to the sex and violence combination in C: the ad for the DVD of a certificate 18 film, and agreed with the ASA's decision because of the way in which it glamorised guns. Young people, on the other hand, were often left wanting to see the film because of the 'action footage' but some acknowledged the case for ASA intervention. An outright ban was deemed excessive, with a 9.00 pm restriction preferred.
- The potentially antisocial / adult content in B: the house party ad was readily identified but not felt to be serious enough to cause much concern among adults or young people in the sample.
- More broadly, some pupils at the school presentations in particular surmised that any action taken against ads should consider the context in which they were set. As a result, they sometimes reflected that the more contentious ads tested could face restrictions (e.g. location, time of broadcasting, revisions to the execution itself) rather than removal.

### **Key influences in relation to commercialisation, sexualisation, anti-social behaviour and violence (focus groups with parents / teachers)**

- Having discussed the example ads, parents / teachers summarised their thoughts on which factors were more likely to influence young people in relation to commercialisation, sexualisation, anti-social behaviour and violence.
- Advertising did not feature as a prominent influence when considering sexualisation. Peers, online content, and music videos were deemed the most influential. Similarly, gaming and TV programmes were of greatest concern in relation to anti-social behaviour and violence, with advertising perceived as less of an influence.
- Parents / teachers did associate advertising primarily with commercialisation because it appeared to provide the most obvious connection. Peers, online content and TV programmes were also thought to play a role in this respect.
- Looking across the focus groups and schools presentations, and all discussions of current / past ads, those displaying potential sexual imagery / behaviour appeared more likely to affect young people, for example with the potential to make girls feel self conscious and uncomfortable and to make boys feel awkward.
- The research also found that certain ads made some young people feel: excited; a desire for the product; amused; unsettled; and uplifted.

### **Reactions to dialogue with the ASA**

- The idea of the ASA initiating dialogue with the public was welcomed overall by focus group participants. Taking part in the groups sparked interest among adults, while some young people felt that they should be involved in decisions that potentially affected them.
- Pupils at the schools presentations clearly enjoyed the opportunity to find out more about, and discuss, advertising regulation using an interactive format.

## KEY FINDINGS

### 5. Media habits, general issues and concerns for young people (focus groups only)

In this first section of the findings, we provide some context on young people (in the focus groups) in terms of what media they consume and the kind of concerns young people can have, including from parents' / teachers' perspective. It also covers adults' views on the key influences on young people and examples of recent advertising that stood out for participants.

#### 5.1 Media consumption and habits among young people

As part of the introduction to the focus groups, young people were asked about their media habits. Some participants reported watching significant amounts of television, for example three to five hours or even five to six hours a day. One participant also described how he watched television on his mobile phone at school.

The types of TV programme they enjoyed watching varied, although there was a bias towards US based comedy series such as Family Guy, South Park, The Simpsons and Friends. I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here, Eastenders and the soaps in general were also mentioned.

Similarly, young people in the focus groups appeared to be spending a fair amount of time online, with estimates ranging from one to three hours a day. Most, including 12 year olds, reported that they were Facebook users (Facebook is intended to be used by those aged 13 and above). Other favourite sites included Youtube (mainly for music videos), MSN and Twitter. A number of young people were also gaming online, for example using the Candy Stand site.

Several participants were heavy users of gaming consoles such as PS3, Xbox and Nintendo DS. Call of Duty: Black Ops was mentioned with some enthusiasm in both the 12-13 year olds focus group as well as the 14-15 year olds group. Other games referenced included Left 4 Dead, GTA Grand Theft Auto, Mario and FIFA games.

Less often female participants referred to magazines that they enjoyed reading, for example Hello, Closer and OK!, because of the stories and images they contained. Few young people in the groups stated that they listened to the radio very much.

The types of people they looked up to centred on music (Eminem, Rhianna, Cheryl Cole, N-Dubz, Skepta, and Justin Timberlake); and sport (Gareth Bale, international rugby players, and footballers in general).

## 5.2 General concerns and issues for young people

As the discussions progressed, young people were encouraged to identify topics that people their age might worry about. They referred mostly to the pressures of education such as homework, exams, preparing for GCSEs and the stress of getting into sixth form.

*Quite stressful because it puts the pressure on you to do well in your exams and stuff. (F, 14-15)*

There were also references to concerns over image in the eyes of their peers or through exposure to media, for example in relation to their general appearance or wearing the wrong clothes.

*People always look at you and look what you look like. They judge you on what you look like . . . Other people in your school the same age as you. (F, 14-15)*

*If you look bad in something you've bought. (M, 14-15)*

Additional issues mentioned included:

- Bullying at school
- Dealing with parents' divorce
- Gangs
- Girls
- Money
- Puberty
- Socialising (e.g. getting into a nightclub)

Parents and teachers in the focus groups were also asked what they felt were the main issues facing young people. They identified a range of concerns although certain issues were more prevalent than others, in particular:

- Knowledge and use of alcohol and drugs
- Fitting in (including relationships, body image, fashion, materialistic requirements)
- Sex (including attitudes, understanding, and STIs)
- Education

*Fashion, they've got to make sure that they've got the right stuff because of their peers. It's like if they haven't got the same as their peers then they're not included in it. (F, parents / teachers)*

Violence tended not to be a top-of-mind concern among parents / teachers.

Parents / teachers were asked to identify the key influences on young people in relation to these areas of concern. **Peer groups** were seen as strongly influencing young people in a variety of areas, for example in relation to alcohol, image, materialism, sex and self esteem.

*When I ask why she hasn't eaten her lunch it's because her friends don't eat lunch, it's not the in thing to eat at lunchtime anymore. It's the in thing to just talk at lunchtime. (F, parents / teachers)*

'**Media**' was also picked out as having a significant impact on young people, especially around body image (mainly affecting teenage girls). Parents / teachers regularly referred to TV programmes (e.g. Friends with 'perfect' looking actors, 'provocative' music channels) and magazines illustrated with 'airbrushed' models.

*They're watching the music channels and everyone is so perfect, everyone is so tanned and looking, you know, airbrushed, and it's just such pressure to look like that. (M, parents / teachers)*

When discussing young people's media habits, parents / teachers highlighted time spent **online** and **gaming** as two key activities, which echoed the feedback given by young people in section 5.1, above. Parents / teachers also referred to age restricted computer games which young people played, including Call of Duty: Black Ops. Some adults felt that the games strongly influenced young people but others were less certain, and occasionally admitted that they might buy such games for their children.

*I've got a nephew that plays it and they get aggressive, and I put it all down to those Call of Duty games and he is only 13. (F, parents / teachers)*

*I've got to admit I know mine plays them, but I haven't noticed anything with him, as him getting more violent or anything like that. The only thing I do notice, if I'm watching the telly sometimes he'll come up and say, 'Oh that guy's carrying an AK47'. (M, parents / teachers)*

**Advertising** was not so readily mentioned by parents / teachers as a key influence on young people regarding the issues they face. Some parents / teachers did feel that it played a role in making young people feel body conscious. In addition, a number believed it influenced young people by raising awareness of, and glamorising, alcohol.

*Children know all the alcohol because of the adverts . . . children know the alcohol, the names and all that. (F, parents / teachers)*

On the whole, parents in the groups appeared to exercise limited levels of parental control over their children's media consumption. There was reference to checking a daughter's Facebook account and a son's browser history but otherwise, parents gave the impression that it was difficult to strike a balance in this respect without affecting the relationship with their children.

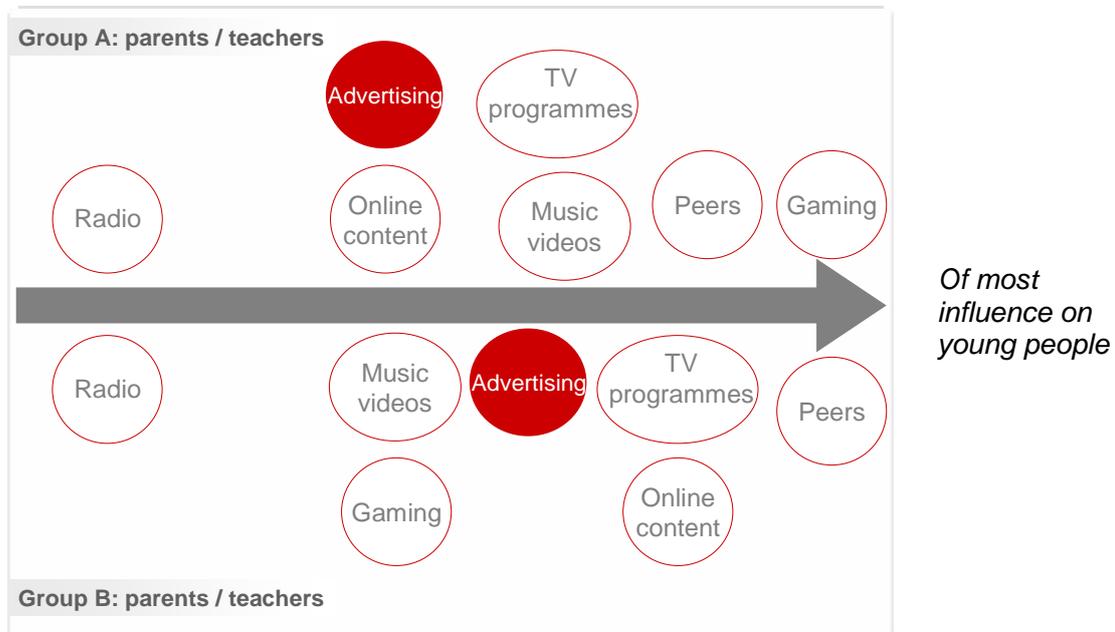
*I don't think you can control it all, you'd have to be on their back all the time and then that's going to make you, well I don't know what that's going to make you, your relationship is not going to be easy. (M, parents / teachers)*

### **5.3 Perceived influence of advertising on young people (parents / teachers)**

Having discussed the range of influences on young people, parents / teachers were asked to position them on a scale according to how influential they felt each factor was. The potential influences used were:

- Advertising
- Gaming
- Music videos
- Online content
- Peer groups
- Radio
- TV programmes

The diagram below illustrates the broad consensus reached among adults in each focus group.



In general terms, peers and TV programmes were felt by parents / teachers to have the most influence on young people. Advertising was positioned in the middle or towards the less influential end of the scale compared with other factors. Radio was consistently deemed to be the least influential on young people.

#### 5.4 Advertising that stood out for focus group participants

Prior to attending the focus groups, parents / teachers had been asked to look out for any advertising that they thought might adversely affect young people. In keeping with advertising's positioning on the influence scale described above, some participants stated that they had struggled to find any ads which they felt might adversely affect young people.

*I've been watching the ads obviously recently very closely and there's nothing really . . . that I've really thought 'oh my goodness I would have that banned or something, that's not shown on TV'. (F, parents / teachers)*

*I found it difficult to find anything that was bad [in terms of ads unsuitable for young people]. (M, parents / teachers)*

As part of their preparation for the focus groups, young people were also asked to make a note of any ads that caught their attention. The majority of those recorded were TV ads. The table below summarises the main categories identified by both audiences, with the size of tick indicating the volume of ads noted down.

	Parents / teachers	Young people
<b>Alcohol</b>	✓	✓ (14-15 year olds)
<b>Toiletries/ cosmetics / fashion / health</b>	✓	✓
<b>Entertain- ment</b>	✓	✓
<b>FMCG</b>	✓	✓✓
<b>Technology</b>	Virtually no reference	✓✓
<b>Financial</b>	Virtually no reference	✓✓

On reflection, parents / teachers often could not decide if certain ads they had collected should be withdrawn, but tended to feel that more could be done to restrict their TV scheduling (advertising's association with TV was strong). Exceptions included gambling ads, and alcohol brand WKD ads which some thought should not be shown at all.

### **Alcohol advertising**

Parents / teachers believed that the examples they gave of alcohol ads made alcohol appealing to young people by glamorising it (Heineken walk-in wardrobe) and associating it with humour (Fosters, WKD). Several adult participants felt that more could be done to address alcohol advertising, for example restrictions on TV scheduling or even banning it altogether.

*They say [in the Fosters ad] ‘well maybe she’ll turn out like a Vorderman’; [pupils] thought that was quite good, and they actually thought that the only way that some women would look better was if they’d had a few Foster’s [all laugh]. (M, parents / teachers)*

*[WKD] Use of childish behaviour, practical jokes to promote an over 18 product. Obviously aimed at under 18s as well. (F, parents / teachers)*

Young people in the focus groups also identified the humour as an appealing aspect of some alcohol ads (Fosters, Carling, WKD). The Fosters ad was clearly well liked, and discussed among peers. Some did not believe that the ads made them think any differently about alcohol – they simply appreciated the humour.

*[Fosters] He asked questions like whether his wife looked like his Mum. I don’t know, it’s just funny. . . . and his accent’s funny . . . sticks in your mind. (M, 14-15)*

*Funny [WKD]. The woman’s in the bath, lights all the candles, and the boy comes in and says he can’t hold on, he’s on the toilet. Of course she’s relaxing. (M, 14-15)*

### **Toiletries / cosmetics / health advertising**

Not surprisingly, this theme was more likely to be raised from girls’ perspective although one parent described how his son always had to have Lynx deodorant. The Lynx advertising was highlighted because it implied (to parents / teachers) that wearing Lynx would lead to sex.

*It’s saying, ‘Wear Lynx, have a girlfriend, have sex’ it’s that, and they’re really quite young-looking. (M, parents / teachers)*

Parents / teachers on occasion referred to the use of Cheryl Cole in L’Oreal ads. One hair product ad was deemed ‘dishonest’ by a parent because it only mentioned her hair extensions in the small print; and her endorsement meant that ‘girls have to have’ the products.

### **Entertainment advertising**

Although this category featured among both adults and young people, there was a slight difference in emphasis. Both referred to computer consoles and games: some adults commented on the inappropriate violence associated with games, while some young

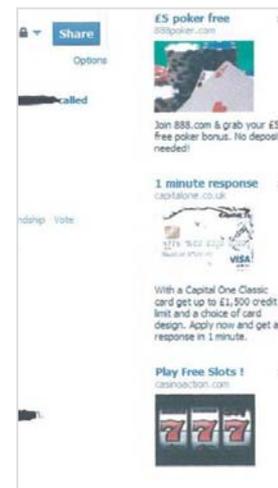
people talked enthusiastically about the violence, as demonstrated by the two contrasting remarks below on Halo Reach advertising.

*[Halo Reach] a girl was dead and she's in her helmet, there was blood everywhere and they just showed you, in her helmet and he took a bomb off her (F, parents / teachers).*

*It was amazing, the graphics were great . . . People were just dying . . . They grabbed the bomb and it blew up, then they got shot . . . Makes you want to buy it . . . And you get addicted, and it's cool. (M, 12-13)*

The point was made among parents / teachers, however, that even if a young person did not see the ad, they would have found out about the game via their peers. Examples of pester power sometimes included requests for games consoles or games; and peer groups / word of mouth seemed to be a significant influence in this respect as well.

Some parents / teachers gave examples of gambling ads which young people could have encountered, mostly online, for example a poker ad on Facebook (see image, right, brought to the group by a parent), and a bingo ad on MSN. They felt that the colours, graphics and accessibility would make the ads appealing.



### FMCG advertising

The FMCG ads noticed by young people were wide-ranging and included fast food (enticing), dairy products (catchy, humour) and confectionary (humour).

*[McDonalds] was good because the food looks delicious . . . The McFlurries. I just remember seeing the sign . . . Big Mac meal . . . Makes you hungry. (M/F, 12-13)*

Parents / teachers tended not to emphasise FMCG products so much although the energy drink Red Bull proved to be the exception. Some adults thought it unsuitable to

use a cartoon creative approach to advertise a 'stimulant'. One teacher described how it was an issue in school with year 7s regularly caught drinking it. The ad was mentioned by young people as amusing and appealing to teenagers with its cartoons.

*Because it's a cartoon it's advertised for children, even though you have to be 16 to buy it . . . I've seen year 7s with it and I'm disgusted, I will take it off a year 7 if I see somebody with it. (M, parents / teachers)*

### **Technology advertising**

Young people were far more likely than adults to recall and talk about technology related ads. Nearly all had their own mobile phone. Smartphones and their 'apps' were appealing (for example the iPhone 4's FaceTime, and YouTube access), as well as network ads such as T-Mobile's flash mob campaign and Orange Wednesdays.

*[The mobile phone ad] was good because the phone could have apps and YouTube etc. (M, 12-13)*

*I think it's a good advert [Carphone Warehouse] because you can communicate with your friends. . . . It makes you want to buy them. . . . They have so many things on them. . . . The offers. (M, 12-13)*

Where such ads were mentioned, young people included themselves among the target audience, as they all had mobile phones.

### **Financial advertising**

Ads for financial services often caught young people's attention mainly because of a catchy tune (Go Compare), use of humour (Swiftcover, Compare The Market) and child-like creative (Lloyds TSB). One adult had heard a Go Compare ad on the radio on the morning school run which referred to 'Nelson's last erection', and felt that this example was borderline in terms of decency.

### **Online gaming advertising**

Several young people explained that, while gaming online, they had to wait for a game to load. During this wait, a range of different ads would appear on screen, some of which were unsuitable for their age. They included alcohol (Strongbow), cleaning products (Vanish, Calgon), film releases (Harry Potter), toiletries (Listerine), and 'dating hot Russian women today'. These ads tended to leave the participants somewhat bemused.

*M: When a game's loading you have to wait about 10 seconds and these adverts just come on. . . . M: Strongbow. . . . M: Harry Potter advert. . . . M: Vanish. . . . M: Vanish is so annoying. . . . F: Flash. M: Listerine. (12-13)*

*F: Trying to load the games and it's all washing things. . . . F: 'Washing machine works longer with Calgon!' (12-13)*

## **5.5 The perceived aim of advertising (young people)**

Young people generally viewed the purpose of advertising as making consumers want to buy the product. A small number who were 14-15 years old also felt that ads were designed to encourage people to discuss the brand, creating aspirations to own items, for example Apple products.

*To make people talk about it so it's well known. . . . Things like the iPad and the iPhone and stuff because Apple is well known and they're something new so people are like 'oh my God'. (F, 14-15)*

The point was also made among young people that they had grown up with ads and 'never known different'.

They were briefly shown screenshots from a prime time weekend TV entertainment programme website which included a mix of advertising and content. They had no trouble identifying advertising over content, with one 12-13 year old describing a telecoms operator as the 'sponsor' of the show.

*It's not really about the [programme], it's more about the advertisements. (M, 14-15)*

## 6. Regulation and the ASA (focus groups only)

Having explored spontaneous perceptions of advertising, the report will now consider overall views on advertising regulation and awareness of the ASA among focus group participants.

### 6.1 Awareness of the ASA

Very few participants were aware of the ASA prior to being contacted to take part in the focus groups. A small number among both adults and young people had heard of ads being withdrawn and assumed that there must be an organisation with this responsibility to ensure that ads are 'truthful'.

*I think it was on TV. I was watching something and it said something like an advert's been taken off for this skin stuff saying it'll make you look younger, because they can't lie. (M, 14-15)*

*Advertising, it's got to be regulated, it's got to be truthful hasn't it, . . . isn't that often where adverts are pulled because they're not really reflecting the product, so it's got to be, you can't be misleading, so there's got to be some criteria about that, hasn't there? (F, parents / teachers)*

The low awareness was reinforced by the lack of knowledge of how to make a complaint about an ad. The few suggestions made were to contact the channel, a programme like Watchdog, or Ofcom.

The way in which the ASA fulfilled its remit was therefore unclear. Some surmised that ads (e.g. TV, print) had to be vetted by the ASA before launch and that perhaps they carried out this task, and monitoring, via forums or groups similar to the focus group.

*I would have thought do they screen the advert before it goes out on TV or in a magazine, I don't know about magazine so much but TV. (F, parents / teachers)*

*They monitor . . . like this meeting here, talking to us, this is like a monitoring process of what we personally think of what's on TV so you're asking us what we as the public would see on that . . . We're the viewers, we're the ones who're going to buy your products. (F, parents / teachers)*

A further suggestion made was that the ASA played a purely reactive role, relying on members of the public to register a complaint before any investigating took place.

*Unless somebody writes in and so many people write in and complain about something then I don't know if they'd do anything about it then. (F, parents / teachers)*

## 6.2 Perceptions of the effectiveness of regulation

Parents / teachers firmly believed that there was a need to protect young people from inappropriate advertising (especially alcohol related ads) but some also believed that there were greater issues young people might encounter, for example drugs and the effects of peer pressure as described earlier in this report. Reference was also made to the role parents should play in helping to protect young people.

*To a certain extent [there's a need to protect young people from advertising] yes; I think there's bigger forces at work though really isn't there, than the television? (F, parents / teachers)*

As discussed in section 5.4, prior to attending the focus groups, parents / teachers had been asked to identify any current ads that might not be suitable for young people. Adults in both focus groups felt that the ASA must be doing a good job because they had not found this task especially easy. When challenged that they *had* identified a number of potentially unsuitable ads, participants rationalised that they were low in number compared with the number of ads that exist.

*I think it must be pretty okay if that's all [the ads] we can come up with. (M, parents / teachers)*

*I'm not convinced there's that much to complain about. (F, parents / teachers)*

A number of young people in the groups were unsure whether the ASA was doing a good job, citing inappropriate ads online, a violent Halo Reach ad which might affect people younger than themselves, and ads for alcohol which might encourage teenagers to drink.

*F: Well it's got to [work]. . . . Because you can't have some rude things on there for little kids. . . . M: I don't think that because I was loading a game once [online] and it said 'date hot Russian women today', and it was very rude. (12-13)*

## 7. Reactions to examples of ASA adjudications (focus groups and ASA schools presentations)

Following discussions of current perceptions of advertising and influences on young people, participants were asked for their views on examples of ads which had prompted complaints to the ASA. Pupils at the schools presentations run by the ASA were also shown these ads and their comments are included in this section, together with those of the focus group participants.

### 7.1 The examples of advertising used in the research

As part of the ASA's aim to open dialogue with young people, parents and those who work with children and young people, participants in the focus groups and presentations at schools were shown five examples of ASA adjudications. The ads chosen by the ASA focused on potential issues of commercialisation, sexualisation, anti-social behaviour and violence.

The details of the ads are contained in section 3 of this report. Each is summarised below:

**Advertisement A** (2008, National Press): an ad for mobile phones with the headline 'Back2School'. Complaint not upheld.

**Advertisement B** (2009, TV): a TV ad featuring numerous celebrities and young people at a house party, advertising a fashion / sports brand. Complaint not upheld.

**Advertisement C** (2009, TV): a TV ad for the DVD of a film (certificate 18) showed a well known actress and various action scenes which included the depiction of guns and bullets. Complaint upheld.

**Advertisement D** (2010, National, Regional Press): a print ad for a department store's lingerie range showed a model's cleavage with the headline, 'Perfect Fits.' Complaint not upheld.

**Advertisement E** (2010, Poster): a poster (at a bus stop) for a table dancing club featured an image of a woman wearing lingerie posing on her hands and knees on a chaise longue. Complaint not upheld.

In the focus groups, participants were shown each of the five ads individually and, before discussion, were asked to write down whether they thought the ad was suitable for 12-15 year olds to see, along with any words to describe the ad.

In the ASA schools presentations, the discussion of the ads took place after the presentation on the ASA as an organisation, and after examples of other ads had been viewed and assessed. Schools presentations participants made their decisions on the ads having discussed them first.

The potential effect of the different approaches of the focus groups and schools presentations should be taken into account when considering the findings below, although the results are similar overall.

## **7.2 Overview of participants' reactions**

Of the five ads shown, the clearest difference between the ASA's and the participants' assessment was for advertisement E which was for the table dancing club. Adult participants in the focus groups were 'shocked' that the ASA had not acted on the complaint. Similarly, the decision drew gasps from some female pupils at the schools presentations.

The table overleaf illustrates the view among participants' on the suitability of the ads for 12-15 year olds / young people. The ASA's assessment is included for comparison. Views sometimes differed within each discussion, however, on the suitability of each ad (with the exception of the table dancing club ad).

The context within which each ad appeared was sometimes an important factor in participants' evaluations. For example, pupils at the schools presentations generally agreed that the DVD ad could still be shown but at a later time; and that the table dancing club ad could be restricted to publications targeted at adult males.

## Reactions to examples of ASA adjudications

	ASA decision	Parents / teachers	Young people (focus groups)	ASA schools presentations
A. Mobile phone ad				
B. Fashion brand TV ad				
C. DVD of a film				
D. Underwear ad				
E. Table dancing club ad				

### Key:

-  Advertisement acceptable in present form
-  Advertisement should not be shown, or increased restrictions should apply
-  Some division of opinion within audience

The discussion of the ads below begins with the more contentious ads in terms of the difference between participants' views and the adjudication made by the ASA.

### 7.3 Advertisement E: Table dancing club poster ad

#### Focus groups

Both parents / teachers and young people in the focus groups believed the sexual imagery in the ad was inappropriate for young people. The image of the woman was described by adults as 'too raunchy', 'porny', 'hardcore' and 'seedy', while young people used words such as 'rude', 'terrible', 'suggestive', and 'disgusting'.

*I think it's too raunchy and I think it's advertising sex. (F, parents / teachers)*

*The picture's not very appropriate either, she's basically like in the sex position. (F, 14-15)*

The ad prompted some giggles among young people and a slight sense of awkwardness and embarrassment. Some adults felt that the image would pique the curiosity of males aged 12-15, and cause embarrassment to young people in general. Parents / teachers also felt that the imagery objectified women, and distorted sexual expectations.

*I think it's degrading to women. I think it makes pupils I know sometimes have a problem with the role of women and to see this it would almost justify sometimes how some of the pupils see women in society. (M, parents / teachers)*

*Their expectations of sex and females, this is confusing and intimidating. (F, parents / teachers)*

Some young people referred to 'advertising women as an object' and making 'women / girls self conscious' on seeing the ad. A small number in the 12 to 13 year old focus group, however, did not know what was being advertised.

Issues with the ad were further compounded by the inclusion of a map for the premises, and because it appeared to be advertised at a bus stop or somewhere similar where any age child could see it.

*You can see roads and stuff right next to it. So it shouldn't be on a bus stop. (F, 14-15)*

*I don't want my child to know where a strip club is. (F, parents / teachers)*

Inevitably, participants agreed with the complaints made but were very surprised to hear that the ASA did not uphold them. One or two adults wondered how many women worked at the ASA, given its decision.

*F: God, I'm shocked. . . . F: Oh, I'm shocked by that. (F, parents / teachers)*

*People our age wouldn't go to a strip club so why would we want to see it advertised? (F, 14-15)*

Some, however, felt that the ad would have been more acceptable if it had not included the sexual imagery, or if it had not been so visible to the general public.

*I think really they should limit where you can put it. . . . They could advertise it somewhere more private but not on display for all types of ages of people to see. (F, 14-15).*

On occasion, males aged 14-15 could not see how the ad differed from the underwear ad (see 7.4) and therefore felt that it was 'all right' and accurate, agreeing with the ASA's assessment.

*I agree with the decision because you're going to see worse things if you go to the strip club than that. And it is a strip club advertising, you wouldn't think it would be a woman with clothes on, do you? (M, 14-15)*

### **Schools presentations**

The feedback received from pupils at the ASA schools presentations was very similar to the views expressed in the focus groups. Initial reactions focused on the 'explicit' and 'porn' like imagery the ad contained.

*It's like a poster for a sex magazine. (F, event pupil)*

As pupils looked at the image more closely, they realised that the ad was located at a bus stop. This factor prompted mention of 'making girls feel uncomfortable', especially if they encountered the ad when out with their parents. One female pupil commented that she felt sorry for the model because of what she was advertising, implying a degrading aspect to the ad, while another described the model as 'a bit slaggy'. The imagery in the ad and product being advertised therefore appeared to have a negative personal effect on some female pupils.

*I'd move away . . . I'd feel awkward [standing next to the ad]. (F, event pupil)*

*You'd look like a prostitute stood next to it. It would be quite awkward. (F, event pupil)*

*It's generally offensive because [the ad] endorses pole dancing clubs. (F, event pupil)*

Some pupils also picked up on the fact that the ad included directions for the club which added to the issue identified with its context.

*F: That's really bad . . . F: Terrible . . . F: And it's got directions, and at a bus-stop. (Event pupils)*

All agreed that the ad was unsuitable for young people to see although the majority of pupils at one school presentation did not think that the ad was offensive to women.

On hearing that the ASA had decided not to ban this ad for a table dancing club, pupils' reactions initially echoed those of the focus group participants. There was genuine surprise, with one female pupil labelling the ASA 'irresponsible' for not banning it. There was also a degree of confusion on occasion over how the complaint against this ad was not upheld while one of the earlier ads shown in the presentation for a fast-food brand was upheld.

*F: That's so bad . . . F: I can't believe it . . . F: Porn in the middle of the street. . .  
 . F: I don't understand how that chicken fillet burger could be banned but this . . .  
 (Event pupils)*

For some pupils, however, the issue was more to do with context than the ad itself, with one or two recognising that that it was not advertising anything illegal.

*The only reason why it's wrong is where it's advertised. (M, event pupil)*

*I would have kept it, but not on [general] public view. (M, event pupil)*

When prompted, other pupils tended to agree that the ad would be acceptable if it was confined to publications aimed at adult males.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, therefore, participants across the groups and schools presentations believed the ad was inappropriate for young people to see, and they disagreed with the ASA's adjudication. However, the ad was acceptable to some in a more suitable context.

## **7.4 Advertisement D: Underwear print ad ('Perfect Fits')**

### **Focus groups**

Adults tended to take issue with the body image used in the ad. They thought that it might make girls feel inadequate and insecure about their bodies. Some also felt that it was 'too sexy', focusing more on the body rather than the product, which would prompt jokes from boys (a small number of boys in the focus groups joked about keeping a

copy). For these parents / teachers, the perception of a 'perfect body' used in the ad was seen to be at odds with the copy which referred to 'Big or small, we love them all'.

*Girls would feel this is how they have to look and boys would just think 'whoa', you know making jokes, 'look at them'. (M, parents / teachers)*

*Why do they have to have, you know, it says 'we love them all big or small' why do they have to have really, the best ones they could possibly find? (F, parents / teachers)*

Similarly, some young people did not feel the ad was very appropriate, and gave the impression that it would cause a degree of embarrassment (for example described as 'rude' and 'revealing'). Some believed that the ad was unsuitable for people younger than them.

*[I feel] quite self conscious to be honest, . . . just if I came across it. (F, 14-15)*

*It is a bit rude if a child saw it but if it was a lady then it wouldn't really matter. (M, 14-15)*

*It's good for women, bad for men. It's rude for men. (M, 12-13)*

The play on words with 'Perfect Fits' also prompted occasional negative comments: one teacher, for example, would not allow this kind of language to be used in the classroom, and one 14-15 year old referred to it as suggesting a 'swear word'. 12-13 year olds, however, appeared not to grasp the play on words in the headline.

*I think it's sort of all right but then it's not because of the 'perfect fits' bit. It's trying to mean something else and it's like a swear word, the other thing. . . . Tits. (M, 14-15)*

In contrast a handful of adults and young people could see nothing wrong with the ad. It was clear to them what was being advertised, the body appeared 'normal' and it contained only 'Carry On' humour (adults). One or two 14-15 year old boys in the focus group also found the headline 'funny'.

*It's just underwear. Makes you feel like you want to buy the underwear. (F, 12-13)*

*It's a bra, there's nothing wrong with a bra. (F, 14-15)*

*I don't think there's anything wrong with it at all really, it's just quite honest. . . . You see more on a beach abroad. (M, parents / teachers)*

The copy occasionally led young people to conclude that the ad was appropriate because it contained the message that size did not matter, as the response from one female participant to another illustrates below:

*F: I think it's a fair point [that it objectifies women]. . . . F: It says in the text 'big or small we love them all', so it says that it doesn't matter what shape or size you are. (14-15)*

The context in which the ad was set (newspaper) left some parents / teachers uncertain over whether or not it was suitable given that their children tended not to read the papers. Some young people thought that it would be more suitable as an in-store ad.

On hearing the ASA's adjudication some focus group participants (especially parents / teachers) rejected the result because of the ad's perceived overemphasis on body image. Some parents / teachers went on to acknowledge that they would be less concerned if the ad was revised in some way, for example a 'less skinny' model or removing the pun.

A small number of young people did agree with the ASA because it was clear what was being advertised and the copy suggested a positive message about different body shapes.

*If [the ad] is outside it's a bit bad if you've got little kids with you. . . . Yeah. I think it's all right our age. It's just a bra. (M, 14-15)*

### **Schools presentations**

Although the ad provoked a mixed response overall, pupils at the schools presentations were more likely than the focus group participants to see nothing wrong with the ad, and it sometimes prompted laughter among pupils. Those who were comfortable with the ad thought that it was in keeping with the product being advertised, and the model was referred to as 'natural' although female pupils sometimes assumed the image had been 'edited'. They tended to expect such enhancements with advertising.

*I don't find it offensive, it's an advert for a bra. . . . I don't think oh my God, she's got the perfect body and I haven't, it's just an advert. (F, event pupil)*

*It is just advertising underwear. (F, event pupil)*

*Yes there's cleavage but there is cleavage when you wear a bra. (F, event pupil)*

*It's a woman's body, a natural thing. It has been edited. (F, event pupil)*

The copy also indicated to some that size did not matter, and some male pupils liked the humour in the headline, describing it as 'original'. The headline therefore tended not to be a significant cause for concern.

Some female pupils, however, were uncomfortable with the image because it was revealing and because of the 'perfect image'. Reference was also occasionally made to the 'inappropriate' headline. A couple at one event were observed not wanting to hold a copy of the ad, trying to pass it to a friend. Some therefore thought it would make girls feel self conscious and that they should aspire to the body image shown.

*It's the perfect image. Women will be influenced. I know a lot of people who would be bothered by it. (F, event pupil)*

*I'd look at the line and think that's funny, then I'd look at the bra and think that's a nice bra, and then I'd look at her and think, Oh God, I'm never going to look like that in a bra and knickers. (F, event pupil)*

This view tended to be in contrast to the reaction from male pupils, as the exchange below illustrates, where a female pupil reacts to a boy's positive remarks about the use of humour and the image.

*M: It's humorous, not obscene . . . F: But you don't have to worry about having perfect ones, do you? (Event pupils)*

Pupils overall tended to agree with the ASA's assessment, although several female participants disagreed. A small number of pupils made the point that they would not expect to see an 'imperfect' model in the ad, reasserting that they assumed 'airbrushing' would take place – 'a given' as one pupil described it. Even so, the comment was made that an alternative model could have been used.

*F: You never see the imperfect image . . . M: But you've got to sell it. (Event pupils)*

*It should be a more realistic body image. (F, event pupil)*

*Whenever you see an ad for make-up they've all been airbrushed. (F, event pupil)*

## **Conclusion**

Parents / teachers adopted a more negative attitude than young people to the ad overall, although some female participants across the focus groups and schools presentations agreed that the imagery and / or headline were inappropriate. For others, however, the ad contained the kind of image that the public came across on a regular basis (TV programmes, newspapers, on holiday etc.), and it simply reflected the product being advertised.

### **7.5 Advertisement C: DVD of a film (certificate 18)**

#### **Focus groups**

Parents / teachers were almost unanimous in criticising the ad. They felt that it glamorised guns, crime and violence, and conveyed a message that 'violence can be sexy'. They expected young people would be excited on seeing the ad, and would want to see the film.

*That could appear as portraying violence as being sexy, sexy [actress name] is going to shoot you with a gun, you know what I mean? (M, parents / teachers)*

*[The message is] that it's okay for pretty women to use sex and violence, . . . like somebody driving a car straight into somebody and women, and they've used good looking, sexy women shooting guns. (F, parents / teachers)*

Some parents / teachers also took issue with the fact that the film was certificate 18; therefore the ad was automatically deemed unsuitable for young people.

*Well they shouldn't [see the ad]. Is it suitable for 12 to 15s? No, it's an 18 film, if it was suitable for 12 to 15s it wouldn't have been classified as an 18 film. (F, parents / teachers)*

The topic of body image was raised again in relation to the images of the well-known actress which might put 'pressure' on girls to look like her.

The reactions of young people in the focus groups often confirmed the adults' view that 12-15 year olds would be keen to see the ad. Boys especially found the ad exciting, describing it as 'cool' and being attracted by the 'action footage'. One male participant

was 'amazed at the bullet curve' in the ad. The 18 certificate was itself an attraction for some participants in the focus groups (male and female) as well.

*M: Kids like our age, boys, usually like all the killing and stuff. . . . M: Violence. . . . When someone crashed through the window. (M, 12-13)*

*I know the film's an 18 but it's not like things are bad in the advert, it's just showing you what is in the film. It's nothing bad. . . . [no] death, swearing or nudity. (M, 14-15)*

It was also suggested among young people in the focus groups that it was not particularly realistic and it would not encourage people to 'drive through a window'.

12-13 year olds in the focus groups did, however, pick out the sexual imagery in the ad, referring in their notes to 'a lady taking her clothes off', a 'half naked woman' and 'kissing'.

On hearing the complaints made against the ad, all participants agreed that it was not suitable to be seen at 9.00 am on a Sunday morning. The majority of parents / teachers, and some young people, also concurred that the ad glamorised the use of guns although some young people had enjoyed this aspect of the ad. Even so, young people in the main did not feel that the ad was inappropriate for them, reflecting their desire to see the film. This assessment was despite the fact that several noted potentially inappropriate content. Some would have tightened the restriction on the ad, rather than banning it altogether which was felt to be 'a bit extreme'.

*M: Yeah [it did make guns seem cool]. When they curved the bullet it looks amazing when you think it will do it. . . . M: Most action films do that. (14-15)*

*Well it was good for teenagers but not for younger people because there is a lady taking her clothes off. (M, 12-13)*

Overall, therefore, adults thought that the ASA's adjudication was 'spot on'. A number who had disagreed with the complaint subsequently agreed, having heard the rationale for the decision. A very small number of adult participants did still disagree with the ASA's ruling: they could see nothing wrong with the ad and expected 14 or 15 year olds to have seen worse.

## Schools presentations

Some pupils attending the presentations quickly picked out potentially inappropriate components to the ad: nudity, violence, fast driving, and glamorising guns. One male pupil admitted that the wording in the ad ('sexy') got his attention.

*F: Use of guns . . . M: Making it look good . . . F: [Actress name] . . . who's really beautiful, holding a gun, and it makes guns look glamorous. (Event pupils)*

Having already heard about the role of the ASA, one or two pupils believed that the ad was likely to be an accurate reflection of the film; and they therefore did not initially think there was an issue with it, or that it was 'misleading'. However, when prompted with aspects of the film's content, it was acknowledged that the ad would not be suitable for young children.

*I think it's OK . . . there's a lot of guns in there, but it shows the truth about the film. (F, event pupil)*

*[Blazingly sexy' prompted]: I wouldn't use those words, I know it's more for adults. (F, event pupil)*

A number of pupils' immediate reaction to the ad was that it was 'fine' and that it reflected the perceived ubiquity of this type of material in films. A further point made was that the viewer was unlikely to note the detail in the ad in any case because it all happened 'so fast'.

*It's just an everyday thing, there's so many films like that, an action film. (F, event pupil)*

*It's just a normal advert, tied into a film. (F, event pupil)*

As with the feedback in the focus groups, pupils generally agreed that it was not suitable to be seen at 9.00am on a Sunday morning (the time the complainant had seen the ad). Instead of banning it, however, pupils thought that more control was needed over when the ad was shown. On the whole, they disagreed that the ad deserved an outright ban, and a few were slightly surprised by this decision.

*I'd just put it on a bit later. (F, event pupil)*

*[The ad] is OK, but it depends what time of day. (F, event pupil)*

## Conclusion

Parents / teachers were in agreement with the ASA while young people in the focus groups and at the schools presentations felt that the ad could still be screened but at a later time, for example post 9.00 pm.

### 7.6 Advertisement A: Mobile phone print ad (Back2School)

#### Focus groups

Parents in the focus groups were comfortable with the idea of their children having mobile phones and nearly all of the young people in the focus groups stated that they had their own mobile. Contextually, therefore, it was acceptable for young people to own one.

Among both adults and young people, mobile ownership was seen as an important safety item, for example where the pupil had a long route on their own to and from school. Mobiles were therefore associated with school itself already.

*I don't think it's too bad, . . . in some respects I think it's quite good that pupils have telephones as long as they're not allowed in the school. (M, parents/teachers)*

Parents / teachers often struggled to see what issue the ad might cause, other than to increase pestering from children for the phones on offer. The parent, after all, would be responsible for purchasing the phone.

*It's just pester power isn't it, that's the worst thing you could have said. (F, parents / teachers)*

The 'Back2School' message was not prominent among the 12-13 year olds, who instead tended to concentrate on the prices quoted and whether it was a 'good deal'. 14-15 year olds in the focus groups did note the headline but did not think it would influence them in any way as most young people had mobiles in any case.

*I thought you don't use it just for school, like a pencil case or something like that. You're going to buy a phone anyway so it doesn't really matter [about the headline]. (M, 14-15)*

The perceived message of the ad, according to focus group participants, ranged from 'buy a phone and save money' (young person) to 'you need to have a phone to go back to school' (adult).

Some adults did identify negative aspects of the ad:

- Irresponsibly adding mobiles to the list of essential back-to-school items
- Potentially placing pressure on parents who cannot afford to buy a mobile for their child

When the nature of the complaint was explained, teachers among the focus groups sample acknowledged that mobiles certainly could be an issue in the classroom, and regularly confiscated them. (A small number of pupils in some of the presentations were seen using their mobiles.) Some adults also felt that the 'Back2School' headline was unnecessary, if not problematic, but that the ASA's rationale for not upholding the complaint was 'naïve' (i.e. that children were unlikely to think that they must have a phone to go back to school with, nor would it make them think it is acceptable to use a phone in the classroom). On balance, however, participants in the focus groups rejected the complaint because most children had phones in any case, they were useful in an emergency, and the headline did not make a strong case for children to have a phone.

*Just 'Back2School' doesn't say you have to have this [phone].  
(F, parents / teachers)*

### **Schools presentations**

Pupils at these events held more mixed views than those in the focus groups. Some believed that the ad was 'irresponsible' because it implied that a mobile phone was a necessity for schoolchildren, and it placed pressure on parents to purchase one for their children, particularly with prices like £69. Some pupils also felt that the ad could result in peer group pressure on school children to be seen with the latest mobile phone.

*'Back2school' sounds like you need it. (F, event pupil)*

*It's irresponsible, you don't need to say 'Back2School' to advertise a phone. (M, event pupil)*

*It makes it seem like a phone is a necessity . . . [and] 'only £69'. Parents would think that's a lot. (F, event pupil)*

On occasion, pupils acknowledged that mobile phones were not welcome in class and that the ad's headline should not be encouraging this behaviour.

*Every teacher in a lesson says 'put your phone away'. You shouldn't have phones in schools and the fact it says Back2School . . . (M, event pupil)*

Other pupils were not so concerned with the potential issues the ad might cause. They commented that 'everyone has a phone', and a few defended mobile phones' association with school because parents saw the device as a form of safety.

*My parents would definitely want me to have [a phone] . . . you have to have them. (F, event pupil)*

*In a way I do think children should have a phone to go to school with. It's more safe but to act as though £69 isn't a lot of money is wrong because it is. (F, event pupil)*

In keeping with the young people in the focus groups, a handful of pupils at the schools presentations appeared to be more concerned with the prices listed in the ad, and whether or not they were reasonable or even possibly misleading. The potential implications of the Back2School headline, therefore, did not always register.

*It's not very offensive, it's not hurting anybody. (F, event pupil)*

## **Conclusion**

Focus group participants were mainly happy with the ASA's decision on the Back2School ad, while the picture was slightly less clear among pupils at the presentations. Some felt that the wording of the headline at least should be changed or that it should be banned outright. Less often, they did not believe that the ad required any action.

## **7.7 Advertisement B: Fashion / sports brand (house party)**

### **Focus groups**

In the main, participants in the focus groups felt the ad was harmless. Some adults and young people found the ad engaging because of its choice of soundtrack, sense of 'cool' and, occasionally, its inclusion of famous people. Some young people in the focus groups remarked that the ad left them feeling 'happy', in a 'party mood' and interested in the brand.

*I like the advert, I think it's interesting to watch and it includes recognisable people. (13-14, written comment)*

The main message of the ad was interpreted by participants as wearers of this brand are cool, like the celebrities who appear in it.

*This ad shows that it's cool to wear [this brand]. (F, parents / teachers)*

*If you wear it you'll be like the people in the video. (M, 14-15)*

The point was also made among adults that different aged young people might interpret it in different ways: younger people might see a celebrity endorsing a pair of trainers while older teens might focus on associations with parties. Young people occasionally noted the celebrity endorsement as well.

*It's a party, you can take what you want from it, if you're older you might say, 'Sex, drugs and rock and roll' but if you're 12 you're just going to see [a famous footballer] in a nice pair of trainers. He did look nice, didn't he? (F, parents / teachers)*

Less often, participants in the groups referred to possible negative aspects of the ad. These included:

- Antisocial behaviour in the ad, such as graffiti, 'wild partying', drinking, 'jumping in the pool', the acid house smiley face (with its drug connotations noted among adults); and celebrity endorsement of such behaviour

*That means it's OK to party and stuff. Famous people are allowed to do it then [children] think it's OK for them to do it. (F, 12-13)*

- Gambling

*I thought it was a good ad. It shows house parties and stuff like that. So some of it was good but some of it was bad as well. . . . Like jumping in the pool and wrecking the house and that. . . . In the casino when he was winning chips. . . . Gambling. (M, 14-15)*

- Sexual imagery, with the couple in the bath and 'sexual looks' from one of the female actors (mostly noted by parents / teachers)

*There were certain things about the ad I thought were a little irresponsible, perhaps the gambling and the very seductive, sexual looks from one of the girls on there. (F, parents / teachers)*

- Commercialisation, encouraging young people to believe that they need to have the product (parents / teachers)

Initially, some participants in the groups were uncertain why the ad might have attracted a complaint. Having heard the challenge to the ad, some did acknowledge that graffiti could be an issue particularly when it appeared to come with celebrity endorsement. None, however, felt that the scooter riding was an issue.

Young people in the focus groups did not recognise the complaints overall. For them, the ad simply showed people partying and having fun. On occasion, they wondered whether the ad might have more of an adverse effect on children younger than themselves in relation to graffiti.

Overall, however, participants thought that the ASA was right in its assessment of the ad.

*I don't think a teenager would scrutinise that advert that much to find those problems. (F, 14-15)*

*M: I don't mind that, they got it right. F: Yeah I think the action they've taken was suitable. (Parents / teachers)*

### **Schools presentations**

Pupils at the ASA schools presentations immediately highlighted potential issues with the TV ad in relation to its possible influence young people. They noted similar themes to those identified in the focus groups, including:

- Antisocial / wild behaviour (vandalism, graffiti, party goers jumping into the pool fully clothed)
- Gambling
- Drinking: some pupils assumed that the party goers were consuming alcohol because of the context and behaviour

*You could tell half of them were drunk. (M, event pupil)*

*That was quite bad: gambling, drinking, dangerous in the water. (F, event pupil)*

- Celebrity approval of irresponsible behaviour, for example with famous musicians seemingly drawing graffiti on a wall

*[8-12 year olds would think] if my role model does it, therefore kids might do it. (M, event pupil)*

*Young people idolise the celebrities . . . it might sway them to go for that kind of lifestyle. (F, event pupil)*

In keeping with the focus groups feedback, however, pupils at the presentations generally believed that this ad did not warrant a ban, but that it might not be suitable for younger children. Some appeared to be engaged by the ad, for example really wanting to attend that kind of party, and moving to the music while the ad was shown. There was also a degree of uncertainty among some pupils as to why the ad had drawn a complaint.

*When I saw that ad, I thought God that would be an amazing party to be at. I didn't think anything about the [product]. (F, event pupil)*

*What's wrong with that [ad], then? (M, event pupil)*

*F: In reality that's what happens anyway so I don't think it's showing anything that's wrong. . . . F: but I wouldn't show it to kids. (Event pupils)*

It was noted among event pupils that the ad seemed to suit the context and content of MTV from which it was recorded, and this confirmed the general view that no action was needed against it. Assessing the ad in more detail revealed that the painting on walls was on paper, the celebrities were not acting irresponsibly, the scooter riders wore helmets and were not driving dangerously, and the actors were drinking from paper cups.

*I like the ad, and it's on MTV as well. (F, event pupil)*

*With MTV you've got programmes like Teen Mum so it's not like you're going to watch that [ad] and not see other stuff. (F, event pupil)*

*You don't actually see the drinking, it's just cups. (M, event pupil)*

A small number at one event, however, did think that the ad should be banned because of the behaviour it appeared to condone.

*The worst part is the very start where you see the graffiti on the wall. (M, event pupil)*

### **Conclusion**

Despite the range of potential issues for young people noted in the execution, this ad example was the most likely to result in agreement across audiences with the ASA's assessment. Overall, the potentially antisocial / adult content was not strong enough to cause real concern.

## 8. Further discussion on the influence of advertising and the work of the ASA

This final section of the report concludes with parents' / teachers' consideration of key influences on young people in relation to the key moral harm themes, how advertising can leave young people feeling, and focus group participants' views on the idea of a dialogue with the ASA.

### 8.1 Advertising compared with other influences in relation to the key themes (parents / teachers only)

Having discussed the example advertisements on which the ASA had adjudicated, parents / teachers in the focus groups were asked to consider the main themes of violent imagery and behaviour, sexual imagery and behaviour, and commercialisation in terms of which of the following was most likely to influence young people:

- Advertising
- Computer games
- Music videos
- Online content
- Peer groups
- Radio programmes
- TV programmes

They were given a continuum on which to place each potential influence. The exercise was repeated for each key theme (violent imagery and behaviour, sexual imagery and behaviour, and commercialisation).

This exercise revealed that parents / teachers believed other factors were more likely to adversely influence young people than advertising in these areas, with the exception of commercialisation. The report summarises below the main factors that parents / teachers felt influenced young people in relation to the key themes of the research. More detail on the ordering of each potential influence against these themes is contained in appendix II.

**Violent imagery and behaviour:** adults identified computer games as influencing young people most because of the popularity of 18 certificate games with this age group. Advertising was not deemed to be a significant influence in this respect.

**Sexual imagery and behaviour:** views varied across the two groups although online content featured strongly (for example a parent finding that his son regularly deleted his browser history) and sometimes TV content. Music videos were also towards the influential end of the continuum. Advertising was not so prominent in participants' minds, being placed around the middle of the continuum, despite the fact that the themes of body image and sexual imagery had emerged among both parents / teachers and young people as they discussed the ASA adjudications.

*There is a lot of sexual content in [TV] programmes, I mean whether it be kissing or cuddling, you know, it's still sexual. (F, parents / teachers)*

**Commercialisation:** advertising was placed at or near the top of the continuum of influence on young people for this theme because it appeared to provide the most obvious connection. Some parents also discussed how their children nagged them for certain items such as computer consoles and games although it would seem that other influences (such as peer groups) were also playing a role.

*My son now he keeps telling me he wants the XBox because he wants to connect with someone . . . [Via] advertising on telly and his Dad went and bought it for himself and he was playing on it and now that's all I hear, 'I want an XBox I want to connect'. (F, parents / teachers)*

## 8.2 How advertising can leave young people feeling

Looking across the focus groups and schools presentations, ads displaying potential sexual imagery / behaviour appeared more likely to affect young people. The table dancing club print ad and the underwear print ad both had the potential to make girls feel self conscious, and embarrassed, and boys feel awkward. Such feelings could become more acute depending on the circumstances, for example encountering one of the ads when with a parent, or observing the reaction among a few pupils at schools presentations on first seeing an ad of this type.

The research also found that certain ads made some young people feel:

- Excited (e.g. the DVD ad of the certificate 18 film tested in the research, gaming ads)
- Amused (alcohol, FMCG ads) to the extent that an ad was discussed with peers (alcohol ads)
- A desire for the product (the DVD ad, consumer technology products, gaming ads which are 'cool', fast food chain)

- Uplifted (the fashion brand ad tested in the research: 'happy', in a 'dance / party mood')
- Uncomfortable (an ad shown during the schools presentations featuring a homosexual kiss)
- Unsettled (not understanding how an online ad can know the user's preferences)

### 8.3 The potential for dialogue with the ASA

Some teachers / parents stated that taking part in the focus groups had sparked an interest in the subject of advertising and young people. For example one teacher had used the topic in class and asked his pupils to look at, and comment on, ads that they encountered.

Others reported that participation had made them think about a subject they had not really considered before, and had made them aware of who to contact in relation to unsuitable ads for young people. A small number felt that perhaps the ASA could publicise its role more.

*F: You've made us aware of something new that we wouldn't think about. . . .*

*M: Yeah it's opened my eyes a little bit tonight. (Parents / teachers)*

The discussions with adults also led one or two to reflect that parents could play more of a role in terms of protecting young people from harmful advertising. Even so, the point was made that the ASA's overall effectiveness in helping to protect young people might be limited given the impact of other influences, such as peer groups and programme content, as well as young people's media consumption habits more generally.

*It's about protecting our children, you see what I mean, the next generation. . . .*

*So we can make a difference, basically. (F, parents / teachers)*

Some young people in the focus groups felt that people their age should be involved in advertising related decisions that affect them. A small number doubted how well those who made the decisions on ads really knew what young people were thinking.

*Because we're the people who watch the adverts. (M, 12-13)*

*I think there should be children [involved] because if it's an adult they don't . . . say you go out with your friends to town they don't know what you'd like, what you see and what you buy. So if you ask teenagers you're going to have a better opinion, I think. (M, 14-15)*

## **Appendix I: reactions to additional ads presented by the ASA (schools presentations only)**

During the course of the ASA events, the presenters showed several other ads to pupils. This section provides feedback on the ads from pupils in terms of what might have been the causes for complaint against them.

### ***Ads which may or may not be misleading***

#### **Fast food (TV, 2005)**

A TV ad for a fast food chain which showed a group of people at a train station singing about a mini fillet burger. The ad showed a close-up of the burger in a woman's hands. Viewers complained that the ad was misleading as the burger was not as big as it appeared in the ad.

ASA decision: upheld

Pupils clearly enjoyed the humour in this ad. A small number worked out straightaway that it was misleading because the advertiser was exaggerating the size of the product. Many, however, did not guess what the issue might be, for example wondering if the price was misleading.

#### **Soft drink (print, 2009)**

A poster for a drink which showed a bottle of the product with a severed noose around its neck. Text stated 'Cheat death. The antioxidant power of pomegranate juice'. Complainants challenged whether the ad misleadingly exaggerated the health benefits likely to be achieved by drinking the product

The headline 'Cheat Death' prompted a few pupils to decide that it was 'a step too far' and 'a bit dodgy' as a claim. They also occasionally felt that there might be 'decency' issues with the image of the noose round the product container, which one pupil described as potentially 'offensive'. Others thought that 'you'd have to be pretty gullible to believe' the headline.

#### **Mascara (TV, 2007)**

A TV and press ad for a mascara featured a famous actress. A complainant challenged whether the actress was wearing false eyelashes and if the ads therefore exaggerated the lash length that could be achieved by using the product.

ASA decision: upheld

Some female pupils realised that the famous actress must be wearing false eyelashes. One pupil pointed out that the ad did not show the disclaimer text that the model was wearing false lashes, which suggested that some female pupils were becoming used to seeing such ads. Another pop singer's ad which included hair extensions was also mentioned.

*Normally it says the model's wearing eyelash inserts. (F, event pupil)*

*[The text] is really small but you always look for it. (F, event pupil)*

When prompted some pupils decided that it was not 'fair' to use false lashes, even with the on-screen text.

*Why advertise it if it doesn't do it? (F, event pupil)*

### **Ads which may or may not offend**

#### **Mayonnaise (TV, 2008)**

A TV ad for mayonnaise which featured a family scene where the 'mother' of the family was a man with a New York accent, dressed in a deli serving outfit. The father in the family kisses 'mum' goodbye as he leaves for work. The ASA received complaints from viewers who found the same sex kiss inappropriate.

ASA decision: not upheld

The overriding opinion aired on this ad was how it portrayed the woman's role in a stereotypical and 'sexist' way.

*F: Women in the kitchen . . . F: An old role . . . F: The men going to work. (F, event pupils)*

*Domestic things always show women, . . . it's wrong, sexism. (F, event pupil)*

At this point, the discussion broadened out at one event where pupils talked about positive examples of ads for domestic products which showed men using the product rather than women (Cillit Bang, Bold).

On the topic of the two men kissing in the ad, pupils at one event were asked whether it was important to respect the views of the minority who were offended by this scene, or whether a decision on the ad should be made based on the majority view. One or two of the pupils commented that it would depend on the nature of the offence. If, for

example, it related to race, then it would always be offensive whereas this ad did not contain anything that was wrong or indeed very unusual.

*It depends on the seriousness of who's offended. My Dad wouldn't like that [men kissing] but it wouldn't really upset him. But if it was race, that would be genuinely bad. (M, event pupil)*

*It's not encouraging you to do the same thing – I wouldn't kiss another girl . . . you go with the [view of] the bigger group [i.e. those who did not complain]. (F, event pupil)*

The perception that it reflected modern times with the kiss was tempered, according to one pupil, who felt that the female stereotyping contradicted the progression.

A number of pupils appeared to dislike the shot with the kiss, with both male and female pupils showing an aversion to the scene (e.g. derogatory noises) and one pupil admitting to feeling 'uncomfortable' about it.

### **Religious offence ads (print, 2009)**

The ASA received complaints about an ad which stated 'There probably is no God'. Complainants objected that the ad was offensive and denigrated people of faith and questioned whether the claim could be substantiated. Another ad from a different group appeared shortly after, claiming 'There definitely is a God' or quoted scripture to point out that 'the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God'. The complaints mirrored those lodged by the earlier ad: it was offensive to people of no faith and complainants questioned whether the advertisers could substantiate the definite existence of God. ASA decision: not upheld

The ads were shown alongside each other. Pupils at one event came to the conclusion that the latter ad was more likely to be offensive because it was unequivocal about the existence of God and pressuring people to adapt to the ways of the organisation being advertised. The point was also made that this might be offensive in not recognising other religions.

*It's slightly more offensive, pressure on you to live their way. (F, event pupil)*

The other ad, on the other hand, stated that 'there's *probably* no God', casting some doubt on the topic.

### **Automotive (TV, 2009)**

A TV and cinema ad for a car showing the 'Chief Engineer' of the car manufacturer fighting himself. Viewers challenged whether the ads were offensive and suitable to be shown at times when children might be watching.

ASA decision: upheld

Pupils acknowledged that some of the fight-scene violence in the ad was quite 'extreme' despite its post 7.30pm restriction. Some pupils countered that young people are likely to come across similar levels of violence in the media (e.g. children's cartoons, soap operas), while some others could not see anything wrong with the ad.

*Kids might try out those moves. (F, event pupil)*

*In kids' programmes the violence is no different [e.g. Samurai Jack]. . . . Children are going to see violence whatever, in all types of media. (F, event pupil)*

*F: There's no blood or anything . . . M: There's fighting in Eastenders. (Event pupils)*

One participant suggested it should be given a post 9.00 pm restriction or the equivalent of a '12' rating. When prompted, most agreed that the post 9.00 pm ruling was appropriate for the ad.

The ad clearly caught the attention of some participants, with its soundtrack and 'action movie' feel.

### **Chewing gum (TV, 2007)**

TV and cinema ads which featured a black man speaking in rhyme with a strong Caribbean accent. Viewers challenged whether the TV ads were offensive and racist, because they believed they showed offensive stereotypes and ridiculed black or Caribbean people and their culture.

ASA decision: upheld

This ad drew contrasting reactions. A small number of participants thought that the ad, featuring a dub poet, was 'stereotyping' African Caribbean people because of the lead character's delivery, and might be seen as 'a bit racist'. One African Caribbean pupil did not recognise the characteristics conveyed in the ad.

*It's stereotypical about Jamaicans being loud - and nothing to do with chewing gum. (F, event pupil)*

Some pupils felt unable to comment on the ad because they had not understood what was being said. A few did not think it was offensive because, in their minds, the dub poet was presented as a comedian.

*I can't see the problem. I think it's OK. (F, event pupil)*

### **Ads and social responsibility**

#### **Fast food (call centre, TV, 2005)**

A TV ad for a fast food chain which featured women working in a call centre singing with their mouths full. Complainants contacted the ASA about a number of different issues but the majority expressed concern that the ad promoted bad table manners.

ASA decision: not upheld

Pupils overall could not pinpoint why this ad attracted so many complaints. Some suggested correctly that there were complaints about how it appeared to trivialise a critical emergency helpline with staff not doing their job properly.

Pupils were amused to hear that the main complaint related to how the ad encouraged bad manners and agreed that it should not be banned.

#### **Soft drink (TV, 2004)**

An ad for a soft drink which featured a man rolling down a hill in concrete construction pipes. The ASA received complaints that the ad trivialised and condoned a harmful situation and could encourage children to play with potentially lethal building materials.

ASA decision: upheld

Pupils enjoyed the humour in this ad. Some joked about wanting to copy the stunt, and remarked on similarities with the TV series Jackass. They recognised, however, that the ad could potentially lead to young people attempting to copy the character's antics.

*I like that . . . It might encourage people to get injured . . . I'd want to roll down the hill! (F, event pupils)*

*There are donuts out there [who would try copying the ad's stunt]. (M, event pupil)*

**Watch-maker (Print, 1998)**

A press and poster ad showing a very thin woman wearing a watch around the top of her arm. The headline read 'Put some weight on'. Complainants challenged whether the ads were offensive to, and mocked, people with eating disorders and were irresponsible.

ASA decision: upheld

This ad drew unanimous, negative comments from pupils because of its especially thin female model. Some initially thought the ad was something to do with anorexia rather than a watch. Pupils, especially females, agreed when asked that it was an image they would rather not see because of how thin the model was and the way in which the ad appeared to promote this body image via 'glam' and 'high fashion'. This image, they felt, might encourage some girls to aspire to the look.

*It's offensive to people with anorexia. (F, event pupil)*

*It wouldn't affect me but people are really self conscious about weight and size. (F, event pupil)*

*It looks like she's making a fashion statement and you have to look like that. (F, event pupil)*

**Ads and children and young people****Broadband provider (TV, 2010)**

A TV ad featuring teenagers in a car scrap yard. The final scene in the ad featured a boy and girl French kissing in the back seat of a scrap car. Viewers complained that the French kiss was too explicit, especially when children could be watching. Other complainants were concerned the ad showed young people in a dangerous environment.

ASA decision: upheld

Overall, pupils disliked this ad and identified potential issues with its content. There was a feeling that it conveyed a clichéd image of teenagers behaving badly (in a scrap yard) and condoned irresponsible behaviour.

*They made the teenagers out to be criminals. (F, event pupil)*

*Really stereotypical, saying all teenagers act in that way. (F, event pupil)*

The kissing, which prompted some giggles, was felt to be ‘unnecessary’, ‘a bit full-on’ and ‘gross’. One pupil imagined the awkwardness of watching the ad with her mother.

*It was a bit too much; you could see their tongues and everything. (F, event pupil)*

Occasionally, however, male pupils did not think there was a problem with the ad and did not think it would encourage teenagers to enter scrap yards and behave irresponsibly.

### **Savoury spread (TV, 2007)**

The ad featured a large amorphous blob and people either screaming and running away from it or smiling and running into it. The ASA received complaints that the ad was distressing to young children.

ASA decision: upheld

In general, pupils found this ad amusing and often could not see what the issue with it might be. Even with a prompt about the children’s channel on which it was broadcast, some pupils still did not think there could be cause for complaint.

*M: That’s a good ad . . . F: The scream catches your attention. It’s honest: ‘love it or hate it’. (Event pupils)*

*[The ad’s] fine unless you’re scared of [the product]! (F, event pupil)*

One pupil thought that it might be traumatic for young children who did not know what the product was, for example mistaking it for ‘poo’. On hearing of the complaint made, pupils tended to feel that this was an ‘overreaction’ although a small number expected that young children they knew would be scared by the ad, and could understand why a post 7.30pm restriction was enforced.

*F: That’s just petty [the complaint]; it’s funny, not very scary . . . F: My niece would be petrified. (Event pupils)*

### **Soft drink (TV, 2008)**

A TV ad for a soft drink which featured a young girl running away with the ‘Cactus Kid’. The ad referred to them not liking water and preferring the soft drink being advertised. The young girl was also shown to be pregnant in the ad. The ASA received a number of complaints including concerns that the girl appeared to be underage and therefore

the ad condoned underage sex. Others complained that the ad suggested the soft drink was a substitute for water.

ASA decision: upheld

Pupils were slightly bemused by the ad (described as 'weird') but some thought that it might be inappropriate by promoting teenage pregnancy with a very young-looking model (who decided to leave home with her unusual-looking boyfriend). Some also wondered whether the ad drew complaints because it showed a young person (estimates ranged from 12 to 16 years old; a 'young voice') running away from home, and it associated being 'different' (the boyfriend's appearance) with freakishness.

The potential issue of implying that the product could be used in place of water was not identified.

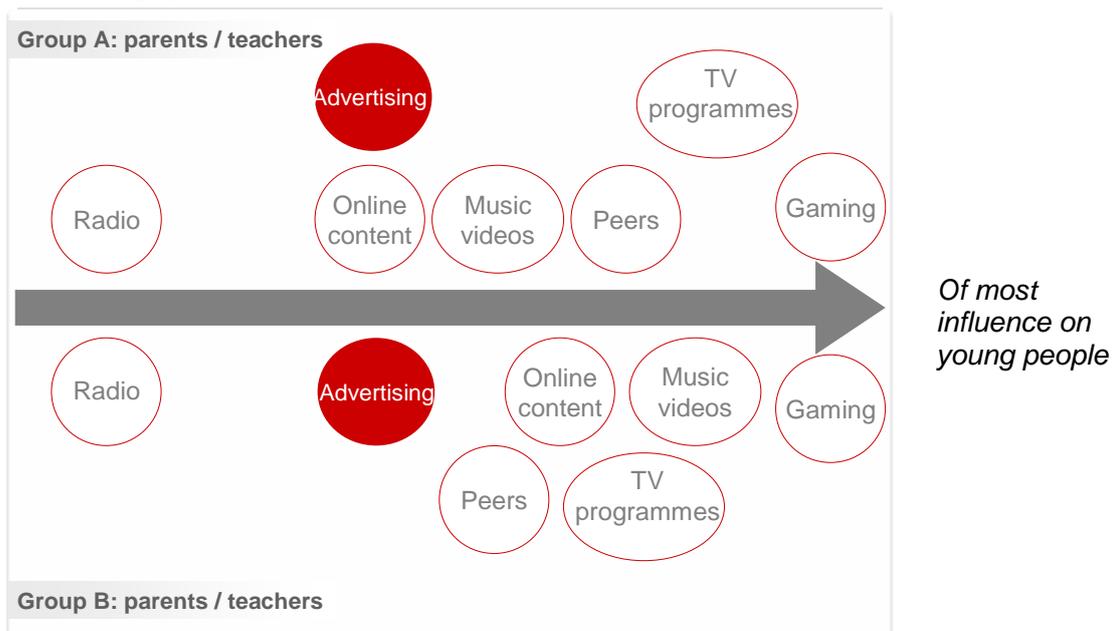
## Appendix II: potential influences on young people according to the key themes (parents / teachers focus groups only)

The diagrams below broadly summarise where the parents / teachers in the focus groups positioned on a continuum each potential influence on young people against the following themes:

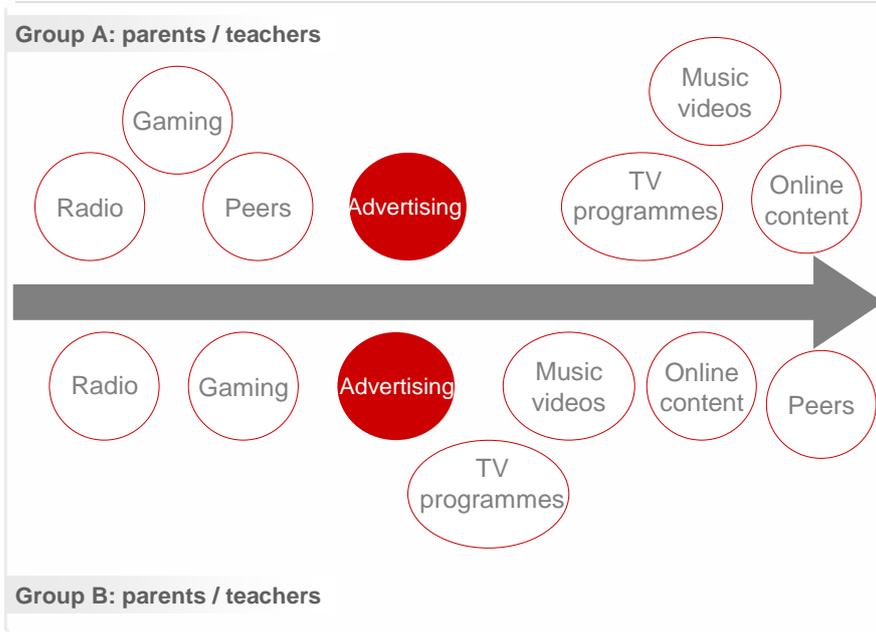
- Violent imagery and behaviour
- Sexual imagery and behaviour
- Commercialisation

The activity was a group exercise conducted towards the end of the focus groups once all the example ASA adjudications had been discussed.

### Violent imagery and behaviour

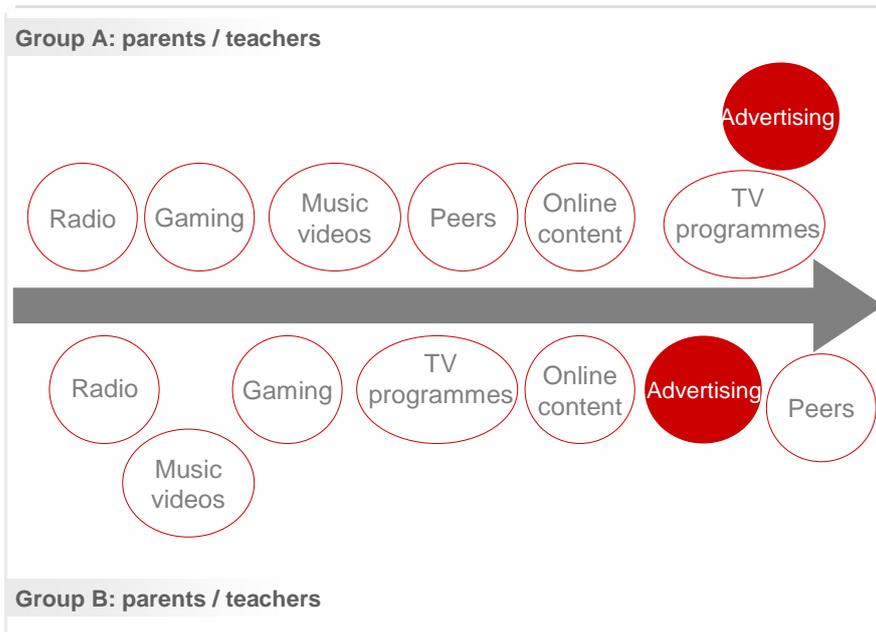


**Sexual imagery and behaviour**



*Of most influence on young people*

**Commercialisation**



*Of most influence on young people*