

2024 Advertising Advisory Committee report

The Advertising Advisory Committee (AAC) advises CAP and BCAP on consumer and citizen issues arising from key aspects of broadcast and non-broadcast advertising regulations. The members are independent of the advertising and media industries and are drawn from a range of different backgrounds to ensure that ad rules are effective, evidence-based, and responsive to public concerns.

Punctuated by the General Election in July, the agenda for the AAC and the timing of matters coming forward for consideration was unpredictable on issues such as Less Healthy Foods (LHF), proposed legislation outlawing advertising of Vapes and the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers legislation. The election also interrupted the work of the previous government's Online Advertising Taskforce. Nevertheless, the Committee had a full agenda, including consideration of issues ranging from environmental claims to advertising in podcasts, from Buy Now Pay Later to Online Targeting and Scheduling and Placement. On most of these matters, the Committee was confident that CAP/BCAP appropriately considered the needs of consumers. Most comments focused on matters of emphasis in guidance and the case for the ASA to use its 'nudge' influence with advertisers. An enduring concern during the year was vulnerability and the need for the ASA system to understand the full range of vulnerabilities and groups at risk. In that context, we welcomed the setting up of an ASA project on this theme at the beginning of 2025.

To widen the range of inputs in its discussions, the Committee pursued its programme, which began in 2023, to invite external stakeholders for informal sessions to explore their perspectives on advertising. In 2024, the AAC welcomed guest speakers from Internet Matters, Money & Mental Health, the sustainability consultancy Anthesis and the Unstereotype Alliance. In 2024, the Committee also moved to establish links with other panels representing consumers, and the Chair was invited to participate in a group including the Chairs of consumer panels of Ofcom, the Financial Conduct Authority, the Legal Services Board and the Civil Aviation Authority.

In a new initiative stemming from the AAC's annual appraisal process, two designated Committee members at each meeting led discussions of a particular section of the Codes. The aim was to assess the extent to which the Codes remained relevant, up-to-date and accessible to those who needed to use them. During 2024, the Code sections covered were those on Financial Products, Environmental Claims, Harm and Offence and Food. These Code considerations will continue into 2025 before being reviewed. The discussions up to now have been considered valuable and have fed directly into CAP and BCAP's consideration of how and when to review the Codes and how to simplify navigation and use of the two advertising codes.

In 2024, the AAC welcomed two new members - Asha Odedra and Nita P. Woods. They were appointed to replace Michelle Goddard, who resigned in February owing to other work commitments, and Rachel Childs, who stepped down after completing her maximum term. Both made a significant contribution to the work of the AAC. Finally, as always, the Committee continued to enjoy highly professional support from Shahriar Coupal, Malcolm Phillips and the whole executive team. My thanks are due to them and to all the members of the Committee.

Sam Younger CBE
Chair, Advertising Advisory Committee