

Statement on outdoor advertising: No. 10 summit on Bailey Report

ASA Chief Executive, Guy Parker

I'm very pleased to be here today on behalf of the Advertising Standards Authority to talk about the progress we've made responding to Reg's recommendation on sexual imagery in posters. I'd like to thank Reg, his team and the Department for Education for the thoughtful and constructive way they've engaged with the ASA.

Protecting children is one of the ASA's key priorities. Reg's review came along at a time when our own research into the views of parents and children was suggesting that we have sometimes been too permissive in allowing sexual imagery on posters. Whilst advertisers have never had carte blanche, we recognise the concerns over such images contributing to the "wallpaper" of children's lives and the "unthinking drift" towards ever greater sexualisation.

So what have we done?

Well, we're undertaking a new Schools Engagement Programme from 2012 and we're in the process of commissioning full scale market research into the public's views on harm and offence in advertising. That will not just help us gain a better understanding of parental views on sexual imagery, it might also inform how we judge other issues like body image and airbrushing. Important matters, yes, but not ones that are the subject of any of Reg's recommendations.

What about posters? We're adopting a two-tiered approach.

First, overtly sexual imagery will likely face a ban from appearing outdoors, anywhere.

There will be cases, however, where an image might not warrant a total outdoor ban, but could still be viewed as suggestive. This is where the second tier of our response comes in. In these cases, we'll consider if a placement restriction is appropriate and proportionate, by that we typically, but not necessarily exclusively, mean that the poster should not appear within 100m of schools.

On Friday, we issued an unprecedented statement to the industry, detailing our new two-tiered approach; an approach that we're already implementing through our decisions. In August, we banned ads that appeared on the back of buses for a company called Eric France Metals, which, although featuring no overt nudity, contained sexualised poses that we judged were offensive because they objectified women and were unsuitable to be seen by children. But it is – of course – far better to prevent the problem in the first place.

Crucially and encouragingly, the industry's on board. Many advertisers are using our free Copy Advice service, citing Reg's Report, to give themselves the best chance of ensuring their ads are acceptable before they run them.

And in addition to our mandatory rules, the Outdoor Media Centre has issued its own guidance to its members about not displaying advertising for lap dancing clubs or sex shops within 100m of schools or other sensitive locations, which Mike Baker might want to talk about later.

There will, of course, be imagery which some people may find sexual but that we feel will continue to be acceptable displayed on posters without restriction. We're not a social engineer; this is about us doing what we can to reflect the views of parents.

But let me be clear. If advertisers use sexual imagery, they are now more likely to face either a placement restriction or an outright ban.

We welcomed Reg's recommendations. We've already begun to take positive action in response to them. And we're committed to further work to ensure that children continue to be protected.