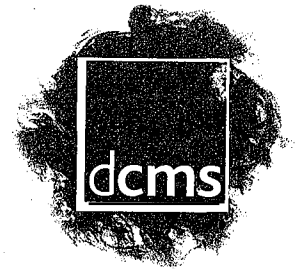


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David Currie

CODE ON THE ADVERTISING OF FOOD PRODUCTS TO CHILDREN

We recently spoke about this. I am now writing to ask OFCOM to consider proposals for strengthening the existing code on advertising food to children.

This reform is but one part of the developing programme to tackle childhood obesity, which is currently under close scrutiny by the Food Standards Agency, the Department of Health and the Health Select Committee.

It is, of course, the responsibility of OFCOM to ensure that there is an appropriate code for the regulation of broadcast advertising and that it is targeted and proportionate. OFCOM will inherit the ITC code under transitional arrangements provided for in the Communications Act but it will need a code adapted to meet its own duties. And if you move to a co-regulatory system for broadcast advertising you will obviously need to ensure that it is robust enough to discharge those duties.

Although I am well aware that there are many factors involved in the increase in levels of childhood obesity – and Government is committed to halting and reversing the decline in levels of physical activity in particular, not least through our work to boost PE and school sport and to encourage physical activity more generally – I take the issue of food advertising very seriously. I believe the current code of conduct governing the advertising of food and drink products to children may be inadequate and is in need of review.

I know that you will want to take into account the conclusions of the FSA Report, the Department of Health's Food and Health Action Plan and the Health Select Committee's inquiry into obesity. I also know that industry is willing to work with us, and this is welcome because a package of solutions is required. I will be exploring further with the food and drink manufacturers how they can partner with Government to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles.



I also believe that the problem of childhood obesity highlights the importance of OFCOM's statutory duty to promote media literacy among children. In addition to understanding the need for a balanced diet and regular exercise, children and young people need to understand that companies advertising any product (not just food and drink) to them are doing so for commercial reasons and want them to spend more of their money on the products of those advertisers.

I look forward to hearing what plans you have to conduct research, review regulation and strengthen the code in this area, and to promote greater media literacy among children.

Yours

TJ

TESSA JOWELL