



The Children's Society

A Voluntary Society of The Church of England and The Church in Wales

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Rt Hon. Tessa Jowell
Secretary of State
DCSM
2-4 Cockspur Street
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16 July 01

Dear Mrs Jowell,

Children and Television

Very many congratulations on your appointment to the cabinet particularly in this important role at the Department of Culture.

I am writing to you having chaired a voluntary sector group on children and television for the past two years. I attach a list of the members.

We have two main concerns:-

- (a) that all children be offered high quality programmes:
- and (b) that the level of advertising directed at children be cut.

We believe that policy on children's television should be based on the child's needs not the industry's desires.

High quality programmes

As you know British children watch an average of over 2½ hours television per day. Fragmentation of family viewing reduces the mediation and control parents have over children's viewing. So there is a question as to how they interpret what they see and whether it enables them to develop. This gives the broadcasters greater responsibilities. Children need to see themselves reflected in programming which is culturally sensitive. For this reason we support the BBC's proposal for two new children's chamber.

CHILDREN'S PROMISE
THE MILLENNIUM FINAL HOUR APPEAL



Less advertising

The number of advertisements watched by British children tops European league tables. On average British children watch 18,000 adverts per year. Spending by advertisers on toys and games rose six fold to £150m in the six years to 1998: a further £50m is spent on advertising crisps and chocolates to them. This is in a country where 20% of children are entitled to free school meals and we have the worst health inequalities in the EU. Younger and younger audiences are being targeted. Recently the advertising industry held a conference where there was a session on "Birth to 2". Four year olds are "brand conscious" and nine year olds respond to questions about product preference. The insidious way this affects family life was demonstrated by Stephen Colgrave of Saatchi & Saatchi who said, "Children are much easier to reach with advertisements. They pick up on it fast and quite often we can exploit that relationship and get them pestering their parents."

A great deal of research has been done which concludes (rather unsurprisingly) that children's understanding of advertising develops in line with their psychological, emotional and intellectual development. So it is not until the age of 12 that it can be said to be comparable to that of adults. In his series "Britain on the Couch" Oliver James looked at the impact on peoples' self-esteem which is reduced by their inability to live up to glamorous media images. Children and adolescents are clearly more vulnerable to the pressure to be "cool" yet the whole subtext of advertising to them is to play on their self-doubt. We believe this is irresponsible when 1 in 5 suffer mental illness before they are 15?

We submitted copious evidence to the ITC last summer on this, but as yet have received no response.

The two issues are of course linked. Some in the industry argue that without advertising good children's programmes cannot be financed. However this is not true. Experience at the BBC and formerly at Channel 4 demonstrate that well directed regulation and the licence fee can provide good quantity public service broadcasting. This was confirmed in the Davies report.

Nowhere is it more important to establish structures which provide for and protect the viewer than in the case of children.

We would be very glad to have the opportunity to come and talk to you about these concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Seaford

Helen Seaford
Head of Planning and Development

List of the members for the Children and TV advertising voluntary group

Ruth Bardger, Deputy Secretary for the Church of England

Michelle Coulton, Social Policy Officer

Mary Crowley, CEO, National Parenting Education and Support Forum

Marina Warner, author

James Erlichman, International Obesity Task Force

Charlie Powell, Projects Director, Sustain

Prof David Piachaud, Dept of Social Policy, LSE

Helen Seaford, Head of Planning and Development, TCS

Kate Seeley, Media Officer, National Children's Bureau

Chris Atkinson, NSPCC Policy Adviser, National Centre

Mike Childs, Senior Campaigner, Friends of the Earth

Sue Dibb, Consultant

Jocelyn Hay, Voice of the Listener and Viewer

Dr Maire Messenger Davies, senior Lecturer, Children and Media