

# EDUCATION NOT EXPLOITATION

## Guidance on using commercial materials in schools

Commercial companies are becoming increasingly involved in schools. Companies can target schools by sponsoring resources, such as teaching packs and materials or by collector schemes, such as Cadbury Get Active and Walkers "Free" Books for Schools promotion. Are commercial companies helping schools by providing them with new resources or exploiting them to obtain new customers? This document sets out the key issues that schools and parents should consider when assessing the suitability of commercial materials.

### Why is the NUT concerned about the use of commercial materials in schools?

Many schools and teachers have established very positive links with companies, local and national. They have benefited from their involvement, for example, through volunteer reading schemes, work experience placements and the provision of materials. There are companies that have a strong record in providing valuable teaching materials and aids.

The NUT is deeply alarmed at the targeting of schools by businesses intent solely on the marketing of their products and the exploitation of schools, pupils and parents. UK brands are spending an estimated £300m a year on targeting the classroom to increase sales. The NUT 's concern is compounded by extent to which the funding crisis in schools created by the Government is pressuring schools to be involved in promotions.

In July 2003 The Guardian newspaper reported that First Impressions marketing agency was encouraging schools to register for free sampling bags. The bags were aimed at different age groups and contained sample products by companies such as McVities, Tomy Toys, The Popcorn institute and Disney. These bags now reach one in four school children. The benefits to First Impressions clients are listed on the agency's website; bags are handed out by teachers "giving your product added credibility", "double exposure" for primary school bags that are taken home and seen by "parents/decision-makers". The agency's website goes on to state that children can be accurately targeted by age, sex and TV region.

### What issues should schools take into account when considering using commercial materials?

There should be a full discussion within each school with the staff involved before decisions involving commercial materials or sponsorship are made. Parents and

school governors should be consulted. The following issues should be considered:

- the educational content of materials and reliability of information;
- unacceptable advertising by the sponsoring company;
- whether the materials support healthy eating by pupils;
- the impact on teacher workload, particularly in terms of balancing the benefit to the school against additional bureaucracy for teaching staff;
- value for money; and
- the impact on parents, for example being pressurised to buy certain products.

These issues are outlined in detail below.

## Should commercial materials be used in schools?

### **Educational content**

When deciding whether to use commercial materials schools should give consideration to their educational value and the beneficiaries of their use. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is encouraging companies to produce more commercial materials for schools. Its EBNet website, which promotes business and education links, lists the benefits to large companies of such involvement: “They can acquire better market knowledge, tap into local creativity to develop new products and gain new and more loyal customers”.

Some of the world’s largest corporations, which are responsible for undermining health, environment and sustainable development, are at the same time being actively encouraged to become partners with schools and to provide core educational materials and services. Companies now claim that such activities are evidence of corporate social responsibility.

There is a need, however, to exercise professional judgement; schools are being targeted with increasingly sophisticated materials, which are being presented as educational resources but which are a form of marketing. Some schools for example, are providing students with materials taken from a website called Key Skills In Context in which the whole of the section on nutrition is provided by Nestle, the world’s leader in marketing sugary, fatty, salty, highly processed and packaged foods. The health and health care information is provided by PPP healthcare, a private health care provider.

The UK KFC website includes a downloadable school pack aimed at teachers. It includes a section on healthy eating and states, “you should always try to choose lower fat options such as pure chicken breast meat (as served at your nearest KFC!).” The Food Commission report that KFC takes chicken meat (typically 4% fat by weight) and sells it with four times as much fat (typically 15 to 20% fat).

Many primary and secondary schools are being sent commercially sponsored exercise books from the company Jazzy Media. The books are given to children, paid for by advertisements by companies such as Pepsi Cola and SmithKline

Beecham. The benefits to clients are listed as being high advertising recall and sharp, sustained increases in brand awareness, brand imagery, product usage, and propensity to purchase.

The targeting of schools by companies actively seeking sponsorship and other deals with schools undermines teachers' ability to draw on the fullest range of teaching strategies and curriculum content.

## How can schools promote healthy eating?

Marketing in schools is sought by manufacturers of crisps, soft drinks and sweets. In 2003 children as young as seven were targeted in a multimillion pound campaign by Cadbury to encourage them to buy 160 million chocolate bars, containing nearly 2 million kilograms of fat, in exchange for school sports equipment. The scheme called "Cadbury Get Active" was backed by the Government but condemned by a wide range of organisations including the Food Commission, the British Diabetic Association and the Consumers' Association. Wide spread criticism so soon after the launch of the scheme forced Cadbury to change the promotion so that to take part, children and their families were no longer required to buy large amounts of chocolate.

Schools and teachers have a crucial role in encouraging children to follow a healthy lifestyle. The NUT believes that teachers should not be pressurised into promoting the use of commercial materials which undermine this role.

The National Audit Office has expressed concern that the products involved in the Walkers Free Books for Schools scheme detract from healthy eating messages. The Walkers promotion enables pupils to gain "free" books for their schools if they buy between 50 and 500 packets of crisps. In its report "Tackling Obesity in England", the National Audit Office refers to the risk that some schemes "may encourage children and their families to buy more snack foods with high fat, salt and sugar content".

The link between food promotion and children's eating patterns is confirmed in the Food Standard Agency's report, "Does Food Promotion Influence Children? A systematic review of the evidence."

The report, published in September 2003 by the University of Strathclyde, concludes that advertising to children does have an effect on their preferences, purchase behaviour and consumption. These effects are apparent not just for different brands, but also for different types of food. They affect whether children buy a chocolate bar or a piece of fruit.

In March 2003 the World Health Organisation published their report "Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Disease." It states that the prevention of obesity in children is a priority and recommends restricting consumption of "energy-dense, micronutrient-poor foods" and restricting "intake of sugar

sweetened soft drinks". It criticises the food and drinks industry for "heavy marketing of energy-dense, micronutrient-poor foods (e.g. packaged snacks)" and states that the marketing of these foods should be limited.

In May 2004 the House of Commons Health Committee published their report on obesity. The report was very critical of the food industry's attempts to involve schools in the promotion of unhealthy foods. The report stated that healthy eating messages learnt through the national curriculum and Government healthy eating initiatives such as the schools fruit campaign would be contradicted and undermined if, within that same school environment, children were exposed to sponsorship messages from unhealthy food manufacturers, and given access to vending machines selling unhealthy products.

The promotion of unhealthy snack foods goes against the Government's own "National Healthy Schools Standard" guidelines. The guidelines, introduced in 1999, stress the importance of giving a consistent message so that healthy eating lessons are reinforced by the food sold at school. It also contradicts the objectives outlined in the Government's "Healthy living blueprint for schools", published in September 2004, which emphasises the importance of adopting a whole-school approach to health.

## Impact on teacher workload

When considering the use of commercial materials, schools should consider the effects on teacher workload. For example, participating in a voucher scheme might mean the use of teachers' time to cut out and dispatch coupons. If schools decide to participate in a voucher scheme it will be important to establish how tasks can be undertaken and consider whether parents could help with the scheme by, for example, coordinating the collection of vouchers.

## Value for money

The promotion of commercial schemes is largely misleading as a means of obtaining free resources and school equipment. A report by Which? magazine in 2001 showed that under the Tesco Computers for Schools scheme 21,990 vouchers were needed to buy a personal computer costing around £1,000. Parents would have to spend nearly £250,000 to obtain the necessary vouchers. The report found that people would need to buy nearly £45,000 worth of shopping for one scanner, which the store itself sold for £80.

The Food Commission has pointed out that a school participating in the "Cadbury Get Active" campaign would need to encourage children to spend more than £2,000 on chocolate and consume nearly 1.25 million calories to win the volleyball posts and net featured in this scheme.

## Impact on parents

The “pros and cons” of participating in an initiative should be explained to parents, including the financial implications. As the Which? magazine report demonstrates parents are frequently called upon to spend large amounts of money to obtain the marketed products. Voucher schemes mean that pressure is put on parents to buy particular brands and shop in particular shops. This can cause additional financial pressures for less well off parents who might not normally shop in particular shops nor choose to spend their income on junk food. It also puts pressure on pupils whose parents choose either not to participate in a scheme or cannot afford to participate.

## Where can I find out further information about the use of commercial materials?

- Information and guidance on the use of commercial materials in schools is contained on the commercialisation section of the NUT website and is regularly updated. The NUT website address is: [www.teachers.org.uk](http://www.teachers.org.uk)
- Baby Milk Action and Reading International Solidarity Centre have produced valuable curriculum guidance on public relations. “Seeing Through the Spin” helps pupils deconstruct public relations messages and question whether commercial sponsorship of education is justified. The Baby Milk Action website address is: [www.babymilkaction.org](http://www.babymilkaction.org)
- Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming has actively campaigned against commercialisation and are currently leading a campaign calling upon the Government to introduce legislation to protect children from the advertising and promotion of foods that contribute to an unhealthy diet. The campaign is supported by over one hundred organisations including the NUT. Sustain’s website address is: [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)
- Guidelines on commercial activities in schools have been produced by the Consumers’ Association, the Department for Education and Skills and the Incorporated Society for British Advertisers (ISBA). Amongst the Steering group members who contributed to the guidelines were the Meat and Livestock Commission, L’Oreal and Proctor and Gamble – industries at the centre of national and global debates about the environment, animal and human rights and food safety. The guidance does not address healthy eating concerns and gives few arguments to help teachers refuse materials such as crisp and sweet promotions. It does not look at how the increased commercial presence in schools might distort the curriculum itself. The guidance is featured on the teachernet website: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=854>

The Government's "Healthy living blueprint for schools" document is featured on the healthy living section of the teachernet website along with a range of other materials and website links on health and schools [www.teachernet.org.uk/healthyliving](http://www.teachernet.org.uk/healthyliving)

- The Consumers' Association is the largest consumer body in Europe and the second largest in the world. Its website address is [www.which.net](http://www.which.net)
- The Food Commission is an independent body which acts as a watchdog on food issues. It can be found at [www.foodcomm.org.uk](http://www.foodcomm.org.uk)
- The National Consumer Council is an independent body which aims to represent consumers in matters of health, safety and legal concerns. Its website includes a section on consumer education. It can be found at [www.ncc.org.uk](http://www.ncc.org.uk)