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**Publicité à l'école**  
Should marketing in schools be banned?  
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FOR & AGAINST: For years, advertisers have campaigned against the commercialisation of schools. Recent concerns over obesity have pushed it to the top of the agenda, so...

**FOR**

Children are getting fatter and more and more are suffering from diabetes. Both are linked to unhealthy eating habits and both impact on a child's ability to benefit fully from going to school. So there can be little doubt that schools have a role in encouraging healthy eating. But they won't succeed if, at the same time, they are using commercial materials that undermine the message.

They have a hard fight on their hands. The potential market among children is so huge that UK brands spend an estimated £300m a year targeting schools to increase their sales.

Manufacturers of crisps, soft drinks and sweets are particularly enthusiastic about involving schools in their promotions. In 2003, primary schools were targeted by Cadbury's <sup>3</sup>Get Active<sup>2</sup> scheme marketed as an anti-obesity message and endorsed by the Minister for Sport.

It aimed to get children to buy 160 million chocolate bars, containing nearly two million kilograms of fat, collect the tokens and, irony of ironies, exchange them for sports equipment.

Teachers are well used to the sophisticated propaganda or unsubtle advertising presented as educational resources. They have long used the wastepaper bin to deal with unacceptable material. But the internet has opened up a new set of problems. The nutrition section of a website called Key Skills In Context is provided by Nestlé, the world's leader in marketing sugary, fatty, salty, highly processed foods. Then there is the vending machine. The increasing use of which in schools has arisen out of the Government's failure to ensure schools are properly funded putting schools under pressure to raise their own income.

But fizzy drinks have a detrimental effect on pupils' concentration, behaviour and learning.

A single drink of Ribena or Lucozade provides as much sugar as several packets of sweets. With bottled water costing as much as a soft drink and the demise of the drinking fountain, children turn to the colourful, flavour-boosted products. Yet children do not drink sufficient water and this affects their concentration and behaviour. The Food Standards Agency's Action Plan on food promotion and children's diets, if implemented by the Government, would help redress the balance in advertising of healthy/ unhealthy products aimed at children.

The NUT has worked closely with Debra Shipley MP, who is leading the campaign in parliament for a ban on advertisements of junk food during television programmes aimed at young children. Her recently published bill will also help schools by banning the marketing to children of unhealthy foods.

The healthy eating message will be reinforced by the food sold in school tuck shops, breakfast club, vending machines and school meal service. This will help ensure that all messages given to pupils, staff and parents about food and nutrition are consistent and mutually reinforced.

Despite the reintroduction of nutritional guidelines, the Union is genuinely concerned about the falling standards in school meals and the impact this has on children's health, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable children in society. For many children the lunchtime meal may be the main meal of the day; so it is important that it is nutritionally balanced. Under-nutrition, even in its milder forms, can have detrimental effects on cognitive development, behaviour, concentration and school performance. Nutritional standards for school meals need to be strengthened to clarify exactly what food should be served and ensure that products such as chicken and fish are not replaced with cheap meat substitutes. They must also reflect the cultural and religious background of pupils.

Debra Shipley's new bill will do all of this.

Schools that have cut back on junk food have noticed improvements in pupil behaviour. A school in Worcestershire which banned all additives from its meals reported a marked improvement in pupils' behaviour.

The Union believes that all schoolchildren in deprived areas should be entitled to a free breakfast and lunch. So it welcomes the work being done in Wales where the Assembly Government has announced that every primary school child will get a free breakfast by September 2006. And in Hull all children at 15 primary schools are entitled to a free school meal. It hopes to extend the scheme to every primary school by the end of the year seeing it as a long-term investment for the future.

But the positive benefits of a healthy diet must be more widely promoted. It would be good to see celebrities and sporting heroes in particular promoting healthy foods rather than the current pattern of crisps, confectionery or sugary fizzy drinks.

John Bangs is head of education at the National Union of Teachers

## AGAINST

We have to recognise that 'marketing in schools' is a hopelessly generic term that covers a whole host of activities and helps neither those who defend the area, nor those who attack it. Some external interventions add real value to the life of a school, some are less easy to defend, some are impossible to justify. Media, topic and approach combine to inform any such judgement. That's no basis for blanket condemnation, simply for discretion and choice. So, let's illustrate this with a few examples.

Some of EdComs' biggest marketing programmes in schools this year are on behalf of

charities. For example, we are helping the NSPCC take a campaign into schools across the country. The NSPCC is determined to help young people by providing a campaign offering practical advice on dealing with issues that just don't get talked about at school or at home.

They want to give young people the confidence to talk about whatever is bothering them. This is probably not the kind of marketing in schools that campaigners get worked up about. But it is marketing in schools. So my first point would be, let's define our terms and let's avoid a sense that marketing in schools is one activity, industry or discipline that should be banned. Any industry which includes vending machines at one end of the spectrum and mentoring programmes at the other is a very broad church encompassing different activities which should be judged on individual merit.

Let's consider redemption schemes, such as Tesco's Computers for Schools. Although there are very few of these schemes, their advertising and point-of-sale activity guarantee huge general awareness and mean that redemption schemes dominate the landscape in any debate about companies working in schools.

It's a shame they do there is a huge amount of investment and a great deal of more designed with input from the children themselves and the results benefit the schools and their communities the communities in which Woolworths also operates. This kind of partnership should be encouraged.

Effective commercial engagement with schools is marked by a proper balance of benefits and a genuine sense of relationship. We regularly monitor views on this balance. This year, through ICM, one question we asked schools was: <sup>3</sup>Following your school's involvement with businesses, which party do you feel has benefited the most?<sup>2</sup> 53% of teachers said that both parties had benefited equally. 42% felt the schools had benefited more than the business. While only 2% felt that the business had benefited more.

This is marketing activity which is policed by every staffroom and school governors<sup>1</sup> meeting in the country. If schemes are balanced and useful they will be used. If they are poorly thought out, they won't be used by schools who take their responsibility to the children in their care extremely seriously.

Opponents of schools marketing often see it as highly cynical. In my experience, the opposite is true. The majority of the work in this market is responsible and is marked by a genuine sense of engagement, commitment and dialogue between businesses and their communities.

These partnerships make traditional advertising and marketing routes look tired indeed. In fact, as 82% of the parents interviewed in ICM's research pointed out, if more of the money that was spent on advertising to kids was actually spent in this way working in schools the world would be a better place.

Responsible, carefully researched and properly piloted campaigns should be encouraged.

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