



NEWS RELEASE

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ENCOURAGING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE – STANBROOK ATTACKS “CROSSFIRE”

Jo Revill, Health Editor of *The Observer*, introducing the Seventh Annual Conference of the Food Advertising Unit (FAU), called it a useful and timely forum for openly debating the issues around food advertising to children.

Lionel Stanbrook, Director of the FAU, setting the scene for delegates at the conference, criticised the current level of debate on advertising to children as: “...crossfire between those who throw meaningless statistics at each other rather than debate the real issues”. He also attacked consumerist propaganda as: “...junk writing from the tribunes of the variably concerned citizen”. He added that Charles Gallichan’s study into the effectiveness of public policy advertising campaigns, which was launched at the end of the conference, pointed the best way forward when it came to Government initiatives.

Representatives of the three main political parties - a Labour backbencher, the Liberal Democrat spokesperson on Women’s Issues and a Conservative Shadow Deputy Health Minister - then engaged in a unique political panel discussion to debate how best to promote healthier lifestyles.

Opening the debate, Debra Shipley MP (Labour) stated that it was important children were receiving the right messages about eating healthily. Whilst accepting that the lack of physical activity amongst schoolchildren was not helping the situation, she argued that food advertising to children was to blame for undermining many of the existing healthy eating messages currently being put out. She proposed that children should also be more actively encouraged to walk to school, dance and play sports.

Sandra Gidley MP (Lib Dem) noted that advertising represented only one part of a complex jigsaw. She was, however, concerned by reports that Government had no intention of regulating further in the area of food advertising to children. It was her personal belief that greater regulation in the area of food advertising to children should be introduced. In order to stimulate interest amongst children to eat more fruit and vegetables, she suggested a “Bend It Like Beckham” campaign to promote bananas.

Chris Grayling MP (Conservative) noted that healthy eating messages seemed to change almost daily, with experts unable to agree between themselves what was healthy and what was not – citing the example of milk in particular. He also wondered whether the introduction of a advertising ban during children's television programming would also make the advertising of toothpaste to children illegal. He also considered that consumer power was often underestimated and could prove to be hugely important in this area, referring as an example to the massive growth in health food products over the past twenty years or so.

Karen Barber, Campaigns & New Media Manager at the Food & Drink Federation, outlined what the food industry was doing in relation to health promotion. Echoing Mr Grayling, she said: "Consumers often receive conflicting messages about diet and lifestyle. We believe that nutrition education must be based on sound science, and that accredited nutritionists and dieticians are the ones that should be providing advice on diet and health-related issues....It's about energy balance. It's not about diet or physical exercise but both together."

Aileen Thompson, European Director of Corporate Communications for Kellogg Company of Great Britain, then provided an overview of the Media Smart initiative, of which her company was a sponsor, which had been launched on 13 November. The initiative, which is aimed at six to eleven year olds, came about as the result of industry appreciating that engagement, dialogue and action to improve media literacy amongst children was key. She went on to say: "Media Smart understands that business is increasingly a major global player and with that authority comes responsibility. We want to promote critical thinking and critical viewing. Children are exposed to commercial messages in many ways in modern society. Media Smart will help them process the information they receive from advertising and become more critical users of the media."

A second panel discussion took place in the afternoon on the subject of diet and physical activity. Angela Balding (Survey Manager, School Health Education Unit) provided details of her organisation's "Fit To Succeed" Devon-based initiative aimed at increasing levels of participation in physical activity amongst eight to eighteen year olds, both in and out of school. Dr Paul Gately (Lecturer in Exercise Physiology & Health, Leeds Metropolitan University) emphasised the importance of ensuring that adequate investment in such intervention programmes would be key to the successful realisation of long-term policy objectives. The short-term costs associated with such initiatives were almost always

recouped by long-term success. Meanwhile, Dr Brian Young (Economic Psychologist, University of Exeter) added that: "...a small imbalance in energy can lead to a gradual but persistent weight gain over a long time scale consisting of several years."

Reviewing the international experience of campaigns to promote physical activity, Nick Cavill (Managing Director, Cavill Associates) concluded that it was essential Governments thought long-term and integrated their own programmes with community approaches.

Charles Gallichan (Founder, Giraffe Marketing), launching his review of public health campaigns, stated that: "The messenger needs to be credible; Government or even the NHS provenance will be rejected. The campaign must be seen to come from a source that isn't seen to be Whitehall controlled. It must be seen to be a health-based issue and not a Government campaign."

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Notes to editors:

1. The Food Advertising Unit (FAU), based in the offices of the UK Advertising Association, is a centre for information, communication and research in the area of food advertising, particularly TV advertising to children. In addition to the commission and publication of research, the FAU holds an annual conference, produces a bulletin and is an active and influential participant in the debate surrounding children and commercialism. The FAU has also produced and widely distributed its ParentPower booklets, which are designed to help parents consider the commercial nature of the modern world, and how best to introduce their children to it. Further details about the FAU can be found at www.fau.org.uk
2. The Advertising Association is a federation of 25 trade bodies representing the advertising and promotional marketing industry, including advertisers, agencies, the media and support services in the UK. It is the only body that speaks for all sides of an industry that was worth over £16.5 billion in 2001. Further information about the AA, its membership and remit is available on our website at: <http://www.adassoc.org.uk/>
3. Debra Shipley MP is the Labour Member of Parliament for Stourbridge. She is also a member of the House of Commons Select Committee on Culture, Media & Sport. Sandra Gidley MP is the Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for Romsey. As well as being the party's spokesperson on Women's Issues, she is a member of the Shadow Cabinet. Chris Grayling MP is Conservative Member of Parliament for Epsom & Ewell. He was promoted to the Shadow Ministerial Team in November 2002.
4. Further details of the Media Smart initiative can be obtained by e-mailing its secretariat on mediasmart@ergo-c.com
5. Nick Cavill was formerly Head of the Physical Activity Programme at the Health Education Authority.
6. Charles Gallichan was formerly Head of Advertising at the Health Education Authority.