

# Church calls for sexual health campaigns to take precedence over condom advertising

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Advertising standards codes: Church gives view on topics ranging from doctors endorsing products on-air to the use of sacred music in radio adverts

The Church of England has called for greater investment in public health programmes aimed at teenagers, rather than supporting proposals that could see 'round the clock' advertising of condoms, in a submission to the committees responsible for regulating the content and scheduling of advertising in the UK.

"The Church supports the sensitive use of media to offer unbiased and authoritative information to young people, but educational and commercial objectives should not be muddled... The causality that is inferred [in the proposals] between lack of widespread branded condom advertising to under 16s and the extent of Sexually Transmitted Diseases among that same age group is entirely unproven." The Church's submission goes on to call for "the transmission of authoritative messages about contraception – delivered in the context of relationships – designed to give young people confidence to make their own decisions about if and when to engage in sexual activity (and include the viability of abstinence as an option)."

The Church's response also accepts that post-conception family planning centres should be able to advertise their services, but argues that all such advertisers should clearly state whether or not they are able or willing to refer clients to abortion services, rather than place this onus only on those who do not:

"The Church of England combines strong opposition to abortion with a recognition that there can be - strictly limited - conditions under which it may be morally preferable to any available alternative. As the consultation notes, young women who have conceived and are unsure whether they are able to continue with the pregnancy are in an extremely vulnerable position. This is no less the case for those who are opposed to abortion, and it is important that their sensibilities are given due respect and that they are able to clearly understand whether a service they see or hear advertised is likely to include abortion among the options presented to them".

The submission also questions why, under the proposed changes, advertisements for post-conception advice services would appear not be subject to any specific scheduling restrictions preventing such adverts being targeted at under-16s.

The present television and radio advertising standards Codes were last reviewed in their entirety more than six years ago: the television Codes in 2002 and the radio code in 2000. The advertising codes in question are now the responsibility of two industry Committees - the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and the Broadcast Committee of Practice (BCAP) and are independently administered by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). The current review is wide-ranging, covering topics ranging from what limitations should be put on advertising targeted at children, to the marketing of products related to psychic or occult phenomena.

The Church of England's response, from the Mission and Public Affairs Council and Communications Office of the Archbishops' Council, also strongly resists the proposal to allow betting tipsters to advertise on TV and radio. The submission states:

"Lifting the prohibition on broadcast advertising for tipsters – especially during difficult economic times – risks broadening the numbers drawn into gambling more than they can afford, lured by the prospects of easy wins; it also risks deepening the problems faced by those already hooked on betting. Indeed, the timing of the proposal, as the country faces the worst economic situation for many years – and more than 2.22 million people are unemployed – seems extraordinarily ill-judged."

The Church's response also gives views on a range of other areas, including:

pointing to the evidence gathered by The Children's Society's 'Good Childhood Inquiry' on the dangers of commercialising childhood and welcoming the proposed tightening of the rules surrounding advertising targeted at children;

arguing for maintaining the present prohibition on the use of health professionals in TV advertisements, to help reduce the risk of damaging the reputation of the profession;

accepting the argument that allowing low-alcohol products to be targeted at those around the age of 18 risks further normalising the consumption of alcohol to young people, and so agreeing that the rules for low-alcohol products should be harmonised with those regulating higher-alcohol drinks;

resisting moves to drop the specific duty to avoid 'promoting promiscuity' in advertisements;

opposing the proposed dropping of a specific restriction on the use of 'sacred music' in radio advertisement for commercial products, based on recent instances of parodies of hymns and carols and the fact that removing this restriction would erase any specific reference to the need to consider the sensibilities of those with religious convictions.

The full consultation submission for the broadcast Code (BCAP) can be found at:  
<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/bcapcons.doc>

The full submission for the non-broadcast marketing Code (CAP) can be found at:  
<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/capcons.doc>

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