

Your Ref:  
Our Ref: 159461/JB/17



Rhona Brankin MSP  
Public Petitions Committee  
T3.40  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh EH99 1SP  
[Franck.David@scottishparliament.uk](mailto:Franck.David@scottishparliament.uk)

23 November 2010

Dear Rhona

Thank you for your letter of 11 November about the display of adult material in retail outlets.

As I said in my letter of 22 October, I know that many people find the content of adult magazines and newspapers offensive, and I can assure you that the Government is particularly concerned that children should not be exposed to inappropriate material of any kind.

With respect to the display of such publications, as you know there is no law which determines where newspapers or magazines are placed, nor is there any formal classification of something as top-shelf material, limited for sale to adults; it is simply a matter of convention and public demand.

Publishers and wholesalers regularly remind retailers about the placement of magazines, and there are guidelines to assist with this as retailers are of course generally keen to avoid giving offence to their customers.

In an open society like ours, it is necessary to find the appropriate balance between protecting the public and legitimate freedom of choice, and this is what the guidelines are intended to achieve. Some retailers are simply not aware that some images are offensive to some people and, once this is brought to their attention, they may be happy to oblige customers by moving the material to a less prominent position.

Guidance for the display of adult material can be found on the website for the Press Distribution Forum, a new industry body whose purpose is to provide a self-regulated forum for associations and companies involved in the supply and distribution of newspapers and magazines, and to ensure the continuation of a diverse and plural press: [www.pressdistributionforum.com](http://www.pressdistributionforum.com).

Officials at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills also meet regularly with the Periodical Publishers Association (PPA) and maintain an ongoing dialogue on a range of topics, including this subject. They have recently emphasised that the issue is for the whole supply chain to address if self-regulation is to remain viable.

It is also worth noting that the PPA recently stated that it has received no complaints in 2010 about adult material, so if members of the public feel that a retailer is breaching the guidelines and are not satisfied with the retailer's response, they may wish to contact the PPA direct online at: <http://www.ppa.co.uk/contact-ppa/> or by telephoning 020 7404 4166.

You may be interested to know that if 25% of a magazine's readership is under 16, then it would fall under the aegis of the Teen Magazine Arbitration Panel, the magazine industry's self-regulatory body which ensures that the sexual content of teenage magazines is presented in a responsible and appropriate manner. However, none of the magazines commonly referred to as 'lads' mags' come close to that threshold.

While at present we do not believe that there is a convincing case for further Government intervention in media regulation, such as a requirement for publications to be concealed or age-rated, the Government is very conscious of people's concerns and this is a matter that we will be keeping under constant review.

With respect to your specific point about the Government's response to the Papadopoulos report, I have discussed this with my counterparts in the Home Office and the Department for Education. I now understand that the Papadopoulos Review, along with the Buckingham Review and the Byron Review, will all be used as a starting point to lead in to the review of Commercialisation and Premature Sexualisation of Childhood which will begin in December. That said I would like to emphasise that while we await this announcement my Department will continue to retain policy responsibility, and a watching brief for the subject of Petition PE1169.

Thank you for inviting me to Holyrood to discuss this issue in person with The Committee. I am afraid that I will have to send my apologies for this. As already explained to the Committee Clerk, I am involved in taking the Postal Services Bill through the House of Commons, and there are two Bill committee sessions taking place on this day.

**Ed Vaizey MP**  
**Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries**