



Compliance with guidelines on the display of sexually graphic magazines



GEORGE STREET
RESEARCH

24 Broughton Street
Edinburgh EH1 3RH (UK)
Tel; +44(0)131 478 7505 Fax; +44(0)131 478 7504
Email; info@george-street-research.co.uk
VAT No: 502 484862

Registered Office:
St Paul's House
Warwick Lane
London EC4P 4BN (UK)
No: 2364135

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the Public Petitions Committee's consideration of Petition PE1169 which is concerned with the display of sexually graphic magazines in retail outlets.

Petition PE1169 raised concerns surrounding the display of sexually graphic magazines, or so-called "lads' mags", in retail outlets, particularly in relation to such material being displayed at children's eye-level and/or alongside children's titles. For the purposes of this survey the "lads' mags" were specified as Nuts, Zoo, Front and Loaded. The Public Petitions Committee has considered the petition on a number of occasions since it was lodged in June 2008, and has communicated on this topic with the Scottish Government, the Home Office and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Committee has also given consideration to the need for research to ascertain whether voluntary guidelines on the display of such material are being adhered to. The guidelines set out a number of recommendations to minimise complaints from consumers including that:

1. such titles are not displayed at children's eye level or below, to ensure that they are not in the direct sight and reach of children
2. such titles are not displayed adjacent to the display of children's titles or comics
3. where display space restraints preclude the above, that titles with front covers that may cause concern are part-overlapped with other titles so as to minimise the potential for offence to parents with children

Aim:

To provide the Public Petitions Committee with research-based information to inform its decision on whether the voluntary guidelines on the display of sexually graphic material in retail outlets are fit for purpose or need to be reviewed.

Objectives:

The objectives of the research were:

- To ascertain the level of compliance with, and understanding of, the voluntary guidelines on the display of sexually graphic material in retail outlets.

The Committee commissioned this small research study on the level of compliance with, and understanding of, the relevant voluntary guidelines. The survey consisted of survey fieldwork across a range of retail outlets such as newsagents, supermarkets, garages, etc in order to determine the level of compliance with the voluntary guidelines; (152 of these were completed). Sixty interviews also took place with shopkeepers, store managers, etc in order to gauge how the guidelines are understood and applied. Additional interviews were conducted with senior managers in two major retailers.

The fieldwork was completed between 25th January 2011 and 2nd February 2011. The telephone interviews were completed between 9th February and 17th February.

SUMMARY REPORT

Main Findings

Magazine Displays in Shops

Every store that was visited was displaying “lads’ mags”. The magazines that were most often on display were Nuts (86%) and Zoo (80%). Loaded (47%) and Front (40%) were displayed by less than half of the retailers. The majority of displays (76%) were wall displays or high shelve islands (17%) the equivalent of a wall. **Therefore it does appear that most shops have the capacity to display “lads’ mags” at a height that is beyond the eyes of younger children.**

Actual Display Height of Lads’ Mags

The majority of magazines in the stores (66%) were laid out on horizontal display units, so most of them were at a universal height. The only type of outlet where there was a large proportion of stores displaying the magazines differently was supermarkets. **The fieldwork has demonstrated that the majority (65%) of “lads’ mags” are displayed at a height of 1.5m or less.** The guidelines refer to “children’s eye level” rather than a specific height, so it is left to individual stores to decide on what height that should be.

Nature of Display

The guidelines suggest that where “lads’ mags” are not displayed above children’s eye level then the covers should be overlapped to minimise the potential for offence. The major supermarkets and the major CTN stores were the outlets most likely to overlap the covers of Nuts and Zoo to ensure that nothing was visible. Smaller stores appear less likely to be covering up front covers. **One area of notable interest relates to forecourt retailers as none of them display the magazines high up and the majority make no obvious attempt to hide anything that might cause offence.**

Height and Visibility

The majority (59%) of “lads’ mags” observed during the fieldwork displayed at a height of 1.5m or less are being displayed with no obvious attempt to hide the front covers. The “lads’ mags” that are most frequently displayed are Nuts and Zoo. The majority of the magazine displays at the lowest heights did not attempt to hide the cover. Because the industry guidelines do not refer to specific heights there is scope for retailers to use

their own judgement about what is “children’s eye level”. The evidence from the fieldwork suggests that some retailers are displaying these products in a way that will be clearly visible to children. **It may be that the guidelines and retailers own briefings are too non-specific and that this results in a degree of confusion as to what is and what is not allowed.**

Retailer Awareness of Guidelines

A clear majority of retailers (80%) said that they were aware of specific guidelines about how magazines should be displayed on their premises. The highest proportion of retailers not aware of any guidelines for their premises was in the independent CTN sector.

The indicative evidence from this research is that around 75% of retailers are aware of the guidelines and that these guidelines apply to “lads’ mags”.
Communicating Guidelines and Policy

Independent retailers are less likely to have a formal written policy about the display of “lads’ mags”. Where retailers do have a policy on the topic it is communicated to staff by a mix of notices on the wall (e.g. in back office / kitchen) (35%), staff briefings (29%), intranet (23%), inductions (19%), admin system (e.g. planogram) (16%) and written instructions (10%). The majority of retailers who took part in this survey said that complying with the guidelines was easy and that they were able to do so for most of the time. **Despite the assertion by the majority of retailers that it is easy to comply with the guidelines and that they do so all the time the evidence from the fieldwork is that compliance is not actually comprehensive.**

CONCLUSION

The fieldwork was conducted right across Scotland and in a range of different retailers. The telephone interviews focused on the same retailers that the fieldwork had been conducted at. The summary points and conclusion are shown below.

- Most shops have the capacity to display “lads’ mags” at a height that is beyond the eyes of younger children and a clear majority of the retailers can see no obstacles to compliance with the guidelines.

- Most retailers (80%) said that they were aware of guidelines about magazine displays on their premises and 53% had their own guidelines for the display of “lads’ mags”.
- Retailers reported that there were almost no obstacles to compliance with the guidelines.
- The observations from the fieldwork were that the majority (65%) of “lads’ mags” are displayed at a height of 1.5m or less.
- The majority (59%) of “lads’ mags” displayed at a height of 1.5m or less are being displayed with no obvious attempt to hide the front covers.
- Independent retailers are less likely to have a formal written policy about the display of “lads’ mags”.
- No forecourt retailers display the magazines high up and the majority make no obvious attempt to hide anything that might cause offence.
- Guidelines produced by major retailers are more specific about heights than the industry’s own guidelines.
- Out of the sixty retailers only 4 reported that they had received any negative comments relating to the display.

The fieldwork conducted across Scotland, indicates that despite widespread claims of awareness of and compliance with the industry guidelines, there is a high proportion of retailers where “lads’ mags” are being displayed at low heights and without any attempt to hide front covers.

RESEARCH REPORT

Methodology and Sample

George Street Research was appointed to carry out this research for the Committee. An inception meeting was held at Holyrood on 19th January 2011 and the method was agreed. The survey consisted of:

- (a) Survey fieldwork across a range of retail outlets such as newsagents, supermarkets, garages, etc in order to determine the level of compliance with the voluntary guidelines; (152 of these were completed)
- (b) A small number of interviews with shopkeepers, store managers, etc in order to gauge how the guidelines are understood and applied. (60¹ of these were completed)
- (c) Depth interviews with senior managers in two major retailers

The fieldwork was completed between 25th January 2011 and 2nd February 2011. The telephone interviews were completed between 9th February and 17th February. Where possible the telephone interviews were linked to the fieldwork so that we could probe whether observed displays matched with stated policies.

A total of 152 fieldwork visits were conducted.

Table 1a – Sample for Fieldwork

	n	%
C- Store (multiple / chain)	30	19.7
Convenience Store Franchise	24	15.8
CTN ² (independent)	23	15.1
Major CTN Chain	22	14.5
Major Supermarket	20	13.2
Convenience store (independent)	18	11.8
Forecourt Retailer	15	9.9
Total	152	100

The mix of retail establishments captures a broad cross-section of retailer types in Scotland. The shops were also carried across a broad geography in the following areas: Glasgow (24 shops), Edinburgh (36), Dundee (16),

¹ Originally 50 of these interviews were planned. However, the challenge of arranging depth interviews with senior personnel meant that additional store interviews were scheduled

² Confectionery, tobacco, news

Inverness (16), East Lothian (20), Dumfries (16) and Dunfermline (24). Results from a sample of this size should be regarded as indicative rather than statistically significant.

Table 1a – Sample of Retailers Telephoned

	n	%
C- Store (multiple / chain)	9	15
Convenience Store Franchise	9	15
CTN (independent)	13	22
Major CTN Chain	5	8
Major Supermarket	10	17
Convenience store (independent)	6	10
Forecourt Retailer	8	13
Total	60	100

The absolute numbers of retailers contacted by telephone is not sufficiently large to be deemed a representative sample of all Scottish retailers. Results should therefore be regarded as indicative.

The relevant magazine covers for the week when most of the fieldwork visits were completed were.



MAIN FINDINGS

The recommended guidelines produced by the joint industry group for the display of “lads’ mags with front covers or content that may offend some customers are:-

- That you do not display them at children’s eye-level or below, to ensure they are not in the direct sight or reach of children
- That you do not display them adjacent to your display of children’s titles and comics
- That where display space restraints preclude the above, that titles with front covers that may cause concern are part-overlapped with other titles so as to minimise the potential for offence to parents with children

Magazine Displays in Shops

Every store that was visited was displaying “lads’ mags”. The magazines that were most often on display were Nuts (86%) and Zoo (80%). Loaded (47%) and Front (40%) were displayed by less than half of the retailers.

The majority of displays (76%) were wall displays or high shelf islands (17%) the equivalent of a wall. However, in ten shops the magazines were displayed on low shelf islands where the height of the unit was 1.5m or less. In these displays it was not possible to move the magazines to a height that was out of sight for smaller children. However, the majority of the “lads’ mags” were displayed in shelf displays that would be appropriate for high displays if the retailer chose to do that.

Therefore it does appear that most shops have the capacity to display “lads’ mags” at a height that is beyond the eyes of younger children.

Actual Display Height of Lads’ Mags

The majority of magazines in the stores (66%) were laid out on horizontal display units, so most of them were at a universal height. The only type of outlet where there was a large proportion of stores displaying the magazines differently was supermarkets where a quarter of the displays were vertical.

The fieldworkers recorded the approximate height of the lowest “lads’ mags” that were on display.

Table 2 - Display Heights

	Not higher than 1m	Not higher than 1.5 m	Not higher than 2m	Over 2m
TOTAL	16%	49%	30%	5%
Major	10%	60%	30%	-

Supermarket				
Major CTN	23%	55%	23%	-
C Store (multiple)	20%	53%	23%	3%
C-Store franchise	17%	42%	29%	13%
Forecourt retailer	13%	73%	13%	-
C-Store (independent)	22%	39%	28%	11%
CTN independent	4%	30%	57%	9%

The fieldwork has demonstrated that the majority (65%) of “lads’ mags” are displayed at a height of 1.5m or less. The guidelines refer to “children’s eye level” rather than a specific height, so it is left to individual stores to decide on what height that should be. In a depth interview with one of the UK’s biggest chains we discovered that their own guidelines suggested that “lads’ mags” should not be displayed below the height of 1.2m. Clearly it is a matter of opinion as to what age of child the guidelines are specifically referring to. **However, what is clear is that relatively few outlets are displaying the “lads’ mags” on the “top shelf”.**

Nature of Display

The guidelines suggest that where “lads’ mags” are not displayed above children’s eye level then the covers should be overlapped to minimise the potential for offence. The fieldworkers noted whether the magazines on display were covered in any way.

The results for **Nuts** and **Zoo** are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 – Nuts Displays

	No Obvious Attempt to Hide	Limited Visible Material	Overlapped with nothing visible
TOTAL	52%	18%	40%
Major Supermarket	37%	11%	53%
Major	36%	18%	45%

CTN			
C Store (multiple)	69%	7%	24%
C-Store franchise	38%	31%	31%
Forecourt retailer	70%	10%	20%
C-Store (independent)	67%	33%	-
CTN independent	47%	26%	26%

(base =130 - all stocking Nuts)

The major supermarkets and the major CTN stores were the outlets most likely to overlap the cover of Nuts to ensure that nothing was visible. Smaller stores appear less likely to be covering up front covers. **One area of notable interest relates to forecourt retailers as none of them display the magazines high up and the majority make no obvious attempt to hide anything that might cause offence.**

Table 4 – Zoo Displays

	No Obvious Attempt to Hide	Limited Visible Material	Overlapped with nothing visible
TOTAL	58%	14%	28%
Major Supermarket	37%	11%	53%
Major CTN	45%	10%	45%
C Store (multiple)	61%	18%	21%
C-Store franchise	50%	19%	31%
Forecourt retailer	90%	-	10%
C-Store (independent)	82%	18%	-
CTN independent	67%	17%	17%

(base =122 - all stocking Zoo)

As would be expected the pattern for Zoo is broadly the same as it is for Nuts.

Once again the largest stores are more likely to be covering up the front covers and forecourt retailers do stand out as not making much of an attempt to hide the front covers of the “lads’ mags”.

Height and Visibility

Clearly the most critical factor in terms of exposure to children is the combination of height and visibility. Therefore analysis was carried out to identify the proportion of specific “lads’ mags” that are on display at 1.5m or less without any obvious attempt to hide material likely to cause offence.

Table 5a– All Magazines Displayed at 1.5m or less

	Nuts n = 89	Zoo n = 80	Loaded n = 47	Front n = 40
No obvious attempt to hide	57%	65%	55%	58%
Limited visible material	16%	10%	17%	13%
Overlapped with nothing visible	27%	25%	28%	29%

What this table shows is that the majority (59%) of “lads’ mags” observed during the fieldwork displayed at a height of 1.5m or less are being displayed with no obvious attempt to hide the front covers.

The “lads’ mags” that are most frequently displayed are Nuts and Zoo. The following two tables illustrate the relationship between height and the type of display for each of these two publications.

Table 5b – Display of Nuts Magazine

	Not higher than 1m n = 21	Not higher than 1.5 m n = 68	Not higher than 2m n = 35	Over 2m n = 6
No obvious	57%	57%	37%	50%

attempt to hide				
Limited visible material	-	21%	23%	33%
Overlapped with nothing visible	43%	22%	40%	17%

(Base = all displaying Nuts n=130)

In the case of Nuts magazine, the majority of the magazine displays at the lowest heights did not attempt to hide the cover. The pattern is replicated for Zoo magazine.

Table 5c – Display of Zoo Magazine

	Not higher than 1m	Not higher than 1.5 m	Not higher than 2m	Over 2m
	n = 18	n = 62	n = 38	n = 4
No obvious attempt to hide	67%	65%	47%	25%
Limited visible material	-	13%	18%	50%
Overlapped with nothing visible	33%	23%	35%	25%

(Base = all displaying Nuts n=122)

The industry guidelines do not refer to specific heights and as such there is scope for retailers to use their own judgement about what is “children’s eye level”. Therefore we cannot state definitively that the guidelines are not being followed by large numbers of retailers. However, the evidence from the fieldwork suggests that some retailers are displaying these products in a way that will be clearly visible to children.

It may be that the guidelines and retailers own briefings are too non-specific and that this results in a degree of confusion as to what is and what is not allowed.

Where possible the telephone fieldwork was conducted with the retailers and stores that fieldworkers had visited. Therefore we asked retailers, where we knew that they had displayed these magazines at 1.5m or less and where there had been no obvious attempt to hide the front covers whether they were aware of any guidelines. **The majority of the retailers said that they were aware of such guidelines.**

Proximity to Other Materials

The fieldworkers were asked to observe whether the “lads’ mags” were displayed close to any non-magazine products that might have been suitable for children such as toys. In only two of the 152 outlets was this perceived to be a problem. The “lads’ mags” were normally displayed next to other types of magazines. The fieldworkers recorded the types of magazines that were in direct proximity to the “lads’ mags”. **The actual proximity to children’s publications appears to be a guideline that is being widely followed as there was only one incidence where “lads’ mags” were displayed next to children’s magazines.**

Table 6 – Magazines next to “lads’ mags”

Motors (cars & bikes)	50%
Sport	36%
Music	31%
Gossip / celebrity	22%
Women’s	16%
Pornography	5%
Computer / computer games	5%
Health & fitness	5%

(all answers under 5% are excluded)

Retailer Awareness of Guidelines

To complete the interviews with retailers the stores where the fieldwork had taken place were specifically targeted. It was originally planned that 50 such interviews would take place. However, due to the challenges of scheduling depth interviews with senior personnel from the major retailers an additional

10 interviews were conducted to specifically boost the numbers of major supermarkets in the survey. This resulted in 10 completed telephone interviews with managers from the major retailers.

The retailers stocked a wide range of magazines. The types of magazines that were almost universally stocked were Music, Motors, Gossip, Women’s, and Lads’ Mags. Additional magazine types stocked by the majority of retailers were Sport, Children’s, and Homes/Gardens. Only a quarter of the establishments stocked pornography. Interestingly a depth interview with a major retailer revealed that the outlet type dictated their policy on the stock of pornography. It was their policy not to stock pornography in their high street outlets. **A clear majority of retailers (80%) said that they were aware of specific guidelines about how magazines should be displayed on their premises.** A further 4 retailers were aware that there were guidelines for the display of lads’ mags. However, they were not aware of what the guidelines were for their particular premises. The highest proportion of retailers not aware of any guidelines for their premises was in the independent CTN sector.

All the retailers who were aware of guidelines for their own premises or who were aware of guidelines in general were asked how they decide which magazines the guidelines applied to.

Table 7 – Magazines guidelines apply to

Lad’s Mags / sexually graphic	87%
Pornography	50%
Offensive front covers	10%
Offensive content	4%
Covers with CDs DVDs	2%
Don’t Know / Other	6%

(base – all aware of guidelines – n =52)

Table 7 illustrates that a clear majority of those who are aware of some form of guidelines claim that they apply those guidelines to “lads’ mags”.

The indicative evidence from this research is that around 75% of retailers are aware of the guidelines and that these guidelines apply to

“lads’ mags”. The retailers who said that they were aware of some form of guidelines were asked what the guidelines actually were. They were not given any prompts so these answers were spontaneous.

Table 8 – Guidelines for “lads’ mags”

They should be on the top shelf / high up	62%
They should be above children’s eye level	42%
If they can’t be high they should be overlapped	25%
They should be displayed away from children’s titles	21%
Don’t know	15%
Cover in plastic	2%
Not for Under 18’s	2%

(base – all aware of guidelines – n =52)

It is apparent that many of the retailers are aware of some or all of the industry’s guidelines. **However, spontaneous awareness of the guidelines relating to anything other than height is lower.** The retailers who said that they were not aware of any guidelines were asked where and how they displayed “lads’ mags”. There were only 18 retailers who said that they were not at all aware of any guidelines. Those retailers stated that they displayed “lads’ mags” in the following ways:-

- On the top shelf / high up (9 retailers)
- Above children’s eye level (4)
- Overlapped (4)
- No special positioning (4)
- Away from children’s titles (2)
- Don’t stock them (2)
- Rack on the side (1)
- High up, not on to shelf (1)
- Under the counter (1)

The retailers who were aware of specific guidelines were asked how they had heard about the guidelines and if they knew who had developed them.

Table 9 – How they had heard about the guidelines

Head office / company policy	24%
Don't know	24%
Common sense / personal decision	14%
Training	14%
Supplier informed	10%
Trade Publication	10%
Sale of goods checklist	2%
Word of mouth	2%
National Federation of Retail Newsagents	2%

(base – all aware of lads' mags guidelines – n =42)

Only 3 retailers said that they knew who had developed the guidelines. From the responses in Table 9, especially those relating to common sense and personal decision, it is apparent that some retailers are referring to their own guidelines rather than those of the industry.

Customer Reaction

All the retailers were asked whether they had received any comments from customers about the way magazines were displayed in their store. **Out of the sixty retailers only 4 reported that they had received any negative comments relating to the display.** The majority (82%) said that they had never had any comments about magazine displays and several said that customers had complimented their displays.

The negative comments expressed were:-

- Concern that children can see unsuitable magazines (3 retailers)
- Concern about magazine covers (1 retailer)

Communicating Guidelines and Policy

The retailers taking part in the research were asked whether their stores had their own policy relating to the display of "lads' mags".

Table 10 – Whether have own policy on “lads’ mags”

	Yes – written down	Yes – not written	No
TOTAL	45%	9%	47%
Major Supermarket	100%	-	-
Major CTN	80%	-	20%
C Store (multiple)	67%	-	33%
C-Store franchise	13%	-	87%
Forecourt retailer	50%	-	50%
C-Store (independent)	-	67%	33%
CTN independent	8%	8%	83%

(base =58 - all stocking “lads mags”)

The interviews with the larger retailers indicated that their policies took into account the recommendations of the Joint Industry Group but they sought to help staff by making them more explicit. Internal guidelines in these store groups were produced by senior managers responsible for formats and displays.

Table 11 illustrates that **independent retailers are less likely to have a formal written policy about the display of “lads’ mags”**. Where retailers do have a policy on the topic it is communicated to staff by a mix of notices on the wall (e.g. in back office / kitchen) (35%), staff briefings (29%), intranet (23%), inductions (19%), admin system (e.g. planogram) (16%) and written instructions (10%).

Compliance with guidelines

Retailers were read each of the three guidelines and asked how easy it was to comply with them and how frequently they complied with them. Table 10 show the percentages of the retailers who said that it was easy to comply with the guidelines and the percentage of retailers who said they complied all the time or almost all the time.

Table 11 – Ease of compliance & Frequency

	Very Easy/ Quite Easy To Comply	Comply all the time / almost all the time
That you do not display them at children’s eye-level or below, to ensure they are not in the direct sight and reach of children	97%	95%
That you do not display them adjacent to your display of children’s titles and comics	91%	90%
That where there are space restraints titles with front covers that may cause concern are part-overlapped with other titles so as to minimise the potential for offence to parents with children.	93%	83%

The majority of retailers who took part in this survey said that complying with the guidelines was easy and that they were able to do so for most of the time. **Despite the assertion by the majority of retailers that it is easy to comply with the guidelines and that they do so all the time the evidence from the fieldwork is that compliance is not actually comprehensive.**