

ASA submission to Ofcom Consultation on extending the definition of Controlled Premium Rate Services to include all Information, Connection and Signposting Services

1. Background and Introduction

- 1.1. This submission is provided by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and the Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) – the ‘ASA system.’
- 1.2. The ASA is the UK’s independent advertising regulator. We have been administering the non-broadcast Advertising Code (written and maintained by CAP) for 57 years and the broadcast Advertising Code (written and maintained by BCAP) for 14, with our remit further extended in 2011 to include companies’ advertising claims on their own websites and in social media spaces under their control.
- 1.3. We are responsible for ensuring that advertising is legal, decent, honest and truthful and our work includes undertaking proactive projects and acting on complaints to take action against misleading, harmful or offensive advertisements. We are committed to evidence-based regulation and we continually review new evidence to ensure the rules remain fit-for-purpose.
- 1.4. In addition to investigating ads, we also provide a wealth of training and advice services (most of which are free) for advertisers, agencies and media to help them understand their responsibilities under the Codes and to ensure that fewer problem ads appear in the first place. CAP and BCAP provided over 389,000 pieces of advice and training in 2017.
- 1.5. The ASA is providing this written submission in response to Ofcom’s consultation on extending the definition of Controlled Premium Rate Services to include all Information, Connection and Signposting Services.
- 1.6. This is in addition to the ASA’s previous submission in response to Ofcom’s call for evidence on Information, Connection, Signposting Services (ICSS).

2. Response to consultation

- 2.1. The ASA acknowledges that, following Ofcom’s review of ICSS to identify the level of harm that it may be causing to consumers and businesses whose customer service numbers may be targeted, there is potential for consumer harm.
- 2.2. We undertook compliance work against 16 ICSS websites with three referred to Trading Standards; we received assurances from seven that they would comply with our rules, and six underwent sanctions that we applied.
- 2.3. As a result of the complaints received we considered that consumers suffered financial detriment through misleading presentation of information on ICSS websites and the Ofcom call for evidence supports this.

2.4. In the interests of reducing consumer harm, the ASA supports Ofcom's recommendation to bring regulation of the issue under one framework to provide greater protection for both consumers and businesses.

Contact

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