

# Online Advertising Taskforce - Progress Report 2025

## Statement from Mark Lund OBE, Deputy Chair

*Against the backdrop of a UK advertising market continuing to grow strongly, the Taskforce has continued to make good progress. I'm pleased to say that with the addition of an A.I group and the introduction of a new focus on how we hinder and prevent Fraud we are making new inroads into the heart of the Taskforce's work of promoting transparency and accountability within the Online Advertising ecosystem.*

*I'm very grateful to Minister Murray for his leadership and close support, and for all the work of the Taskforce secretariat and members, particularly the group heads. This will be a decisive year, and I look forward to the Taskforce's wholehearted endeavour and achievement.*

## Introduction

This progress report from the Online Advertising Taskforce updates on work delivered during 2025 and sets out our ambitious objectives for 2026. The UK advertising market remains a hugely important part of our economy, and the government's Creative Industries Sector Plan published in June 2025 recognised it as a high-growth potential frontier sub-sector that is central to supporting the growth of the creative industries and wider economy. Advertising is in its own right a key creative industry, with forecasts predicting a total ad spend of £46bn during 2025<sup>1</sup>. It is also an exporting success, with UK advertising exporting an estimated £17.9bn of advertising services to the world in 2024<sup>2</sup>.

Online advertising makes up a significant proportion of ad spend, with £4 in every £5 of advertising budgets now spent online<sup>3</sup>. This prominence will only increase, and it is therefore vital that advertising is trusted, and online advertising harms are anticipated and reduced, helping the UK online advertising industry to thrive.

The Taskforce continues to be a valuable forum to raise standards, promote industry initiatives and drive adoption of best practice through its six industry-led working groups. The working groups set further ambitious targets at the start of 2025 for improving trust, transparency and accountability in online advertising, and a new AI-focused working group was established.

This report summarises the aims of each working group and presents the activity and progress made across 2025. It also sets out next steps and objectives for each working group in 2026.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://adassoc.org.uk/our-work/uk-ad-spend-rose-11-4-to-12-5bn-in-q3-2025/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://adassoc.org.uk/credos/advertising-pays-2025/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://adassoc.org.uk/our-work/uk-advertising-records-42-6bn-spend-in-2024/>

## Who we are

The Taskforce was established in 2023 to deliver a programme of work to help improve transparency and accountability in online advertising, to reduce harms, tackle illegal advertising and minimise children being served advertising for products and services illegal to sell to them.

Working with the advertising industry including key players in the online advertising supply chain, regulators, and relevant government departments and agencies, the Taskforce aims to:

- Improve the evidence around the in-scope harms and issues around transparency;
- Identify ways in which it can enhance voluntary initiatives or standards to tackle the in-scope harms and increase transparency, by pushing the ambition and/or take-up of these initiatives and considering the development of new standards where gaps are identified;
- In relation to any identified gaps, consider whether Taskforce-led action could help address them and add deliverables to its work programme where it is decided it can.

The Taskforce is chaired by the DCMS Minister of State, Ian Murray, with Deputy Chair Mark Lund, Chairman of the Advertising Standards Board of Finance.

Annex A sets out further background information, including a full list of members.

## Industry-led working groups

Over 2025 six industry-led working groups continued to focus on addressing specific challenges faced by the sector, bringing forward innovative solutions and helping secure wider industry buy-in. Each group is chaired by an advertising industry leader and has membership from across industry, key players in the online advertising ecosystem, and regulators and government.

For 2025, the working groups were:

- Age Assurance
- AI
- Gold Standard
- Influencer Marketing
- Information Sharing
- Intermediary and Platform Principles.

In November 2025, the Taskforce membership agreed that transparency should be a key focus of the Taskforce, recognising a need to focus on fraudulent advertising using the online advertising ecosystem. The [Terms of Reference](#) were refreshed accordingly, and a new working group is being established - the Ad Fraud and Standards working group. This will focus specifically on fraudulent advertising and standards, and will support the government's wider Fraud Strategy.

## **Age Assurance**

### **Objective**

The Age Assurance working group, chaired by the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers (ISBA) seeks to improve standards of age assurance to reduce children's exposure to advertising for age-restricted products. It is building a more detailed understanding of the current landscape of age assurance online, and how it can be improved.

For 2025, the group agreed to work with multiple brands and platforms to establish a pilot to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of advertisers' current targeting practice in limiting underage exposure to advertisements for age-restricted products.
- Establish a baseline for levels of on-target audience compliance, from which to assess the merits of developing a methodology for future periodic reporting and age assurance.

### **Activity and progress**

In early 2025, the working group established and refined a proposal for the pilot; brands and platforms were engaged to participate in the pilot, and a scoping and feasibility assessment completed. The working group commissioned Nielsen for this study; Nielsen submitted a proposal for a Controlled Digital Ad Ratings (DAR) Test which would provide a scientific and reliable measure of the accuracy of ad targeting.

The test began in Q4 of 2025, with Nielsen assessing the advertising campaigns of participating brands across a series of platforms in November and December. The pilot was conducted successfully, and a report is being produced for participants to summarise the results, as well as individualised feedback for brands.

### **Outcomes and next steps**

The initial headlines from the Nielsen report were presented to the Taskforce at its meeting in early 2026. The research served as a useful proof of concept for how ad targeting compliance can be monitored, and the working group is considering how it could serve as a baseline for future work.

## **AI**

### **Objective**

The AI working group, chaired by the Advertising Association (AA), was established in 2025, to explore AI's effect on trust, transparency and accountability in advertising content and placement. This group set three key areas of focus and delivery:

- Review and evolve existing industry principles/code of conduct for AI use in advertising.
- Measure and analyse how AI in advertising affects trust in advertising.
- Examine key issues, including labelling, to understand the impact of AI on advertising transparency.

### **Activity and progress**

The group's initial focus was on the development of a Best Practice Guide on the safe and ethical use of AI in advertising. The Advertising Association led drafting, highlighting the relevant legislation and ASA self-regulatory rules and drawing on expert insight from working group participants. The guide was publicly launched at LEAD (the advertising industry's annual summit) in February 2026<sup>4</sup>. The final guide has two versions targeting large businesses and SMEs separately, ensuring the guide is accessible and relevant to different actors within the advertising supply chain. In addition, a one page 'explainer' was created as a tool for highlighting the key principles.

In parallel, the AI working group also gathered evidence relating to AI and its impact on trust. The AA incorporated AI-related questions into its Quarterly Trust Tracker survey, to understand the public's perception around the use of AI in advertising. Indicative findings were presented to working group members for consideration and questions relating to AI and trust will be included in future rounds of the research, helping to build the evidence base and monitor trends.

Finally, the group considered issues around AI labelling in advertising. Konrad Shek (AA) drafted a report commissioned in 2025 by the International Council for Ad Standards (ICAS) Global Think Tank. Findings from the report, which have gained international interest from organisations such as the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA), and World Federation of Advertisers, were presented to the working group. The working group is following the international developments and will continue to be updated on Konrad Shek's involvement with other groups, including the EU AI Office, which has begun drawing up a voluntary code of practice on marketing and labelling of AI-generated content.

### **Outcomes and next steps**

A key focus for the AI working group in 2026 will be maximising the visibility and take-up of the AI Best Practice Guidance. The guide was given significant publicity at LEAD 2026, and there were over 10 mentions in industry press pieces (with combined editorial reach of over 1 million people) following the news release which featured supportive quotes from Minister Murray, Taskforce Deputy Chair Mark Lund OBE, and Advertising Association CEO Stephen Woodford. Campaign magazine has also published a follow-up Op-Ed by Mark Lund setting out the guide's eight principles<sup>5</sup>. The Advertising Association is developing a broader communications plan to sustain attention and encourage adoption across the industry.

Work will continue on monitoring the impact of AI on advertising content and its effect on consumer trust, through regular research and feedback. We are also exploring how to expand this research into specific themes in greater depth, and anticipate using the findings as the basis for an article in Advertising's Association's 'Advertising's Big Questions' series.

The Advertising Association will also continue to influence the debate around AI labelling through its participation in the EU AI Office working group. ICAS has also approached the Advertising Association to write a follow-up to the original AI labelling study. The working group will be briefed regularly and used as a sounding board for any inputs to the Code.

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<sup>4</sup>

<https://adassoc.org.uk/our-work/best-practice-guide-for-the-responsible-use-of-generative-ai-in-advertising/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/eight-principles-ad-practitioners-use-ai-responsibly/1947988>

## **Gold Standard**

### **Objective**

The Gold Standard working group, chaired by Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB UK), focuses on promoting awareness and uptake of IAB UK's Gold Standard. This is a certification scheme that incorporates industry initiatives and standards to address shared challenges in the online advertising ecosystem, such as addressing ad fraud and improving transparency to support greater consumer safety, and increase business trust in online ads.

### **Activity and progress**

A new Gold Standard specification was launched in January 2025, updating and expanding its scope, and increasing its effectiveness. Changes include an expansion to encompass specifications for emerging advertising channels like retail media and CTV, and a new sustainability pillar for the Gold Standard criteria.

Across the year, IAB UK and the working group focused on promoting the benefits of Gold Standard certification to industry, and engaged with a wide-range of companies across the advertising ecosystem. In addition, IAB UK continued to seek pledge support towards the Gold Standard from advertisers so they will work with digital advertisers who are Gold Standard certified where possible. The Government Communication Service became a pledge supporter of the Gold Standard in November, demonstrating the UK Government's commitment to promoting a responsible, transparent and safe digital advertising ecosystem. By October 2025, a total of 84 companies had been engaged (including those who have been certified and those who have registered their interest in becoming Gold Standard certified) with the Gold Standard, with 45 of those on 2025 specification.

### **Outcomes and next steps**

A new working group will be set up in 2026 to focus on ad fraud and standards (see further details below), which will be co-chaired by IAB UK and government; the Gold Standard working group will therefore conclude its activities as part of the Online Advertising Taskforce. The Gold Standard will continue to be a core offering for IAB UK and expanding the number of industry participants will remain a key focus. IAB UK will continue to periodically update the Online Advertising Taskforce on adoption numbers as needed.

## **Influencer Marketing**

### **Objective**

The Influencer Marketing working group, chaired by ISBA, was set up to identify and agree better standards to be incorporated into the next iteration of the [Influencer Marketing Code of Conduct](#), an industry initiative that is co-owned by ISBA and the Influencer Marketing Trade Body (IMTB) which represents talent agencies. The Code includes requirements for brands working with influencers, the agencies who represent them, and the influencers themselves.

The working group had a major role in the design and launch of the [fourth edition of the Code](#), which was published in November 2024. Key updates for that edition included new protections for children and young people from age-inappropriate or age-restricted influencer content, ensuring that ads are representative, protecting the health and wellbeing of influencers themselves, and considering environmental sustainability. For 2025, the group

focused on promotion and increasing adoption of the Code of Conduct and set a stretching target of covering 50% of the market.

### **Activity and progress**

With a key focus on promoting and increasing coverage and sign-up to the Code, much of the work in 2025 has focused on engagement with brands, agencies and influencers. In May 2025, ISBA and IMTB announced a [new wave of signatories](#) to the Influencer Marketing Code of Conduct. This brought representation to approximately 35% of the market.

Promotion of the Code continued in 2025, and it has attracted more attention and signatories across the year. With the latest recruitment by the end of 2025, we believe that the target of 50% market coverage was achieved.

### **Outcomes and next steps**

The work of this group has driven up standards across the influencer marketing space, meaning that more brands, influencers and agencies are advertising more responsibly. With the support of the wider taskforce, ISBA and IMTB will continue to promote and drive uptake of the Code of Conduct over the course of 2026, including identifying sectors where signatories are under-represented.

They will also seek to work with platforms to coordinate campaigns by content creators to promote and advocate the Code, as well as educating creators on the Code's provisions. ISBA is in discussion with TikTok regarding such initiatives.

This work will continue as part of ISBA's influencer workstream. The Taskforce will be kept updated with developments and seek government and other Taskforce member support as necessary.

## **Information Sharing**

### **Objective**

The Information Sharing working group, chaired by the Advertising Association (AA), was established to examine existing information sharing mechanisms as well as barriers to greater sharing of intelligence on malvertising between trusted partners in the advertising eco-system.

For 2025, this working group committed to establishing and undertaking a working pilot partnership, to ensure that information on data scams and fraud using the advertising supply chain can be shared quickly and safely.

### **Activity and progress**

This group has evolved into a smaller subset of stakeholders: namely Amazon, Google and the Global Signal Exchange (GSE), to develop a pilot for sharing online fraudulent ad signals. The GSE platform is run by the not-for-profit OXIL Research. Since its launch in 2024, the platform has processed nearly a billion signals across financial, e-commerce, telecoms and online dating sectors. The key benefit of the platform is that it allows trusted partners to share fraud-related intelligence in real-time with other organisations, including law enforcement, to surface new insights and address volume cybercrime.

A group workspace for the pilot has now been set up on GSE, and the Advertising Association has access to it as the nominal 'owner'. Amazon and Google have started sharing and analysing each other's signals, including information about malicious URLs and attack type (e.g. malware, scams, cloaking, impersonation etc.) from known malicious threats. Note that a single signal could represent multiple ad campaigns pointing to a single malicious URLs.

The pilot, though initially modest in scope, will increase the amount of data and data types being shared over time. It will act as a confidence-building measure between participants, helping them determine what overlap and uplift the exchange of data provides, especially as domain intelligence can provide important information about the origins of these threats.

At the LEAD summit in February 2026, this work was brought to the attention of the wider advertising industry during a panel session focused on malicious advertising and consumer protection, with calls for more industry participation from a GSE representative.

In parallel, the AA has been involved in the Home Office working group around the design and delivery of their wider Fraud Strategy, as well as a Google led working group developing an international best practice guide for data sharing to combat fraud.

### **Outcomes and next steps**

If the pilot is deemed successful, it will provide the basis to share raw malvertising signals in real-time and at scale, recruit other partners and connect with law enforcement to act on specific intelligence.

The next steps are:

- Following discussion at the LEAD summit, to reach out to wider industry to seek greater participation. We have already reached out to a number of significant actors, inviting them to join the next stage of the pilot.
- Depending on the group, we may integrate the pilot within the Online Crime Centre (OCC) setup as part of the wider Fraud Strategy. In the meantime, the Advertising Association remains an active participant of the OCC's Design and Delivery Group.
- Formalise and integrate KPIs into the pilot.

### **Intermediary and Platform Principles**

#### **Objective**

The Intermediary and Platform Principles (IPP) working group, chaired by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), focuses on the continued implementation of a full-scale IPP framework and its integration into the wider ASA regulatory framework. IPP supports social media and demand-side platforms (which provide services to advertisers to buy digital ad space (inventory) across a number of digital channels) to promote the UK non-broadcast advertising code (the CAP Code) and enforce it in the event that the platform is informed by the ASA of an advertiser's repeated non-compliance.

An initial IPP pilot was conducted by ASA and IAB UK from 2022 to 2023, testing principles for major companies in the digital advertising supply chain to adhere to on a voluntary basis,

helping to ensure their advertisers comply with the CAP Code. Participating companies included Adform, Amazon Ads, Meta, Google, Yahoo for Business, Snapchat, TikTok and X.

The IPPs provide clarity and consistency to platforms, helping them to support the ASA to secure compliant advertising online. Embedding these within platforms helps to reduce regulatory risk, strengthens trust with regulators and advertisers, and demonstrates leadership in responsible advertising. A consistent approach across intermediaries also helps to support brand safety, reduce exposure to harmful or misleading advertising, and contribute to a healthier digital advertising marketplace.

Overall, the IPPs are intended to help consumers by reducing exposure to ads that are misleading, socially irresponsible or otherwise harmful, increasing confidence in online advertising, and ultimately supporting informed decision-making.

### **Activity and progress**

The ASA has continued to plan and develop the full-scale IPP framework and has conducted a recruitment phase, bringing the main social media and demand-side platforms into the policy development stage. In December 2025, it raised awareness of the IPP framework to the long tail of relevant platforms, inviting their participation in the next steps.

### **Outcomes and next steps**

The ASA will continue to work with the largest social media companies and demand-side platforms to fully integrate the IPP framework into the UK's established advertising self-regulatory system. Through the Principles, the ASA will be able to hold platforms and intermediaries accountable for promoting the CAP Code to advertisers, and, for cases of repeated non-compliance by advertisers, act as 'back-stop' enforcement partners.

The aim for 2026 is to achieve and implement industry and ASA system agreement on the Principles; the reporting channels that will ultimately deliver the transparency and accountability that are key to the Principles; the funding; and the overall governance structure. The policy development stage will be undertaken in Q1 of 2026, with the planned full framework launch expected from summer 2026 making this a potential world first for increased regulation of online advertising.

## **Ad Fraud and Standards**

### **Objective**

At the Taskforce meeting on 10th November 2025, the Minister for Creative Industries, Media and Arts and Taskforce members agreed to the establishment of an additional working group focused on fraudulent advertising which will be co-chaired by the government and IAB UK.

The Ad Fraud and Standards working group will help to understand the advertising ecosystem, examine best practice, and identify gaps in transparency mechanisms or adoption of existing standards. The group will focus on ensuring there is a robust understanding across industry of existing transparency mechanisms that help minimise the chance of malicious advertising entering the legitimate online advertising supply chain. It will

also work to identify any gaps which can be addressed to strengthen either the efficacy of these mechanisms or their widespread adoption.

The group will run for 12 months, with the possibility to extend if additional work needs to be completed, and report findings back to the Online Advertising Taskforce.

### **Next Steps**

Following the agreement of Terms of Reference and membership, this group has agreed to produce the following:

- A comprehensive mapping exercise of what transparency standards and mechanisms already exist to detect, disrupt and prevent malicious advertising from entering the supply chain, how they are used by industry, and the benefits they provide. The group will aim to present this to taskforce members by the end of June 2026.
- Using that mapping exercise, a gap analysis to examine whether further transparency mechanisms are required beyond the current suite, or whether the remaining challenge is adoption of existing standards. A roadmap will be created setting out where further interventions are needed and what needs to happen to deliver change in these areas, both from industry and government. The group will report back to Ministers in early 2027.

### **Conclusions**

Throughout 2025, the Taskforce's industry-led working groups achieved important milestones in improving standards and reducing online advertising harms through bringing together key stakeholders across the ecosystem to tackle shared challenges.

As the Taskforce moves into 2026, with a refreshed focus on transparency, it will continue to be ambitious in pursuing its aims to improve trust, transparency and accountability in the online advertising supply chain. It is important that the government and industry continue to work together on this mission. Tackling these challenges through collaboration can play a central role in helping the advertising sector thrive as a frontier creative industry in the UK, with strong growth and exports.

## Annex A: Information and Background

### Membership

- Rt Hon Ian Murray MP, Minister for Creative Industries, Media and Arts (DCMS) - **Chair**
- Mark Lund, Chairman, Advertising Standards Board of Finance - **Deputy Chair**
- Fran Dowling, Deputy Director of Fraud Policy, Home Office
- Vita Maynard, Deputy Director of Information Resilience & Public Safety, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
- Tony Thomas, Deputy Director of Consumer Policy, Department for Business and Trade
- Guy Parker, Chief Executive, Advertising Standards Authority
- Rob Newman, Director of Public Affairs, Incorporated Society of British Advertisers
- Sinead Coogan Jobes, Head of Policy & Public Affairs, Internet Advertising Bureau UK
- Konrad Shek, Public Policy and Regulation Director, Advertising Association
- Stephen Woodford, Chief Executive, Advertising Association
- Richard Lindsay, Director of Legal and Public Affairs, Institute of Practitioners in Advertising
- Sayra Tekin, Director of Legal, News Media Association
- Helen Fairfax-Wall, Chief Policy and Communications Officer, Stop Scams UK
- Antony Walker, Deputy CEO, TechUK

Information on the background and structure of the Taskforce is set out in the [Terms of Reference](#).