



Road-testing the IAB UK creator qualification: pilot insights on advertising compliance training

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Contents

Summary	3
Overview and purpose of the pilot	4
Key implementation insights from the workshops	4
Perceived strengths of the training	5
Areas for refinement.....	6
Wider issues raised by participants	7
Implementation and adoption considerations	7
Recommendations for next iteration	8
Priority refinements	8
Longer term considerations.....	9
Concluding observations.....	9

Summary

The two workshops provided an early, practice-facing test of selected elements of the newly launched IAB UK Creator Qualification. They generated useful pilot-stage feedback on how creators understood, received and applied the training content, particularly around advertising disclosure, regulatory responsibility and day-to-day commercial content decisions. The findings are therefore best understood as implementation insights: they indicate where the training appears clear, useful or in need of refinement, but do not establish its effectiveness across the wider creator economy.

Participants broadly recognised the need for clearer, creator-facing education on advertising rules, especially around disclosure, the ASA/CAP framework, CMA consumer protection obligations, and the practical difference between organic content, gifted content, paid work and controlled brand partnerships. This gives early support for the qualification's core premise, while showing that regulatory guidance needs to be translated into more practical decision-making tools creators can use quickly and confidently.

The training's strongest moments appear to have been those that made regulatory expectations operational: what counts as payment, what counts as control, where #ad should appear, and how compliance can help creators push back against brands asking for weaker disclosure. One creator observed that the material around disclosure gave them confidence in commercial settings to resist brand pressure to bury an ad label or disclose incorrectly. This is a useful signal of practical relevance, though not evidence of sustained behaviour change.

The pilot also identified several implementation issues that are likely to matter for clarity and adoption. Some terminology appeared too legalistic or too industry-facing. For instance, one creator said 'compliance' needed defining, described 'drives growth' as generic marketing language, and suggested replacing 'consumers' with 'audience'. Participants also wanted more concrete examples, platform-specific guidance, downloadable reference material, more practical case studies and clearer positioning of the qualification's value to creators.

Wider discussion suggested that creator compliance cannot sensibly be treated as a creator-only issue. Brands, agencies and managers shape the briefs, sign-off processes and disclosure pressures that creators encounter. This suggests that the qualification's wider value may thus depend on whether it is embedded across the creator marketing supply chain, rather than treated as a creator-only learning intervention.

The next iteration should therefore translate the legal content into clearer creator-facing decision tools: sharper explanations of key regulatory distinctions, more realistic worked examples, and practical resources that creators can use when campaign questions arise. It should also support an adoption model that treats creators, brands, agencies and managers as shared participants in advertising compliance, rather than placing responsibility on creators alone.

Overall, the pilot indicates that the training can support creator understanding of advertising compliance, while also identifying targeted refinements needed to strengthen clarity, usability and adoption.

Overview and purpose of the pilot

1. The workshops formed part of an applied pilot for an asynchronous training programme for UK content creators, developed by IAB UK. The purpose was not to study creators as a social group, generate new empirical theory, or profile participant behaviour. The pilot was designed as an implementation exercise, road-testing how far selected short training modules could support creators' practical understanding of UK advertising rules, including creators' day-to-day commercial content decisions. It also made clear prior to participation that the workshop was a skills exercise, not legal advice, and that findings would be anonymised and aggregated.
2. Two 90-minute creator workshops were facilitated by Responsible Marketing Advisory (RMA) and convened at their London offices, with hybrid participation: the morning session (Workshop 1) involved 9 creators, of whom 5 attended in person and 4 joined remotely; the afternoon session (Workshop 2) involved 7 creators, split evenly between 7 in-person and 7 remote participants.
3. The training overview provided by IAB UK shows a broad programme: Module 1 introduces the qualification and the value of compliance; Module 3 addresses what makes content an ad; Module 4 covers disclosure rules; Module 5 addresses advertising content; Module 6 covers contracts, codes and professional standards; and later modules address campaign measurement, platform practice, trust and long-term career growth. The workshops used selected excerpts from the training, chiefly those concerned with the application of UK advertising and consumer protection rules to influencer and creator content (Modules 1, 3 and 4).

Key implementation insights from the workshops

4. Five main insights emerged from the two workshops. They should be read as early implementation observations rather than as representative evidence of the wider creator economy.
5. The first major implementation insight is that legal clarity needs to be delivered in more accessible **creator-facing language**. Participants did not reject regulation; they wanted rules that could be applied at speed, across platforms, and without needing a lawyer beside them. This came through strongly where participants discussed the difference between payment, control, commercial relationships, gifted products and organic content.
6. A second, related insight concerned **terminology**. In Workshop 2, one creator argued that 'compliance' should be defined because creators do not necessarily enter the industry thinking of themselves as regulated advertising actors. The same participant criticised 'drives growth' as vague marketing language and suggested that 'protect consumers' should become 'protect your audience', because creators understand their relationship with followers in relational rather than transactional terms. This is significant because it goes to the training's perceived relevance and likely adoption: creators are more likely to engage with guidance that maps onto how they describe their relationship with their audience and their day-to-day working practices. If the language sounds like it belongs to advertisers rather than creators, the training risks being understood as externally imposed, advertising-facing compliance instruction.
7. The third insight relates to the need to **reinforce the benefit to creators**, not only the risk. Several participants asked what the qualification would actually do for them. In Workshop 2, for example, one creator put the question bluntly: will this make brands and agencies more likely to work with qualified creators? The qualification's potential value is likely to depend not only on the quality of the learning content, but also on whether it functions as a signal of responsible professional practice in the creator marketplace. If brands, agencies and platforms do not recognise or use it in commissioning decisions, the training may remain a

useful individual learning tool rather than developing into a credible industry-facing standard. In that case, its value is likely to remain educational rather than systemic.

8. The fourth implementation insight concerned **shared responsibility**. Some participants repeatedly pointed out that creators are often asked by brands, agencies or managers to produce content in ways that may not align with UK disclosure expectations. Participants in Workshop 1, in particular, expressly suggested that brands and talent agents should also complete some form of training, because creators often find themselves educating the very organisations commissioning the work. This matters because creators are not always the party setting the brief or approving the copy. A creator-only model risks placing responsibility too narrowly on the person who may have the least control over campaign terms. The finding is also significant because it frames compliance as a shared implementation challenge and suggests that the qualification's wider value may depend on whether it is embedded beyond individual creator learning and used to support more consistent expectations across the creator marketing supply chain.
9. The fifth major insight relates to **platform reality**. Participants raised Instagram paid partnership labels, TikTok placement, carousel posts, stories, reposts, long-form YouTube integrations and the risk that disclosure tools do not always map neatly onto real content formats. A sharper point also emerged around the gap between platform-native labelling and regulatory sufficiency: creators may use the tools available to them, but it was felt that those tools did not necessarily address the regulatory issue of whether the commercial nature of the content is sufficiently clear to the audience in context. This is important because advertising literacy cannot be separated from the design and affordances of the platforms through which creator advertising is published. Effective training needs, therefore, to translate rules and compliance expectations into more practical conditions of platform publication, incl. format, visibility, workflow and platform-tool constraints, rather than treating disclosure as a purely abstract rule.

Perceived strengths of the training

10. The strongest feature of the pilot content was **its practical orientation**. Participants responded well when the training moved from abstract compliance language to the more specific disclosure rules and consequences. In Workshop 1, one creator said the disclosure module gave them confidence to tell a brand that disclosure must be done properly, rather than hidden or weakened. That is a meaningful implementation signal, though not proof of behavioural change.
11. The **presenter-led format** also appeared to land reasonably well. In Workshop 1, participants described the presenter as engaging, although the introduction became less compelling towards the end. This suggests the format is viable but pacing matters. For an asynchronous delivery format, the material must be sufficiently lean to support completion, while retaining enough detail to guide real-world application.
12. Moreover, the training seems to have **improved immediate understanding in specific moments**. In Workshop 1, for example, after an explanation of the ASA and CMA, one participant said the explanation gave them a reasonably clearer understanding of the two bodies. The workshop feedback offers some early evidence that the training has the potential to clarify complex regulatory responsibilities and improve understanding of specific compliance concepts at the point of delivery but does not establish measured knowledge uplift without independently evidenced pre/post data.

Areas for refinement

13. The opening module needs tightening. It currently tries to do too much: explain the industry, justify the qualification, introduce IAB UK, discuss compliance, reassure creators, and position creator marketing as serious professional work. Workshop 1 participants found it helpful but rather long, with one noting they began switching off towards the end. A stronger opening in a subsequent iteration could centre more around creator benefit by merely addressing three priorities quickly: why this matters, what creators will learn, and how it can help them in practice. Given that many creators work in short-form environments, the course may also benefit from shorter, modular video segments that mirror the pace at which creators are used to consuming and producing content.
14. Another significant refinement concerns the way the training explains **the interaction between advertising self-regulation and consumer protection law** (i.e., when the ASA is likely to matter, or when consumer protection law matters). Moreover, the pilot content correctly distinguished the ASA/CAP 'payment and control' test from wider CMA-facing consumer protection obligations, including situations where a commercial relationship may still need to be made clear even if CAP Code application is less straightforward. However, participant discussion suggests that this distinction was not fully settled by the training content. Instead, questions persisted around own-brand promotion (creators may not always recognise that promoting their own course, product or service can raise disclosure and transparency questions), gifted products, PR events, reposted content and multi-brand posts. This points less to a flaw in the legal framework being introduced than to a need for shorter, more worked examples, including what a creator is expected to do in borderline cases.
15. Participants found the examples on how to disclose generally useful as clear illustrations of the basic rule, but feedback suggests **these examples risked feeling too neat when set against the realities of creator campaigns**. Specifically, some participants indicated that the examples did not fully address more complex campaign situations, and identified further real-life examples they wanted the training to address, especially where campaigns involve long-form content, integrated sponsorships, reposts and brand-led pressure to preserve an organic feel. This suggests a need for training content that moves beyond tidy compliance scenarios and tests the rules against more realistic formats and creator workflows (e.g., Instagram story sequences, TikTok captions, YouTube integrated sponsorships, affiliate links, PR gifts, own-brand promotion, events, carousels, reposts and cross-border campaigns involving global brands or audiences).
16. Linked to this, some participants wanted **more post-by-post analysis**: what is compliant, what is not, and why, while others expressed their interest in downloadable resources, real-world examples and scenarios closer to creators' day-to-day work. For this audience, more practice-focused examples appear not just supplementary but the main route through which marketing communications rules become usable decision-making tools.
17. Participants also pointed out that broad **claims about performance** needed support. In Workshop 1, a participant challenged the statement that disclosed content may perform 'or better' than undisclosed content, calling it 'unsubstantiated'. That criticism is fair. Unless the course can cite reliable evidence, claims about performance should be treated cautiously or reframed as trust- and risk-management claims.

Wider issues raised by participants

18. The discussion in Workshop 1 stayed closer to the displayed excerpts (Modules 1, 3 and 4), particularly disclosure, ASA/CMA roles, platform tools, pricing, accessibility and examples. Participants also raised **broader ecosystem issues**, including brand accountability and sign-off, contracts and morality clauses, talent-agent literacy, enforcement credibility and whether non-disclosure is policed consistently, platform constraints and defamation-type questions. Similarly, the discussion in Workshop 2 ranged more openly into adjacent legal and professional concerns, including creator-owned products and services, UGC made for brand channels, reposting liability, long-form YouTube/podcast integrations, copyright licensing for music in campaigns, AI updates, platform workflows and ongoing CPD-style updates.
19. Although both workshops tested the training, the afternoon discussion more visibly exposed the **surrounding professional infrastructure** needed for adoption. These wider discussions should not be treated as evidence that the advertising course must become a general creator law course. They do, however, show that creators experience advertising compliance as part of a broader professional risk environment. The appropriate response is *not* to widen the qualification into a catch-all legal training product, but a stronger next iteration would benefit from sharpening its advertising-compliance remit and signposting adjacent legal risks separately. Clearer boundary-setting would help preserve the course's regulatory coherence while recognising that creators experience ad disclosure, contracts, intellectual property (e.g., music licensing), defamation, platform takedowns and related issues as connected aspects of professional practice. This would make the training better scoped and even more credible for industry adoption but folding these issues into the current formulation could dilute the product.

Implementation and adoption considerations

20. Adoption will depend on more than content quality. Creators asked about the **communication strategy** behind the qualification, i.e., how it would be displayed, whether brands would recognise it, and whether it would help them win work. Without a visible credential, the incentive appeared weak and its value as a market signal may remain limited. A further adoption question is whether the qualification should be positioned primarily for early-stage and mid-tier creators, or also for creators whose campaigns may carry greater visibility. The pilot evidence does not establish likely uptake differences across creator tiers, so this should be treated as a design question rather than a finding.
21. The **cost** of the training also came up, although the feedback should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive. One participant suggested they had expected a price closer to £150, which was useful because it showed that a lower price is not automatically perceived as more attractive. For at least some creators, price may also signal seriousness: if the qualification is positioned as a professional credential, pricing it too low could risk making it feel like a light-touch add-on rather than a meaningful marker of advertising literacy and professional standards. The issue, then, is not simply affordability, but the balance between accessibility and perceived credibility.
22. A related point was **who should bear the cost**, which may be a barrier for part-time, early-stage or income-variable creators. The discussion did not point simply to a preferred creator price point; it raised a broader implementation question about where the cost should sit in the creator-brand ecosystem. Some participants queried whether it is fair or realistic for creators alone to absorb the cost, particularly if brands, agencies and platforms benefit from a stronger compliance indicator. This suggests that a purely creator-funded model may be less robust than a mixed model, e.g., where brands, agencies or platforms fund access when they require or strongly encourage completion as part of campaign onboarding. A tiered model could also reduce the risk that the qualification is perceived as more accessible to established creators than to smaller or early-stage creators.

23. Participants also raised the issue of **time**. One participant pointed out that a 90-minute course could be difficult if brands require completion during quick turnaround campaigns. Coupled with the cost, both of these issues point to a practical solution: brands should fund or bundle the training where they require it.
24. **Ongoing currency** was another issue. There was a concern that static certification in a moving regulatory environment will date quickly. In Workshop 2, participants asked how qualified creators would be kept up to date when disclosure rules (or advertising rules more generally) change. Introducing an annual update mechanism, e.g., a short CPD-style refresh, would address participant concerns about evolving rules and practices and possibly acquiring a static credential with limited durability.
25. There were also **accessibility** considerations. Workshop 1 participants suggested that some wording could feel overwhelming, especially where rules are expressed as 'likely' rather than clearly operationalised. The pilot thus suggests that the training's practical value lies not only in explaining the rules, but in converting legal uncertainty into clear and usable decision architecture such as decision trees, checklists and more real-life worked examples that support more consistent application and help creators move from recognising the rule to applying it reliably in live brand-partnership contexts.

Recommendations for next iteration

26. Drawing on these pilot-stage findings, the following recommendations identify some practical refinements that would strengthen the qualification's clarity, usability and adoption potential.

Priority refinements

- Clarify secondary framing terms early. The pilot suggests that the core regulatory tests were not the only source of friction; supporting terms like 'compliance' and 'creator economy' also shaped how participants received the training. Explaining these in *creator-facing* language would make the regulatory content feel more practical and less like material imported from brand, agency or legal discourse.
- Strengthen the ASA/CAP and CMA distinction with short examples showing more clearly when each framework is likely to matter. The pilot suggests that creators need a practical map and operational clarity, rather than a regulatory explanation standing on its own.
- Clarify sequencing and applicability earlier. The training should help creators distinguish very early in the training between the *core* disclosure questions covered in the piloted modules (1, 3, 4) and *additional* advertising-content rules that may be triggered by context, including product category, claims made, audience, platform format or sector (without suggesting that some obligations are lower priority).
- Include worked borderline scenarios on gifted products, PR events, own-brand promotion, reposts, multi-brand posts and long-form sponsorship, with particular attention to how payment, gifting and control operate in practice. These are the situations where creators appeared to need more than a headline rule.
- Create downloadable one-page reference sheets (e.g., 'Do I need #ad?', 'Where should disclosure appear?' and 'What if I am promoting my own product or brand?' as well checklists and decision trees) to build a richer and more practical resource pack for creators (and advertisers but only where appropriate).
- Review claims about commercial performance. Statements suggesting that disclosed content may perform as well as, or better than, undisclosed content should either be evidenced or reframed as trust- and risk-management claims.
- Include short scenario quizzes *after each module* to allow misunderstandings to be corrected before they compound into a weaker end-of-course assessment.
- Consider shortening and/or further modularising the video content, especially the opening module, so creators can absorb the key points quickly without losing the essentials.

- Develop a more visible credential system: e.g., a badge, email signatures or forms of brand-facing verification with clear rules on permitted use.
- Consider a parallel brand/agency companion version or module: the pilot tested a creator-facing qualification, so its current form may not reasonably be presented as suitable for all industry actors. However, the creator-only model risks locating responsibility too narrowly with creators, despite participants' accounts of non-compliant or confused requests from brands and agencies. Participants' feedback strongly suggests that baseline advertising literacy is also needed on the commissioning side, where briefs, approvals and disclosure expectations are often shaped.

Longer term considerations

- Build in a periodic renewal model or an update process: given that expectations, regulator guidance and platform tools can change quickly, a refresher (supplemented e.g., by interim update notes or email alerts) would help preserve the practical reliability of the training after the initial qualification.
- Develop separate signposting pathways for adjacent legal issues (incl. e.g., contracts, reputation risks, platform takedowns): this would acknowledge (and meet to an extent) creators' wider professional risk needs without turning the qualification into a general creator law course.
- Consider a tiered adoption strategy: free or subsidised access for early-stage creators; brand-funded access where completion is required; and integration into influencer marketing platforms where feasible.
- Establish a post-launch evaluation: this might include, for example, completion data, learner feedback, selected follow-up indicators on confidence and intended practice, to allow future claims about usefulness or knowledge change to rest on stronger evidence.
- Consider a guided support tool, potentially including an AI-assisted FAQ based only on approved course content (though any such tool should be clearly framed as training support, not legal advice).
- Test the revised content with a broader creator mix, including early-stage, part-time, neurodiverse and sector-specialist creators. This would help assess whether the training works beyond professionally engaged participants.

Concluding observations

27. This pilot was designed as an applied road-test of training usability, implementation readiness and potential knowledge change, not as research into creators as a group or as behavioural profiling. It was designed to test selected short excerpts (Modules 1, 3 and 4) helping influencers apply UK advertising rules in practice, with anonymised and aggregated findings used to support refinement of the qualification.
28. The findings suggest a promising training model. Participants appeared to value advertising compliance guidance when it spoke directly to their working realities. One of the strongest pilot-stage insights is that creators did not merely respond to the training proposition in the abstract; they tested it against live points of professional uncertainty, including brand pressure, gifted products, global briefs, platform labels, own-brand promotion, long-form content and responsibility when content moves across accounts.
29. The training is therefore on the right track but would benefit from sharper execution. The next version should be less declaratory and more operational. Less 'this matters'; more 'here is what you do when a brand sends the brief'.
30. If refined and deployed with care, IAB UK's qualification can become a useful implementation tool for clearer advertising disclosure and more consistent creator-brand practice, particularly if it is recognised and used by creators, brands, agencies and managers as part of routine campaign onboarding. These findings remain pilot-stage and context-specific. They provide

credible early evidence of practical relevance and implementation potential but not proof of sector-wide adoption readiness, sustained changes in creator practice, or measurable regulatory improvements.