

**bbfc** View what's  
right for you



# Classification Guidelines

Age Ratings. Shaped By You.

**87%**

of parents agree with  
BBFC age rating decisions  
all or most of the time

**85%**

trust BBFC age ratings to indicate  
whether content is suitable for  
themselves or their family

Trust in BBFC age  
ratings has grown to

**90%**

among parents/caregivers  
in the last five years

**99%**

recognise at least one BBFC  
age rating symbol

(78% recognise them all)

**97%**

of people see a benefit to age  
ratings for some or all audiences

**81%**

of people want consistent age  
ratings across cinema, DVD and  
Blu-ray and Video on Demand/  
streaming services

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# The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) is the independent film and video regulator for the UK. We are here to help everyone choose age-appropriate films, videos and websites, wherever and however they watch or use them. We do this primarily through our widely recognised and trusted age ratings and content advice.

Every BBFC age-rating decision and every piece of content advice is based on our Classification Guidelines, which we refresh every four to five years through an extensive consultation with thousands of people across the UK. This gives us an unmatched insight into what audiences find acceptable for different age groups.

The result is a transparent, well-understood and trusted classification system that gives people the best information to help them choose what to view and to protect children and vulnerable adults from harmful content.

We are not-for-profit and are funded through the fees we charge for our services.

We classify:

- films, trailers, advertisements and other content for theatrical (cinema) release on behalf of local authorities who licence cinemas under the UK's licensing legislation<sup>1</sup>
- video works distributed on physical media under the Video Recordings Act 1984 (VRA)
- video content distributed on Video on Demand and streaming services (VoD) under a voluntary, self-regulatory service
- commercial and internet content distributed via the UK's Mobile Networks under a voluntary, self-regulatory service

As well as being based on consultation with thousands of people across the UK, our guidelines incorporate other relevant research, expert advice and our accumulated experience. The guidelines, and our practice in applying them, pay particular attention to changes in audience expectations, attitudes and concerns and to changes in the law.

Here, and throughout the guidelines, we take video content to include films, programmes and other content released on DVD and Blu-ray and on VoD services.

We take responsibility for applying the guidelines to all content submitted to us, to ensure their application and interpretation is consistent, fair and reasonable. From time to time, issues may arise that are not addressed directly in the guidelines. Where such issues occur, we will deal with them in line with the standards expressed and implied in these guidelines. The guidelines are not a legal document and should be interpreted in the spirit of what is intended as well as in the letter.

We will provide, on request, guidance on the interpretation and application of these guidelines.

<sup>1</sup>Since 31 March 2016 the BBFC has sub-contracted the assessment of cinema advertisements for commercial goods and services to the Cinema Advertising Association, while retaining responsibility for classifying, on behalf of local authorities, films, trailers, public information films and charity campaigns, and other cinema content.



# Shaped by you.

Our latest guidelines consultation  
involved 12,000 people.



# Guiding principles

## Our guiding principles are:

- to protect children and vulnerable adults from potentially harmful content
- to empower consumers, particularly parents and those with responsibility for children, to make informed viewing decisions
- to enable content to reach the widest possible audience appropriate for the theme and treatment
- to support the right of adults to choose their own entertainment as long as it remains within the law and is not potentially harmful

We fulfil these principles chiefly by providing and publishing age ratings and content advice for films and videos. Content advice gives a detailed breakdown of the issues that result in a particular age rating, as well as other issues likely to be of relevance to audiences.

Our extensive research into UK public opinion guides us in ensuring that our classification decisions reflect public sensibilities and expectations, especially as these change over time. We also consult regularly with experts on a range of issues. Where input relating to harm is inconclusive, our own experience and expertise help us to make a judgement as to the suitability of content for classification at a particular age category, taking into consideration whether the availability of the material to the age group concerned would run contrary to broad public opinion.

In relation to harm, we will consider whether the material, either on its own or in combination with other content of a similar nature, may cause any harm at the category concerned. This includes not just any harm that may result from the behaviour of potential

viewers but also any moral or societal harm that may be caused by, for example:

- desensitising a potential viewer to the effects of violence
- degrading a potential viewer's sense of empathy
- encouraging a dehumanised view of others
- encouraging antisocial attitudes
- reinforcing unhealthy fantasies
- eroding a sense of moral responsibility

Especially with regard to children, harm may also include impairing social and moral development, distorting a viewer's sense of right and wrong and limiting their capacity for compassion.

We will not classify material that is in conflict with the criminal law, and we will have regard to whether the material has arisen from the commission of an unlawful act. As the UK does not have a single legal system, we take account of the different legal systems that coexist. Further details about the applicable legislation can be found in the 'Annexe: legal considerations'.

# General classification considerations

**There are general factors that may influence a classification decision at any level and in connection with any issue. These factors are of particular importance when content lies on the borderline between two age categories.**

## Context

We consider the context in which an issue (such as sex, language or violence) occurs. In doing this we take account of factors such as:

- the setting (historical, fantasy, realistic, contemporary)
- the apparent intentions or manner of presentation
- the original production date (for example, outdated attitudes in some older content might be considered less offensive and consequently classified at a lower category)
- the expectations of the likely audience
- any special merits or value in the content as a whole

## Theme

Classification decisions take into account the overall theme, including its treatment and the sensitivity of its presentation.

Filmmakers and other content producers are free to explore controversial themes and subjects, and we will assess them in accordance with our guidelines. Certain challenging themes (for example, suicide, substance addiction, sexual violence) are unlikely to be appropriate at U and PG. In principle, however, most themes can be presented in a manner that allows classification at 18 or, where suitable, at lower categories.

We are likely to require a less restrictive age rating where difficult themes are handled in a reassuring and age-appropriate manner, or

where there is a positive outcome. We are likely to require a more restrictive age rating where difficult themes are handled in a manner likely to create or reinforce anxiety.

## Tone and impact

The overall tone may also affect the classification decision. While the presentation of specific issues, such as sex and violence, may not be problematic at a particular category, a bleak or unsettling tone may result in a higher age rating. Other tonal considerations that influence classification include the extent to which the content presents a despairing view of the world, or the extent to which transgressive or harmful behaviour is condoned or normalised.

Classification decisions take into account the potential impact of the content, how it may make the audience feel. This may include the presentation of credible real-world scenarios about which audiences, especially younger audiences, are likely to be anxious (for example, terrorism, abduction, suicide, self-harm). People's expectations of genre are also important, for example regarding horror films, where threat may be more significant than the level of violence, or regarding action films, where people might expect certain types of choreographed and unrealistic violence.

The presence of multiple classification issues may result in a cumulative impact that makes a higher age rating more appropriate.





# Specific classification considerations

**This section identifies concerns that apply, to a greater or a lesser degree, at all classification levels, and sets out the general approach that we take. The concerns are listed in alphabetical order.**

**Pages 16 to 27 provide specific guidance for U through to R18 with regard to such concerns. This should be read together with the ‘General classification considerations’.**

## **Dangerous behaviour**

Classification decisions will take into account any detailed portrayal of criminal and violent techniques, and glamorisation of easily accessible weapons such as knives. Content that portrays antisocial behaviour uncritically is likely to receive a higher age rating. Content that, taken as a whole, promotes illegal behaviour may be cut or found to be unsuitable for classification.

Portrayals of potentially dangerous behaviour that children and young people might copy will be cut if a higher age rating is not appropriate. The relative ease and likelihood of imitation will also be considered.

Classification decisions may be less restrictive where the risks of any dangerous behaviour are likely to be obvious to the intended audience, or where content may carry valuable messages for younger viewers about dangers. Classification decisions will be more restrictive where novel information (for example, a specific criminal technique) is presented, harmful behaviour is glamorised or risks are not made clear.

## **Discrimination**

Classification decisions will take account of potentially offensive material relating to matters such as race, gender, religion, disability or sexuality, and of the strength or impact of their inclusion. The context in which such material may appear also has a bearing. A lower age rating may be given where:

- discriminatory language, behaviour or attitudes are implicitly or explicitly criticised or challenged
- there is a historical setting in which people would anticipate outdated attitudes or expressions
- attitudes or expressions in older content are a product of their time
- there is value to younger audiences in the representation of the past or the treatment of discriminatory behaviour
- there is no clear discriminatory intent behind the language or behaviour
- discriminatory language is used in a reclaimed or self-referential manner

A higher age rating may be given where:

- discriminatory language, behaviour or attitudes are unchallenged or normalised
- discriminatory language and behaviour are accompanied by threat or violence
- there is a clear power imbalance

Where discriminatory language or behaviour occurs, this will normally be indicated in content advice.

### Drugs

Content that normalises or glamorises drug misuse is likely to receive a higher age rating than content that emphasises the dangers of drug misuse. We may cut highly detailed, promotional scenes of drug misuse if the portrayal is likely to encourage illegal behaviour or presents a harm risk at the category concerned.

Where alcohol, smoking or substance abuse feature to a significant extent in content that appeals to children, this will be indicated in content advice or may result in a higher age rating being given. Classification decisions will also take into account any promotion or glamorisation of such activities.

### Language

The extent of offence that a word, expression or gesture may cause can depend upon the context in which it is used. Responses can vary according to the age, gender, race, background, beliefs or expectations of the viewer.

The advice at different categories, therefore, provides general guidance, taking account of the views expressed in our public consultations.

### Nudity

Nudity with no sexual context is in principle acceptable at all categories, but at U this will be infrequent.

Sexualised nudity will receive a higher age rating. Nudity in a pornographic context – that is, where the content taken as a whole is designed primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal – will only be classified at 18 or R18.



## Specific classification considerations continued

### Sex

We will apply these guidelines in relation to sex to the same standard regardless of the sexual orientation of the activity portrayed.

Sexual activity can range from kissing to unstimulated sex. Progressively stronger sexual content may be permitted at each successive age rating. Overtly sexualised behaviour is a concern at U and PG.

Pornography – content that, taken as a whole, is designed primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal – will only be classified at 18 or R18.

### Sexual violence

The stronger forms of sexual violence, including rape, are not permitted at U and PG, and at 12A/12 should only be implied.

When considering scenes of sexual violence, factors that may lead to a higher age rating include:

- the presence of a gang dynamic (for example, a ‘gang rape’ scene)
- a focus on the victim being overpowered or powerless
- prolonged, detailed or gratuitous depictions
- an emphasis on nudity
- an emphasis on the pleasure of the attacker
- a strong emphasis on the distress and fear of the victim
- a credible real-world setting
- a protracted build-up of sexual threat

Factors that may lead to a lower age rating include:

- brevity and lack of detail
- a valuable message aimed at young people
- a strong narrative justification

We may find content unsuitable for classification if it makes rape or other non-consensual sexually violent behaviour look appealing or acceptable, reinforces the suggestion that victims enjoy such behaviour, or invites viewer complicity in such behaviour.

We are likely to treat references to sexual violence less restrictively than depictions of sexual violence, although any references at the lower categories will generally be oblique or undetailed.

### Suicide and self-harm

When considering portrayals of suicide or self-harm, we assess the relative ease and likelihood of imitation, and may find material unsuitable for classification if a higher age rating is not appropriate.

Classification decisions may be less restrictive where the risks are likely to be obvious to the intended audience, or where material may carry valuable messages for younger viewers about mental health, suicide or self-harm. Classification decisions will be more restrictive where novel information is presented (for example, about specific suicide techniques), where harmful behaviour is glamorised or where risks are not made clear.



### Threat and horror

Where content is targeted at a younger audience, classification decisions will take into account factors such as the frequency, length and detail of scary or otherwise unsettling scenes as well as factors such as the impact of music and sound, and whether there is a swift and reassuring outcome.

The classification of threat and horror will take account of the general tone, impact, realism and supernatural elements of the content overall, as well as the level of detail in individual scenes. Fantasy settings or the inclusion of humour may lead to a lower age rating. The presentation of real-world issues and fears may lead to a higher age rating.

### Violence

Classification decisions will take account of the degree and nature of violence. Content that features the following is likely to receive a more restrictive classification:

- the portrayal of violence as a normal solution to problems
- heroes who inflict pain and injury
- callousness towards victims
- the encouragement of aggressive attitudes
- characters taking pleasure in pain or humiliation

- the suffering of a victim of violence
- the glorification or glamorisation of violence
- gratuitous violence
- violence presented in a credible and realistic context (for example, gang violence, discriminatory violence, domestic abuse)

Content that features the following is likely to be treated less restrictively:

- violence in a historical context
- violence in an action or fantasy context
- violence that lacks detail
- violence that looks unreal, fake or overly staged
- comedic violence
- violence that is challenged or punished

# Other classification considerations

## Education videos

When classifying an education video, including a sex education video, we will take account of the educational purpose of the video and the context in which it is to be viewed (for example in the classroom mediated by a teacher).

## Music videos

Where music videos are short and self-contained, material is less likely to be justified by context, and so we take account of this when classifying them.

## Photo or pattern sensitivity, motion sickness and reactions to low-frequency sound

A small number of viewers are sensitive to flashing and flickering light, or some shapes and patterns, and may experience seizures or other serious physical effects. Some viewers experience feelings of motion sickness or other symptoms when viewing content that features handheld or otherwise moving camerawork, or which feature very low-frequency sounds.

Where clear examples of such imagery or sounds are obvious upon viewing, we will advise the customer of the need to ensure that appropriate warnings are in place. Where necessary, we may require assurances regarding the display of appropriate warnings as a condition of classification.

## Reclassification of older content

Our classification standards change over time in line with public opinion. Older content with an existing BBFC age rating may therefore require a higher or lower age rating if it is submitted to us again.

To ensure the age rating is in line with current audience expectations, we strongly encourage customers to submit such content to us again in order for us to reassess it under current standards. Customers will be required to resubmit the content if the existing rating is a historic rating and therefore no longer valid.

In some cases, previously issued cuts are no longer required, because of changes in our classification standards or amendments to relevant laws. Changes to UK law and its interpretation may also result in cuts being required to content previously passed uncut.

## Release format

Classification decisions may be stricter on video works than for cinema content. This is because of the increased possibility of underage viewing as recognised in the VRA (see 'Annexe: legal considerations'), as well as the increased possibility of works being replayed or sections viewed out of context. Accordingly, a video (either packaged or online) may occasionally receive a higher age rating than for cinemas, or require new or different cuts.

The screen format or visual presentation of a submission may also alter a classification, for example, if the image has been processed in the 3D format, or is shown with an altered aspect ratio such as on an IMAX screen, or if the content is experienced as immersive linear virtual reality (VR). A film may also receive a different rating than before because it is a different edit.

### **Titles**

We will require changes as a condition of classification if the title of a film or video incites hatred or other criminal behaviour or encourages an interest in abusive or illegal sexual activity.

If the title is likely to cause significant offence to a significant number of people if it were displayed in a public place, we will advise the customer to consider carefully the places in which the title is likely to be seen and to take appropriate action, for example, by obscuring certain words on packaging or marketing materials. (This advice is not given in relation to pornographic video works classified R18 as such works may only be supplied or offered for supply in a licensed sex shop.)

### **Trailers and advertisements**

Audiences may choose to see a full-length feature based on expectations of the particular genre at the given classification and on the published content advice. In contrast, audiences have no choice, and often no expectation, about

the accompanying trailers or advertisements, which may be very different in tone and content to the main feature. In addition, because trailers and advertisements are short and self-contained, material is less likely to be justified by context.

For these reasons, classification decisions for trailers and advertisements may be higher than for equivalent material in a main feature.

### **Video games**

With a few limited exceptions, we do not classify video games. We consider for classification those video games contained on discs that feature primarily linear video content and any pornographic video games.

We also advise the Games Rating Authority on the classification of linear video footage contained in games that is not integral to the game. This includes, for example, rewards and video content in games that is designed to be viewed in its own right, without taking forward the narrative drive of the game.

### **Virtual reality**

The BBFC is responsible for classifying linear VR content whereas the Games Rating Authority is responsible for classifying non-linear VR content.

# The classification categories







**The following guidance should be read in combination with the general approach set out earlier under ‘Guiding principles’, ‘General classification considerations’, ‘Specific classification considerations’ and ‘Other classification considerations’.**

**Because content from time to time presents issues in ways that cannot be anticipated, we will not apply these criteria in an over-literal way if such an interpretation would lead to an outcome that would confound audience expectations.**

# Universal

Suitable for all



**U-rated content is suitable for audiences of all ages, although not all U-rated content is aimed at children.**

**Children's content should be set within a positive framework and should offer reassuring counterbalances to any violence, threat or scary scenes. Generally a U is unlikely to unsettle a four-year-old, although it is impossible to predict what might affect any particular child.**

## **Dangerous behaviour**

Potentially dangerous or antisocial behaviour that young children may copy should be clearly disapproved of or wholly unrealistic. There should be no emphasis on realistic or easily accessible weapons.

## **Discrimination**

Discriminatory language or behaviour is unlikely to be acceptable unless clearly disapproved of.

## **Drugs**

References to drugs must be infrequent and innocuous, or have valuable messaging for young children.

## **Language**

There may be very mild bad language. Frequent use may result in a higher age rating.

## **Nudity**

There may be occasional nudity with no sexual context.

## **Sex**

There may be very mild sex references or sexual behaviour (for example, kissing).

## **Threat and scary scenes**

Threat and scary scenes that may unsettle young children should be very mild and the outcome should be reassuring.

## **Violence**

Violence should be very mild and justified by context (for example, comedic, animated, wholly unrealistic). Injury detail should be very mild, brief and undetailed.





# Parental Guidance

General viewing, but some scenes may be unsuitable for young children



**PG-rated content is suitable for general viewing. A PG should generally not unsettle a child aged around eight, although parents and caregivers should be aware that some scenes may be unsuitable for more sensitive children.**

## **Dangerous behaviour**

Potentially dangerous behaviour that young children are likely to copy should not be detailed or presented as safe or fun. Realistic or easily accessible weapons such as knives should not be glamorised. Any focus on antisocial behaviour that young children are likely to copy is unlikely to be acceptable.

## **Discrimination**

Discriminatory language or behaviour should be clearly disapproved of. Some language or behaviour may be permitted if justified by context (for example, reclaimed, historical, lack of discriminatory intent).

## **Drugs**

References to illegal drugs or drug misuse should be brief and carry a suitable cautionary message.

## **Language**

There may be mild bad language only.

## **Nudity**

There may be nudity with no sexual context.

## **Sex**

Sexual activity may be implied, but should be discreet and infrequent. There may be mild sex references and innuendo only.

## **Threat and scary scenes**

Threat and scary scenes should not be prolonged or intense.

## **Violence**

Violence will be mild, with more impactful moments permitted if justified by context. Injury detail, including sight of blood, should be brief.





# 12A/12

Suitable for 12 years and over



**Cinema content classified 12A and video content classified 12 contain material that is not generally suitable for children aged under 12.**

**No one younger than 12 may be permitted to attend a 12A cinema screening unless they are accompanied by an adult. Adults planning to take a child under 12 to a 12A should consider whether the main feature is suitable for that child. To help them decide, we recommend that they check the BBFC's content advice for the film in advance.**

**No one younger than 12 may rent or buy a 12-rated video.**

## **Dangerous behaviour**

Potentially dangerous behaviour that children are likely to copy should not be encouraged. Realistic or easily accessible weapons such as knives should not be glamorised. Antisocial behaviour should not be endorsed.

## **Discrimination**

Discriminatory language or behaviour must not be endorsed by the content as a whole. Such behaviour is unlikely to be acceptable if accompanied by violence, unless clearly condemned.

## **Drugs**

Misuse of drugs or other substances will generally be infrequent. There should be no glamorisation or instructional detail.

## **Language**

There may be moderate bad language. Strong language may be permitted, depending on context and frequency within the content as a whole.

## **Nudity**

There may be nudity, but in a sexual context it should be brief and discreet.

## **Sex**

Sexual activity may be portrayed briefly and discreetly. Moderate sex references are permitted, but frequent crude references are unlikely to be acceptable.

## **Sexual violence**

There may be verbal references to sexual violence provided they are not graphic. The stronger forms of sexual violence, including rape, may only be implied and any sexual threat or abusive behaviour should be brief and negatively presented.

## **Suicide and self-harm**

There may be references to suicide and self-harm, although stronger details are unlikely to be permitted unless justified by context. Portrayals of suicide and self-harm should only be brief and discreet.

## **Threat and horror**

There may be scenes of moderate physical and psychological threat. Although some scenes may be disturbing, the overall tone should not be. Horror sequences should not be frequent or sustained.

## **Violence**

There may be moderate violence, but it should not dwell on detail. Occasional blood and injuries may be shown, but gory images should be infrequent and justified by context (for example, medical detail, fantasy).





# 15

Suitable only for 15 years and over



**No one younger than 15 may see 15-rated content in a cinema.  
No one younger than 15 may rent or buy a 15-rated video.**

## **Dangerous behaviour**

Highly dangerous behaviour should not dwell on detail that could be copied. Whether the depiction of easily accessible weapons is acceptable will depend on factors such as realism, context and setting.

## **Discrimination**

Discriminatory language, themes and behaviour are permitted, but must not be endorsed by the content as a whole.

## **Drugs**

Drug and substance misuse may be shown, but should not be promoted or encouraged by the content as a whole.

## **Language**

There may be strong language. Very strong language may be permitted depending on the context and frequency.

## **Nudity**

Sexualised nudity may be permitted, but graphic detail should be brief and justified by context.

## **Sex**

Sexual activity may be portrayed, but usually without graphic detail. There may be strong sex references, but frequent crude references are unlikely to be acceptable. Content that, when taken as a whole, has the primary purpose of sexual arousal is unacceptable.

## **Sexual violence**

There may be detailed verbal references to sexual violence or abusive behaviour, but graphic descriptions of specific acts are unlikely to be acceptable. The stronger forms of sexual violence, including rape, must not be detailed or prolonged. An intense and sustained focus on sexual threat is unacceptable.

## **Suicide and self-harm**

Scenes of suicide and self-harm should not be frequent or endorsed. Glamorisation of suicide or self-harm may result in a higher rating. Graphic depictions or detailed references are unlikely to be permitted.

## **Threat and horror**

There may be strong threat and horror. A sustained focus on sadistic threat is unlikely to be acceptable.

## **Violence**

Violence may be strong but there should not be sustained focus on the infliction of pain or victims' suffering. The strongest gory images may occur if justified by context (for example, war, medical detail). Prolonged sadistic violence is unlikely to be acceptable.







# 18

Suitable only for adults



**No one younger than 18 may see 18-rated content in a cinema.  
No one younger than 18 may rent or buy an 18-rated video.**

Adults should be free to choose their own entertainment. Exceptions are most likely in the following areas:

- where material is in breach of the criminal law, or has been created through the commission of a criminal offence
- where material risks harm to individuals or, through their behaviour, to society. This may include portrayals of sadistic violence, rape or other non-consensual sexually violent behaviour, particularly where this is made to look appealing, reinforces the suggestion that victims enjoy it, or invites viewer complicity. Other examples may include scenes of drug misuse or suicide/self-harm where the portrayal is sufficiently detailed, glamorised or promotional as to represent a non-trivial harm risk
- where there are more explicit images of sexual activity in the context of pornography (see right)

In the case of videos, which may be more accessible to younger viewers, intervention may be more frequent than for cinema films.

### **Pornography at 18**

Pornography is content that, taken as a whole, is designed primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal. Pornography containing only material that may be simulated is generally passed 18. Pornography containing clear images of real sex, strong fetish material, sexually explicit animated images, or other very strong sexual images will be confined to the R18 category.

Material that is unacceptable in pornography at R18 is also unacceptable in pornography at 18.





# R18

To be shown only in specially licensed cinemas,  
or supplied only in licensed sex shops, and to adults only



**R18 is a legally restricted classification for explicit pornographic works of consenting sex or strong fetish material involving adults. R18-rated cinema content may only be shown to adults in specially licensed cinemas, and R18-rated video works may be supplied to adults only in licensed sex shops and may not be supplied by mail order.**

The following content is not acceptable:

- material that is in breach of the criminal law, including material judged to be obscene under the current interpretation of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 (see 'Annexe: legal considerations' )
- material (including dialogue) likely to encourage an interest in sexually abusive activity that may include adults role-playing as non-adults
- the portrayal of sexual activity that involves real or apparent lack of consent. Any form of physical restraint that prevents participants from indicating a withdrawal of consent
- the infliction of pain or acts that are likely to cause serious physical harm, whether real or (in a sexual context) simulated. Some allowance may be made for non-abusive, consensual activity
- penetration by any object likely to cause physical harm
- sexual threats, humiliation or abuse that do not form part of a clearly consenting role-playing game

STANFORDRO

SEX  
SHOP

SHOW

EXOTIQUE

ONE VIDEO

FREE SHOW

# Intervention and appeals

**Where possible we will carry out our responsibilities through appropriate use of the classification categories, our primary focus always being the protection of children and vulnerable adults from potential harm.**

In some cases, we require assurances, cuts or other changes (for example, the addition of warning captions) as a condition of classification, or as a condition of classifying at a particular category. If necessary, however, we may cut a film or video or determine that it is unsuitable for classification.

## **Advice viewings**

A customer may submit content for advice at any stage of the production process. We will inform them of the likely age rating their content will receive, and where appropriate any changes required to achieve their preferred age rating.

Advice given in such circumstances is not binding and we reserve the right to reach a different decision when the final version is submitted for classification. If the final version differs in any significant respect from the advice version, and if those changes appear to reflect advice we have given, then details of the changes will appear on our website.

## **Optional cuts**

As well as providing our advice service, we work with customers to help them achieve their preferred age rating when they submit their content for classification. Securing a lower age rating may be possible through relatively simple changes. If so, we will offer the customer a choice of accepting either the higher age rating without cuts or the lower age rating with changes as necessary.

Optional cuts are unlikely to be available if the required changes would be very extensive or complex, or would not address a tonal or thematic issue running throughout.

## **Compulsory cuts**

If a film or video raises issues or concerns that cannot be addressed by classification at a particular category, we may require cuts or other changes as a condition of classification.

Such intervention is most likely when the content contains:

- material that may promote criminal activity
- material that is obscene or otherwise illegal
- material created by means of the commission of a criminal offence
- portrayals of children in a sexualised or abusive context
- material that makes rape, other non-consensual sexually violent behaviour or sadistic violence look appealing
- graphic images of real injury, violence or death presented in a salacious or sensationalist manner that risks harm by encouraging callous or sadistic attitudes
- material that reinforces the suggestion that victims enjoy rape or other non-consensual sexually violent behaviour
- material that invites viewer complicity in rape, other non-consensual sexually violent behaviour or other harmful violent activities
- pornography that contains material listed as unacceptable at R18

When the issue relates to the circumstances of filming (for example, in relation to animal cruelty or public indecency), the customer will be given an opportunity to present evidence before a final decision is reached.

### **Unsuitable for classification**

As a last resort, we may find the content as a whole unsuitable for classification, in line with the objective of preventing non-trivial harm risks to potential viewers and, through their behaviour, to society.

We may do so, for example, where a central concept is unacceptable, such as a sustained focus on rape, other non-consensual sexually violent behaviour or sadistic violence.

Before determining that a film or video is unsuitable for classification, we will consider whether the problems could be adequately addressed through intervention such as cuts. In considering whether content is unsuitable for classification, we will keep in mind the inherent difficulty of using behavioural research to draw conclusions about real-world risks, and will have regard to the full range of available evidence, including the views of audiences and our own knowledge and experience.

### **Appeals**

We offer a formal reconsideration process, open to any customer wishing to appeal our classification decision. The reconsideration is free of charge and will normally take fewer than 10 working days.

A customer may also appeal directly to an independent authority. Such an appeal may take place following, or instead of, our reconsideration. In the case of cinema films, the customer (or any member of the public) may contact the local authority that licenses cinemas in a particular area. In the case of video works that we have classified under the VRA, a customer may appeal to the Video Appeals Committee (VAC).

The VAC is independent of the BBFC and can be contacted as follows:

The Secretary  
The Video Appeals Committee  
3 Soho Square  
London  
W1D 3HD  
Email: [secretary@vacappeal.co.uk](mailto:secretary@vacappeal.co.uk)

Customers should note that a reconsideration or an appeal involves looking at the issues afresh. This means that the outcome could, in some circumstances, be more restrictive than the original decision.







# Content advice and other information for audiences

**We publish information about the content of every film and series that we classify.**

Aimed particularly at parents and caregivers, content advice includes:

- a short description of the issues contained in the film or the episodic content. For cinema releases, this appears on the black card shown on screen before the film starts
- an extended version, designed for people who want a more detailed idea of the issues – such as bad language, drugs, sex, violence or the use of discriminatory language – that they are likely to find within the content, before they or their children watch it

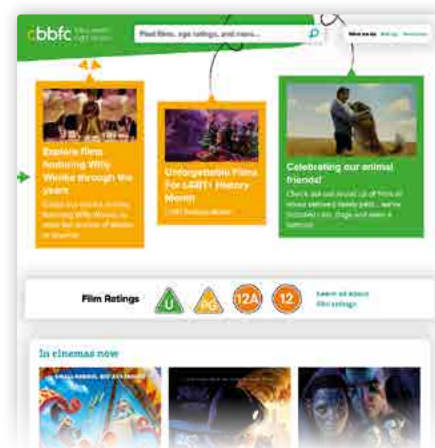
We publish content advice on our website and app the moment a film or video is classified. Our extended content advice for cinema films may only be available from 10 days before the film opens. We encourage people to check our content advice before they decide what is right to view for themselves or their family. All our extended content advice is published with a spoiler warning.

**bbfc.co.uk**

Our website provides a comprehensive database of all the content we classify, including age ratings, content advice and information about cuts. We publish the Classification Guidelines, as well as our press releases, research and Annual Reports. We also publish case studies – including on many films that are set texts for Film Studies courses in the UK – a timeline of key events in our history, and podcasts.

**cbbfc.co.uk**

CBBFC contains content for younger children to help them learn more about our work. It includes activities such as the chance to apply age ratings to trailers for children's films. Parents and caregivers can also find advice about choosing content for children on VoD platforms and information about our education programme.





### BBFC app

Our free app for iOS and Android devices lets audiences check the latest age-rating decisions and content advice, watch trailers, find local showtimes and read our guidelines.

### Social media

We operate official BBFC social media accounts on a number of different platforms, including Facebook, Instagram and X. We share all our news and latest classification decisions, along with topical and relevant resources including articles and case studies. You can ask us quick questions there too. For more detailed questions, you can email us on [feedback@bbfc.co.uk](mailto:feedback@bbfc.co.uk).

### Podcasts

Our BBFC podcast is available to stream from our website, as well as from Apple Podcasts, Soundcloud and Spotify. Each episode focuses on a particular theme or on age-rating decisions, highlighting key issues we took into account and any interesting facts about the classification process, for example any advice we gave, or changes made by the filmmaker or customer to secure a particular age rating.

### Feedback

Your feedback is welcome. Please contact us on [feedback@bbfc.co.uk](mailto:feedback@bbfc.co.uk) or write to us at:

Chief Executive's Office  
British Board of Film Classification  
3 Soho Square  
London  
W1D 3HD





# Annexe: legal considerations

**The following legislation is not listed according to chronology or importance. Instead, it reflects a useful way of explaining the structure of the legal framework that applies to our work.**

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## **The Licensing Act 2003**

England and Wales

## **The Cinemas Act 1985**

Scotland

## **The Cinemas (Northern Ireland) Order 1991**

Northern Ireland

Cinemas require a licence from the local authority in which they operate. The licence must include a condition requiring the admission of children (anyone under 18) to any film to be restricted in accordance with our recommendations or those of the licensing authority. One of the key reasons for the licensing requirement is the protection of children, including from potentially harmful content in films.

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## **The Video Recordings Act 1984**

Video works (including films, TV programmes and some video games) that are supplied on a disc, tape or any other device capable of storing data electronically must have a BBFC classification unless they fall within the definition of an exempted work.

When considering whether to give an age rating to a work, or whether a work is suitable at a particular category, we are required by the Act to have special regard to the likelihood of works being viewed in the home, and to any harm that may be caused to potential viewers or, through their behaviour, to society by the manner in which the work deals with:

- criminal behaviour
- illegal drugs
- violent behaviour or incidents

- horrific behaviour or incidents
- human sexual activity

In considering these issues, we have in mind the possible effect not only on children but also on other vulnerable people.

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## **The Obscene Publications Acts 1959 and 1964**

England and Wales

## **The Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982**

Scotland

## **The Obscene Publications Act 1857**

Northern Ireland

It is illegal to publish a work that is obscene. A work is obscene if, taken as a whole, it has a tendency to deprave and corrupt a significant proportion of those likely to see it. Under the Obscene Publications Act 1959, no offence is committed if publication is justified as being for the public good on the grounds that it is in the interests of science, art, literature or learning or other objects of general concern.

In Scotland, case law implies a similar test would be applied. In Northern Ireland, while there is no express defence of public good it is likely that English law would be taken into consideration.

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### **The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008**

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

### **The Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010/The Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982**

Scotland

It is illegal to be in possession of an extreme pornographic image. Under the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 an extreme pornographic image is one that is pornographic and grossly offensive, disgusting or otherwise of an obscene character, which features an apparently real person and which portrays, in an explicit and realistic way, an act that:

- threatens a person's life
- results, or is likely to result, in serious injury to a person's anus, breasts or genitals
- involves sexual interference with a human corpse
- involves intercourse or oral sex with an animal
- involves non-consensual penetration of a vagina, anus or mouth with a penis or non-consensual sexual penetration of a vagina or anus by another part of a person's body or anything else

Under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 an extreme pornographic image is one that is pornographic and obscene, and which depicts, in an explicit and realistic way, an act that:

- takes or threatens a person's life
- results, or is likely to result, in a person's severe injury

- involves rape or other non-consensual penetrative sexual activity
- involves sexual activity involving (directly or indirectly) a human corpse
- involves sexual activity between a person and an animal

Works we have classified under the VRA are excluded from the scope of the offence unless images have been extracted from such works for the purpose of sexual arousal.

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### **The Protection of Children Act 1978**

England and Wales

### **The Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982**

Scotland

### **The Protection of Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1978**

Northern Ireland

It is illegal to make, distribute, show or possess indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of a child. It is also illegal to make, distribute, show or possess indecent images of children that have been derived from a photograph or pseudo-photograph (for example, by tracing). Offences relating to the possession of such images are contained within the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (England, Wales and Scotland), and the Criminal Justice (Evidence, Etc.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. A child is defined as a person under the age of 18.

## Annexe: legal considerations continued

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### **The Coroners and Justice Act 2009**

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

It is illegal to be in possession of a prohibited image of a child. A prohibited image of a child is a non-photographic or non-pseudo-photographic image that is pornographic and grossly offensive, disgusting or otherwise of an obscene character, and which focuses solely or principally on a child's genitals or anal region, or which portrays specified sexual acts by, of, or in the presence of a child, including masturbation, oral sex or penetration, including sexual acts with animals. A child is defined as being under 18 and an image of a child or other person can include imaginary representations. Works we have classified under the VRA are excluded from the scope of the offence unless images have been extracted from such works for the purpose of sexual arousal.

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### **The Sexual Offences Act 2003**

England and Wales

### **The Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009**

Scotland

### **The Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008**

Northern Ireland

It is illegal to expose oneself with intent to cause alarm or distress – this offence augments the common law misdemeanour of indecent exposure. It is also prohibited for a person to record the private act of another, where the intention of the recording is for the sexual gratification of himself or a third party and where the recorded party has not consented to so being filmed.

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### **The Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015**

England and Wales

### **The Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016**

Scotland

### **The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2016**

Northern Ireland

It is an offence to disclose a private sexual photograph or film without the consent of any individual who appears in the photograph or film, if it is done with the intention of causing that individual distress (or, in Scottish law, causing them fear, alarm or distress).

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### **The Public Order Act 1986**

England, Wales and Scotland

### **The Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987**

Northern Ireland

It is illegal to distribute, show or play to the public a recording of visual images or sounds that are threatening, abusive or insulting if the intention is to stir up racial hatred, or if racial hatred is likely to be stirred up. It is also illegal to distribute, show or play to the public a recording of visual images or sounds that are threatening if the intention is to stir up religious hatred or hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation.

In Northern Ireland the relevant group of persons may be defined not only by colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins but also by religious belief, sexual orientation or disability.

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### **The Cinematograph Films (Animals) Act 1937**

England, Wales and Scotland

It is illegal to show any scene organised or directed for the purposes of the film that involves actual cruelty to animals. This Act applies to the exhibition of films in public cinemas but we also apply the same test to video works. For the purposes of this legislation and the Animal Welfare Act 2006, only vertebrates that are domesticated or otherwise under the control of man are defined as animals.

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### **The Animal Welfare Act 2006**

England and Wales

### **The Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006**

Scotland

### **The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011**

Northern Ireland

It is illegal to supply, publish, show or possess with intent to supply a video recording of an animal fight that has taken place within the UK from the commencement date of the relevant legislation.

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### **The Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act 2002**

It is illegal, in the course of a business, to publish a tobacco advertisement.

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### **Blasphemy**

In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the common law crime of blasphemy exists but has not been utilised for prosecution in modern times. The offences of blasphemy and blasphemous libel under the common law of England and Wales were abolished in the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.

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### **The Human Rights Act 1998**

The Act permits such restrictions on freedom of expression as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

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### **Other unlawful material**

In carrying out its responsibilities the BBFC will have regard to whether the material itself appears to be unlawful in the UK, or has arisen from the commission of an unlawful act.



Get more info on our app

**[bbfc.co.uk/app](https://bbfc.co.uk/app)**

**British Board of Film Classification**

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