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I am very pleased to publish the outcome of our consultation with parents on their attitudes to, and knowledge of, the work undertaken by the Irish Film Classification Office. It is almost 10 years since the last survey into general attitudes took place and I have been very conscious of the need for an updated opinion from our consumer base.

Given the economic downturn, it has not been feasible to engage in cost incurring research conducted by third parties. Accordingly, we decided to carry out the task in-house, using existing resources and broadly mirroring the 2004 project. This enables us to better evaluate changes in perceptions and emphases.

The detail of the work as well as its methodology is covered in the following pages. However, there are a number of points which are particularly relevant, including the following:

- This work was carried out principally among parents of primary pupils, whereas the 2004 project concentrated on post-primary.
- Violence in all forms continues to be an issue of serious concern to parents.
- Sexual content is of greater concern than drugs content. This is particularly interesting given that drugs content was of significantly greater concern to post-primary parents as per the 2004 survey. It can be assumed this is due to the very small drugs related incidence in films rated 12A or lower.
- Language is of least concern.
- The vast majority would like to see IFCO classifications preceding films available to an Irish audience on TV.

Building on this research, we will be extending our involvement with schools, making presentations to them about our work and getting feedback which is so valuable in the continuing development of the office.

This project was undertaken chiefly by my colleagues David Power, Mark Brennan and Niall Munroe. I am extremely grateful for the assistance given to us by the National Parents Council (Primary) and also those individual parents who gave of their time to attend a focus group or complete the research questionnaire.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Ger Connolly'.

Ger Connolly  
Acting Director of Film Classification



## The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Director: Stephen Chbosky



*"Context with drug use is key – showing it's bad. If it's glamourising, it's problematic in all categories."*

**Parent, IFCO Focus Group, April 2013**



## **Acknowledgments**

The Irish Film Classification Office would like to thank those who contributed to this research, particularly parents who took the time to attend focus group screenings. Their contributions are invaluable as IFCO seeks to accurately reflect the attitudes and concerns of wider Irish society.

We would also like to thank the National Parents Council (Primary) for their kind assistance.

## **Background**

- It is almost ten years (2004) since IFCO last carried out a survey in relation to general attitudes to film classification among members of the public. This being the case, it was felt that it was an opportune time to consult with consumers, especially parents/guardians, to gauge their awareness of, and opinions on, the work undertaken by this Office.
- Aware that financial constraints generally would preclude an expensive undertaking, the Director of Film Classification decided to instigate an in-house project, overseen by Assistant Classifiers David Power and Mark Brennan, to conduct both a qualitative and quantitative study among parents/guardians.

## **Research Methodology**

The research was carried out in two parts –

1. An online survey was composed. It was designed to reflect the 2004 survey so as to track changes in public opinion with regard to the work of the Office in that time but also to address areas of specific concern in relation to current classification decisions. This survey was distributed to parents nationally via the National Parents Council (Primary). There were 267 respondents.
2. Alongside the survey, a number of focus groups were held, attended by parents of post-primary age children. At these focus groups, parents were asked to respond to a feature presentation and a number of illustrative clips designed to give context to classification issues that would not be possible through the survey.



## Taken 2

Director: Olivier Megaton



*"The absence of injury detail I find more disturbing, it removes the consequences of the violence."*

**Parent, IFCO Focus Group, April 2013**





### Summary of Findings

Among the main findings of the survey are:

- The vast majority of parents (97%) feel that age related classifications are important in protecting their children from viewing inappropriate material.
- 90% of parents always check the age classification before allowing their children to watch a film.
- 83% of parents believe it is easy to access information regarding a film's suitability for their children and 85% say that IFCO is effective in providing appropriate film classifications that they can rely on. However, only 17% of respondents say that they have visited the IFCO website.
- 61% of parents surveyed would make use of an IFCO smartphone app if available.
- 74% of parents are happy with the current classification system. Of those who are not, 41% do not agree with the categories used, while 31% do not feel they are adequately enforced by exhibitors.
- 53% of parents 'always' talk to their children about the films they watch while 22% have a child who has been upset or stressed by the content of a film they have recently viewed. The films most mentioned in this regard were 'Coraline' (PG), 'Paranorman' (PG), 'The Hobbit' (12A) and 'The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas' (12A).
- The primary concern of parents with regard to classification issues is violence. This is followed by sex and then drug use. Of IFCO's four main classification issues, language is very much of least concern to parents.
- 63% of parents had an accurate understanding of the 12A classification ('suitable for those aged 12 and above, but parents/guardians can accompany younger children if they deem the material appropriate'). Of the remainder, 26% felt that a 12A rated feature was not suitable for any child under 12.

*"Mostly 12s films are OK for 10 year olds, 11 year olds."*

**Parent, IFCO Focus Group, April 2013**



## This Means War

Director: McG



"There's a difference between two people in love having sex and promiscuous behaviour. Kids might think – 'is that normal?'"

**Parent, IFCO Focus Group, April 2013**





- The majority of parents (57%) have allowed their children to watch a film classified for an older age group once they had satisfied themselves as to the suitability of the film. In these circumstances, 95% believe it may be acceptable for an under 12 to watch a 12A rated film while 72% believe it may be acceptable for an under 15 to view a 15A rated film.
- The majority of parents regularly agree with IFCO's classification decisions. Of those who disagree, there is greatest divergence over films classified 12A, with 25% of respondents indicating they are sometimes classified 'too strictly' and an equal number indicating they are sometimes classified 'not strictly enough'.
- The majority of parents (59%) said that their children agreed with their views with regard to what they were allowed to watch.
- The vast majority of parents believe that the media in general (film, internet, TV) can have a bad influence on young people and 58% agree that young people copy what they see in films. However, 66% agree that as people move from childhood to adolescence they are better able to cope with challenging imagery in the films they view.
- 82% of respondents disagreed with the statement 'there is no longer a need for film censorship (i.e., the banning of films)'.
- 89% of parents felt that it would be helpful to them if IFCO's classifications were shown before films airing on television in Ireland.
- 81% of parents believe that while classifications are a useful guide, they should have the final say on what their children can and cannot watch.

*"You need to be more careful at 12s than 15s as there is a huge range of difference in development at that age."*

**Parent, IFCO Focus Group, April 2013**



## The Hunger Games

Director: Gary Ross



"This film leaves you with an uncomfortable feeling because it's such a good story and it's clear that it's so wrong what they've done to these children. Kids know that this is wrong. I think that 12 year olds can take this in and understand that."

**Parent, IFCO Focus Group, April 2013**

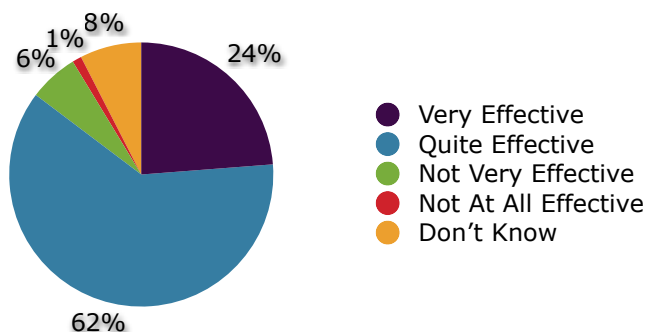


## Key Findings

### Awareness and Functions

Awareness of IFCO's role in classifying films and approval for the way in which the Office carries out its functions have not varied significantly since the previous survey in 2004. 85% of respondents now state that they feel IFCO is effective in providing film classifications they could rely on.

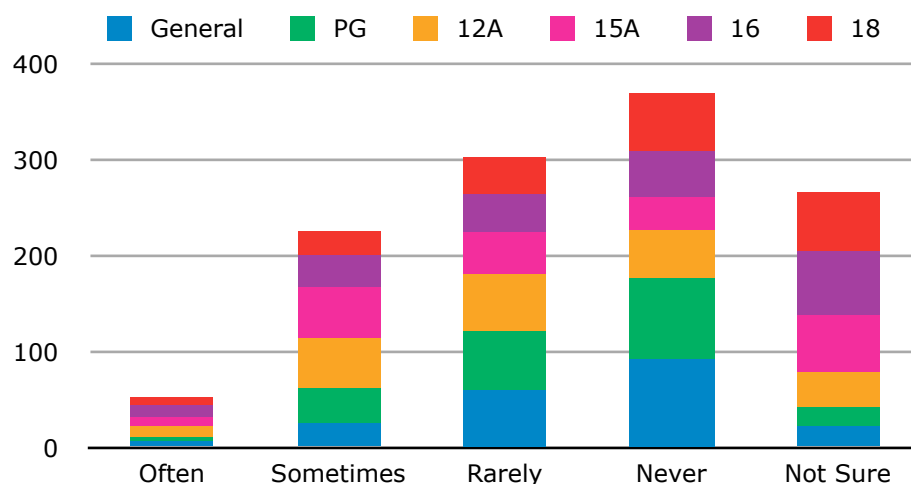
#### ***Do you feel IFCO is effective in providing appropriate film classifications that you can rely on?***



90% of parents now 'always' check the age classification before allowing their children to watch a film. This is a rise of 20% from the previous survey and is indicative of the ease by which parents can access information online through the IFCO website and other sources (83% of parents state it is now 'easy' to access information regarding a films suitability).

Despite the general recognition of the effectiveness of the Office and awareness among parents of classification issues, one area of concern for IFCO is the relatively small number of parents who have visited the IFCO website (17%). This number underlines the need for a public awareness campaign by IFCO to highlight for parents/guardians the tools at their disposal.

#### ***How often have you found films you have viewed to be classified NOT STRICTLY ENOUGH in the following categories?***

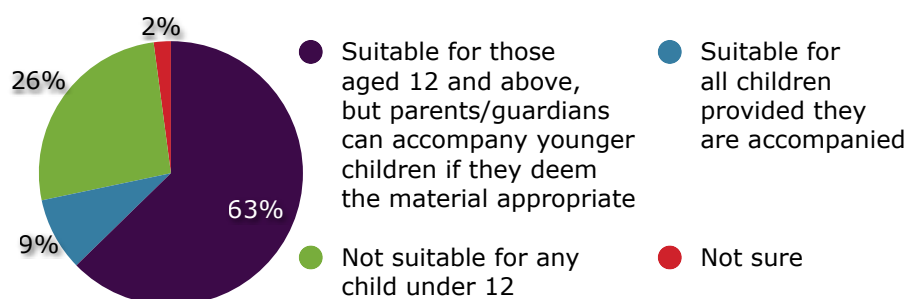




Perhaps indicative of a general migration of use from desktop to handheld devices, 61% of parents stated that they would use an IFCO smartphone application if available.

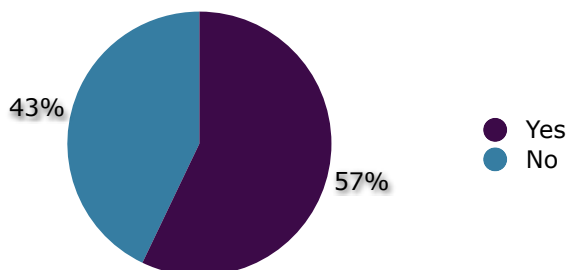
73% of parents are happy with the current classification system and parents generally are in agreement with regards to the specific ratings awarded, with the majority of parents responding 'rarely' or 'never' when asked if they have found films to be classified either 'too strictly' or 'not strictly enough'. There is a slight divergence on this in relation to the 12A certificate where an equal number (25%) felt that films classified here have been rated 'too strictly' and 'not strictly enough' and at 15A where 1 in 4 felt that films had 'sometimes' been classified 'not strictly enough'.

#### ***What is your understanding of the 12A film classification?***



One area of habitual concern for IFCO has been whether parents were sufficiently aware of what individual ratings mean, in particular as to whether accompaniment was compulsory or discretionary with regard to the 12A and 15A categories. However, 63% of parents were accurate in defining the precise meaning of the 12A classification ('suitable for those aged 12 and above, but parents/guardians can accompany younger children if they deem the material appropriate').

#### ***Have you allowed your child(ren) to watch a movie that was classified for an older age group?***



The majority of parents (81%) felt that 'classifications are a useful guide but it is ultimately the responsibility of the parent/guardian to decide what their children view'. This ties in with one of IFCO's guiding principles, that is - 'we strongly encourage and promote the exercise of parental responsibility'.



## Pitch Perfect

Director: Jason Moore



"Parents are different and have different ideas. Some want their kids to grow up quickly and some are very protective."

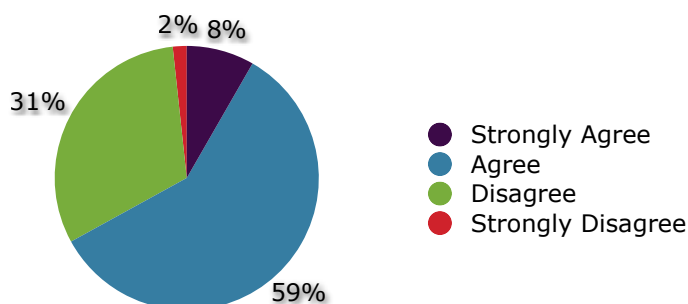
**Parent, IFCO Focus Group, April 2013**





The fact that parents are happy to exercise their discretion in this regard is underlined by the fact that the majority of parents (57%) have allowed their children to watch a film that was classified for an older age group, having satisfied themselves as to its suitability. Of those, 95% believe it is acceptable for a child under 12 to watch a 12A rated film while 72% believe it is acceptable for a child under 15 to view a 15A rated film.



***To what extent do you believe your child(ren) agree with your views with regard to what they should be allowed to watch?***



Dialogue between parents and children on ratings issues appears strong with 53% of parents stating that they 'always' talk to their children about the films that they watch and 41% saying that they 'sometimes' do. From the parents' point of view at least, they feel their children agree with them more often than not in terms of what they should and shouldn't be allowed to watch (67% saying their children agree, 33% saying that they don't).

22% of respondents stated that they have a child who has been upset or stressed by the content of a film they have recently viewed. The films most mentioned in this regard were 'Coraline' (PG), 'Paranorman' (PG), 'The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas' (12A) and 'The Hobbit' (12A). This is unsurprising in the case of the first three titles, all of which pushed the boundaries of both their genre and classification in some regard. The repeated reference to 'The Hobbit' suggests that parents, familiar with the source material, may have taken children younger than 12 to the 12A rated title who may have been upset by the intensity of the violence depicted.

***IFCO website consumer advice for 'The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey'***

		None	Mild	Moderate	Strong
				✓	
			✓		
		✓			
		✓			
		Moderate fantasy violence/threat consistent with The Lord of the Rings trilogy.			





## The Woman In Black

Director: James Watkins



"I wouldn't want my kid to see the ghosts of children, he'd be locked in his room for a week after that! "

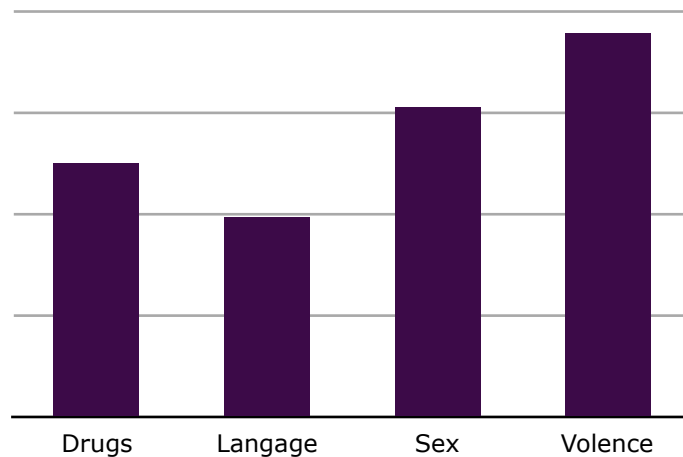
**Parent, IFCO Focus Group, April 2013**



A large majority of respondents (82%) disagreed with the statement 'there is no longer a need for film censorship (i.e., the banning of films)'. In fact, although it remains within IFCO's remit to ban or impose cuts on material submitted to the Office should the need arise, one of the guiding principles of the Office is that 'we believe that adults (i.e., persons over 18) should be free, within the law, to choose what they wish to view'.

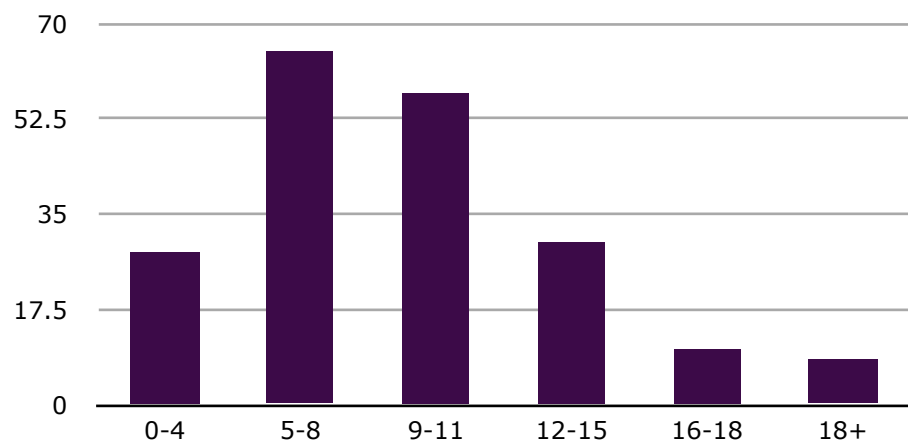
### Classification Issues

***Please list in order which of the following classification issues causes you greatest concern***



Of IFCO's four main classification issues (drugs, language, sex, violence), violent content in films is of most concern to parents, followed by sexual content, drugs and then language. This is a marked difference from the 2004 survey where depictions of drug use were deemed to be of greatest concern, followed by depictions of violence and sexual content.

***Please indicate the age(s) of the children in your family/care***





One reason for this change might be the age profiles of the children of the survey respondents. The 2004 survey targeted the parents of adolescents as distinct from the respondents to the 2013 survey whose children are, in the main, between the ages of 5 and 11. Parents of younger children are unlikely to have registered drug use themes and imagery in the same way as the parents of adolescents as it is less likely that such content will have yet emerged as a factor in their child's viewing.

It is also true to say that prior to 2004 the Irish Film's Censor's Office (as it was then known) was viewed by the public as a more conservative body than today, particularly with regard to depictions of sexual content. This point is underlined by the decrease in the number of respondents who feel films are classified 'too strictly' today.

While there is a slight increase in concern in relation to sexual content, parents comfortably made the distinction between sexual activity/dialogue and natural nudity with sexual activity being of far greater relevance. 43% of respondents felt that natural nudity should be acceptable within the junior categories (General, PG, 12A).

*"To censor natural nudity seems wrong - it's teaching kids there is something wrong with your body."*

**Parent, IFCO Focus Group, April 2013**

Distinction is also drawn between fantasy violence and violence depicted in a real-life setting. 1 in 3 parents disagreed with the statement 'violence is less of a concern if it occurs in a comic or fantasy setting' while the vast majority felt that stylised violence was acceptable within the junior categories. A small majority of parents felt violence depicted in an educational or historical context (e.g., 'Lincoln') was also more acceptable (39% agreeing, 36% disagreeing).

*'It's fantasy. Kids can say 'it's not going to happen to me'.*

**Parent, IFCO Focus Group, April 2013**

While parental concern about language in films remains the lowest of the main classification issues, parents drew a strong distinction between swear words and discriminatory/racist language, with the latter being of far greater relevance in terms of age classification (40% feel occasional strong swear words are acceptable within the junior categories).

*'It depends on the context of the language used. If it's used in a violent way - where someone's being bullied - then you have to look at the rating.'*

**Parent, IFCO Focus Group, April 2013**

[www.ifco.ie](http://www.ifco.ie)

