

October 2025

Stakeholder research for

IFCO's Strategy

Statement Review

Prepared by

DHR
COMMUNICATIONS

Methodology

DHR Communications was engaged by the Irish Film Classification Office (IFCO) to carry out research to review the sentiment around and evaluation of IFCO's current work and organisational mission, vision and values among the Office's stakeholders.

DHR surveyed a range of IFCO's key external stakeholders through quantitative and qualitative research. The stakeholder research comprised one-on-one interviews and an online survey with 54 key stakeholders, as identified by IFCO, broken down into 6 one-to-one interviews, and 48 survey responses.

In addition, DHR surveyed 5 members of IFCO staff in one-on-one interviews, broken down in 2 Assistant Classifiers and 3 members of IFCO office staff. The staff interviews helped to gain insight into their thoughts on the work environment and support at IFCO.

All research was undertaken on the understanding of confidentiality.

Our findings are outlined in this report.

Research findings

Stakeholder Research

Qualitative and Quantitative

54 respondents

- In-depth one-on-one interviews - Qualitative
- Online survey - Quantitative and Qualitative

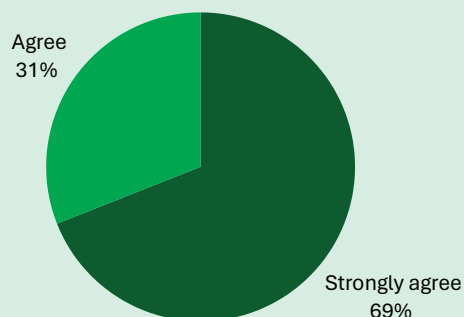
Stakeholders consulted included state sector representatives, distributors, exhibitors, and a wide selection of other representatives in the sector.

Classification and advice

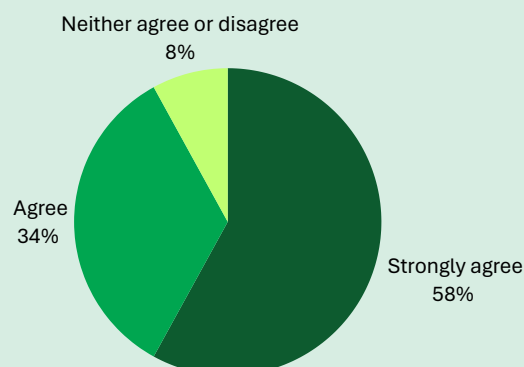
Trusted guidance on content classifications

- There is a very strong level of trust and confidence in IFCO's classification and advice on audio visual content among stakeholders across the interviews and the stakeholder survey.
- Confidence in classification and advice is scored 91/100 on average among survey respondents.
- Participants describe IFCO's guidance and classifications as: 'trusted', 'independent', 'impartial', 'very considered', 'thorough', 'balanced' 'consistent', 'evidence based', 'clear', 'reliable' and a 'mark of trust'.
- Participants also said that IFCO's communication around its classification is 'clear', 'open', 'fair' and 'transparent'.

IFCO provides trusted guidance on content classifications



IFCO is independent in its deliberations and decisions



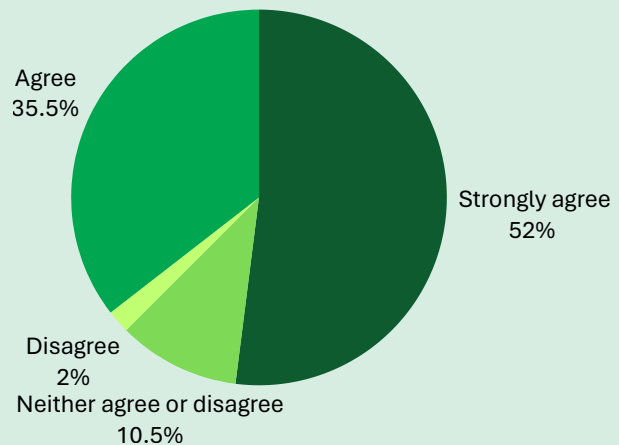
*Stakeholder Survey, Q2 & Q10: 'To what extent do you agree with the statement', n=48

Independent in deliberations and decisions

- Participants in both the survey and the interviews seem satisfied that IFCO has proven itself to be independent and impartial in its deliberations and decision making. They believe that IFCO engages with and has a good understanding of the industry, while its decision making remains independent.
- Participants believe that the grounding for IFCO's decisions are seen as fair and are accepted within the industry, even if there is not always agreement with the decision. The Office is seen as an entity rather than individual classifiers which supports the trust in its independence in decision making.
- The move from the Department of Justice to the Department of Culture, Communications and Sports was welcomed by participants - they believed this to be a better fit for the Office.

Reflecting community standards and public expectations

IFCO's classifications and guidance reflects the public's expectations in relation to the suitability of classified content for different audiences



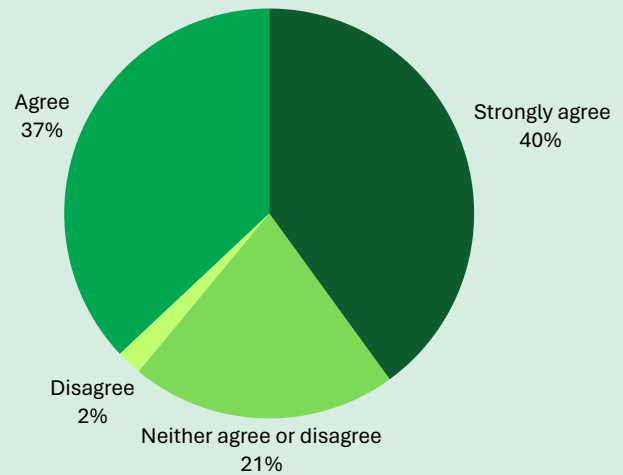
*Stakeholder Survey, Q4: "To what extent do you agree with the statement", n=48

- The majority of participants are satisfied with IFCO's ability to evolve as society changes to reflect public expectations and attitudes and view IFCO as a progressive organisation.
- Participants recognise that IFCO has evolved over the last few decades from censorship to guidance and advisory. The advisory classification categories play an important role in this. Participants indicate that they feel IFCO empowers people to make their own decisions, especially those in a carer position. IFCO is seen as a valuable resource for parents/guardians/teachers to make informed decisions on what they and their children watch.
- Some participants, however, share the feeling that the distinction between the 15A/16 rating is not well understood by the public and proves difficult to enforce at times, as parents feel they should be able to make decisions on what their children view.
- The perception among participants is that IFCO is aware of the echoes of their decisions. It maintains a healthy relationship with Irish audiences and has increased its visibility within the industry and the wider public.

Service and stakeholder engagement

Supporting the availability of a diverse range of audio visual content

IFCO's work supports the availability of a diverse range of audiovisual content for Irish audiences



*Stakeholder Survey, Q6: "To what extent do you agree with the statement", n=48

- While the majority of stakeholder survey participants agree (net agree=77%) that IFCO supports the availability of a diverse range of audio visual content for Irish audiences, a significant percentage (21%) neither agrees nor disagrees.
- Feedback from both the survey and the stakeholder interviews indicate that while some participants are aware of IFCO's support for a diverse range of content through classification and the changes in the fee structure it has put in place in respect of different submissions – for smaller/limited releases and shorts for example – quite a few participants indicate that they don't understand how IFCO's role or work directly influences the range of content nor do they expect this of IFCO. It is felt that IFCO's influence is not as significant as other elements of the process and industry.
- Cost for classification and distribution in Ireland is mentioned by some participants as a hindering factor in the availability of diverse content. Participants familiar with the new fee structure welcome this change and can see the impact of it. In terms of doing more, it is understood that this is a policy question.

Responsiveness to evolving views and needs of stakeholders including the public

- Participants are happy with IFCO's responsiveness to their evolving views and needs including the public (scored 81/100 on average). Participants indicated that they feel IFCO is up-to-date with sectoral developments and maintains a healthy dialogue with stakeholders.
- Participants indicated that they feel IFCO is respectful of their stakeholders. Suggestions and feedback are heard. They feel IFCO is willing to engage and open to feedback without shying away from making and defending decisions. Participants are satisfied with IFCO's ability to respond to feedback, including the public's, and give rational and adequate explanations for its decisions in a positive way.

81 /100



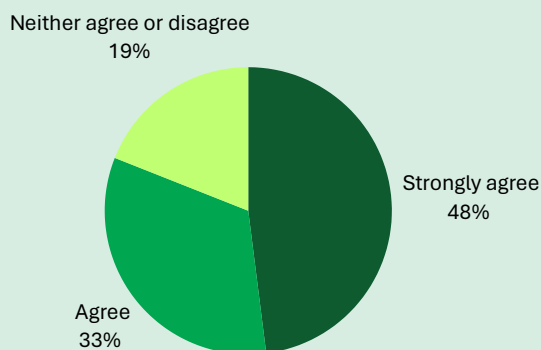
*Stakeholder Survey, Q15: “How responsive is IFCO to evolving views and needs of stakeholders including the public?”, n=48

Transparency:

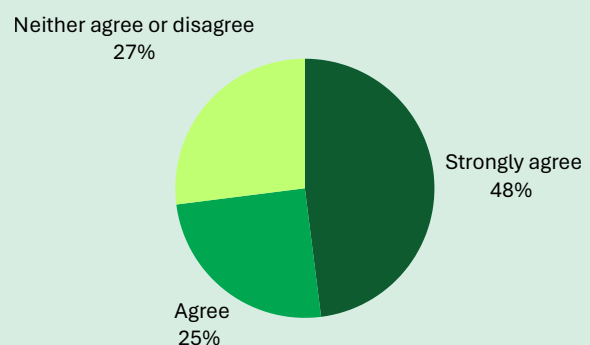
- In terms of transparency, the survey participants are content with how transparent IFCO is about its decisions (scored 83/100 on average) and processes (scored 77/100 on average), which in turn shows confidence in how classifications are explained and applied. The respondents were slightly less satisfied with the transparency around governance (Scored 73/100 on average) and use of resources (Scored 71/100 on average).
- Interview participants indicate that there is transparency with stakeholders and the public around the basis and rational for IFCO’s decisions as well as its processes.
- Participants rate IFCO’s communications as very good. Participants feel IFCO is helpful, open and transparent. Whereas some see IFCO as very proactive in their communications, others indicate they only communicate with IFCO on issues. They view IFCO as responsive.
- Whereas some participants indicate that the IFCO website is a very useful resource for stakeholders, used as a reference point daily, others indicate that the website is clunky and it is difficult to find what you are looking for. Social media is also mentioned, it is felt that IFCO does not have good visibility on the platforms and this should be addressed.
- The centenary campaign was well received by participants. They indicate that it helped the Office to ‘pull back the curtains’, engage with multiple audiences and reflect evolution.

Value for money and timeliness

IFCO provides decisions and feedback in a timely manner



IFCO provides value for money service



*Stakeholder Survey, Q12 & Q13: ‘To what extent do you agree with the statement’, n=48

- Feedback from the interviews shows that participants are very satisfied with IFCO's timelines on providing decisions, even when requests come in late or last minute.

Challenges and opportunities for IFCO in the next 3 years

- **IFCO's remit:** Participants indicate that the biggest weakness currently is cinema. The exhibition structure in Ireland is not as well resourced as the distribution structure. In addition to this, participants indicate that there has been a change in audience behavior and consumption of audiovisual content, with on-demand services becoming more prominent. DVD, another significant part of IFCO's remit has declined in recent years, even plateaued maybe. This is seen as a challenge for IFCO's operating model. Some participants indicate that IFCO's remit is too exclusive, primarily focused on classification for cinema. It is felt that cinema finances the cost of IFCO, which is seen as a weakness as cinema audience numbers are going down as well as the possibility of disruption as a result of strikes about how cinema is delivered. Participants see potential in IFCO extending/reimagining its remit. Participants indicate there might be an opportunity for IFCO in the classification for video-on-demand and streaming services. This will require looking at how this fits in with the remit of other organisations. This however brings its own challenge of how classifications are applied in the home setting. Another opportunity mentioned is extending the remit in relation to classification for video games.
- **Volume:** Another challenge mentioned is the volume of content and resourcing. Participants acknowledge that IFCO is very busy and see the importance of continuing investment in human resources, in particular Assistant Classifiers, making sure this is done in a timely and robust manner.
- **Industry challenges:** Piracy is mentioned as one of the industry challenges. IFCO has been engaged with this, however, if appropriate, it would be welcomed by the industry for IFCO to engage with Government on the issue. Engagement with the public about industry challenges would also be welcomed.
- **Understanding of classification:** It was pointed out that there can be confusion around the implications of some classification categories, especially the non-advisory categories. Participants indicated they would like to see IFCO support industry and cinema staff in speaking to the public about the implications and rules around the classifications - e.g. why a 15/16 year old cannot be let into a film classified for older audiences.

Public engagement and understanding

Engagement with IFCO's work

- Overall stakeholders are satisfied with how informed they feel about IFCO's work - scored 79/100 on average. (Q20 stakeholder survey)
- Stakeholders seem less satisfied with their engagement with IFCO's activities - scored 65/100 on average. (Q21 stakeholder survey)

Awareness of IFCO initiatives to enhance public understanding and engagement with audio visual content

- Participants indicate that there is a new energy at IFCO and a lot has been done recently to enhance public understanding of content. They are aware of IFCO's initiatives including the centenary programme of events, advertising, and its engagement with film festivals and educational institutions. Participants indicate that there is good engagement and outreach with the industry as a whole and they feel that IFCO engages well with the public, they 'really get the public'. IFCO deals particularly well with sensitive audiences in this respect. Awareness among the public has also improved, media interviews have gone a long way to achieve this.

Suggestions to enhance the public's understanding of its activities

- Participants would like to see a continuation of the promotion of the Office and the educational activities, including more public engagement around the age classifications.
- Participants indicate that IFCO could increase their engagement and reach wider and different audiences by going outside of Dublin with their engagement and communications programming.
- It is also suggested that IFCO should attend and participate in film festivals and address challenges in the industry. Participants would welcome more investment in film culture and education, working with younger audiences, to grow safer and more protected knowledgeable audiences. This could be a joint programme with other organisations. It was also suggested that IFCO could address and give more guidance on media literacy.
- Other suggestions include an improved online presence – user friendly website and social media presence – as well as on-the-ground engagement through working with schools and universities and other organisations or open 'town hall' style meetings. Another suggestion is an awareness programme for audiences in cinemas around what the different classifications mean – in particular those in the advisory category.

Staff Research

Qualitative

5 respondents

- In-depth one-on-one interviews - Qualitative

5 members of IFCO staff in one-on-one interviews. This included Assistant Classifiers and office staff.

Participants expressed a largely positive view of working at IFCO. Overall the staff feel valued, supported and included but there are a few concerns around staffing levels, workload and limited career progression.

Satisfaction with the work environment

- Overall positive response – all participants said yes. Some of the key positives mentioned were: collegial, communicative and inclusive atmosphere that allows for discussions, collaboration and shared decision making. There is a clear appreciation of the stability and consistent leadership. There were some references to being stretched and understaffed but it was mentioned as part of the workload rather than it being a source of dissatisfaction.

Feeling valued by leadership

- There is a strong sense of being valued and respected. The staff feel heard, trusted and acknowledged. There is also open communication and appreciation. The new direction under the current Director of Film Classification was repeatedly and positively mentioned. After the past periods of instability during temporary leadership and COVID 19 disruptions, staff indicate that the Director of Film Classification has stabilised the organization. Staff associate feeling valued with being listened to, trusted with responsibility, and being involved in projects. Some raised concerns about uncertainties around contract renewal which undermines the feeling of being valued at times.

Feeling valued and supported at IFCO

- All staff said they felt valued and there is good day-to-day support. The sense of support is collective and the culture at IFCO is one where people can ask for help and rely on each other. Support is seen as an ongoing and built into daily communications. There is a shared understanding within the small team.

Understanding their contributions to IFCO

- All interviewees clearly understood how their work fits into IFCO's mission. The staff see their work as publicly valuable and understand how individual efforts contribute to IFCO's social purpose.

Support for work – life balance

- Most of the responses were positive with some raising practical concerns around limited staffing levels making it difficult to adjust work hours or work more days from home. However the leadership is described as considerate and accommodating and flexibility has improved since covid.

Inclusive work environment

- Staff view the work environment as inclusive and respectful. Most of them feel that there is an equality of voices and a collaborative culture. The overall tone indicates that staff feel respected, involved, and able to contribute equally.
- There is democratic voicing and less siloing than before. Inclusion has improved over time — divisions between different staff groups have faded. However, there are some concerns in regards to the small team that makes some feel less included and leaves no room for upward mobility.
- The physical layout of the office was mentioned as a possible hindrance to an inclusive work environment.

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