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I am very pleased to publish the second and final part of our consultation with parents on their attitude to, and knowledge of, the work undertaken by the Irish Film Classification Office. This work was carried out among parents of post-primary students (PP) and complements the previous publication on the attitudes of parents of primary schoolchildren.

As stated previously it has not been possible, nor would it have been prudent, to engage in cost incurring research conducted by third parties. Bearing this in mind we decided to carry out the task in-house, using existing resources and broadly mirroring the 2004 project. This has enabled 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.

Among these are the following:

- Violence in all forms continues to be the issue of most concern to parents.
- Sexual content is the second greatest concern, slightly more so than drugs. This is slightly surprising given that the respondents are parents of children in secondary school, who face greater exposure to issues of drug use than those in primary school.
- Language is of least concern. However, this should be tempered by the fact that 62% still regard the use of bad/coarse language to be harmful rather than just unpleasant.
- The vast majority would like to see IFCO classifications preceding films available to an Irish audience on TV etc.
- There is concern about a perceived lack of enforcement by exhibitors of age restrictions.
- A smartphone app of classification decisions should be made available.

Overall it is heartening to see the overwhelming support for the classification system and the reliance placed on it by parents. This reinforces our commitment to accurately reflect the social values of the day and also the necessity to stay informed of public/parental expectations of IFCO.

The completion of this project was chiefly undertaken by my colleague David Power. I am also extremely grateful for the invaluable assistance given to us by the National Parents Council (Post Primary) and also to those individual parents who gave of their time to complete the research questionnaire.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Gerard Connolly'.

Ger Connolly  
Acting Director of Film Classification



## Gone Girl

Director: David Fincher

16



*"The murder was on the higher end of the violence scale. How was this only 16s?"*

**Excerpt from correspondence received by IFCO in relation to the classification of 'Gone Girl', April 2014.**



## **Acknowledgments**

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

We would also like to thank Sandra Boylan and her colleagues at the National Parents Council (Post Primary) for their kind assistance.

## **Background**

- This survey forms the concluding part of an extensive public consultation that began with Parental Attitudes 2013 (report available via the IFCO website). While the 2013 survey sought responses from parents/guardians of children in primary school, this report widens the focus to include parents/guardians of children in post-primary education.
- When combined, the results of these surveys form the most complete picture of attitudes to film classification among members of the public since a similar undertaking in 2004. Attitudes towards age related classification and the individual issues that influence it are constantly evolving. This being the case, it is crucial that IFCO takes the time to consult with consumers, especially parents/guardians, to gauge both their awareness of and opinions on the work undertaken by the Office.
- As before, and aware that financial constraints would preclude an expensive undertaking, the Director of Film Classification decided to instigate an in-house project overseen by Assistant Classifier David Power and assisted by Mark Brennan and Niall Munroe.

## **Research Methodology**

An online survey was composed, closely modelled on that used in 2013 (save for some minor alterations necessitated by the differing age groups under consideration). Both the 2013 and 2015 surveys were designed to reflect the survey of eleven years ago 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 (Post Primary). There were 330 respondents.



Mrs Brown's Boys D'Movie  
Director: Ben Kellett



*"I am puzzled as to how this is rated 15A – the f word is used a lot but no more than in everyday Irish life."*

**Excerpt from correspondence received by IFCO in relation to the classification of 'Mrs Brown's Boys D'Movie', July 2014.**



## Summary of Findings

Among the main findings of this survey of parents/guardians of children in post-primary (PP) education are:

- The vast majority of PP parents (98%) feel that age related classifications are important in protecting their children from viewing inappropriate material.
- 78% of PP parents always check the age classification before allowing their children to watch a film. Interestingly, 46% always check the classification before they view a film themselves.
- 81% of PP parents believe it is easy to access information regarding a film's suitability for their children and 80% 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.
- 51% of PP parents surveyed would make use of an IFCO Smartphone app if available.
- 75% of PP parents are happy with the current classification system. Of those who are not, 35% do not feel exhibitors adequately enforce classifications.
- 49% of PP parents 'always' talk to their children about the films that they watch while 16% 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 'The Hunger Games' (12A), 'The Fault in Our Stars' (12A) and 'The Woman in Black' (15A).
- The primary concern of PP 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 continues to be of least concern to parents. These results closely correspond to those received from parents/guardians of primary school children.
- 60% of PP parents had an accurate understanding of the 15A classification ('suitable for those aged 15 and above, but parents/guardians can accompany younger children if they deem the material appropriate'). Of the remainder, 28% felt that a 15A rated feature was not suitable for any child under 15.
- The majority of respondents (77%) have allowed their children to watch a film that was classified for an older age group.



## Dallas Buyers Club

Director: Jean-Marc Vallée

16



"I find it very alarming this film got a 16 cert - surely it should have been rated 18."

"I feel the film warranted a 15A rating as younger people deserve the right to view a film as important as this one."

**Excerpts from separate correspondence received by IFCO in relation to the classification of 'Dallas Buyers Club', June 2014.**



- The majority of parents regularly agree with IFCO's classification decisions. However, 58% of respondents indicated films are sometimes classified 'too strictly' while 75% felt 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.
- 45% agreed with the statement: 'young people copy what they see in films'. 47% disagree that 'there should be no difference in classification terms between the depiction of hard drug use (e.g. cocaine) and soft drug use (e.g. marijuana) in movies'.
- 62% of respondents disagreed with the statement: 'the use of bad language in film may be unpleasant, but it is not harmful to children'.
- 76% of respondents disagreed with the statement: 'there is no longer a need for film censorship (the banning or cutting of films)'.
- 86% of PP parents felt that it would be helpful to them if IFCO's classifications were shown before films airing on television in Ireland.
- 82% of PP parents believe that while classifications are a useful guide, they are ultimately responsible for what their children can and cannot watch.
- 82% of PP parents feel that films are more violent today than when they were growing up.



**Nymphomaniac**  
Director: Lars Von Trier



"Please let me know as to why this film was not banned."

**Excerpt from correspondence received by IFCO in relation to the classification of  
'Nymphomaniac', February 2014**



**Key Findings**

**Awareness and Functions**

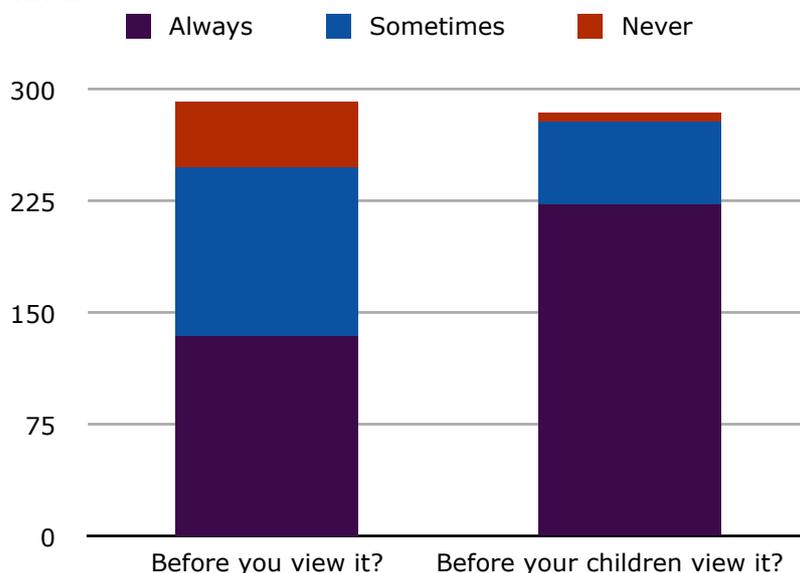
As with the 2013 survey, the results here in relation to public awareness of IFCO’s role in classifying films and approval for the way in which the Office carries out its functions are encouraging. 98% of parents/guardians of children of post-primary (PP) age believe it is important to have IFCO’s classifications for guidance while 80% feel that IFCO is effective in providing film classifications they could rely on.

78% of PP parents ‘always’ check the age classification before allowing their children to watch a film. This is a drop of 12% from the 2013 survey and indicates that as children move from childhood to adolescence:

1. some parents become more relaxed about the content of films that their children view and
2. parents are perhaps not in a position to be as vigilant as they were previously (given the greater degree of independence among teens).

Interestingly, 46% of parents ‘always’ check the classification before watching a film themselves indicating that the age rating can be a determining factor in the viewing choices of many adults.

***In general, how often would you check the age classification of a film?***

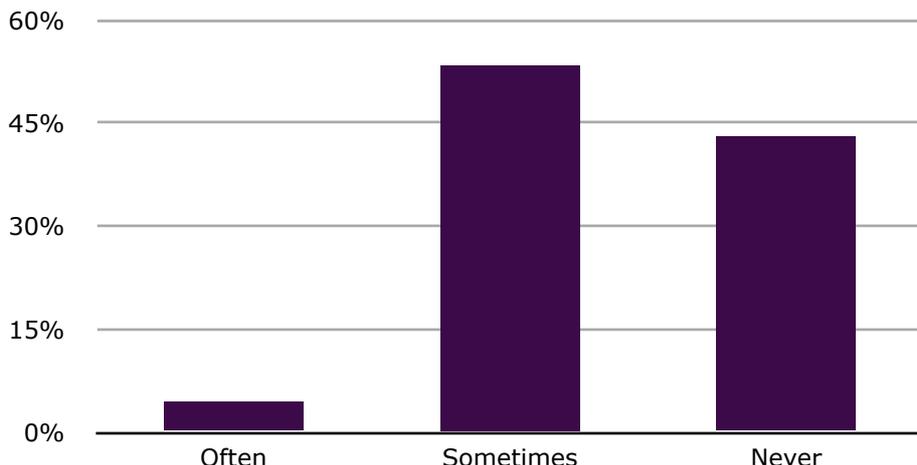


81% of PP parents state it is now ‘easy’ to access information regarding the suitability of a particular film. However, a continuing area of concern for IFCO is the relatively small number of parents who have visited the IFCO website (17%). This number again underlines the need for a public awareness campaign by IFCO to highlight for parents/guardians the tools at their disposal (i.e. the detailed consumer advice available via the website that explains the age rating given).



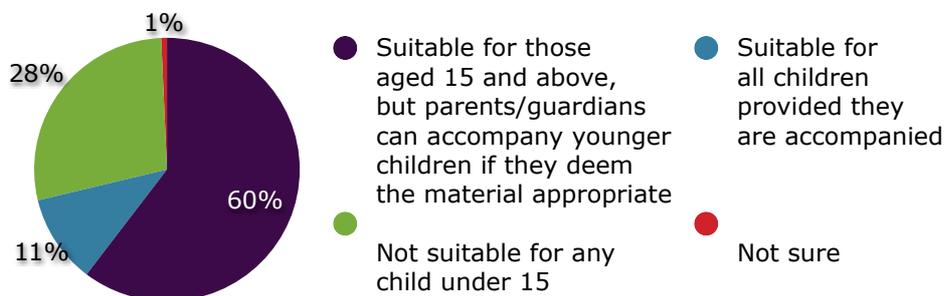
75% of PP parents are happy with the current classification system. Of those who are not, the majority (35%) do not feel exhibitors adequately enforce the classifications while 30% do not agree with the categories used. While there is general agreement with regards to specific ratings awarded, PP parents are more likely to find that films, in their opinion, have been classified 'not strictly enough' rather than 'too strictly'.

**How often have you found films you have viewed to be TOO STRICTLY classified?**



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, 60% of parents were accurate in defining the precise meaning of the 15A classification ('suitable for those aged 15 and above, but parents/guardians can accompany younger children if they deem the material appropriate').

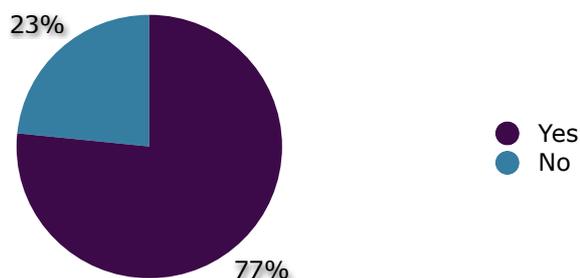
**What is your understanding of the 15A film classification?**





The majority of PP parents (82%) 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’. The fact that parents are happy to exercise their discretion in this regard is underlined by the fact that the majority of PP parents (77%) have allowed their children to watch a film that was classified for an older age group. This is a 20% rise from the survey of parents of primary school children and this increase is again indicative of a more lenient attitude on the part of parents of older children.

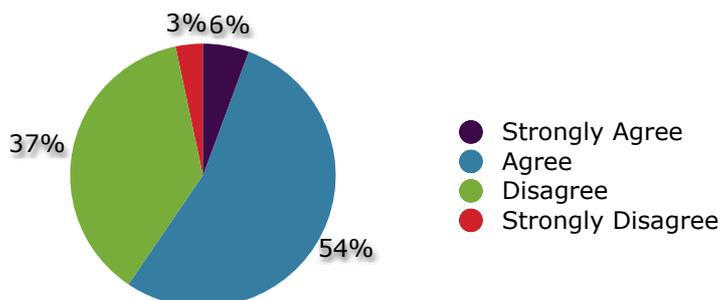
***Have you allowed your child(ren) to watch a movie that was classified for an older age group?***

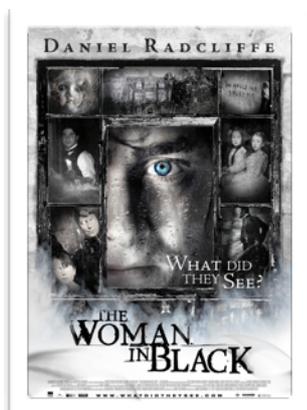


The films referenced in this regard were overwhelmingly comedies, with ‘Mrs. Brown’s Boys D’Movie’ (15A), ‘Dumb and Dumber 2’ (15A) and ‘The Hangover 3’ (15A) most often mentioned. The fact that these titles are not wholly original works (being spin-offs and sequels) might have offered parents/guardians some reassurance as to their content that would not have been possible with less familiar works.

Dialogue between parents and children on ratings issues appears strong with 49% of PP parents stating that they ‘always’ talk to their children about the films that they watch and 47% 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 (59% saying their children agree, 41% saying that they don’t).

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




**IFCO website consumer advice for 'The Woman in Black'**

**15A**

|                    | None  | Mild | Moderate | Strong |
|--------------------|---|------|----------|--------|
| Violence           |   |      |          | ✓      |
| Drugs              | ✓   |      |          |        |
| Sex/Nudity         | ✓   |      |          |        |
| Language           |   | ✓    |          |        |
| Other/<br>Comments | Undercurrent of supernatural threat throughout with some strong psychological horror. |      |          |        |

16% of PP parents stated that they have a child who has been upset or stressed by the content of a film they have recently viewed (a 6% drop from the survey of parents of primary school children). The films most mentioned in this regard were 'The Hunger Games' (12A), 'The Fault in Our Stars' (12A) and 'The Woman in Black' (15A). This is unsurprising in the case of the first two titles, both of which pushed the boundaries of their genre and classification in some regard ('The Hunger Games' in terms of its depiction of teen on teen violence; 'The Fault in Our Stars' in terms of its depiction of teenage bereavement and grief). 'The Woman in Black', though classified 15A, attracted a great deal of interest from a younger audience due to the presence of its leading man Daniel Radcliffe (star of the Harry Potter franchise). This audience would perhaps have been unprepared for the levels of supernatural horror/threat contained within.

As with the 2013 survey, a large majority of respondents (76%) disagreed with the statement 'there is no longer a need for film censorship (the banning of films)'. This is somewhat surprising as it is some time since a cinema release film has been banned in Ireland. However, it remains within IFCO's remit to ban or impose cuts on material submitted to the Office should the need arise. 86% of PP parents agreed with the statement 'it would be helpful if IFCO's age classifications were shown before films airing on television in Ireland'.



## 12 Years a Slave

Director: Steve McQueen



"As a 30 year old man, I found this very difficult to watch. I am therefore astounded that you could deem that a child can attend this movie with an adult."

**Excerpt from correspondence received by IFCO in relation to the classification of '12 Years A Slave', February 2014**



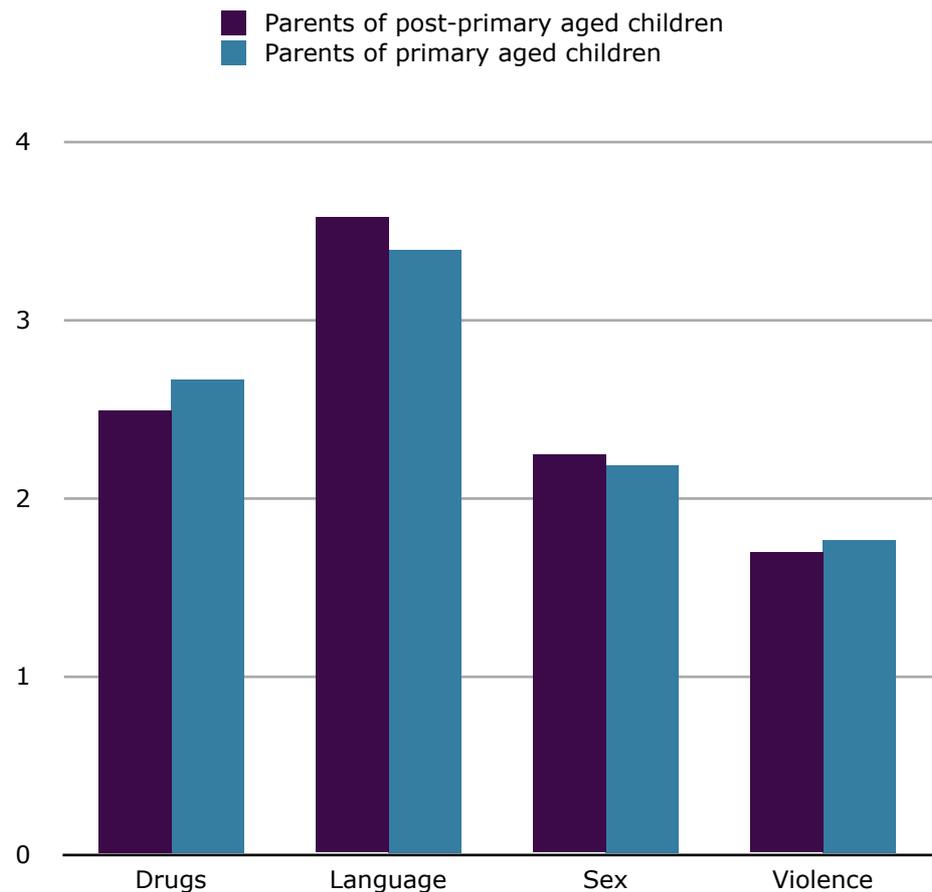
### Classification Issues

Perhaps the most striking development to emerge in the results of the 2013 survey was the change in emphasis among parents in relation to individual classification issues. Drug use in film was of greatest concern to parents in 2004. The 2013 survey now placed depictions of drug use in film third, behind both violence and sexual content.

It was suggested in the Parental Attitudes 2013 report that this data was slightly skewed due to the fact the survey respondents were parents/guardians of primary school children and, due to the very small drugs related incidence in films rated 12A or lower, such content had not yet become an issue. However, the attitudes of post-primary parents in this survey corresponds with their primary counterparts.

Of IFCO's four main classification issues (drugs, language, sex, violence), violent content in films is of most concern to PP parents, followed by sexual content, drugs and then language.

***Please list in order which of the following classification issues causes you greatest concern (1 being the greatest, 4 being of least concern).***





In terms of violence, distinction is drawn between fantasy violence and violence depicted in a real-life setting. The majority of PP parents agreed 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.

While parental concern about language in films consistently remains the lowest of the main classification issues, PP parents draw a strong distinction between swear words and discriminatory/racist language, with the latter being of far greater relevance in terms of age classification (45% feel occasional strong swear words are acceptable within the junior categories). It should also be noted that 62% of respondents disagreed with the statement 'the use of bad language may be unpleasant, but it is not harmful to children'.

With regards to drug use on screen, 47% of respondents disagree that 'there should be no difference in classification terms between the depiction of hard drug use (e.g. cocaine) and soft drug use (e.g. marijuana) in movies'.

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