

PRESS RELEASE

Monday, 10th July 2023

Irish Film Classification Office launches public consultation on draft Strategy Statement

Strategy informed by extensive research with parents and teens

The [Irish Film Classification Office \(IFCO\)](#) is calling on members of the public to have their say in the future focus of the Office, with the launch today (10.07.23) of a public consultation on its draft Strategy Statement 2023–2025. The consultation was launched at an event in Dublin, which also saw the publication of research carried out to inform the strategy, and the publication of the IFCO Annual Report 2022.

The draft Strategy Statement sets out IFCO's vision for audiovisual content regulation that empowers the public and to promotes plurality. It details a range of strategic objectives, KPIs and targets under three strategic themes: Quality Service; Resource Effectiveness and Excellence in Governance, and Communication and Engagement.

Commenting, Director of Film Classification, Dr Ciarán Kissane said: "This year marks the centenary of the signing of the Censorship of Films Act 1923, one of the first pieces of legislation passed by the Irish Free State. Over that time, and in particular in the last 20 years, the Office has evolved from censorship to classification and now focuses on providing classification decisions that include advice and guidance for audiences in relation to cinema and home entertainment content sold in Ireland."

"The draft Strategy Statement reflects how the work of IFCO must balance the right to freedom of expression with the requirement that audiences are protected from harmful and illegal content. IFCO's responsibility in this regard is very specific, but it is part of a wider regulatory landscape for audiovisual content that is now taking shape across Europe through enhanced statutory regulation of such content on all platforms. This is the context in which IFCO's Strategy Statement 2023 – 2025 has been drafted.

"The Office's role in providing trusted guidance that reflects and shapes audience expectations remains the core of our activities. The draft Strategy Statement identifies our focus on working with others to ensure that available content reflects the increasing diversity of Irish society and our commitment to enhance digital literacy."

The development of the draft Strategy Statement 2023-2025 was informed by extensive research carried out by IFCO and Behaviour & Attitudes examining the public's views on the suitability of existing classification guidelines. The research specifically sought feedback from parents and teens with a focus on social concerns, cultural changes, and attitudes to the depictions of sexual violence, suicide and self-harm, the portrayal of young people on screen and the importance of context in classification.

A synopsis of research findings is contained in IFCO's Annual Report 2022. Research indicates that among teenagers; sexual violence, suicide, and the portrayal of young people are the areas where guidance and boundaries are most needed, along with content that can be seen to impact on mental health. Overall, teenagers would like to see less focus on age classification and more emphasis on alerting them to triggering content to help them make their own decisions about what is and isn't suitable to watch.

The research also found that the broader media context in which the Irish Film Classification Office operates generated key concerns for respondents. Managing the material their children are watching day to day was cited as an increasing challenge for parents. The research revealed that practically all children surveyed from the age of 13 currently use a 'solo' viewing device for consuming content, often alone and with minimal parental supervision and monitoring. Some 50% of parents surveyed reported feeling overwhelmed monitoring the number of media devices in the home; and reported confusion about how streamed content is classified, recommended, and accessed.

Reflecting on the research findings, Dr Kissane said: "We set out to examine citizens' views on the suitability of existing IFCO classification guidelines with this research. Coupled with the public's feedback on our draft Strategy Statement 2023-2025, this research is hugely important in shaping the future of the Office. The research findings will also be of interest to others who are responsible for providing audience guidance and advice in relation to audiovisual content. While audiences recognise the different contexts in which they view audiovisual content, they have an expectation that some basic standards and protections will apply. This is particularly the case in cinema, which is a communal experience where the theatrical nature of the presentation remains more immersive and impactful than home entertainment."

In 2022, IFCO certified 438 feature films for cinema release, an increase of 52% on the previous year, and 85% of pre-COVID levels. There were no appeals regarding its decisions. Cinema box office revenues also showed significant recovery in 2022. At €92,089,883, they were more than 75% of their pre-pandemic peak €119,741,264 in 2019.

The Irish Film Classification Office draft Strategy Statement 2023-2025 is available now for the public to view [here](#). Submissions should be sent to info@ifco.gov.ie with "Draft Strategy

Statement” in the subject line. The closing date for submissions is **Monday, 1st August 2023** at **12 noon**. The final Strategy Statement will be published in Autumn 2023.

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Note for Editors:

- The IFCO Annual Report, which includes the research used to inform the draft Strategy Statement 2023 – 2025, is available [here](#).
- Dr Ciarán Kissane is available for interview, on request.
- A series of commemorative events will be announced later this month to mark the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Censorship of Films Act 1923.

About IFCO:

Oifig Aicmithe Scannán na hÉireann The Irish Film Classification Office (IFCO) is a statutory body established under the aegis of the Department of Justice. It is responsible for examining and certifying all cinema films and DVDs distributed in Ireland that are not otherwise exempt from classification. IFCO also licences retail and wholesale outlets that sell DVDs. Established on a statutory basis pursuant to the Censorship of Films Act 1923, the role of the Office has been expanded by the various censorship of films acts and the Video Recordings Act, 1989. Its name was changed from Film Censor's Office to The Irish Film Classification Office in 2008 to reflect its changing role - from censorship to providing age classifications and advice. The IFCO's decisions are legally binding, and all powers of prohibition remain. The decisions of IFCO are independent and can be appealed to the Classification of Films Appeal Board.

Biography of Dr Ciarán Kissane:

Dr Ciarán Kissane was appointed as the Director of Film Classification in March 2023 following a public competition. A native of Co Laois, D Kissane has worked in media regulation for almost 30 years and has extensive experience in content classification, strategic planning, and organisational development. In his career to date, Ciarán has led projects in licensing, compliance, funding schemes, research and media development. He is recognised as an authoritative voice nationally and at EU level on media policy and the fight against disinformation. An accredited Coach (ICF) and Mediator (MII), Ciarán is also an active scuba diving instructor and is President of Diving Ireland, the national governing body for underwater sports.