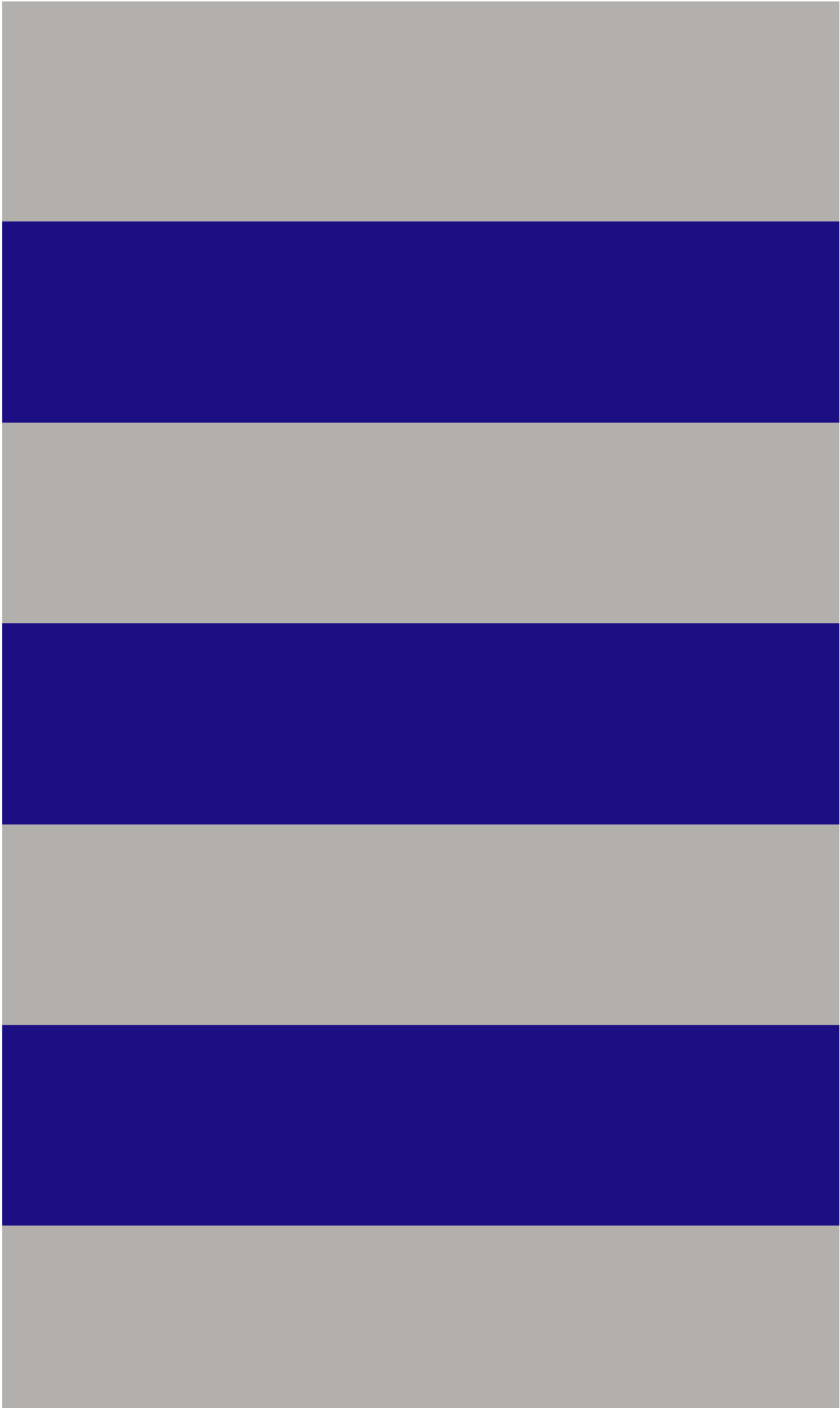


Sense & Sensibilities: Public Opinion & the BBFC Guidelines



Sense & Sensibilities:
Public Opinion & the BBFC Guidelines
by Pam Hanley

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September 2000

Introduction

The Board has always striven to remain in step with public attitudes towards matters of taste and decency. Every letter from a member of the public which raises questions about the classification process is noted and a response is made. Presentations are regularly given in schools and colleges and to a wide range of public groups in order to gather feedback about the Board's activities. The Board has also participated in a number of research initiatives, including the annual British Social Attitudes Survey, to gauge the public mood on a number of classification issues like sex and violence. These initiatives offer a necessary window onto public sensibilities, and inform all classification policy and decision-making.

In 1998, the Board published written classification Guidelines for the first time in its history. They gave the public an opportunity to understand the basis for film and video classification decisions. These efforts have been warmly welcomed, offering greater transparency, accountability and consistency. The Guidelines were originally written to reflect current classification policy and practice and built upon an appreciation of public attitudes that had developed over the course of many years. But attitudes change over time, and it is essential to remain attuned to such developments. In 1999 it was decided that a large-scale consultation exercise was needed, to probe attitudes towards a new draft set of Guidelines drawn up that year. The Board hosted a series of public meetings in London, Edinburgh, Londonderry, Swansea, Manchester, Birmingham, Norwich, Bristol and Newcastle. The audience, made up of members of the public who had responded to advertisements, were taken through the

Introduction

issues associated with classification and then invited to debate them with a panel of the Board's Examiners. Much of what was said was vivid and illuminating, but for the most representative view of public opinion the Board commissioned a nation-wide questionnaire survey and citizens' juries, each designed to explore in more detail the issues raised at the public meetings. This report, which has been written for the BBFC by Pam Hanley, who also provided expert advice throughout, provides an overview of this research, and offers a detailed discussion of the main findings. It is hoped that the report will be read in conjunction with the new revised Guidelines, which reflect the views and sensibilities of the British public as revealed in the research and consultation process.



Robin Duval

Director

September 2000

Main Findings

Bad language

- 56% of the national sample agreed that “young people use bad language because of what they hear in films and videos”.
- 48% of the national sample thought that the language Guidelines were “about right” (43% thought they were not strict enough, and only 5% thought they were too strict).
- Both sets of juries were concerned about bad language, especially in the junior categories. There was some concern about the use of “very strong language” at ‘15’.

Sex

- 46% of the national sample agreed that “people over 18 have a right to see graphic portrayals of real sex in films and videos”.
- 54% of the national sample thought that the Guidelines for sex were “about right” (32% thought they were not strict enough, and 12% thought they were too strict). The consensus of both juries was that some relaxation in sex Guidelines was possible, especially at ‘15’ and ‘18’.

Violence

- 46% of the national sample agreed with the statement that “watching violence in films generally makes people more likely to be violent in real life”. When members of the citizens’ juries were asked their views on that statement at the outset of the jury process, half of them agreed with it. However, nearly three-quarters of them disagreed with it once they had heard the evidence of the ‘expert witnesses’.
- 46% of the national sample agreed that “violence is more acceptable if it occurs in comic, historic or fantastic settings”.
- 51% of the national sample thought that the violence Guidelines were “about right” (42% thought they were not strict enough, and only 5% thought they were too strict).

Drugs

- 52% of the national sample agreed that “films should be allowed to portray drug use in a realistic manner”. The portrayal of drug use was considered more offensive than all other classification issues (sex, violence, language, nudity and blasphemy).
- 47% of the national sample thought that the drugs’ Guidelines were not strict enough (45% thought that they were ‘about right’, and only 4% thought they were too strict). Members of the citizens’ juries also felt that the Guidelines were too relaxed, particularly at ‘12’ and that more differentiation between hard and soft drugs was needed. Concern also extended to the ‘15’ and ‘18’ categories, with 46% of the national sample agreeing that the Guidelines were not strict enough even at ‘18’.

Methodology

Several techniques were used to maximise the range of people consulted during the research programme, and to achieve a combination of quantitative and qualitative input:

- Citizens' juries
- National survey
- Roadshow/postal questionnaires
- Website questionnaires

The methodologies, including their advantages and limitations, are outlined below. The report draws on findings from all four approaches, but mainly the national survey (to indicate how widely a finding is applicable) and the juries (to enable a more considered response). The postal and website questionnaires are of interest but, because they are self-selecting, cannot reliably represent the full breadth of public opinion.

Citizens' juries ¹

- Two juries, conducted in Portsmouth and Birmingham
- A small panel was convened in each location (13 in Portsmouth and 15 in Birmingham, including one person unable to complete the jury)
- The sample was recruited via random mailout to reflect the demographics of the locality (but excluding those who never visit the cinema or rent videos)
- The fieldwork took place in February/March 2000
- The fieldwork was conducted by Opinion Leader Research, an independent agency specialising in new forms of consultative research

Each jury met for four days, plus an introductory evening. They received input from factsheets, expert witnesses (representing a range of viewpoints in the classification and censorship debate) and film clips. They also spent a significant amount of time discussing issues amongst themselves, both in small groups and in full session. At the end of the process, each jury presented its recommendations about the construction of the Guidelines to the BBFC. To help track changes in opinion, every participant completed a questionnaire before and after the jury.

¹ The ITC, BSC, BBC, Channel 4, Channel 5, BSky B and Front Row were the BBFC's co-sponsors in this research

Both juries followed a similar format although the witnesses differed between the two locations:

Day 1

Consideration of the framework within which the BBFC operates, and the pros and cons of film classification/censorship in general

Days 2 and 3

Deliberation over the existing BBFC draft Guidelines for each category in turn ('U', 'PG', '12', '15', '18' and, more briefly, 'R18') assisted by panels of expert witnesses and illustrative film clips

Day 4

A session considering classification and regulation of films when available on video or broadcast on television.
Presentation of recommendations to BBFC

National survey

- National, demographically-representative sample of 1249 people (*not* selected on the basis of any film-related behaviour, such as going to the cinema or renting videos)
- The sample was recruited off the street and interviewed in central locations in towns and cities across the UK, including Northern Ireland
- The fieldwork took place in February/March 2000
- The fieldwork and analysis was conducted by System 3, an independent research agency

After a brief explanation about the purpose and the mechanics of the study, respondents were invited inside to read through the BBFC draft Guidelines at their own pace. They then filled in a questionnaire eliciting their opinion of film classification generally and the draft Guidelines specifically. Self-completion was used to minimise any embarrassment at covering potentially sensitive areas, and they were given the choice of opting out of the final section on 'R18' sex videos. Supervisory interviewers were available in case of difficulties.

Methodology

Postal/website questionnaire

- 1827 responses (816 postal, 1011 internet)
- The sample was self selecting: respondents either attended the roadshow, visited the BBFC website or contacted the BBFC for a questionnaire
- The responses arrived between Autumn 1999/ Spring 2000
- The tabulations were produced by Quality Data Preparation, an independent data analysis specialist

The questionnaire was very similar to the one administered in the national survey. Most postal respondents had been among the estimated 1500 people who attended one of a series of public roadshows held by the BBFC at regional centres (London, Edinburgh, Londonderry, Swansea, Manchester, Birmingham, Norwich, Bristol and Newcastle). At these, audiences were given an explanation of the BBFC Guidelines, illustrated by clips. There followed a question and answer session, chaired by the President of the BBFC, with the Director of the BBFC and a panel of Examiners. Attendees were encouraged to read the draft Guidelines and complete the questionnaire, which was also available to anyone accessing the BBFC web pages via the internet.

Comparison of techniques

Sample size

The national, postal and internet samples were all of sufficient size for analysis, enabling comparison of subgroups. The jury technique does not involve a statistically robust number of people, and although the percentage responses are recorded in the report tables for comparative purposes, ***they should be treated with caution.***

Representativeness

The source of participants varied across the different studies. Respondents for the national survey were recruited to match the demographic profile of the UK, and not on any criteria relating to film and video. As far as was possible with such a small number of people, the jury members too were selected to provide a demographic spread (although all visited the cinema or rented videos at least occasionally). In contrast, postal and internet respondents had either attended a BBFC roadshow, logged on to its website or contacted its offices to obtain a questionnaire. Almost undoubtedly they had a particular interest in film and video classification, so did not form a representative cross section of the UK population. This was confirmed by their demographic make up. Furthermore, there were no procedures in place to prevent individuals submitting multiple responses to the postal or internet surveys.

Thoroughness

Juries had the advantage that participants learnt about the issues in some considerable detail. This meant they were able to give considered and informed, rather than superficial, responses. Although all the other respondents were encouraged to read the Guidelines before completing the questionnaire, some would take more care than others to absorb the document. Also, the written Guidelines were open to different interpretations (as, of course, were the questions) – this was particularly true for the national and internet respondents who did not have the benefit of illustrative film clips.

Sample Characteristics

Demographic profile

Table 1 shows the marked difference in demographics across the three survey samples.

Compared to the UK profile, men, younger people, full time workers and students were all over-represented in the postal and – to a more extreme degree – the internet sample

- the national sample was an equal mix of men and women, whereas 60% of the postal and 89% of the internet respondents were male
- nearly half the national sample (46%) was aged 45+, compared with 34% of the postal sample and a mere 8% of the internet respondents. Just over a third of the national (34%) and postal (38%) respondents were under 35, compared with the majority (73%) of the internet respondents
- a higher proportion of internet and postal respondents than those in the national survey were in full time work (71% and 56% vs 45%) or students (19% and 9% vs 5%). Consequently, fewer were unemployed or retired

Some of the differences in the internet sample are partly, but by no means wholly, explained by the profile of internet users generally.

Members of the juries were recruited to provide a split between the sexes and a spread of ages and backgrounds. A high proportion of them proved to be parents, perhaps at least partly because it was stipulated that they had to visit the cinema or rent videos nowadays, and this is more common amongst people with children.

Sample Characteristics

Table 1: Demographics

	National N=1249 %	Postal N=816 %	Internet N=1011 %	Juries Post N=27 %
Male	50	60	89	52
Female	50	39	9	48
18-24	14	13	29	19
25-34	20	25	44	15
35-44	20	25	18	22
45-60	*24	25	7	26
60+	*22	9	1	19
Full-time work	45	56	71	41
Part-time work	12	13	2	7
Housewife/husband	9	5	1	15
Student	5	9	19	7
Unemployed	10	3	3	7
Retired	18	10	1	22
No children	69	68	71	26
Age of children (Those with children)	(N=384) %	(N=242) %	(N=262) %	
0-5	38	31	51	na
6-11	45	44	39	na
12-13	*19	22	19	na
14-15	*19	19	19	na
16-18	19	27	16	na

*estimates as slightly different age categories were used

Sample Characteristics

Viewing habits

Across all three samples, respondents rented videos more frequently than they visited the cinema, although it was a less widespread phenomenon – for example, almost a quarter of the national sample (24%) never rented videos, dropping to 14% who never visited the cinema.

Men, younger people and parents were all more likely to rent videos; younger people and (to some extent) parents were also the groups who visited the cinema more frequently, but here there was no sex difference.

The internet sample rented videos and, in particular, visited the cinema more often than the national sample. The postal sample was close to the national picture for videos but more similar to internet respondents when it came to cinema attendance.

There was a clear overlap between video and cinema, with those keen on renting videos tending to go to the cinema more often. Eight per cent of the national sample (96 people) never rented videos or went to the cinema, compared with less than one per cent of the combined postal and internet sample (13 people). Although respondents to the national survey were not selected on viewing criteria, other available statistics suggest that the UK population tends to visit the cinema and rent videos less often than this. So either some bias did creep into the sample - perhaps those who never did either were more likely to refuse to participate – or they exaggerated the frequency of their behaviour when completing the questionnaire.

Jurors were recruited on the basis that they rented videos or visited the cinema at least occasionally, but within this there was a spread of frequencies.

Sample Characteristics

Table 2: Frequency of renting videos

	National N=1249 %	Postal N=816 %	Internet N=1011 %	Juries Pre N=28 %
Every day	1	*	2	-
2/3 per week	6	6	18	7
1 per week	10	14	23	21
1 per fortnight	12	12	13	21
1 per month	14	19	16	14
1 per 2-3 months	11	11	8	11
1 per 4-6 months	6	7	5	11
Less often	16	14	8	14
Never	24	17	6	-

Table 3: Frequency of visiting the cinema

	National N=1249 %	Postal N=816 %	Internet N=1011 %	Juries Pre N=28 %
Every day	*	1	*	-
2/3 per week	1	5	7	-
1 per week	4	14	17	7
1 per fortnight	7	21	23	7
1 per month	18	20	29	29
1 per 2-3 months	19	16	13	18
1 per 4-6 months	15	10	5	18
Less often	23	11	5	21
Never	14	2	1	-

* less than 0.5%

Attitudes

Attitudinal statements

All respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements related to films and videos. Responses to some of the key propositions are shown below.

Attitudes towards emulation

Respondents were asked if they agreed with a number of statements suggesting that people would copy various elements of film and video. Generally speaking, agreement with the statements was stronger among women, older people, and those who rarely or never rent videos or visit the cinema.

Almost half the national sample agreed that violence in films might make people behave more violently in real life (46%, including 19% who strongly agreed). Just over a quarter of the sample (28%) disagreed (Table 4). The response of the postal sample was rather more sceptical, with 38% agreeing with the statement (slightly more, 41%, disagreed). In the internet sample, far fewer (7%) thought the proposition might be true, with 85% disagreeing (54% strongly disagreed).

The same statement was put to participants before and after the jury. As part of the process, they heard from witnesses involved in researching the possible effects of screen violence, and this seems to have made them much more doubtful about the simple cause and effect proposition. Agreement fell from half the jury members beforehand to less than one in five afterwards. However, some clung to their initial views, leading to exchanges like this:

“These children are actually seeing this in films and they are copying it.”

“I disagree with that, I don’t think violence in America has anything to do with films.”

Table 4: Emulation of violence

% agreeing (% disagreeing in brackets)	National N=1249	Postal N=816	Internet N=1011	Juries Pre N=28	Juries Post N=27
	%	%	%	%	%
Watching violence in films generally makes people more likely to be violent in real life	46 (28)	38 (41)	7 (85)	50 (25)	15 (70)

Over half the national sample (56%) agreed that young people might use bad language because of what they hear in films and videos. Just over a quarter of the sample disagreed (Table 5). The postal sample was slightly less convinced (48% agreed, 34% disagreed) and most of the internet sample dismissed the idea out of hand (19% agreed, and 64% disagreed, 37% strongly). Jurors, who were only asked about the statement afterwards, demonstrated very little support for it (only one in ten agreeing).

Table 5: Copying bad language

% agreeing (% disagreeing in brackets)	National N=1249	Postal N=816	Internet N=1011	Juries Post N=27
	%	%	%	%
Young people use bad language because of what they hear in films and videos	56 (26)	48 (34)	19 (64)	11 (59)

Attitudes

Attitudes towards realistic portrayals

Almost half the national and postal samples agreed with the statement that people over 18 have a right to see graphic, real sex in films and videos (Table 6). Internet respondents were much more strongly behind the proposition. More men than women agreed, and agreement declined with increasing age. Faced with the same statement after the juries, about three-quarters of participants agreed with it:

“If someone wants to bore themselves stupid watching that, then why not?”

Table 6: Portrayals of real sex

% agreeing (% disagreeing in brackets)	National N=1249 %	Postal N=816 %	Internet N=1011 %	Juries <i>Post</i> N=27 %
People over 18 have a right to see graphic portrayals of real sex in films and videos	46 (31)	49 (36)	89 (6)	78 (4)

There was considerable support from the national sample for allowing the realistic portrayal of drug use in films (52% agreed), but those aged 55+ (47%) and those who never go to the cinema or hire videos (46%) were more cautious. A hefty minority (30%) disagreed (Table 7). The proportions for the postal sample were identical. Internet respondents were much more strongly behind the propositions, with over three-quarters agreeing and around a tenth disagreeing. Jurors were more doubtful about the proposal, with more of them disagreeing than agreeing. On the one hand, some felt that overly realistic scenes might prove instructional and easily copied:

“... Seeing the effects of drug use is acceptable, but to see how it is used – NO. To train people in the use of drugs is not acceptable.”

“You should be able to just have the effects of what it has done afterwards. You don’t have to show the basics of how to inject it and that.”

On the other hand, some believed it had to be shown sufficiently realistically and in detail to be aversive:

“... the scenes might not be so hard hitting if you hadn’t seen the needle going in because you are so involved in saying ‘Oh God!’ that it makes you realise the consequences.”

“You are showing a lot of people how to do something, but I think the vast majority of people are horrified by it.”

Table 7: Realistic drug use

% agreeing (% disagreeing in brackets)	National N=1249	Postal N=816	Internet N=1011	Juries Post N=27
	%	%	%	%
Films should be allowed to portray drug use in a realistic manner	52 (30)	52 (30)	77 (10)	19 (37)

Approaching half of all three survey samples agreed that violence becomes more acceptable if it is humorous, or in a historic/fantastic setting, with less than a third disagreeing (Table 8). The vast majority of jurors agreed with this sentiment:

“(Men in Black) Even though he shot his head off there was green that came out so it was unrealistic violence.”

Attitudes

“(The Matrix) The fact that there is so much violence makes it make-believe... It’s fantasy... It’s a bit like an arcade game, isn’t it, really?”

Table 8: Violence in context

% agreeing (% disagreeing in brackets)	National N=1249 %	Postal N=816 %	Internet N=1011 %	Juries Post N=27 %
Violence is more acceptable if it occurs in comic, historic or fantastic settings	46 (31)	46 (33)	44 (27)	81 (7)

Realism was often seen as a justification in the debates the jurors had about bad language:

“If you have got an action film where someone gets shot in the shoulder they are not going to say ‘oh that hurt, that isn’t very nice, don’t do that again.’”

“(Nil by Mouth film clip) It is strong language, but the sort of thing you hear in a pub all the time... ... I still don’t like it mind you.”

Offensiveness of different elements

Respondents were asked to think of the different categories of film, from 'U' up to '18', and indicate for each level how offensive they found specific elements, namely

- bad language
- sex
- violence
- horror
- blasphemy
- nudity
- drug use

They used a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant 'not offensive' and 5 meant 'strongly offensive'.

All three samples show the same broad pattern, with drug portrayal consistently causing the most offence and nudity the least. Both the national and postal surveys included a core of people who found blasphemy 'strongly offensive' regardless of the classification (19% and 23% respectively at '18'). This core was virtually non-existent in the internet sample.

The amount of offence generally was lower in the postal sample than nationally, and even lower in the internet sample. Fewer than one in ten internet respondents were strongly offended by any of the elements apart from drug use after 'U' and 'PG': by '18', the levels of offence in this sample were minimal for everything.

Figures 1-3 on the following page, illustrate the decline in offensiveness across the age categories. At 'U', a high proportion of all three samples (over half in many cases) found most of the elements strongly offensive. This proportion slides fairly smoothly downwards from 'U' to '15' in the national and postal samples, with the decline tailing off between '15' and '18', in most cases dwindling to a level less than 20% (nearer 10% for the postal sample). The decline was accelerated for the internet sample – with, for instance, less than 10% finding any of the elements, bar drug use, offensive at '12'.

Offensiveness



Figure 1: Offensiveness - National Survey

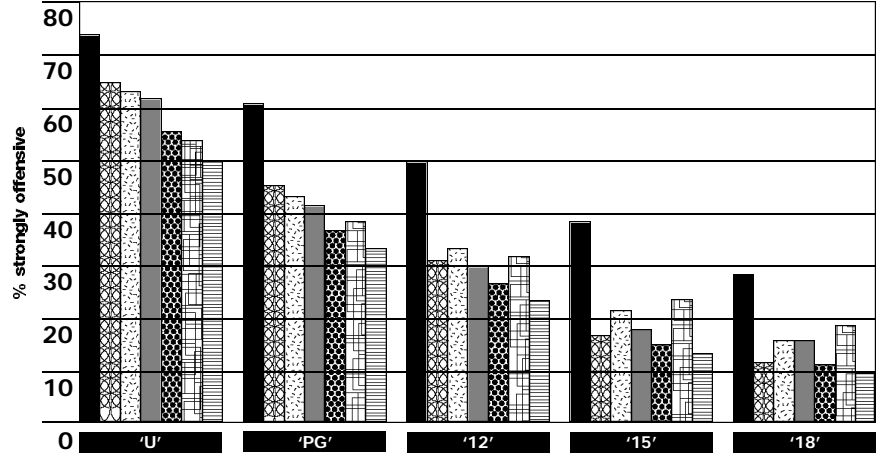


Figure 2: Offensiveness - Internet Sample

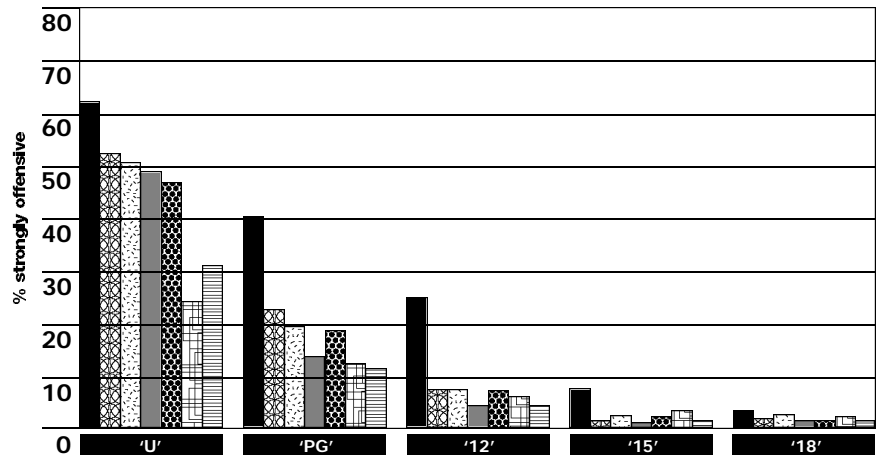
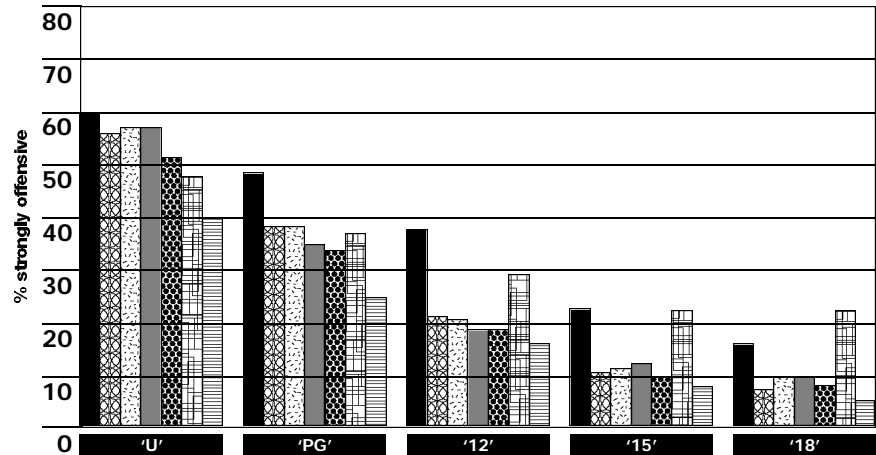


Figure 3: Offensiveness - Postal Sample



The proportions finding the elements 'not offensive' were consistently low (around one in ten) at 'U' across all three samples. For the national and postal samples, levels started to rise between '12' and '15'. The main increase was at '18', where the percentage not at all offended ranged between about a third for drugs and half for sex and nudity. Among the internet respondents, the rise tended to start earlier (between 'PG' and '12') and be much steeper, peaking at 89% finding nudity not offensive at '18', and 88% for sex.

As well as causing the most offence across all the age categories, drug use provided the most polarised response in the national sample: at '18', 35% declared it 'not offensive' and 29% 'strongly offensive'. To some extent, the postal sample echoed that pattern and even internet respondents found drug use a less inoffensive aspect of films.

For every element, women, older people and parents formed the most offended groups. Those who frequently go to the cinema or rent videos were less prone to finding the elements offensive.

Jurors addressed the same question before and after the juries, although the percentages are not shown graphically because the sample sizes are so low. Like the other samples, jurors rated drug use the most offensive category and nudity the least, regardless of age classification. The post-jury responses showed a slight decline in the proportion being offended by any of the elements, except bad language which hovered around the same level as previously. The most marked decreases were for nudity and violence, particularly at '12'.

Opinion of draft Guidelines

Respondents were asked to judge how satisfactory the BBFC's draft document was in terms of the strictness of the Guidelines concerning sex, violence, language and drug use. They were then asked whether they agreed or disagreed that 'too much' of each of these elements was allowed at the different age levels.

There were some consistent patterns in the demographic differences. Older people were more likely to find the Guidelines 'not strict enough' in every category, as were those not working and people who never go to the cinema or rent videos (perhaps related, as many of both subgroups are aged 55+). Women were consistently more likely than men to condemn the Guidelines as 'not strict enough', with the exception of drug standards where both sexes reacted similarly. This difference was most pronounced for sex standards. Likewise, women, older people and infrequent cinema goers or video renters were more inclined to say 'too much' of each element was allowed in the different age categories.

Although nearly all the postal respondents expressed an opinion about the sex Guidelines, a hefty minority of around 16% failed to express an opinion about the other Guidelines. This is one of several indications that this sample included a subgroup whose primary focus was the portrayal of sex on film and video, and who had little interest in the other issues.

The following tables include columns labelled pre- and post-jury. The opinions expressed before the jury were based on personal experience rather than the draft Guidelines, which participants had yet read at that stage. (As usual, caution should be exercised when interpreting these figures because of the low sample size).

Opinion of draft Guidelines

Sex

Just over half the respondents in the national sample (54%) thought the sex Guidelines were about right, with most of the remainder (32%) considering them not strict enough (Table 9). Despite this, of all the categories being considered, the sex Guidelines had the highest proportion (12%) judging them to be too strict.

To different extents, both the postal and internet samples were more inclined than the national sample to judge the sex standards too strict. Most internet respondents were of the view that the Guidelines should be slackened (82% saying 'too strict'). The postal sample was much more evenly split, with the highest proportion (40%) opting for 'about right'.

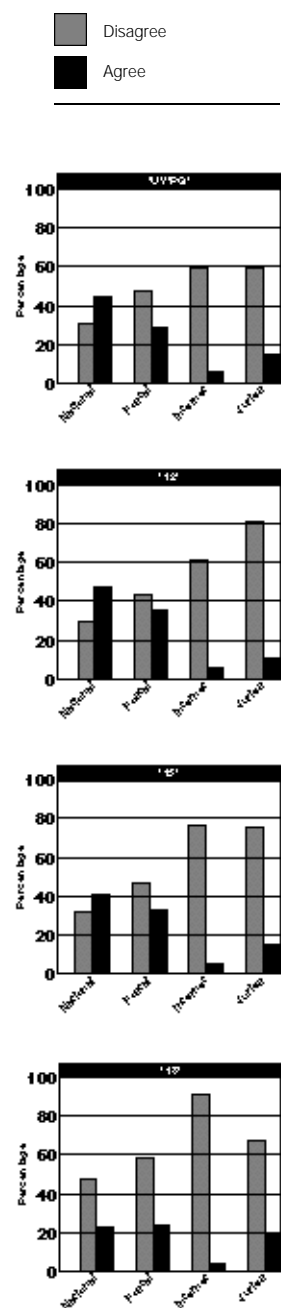
Most jurors were satisfied with the sex Guidelines by the end of the jury, with a marginal shift towards finding them 'too strict'.

Table 9: Strictness of sex Guidelines

	National N=1249 %	Postal N=816 %	Internet N=1011 %	Juries Pre N=28 %	Juries Post N=27 %
Too strict	12	30	82	14	19
About right	54	40	13	50	78
Not strict enough	32	27	3	21	4
Not stated	2	3	3	14	-

From 'U' to '15', around 40% of the national sample agreed that the Guidelines allowed too much sex, and 30% disagreed (Figure 4). There was a dramatic turnaround at '18', where the number agreeing outweighed those disagreeing: less than a quarter of the sample (23%) thought there was too much, whereas nearly half (47%) disagreed.

Figure 4:
Opinion of Sex
Guidelines by age category
Too much at...



Opinion of draft Guidelines

Around a third of the postal sample thought there was too much sex allowed at 'U' to '15', and just under a quarter (24%) at '18'. However, more of them disagreed than agreed at each level (the figures being closest at '12', at 43% and 35% respectively).

Only a minimal number of internet respondents agreed there was too much sex allowed by the Guidelines at any classification. The level of disagreement rose to a massive 91% at '18', compared with 58% of the postal sample and 47% nationally.

The consensus across both juries was that some relaxation in these Guidelines might be possible, especially at '15' and '18'. They felt that account should be taken of the sex education that young people receive at school, and that sexual portrayals could be more frank at '15' if in the context of a loving relationship. Many raised what they considered the absurdity of being legally allowed to have sex at 16, but unable to see it on film until the age of 18:

“There is an anomaly about not being able to watch sex but being able to have sex.”

At '18', the majority of jurors considered that the Guidelines could be relaxed, with quite explicit images allowed:

“Pictures of aroused genitalia are not permitted, but we didn't think that was too serious as long as it was in context.”

At 'R18', both juries concluded that anything legal should be permitted:

“If you are going to that extreme anyway, why do they say you can't have semen on your face?”

This contrasts with the national sample, 36% of whom judged the draft 'R18' Guidelines 'not strict enough' (49% thought them 'about right' and 13% 'too strict').

Violence

Rather more of the national sample found the violence Guidelines about right (51%) than not strict enough (42%), with only a tiny minority (5%) saying they were too strict (Table 10). Overall, the postal sample was less restrictive than the national sample, with 29% saying 'not strict enough'. This was outweighed by the proportion satisfied (45%), and only 10% thought them 'too strict'.

A substantial minority (16%) did not answer. In contrast, over half the internet respondents (55%) said the Guidelines were too strict with most of the remainder (36%) judging them about right.

Initially, based on their own viewing, nearly half the jurors thought the Guidelines were not strict enough on violence. Afterwards, however, around three-quarters thought they were about right. One of the clips they saw was an exceptionally powerful scene of racist violence from **American History X**, which provoked opposing viewpoints:

“(It) could be influential to violent people, so I don’t like it at all.”

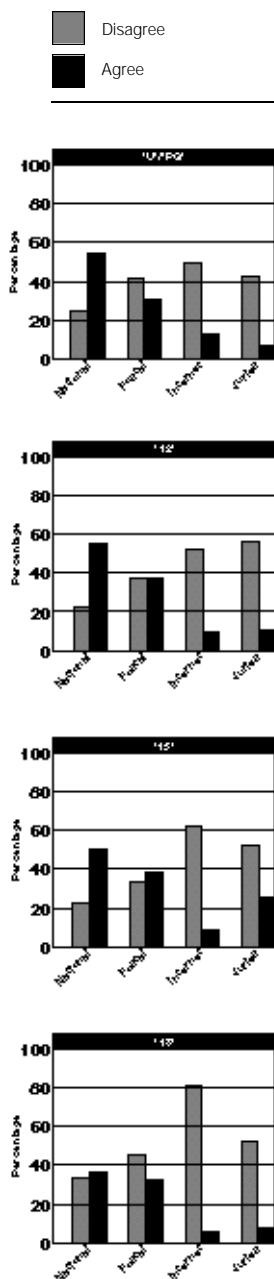
“Even if one person copies it, it might stop a hundred people from doing it, so I don’t think you can judge it that way.”

Table 10: Strictness of violence Guidelines

	National N=1249 %	Postal N=816 %	Internet N=1011 %	Juries Pre N=28 %	Juries Post N=27 %
Too strict	5	10	55	11	4
About right	51	45	36	36	78
Not strict enough	42	29	6	46	19
Not stated	2	16	3	7	-

Opinion of draft Guidelines

Figure 5:
Opinion of **Violence**
Guidelines by age category
Too much at...



Up to and including the '15' classification, at least half the respondents in the national survey thought there was too much violence allowed, with less than a quarter in disagreement (Figure 5). At '18', opinion was fairly evenly divided. Disagreement that 'too much' violence was allowed at the different classifications easily swamped agreement in the internet sample, though it was not quite so pronounced as for sex. Views were more mixed among postal respondents, with the proportion disagreeing only drawing ahead of those agreeing at 'U' and '18'.

The jurors were generally satisfied with the violence Guidelines. Their main concern was sexual violence, which they felt very strongly should be handled with great care. One jury stipulated that it should not be allowed unless it was clearly shown in a negative light. There were doubts about the rape scene shown in a clip from an American film, **Showgirls**:

"I think it depends on the type of film as well, I think if it was a real social realism film [it would be okay], but it was very glamorized and I was uncomfortable with that and the man was a cool dude rock star that was doing it and I was feeling uncomfortable with the whole set up of it."

Language

Slightly more of the national sample considered the language Guidelines about right (48%) than not strict enough (43%). Postal respondents were similarly split between finding the Guidelines satisfactory (39%) and not strict enough (31%), although a somewhat larger minority (12%, against 5% nationally) thought they were too strict. Over half the internet sample (53%) thought the language Guidelines were about right, although most of the remainder opted for 'too strict' (38%).

The proportion of jurors who were satisfied with the Guidelines decreased over the course of the jury, with just over half ending up judging them 'not strict enough', doubled from their initial impressions:

"The language needs to basically be reviewed, big time."

Much of the disquiet related to the reference list produced in the Guidelines, where words were slotted into one of five categories from very mild to very strong, based on previous research². The definition of 'bad' language was clearly a very personal issue, leaving jurors unable to agree either with the list or with each other:

"I think that there are certain words that you shouldn't put in a certain category."

"But then again exceptions can be made if it is silly not to. ET [featuring the term 'penis breath'] shouldn't be a 15."

"There would have to be some kind of discretion."

"The other thing is, with how quickly it changes and before you have got the list it could be absolutely obsolete."

² Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1997

Opinion of draft Guidelines

Many concluded that having a 'laundry list' approach was an oversimplification and unworkable, ignoring as it did context and tone of use:

"It's more how it's used than what is used."

"I think it comes down to context and how the word is being used."

"I think words have power and I think some of the derogatory words are probably worse than that ..."

One or two jurors did not object to strong language in principle:

"I just see them as words and they don't do any real damage. It's just what people perceive as what is good and bad as a word."

However, the more common attitude was that they could be distasteful, depending on how they were used:

"You can make it sound funny. But other times you say something in an offensive way."

Table 11: Strictness of language Guidelines

	National N=1249 %	Postal N=816 %	Internet N=1011 %	Juries Pre N=28 %	Juries Post N=27 %
Too strict	5	12	38	7	11
About right	48	39	53	57	30
Not strict enough	43	31	5	25	52
Not stated	5	17	5	11	7

Opinion of draft Guidelines

In the national sample, the split between agreement and disagreement as to whether there was 'too much' bad language at any level (Figure 6) was very similar to that seen for violence. The balance agreed there was 'too much' until '18', where the split was more even. The largest gap was at '12', where 58% agreed there was too much bad language allowed, and 22% disagreed. The proportions were fairly even for the postal sample except at '18', where more disagreed (47%) than agreed (32%). Asked if there was 'too much' language allowed at the different classifications, internet respondents tended to answer as they had for violence, mostly disagreeing.

Jury members were very concerned about bad language, primarily at the younger end of the scale:

"I think that certainly from around the '12' category and downwards we felt quite passionate about it, didn't we?"

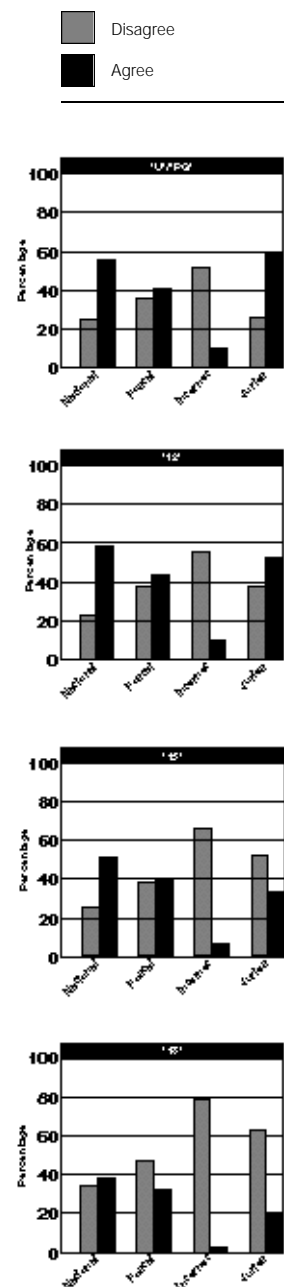
There was a feeling that only very mild language should be allowed at 'U', or even no bad language at all:

"If you are sitting there with them (kids) in a film and that sort of thing is being said and you've taken them to see that film, you are almost condoning the contents of that film."

At '12', neither jury was convinced by the rule allowing one use only of strong language (that is, the word 'fuck'). This rule is designed to meet the vagaries of the US classification system, where films often include one example of the word to acquire the equivalent PG 13 classification, which the film industry believes will bring them more commercial success. However, the juries tended to go in opposite directions to solve the problem – one would be stricter (allowing only moderate language) and one more lenient (permitting more than one use so long as it was not repetitive or excessive):

"I am not bothered about swearing from the age of 12 up depending on the amount."

Figure 6:
Opinion of **Language**
Guidelines by age category
Too much at...



Opinion of draft Guidelines

“We felt it would be better for them not to be exposed to swearing in films rather than trying to decide which word was acceptable and which wasn’t.”

Some members of the juries admitted their response was pragmatic, aimed at meeting the demands of the parents rather than their offspring:

“Children don’t object to any amount of swearing really, but what we are talking about, it’s from the parents’ perspective.”

At ‘15’, jurors tended to be more relaxed about the language issue. However, there was considerable unease about the use of ‘very strong’ language (defined in the Guideline list as ‘cunt’ and ‘motherfucker’). One jury had a vote on whether these words should appear at all in ‘15’ films, and only three approved, the other ten finding them unacceptable. At ‘18’, the draft Guidelines were judged satisfactory, although there was some concern over extreme repetitiveness of bad language.

Drugs

Once again, the national sample was clearly most inclined to opt for 'not strict enough' (47%) although almost as many (45%) thought the drug use Guidelines were about right. Satisfaction was highest among internet respondents (54%), but most of the remainder (34%) said they were too strict. Opinion among the postal respondents was more divided: just under half (48%) approved of them, with a quarter saying they were not strict enough and 11% saying the opposite.

The jury members were initially split between thinking the Guidelines about right and not strict enough, and there was a slight drift towards the latter position during the jury:

"They shouldn't put (drug use) in films because they are just making it more acceptable."

Some participants thought showing drug use might encourage viewers to try for themselves:

"They (army cadets juror worked with) would have been impressed by it (heroin injection scene in Looking after Jo Jo) because those kids were out to prove I am the big I AM and they would have done it."

There was general agreement that drugs should be shown in a negative light:

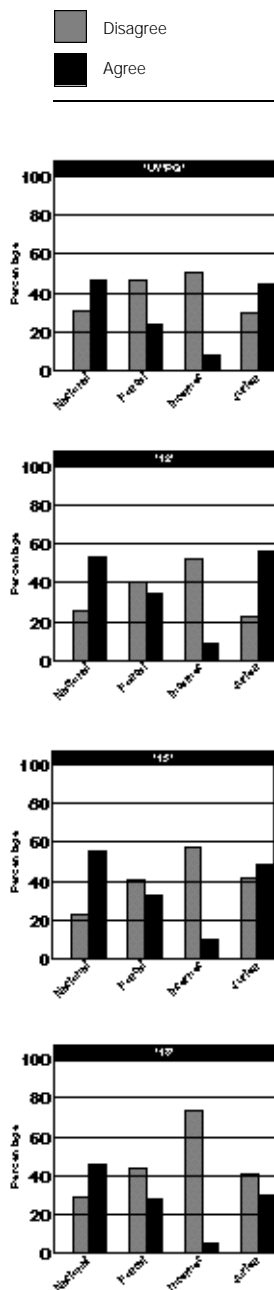
"The drug storyline has its place, but not glorified."

Sometimes, this would justify detail being shown:

"I think that if you do sanitise it, it doesn't have such an impact on you and I think it should have an impact."

Opinion of draft Guidelines

Figure 7:
Opinion of **Drug Use**
Guidelines by age category
Too much at...



³ Knowing the score, Arnold Cragg, for BSC and BBFC, April 2000

One juror was concerned that showing drugs in an unremittingly negative light would be counter productive (a theme that also emerged in recent BBFC-sponsored research among drug users³):

“My experience is when you are between 15 and 18, the people who take drugs go ‘oh yes, they always show it’s bad in films, but you know it’s not’. And it makes them feel more important, because they can say ‘we know better’.”

Table 12: Strictness of drug use Guidelines

	National N=1249 %	Postal N=816 %	Internet N=1011 %	Juries Pre N=28 %	Juries Post N=27 %
Too strict	4	11	34	7	-
About right	45	48	54	36	44
Not strict enough	47	25	6	43	56
Not stated	4	15	5	14	-

The percentage agreeing that too much drug use was allowed heavily outweighed those disagreeing at all classification levels in the national sample (Figure 7).

Dissatisfaction with the Guidelines peaked at ‘15’ with the proportion agreeing there was too much allowed being more than double those disagreeing. However, unlike sex, violence and language, there was no real levelling out of opinion at ‘18’, with 46% agreeing there was ‘too much’ making it the least satisfactory of the Guidelines at ‘18’ in their opinion.

As with the other Guidelines, only a minority of the internet sample thought too much drug use was allowed at any of the classifications, and around half disagreed, rising to almost three-quarters at ‘18’. The proportion of the postal sample disagreeing outweighed those agreeing at all levels, although there was least difference at ‘12’ and ‘15’.

Opinion of draft Guidelines

The portrayal of drug use was a very contentious issue in the juries, as already shown in the quotes reported previously. Much debate revolved around what would be appropriate to show in a '12'. Some, as with sex, argued that portrayals should keep in line with the level of knowledge likely from drugs education programmes in school. Others thought no visual or verbal references to illegal drugs should be allowed even at this age:

“Drugs, this is our biggest debate, we don’t think really that it needs to be in there at all at that age group, you want children to have a childhood as long as they can.”

There was criticism of the Guidelines for lumping all illegal drugs together. Jurors felt that drugs ranged across a spectrum from the less problematic soft drugs (eg cannabis) to hard (eg heroin), and should be treated accordingly. There was a sense in which the concern about drugs in films reflected a very real fear of drugs in society, particularly as relates to school age children:

“They shouldn’t put (drug use) in films because they are just making it more acceptable.”

Age Categories

The vast majority of jurors preferred the current restrictive system of film classification rather than an advisory system more similar to the American model. There was some discussion about tweaking the ages at which the dividing lines are actually drawn, but no consensus:

“... the categories are about right, ‘12’, ‘15’ and ‘18’. They are not ideal, but putting it to 13 might be too confusing and I’m not sure of the best way that you could put it, unless you had a category for every age. That would be unworkable.”

The chief concern was to protect both children and the sensibilities of their parents. Both juries had a session with school age witnesses (aged from 12 to 14), and this proved revealing and even surprising to many jurors:

“Nothing seemed to bother them very much really.”

“I think we underestimate them.”

At ‘18’, the general feeling was that the audience would be made up of adults and Guidelines could be much more relaxed – although a minority debated whether a new classification of ‘21’ would be justified:

“Well, you’re dealing with grown ups, aren’t you?”

“... we are all adults in here ... we don’t want to be censored.”

Age Categories

“As adults you have the right to make your own mind up, there shouldn’t be something limiting you as to what you have got a choice of.”

“Maybe you could have 18 and have the 21 so ... you could allow more through by putting another category to allow more artistic licence.”

Most people agreed that adults who would find the content of some ‘18’ films offensive had the choice not to watch:

“Well, I think if you don’t like swearing, you don’t like horror, you don’t like to see people taking drugs, then you are quite free to go and pick a film with a younger category, aren’t you?”

Consumer Advice

All the jurors were supportive of sufficient details about films and videos being available so that potential viewers could make educated choices. They were encouraged by the information given currently on many videos, ie the theme of the film and the presence of different elements (sex and nudity, language and violence). If possible, they thought this should be expanded and include some indication of frequency and intensity. They were keen that it should appear in as many relevant places as possible, not just on the video or in the cinema but on all advertising sites and newspaper billings:

“I think it should be obligatory that it should have symbols or some sort of indication of what is in the film as well as the category it is in.”

“A standard box and a standard system which appears in the same colour or whatever in all advertising, so that it is easily recognisable.”

“It should come up with a warning like there are with cigarettes on the billboards, so you look at it and read it.”

There was a strong feeling that the system, whatever form it took, should not be voluntary as at present but should be imposed on the industry. The jurors had little or no patience with industry reluctance to include consumer advice because of lack of space or other constraints:

“I think that these are people who make their money and I just think it’s selfish to say oh, we haven’t got enough space – it’s rubbish.”

Jurors were particularly concerned about films in the ‘PG’ category, because they felt it was unrealistic to expect parents to make an informed decision about the film unless they were given adequate guidance about its content.