

BBFC Board of Classification Meeting

Tuesday 22 February 2022

Present

Patrick Swaffer	President
Murphy Cobbing	Vice President
David Austin	Chief Executive
Dave Barrett	Deputy Chief Executive
Matt Tindall	Senior Policy Officer (minutes)
Faye Harcourt	Director, Marketing and Outreach (for items 3, 4 and 5)
Ed Lamberti	Policy Manager (for items 3 and 4)
Jonny Goodman	Senior Compliance Officer (for item 6)
David Hyman	Compliance Officer (for item 5)
Debbie Meade	Compliance Officer (for item 5)

Apologies

Kamlesh Patel	Vice President
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Minutes of the previous meeting

1. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

Matters arising

2. There were no matters arising.

Research into non-photographic sexually abusive content

3. Ed briefed the Board on research exploring the risks and public policy responses associated with non-photographic sexually abusive content. The BBFC has collaborated on the project with academics from the onlinePROTECT research group at the University of Lincoln. The aim is to enhance understanding of the cultural context of this material, its prevalence today, its harm impacts, and the potential future impact of technological change. The Board discussed and agreed plans for the publication of the report.

THE BATMAN and Belfast City Council

4. The Board discussed the recent request from a cinema owner that Belfast City Council vary the conditions of the 15 classification for THE BATMAN to allow children aged under 15 to attend the film if accompanied by an adult. The Council had voted against the request.

Comms strategy

5. Faye presented the BBFC's comms and marketing strategy for 2022.

Recent classification decisions

6. Debbie, David Hyman and Jonny presented a number of clips for discussion.
7. Debbie invited the Board to consider two clips from an audio commentary version of the 1936 Charlie Chaplin comedy MODERN TIMES, which resulted in the historically U-rated work being classified PG. In the first clip, which analyses a scene in which the tough exterior of a prison inmate is undercut by his embroidery skills, the commentator states that the US censors of the time referred to this scenario disparagingly as 'the pansy joke'. In the second clip, the commentary specifies that the white powder which causes Chaplin to behave erratically was meant to be cocaine, a fact that is not made overt in the feature itself. The Board agreed that the use of the discriminatory term and the direct reference to cocaine required the PG.
8. David shared two scenes for comparison: one from the original 1961 film of WEST SIDE STORY, which is rated PG, and the corresponding scene from the 2021 remake, which was classified 12A. In both scenes, sexual threat is implied as a group of gang members surround and harass a woman. As the threat is brief and negatively presented the Board agreed that the 2021 version was appropriately classified at 12A. They thought it was possible that if the 1961 film were submitted for reclassification the longstanding PG may no longer be reasonable and defensible given changes to the BBFC's Classification Guidelines in recent years in response to increased public concern around issues related to sexual violence.
9. Jonny introduced a clip from DOCTOR SLEEP, the 2019 sequel to THE SHINING, in which a young boy is abducted and ritualistically murdered by a gang of supernatural villains. Since its release the film has prompted four complaints from members of the public who thought the violence in this scene was too strong for a 15 classification. The Board considered that the fantastical context, in which pain is inflicted not purely for sadistic reasons but in order to extract magical energy from the child, as well as the relative visual restraint, meant the sequence was permissible at 15.

AOB

10. There was no other business.

Date of next meeting: 24 March 2022