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News Release

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BBFC INTRODUCES NEW FILM CATEGORY

Children under 12 will be able to see '12' rated films at the cinema for the first time from tomorrow when the BBFC introduces the new advisory category, '12A'. The mandatory '12' category was introduced for films in 1989 and videos in 1994 and will remain in force for videos. The new category will require children under 12 to be accompanied into the cinema by an adult. Children over 12 will be able to see the film unaccompanied, as previously.

Announcing the change, BBFC Director, Robin Duval said:

"The BBFC receives a steady stream of letters from parents asking why they cannot make the decision about whether their child can see a '12' rated film. We know that the development and maturity of children varies considerably and parents know best what their children can deal with. It is important, however, that young children have an adult with them in case they are disturbed by anything they may see.

"Before making any decision the Board carried out research to establish whether the majority of the public wanted to move to an advisory rating at '12'. We ran a pilot exercise in Norwich for seven weeks at the end of last year when children under 12 were allowed to see '12' films with an adult. We asked people coming out of the cinemas for their views in addition to polling in the street and focus groups. We followed that up this year with a national survey involving over 4000 people from around the UK. The outcomes were almost identical. There was no majority in favour of changing to an advisory rating unless two elements were included: the accompaniment of under 12 children by an adult and the provision of easily available information - Consumer Advice - about the content of '12A' films. When both of those factors were included, 70 per cent of people, both in Norwich and nationwide, supported an advisory '12' rating."

Mr Duval went on to say:

“Advisory ratings for this age group are now the norm in most of Europe, America, Australia, Canada and elsewhere. The British public, however, wanted information about why the film had been given a ‘12A’ rating to be available before they reached the box office. As well as information about levels of violence, bad language, sexual references etc appearing on film posters and TV commercials, they wanted to see the information in their local press. We have been working closely with both the film distributors and the cinema exhibitors to ensure that Consumer Advice is in place before making the final decision to change to ‘12A’. I am delighted to say that the film distributors are already putting Consumer Advice on posters and commercials for ‘U’, ‘PG’ and ‘12’ films and all of the major cinema chains and many of the independents are already including it in their listings in local newspapers for ‘12’ films. This will continue through to the ‘12A’.”

The change to ‘12A’ will take effect from Friday. A new orange ‘12A’ symbol has been introduced for cinema films, with the old ‘12’ symbol remaining for video. There will continue to be films in the cinema with the old ‘12’ certificate, which were classified before today’s announcement. But all ‘12’ films, as well as newly-rated ‘12A’ films, will be open to children under 12 accompanied by an adult. The Board will use the same Guidelines to classify ‘12A’ films as have been used to classify ‘12’ films and videos.

Note for Editors

The research results from the Norwich pilot and the national survey are available on the BBFC website.

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