

Councillor Micheal Donnelly

Chair, Licensing Committee

Belfast City Council

City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS

Dear Councillor Donnelly,

I am writing to you today as the owner of one of Belfast's longest established cinemas, Movie House at Cityside (Yorkgate), to request that the committee considers a new film rating option for specific movies released in your jurisdiction. As you are no doubt aware, each council has the power to set age ratings on all films shown in their jurisdiction.

We currently use the guidance passed by the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification), which as you will know issues certificates of U, PG, 12A, 15 and 18. Many cinema owners across the UK share my view and have asked our trade body, the UKCA (United Kingdom Cinema Association) to write to the BBFC to request that they consider a new rating of 15A that would give parents a greater power to choose what films their children can see but this will take some time to be discussed by this body.

In 2002, the BBFC adopted a new 12A certificate to replace the existing 12 Certificate. 12A simply means that those under 12 can watch the film as long as they are accompanied by an adult parent or guardian. This has proved popular and a current example of this is Spider-Man: No Way Home, which has been attended by thousands of Belfast parents along with their children.

There is precedent for a rating system that gives parents greater power. The Republic of Ireland has a 15A rating available, while Canada offers a 14A. In the United States, a PG-13 rating is used as an advisory to caution parents that some content may be unsuitable for those under 13, while an R rating advises parents that those under 17 require an accompanying adult.

The BBFC itself states on its website that statutory powers over film remain with the local councils, which can overrule any of the BBFC's decisions on appeal, including altering the age ratings for films shown in their area.[1]

The reason I am writing to you at this particular time is because there has been a significant shift in the way families consume film and parents prefer to be the decision makers. Over recent months we have

[1] <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/education/university-students/bbfc-history>

had a significant increase in mums and dads arriving at the cinema with young people under the age of 15 wishing to see a film. They feel it is their right to make this decision and it causes them frustration and embarrassment when we are forced to turn them away.

On 4 March 2022, we are looking forward to the release of the new DC comic-based film The Batman; however, we anticipate that the BBFC may rate this film as a 15 based on feedback we have received. In the US this is likely to be rated PG-13 meaning any age can see it with parental consent.

I write to ask the committee to consider issuing a 15A rating on The Batman, while we and other cinemas enter into discussions with the BBFC over the outdated rating system.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Michael McAdam

Managing Director, Movie House Cinemas