

Why do we have ratings?



When video tapes were first introduced, in the late 1970s, there was **no requirement** that films released on tape must be classified. As such, children could rent or buy **unsuitable content** and some films were released that would not have been allowed to be shown in cinemas. The press started to call these films 'video nasties'.

The government introduced the **Video Recordings Act 1984 (VRA)**, which required that nearly all videos must be classified before they were released and that they must also **carry age ratings**, if required. This system was administered by the **BBFC**, who already rated cinema films, and their ratings can still be seen on DVDs and Blu-rays, as well as many online films, today.

Certain types of videos were exempt from BBFC classification, including **educational videos** and **video games**. That exemption was only lost if video games contained very strong content. Early video games were usually not strong or realistic enough to **require formal classification**.

As video games became more realistic, but in many cases not realistic or strong enough to require BBFC classification, the games industry decided to set up a **voluntary age rating system** for all video games. This was known as the **ELSPA** system and was **administered by the Video Standards Council, now called the Games Rating Authority (GRA)**. It ensured that those games not classified by the BBFC still carried age ratings.

In 2003 ELSPA was replaced by the **Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) system** which continued to rate games on a voluntary basis. However, stronger games were referred to the BBFC for a formal classification.

In 2007 Professor Tanya Byron was asked by the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, to undertake a review on behalf of the **UK Department for Children, Schools and Families**. The review '**Safer Children in a Digital World**' focused on the use of video games and the internet. One of the recommendations made in the review was that the dual system of mandatory video game ratings (BBFC) and advisory video game ratings (PEGI) was proving **confusing to many consumers**.

In 2012 the GRA was **designated by government** under the VRA as the statutory UK regulator responsible for the age rating of video games using the **PEGI system**.

By law, games rated PEGI 12, 16 and 18 must not be supplied to people below those ages.

