



**OFFICE OF FILM
& LITERATURE
CLASSIFICATION**

Te Tari Whakarōpū Tukuata, Tuhituhinga

**CENSOR
FOR A DAY
TERM 3, 2011**

www.censorship.govt.nz
0508 CENSOR (236 767)

Introduction

The Term 3, 2011 Censor for a Day event was held at the Spectrum Theatre in Wellington, at Reading Cinemas in Napier, and at Downtown Cinemas in Palmerston North.

Students were given a presentation about New Zealand's censorship system by Kate Ward, our Information and Policy Manager, including an overview of the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993. They also learned about the process followed by Classification Officers ('censors') when classifying films, video games, and other publications.

Students were asked to evaluate the film *Fright Night* using the classification criteria. The film had been classified but not yet released in cinemas.



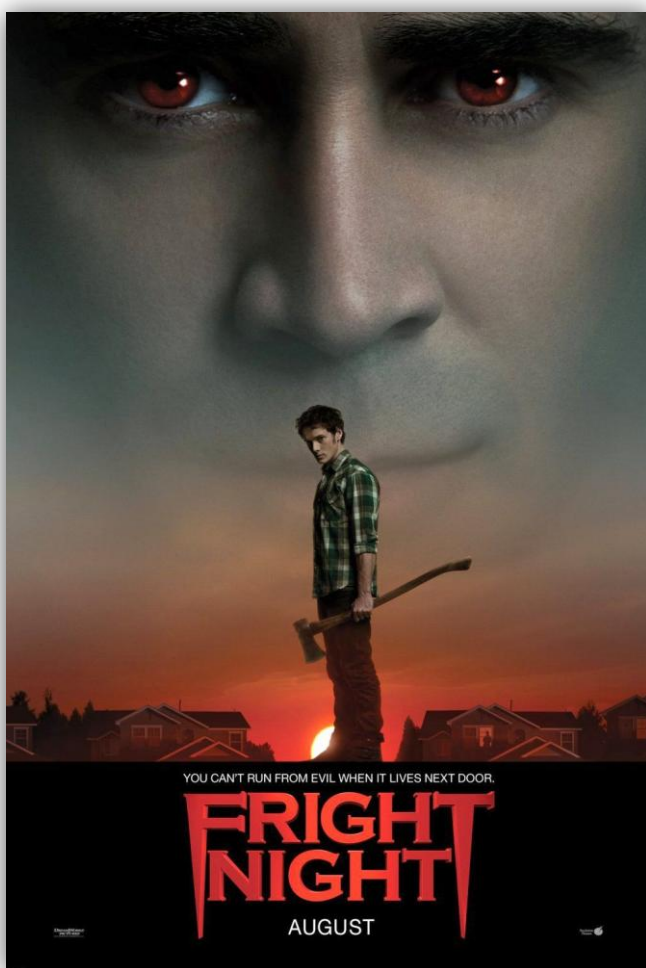
After watching the film, the students completed a classification form with the help of a Senior Classification Officer and decided on an appropriate classification. Kate then led a discussion about how the students applied the classification criteria to the film, and the reasons behind their individual classification choices.

At the end of the day, students were given the opportunity to ask general questions about censorship in New Zealand. Along with Kate, questions were taken by a Senior Classification Officer and an Information Unit Advisor.

In order to ensure that the Classification Office performs its role effectively, it is important to be aware of the public's views on our classification decisions, and on the censorship system as a whole. Censor for a Day is not only about teaching young people about the classification system. It's about hearing their views on the role of censorship in our society, especially as it relates to children and young people – as they are generally the groups most affected by the decisions we make. As always, the views of participating students were thoughtful, constructive, and sometimes challenging. We are grateful for the chance to hear them.

The Film

Fright Night is classified R13 with the descriptive note 'contains violence, horror scenes and offensive language'. The film is a reimagining of the 1985 horror comedy film of the same name and has been released in both 2D and 3D cinemas.



Official poster for the film *Fright Night*

The story follows teen Charley Brewster as he deals with the realisation that a vampire named Jerry has moved into the property next door in the Las Vegas suburb where he and his mother live. With the help of a hedonistic Las Vegas 'vampire killer' showman, Charley carries out an elaborate plan to kill the powerful vampire and save his girlfriend, who has been abducted and turned into a vampire herself.

The film was directed by Craig Gillespie, the director of *Lars and the Real Girl*, and was written by Marti Noxon, the writer-producer of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. It stars Anton Yelchin, Colin Farrell, David Tennant and Toni Collette.

Fright Night was released to generally positive reviews, scoring an average of 6.4/10 on the aggregate review database [Rotten Tomatoes](#), and an average of 64/100

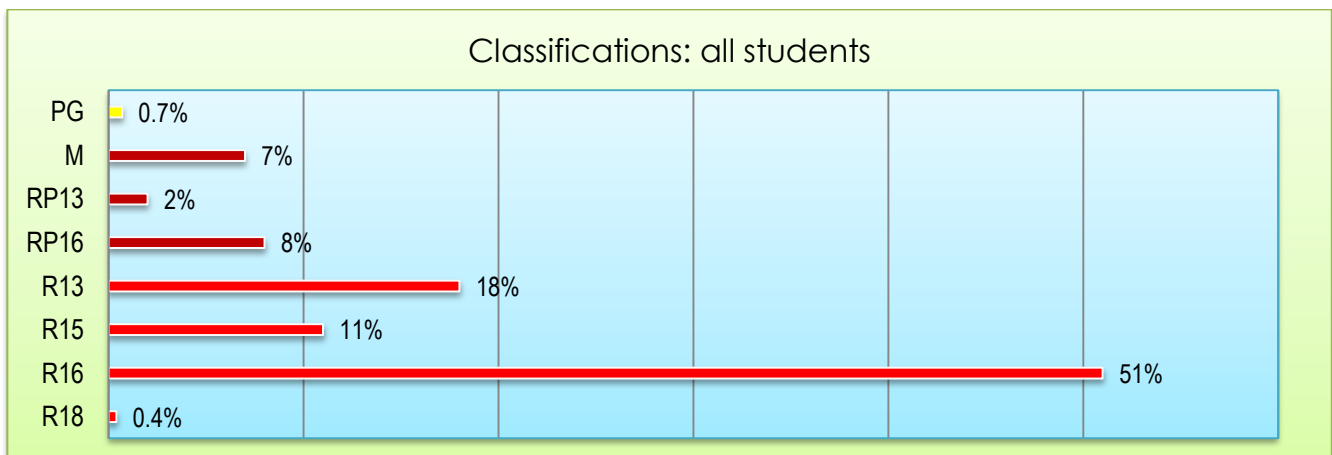
on [Metacritic](#). Sean O'Connell from the *Washington Post* said the film 'stands apart from the rehash pack by accomplishing something rival remakes rarely do: It improves on the premise it has been handed, producing a modernised version of a decades-old story that's superior to its predecessor in virtually every aspect'.



Survey Results: An Overview

Due to the extent, degree and manner in which *Fright Night* deals with sex, horror, crime, cruelty, violence and offensive language, most students (90%) thought that the film should have an age restriction assigned – these ranged from RP13 (restricted to people 13 years and over unless accompanied by a parent or guardian) to R18 (restricted to people 18 years and over).

A majority (51%) of the students decided the film should be classified R16, followed by R13 (18%), R15 (11%) and RP16 (8%). Seven percent of students opted for the unrestricted M classification (suitable for mature audiences 16 years and over).



Students' Classifications

A wide range of reasons were given by students in order to justify their choice of a particular classification.

R18 – restricted to people 18 years and over

Only one student chose the R18 classification, 'because it is scary and has no merit or meaning in society...under 18s will be too immature and will be affected by the violence'.

R16 – restricted to people 16 years and over

The majority of students who classified the film R16 did so for a variety of reasons. The most common concerns were the violence and horror. Students noted that 'mutilation and violence are not suitable for young children', and that those 16 and older are 'more able to deal with graphic content/influences'. Students felt that the frightening nature of the film would be harmful to younger audiences: one student noted that 'those without the maturity of a 16 year old may not be able to simply discard the terrifying images of this film and may have nightmares'. Another said that 'people below the age of 16 will be psychologically damaged because this movie seems so real'.

Concern over the harmful effects of offensive language was also common: 'Offensive language affects young children and possibly even young teenagers'; 'for kids who are vulnerable or more impressionable, the highly offensive language may have a negative effect'.

For some students the treatment of sex in the film was of most concern. One student argued that 'it is not legal for under-16s to be doing it' and so they should not be exposed to sexual content. Another stated that while the film contained 'crude sexual humour and continual reference', it was suitable for 16 year olds as there was 'no actual action'.

Many students reasoned that an R16 restriction was a justified limitation on the freedom of expression as the film would still be able to reach most of its target audience.

R15 – restricted to people 15 years and over

Use of the R15 classification by the Classification Office is uncommon, but was chosen by 11% of students. One person said that 'it's not racy enough to be R16 or R18'. Another summed it up by saying that the 'comedic aspects and light-hearted, satirical feel in some places brings it down from R16. As the film has little artistic merit, there is no need to leave the film unrestricted or with a lower restriction'. Students had been informed that the presence of merit can in some cases lead to a lower classification.

R13 – restricted to people 13 years and over

R13 was chosen by 18% of students, who generally considered the humorous and fantastical nature of the film would make it less harmful to early teens than many similar horror films. One student noted that ‘over 13s are more likely to understand that the violence isn't real and isn't towards real people’. Offensive language was a common reason for restricting the film from children, as it is likely to ‘damage the public good through children becoming flippant about manners’.

RP16 – restricted to people 16 and over

unless accompanied by a parent or guardian

RP16 was chosen by 8% of students. Many emphasized the importance of parental rights and supervision: ‘If the parents are ok with you going to watch it with them, then it should be ok – this gives people more freedom’. Another said that ‘if parents of children under 16 think their child is mature enough to view it then they can attend with them so as not to discriminate purely on age’. The educational merit of the film was also considered by some students: ‘The film is too scary for people under the age of 16 generally. However, it would make a good film study at school under teacher supervision’.

RP13 – restricted to people 13 and over

unless accompanied by a parent or guardian

RP13 was chosen by 2% of students. Some thought the nature of the material was not inherently harmful to children with adult supervision: ‘Even though this film has variations of violence, they are fantasy situations, as everyone knows that vampires do not exist. By making the film RP13 it would be possible for younger people to see this film, in a family situation where guidance can be given by a parent/guardian’. Some students emphasized the Bill of Rights Act, with one stating that ‘freedom of choice should be a matter for the individual, not an appointed moral guardian’.

M – suitable for mature audiences 16 years and over

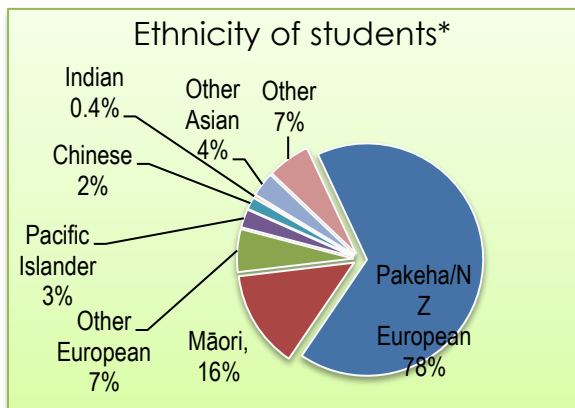
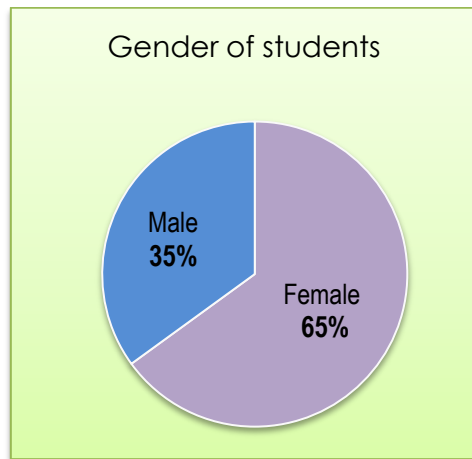
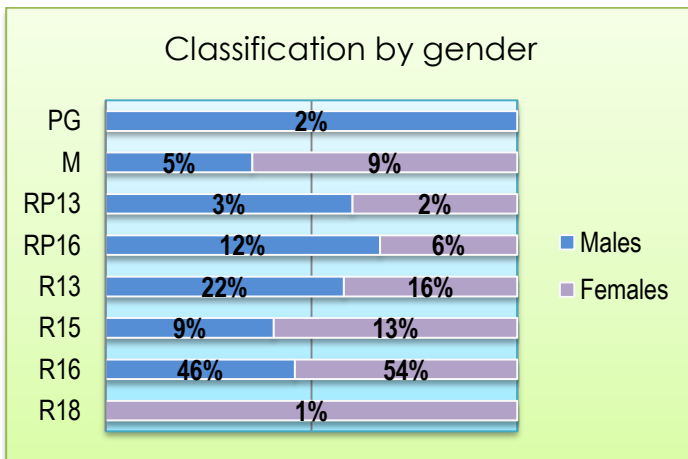
The 7% of students who opted for the unrestricted M classification believed that the film was unlikely to cause any harm if made available to children: ‘I wouldn't put a restriction on this film because it doesn't involve violence or horror that would really scar anybody’ and is depicted ‘in a comedic and light hearted way’. Another reasoned that a mature audience recommendation and descriptive note would be sufficient guidance for viewers: ‘An M will tell them that there is offensive language, sexual references and horror but that it is not so horrific that it needs to be restricted’.

PG – parental guidance recommended for younger viewers

Two students chose the unrestricted PG classification: ‘This film is a classic example of the audience needing to exercise its own discretion. In short, nobody is obliged to watch it, and even if they were, no harm could be done anyway’.

Classification by gender

Male and female students’ classification decisions were generally quite similar, though female students were more likely to choose higher restrictions (R15 and R16) and male students lower restrictions (R13, RP16 and RP13), while female students were more likely to choose the unrestricted M classification.

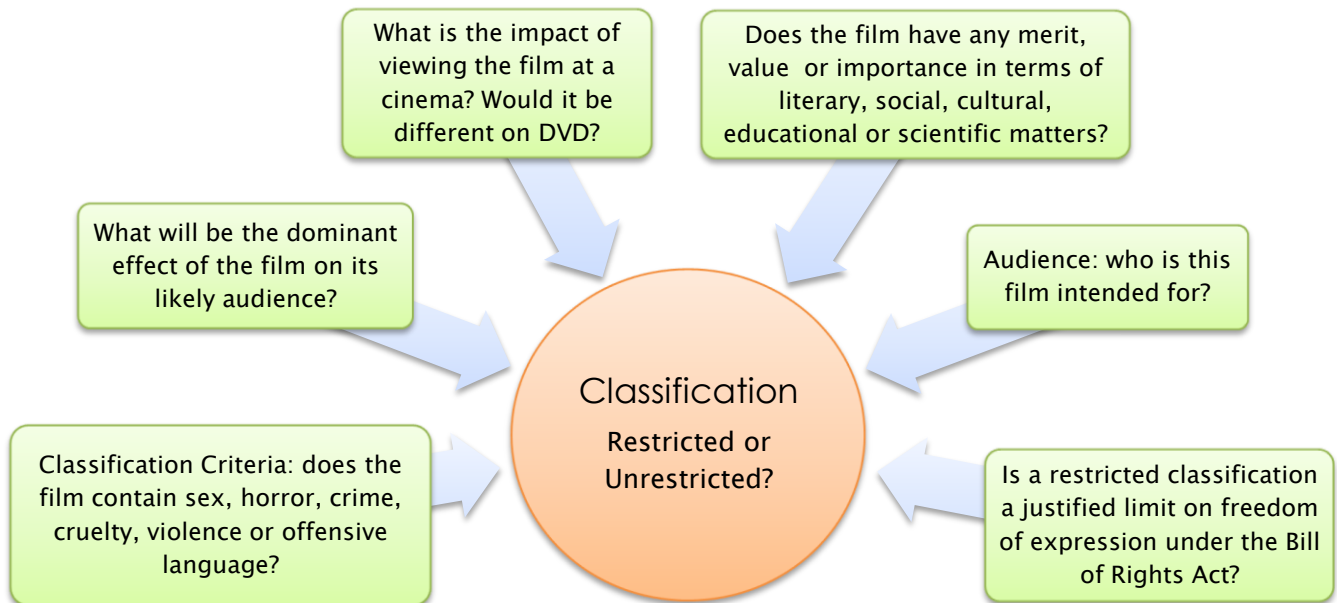


Almost twice as many female students participated in the event as male students. Just over three quarters of the students identified as Pakeha/New Zealand European, 16% identified as New Zealand Māori, 7% as non-New Zealand European, 3% as Pacific Islanders, and 2% as Chinese.

*some students indicated more than one ethnic group

The Classification Exercise

Students filled out the classification form – a pared down version of a 21–page consideration sheet Classification Officers use when classifying a film. The exercise involved students answering the following questions which relate to specific sections in the Classification Act. The students were asked to use their answers to these questions to decide on a suitable classification and descriptive note.

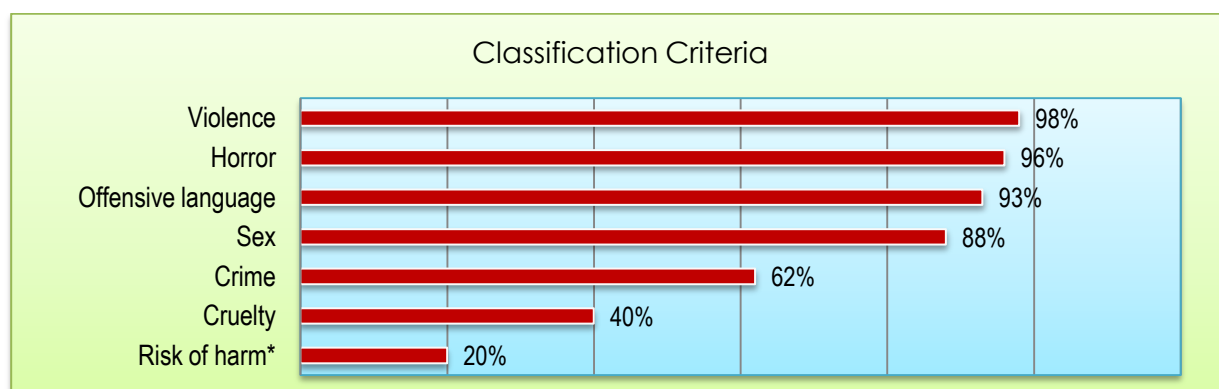


After evaluating *Fright Night* using New Zealand’s classification criteria, students decided on a particular age restriction – for example R13 or R16 – or they decided the film should be unrestricted, for example classifying the film as M (suitable for mature audiences 16 years and over). No students chose the G classification (suitable for general audiences).



Survey Results

Students were asked if the film contained potentially restricted material such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty, violence, or highly offensive language. The students were also asked to describe how this material is depicted or otherwise dealt with in the film. Almost all students agreed that *Fright Night* contained horror and violence, and most thought the film contained sexual material and highly offensive language. There was less agreement about the other criteria – for example, just under two-thirds thought the film contained crime, and just 40% thought the film contained cruelty.



*Content likely to increase the risk of young people harming themselves or others

Classification criteria considered by the Office

The Classification Office restricted the film to people 13 years and over due to its treatment of horror, violence and highly offensive language. A majority of students agreed that these criteria were present in the film. In the summary of reasons for its classification decision the Classification Office noted that:

The publication's unrestricted availability is likely to be injurious to the public good. Children are likely to be shocked and disturbed by the horror, violence and gore. They will also be unfamiliar with the conventions of the vampire genre and are unlikely to understand the use of humour in this context. This is likely to increase the impact of the stronger elements. While horror films of this type are usually restricted to older teenagers and adults, the Classification Office considers that in this instance any likely injury to younger teenagers is mitigated by the cartoonish presentation and the use of humour...While younger teenagers might find the horror and violence startling, they are unlikely to suffer any long-term injury. In addition, the use of highly offensive language is likely to encourage a younger audience to emulate it and its use contributes to the need for a restriction to audiences 13 years of age and over.

Classification criteria considered by students

Sex

Most students thought the film contained sexual material of some kind. This included romantic scenes between Charley and his girlfriend, and sexual language and references. One student summed up the sexual content as 'some reference to sex, not major, done in a tasteful manner, with some lines in the movie being rude in a way but I wasn't offended by it...more for comedy than hurting or offending the public'. Another student took a more critical view: 'Sex is described throughout the film by male characters who boast about sexual endeavours, and females that yearn for male sexual attention'.



Jerry the vampire with one of his victims

Violence, Horror and Cruelty

The majority of students believed the film contained violence and horror. While most students thought that the violence and horror was widespread and relatively explicit, most also agreed that the fantastical, over the top and humorous nature of this content reduced its overall impact. Many students considered genre to be important – one noted the 'many conventions of horror, such as blood, music, isolation and dark settings'.



Charley's girlfriend Amy, a new vampire, prepares to feed

Forty-percent of students noted the presence of cruelty in the film. Some students mentioned the cruelty of school bullying, but most focused on the actions of the vampire: 'Jerry kept his victims locked up and tortured them...this wasn't shown much in the film, but evidence of torture was there'.

Crime

The majority of students thought the film contained crime, such as 'kidnapping, trespassing, arson and murder'. In the context of a horror film however, crime was seen as less important than the violence and horror – it was noted by some students that despite all the carnage no police appeared in the film.

Highly offensive language

Most students thought the film contained highly offensive language, but that in context it was not highly problematic. Language use by Charley was generally seen as appropriate considering the highly stressful and dangerous situations he found himself in. Students were more likely to find the misogynistic language of the vampire particularly harmful to a younger audience: 'Casual offensive language was spread throughout the film and was demeaning of women'.



Jerry chases Charley and his mother after burning down their house

Content likely to increase the risk of young people harming themselves or others

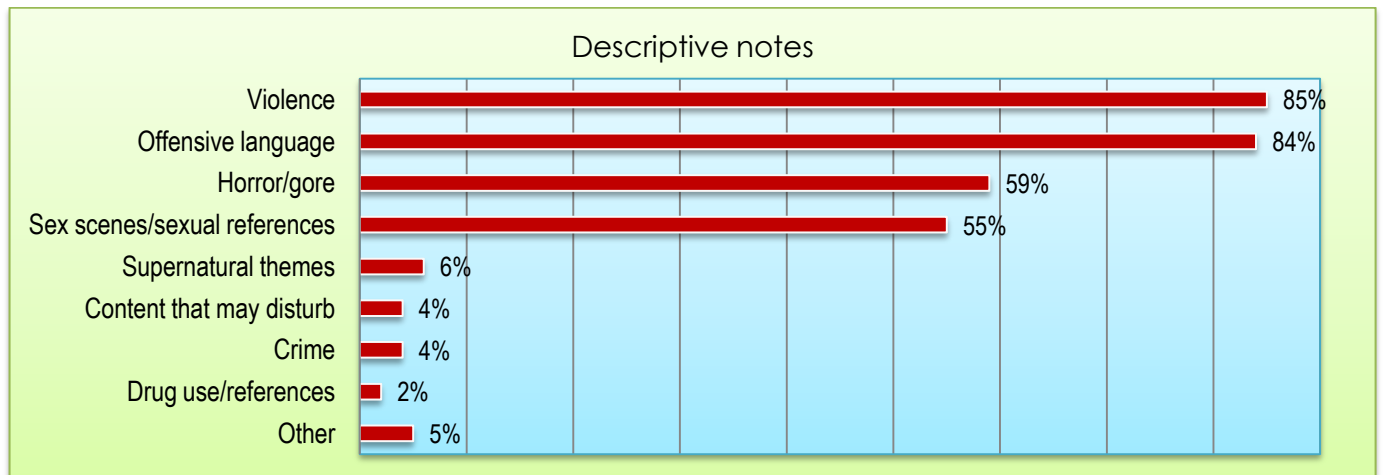
The classification criteria include material likely to increase the risk of children and young people harming themselves or others. Only twenty-percent of students felt that content likely to cause such harm was present in the film. Some thought that children may be influenced to harm others they suspect of being vampires, or that children and young people might be encouraged to see violence as a legitimate means to deal with threatening situations.



Charley and Peter Vincent go hunting for Jerry

The Descriptive Note

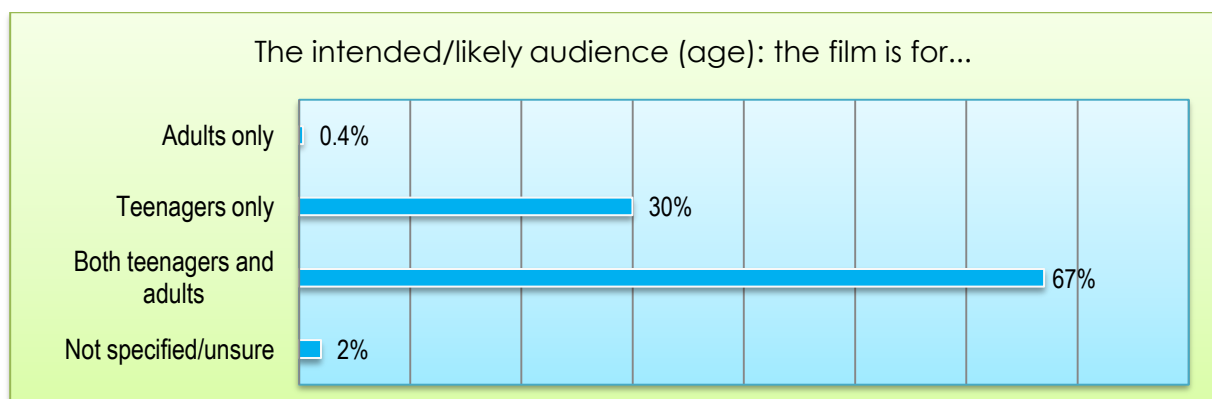
Descriptive notes inform the public about content within a film which may concern them. The descriptive note for *Fright Night* informs potential viewers that the film contains 'violence, horror scenes and offensive language'. When students were asked what descriptive note they thought the film should have, most noted 'violence' (85%), followed by 'offensive language' (84%), 'horror/gore' (59%), and then 'sex scenes/sexual references' (55%).



Audience

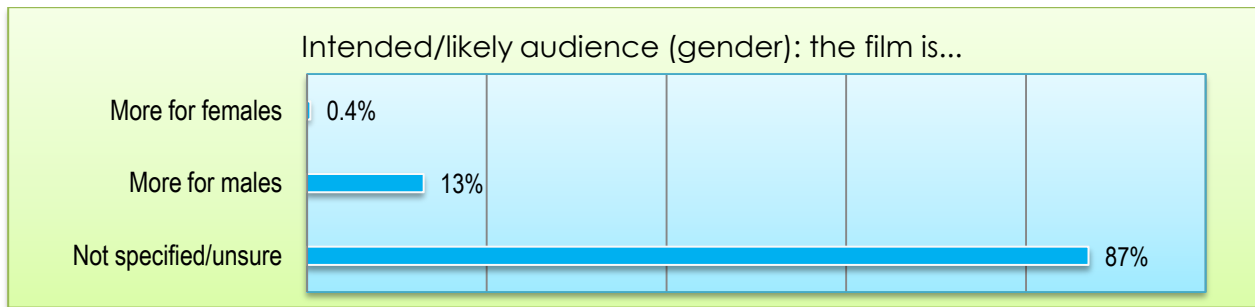
Age

Students were asked who they thought was the intended or likely audience for the film. Around two thirds felt the film was aimed at both a teenage and (mostly young) adult audience. About a third of students thought the film was aimed solely at teenagers.



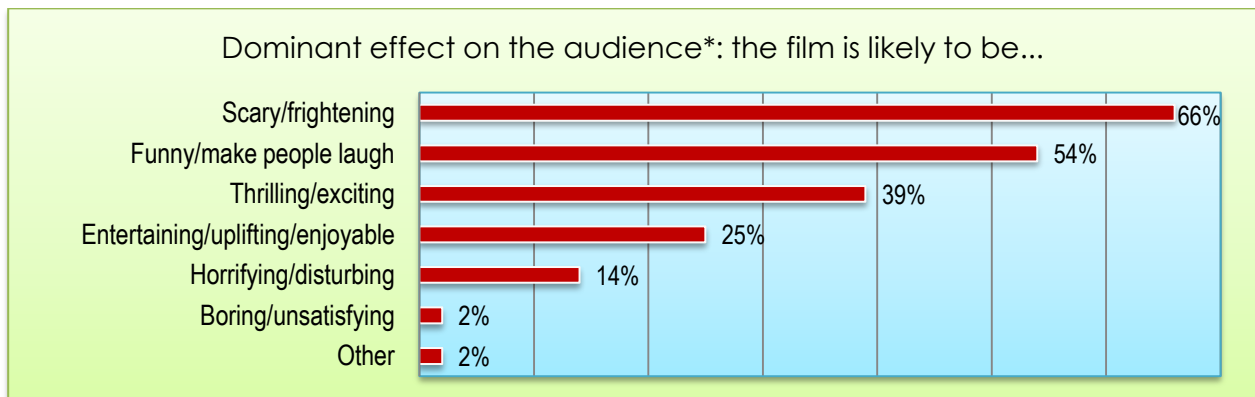
Gender

Most students did not differentiate between male and female viewers in terms of the intended or likely audience of *Fright Night*. However, 13% held the view that the film is aimed at and would be more popular with male viewers.



Dominant Effect

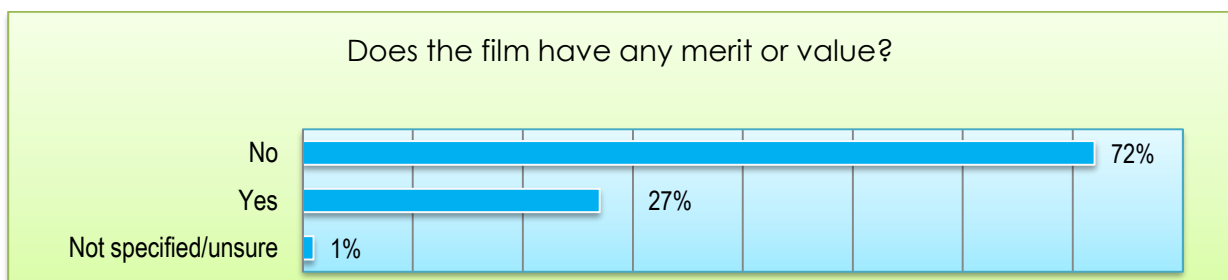
When asked what the dominant effect on the film's likely audience would be, most students thought the film was likely to 'scare', 'frighten, or 'terrify' viewers. A majority of students thought that the comedic nature of the film would make people laugh.



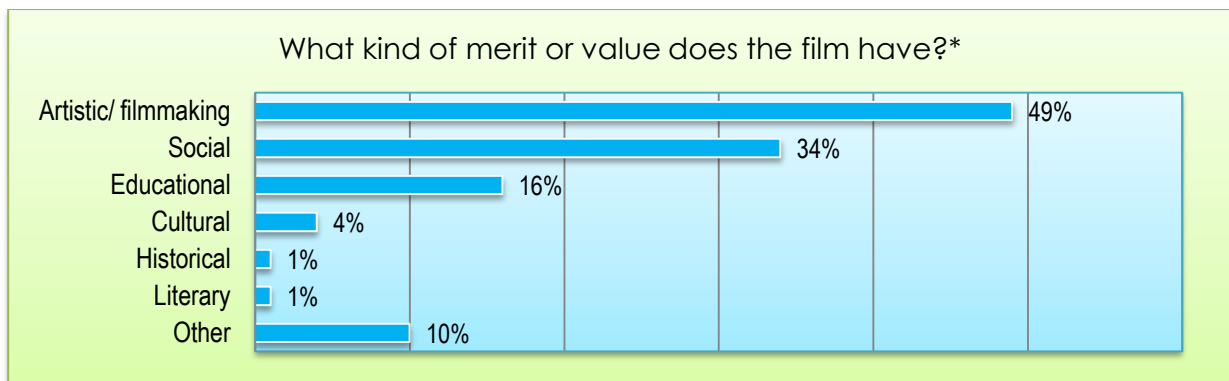
*Some students indicated more than one dominant effect

Merit, Value or Importance

When deciding on a film's classification, the Classification Office must consider if it has any merit, value or importance - such as artistic merit or cultural significance. In some cases this could lead to a lighter classification.



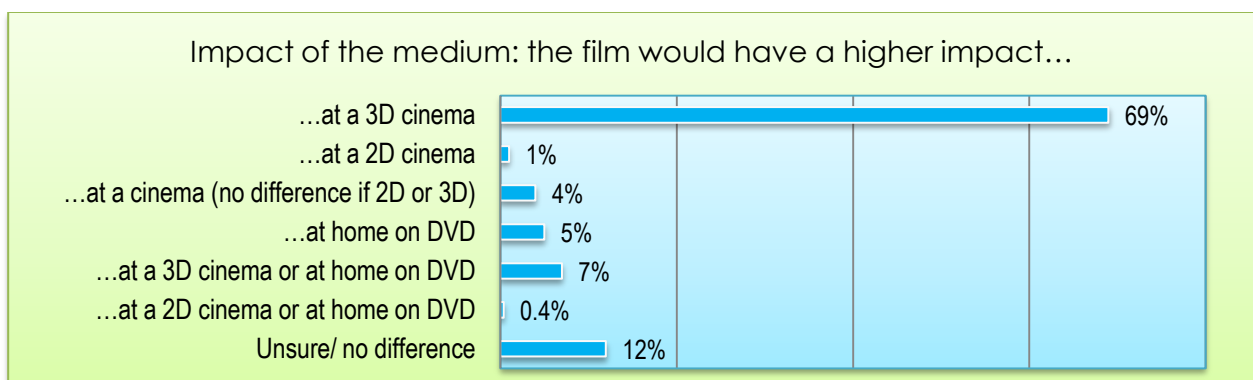
Most students (72%) did not think that *Fright Night* had any particular merit, value or importance. Those who thought the film did have merit or value were asked to specify what kind of merit or value the film had. Students most often referred to the film's artistic merit, particularly the quality of the special effects. Others noted the educational value of learning about vampire mythology, or the social and cultural value of the film's message of bravery and the importance of friendships, for example.



*These percentages are based on those who agreed that the film had merit

Impact of the Medium

Students were asked if the experience of viewing the film would be different on DVD compared to at a 2D cinema or a 3D cinema (the film was released in both 2D and 3D format). The majority felt that the impact of the film would be greatest at a 3D cinema due to the surround sound, darkness, large screen, three-dimensional image and the atmosphere created by the audience. Those who felt the impact would be greater on DVD thought that watching the film at home alone would make it scarier, and that viewers could focus more on the story without the distraction of a cinema audience.



Teacher feedback

Teachers who attended Censor for a Day were encouraged to fill in a feedback form about the event. This feedback helps us ensure that the event is meeting the needs of media studies educators and their students.

Of the 11 teachers who filled in the feedback forms, all agreed that:

- The length of the programme was suitable
- The time slot was suitable
- The classification form was easy to follow
- The content of the film was appropriate
- Their school would wish to attend a similar event again
- The programme as a whole was 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent'.

Some teachers suggested some possible improvements to the programme, such as:

- The PowerPoint presentation could be more interactive, video examples of the criteria would be useful
- Examples of censored film/games or publications would be useful, as many students were already aware of the censorship criteria
- A one-page summary sheet of topics covered would be useful
- The morning and lunch break could be extended

Some additional comments:

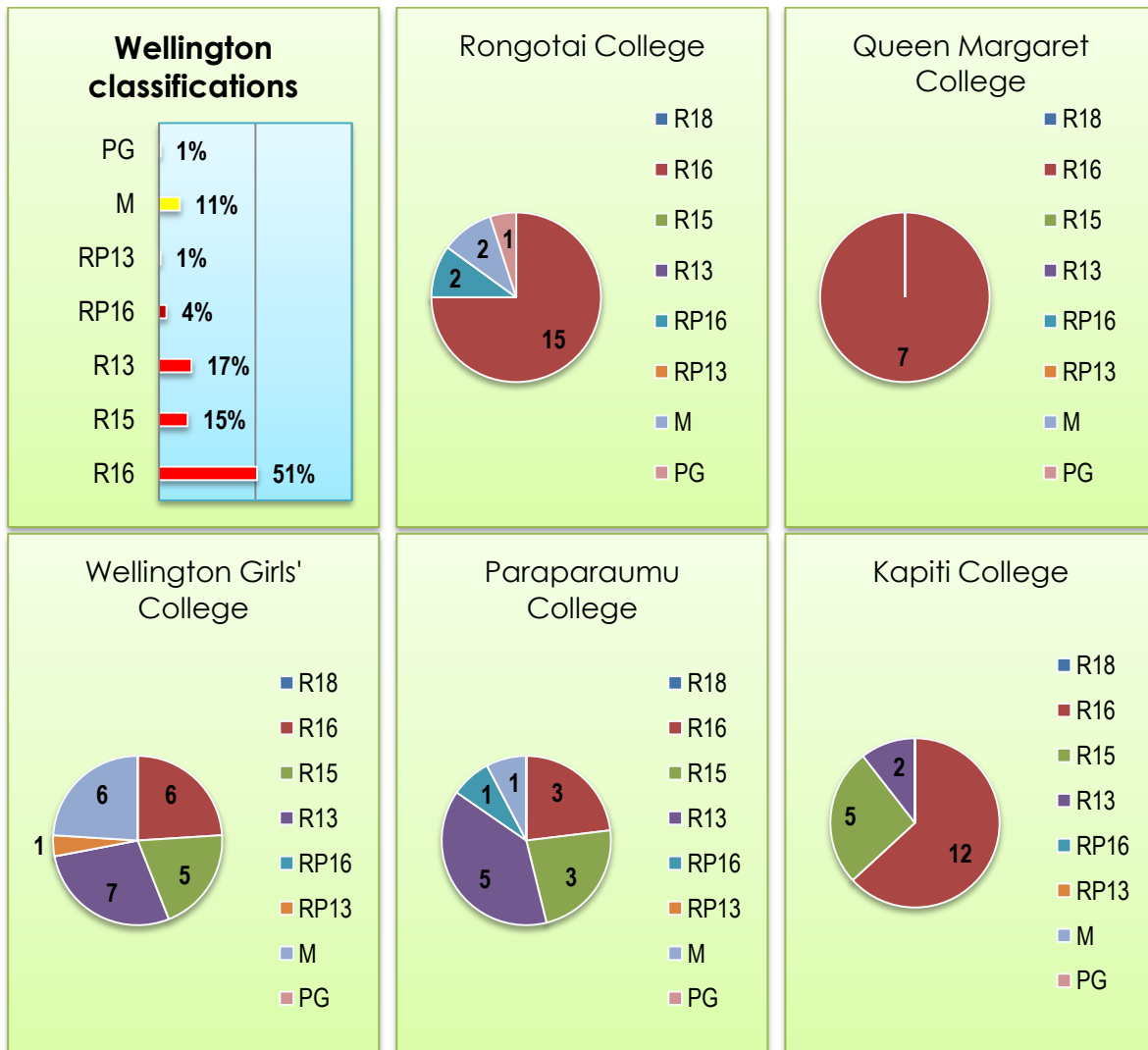
- 'Overall it was a great day and we really enjoyed and learned from it. Thank you!
- 'The rating exercise was practical and driven to get them to apply their knowledge actively. This is exactly the learning in the real world that is at the foundation of the new Media Studies curriculum. Please invite us next year!'

Wellington

Spectrum Theatre

The first event was held in Wellington at the Spectrum Theatre on Thursday 22 September. Schools attended from Wellington City and Paraparaumu. Out of a total of 84 students, 88% decided to give the film a restricted classification, and 51% classified the film R16. Wellington students were less likely to choose RP classifications than students attending the event in Napier or Palmerston North.

There were 28 male students (33%) and 56 female students (67%). Male students were more likely to choose the R16 classification (75%) and female students were more likely to choose lower classifications, with 21% choosing R15, 23% R13, and 13% choosing M.

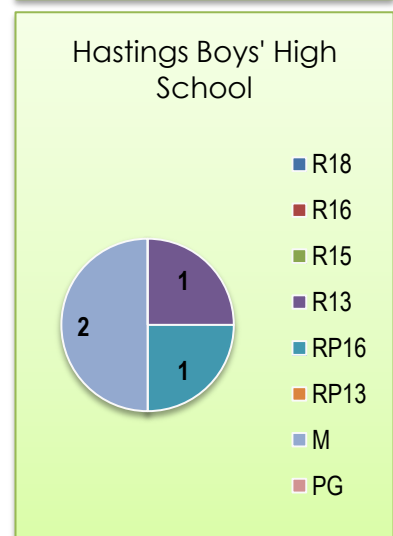
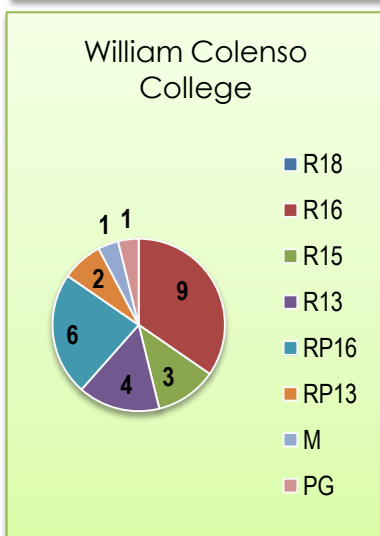
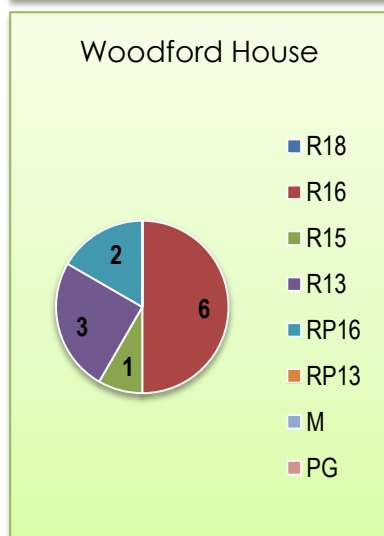
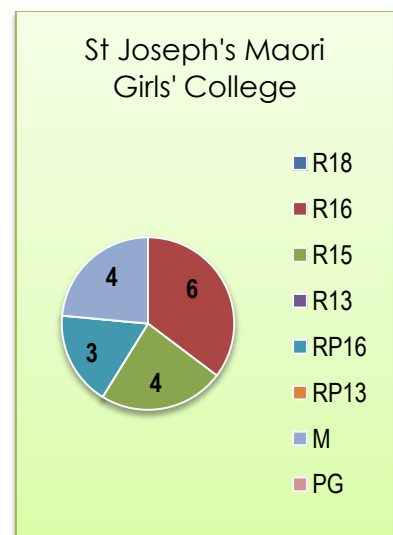
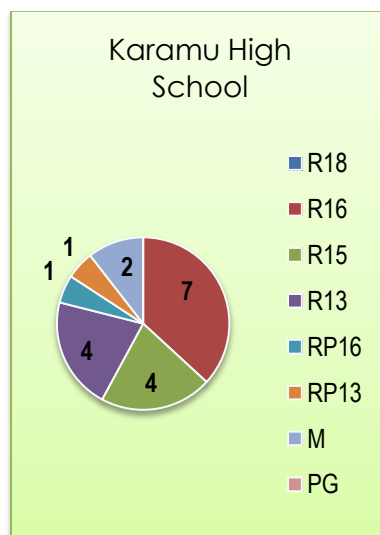
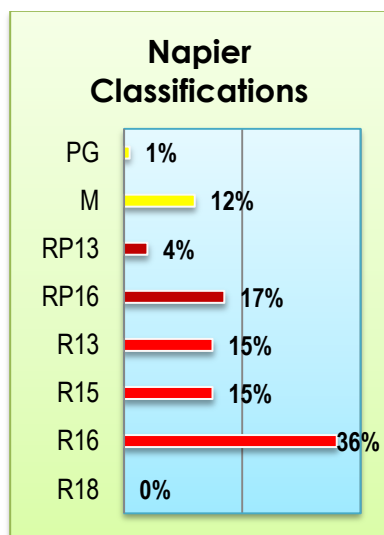


Napier

Reading Cinemas

The second event was held in Napier at Reading Cinemas on Monday 26 September. Schools attended from Napier, Hastings and Havelock North. Out of a total of 78 students, 87% decided to give the film a restricted classification. While the R16 classification was the most popular choice in Napier, the proportion of R16s was lower than in Palmerston North or Wellington. Napier students were much more likely to choose the RP classifications; 17% chose RP16 and 4% chose RP13.

There were 27 male students (35%) and 51 female students (65%). Female students tended towards higher restrictions overall, and 45% chose the R16 classification compared with 19% of male students. Male students were more likely to choose the R15 classification – 45% compared with 16% of females.

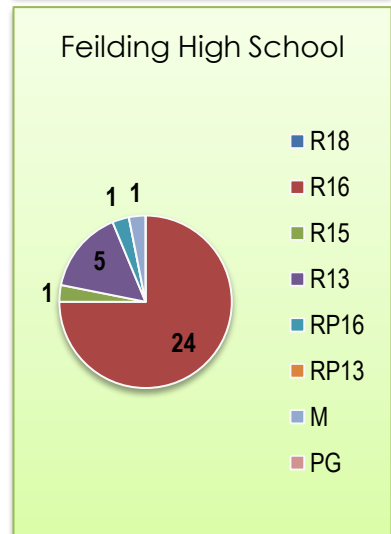
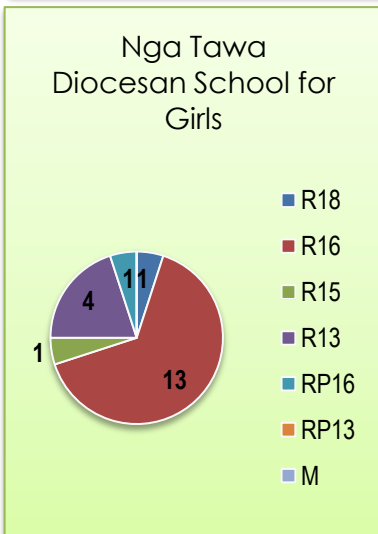
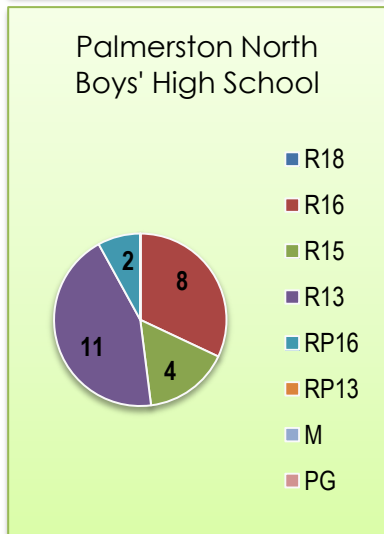
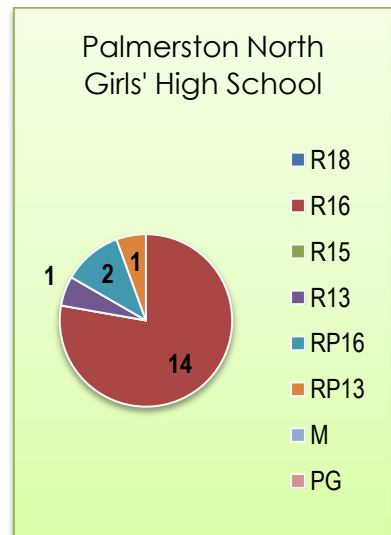
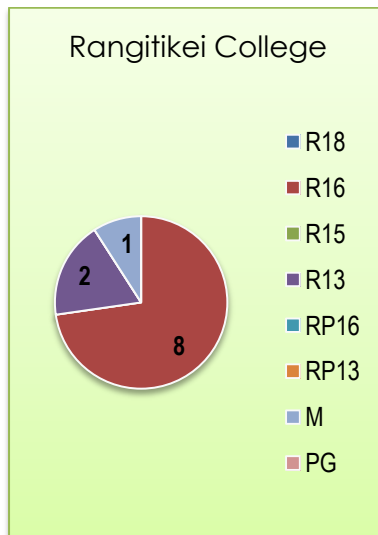
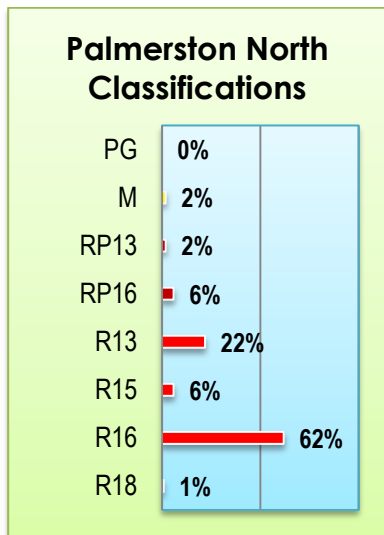


Palmerston North

Downtown Cinemas

The third event was held in Palmerston North at Downtown Cinemas on Tuesday 27 September. Schools attended from Palmerston North, Marton, Feilding and two Whanganui. Out of a total of 109 students, 98% decided to give the film a restricted classification. A majority of students chose the R16 classification, the proportion of R16s was significantly higher than in Napier or Wellington. Palmerston North students were more likely to choose the R13 classification (22%) and less likely to choose the unrestricted M classification (2%).

There were 40 male students (37%) and 69 female students (63%). Female students were more likely to classify the film R16 (72%) than male students (45%). Males were more likely to choose the R13 classification – 35% compared with 14% of females.



Acknowledgements

The Classification Office would like to thank Walt Disney Studios NZ. Without distributors' generosity in lending us a pre-release film, Censor for a Day would not be possible.

We would also like to thank the cinema managers, projectionists and caterers who did such a good job on the day and ensured the events ran smoothly.

Lastly we would like to thank the students and teachers from around the North Island who made the event another success – sometimes travelling considerable distances to attend – and who gave us valuable feedback in the process. We hope to see some of you at a future event!

The Classification Office has produced a classroom DVD resource for students who are unable to attend Censor for Day. If you would like a copy for your school, please contact the Classification Office on 0508 CENSOR (0508 236 767) or at information@censorship.govt.nz.

