

November 20th 2008

Dear Sir/Madam,

Care is pleased to respond to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport consultation on Video Games Classification. We welcome the opportunity and appreciate the work that has gone into preparing the consultation.

Care is a well-established mainstream Christian social policy charity. We help to bring Christian insight and experience - developed alongside practical caring initiatives - to bear on matters of public policy.

We approach the subject of internet games with a particular interest in the family and the impact of internet gaming on family life and vice versa. On the one hand the family can play a key positive role in relation to education and the internet. On the other hand it can also suffer from internet abuse, see the relationship between online gambling addiction and family breakdown.

Before answering the relevant consultation questions, attached, we do want to offer some preliminary comments.

First, we want to affirm the benefits of internet games both in relation to their educational value and in relation to the opportunities they provide for creativity.

Second, we want to emphasize the importance of empowering parents with relevant information so that they can monitor the kind of games their children are accessing. Within this context, however, and bearing in mind some of the Byron review findings, we would emphasise that it is also in parent's best interests at times to let children learn how to set their own boundaries. While we see age verification as appropriate for games that include violent or sexual content, it is entirely possible that in some instances (where sex or violence is not an issue) children will have to learn how to set their own boundaries. In learning how to navigate the internet and how much time to spend online, children - in consultation with adult role models and at appropriate age levels - should learn how to make their own judgements.

Finally, we want to highlight that (and this point should be understood to apply to children as much as it does to adults) we have become increasingly concerned - even before recent reports on World of Warcraft¹ - that some online behaviour and game-play can develop into addiction.²

¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/scienceandtechnology/technology/technologynews/3451069/World-of-Warcraft-release-revives-concern-over-games-addiction.html> (retrieved, 17, Nov. 2008)

² While anecdotal the following website shows (some) peoples testimonies with regard specifically to World of Warcraft addiction: <http://www.wowdetox.com/> Here is a link to the first clinic to treat

We recognize that there is currently insufficient scientific evidence to make a pronouncement about the addictive nature of some types of games or online behaviour. However, we do feel that because of the increased move towards games having significant online content and because of the potential for longer more engaging gaming in MMORPGs³, it is important to highlight these possible dangers to Government and DCMS and so we ask that you keep this issue under review.

Kind regards,

Lauri Moyle
Public Policy Officer, CARE

Gaming addictions http://www.smithandjones.nl/en/addictions/internet-and-videogames_2_22.html

³ Massively Multimedia Online Role Playing Games

Option 1 Hybrid classification system

The BBFC would rate all games that are 12+ or higher, with PEGI continuing to rate all 3+ and 7+ games.

The BBFC logos would appear on the front of all boxes, with the PEGI logos on the back.

This system will work best if BBFC and PEGI come to an agreement on their logos and age classifications so that a more integrated approach can be adopted. The BBFC would extend its statutory powers to cover games from 12+, bringing it into line with the classification system used for DVDs/videos and building on parental awareness and understanding of what those ratings mean.

How to use the form

Type **inside the shaded areas** which will expand automatically to accommodate your answers

Q1: What is your overall assessment of whether this option would work and why?

Though CARE has great respect for Dr. Byron and her report, we believe that this system would not be suitable. We believe it could cause confusion for parents. The BBFC has not had enough experience at rating games and indeed has no experience or mechanism in place to rate online games. Moreover, the fact that this proposal would move the age range for which the BBFC would have control to 12+ is a particular concern, given that the BBFC does not have a good track record of dealing with the 12-15 age group. Some of its recent ratings have fallen short of what the general public and indeed MPs believe is appropriate. In this context we have real concerns about the transparency of the BBFC and its current accountability to the general public. Furthermore, as more and more games will move to an online environment, and as games can and indeed will increasingly be purchased from other countries within the EU via the web or otherwise, it is good to have a pan European system rather than a hybrid-Britain only system.

Q2: What are the key flaws with this option and how could it be adapted to overcome them?

The flaws are as mentioned above. The key problem is that the model is confusing. We do not see Pegi and BBFC working together to overcome their differences.

Q3: What are the key advantages with this option and why?
We do not see any advantages other than the immediate recognizability of the BBFC logos.
Q4: How do you think this system would work for the following key stakeholders:
(i) the consumer?
Some might be confused. The BBFC website, unlike the Pegi website offers no immediate complaints facility. In line with consumer empowerment, and specifically with games that might fall in the 12+ category, we believe this to be a flaw.
(ii) the games industry?
n/a
(iii) the retail industry?
n/a
Q5: What suggestions do you have to improve the system for any of the key stakeholders?
To make BBFC more transparent and implement a complaints procedure and an accountability structure.
Q6: Do you think this system addresses the evidence on potential harms raised by the Byron review and if not why not?
In some ways, though, some of the potential harms cannot be stopped by age verification only. Parental involvement is central and cannot be replaced.
Q7: How do you think this system will last into the future?
N/A
Q8: Do you think this option would work in the online environment?
(i) If so, what would be the benefits?
No.
(ii) If not, what would be the problems and do you have any solutions?
The environment in online game play (e.g. World of Warcraft) can change

<p>according to who is playing. We believe that if a computer game should receive a rating it needs to have in place stated mechanisms by which the online environment is made safe for the relevant age group. The game and its environment should be explained to parents in an online forum etc. Because the BBFC does not apply this criterion to online gameplay we believe it would fall short of protecting under 18s.</p>
<p>Q9: Is there any other information that you think Government should take into account when considering the monetary costs of this option?</p>
<p>N/A</p>
<p>Q10: Do you think having different age classifications on the front and back of the box is a significant problem? If so, do you think the solution offered here is the right one or can you suggest an alternative?</p>
<p>N/A</p>
<p>Q11: Do you think this option would be more or less costly to the games industry and if so what evidence do you have of this?</p>
<p>N/A</p>
<p>Q12: What are the likely implications (including costs) for games producers of having a classification system that does not automatically translate across to some other European countries?</p>
<p>N/A</p>
<p>Q13: It would be helpful to have your views on whether this option would affect games developers based outside Europe, such as those in Japan or US; namely, how this option might affect them and the extent, if any, to which it may affect them.</p>
<p>N/A</p>
<p>Q14: What do you think should be the determining factors or characteristics in deciding whether a game becomes subject to statutory classification at 12+? [see following section]</p>
<p>We are broadly in favour of Dr. Byron's examples, though we believe Pegi's rating criteria to be most favourable.</p>

Option 2 – Enhanced BBFC system

The BBFC would act as the statutory classifications body for all video games, applying its ratings from U to 18. It would retain its power to refuse to classify games it feels are potentially harmful based on its public consultations.

Q15: What is your overall assessment of whether this option would work and why?
As the above, although we feel that the problem of confusion would be overcome by having a single rating system.
Q16: What are the key flaws with this option and how could it be adapted to overcome them?
As above with regard to comments made specifically about the BBFC. To these we would add that the lack of PEGI's extra symbols which indicate why a game is given the rating it is given, such as for violence, sexual content or drug use (as well as simulated gambling) would be sorely missed by parents.
Q17: What are the key advantages with this option and why?
N/A
Q18: How do you think this system would work for the following key stakeholders:
(i) the consumer?
N/A
(ii) the games industry?
N/A
(iii) the retail industry?
N/A
Q19: What suggestions do you have to improve the system for any of the key stakeholders?
N/A

Q20: Do you think this system addresses the evidence on potential harms raised by the Byron review and if not why not?
N/A
Q21: How do you think this system will last into the future?
N/A
Q22: Do you think this option would work in the online environment?
(i) If so, what would be the benefits?
So far we have not seen any evidence that shows the BBFC has the requisite knowledge to rate Online Games effectively.
(ii) If not, what would be the problems and do you have any solutions?
N/A
Q23: Is there any other information that you think Government should take into account when considering the monetary costs of this option?
N/A
Q24: Do you think this option would be more or less costly to the games industry than both the current system and the hybrid system and if so what evidence do you have of this?
N/A
Q25: Which of the following options do you think would work best in the online environment and why?
(i) BBFC symbols recognised as part of PEGI Online; or
N/A
(ii) BBFC.online (separate from the PEGI system)
It would depend on the way BBFC.Online was implemented and on how it would work.
Q26: What are the likely implications (including costs) for games producers of having a classification system that does not automatically translate across to some other European countries?
N/A

Q27: This option could be complicated by differences across Europe if games are purchased elsewhere. We are interested to know whether there is evidence that might support or disprove this. (Please refer to Paragraph 2.16)
According to one story in EUROactive.com the sale of computer games via the internet and computer games via mobile phones will make up 33% of total revenue gained by the sale of computer games by 2010. This is a significant enough market share to warrant consideration of the issue, within the context of a single market.
Q28: We would be interested in evidence to demonstrate whether this option creates additional burdens to online games developers and whether this could be confusing to parents. (Please refer to Paragraph 2.25)
N/A
Q29: It would be helpful to have your views on whether this option would affect games developers based outside Europe, such as those in Japan or US; namely, how this option might affect them and the extent, if any, to which it may affect them.
N/A

Option 3 – Enhanced PEGI system

A UK-based organisation (possibly the Video Standards Council) would be the designated statutory classification body for video games, applying the PEGI ratings. The VSC (or other UK body chosen) would need to sign up to this new role and any legislative changes required. All video games would be rated using the PEGI system and there would be no role for the BBFC in classifying video games.

Q30: What is your overall assessment of whether this option would work and why?
Because Pegi is a Europe wide authority on video games standards and because of its experience not just in rating games and online content, but also in keeping game developers accountable within Europe, we believe that this is the best option. We also approve of the simple symbol recognition system as well as symbols that cover more than just age but include symbols for violence, sexual content, drugs, gambling content, bad language and fear.

Q31: What are the key flaws with this option and how could it be adapted to overcome them?
The only flaw we recognize is that some parents currently do not recognize the Pegi symbols. It is our understanding that Pegi has moved to change their symbols to make them conform to the more recognizable three colour system, which is a step in the right direction of remedying this drawback. We also believe that ELSPA and Pegi should invest more money in educating the general public about the Pegi rating system.
Q32: What are the key advantages with this option and why?
Pegi has a good existing regulator in the UK that seems to function in a transparent and consistent way. Pegi can ban a games producers' whole output rather than simply one game, which means that producers are incentivised to conform to industrial standards via peer pressure. We also believe that Pegi Online has the experience and the right criteria to keep cross border based servers accountable, something which we are not sure BBFC could do effectively.
Q33: How do you think this system would work for the following key stakeholders:
(i) the consumer?
This system would not be confusing to customers. It would also safeguard children and other vulnerable people from some online content.
(ii) the games industry?
N/A
(iii) the retail industry?
N/A
Q34: What suggestions do you have to improve the system for any of the key stakeholders?
As per our covering letter, we believe that the Pegi system might be strengthened by Pegi, the Government and DCMS recognizing the possible danger of the addictive nature of some types of games. This might take the form of a regular review of how and what is rated in games, allowing for public consultations to regularly permit feedback to the rating system and by providing a framework under which warning signs might be added to the current list.

Q35: Do you think this system addresses the evidence on potential harms raised by the Byron review and if not why not?
Yes.
Q36: How do you think this system will last into the future?
Currently it seems that only limited opportunity exists for the public to get involved in giving feedback. While a complaint mechanism exists, we do not know how it would be implemented in the future and whether individual games would ever be prohibited in the UK. Manhunt 2 is an example where the BBFC did step in to ban an inappropriate game. And while we realize that the vast majority of games will not be of such a nature, and that only very irregularly will a game need to be banned, we would like to see the PEGI system scrutinized by some accountability to the UK public.
Q37: Do you think this option would work in the online environment?
(i) If so, what would be the benefits?
As stated previously PEGI has the knowhow and already has a stable system in place. The strict criterion of the code of conduct is also accessible to parents wanting to view what their children might be accessing.
(ii) If not, what would be the problems and do you have any solutions?
N/A
Q38: Is there any other information that you think Government should take into account when considering the monetary costs of this option?
N/A
Q39: Who do you think would be the right body to take on the role of statutory classifier of video games and why?
N/A
Q40: Do you think the body given in answer to Q39 would be able to set up the systems required to carry out this statutory function and why? But if not, why not?
N/A
Q41: Do you think this option would be more or less costly to the games industry than both the current system and the hybrid system and if so what

evidence do you have of this?
N/A
Q42: Do you think the BBFC should continue to rate all content (games and video) of discs which contain film or video content not integral to the game and why? [please refer to footnote 5 in answering this question]
As far as we understand, video content and advertising of games is also rated by PEGI. If this is the case we do not see any need for the BBFC to be involved, as long as a significant part of the product content is a game and not a film. Where most of the content is a film it should be rated as such.
Q43: Do you think PEGI should rate the game content, while the BBFC rates the film/video content and why?
(i) If so, should both symbols be on the box?
No
(ii) In the event of different age ratings, should only the higher symbol prevail?
If it is decided that both the BBFC and PEGI rate the film/game content of a game the highest symbol should prevail.
Q44: It would be helpful to have your views on whether this option would affect games developers based outside Europe, such as those in Japan or US; namely, how this option might affect them and the extent, if any, to which it may affect them. (Please refer to Paragraph 2.36)
N/A

Option 4 – Voluntary Code of Practice

There would be no changes made to the legislation so the BBFC and PEGI would continue to classify games as they currently do. The Government would ask retailers and suppliers to sign up to a voluntary Code of Practice to secure adherence to the classification system when selling or supplying video games to children aged 12 or above, even though a statutory offence would not be committed if they broke the code. This Code of Practice would focus on classification and consumer protection and would follow the guidelines outlined in the review. If tougher measures were called for, this could be backed up with statutory legislation calling on the industry to consult and agree on a Code of Practice, breach of which could then be taken into consideration during a prosecution.

Q45: What is your overall assessment of whether this option would work and why?
We do not support this system based on our previous comments.
Q46: What are the key flaws with this option and how could it be adapted to overcome them?
Q47: What are the key advantages with this option and why?
Q48: How do you think this system would work for the following key stakeholders:
(i) the consumer?
(ii) the games industry?
(iii) the retail industry?
Q49: What suggestions do you have to improve the system for any of the key stakeholders?
Q50: Do you think this system is sufficient to reflect the evidence on potential harms raised by the Byron review and if not why not?
Q51: How do you think this system will last into the future?
Q52: Do you think this option would work in the online environment?
(i) If so, what would be the benefits?

(ii) If not, what would be the problems and do you have any solutions?
Q53: Is there any other information that you think Government should take into account when considering the monetary costs of this option?
Q54: Do you think industry would sign up to such a code?
Q55: Would this incur any additional costs to industry (games or retail) and can you provide evidence of this?
Q56: Do you think that this would work in practice on the ground?
Q57: It would be helpful to have your views on whether this option would affect games developers based outside Europe, such as those in Japan or US; namely, how this option might affect them and the extent, if any, to which it may affect them.