



PEGI administrators | game and app ratings

### **Controversial Content**

The reason for identifying controversial content arises because the VSC has a duty to identify content which may contravene UK law, which may otherwise result in a video game being 'banned' from supply in the UK or may result in the video game being referred to the British Board of Film Classification for legal classification in the 18R category (pornography).

It is important that Games Examiners take this issue very seriously. If they have any doubts whatsoever as to whether the content of any game is controversial content they must refer it to the Operations Manager. The VSC encourages its Games Examiners to err on the side of caution so far as this issue is concerned.

The following is a list of topics and issues that will or may be considered as controversial content:

- Sexual content: This means all aspects of human sexual activity (intercourse, sexual foreplay, homosexual and lesbian sexual activity, masturbation), any activity involving genitals or anus, sexual fetish material (including bondage or sadomasochistic activity, urination or other bodily functions) and any form of sex or sexual activity without consent.
- Extreme pornographic images: This refers to any image which is pornographic and grossly offensive, disgusting or otherwise of an obscene nature which features an apparently real person, and which portrays, in an explicit and realistic way, an act which threatens the person's life, or is likely to result, in serious injury to a person's anus, breasts or genitals or involves sexual interference with a human corpse or involves bestiality.
- Protection of children: This refers to indecent images (still or moving) of children. It includes photographs or film footage and pseudo photographs or film footage (graphics, drawn or computer generated images). For these purposes a child is defined as a person who is or could be under the age of 18.
- Cruelty to animals: This refers to depictions (usually real film footage) of a staged animal fight (e.g. dog fight, cock fight) or other depictions (usually real film footage) showing the infliction of pain or injury to an animal.
- Racial or sexual hatred: This refers to content which is threatening, abusive or insulting where the intention is to stir up racial hatred or hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation.
- Private sexual recordings: This refers to real film footage showing a recording of a private act (usually sexual) where the intention of the recording is for the sexual gratification of a third party and the recording has not been consented to by the person filmed.
- Obscene material: The content of a game is obscene if it tends to deprave or corrupt the viewer (make morally bad). It is not possible to define what this covers except to say that it

is probably covered by other items listed as controversial content. Unlawful material: Again it is not possible to define what this covers but examples would be content which appears to be real film footage of a person being killed, seriously harmed or raped.

- Tobacco advertising: This does not cover depictions of tobacco advertising which are incidental to game play. If however the advertisement becomes a prominent feature then this may become a matter of concern. If there is a standalone tobacco advertisement then this could be illegal. It should be remembered that the tobacco product must be a real product and not a fantasy product.
- Harmful content: This is the most difficult to define and identify in the context of a video game and is best approached by giving guidance of the topics that may have to be taken into account. These topics include:
  - Criminal behavior
  - Illegal drugs
  - Violent behavior or incidents
  - Horrific behavior or incidents
  - Human sexual behavior

When considering 'harm' this should include not only harm to the viewer but also harm to anyone else arising from the viewer's behavior. In considering 'harm' this should not be restricted to children and young persons only but also any other vulnerable person. Potential harm should also not be restricted to physical harm but should be extended to any moral harm that may be caused by:

- Desensitising the viewer to the effects of violence
- Degrading a viewer's sense of empathy
- Encouraging a dehumanised view of others
- Suppressing pro-social attitudes
- Encouraging anti-social attitudes
- Reinforcing unhealthy fantasies
- Eroding a sense of moral responsibility

In regard to children potential harm should also be extended to:

- Retarding social and moral development
- Distorting a viewer's sense of right and wrong
- Limiting the viewer's capacity for compassion

In essence the identification of potential harm requires a legal/clinical decision and Games Examiners will not be required to make any final decision. They should however be aware of this overall issue and bring any matter that they believe may arise from it to the attention of the Operations Manager.