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# Guidelines on the Classification of Dramatic and other Stage Productions according to Age

## Notices and Regulations

Legal Notice 416/2012 entered into force on 10th July 2013. Clause 16(1) of this Legal Notice stipulates that all dramatic and other stage productions to which the public is admitted, whether by payment or otherwise, must be given a reasonable and proper age-classification, according to the age classification ratings listed in regulation 6(1) i.e.:

- U certificate - Persons of all ages are admitted;
- PG certificate - Persons of all ages are admitted but some scenes may be unsuitable for young children;
- 12A certificate - Suitable only for persons of 12 years and over, but persons younger than 12 years may attend only when accompanied by an adult;
- 12+ certificate - Persons of 12 years and over are admitted;
- 15+ certificate - Persons of 15 years and over are admitted;
- 18+ certificate - Persons of 18 years and over are admitted.

The age classification shall be exhibited in a conspicuous place at the entrance of the premises and may be communicated to the public by any other means.

The same Clause obliges the person responsible for determining the age classification in accordance with these regulations in respect of dramatic and other stage productions shall be the producer; in the absence of an identified producer, it shall be the director; in the absence of both it shall be the registered licensee of the venue; and in his absence, the owner of the venue where the production is staged.

Clause 18 of the aforementioned Legal Notice stipulates that a nominated Guidance Board has the power to recommend an alternative age classification to the dramatic or other stage production.

The Malta Arts Council is proposing these guidelines for use as parameters for the classification of all dramatic and other stage productions.



## **U – Universal**

**Persons of all ages are admitted.**

Since every child is a unique individual it is very difficult to generalise what could bother or scare them. Therefore, when children choose to attend a dramatic and other stage production alone, it is the responsibility of each parent/guardian to ensure that the theme of the production will not have a negative impact on them. The parents/guardians should be very vigilant when allowing very young children to watch a production on their own.

Dramatic and other stage productions classified 'U' should complement what children learn at school and, in a general way, the moral values that are accepted by society and on which the Maltese family is built. These dramatic and other stage productions should promote positive values rather than scenes that are violence, menacing or scary. Ideally they will not include any sexual references.

### **Criteria**

The language and conduct of the characters in the dramatic and other stage productions should not discriminate on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, race or colour, political opinion or beliefs. These productions should not present persons with some form of disability who are ridiculed or put at a disadvantage. If this is done for the sake of educational purposes, the disapproval for such behaviour should be evident from the production itself.

There should be no reference to illegal drugs or abusive use of drugs (including medicines that are easily found at home but taken without medical advice) except if there is an educational purpose that is made clearly evident. If this is the case, and even for an educational purpose, the person who classifies the production is obliged to issue a notice that makes the public aware of this.

Problematic themes that can be present should be treated in a sensitive manner. Fright scenes should be short, light and as much as possible should not lead to anxiety in young children. The use of arms or actions that put the life of people or animals in grave danger should really be extremely limited. No violence should be justified if not as a way for somebody to defend themselves. In these cases the violence should be light and without exaggeration or overdue emphasis. Particular attention should also be paid to the music accompanying the production. The person responsible for the classification of the production according to age should judge each scene according to its repercussions. Productions that are classified as 'U' that contain lightly violent or frightening scenes should ensure a positive ending.

Bullying and the use of vulgar language (including gestures or other types of disparaging and offensive behaviour) towards other persons, including friends, teachers and people in authority should not be frequent. If a production in this category should contain such behaviour, at no point should the character displaying such behaviour be seen as a hero. Disparaging language is unacceptable.

Scenes containing nudity should not have a sexual purpose. Light sexual behaviour (like kissing) is acceptable as long as it is presented in the context of two people who love each other.



## **PG – Parental guidance suggested**

**Persons of all ages are admitted but some scenes may be unsuitable for young children.**

Children of all ages can watch by themselves a dramatic and other stage productions classified PG. Productions in this category may contain scenes that affect certain children, mostly those under 7 years of age. Parents should therefore consider if the content leads to any repercussions that might in some way disturb young or sensitive children.

### **Criteria**

As a general rule, the language and conduct of characters in the productions should not be discriminatory except with the intention of showing disapproval towards this behaviour in an educational, political, social or historical context. A display of discrimination without negative consequences by a character that in children's eyes looks like a hero is not normally acceptable.

If there is a light reference to illegal drugs or abusive use of drugs (including medicines that are easily found at home but taken without medical advice) there should be a clear educational purpose that is directly linked. If this is the case, and even for an educational purpose, the person who age-classifies the production is obliged to issue a notice that makes the public aware of this.

Problematic themes that can be present should be treated in a sensitive manner. Fright scenes should not be lengthy or repeated without adequate time during which the intensity decreases. A fantasy environment should be considered in the general context of the production. The use of arms or actions that put the life of people or animals in grave danger should not be frequent or unduly long, and need to be considered in light of the full context of the production as a whole. In a PG production, scenes that contain the use of arms should not be presented in a way that the children find easy to imitate. This use of arms should never be

interpreted or in any way justified as a good thing. Scenes of violence need to be carefully moderated and avoid displaying particular details. Domestic violence needs to be treated extremely carefully and presented as unacceptable. Violence set in a historical context (wars, revolutions and similar) should not be shown in an insensitive way. The person responsible for the age classification of the production is responsible for issuing a notice that makes the public aware about scenes containing acts of violence and the possibility that these might be imitated.

Bullying towards other vulnerable persons should be very limited and should not lead to the character who performs it to become popular among his or her friends. The use of vulgar language or swear words needs to be light and those who speak it must not come across as heroes. Disparaging language is generally unacceptable.

Scenes containing nudity should not have a sexual purpose. Light sexual behaviour (like kissing) is acceptable as long as it is infrequent and presented in a decent manner.



## 12A – Suitable only for persons of 12 years and over

Persons younger than 12 years may attend only when accompanied by an adult.

Dramatic and other stage productions classified 12A are suitable for those who are twelve years or older. Adults may take children that are not yet twelve but it is up to their judgement to ensure that the production is suitable for them. In this case the adults are totally responsible for the children under twelve years of age that are in their company.

### Criteria

As a general rule, aggressive language and conduct during the dramatic and other stage productions are not normally acceptable if they're not presented in a context where they are very clearly condemned. Discriminatory acts from a character that in the children's eyes looks like a hero are also unacceptable unless the same character is fully reformed by knowing to fix their behaviour in the same play.

Abusive use of illegal drugs or medicines should not be presented as appropriate conduct. In a 12A production it is not normally acceptable to give details about how people use drugs on themselves or on others as well as details about drug trafficking. The use of drugs at school is also unacceptable in this category of productions.

Moderate physical and psychological menace is permitted as long as this behaviour is neither frequent nor shown as positive. Dangerous behaviour (like suicide, pain caused by a person on themselves, driving while under the influence of alcohol and drug taking) shouldn't be presented as though it is normal or that it has no consequences. The use of arms or any behaviour that puts the life of persons or animals in grave danger shouldn't be presented as a positive or justifiable action. Violent acts that lead to injury or bleeding have to be moderate during strong moments of aggression. All domestic violence should look like unacceptable conduct. Violence in a historical context (in wars, revolutions and

similar) should not be shown in an insensitive manner. The person responsible for the age classification of the production is responsible for issuing a notice that makes the public aware about scenes containing acts of violence and the possibility that these might be imitated.

Bullying between friends shouldn't be presented as justifiable or good conduct. The use of vulgar language is permitted but shouldn't be frequent.

Sexual acts need to be short and shown prudently. Any form of rape, either if it is performed by a person or a group and also if it is performed on a heterosexual or homosexual person, is not acceptable in a production rated 12A. References to sex that are spoken should be mild to be acceptable for an adolescent audience.

Hate crimes are not acceptable in this category of productions except if they are presented carefully in a historical context with the purpose of showing the progress of a particular society.



**12+**

**Persons of 12 years and over are admitted.**

Dramatic and other stage productions classified 12 are suitable for those who are twelve years or older. This means that the level of the criteria is slightly higher than those identified for the 12A Category but less than those of the 15 Category.



**15+**

**Persons of 15 years and over are admitted.**

No person under fifteen years of age should be authorised to attend a dramatic and other stage production that falls under this category.

In a general way, the production should not present a story that approves of discriminatory language and behaviour.

Although scenes depicting the use of drugs are permitted, this behaviour should not be encouraged or shown in a positive light. Abuse of volatile substances (like glue sniffing and chemical substances) is generally not acceptable except when placed in a context that emphasizes the harm and repercussions of the same abuse.

Scary scenes are generally accepted in this category of productions as long as they do not contain crimes of sadism or sexual abuse. These horror scenes should not be too macabre. The person responsible for determining the age classification needs to analyse carefully how these treat the themes of isolation and solitude, anxiety and sexual abuse among adolescents. The use of arms or any behaviour that places in grave danger the life of persons or animals shouldn't be presented as a justifiable or positive action. Acts of violence and scenes of blood presented in a lively and real way are permitted but have to be moderate while the character committing or bringing about such actions should not be the one who the audience empathise with. Violence should not emphasize too much the act that leads to pain, suffering or injury. Sadism and violence are not normally acceptable if they also include sexual abuse on the victim. Domestic violence should appear as condemnable conduct. Violence in a historical context (wars, revolutions, and similar events) can be shown in an intensive manner. There may be frequent use of vulgar language but it is

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**18+**

**Persons of 18 years and over are admitted.**

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generally not acceptable to have vulgarities or swear words spoken in an overly aggressive manner and/or that offends a religion. Any decision about this has to be made in the context of how the scene will develop.

There can be scenes containing sexual acts and long scenes of nudism. Excessive and lengthy scenes of sexual abuse or violence are not tolerated in productions within this category. Nor are productions normally accepted if they primarily have the aim of sexual stimulation.

Hate crimes are not acceptable in this category of productions unless they are presented carefully in a historical context with the aim of showing the progress of a particular society.

No person under eighteen years of age should be authorised to attend a dramatic and other stage productions that falls under this category.

In light of continuous public consultation and the right of an individual when they reach 18 years to choose freely how to spend their free time, the person responsible for determining the age classification will see that in this category it is permitted to put up productions as long no law is broken by means of the production.



### Application of Classification Guidelines

The selected classification, apart from being mentioned in the releases about the production, where possible, should be shown and made visible on posters (or similar materials) that are printed and/or digital through the use of the designs made available through [https://www.artscouncilmalta.org/files/uploads/misc/ACM\\_ClassificationIcons.zip](https://www.artscouncilmalta.org/files/uploads/misc/ACM_ClassificationIcons.zip). When using these designs, one must remember to adhere to these guideline, found at this link: <https://www.artscouncilmalta.org/news/guidelines-on-the-classification-of-dramatic-and-other-stage-productions-according-to-age>.

For more information on the Classification Guidelines of Dramatic and other Stage Productions, please contact **Arts Council Malta** on 2334 7201/02 or send us an email on [info.acm@artscouncilmalta.org](mailto:info.acm@artscouncilmalta.org).