

Classification Office

TE MANA WHAKAATU

A photograph of two young people sitting on a grassy slope in front of a blue building. The person on the left is a young woman with brown hair in a ponytail, wearing glasses and a black sweater with a red and white mushroom graphic. The person on the right is a young man with dark hair, wearing a dark jacket and holding a smartphone up to take a selfie. The phone has a green and white patterned case.

Youth Advisory Panel
2023/24 Report

Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) 2023/24 Report

Lead facilitators: AJ, Shannan, Caitlin.

Supporting facilitators: Tara and Dylan

Classification Office

TE MANA WHAKAATU

Level 1, 88 The Terrace, Wellington 6011
PO Box 1999, Wellington 6140

Phone: +64 4 471 6770

Email: youthadvisorypanel@classificationoffice.govt.nz

Social media: @NZOFLC

Website: www.classificationoffice.govt.nz

Report design: Mark Creative Ltd

Photos: Rebecca McMillan Photography

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Foreword

2023–24 was another busy year for the panel, with a wide range of important topics discussed in meetings and in co-viewing sessions.

While young people continue to use social media and consume content, the Youth Advisory Panel remains a vital link between the classification unit and those impacted by its decisions, as well as being a touchpoint to the fast-paced world of online content that we have grown up with. The panel is important to help ensure that the Classification Office upholds its duty to balance freedom of expression and prevention from harm.

Researchers from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue facilitated a discussion with us, which helped inform the development of a toolkit on countering online extremism in Aotearoa New Zealand. This meeting was useful, as it allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the global problem that is extremism, and enabled us to share our thoughts on extremist content in Aotearoa. Their research was published in a [playbook](#) in 2024.

The discussion on anime at the end of 2023 was beneficial. A member raised concerns that a ‘sexual themes’ warning did not adequately reflect the level of harassment that was present in a clip of a show that was shown, as they thought that it could potentially normalise harmful behaviour. This led to the creation of a new content warning of ‘sexual harassment,’

which reflects the level of harm present, and can now be used by the Classification Unit.

As usual, panel members were invited co-view a number of new releases, to provide a youth perspective on their classification. This is one of the most important roles that we have, as we’re able to voice concerns that young people may have on particularly impactful moments, and have an understanding of the effect that a particular classification may have on young people. Some notable films we co-viewed were [Civil War](#), [Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga](#), [MaXXXine](#) and [Kinds of Kindness](#).

Being on the panel for the past few years has been an amazing experience for me, and I feel incredibly lucky to have been able to be a part of it. I have really loved talking about media with my fellow panel members, and seeing our suggestions be put into practice. With the rise of AI and a continually evolving media landscape, the next few years are going to pose a lot of challenges, so the panel will remain a crucial part of the work that the office conducts.

Lastly, I’d like to thank all of the facilitators of the Youth Advisory Panel over this year – Shannan, AJ, Caitlin, Tara and Dylan. We could not do this without your support and expertise.

Stephen (he/him)

Youth Advisory Panel Member

Message from the Chief Censor

Te Mana Whakaatu – Classification Office established the Youth Advisory Panel as part of a wider youth engagement strategy in 2018.

Whether it's classifying content, conducting research, or developing resources on how to safely navigate media, young people are at the heart of our mahi as those most likely to be impacted. That's why the voices of rangatahi aren't just welcome in our conversations, they're essential.

We are so lucky to have our Youth Advisory Panel (YAP), who give their time to offer insights into how classification decisions might impact rangatahi and tamariki. And in 2023–24, their input remains as important as ever. One of the biggest projects they've helped with is our Classification Handbook – a resource we've put together that guides our decision making. It explains everything about how we work, from classification processes to our overarching kaupapa. Members' contributions have ensured that the guide speaks to young people's experiences, making it a powerful tool for staff as well as external audiences.

Members have also played a crucial role in discussions about objectionable content and its impact on young people, leading to a decision to consult with young people from all over the country about their experiences with extremely harmful content. This has helped us to design tools, information and guidance for the community and it has contributed to our efforts to modernise our forensic classification service. Their involvement highlights how essential it is to include youth perspectives when tackling complex and evolving challenges.

While the YAP isn't designed to represent all young New Zealanders, their voices bring an incredible depth of understanding to our work. Their insights shape all that we do, and this is increasingly valuable as we adapt to the ever-evolving digital landscape. I'm incredibly proud of the YAP members who continue to step up, share their experiences, and help us make better, more informed decisions. I'm also thankful to the staff who facilitate our YAP meetings and events, creating a safe space to make it all possible.

Caroline Flora (she/her)

Chief Censor

Facilitators

“With their sharp perspectives and lived experiences—both online and offline—the YAP are key in helping us understand the challenges young people face and ensure we’re responding in ways that truly meet the needs of all New Zealanders.”

CAITLIN

“The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. I’m proud of the amazing rangatahi on the Youth Advisory Panel who work collaboratively to help ensure youth voice is heard.”

AJ

“The YAP are such a pleasure to work with. They are smart and empathetic. I always learn something from them.”

TARA

Our Approach

Our approach to collaborating with the YAP is based on the [Mana Taiohi Framework](#).

Whanaungatanga

The facilitators and panel members purposefully cultivate a constructive, fun, and encouraging environment. There is no expectation of bringing anything more than what each individual already knows, believes and has experienced. We are grateful for our panel members time, energy, and meaningful engagement.

Whai Wāhitanga

Being a young person can be hard. They are all on their individual journeys, which include setbacks, pressures, barriers, emotions, and physical and mental changes. All this comes while they are trying to find their place in the world and work out who they are. It has been a privilege getting to know our panel members individually, experiencing their insights and walking alongside them as they positively develop. Our aim is to always respect, listen, and amplify their voices. We encourage and connect individual members to participate in additional opportunities.

Mātauranga

As an independent Crown entity, the YAP helps us to deliver our statutory functions well, but we have to be careful that any collaboration with young people is not decorative, manipulative, or tokenistic – something that can happen unintentionally. We ensure that every project benefits both the young person and our Office, and ensure their voices are not misused or repurposed. We want to provide meaningful opportunities for young people and empower and enhance their mana.

We also draw on the [Youth Plan](#) which aims for the voices and perspectives of young people are listened to, valued, and embedded in decision-making at all levels.

Highlights

The Panel meets every month to support the Office to understand issues that directly impact rangatahi. Below are some highlights from this year's meetings.

Sextortion with Netsafe and NZ Police

Background

YAP members, NZ Police and Netsafe came together in September to discuss the pressing concern of sextortion in Aotearoa. Sextortion is a type of blackmail when someone threatens to share a nude image or sexually explicit video of you online, unless you pay them or provide more sexual content. The impact of sexual extortion can range from mild embarrassment and a sense of humiliation to extreme emotional harm.

As sextortion significantly impacts a lot of young people, NZ Police and Netsafe wanted to both inform and hear from YAP members about the issue.

Discussion

NZ Police and Netsafe each gave presentations providing an overview of sextortion and what it looks like, trends over time, and what to do if you suspect you or someone you know has been targeted. The YAP provided feedback and recommendations that both NZ Police and Netsafe recorded. The YAP expressed the need for more education, more relatable “edgy” messaging, detail on support pathways, and youth influenced design.

Outcomes

NZ Police and Netsafe thanked the YAP for their valuable insights and were excited to share them with their respective organisations. The YAP were grateful for both organisations taking the time to provide an informative evening on sextortion.

Objectionable material

Background

In April, the Chief Censor joined facilitators in meeting with the YAP to talk about objectionable material. Members of the Classification Unit also attended the session to help with the discussion. The purpose of this meeting was to inform our plans to run a campaign focusing on objectionable content, aimed at young people and their whānau, and also to continue the work the Panel is doing with the Classification

Unit and the Golden Guide, ensuring youth voice is at the centre of our core functions. We wanted to understand the experiences young people have navigating online spaces and objectionable content.

Discussion

The Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) explored the concept of objectionable content online, discussing how young people encounter and respond to harmful material. The conversation focused on key questions, including the meaning of terms like "triggered" versus "traumatised," personal boundaries when engaging with distressing content, and the legal implications of sharing or viewing objectionable material. YAP members considered different types of harmful content, such as terrorist material, underage nudes, and violent crime, as well as the role of the Harmful Digital Communications Act in addressing online harms.

The discussion also covered the challenges of identifying objectionable material and the impact of seeing such content on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Participants reflected on how social media algorithms amplify extreme content and the stigma surrounding reporting harmful material to authorities like Netsafe or Youthline. They shared insights into barriers young people face when seeking help, including concerns about being perceived as "snitching" and the potential social consequences of speaking out.

YAP members emphasised the need for more education on recognising and reporting harmful content, as well as ensuring that young people feel supported when discussing their online experiences. The group also identified areas for future sessions, including breaking the bystander effect and encouraging proactive digital safety measures.

Outcomes

The YAP's insights have been key in shaping our campaign on objectionable content, helping to steer us on the most important questions – how young people encounter extreme material, how they respond, and how we can best support them. Their feedback will guide our social media approach, ensuring our messaging truly connects. Consultations begin in late 2024, and we aim to launch the campaign in early 2025.

Positive Interventions with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)

Background

In May, the Youth Advisory Panel met with researchers from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), an international 'think and do tank' that specialises in information threats to democracy, public safety, and national security. The Classification Office has worked with ISD on varied pieces of work in the countering violent extremism space.

Discussion

ISD talked with YAP members to gather feedback on their playbook for positive online interventions. This resource was developed under the Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism fund and aims to provide strategies for addressing online extremism.

The playbook outlines intervention models designed to counter online extremism. It includes best practices, safeguarding measures, and ethical considerations for implementing these interventions. The Youth Advisory Panel provided feedback on the resource, offering insights from their perspective as young people.

Outcomes

ISD published their [Positive Online Interventions Playbook: Innovating Responses to a Shifting Online Extremist Landscape in New Zealand](#), which now informs the development and delivery of prevention programmes that respond to a shifting online threat landscape.

The playbook takes stock of established and emerging intervention models to counter online extremism, brings together domestic and international best practices, and suggests potential avenues for new positive intervention approaches. It also reflects on practical considerations for programming, including monitoring and evaluation, safeguarding, operational security and ethical considerations.

ISD expressed appreciation for the YAP's support. The Office has integrated key insights from the playbook into our classification handbook and decision-making processes.

Safer Online Services and Media Platforms (SOSMP) Consultation

Background

The Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) consulted with the YAP in July on their Safer Online Services and Media Platforms (SOSMP) proposal, which aims to modernise media regulation with a risk-based approach.

DIA wanted to hear members' views on the proposals set out in a discussion document from a user perspective, including thoughts and ideas on the role of education, safety objectives and on the code of practice development and approval processes.

Discussion

DIA gave a presentation to members outlined plans for a new regulatory body focused on industry standards rather than content regulation, aiming to improve platform accountability and user safety. Members were then invited to give feedback, ask questions, and participate in a group activity involving how they might respond to certain issues under a new system.

Members shared their online experiences, questions about the review and proposals, as well as sharing their perspectives on what the review should consider. The YAP specifically raised: young people want to be able to control what they see on social media, young people want more information when using platforms, young people felt that platforms need to take responsibility and be transparent, and education especially of older people, will be keys. Education, especially for parents and older generations, was highlighted as crucial.

Outcomes

The discussion reinforced the need for regulatory reform and highlighted key areas of concern for young people. DIA found the YAP's insights invaluable and thanked them for their contributions and acknowledged the importance of ongoing engagement with young people.

“It’s always fascinating to hear how other young people have experienced the onslaught of media that we see these days. Being a part of the YAP has given me a unique perspective on navigating the online world, and helped me understand how important it is to teach internet safety and media literacy.”

Kit, YAP Member

2023/24 Co-views

This year, the Youth Advisory Panel helped us to classify 9 films. Members attend viewings along with our classification advisors and provide their insights on the most impactful content.

The Nun II

R16 | Horror, violence & suicide references

A member of the Youth Advisory Panel attended the screening and shared their thoughts on the film. They found one scene where a woman was stabbed in the eyes quite confronting, as well as references to, and depictions of, suicide. They thought that the content was more appropriate for older viewers.

The Exorcist: Believer

R16 | Violence, horror and content that may disturb

Three members of our Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) attended the screening for this film. They found some scenes confronting and thought one of the scenes involving a wound was realistic. They thought the horror elements were “quite disturbing” but not overly intense. The YAP found that the religious-focused narrative tempered the scary elements of the film. They thought that the content was appropriate for older teenagers.

Saw X

R18 | Gore and sadistic violence

One Panel member attended this screening.

Civil War

R16 | Violence, cruelty, offensive language and content that may disturb

Two members of the Youth Advisory Panel attended this classification screening. Both found the film to be very hard hitting with a lot of intense content, including realistic scenes and confronting violence. They found the moment where two journalists are shot and one crawls through a pit of bodies to be the most impactful, particularly as the scene was cruel and sudden, and the murders seemed racially motivated.

Monkey Man

R16 | Violence and offensive language

Two members attended the screening and noted the violence had the highest impact for them. They said the amount of violence ramped up towards the end of the film, becoming gorier and more brutal – but that much of the violence was fast-paced, unrealistic and dimly lit, which lessened its impact. They also noted the way in which women in a club were demeaned as they could be ordered off menus which listed their attributes.

Sting

R13 | Horror, offensive language and content that may disturb

Three members supported us in the classification of this film. They identified the film as a horror and felt that the most impactful content was the

bloody body horror elements, particularly in one scene where a woman is attacked by a spider and cracks her head.

particularly strong. They felt the drug use was glamourised.

Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga

R16 | Violence, cruelty and content that may disturb

One member attended this classification screening. They felt the film was quite full on and the main content that stood out to them was the violence and cruelty. However, they did not think there was as much violence as in the 2015 film *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

Kinds of Kindness


R16 | Bloody violence, sex scenes, rape, suicide and content that may disturb

Three members attended this classification screening. They discussed a lot of content, especially cruelty, self-harming behaviour and bloody injury. Particularly impactful scenes for them included someone being driven over, a policeman shooting a character in the hand and then licking the wound, a character severing her own thumb and removing her liver, plus the animal cruelty, drug rape and empty pool suicide. They felt that one sex scene, which is shown on a television screen, was quite intense.

MaXXXine

R16 | Graphic violence, offensive language, drug use and sex scenes

One member attended the classification screening for *MaXXXine*. They felt the film was gory, but they “expected it” having seen the previous two films in the series, and didn’t think the material was as strong as it was in the first film, *X*. While they described sex scenes as having a lot of nudity, they didn’t think they were



“I’ve felt very welcomed being on the Youth Advisory Panel and I’m so glad to be able to talk about issues regarding media with insightful and critical intent. I’ve learned so much about classification and how the content around us affects us.”

Dani, YAP member

Opportunities for Members

Tūhono: event hosted by Mana Mokopuna to connect eight different youth advisory groups across Government.

“I was granted the opportunity to attend Tūhono after taking part in just one YAP meeting. I found it incredibly complimentary that even being new, I was being considered for roles of high importance. Once at Tūhono, it became apparent that although we were all focused on separate sectors and therefore working towards vastly different goals, we were all united in caring about youth perspectives and had a shared desire to make positive changes. Tūhono granted me a wonderful induction to the professional world, and I’ll be endlessly thankful that I undertook the journey surrounded by supportive mentors and peers.”

Zara, Panel Member

“In 2023 I had the opportunity alongside a fellow YAP member to represent our panel at a conference of other panels. It was an amazing experience, getting to share the work we’d done and learning about the changes young people are making – it was really inspiring.”

Grace, Panel Member

Social Media & Blogs

It's important that we talk to young people, not at them. That's why we design youth-focused social media campaigns with input from our members and publish blogs which include their perspective.

Social Media Strategy

We asked the Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) for their input on strengthening our social media strategy, and their insights were invaluable. Our goal was to better engage with our audiences, namely young people, parents and stakeholders by understanding how they use different platforms, who interacts with our content, and what resonates most.

YAP confirmed that TikTok and Instagram are the go-to platforms for young people. TikTok's algorithm makes it especially effective for engagement, while Instagram remains popular – though much of its content is recycled from TikTok. Facebook is still used but mostly by parents and older audiences, while X (Twitter) isn't on young people's radar, with little useful content for them. Discord came up as a tool for academic purposes, with one member noting they use it for their science degree. LinkedIn was seen as valuable for networking and career growth, allowing people to share achievements without seeming like they're bragging. Reddit was mainly used for searching information rather than posting, and platforms like BeReal and Tumblr had little to no engagement.

When it comes to content, YAP made it clear that fast, fun, and trend-driven posts are key – especially on TikTok, where successful brands and political groups lean into humour and viral moments. Reels are a must, keeping content snappy and engaging, while featuring someone's face and making eye contact strengthens the connection with viewers. They highlighted the power of interactive elements like hashtags, polls, and audience participation, which help drive engagement.

Visually, YAP preferred a modern and minimalistic aesthetic, steering away from millennial-style designs. They favoured calmer colour palettes, sans-serif fonts, and presenting Content Breakdowns in carousel posts rather than hiding them in comments. Merging reels and posts where possible, tagging official movie or promo accounts to boost reach, and experimenting with narration and podcast-style discussions for ratings were also recommended.

This advice has directly shaped how we approach content creation and engagement, ensuring we're meeting young audiences where they are – and in ways that actually connect.

“Being able to voice my opinion on social media and potential strategies about it is vitally important, especially as someone who uses it.”

Max, Panel Member

Studio Ghibli, Movies and Mental Health: blog

"Movies have the ability to transport us, to literally spirit us away into imaginative realms that provide comfort and solace." We co-viewed *The Boy and the Heron* with members of the Panel, and [they told us](#) that watching Studio Ghibli films brings them comfort and joy.

In response, we created a ["Through the Ages" guide](#), ranking all Studio Ghibli films from most to least suitable for children. This is to help parents choose which films to introduce to their tamariki or watch as a whānau.

Pastoral Care

The purpose of the work we do as an Office is to safeguard tamariki and rangatahi from harm, and we extend this kaupapa to our YAP members.

We deal with challenging content, so we have a strong internal focus on keeping each other safe. We achieve this in a variety of ways:

Interview processes

During recruitment for the Panel, we are transparent with applicants about the kind of topics we talk about in meetings and after watching films. We make sure that new members know exactly what they are getting into when they join the Panel.

Support policies

We don't ask for personal experiences when it comes to discussion challenging topics. We ensure that members are aware of and have access to appropriate help and support measures. We have a disclosure policy in place, and we evaluate our approach with members annually.

Follow ups

Some of our meetings this year were particularly difficult, such as our discussion on suicide. We wanted to ensure that all members felt safe and supported, so we caught up with each member individually. We talked not only about the meeting, but also life in general.

Tools and Opportunities

The Panel has assisted the Office to provide younger audiences with the tools to safely engage with content and to offer opportunities to understand the way classification works in Aotearoa.

Find a Rating

The [Find a Rating](#) section of our website allows users to browse our huge library of film, book and video game ratings and classifications. It is the most visited section of our website, helping tens of thousands of users to make the best viewing decisions for themselves and their whānau.

The original idea for the page was for parents and caregivers to easily access New Zealand ratings and content warnings and to find more information about popular series, films and games.

The Panel saw that there was particular value for young people and other groups living in Aotearoa because it helps them to make good decisions about what they watch.

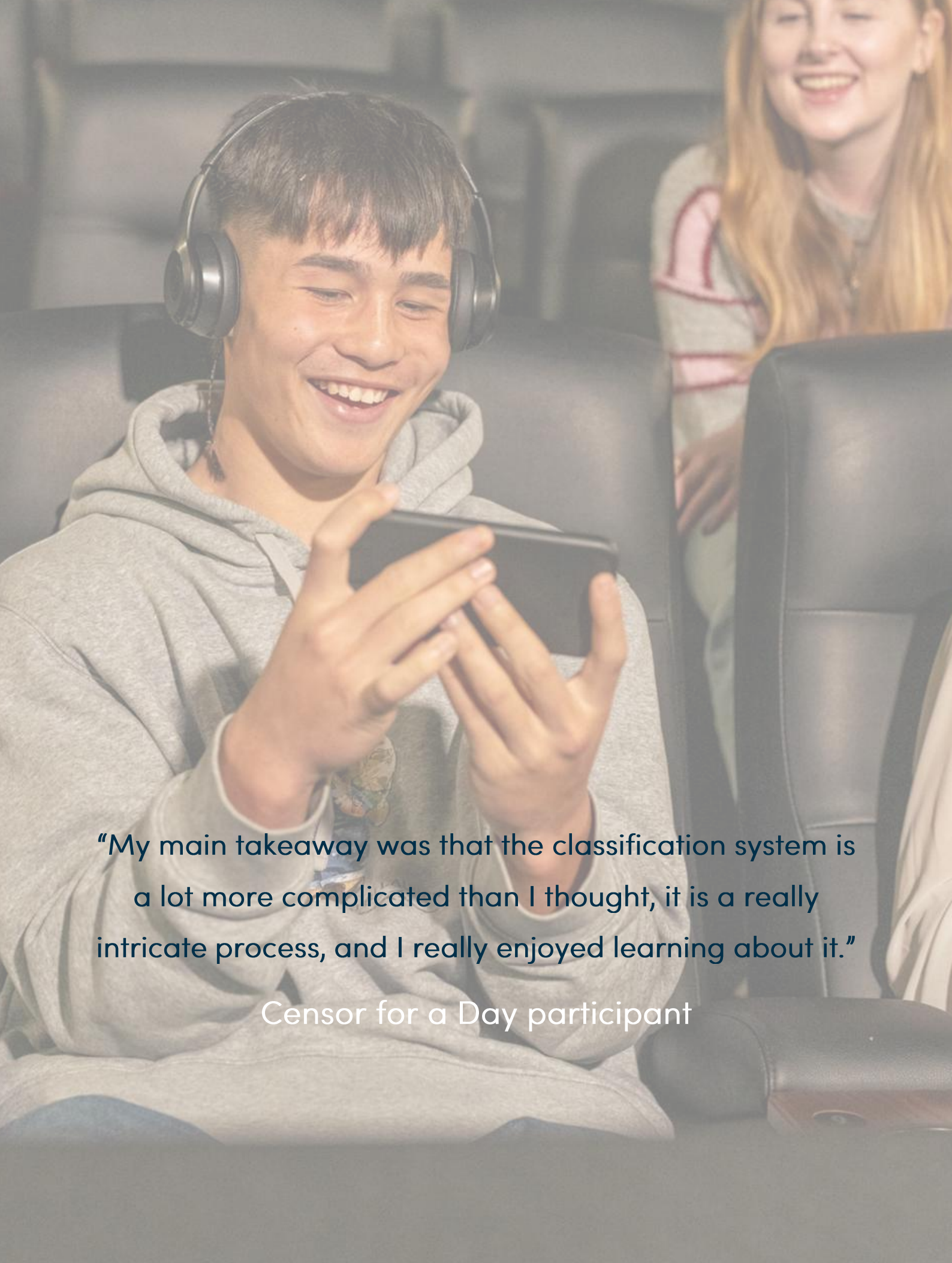
Through discussions with members and broader research, we recognised the importance of providing more detailed insights into content. Research confirmed the demand for this level of detail, but YAP played a key role in highlighting how useful Content Breakdowns are and reinforcing the need for more of them. Their enthusiasm helped shape our approach, and as a result, expanding Content Breakdowns has become a priority in our work programme.

Censor for a Day

Each year we invite senior media studies students to a local cinema for [Censor for a Day](#), to walk through the [legislative criteria](#) used to classify films, video games, books and other publications.

The event is a valuable learning opportunity, giving students a unique insight into the world of film classification. The Classification Office also benefits from receiving feedback from young people about the content they're seeing in films and games, and their views on film censorship.

We hope that by participating in Censor for a Day students gain information that is not only useful to their school studies, but also to their everyday movie-watching lives. In turn, these events are a valuable opportunity for Classification Office staff to gain insight into what rangatahi think about both the classification system and the content they're seeing in the films and video games.



“My main takeaway was that the classification system is a lot more complicated than I thought, it is a really intricate process, and I really enjoyed learning about it.”

Censor for a Day participant

Acknowledgments

To our supporters, teachers, guest facilitators and most importantly our members, thank you for all your mahi. We also acknowledge all rangatahi in Aotearoa. We hear you and we see you.

Feeling inspired to work with rangatahi?

For organisations intending to set out on this journey we recommend working with others with expertise to help guide and support you. We have learnt on and have been guided by experts in youth engagement.

Our advice is to understand the ethics and remain updated. And most of all, have fun. Every single young person brings something unique, and it is exciting to support and enhance their mana.

“The panel gives me a great sense of community, as well as purpose. The events the YAP has afforded me to attend have gifted me with many unique experiences. I genuinely believe the Classification Office’s work is of great importance, and I consider myself incredibly lucky to be a part of it.”

Zara, Panel Member

Appendix

Meeting timeline

11/07/2023 | Safer Online Services and Media Platforms Consultation

The Youth Advisory Panel participated in a session with the Department of Internal Affairs about the Safer Online Services and Media Platforms review, which they were invited to give feedback on.

08/08/2023 | Induction to Classification

Members took part in our annual induction session we run for new and current YAP to get a better understanding of our mahi and the classification system.

07/09/2023 | Sextortion

The Panel met with NZ Police and Netsafe to discuss sextortion and the impacts of the issue on young people in Aotearoa. Both agencies delivered presentations on the topic and members provided feedback afterwards.

26/10/2023 | Classification Handbook

The Classification Unit (CU) highlighted topics they would like the YAP to discuss and share a youth perspective on to shape the Classification Handbook and influence our mahi.

16/11/2023 | Anime

Members reviewed and discussed clips from various anime shows that fit within our gateway criteria, to help the office understand what young people think the harms are in anime films and series.

13/02/2024 | Social Media Strategy

Members talked about how young people use social media and shared ideas for shaping the Office's social media strategy. This included brainstorming ways to connect with rangatahi and other community groups, as well as identifying the types of content that would resonate with stakeholders.

14/03/2024 | Meeting Summaries Review for Classification Handbook

Members reviewed key topics from previous meetings, including nude selfies, anime, true crime, offensive language, teen sex comedies, drug use, and suicide. They assessed whether the information remained relevant, identified any gaps, and ensured nothing was overstated or overlooked.

23/04/2024 | Objectionable material

Members had discussions around objectionable material to help shape our youth campaign, aimed at supporting young people to understand and respond to extreme harmful online content while educating them on the dangers of creating and sharing such material. They provided crucial feedback on the topic and their input will inform how young audiences engage with social media. Members of the Classification Unit attended to assist with facilitating the discussion.

30/05/2024 | ISD Positive Interventions

Researchers from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue talked to the YAP about a toolkit they are building for positive online interventions to counter a new generation of extremism threats. Members gave feedback to contribute to the toolkit.

20/06/2024 | Mini C4AD and New Member Induction

Members took part in our annual induction session we run for new and current YAP to get a better understanding of our mahi and the classification system.

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