



## A Basic Guide to Licences for Film Screenings

### Why confirm licences?

- Legally, you have to (☹️)
- Threat of fines (and your venue can be classed as a “contributory infringer”)
- The greater good (exhibitors, film makers, distributors and everyone in between depend on each other to sustain the film industry)
- Access to funding and other support to help keep doing what you’re doing

### These are the licences venues need to screen films anywhere in Scotland:

- Cinema Licence (from your local council)
- Entertainment Licence (from your local council)
- Performing Rights Licence (PRS) (from [PPL/PRS](#))

### Depending whether or not you want to plan your screening (e.g. if you want to advertise your screening anywhere outside your venue or online), you will also need one of two kinds of licence:

- Single Title Screening Licence (STSL, for planned screenings, free or not)
- Public Video Screening Licence (PVSL, an umbrella licence for unplanned and/or “ambient”, free screenings and/or members-only orgs)
- NB Filmbank’s [Licence Wizard](#) is a handy way to figure out which you need

### You can confirm most licences from ‘gateway’ distribution companies who manage large libraries on behalf of major studios, for example:

- [Park Circus](#) (mostly but not exclusively theatrical, i.e. in cinemas)
- [Filmbank](#) (non-theatrical, i.e. anywhere not a cinema)
- [Motion Picture Licensing Company](#) (MPLC)
- [BFI](#)
- [Cinema For All Booking Scheme](#)

### Or sometimes licences are held by individual distributors, for example:

- [Arrow](#)
- [Dogwoof](#)
- [Peccadillo](#)
- And many, many more

### Some tips for finding elusive licence holders:

- Check [IMDb](#), [BBFC](#) and/or Amazon to find distributors and/or production companies
- Research recent screenings (e.g. Facebook) and message the organisers
- ICO offer advice on rights tracking:  
[enquiries@independentcinemaoffice.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@independentcinemaoffice.org.uk)

### Useful + more detailed guides:

- [How to start Screening Films \(Scalarama\)](#)
- [What Licences Do I Need? \(ICO\)](#)
- [Cinema For All Starter Pack \(Scottish Edition\)](#)
- [Grow Your Own Cinema Guide](#)



## **F.A.Q.**

### **Q: How much is a film licence?**

A: Depending on the context and source, it can be anywhere from £60 + VAT to several hundred pounds. Some distributors demand a percentage (often 35%) of final box take versus a minimum guarantee (MG), meaning you pay whatever is more.

### **Q: Can I haggle/negotiate?**

A: You can try. Haggling is more commonplace in Europe and North America than in the UK. And some distributors, e.g. Filmbank, operate an online portal that doesn't allow for it.

### **Q: Who will know if I don't get a licence?**

A: Distributors, especially the bigger ones, do keep an eye on screening activity and if they're made aware of unlicensed screenings of their films, they will investigate. Most commonly, they'll simply chase you to book it in. Other local exhibitors, including cinemas, will likely notice screenings that seem to be unlicensed too => side-eye and/or bad blood.

### **Q: Do I need a licence if my screening is free or for charity?**

A: Yes. Although on rare occasions you may be granted a licence for free, you still have to confirm permission to screen with the licence holder.

### **Q: Do I need a licence if the director/star is coming?**

A: Most likely. Unless the director is also the licence holder and/or the film doesn't have distribution, they probably won't manage the screening rights for their own film.

### **Q: If I own the DVD, can I screen it?**

A: Not without a licence. However, the licence fee most likely will not cover screening materials (i.e. DVD, Blu Ray), which you usually must provide yourself.

### **Q: If someone released the DVD/Blu Ray, can they grant a screening licence?**

A: Sometimes, but not always. The rights to distribute a film for home entertainment and the rights to distribute a film theatrically or non-theatrically are not essentially the same.

### **Q: What do I do if I've exhausted every avenue and explored all possibilities of finding a licence holder?**

A: In the very unlikely chance you have (see [Sophie Brown's Point Break saga](#)), there is the option to self-indemnify, meaning you make a record of your attempts to source the licence, reserve the box office take and prepare for the licence holder to eventually come forward. No-one recommends you do this.

### **Q: Which films are in the public domain?**

A: There isn't a definitive answer or resource for this. Websites that claim to be definitive are not and in any case are often based in the US, which is a different distribution territory that also has different copyright laws. On top of this, the legal status of films often changes over time. All you can do is research.

**Any more questions/advice:** [info@matchboxcineclub.com](mailto:info@matchboxcineclub.com)