

## AWARENESS RAISING

# CSR on the big screen

Academics at Nottingham University Business School have come up with an engaging and entertaining way to introduce business ethics topics both to their students and to the general public – by screening films at a local cinema and then throwing the floor open for discussion

If you're studying corporate responsibility in the Nottingham area of the UK any time soon, then it may be as well to take some popcorn with you. Nottingham University Business School, which is home to the International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility (ICCSR), has got the film bug.

For three years now, the centre has held screenings of films with corporate responsibility themes – from the political thriller *The constant gardener* to the personal documentary *Super size me* – that raise business responsibility topics in an imaginative and thought-provoking way.

Launched in 2004, the annual Doing the Business film series is an innovative component of the ICCSR's curriculum on CSR and business ethics. The screenings take place at the independent Broadway Cinema in Nottingham on Wednesdays during the students' second semester, usually during February and March. But the viewers don't just go to watch the big screen and eat popcorn; depending on the film, the screening may be preceded with a lecture or introduction to highlight its main themes, or be followed by a guest speaker to prompt further discussion of the issues it raises.

The screenings are open to the general public, ensuring a wider airing for the issues raised in the films. All students on ICCSR modules or programmes are given a free pass to attend each showing, space permitting. Entrance is on a first-come, first-served basis, and over the first three years of the programme many films have shown to packed houses.

Andrew Crane, professor of business ethics at the ICCSR, says the intention of Doing the Business is 'to encourage reflection about social and ethical issues in business outside the classroom', using the films to highlight 'the practical, real-life relevance and interest of the subject', as well as to put sources other than academic articles and books under academic scrutiny.

The ICCSR is also keen for the public to take part in the discussions, 'particularly since this is a subject of such widespread interest and concern'. Crane feels that film is a great medium to illustrate the consequences of business activities. 'As they

say, a picture can speak a thousand words, and sometimes a film can illustrate the outcomes of corporate actions much better than the printed page', he argues.

Crane also believes it's important to present the film industry as 'a relevant constituency in shaping the social context in which business operates' – especially given that the media plays a central part in communicating and propagating the values of wider society. On a more practical note, the ICCSR knows the films shown in the series will provide a good range of engaging examples and illustrations that can be used in students' assignments and other assessed work. As a spin-off, an ICCSR student, Catherine Barlow, recently won the annual European Business Ethics Network essay competition using analysis of two films as the basis of her work – the second year running an ICCSR student has won the prize.

For Laura-Mae Browne, head of marketing at the Broadway Cinema, Doing the Business is a chance to involve audiences with film in a way they are not normally accustomed to – as well as to keep people coming through the doors. 'It gives a great platform for the public to gain access to debate on business responsibility, which is an area many of our staff are also interested in and committed to at a personal level,' she says.

Hollywood is hardly awash with CSR-related output, so there often has to be some lateral

**screenings are open to the public, ensuring a wider airing for the CSR issues the films tackle**

**In a community dietician was brought in to talk to filmgoers about business responsibility issues raised by the Morgan Spurlock documentary *Super size me***





■ this year's film festival included *Darwin's nightmare*, which deals with the impact of big business on Tanzania's fishing industry

thinking when drawing up the programme – the 2005 schedule, for instance, featured *Fight club*, starring Brad Pitt, which the ICCSR presented as ‘an anti-consumerist rant’ – and while *The constant gardener* might not immediately bring the social and environmental responsibilities of business to the forefront of the average filmgoer's mind, it does deal with corporate corruption and the influence of large multinationals.

In any case, the annual programme offers both mainstream and fringe, mixing blockbusters with films such as Ken Loach's *The Navigators*, which follows the fortunes of track workers during the privatization of British Rail, or documentaries such as *Darwin's nightmare*, which looks at the damaging impact of commercial fishing operations in Tanzania that supply European supermarkets and was nominated for an Academy Award.

For *Super size me*, a Morgan Spurlock documentary in which the director sets himself a month-long challenge of only eating items on the McDonald's menu, the ICCSR invited Clare Pettinger, a community dietician specializing in obesity and lifestyle management, to lead discussion with filmgoers afterwards. Similarly, John Lloyd of the *Financial Times* came to speak on Robert Greenwald's documentary *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's war on journalism*, attracting a full house.

Input from such knowledgeable outsiders provides fresh insights into the issues raised in the film, but it also brings CSR topics to members of the public and generates wider support for the film series, which will be sponsored by the professional services organization Accenture next year.

Certainly the ICCSR is pleased with the feedback it has had, and, assuming the stock of CSR-related films doesn't run out, it should be booking the cinema for years to come.

■ Further information:  
[www.nottingham.ac.uk/business/iccsr](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/business/iccsr)

## the organization

The International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility was founded in 2002 within Nottingham University Business School. With eight core employees and 13 visiting staff and fellows, as well as nine research associates, the centre teaches undergraduate modules and specialist MA, MBA and PhD programmes, as well as carrying out interdisciplinary and international CSR research. It:

- runs an annual CSR Research Symposium, now in its fourth year, in which academics and others from around the world present their latest research findings
- organizes CSR conferences, most recently in the UK and in Asia
- invites visiting scholars and practitioners to spend up to six months at the centre to work on collaborative research
- offers students taking an MA in CSR or MBA in CSR programme three-month internships working on corporate responsibility projects within a range of organizations

## ibe comment ICCSR

If you are a research centre with CSR in your name and are attached to a university, you would hope that your institution's attitude to corporate responsibility would be demonstrated in the local community. The ICCSR has found a way: opening up its annual Doing the Business film series to local people. Not only are students given free access to screenings that will help them in their studies, but members of the public are encouraged to see films on business responsibility topics that they may not otherwise view. And they can take part in expert-led discussion of the main themes such screenings raise.

### features of interest:

- includes consideration of ethical dilemmas within courses
- invites experts to comment on the themes of the films
- understands that corporate responsibility is derived from a corporate values and ethics policy

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