Admissions

Despite months of closures at the start of the year and subsequent restrictions in the form of capacity limits and rules on social distancing, cinemas enjoyed significantly greater audience numbers in 2021 than in 2020.

Admissions for the year totalled 74 million, up 68% compared with 2020, but still well below the level of attendances seen in 2019 (Figure 1).

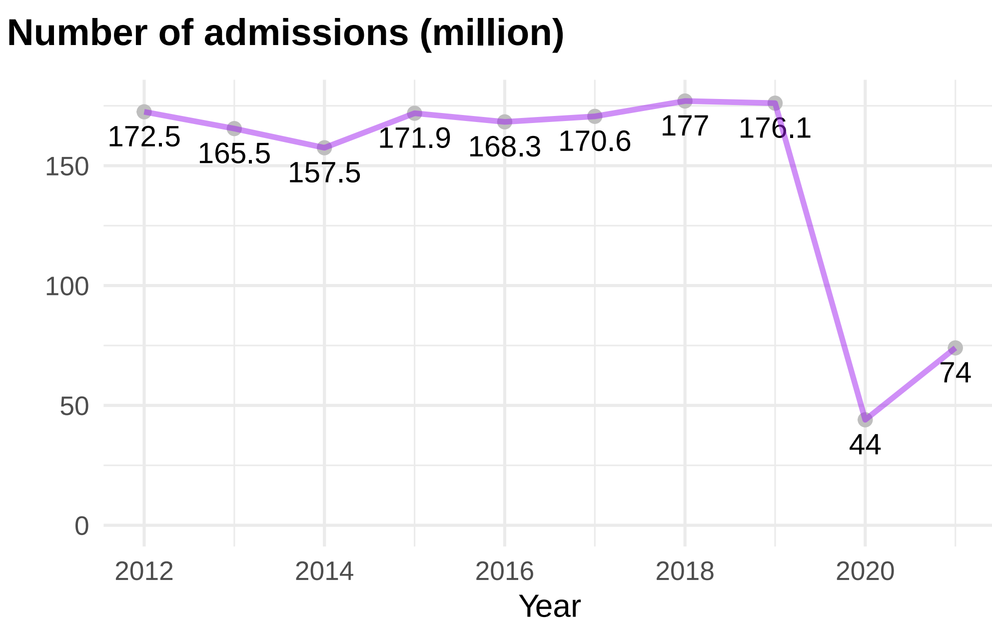

Figure 1: Annual UK cinema admissions, 2012-2021. Admissions for the year include all titles on release, including event cinema. Source: Cinema Advertising Agency (CAA), Comscore.

Table 1 shows admissions data for the largest world and European film markets between 2019 and 2021. As with the UK, the majority of territories saw increased attendances in 2021

Table 1: Largest film markets by admissions, 2019-2021 (ranked by 2021 admissions). Includes all global territories with more than 50 million admissions and all European territories with more than 25 million admissions in the calendar year 2021. Source: Omdia.

Territory	Admissions 2019 (million)	Admissions 2020 (million)	Admissions 2021 (million)	+/- 2019
China	1727	548	1167	-
USA	1163	226	466	-
India	1460	225	427	-
Russia	219	89	146	-
Japan	195	106	115	-
Mexico	350	65	114	-
France	209	64	94	-
UK	176	44	74	-
South Korea	227	60	61	-
Brazil	176	39	51	-
Germany	119	38	42	-
Spain	105	29	41	-
Poland	61	17	29	-
Indonesia	140	31	25	-
Italy	98	28	25	-

in comparison with 2020 but cinema-going in every territory remained well below the level of admissions in 2019. The two territories reporting numbers of ticket sales in 2021 closest to those of 2019 were China (down only 32%) and Russia (-34%) while those with the greatest shortfall between 2019 and 2021 were Indonesia (-82%), Italy (-74%) and South Korea (-73%).

According to Omdia, global cinema admissions in 2021 totalled 3.3 billion, an increase from 1.9 billion in 2020, but still 57% down on the 7.6 billion recorded in 2019.

Table 2 shows UK cinema admissions by month between 2019 and 2021. The figures show both the shortfall in admissions in comparison with the pre-pandemic totals of 2019 and the year-on-year recovery in attendances seen during some months in 2021. It should be noted, however, that following the re-opening of cinemas in the UK in late spring 2021, one or more restrictions (such as mask wearing, social distancing, capacity limits and mandatory vaccine passports) were in operation in some or all parts of the country for the remainder of the year. (Cinemas began reopening in England, Scotland and Wales from 17 May, and in Northern Ireland from 24 May.)

The first film to top the UK box office charts when cinemas reopened in 2021 was the family-friendly Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway which grossed £4.6 million (in the UK and Republic of Ireland) on its seven-day opening. (Its Friday to Sunday total of £3.8 million was the biggest three-day opening gross in the territory since Sonic the Hedgehog which earned £4.7 million for its three-day debut in February 2020.) The film was one of three top 20 titles released in May and heralded a summer dominated by action, adventure and comedy titles which attracted younger audiences in particular back to cinemas. After May openers Cruella (a UK qualifying film) and the US horror title The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It, top 20 earners in the summer included UK studio-backed titles Black Widow and Fast & Furious 9, along with Space Jam: A New Legacy, The Suicide Squad, Jungle Cruise, The Croods: A New Age and Free Guy. Top grossing UK independent films released in the summer included the year's second highest earning UK independent title, The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard alongside The Father, The Courier and People Just Do Nothing: Big in Japan.

Admissions rose each month between May (3.5 million) and August (10.4 million) but fell in September to 6.5 million. Traditionally one of the slowest months for ticket sales, September did, however, see the opening of the year's fourth highest earning release Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings. The superhero blockbuster, the 25th film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the first to feature an Asian lead, had the largest opening weekend of the year thus far with a three-day gross of £5.8 million.

Shang-Chi's three-day record was soon overtaken by the debut of another official 25th outing. The much delayed 007 instalment, No Time to Die, originally scheduled for release in April 2020, grossed £21 million on its three-day opening (£25.8 million including Thursday previews), the highest Friday to Sunday tally for a Bond film ever in the UK and Republic of Ireland. Officially released on 1 October, No Time to Die would go on to become the UK's third highest ever release with a gross of £97 million and was the first film of the year to entice substantial numbers of older audience members back to the cinema. Alongside three other top 20 earners – Dune, the UK studio-backed title Venom: Let There Be Carnage and The Addams Family 2 – and the top earning UK independent film of the year, The French Dispatch, No Time to Die helped propel October's ticket sales to the highest total of the year at 16.4 million. October was the only month to see an increase in admissions compared with the equivalent month in 2019.

Figure 2 shows the level of recovery in cinema-going in 2021 with admissions in the second half of the year mirroring the pattern of previous years. In general, attendances are cyclical, peaking during the school and festival holiday periods when people have more time to go to the cinema.

Table 2: Monthly UK cinema admissions, 2019-2021. Source: CAA, Comscore.

Admissions (million)	2019	2020	2021	% change on 2019
January	13.7	16.5	0.0	-100.0
February	12.2	14.5	0.0	-100.0
March	11.4	4.8	0.0	-100.0
April	16.0	0.0	0.0	-100.0
May	16.6	0.0	3.5	-78.8
June	13.9	0.0	7.0	-49.9
July	18.7	0.4	7.8	-58.5
August	15.6	2.1	10.4	-33.1
September	11.0	2.7	6.5	-40.6
October	16.3	2.2	16.4	0.9
November	12.2	0.3	8.8	-27.5
December	18.5	0.5	13.5	-26.8
Total	176.1	44.0	74.0	-58.0

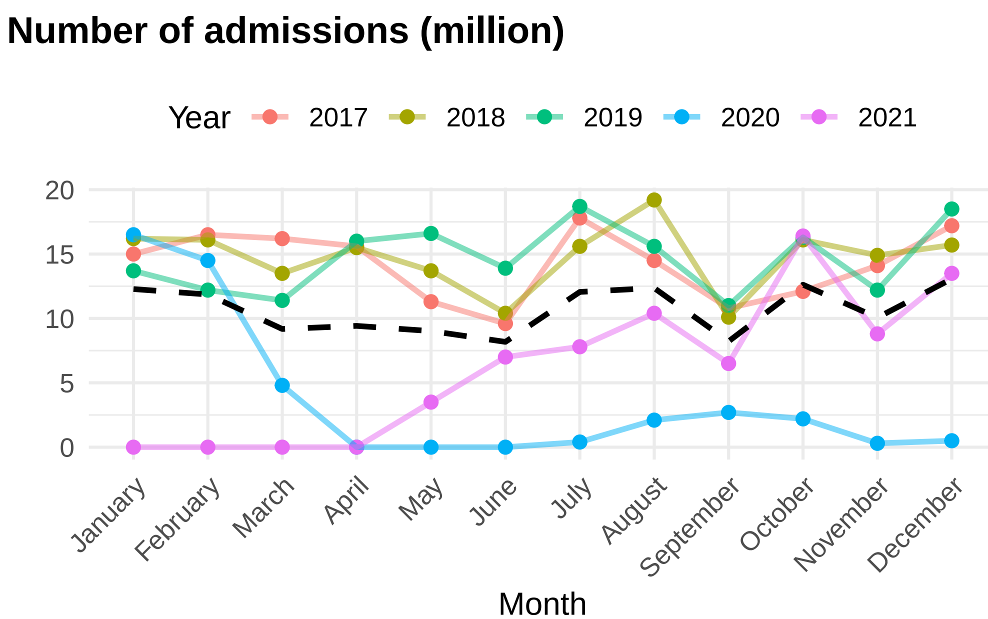

Figure 2: Monthly UK cinema admissions, 2017-2021. Dashed line is 5-year average. Source: CAA. Download this data.

Month	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
January	15.0	16.2	13.7	16.5	0.0
February	16.5	16.1	12.2	14.5	0.0
March	16.2	13.5	11.4	4.8	0.0
April	15.6	15.5	16.0	0.0	0.0
May	11.3	13.7	16.6	0.0	3.5
June	9.6	10.4	13.9	0.0	7.0
July	17.8	15.6	18.7	0.4	7.8
August	14.5	19.2	15.6	2.1	10.4
September	10.8	10.1	11.0	2.7	6.5
October	12.1	16.1	16.3	2.2	16.4
November	14.1	14.9	12.2	0.3	8.8
December	17.2	15.7	18.5	0.5	13.5

Figure 3 puts UK admissions in a longer-term perspective. Along with the USA and other western European countries, cinema-going in the UK declined sharply in the post-war era as incomes rose and new leisure activities became available. The largest competition came from the growth of television, which allowed audiences to satisfy their appetite for screen entertainment in the comfort of their own homes. As cinema admissions fell so did the supply of screens, which led to further falling demand and more cinema closures. By the 1980s the number and quality of the remaining cinemas were at an all-time low. The popularisation of the VCR in the same decade had a further negative impact on attendances, and by 1984 ticket sales had plummeted to a 50-year low of 54 million. However, the introduction of multiplex cinemas to the UK from 1985 onwards began to reverse the trend and ushered in a new period of growth which saw admissions gradually returning to levels last seen in the early 1970s. In the decade prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (2010-2019) attendances topped 170 million in six different years, peaking in 2018 with the highest admissions since 1970. The onset of the pandemic in the UK in 2020 caused massive disruption to the cinema sector: admissions for the year fell to an all-time low of 44 million. While the impact of the pandemic continued into 2021, admissions began to recover with total tickets sales for the year up by more than two-thirds compared with 2020.