

New requirements for UK's biggest video-on-demand services

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- Media Act implementation will bring the UK's largest video-on-demand services under regulation by Ofcom to better protect the most vulnerable
- Major streamers such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, ITVX and Disney+ will need to comply with a new accessibility code

More than 18 million people across the UK with disabilities impacting their sight or hearing are set to benefit from new Ofcom rules to ensure films and TV shows on the most popular video-on-demand (VoD) services can be enjoyed by everyone.

The government is laying secondary legislation to implement the Media Act 2024, bringing the largest, most popular VoD services in the UK under enhanced regulation by Ofcom. Platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+, and public service broadcaster VoD services like ITVX and Channel 4, will now be required to follow similar Ofcom accessibility requirements to those currently in place for traditional broadcasters.

Ministers will legislate to create a new VoD accessibility code, enforced by Ofcom, which will set minimum requirements for accessibility features. Mainstream streaming services will need to ensure that at least 80% of their total catalogue is subtitled, 10% is audio-described, and 5% is signed.

This will benefit Britain's estimated 18 million people who are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus and 350,000 who are blind or partially sighted so that they can better enjoy world-class content on-demand.

Media Minister Ian Murray said:

With UK audiences increasingly favouring on-demand platforms over live TV, we want to ensure that no one is left behind, and that everyone can enjoy the huge range of content available on video-on-demand services.

Implementing a new Ofcom-regulated accessibility code for our largest video-on-demand services will give people with disabilities impacting their sight or hearing peace of mind that they'll be able to stream all their favourite films and TV shows long into the future.

While licensed television channels must comply with Ofcom's accessibility requirements, such as subtitles, many of the UK's most popular VoD services are not regulated to the same standard. Some are not regulated in the UK at all. This poses a risk to disabled audiences who may face barriers accessing content.

The government wants to ensure that UK viewers with disabilities can be confident that the appropriate accessibility requirements are in place, whether they tune in via traditional channels or a mainstream on-demand service.

The government is clear that these are minimum targets and fully expects VoD services to go further where possible. The largest, mainstream services will have four years to meet the requirements of the accessibility code, with interim targets after two years. However, the government expects many services will meet the requirements earlier than required. Ofcom will shortly begin a public consultation on the new VoD accessibility code, which will be an opportunity for the public and providers to set out their views on the rules that will be within the codes.

Victoria Boelman, Director of Insight and Policy at RNID said:

Everyone deserves to be able to stream their favourite shows and access a wide variety of content across video on demand services. Being deaf, having hearing loss or other sensory loss should never stand in the way of that.

Bringing on-demand services in line with traditional broadcasting is much needed, and the new Ofcom rules reflect the significant progress we've seen in accessibility since we launched our Subtitle It campaign in 2015. However, we urge the UK's video on-demand providers to go further than the minimum requirements and not wait for them to come into force – so deaf people and those with hearing loss can access as much content as possible as soon as possible.

Sonali Rai, Senior Manager, RNIB Media, Culture and Immersive Technologies Team, Royal National Institute of Blind People said:

The introduction of legal requirements for audio description on video-on-demand services is a long-awaited and important step as on-demand viewing becomes the norm for many, including blind and partially sighted audiences.

From this positive starting point, which should bring much-needed consistency across services, we want to see progress beyond the 10% minimum requirement, so that viewers with sight loss can enjoy as much content as possible. We look forward to continuing our work with the industry and Ofcom to ensure more content is audio described, and that platforms are accessible so blind and partially sighted viewers can independently find and enjoy programmes.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- Latest figures on audience viewing behaviour from Ofcom's 2025 Media Nations report.
- Through the Media Act 2024, the Secretary of State has powers to designate UK and non-UK based video-on-demand services as 'Tier 1 services'. Through secondary legislation, the Secretary of State will shortly designate services with more than 500,000 UK users as Tier 1.
- Following designation, Ofcom will consult on, draft, and enforce the new codes, which will set similar standards to those which apply to television in the Broadcasting Code – including rules

to protect audiences from harmful and offensive content, privacy, fairness, and due impartiality and accuracy in news.

- Statutory sanctions that can be applied to linear broadcasters by Ofcom will similarly be available to apply to on-demand services, such as financial penalties. For video-on-demand services, the maximum fine per breach of a rule will be £250,000 or 5% of qualifying revenue.
- The standards code will then come into effect one year after it's published by Ofcom.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-requirements-for-uks-biggest-video-on-demand-services>