

UK's video-on-demand services to have enhanced Ofcom regulation

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Media Act implementation will bring the UK's largest video-on-demand services under regulation by Ofcom to better protect children and the most vulnerable.

- Major streamers with over 500,000 UK users such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and ITVX will need to comply with new standards and accessibility codes
- Reflects shift in viewing habits as number of people using streaming services each month surpasses those watching live TV

Audiences across video-on-demand (VoD) services with more than 500,000 UK users will benefit from new Ofcom codes designed to protect audiences and improve accessibility.

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 the public service broadcaster VoD services like ITVX and Channel 4, will be required to follow similar Ofcom content rules to those currently in place for traditional broadcasters.

These regulations reflect the significant shift in how audiences choose to watch TV. Two thirds of households subscribe to at least one of Netflix, Amazon Prime Video or Disney+, with 85% of people using an on-demand service each month, compared to 67% who watch live TV. Many, especially younger audiences, now bypass TV channels and head straight to streaming services when choosing what to watch.

While licensed television channels must comply with Ofcom's Broadcasting Code and 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 audiences and a lack of consistency across TV and TV-like services.

The government wants to create a more level regulatory playing field and ensure that UK audiences - particularly children and parents - can be confident that protections from harmful material are in place, whether they tune in via traditional channels or a mainstream on-demand service.

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Lisa Nandy said:

We know that the way audiences watch TV has fundamentally changed. Millions now choose to watch content on video-on-demand platforms alongside or, in the case of many young people, instead of traditional TV.

The Media Act introduced vital updates to our regulatory framework which this government is committed to implementing. By bringing the most popular video-on-demand services under enhanced regulation by Ofcom, we are strengthening protections for audiences, creating a level playing field for industry and supporting our vibrant media sector that continues to innovate and drive growth across the UK.

The Culture Secretary will designate the most popular VoD platforms with more than 500,000 UK users as 'Tier 1' services, meaning they will need to adhere to a new VoD standards code. Similar to the Broadcasting Code, this will ensure that news is reported accurately and impartially and audiences are protected against harmful or offensive material. Audiences will be able to complain to Ofcom if they see something concerning, and Ofcom will have powers to investigate, and take action, where they consider there has been a breach of the code.

A new VoD accessibility code will set minimum requirements for accessibility features, and 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 bring benefits to people with disabilities, in particular those affecting their sight and/or hearing, and ensures that more content can be enjoyed by everyone.

Ofcom will shortly begin a public consultation on the new VoD standards and accessibility codes, which will be an opportunity for the public and providers to set out their views on the rules that will be within the codes.

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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.
- 'Tier 1' 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.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uks-video-on-demand-services-to-have-enhanced-ofcom-regulation>