

MEASURES CONCERNING ACCESS OF VISUALLY AND HEARING-IMPAIRED PEOPLE TO TELEVISION PROGRAMMES

United Kingdom

1. Subtitling, audio description and signing for deaf and visually-impaired viewers

1.1. Are there legal provisions on the use of subtitling, audio description and signing?

Section 303 of the Communications Act 2003 sets targets for subtitling, signing and audio description and requires Ofcom (the UK broadcasting regulator) to draw up a code giving guidance relating to provision of services for the deaf and visually impaired detailing how the subtitling, signing and audio description obligations are to be met. The Ofcom code was published in July 2004.

1.2. Are there obligations on Public Service Broadcasters concerning access services for deaf and visually impaired viewers?

If so, what are these? (types of programmes, percentage of programming, etc.)

In the UK there are 6 channels with public service requirements – BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, S4C and Five.

The BBC has no legal requirements to provide subtitles, signing and audio description but the corporation recognise they have a leading role in providing services for people with sensory impairments.

Subtitling: The 2003 Act requires 90% of all programming on ITV and Channel 4 and S4C to be subtitled by 2010. Five must subtitle 80% of its programmes by 2008.

The BBC aim to subtitle 100% of their programmes by 2008.

2. Audio-description

The 2003 Act requires ITV, Channel 4 and S4C to audio describe 10% of their programmes by 2010. Five must audio describe 10% of their programmes by 2008.

The BBC aim to audio describe 10% of their output by 2010.

Signing: The Act requires ITV, Channel 4 and S4C to sign 5% of their programming by 2010. Five must sign 5% by 2008.

The BBC aim to sign 5% of their output by 2010.

2.1 Are there obligations on commercial broadcasters concerning subtitling, audio description and signing? If so, what are these? (types of programmes, percentage of programming, etc.)

ITV, Channel 4 and Five are all commercial broadcasters with public service requirements.

Subtitling: All other UK commercial broadcasters on digital terrestrial, digital cable and digital satellite have requirements to provide 80% subtitled programming within a ten-year anniversary.

Audio-Description: All UK commercial broadcasters must audio describe 10% of their services within the ten-year anniversary.

3. Signing

All UK commercial broadcasters must provide signing for 5% of their programmes within the ten-year anniversary.

There is a statutory 60% interim target for subtitling and other interim targets set by Ofcom for commercial services with new requirements so that they provide an increasing amount of subtitling on their way to the 80% target. There are also interim targets for signing and audio description.

Ofcom has the ability to exempt certain programmes or services from the requirements having regard to certain criteria set out in the 2003 Act. These are detailed at AnnexA.

3.1. Are there other arrangements concerning the use of subtitling, audio description and signing? If so, what are these?

N/A

3.2. Do broadcasters, who are not under any obligation to provide subtitling, audio description or signing, provide these on a voluntary basis?

Based on the criteria set out in paragraph 3 (above), Ofcom have completely excluded some services from the subtitling, signing and audio description requirements. The criteria for excluding services are such that it is unlikely that any excluded services would provide subtitling, signing or audio description even on voluntarily.

3.3. Are speech recognition systems used or being developed for subtitling?

Speech recognition services have been used for some time when providing live subtitling and include facilities in place to create specialist voice profiles. More advanced technology is being developed.

3.4. Are provisions on subtitling, audio description and signing envisaged in particular in the context of the digital switchover?

Requirements in the Communications Act 2003 for the public service broadcasters apply for both analogue and digital broadcasts and will apply post switchover. The obligations on other commercial channels apply only to their digital broadcasts, and will therefore continue to apply post-switchover (in fact all their broadcasts are digital except residual analogue cable services).

Annex A

Channels required to provide television access services

Level One (full requirements)

BBC 1 Sky Movies 3 (Premier 2)
BBC 2 Sky Movies 4 (Moviemax 2)
BBC 3 Sky Movies 5 (Premier 3)
BBC 4 Sky Movies 6 (Moviemax 3)
BBC News 24 Sky Movies 7 (Premier 4)
CBBC Sky Movies 8 (Moviemax 5)
CBeebies Sky Movies 9 (Premier Widescreen)
ITV 1 Sky Cinema 1
ITV 2 Sky Cinema 2
Channel 4 Sky Box Office
Channel 5 Disney Channel
S4C Digital Disney Playhouse
ITV News Disney Toon
E4 MTV
Sky News MTV Hits
Sky One MTV Base
Sky One Mix VH1
Sky Sports 1 VH1 Classic
Sky Sports 2 TMF
Sky Sports 3 Nickelodeon
Sky Sports Extra Hallmark
Sky Sports News Sci Fi Channel
Sky Travel Paramount
Sky Movies 1 (formerly Premier)
Sky Movies 2 (Moviemax)

Level Two (full requirements for signing and audio description; 66% of subtitling)

Living TV UKTV Gold
Discovery Channel UKTV G2
Bravo UKTV Food
Challenge TV UKTV History
Trouble UKTV Style
Granada Plus UKTV Documentary (Horizons)
Cartoon Network

Level Three (full requirements for signing and audio description; 33% of subtitling)

History Channel The Hits
Discovery Home & Leisure Magic TV
National Geographic Smash Hits
Fox Kids Kiss TV
The Box Kerrang