

Media Bill: Ofcom's roadmap to regulation

[Welsh version available](#)

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1. Introduction

About this document

- 1.1 The UK's broadcasting and media landscape is one of the most diverse, creative, and vibrant anywhere in the world. Audiences across the UK enjoy an incredible range of services, programming and journalism created through a mix of public and private innovation and investment, nurtured by a robust and stable regulatory framework. It is thanks to these conditions that every one of us continues to be able to access reliable news, information, and entertainment that enriches our cultural lives.
- 1.2 However, these conditions are changing. Over the past decade, the ways in which we can watch and listen to content have transformed. The passage of the [Media Bill](#) therefore comes at an important moment.
- 1.3 As the first major update to UK legislation in this area for 20 years, the Bill amends requirements on PSB and audio services, places new obligations on connected platforms and strengthens regulation of Video-on-Demand (VoD) services. Building on recommendations made by us in our last major review of public sector media, [Small Screen: Big Debate](#), the Bill provides us with new tools to ensure that UK viewers and listeners can continue to access high quality programming and journalism.
- 1.4 The Bill makes changes to some of Ofcom's existing responsibilities, such as how we regulate commercial radio and how we ensure PSBs deliver against their quotas. It also introduces new duties, such as a requirement for us to put in place new regimes for online TV prominence and voice assistants, as well as a new standards code for VoD services.
- 1.5 Ofcom welcomes the changes made by the Media Bill. We are committed to implementing these new rules as quickly as possible in a way that is fair, proportionate and effective. This document explains our high-level plan for doing so.
- 1.6 Stakeholders should take careful note that the approach set out in the following pages is based on our current understanding of our new duties; these may change as Parliamentary scrutiny of the Bill continues. Similarly, the timetable for Parliamentary processes (including the scheduling of secondary legislation required to bring some parts of the Bill into effect) as well as for Ofcom consultations and reports - both of which we have included below to illustrate the potential sequence of our work and help interested parties plan engagement with us - should be viewed as indicative and subject to change. We will provide updates to keep stakeholders informed once the Bill completes its passage through Parliament.

audiences across a range of services and platforms. This document describes how we will work to implement these changes.

- 2.6 Alongside this work, Ofcom will also shortly begin our next PSB review. As well as assessing how the PSBs have fulfilled their purposes over the last five years, we will once again look ahead at the challenges to come as rapid change continues. We will consider what is needed to ensure audiences benefit from accurate, well-funded and trustworthy news in a world increasingly dominated by social media, to sustain a diverse PSB system and to support a thriving production sector well into the future.

Scope of the Media Bill

- 2.7 The Bill contains a range of measures amending the regulatory framework and Ofcom's duties:
- **Part 1 updates the legislative framework for public service television broadcasting.** This section of the Bill revises a regulatory framework based on linear scheduling that is increasingly out of step with audiences. It amends PSB remits and requirements to focus on the most important areas of public service delivery, with the aim of giving broadcasters greater flexibility to meet their obligations in a way which serves audience interests. Further, as more and more firms compete for the rights to show sporting events, Part 1 of the Bill also makes changes to the listed events framework to protect the ability of people across the UK to access events of national interest.
 - **Part 2 introduces new rules to ensure public service content is available, prominent, and easily accessible on a range of connected TV platforms, such as smart TVs.** This section, building on [recommendations](#) made by Ofcom in 2019, complements the existing framework – which requires only the prominence of linear PSB channels on regulated electronic programme guides (e.g. Sky's EPG) – with a new one requiring a broader range of platforms to carry and prominently display the on-demand players on which PSBs distribute public service programming. It requires Ofcom to establish new Codes, guidance and dispute resolution processes designed to ensure a fair and sustainable system that serves audiences.
 - **Part 3 gives Channel 4 more flexibility within its operating model and updates S4C's legislative framework.** This section of the Bill gives Channel 4 the ability to produce and monetise its own programming – removing the publisher/broadcaster model which has been in place for over 40 years. It also introduces a new duty on the Channel 4 Corporation (C4C) Board to ensure C4C's long-term financial sustainability. The changes affecting S4C, which are not for Ofcom to implement, will broaden its remit to include digital and online services, allow S4C to offer its content on a range of platforms and remove the geographical restrictions that have limited its ability to provide services outside of Wales. It also provides a statutory footing to the new unitary board and audit arrangements recommended by the independent review of S4C.
 - **Part 4 places new standards and accessibility requirements on mainstream, TV-like video-on-demand services.** Although VoD services are now watched by millions of UK viewers, they are not subject to the requirements of Ofcom's Broadcasting Code, which sets standards for content including due impartiality and due accuracy in news. This part of the Bill means that mainstream VoD

3. Putting the Media Bill into practice

Our approach to regulation

- 3.1 The aim of the Media Bill is to ensure both the continued availability to UK audiences of a wide range of high-quality live and on-demand TV and radio services, and that these audiences are appropriately protected from harmful or offensive material. In our approach to implementing the Bill, we will consult openly and use the range of evidence and research available to us to secure the best outcomes for people across the UK.
- 3.2 In some areas of the Bill, regulated providers will have more flexibility than before in how they meet obligations. For example, PSBs will have greater freedom to determine how best to serve audiences across platforms than has been the case to date. However, the Bill is also clear about the importance of protecting the provision on linear services of trusted news and current affairs and a diverse range of programming. In taking forward the Bill, we will remain mindful of the need to ensure that public service media remains universally available, relevant, and publicly accountable.
- 3.3 The Bill also aims to support UK media businesses as they seek to transform their services to adapt to shifts in technology and audience behaviour. Companies impacted by the new legislation, including many not previously subject to regulation by us, face a wide range of opportunities and challenges to respond to the Bill's requirements. Through our engagement with industry, we will seek to understand the impact of regulatory proposals on all parties before we make the decisions needed to bring new frameworks into effect.

Implementation across the Bill

- 3.4 Our implementation timetable will be determined by the timing of the Bill's passage through Parliament. Our current planning assumptions are based on the contents of the Bill as it stood when the House of Commons completed its initial assessment in January 2024 and are subject to change as Parliamentary scrutiny continues.
- 3.5 The plan that follows assumes the Bill will receive Royal Assent by the summer, with its provisions brought into force and necessary secondary legislation subsequently laid before Parliament . We will look to begin consulting on aspects of the new regime as soon as possible, while consulting fully and transparently on our plans, giving stakeholders sufficient time to comment, and ensuring that we are able to consider all the feedback we receive carefully.
- 3.6 Where it is possible to do so, we will look to accelerate our timetable as compared to the proposals set out in this paper. Given the number and range of steps required we anticipate that the full implementation programme, including the designation of

4. Implementation plan in detail

- 4.1 This section outlines our current plan to implement each part of the Media Bill once it comes into force. This document is not intended to offer guidance to regulated parties on any new obligations resulting from the Bill, or to be exhaustive in its coverage of every area of the new legislation. More information on compliance will be provided in the codes and guidance which we will consult on as part of the implementation process.

Part 1: Public Service Television

Timeline for implementation



Summary of changes

- 4.2 This section of the Bill applies to the BBC, S4C, and the licensed commercial public service broadcasters ITV, STV, Channel 4 and Channel 5.
- 4.3 Under this part of the Bill, the PSBs collectively will have an updated and modernised public service remit deliverable across a broader range of audio-visual services (including their on-demand players and services provided by third parties). The licensed PSBs and S4C will be required to publish annual statements of programme policy (known as SoPPs) explaining how they intend to fulfil their individual public service remits (including which audiovisual services they will use to do so, and the contribution these services will make).
- 4.1 The PSBs will remain subject to quota obligations, including obligations to commission content from independent producers and to produce content outside the M25. However, for the first time, they will be able to deliver many of these via on-demand services as well as via their main linear channels. Their licences will need to be updated accordingly.

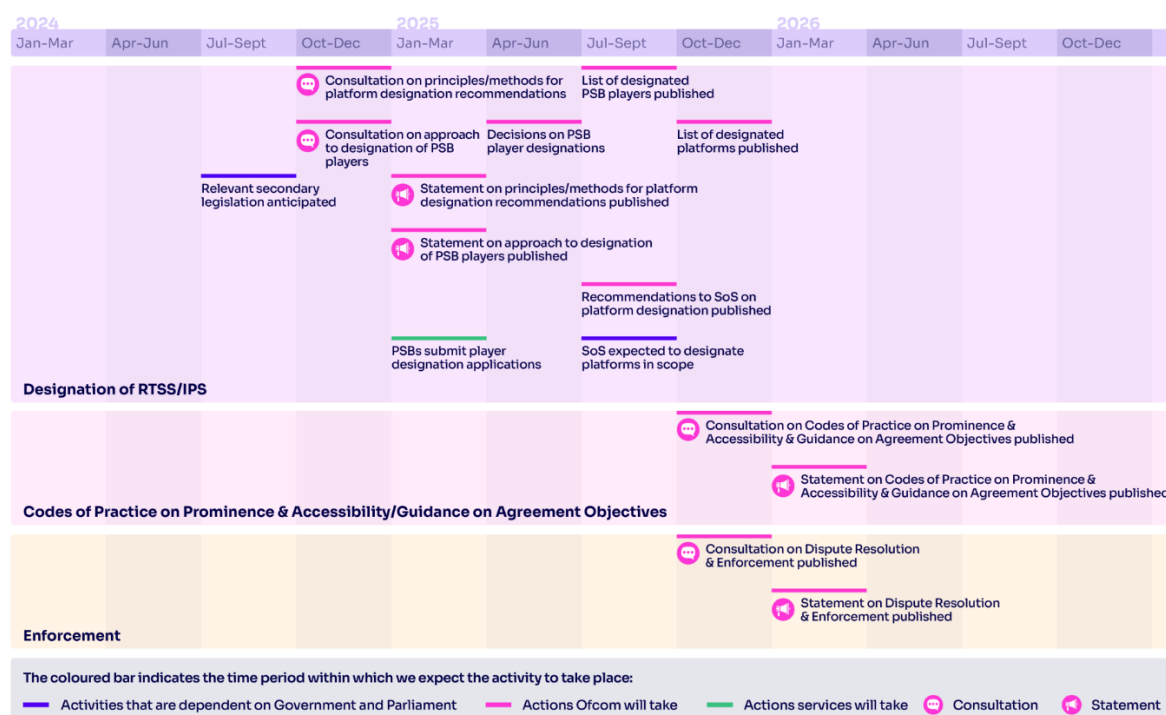
providers, including streaming services, who may be required to apply to Ofcom for consent to show coverage if they acquire exclusive live rights to a listed event.

Proposed process for implementation and stakeholder engagement

- 4.8 Following Royal Assent, we will be required to draft regulations to define the meaning of certain terms used in the listed events regime, including ‘adequate live coverage’ and ‘adequate alternative coverage’. We expect to launch a call for evidence in the summer to gather stakeholder input ahead of consultation. We will also look to revise our Code on listed events to explain the basis on which we will give or revoke consent. We intend to seek the views of stakeholders on this early in 2025, with a consultation on the revised Code and regulations to follow later that year.

Part 2: Availability & Prominence

Timeline for implementation



Summary of new duties

- 4.9 This part of the Bill will introduce new rules to ensure online PSB services are both available on popular TV platforms and capable of being easily found and discovered by audiences. The rules are complex, but in broad terms the Bill will require designated platforms to “carry” on-demand players “offered” to them by the public service broadcasters.
- 4.10 Once the Bill becomes law, the Secretary of State will issue an order specifying the types of devices and technical equipment that will be covered by the regime, likely to include both smart TVs and set-top boxes that enable users to access on-demand apps

- 4.16 For the final stage of implementing the regime, we will publish consultations outlining our enforcement and dispute resolution procedures. We currently expect to publish consultations on both sets of procedures towards the end of 2025.

Part 3: Channel 4

Summary of changes

- 4.17 This section of the Bill makes changes which affect two of the UK's publicly owned PSBs, Channel 4 and S4C. Only the changes to Channel 4 are directly a matter for Ofcom.
- 4.18 The Bill removes the long-standing restriction on C4C's involvement in programme-making, enabling it to produce content for broadcast on Channel 4 for the first time. Alongside this, the Bill also places new duties on C4C to put in place procedures that facilitate fair competition for commissions and prepare an annual statement about its commissioning policy to be reviewed by Ofcom. The Government has indicated that it intends to bring these new duties into force only when Channel 4 establishes a production business.

Proposed process for implementation and stakeholder engagement

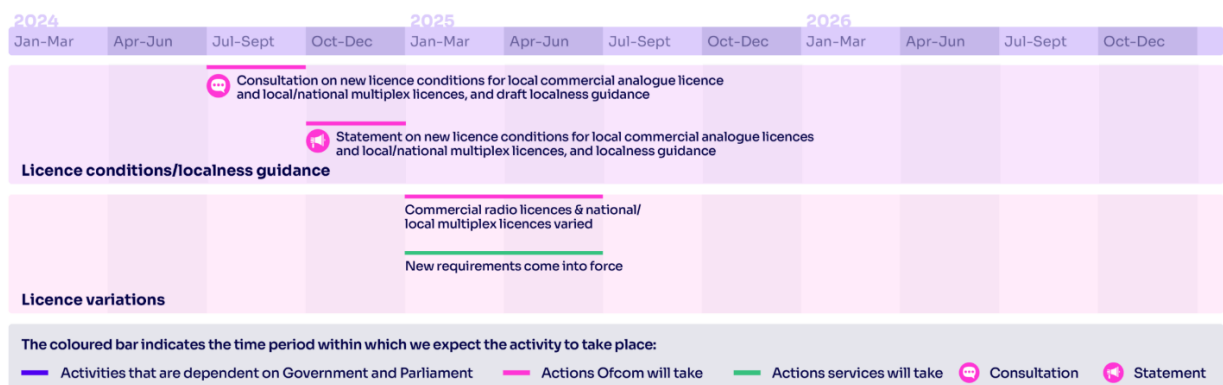
- 4.19 We plan to consult on guidance for C4C on preparing its statement of commissioning policy that will apply when its new duty is in force. We will seek to align, where appropriate, with the work on guidance relating to PSB codes of practice for commissioning from independent producers discussed in paragraph 4.7 above.

providers to inform this report, submitting our work to the Secretary of State around the end of 2024.

- 4.24 This year, we will also begin work on our draft VoD Code and accompanying guidance, with the final documents to come into effect in 2025 following consultation. Tier 1 providers will then have a 12-month grace period from publication of the Code (or their designation as a Tier 1 service, whichever is later) before they are required to be in full compliance. We propose to use this period to consult on and finalise new procedures for the handling and resolution of complaints.
- 4.25 The Bill also requires Ofcom to review the audience protection measures implemented by VoD providers to protect audiences from harm. This includes the existing obligations to protect audiences imposed on all VoD services as well as the new requirements that will apply to Tier 1 services. We expect to begin a general review of audience protection measures in use shortly after Royal Assent.
- 4.26 Regarding the new accessibility requirements, we expect to consult on a new VoD Accessibility Code around the beginning of 2025. The first set of accessibility quotas (for subtitling, audio description and signing) set out in the Bill will come into effect 24 months after the final VoD Accessibility Code is published (i.e. likely around the middle of 2027), or 24 months after a provider is designated as Tier 1, whichever is later. However, we expect to consult on the introduction of interim access services quotas likely to apply from 2026, alongside requirements around reporting to Ofcom on accessibility and provision of information to disabled people.

Part 5: Regulation of Radio Services

Timeline for implementation



Summary of changes

- 4.27 This part of the Bill removes a number of longstanding regulatory duties applying to licensed FM and AM commercial radio services and national and local radio multiplex services. Specifically, to reflect the wide range of services now available to listeners, there will no longer be requirements on local stations relating to where they make their programmes and what music they play. Ofcom's role in regulating which radio stations are carried on DAB will also end.

speakers and in-car entertainment systems, are an increasingly important part of the audio market. The Bill brings them into regulation for the first time.

- 4.33 As with the Part 2 requirements for on-demand TV platforms, it is for the Secretary of State to decide which voice-activated platforms are to be brought into scope. To do so, she will need to decide which platforms are significant for radio listening and must both have received advice from Ofcom and consulted on her conclusions.
- 4.34 Platforms which the Secretary of State designates will have to make sure that when audiences request a particular radio service, that radio service is played – for example, “Play me Radio 4” or “Play Classic FM” should mean the platform playing Radio 4 and Classic FM – and they must not interrupt any radio stream with ads or other content. They will also have some obligations to the radio services they offer to listeners – not charging for providing them to audiences and allowing radio services to choose the route or app via which they reach audiences.
- 4.35 The Bill also specifies which radio services may benefit from these new obligations on designated voice-activated platforms. In order to qualify, internet radio services will have to play the same content at the same time as a licensed radio service (except for any advertising, which can be different). Licensed radio services can opt-in by notifying Ofcom.

Proposed process for implementation and stakeholder engagement

- 4.36 Our first step in implementing the regime will be to determine the principles and methods we will apply in making a recommendation to the Secretary of State about which platforms should be designated. We will proactively engage with stakeholders, focusing in particular on the voice-activated platforms with whom we don’t have pre-existing regulatory relationships, and we expect to gather data from stakeholders in support of this work early in the process.
- 4.37 We plan to consult towards the end of the year on our proposed approach, with a final statement and recommendations following early in 2025. The implementation of this part of the Bill is then dependent on the Secretary of State’s designation decision, after which we will publish a final list of regulated platforms.
- 4.38 The legislation requires us to produce a Code of Practice that will set out our expectations on both designated platforms and radio services that have opted into the regime. The Code of Practice will, among other things, explain the steps platforms can take in order to ensure compliance with their duties as well as clarifying the technical and other requirements which will apply to internet radio services. We plan to launch a consultation on the draft code around the end of 2025 alongside a consultation on draft enforcement guidance. We expect to publish final versions of these documents in 2026.
- 4.39 We will develop a notification process for internet radio services who wish to opt-in and expect to publish this in 2025, at which point services should be prepared to submit their notifications. We plan to publish an initial list of notified services in 2026, when our new codes will also come into force.