
Television channels required to provide access services in 2021

STATEMENT:

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About this document

This document explains which TV channels licensed by Ofcom are required to provide access services (subtitles, signing and audio description) on a proportion of their programming in 2021.

Access services are intended to help people with sensory impairments to understand and enjoy TV programmes. The channels required to provide access services include domestic channels broadcast within the UK and some non-domestic channels broadcast within other European countries.

In 2021, 90 domestic channels and 18 non-domestic channels will be required to provide access services.

1. Statement

- 1.1 The Communications Act 2003 (“the Act”) required Ofcom to publish a code setting out the obligations of television channels licensed in the UK to provide television access services. Following consultation, Ofcom published the Ofcom Code on Television Access Services (“the Code”) in July 2004, together with an explanatory statement setting out the channels that would be required to provide such services in the following year. A copy of the current version of the Code, incorporating amendments made since the Code was first published, can be found at https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0035/179954/tv-access-services-code.pdf.
- 1.2 The Code also provides for a mid-year review of the audience share and revenues of UK-licensed television channels, based on data for the previous year. The purposes of the review are to establish whether, in the next calendar year, channels should be:
 - a) required to provide television access services;
 - b) required to meet a different level of provision; or
 - c) excluded from the requirement to provide television access services.
- 1.3 The statutory targets for broadcasters are expressed as percentages of the service. They rise from a low level to the ten-year targets prescribed by the Act, that is 80% for subtitling, 5% for signing and 10% for audio description. In the case of Channel 3 services (ITV, STV and UTV) and Channel 4, the relevant target for subtitling is 90% and for BBC channels (excluding BBC Parliament which is exempted on audience share grounds) it is 100%¹.
- 1.4 Ofcom has used the cost of providing access services to calculate three levels of provision that we apply to relevant channels:
 - a) Level One equates to the full current annual targets for subtitling, signing and audio description, as well as any alternative requirements;
 - b) Level Two equates to 66% of the current annual target for subtitling, as well as 100% of the targets for signing and audio description, and any alternative requirements; and
 - c) Level Three equates to 33% of the current annual target for subtitling, as well as 100% of the targets for signing and audio description and any alternative requirements.
- 1.5 For channels broadcasting within the UK (‘domestic channels’), data collected from broadcasters in early 2018² was used by Ofcom to estimate the costs incurred for the

¹ Under the BBC Charter and Agreement, Ofcom has specific duties relating to access services on BBC television and on demand services.

² In order to reduce the burden on broadcasters during the Coronavirus pandemic, Ofcom did not request updated cost data for domestic channels in 2020. Ofcom intends to seek updated cost information from both domestic and non-domestic broadcasters in early 2021.

provision of access services. This helps assess whether broadcasters can afford to meet their obligations, by spending no more than 1% of their relevant turnover.

- 1.6 For channels broadcasting in other European countries ('non-domestic channels'), Ofcom collected data from broadcasters in early 2019. This data has been used to generate country-specific estimates of the different costs incurred for the provision of access services. Ofcom then used these estimates to determine which non-domestic channels can afford to provide access services from 2021.

Domestic TV Services

- 1.7 The list of domestic channels required to provide access services in 2021 is at Annex 1. In brief:
- a) 90 channels will be required to provide television access services in 2021;
 - b) 76 channels will be required to provide access services at Level One during 2021 and 14 channels will be required to provide access services at Level Two. No channels will be required to provide access services at Level Three. Subtitling targets are now the highest required under the Code (80%) for most channels, with audio description at the maximum level of 10% for most; and
 - c) over 50 time-shifted services (e.g. ITV2 + 1) and simulcast HD services (e.g. Channel 4 HD) are also required to provide access services.
- 1.8 The statutory target for audio description is 10% from the tenth anniversary of the relevant launch date (normally the date on which a channel started broadcasting). Four broadcasters – the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Sky – have committed to audio describing at least 20% of their content on their channels.
- 1.9 Finally, the statutory target for sign-interpreted programming is 5% from the tenth anniversary of the relevant date. Channels with a smaller audience share (i.e. an audience share between the audience share and signing thresholds set out in Annex 2 of the Access Services Code) are excluded from the requirement to provide sign interpreted programming. Instead they are required to either:
- a) provide a minimum amount of sign-presented programming between 7am and 11pm every month, subject to the targets shown in the first row of Table A below and to transitional arrangements as shown in Table B; or
 - b) pay a minimum annual contribution towards alternative signing arrangements approved by Ofcom as set out in Table A below and subject to transitional arrangements as shown in Table B.

Table A: Signing obligations for channels with smaller audience shares

	Signing obligations for channels with smaller audience shares (These channels should show at least the amount of sign presented content set out below unless Ofcom has approved alternative arrangements)	
Anniversary of relevant date	Sign-presented content (monthly)	Minimum annual contribution towards alternative arrangements ³
First	30 minutes	£26,438
Second	30 minutes	£26,438
Third	30 minutes	£26,438
Fourth	30 minutes	£26,438
Fifth	45 minutes	£39,712
Sixth	45 minutes	£39,712
Seventh	60 minutes	£52,985
Eighth	60 minutes	£52,985
Ninth	60 minutes	£52,985
Tenth	75 minutes	£66,257

Table B: Transitional arrangements

(for relevant channels that reached the fourth (or later) anniversary of their relevant date by 1 January 2016)

Year	2021 ⁴	2022
Minimum monthly sign presentation obligations	65 minutes	75 minutes
Minimum annual contributions to alternative arrangements	£57,408	£66,258

³ Ofcom has adjusted these figures to reflect the Consumer Price Index in 2019 being recorded at 1.8% (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/d7g7/mm23>). We will again review and, if necessary, update the minimum contribution levels when we publish the annual list of channels required to provide television access services in 2022.

⁴ Ibid.

Non-domestic TV Services

- 1.10 The list of non-domestic channels required to provide access services in 2021 is at Annex 2. In brief:
- a) The channels required to provide access in 2021 are the same as those required to provide access services in 2020, with the exception of Disney Cinema which stopped broadcasting in April 2020.
 - b) 18 non-domestic channels will be required to provide television access services in 2021. The channels required to provide access services in 2021 are broadcast in three European countries;
 - c) All 18 non-domestic channels will be required to provide access services at Level One.
 - d) The default signing requirement for these non-domestic channels is to provide sign-presented content. However, Ofcom may impose a substitute requirement to broadcast sign-interpreted content or additional subtitling if it considers that these would better meet the needs of sign language users in the country concerned.

A1. Domestic channels required to provide access services in 2021

Level One (full requirements)		
BBC One	Nick Jr Too	Sky Cinema Drama
BBC Two	Paramount Network	Sky Cinema Hits
BBC Four	MTV	Sky Cinema Thriller
BBC News	Comedy Central	Sky Cinema Disney
BBC Scotland	Comedy Central Extra	Sky Witness
CBBC	Sky Atlantic	Sky Arts
CBeebies	Sky News	Sky Crime
Channel 3 Services (ITV/STV/UTV)	Sky One	Challenge
ITV2	Sky Two	Syfy
ITV3	Pick	E!
ITV4	Sky Sports Main Event	Movies 24
ITVBe	Sky Sports Premier League	Movies 24+
CITV	Sky Sports Football	Dave
Channel 4	Sky Sports Cricket	W
4seven	Sky Sports Golf	Yesterday
E4	Sky Sports Action	Alibi
More 4	Sky Sports Mix	Gold
Film 4	Sky Sports Arena	Drama
4Music	Sky Sports F1	Disney Channel ⁵
Channel 5	Sky Sports News	Disney Junior
5Star	Sky Cinema Premiere	BT Sport 1
5USA	Sky Cinema Comedy	BT Sport 2
5Select	Sky Cinema Action	BT Sport 3
Nickelodeon	Sky Cinema Family	Fox
Nicktoons	Sky Cinema Sci Fi & Horror	
Nick Jr.	Sky Cinema Greats	

Level Two (full requirements for signing and audio description; 66% of subtitling)		
Boomerang	Cartoon Network	S4C
CBS Reality	National Geographic	Discovery
Quest	Quest Red	Investigation Discovery
Animal Planet	TLC	Food Network
Really	DMAX	

⁵ Although Disney Channel and Disney Junior met the thresholds to have a requirement to provide access services in 2021, Ofcom understands that these services are due for closure in September 2020.

A2. Non-domestic channels required to provide access services in 2021

Level One (full requirements)	
EU Member State	Channel
Denmark	Kanal 4
	Kanal 5
	6'eren
	3+
	TV3
	TV3 Puls
Republic of Ireland*	BBC One
	BBC Two
	Channel 4
	Sky One
Sweden	Discovery Channel
	Kanal 5
	Kanal 9
	Kanal 11
	TV3
	TV6
	TV8
	TV10

* Indicates countries where TV platforms do not generally support the provision of audio description and channels are typically exempt from the relevant requirement.