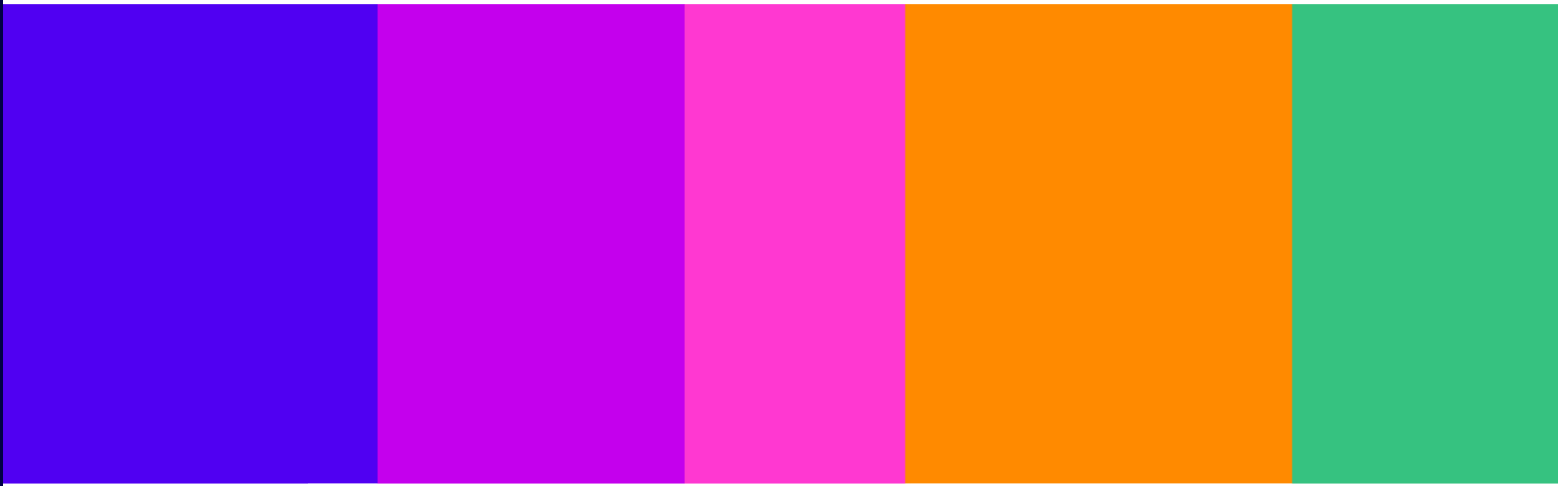


Plain English Summary: Ofcom's Tier 1 Accessibility Code

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Draft for Consultation



Introduction

Ofcom's Tier 1 Accessibility Code sets out rules for providers of some of the most-used video-on-demand services (commonly known as streaming services) on making a certain amount of their programmes accessible to disabled people.

This document is a simplified summary only. It should not be considered by services as a replacement for the full code, which can be found on our website.

Tier 1 Services are UK or non-UK services that have large audiences in the UK, or on-demand services used by public service broadcasters to provide public service content.

Ofcom's Code is about making subtitles, audio description and signing available on programmes. Together, these are known as 'access services'.

- Subtitles are text on screen representing speech and sound effects.
- Audio description is an additional spoken commentary that describes what is happening on screen, primarily for people with sight loss and blind people.
- Sign-interpretation is when a signer, usually in the corner of the screen, translates a programme into sign-language (usually British Sign Language).
- Sign-presentation is when everyone in a programme uses sign-language.

The Code also contains rules on reporting to Ofcom on the quality and usability of access services, and to ensure Tier 1 Services give enough information about available access services to those who need it. In the Code we also give guidance on how Tier 1 Services should promote their access services.

Tier 1 Services must also consider Ofcom's published Guidelines on Providing Television and On-Demand Access Services.

Background

Ofcom's powers to make the rules on Tier 1 Services come from the Communications Act 2003, which was updated by the Media Act 2024.

Separately, Ofcom's powers to make the rules on access services for the BBC come from the BBC Agreement.

Quotas

The Code sets out the minimum amount of access services Tier 1 Services have to provide, as a percentage of hours of programmes on the service. These quotas start on a certain date (usually a year after the Code's publication) and increase gradually over four years.

Four years after the quotas start all Tier 1 Services must offer the following:

- 5% signing (sign interpretation and/or sign presented);
- 10% audio description; and

- 80% subtitling (90% for the BBC's on-demand services like iPlayer).

The Code does not tell Tier 1 Services how to produce access services. However, it says poor quality access services will not count towards the quotas.

Exemptions and alternative requirements

In some cases, Ofcom may allow Tier 1 services not to meet all or part of the quotas. For example, if we think that it would not benefit audiences, would technically be too difficult, or cost too much taking into account things like audience benefit. Tier 1 Services need to apply to Ofcom to consider any request for an exemption.

If a Tier 1 Service is exempt, Ofcom can then tell them to meet different requirements instead. This could include providing a lower amount of access services or providing access services in another way.

Promoting awareness

Tier 1 Services must provide information on which programmes on their service have access services. This includes, for example, using the symbols for subtitling (S), audio description (AD) and sign language (SL). They must also raise awareness in other ways and explain to Ofcom how they promote awareness to disabled people who might use access services.

Reporting

Every year, Tier 1 Services must tell Ofcom whether they met their quota, by sending details of how much subtitling, audio description and signing they provided that year.

They also have to report to Ofcom each year on the quality of their access services, reporting on factors such as:

- accuracy, synchronicity, readability, presentation style, and description of non-speech information for subtitles;
- accuracy, comprehensibility, and audibility for audio description, and;
- accuracy, synchronicity, and visibility for signing.

There are more details about this in Ofcom's [Best Practice Guidelines](#).

Services' reports must also explain how useable access services were for consumers and how they assessed this – for example with details of audience research.

Ofcom will publish a list of exemptions and alternative arrangements in place on our website and report on how services have met their requirements.