

[GB] New Code on Electronic Programme Guides

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The Office of Communications (Ofcom) has completed consultation regarding the Code on electronic programme guides (EPGs) required by the Communications Act 2003, and has issued a final version. The Act requires that the Code gives appropriate prominence to public service channels, includes provision for people with disabilities affecting their sight and hearing (see IRIS 2004-8: 9), and it is also covered by the regulator's general duty to secure fair and effective competition (Sections 310, 316).

The Code is general in nature and is deliberately limited in its degree of direct prescription. In relation to appropriate prominence for public service channels, it requires that the approach adopted is objectively justifiable and that the EPG provider publishes a statement setting out its approach. Viewers in the regions should be able to select regional versions of public service channels through primary listings, and it would be justified to home page.

EPGs should be appropriately adjusted to facilitate their use by disabled people, and provision for this should be an integral part of planning for their future development. Information should be provided in the EPG on which programmes are accompanied by access services for the disabled, and on how to use the EPG itself.

The Code requires that the providers of EPGs ensure that any agreement with broadcasters is made on fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory terms. An objectively justifiable method of allocating listings must be published; this could be 'first-come first served', alphabetical or based on audience shares. They must not give undue prominence to any channel to which they are connected and must ensure that viewers are able to access all services included in the EPG on the same basis. Free-to-air services must be at least as accessible as pay TV services, and no condition may be imposed between the EPG operator and a channel provider specifying exclusivity to one EPG for any service or feature. EPG operators which are also channel providers must ensure that access to all services in the EPG is easily available to all viewers using it who are equipped to receive the service.

Code on Electronic Programme Guides

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/broadcast-codes/epg-code/>

