[GB] Requirement of a television licence extended to cover BBC on-demand services

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In the UK, the BBC (and S4C, the Welsh language broadcaster), are funded by a licence fee. This is a fee payable by the owner of any television receiving equipment, including laptops, mobile phones, and tablets. It is a criminal offence to install or use a TV receiver if this has not been authorised by a TV licence. Under the Communications Act 2003 and regulations made under it in 2004, the requirement applied to equipment used for streaming live television services online ('linear' television) but not for 'on-demand' services, viewed at a different time from the broadcast, or provided on-line only (see IRIS 2003-8/10). This included watching television through the BBC iPlayer. The result was that, as viewing habits move away from linear television, viewers who watch it increasingly subsidise the content enjoyed by many others who view it through on-demand services only.

The Communications (Television Licensing) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 are the result of an agreement by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the BBC to extend the scope of the TV licence to cover BBC on-demand services, most notably the iPlayer. The regulations extend the licence requirement to cover the streaming or downloading of a programme or part of a programme on any on-demand service provided by the BBC, on any device. The requirement does not extend to on-demand services provided by other public service broadcasters, nor to on-demand services produced by the BBC's commercial subsidiaries, such as BBC Worldwide and BBC Store. Nor do they apply to the streaming or downloading of BBC programmes on other on-demand service, such as Netflix or Amazon Prime.

The regulations also make minor changes to permit the withdrawal of universal free TV licences for the elderly in the Isle of Man and Guernsey following changes in priorities for social support. All the provisions come into effect on 1 September 2016.

The Communications (Television Licensing) (Amendment) Regulations 2016, S.I. 2016/704

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2016/704/contents/made

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