[GB] Non-domestic TV channels: changes to access service obligations

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David Goldberg
deeJgee Research/Consultancy

On 2 December 2016, Ofcom published a document announcing several decisions regarding the enhancement of “access services” to “non-domestic” television channels, which are channels licensed by Ofcom for transmission to other EU member states.

Access services (required for domestic channels since 2005) comprise subtitles, audio description and signing. The provision of such services enables people with impairments to their sight and/or hearing to access television. The obligation has been imposed on non-domestic channels since 2014. Certain exceptions (mainly with respect to signing) apply to channels with “smaller audiences”.

Three main changes are announced in the document: first, the transitional period for non-domestic channels with smaller audiences, originally ending on 31 December 2016, will be extended to 31 December 2017. In the meantime, signing requirements can be met by the provision of additional subtitling. Second, after January 2018, non-domestic broadcasters with smaller audiences must meet rising targets for sign language; failing that, such broadcasters must make increasing financial contributions to Ofcom-approved alternative arrangements. However, if Ofcom is satisfied that sign language users in any particular country would prefer other arrangements, Ofcom may allow other arrangements, such as increased levels of sub-titling, instead.

Finally, from 1 January 2018, channels broadcasting to Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway - that is, EEA countries where the Audiovisual Media Services Directive applies - will be required to provide access services on the same basis as those targeting EU Member states.

Ofcom, Non-domestic TV channels: changes to access service obligations, 2 December 2016

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/95027/Non-Doms-signing-statement-FINAL-301116.pdf

Ofcom, 2015 Consultation: Non-domestic TV channels: proposals to modify access service obligations, 14 October 2015

http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/nom-dom/

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Patrick Mitchell and Ed Chalk, Ofcom announcement on non-domestic TV channels: changes to access service obligations, 5 January 2017

http://blogs.dlapiper.com/mediaandsport/2017/01/ofcom-announcement-on-non-domestic-tv-channels-changes-to-access-service-obligations/#page=1

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