



Consultation on proposed modifications to the TV Access Services Code and updates to Ofcom's best practice guidelines on access services

Comments from Paramount Global

2nd October 2023

Paramount welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Paramount is one of the world's leading producers of premium entertainment content. Paramount is committed to engaging audiences around the world with high quality, engaging content. This is underpinned by the \$15bn we invest in content annually.

For three decades Paramount has been the most successful international supplier of pay-TV channels to the UK market, in particular MTV, Nickelodeon, Comedy Central, BET, and the Paramount Network. Under Paramount's stewardship Channel 5 and My5 has successfully carved a position in the market as a destination for factual programming, as well as drama, kids, news and current affairs. The UK is also a key international market for the Pluto TV service which offers over 100 curated FAST channels that combines traditional linear entertainment with internet video that viewers love. Last year we launched subscription streaming service Paramount+. Paramount Pictures, the oldest Hollywood Studio has long considered the UK a crucial hub for making and distributing both global franchises and local projects.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

1: Do you have any comments on our proposed approach to making these changes?

N/A

2: Do you have any comments on our proposed additions to the TV Access Services Code? Overarching best practice guidelines

Paramount welcomes the changes to the guidelines which are in many instances simplifications that will allow broadcasters and content providers to be more efficient in their operations and improve audience outcomes.

3: Do you have any comments on any of the following proposed changes/additions? Please provide any additional evidence you think we should take into account.

- Understanding audiences
- Developing strategies
- Programme selection and scheduling
- National emergencies and important on-screen information
- Promoting awareness
- Accessibility and diversity in production
- Training

• **Monitoring of quality**

With regards to national emergencies Paramount agrees it is important that any notices of national importance should be made available to all members of the viewing audience. We can provide live subtitles for notices of national importance, however, we do not currently have the capability to add audio description or visual signing, live into these televised events. The provision of live audio description and visual signing are capabilities we continue to investigate for the future, working with our access services and playout providers. It should be noted, we would also balance this requirement against the provision of these services by other broadcasters such as the BBC and ITV; where we anticipate the audience is more likely to turn.

Paramount agrees with Ofcom's view that where there are delivery failures of access services, broadcasters should have mechanisms in place to inform viewers about the failure. Sudden unexpected failures of access services are impossible to predict, however Paramount already has a mechanism in place to apologise for a sudden loss of subtitling and communicate with audiences. It is currently not possible to cover the loss of audio description or visual signing at short notice, but, for long term AD and visual signing outages, Paramount accepts the principle that communication with the audience should be broadened beyond on-air apologies, such as using on-line and social media tools.

The guidelines say that viewers should be given timely info on "cause, steps being taken, and estimated time to restoration". It should be noted that when an outage occurs the business may not have full clarity on these points. But we do appreciate that communication with audiences should be as clear and informative as is possible.

4: Do you have any views on how developments in technology may inform the production of access services in the coming years?

N/A

5: What do you think about the proposed list of external sources/ guidelines in Annex 3? Are there any additional sources which Ofcom should refer to?

N/A

SUBTITLES

6: Do you have any comments on the following suggested changes relating to subtitling? Please provide any additional evidence that you think we should take into account.

Paramount broadly welcomes the proposed changes set out in the consultation paper relating to subtitling speeds, live programming, subtitling presentation, sound and music description and subtitle language.

With regards to speed and synchronicity Paramount also ensures subtitles are synchronized with the audio as close as possible. With regard to subtitling in live we specifically support the change from latency of 3 seconds to 4.5 seconds.

Paramount already meets the codes new expectations regarding sound effects and music. **We welcome** the increased flexibility in the new guidelines which will support broadcasters to make greater use of existing materials from other territories (such as the US and Australia), allowing broadcasters to minimise duplication of effort while increasing accessibility for viewers.

On the issue of presentation we should note that whilst we agree with the proposed changes we do not have control over subtitle presentation on third party platforms that may have their own approach.

7: Do you have any comments about the other proposed changes to the subtitling guidelines, as summarised in Table 1 (Annex 1)?

It is worth noting that in many instances for VOD services the delivery of subtitles (and AD) may depend on the platform via which the content is being viewed. Whilst VOD or FAST services are constantly improving accessibility, some legacy platforms and devices may not be able to carry the latest versions of apps that provide these services. We feel it is important to point this out in the context of Section 4.4 of Annex 8 which states that delivery targets need to be met on each platform.

8: Is there anything additional that you think should be added to the revised guidelines on subtitling?

N/A

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

9: Do you have any comments on the following suggested changes relating to audio description?

Please provide any additional evidence that you think we should take into account.

Paramount broadly welcomes the proposed changes set out in the consultation paper relating to styles of audio description, describing visual features, describing information about diversity characteristics and additional audio accessibility features.

We agree that recognizing that people with cognitive impairments may use AD is useful when considering AD.

Regarding the selection and scheduling of programmes it is good practice to consider AD as part of the commissioning and production process. However, it is not always possible to identify if a programme will be suitable for AD until after a programme has been made. So whilst it may be considered best practice, it is not always practicable.

Paramount welcomes the proposed retention of existing guidance on describing visual information relevant to the plot, with examples of what might be described rather than saying what 'should be described'. We appreciate the proposal that AD should also be sensitive to other visual features beyond those directly relevant to the plot, including diversity characteristics, but should avoid assuming default characteristics.

The introduction of a new clause that suggests additional description within the introduction when there is limited space available in the main soundtrack will be a challenge for linear broadcasters. At present, this is not possible on linear.

On clarity and audibility of AD Paramount is supportive of customization. Industry is presently looking at next generation developments that would provide the viewer with a selection of audio options. The revised guidance encourages broadcasters to innovate in this area without any quantitative obligations which we feel is the right approach.

10: Do you have any comments about the other proposed changes to the audio description guidelines, as summarised in Table 2 (Annex 1)?

N/A

11: Is there anything additional that you think should be added to the revised guidelines on audio description?

N/A

SIGNING

12: Do you have any comments on the following suggested changes relating to signing?

Paramount broadly welcomes the changes to guidance on signing that covers: meeting the signing requirements, selection/scheduling of signed programmes, use and preferences for different types of signed programmes among d/Deaf children, ensuring the quality of sign-interpretation, and the size of sign interpreter image.

Proposed changes to guidance (selection and scheduling) that aims to ensure signed programming is made available are sensible. However this must also be considered in the context of PSB budget impacts and audience expectations between linear and VOD viewing. It can be challenging to schedule signed programming into peak times as part of a diverse programme schedule on linear channels. However increased viewing of BVOD services provides an opportunity for broadcasters to make signed content more easy to access for viewers.

Proposed changes to visibility of the signer reflect current industry best practice.

13: Do you have any comments about the other proposed changes to the signing guidelines, as summarised in Table 3 (Annex 1)?

N/A

14: Is there anything additional that you think should be added to the revised guidelines on signing?

N/A

To discuss this submission further please contact:

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