Provision of Access Services Code

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Contents

1.   Introduction.................................................................................................................3
2.   Definitions..................................................................................................................3
3.   Users..........................................................................................................................4
4.   Selection and scheduling of programmes.................................................................4
5.   Promotion of awareness..............................................................................................5
6.   Monitoring for consistency and quality ....................................................................5
7.   National emergencies................................................................................................6

Annex - Guidelines............................................................................................................7
1.   Subtitling......................................................................................................................7
2.   Audio Description.......................................................................................................10
3.   Sign Language..........................................................................................................11
1. **Introduction**

   **Legislative basis**

   The Gibraltar Regulatory Authority ("the Authority") has developed a code ("the Code") that sets out the requirements on subtitling, sign language and audio description ("access services") in accordance with section 28A of the Broadcasting Act 2012 (the "Act").

   Guidance on practices to be followed in providing access services in TV and radio broadcasts are set out in the Annex of this document.

   The Code serves to promote the understanding and enjoyment of programmes by persons who are deaf or are hearing impaired, persons who are blind or partially sighted and persons who are both hearing and visually impaired.

   The Authority reserves the right to revise and/or extend the Code, from time to time.

   **Jurisdiction**

   The Code shall predominantly apply to the public service broadcaster, as well as other media service providers under the jurisdiction of Gibraltar, to ensure that their services are progressively made accessible to people with hearing or visual impairments.

   **Complaints**

   Information on how to make a complaint concerning broadcast content is set out in our "Procedures for Handling of Complaints” available on our website.

   The effective date of this Code is 17th March 2017.

2. **Definitions**

   **Subtitling**

   An on-screen text representing speech and sound effects that may not be audible to people with hearing impairments, should be synchronised as closely as possible to the sound.

   People using subtitling range from those who have become hard of hearing later, to those who have been profoundly deaf since birth. Many people with good hearing also use subtitles so that they can watch television and/or on-demand services with the sound muted (e.g. so that they can simultaneously talk on the telephone), or learn English, but they are not the target audience. For the deaf, and those suffering severe hearing loss, subtitles are likely to be the most important source of audio information. Viewers with a mild hearing loss to moderate hearing loss are likely to rely on subtitles to aid their hearing rather than as a substitute.
Audio Description

A service primarily aimed at blind or visually-impaired people. It comprises a commentary woven around the soundtrack, exploiting pauses to explain on-screen action, describe characters, locations, costumes, body language and facial expressions to enhance meaning and enjoyment for blind or visually-impaired viewers.

While people with visual impairments are drawn from all age ranges, a majority will experience loss of some or all of their vision later in life, for example, as a result of macular generation. Accordingly, audio describers should take account of the fact that most potential users of audio description will have some sight, or would have had sight at some stage.

Sign Language

This access service involves the use of manual gestures, facial expression and body language to convey meaning. British Sign Language (BSL) is the most popular sign language in Gibraltar.

Some people who are deaf or have significant hearing impairments (usually those who are profoundly deaf, often from birth or early in life) use BSL as their preferred form of communication. Young deaf children who are not yet literate in English rely particularly on sign language to understand and enjoy children’s programming.

To assist media service providers, more information on the use and application of the above-mentioned access services can be found in the Annex to this Code.

3. Users

Persons using access services do not fall neatly into homogenous groups. For example, many people using audio description have visual impairments, but not all are completely blind, and most have had some vision at some time. By the same token, those using subtitles can range from those with normal hearing (using subtitles so that the television sound can be turned down), through those with relatively minor hearing loss, to those who are profoundly deaf. Some users, particularly the dual sensory impaired (deaf-blind), may benefit from more than one access service.

Those using access services may stem from all age groups, however a significant proportion of these viewers are likely to form part of the older generation, as the incidence of hearing and sight loss increases with age.

4. Selection and scheduling of programmes

The Code requires that the public service broadcaster regularly informs about the existence and usage of at least one form of access service available during certain programmes, primarily those of an informative nature, crucial to the cultural development and societal integration of any individual. To this end, it is encouraged that local news bulletins, ministerial messages and party political broadcasts should
make use of an access service, such as subtitling, to aid and promote user understanding.

The Code requires that, in selecting and scheduling signed programmes, all media service providers should seek advice from disability groups about how best to maximise the benefits to those with hearing impairments.

When a series of programmes commences with access services, every effort should be made to ensure that all programmes in the series are accompanied by the relevant access services.

If unforeseen problems prevent this, and a repeat is scheduled in the near future, a continuity announcement should be made and subtitled, explaining when the repeat can be seen with the appropriate access services. An on-air apology should also be broadcast, preferably both before and after the programme. If this is not possible, because a technical fault does not come to light until after the programme has been broadcast, an apology should be broadcast at the beginning of the next programme in the series.

5. Promotion of awareness

The Authority requires the public service broadcaster, and other media service providers to promote awareness of the availability of their television and/or on-demand access services to potential users. Such services should include programme synopses clearly indicating which programmes are accompanied by television and/or on-demand access services by including the standard upper-case acronyms for subtitling (S), audio description (AD) and sign language (SL).

The Authority requires that the public service broadcaster, in particular, demonstrates that they are taking effective steps to locally publicise awareness of their television and/or on-demand access services through other means. For example, this could include periodic on-air announcements and information in publications aimed at persons likely to benefit from television and/or on-demand access services. Where the nature of the access service is not spelt out in full, the standard abbreviations referred to in the paragraph above should be used.

6. Monitoring for consistency and quality

Media service providers should monitor play-out at regular intervals to ensure that scheduled access services are being provided correctly. The failure of access services is just as disruptive for those who rely upon them as a break in transmission would be for others. Where practicable, media service providers should insert an apology (either spoken or subtitled, as appropriate) as soon as a problem has been identified, with a brief explanation of the cause.

The quality of access services should also be regularly monitored. To this end, local charities or disability groups and feedback from individual viewers can serve as a helpful indicator of quality.
7. National emergencies

In order that access service users are kept informed about national emergencies, it is important that broadcast information, including relevant telephone numbers, is subtitled (preferably in open captions) leaving sufficient time to write the details down.
Annex - Guidelines

These guidelines are provided to assist local broadcasters as well as providers of subtitling, audio description and sign language services with a comprehensive framework of advice and recommendations to encourage the provision of access services.

1. Subtitling

1.1 Key Priorities

The key priorities for effective subtitling can be summarised as follows:

(a) Subtitles must match what is actually said, reflecting the spoken word with the same meaning and complexity; without censoring.

(b) Subtitles contain all obvious speech and relevant sound effects.

(c) Subtitles are located sensibly in time and space.

(d) A maximum subtitle length of two lines is recommended.

1.2 General Requirements for Subtitle Display

1.2.1 Basic Text Display

(i) Words within a subtitle should be separated by a single space.

(ii) Text should always have a high contrast against the background colour.

1.2.2 Colour

The most legible text colours on a black background are white, yellow, cyan and green. The use of blue, magenta and red should be avoided.

1.2.3 Punctuation

The effectiveness of punctuation can be enhanced by the use of a single space at the following points:

- Before exclamation marks and question marks
- After commas, colons and semi-colons
- On both sides of dashes (but not mid-word hyphens)
- Before opening brackets and inverted commas
- After closing brackets and inverted commas.
1.2.4 **Line Breaks**

(i) Subtitle lines should end at natural linguistic breaks, ideally at clause or phrase boundaries.

(ii) Line breaks within a word are especially disruptive to the reading process and should be avoided.

1.2.5 **Positioning Subtitles on Screen**

(i) Subtitles are usually positioned towards the bottom of the screen, but it is important that this does not obscure any ‘on-screen’ captions, any part of a speaker’s mouth or any other important activity.

(ii) Certain special programme types carry a lot of information in the lower part of the screen and in such cases top-screen positioning will be a more acceptable standard.

(iii) Subtitles should be displayed horizontally.

1.3 **Special Techniques**

1.3.1 **Emphasis and Phrasing**

Text in upper case characters can indicate an increase in volume, for example shouting, while emphasis of an individual word can be achieved by a change in colour.

1.3.2 **Tone of Voice**

Where tone of voice is particularly critical to meaning, and facial expression and body language are inadequate to convey the tone, the use of “(!)” and “(?)” immediately following speech can indicate sarcasm and irony.

1.3.3 **Speaker Identification**

The use of colours to identify individual speakers is particularly helpful although over use is known to confuse. Where possible, therefore, each speaker should be identified by a single colour consistently throughout the programme.

An alternative is to use subtitle screen position and justification to support speaker identification. Each subtitle can be displaced horizontally towards the appropriate speaker although careful positioning will be needed when characters move about while speaking. Colours may still be added.
1.3.4 Off screen voices

When the source of off-screen/off-camera speech is not obvious from the visible context, special techniques should be used. Off-camera speakers are effectively indicated by using the ‘greater than’ (>) or ‘less than’ (<) symbols as appropriate.

When off-screen speech is employed throughout programmes such as in narrative documentaries for example, the common approach is to centre subtitles without symbols.

Other situations where the source of speech is not immediately apparent (telephone voices or radio announcements); it may be helpful to accompany the first subtitle from these sources with a labelled caption:

| LOUDSPEAKER: “Fasten your seatbelts please” |

Character-name labels are sometimes necessary for clarification purposes, particularly during a crowd scene or those enacted in the dark:

| PHILLIP: What’s happened to the lights? |

1.4 Sound Effects

Any relevant sound effect not immediately obvious from the visual action should be subtitled. This includes sound effects that become apparent in the subsequent action (e.g. the telephone ringing before it is picked up or an explosion occurring outside before everyone dives under the table).

1.4.1 Background atmosphere

Sound effect subtitles can be used judiciously to create the background atmosphere for a scene:

| ROAR FROM THE AUDIENCE or LIVELY CHATTER |

The use of upper-case text provides a distinction between sound effect subtitles and speech subtitles.

1.5 Music

At the very minimum, the title of the music playing should be given.

The provision of an occasional subtitle for mood music, if it is significant to the plot, can be very effective:

| #LIVELY DANCE BAND MUSIC |
Such subtitles, however, should only be used sparingly. The use of the “#” to indicate music may be changed to the use of two semi-quavers “♩” as part of the specifications set within Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT).

1.6 Silence

Long speechless pauses in programmes can sometimes lead the viewer to wonder whether there are problems with the subtitling feature. For this reason, it can help to insert an explanatory caption such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTRODUCTORY MUSIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LONG PAUSE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.7 Real-time subtitling

The production and transmission of subtitles in real time can present considerable problems for both the subtitler and the viewer. Such techniques should be limited to occasions when there is insufficient time to prepare subtitles using other methods.

The construction of subtitles for informative subjects such as news should convey the whole meaning of the material. To this end, efforts must be made to adhere to the following:

- Key facts should feature as a good percentage of the spoken message
- Attempt to avoid overrunning shot changes (synchronisation)
- Avoid subtitling over existing video captions (in news, this is often unavoidable, in which case a speaker’s name can be included in the subtitle if available).
- Send an apology caption following any serious mistake or a garbled subtitle; and, if possible, repeat the subtitle with the error corrected.

2. Audio Description

2.1 What to describe?

To the extent relevant to the storyline, audio description should describe the following:

- Characters: mainly dress code, facial expressions and body language
- Location
- Time of day and circumstances
- On-screen action
- On-screen information (subtitling captions)
- Sounds or sound effects
2.2 Programme sound level

It is important that the audio description does not encroach the dialogue. Audio description should occur when there are breaks in dialogue and if necessary, it can occur over song lyrics.

When a descriptive commentary is inserted into a programme, the background level of the programme audio needs to be reduced, so that the description can be clearly heard. Care should be taken to ensure that the narration sound level does not exceed that of the background.

2.3 Audio description recordings

Visually impaired viewers rely on the clarity of every word, therefore the audio description must not be hurried. Whilst the voice should be neutral, it may be important to add emotion at different points to suit the mood and the plot development.

Audio description provides a real-time commentary so should generally be in the present tense ("he sits"), the continuous present ("he is sitting"), or the present participle ("standing at the window he lets out a deep sigh") as deemed appropriate.

2.4 Prioritising information

Setting the scene is an essential part of audio description and without guidance the visually impaired viewer can lose the thread of a story or narrative. When several people are speaking at the same time, it is important to clarify who is speaking at any given moment. Frequently repeating proper names is helpful so the viewers are left in no doubt as to who is doing or saying what.

Avoid giving too much detail. Minor description details, unless they are the subject of the programme need not be mentioned.

Description should avoid stating the obvious, for example a telephone or doorbell ringing does not need to be described, unless the actual sounds are unfamiliar.

Personal opinion should not be given.

3. Sign Language

Whilst BSL should be the default language for signed programmes, Makaton can also be used as an aid to the spoken English language, particularly for children’s programmes.

3.1 Format

There are two ways of providing sign language access to programmes:
3.1.1 Interpretation

A person interprets and signs live or is pre-recorded for specific programme segments. The image of such an interpreter is usually superimposed on a programme.

3.1.2 Presentation

A sign language presenter, narrator or reporter provides the main language in the programme or programme segment. The signs are then interpreted into a ‘voice over’, with the addition of subtitles or captions as appropriate.

3.2 General Requirements

3.2.1 Signing competence

Sign language presenters, reporters and interpreters should be appropriately qualified, both to use sign language of native competency, and to communicate effectively via broadcasting services. Some latitude is allowed for guests and interviewees, though it is of prime importance that the media service providers ensure that they are understandable.

3.2.2 Choice of dress and background colours

It is important that the person signing can be clearly distinguished, for example by means of contrasting plain colours and suitable lighting. The visual appearance of the interpreter (e.g. choice of clothing and dress accessories) should not cause undue distraction to the viewer.

3.2.3 Off-screen sounds

The sign language interpreter or presenter should indicate the presence of off-screen sounds (e.g. a ringing telephone, the knocking of a door or a gunshot) where these are important to the understanding of the programme.

3.2.4 Monitoring

It is of utmost importance that broadcasters monitor the effectiveness of this access service through contact with associations that cater for and assist the deaf or hard of hearing.