



Please reply to: 7 Eldridge Close
DORCHESTER
Dorset DT1 2JS

Registered Charity No. 294922

National Association of Deafened People

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Sara Winter
Fifth Floor, Content and Standards
Ofcom Riverside House
2A Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

Dear Ms Winter

2009 Review of Television Access Services

The National Association of Deafened People wishes to comment as follows on this Consultation.

The criteria to be used to select the TV channels required to provide access services.

We concur with Ofcom's view that no change is required to the current rules. The current rules are well understood and seem to work fairly well, and there is no evidence that even in the present economic climate they impose an unfair burden on broadcasters. Indeed we are concerned that Ofcom's assessment treats the provision of subtitling and other forms of access services solely in terms of costs, rather than revenue. Ofcom's own research has shown that large numbers of deaf and hard of hearing people rely on subtitling, ie they simply won't watch programmes which aren't subtitled. Ofcom's research has also shown that subtitles are heavily used by recent immigrants, and other groups for whom English is a second language. If by spending less than 1% of its turnover on provision of access services a channel can extend its potential audience by 5-10% this ought to be viewed as a good bargain.

One area where we are concerned about the operation of the current quota rules is the significant percentage of programmes which are transmitted with "live" subtitling, where this simply is not fit for purpose. Virtually all comedy programmes are crucially reliant on the timing of delivery of the material, and "live" subtitling just can't meet this requirement. We also see cases of programmes such as *Panorama* using "live" subtitling, and where the time lags between what is happening on screen and the subtitles is so great as to make the programme unwatchable. We consider that in such cases only subsequent repeats of the programme using pre-prepared subtitles should be counted as meeting quota requirements.

The case for increasing audio description quotas

We support the case for increased provision of audio description, but consider that this should not be achieved by disadvantaging the much larger numbers of people who rely on subtitling. In considering these requirements it should be noted that for the majority of TV programmes the great bulk of the useful information is actually conveyed via the sound track rather than vision feed, which highlights the importance of ensuring that deaf people [and those for whom English is a second language] have maximum access to subtitling.

We endorse Ofcom's Option 3 as being a cost effective way of reconciling the needs of these two constituencies.

Provision of access services on channels targeting areas outside the UK

We support Ofcom's proposed approach to implementation of the Audio Media Services Directive. Many UK residents spend a significant amount of time abroad, either working or on holiday, and for those of them who are deaf and hard of hearing to be able to watch UK based TV channels [for example on hotel TVs] with subtitles would be a significant benefit.

Video on Demand

We can see no reason why any programme which has been broadcast with subtitles should not have subtitles available when delivered over VoD, and would encourage Ofcom to press the industry to adopt such a policy. As indicated in our response under the first issue, we consider that there are clear commercial advantages to broadcasters in offering subtitles as widely as possible, and see the launch of VoD services as a good opportunity to regard the provision of subtitles as the default option.

Yours sincerely,

Paul N Tomlinson
Honorary Secretary