RiDC

Audience expectations of access services across TV and Video-on-Demand services

April 2024

Contents

Executive summary

Ofcom commissioned the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC) to conduct research with people with different access needs, exploring their use of, attitudes towards, and preferences for access services (subtitles, audio description, and signing) across broadcast TV and Video on Demand (VoD) services. This report details the findings which have supported Ofcom's accessibility best practice guidelines (which have been updated and expanded to cover VoD accessibility). The research has also helped Ofcom further develop recommendations, which include wider audience engagement with access services, beyond those with sight and hearing loss, for whom access services are expected to primarily serve.

These findings are based on 55 in-depth interviews with people with hearing loss, sight loss, dual-sensory loss (both hearing and sight loss), British Sign Language (BSL users) and cognitive and neurodevelopmental conditions. Fieldwork was conducted between June and November 2023.

The findings presented in this report should not be considered a reflection of the views or opinions of Ofcom or RiDC but the views and opinions of the respondents interviewed, as well as their experiences and perceptions of various broadcaster and on-demand services' functionalities. We would like to thank broadcasters for the use of images within this research, which were used during fieldwork and have been included in this report for illustrative purposes only.

Key findings

Reasons for using access services varied and underpinned desire for choice and customisation.

- For many, television played a crucial role in reducing loneliness, providing companionship, education, and a way of connecting with others. These benefits, however, depended on the availability, ease of finding and quality of access services across broadcast TV channels and VoD services.

- Subtitles and audio description served different participants in different ways; for those with cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions, they helped them to better understand and process what is being said, or what is happening visually in a programme.

- Participants who were d/Deaf, with dual-sensory loss or cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions often relied on more than one access service. They used different access services alternatively or simultaneously.

- The need for choice and customisation of access services was important across all groups. Participants often had individual needs and preferences which they would like to see supported by an ability to customise the relevant access service.

Participants wanted more consistency in the availability and presentation of tools to find and enable access services across VoD services.

- Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring that access services are easy to find and enable, regardless of device or platform. In addition, many wanted clearer signposting, particularly across VoD services, to indicate whether programmes were subtitled, audio described and/or signed before accessing them.

- Once the access service(s) were set-up, participants wanted them to be remembered within a service, to ensure they did not have to keep enabling them.

- Participants wanted greater consistency across VoD services in the layout of user-interfaces (including navigational tools such as categories and filters) and settings to enable access services.

- There was a lack of awareness amongst participants of navigational tools available on certain VoD services (such as categories and filters) and many felt that providers should do more to raise awareness of these.

Whilst access service users observed that both the provision and quality of subtitles had improved in recent years, many said they avoided watching live programmes or watched them without subtitles because of poor synchronisation and inaccuracies.

- Most participants considered subtitles which were well synchronised to, and accurately reflective of, the audio to be more important than the speed at which they were delivered.

- Most participants wanted to be able to change the font size of subtitles. The need for wider customisation options, such as the ability to change the font type, colour, opacity, background, position and speed, was recognised by all disability cohorts and it was particularly noticeable for those with dual-sensory loss or cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions.

- Participants expressed different preferences for how individual speakers are identified in subtitles – some preferred hyphens or name tags whilst others preferred different colours.

- Most participants considered musical notes to be a clearer and more recognisable symbol for music than hashtags. For music and sound descriptions, participants favoured more precise, but brief, comprehensible and not overly descriptive sound labels rather than generic ones.

Access service users said the quality of audio description varied by service but wanted more content to be audio-described.

- In particular, participants wanted more audio description on documentaries, dramas, comedy, and televised events of national importance. They also wanted more timely provision of audio description for Broadcaster VoD content and for service providers to treat audio description as an integral part of a programme or film's acquisition.

- Participants were generally satisfied with the quality of audio description, but noted it varied both across and within services. Many were sometimes frustrated by the audibility of audio description, highlighting that there was often an imbalance between the sound levels of the audio describer and the soundtrack.

- Most participants generally thought it appropriate for the accents and tone of the audio describers to be aligned with the actors, genre and context of programme. However, this should not be at the expense of losing comprehension of what is being said.

- Participants felt that better quality audio descriptions were more detailed and wanted diversity characteristics to be described - regardless of whether these were relevant to the plot or not.

- Synthetic voices for audio description were generally opposed, but many participants said they would accept their use for specific programmes, as long as quality was ensured and it enabled the production of more audio described content.

BSL users generally preferred programmes presented entirely in sign-language (sign-presented) to programmes translated into sign-language by a signer in the corner of the screen (sign-interpreted). For mainstream programmes, BSL users often relied on subtitles but preferred sign-interpretation for certain genres including news and current affairs.

- Overall, participants wanted to see more provision of both sign-presented and sign-interpreted content across the board. They also wanted to see greater representation of the Deaf community on-screen, including signing delivered by Deaf signers.

- Participants expressed a clear preference for sign-presented programmes as they did not need to focus on a sign-interpreter in the corner of the screen and because they believed the signing to be less formal and of better quality than sign-interpretation.

- Participants tended to use subtitles across most mainstream programmes, partly through preference and partly through availability of sign-interpretation (and depending on fluency in English). However, they did express a preference for sign-interpretation for certain genres, such as news and current affairs.

- Participants expressed frustrations about the clarity, accuracy, and synchronisation of sign-interpretation to the programme's content as well as the visibility of the signer on screen. They highlighted the importance of balancing the size of the signer with the programme's picture and subtitles, while ensuring that the signer's facial expressions, body language and signing gestures could be easily viewed against the programme's picture.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Under the 2003 Communications Act, broadcast television channels are required by law to provide subtitling, audio description, and signing (known as access services) on a proportion of their programming. Subtitles and signing primarily help people with hearing loss and people who are d/Deaf access programmes, while audio description helps people with sight loss or people who are blind.

Ofcom's Code on Television Access Services sets out these requirements. Separate from this, Ofcom provides best practice guidelines which give broadcasters advice on ensuring the quality and usability of their access services. There is currently no legal requirement for access service provision on regulated on-demand or catch-up (VoD) services. However, following further exchanges between Ofcom and the Government, such requirements are proposed in the Media Bill. Ofcom has also expanded its best practice guidelines to cover VoD services.

Ofcom is developing its approach to addressing the needs of the wider disabled community in line with the enlarged mandate of the 2020 Audio-Visual Media Services Regulations, which broadened the wording in the 2003 Communications Act so that Ofcom now has a duty to provide guidance on how to make TV programming more accessible for people with all access needs (rather than for people with hearing or sight loss exclusively).

1.2. Previous research

Previous research has sought to understand perceptions of access service quality, and a variety of methods have been used to understand how people receive and process information when watching content with subtitles and audio description. Viewers' perception of subtitles has largely been measured through eye-tracking studies and questionnaires (DTV4ALL project, 2015)[1]. Other previous studies on subtitling have used eye-tracking to identify viewers' reading patterns (Romero-Fresco, 2022)[2] and to explore the impact of

---

[1] See the European Commission's Digital Television for All (DTV4ALL) project on accessible digital Audiovisual (AV) systems

[2] Romero-Fresco (2022). P. 2022. "Subtitling" @ ENTI (Encyclopaedia of translation and interpreting). https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6370769

subtitle speed on viewers' comprehension, cognitive load, and enjoyment (Szarkowska & Moron, 2018)[3]. For audio description, attempts have been made to broaden its reach through machine-generated methods, but some studies have suggested that it is not yet of sufficiently high quality to replace human-generated descriptions (Braun, 2019)[4]. Previous studies on audio description have investigated the way sounds are described (Vercauteren & Reviers, 2022)[5], and research projects on describing diversity characteristics (Hutchinson, Thompson & Cook, 2020; Fryer, 2023) have produced principles for describing human characteristics and explored the challenges that audio describers face when producing descriptions[6].

Much research has been carried out to improve access service quality and understand how subtitles and audio description can be better produced. However, little recent research has been done by way of in-depth qualitative interviews to better understand viewers with different access needs' preferences towards the quality and usability of access services, including how they use multiple access services simultaneously, such as subtitles and signing for d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences, or subtitles and audio description for dual-sensory (or deafblind) audiences.

There is also limited research on how people with other disabilities or conditions beyond those with sight and/or hearing loss (such as cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions) can benefit from the provision of access services. Garman (2011) found that subtitles and audio description can reinforce what is going on visually/what is being said for people with autism or ADHD[7], while subtitles may be helpful for people with dyslexia to improve their spelling. Other recent research (Braun & Staff, 2021) also found that audio description had the potential to assist children with autism with interpreting emotional cues[8].

[3] Szarkowska A, Gerber-Morón O (2018). Viewers can keep up with fast subtitles: Evidence from eye movements. PLoS ONE 13(6): e0199331. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0199331

[4] S Braun (2019). Finding the right words: Investigating machine-generated video description quality using a corpus-based approach. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, 2(2), 11-35.

[5] Vercauteren, G. & Reviers, N. (2022). Audio Describing Sound – What Sounds are Described and how? Results From a Flemish Case Study. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation, 5* (2), 114–13. https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v5i2.2022.232

[6] See VocalEyes, Royal Holloway, and University of London's 'Describing Diversity' report. And Fryer, L. (2023) Erasure or over-exposure? Finding the balance in describing diversity (in audio description), *Journal of Specialised Translation, 39*, 11-25.

[7] See Garman (2011), Autistic spectrum, captions, and audio description

[8] See Starr K and Braun S, Audio description 2.0: Re-versioning audiovisual accessibility to assist emotion recognition in Braun, S. and Starr, K. (Eds) (2021). Innovation in audio description research. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, Ny: Routledge. In addition, research by Zabrocka (2022) explored how audio description could support the speech and language and social communication skills of children with neurodevelopmental disabilities like autism. See Zabrocka, Monika. (2022). The value of audio description for the therapy of speech-communicative disorders. Revista de Investigación en Logopedia.

Additionally, it appears there is very little existing research into Deaf people or BSL users' perceptions of the quality of sign-presented and sign-interpreted programmes as well as their preferences[9].

1.3. Current context

Since 2003, there have been improvements in the amount of subtitled, audio described, and signed programmes provided on television as well as the accessibility of VoD services. In recent years, there has also been a rapid expansion of VoD services alongside the development of new technologies. The proportion of viewing time spent watching content on VoD services, including Subscription Video-on-Demand (SVoD), such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, and Broadcaster Video-on-Demand (BVoD) or catch-up services (such as BBC iPlayer and ITVX) has increased. While accessibility features have been included as part of some services (such as options to customise subtitles on services like Netflix and BBC iPlayer), audiences with different access needs still face challenges with the quality and usability of accessibility features across broadcast TV and VoD services. Examples of these issues include inaccuracies and delays in live subtitling, and difficulties finding accessible programmes on VoD services[10].

New technologies have emerged to support accessibility across services, such as automatic subtitling and synthetic voices for audio description. While such technologies may allow for more cost- and time-efficient production of accessible content, there are questions around how these could impact the quality and usability of access services.

1.4. Key research objectives

The overall research objectives were to understand:

- The use of, attitudes towards, and preferences for, accessibility features on both broadcast TV programmes, SVoD and BVoD services.

- The practical experiences of both finding and watching subtitled, audio described, and signed programmes among audiences with different access needs.

---

[9] Traverse's report to the British Sign Language Broadcasting Trust in 2019 found that there is limited recent and robust research on d/Deaf people's views on television broadcasting.

[10] For example, some of these issues are set out on page 32 of Ofcom's video-on-demand accessibility statement.

- The impact of changes in the landscape, particularly global service providers' approaches to accessibility and emerging technologies, on the expectations and preferences of UK audiences.

- The preferences for access service provision across different programme genres, types of service and platforms.

- The benefits of using accessibility features, in particular for people who have cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions (where there is limited research on the benefits).

1.5. Note on terminology

We are conscious that different people use or prefer different language to describe issues around disability or access needs. Throughout the report, we have used language and terminology that reflect the social model of disability which says that people are disabled by barriers in their environment, not by their impairment or difference. For this reason, we refer to 'disabled people' rather than 'people with disabilities'. More specifically, we refer to people with hearing loss and people who are hard-of-hearing or d/Deaf rather than 'hearing impairment'. We use Deaf with a capital D (in combination with a lower case 'd') as we are aware that many members of the Deaf community self-identify under the capitalised form (which indicates a cultural identity). We also refer to people with sight loss and people who are partially sighted or blind rather than 'sight or visual impairment'. However, this will also vary depending on context – for example, in this report, we have referred to people with cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions. Throughout, we have referred to 'participants' as well as 'cohorts' to describe the five participant groups we interviewed: People with hearing loss or who are d/Deaf; British Sign Language users; people with sight loss or who are blind; people with dual-sensory loss or who are deafblind; and people with cognitive and neurodevelopmental conditions.

Evidence is provided through anonymised verbatim quotes from participants and the report reflects their own language as appropriate. Quotes have been attributed through providing information on participants' key characteristics such as gender, disability, age, and region.

Table 1 is a glossary of key terms used throughout this report.

Table 1: Glossary of key terms

Accessibility features	These are features that are either built into a device (TV sets, set-top boxes, and streaming devices) or a broadcast TV or VoD service, to assist users with different access needs navigate a service or search for and use access services.
Access services	Access services are used to refer to subtitles, signing, and audio description. They are designed primarily to allow people who are d/Deaf, people with hearing loss, people who are blind and people with sight loss gain access to TV content.
Assistive technologies	Assistive technologies are products or systems that support and assist individuals with disabilities access apps or websites. These include screen readers, screen magnifiers, adaptive keyboards, speech-input software.
Broadcast TV	Television that is watched as it is being broadcast, with scheduled times for each programme. Examples of broadcast TV channels include BBC One, ITV 1, and Channel 4.
Broadcaster Video-on-Demand (BVoD) services (or catch-up services)	These are Video-on-Demand services provided by broadcast TV channels. Examples of BVoD services include BBC iPlayer, My5 and ITVX. Such services are likely to include programmes previously broadcast on linear services and increasingly, programming that has not yet been broadcast or is only intended for the BVoD service.

Subscription Video-on-Demand (SVoD) services	SVoD services are Video-on-Demand services which require a subscription. Examples include Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime Video.
Devices	Devices are the hardware used to access broadcast TV and VoD services and their programmes. These include TV sets, smart TVs, set-top boxes (such as Sky, Virgin Media), streaming devices (such as Amazon Fire TV stick, Google Chromecast), laptops/computers, smartphones, and tablets.
Platforms	Platforms are the software on which broadcast TV and VoD content is played out on devices. These include broadcaster and subscription services' websites and apps as well as aggregating services like Sky Go or YouView.
Electronic Programme Guide (EPG)	EPGs provide users of television with continuously updated menus that display listings and scheduling information for current and upcoming broadcast programmes, and allow users to access the programmes listed.
Live subtitles	Live subtitles are produced in real-time as a programme is broadcast. These are usually provided on programmes such as the news, weather, and live events and typically appear as scrolling text on the screen.
Pre-recorded subtitles	Pre-recorded subtitles are prepared in advance and are provided on other types of programmes such as dramas, documentaries. They typically appear as a block of text on screen.

Sign-interpretation	Sign-interpretation is when a signer visible on one side of the screen, interprets a programme into sign-language such as seen with the national news.
Sign-presentation	Sign-presentation is when programmes are presented entirely in sign-language (i.e. all the presenters or characters on screen use sign-language).

2. Methodology

2.1. Approach

This research is an interview-based qualitative study of 55 people with different access needs' views and experiences of engaging with access services (subtitling, audio description and signing) across broadcast TV and VoD services.

The user experience and accessibility of broadcast TV and VoD access services can be quite different for disabled, d/Deaf and neurodiverse people depending on the different technologies they use, such as devices (e.g. TV sets, laptops/desktops, or smartphones), viewing platforms (app- or web-based) and assistive technologies (e.g. screen readers, screen magnification software). It was important to capture as much of this diversity in the interviews as possible. In addition to this, we needed to recognise the complexity of disability which resists categorisation, with a significant number of disabled people having more than one disability.

Primary recruitment drew upon RiDC's consumer panel of over 4,000 disabled and older people across the UK and, where needed, approaches were made to an extensive network of specialist disability groups within the UK.

This engagement with specialist disability groups was central to the research, not only for boosting recruitment but also for expert advice about understanding the specific requirements for each of the five cohorts we interviewed (see Figure 1 and section 2.2.). This was particularly important when interviewing participants with dual-sensory (both sight and hearing) loss and BSL users.

All materials were made accessible, and alternative formats were provided, which are detailed in the following sections. RiDC worked closely with Ofcom during the development of the materials.

The main elements of the research can be seen below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Research Method
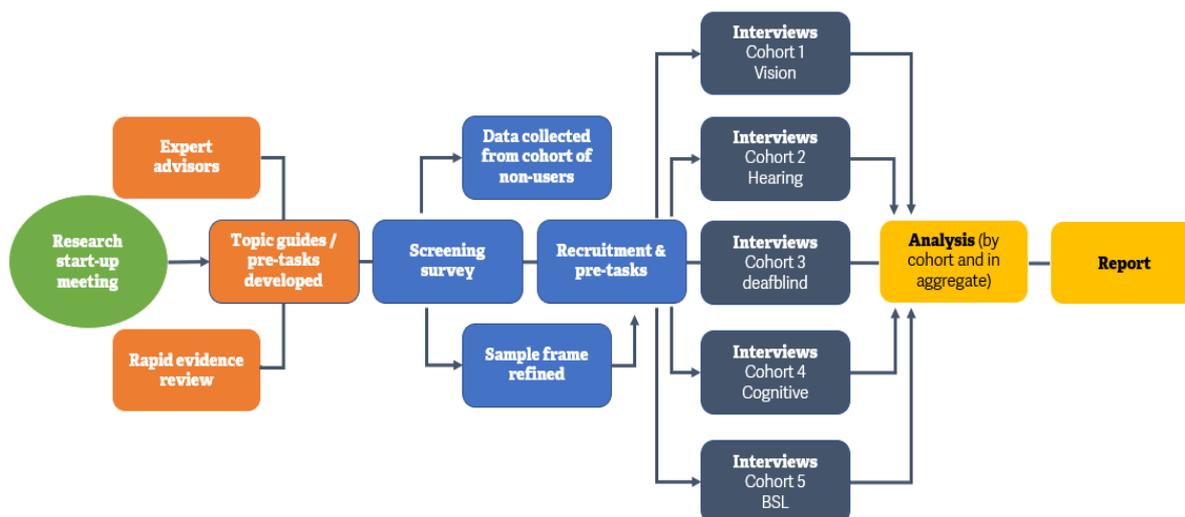
2.2. Screener survey and sampling

An online screener survey was developed and circulated to the RiDC consumer panel and other networks. The survey included an option to record responses over the telephone. The screener questions were also made available in BSL and options to record answers either by text or using video capture of BSL were provided.

In order to select participants with an appropriate balance of representative viewing experiences, home circumstances and demographic spread, the sample frame was segmented into three levels. The primary sampling criteria for the research was by disability or condition, access service use, and media consumption. In addition, we aimed to ensure a broad range of demographics (including gender, age, socio-economic group, ethnicity, and region) and digital capabilities.

Screener questions and a more detailed description of the sampling framework can be found in the Appendix.

Cohorts

55 in-depth interviews were conducted either online, in-person, or over the telephone, with participants across five of the following cohorts[11].

- **Hearing loss** – 15 participants who were hard-of-hearing, deaf or had mild hearing loss (excluding BSL users), who all used subtitles.

- **BSL** – 10 participants who were Deaf, and all used British Sign Language (BSL). Half were native BSL users for whom BSL was their first language, and English their second, while others were born hearing and had learnt BSL at a later point in their life. They all used both subtitles and signing.

- **Sight loss** – 15 participants who were blind or partially sighted and all used audio description.

- **Dual-sensory loss** – 5 participants who had both sight and hearing loss (including two who identified as being deafblind). They used subtitles and/or audio description.

- **Cognitive and neurodevelopmental conditions** – 10 participants with cognitive loss or deterioration, learning differences and neurodevelopmental conditions such as dyslexia, autism, and/or ADHD. They all used subtitles, and some used audio description.

2.3. Pre-tasks

Prior to the interview, participants were asked to complete two pre-tasks either online, over the phone or on paper (depending on their access needs and/or preference) via a short survey. A BSL version of the online pre-task with the option to respond in BSL was also made available. The purpose of the pre-tasks was to get participants to reflect on the quality of the access services they used on different broadcast TV channels and/or VoD services in preparation for the interview. They were asked to watch at least 15-minutes of a film or programme on a broadcast TV channel, BVoD or SVoD service they used frequently, with the access service(s) they normally used. They were then asked to repeat this exercise by watching a programme on a broadcast TV channel, BVoD or SVoD service they used less often. They reported on their experience by answering a series of questions in an accompanying survey (see Pre-task subtitling booklet). In some cases, where two access services were used, they were asked to answer questions about both access services.

---

[11] Some participants had multiple disabilities or conditions so fell into more than one cohort.

2.4. Interviews

Topic guides were written to support semi-structured interviews. There were informed by a rapid evidence review. As with the pre-tasks, topic guides were appropriate to the access service(s) used. By way of example, the topic guide for subtitles can be found in the Appendix. Topic guide (subtitling).

To explore participants' specific preferences, stimulus material was provided in the form of images, and/or video clips, to demonstrate different access service approaches taken by different TV broadcasters and different VoD providers. Participants across cohorts were shown stimulus material relating to the primary access service they used (e.g. those with hearing loss were shown images of subtitles, those with sight loss were played audio described clips, and BSL users were shown images of signing). **These images were taken in Spring 2023 from VoD provider websites so functionality and presentation of these services may now be different. Functionality can also differ depending on the platform used to view the service (for example on mobile apps or TV platforms).** Most of this stimulus material can be found in relevant chapters of the report and in the Appendix: Pre-task subtitling booklet. All interviews were designed to be as accessible as possible and appropriate to the needs and preferences of participants. For example, interpreters were provided during interviews with BSL-using participants. The interviews were recorded either online, in–person, or over the telephone and fully transcribed.

3. Findings

3.1. Understanding audiences and their needs

This chapter explores the viewing habits and specific access needs of the five cohorts we interviewed, as well as some of their device and platform preferences when watching broadcast TV and VoD services.

Television plays a crucial role in reducing loneliness, by providing companionship, and a way of connecting with others as well as providing entertainment, education, and information.

Participants within and across cohorts watched a wide range of different programme genres on a large number of different broadcast TV channels, BVoD and SVoD services. Many participants particularly liked watching documentaries, TV series/dramas, comedies, and the occasional film. The main broadcast TV channels and catch-up services they watched or used were BBC/BBC iPlayer, ITV/ITVX and Channel 4. Two of the three Welsh participants watched S4C and its catch-up service S4C Clic. In terms of SVoD services, participants mainly used Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+.

Reasons for watching television also varied amongst participants. For many, television was not only for entertainment or relaxation. It also represented a crucial form of support in reducing feelings of isolation that accompanied some of their disabilities or health conditions. For example, some participants within each cohort described feeling socially isolated due to living alone, or because of the accessibility barriers they encountered outside their home. These findings are consistent with previous research that has shown the disabled and older population can often feel more socially isolated.[12] These participants told us that watching television and VoD services was important to them to help combat feelings of loneliness.

> *"I would say [TV] is actually a critical part of my life. Not only firstly, for information, but also for mental health, and companionship."*
>
> M, partially sighted, 57, London

---

[12] See the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) statistical bulletin on 'Disability, Well-being, and Loneliness, UK 2019'

> *"I am never alone when the TV is on, I don't know if you'll understand that…when the TV is on there is someone else there."*
>
> F, deafblind, 51, London

Many participants said that television also served as a vital means of information and education for them. For example, many said that they watched TV programmes to keep up to date with the news, current affairs, or to learn new things, for example through watching documentaries or historical programmes. When other ways of keeping up with the news, current affairs, or popular culture, such as reading the news, books, or magazines, may present additional barriers for audiences with different access needs, TV can play an important role in helping them keep up to date with what is happening in the world. Additionally, one autistic participant spoke of watching television dramas to help them develop skills in communication and social interactions.

> *"Its main purposes for me is education and entertainment – the historical aspects are lovely, watching documentaries about Scottish history or things like the Titanic…I just really love to learn."*
>
> F, blind, 36, Scotland

> *"I remember when I was growing up…because I'm Autistic, I used to watch dramas to pick up on like social skills and things and learn more about how to interact with people through watching dramas."*
>
> F, colour blind, ADHD, autistic, 34, East of England

Other participants highlighted that television not only kept them informed but also provided them with a set of shared reference points in their day-to-day interactions with others. When they could be already experiencing increased levels of isolation or loneliness, using TV programmes or films as a talking point could help them form connections with others – whether that was online or face-to-face.

> *"Not only do I like watching stuff with people…It's a form of socialising…even if you're not watching the show with the person, it still forms conversations, away from that, whether that would be friends, family, colleagues."*
>
> F, blind, 39, London

> *"I met friends through online communities…I am also a Discord user, so I chat with people there so [TV] is not only to have something to put on in the background, there is actually a big kind of community behind it…although I watch it by myself, it's also a social thing."*
>
> F, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, 43, London

All of these important benefits are, however, dependent on the ability to access TV programmes in the first place. Most importantly, they will depend on the availability, usability, and quality of access services on programmes across broadcast TV channels and VoD services.

> *"I think the important thing is that it's accessible – if it's not then I have absolutely no engagement with [TV programmes], I can't enjoy it. I can't keep up with current affairs and it just means that if that accessibility isn't there, I'm not able to engage in peer discussions of current events."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 23, Yorkshire and the Humber

> *"For me, if the people producing the programme don't believe it's important enough to add audio description to their show, then it's not worth my time to watch their show in the first place…it restricts what I can watch, it limits my choice and I don't like that."*
>
> F, blind, 39, London

3.1.1. People with hearing loss and BSL users

Subtitles serve a crucial role for those with different severities of hearing loss as well as d/Deaf viewers.

The extent of dependency on access services (subtitles and signing) varied depending on the severity of a participant's hearing loss. Some participants with milder hearing loss could follow TV programmes without subtitles but experienced difficulty in doing so. For those with more profound hearing loss or who were d/Deaf, it was impossible to follow TV programmes without subtitles. This was especially the case for BSL-using participants, who also preferred signed programming but relied on subtitling as an alternative or simultaneous access service.

The type of assistance that subtitles provide varied depending on users' needs and the availability of alternative access services such as signing. For example, Deaf participants who were BSL users mostly used or relied on subtitling due to the lack of signed programming across broadcast TV channels and VoD services,

difficulties following signing on its own, or issues with the signing itself. These challenges are further explored in section 3.5.1.

For all participants with hearing loss and who were d/Deaf, however, subtitles served a crucial role in facilitating their understanding of programme content. For most, subtitles compensated for not being able to hear spoken dialogue and sound effects. For others, subtitles could clarify the dialogue, helping to overcome poor quality or unclear audio, mumbling, or difficulties understanding certain accents. Some participants also spoke of using subtitles as an alternative to turning up the volume so as not to disturb others.

> *"Some programmes we cannot watch without subtitles because of either background noise or the actors mumbling…in other programmes, there's absolute clarity and there's no problem at all."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, 83, Wales

> *"I use them when I struggle to keep up with what is being said on TV… I do find them a great benefit because I can easily get lost in interpreting what I'm hearing. I always say to people, to me being deaf is like listening to a foreign language. You hear the language, you have to translate it and then it makes sense and then, you know, there's that delay in processing what's on screen. What I think I've heard isn't necessarily what's been said, the need for subtitles, it's used more for validation."*
>
> F, deaf, 66, North East

> *"I don't see my [hearing difficulties] as a disability except when I'm trying to have a conversation face-to-face or when I'm trying to watch TV – especially at night, there's no point turning up the volume on the TV because the problem with my hearing isn't the volume it's clarity… and I don't want to turn the TV up in case I disturb the neighbours."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, 61, Scotland

Participants in the hearing loss and BSL cohorts' reasons for using subtitles also had implications for the quality and subtitling features they looked for - such as positioning, accuracy, synchronisation, and the level of detail provided in sound and music descriptions (see section 3.3). The combination of these features was considered particularly important by participants who co-depended on lip-reading or signing when watching TV in these cohorts.

Reliance on signing for programme enjoyment is higher amongst native BSL users.

The majority of participants in the BSL cohort used signing on most programmes where available. Their level of need for signing partly depended on whether they were native BSL users, for whom BSL was their first language, or whether they had learnt BSL at a later point in their life. For example, native BSL users experienced more difficulty following certain TV programmes that were only supported by subtitles and not by signing – especially where programme content was complex or nuanced and more difficult to grasp by viewers for whom English was a second language. Participants who were born hearing and had learnt BSL at a later point in their life, found it easier to rely only on subtitles when signing was absent. Moreover, for a lot of mainstream TV programmes, many of these participants also preferred using subtitles to sign-interpretation even when the latter was available (see section 3.5.1).

> *"If it's presented in BSL or if there's an interpreter, I won't use the subtitles"*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 29, London

> *"I prefer the captions because they have the actions as well, but if there was important news, that's when I'd be using the interpreter."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 39, London

> *"It depends. Most of the time I use subtitles, but I do like having an in-vision BSL signer, especially when it's linked to political issues because sometimes the concepts are a bit more complex. The jargon and the English might be a bit difficult to understand"*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 23, Yorkshire and the Humber

There is a preference amongst many BSL users to have access to signing and subtitles at the same time, as this provides a more complete understanding of a programme's content.

Many participants in the BSL cohort also expressed a preference for using both signing and subtitles at the same time, with the use of one access service supporting the use of the other. One reason for this co-use was that the option of subtitles allowed this cohort to follow what was happening on the whole screen, rather than just focusing on the sign-interpreter in the corner.

Some participants found it more difficult to rely on subtitles alone. A number of participants needed to use subtitles in conjunction with signing in order to validate their understanding of the subtitles. Other

participants needed to use subtitles to confirm their understanding of the signing (e.g. if they found it difficult to understand different regional signs). Some participants said they needed to use subtitles when the signing was unclear or the quality poor. Co-use was particularly more pronounced for programmes in which complex topics were being discussed such as in documentaries, interviews, or debates.

> *"I like having both on at the same time so for example, there's one programme – Question Time, there's a lot of discussion so I like to know exactly what's being said…so the BSL saves me processing time and sometimes when I'm watching the BSL I catch a concept …the English gives me the English word"*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 23, West Midlands

> *"Sometimes I have the subtitles and BSL on at the same time. If I don't understand the sign or if I don't understand the English, I'm able to watch the BSL. So I might have the subtitle and interpreter on at the same time, which I find really helpful."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 39, London

> *"I like to have both but really it depends on the programme. Sometimes maybe the interpreter misses information, and the subtitles are there to re-affirm it so it's nice having both."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, East Midlands

Larger screened devices are generally preferred to view subtitles and signing.

Most participants in both the hearing and BSL cohorts generally expressed a preference for using larger screened devices (like TVs and laptops) to access broadcast TV and VoD services, as the subtitles and signing were typically larger in size.

> *"I prefer the TV because it's bigger…phones are too small, and the subtitles are too small which often gives me headaches and pains in my neck…and it's really difficult to see the interpreter when they're small because you want to be able to see the facial expressions…the facial expression during sign language is exceptionally important…with facial expression it changes the meaning of the sign, it gives you lots more information as well as the signing."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 60, East of England

3.1.2. People with sight loss or who are blind

Reliance on audio description is related to the severity of sight loss. Blind viewers tend to be entirely dependent on it for programme engagement and enjoyment.

Amongst audiences with sight loss or who are blind, the extent of reliance on audio description will depend on the severity of their sight loss. For most blind participants, audio description was indispensable as they were unable to follow most programmes without it. Partially sighted participants and those with light sensitivities mentioned using audio description when they had difficulty viewing content or on-screen information relevant to the programme's plot due to poor colour contrast or visibility. Some participants within this cohort who had some visual perception mentioned using audio description to enhance their engagement with, and enjoyment of, a programme.

An initial point that participants raised was that in order for them to use audio description, the device and the service's platform needed to be accessible to them. Some of the factors that determined what services these participants used, and the programmes they watched included; the accessibility of the device used, the accessibility of the viewing platform (app or web-based) and the availability and quality of the audio description on that platform.

> *"I really rely on AD, in fact I'd go so far as to say that if something – particularly a drama or a movie is not audio described, I tend to get a little frustrated, sort of lose interest and usually depart the room and go upstairs to do something else so audio description means much more to me now than it did when I had some residual sight."*
>
> M, blind, 70, London

> *"With regards to watching TV, if the colours are all very similar, if it's dark or just not brightly lit, then it's harder and I need the audio description to help me follow as I get very confused with characters and things like that…also if things happen fast, my eyes can't keep up with it so they can't follow the action so audio description is amazing, it really helps."*
>
> F, partially sighted, 43, South West

> *"I can watch television if I'm close to the screen…in more recent years, I've discovered how much easier it is watching with audio description because I'm not straining my eyes or my mind to try and work out what I can see and what I cannot see."*
>
> M, partially sighted, colour blind, 29, Scotland

A potential downside of audio description is that it is not always compatible in a shared viewing experience with others who are not partially sighted or blind.

Some participants highlighted constraints on their use of audio description. Many enjoyed watching programmes or films with others but shared watching also presented problems for those dependent on audio description. For example, within certain households or shared environments, audio description will not be required by certain people and may be perceived as intrusive or unwelcome. As a result, some participants spoke of voluntarily abstaining from using it while watching programmes or films in their company or said they avoided in shared watching altogether. This was a source of frustration for many as the outcome could either be disabling or isolating for them.

> *"My family don't like listening to it…I use audio description when I'm watching something on my own so when I'm cooking, washing up in the kitchen…but when we're watching something as a family which is normally a film every Friday evening – we don't use audio description because everyone else finds it really annoying, so I have to ask questions – who is that? What's happening?"*
>
> F, partially sighted, 43, South West

> *"I remember when 'The Story of Fire Saga' came out on Netflix that is well liked by many… when we decided during lockdown to watch that. My mum said she didn't want to put on audio description, and I just said, 'well I'm not watching it then…I'm not joining this family time…she said she would describe it for me, but she can't describe it to me."*
>
> M, partially sighted, colour blind, 29, Scotland

In-built accessibility and text-to-speech features provided by devices were crucial for accessing audio description services.

Many participants spoke of mainly watching programmes on broadcast TV channels due to the higher levels of audio-described content. Delays in uploading audio-described programmes to these broadcasters' VoD services were a widely reported issue – with many recording broadcast TV programmes for this reason. All of

these participants mentioned that they used in-built accessibility features (such as text-to-speech features or text or colour contrast adjustments) provided by their TV sets, smart TVs, or TV box (such as a Freeview, Virgin Media, or Sky box) to help them access TV channel names or numbers, recordings, television guides, menus and other various settings.

> *"I have a very ancient television which is connected to my Freeview box, which is a TV Onics – a talking Freeview box, I can record things on terrestrial TV, I can turn on functions like audio description, I can rewind, pause, and fast forward programmes and access the programme guide…I'll use that to watch broadcast TV."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

Some participants mentioned using in-built accessibility features provided by other add-on devices such as Apple TV, Amazon Fire Stick and Google Chromecast to access VoD services' apps on their TV sets.

> *"I wanted to get better smart TV access so I purchased an Apple TV as they were the first to put speech and magnification on their smart phones…I use devices that I deem accessible to access television on-demand services."*
>
> M, partially sighted, colour blind, 29, Scotland

> *"If it's on demand, it's mostly the laptop that I use…[with my laptop] I'm just more used to using my screen reader software [JAWS]…but I'm starting to use the Amazon Fire stick which is definitely accessible for me"*
>
> F, blind, 37, Scotland

Some participants expressed a preference for using smaller, more portable devices like laptops, tablets, and smartphones to access VoD services as they can navigate their platforms (i.e. websites or apps) more easily using in-built assistive technologies (such as screen readers and magnifiers) on those devices, instead of TV remotes.

> *"I prefer the iPad or the phone [to access VoD] just because it's easier, it's easier to interact with the apps…even though some of the Virgin Media boxes talk, it's still hit and miss…it's just so much easier to do it on a tablet or phone."*
>
> F, blind, 39, London

> *"If I'm on my own, I use the iPad...I wish there was more accessibility on these remotes and TVs because the iPad is very easy to navigate."*
>
> M, blind, 32, London

3.1.3. People with dual-sensory loss

People with dual-sensory loss can vary considerably in their choice of access services, depending on the severity of their hearing and sight loss.

People with dual-sensory loss have a combination of both hearing and sight loss. However, the severity of their hearing and sight loss can vary, which means that their access needs will also vary when watching TV. Some could use subtitles, or signing, while others may use audio description. Of the participants with dual-sensory loss, two used both subtitles and audio description (either simultaneously and/or separately), three used subtitles alone, and one used only audio description.

Participants who used both subtitles and audio description had different patterns of use. Sometimes they used both access services simultaneously, but sometimes they used the access services separately. Simultaneous use of both access services can optimise the ways in which individuals with dual-sensory loss can absorb programme content through different sensory channels (i.e. both audio and visual). Reasons for using the access services separately related to the fluctuating severity of their sight or hearing difficulties that day or if the content failed to offer both access services.

> *"I use both... [subtitles and audio description at the same time]...so the link between them needs to be bridged."*
>
> F, deafblind, 58, Wales

Additional adaptations were needed by participants with dual-sensory loss in order to maximise visual and audio information when watching TV.

Often, participants with dual-sensory loss had challenges accessing TV, regardless of whether subtitles and/or audio description were enabled. Many used a mixture of different devices and technologies to maximise sounds and/or visuals on their TV or other devices. For example, some preferred using larger screened TVs or tablets they could hold up close to their face (to view the picture or subtitles better), while others spoke of

watching programmes in high definition on their TV or other devices. Many also used headphones to be able to hear the sound (i.e. soundtrack and/or audio description) properly or stream the sound directly to their hearing aids.

> *"I watch things on the Sky Glass telly, 55 inch telly. When I go to the in-laws, they [have] got a small telly, about 30 inches, and I struggle with that. But that's my preferred way of watching, on the big telly. I can watch it on the PC here, because then I am closer to the screen."*
>
> M, hearing and sight loss, 45, North West

> *"My vision is also deteriorating so that's become quite a difficult thing, the picture quality is the problem...I watch things in high definition now."*
>
> M, partially sighted, hearing loss, understanding difficulties, 54, East Midlands

> *"I use headphones when I'm watching because I'm dual sensory, so that I can hear properly."*
>
> F, deaf blind, 58, Wales

3.1.4. People with cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions

Subtitles can help people with cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions validate what they have heard, retain information, and/or improve their reading, or spelling.

Access services not only serve audiences with hearing and sight loss. Those with cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions can also benefit from the provision of subtitles and/or audio description. The range of cognitive and neurodevelopmental conditions is broad, and can include cognitive loss or deterioration, autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other learning differences. Given this range, the perceived benefits of using access services also varied considerably between participants.

Every participant in this cohort used subtitles. The extent of their dependency on subtitles varied. Most of them said they were able to follow TV programmes without subtitles, but with difficulty. However, some were unable to follow programmes at all without subtitles.

Reasons for using subtitles related to the nature of participants' cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions. Most of those with neurodevelopmental conditions (such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia) spoke of having audio-processing disorders that made it difficult to process and understand sounds, including spoken words and non-speech information. This could result in them being easily distracted by background noises either within or outside of a programme, making it difficult to follow the programme's narrative. For these participants, subtitles played a crucial role in validating their understanding of spoken dialogue and sound effects in a programme by providing them with visual information to complement the auditory information (when they might struggle to process auditory information alone). Subtitles could also help them distinguish between certain sounds, character voices, or similar-sounding words, to support their comprehension and reduce cognitive load. Additionally, subtitles could help them follow spoken dialogue and sound effects in programmes when they watched them in noisy environments. For some, subtitles even helped with their vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation of certain words.

> *"I've also got auditory processing problems…although I don't actually have problems with hearing, I have problems with making sense of what I've heard… Those difficulties are greatly increased when there's more than one thing going on, sound wise."*
>
> F, cognitive loss or deterioration, 61, South East

> *"I have quite severe auditory processing problems – I struggle with a lot of information in one go, and I like struggle to differentiate between certain pitches or so I've particularly struggled with background noise when I'm watching a film. If there is background music, I really struggle to pick out that certain voices. So, I tend to use subtitles when I'm watching TV – as a second [way to] reinforce my understanding…without them, I don't think I take any of it in or very little…I probably couldn't tell you the next day what I'd been watching."*
>
> F, dyslexic, ADHD, autistic, 32, East Midlands

Some participants with short-term memory loss, and many with audio-processing disorders, spoke of using subtitles to help retain information while watching programmes. Additionally, a participant with ADHD spoke of using subtitles to help them focus better on a programme's narrative. This in turn, helped reinforce their engagement with a programme's content. Participants with dyslexia or other learning disabilities said they used subtitles to improve their reading and/or spelling – thereby enhancing their literacy skills.

> *"I really struggle to process information because I hear something, and I forget it straight away. Sometimes having the subtitles there, helps me."*

> *"I don't know why I prefer watching with subtitles, but I have ADHD. And I think it helps me focus…I always find that I read a lot quicker than I hear…Often, using subtitles means I don't have to keep rewinding the TV."*
>
> F, cognitive loss or deterioration, autistic, ADHD, 37, London

Audio description can be used by some people with cognitive or neurodevelopmental disabilities to better understand what is going on visually in a programme.

While use of audio description was greater amongst blind participants and those with sight loss, it was not exclusive to that cohort. For example, one participant with autism spoke of using audio description to identify emotions and pick up on social cues. This indicates that having emotions, facial expressions and body language described in audio description can provide specific benefits to those with autism who might find it difficult to read or interpret emotions on people's faces or draw inferences from their body language.

> *"I find audio description helpful in terms of picking up social cues… sometimes they'll describe what's going on in the background that I wouldn't maybe have picked up or they'll describe an emotion on an actor's face that I wouldn't have maybe picked up."*
>
> F, autistic, ADHD, colour blind, 34, East of England

Additionally, another participant with cognitive loss or deterioration spoke of using audio description when they got migraines and could not focus on the screen. Having the visual elements of a programme described to them allowed them to better access its content in such circumstances.

> *"At the moment…. audio description is a lifeline because it's telling me what's on screen, who's doing what, what the movements are. And it's joining it all together rather than me having to squint at the TV and go I can't really see that or that's going to hurt if I look at that bright light for too long if it's quite well-lit or flashing."*
>
> F, sight loss, cognitive deterioration and understanding difficulties, 44, South West

3.2. Finding accessible programmes and enabling access services

This chapter explores participants' practical experiences of finding accessible programmes and of enabling access services on broadcast TV and VoD services separately.

It is important to note that the experience of finding and navigating to programmes with access services as well as enabling them, differs across broadcast TV and different VoD services.

Summary

- Participants used a variety of methods to find and enable access services across broadcast TV and VoD services, linked to the particular set-up they had, but many reported challenges in setting these up initially. For VoD services in particular, participants wanted there to be greater consistency in terms of the layout of user-interfaces, finding accessible content, and enabling access services, to improve accessibility.

- Once set-up, participants wanted their access service preferences to be remembered within a service, to ensure they did not have to keep enabling them.

- Participants were not always aware of the different tools available on certain services to help them find accessible programming. They felt service providers should promote accessibility features and access services across all of their platforms.

- Across both broadcast TV and VoD services, participants wanted some indication whether the programmes were subtitled, audio described, and/or signed before accessing them.

3.2.1. Broadcast TV

Electronic programme guides (EPGs) are often used to help find accessible programmes on broadcast TV.

Participants within and across cohorts said they used TV programme guides (known as electronic programme guides or EPGs) to discover, navigate to, and access, broadcast TV channels[13] . To access the guide, participants spoke of using the EPG button or in some cases voice input on their TV remotes or TV sets to call up the guide more easily.

Generally, participants considered these guides to be mostly accessible. However, the degree of accessibility varied depending on the EPG used and participants' individual access needs. For example, some participants with mild sight loss, expressed more difficulty accessing their TV guide due to symbols denoting the availability of access services on programmes not being sufficiently visible beside programme listings.

> *"[Access service symbols on TV guide] It's hard, you know, you're fighting with a society that doesn't want us to be disabled, because you're a burden on them. You know, they want you to watch TV, but they don't want to give you the facilities to be able to do it."*
>
> F, deafblind, 51, London

However, participants who were blind, said that they were able to easily access these guides or TV channels by using text-to-speech and in some cases, by highlighting or filtering programmes with audio description.

> *"What works best for me is on my TV Onics, the TV guide is pretty accessible – it will tell me the name of the programme, time of the programme, the name of the channel and then it says audio described, with subtitles or both."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

> *"The TV guide that comes on screen will show you which things are AD and which aren't. It's not 100% foolproof, and sometimes they don't tell you about things that are AD but generally speaking, Sky will highlight programmes that are audio described. So, it's very easy indeed."*
>
> F, blind, 72, North East

---

[13] An EPG is an on-screen menu that informs viewers about what TV programmes are available on different channels on their television, including whether the programmes are subtitled, audio described, or signed. An EPG can normally be found by pressing a button, such as 'Guide', on a TV remote control or set-top box.

Other participants with dual-sensory loss and BSL users spoke of using the Freeview Accessible TV guide (ATVG) via Channel 555 to help them find accessible content. This is available on the majority of Freeview Play devices and shows dedicated listings of subtitled, audio described, and signed programmes on its TV guide. It has text-to-speech functionality, screen magnification, and a high contrast interface on most devices. However, when probed about the TV guides they used to find accessible content, many participants in the sight loss, hearing loss and cognitive cohorts with Freeview boxes failed to mention using this guide, suggesting that they were either unaware of it or did not rely on it in practice. However, those who indicated that they did use it confirmed that the service was of value to them.

> *"I think for me, when I look at the TV guide…I have Freeview and I can click 555 and that's the accessibility guide so it tells you which ones have subtitles, which ones have signing."*
>
> F, sight loss, Deaf (BSL user), 23, Yorkshire and the Humber

> *"I use Channel 555 on Freeview, which again, is very difficult to get to the accessibility of it, I think it's the top right-hand corner…it's a bit of a palaver but I put on audio description, and I put on subtitles, so AD and S comes up in programmes that are suitable."*
>
> F, deafblind, 58, Wales

Access service preferences were often pre-set in the global settings of participants' TV sets. However, these settings were not always easy to find or access with their TV remotes.

Many participants reported having pre-set their access service preferences (namely subtitles and audio description) in the global settings of their TV sets to appear automatically on programmes they watched across broadcast TV channels (where available). However, for many, these settings were not always easy to find or to navigate to, user-friendly, or accessible for them to use with their TV remotes. Some participants also noted that settings to enable access services differed between TV set integrated services (such as Samsung TV) and set-top boxes (such as Sky or Virgin), which only added to their confusion. Some mentioned having received assistance when setting-up their TVs and expressed a reluctance to change their devices because of this.

> *"It's very difficult because each of them have a different method of accessing subtitles…with Sky you have a Sky guide, an interactive guide, and on there it will say whether it has subtitles or not but… you can't just click on the subtitles of that programme, you've got to come back out and go into the*

> *accessibility menu which is part of the TV set up so that's really tricky if you don't know your way around the headings and everything."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, understanding difficulties, 54, East Midlands

> *"You should be able to turn on audio description in the global settings of your TV...but quite often it's hidden away in a lot of TVs."*
>
> M, partially sighted, 39, Yorkshire and the Humber

> *"There's obviously things I am unaware of and there's obviously things, that people who sell TVs are unaware of as well, or else they could be more helpful to their customers...in this case, they were very helpful but obviously, the chap who helped me [set up TV] wasn't going to be totally aware of what my problems were, and maybe should have helped me further."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, memory difficulties, 70, Scotland

Subtitle users also mentioned using the subtitle button on their TV remotes to enable subtitles on programmes across broadcast TV channels. However, participants who required audio description were critical of the lack of an enabling feature for this on their remote controls (in contrast to the standard provision made for subtitles). They noted that being required to use the screen to enable audio description was especially inappropriate for blind users.

> *"Nobody put an audio description button on the remote control [used by the participant] as they've done for subtitles. They require you to go into the menu on the screen to turn audio description on and I keep thinking 'what were they thinking?' The whole point of audio description is you can't see the screen."*
>
> M, blind, 69, South West

3.2.2. VoD services

Participants stressed that VoD services' platforms (both app and web-based) must be accessible and user-friendly for them in the first place.

Some participants across cohorts said they preferred to navigate VoD services on more portable devices such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones, because they were able to access the services with the help of certain

assistive technologies. They also preferred accessing VoD services on such devices as they found it easier to navigate their platforms' interfaces using a touchscreen or mouse compared to a TV remote.

However, other participants made use of in-built accessibility features available on their smart TVs, set-top boxes, or streaming devices (such as Amazon Fire stick, Google Chromecast, and Apple TV) that allowed them to access VoD services more easily on their TV sets.

In order to find accessible programmes, they highlighted the importance of being able to easily navigate VoD services' apps and websites with or without their assistive technologies across all devices. However, the navigation process itself often presented barriers – particularly for participants with sight loss or who were blind.

> *"It's paramount to me being able to use the app in the first place, let alone figure out whether [a programme] has audio description or not."*
>
> F, blind, 39, London

> *"Some of the streaming service apps are not straightforward to use. I get the feeling they're designed more for the streaming provider than the customer."*
>
> M, blind, 69, South West

Barriers to navigation related to the inconsistency in layout of user interfaces - not only across different VoD services, but also different devices and services' platforms. An additional barrier related to the type and number of navigation steps involved to find accessible programmes across services and their platforms. As a result, these barriers made it difficult for many participants to discover and access accessible content on VoD services' platforms.

> *"Generally, it needs to be more easily accessible. It shouldn't be three or four steps to obtain it – it should be at the most two steps…you shouldn't have to worry about how you're going to get it, where you need to go…and the lack of uniformity of where it is on the screen, in the end you give up! I'd love to know the percentage of people who try to do it and give up."*
>
> M, blind, 72, London

> *"[A service] is supposed to be there to inform, be engaging, or a form of leisure but it's not a form of leisure when it's got so many barriers in front of it…this should not be something that takes your autonomy and agency away from you. You shouldn't have to ask another person to help you…you're asking me to find something that legally I'm entitled to but you're asking me to chase around the room for it – that's not equality, it's discrimination."*
>
> F, deafblind, 58, Wales

To help overcome these barriers, some participants referred to needing assistance from family members or friends. However, many disliked the fact that this made them more reliant on others and reduced their independence and agency. Furthermore, not all participants had the possibility of receiving such help. There was also a lack of awareness amongst some participants' household members of how to navigate VoD services and find accessible programmes.

> *"If I'm on my own, I find it very difficult to navigate all the menus and everything – that's a real problem for me…it puts me off watching a programme if I can't access it or my wife isn't here."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, understanding difficulties, 54, East Midlands

> *"As someone helping to give my wife some enjoyment, variety, publication of the navigation and the access, the availability and where to find information…I've only just found out about things from what you have shown me."*
>
> [Participant's husband] F, blind, 65, South East

There was a lack of awareness of the tools offered by certain VoD services to help users find accessible programmes (such as categories and filters).

Some VoD services offer tools such as filtering and categories to help users find accessible programmes. When applied, these tools display programmes that are subtitled, audio described or signed. When asked how they found programmes with access services, some participants who used audio description or signing in relevant cohorts spontaneously mentioned using such tools to help them find programmes with their required access service.

> *"Quite a lot of the platforms do have a category that allows you to filter through shows that have audio description…that is helpful, you don't have to press play to find out."*
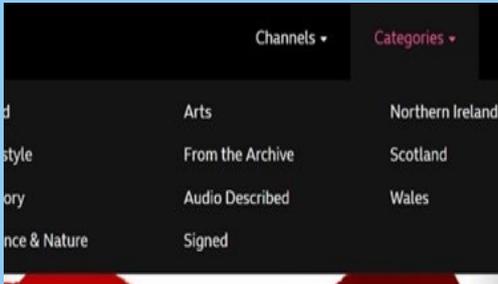
"On the TV itself I have the iPlayer app and if you go to it you can select the categories of the programmes so there is a signed category – just specifically for signed programmes so I just select that and I know that whatever programme I pick in that category there will be a BSL interpreter."
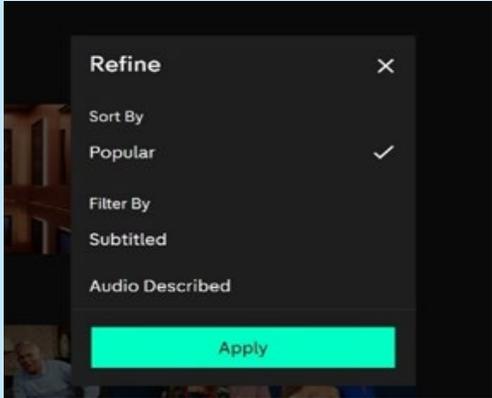
To further explore their awareness of these tools and preferences, participants across relevant cohorts were shown or described images of how different BVoD services allowed users to find content with access services on their websites. Those in relevant cohorts were shown an image of Channel 4's filtering tool (for subtitled and audio described content), followed by an image of BBC iPlayer's categories page for audio described and signed content. The third example was from My5, which included signposting of available access services on programme descriptions but did not include any category or filtering tool. These images are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Tools and signposting to help users navigate to accessible content[14].

Feature	Representation	Placement
Categories include audio described and signed programmes **(BBC iPlayer)**		Category option from drop-down menu at top of the screen

[14] Note that these images were taken in Spring 2023 from VoD provider websites. Functionality and presentation of these services may now be different and can also differ depending on the platform used to view the service.

Feature	Representation	Placement
Ability to filter/refine content by access service – subtitled and audio described **(Channel 4)**		Filter content by access service (subtitled and audio described), from refine option, presented on the top right of the screen in a drop-down box
Available access services are labelled on programme blurb (subtitles and audio description) **(My5)**		Available access services are signposted using symbols (S, AD) in a circle which are part of the programme's description and found at the bottom of the screen

NB: As explained in the methodology section, these screenshots were taken in Spring 2023 and functionality or presentation is now different on some of these services. Functionality can also be different on different platforms (for example mobile apps or TV platforms).

While a number of participants were aware of and made use of these features, there was an issue of lack of awareness amongst others, including those who frequently used those BVoD services.

> *"I had no idea that you could find audio described programmes that way…they could do with promoting that a bit more…I thought it was just potluck if it's audio described or not."*
>
> M, partially sighted, 43, South West

> *"I wasn't aware of any service that has an AD filter...That's very interesting...I'm a busy guy...if they're not making it obvious for me. I'm probably not going to go looking for it. I'm just going to keep on going in the sort of haphazard way I am."*
>
> M, partially sighted, colour blind, 29, Scotland

> *"I didn't know about that...I think that would help me considerably where you can pick the one with signed."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 60, South West

Participants felt that categories or filters to find accessible content (namely audio described and signed) should be consistently used across VoD services and their platforms.

After being shown examples, most participants expressed appreciation for the tools offered by certain VoD services as they felt it would make it easier for them to navigate to and find content with their required access service. VoD services often have a vast amount of content, and participants considered that the use of categories and filters allowed them to find accessible programmes more quickly and efficiently. Additionally, participants felt that the use of categories or filters by VoD services not only demonstrated a greater commitment to accessibility, but also made them aware of the wider choice of accessible programmes available on certain services. However, some participants highlighted that the use of such tools could also reveal the limited number of accessible programmes (namely signed and audio described ones) available on the service or within a category.
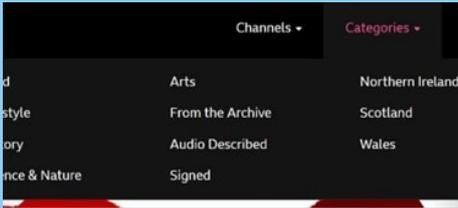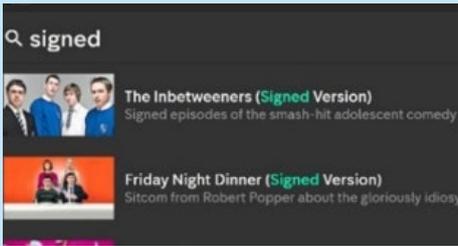
> *"The other thing I've been pushing for is the filtering and categories you described...but the problem with that is that there's only a small percentage in that category or filter."*
>
> M, blind, 72, London

When exploring their awareness and preferences for tools to find accessible content, participants in the BSL cohort were shown two different examples of how two BVoD services allow users to find signed content. They were first shown BBC iPlayer's categories page, followed by an image from Channel 4. While BBC iPlayer had a categories page for both signed and audio described content, Channel 4 only had a category or filter for

audio described and subtitled content[15]. Viewers were only able to find, or access signed programmes on Channel 4's service by searching for a separate signed version of a programme. These examples are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Navigating to signed content[16]

Feature	Representation	Placement
Categories include signed programmes **(BBC iPlayer)**		Category option from drop-down menu at top of the screen
Search for signed content **(Channel 4)**		Signed content is found via a search engine. Programmes that have this service are then displayed in the results

Whilst participants in other cohorts valued the filtering tool or category for audio described content offered by both services, most participants in the BSL cohort disliked that there was no equivalent filter or category for signed content on Channel 4 (unlike on BBC iPlayer). Many of them preferred BBC iPlayer's category for signed content and felt that Channel 4's approach (which only allowed viewers to find signed programmes via a search engine) made navigating to signed content more difficult as it would not occur to them to search for a separate signed version of a programme.

---

[15] At the time of taking the screenshot, Channel 4 did not have a category for signed content.

[16] Note that these images were taken in Spring 2023 from VoD provider websites. Functionality and presentation of these services may now be different and can also differ depending on the platform used to view the service.

"I feel with Channel 4 people wouldn't type in signed to find that content because I think they expected the information to be accessible. People shouldn't and don't tend to look [or search] for accessibility."

M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

"When I think of BBC…not just because of the quality but the way you can find (signed content) that does make a difference because it doesn't register in my mind of Channel 4 having a separate version of it. I think with BBC it shows much more of a commitment, rather than let's hide it somewhere in the background. I prefer how BBC do it."

F, Deaf (BSL user), 35, London

Most participants across relevant cohorts felt that categories and other tools to find audio described and signed content should be consistently used and prominently displayed across all services and their platforms. More generally, they attached importance to having a range of means of finding accessible content on platforms. For example, some participants also discussed the value of being able to use a search facility (in addition to categories or filtering tools) to find accessible programmes.

"It would be better if it was the same…if there was some consistency because then each time I use a platform…I would know what to do, I'm not wasting time on how to find audio description…if the process was the same, I'm not wasting another 15 minutes figuring out what to do."

F, blind, 39, London

"It would be nice if they all did it in the same way…what they should do is have multiple ways of getting access to this information so I like the fact you can have a category of audio described stuff, I also like the way that Channel 4 does it where you select your particular genre and filter it by audio described or subtitles – that's good."

M, blind, 43, London

"All companies and providers should agree that standard [to find accessible content], that same accessibility provision to be provided in the same way. That would help with knowledge but also confidence…and awareness. If all providers are different, people will just give up."

M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

Participants also wanted all VoD services to clearly signpost on programme descriptions whether they had access services available or not.

Most participants across cohorts stressed that, in addition to categories and filtering tools, they needed some indication that a programme was subtitled, audio described, and/or signed before accessing it. Many spoke of relying on labelling or signposting of access services on programme descriptions (with symbols such as [S], [AD], and [SL]).

> *"ITV Hub they normally have an indicator saying 'S'…if a programme doesn't have the 'S' then I won't bother to watch it."*
>
> M, deaf, 72, South West

> *"I think having an AD graphic somewhere…I've got enough vision to pick that up, whether or not that's reliably read out by screen readers is another matter."*
>
> M, partially sighted, 39, Yorkshire and the Humber

However, many noted an absence of this signposting on certain VoD services and their platforms. They expressed frustration with having to click on or begin watching a programme on certain VoD services to find out whether it was subtitled, audio described, or signed. Additionally, some expressed frustration with beginning to watch programmes only to discover that they did not contain the access service they needed. For this reason, most wanted all programme descriptions or blurbs on all VoD services and their platforms to clearly label whether they have access services available or not – using symbols that are both recognisable (such as [S] or [CC], [AD], [SL]) and prominent.

> *"What I love about the Disney+ app – in the blurb when it tells you how long the show is, what the PG rating is…it says it within there that it has audio description and I love that because I don't have to press play to find out! All shows should have that as part of their blurb bit."*
>
> F, blind, 39, London

> *"It would be good if they could signpost programmes that don't have subtitles, it would save faffing around."*
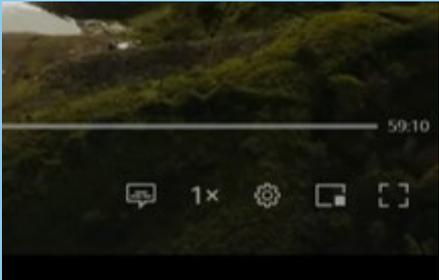>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, autistic, AHD, 23, North West

Participants wanted a standardised approach to turning on or off access services across VoD services and their platforms.
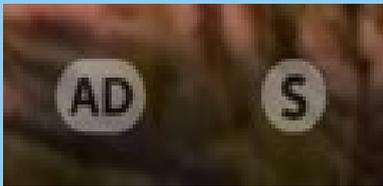
When viewers select or click on a programme to watch on a VoD service, they are then presented with a video player on their screen. This video player includes settings either within or around it to turn on or off access services (i.e. subtitles, audio description, and in some cases, signing). However, these settings are displayed differently across VoD services i.e. in different positions and with different symbols or as headings. Participants across relevant cohorts were shown or described different images demonstrating these different approaches. These images are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Enabling subtitles, audio description and signing[17]

Feature	Representation	Placement
Setting to turn on/off subtitles **(BBC iPlayer)**		Setting to turn on/off subtitles is represented as a speech bubble symbol on the bottom right of video player screen.
Settings to turn on/off audio description and sign-language **(BBC iPlayer)**		Settings to turn on/off audio description and sign-language are represented as headings below the video player screen.

---

[17] Note that these images were taken in Spring 2023 from VoD provider websites. Functionality and presentation of these services may now be different and can also differ depending on the platform used to view the service.

Feature	Representation	Placement
Settings to turn on/off audio description and subtitles **(Channel 4)**		Settings to turn on/off audio description and subtitles are represented as 'AD' and 'S' symbols on the top right of video player screen, with a hard, black background.
No setting to turn on/off signing – instead programme is indicated as a separate signed version **(Channel 4)**		'BSL' heading is used to indicate programme is signed at the top of and 'Signed Version' is written below the video player screen.
Settings to turn on/off audio description and subtitles **(My5)**		Setting to turn/off audio description and subtitles are represented as small 'AD' and 'S' symbols on bottom-right of video player screen, with a transparent background.

The positioning of symbols or labels used by some services presented barriers for certain participants - particularly for those with sight loss and cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions. Issues highlighted included difficulties locating the settings to turn on or off access services on the screen (due to symbols or headings not being visible or prominent enough on-screen) and understanding what the symbols meant. Most participants' least favoured approach, from the examples shown to them, was My5's, as they felt that the 'AD' and 'S' symbols were too small and poorly contrasted with the background.

> *"Maybe if you've got proper sight you would be able to notice it quicker but a lot of us are disabled and have multiple problems and also if you're on a lot of meds, you can't focus sometimes…I just wish the 'S' for subtitles was a little bigger or maybe even coloured because yellow is the colour of blindness…you end up going on YouTube trying to get instructions of how to do that and you shouldn't have to."*

F, deaf, sight loss, 65, East of England

> *"[When shown the 'S' symbol for subtitles] I had no idea that 'S' meant subtitles. I thought that was stereo sound or something."*

M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, 45, East of England

> *"People who might want subtitles might also have sight issues as well – that's really tiny [My5 example], you've got no contrasting colour background so it's really difficult to see…The BBC one, I don't think that icon of the wavy bubble actually represents to me subtitles."*

M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, understanding difficulties, 54, East Midlands

A particular issue raised by participants was the lack of uniformity across VoD services. Participants across cohorts expressed mixed preferences for where the settings to turn on or off access services should be positioned and what symbols should be used. Some preferred BBC iPlayer's speech bubble symbol and separate headings for audio description and sign language, whereas others preferred Channel 4's use of 'S' and 'AD' symbols. However, almost everyone urged for consistency across services and for these settings to be made more visible i.e. labelled in bold and large text on a background that provides good colour contrast instead of small text or symbols with muted colours.

> *"If I went to a new service, you've got to hunt around to try and find where you've got to turn it on because there's no standardisation…if they agreed where it will be on screen as well that would help but there are some companies who are so in love with making their stuff look different…they forget about usability."*

M, blind, 69, South West

> *"I don't see why it can't be big letters on the side, just the word 'subtitles on/off'…they are going to disappear anyway when I click 'okay' so I don't see the problem with making it more noticeable and more easy."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, 45, East of England

Participants wanted the available access services to appear automatically across different programmes they watched within a VoD service.

Some participants across cohorts expressed frustration with having to turn on access services each time they watched a programme within the same service. They appreciated when their access service preferences (including any customisations made to subtitles) were remembered on subsequent programmes that they watched within a VoD service, as well as across the different devices and platforms they used to access them.

> *"…every time a new episode started or went onto something new, I had to turn the subtitles on again…it does almost feel like a punishment, you don't have to turn the sound on every time you start a programme, so why should you turn the subtitles on? It's probably why I use Netflix a lot…you kind of come out of it and go back into it or go to a different programme, the subtitles will stay, you don't have to turn them on again."*
>
> F, autistic, 32, Yorkshire and the Humber

> *"I'm actually able to set it up in the settings through Netflix, anytime there's a programme that's got audio description, and for Amazon it automatically runs audio description… that makes life much easier because you've only got to set it up once as opposed to keep selecting for each programme."*
>
> M, blind, 54, South

Some participants wished to enable more than one access service at the same time.

Most participants in the BSL cohort expressed a need for using subtitles and signing at the same time – with the use of one access service supporting use of the other. Several participants in other cohorts discussed how they benefited from using both subtitles and audio description at the same time. For example, one participant with autism spoke of using audio description (in addition) to subtitles to help them identify emotions or facial expressions, while some participants with dual sensory loss used both simultaneously to enhance their understanding of both the auditory and visual aspects of a programme. However, whilst some services and platforms currently allow audiences to enable and use multiple access services simultaneously (e.g. audio

description with subtitles and/or signing), others do not. Participants wanted multiple access to be more readily available across all services and their platforms.

> *"GI Joe - I sat here and watched the whole thing. And what was really interesting is, I had my TV set up, which is always set up for audio description and subtitles, so they were matching… it was like reading a book… it was in sync."*
>
> F, deafblind, 58, Wales

Participants felt that tools to find accessible content as well as the access services themselves should be subject to better promotion and awareness raising.

The research indicated a lack of awareness by some participants of the tools available on certain services to help them navigate to accessible content and enable access services. While recognising the value of such tools, participants stressed the need for awareness of their existence. Some also felt that there was a lack of promotion about the availability of access services across different services and their platforms. Many also underlined the importance of providing guidance and support on how to make the best use of accessibility features to find subtitled, audio described, and signed programmes across services. Participants' suggestions included providing viewers with the opportunity to sign up to regular communications from broadcasters or service providers. Such services could then provide communications to subscribers alerting them to both features and guidance.

> *"Showing the community how it can be accessible because you can't provide accessibility if no one knows it's there so we need to think how we can empower the community to then guide them to accessibility. One thing is improving accessibility, and the other is to show how to find that accessibility…knowing how to navigate there…making people aware of the developments."*
>
> M, deaf, 45, West Midlands

> *"What they could do with doing is with all of their channels, where people subscribe to email services and perhaps the RNIB – they could do an information email explaining to people about the options, and the menus for searching for audio description, I would never have known that."*
>
> F, partially sighted, 43, South West

3.3. Subtitles

This chapter explores participants' perceptions of the quality of subtitles across broadcast TV and VoD services, including their frustrations when viewing the access service. It also provides an insight into their specific preferences for different elements of subtitling.

For context, the statutory requirement for non-excluded broadcast TV channels in the UK is currently that 80% of content should be provided with subtitles (90% for ITV and Channel 4 and 100% for the BBC Channels)[18]. However, there is no statutory requirement for VoD services.

Summary

- Whilst participants observed that both the provision and quality of subtitles had improved in recent years, there remained some frustrations, particularly in relation to poor synchronisation or inaccuracies of subtitles.

- Participants highlighted the importance of customisation and choice for subtitle presentation, given individual needs and preferences, as well as the importance of raising awareness of these features where they are available.

- For speaker identification, preferences varied both within and across cohorts, with some expressing a preference for hyphens/name tags, while others preferred different colours.

- However, preferences for music identification were more aligned, with musical notes seen as a clearer, more recognisable symbol, than the hashtag. For music and sounds' descriptions, participants generally favoured more precise, brief and not overly descriptive, sound labels rather than generic ones.

[18] For more detail, see Ofcom's TV access services code

3.3.1. General perceptions of quality

It is important to note that there are two types of subtitling on programmes – **live subtitles** and **pre-recorded subtitles**. The methods used to create each type of subtitles differ and will impact the output and perceived quality of the subtitles.

Live subtitles are produced in real-time as a programme is broadcast by re-speaking[19], stenography[20], or automatic speech recognition software[21]. Live subtitles are usually provided on programmes such as the news, weather, and live events and typically appear as scrolling text on screen. The methods used can result in an average delay of 5-6 seconds[22] between what is being said and the subtitles appearing on screen, as well as subtitling errors.

Pre-recorded subtitles are prepared in advance and provided on other types of programmes such as dramas, documentaries, and soaps and appear as a block of text on screen. Because the subtitles are prepared before a programme airs, the subtitler has time to perform quality checks.

Participants' perceptions and expectations of subtitle quality were much lower for live programmes compared to pre-recorded ones.

In general, participants observed that both the provision and quality of subtitles had significantly improved in recent years. These improvements were most evident for pre-recorded programmes, but improvements in subtitling on live programmes were also observed, albeit to a lesser extent.

> *"I must admit in the 20 odd years, they definitely have gotten better – even the live subtitles….I mean even the Eurovision Song Contest, they are a lot better than they used to be."*
>
> F, deaf, cognitive loss or deterioration, 39, North West

Generally, participants had lower expectations when it came to the quality of live subtitles – particularly in terms of their accuracy and synchronisation with the audio. Their expectations were correspondingly higher

---

[19] Re-speaking is the most common technique used to produce live subtitles, and involves a human re-speaker listening to the sound of a live programme and repeating it, including punctuation marks and sound labels to a speech recognition software.

[20] Stenography is a technique in which a stenographer records spoken words by writing shorthand on a stenotype machine.

[21] Automatic speech recognition software is a technology that converts spoken words into text in real-time.

[22] https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20230703112740/https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand/tv-research/live-subtitling.

for pre-recorded programmes and VoD content – reflecting a perception that there was more time to prepare and optimise the quality of the subtitles.

> *"I think that there's been a clear improvement over time. Subtitles in general today, are like much better than they were a couple of years ago. Obviously, live subtitles are always going to be less accurate, you kind of have to accept that. I do find the scrolling nature of them quite challenging."*
>
> F, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, autism, sight loss, 32, East Midlands

While most appeared to accept this quality difference, it often affected their viewing habits in at least two ways. Some said they avoided using subtitles when watching live programmes such as the news and live sports. Others said they avoided watching live programmes altogether due to the prevalence of these issues and only watched pre-recorded content instead.

> *"The one place we do not use subtitles are on news programmes where they use this kind of instant translation. Which is not always accurate. It's delayed, and they can't spell."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, 83, Wales

> *"I don't often watch live programmes because I tend to find the subtitles hard to follow so if I'm watching news, I will watch like playbacks of non-live news because I listen and read …because of my issues with dyslexia live TV just isn't accessible because the difference between reading and hearing just starts giving me a headache…it turns TV into a chore and I don't want it to be a chore."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, 24, North East

3.3.2. Frustrations with the quality of subtitles

Most participants across relevant cohorts mentioned that the following factors could make it difficult to follow either or both live and pre-recorded subtitles. However, most of the frustrations they described, related to live subtitling rather than pre-recorded.

Synchronisation – Poor synchronisation between subtitles and the audio was an across-the-board issue affecting both live and pre-recorded programmes. However, most participants noted that this issue was significantly more prevalent on live programmes due to delays between what is being said and the subtitles appearing on screen. This presented particular challenges for many participants who highlighted their frustrations about not being able to match the person talking to the dialogue being turned into subtitles. This

was an issue for programmes involving multiple speakers and scene changes, such as the news and live sports.

> *"I don't watch live news for that reason – as there's such a lag between what is said and then the newsreader moves onto a new topic – they could be talking about the nurses' strike but then they've moved onto the next story."*
>
> F, deaf, cognitive loss or deterioration, 39, North West

For pre-recorded programmes, participants attributed poor synchronisation to subtitles being delivered or taken away too soon or remaining on the screen once the speaker has stopped talking. Some participants across cohorts noted that this could result in them being taken out of an immersive experience as in a drama or film or having a punchline delivered prematurely whilst viewing it with other people.

> *"Sometimes I find with BBC iPlayer, the subtitles can either be either a little bit premature or move on a little bit too early."*
>
> F, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, sight loss, 32, East Midlands

> *"My husband tends to watch stand-up comedy and if the subtitles are on the screen, you find that I'm laughing before he is."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, autistic, 40, East of England

More generally, poor synchronisation between the subtitles and the audio caused more difficulty for certain cohorts. For example, participants with hearing loss or who were d/Deaf (some of whom co-depended on lip reading), as well as those with audio processing disorders (which often accompany neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD, autism, and speech or language disorders), experienced frustration because they required subtitles to be well-synchronised to mirror the actual spoken dialogue or soundtrack as accurately as possible, and at the right speed.

> *"Because I lip read what I'm seeing, [subtitles] being out of sync you can't actually marry up because by the time the subtitles – well the subtitles don't necessarily catch up in some instances."*
>
> F, deaf, 66, North East

> *"I have hearing and dyslexia issues so in general I need to have good audio and sound and for them [subtitles] to be similar otherwise it starts getting hard to watch and confusing."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, 24, North West

Scrolling text – Participants related this issue specifically to live subtitling where words appear on screen one at a time rather than as a block of text and are corrected live on air. They noted that this could detract from their engagement with the programme. This is because they needed to split their attention between the programme's picture and the subtitles more frequently (while waiting for or re-visiting the subtitles to see if corrections have been made), compared to subtitles that appear in idea units[23] or sentences. Participants with cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions in particular highlighted this as an issue.

> *"I find the ticker tape thing really distracting. I would prefer it to come out as a sentence and then another sentence – I just find it very difficult to concentrate on the thing I am trying to watch when I am just waiting on, you know word, word, word. It's a very tiring way to follow content."*
>
> F, autistic, ADHD, 52, London

> *"I don't mind if the subtitles are delayed enough for the whole sentence to appear at once – because I hate when the words are trickling through, and you can't read it as a whole sentence – because you can see when they're making a mistake and deleting and adding again."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, autistic, 40, East of England

Inaccuracies - Participants across all relevant cohorts noted that spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, lack of punctuation and other inaccuracies in subtitles not only caused frustration for them, but in some cases, acted as a barrier to comprehension. Some also noted that occasionally, incorrect words appeared in the subtitles that sounded similar to the word being spoken. They observed, however, that these inaccuracies were more prevalent in live and automatic subtitles (generated by automatic speech recognition software). While most participants with mild hearing loss and cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions were able to spot these inaccuracies, they argued that they made the subtitles jarring to read. This in turn, could distract them or take them out of an immersive experience of the content. For some participants with more profound

---

[23] In linguistic analysis, an idea unit is a concept used to describe a single unit of meaning or information within a sentence (a clause is a closely related concept).

hearing loss or who were d/Deaf, the effects of inaccuracies were more problematic for their comprehension. Such inaccuracies could cause them to be confused or, in some cases, miss out on key information.

> *"There was a character the other night that was talking about salary caps and salaries – every time it [subtitle] mentioned 'celery' – I had half an hour programme talking about some person's 'celery' and how much 'celery' they've got – it's nonsense."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, understanding difficulties, 54, East Midlands

> *"Sometimes the spelling is atrocious. Really dreadful so I'm lost, can quickly lose the thread of what is meant to be taking place in the studio because of the terrible spelling mistakes that are made. I'd have thought that with the advances in AI they would maybe get these things sorted."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, 71, Scotland

> *"We were watching Glastonbury Festival recently…what the ladies were saying…. everyone else [in my house] would be commenting on it, and they would be like 'oh that's not what they said' and then I'm like 'what did they say?'"*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, sight loss, 24, South East

Presentation – Many participants across cohorts, particularly those with sight or dual-sensory loss, highlighted that the subtitle font size could be too small. Small font size, combined with an inability or lack of knowledge of how to adjust it, often resulted in the subtitles being difficult or impossible to follow. Some referred to getting headaches from squinting and being unable to fully absorb a programme's narrative. However, many acknowledged that the appropriateness of font size depended on the symptoms of their disability or health condition that day, or the device they used to watch content – with the size needing to vary according to whether the device screen was smaller or larger.

> *"In the morning my eye sight is a lot worse than it is in the evening, and on BBC iPlayer you can adjust the size of the subtitles… that's good, that's great, that's a big plus."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, 45,

> *"They're actually sometimes too small. The letters are too small…Things seem to be much easier when watching them on the tablet or an iPad than the actual TV… because I am closer the actual screen when I'm looking at my iPad."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, 71, Scotland

Participants not only raised the issue of font size, but also font type and colour. For instance, it was evident that certain subtitle font types and colours were more difficult to read for those with dual-sensory loss or neurodevelopmental conditions (see section 3.3.2). Additionally, many participants expressed frustration when subtitles were not clearly visible against the background they were displayed on – making it difficult to read the subtitles and follow the programme's action at the same time.

> *"…I struggle to read, subtitles that clash badly with the background…the fonts can make a big difference because dyslexic friendly fonts are often seen as not very professional, so they [subtitle providers] don't use them… it would be good if there was a standardisation of hey, these fonts are good for this – because the belief [is] that disabled people have one disability, and that's it."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, sight loss, 24, North East

> *"A lot of the subtitles…I find really difficult to read, especially if they're all squished together…if they're a Serif font, I try and make them bold. And I try and give them a colour behind. Because they can stand out better. But a lot of them like you can't change how opaque it is…generally you can change the size. And maybe the colour if you're lucky."*
>
> F, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, 43, London

Positioning – There is no fixed standard for the positioning of subtitles. Most programmes present subtitles in a fixed position at the bottom-centre of the screen. However, in some cases, the position of subtitles can change so as not to obscure important information on screen. A frustration for many participants related to the obscuring of speaker's mouths and other important or plot-pertinent information on-screen (such as the names of speakers in boxes, or the score of a sports match). Participants highlighted that this could have a negative impact on their viewing experience because the subtitle placement could cause them to miss vital on-screen information. In particular, the obscuring of speakers' mouths presented challenges for those who co-depended on lip reading. However, contrary to this, a different frustration related to the unpredictable movement in the positioning of subtitles on the screen, which could cause the viewer to search for subtitles.

> *"That really was what got me frustrated. Because the subtitles were all over the people's faces. Which, you know, I want to lip read as well! ...Sometimes at one point, the subtitles would move so it will be up here [points to forehead] or it will be over faces or down below."*
>
> F, deaf, dyslexic, sight loss, 25, South West

> *"I didn't like the subtitling, because they moved about on the screen. They weren't in a constant spot, which I found extremely difficult to keep up with. He's reading it down at the bottom and whoops, now it's going up to the top."*
>
> F, deaf, 66, North East

> *"Where they have on the screen where they are explaining something at the bottom or introducing something, and then the subtitles have gone over that. So you sort of miss out on a lot... but also when you're reading them on the bottom and then suddenly they put them on the top of the screen then it makes it hard."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, 46, East of England

3.3.3. Specific preferences

The following section provides insight into participants' specific preferences for the following elements of subtitling: presentation and customisation; speed of delivery; speaker and music identification and music and sound descriptions. To explore their preferences, participants were asked specific questions about each of these elements and shown images demonstrating different approaches.

Presentation and customisation

Participants had very individual needs and preferences in terms of how subtitles are presented, underlining a need for choice and customisation.

There was agreement amongst participants across all relevant cohorts, that the appropriate size, font type (including spacing between lettering) and colour, as well as the background they were displayed on, all played a significant role in aiding the readability of subtitles. Subtitle presentation, however, was considered a

particularly important criterion of quality for those with dual-sensory loss, as well as those with cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions (such as dyslexia, autism and ADHD).

> *"A lot is down to the font size…the font and the font size makes a big difference…when they use yellow, blue or light blue, they're good colours for my eyesight – there are some colours like red I find difficult to read…a good quality font which enables the letters to be spaced out a bit."*
>
> M, deaf, 75, South West

> *"I have a severe hearing impairment and macular degeneration [affecting my vision] so both don't help me when I'm watching TV…I need them (subtitles) to be a reasonable size and if I'm having a bad sight day, I need them quite big."*
>
> F, deaf, sight loss, 65, East of England

Many participants, particularly those with dual-sensory loss and cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions, spontaneously expressed a preference for Sans Serif fonts such as Arial, Comic Sans, Calibri and Tahoma, which do not have ornate or decorative strokes at the end of each letter. Other Sans Serif fonts which are less dense, such as Helvetica, were also considered more readable for those with dyslexia and ADHD. A minority of participants, however, due to familiarity, expressed a preference for Serif type fonts like Times New Roman, which do have decorative strokes. This range of perceptions is consistent with other research that suggests that Serif and Sans Serif fonts work for different groups of people[24].

> *"I like dyslexic friendly fonts like the Tahoma font or Comic Sans and I prefer a black background with lighter coloured fonts and white on light grey or dark grey."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, sight loss, 24, North East

> *"As long as they are kept at the bottom, in Times New Roman or a normal font, we're fine."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, sight loss, 45, North West

---

[24] https://business.scope.org.uk/article/font-accessibility-and-readability-the-basics

Participants across cohorts showed varied needs and preferences for font type as well as the size and colour of subtitles. Many were acutely aware that their needs and preferences differed from others and highlighted that there should not be a 'one size fits all' approach to presenting subtitles.

> *"The key messages are that people… have different needs so it's not a one size fits all. Although I know they need to make it sort of standardised for people."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, cognitive loss or deterioration, 53, North West

For some, their needs also varied according to the device they used. For others, needs varied according to the severity of symptoms of their disability or health condition that day (such as poorer vision or migraines). Several other participants highlighted that their needs could even vary depending on the type of programme they watched. Before discussing customisation features specifically, many spontaneously pointed towards a need for subtitles to be customisable according to the needs, circumstances, and preferences of the user.

> *"We should be able to have it in the size that we need for our needs…some people might prefer coloured subtitles…everybody is different and I feel like we should be able to choose because television to us, when you're housebound most of the time, becomes part of your life and sometimes it's the only person we see…that becomes our friend so we should be able to arrange it how we want."*
>
> F, deaf, sight loss, 65, East of England

> *"That [customisation] could make a huge difference, especially [for me with] learning difficulties… if I'm having a bad day, I can change the pitch and size of the text and the font and the colour. I can customise it to my needs so that would be amazing."*
>
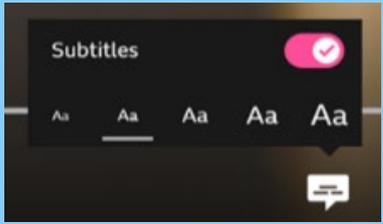> F, cognitive loss, understanding difficulties, 44, South West

> *"I struggle to read black and white or white and black so I always need…to change colour… My preferences change depending on what I am watching. If it's a very dark…film or something… I'll need bright…subtitles. Usually green, to be able to see that… But I wish there was more ability to change fonts…, there isn't enough ability to personalise the size."*
>
> F, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, 43, London

Many participants were unaware that they could customise the presentation of subtitles on certain VoD services they used.

Participants were asked if they were aware of or had used certain customisation tools offered by certain VoD services before. They were then presented with two images showing different approaches to subtitle customisation. The first image showed text size adjustments and the second contained more extensive options to also change the font type, colour, opacity, edge, and background colour of the subtitles. These images are shown below in Table 5.

Table 5 Subtitling customisation stimulus material

Feature	Representation	Placement
Font size adjustment		Bottom right of screen, in a pop-up solid box overlay.
Font size, type, colour, opacity and background adjustments		Full page configuration overlay.

While some participants spoke of using these tools, many were not aware that they existed, even on VoD services they frequently used. They were particularly keen to try these out and argued that they should be the subject of better promotion and awareness raising by BVoD and SVoD services.

> *"I didn't even know you could do that… you know what would be really cool if some of these platforms did a tutorial, a video tutorial [for people] who are not familiar with subtitles, this would be really useful… this is where they are, you can customise them."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, understanding difficulties, 54, East Midlands

> *"They need to publicise it's there, whether I've just not picked it up probably… that is amazing… that is, it is really good. Especially, the fact you can change the font type to suit your processing speed and difficulties."*
>
> F, sight loss, cognitive loss or deterioration, understanding difficulties, 44, South West

Most participants were in favour of being able to customise subtitles - particularly the font size.

There was universal support for being able to adjust the size of subtitles. This emerged as a clear priority across every relevant cohort. However, many participants expressed a need for wider customisation options (i.e. ones that not only allow you to change the font size) such as the ability to change the font type, colour, opacity, background, position, and speed. This was particularly evident for those with dual-sensory loss, or cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions (such as dyslexia, ADHD and autism) who had very individual needs and preferences in relation to these subtitle features.

> *"The core thing is the fonts, colours, size, and the ability to put a background colour behind the subtitles…because for some programmes even if you can adjust the colour, if the colours of the screen are changing a lot, the subtitles might be hard to see on some scenes but if you have a consistent bar behind the subtitles that is one colour it's easier…seeing a big site like Disney + putting time and effort into big accessibility options because a lot of places don't seem to have the view that disabilities are individual."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, sight loss, 24, North East

> *"I think the number one thing is like, the more customisation there is the better…I'd like to be able to like customise what you can't … like colour, size, position, speeds, like amount of text on the screen in one go."*
>
> F, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, 43, London

However, some concerns were raised about usability of customisation and the risk of overcomplicating choices.

At the same time, however, some participants within and across cohorts considered a wider choice in settings to be unnecessary or in some cases, overwhelming. There were also concerns about the ease of accessing a customisation tool with more extensive options and a fear of being unable to successfully change or reverse

settings that might prove unhelpful. These concerns or fears were particularly relevant for those who lacked digital skills or confidence, as well as those with dynamic disabilities who would require different configurations depending on their symptoms that day. This highlighted a need for customisation tools to be easy to access, flexible and user-friendly on all VoD services' viewing platforms (app or web based) as well as the devices used to access them.

> *"I'm not sure that I would want to be able to fiddle around as much as that [Disney+]. Okay, the facility on the first one you showed with BBC One, to enlarge the printing would be quite helpful. But this [Disney+] does over egg the pudding I think."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, 83, Wales

> *"Don't know whether I would have the necessary technical wizardry or knowledge to be able to change things like that… It's the thing of… if I do it wrong, and then I'll lose it… I'm absolutely cream crackered you know, so I'd rather hang back."*
>
> F, Deaf, 66, North East

> *"I think I probably wouldn't really want to get involved in it…it seems onerous, a lot of work and might be a bit you know, fiddly for me, technology wise… I just find it off putting…I feel that I might mess something up on my settings on my TV."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, cognitive loss or deterioration, 53, North West

Because of the perceived complexity of such tools and viewers depending on using multiple devices and platforms, there was also a wish for any modifications made to subtitle presentation to be remembered, not only across programmes viewed on VoD services, but also the different devices or platforms used to access the service.

> *"If this came up every time I had to set [up] subtitles, it'd be too much. If I had to go in once, and go I want it like this, like this, like this, like this … and then it did that from then on. I think that'd be really helpful."*
>
> F, cognitive loss, understanding difficulties, 44, South West

Speed of delivery

Most participants considered that subtitles that were well synchronised to, and accurately reflective of, the audio were more important than the speed at which they were delivered.

When determining the speed of subtitles (i.e. the length of time they appear on screen), there could be potential trade-offs between reflecting the content verbatim and ensuring that the subtitles are readable for viewers with different access needs. For example, subtitles that appear on-screen for two seconds will require a quicker reading speed than subtitles that appear on-screen for five seconds.

Some broadcasters or streaming services might provide verbatim subtitles that are faster, or more heavily edited, or paraphrased subtitles that are slower.

> *"Really, it's a bit of a trade-off… you're either going to get the paraphrase which isn't entirely what's being said or trying to read out the speed that someone is speaking. As a Scottish person, I tend to speak a bit quicker so on Scottish programmes you tend to get people speaking a lot quicker, but luckily enough I can pick it up. If it is a different accent, I do have to concentrate a lot more on it… I think if the box was bigger [it would help] with more words rather than them trying to cram everything into a smaller box."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, 66, Scotland

With regard to this trade-off, the findings indicated a general preference for subtitles to reflect the content verbatim and match the speed of the audio. This preference was mainly expressed by participants who were d/Deaf or with hearing loss who were more reliant on using subtitles. For instance, some spoke of needing an equivalent experience of the content as they co-depended on lip reading. Furthermore, this preference was also found amongst many participants with audio processing disorders (with accompanying neurodevelopmental conditions such as dyslexia, ADHD, and autism) who spoke of needing the subtitles to accurately reflect the audio so they could validate what they had heard. Paraphrased subtitles, which did not reflect the dialogue verbatim, were generally considered inferior by many participants because they did not allow them to sufficiently validate their understanding of the content. This common preference for verbatim subtitles that were well-synchronised to the audio, could be explained by the different access needs of the audiences concerned.

> *"To me, I would prefer verbatim (subtitles) because why should I miss out on something because I'm following subtitles...I would still like to have all the information included...I don't have an issue keeping up with the speed."*
>
> F, deaf, cognitive loss or deterioration, 39, North West

> *"I'm actually quite happy with subtitles coming out quicker...that would be my preference rather than some improvised text."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, understanding difficulties, 54, East Midlands

> *"I have hearing [audio processing] and dyslexia issues so in general I need to have good audio and sound and for them (subtitles) to be similar otherwise it starts getting hard to watch and confusing."*
>
> F, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, 43, London

Generally, most participants were content with the speed of subtitle delivery on pre-recorded programmes. Many of them, particularly those with more profound hearing loss who were more dependent on using subtitles, noted that they had become accustomed to different subtitle delivery speeds and reading more quickly from viewing experience. Nevertheless, most participants did point to the inconsistent length of time subtitles could appear on live programmes. However, it was apparent that subtitles not being in-sync with the audio or failing to accurately reflect the content was more of an issue for participants than subtitles being too fast or too slow.

> *"I think it's just experience...when you're growing up, you just learn, you learn to read the subtitles quickly...if I was younger, I would struggle, younger people struggle but you're trying to read across, read the sentences, it's a skill."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

> *"[Whether there is enough time to read subtitles and watch the image on screen] Most of the time. Yes. But there might be the odd occasion. Where, oh my gosh, you think where have the subtitles gone? We're moving on to the next one. And I haven't had time to read. But that doesn't happen very often."*
>
> F, deaf, 67, Wales

> *"[Live subtitling] Sometimes it can be like, the subtitles taking too slow and will last over a period of time and then, like chop, like kind of back into the real time."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, sight loss, 25, South West

Subtitles that are well-synchronised to and accurately reflect the audio can require quicker reading speeds, presenting challenges for some participants.

It is important to note that subtitling speed did present challenges for some participants with cognitive loss or deterioration, learning differences, dyslexia, dual-sensory loss as well as some BSL users (some of whom had lower fluency in English). Some read more slowly or had sight loss, which made it difficult for them to keep up with subtitles that appear too quickly or as large blocks of text on-screen. Additionally, some participants with dyslexia, learning differences, cognitive loss or deterioration, as well several BSL users, found it difficult to read and understand the subtitle text. Because of this, some expressed a preference for slower subtitles with fewer words and easier language.

> *"My husband [also a BSL user] finds it really difficult and he misses things quite a lot...his ability to read English quickly is slower than my pace, mine is quite fast, so sometimes he misses things."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 30, London

> *"Because I read quite slowly as I'm dyslexic...that's probably why I don't watch loads of telly as the subtitles go too fast for me...they can be too descriptive...I have to understand each word so I have to understand that the subtitles will appear like this – that's how my brain will read it, especially when you don't know what's coming up... so I have to read each word and then try to put it into a sentence in my head."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, 46, East of England

> *"On Disney, the subtitles, they'll flash up and then go quite quickly...And you go, oh hang on, what did that say? And you've missed a bit of the program...it really kind of destroys your concentration...Whilst on the BBC they come on and then go away again in a nicey nice steady consistent way"*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, 45, North West

While there was a general preference for subtitles to reflect content verbatim, there was acceptance amongst other participants across cohorts, who did not experience these difficulties, that paraphrased subtitles might in some cases be justified for programmes in which the dialogue and action was fast paced.

> *"The important thing is you get the gist of what is actually being said so I think in my point of view, normally I would prefer every word, but if it's fast moving, I would prefer that they opted to paraphrase the missing words, so the subtitles could move at the pace and you have a good chance of reading them."*
>
> M, deaf, 75, South West

> *"I think really it depends on the show, if it's a fast show with a lot happening, and a lot of dialogue…BBC is quite good at paraphrasing, it'll give you the gist of what's being said but they don't all do that – most of the things I watch is verbatim subtitles and that can be really hard to follow if they're talking very quickly."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, 61, Scotland

Speaker identification

Subtitles contain information to identify different speakers. Speakers are typically identified in the following ways:
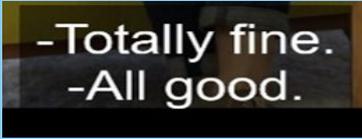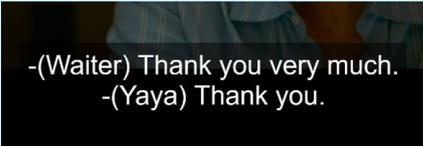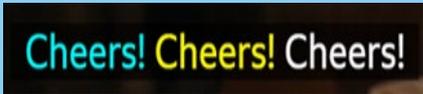
Hyphens (i.e. -) **and nametags** e.g. (JENNY), [JENNY], or JENNY. Depending on the scene of a programme, if there are multiple speakers in a subtitle and the speakers are on screen, each speaker will have a hyphen at the start of their sentence. However, if there are multiple speakers in a subtitle and the speakers are off the screen, name tags will also be used because otherwise the viewer will not be able to identify the separate voice.

Different colours to denote different speakers.

Participants' preferences for how different speakers are identified varied both within and across cohorts.

Participants were asked what their thoughts were on the way different speakers are identified across services, and whether they had any preferences. They were then shown three images of the different ways speakers can be shown: hyphens, name tags, and different colours. These images are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Subtitles stimulus material

Indicating	Representation	Placement
Hyphens	-Totally fine. -All good.	Bottom middle, in a semi-transparent box, separate lines for each speaker.
Name tags (hyphens & brackets)	-(Waiter) Thank you very much. -(Yaya) Thank you.	Bottom middle, in a semi-transparent box overlay, separate lines for each speaker
Colours (blue, yellow and white)	Cheers! Cheers! Cheers!	Bottom middle, with a transparent overlay

Nine of the fifteen participants in the hearing cohort were more in favour of the use of hyphens and name tags to identify different speakers. This preference was also expressed by most of the participants who used subtitles in the dual-sensory cohort. However, the cognitive cohort were equally divided between the use of hyphens/name tags and different colours.

Hyphens and nametags – Reasons for this preference for hyphens/name tags related to difficulties with following different colours. For example, many participants said they found it difficult to assign different colours to the correct speaker.

> *"With BBC One...it's really hard who to tell is speaking because it will be white font but then if somebody else speaks it will turn yellow but they're not showing you who is actually is speaking...that's difficult."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, 46, East of England

> *"I don't follow the colours... I get confused as to who's which colour."*
>
> F, autistic, ADHD, cognitive loss or deterioration, 37, London

> *"When there's many people in a scene, like four of five persons, and they're all giving it [talking at the same time], [the subtitlers] they tend to try to use different colours. But then you've got to tie that colour to that person."*
>
> M, hard-of-hearing, sight loss, 45, North West

One participant with a cognitive disability also spoke of having face blindness and as a result, found name tags to be particularly helpful for identifying speakers.

> *"Love it when they tell you the name of speaker, because I also have quite a moderate bit of face blindness. So, I could watch a show. And I'm like, I don't know who these people are, like, who are they in relation?... So, I really love it when they have name tags."*
>
> F, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, 43, London

Additionally, some participants with dual-sensory loss, cognitive and neurodevelopmental disabilities found the choice of colours used by providers to denote different speakers difficult to read, while others considered them distracting.

> *"Name tags are good...I don't like different colours because it throws me off and sometimes the colours can be very unreadable."*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, sight loss, 24, North East

> *"A line change for a change of speaker works better for me. I know some other people prefer the colour change, but I find the colour change from a sensory perspective really distracting."*
>
> F, ADHD, 52, London

However, some participants who preferred name tags as well as those who favoured different colours, acknowledged certain shortcomings with the use of name tags to identify speakers. For instance, some disliked the extra effort required to read more text and process more information. Others also observed that there were times when nametags could reveal the name of the speaker too soon or at inappropriate times i.e. when the script might want the viewer to wonder who is speaking to add mystery to the plot.

> *"My favourite option is probably name tags...but I suppose the difficulty with that [nametags] is it's more written information people have to take-in in terms of the time it takes to read subtitles."*

> F, colour blind, autistic, ADHD, 34, East of England

> *'I remember watching Bridgerton with my daughter and the name came up in brackets and she said 'that's just ruined it for me'… that would put me off a wee bit as well."*
> F, deaf, 61, Scotland

Different colours - Other participants considered the use of different colours to denote different speakers more helpful as it meant there was less text for them to read. Some also preferred colours as they felt that having to process the names of characters in name tags could distract them and interrupt their engagement with a programme.

> *"I wouldn't want the name of the person to appear because that would just be more text to read."*
> M, deaf, 75, South West

> *"I think colours are more instant whereas if you're trying to read a name tag you're going to have to read that as they're speaking and change that in your brain to say that's them."*
> F, hard-of-hearing, 66, Scotland

Some participants, however, observed that certain colours were sometimes used to identify more than one speaker throughout a programme which could cause them confusion.

> *"So that can be confusing, that the same character doesn't always have the same colour subtitle, it will go with who the main speaker is in each scene… so that has problems."*
> F, colour blind, autistic, ADHD, 34, East of England

Music identification

Subtitles also need to distinguish between musical lyrics and spoken dialogue. Music is typically identified in the following ways:
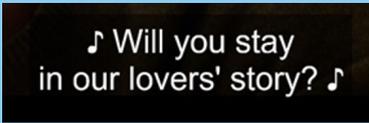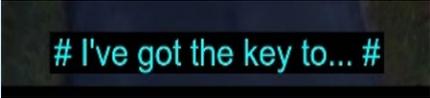
Hashtags (# symbols)

Musical notes (♪ symbols)

Most participants, both within and across cohorts, considered musical notes to be a more recognisable symbol to identify music than hashtags.

To explore their preferences, participants were shown two images illustrating these two approaches. These images are shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Subtitles stimulus material

Indicating	Representation	Placement
Musical notes	♪ Will you stay in our lovers' story? ♪	Bottom middle, with a transparent overlay
Hash tags	# I've got the key to... #	Bottom middle, in a solid box overlay

While a minority of participants within and across cohorts preferred hashtags, the majority felt that the symbol for music was the most appropriate to indicate music. Most participants felt that the meaning and associations of the symbol for music were much more recognisable than a hashtag. Many associated a hashtag with a tweet on Twitter, now known as X, rather than music.

> *"I mean everyone knows what a musical note is…a hashtag is like social connotation, like a tweet."*
> F, hard-of-hearing, 46, East of England

> *"Hashtags don't mean music to me."*
> F, cognitive loss or deterioration, 61, South East

Many participants wanted musical notes to be consistently used across broadcast TV and VoD services.

> *"I just read that as hashtag like they are reading out a tweet…I wish the musical note was a standard, please standardise things."*

"I think consistency is best for everyone really…it would be better for everyone to be working on the same page…because those with learning disabilities are going to have to learn that hashtag and notes mean the same thing."

Music and sound descriptions

Subtitles also contain labels to indicate or describe non-speech information, such as tone of speech, sound effects, or music. For example, they can either indicate the way someone says something (e.g. whispering or shouting), action sounds (e.g. gun firing, phone ringing, door slams), or describe the tone of music (e.g. romantic music plays). Some music and sound descriptions are more detailed and specific than others.

Generally, participants wanted more precise and comprehensible, but brief and not overly descriptive, sound and music descriptions rather than generic ones.

To explore their preferences, participants were shown images of more and less detailed sound descriptions of music (such as 'Music Plays' and 'Ominous music playing') followed by sounds coming from a person or within the programme (such as 'Maggie Sighs' and 'deep determined breathing'). These images are shown below in Table 8.

Table 8 Subtitles stimulus material

Indicating	Representation	Placement
Sound descriptions (Music)		
Less descriptive/ detailed	MUSIC PLAYS	Bottom left, in a solid box overlay
More descriptive/ detailed	[ominous music playing]	Bottom right, with a transparent overlay
More descriptive/ detailed	[tender, emotional music swells]	Bottom centre, with a transparent overlay

Indicating	Representation	Placement
Sound descriptions (Diegetic)		
Less descriptive/ detailed	MAGGIE SIGHS	Bottom left, in a solid box overlay
More descriptive/ detailed	[deep, determined breathing]	Bottom middle, with a transparent overlay

Participants expressed mixed preferences for the amount of detail provided in music and sound descriptions. Generally, they preferred more descriptive sound labels rather than generic ones, especially for programmes where emotional context was important (such as in films or dramas). Many of them considered that more detailed or precise descriptions of sound effects, music and tone of speech provided a more immersive and enjoyable experience of the content. It was evident that more specific descriptions of non-speech information were not only of value to participants who were d/Deaf or hard-of-hearing who were not able to access sound effects otherwise, but also those with audio processing disorders (and accompanying neurodevelopmental conditions) who struggled to recognise, understand, or distinguish between certain sounds or emotions.

"I also prefer if they are subtitles designed for Deaf people, so the ones that have all the extra and contextual information like 'door slams'."

F, Deaf (BSL user), 35, London

"Netflix – there's a lot more, it helps me understand what's going on a lot easier because the other ones are a bit lacklustre…always more detail, I want know what's going and I don't want my hearing to be what's tripping me up…with BBC they're doing everything they have to, not everything they could do."

F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD, sight loss, 24, North East

"I've been watching Wednesday. And there's a lot of music in that. And they describe the emotion of it. So, let's say 'creepy music plays' or 'melodramatic music plays' and that's really helpful. To help you emote along with the character. And I think that's part of the drama, I think it's really important."

F, colour blind, autistic, ADHD, 34, East of England

At the same time, participants were slightly critical of music and sound descriptions that were imprecise, difficult to understand (such as 'quintessential music playing' or 'determined breathing') or in some cases, overly descriptive. Some felt that these could distract them, making it more difficult to follow the plot of a programme. There was also a concern amongst some participants with cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions about the challenge of reading sound labels that were too long or complex.

> *"The one with determined breathing…I was thinking all you should have done was just put deep breathing…I would be thinking afterwards, 'what is determined breathing?' You start thinking about that and then you've lost the plot to the film."*
>
> F, deaf, sight loss, 65, East of England

> *"You end up with something that kind of says 'quintessential music playing' and you think 'crikey', I know they have to be descriptive, but you know is it really necessary to take up the whole screen with that?"*
>
> F, hard-of-hearing, dyslexic, 46, East of England

3.4. Audio description

This chapter explores participants' perceptions of both the quantity and quality of audio description across broadcast TV and VoD services, as well as their frustrations when using this access service. It also provides an insight into their specific preferences for different elements of audio description.

For context, the statutory quota for providing audio described content on non-excluded broadcast TV channels in the UK is 10% of programmes. A number of broadcasters such as the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Sky have committed to audio describing at least 20% of their programmes on their channels. However, there are currently no statutory obligations in respect of VoD services.

Summary

- Many participants in relevant cohorts highlighted their dissatisfaction at the availability of audio description across broadcast TV and VoD services, and wanted greater provision across all services, particularly for specific programme genres and events of national importance.

- Overall, participants were satisfied with the quality of audio description, but noted variation in this, and some frustrations. A particular frustration concerned the audibility of the audio description, as there was often an imbalance between the sound levels of the audio describer and the soundtrack across many programmes that they watched.

- In terms of specific preferences, participants emphasised the importance of clear diction, but generally thought it appropriate for the accents and tone of audio describers to be aligned with the actors, genre, and context of a programme. In addition, participants also felt that better quality audio description was more detailed and wanted diversity characteristics to be described – regardless of whether these were directly relevant to the plot.

- Synthetic voices for audio description were generally opposed, but use would be accepted for specific programmes, if quality was ensured and it enabled the production of more audio described content. Many participants felt that audio description should be considered early on in the production process for programmes, and that seeking feedback should be sought before broadcast, in order to enable better quality audio description.

3.4.1. Quantity/provision

Participants were more dissatisfied with the lack of provision of audio described content across broadcast TV and VoD services than the quality.

Most participants argued for greater provision of audio described content across all broadcast TV channels and VoD services. However, they did acknowledge the practical and financial constraints in greater provision, and spoke of a possible progressive approach, with the quantity of audio described content being increased gradually over time across services and their platforms.

Many noted that the lack of provision on certain broadcast TV channels and VoD services not only limited how they could access them or what they could watch but also sometimes prevented them from using such channels or services altogether.

> *"I don't think 20% for broadcast TV is even high enough…it was fine 10 or 15 years ago…get that percentage of audio description up to 50% for live TV…place a requirement on video on-demand services that they have to also audio describe a certain proportion [of their programmes] …I would be happy for them to start with 25% and match up to TV eventually."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

> *"It should be way more than 20%. Raising it to 40/50% would be better."*
>
> F, blind, 64, South West

> *"For a lot of these [services], they don't always have audio description on every platform so if you go to your television and then the app on your tablet, it's not always the same even though it's the same provider…I would like certain services to actually have audio description because they don't on the app – they do on live TV…we're never actually going to get [certain services] because they don't have audio description."*
>
> F, blind, 37, South West

Some participants expressed frustration at having signed up to certain SVoD services that failed to inform them in advance about the access services available.

Additionally, some participants expressed frustration with signing up to certain paid-for services only to discover that they did not carry audio described content. They wanted service providers to inform potential customers about the extent to which their programmes were accessible before the point of sale.

> *"As a big Star Trek and South Park fan I was really excited when Paramount Plus came to the UK…I cancelled it because there was almost no audio described content on there – despite the fact that if you look on the Paramount Plus audio described listings page, and this is for the US, they've got a lot of audio described stuff in the US. They released it in the UK without bringing over the audio described content.[25]"*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

---

[25] Paramount + now includes programmes with audio description.

Audio description being added late to on-demand programmes was a key frustration for many participants.

Many participants mentioned frustration with certain TV broadcasters delivering audio description late on programmes uploaded to their catch-up service, with some highlighting that when whole series have been made available online, audio description has often only been added after an episode has been broadcast on TV. As a result, they had been unable to 'binge watch' audio described popular programmes until all episodes have been broadcast on TV.

> *"I think if a programme is uploaded to the iPlayer before it's been broadcast, the audio described episodes seem to only get added as they are broadcast on the telly."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

Many participants felt that if a channel or service acquires certain TV series or films that have been previously audio described, then the audio description should be treated as an integral part of their acquisition.

Participants expressed particular frustration when audio description was omitted from programmes or series that moved to a different channel or VoD service. This was a particular issue when the content was no longer available through the original provider. Many took the view that if a content provider acquires certain TV series or films that have been previously audio described, then the audio description should be treated as an integral part of the programme or film's acquisition.

> *"If you could do it once and distribute it everywhere…if a particular programme has audio description, I would like that programme to have audio description regardless of who is broadcasting it."*
>
> M, blind, 69, South West
>
> *"Like that programme 'House'…when it came out originally it was audio described and now we're watching it on Amazon Prime and it's not audio described…you shouldn't have to go re-invent the wheel just to make another one that is audio described…it just seems daft that the audio describers have already been paid for their work, the channels have sorted it, why can't they just share it?"*
>
> F, blind, 37, South West

Many participants were frustrated by the inaccessibility of on-screen text in programmes such as subtitled foreign language segments.

Many participants expressed frustration at the lack of audio description of on-screen text or information (including subtitled foreign language segments) – especially on news coverage but also in documentaries. They highlighted that the lack of dubbing of foreign language dialogue or presenters failing to read out on-screen text were additional barriers to accessing content.

> *"I was watching football focus on BBC One and they were interviewing a Liverpool player and as a Liverpool supporter, I wanted to actually hear what he was saying, but he was doing the interview in Portuguese…and they must have just put subtitles up, which is no good to me. There's no sense of voicing over…reading out what he was saying would have been beneficial…and this often happens on the news as well."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

> *"That's what I like about the audio description they do on Netflix, they will have the audio description also translate the foreign language but only if there are subtitles for it…or they will actually employ other voice actors to dub over the foreign language parts, so you'll have the audio description, and then two other people…who will actually be dubbing the other characters but it's done as part of the full audio described service rather than a full dub."*
>
> M, blind, 69, South West

Participants wanted greater provision of audio description on documentaries, dramas, comedy, and televised events of national importance.

Participants acknowledged that it may not be necessary to audio describe certain types of programmes such as the news, weather, chat/magazine shows, interviews/debates, stand-up comedy or game shows, but that descriptions could be integrated into the programme instead (as a workaround) – for example, by presenters reading out on-screen information. Many of them did not deem it necessary to audio describe live sports programmes either. However, they highlighted the importance of providing good spoken and detailed commentary in its absence – of radio standard, for example.

> *"I don't really think things like the six o'clock news for example needs [audio description]. I don't really know how you would describe it."*
>
> M, blind, hard-of-hearing, 70, London

"Audio description on a lot of quizzes (like University Challenge) it's not really required so they're paying lip service to it when it's actually unnecessary...don't give us tokenism AD, The Chase is another one."

M, blind, 72, London

"It would be nice if we could get more of a fuller commentary [for live sport], or at least have the option of having a more fuller commentary like you would on the radio so then I don't have [to turn the radio on] when I'm with friends and family and watching sports... it would be nice if that was there."

F, blind, 39, London

Genres of programmes where participants said they would like to see greater provision included documentaries, dramas, and sitcoms – which involve scene changes, action, and/or multiple character appearances. Participants also expected televised events of national importance (for example, the Queen's funeral and the King's Coronation) to be audio described.

"I really wish they had done Michael Palin Around the World in 80 days and all the other ones he did with audio description because that would be amazing."

F, blind, 37, South West

"I would say it's going to be programmes like dramas, films, nature programmes which are really important to have the descriptions."

F, partially sighted, 43, South West

"I also think we don't do nearly enough live description of live things like national events, I mean, how we did not describe the Queen's funeral I do not know but we should have done as they did for the coronation."

M, blind, 43, London

Some concerns were raised that greater provision of audio described content might come at the expense of quality.

Whilst most participants argued for greater provision, there were some concerns that increasing the quantity of audio described content could come at the expense of quality. The concern focused on the likelihood that increased provision would require a higher number of skilled audio describers and the possibility that additional audio describers might not have the capacity to deliver the same quality audio description as the existing pool of audio describers.

> *"The only worry would be if there's no longer that high quality experienced set of people [doing audio description] … I can see more people having to be added to that pool if there's going to be a lot more content with audio description."*
>
> M, partially sighted, 39, Yorkshire and the Humber

3.4.2. General perceptions of quality

Many participants observed that the use of different audio describers, both within and across different services, meant that the quality could vary.

Participants were generally satisfied with the quality of audio description across services – believing it to have improved across broadcast TV and VoD services in recent years. Nevertheless, many noted that the use of different audio describers by content providers meant that the quality could often vary even within the same service.

> *"It's difficult to be specific to services, because you get variation in quality within services – I mean for instance BBC…I would say the quality is good but…there are occasions where whoever wrote the script for audio description that day wasn't overly enthusiastic."*
>
> M, blind, 69 South West

3.4.3. Frustrations with the quality of audio description

Participants mentioned that the following factors made it difficult to follow audio description, which in turn, could disrupt their engagement with a programme.

Audibility of the audio describer – This was the most widely reported frustration amongst participants within and across relevant cohorts, with many highlighting that there was often an imbalance between the sound levels of the audio describer and the programme's soundtrack. This meant that the audio description could be too loud compared to spoken dialogue or ambient sounds in the programme or vice versa.

> *"The only complaint I have, I suppose, an observation…that sometimes the volume of the AD is not consistent – sometimes it's very loud. It's louder than the dialogue on the play or the drama we're listening to and other times it can be very soft and quiet and there's no way to control it."*
>
> M, blind, 72, London

> *"…the audio description sometimes isn't loud enough to get over the combination of background music, background noises…some content providers have it set so that the volume of the programme automatically drops but some don't…I've noticed this particular problem on Sky programmes…in order to hear the audio describer you have to turn the TV up even louder so it can penetrate."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

Being able to clearly hear both the audio description and main soundtrack of a programme was particularly important for those with dual-sensory loss who used audio description. Some participants, including those from other cohorts, suggested that, as technology develops, this issue could be resolved by allowing users to adjust the sound levels of the audio description in addition to the programme's soundtrack. They also spoke of the possibility of delivering audio description through headphones as a workaround for watching television with others who do not need or want to use audio description.

> *"I find it quite frustrating that the person [doing audio description] won't necessarily be audible above the music or the dialogue…it's really really difficult to follow so I end up turning the volume up [to hear the audio description] and holding [my device] from my ear."*
>
> F, blind, hard-of-hearing, 65, South East

> *"I would love to have that facility as a norm…I mean when you're in a family setting, you want to be like everyone else in that family…you have Bluetooth headphones now, really you should have the facility to adjust the volume of the AD. That would come under my top five requests."*
>
> M, blind, 72, London

Misidentifying characters' names – A number of participants observed that audio describers sometimes got characters' names wrong or confused – particularly on programmes where participants had learnt to recognise characters' voices e.g. soaps or dramas.

> *"I was actually watching something yesterday, and they kept on giving the character the wrong name so whether it's because there's a faster turnaround on TV than films, but you know… it's quite a regular occurrence on TV – some of the character's names to be wrong."*
>
> M, blind, 54, South East

> *"I've even noticed [on certain shows] they'll say the wrong name – sometimes you think 'that's not the right name?' I know it's not. I know human beings can make mistakes."*
>
> F, blind, 64, South West

Audio description masking dialogue – Some participants mentioned that, in some instances, audio description can overlap with the spoken dialogue in a programme. However, they noted that this happened very rarely on broadcast TV or VoD services they watch.

> *"Sometimes the audio description will cut out the dialogue…so I might miss the end of a sentence of what the actor says."*
>
> F, blind, 39, London

> *"As for the audio describer going over the dialogue…it's very rare in this country that this happens. I know in the US it sometimes there is a bit of clashing with the audio description and dialogue."*
>
> M, blind, 54, South East

3.4.4. Specific preferences

The following section provides insight into participants' specific preferences for different elements of audio description such as voices and tone, level of detail, and audio introductions. To explore these preferences, participants were asked specific questions about each of these elements and played several clips demonstrating different approaches.

Voices and tone

Participants wanted the accents of audio describers to be aligned with the actors, genre, and context of a programme but felt that comprehensibility should be prioritised.

In terms of voice and tone, participants considered clear diction of the audio describer to be most important. They also felt that it was important for audio description to be delivered in an unobtrusive and sensitive way and relevant to the genre of the programme.

Generally, participants preferred listening to British accents in audio description. Some explained that they found these easier to follow as they were more familiar with or better understood their intonations, expressions, and the way they pronounced certain words. However, most participants did consider it acceptable and more appropriate for audio describers' accents to match those of the actors in the programme and/or its language/context where possible. They did stress however, that these accents must be comprehensible.

> *"I was watching a film on Netflix with audio description on…and it was very American…that's quite interesting, the different phrases and you think what do they mean? It is a different tone… we're a bit more reserved, and conservative in the way we describe."*
>
> F, partially sighted, 43, South West

> *"In general, I tend to prefer neutral British accents or English movies but if it's an American movie I would think it's perfectly legitimate to have an American audio describer."*
>
> M, blind, 72, London

> *"I think my first priority is getting a good audio describer and then if the audio describer happens to have a Mancunian accent to fit the Mancunian of the character… if the programme is set in Britain or the programme is set in America, it may be easier for the audio describer to do the job if they are from that country because they have a greater sense of cultural norms…. I don't think it matters so long as you can be understood…clear voice, clear diction, clearly spoken and you speak correctly as well."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

Participants felt that the tone of audio description should not be dull or monotone, but not overly expressive to the extent that it detracts from programme's content.

Most participants felt that, in general, the tone of the audio description should also reflect the genre and mood of the programme, for example by adding lightness of touch, empathy, emotion, or seriousness where appropriate. Some participants also felt that the tone should reflect the age of the programme's intended audience. For example, a more expressive or animated tone might be more appropriate for children's programmes.

> *"Because if I'm watching something to do with comedy, and the voice is very serious, I don't feel connected again, and if it's something serious, and the person is doing it in a fun way then I don't like it."*
>
> M, blind, 32, London

> *"There are certain kinds of films where the extra intonation is not a bad thing."*
>
> M, partially sighted, 39, Yorkshire & the Humber

> *"There's this audio describer for children's programmes. And she's very excitable when she audio describes things, which I think for the children is fine. But as an adult, it's not necessary."*
>
> M, blind, 60, London

However, in terms of the tone of audio description, the broad preference was for a happy medium between neutrality and expressiveness. Whilst participants felt that the tone should not be dull or monotone, neither should it be overly enthusiastic or expressive – to the extent that it draws attention to itself or detracts from the programme's content.

> *"The AD felt really jarred…once you start letting some degree of creativity come, someone will take that too far and will produce an AD track that is diverting from the content rather than adding an accessible layer – that is connecting me to the content in its original form."*
>
> M, partially sighted, colour blind, 29, Scotland

> *"It can't be too expressive because it takes away from the art of the actors…it can steal the show. Leave that to the actors."*
>
> M, blind, 72, London

> *"The audio describer is not a character, the audio describer is not a performer, there is audio description that is creative – but to me it shouldn't be creative but a way of conveying those visual aspects. I want to be given the tools to make up my own mind about something."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

Participants expressed a broad preference for the same audio describer to be used across episodes of TV series, although this could depend on whether they liked their audio description style or not.

In general, participants expressed a preference for the same audio describers to be used across episodes of a series, where possible. Many valued familiarity and consistency with the audio describers used by certain services, and often considered it disruptive when new or different audio describers were used within the same TV series.

> *"It's amazing how irritating it is when it changes from season to season…sometimes you watch a show and the next season, it's somebody else new like why?…Because you get familiar with that voice. You get familiar with the way of what they're describing. I like the consistency."*
>
> F, blind, 39, London

> *"I've become quite familiar with it because he's been doing it for at least a year now [Coronation Street]. They used to have a variety of audio describers doing it, which sometimes was a bit disruptive but the problem with having just one person do it is audio description is very individual…one person's voice will be liked by one person then hated by another."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

However, some participants noted that the use of the same describer across a TV series would have its downsides if they were dissatisfied with the style or tone of their audio description. They argued that in some

cases, it could prevent them from further watching or engaging with the rest of a series on a TV channel or VoD service.

> *"You know, there was an audio describer, unfortunately it was a one with loads of episodes and I found it very difficult to listen to her. We all have preferences for voices."*
>
> M, blind, 72, London

Participants were generally opposed to the use of synthetic voices for audio description. However, many said they would accept its use for specific genres of programmes and if quality was ensured.

There have been developments in technology to support the production of audio description in recent years, such as the use of computer-generated synthetic voices.

Participants were asked if they had knowingly come across computer generated synthetic voices for audio description before. Some confirmed that they had previously noticed use of synthetic voices on certain programmes, but had negative reactions, believing it to be cold and lacking emotional inflection. Although participants acknowledged recent improvements in synthesised voices, there was general opposition to their use, with almost everyone spontaneously expressing a preference for human voices.

> *"I don't know why Amazon have this fascination with using a computer generated reader…if you try and watch the Big Bang Theory, it's not a real person, it's worse than a screen reader and we've all grown up with screen readers…there's no emotion… it has no inflection, it's just cold…that was particularly bad, I like synthetic voices but in that context it's a little bit grating…I'd rather not have it, it's just not pleasant."*
>
> F, blind, 37, South West

> *"When Netflix first introduced Narcos…I switched it off less than a minute in because it used a synthetic voice…it was disgusting. I'm pretty sure they've updated it and it does have a human voice now…I know when a video isn't using a real person… if any fully sighted person is choosing to cheap out on a synthetic voice and thinks that we don't know the difference, it should be us making that decision."*
>
> M, partially sighted, colour blind, 29, Scotland

Many participants also drew attention to their need to rely on synthetic voices when using screen readers on a daily basis and did not want this exposure to be increased via synthetic audio description. While they could tolerate listening to synthetic voices in specific contexts e.g. when using their screen readers to access emails, documents, or certain audio books, they felt that listening to human voices in audio description made for a more enjoyable experience of watching programmes. They felt that human voices, in contrast to synthetic ones, were more engaging as they have more natural intonations, and can convey emotions better.

> *"I spend most of my day listening to synthetic speech…whether I use my computer, on my mobile phone, or when I use my tablet…like when I'm chilling out I want to relax, I don't want to listen to that."*
>
> F, blind, 39, London

> *"The thing about this is I listen to synthetic speech all day, every day – while I'm using my computer, I get emails read out by Jaws, I get documents read out by Jaws, my screen reader…when I watch the telly I don't want to listen to synthetic voice. I want to listen to real humans interacting with real humans being described by a real human."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

Participants were then played a short clip of a synthetic voice for audio description from a magazine programme. Participants generally felt that the tone of the audio description was monotonous and detracted from their experience of the content. However, there was some understanding that, for magazine programmes such as this one, use of synthetic voices may be less objectionable than it would be for films or dramas.

> *"I don't like it [synthetic voice used in the magazine programme clip], and it would draw my attention immediately for the wrong reasons because the intonation is just wrong, it doesn't sound natural. And sometimes the words kind of sound oddly placed like they kind of run into each other almost."*
>
> F, blind, 36, Scotland

> *"Less pleasant to listen to definitely…but what's interesting is that's daytime sort of telly, it's something that has a narrator already…it's sort of factual…it's definitely not as bad as [a programme like] Narcos because it isn't a drama type programme."*
>
> M, partially sighted, 39, Scotland

When participants were asked if they would support the use of synthetic audio description if it allowed broadcasters to provide more programmes with audio description, many explained that they could accept its use – but only if certain conditions were met. Participants would accept synthetic audio description as long as there was increased availability of audio described programmes across broadcast TV and VoD series. However, they felt that the use of synthetic audio description was only appropriate for specific genres of programme, such as news, certain documentaries and magazine shows. Many participants also highlighted that they would only accept its use on the condition that there would be a high level of quality, i.e., more detailed descriptions, with appropriate intonations, correct pronunciations of words and use of voices that were natural and as close to human as possible.

> *"I think for factual programmes it would be okay…it might also be useful for live events, like a news programme where you have information on screen – that could go to synthetised speech…so factual things, documentaries, that would be fine…As long as they didn't substitute it for quality."*
>
> M, blind, 69, South West

> *"I think I prefer a human voice but I'd just like to have that level of detail…if it had a synthetic voice then I would accept it."*
>
> F, blind, hard-of-hearing, 65, South East

> *"Perhaps, I could accept audio description being of the highest quality of synthetic voices on programmes like this but not on a drama, soap, emergency medics or where you've got human things going on, you do need an appropriate tone of voice and inflection with that."*
>
> M, partially sighted, 29, Scotland

Feelings against using synthetic voices were strongest in relation to dramas, films, or certain documentaries that require emotional inflection or visual aspects to be described in a sensitive way. However, there was also a social dimension to participants' opposition of its use – with many not wishing to displace human audio describers.

> *"I would support it in only very limited contexts, I wouldn't want it for dramas, I wouldn't want it for soaps, I wouldn't want it for anything requiring sensitivity – maybe more science ones…but honestly I'm*

not in the business of doing humans out of jobs to make the lives of TV companies easier, they ought to be employing audio describers."

M, blind, 43, London

"If it meant more programmes will be audio described, that would be really good…but obviously you don't want to put audio describers out of a job but if it means they can afford it or don't have the budget for certain programmes."

F, partially sighted, 43, South West

Level of detail

Participants considered the level of detail in audio description to be important for quality, with many preferring descriptions that fully reflect the key visual elements of a programme.

Some audio descriptions are more detailed than others. Generally, participants considered that better quality audio description consisted of richer and more detailed descriptions, such as character names, appearances and body language, settings/locations, on-screen information and actions, colours, emotions, and facial expressions. It is important to note that descriptions of these aspects were not only valued by participants who used audio description in the sight and dual-sensory loss cohorts, but also those in the cognitive cohort. For instance, one participant with autism said they needed emotions and facial expressions to be described to help them pick up on social cues, while another participant spoke of using audio description when they got migraines and could not focus on the screen, and so needed on-screen information and actions to be described.

More generally, participants noted that, for certain genres of programmes, notably documentaries, dramas, comedy and films, descriptions of such visual elements and actions were crucial to understanding key aspects of a programme such as the context, plot, and/or characters.

"There were things I miss because I can't see the detail and because I can't see contrast very well…I miss an awful lot of small gestures that are made in films, small actions, facial expressions…when something is described really well, it gives colour, it gives what she's doing, what the expressions are…the audio description seemed to tail off halfway through …like what are they wearing?"

F, partially sighted, 43, South West

However, at the same time, participants acknowledged that there was not always time to provide detailed audio description between spoken dialogue and scene changes – especially for programmes that were more fast-paced or dialogue heavy. They also observed that certain programmes could over-describe or include unnecessary audio description. For example, the audio describer could either repeat what they had already described or describe aspects that could otherwise be obtained from listening directly to the programme's soundtrack (e.g. door slams, gun shots).

> *"I would in some cases prefer to have it than not but something like that like a comedy or 'Friends' it's great to have audio description but actually there's not much time to say very much, you've probably sussed out what they're doing anyway like does it matter that they've put a cup of coffee down?... There's a time and place for detail...I've come out of the cinema tired where they've told you a lot of stuff, you're having to process a lot of stuff which visually you would get in one eye sweep."*
>
> M, blind, 69, South East

> *"Try not to tell me things that I can pick up from the dialogue or the soundscape....For example, don't tell me David knocks on Roy's door, because I can hear David knocking on the door and then I can hear David speaking...You could say, David approaches a brown door with number 27 on it – that's information that I wouldn't get when I hear the knock and open 'Hello, David' – I know it's Roy. Tell me things I can't work out for myself. Don't tell me things that I can work out...you can't describe everything because there isn't time."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

Many participants spontaneously singled out examples of where they found that the quality and level of detail of audio description had been better. They considered these examples better as the audio descriptions included descriptions of the scenery/setting, character appearances (including of clothing and diversity characteristics), on-screen actions, and facial expressions. In contrast, participants often described less detailed examples as being 'lack lustre' – due to long gaps not being audio described or a failure to audio describe physical surroundings, character appearances, or identify characters by name.

> *"I used to watch Daredevil on Netflix...he plays his normal persona Matt Murdock who is a blind lawyer and they even described the fact that he walks inside the building, he is using a white cane but it has a red tip on it which is a nice little touch as his daredevil outfit is red...in my experience BBC's are less descriptive, ITV is a bit more... I like to hear the scenery, what the room or surroundings are like, if there's time and if it adds to the atmosphere of the programme."*

M, blind, 69, South West

"I'd give (Netflix) a bouquet if you like...the detail that their main audio describers give you tends to give you quite a lot of detail – and even if something is fast moving, they seem to be able to cover it."

M, blind, 72, London

"The audio description was appalling – you had to infer or guess the setting. The description was behind the actual scene, and it was either seconds behind or out of such large portions with no description."

F, deafblind, 58, Wales

To further explore participants' preferences on level of detail, two clips were presented, each with a different approach to audio description; one had a more detailed description of diversity characteristics than the other. Participants' reactions to these video clips were consistent with previous impressions, with the majority expressing a preference for the more detailed description. Many believed that this seemed to get the balance right between being information rich but not overly descriptive, time consuming or distracting. They were particularly appreciative of the audio describer's descriptions of the characters' appearances (including diversity characteristics), gestures, and their physical surroundings.

"[I thought that was good...it was describing the characters, the surroundings, scenery and actions... [description of diversity characteristics] It wasn't gratuitous, it didn't detract at all."

M, blind, 69, South West

"[That's the sort of way I would want something described...the style of hair, the character/person...it's just another layer of description... and the high-rise blocks, you got a sense of the environment...I would watch programmes that had that level of description."

F, blind, hard-of-hearing, 65, South East

Participants wanted diversity characteristics to be described – regardless of whether these were directly relevant to the plot or not.

Participants were then asked if they had noticed the language used to describe diversity characteristics (such as ethnicity, age, body shape or gender) of people on-screen when watching programmes before. They were also asked what they had thought of the language used to describe characters' appearances in the more detailed clip.

It was evident that participants considered descriptions of diversity characteristics (such as ethnicity, body shape, gender, and disability) to play a particularly important role in the level of description they were looking for, regardless of whether these details were perceived as directly relevant to the plot. Many felt that describing such characteristics was important for highlighting the diversity of cast members on TV.

> *"To me it's only important if it matters in the storyline but sometimes it's out of curiosity…not the storyline…I might just want to know what this character looks like, what their ethnicity is…because I guess it is nice to know that information…it helps in social aspects [if people are talking about people's visual appearance]."*
>
> F, blind, 39, London

> *"I've discovered recently with all the social media and 'Me Too' movement and 'Black Lives Matter' – the highlighting of minorities that I probably had no idea whether I was watching something with a white cast or an all black cast…it's not that it didn't ever bother me but I would like to see more representation from minorities."*
>
> F, blind, 37, South West

Many participants felt that the exclusion of diversity characteristics from audio description could also make them feel less connected to the content. They highlighted that having descriptions of diversity characteristics not only allowed them to have an equivalent experience of the content to sighted viewers but would also improve their experience of watching and engaging with a programme more generally.

> *"It's very important to me as well that Ofcom and this country does rightly focus on diversity and representation on screen and therefore if audio description doesn't provide that insight, then we're not to know so I do like that being there…if I'm not told I'm not normalised to it, I could misunderstand or not appreciate these things…my eyes are not open to diversity in television."*

"Sometimes as a person listening you can tell by the accent, but you can never be totally certain. I feel that we need to have the same information as someone sighted watching that screen…the audio describer is only describing what a sighted person is seeing."

M, blind, 72, London

Many participants considered that it would be easier to get the level of detail right if audio description was treated as an integral part of the programme's production from the outset.

Many participants urged service providers and programme makers to consider audio description early in the production process rather than afterwards. They felt that treating audio description as an integral part of the production process would mean that audio describers would have a better understanding of the objectives of the programme's plot and the artistic choices made by the programme or film maker. They believed that this would make it easier for audio describers to identify and understand aspects of the content which need to be reflected in the audio description. They felt that this would, in turn, significantly improve the overall quality of audio description.

"I think it would be a lot better if the programme makers commissioned them to provide audio description, which then became part of the package that was then syndicated by broadcasters because a) it would mean once a film or television programme has got description, it would have it wherever it was broadcast but the other advantage is…the programme makers have got all of the production information available to them so the audio describers could actually have a copy of the actual script, or the camera directions, and stuff like this."

M, blind, 69, South West

Participants also felt that the quality of audio description would be enhanced if there was time to obtain feedback from different types of users of the access service before the programme airs.

"I do think that one shout out is that TV production people need to give more time for audio describers, it would be great if there was enough time for the audio describer to be able to work with a blind person to help improve the audio description before it goes out."

M, blind, 43, London

> *"You can always listen to the feedback from the people that are benefitting mainly from it."*
>
> M, blind, 72, London

Audio introductions

Many participants supported the use of audio introductions – but only for specific genres of programmes, and as an additional feature.

Given there is sometimes limited space available to provide descriptions between spoken dialogue and scene changes in programmes, we explored participants' attitudes towards audio introductions (which are often used in theatre performances). Audio introductions are short narrations given before a piece of content to describe the most important visual elements of a programme. As an example, participants were played a character introduction from a programme on YouTube[26].

Many supported its use, but as an additional feature and for specific genres of programmes with recurring characters such as TV series, dramas, and soaps. Some participants also liked that the programme's actor voiced their own character introduction in the example played, allowing them to form a connection between the character's voice and their physical description.

> *"I thought that was excellent especially if it's going to be a long series or episode...it really was good...particularly for dramas where they play four episodes in a row."*
>
> M, blind, 72, London

> *"I quite liked that it was the individual giving their description...it wasn't an audio describer...that is that person's experience which is more important than somebody else making an assumption on how they perceive that person...if I was watching this with family, that intro wouldn't just be for my benefit, they're gaining from it as well."*
>
> F, blind, 39, London

---

[26] Audio introduction from ITV's Trigger Point

However, some participants said they would prefer audio introductions to focus primarily on physical and diversity characteristics, rather than contextual information they could otherwise pick up when listening to the programme's soundtrack. They also believed that these descriptions did not need to be excessive and should not result in less detailed audio description being provided in programmes.

> *"Don't tell me about you know, this person is that person's boss and they've been in a relationship because I'll get that from the show. Tell me what you look like, what you're wearing, the kind of clothes, the jewellery – give me that information because there won't be time for that in the performance."*
>
> M, blind, 43, London

> *"If a programme can't tell me that as part of the action, then it's not doing its job. I don't think I need to have access to information that the average viewer wouldn't…for a soap kind of thing maybe. I think as a separate service, not as part of broadcast, useful as a resource in addition to a programme… you press the red button or something."*
>
> M, blind, 69, South West

3.5. Signing

This chapter explores participants' perceptions of the quantity and quality of signed programmes across broadcast TV and their catch-up services, including participants' frustrations when viewing signing. It also provides insight into their specific preferences for different elements of signing.

It is important to note that there are two types of signed programmes:

Sign-interpreted programmes, in which a signer is visible on the side or corner of the screen and interprets the dialogue into sign-language

Sign-presented programmes, in which all the characters and presenters in a programme use sign-language. Well-known examples include the BBC's See Hear and BSL Zone programmes

For context, under current broadcast accessibility requirements, television broadcast services with the largest audiences need to provide 5% of their content with sign-interpretation, while other broadcasters with

smaller audiences have the option to provide sign-presented content or provide funding to the British Sign Language Broadcasting Trust (BSL Zone).

Summary

- Overall, participants wanted greater provision of both sign-presented and sign-interpreted content across broadcast TV and VoD services, in addition to wanting to see greater representation of the Deaf community on-screen. Many expressed a clear preference for sign-presented programmes, as they did not need to focus on a sign-interpreter in the corner of the screen and because they believed the signing quality to be better than sign-interpretation.

- Across content on broadcast TV and VoD services, participants generally used subtitles. However, for certain genres, such as news and current affairs, there was a preference for sign-interpretation.

- Participants expressed frustration about quality. This related to the clarity, accuracy, and synchronisation of the signing to the programme content, as well as to the visibility of the signer on-screen. In particular, participants noted the importance of balancing the size of the signer with the programme's picture and subtitling positioning while ensuring that the signer's facial expressions, body language, and signing gestures could still be easily viewed.

3.5.1. General preferences for signing

Most participants generally preferred watching sign-presented programmes to sign-interpreted ones.

Almost every participant in this cohort watched sign-presented programmes on the BSL Zone and some spoke of watching BBC's See Hear programme, while most used sign-interpretation on certain mainstream programmes across broadcast TV channels and their catch-up (BVoD) services, where available.

Participants were asked about their general preferences for sign-interpreted and sign-presented programmes. Most of them preferred watching sign-presented programmes as they appreciated that the use of sign-language was more integrated with content compared to sign-interpreted ones. In contrast to sign-presented programmes, the use of signing in sign-interpretation is separated from what is happening on the rest of the screen. This requires the viewer to simultaneously focus on the programme's picture and the sign-interpreter in the corner of the screen – which many participants often found onerous or difficult to do.

Many participants also considered the quality of the signing in sign-presented programmes to be generally superior to that of sign-interpretation, believing it to be clearer, less formal as well as more entertaining and engaging (see section 3.5.3). They also liked that sign-presented programmes were usually presented by Deaf people or members of the Deaf community which allowed them to see their culture and community reflected on screen.

> *"[My preference] would be the sign-presented option because…if there's an in-vision interpreter [in the corner of the screen] …then you're watching the interpreter and then the show – it becomes more work."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

> *"I think with signers in the corner, they're translators but they are not presenters whereas sign presenters…they know how to be really engaging, it's much more entertaining…the clarity is very good…I prefer captions or BSL presented than translated [sign-interpreted]."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 35, London

> *"The quality is always better on the BSL Zone because it's delivered in my first language. Obviously, we're from the same world and same culture so it's easy for me to access that….On the whole [sign-interpretation] is okay. My preference would be to watch a sign-presented programme such as BSL Zone…and a hearing programme with subtitles."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 29, London

While subtitles were preferred for most types of mainstream content, there was a stronger preference for sign-interpretation for certain genres such as the news, current affairs, and certain documentaries.

Some participants preferred to rely on subtitles instead of sign-interpretation in circumstances where this ensured greater accuracy or where the quality was otherwise better than the quality of the sign-interpretation. However, for many, reliance on using subtitles reflected the insufficient provision of sign-interpreted programmes across broadcast TV channels and VoD services.

Preferences for sign-interpretation also depended on the genre of programme participants watched. For example, amongst many participants, including those whose native language was BSL, preferences for using

sign-interpretation were less pronounced for certain genres of programmes in which there were multiple characters speaking or the dialogue or action was fast-paced, such as in comedy, films, TV series and dramas. For these types of programmes, participants often preferred to rely on subtitling instead as sign-interpretation could require more viewer concentration in situations where they would want to pay closer attention to the programme's picture or action on-screen. They also considered that sign-interpretation was often more formal and less naturally expressive than sign-presentation. For mainstream programmes in which emotional content and expression are central (such as in dramas, comedy, films, and TV series), they also expressed a preference for relying on subtitles instead.

> *"I don't have the options for an interpreter so I use the subtitles for everything…I don't think I'd choose an interpreter for a horror film, I would just watch the film…I think maybe if you have a comedy show…the interpreter is almost trying to sell the joke in a different way and that can be difficult…when it's comedy, I prefer subtitles because that means I can see the comedian, that joke, that interaction, the meaning…sometimes with interpreters it can lose the meaning. I don't like the interpreter trying to sell the person's joke."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

> *"I'm not sure an interpreter would work well for a drama or soap because I don't know who's speaking. It's all just coming from the same person, and as much as they have to shift and become that person it's even more difficult to tell who they are. That's why captions are really useful because when a different person is talking on screen, the colour of the caption changes so you know it's that character."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 54, West Midlands

> *"If there is a lot of speaking and a lot going on, I'll rely on the other [subtitles] instead of signing."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 29, London

Participants' need and preference for sign-interpretation (as compared to only subtitles), however, was more pronounced for mainstream programmes covering current events or complex topics such as in the news, current affairs, certain documentaries, interviews, or debates. For these types of programmes, participants often found it more difficult to rely on subtitles only. Sign-interpretation better enabled them to overcome any barriers to comprehension created by the use of English, including any jargon (English not always being their first language). Being able to better comprehend content also enabled them to better engage in peer

discussions of the topics covered. They also considered that the formality of sign-interpretation (compared to sign-presentation) was a strong point when it came to news or other programmes with a clear factual content (and a corresponding audience interest in fully absorbing that factual content).

> *"For me, personally, it's just having [BSL] access for the BBC news or ITV news with an interpreter just because it's real-life world problems going on. With a TV programme or film having a BSL interpreter isn't a priority for me."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 39, London

> *"Most of the time I use subtitles, but I do like having an in-vision sign [interpreter] especially when it's linked to political issues because sometimes the concepts are a bit more complex. The jargon and the English might be a bit difficult to understand so I like having the BSL interpreter there…the important thing is that it's accessible – if it's not then I have absolutely no engagement with it, I can't enjoy it. I can't keep up with current affairs and it just means that if that accessibility isn't there, I'm not able to engage in peer discussions of current events."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), sight loss, 23, Yorkshire and the Humber

> *"If the translator [interpreter] comes in…they are quite formal and it's like perfect for BBC, you know for the updates, Covid, all that serious stuff."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

Some participants did acknowledge that individual needs and preferences for sign-interpretation would vary amongst Deaf audiences. For example, they noted that other Deaf people in their communities had varying levels of fluency in English, and that British Sign Language was their first language or preferred form of communication. This meant that they would not be able to substitute signing for subtitles alone. For this reason, they highlighted that sign-interpretation would allow such users to better follow and enjoy mainstream and popular programmes made in other languages, including English.

> *"My friends who are Deaf, profoundly Deaf, their English isn't very good so they do prefer sign language …for me I understand English so subtitles are fine but it depends and varies on each Deaf person and what their preferences are."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 40, London

> *"It is difficult. I think I watch more the subtitles than the sign language interpreter. My father [who is also Deaf] would prefer to watch more of the interpreter than the subtitles so it's different."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 30, London

3.5.2. Quantity/provision

Participants expressed frustration that sign-interpreted programmes were typically broadcast in the early hours of the morning and uploaded late to TV channels' catch-up services.

Some participants said they did not bother watching sign-interpreted content as it was often broadcast on TV channels at times when they were unlikely to be watching i.e. in the early hours of the morning. While some of them were able to record these programmes on their TV sets as a workaround, others implied they were not able to do so. Additionally, some participants expressed frustration when such sign-interpreted programmes were uploaded late to BVoD services after they had been broadcast on live TV.

> *"Sometimes they are on late at night so I might have to record them."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 60, East of England

> *"When they do have an interpreter on other programmes, they're at 2 in the morning and that kind of thing…I'm not going to wake up at 3 in the morning to watch an interpreter. Interpreter provision is very small for television."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

> *"The interpreter is only used on live, so if you've missed it and you want to go on catch up it's not there. It's only the subtitles so you haven't got that full access."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 30, London

Some participants expressed frustration at the failure to sign-interpret important televised briefings.

Some participants spoke about being unable to fully access or understand important information during the Covid 19 pandemic and referred to a lack of in-room interpretation by the UK Government (compared to e.g. the Scottish government).

> *"There was a lot of confusion for Deaf people at the beginning of the pandemic."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 60, East of England

> *"Through Covid there was a lot of really important information that I wanted to know, and I wanted to see but couldn't get access to."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 54, West Midlands

Most participants argued for greater provision of signed content across broadcast TV channels and VoD services.

Most participants particularly wanted to see greater provision of sign-presented content across the board, not only on the BSL Zone or the BBC's See Hear programme, but also on mainstream TV channels and services. Participants wanted to see greater representation of their community and language on-screen, and felt that this would allow for a more instant and immersive experience of the content (as they would not need to focus on the sign-interpreter in the corner of the screen). They also wanted to see a greater variety of sign-presented programme genres being produced and broadcast. In addition, some felt that such providers should consult audiences when deciding which types of programmes to sign-present.

> *"It would be nice to see more variation, I don't feel there's enough content…See Hear's topics are serious…it's fantastic but it's only on air once a month and not for very long…it's very light with regards to topics, not really sad or hard-hitting [like a drama]…It would be nice to have BSL on mainstream, rather than on a programme about woodcarving for example. We should be able to pick and choose what we watch. It would be nice to have more Deaf representation within programmes as well. That might be something that they would have to work with BSL Zone on to make sure that BSL Zone becomes part of the mainstream options on TV."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 54, West Midlands

> *"I think I ultimately would like to have more sign-presented programmes because then the person that I'm looking at who is presenting the programme is using my language and signing at me rather than me looking at the people on screen and then at the interpreter in the corner."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 23, Yorkshire & the Humber

Participants also wanted to see greater provision of sign-interpreted programmes, particularly on VoD services, including programmes on BVoD services after they had been broadcast on their TV channel. Alongside greater provision, they also wanted to see greater consistency in terms of the quality and how sign-interpretation is delivered. However, some raised concerns that greater provision might come at the expense of quality as there would be more demand for well-trained and skilled interpreters.

> *"I think particularly on catch-up TV there definitely should be [more signing] because they would have had time see that programme and do it with a signer."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 72, South West

> *"It would be nice to watch more, it would be nice to see more provision, more of the service available…also how to measure that provision to make sure it's working. Making sure we have more opportunities for Deaf people…if that expands, grows, and more people become involved – there's not enough deaf translators, same with interpreters for TV…It's important that there is training for that."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

3.5.3. General perceptions of quality

Participants' perceptions of signing quality were lower for sign-interpreted programmes compared to sign-presented ones.

Consistent with the preferences highlighted in section 3.5.1, most participants were more satisfied with the quality of signing in sign-presented programmes (as against sign-interpreted ones) believing it to be clearer, and more engaging. They considered that sign-presented programmes often involved more fluid, natural, and expressive use of sign language, making them feel more linguistically and culturally connected to the content being signed.

More generally, many participants felt that signing delivered by Deaf signers (who were more fluent in sign language) across both sign-presented programmes as well sign-interpreted ones contributed to better quality signing as they were usually able to understand the signing better.

> *"I can't really complain with the quality of the signing. I think it's because they're not translators. When it's presented it's ad-hoc and fluid."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 54, West Midlands

> *"They pick presenters that are very clear, who are Deaf themselves, they're very engaged presenters… They have smaller budgets so they can't make as exciting programmes as the mainstream can but I think they do a good job considering the budget they have."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 35, London

> *"There's a programme called Hollyoaks…the people who translate it are all Deaf interpreters and what's nice for me, I can watch Hollyoaks and the interpreter uses the same language that I would use and I feel there's a bit of a link and relationship there and the jargon…when they are Deaf it helps me connect to that programme, I feel absorbed in the programme, I can really watch it…there might be a disconnect to a hearing interpreter who is quite formal"*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

Many participants noted that the quality of sign-interpretation varied across different broadcast TV channels and their catch-up services.

With regard to sign-interpreted programmes, most participants were relatively satisfied with the quality. However, they highlighted that the quality could vary considerably across the different broadcast TV channels and BVoD services they used. Perceived differences in quality not only related to the clarity, accuracy of and synchronisation of the signing to the programme's content but also the way in which sign-interpreters were presented on-screen (i.e. how visible they were). Some participants spontaneously singled out examples where they had observed that the quality had been better than on other services.

> *"I think the quality is good, I think on every service and platform they're good, but they're just different. It's just not exactly consistent… there is no consistency in how they interpret something, how they*

present the signer. Every platform has a different way [of doing it] we've talked about BBC in-vision interpreters and All4....I think there should be a policy that governs all the different programmes or channels to follow one way of delivering this...BBC iPlayer I think the quality of their provision is very high."

F, Deaf (BSL user), sight loss, 23, Yorkshire & the Humber

"I think the BBC are very good...but others, I don't really use them as they don't have the provision or the service... The number of programmes is growing...and it's very consistent with the interpreter and subtitles. Before you may have the interpreter there covering the subtitles...but now that's not the case, you can see both. I feel like BBC is the leader of this."

M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

"Some interpreters are very skilled...I think it's because [they] summarise the information rather than signing it verbatim. [They have] a different style and can translate it to a high level. I can see that by watching [them] on screen."

F, Deaf (BSL user), 54, West Midlands

3.5.4. Frustrations with the quality of signing

Participants mentioned that the following factors made it difficult to follow signed content.

Poor synchronisation of sign-interpretation – Many participants expressed frustration when sign-interpretation was not synchronised to the dialogue in a programme as well as to the subtitles. They noted that sign-interpretation was sometimes delivered too late after spoken dialogue or a scene change which could make it difficult to follow or keep up with the narrative of a programme. This issue, however, appeared to be more prevalent in dialogue-heavy or fast-paced programmes. Some participants urged for interpreters to provide a more fluid or a summarised interpretation of the content where necessary, so that they could obtain information at the same time as other viewers.

"Most of the time I'm finding that they're trying to keep up with the programme itself, occasionally the person will be gone onto something else, and then the signing comes up."

M, Deaf (BSL user), 72, South West

> *"I can lip read them saying 'Hello, how are you?' and I can tell that the sign language interpreter is late and that there's quite a big-time lag so if I look at the interpreter, they're not always matching the screen."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 39, London

> *"Like Question Time, the speed of everyone talking and the debates can be very very fast so the lag between the interpreting can be quite far."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), sight loss, 23, Yorkshire & the Humber

Sign-interpretation being unclear or failing to reflect the content accurately or fully – Many participants observed that the sign-interpretation on certain programmes could be unclear and not accurately reflect the content. They noted that sign-interpreters sometimes failed to use techniques to indicate whose speech they were interpreting, translate sound effects, or speakers' intonations and emotions – all of which they considered crucial for understanding the narrative or plot of a programme.

> *"I struggle to understand what they are saying, the signing is just not clear, it's the equivalent of mumbling in sign language…they don't role shift where you make subtle movements with your body, so you know who is talking. Some of them are so bad at it, that it's like this one long stream of monologue, and you just don't know who's talking and who's saying what…or they are not very expressive…so the quality varies quite a bit."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 35, London

> *"It might be that one interpreter doesn't sign everything in the programme…While there's other interpreters, who will even sign the sound so for example, if there's a bell ringing, they'll sign that, whereas [the other] person doesn't so it's that inconsistency."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 27, North West

> *"It's a bit like a storyteller…some people will sell that story really well with their voice and intonation, and that becomes very interesting, but the other person could be very monotone and flat…It's the same premise with interpreters."*

Understanding certain regional accents / signs - It should be noted that within British Sign Language, there are many regional dialects (or signs). This did present challenges in terms of full comprehension for certain participants who said they mostly encountered these difficulties when watching sign-presented programmes or content delivered by Deaf signers. Some spoke of using subtitles to clarify their understanding of certain regional signs.

> *"Deaf presenters will use regional signs whereas hearing interpreters will use more general signs…some Deaf presenters are extremely difficult to pick up because they use very little lip pattern and some Deaf people sign extremely fast, whereas interpreters will pace themselves a bit… the most difficult is Northern Ireland – that is really difficult to pick up."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 60, East of England

> *"It's clear and I'd say it's good quality [of sign presented programmes]. There can be different regional variations but if you have the captions too, it's fully accessible."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 39, London

However, some participants did appreciate that different regional signs could reflect the regional context of a programme as well as the linguistic variety and diversity within sign language.

> *"I think it's important for any programmes that have a cultural theme to reflect that accurately in the signing because it would allow a deaf person from Liverpool to watch it and be like 'yes that's my sign, that's a programme where I'm from'."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), sight loss, 23, Yorkshire & the Humber

Sign-interpreters lacking knowledge or proficiency – Some participants felt that they were able to spot when a signer had not prepared for an interpreting assignment or lacked proficiency, training, or knowledge of a programme's topic. Many of them highlighted the importance of preparation and ensuring that the interpreters were appropriately qualified to use sign-language and communicate it on TV.

> *"Sometimes when they bring in an interpreter, the interpreters don't have deep knowledge of the topics being discussed or they don't know the background of the programme and they might not be experts in*

> *the topic that's being discussed…I think it would be much better for the TV show to ensure that the interpreter who is there is more matched to the content of the show."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), sight loss, 23, Yorkshire & the Humber

> *"For me, it's making sure all the interpreters are qualified. They have to be qualified interpreters – that's important."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 40, London

Many argued that obtaining feedback on the signing from the Deaf community before broadcasting a programme would help resolve this and ensure that the signing was of high quality and easy to follow and understand.

> *"There needs to be more serious vetting in place in terms of ensuring the quality and to look at the feedback of Deaf people, like whether you are understanding this content or not because there are loads of people I talk to that are like we didn't understand this one person…They really need to monitor that in terms of what we understand…There needs to be more uniformity."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 35, London

3.5.5. Specific preferences

The following section provides insight into participants' specific preferences for the following elements of signing: the size and visibility of the signer and how the signer is presented on-screen. To explore their preferences, participants were asked specific questions about each of these elements and shown images demonstrating different approaches.

Size and visibility of the signer

Being able to easily view a signer's facial expressions, body language, and signing gestures is particularly important for BSL users.

For sign-interpreted programmes, many participants highlighted the importance of being able to easily view the signer's facial expressions, body language and signing gestures as well as the programme's main picture at the same time. Facial expressions and body language (known as non-manual features) convey descriptive

information, emotional nuances, and grammar in BSL. Being able to view all of these features alongside signing gestures not only enhances the clarity of the sign language but also users' ability to interpret the emotional tone of the dialogue more accurately.

> *"You want to be able to see the facial expressions…the facial expression during sign language is exceptionally important…with facial expression it changes the meaning of the sign, it gives you lots more information as well as the signing…facial expressions, the body language, all of that incorporates sign language."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 60, East of England

> *"It's not just about the sign language, it's also about the facial expressions, body movements, that's all part of the language and in that way the interpreter can become an actor."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, East Midlands

Many participants observed that there was a lack of consistency in the size and visibility of sign-interpreters across services, with the size being often too small, or in some cases, too large.

When determining the size of the sign-interpreter, there is a potential trade-off between ensuring that these features can be easily viewed, and not obscuring any other important visual information in the programme's picture, as well as subtitles, if they are being used.

Participants were asked what their general thoughts were on the size and visibility of sign-interpreters across the broadcast TV channels and catch-up services they used. Many noted a lack of consistency in size across services. They found that the size of the sign-interpreter was often too small on the screen, but in some cases, too large to the extent that it could detract from what was going on in the programme's main picture. Some did, however, recognise that their preferences for the size of the signer could vary depending on the type of programme they watched, or the device used to view the programme. For many, the quality of the contrast between the signer and the background on which they were displayed also represented a particularly important determinant of clarity and the ease with which the signing could be followed. One observation was that it would be advantageous if the size of the sign-interpreter could be adjusted in a manner similar to subtitle size.

> *"I don't think that they are big enough… they need to be bigger so you can see their signing and facial expressions at the same time. "*

> F, Deaf (BSL user), 60, East of England

> *"It depends on what I'm watching…if it's too big it interrupts what's going on in the film. If it's news, I'd have it small. I don't want it interfering with what's going on in the programme. I like to be able to see the visuals."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 29, London

> *"I don't know why you can't amend the settings more, you can change subtitle settings on BBC, but why can't you do it with signing? It would be good to move them around, make them bigger or smaller. "*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 35, London

Most participants expressed a preference for the sign-interpreter to be positioned outside of the programme's frame rather than overlaid on the programme.

To explore their preferences, participants were shown two images of how sign-interpreters can appear on-screen. The first one showed the signer separate to the programme (or outside of the programme picture's frame). The second showed the signer overlaid on the programme's picture. These images are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Signing Stimulus Material

Providing	Representation	Placement
Signer positioning		Bottom right-side of screen, outside of the programme's picture frame

Providing	Representation	Placement
Signer positioning		Bottom right-side of screen, inside of the programme's picture frame

A substantial majority expressed a preference for the sign-interpreter to be positioned outside of the programme's picture frame. They felt that it was easier to follow the signer if there was a plain and monochrome background behind them. Some did, however, stress that the background colour should provide sufficient contrast for the sign-interpreter to stand out and be easily viewed, including alongside subtitles. Several acknowledged that this would be particularly important for Deaf viewers with sight loss who also used signing. Most considered that the alternative approach of overlaying the sign interpreter on the programme's picture was distracting and could result in obscuring important visual elements of the programme's content.

> *"I prefer the first one [signer outside the programme's picture frame]...the background is fixed which means for me it's clearer but for the other one the background will change as the screen changes...what would happen if it changed to a black background? The interpreter would just disappear, you'd just see her face."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

> *"I prefer that one [signer outside the programme's picture frame] because it's bigger, you can see it more clearly... Whereas when they're actually in the programme, they're covering bits of the characters and the programme itself."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 30, London

A minority, however, preferred the sign-interpreter to be inside of, or overlaid on, the programme's picture. They felt that it was easier to follow the sign-interpreter if they were integrated within the picture as it avoided them having to divide their attention between the picture and the sign-interpreter.

> *"I prefer the second one [signer inside of the programme's picture frame] because you get to see more of the screen and more of the visual of what's happening. It seems more natural if the interpreter is within the motion picture. It can become difficult to follow if it's separated."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 54, West Midlands

Presentation

Most participants felt that it was particularly important for the sign-interpreters' clothing to contrast with their skin and the background they were displayed on.

Participants were asked if they had any views and preferences for how sign-interpreters present themselves across programmes. Generally, they did not express any specific preferences for how sign-interpreters present themselves - as long as there was good colour contrast between the signer's clothing, skin, and the background they were displayed on. They felt that the signer's clothing, however, should be plain and not visually distracting.

> *"I don't really have any preference in how the interpreter presents themselves as long as it's accessible – that's all that matters to me….if you see in programmes that the interpreter has the wrong colours on, the wrong colour clothing, wrong colour background, it becomes quite difficult to capture what they are signing… Normally they wear black clothes because that's what people are used to but if you turn up in colourful clothing, it's too much."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

> *"Not having too many patterns, anything that's too bright, black plain clothing is fine."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 40, London

Nevertheless, a few participants felt that the signer's clothing should reflect the genre or tone of the programme being interpreted. For example, many of them felt that it was more appropriate for interpreters to wear formal or smarter clothing for news or current affair type programmes, more casual clothing for TV series, dramas, or comedy, and more colourful clothing for children's programmes. Additionally, one participant felt that the signer's identity should reflect the topic of the programme. To improve and reflect diversity in signing, they considered it important for broadcasters to include signers from different backgrounds. This could in turn, better reflect the diversity of their audience members.

> *"Sometimes the interpreters who are doing the translation match the tone of the programme so if it's something like Question Time they'll wear something smart but if it's something like a drama it's a bit more casual…informal – if they dressed up wearing a suit it wouldn't match the tone or genre of the show."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), sight loss, 23, Yorkshire & the Humber

> *"I do think it matters [the identity of the signer] …if the programme is about race, then there should be a person of colour as an interpreter. If it's linked to women or women's rights, then they should have a woman. If it's a children's programme, you might want a younger interpreter…If it's an informal programme it would be good for the signer to match. But the interpreters do usually match the content from what I've seen. And also match the personality of whoever is speaking – reflection of character is important."*
>
> F, Deaf (BSL user), 54, West Midlands

Most participants expressed a preference for the same sign-interpreter to be used across episodes of a TV series. However, this preference depended on whether they were happy with the quality of their signing.

Like those who used audio description, participants who used sign-interpretation valued familiarity and consistency with the signers used by certain services. They expressed a broad preference for the same signers to be used across episodes of a series and considered it distracting when different signers were used within the same TV series as it meant they needed to familiarise themselves with a different signing style. However, some acknowledged that using the same sign-interpreter across episodes of a series would have its downsides if their signing was unclear or did not accurately reflect the programme's content.

> *"It definitely matters that the same interpreter is used across a series…because there's lots of Deaf people who will work with the same interpreter in real life situations outside of television… I get used to the interpreter's style of signing…the consistency. With a change of interpreter, you have to learn their style again and how they translate something."*
>
> M, Deaf (BSL user), 45, West Midlands

"I think I'd want to ask why they'd want to change the interpreters? I don't think it matters too much but it's important to keep the consistency of the interpreter...If the interpreter is signing clearly then it's fine but if another one goes off topic or omits anything, you can then start to notice the changes."

M, Deaf (BSL user), 29, London

Appendix

Screener survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. As mentioned before, we would like to get a better understanding of the programmes you watch on TV channels/their catch-up services (such as BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub/ITVX, All4 or My5) or video streaming services, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime to help us tailor the next stage of our research and identify participants who would be well placed to take part. As part of this process, we will also be asking some profiling information to make sure we hear from lots of different types of people.

You do not need to be a regular viewer of TV channels or video-on demand services to complete this survey.

This survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The data we collect will be kept securely as outlined in the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, and in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

 If you have any questions or would prefer to give your answers over the phone, please contact: xxx and we will arrange for someone to call you.

Under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), we need your permission to use the survey results to inform a research study we will be conducting over the coming few months as well as our selection of participants. By selecting 'I consent to take part in this survey', you agree to participate in this survey and for the Research Institute of Disabled Consumers (RiDC) and Ofcom to process all of the information you provide.

Please click one of the following boxes to continue:

- I consent to take part in this survey
- I do not consent to take part in this survey

Q2 Are you completing this survey for yourself or on behalf of someone you care for (as a paid or unpaid carer)?

- For myself
- For someone else I care for who is under 18 years old
- For someone else I care for who is over 18 years old

Q3 You told us you are completing this survey on behalf of someone else. If you live in the same household please respond on their behalf by asking them about their experience directly or, if this is not possible, based on your knowledge of their experience. Please select the statement that best applies to you:

- I am asking them directly and so am completing this survey based on their experience
- I am not able to ask them directly and so am completing this survey based on my own knowledge of their experience

Q4 To begin with, we would just like to ask you a few questions about you. We want to make sure that we hear from lots of different types of people to understand if there are any issues that affect specific groups.

What is your age? (Please specify using numbers only)

Q5 Which of the following impairments, if any, impact or limit your daily activities or the work you can do? (Please tick any that apply)

Hearing - poor hearing, partial hearing or are Deaf

Eyesight - poor vision, colour blindness, partial sight or are Blind

Physical mobility - cannot walk at all/use a wheelchair or mobility scooter, cannot walk very far or manage stairs or can do so only with difficulty

Dexterity - limited ability to reach/difficulty opening things with your hands/difficulty using a telephone handset/television remote control/computer keyboard etc.

Breathing - breathlessness or chest pains

Mental abilities - such as learning, understanding, concentration, memory, communicating, cognitive loss or deterioration

Difficulty with speech - due to stroke, stutter, or stammer

Social or behavioural - conditions associated with autism, Asperger's, attention deficit disorder etc.

Mental health - anxiety, depression, or trauma-related conditions

Other illnesses/conditions which impact or limit your daily activities or the work you can do (please specify) _____

⊗ None of the above

⊗ Prefer not to say

Q6 Which of the following hearing impairments impact you?
- Poor hearing
- Partial hearing
- Deafness
- Other (please specify) _____

Q7 Can you communicate using British Sign Language (BSL)?
- Yes
- No

Q8 Which of the following best describes how well you know and use BSL?

- I use BSL as my first language rather than English language to communicate
- I use both BSL and English equally to communicate
- I do not use BSL to communicate a lot
- I do not use BSL to communicate at all

Q9 Which of the following visual impairments impact you?

    Poor vision
    Colour blindness
    Partial sight
    Blindness
    Other (please specify) _____

Q10 Which of the following, if any, impact you?

    Dyslexia
    Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
    Autism
    Asperger's
    Cognitive loss or deterioration
    Learning difficulties
    Understanding difficulties
    Other (please specify) _____

    ⊗ None of the above

Q11 How many people, including you, live in your household?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

Q12 Who do you live with? (Please tick any that apply)
    Spouse/partner
    Parent
    Offspring/children
    Grandparent(s)
    Grandchild/grandchildren
    Sibling(s)
    Other relative(s)
    Other non-relative(s)

Q13 Which of the following age groups do other members of your household belong to? (Please tick any that apply)
    Under 18
    18-39
    40-59
    60-79
    80 and over
    ⊗ Prefer not to say

Q14 Which of the following best describes the chief income earner in your household?

If you/ they are retired and living on a private pension, please choose your description based on what you/ they did before you/ they retired.

If you/ they have been unemployed for six months or less, please choose your description based on your/ their most recent main job.

- High managerial, administrative or professional - e.g. doctor, lawyer, company director (50+ people), judge, surgeon, school headmaster etc.
- Intermediate managerial, administrative, or professional -e.g. school teacher, office manager, junior doctor, bank manager. police inspector, accountant etc.
- Supervisor, clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional - e.g. policeman, nurse, secretary, clerk, self-employed (5+ people) etc.
- Skilled manual worker - e.g. mechanic, paramedic, cook, fitter, plumber, electrician, lorry driver, train driver, hairdresser, beautician etc.
- Semi-skilled or unskilled manual worker - e.g. baggage handler, restaurant server, factory worker, receptionist, labourer, gardener etc.
- Housewife/househusband
- Unemployed
- Student
- Retired or on state pension only (if retired but not only on state pension, please indicate the occupation just before retirement)
- I don't know
- Prefer not to say

Q15 What is your annual household income (before tax)?
Please include any benefits or credits that you or anyone else in your household received, including housing benefit, as well as any income from employment.

- Up £199 per week/£10,399 per year
- From £200 to £299 per week/from £10,400 to £15,599 per year
- From £300 to £499 per week/from £15,600 to £25,999 per year
- From £500 to £699 per week/from £26,000 to £36,399 per year
- From £700 to £999 per week/from £36,400 to £51,999 per year
- £1,000 and above to £1,499 per week/ £52,000 and above to £77,999 per year
- £1,500 and above per week/£78,000 and above per year
- I don't know
- Prefer not to say

Q16 Do you or anyone else in your household have access to the internet at home (via any device, e.g., laptop/PC, mobile phone, tablet etc...)?

- Yes - I have access to and use the internet at home
- Yes - I have access to but do not use the internet at home
- No - I do not have access to internet at home

Q17 Please think about the hours that you spend doing things online in a typical week, maybe using social media, looking for information, watching a TV programme, film or video clip, playing games online or checking emails. It could be going online using a computer, laptop, tablet, mobile phone, games console or Smart TV.

How many **hours** in a typical **week** would you say you spend online – at home or anywhere else? Please specify using numbers only)

Q18 How confident are you as an internet user?

- Very confident
- Fairly confident
- Neither confident nor not confident
- Not very confident
- Not at all confident

Q19 The following questions are about whether you need and use any access services when watching programmes, films, or any other video content.

By access service we mean the additional features that are designed to enable hearing and visually impaired users to watch programmes, films or other video content. These include subtitles, audio description and sign-interpretation/BSL.

Q20 When watching programmes, films or any other video content, do you ever use any of the following access services?

Subtitles
Audio Description
Signing/British Sign Language (BSL)
⊗None of the above

Q21 How often would you say you use '**${Q20/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}**'?

With...

	All programmes	Most programmes	Some programmes	Few programmes
Subtitles				
Audio Description				
Signing/British Sign Language (BSL)				
⊗None of the above				

Q22 To what extent are you able to follow TV programmes or films without using subtitles?

- I can't follow TV programmes at all without subtitles
- I can follow TV programmes without subtitles but with some difficulty
- I can easily follow TV programmes without subtitles
- N/A - I cannot access subtitles

Q23 To what extent are you able to follow TV programmes without using any audio description?
- I can't follow TV programmes at all without audio description
- I can follow TV programmes without audio description but with some difficulty
- I can easily follow TV programmes without audio description

Q24 To what degree are you able to follow TV programmes without using any sign-interpretation?

- I can't follow TV programmes at all without signing
- I can follow TV programmes without signing but with some difficulty
- I can easily follow TV programmes without signing

Q25 You said that you use **subtitles** when watching programmes, films or any other video content.
What are your reasons, if any, for using subtitles? (Please tick any that apply)

When answering this, please disregard the use of subtitles to follow foreign language programmes or films or accents or dialects that are difficult to understand.

I use subtitles to...

Help me follow the flow of a programme or film
Help me follow a programme or film in a noisy environment
Allow me to multi-task when watching a programme or film
Help improve my literacy/reading
Other (please specify) _____
⊗No reason

Q26 You said that you use **audio description** when watching programmes, films or any other video content.
What are your reasons, if any, for using audio description? (Please tick any that apply)

I use audio description to...

Help me follow the flow of a programme or film
Help me understand what is going in a particular scene
Help me understand emotions, mood or body language in a particular scene
Help me understand the imagery or setting in a particular scene
Allow me to multi-task when watching a programme or film
Other (please specify) _____
⊗No reason

Q27 Does anyone in your household ever use any of these to watch television programmes or films at home or elsewhere? (Please tick any that apply)

Please include all types of viewing – so watching television programmes or films as they are broadcast, anything recorded from the TV to view later, any use of catch-up services (such as BBC iPlayer or ITV Hub) or other paid-for streaming services (such as Netflix or Amazon Prime Video).

A television set – including smart TV sets
A tablet (like an iPad, Kindle Fire, Samsung Galaxy Tab)
A mobile phone/ smartphone (like an iPhone/ Samsung Galaxy)
A desktop computer/ laptop/ netbook
A games console or games player (like a PlayStation/ Xbox/ Nintendo Switch)
Any other type of device (please specify) _____

⊗ None of these/ no one watches TV programmes or films

⊗ Don't know

Q28 Which of the following ways of watching broadcast TV channels like BBC, ITV, Channel 4 or Channel 5 are used in your household? Please include watching on a TV set, on a tablet, smartphone or laptop or any other device. (Please tick any that apply)

Freeview or Freeview Play (free TV via an aerial or set top box)
Virgin Media (cable with TV subscription)
Sky (satellite TV with a monthly subscription)
Freesat (satellite TV with no subscription)
BT TV
TalkTalk TV
EE TV
YouView
PS4
Xbox
Now TV
Amazon Fire TV (plug in stick, box or cube)
Google Chromecast
Roku
Other (please specify) _____

Q29 We would now like to know about the broadcast TV channels, and video-on-demand services you watch and how you watch them.
How often, if at all, do you watch shows on...

A) Broadcast TV channels E.g, BBC One, ITV, Channel 4
B) Catch-up on demand services offered by broadcasters? I.e., BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All 4

C) Paid for streaming services E.g, Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney Plus

	Daily/weekly	At least once a month	At least once every three months	Not watched in the last three months
Broadcast TV channels (A)				
Catch-up on demand services (B)				
Paid for streaming services (C)				

Q30 Which of the following **TV channels** have you watched in the last three months? (Please tick any that apply)

BBC TV channels
ITV (STV or UTV) TV channels
Channel 4 TV channels
Channel 5 TV channels
S4C channels
UKTV channels (e.g. Dave, Really, Yesterday)
Sky TV channels
Other (please list below) _____

Q31 And which of the following **TV catch-up and streaming services** have you watched in the last three months? (Please tick any that apply)

BBC iPlayer
ITV X / ITV Hub
All4 / All4+
My5
S4C Clic
UKTV Play
STV Player / STV Player +
Netflix
Amazon Prime Video
Now TV
Disney +
Apple TV +
Discovery +
Paramount +
Other (please specify) _____
⊗ None of the above

Q32 Do you use any of the following assistive tools when accessing **TV channels/catch-up and streaming services?**

⊗N/A - I do not use any

Screenreader on desktop/laptop (JAWS, NVDA or VoiceOver for Mac)

Screenreader on smartphone and/or tablet (VoiceOver on iOS or TalkBack on Android)

Screen magnification software

Tools to adjust the text size and/or colour contrast on the website or app (if available)

Speech input software (e.g. Dragon)

Keyboard navigation

Operating system or web browser accessibility features (please list)

_____

Smart TV or streaming device accessibility features (please list) _____

Other (please list below) _____

⊗I don't know

Q33 You said that no one watches TV programmes or films in your household.
What are your reasons, if any, for not watching them?

I don't have time to watch them

I don't enjoy the content

I don't have a TV licence/want to pay to access them

I don't have the equipment needed to watch them

I don't find the interface of TV channels or on-demand services intuitive, accessible or user-friendly

I find it hard to access programmes with the access service I need (i.e. subtitles, audio description, signing/BSL)

I find the quality of the access services I need (i.e. subtitles, audio description, signing/BSL) are poor

⊗None of the above

Q34 You said that you haven't watched any **broadcast TV channels** in the last 3 months. Why haven't you watched these? (Please tick any that apply)

I don't have time to watch them

I don't enjoy the content

I don't have a TV licence

I don't have the equipment needed to watch broadcast TV channels

I don't find the interface of TV channels intuitive, accessible or user-friendly

I find it hard to access programmes with the access service I need (i.e. subtitles, audio description, signing/BSL)

I find the quality of the access service I need (i.e. subtitles, audio description, signing/BSL) are poor

⊗None of the above

Q35 You said you haven't watched **catch-up and/or paid for video on demand services** in the last 3 months. Why haven't you watched these? (Please tick any that apply)

I don't have time to watch them
I don't enjoy the content
I don't want to pay for it
I don't have the equipment needed to access them
I don't find them intuitive, accessible or user-friendly
I find it hard to access programmes with the access service I need (i.e. subtitles, audio description, signing/BSL)
I find the quality of the access service I need (i.e. subtitles, audio description, signing/BSL) are poor
⊗ None of the above

Q36 Do you or any members of your immediate family work in any of the following areas, either in a paid or unpaid capacity?

Please note that this does not include being a member of the RiDC or other market research panels.

Journalism/the media
Communications/Public relations (PR)
Market Research
TV Broadcasters
Internet services provider or tech firm
⊗ No, none of these
⊗ Don't know

Q37 Have you participated in a focus group, workshop discussions or interviews about TV or online video-services in the last 2 years?

- Yes
- No

Q38 In May/June, we will be inviting respondents to take part in an in-depth interview to explore use of, attitudes towards and preferences for accessibility features on broadcast TV programmes and Video On Demand services. These interviews will explore the practical experiences of finding and watching subtitled, audio described or signed programmes among audiences with specific access needs.

The interview would last up to 60 minutes and would be conducted either online (by Zoom or Microsoft Teams with closed-captions if needed), in-person/face-to-face or by telephone depending on your preference. For BSL users, we will provide an interpreter. You would receive £75 as a thank you for taking part.

Unfortunately, we can only recruit a small number of participants to take part and due to the volume of panel members who usually express interest, we cannot get back to everyone.

Would you be willing to take part?

- Yes
- No

Q39 Thank you for your interest in taking part. Which of the following would be your preferred interview method?

- Online (by Zoom or Microsoft Teams)
- In my home/face-to-face
- By telephone

Q40 We are also inviting some participants to be interviewed alongside other members of their family or household.

Would you be willing to be interviewed as a family or household?
- Yes
- No

Q41 Before we finish, we would like you to answer some questions about yourself. As mentioned before, when we conduct our research over the coming few months, we want to make sure we hear from lots of different types of people to understand if there are any issues that particularly affect people from specific groups.

What region do you live in?

- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- Wales
- London
- North East of England
- North West of England
- East Midlands
- Yorkshire and the Humber
- South East of England
- South West of England
- East of England
- West Midlands

Q42 Which of the following best describes how you think about yourself?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer to use my own term (please specify) _____
- Prefer not to say

Q43 Which of the following best describes your ethnic group or background?

- White (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British)
- Any other White background
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- White and Black Caribbean
- Other mixed/multiple ethnic background (please specify) _____
- Indian
- Pakastani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Other Asian background (please specify)
  _____
- Black African
- Black Caribbean
- Other Black/African/Caribbean background (please specify)
  _____
- Non-British European (please specify)
  _____
- Other (please specify)
  _____
- Prefer not to say

Q44 Your contact details
This is so that we can contact you about the follow-up interview if you are invited to take part.

What is your first name?
_____

Q45 What is your email?

_____

Q46 You said that you have not watched **TV channels** and/or **catch-up or paid for video-on demand services** due to the following reasons: ${Q33/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}
${Q34/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}
${Q35/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}

Would you be willing to record a short video of yourself (i.e. no longer than 3 minutes) in this survey telling us about the accessibility issues that have prevented you from watching TV channels and/or video on demand services?

If this is not possible or you would prefer not to record a video, that is perfectly alright. You are welcome to provide a written answer instead.

Please note that you will have the option to re-record the video should you wish to do so. Quotes taken from

the video recording or the written response you submit will be shared with Ofcom as part of the research. We want to stress to you that the data collected in the video or written answer will be kept anonymous and that you will not be identified at any point to Ofcom or any other third party.

- Yes - I am happy to record a video
- Yes - I would prefer to provide a written answer instead
- No - I wish to skip this

Q47 Can you please tell us about the accessibility issues you have experienced and why they have prevented you from watching TV channels and/or video on demand services?

_____

Q48 Thank you for your willingness to record a short video telling us about the accessibility issues you have experienced on **TV channels** and/or **video on demand services.**

The video recording you submit will be viewed in full by the RiDC for the purpose of analysis. Quotes taken from the video recording will be shared with Ofcom for insight purposes only. The data collected throughout this video recording will be kept anonymous and confidential and your personal details will not be shared with Ofcom or any other party. All video data collected will be stored in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

In order to proceed to the video recording, please tick all of the boxes below to provide consent. If you no longer wish to record a video please just click 'Next'.

I understand that my participation in this video recording is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason

I give permission for the video recording I submit to be shared and viewed in full by members of the RiDC research team for the purpose of analysis only

I understand that data (i.e. quotes) taken from the video recording I submit will be used in in-house publications and presentations which will be shared with Ofcom

I give permission for some demographic details about me (i.e. age group, gender, region and impairment) to be used in in-house publications and presentations by RiDC and Ofcom

Q49 Please record a short video of under 3 minutes telling us about the accessibility issues you have experienced and why they have prevented you from watching TV channels and/or video on demand services.

To protect yours and other's anonymity, we kindly ask that you do not mention yours or anyone else's name or include anyone else at any point during the video recording.

1. Press the 'play arrow' of the player where it says 'start recording'
2. Please note you may get a pop up window that asks for your permission to use the microphone and camera of your device. You have to click on 'allow' to proceed.
3. Press the white round dot to start recording (like on the camera of a phone)
4. You can stop the recording by pressing the red stop square (this will appear in the white round dot). Please

allow a few seconds for the video recording to be processed (this is shown by a red line that appears all the way to the right when processing is complete).

5. You will then be given the option to review your video if you want, by pressing play (on the bottom left).

6. There is an option to re-record (on the bottom right) if you'd like to record your video message again. This will trigger a pop-up message that will ask you to confirm or to cancel.

Achieved sample

Cohort (n)	Disability or condition (n)	Gender (n)	Age (n)	Nation (n)
Hearing = 15	**Hearing** Deaf = 6 Hard-of-hearing = 9 **Other** Sight loss = 2 Cognitive or neurodevelopmental conditions = 6	Male = 5 Female = 10	18-39 = 4 40-59 = 4 60-79 = 6 80 and over = 1	England = 11 Wales = 2 Scotland = 2
BSL = 10	**Hearing and BSL** Deaf = 10 Native BSL users (first language) = 5 Non-native BSL users = 5 **Other** Sight loss = 1	Male = 3 Female = 7	18-39 = 5 40-59 = 2 60-79 = 3	England = 10
Sight = 15	**Sight** Blind = 10 Partially sighted = 5 **Other** Hard-of-hearing = 2 Colour blind = 1	Male = 7 Female =8	18-39 = 7 40-59 = 5 60-79 = 3	England = 13 Scotland = 2
Dual-sensory (hearing and sight) = 5	**Dual-sensory** Deafblind = 2 Predominant hearing loss = 1 Predominant sight loss = 2 **Other** Cognitive conditions =1	Male = 2 Female = 3	18-39 = 1 40-59 = 2 60-79 = 2	England = 3 Wales = 1 Scotland = 1

Cohort (n)	Disability or condition (n)	Gender (n)	Age (n)	Nation (n)
Cognitive and neurodevelopmental = 11	**Cognitive** ADHD = 6 Autism = 7 Aspergers = 1 Cognitive loss or deterioration = 4 Understanding difficulties = 2 **Other:** Sight loss = 1 Hard-of-hearing = 1	Male = 1 Female = 6 Other = 4	18-39 = 5 40-59 = 5 60-79 = 1 80 and over = 0	England = 10 Wales = 0 Scotland = 1

NB: Disability or condition was the primary recruitment criteria. Participants' disabilities or conditions were self-reported during the survey screener and interviews.

Please note: a full accessible version of the pre-task and topic guide that follows are available on the Ofcom website.

Pre-task booklet (subtitling)

Pre-task booklet cont.

There are two tasks we would like you to do:

Task 1. Watch a programme on a TV channel, broadcaster catch up service or video on demand service you **use a lot.**

Task 2. Watch a programme on a TV channel, broadcaster catch-up service or video on demand service you **use less often.**

By TV channel, we mean programmes on broadcast television such as BBC One, ITV1 or Channel 4.

By broadcaster catch-up service, we mean programmes that can be found on services such as BBC iPlayer or ITVX.

By Video on demand service, we mean programmes found on services such as Netflix or Amazon Prime.

We would like you to watch this with the access services you would normally use enabled.

We have a few questions for you to think about as you are watching. Please turn the page to start Task 1.

TASK 1

Watching a programme on a TV channel, broadcaster catch up service or video on demand **service you use a lot**.

Please choose a programme on a TV channel, broadcaster catch up service or video on demand service you **use a lot** and make sure the access services you normally use are switched on. Please try to watch at least 15 minutes of the programme.

On the next page, we have a few questions for you to think about. Please record your thoughts underneath each question.

These answers can be made by using bullet points or writing a short paragraph or even drawing something.

Watching a programme on a TV channel, broadcaster catch up service or video on demand **service you use a lot**.

Sign-interpretation   SL

This is when the programme is translated into sign-language (BSL) by a signer, usually in the corner of the screen.

Question: What channel or service did you use?

Question: What programme did you watch?

Question: How did you find out the programme had signing?

Question: How easy was it to turn on the signed version?

Question: Overall, what did you think about the quality of signing in the programme you watched? Things to consider in your answer might be:

- How easy the signer is to follow
- Size of the signer
- Positioning of the signer on the screen

Thank you for giving your thoughts on Task 1. This will be useful to us when discussing access services with you during our interview.

When you are ready, turn to the next page to do Task 2: Watching a programme with access services on a TV channel, broadcaster catch up service or video on demand that **you use less frequently.**

TASK 2

TV channel, broadcaster catch up service or video on demand **service you use less frequently**.

Please choose a programme on a TV channel, broadcaster catch up service or video on demand service you **use less frequently** and enable the access service. Please try to watch at least 15 minutes of the programme.

On the next page, we have a few questions for you to think about. Please record your thoughts underneath each question.

These answers can be made by using bullet points or writing a short paragraph or even drawing something.

Watching a programme on a TV channel, broadcaster catch up service or video on demand **service you use less frequently**.

Sign-interpretation   SL

This is when the programme is translated into sign-language (BSL) by a signer, usually in the corner of the screen.

Question: What channel or service did you use?

Question: What programme did you watch?

Question: How did you find out the programme had signing?

Question: How easy was it to turn on the signed version?

Question: Overall, what did you think about the quality of signing in the programme you watched? Things to consider in your answer might be:

- How easy the signer is to follow
- Size of the signer
- Positioning of the signer on the screen

Pre-task booklet cont.

You have now completed both tasks in preparation for our interview.

THANK YOU!

Please place this booklet into the **stamped addressed envelope provided to you and post it back to us at RiDC**. We are looking forward to meeting you and reading your thoughts on access services.

RiDC Research Institute
for Disabled Consumers

Topic guide (subtitling)

Introduction and practicalities	5 mins
Introduction	
Introduce participant to self and RiDC.	
"Firstly, I would like to thank you for completing the recruitment questionnaire, short pre-tasks and agreeing to take part in this interview about your experience of accessing and watching programmes or films on broadcast and video-on-demand services.	
The aim of this interview is to further explore your experience and preferences of using access services. The findings from this research will be used to help improve broadcast and video-on-demand access services for users with different access needs. This interview should take up to an hour to complete. You can pause or stop at any time and resume later if you wish.	
We will be asking you some background questions about your general broadcast or video-on-demand viewing and experiences of searching for, finding, and watching content with access services.	
The data we collect throughout this interview will be kept anonymous and confidential and your personal details will not be shared with any other parties. All data will be kept securely as outlined in the Market Research Society Code of Conduct and in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)."	
Practicalities	
Before we begin there are a few practicalities to go through...	
• Ask for permission to audio and video record for the purposes of this research only.	

• Ask if they are happy to continue and for you to **start recording** now...	Press record

Participant introduction	5 mins
• Before we begin, can you tell me a bit about yourself? → Prompt about impairment to give context to the use of access services later – Can you please tell me a little about your impairment(s) or disability?	Confirm who they live with, impairment (incl. recent vs. long term, severity, impact on daily life) Respondent-driven

General discussion about TV, the role of television in their lives, what they watch, how they watch	10 mins
• You told us in the screener, that you watch the following broadcast TV channels [list TV channels] and/or video on demand services [list], is that correct? → Are there any other TV channels and/or video on demand services not mentioned that you use? • What are your favourite TV channels/on-demand services you use regularly? What do you like about them? • What sort of genre of TV programme do you like? o Do you watch any live programmes? (By this we mean programmes broadcast in real time like the news, morning chat shows, sports etc...)	Respondent-driven Revisit and confirm responses in screener survey

Topic guide cont.

- o What role does TV have in your life? Do you use it for entertainment, company, or to have something on in the background?

- How does your impairment impact how you watch television?

  - → Can you tell me a bit about the access service(s) you use when watching TV? [Tailor as per impairment]

  - → Why do you use [access service(s)]? [Cognitive impairment group only]

  - → When and how do you use [access service(s)]?

  - → How do(es) [access service(s)] allow you to enjoy television? [Cognitive impairment group only]

  - → Are there particular aspects of the programme that the access service helps you understand or enjoy more? [Cognitive impairment group]

- Do you watch TV with a family member or friend?

  - → (If yes) How do you find watching TV with a family member or friend?

- You told us in the screener that you use the following devices or platforms to watch broadcast or video on-demand services [list devices (e.g. TV set, smartphone, tablet etc..) and platforms (e.g. Freeview, Sky, Amazon fire stick]....

  - → What devices or platforms do you prefer using to watch broadcast or video-on-demand services and why? (E.g. Freeview, Sky, Smart TV, mobile, tablet, laptop etc.)

- [If applicable] We will ask questions about assistive tools later, but just to check you said you use the following assistive tools when using TV channels / catch-up streaming services [insert tools e.g. screen reader, speech-to text software, screen magnifier] Is that correct?

Second and fourth prompts here are high priority.

Pre-task discussion	5 mins

Thank you for completing the pre-tasks and for reflecting on how you found the process of finding programmes with access services and the quality of the access services.

- In terms of the service you use a lot, you said you watched [insert content] on [insert TV channels or catch-up service] with [insert access service(s)].

  - → What device or platform did you use to watch [insert content]? (E.g. Freeview, Sky, smart TV, mobile, tablet, laptop etc..)

- And in terms of the service you use less often, you said you watched [insert content] on [insert TV channels or catch-up service] with [insert access service(s)].

  - → What device or platform did you use to watch [insert content]? (E.g. Freeview, Sky, smart TV, mobile, tablet, laptop etc..)

- Can you tell us a bit about the tasks you completed? How did you find the tasks?

  - → What did you like about the [access service(s) used]?
  - → What did you dislike about the [access service(s) used]?
  - → How did your experience compare across the TV or catch-up services you watched?

Respondent-driven

Revisit and confirm responses to pre-tasks

Discussion on navigation	10 mins

General experience of finding content with access services

- We would like to understand your general experience of finding programmes or films with access services.

  - How do you find navigating to content with access services across the different services and devices you use?

    - → Across broadcast TV (e.g. live channels such as BBC One, ITV, Channel 4)?
    - → Across broadcaster catch-up services like BBC iPlayer or All4?
    - → Across subscription video-on-demand services like Netflix or Amazon Prime?
    - → Across different devices and platforms? E.g. Freeview, Sky, smart TV, website, mobile or tablet apps.

  - [If uses more than one access service] You said you use multiple access services, how easy is it to navigate to programmes to use [access services] together?

Enabling access services

- Once you have found content with access services available across different TV channels/services, devices and platforms you use...

  - Where would you expect the settings to turn on/off access services to be positioned on the screen? What works best for you?

    - → What symbols would you expect to see? [Tailor as per impairment]

Stimulus materials: Here are some examples of the different ways access services are positioned on screen. [Show screenshots 7a,

Spontaneous views and prompts first (respondent-driven)

7b and 7c and point out ways to turn on/off access services are positioned on screen].

- Can you give some examples of services where the access services have been easy to turn on or off? What makes them easy to turn on/off?

  - → Would it make a difference if service providers took the same approach to turning access services on or off? (E.g. With the same symbols / positioning on the screen)

- [If uses more than one access service] Do you ever turn on or watch programmes with [access services] at the same time?

  - → [If not] Why not?
  - → [If not] Would it help if you were able to?

  - → [If yes] Are there any challenges with using both at the same time? How easy is it to follow them together?

If uses multiple access services

Discussion on specific access service(s) (Subtitling)	20 mins

We're now going to move on to talk about how you use **subtitles**, about the quality of them and your preferences, moving on from talking about how you find and navigate to content on different services/platforms.

Before we start on this section, you may already be aware there are two types of subtitles: live subtitling, for **live** content like the news, weather, live events (live subtitles are not always in sync with the sound and often appear as scrolling text), and subtitles on other types of content such as dramas, documentaries, and soaps (which are normally prepared in advance and do appear in sync with the sound). Live subtitles and pre-recorded subtitles can be quite different, so we want to talk about both types today.

Spontaneous views and prompts first (respondent-driven)

Topic guide cont.

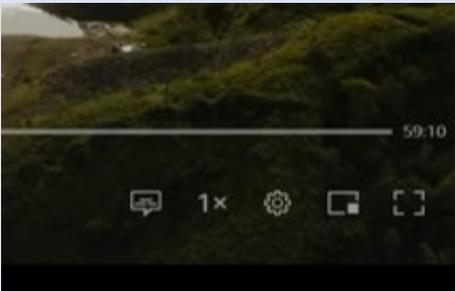|	

Subtitle <u>quality</u>
 	
• What do you think about the quality of subtitles in general? Do you have…?
 	
   → Good examples
   → Bad examples
   → Are there any particular services that you think offer good subtitles?
 	
• Are you generally satisfied with the provision and quality of subtitles? Does the quality of subtitles meet your expectations?
 	
   → Explore the quality of live and pre-recorded separately (if necessary)
 	
• In general, how <u>easy</u> or difficult do you find it to follow subtitles? And why?
 	
   → What can make it difficult to follow subtitled programmes?
   → Do you experience any challenges when watching subtitled programmes? (Participants may mention: Syncing, understanding who is speaking etc.)
 	
Subtitle preferences (presentation, speed, speaker ID, sounds)
 	
<u>Presentation:</u> Subtitles can be presented in different sizes, fonts, and positions depending on where you watch them.
 	
• What are your thoughts on the way subtitles are presented?
• How easy or difficult do you find subtitles to read?
 	
   → What can make subtitles difficult to read?
   → What do you think of the size?
   → What do you think of the font?
   → Explore presentation of live and pre-recorded separately (Note for us: live subtitles are presented with
	Get a sense of 'top of mind' priorities and particular frustrations here
	
	We need to focus more on pre-recorded subtitles particularly if they are talking about syncing which is a very specific issue with live subtitles.

a delay of 3-6 seconds, pre-recorded are in sync with the dialogue)
 	
• Were you aware on some services you can customise the subtitles? [Where appropriate, screenshots 4a and 4b can be used here if participants are not sure what we mean] Do you use the customisation options for subtitles (e.g. on Netflix / BBC iPlayer)? If so…
 	
   → On which services do you use these?
   → What do you think of them?
   → [If not used or not aware] Would you like to be able to alter things like size, font, colour?
 	
<u>Speed:</u> As you know, when watching content with subtitles, we need to read the subtitles and watch the images on screen.
 	
• Generally, do you feel as though you have enough time to read the subtitles and watch the images?
 	
<u>Speaker ID:</u> Subtitles usually show you who is speaking. This can be done in different ways: name tags, colours, hyphens [Tailor speaker ID questions as per impairment]
 	
• What are your thoughts on the way speakers are identified? Do you have any preferences?
 	
• When you are watching content with subtitles, is it usually clear to you who is speaking and when?
 	
   → [If no] Can you give an example? What would make it clearer?
   → Does this differ across services? (E.g. BBC vs. Netflix) Or on your TV vs computer?
   → Explore live subtitles and pre-recorded separately (if necessary) (Note for us: live subtitles may show previous speaker and the screen shows current speaker)
	High priority questions for those with visually impairments, colour-blindness, dyslexia, and dual-sensory impairments
	
	High priority question for cognitive impairment group

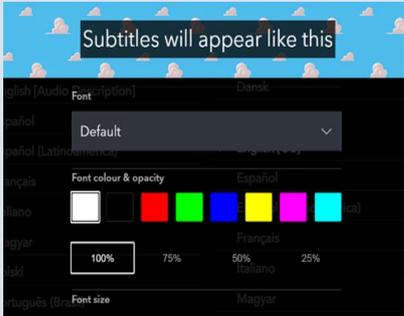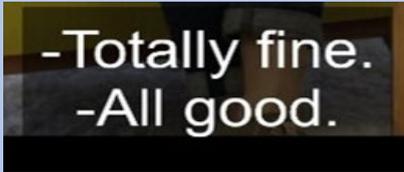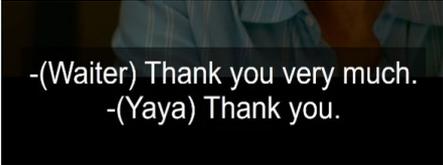|	

Stimulus materials: Here are some examples of the different ways speakers are shown. [Show screenshots 1a, 1b and 1c]. The first one indicates speakers with hyphens, the second one with name tags and the third one with colours. [Screenshots can be brought in earlier if participant struggles to articulate what they mean].
 	
• Does it matter to you if speakers are shown in different ways? Do you think speakers need to be indicated in the same way across different services?
 	
   → Explore importance of consistency
 	
<u>Sounds:</u> Subtitles also show sound labels to indicate music, the way someone says something (e.g whispering, shouting) or action sounds (e.g. gun fires, phone ringing). [Tailor sound label questions as per impairment]
 	
• Can you tell me a bit about your thoughts and experiences on the way sounds and music are presented?
 	
   Stimulus materials: Here are some examples of the different ways sounds are shown. [Show screenshots 3a, 3b, and 3c in one group and 3d and 3e in another group]. Each example shows a more detailed or a less detailed sound description either of music [first group] or the sound coming from a person [second group].
 	
• How do you prefer sounds to be shown? Why?
 	
• Generally, what do you think of the description of sounds?
 	
   → Do you think sounds are described effectively?
   → Do you prefer more detailed or less detailed descriptions of sounds?
 	
Stimulus materials: Here are some examples of how music is identified. [Show screenshots 2a and 2b]. The first example uses musical <u>notes</u> and the second example uses hashtags.
	
	Low-priority questions for cognitive impairment group

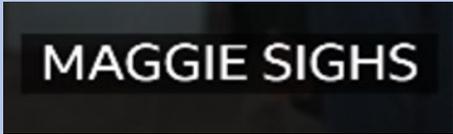|	

• Sometimes sounds are shown in different ways depending on where you're watching content. Does it matter to you if sounds are shown in different ways?
 	
   → Explore importance of consistency
 	
<u>Overall</u>
• Are there any improvements you would like to see made to subtitled programmes?
 	
   → Is there anything that would make it easier to follow subtitled programmes?
   → Explore improvements to live and pre-recorded separately (if necessary)
	
	Ask all

Close	**5 mins**
• To round off, what are the key messages you'd like us to take back to Ofcom? • Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of accessing and watching content with access services that we have not covered in this interview? • Thank participant for taking part in the interview and remind them of confidentiality. • Stop recording.	

Stimulus material

These screenshots were taken from VoD provider websites in Spring 2023. Presentation and functionality are now different on some of these services. Functionality can also differ depending on the platform used to view the service (for example on mobile apps or TV platforms).
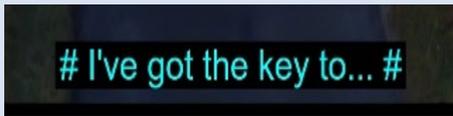
Subtitles	
Description	**Stimulus**
Symbols used to turn on subtitles: symbol on bottom right of screen - BBC iPlayer	
Symbols used to turn on subtitles: audio description and subtitles symbols on top right corner of the screen – Channel 4	
Symbols used to turn on subtitles: subtitles and audio description symbols in bottom right corner of screen – My5	
Customisation of font size - BBC iPlayer	
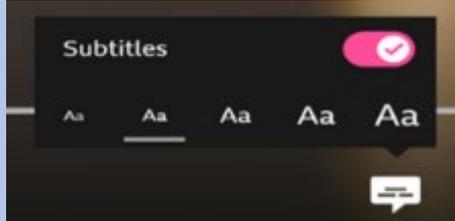
Subtitles	
Description	**Stimulus**
Customisation of font size, type, colour, opacity and background – Disney+	
Speaker Identification: Hyphens/ two separate lines - Amazon Prime Video [no additional name tags as speakers are on-screen]	
Speaker identification: Hyphens/two separate lines and name tags - Amazon Prime Video [name tags used in combination with hyphens as speakers are ambiguous/off-screen]	
Speaker identification: Colours (blue, yellow, and white are used to indicate different speakers) – BBC iPlayer	

Subtitles	
Description	**Stimulus**
Sound descriptions: Less descriptive/detailed music description - BBC iPlayer	MUSIC PLAYS
Sound descriptions: More descriptive/detailed music description - Netflix	[ominous music playing]
Sound descriptions: More descriptive/ detailed music description - Netflix	[tender, emotional music swells]
Sound descriptions: Less descriptive/detailed diegetic sound description - BBC iPlayer	MAGGIE SIGHS
Sound descriptions: More descriptive/ detailed diegetic sound description - Netflix	[deep, determined breathing]
Indicating music: Musical notes - Amazon Prime Video	♪ Will you stay in our lovers' story? ♪
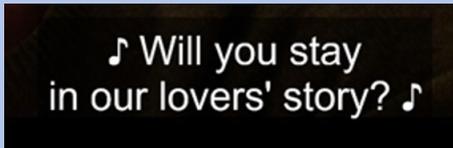
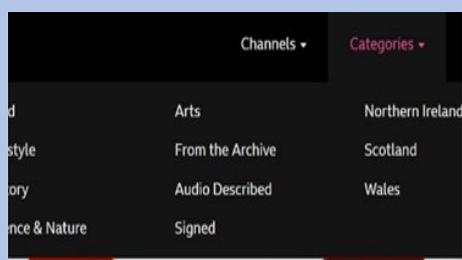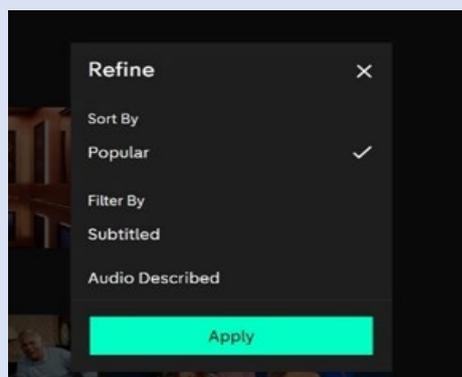|	
Indicating music: Hash tags – Channel 4	# I've got the key to... #

Audio description

Description	Stimulus
Navigating to accessible content (audio described and signed category) - BBC iPlayer	
Filter/refine content by access service (audio described and subtitled) – Channel 4	
No categories/filter for audio described or subtitled content so need to look at individual programmes. Available access services are labelled on programme blurbs (subtitles and audio description) – My 5	Tuesday 18 April Alf and John clash, and Dean and Ziggy welcome a surprise visitor. AVAILABLE UNTIL: 17 MAY 2023

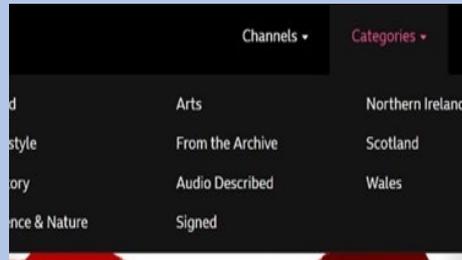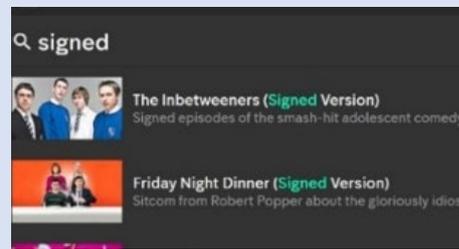| Audio description	
Description	**Stimulus**
Symbols used to turn on audio description and sign language (below the video player screen) - BBC iPlayer	Race Across the World Series 2: Episode 1 ive teams set off from Mexico City – a gargantuan metropolis and the largest Spanish speaking city in the world in a race to reach the most southerly city in the world, Ushuaia in Argentina. **More ▾** ⏱ 59 mins 8 Mar 2020 Available for over a year ❓ ＋ Add ⤓ Download **Audio Described** **Sign Language**
Symbols used to turn on audio description and subtitles (top-right corner of screen) – Channel 4	(AD) (S)
Symbols used to turn on audio description and subtitles (bottom-right corner of screen) - My 5	AD S
Audio Files	
Line of duty video clip	
Trigger Point (including of diversity characteristics)	
Magazine programme– synthetic audio described clip	

Signing

Description	Stimulus
Navigating to accessible content (audio described and signed category) - BBC iPlayer	
Navigating to signed content – Signed version of programmes are found via a search engine on the platform. Programmes that have this service are then displayed in the results – Channel 4	
Symbols used to turn on audio description and sign language (below the video player screen) - BBC iPlayer	
No symbol to turn on sign language. Instead, a 'BSL' heading is used to indicate programme is signed at the top of the screen and 'Signed Version' is written beside the programme title below the video player screen – Channel 4	

Signer positioning - bottom right-side of screen, outside of the programme's picture frame – BBC iPlayer	
Signer positioning - bottom right-side of screen, inside of the programme's picture frame – All 4	