

Question 1: Which of the three options do consultees favour, and why?:

Option 2 - an increase to 20% audio description on all channels.

Question 2: Do consultees have any further suggestions for future access service provision? If so please provide the rationale for these suggestions:

As a blind person who enjoys audio description at home, I have three key suggestions:

1: movies -- films and longform drama are probably the most difficult genres to follow as they are least likely to have a running spoken narrative. News and documentaries tend to be easier to follow by dint of an accompanying voiceover, providing a clearer audio narrative which holds the hand of the non-sighted viewer from start to end. Films - with their noisy car chases, long periods of silence, smoldering looks between characters and expensively shot very visual sequences - tend to have been crafted by the director to minimise dialogue and to play the narrative out more effectively with images. They have the budget to do so and they do it. It appeals to a wider audience and, as such, tends to be economical with words. I'd like to suggest that channels which show movies and drama as a big part of their output - Sky Movies, FilmFour, ITV3, Virgin One, Sky One FX for example - ought to weight their AD towards this. I'd like to suggest 20% of all programmes be described ... but 75% of all movies with broadcast start times between 5pm and 10pm . They can make up a big part of a broadcaster's evening schedule and as such greater provision should be made. At a point in AD history where only a small percentage of programmes are described, the budget needs to be used as effectively as possible with good popular support from vision impaired people. Am sure a formula or mechanism can be easily developed to reflect this until the next time AD limits are revisited by Ofcom.

2: FOREIGN LANGUAGE -- Documentaries are important to blind people. Television is a good way to teach us about history, politics, current events - a learning tool for personal growth. Books are not widely accessible and so television plays a big role in educating vision impaired people on a daily basis. We should take documentaries, or landmark primetime documentaries, very seriously. They 'document' society. Though broadly speaking, documentaries are very accessible as already discussed, when foreign language is used with no English over-dubbing and only supported with onscreen subtitles, vision impaired people cannot learn or appreciate important historic documentary evidence from foreign language contributors.

I'd like to suggest that ALL PROGRAMMES which have foreign language in, and that are not overdubbed with an English soundtrack, should use the AD technology to communicate the subtitles to vision impaired people and a low tolerance of 'unsupported foreign language speech' should be nurtured and enforced.

Recent programmes on China during the run up to the Beijing Olympics on many channels chose to use just subtitles to convey what was being said in a Chinese language. This rendered documentaries about this emergin gsuperpower with a controversial record on human rights, near useless. As a blind person I cannot add to my personal development by picking up a book on the subject at my local library - I can't read books but, if produced with English overdubbing or audio description to cover subtitles - my TV could be my important and dominant learning source. (other examples include: documenting world war II with German contributors, World War II through the eyes of Japanese contributors, Japan season

on the BBC and the BBC's 'Tribe' series.

3: SHARING AD -- It's perplexing and disempowering when you see a film or TV series on one channel which has audio description but when bought by another channel ... the AD is not portable and does not also get transferred. For instance, Sky One led the audio description revolution by painstakingly audio describing most of the Star Trek series' in the 90s and early 2000s: Next Generation, Voyager, Deep Space 9. When these shows transferred to Virgin One, the AD was lost forever. This should not be allowed to happen and perhaps a more altruistic contractual arrangement between AD suppliers and broadcasters needs to be pursued. i.e. when AD is paid for once, it doesn't get paid for again. And broadcasters should work towards unifying their AD systems so that portability of AD audio content between channels is more easily done and that their AD budget is used most effectively to broadcast 20% beyond such AD accompanied acquisitions.

4: CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMES -- Suggested research: Do vision impaired toddlers enjoy AD? Do they in fact watch television in the same way as sighted children? Vision is the dominant sense to able bodied children but does television captivate vision impaired children at that early age? Again, could the budget be used more wisely elsewhere? And do parents of sighted children benefit as effectively as hoped from AD of early years CBeebies and Nick Jnr style television?

This kind of intelligent approach to AD could help vision impaired people enjoy far more programmes with present day budget and targets.

Comments:

I very much welcome this consultation. I'd be more welcoming of a consultation into access to video on demand and other present day and near future set-top box services.

Talking access to EPG, access to PVR, access to paid for content, is falling behind. Vision impaired people are behind the curve on the television revolution and again it could bring great life enhancement by means of education and also social communication through the set-top box. Future services, such as being able to see what tv shows your friends or like-minded people, are watching or recommending, is the way forward and access to these needs addressing. AD on downloadable and Video on Demand programmes is also crucial ultimately and not beyond our technical knowhow by any means.