

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

Increase to 20 per cent on all digital channels

I am a registered blind television viewer. Audio Description has become such an integral part of my viewing experience that I no longer watch programmes unless I know they are audio described. Many of my friends and acquaintances feel the same, and in a world in which technology increasingly causes more access problems than it resolves, I feel this is an essential part of creating an excellent and inclusive media service in the UK.

I also feel that the percentages being considered here are hardly unreasonable, especially when viewed in comparison with the percentage of programming currently available with subtitles for the hearing impaired.

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

I don't know if these points are strictly within this remit, but there are considerable issues surrounding online content and hardware.

The two most significant barriers to a visually impaired person's enjoyment and access to television media content are the currently low level of programmes available with audio description, and the relative inaccessibility of hardware.

Increasing numbers of intricate flat panel televisions and DVD or HDD recorders are available with audio description and other assorted useful features, and yet with complex visual menus and a lack of speech feedback available within these units, it is still impossible for a visually impaired person to use the hardware to access television content in the first place.

A greater percentage of audio described content is, in my view, essential, but in tandem with this is the equally significant pipe dream of accessible hardware. An HDD Recorder with a talking programme guide and speech feedback on major functions such as recording and storing programmes would make a significant difference to the lives of visually impaired viewers. If Apple can manage to provide this feature on the Iphone, I'm not quite sure what other manufacturers are waiting for.

In terms of online, BBC I player's reliance on Aero and Flash content means it is less accessible than it could be for visually impaired users working with screen reader technology on their computers.

I understand the BBC have sort to take steps to address this issue, but I don't feel that these go far enough, and accessibility on the Iplayer, real and functional accessibility, remain some way off.

For example, Audio Description is only available to view online, not download, and yet the download option is the only one that works really well with screen reader technology, because it is then possible to view the video through an offline accessible player such as Windows Media Player.

Comments:

I cannot stress strongly enough the need for much greater levels of audio described programming on the television. In an ideal world, this increased percentage would also go hand in hand with a consistent level of quality in this provision. Currently, the quality of the audio description provided can vary massively between channels. Sometimes the service, although advertised for a particular programme, does not get broadcast, and sometimes technical issues mean that the audio description commentary, although present, isn't properly synchronised with the programme, or its advert breaks. Another issue occurs when channels provide audio description on the first series of a programme, but then don't follow this up by describing subsequent series?, leaving the visually impaired viewer high and dry. Friends on E4 and The Sopranos are particularly notable examples.

One further issue arises where providers audio describe a programme on the television, but then do not transfer this to a subsequent commercial DVD release for that programme. BBC Worldwide are particularly bad at this. Many programmes on the BBC are audio described, including big budget dramas and nature series, but when these are released as box sets on DVD, the audio description isn't present. There must be a huge reservoir of audio description soundtracks which are not fully utilised on DVD releases and in other scenarios.

Film is another area where audio description on TV is vital. With a pitifully small percentage of cinema and DVD releases carrying AD, often the only choice is to wait to see if that film comes with AD when it gets broadcast on TV, often a couple of years down the line. It's a frustrating test of patience, but often having a film described on television ? even if you have to wait years for it ? is your only chance; at least until studios and distributors buy in to the importance of AD and include it more regularly in their cinema and DVD releases.

As I have said, in our house we no longer watch any programming unless it has audio description. The only programme listings we consult are the audio description programme listings. In this sense, an increase in provision for audio description could ? no, would revolutionise our television experience.

I have a degenerative eye condition. I have been losing my sight gradually for over a decade. Throughout this time I have experienced the drawn out sensation of having to give things up. Enjoying a good film or programme on TV was something I lost a long time ago. Audio Description has, to some extent, restored my pleasure in watching TV. It's not the same experience, but it's not bad. Now my problem is seeing things I want to watch, but which have no AD. Give me more AD and a talking HDD Recorder, and I'll be a happy man, but we'll start with more Ad perhaps!?