

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

I support Option 2 - an increase in the required level of audio description to 20 per cent on all channels required to provide the service. I have been blind since birth and am now twenty-five years old. Audio description has revolutionised my ability to enjoy television with my partner and family. Before audio description became generally available, I rarely used to watch any television at all due to the difficulty in following the action and events in TV programmes. Whilst it was sometimes possible for friends and family to explain what was happening, this often reduced their enjoyment of the programmes. Furthermore, it was sometimes difficult for them to attempt to describe a programme that they themselves had not seen before and there were occasions when the effort of explaining everything would be too much, meaning that no-one in the house was able to enjoy the programme.

When audio description is available, I no longer have to struggle to understand TV programmes and I am placed on an equal footing with sighted members of my family. Without audio description I would watch far less television and would be unable to share in the enjoyment of TV programmes together with my partner and family. The BBC in particular has led the way on audio description, but there are programmes broadcast by the BBC and other broadcasters which are transmitted without audio description. Now that I have discovered the benefits of the service it is always a real disappointment when audio description is not provided for a particular programme, especially when similar programmes have been audio-described previously, leading to an expectation that a particular programme will be audio-described.

I believe that increasing the requirement to twenty per cent across all channels will provide broadcasters with opportunity to address a few of the anomalies in the provision as it stands and offer a much more comprehensive service of audio description across a wider range of programmes. Increasing the requirement will also provide a much more comprehensive service to day-time viewers, as existing provision is, for obvious reasons, focused around evening schedules.

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

I would like there to be some investigation of the provision of audio description through the 'receiver mix method' (currently used on freeview) to viewers using cable and satellite. (i.e. AD is transmitted at the set-top-box and mixed in with the programme sound at the viewer's end). This would enable better control of sound balance between the audio description and programme sound. Sometimes the balance provided by the broadcaster in the AD feed for cable and satellite does not suit particular TV set-ups, meaning that the AD is either too loud or too quiet. Due to how AD is implemented technically on cable and satellite, the viewer can not do anything about this.

There is a similar issue on cable and satellite which means that the London variation of the appropriate channel must be watched in order to receive the AD. This may result in individuals who would benefit not being aware of the existence of audio description. Also AD must be activated through the settings of most cable and satellite receivers, which is difficult for a visually impaired person to complete independently.

I would also suggest that there may be occasions when it may be appropriate to provide

advanced supplementary information regarding the visual contents of a programme e.g. a complex nature documentary or travel programme, via a broadcaster's website, to enable visually impaired viewers to fully appreciate the programme e.g. Stephen Fry's 'Last Chance to See' currently running on BBC1. It is sometimes difficult for sufficiently detailed explanations of visual elements to be given through audio description during the gaps in programme dialogue.

Comments: