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Fiona MacTaggart MP
[REDACTED]

27 October 2015

Dear Fiona,

Thank you for your letter of 8 October, on behalf of your constituent about digital services for people with sensory loss.

It is the case that the UK is a world leader in the extent and the quality of TV access services, which include subtitles, audio description and signing. UK broadcasters and content providers are committed to meeting the needs of disabled people and want to ensure that this remains the case in the future.

The UK Communications Act of 2003 is regarded across the world as a good example of a legal framework for television access services. Sections 303 to 305 of the Communications Act 2003 require Ofcom to draw up a Code which provides guidance as to the extent to which television services should provide access services. Ofcom monitors the provision of access services and publishes reports reflecting licensee's performance against the target. Ofcom has the power to take action against broadcasters who fail to meet their target.

The Government is working with the Authority for Television on Demand (ATVOD), Digital Television Group (DTG) and stakeholders to monitor the quality and the amount of subtitles and audio description (AD) delivered online via Catch up and On Demand services.

ATVOD published its report Provision of Video on Demand Access Services - 2014 Report on 13 December 2014. This is a report on the level of provision by On Demand Programme Service providers of subtitling, audio description, signing and other services for people with disabilities relating to sight, hearing or both.

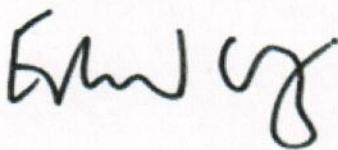


The key findings highlighted:

- public service broadcasters (PSBs) such as ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 are making the most significant progress in providing subtitled VoD services;
- these accessible services are still most commonly available via a computer on own-brand websites (the 4oD website, for example). Provision of subtitles via such websites is steadily increasing;
- 2014 started to see accessible services provided via other platforms, such as mobile apps. 'Demand 5' and the 'STV Player' are good examples of services available with subtitles; and
- providers continue to identify persistent barriers to the provision of subtitles and audio description. The biggest problem seems to be delivery of accessible programmes to multiple platforms in multiple formats. A programme may have been broadcast with subtitles, but the VoD version of the programme can be available via a range of platforms (for example, set top boxes, websites, apps, connected TVs) all requiring different technical formats for the subtitles to work.

The ATVOD report states that barriers remain and many more conversations between content providers and platform operators needed to take place to overcome these. I am committed to seeing an improvement in the provision of access services for the content of VoD services and will continue to monitor progress. If discussions with the key organisations to explore the recommendations in the Defining Progress for Access Services on Video on Demand paper (April 2015) and the 2015 survey show that significant progress has not been made, then as stated in the Connectivity, Content and Consumers paper (July 2013) I will consider legislation.

I hope that this is helpful.



Ed Vaizey MP
Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy