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Dev ER

Thank you for your letter dated 8 June about Ofcom's review of audio description in which you set out the conclusions of your work in this area.

I would like to begin by expressing my thanks to Ofcom for this extensive work in which you have analysed the advantages and disadvantages of each of the three options for future levels of audio description. Based on this analysis, you have drawn the conclusion that the evidence in support of each option is very finely balanced. As such, Ofcom has not made a specific recommendation and so, in accordance with legislation, any decision to change the statutory audio description target rests with the Secretary of State.

The Government is fully aware that audio description is highly valued by visually impaired people in the UK and we recognise the importance of this service in helping visually impaired people enjoy the best programmes British television has to offer. The UK continues to lead the world in terms of the breadth and volume of audio description that broadcasters are required to deliver, and that has helped to foster the market for a growing range of AD-enabled television receivers. The completion of Digital Switchover over the next two years will create additional opportunities for visually impaired people who have not already switched to benefit from audio description.

We have carefully considered Ofcom's work and also taken into account the encouraging voluntary commitments made by Sky, the BBC and Channel 4 to audio describe 20% of their programming on 26 channels. Based on the findings before us, we have concluded that it is not obvious that further regulation is called for. Therefore we have taken the decision not to increase the statutory 10% audio description target at this time.

However, I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise the importance that we place on the ongoing monitoring of this provision and I ask that Ofcom continues to closely monitor and report on actual levels of audio description provision. If these fall significantly below current levels we will review the statutory targets, in consultation with the RNIB and other interested parties, to consider whether an increase is warranted.

My officials have also informed me that Ofcom is planning to facilitate a further audio description awareness and usage campaign to build on the one undertaken in 2008. I wholeheartedly support this proposal, which will hopefully lead to an even greater take up of this service and I look to Ofcom, the RNIB and broadcasters to work together to help achieve this objective.

Finally, I appreciate that this decision will be a very disappointing one for the RNIB. I have, therefore, written to their Chief Executive outlining our reasons for this decision and explained that Ofcom will continue to closely monitor and report on the levels of audio description. I have also set out that if this provision falls significantly below current levels we will take appropriate action, as outlined above.

Once again, thank you for your review of this valuable service.



ED VAIZEY

Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries