

RNIB International AD Exchange Study

Observations from a focus group study

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Audio Description (AD) is like a narrator telling a story. It is an additional commentary that describes body language, expressions and movements, making the story clear through sound. AD is often relied upon by blind and partially sighted people in the same manner as subtitles are relied upon by deaf and hard of hearing people.

The development of AD has been quite fragmented across the world. In the UK, AD is currently available across television channels, cinemas, home entertainment products such as DVDs, Blu-ray discs and on two online catch up players. Many other countries have made AD available on different media platforms as has been found practical and feasible. They may not necessarily call the narrative track audio description; instead several other terms are used such as video description and descriptive narration. Descriptive Video Service®, registered trademark of WGBH created for its video description service is one such term that is quite often used in the US. For consistency and ease of reading, we will use the term 'AD' in this document.

With the availability of AD increasing across many countries in the world, it is time to look at the exchange of these access features between countries e.g. AD tracks as assets with the original content. The exchange of television content between countries is common practise these days as is the production of DVDs for multiple regions so such a system of AD exchange would ideally minimise any duplication, thereby bringing down production costs and resources allocated to the production of AD. With film companies releasing DVDs and Blu-rays of film/s across many countries, it is now possible to include the same AD track on DVDs/ Blu-rays being released across a number of countries. A very successful and existing example of this exchange would be DVDs and Blu-rays currently being released in Australia with AD tracks that were produced by UK film distributors primarily for UK audiences.

However, since the primary target of these AD tracks is the community of blind and partially sighted people, it is important that their views are taken into consideration before any such system is put in place.

Therefore, this study sought to establish whether or not internationally produced AD would be acceptable to blind or partially sighted regular AD users in the UK.

Key findings

- A majority of blind and partially sighted participants expressed that the origin of AD, produced locally within the UK or imported from another country, made no difference to them as long as the description was of good quality and helped them keep up with the action on the screen.
- Participants were keen to point out that they would much rather have internationally produced AD than no AD at all so if exchange of AD meant more programmes with AD, then it would be more than welcome.
- Some participants felt that if the country of origin of AD was the same as of the programme, then the AD would potentially fit in better with the programme, as the accent (e.g. American English) would remain same throughout

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In contrast to the widely accepted misconception that blind and partially sighted people do not watch television/ films, a needs survey carried out by RNIB in 1991, showed that 94 per cent of blind and partially sighted people watch films/television regularly (RNIB, 1991). In 2006 Research by the University of Birmingham found that around 87 per cent of blind and partially sighted people regularly watch TV and videos or DVDs. The broadcast media plays an important role in the lives of blind and partially sighted people by providing access to news, information and entertainment. (Douglas, G., Corcoran, C., Pavey, S. (August 2006) Network 1000)

AD is an additional commentary to a film/television programme, which describes body language, expressions and movements. It gives people information about the things that they might not be able to see, so that they can keep up with the action on the screen. It takes away the dependence of relying on someone else to fill in the gaps.

The majority of Hollywood distributors such as Warner Bros, Disney, Fox, Paramount, Pathe and Sony Pictures increase the accessibility of their films by providing subtitling for deaf and hearing impaired audience and AD for blind and partially sighted people on almost 100% of their UK releases. In addition, about 40% of the cinemas in the UK are equipped with special equipment that delivers AD to viewers in the cinema. It is delivered at every screening of the film via a headset as long as it is playing in an accessible screen of the cinema. The description comes through the headset and the film soundtrack comes from the cinema surround sound. With the dawn of the new digital cinema age, it will soon be technically possible to have AD on every single show of a film as long as the cinema has infra-red headsets and the required system to support the headsets. The digital system eliminates the need for special equipment to deliver AD as it can be placed on one of the tracks on the hard drive that contains the film media unlike 35mm prints.

The AD track is quite often also carried over on to the DVD and Blu-ray release of the film in the UK.

However, it is television that has emerged as the largest area for

audio described programming in the UK. As per the Communications Act 2003, ten per cent of the programming on digital terrestrial/ cable/ satellite television must be broadcast with AD by the fifth year of a digital license being issued. A number of broadcasters such as BBC, Sky, Channel 4, and most recently ITV have committed to providing AD on at least twenty per cent of their programming.

It is important to note here that the development of AD is relatively widespread across many other countries and it is no longer a UK phenomenon. AD is available across different platforms in Germany, France, USA, Australia and Canada. Whilst it may not be as extensively available as in the UK, this presents an opportunity for the exchange of AD files with the assets that are regularly exchanged with the TV programmes to avoid duplication.

As long as the content is available in the same language across countries (e.g. content in English in the English speaking countries, content in French in French speaking countries) the possibility exists for AD files to be exchanged with the original content.

There are two main benefits of this potential exchange:

1. Reduction in duplication and consequently costs incurred for the production of AD since AD files will be shared amongst broadcasters for mutual benefit.
2. By sharing existing AD, broadcasters will have more capacity to produce AD for other programmes thus increasing the overall quantity of AD

Of course, another potential outcome may be that broadcasters see this as a cost saving opportunity and it could result in the introduction of internationally produced AD tracks without any increase in the total amount of AD being delivered on TV.

Since the primary audience for AD is blind and partially sighted people, it is important to consider their views on the introduction of internationally produced AD before any concrete steps are taken in this direction. In the UK context, this could very well be AD produced in America, Australia, New Zealand, Canada or any other English speaking country. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to seek feedback from blind and partially sighted people in the UK on AD that has been produced internationally.

1.2 In-depth analysis of UK AD and Internationally produced AD

In early July 2009, RNIB exchanged some audio described content with WGBH Boston, AD provider in the US for simple evaluation and forming some initial "expert staff" views on the differences and similarities between AD produced in the UK and internationally produced AD. AD is also referred to as Descriptive Video Service [DVS ®] in the US.

Analysis carried out by AD experts in the UK and US have been included in this report and can be found in Chapter 4.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The aim of this study was to explore the potential for the international exchange of AD files for TV or films on DVD/ Blu-ray, by gathering feedback from regular users of AD within the UK on internationally produced AD. Areas of particular interest included:

- to what extent would the participants feel positively or negatively about internationally produced AD
- to what extent factors such as local accents and dialects, different terminology, and style of AD may affect users' enjoyment
- Whether participants would express preference for a particular style of AD - UK or internationally produced AD

2 Method

2.1 Design

In order to understand the views and opinions of AD users on the subject of internationally produced AD, a qualitative approach was chosen for this research. Focus groups were used to allow discussions between users.

2.2 Participants

Ten regular and enthusiastic users of AD were recruited as participants by RNIB's Media and Culture Department. These people were existing contacts and known to be regular users of AD. The international exchange of AD focus group session was hosted at the RNIB offices in London.

Background information about participants was collected prior to their taking part in the focus group sessions. This included: demographic information (age, gender); sight condition (self report); how sight condition affects TV viewing; and extent of weekly TV viewing with AD.

Demographic information

- Three participants self reported as partially sighted and seven as blind
- Six had congenital sight problems whereas four had acquired sight loss
- Six participants were male and four female
- One participant was aged between 25-34; two between 35-44; two between 45-54; three between 55-64; one between 65-74 and one 85+

Sight Conditions

Participants had a wide range of eye conditions affecting their sight

- Retinitis Pigmentosa - two participants
- Retinal problems - two participants
- Retinopathy of prematurity - one participant
- Nerve damage - one participant
- Stroke - one participant
- Rubella - one participant
- Macular dystrophy/Stargardt - one participant
- Monocular vision - one participant

How sight condition affects TV viewing

- Five participants reported that they could not see anything on the TV screen
- Two participants reported having difficulty seeing the picture, fine detail and text on the TV screen and were unable to see the light of the TV screen
- One participant reported having difficulty seeing the picture, fine detail and text on the TV screen
- One participant reported having difficulty seeing fine detail and text on screen and were unable to see the light of the TV screen
- One participant reported having difficulty seeing the fine detail and text on the TV screen

Extent of weekly TV viewing with AD

- Four participants watched around 20 hours of audio described television per week
- Two participants watched between 10-14 hours per week
- Three participants watched between 4-7 hours per week
- One participant only watched audio described films on DVD

2.3 Materials

There were two key areas investigated in this research-

- Impact of internationally produced AD on international programmes
- Impact of internationally produced AD on a programme written and produced in UK.

The media used for this research were 15-minute clips from each of the following programmes:

1. CSI Miami (an American programme) - AD produced by WGBH Boston. The clip had been selected because of its style and content, it asked for a significant quantity of description. AD in this clip was deemed vital for understanding the clip independently.

2. Miss Marple (a programme produced in the UK therefore with English accent) - AD in American accent produced by WGBH Boston

In contrast to the clip from CSI Miami which is a highly visual fast paced crime thriller series with slick editing, participants were now asked to watch a clip from the British television series Miss Marple. The mystery series is based on a character created by the novelist Agatha Christie in the early 20th century who is quite often seen knitting or working in her garden in the programme. The format of

Miss Marple is much slower and more relaxed in nature when compared to CSI. The basic idea of choosing these two clips was to make the participants hear the American AD on an American show and then make them listen to American description on a British show.

2.4 Procedure

Participants were split into two groups of five for the focus groups. Each focus group included partially sighted and blind participants and was led by a facilitator. Initial questions covered participants' existing views on the idea of international exchange of AD, particularly considering potential benefits and drawbacks of such an exchange.

Following this discussion, all participants came together to view the first demonstration clip, of 15 minutes from an episode of CSI Miami, an American TV programme with American AD. Having watched the clip together, participants went back to their original groups to discuss their experience of the clip. Participants were asked to focus on the AD itself, rather than the genre of the programme, which may or may not have appealed to their taste.

Following this discussion, participants came back together to view the second demonstration clip, 15 minutes from Miss Marple, an English programme with American AD. Again, participants returned to their groups to discuss their experience. Final questions covered participants' acceptance of international AD for British and international programmes.

The facilitator of each focus group used a set topic guide, in annex 2.

3 Focus Group Discussions

3.1 Initial impressions of internationally produced AD

Initial impressions were sought from participants on what they thought about the concept of importing AD tracks from other English speaking countries such as US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada for television programmes and films.

To initiate the discussion, groups were asked to identify potential benefits and drawbacks of such an exchange.

- **Can you think of any benefits to the international exchange of audio description?**

A number of potential benefits of international AD exchange were identified. Some of the participants felt that with the introduction of international AD, UK broadcasters will be able to allocate existing resources to the production of AD for programmes that currently do not carry any AD at all. In addition to this, some also stated that American AD would fit better with American programmes because of similar accents and other relevant features.

- **Benefits**

"I actually watched a film with American AD and it was quite relaxing hearing the description within the [same accent] language...it's not just making sure the AD is fine but making sure the voice is matching up with the film.....I think I went to see Shrek where all these people were talking in animated voices and I found the English AD very distracting because the person who was doing the description was quite soft spoken and it jarred me out of the film."

"I suppose there is one way of looking at it, if we did use international AD then we may have more programmes with it!"

The following three quotes were voiced consecutive to each other.

"[It could mean] saving money"

"[It could mean] more audio description"

"More audio description - yes!!!"

- **Disadvantages**

Most of the participants did not seem to have any firm reservations about internationally produced AD at this point; therefore views expressed during this discussion were really questions that people had in mind. These included potential of problems with different usages of language, different styles of AD, and inclusion of subtitles where some accents may be difficult to understand.

"My only take on it is, if I'm watching Upstairs Downstairs I [would] actually like the audio describer to be in that mood of accent and speaking."

"[What] I'm thinking of is and I've no examples of it as such, that we and the Americans are a country divided by the fact that we speak the same language but differently. So that might pose a problem."

"In the UK, we are used to a more descriptive AD track whereas the AD tracks produced in the US, well at least the ones that I have heard, are more matter of fact. So I am not sure if they would fit and vice versa, of course!"

3.2 Discussion- AD on CSI Miami

Participants watched a 15-minute clip from CSI Miami with AD produced in the US and then split into two groups same as before to discuss the AD that they had just heard. Participants were now asked to comment on their experience of internationally produced AD.

3.2.1 What did you think of the AD?

Participants were asked to put aside whether or not if it would be the genre of programme that they would otherwise choose to watch while at home, and think particularly about the AD.

- **Prompt 1- Compared to the AD that you use now, were there any differences?**

As regular users of AD in the UK, participants were able to pick out the differences between the UK AD and American AD quite quickly. These differences included voicing of credits at the beginning of the show, faster pace of the AD track, additional details in the description. Despite identifying differences in the description, participants felt that none of them seemed instrumental enough to lose interest in the show:

"I was a bit surprised when the credits started - we're so used to hearing that at the end of the programme it's a different method of describing but the details were very good."

"It was put together really well, it was easy to understand, the American dialect didn't bother me personally at all. It was fast moving, but as it was a fast moving programme it seemed to fit in very well."

"I thought it was good. Enhanced the programme because my wife watches CSI and I don't, and one of the reasons why I don't [watch CSI] is because the action happens so quickly. They keep flashing between different scenes and I find that hurts my eyes and I can't concentrate on it. With the AD, I was actually able to follow for the first time what was actually going on in a CSI programme."

"I'm so used to the English description so I found it strange at first but I did start to get used to it and I'm sure in time I would completely get used to it. But it was a bit rapid fire and I do think unfortunately that you need a bit of time to assimilate, contemplate, and to meditate on what you're seeing. You do need a pause to absorb a film. I did get used to it - to the American accent - it was okay and I'm sure in the interest of standardisation I would have to vote for it."

- **Prompt 2- Was there anything that you liked about the audio description in this clip?**

Various factors seemed to impact the enjoyment of participants watching the first clip with American AD. These included the AD being easier to understand as it fitted better with the programme, and better sound levels.

"It was very nicely mixed, easy to hear over the background noise."

"I really liked the American description, it was easy to follow [...] I almost found myself looking towards the screen subconsciously because it held my interest, it was easy to distinguish between the dialogue and the describer.

"For me, because English is a second language it's the same amount of concentration whether it's British or American English. I don't mind especially if that

means it [programmes] can always be audio described."

- **Prompt 3- Was there anything that you disliked about the audio description in this clip?**

The most significant issue that emerged from this discussion was the pace of the AD track and the fact that it probably had too much information which some people found hard to process, (though this may have been a feature of the programme, rather than the AD itself). Other aspects disliked by participants included the presentation of the credits, and use of some unfamiliar terminology.

"The pace of it - it shouldn't be an intrusion - the AD - I don't want the audio describer to win an Oscar."

"It was almost quite relentless and I completely appreciate that it was a very fast moving programme and lots of things were happening and it was switching from different locations and all of that was very good. They did a very good job of switching locations and all that sort of stuff - but personally I just found myself thinking ' I've got a headache'."

"It was just a little bit too fast, rapid."

"I didn't like the way credits came in the middle of nowhere. It seemed disjointed."

3.3. Discussion - AD on Miss Marple

Having viewed the clip from Miss Marple, with American AD, participants were asked to comment on their experience.

3.3.1. What did you think of the AD track?

Once again participants were reminded to focus on the AD rather than the genre and content of the programme.

- **Prompt 1 – Compared to the AD that you use now, were there any differences?**

The majority of the participants wore a puzzled look when they were asked about the difference in AD that they normally used in the UK and this AD track that had been produced in the US. The quotes below summarise what participants said in response to this

question, seeming to pick on the faster pace of the description and the different terminology.

"It seemed a little bit faster than what you would get in the UK description. But it was easy to follow."

"I did notice a few times. The different terminology they have for things. I was left wondering what a caravan was."

"No, I didn't see any difference at all."

- **Prompt 2- Was there anything that you liked about audio description in this clip?**

Although participants struggled to identify differences between the American AD and British AD for Miss Marple, it seemed they found it easier to pick the aspects that they really liked or even disliked during the focus group session. Aspects liked by participants included content of the description, voice of the describer, and a sense of engagement with the programme

"I thought that this is not going to fit - because of the American twang. But safe to say there are as many different American accents as there are English accents - she had a very soft refined American accent. It's all about being in context with what it is. It was brilliant - in the end she did it so well, so professionally that I forgot about her accent."

"I think it's the quality and the quantity of description that we're actually looking for rather than who actually reads it - what accent they've got. As long as you've got the quality and the quantity and it blends in well with the programme and it's clear."

"It's also the feeling, the sense of the programme that the describer has. The American woman describing Miss Marple - she seemed to just have a sense for the content of the programme. That's so important."

"I could have sat and listened to that for however long it went on because it was quite a pleasant North American voice."

- **Prompt 3- Was there anything that you disliked about the audio description in this clip?**

Some participants identified differences in the description which they did not like, such as missing details about how people looked, and having a different style to UK AD, often using the terms 'now' and 'later' and repeating the names of characters in a scene.

"The details were missing about how people looked. I like to know how people look. What their features are - I can imagine by the voice but I like to know how they look."

"I was a bit sceptical at first - but it worked very well. Didn't detract very much but given the choice I would prefer an English describer."

"Being honest it was okay - but it didn't really work for me. I know I'm being picky but how many times did she use that word 'later' and 'now'. I got fed up with hearing her name [the characters]. There were only two of them in the room but she kept repeating the girl's name all the time and the boy's name. "

This discussion was followed by two more general questions on the international exchange of AD model rather than the clips themselves. Since participants had experienced internationally produced AD first hand, they were now able to offer more substantial responses in comparison to the start of the session when only a few of them had actually experienced internationally produced AD.

3.4 Foreign Accents

At this point participants were asked, now that they had seen both the clips, American programme with American AD and a British programme again with American AD, if it made any difference to their viewing experience.

Foreign accents was one of the areas identified by a RNIB AD expert who had analysed the clips before the focus group sessions, to pick out any potential areas that may act as barriers for regular AD users in the UK. Instead of asking the participants directly if the accent would pose an impediment in their enjoyment

of the clip, participants were left to single it out as a significant factor once they had seen both the clips. Below are a selection of quotes that mention foreign accents:

"It didn't make any difference to me actually - we're so used to hearing American voices now, American accents all the time. I read audio books read by Americans. It doesn't really bother me."

"I think if it does promote higher output of AD for us or globally then that's a very positive action from that. The more time allowed - if this does happen - I think the ears and the brain will get used to it anyway."

"I'm listening to so many American Audio books that I really don't care anymore if it's British or American. I don't care. I enjoyed it the same as I do an American movie with British AD. I don't mind - I'm just happy AD is available."

3.5 Support for the exchange

Having had some demonstration of internationally produced AD, participants were now asked, generally speaking, if they would support the idea of international exchange of AD. The discussion that followed this question, almost in effect, mirrored the discussion that had previously taken place after the clips had been played. The conflicting statements below sum up discussion:

"Did anyone have an idea about what the characters looked like...? For me that is very important so it did not really work for me that much"

"Facilitator/s: So generally speaking would you support the idea of International Exchange of AD?"

Participants [almost in unison]: Yes

Facilitator: An overwhelming answer?

Participant [and everyone else nodded in agreement]:

"the more stuff we can get the better."

4 In-depth analysis - AD comparison between UK and US material

4.1 UK Analysis of material described in the US

Author: Joan Greening

After having watched the WGBH Boston programmes- Miss Marple and CSI Miami with American AD, two areas seem to emerge where the US audio description conflicts with the UK Ofcom Best Practise Guidelines. These are as follows:

- **Ofcom Best Practice Guideline 6 [see Appendix 1] states 'When to describe: Audio description should not encroach on dialogue'.** Numerous examples were found where the US description was clashing with the programme dialogue, thrice during 'CSI' and on 35 instances in 'Miss Marple'

- **Ofcom Best Practice Guideline 8 [See Appendix 1] states 'Delivery: 'Avoid the term 'we see'.'**

The AD track on CSI was written from the viewpoint of the person watching the TV programme e.g. - "Now an aerial view sweeping over rooftops. We drift down We lift away into the sky"

- **Additional differences between the US/UK AD**

There are three key areas where the US AD differs from the UK AD.

- **Language and Cultural Differences:**

Although both the US and UK have English as their common language, there are many differences in our use of words and phrases. The following examples were found in the programmes supplied:

- Garbage/Trash [UK - rubbish]
- Tarp [UK - tarpaulin]
- Asphalt [UK- tarmac]
- Fender [UK - wing]
- Sedan [UK - saloon/Bentley/Rolls Royce]
- Jeweller's loupe [UK - jeweller's eye glass]
- Trunk - [UK - boot]
- Ocean - [UK - sea as 'Miss Marple' is set in the English countryside and the UK is surrounded by seas not oceans.]

- Castle - [UK - country mansion/estate. "Castle" conjures up a very specific image to a UK audience. There were no castles in 'Miss Marple'.
- Castle wall [UK - estate wall].

- **Use of adverbs:**

US description uses 'Now' as a way of indicating a scene change, e.g. "Now in a church"; "Now at the licence office". In the UK we use intonation to indicate a scene change e.g. "In a church", "At the licence office". "Now" was used 23 times in 'Miss Marple' and repeatedly in the episode of 'CSI'.

Similarly there is a repeated use of "later" in US description. UK description tends to use "later" when there has been a passage of time in the same setting. In 'Miss Marple', there were 9 uses of the word "later" which in the UK we would simply have described what was happening - "In a bedroom" rather than "Later in a bedroom".

To sum up, the US materials are broadly in line with the Ofcom Best Practise Guidelines however there are additional areas of difference which include language and cultural differences, and use of adverbs in the AD.

4.2 US Analysis of material described in the UK

Author: WGBH

Boston Descriptive Video Service [alternate name for AD in the US] staff and others listened to UK samples on 25/9/09
Los Angeles DVS staff listened at various times

- **Review of Bleak House**
 - the "bundled" descriptions let the drama play out uninterrupted – a good technique
 - we noticed less use of short descriptions (1 sec., 2 sec.) than our usual practice
 - of course, there are language and word differences: "cupboard" for "closet," "lorry" for "truck," "lift" for "elevator." It was suggested that describers should use language culturally relevant to the source of the production; WGBH's DVS staff does this at times (e.g., use of "boot" for "trunk," especially when characters in the production use those words themselves)

- UK describers seem to use less scene-change description than we are used to and wonder if this might leave the viewer a bit lost
The audio mix was better for Bleak House than for the other programs we listening to: Mad Men, 2-1/2 Men, Monk, Brothers & Sisters
- **Review of Sitcoms (situation comedies: i.e., “Two-and-a-Half Men”)**
 - the audio mix seemed jarring when a laugh track was present (in the sitcoms). There are little-to-no sitcoms described in the U.S., so laugh track issues as they effect the mix are not common
 - there is certainly less space/time for adding description in a sitcom
 - the description script seemed to have more "attitude" or “edge” (in 2-1/2 Men in particular); we tend to be more “removed” except for kids programs
- **Review of Monk**
 - due to lack of space/time in the program, there did not seem to be enough description for mystery-solving and understanding by blind audiences

5. Conclusion

The small sample size and non-random selection of the participants prevents these findings from being used to generalise the results to the wider population. The results from this study show that the use of internationally produced AD on UK or international programmes would not have any impact on the enjoyment of programmes but that does not necessarily represent views of all AD users.

The two focus groups were unanimous in their view on the use of internationally produced AD. However it is noteworthy, while their views were positive on the introduction of internationally produced AD as it may potentially lead to an increase in the percentage of audio described content on television, they were concerned about the quality of AD. So as long as the quality of AD was maintained, they were happy to use the AD that was produced in any part of the world.

Key Findings:

- The single most important factor that emerged from this research was the availability of AD as it made all the difference in the understanding of the television programme/ film.

"I think if it does promote higher output of AD for us or globally then that's a very positive action. I think the ears and the brain will get used to it anyway and I would really consider it but if it's too bad then I'd switch it off - and then ask what's happening? It needs to be of a good quality from both sides of the pond really."

- The majority of blind and partially sighted participants expressed that the origin of AD, produced locally within the UK or imported from another country, made no difference to them as long as the description was of good quality and helped them keep up with the action on the screen.

"As long as you've got the quality and the quantity and it blends in well with the programme and it's clear. To me it doesn't matter if it's an American person describing it on an English programme or the other way around."

"We could have theirs if it's the same quality as ours. For me the whole thing hangs on standards."

- Some participants felt that if the country of origin of AD was the same as the programme, then the AD would potentially fit in better with the clip, as the accent (e.g., American English) would be the same throughout

"I would like an American movie with an American audio describer."

"It's about quality, although accent does come into it."

6. Recommendations

Following on from this study to examine AD preferences, it is recommended that broadcasters and AD providers in different countries carry out a further study to explore the various possibilities that exist for AD exchange:

- Practical implementation of this exchange system of fully produced AD files
- Exchange of AD scripts only, which can then be adapted as per scheduling patterns followed in different countries for example., 2 commercial breaks in a 30 minute programme or 4 commercial breaks in a 30-minute programme.

This study only gives the perspective of potential users without going into the technical intricacies of any exchange of AD files.

Appendix 1: Ofcom Code on Television Access Services

1. What to describe: to the extent relevant to the storyline, audio description should describe characters, locations, time and circumstances, any sounds that are not readily identifiable, on-screen action, and on-screen information.
2. Characters: identifying and describing characters is vital to effective audio description. Key features should be identified as soon as practicable, to help identify the person in the listener's mind's eye and avoid the need for long-winded and confusing descriptions, e.g. 'the tall man', 'district attorney Lopez'. But do not give the name away if the plot requires the character's identity to be revealed at a later date. When describing characters, aspects such as dress, physical characteristics, facial expression, body language, ethnicity and age may be significant. Don't shy away from using colours or describing a character as pretty, or handsome, where relevant to the story. Generally names (rather than 'he' or 'she') are used more often than in normal speech, so as to avoid confusing the audience, particularly when there are several people taking part in a dialogue.
3. On-screen action: wherever possible try to describe at the same time as the action occurs. This is particularly important with regard to comic situations, where the audience, sighted and visually impaired, should be able to laugh at the same time. Where relevant, key back-references can be included. It may be necessary to set up the next scene during the current description.
4. Settings: when describing locations, try to cover scene changes where possible. the locations (including scene changes wherever possible); the time of day/season/date setting where appropriate; any sounds that are not readily identifiable; and on-screen information (e.g. signs, hieroglyphics, open subtitles for foreign languages, captions, and opening and closing credits). The description should not censor what is on screen. However, it should not be necessary to use offensive language, unless (for example)

when referring to content that is integral to understanding the programme, such as graffiti scrawled on a wall.

5. What not to describe: the description should only provide information about what can be seen on the screen. Information unavailable to the sighted viewer should not be added though discretion is always necessary. 'A turreted bridge over a city river' would fall short if the sighted audience sees London's Tower Bridge, even without an identifying caption. Generally, 'filmic' terms such as camera angles should not be used.
6. When to describe: audio description should not encroach on dialogue, important or complementary sound effects, or critical sound effects unless really necessary. Even then, audio description should only be used to impart relevant information when the dialogue or other sound is inconsequential, or to read subtitles or on-screen captions. To differentiate between subtitles and description the describer should do this by either the use of their voice (e.g. stating the obvious, 'He says in Russian...' or 'A caption reads...') or a second voice. During opening titles and end credits, care should be taken to avoid clumsy overlaps with song lyrics. During songs, audio description should ideally where there is a reprise of the lyrics and where the lyrics are not relevant to the storyline.
7. Language: audio description provides a real-time commentary, so should generally be in the present tense (he sits), the continuous present (he is sitting) or the present participle ('Standing at the window, he lets out a deep sigh'), as appropriate. Variety is important, particularly with verbs. 'She scuttles into the room' rather than the simple fact 'She enters the room' creates a clearer image for the viewer (a Thesaurus is always useful). Adverbs are a useful shorthand to describing emotions and actions, but should not be subjective. Vocabulary should be matched to the genre of the programme, and should be accurate, easily understood, and succinct.
8. Delivery: delivery should be steady, unobtrusive and impersonal in style (but not monotonous), so that the personality and views of the describer do not colour the programme. Avoid the term 'we see'. However, it can be

important to add emotion, excitement, lightness of touch at different points in different programmes to suit the mood and the plot development – the style should be matched to the genre of the programme. Diction should be clear, and not hurried – every word should be clear, audible and timed carefully so that it does not overrun subsequent dialogue. The aim should be to enhance the enjoyment of a programme not to distract from it.

9. Balance: judgement is needed in striking an appropriate balance between the amount of detail that is conveyed, and the risk of overburdening the audience with detail and detracting from the enjoyment of the programme. Too much description, even where there is a lot of space for description, can make it difficult for viewers to absorb information. The programme should be allowed ‘to breathe’. On the other hand, long gaps in the dialogue may need to be explained if the viewer is not to be left confused, e.g. ‘the cowboy rides across the prairie into the distance’. If a slot available for audio description is short, it is better to focus on key moments and dynamics rather to rush the description or fill every available moment. For example, it may be distracting in dance or fight scenes to describe every piece of action. A consistent approach is important: if a description starts out as detailed, it should not suddenly become scant.
10. Describers: describers should be chosen to fit the genre, the nature of the programme and the intended audience. Ideally, the same people should be used to describe a series of programmes, both to ensure a consistent style (e.g. in terms of level of detail) and because the description forms a part of the programme for users.
11. Children’s programmes: Language and pace of delivery for children’s TV need particular care, having regard to the age and background of the target audience, as well as feedback from children and their parents. A more intimate style may be appropriate than would be the case for programmes aimed at adults.

Appendix 2: Topic guide for focus group sessions

Introducing ourselves

- Hello everyone. My name is [facilitator] I will be facilitating our discussion today.
- Before we get started, I think it would be good to introduce ourselves. As we're talking about TV today, lets get to know each other a little bit by saying our first name, where we come from and a favourite TV programme. If I start [facilitator introduces]. Then if we go clockwise round the table...

Reminders/Housekeeping

Thank you.

- Just to remind everybody, our discussion is being recorded
- What we discuss here today will be confidential. Your names will not appear in any reports and you won't be identified in any way.
- We're really interested to hear what you think, please feel absolutely free to answer honestly, and to voice opinions that are different to other members of the group. We're interested in what everyone has to say.
- If you want to leave discussion, that's fine

How it will work

- To make sure everyone has a chance to speak, I will ask a question and then go around the group asking for each person's thoughts. But it is meant to be a discussion, so if you want to respond to what someone else has said please feel free to chip in.
- When doing this, it would really help if you could say your name first, so everyone knows someone else is waiting to speak and we'll come to you next. Please try not to talk over each other so we can all hear what is being said.

Background

So before we get going, let's remind everyone why we're here today!

We're here to talk about the potential for sharing audio description of TV programmes between countries. Currently all the audio description we get on UK television is produced in the UK. But a number of other English speaking countries also produce audio description (such as America, Canada, and Australia). As there is

a lot of international exchange of TV programmes, there may be potential for audio description to be exchanged too. We're here today to hear what you – as users of Audio description – think about this idea.

We will be watching some samples of programmes with audio description produced in other countries, but before we do that I'd like to hear your views on the idea of international exchange of audio description.

So to start off,

1. Can you think of any benefits to the international exchange of audio description?

[Prompt – what would be good about it?]

Notes:

2. Can you think of any drawbacks to the international exchange of audio description?

[Prompt – what would be bad about it?]

Notes:

Lets watch the first clip now. It is from a crime drama television series. Some of you may have heard of it- CSI Miami

VIEWING OF THE FIRST CLIP - CSI Miami

Duration: 15 mins

Cue in- Start of the episode

Cue out- End of first segment [ad break comes in...]

If we can put aside whether or not that is the sort of programme you usually like to watch, and think particularly about the audio description,

5. What did you think of the audio description?

[Prompt 1- Compared to the audio description that you use now, were there any differences?]

[Prompt 2- Was there anything that you liked about the audio description in this clip?]

[Prompt 3- Was there anything that you disliked about the audio description in this clip?]

Notes:

6. Any additional comments

Lets watch the second clip now. It is a television series based on **Miss Marple** murder novels by Agatha Christie.

VIEWING OF THE SECOND CLIP - Miss Marple

Duration: 15 mins

Cue in- Start of the episode

Cue out- Miss Marple standing at the train station, and smoke billowing out of the engine....

So again, thinking particularly about the audio description,

7. What did you think of the audio description track?

Prompt 1 – Compared to the audio description that you use now, were there any differences?

Prompt 2- Was there anything that you liked about audio description in this clip?

Prompt 3- Was there anything that you disliked about the audio description in this clip?

Notes:

8. Any additional comments

9. Now we have seen both clips, you might have noticed that one was an American program with American audio description and one was a British programme with American audio description. Did this make any difference?

[Prompt: did it affect how much you enjoyed the clip?

Prompt: did it affect your understanding of the clip?]

10. Having had some demonstration of internationally produced audio description, generally speaking would you support the idea of international exchange of audio description?

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