



Accessibility and digitalisation

Digital television promises better access to television for viewers with hearing or vision impairment by using new closed captioning technologies and the possibility of audio descriptions on television programs.

The recent visit by a member of the Ofcom Content Board, Kevin Carey, gave ABA staff the opportunity to learn about accessibility issues under consideration in the United Kingdom resulting from the strong take-up of digital and increase in multi-channel homes.

Mr Carey notionally looks after issues to do with accessibility to broadcasting services for hearing and vision impaired audiences, older people and the intellectually impaired. He currently has a research fellowship to study accessibility in a number of overseas countries, in order to establish a European Centre for Accessible Media. While in Sydney Mr Carey also met representatives of Blind Citizens Australia, Australian Association of Hearing Impaired, Deaf Citizens of Australia, the Australian Caption Centre and the Disability Unit of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Closed captions

Programming broadcast on commercial and national television between 6 pm and 10.30 pm, must be broadcast with closed captions for the hearing impaired. The percentage of captioned broadcasting between 6 am and midnight is to rise to 70 per cent by the end of 2007. Foxtel launched closed-caption programming on its digital subscription broadcasting service on 21 October 2004.

Five per cent of programs across a minimum of 20 digital subscription broadcasting channels will be captioned by December 2005. This quota will increase by five per cent every year and a further 20 channels must be caption enabled by December 2006.

Australian requirements for captioning have been set through a combination of broadcasting legislation and decisions by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Audio description

The communications regulators in both the UK and US have established initial requirements for audio description/enhancement of television services (video description in the US). This

involves the addition to a television program of a verbal description of the on-screen action, scene and other visual elements. The UK's Communications Act of 2003 requires Ofcom to set 10 year targets for audio description, which it did by means of a code issued on 26 July 2004.

Discussions with Mr Carey highlighted the need to consider the broad issues to do with access to digital media, as well as the potential for audio description of television programs in Australia. In particular, electronic program guides (EPGs) are going to become essential tools for accessing television programs in a digital multi-channel environment. Unless EPGs are in accessible formats (e.g. web accessible/manipulable data, voice-out processors in remotes, bitmap EPGs on screen) vision impaired viewers, including many elderly viewers, will not be able to find the content they want. Well designed emotes and EPGs will become more important when dealing with non-scheduled media in the future. ☒

New on the web www.aba.gov.au

In addition to the news releases which are listed on the ABA's home page, www.aba.gov.au, the following items have been added to the site:

the following areas have been updated:

- added applications for the community radio broadcasting licence for Alice Springs, NT: www.aba.gov.au/radio/services/services/nt/alice_springs/index.htm
- added applications for the community radio licence to service Charleville, Qld: www.aba.gov.au/radio/services/services/qld/charleville/index.htm
- Added letter to Tamar FM (applicant for the community radio licence to service George Town, Tas) requesting more information: www.aba.gov.au/radio/services/services/tas/georgetown/community/applications.htm
- updated consolidated regional television licence condition: www.aba.gov.au/tv/investigations/projects/regional_news/maps.htm
- updated the publications order form: www.aba.gov.au/store/index.htm
- updated 5AA disclosure statement: www.aba.gov.au/radio/content/standards/table.htm
- updated radio and community radio pages: www.aba.gov.au/radio/index.htm ☒