

THE ATTACHED TRANSCRIPT WAS TYPED FROM A RECORDING AND NOT COPIED FROM AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF MISHEARING AND THE DIFFICULTY IN SOME CASES OF IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS, THE BBC CANNOT VOUCH FOR ITS COMPLETE ACCURACY.

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## **YOU AND YOURS – RNIB LOBBY PARLIAMENT OVER THE NEW COMMUNICATIONS BILL - 04.02.03**

### **WAITE**

Hundreds of visually impaired people are lobbying Parliament today over the Government's new Communications Bill, which they say does nothing to ensure that they will be amongst those who'll benefit from the digital revolution. The bill sets out the future provision of digital TV, radio and mobile phones but, according to today's protestors, it fails to include anything to help those with any kind of sight problem. Neither does it increase the number of TV programmes which are what's called audio described, in other words they have narration added between the dialogue.

Well in a moment we'll be hearing from the RNIB but first Tony Gunnell from Ramsgate in Kent has been telling us about his visually impaired son. He says that Daniel, who's two, will grow up in a different world.

### **GUNNELL**

Daniel will never be able to read the onscreen menu and the programmes he does see he can't see the action, he can't see what the characters are doing and what their faces are doing and so he misses out a substantial portion of the dialogue and the action and the plot. And we want these things available for him so he can be included in the world, not excluded. I think that will be very easy in the future for technology to be made which will enable a voiceover to be done, an optional voiceover, which Dan will be able to benefit from. If it's not done now in the future it'll become too expensive because the platforms will all be in place and it would need multiple massive changes to make these things included.

### **WAITE**

Tony Gunnell. Well with me now Steve Winyard, head of public policy for the RNIB, give us some more examples will you Tony of how television and radio and mobile phones of the future will fail to be accessible to people with a visual impairment.

### **WINYARD**

Well so much of digital technology basically has visual displays and at the moment thought is not being given to how this visual information can be made - turned into audio information. And it's not difficult to do but it's not being done and crucially this Communications Bill, which is in Parliament, will set the framework for the next 10 years, so if we don't grab this opportunity now so much of the new technology that comes through will be inaccessible to people with a sight problem.

### **WAITE**

So they'll just miss out on talking about TV programmes which they won't be able to follow, or radio programmes. They won't be able to read dramas, news ...

### **WINYARD**

Absolutely so much of the - I mean television is central to our culture and digital television offers the opportunity but if we don't get this legislation right now that visually impaired people will be excluded from it.

### **WAITE**

So what changes are needed?

### **WINYARD**

Well one of the central ones is to ensure that audio described programmes are available, that the technology's available, so people can receive them, at the moment it's ludicrous - the BBC is audio describing four per cent of its programmes, only 45 people in the country can receive them - it's crazy.

**WAITE**

And is that the BBC's fault?

**WINYARD**

Well I don't say it's the BBC's fault, I think it would cost £3 million for the Government to put - to make the equipment available and to get it into production and that's one of the things we're asking for.

**WAITE**

So the Government should take a lead and, what, force manufacturers to have this ability on their TV sets?

**WINYARD**

Well certainly that's what we'd like to see in the Bill - that there would be a requirement on companies to produce the accessible equipment but 3 million would at least allow us to get things moving along.

**WAITE**

So what are the current targets for audio description - this narration that runs in between the dialogue - as compared say with subtitling - text - on screen?

**WINYARD**

Well there's a massive gap. At best audio description - 10 per cent of programmes will be audio described, whereas the target for subtitling would be 90 per cent - so there's an enormous gap.

**WAITE**

And does the Bill suggest any increase?

**WINYARD**

Sadly not, these targets - the Government - we've been talking to them repeatedly over the last couple of years and they keep saying no they won't increase them.

**WAITE**

So finally what do you hope today's lobby will achieve?

**WINYARD**

Well we hope it'll be a wake up call to the Government. It's the first lobby by blind and partially sighted people of Parliament for 10 years and people are very, very angry - they're coming from all over the country to lobby their MPs and if you can arouse a group like blind and partially sighted people who typically tend to sadly often take what's given to them - they're angry - MPs should listen and the Government should respond.