

# RNIB

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See differently

## **Modernising the BBC's Operating Licence - RNIB's response**

### **About us**

RNIB is the largest organisation of blind and partially sighted people in the UK and welcomes this opportunity to respond to the consultation. With blind and partially sighted people at the heart of everything we do, our community of over 33,000 people brings together anyone affected by sight loss. More than three quarters of our Board of Trustees are blind or partially sighted. We support, empower and involve thousands of people affected by sight loss to improve lives and challenge inequalities. We engage with a wide range of politicians, organisations and professionals to achieve full inclusion through improvements to services, incomes, rights and opportunities.

We campaign for the rights of blind and partially sighted people in each of the UK's countries. Our priorities are to:

1. Be there for people losing their sight.
2. Support independent living for blind and partially sighted people.
3. Create a society that is inclusive of blind and partially sighted people's interests and needs.
4. Stop people losing their sight unnecessarily.

RNIB welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

### **Consultation Responses**

#### **Question 1: What are stakeholder views on how Ofcom should assess and measure BBC performance?**

RNIB broadly agree with Ofcom's approach.

Appendix A4 of the consultation document states that Ofcom considers "...the needs of persons with disabilities, of the elderly, and of those on low incomes;" to be relevant to this consultation. The mission of the BBC is "to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain". The public purposes of the BBC are concerned with the content it creates, therefore in order to serve all audiences this content needs to be accessible. This is also in line with

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the obligations of both Ofcom and the BBC under the Public Sector Equality Duty [i], namely the obligation to “...advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it”.

It seems sensible that quotas for the BBC are made largely platform independent, however those quotas are only being fulfilled if the content is accessible and the platform they are delivered on is accessible. When delivered digitally, only content that can be navigated to and viewed accessibly (including with audio description if required) should count towards quotas. In addition to this, the accessibility of iPlayer across different platforms should be included in the annual report to Ofcom to measure the reach of the BBC’s content.

**Question 2: Do you agree with the proposals for Public Purpose 1? If not, please explain why.**

As stated above, for the quotas to be meaningful the content and the platform need to be accessible. News and current affairs are formats which can often be made accessible by good design without the need for additional services such as audio description.

In the past, BBC news has hosted informative videos on the website and online channels with all or most of the information presented as text on the screen set over background music, providing no accessible alternative. This is inaccessible to screenreader users but could easily be made accessible either by reading out the text or by providing the text alongside the video in a format that screenreaders can access. Content such as this, which is inaccessible but could easily be made accessible, should not count towards any target quota.

News segments which include interviews in foreign languages have often used English language subtitles to translate the content despite the inaccessibility of written subtitles for blind and partially sighted people. If this content was dubbed rather than subtitled it would be naturally accessible to blind and partially sighted people. Thus, news programs that include foreign language content which is inaccessible in this way should not count towards any quota.

**Question 3: Do you agree with the proposals for Public Purpose 2?  
If not, please explain why.**

As referenced above, only accessible content should count towards quotas.

**Question 4: Do you agree with the proposals for Public Purpose 3?  
If not, please explain why.**

As referenced above, only accessible content should count towards quotas.

**Question 5: Do you agree with our preliminary view on the BBC's request to change Operating Licence conditions 2.21 and 2.32 for BBC Four, including our proposal to remove BBC Four's peak original productions quota and set the 'all hours' quota at 65% instead of 60% as requested by the BBC? If not, please explain why.**

RNIB have no view on this matter.

**Question 6: Do you agree with the proposals for Public Purpose 4?  
If not, please explain why.**

As referenced above, only accessible content should count towards quotas.

**Question 7: Taken together, do you agree with the proposals for a new Operating Licence? If not, please explain why.**

RNIB broadly agree but with the provision that only content which is accessible should be counted towards quotas. The BBC should report on the accessibility of content and platforms, so Ofcom can assess whether this content is "serving all audiences" as is promised by the BBC's mission statement.

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i Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010