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Department for Culture Media and Sport		
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Re Response to "Public Service for All"

This organisation is the largest national self-help organisation of blind and visually impaired people; it is regularly consulted by government, central and local, and public authorities on legislation and other matters concerning people with a visual handicap and has regular meetings with ministers and civil servants.

We are taking the opportunity to respond to the above White Paper and trust that our recommendations will be taken into consideration.

We fully support the response submitted to the above White Paper by the Royal National Institute of the Blind, and would like to make the following additional recommendations: -

Audiodescription on TV - Some of our members, particularly in the regions, report that the quality is not what it should be: frequently commentary is superimposed on dialogue to the extent that both

become incomprehensible. OFCOM as the responsible regulator should concern itself with this matter and monitor improvements.

Television - A recent survey showed that 94% of visually impaired people tune into TV as a source of indispensable information. Some ten to fifteen years ago the BBC agreed a set of guidelines with representatives of the visually impaired on improving access to TV for people without sight. Matters covered included mainly that important information, such as addresses and telephone numbers, names of speakers, which was at present shown on screen only should also be spoken, i.e. should be audible as well as visual. These included subtitling in public service programmes and documentaries, synopses of instalments of TV drama series. These guidelines have never been implemented. The excuse of the programme controllers that they have to accept what the programme makers provide cannot be valid if the principle of the piper and his paymaster is accepted. It is the failure to insist that these changes be made that is responsible.

Literature in alternative media - On the occasion of the previous Charter review in the 1990.s the BBC gave an undertaking that it would endeavour to produce some of its publications in alternative media accessible to people without sight - Braille, compact cassette, computer disc and CD. There has been no movement on this front at all since then.

DAB - There is a general perception among the trade and consumers that the quality of the BBC's digital radio output is not as high as it should be and that of other European broadcasting enterprises. There seems to be a preference of quantity over quality. Technically, the bit rate of digital broadcasts is lower than that of the equivalent analogue broadcast. We trust that OFCOM will  
address this matter urgently. ,