[IE] Draft television access rules launched

IRIS 2014-7:1/25

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On 26 May 2014, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) launched a public consultation on Draft Revised Access Rules for Irish television broadcasters. The draft Rules will update the current Access Rules in place since 2005 and last reviewed in 2012 (IRIS 2012-7/28). The Rules determine the levels of subtitling (including captioning), sign language and audio description that broadcasters will be required to provide; they apply to certain broadcasters within the State but do not apply to broadcast services commonly received in Ireland but licensed in other jurisdictions.

Section 41(3)(c) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 provides that the BAI shall prepare and revise rules that require broadcasters to take steps to promote the understanding and enjoyment of programmes for persons who are deaf, have a hearing impairment or are blind or partially sighted or a combination of these. Section 43(3) of the Act further provides for the rules to specify a percentage of programmes broadcast that must be accessible.

Under the draft Rules a range of percentage targets are set for each broadcast service (television station) that they must provide for the period 2014-2018 and different targets are set for each broadcaster. The target range is increased annually for each applicable broadcast service on an incremental basis over the five year-period.

Subtitling (on-screen text that represents what is said on screen) targets are set for the first time for the three additional RTÉ - national public service broadcaster - television services established in 2011, namely RTÉjr, RTÉ Plus 1 and RTÉ News Now. The draft Rules do not prioritise any programme genres, types or time-blocks. However, broadcasters must consult at least annually with user groups as to their viewing preferences.

Targets for Irish Sign Language and Audio Description (commentary that provides a verbal description of what is happening on screen) are currently only applicable to RTÉ One and RTÉ Two. The draft Rules propose extending the range of services on which Irish Sign Language must be provided. Specifically, it requires RTÉjr - a children's channel - to begin providing some Irish Sign Language. This requirement is in response to calls from access user groups who have highlighted their desire that children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing would be able to access

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the children's television service and that their parents or guardians would be facilitated in watching this service with their children.

The draft Rules propose further reviews in 2016 and 2018. This is in line with the requirements under section 43(6) of the Broadcasting Act 2009. The closing date for receipt of public submissions on the draft Rules is 23 July 2014.

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), Access Rules Review Public Consultation, (May 2014)

http://access.baifuture.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/20140508_AccessConDoc_vFINAL_IRE_ENG.pdf

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), Press Release - Changes Proposed to Rules on Television Subtitling, Sign Language & Audio Description, (26 May 2014)

http://www.bai.ie/?p=38619

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