

Your Ref:
Our Ref: 209362/KS/09

Jim Edwards
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14 August 2012

Dear Mr Edwards

Thank you for your letter of 19 June about telecommunications access for British Sign Language (BSL) users in the UK.

Thank you for your offer to meet and discuss improving access to broadcast services for those with visual and hearing impairment. Owing to heavy diary commitments I am afraid that I will not be able to accept your offer to meet and discuss this matter at present.

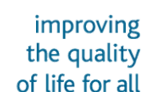
Government understands that television subtitles are vital if profoundly deaf and hard of hearing people are to have access to television services. It is for this reason that the Government is committed to extending access to broadcasting services for people with sensory impairments and to help ensuring that the subtitling offered is of a consistently high standard.

The Government continues to be committed to making progress on the accessibility and availability of access services, and the programme of work of the eAccessibility forum will continue.

As you may be aware, a series of policy seminars will be held in the coming months to shape and inform the Government's communications review. We have just published a series of policy papers outlining the key questions each seminar will consider – these papers are all on the DCMS website here:

<http://dcmscommsreview.readandcomment.com/about-the-communications-review/>

The policy papers and seminars will replace a previously planned Green Paper. Rather than hold a second general consultation on a broad range of communications policy issues, these focused events will allow detailed exploration of key themes to inform a White Paper published early in 2013.

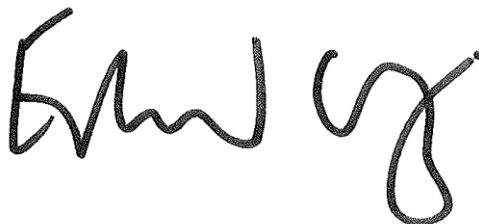


The paper which has just been published to inform for the consumer perspective seminar does also covers accessibility issues, and sets key questions on these. Responses to these questions, and other issues which people may want to raise, can be submitted to communications.review@culture.gsi.gov.uk.

Equally, you may also wish to note that the papers on the website (link above) are also in a 'commentable' format; enabling them to add public comments and answers to the questions should they so wish.

Furthermore as part of the Government's engagement process the Government's eAccessibility Forum met on 10 July 2012, to discuss the eAccessibility questions raised in the Seminar paper which can be found on the link above. Questions included issues people with disabilities in the UK would face in five to ten years from now, and specifically covered Video Relay Services (VRS) for accessible telephone services, and other issues affecting access to digital services and products for disabled and older people living in the UK. The eAccessibility Forum meeting on 10 July was used to discuss the accessibility issues covered in our discussion paper. By having a dedicated session on this we were able to focus on these important issues and give them the time they deserve.

The DCMS website, and the associated Communications Review email address above, provides a means for all stakeholders to engage with the process, to submit evidence and arguments, and to address key questions posed in the paper.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Vaizey', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ed Vaizey MP
Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries

Approved by the Minister and signed electronically in his absence