



Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI)
Target Audience Consultation Research to Inform Review
of the Access Rules

November 2009



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1. Introduction

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI or ‘the regulator’) was established on October 1st, 2009 and is an independent statutory organisation responsible for a number of key areas of activity with regard to television and radio services in Ireland. The work of the BAI is principally guided by the Broadcasting Act, 2009 (“2009 Act”). The objectives of the BAI as set out in Section 25(1) of the 2009 Act are: to ensure that the number and categories of broadcasting services made available in the State best serve the needs of the people of the island of Ireland, bearing in mind their languages and traditions and their religious, ethical and cultural diversity; to ensure that the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution especially those relating to rightful liberty of expression, are upheld, and; to provide for open and pluralistic broadcasting services. The BAI incorporates work previously undertaken by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission (BCC).

Further to the provisions of the Broadcasting Act 2001 the regulator is responsible for the development of codes and rules covering standards in broadcasting. These codes and rules concern matters such as taste and decency in programming, advertising, and the provision of services for the enjoyment of television programmes by the vision and hearing impaired. The Broadcasting Act 2001 called on the regulator to draw up rules which required broadcasters to take steps to promote the understanding and enjoyment of programmes by people who are Deaf, hard of hearing or blind or vision impaired. The legislation allowed for such rules to specify the percentage of programmes broadcast that must be ‘accessible.’ The subsequent ‘Access Rules’ developed by the regulator therefore determine the levels of subtitling, sign language and audio description that broadcasters in Ireland are required to provide in accordance with their statutory obligations. The Access Rules were developed through a process of public consultation together with submissions received from various interest groups. The Access Rules came into effect on the 1st March 2005 and apply to broadcasters in the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland namely RTÉ 1, RTÉ 2, TG4, TV3, 3e, Setanta Ireland, City Channel (Dublin, Galway and Channel South), Dublin City TV and P5 TV. (During the period of the review ESPN America was also subject to the Access Rules.)

In keeping with good practice the regulator is currently undertaking a review of the Access Rules. A number of strands of research have been undertaken to inform this review. One of these strands of research, and the subject of this particular report, involved a targeted consultation. This targeted consultation focused on those principal audiences benefiting from the Access Rules namely members of the general public who have a sensory disability and who use subtitling, sign language and audio description to assist their understanding and enjoyment of television programmes. As specified by the regulator the purpose of this research was to elicit views concerning the **quality** of access

provision. The research study also set out to obtain feedback about Irish based television viewers' **use** and **experience** of the access services made available by the Irish based broadcasters.

Specifically this study sought to determine what constitutes 'good access' for the Irish television viewer in terms of subtitle, sign language and audio description provision. The research was commissioned to offer a contemporary perspective that would not only provide more comprehensive data than had been generated previously in an Irish context on levels and trends of use of television access services, but would also offer a voice to the opinions, experiences and preferences of those who are Deaf, hard of hearing or blind or vision impaired. By exploring and examining the views and opinions of relevant audience members concerning the quality, format and impact that elements such as timing, placement, colour and synchronisation introduces to the enjoyment and understanding of television programmes this research study was undertaken to support the regulator in making decisions that are well informed and based on robust evidence.

The field work for this most recent consultation process was conducted between June and August 2009. This report details the key findings generated through the research.

2. Objective & Methodology

The principal objective of this research study was:

To identify the level of use of television access services by those with a sensory disability and to generate feedback on the quality and format of current access provision and the impact of access services on viewer enjoyment and understanding.

Sub-objectives for the research were also defined and agreed, as follows:

- To explore and examine Irish based television viewers' use and experience of the television access services made available by the Irish based broadcasters.
- To explore what constitutes 'good access' for the Irish television viewer in terms of subtitle, sign language and audio description provision.
- To provide a voice to the opinions, experiences and preferences of those who are Deaf, hard of hearing or blind or vision impaired on the subject of television access services in Ireland.
- To identify ways in which improvements could be made to the various television access services.

- To provide research findings that will support the BAI in making decisions that are well informed and based on robust evidence.

Both qualitative and quantitative research was undertaken to generate relevant findings on both the perceived quality and the level of use of access provision in Ireland.

2.1 Qualitative Research

A number of phases of research were undertaken to generate qualitative research findings;

(1) Diary research involving participants with a sensory disability; Fifty members of the general public each of whom is either Deaf or heard of hearing were invited to take part in a two week long diary research study. The study required participants to keep a written record of television programmes, aired by the Irish based broadcasters, that they watched over the two week period. In maintaining this diary the participants were also asked to comment on their use of the television access services that may or may not have accompanied these programmes. The diary research study provided participants with an initial opportunity to articulate their views and opinions on and levels of satisfaction with the availability and quality of subtitling and sign language provided by the Irish broadcasters. Many of the participants included very insightful comments on the quality, format and availability of both subtitling and sign language. In respect of subtitling in particular the returned diaries also offered the research team an initial insight to the various dimensions, features and attributes of subtitling provision which are most important to the Irish viewer.

Of the 50 people who committed to participate in this element of the study 28 diaries were completed and returned by the required closing date and thereafter included in the overall analysis of findings. A sample diary booklet, as would have been received by each of the original 50 targeted participants, is included in the appendices.

(2) One to one interviews with 48 research participants; On completion of an initial top-line analysis of the data presented in the completed diaries the researchers conducted a series of one to one interviews with 48 research participants each of whom is either Deaf, hard of hearing or blind or vision impaired. Through this phase of research the researchers attempted to secure a 'reasonable' spread amongst the 48 participants in terms of both age and severity of hearing or vision impairment. The interviews provided an opportunity to explore in more detail views recorded in the diary research element of the study. The interview guide used by the researchers is included in the appendices.

(3) Ten group interviews each involving approximately four to eight participants; A focus group is a creative and discursive format that can allow for subtle and insightful ideas to surface. As part of the research OCS facilitated ten focus group meetings. The group sizes varied with each group including between four and eight participants. In order to secure a wide range of views the researchers recruited participants with various levels of hearing and vision impairment and people who use different forms of communication. A profile of participants attending each of the ten groups is provided in Table One overleaf.

The discussion across the ten groups focussed on the participants views on both the availability and quality of current access provision and examined ways in which improvements could be made to the existing services. The participants were also shown a series of approximately 20 clips of television programmes, each ranging in duration between two and three minutes, drawn from various channels with different types and styles of access provision. In addition to discussing their experiences of accessing television programmes those involved in the various groups were asked for their views and opinions of the different formats and to identify the features and elements of the access services which are most important to them. The discussion guide employed during the course of the focus groups is included in the appendices.

In total 56 people took part in ten focus group sessions across five locations – Dublin, Kilkenny, Waterford, Cork and Galway. Of the ten groups three groups were populated by participants with a vision impairment while the remaining seven groups included participants with various levels of hearing impairment.

Of the seven groups which focused on people with a hearing impairment three groups included participants whose preferred form of communication is Irish Sign Language while two of these seven groups were populated by participants ranging in age between 9 and 15.

Of the three groups where the focus of the discussion was on television access services for viewers with a vision impairment participants in two of the groups had previous experience in watching television with audio description accompaniment while those in the third group had not experienced audio description prior to attending the focus group.

Table One: Focus Group Participant Profile

| Group No. | Hearing / Vision Impairment | Preferred Form of Communication | Number of Participants | Age range in years | Location |
|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Hearing | Irish Sign Language | 8 | 20 – 55 | Dublin |
| 2 | Hearing | Combination of signing & speaking | 4 | 25 – 35 | Dublin |
| 3 | Hearing | Combination of signing & speaking | 6 | 9 – 15 | Dublin |
| 4 | Hearing | Spoken English | 4 | 60 – 75 | Dublin |
| 5 | Hearing | Spoken English | 7 | 17 – 35 | Waterford |
| 6 | Hearing | Spoken English | 6 | 9 – 15 | Cork |
| 7 | Hearing | Spoken English | 4 | 45 – 75 | Galway |
| 8 | Vision | n/a | 5 | 30 – 65 | Dublin |
| 9 | Vision | n/a | 6 | 17 – 35 | Kilkenny |
| 10 | Vision | n/a | 6 | 45 – 75 | Waterford |

2.2 Quantitative Research

(4) Survey to elicit information regarding the use of and satisfaction with the various television access services; In order to generate relevant quantitative data on the level of use and satisfaction with the quality and format of current access provision separate questionnaires were developed for subtitling, sign language and audio description. The three survey questionnaires also provided respondents with an opportunity to comment on gaps and weaknesses in current provision and to put forward suggestions for possible improvements in those same television access services. The additional purpose of the three surveys was to ensure that further validity be brought to the qualitative findings and to allow for the views of a broader sample of stakeholders to be taken into account.

In order to maximise input to the research process the three surveys were developed and administered across a number of different formats. The questionnaires focussing on subtitling and sign language were promoted and/or circulated in soft copy format (i.e. via email) amongst members of interest groups such as the Irish Deaf Society, the Irish Hard of Hearing Association and Irish Deaf Kids. These two surveys, alongside associated web links directing interested parties to the Internet based survey locations,

were also promoted on relevant websites hosted by organisations such as Irish Deaf Kids, the Irish Deaf Youth Association and Irish Deaf.com. In order to generate further awareness the research team also placed promotional notices on a number of general interest web blogs and forums. The researchers also circulated traditional hard copy versions of the two surveys amongst members of the Drumcondra based Dublin Deaf Club and those attending classes at Deaf Hear.

With assistance from the National Council for the Blind of Ireland’s Centre for Inclusive Technology the survey on audio description, along with relevant web links, was promoted on a number of relevant Internet discussion boards.

Copies of the three surveys are included in the appendices at the rear of this report.

2.3 Respondent Profile

The profile of respondents to the three surveys is outlined in Tables Two through to Table Seven below and overleaf. Responses were received from all four provinces across Ireland. Of those responding to the questionnaires on subtitling and sign language 66% and 100% respectively are either severely or profoundly Deaf. In the case of respondents to the questionnaire on audio description 75% have a severe visual impairment.

Table Two: Number of Respondents

| | Subtitling Survey Questionnaire | Sign Language Survey Questionnaire | Audio Description Survey Questionnaire |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Number of Respondents | 267 | 102 | 67 |

Table Three: Age Profile of Respondents

| Years of Age | Subtitling Survey Questionnaire | Sign Language Survey Questionnaire | Audio Description Survey Questionnaire |
|---------------------|--|---|---|
| Under 12 | 4% | 2% | 7% |
| 12 – 17 | 19% | 0% | 10% |
| 18 – 24 | 4% | 34% | 0% |
| 25 – 39 | 8% | 28% | 50% |
| 40 – 59 | 31% | 32% | 28% |
| 60 – 69 | 23% | 4% | 5% |
| 70+ | 12% | 0% | 0% |

The Deaf people represented by the responses used a number of communication methods. In the case of those responding to the questionnaire on subtitling 54% preferred to use spoken English while approximately one fifth (19%) favoured a combination of signing and speaking. Of those responding to the questionnaire on sign language 45% preferred to use Irish Sign Language while 50% preferred to use a mixture of signing and speaking.

As illustrated in Table Five overleaf survey respondents were also asked to indicate the main provider of their primary television service. It was interesting to note the large proportion of respondents to the sign language survey questionnaire (72%) that received their primary television signal by means of a rooftop aerial. Similarly it was interesting to see the relatively large proportion of 'Sky' subscribers (58%) amongst those responding to the questionnaire on audio description.

Table Four: Preferred Form of Communication

| | Subtitling Survey Questionnaire | Sign Language Survey Questionnaire | Audio Description Survey Questionnaire |
|--|--|---|---|
| Irish Sign Language (ISL) | 19% | 45% | n/a |
| Other Signing | 0% | 0% | n/a |
| Spoken English | 54% | 5% | n/a |
| Mixture of Signing & Speaking | 19% | 50% | n/a |
| Other Spoken Language | 0% | 0% | n/a |

Table Five: Primary Television Provider

| Primary Television Provider | Subtitling Survey Questionnaire | Sign Language Survey Questionnaire | Audio Description Survey Questionnaire |
|--|--|---|---|
| Sky | 31% | 0% | 41% |
| Sky Plus | 23% | 0% | 17% |
| NTL | 19% | 18% | 17% |
| NTL Digital | 8% | 10% | 17% |
| Rooftop Aerial | 12% | 72% | 8% |
| Other | 8% | 0% | 0% |

Table Six: Classifying Hearing/Visual Disability

| Hearing / Vision Disability | Subtitling Survey Questionnaire | Sign Language Survey Questionnaire | Audio Description Survey Questionnaire |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Mild | 0 | 0% | 17% |
| Moderate | 35% | 0% | 8% |
| Severe | 31% | 32% | 75% |
| Profound | 35% | 68% | n/a |

Interestingly close to one-half of the respondents to the three surveys had not previously complained to an Irish broadcaster or the regulator about the quality, format or availability of subtitles, sign language or audio description on Irish television.

Table Seven: Previously complained to an Irish broadcaster, BCI, or BCC about the quality, format or availability of subtitles/sign language/audio description on Irish television

| | Subtitling Survey Questionnaire | Sign Language Survey Questionnaire | Audio Description Survey Questionnaire |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Yes | 39% | 12% | 25% |
| No | 44% | 46% | 50% |
| Don't Know How To | 15% | 42% | 25% |

Within this report feedback is detailed from the participants across the various strands of research. Comments and quotes used are representative of a number of similar points raised.

One of the reasons for undertaking this targeted consultation was to provide a voice to those members of the general public who use the various television access services. This report therefore has, wherever relevant, featured direct quotations as articulated by the research participants across the various component strands of research.

3. Acknowledgements

The OCS research team would like to thank Declan McLoughlin, Deborah Molloy, Neil O'Brien, and Margaret Tumelty of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland for their helpfulness, ongoing guidance and thoughtful input during the preparation for and conduct of this research study. We are also extremely grateful to the many research participants who very generously and thoughtfully gave of their time and views over the course of the research. Without their co-operation and informed input this study would not have been possible.

We are also very grateful to a number of representatives of the key interest groups acting in this area who very generously facilitated the research team in a number of different ways. In this context special thanks should go to Bridget Mc Sweeney and Julianne Gillen of DeafHear, Aoife Blake and Kevin Mulqueen of the Irish Deaf Society, Michael Tighe of the Irish Hard of Hearing Association, Caroline Carswell of Irish Deaf Kids, Marianne Campbell of the Dublin Deaf Club, Lorraine Leeson of the Centre for Deaf Studies and Mark Magennis and Stuart Lawler of the National Council for the Blind of Ireland.

4. Key Research Findings

Research findings relevant to the three key television access services – subtitling, Irish Sign Language and audio description are presented in three separate sections of this report. Overall conclusions and recommendations drawn from the various strands of research are presented separately in Section 5 ‘Conclusions and Recommendations.’

4.1 Subtitling

This section of the report explores the views of research participants on the subject of subtitling. These views are examined in some details across six separate sub-sections as follows;

- (a) The use and importance of subtitling
- (b) Views on the current availability of subtitling
- (c) & (d) Quality of subtitling – features and attributes that are most important to the Irish viewer
- (e) Subtitling for live broadcasts
- (f) Satisfaction levels with individual broadcasters

(a) Use and Importance of Subtitling

Not surprisingly those participating in the research clearly attach very significant importance to the availability of subtitles when viewing programmes on Irish television. Across the various strands of diary research, one to one interviews, focus groups and returned questionnaires the majority of those participating in the research repeatedly stressed that subtitling is critical to their ability to enjoy and understand programmes on television.

The very significant importance of subtitles to the ability of the television viewer, who has either a profound, severe and in many cases moderate hearing disability, to enjoy and understand television programme content became quickly and clearly apparent to the research team. Most, if not all, of the research participants described subtitling as being of fundamental importance to their ability to enjoy and understand television programmes.

“Unless it’s something extremely visual such as the St. Patrick’s Day Parade or a hurling match there is no point at all in watching a programme that is not subtitled. The only analogy that I can think of would be if a hearing person were to sit down to read a book where every second and third line had been removed.....It would simply be pointless.....Without the subtitling you would miss out on way too much.”

“For me, and I would be reasonably confident in saying everyone like me who is either severely or profoundly Deaf, there is no point in watching a programme that has any level of dialogue....that has no subtitling.....You would have no idea what’s going on.....Apart from not being enjoyable you just would not understand it (the programme content.)”

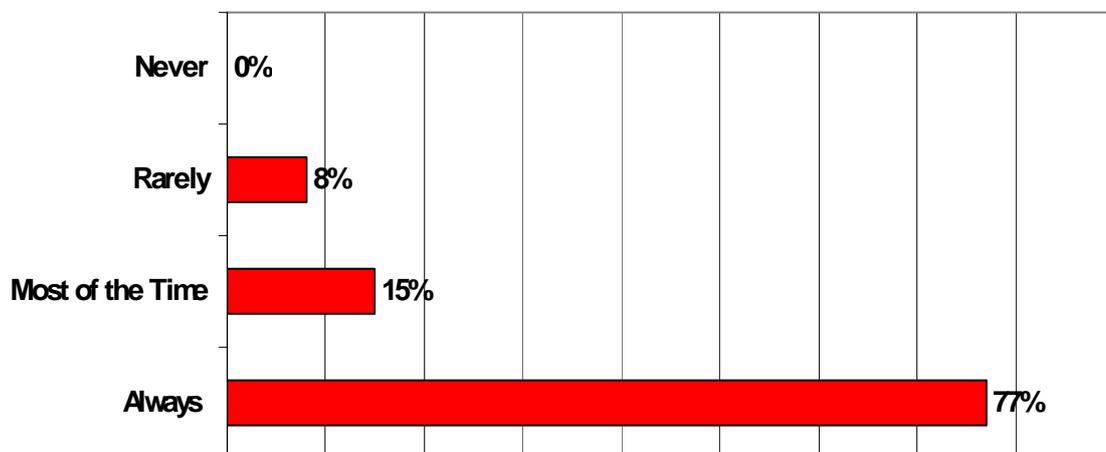
Consequently, when watching television, the majority of research participants are also using subtitling. Indeed many of the participants frequently emphasised that in the absence of subtitling provision there is little if any point in watching a television programme as their ability to enjoy and understand the content aired is completely undermined. In situations where subtitling is not available it was suggested that Deaf and hard of hearing people are being denied the ability to access their preferred choice of programming.

“There is no way you can use lip reading to watch a programme on television....Subtitles are as important to me as the picture on screen....Without subtitles you would simply be watching a series of moving pictures with very little notion of what’s going on.”

Very high levels of regular subtitling use were evident amongst those participating in the various strands of research conducted as part of this study. As illustrated in Figure One below of those responding to the survey questionnaire on subtitling 92% revealed that they use subtitles either ‘all of the time’ or ‘most of the time’. This figure rose to 98% in the case of respondents who are either profoundly or severely Deaf.

Figure One: Respondents Level of Use of Subtitling

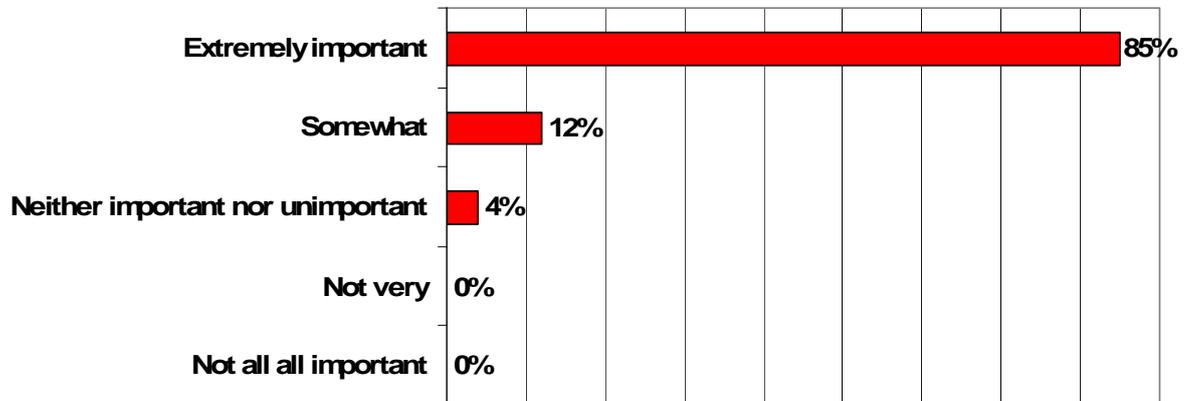
Normally, when you are watching Irish television how often do you switch on the subtitles?



Based on the feedback provided across the various strands of research the availability of subtitling is of very significant importance to the Irish Deaf or hard of hearing viewer and their ability to enjoy and understand television programmes. As illustrated in Figure Two overleaf in terms of importance 97% of those responding to the survey on subtitling described subtitling provision as either ‘extremely important’ or ‘somewhat important’ to their enjoyment and understanding of television programmes on Irish television.

Figure Two: Importance of Subtitling

How important is the availability of subtitling to your enjoyment and understanding of television programmes on Irish television?



In the case of respondents who classified themselves as either profoundly or severely Deaf the proportion who described subtitling provision as ‘extremely important’ to their enjoyment and understanding of television programmes on Irish television rose to a very significant 94%.

Throughout the research participants spoke of the very significant relevance and importance of television to their daily lives. It was widely agreed that television itself becomes significantly more accessible when subtitles are available. It was also widely recognised that having subtitles available on programmes improves understanding and enjoyment. Participants also suggested that watching programmes with subtitles can allow them to feel ‘equal’ to hearing viewers and in a position to participate in discussions about what may be happening in television programmes with their ‘hearing’ peers. Having subtitles can also allow those who are Deaf and hard of hearing to act more independently as they will not need someone to explain what’s happening on screen.

“...Without subtitling you (the Deaf viewer) miss out on so much....It’s just not possible to follow anything on TV without subtitles.....It’s really important that they be provided....”

“I would have thought it’s a basic right to be able to sit down and enjoy TV like all the hearing people can. You are really excluded from what’s going on if subtitling isn’t provided....”

“In the USA a requirement is placed on the broadcasters that everything be subtitled.....It’s so important to the viewer who has lost their hearing.....Otherwise we are just sitting on the margins...”

“TV is such an important channel for news and entertainment.....the Deaf person naturally enough can’t experience radio so subtitling on TV is really important....Without it the Deaf person would miss out on so much....It wouldn’t be fair or right (not to have subtitles).”

Many of the participants also suggested that the availability of subtitling can have benefits for fellow viewers as the volume on the television does not have to be so loud or the Deaf viewer does not need to ask as many questions of fellow viewers.

The irrelevance of radio as a source of information or entertainment for Deaf people was mentioned frequently. Similarly participants spoke of the challenges faced by significant proportions of the Deaf community in accessing print media due largely to the comparatively lower literacy levels amongst members of the Deaf community. This combination of factors would appear to contribute to the significant weighting of importance which Deaf people can attach to television. Television was described as an extremely valuable source of information, education and entertainment for *all* people in Ireland. However research participants suggested that this is particularly true for people who may be vision impaired, Deaf or hard of hearing, and for those people who face specific challenges in accessing printed or spoken media. The inability to access television due to the absence of subtitling can therefore limit many Deaf and hard of hearing people in their attempts to remain informed on contemporary issues. Owing to this very significant weighting of importance which Deaf people can attach to television the absence of subtitling, can, as suggested by a number of research participants, act as a barrier to cultural pluralism.

“.....Subtitling, when it is in place and provided to a high standard, really is wonderful. It allows you to sit down and enjoy a programme in much the same way that a hearing person takes for granted...Without it (subtitling) TV would become largely irrelevant and Deaf people would become even more socially excluded....”

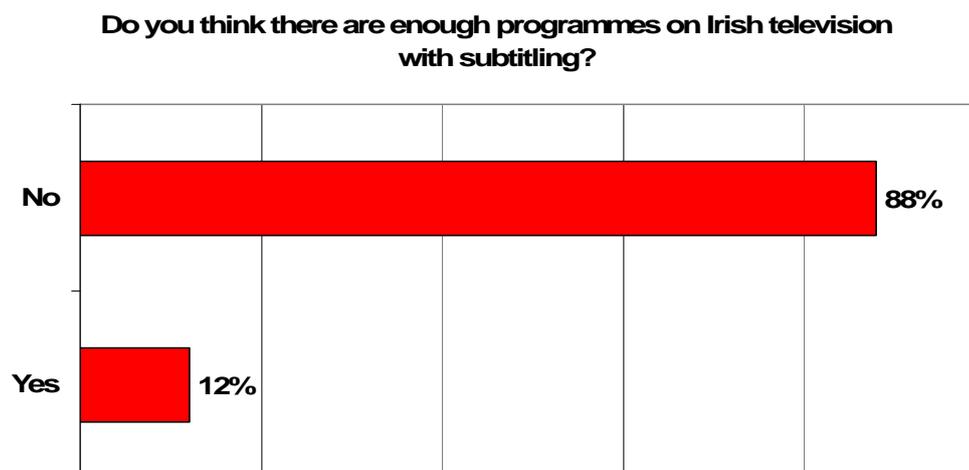
“.....In today’s society TV is very important for keeping ‘in touch’ and to get information but also as a form of entertainment.....Deaf and hard of hearing people need subtitling to make TV understandable and anyway enjoyable.....Without it (subtitling) it (Television) just wouldn’t be relevant.....”

“A lot of people (in Irish society) seem to take pride in stating that they watch little or no TV but if we are honest most people rely on it (television) and use it heavily. Radio is not a runner (relevant) for Deaf people.....but television only becomes relevant to the Deaf person when there are subtitles available.....”

(b) Subtitling – Current Availability

On the subject of the current availability of subtitles a very significant majority of respondents to the survey (88%) indicated that they do **not** think there are enough programmes on Irish television with subtitling.

Figure Three: Are there enough programmes with subtitling?



Expectation levels, amongst research participants were clearly high. Indeed many of the participants in the various qualitative strands of research suggested that while Irish television has “come a long way” and “significantly improved its track record” on subtitling in very recent years there is “still a long way to go”. The absence of ‘complete’ or ‘100%’ provision prompted several participants to suggest there is a certain inequity or unfairness which could lead to further risk of social exclusion on the part of Deaf and hard of hearing viewers. Research participants would appear to have ‘benchmarked’ their set of expectations against the level of subtitling that they perceive is made available by the UK based broadcasters. In this context it was frequently suggested that the UK based broadcasters provide more subtitling than their Irish counterparts.

“.....when there are so many programmes provided on stations such as RTÉ you wonder why others (other Irish broadcasters) aren’t offering the same (level of subtitling).....”

“.....why should we (people who are Deaf) be excluded from watching some TV (due to a lack of subtitling provision) that hearing people can watch easily...It doesn’t seem fair....”

“....When people (hearing people) are talking about watching a certain drama on Irish television (that does not have accompanying subtitles) you can’t help but feel left out.”

The subject of ‘availability’ was both commented on and discussed in some detail across each of the various strands of research conducted as part of this study. Although there was considerable debate and discussion on the topic of subtitling quality the extent to which subtitles are ‘available’ on programmes on Irish television is clearly **the** single issue which research participants feel most strongly about.

This would appear to strongly endorse the current focus of the Access Rules which prioritise the achievement of quantifiable minimum targets or quotas of subtitling provision which each channel must achieve on an annual basis. For those viewers who are Deaf or hard of hearing and who depend on subtitles the basic expectation would appear to be that subtitles ought to be ‘available’ when required. Participants frequently suggested that their ability to freely choose what to watch on Irish television can be limited and is often determined by the availability of subtitling. This inability to have complete freedom to choose from the wide spectrum of programming available on Irish television is clearly very frustrating for some. It was in this context that many of the participants prioritised the call for greater availability of subtitling on Irish television. According to many of the research participants it is only when more ‘meaningful’ levels of subtitling provision are made available that attention can be turned to quality related dimensions.

“...It’s all very well asking us (research participants) to critique the quality of subtitling being provided...the key issue at the moment is quantity.....they (the broadcasters) must be encouraged to up (increase) their provision.....We (Deaf people who depend on subtitling) are missing out on too much (choice as to what can be watched on television) as it is.....If it’s not subtitled we simply cant watch it. It’s that simple!”

“It’s as if what we watch on TV is chosen for us rather than we choosing it for ourselves.....As there is so much television (aired by the Irish broadcasters) that is not subtitled I would suggest that the focus on quantity is the first issue that needs to be addressed.....Then over time quality related issues can be looked at more closely.....”

“.....We (the Deaf and hard of hearing) should be treated like all viewers and everyone else who pays their TV license.....Subtitling is a basic requirement for us.....It really is a ‘must have’It’s not some nice to have ‘add-on’ that enhances the experience....Without it (subtitling) watching TV is a pretty much pointless exercise.....The ‘amount’ of programmes that are subtitled must (therefore) be increased....This (availability) is where priority needs to be attached....”

When commenting on whether viewers are sufficiently informed as to which programmes are going to have subtitling provision it was interesting to note that 62% of respondents indicated that they do not know in advance which programmes on Irish television are going to have subtitling provision. It would appear that many are discounting certain programmes on the presumption that subtitling is not available. As users of subtitling would often 'plan' their viewing around the availability of subtitling this will be an important issue for Irish based broadcasters to consider. On this point a number of research participants speculated that while the television listings in newspapers can often provide a symbol to indicate the presence of subtitling the relatively low literacy levels amongst the Deaf community may mean this form of promotion is less relevant than others.

“...the TV listings in the newspapers usually include a symbol to show whether a programme is subtitled or not but I would imagine there are a lot of people in the Deaf community that do not read a newspaper on a regular basis.....therefore they just wont know whether a programme has subtitles or not until they turn it on.....They (the broadcasters) might need to look at other ways of getting the word out as to whether programmes are subtitled or not.....”

“...Teletext is usually a good service and most Deaf people would be used to using it but maybe they (the broadcasters) need to promote it (subtitling availability) more prominently on Teletext (the TV listings page and the broadcasters subtitling schedule).

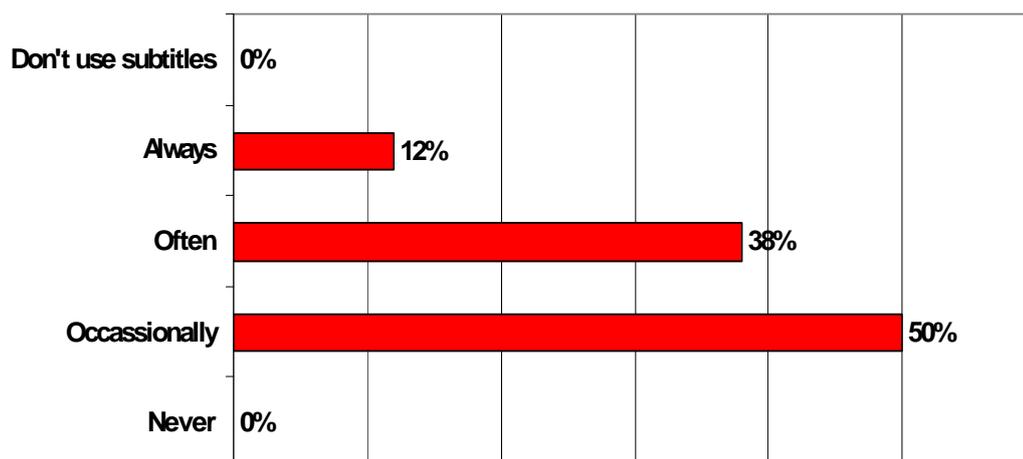
Instead information on subtitling availability would often appear to be shared informally amongst members of the Deaf community or sourced through various Deaf community publications and publicity material.

(c) Quality of Subtitling – A Top- Line Look

Opinions varied amongst participants as to the current standard or quality of subtitling provided on Irish television. Generally however there was a sense of ‘frustration’ and in some cases disappointment with the quality of subtitles provided. In progressing through the various strands of research it became clear to the research team that very poor quality subtitling can completely spoil the viewer experience. Of the 267 respondents to the questionnaire on subtitling a very significant 85% indicated that they have, on occasion, stopped watched a programme on Irish television because of the quality of subtitles provided. This figure rose to 93% in the case of those respondents who are profoundly deaf. All of the respondents to the survey (267 respondents or 100%) indicated that they experience problems with subtitling at least ‘occasionally’. One half of the respondents claim they experience problems either ‘always’ (12%) or ‘often’ (38%).

Figure Four: Frequency with which problems are experienced

How often do you have problems when using subtitles on Irish television?



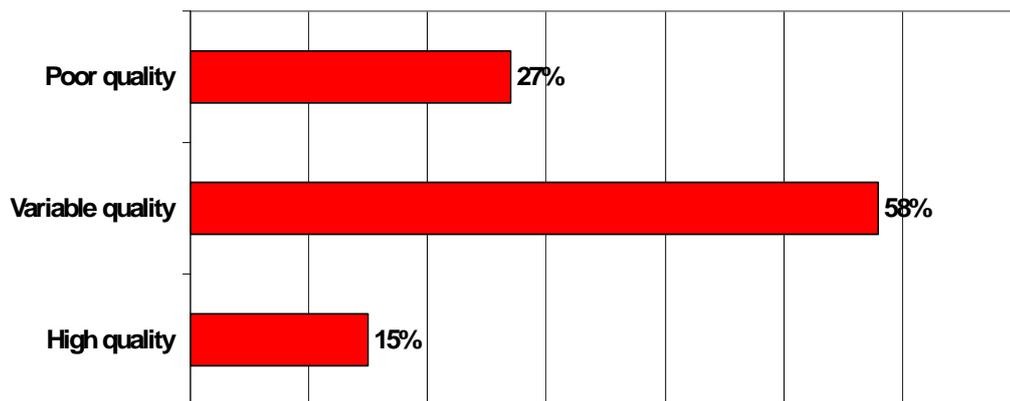
A significant majority (85%) of respondents indicated that the quality of subtitles provided by Irish broadcasters is either of a ‘variable’ or ‘poor’ quality. Key quality related issues, which will be examined in more detail in subsequent sections of this report, appeared to center on the lack of ‘reliability’ associated with the subtitling services provided by Irish broadcasters. Research participants repeatedly called for broadcasters to provide a subtitling service that can be relied on to start on time and stay in place throughout the programme being viewed. As subtitling users often plan their television viewing around certain programming, on the assumption that subtitling will be available for that programming, the ability to rely on the accompanying subtitles to start on time and stay in place for the programmes duration is clearly most important.

“.....as not everything (aired by the Irish broadcasters) is subtitled you ought to be able to rely on those programmes that are subtitled to start on time (i.e. start of subtitling scroll to be synchronised with start of programme), not freeze or pause and to stay in place right through the programme that you are watching.....Unfortunately that doesn’t happen. They (the subtitles) can often start 5 or 10 minutes after the programme has started or may not start back in time after a break.....”

“.....I would have thought it (the ability to rely on subtitling to start on time and to stay ‘in place’) is a basic enough expectation...A hearing person would be really annoyed if there were large chunks taken out of a programme they were trying to watch.”

Figure Five: Perceived Quality of Subtitling

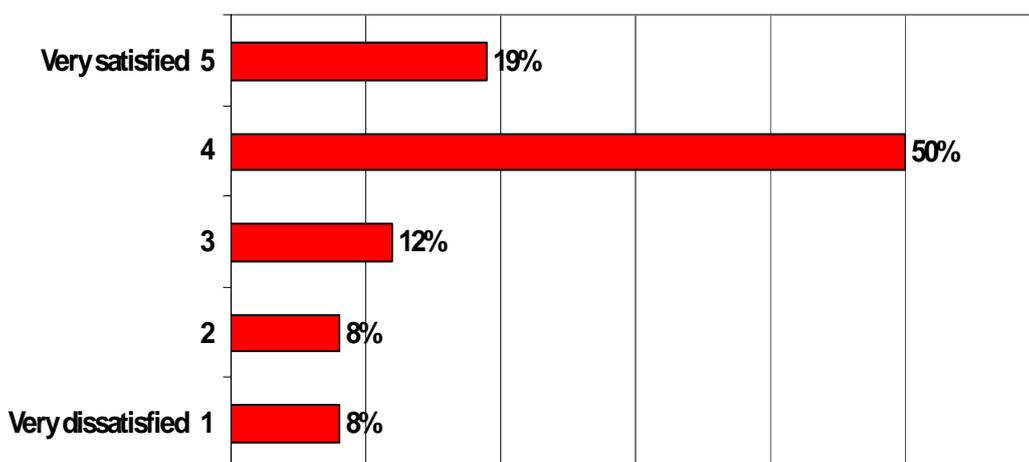
Generally, what do you think about the quality of subtitles made available by Irish broadcasters?



The majority of research participants however were anxious to stress that the subtitling provided on Irish television does help them to enjoy and understand programmes on Irish television. More than two-thirds (69%) of respondents were ‘satisfied’ with the success of Irish broadcasters in providing subtitling that helps the viewer to enjoy and understand TV programmes. As the majority of participants suggested subtitling is a “really important service....without it you simply can’t understand, not to mind enjoy, Irish television.”

Figure Six: Perceived quality of Subtitling

Success in providing subtitling that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes



Interestingly several of the research participants speculated that the significant improvements which have been made in recent years in terms of subtitling availability have in part helped to heighten expectation amongst those who use and depend on subtitling services. The very considerable increases in subtitling provision introduced by RTÉ in recent years have in particular contributed to this heightening of expectations amongst users of subtitling. It would appear that key broadcasters such as RTÉ, BBC and Channel 4 are used by many, perhaps somewhat subconsciously, as a 'benchmark' for the level of subtitling provision that 'ought' to be made available by other Irish based broadcasters. In an Irish context RTÉ is described by many as the 'standard bearer' in terms of subtitling provision which other Irish based broadcasters could usefully aspire to emulate.

“....In years gone by the profoundly and severely Deaf probably wouldn't have bothered to watch Irish television.....as without subtitling they wouldn't have been able to understand it.....Now that RTÉ and some of the other broadcasters are subtitling a lot of their content expectations have naturally risen....You (the Deaf person) want to be able to watch 'everything' (i.e. with accompanying subtitles) just like a hearing person would be able to.....”

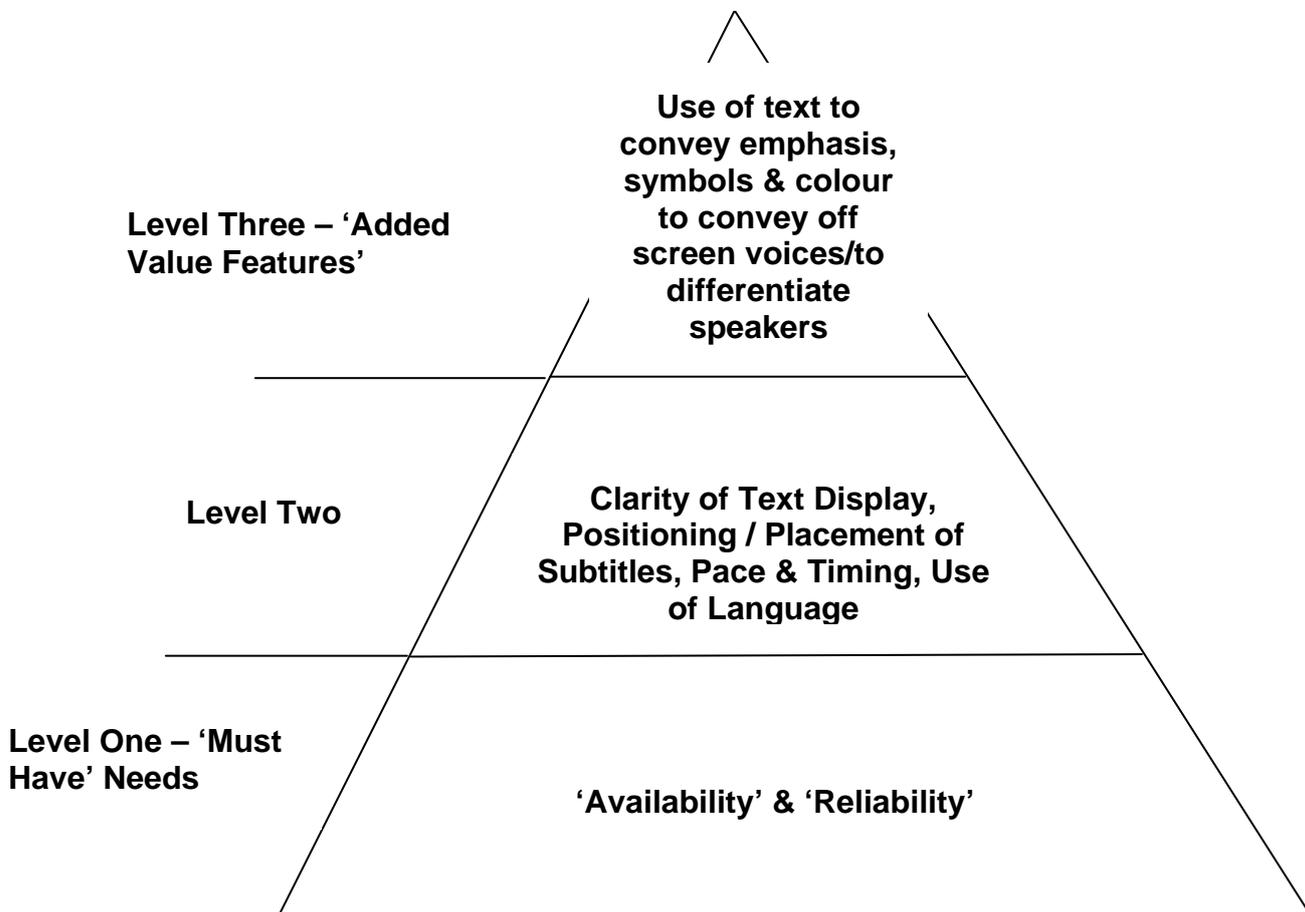
“.....RTÉ certainly has improved things considerably over the last five years in particular.....It (subtitling increased proportions of the RTÉ television schedule over time) has pointed out to us (the Deaf and hard of hearing communities) how much we have missed out on in the past and how much we are continuing to miss out on (with other Irish broadcasters).....It (increased subtitling provision) has shown us what is possible.....”

(d) Quality of Subtitling: ‘Hierarchy of Requirements’ from the User Perspective

Throughout the study participants were asked to identify the service related dimensions, features and attributes that are most important to them as users of subtitling. The researchers identified that, from the viewers’ perspective, a ‘hierarchy of needs’ exists - predetermined in order of importance. This hierarchy can be depicted as a pyramid consisting of three levels: the lowest level being associated with ‘critical’ or ‘must have’ needs, while the uppermost level is associated with the ‘nice to have’ or ‘added value’ features.

‘Level One’ needs which concern subtitling ‘availability’ and ‘reliability’ must, according to research participants, be met first. Once these needs are met, the subtitling user will focus their attention on and attach priority to ‘Level Two’ needs which include an appropriate clarity of text display, on screen positioning, pace and timing and use of language. The ‘higher’ or ‘Level Three’ needs in this hierarchy only come into focus when the lower needs in the pyramid are met. Once a subtitling user has moved upwards to the next level, needs in the lower level will no longer be prioritised. If a lower set of needs is no longer being met however, the individual will re-prioritise those needs by focusing attention on the unfulfilled needs. The subsequent prioritisation of requirements is explored in the following sections of this report.

Hierarchy of Subtitling Needs – The User Perspective (Ireland)



Level One – ‘Availability’ & ‘Reliability’

Availability of Subtitling;

‘Availability’ followed very closely by ‘reliability’ (i.e. a subtitling service that can be relied on to start on time and stay in place throughout the programme being viewed) would appear to be **the** key requirements of a subtitling service. Research participants consistently singled out these two dimensions as being ‘most’ important as they bid to enjoy and understand programmes broadcast on Irish television. It was generally agreed that there is considerable scope for improvement in how the majority of Irish broadcasters perform on both of these key dimensions.

The majority of research participants suggested there is not enough subtitling on Irish television. Of those responding to the survey questionnaire on subtitling only 46% were satisfied with the success of Irish broadcasters in providing enough subtitling at ‘popular’ viewing times which for the purpose of this research study was defined as between 6pm and 10pm.

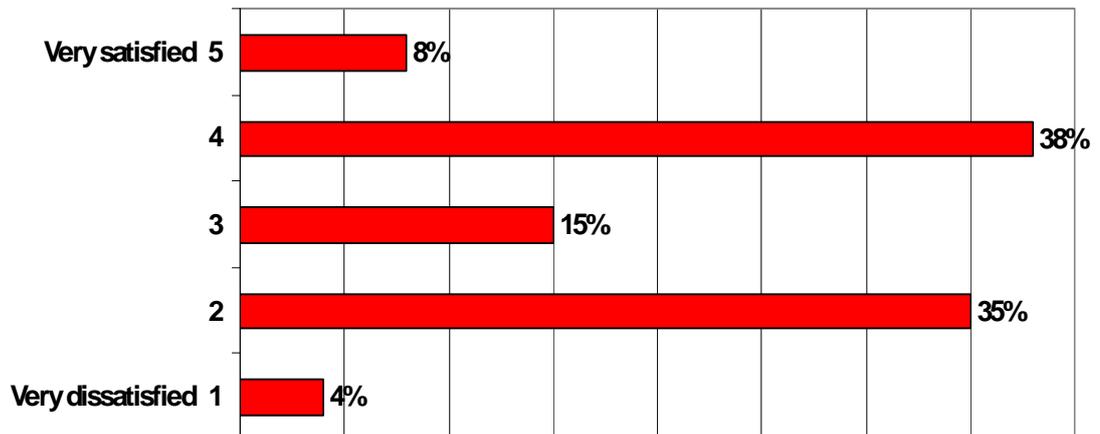
“.....First and foremost it (subtitling) has to be in place.....You can’t watch it (television) without subtitles so the priority has to be about getting the amount of subtitling (provided by the Irish broadcasters) increased.....

“.....If we are talking about what is ‘most’ important to us....first up its ‘quantity’ followed very closely by some basic quality related features.....(subtitles) starting on time and continuing throughout the programme without going missing is got to be up at the top of the list.....”

“...there needs to more subtitling and the person watching it should be able to depend on the subtitles kicking in on time and staying in place.....They (‘availability’ and ‘reliability’) would be the very basic expectations (for a subtitling service).

Figure Seven: Satisfaction with Availability of Subtitles on Irish Television – ‘Peak’ Times

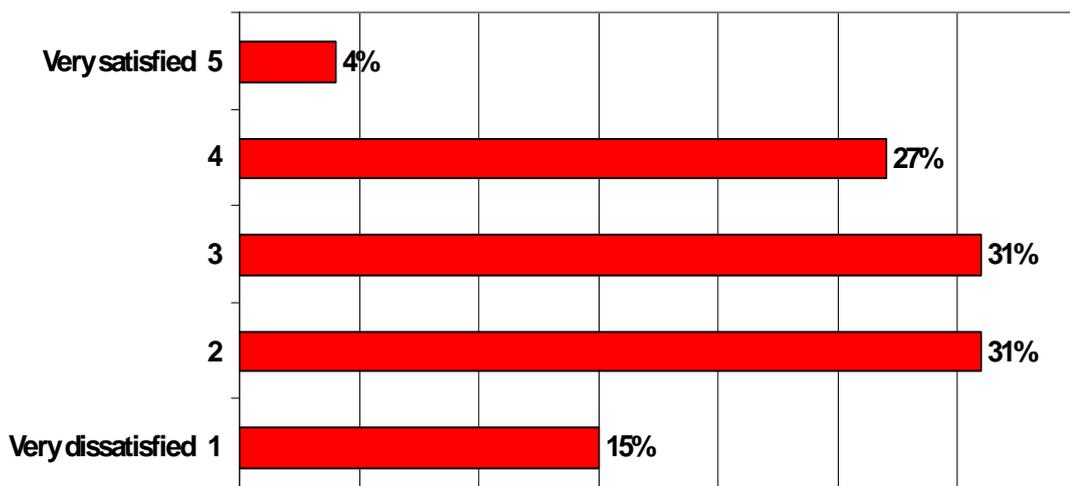
Success in providing enough subtitling at popular viewing times (i.e. between 6pm and 10pm)



Although less than one-half of respondents were ‘satisfied’ with the quantity of subtitling available on Irish television during ‘peak’ viewing hours the comparable figure for satisfaction with the amount of subtitling provision at ‘other times’ (which for the purpose of this research was defined as ‘all other times outside the hours of 6pm and 10pm.’) dropped to 31%.

Figure Eight: Satisfaction with Availability of Subtitles on Irish Television – ‘Off- Peak’ Times

Success in providing enough subtitling at other times



The majority of participants agreed that in the short to medium term, and until such a point that the amount of subtitling made available increases significantly, that Irish based broadcasters should prioritise the provision of subtitling on programmes broadcast during peak viewing hours. Popular and high profile television programmes, across a range of different genres, tend to be broadcast during the early evening hours. Key news, current affairs and entertainment shows are, as suggested by those participating in this research study, most often broadcast during peak viewing hours. Programming broadcast during the early evening also provides families and other groups of people with an opportunity to watch and discuss programming together. This desire to be able to access Irish television programmes during peak viewing hours in the same way that a hearing person would was very important to those participating in the study. It was for this reasons that there was a level of expectation amongst research participants that all programming broadcast during peak viewing hours ought to be subtitled. It was generally agreed that the provision of subtitles for daytime programming, ought not to be prioritised at the expense of subtitling provision during peak viewing hours.

On the subject of ‘availability’ and the amount of programming that is subtitled on Irish television it would appear that RTÉ, and also to a similar extent the UK broadcasters such as BBC and Channel 4, have helped to set somewhat of a benchmark level of expectation amongst those who avail of the subtitling services provided by the Irish broadcasters.

“Until they (the broadcasters) get to a point where they are subtitling everything (all programmes) they should be focussed on subtitling all programmes at peak times....say between 6pm and 11pm.....that’s when most people sit down to watch television...It’s when families would sit down together to watch things like the news and the popular soaps....It’s really important that Deaf people aren’t excluded from that.....”

“.....100% provision (all programming to be subtitled) should be the target.....but in the short term the focus should be on programmes that go out each evening.....Everybody else is watching television then...Why should the person who depends on subtitling miss out?....”

“...although employment levels are probably lower amongst members of the Deaf community and many would have an opportunity to watch day time programmes I would agree that the priority should be on subtitling everything that is aired during the early evening.....that is when the most popular and important programming is aired.....”

“....For years we have watched BBC and other UK channels.....because they subtitle pretty much everything...Only RTÉ (in an Irish context) can compare (anyway favourably).....”

“.....a lot of Deaf people watch more British television than Irish television simply because they (UK broadcasters) subtitle so much more of their programmes. That is a real shame.”

There was considerable disappointment and frustration amongst participants who suggested that Irish viewers who are dependent on subtitling can often have no other choice but to watch programming produced by UK based broadcasters due to the comparatively limited quantity of subtitling provided by Irish broadcasters.

A significant proportion of the research participants also appeared to be aware of the principle of 'quotas' being set for the broadcasters under the Access Rules. However there appeared to be much confusion as to what the actual levels those targets or quotas are set at. Indeed many participants, during the various discussions held as part of this study, appeared to 'over-estimate' the quotas for subtitling provision that have been set for the Irish broadcasters. The desire or expectation for 'all' programming on Irish television to be subtitled was voiced by a large proportion of those participating. The researchers would suggest that it will be challenging for the 'other' broadcasters, and indeed RTÉ, to continually meet the level of expectation that would appear to currently exist. Indeed the broadcasters could usefully consider publicising more prominently detail on the actual quotas that are to be attained as such an approach may help in setting more realistic expectations amongst the viewing public.

"I would like to watch more Irish programmes but it is much easier to watch the soaps on the UK channels than it is on the Irish channels....They will be subtitled (whereas on Irish television the viewer can not always be confident that subtitles will be provided.)....."

"....they (the broadcasters) are meant to be subtitling more content (as per the Access Rules) yet they aren't anywhere near the levels subtitled by RTÉ or BBC."

"....why can't the other Irish stations subtitle the same amount that you would get on RTÉ or BBC or Channel 4.....the Rules (Access Rules) are there in place for a number of years...They (the broadcasters) don't seem to be complying with them...."

"...There are some Irish channels that you (the Deaf person) just wouldn't turn on at all as they don't seem to subtitle anything....I thought the Access Rules meant that they (the broadcasters) had to provide subtitles..."

'Reliability' of Subtitling Service;

Research participants emphasised the very significant importance of 'reliability' in the context of subtitling provision. A subtitling service that can be relied on to start on time and stay in place throughout the programme being watched should, according to the majority of those participating in the research, be viewed as a 'basic minimum requirement.' It was suggested that viewers in Ireland who use and depend on the subtitling services provided ought to have a sufficient level of confidence to be able to 'set an appointment to view' a particular programme where subtitling is expected to be available.

Frequently research participants spoke of their disappointment when sitting down to watch a particular programme only to find that the subtitling service is not available, is significantly delayed or does not recommence after a break for advertising.

The findings from the survey questionnaire revealed that 73% of respondents were 'dissatisfied' with the success of Irish broadcasters in providing a subtitling service that can be relied on to start on time and stay in place throughout the programme being watched. The issue of reliability has been singled out as a critical dimension by research participants and, given the level of dissatisfaction evident, will need to be carefully considered by both broadcasters and the regulator alike.

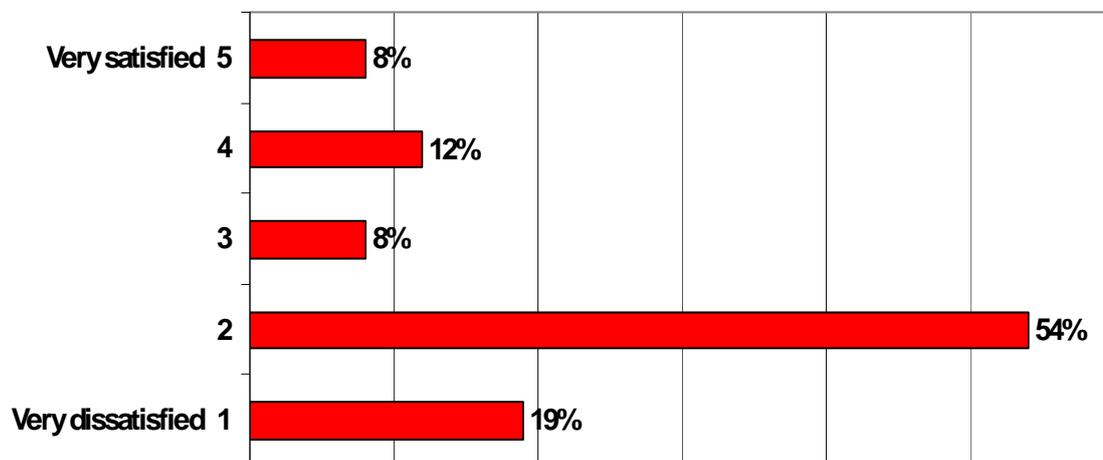
"...when you sit down to watch a soap at 8pm you should be able to expect that the subtitles will start at the same time as the programme and flow smoothly without freezing."

".....Not everything is subtitled but where it is meant to be you (the viewer) should be confident that it (subtitles) will start in line with the programme start, stop at the ad break and pick up again when the programme recommences. Unfortunately that (level of confidence in the service) just isn't there at the moment....You won't know if the subtitles are working until you sit down and turn them on....Then you just hope they will stay in place."

"...you can't rely on it....If the programme starts on the hour the subtitles might take a minute to start up or it could be ten minutes.....You just don't know. When the programme goes to a break (for advertising) the subtitles could either keep rolling so that you know during the break what happens in the second half of the programme or the subtitles don't start up again for the second half of the programme so that your experience is totally spoilt."

Figure Nine: Reliability of Subtitles on Irish Television

Success in providing a subtitling service that you can rely on to start on time and stay in place throughout the programme being watched



“.....It’s all well and good talking about things like font size, colour of text, speed, the type of language used, etc. etc. etc.....If the subtitles aren’t provided at all (i.e. the availability issue) or else don’t start on time and keep rolling throughout the programme (i.e. the reliability issue) nothing else matters...these (availability and reliability) are the key issues (from our perspective).”

The focus and priority associated with subtitling provision has to date, understandably, been on the ‘quantity’ of provision. The majority of research participants appeared to agree with this general approach and the focus of the Access Rules as they stand currently. Many of the participants also speculated that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to secure agreement on quality related dimensions associated with subtitling as so many of the features and attributes associated with subtitling can in the words of more than one participant “all come down to a matter of personal taste.” However many of those involved in the various focus groups and one to one interviews suggested that there may be merit in placing additional focus on one, key quality related measure, that being ‘reliability’. The prevailing view amongst those participating in the research would be that viewers must be able to rely on the subtitling services provided to start on time and stay in place throughout the programme being watched. It was frequently suggested that the Access Rules, in addition to their current focus on ‘quantity’ of subtitling provision, ought to have consideration for this ‘key’ quality related measure. Although the ‘format’ and ‘on-air’ quality of subtitling is of very significant importance to the Irish viewer the majority of those participating in the various interviews and focus groups indicated that these more ‘specific’ quality related features are not as significant a priority as the reliability dimension.

Level Two – Clarity of Text Display, Positioning/ Placement of Subtitles, Use of Language, Pace & Timing

Clarity of Text Display;

Largely speaking positive satisfaction ratings were recorded with the quality of text display provided by Irish broadcasters. Participants understandably spoke of the considerable effort required on their part in watching television with subtitling accompaniment. The level of concentration and effort required to read the subtitling while simultaneously watching the on-screen material quickly became apparent to the researchers. The importance of subtitling being based on text which is clearly presented and not difficult to read was therefore emphasised repeatedly. Research participants indicated that low quality text display contained in a subtitling block can deter viewers from watching additional programming in a given day as the effort required to read the text can be very draining.

As illustrated in Figure Ten below only one-fifth (20%) of respondents were dissatisfied with the success of Irish broadcasters at providing text on screen that is not difficult to read.

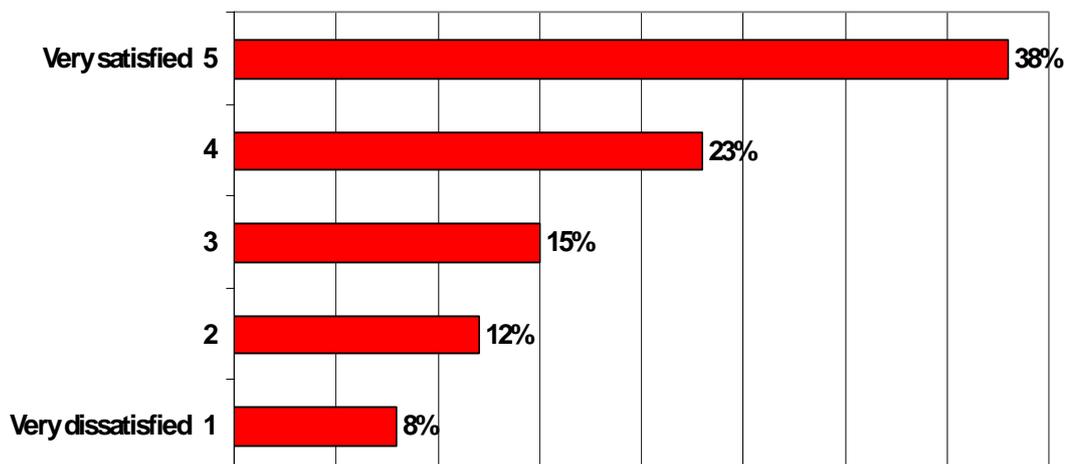
“....Watching television is supposed to be enjoyable, and don’t get me wrong it is, but when you have to read all the subtitles while watching all the action unfold on screen it can be very draining....I probably would only be able to watch an hour or two of television at most in any one day...It’s just too demanding.....especially if the text in the subtitles is difficult to read...”

”....For a viewer who needs subtitling to understand what is going on there is a lot of ‘work’ involved. They have to read in parallel to watching the programme content.....If the text isn’t presented clearly it’s too much like hard work....and is no longer enjoyable..... The font has to be clear.”

“....the font really has to be strong and clear....Otherwise it (watching television) can lose its enjoyment factor.”

Figure Ten: Satisfaction with Text Display

Success at providing text on screen that is not difficult to read



What struck the researchers however was the wide and considerable variation in opinions and preferences put forward as to 'how' text ought to be displayed and formatted. In each of the seven focus groups containing Deaf and hard of hearing participants a series of approximately 20, two minute clips were played in order to get feedback on various subtitling formats and styles. When examining very specific features and attributes concerning text display and formatting clear differences of opinion emerged. Preferences in terms of style and formatting can be very personal. What one person or group of people may enjoy and identify as being 'important' to their viewing experience another may dislike entirely. This was particularly true in the case of the use of colour and colour changes in subtitling. While many of the participants agreed that the use of colour and the practice of assigning different colours to different speakers can enhance the viewer experience others suggested it can be extremely distracting and can introduce greater opportunity for error in the subtitling service provided. Many suggested that this practice is not always effective as assigned colours initially associated with a specific speaker can alternate mid way through a programme which, from the viewers perspective, understandably introduces a very unwelcome element of confusion.

"....It is much better when the text is presented in a way that makes it easy for the viewer to follow.....(assigning) a different colour for each different speaker certainly helps...it means your brain is not working unnecessarily in trying to figure out who said what...or you are not misinterpreting storylines by thinking (incorrectly) that certain people said certain things...when in reality they didn't."

".....subtitling is obviously becoming more sophisticated and user-friendly.....people (viewers who use subtitling) are used to seeing different colours for different actors or speakers on screen....It means you don't have to guess 'who said what' in a fast moving dialogue.....It just makes it easier (for the viewer)."

".....I don't like it (practice of using different colours for different speakers).....It is unnecessary and is kind of confusing.....The subtitles should be clear on screen...but at the same time ought to be subtle and not overly distract from the programme itself.....The use of garish colours can be quite distracting...."

"....It (assigning different colours) can get in the way (of the viewer experience)....and can actually detract from the overall quality (of subtitles provided).....The programme might contain a 'master font' which is clean, crisp and easy to read but when it (the subtitling) goes to different colours they (the different colour fonts) can be blurred and of an inferior quality and clarity to the master font...."

The series of clips aired during the conduct of the focus groups helped to highlight the very significant range in subtitling styles and formats which Irish viewers may encounter when watching television. When exploring the participants different experiences and preferences which they associate with subtitling it became clear that there can be an element of ‘learning’ and ‘familiarisation’ involved in ‘using’ subtitling. In watching particular channels and programmes viewers can, over time and perhaps somewhat subconsciously, develop a preference for a particular style or format of font or text display.

When viewers encounter a new formatting or presentation style it can, it would appear, sometimes take a small period of ‘adjustment’ to familiarise oneself with the new style. Taking the case of colour change as a key example many of the participants in the focus groups who initially expressed some resistance towards the concept, disclosed that over time the format had actually ‘grow on them’ and become more pleasing and actually added positively to the viewing experience.

What did emerge strongly from this element of the research was the need for all subtitling to be based around a ‘clear’, ‘strong’ font, irrespective of the colour of that font. It should be noted that the majority, but not all, of the research participants tended to favor a presentation format whereby this strong, clear font is placed on a black or dark background block. The need to avoid a situation whereby the font is either blurred or ‘bleeding’ in anyway was stressed by the majority of research participants. Research participants spoke at length about the onerous task that can be involved in reading subtitles over a sustained period.

“...It (assigning different colours) just introduces additional margin for error.....The colours (previously assigned to a specific speaker) can switch mid way through a programme which just defeats the purpose of the exercise entirely...It adds to the confusion...”

“...now that you (the group facilitator) have shown a number of these clips (which include use of assigned colours) I could see how it would grow on you....I guess you just get used to a particular style and don’t want to see anything different....”

“...You do get used to it (colour changes). Now that I have seen a few clips in a row I can see how it would be very useful and could actually add to the (experience of reading) subtitles.”

“...when the font is blurred it just looks awful...”

“...that type of text (an example featuring somewhat blurred text) is terrible....When you are reading it for a half hour or more it really is tiring....”

“Font clarity is really important,....especially for the older viewer who may have poor sight as well as hearing issues....It (the font) can’t be blurred or messy (bleeding beyond the frame on each letter.)”

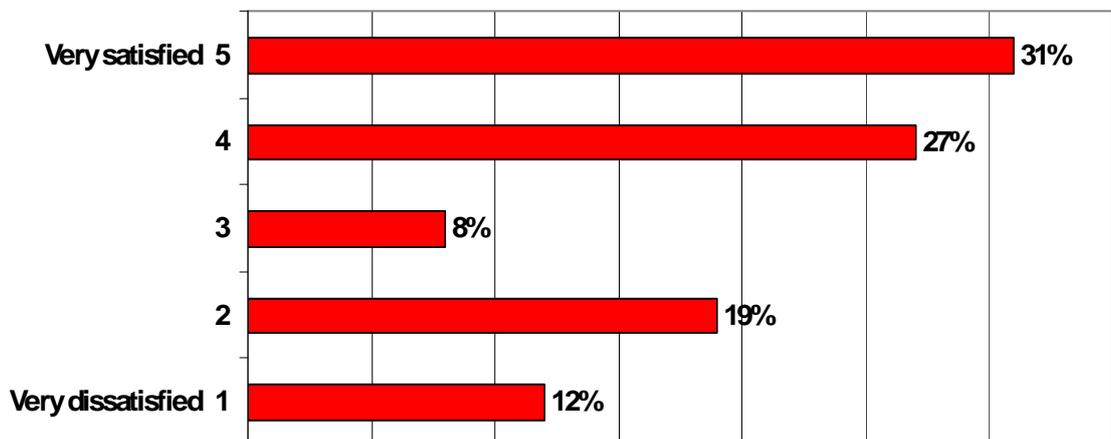
As a significant proportion of subtitle users may also have poor eyesight the need for a clear and easy to read font was stressed. Aside from the ‘reliability’ issue the call for a clear, ‘strong’ font was put forward as a critical quality related dimension which broadcasters could usefully consider when developing subtitles. It was suggested that, where possible, broadcasters should select a ‘house’ font which would be used consistently across all subtitling provided by the broadcaster.

Close to one-third of respondents (31%) expressed dissatisfaction with the success of Irish broadcasters in using colour to identify which person on screen is speaking. In interpreting this particular finding while ‘dissatisfaction’ in the main will most likely refer to those who do not think there is ‘enough’ colour used in the subtitling provided it is also likely to include those who believe coloured subtitles are an unnecessary distraction and a potential cause for error and confusion.

“A good strong, clear font is what’s required first and foremost.....all the added features like car horns, ringing telephones (i.e. off screen information) and colour changes would definitely be in the ‘nice to have category...while this (font clarity) is a ‘must have’ (feature from the viewers perspective).

Figure Eleven: Use of Colour in Subtitling

Success in using colour to identify which person on screen is speaking and to show the presence of sound effects



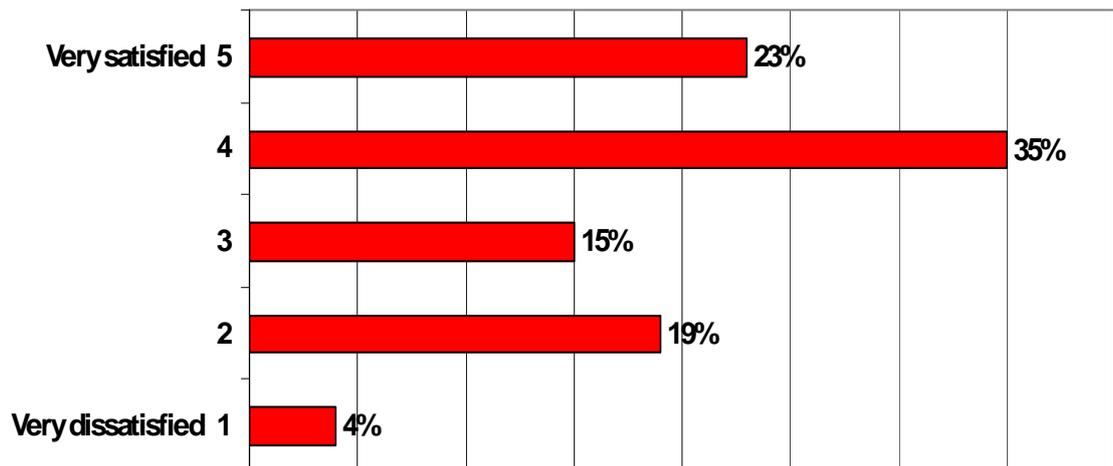
The researchers were left with the clear sense that the use of colour to identify which person is speaking can, when handled well, contribute to a more positive viewer experience and when more familiar to the entire viewing population would be favoured by Irish subtitling users over time.

On the subject of placing and presenting text in a format that requires the viewer watching to exercise a minimum amount of effort to read from line to

line research participants tended to be more satisfied than dissatisfied. Less than one-quarter (23%) of survey respondents were in fact dissatisfied.

Figure Twelve: Formatting of Text On Screen

Success at placing text on screen in a format that requires the person watching to use a minimum amount of effort to read from line to line



However as more than one third of survey respondents (38%) were not satisfied with the quality of subtitling provided on this particular dimension there would appear to be further scope for improvement. In particular participants tended to be most critical of the 'rolling' format adopted for subtitles provided on live broadcasts such as news and sporting events. It was suggested that such a presentation format can require very significant concentration and effort on the part of the viewer. The use of this presentation format for subtitling can, it would appear, discourage subtitling users from watching particular television programmes for any sustained or considerable period of time. Instead participants suggested that they will often switch to another programme where the subtitling is formatted and presented in a more viewer friendly style. Many of the participants were therefore concerned that members of the Deaf community may not enjoy the same level of access, as viewers with hearing, to in-depth news and current affairs related issues.

"...the way it (text) moves across the screen and then 'jumps' from the bottom to the top line of the (subtitling) block can make it very difficult to read....I find I often end up reading each line twice which distracts a lot from the programme you are meant to be watching.....It (this format) can be very tiring (for the viewer).

".....It (text) moves so slowly but then 'jumps' so abruptly from the bottom line to the top line...It can be quite jarring....."

"You (as a viewer) 'have' to watch the news to stay informed....but I can only watch so much of that (subtitling) format.....It's so jumpy and basic.....Not a pleasurable (viewing) experience..."

Positioning of Subtitles On Screen

The positioning of subtitles on screen was also put forward as an important issue. The poor placement of subtitles on screen can detract significantly from the viewer experience by obscuring part of a speakers' mouth or indeed other important activity happening on screen. Of those responding to the survey on subtitling 39% were dissatisfied with the success of broadcasters at providing text that is positioned effectively. The placement of subtitling on Irish television broadcasts was thought to be particularly poor during the course of live broadcasts and particularly so in the context of live sporting events when important on screen activity may be obscured. Frequently participants also spoke of important plot related activity being concealed by subtitling blocks.

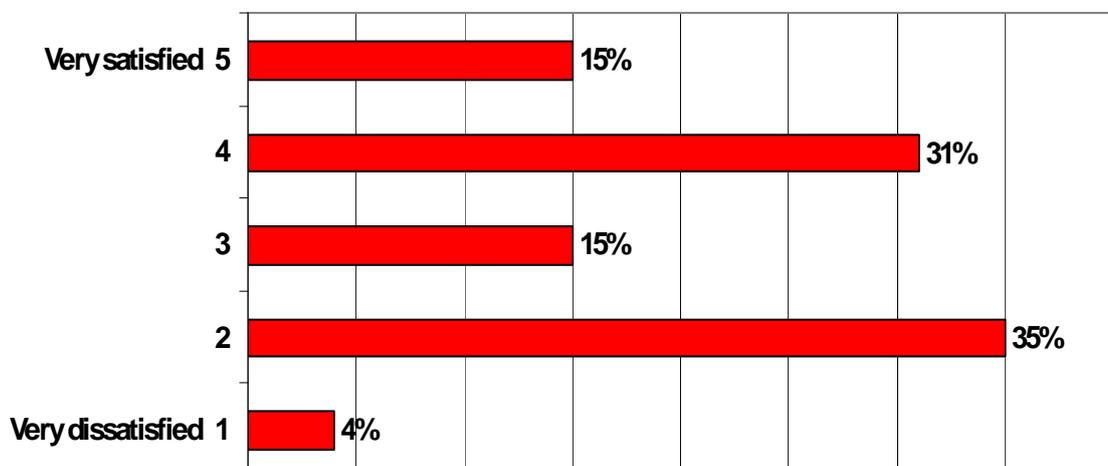
"...I can't stand it when the subtitles are blocking the faces and mouths of the people on screen.....It totally takes away from the programme (experience)..."

"It drives me mad when the subtitles are positioned halfway up the screen and are obscuring the actors....It's just (down to) laziness on the part of the broadcasters...they are just concerned with getting the subtitles on screen.....they (the broadcasters) are not worried about how they (subtitles) add to or detract from the actual programme being watched..."

"It suggests there is a lack of quality control (on the part of the broadcasters).....they are focussed on getting the subtitles 'out' but don't pay attention to how they complement the programme....."

Figure Thirteen: Positioning of Subtitles On-Screen

Success at providing text display that is positioned effectively i.e. does not block out captions, part of a speakers mouth or other important activity



The strong preference, amongst the majority of research participants, was for subtitling to be placed as close as possible, unless other programme related circumstances make this impractical, towards the bottom of the television screen. Although subtitling, for Deaf and hard of hearing people, can be a critical component of the viewer experience television itself was described as a visual experience first and foremost. Subtitling is, according to those participating in the research, a ‘tool’ which supports the viewer experience and their ability to understand and enjoy a programme. The subtitling block should therefore not overly detract from this core visual experience and its positioning needs to be considered by subtitling providers as the programme content plays out.

Interestingly research participants who were regular viewers of TG4 commented very favourably on this broadcasters on-screen positioning of the subtitling block. Indeed several of the participants suggested that the on screen placement of subtitles by TG4 very rarely obscures important on-screen activity or information.

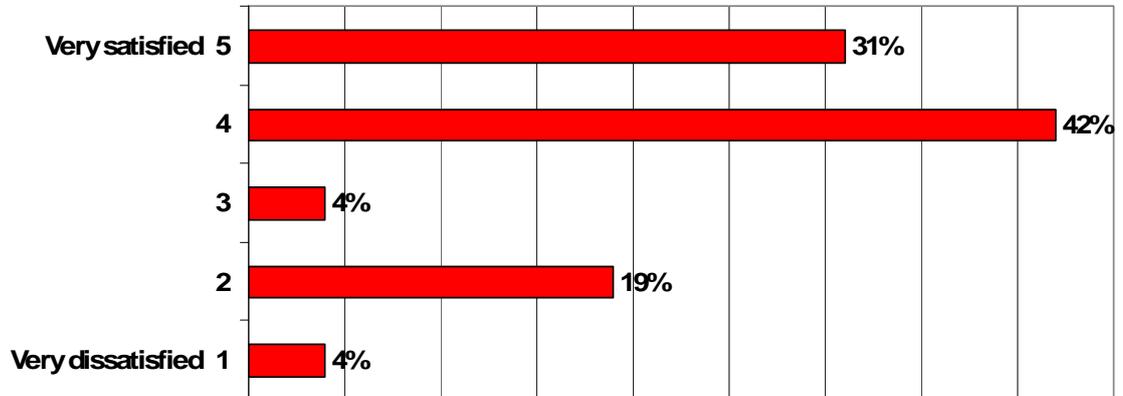
“Although subtitling is really important and we (Deaf people) can’t get by without it.....It’s still meant to ‘add’ to the experience rather than detract from the programme.....The primary reason you are watching the programme is for the visual content.....the text (subtitling) shouldn’t detract from that.....For the most part it should be placed as close to the bottom of screen as possible so that you can see what’s going on on the rest of the screen...”

“.....Unless something really important is happening at the bottom of the screen that’s where the subtitling should be placed....”

“Television is primarily a visual experience....Having subtitles blocking important content is really annoying.....the subtitles should be down at the bottom of the screen whenever possible....”

Figure Fourteen: Use of Language

Success at providing subtitles which contain easily read and commonly used sentences in a tidy and sensible format



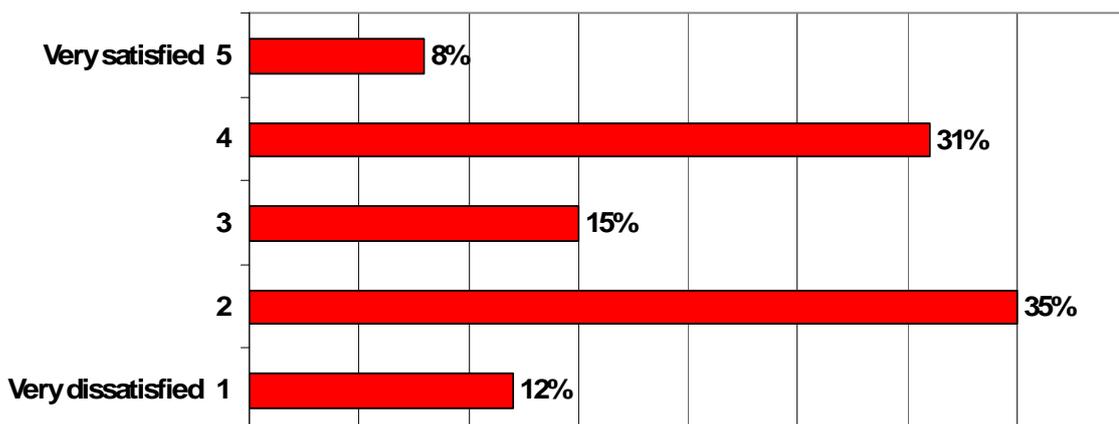
When commenting on Irish broadcaster’s use of language in subtitling research participants indicated that they were disappointed with the success of subtitling providers in matching what is actually said with the same meaning and complexity. Although 73% of respondents were satisfied with the success of Irish broadcasters at providing subtitles which contain easily read and commonly used sentences in a tidy and sensible format only 39% were satisfied with the success of subtitling providers at matching what is actually said on screen with the same meaning and complexity.

“...the language they (subtitling providers) use is fairly straightforward and easy to read. It’s (the language) nothing you wouldn’t encounter every day of the week.....”

“...It (the language) usually mirrors how people would talk to each other normally....It seems fine to me...”

Figure Fifteen: Use of Language

Success at providing subtitling which matches what is actually said with the same meaning and complexity



Many of those participating in the one to one interviews and focus groups were concerned that those depending on subtitles *may* be missing out on the 'complete viewer experience' as 'short-cuts' can be taken by subtitling providers when seeking to match what is actually said on screen. While the majority of participants recognised and understood that a level of 'editing' has to be undertaken by subtitling providers in order to maintain reasonable pace with the spoken word on screen there was a general level of concern that this may be more for reasons of 'convenience' on the part of providers rather than for practical reasons or for the benefit of the subtitling user.

The research participants, however, appeared to appreciate that subtitling providers will have to make some 'judgement calls' particularly in programmes which involve fast moving dialogue. In such situations research participants suggested that it was reasonable that not every single spoken word would appear on screen in order to avoid a situation whereby the subtitling would be lagging well behind the dialogue or action on screen. Many of the participants suggested that they can be concerned or feel somewhat 'short-changed' when they notice what would appear to be a relatively lengthy piece of dialogue on screen is matched only by a short piece of subtitling. Several of the participants suggested that they are often prompted by family members or other fellow viewers that the subtitling is not capturing accurately or in full what is being said on screen. This can, understandably, cause a level of frustration among such viewers.

".....It's understandable that some editing has to be done in order to keep pace with the dialogue and content on screen but you can be left feeling that you are not getting the same depth or detail that the hearing person is enjoying....It's difficult to say whether this is for practical reasons...such as the need to keep pace.....or purely for convenience (on the part of the subtitling provider)."

".....I suppose the priority has to be in keeping pace with the action on screen....It's understandable that some words will be cut where there is a lot of talking...."

".....When the programme contains a lot of fast moving dialogue it's reasonable to expect that not every single word will appear on the subtitles.....If it were the subtitles would be lagging well behind the action on screen....but a lot of the time you do get the sense that the subtitles aren't always (accurately) capturing what is said on screen (with the same meaning and complexity)....."

"...It's easy to notice.....the dialogue may be going on for a lengthy period but is only represented by a few lines of subtitling.....there is no way we (the Deaf person) are getting the entire picture (of what is actually said on screen)"

Several of the participants also speculated that it can appear that the subtitles created as part of certain broadcasts on Irish television may be ‘censored’ to a degree for the ‘benefit’ of the viewer using subtitles. Many were clearly very offended by this notion.

There was considerable variation in opinion amongst research participants on the subject of the broadcasters use of appropriate language and the degree to which subtitles match the literacy levels of viewers. The range of opinions provided by research participants speaks to the significant challenge facing subtitling providers. The viewing audience is very often represented by a very wide range of reading abilities and literacy levels. Different audience members will often have very different levels of reading ability and therefore have different preferences as to the complexity of language used and the ‘speed’ with which subtitles are played through on screen. The quantitative findings support this view and the variation in opinion, as depicted in Figure Sixteen below, partly illustrates the challenge facing subtitling providers in balancing language use against the wide range of literacy levels and reading abilities of the viewing audience.

Figure Sixteen: Use of Language

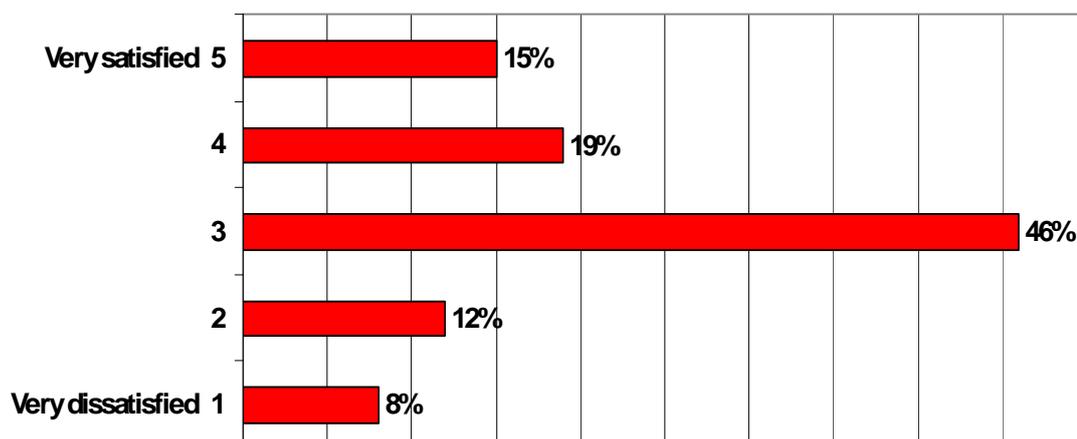
“It really annoys me when you can see they are using bad language on screen but they ‘gloss’ over it in the subtitles.....We (Deaf people) use bad language too you know....We wont keel over with shock!”

“It’s as if they (subtitling providers) think we (Deaf people) would be shocked or offended if we were to come across bad language or anything mildly risqué.....Maybe they think they are protecting us.....but it’s (this perceived form of censorship) kind of offensive.....We want (to enjoy) the same programme (content) as the hearing person...”

“It can feel a little patronising when you know important pieces of the dialogue are being left out.....You are sometimes left wondering if they (subtitling providers) think we (Deaf people) shouldn’t ‘be bothered’ or ‘overloaded’.....”

“I’m sure it is difficult for them (subtitling providers) to get it right (achieve an appropriate balance). Some Deaf people have excellent reading skills while others really struggle to understand everything and keep pace...”

Success at providing subtitling that uses language which matches the reading age of the intended audience



Maintaining pace with the spoken word on screen is clearly an issue that is important to the vast majority of research participants. Users of subtitling spoke of the added challenge in viewing a programme when the subtitling block is poorly synchronised with the on screen content. In such instances the subtitling user will have to balance the two very separate tasks of reading the subtitling block and watching the on screen content rather than engaging in one seamless or combined process.

Although described as a critical dimension 57% of respondents were 'dissatisfied' with the success of broadcasters at keeping pace with the spoken word on screen.

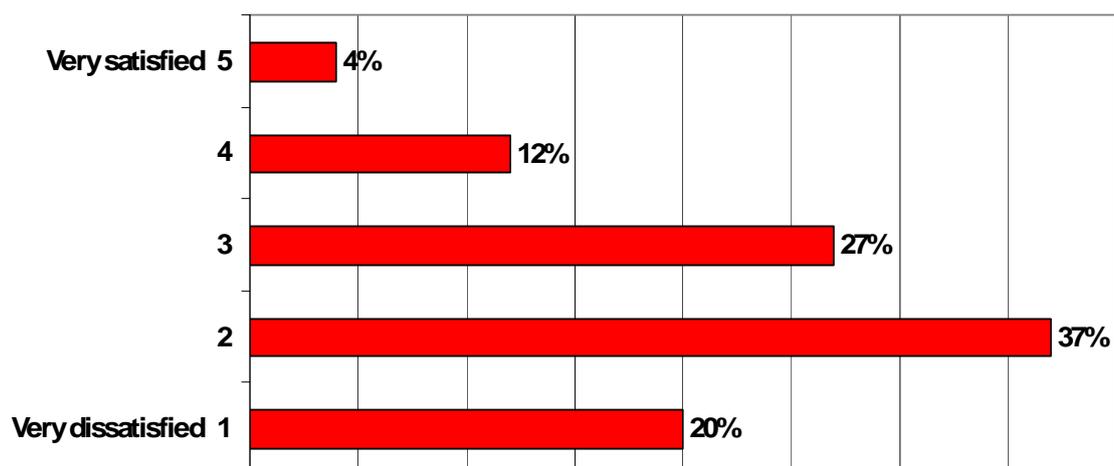
“You want the subtitles to keep up (maintain pace) with what’s happening on screen.....Otherwise it becomes too disjointed and too much of a mental effort....It would be like a hearing person trying to read a book at the same time as watching television...”

“.....the subtitles have to keep pace with the picture (on screen)....If not you (the viewer) find your eyes are jumping continually from the subtitles up to the picture rather than watching and reading in parallel...”

“...It’s awful when the subtitles are way behind or way ahead of what’s happening on screen.....watching (the programme) and reading (the subtitles) then become two separate exercises rather than one combined process.....It is much less enjoyable....”

Figure Seventeen: Pace of Subtitling

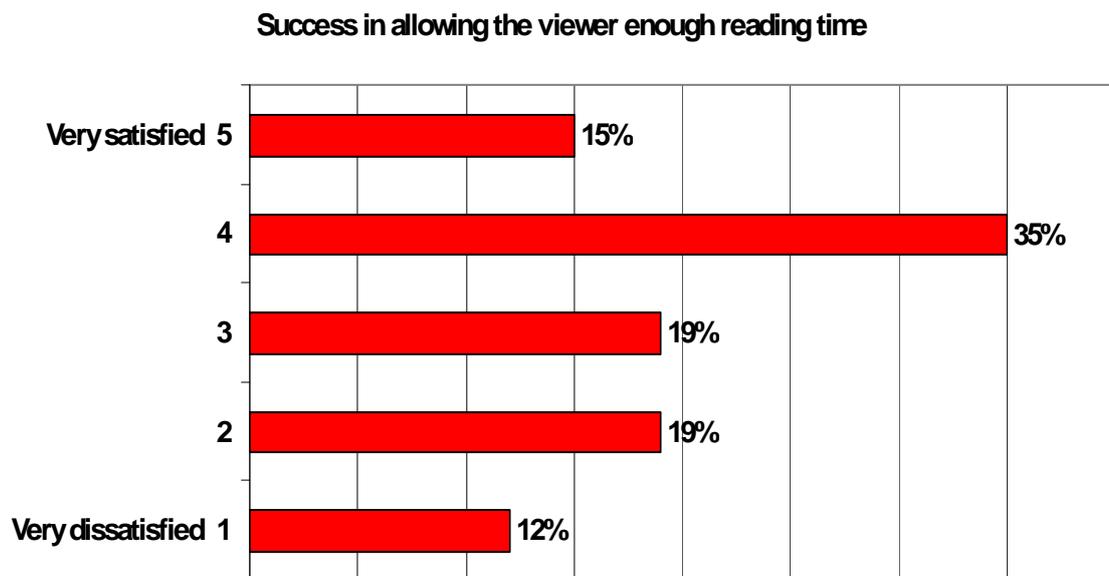
Success at keeping pace with the spoken word on screen



When this level of dissatisfaction is viewed in parallel to the survey respondents views on whether or not subtitling allows the viewer enough reading time it clearly speaks to the challenge facing subtitling providers.

Different groups within the viewing audience will have very different reading abilities and preferred reading speeds. However similar to the type of language that ought to be used as part of subtitling there was much difference of opinion as to what ought to be considered 'appropriate reading time'. Preferences amongst those who use subtitling services in Ireland are very personal and can vary significantly from person to person. Setting a meaningful 'standard' to achieve on either of these two dimensions will be both difficult and perhaps somewhat inappropriate to consider.

Figure Eighteen: Pace of Subtitling



Level Three – Use of text & punctuation to convey emphasis & meaning, Use of symbols to convey off screen & off camera voices, Provision of off screen information

The researchers also asked participants to consider and comment on both the relevance of and success broadcasters enjoy with using text and punctuation to convey emphasis and meaning. Participants also put forward their views on the relevance of using symbols to convey off screen and off camera voices. Interestingly it was emphasised repeatedly by the majority of participants that both of these ‘features’ could usefully be considered as ‘nice to have’ rather than critical components of a subtitling offering.

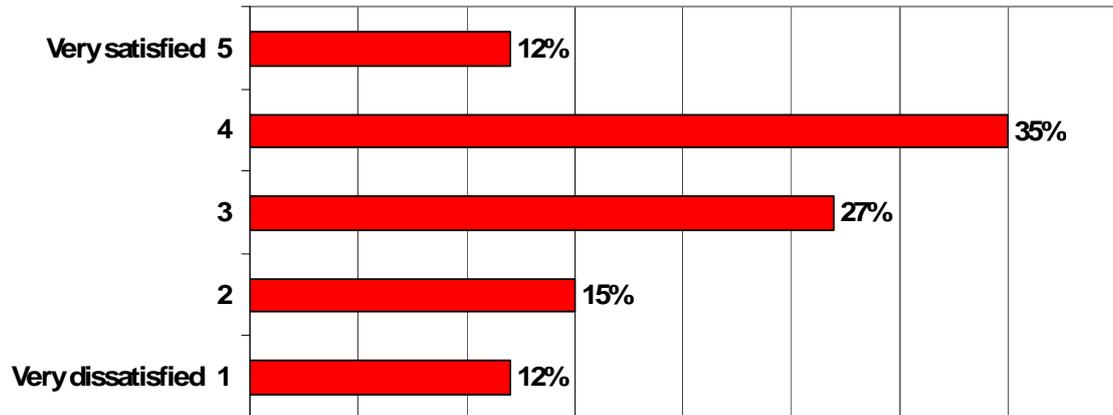
While the responses would indicate that a significant proportion of viewers are not satisfied with the Irish broadcasters success in using either text or punctuation to convey emphasis or phrasing (27% dissatisfied) or in using symbols to convey off screen and off camera voices (58% dissatisfied) research participants stressed that the call for these ‘added value features’ should not distract from the need for greater focus on core dimensions such as ‘availability’, ‘reliability’ and ‘clarity of font’. Bringing about improvements on these three key dimensions were prioritised by research participants over all other quality related features and characteristics.

“....Yes it’s nice to see (use of text/punctuation to convey emphasis and tone of voice) but the real emphasis has to be on ‘quantity’ (i.e. the amount of subtitling) and meeting basic expectations.....like (subtitling) starting on time, not pausing without explanation or going missing.....and having a clear font that isn’t all blurred.....”

“.....I do think that (use of text/punctuation to convey emphasis and tone of voice) adds to it (the viewer experience) but I would hate to see it distract from the need for a greater amount of Irish programming to be subtitled or indeed on more basic quality related features.....these are nice to have rather than must have elements...”

Figure Nineteen: Use of Text & Punctuation to Convey Emphasis & Phrasing

Success in using text and punctuation to get across emphasis and phrasing (e.g. shouting) and tone of voice (e.g. anger)



Exploring the subject of off screen information a little further only 15% of respondents, as illustrated in Figure Twenty One overleaf, were satisfied with the success of Irish broadcasters at providing a subtitling service that provides an appropriate amount of 'off screen information.

“.....It definitely (use of symbols to convey off screen voices) helps but its probably too early in our (Ireland's) adoption of subtitling to get hung up on issues such as this....Other core issue (such as availability, reliability and clarity of font) need to take priority....”

Figure Twenty: Use of Symbols to Convey Off Screen & Off Camera Voices

Success at using symbols to convey 'off screen' and 'off camera' voices

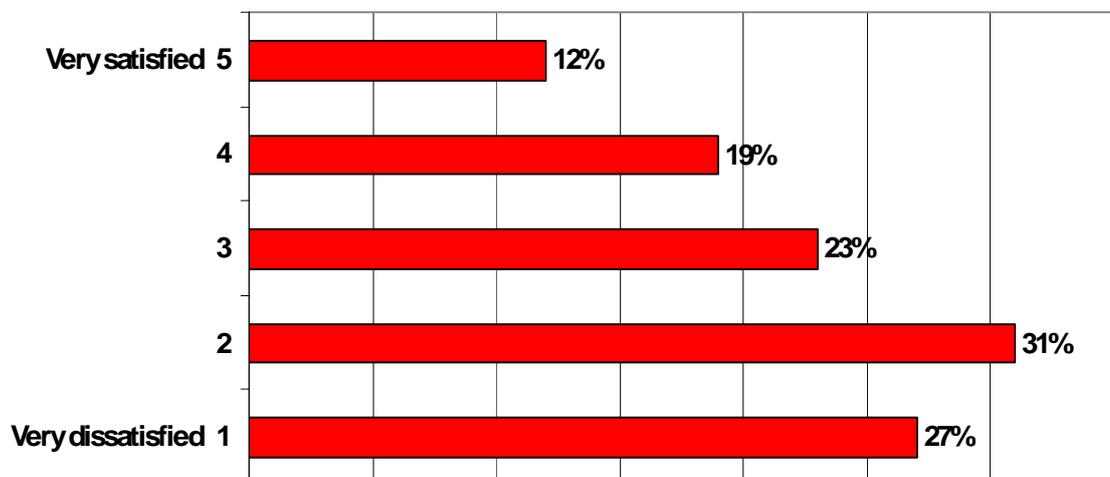
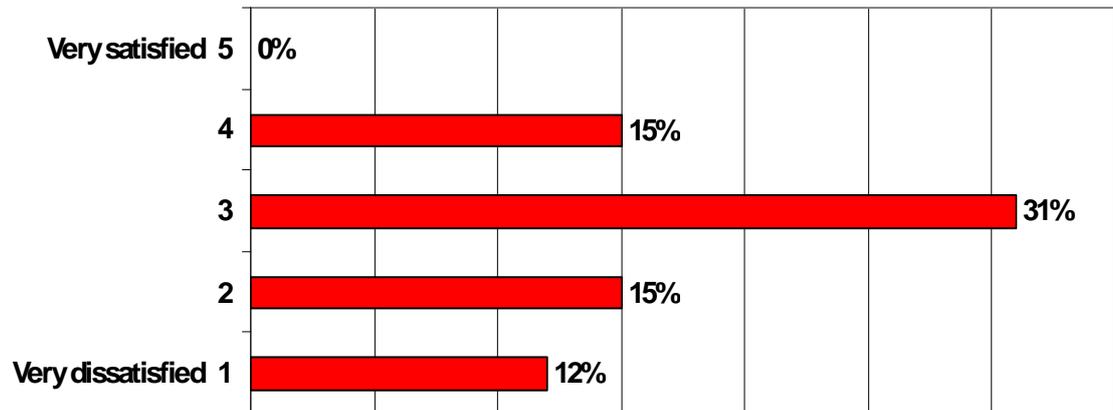


Figure Twenty One: Provision of off screen information

Success at providing a subtitling service that provides a correct amount of 'off screen information' (to convey sound effects, playing of music, silence, the failure of the subtitling transmission etc.)



Television viewers participating in the one to one interviews and focus groups spoke of being 'left in the dark' and in 'a state of suspense' when certain planned or unplanned events occur such as the playing of music, silence between sets of dialogue, sound effects critical to the on screen storyline or indeed if the subtitling transmission fails. In many of these instances subtitling users suggested they often jump mistakenly to the conclusion that the subtitling service has failed and therefore may stop watching the programme.

"...if there is music playing for any length of period and no subtitles to explain you're (the viewer) left wondering what's happening.....You often might think 'oh the subtitling has broken down again' when in fact its all part of the on screen story but they (the broadcaster) have forgotten to tell you."

"In an action movie when there can be lengthy pauses in dialogue....the lack of subtitled prompts to let you know what's going on can frustrating.....You are left wondering 'has it (subtitling) broken down?'..."

(e) Subtitling for Live Broadcasts

Research participants generally accepted that subtitling on live programming will be of an inferior standard to that provided on pre-recorded programming. The reasons or logic for this difference in quality also appeared to be recognised and understood as participants spoke of the challenge facing subtitling providers in keeping pace with a live and often fast moving dialogue or sequence of events on screen. In particular subtitling users appeared to be sympathetic to the challenge faced by stenographers in producing subtitles so quickly and on the strength of a single hearing of the spoken dialogue.

Despite this recognition there was, as illustrated in Figure Twenty Two below, a wide range of views and opinions expressed as to the quality of subtitling provided for live broadcasts in Ireland. While 31% were satisfied with the success of broadcasters in providing subtitling for live programmes that help the viewer to enjoy and understand the programmes, 34% were dissatisfied. Of those that were dissatisfied close to one-fifth (19%) of all respondents indicated that they were 'very dissatisfied.'

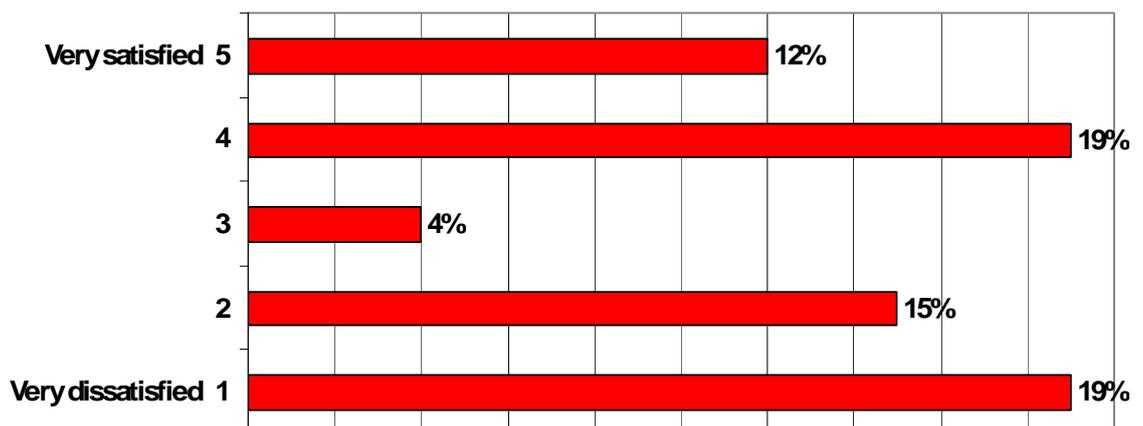
"I guess it's (live subtitles) not going to be of a similar quality (to pre-recorded subtitles) as they (the stenographers) have to do it (create the subtitles) there and then as the programme airs....With other programmes (that are pre-recorded) they (the broadcasters) will have a lot more time to develop the subtitles...."

"I am sure it's (creating subtitles for live television) a lot more demanding (than subtitling for pre-recorded material)....they (the stenographers) only have one opportunity (on first hearing the dialogue or script) to get it right....that leaves a lot of scope for error.....and obviously means there will be a time lag between what is said on screen and the subtitles actually appearing on screen...That time lag and the higher number of errors in the text (subtitles on screen) would be the obvious criticisms for me."

"They (the stenographers) are developing the subtitles based on one hearing (of the on screen spoken word)....that means a lot of errors can creep in....."

Figure Twenty Two: Subtitling for Live Television

Success in providing subtitling for 'live broadcasts' that helps you enjoy and understand these television programmes



Among the criticisms voiced, in the context of subtitling for live television, were the 'uneven' speed at which the subtitling text can travel across the screen, the often lengthy delays between the spoken word and the appearance on screen of relevant subtitles, the comparably higher proportion of mistakes when compared against pre-recorded programmes and the often 'disjointed' presentation of text as the bottom line in a subtitling block replaces the top line thereby forcing the viewer to frequently readjust their line of sight. It was frequently suggested that this can be quite unsettling or even 'jarring' as the viewer attempts to follow the subtitling provided. Several participants also claimed that live subtitles often contain spelling mistakes. They are also prone to 'freezing' on screen, appearing in the wrong order, or, on rare occasions, for the wrong live event.

Although many of the participants appeared to have a level of sympathy for and understanding of the challenges facing broadcasters in generating subtitles for live programming it would appear that expectations around standards that 'ought' to be achieved are still relatively high. Many of the participants suggested that higher quality standards on subtitling for live programming would be readily achievable were broadcasters to apply additional resources to the issue. Subtitling users called on the broadcasters to add additional stenographers to their panels to facilitate the provision of higher quality subtitling for live broadcasts.

"...it (the subtitling text) can either move very quickly or slowly across the screen....so you (the viewer) are either lagging behind the on screen events or else having to read very quickly to keep pace.....That can be difficult for some (Deaf) people who may not have a high level of literacy...."

".....You know they (the news readers) have moved on to another story but you (the viewer) are left reading about the previous story....Similarly watching GAA on television the subtitles are usually well behind the pace of play....."

"....as they (the subtitling providers) are developing the text (subtitles) 'live' they are going to get a lot of things wrong...there is no scope to correct it or quality control it....unlike with subtitling for pre-recorded material..."

".....the way in which the bottom line of subtitling 'jumps' to the top line of the block can be very distracting....your eyes get a bit of a jolt....it requires a lot of concentration (to follow this presentation format)....that's ok for something like the news but for sports which are meant to be enjoyable it's a real nuisance...."

In the context of subtitling for live sporting events it was interesting to note that several of the research participants suggested that broadcasters could usefully look to prioritise the provision of high quality subtitles on pre, half-time and post match analysis rather than on the 'in game' commentary. Indeed several of the research participants indicated that they often 'switch-off' the subtitles during live sporting events as it was felt that the subtitling block can distract from important on-screen activity. It was also suggested that the subtitles can be irrelevant to the activity that is happening at a specific point in a live sporting event.

"....if they just had a bigger team of people (stenographers) working on a live programme at any one time the quality would improve....there would be fewer mistakes...It's probably only a financial issue which is holding back standards (on subtitling on live programming)."

".....I am sure they (the broadcasters) will say that it (subtitling on live television) is much more expensive but if they were to get another couple of people (stenographers) working on each programme the quality would improve considerably...."

".....when I'm watching the game I usually turn the subtitles off. They can get in the way (blocking important activity on screen), they are usually running well behind what's actually said and thus become largely irrelevant.....What's really important though is for the chat and analysis prior to the match and again at half time (to be subtitled to a high standard)....that's where I would like to see them focussing their attention...."

".....If they (the broadcasters) only have a certain budget for subtitling on games I would like to see them concentrate on the analysis....'the Hook and Pope' or 'Giles and Dunphy'....that's what you (the viewer) really want to be subtitled (to a high standard).....the actual game itself you can interpret yourself (subtitling is largely superfluous)."

"....subtitling on a match can actually get in the way....there is nothing worse than the subtitling block actually blocking (obscuring the view) off a point being scored in a (GAA) match....that's why I don't turn it (subtitling) on for the match itself...I do like to get it (subtitling) though for the panel discussion (pre-game, at half time and again at full time)...."

".....you can see the match for yourself you don't need anyone telling you what's happening....If anything it (subtitling) can get in the way (of the viewer experience).....What I would love to see improve though is the subtitling for the analysis done by the panels....that would really add to it (the viewer experience)"

(f) Satisfaction with Individual Broadcasters

Research participants were also asked to comment on their level of satisfaction with the subtitling services provided by the various individual broadcasters and television channels. When examining the figures one can see that satisfaction was highest in the case of RTÉ 1 (85% satisfied) followed closely by RTÉ 2 (73% satisfied). In the case of RTÉ 1 and RTÉ 2 only 8% and 12% of respondents respectively indicated that they were dissatisfied with the success of the two stations in providing subtitling that helps the viewer to enjoy and understand television programmes.

In the case of TG4 while 34% of respondents were satisfied only 8% were dissatisfied. This is partly explained by the relatively large proportion of respondents (23%) who indicated that they do not watch this particular channel. Respondents appeared to be most dissatisfied with the success of TV3 in providing subtitling. In this case only 4% of respondents were 'satisfied' while 77% indicated that they are dissatisfied with the success of TV3 in providing subtitling that helps the viewer to enjoy and understand television programmes.

The proportion of respondents who watch the remaining channels (3e, Setanta Ireland, City Channel, ESPN America, DCTV and P5TV) were significantly lower and therefore it is somewhat challenging to generate meaningful conclusions from the available results. However in the case of ESPN America, DCTV and P5TV it is interesting to note that of the respondents who indicated that they do watch these channels all, albeit small in number, expressed satisfaction with these three channels in providing subtitling that helps the viewer to enjoy and understand television programmes.

Table Eight: Satisfaction with Subtitling Provided by Individual Broadcasters

| Television Channel | Satisfied | Dissatisfied | Do Not Watch this Channel |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------|---------------------------|
| RTÉ 1 | 85% | 8% | 0% |
| RTÉ 2 | 73% | 12% | 0% |
| TG4 | 34% | 8% | 23% |
| TV3 | 4% | 77% | 12% |
| 3e | 0% | 35% | 54% |
| Setanta Ireland | 8% | 27% | 65% |
| City Channel | 8% | 4% | 88% |
| ESPN America | 8% | 0% | 88% |
| DCTV | 8% | 0% | 92% |
| P5TV | 8% | 0% | 92% |

4.2 Irish Sign Language

Irish Sign Language (ISL) is one of the recognised access services along with subtitling and audio description, which can be included with television programmes to make them understandable and enjoyable for people who are Deaf, hard of hearing or vision impaired. Irish Sign Language, or ISL, is according to the Irish Deaf Society (IDS) the indigenous language or mother tongue of the Irish Deaf community. The IDS estimate that there are approximately 6,000 Deaf people in Ireland whose first or preferred language is ISL. Furthermore the IDS estimate that approximately 60,000 Deaf and hearing people in Ireland use ISL either as their first language *or* in addition to their first language on a daily basis in Ireland.

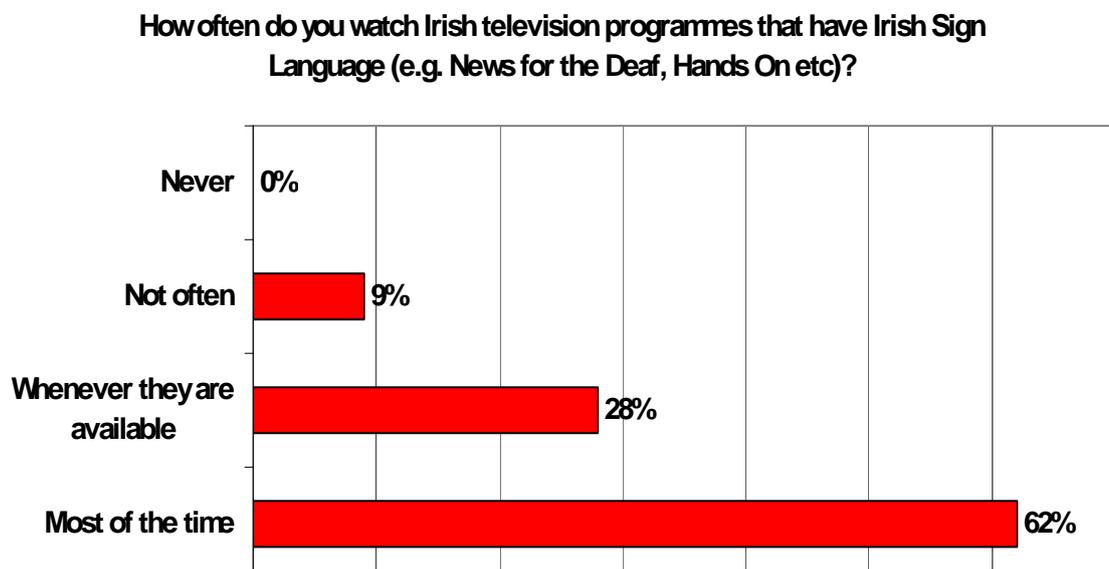
The regulator has established minimum quotas for subtitling provision for each television channel. Targets for both Irish Sign Language and audio description provision were however only applied to RTE services in acknowledgment of the public service remit and funding of these stations.

As part of this study the researchers facilitated three focus groups involving participants whose preferred form of communication is either ISL or a combination of ISL and spoken word. In addition approximately 10 one to one interviews were conducted with participants whose preferred form of communication is either ISL or a combination of ISL and spoken word. There were also 102 respondents to the survey questionnaire on Irish Sign Language.

(a) Use & Importance of Irish Sign Language on Irish Television

Of the 102 research participants that responded to the survey questionnaire on ISL a very significant 90% revealed that they watch television programmes that feature ISL either ‘most of the time’ or ‘whenever they are available’.

Figure Twenty Three: ISL on Television



It was interesting to note the relatively large proportion of research participants that actively seek out programmes with ISL interpretation provided. Many of these participants suggested that they would, whenever possible, make considerable efforts to watch most if not all of the programming on Irish television that features ISL. According to these participants this programming provides ISL users with an important opportunity to connect with “the shared culture and sense of community that unites Deaf people in Ireland.” The majority of these research participants were very anxious to stress that while ISL still has no official status in Irish legislation the language is recognised by a large proportion of the Deaf community as the community’s mother tongue. Seeing ISL on screen and following programmes which features ISL provides, according to many of those participating in the focus groups and one to one interviews, an important opportunity to watch programming in one’s own first language.

“I appreciate people who use ISL make up a relatively small section of the population but it is very important to us that our preferred language would be recognised and that we would be able to watch programmes on Irish television that are based around our language.....”

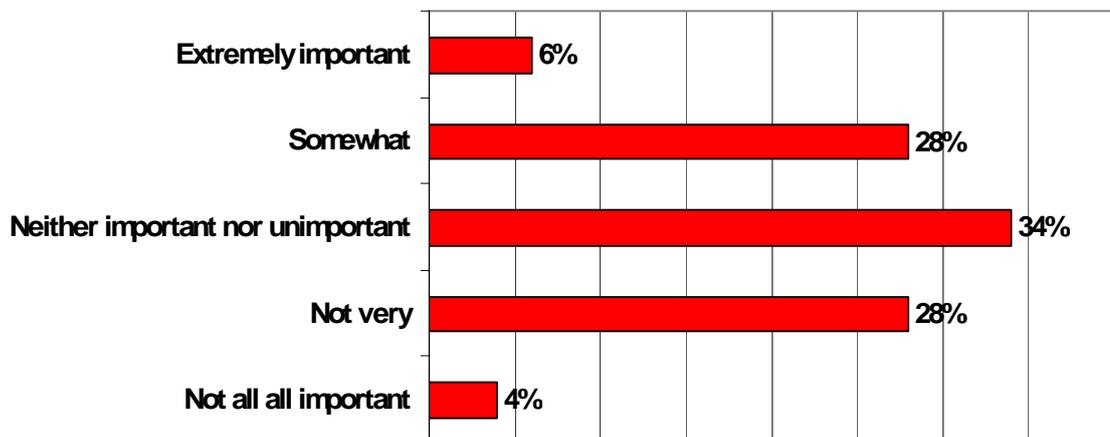
“Subtitling is great....but it is nice to see something (programmes on Irish television) that is based around your own first language....That’s why I would always try to watch every episode of Hands On.....”

“When you are talking with another person through ISL you share a deeper sense of understanding and empathy....It’s the same when you are watching programmes on television....’Hands On’ provides that opportunity to watch people from your own community who are speaking in their and your first language....”

When commenting on the importance of ISL to the viewers enjoyment and understanding of television programmes the majority, but not all, of research participants suggested that subtitling is, in the main, ‘more’ important than Irish Sign Language. However there were many research participants who were anxious to stress that ISL on television would still be particularly important to those viewers whose reading ability may not be advanced. Approximately one third (34%) of respondents suggested that the availability of ISL was in some way important to their understanding and enjoyment of programmes on Irish television.

Figure Twenty Four: Importance of Availability of ISL

How important is the availability of Irish Sign Language to your enjoyment and understanding of television programmes on Irish television?



ISL users participating in the research suggested that sign language interpretation on television programmes is very important for Deaf viewers who would not have sufficient literacy skills to follow a programme's subtitles. It was also suggested that having ISL on television plays an important role in raising awareness of Deaf people and issues relevant to the Deaf community in Ireland. Many of the participants suggested that by routinely having ISL included as part of television programming the attached stigma of 'being different', because of use of sign language, is reduced. It was also put forward that the inclusion of additional ISL on Irish television would help to increase awareness of deafness, cultural issues relevant to the Deaf community and about the communication of Deaf people in Ireland. By having additional sign language interpretation on Irish television, research participants generally felt that the status of Deaf people in Ireland could be raised.

“Literacy levels amongst the Deaf community will be lower than those enjoyed in the hearing community. Subtitles are not always accessible to everyone, particularly when a programme can involve complex, fast moving dialogue. Some Deaf people will not be able to keep pace with the subtitles that appear on screen or they may miss out on very important general news content or information immediately relevant to them as members of the Deaf community. That’s why it is so important to have some ISL on Irish TV. At least then they can get a chance to catch the full story.”

“You have to remember that not everyone (amongst the Deaf community) will have a good reading ability.....therefore ISL will be very important to them and their ability to understand.”

“ISL on TV gives those who communicate through ISL an opportunity to see something in their own first language....So they won’t be concerned about missing out on any information ...”

Many of the research participants also suggested that sign language interpretation on television programmes has the potential to be particularly important as it could allow Deaf children and young people to access the same programmes as hearing children. Many also felt that the inclusion of ISL on Irish programming would help to improve ISL literacy levels amongst the Deaf community itself as by watching programmes with sign language interpretation the viewers Irish Sign Language skills will improve.

There was a very significant level of disappointment amongst research participants with the current level of ISL provision on Irish television. Indeed many of those participating described the provision as ‘paltry’ and even ‘insulting’. In an attempt to emphasise or stress the minimal level of provision of ISL on Irish television participants frequently spoke of that provision in the context of ‘mere minutes per year.’

Amongst research participants, whose preferred form of communication is ISL, there was a clear level of frustration and disappointment with the way in which the majority of the Irish broadcasters have yet to engage in the provision of ISL. Perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly therefore a very significant 97% of survey respondents do not think there are enough programmes on Irish television with ISL provision. Indeed many of the participants speculated that there is ‘no way’ that the broadcasters are meeting their targets for ISL provision under the Access Rules.

“...the News for the Deaf each day is on for two to three minutes and Hands On is a 30 minute programme in a series of about fifteen programmes....By my rough calculations that’s about 1,200 minutes per year...and that’s probably being generous.....That level of ISL is simply not good enough...”

“.....Out of a possible 18 or 24 hours a day we get 2 minutes a day Monday to Friday thanks to the News for the Deaf...which by the way is on at a very awkward time.....and then Hands On which offers about 25 minutes over 15 or 17 episodes....In the context of a years worth of television across a number of Irish (television) channels that (estimated level of ISL provision) is awful...”

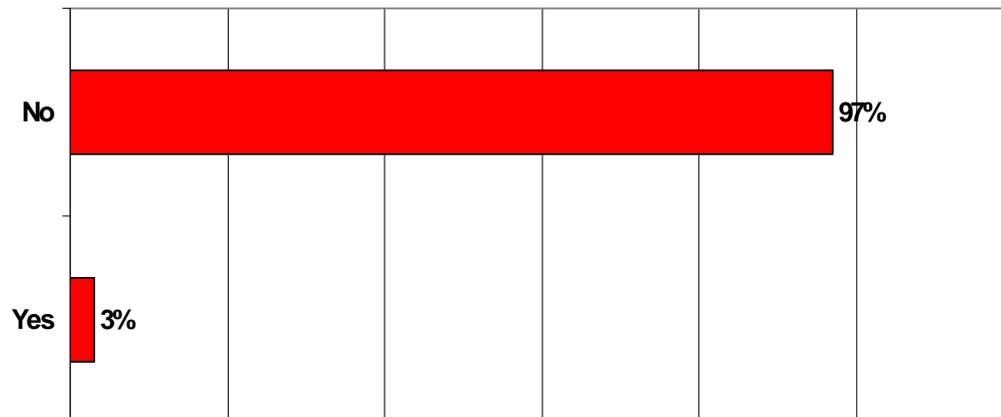
“.....I know the target (under the Access Rules) for ISL provision is low but there is no way that they (the Irish broadcasters) could be achieving it (the target set)”

“.....why bother having a target at all if its going to be set that low....Yet even still (with the perceived low target to be attained) I couldn’t imagine the broadcasters are achieving it....

“.....It’s set at a very low level....Yet I wonder are they actually reaching it....It also makes you think ‘why does it (the target for ISL provision) only apply to RTÉ?...”

Figure Twenty Five: Satisfaction with Current Level of Sign Language Provision on Irish Television

Do you think there are enough programmes on Irish television with Irish Sign Language provision?



In a similar manner to that evident in the discussion on subtitling research participants made direct comparisons between the Irish situation and the level of sign language provision that is available on the UK based television channels. Many were clearly very disappointed and frustrated that the Irish broadcasters do not compare favourably with the UK based broadcasters in terms of their level of sign language provision

Many of the research participants were particularly concerned with the lack of provision of on screen Irish Sign Language for children’s programming and the negative effect that this may have on the acquisition of ISL as a first language amongst Deaf children.

The majority of participants felt that by watching programmes with sign language interpretation a young child’s sign language improves. Many also suggested that watching sign language interpretation on television also benefits ‘family members’ skills.’

“...Irish television just doesn’t compare at all well with UK television....Turn on Channel 4, Nickelodeon, or C-Beebies at the weekend and you will see so many programmes with sign language.....”

“.....I am sure there are one or two UK channels who provide more sign language programming in a single weekend than we (in Ireland) can get in a whole year....”

“.....Subtitles are no good (not appropriate) for very young (pre-school) children.....It would be great however if they had ISL built into the programming....It would help them to learn this language at a much earlier stage.....that’s what is happening in the UK...”

“...Very young Deaf children in Ireland simply aren’t able to watch TV.....Subtitles aren’t relevant yet....That’s why it would be great to see ISL included in this type of programming...”

This, according to many of the ISL users participating in the research is important, as so many Deaf children are born to hearing parents, with limited experience of Deafness. By watching ISL on television together the family unit is given a greater opportunity to learn and use ISL together on a day to day basis. For children who use sign language, having a presenter or character using their first language would, according to many of the research participants, enable fuller engagement with a programme.

Amongst children who participated in the research the majority appeared to have a preference for a presentation format involving presenters who use sign language as opposed to having an interpreter superimposed on screen. For younger Deaf children it was suggested that in instances where an interpreter is superimposed on the screen the signer needs to be of a reasonable size to be able to allow the viewer make out the signs and identify with the facial expressions used and to take in the communication cues from the sign language interpreters body language.

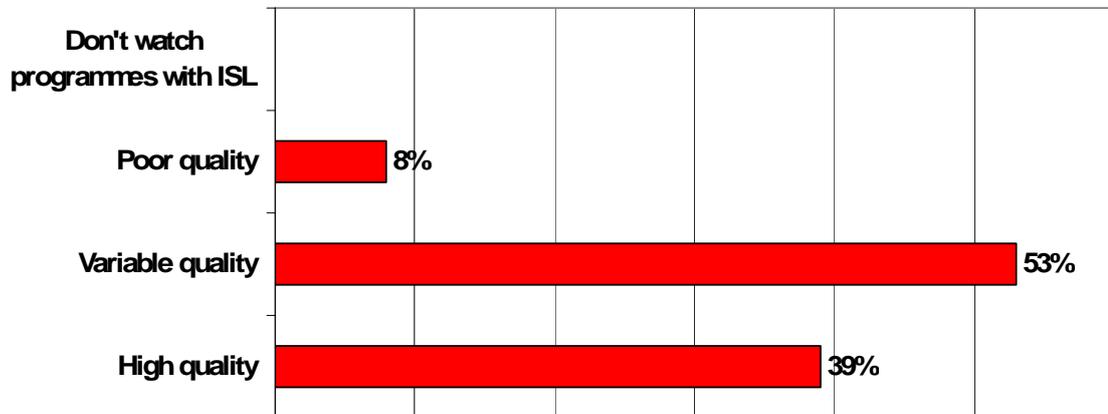
(b) Quality of Irish Sign Language on Television

In addition to providing an opportunity to put forward views on the availability, importance and current level of use of ISL on Irish television the one to interviews, focus groups and survey questionnaire also called on research participants to comment on the quality of ISL provided on Irish television. When research participants spoke about the quality of ISL currently provided on Irish television they invariably referred to two programmes broadcast by RTÉ – ‘Hands On’ and the News for the Deaf. Each evening as part of the Irish language news bulletin the news is signed by a Deaf newsreader in Irish Sign Language. The signed news is located towards the end of the news bulletin and lasts on average for between two and five minutes. ‘Hands On’ is the magazine programme broadcast by RTÉ for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities in Ireland. The programme is broadcast on a Sunday morning on RTÉ One at 10.40am and is produced by a mixed Deaf and hearing team. Hands On covers a broad range of issues relevant to the Deaf Community such as education, health, current and foreign affairs, sports and festivals taking place throughout the county. There is also a regular children’s slot ‘Molly and Mr Milk’ featured as part of the programme.

There was considerable variation in terms of the views put forward by respondents on the quality of ISL provision made available by the Irish broadcasters. Of those responding to the survey questionnaire on ISL 61% suggested that ISL provision on Irish television is either of a variable quality or a poor quality.

Figure Twenty Six: Perceived quality of ISL provided on Irish television

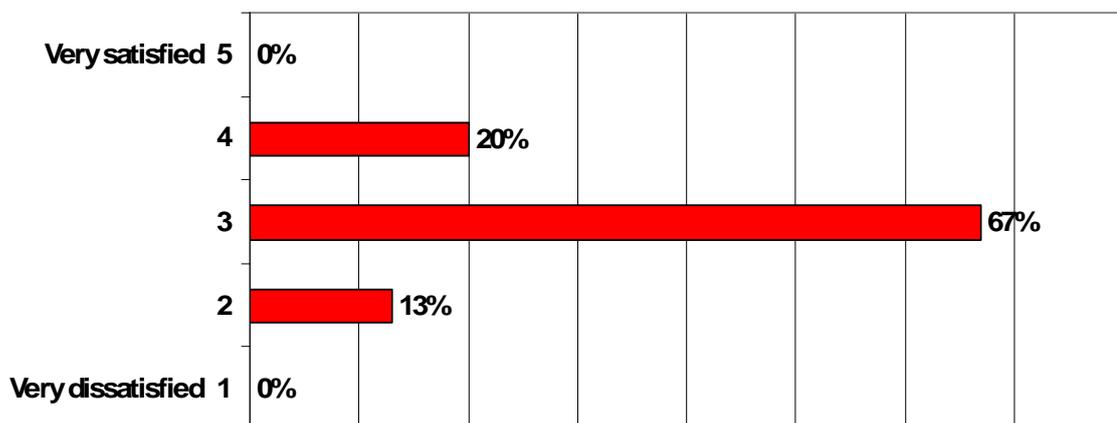
Generally, what do you think about the quality of Irish Sign Language provision made available by Irish broadcasters?



Similarly a large proportion of respondents (67%) indicated that they were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' when rating the success of broadcasters in providing ISL that helps the viewer to enjoy and understand television programmes.

Figure Twenty Seven: ISL impact on enjoyment and understanding of television programmes.

Success in providing Irish Sign Language that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes



Although only 8% of survey respondents indicated that they have stopped watching a programme on Irish television because of the quality of ISL provision 28% signalled that they have 'occasionally' had problems when viewing ISL on Irish television.

Figure Twenty Eight: Quality of ISL on Irish television

Have you ever stopped watching a programme on Irish television because of the quality of Irish Sign Language provision?

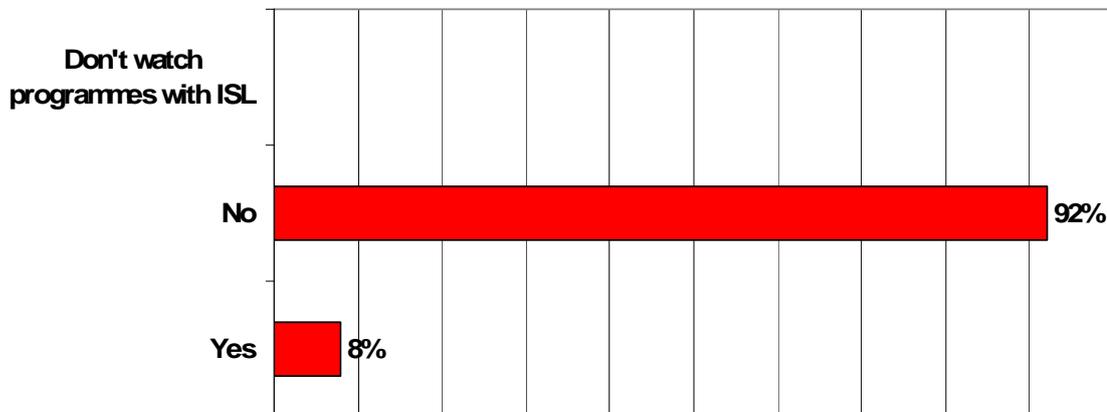
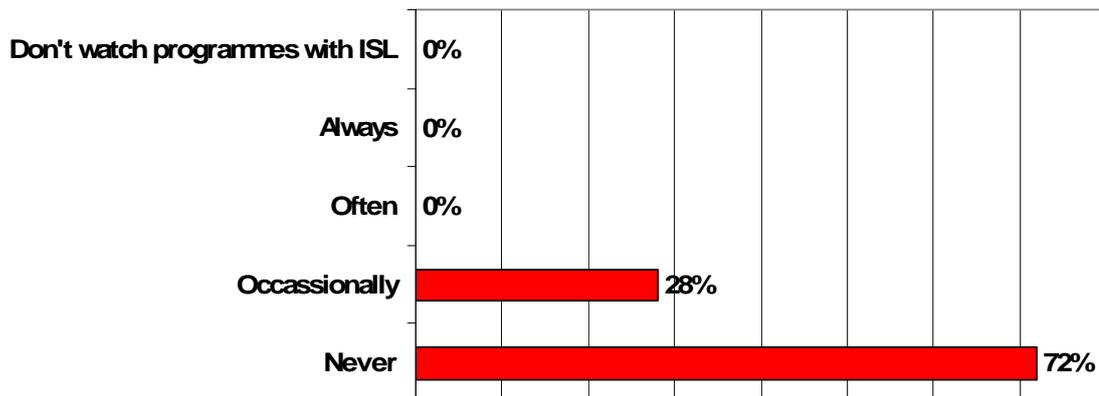


Figure Twenty Nine: Problems when viewing ISL on Irish television

How often do you have problems when viewing Irish Sign Language on Irish television?



Research participants were very positive when commenting on the quality and suitability of ISL featured as part of the Hands On programme. Indeed the majority of participants tended to rate this magazine programme very highly in terms of presentation style, format, approach and content.

“...(Watching) Hands On is like getting together with a group of your own friends (fellow Deaf people fluent in ISL) to share information, and discuss what’s going on in the (Deaf) community.....It’s obviously put together (created and produced) by Deaf people for Deaf people....It has a lovely natural style and the fluency and ability of those signing is of a very high standard.....It really is excellent.”

“....I think it (Hands On) is a really fabulous programme.....It allows Deaf people to watch a programme made (broadcast) in their own first language....It’s not some cobbled together form of basic signing or doesn’t involve presenters with poor ISL skills....they (the presenters) are really skilled and do an excellent job...”

“....It (Hands On) gives us (Deaf people) really important news and information about services for the Deaf...(information) that simply isn’t available anywhere else (i.e. in other mainstream accessible media).....”

“.....It’s a real focal point for our (Deaf) community.....Its like a gathering....You (the viewer) really feel a part of it (the ‘experience’)....Its so nice to sit back and watch a programme in your own first language.....We pay the same license fee (as the mainstream audience) yet this (Hands On) is the only opportunity we (Deaf people) have to share news and to (connect with) the traditions of our community...It (Hands On) is really important (in that respect)....”

“.....that’s ISL as we (focus group participants) would use it every day.....”

Participants, however, were somewhat critical when commenting on the format and approach adopted as part of the daily News for the Deaf programme. Any concerns aired in this respect appeared to be practical in nature. Such concerns and criticisms tended to relate primarily to the technical aspects of signing adopted by presenters on the programme, issues relating to the layout and format of both the studio itself and the clothing and accessories worn by presenters as well as both the broadcast time and duration of the programme.

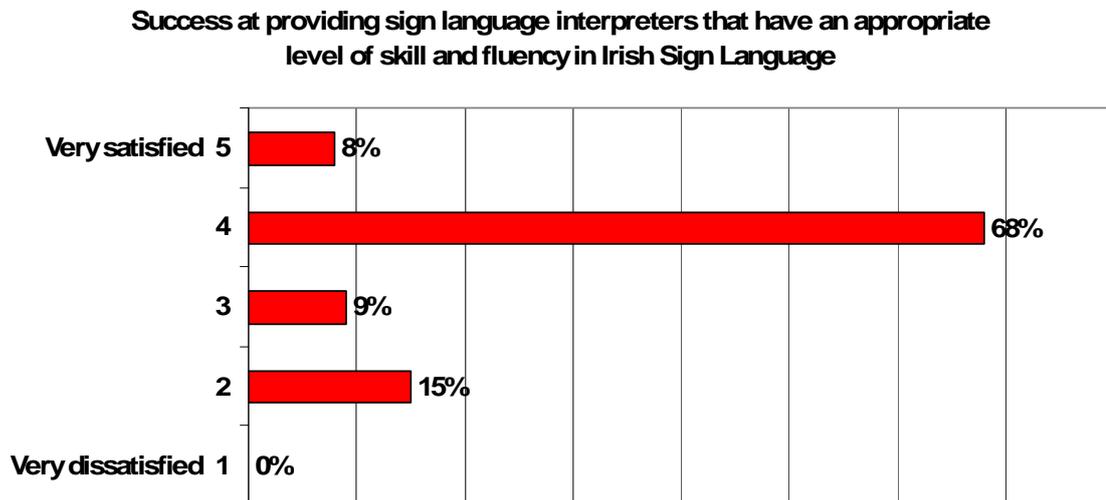
The signing used as part of the News for the Deaf programme is, according to a significant proportion of those participating in this strand of research, not a contemporary form of ISL as many of the participants would recognise it. ISL, like any other sign language, is a non-verbal language and involves the use of hand movements, facial expressions, body movements and lip patterns to convey meaning. The language has its own complex linguistic structures, rules and features. Research participants were anxious to stress that ISL is a visual, spatial language with its own distinct grammar and is not only a language of the hands but also of the face and body. Similarly participants emphasised that ISL is not a signed version of English but is a unique language whose grammatical structure is very different from that of English. However according to those participating in the research the signing adopted by presenters as part of the News for the Deaf programme is more akin to a form of signed English rather than contemporary ISL.

“.....that’s (form of signing provided on the News for the Deaf) not ISL as I would use it every day....It’s a very direct translation of the spoken word.....It’s signed English really....It (signing on News for the Deaf) doesn’t involve any facial movement or expression.”

“.....I wouldn’t think that’s ISL....It’s a very literal translation of each spoken word.....”

Interestingly however more than three quarters (76%) of respondents were satisfied with the skill and fluency levels of ISL presenters that feature on Irish television.

Figure Thirty: Skill and fluency levels in Irish Sign Language



When attempting to reconcile this with the comments featured previously it was interesting to note the views of participants as many appeared to have given the issue much consideration.

“.....It (the use of signed English rather than ISL on the News for the Deaf) is either an editorial decision (taken on the part of the broadcaster) or some sort of legacy issue.....It’s certainly not the fault of the presenters....They (the presenters) are well known and very well respected in the Deaf Community and do have very good ISL skills.....but for some reason are using signed English for the news programme...”

“.....if you were to ask me (the research participant) a question specifically about ISL (provision) on Irish television I could only use Hands On as an example.....the News for the Deaf doesn’t use ISL so strictly speaking it isn’t relevant.....”

Similarly participants were somewhat critical when commenting on the studio configuration and the clothing and accessories which can be worn by presenters. It was frequently suggested that the use of a desk based presentation style which obscures much of the presenters body does not allow the viewer to see body movements which, according to those participating, can be such an integral part of ISL. It was also suggested that the studio lighting can conceal important facial expressions of the presenter and interfere with viewer understanding. Similarly several participants suggested that clothing and accessories worn by presenters can on occasion be overly distracting.

“....I wished they (the presenters) wouldn’t sit behind a desk.....ISL relies on much more than the hands for signing....It uses space and body (movement) to get across meaning...”

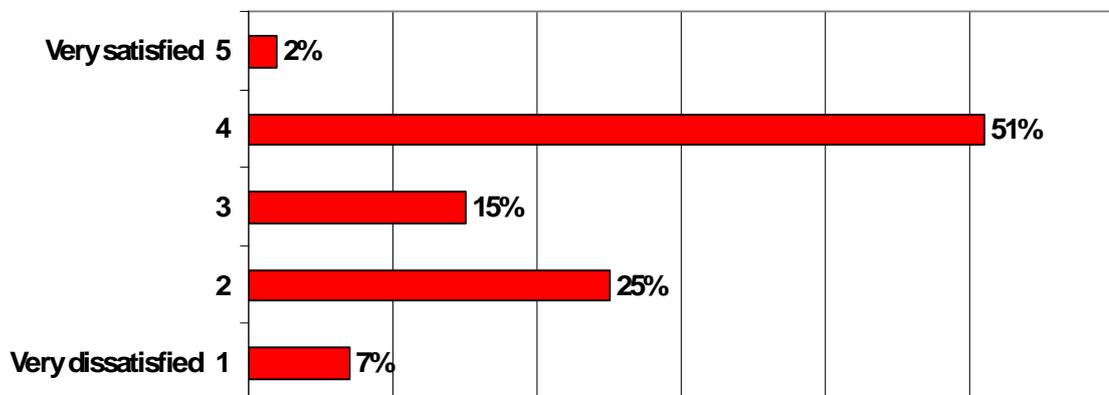
“....The colour of the (studio) background and the lighting gets in the way I think (of the presenter and their attempts to communicate with the viewing audience).”

“.....a lot of the time you notice that they (the presenters) can be wearing a pinstripe suit or some shiny jewellery which can be very distracting....”

Approximately one-third (32%) of survey respondents were dissatisfied with the success of Irish broadcasters in providing an appropriate quality of display for signing presenters. More than one-half (53%) were however satisfied on this particular quality related dimension.

Figure Thirty One: Satisfaction with quality of display

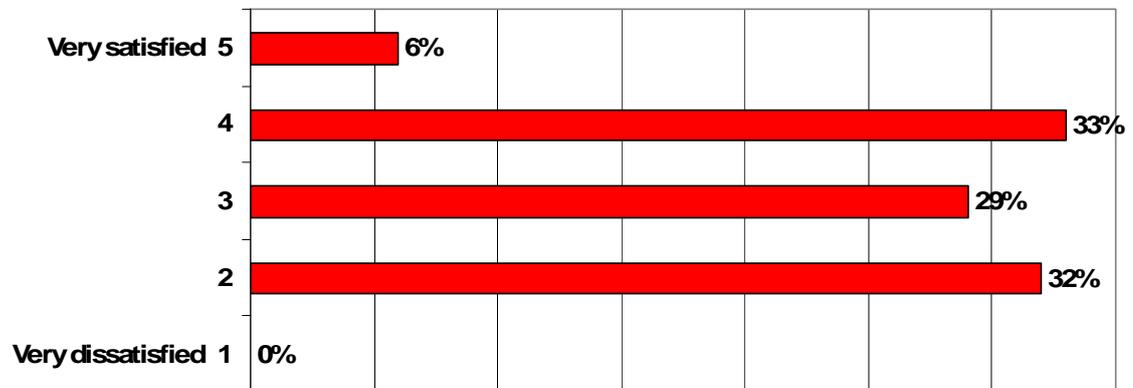
Success at providing an appropriate quality of display whereby the signer is of sufficient size and resolution to show all relevant movements involving arms, hands, fingers, facial movements, expressions and gestures.



A similar proportion (32%) of respondents, as illustrated in Figure Thirty Two overleaf, were dissatisfied with the success of presenters in timing signed sentences to keep appropriate pace with the spoken dialogue on screen.

Figure Thirty Two: Keeping pace with spoken dialogue

Success at timing signed sentences to keep appropriate pace with the spoken dialogue on screen



The time at which the News for the Deaf is aired also came in for criticism as it was frequently suggested that the early evening screening can mean that it is not accessible to a large proportion of the Deaf community who may be participating in the workforce. The duration of the programme was also criticised as participants were concerned that news coverage can be abbreviated to such a level that viewers only get a top line sense for key news stories.

The time at which the News for the Deaf programme is aired and the short broadcast duration appeared to be the issues which most frustrated those ISL users participating in the research. Participants suggested that these were the two issues which would be most likely to prompt them to make an official complaint to a broadcaster. However of those responding to the survey questionnaire on ISL only 12% had previously made an official complaint.

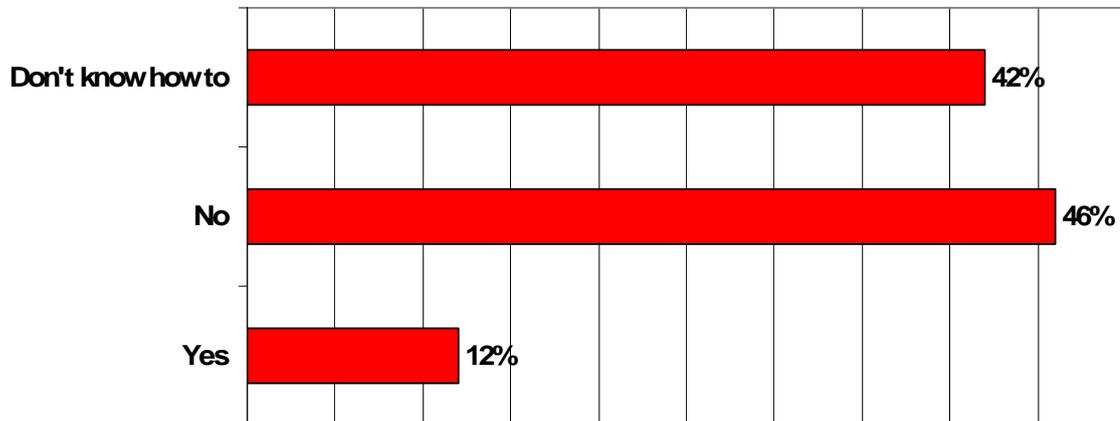
“.....sure most people would be out working at that time....they won't get to see it. I think that's really unfair....Hearing people can watch the news again at nine (o'clock) and at around eleven (o'clock)....this two or three minutes is our only chance to see the news on TV.”

“.....You don't get any of the detail (on a news story) in the space of three minutes....”

“It's insulting to think that we (Deaf people) would be satisfied to see that a half hour news programme can be cut down into a few minutes (signed news) for the benefit of the Deaf viewer...”

Figure Thirty Three: Complained re ISL provision

Have you ever complained to an Irish broadcaster, the BCC or the BCI about the quality, format or availability of Irish Sign Language on Irish television?



Satisfaction levels with the success of Irish broadcasters in providing enough ISL either at peak viewing times or indeed ‘other times’ was, perhaps as expected, very low. As illustrated in Figures Thirty Four and Thirty Five below and overleaf few, if any, respondents were satisfied with the success of Irish broadcasters in providing enough ISL either at popular viewing times or outside peak viewing times. RTÉ did however generate an amount of positive comment for being the only Irish broadcaster that provides any ISL as part of its programming. This positive feedback was tempered somewhat as research participants reacted very negatively to the RTÉ proposals to cut back significantly on the Hands On schedule and associated programme budget.

Figure Thirty Four: Satisfaction with current ISL provision – Peak viewing

Success in providing enough Irish Sign Language provision at popular viewing times (i.e. between 6pm and 10pm)

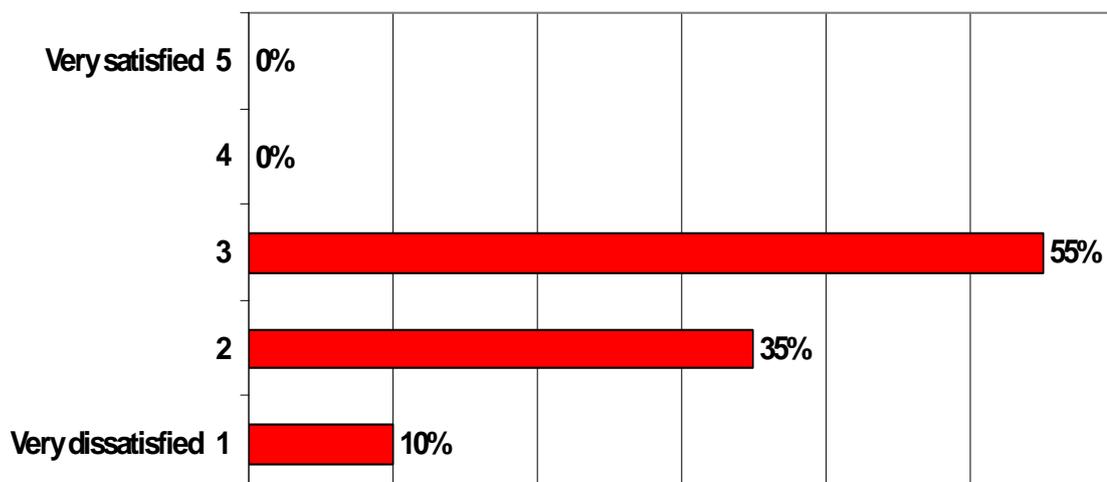
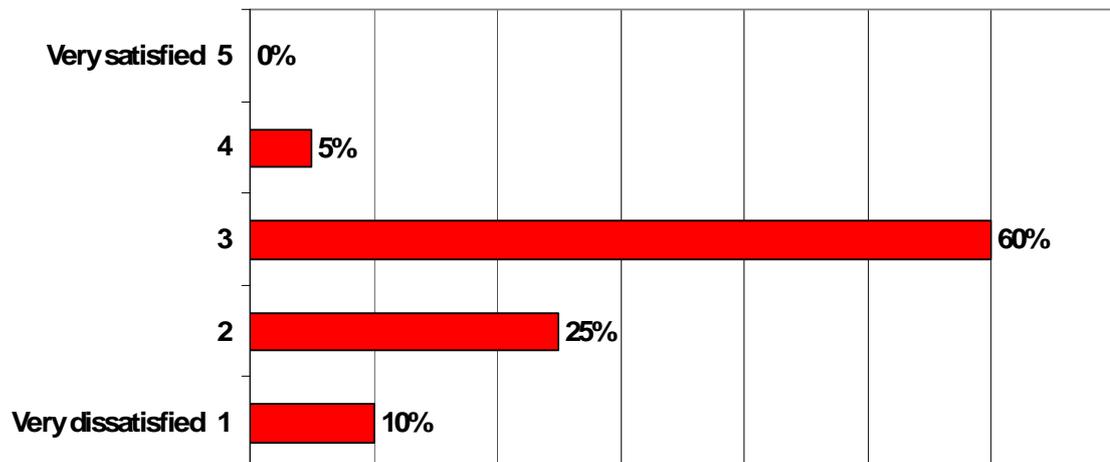


Figure Thirty Five: Satisfaction with current ISL provision – Outside peak viewing times

Success in providing enough Irish Sign Language provision at other times



On other quality related and technical dimensions satisfaction ratings put forward by respondents were reasonably positive. More than two thirds (67%) of survey respondents were satisfied with the success of ‘broadcasters’ at indicating the presence of important off screen sounds. Close to three quarters of respondents (72%) were satisfied with the success of broadcasters in using appropriate techniques to identify which person on screen is speaking. Satisfaction levels with the success of broadcasters in informing viewers when there is a breakdown in the service were however less positive with only 16% of respondents demonstrating any level of satisfaction.

Figure Thirty Six: Indicating off screen sounds

Success at indicating the presence of off screen sounds (e.g. a ringing telephone, knocking of a door) where these are important

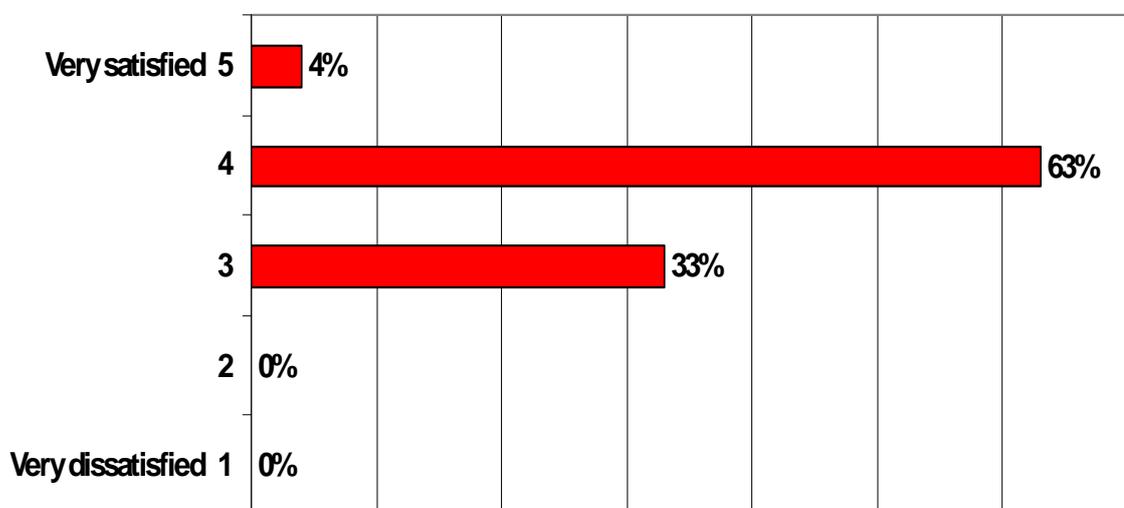


Figure Thirty Seven: Using techniques to identify which person on screen is speaking

Success in using appropriate techniques to identify which person on screen is speaking

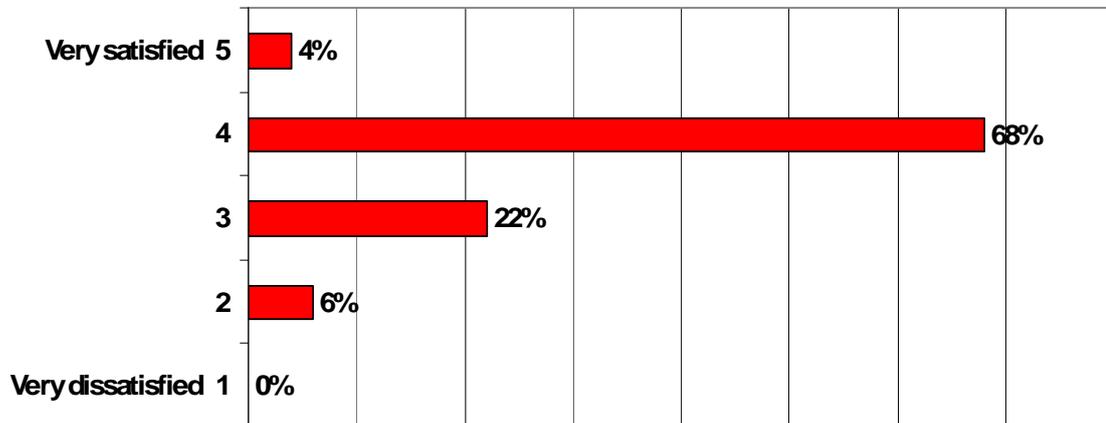
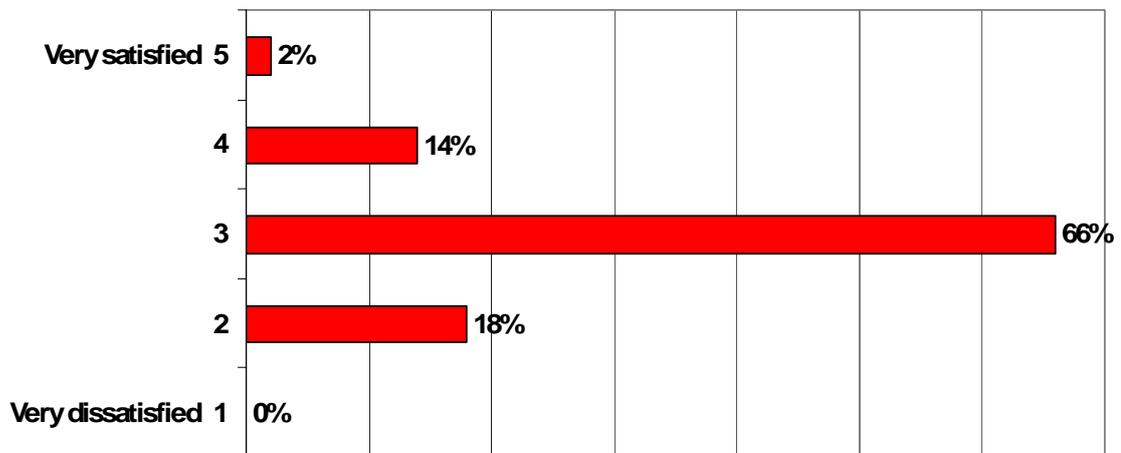


Figure Thirty Eight: Informing viewers when there is a breakdown in service

Success at providing a subtitle when there is a breakdown in the service



When commenting on the availability of ISL on Irish television the expectations of research participants appeared to be more modest than was the case when these same participants were discussing the subject of subtitling. The majority of participants emphasised that demand for subtitling would be significantly higher than would be the case with ISL. There was however much upset, and in some cases anger, expressed when the subject of the proposed cutbacks to the Hands On programme budget was introduced.

“...the reality is (increasing) subtitling (provision) has to take priority.....it meets the needs of such a bigger audience (than would be the case with ISL).....At the very least though existing budgets (for ISL provision) must not be cut.....They (the broadcaster) could also look at the timing and format of the News for the Deaf.....It could be aired at a better (more suitable) time and they could go with a better format (studio layout, use of lighting etc.)”

“.....so many people make use of subtitling.....It's not just the profoundly Deaf or those that sign....people whose hearing deteriorates later on in life find subtitling to be so important....ISL, I hate to say it, is probably less of a priority.....they (the broadcasters) need to sort out (improve) the levels of subtitling provision first before tacking ISL....”

“...the viewing audience for ISL is probably quite small.....It must be recognized though that it (ISL on television) is very important to that audience...but I understand the targets have to be much higher for subtitling.....a much bigger audience depends on it (than would be the case with ISL).”

“...There is talk of the Hands On schedule being cut significantly.....That is shocking.....We just have one programme which is so important to us and to hear that it is to be cut back is just really upsetting.....It's insulting really.....It makes it clear to us that we are just not important....”

“...I can't believe it (Hands On programme budget) would be cut so dramatically.....It seems so unfair....it's the only programme (on Irish television) that is (broadcast) in our (preferred) language.....”

Interestingly the participants themselves suggested their own expectations are modest. Indeed several speculated that the quotas for ISL provision which have been set under the Access Rules have partly contributed to this low level of expectation.

“...we (those favouring an increase in the level of ISL provision) are coming from a very low base.....Where the targets for subtitling are set at reasonably decent levels....the ISL target is really low (in comparison).....Any improvement (increase in provision) would therefore really make its markWhat’s frustrating though....is that they (the broadcaster) are probably not even achieving that (low ISL target).....and certainly won’t be if they cut back on Hands On.....as we think might happen...”

“...they (the broadcasters) only have to provide a minimal amount (to realise Access Rules quotas set for ISL provision)....so if there was even a programme or two additional to that it would make a big impression.....”

“....sure only RTÉ has to (under the Access Rules) provide any ISL.....If some of the other broadcasters were to give it a go (engage in ISL provision) that would make a big difference.....”

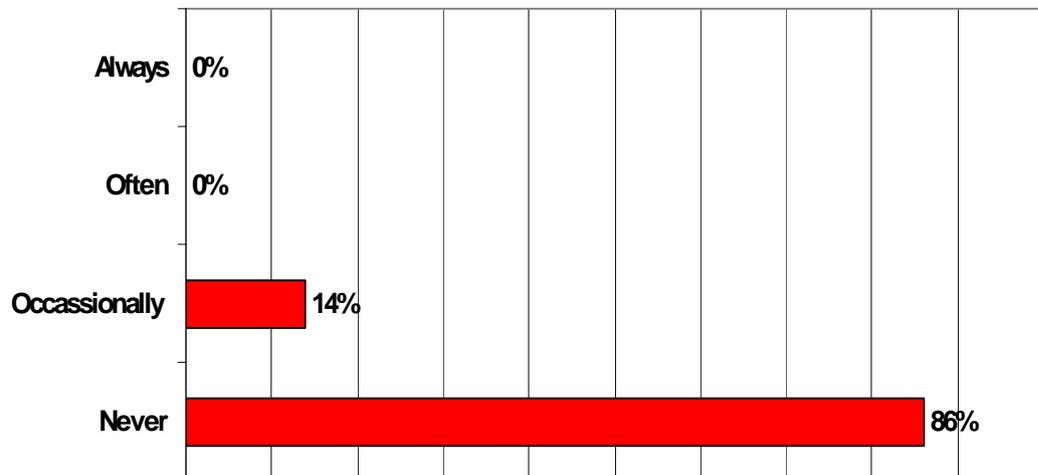
“Nobody (amongst those whose preferred language is ISL) is expecting a really big increase in ISL provision....but it’s terribly important that they would at the very least hold onto (the current level of provision).....to cut it back would be a real smack in the teeth (for the Deaf community).....”

“.....Between the four decent sized channels...RTÉ 1 and 2, TV3 and TG4....they (these broadcasters) should be able to improve their record (in respect of ISL provision) just a little bit....It wouldn’t take much to make a big impression (amongst the Deaf community.....)”

Research participants also appeared to be very open to the concept of broadcasters taking a more creative approach to the subject of ISL provision. Indeed many were very forthcoming in actively encouraging broadcasters to explore the possibility of adopting alternative forms of provision. The idea of broadcasting programmes with ISL content overnight or on the broadcasters own Internet site were frequently put forward as possible alternatives. The findings from the structured survey would however suggest that the broadcasters may have to engage in some further promotional work for such an initiative to work effectively as currently only 14% of survey respondents ‘occasionally’ watch television on the Internet.

Figure Thirty Nine: Watching television on the Internet

How often do you watch television on the Internet?



“....I am guessing it (ISL provision) comes down to (available) budgets....There aren’t enough viewers (from the broadcasters perspective)....for the broadcaster to justify screening ISL programmes during prime time.....While that’s disappointing it’s probably not going to change....It would be a positive move if they (the broadcasters) were to schedule some ISL programmes over-night....I would record them and then watch them again when it suits me.....or maybe they (the broadcaster) could put them on their screen player on the (broadcasters) web page.....”

“....It’s disappointing that we (the Deaf community) continue to be marginalised like this.....but I suppose it would be a move in the right direction if they (broadcasters) were to broadcast (ISL) programmes at night time.....I’m sure a lot of people would record them (and watch them again at a more convenient time).”

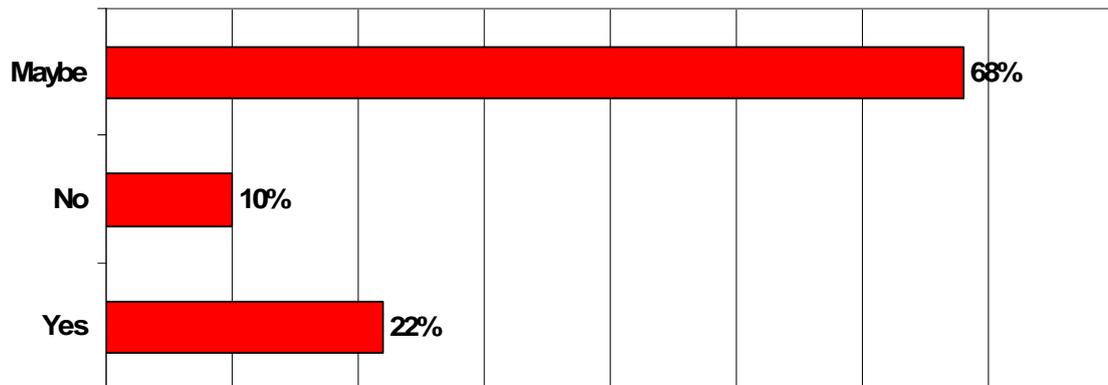
“.....I use the internet all the time and would love to see ISL programmes on the broadcasters web pages...”

“....showing ISL programmes on the web would certainly be a change for the better....”

However it was more pleasing to see that 90% of survey respondents would consider recording ISL programmes if they were aired by the Irish based broadcasters overnight.

Figure Forty: Attitude to recording programmes with ISL content

If television programmes with Irish Sign Language were aired overnight by an Irish broadcaster would you record and watch these programmes at a more convenient time?



The traditional use of ISL in programmes involves the auditory content being conveyed in ISL by a ‘live’ ISL interpreter. However it is also possible to separately video record the interpreter and super-impose the image of the interpreter onto the screen. Such an approach allows for previously pre-recorded programming to be broadcast with a supporting ISL interpreter. Many of those participating in the research suggested that this is an approach that has been used very successfully by the UK based broadcasters. Indeed many speculated that the adoption of such a format could prove to be a very efficient and cost effective way for the broadcasters to meet the needs of those viewers whose preference it is to watch programmes in their first language.

“Turn on the TV any weekend and you will see a whole range of programmes on BBC, Channel 4 and the other UK stations that have a sign language interpreter superimposed onto the screen....I am sure that it’s a cost effective way of getting it done....I would love to watch Fair City or any of the other Irish programmes this way....”

“...I don’t understand why they (the Irish broadcasters) don’t do more of this (superimposing a ISL interpreter onto the screen of pre-recorded programmes) it wouldn’t cost a whole lot to do....just the cost of the interpreter and maybe a small bit of a technicians time.....”

“...It’s fair enough if we (the Deaf community) don’t get to see new (newly produced) programmes created specifically in ISL....but what about getting an ISL interpreter in to sign pre-recorded mainstream programming...Fair City for example..... and screening that at the weekend....”

“The UK stations do so much of this but we don’t even get a single programme in Ireland (with a superimposed interpreter)....That might be a useful thing for the TV stations to aim at.....”

4.3 Audio Description

Audio description, alongside subtitling and Irish Sign Language, is recognised under the Access Rules as an access service which can be included with television programmes to make them more understandable and enjoyable for people who are blind or vision impaired. Audio description is a spoken running commentary inserted between the dialogue in a film or television programme to provide a verbal description of objects, actions, body language and other important visual information. Blind television viewers can often miss a lot of the content and meaning of programmes as information that is critical to a full understanding of the programme is often conveyed solely through visual means. With audio description, this information is revealed to blind viewers through the audio running commentary.

The quota for audio description under the Access Rules is currently 1% of programmes broadcast by RTÉ 1 or RTÉ 2, of any type and at any time. There are no quotas for audio description on any of the other Irish channels. The National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) Media Centre has produced a number of audio described programmes for RTÉ, including an 11 week series of About the House which was broadcast on RTÉ 1 on Sunday mornings at 9:45am from June 15th 2008.

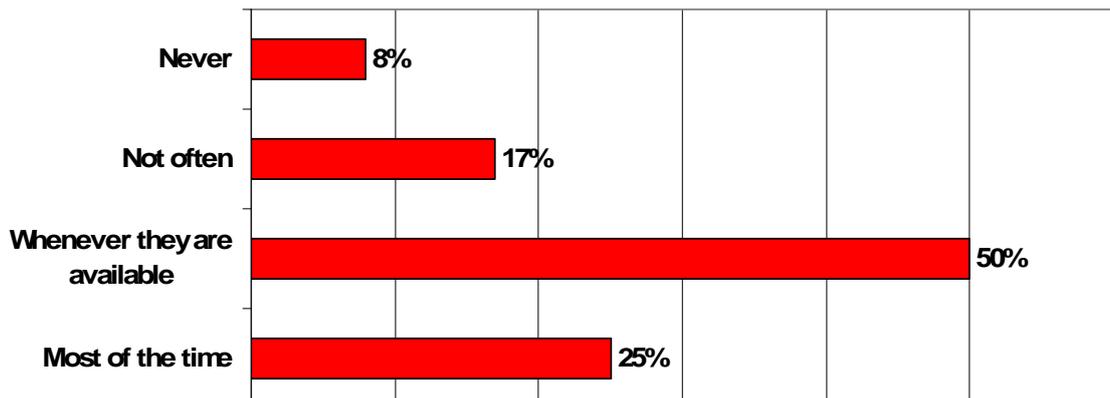
As part of this study the researchers facilitated three focus groups involving participants who are blind or visually impaired. A further seven one to one interviews were conducted with members of this segment. There were also 67 responses to the survey questionnaire on Audio Description.

(a) Use & Importance of Audio Description on Television

For the majority of those participating in this segment of the research audio description is a relatively new technology. Awareness of the technology and familiarity in using audio description would appear to be still quite modest in an Irish context. Although three quarters (75%) of respondents indicated that they currently watch programmes with audio description either ‘most of the time’ or ‘whenever they are available’ one quarter of respondents have very little experience in watching programmes with audio description.

Figure Forty One: Audio description viewing frequency

Normally, when you are watching television (Irish and otherwise) how often do you watch programmes with audio description?



The lack of provision of programmes on Irish television with accompanying audio description was put forward as the key reason for the lack of familiarity of this technology amongst Irish viewers.

Many if not all of the research participants were however aware of the potential of audio description and most had actively sought out opportunities to watch programmes with audio described content. NTL subscribers, in particular, spoke of the challenge in accessing programme content with audio description accompaniment.

Despite the lack of opportunities to access audio described content on Irish television those participating in the research were anxious to emphasise that, without audio description, blind and vision impaired people are very limited in their ability to experience and enjoy Irish broadcast material. Interestingly a very significant three quarters of survey respondents suggested audio description is 'very important' to their understanding and enjoyment of programmes on television. Research participants stressed that people who are blind are largely excluded from print media so television provides an important alternative source of news and information. The majority of those participating in this element of the research study felt that audio description on television is extremely important in terms of allowing blind and vision impaired people to access the same programmes as fully sighted people. Participants also suggested that the inclusion of audio description on Irish television would provide important support by raising awareness of blind people in Ireland and the issues that they face.

"...You really need to have Sky to pick up audio description.....Nothing (no programmes) on NTL have AD (audio description)...If you don't have Sky you probably won't even have heard of it....."

"...I don't think NTL carry AD (audio description) at all....I'm sure if you didn't have Sky you wouldn't know much about it (audio description)....."

"...I don't watch any Irish television at all...Ok, maybe I listen to the news at nine o'clock or to a debate on Prime Time but that's it.....Without audio description it's just too difficult to follow...I just end up watching AD (audio description) programmes on SKY or UK Gold....For Irish news I just use the internet or listen to the radio..."

".....the Irish stations wouldn't mean much to me....They might be (switched on) in the house but I would never watch them....Why would I?...there is no audio description....It's just too difficult to follow without it..."

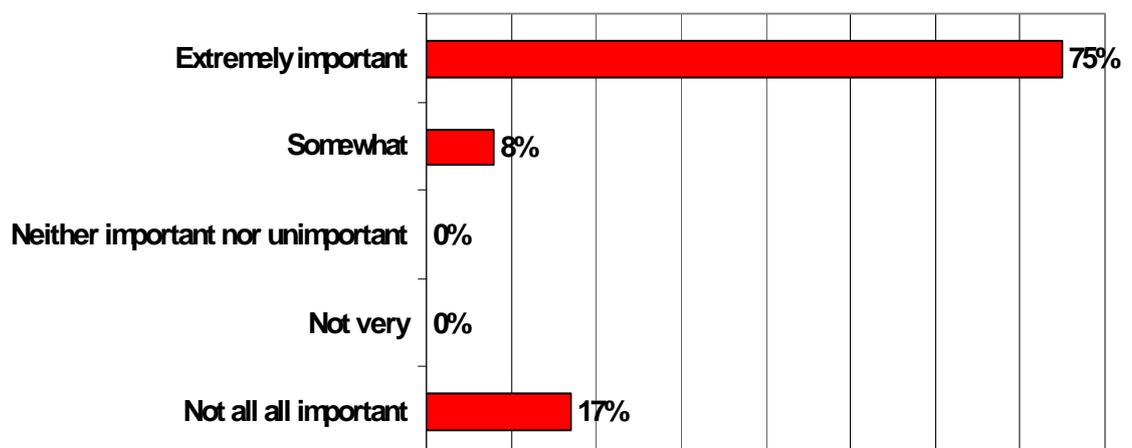
"It's a shame I cant watch Irish television.....but if I want to watch television I would watch stuff (programming) on Sky where there is a lot of audio description content....Otherwise I might listen to the news at nine o'clock (on RTÉ television)...but that's about it..."

A number of research participants also suggested that by routinely having audio description included as part of Irish television programming the attached stigma of 'being different', because of being blind would be reduced.

As illustrated in Figure Forty Two below only 17% of survey respondents suggested that the availability of audio description is not important to their enjoyment and understanding of programmes on television.

Figure Forty Two: Importance of audio description

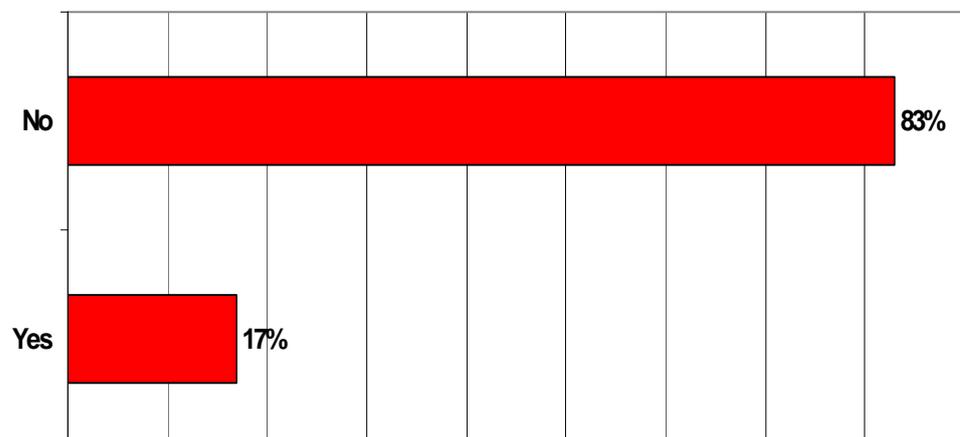
How important is the availability of audio description to your enjoyment and understanding of programmes on television?



Perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly research participants were disappointed with the current level of audio description provided on Irish television. A very significant proportion (83%) of survey respondents do not think are enough programmes on Irish television with audio description. Indeed only 17% of survey respondents suggested that there are enough programmes on Irish television with audio description.

Figure Forty Three: Current level of provision

Do you think there are enough programmes on Irish television with audio description provision?



Similar to suggestions put forward by research participants involved in the ISL segment of this study there was a call for Irish broadcasters to ‘experiment’ further with audio description provision. Many research participants welcomed the idea of broadcasters screening audio described programming on the internet.

“...I would just like to see them (the Irish broadcasters) try (providing audio description)...it would be great (if they were to do this on a limited trial basis) even just for the purpose of promoting the technology.....It really is something that everyone who is blind or visually impaired should be aware of....I really love it (audio description).”

“...It’s (audio description) a fabulous technology.....I get so much (enjoyment / satisfaction) from it...I wish everyone in Ireland (who is blind/visually impaired) had a chance to try it out....”

“....As there is no audio description provided in Ireland at the moment....the only way is up.....It would be a great first step if they (the broadcasters) were to air some content either at night so that we could record it or even over the Internet....”

“....We (blind people) shouldn’t have to rely on Sky....I’d love to see the Irish stations give it a go (engage in the provision of audio description).....even if it does mean them screening programmes initially during the night or on the Internet.....”

Currently only 50% of survey respondents indicate that they watch television on the Internet either ‘often’ or ‘occasionally’. However, as illustrated in Figure Forty Five overleaf, a very significant 75% of respondents indicated that they would be likely to record and watch programmes with audio description if they were aired over-night by the Irish broadcasters.

Figure Forty Four: Watching television on the Internet

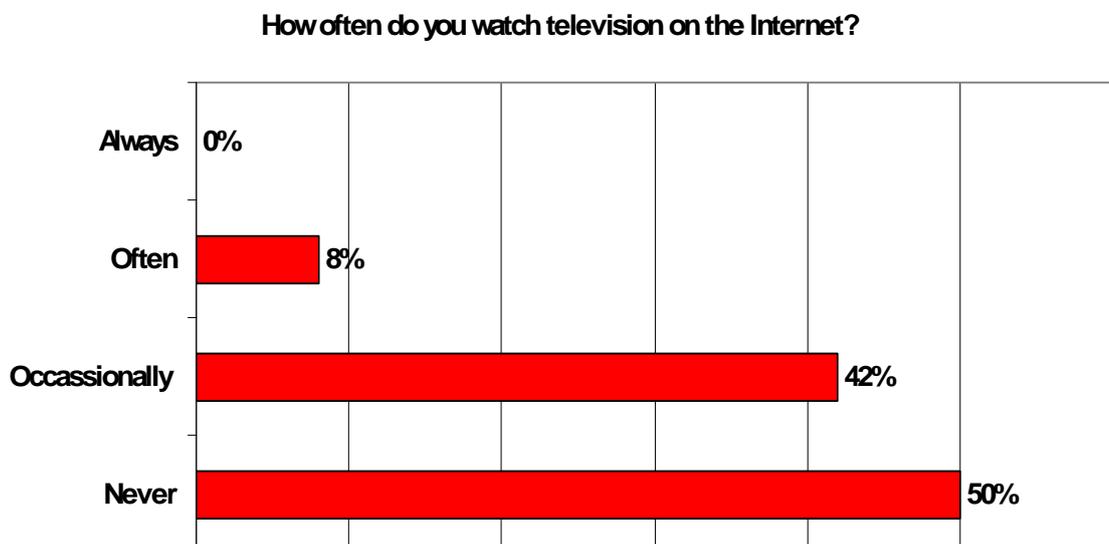
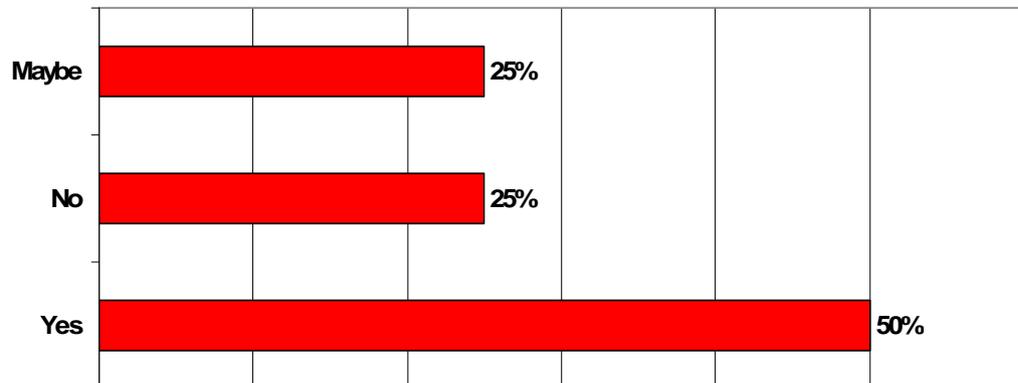


Figure Forty Five: Attitude to recording programmes with Audio Description content

If TV programmes with audio description were aired overnight by an Irish broadcaster would you record and watch these at a more convenient time?



Overall, research participants who had previous experience of audio description spoke very positively of the technology and the extent to which it assists them in understanding and enjoying programmes on television.

“.....it (audio description) is amazing....I love to watch television with audio description.....It adds so much to the experience (of watching television).”

“....I’m relatively new to it (audio description) but I can see how it would really help you to clue into (understand) the storyline of a programme...When it’s (audio description) well done its so subtle but so helpful (to the viewer) at the same time....”

“....I wont say it (audio description) has changed my life but it certainly has changed my attitude to television.....I thought television was always going to be irrelevant but audio description has changed all of that...”

These participants were very enthusiastic when considering the possibility of Irish broadcasters engaging more actively in the provision of audio description. Indeed many were very optimistic that the expected switchover to digital television will provide greater opportunities for broadcasters in providing television that meets the needs of blind and partially sighted viewers.

“...I would love to see them (the Irish broadcasters) provide it (audio description)....its great being able to watch the UK stuff (programming with audio description) but it would be so nice to watch Irish material (with audio description)...”

“....I know they (the Irish broadcasters) have subtitling (for those with a hearing impairment) so why shouldn't they provide audio description.....Maybe the switchover to digital will make it easier for them (the broadcasters to provide audio description)...”

“I really think they (Irish broadcasters) should (provide programmes with audio description).....It would be so nice to see Irish programmes (with audio description)....We (Irish viewers) shouldn't have to be at such a disadvantage compared to our UK neighbours.....With digital (television) there's no excuse for them (Irish broadcasters) not to (provide audio description)....”

5. Key Conclusions & Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Subtitling

More than two-thirds of survey respondents were 'satisfied' with the success of Irish broadcasters in providing subtitling that helps the viewer to enjoy and understand TV programmes. Very high levels of regular subtitling use were evident amongst research participants. Of those responding to the questionnaire on subtitling 92% revealed that they use subtitles either 'all of the time' or 'most of the time'. In terms of importance 97% of respondents described subtitling provision as either 'extremely important' or 'somewhat important' to their ability to enjoy and understand programmes on Irish television. Irish broadcasters are recognised for having improved their performance on subtitling provision very significantly in recent years. The Access Rules were largely credited with bringing about this improvement in provision. Expectation levels, amongst users of subtitling, are however clearly very high. Indeed many of the participants suggested that while Irish television has "come a long way" and "significantly improved its track record" on subtitling in very recent years there is "still a long way to go". In situations where subtitling is not available it was suggested that Deaf and hard of hearing people are being denied the ability to access their preferred choice of programming. The absence of 'complete' or '100%' provision prompted many to suggest there is a certain inequity or unfairness which could lead to further risk of social exclusion on the part of Deaf and hard of hearing viewers.

'Availability' followed very closely by 'reliability' (i.e. a subtitling service that can be relied on to start on time and stay in place throughout the programme being viewed) would appear to be **the** key requirements of a subtitling service. Research participants consistently singled out these two dimensions as being 'most' important as they bid to enjoy and understand programmes broadcast on Irish television. However a very significant majority of survey respondents (88%) do not think there are enough programmes on Irish television with subtitling. This would appear to strongly endorse the current focus of the Access Rules which prioritise the achievement of quantifiable minimum targets or quotas of subtitling provision. As subtitling users often plan their television viewing around certain programming, on the assumption that subtitling will be made available for that programming, the ability to 'rely' on the accompanying subtitles to start on time and stay in place for the duration of the programme was put forward as being 'as important' as the 'availability' issue. Although a significant majority (85%) of respondents indicated that the quality of subtitles provided by Irish broadcasters is either of a 'variable' or 'poor' quality it is, according to many of those participating in this study, only when more meaningful levels of subtitling provision are made available and the 'reliability' issue is addressed that attention ought be turned to more specific quality related dimensions. It was frequently suggested therefore that the Access Rules, in addition to their current focus on 'quantity' of subtitling provision,

ought to have consideration for one, key quality related measure that being 'reliability'.

Although the 'format' and 'on-air' quality of subtitling is of very significant importance to the Irish viewer the majority of research participants indicated that the more 'specific' quality related features are not as significant a priority as the reliability dimension. Many of the participants also speculated that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to secure universal agreement on the wide range of quality related dimensions associated with subtitling as so many of the features and attributes can in the words of more than one participant "all come down to a matter of personal taste." The very wide range in personal preferences amongst the viewing audience clearly speaks to the very significant challenge facing subtitling providers. Different groups have very different reading abilities, preferred reading speeds and formatting preferences. There is much difference of opinion as to what ought to be considered 'appropriate reading time' and 'appropriate use of language'. Setting a meaningful 'standard' to achieve on many of the use of language and speed of text display dimensions will therefore be very challenging to develop and implement.

Aside from the issues of 'availability' and 'reliability' the call for a clear, 'strong' font was made by all research participants and was put forward as **the** critical quality related dimension which broadcasters could usefully consider when developing subtitles. It was suggested that, where possible, broadcasters should select a 'house font' which would be used consistently across all subtitling provided by the broadcaster. Research participants stressed that the call for the introduction of 'added value features' such as the use of colour in subtitling text, and punctuation to indicate off screen and off camera action or dialogue should not distract from the need for greater focus on core dimensions such as 'availability', 'reliability' and 'clarity of font'. Bringing about improvements on these three key dimensions were prioritised by research participants over all other quality related features and characteristics.

Irish Sign Language

ISL programming provides those whose preference it is to communicate in ISL with an opportunity to connect with the shared culture and sense of community that unites Deaf people in Ireland. A very significant 90% of survey respondents revealed that they watch television programmes that feature ISL either 'most of the time' or 'whenever they are available'. Approximately one third of respondents suggested that the availability of ISL was in some way important to their understanding and enjoyment of programmes on Irish television. However a very significant 97% of respondents do not think there are enough programmes on Irish television with ISL provision. Indeed many speculated that it is unlikely that the broadcasters are meeting their targets for ISL provision under the Access Rules. The majority of participants accepted however that demand for subtitling would be significantly higher than would be

the case with ISL and indeed suggested that subtitling is, in the main, more important than ISL on Irish television.

Research participants would be very interested if broadcasters were to explore the possibility of adopting alternative delivery approaches for ISL on Irish television. Indeed many were very forthcoming in actively encouraging broadcasters to explore the possibility of adopting alternative forms of provision. The idea of broadcasting programmes with ISL content overnight or on the broadcasters own Internet site were frequently put forward as possible attractive alternatives. Many of those participating in the research suggested that pre-recorded programming could be cost effectively broadcast with a supporting ISL interpreter superimposed onto the screen. This approach is, according to those participating in the research, a format that has been used very successfully by the UK based broadcasters.

Audio Description

The lack of provision of programmes on Irish television with accompanying audio description was put forward as **the** key reason for the lack of familiarity amongst Irish viewers of this technology. Research participants who had previous experience of audio description spoke very positively of the technology and the extent to which it assists them in understanding and enjoying programmes on television. Those participating in the research were anxious to emphasise that, without audio description, they are very limited in their ability to experience and enjoy Irish broadcast material. Three quarters of survey respondents suggest audio description is 'very important' to their understanding and enjoyment of programmes on television. However less than one fifth of respondents believe there are enough programmes on Irish television with audio description. There was a general call for Irish broadcasters to 'experiment' further with audio description provision. Many research participants welcomed the idea of broadcasters, in the short to medium term, screening audio description programming on the Internet. Indeed many were very optimistic that the expected switchover to digital television will provide greater opportunities for broadcasters in providing television that meets the needs of blind and partially sighted viewers.

5.2 Recommendations

When reviewing the approach to television access services OCS would, in particular, stress the following:

- Broadcasters must be encouraged to focus on the core dimensions of subtitling provision namely 'availability', 'reliability' and 'clarity of font'. Bringing about improvements on these three key dimensions were prioritised by research participants over **all** other quality related features and characteristics. 'Availability' in the context of both ISL and audio description on Irish television is extremely limited and will need to be given very careful consideration by both broadcasters and the regulator alike in the short to medium term.
- The key focus of the Access Rules which currently prioritise the achievement of quantifiable minimum targets or quotas of subtitling provision has been strongly endorsed by research participants. However the regulator could usefully consider the introduction of additional measures to add further weight and emphasis to the 'reliability' and 'clarity of font' dimensions' in order to ensure the Rules better reflects the needs of subtitling users.
- Both broadcasters and the BAI may need to consider setting more realistic expectations amongst the viewing public in relation to targets to be achieved under the Access Rules. It would be beneficial if all stakeholders involved in this area were clearly informed and aware of the targets that the various individual broadcasters have to achieve.
- It may be appropriate for the BAI, in the short to medium term, to promote greater flexibility within the Rules and to reward 'creativity' on the part of the broadcasters in delivering television access services. Greater use of ISL on television could, for example, be 'offset' against a broadcasters' subtitling related commitments as set out under the Rules. Similarly broadcasters could be awarded additional 'credit' or recognition for delivering television access services overnight or on their Internet services.
- Broadcasters could usefully consider alternative and more carefully targeted ways of promoting the availability of the television access services. In particular more prominent promotion of television access service availability on the broadcasters' teletext and internet services will be relevant. Similarly broadcasters could be usefully encouraged to develop closer linkages with the interest groups acting in this area to facilitate more targeted promotion of television access service availability.
- The BAI and/or the various interest groups acting in this area could usefully consider the sponsorship of an awards scheme or special

award to reward general excellence, achievement and creativity on the part of broadcasters in providing television access services.

- In the context of subtitling for live sporting events broadcasters could usefully look to prioritise the provision of high quality subtitles on pre, half-time and post match analysis rather than on the 'in game' commentary.
- The BAI could usefully consider lobbying for greater flexibility around the costs involved in screening pre-recorded television material specifically for 'access' related purposes. Research participants expressed an interest in viewing re-runs of popular mainstream programming should that programming be accompanied by supporting ISL or audio description. However the costs involved in meeting residual payments for actors for re-screening pre-recorded material would appear to be one of the key barriers which deter broadcasters from scheduling re-runs of popular programmes with supporting ISL or audio described accompaniment.
- It will be important for the BAI to refresh this research periodically as user expectations will change over time as improvements are gradually introduced by the Irish based broadcasters and as the impact of changing technologies and personal preferences take effect.

Appendix One: Satisfaction levels with subtitling provided by individual broadcasters

Figure Forty Six: Satisfaction with Subtitling Provided by– RTÉ 1

Success of RTÉ 1 in providing subtitling that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes

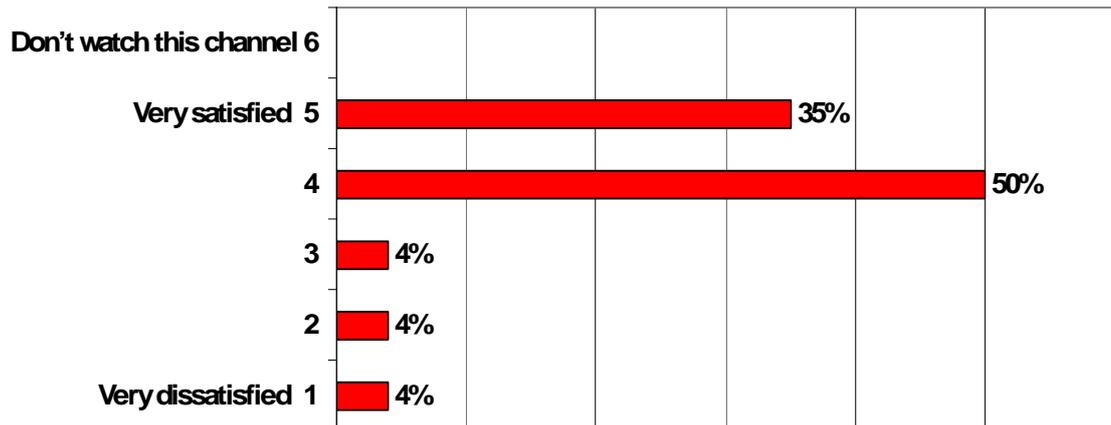


Figure Forty Seven: Satisfaction with Subtitling Provided by RTÉ 2

Success of RTÉ 2 in providing subtitling that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes

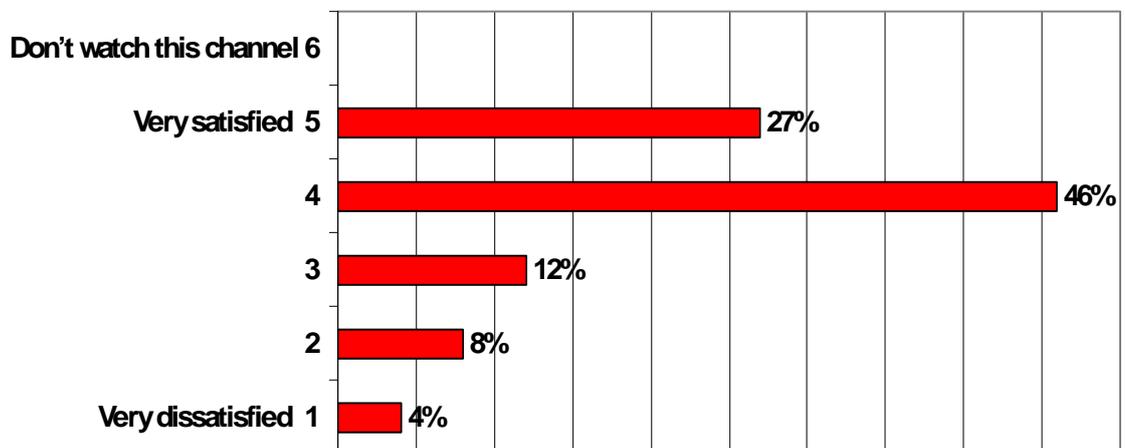


Figure Forty Eight: Satisfaction with Subtitling Provided by TG4

Success of TG4 in providing subtitling that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes

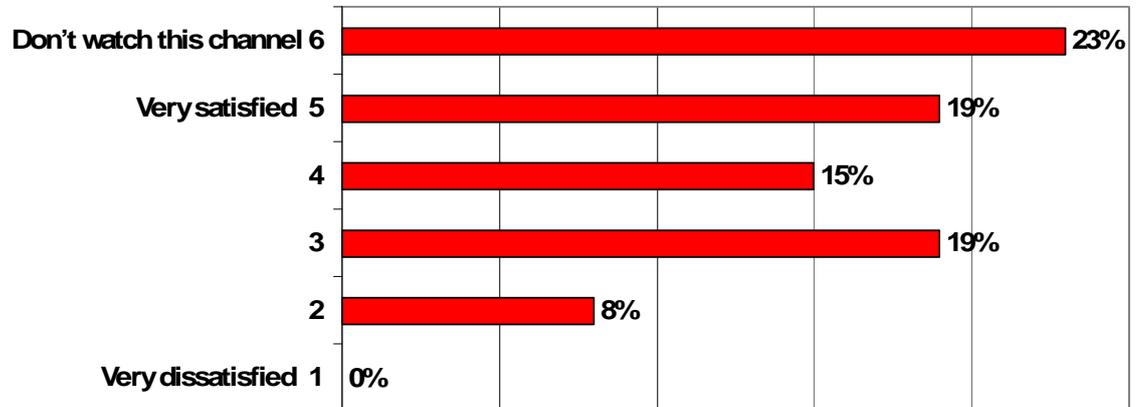


Figure Forty Nine: Satisfaction with Subtitling Provided by TV3

Success of TV3 in providing subtitling that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes

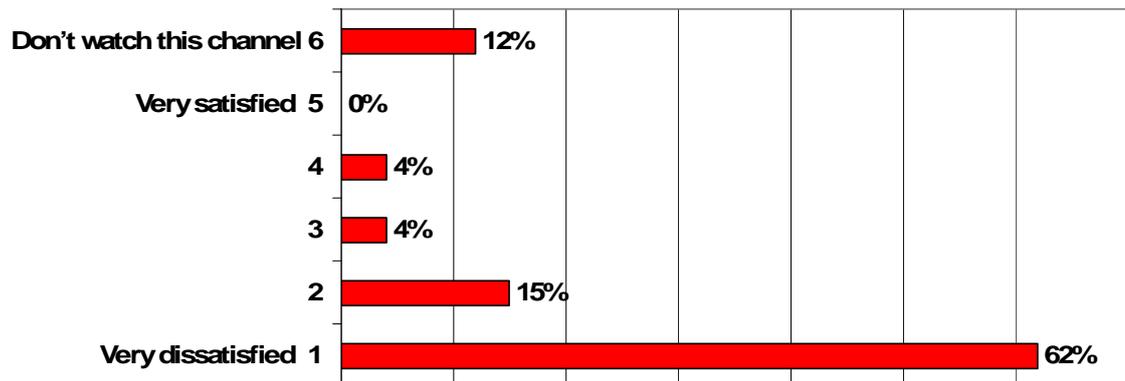


Figure Fifty: Satisfaction with Subtitling Provided by 3e

Success of 3e in providing subtitling that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes

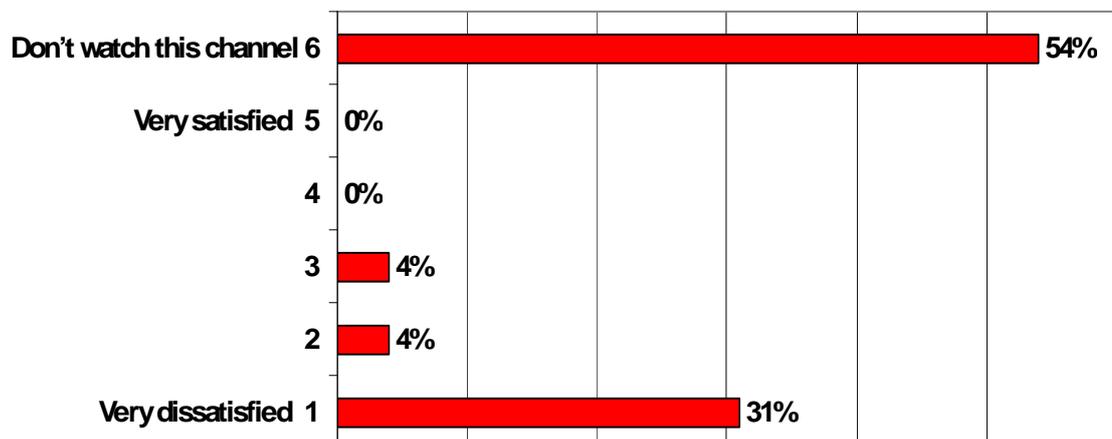


Figure Fifty One: Satisfaction with Subtitling Provided by Setanta Ireland

Success of Setanta Ireland in providing subtitling that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes

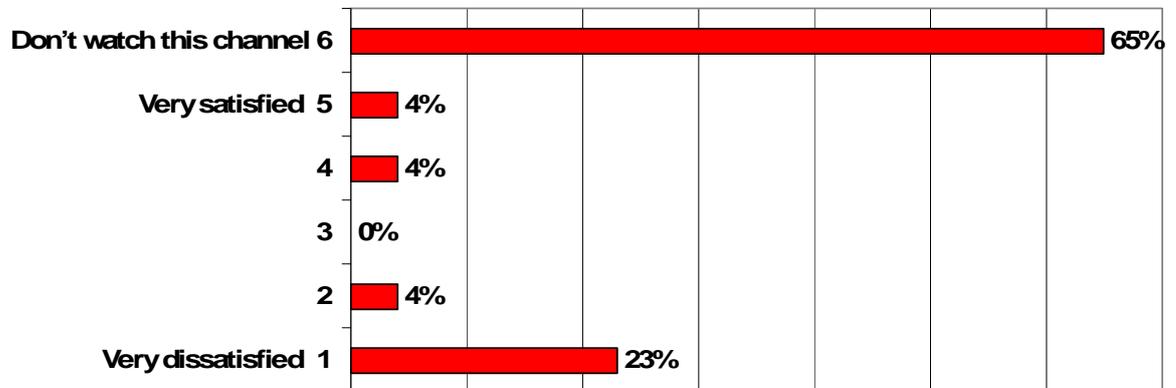


Figure Fifty Two: Satisfaction with Subtitling Provided by City Channel

Success of City Channel in providing subtitling that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes

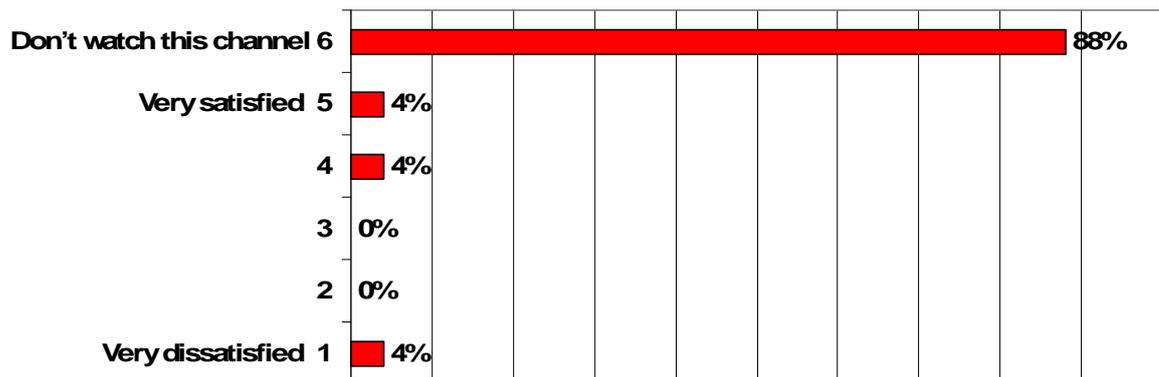


Figure Fifty Three: Satisfaction with Subtitling Provided by ESPN America

Success of ESPN America in providing subtitling that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes

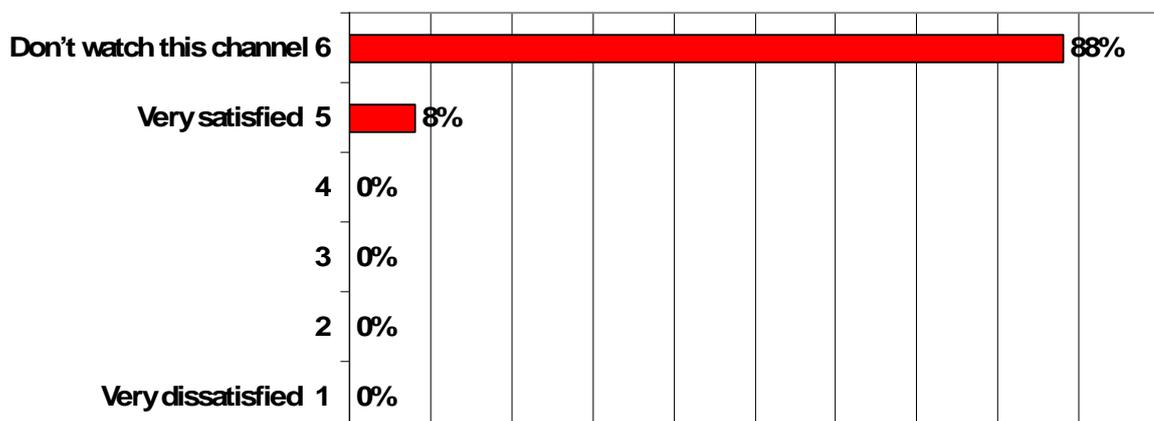


Figure Fifty Four: Satisfaction with Subtitling Provided by Dublin City TV

Success of Dublin City TV in providing subtitling that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes

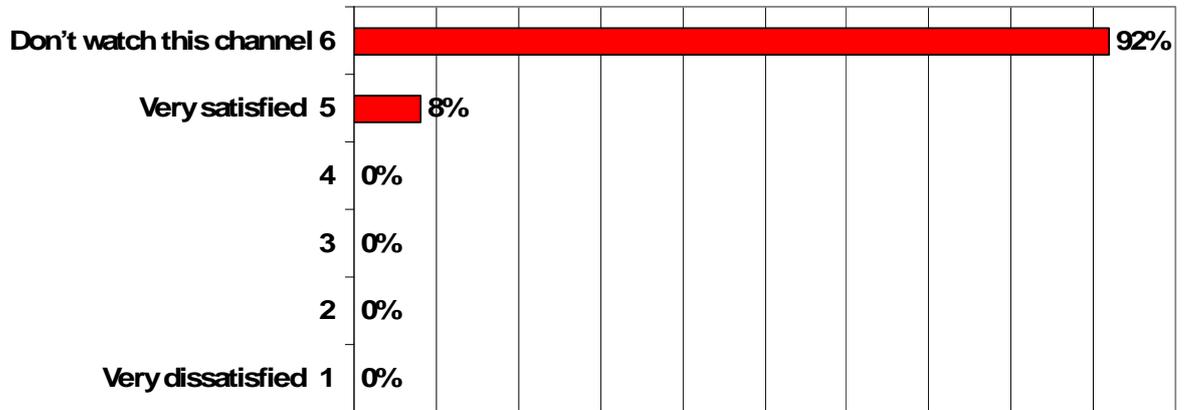


Figure Fifty Five: Satisfaction with Subtitling Provided by P5TV

Success of P5 tv in providing subtitling that helps you enjoy and understand television programmes

