>> Hi everyone, welcome to the session on media accessibility and audio description and video on demand services. We were supposed to have lunch right now. I can see a few anxious faces. We are talking entertainment here, so hopefully it will be interesting for you. Lots of box sets, season one, episode one, two, three, season, two, three, four. Winter is copping or it's here already.

(Laughter)

So, we have five panellists today. I think four of them collectively represent the mammoths in media delivery. Thank you for joining us. We have Mariana Lopez, Dr Mariana Lopez from the University of York, brilliant research on enhancing audio description, which is one of the most interesting research segments I've come across on audio description recently. Now I think it was Caroline who mentioned yesterday that 2019, there's something different about 2019, it feels there is a buzz about accessibility inclusion. I think there's definitely a buzz around media accessibility as well and therefore audio description. For someone who works for a user organisation, I think, at the centre of this buzz, in this world where it's the end user, in this case the viewer. We have a generation of viewers now who have grown up with audio description. They are not grateful for having description, but it's not there they're very angry. They have platforms to express their disappointment. It's hashtag furious. RNIB, what are you doing about it! A lot of media providers are understanding the importance of audio description. There is an acknowledgement which is often followed up by an apology, but at least there's an acknowledgement, yes, audio description is important, and we are trying. A lot of improvements have been made. But at the centre of this, these developments, will be the viewer. As I said, viewers today are not grateful. They want the 5.1 mix, the they want the Dolby Atmos mix. That is going to be the challenge. On that note, over to you.

NIGEL: I'm Nigel Megitt from the BBC. It says I'm executive product manager, which is my job title. What I actually do is look after the engineering strategy for audio visual media accessible both on broadcast and online. A lot of the time, what that means is I have audio description and occasionally that stretches into other areas as well. The BBC is in a really interesting place, in this room and in the room generally. Because we're paid for by what most people regard as a tax, most people in the country have to pay a license fee, we have a feed to represent the UK's audience, all of the audience. And so, I take that as part of my role. That means encouraging the use of standards in this country to make it easy for everybody to make accessibility. So also understanding needs. Sometimes people will propose technical solutions for accessibility, which I don't think actually do meet the audience's needs. I feel it's my job to stand up in the forums where that's being proposed and say that's not good enough. You need to do this extra thing as well. You need to do this. My role is both internally to do projects and make sure things are working well and doing the improvements. But also, externally, to work with a lot of different standards organisations to make sure that what we want for our audience, because our audience needs it, is not just available to us, but to other providers as well. That's really important. From a content perspective, the BBC in the UK subtitles 100% of the programmes on all the main channels and that's the regulatory requirements. We did that ahead of when they were needed. More than 20% programmes are audio described. That's far in excess of regulatory requirements. We take it really seriously. I'm clearly talking here about the programmes that we make. But there's a load of other content that we make, audio only or short videos online of things and we have a long way to go with those. That's recognised and part of what I do is to try to make that work better and better. And to make sure when we make subtitles for a programme, we try to make it available on as many platforms as possible. We have a couple of outliers there, unfortunately for us, where they don't work, we are continually trying to work through that and make improvements. Sometimes the technology is complicated, the tools are not necessarily there to take off the shelf and use them. It takes us quite a while. My goal is to obviously, my aspiration certainly is to, for every bit of content we make, make it once, make the accessible components of it as needed and be able to distribute those and be able to play back everywhere. We can't always achieve that. We are always trying to work towards that. To the next page of the extensive notes I made and trying to keep to time. Don't know how I'm doing. Yeah? So, an example of something that I did which you may have seen, a couple of people have mentioned here, they saw me at the Festival, that the BBC put on earlier this year. I talked about my colleague Ed White about a widget that we created for adjusting the size of subtitles on our web-based player. It's only on the web. There are some feature sets for different platforms. Another thing that we are aware of is with AD, the navigation experience is not always great on the platforms. We have become aware of these things, we try to improve them. It's not an instant fix. Not easy to describe the problem and the solutions. Another one is player media controls or media player controls. Things like the forward, rewind, play, pause, that kind of stuff. Especially on touch screens, people say well, maybe there are improvements to be made there. That's the internal stuff, just a flavour of it. External stuff, lots of open standards work, particularly things like in a world where web consortium, this is a weird thing right, I'm talking about the UK audience's need, in order to meet UK audience's need, the only way that is going to happen in a cost effective way for everyone is if we affect the global standards. We're at Google here, they make their own browser. Lots of other people here will have their browsers they will make one thing but they use globally. Here is Sarah from Apple. Obviously, it's a thing that's different in different countries. They make one thing and that's everywhere. If we can't affect that one thing, then we can't get the functionality that we need. Working to global standards is where we're headed to. Some specific things that I'm working on ... thank you. Time check there. Things like an open standard file format for exchange of audio description to take, to go all the way through the work flow from descripting, the text that's going to be spoken to, mixing the audio or presenting the audio description to screen readers or assistive technology. That's one thing I've working on. Live subtitle contribution formats. Just to finish, one thing that will be interesting and maybe we can discuss it a bit more is how we talk about usage data. I could talk easily about how much output has subtitles on, I cannot talk on it easily and across the board we cannot talk easily about how many people use them across all devices and things and there is a tension here, lots of different needs, it's complicated. You can't just say to people, hey, this number of people use it, therefore this is your product decision. Because the fur might be small, but it doesn't mean it's an unimportant group of people. But I think we need to start thinking about how we get the message out in the appropriate way to drive behaviours right in organisations that maybe don't think, oh, yeah, I should be subtitling here. It's to understand the value better to get the right data expressed in the right way. I'm saying that in the spirit of beginning a conversation. I don't think it's obvious how to do it and what the best way it. It needs to be discussed. I will stop there.

SONALI: Obviously I work with the RNIB, so a user organisation. User data I understand the significance of it, but isn't accessibility meant to be provided regardless, it could be that users aren't using the service because there is no accessibility?

NIGEL: Yeah, tell the people providing the content, give them data that says hey your competitors do this and here is their data. You don't. You know find a way to express that, to show that the value is what I'm trying to say. Because yeah, they might be losing out. I can say that on, I think games and children's genre of television programmes, people watching or playing with, 35% or so with subtitles, something around that number. That's loads. If you didn't offer that 35% of people switch off? Maybe not. Maybe 15 would. That's a big audience. That's millions and millions of people. If that message is not clearly understood by the people who go, oh, yeah, my business isn't only about the people who can see and hear in every moment, those magical beasts that don't really exist, then yeah. We should help them to understand that is the case.

SONALI: Thank you Nigel. Next, we've got Sarah Herrlinger from Apple. I talked about the Atmos mix and Apple have got that.

SARAH: I'm Sarah Herrlinger, I am the director of global accessibility policy and initiatives. There are seats up front if you would like to sit down, you can come forward. If you don't want to be the person who walks in front of the entire room, I get that as well. I thought I'd make sure you're aware. So, I think to start off giving a bit of background on accessible content at Apple. This is something that's been important to us for a long time. Personally, I've held a, worn a lot of hats in terms of the jobs I've done. One was as the product manager across all product lines, which got me into the realm of being able to help work on how we surface accessible content. It started with just having the hooks within the operating system that if anyone had accessible content, we would be able to surface that. If a provider put closed captioning or audio descriptions in, you could turn on a flag and those would show up. We started doing that almost ten years ago, as a baseline in what we did. Then I worked with our iTunes team to surface that information within iTunes. If you, if there was material that had closed captions, we work with all the major studios on getting movies and such, that if those were closed captioned or had audio descriptions that we surfaced that up so an end user could know before making that purchase, was that accessible to them? And they could search on, show me everything that's audio described in the store right now. Things like that. Then, at the same time, putting in the terms into what we send to our studio partners to say, hey, as long as you're sending us this latest blockbuster with subtitles in Japanese and French and German and all those many things, please also provide us with a track for closed captioning and a track for audio descriptions. Really trying to hold partners accountable to the same level of support that we wanted to be providing and make sure we were getting as much accessible content in as possible. The latest is Apple has moved into the realm of original content of our own and we just launched, on November 1, with a group of both series as well as individual movies and documentaries and things. We are providing all of that material in over 40 languages in closed captioning. Nine languages in audio descriptions. Because we are the content creator and distributor, we are not beholden to the same regional distribution rights and rules that other content may have. So, we will actually be providing that globally into the over 100 countries that Apple TV plus is available in. Meaning that if you are an English speaker but you want to get Italian audio description while travelling in Japan, have at it! Pick whatever one you want. But the last key piece of this, as Sonali mentioned, we are also delivering this is Dolby atmos. Quite often the people who creates those 80 tracks, for lack of a better way, dumbs down the AD. And provides it in only 5.1 or stereo, which is not as good of an audio mix and our view was you know for a community, for whom the audio is so centrally important to experiencing this material, why would you want to give them an experience that was not the same quality as everyone else? Assuming your system allows you to get Atmos, that would be the first thing we would try to deliver to you and if your system doesn't, then we figure out the step downs from there to give you the highest quality that your system will allow for. But I'm really excited. I feel like this is something that we, when I look at our work and accessibility being a core corporate value of Apple, this is something that I've been working with the team. They've been really excited about it. We've done a lot to really ensure that that's something we can provide across all of the shows that we produce.

SONALI: Just one question about the languages that we choose for audio description. How do you fill in the languages, you mentioned nine languages, is that based on past experiences of iTunes, how often it's being used? Or is there other data available?

SARAH: There's a few things we do look at. Some of that is usage and where, sort of what are languages that give us the most bang for the buck, I suppose, in terms of those that are most, you know, global, as well as, a number of other things that we look at. But we're trying to provide it in as many languages that we possibly can, that will reach as many users. As I said, we are going into 100 plus different countries. It's how do we make sure we hit as much as we possibly can do.

SONALI: Thank you. Jane Laurance from ITV.

JANE: Thank you. I feel like I'm going to sing.

>> You can!

JANE: I can.

(Laughter)

I won't! I know shame. I'm Jane Laurance. I'm head of specialist broadcast services for ITV. And that involves quite a number of things. Part of my role is to report back to Ofcom on our access service quotas and targets etc. We also work very closely with Sonali and her team at the RNIB. I also monitor at viewer impacting access service regs. Firstly, I thought I would quickly run through ITV's policy on access services, very similar to the BBC's no doubt. ITV is really committed on ensuring our content is accessible and available to all, both on linear TV and on board. We know linear TV, as our competitors, are subject to statutory requirements on access services in the UK. From our point of view, we believe a coordinated policy across our channels is necessary, both operationally and strategically, in order to maximise benefits to the viewer. Moving forward, we're completely aware that the UK Government, following Ofcom's recommendations published last year, is looking to introduce specific access services targets on vod platforms. This is to be announced early next year and will come into force in the coming years. ITV aspires to provide the audience with the best possible access services across our family of channels. And on those platforms where access services are available. We also recognise the importance of collaboration with stake holders, such as the RNIB and we very much appreciate their advice and guidelines. Before I update you on our VOD services, I thought I would update you on what's happening with access services at the moment. We're in the middle of insourcing our access capability. Visually signing is already done in‑house, in Gateshead. We are bringing in our AD and subtitling and that will all come under the umbrella of Signpost. As of today, we have nearly finished our AD testing. And subtitling for ITV4 and ITVB has been brought in‑house. We're in the middle of currently testing all our regions in the ITV main channel. Our stenographers will be based remotely and they'll be using dragon speech recognition and screen wincaps subtitling software and for the AD, audio describers will use Advantage Software. At ITV we're excited about bringing our access services, all of our access services in‑house. We'll have more control and we look forward to looking at what we can actually do with maybe, or hopefully providing AD on any of or some of our late delivered programmes such as Love Island. I'm not promising anything for next year quite yet!

SONALI: That is really important, we need Lover Island!

JANE: Everyone mentions that. I have mentioned it already, good news. So, updates in VOD for 2019, so since last year, ITV now provides AD on iOS as well as Android. We went live on iOS in May this year. On both platforms we deliver approximately 31% of AD hours, which equates to 29% of our programmes. So, for us, this is a huge step forward. Android and iOS take up almost 100% of the market, mobile market share, so we're doing really well in this space. But we're also aware that mobile accounts for proximately 30% of access to the ITV hub, with another 30% from browsers and 30% through connected TVs. Consequently, we recognise that more needs to be done with respect to browsers and connected TVs and that's where our focus is right now. We're aware that they're not singular challenges especially as they use different technology for AD on mobile. It's worth noting that each of these services is an individually bespoke build. It's not an insignificant amount of time and resource to do each of these, so we are delivering incrementally. The full main browsers and connector connected TVs have differing, which may not have AD in connection with the other technologies we are currently supporting. Given the technical complexities involved and the resources needed to meet this challenge, full coverage on connected TVs and browsers will be much longer in coming, but we hope to make progress in the coming months and years. In helping ITV prioritise our work in this area, we want to work with the RNIB and other relevant stake holders to help us identify the most popular platforms in terms of the number of users, so we can focus on delivering AD on these platforms. Finally, in 2020, we are looking at rolling out AD for Brit box as well as holding a focus group with our AD users with help from our audio describer editors and from the RNIB. Thank you.

SONALI: I'm glad you brought that in. That was going to be my question.

JANE: Some time next year. No dates at the moment.

SONALI: Thank you very much. Next, we have Abhiram Moturi from Amazon Prime video.

ABHIRAM: Hi everyone. I'm the product manager for the sect programme at Prime video. I'm part of the larger accessibility team, which includes user researchers, designers, design technologists. I'm part of the accessibility team which focus on Prime video, we have many other accessibility teams at Amazon who work on devices, who work on Amazon shopping, our kindle, etc. I'm part of a very small team of the larger accessibility programme at Amazon. My work at Prime is twofold. One, I look at our customer needs, accessibility needs, and I try and work on features and improvements to our service to meet their needs. On the other hand, I also try to be an advocate for our customers. I look at what everybody else at Prime video is doing, what features are being developed and I look at how I can make sure accessibility is part of their work. How do we, when we get content from our partners, how do we ensure that we get them with audio description? How do you make it just part of the process of our work at Prime video? It's quite by accident how I started working on accessibility. I joined Prime video a little over a year ago. And I joined the user experience team. Because I loved movies and TV shows. I wanted to work on user experience. On day one, my boss said, you're here, we want you to work on accessibility. So, I asked ‑ OK, what does that mean?

(Laughter)

Since then, it's been a journey for me trying to learn about what the area is, what accessibility means when it comes to streaming video or videos in general. Trying to learn as much as I can from the people around me and from our users. And at the same time, moving our service in a way that helps our customers. I'm really happy, this is my first TechShare Pro, to be learning from everyone around here. I'm really happy to talk about some of the improvements we made at Prime Video. In 2019 we made a number of improvements to our service, when it comes to accessibility. I'm going to read out a list. For example, we now have audio descriptions worldwide, over 100 countries. We previously only had it for the US and UK. I'm very happy about expanding the access of audio description. We've also enabled audio description on many more smart TVs and living room devices. We've already had it on many of our Android apps, on our iPhones, on the website and many of our Fire, TV and Amazon devices. We've increased the content we had with audio description. We have nearly tripled the number of content we have with audio description in the US. We now provide the most number of movies and TV shows with audio description. We've doubled our content in the UK and we are going to increase the pace of how we add more audio description. Right now, for all Amazon originals that we produce, we release audio description when we release the original content. At the same time, what I try to focus on is how do we make sure customers can easily access the titles with audio description? So, for example, we now have AD badges in our detail pages, so that customers can know if our title has audio description before they start playing and realise, oh, this doesn't have it. We have tried to have easier ways, like easy URLs to get to these titles. If you go to Amazon.co.uk/video, audio description, you can get the list of all the titles that have audio descriptions. On the apps, we're trying to add in easy links where you have the entire list of our catalogue of audio description content. There's still a long way to go with adding more content, making them more easily discoverable and more accessible. But I'm really happy with the pace that we're going.

SONALI: Just one question before you pass the mic. You have unique challenges, because you acquire a lot of content, which lands on Prime. How easy is it to actually acquire content, when you're commissioning, say you're taking content from the BBC or ITV, how easy is it to acquire the access features? And repurpose them for your platform? I think the two challenges, one is acquiring the access features, then repurposing them for your own platform. Because the versions are quite different at times, I'm assuming.

ABHIRAM: It is quite a challenge to acquire the access services. As a worldwide service there's a lot of licensing requirements that we look at, so it's not as straightforward to repurpose as say from our US catalogue to the UK catalogue. We have a number of partners, so, some partners provide the audio description files when they provide the video. But some may not. What we are trying to do is make sure that processes are robust enough so that we ask them when they provide the video, we asked them, hey you need to give us all the files with it along with the audio description. That's just a new way of acquiring content, that's just the normal way and make sure it's not, at the same time we're trying to go back to them if they don't provide it and say ‑ now you have a lot of content on our servers that don't have audio described files, why don't you provide them now. It has other challenges like we need to work with them. There may be an additional delivery fee. But we're trying to ensure that is our new working process.

SONALI: Thank you. We heard from the service providers and now we have Mariana.

MARIANA: I'm aware that you must all be quite hungry, I'll try to be as entertaining as possible to distract you from the impending hunger. So, my name is Mariana Lopez. I'm a senior lecturer at the department of theatre, film, television and interactive media, our name keeps getting longer and longer at the University of York. What I'll be talking briefly is about a project that we completed a few months ago called enhancing audio description. The project was funded by the arts and humanities research Council in the UK, led by the University of York, by myself and the Gavin Carney and had a research assistant based in Cambridge. We are really lucky to work with different stake holders including RNIB, we work with audio description provider Sensor media. We work with ITV, Dolby, Lisa Holdsworth, charity camp site and well renowned dubbing mixer. The idea of the project was that we wanted to look into alternative formats to audio description for accessibility for film and TV, drama, for vision impaired people. The main concept of the project was that if accessibility is about acknowledging diversity and different needs and experiences, we can't just be offering one type of accessibility to visually impaired audiences. We should be thinking about what the shortcomings of the system are, and by system, I mean an audio description format that a third person narration that tells us what's happening on screen through verbal descriptions. And was there something that we could provide as an alternative. I always make sure that I emphasise this isn't about replacing a format that many users are very, very happy with. But it's what about those for whom audio description is not ticking all the boxes. We proposed to use the sound assign creative approach to accessibility, where we looked to reduce verbal descriptions through three basic methods. One of them is looking at the addition of sound effects to the original sound track of a film. Just to give an example to make it a bit clearer. We worked with adapting a short film, that film had in the final scene quite an important moment, a girl running across a beach, looking very distressed. People chasing after her. But the editors of the film and the director had decided that it was going to be a musical moment. All you can hear is the music. Now visually impaired audiences found that up possible to follow without features because the only thing they could hear is music. It's very difficult to tell what's happening if you can just hear the music. So, something that we proposed to work on with sound effects is well, let's reduce the level of the music. Let's redo the mix for an accessible version. Let's add the footsteps of the character running through the beach. The footsteps of the mother and doctor chasing after her. And let's add some Atmos, sea gulls to tell people they're at the beach. That made a huge difference for audio description users from a focus group saying, we have no idea what's going on. They were like, oh, OK, I completely follow that. That is actually a really easy to apply to creative work flows of film making. Most of the time those decisions on how to mix that clip won't be done until the final stage of film making. Those footsteps would have been recorded, the Atmos tracks would have been recorded. We just need to create a version that redoes the mix to make it more accessible and reduces the need for verbal descriptions through an added audio description track. The other important thing we locked at is spatialisation and we worked with binaural audio, that's the rendition of 3D audio through head phones. The deal with this is that you could spatialise the sound track in a way that you were providing information that again could reduce the need for verbal descriptions. For example, if a character enters to the right of the screen and walks to the left, instead of someone describing what's happening, we have the dialogue panned from right to left because of the audio, we can do back to front and any other combination that you might want. That implies we need to break the conventions of mixing for drama, this is that the dialogue is tied to the centre channel. When we tried it with our visually impaired users, they loved it. They found they could now, that film or TV programme came to life with the movement of the characters. Another thing you can do through spatialisation is giving a sense of items that are in the set. Just an example, let's say there is a fireplace at the rear, the right of the shot. You can just have the sound of a fireplace located there. There is a reduction of the need to have a verbal description of how the set is constructed. That means that the sound track of the film can come to life. We also acknowledge that you can't do everything, provide all the information through sound effects and spatialisation. Some things like gestures are very different to convey in that way. We worked on a system of first-person narration, where the main character of the film provided some clarifications on content. This created a very poetic, very immersed experience for the film. Because suddenly you have those gestures, translated into and explanations of the motions that character was feeling. Our model implies that accessibility is incorporated in the production and post production and pre‑production of film making and television making, which means that first‑person description would be written by the screen writer and not added to the end of the process. Our project was very user focussed. Everything we did we tested, we asked visually impaired users what they thought of our ideas, invited them to critique them and we played the film that we wanted to turn into an enhanced audio described film and they took those ideas to the research and did the testing again and so what they thought about it. The great news for us is that when we compared the results between a traditional audio described film, against the one with an enhanced form of sound design, they scored the same for accessibility. Users found they were both equally accessible and equally engaging. I think that's a really great thing. Yeah, but wouldn't you have liked it to score more, you're probably thinking. I would. But people are used to audio description. And asking a group of people forget everything you know about accessibility, sit down and listen to this, that's a lot to ask. Some of them mentioned that it took them a few minutes to realise that is what they were experiencing was accessible. They kept waiting for the third person description to kick in. We are really proud of the results. We're planning a second application for funding to be able to continue our research. So, if anybody's interested in collaborating, we really want to see this taken out of the research lab and into the homes and very, very happy to collaborate. That's my plug, please give me money!

(Laughter)

SONALI: Thank you. I was really impressed with the project. I hope you get the next round of funding. Support the blog. Please, if anyone is here ...

MARIANA: Give me money ...

(Laughter)

For the project!

(Laughter)

SONALI: Let's move onto the questions. One of the questions that relates to what you just presented is about, it's on the screen right now, so many people, particularly the creative types, seem to struggle with the concept of audio description. How do you simplify the film so it's really understood? From RNIB's point of view what we can do is run awareness, run campaigns on what audio description is. Campaigns are designed towards different stake holders, towards the creative types sometimes. But also, towards end users and the service providers. But I think if you really want audio description to be understood and the creative level or at the grassroots level, we would need broadcasters to be involved or content producers. What are the chances of embedding accessibility at the very start of a production, Nigel, you can take that?

NIGEL: It's a really interesting question. There's a contrast here between what we would do for say a web page or an app. We just require that it would be built to accessible standards and tell them what the standards are and they go and do it. Versus what we do for broadcast content, for our programmes I should say. Where we have taken the view that we're introducing something which is a bit different to what the content producers normally are used to doing. We're increasing the scale. We do more than 20% of our programmes, but if people aren't familiar, we have a lot of different television services. 20% is a lot of content. I can't remember the number of hours, but it's quite a few. Our approach to doing it has been for economy purposes, to outsource that to a specialised provider, who knows how to do AD well. So that's great. They know how to do that. They give a consistency of experience to the audience. But it doesn't really quite answer the question. I think sustainably, in the long‑term, you might think well perhaps the deliverable ought to be the programme with all the accessible components, whatever they are, and it's the content producer's job to make that, otherwise they're not fulfilling their commission. I don't see that happening particularly soon. It feels like the only way to get there in the end.

SONALI: I've been asked that question for a number of years and I've always said I don't have any contacts with Spielberg, but if I did, I might reach out to him, if he made a film that's fully accessible that might start a trend. If you have any contacts ...

(Laughter)

MARIANA: I don't have contacts with Spielberg. Someone has said it would be useful, that he is particularly interested in accessibility. Someone that's expert in the topic told me. But never replied with a consistent reference as to where she got this information from. I think he's out there looking to fund our work.

(Laughter)

SONALI: Does anyone else want to answer that?

SARAH: It is a hard thing even with AD. With closed captioning there are a lot of ways to do it. Within Apple's work we have a product called final cut pro, one of the video editing software tools used to make major motion pictures, one of the things we added in a year ago was the ability to do closed captioning directly into Final Cut Pro. I saw a question about how do you do it and ensure the synchronisation stays in. That's part of what we did when we built this as a piece of final cut was to make it really simple and easy so that rather than having it be a separate track that someone produces, you're just, you can just type in along the way as you're listening to whatever is the audio running, and then, if you decide to cut a clip, it just magically cuts that area and your captions follow along. Audio description is a science. To do good audio descriptions and thinking through the different things that are important for someone to get context is a complicated process. I have such huge respect for people who, as their profession, do audio description. I don't think it's as easy as saying, is there some magical way to make that happen? Who knows, maybe one day AI will solve this for all of us. I don't know that we're anywhere close yet. I think that the more we can get people to consider AD at the start of their process, for us, by saying we just, we plan to AD everything we do ‑ it brings that into the conversation really early on. It becomes a part of the, you know, the discussion of how something, even how the show might end up being created in terms of how does AD ‑ I'm not by any means saying that somebody is in a room deciding AD as the primary factor for this, but we start to have those discussions of how does AD fit into a show where there's a lot of dialogue that's moved super-fast? Or just what is AD mean in this? And by having that as a baseline of the production, you can at least begin to have those conversations in a way that didn't happen in the past.

ABHIRAM: I can talk about some things at Prime Video, that increase the awareness of AD within our organisation. We start, when I started off, I did not know what audio description were, because I never used them. I realise many people at Prime video were similar. They have never used them. What we started doing was for any new show that could come out, that came out, we would have a pre‑screening of the show, but then we would have it with audio description. So, this would mean people are interested in it, would come and watch the show, watch with audio description and be like, oh, that's what this is. And now I get it. Now they start thinking about, they may start thinking about a new show, how does audio description fit into this? This is what helped us just increase the awareness of that.

SONALI: Since you've got the mic ... will you be able to turn on closed captions and audio description using voice control on Fire TV?

ABHIRAM: That's definitely a really good idea.

(Laughter)

Right now, I don't think we support that. But we definitely want to do that in the future. We want to, so, Fire TV is very well integrated with our Alexa voice service, which enables, which already makes the service more accessible, so customers can just search for a movie, say "Alexa, play Jack Ryan" which makes it easier to find content. There are many other features that we want to add on top of it. Like play Jack Ryan with audio description, or find me all the audio described movies on the service, turn on captions. We want to add those features.

SONALI: I know we're talking a lot about quality. Just taking a step back on the quantity as well, because yes quality is very important, but quantity is slightly more important, because quite often when you speak to audio description users, they say there's nothing available, I'll take what's there right now. Do you think, I don't know ‑ are you led by legislation? Because often we've got, we've seen that legislation triggers broadcasters or providers to start looking at accessibility. I don't know how it works within your respective organisations. Are you led by innovation or what's available in mainstream? At RNIB, whether it's legislation, regulation or you know you decide to make sure, that's OK users need it and what they prefer. Is there anything you'd like to add?

NIGEL: Historically the BBC has led here. We started subtitling in the late 70s or early 80s. There wasn't any regulation. The pattern that we tend to see is that we might introduce a service and or we might follow on, other people may have introduced the idea of the service and we think it's a good idea and it fits with the charter requirements, we may go ahead and start doing that. That's what we've seen happen. Then later on, the pattern has been that becomes part of a regulated service. We work closely with the regulator as well to make sure that we don't get put into a position where we can't actually do what the regulator is demanding, but also that question doesn't arise because we try to be ahead of the curve. I would say regulation really is the thing that bakes in the expectations, right, you can do this. It's a good thing to do, keep doing it, at at least this level. But don't slip back. It's useful from that perspective. It doesn't tend to drive us. We put subtitles on iPlayer from day one when it launched in 2007. There is still no regulation for on‑demand content. That doesn't stop us from doing it.

SONALI: It levels the playing field, I think. If other providers are not providing on accessibility. How does it work with for say ‑ is there legislation, I'm not sure if there is in the US?

SARAH: Well, I mean, there is, I don't believe there's legislation right now that covers digital media. There are some things through the CVAA that cover broadcast. But that's one of the things about this for us, you know, accessibility is one of our six core corporate values. So, because of that, the decisions we make tend to be about what we want to do best by our customers and not specifically by legislation. You know the conversations that I have with our Apple TV Plus team, you know, compliance isn't a word that gets used in those conversations. It's about the fact that we're a global company, creating global content and at the heart of what we do we're excited about what we make and we want everyone else to be excited about what we make. You know, we want people to ‑a show and want to watch it and want to wait until every Friday when the next episode comes out and be able to take in that content in the way that works best for them. So, our goal is to keep pushing the limits, not to sit back on this, you know, country standard says X, Y and Z. We want to blow that standard out of the water everywhere we can. When you come out from that perspective you make better products.

JANE: Same at ITV, yes, we have the legislation for linear TV channels. But we don't just meet the targets, we try and blow them out of the water. So very much like the BBC, for subtitling we have nearly 100%. For AD we had the 10% that Ofcom have set. But we go above 20% on our main channel and all our other channels higher than that. It's about what the viewer wants and needs from us. Yes, we are led by legislation, but it's not the sole purpose for us to do all these great things.

ABHIRAM: It's the same for us as well. We have a tenant that is, although we look at legal requirements, that's just the starting point for us. We are driven by, trying to know what makes, what meets customers' needs. We spend a lot of our time trying to understand what the customers want, rather than trying to understand what the law is and trying to comply with that. Also, if you want ‑ our goal is to make accessibility like a movement within the organisation. If you say compliance, people are not going to get excited about it. So, you have to, it has to come from innovation.

SONALI: I have been told, I mean, there are times we're told can you send us a letter of complaint please, because a letter of complaint from the RNIB will trigger conversations internally, because there is no requirement around this. If there's a letter of complaint ... any way. Going through questions here, there's just lots of questions. I think someone's talking about guidelines, are there any comprehensive documents about audio description guidelines especially for film and let's say a sitcom for example, because you said sometimes it can be political. Ofcom have standards, guidelines and best practice. But I think the BBC has got some guidelines as well, internal. I've seen some documents.

NIGEL: Can you share those with me?

(Laughter)

SONALI: This is on the BBC website.

NIGEL: Yeah, it's an interesting question. I think one of my products is the BBC subtitle guidelines. It's noticeable that there is not an equivalent for audio description. One of the reasons there is not is that it's not straightforward for anybody other than the provider to provide AD to us. The technology is not open. It's not cheap. The way to integrate that into our content flow is not either. The documentation of the editorial requirement goes to the audio description provider. We work on that with them. That is great because that does all our audio description. I would love to be in a state in, you know, a year's time or two years when we can say, here’s an open standard way to provide audio description so that people making content that isn't covered by that contract for broadcast programmes, can also contribute audio description. Then we can create a document like the subtitle guide that says here's how you do AD. I'd love to publish that. We're not at that stage yet. Nobody can do it any way. Although it would be maybe somewhat useful to the world at large to know what the editorial guidelines are, there isn't anybody who can use them to contribute. It's not a high priority for me right now.

SONALI: Do you all have different guidelines that you follow or best practice? Do you have internal documents?

JANE: From ITV the gentleman that will do it for ITV and has been doing it at a different company, there are certain guidelines. But they're not set in stone. I think it's, yeah, you know, when they do describe these programmes, it's not about your own personal point of view, how somebody's feeling. It's about what you see. So, they take a lot of time over writing scripts. And making sure that everything, you know, is what the visually impaired would like to hear, or makes this programme understandable.

SONALI: I remember when I joined RNIB, my job for the first year was to accompany my boss to do the audio description providers and watch films that are being viewed with description. I can't name it because of confidentiality. I used to watch all the films before they came out. By the time they came out, I was so sick of them because I'd watched them about 50 times! Yeah it sounds like fun ... but it is a task. It needs a lot of care. And a lot of attention to detail, what is being described, because the time is so short. Someone has tweeted no it's on Slido. Regarding guidelines for audio description, Netflix has some. If you are on Slido the link is right there. I think that would be very, very helpful. It is 1.50, I can see hungry faces. We'll wrap it up for now. Thank you ever so much for everyone on the panel. A very warm thank you and hope you enjoy the rest of the conference.