

Broadcasting Committee

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Digital TV Switchover in Wales: a briefing for the National Assembly for Wales Broadcasting Committee

9 June 2008

Introduction

Digital UK welcomes the opportunity to present a short briefing to the Broadcasting Committee. The aim of this paper is to outline some of the key milestones, issues and challenges facing Digital UK as we move towards the final year of preparation for digital TV switchover in Wales. It is also designed to provide evidence that:

- The switchover in Wales is on track and on time
- Switchover will deliver significant benefits to viewers in Wales including the ability to get Channel 4 as well as S4C from Welsh transmitters.
- Many viewers already know when switchover is happening in their area and what they have to do
- Digital UK and the Switchover Help Scheme (SHS) intend to actively address the needs of all viewers including those who might need extra help with switchover and those who are eligible for the Help Scheme

Background to switchover

Digital TV switchover will make digital terrestrial television, generally known as Freeview, universal by 2012. Switching off the analogue signal and replacing it with a digital one will give viewers more choice and release spectrum for new services. The UK switchover programme rolls out on a national and regional basis and is designed to accord with neighbouring European countries.

Digital UK, representing the main public service broadcasters (the BBC, ITV, Channel Four, Five and S4C), is the independent, non-profit organisation leading the process of digital TV switchover in the UK. Digital UK provides impartial information on what people need to do to prepare for the move to digital, and when they need to do it.

Digital UK works closely with BBC Wales, ITV Wales and S4C and Ofcom Wales and regularly briefs Government ministers, officials and Assembly members on switchover.

Current take-up of digital TV in Wales

According to the Digital UK/Ofcom Switchover Tracker Survey Q1 2008¹, Wales has one of the highest take-up rates of digital TV in the UK reflecting the relatively low coverage of analogue terrestrial television and the popularity of satellite television.

- 88% of households in Wales already have digital television (the UK figure stands at 86.7%).
- The majority of main sets in Wales receive a satellite TV service (46%, compared with 31% who receive digital terrestrial TV and 10% cable).
- Full household set conversion in Wales is higher than the UK average – 60% compared with 57%.
- People aged over 75 who are eligible for the Help Scheme across the UK show markedly lower levels of conversion to digital TV – 67%
- People with disabilities who are eligible for the Help Scheme across the UK have a conversion rate closer to the average – 83%

Understanding of switchover

Levels of awareness and understanding of switchover in Wales are higher than the UK average. However, Digital UK recognises that there is a job to do to make sure everyone knows the precise date of switchover of their transmitter:

- In Q1 2008 the population in Wales had a higher level of switchover awareness (92% vs. 90% in the UK) and a greater understanding of what to do for switchover (73% vs. 70% in the UK).
- Half of those in Wales (50%) are able to name the correct year for switchover, compared with around 1 in 4 UK-wide (27%)
- In Wales, 3 in 5 (59%) have a high level of detailed understanding about digital switchover, compared with less than half (48%) across the UK.

The technical background:

With eight main transmitters and 198 relays switching over two years and many overlaps between transmitters, the switchover timetable for Wales is complicated. For example, those parts of Swansea served by Kilvey Hill switch between July and September 2009 whilst those served by Wenvoe switch between January and March 2010.

Wales consists of eight main transmitter groups:

- **The Kilvey Hill transmitter group** with its 9 relay transmitters, serving c.132,000 homes in the Swansea area, which switches between July and September 2009

¹ The Digital UK / Ofcom Switchover Tracker Survey (a door-to-door quantitative survey operated by GfK NOP) interviews over 2,800 households nationally each quarter, and a minimum of 300 households in Wales each quarter. The sample is collected according to quotas and weighted to ensure it is fully representative of the region.

- **The Preseli transmitter group** with its 25 relays, serving c.82,000 homes in south west Wales, which switches between July and September 2009
- **The Carmel transmitter group** with its 19 relays, serving c.114,000 homes in parts of south and central Wales, which switches between July and September 2009
- **The Llanddona transmitter group** with its 22 relays, serving c.113,000 homes in north-west Wales which switches between October and December 2009
- **The Moel-y-Parc transmitter group** with its 20 relays, serving c.166,000 homes in north-east Wales which switches between October and December 2009
- **The Long Mountain transmitter group** with its 14 relays, serving c.25,000 homes in parts of east and central Wales which switches between October and December 2009
- **The Blaenplwyf transmitter group** with its 14 relays, serving c.32,000 homes in parts of west and central Wales which switches between January and March 2010
- **The Wenvoe transmitter group** with its 75 relays, serving c.662,000 homes in Cardiff, Newport and south-east Wales which switches between January and March 2010

Wales has a tradition of some households receiving a signal from transmitters in England in order to get all the possible channels. Switchover will, for the first time, make it possible for Welsh viewers to receive both S4C and Channel 4 from all Welsh transmitters:

Further, the new Storeton relay transmitter based on the Wirral will improve general access to Welsh television services. Many viewers based in north east Wales will receive these services for the first time.

TV channel availability

After switchover 97.8% of households will be able to view at least 20 of the most watched Freeview digital channels, many for the first time.

Currently the full Freeview 40 plus channel line up is available to 57% of households in Wales. This figure will rise to 73% of households after switchover.

Viewers who want more than the 20 or 40 channels which they will be able to get from Freeview after switchover can choose from a range of free or subscription satellite services offering 90-400 TV channels.

Digital UK in Wales

Digital UK commenced its national communications campaign in Wales in 2006. We are moving to a regional approach reflecting the timing of switchovers and the geographical location of transmitters:

- west Wales, July – September 2009
- north Wales, October – December 2009
- Blaenplwyf, (west and central Wales), January – March 2010
- south Wales, January – March 2010.

There are three main strands to our bilingual campaign:

- A public information campaign alerting viewers to when switchover is coming and what they have to do to get ready
- Housing sector and trade support informing businesses and public bodies who will guide viewers through switchover
- Local community support for those who may need an extra bit of help through the switchover process

1. Public information campaign

- Information leaflets to every home – Digital UK will send a second explanatory leaflet to every home across Wales in January 2009 (the first having been distributed in 2006). A further leaflet, providing detailed information on how to convert, will be delivered to every home three months prior to each individual transmitter group's switch to digital
- Good Neighbours Pack – A community pack containing an informational DVD and materials will be sent to charities, community centres, libraries and Citizens Advice Bureaux in the run up to switchover
- On-Screen Captions – captions will be broadcast on analogue televisions informing viewers of the imminence of switchover six, three and one month before a switch
- Advertising – The Digital UK campaign includes television, radio and press advertisements. There will also be an extensive programme of roadshows across the country in the run up to the first switchover in Wales
- Phone line – viewers can access experienced advisors at Digital UK on 0845 6 50 50 50 (Welsh language phone line – 0845 8 48 48 48)
- Website – Further information about the switchover in Wales is available online at <http://www.digitaluk.co.uk/when/wales> and in the Welsh language at <http://www.digitaluk.co.uk/cy>

2. Housing & Trade Support

- Social housing – Advice has been provided to all social housing providers, including details of Digital UK's 'Homes Set for Digital' Accreditation

Scheme. The Welsh Assembly Government Housing Division and Community Housing Cymru have also disseminated information.

- Care homes – Care homes in the area have been written to, and will be contacted again before switchover
- Retail support – Local retailers will be offered merchandising and training support by a dedicated Retail Support Executive from June this year.
- Aerial installer support – Two mailings, providing technical information needed for switchover, will be delivered to aerial installers one year and six months ahead of the first switchover
- Tourism sector – Visit Wales has agreed to disseminate information through their database and letters have been sent electronically to 4000 Welsh tourist businesses in Wales.
- Private landlords – We will write to managing and lettings agents in the area 1 year ahead of switchover.
- Dr Brian Gibbons, Minister for Social Justice and Local Government has written to all local authorities in Wales encouraging them to make use of Digital UK's online guide and checklist to help them prepare for digital TV switchover. The guide is available at www.digitaluk.co.uk/localgov

3. Local Community Support

- Digital UK's National Team – Gwenllïan Carr, the Digital UK Wales National Manager, leads a team of three. S4C provides a central office resource.
- Digital UK will work with Digital Outreach Ltd, a consortium charities to organise a rolling programme of local meetings and events, the distribution of key information materials in the six months leading up to switchover, as well as a network of drop-in centres at the point of switchover for those who might need an extra bit of help.

Switchover Help Scheme

The Switchover Help Scheme (SHS) commenced operations in 2007. The Help Scheme is run by the BBC by agreement with the UK Government and provides help, including the conversion of one television, to eligible individuals. The Help Scheme communicates directly with people entitled to help and is building wider awareness of what it can do among those who care for and assist potentially vulnerable citizens.

An information campaign to increase general awareness and understanding of the scheme will launch eight months before the first switchover in Wales.

What help does the Scheme provide?

- The Switchover Help Scheme is available to people who are aged 75 years old or over, who are entitled to attendance allowance, disability living allowance or mobility supplement, or who are registered blind or partially sighted

- Eligible individuals will be asked to contribute £40 towards the conversion costs for one TV unless they are in receipt of income-related benefits (pension credit, income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance) when the help is free
- Help includes easy-to-use equipment, installation, a demonstration in their homes, and a satellite dish or an aerial to make that equipment work, if it's needed
- The Help Scheme will write directly to every eligible individual up to three times to ensure that everyone knows their entitlement. The first proactive communication to eligible individuals, the 'Options Pack' describing the Scheme and the choices available, will be delivered around five months ahead of switchover

For further information, contact:

- Simon Crine, Digital UK Director of Corporate Affairs
Simon.crine@digitaluk.co.uk
020 7462 5422
- Gwenllïan Carr, Digital UK National Manager, Wales
gwenllian.carr@digitaluk.co.uk
07792 010 758

South Wales

