

Digital switchover

Introduction

24.8 million (98.5%) of UK households can receive an analogue terrestrial signal, while 18.4 million (73%) can receive all six digital multiplexesⁱ. Analogue coverage in Wales is below the UK coverage at 97.4%, with 96.7% of Welsh households being served from transmitters based in Wales.

While 3.3% of Welsh households (around 36,000 households or 85,000 people) are not currently served by the Wales based transmitter network, a further 7,700 households are served by England based transmitters, leaving 28,300 households not served by the transmitter network. Licensed Self-Help-Schemes provide some additional fill-in coverage through relays or active deflectors.

Although fewer than 60% of homes are able to receive Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) in Wales, digital television has been widely adopted with higher than UK average take-up (72% compared with a 65% UK average). This is largely driven by higher satellite take-up.

The digital TV platform with the greatest coverage in Wales is digital satellite which covers approximately 98% of the population (100% reception is not possible due to local obstructions, such as deep valleys with steep south facing

Delivering digital services post-switchover

Conditions in the licences of the Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) will ensure that their terrestrial digital services substantially match the coverage achieved by analogue television servicesⁱⁱ. There are similar conditions on the BBC's services not licensed by Ofcom through its Charter and Agreement. The post-switchover coverage of the three commercial multiplexes should at least match that which they currently achieve.

Post-switchover, it is anticipated that 24.8 million (98.5%) UK households will be able to receive the three Public Service Broadcast (PSB) multiplexes, and 22.8 million (90.5%) households will be able to receive the three PSB and the three commercial multiplexes.

DTT services in Wales are broadcast from ten sites and core coverage (where all 6 multiplexes can be received) is currently around 57% of the Welsh population (below the UK average of 73%). Although DTT is carried by the 6 main transmitters serving Wales, due to its mountainous terrain the country also has 207 relay transmitters, of which only 4 carry DTT. As the plan at digital switchover is to at least replicate the current level of analogue coverage in Wales, this will require the conversion of the remaining relays to DTT.

Overview of current statutory powers of the Assembly

Matters relating to the media and broadcasting, including broadcasting in the Welsh language and the activities of Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C) are reserved to the UK Government.

Forthcoming EU and UK primary legislation

1. The Digital Switchover (Disclosure of Information) Bill was introduced on 16 November 2006ⁱⁱⁱ.

Digital switchover in Europe

It is expected that analogue switch-off will take place in three phases across western Europe.

- ◆ **2006 to 2008** - those countries which have offered DTT services for a number of years, or that have very few households that rely on the terrestrial platform.
- ◆ **2009 to 2011** - those countries where the number of households relying on the terrestrial platform is relatively low.
- ◆ **2012 to 2015** – countries (including the UK) with large populations and a high number of households relying on the terrestrial platform.

Key dates

- ◆ **2007, 17 October:** UK Digital Switchover starts in Whitehaven, Cumbria.
- ◆ **2009, Mid-year:** Digital Switchover in parts of South Wales.
- ◆ **2009, Late-year:** Digital Switchover in North Wales and Granada Region.
- ◆ **2010, Early-year:** Digital Switchover in rest of Wales.
- ◆ **2011:** Digital Switchover in Central Region (may affect some households who do not receive signals from Welsh transmitters).
- ◆ **2012:** UK Digital Switchover completed by year end.

Legacy issues from the Second Assembly

The Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee's legacy paper^{iv} highlighted the following issues relating to digital switchover for the attention of the Third Assembly:

- ◆ Wales should not be disadvantaged in any way when "switch off" from analogue takes place.

Useful links

1. Ofcom, *Predicted coverage of public service and commercial digital television multiplexes following switchover*, 8 February 2007:
<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv/ifi/tech/dttcoverage/>
2. Ofcom, *Ofcom publishes research on communications in the Nations and Regions of the UK*, 26 April 2006:
http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media/news/2006/04/nr_20060426a
3. Ofcom, *The Communications Market: Nations and Regions Wales Research Report*, April 2006:
<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/research/cm/nations/wales/wales.pdf>
4. BBC consultation on *Freesat*:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/consult/closed_consultations/freesat.html
5. UK Government's digital switchover web-site:
<http://www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk/>
6. Digital UK is the organisation leading the process of digital TV switchover in the UK.
<http://www.digitaluk.co.uk/en.html>
7. Report on the Digital Switchover Technical Trial in Ferryside and Llansteffan, July 2005:
http://www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk/publications/pub_digitalswitchover_researchreport.html

Further information

For further information on any aspect of digital switchover, please contact:

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ⁱ A Multiplex is a term to describe a single broadcast frequency that contains multiple compressed channels. Rather than each frequency carrying one TV channel as in the case of analogue TV, each Digital TV frequency contains several (normally around 8). These are all 'multiplexed' together into one frequency, and a special decoder is required to 'undo' this multiplexing. There are six multiplexes in use for Freeview.

ⁱⁱ Ofcom statement on switchover related changes to DTT licences:

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/dtt_changes/statement/statement.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ DCMS, The Digital Switchover (Disclosure Of Information) Bill - 16 November 2006:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/Reference_library/Publications/archive_2006/digitalswitchoverbill_nov06.htm

^{iv} 14 March 2007, Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee, CWLS (2) 04-07 (p3)