



Digital Switchover - Questions and Answers (January 2006)

Ref IS/29

This information sheet is aimed at people over 60 and refers to the situation in England. Those living in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland may wish to contact:

Age Concern Scotland, Causewayside House, 160 Causewayside, Edinburgh EH9 1PR, tel: 0845 125 9732 (local call rate), website: www.ageconcernscotland.org.uk;

Age Concern Cymru, Units 13 & 14 Neptune Court, Vanguard Way, Cardiff CF24 5PJ, tel: 029 2043 1555 (national call rate); website: www.accymru.org.uk;

Age Concern Northern Ireland, 3 Lower Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NR, tel: 028 9032 5055 (national call rate) Monday to Friday 9.30am - 1pm.

What is this all about?

The Government want to change the way all households in the UK get their television signal. The date when you will be affected by this change will depend on which ITV region you live in and these changeover dates are given at the end of this briefing. The change is often referred to as digital switchover because the new

signals will be digital and will only work with digital equipment. Wherever you live you have plenty of time to plan for the change.

Why the change?

Some benefits to going digital are:-

- As well as getting the five main channels, BBC1, BBC2, ITV1, Channels 4 and 5 a lot more channels will be available to you;
- Some programmes allow you to interact; so for example you can view a football or tennis match from different angles;
- You can listen to digital radio stations through your television;
- Digital television offers more special services for people with hearing and visual impairments. As well as subtitles and teletext, there will also be audio description service for people who have difficulties seeing the screen.

How will it affect me?

If all the televisions in your home are already digital, the change will not affect you. But once your region is switched over to only receive digital signals, any televisions you have that have not been changed to receive digital signals will no longer work.

What do I need to do?

You will need to ensure your television equipment can receive digital signals. These can be received in one of four ways: through an aerial, with a satellite dish, by cable or through a telephone line (see below). Which option you can choose will partly depend on where you live. Most places can receive a signal with satellite but not all areas can receive cable television. Most places can receive digital signals with an aerial, but there are areas in the country where households converting their equipment using the aerial system will not be able to watch digital channels until the switchover has been made in their region.

Option 1: Using an aerial

Provided you live in an area which is covered, you will be able to receive digital terrestrial channels and services Freeview which are free of charge. To check, whether this is possible for where you live, visit the website: www.freeview.co.uk or telephone 08708 809980 (national rate).

To receive digital terrestrial television, you will either

Have to convert your existing television by adding a set top box

Set top boxes range in price from about £40 to £200 and are available from your local electrical retailer. They vary in the features - such as ability to get audio description - they offer. Think about what features are important to you before buying.

or

Replace your current television set by buying an integrated digital television

These cost from about £200 upwards and there is limited choice of screen size at the moment, but it is expected that manufacturers will be providing more choice and prices are already coming down.

With either of these options you may need to have a new aerial which could cost an additional £80 or more. Your local electrical retailer should be able to tell you if you need a new aerial. If you live in property where there is a communal reception system you will need to contact your landlord or managing agent to see if this has been upgraded to receive digital signals.

Option 2: Having satellite

To receive signals you will need to install a satellite dish. There are some areas in the country where there are local planning restrictions that prevent you having a dish installed on your property. Check with your local council whether you live in such an area.

BSkyB is currently the only television satellite provider. They offer a subscription service with a range of channel packages. Installation costs will depend on which package you choose. BSkyB also offer a free subscription service but you will have to pay £150 to have this installed and get a viewing card. At the moment the viewing card has a guaranteed life of five years.

ITV and BBC have announced that they are intending to launch a free satellite service sometime in 2006. There are no more details on this service so it is not yet

known if there will be installation costs involved. At the moment it is not clear whether this service will include Channels 4 and 5.

Option 3: Having Cable

This is only an option if cable has been installed in your area. To check you will have to contact the two cable companies, NTL telephone 0800 183 0123 or Telewest 0845 142 0220 (these two companies are in the process of merger at the time of writing). Cable is only available on a subscription basis but these often include telephone services as well. You may have to pay installation costs depending on which package you choose.

Option 4: Through a telephone line

This technology is based on the existing telephone network. These services are at present only available in some regions. Kingston Communications offers such service in Hull (for more information see website: www.kcom.com or tel: 01482 222 666) and Home Choice in the south-east of England (see website www.homechoice.co.uk; tel: 0800 092 4444). This service is only available on subscription. £1 installation fee includes broadband connection.

Will I be able to use my video recorder?

Your video recorder will still work but once your region has changed to digital signals only, it will no longer be possible to video programmes on a different channel from the one you are watching. You will still be able to video any channel if you are not watching your television. Shops are now replacing their stocks of video recorders with a new piece of equipment called personal video recorders (PVR). While these will allow you to video whatever channel you want, they will only work with one specific system. So if you are a Freeview subscriber for example it would be important to ensure you bought a PVR which will work with Freeview and not one that would only work with satellite. PVRs currently cost about £80 to £100.

Who can help me?

Financial and practical help with installation

If you are aged 75 and over or get disability living allowance or attendance allowance you can get both financial and practical installation help in making the change. This help will ensure that at least one television set in your house will be able to receive

digital signals. You will have to pay a small charge for the practical installation help unless you are on Income Support, Job Seekers allowance or Pension Credit. Details of how you can access this help have yet to be finalised.

More information

Digital UK is an independent body set up by the broadcasters to give advice about the changeover to digital. You can look at their website: www.digitaluk.co.uk or telephone them on 0845 6 50 50 50 (local rate). If you are a person who qualifies for the financial and practical help you can telephone them on 0800 5 192021 (free call).

Buying new equipment

If you need to buy new equipment make sure that the retailer you choose displays the digital logo. This has the word digital followed by a box with a pink tick in it. The logo means that the staff selling digital television equipment should have been properly trained. They should be able to give you advice about what you are likely to need, which systems you can use to receive digital signals where you live and whether or not you might need an aerial.

Installing a new aerial

If you need to have a new aerial installed, it is very important that you use someone who is qualified to do so. DO NOT agree to let someone install a new aerial who approaches you without you having asked them to call.

The Confederation of Aerial Industries (website: www.cai.org.uk, tel: 020 8902 8998) and the Independent Digital Standards Commission (website: www.idsc.uk.com, tel: 01291 645 999) will be able to advise you who are qualified aerial installers in your area. Installers will only be recommended by these organisations if they have undertaken the necessary training to ensure they can do a competent job at a reasonable price.

Do I need to have another television licence?

A separate licence is not needed to receive digital television. Your existing licence is will cover all your digital viewing.

What is the right option for me?

This will depend on various factors and the following questions may help you to make decision.

Where do you live?

- depending on which ITV region you live in, you will have different amount of time before you have to make decisions;
- you need to find out which digital television options are available in your area as this will affect what choices you can make;
- if you are a tenant, you need to find out if your landlord is doing anything that will affect your choice.

Do you want to pay a subscription to get more channels?

If not, you can only have digital terrestrial services – e.g. Freeview or free satellite services from BSkyB or the FreeSat option that will be launched by the BBC and ITV in 2006. But there are initial costs involved. For Freeview you will have to buy a set top box or a new integrated digital television and you may have to get a new aerial. For Sky you will probably have to pay for a satellite dish to be installed.

FreeSat (not available until 2006) it is not known yet what the installation costs will be. At present, it is also not known if it will include Channels 4 and 5.

If yes, you have a choice of satellite or cable or telephone line digital television.

Order of changeover

| TV Region | Date |
|--------------|------|
| Border | 2008 |
| West Country | 2009 |
| HTV Wales | 2009 |
| Granada | 2009 |
| HTV West | 2010 |
| Grampian | 2010 |
| Scottish TV | 2010 |
| Yorkshire | 2011 |
| Anglia | 2011 |
| Central | 2011 |
| Meridian | 2012 |

| | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| Carlton/LWT | 2012 |
| Tyne Tees | 2012 |
| Ulster | 2012 |
| Channel | to be announced |

If you would like

- to receive this information in large print

phone 0800 00 99 66 (free call) or write to Age Concern FREEPOST (SWB 30375), Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7ZZ. Find out more about Age Concern England online at www.ageconcern.org.uk

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IS/29
GJ/AN
January 2006