[GB] Analogue Switch-Off

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The ITC published its response at the beginning of September to the Government's consultation document on "Television: the Digital Future" which considers how and when analogue broadcasting could end. The ITC argues that if viewers' expectations are to be met and social exclusion is to be avoided, digital television needs to maintain both the near-universal availability of analogue transmissions, (i.e., to over 99% of homes) and the greatly-valued regional services. Digital terrestrial television is the only platform which can satisfy these criteria, provided that, at the point of analogue switch-off, some of the frequencies released are retained for broadcasting purposes, but a substantial part of the capacity released will still be available for other uses. http://services.obs.coe.int/en/index.htm If the equipment in viewers' homes is not to be scrapped prematurely, the final switch-off of analogue is many years away. Moreover, alternative frequency use will not simply emerge. It needs to be carefully planned and structured (a lesson from the switch-off in 1985 of the old 405 line VHF black and white service). Therefore, according to the ITC, there is no advantage in setting a target date now when viewers' attitudes to digital are untested. However, specifying the criteria for switch-off would be more useful. Viewers who have until then declined to purchase digital equipment need sufficient warning to make their arrangements; but too lengthy a period between announcement and switch-off will reduce its effectiveness as a warning to viewers. As a basis for discussion the ITC suggests that analogue transmission should cease, say, five years after digital penetration accounts for 75% of TV sets then in use. The five years notice provides an incentive for the replacement of the remaining analogue sets to digital, and a reasonable amount of time in which it could be achieved.

Television: The Digital Future. The Independent Television Commission's View.

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