[GB] Official Report on Progress Towards Digital Switchover

IRIS 2003-7:1/16

Tony Prosser
University of Bristol Law School

As required by section 33 of the Broadcasting Act 1996, the BBC and the Independent Television Commission (the regulator of commercial broadcasting) have published a report on progress towards digital switchover in the United Kingdom.

In 1999, the UK Government set criteria for the achievement of digital switchover (see IRIS 1999-9: 15). These were that:

- the 99.4% of the population able to receive analogue broadcasts should be able to receive them digitally;

- 95% of consumers must have access to digital equipment; and

- digital equipment must be affordable for the vast majority of people.

A "target window" for switchover of 2006-2010 was set on the basis that these targets could be achieved during this period.

The report found that good progress has been made towards meeting the criteria. Nearly all viewers could have access to digital by one or other platform (satellite, cable or terrestrial). About 40% of households had taken up digital, at least for their first set. There had been considerable uncertainty during 2002 due to the collapse of ITV Digital, but this has now been resolved with the launch of the free-to-air service, Freeview, operated by the BBC with significant input from BSkyB. Low cost set-top boxes are now available for digital terrestrial broadcasts, and the take-up figures for the new service have been encouraging. However, digital terrestrial broadcasts will only be available to about 80% of households, even after an aerial upgrade. The BBC also intends to broadcast in the clear on digital satellite, rather than using BSkyB's encryption service.

The take-up projections for digital ranged from 58% to 78% of households over the next five years. They suggest that it is unlikely that the criteria for switchover will be met in the early part of the target window. However, they may be met towards the end of it, near 2010. This is on the assumption that progress is achieved by the market alone; the report also suggests a number of actions the Government could take to assist, such as announcing a firm switchover date,

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requiring digital tuners to be included in new television sets, and making a public commitment to high levels of digital terrestrial coverage after switchover. Switchover could also take place on a rolling region-by-region basis.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport welcomed the report and is examining the proposed government actions. A further report will be produced in 2004.

"A Report on Progress Towards Digital Switchover", Independent Television Commission and the BBC, April 2003

http://www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk/pdfs/ITC_BBC_switchover_report.pdf

"New Report Shows Good Progress Towards Digital Switchover", Department for Culture Media and Sport Press Release 41/03, 4 April 2003

http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/press_notices/archive_2003/dcms41_2003.htm?properties=archive%5F2003%2C%2Fbroadcasting%2FQuickLinks%2Fpress%5Fnotices%2Fdefault%2C&month=

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