[GB] Licence Conditions to Achieve Near-Universal Coverage of Digital Terrestrial Television after Switchover

IRIS 2007-2:1/22

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Analogue broadcasting in the UK is to be switched off in regional stages between 2008 and 2012. Digital television in the form of Freeview (a joint venture between the BBC and commercial broadcasters) has been phenomenally successful and has contributed (together with digital satellite broadcasting) to a figure of over 73% of households receiving digital television by September 2006. Ofcom, the UK communications regulator, has now confirmed details of licence conditions to ensure that coverage by digital terrestrial television is achieved after switchover, to a degree equivalent to that of current analogue television coverage.

Freeview is transmitted on television multiplexes, five out of six of these being licensed by Ofcom (the sixth is operated by the BBC under its Royal Charter and Agreement). For the two multiplex licence holders carrying public service television channels, coverage of 98.5% of the UK population will be required (current coverage for digital terrestrial television is 73%). To achieve this, the multiplexes will be required to broadcast from all 1,154 sites currently used for analogue transmissions, and nine additional transmission relays will be necessary. Lists of sites from which transmissions must be made are included in the conditions. The three commercial multiplexes not carrying public service broadcasting channels will be required to achieve the current 73% coverage from 81 sites, though this will increase to 90% after switchover, due to efficiencies from switching off analogue transmission. An annual report on compliance will have to be sent to Ofcom by holders of multiplex licences. Multiplex and digital terrestrial television licence holders will also each be required to cooperate with other parties in the switchover process. Similar conditions on coverage apply to the BBC under its new Agreement with the Secretary of State (see IRIS 2006-5: 13).

Ofcom, "Ofcom Sets Digital Switchover Related Licence Conditions", Press Release of 7 December 2006

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media/news/2006/12/nr_20061207

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