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Dear Colleague,

SWITCHOVER TO DIGITAL TELEVISION

As promised, we are writing to update you on preparations for the switchover to digital television.

In September 2005, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport announced the UK would switch over to fully digital TV broadcasting between 2008 and 2012. This will bring enormous benefits to all viewers, the broadcasting industries, the creative industries and the UK economy.

Since that announcement, consumers have continued to show considerable enthusiasm for digital television. Over 72% of UK homes have now converted at least one TV set to digital – the highest level in the world.

Awareness of digital switchover continues to grow. Research published today by Digital UK, the independent not-for-profit organisation set up to lead switchover, found while nationally 66% of people are aware of switchover, in the Border TV region, the first to switch, awareness has reached an encouraging 82%.

Digital UK launched their national and regional communications campaign in May 2006. This campaign raised awareness and understanding of switchover and we look forward to more progress as Digital UK continues its important work.

Targeted Help Scheme

The Government is determined to prevent any “digital divide” when the nation switches to digital television. In September 2005, we announced those who most need help would be given support through switchover. A recently completed trial in Bolton clearly showed that older and disabled people embrace digital television if they have appropriate help and advice through the process of switching.

Extra help with switchover will be available to:

- all households with one person aged 75 or over;
- all households with one person with a significant disability (receiving attendance allowance or disability living allowance);

- all households where one person is registered blind or partially sighted.

Help will be available free of charge to the poorest eligible households (e.g. those receiving pension credit, income support or jobseekers allowance); other households will pay a modest fee.

Assistance will consist of equipment designed for the needs of older and disabled users and will also offer participants:

- an installation visit
- replacement aerial if necessary
- follow-up support
- specific assistance for blind and partially sighted viewers.

We do not want those who are eligible to have to go through a lengthy claims procedure in order to get the support. So, to enable eligible households to be identified and contacted, we will seek a suitable legislative opportunity to ask for Parliament's approval to use information held by the Department for Work and Pensions. The data-sharing provisions will be narrowly drawn and similar in scope to the Television Licences (Disclosure of Information) Act 2000, which allows DWP data to be shared with the BBC specifically for the free TV licence scheme for those aged 75 and over.

Timetable for switchover

The start date for switchover in each TV region is expected to follow the timetable set out by the Secretary of State for DCMS, with the Border TV region switching first, starting in the second half of 2008:

| Switchover date | TV region |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Starting in 2008 | Border |
| Starting in 2009 | West Country, Wales, Granada |
| Starting in 2010 | West, Grampian, Scottish |
| Starting in 2011 | Central, Yorkshire, Anglia |
| Starting in 2012 | Meridian, London, Tyne Tees, Ulster |

Within regions, switchover will be a transmitter-by-transmitter process. The detailed planning that will enable details of when each main transmitter and its relays will switch over to digital to be set out is continuing.

A significant milestone passed recently with the successful conclusion of the Regional Radio Conference in Geneva on 16 June. This conference agreed all the key aspects of international coordination on use of the radio spectrum that support our plans for switchover in the UK. This is a major step forward. We now need to conclude detailed agreements with our near neighbours in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Ireland in order to finalise the timetable for the conversion of all the transmitters in the UK network.

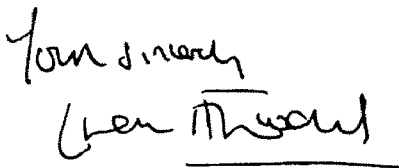
Switchover in the Border TV region

In March 2005, the citizens of Ferryside and Llansteffan in West Wales were the first community in the UK to switch over to fully digital TV, as participants in a technical trial. We are pleased to announce today that Whitehaven in Cumbria has been chosen to be the first town to go all digital, leading out digital switchover, in the autumn of 2007.

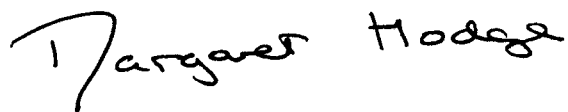
Further, we can confirm that switchover in the rest of the Border TV region will start in the fourth quarter of 2008, with the Selkirk transmitter and its dependent relays (which serve the eastern part of the Scottish borders). This will be completed in the second quarter of 2009, with the conversion of the Caldbeck transmitter and its dependent relays (which serve Cumbria, and Dumfries and Galloway). The timing of switchover in Whitehaven, 12 months before Selkirk, will contribute to ensuring the success of switchover.

Digital UK will be leading the Whitehaven flagship project. This will include providing advice and information for consumers to help them to switch to digital TV, working with retailers and aerial installers (to support them in providing a good service for consumers), and delivering the targeted help scheme.

Later in the year, we hope to be able to provide further information on the transmitter timetable for the West Country, Wales and Granada.



SHAUN WOODWARD MP
Minister for Broadcasting
Department for Culture, Media and Sport



RT HON MARGARET HODGE MP
Minister for Industry and the Regions
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