

END OF ANALOGUE ERA AS SWITCHOVER COMPLETES

*Digital TV signals boosted to reach 26 million homes
Airwaves released for 4G mobile services
PM praises ‘biggest change for generation’*

The UK ended more than 70 years of analogue broadcasting today with the completion of digital television switchover.

Switchover has boosted digital terrestrial TV (Freeview) coverage to 10 million viewers in reception blackspots across the UK and cleared airwaves for new uses, including the next generation of mobile broadband services.

The final stage of the change got underway in the early hours of this morning after Olympic gold medallist Dame Mary Peters switched off the last analogue signals in the UK at the Divis transmitter, just outside Belfast and Freeview signals were boosted across Northern Ireland.

Prime Minister David Cameron said: ‘The UK’s switch to digital television has been the biggest single change to broadcasting for a generation. It has delivered more choice for millions of viewers and paved the way for exciting new services, securing our role as a global player in broadcasting and creative industries.’

Digital UK led co-ordination of switchover, including transmitter upgrades and the viewer information campaign. The Switchover Help Scheme has helped more than 1.3 million older and disabled viewers make the switch to digital TV and transmission company Arqiva undertook the re-engineering of more than 1,100 transmitter sites.

David Scott, Chief Executive of Digital UK, said: ‘Today is a milestone for UK television. Over the last five years switchover has modernised the terrestrial TV network and ensured that the benefits of digital are available to everyone. I want to thank the many organisations which played a part in this success and the viewers who generally took the change in their stride. I am delighted we have not only completed the task on time but also significantly under budget.’

Following the completion of switchover, some airwaves previously used for television will be auctioned for 4G high-speed mobile broadband. 4G is the fourth generation of mobile phone technology, ideally suited for video streaming, email, messenger services and social networking.

- ends; notes follow –

Notes to editors

1. Digital TV switchover is the process of converting the UK's terrestrial television system to digital. Since 2008, analogue channels have been switched off region by region and replaced with free-to-air digital TV and radio services (Freeview). Switchover has extended Freeview coverage virtually to the whole of the UK and free up airwaves for 4G mobile broadband.
2. Dame Mary Peters won gold in the Women's Pentathlon in the 1972 Munich Olympics.
3. Boosting coverage - before switchover, Freeview TV was available from 80 transmitter sites only. Today Freeview channels are available from more than 1,100 sites serving more than 26 million homes.
4. The switchover campaign 2008-2012: The viewer information campaign featuring switchover robot, Digit Al, and support from a network of 3,500 national and local charities helped ensure viewers were ready when analogue TV signals were switched off in their area. During the course of the campaign, Digital UK's advice line handled more than two million calls from viewers.
5. Budgets and savings: The national viewer information campaign was funded by the BBC with an original budget of £201 million. Digital UK estimates it has made savings of 37 per cent (£74 million) over the course of switchover.

The Switchover Help Scheme has spent around £260 million installing digital TV equipment for more than 1.3 million eligible older and disabled people. In all, £603 million was ringfenced within the BBC Licence Fee to pay for the Help Scheme, but the BBC has spent less than half that budget and more than £340 million is being returned to the Government.

6. The lead organisations:
 - Digital UK is the independent, not-for-profit organisation established in 2005 to lead the implementation of digital switchover. It is jointly owned and funded by the public-service broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5), and the digital multiplex operators.
 - The Switchover Help Scheme is run by the BBC under an agreement with the Government to help older and disabled people make the change to digital TV. More information is available from helpscheme.co.uk.
 - Arqiva - The engineering work for TV switchover was undertaken by Arqiva, as owner and operator of the transmitter network.

Images are available to media free of charge at digitaluk.co.uk/press. Follow us on Twitter for live updates on switchover on twitter @DigitalUK.

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