

## Broadcasters collaborate to secure future of free-to-view TV

The UK's top broadcast companies have signed a new five-year agreement to accelerate Freeview's transition to a fully hybrid platform, providing the best in free-to-view live and on-demand TV.

The collaboration between BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and network operator Arqiva – the four shareholders of Digital UK - will see an investment of £125 million over the next five years to build on the success of Freeview Play, the UK market leader in free-to-view connected TV. Alongside the ongoing support for the Freeview platform, new developments will include a mobile app and improvements in content discoverability and navigation. Since launch in 2015, more than three-and-a-half million Freeview Play products have been sold in the UK from brands including Panasonic, LG, Sony, and Toshiba, accounting for 60% of smart TV sales. The service gives UK viewers a seamless combination of live and on-demand content all in one place with no monthly subscription.

Digital UK will lead on implementing the new strategy, focusing on product development and working closely with sister organisation, Freeview, on a refreshed marketing approach and brand positioning. The new investment will help Freeview exploit the trend towards 'cord cutting' as viewers build their own 'skinny bundles' combining free-to-view TV with low-cost streaming services. Since 2016 Freeview has grown its base of main sets by over a million homes to 11.4m cementing its position as the UK's largest TV platform. Around 19 million homes watch Freeview on either the main or a secondary set.

Key areas of development will include:

- A new mobile app enabling viewers to access live and on-demand content on a range of smartphones and tablets, launching later this year
- Restart functionality allowing viewers switching on mid-way through a programme to watch from the start using catch-up links built into the Freeview Play TV guide
- Improved navigation through voice search, and further evolution of the Freeview Electronic Programme Guide (EPG) on televisions

The agreement to invest in developing Freeview as a fully hybrid platform reflects the continuing strength of linear TV but also the growth of on-demand viewing.<sup>1</sup> Ofcom recently highlighted challenges created by new players such as Netflix and Amazon, calling for more industry collaboration to maintain the prominence of PSB content on connected TV interfaces.<sup>2</sup>

Jonathan Thompson, CEO of Digital UK, said: 'As the UK's TV landscape becomes increasingly impacted by global players, this new commitment from our shareholders is a major boost for UK viewers. Building on this spirit of collaboration, we will not only safeguard free-to-view TV but reinvent it for a new age of viewing.'

Joining forces is a strategy that the head of the world's foremost alliance of public service media, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), supports, "Technological innovation increasingly requires new models of co-operation and investment to meet ever changing public needs. The EBU has always

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<sup>1</sup> Source BARB

<sup>2</sup> PSB in the Digital Age, Ofcom, 8 March 2018

championed open innovation initiatives for Public Service Media. This new deal provides added value and new services for viewers across the UK, especially for online and streaming consumption,” said Noel Curran, Director General of the EBU.

End

## **Notes**

### **About Digital UK**

Digital UK supports Freeview viewers and channels. The company manages strategy, policy and service development for digital terrestrial television (DTT) in the UK and provides day-to-day technical management of the Freeview Electronic Programme Guide (EPG). Digital UK is owned by the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Arqiva and has also led development of Freeview Play, a hybrid platform bringing together free-to-view DTT and catch-up services in a range of TVs and set-top boxes.