

NORTHERN IRELAND HEADS FOR DIGITAL ERA

500,000 viewers will gain new way to receive TV

The date for digital TV switchover in Northern Ireland was announced today, promising more channels and better pictures for thousands of households.

Analogue television will close on **24 October 2012** and be replaced by a stronger Freeview signal that will reach virtually all Northern Ireland households, including half-a-million viewers who cannot receive it now.

Viewers who are still watching analogue TV – an estimated 100,000 households in Northern Ireland – need to switch to either Freeview, cable or satellite in the coming year, or face a blank screen at switchover.

Northern Ireland will be one of the biggest winners from the UK switchover process, with Freeview coverage boosted from 66% to 98% of households.¹

Digital UK and the Switchover Help Scheme are preparing to launch a public information campaign to ensure viewers are ready for the change. The campaign, due to kick off in the spring, will include roadshows, advertising and an information leaflet sent to every home. The Help Scheme will write to eligible older and disabled people offering support in making the switch, including equipment, installation if needed and aftercare.²

On 10 October 2012, two weeks before switchover completes, analogue BBC Two will be turned off as a final reminder to viewers who have yet to switch.

Denis Wolinski, Digital UK's National Manager in Northern Ireland, said: "Today is an exciting day for television in Northern Ireland.

"This announcement paves the way for the end of analogue TV and the dawn of a fully digital age in which everyone can enjoy more channels, more choice and better pictures. Digital UK will ensure people know what to do, and that advice and practical support are available to those who need it."

Analogue signals will also be turned off in the Republic of Ireland on 24 October 2012, the Government of Ireland announced today, in order to make the transition to digital as straightforward as possible for TV viewers and the broadcasters.

– end; notes follow –

Get set for switchover with Digital UK's Top Five Tips:

1. Check out the different ways of getting digital TV, including subscription-free options, at Digital UK's postcode checker, which provides details of digital services available in your area. Visit digitaluk.co.uk or call **08456 50 50 50**.
2. Remember the Switchover Help Scheme will offer equipment and practical support to older and disabled viewers. It will write to eligible viewers in the run-up to switchover. Call 0800 40 85 900 or visit helpscheme.co.uk for more details.
3. Don't throw out your old TV - almost all sets can be converted with a digital box.
4. Your existing aerial should also be fine for digital if it receives a good picture now.
5. If you have Freeview, check you know how to retune your TV or box – you'll need to do it at both stages of switchover. For more information visit digitaluk.co.uk/retuning.

1. **Channel availability:** Before switchover, Freeview channels are available from main transmitter sites only, offering viewers with digital TVs or set top boxes a line-up of more than 40 channels. Switchover will see local relay transmitters upgraded to digital. After switchover, relay transmitters will broadcast around 15 Freeview TV channels, including BBC One, BBC Two, UTV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 plus associated services such as BBC Three. Viewers can use the postcode checker at digitaluk.co.uk to check channel availability in their area. Digital TV is also available via cable, satellite and broadband.
2. **The Switchover Help Scheme:** People aged 75 and over, eligible for certain disability benefits, registered blind or partially sighted or living in care homes are entitled to practical help from the BBC-run Switchover Help Scheme. For £40, they will be given equipment to switch one TV per household to digital. They will be able to have that equipment installed if they want it, a demonstration of how it works and a number to call while they get used to things. If they're eligible and also on income-related benefits, the help will be free. Everyone eligible will be contacted directly before switchover. More information is available on 0800 40 85 900 and online at helpscheme.co.uk.
3. **How switchover happens:** Analogue services will be switched off in two stages. At stage one (10 October 2012), analogue BBC Two will be switched off and the first group of Freeview digital channels will become available from relay transmitters for the first time. At stage two (24 October 2012) the remaining analogue channels will be permanently switched off and replaced with additional digital TV, radio and text services.
4. Northern Ireland switchover marks the completion of the UK's digital switchover programme.

Digital TV switchover is the process of converting the UK's terrestrial television system to digital. Between now and 2012, analogue channels will be switched off region by region and replaced with free-to-air digital TV and radio services (Freeview). Switchover will extend Freeview coverage virtually to the whole of the UK and free up airwaves for new services such as ultra-fast wireless broadband and mobile television. Digital services are also available via broadband, cable and satellite.

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, Channel 5 and S4C), 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.

The engineering work for TV switchover is being 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 at twitter.com/DigitalUK.

Contacts

Jane Wells, JPR: 028 9076 0066 / 07860 288 860 jane.wells@jprni.com

Andrea Clements, JPR: 028 9076 0066 / 07808 761 857 andrea.clements@jprni.com

digitaluk.co.uk/press