

Information Sheet

28 Digital Switchover

The Government is changing the way the UK receives television (TV) signals. Most people currently receive analogue signals to view television; these will be phased out and replaced by digital signals. The switchover started in late 2007 and will finish in 2012. To carry on watching television, you will need to decide how you want to receive digital signals. You may also need to buy new products to enable your television to receive digital signals.

This information sheet explains what the digital switchover is, when it will happen in your area, what you will need to do, and what financial and practical help is available.

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Digital Switchover was printed in August 2009. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this information sheet is correct. However, things do change, so it is always a good idea to seek advice on your personal situation. If you would like further information on the digital switchover, you can call **Digital UK** on **0845 650 5050**.

What is digital TV?

Digital television is a way of transmitting TV pictures and sound as computerised bits of information. Many people already receive digital signals, but others still have a traditional TV set that picks up analogue signals.

What is the digital switchover?

The Government wants to change the way everyone in the UK gets their television, by switching from analogue to digital. At the moment the five main channels (known as terrestrial channels) that most people get, are broadcast as both analogue and digital signals. TV stations have started to 'switch off' the analogue signals and broadcast only digital signals. This is called the **digital switchover**. TV stations will switch to digital region by region until the whole of the UK is completely digital, by 2012.

Why is the UK switching to digital?

The UK is switching to digital TV because analogue TV signals, which have been used since the 1930s, take up a lot of air space and digital television cannot operate properly across the whole country while analogue signals are still around. When the analogue signals are switched off it will free up this air space and allow TV stations to launch full digital services.

Benefits of switching to digital

- You will get more TV channels (including Channel Five if you cannot get it now).
- You will get new digital-only radio channels.
- You will get new features such as an on-screen TV guide.
- You may get improved picture and sound quality with digital TV.
- You will get interactive features via a red button on your remote control.

- You can get special features such as access to subtitles and British Sign Language (BSL) (for those with hearing loss) or audio description (for those who are sight-impaired). Audio description is additional commentary that helps people who are partially sighted or blind to understand body language, facial expressions, costume, scenery and action sequences, as well as dialogue.

The planned **timetable** for the switchover is:

Year of switchover	TV region
Completed: October 2007	Whitehaven and Copeland
Completed: 2008	Border (including Isle of Man)
Starting in 2009	West Country, Granada, Wales
Starting in 2010	West, STV North and STV Central, Channel Islands
Starting in 2011	Anglia, Central and Yorkshire
Starting in 2012	London, Meridian, Tyne Tees and Ulster (UTV)

Some areas of the UK have switched over already; the rest of the UK will switchover between 2009 and 2012.

You can check which TV region you are in by seeing which ITV news service you get. You can also check by looking at Teletext if you have access to it.

You should be given plenty of warning before your area switches to digital and be given advice on what you need to do. If you want to know when your area will be switching over to digital TV, you can call **Digital UK** on **0845 650 5050**.

What will I have to do to for the digital switchover?

You need to make sure that your television set(s) can receive digital TV signals. In this section we look at the four options to choose from to enable your television set(s) to receive digital TV. We also look at whether you may need to buy new products, which companies provide the options listed and how you can pay for digital TV i.e. whether as a monthly subscription or a one-off payment.

The options for receiving digital signals are through:

- an aerial
- a satellite dish
- a cable
- your telephone line.

You need to check whether the options listed above are available in your area before making a decision about which option you choose because not every option is available in every part of the country. You can find out what options are available in your area by visiting the **Digital UK** website at www.digitaluk.co.uk You could also call **Digital UK** on **0845 650 5050** (textphone **0845 234 0380**).

Getting digital TV through an aerial

Getting digital TV through **an aerial** is the option closest to how you currently receive the analogue TV you get at the moment. You will need to do one of the following:

- buy a digital **set-top box**, that plugs into your existing TV which will receive Freeview; **or**
- buy or rent a new television (often called an **integrated digital TV** or **iDTV**) with a built-in digital tuner that picks up Freeview.

There are currently two companies which provide digital TV using Freeview: Freeview and TopUp TV.

If you choose to get Freeview from the company Freeview, you will get over 40 digital TV channels including the channels you can get now – BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel Five. You will also be able to receive over 20 digital radio channels. For more information call the information line at **Freeview** on **0870 111 1270**.

Top Up TV gives you over 40 Freeview channels to choose from. You need a product called a TopUp TV Anytime digital TV recorder to receive this way of getting digital TV. For more information visit TopUp TV at www.topuptv.com or call **Top Up TV** on **0844 415 2020**.

Will I need a new aerial?

It is unlikely that you will need to get a new TV aerial to watch digital TV. Portable aerials – the type that sit on top of your TV – may not work very well. As a rule of thumb, if you get a good analogue signal now, you should be able to get a good digital signal after switchover. If you have a poor analogue signal now, you should consider having your aerial checked by a **Registered Digital Installer (RDI)**. To find an installer in your area, visit www.rdi-lb.tv or call **01353 644040**. You can also contact the Confederation of Aerial Industries (CAI) Plus Scheme which can provide you with details of installers in your area which have been checked by the CAI; its contact details are in the Useful contacts section starting on page 13. You could also call **Digital UK** on **0845 650 5050**. You may also like to read a copy of the leaflet *Is your TV aerial ready for digital switchover?* produced by Digital UK. You can download a copy from its website or call it on 0845 650 5050.

The cost of a new aerial for a digital set-top box will vary because it will depend on where you live and the type of aerial you need for the conditions in your area. Ricability contains independent advice on indoor aerials. For advice on choosing a suitable aerial, see the section called Buying new products, starting on page 10.

Where to buy a set-top box or idTV

You can buy a set-top box or idTV from most electrical retailers and often large supermarkets. Set-top boxes vary in price and how easy they are to use, so try to look at a few products before buying one. For more information about where to get products that are suitable for the digital switchover, see the section called Buying new products, starting on page 10.

Do I need a set-top box for each TV in my house?

Yes, you will need a set-top box for each TV in your house.

Do I pay a one-off fee or a monthly subscription?

Whether you pay a one-off fee or a monthly subscription will depend on which company you choose to get your digital signals from. If you choose to get your digital signals from Freeview, you will pay a one-off fee for a set-top box; if you choose to get your digital signals from TopUp TV you will have to pay a monthly subscription.

While getting digital TV through an aerial can be the cheapest option, it is important to look at all the options available to make sure you are getting the service and products that are most suitable for you.

Getting digital TV through a satellite

Another option for getting digital TV is through a **satellite**. You will need to have a small satellite dish attached to the outside of your house, and a receiver box for each TV.

Satellite is provided by two companies: a company called **Sky** and a company called **freesat** (a digital TV service from the BBC and ITV). Sky provides digital TV under two names: Sky and Freesat from Sky.

You can get up to 900 TV channels from Sky (depending on which TV package you choose), around 140 TV channels (including digital radio channels) if you sign up to freesat and up to 240 channels if you sign up to Freesat from Sky (depending on which package you choose). These channels include the usual five terrestrial ones you have currently. Bear in mind that some TV packages are more expensive than others so make sure you check what the cost will be before you decide which package you want.

For more information about the service provided by **Sky** call **08448 222 035** or visit its website at www.sky.com. For information about the service provided by **Freesat from Sky** call **0844 241 0595** or visit its website at www.freesatfromsky.co.uk Or for more information about **freesat** call **0845 313 0053** or visit its website at www.freesat.co.uk

Before you install a satellite dish, you need to make sure that you have space and always **ask permission** from your local council first.

Do I pay a one-off fee or a monthly subscription?

This will depend on which company you choose. You will need to pay an initial one-off payment for services provided by Freesat from Sky and freesat. For the service provided by Sky, you will have to pay a monthly subscription fee. If you sign up with Sky you will have to sign a contract for a minimum of 12 months so think carefully about whether you want this financial commitment.

Getting digital TV through a cable

A third option for getting digital TV is through a **cable**. You will need a cable connection to your house and a set-top box. Check whether cable is available in your area as it is only available in areas covered by the cable network. To check whether you can get cable in your area, call **Digital UK** on **08456 50 50 50**.

You can get cable TV from **Virgin Media** on **0845 840 7777**. If you live on the Isle of Wight, you can also get cable from **Wight Cable** on **01983 242424**, and if you live in Scotland or the north of England, you can get cable from **Small World Media** on **0800 070 6093**. You may also be able to get Cable from **Newtel Solutions**; call it on 01534 506400 for more information.

Do I pay a one-off fee or a monthly subscription?

You can only get digital TV through a cable by paying a monthly subscription. You will have to sign a contract, the length of which depends on which company you sign up with. Wight Cable offers three time lengths for contracts: six, 12 and 18 months. Virgin Media will ask you to sign a contract for 12 months and Small World Media will ask you to sign a contract for either 12 or 18 months. You may also have to pay a connection fee. The cost will vary, depending on which package of TV channels you choose so **make sure you choose a package of channels within your budget**.

Getting digital TV through your telephone line using broadband

The fourth option for getting digital TV is through your telephone line using a broadband connection. Two companies provide this service: **Tiscali TV** and **BT Vision**. For further information about the service Tiscali TV provides, call **0844 875 0607**; website www.tiscali.co.uk For further information about the service **BT Vision** provides, call **0800 800 900** or visit its website at www.btvision.bt.com

Do I pay a one-off fee or a monthly subscription?

You can choose to pay a one-off fee or a monthly subscription from BT Vision, depending on how you want to get digital TV. **You will need to sign a contract of either 12 or 18 months**. If you sign up to Tiscali TV, you will need to pay a monthly subscription for the services it provides and you have to sign a contract for a minimum of 18 months.

Questions and answers about the digital switchover

Can I still use my Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) or DVD recorder?

Yes, you will be able to use your VCR or DVD recorder when your region switches over to digital, but you will only be able to:

- play existing recordings and pre-recorded videotapes;
- watch a programme and record it at the same time; and
- set the VCR or DVD recorder to record programmes when you are not in.

You will not be able to watch one programme on BBC1 and record another programme on ITV.

To be able to record a programme on one channel while you watch one on another, you will need to buy a **Digital TV recorder (DTR)**. You can choose from three types of digital TV recorders:

- a recorder that records on to a hard drive
- a recorder that records on to a DVD
- a recorder that allows you to do both.

You can get a digital TV recorder **with a twin tuner** which will enable your TV to receive digital signals as well as allow you to carry out the tasks listed above.

The benefits of buying a digital TV recorder include being able to:

- watch one channel while you record another
- pause and rewind live TV
- record a whole series at once; and
- record television programmes at the touch of a button.

Many companies providing digital TV may offer or sell you a digital TV recorder as part of its service. Contact your service provider for more information about digital TV recorders it provides.

For more information about buying digital TV recorders, and other products that will work after the digital switchover, see the section Buying new products, starting on page 10.

What will happen if I have a communal aerial?

You may have a communal aerial if you live in a care home or a block of flats. The communal aerial may need to be upgraded to work for the digital switchover. Talk to your landlord, council or managing agent about how they plan to deal with this. Digital Television has produced a brief called *Digital Switchover A Good Practice Briefing Special Edition*. It is aimed at housing professionals such as social and private sector landlords and managing agents, but it may also be of interest to residents' groups who want to raise the issues discussed in the brief with their landlord or managing agent. You can download it from its website at www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk

What will happen if I do not switch to digital?

If you don't switch to digital TV, your TV won't be able to receive television signals when your region switches to digital; you will only be able to use it to watch video tapes through your VCR or DVD, or play computer games.

What if I need information in large print, audio or Braille?

If you need information in large print, audio or Braille, you need to call Digital UK on **0845 650 5050**. You will be able to ask for an information pack to be sent to you when the region you live in switches over to digital TV.

Will my radio be affected?

No, your radio will not be affected by the digital switchover. In fact, you may have access to more radio stations. For information about Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) visit the BBC's website at www.bbc.co.uk/digital or call Digital UK on 0845 650 5050.

Will I be able to carry on using my television?

In the majority of cases people will be able to carry on using their existing television, even if it is a black and white one. Only in rare cases will people not be able to convert their television over to digital. If you have an old TV, without the large rectangular SCART socket in the back, you should ask for a set-top box with an **RF modulator** built in.

Will I need a new TV licence?

No. You **do not need** a new TV licence for getting digital TV. You will be able to carry on using your existing TV licence. Remember that if you or someone

you live with is **over 75, you are entitled to a free TV licence** for your main home. Also, if you are over 60 or disabled, and live in certain types of accommodation (some sheltered housing schemes or a care home where the TV is not communal) you may qualify for an **Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) Concessionary TV Licence**, which currently costs £7.50. If you are blind or severely sight impaired, you can get a 50 per cent reduction off your TV licence. For more information see our information sheet no. 29, *Entitlements for the Over-60s*. Alternatively, you can contact **TV Licensing** on **0844 800 6790**.

Buying new products

If you are thinking about buying new products for the digital switchover, you need to make sure that it will be able to receive digital signals. You can do this by looking for products which display the **Digital Tick logo** (a black outlined box with a pink coloured tick in the middle).

You may need to think carefully about whether the product you want is suitable for your needs: for example, if you find it difficult to operate small buttons, you may need to look for products which have larger buttons.

If you need to buy new products, **Ricability**, an independent consumer charity, is a good place to start. Ricability provides independent advice on products that are suitable for the digital switchover. It has tested a range of products such as aerials, digital TV recorders, set-top boxes and iDTVs. To look at one of the product reviews, you need to visit its website at www.ricability-digitaltv.org.uk If you are thinking about buying a set-top box, Ricability has a section called 'Features to look for' which may help you decide which model will suit you.

If you do not have access to a computer, call Ricability on 020 7427 2460 to ask for information on its website to be printed out and sent to you. You can also ask for information from its website to be put on to tape or CD.

Ricability has a **jargon buster** on its website which contains words or phrases you may be unfamiliar with or find hard to understand.

You could also ask your local electrical retailer for advice on products you want to buy from it.

Buying energy-efficient products

If you want to buy energy-efficient products, look for the **Energy Saving Recommended logo** (this has the wording 'energy saving recommended' on it). Products with this logo will use less energy than the average product. If you would like more information about energy-saving products, contact the Energy Saving Trust by calling 0800 512 012 or visit www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

Buying new products at home

If a doorstep salesperson visits you in your own home to sell products to you, remember that you do not have to buy it from them if you do not want to. Doorstep salespeople can provide a valuable service, but not all callers are welcome or genuine. For more information on genuine doorstep selling, bogus callers and how to avoid being pressured into buying, see our free information sheet, no.19 *Protecting Yourself When Buying Goods or Services at Home*.

Financial and practical help

The Government has announced a **Switchover Help Scheme** for the digital switchover which aims to make sure no one is left behind when the UK switches to digital TV. The help provided will convert one TV set to digital.

You will be eligible for the help scheme if:

- you are aged 75 years or over; or
- you are registered as being blind or partially sighted; or
- you receive Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Constant Attendance Allowance (under the Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit scheme), and Constant Attendance Allowance and War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement (under the pre-2005 War Pensions scheme); or
- you have lived in a care home for six months or more.

How much will this help cost?

The switchover help scheme will ask you to contribute £40 towards the cost of the help provided outlined below, unless you receive Pension Credit, Income Support or income-based Job Seekers Allowance, in which case the help will be free.

The help will include:

- installing easy-to-use products in your home
- help with installing the products and showing you how to use it; and
- someone you can call for help if you need advice getting used to the new products.

When will I get help to switchover?

If you are eligible for help the Switchover Help Scheme will write to you in advance to find out whether you need help to switch over. For more information about whether you will be eligible for help and what help you will get, you can ask for a copy of the leaflet *Code of service standards booklet* by calling **0800 408 5900** or download a copy at **www.helpscheme.co.uk**

Useful contacts

Organisations that provide information about getting an aerial

Confederation of Aerial Industries Limited (CAI)

Communications House
41A Market Street
Watford
Hertfordshire WD18 0PN
Tel: 01923 803030
Web: www.cai.org.uk

If you need to upgrade your TV aerial to get digital TV, it is a good idea to contact an installer through the CAI. CAI has a code of practice, its members carry ID cards and it offers a 12-month guarantee for aerial installations.

Registered Digital Installer – licencing body (RDI)

Tel: 01353 644040
Web: www.rdi-lb.tv

Can provide details of registered digital installers in the area you live in.

Organisations that provide information about the digital switchover

BBC

Web: www.bbc.co.uk/digital

Provides information on the digital switchover, including what it is and what options are available to you.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Tel: 020 7211 6200
Web: www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk

Provides information on why the government wants to switch to digital. It also produces a booklet called *Analogue to digital – A guidance booklet*, which you can download from its website.

Digital-TV

Web: www.digital-tv.co.uk

Provides information on the digital switchover, and information on some of the main service providers which provide digital TV.

Digital UK is responsible for ensuring that the public have timely and accurate information about digital switchover. This includes being sent information when your TV region is going digital, and what you have to do to make sure you get the new digital signal. It can also tell you what digital TV options are available in your area, as well as providing information on what financial and practical help is available. It has several Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) areas on its website. For more information visit its website at www.digitaluk.co.uk or call **0845 650 5050**.

RNIB

Royal National Institute for the Blind
105 Judd Street
London WC1H 9NE
Helpline: 0303 123 9999
Web: www.rnib.org.uk

Can provide information on digital TV and how it will affect partially sighted or blind people. It can also explain more about audio description.

Switchover help scheme

Freepost
Switchover Help Scheme
Tel: 0800 408 5900
Textphone: 0800 408 5936
Web: www.helpscheme.co.uk

Can provide information about the help scheme for the digital switchover, including who is eligible and what help is available.

uswitch.com

Web: www.uswitch.com

Compares different options for getting digital TV.

Which? magazine

Which? magazine and website provides independent consumer advice on products needed for the digital switchover. Your local library may hold copies of *Which?* magazine or you can subscribe to it and its website information. Visit www.which.co.uk or call **01992 822800** .

Product information

Ricability

Tel: 020 7427 2460

Web: www.ricability-digitaltv.org.uk

Can provide independent advice on products that are suitable for the digital switchover.

Digital TV providers

Through an aerial

Freeview

Tel: 0870 111 1270

Web: www.freeview.co.uk

Top Up TV

Tel: 0844 415 2020

Web: www.topuptv.com

Satellite

freesat

Tel: 0845 313 0053

Web: www.freesat.co.uk

Sky

Tel: 08448 222 035

Web: www.sky.com

Freesat from Sky

Tel: 0844 241 0595

Web: www.freesatfromsky.co.uk

Cable

Virgin Media

Tel: 0845 840 7777

Web: www.virginmedia.com

Small World Media

Tel: 0800 070 6093

Web: www.smallworldmedia.com

WightCable (Isle of Wight)

Tel: 01983 242424

Web: www2.wightcable.com

Newtel Solutions

Tel: 01534 506400

Web: www.newtelholdings.biz

Through your telephone line using broadband

Tiscali TV

Tel: 0844 875 0607

Web: www.tiscali.co.uk

BT Vision

Tel: 0800 800 900

Web: www.btvision.bt.com

For further information contact:

Information Resources Team
Help the Aged
207–221 Pentonville Road
London N1 9UZ
Tel: 020 7278 1114

If you have access to the internet you can download our information sheets and advice leaflets by visiting **www.helptheaged.org.uk**

SeniorLine is the free welfare rights advice and information service run by Help the Aged for older people and their carers. Trained advice workers offer free, confidential and impartial advice about:

- welfare and disability benefits
- care at home
- residential care
- housing options and adaptations
- access to health and community services.

Freephone: **0808 800 6565**

Textphone: **0800 26 96 26**

9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday

If you are in **Northern Ireland**, contact **Seniorline** on **0808 808 7575**.

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