

# Information Sheet

## 28 Digital Switchover

The Government is changing the way the UK receives television signals. Most people currently receive analogue signals to view television; these will be phased out and replaced by digital signals. The switchover started late in 2007 and will finish in 2012. To carry on watching television, you will need to choose a **service provider**. You may also need to buy new equipment 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 published in January 2008. 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:

<b>Year of switchover</b>	<b>TV region</b>
<b>October 2007</b>	Whitehaven and Copeland
<b>2008 and 2009</b>	Border
Starting in <b>2009</b>	West Country, Granada
<b>2009 and 2010</b>	Wales
<b>2010 and 2011</b>	West, STV North, STV Central
Starting in <b>2011</b>	Anglia, Central and Yorkshire
Starting in <b>2012</b>	London, Meridian, Tyne Tees and Ulster

Whitehaven and Copeland in Cumbria were the first areas to be switched over; the rest of the UK will switchover between 2008 and 2012. The Channel Islands are scheduled to be switched over early in 2013, but this is subject to change.

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. **You should be given plenty of warning before your area switches to digital, and be given advice on what you need to do.**

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

You need to make sure that your television can receive digital TV signals. To do this you need to make sure you have the right equipment, and choose a way of receiving digital signals (also known as a **platform**). This section looks at which options you can choose from.

The options for receiving digital signals are through:

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

Not every option is available in every part of the country, which means you will need to check whether you are able to get digital TV using the option you would like. You can find out what options are available to you by visiting the **Digital UK** website at [www.digitaluk.co.uk](http://www.digitaluk.co.uk) and putting your postcode into the postcode checker. You could also call the **Digital UK information line** on **0845 650 5050**. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can call its textphone number **0845 234 0380**.

### Subscription or one-off payment

You will also need to choose whether to pay a **one-off fee** to receive your digital TV or pay a **monthly subscription**. If you want to pay a one-off fee, you need to choose **Freeview** or **FreeSat** from Sky. If you want to pay a monthly subscription, you need to choose from **TopUp TV**, **Sky** or **VirginMedia**. All of these options are listed below.

### Through an aerial

Getting digital TV through an aerial is the option closest to how you receive the analogue TV you get at the moment. Digital TV signals will be delivered through your usual television aerial. To get digital TV through an aerial, 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.

Either of these two options will give you your usual TV channels – BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel Five – as well as over 40 extra TV channels. These will include BBC3, BBC4, BBC News 24, Film4, E4 and ITV2. You will also be able to receive over 20 digital radio channels. For more information about Freeview, call **Freeview** on **0870 111 1270**.

If you have more than one TV in your house, you will need a set-top box for

each one. This piece of equipment does not have to be expensive. For more information about equipment which is suitable for the digital switchover, see the 'Buying new equipment' section on page 9.

Another way of getting digital TV through an aerial is by signing up to **TopUp TV**; this gives you additional channels as well as the standard ones. You will need to buy a digital TV recorder, and you will need to pay a monthly fee, but there is no annual contract. Visit its website at [www.topuptv.com](http://www.topuptv.com) You can call **Top Up TV** on **0870 054 3210**.

You could also get Freeview from **BT Vision**. You will need to receive BT Total Broadband to get BT Vision. You will need to pay a one-off connection fee. For more information, visit its website at [www.btvision.bt.com/](http://www.btvision.bt.com/)

How much will this option cost?

The cost of this option varies, depending on how you choose to get TV through an aerial. The cheapest option of getting digital TV through an aerial is to buy a set-top box which plugs into your existing TV. You will only have to pay for the initial set-top box or iDTV. You may also need to pay for a new aerial.

Unless you sign up to TopUp TV there will be no ongoing costs, if you choose to get digital TV through an aerial.

Although this is the cheapest option, it is important to look at all the options available to make sure you are getting the service and equipment that are most suitable for you.

Where to buy this equipment

You can buy a set-top box from most electrical retailers, such as Currys, Currys.*digital*, Comet or Argos, independent retail stores and, quite often, large supermarkets. Ask your retailer for advice on installation and help using the equipment.

Will I need a new aerial?

You may need to get a new TV aerial, depending on how long you have had your existing aerial, its condition and where you live. 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](http://www.rdi-lb.tv) or call **0870 129 8015**. You can also call **Digital UK information line** on **0845 650 5050**. If there isn't a Registered Digital Installer near you, then you can contact the Confederation of Aerial Industries (CAI) which can provide you with details of installers in your area; these may or may not be a Registered Digital Installer, but will have CAI trade association qualifications.

The cost of a new aerial for a digital set-top box will vary; the price 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. Its website is [www.ricability-digitaltv.org.uk](http://www.ricability-digitaltv.org.uk)

## Satellite

Another option for getting digital TV is through a satellite, for which a small satellite dish will need to be attached to the outside of your house. You will also need a Sky Box which plugs into your TV. **Sky** is currently the only company that provides satellite television. Before you install a satellite dish, you need to make sure that you have space and **ask permission** from your local council first; if you do need permission, you will need to have this in writing before Sky will install a satellite.

How much will this cost?

The cost of satellite TV will depend on whether you decide to pay an initial one-off fee – called **Freesat** – or choose a **monthly subscription package**. If you decide to choose Freesat, Sky will install your receiver box and mini-dish and give you an initial viewing card. You will get around 200 TV channels (including the usual five terrestrial ones you have currently) and 80 digital radio channels. There will be no ongoing costs. For more information about Freesat contact **Sky** by calling **08702 405 651**. You can also visit its website at [www.freesatfromsky.com](http://www.freesatfromsky.com)

If you decide to get a **monthly subscription package**, you will need to sign up to **Sky Digital**; the cost will depend on what package you choose. The package will depend on the types of programmes you like to watch; the most expensive packages usually include more sport and films, and the cheaper packages may include a choice of news, music, children's, educational or comedy channels. **You will have to sign a contract for a minimum of 12 months**, so think carefully about whether this is what you want. For more information and to subscribe, call **Sky** on **0870 580 0874**.

## Cable

The third option for getting digital TV is through a **cable**. To get digital television, you will need a cable connection to your house, a set-top box and a viewing card. Cable is available only in areas covered by the cable network. There is one main provider of cable television: **Virgin Media**. However, if you live on the Isle of Wight, you can also contact **Wightcable**, and if you live in Scotland or the north of England, you can contact **Small World Media**. To check whether you can get cable in your area, call **Virgin Media** on **0845 840 7777**. Virgin Media will link up your home to the cable network, which usually involves getting a small cable box put on the front of your house.

How much will it cost?

The cost of cable will depend on which package you choose. You may also have to pay a connection fee. This is a subscription service and you will have to sign up for a **minimum of 12 months**, so it is important to choose the right package for you, **within your budget**. You can get other services, such as telephone and broadband internet access, included with your subscription. Call **0845 840 7777** for more details.

## Through your telephone line via broadband

The fourth option for getting digital TV is through your telephone line via a broadband connection. **Tiscali TV** provides this service. You will need a BT line, a television and a computer for this service. For further information about this service, and to find out whether it is available in your area, phone **0800 107 9000**. You can also visit its website at [www.homechoice.co.uk](http://www.homechoice.co.uk) **BT** also provides digital TV through a broadband connection; this service is called **BT Total Broadband**. To find out more about this service, and whether it is available in your area, call **0800 800 900** or visit its website at [www.bt.com](http://www.bt.com)

How much will it cost?

Both Tiscali TV and BT, will ask you to sign a contract of at **least 12 months**. You will need to pay a monthly payment for both services. For more information about the service BT provides, call **0800 800 0900**; for more information about the service Tiscali TV provides, call **0800 107 9000**.

## 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, for example, 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)**. (This is also known as a personal video recorder or PVR) with a twin tuner. For more details on digital TV recorders, **Ricability** has a list on its website, [www.ricability-digitaltv.org.uk](http://www.ricability-digitaltv.org.uk) You can also ask your local retailer, such as Currys or Comet, for advice. Sky+ offers a service which includes a digital TV recorder and a satellite receiver. You can also rent a digital TV recorder from Virgin Media; you need to ask for its V+ service. Freeview also has a digital TV recorder called Freeview Playback.

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 will need to be upgraded to one of the service providers available in your area. Talk to your landlord, council or managing agent about how they plan to deal with this. Digital UK has produced a letter template, which you can use to send to your landlord to ask them what they are planning to do to switch the communal aerial over to digital. You can download it from its website at [www.digitaluk.co.uk](http://www.digitaluk.co.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 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 234 0388**. It will arrange for an information pack to be sent out to you. **You will only be able to request this when the area you live in switches over to digital.**

Will my radio be affected?

No, your radio will not be affected by the digital switchover. For information about DAB digital radio visit the BBC's website at [www.bbc.co.uk/digital](http://www.bbc.co.uk/digital)

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 through loop adaptor** or **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 could get an **Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) Concessionary TV Licence**, which currently costs £7.50. 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 equipment

If you are thinking about buying new equipment 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 equipment which displays the **Digital Tick logo**.

If you are looking for equipment, **Ricability** is a good place to start. This organisation can provide independent advice on equipment that is suitable for the digital switchover. It has tested a range of products sold by retail shops and

satellite and cable companies, 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](http://www.ricability-digitaltv.org.uk) If you are unsure of what any of the words used in the digital switchover mean, Ricability has a **jargon buster** on its website; this contains words or phrases which may be unfamiliar to you or are hard to understand.

You can also ask a retail store near you for more information on equipment. To find an electrical installer near you, visit [www.digitaluk.co.uk](http://www.digitaluk.co.uk) You can type your postcode into a search engine, which will provide you with a list of electrical installers in your area; the installers listed will be licensed under the digital switchover logo scheme.

If you want to buy an iDTV which is energy efficient, look for an iDTV which carries the **Energy Saving Recommended logo**; this is a blue triangle. This means that it will use less energy than the average iDTV.

If a doorstep salesperson visits you in your own home to sell equipment 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 bogus callers, genuine doorstep selling, and how to avoid being pressured, see our free information sheet, no.19 *Buying Goods or Services at Home*.

## Financial and practical help

The Government has announced a **Digital Switchover Help Scheme** which aims to make sure no one is left behind when the UK switches to digital TV; it will help you to convert one TV set to digital. You will be eligible for the help scheme if:

- you, your partner or dependent child are aged 75 years or over; or
- you, your partner or a dependent child are registered as being blind or partially sighted; or
- you, or your partner, or a dependent child 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).

How much will this help cost?

The scheme will cost you a subsidised amount of £40 for the basic equipment and help, unless you are on Pension Credit, Income Support or income-based Job Seekers Allowance, in which case it is free.

This help will include:

- the provision of equipment to convert one TV set to digital;
- help with installing the equipment and learning how to use it.

**Digital UK will be providing this help.** Eight months before the area you live in switches over to digital, Digital UK will send you details of how to apply for the Help Scheme in the post. You can then register for help using the information sent to you. It will arrange for someone to come to your house and install the equipment for you.

## 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](http://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: 0870 129 8015  
Web: [www.rdi-lb.tv](http://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](http://www.bbc.co.uk/digital)

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

### **Digital Television Project Team**

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

2–4 Cockspur Street

London SW1Y 5DH

Tel: 020 7211 6200

Web: [www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk](http://www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk)

Provides information on the benefits of switching over to digital, has a section containing useful links and has a jargon buster. It also has a booklet called *Analogue to digital – A guidance booklet*, which you can download from its website.

### **Digital-TV**

Web: [www.digital-tv.co.uk](http://www.digital-tv.co.uk)

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

The **Digital TV Group** is the industry association for digital TV. It has information on what digital TV is, and information on digital TV retailers. It has a section on how to receive digital TV and a section called a connection wizard, which gives information on how to connect your set-top box, satellite dish or cable to your TV including your VCR, DVD player and audio equipment). Visit its website at [www.dtg.org.uk](http://www.dtg.org.uk)

**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 in your area, as well as providing information on what financial and practical help is available. It has a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) area 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: 0845 766 9999  
Web: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://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.

## **uswitch.com**

Web: [www.uswitch.com](http://www.uswitch.com)

Provides general information on the digital switchover, including what it is, as well as comparing different options for getting digital TV.

## **Which?**

*Which?* magazine and website provides independent consumer advice on digital television including 'best buys'. It also has general information on 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 **0845 307 4000**.

## Product information

### **Ricability**

Web: [www.ricability-digitaltv.co.uk](http://www.ricability-digitaltv.co.uk)

Can provide independent advice on equipment that is suitable for the digital switchover.

## Digital TV providers

Through an aerial

### **BT Vision**

Web: [www.bt.com](http://www.bt.com)

### **Freeview**

Tel: 0870 880 9980

Web: [www.freeview.co.uk](http://www.freeview.co.uk)

### **Top Up TV**

Tel: 08700 543210

Web: [www.topuptv.com](http://www.topuptv.com)

Satellite

### **Sky Digital**

Tel: 0870 580 0874

Web: [www.sky.com](http://www.sky.com)

### **Sky Freesat**

Tel: 0870 240 5651

Web: [www.freesatfromsky.co.uk](http://www.freesatfromsky.co.uk)

Cable

### **Virgin Media**

Tel: 0845 840 7777

Web: [www.virginmedia.com](http://www.virginmedia.com)

### **Small World Media** (Scotland and North of England)

Tel: 08000 70 60 50

Web: [www.smallworldmedia.com](http://www.smallworldmedia.com)

### **WightCable** (Isle of Wight)

Tel: 01983 295050

Web: [www.wightcable.com](http://www.wightcable.com)

Through your telephone line via broadband

### **Tiscali TV**

Tel: 0800 107 9000

Web: [www.homechoice.co.uk](http://www.homechoice.co.uk)

**BT Total Broadband**

Tel: 0800 80 09 00

Web: [www.bt.com](http://www.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 logging on to **[www.helptheaged.org.uk](http://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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