

Memorandum

Digital switchover: Supplementary evidence, House of Lords Select Committee on communications

By Alison Hopkins, Principal policy advocate, Consumer Focus

This memorandum supplements the evidence submitted earlier by Consumer Focus. We would be happy to discuss any of the points we have made further with the Committee.

About Consumer Focus

Consumer Focus is a statutory body that champions the needs of consumers across England, Wales, and Scotland and, for postal services, Northern Ireland. We operate across the whole of the economy, persuading businesses and public services to put consumers at the heart of what they do. Consumer Focus has the power to take action where markets are failing consumers and to ensure a fair deal for all – especially the vulnerable and disadvantaged. As well as highlighting problems for consumers, we work with a range of organisations to champion creative solutions that improve consumers' lives.

1 Better information for consumers

1.1 Consumer power questions

Consumers need clear information about what their choices are when buying digital equipment, and it is difficult to find a single, authoritative source that explains what to look for and how to compare different products. Consumer Focus would like to see the production of an easy to read checklist that would prompt consumers about what digital products can deliver, explains the different features and help them to make better informed decisions. The Consumer Expert Group developed a set of questions that would inform decisions about buying digital televisions, which we called Consumer power questions¹. Digital UK has used a version of these questions in some of their own consumer guides but they have been split up into different topic areas, and are mostly available online, which makes them less useful.

We strongly believe that the questions such be available all together as a self-contained document and disseminated widely, particularly at point of sale and for example through public information points such as libraries, through consumer organisations, and local community

¹ See appendix 1

organisations. They should also be given prominence in publicity campaigns about switching and be accessible online.

In the event of a switch to digital radio a similar list could be developed, drawing on the expertise of the Consumer Expert Group, Ricability, and others.

As an incentive for retailers to display the leaflets prominently they could be integrated into the requirements for accreditation for 'digital tick retailers' and for staff training too.

2 Digital tick

The digital tick is a striking and simple logo used in all DUK's promotions, across products, services and retail. It signifies a level of accreditation or approval but there is no easy way for consumers to find out what lies behind the tick. For example, when it appears on a product it just means that it will work at switchover. It doesn't give any details.

Consumer focus believes the tick scheme would be much improved if it was used in a more sophisticated way, providing more in-depth information but without diluting the value of the tick. For example, we discussed the idea of using a scorecard approach to indicate a product's range of features, such as whether it had Audio-description, an easy to use Electronic programme guide or remote control, and whether it needed extra scart leads².

A scorecard of this nature could be used in conjunction with the 'power questions' and well trained sales staff would be ready and willing to answer follow up questions and provide additional information. Again, a similar grid could be developed for digital radio, covering essential 'usability' factors and key consumer-defined criteria.

The design and size of the scorecard labels is critical as ideally they should be clearly visible on the outside of packaging as well as on products. We do understand that this could make the surfaces crowded, and that manufacturers are concerned about their brand labels being crowded out but with some creative input we are confident a satisfactory solution could be found, as has already happened for energy efficiency labelling. There may be scope to link it to other incentives and permission to use an 'advanced' digital tick to encourage manufacturers and retailers to take it up.

3 Training

Staff training at retail outlets should be more consistent. Retailers have made tremendous progress but access to well-trained staff and the knowledge and willingness of staff to proactively advise customers varies enormously. It is a huge challenge, given the turnover of staff and the use of part-time and temporary staff but it is important that retail staff are encouraged to become 'accredited digital advisers'.

4 Time and input

Consumer Focus cannot stress enough the need to build in sufficient time and resources to plan effectively for switching to digital radio. There is much to learn from the experience of the digital television switch, and there will be more to come as the process is still in the early stages.

It is also important to continue a mechanism to capture the advice and insight from a group like the Consumer Expert Group. We have been able to influence policy and practice in relation to

² See appendix 2

television switching to the benefit of consumers, acting as an advisory body and sounding board for both DUK and the help scheme, making a positive contribution to their work on targeted communications, the design of the help scheme specification, for example.

Consumer Focus

February 2010

If you require this publication in Braille, large print or on audio CD please contact us.

For the deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired,
contact Consumer Focus via Text Relay:

From a textphone, call 18001 020 7799 7900

From a telephone, call 18002 020 7799 7900

Consumer Focus

4th Floor

Artillery House

Artillery Row

London SW1P 1RT

Tel: 020 7799 7900

Fax: 020 7799 7901

Public affairs team: 020 7799 8021

Appendix 1

Consumer Power questions on Digital TV (Consumer Expert Group)

POWER QUESTIONS: WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN YOU BUY A DIGITAL TV PRODUCT

- Say what your needs are up front in the shop, for example mention any sight, hearing or dexterity problems anyone in your household has. Tell the shop assistant that you expect the equipment to be suitable for those specific needs.
- You have the right to return goods and get a refund or a replacement if they are faulty. You have the same rights if the goods are not fit for their purpose. So if you tell the seller that you need them for a specific purpose, they should be fit for that as well as for general use. You need to return the goods as soon as possible and preferably within 7 days of the purchase. If you take longer you may lose the right to a refund, but you should be able to opt for a replacement.
- Look for the digital tick logo. It guarantees that a digital TV product will work through and after switchover. If you are interested in usability of equipment, read on because the digital tick does not currently guarantee usability of equipment.

There are a range of features and characteristics that will differ between makes and models of digital TV products, and as you are likely to use your digital TV on a daily basis, it is important to find a system that meets your needs.

1. General features

- How far will I be sitting away from the TV screen in my home?
 - Different products have different on-screen TV guides and some are more legible than others. Ask the shop assistant to show you the on-screen guide before you buy. Check for yourself whether you find the on-screen guide legible, whether the colour contrasts and letter sizes suit you.
- What other equipment do I want to connect?
 - Tell the shop assistant what you will want to connect and check whether the product has a sufficient number of connecting slots to allow you to do this. For every piece of equipment you are likely to need a connecting SCART socket.
- Is my existing TV old or relatively new?
 - If you are planning on buying a set-top box and your existing TV is old it might not have SCART sockets, in which case you will need a digital box that incorporates a modulator.
- Will I want high definition TV now or in the future?

- It is not necessary to get an HD ready or high definition product to get digital TV, but if you are interested in HD ask the shop assistant for your options because not all products support it.
- Do I want equipment that is more energy efficient? Some digital TV products and TV screens consume less power than others. If this is of interest to you look for one with the energy saving recommended logo.
- How much space have I got?
 - Some set-top boxes can sit on top of a regular TV, whilst the larger ones need their own shelf.
- Do I want to listen to radio via my TV?
 - If the answer is yes, then you might want a product that has a radio/TV button. This quickly switches between TV and radio stations. Without this you have to scroll all the way through the TV channel list to get to the radio channels, or enter the radio station's three digit number into your remote control.
- Do I want to delete unwanted channels from my on-screen guide or set up my own favourites list?
 - If the answer is yes, then ask for a product that offers this option.
- Do I feel comfortable using 2 remote controls?
 - When you buy a digital set-top box or digibox you will normally have to use 2 remotes: one to control your TV and one to control the box. If you do not feel comfortable doing this, ask the shop assistant whether the remote can be set to also control your TV or consider buying an integrated digital TV.
- Does anyone in my household have a sight problem?
 - If the answer is yes, they might be interested in a product that can receive audio description. Audio description is an additional commentary that helps people with a sight problem to picture the on-screen action, body language and facial expressions. Few brands and models can deliver audio description. You can look on www.rnib.org.uk/tv or ring RNIB on 0207 391 2398 for an up to date list of the models that have this feature.

2. The remote control:

You use the remote control for a host of features and a good design can make all the difference. In fact the best remotes can be operated with one hand without looking at them. Here are some things to look out for:

- Does anyone in my household have a problem operating very small buttons? If the answer is yes, than look for a remote control with decent size buttons. Some remotes can be very small indeed.
- Does anyone in my household have difficulty finding the buttons on a remote control?
 - Ask the shop assistant to let you try the remote that comes with the product you are planning to buy. Check whether the buttons are well spaced out. Make sure you are comfortable with at least the following buttons: on and off, channel up and down, volume up and down, on-screen guide, number buttons

- Is anyone in my household deaf or hard of hearing?
 - If the answer is yes, then it is useful to know that almost all digital products deliver subtitles but you might want to look for a remote that has a separate button to switch them on. Some products will always display subtitles when switched on and hold the subtitles across channel changes.
- Does anyone in my household have a sight problem?
 - If the answer is yes, consider whether the remote has differently shaped buttons, good contrast between the casing and the buttons and well spaced out buttons as that can be helpful. Larger size buttons can also be helpful.
- Does anyone in my household prefer a system that can be used without a remote control?
 - If the answer is yes, look for equipment that allows you to change volume and channel from easily reachable controls on the front panel of the digital TV or set-top box

3. Recording.

If you are buying a digital TV recorder to replace your analogue DVD recorder or VHS recorder:

- Do I want to record one digital channel while watching another?
 - Make this clear to the shop assistant and explain what other equipment you have at home. You will most likely need a recorder with twin tuners.
- How many hours will I want to record?
 - Most digital recorders have a built-in storage device, for example 80Gb or 160Gb hard discs, storing around 40 or 80 hours of TV. If you think this is not enough space for you, consider having a DVD digital recorder that can store on recordable discs.
- Do I want to record on to discs or do I prefer to record on to a hard drive so that programmes stay on the machine itself?
 - Let the shop assistant know whether you want a recorder with built-in storage (hard drive) or one that records on DVD discs that you can take away, or both.
- Do I want to record an entire series?
 - If the answer is yes, then you might be interested in a series link feature system that will automatically record all episodes or a system that automatically records at the same time every week or every day.

4. If you want impartial advice on specific digital products.

For detailed advice and tests of products go to <http://www.ricability-digitaltv.org.uk/>

UNRESOLVED EDITORIAL ISSUES:

- is there a word that is easier to understand for Scart socket? For modulator?

- is "digital TV product" easily understood?
- is the text about "hard drives" easy enough to be understood?

CEG RECOMMENDATION ON HOW AND WHERE THESE POWER QUESTIONS SHOULD BE USED:

- Provide them at retail outlets. This would enable consumers to have the correct information at hand at the point of purchase.
- Provide them in the "helping hand packs"
- Provide them on DUK website.
- CEG members who have appropriate networks could make them available to their customers

DATE AND CONTACT DETAILS

- submitted by CEG to DUK on 10 August
- contact Leen.Petre@rnib.org.uk or Alison. Hopkins@ncc.org.uk

Appendix 2

Digital scoreboard (Consumer Expert Group response to consultation)

Consumer Expert Group on Digital Switchover. Response to Digital Scoreboard consultation, 20 April 2007.

The consumer expert group very much welcomes the idea of the digital scoreboard, as it provides consumers with a consistent, clear and meaningful summary of the most important features they may wish to consider when making a purchase decision. We think that the scoreboard could make a major contribution to helping consumers make the best possible informed choices about digital TV equipment to meet their individual needs. Ultimately equipping consumers better to make the right purchasing decisions will have a positive impact on how they rate their overall switchover experience.

The Digital Scoreboard should be of benefit to mainstream consumers as well as those with particular needs in mind, in order to widen its appeal. The suggestions below are based on this requirement.

Only the information on the left of the shown example should actually be shown on the products. See the Appendix for clarification.

The notes should be moved to a standardised leaflet or booklet that explains the whole scoreboard and what each item means. An example is given in the Appendix.

The following are our detailed comments on the proposal:

1. The scoreboard should always list all proposed features and items, even if some of those are not present on a particular product. Having a scoreboard with the same features and items on across different brands and products will enable consumers to easily compare products. If a certain feature or item is present in a particular product, this should be indicated on the scoreboard. Similarly, if a certain scoreboard item or feature is not present in a particular product, this should be indicated on the scoreboard.
2. For increased clarity, the presence and absence of items should preferably read 'Yes' or 'No' as the meaning of a tick or dash is not intuitively clear. Alternatively, as a 2nd best option, features that are not present could have an empty box. This makes the meaning clearer than having a cross marking.
3. Including the energy consumption figure is a very good idea. However the proposed wording and text surrounding it, are currently confusing. Ideally, the energy figures should be calculated on a more consequential scale. The preferred measuring method is to take the energy consumed over 24 hour period during which the set is in 'viewing' mode for an agreed number hours (for example 8 hours) and in 'recording' mode for an agreed number of hours (for example two hours). Where the device is not capable of recording but has a timer function, this should be used. Where no timer function is available, the device should be active for those two hours. The resulting measured consumption should be multiplied by 365 to result in average annual energy consumption, expressed in kWh per year.


4. The text about audio description rightly refers to people with a sight problem. It should also be noted in the accompanying literature that AD might be a useful feature to people who may be giving their visual attention to something other than the television.
5. With reference to the last item, this should read "Also works without SCART" and be a yes or no item like most of the others. Here, a 'yes' would indicate that the receiver has an RF modulator. This would be explained thoroughly in the accompanying literature.
6. There should be an additional item that states whether or not the product complies with the DTG's definition of a remote control as soon as the DTG remote control subgroup has concluded its work. The item could be called "user-friendly remote control".
7. All products have subtitles as a requirement, so some would argue that this item is superfluous. However, as audio description as access service is mentioned, it is useful to have a reference to subtitles, but we would suggest that it is best to state whether or not the product offers a dedicated button to activate subtitles. This item could then read "Subtitles button".
8. An additional item could be added stating the number of SCART sockets provided by the product. This is an important parameter for choosing a suitable product and can be explained thoroughly in the accompanying booklet. The advantage of placing this on the scoreboard is that it draws consumers to the importance of considering the connectivity of their system as a whole before choosing a particular set-top box.

For further information, please contact:

Leen Petré
18 April 2007
020 7391 2314
leen.petre@rnib.org.uk

Appendix

An example Digital Scoreboard label is shown below:



Annual Energy Consumption	26 kWh
Subtitles	Yes
Audio	No
Auto Re-	Yes
Also works without SCART	No
SCART	1
User-friendly Remote Control	Yes

An example of the text of the explanatory booklet is given below:

Every digital receiver that has been awarded with the digital tick shows a label with a standard layout. This is what the items on the label mean:

Annual Energy Consumption	This figure gives an indication of how much energy this particular product uses each year, and can be compared directly with other similar products. Products with more functions may consume more power. It is based on using the product 8 hours per day and if the product is a recorder this figure includes recording for an additional 2 hours.
Subtitles button	All Digital Freeview products provide a subtitles feature, which is great for when you cannot hear the TV programme sound. To make this easier to turn on and off, some products have a button on the remote control that can be used to turn them on and off easily. On products that do not have this button, the subtitles must be controlled through an on-screen menu system. Subtitles are subject to provision by the broadcaster.
Audio Description	Audio description is an additional commentary that helps people with a sight problem to picture the on screen

	<p>action, body language and facial expressions. This is a feature, new with digital television, that helps you to follow what is happening in a TV programme when you cannot see the screen. It is particularly useful to people who have difficulty seeing the screen, but is also a great help to anyone who needs to concentrate on something other than the television screen but still wants to follow a programme. It is only available on some programmes, subject to provision by the broadcaster.</p>
Auto Re-Tuning	<p>This shows whether the product will automatically re-tune itself to find new channels, when they come on, and at the time of digital TV switchover. It means you do not need to do anything to these products yourself during the progress of digital switchover.</p>
Also works without SCART	<p>Some older TVs do not have a SCART socket, in which case you need a product where this box says “Yes”. In this case, you tune a spare channel on your TV into the Digital Set-top box and get digital by switching to this channel. Remember that you may later decide to use the product you buy on a different TV, so it is worth checking all of the TVs that you may use this product with.</p>
SCART sockets	<p>Products have either one or two SCART sockets. If all of the SCART sockets on your TV are in use, then you can buy a product with two SCART sockets, and connect one of the devices currently connected to your TV to the second SCART connector of the set-top box instead. This is usually a recording device, such as a video recorder or a DVD recorder. This way, it is possible to play back recordings when the set-top box is in standby, and also make recordings from the set-top box.</p>
User-friendly Remote Control	<p>This tells you whether a product has passed rigorous tests on how easy it is to work its remote control. If you usually find remote controls hard to use, look for a product where this item says “Yes”.</p>

What is SCART?

A SCART lead is the best way to connect components of your television system. The socket is long and thin with two rows



the components together. of 10 slots

(shown here). Televisions that are less than ten years old usually have at least one.