

Supplementary evidence from RNIB to the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications, Digital Switchover enquiry.

Following the question asked at the House of Lords Select Committee evidence session, RNIB suggests that the following recommendations be considered by the committee in addition to the previous written and oral evidence we provided:

1. Recommendation: talking TV solutions in the TV help scheme.

It is absolutely necessary that the digital TV switchover help scheme incorporates a talking solution that allows people who can not see the screen to independently use their television when this solution becomes available later this year. RNIB is also asking that this solution would be offered to those registered blind and partially sighted people in regions that have already switched and who have already had assistance from the help scheme but who may have been fitted with equipment that does not fully meet their needs. The help scheme should contact them and make them the offer of the talking solution. The help scheme budget underspend should allow for this.

2. Recommendation: Digital tick for radio that incorporates usability elements.

This idea has been floated and RNIB supports the idea to have a digital tick for radio, but given the complexity of the equipment compared to analogue equipment, it should mean more than the digital TV tick. The existing digital TV tick only means that your equipment will work after switchover, nothing more. Efforts to rectify this afterwards with a digital tick labelling scheme to indicate usability features have largely failed as manufacturers are not taking them up. A digital radio tick should also indicate that the equipment fulfils some usability criteria. Reason being that we have found that purchasing decisions for TV are really quite tricky for a lot of people, and as people will be forced to buy digital radio it is important that they are helped in their decision on what to buy by a tick that means more than "this equipment will work after digital radio switchover".

3. Recommendation: digital radio power questions

To guide consumers with buying decisions about digital radio in store, a set of "power questions" should be available. These are questions that help consumers, in particular those with special needs, choose equipment that fully meets their needs. These "power questions" should be available at point of sale. They should be very visible in any switchover awareness raising campaign and they should be well publicised. The Consumer Expert Group made this suggestion for digital TV (see Annex), and wrote an example of what brand-neutral power questions should look like, but Digital UK did not see it as their task to ensure that they would become available at point of sale. One way of implementing this idea would be to require that having this information available in the shop at point of sale would be a requirement to become an "accredited digital tick radio retailer". The power questions could be put together by consumer organisations with expertise in testing this equipment area such as Ricability.

4. Recommendation: early planning for radio help scheme

RNIB recommends that the planning for a radio help scheme starts very quickly, because the digital TV switchover experience demonstrates that such a scheme requires a good deal of planning and 2015 is not far off.

Annex: Digital TV consumer power questions

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 2008
- contact Leen.Petre@rnib.org.uk or Alison.Hopkins@ncc.org.uk