

## Memorandum by Wireless for the Blind Fund

### Digital Switchover of Radio

British Wireless for the Blind Fund is the leading organisation in the United Kingdom providing a help service through the provision of radio equipment on free permanent loan to registered blind and partially sighted people. We specialise in equipment to visually impaired people over the age of eight, resident in the United Kingdom and in need i.e. Means tested benefit. We also sell our sets to those who don't meet our criteria. The equipment, given on free permanent loan, is provided with training and additional support until such time as our recipient can independently use the set. On average, this can entail up to a further three visits at no cost to the recipient. Should any further support be required at a later date this again is provided free of charge. Should the equipment fail it is repaired/ replaced as required, and again all of these services are provided free of charge.

When considering the digital switchover, note should be taken that many registered blind and partially sighted people will require adapted sets, which cost more than sets available in high street outlets. This will give the individual or BWBF an additional financial burden depending whether an individual purchases the set or BWBF does. It should also be remembered that blind people rely heavily on the radio for information, far more than for sighted people.

We believe that before migration begins there should be further research into the groups of people in greatest need of support i.e. blind or partially sighted, disabled, those people living in low income homes and also older people to whom the changeover will cause confusion and financial hardship and stress. For those people wishing to purchase there should be information and support available partly in the form of a kitemark, indicating recommendations for various groups.

To use DAB equipment is extremely difficult for those people who are visually impaired. To change station other than using a pre-set facility, a visual display is used. To utilise the set to its full extent and access all of the information provided this again this requires the use of a visual display. This is, at best difficult, and for most visually impaired people practically impossible, unless the equipment is designed with them in mind. In a recent Ricability study the BWBF 'Duet' radio was the only set recommend for use by blind and partially sighted people.

The Government when providing any assistance should recognise and work alongside those charities already providing a help scheme to those in need whether blind, partially sighted, disabled or disadvantaged to ensure that they are not financially burdened either through the provision of equipment or thereafter with the support and training that is additionally required by vulnerable people.

The British Wireless for the Blind Fund and W4B - the TV and Radio Charity are the two leading providers of charitable support within the United Kingdom. Both charities have much experience and are working closely together to help vulnerable people access and radio and television more easily. The both expect a considerable upturn in the number of people requesting assistance not only with the provision of a set but also with the additional training that will be required to enable them to use it. They also expect a substantial upturn in the number of people who can afford to or are able to purchase requesting assistance in the choice of equipment. Neither organisation is currently in a position to deal with the increase demand on their services in the magnitude that is expecting to be generated by the switchover.

The role of internet radio should also be taken into consideration. BWBF have found that since the provision of the internet audio service through their 'Sonata' set, there has been an increase in the number of blind and partially sighted people wishing to utilise this service (which is available without requiring a computer) to access radio; particularly in areas where the reception of radio, either on DAB or FM is poor. A number of organisations are working with us to provide a variety of audio content including newspapers, magazines, books, podcasts and catalogues in addition to the thousands of radio stations available over the internet worldwide. We have found this accessibility has provided new listening opportunities, particularly for those people whose first language isn't English and also enabling communication from a number of geographical areas which is becoming increasingly important in the diverse society in which we now live.

Margaret Grainger (Mrs)  
Chief Executive  
British Wireless for the Blind Fund

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