

Digital Dividend Consultation

The Third Age Trust was represented at the Digital Dividend Review Conference on 5th February by Dr Ian Funnell and on behalf of the Trust I would like to make the following comments as our response to the Digital Dividend Consultation.

It is appropriate to start with a brief account of the activities and membership of the Third Age Trust. The Trust is the representative body for the Universities of the Third Age (U3As) in the UK whose aims cover self-help education, the provision of life-long learning, the celebration of the capabilities and potential of older people in society and the provision of U3A activities in every part of the country. U3A membership is open to anyone who is no longer in full-time paid employment. Currently we have more than 168000 members in 623 U3As with a yearly membership growth rate of more than 8%. The main educational activities are carried out within interest groups in the U3As, which are themselves separate local charities. The interest groups vary in size from six to even sixty members and their subjects range from French conversation to industrial heritage and from art appreciation to current affairs. We are also developing research projects with many outside institutions including the British Museum, the Royal Opera House and the Imperial War Museum. We have recently reached an understanding with the Open University on areas of cooperation. The Trust is represented on the International Association of Universities of the Third Age (IAUTA), which has members from twenty-two countries and a member of the Trust is currently the elected President of IAUTA. 2007 is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the U3A movement in the UK and is an occasion for celebrating our success and looking very positively to our growing contribution to society in future.

We note that digital terrestrial television (DTT) will have a capacity between five and ten times that of analogue television across the country, enabling the public service broadcasters to extend the range of their provision including, possibly, high definition television. We note the expectation that 1.5% of the population will be unable to receive DTT, as also applies to analogue television. We have also noted the government's intention under the EU Riga Declaration of July 2006 that 90% of the UK population should have provision for broadband access by 2010 and their aim of halving the proportion of people at risk of digital exclusion, including older people, by the same date.

On behalf of our members we suggest that:-

1. Opportunities for building communities should be sought and the provision of local television within more than forty areas would be very valuable. The number of localities should be maximised so that local organisations can feel they have a home and an opportunity to build links to the local community.
2. Broadband wireless applications could be very valuable to people in rural areas and we expect there will be a growing need to ensure that the number of people disadvantaged by digital exclusion is reduced as soon as possible. There are many social and educational barriers as well as technical barriers, but many U3As have active computer interest groups that encourage members to make best use of modern communication technology.
3. However handled, we believe the allocation of the frequency spectrum should aim to give the widest range of service provision on a local basis, rather than comprehensive monopoly provision on a national basis.

Yours sincerely

Jean Goodeve – Chairman

20th March 2007