

Response to Ofcom Consultation on D1 expansion into Northern Ireland

Q1. Do you think that allowing Digital One to extend the coverage area of its national radio multiplex licence to include Northern Ireland would be calculated to maintain or promote the development of digital sound broadcasting in the UK otherwise than by satellite? Please explain the reasons for your view.

Allowing Digital One to extend coverage of its national radio multiplex to include Northern Ireland would certainly *promote* the development of digital sound broadcasting in the UK.

Research shows that the most popular means for listening to a digital radio platform is DAB.

Q4 2012 RAJAR results show that of those who listen to any digital platform 64% listen on DAB, while 32% listen via Digital Television (including satellite) and 28% listen via the internet¹.

Furthermore, amongst digital listening hours, the vast majority of digital hours are also delivered via DAB compared with other digital platforms. Of digital listening hours, 64% come via DAB, compared with 16% on digital television and 15% via the internet.²

However, Northern Ireland is currently ill-served with DAB services. With only a single commercial radio multiplex, nearly all the services currently carried on the multiplex are simulcasts of widely available analogue services.

DAB ownership in Northern Ireland is well below the national average with just 20.9% of the population owning a DAB set in Northern Ireland compared with 42.3% nationally.³ This makes it the region with the lowest DAB take up by far.

Furthermore, Absolute Radio receives regular correspondence from listeners in Northern Ireland who'd like to be able to listen via DAB, but are unable to. The local multiplex in Northern Ireland is full and there is no way to currently extend DAB listening to the province.

Q2. Do you think that Digital One's proposals for providing coverage of Northern Ireland are satisfactory? Please explain the reasons for your view.

Absolute Radio believes that Digital One's proposals for providing coverage of Northern Ireland are satisfactory.

The six proposed transmitters give broad coverage and are located in the same sites as current BBC transmitters.

Q3. Do you consider that Digital One has the ability to maintain its national radio multiplex service if its request is granted? Please explain the reasons for your view.

Absolute Radio does consider that Digital One has the ability to maintain its national radio multiplex service.

¹ RAJAR Q4 2012, based on 25.m adults 15+ who listen via a digital platform.

² RAJAR Q4 2012, based on adults 15+ who listen via a digital platform.

³ RAJAR Q4 2012, based on 15+ adults in the BBC Northern Ireland region.

Digital One has operated the national commercial digital multiplex since 1999 and is now fully owned by Arqiva who are responsible for the vast majority of UK terrestrial broadcast services.

Q4. (For programme service providers on the national radio multiplex, and the holder of the Northern Ireland local radio multiplex licence and its service providers only) Do you consider that there are sufficient safeguards in place to protect your rights and interests in the event that Digital One is permitted to extend coverage to include Northern Ireland?

Absolute Radio does consider that there are sufficient safeguards in place to protect our rights and interests in Northern Ireland. Our service is already broadcast on AM in Northern Ireland, and the improved quality would do nothing but benefit listeners.

Q5. Do you consider that there any other grounds on which Ofcom should approve, or not approve, the request from Digital One? Please explain the reasons for your view.

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