

HD tv should be made available on all platforms, including Freeview. Ofcom should ensure that, as an outcome of the Digital Dividend Review (DDR), adequate spectrum is reserved for public service broadcasting in HD to ensure that the social value of universal digital terrestrial television is not lost & the public interest is protected. The campaign is supported by the Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) – BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Five – manufacturers & retailers of ‘HD Ready’ televisions including Sony, Samsung, Toshiba, Comet and DSGI (the high street electricals group behind Dixons, Currys and PC World). PSBs and consumers have and will invest heavily in the digital terrestrial platform, to give everyone the option of free-to-air television through an aerial, when analogue services are removed at switchover. In the past, the free-to-air broadcasting that so many UK viewers value has always been allowed to develop in line with technological advances like colour, widescreen and stereo sound – making these features universally available to all. HD television is the next such advance. The costs of transmitting television channels in HD are substantial and will require high levels of investment by the PSBs. At the same time, free-to-air transmission offers no corresponding revenue stream to pay for that investment. This will put PSBs at an economic disadvantage when bidding in a competitive auction against commercial operators of subscription services. Without intervention there is the risk that a viable PSB HD offering on DTT will not be possible for the next generation of consumers, resulting in a second class television service for millions of viewers who have already invested in both the digital terrestrial platform and ‘HD Ready’ TVs in time for digital switchover. An allocation of spectrum now to HD will allow very significant spectrum efficiency gains in the future and is therefore a “spend now to save later” strategy.

Universal access to DTT is a key part of the Government’s plans for achieving full digital switchover by 2012. Every household in the UK is paying for the digital switchover by investing in digital TV and it is this consumer investment that will allow the spectrum to be freed. A DTT platform without HD will be less competitive against cable and satellite and risks undermining the platform - the most popular free-to-air option.

There is clear citizen value in universal free-to-air DTT. The 2006 Digital Terrestrial Trial of HD television, undertaken jointly by the PSBs, indicated an overwhelming demand for HD on DTT with 85% of respondents indicating that they believed the availability of HD on DTT was “very important”. HD is one of the biggest changes since the introduction of colour in the 1960s and is of major importance to the future of the DTT platform. ‘HD Ready’ televisions have been available for two years. In July 2005 sales of ‘HD Ready’ sets overtook non-HD sets and nearly three million have been sold to date. These figures prove consumer demand has been strong and expectations are growing. Universal availability of HD programming must therefore be allowed to evolve in line with those expectations. Since the launch of Freeview in 2002, DTT has proven itself as the platform of choice for millions of consumers throughout the UK. To date it is estimated that more than 9.3 million homes have invested in the platform. The spectrum which Ofcom proposes to auction is the only available spectrum that can be used for HD. There are, however, additional spectrums available which could be used for other uses, such as mobile television and wireless broadband services.

**Responsible intervention now needs to be made for specific provision on HD services on DTT to preserve the social value of British television and prevent the creation of a second class television service for licence fee payers. I want this to happen. We should get what we are entitled to in our licence fee - the most up to date value for money.**

**Thomas Cooper**