

"Working for quality
and diversity in
British broadcasting"



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Rt Hon Ben Bradshaw MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Dear Secretary of State,

Response to radio recommendations in the final Digital Britain Report

I write to express the concerns of Voice of the Listener & Viewer about the proposals, included in the final Digital Britain Report for the switch to digital broadcasting of most radio output in the United Kingdom by 2015.

The Report describes radio as *a flexible medium,[its] appeal to the listener is that it is more than simply a stream of audio: it is an intimate, portable and ambient medium; and it is a very personal medium: the pictures that it forms inside our heads are different for every listener*. The Report continues: *to remain true to that breadth of appeal to listeners, we argue that radio needs a future on its own, dedicated, digital platform*. To achieve this dedicated platform it is intended to switch off the majority of analogue transmissions by 2015. This will involve most citizens from every strata of society changing how they listen to the radio. They will have to stop using cherished equipment that is still serviceable and be forced to purchase new sets, probably of inferior quality.

We consider that the speed of the change will alienate many people. It is proposed to make the switch two years after 50% of listening is to digital receivers. This means that the 50% of consumers still listening on analogue sets would have just two years to switch. This disproportionately affects disadvantaged groups. It will put at risk a well trusted medium that is vital to many of the most vulnerable and isolated of our fellow citizens.

The example of the current switch to digital television should be followed. The change should not be rushed but only happen when there is evidence of a very substantial switch (85-90%) in listening to digital radios. We consider that this will happen when there is a compelling reason for consumers to change their radio sets. Among several factors this means there is confidence that reception is reliable and as good as analogue in all parts of the UK, that there is content that makes it worth while and that the sets are as easy to use and as good as current analogue equipment.

The note attached to this letter details our concerns about the radio section of the final Digital Britain Report. In summary these are: The timescale will force the most

vulnerable and at risk citizens, those most dependant on radio, to adopt unfamiliar technology before the coverage issues have been fully resolved. There are real questions about the quality and functionality of the sets and the digital technology chosen. VLV also has wider concerns about the funding of this proposal, which will be met mostly from the licence fee - which is already threatened. There will be significant, and very unpopular, costs for most citizens.

On behalf of radio listeners throughout the UK we ask you to give our concerns your attention. I much look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Richard Lindley
Chairman, Voice of the Listener & Viewer