

Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of Ireland regarding the Digital Switchover and the provision of digital television services in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is to provide a framework for the changes that are taking place in Northern Ireland and Ireland to the technologies used in the reception of television services.

The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998 and the 2006 St. Andrews Agreement, in paving the way for a permanent and lasting peace on the island, recognised the importance of the unique and diverse cultural and linguistic identities that exist on the island.

In this context these Agreements have put in place arrangements to support a comprehensive sharing of cultural and societal information that is of importance to the communities on the island. This includes the decision by the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to seek to achieve widespread availability of the Irish language television channel Teilifis na Gaeilige (TG4) throughout Northern Ireland. Public service broadcasting supplied from both jurisdictions has a long recognised role to play throughout the island of Ireland in promoting cultural diversity, in providing educational programming, in objectively informing public opinion, in guaranteeing pluralism and in supplying quality entertainment.

The development of the television transmission system, known as 'Digital Terrestrial Television' (DTT), has been put in place to a very significant extent in the UK including across Northern Ireland. This system is now starting to be built in Ireland. The construction of this system will allow for the digital switchover from the free-to-air analogue transmissions to DTT. The Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland plans for this to happen in Northern Ireland in 2012. While no specific date has been set for this in Ireland, the Government of Ireland intends to move proactively towards the digital switchover once the Irish DTT system has been put in place. The European Commission has proposed that Member States switch-off analogue transmissions by 2012.

Once this has taken place, the DTT systems in both Northern Ireland and Ireland will be the primary means of providing free-to-air public service broadcasting to the television licence holder in both jurisdictions. The analogue systems that will be switched off have been the primary means of receiving free-to-air public service broadcasting since the 1950s in Northern Ireland and the 1960s in Ireland. However, it has been a factor of analogue free-to-air public service broadcasting since the 1950s that there has been, given the nature of analogue transmission, significant reception of signals from both jurisdictions throughout the island. A large proportion of viewers in Northern Ireland watch free-to-air analogue transmissions of Irish public service channels and a large proportion of viewers in Ireland watch free-to-air

analogue transmissions of UK public service channels. Both Governments are mindful of the fact these viewers will no longer obtain such analogue overspill signals after the digital switchover has taken place.

### Co-operation

In light of this, the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Government of Ireland will cooperate to help ensure:

- a) A smooth transition to digital terrestrial television and the switch-off of analogue services on the island of Ireland.
- b) The widespread availability on the DTT platform of TG4 in Northern Ireland.
- c) That arrangements are made to facilitate the widespread availability on the DTT platforms of BBC services in Ireland and of RTE services in Northern Ireland.
- d) That public information campaigns about digital transition in both jurisdictions are coordinated in both delivery and content where it is mutually decided that suitable overlaps and sharing of information will assist the viewers. These campaigns should include information on the changes in overspill services in Ireland once the analogue signal is switched off.
- e) Arrangements are put in place to facilitate information sharing to allow for the development of digital terrestrial reception equipment which is compatible with the technical standards<sup>1</sup> applied in both jurisdictions.
- f) That the possibilities are explored regarding the reciprocal sharing in both jurisdictions of public service broadcasting digital radio services.

### Actions

The Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Government of Ireland will also take the following action:

- a) Ensure spectrum availability on relevant DTT multiplexes in Ireland and Northern Ireland for the Public Service Channels identified above.
- b) Seek the agreement of the providers of the Television Services identified above to operate on the basis set out in this MOU and to facilitate the resolution of any broadcasting rights issues which may arise.

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<sup>1</sup> MPEG2/MPEG4 and DVB-T/DVB-T2

c) Come to a mutually acceptable financial agreement regarding any transmission and associated costs.

d) Arrange ongoing meetings between DCMS and DCENR, with other stakeholders attending as necessary, which will focus on:

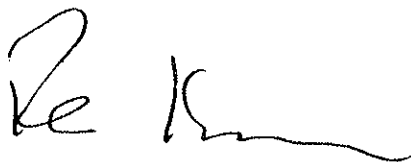
- i) Sharing information in the context of digital transition information campaigns and on digital transition generally
- ii) Facilitating the ongoing spectrum coordination
- iii) Facilitating the actions set out above in relation to all-island availability of Television Services
- iv) Facilitating the sharing of information around set top box standards and other technology
- v) Exploring options in relation to the reciprocal sharing of digital radio services.

Each Government will notify the other that it is ready to apply this Memorandum of Understanding. It will come into effect on the date of the later Government notification and will continue in effect until terminated by either Government on six months' written notice.

The foregoing record represents the understandings reached between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of Ireland upon the matters referred to therein.

Signed in duplicate on... 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2010

For the Government  
of the United Kingdom of  
Great Britain and Northern Ireland



For the Government of Ireland

