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Satellite Shuffling: reducing BBC Red Button and expanding BBC One HD

Tuesday 2 October 2012, 16:53



Alix Pryde

Director, BBC Distribution

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Just as the Paralympics kicked off at the start of September I wrote about a [modification to our HD satellite transponder](#) that I can happily report went ahead successfully as planned on 27 September 2012. This increased the capacity available to us and was the first of a number of modifications we are making to our satellite transmissions over the coming months to enable us to implement two key changes to our service line-up:

- In the middle of October we will be reducing the number of **BBC Red Button video streams** on satellite (and cable) to one. This will mean we close our 'DSat7' transponder (Astra 2A tp 13).
- Over the next few months we will be launching **BBC One HD for the nations** of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. They will each be available on terrestrial, satellite and cable platforms. In order to carry these services on satellite we'll be opening a new transponder (Astra 1N tp 61) which we will be referring to as DSat8.

These changes will affect different people in different ways, and I know from reading your responses to my previous blogs that some of you take issue with the changes, so I wanted to explain the thinking behind the decisions as well as what will be happening from a technical standpoint.

1. BBC Red Button video streams

In November 2010, the BBC Trust published its [review of the BBC Red Button](#) and challenged the BBC Executive "to reduce its distribution costs by providing a more consistent level of service across different digital TV platforms". Accordingly, the BBC's [Delivering Quality First proposals](#) in October 2011 set out a plan to reduce the number of BBC Red Button video streams on satellite and cable from five to one and save the costs of one transponder.

I know that the BBC Red Button service as a whole is very appreciated and used by a wide section of the population, who value the ease of access to text and video at the press of a button. And the BBC is committed to maintaining a vibrant and popular red button service. We have exciting future plans for the BBC Red Button, as my colleague Tom Williams explains on the [BBC Internet blog](#).

What's happening when?

Turning to the technical changes involved, as I'm sure you can imagine, closing a transponder is not as simple as flicking a switch. There are a number of stages we'll be working through in the next few weeks. Most of them should be invisible to you but there are a couple of dates in particular to note.

Step 1: Move the TV services

The one remaining BBC Red Button service will move from DSat7 to DSat1 (Astra 1N tp 45) but in order to make this fit and optimise how our more and less capacity-hungry channels are arranged, we need to shuffle some of our TV services around. So in the early hours of 12 October 2012:

- BBC Three / CBBC (DSat1) and BBC News (DSat 2) will move to DSat6 (Astra 1N tp 48)
- BBC ALBA and BBC One North East & Cumbria will both move from DSat6 to DSat2 (Astra 1N tp 47)
- BBC Four / CBeebies (DSat2) and BBC Red Button stream 1 (DSat7) will move to DSat1

Step 2: Move the radio services

On 15 October 2012 we will move our radio services on the Sky platform from DSat2 and DSat7 to be more evenly spread across DSat2 and DSat5 (Astra 1N tp 46). On the 16 October 2012 these changes will take effect on Freesat and Virgin Media. As each of the radio services moves there will be a small outage of a couple of minutes.

This will also mean that our radio services move from a European beam to a UK spot beam as DSat7 is the last of our European beam transponders. We use a UK beam for our TV services, so the radio

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services will be as available in the UK as our TV services. But it does mean that the radio services will no longer be receivable across much of mainland Europe. I've no doubt that some readers of this blog will be disappointed by this news. But I'm afraid European-beam transponders are not cost effective for us. We broadcast our services for UK audiences "in the clear" or unencrypted (which is what makes Freesat possible) and so for rights reasons we are limited in terms of the services that we are able to broadcast on a European beam. The BBC's radio station for listeners outside the UK is the BBC World Service, and it is widely **available throughout the world**. In Europe you can receive the World Service in **many different ways** including on satellite from Eutelsat Hot Bird 8 at 13° East. It's also available online 24 hours a day via the listen live link from the **BBC World Service homepage**.

On 15 October 2012 we will also stop using the four other BBC Red Button streams.

Step 3: Close the transponder

DSat7 will then close at the end of October.

How will this affect me?

Full details of the new line-up will be published on our **reception advice page** from 12 October 2012.

The change will mean different things to different people:

- If you watch TV or listen to radio using Freeview or Virgin Media, you will not be affected.
- If you have Sky, you should not notice the change and shouldn't have to do anything. If you do have an issue receiving any of our channels after these dates, you can try unplugging your Sky set top box, waiting 30 seconds and plugging it back in again. If that doesn't resolve your problem it's best to contact Sky on 08442 411 653.
- If you have Freesat you may need to put your digital box or TV into standby for 30 seconds and then switch it back on again. If the channels are still unavailable then carry out a 'Freesat channel retune'. Full instructions can be found in the manual for your digital TV or box. Further help with retuning can be found at www.freesat.co.uk or by calling the Freesat customer support team on 08450 990 990.
- If you have any other kind of satellite receiver that can currently receive our services you'll need to either get it to retune or configure it manually using the details on our **reception advice page**. Please consult the manual for more information.

As well as briefing Sky and Freesat, we have contacted satellite and aerial installer trade associations – the CAI (Confederation of Aerial Industries) and the RDI (Registered Digital Installers) – providing them with information with which to brief their members in case anyone experiencing a problem contacts an installer rather than their platform operator. We have also put information about this change on BBC Red Button page 998 and it will be in the Radio Times because we know not everyone has access to the internet.

2. BBC One HD for the nations

We will be launching BBC One HD for Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland over the next few months. I'll update you with exact dates when we have them confirmed. We are launching them across all of our broadcast platforms so the channels will be available subscription-free on Sky HD, Freeview HD, Virgin Media and Freesat HD at the same position in the EPG where BBC One HD is currently found. As with our other nations and regional channels on satellite, the nations HD services won't carry audio description. So we will be listing the current version of BBC One HD in the 900s on Sky HD and Freesat HD so that viewers in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland will still be able to access audio description.

If you live in Northern Ireland, Wales or Scotland, you should find that the service appears automatically from launch if you have an HD satellite or cable service. If you have Freeview HD, you may well find that your TV or set-top-box retunes itself to pick up the channel. If not, you will need to do a re-tune after the new service has launched. Help with this can be found on tvretune.co.uk. Whichever platform you use, if you have scheduled recordings on BBC One HD, please check them after your new national HD service launches to make sure you don't miss any episodes of your favourite programmes.

When I mentioned in my **previous blog** that preparations for the launch of these services were underway, a number of readers posted comments querying why the BBC has chosen to launch BBC One HD for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland instead of other BBC TV channels in HD. So I thought I'd include an explanation of that in this main post. At its heart, it comes down to striking a balance between the different technical and cost considerations on DTT compared with satellite.

- **Technical:** On DTT, we are constrained in terms of the space available to launch services in HD, whereas on satellite, the capacity is there...at a price.
- **Cost:** On satellite, it costs essentially the same to launch an HD service whether it is a pan-UK TV channel, like BBC Three or BBC Four, or a national or regional variant of BBC One HD. However, on DTT, it is somewhat cheaper to launch a national or regional variant, as we tailor the network in that part of the UK to point to the new feed.

So with limited DTT spectrum and limited funds, our expansion of HD has focused on the nations versions of BBC One HD.

One reader pointed out that there are a number of English regions that have larger populations than the nations, and asked why they weren't prioritised. Population size is one factor we have borne in mind. However, another key factor is the length of time that the BBC One schedule in that part of the UK is different from a "network" feed. For English regions, this time is mostly made up by the regional news bulletins. However, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the schedule can vary significantly from network particularly in peak time. So this launch of the HD services for the nations will help to make BBC One HD more relevant to its viewers in the nations and more true to the SD service the BBC broadcasts.

One other reader suggested BBC Two HD as a priority, and I'm pleased to confirm that plans announced earlier this year to convert BBC HD into BBC Two HD are progressing towards completion next year.

Finally, some readers were curious to know how we planned to fit BBC HD and four versions of BBC One HD into a single transponder without messing up picture quality. The answer is that we're not. We have bought a new DVB-S2 transponder (DSat8) alongside the existing DSat4. Each of these transponders will carry two versions of BBC One HD and DSat4 will also carry BBC HD, as it does now. (We are evaluating

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"essential viewing for everyone who's ever watched Doctor Who and wondered what it's a like to be a part of the team that brings this global phenomena to our screens"

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2012

2011

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2009

options for the spare capacity on DSat8.) My esteemed colleagues in BBC Research & Development have put a great deal of painstaking work into the configurations of these two transponders to try to match the picture quality of each version of BBC One HD to the one we have at the moment, and maintain BBC HD's picture quality, for which I am very grateful.

So we have a busy autumn ahead of us in BBC Distribution, helping to deliver the above transitions. I hope your experience of these changes will be a smooth one and that this post has given you a clearer picture of the rationale and work behind them.

Alix Pryde is Director, BBC Distribution

Red Button Development Editor Tom Williams has also written about [changes to Red Button](#) on the BBC Internet Blog.

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1. William Kay

2ND OCTOBER 2012 - 18:27

0

Does this mean the end of coverage of multiple snooker tables during the championships the BBC covers? If so, that will really be a step in the wrong direction. It's not always the match that BBC2 has chosen to go with that's the most interesting or exciting...

2. Guv-nor

2ND OCTOBER 2012 - 18:38

+1

Tom Williams, the missing link, or at least the link missing at time of posting
http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/bbcinternet/2012/10/red_button_changes.html

3. NSM_HD

2ND OCTOBER 2012 - 18:41

+1

Hi, Alix thanks for the post.

It's good to hear that you won't be cramming all the bbc one hd's into one transponder. I am also glad that you are keeping them all 1920x1080.

This is properly not your department, but if you could pass on the info, I would like to thank you for removing the DOG from bbc one hd, it looks so much better now without it. I wish the same could be done for bbc hd and the others.

I would also like to say a big thanks to the R&D department and yourself for all of your hard work you have put in.

One thing I'm still unsure about is the AC3 audio streams, on DSat which are down to 192kbps, which I have found on occasions to effect the quality of audio on bbc one hd especially, where it seems to have a slight but audible crackle, but switching to the audio description track gets rid of it, and it doesn't happen on other channels or audio sources. I am listening via a 5.1 amp. Just a thought.

Many thanks again.

4. popeye13

2ND OCTOBER 2012 - 19:17

-1

So because DTT is limited, you again use that a template for how much the BBC will and will not expand into HD services and what will be culled to keep the DTT users happy, at the expense of those more millions that use either satellite & cable..

When o when will the BBC drop this silly, stupid and pathetic line from the book of excuses about platform neutrality and exploit each platform to the max it can take, not limit everything to the one platform that can handle next to nothing.

And, i wouldn't be boasting about BBC HD PQ, its shocking if not a shambles and frankly, embarrassing to even claim it to be HD, but of course, the BBC don't listen to the masses that have been telling you this for how long...?? You listen to one or two folks that know nowt.

BBC One HD Scot, Wales & NI are a good idea in principle, but the fact you will then go ahead and kill off BBC HD, leaving BBC Three & BBC Four, with no outlet for HD content, is nothing short of braindead. The channels are still not 24 hours a day, and now, will be left with no HD.

I can't believe i pay a LF for all this nonsense, yet those on the European continent, get stunning BBC HD content, topend bitrates and yet the BBC in the UK, paid for by the public, get something thats nothing remotely to be proud of in terms of HD quality.

Im also in the mindset to think you took the BBC One HD logo off, because it looks nothing close to real HD, like ITV, Channel4 & NHK are able to deliver.

A reply to any of this? Ive more hope of winning millions on the lottery haven't i.

I wonder if this will make it through the moderation process...

5. Alan0001

2ND OCTOBER 2012 - 20:26

0

Have BBC Research & Development looked at possibility of transmitting just one single HD stream when all 4 nations are in sync but switching to a SD stream for each nation when necessary for example local news. All the SD variations & the HD stream would be on the one mux. Each Sky/freesat decoder would switch to the correct SD stream depending on postcode while SD

streams are transmitted but switch back to a common HD after. A DVB-S2 mux could easily handle multiple SD (18 odd versions of BBC1) MPEG4 encoded channels. Obviously some legacy version (s) of BBC1 would need to be transmitted on a DVB-S mux in mpeg2 for any non HD decoder users. This method if possible would reduce the number of satellite muxes required by BBC & still provide localised programming for those who have a HD decoder. SD users would need to upgrade to HD to keep their local BBC1 versions but would at least have access to some region of BBC1 if legacy DVB-S mpeg2 version is kept.

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