Operational guidelines for live OBs and studios

This document details how live programmes should work with the Planning and Playout teams in Ericsson Broadcast Media Services (EBMS) to ensure maximum resilience during all live broadcasts. If followed thoroughly, these guidelines will ensure that any issues which arise during transmission can be dealt with swiftly and effectively following a process that has been agreed in advance.

Pre event procedure
If your programme features a Major Event or is particularly unusual or unpredictable the Executive Producer or another senior member of the Production team who is responsible for the output should contact the BBC Playout Editor one week in advance of transmission. This discussion will cover editorial concerns including possible scenarios which may impact the timing of the programme as well as an overview of circuit resilience/standby options and alternative feeds/coverage of the event e.g. international feeds/other BBC Platforms.

Email: BBCTVPlayoutEditors@bbc.co.uk

Telephone (Playout Editor): 0208 4955001

For all events, with a minimum of three days to transmission, the PA should email Programme Planning (BBCTVPlayoutEditors@bbc.co.uk), cc’ing the Playout Editors, with onsite contact information, key personnel names and confirmation of latest TX times. In addition you should provide details of vision and audio format (e.g. HD/SD/Sound and 5.1/Stereo/S2020), resilience (e.g. fully redundant spare or international options) and a general overview of the OB delivery. This information should be provided by the Editor/Producer/EM.

Playout Planning contacts:
BBC One Programme Planner: 0303 0818101
BBC Two Programme Planner: 0303 0818102
BBC Four Programme Planner: 0303 0818103

On the day procedure
At least 30 minutes prior to transmission your technical crew should telephone CCA (Central Control Area) to begin full circuit line up. From CCA the OB will then be ‘passed on’ to MCR (Ericsson Master Control Room) to check the link into Broadcast Centre where MCR is located. Once MCR and the OB are happy that this stage of the line up is complete the circuits will be made available to Playout. The Playout Director will then have access to all sources required to execute the live transmission.

At this point, as is common practice, the OB PA should go through the following with the Playout Director (depending on what is happening at the OB this can either be done on the phone or over talkback, but either way talkback must be established and proved to all relevant positions in the scanner or studio):

- Clock check
- On air/off air times
- Description of how programmes starts, including who’s presenting
- How programme ends (if known)
- Del/mobile numbers if required
- Agree in the event of a technical breakdown whether the OB/studio or Playout will put up an apology caption.
Important
The Director in the Production Gallery/Scanner must then identify the main, reserve and any international circuits to Playout by offering them on the live mixer as well identifying the associated sound. At this stage make clear and agree the exact procedure (for both sound and vision) should a problem occur with the main circuits. It is important that having agreed this no changes are made in the use of the OB circuits. If for some reason a reserve line needs to be utilised in a different capacity (e.g. sending material to VT) then this must be clearly communicated to the Playout Director before the change is made. Also take this opportunity to show Playout how your programme is going to start. Remember that network will automatically cut to your output at a designated time so make sure you are offering your first vision and can run or cue instantly. Please do not cue your titles to the -5" and sit on the clock.

NB: If you line up with CCA well in advance of transmission, i.e. several hours in order to service another programme, Red Button Interactive or to play material for lines record, do not assume that CCA will pass you on to MCR as is described above. It is vital therefore that your technical team communicate with MCR approximately 30’ to TX and in turn check that circuits are passed on to the Playout Director.

Note that Broadcast Centre Engineering Control Area is not only servicing BBC requirements but also those of many other clients such as Channel 4.

Talkback
A reminder that all live programmes must leave talkback open for the duration of the programme. If the Playout Director can no longer hear talkback they will be immediately alerted to a possible line failure and can therefore chase the problem as early as possible. Open talkback also ensures that when technical breakdowns do occur on incoming sound and vision lines, these can be managed quickly and effectively by the Production and Playout teams. Clear and open communication in such situations is essential and this requirement must over-ride any sensitivities regarding discussions taking place within a live production gallery. Playout teams respect all talkback discussions as strictly confidential. Talkback from Ericsson to the OB/studio will never be latched by Playout and will only be used for essential purposes, e.g. line up, counting you on air and alerting you to a problem.

Breakdown
In the event of a problem with the main circuits carrying a live programme during transmission, the Playout Director will first check the reserve circuit (if available) and if all is ok they will immediately cut to this source which, as rehearsed, will be a replication of the OB/studio’s main output. The Playout Director will communicate what they have done both to the OB and MCR.

If there’s a problem with the reserve circuit the Playout Director will cut to a Breakdown slide and alert the OB/Studio if they still have talkback. If talkback is no longer available, Playout will call the Production team on the telephone number agreed during line up. In both of these situations clear and calm communication is essential between all parties as both technical teams look to remedy the situation.

In the event of picture or sound interference (which cannot be solved by going to the reserve circuit), Playout will alert the OB and request that Production apologise for the problem to the viewer. An apology caption should also be super-imposed over the output either by Production or Playout, as agreed during line up. NB Ericsson have a variety of approved, channel branded straps available for such situations.
**Timing issues**

If the timing of the live event/programme changes while on air such that the following schedule is affected, Playout will create and super a relevant graphic informing viewers of the impact on subsequent programmes. The Playout Editor will inform the Production team of the need to caption and the Programme Director will cue the caption on and off air. This will ensure that the caption does not clash with production captions and will enable multi-messaging whereby Nations, Regions which are simulcasting the programme can execute their own messages. For information N&R will be across Playout/OB talkback and can either take a clean feed that does not include graphics or pre-empt the strap by masking with their own, following guidance from the OB and network Playout.

Productions should contact the Playout Editor to warn of any potential timing issues, previously agreed or otherwise, which may require contingencies or escalation to Scheduling.

If you need any further information please contact Red Bee’s Head of Managed Services Delivery Andrew Smith on 07920 548 425 andrew.smith@redbeemedia.com.

If you or members of your team would like to visit the Playout area in the Broadcast Centre to gain a greater understanding of this side of the operation, Chris is happy to organise visits.

**Last updated 18 April 2019**