

Sixty small-scale radio stations take to the air in Ofcom trials

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Radio listeners in ten areas around the country will benefit from new DAB digital stations as part of an Ofcom trial this summer.

Ofcom today announced that around 60 stations will begin broadcasting on digital radio for the first time using 'small scale DAB'. This new approach could provide a more affordable way for smaller stations to broadcast on DAB digital radio.

The trials, a further step in the development of this new technology, are designed to test how it operates and understand how smaller radio stations could work together.

If the trials are successful, UK listeners could benefit from hundreds more local and community radio stations on digital radio in the future.

Demand for digital

Ofcom has awarded ten trial licences for radio 'multiplexes' – discrete chunks of the airwaves used to broadcast several radio services.

This will enable groups of community, online and local commercial radio stations to work together and bring new stations to local areas from Norfolk to Glasgow and Cambridge to Manchester.

The stations are expected to begin broadcasting on DAB digital radio from the summer for a period of nine months. Each successful applicant now has 12 weeks to launch their multiplex. Ofcom will then work with Government to decide on the next steps for the new approach to radio broadcasting.

Peter Davies, Ofcom Director of Content Policy, said: "There's been huge interest in these trials, which are another step in bringing new local services to digital radio listeners.

"Ofcom is helping unlock the potential of this new approach and, if it proves successful, millions of radio listeners could benefit right across the UK."

The successful applicants are:

- **Angel Radio**, bringing Angel Xtra, Express FM, JAMM Radio, Mango Vibe, The Flash and Triple Hits to **Portsmouth**.
- **BFBS Aldershot**, bringing BFBS Aldershot, BFBS Radio, BFBS Gurkha, Radio Frimley Park, Radio Woking and The Breeze to **Aldershot**.
- **Brighton & Hove Radio**, bringing Juice 107.2, Radio Reverb, Smile Sussex, Totallyradio, Resonance and Brighton City Student Radio to **Brighton & Hove**.
- **Celador Radio**, bringing Hub Radio, BFBS Gurkha, Ujima Radio, BSR 103.4fm, BCfm 93.2, Somer Valley Radio, The Breeze and BFBS Radio to **Bristol**.
- **Future Digital Norfolk**, bringing Future Radio, Norwich 99.9, The Music Machine, Solar Radio, Jazz FM, Totallyradio and Future Plus to **Norfolk**.
- **Niocast Digital**, bringing Panjab Radio, Revolution 96.2, Manchester Business Radio, The Steve Penk Wind-Up Channel, Chris Country and Gaydio to **Manchester**.
- **Switch Radio**, bringing Switch Radio, Scratch Radio, Gaydio, Oak FM and Touch FM to **Birmingham**.
- **Scrimshaws Information Directories**, bringing Your Radio, Celtic Music Radio, Pulse FM and Go Radio to **Glasgow**.
- **U.DAB**, bringing Resonance, London Greek Radio, Rinse FM, NuSound Radio, Reprerent, Solar Radio and Crackers Radio to **London**.
- **UKRD**, bringing Star Radio, Gaydio, Chris Country, Core Radio and Cambridge 105 to **Cambridge**.

Making digital broadcasting more affordable

Currently, the cost of broadcasting on DAB is beyond the reach of many small radio stations.

But a new approach, pioneered in the UK by Ofcom engineer Rashid Mustapha, means that small scale radio stations could start broadcasting on DAB radio for a fraction of current costs.

The new approach is cheaper than current systems because it uses software freely available from opendigitalradio.org and equipment that costs around £6,000. While stations also have to budget for running costs - such as site rental, maintenance and electricity - small scale DAB is a much more affordable way for smaller stations to broadcast on digital radio.

The UK's first small scale DAB experiment

The UK's first experimental small scale DAB multiplex was set up in 2012. Ofcom engineer Rashid Mustapha was granted a test licence and installed a low power digital radio transmitter on a Brighton roof-top.

The test successfully delivered a reliable, high quality digital radio broadcast. The test transmission was an audio track of squawking seagulls.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is funding Ofcom's work on how small stations could access DAB digital radio and the equipment available for these trials.

Digital radio in the UK

Almost half of UK adults (48.9%) say they now own a digital DAB radio set and 39.6% of all radio listening is digital.

The first national commercial DAB multiplex, operated by Digital One, now carries 14 digital radio stations, and a second national commercial DAB multiplex is expected to launch early next year. The BBC also operates its own digital multiplex, carrying the BBC digital stations.

As well as increasing the capacity for national digital radio, Ofcom is supporting the Local DAB Expansion plan, which will bring local DAB radio services from commercial broadcasters and the BBC to even more UK homes.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Ofcom will award short term multiplex licences under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 2006.
2. Ofcom will accommodate the trial multiplexes among existing DAB multiplexes and in a portion of adjacent spectrum not being used by other radio services. During the nine month trials, Ofcom will test the geographical coverage of these multiplexes, how well they can be picked up by receivers, and how well multiple radio stations in a local area coordinate themselves to deliver a DAB multiplex service.
3. Ofcom will look to provide the majority of equipment necessary to establish the small scale DAB multiplexes if requested by an applicant. Ofcom received 51 applications to take part in these trials.

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