

Sky News

Sky News was the UK's first rolling 24-hour news channel. Part of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, it has regularly won awards as Britain's top rolling news channel. It is on satellite, cable and digital terrestrial TV. It has interactive and mobile phone services too.

In late 2005, Sky News moved to a purpose-built studio complex across the road from its original base on a trading estate in Osterley, West London. The move coincided with a redesign of the channel, and a switch to widescreen broadcasting. The programme schedule was refreshed, with dedicated shows aimed at different audience demands throughout the day.



The channel's unique selling point (USP) is that it is first for breaking news. Channel head Nick Pollard, who ran the operation for ten years, asserted: 'We can't afford to be on background or analysis when there's a breaking story.' So, each programme was constructed so it could be broken into at any time to deliver major news.

The programmes changed when John Ryley took over from Pollard in summer 2006, but the commitment remained to build on the reputation for breaking news with specialist correspondents delivering more original journalism.

When we visited Sky, ITV had announced the closure of its rolling news channel, leaving Sky News and BBC News 24 competing head-to-head. According to a senior Sky News manager, the two big players had their tanks parked on each other's lawns.



Sunrise, Sky's breakfast programme, goes on air. It is co-presented by Eamonn Holmes, one of the UK's most popular broadcasters, famous as the host of GMTV's breakfast show and of the lottery, quizzes and factual light entertainment on the BBC. Lorna Dunkley co-hosts, with Jacquie Beltrao on sport.

The opening story is a Sky exclusive about the rescue of a Midlands woman from a forced marriage in Pakistan. The film, following a foreign office rescue team backed up by armed police, is the result of nine months' investigation, research and persuasion by reporter Eve Richings.

At the home news desk next to the studio, Senior Home News Editor Kirsty Thomson has just come on shift. She's been briefed about overnight developments on stories the channel is covering. She'll keep track of crews and reporters across the UK, and keep an eye on what the opposition is doing on a multi-screen display on her desktop. Nick Toksvig is on the foreign desk, co-ordinating input from correspondents around the world.

<div>0700</div> <div> </div> <div> </div>	<p>The first newsroom meeting of the day. Head of News Nick Pollard is briefed by Kirsty and Nick. Also at the informal gathering in a glass-fronted conference room are Head of Home News Phil Wardman, and the executive producers of the programme 'belts' which start at 0900 and 1200. They discuss the prospects.</p> <p>Kirsty reports that the top stories of the day will include Britain's first 'gay marriage' – the civil partnership of Grainne and Shannon in Northern Ireland, apparently to the strains of Dolly Parton's 'Touch Your Woman'. Sky will be live outside but not allowed into the ceremony. Nick Pollard asks when the 'royal wedding' takes place – Elton John and David Furnish will 'marry' when the law comes into force in England later in the week.</p> <p>Another highlight should be the unveiling of Rolf Harris's portrait of the Queen.</p> <p>In politics, Prime Minister Tony Blair will be talking in the Commons about the latest EU budget deal, and the Education Secretary Ruth Kelly will be defending government reforms in front of a Parliamentary select committee. Live feeds of both are available from Bowtie, the company that provides the Parliamentary service to broadcasters.</p> <p>There's talk of doorstepping Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, who's criticised the education reforms in the weekend papers.</p> <p>In foreign news, George Bush is to make a speech from the Oval Office admitting mistakes over the Iraq war and the Israeli PM Ariel Sharon is due to leave hospital after a minor stroke.</p>
<div>0740</div>	<p>Eamonn and Lorna are interviewing an art critic in the studio about the Rolf portrait. David Lee is predictably sniffy, describing Rolf as a 'talented amateur' and saying the portrait looks like something you might see on a tea towel.</p>
<div>0812</div>	<p>The 'breaking news' caption across the lower third of the screen reveals that 14 people have been arrested in Spain over links to Islamic terrorism. This is one of a number of 'breaking' stories that will not be followed up in great depth but which are seen as integral to the Sky service. Editorial Development Manager Rob Kirk explains: 'You heighten expectation. There's a psychological dimension. People watch Sky News because they don't want to miss anything. They feel that if it's going to happen, it'll be on Sky.'</p>
<div>0824</div> <div> </div> <div>Nick Pollard</div>	<p>Another 'breaking news' strap: Al Qaeda have broadcast video of the execution of a US contractor in Iraq. Nick Pollard mentions at the next newsroom meeting that the word 'killing' should be used instead of 'execution' in this type of story. Sky News editorial guidelines state: 'An "execution" suggests the killing has some kind of legal sanction.'</p> <p>Kirsty is busy photocopying the day's prospects for the daily 0830 meeting. Nick has the foreign prospects prepared.</p>

0832



Eve Richings

The main newsroom planning meeting, in the same conference room as the 0700 but with more production staff involved, gets under way. There's discussion about the weekend's political developments and their implications for today's stories. Is Blair going to get a 'big kicking' over Europe? Do Prescott's comments mark the return of 'real Labour'?

Nick Pollard enthuses about Eve Richings' forced marriage report: 'It's an excellent piece. Fantastic journalism and it shows. You can tell that we've spent months getting it. And it's infinitely variable in length.' A 3'56" version is running this morning. There's an extended version of over ten minutes for the 7 p.m. *Sky Report* (which will be followed by an interview with a victim of forced marriage who now campaigns to help other women), and a half-hour programme 'Finding Sadia' to be shown tomorrow.

And Rolf's portrait prompts a mini-debate on 'what is art?' – the very talking point they hope will engage the viewers.

0900

The *Sunrise* team come off air. In the studio, presenters Martin Stanford, Anna Botting and Anna Jones take over. In the gallery, Executive Producer of *Sunrise*, Neil Dunwoodie, hot-seats with his replacement Tim Cunningham, who takes over for the 0900-1200 'belt' *Sky News Today*.

0904



Martin Stanford

The *Sunrise* team hold a debrief. There's agreement that the show had excitement and energy, and the art critic was probably the highlight. Neil Dunwoodie says some of the headline writing did not match the pictures; there was a picture of actress Scarlett Johansson while the words referred to Woody Allen. Eamonn Holmes, in jovial mood throughout, notes: 'Nobody's interested in the director. She was the shot.'

Martin Stanford is on air introducing details of President Bush's latest speech from the Oval Office.

0925

The latest official portrait of the Queen has just been released. A live voice-over explains that it's been painted by Rolf Harris to celebrate the Queen's eightieth birthday, and that the public can see it from tomorrow.

0926



Kirsty Thompson

Kirsty is discussing crews and satellite links with Assignment Editor Mark Paterson, who sits opposite her. It's his job to assign London-based crews and the channel's Satellite News Gathering (SNG) vehicles. He can also call up the Skycopter. The Twin Squirrel helicopter – on annual charter – has a gyro-mounted external camera with a powerful zoom and the facility for a reporter/presenter to broadcast live. There's disappointment this week that flight restrictions round Heathrow Airport will prevent them using it on the 'royal wedding', Elton John's civil partnership ceremony in Windsor.



Mark Paterson



0945	<p>Producer Jack MacDonald, from the <i>Lunchtime Live with Kay Burley</i> programme, is setting up a 'disco', a discussion, on 'gay marriages'. He asks Mark and Kirsty if a crew and SNG can get to Oxford for 12.30. He's told that would be pushing it, but 1.30 is possible.</p>
1010	<p>There's a problem covering the 'gay wedding'. The satellite truck is at the front of the register office in Belfast. The lesbian partners have gone in through the back door. There are moving pictures and an interview, but reporter Orla Chennaoui has been live on air and the crew hasn't had time to feed the shots. Kirsty sums up the dilemma: 'As we're live 24-hour news, we've got to stay on air, but we have to move the truck. We have to get the pictures and then move the truck round the back, but the couple could come out at any time, and we want to be live when they do.'</p>
1012	<p>Kirsty advises the Belfast team they should have fed the pictures before they went live. Pictures of the couple going into the ceremony have started to appear on other channels.</p>
1014	<p>The live output has switched to Parliamentary correspondent Glen Oglaza, who's talking about the controversy over education reforms.</p> <p>Mark tells Kirsty the arrival pictures from Belfast are coming in on Digi 9, one of the channels for taking in, or 'ingesting', video. Kirsty is thinking ahead: 'To salvage this we've got to get them coming out live.' As she speaks, shots of the arrival are showing on BBC News 24.</p> <p><i>Ingest and output are controlled from a communications room a few yards from the newsroom. All incoming video is ingested on to a server-based system from Quantel, a company that made its name with digital TV graphics, but now offers full editing and play-out systems. Reporters and producers can view the material on any desktop. Producers cut headlines using a program called Qview, a simplified editing system. There's also Qedit, used by Sky's video library and for versioning material for the interactive services, and Qeditpro, the top-of-the-range software for cutting reporter packages.</i></p>
1020	<p>Chris Birkett, the Executive Producer of <i>Lunchtime Live</i>, has decided to do the 'disco' at 1.30. He says he enjoys the flexibility of rolling news, adapting the running order to the availability of technical facilities and guests: 'If you can't do it one hour, you can do it the next. It means you don't often miss things.'</p> <p>He contrasts the experience at Sky News with the BBC, where he was a senior editor on Radio Five Live, News 24 and the <i>One O'Clock News</i>: 'When I was editing the One, I was often scrapping with the Six for resources. People here are all pulling in the same direction and it makes a real difference.' [Since Chris left the BBC, the corporation's executives have declared there should be no competition between programmes.]</p>
1040	<p>Grimsby MP Austin Mitchell is interviewed live from Parliament about fishing quotas. As a former TV presenter, he is a regular contributor to live TV debate on all channels. This time he's talking about something that directly affects his constituency.</p>

1055	A live camera shows the rear exit of the register office in Belfast. The lower third caption reads: 'First civil partnership has taken place in Northern Ireland.'
1056	A crowd of guests emerges from the building, followed by the happy same-sex couple. There are no 'traditional' wedding photographs on the steps. Instead they head towards the assembled media, pausing briefly to raise their hands. Grainne says: 'We're going to show you our rings.' Asked how they're feeling, Shannon says: 'Delighted, and to many more.' And with that they turn and get into a cab, apparently followed by a documentary film crew.
1140	 <p>Another art critic is being interviewed live, this time down-the-line. Rachel Campbell Johnston says Rolf's portrait is 'safe' but 'appealing': 'It's the nation's most popular painter, painting the nation's favourite granny in the nation's most popular style, impressionism . . . There's a childlike simplicity about it and it becomes almost churlish to criticise him.'</p>
1200	 <p><i>Lunchtime Live with Kay Burley</i> comes on air. The 0900–1200 programme has featured very few packages but has a high demand for live pictures and rushes (uncut news footage). The lunchtime show is a round-up of the day's news so far. The best stories will be packaged, and there's a premium on human interest stories and interviews, anchored by one of Sky's most experienced presenters.</p>
1202	A High Court judge has ruled that property tycoon Nicholas Van Hoogstraaten, who was cleared on appeal in a criminal trial, was behind the killing of a business rival. The victim's son Amjad Raja is speaking live outside the court. The family are making a civil claim for damages. Mr Van Hoogstraaten is apparently out of the country. Library pictures (also known as file tape) of him are run in a split-screen alongside the live shot of Mr Raja.
1209	A reporter package about the first 'gay marriage' is broadcast.
1211	 <p>A live interview follows from Belfast. The Reverend Ian Brown, a Free Presbyterian minister, argues that same-sex unions are against the will of God. He has been chosen from a crowd of protestors by reporter Orla Chennaoui. Planning News Editor Clive Kerfoot explains that, while the planning desk sets up as much as it can for location crews on diary stories, there comes a point when reporters take over and make the story their own: 'We can't see round corners. You can only control so much from this end. That's when reporters start using their talents.'</p>

1228	The lower third strap announces that the hospital in Israel hopes to release Ariel Sharon on Tuesday.
1237	<p>Kay Burley walks along the <i>newswall</i> trailing the main stories of the day against a backdrop of giant pictures.</p> <p><i>The newswall is a giant video screen 13 metres long and three metres high, made up of more than 250 'tiles'. It is twice the length of the wall in Sky's old studio. The studio itself with a floor space of 7,500 square feet is twice the size of the old one. It features a rotating presentation desk at its heart, one of at least eight different presentation points around the studio.</i></p>
1238	Kay breaks off from the <i>newswall</i> for breaking news. Crime correspondent Martin Brunt is at the Old Bailey where verdicts have been returned in a high-profile case. Elliot White has been found not guilty of the attempted murder of Homeyra Monckton, the widow of financier John Monckton who was stabbed to death. But he's guilty of wounding with intent. The live two-way explains that sentencing will take place in a month's time after reports have been compiled for the court.
1241	Kay throws live to Glen Oglaza for the latest from Parliament on the education reform story.
1245	<p>There's a headline sequence of three top stories: first same-sex weddings; tycoon responsible for killing; Rolf's portrait of the Queen; and a trail for Sky News Active.</p> <p><i>Sky News Active was the UK's first interactive news service, offering a choice of eight channels at the touch of the red button on the TV remote. The active team also provide material for Sky's broadband services and mobile phones. Sky News is available live on mobiles with just a few seconds delay. The Sky News website is the second most popular news site in the UK, after the BBC.</i></p>
1246	Eve Richings' exclusive report on forced marriages airs again.
1304	The same-sex marriage package runs again. Sky News is running a text vote. In answer to the question: 'Do you support gay weddings?', 22 per cent of voters say Yes: 78 per cent say No.
1305	Martin Brunt is live again from the Old Bailey explaining the delays in the Monckton court case. The verdicts have come out in 'drips and drabs' and it's taken three days to get to the end of the trial.

1335	The 'disco' takes place. Peter Tatchell, the gay rights campaigner, is live from the Westminster studios at Millbank. He's pitted against newspaper columnist Anne Atkins, live from her home in Oxford, courtesy of the SNG truck based in the West Midlands.
1358	In cricket, Pakistan beat England by 13 runs to win the one-day series.
1400	Mark Longhurst, Ginny Buckley and Steve Dixon present <i>Sky News Today</i> . The use of three presenters in the morning and afternoon 'belts' is a talking point. It breaks with UK convention, but allows lively use of the studio, including the newswall and the positions known as the pod, the pulpit and the mezzanine (a platform reached by a flight of stairs).
1406	Martin Brunt reports live from the court (again). Brunt is one of Sky's most accomplished live reporters. He has never been a glamorous on-screen presence, but he typifies Nick Pollard's commitment to 'accuracy, accuracy, accuracy'. Court reporting has, by law, to be fair and accurate. That is difficult enough to achieve in a scripted report, but in extended live two-ways the pitfalls are obvious. Brunt masters the key facts, and sticks to them.
1530	Live to the House of Commons for Tony Blair's defence of his deal on Britain's EU budget rebate.
1607	More Parliamentary coverage – Education Secretary Ruth Kelly in the select committee, answering questions about the government's proposed reforms.
1642	George Bush has delivered his speech about Iraq. Correspondent Andrew Wilson is live from Washington offering reaction and analysis.
1700	Jeremy Thompson takes over in the studio for <i>Live at Five</i> . The presenter is a veteran of 30 years on the road as a foreign correspondent for ITN and Sky. He brings that experience and an enthusiasm for live TV to the studio, and comes into his own whenever Sky News sends presenters to the scene of live stories like the Tsunami at the end of 2004.



Jeremy Thompson

1715	<p>Head of Home News Phil Wardman is in an edit suite reviewing a report from Far East Correspondent Dominic Waghorn. It's due to air tomorrow. The story has elements in common with Eve Rushings' forced marriage report – investigation, secret filming and an insight into an under-reported Asian phenomenon. It is a hard-hitting exposé of China's fur trade. It includes shots of animal cruelty, including dogs and foxes being skinned alive and hung up to die. Wardman has to decide what can be shown, what must be cut and how to treat the rest. Some close-ups are cut. Much of the rest is pixilated to obscure the detail. Wardman says: 'We're not about sanitising the real world, but we don't have to be gratuitous. We're showing enough for the audience to know what's going on.'</p> <p>The next day's news prospects will carry instructions in bold type that the fur trade report should not be broadcast without a 'health warning' – an on-air announcement that some viewers might find the content of the report upsetting.</p>
1732	<p>Bristol reporter Andy Moore has reacted to a Press Association story that appeared earlier in the afternoon. A dying hospital patient had live maggots on her face. He has set up an interview with the woman's daughter. Nyree Ellison Anjee talks live from her home to Jeremy Thompson. Later, Moore will cut a package, including interview clips and a statement from the hospital.</p>
1736	<p>A Martin Brunt package on the Monckton case is aired. It includes interviews with the family's solicitor and a senior policeman.</p>
1743	<p>Andrew Wilson appears in another live two-way from Washington.</p>
1803	<p>The Sky Active vote has been running all day. Do you support gay marriage? 20 per cent say Yes: 80 per cent say No.</p>
1820	 <p>Kirsty is about to end her shift, more than 12 hours after she started. She's talking on the phone to Professor Colin Pillinger, the space scientist behind the Beagle Two probe which crashed on Mars two years ago. He thinks a new photograph from the red planet shows wreckage which could be his missing craft. He agrees to come in for a live interview next morning, but, frustratingly for Kirsty, won't agree to a crew visiting him for a recorded interview tonight.</p>
1830	<p>Kirsty hands over to another Senior Home News Editor, Roger Protheroe. He's already aware of the evening's prospects. Kirsty passes on the result of her conversation with Professor Pillinger. There's Andy Moore's report from Bristol due in, and a crew is waiting for celebrity guests outside the venue of Elton John and David Furnish's stag night. The news rolls on.</p>