

Review of services: News



## A trusted voice

93% of the UK population turned to BBC television, radio, text or online services in the first two weeks of the war in Iraq.

**The continuing 'war on terror' erupted into one story that dominated the year: the coalition invasion of Iraq to unseat Saddam Hussein. In an increasingly divided, yet more interdependent world, BBC News remained the UK's most trusted source of information on the conflict.**

It has been a year of extraordinary news events, at home and internationally, when the daily agenda more often encompassed violent crisis than peaceful celebration. Global terrorist attacks, the war in Iraq and continued conflict in the Middle East resulted in thousands of victims. At home the summer party spirit of the Queen's Golden Jubilee, the World Cup and the Commonwealth Games had a sombre counterpoint in the Queen Mother's funeral and the Cambridgeshire schoolgirl murders.

The year saw a strong performance from the BBC's main news bulletins on television and radio as a new strategy to further strengthen journalism and help audiences make sense of a complex world was implemented. BBC Radio 4's news programmes provided exceptional insight into difficult issues across the broad range of their output and contributed to the network's Sony Station of the Year award.

Making news and current affairs more relevant to younger audiences is a continuing priority and the new digital services have a key role to play across radio, television and online in reaching them.

New programmes and documentaries were launched on BBC Three with *60 Seconds*, one-minute headline bulletins on the hour; *The News Show* and entertainment-led *Liquid News* every weekday evening. *1Xtra* provides a targeted news and documentary service for a young urban audience while *Newsround* bulletins increased to seven a day on CBBC. BBC News online attracts a high percentage of younger users – more than 55% are under 35. Use increased

massively during the war in Iraq with a record 140 million page impressions in the first week before settling down to 3 million users a day – 50% more than usual.

### Reporting the war in Iraq

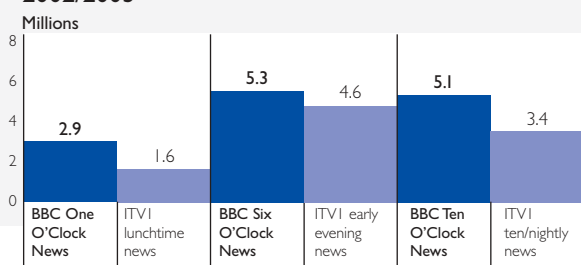
Wars have always been one of the greatest tests of independence and impartiality for a publicly funded broadcaster such as the BBC, which aims to provide global, national and local perspectives on key issues and to report all points of view accurately.

BBC News responded to the international crisis leading to the war in Iraq with immediate extra coverage. Throughout the war an average of five extra hours of news coverage was broadcast every day on BBC One and BBC Two. BBC News 24 was simulcast on BBC One and BBC Two and *Newsnight* broadcast special weekend editions every Saturday night. BBC Radio Five Live and BBC World Service became rolling news channels and BBC Radio 4 extended all its news programmes. Current affairs teams responded quickly, with David Dimbleby leading special programmes.

In an ICM poll BBC News was rated most highly for coverage of the war across all media. 93% of the UK population used the BBC to follow events in the first two weeks of the war. According to the same poll BBC One was the most watched and trusted channel and BBC News 24 was seen by 70% of the population – 40 million people – in the first week of the conflict. 72% of people who used radio to follow the war chose a BBC network service and calls to BBC Radio Five Live averaged 2,400 per day.

War reporting in Iraq was characterised by the latest digital technology combined with journalistic access. Although their perspective was by definition limited, correspondents 'embedded' with US and UK forces shared the immediacy and the danger of the unfolding conflict.

### Average audience for network news bulletins 2002/2003



Source: BARB, TNS/Infosys



Facing left: International news cameramen and photographers cover the Iraq relief story.

Above: Rageh Omaar reports live on the bombardment and fall of Baghdad.

Right: Happy times as the Queen celebrates her Golden Jubilee.





The immediacy of live television and radio has brought new dilemmas however – how much risk is acceptable to get pictures and commentary? BBC cameraman Kaveh Golestan was killed by a land mine in northern Iraq. ITN's Terry Lloyd was killed. World Affairs Editor John Simpson was injured and a Kurdish translator working with him, Kamaran Abdurazaq Muhamed, was killed in northern Iraq. Despite the risks the BBC believes that its reporters and correspondents, now in 44 countries around the world, should be there to report what they see – not rely on other people's pictures and information.

### Strengthening current affairs

The *BBC Statements of Programme Policy 2002/2003* included a commitment to strengthening current affairs in the peaktime evening schedule. Alongside existing programmes such as *Correspondent* and *Real Story* BBC One responded with event days on crime and Iraq. All domestic BBC News channels took part as well as national and local radio services, digital and interactive television, online, BBC World Service and CBBC, reaching more than 20 million people.

*Newsnight's* pioneering debates with Tony Blair answering questions from Jeremy Paxman and audiences which included swing voters and anti-war protestors was a format later copied by other broadcasters. *Newsnight* continued to innovate in its approach and featured Ms Dynamite, the UK's new black female star rapper, as a political commentator for a special debate on young people and gun crime.

In its 50th year, *Panorama* remained at the cutting edge of television current affairs, with headline-making scoops such as *The Corruption of Racing*, *The Secrets of Seroxat* and *A Licence to Murder*. Jane Corbin's worldwide investigations into characters and issues behind the international crisis over Iraq and Afghanistan provided valuable insight. Peter Taylor's dogged pursuit of truth in the secret world of *True*

*Spies* helped him to gain the RTS award for TV Journalist of the Year.

### BBC News 24

BBC News 24's average 15-minute weekly reach in multichannel homes rose by 36% to 2.2 million in 2002/2003. Simulcasting on BBC One and BBC Two during the war in Iraq saw it reach 23 million people on one day alone.

Daily business journalism improved significantly, spearheaded by Business Editor Jeff Randall. *Business Today* on BBC News 24 has been refocused with a later start time (10.30pm) and a distinctive dual presentation from London and New York.

Over the year, BBC News 24 expanded its interactive news service, adding business and entertainment news and an occasional archive service, *On This Day*.

Five years after the launch of BBC News 24, the Government asked the former editor of the *Financial Times*, Richard Lambert, to undertake a review of the channel's public service purposes. His report confirmed the importance of the channel to the BBC's public service portfolio but noted that it needed to be more distinct from other 24-hour news channels. In response, the BBC Governors asked BBC News 24 to develop its rolling news remit with a more analytical agenda, drawing on regional and international correspondents to create a broader outlook. The channel is now pressing ahead with plans to reshape the service.

### New approach to politics

The BBC's politics review in 2002 sought new ways to connect with young audiences who do not always engage with Westminster-dominated political debate but are often motivated by single issues. The *Politics Show*, presented by Jeremy Vine, replaced *On the Record* to offer Sunday lunchtime viewers a more rounded look at politics across



Above: Fiona Bruce in the BBC newsroom preparing for the 10 O'clock bulletin.

Right: *Newsround*, the BBC's specially-made news service for children.

Far right: *The News Show* reporting to BBC Three viewers.



## On the scene

The BBC has correspondents and reporters in 44 countries around the world.

the UK. The new programme gained an average audience of 1.5 million and an 18% share – up by 0.3 million and two share points. *This Week* replaced *Despatch Box* and was moved from BBC Two to be scheduled immediately after *Question Time* on BBC One. It is attracting an average 2.1 million viewers per programme. *The Daily Politics*, the replacement for *Westminster Live*, is on air three times a week, scheduled in a morning slot to take account of Parliament's rescheduling of Prime Minister's Questions.

### BBC Parliament

BBC Parliament has expanded and strengthened its European coverage with *Politique*, a new weekly programme on the workings of the EU, presented from Brussels and Strasbourg. The channel has been re-designed and re-branded to bring it into line with the rest of the BBC's digital portfolio, and a web presence has been developed to provide additional supporting material.

A new, clearer, schedule includes a daily repeat slot for *The Record*, the presenter-led review of Westminster, as well as a weekly hour-long edition. *Briefings*, the channel's weekly review of politics outside Parliament, runs in a new slot on Saturday evenings.

Over the year, BBC Parliament increased its broadcast hours by 30%. More time has been devoted to the nations, as well as to special event coverage – such as the broadcast of the entire original Coronation Day transmission during the Golden Jubilee celebrations – and increased recess programming has given extra time to Select Committee discussions on crime, health and education. Select committees are also highlighted in weekend evening schedules.



Above: David Dimbleby led the Iraq debate on BBC One.

Right: Evan Davis making sense of the Euro.



Above right: Green Goddesses returned during the firemen's strike.  
Right: Prime Minister Tony Blair faced *Newsnight's* Jeremy Paxman in two gripping political debates.

