

Review of services: News

One news story dominated last year: the attack on the World Trade Centre, the collapse of the Twin Towers and the subsequent conflict in Afghanistan. On 11 September, BBC News was the nation's first choice as people sought to learn what had happened and to make sense of it all.



Above: Half-mast – an American flag in the ruins of the World Trade Centre.

Right: BBC Political Editor Andrew Marr reports from outside Number 10.

The BBC's public mission has always rested heavily on the defining quality of its journalism and this was evident, not just in the immediate aftermath of the attack on America, but also in the days and weeks that followed, across all our news output.

BBC News reacted quickly on all fronts, producing 33 extra hours of news programming across the five radio networks, more than 40 hours of live rolling news for BBC World Service and an extra 14 hours of news on BBC One and BBC Two. This was supplemented with strong current affairs including *The World's Most Wanted*, *One Day of Terror* for *Correspondent* on BBC Two and a special *Analysis* for BBC Radio 4.

Levels of audience interaction also reached an all-time high, with 15 million page impressions recorded to the BBCi News website on 11 September and a record 23 million the following day. Within five days 75,000 people had emailed their thoughts and reactions as the world struggled to understand the most shocking images for a generation. Surveys showed that a clear majority of the audience considered the BBC's news coverage on all media to have been the best.

BBC News 24 came of age as demand for the latest news reached record levels. Significantly, the audience then stayed at a higher level, with an average weekly reach of 3.3 million in March 2002, a million higher than a year before and only 0.2 million behind Sky News. BBC News 24's reach, however, including overnight simulcasting on BBC One, remains far higher at seven million viewers a week. The enhancements in production quality achieved in the past year will be taken further in 2002/2003.

The BBC's General Election coverage in June 2001 was again the public's first choice, with over 18 million people tuning to the results between 10pm on Thursday night and lunchtime the following day – more than double ITV's audience. But the election clearly failed to engage many of the public, especially



Attack on America

On 11 September, 35 million people in the UK tuned to BBC News on TV, radio and online



Far left: BBC World Affairs Editor John Simpson prepares to enter Afghanistan undercover, dressed in a traditional female burka.

Left: Orla Guerin reporting from Israel.

younger voters, and the BBC has embarked on a major review of its political coverage with a view to modernising its output without diminishing its commitment to Parliamentary reporting. As Political Editor, Andrew Marr has already played a major role in making BBC coverage more accessible – an achievement honoured by major awards from both BAFTA and the Royal Television Society in the past year.

High points in the past year's current affairs output have included a strong debut by *Kenyon Confronts*, which was the highest-performing television current affairs strand last year with an average of 4.2 million viewers. Notable *Panoramas* included *Jeffrey Archer: A Life of Lies* and John Simpson's *Afghanistan: The Dark Ages*, both attracting over five million viewers. Audiences for some programmes in the series' new Sunday evening slot, however, remained disappointing. On BBC Two *Smallpox 2002: Silent Weapon* achieved high impact and 3.4 million viewers, and on BBC Radio 4 *File on 4*'s exposé of the Independent Learning Account led to a change in government policy.

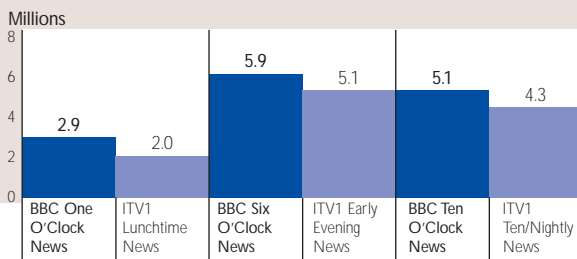
Question Time travelled much more widely across the country, broadening the profile of its live audiences and panellists and increasing its ratings, especially among younger viewers but errors were made in the tone and timing of the edition of 13 September when the US Ambassador was a panellist. The Oryx libel case was another cause of concern (see page 47).

The *Ten O'Clock News* continued to perform strongly in its new slot, with 5.1 million viewers over the year, and audiences for both *Breakfast News* and the *One O'Clock News* rose. The *Six O'Clock News* fell back slightly after *Home and Away* moved to a new slot on Channel 5, but it remained well ahead of ITV's early evening news.

Business coverage was strengthened across the output, led by the new Business and Economics editors, Jeff Randall and Evan Davis. New posts were created to improve reporting from the North of England, including a social affairs correspondent, a politics correspondent, a BBC Radio 1 reporter and a BBC Radio 4 news post.

As the BBC rolls out its new digital TV and radio channels, distinctive news services are being provided by BBC News, tailored to the interests and needs of their specific audiences. These are already on air for BBC Four and 6 Music, with 1Xtra to follow later in the year, with its own 15-strong news team. A closer relationship is being developed to support the BBC Asian Network's UK-wide journalism as the station prepares to go national.

Average audience for network news bulletins Calendar 2001*



Source: BARB 2001 (* Q1 2002 programme data is not yet available under the new BARB system).



Jeremy Paxman on the set of BBC One's General Election night programme, *Vote 2001*.