

## Review of services: BBC World Service

At times of world conflict the BBC World Service, with its core values of accuracy, trust and impartiality, has often found itself playing a crucial role for local people caught up in events. Nowhere in recent times has this been more true than in Afghanistan in the past year.



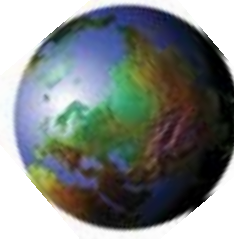
Above: William Reeve (right) and Rageh Omaar in the BBC's Kabul office.

Right: Taliban officials listening to the BBC World Service.



## Global standing

BBC World Service won the top Sony 2001 Award for its coverage of 11 September and Afghanistan



Under Taleban rule, with no television and no credible national newspapers, radio was the main source of news and information. Listening to the BBC's Pashto and Persian services has been a way of life in Afghanistan, and the war-torn population tuned in their millions to what is a unique lifeline of accurate and independent information in their ravaged country.

Broadcasts on these key language services and in Arabic, Urdu and English were expanded rapidly after 11 September. Short-wave transmission power was boosted and an additional medium-wave transmitter hired in the region to improve distribution. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office provided an additional £2.8million to support the immediate response.

Within minutes of the first attack on the World Trade Centre, the World Service English language service began the longest continuous broadcast in its history, lasting more than 40 hours. A special edition of its interactive phone-in programme, *Talking Point*, generated 30,000 emails from across the world.

But the story does not end there. Through the work of the World Service Trust, the BBC has played a central role in the reconstruction of the media in Afghanistan, including training journalists, providing technology support and helping equip new radio studios. More than 150 journalists have already received training from a team led by William Reeve, previously the BBC correspondent in Kabul.

In recognition of its response to 11 September, the BBC World Service won the top Sony Radio Academy 2001 Award, with special praise for its outstanding coverage in Afghanistan. Baqer Moin, Head of the Persian and Pashto services, also received the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association's most prestigious honour, the Elizabeth R Award, in recognition of the extraordinary contribution made by his teams throughout the conflict.

One of the BBC World Service's smallest language teams, the

Nepali section, responded to the dramatic murder of almost the entire Nepalese royal family in Kathmandu by doubling its output and working round the clock as official government and palace sources provided scant information on the shootings. Major coverage of the Zimbabwe presidential election was achieved despite the fierce reporting restrictions imposed on the BBC.

The overall global radio audience for the BBC World Service fell by three million in the past year, from the record high of 2001, to 150 million weekly listeners. These figures reflect a steep decline in radio consumption in India, where fewer than one in four people now listen to any radio. However, the global audience figure does not take account of high listening in areas like Afghanistan and Somalia, where it is not possible at present to carry out comprehensive, reliable audience surveys.

Nearly 30% of listeners, seven million more than a year ago, now access the BBC World Service through the growing network of nearly 2,000 local broadcasting station partners around the world. Listeners to FM re-broadcasts in the USA rose by 25% to their highest level ever, 2.9 million, and in Australia they doubled to two million. Both areas saw direct short-wave transmissions discontinued or reduced last year in response to audiences' changing listening habits.

The BBC World Service's multilingual website achieved dramatic year-on-year growth, with usage rising by 92% over the year, and was judged the world's best radio website in the 2001 Webby Awards.

BBC Monitoring, based at Caversham, responded to the particularly high demand for fast and accurate global media monitoring in the past year. It provided key source material in the wake of 11 September for stakeholders including the Foreign Office, the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Defence and the BBC. Customer satisfaction ratings are at their highest level ever.

### BBC World Service/World News growth in internet traffic

	Million page impressions
March 2002	75.3
March 2001	39.3

Source: BBC Server logs.

Right: BBC World Service provided extensive coverage of the Africa Cup of Nations.

Far right: The Nepali section doubled its output in response to the murder of members of the Nepalese royal family.

