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News at When? - Broadcast Journalism in the Digital Age Speech given at Leeds University

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When I asked Phil Steel, the Head of Alumni Relations at the University, if I was to be the first person to give a talk here in this newly opened Stage at the School of Performance and Cultural Industries, he replied no – the opening lecture here, he said, had been given by a Professor Baugh... well it can only get better I thought!

Then I wondered if I was to be the first to speak here on broadcasting issues. That must be the case, surely, I surmised. Then I looked at the alumni programme for this year and saw that I wasn't even the first person to speak here about the Beeb ... in fact I'm the third Leeds alumni in the past week. No really!

Last Saturday, Diedrick Santer who graduated in Psychology in 1991 and is now Executive Producer of EastEnders, was here taking the high ground as he revealed who really rules the roost on Albert Square!

And the day before, another Leeds alumni, Jane Featherstone, German and History in 1991, and now Managing Director at the leading independent company Kudos, stepped back in time to the 1970s to give the background story on the making of the hugely successful BBC dramas Life On Mars and the new follow-up, set in the Eighties, Ashes to Ashes.

So three BBC talks in five days. You can have too much of a good thing I fear!

However, within the next hour I, too, on occasions will be stepping back in time to the Seventies and to the Eighties, looking back at staging posts in my own career here in Leeds. And highlighting how key market developments during those years remind us all that broadcasting is constantly in a flux of change, adapting to new challenges, searching for new or lost audiences, offering up new ways of delivering its role.

But first, can I say what a delight it is to be coming home, so to speak, tonight.

It's almost 30 years since I graduated from here in Law, then walked from this campus literally across the road, Woodhouse Lane, and joined the local BBC television newsroom at Look North as a summer vacation trainee.

A 'holiday relief assistant' I think they described the job... for three weeks in the summer of '79.

How life has changed since then... or has it? Some things have changed dramatically ... some not at all.

The University then had under 15,000 students, today it's more than 30,000.

The South Library, The Edward Boyle Library now, was just being opened; not one student had a laptop nor even a mobile phone; there was no School of Performance and Cultural Industries on site that I recall – Performance was miles away at Bretton Hall near Wakefield.

But the most familiar University landmarks remain the same today as they did then: The Parkinson building; The Students Union; The Refectory still hosting great live bands.

Indeed the Law Faculty building on Lyddon Terrace seems frozen in time looking exactly the same today from the outside as the first day I walked up its steps.

And the purpose of the University continues: "to be a research-intensive centre of learning striving to create, advance and disseminate knowledge, and develop outstanding graduates."

It's the same story in broadcasting. Change to ensure continuity.

My career here began in an analogue world. We'd never heard of digital. Nor of the internet. There was just the BBC and ITV. No Sky, no CNN... even Channel 4 was still a dream, an idea then called ITV2. No computers in the newsroom – just white boards and markers to write up the running orders; typewriters going twenty to the dozen; news film needing at least 40 minutes processing in the chemicals bath before being ready for editing; and very few live links, if any, anywhere in the region.

No breakfast news; no moving pictures in any bulletin outside the main teatime Look North.

And yet today, on average, each person in the UK, apparently, now spends approaching half their waking hours using communication tools like PCs, laptops, mobiles, TVs, radios, iPods and other devices.

Over the past 30 years the story has been of the need to constantly adapt, modernise and renew, as technology and audience priorities move on, whilst at the same time clinging on to vital constants in broadcast journalism that should never fade or die.

But it's the pace of change in broadcasting that's never been as great as it is today and in News it's moving faster than in any other broadcasting genre.

A real revolution in audience behaviour; in the competitive landscape; and in technological change.

Narrowband to broadband and in future to wideband.

Indeed, in future will we remain broadcasters or are we even now content generators in a digitalised, interactive, audience controlled world?

What's certainly true is that we are having, literally, to transform our business to thrive, in fact, to survive, to become multi-platform suppliers of quality news content for a digital world.

And it's that that I want to talk about tonight ... in News at When? - Broadcast Journalism in the Digital Age.

The biggest broadcasting event in News in the UK so far in 2008 has been the return of News at Ten on ITV.

At the start of this year, the newspapers were full of it.

Bong: Sir Trevor returns to take on the Beeb.
Bong: The return of the great flagship, restored to its rightful place.
Bong: David takes on Goliath ready to slay the mighty Beeb.

The stakes were high for ITV, for News at Ten and for another Leeds alumni – Mark Wood, the Head of ITN, who studied German here in the 1970s.

Seven weeks on... what's the story?

Well for 35 out of 36 nights since News at Ten has returned to ITV, to go head-to-head with the BBC Ten O'Clock News, the BBC has won the higher audience. Indeed on average by over 2m viewers - the BBC Ten O'Clock News averaging 4.8m a night and News at Ten 2.7m.

In terms of weekly reach – the number of people watching at least one of the bulletins Monday to Friday - the average weekly reach for the BBC at Ten is 18.1m and for ITV 11.2m.

We are pleased, obviously, that the BBC is so convincingly ahead since News at Ten's return. But I salute ITV for putting the late news back in peak – it was a brave decision.

And direct competition is good for us... we relish it. It makes us work harder, it raises the bar and it keeps us on our toes.

Moreover, the good news for viewers in the UK is that more people overall are now watching television news in the late evening, at ten o'clock, than they were before the start of this year.

The BBC's audience has held up despite the competition, the ITV news is bringing more viewers to the screen ... and Newsnight's weekly audience at 10.30pm is also up by one million.

That's good for broadcasters, for public service broadcasting in general, for democracy, for citizenship.

But that 2.7m average audience for News at Ten is a lifetime away from when I joined the BBC in 1979 and ITV's News at Ten was the number one news programme in the UK ... by audience and by reputation. Then it got up to 10m viewers. Even ten years later it reached over 7m.

What all this really emphasises to me is the big impact of audience fragmentation, the multiplicity of choice in a multi-channel Britain and, most importantly, that while the flagship news bulletins can still command a decent audience – indeed in the BBC's case, a strong audience level – they no longer have the pull that they had when I joined the BBC, nor indeed when I returned to BBC Leeds as Head of Centre back in 1989.

For example the BBC's Six O'Clock television news programme averaged 6.5m in its first year in 1985, just over 20 years ago; it increased to an average 7.9m five years later at its peak; 6.1m in 1995; 6.1m eight years ago. But by 2005 it had lost 26% of its audience in five years as it fell to 4.5m and the impact of the multi-channel world really began to bite.

Today the average is still falling at 4.3m.

In that same five year period between 2000 and 2005, more than 50% of the Six O'Clock's 16-24 year old audience had gone and 30% of 25-44 year olds.

More generally in 2006, in digital TV homes, compared with analogue homes, weekly viewing reach among all adults was lower:

by a third for news - 73% to 54%;
by a half for current affairs.

Interestingly soaps didn't suffer the same decline.

And all this in the context that analogue television switch off begins this year and ends in 2012. In four years we're fully digital.

Today, and increasingly in future, audiences want the news at the time they want, on the platform of convenience they most use, and tailored to the subjects agenda they want to be most connected with.

Whether for the BBC or ITN, News at Ten has become News at When? – whenever audiences want it.

Of course producing outstanding, distinctive content still remains everything for a leading news organisation but today it has to be showcased, to be available on demand, to be available on all relevant platforms – video, audio, text, on live continuous 24/7 news channels as well as fixed time bulletins, the internet, podcasts, mobiles - in order to make the biggest and the widest impact.

For example a fortnight ago the BBC's Matt Frei secured an exclusive and quite extraordinary interview with President Bush.

[Bush interview]

The interview was so powerful, so newsworthy, we featured it heavily across all our output from Newsnight to The World Service, from Radio Five Live to the website, from a podcast to the BBC's main news programme in the US itself, BBC World News America.

Even here in Leeds it's the same story too – news provision is going through a revolution.

In 1979 when I joined Look North, the market leader for regional television news was Yorkshire Television's Calendar. It was well ahead in terms of audience share against Look North.

Today both have lost share in a multi-channel world but the picture between them has been completely reversed. Look North achieves a 28% share, Calendar 23%.

And all at a time when ITV says it can no longer support one of its most distinctive brand assets – regional news – to the same extent as before, hence why Michael Grade is asking the regulator Ofcom to allow it to reduce its regional news programme network across England from 17 programmes to 9.

The simple truth: with digital switchover looming, the economics are very challenging for commercially funded regional TV news in its present form.

The BBC's Look North is now producing more localised editions of the programme – for Yorkshire, and for East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. YTV is going in the opposite direction consolidating its offer into one single proposition from the Dales to the Wash. We are putting more investment into regional news. ITV is cutting back very significantly.

Look North from Leeds celebrates its 40th birthday this year ... so too does Radio Leeds, the first local radio station in the region when it opened in 1968.

Today Radio Leeds is also in a very different marketplace – not just competing with network BBC radio stations but a plethora of music based stations around the region.

But its speech led service of local news, information and sport still has a big appeal.

In the latest audience research figures, Radio Leeds achieved a weekly reach of 270,000 listeners... the sixth biggest BBC local radio station in the country.

And the power of the new technologies, from satellites to the internet, mean that I can watch Look North every night from my home in Winchester and whenever I am on the move around the UK and around the world, and so too clicking on to Radio Leeds, anytime, any place, anywhere.

Indeed here are Tony, Tracy and Billy Gaunt from Sydney, Australia. They moved from Leeds three years ago but remain firm listeners via the net.

"Sometimes we tell our families things that are going on in Leeds that they don't know," they told us. "You can be 11,000 miles away and still feel at home."

Who would have thought that back in '79?

And the local newspaper scene here as well has undergone dramatic change.

In 1979 the circulation figure for the Yorkshire Evening Post was 179,000 a night. Today it's fallen nearly 70% to under 60,000.

And the YEP too is now embracing the internet in order to try and offset that decline, to reach out to new young readers – with video, audio, stills. It's all very different indeed from when my career began.

During that first spell in Leeds, between 1979 and 1982, I felt so privileged – I had become a very, very small cog in the world's number one news organisation and I was on the inside, witnessing it covering the biggest news stories at home and abroad.

But look how audience interests in the news agenda has changed for news in the UK, from that period to today.

In 1979, the year Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, an IPSOS Mori poll indicated the top subject interests for news were inflation, trade unions, unemployment and crime.

Today it's a much broader range and the hot topics of industrial relations, strikes and inflation have been replaced by crime, race relations, the Health Service and terrorism.

But however the subjects of most interest to audiences may change or adapt, all good journalism has familiar characteristics in any age:

brilliant story telling;
great writers and reporters;
outstanding editorial leadership in the selection and pursuit of stories;
the vividness of eyewitness reportage;
excellent explanation and analysis from respected and renowned specialist correspondents;
a sense of revelation and investigation;
and today, more than ever, engaging and open debate and audience interactivity.

And of course the culture of any journalistic organisation is fundamental to its content offer. BBC journalism was rooted in the same values in 1979, when I joined, as it is today:

truth and accuracy;
serving the public interest;
impartiality and diversity of opinion;
independence;
accountability.

One BBC journalist who has displayed all these characteristics and values, day in day out over 40 outstanding years, is John Simpson, the BBC's World Affairs Editor. Here's an extraordinary example of his work reporting from Baghdad last year. Simpson, and BBC journalism at its very best.

[Simpson video]

It's those characteristics of brilliant journalism, matched by clear values, that must always remain the foundation of our overall BBC Journalism goal:

to provide the best journalism in the world, or should I say in the digital age;
the best multi-media news and information content in the world.

That's a big goal, to be the best, to be truly world class.

But our lead position, as the most trusted local, UK wide and international news provider, offering the best journalism in the world, is under threat if we don't transform ourselves to meet the challenges of the digital revolution and the changing demands of our audiences for: greater convenience; personalisation; audience participation.

And in the wider context of an explosion in choice; less loyalty; more opinionated news; more globalised; trust being re-defined in a world of less deference.

How do we remain relevant in this new world? How do we continue to make real impact? How can we maintain our overall audience reach and build on our reputation for excellence? How do we change in order to prosper?

We cannot let BBC News become a heritage brand – known for what it has been rather than what it is, and, importantly, what it can be. And staying number one is harder in many ways than actually getting there. The last thing we can do is rest on our laurels.

BBC Journalism is valued hugely – indeed it's the cornerstone of the BBC. When asked, as both consumers and citizens, audiences rank News and Regional News as far and away the two most important genres provided by the BBC.

So we have to maintain the overall reach for BBC Journalism – that is the amount of people who connect with it every week.

Today in the UK BBC Journalism connects with 80% of the population every week – that's 39m people – a staggering figure.

But the way that reach is made up is changing significantly as traditional linear TV news programmes decline and interactive new media consumption increases.

Reach is lower among younger audiences – higher among older. Lower among C2DE classes – higher among ABC1's.

In 2007 fewer than 25% of 15-24 year olds watched 15 consecutive minutes of BBC News in any given week.

That's why we recently launched a 90 second bulletin at 8.00pm on BBC One in the heart of peak-time viewing, right next to EastEnders. It's already increased our reach to TV News by 3%, that's 1.8m extra unique viewers - who only watch this bulletin and no other BBC TV news – and 600,000 of them are under 35.

Of course, continuous news channels like News 24, Sky, CNN are now an essential part of the offer from a leading news broadcaster. Three years ago we focussed on improving the impact of News 24.

Frankly it wasn't good enough, it wasn't centre stage enough, it wasn't seen as a core asset of BBC Journalism. It was late into the market. For its first six years, News 24 was second to Sky News.

Today News 24 is reaching nearly 8m viewers a week and has pulled well ahead of Sky News as the most popular news channel in Britain in terms of reach.

And reputationally audiences rate it the best for breaking news.

Importantly the reputation for speed and for breaking news is increasingly judged by the effectiveness of continuous news channels and in that context News 24 had to improve. It has, brilliantly.

Meanwhile radio, although a broadcast medium that's now more than 80 years old, still holds a huge grip over the UK's consumption of journalism.

Over half of all adults in the UK listen to BBC news and current affairs output on the radio and our overall radio audiences remain stable. Indeed between 7.30 and 8.30 each morning 41% of all UK adults - that's a huge 20m people - are listening to news from the BBC on one of our network, national or local radio stations.

And this is the position today for breakfast listening here in Leeds.

Radio 2 is the most popular station with 205,000 listeners, above Radio 1 and Radio 4, Radio Leeds and Five Live. Galaxy is the top commercial station with 159,000 listeners.

Yet Radio listening too is now evolving rapidly - on digital radio, through the television or via the net. 30m hours of on-demand radio are now consumed via the BBC iPlayer each month. Nearly 3m listen live on the Internet.

And podcasting is developing very fast: 12 out of the top 20 podcasts are BBC Journalism offers.

But if radio listening habits are changing, it's online - interactive media usage on the web - that is seeing the fastest growing audience of them all and especially for younger audiences.

Page impressions on the BBC News website grew by 20% last year and have now reached more than a billion per month.

More than 8m people now use the BBC's news site in the UK – up 33% year on year.

And the BBC news site is the clear market leader in the UK, almost three times as popular as Yahoo News, The Guardian, The Telegraph and The Times – the other leading news sites. And it's won the world's leading internet news award, the Webby, three years running.

It's crucial for us for the future because younger audiences are particularly attracted to new media. 16-24 year olds spend three times as long using new media as over 25s.

In the US the internet is now the second source of news for under 30s, fast catching up on TV News. That's expected to be the same position in the UK within two years.

But today, users spend relatively little time with BBC online especially compared to radio and television. A key challenge is to maintain our online growth rates but also make it a more sticky medium, with users spending more time on the site reaping more value from our content – more on that later.

This is how I can use the site today, tailored to my interests, my needs.

[Mark journey around the website]

My five children Sam, Molly, Flora, Harry and Lily, have really never known anything else than a digital world. They take for granted instant, mobile access to all forms of media - they are 'born digital'. They want control. They relish change.

The strength of the BBC News brand and its prominence through global aggregators like Google and Apple's iTunes mean our content, in text, audio and video, is more widely available than ever before.

Direct access but also access via third-party sites like Facebook and YouTube to our content is now becoming the norm.

The last thing we should do in such a fast changing environment as this is to stand still, to not embrace change, to not seize the new opportunities - if so we will decline

rapidly. Our reach could go down from 80% to less than 60% in under ten years. My job is to ensure that must not happen.

And this rapidly changing world of broadcasting convergence, this explosion in media choice and the move to on-demand is prevalent not just here but in markets all over the world from Accra in Ghana to Delhi in India, from Moscow to Jakarta, from Cairo to Riyadh.

Today the BBC is the most used and most trusted international news in the world.

233m people listen, watch and connect with BBC Journalism around the world every week and our global audience continues to grow year by year.

The BBC is also the number one for trust in every major market surveyed although the levels of ratings vary starkly, market by market.

When I joined the BBC in 1979 I must admit I had little knowledge or awareness of the BBC's enormous impact around the world.

The Nine O'Clock News as it then was, Look North and Radio One's Newsbeat were about as far as my BBC journalism consumption went.

But 1979, like so many other years, saw the BBC at the very heart of huge international stories that changed the course of the world.

In 1979 it was Iran as Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile in France, back to Tehran, to take over as the country's leader, from the deposed Shah.

Then the BBC Persian Service was a lifeline, broadcasting 90 minutes a day of radio programming in Farsi to Iran, via short wave and medium wave transmitters.

And it was John Simpson again, a little younger and a little slimmer, who was reporting from Tehran for the BBC.

[Simpson video]

Today in 2008 the BBC Persian Service is about to launch a new television news service this year to stand alongside an expanded 40 hours of radio per week and alongside a world renowned BBC Persian website used by Iranians across the country and by the diaspora population around the world especially in the US.

So influential is the BBC Persian website that the authorities in Iran regularly try to block its use.

Today 3m listen to the BBC in Iran on SW and MW each week. One million connect to the Persian website.

So in 2008 it's a big moment for the BBC Persian Service as it truly becomes a multi-media portal offer for the digital age.

Meanwhile Iran itself is expanding its own international broadcasting, recently launching Press TV, a 24-hour English news channel aimed at viewers in the US and here in Europe.

Also, in just one week's time, the BBC Arabic Service launches a new television news service for the Middle East to sit alongside the BBC Arabic radio offer which has been transmitted since 1938 (the BBC's first foreign language service) and the BBC Arabic website available across the Middle East and around the world for nearly a decade.

In Cairo and Riyadh you can connect to BBC News by watching TV, by listening to SW and MW radio, logging on to the web, and watching on-demand video reports.

All our 33 foreign language news services will have to embrace the opportunities of the digital age to stay relevant, to stay strong. The impact of the BBC's global news services in so many places around the world is extraordinary.

In Afghanistan today more than 10m – 60% of the population - listen to the BBC Pashto Service; in Iraq 2.2m, a quarter, listen to the Arabic Service; and in strife-torn Kenya 7m are listening to the BBC's Swahili and English Services.

But in all these places broadband internet, mobile hand helds, satellite dishes and quality FM sound are shaping the market context of 2008.

So if the BBC is to remain the best known and most respected voice in international broadcasting thereby bringing benefit to Britain, then it's Global News Services too can no longer be broadcast at a fixed point determined by the BBC – they have to be increasingly available anytime, any place, anywhere.

And one fact to wipe out any complacency at us being the number one - Google News is now the third most trusted news provider in the world, behind the BBC and CNN, but as an aggregator, it doesn't produce any content of its own whatsoever!

Competition in the UK in 1979 looked like this.

Competition in 2008 looks like this: the end of national boundaries; new players, new global entrants; a radical change in the landscape of news; just think how your news consumption is shaped and is changing.

Of course change and having to transform the way we work in such a significant way is unsettling, exhausting and, at times, painful.

Our current efficiency programme is driving savings of more than 20% over the next five years in the News area... with around 500 job losses.

But we have to do this to stay fit, to generate the money we need to invest in new areas and new initiatives, and to keep us strong in the long term.

We are focusing our savings plan on reducing duplication; on greater multi-media working; streamlining tiers.

And an old newsroom architecture designed for three different and quite separate mediums – television, radio and a fledgling online area sited on a different floor, hundreds of yards away from the heartbeat of the newsroom - has been taken apart.

And now it's all being brought together in a single multi-media newsroom – video, audio, text - in an integrated way.

More money, as a proportion of the the BBC's content investment, will be spent on BBC journalism in 2012 than is spent today. It's all about transforming for the future. We have to do it.

So what must our priorities be in the future for BBC News and Current Affairs covering our UK-wide, national, local and international services? And in response to a rapidly changing landscape in what is truly a revolution in journalism – in changing audience behaviours, exploding market choice and a dazzling array of new technology opportunities. And all of which will have profound implications for audiences, content producers and society.

With all this as our reference point, what must we do to stay strong and relevant and to achieve our goal – the best journalism in the world.

Firstly maintain an absolute commitment to excellence in all we do.

Journalism rooted in: ambition, enterprise, originality, authenticity, creativity, quality.

Teams full of enquiring minds, curiosity, talent, energy and new ideas.

A culture of integrity, fairness and of getting it right matched by boldness, confidence and drive.

An agenda of relevance and significance which focuses on the big themes and trends and engages with all our audiences.

A broad agenda reporting the whole of the UK to itself and the world to the UK.

We know audiences want news which gives clear, accurate, immediate information on what's happened, specialist correspondents of authority who promote greater understanding of complex issues, interviewers who can hold the powerful to account together with a wide range of views, providing different perspectives and open, informed debate.

And all underpinned by a firm commitment to eyewitness reportage rooted in a comprehensive network of outstanding correspondents and newsgathering bureaux across the UK and around the world.

Next a big drive in on-demand focused on convenience and innovation recognising audiences increasingly want to shape their own news and information so it works for their lifestyle. Being able to find what they want, use and play with it, and share it with others.

We've made strong progress via the on-demand space with our websites and mobile offerings but we have to keep up the momentum, driving forward, pressing for more innovation.

More personalisation.

Better search.

High quality embedded video -we've lagged behind here.

More BBC content available via external aggregators.

Better showcasing of our very best work.

More special sites of real depth on the biggest stories like the US Election, climate change.

Increased audience involvement and participation.

Making BBC content more available on mobiles.

Every senior specialist editor and our top correspondents at home and abroad writing regular columns online with active audience participation.

Different cuts of programmes and reports being available to suit different audiences. And current affairs programmes not just available at a fixed point in the schedule like Panorama on BBC One on Monday at 8.30 or Inside Out here at 7.30 on Friday but available on-demand via the BBC iPlayer for longer periods.

Success in future for current affairs programmes like this Panorama Special with the troops in Afghanistan will be that the content is available to more people over more devices over more time bringing greater value to audiences.

The relevance of a Panorama could last for weeks. It should be available to view over all that time.

And this in a context that, since its launch on Christmas Day, the BBC iPlayer has more than a million users each week; 500,000 videos accessed each day; 17.6m live audio hours are being accessed each month, 7.7m podcasts.

This is about the BBC aiming to provide and produce the best news site and on-demand facility in the world... modernised and creatively renewed for a web 2.0 world and beyond.

Next, we need to knit BBC journalism more effectively around its unique 3x3 dimensions which transcends any one platform - audio, video, text; global, UK, local - and under a simplified banner of BBC News.

When it's all singing together, it's an unrivalled powerhouse.

We must develop significantly our local offer across the UK for the digital age.

We recognise licence payers feel strongly we are not local enough and demand change. Digital allows us to address the serious shortcomings of an analogue transmitter pattern designed for a bygone age.

We plan to develop, subject to a potential Public Value Test by the BBC Trust, a strengthened broadband offer, based around the already existing and audience relevant Where I Live sites - 40 local offers across England based on the existing local radio map together with more localised coverage for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Enhanced local sites with local video reports on-demand, audio streams and clips, together with text - in news and sport, stronger weather and travel information, local democratic institutions covered more comprehensively and more interactively.

We must continue to aim to reach everyone across the UK.

Universal access for every citizen to high quality journalism free at the point of access must remain the basis of the BBC's content offer.

We must do all we can to maintain, if not build upon, our current 80% reach figure over the next five years holding the loyalty of our traditional, heartland audiences whilst appealing more to disengaged and vulnerable audience like the young.

That's why we've recently beefed up the quality and depth of news on the Radio One Newsbeat site and we'll continue to develop there.

It's why, through School Report, we want all secondary schools across the UK to connect with BBC News and engage in the making of broadcast news.

No one must be excluded from BBC News through age, social standing or geography.

We are owned by all the public. Our journalism must connect to all the public.

But to maintain that overall 80% reach figure in the context of the inevitable steady decline in television news audiences, we need our news online audience to double to more than 12m by 2012 and the traffic to our local online offer to double to 9m over the same five year period.

And around the world, we want our 233m reach figure not only to be maintained but to increase to more than 250m people.

We need to offer not only direct access to BBC News content but also access via third party sites – aggregators, You Tube - whenever, ensuring though at all times that the integrity of our brand and our content is kept intact.

We support the need for plurality and the benefit of choice in the market place for news.

No single voice. No one dimension but diversity – differences of approach.

Clearly quality broadcast journalism doesn't just come from the BBC. ITN is a hugely respected outfit; Sky News is a class act. Plurality of provision is good for the BBC - a plurality of voice is good for us all as consumers and citizens.

That's a big challenge for regulators and for the industry.

In this new world BBC journalism needs to be ever more distinctive, standing out for its ambition, quality, originality, its range of stories, its width of agenda.

BBC journalism must be at the heart of supporting the BBC's overall public purposes:

sustaining citizenship;
reflecting the UK's nations and regions;
bringing the UK to the world;
and the world to the UK;
helping to build digital Britain.

As the Liberal Democrat Peer Tom McNally said recently: "This industry is about the very fabric of our democracy – how we talk to ourselves and how we talk to the world."

We are going to seize the opportunity of the digital age to significantly enhance our broadband coverage of the democratic institutions of the UK – Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the European Parliament and local government - with much richer video, better search on key subjects, analysis of debates and voting patterns.

In 1979 just before I joined, the BBC proudly boasted that on General Election night it had 24 live inputs with cameras at 37 different locations.

In 1989 the televising of the House of Commons began.

In 2009, or whenever it will be, our General Election site will be one of the richest, most innovative and most dynamic parts of the BBC online site and we hope to have a video feed from every single count right across the country.

And in a world of great change, new styles, new competition, and with the growth of partisan news and opinion, we must stand steadfastly to our core value of impartiality working hard to promote objectivity, a striving for completeness in a story with the widest range of perspectives and views.

The BBC must not, will not, take sides. That's why we are trusted. And whatever the pressures on impartiality it's a core value we must strive to uphold at all times.

We want the best trained journalism staff in the world. Training and development, with a goal of never stop learning to be at the heart of our contract with our people.

That's why three years ago we launched the College of Journalism, one of the most advanced journalism training and development tools for practitioners in the world.

An online site with outstanding interactive modules on audiences, values, editorial dilemmas, case histories, production techniques, skilling for the multi-media age. Matched by face-to-face and workshop training.

We invest £5m a year in the College, double our commitment of three years ago. We will continue to invest substantially in our people and their developing skills base.

Moreover the best possible safety training must continue to form an essential part of our commitment. Our world class hostile environment training must remain leading edge to support our brave journalists who go to and report from dangerous and difficult places in order to get to the truth.

No story is ever worth losing a life and in the context of Alan Johnston, kidnapped in Gaza for 114 days, Kate Peyton murdered in Somalia, and Simon Cumbers killed and Frank Gardner paralysed in Saudi Arabia, we fully understand that reporting around the world can never be risk free but we must do all we can to minimise the risks and support all our teams in the field.

I salute the professionalism, commitment and bravery of our teams at a time when 171 journalists were killed around the world last year in the pursuit of their work - the highest on record.

It's been a great pleasure and privilege to be back here at the University tonight and thank you for listening.

I see that there is a careers fair this week on campus.

Interestingly a recent survey of undergraduates around the land revealed that the most exciting organisation, the one they most dream of working for is the BBC.

This is a time of great opportunity and exciting technical breakthroughs. But then this city has always been rooted in broadcasting history.

In 1888 Louis le Prince, in his workshop on Woodhouse Lane, perfected a process of using spools of paper negatives and a multi-lens camera to record moving pictures for the first time. He shot these pictures on Leeds Bridge a hundred and twenty years ago. The first recorded motion images on film ever to be taken – the birth of movies, indeed the modern media industry itself.

How times change.

In 1922 the fledging British Broadcasting Company agreed that no news would be broadcast on the radio before seven o'clock at night. "I don't think there is much demand for an earlier bulletin," said Lord Reith.

There'd be no coverage of controversial subjects.

No live commentaries.

No name check for any newsreader.

In 1979 I joined the BBC in effect at the end of the first age of broadcasting, the analogue world of limited spectrum.

In 1989 I came back at the start of the second age - the multi-channel world of satellites, cable and extended choice.

Tonight I return at the start of the third age – the full digital multi-media, multi-platform, on-demand world of convergence.

And I feel as excited, as thrilled, and as passionate about the BBC, its mission and its ability to make a difference, to make life better, to be at the heart of British life, as I did on that first day I joined back on 4 June 1979.

You're looking at a very challenged but a very lucky man. Thank you.