



BBC Coverage of Business in the UK

A Content Analysis of Business News Coverage

April 2007

Michael Svennevig
Institute of Communications Studies
University of Leeds



Contents

- 1. Background**
- 2. Analysis Methodology**
- 3. Overall Patterns of Broadcast Business Coverage**
 - 3.1 Business Coverage in News Programming**
 - 3.2 Business Themes in News Programming**
 - 3.3 Differences between News Sources in Business Themes**
- 4 Specific Aspects of BBC Business Coverage**
 - 4.1 The Radio 4 Today Programme**
 - 4.2 BBC One Ten O'Clock News**
- 5 Three Case Studies of Business News Coverage**
 - 5.1 The Farepak Company Collapse**
 - 5.2 The British Aerospace and Saudi Arabian Arms Deal**
 - 5.3 Green and Environmental News**
- 6 BBC Regional News**
- 7 Internet News Resources**
- 7. Overview**

1. Background

The general statement of purpose for this study is:

"To assess the impartiality of BBC news and factual coverage of business with particular regard to accuracy, context, independence and bias, actual or perceived; to assess whether the BBC portrays a fair and balanced picture of the world of business and of its impact on society more generally; to focus primarily on business coverage in mainstream output though specialist business programming should also be considered; and to make recommendations to the BBC Trust for improvements where necessary."

Based on this, the research operated from a basic definition of what 'business-related' encompassed in terms of which items were to be considered for analysis and which would be excluded from the study.

The following broad criteria were applied in deciding whether an item or programme was business-related, and to be eligible at least one of these criteria must apply to it. Any item was deemed to be business-related which included clear reference to one or more of the following:

- Pay and earnings and related issues
- The Stock Exchange, including New York/other countries
- Banks and banking, including interest rates and inflation
- Pensions and retirement
- Personal finance, mortgage rates, levels of personal debt, credit cards
- News of companies and commercial organisations, including financial news about these
- Regulation of commercial activities
- Consumer protection
- Industrial relations issues (actual or proposed), including pay and working conditions, disputes and strikes
- Environmental issues relating to business
- Legal and criminal issues relating to businesses

Subject to the following conditions:

- 'Business' means people or groups, companies and organisations producing goods or services which are bought or sold, and includes broad references such as 'the transport industry' or 'small companies'.
- Business items involve UK-based interests, businesses/companies/ organisations which are clearly stated to be involved or affected in an item or story, including references to past or future events.
- 'Business' does not include public organisations such as Government Departments/ Ministries, local government, the NHS, Police and emergency services, the military unless the context clearly involves these organisations' direct dealings with commercial businesses in situations such as PFI (Private Finance Initiative) funding.

- International organisations' impacts on UK businesses – such as EU directives, World Trade Organisation – are **also** business items as long as there is a clear reference to impacts on UK businesses/companies/ business organisations
- Government (and political parties) statements and actions are **excluded** unless one of the above topic areas is the main point of the coverage – for example Government *reacting* to business-linked events, or industry/businesses/others *reacting* to Government actions or proposals.
- Government (and political parties) actions or statements without a clearly-stated impact on industry or people's financial affairs are **not** business items.
- Business- and citizen-related organisations – such as the CBI, Consumers' Association, Trades Unions and Associations - are business items as long as there is a clear reference to impacts on UK businesses/companies/business organisations

The following sources were collected for the study:

Television

BBC One Breakfast	Monday-Friday
BBC One Six O'Clock News	Monday-Saturday
BBC One Look North (West Yorkshire) Early Evening	Monday-Saturday
BBC One Ten O'Clock News	Monday-Sunday
BBC Two Newsnight	Monday-Friday
BBC News 24 News Hour (2200-2300 only)	Monday-Sunday
ITV Early Evening News	Monday-Sunday
Calendar (Yorkshire news)	Monday-Saturday
ITV Late Evening News	Monday- Sunday
Channel 4 News	Monday-Friday
Sky News (2200-2300 only)	Monday-Sunday

Radio

Radio 1 Newsbeat afternoon business slot	Monday-Friday
Radio 2 early evening business slot	Monday-Friday
Radio 4 Today	Monday-Saturday
Radio 4 6 O'Clock news	Monday-Sunday
Radio Five Live Drive	Monday-Friday

Internet

BBC Online, Guardian Online, Daily Telegraph and The Times:

Main news site and business news front pages, and individual issue-led pages as needed.

2. Analysis Methodology

These sources were collected between October 2nd 2006 and January 26th 2007, excluding December 24th-27th and December 31st and January 1st. All broadcast materials - TV and radio - were recorded onto DVD and copied for security. In total 287 DVDs were recorded, representing over 95 hours transmitted material per week. Other materials such as daily news web pages, and news scripts where available were stored electronically and printed off as needed.

A team of coders was recruited and trained at the University of Leeds. The coders were recruited from 3rd year broadcasting or communications students, along with a number of post-graduate students on an MA course in Mass Media and Society. Coders were paid by the hour to watch/listen to the recorded content and then to complete a coding form which recorded details of source, timing, length, and a summary of content for each item which was business-related. Before beginning the main coding exercise, coders were given a set of training materials to take away and analyse independently, and the results were then reviewed and any errors in method corrected. Additionally, all analyses from all coders were inspected at the data entry stage, which was carried out centrally.

The design and capacity of the study necessarily involved making assumptions about the likely frequency of occurrence and length and complexity of business-related items in news coverage. In the event, the frequency of business-related news items was greater than anticipated, meaning that the first stage of analysis – identifying, measuring and documenting each business item in the range of content recorded took considerably longer than planned for. As a result a number of the DVDs could not be analysed in time to incorporate the data into the project database in time for drafting this report.

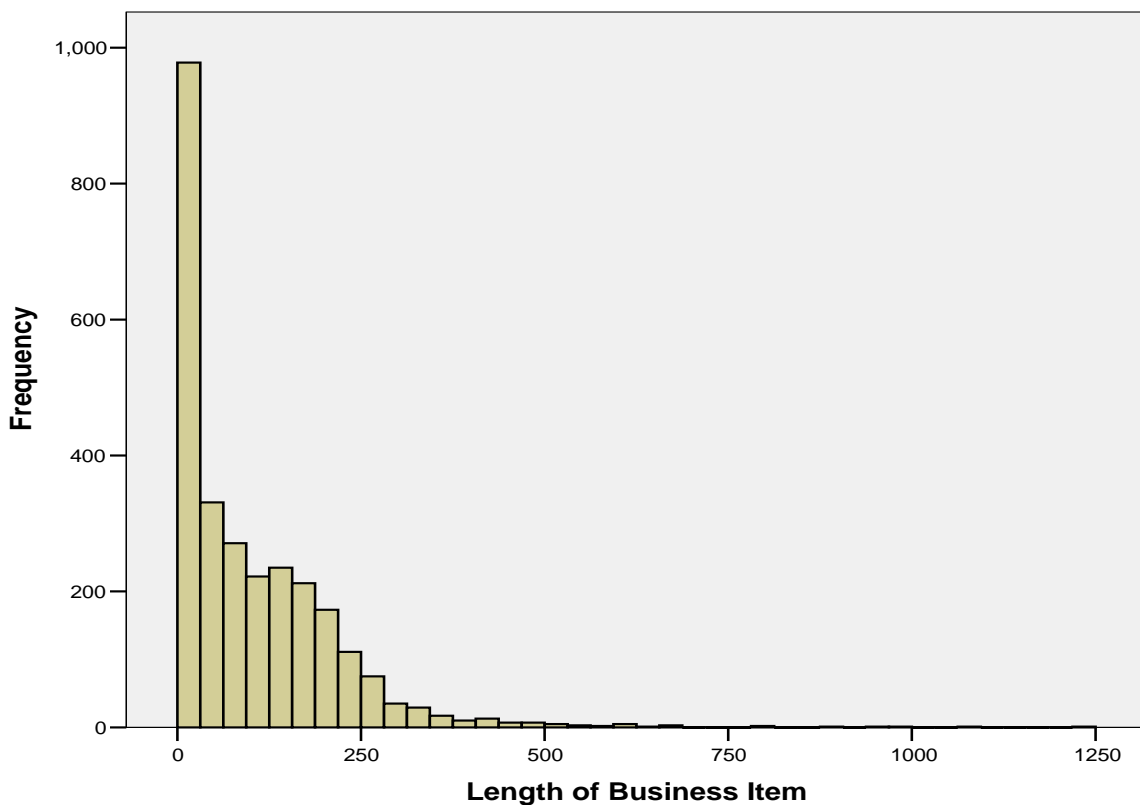
Out of a total of 287 DVDs, 228 have been analysed to date. Those which remain at present unanalysed were selected so as to ensure that the primary effort of the coding was always upon BBC terrestrial TV and radio materials, then ITV and Channel 4, and then BBC News 24 and Sky News. Also, coding effort was focussed on the period beginning 2nd October to January 5th. This strategy means that the data for BBC output are very detailed and fully representative for the period October through to December, and those for January are, in effect, a random sample of output rather than a full census of it. However, these data are also, of course, representative. Overall, the great majority of the recorded materials - particularly the BBC-originated materials - have been analysed and constitute a solid and reliable sample based on the majority of the output during the study period and provide a statistically sound basis for the conclusions drawn.

3. Overall Patterns of Broadcast Business Coverage

3.1 Business Coverage in News Programming

Over 3,000 business-related news items have been identified and classified across the various TV and radio sources analysed. On average, these items represent 10.7% of the analysed news programmes' total airtime. The average length of business items is 1 minute 44 seconds, though there is a very wide range of item durations: putting aside single-topic programmes, these typically ranged from an item over 6 minutes long in BBC Yorkshire's Look North on GNER's problems with their East Coast main line rail franchise and a new CEO, down to a short sentence on Unilever share prices lasting 7 seconds. The most commonly-occurring (modal) length of item is 20 seconds, and 2 out of 3 were less than 2 minutes long.

Chart 1: Lengths of Business-Related Items



Across most of the sources surveyed, there are relatively minor differences in the average length of items – with Sky News items slightly shorter than others. Channel 4 News in turn has the longest items on average; reflecting its typical and well-established style of news coverage and analysis.

BBCTV	ITV	C4	Sky News	BBC Radio
1:47	1:26	2:04	1:42	1:42

Average item length across a media source is, however, a very broad measure and conceals considerable variation between the individual channels and mediums. There are a number of more informative ways in which the relative performance of the various channels can be assessed.

No one measure is ideal or sufficient, but three key, average-based, measures for each news source are shown below in Table 2: the number of business-related items per transmitted hour; the average length of business-related items; and the proportion of each programme's news devoted to business related-topics. This third measure is in effect a measure of business news' average *share of voice* within each programme, reflecting its relative prominence within the overall news agenda.

Table 2: TV Business News

	Average No. of business items per transmitted hour	Average business item length (min:sec)	Average minutes of business coverage per transmitted hour as% of airtime
BBC One Breakfast	5.6	1:48	16.8%
BBC One Six O'Clock News	3.0	2:08	10.7%
BBC One Look North Regional News	2.7	2:00	9.0%
BBC One Ten O'Clock News	2.8	2:10	10.1%
ITV Calendar News (Yorkshire)	1.6	1:53	5.0%
ITV 1830 Evening News	1.7	1:53	5.3%
ITV 2230 Late News	4.1	1:08	7.7%
BBC Two Newsnight	2.2	2:30	9.2%
Channel 4 News	2.5	2:04	8.6%
BBC News 24 News Hour 22-2300	5.5	1:23	12.7%
Sky News 22-2300	1.2	1:42	3.4%

What these data clearly show is a wide disparity between different news strands and news channels both in terms of the number of business items and the average size of these business items. So for example, BBC Breakfast tends towards multiple and relatively short items, while the BBC Evening News tends to have longer but fewer items. These differences presumably reflect the commonsense insights that people in the morning and in the evening have different information needs and also have different amounts of time available. Shorter and more frequent items would seem to be a logical offering at the time of day when many people are preparing to leave for work, school or whatever else.

There are also marked differences between BBC News strands and other broadcasters' output. ITV's early evening news contrasts somewhat with the BBC's rival production: it has just over half the amount of airtime devoted to business news and has fewer and shorter business items. A similarly distinctive difference in news provision can be seen when comparing BBC and ITV early evening *regional* news programming. As with the national early evening news the, BBC output covered more stories and devoted a larger slice of output time to business than did ITV.

On other comparisons there are fewer clear points of separation between the news sources. BBC Two's Newsnight and Channel 4's Channel 4 News profiles are broadly similar at the level of numbers and durations of business stories, and they do both tend to have a structure built around fewer stories than the 'main' channels but in contrast offer longer and deeper coverage.

BBC One and ITV's late evening news bulletins also show some differences in terms of number and length of business-related news items, shown in Table 3 overleaf.

There is one contrast in Table 3 which is particularly striking, namely that the between the style of BBC News 24 and that of Sky News for the same evening hour: 22-2300. News 24 has over 3 times as many business-related items as Sky News and has almost 5 times the amount of airtime devoted to business matters. Moreover this is not attributable simply to the fact that half of that News 24 hour consists essentially of BBC One's Ten O'Clock News – the latter half of the News hour does have additional dedicated business content¹. Sky News does not.

¹ This specific feature of News 24 is clearly flagged up within the BBC One Ten O'Clock News itself.

Table 3: BBC Radio Business News

	Average No. of business items per transmitted hour	Average business item length (min:sec)	Average minutes of business coverage per transmitted hour as % of airtime
Radio 1 Newsbeat	5.2	1:14	10.7%
Radio 2 Business Slot ²	15.0	1:36	n/a
Radio 4 Today	3.9	1:58	12.8%
Radio 4 6 O'Clock News	5.4	1:03	9.5%
Radio 5 Live Drive	3.1	1:45	9.0%

For radio news, a much more varied picture is seen. The five examples used in the analysis do show differences in the structure of each network's news output. Not surprisingly Radio 4's Today programme has the highest proportion of airtime devoted to business. In principle so does Radio 1's Newsbeat - however it needs to be borne in mind that it does not transmit for three continuous hours. Radio 4 output tends to have longer items on average, apart from the 6 O'Clock news.

² This is 'dedicated' short and intensive programme element which almost entirely consists of business-related issues and talk, and therefore produces a correspondingly high, and potentially misleading, average per hour figure.

3.2 Business Themes in News Programming

Each news story has been classified in terms of a set of broad themes: business topics/issues/areas which were derived from the items found during the content analysis itself. The issues are not intended to be detailed, since the aim is reduce the amount of data to manageable proportions and provide a strategic overview rather than a detailed map. This analysis is also useful as a basis for comparison between channels, media and programmes which goes beyond the basic indicators of time and numbers of items. Table 4 shows the categories used and the relative distribution of these among the business items found in the study.

	% of total business items	Average item length [min:sec]
Shares, market news, FTSE, Dow	15.7	0:27
Business problems, loss of profits, contraction	9.3	1:53
Regulation of business, legal issues, EC rules	8.7	1:54
General business news, announcements, appointments	8.5	1:52
Business ethics, issues of trust, corporate responsibility	8.4	2:13
Industrial relations, workplace regulation, strikes	8.2	1:28
Personal finance, mortgages, debt , pensions	7.1	1:54
Business growth, profits, expansion	7.0	1:33
New products, services, innovation	6.6	2:09
Green issues – recycling, waste, ecology	5.7	2:25
Takeovers and mergers	4.8	1:27
Consumer protection, product recalls, scams	4.4	2:23
Financial sector, bank rates, banking, economics	3.4	1:51
Carbon economy, climate change, global warming	3.3	3:17
The future, visions, worries, hopes, speculation	2.4	2:23
External factors with business/economic impacts on UK	1.5	1:48
Resistance to change, retaining services, protests	0.4	2:13
Imports, outsourcing work from UK	0.3	1:28
Exports, new markets	0.2	0:31

The categories also reflect the rise of a number of issues during the data collection period of this analysis. For example, the 'business ethics' category encompasses the Farepak company

failure, and the decision to drop the Serious Fraud Office investigation into BAe's dealings with Saudi Arabian potential clients. The 'Carbon Trading' category also effectively emerged during the study following the Davos meeting of the World Economic Forum and the publication in the UK of the Stern Report.

The largest single category in terms of numbers of separate items is that of the possibly 'ritualistic' exercise of giving relatively short descriptions of the day's shifts in stock and money markets, exchange rates and share movements. However, these are also rather short items compared to others, and while accounting for one in six of all business-related news items, they only take up an average of just under half a minute to give out and so account for under 5% of business news airtime. Also, the 'business ethics' category reflects the prevalence during the research period of the Farepak Christmas savings company collapse, and the BAe/Saudi arms deals corruption issues through November and December 2006.

Table 5: Business News Themes	Share of business news airtime per theme
Business ethics, issues of trust, corporate responsibility	8.3%
Business problems, loss of profits, contraction	7.8%
General business news, announcements, appointments	7.1%
Regulation of business, legal issues, EC rules	6.7%
New products, services, innovation	6.3%
Green issues – recycling, waste, ecology	6.2%
Personal finance, mortgages, debt , pensions	6.0%
Industrial relations, workplace regulation, strikes	5.4%
Business growth, profits, expansion etc.	4.9%
Carbon economy, climate change, global warming	4.8%
Consumer protection, product recalls, scams	4.7%
Shares, market news, FTSE, Dow	3.1%
Takeovers and mergers	3.1%
Financial sector, interest rates, banking, Bank of England	2.8%
The future, business problems, loss of profits, contraction	2.6%
External factors with business & economic impacts on UK	1.2%
Resistance to change, retaining services, protests	0.9%
Imports, outsourcing work from UK	0.5%
Exports, new markets	0.4%

3.3 Differences between News Sources in Business Themes

Television

As with the analysis of item lengths and share of news voice for business items, large scale and systematic differences are also clearly seen when the different news sources are looked at in terms of the broad business themes set out in the previous section. Table 6a overleaf shows the differences found between the television broadcast sources in coverage of these issues. There are marked differences between the five late evening news programmes; BBC Ten O'Clock News, ITV 1030, BBC Two Newsnight, News 24 and Sky News. Here the BBC's Ten O'Clock News - and to a lesser degree BBC News 24³ - shows quite a different profile from its late-night commercial rivals. ITV's late evening news and Sky News both focus upon a rather limited range of business topics, while also sharing with Channel 4 News and Newsnight are a habit of giving FTSE, Dow Jones and other financial and currency information. It is worth bearing in mind that while these items tend to dominate in terms of counting occurrences, they take up a relatively small amount of time. However this also be taken to signify the assumption of a need on the part of the audience to be able to receive this sort of information at this time of day.

What is also clear from the data shown is a markedly different pattern of coverage within BBC and ITV regional news strands. Indeed, they are very similar in profile, both focussing particularly upon industrial relations and general business news within the region served. This is information which is useful to viewers, either in avoiding disruption or looking for jobs and being generally informed about events in the locality or region.

Radio

The radio service analysis shows a much more varied picture (Table 6b), with each service being to a greater or lesser degree different from each other. This does reflect the targeted nature of radio provision and use: certainly the contrast between Radio 4's Today programming and Radio 1's Newsbeat is great, as is that between the profiles of their respective audiences. However, what is also noticeable on all the radio services is the wide range of themes covered on all of them. Unlike the television news services, which tend to have one or two themes which receive markedly greater attention, the radio 'mix' in terms of themes (but not necessarily in terms of programme time) is more even.

³ The first half of BBC News 24 is the BBC One 10 O'Clock news.

Table 6a: TV News Patterns of Coverage

% of themes within each source	BBC One Break-fast	BBC One 1800 News	BBC One 2200 News	BBC Region	ITV 1830	ITV 2230	ITV Region	BBC TWO News-night	C4 News	BBC News 24	Sky News
Shares, market news, FTSE, Dow	6		2		3	44		45	36	10	40
General business news, announcements, appointments	13	5	6	11	8	10	14	2	4	11	3
New products, services, innovation	6	9	9	20	8	3	6	4	3	8	1
Business growth, profits, expansion etc.	4	4	5	7	8	3	6	1	3	5.	5
Financial sector, interest rates, Bank of England, economics	1	-	6	-	-	-	-	2	1	9	3
Regulation of business, legal issues, EC rules	9	11	6	7	11	9	3	4	6	8	3
Personal finance, mortgages, debt , pensions	10	12	9	2	3	3	6	3	7	11	7
Consumer protection, product recalls, scams	5	4	2	2	-	-	14	-	2	4	5
External factors affecting UK business and economy	2	1	-	2	-	3	3	1	3	2	2
Industrial relations, workplace regulation, strikes	10	8	6	23	8	6	28	2	4	8	3
Business problems, loss of profits, contraction	8	15	6	14	6	4	8	2	3	8	2
The future, visions, worries, hopes, speculation	2	1	4	-	3	-	-	-	1	>1	1
Business ethics, issues of trust, corporate responsibility	7	12	7	2	28	10	6	8	13	3	8
Green issues – recycling, waste, ecology	9	9	15	2	8	-	-	6	7	2	9
Carbon trading, climate change, global warming	3	5	5	2	1	1	3	15	3	1	-
Resistance to change, retaining services, protests	1	-	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	>1	2
Imports, outsourcing work from UK	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Exports, new markets outside UK	1	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	1	-
Takeovers and mergers	4	3	8	4	3	5	5	4	5	7	7

Table 6b: BBC Radio News Patterns of Coverage**% of themes within each source**

	BBC Radio 1 Newsbeat	BBC Radio 2 Business	BBC Radio 4 Today	BBC Radio 4 1800	BBC Radio 5 Live
Shares, market news, FTSE, Dow	5	30	9	31	22
General business news, announcements, appointments	4	9	9	4	8
New products, services, innovation	18	11	5	3	5
Business growth, profits, expansion etc.	3	3	4	3	1
Financial sector, interest rates, Bank of England, economics	3	6	4	5	2
Regulation of business, legal issues, EC rules	10	4	9	10	8
Personal finance, mortgages, debt , pensions	12	9	5	5	4
Consumer protection, product recalls, scams	13	8	5	2	5
External factors affecting business, economic impacts on UK	3	2	1	1	1
Industrial relations, workplace regulation, strikes	6	3	5	14	10
Business problems, loss of profits, contraction	6	5	8	3	6
The future, visions, worries, hopes, speculation	5	1	4	-	6
Business ethics, issues of trust, corporate responsibility	4	3	10	9	14
Green issues – recycling, waste, ecology	5	3	8	3	2
Carbon trading, climate change, global warming	1	1	5	1	1
Resistance to change, retaining services, protests	-	-	3	-	1
Imports, outsourcing work from UK	-	-	>1	-	-
Exports, new markets outside UK	-	-	>1	-	-
Takeovers and mergers	3	3	5	5	5

4 Specific Aspects of BBC Business Coverage

In the following sections, specific aspects of the BBC's coverage of business news are examined in detail. These analyses are essentially distillations of large datasets, giving an overview rather than a densely detailed analysis.

4.1 The Radio 4 Today Programme

Today is effectively a unique part of the UK broadcast environment. It runs for three hours each weekday morning and two hours on Saturday, and is heard by up to 5 million listeners each week.⁴ It is also unlike most other news-based radio programmes⁵ in that it quite clearly segregates news from opinion and analysis about events in the news. This division of functions is reflected in the fact that there are separate formal news bulletins within the Today programme - with dedicated newsreaders - and more broad ranging news-based discussion or background analysis run by the key 'anchor figures': currently John Humphrys, James Naughtie, Sarah Montague and Edward Stourton. It also makes regular use of senior BBC news staff for its business-related items. Apart from the standalone news bulletins at 7 and 8 a.m., there also two scheduled business news slots on most weekdays with dedicated reporters⁶. Additionally, there are other business-related items on an ad-hoc basis.

Today does have a history of disagreement or even controversy at some times where interviewing has been particularly robust, particularly in the political domain. However, it also has a long history of presenting detailed and informed interviews with, and exploration of the views of, major figures in government and politics, as well as in business and in public life in general.

Business Items in Today

The programme typically carries a range of business-related items of varied lengths and content topics. These fall into two broad types: which can be characterised respectively as descriptive and analytical. The descriptive items are essentially short news items, often read by the newsreaders. The analytical items may or may not be linked to the day's news, and are fronted either by the resident business reporters or the Today anchor.

On average, Today has relatively few business items per programme (3.9 per transmitted hour) compared with many other programmes, but these are generally longer than other programmes' items.

⁴ Source: RAJAR Q4 2006 data: weekly adult reach of R4 6-9 slot 6.2 million.

⁵ The closest radio programme in terms of style is probably Radio 4's PM. But PM, together with BBC TWO's Newsnight and Channel 4 News which also go beyond reportage have a far more limited time budget to work with.

⁶ Very occasionally, these are compressed or displaced by other news items.

Table 7: Today's Business News Coverage	Average item length [min:sec]	Share of Business-related airtime
General business news, announcements, appointments	1:44	10.6%
Carbon economy, climate change, global warming	3:12	9.6%
Regulation of business, legal issues, EC rules	1:58	9.3%
Green issues – recycling, waste, ecology	1:48	8.1%
The future, visions, worries, hopes, speculation	2:22	7.3%
Personal finance, mortgages, debt , pensions	2:27	6.8%
Consumer protection, product recalls, scams	2:10	6.2%
Business ethics, issues of trust, corporate responsibility	1:54	5.3%
New products, services, innovation	1:51	5.0%
Industrial relations, workplace regulation, strikes	1:28	4.0%
Imports, outsourcing work from UK	1:28	4.3%
Takeovers and mergers	1:06	3.8%
Financial sector, bank rates, banking, economics	1:40	3.7%
Resistance to change, retaining services, protests	2:13	3.1%
Shares, market news, FTSE, Dow	0:37	3.0%
External factors with business/economic impacts on UK	1:47	1.3%
Exports, new markets	0:31	0.7%

The most frequently-occurring themes were general business news items, often in the news bulletins or the business slots. There was a sizeable slice of time devoted to the general area of the plans for building a carbon economy, working against global warming. This accounts for almost 10 % of the business – related airtime.

In part this level of emphasis is most likely accounted for by the Stern Report, the Davos meeting of the World Economic Forum, and various sources of schemes for emission and pollution-charging all occurring within the sampling period.

Also, issues of business ethics, corporate responsibilities were quite high in the order of time spent. This was largely due to items on the Farepak collapse and its consequences, together with the repercussions of the cancellation of the SFO investigation into arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

There is no real evidence of bias or favouritism in the Today business coverage. However, there were a few examples of the 'combative' approach which Today is sometimes held to

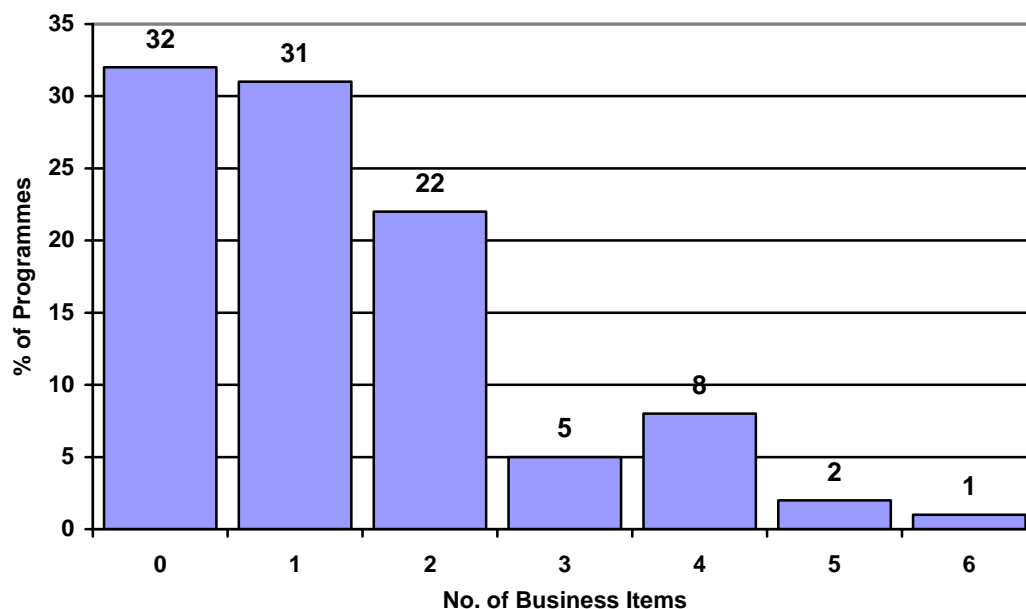
account over. For example, when interviewing the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, on Dec 6th about the pre-Budget Review due to be released later in the day, James Naughtie was robust in his questioning about the various issues covered in the Report and about the political future: e.g. *“But Chancellor...”* , and *“Isn’t the truth that...”*, and *“If you become Prime Minister next year, and that’s clearly what you hope....”*.

4.2 BBC One Ten O’Clock News

This is the most widely-viewed BBC TV news programme on weekdays, regularly achieving average daily UK audiences of 4 to 5 million .

10.7% of its airtime is devoted to business news coverage, and the average number of business – related items per bulletin is 1.35 per edition. In practice, the simple average can be deceptive, since the reality is that there may be meaningful patterns hidden within a simple overall statistic. The distribution of business coverage within the 10 pm news is shown in Chart x below. One in four editions (23%) do not have any business news items. A clear majority of editions (64%) have 1 or 2 business items, while only a small minority have 3 or more.

Chart 2: BBC One Ten O’Clock News Business Items



The 10 O’Clock News has relatively few business news stories compared with some other BBC news programmes. However, it should be borne in mind that the programme normally trails the fact that more news and business coverage is available on BBC News 24 following the end of the Ten O’Clock news⁷. This is confirmed by the data shown earlier in Table 2.

Another feature of the BBC One 10 O’Clock news which has been noted (p7) earlier is the different pattern of coverage made by its ‘rival’, the ITV News at 1030 pm. The ITV strategy seems to be to cover more issues but with shorter items. As the data shown in Table 6a (p13) show, the ITV late news has a narrower average range of items than does the BBC’s programme.

Interviews conducted within BBC One Ten O’Clock News items

⁷ Which also means not seeing the following regional BBC news

Typically, longer business items, or those dealing with complex topics, feature interview material which draws on experts, officials and representatives of organisations or interest groups, witnesses, victims and others. Not all the business-related items in the Ten O'Clock News were analysed to this level, but a sample of longer stories gives a reasonable overview of the type of interviewees found in business stories.

Essentially, the interviewees fall into three broad categories: experts, players, and recipients.

Experts are those individuals, usually accredited to an organisation or presented as a specialist, whose views are sought or clearly presented during a news item. They serve to give independent validation of content from outside the news-gathering organisation itself.

Experts used in the materials studied include:

- a climate forecaster from the Meteorological Office explaining possible flood threats to coastal nuclear power plants
- a representative of Marshall James HR setting out an analysis of the issues underlying proposed strike action by BA cabin staff
- a taxation expert from Ernst and Young explaining EU rules on paying duty on purchases
- a Saudi authoress explaining how the Saudi business community are go about things
- a Personal Shopper explaining how City bonuses might be spent .

Players are those who make events or intend to influence them or stand to lose or gain from them in one way or another, such as:

- The Chairman of EHR, the group which included Farepak
- The Chairman of HBOS, the bank EHR claimed had let Farepak down
- Government Ministers or senior civil servants explaining/defending policy and decisions made
- Formally-constituted interests wanting to get their cases across, such as the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT)
- 'Green' groups arguing for radical change in taxation of energy use
- Government, EU and other wide-scale policy-makers, as well as MPs and MEPs
- General Workers Union and British Airways representatives setting out their positions on the problems which ultimately led to strike action just before Christmas 2006.

Recipients are those who are least able or likely to influence events, but are deemed to be affected by them directly or indirectly. Examples in items include:

- Opinions voiced by individuals who had lost their savings – often characterised as ‘victims’ - in the Farepak collapse
- Vox pop interviews with drivers about congestion charging
- The views of people stranded at Heathrow because of bad weather and bad luggage handling arrangements
- Reactions to increased interest rates on borrowing and mortgages among home owners

These general ways of using outside or largely independent sources are part of a common journalistic ‘code’ and are used at one time or another by all the broadcasters.

However, it is also clear that the BBC’s own senior specialists – generally signified by the roles of editor or correspondent – can also act as ‘independent’ experts when formally interviewed by a newsreader. For example, on December 14th in an item about the cancelled SFO investigation into possible corruption in the BAe-Saudi arms deals, the BBC’s business editor Robert Peston first reported on the story using background video material, graphics and interview material, and was then questioned by the newsreader, Huw Edwards.

5 Three Case Studies of Business News Coverage

The study focussed specifically on three quite different business topics which arose during the period of research:

1. The collapse of the Farepak company in October 2006;
2. The decision to cancel the Serious Fraud Office's investigation into allegations of corruption in BAe's arms deals with Saudi Arabia;
3. Coverage of the linked topics of 'green issues', carbon economics, and global warming.

Relevant news items were examined in depth, and the sections set out below aim to provide an overview of the large and detailed amounts of coverage given to these.

5.1 The Farepak Company Collapse

The Christmas hamper savings scheme Farepak went into liquidation on 16th October 2006, and the story immediately hit the news. This story was rapidly taken up by all news media quickly and prominently. However, it also soon lost momentum, and there was no coverage after Christmas, apart from a report from the administrators and a Treasury announcement that there would be a review of regulation of savings clubs.

There was a lot of coverage, mainly focussing on the savers, who achieve the clear and unanimous status of innocent victims, including the local agents who collected funds from friends, colleagues etc. The bulk of coverage was in the weeks immediately after the collapse, and the story effectively vanished from the news agenda by Christmas. One of the main elements of coverage, understandably, was the fact that the collapse meant that up to 150,000 relatively poor families across the UK had lost hundreds of pounds each and would not now have a good Christmas as a result. All sources had coverage of families who stood to lose from the collapse.

ITV's take on the issue was notably populist, frequently using headlines and captions such as 'the company that stole Christmas' and, profiling the group Chief Executive as 'the man who stole Christmas'. Radio 4's 1800 News on 16 November used House of Commons debate recordings of a Labour MP referring to Sir Clive Thompson (Chair of EHR) as 'the unacceptable face of capitalism'.

The BBC's regional Leeds-based Look North coverage revealed the fact that the CE and Finance Director until recently lived in the area, but had moved away. Look North sent a team

from Leeds to York to film at the gateway of the CE's empty house. Also, the Farepak Rescue Fund set up to help savers is located in York, and the director was interviewed.

Among all broadcasters, the same overall story structure was offered. In effect, a very old framework was redressed in modern clothes: 'bad' rich people had mistreated the 'good' poor people. Almost without exception Farepak management, Farepak's parent group (EHR), and the bank HBOS that had stopped underwriting the group debts were tarred with same brush. The apparent cause of the collapse was the use of Farepak funds to finance new business ventures by EHR which did not flourish. Attempts by HBOS to point out that they had little choice did not get very far, nor was there much in the way of detailed explanation of why there was no formal regulatory system to cover such eventualities in savings-based schemes.

5.2 The British Aerospace and Saudi Arabian Arms Deal

On December 14th the Attorney General announced in the House of Lords that the long-running Serious Fraud Office investigation into allegations of corruption in BAe's dealings with the Saudi Arabian government was to be dropped with immediate effect. On the same day, Tony Blair was formally interviewed by the police concerning the ongoing investigation into 'cash for honours'. Both events were picked up by most of the broadcast news despite coming late in the day and late in the week. Most treated the event as if it was entirely unexpected: however, the Today programme had previously carried items about Saudi Arabians making it known that they were unhappy about the SFO's activities and that this might cause problems with the current £10 billion deal for Eurofighters from BAe. The Today programme had flagged up a story from the Daily Telegraph on October 28th:

"According to the Financial Times Saudi Arabia has suspended negotiations with the UK over a £10 billion purchase of Typhoon fighter aircraft. The FT says that it's an attempt by the Saudis to force the Serious Fraud Office to wind up their long-running investigation of allegations into slush funds surrounding an earlier deal between the two countries. The paper reports that the SFO's the decision to seek bank account information from Switzerland has sparked anger in Riyadh."

And Greg Wood in the Today business slot the same day, reported:

"The Saudis are thought to have suspended negotiations because they are furious about the Serious Fraud Office probe that has taken nearly 3 years now into allegations of corruption surrounding a previous arms deal with BAe Systems. Those allegations the company denies. It's thought that the Saudis could now buy other jets from the French aerospace company Dassault instead."

On the 14th, all evening news sources put the 'cash for peerages' and BAe stories back-to-back in their evening news output, but in the BAe coverage there was a range of different approaches to the cancellation of the BAe investigation.

BBC One 6.30 and Ten O'Clock News both ran the story as a fairly typical political story with business overtones, covering the value of foreign trade and protection of UK jobs and influence, as well as the security and intelligence aspects of the SFO termination.

Channel 4 News ran, as it often does, a long piece (over 7 minutes) on the BAe story, with some rhetorical flourishes: reporter Faisal Islam opened with "So what price British justice and the rule of law?", while Jon Snow began a studio interview with the Chair of the Parliamentary Joint Defence Committee with "Now, James Arbuthnot, this is a pretty scruffy business, isn't it?".

Arbuthnot, a Conservative MP, went on to say that he thought the decision was right.

BBC Two's Newsnight went its own distinctive way that evening, devoting just over 12 minutes to the SFO decision and its announcement. Kirsty Wark opened the programme with the headline:

"Has Tony Blair besmirched the office of Prime Minister and [has] his Attorney-General compromised our rule of law all in one single day?"

This succinctly combined the cash for peerages and BAE stories into a single 'package'. A little further on, she continued:

"This has been an incredible day. Tony Blair became the first serving Prime Minister in history to be interviewed by police officers. And then, at around 5 o'clock tonight, a second unprecedented development. The Attorney-General suddenly announced - with no fanfare - that he'd abandoned a two-year fraud investigation into BAE's £10 billion Saudi Arabian arms deal. A good day to bury incendiary news?"

The analysis of the SFO decision, again intertwined with the cash for honours investigation, was taken up by Sarah Montague and John Humphrys on the Today programme the next morning (Friday 15th). Humphrys (ironically) echoed the previous evening's Newsnight: "It seems, to coin a phrase, a good day to bury bad news". In 3 hours, it devoted around 30 minutes to it in one form or another, covering a wide and detailed range of views from the Lib Dems, who wanted a formal inquiry set up, from an ex-deputy director of the SFO, and from Security Correspondent Frank Gardner who put a sympathetic case for the Saudi ways of doing things, from Tony Wright MP who wanted BAe jobs saved, and from Robert Peston with a detailed account of how the SFO decision was arrived at. Lord Goodhardt and John Major were also interviewed.

There was further limited coverage over Friday and the weekend - effectively refuting the last point in the above quote - including an attempt on Friday by an ITV journalist in Turkey with the Tony Blair entourage to ask about the SFO decision. She got an answer which simply repeated what had already been said. The Today programme Saturday edition also had an extended discussion of ethical foreign policy with Robert Cooper (ex-Blair advisor) and Rosemary Hollis from Chatham House. This was a non-controversial trawl though the principles of policy and how to balance different needs - BAe was mentioned in passing, but was not the focus.

Overall, the impression gained was that the coverage was rich, enthusiastic and detailed, but not noticeably biased in any consistent or obvious direction. Rather, the Newsnight and Today (and to a degree Channel 4 News) styles of doing things gave more an impression of operating from sound background knowledge, and from the desire to ask, on the public's behalf, 'hard' questions about important issues of those who take decisions about these issues.

5.3 Green and Environmental News

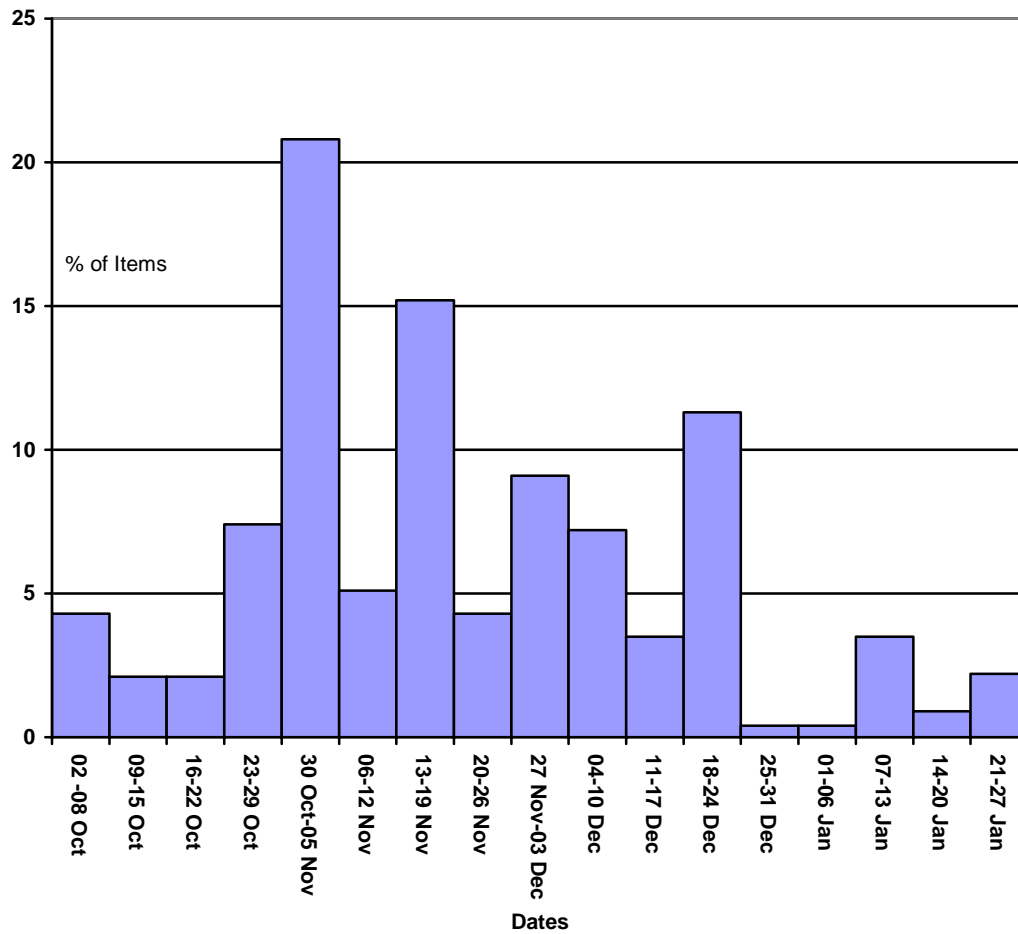
News items which covered green themes – conservation, ecology, reduction of waste, recycling – and which had some links with business and/or economic issues were analysed. Those dealing with the more global and long-term issues, such as global warming and climate change were also included where there was a clear link to business or economics. Broadly speaking, there are two clear sets of themes in the materials broadcast.

First there are the ‘everyday’ issues which are or can be part of everyday life in the UK for most people: waste, power use and pricing, emission and pollution, and the visible or practical impact of these things. Fairly prominent in the overall agenda were such things as pricing vehicle use by the mile (in addition to fuel costs), and problems of waste management and reduction elements of such waste, such as superfluous packaging. Several reports also featured businesses’ own efforts to reduce environmental impacts in terms of their packaging, sourcing of products, energy use and waste disposal. Reporting of these sort of issues tends to assume a fairly broad consensus that these are for the general good of society: certainly the voice of dissent as to the pace and possible outcomes of environmental change is distinctly muted. Possibly there could be room for a more critical evaluation of whether recycling is always the best option, or how effective some of the present schemes are.

A regular feature among this group of items is the issue of transport taken as ‘a problem’ in terms of emissions, use of increasingly scarce fuel resources, and road and service congestion. The scope of transport-based coverage is largely focussed on the private car and, to a lesser degree, air travel. Rail, bus and commercial transport is less prominent, except when problems occur. Road-charging schemes, together with proposals to ban cars in some cities and stated intentions to penalise high fuel consumption vehicles were regular topics, together with various responses to these concepts.

The second broad set of themes are those which relate to the global and longer-term level – effectively addressing the ‘are we all doomed?’ scenario. These stories increased in frequency during the research period due to the agenda set by the Stern Report published in the UK on October 30th 2006, UN climate talks in mid-November 2006, and the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in late January 2007 which also covered global environmental issues in its agenda.

Chart 3: Green and Environmental Items



Many of these reports focussed upon the likely effects of unbridled expansion of fossil fuel use and exploitation of dwindling natural resources, usually explained by specialist journalists. Within these reports were also pointers to the fact that control of and responsibility for the overall impact of increasing energy and resource use was not in the gift of the established industrialised nations. China and India seem to be the new environmental threats. And it may well be the case that the emerging concepts of carbon trading, offsetting and so on need to be well-explained before becoming used as standard reporting shorthand. There is also reporting of innovation and change – new forms of power generation such as wind, water and solar power, nuclear fusion, and bio fuels, for example. Possibly this coverage could be more evaluative in terms of benefits and disadvantages of some of these proposed solutions.

Overall, the impression gained is of pressure for change coming from all directions, often beyond any one individual’s control, yet having direct consequences on everyday life – but without much guidance from news sources as to what is likely to become reality for the average, and what is not, and what can be done, at the micro as well as the macro level.

6 BBC Regional News

The study also collected regional television news output from the Leeds-based edition of BBC Look North, shown after the BBC One Six O'Clock News.

It would be unfair to take this example as being representative of each BBC national or regional news service: each clearly aims to reflect its catchment area, and the East, West and South Yorkshire area is complex and highly industrialised in places, and rural in others.

Look North carries a wide range of business-related items, largely related to issues of business expansion or retrenchment, together with job creation and job losses. It also looks at innovation, growth and change, as well as history and continuity with the past. It also gives the impression of being somewhat better-resourced than its ITV equivalent, Calendar. Certainly, it devotes almost twice as much airtime as Calendar to business-related matters (8.9% compared to 4.8%). For example the fact that the city of York and other specific parts of East and South Yorkshire have gone through a bad year in terms of job losses in a number of different industries is acknowledged by Look North, and the programme also publicises job creation, new enterprise and innovation. Equally, it should be said that both BBC and ITV services give valuable coverage of regionally-important issues which would not generally enter the national news arena.

7 Internet News Resources

All of the broadcast sources assessed for this study also have websites. So do the national newspapers. As part of the study, daily trawls were made of the BBC's main news and business news web pages, together with those of the Guardian, Daily Telegraph and the Times. These have not been assessed in any statistical sense because such an undertaking is difficult to define, let alone undertake. For example, the BBC's news website contains links to literally thousands of news items from the date of access going back in many cases to the beginnings of the internet itself. The same is true, albeit on a more manageable scale for the three newspaper websites examined.

The BBC websites are also a world-wide resource, regularly featuring in the USA Top 100 website access league tables.

As far as the BBC website (or websites) is concerned, there are some problems as well as undoubted benefits. The two key problems are scale and depth of coverage.

The sheer scale of the BBC's archives and resources is daunting. During this study, for example, a search for the term 'Farepak' produced 180 hits, each leading to a page of information more or less relevant to the topic, and often offering links to external sites and to other BBC pages or archives as well. The Guardian website produced 54, and the Daily Telegraph 82. Also, filtering out irrelevant information is hampered to a degree by a relatively basic search facility. Compared to the search engine market leader, Google, the BBC search facility is basic and inflexible. Currently the BBC website carries a message that it is testing a more complex search facility but in its present state it offers relatively little.

The business pages offered by the BBC are relatively limited in scope, essentially offering print versions of the various stories carried in national and regional output, sometimes together with links to archived video and audio footage. Also, in many cases, there are links to relevant external sites. While this means that the BBC's websites undoubtedly offer an excellent starting point and may often suffice as a 'one-stop shop', there is no editorial structure associated with items. A useful resource, but without any evaluation of accuracy or guidance as to which issues are more salient than others.

The BBC's business pages (and the overall news front page) are clearly signposted on the main the main bbc.co.uk page. Opening the link marked 'business' leads to the business section of the main BBC News website, which then offers a small number of pre-selected categories mainly relating to personal finance (mortgages, borrowing, pensions) rather than a wider range of possible business-related categories. This arrangement means that some pages which are clearly business-related, such as new products or services, not being easily found. There is the potential for a much more user-friendly design, possibly requiring a much

broader basic classification of stories/information sources/links and a dedicated and more complex search facility. As it stands, the business section of the website does not really do justice to the resources, expertise and materials which the BBC possesses. What is needed is some form of guidance for the 'amateur' website user. The BBC is a household name and will attract unskilled as well as skilled internet-users by virtue of this branding effect. By offering well-designed guidance, clear signposting and content categories, it could become a leader in the field.

7. Overview

There is one overall conclusion which comes immediately to mind: namely that when it comes to broadcast business news reporting there is only one 500-pound gorilla in the room. It is abundantly clear that the BBC has far more resources available to the generation and production of business news than its rivals. That is not to say that other news providers are less professional or more professional than the BBC: it simply means that the BBC has more options and more flexibility.

This also reflects the fact that the BBC's funding is far more secure than its commercial rivals, which is decreasing markedly in real terms as low-cost digital channels nibble at the increasingly limited revenues available from advertising. BBC radio services, especially Radio 4 and Radio Five Live⁸, deliver business news to a large listener base, unlike almost all its independent commercial radio rivals outside London. ITV business news output is lower in volume than that of BBC One, and reflects a clear reduction in scale and range from what the former ITN-branded service could deliver in its heyday. Channel 4 News maintains its distinctive and in-depth style, but does not have a particular strength in the business field. Sky News is relatively weak when compared to BBC News 24 on a direct slot-by-slot basis. And the BBC's web resources are a match for any of the online newspaper-based pages. Clearly, the BBC is a major player in the delivery of business information field, particularly for those for whom business matters are not a central part of everyday life.

The overall impression gained from watching and listening to the hours of material involved in this study is the range, depth and professionalism which the BBC delivers in its treatment of business matters.

⁸ There are also of course the BBC local and regional radio services which carry some business coverage.