



British Broadcasting Corporation
Broadcasting House, London W1A 1AA

28 February 2025

Rt Hon Dame Emily Thornberry DBE MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Dame Emily,

Thank you for your letter sent on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

We greatly appreciate the strong support the Committee has shown for the World Service and its value to the UK and are grateful for the Committee's work in considering the challenges the World Service faces and in making the case to Government for sufficient long-term investment in the World Service.

In the last few days we have been asked to prepare for further engagement with the FCDO on the impact of the reduction in Overseas Development Spending. We will be happy to keep you and your Committee posted if this results in any further financial implications on the World Service in 2026/27 and beyond.

We include below answers to the questions set out in your letter and would be very happy to supply more information should you have any further questions. In assessing the overall impact of the recent savings, we would draw your attention in particular to the answer to question 4, that this round has been delivered without platform/ distribution cuts, and no scope cuts to Languages output. The impact has been on our English Language output.

1. What impact assessment was made before the cuts announced on 29 January?

Due to the pressure on licence fee funding, global inflation and the need for digital and tech upkeep, we have had to make savings across the World Service. The savings were necessary for the financial year ahead. We sought to do this in line with our strategic priorities and to minimise role closures where possible.

Detailed impact assessments were made ahead of the World Service savings announced on 29 January. The BBC reviewed all options against multiple criteria including audience impact, geopolitical context, and in-market potential for growth. The review also aimed to deliver this round of savings as much as possible through efficiencies rather than platform cuts.

2. In which countries and to which divisions were the cuts to international jobs made?

In line with our strategic objectives, changes to the World Service language services will include refocusing of resources leading to some post closures and reinvestment in new roles as well as the relocation of some of our language service staff bringing them closer to the audiences we serve.

We committed to keeping all 42 language services as part of the latest government settlement and sought to minimise the impact on audiences. As a result, there are no platform closures across the language services in 2025/26 either.

Language services with staff relocating include Arabic (a small number of digital posts moving to Amman) and English for Africa (with some posts moving to Nairobi).

Eight programmes on World Service English radio have been decommissioned with a concomitant reduction in roles.

Due to different HR and legal practices in the UK and internationally, we will be outlining exactly how we will achieve this saving over the coming weeks and months. Those in the UK who are affected have already been briefed. Internationally, we are talking to teams and individuals in February and plan to have all briefings done by the end of March.

Our aim is to deliver as many of these role closures as we can by closing vacant roles and accepting volunteers for redundancy in the UK. We are doing everything we can to support staff potentially impacted.

3. To what extent was the FCDO consulted in advance of the recent cuts? What was their assessment of the impact of cuts to international jobs, if any, with reference to countering dis and misinformation and projecting British soft power? What other Government departments were consulted?

The BBC shared details of its budget deficit and subsequent overall savings requirement with the FCDO ahead of the Budget and 2025/26 Spending Review last year. In dialogue with FCDO the BBC provided information about the impact of various funding scenarios proposals such as reach loss, with both parties respecting provisions in the BBC's Royal Charter requiring the BBC to be editorially and operationally independent.

We were clear that whilst the uplift agreed was welcome, it would not stave off difficult decisions in order to remain globally competitive and meet our savings requirements. With state-backed international news providers investing billions we are facing increased competition for staff, platforms and frequencies, and audiences. For example, three quarters of the BBC's digital Hausa team in Abuja left in just a few weeks in early 2023 – for Turkey's TRT World.

We are mindful of the fact that around the world, media polarisation and state interventions are systematically eroding key democratic principles such as freedom of expression and press freedom by distributing agenda-driven state media and disinformation.

As lead department for the World Service, FCDO was the Government department that was briefed on the details of World Service savings by the BBC in late Autumn and in the run up to Christmas, with some specific relevant information given to Cabinet Office and DCMS. The view of the FCDO, and its assessment, is a matter for the FCDO.

- 4. On 17 Dec, Jonathan Munro described aggressive action by state actors, including Russia and China, to dominate the global news agenda as *'an existential threat to those of us who believe trust should be based on impartial news and value-based journalism, not on propaganda'*. You will also be aware that the closure of BBC Arabic radio resulted in the World Service's former frequency in Lebanon being taken over by Russian state media. To what extent do you expect the recent round of international cuts to be exploited by our adversaries to spread dis and misinformation? Were these concerns included in an impact assessment in advance of the cuts?**

As stated above, this round of savings has been delivered without platform/ distribution cuts, and no scope cuts to Languages output. We do not believe therefore that this round of savings will directly lead to any capture of a distribution channel in the way that happened with Arabic radio. However, savings lead to uncertainty in organisations which could be exploited by other actors.

- 5. The partial close of BBC Monitoring is a considerable loss. What replacement service will ensure that the BBC World Service remains at the forefront of tracking, analysing, summarising and translating global media, particularly in an effort to counter dis and misinformation? Further, how will the BBC World Service ensure that the linguistic and in-country local expertise accrued by BBC Monitoring staff is retained across the organisation?**

There are no plans for the closure or 'partial' closure of BBC Monitoring. Plans include a small number of post closures whilst also reinvesting in strategically important skills.

Like all parts of the BBC, BBC Monitoring is not immune to the savings challenges the organisation needs to make. However, we are ensuring the core activities our customers rely on will not be impacted and will focus on key areas of coverage (notably Russia, China and Iran and their influence and operations around the world) and our main themes – extremism, disinformation and media landscape expertise.

Our aim is to deliver as many of the post closures as we can by closing vacant roles and accepting volunteers for redundancy. We are doing everything we can to support staff potentially impacted.

- 6. We understand that a good deal of news is now consumed digitally. However, during oral evidence on two occasions in 2024, the Committee heard that considerable numbers of people globally continue to access news via radio. This is particularly true in conflict zones, where internet may be censored or digital access hampered. Of the recent cuts to international jobs, how many were digital and how many were radio-based? What assessment was made for different populations around the world who consume their news via radio, and may not have access to digital forms? How will these groups access independent and impartial media?**

All 42 language services will be retained in 2025/26 and there will be no major platform changes.

There will be some reshaping of our World Service Language teams to enhance the focus on digital output as audience behaviour changes. However, we will continue to protect linear output for the rest of 2025/26, especially in those markets where digital consumption is still to develop fully.

Our assessments included the digital maturity of markets, internet penetration within countries, and how audiences accessed news (online or not).

We recognise the need to serve audiences on the platforms they are using both on linear and digitally and strive to ensure audiences have access to BBC content wherever they are located.

As stated in our evidence to the committee, the World Service has a history of acting swiftly and decisively in times of extreme need and conflict. At short notice we have previously set up emergency services for Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine. The most recent example was our output for Syria where we now have a 24 hour radio feed of existing Arabic and English content going out in Damascus and the coastal regions of Syria.

- 7. Of the £6m in savings which is estimated from the most recent round of job cuts, how much will be used to find a replacement for HARDtalk? Specifically, we refer to a programme that would ‘hold opinion-formers, politicians, decisionmakers, industry leaders and entrepreneurs to account’, as detailed by Jonathan Munro on 17 December. We also welcome news on the status of the consultation which Jonathan Munro said was ongoing with BBC staff, to replace HARDtalk, and news on the ‘schedule(d) proposal’ (with reference to HARDtalk) which was mentioned on 17 December.**

The decision to close HARDtalk was part of the wider savings programme across BBC News, as it is a News channel production. Its closure was not part of the £6m BBC World Service savings although the audio version runs on World Service English.

BBC News is committed to sourcing and running hard-hitting long-form interviews, and BBC World Service English will have a new strand which showcases these each week. The network will continue to ensure accountability interviews with policy makers and opinion formers have a high profile and run at length, both on the radio and on-demand.

The consultation with BBC staff mentioned at the oral evidence session has ended. We will keep the Committee across any further developments.

8. What more can the Government do to ensure that the BBC World Service is able to meet the challenge posed by well-resourced state-backed media spreading false and inaccurate information?

We agree with the Committee that we are at a critical time and a moment of unique opportunity for the World Service's place in the world.

The World Service faces fierce competition from state actors with funding that significantly outstrips its own investment. Russia and China are committing huge resources (an estimated £6-8bn) to media activities globally and are increasing their investment in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, deploying technology as a tool for influence and disinformation. And they are winning audience trust as a result.

We need to break the cycle of short term funding settlements. The current uplift from the Government is only for 2025/26. The Spring Spending Review is an opportunity for the current Government to set the World Service on a path to bold ambitious growth with a stable new funding mechanism.

We need a long-term sustainable funding solution for the World Service that comes from central government budgets, as it did for the first 80 years of its life.

Thank you once again for your support.

Best wishes,



Tim Davie
Director-General



Jonathan Munro
BBC News Global Director and
Deputy CEO, BBC News and Current Affairs



**Foreign Affairs
Committee**

Wednesday, 12 February 2025

**Tim Davie CBE
Director-General of the BBC**

**Jonathan Munro
BBC News Global Director and Director of the BBC World
Service**

By email

Dear Tim and Jonathan

Thank you for your attendance at the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Foreign Affairs Committee and International Development Committee's joint oral evidence session on the BBC World Service on Tuesday the 17 December 2024.

You will have noted that on 31 January, these three Committees sent a joint letter to the Government, asking that they secure the long-term funding of the BBC World Service. One of the key requests in this letter was to invest sufficiently in the BBC World Service so that it can lead the fight against dis- and misinformation and, with investment, it can go further in terms of promoting democratic values and impartial media around the world. For instance, the BBC's Russian Service has undertaken hugely important work in assessing the level of casualties in the war in Ukraine and disseminating this information.

The Foreign Affairs Committee were disappointed to hear about the additional cuts made to the World Service last week (announced on 29 January), including 130 jobs, and sympathise with the difficult financial decisions the BBC has to make. It is on this topic that we would appreciate answers to the following questions:

1. What impact assessment was made before the cuts announced on 29 January?
2. In which countries and to which divisions were the cuts to international jobs made?



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3. To what extent was the FCDO consulted in advance of the recent cuts? What was their assessment of the impact of the cuts to international jobs, if any, with reference to countering dis and misinformation and projecting British soft power? What other Government departments were consulted?
4. On 17 December 2024, Mr Munro described aggressive action by state actors, including China and Russia, to dominate the global news agenda as “an existential threat to those of us who believe trust should be based on impartial news and value-based journalism, not on propaganda”.¹ You will also be aware that the closure of BBC Radio Arabic resulted in the World Service’s former frequency in Lebanon being taken over by Russian state media. To what extent do you expect the recent round of international cuts to be exploited by our adversaries to spread dis and misinformation? Were these concerns included in an impact assessment in advance of the cuts?
5. The partial closure of BBC Monitoring is a considerable loss. What replacement service will ensure that the BBC World Service remains at the forefront of tracking, analysing, summarising and translating global media, particularly in an effort to counter dis and misinformation? Further, how will the BBC World Service ensure that the linguistic and in-country local expertise accrued by BBC Monitoring staff is retained across the organisation?
6. We understand that a good deal of news is now consumed digitally. However, during oral evidence on two occasions in 2024, the Committee heard that considerable numbers of people globally continue to access news via radio. This is particularly true in conflict zones, where internet may be censored or digital access hampered. Of the recent cuts to international jobs, how many were digital and how many were radio-based? What assessment was made for different populations around the world who consume their news via radio, and may not have access to digital forms? How will these groups access independent and impartial media?

¹ [Page 11 of transcript](#); 17 December 2024.



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7. Of the £6 million in savings which is estimated from the most recent round of job cuts, how much will be used to find a replacement for HARDtalk? Specifically, we refer to a programme that would "hold opinion-formers, politicians, decisionmakers, industry leaders and entrepreneurs to account," as detailed by Mr Munro on 17 December.² We also welcome news on the status of the consultation which Mr Munro said was ongoing with BBC staff, to replace HARDtalk, and news on the "schedule[d] proposal" [with reference to HARDtalk] which was mentioned on 17 December.³
8. What more can the Government do to ensure that the BBC World Service is able to meet the challenge posed by well-resourced state-backed media spreading false and inaccurate information?

The Foreign Affairs Committee supports the BBC World Service and has urged the Government to back it with sufficient resources so it can continue its valuable work and, in future, grow and expand its activities. We believe that the World Service benefits the whole of the UK, not just in terms of its journalism and public service programming, but also for its contribution to the UK's soft power and security, fighting misinformation and disinformation, and as a positive reflection of the UK's values to the world.

We would be grateful for a response by 26 February 2025. We intend to place your response in the public domain.

It is extremely depressing and frustrating to see these cuts barely a month after three select committees expressed such strong support for the World Service

*Yours
E.S.*

² [Page 23 of transcript](#); 17 December 2024.

³ [Page 22 of transcript](#); 17 December 2024.