

David Shukman
Doctor of Science
Durham Cathedral, 8 July 2025

David Shukman is best known as a BBC reporter: to many of us he was a familiar face on our TV screens explaining stories of the day on the news, and often from a remote location. David would be explaining events, some of them now etched into our public consciousness, and having to do so live, as they were unfolding often in unexpected ways. And doing this no matter what the conditions: whether there were literal bullets flying around, or whether dealing with the metaphorical slings and arrows of reporting from extreme locations. And David would do all this clearly and calmly, a master storyteller communicating the wider world to us in our living rooms at home.

David graduated from the Durham Geography Department and began to cut his journalism teeth on regional newspapers. After only a few years he had joined the BBC where he was handed the Northern Ireland brief – this in the 1980s when The Troubles were at their height – followed by defence correspondent and then on to World Affairs. Assignments included the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first Gulf War, Bosnia, conflicts in the Caucasus and in Africa, and even venturing into some of the Soviet Union's secret nuclear installations.

But he is perhaps even better known for his latter roles at the BBC when he took over as Environment and Science correspondent and eventually became the BBC's first ever Science Editor, a post he held for a decade. In this role he had a huge brief; bring the key stories to us from across the range of science discovery: new medical breakthroughs, particle physics, astronomy, along with stories about the environment here and abroad. And David has particularly been at the vanguard of the news reporting of climate change during an era where his work, amongst others, helped bring it to public and political attention.

David was a pioneer of live broadcasts from remote locations, something that with modern satellite technology we perhaps take for granted but which decades ago was most certainly not routine. David has reported live from the Amazon to Antarctica. We just saw the reports on the news, we didn't see the cold, the heat, the insects, the dust,

the mud. We didn't see the sand blowing into the precious electronics, or the satellite phone that was delicately balanced, we didn't see when the laptop had frozen (literally and metaphorically), or the stress of the satellite link cutting out 30 seconds before the anchor in London casted across to David for his report. But David would (nearly always) give the report, and tell the story. We would move on to the next story on the news whilst David, the camera operator and producer would all have to extricate themselves from whatever location they were in and make their way home. He has won awards for his work on showing the scale and rate of planetary change, and David Attenborough praised him as "*a leader in raising awareness of the climate emergency*".

Since the BBC David continues to work as an independent writer, consultant and broadcaster, with a particular interest in covering climate and environment stories. He is a visiting Professor at the Grantham Institute in the London School of Economics and Political Science, where he teaches on the role of communications in accelerating action on climate change. He provides advice to corporations and organisations on net zero, and is a member of the Advisory Board of Oxford University's Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment.

David has said he greatly respects and admires the careful, rigorous approach of scientists, whether it is the drilling and analysis of Antarctic ice cores to understand how the Earth's climate works; or studying grains of sand (literally) in the Kalahari desert to see how dunes will migrate due to climate change; or sampling the air above Mauna Loa in Hawaii to measure precisely how carbon dioxide is rising; or measuring plastic pollution and its impacts on nesting birds on a remote Pacific island. Indeed, David has said that it was partly seeing the consistent care and rigour with which such measurements of change are made, and seeing those results up-close that convinced him of the reality of man-made climate change.

Perhaps one of the greatest compliments I can give David is that whilst he may admire the rigorous, careful approach of scientists, that same community of scientists greatly respect and admire his ability to tell the stories of that science. To have someone who can communicate complex stories and concepts, so clearly and carefully and to explain those critical science and environment stories to an audience of millions, we are enormously grateful.

So for his work on reporting news, science and environment, and do so from some of the remotest environments on Earth:

Chancellor, I present David Shukman to receive the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.