[GB] Retention of Amended List of Protected Free-to-Air Events Recommended

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The UK has had since 1956 a list of events that are felt to have special national resonance and so are available, so far as is possible, to be broadcast on free-to-air television. The list, which is drawn up by the Secretary of State, has been regularly amended and has now been examined by an Independent Review Panel.

The Panel found that 82% of respondents believed that they had an entitlement to watch certain events free-to-air, as they had already paid their BBC licence fee, and that there is compelling evidence of a public expectation that the BBC should give a high priority to such events. On this basis it concluded that in current circumstances it supported the principle of protecting some major sporting events for the widest possible television audience, if necessary by means of listing them. However, the current criteria should be simplified to require that the event must have a special national resonance and not merely be of interest to followers of the sport concerned; it must be a pre-eminent national or international event with the involvement of a national team and be likely to command a large television audience. There should also be a single list of live events rather than the current two lists, one with full protection and the second with protection of highlights only.

The Panel accepted that sports governing bodies (who were opposed to listing) should be best placed to know what is in the interest of their sport now and for the future. However, the Panel had to look beyond the singular interests of any one sport to assess events “of major importance to society”. Those who opposed listing had to accept that their view means that there are circumstances in which a significant proportion of the population could be denied the chance to view major national and international events, including senior citizens who qualify for free television licences. Despite radical changes in the media landscape, for the foreseeable future most people’s first choice of how to view the biggest sporting events will be by means of a television set.

On this basis the Panel recommended that the Summer Olympic Games, the World Cup Finals and the UEFA European Football Championship Finals should continue to be listed, as should a number of domestic sporting events. The whole of the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships should be listed (not just the finals as at present), while the Open Golf Championship and Cricket’s Home Ashes Test

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Matches against Australia and the entirety of the Rugby Union World Cup should also be added to the current list. Some events such as the Winter Olympic Games should be de-listed.

It is now for the Secretary of State to decide to what extent the recommendations will be accepted.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 'David Davies Publishes His Review of Free-to-air Listed Events', 13 November 2009

http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/media_releases/6436.aspx

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