[GB] List of Protected Free-to-Air Events to be Retained Unamended

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The UK has issued a list of events that are felt to have special national resonance and so are available, so far as possible, for broadcast on free-to-air television. In late 2009 an Independent Review Panel reported on the list (see IRIS 2010-1: 1/26). The Panel recommended that the list be retained but amended so that it should contain pre-eminent national or international events with the involvement of a national team and likely to command a large television audience. 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) and the list should be expanded to include the Open Golf Championships and cricket's Home Ashes Test Matches against Australia, as well as the whole of the Rugby Union World Cup. Some events should be removed from the list, such as the Winter Olympic Games. There should also be a single list of events rather than the current two lists, one with full protection and one with protection for highlights only.

The proposals met with strong opposition from the sports governing bodies and the Government has now announced that the list will remain unchanged until the conclusion of digital switchover in 2012. This would permit the consideration of the effects of availability of a significantly increased number of free-to-air digital channels and the completion of the BBC's strategy review and the Ofcom Pay TV review. According to the Government, the current economic climate also points against making a decision which could adversely impact sport at the grassroots. There will thus be a further review in 2013.

The listed events will consequently continue to include protection of full live coverage of the Olympic Games, the World Cup Football Finals, the European Football Finals, the Wimbledon Tennis Finals, the Rugby World Cup Final and a number of major domestic events, such as the Derby horse race. Protection of secondary coverage will include the Open Golf Championship and the Ryder Cup, the World Athletics Championship, the Commonwealth Games and cricket Test Matches played in England.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport, "Decision on Free-to-Air Listed Events Deferred Until 2013", Press Release 080/10, 21 July 2010

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