

Research Briefing

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Broadcasting: listed sporting events



Summary

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Summary

The Broadcasting Act 1996 gives the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport the power to draw up a list of sporting events of “national interest”. This means the broadcast rights to these events must be offered to the main free-to-air terrestrial broadcasters on “fair and reasonable terms”. The aim is to make sure the events are made available to all television viewers. The list consists of two groups:

- **Group A events** - full live coverage must be offered.
This group includes the FA Cup Final, the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the Women’s Football World Cup European Championships.
- **Group B events** - these can have live coverage on subscription television provided that secondary coverage is offered to the free-to-air broadcasters.
This group includes the Six Nations rugby union tournament, the Ryder Cup, and cricket test matches played in England.

Broadcasting White Paper (April 2022)

In its April 2022 [Broadcasting White Paper](#) (PDF), the Government said that, because of changing viewing habits (eg catch-up and on-demand viewing), it would review the listed events regime and whether its scope should be extended to include digital rights.

1 Listed events

Part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996 (as amended) gives the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport the power to draw up a list of sporting events of national interest.¹ The aim is “to make sure that key sporting events are made available to all television viewers, particularly those who cannot afford the extra cost of subscription television”.²

No definition of “national interest” is given in the Act.³ However, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has said a “listed event” is “one which is generally felt to have special national resonance” and which contains “an element which serves to unite the nation, a shared point on the national calendar, not solely of interest to those who follow the sport in question.”⁴

The listing of an event ensures the broadcast rights to that event, if offered, must be made available on “fair and reasonable terms” to the free-to-air channels that are received by 95% of the UK population.⁵ [Section 97 of the Digital Economy Act 2017](#) gives the Secretary of State the power to amend the 95% figure. The power was added to the legislation, through a Government amendment at [report stage in the Lords](#). This followed concerns that the 95% figure did not consider the impact of new technology on the way people watch TV.⁶

The inclusion of an event in the list does not mean it has to be shown on television. Sports rights holder are not obliged to offer events and broadcasters are not obliged to bid for coverage of them.⁷

Under section 97 of the 1996 Act, the Secretary of State can add and remove events from the list at any time, but only after consultation with:

- the BBC.
- the S4C Authority.

¹ Part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996 (as amended)

² DCMS, [Coverage of sport on television](#) (PDF), Undated, p4 (accessed 3 May 2022)

³ [Review of free-to-air listed events](#) (PDF), Report of the Independent Advisory Panel to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, November 2009, para 15 (accessed 3 May 2022)

⁴ DCMS, [Coverage of sport on television](#) (PDF), p4

⁵ Ibid, p4

⁶ See p49 of the Library’s [Committee Stage Report](#) (PDF) on the Bill (CBP 7799, 24 November 2016) and p19 of the Library’s [Paper on Lords amendments](#) (PDF) (CBP 7953, 24 April 2017); See also [HL Deb 8 February 2017 cc1763-9](#)

⁷ DCMS, [Coverage of sport on television](#) (PDF), p5

- Ofcom, the UK's broadcasting regulator.
- the holder of the rights for the event in question.

Further detail on the listed events regime is available in Ofcom's [Code on Sports and Other Listed and Designated Events](#) (PDF) (July 2014).⁸

1.1 Current listed events

The list is divided into two categories: Group A and Group B.

For Group A events, full live coverage must be offered to qualifying broadcasters.⁹

Events listed in Group B may have live coverage on subscription television provided that secondary coverage is offered to qualifying broadcasters.

Group A: full live coverage protected

- The Olympic Games
- The Paralympic Games
- The FIFA World Cup Finals Tournament
- The FIFA Women's World Cup Finals Tournament
- The European Football Championship Finals Tournament
- The European Women's Football Championship Finals Tournament
- The FA Cup Final
- The Scottish FA Cup Final (in Scotland)
- The Grand National
- The Wimbledon Tennis Finals
- The Rugby World Cup Final
- The Derby

⁸ Ofcom, [Code on Sports and Other Listed and Designated Events](#) (PDF), July 2014 (accessed 3 May 2022)

⁹ i.e. services that are free-to-view and received by 95% of the UK population

- The Rugby League Challenge Cup Final

The Paralympic Games were added to Group A in January 2020.¹⁰ This followed a consultation in 2019.¹¹

The FIFA Women's World Cup Finals and the Women's European Football Championship Finals were added to Group A in April 2022.¹² This also followed consultation in 2019.¹³

Group B: secondary coverage protected

- Cricket Test Matches played in England
- Non-Finals play in the Wimbledon Tournament
- All Other Matches in the Rugby World Cup Finals Tournament
- Six Nations Rugby Tournament Matches Involving Home Countries
- The Commonwealth Games
- The World Athletics Championship
- The Cricket World Cup - the Final, Semi-finals and Matches Involving Home Nations' Teams
- The Ryder Cup
- The Open Golf Championship

¹⁰ DCMS, [Written Ministerial Statement on Sport Broadcasting](#), HCWS66, 27 January 2020

¹¹ DCMS, [Written Ministerial Statement on Equality and Listed Events](#), HCWS1751, 18 July 2019

¹² [Government adds women's international football tournaments to listed events regime](#), DCMS news story [online], 25 April 2022 (accessed 3 May 2022)

¹³ DCMS, [Written Ministerial Statement on Sport Broadcasting](#), HCWS66, 27 January 2020; [Nicky Morgan's speech to the Royal Television Society](#), GOV.UK, 18 September 2019 (accessed 3 May 2022)

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The Broadcasting White Paper (April 2022)

In its April 2022 [Broadcasting White Paper](#) (PDF), the Government said the current list of events achieved an “appropriate balance” between retaining free-to-air sports events for the public, while allowing rights holders to negotiate agreements in the best interests of their sport.¹⁴

However, the White Paper noted that the framework was established in 1996 and does not include digital rights, including on-demand rights, which have become an important element in the sale of sports rights. This, together with changes to viewing habits (ie catch-up and on-demand viewing), raised questions about whether the listed events regime remains fit for purpose:

If for example the Olympic 100 metre final was broadcast live in the middle of the night on the BBC, but all streaming and catch-up rights were sold to a different broadcaster and kept behind a paywall, then a culturally relevant event might not be available to a wide audience on a free-to-air basis.¹⁵

The Government said it would review the listed events regime and whether its scope should be extended to include digital rights.¹⁶

¹⁴ DCMS, [Up Next: The Government’s vision for the broadcasting sector](#) (PDF), 28 April 2022, p24

¹⁵ Ibid, p25

¹⁶ Ibid, p25

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