

SUBMISSION TO THE BBC TRUST: REVIEW OF LISTED SPORTING EVENTS

Summary

The Audience Council England in consultation with members of its 12 supporting regional councils has considered the future of the DCMS list of sporting events.

The Council fully supports the existence of such a list and endorses the principle of making as much use as possible of the BBC and commercial broadcasters' free-to-air channels for the benefit of audiences who may not be able to access digital services, or may not be in a position to pay for subscription services. It also agrees on maintaining the current list with its A and B categories.

The Council suggests that the essential criterion test could be expanded to include events of significance to all four home nations in the UK as well as events which while not necessarily appealing to large audiences, do have appeal for smaller and less well-served audiences, for example those interested in minority sports, and also to minority audiences including the disabled.

In addition, members support the suggestion for an additional characteristic under the essential criterion test, aimed at encouraging wider social cohesion through a sense of local community harmony.

With the uncertainty at the time of writing around the future of the sports broadcaster Setanta, the Council also asks for more clarity from the Secretary of State on contingency planning in the event of a pay-to-view broadcaster being unable to deliver on its contractual obligations with sporting bodies and the resulting impact on audiences.

More detailed responses are given below, based on the questions posed in the DCMS consultation.

Detailed Responses

Q1	Do you think that the UK should continue to protect certain major events through live or deferred coverage on free to air television? Please give a reason for your response.
Answer	<p>Yes.</p> <p>First, sport represents an opportunity for the BBC and other broadcasters to represent all the nations within the UK along with supporting important themes of competition, exercise and fitness, and athleticism in the run up to London 2012.</p> <p>Second, there is still a significant number of people across the UK who cannot access digital services or cannot afford them.</p> <p>Third, with the differences in household income across the population becoming even greater during the recession, having more mainstream sports moving to satellite TV will only serve to increase the division of cultures within the UK.</p> <p>Fourthly, the BBC should be broadcasting a wide range sport because the corporation is embedded in British culture, and coverage of sport is an important element of its contract with the UK nation through its licence fee funding.</p>
Q2	Do you think that events other than sporting events should be listed? If so, please give your reason.
Answer	No. Non-sporting events fall either under the banner of news interest or general audience interest and are well covered elsewhere.
Q3	<p>The essential criterion test is that the event has a special national resonance, not just a significance to those who ordinarily follow the sport concerned; it is an event which serves to unite the nation, a shared point on the national calendar.</p> <p>Do you agree that the current essential criterion test should remain?</p>
Answer	<p>Yes, we support the essential criterion test as it stands and agree that it should remain; it should be reviewed periodically for transparency.</p> <p>We also believe that the criterion should be widened to include events of significance to all four home nations, so that the entire UK population has the opportunity to join together to enjoy the spectacle.</p> <p>The widened criterion might state that the event has national significance and resonance for any or all of the UK's four nations, as with the National Eisteddfod of Wales or some of the Scottish Highland Games.</p>
Q4	If your answer to Q2 was that non-sporting events should also be considered for listing, what might an essential criterion be?
Answer	We think it is unlikely that a pay-to-view broadcaster would be interested in non-sporting events that are currently shown only on free-to-air TV.
Q5	Having qualified under the essential criterion test, an event was more

	<p>likely to be listed if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was likely to command a large television audience; • It has a history of being broadcast live on free-to-air television. <p>Do you consider that these characteristics remain appropriate?</p>
Answer	<p>Yes, provided the opportunity to show highlights on free-to-air TV remains, for example as with the England cricket team.</p> <p>Our view is that the event need not necessarily command a large audience; smaller and less well-served audiences should not be overlooked, for example for minority sports such as hockey matches, netball and canoeing, lesser league games which are still of relevance to audience, and emerging sports; and events appealing to minority audiences including the disabled.</p> <p>We suggest an additional characteristic: 'It was likely to encourage a sense of social cohesion, unity and local community harmony'.</p>
Q6	<p>Do you agree that both an A and B list should be maintained? (List B would include events that might be difficult to schedule, but which could be protected by way of highlights, deferred coverage or live radio commentary.)</p> <p>If not, please explain why.</p>
Answer	<p>Yes, we agree.</p>
Q7	<p>Do you think that the Secretary of State should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ leave the current arrangements unchanged; ○ move existing events between the A- and B- lists; ○ add any entirely new events; or ○ remove any events that are currently listed? <p>Please give reasons for your answers.</p>
Answer	<p>We suggest that events move from the B to the A list using the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> § events which draw in audiences not generally interested in sport § events which relate to national and international finals. <p>This would cover the Cricket World Cup Final, the Ryder Cup and the Commonwealth Games. We would also like to see the World Athletics Championships included on the A list.</p>
Q8	<p>Please suggest any non-sporting events you would like to see listed and why.</p>
Answer	<p>We do not feel there is sufficient weight of opinion from our members to warrant any non-sporting events being added to the list; however we note that there have been a small number of suggestions to list events such as the major gardening shows run by the RHS (Royal Horticultural Society) and major royal events or events with a royal presence. The latter are already covered by sharing arrangements with broadcasters.</p>
Q9	<p>Do you have any other issues that you would like to be taken into account in reviewing the current list?</p>
Answer	<p>There needs to be more clarity from the Secretary of State about the fall-back position should a pay-to-view TV channel not be able to deliver on</p>

its negotiated rights. The current situation surrounding Setanta and ITV is a prime example of this. With Setanta's future in doubt, the wider public interest should not be harmed if it turns out that a commercial satellite broadcaster has overstretched its financial limits in order to win a valuable contract such as English football matches.

15.06.09

ANNEX

RAC Participants

West	Ben Batley
	Mel Poolton
Yorks & Lincs	Trevor Barwood
	Denis Price
	Claire Ramsden
North East & Cumbria	Andrew Philpotts
	John Baharie
	Steve Ryall
Yorkshire	<i>No response</i>
North West	Steve Murphy
West Midlands	Paul Taberner
East Midlands	Tracey Davenport Katharine R Stewart Paul Dickerson
East	Dominic O'Sullivan Joe Lewis Marcus Tinworth Terry-Anne Golko
South West	Graham Clarke
South	Jacqueline Cass Mike Harris
London	Darren Bray Liz Heath Shelley Ward Steve Ashton
South East	<i>No response</i>
TOTAL	23 responses