

Welsh Parliament

**Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and
International Relations Committee**

Six Nations Rugby Championship broadcasting rights

April 2024



Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport should move the Six Nations Championship from being a Group B event to being a Group A event as part of the listed events regime under the Broadcasting Act 1996.....19

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to move the Six Nations Championship from being a Group B event to being a Group A event as part of the listed events regime under the Broadcasting Act 1996.....19

Recommendation 3. In the event that the Six Nations Championship is broadcast on pay-to-view platforms, the UK Government should introduce protections for the hospitality industry including a compulsory contractual clause that allows for reduced pay-to-view subscriptions for pubs and clubs with a rateable value below a specified amount. This should be done following consultation with the hospitality industry to determine the most appropriate approach..... 20

Recommendation 4. The UK Government must take steps to protect full Welsh language coverage of the Six Nations tournament..... 20

1. Background

1. In autumn 2023, the Senedd's Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee undertook a series of scrutiny sessions with stakeholders in public service broadcasting to determine how public service broadcasters were faring.
2. The report for that inquiry was published on 25 March 2024.¹
3. Following its consideration of the evidence to that inquiry, the Committee decided to further investigate the extent to which the current listed sports regime as it relates to the Six Nations Rugby Championship is suitable for Wales.

Terms of reference

4. The Committee considered:
 - Whether the Six Nations Rugby Championship should move from Group B to the Group A list of sporting events of “national interest”, meaning full live coverage should be offered to free-to-air terrestrial broadcasters;
 - The impact on audiences of popular sporting events being broadcast only on subscription services;
 - The impact on Wales's cultural life of popular sporting events such as Six Nations rugby being broadcast only on subscription services;
 - The impact on sports participation of popular sporting events being broadcast only on subscription services;
 - The impact on sporting national governing bodies such as the Welsh Rugby Union of including sporting events on the list of sporting events of “national interest”.

Evidence gathering

5. The Committee met on Thursday 1 February 2024 to consider evidence for the inquiry. The evidence received is outlined in Annex 1 and Annex 2 at the end of this report.

¹ [State of Play: Public Service Broadcasting in Wales](#)

6. The Committee is grateful to all those who participated in the evidence session and submitted written evidence to inform discussions.

2. Policy context

7. The debate as to whether or not Six Nations rugby matches should be listed for full live coverage on free-to-air television has been going on for some time. In this chapter, we outline the recent policy context surrounding this issue.

Listed events of national interest

8. The Broadcasting Act 1996 (“the 1996 Act”) gives the Secretary of State the power to draw up a list of sporting or other events of “national interest”.² This means the broadcast rights to these events must be offered to the qualifying free-to-air terrestrial broadcasters on “fair and reasonable terms”.³ The aim is to make sure the events are made available to all television viewers. It should be noted that there is no definition for “national interest” in the 1996 Act.⁴

9. The UK Government 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.”⁵ Separately, Ofcom guidance notes that:

“An event may be listed because it is of ‘national’ interest within England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland separately. This is the basis on which the Scottish FA Cup Final, for example, has been listed. The Act allows for those events to be shown only in the relevant part of the UK in which there is likely to be most viewer interest.”⁶

10. The current list of sporting events of national interest is divided into two categories, Group A and Group B.⁷ Full live coverage of Group A events must be offered to qualifying free-to-air broadcasters. Group B events can have live coverage on pay-to-view television provided that adequate provision has been made for secondary coverage by a free-to-air broadcaster.⁸ The current Group A events list include the Olympics, Paralympics, Rugby World Cup Final, FIFA

² Part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996

³ Ofcom Code on Sports and Other Listed and Designated Events

⁴ Part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996

⁵ Coverage of sport on television – Broadcasting Policy Division, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

⁶ Ofcom Code on Sports and Other Listed and Designated Events

⁷ Ofcom Code on Sports and Other Listed and Designated Events

⁸ Ofcom Code on Sports and Other Listed and Designated Events

World Cup Finals and European Football Championship Finals (both Men's and Women's Finals). It also includes events such as Wimbledon Tennis Finals and the Derby. Group B events includes all other matches in the Rugby World Cup, the Six Nations and the Commonwealth Games.⁹

UK Government approach

11. In November 2009, a review of free-to-air listed events proposed listing Wales matches in the Six Nations Rugby Championship (in Wales only), reflecting the “special national resonance” of rugby in Wales.¹⁰

12. In March 2020, the then Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport noted the Six Nations has been a Group B event since 1998. He argued that the existing list works well, and he argued that this provides the correct balance between retaining access to the public and allowing rights holders to negotiate in the best interests of their sport. He concluded that the UK Government had no intention of reviewing the list.¹¹ This view was reaffirmed in correspondence with us in December 2021.¹²

13. In June 2023, however, the then Minister of State for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries, the Right Honourable Sir John Whittingdale OBE MP (“the Minister”) told the Welsh Affairs Committee:

“...this [the Six Nations] is particularly important for the Senedd—while broadcasting is a reserved policy issue, sport is not, so if the Welsh Government had strong views about sport, we would be keen to discuss that with them.”¹³

14. The Minister told us in October 2023 that:

⁹ [Government adds women's international football tournaments to listed events regime – UK Government](#) – 25 April 2022

¹⁰ [Review of Free-to-air Listed Events](#) - Report by the Independent Advisory Panel to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

¹¹ [Written question: Rugby: Listed events](#) – UK Parliament – 4 March 2020

¹² [Letter from the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to the Chair of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee regarding the future of public service broadcasting and media in Wales](#) – 6 December 2021 [PDF 114 KB]

¹³ [Welsh Affairs Committee: Oral evidence: Broadcasting in Wales – Q449](#) - 28 June 2023 – House of Commons

“We've always said that if the Welsh Parliament argued very strongly that, for the good of sport in Wales, we needed to look again at the listed events, we would look at it, certainly. So, it's not closed.”¹⁴

Welsh Affairs Committee inquiry

15. The Welsh Affairs Committee published their report on Broadcasting in Wales on 27 October 2023.¹⁵ In that report, they recommended that:

- the Government should add the Six Nations to Group A of the Listed Sporting Events, to ensure its status on terrestrial TV;
- the UK Government should work with the Welsh Government and broadcasters to discuss how the listed events regime could be amended to support a specific list of Welsh events;
- Ofcom's remit should be amended to ensure that it can designate events in Group A and Group B of the Listed Events Regime and specified non-listed events as requiring live Welsh language commentary.¹⁶

16. The UK Government rejected these recommendations.¹⁷ It also noted, however, that:

“As sports policy is devolved, it would be for the Welsh Government to comprehensively evaluate in the first instance whether there is currently the right balance between Welsh rights-holders' ability to generate sufficient income to invest in Welsh sport, and access for Welsh audiences to those sporting events. The UK Government would then take those considerations into account.”¹⁸

¹⁴ [Record of Proceedings: Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee – 19 October 2023, paragraph 117](#)

¹⁵ [Broadcasting in Wales – Welsh Affairs Committee – 27 October 2023 – House of Commons](#)

¹⁶ [Broadcasting in Wales – Welsh Affairs Committee – 27 October 2023 – House of Commons](#)

¹⁷ [UK Government response to Broadcasting in Wales – Welsh Affairs Committee – 23 January 2024 – House of Commons](#)

¹⁸ [UK Government response to Broadcasting in Wales – Welsh Affairs Committee – 23 January 2024 – House of Commons](#)

3. Evidence considered

17. Our Committee received evidence from a broad range of stakeholders who have an interest in the broadcasting rights of Welsh rugby matches. This includes evidence considered at our meeting for this inquiry, as well as relevant information gathered from other sources. In this chapter, we outline the evidence we considered.

Market dynamics

18. Wales is the only UK nation to have any rugby games appear in its list of the “top ten” most-watched programmes in 2022.¹⁹ As with the previous year,²⁰ the Wales v France Six Nations Rugby match, broadcast on BBC One on 11 March 2022, was the most-viewed programme in Wales for the year, with an average audience of 652,000. Another Six Nations match (England v Wales) also appeared in the top ten most viewed programmes in 2022.²¹

19. It was reported in May 2021 that Six Nations Rugby Limited agreed a four-year broadcast deal with BBC and ITV for coverage of the Six Nations.²² Later in 2021, both the BBC and S4C lost the broadcasting rights to the Men’s rugby Autumn International Series to Amazon Prime, who also provided their own Welsh language output.²³

20. The Welsh Rugby Union told us that their position was not that the Six Nations should move away from public service broadcasting, but that placing such a restriction:

“...would artificially restrict the market for our media rights and significantly diminish our earning potential to devastating effect on our game.”²⁴

21. Six Nations Rugby Limited added that it is important to strike a balance between reach and revenue generation to allow rugby governing bodies to

¹⁹ [Ofcom Media Nations, Wales 2023](#)

²⁰ [Ofcom Media Nations, Wales 2022](#)

²¹ [Ofcom Media Nations, Wales 2023](#)

²² [Six Nations: Organisers agree in principle to continued BBC and ITV deal](#) – BBC News – 21 May 2021

²³ [Wales rugby: TV offers 'not enough' to air free coverage](#) – BBC News – 20 October 2021

²⁴ [Evidence from the Welsh Rugby Union: Six nations rugby broadcasting rights](#) [PDF 194 KB]

reinvest across the game.²⁵ This view was shared by the Association for Commercial Broadcasters and On-Demand Services (“COBA”) who told us that competition for rights is crucial for investing in the grassroots of sport.²⁶

22. Professor Richard Haynes (University of Stirling), a professor in culture, media and communications, noted that following football’s commercial model is not necessarily the right model for other sports to follow. This was because football benefits from being the world’s biggest sport.²⁷

23. In autumn 2023, as part of our inquiry on public service broadcasting, the BBC told us that they have a limited budget for sport:

“I could spend the whole licence fee on sports. We are ducking and diving a little bit in terms of sharing events—with ITV on the rugby. We are going to have to do that to keep within the constraints of our budget.”²⁸

24. In correspondence with us previously, Ofcom told us that:

“PSBs [public service broadcasters] have maintained a steady level of investment in sports in recent years, largely driven by focus on Listed Events. However, there are a number of challenges facing PSBs that may impact their ability to compete for sports rights. PSBs are facing budget constraints, whether from a freeze to the licence fee or a downturn in the advertising market, and this is compounded by production cost inflation. Sports rights can be expensive, and these budget constraints may be impacting PSBs’ ability to compete for these rights packages.”²⁹

25. Ofcom added that public service broadcasters also faced competition from “global media organisations” who are branching out into this market.³⁰ Whilst

²⁵ Evidence from Six Nations Rugby Limited: Six nations rugby broadcasting rights [PDF 353 KB]

²⁶ Evidence from Association for Commercial Broadcasters and On-Demand Services: Six nations rugby broadcasting rights [PDF 470 KB]

²⁷ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 1 February 2024 – paragraphs 236-237

²⁸ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 16 November 2023 – paragraph 196

²⁹ Correspondence from Ofcom: Public service broadcasting in Wales - 10 October 2023 [PDF 294 KB]

³⁰ Correspondence from Ofcom: Public service broadcasting in Wales - 10 October 2023 [PDF 294 KB]

this is not a new challenge, as public service broadcasters have competed against pay-to-view platforms before, Ofcom notes it is “becoming more acute”.³¹

26. Professor Haynes shared a similar view to that provided by Ofcom:

“...if it was on the open market, I would say the likelihood of BBC, ITV retaining rights to the six nations is also a bit of a dodgy proposition.”³²

27. Professor Haynes said that the notion of paying to view sport had been normalised:

“It's kind of common ground that if you want to watch the sport that you're interested in, then most likely you have to pay for it. But, of course, that raises lots of questions about ability to pay and so on and so forth.”³³

28. We also discussed the impact of Group A event status on the commercial viability of other sport. Discussing the Wimbledon Tennis Championships, Professor Haynes said:

“...I don't think they're struggling commercially. If Wimbledon were to go behind a paywall I think that would change the dynamic of tennis in the UK, at least, quite radically.”³⁴

29. Huw Llywelyn Davies, the former BBC rugby commentator, and President of Pentyrch Rugby Football Club, noted that there are also socio-economic considerations to this. He told us that Wales is traditionally more working class than other nations and that:

³⁰ Correspondence from Ofcom: Public service broadcasting in Wales - 10 October 2023 [PDF 294 KB]

³¹ Correspondence from Ofcom: Public service broadcasting in Wales - 10 October 2023 [PDF 294 KB]

³² Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 - paragraph 292

³³ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 - paragraph 208

³⁴ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 - paragraph 298

“...there is less money available for rugby supporters, and, by now, taking a family to watch a game live could cost around £500, £600, and that is beyond the pockets of many people.”³⁵

Welsh Rugby Union’s financial situation

30. In advance of our evidence session, the WRU told us that:

“Put simply, the negative financial implications of moving international rugby matches in the Six Nations Rugby Championship to the protected list could have a devastating impact on the whole of the game in Wales in the medium and long term.”³⁶

31. During our evidence session with them, the WRU elaborated further on the financial consequences of reclassifying the Six Nations as a Group A event:

“...our total revenue is approximately £90 million a year, and our media rights revenue has been, on average, about £20 million ...if we were to get less in that media revenue, that's less money we can invest in Welsh rugby. And it's not a small amount of our revenue, and we had the conversation last week about the impact of our loans and all of those things—we would struggle to survive.”³⁷

32. Were the Six Nations to become a Group A event for the purposes of the listed events regime, financial mitigations could help. Seimon Williams, a rugby columnist, blogger and author of “Welsh Rugby: What Went Wrong”, told us:

“One of them would be to make up any shortfall between the contract that was agreed by going to category A and staying in category B...you could make up that shortfall in terms of the grass-roots game, through grants and that sort of thing.”³⁸

³⁵ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 ... paragraph 224

³⁶ Evidence from the Welsh Rugby Union: Six nations rugby broadcasting rights [PDF 194 KB]

³⁷ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 ... paragraph 111

³⁸ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 ... paragraph 281

33. He added that another option would be to renegotiate existing loans given that they take out £8million from the game per year.³⁹

34. The loans referred to by Seimon Williams were loans provided by the Welsh Government to the WRU in March 2022.⁴⁰ When it comes to these loans, the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism noted that in March 2022 that:

“Following an approach by the WRU, the Welsh Government took an unprecedented, but necessary measure in agreeing a £18m loan to enable the WRU to refinance its existing three-year UK Government Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CLBILS) loan. At that time, the WRU was unable to satisfy the terms of the CLBILS loan. It was made clear to Welsh Ministers that without urgent assistance in the form of a refinanced loan, the organisation – and the four regions – faced existential financial risks.”⁴¹

35. The Deputy Minister said that this was provided with an extended repayment term of 18 years to provide headroom for the union to recover [financially following the pandemic]. The Deputy Minister also stated that this is a commercial loan, and not a Covid loan.⁴²

36. The letter from the Deputy Minister confirms that the Welsh Government provided rugby with £14million, from a non-repayable grant, during the Covid-19 pandemic.⁴³

37. In a previous evidence session with our Committee, the WRU told us that it cannot continue to finance the regions at the same level as it did previously, unless the union itself becomes more commercially successful.⁴⁴

³⁹ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 1 February 2024 – paragraph 281

⁴⁰ Letter from the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism: Six Nations rugby broadcasting rights - 8 February 2024 [PDF 183 KB]

⁴¹ Letter from the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism: Six Nations rugby broadcasting rights - 8 February 2024 [PDF 183 KB]

⁴² Letter from the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism: Six Nations rugby broadcasting rights - 8 February 2024 [PDF 183 KB]

⁴³ Letter from the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism: Six Nations rugby broadcasting rights - 8 February 2024 [PDF 183 KB]

⁴⁴ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 24 January 2024 – paragraph 116

Rugby participation

38. We also discussed the effects that broadcasting the Six Nations has on participation in rugby. According to the WRU:

“The health of Welsh rugby relies heavily upon the income generated by its media rights. This funding fuels the investment in the development and grassroots areas of the game and therefore its long-term sustainability.”⁴⁵

39. Huw Llywelyn Davies noted that there’s been an undeniable impact on participation since rugby has become less available on free-to-air television:

“I think, that there are fewer people watching rugby on television and that has a detrimental impact on the game in Wales, because there is a link between the number watching on television and the number who play and participate in the game.”⁴⁶

40. Whilst placing sport behind a paywall increases commercial income (which helps fund a sport at all levels, including the grassroots), Professor Haynes warned that, as a consequence, the visibility of the sport decreases.⁴⁷ In that regard, he told us that:

“...if you can't see it, you can't be it...”⁴⁸

41. In a previous Committee session, the WRU noted that male rugby participation is declining⁴⁹:

“All unions across the world are seeing a real struggle to maintain the number of players playing, certainly on the male side. The female side

⁴⁵ Evidence from the Welsh Rugby Union: Six nations rugby broadcasting rights [PDF 194 KB]

⁴⁶ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee -- 1 February 2024 -- paragraph 204

⁴⁷ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee -- 1 February 2024 -- paragraph 235

⁴⁸ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee -- 1 February 2024 -- paragraph 235

⁴⁹ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee -- 24 January 2024 -- paragraph 41

is not as mature, so the female side in most countries seems to be going up, but the male side is under challenge.”⁵⁰

42. This view was echoed by Huw Llywelyn Davies. He cautioned that grassroots rugby in Wales was not in a healthy place:

“Fewer people are playing. If you look at a weekend of rugby in Wales, about 20 matches are postponed because teams can't get the players to play.”⁵¹

Effect on Hospitality

43. We asked the WRU what the effect would be of placing the tournament on a pay-to-view platform, when it came to the hospitality sector (in particular the co-operative sector, and venues such as local rugby and/or social clubs). Our concern was that such venues might not be able to afford the subscriptions that are required. In response, they told us:

“We recognise that and that will absolutely be part of our consideration, looking at the number of different players in the market as we go through the bidding process, and trying to make sure that we're not making that access too complicated or unaffordable.”⁵²

44. UK Hospitality stated that nothing is affordable for the hospitality industry in the current financial climate, and that “margins are squeezed everywhere”.⁵³ They added that the communal aspect of getting together in a local pub is as important as the economic situation:

“...the community factor is probably as important to Welsh people as the perpetuation of the economic surroundings for their local pub—

⁵⁰ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 24 January 2024 – paragraph 41

⁵¹ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 1 February 2024 – paragraph 269

⁵² Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 1 February 2024 – paragraph 87

⁵³ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 1 February 2024 – paragraph 214

the chance to get together. There is a unique atmosphere in our pubs when these things happen.”⁵⁴

45. UK Hospitality also told us that free-to-air Six Nations matches were crucial to the sector:

“...it's the period between January and March that's really critical to pubs' survival. You will have seen—. I mean, we've got 10 per cent more pub closures than England in Wales...It's this period now that is particularly relevant and that's when the key six nations comes in.”⁵⁵

Broadcasting rights negotiations

46. The WRU's position on rights negotiations was clear:

“Our position is not that Six Nations Championship rugby should be moved away from free-to-air television channels. It is that to place this restriction on rugby would artificially restrict the market for our media rights and significantly diminish our earning potential to devastating effect on our game.”⁵⁶

47. On audience reach, the WRU added:

“The balance we must strike is between that reach and pounds, shillings and pence, because if you go totally for reach, the discrepancy between what you could get between free-to-air and pay tv is so large you won't make it up, so you get greater reach, but the money won't go as far...”⁵⁷

48. According to the WRU, making the tournament a Group A event would lead to lower bids as public service broadcasters wouldn't need to compete for the rights with pay-to-view platforms:

⁵⁴ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 ... paragraph 218

⁵⁵ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 ... paragraph 219

⁵⁶ Evidence from the Welsh Rugby Union: Six nations rugby broadcasting rights [PDF 194 KB]

⁵⁷ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 ... paragraph 26

"I think our argument is, if we were to move onto the A list, the tension would be taken out and therefore they would bid, potentially, lower because they wouldn't have to be competing."⁵⁸

49. The WRU also confirmed that pay-to-view platforms have previously bid for the rights to the tournament:

"I understand there was at least one offer, possibly two offers, from pay tv broadcasters, and the decision was taken that the difference was not enough to make up for the reach."⁵⁹

50. We also asked the WRU what influence CVC Capital Partners (who own a 14 per cent share in Six Nations Rugby Limited) have on broadcasting negotiations. We challenged the WRU that CVC Capital Partners might be interested in selling the rights for the highest price possible. The WRU countered this, however, by telling us that:

"...they actually want to grow the game, because they understand that if they grow the game, the revenues will increase and they're more likely to get a return on their investment. So, they're not in it for short-term gain. I've not seen any evidence of that in my time around that table."⁶⁰

Welsh language provision

51. The Welsh Government previously told the Welsh Affairs Committee:

"The availability of sports programming through the medium of Welsh is also essential to the Welsh Government's ambitions for the Welsh language as set out in our strategy, Cymraeg 2050, and plays

⁵⁸ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 ... paragraph 113

⁵⁹ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 ... paragraph 58

⁶⁰ Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee ...1 February 2024 ... paragraph 164

a vital role promoting the language to traditional as well as non-traditional Welsh language audiences.”⁶¹

52. The WRU emphasised their commitment to the Welsh language:

“I'd like to reassure the committee of our commitment to the Welsh language and our understanding of the importance of the Welsh language, and that certainly will not change during these negotiations.”⁶²

53. Seimon Williams also noted how important a Welsh language offering was:

“I think it's vital, whatever happens, that there is Welsh provision available and openly. Recently, Amazon has provided two streams, exactly the same, during the autumn internationals—that seems to be working well. But it has to be accessible and easy to reach, and of good quality.”⁶³

54. Efa Gruffudd Jones, the Welsh Language Commissioner, has previously stated that further moves from free-to-air sports broadcasting would make it necessary to ensure that a Welsh-language commentary was provided.⁶⁴

⁶¹ [Welsh Government written evidence to Broadcasting in Wales inquiry – Welsh Affairs Committee](#) – House of Commons

⁶² [Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 1 February 2024 – paragraph 168](#)

⁶³ [Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee – 1 February 2024 – paragraph 258](#)

⁶⁴ [Welsh Affairs Committee – House of Commons](#) – 28 June 2023 – Q407

4. Conclusions

55. The simple question facing us as a Committee was whether or not the Six Nations Rugby Championship should be made a Group A event as part of the listed events regime under the 1996 Act. This was not a straightforward question for us to consider, and we tried to balance and weigh a number of factors in our deliberations. We believe that the arguments for and against making such a change are finely balanced, especially when it comes to the competing needs to generate sufficient income for rugby to thrive, and to maintain and ensure the broadest reach possible for the game in Wales. Rugby in Wales, and perhaps in particular the Six Nations Championship, holds a special place for Welsh audiences and for the Welsh psyche, and this was never far from our minds.

56. The WRU outlined the importance of retaining a “tension” in the market to allow for sufficient income to be generated from selling the tournament broadcasting rights. They were resolute in telling us that retaining Group B event status was key to retaining this “market tension”. It is clear to us how valuable an income stream broadcasting rights are for the WRU, which in turn supports rugby at a grassroots level in Wales. We are of the view that the funding challenges facing the WRU and Welsh rugby, as well as other sports in general, go beyond what is set out in this report, and are beyond the scope of this inquiry.

57. Conversely, we were told about the challenges inherent in reduced playing numbers, in Wales, most notably in men’s rugby. Concerns were shared with us about the effects which placing the tournament behind a paywall could further have on playing numbers. As one witness said, “if you can’t see it, you can’t be it.” This point is exemplified most infamously in the experiences of cricket in the UK since it was placed on a pay-to-view platform. Home tests involving the England cricket team were moved to a pay-to-view platform in 2006. During the period between 2006-07 and 2015, there was a 32 per cent reduction in playing numbers.⁶⁵ Evidently, there are clear consequences when it comes to sports participation when decisions are made to chase funding at the expense of audience reach.

58. Moreover, we would note that the listed events regime, as outlined in the 1996 Act, is concerned with providing an opportunity for live coverage to be made available. The inclusion of an event in the list does not mean that it has to

⁶⁵ [Fall in Sky Ashes viewing figures leaves English cricket facing stark choices](#) – Guardian – 12 July 2015

be shown on television. Sports rights holders are not obliged to offer events, and nor are broadcasters obliged to bid for coverage of them.⁶⁶

59. Our deliberations have also focused on the unique role of rugby in our national life. Whilst Wales has performed strongly in an array of sporting events in recent years, rugby holds an undeniably special resonance in our cultural life. We have come to the view that, the challenges facing the sector and the game notwithstanding, this special resonance must be protected, to ensure that future generations in Wales are able to connect with the game without having to pay for the privilege. It is a game which has been embraced by the working classes of Wales since the end of the 19th century, and has helped to tell Wales' story as a nation on the world stage. Our culture would be incalculably poorer, were we to lose that strong connection with the game.

60. We are thus of the view that the Six Nations Rugby Championship should be made a Group A event as part of the listed events regime. This has been a difficult, and finely balanced decision for us to take as a Committee. We do not come to this decision lightly, and nor do we wish to dismiss the concerns outlined to us by the WRU. We have concluded that, on balance, these vitally important considerations still do not outweigh the place that rugby has in our cultural life.

Recommendation 1. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport should move the Six Nations Championship from being a Group B event to being a Group A event as part of the listed events regime under the Broadcasting Act 1996.

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to move the Six Nations Championship from being a Group B event to being a Group A event as part of the listed events regime under the Broadcasting Act 1996.

61. If, the Secretary of State, however, is unwilling to amend the list of sporting events to move the Six Nations Championship from Group B to Group A, we think additional protections must be considered for the hospitality industry (were the Six Nations to be moved to a pay-to-view platform). Given the role that rugby plays in our cultural life, we think certain safeguards need to be

⁶⁶ Coverage of sport on television -- Broadcasting Policy Division, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

introduced to ensure that smaller pubs and clubs should be able to afford to show live matches.

Recommendation 3. In the event that the Six Nations Championship is broadcast on pay-to-view platforms, the UK Government should introduce protections for the hospitality industry including a compulsory contractual clause that allows for reduced pay-to-view subscriptions for pubs and clubs with a rateable value below a specified amount. This should be done following consultation with the hospitality industry to determine the most appropriate approach.

62. We also believe that Welsh language broadcasting of the Six Nations Rugby Championship must be protected. Providing Welsh language coverage is essential, not only in offering a choice to Welsh speakers, but also to promote the Welsh language to both speakers and learners alike as we work towards Cymraeg 2050. In this regard, we think that Welsh language coverage must be offered in full. This means that coverage should include pre and post-match coverage, as well as a Welsh language commentary option.

Recommendation 4. The UK Government must take steps to protect full Welsh language coverage of the Six Nations tournament.

Annex 1: List of oral evidence sessions.

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Date	Name and Organisation
1 February 2024	<p>Abi Tierney, Chief Executive Officer, Welsh Rugby Union</p> <p>Nigel Walker, Executive Director of Rugby, Welsh Rugby Union</p> <p>Dave Chapman, Executive Director in Wales UK Hospitality</p> <p>Huw Llywelyn Davies, former BBC Cymru Wales rugby commentator, and President of Pentyrch Rugby Football Club</p> <p>Professor Richard Haynes, professor in Communications, Media and Culture University of Stirling</p> <p>Seimon Williams Author of "Welsh Rugby: What Went Wrong?"</p>

Annex 2: List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All Consultation responses and additional written information can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Organisation
Welsh Rugby Union
Six Nations Rugby Limited
Association for Commercial Broadcasters and On-demand Services