

Welsh Government response to the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee's 'Six Nations Rugby Championship Broadcasting Rights' report

The Welsh Government welcomes the findings of the report and offers the following responses to the four recommendations contained within.

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

Response: This is not a recommendation for the Welsh Government.

The Welsh Government has always been clear the Six Nations Rugby Championship should remain free-to air. Whilst we recognise this is a complex matter and television rights form an important part of the sport's income, this should not be at the expense of depriving audiences and eroding the base of the sport's grassroots support in Wales. We also acknowledge the unique cultural position which rugby and the Six Nations Championship holds in Wales, an intrinsic part of the fabric of the country.

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

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government has already written to the UK Government on this matter, most recently to Julia Lopez MP, Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries on 11 March 2024 requesting a review of listed events and the movement of the Six Nations Rugby Championship from Group B to Group A. We received a response from Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP, Minister for Sport, Gambling and Civil Society and Julia Lopez MP, Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries on 13 May. The response stated the UK Government has no current plans to undertake a review of the list. It noted the devolved nature of sports policy and it would be open to the Welsh Government to comprehensively evaluate 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 sports fans to those sporting events. Should the Welsh Government put a recommendation to the UK Government, they remain 'open to taking those considerations into account following any evaluation, in balance with any wider views, such as would be the case for events with pooled rights including the Six Nations'. The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social

Justice has provided a response to this letter reenforcing the Welsh Government position, a copy of which is attached for your convenience.

Recommendation 3.

In the event of the Six Nations Championship being broadcast on pay-to-view platforms, the UK Government should introduce protections for the hospitality industry including a compulsory contractual clause which 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.

Response: This is not a recommendation for the Welsh Government.

The public broadcast of sporting events such as the Six Nations Rugby Championship in pubs and clubs brings much needed revenue to these establishments and provides a financial lifeline to many sporting clubs in Wales. The act of collectively supporting the national rugby team in these establishment also plays an important role in bringing together communities and strengthening national identity.

However, the cost of paywall broadcast subscription can be prohibitive, particularly in the context of the economic difficulties facing the hospitality industry related to increasing costs coupled with a decrease in footfall.

Detail of contractual agreements between broadcasters and custodians of sporting competing are a matter for individual parties, outside of the usual broadcast regulations, with decisions on subscription price points decided by market value. However, given the importance, both culturally and financially, of allowing the Six Nations Rugby Championship to be broadcast in hospitality venues, we agree the UK Government should explore all levers to make broadcast subscriptions as affordable as possible to pubs and clubs across country.

Recommendation 4.

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

Response: This is not a recommendation for the Welsh Government.

The Six Nations Rugby Championship holds significant importance for audiences in Wales, serving as a powerful cultural and social touchstone which fosters national pride and unity. It is essential audiences are able to enjoy the tournament in their language of choice and Welsh language coverage is protected and easily available.

The Championship plays a crucial role in promoting the Welsh language, particularly in relation to increasing the use of Welsh, one of the three strategic themes set out in *Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers*. Welsh language coverage of the Six Nations Championship provides a crucial platform for the Welsh language to be featured in media coverage. The championship is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Wales and the use of Welsh during broadcast reinforces the language as a vital component of national identity, whilst ensuring its relevance in a modern Welsh society. Welsh coverage increases access to the language to a wider audience and encourages its use among both fluent and new speakers. For new speakers, following the game in Welsh can often be a first step in their learning journey, providing an easier to follow narrative linked to the game play. The excitement surrounding the championship can also be leveraged into educational settings as a means of engaging students.

The protection of Welsh Language coverage of the Six Nations Championship will contribute to a sense of community and belonging, helping to bridge linguistic barriers in encouraging non-Welsh speakers to embrace the language as part of a collective Welsh Identity. The Welsh language belongs to all in Wales, regardless of where they are on their language journey. Exposing everyone to the language sends a clear signal that the language is there for whoever wishes to embrace it. It must be readily and easily available without barriers.