

Listed Sports Regime Inquiry

**Response from COBA to the Culture,
Communications, Welsh Language,
Sport, and International Relations
Committee**

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Introduction

1. COBA is the Association for Commercial Broadcasters and On-Demand Services. It represents multichannel broadcasters and on-demand services.
2. COBA members operate a wide variety of services, offering news, factual, children's, drama, music, arts, entertainment, sports and comedy. Their content is available on free-to-air and pay-TV platforms, as well as on-demand.
3. COBA members are arguably the fastest growing part of the UK television industry, and are increasing their investment in jobs, UK content and infrastructure. They make this investment without support from the licence fee or indirect support from statutory prominence.
4. For further information please contact Adam Minns, COBA's Executive Director, at adam@coba.org.uk.

1. COBA members play an important role in bringing sporting events to a wide audience. Warner Bros. Discovery, Sky, Amazon Prime Video and others have often made major non-listed events free at point of access, including partnering with PSBs themselves. For example, Prime Video partnered with Channel 4 for the US Open Final to offer a simulcast. In some cases, these non PSB services are able to offer events to a wider audience free at point of access than PSBs' comparable services. For example, Sky's Youtube channel is free at point of use and has more subscribers than ITV's online service.
2. The resulting competition for IP rights to sporting events is crucial for investment in grassroots sports. Sky, for example, has been a long-standing partner of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), with exclusive rights to many matches. This long-term partnership has helped support strong growth in turnover for the ECB, and a substantial increase in the body's investment in grassroots cricket, which is now worth £44m a year, double the comparable amount ten years ago. For its part, Prime Video recently donated £1m to women's tennis.
3. We therefore urge policymakers to encourage competition to bring sports events to viewers. We of course note this must be balanced with making events available to as wide as possible audience, but this is not necessarily mutually exclusive. As we have mentioned, non PSBs have repeatedly demonstrated they can successfully show events free at point of access, as well as via their pay services.
4. Crucially, the Media Bill will end such competition for listed events by prohibiting any service that is not a PSB from showing a listed event even if that service is free and widely available. We therefore ask policymakers to exercise caution when considering recommending that further events be added to the listed regime, especially if the sports in question need investment in order to compete with other sports or countries, or to strengthen their grassroots activities.

5. Beyond sport, we wish to note the vital role of non PSB players in Wales. Thanks to a mixed ecology of non PSBs and PSBs, high-end TV spend in Wales has grown from £31m pa in 2017 to £71m in 2019, making the nation one of the fastest growth areas within the UK screen sector. Over this period, the Welsh screen sector's GVA has doubled (up to £63m pa, or £108m with value chain impacts included). Employment in the Welsh screen sector has also doubled, with 1,200 people now employed in the sector.

6. This success story has been driven by a wide range of players, from PSBs such as the BBC's Dr Who series to many non PSBs. For example, the HBO-BBC co-production His Dark Materials is now in season three, while Sky has shot returning series Britannia; season two of I Hate Suzie, starring Billy Piper, with HBO; and A Discovery of Witches, with another COBA member, AMC Networks. Willow, a Disney+ original series, filmed at Dragon Studios in Llanilid, while HBO has partnered with the BBC on Bad Wolf's Industry for a second season. Crucially, such investment is often sustained over multiple series, allowing a creative cluster to form in the area.