

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Major cultural and sporting events, HC 259

Tuesday 19 October 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 19 October 2021.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Julian Knight (Chair); Kevin Brennan; Steve Brine; Alex Davies-Jones; Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Damian Green; John Nicolson.

Questions 115 - 253

Witnesses

[I](#): Andrew Moger, Director, News Media Coalition; and Barbara Slater, Director, BBC Sport.

[II](#): Simon Morton, Chief Operating Officer, UK Sport; and James Hampson, Director UK & External Affairs, British Council.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Andrew Moger and Barbara Slater.

Q115 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and this is our inquiry into major sporting and cultural events. We have two panels in front of us today. In our first panel we are joined by Andrew Moger, the director of News Media Coalition, and Barbara Slater, the director of BBC Sport. Barbara and Andrew, thank you very much for joining us this morning. It is nice to see you in person as well.

Barbara, you were, I believe, right at the centre of the 2012 Olympic coverage, and I think you were an Olympian—

Barbara Slater: I was director of sport at that time, yes.

Chair: You were an Olympian as well, as I understand it, in 1976?

Barbara Slater: Indeed, I competed in 1976 against Nadia Comăneci, in that era, so yes, indeed.

Chair: The Olympics can be said to be in your blood.

Barbara Slater: It is.

Q116 **Chair:** What was your perception of the BBC's Olympic coverage?

Barbara Slater: Of this year?

Chair: Yes.

Barbara Slater: That it was very successful and that it reached very significant numbers. I think there were a number of things to consider. First, it was an overnight games, and I do think that that has a significant bearing upon the coverage. There was a difference in rights mix, which I am sure we will go on to talk about. Overall, in terms of the quality of the coverage produced by the teams, particularly in the circumstances of Covid, I think we were probably on plan 25 by the time we actually delivered the games. The bulk of the operation was in Salford, including a lot of the commentary, and I think the teams did an absolutely fantastic job of operating under all the Covid restrictions, which added huge complexity.

It is also worth saying a few things. We covered over 500 hours; we had two streams. Three hundred hours of those were on network, primarily BBC One. Indeed, it was the most hours ever from an Olympics on BBC One. That was partly again because of the fact that it was an overnight games. What we had was live coverage through the night, and then, as people were getting up in the morning, there was a mixture of live and some of the best action from overnight. I can understand why that perhaps felt very different to people who had experienced London 2012 when it was in the UK time zone. For the Rio Olympics also, although



HOUSE OF COMMONS

some events pushed late into the evening, nevertheless through that whole peak time there was a lot of live coverage.

We had two channels available, so there was always choice. There were obviously a lot of action replays running through the day. I can understand that we did not have all of the individual sport by sport streams. For example, if you were a fan of volleyball and you wanted to watch volleyball from 9 in the morning until 10 o'clock at night, that provision was with our partner Discovery and via Eurosport.

Of course, we know for some audiences that access to individual sports was very important, but that came about as part of the rights negotiation. We bid as part of the EBU and the EBU lost collectively across Europe the rights to Discovery. Therefore, it was a negotiation with Discovery as to what rights we may be able to have. We know that listed events obviously is a fantastic protection—

Chair: We are going to come on to listed events shortly.

Barbara Slater: We will come on to listed events later, yes, of course.

Q117 **Chair:** Yes, we will touch on that. You paint quite a rosy picture of the coverage. Why was there so much criticism, at least initially, of the coverage?

Barbara Slater: I think because it felt different. What is interesting is that it was the exact same circumstances as PyeongChang. Interestingly, we did not get a huge amount of feedback from what I would describe as our main eventer audience. What we did get, though, was individual stakeholders. If you were from the sport of equestrian or what have you, I think that it felt quite different.

What is interesting to consider as well is if you look back at both 2012 and Rio, the vast majority of audience accessed the games via the main channels. If we look at Rio, for example, between 3% and 5% of the audience accessed the Olympics via an individual stream. I suppose that when it comes to prioritisation, what was most important to us was to be able to make sure that we were unrestricted in the events that we could show.

Q118 **Chair:** You say that, but that was five years ago—the Rio games were in 2016—and the world has moved on since then. What you have presented us with, effectively, and this was the feeling, you say that most of the stakeholders seemed to be relatively pleased with it, but the perception that I had, which I was getting not just from constituents but people working in the industry, was that it was presenting them with coverage that felt like two decades ago.

Barbara Slater: I wouldn't agree with that. I think what is very interesting is to look at the digital numbers. As I say, we had two streams—so two choices—and more than any human could possibly



HOUSE OF COMMONS

watch over 17 days of 500 hours. There really was a lot of choice and a lot of coverage.

I think you are right to say that audiences have changed. What is interesting, if I could paint a picture of last year, is that for Wimbledon—we have the choice of the individual match courts—we broke records: 28 million people made video requests for Wimbledon. We are seeing big changes. The Euros was up to 75 million people accessing content digitally. For the Olympics, it was an all-time record of over 100 million.

Q119 **Chair:** That is across two channels, isn't it?

Barbara Slater: That is effectively digital requests. That does not include the linear programming on network. That is purely people accessing and making a digital request. They were doing that for a number of reasons. They were doing it to catch up. What we wanted to do was present people with a rich mix when they got up in the morning, so they could choose the events that had happened overnight that we could package up and show digitally.

The other main point of access was that people were choosing the second option. Again, I would stress that it was 500 hours of coverage. A lot of it was available on demand and that drove what were record-breaking numbers. For the Rio Olympics, where we had all of the streams, that number was about 74 million accessing streams.

Q120 **Chair:** Are people's expectations too great, given the financial constraints that you have already highlighted with the European Broadcasting Union?

Barbara Slater: What was fantastic was that in the home games in 2012 a whole new innovation was achieved in terms of the multiple streams. There is no question that that felt really interesting. We were the first broadcaster to do that and it felt quite a step change. Often the Olympics is a step change in the innovation of broadcast coverage.

Chair: This was a step backwards.

Barbara Slater: It was being realistic.

Q121 **Chair:** May I say, Barbara, you are doing a very sterling job of presenting it as such, but no one can suggest that the coverage of 2016 was anything like the same as the most recent coverage. We do understand that and, frankly, the reasons are that it is just too great an expense. Effectively, Discovery outbid EBU and, therefore, that is the problem.

Barbara Slater: It is a problem, yes.

Chair: The quieter question is about whether or not, frankly, the BBC can afford to compete for such rights on a global scale.

Barbara Slater: I think that you are very good to raise those issues. Of course, it is a concern when rights are sold on a pan-territory basis because it means the BBC cannot bid individually for those rights. We are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

talking to the IOC to discuss how it might do future tenders and, in fact, whether there might be the ability, but we are not clear on that. Those conversations have not yet finalised the process going forward.

That incident was over rights being sold on a pan-territory basis. We were then in a commercial negotiation with Discovery, and what we have to remember here—and I think this is an important point that I hope we will come on to discuss around listed events—is listed events was created in an analogue age. It applies to linear. There is a provision for live linear coverage. That just does not feel adequate for this modern age. I would implore that there is consideration given to modernisation.

Another important point is what you are tending to do is see a little bit of a divide on demographics, particularly around age. Therefore, an older audience still tending to access via linear but a younger audience very active in the digital space. We do not want listed events to create a divide, so I would emphasise the importance. The fact that we had any digital access at all was the result of a negotiation as opposed to a listed event protection. It is really important to make that point.

In that negotiation, what we wanted to do there was to preserve what we believed was most precious to the audience, effectively access to any event at any time and to be able to offer some choice. There is an inevitable prioritisation that we have to make, and this is a much wider issue when you consider that the BBC's income in the last decade has gone down 30% in real terms. The value of sports rights in that same period has doubled. It just is not possible to be able to afford to do everything that we did.

What we have done is we have tried to come up with partnerships as one solution to that. Pretty much all our major events are now in partnership, some of those with paid broadcasters, some of those with other free to air. For example, the Six Nations is a great example of where we met with the organisers—this was obviously a few years ago—and it became quite obvious we were not going to be able to meet their expectations. For us, the priority was that the Six Nations should remain free to air. We reached out and we partnered with ITV and by spreading that cost it meant that we were able to bid, and bid successfully, for the Six Nations.

The other thing we do is we emphasise to rights holders the other assets that the BBC can bring: reach, the amplification of events. In the discussions with the ECB over the last contract, it was interesting that there was a bundling of rights. There was a pay package but there was the reserving of some rights more explicitly for free to air. There was competition for those, but effectively there was a governing body seeking a best of both worlds.

Chair: Yes, they were used as a loss leader, effectively.

Barbara Slater: That is right. They did. By the way, look at The Hundred. They are launching a new form of the game, a new format.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There were lots of questions as to whether that was the right thing to do, but I think we can all look back and say the audience that came to The Hundred was fantastic for cricket. What a breakthrough moment it was for women's cricket as well. Having heard what some of the women players said, I know how much they saw that as a bit of a sea change in terms of the crowds that watched; a real breakthrough moment for women's cricket.

Chair: Thank you for that. I am going to turn now to our next questioner, who will be Kevin Brennan.

Q122 **Kevin Brennan:** I agree with you about The Hundred. Although, ironically, if it does get into the Olympics you probably will not be able to show it under the new regime.

Barbara Slater: There are two streams. That is still a lot of choice.

Q123 **Kevin Brennan:** On that negotiation you were talking about with Discovery, how did the presence of the listed regime on the table in those negotiations play into the negotiation you had with Discovery?

Barbara Slater: We knew what the listed events provided for, which was linear live coverage. Anything beyond that was part of an overall discussion.

Q124 **Kevin Brennan:** You said you partnered successfully with ITV over the Six Nations, which by the way should definitely remain free to air and, in my view, ought to be listed to remain free to air. That is particularly important in Wales, as you know. You partnered with ITV over that in order to be able to continue to offer it free to air. Why didn't you partner with someone like ITV over the Olympic negotiations in order to make sure there was more available on linear free to air?

Barbara Slater: I don't think that would have solved that problem because I think Discovery invested pretty much £1 billion in those rights. It clearly wanted something for Discovery. I do not want to speak on Discovery's part, I am not qualified to do that, but you could consider that it would be important to it to reserve access for itself. Whether even a number of public service broadcasters had joined forces, I don't think it would necessarily have resulted in more access.

Q125 **Kevin Brennan:** If it was not for the listed regime, do you think you would have had any access?

Barbara Slater: I think that the listed events regime preserves events like the Olympics for the widest possible reach. I don't know whether we would have done that because obviously we have a listed event regime, but it would be extremely concerning for those types of pinnacle events if we did not have a robust listed regime.

We should not lose sight of the fact that there is often a lot of public investment that will go into these events, particularly when they are hosted in the UK. It seems to me that the wide access to those events is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

something that we should fight to preserve—even events that happen overseas—for example, if you look at the investment that is made in UK sport.

Let's just think back to a slightly longer-term history of when we had Olympics and we might win one or two medals. You see that transformation. Maybe you could say it started through Beijing, through Rio and obviously through 2012. Just think of those wonderful role models, how uplifting that is for people to follow those stories of extraordinary achievements. Having made that investment, surely what we want to do is preserve access to those events for the widest possible reach.

Q126 Kevin Brennan: When Tim Davie, the Director-General, was in front of us recently, we had a little discussion about this. He was asked whether the limited free to air coverage we saw this year is what we can expect for all future Olympics, and he said that the BBC has a deal until 2024 on these terms.

Barbara Slater: We do, until Paris.

Kevin Brennan: He also later said that he was sorry that the Olympics offer is a little bit skinnier.

Barbara Slater: It is skinnier.

Q127 Kevin Brennan: He was perhaps a bit franker about that. What can you tell us about the plans for the Winter Olympics in Beijing in 2022 and the 2024 summer games? There is something I want to ask you: what is the status of your application to Ofcom for broadcasting of these games? Have you made an application with Discovery as per this year and does that mean that once again free to air coverage will be limited for these next two games?

Barbara Slater: My understanding is that because, as I say, listed events was designed in an analogue age, there is no provision for digital access.

Q128 Kevin Brennan: Should there be?

Barbara Slater: Yes, I think there should be. I think it is very important that that regime is modernised. Unfortunately, those agreements were made in an era when listed events applied only to analogue. Part of that negotiation was to secure digital access. Beijing will be very similar in pattern to PyeongChang. We already operated in PyeongChang under this regime, which was a lot of live coverage overnight and then a mixture of live and recorded so that all of the key action overnight would be shown. PyeongChang, for which we received no audience issue, will replicate in Beijing. One of the reasons is because, of course, there are fewer simultaneous events in the Winter Olympics.

Q129 Kevin Brennan: What about 2024?



Barbara Slater: I think that 2024 is interesting because one of the reasons that the Tokyo games felt different was that it was an overnight games. It was a very tough ask for our editorial teams and I think they did a brilliant job in the morning of having to try to reflect both what was happening live but also make sure that they reflected on what had happened overnight. In Paris, of course, the coverage—

Kevin Brennan: Everything will be happening on the day.

Barbara Slater: Everything will be happening in real time. Although I am not trying to say that it will not be a slimmer offering, as you say, I think it will be an incredibly rich offering because it will be live. We will not have that issue of lots of recordings to squeeze in because it will all be live.

One of the things that we discuss with the IOC is around how those events dovetail with each other. For example, you do not want the gymnastics final clashing with the 100 metres or with some of the blue ribbon swimming events.

Q130 **Kevin Brennan:** That does not happen anyway, does it?

Barbara Slater: It doesn't because there is a staggering of events. All of that staggering of events from Tokyo was happening in the middle of the night, whereas in Paris we will have live action from morning, noon, late into the evening.

Q131 **Kevin Brennan:** We sometimes win medals in odd—well, I say odd sports, minority sports. Will you be able to jump around on linear freely to any number of sports throughout the day?

Barbara Slater: Correct. That was exactly one of the big prioritisations that we made. To us, to be able to access any event at any time was a priority.

Q132 **Kevin Brennan:** That remains on linear?

Barbara Slater: That remains.

Q133 **Kevin Brennan:** Just to finish, because I need to ask one other question: one thing I did raise with Tim Davie previously is that I hope the BBC does not continue, as I felt some of the coverage did this time—it was pretty good coverage overall—to pretend that something is live when it is not. For years in America, they covered the Olympics in that way and it is shocking. Sometimes events that happened some time previously are presented as if they are happening at the time.

Barbara Slater: We are very clear on that point. We don't, and I hope that at no point did anybody hear us try to claim that we were in Tokyo when we were not.

Q134 **Kevin Brennan:** It can be by omission as well, though, can't it?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Barbara Slater: Somebody did say it at one point. I think they said something like, “Welcome here” but we were straight on it and said no. It is not our role to mislead.

Q135 **Kevin Brennan:** Andrew, from a news organisation perspective, how are rights deals for major events evolving?

Andrew Moger: Clearly, not evolving I would say. I think we are stuck in a time warp. There is a huge disconnect between news consumption expectations at the moment, the way that the news media is able to deliver to those expectations, and the background market for rights, which has not moved on, as Barbara has indicated. I think we all know it is analogue based. It does not take account of patterns of consumption and the growth of the digital platforms.

Q136 **Kevin Brennan:** What would you recommend in order to safeguard news gathering alongside a competitive rights market?

Andrew Moger: I think that there ought to be prerequisites built into the processes, in fact built in prior to the bidding processes, prerequisites set out for media freedom, evolving journalism, at the very first blink of an eye around an event coming to a particular country. That means that the invitations to bid, or even the conversations prior to the invitations to bid, need to have as a bulwark foundation element media freedom and evolution around content.

Who knows what the next iteration of news creation and flow is going to be? We need to pre-empt that as best we can. It does not work when bids are invited and hosting rights are secured five, six, seven years before an event happens. That has to result in failure and an inability of the news organisations and others to deliver to the news consumption patterns at that time, on day one of an event.

Q137 **Clive Efford:** I am sorry to come back to you, Barbara, but I just wondered whether you think that the BBC spends enough on sport. The Director-General has said that he would not spend 50% of the budget on sport. Do you argue? Tell us what goes on inside the BBC.

Barbara Slater: I might get into trouble if I do.

Clive Efford: Are you arguing for a bigger slice of the cake for sport?

Barbara Slater: We fight very hard. What I can say, though—and I have articulated the super-inflation we are seeing in sports rights and the fact that the BBC’s real-term income has come down by 30%—is that broadly, if we look across that last decade, the BBC has been consistent in what it spends on sports rights. It is between about 7% and 10%. Obviously, the BBC has many different pulls on its resources, and we have had fantastic support.

A place where we also get support, and this is something that we talk to rights holders about a lot, is the way we can amplify events. We can do



that by getting wider support from the BBC. When we do have an event—take the Commonwealth Games next summer—this is an event that the whole of the BBC will get behind. We are not shy about talking with a rights holder.

If I was to draw upon an example of where I think the role of the BBC has been transformational, I would point to the 2019 Women's World Cup. I do think it is really worth considering the story there. We did a world cup in 2015. Twelve million people watched that world cup—it was in Canada—and 48% of that audience said they had never watched a women's football match before. That is 6 million people who were being introduced to something that they might then follow and they might be interested in. We then had great success in the Women's Euros in 2017, a semi-final place, and the audience got to an individual peak of 4 million. That is a pretty good audience by modern standards.

Then, with the Change the Game campaign that ran across the BBC, I don't believe there can have been a single person in the UK who was not aware that England was going to be playing Scotland in Nice as the opening match. It was a comprehensive campaign. That audience jumped to over 6 million, the next match 7 million, the match after that 8 million. Finally, we had a semi-final watched by nearly 12 million people, the second most watched programme in the UK that entire year in any genre.

That shows the amplifying power when a national broadcaster can get behind an event like that. I think that is an extraordinary springboard for women's football and for women's sport, and I hope we see that continue through the Women's Euros hosted in the UK next year. There is no question that women's sport suffered disproportionately during Covid, so I sincerely hope that with the WSL coverage now on network television and the Women's Euros here in the UK, that springboard will, if you like, be rebounded.

Q138 Clive Efford: I am tempted to go down that road and ask you whether sport governing bodies recognise that power of the BBC, but I won't go down that route.

In terms of money for sport and for the coverage of sport, and there is a cost involved, has the BBC ever considered an optional top-up licence fee to provide a sport option?

Barbara Slater: I have to say, I am afraid that is probably beyond my remit.

Q139 Clive Efford: Okay, I will not dwell on that. How do you prioritise which sporting events to cover?

Barbara Slater: Many factors. There is an historic factor. There is where governing bodies are aligned on values, where governing bodies value free to air coverage. There are some occasions where we genuinely get a discount because of the reach that we can offer. There are many factors. Nations is an important factor. That is a big driver of why we prioritise



the Six Nations. Indeed, as our funding has become more restricted, what we have in our new arrangement is that we will be the host for Wales and Scotland but the other matches will be hosted by ITV. Again, we have had to take a slightly diminished package, but what we wanted to prioritise there was the nations' coverage.

Obviously, we listen to what our audiences want. They are very clear: they want crown jewel events. They want the Olympics; they want the World Cup; they want the Euros. We will also consider things like the demographics of different sports. There is an ambition—and sometimes rights fees get in the way of it—to offer something for everyone. The truth is we have quite a polarised portfolio. Most of our investment goes into the big crown jewel events but we also have a very long tail. We will cover up to 50 sports. We stream a lot of sports. We want to give sports a platform. Even though we might not be able to pay big rights money, what we are doing is using our digital infrastructure to provide a platform for a multitude of sports.

Q140 Clive Efford: You mentioned the Olympics and we are only three years away now from the next Olympics. Should we read anything into the fact that you have let the two Olympic reporters go in BBC Sport? Does that indicate that you are expecting a scaled-down offer for the next?

Barbara Slater: No. I want to be really clear on that. That is a change of model in that we did have staff members who were reporters. We envisage that being done by a wider spread of freelance because we might want to use a wider mix of contributors. I think that is a very reasonable decision to make. It is very much a change of model. We serve Olympic sports. It is very important to us and that is where our streaming service comes in.

If we look at the year ahead, we have a number of the key Olympic sports. I think we have world swimming championships, we have world athletics championships, we have world gymnastics championships, all of which we want to be incredibly supportive of. No, I think we have a very strong, longstanding commitment to Olympic sports and that continues.

Q141 Clive Efford: It has been reported that at the time these two reporters were made redundant you employed two reporters to cover combat sports. Is that an unfortunate coincidence or is that linked?

Barbara Slater: I don't think they are related. We change our staff mix all the time. Again, it is very much driven by audience. If we feel there is a strong interest by our audience in combat sports, then we have to reflect that. We will look at our portfolio and the best way to cover it. I really would push back against any idea that we somehow have diminished our Olympic sport coverage because we are transferring that resource elsewhere.

Q142 Clive Efford: How much will cage fighting feature in your combat sports?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Barbara Slater: We do cover MMA. It is one of 50 sports that we cover. I am aware that it is a physical and combative sport. There is a following. We believe there are 2 million people out there who follow it. It is a £1 billion industry. We have to try to serve all our audience interest, and there is a strong following. This is reported across all the major newspapers and other broadcasters cover MMA. It is important to a certain section of our audience, but it is one of 50 sports. Again, I would describe our investment as very polarised and the MMA is at one end of the scale. I would not accept that because we are covering MMA we are not covering other sports. I don't think that is the case at all.

Q143 **Clive Efford:** I have one last thing. You have talked about the reach of the BBC and it being able to promote a particular event or sport. On the BBC coverage of the London Marathon, what would be the impact, do you think, on charities if the BBC stopped covering the London Marathon?

Barbara Slater: I sincerely hope that the BBC will continue to cover the London Marathon. It is correct that, at the moment, that is at a point of negotiation and I obviously cannot go into details on any individual negotiation. That would not be right.

What I can do, though, is declare an absolute ambition. We did nine and a half hours of coverage from the London Marathon this year. We told some absolutely extraordinary backstories. In fact, there was a documentary programme on the Saturday, "We Run Together", which I think threw a light on many of the powerful and wonderful stories for the London Marathon.

You are absolutely right to make that charity connection and the exposure of that event has enabled it. It has been a 40-year partnership and if you look at the humble beginnings of the marathon and you see what it is today, I do believe that part of that success has been the exposure that that event has received on free to air TV. It is a people's event, isn't it? It is, and a wonderful, rich mix of stories. It is our ambition, but ultimately it is up to rights holders to decide to whom they award their rights.

Q144 **Chair:** I have a couple of points for you, Barbara, and then I have some questions for you, Andrew. Is MMA compatible with Reithian values? Discuss.

Barbara Slater: It is about our audience. There is an audience interest in MMA that is significant, and we are here to serve all audiences. As I say, it is one of 50 sports. We are a tiny, tiny, tiny contributor if you think of MMA as a £1 billion industry.

Q145 **Chair:** Is it middle-class snobbery, basically, as to why you get so many brickbats over that particular contract?

Barbara Slater: I just think that we should show a breadth and range of sport. It is one of those. There is an interest for it. Lots of sports have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

risks—motor sport, equestrian, my own sport of gymnastics—and we accept that.

Q146 **Chair:** Because it is popular, is it right that you should broadcast it?

Barbara Slater: I just go back to audiences.

Q147 **Chair:** Obviously, we had the same thing used about Jeremy Kyle with ITV. They said exactly the same thing to us. They said it is because it is popular, and our answer was that the Roman colosseum was popular. Is it really something that—

Barbara Slater: I don't think this is comparable, personally. I think it is driven by audiences and right for us to make sure we do something for everyone.

Q148 **Chair:** Barbara, was there a groundswell of opinion that we must have MMA on the BBC, or is it just about trying to get the digital content to reach out to particular audiences?

Barbara Slater: Yes, it is, because there are some audiences that the BBC would want to serve better, people who do not come to the BBC as often as the BBC would like. I think it is important that there is a range of content.

Q149 **Chair:** We have discussed the idea of a subscription channel and you said it is well above your pay grade. Surely, you would welcome the idea maybe of the extra money that could be brought in. You would be able to bid for the Olympics and be able to bring in all the digital channels if you were able to do a subscription service.

Barbara Slater: What I say is that what we need is a well-funded BBC.

Q150 **Chair:** On the Newcastle United takeover by the Saudi Arabians, I was quite interested in some of the coverage by some of your pundits on the BBC, namely Alan Shearer in particular. He said it was a great day, effectively, for Newcastle fans and that they needed to educate themselves on the human rights issues when it comes to Saudi Arabia. What part of education do people need to understand when a journalist is cut up and put in a suitcase?

Barbara Slater: I would say that across the BBC—particularly our news colleagues and those in our sports news department—we will absolutely report on issues just as you have mentioned, including human rights. The BBC does not shy away from telling the full story and I just think—

Q151 **Chair:** Was Mr Shearer's unalloyed joy expressed on the BBC News website tasteful? Was that exactly where the BBC wants to sit in terms of the Saudi takeover?

Barbara Slater: I think there is an understanding. Clearly, Alan Shearer has an extraordinary record with that club and, as you say, he did discuss. He did not shy away from the fact that there were human rights issues; he absolutely acknowledged that. This is the interview I saw. It



HOUSE OF COMMONS

might have been a different one to the one you saw. He has acknowledged those issues but he also spoke as a fan of the club about what the—

Chair: Or an apologist.

Barbara Slater: I don't think so. I think he spoke genuinely, as a fan of the club and about what the potential for more investment would mean for the success of the club. I would go back to the fact that this is a story that the BBC tells in the round.

Q152 **Chair:** Were you comfortable with it? The fact that he was being paid by the BBC and then coming out with this sort of unalloyed joy at the takeover by the Saudis, which seemed to jar a great deal with the rest of the coverage? I think that the *Telegraph*, for instance, described it as probably the darkest day for football in terms of the involvement of the Saudis in Newcastle United. That did not seem to register. Basically, Newcastle could afford a new striker so it is all fine then.

Barbara Slater: That story has been well told across the BBC. The BBC is not shying away from telling that or discussing and shedding a light on that issue in the round. I think that across the piece we have done that.

Q153 **Chair:** Andrew, should public sports funding be with requirements to allow media access? I am thinking as well about the requirements for sports stars. Obviously, there was the mental health challenges that Naomi Osaka had and the fact that she was going to be fined and so on. What are your views on where the line should be drawn in terms of media access and the rights of the individual sportsperson?

Andrew Moger: It is a really good question. It is best to answer that by reflecting on what works well in the relationship between sports journalists and news sports journalists and the subjects of news. Where there is distance and remoteness that is introduced because of commercial pressures, because of the role of agents, because of other circumstances—sometimes it is a physical distance as well.

Nobody likes to be doing an interview or even a committee hearing by Zoom. It is remote and often it does not give either side an opportunity to empathise with the professional work done by the athlete and by the journalist as well. The more that we can keep the physical point of contact, the relationship-building opportunity, the greater we are going to avoid situations like the one you have alluded to.

It is great that Naomi Osaka is now itching to get back to a tennis racket and a court, and we would applaud her on to that court. We need to be sympathetic and empathetic to those who are suffering in that way, for sure. As an industry, at news gatherer end as well as newsroom end, we are reflecting on how best to deal with that.

Q154 **Chair:** Often it is the requirement of the sponsors that they 'fess up, effectively, in front of the world's press. Should that also be a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

requirement perhaps for public sports funding that these stars are accessible to news media?

Andrew Moger: I think they would want to be accessible to the news media, and the reason why there is a big question mark around the viability of press conferences is because they replaced—and I don't want to reflect too much on the old times—the situation where reporters would go out for a beer with football stars, they would go out for lunch with Rod Laver after a Wimbledon victory, and they would have a relationship. The press conference was then a convenient means of corralling that conversation, which used to be a bilateral relationship.

I am very concerned about press conferences in many environments: news, sports, politics, cultural events, civic events, and so on. I think that, if we are going to dismantle that or come up with an alternative, it needs to be a progressive alternative that gives more access and greater opportunity for both sides to be able to ply their trade.

Q155 **Chair:** I sense you are not keen on the press conference, which is anodyne?

Andrew Moger: I am not in the way that they have become sanitised, inert, slightly dysfunctional. That said, quite often it is the press conference outside of an event, post an event, which actually gives us and the news consumers the better insight into what has just happened. Our role is to ask the difficult question politely, sympathetically, but to find out why something has worked and why something has not worked.

There ought to be an ongoing obligation on sports stars, athletes and others to make themselves available perhaps, but we need to rethink the environment in particular. I know that there are some interesting conversations going on around Birmingham 2022. We will no doubt come to that, but we need to be innovative and creative and understanding on things like that.

Q156 **Chair:** To follow that up before I turn to Damian, the conversations around Birmingham 2022, what are you talking about?

Andrew Moger: Birmingham 2022 has done well, I believe, in embracing the needs of the news media, or at least hearing them out. You had Ian Reid here previously and we have worked closely with his team. It has done well by hiring the best specialists in media operations. That has given us an opportunity to describe what we want to be able to do at a media-friendly games in Birmingham next year.

It is things like reduced venue press conferences but replacing them with something called iZones, which is a more intimate moment for an athlete to be in a huddle—possibly a distanced huddle but we will have to see—with journalists and for that interview to be captured and shared with others. There are some interesting things going on and I know that the international tennis writing community is also speaking to the world tennis federation.



Q157 **Steve Brine:** Could you just explain that iZone huddle?

Andrew Moger: Yes. Instead of a politburo-style desk with cameras and someone under the biggest spotlight you can imagine being asked a difficult question, on invitation or by application, rather, a group of journalists will be able to say, "We want to speak to X athlete or star", some winning athlete, some failing athlete—it does not really matter—some administrator perhaps. They will then go into a breakout room, comfy chairs, soft lighting, more of a convivial atmosphere, rather than the brutal spotlight of a press conference.

That has been shown to work in other events and I think it is potentially the way forward because it fits with my requirement, or certainly the requirement of our members, that we are able to get closer to the story and to be able to share that story.

Q158 **Damian Green:** Barbara, I have one musing and a couple of questions. The musing is that, although you may welcome and we can all welcome as viewers the fact that the Paris Olympics will be in a more convenient time zone for us, if you only have two streams I can absolutely guarantee that something will happen along the lines of, "We have to cut away from the dressage now because it is the kayak slalom final". At that point you will be bombarded with complaints. In the end, if you have restricted access, then you are going to disappoint some viewers, particularly in a multi-sport event like the Olympics.

Barbara Slater: I am sure that there will be moments, but I think there will be relatively few moments. We can be quite fleet of foot. It is very possible to immediately replay things and guide an audience through. Two streams is quite a significant amount of choice, but I don't deny that there will not be the occasional clash, which will be unfortunate and we will have to navigate in the best way that we can.

Q159 **Damian Green:** Looking more long term, the picture you paint is of a BBC constrained in its income and inflationary sports rights, particularly for big events and big sports. That second phenomenon is only going to get worse, it seems to me, with more people entering. Now you have people like Amazon coming into the sports arena, and Jeff Bezos could buy the Olympics tomorrow and stage it privately if he wanted to. Perhaps I should not put that idea into his head. Long term, what is the BBC's stance? It seems to me that the BBC is going to have to be not just fleet of foot but also much more selective. In the end, you are just not going to be big enough to compete on the world stage for the biggest rights.

Barbara Slater: That is why the listed event legislation is so critical. I know that that does not just apply to the BBC. That applies to public service broadcasters. There probably is a market within the public broadcasting space that is different to a market that might apply—as you say, Amazon could probably come and buy several Olympics many times over. That is why I think the listed event regime is so critical. I do believe



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that not just ours but the other free to air broadcasters' rights portfolio would be all the poorer if the listed regime had not existed to now.

You are right that there will have to be prioritisation, but I would not want to be as defeatist as that because I think the BBC still brings so much. There is an ability of the BBC to amplify events, and some governing bodies recognise that. You have seen an arrangement with the ECB whereby there has been a bundling of rights so that there is an acknowledgement about free to air access. Indeed, there is provision within the IOC's charter for a certain number of hours being preserved for free to air. Our listed event regime guarantees more. We did 500 hours. The IOC's provision I believe is 200 hours. Again, you would see a far greater restriction on them than we will have, for example, in Paris.

There are partnership deals that we can do where I do believe the BBC can bring a lot of benefit to events. If you were to speak to FIFA about the success of, for example, the Women's World Cup and what that has generated going forward in the trajectory of the women's game, it would say that that was a great value deal, both for the BBC and for FIFA.

It is around us using the very many assets that the BBC has. It will have to be prioritisation. It will have to be creative partnerships. It also has to be a robust listed event regime and governing bodies also recognising the value of reach.

Q160 Damian Green: When you talk about a robust listed event regime, and obviously we are talking about digital access in a way that did not exist when the listed regime was introduced, what in practice would you want to change?

Barbara Slater: There would be a number of things I would say on that. First, make sure that the qualification is simple and sound. My understanding is that Ofcom has recommended that that is a public service broadcaster benefit. It could be as simple as naming those public service broadcasters. Then all of the qualifications and audience reach complications around the qualification could be removed. I do think that on demand is a modernisation that should happen.

The other interesting thing is that I believe a previous Secretary of State raised the prospect of women's events being listed. Again, I would throw that back to say I am not certain how far that has progressed, but that certainly was a declared ambition.

Q161 Damian Green: Have you had any signal from Ofcom or Government or anyone that people are actively considering a radical change to the listed regime so that it is fit for purpose?

Barbara Slater: We are living in an incredibly dynamic environment where there is ever-increasing fragmentation. If you think about sport; for example, think of the number of potential subscriptions you might need or the number of providers. That tends to mean audiences having to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

choose and audiences not having access to a broad spectrum of sports. These are very live issues.

This was a regime that was introduced in the 1990s. There has been a step change in the qualification criteria. There has been a move on that, but apart from that there hasn't been any evolution in, for example, digital and on-demand access since the formulation of the legislation back then.

Q162 Julie Elliott: Good morning. Andrew, what distinguishes an event that is open to news gathering from one that is closed? Can you provide us with some specific examples of major events where the media's freedom to cover things has been limited?

Andrew Moger: For sure. Thank you for the question. There are two forms of closed event. One of those is closed in the sense that journalists cannot deploy all their news-gathering skills that they might want to do, whether that be text writers, photographers or video journalists. That has become much more problematic during the Covid pandemic period, of course, with much greater limitations on the numbers of journalists being able to get into venues and greater limitations, almost exclusion, of journalists in press conferences and training sessions around an event. That has been highly problematic.

Secondly, there is the rights closure—which Barbara has alluded to and which is very much driven by the rights market—whereby newsrooms are seeking to evolve into new forms of news gathering but they hit a very firm barrier when it comes to being able to do those things within a venue. That applies to football, cricket, tennis—all sports.

It is particularly acute around the high-profile, most commercialised sporting assets—the FIFA World Cup, the European football championships, the International Cricket Council, tour events and others—whereby the matrix of background rights and the monopoly around certain content opportunities presents an insurmountable barrier to news gathering. We do what we can at those events, both in the venue and outside the venue, in newsrooms as well, to find the background stories and to share those with news consumers, but it is becoming highly problematic to be able to retain relevance to the way that news consumers want to access news of all forms.

Q163 Julie Elliott: Do you think that, as a consequence of that, people are just not seeing or getting the full stories around athletes, events, sportspeople? What are the consequences of this restriction? Not the Covid restriction, the other restrictions you talked about.

Andrew Moger: I think it is a lack or a reduction in richness around the humanity that surrounds sport. Sport is so important to our society. It is also very important to the news industry and to sports journalists as well. If we are unable to tell the full story of sport, in terms of performance and how that performance came about, in my view, sport, athletes and



news consumers are worse off. The two combined have really been a wrecking ball to the way that news journalists are able to reveal, to explain, to report, and occasionally to investigate what has gone on, what has gone right, what has gone bad, with a sporting event.

Q164 **Julie Elliott:** Barbara, Andrew mentioned the restrictions this year with Covid and the limits on people being there. Has that gone back to how we were before yet? What problems has that created?

Barbara Slater: I am not sure we have fully gone back to how we were. There are a number of things. I think we can all understand that during Covid the numbers that could be on site at an event were extremely restricted. Indeed, different sports have different arrangements. For example, in cricket, there was access for a very few members of the TMS team, who effectively "entered the bubble". That was pretty tough. That meant being within a restricted environment for long periods of time. The number of people who might have access to that bubble was inevitably restricted.

It was pretty transformational in the way that we work, and I suspect some of that will carry forward. I would say that remote technology moved on. We are probably three or four years further ahead than we would have been without Covid.

What was remarkable was that overnight the sport website, instead of being produced from an office, was being produced from people's homes. We had commentators who were commentating on events from their living rooms because in the lockdown it was not possible. I do think that there were very legitimate reasons.

Will we go back to where we were? No, I don't think we will. I think we have seen remote technology come to stay. I think the audience got incredibly used to Zoom interviews. There is an ability maybe to reach further and wider and to more different voices.

Julie Elliott: We are absolutely fed up with Zoom interviews.

Barbara Slater: As participants, yes, but in terms of speed of access and the number of people that you can contact. I think that, as things get back to normal, people will tolerate less the blurry pictures and the rather poor quality imagery that you get.

I think things are returning to normal. In a way, we have many shared concerns in this space because, of course, we are often effectively in journalism trying to tell the stories as opposed to being a broadcasting rights holder. We would, indeed, endorse the importance of independent journalism, media freedom and so on.

Q165 **Julie Elliott:** Some of the countries where some sporting events take place are very restrictive in terms of their citizens. How do you balance that kind of coverage with the sporting coverage? At the forefront is the World Cup in Qatar.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Barbara Slater: What is important to say is that across the BBC, in our news, in our sports news output, we will tell the whole range of stories. As a sports department it is true that we are there to cover an event. The World Cup is incredibly important to audiences. It is a global event. It is not the broadcaster's decision as to where an event is shown, but, even within our sport coverage, we would not shy away from effectively covering those issues, often in surround programmes, for example, if we had a preview programme. I think we have done that with previous championships.

As a sports department we are primarily there to cover the sporting action, but as a wider BBC, with a sports news department as well as a news department, I am confident that the full story of the Qatar World Cup will be told across the BBC.

Andrew Moger: From a non-rights-holding perspective, you can rely upon the news media to be as robust as it can be in Qatar, both in situ and outside as well. We are all familiar with the human rights abuses in the country. No free press. That is not a good start and for us there is a balance of need here. It is about the sporting event but also the culture around that event. It remains to be seen how women journalists, in particular, are going to be able to ply their trade in Qatar. I am sure the authorities there have considered this, but whether it matches up to our precepts of media freedom and freedom to go about your business, I have some real concerns about it.

Q166 **Steve Brine:** Barbara, I was quite interested that you just said there about covering events and that you cover the wider picture but, of course, you do not get involved in where the events will be. The BBC is a state broadcaster and it is funded by my constituents on pain of prosecution if they do not pay for it. We have a national football team in England, footballers with a great conscience. Some of them spent quite a lot of time pursuing their conscience and they take the knee before every Premier League football match, yet reports suggest that thousands of people have died building the stadiums for the Qatar World Cup. Qatar has an interesting human rights record and a questionable view on LGBTQ people. Where does that fit with England footballers and their conscience and our state national broadcaster covering it?

Barbara Slater: As I say, the broadcaster does not choose the location of the event. It is a global event and teams will travel from all over the world. We have a responsibility to show and broadcast that event to our audiences. We also have a responsibility to tell the full story and I am sure that we will do that across the various BBC outlets.

Q167 **Steve Brine:** Of course, no coverage, no event. This is a global television event. Should you have a role in where we decide to take the biggest sporting event?

Barbara Slater: Maybe we should but we do not and that is the current position.



Q168 **Steve Brine:** Would you welcome having a role?

Barbara Slater: This has to be the decision for the rights holder.

Q169 **Steve Brine:** Interesting. On the subject of the times in some ways, there is a lot at the moment about people in public life—politicians, MPs—facing the ire of having a public-facing role. I want to ask you about violence against journalists. The NUJ put out some reports about journalists facing abuse at the Euros final at Wembley in July. Do you have any experience of journalists at the BBC facing abuse for their ethnicity when they are in situ?

Barbara Slater: Staff wellbeing and safety is an absolute priority and we have expertise within the BBC to be supportive on that. We have a high-risk team, effectively. When we are at events, we will often have members of the high-risk team to ensure that staff safety. It is a key part of our planning.

Have I any examples specifically in recent times? I don't. That does not mean that it is not a huge concern and that it isn't important. I don't know. There may have been an individual journalist who had to suffer some verbal abuse and so on, but I have not directly heard that. I want to be cautious about saying something that I do not know that may have happened.

Q170 **Steve Brine:** Sure. Andrew, do you have any experience of that? Tell us about it.

Andrew Moger: Absolutely. It is the new scourge of the interplay between journalism and social media. Many journalists, particularly women, are questioning whether they want to continue in journalism because of the onslaught of hate, vilification and abuse online. It has become so bad that news organisations have taken this seriously as a welfare issue. In fact, only yesterday one of the major publishing houses in the UK, one of my members, appointed an editorial welfare officer to support those journalists who are inundated with abuse simply for going about their factual reporting.

Q171 **Steve Brine:** Can you give us any examples without naming names?

Andrew Moger: Yes. Women TV commentators have come under a lot of vitriolic hate-driven abuse. Journalists on a number of national newspapers, as well as local newspapers, are getting this as a matter of routine. Journalists are now in the target hairs of the social media haters.

Barbara Slater: When you asked the question I thought you meant physical threat, such as physically being barred from access or having bottles thrown at them. Of course, social media is entirely different. I would absolutely concur with what Andrew has said. Social media can be utterly vicious.

Q172 **Steve Brine:** Yes, we are aware, and online harms is an interest of ours. Finally, Barbara, linked to this, what was your view of the public



HOUSE OF COMMONS

discourse about Clare Balding and Alex Scott presenting your Olympics highlights programme? I saw comments that it was a Sam Fox-meets-Mick Fleetwood moment, referring to their disastrous presentation of The Brits years ago. Lord Digby Jones took it upon himself to have a view on how Alex pronounced her Gs. What did you think of that?

Barbara Slater: I have to say that I am not sure I recognise what you are presenting there or that that came through particularly strongly in our audience research. Clare Balding and Alex Scott are two outstanding presenters. Of course, there will be a degree of individual like and dislike. When someone is coming into your home for 17 days every evening, there will be a divergence of opinion. They are both outstanding broadcasters. I do not recognise what you have just presented there.

Q173 **Steve Brine:** I am presenting you with what was said out there as opposed to my view.

Barbara Slater: Yes. By an individual for sure, but I do not believe that was the broad audience response.

Steve Brine: Thank you for saying that.

Q174 **John Nicolson:** Thank you both for joining us. Could I pursue that a bit further with you, Mr Moger? Is there a dampening effect on the way that journalists conduct themselves in sport because of the level of abuse that they get? In other words, do they sometimes think, "I had better not say that because I will be faced with an onslaught"?

Andrew Moger: Yes, you are entering the world of self-censorship and, if that results in journalists not asking the right question or making the right call, we are all the poorer. There is a reality feeding through into newsrooms, which is why there is this industry response to it.

Q175 **John Nicolson:** We hear a lot about this in political journalism. For example, Laura Kuenssberg had to be protected at a party conference. Some people might be surprised that this is such an issue in sport as well. How bad is it in sport compared to other branches of journalism?

Andrew Moger: It does not matter what branch of journalism you are talking about. They are all public facing. They do not divide up. The haters will find somebody to hate. Some journalists, colleagues of mine, have asked to be reassigned from the sports beat into other areas.

Q176 **John Nicolson:** Really? Is it as bad as that?

Andrew Moger: It is, absolutely.

Q177 **John Nicolson:** What happens when they make that request?

Andrew Moger: It is sympathetically listened to and usually acceded to. There is a process internally to support that journalist to continue in that area.

Q178 **John Nicolson:** What support can you give?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Andrew Moger: Particularly football for sure is the biggest area of concern at the moment.

Q179 **John Nicolson:** I noticed an explosion of this over the Newcastle United takeover. I found some of it extraordinary. Some Newcastle United supporters just did not care what Saudi Arabia's human rights abuses were.

I am trying to imagine what it must be like to be Jamal Khashoggi's widow, when her husband has been murdered and chopped up on the instructions of the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia and she sees numpties dancing around in cod-Arabic headdresses outside Newcastle United. On a personal basis for her, it must be heartrending.

Andrew Moger: It is a cruel world for sure and, in my view, this is the worst display of cruelty. Journalists are becoming caught up in that. Simply for reporting that takeover, journalists will be abused.

Q180 **John Nicolson:** The journalists who pointed that out suffered enormous abuse. As an outsider watching it, it made me think that, no matter the level of the person who took over the club, it would have resulted in nothing other than celebration for large numbers of these Newcastle United. That is a sickness at the heart of football, isn't it?

Andrew Moger: Thankfully, all these issues are being well reported. It is good that we keep visibility going around, not only the issues that you have raised in general human rights terms but also the welfare of journalists.

Q181 **John Nicolson:** If we can turn to you, Ms Slater, it was well reported. I noticed when you addressed this earlier you talked about "across the BBC". No doubt there was lots of coverage about this in news and current affairs and in the main bulletins elsewhere, but did the sports coverage do enough to highlight the fact that this club was being bought by somebody who routinely kills journalists, from a country that murders homosexuals, with a ruler who was responsible for the mutilation and murder of a prominent journalist?

Barbara Slater: I concur with what Andrew has said. It is essential those stories are told and I believe those stories were told across the BBC.

Q182 **John Nicolson:** In sport?

Barbara Slater: Across the BBC.

Q183 **John Nicolson:** I note that you have used that formulation several times. Lots of people follow sports coverage and are not listening to the BBC World Service and, indeed, are maybe not watching the main bulletins.

Barbara Slater: We are talking about the main network news, so this is—



Q184 **John Nicolson:** What about in sport?

Barbara Slater: Obviously, there is a role and we have and will talk about issues within our sports coverage. We are not blind to some of the issues. However, there is a balance in sports coverage. While there may be some discussion, it is true that, for example, a programme like "Match of the Day" will do what the audience expects it to do, which is to cover all of the action from the day. That does not mean there is not any discussion, but that is the priority of that programme. Given that that programme is playing out on a channel that also has the main network news, I do believe—and I am sorry to have to stick to this point—the BBC in the round absolutely tells the full story.

Q185 **John Nicolson:** I know you have said that, but is there a moral imperative on sport to focus on these issues specifically in the sports coverage? Is it acceptable to have any discussion at any point in BBC Sport about the takeover of Newcastle without the point being made again and again that the man who has bought this club is responsible for murder?

Barbara Slater: That point is there within a discussion but that is not the dominant part of a programme like "Match of the Day".

Q186 **John Nicolson:** Should it be?

Barbara Slater: I believe, because the BBC tells that story in the round, I am sorry but I have to stand by that position.

Q187 **John Nicolson:** I know, but that is evading the issue. It would be a bit like saying, "As you can see there, the England footballers are all giving Nazi salutes, but let us move on from that. It was a great match". This key and important part of this Newcastle United takeover, a lot of people thought was underplayed in the sports coverage and that did not reflect well on the BBC Sports coverage.

Barbara Slater: There are many controversial issues. Our sports coverage is not blind to those issues and they are discussed. They are raised but not to the same extent as they would be in the news output. It is not that nothing is ever discussed within sports programmes about some controversial issues, but there is also a position that I will have to come back to: the BBC has told that story and it will continue to.

Q188 **John Nicolson:** Morality has to be an important part of sports coverage. This is an important sports story, not just because of the unsavoury monster who has taken ownership of Newcastle United but because football is now up for sale. Apparently, nobody is so awful that he cannot be allowed to buy a Premier League club. At some point, you become complicit as a sports broadcaster if you just go along with the idea that it is a cause for celebration that Newcastle United now has its hands covered in blood and has so much money it can do anything.

Barbara Slater: Our rights agreement for "Match of the Day" is with the Premier League. It is for the Premier League to determine how clubs are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

owned. Our deal is with the Premier League. Our arrangements are with the governing bodies. My role, as director of sport, is to try to acquire the best possible rights I can for our audiences. Of course, there are moral issues and those moral issues should be explored and debated and raised. I believe that BBC does that and I believe it does that both within its sports coverage—

Q189 **John Nicolson:** Do you think sport, for which you are responsible, does so adequately as well?

Barbara Slater: We absolutely raise these issues within our sports coverage and we have a track record of doing that, but we are also there to cover those events as sporting events. Maybe we have to disagree on the balance of that.

Q190 **Chair:** Thank you. Before I turn to Alex on a point that you made, Andrew, about journalists leaving sports, it seems quite extraordinary to me as a sports nut. Is there any gender bias in that respect? Are more women asking to move from sports?

Andrew Moger: It is more women.

Q191 **Chair:** Therefore, it is misogyny?

Andrew Moger: It is, yes.

Q192 **Chair:** Is that mostly online or is that within the culture of sports journalism?

Andrew Moger: No, most definitely it is online and via social media. It has included threats of violence in many forms and a determination by the social media hater to seek to go after that journalist.

Q193 **Chair:** Have you ever made any representations to social media companies to try to protect your employees?

Andrew Moger: The dialogue between the news industry and social media is ongoing. It is challenging in many respects to get the right responses around—

Q194 **Chair:** They do not listen to you?

Andrew Moger: I am sure they listen but the response is not as always as forthcoming as we would want.

Q195 **Chair:** Even when women sports journalists are being threatened with violence?

Andrew Moger: Even then.

Q196 **Chair:** It is extraordinary. Would you like to say that a particular social media company is better or worse than others?

Andrew Moger: I do not want to name and shame. Perhaps I can follow up subsequently with you on that.



Q197 **Chair:** Please do. We are interested in that respect. Is this also related, perhaps, to a societal issue: that men enjoying sport do not want to have it commented upon or discussed by women and think it is not right that they do so? Is that at the heart of this? Is it societal misogyny?

Andrew Moger: There are two aspects to this. One is the degree of loyalty and ownership that exists between individuals and sporting assets, whatever they are. That is a good thing that drives interest. But the flipside of that is when it then turns nasty and takes the form of wearing the t-shirt and using that as a means of getting at somebody else.

Secondly, a huge transformation is going on within the venues and sporting arenas. These are now the crucibles of debate. One would hope that it is sensible and rational debate, but it is an outpouring so often of hatred. We have seen violence one to another, to other spectators and to journalists.

Coming back to the point that was made earlier on, perhaps this is a reflection of society at the moment and we must be there to report on it through all means to ensure that we are informed about what is happening behind the turnstiles and behind the well-lit TV studios of rights holders.

Q198 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Thank you to both witnesses for coming in this morning. Your testimony has been quite compelling.

I would like to follow upon some of the questions my colleague Julie Elliott asked around the media involvement in the bidding and planning for these major cultural and sporting events.

Andrew, what difference would it make if you were involved in the early stages of the bidding process or the planning for some of these major sporting events?

Andrew Moger: Apart from making myself redundant, there would be a huge benefit. We would have planning certainty. News organisations, while they work to the next deadline, as a cliché, need to know who to hire, what to invest in and what the inventory will be on the day. We are already concerned about the inventory of news opportunities around Paris 2024 and that is three years away. Some headline rights are sold up to 2032. We are already on the slippery slope of not being able to do what we need to do on the first day of an event. This is about agenda setting. The quicker we can get in, the better we can satisfy the news consumers all the way through the cycle.

Going back to Birmingham 2022, the "Birmingham Live" news brand has carried nearly 350 stories on the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games 282 days before the event has even started. This is what we do. We tell the story before. We galvanise. We inspire interest. Give us the opportunity to do it, with certainty around media rights, and we can



accelerate the way that the news media creates points of interest and, hopefully, participation in sport as well.

Q199 **Alex Davies-Jones:** If that is the case, what role could the Government or other public bodies do to help broker those initial discussions between the media and organisers on obtaining the rights?

Andrew Moger: I understand that in the UK there is a framework document already that sets out some of the parameters around the staging of events. I have had a look at that. I have had a look at the invitations to bid around World Cups and Euros. Unless I am misreading it, unless I am wearing the wrong glasses, I do not see anything that comes close to provisions or safeguards for news media.

Q200 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Yes. That answers my next question. Is that what you would like to see in there? You are talking about the Gold Framework for media relations and the media landscape. What is lacking in that and what would you like to see apart from the safeguarding for journalists?

Andrew Moger: That would be a good start and then an ongoing conversation about how that plays out on a practical level. It is all very well talking at a lofty level about media freedom and safeguarding journalism, but what does that translate into within the venues? What news can be created? What content can be created? How can it be distributed? How can that copyright content be monetised to help reinvestment back into sports journalism? We want to be able to explain these things to the Government and to any other stakeholders sitting around the table.

Chair: Thank you, Barbara and Andrew, for your evidence today. It was interesting. We will now take a short adjournment as we set up our second panel.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Simon Morton and James Hampson.

Q201 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. This is our second panel today in our inquiry into major sporting and cultural events. We are joined in our second panel by Simon Morton, chief operating officer at UK Sport, and by James Hampson, director of UK and External Affairs at the British Council.

James and Simon, thank you very much for joining us this morning. It is great that you are here in person as well. It is very much appreciated.

Simon, you would have seen the story today in relation to the fine levied on the FA and also the two-match ban behind closed doors, one of which is suspended for a year, as I understand it. Is that basically the World Cup bid up in smoke?

Simon Morton: It was not our finest hour as a country or as a major host of international sporting events. I was at the match that night. It



HOUSE OF COMMONS

was pretty horrific. It was the opposite of what we want big sporting events to feel like. I was pleased that my daughter was not with me at that match. It was pretty shocking.

However, it is not reflective of how this country organises big sporting events. It is not reflective of our hosting reputation. We have an excellent reputation not only for hosting brilliant events but also for hosting safe and secure events. Countries around the world see that and are aware of that. We have to try to get the balance right here. To be clear, what happened was unacceptable and, as a country, we need to be big enough to accept that, but most countries around the world recognise that it is not reflective of what normally happens.

In respect of the bid, specifically to the question, all I can say there is that the UEFA president, who is of course an important person in respect of the bid process, has gone on the record as saying it will have no bearing whatsoever on our bid. There are lessons that need to be learned. The FA has commissioned a review from Baroness Casey. It is serious. But it is not our bid up in smoke.

Q202 Chair: What could you have done with the £3 million that will be spent on a feasibility study?

Simon Morton: The feasibility money is going on a number of areas. We are doing a lot of work around the budgeting for the tournament and what that budget might look like and also a lot of work around where the cost apportionment might fall. There are a number of partners around this prospective bid and how that works is quite complex.

We are doing work around looking at stadiums across the five countries and how those measure up to FIFA's current standards, although FIFA has not released its new standards for the 2030 World Cup yet. We are doing work around safety and security, which of course is relevant to the previous question, what might be required around that and what the costs might be. We are focusing on what corporate governance might look like for the 2030 World Cup, again, because of the number of partners that are involved. We are assessing the social and economic benefits and impacts of the tournament that might accrue from hosting that event.

Finally, one of the most important, however, is we are looking at the winnability of the tournament. We are looking of course at the bid process, as you would expect us to do given the history, but also the chances of success of a five-nation bid.

Q203 Chair: Yes. Your last point is absolutely the key because last time was an embarrassment in terms of winnability. I think we got two votes.

Simon Morton: That is right.

Q204 Chair: We did manage to vote for ourselves and New Zealand is probably the only country that still likes us.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

In terms of that winnability and that process, what is your early indication? It is an enormous jump from two votes and humiliation to carrying off the World Cup in 2030.

Simon Morton: Yes. That is the simple answer to that. First, why are we looking at this and why are we looking at it again? We are looking at it because the scale of this event is so significant and what it can do for the country is so significant.

To bring that to life for you, it will have 4 to 5 million spectators, a global audience of 3 to 4 billion, 30,000 to 40,000 volunteering opportunities, billions of pounds of economic impact and a tournament model that could genuinely be revolutionary and certainly unprecedented, in the way that it is being constructed in terms of dispersing the benefits of a mega sporting event right across the UK and its partners. Those are the reasons why we are looking at this again.

We are also looking at it again because some things have changed since the last time. I am sure members of the Committee can remember the pain of that vote. That vote is now 11 years ago. The FA decided that it was going to bid for the 2018 World Cup 14 years ago. Now is a reasonable time to reappraise whether it is right for this country to go for that again. It is a long period of time.

Some other important things have changed, too. FIFA has made some important reforms to the bidding process. We can talk about what those are and why we think those are important. Also, the proposition that we have on the table now is fundamentally different to the one that we had back for the 2018 bid with one nation, England, bidding on its own. We have five countries now together.

Although it is important to be clear about where this is as well. We are in a feasibility stage, as you mentioned earlier. No decision has been taken yet on whether we will bid for this event. Those are the reasons, first, why we should be looking at this again and, secondly, why things have changed, which gives a level of confidence that we might be able to close that gap.

Q205 **Clive Efford:** I want to follow upon the Chair's question about Wembley Stadium. There was some coverage about the problems in securing the area around the stadium. At the Hungary game there was concern that the authorities could not gain access to parts of the ground to arrest individuals they wanted to extract from the ground. I can recall—because I was there—a match at Wembley when Millwall fans decided to beat each other up. A similar problem occurred then. The police and the security could not get access to the area where the fans were.

Is there a problem with the design of Wembley that needs to be reviewed? There seems to be a range of problems about policing the area around the footprint of the stadium and about the security gaining access to areas where they need to when the trouble breaks out.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Simon Morton: It is a great question and I hope that will come out of the independent review that the FA has commissioned. I believe that is exactly the sort of thing that should come out of that review. I could not tell you the answer to that, but we are equally interested in the answer.

Q206 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Thank you to both witnesses today. The Chair mentioned the £2.8 million that the Government have put in to fund this feasibility study. Was that Government support required or could the football authorities have funded this themselves?

Simon Morton: One of the lessons of the previous bid was that the distance between the bid and the Government was too great. Of course, there is a question here about whether the Government should or should not pay for activity in football given the money that is in football.

The Government should be contributing towards that feasibility work. This is not just a huge sporting event but a huge event on the planet full stop, sporting or otherwise. The Government should take a view on the costs, risks and benefits. They need to do their own work on that. I am afraid that the only way they can do that is by putting their hands in their pockets and commissioning good work and closing the gap between the football associations and their bid and what we know about the event itself.

Q207 **Alex Davies-Jones:** On that point, will the feasibility study look at a co-ordinated approach between the nations so that we get value for money for the taxpayer out of this investment?

Simon Morton: It will have to. I envisage that FIFA is expected to release its documentation and guidelines for the bid process around the event in Q1 next year. That is not confirmed but we are anticipating that. After that point, probably in Q2, we will be finalising the feasibility work.

At that point, the five football associations and their five respective government authorities will have to size this up and will have to take a view on whether they want to submit a bid. At that point, the respective government authorities will need to look at value for money. Around Q2 of next year is the key point, I would say.

Q208 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Thank you. Simon, you mentioned that FIFA's bidding process has changed since the last time we attempted and the voting procedure has also changed since the last time. Could you talk us through some of those changes about why this time it is worth us bidding?

Simon Morton: Yes. There have been a few changes. To bring some of those to life, this is now not a vote conducted purely by the 20-man—as it probably was or is—ExCo. Now the whole congress votes, which is a positive move in the way that bid works. There is now open voting, so everybody gets to see which country every other country has voted for.



There is now a far tougher compliance environment in place that FIFA runs—and of course we can question that—in terms of the bidders. There is now a lot more transparent and increased technical documentation and assessments. Again, these bids are not won purely, of course, on technical criteria alone but all of those things are positive.

Those procedural aspects have already been rolled out in some of the votes that FIFA has conducted, so these are not hypothetical things that will happen in the future. For example, the 2026 World Cup was awarded in this way. We have spoken to some of the people involved in the 2026 World Cup bid process and they have told us how different it felt under this approach, which, again, is not a guarantee that it is perfect but gives us a level of confidence that perhaps things are moving in the right direction here.

However, we are also acutely aware that the process alone is not the only bit. There are the people and there is the culture as well that we need to think about quite carefully when we make this sort of bid. Right now, a lot of listening is going on. A lot of international football is being played at the moment with qualification matches for Qatar 2022. A benefit of having five football associations as partners around the table is that that is five pairs of ears. The international match windows that are coming up have one to two matches being played every window. That is a lot of football associations around the world that we can talk to and we can get their views not only on winnability but also on the process itself.

Q209 Alex Davies-Jones: You mentioned that the difference this time is that it is a five-nations approach compared to just one. It would not surprise you to learn that, as a Welsh MP, I am keen that all the devolved nations have a say in this and that their views are interpreted in the bidding process. How are you ensuring that that is happening?

Simon Morton: We have a series of working groups and steering groups that involve all the partners. It feels genuinely collaborative to be a part of it. It would be good for you to take soundings as well from the FAW. It feels game-changing to the point where this process has led us to begin exploring other mega events that can be co-hosted across the devolved governments. Two or three look promising in that respect.

Q210 Alex Davies-Jones: Good. I have spoken to the FAW in advance of this meeting. To reassure you, it was also complimentary about how collaborative this has been and how heavily involved they have been in the process. That is good to know.

Finally, James, did we underestimate Britain's soft power during the last bid to host the 2018 World Cup?

James Hampson: I was working in Pakistan at the time. The UK is a soft power superpower, but we are in the middle of what we characterise as a competition for influence. We see other countries right across the world—from near neighbours in Europe to China and others—investing in soft power to a considerable degree. This race is real because it accompanies



HOUSE OF COMMONS

sovereign wealth investment and all the waterfront that states will put there. We are the most attractive country on earth in a G20 survey of 40,000 young people we did last year but we want to stay No. 1, so we have to invest in it.

Q211 Clive Efford: Can I ask, Simon, about the process for measuring athletes' performance at the recent Tokyo Olympic Games? It was an exceptional year, but you took an approach that had a focus more on performance rather than the actual podium. Will you take that approach more in the future or did you take that different approach in an exceptional year because of the pandemic?

Simon Morton: Do you mean in respect of the approach to targets specifically?

Clive Efford: Targets and measuring outcomes and performance.

Simon Morton: It was principally as a result of the pandemic. We were conscious that athletes of course in their preparations had been hugely disrupted. It was not the right approach to work with sports to agree targets on a sport-by-sport basis, so the approach we took was to prepare a centralised aggregate range of 45 to 270 medals in the Olympic Games and 100 to 140 medals in the Paralympic Games. As you mentioned, the performances were fantastic.

However, although that flowed from the pandemic, it was an opportunity for us to try something that we had been considering anyway. There is a debate about the use of targets with pros and cons. Our direction of travel as an organisation is to think about broader metrics than simply the medal count. The medal count will always remain important. We are unashamedly a high-performance agency and we have a stated ambition to remain in the upper echelons of the medal table. For us, that means the top five. That will remain.

We do want to now start to measure success by other factors as well. Do we have a diverse team? Does it reflect British society? How many sports are we winning medals in? We saw new sports in which we were successful this time around such as BMX freestyle, skateboarding and so on. We want to bring in some of these new measures. It will probably move towards a blended, more plural approach to how we will measure success.

Q212 Clive Efford: In the past it has been heavily driven by the podium and medal winning. Has that been too brutal? Does it allow enough opportunity to consider the mental health and wellbeing of the athletes? Do some sports drive their athletes too much because they know that that is the measure you will use?

Simon Morton: The focus on the medal number was probably of its time. The Committee is aware of the back story around how the UK Sport organisation was set up as a response to not winning enough medals. If you look at the early stages of our organisation's evolution and



maturation, there was a focus on winning medals. That was why the organisation was set up.

We saw off the back of the Rio Games—particularly in 2017—a number of athletes coming forward and saying they did not feel that they had been treated appropriately in their world-class programmes. That led to a lot of change in Olympic and Paralympic sport.

In general terms, yes, the system is changing. The fact that we are considering changing our metric is reflective of that. However, I have heard a lot about the system being win-at-all-costs and it has never been about that, but there is scope to take a broader view and we are doing that at the moment.

Q213 Clive Efford: Is there a challenge for team sports, because by their nature there are more of them and there are more athletes involved, to gain funding? Is there a higher threshold to be closer to success because of the costs involved in supporting that number of athletes? Are team sports disadvantaged?

Simon Morton: I do not believe they have been disadvantaged per se. I believe in the UK we have a greater performance output in those sports that are not team sports than in individual sports. It is not necessarily that the system disadvantages team sports. In sports like hockey, for example, we have done well. When those sports are in a position to do well, they have been supported.

I do agree that we have a number of team sports that are further away from the podium than other sports that we need to think carefully about. That is why in December last year we introduced a new stream of funding called progression funding. Whereas in the past we had funded sports and athletes that were two cycles away from the podium, effectively up to eight years away, progression funding allows us to move further down the pathway and start reaching other sports, including team sports, which are not in that position yet.

Q214 Clive Efford: To what extent do you consider the contribution from regions when you decide how to apportion out the financial contributions you make to sport governing bodies? Do you look purely at your criteria or do you consider where the money is raised and whether it should be reinvested back into those communities?

Simon Morton: For our athlete performance funding, we do not look at where sports are based and we do not look at where athletes are based per se. When we look at Team GB and when we look at Paralympics GP, we do see a team that comes from all four corners of the UK. We saw that through the stories that were told brilliantly in Tokyo.

There is a slightly different picture on events. We lean a lot more into that area because it is easier geographically to say, "This event will be in this place. What do we think about that?" We have a scorecard that assesses the relative strategic value of events to allow us to make



comparisons. Should we host the World Rowing Championships or should we host the European Athletics Championships? What is the priority? When we make that assessment, one of the factors we look at is geographic diversity. Will this sport take us to a place, a town or a city in the UK that we have not been to before or that we have found it hard to reach before? We absolutely do hardwire it into our decisions around events.

Q215 Clive Efford: When an athlete is cut from the programme, does UK Sport take an interest in how that athlete is treated? Is it down to the sport governing body or does UK Sport demand that that athlete is given a soft landing?

Simon Morton: There are soft landing provisions. The funding does not stop immediately. There is a three-month transitional funding period. Athletes are able to continue accessing performance lifestyle services from the English Institute of Sport. They are also able to access medical support for a period of time after they depart from the world-class programme. There are provisions.

Should we continue to challenge ourselves in those areas? Absolutely, for the direction-of-travel reasons that I mentioned earlier.

Q216 Clive Efford: I will switch to football briefly. How would this biennial summer World Cup idea impact on the sporting calendar if it were implemented?

Simon Morton: Fundamentally, the specific question of this is a matter for the football associations. It is not necessarily for us to pass judgment on their calendar—

Q217 Clive Efford: But you do have other sports and events that take place in that window.

Simon Morton: Yes. On the general landscape of the sporting calendar, we are concerned about the oversaturation of sporting events from an athlete welfare perspective and the pressure on the athletes to attend an ever-increasing number of events globally and, also, in terms of the value to sport. I am talking about not just the commercial value but the inherent social value that sport brings.

Sport is so popular because of its scarcity. When we host events, you want to know that that is special because you are attending the world championships. If there were 10 world championships a year, would it mean so much to the public? It would not. There is a scarcity factor to consider there.

There is also a factor around, I suppose, the homogenous nature of the sporting structure. It is important that when a member of the public goes to a world championships, they know that they are watching the best athletes in the world. One of the risks at the moment of the increasing volume of sporting competitions is that we may see in sport a number of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

rivals or splinters or schisms emerge across those, a bit like when you watch darts and you are not quite sure which code it is or indeed when you watch professional boxing and you are not quite sure which belt they are fighting for. The oversaturation of sporting competition events is a real risk to the inherent value of sport. We want to host these events because they are special.

Q218 **Chair:** Thank you. Simon, can a World Cup bid succeed without fundamental reform of the Football Association?

Simon Morton: The English Football Association is moving in the right direction. A number of good things are happening in the English Football Association. Look at what is happening with the England team and the way that some of the changes are resonating with society. Look at the way we have worked on this prospective bid for a football World Cup. Some things have changed.

I am not close to the governance per se. We have introduced the Code for Sports Governance—

Q219 **Chair:** No, but it is a key aspect of feasibility. You mentioned it yourself right at the start when you said that we host great events but it was an exception when thousands of people piled into Wembley without tickets. Thank goodness we avoided a disaster. We could have had one on our hands as a result.

As you will be aware, this Committee has in the past been quite scathing in its critique of the Football Association. In fact, on the Floor of the House, we have had motions of no confidence in the Football Association.

I will put it to you again. Is a prerequisite of a successful World Cup bid fundamental reform of the English Football Association?

Simon Morton: That will be a judgment ultimately for the Government to make if they decide to invest into a bid. My view is that it is not a prerequisite but that, through something like bidding for and staging a football World Cup, the Football Association will come under considerable scrutiny. We saw that with the London 2012 process. Bidding for and staging a football World Cup could be good in driving reform.

One benefit we see from hosting big sporting events is the benefit it provides to the governing body. We see that in a number of areas. I am not sure that necessarily it should be a prerequisite but it could be a benefit of it.

Q220 **Chair:** “Give us the World Cup and we will put our house in order”. Will that be the approach? It is a difficult sell.

Simon Morton: Hosting the World Cup can be a beneficial aid towards development of the governing body.

Q221 **Chair:** We talk about FIFA quite often. The Sepp Blatter era, thank goodness, is over but there are still issues with that. We rather



HOUSE OF COMMONS

highhandedly say, "FIFA is reforming. Therefore, as a result, we may now consider the largesse of putting a bid forward". Surely there is another side of that, which is the fact that the Football Association is a complete and utter basket case. Yet we are spending public money to do a feasibility study on whether that said basket case should organise a global tournament in this country and have a say in that, when we have seen on our own TV screens people piling into a stadium, potentially leading to crush injuries or death. I put it to you again: is there any real way in which we can honestly say to ourselves, "We should host a World Cup", without first fundamental reform of the Football Association?

Simon Morton: If the Government want to set prerequisites for the Football Association before it provides financial support—as it would have to consider—for a football World Cup bid, then they have the opportunity to do that next year. That is when the Government will take a decision on that and it will be a perfect opportunity for them to do that.

Q222 **Chair:** Should the Government attach strings and say, "We will find this provided you do X, Y and Z", to the Football Association? Is that a fair exchange?

Simon Morton: It is fair. This is effectively what we already do in respect of governance when we fund national governing bodies. National governing bodies are independent autonomous organisations, but we say to them that if they wish to receive public money they need to sign up to the 58 mandatory requirements of the Code for Sports Governance. The principle is already embedded—

Q223 **Chair:** How many of those mandatory requirements does the Football Association right at this moment not meet up to?

Simon Morton: I don't know. The way that we work across UK Sport and Sport England, on the Code for Sports Governance, is we take leads with different governing bodies. UK Sport is not the lead governing body for the Football Association. If we were to fund a bid, the bid would be set up with a special-purpose standalone vehicle and that vehicle would need to be compliant with the Code for Sports Governance.

The key point here to your question is that, yes, this is exactly the opportunity that you present. If this Committee or if the Government say that there are things that should happen as prerequisites, as long as those are reasonable things to be requesting, yes, those can be embedded into the agreement.

Q224 **Kevin Brennan:** On the World Cup issue, I have a couple of brief follow-ups. With the five nations bidding, what would be the process for qualification for the tournament itself for each of those nations in the proposal if they were going to host it?

Simon Morton: It is under discussion. As you can imagine, there is a lot of interest in how that would work.



Q225 **Kevin Brennan:** What are the possibilities?

Simon Morton: First, we do not know how many spaces or berths FIFA would provide. I mentioned earlier that the bid guidance and recommendations will not be released until Q1 next year. Only once those are seen can the five football associations agree between them, if there is a small number than five, how they would then approach the allocation of those. That matter is for the football associations.

Q226 **Kevin Brennan:** There must have been some discussion about the possibility of that. Would they draw lots? Would the biggest boy in the room claim first dibs? How would it work?

Simon Morton: There are discussions about it, but it is a matter for those football associations to agree between themselves. It is not agreed finally between them. There is a general consensus but there is some finetuning to do on that. Until that is agreed, it is not for me to say.

Q227 **Kevin Brennan:** I accept that you cannot say because it has not been decided but what are the options?

Simon Morton: Hypothetically, you could draw lots, you could look at world rankings or you could have play-off matches between the countries. You could come up with lots of different scenarios.

Q228 **Kevin Brennan:** Bring back the Home Nations Championship plus Ireland and generate some interest. Who will be the main competitors for the bid?

Simon Morton: We do not know yet—that is the simple answer—until we get into next year. There are a lot of media reports about the runners and riders—

Q229 **Kevin Brennan:** Who are in those reports?

Simon Morton: China has been cited. There is a lot of debate about whether it is the right time for China. There is the prospect of a Spanish and Portuguese bid. They have come out and said that they do want to bid. There is the prospect of a South American bid as well. I have no doubt we may see some others emerge. They may come up and they may fall away. This is one of the reasons why it is important that we do not go too soon. Indeed, that was a lesson from the previous bid. Be cautious. It is not possible for us to make an assessment of winnability at this stage until we know who the runners and riders are.

Q230 **Kevin Brennan:** Presumably the South American bid would be built around the centenary in Uruguay in 2030.

Simon Morton: Presumably.

Q231 **Kevin Brennan:** You mentioned a couple of other things that I wanted to follow up on. You said that two or three other types of events might be bid for on a five-nations basis. Which events are you thinking of?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Simon Morton: I am not in a position to share that at this point. You will understand that bidding is a competitive industry globally and so I would not want to say at this stage. I would be happy to share privately but I would not want to say in a public forum which ones those are.

Q232 **Kevin Brennan:** I will not press you on it but I would be interested to know. You said that some other team sports that perhaps were further away from medalling could get more funding. What sports are you thinking of there?

Simon Morton: I suppose the point I was making was that some of the team sports in the Olympic Games particularly, such as handball, volleyball and so on have been further away from the podium rather than necessarily the system disadvantaging them. One team sport that we said we would like to fund in our progression investment is basketball, for example.

Q233 **Kevin Brennan:** Can I ask you about the National Lottery, Simon? Since the last licence in 2009-10 the returns for good causes in 2016-17 were 2% higher than they had been, whereas Camelot's profits were 122% higher. Are you involved much in the new bidding process and trying to give some advice to make sure that the pure greed of Camelot and the way that that licence has played out is not repeated this time around?

Simon Morton: We are not closely involved in it but we are concerned and we are keen to ensure that good causes get—

Q234 **Kevin Brennan:** Do the Gambling Commission ask your opinion and do you feed in views there?

Simon Morton: We will have an opportunity to contribute towards that but we are not directly involved in decision-making. That is probably the best way to describe it.

To the point you raise, we do want to ensure that good cause money is maximised. Lottery funding is an absolute lifeline to high-performance sports and sporting events. It is critical to our survival. It is a concern that good cause money might not be getting its full share. We are extremely interested in the fourth licence renewal. It is critical for us and we want to ensure that good cause money gets the biggest possible share that it can out of that settlement.

Q235 **Kevin Brennan:** Will you make any formal proposals or any formal input into the process to the Gambling Commission saying, "We at UK Sport think this is how it should be redesigned"?

Simon Morton: I hope so, yes. Absolutely. I do not personally know the detailed timeline of how those processes are working and where the points of consultation on that are. As an organisation, we will take whatever opportunities exist to ensure that we put the case for good cause money.

Q236 **Kevin Brennan:** James, I would like to ask you a couple of questions



HOUSE OF COMMONS

about the British Council's programme of major events. How do you decide where to run festivals? You also run seasons as well. How far in advance do you start conversations with local stakeholders about that?

James Hampson: We work closely with the Foreign Office. The FCDO is our sponsoring Department in the UK and at post as well and DCMS. We have a five-year forward calendar. We are pretty far out. There is a much better way of saying that, I am sure. We make a judgment. Will this contribute to the bilateral relationship? Will it contribute to the soft power perceptions of the UK so we can showcase Britain? We have quite a rigorous planning process.

The seasons have yielded some interesting results for us in terms of people's favourability towards the UK. They are twice as likely to do trade with the UK or to study in the UK if they have been through a British Council-brokered experience. Trust in the UK Government increases through cultural initiatives as well. We have all the research that sits behind that.

Q237 **Kevin Brennan:** You recently had a UK-Italy Season. What learnings from that could be shared for future festivals and events?

James Hampson: One is that you can do this online. It was entirely digital. It launched in the teeth of the pandemic. As an organisation, we learned a huge amount about delivering cultural relations digitally. You cannot do everything digitally. We do the last 3 ft of engagement well. We had a strong and compelling digital offer last year with 750 million people online. We were able to deliver a strong contribution to the bilateral relationship with one of our closest European partners entirely on the internet.

Q238 **Kevin Brennan:** How well can you judge the legacy of these sorts of events? Is it possible over quite a long period of time to say what kind of impact they have?

James Hampson: You can look at a number of measures. Some are economic. For example, every £1 invested generates a further £8 for arts and culture organisations in the UK, which is a pretty good ratio. The China Now Festival some years ago delivered about £20 million worth of business for the UK creative economy and the industries. There is a contribution to politics as well. The UK-Russia Season, which took place in 2019-20, was during a period of strained political relationships. It is a way to keep the dialogue between countries going and a way to keep people-to-people relationships going. That is the business that we are in. We are in the optimism business. We want young people and their parents to study English, take UK qualifications, come to study here, align with our values and so on.

Q239 **Kevin Brennan:** A big part of our soft power comes from our cultural industries and particularly from our brilliant music industry as well as other types of cultural activities that are toured. What has the impact been following Brexit of the Government's failure to ensure that people



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have the opportunity to freely tour as musicians and other artists across the European Union?

James Hampson: We take the world as it is. The FCDO is our sponsoring Department and so we work closely with it—

Kevin Brennan: We take the world as it is and we like to try to change it.

James Hampson: Yes. We are looking at how we can use digital to continue to create those relationships. We are looking as an organisation beyond the European Union. The Indo-Pacific tilt is incredibly important as part of the integrated review. The relationship between India and the whole of the UK is incredibly important, too, so we are doing a huge—

Q240 **Kevin Brennan:** Are you—and I understand if you are—restrained by the position you hold in being able to venture an opinion on the disastrous consequences of the Government not—

James Hampson: I would rather keep my oar out of that, if that is okay.

Q241 **Chair:** Thank you. Simon, just to recap, is it correct that you were stating that, while the Gambling Commission is designing the licences, it has not yet spoken to you about what you would like to see for an avenue of funding that is so critical to sport in this country?

Simon Morton: I am saying that that area of work is led by a different director in the organisation. I know we are engaging on it but I am not sighted on—

Q242 **Chair:** What does “engaging” mean in this context?

Simon Morton: I know that we are aware of the timetable generally in terms of the fourth licence negotiations but—

Q243 **Chair:** We are aware of the timetable. Where are the conversations? I am not having a go at you guys because, frankly, I find it extraordinary that you are not front and centre of these discussions. What is the Gambling Commission up to if it does not have you, along with other bodies, in there to say, “What do you require from this process to ensure that good causes get the money that they need to produce the societal impact that we would like to see”?

Simon Morton: I agree with you 100% in terms of that ambition. You are right. We are talking in the same words. I am simply saying that it is not my area of our organisation specifically.

Q244 **Chair:** Despite the Gambling Commission not wishing for us to scrutinise it, seemingly, could you write to us outlining precisely the type of engagement, the way you have gone about it and where this is going? This Committee would be interested when the Gambling Commission does come in front of us to discuss the spadework that needs to go on when it comes to something as important as this.



Simon Morton: We would be delighted to do that.

Q245 **Chair:** Thank you. James, your written evidence suggests a key metric of major event success should be the extent to which global partnerships are created and UK cultural and sporting assets can be exported. How well are Festival UK* and the Commonwealth Games doing according to those parameters?

James Hampson: First, we have a great relationship with the two organisations. We are excited about what will come next year. It is early days in the delivery of those events. We enjoy a close relationship with Martin Green, who has appeared before this Committee recently. We are trying to amplify and deliver the soft power that those events will generate overseas. Chair, I can go back into my organisation and get you some numbers if you would be interested, but it is quite early days.

Q246 **Chair:** The Commonwealth Games is coming up fast. Is there no indication of exactly how this spreads brand Britain overseas? Do you have any insight into that? I will ask about Festival UK* in a second.

James Hampson: All of our experience from London 2012 demonstrates that the impact of these events is considerable. We are delivering our global network across the Commonwealth with the Queen's Baton relay and with the schools work that we are doing. We are optimistic that this will have a great impact for brand Britain and we will be able to showcase the UK in the optimistic way that we want to.

Q247 **Chair:** Will there be any touring opportunities for the Festival UK* commissions?

James Hampson: I have to get back to you on that. I am not sure.

Q248 **Chair:** Have there been any discussions?

James Hampson: We are connecting international producers and creatives from overseas into the 10 commissions from the UK. I don't know whether Martin is planning on taking them out into the world. I can find out.

Q249 **Chair:** That is relatively germane to that because Martin was incredibly enthusiastic and impressed us with that. He has done a great job with Hull, for instance. At the same time, this Committee was struck by the ambition and perhaps the lack of focus on what Festival UK* actually means. Maybe you can enlighten us, James. What does it mean?

James Hampson: Festival UK* is about celebrating the whole of the UK and shining a spotlight on our talent.

Chair: It sounds like the Millennium Dome on wheels.

James Hampson: It is entirely legitimate to do.

Q250 **Chair:** Will this advance your organisation and messaging overseas?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

James Hampson: More importantly, it will advance the UK's messaging and profile and standing overseas. It will allow us to engage with millions of young people who want to absorb and engage with the UK's arts and culture and education system. If you look at the whole waterfront and the whole chessboard here, it is a brilliant opportunity for the higher education sector to engage where these things are happening, for the creative economy to engage where these things are happening and for us to share the English language in a way that engages people in one of our world-class assets.

Q251 **Chair:** Simon, over the last 10 years, what proportion of the major events that UK Sport has supported have received dedicated investment in legacy alongside their staging costs?

Simon Morton: I cannot give you a number but I can describe to you what happens. You have the list of 123 events that we have helped to secure since the Games.

If you look at some of the smaller events on that list, it is not unusual that they would not have any dedicated legacy funding towards them because not all of the events on that list are driving that legacy. Some events on that list we might be hosting for specific and clear reasons. We might be hosting an event in the qualification lead-up to the Olympic or Paralympic Games because it drives a clear performance benefit for our athletes. A local authority might host an event for the direct economic impact. For some smaller events, it is not necessarily the case.

Probably for some of the medium-sized events on that list, the hosting partners—and every single one of these events requires quite an elaborate cocktail of partners around them, normally involving the national governing body and the local authority—would tend to come together into a legacy group and would probably bring their own resources from their own existing programmes to point at the event and to harness the event. It is difficult to get a number about what that is, but we can see them providing value in kind into the mix.

The easiest group to answer your question around is the really big events because, increasingly, there is dedicated funding for legacy. For the Rugby League World Cup, which was supposed to be this year and is now postponed to next year, the Government invested £15 million into the staging costs of that event. They invested alongside that £10 million into the legacy costs. For the Road Cycling World Championships in Yorkshire in 2019, between UK Sport and the Government we invested £13 million into the staging costs and the Government invested £15 million into the legacy costs.

We are starting, pleasingly, to see a new dawn whereby there is an appreciation that if you scramble to get the hosting costs for these events together, you miss the potential to activate the benefit they bring. Increasingly, we are seeing those dedicated legacy funding pots alongside staging. When we submit funding requests or we make proposals into the



Government, we are now embedding legacy costs alongside staging costs.

Q252 **Chair:** Are you tilting that towards the levelling-up agenda?

Simon Morton: Not per se, although we support the levelling-up agenda. It is more about doing the right thing by the events. It is about pushing ourselves harder to say, "This is a great sporting event, but how could it catalyse other things?" We are supportive of the levelling-up agenda, but it is more about the intrinsic value of the events.

Q253 **Chair:** Should DCMS provide more support for evaluation of legacy? As you said yourself, you can speak to the bigger events but for some of them we will have no real idea of what the legacy is.

Simon Morton: We are not there in terms of evaluating. Right across the sector people are asking how we should measure social impacts. There is not a good, cohesive, singular answer to that. We measure some of the things around the social dimensions of events. You have seen in our submission that we look at Pride, social cohesion and some of those things.

A lot of the wider social benefits and legacies of events are quite bespoke. There would be a bespoke measure for how the netball World Cup in 2019 can drive a return and a reformation of women's netball teams that perhaps have fallen by the wayside or whatever it might be. That is the way the measurement needs to go. We need some good, solid, core measurements but we also need to reflect that a lot of this work is bespoke.

Chair: Thank you. That concludes our session for today. Simon Morton and James Hampson, thank you very much for your evidence.