

# Call for sports to be shown on free TV



Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health, has today called for key sporting events to be guaranteed for broadcast on free to watch terrestrial channels.

His call – which includes demands for Scotland’s international football matches to be available – follows the announcement last week that live coverage of The Open Golf Championship will only be available on pay-per-view television from 2017.



Mr Hepburn said:

“I am extremely disappointed that the Open Championship, arguably the world’s greatest golf tournament, will no longer be available on free-to-air television.

“It is hard to quantify how many young people, watching thrilling contests on the greens of St Andrew’s, Turnberry or Troon, have been inspired to pick up a club for the first time. Welcome though the evening highlights package will be, there is no substitute for being able to watch the action unfolding as it happens.

“Of course, governing bodies must consider the financial health of their sports, and it is understandable for them to choose the most rewarding contracts on offer. But the announcement simply highlights the wider issue of access to some of the biggest sporting events on terrestrial TV.

“It cannot be right that an event as prestigious as The Open is not on the so-called ‘crown jewels’ list of protected sporting events. The Scottish Government has consistently

argued that The Open, The Ryder Cup, and Scotland football internationals, should be guaranteed as terrestrial events. I also have concerns about the Rugby Six Nations Championship, which ends its BBC contract in 2017 and could potentially shift to a pay-per-view broadcaster.”

Mr Hepburn added:

“A UK-wide independent advisory panel, set up to review the crown jewels list, reported to the UK Government in 2009. It recommended an extended list of events protected for live transmission on free to air television, including home football internationals and The Open.

“The Scottish Government contributed to that panel’s review, and we supported its findings. I am therefore very frustrated that no progress has been made on extending the list of protected live events. I am now calling on the UK Government to act swiftly to extend that list so that Scotland’s young sports fans, regardless of background, can continue to be inspired by these great sporting moments.

“They should either give increased protection to major events, or devolve this element of broadcasting law to Holyrood so we can make these decisions in Scotland for the benefit of Scotland’s sports fans and Scottish sport.”