



SPÓRT ÉIREANN  
SPORT IRELAND

# Sport Ireland Maternity Policy

International  
Carding Scheme

#WomenInSportIRE

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## Introduction

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The philosophy of Sport Ireland's High Performance Strategy 2020-2029 is that our athletes and the people who support them are at the heart of everything we do. Sport Ireland places an emphasis on providing comprehensive support to athletes and ensuring that their experience of the system is positive during and beyond their sporting involvement.

In the development of Sport Ireland's High Performance Strategy, athlete support was highlighted as a key area to advance within the high performance system. The strategy, which will be launched in early 2020, identifies the need to provide supports throughout key points of an athlete's career. Sport Ireland recognises that this includes female athletes who wish to have children and continue to compete in their sport following the birth of their child. Together with the National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs), Sport Ireland is committed to providing a safe and inclusive environment for all athletes.

## Our Principles

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In expressing the following principles, we will aim to develop a more supportive performance system for our female athletes.

- It is understood and accepted that athletes may wish to have a child during their athletic career
- We recognise that the needs of male and female athletes within performance sport can differ
- Performance plans for athletes during and after pregnancy should be tailored and flexible to reflect the differing needs of each athlete
- Athletes should feel supported throughout their pregnancy and facilitated in their return to sport
- Collaboration and communication are central to the functioning of any support programme between the athlete, their NGB, and Sport Ireland

**Sport Ireland will demonstrate its commitment to these principles through the International Carding Scheme. In 2020 the International Carding Scheme will see the introduction of a 12-month guarantee of funding to an athlete who becomes pregnant.**

In practice, this commitment will operate in two stages:

**Stage 1:** The athlete will continue to receive Carding as normal up until the birth of her child. In line with the recommended notification process outlined in the *Conditions*, the commencement of this stage is considered to begin at the end of the first trimester of pregnancy.

**Stage 2:** Following the birth of the athlete's child, she is guaranteed to receive Carding for six consecutive months. This is regardless of the award period i.e. if the six months' overlaps two years.

## Conditions

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- 1.1 The athlete is required to have sought her own independent medical advice and care in relation to her pregnancy
- 1.2 Sport Ireland is committed to the 12-month guarantee of funding. Notwithstanding this, it is important to note that athletes in receipt of funding under the International Carding Scheme are not employees of Sport Ireland or their NGB. Athletes should inform themselves of the supports which are available to them through their employer or other agency.
- 1.3 A commitment of funding from Sport Ireland is provided on the basis that the athlete intends to return to competition at an appropriate time following the birth of her child. Any Carded athlete who does not intend to return to competition following the birth of her child is encouraged to engage with their NGB and Sport Ireland to explore supports in their transition.
- 1.4 To protect the athlete and her unborn child, the athlete is recommended to notify the personnel who are involved in supporting her performance programme. The athlete is responsible for informing those within her performance programme and has the right to confidentiality from all those informed.

The athlete is encouraged to notify these individuals at the end of the first trimester, or earlier if she chooses.

- 1.5 To avail of funding support, the athlete, with support from her Performance Director, is requested to notify the Sport Ireland Director of High Performance of her pregnancy.

- 1.6 The Sport Ireland Institute will provide performance related support to the athlete throughout her pregnancy and in her return to training and competition following childbirth. Any support provided by the Sport Ireland Institute will be advised on by the athlete's own independent medical practitioner.
- 1.6 At the end of the six-month period following childbirth a review will be conducted to assess the commitment and progress of the athlete against the agreed targets. This review will be led by the Performance Director and with assistance from key support personnel. Depending on the outcome of this review, the NGB, in consultation with Sport Ireland, will have discretion to continue or withdraw funding.
- 1.7 Any decision to continue funding after the six-month period following childbirth will be dependent on a number of factors including budget availability. Funding may extend to the remainder of the Carding year i.e. December 31st. In the instance where funding will cease at the conclusion of the six-month period post-childbirth, notice of this decision to the athlete is expected within two weeks of the review.

## Implementation

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To support this policy, a **Maternity Programme** will be shared with the high performance community. This Programme, which has been developed through collaboration between the Sport Ireland Institute, High Performance Unit, and Women in Sport Programme, will detail how all stakeholders can work together to achieve the objectives of the Maternity Policy. The responsibilities of the athlete, NGB, and Sport Ireland will be specified within this Programme.

The principles and conditions outlined in this document are expected to be adopted by all sports which are part of the International Carding Scheme.

Athletes who are part of the International Carding Scheme in a non-transition sport (NGBs that do not run their own Scheme) will be supported to the level outlined in these guidelines provided that both the athlete and NGB demonstrate their adherence to the conditions identified. Sport Ireland will consider this on a case by case basis.

Sports which are not included on the International Carding Scheme but receive Sport Ireland High Performance Programme Funding are encouraged to consider the Maternity Policy and its application to their sport. Sport Ireland welcomes engagement where there is an opportunity to advance this policy to include female athletes within these NGBs.

This policy is subject to change as part of Sport Ireland's continued monitoring and review of its implementation. Any such change will be communicated to all High Performance NGBs.



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