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**Governance Code for Sport**

**Athlete Feedback**

Guidance Notes

Disclaimer

Sport Ireland is making available a range of resources including guidance notes, policy documents and templates for selected areas aligned to the Governance Code for Sport which will support sport organisations, boards, management and staff in the development of relevant governance processes and procedures particular to their own organisation.

For the avoidance of doubt, the final decision on the nature, type, extent and format of approved governance policies, procedures and processes for each organisation is a matter for the board / highest governing structure of the organisation and the resources and material provided may assist the approval process.

This document is not, nor is it intended to be, a definitive statement of the law and it does not constitute legal advice.

This document is not a substitute for professional advice from an appropriately qualified source and it is recommended that sport organisations consult their governing document or obtain their own independent legal advice where necessary. Sport Ireland does not accept any responsibility or liability for any errors, inaccuracies or omissions in this document.

**Why an organisation needs an athlete/participant feedback process?**

A two-way communication channel between an athlete/participant and the sporting organisation they represent is critical. This is important so that the organisation and the athlete/participant are in synch with each other, and operating within a shared culture and shared set of values. It is a mechanism for improving performance, whilst supporting the best welfare of the athlete participant, and flagging any issues before they become problems. A good feedback process will have multiple contact points, so that all communications are not just via one person. An athlete/participant feedback process clearly demonstrates the culture and values of an organisation, as well as transparency within the organisation. It also demonstrates that it takes the welfare of its athletes/participants seriously.

Having an athlete/participant feedback process is part of a suite of sporting, rule book, and athlete/participant related processes that an effective sporting organisation should develop as part of good practice and effective stakeholder communications.

Having an athlete/participant feedback process speaks to all of the principles of the Code, but especially Principle 3: ‘Being Transparent and Accountable’ and Principle 5: ‘Behaving with Integrity’.

Whilst an athlete/participant feedback process is not a stated requirement for compliance with the Code, it will support all organisations – whether Type A, B or C – to communicate more effectively with a key stakeholder group, namely athletes/participants. In reality it is likely to be Type C organisations, and some Type B organisations, who will have high-performance athletes competing on their behalf in top level national and international competition, and will have high-performance units. These organisations will have the most significant need for a documented athlete feedback process. For the High Performance (HP) community that receives funding from Sport Ireland, the development of an athlete feedback process is expected. The Sport Ireland High-Performance Unit provides support and further specific information to the HP community on this process and other athlete welfare related initiatives.

There are a number of governance reasons why an athlete/participant feedback process is important:

* It underpins the values of the organisation
* To manage, support and hold to account those who volunteer or work on behalf of the organization, including those who work and volunteer with athletes/participants
* To Identify risks for the organisation and decide ways of managing the risks, specifically where those risks could pertain to athletes/participants
* To ensure effective communication with stakeholders – in this case athletes/participants and their families, as well as all those who work and volunteer with athletes/participants
* To make sure that all those who work and volunteer with athletes/participants understand their: role, duties, and responsibilities
* To protect and promote the organisation’s reputation, in the case where the reputation of the organisation would suffer should athletes/participants not be treated appropriately

Furthermore, from a sporting perspective, it is also important:

* It facilitates the athlete’s/participant’s voice which supports continuous programme improvement
* To help promote a positive, productive, and safe performance environment
* To build relationships within the HP programme
* To discuss, agree and review performance objectives and outcomes between athlete/participant and coach/Performance Director
* In the instance where a concern or issue arises for an athlete/participant, to ensure that a clear line of communication functions with those who have the responsibility and capacity to address the matter

Whose responsibility is it to develop an athlete/participant feedback process?

It is the responsibility of the Board to ensure that all the principles of the Code are being upheld and delivered, and this will include ensuring that appropriate processes and procedures are in place. Organisations with a HP unit will likely have a High-Performance Director or High-Performance Committee, whose responsibility it is likely to be to ensure an appropriate athlete/participant feedback process is in place. This in turn is likely to be approved at Board level. The Sport Ireland HP Unit can provide guidance to organisations drafting policies and processes pertaining to their high-performance athletes.

It is recommended that athletes/participants are central to and have ownership in the establishment of a feedback process.

What is an athlete/participant feedback process?

An athlete /participant feedback process is a documented process, particularly pertaining to the high-performance community, which sets out the two-way communication channel between the athlete and the sporting organisation they represent.

It should reference and be read in conjunction with:

* Safeguarding Guidelines
* Codes of Conduct
* Athlete Welfare Policy

The athlete/participant feedback process may include elements such as:

* Culture and values of the organisation
* Purpose of the process – two-way communication between the organisation and the athlete/participant
* Debriefs at the conclusion of major events/training camps/sessions, etc.
* Continuous feedback loops – what they are and how they work
* The various mechanisms for athletes/participants to raise issues
* How the process is to be documented
* Formal and informal feedback mechanisms e.g. team meetings, etc.
* Athlete induction process – for development athletes and at later stages
* Athlete/player representatives – who they are and how they communicate on behalf of the athlete group
* Anonymous feedback possibilities

How should the athlete/participant feedback process be implemented?

The athlete feedback process can be implemented in the following ways:

* Displayed on the website
* Shared with athletes and their families
* Shared with athletes during athlete induction
* Shared with athlete representatives
* Share with coaches and others who work with athletes on their induction, and on any training courses
* Made available via company intranet and shared files

It should be regularly reviewed to ensure it is still up to date, with best practice, and feedback regularly sought from the athletes themselves. Sport Ireland High Performance Unit can support in this area.

Further links and resources

[Sport Ireland High Performance Unit](https://www.sportireland.ie/high-performance)