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**Governance Code for Sport**

**Athlete Welfare Policy**

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 welfare policy?**

An athlete/participant welfare policy clearly demonstrates the culture and values of an organisation and demonstrates that it takes the welfare of its athletes/participants seriously. An athlete/participant welfare policy should serve to guide those within the organisation on best practice in relation to athlete /participant welfare and support. It should set out the standard of experience that the organisation is striving to provide for its athletes/participants. It should also establish the roles and responsibilities of athletes /participants, coaches, volunteers and staff in delivering the values of the organisation. It shows transparency within the organisation, and that the organisation has the best welfare of the athlete/participant at its heart.

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

Having an athlete/participant welfare policy speaks to all of the principles of the Code:

* Principle 1: ‘Leading Our Organisation’
* Principle 2: ‘Exercising Control over our Organisation’
* Principle 3: ‘Being Transparent and Accountable’
* Principle 4: ‘Working Effectively’
* Principle 5: ‘Behaving with Integrity’

Whilst an athlete/participant welfare policy 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 most significant need for an athlete welfare policy - for the High Performance (HP) community that receives funding from Sport Ireland, the development of an athlete welfare policy is expected, as is the adoption of specific athlete welfare processes that feed into it. (The Sport Ireland High-Performance Unit provides support and further specific information to the HP community on these processes).

There are a number of governance reasons why an athlete/participant welfare policy 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 coaches and other athlete/participant support staff and volunteers
* To Identify risks for the organisation and decide ways of managing the risks, specifically where those risks could be to the welfare of 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:

* To support athletes/participants throughout their sporting career
* To support athletes/participants as they transition out of the sport
* To provide clear policy to all working and volunteering with athletes/participants on the practices and processes expected
* To provide clarity on what is acceptable within the HP culture of the organization and what is not

Whose responsibility is it to develop an athlete/participant welfare policy?

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 policies 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 draft an athlete welfare policy, which is then 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.

What is an athlete/participant welfare policy?

An athlete/participant welfare policy is a culture and values document, particularly pertaining to the high-performance community, which sets out how the organization will manage athletes within their programmes and will put in place processes that contribute to a positive athlete experience.

It should reference and be read in conjunction with:

* Safeguarding Guidelines
* Codes of Conduct
* Selection Policy Guidelines

The athlete/participant welfare policy may include elements such as:

* Purpose and goal
* Culture and values of the organisation
* The role of the organization in supporting the athlete
* Guidelines for dealing with issues
	+ Internal investigation processes
	+ Disciplinary processes
	+ Mediation
* Athlete induction
* Athlete handbook
* Selection processes
* Athlete agreements
* Athlete Voice
* Culture Checks
* Transition Support

How should the athlete/participant welfare policy be implemented?

The athlete/participant welfare policy can be implemented in the following ways:

* Displayed on the website
* Shared with athletes and their families
* Shared with athletes during athlete induction
* 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, and keeping abreast of any changes in legislation (for example around safeguarding and child protection for underage athletes) or common practice. Sport Ireland can support in this area.

Further links and resources

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