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**Governance Code for Sport**

**Pandemic 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 a Pandemic Policy**

Remote working during a pandemic is not normal remote working. Organisations must understand and acknowledge that employees may be caring for their children or a vulnerable family member or sharing their workspace with others who are also working from home. Staff may feel anxious and fearful, or overwhelmed by an extra workload created by the pandemic, compounded by ‘Zoom burnout’ and lack of human interaction. Working from home during a pandemic may result in slower Wi-Fi connections, distractions and time restraints which may necessitate working outside of normal core hours. For this reason, businesses should revisit their remote working policy or draft a pandemic policy, which addresses the reality of the workplace under pandemic conditions. Furthermore, the Code requires organisations (especially Type C organisations) to have business continuity planning in place, which includes pandemic planning.

Realistic and achievable objectives should be set to suit each employee’s situation, availability and restrictions. The pandemic policy should address remote working not as a new form of work, but rather as a new way of organising existing working arrangements. The obligations of the organisation and its employees remain the same irrespective of whether an employee is performing remote work or working from their normal place of work. However, the organisation should be cognisant of the stresses created by a pandemic and ensure that the pandemic policy supports the best possible welfare of the employee.

Having a pandemic policy speaks to a number of the principles of the Code, especially:

* Principle 1: Leading our organisation
* Principle 2. Exercising Control Over Our Organisation
* Principle 4. Working Effectively

Type B and Type C organisations are bound by the obligations of employer legislation. From 2021 a legally admissible code of practice on the right to disconnect from work – covering phone calls, emails and switch-off time – will be introduced into legislation, and Type B and C organisations will be bound by this legislation. All organisations, however, should consider have a pandemic policy in place to support volunteers as well as staff.

Type C organisations are required to have business continuity planning in place, as specified in principle 2, sub-principle 3, ‘Managing Risk’. Having a pandemic policy in place supports work in this area in terms of identifying risk and having a plan in place to mitigate that risk.

Whose responsibility is it to develop a pandemic policy?

It is the responsibility of the Board to ensure that all the principles of the Code are being upheld and delivered. The executive lead / Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is tasked with ensuring that the principles of the Code are being implemented in the organisation and thus will be responsible for ensuring there are welfare and employment policies, including a pandemic policy in use in the organisation. In larger Type C organisations there may be a Head of Human Resources whose role will include producing employment and welfare policies, including a pandemic policy.

What should a pandemic policy consider?

A Pandemic Policy will consider the following details:

* Nature of Employee’s Role & Duties - Organisations should revisit or draft a remote Working policy tailored to suit a pandemic. Realistic and achievable objectives should be set to suit each employee’s situation, availability and restrictions. It may not be feasible to perform some aspects of their role and special considerations are required.
* Feedback – a lack of connection with the workplace can be a challenge for employees. Employers should maintain regular contact via virtual check-ins with their team. Technology apps such as Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams meetings help to maximise the contact with employees.
* Availability & Communication Requirements - employee and their team/department should hold regular team meetings. Organisations should be flexible and understanding regarding each individual’s case. The organisation and employee should establish clear expectations as to response times for all parties and agreed appropriate communication methods – email/phone/videoconference.
* Time and attendance - important for organisations to understand the balance between expected concentration levels and relaxation levels. Time spent on work and non-work engagements should therefore be ‘balanced’ during a pandemic. Organisations should be both personally and professionally reaching out to employees to provide support, as it is particularly challenging time for all.
* Safe remote workplace - Organisations should consider the following aspects:
  + Operational – the organisation should arrange for a safe and suitable chair and desk. Home conditions should be taken into account (e.g. children at home) and allowances should be made to facilitate the employee
  + Health and Safety - arrangements should still adhere to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.
  + Security & Data Protection - organisations should still maintain strict adherence to the company’s IT Policies and Procedures
* Performance management – the organisation must continue to monitor and manage the performance of employees during this period of remote work, whilst being careful not to be over demanding of employees
* Employee wellbeing:
  + Organisations must be cognisant of the ‘right to disconnect’ of the employee and support and remind the employee to stop work at a given time
  + Organisations should consider what wellbeing initiatives they can instigate for employees at this time e.g., online yoga session, time off

Further pandemic amendments

The organisation should also consider undertaking the following further amendments:

* Pandemic amendment to the employee handbook
* Pandemic checklist control measures
* Induction during a pandemic
* Dealing with a suspected case of the virus
* Cleaning and disinfection
* Employee return to work
* Pre-return medical questionnaire
* Virus response plan

Implementing the pandemic policy: how and when to use it

Staff members should be given detail of the pandemic policy on their induction, and it should be included in the employee handbook. The Board must ensure that they are aware of what is contained in the pandemic policy and it should be regularly refreshed and updated, especially with a view to ongoing updates around remote working, employment legislation and public health emergencies.

Further links and resources

[Gov.ie website](http://www.gov.ie/)

[Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment](http://www.enterprise.gov.ie)

[Health Service Executive Website](http://www.hse.ie/)

[Health Protection Surveillance Centre Website](Health%20Protection%20Survelliance%20Centre%20Website)

[Health and Safety Authority](http://www.hsa.ie)