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**Governance Code for Sport**

**Rule Book**

Guidelines

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 rule book?**

A rule book within a sporting organisation is the document containing the sporting rules of the organisation – essentially how the game is played. (*Note this is different from the Constitution of the organisation – see the Governing Documents Advisory for details on the Constitution*). It is often the official guide of an organisation – detailing the sporting rules, but often also the formation of the game, membership details, administration structure, competition rules, disciplinary procedures and appeals guidelines. In the case of an organisation with an international federation, the rules of the game will be standard international rules, overlaid with specific national detail. In the case of organisations without an international federation, the rule book is likely to be greater and with specific detail. Generally any changes to the rule book will have to be voted in at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the membership, by a percentage or majority often referred to in the rule book itself, or in the governing documents.

Having a rule book is a core part of the governing documents that an effective sporting organisation has – given that it outlines the rules of the game and competition, the game cannot be competed in without its existence. Without a rule book there is essentially no way to decide the winner or loser of a sporting competition.

Having a rule book speaks to a number of the principles of the Code, especially:

Principle 1: ‘Leading Our Organisation’

Principle 3: ‘Being Transparent and Accountable’

Principle 4: ‘Working Effectively’

Whilst a rule books is not a stated requirement for compliance with the Code, the majority of type A, B and C organisations cannot deliver competitive sport in this jurisdiction without it.

There are a number of governance reasons why a rule book is important:

* To manage and support staff and volunteers in their delivery of the game
* To make sure that those involved understand their: role, duties, and responsibilities

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

* To provide consistent delivery of the sport in both competition and development
* To support the delivery of the game and provide consistency
* To support those coaching and officiating in the game
* To support the resolution of disputes and disciplinary processes

Whose responsibility is it to develop a rule book?

Generally, a rule book will already be in existence within a sporting organisation. It is the responsibility of the Board and executive lead/CEO to ensure that the rule book is contemporary and remains fit for purpose for a modern organisation. This may mean incorporating changes as decreed by the international federation, or rule changes voted in at an AGM. It may sometimes be delegated to a committee or individual to manage the rule book amendments.

What is a rule book?

A rule book is a technical/sporting document, which sets out the playing rules of the sport, as well as other sporting and organizational specific information. This may include elements such as:

* Organisational membership
* Organisational and administrative structure
* Player/athlete registration
* Player/athlete eligibility
* Competition structure
  + Club competition
  + Underage / Senior / Master
  + League / Cup / National / Regional etc.
* Entry to international competition
* Kit and playing gear
* Formats of the game
* Playing field / hall / venue / course sizes and markings
* Arbitration and discipline
* Enforcement of rules

How should the rule book be implemented?

The rule book should always be dated, so that readers can understand that they are looking at the latest version, and with addendums outlining where changes have been made to rules. It should be shared as widely as possible and in the following ways:

* Be part of refereeing and club handbooks
* Be part of officials and referee courses
* Be available on the website
* Made available via company intranet and shared files
* Posted annually to members, whether in a digital link or printed copy

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) or common practice.