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**Spokesperson Policy**

Guidance Notes

**Governance Code for Sport**

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.

Spokesperson Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide clarity on who is entitled to formally represent and speak on behalf of the organisation. The spokesperson role involves the faithful representation of the organisation when speaking on behalf of the organisation.

For example, within the Governance Code for Sport, principle 5 makes explicit reference to the need to protect and promote the organisation’s reputation.

*“The focus and definition of governance are typically associated with direction and control and achieving the organisation's mandate for the betterment of its stakeholders. Governance guidance (association, membership, codes, etc.) also place an obligation on organisations, their leadership team and staff to protect, sustain, and enhance the organisation's reputation and profile and ensure that the brand is not tarnished in any way.”*

Within the governance framework, under the representational aspect of board member roles it should be specifically highlighted that members must be aware that, when writing or speaking on any matter that is within the remit of the Board or Sport Organisation, they may be perceived as representing the organisation, the Board or the Board’s position even when they are writing or speaking as an individual. Any (mis)perception that a member is speaking as a Board member can lead to embarrassment and distress for both members and the wider organisation.

In considering the governance arrangements and policies in sporting organisations and national governing bodies, the issue of communications generally and the various roles and responsibilities in relation to media relations and “speaking for” the organisation, are areas where a variety of practices prevail and in many organisations, there does not appear to be an explicit policy or protocol in place.

Representing the organisation in the media

The Executive Lead is usually the designated spokesperson for the organisation, which should be formally agreed by the Board. In the absence of an Executive Lead, a senior manager will be delegated to undertake this role. In certain circumstances, or by prior agreement, the Chairperson (or President) of the Board may be designated to undertake the role, usually depending on what the announcement/news relates to.

From time-to-time, a Board or staff member may be requested to make a statement to the media or to represent the organisation in a public forum. If a request is received, in such instances, the Executive Lead and the Communications manager should be informed of the request or invitation and they will agree as to who should speak and if the request is acceded to or the invitation accepted. More specifically:

* Board members/staff will not speak to the media or in a public forum without the prior knowledge and approval of the Chief Executive, Communications manager and/or Board Chair/President.
* When prior agreement has not been obtained, they will inform the President, Chief Executive and Communications Manager at once when they have spoken to the media or in a public forum.
* When speaking on behalf of the organisation, the speaker or contributor should reflect the current organisational policy, even if they personally hold a different view.
* When speaking as a private citizen, the member/staff will strive to uphold the reputation of the organisation and those who work in it.
* Members should respect organisational, board, Committee, and individual confidentiality.
* Members should take an active interest in the organisation’s public image, noting news articles, books, television programmes and similar profile pieces about the organisation, about similar organisations or about important issues for the organisation.

Other aspects such as press releases, publications which outline policy positions of the organisation as well as annual and other reports will be reviewed and quality assured in advance. The social media policy and the use of platforms like Twitter, Linkedin, Facebook should also be consistent with the position as set out in a final agreed media policy.