



Guidelines

2026 International Carding Scheme

Athletes must achieve performance criteria in 2025 (January 1st – December 31st) for eligibility to apply for the 2026 Scheme.

All criteria is based on Olympic/Paralympic disciplines only unless otherwise stated.

Version Control		
2026 International Carding Scheme Guidelines		
Version No	Date	Status
1.1	12.9.25	Published



Introduction

The International Carding Scheme is an integral part of Ireland's High Performance System. Since 1999, the International Carding Scheme has provided financial support to athletes for their training and competition programmes.

The primary purpose of this funding is to support Irish athletes in reaching finals and achieving medals at European, World, Olympic and Paralympic level.

This document, International Carding Scheme Guidelines, sets out in detail the structure and processes associated with Sport Ireland's delivery of the Scheme.

From 2026, all applications for the International Carding Scheme must be submitted through Sport Ireland's Grant Management Application System (SIGMA). The introduction of SIGMA for Carding will streamline the application process, providing a more efficient, transparent, and user-friendly system for Performance Directors. The platform will support greater accuracy in applications, enable secure document submission, and allow applicants to track progress in real time, while also providing a central repository for all submitted documentation. This transition represents a significant step in modernising Sport Ireland's grant administration and reducing the administrative burden on National Governing Bodies (NGBs).

Athletes and Performance Directors are advised to read this document in conjunction with the criteria document, prior to making any application for funding.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
2026 International Carding Scheme Guidance Note	3
High Performance Strategy Mandate	4
1.1 Increased Awards Levels	4
1.2 2026 Award	5
1.3 Athlete Career Transition Programme	5
1.4 Player Funding Scheme	6
Athlete Guidelines	7
2.1 Application Process	7
2.2 Assessment.....	8
2.3 Appeals	9
2.4 Monitoring of Athletes' Progress	10
2.5 Tax Liability.....	11
2.6 NCCA Athletes.....	12
2.7 Sport Ireland Institute.....	12
2.8 Maternity Policy	12
2.9 Terms and Conditions	12
NGB Guidelines.....	14
3.1 Principal Sports	15
3.2 Principal Sports Fit for Purpose Criteria	15
3.3 Non- Principal Sports	16
3.4 Procedure for Applications	16
3.5 NGB Endorsement of Application.....	17
3.6 Appeal Process.....	18
3.7 NGB / Athlete Contributions	19
3.8 Quarterly Evaluation and Monitoring by NGBs on Athletes Progress	19
3.9 Sport Ireland Issuing Payment to the NGB (Principal Sports Only)	20
3.10 NGB Issuing Payments to Athletes (Principal Sports Only)	21
3.11 Payments to Athletes (Non-Principal Sports)	21
3.12 Terms and Conditions	21
Timeline.....	23

2026 International Carding Scheme Guidance Note

The International Carding Scheme is an integral part of Ireland's High Performance System. Since 1999, the International Carding Scheme has provided financial support to athletes for their training and competition programmes. The primary purpose of this funding is to support Irish athletes in reaching finals and achieving medals at European, World, Olympic and Paralympic level.

Sport Ireland continues to review the Scheme to ensure it remains fit for purpose and a world-class offering for Irish athletes. Throughout the Paris Cycle, Sport Ireland has introduced several advancements, including increased award levels, multi-annual funding, financial supports under the Athlete Career Transition Programme, and funding equality across para-athletes and pilots/guides.

Ahead of the LA Cycle (2025-2028) Sport Ireland, alongside the National Governing Bodies (NGB), reviewed and updated the International Carding Scheme Criteria. The updated criteria reflects the progress of NGBs' High Performance Programmes and continued improved performances. Sport Ireland remains committed to supporting senior athletes at a level that is appropriate for their stage of development, and in a manner that enables them to continue to progress.

The role of the NGB in the decision-making process to award Carding should be understood by athletes and coaches. Sport Ireland will only consider applicants where there is NGB endorsement. **NGB/Performance Director endorsement is a key factor in the decision-making process and Sport Ireland places a high value on the expertise of the Performance Director. The achievement of criteria is a key factor when awarding Carding, however it is not the only area considered by Sport Ireland.** The Carding Criteria (available [here](#)) should be read in conjunction with this document.

Athletes in receipt of an award should understand the purpose of the Carding Scheme and their responsibilities whilst in receipt of funding. All athletes in receipt of an award must have valid tax clearance and are responsible for their own tax affairs. Athletes are not employees of Sport Ireland under this Scheme.

High Performance Strategy Mandate

How Sport Ireland will deliver on the High Performance Strategy 2021-2032

Relevant to the Strategic Pillar 2, Athlete Performance & Holistic Support, Sport Ireland has made several advancements to the delivery of the International Carding Scheme. Sport Ireland will monitor the implementation of these changes and plan for further advancements at appropriate points in the coming Cycles.

Underpinning the High Performance Strategy objectives, is the [Athlete Welfare Policy](#). This policy serves to guide athletes and NGBs on best practice in relation to athlete welfare and support. It sets out the standard of experience that an NGB should strive to provide for an athlete that engages in their high performance programme. The advancements include:

1.1 Increased Awards Levels

Originally, the purpose of the Carding Scheme awards was to cover the athlete's competition and training expenses. However, a number of NGBs have developed and now operate centralised performance programmes which have taken on the expenses of training and competition programmes for many of the athletes. This has resulted in an evolution of Carding to become more of living allowance, enabling athletes to commit to their training and competition programmes.

The rationale for increased funding for athletes in International and World Class categories is two-fold:

- i. Enable athletes to commit to their sport on a full-time basis if they so choose.
- ii. Ensure athletes have an acceptable standard of living whilst being involved in high performance programmes.

The award levels for each category are outlined in the table below. Award levels represent the maximum funding available in each category. Athletes may be awarded lower amounts than the maximum award level.

Category	2026
International	€18,000
World Class	€25,000
Podium	€40,000

1.2 2026 Award

In 2026, Carding will be awarded as a one year scheme.

1.3 Athlete Career Transition Programme

Sport Ireland has further evolved the Athlete Career Transition Programme to assist athletes with post athletic career planning. This programme will provide financial and services support to carded athletes on retirement.

The ACT playbook provides athletes with guidance on how to engage with the ACT programme to access the supports to assist with their transition from competition. The ACT playbook will be distributed to Performance Directors.

Financial Support

Sport Ireland will provide a continuation of funding to an athlete through the International Carding Scheme for a specific period upon retirement. This element of the Programme will be overseen by the Sport Ireland High Performance Unit in consultation with each Performance Director and the Sport Ireland Institute.

The conditions associated with this continuation of funding include:

1. Request for support must be submitted and endorsed by the Performance Director.
2. The extension of funding will be provided to athletes who have been on the Scheme for;
 - a. a minimum of 3 of the previous 5 years or,
 - b. for 2 consecutive years, including the current year.
3. A transition plan must be agreed in advance of retirement and should be led by the individual athlete in consultation with the Performance Director and Sport Ireland Institute (Lifeskills Team).

Pending satisfaction of the conditions outlined above, the continuation of funding will be offered as follows:

- a) In the year of the Olympic/Paralympic Games, athletes who retire after the Olympic/ Paralympic Games will receive 100% of that year's funding and secure 50% of their current award for the following year. This process recognises that the post-Games period is a time of reflection and planning.
- b) In the non-Olympic/Paralympic years, athletes who intend to retire will be assured of 50% of their current award from any point from any point of exit.

This financial support will not be provided in one single payment but will align to the periods of engagement with the Sport Ireland Institute's transition plan.

Services Support

Sport Ireland will provide a continuation of services to an athlete through the International Carding Scheme for a specific period upon retirement. This element of the Programme will be overseen by the Sport Ireland Institute in consultation with your respective National Governing Body and the Sport Ireland High Performance Unit. Each service within the Sport Ireland Institute will be considered when developing a tailored retirement plan for an athlete.

Aligning with the commitment of financial support, and in recognition of the individual nature of transitioning, the availability of support services from the Sport Ireland Institute team will be linked to the length of time an athlete was on the Carding Scheme as illustrated below.

Time on Carding	3 years	4-6 years	7-9 years	10+ years
Post retirement physio/medical (pre-existing sport related)	3 months	6 months	9 months	12 months
Post retirement S&C detraining / nutrition	3 months	6 months	6 months	6 months
Transition - psychology & career	6 months	12 months	24 months	36 months

Performance Directors are required to directly engage with Sport Ireland where an athlete is intending to retire and meets the conditions outlined above. Notice of retirement through the submission of quarterly evaluations **does not** satisfy this process.

Athletes are required to read and complete the ACT Playbook in order to engage in these financial and services support.

1.4 Player Funding Scheme

The High Performance Strategy 2021-2032 identifies that "Sport Ireland will develop a clear policy on how team sports will be supported in terms of direct athlete investment, athlete support services and National Governing Body input" (Strategic Pillar 2, Athlete Performance & Holistic Supports).

The primary objective of funding players within team sports is to enhance their collective ability to compete on a global stage and give recognition of previous performance successes. As with the International Carding Scheme, funding to team sports will be a criterion based scheme. The criteria will be sport specific and align the overarching standards of the International Carding Scheme.

Principles of a Player Funding Scheme:

Funding team sports requires high levels of resource and presents a significant resource demand on the high performance system. Sport Ireland must be prudent in its approach to supporting teams, recognising the limitations of resource available.

The principles to facilitate Sport Ireland's engagement with NGBs in any Player Funding Scheme are as follows:

- NGBs will have robust athlete development pathways which are underpinned by appropriate competition and training plans at all stages.
- The High Performance Programme will be Performance Director led and supported by sufficient levels of NGB employed coaches.
- The Programme will have a track record of quality performances at major events over a consistent period. This track record will include Olympic Games, World Cups, European Championships. A performance benchmark of top 6-8 in the world will be set.
- NGBs will take ownership and accountability for their Scheme. They will ensure transparency and clarity in the decision making process for supporting individuals. Recognising that Head Coach discretion is a feature of team sports, NGBs will adopt an approach which ensures good governance at all levels (i.e., functioning HPC, selection committees, etc.).
- Player Funding Schemes will require multiple sources of investment to complement the funding provided by Sport Ireland. NGBs will be required to secure these sources of income prior to any commitment from Sport Ireland.
- NGBs will be clear on the performance benefit expected from any investment by Sport Ireland. This will be explicitly stated and monitored annually.

Athlete Guidelines

2.1 Application Process

All application details must be completed and sent via the NGB (Performance Director) to Sport Ireland for consideration. All applications will be completed through Sport Ireland's Grant Management Application System (SIGMA).

Three general classification categories will be used to determine the levels of support for which athletes may be eligible:

- Podium (Olympic/Paralympic medal zone athletes)
- World Class (Olympic/Paralympic finalists)
- International (Olympic/Paralympic semi-finalist)

Criteria

Athletes are required to achieve the published carded criteria in 2025 to be eligible to apply to be on the Scheme in 2026. In 2026, Carding will be awarded as a one year scheme. The published criteria for all sports is available on the Sport Ireland website and can be accessed [here](#).

Sport Ireland has supported several athletes in the past who were without criteria but considered by their NGB as legitimate high potentials for an Olympic/Paralympic Games. Please refer to Section 2.2 of this document for further information.

Application Process

In 2026 the application for the International Carding Scheme will be completed through Sport Ireland's Grant Management Application System (SIGMA).

- Performance Directors from NGB's participating in the Scheme will be notified via email when the application is live on the SIGMA system.
- Each NGB is responsible for ensuring that the International Carding Scheme Guidelines and Criteria documents are made available to athletes within their membership who may be eligible to apply under the Scheme.
- Performance Directors will complete the application on the athlete's behalf. Prior to submission to Sport Ireland, the athlete and NGB should meet to discuss and agree the Programme outlined in the application. The Programme includes agreement on the performance benchmarks for athletes to achieve throughout the season.
- It is essential that a full competition and training programme is completed for the athlete with detailed and realistic performance targets for each event that has been agreed with the athlete and NGB as part of the High Performance Plan.

Please Note: If the full Competition and Training Plans are not finalised, there will be an opportunity in SIGMA to update once plans are confirmed.

- Sport Ireland will write to all athletes notifying them of their funding decision.
- No payments will be issued until an athlete has signed the Athlete Declaration confirming the Terms and Conditions of the Carding Scheme, provided valid tax details, completed the required Anti-Doping Education, and signed the athlete agreement form if applicable.

2.2 Assessment

The Sport Ireland Carding Committee will consider all applications. The primary consideration for funding is the achievement of the Carding Criteria and the endorsement of Performance Director. However, there are secondary considerations which will be critical to the Carding Committee's decisions, these include:

1. Athlete integration in the High Performance Programme

2. Athlete daily training environment
3. Athlete trajectory on the performance pathway.
4. Podium and final potential of the athlete in 2028 Olympic / Paralympics Games.
5. Historic progression of the athlete within the Scheme
6. Past performance record within the Paris cycle

In addition to the above, Sport Ireland has a duty to protect the public funds it is responsible for and must ensure the integrity of the Scheme is protected by selecting athletes who do not present the risk of bringing themselves, the NGB, or Sport Ireland into disrepute. NGBs must advise Sport Ireland at the time of submission of any athletes with a criminal conviction or a pending criminal case. Failure to do so may result in a suspension of all Carding awards to the NGB until the matter is investigated and resolved.

****The “Five Year Rule” explained:***

Sport Ireland may, on a case-by-case basis, review the eligibility of athletes who have for a cumulative period of five years, at any category received financial and/or other support from Sport Ireland pursuant to the terms of the Scheme. The purpose of the review is to determine whether financial and/or other support will continue to be made available to such athletes. In conducting such review Sport Ireland will have regard to the athletes:

- progression within their sport over the last five years
- progression in the Scheme over the last five years
- current status in their sport
- ability to progress in their sport over the coming years.
- Medal potential of athlete on Olympic/Paralympic pathway

The 5-year rule may be applied more than once to applicants.

2.3 Appeals

Athletes do not have the right to lodge an appeal if they have not achieved the Carding Criteria of their sport in 2025.

Athletes may only appeal decisions of Sport Ireland Carding Committee made in respect of or under the Scheme regarding the following:

- non-inclusion on the Scheme
- level of investment allocation within the category
- Carding category allocation

The appeal must be made through the appeal section in the athlete's application on SIGMA. Athlete's must contact their NGB for information on how to appeal. NGB's must complete the appeal process on the athlete's behalf.

Please note that if an NGB does not process an application form for an athlete, the athlete cannot appeal that decision.

If an athlete believes a decision made regarding him/her has been based on incomplete or incorrect information, or is unjust, he or she is encouraged to contact Sport Ireland

2.4 Monitoring of Athletes' Progress

Once an athlete is successfully included in the 2026 International Carding Scheme, the monitoring of athlete's progress and performance will be undertaken on a quarterly basis. Sport Ireland will communicate with each NGB to review each athlete's performance in accordance with the programme outlined in the application. Possible outcomes may include the following:

- The review will find the athlete to be performing satisfactorily, and the quarterly payment will be made; or
- The review will find the athlete may not be performing satisfactorily but that the quarterly payment should be made. The NGB will issue a letter advising the athlete of this position and warning about the possibility of non-payment of future quarterly payments; or
- The review finds the athlete has not been performing satisfactorily or that there is insufficient information for Sport Ireland and relevant NGB to complete the evaluation. Payments to the athlete may be suspended pending further evaluation and may be withheld for such a period as Sport Ireland considers appropriate. The NGB will issue a letter to the athlete advising them of the review outcome.
- Once an athlete has been approved within a specific category within any Carding year, there will be no opportunity for that athlete to change categories within that calendar year.

It should be noted that failure to comply with the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme may result in forfeiture of all or part of the investment allocation.

All athletes are required to return specific items in advance of the quarterly evaluations between Sport Ireland and NGB. These items will be shared with the athlete at the time of notice of acceptance to the Scheme.



Athletes in Principal Sports will agree payment schedule with NGBs. The payment schedule should be agreed at start of the year, transparent to all stakeholders and included in any athlete agreements.

2.5 Tax Liability

Athletes in receipt of funding under the International Carding Scheme are not considered employees of Sport Ireland.

All Applicants receiving an investment allocation are required to provide a PPS or NIN number. This is a directive from the Revenue Commissioners.

In general, expenses incurred by athletes wholly, exclusively, and necessarily in the pursuit of training and competition are deductible for the purposes of calculating liability to income tax. It is the responsibility of the athlete to satisfy the Revenue Commissioners regarding the nature of such expenses.

It should be noted that the portion of the investment allocation used by the athlete might be regarded as income, in the same way as income from any other occupation.

As such, this portion of the investment allocation may be assessed by the Revenue Commissioners in the context of determining an individual's liability, if any, to income tax (Athletes are advised to retain receipts throughout the year, in the event that the Revenue Commissioners request assessment of the investment allocation).

Sport Ireland accepts no responsibility in relation to any tax liability incurred by athletes, as this is a matter for the individual. For more information, athletes should consult the Revenue website www.revenue.ie

Tax Clearance Procedures

eTax is confirmation from Revenue that a person's tax affairs are in order.

Applicants should note that the following tax clearance procedures, which are operated by the Revenue Commissioners, apply to all individual payments of €10,000 or more (in a 12 month period) made under the Carding Scheme:

- For Resident Applicants – You are now required to register with www.revenue.ie to apply for an eTax certificate.

- For non-Resident Applicants – Complete the TC1 application form and return to, Non-resident Tax Clearance Unit, Sarsfield House, Francis Street, Co. Limerick

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/starting-a-business/tax-clearance/apply-for-tax-clearance-certificate/non-resident-applications.aspx>

2.6 NCAA Athletes

Athletes that are competing in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States of America should be familiar with the rules relating to athletes receiving state grants and ensure that any funding from the International Carding Scheme are allowed under the rules of NCAA.

2.7 Sport Ireland Institute

Sport Ireland Institute provides world-leading services to Ireland's high performance athletes. Service support for athletes include Strength & Conditioning, Rehabilitation, Nutrition, Physiology, Medicine, Performance Analysis, Education and Life skills. The Sport Ireland Institute provides medical services such as blood profile testing, cardiac screening, clinical psychology, CT scans, DEXA scans, MRI's, Ultrasounds and X- Rays.

Support services are built into the performance plan and managed by each NGB in consultation with Sport Ireland Institute.

Athletes should contact the NGB services coordinator / Performance Director / Head Coach to discuss their support service requirements.

2.8 Maternity Policy

In 2019, Sport Ireland established a maternity policy for athletes on the international Carding Scheme. The principles and how the policy will work in practice is available on the Sport Ireland [website](#).

The Maternity Policy ensures that athletes who become pregnant whilst on the International Carding Scheme are sufficiently supported and facilitated in their return to high performance sport, should they so choose.

2.9 Terms and Conditions

Athletes agree to:

The Scheme:

- Comply with and be bound by the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme.

- Co-operate and abide by any Sport Ireland decision relating to the Scheme.

Engagements:

- Publicly represent, if required, the NGB and/or Sport Ireland in the media and through a limited number of public appearances. This expectation is outlined in the National Sports Policy 2018-2027.
- Comply with the NGB athlete agreement with regard all services (e.g. medical).
- Undergo a medical review with as required by the Head of Medicine or Head of Rehab at Sport Ireland Institute.
- Actively and positively engage with the Athlete Life skills and Advisory Service of the Sport Ireland Institute
- Upon request and where suitable, engage with key stakeholders through a limited number of public appearances.

Debrief Process:

- Sport Ireland has the expectation that athletes engage with debriefs on regular basis with their performance director and coach as well as any Sport Ireland review (e.g. Games Review, Culture Review).

Athlete Conduct:

- Athletes agree to conduct himself/herself at all times in an appropriate manner and display a positive approach and co-operative behaviour towards his/her NGB, Sport Ireland and fellow athletes. Athletes should not behave in a manner which is likely to bring their respective sport,

NGB or Sport Ireland into disrepute in each case, Sport Ireland shall be the sole arbiter as to whether the athlete is in disrepute.

The following are examples of what Sport Ireland may view as “bringing into disrepute”.

- a) conduct that is unbecoming of an athlete; and/or
- b) criminal conduct or other misconduct; and/or
- c) conduct that is or could be harmful to the interests, values, and reputation of the sport; and/ or
- d) conduct that does bring or could bring Sport Ireland and the NGBs into disrepute; and/or
- e) committing any act, or permitting or suffering to be done, anything which has a negative impact on the image or reputation of Sport Ireland and/or the NGB or otherwise brings either of them into disrepute.

- The above examples at (a) – (e) do not represent an exhaustive list of examples but are merely provided to illustrate the types of circumstances in which Sport Ireland may find an athlete to be in disrepute.

Performance:

- Follow their competition and training programme as agreed with the NGB and as laid out in the application form.
- Adhere to the performance benchmarks as laid out by the Performance Director for 2026.
- Participate in the National Championships of their sport unless otherwise agreed in exceptional circumstances with NGB.
- Maintain amateur/eligibility status to compete for the NGB through which an investment under the Scheme was allocated.

Anti-Doping:

- Comply with any service support guidelines of the National Governing Body and Sport Ireland Institute
- Comply with and be bound by the Irish Anti-Doping Rules.
- Know the substances and methods which have been included in the Prohibited List (as may be amended from time to time) and to take responsibility to make sure that any substance ingested by the Athlete does not violate the Irish Anti-Doping Rules.
- Participate in the National Sports Anti-Doping Programme and undertake, as required, anti-doping testing, including the taking of a blood or urine sample, in competition and/or out of competition.
- Understand that a refusal by the athlete to submit to a test will have the same consequence as if the athlete had tested positive.
- Provide Sport Ireland, by the specified dates, an accurate and complete whereabouts filing in the format and detail required by Sport Ireland on a quarterly basis throughout the year.
- Update their whereabouts filing as required so that it is up to date and accurate at all times.
- Comply with the contents of their whereabouts filing.
- Supply accurate contact details to Sport Ireland. Addresses supplied via the application form will be made available to the Anti-Doping Unit for the purposes of implementing the anti-doping programme, and Sport Ireland Institute in relation to their various athlete programmes.
- Agree to complete Sport Ireland anti-doping education by 31st of January 2026

NGB Guidelines

NGBs are required to familiarise themselves with the guidelines and agree to terms and conditions of the Scheme outlined in this document.

3.1 Principal Sports

A number of NGBs manage and administer the International Carding Scheme on behalf of Sport Ireland. It should be noted that sports undertaking this are taking on responsibility for Sport Ireland's Scheme and are accountable for the monies that they administer.

The main difference between Principal Sports and non-Principal sports is that the NGB manages the Scheme on behalf of Sport Ireland. NGBs who manage their own Scheme have autonomy on releasing payments to athletes and have a greater capacity to maximise the performances of athletes. In addition, Principal Sports and their athletes will likely experience increased flexibility regarding the delivery of the ACT Programme.

The reporting and evaluations must be submitted within the deadline stated by Sport Ireland on a quarterly basis. Sport Ireland will oversee the management of the Scheme within NGBs, which may include checks on paperwork, and NGBs will be required to report into Sport Ireland in a periodical and timely manner. These reports include the athlete quarterly evaluation forms.

3.2 Principal Sports Fit for Purpose Criteria

Principal Sports are required to meet the standards set out by Sport Ireland. Failure to satisfy any of these standards may result in the NGB's Principal Sport status removed. This will require Sport Ireland to take over the management of the Scheme, which will involve funding athletes directly.

The fit for purpose standards are as follows:

1. **Governance:** The NGB is Governance Code compliant. The NGB has adequate oversight measures in place.
2. **Administration:** The NGB has the administrative capacity in place to operate the Scheme. This will ensure athletes are paid on time and through an organised process.
3. **High Performance Planning:** The NGB is in receipt of High Performance Programme Funding and has an approved Performance Plan by Sport Ireland.
4. **High Performance Personnel:** The NGB is led by a Performance Director and supported by sufficient levels of administrative and coaching staff.
5. **Internal Appeal Process:** The NGB will set up an Independent Internal Appeals Process if required.
6. **Finance:** The NGB is in financial good health and has a history of good financial management.
7. **Anti-Doping:** The NGB has a strong Anti-Doping programme and a strong history on ethical issues.



8. **Performance Management:** The NGB has a robust performance management process in place which is effective in engaging and support athletes. The NGB understands the circumstances of the athlete beyond performance metrics and is aware of current and future issues.

Principal Sports currently approved to manage the Scheme include:

1. Athletics Ireland
2. Badminton Ireland
3. Canoeing Ireland
4. Cycling Ireland
5. Gymnastics Ireland
6. Irish Sailing Association
7. Paralympics Ireland
8. Rowing Ireland
9. Swim Ireland
10. Triathlon Ireland

Principal Sports may be subject to audit of their management of the Scheme in 2026.

3.3 Non- Principal Sports

There are a number of sports who do not manage their own Scheme. For these sports, Sport Ireland manages the payment of Carding directly to athletes. Sport Ireland welcomes engagement for any NGB to be considered as a Principal Sport.

Non-Principal Sports include:

1. Irish Boxing Athletic Association
2. Irish Clay Target Shooting Association
3. Irish Judo Association
4. Taekwondo Ireland
5. Pentathlon Ireland
6. Table Tennis Ireland

3.4 Procedure for Applications

From 2026, the application process for the International Carding Scheme will be submitted through the Sport Ireland Grant Management Application (SIGMA). Performance Directors from NGBs participating in the Scheme will be notified by email when the application is live on SIGMA.

It is the responsibility of all NGBs to ensure that the International Carding Scheme Guidelines, and Criteria documents are made available to athletes within their membership who may be eligible to apply under the Scheme.

Sport Ireland will host webinars for Performance Directors to outline the application process. Dates for these webinars will be communicated via email. Recordings will also be made available to Performance Directors to assist them during the application process.

A handbook will also be provided, detailing the requirements and step-by-step instructions needed to complete an application.

3.5 NGB Endorsement of Application

Each application must be endorsed by the relevant NGB's Performance Director. Performance Directors will be required to complete the application process on the behalf of the athletes. By submitting an application on an athlete's behalf, the NGB is confirming their endorsement.

Each NGB must confirm that the correct Carding Criteria has been achieved by each athlete by providing details of the event, event date, and result in the athlete's submission. If the Carding Criteria has not been met, an appropriate note must be included explaining why the athlete should still be considered for Carding (see Section 2.2).

All applications must be completed and submitted on SIGMA on or before the official closing date for consideration. NGB's will not be able to submit an application once the deadline has passed.

Please note that there is opportunity for athletes to achieve the required criteria up to 31 December 2025. Performance Directors are requested to submit a provisional application, noting any upcoming opportunity (with date specified) for the athlete to achieve the criteria.

At the time of application submission to Sport Ireland, NGBs are required to advise of any circumstances which may be considered to be a breach of the Terms and Conditions. This includes any criminal convictions or pending criminal proceedings.

All NGBs are requested to:

- Provide all the necessary documentation to athletes that have obtained the Carding Criteria in 2025 to apply.
- Sport Ireland requests that the NGB meets with each eligible Athlete and brief each athlete on the 7 Assessment areas for participation on the Scheme.



- Ensure that each athlete submission is completed accurately and fully, and that all the necessary information is supplied by the applicant.
- All necessary supporting documents had been attached - proof of other income/sponsorship.
- Retain a copy of each application submitted for future reference and auditing purposes.
- Submit only those applications where the criteria specified under the Scheme are fulfilled; and
- Certify the application by an appropriate member of the NGB.

Please note that athlete submissions will only be considered if: -

- Submitted on SIGMA on or before the official closing date.
- Endorsed by NGB.
- Certified on behalf of the appropriate recognised NGB; and

The NGB will be expected to submit their completed application, no later than the 31st of October 2025.

The Carding Scheme Committee will review the allocations in November as part of the normal assessment process. The Committee will make a recommendation to the Board at its December meeting. NGBs will then be notified of the athlete allocations.

Late Applications:

It should be noted that application forms received after the official closing date will not be accepted.

3.6 Appeal Process

Appeals may arise where an athlete is not considered for the Scheme or does not agree with their final allocation or category. Appeals may only be made in relation to applications that have been fully processed and submitted to Sport Ireland.

Only athletes that achieved Carding criteria in 2025 can appeal.

The appeal process for Principal and Non-Principal NGBs is outlined below:

Appeals Process for Principal Sports

In the event of an appeal arising, the NGB must set up an independent group to consider any appeals. Sport Ireland will make representation available for the appeal committee on a case by case basis, where deemed appropriate.

If the appeal committee's decision differs from Sport Ireland's decision, the NGB will be required to fund the additional athletes from the NGB's own resources.

Appeals Process for Non-Principal Sports

The appeal form will be available on SIGMA following a request from the NGB. The NGB must make the appeal on the athletes' behalf.

The Appeals Secretary will liaise directly with NGBs and not athletes.

An independent panel will be set up by Sport Ireland to consider the case. Any decision of the panel in relation to such an appeal shall be final and binding, and no further appeal may arise thereafter.

3.7 NGB / Athlete Contributions

NGBs should have a clear model for how athlete contributions are managed. This should be explicitly stated and understood by all throughout the programme's performance pathway.

NGBs should identify priorities for obtaining income. For example, contributions from the NGBs own sources should be considered first, with the athletes' contributions a final consideration. NGBs should invest a minimum of 20% from their own resources into the High Performance programme (e.g. sponsorship, philanthropy).

The language used to describe the process of athlete contributions is important. "Levies" or other words which may imply a penalty for programme membership should be avoided.

In so far as possible, athletes should not pay to compete for their country at European and World Championships. Some fees may be appropriate for other international competitions and training camps (e.g. World Cups).

Sport Ireland considers it reasonable that carded athletes contribute a percentage of their Carding allocation (10-20%) in centralised / fully funded programmes. This should be agreed and included in any athlete agreement.

Sport Ireland may request submission of athlete agreements as part of the quarterly reporting processes.

3.8 Quarterly Evaluation and Monitoring by NGBs on Athletes Progress

All NGBs must complete Quarterly Evaluation and Monitoring for all athletes on the Scheme at the end of each quarter.

These must include for the following each athlete:

- Competition details, targets, results, and comments.
- Training programme details.
- Progress for the quarter – the NGB must give a rating score for each athlete.
- NGB comments and NGB sign off of each evaluation form for athlete payment.
- Indication of the payments made to each individual athlete or note if an athlete will not be receiving their quarter funding on each athlete's evaluation.
- If an athlete receives a quarterly rating of 1 – unsatisfactory, the NGB must indicate if the athlete will receive that quarters funding.

If new competitions are added or if the target measurements have changed during 2026, this must be highlighted that it is clearly identifiable to Sport Ireland when reviewing quarterly athlete evaluations.

Quarterly Evaluations and Monitoring will be completed on SIGMA each quarter. Performance Directors will be notified via email when the Evaluation Process is live.

3.9 Sport Ireland Issuing Payment to the NGB (Principal Sports Only)

Sport Ireland will issue the 2026 Carding Award to NGBs in two tranches: 75% & 25%. Payments to athletes from NGBs may continue quarterly, if deemed appropriate. The first payment of 75% will be paid in January to allow the NGB the flexibility to facilitate payments schedules to athletes to maximise performance.

NGBs have an opportunity to assess an athlete's entire financial need, taking into account other sources of income e.g. Sport NI and sponsorship or other sources. While Sport Ireland does not wish to see athletes out of pocket for any reason, it could be a valuable NGB exercise to determine the actual cost of a programme, including living costs. The key point to highlight here is that any allocation must be agreed upon between NGB and athlete.

Any unallocated money (where an athlete has not used the funding or has been cut a quarter's funding for reasons other than anti-doping ones) may be redirected into the NGB's HP plan. The NGB will need to apply to Sport Ireland in advance for a change of use, detailing exactly how the NGB proposes to use the funding on the specified template. There is no guarantee that the request to reallocate funds will be granted. Only Principal Sports are eligible for a reallocation of funds. ***Reallocation of Funds template is available on request.***

3.10 NGB Issuing Payments to Athletes (Principal Sports Only)

Sport Ireland will check the NGB's quarterly submission of the review documentation, then sign off on payments to athletes. Sport Ireland will trust that the NGB has carried out the necessary checks to ensure an athlete is compliant with the Scheme. The quarterly submission will also allow Sport Ireland to flag any concerns internally. It is important to note that Sport Ireland will maintain oversight of the programme and complete spot checks to ensure each NGB are administering payments and storing documentation correctly. This is necessary to ensure a seamless transition of the Carding Scheme into an NGB's programme and that the NGB can account for all monies allocated.

It is up to NGBs to decide how often they pay their athletes (monthly, quarterly). Any payment schedule should be agreed with and clearly communicated to all athletes and Sport Ireland.

3.11 Payments to Athletes (Non-Principal Sports)

For Non-Principal Sports, investment allocations for the international, world class and podium categories in the Scheme will be paid directly into each athlete's bank account or otherwise directed, on a quarterly basis. This will be made following the quarterly review of the athlete's performance by the NGB and Sport Ireland. Possible outcomes that may arise from these quarterly reviews are detailed in "Monitoring of Athletes Progress" in [section 2.4](#) in this document.

3.12 Terms and Conditions

NGBs agree to comply with Sport Ireland in the following areas:

Performance:

- Sport Ireland or an NGB (Principal Sports) may withhold from an athlete a quarterly instalment of the annual financial support payable to that athlete under the Scheme where the evaluation by the NGB has determined that the athlete has:
- Not performed satisfactorily or achieved the benchmark performances as agreed with the NGB.
- The athlete is no longer integrated in the High Performance Programme
- The athlete's daily training environment is no longer considered suitable to maximise the performances of the athlete.
- The athlete is no longer considered to be of podium or final potential in the 2028 Olympic or Paralympic Games.

Anti-Doping

- Sport Ireland may withhold from an athlete a quarterly instalment of the annual financial support payable to that athlete under the Scheme where an alleged Whereabouts Failure has been



recorded against that athlete, regardless of the anti-doping organisation that has recorded the alleged Whereabouts Failure.

- A Whereabouts Failure is either a Filing Failure or a Missed Test. If the athlete fails to submit each required whereabouts filing by the specified timeline or makes a whereabouts filing that is not accurate and complete, that failure is a Filing Failure. If the athlete is not available for anti-doping testing at the location during the sixty-minute time slot specified for that day in their whereabouts filing and has not updated their whereabouts filing to provide an alternative time slot or location for that day, that failure is a Missed Test.
- Investment allocations under the Scheme shall stand suspended from the date Sport Ireland notifies an athlete of a possible anti-doping rule violation, other than an anti-doping rule violation involving a Specified Substance as defined in the Irish Anti-Doping Rules. The suspension shall last until the date of final determination that an anti-doping rule violation has or has not been committed.
- Where the final determination is that an anti-doping rule violation has not been committed, the suspended investment allocations shall be remitted to the athlete.
- Where the final determination is that an anti-doping rule violation has been committed but the period of ineligibility has been eliminated, the suspended investment allocations shall be remitted to the athlete.
- Where the final determination is that an anti-doping rule violation not involving a reduced sanction for Specified Substances has been committed and a period of ineligibility has been imposed on the athlete, all investment allocations will be withheld by Sport Ireland, the NGB and any other sports organisation concerned during the period of ineligibility and the athlete shall not be entitled to access to services under the Scheme for the duration of the period of ineligibility.

Failure to comply with the Terms and Conditions

Where an athlete is approved for inclusion in the International Carding Scheme and fails to comply with the Terms and Conditions, Sport Ireland may:

- Withhold investment allocations from or refuse to provide funding to that athlete.
- Demand a refund of any investment provided under the Scheme to that athlete and recover, as a simple contract debt in any court of competent jurisdiction, from that athlete any such refund due and owing to Sport Ireland.

The process of applying the above actions will involve a meeting of the Sport Ireland Carding Committee. NGBs will be required to submit the relevant information to the Carding Committee in advance for their consideration. Sport Ireland's decision will be final.

Data Processing:

- Principal Sports NGBs will be required to agree data processing agreement with Sport Ireland in line with current data protection regulations.

Timeline

17th September	Application process commences
31st October	Submission Deadline for NGB applications
November	Assessment period by Sport Ireland High Performance Unit
November	Sport Ireland Carding Committee Meeting
9th December	Sport Ireland Board Meeting
December	NGBs will be notified of the Carding allocations following the December Board meeting. Sport Ireland will write to all athletes notifying them of their funding decision.