



# Accreditation for Student Athlete Support

The National Dual Careers Support Program for Higher Education Institutions in Ireland



This document provides essential information for higher education institutions to become ASAS accredited under the new enhanced ASAS program criteria launched in 2026.

It has been developed by the Sport Ireland Institute ASAS Steering Committee and approved by the Sport Ireland High Performance Committee.

The ASAS Program is endorsed by Student Sport Ireland, and ASAS awards to institutions in Northern Ireland are recognised by Sport Northern Ireland.

## The ASAS Accreditation responds to several key challenges:

- To guarantee a quality-driven organisation for stakeholders in the national sport system and prepare student-athletes to reach the highest levels of performance.
- To meet the increasingly demanding constraints of high-performance sport.
- To enable student athletes to accomplish their high-performance and academic programs under the best possible conditions.
- To offer a national framework that guarantees the quality and coherence of the services offered.

The accreditation constitutes a mark of quality standard from the state agency for Sport in Ireland, awarded to centres that meet its specifications after a global evaluation. For a Higher Education Institution (HEI), the advantages of being ASAS-accredited are numerous, allowing it to:

### Enhance Prestige and Marketing:



- Use the official ASAS accreditation mark as a powerful marketing tool to attract high-quality student-athletes.
- Gain recognition as a leading institution for dual-career support.
- Benefit from dedicated promotion days on the Sport Ireland Social Media channels.

### Join a High-Performance Network:



- Act within a group of high-performance centres organised as a network to increase performance and share best practices.
- Receive invitations to exclusive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events (such as the HPX Conference) and Sport Ireland Institute training sessions.

### Access Centralised Resources & Platforms:



- Gain access for students and staff to the ASAS Learning Management System (LMS) platform, allowing student-athletes to access education on a variety of topics (e.g., life skills, nutrition, sport psychology).
- The platform will be providing a comprehensive library of content, with access expanding based on accreditation level.

# 1. Introduction: Pathway to Excellence in Dual-Career Support

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This guide provides a comprehensive overview of the ASAS tiered accreditation framework and outlines the operational procedures for an institution to achieve recognition for its commitment to dual-career student-athletes.

The ASAS framework is designed to be a developmental pathway, helping an institution to build, enhance, and showcase its support systems.

This document contains the following:

- The three tiers of accreditation: Bronze, Silver, and Gold.
- The specific requirements and evidence needed for each tier.
- The step-by-step process for application and assessment.
- The benefits and support.

## Background and rationale

Combining education or full-time work with a sporting career is known as a 'dual career.' Over the last two decades, there has been an increase in the number of high-performance athletes engaging in third-level education. Research consistently demonstrates the value of gaining an academic qualification in advance of athletic retirement, with evidence highlighting both short- and long-term benefits. These include enhanced sporting performance, the development of a more rounded and integrated identity, improved personal and career development, stronger employability, and healthier post-athletic career adjustment [1][2][3].

High-performance athletes face unique demands compared to their non-athlete peers, such as increased time and energy commitments, accountability to multiple stakeholders, and extensive international travel and competition. These demands create pressures that often conflict with academic schedules, meaning that without flexible and supportive structures, athletes may struggle to successfully maintain a dual career [4][5]. Research has shown that environments which are explicitly designed to accommodate dual careers—through clear policies, designated contacts, structured support systems, and consistent communication—are critical success factors [6].

Across Europe, there has been a progressive shift from ad-hoc, goodwill-driven approaches toward more formalised and policy-based systems of dual career support. The EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes [7] and subsequent European Commission studies on minimum quality requirements [8] have underlined the need for transparent structures and minimum service standards across higher education. Parallel research has mapped what effective Dual Career Development Environments (DCDEs) look like in practice, highlighting the importance of institutional commitment, academic flexibility, competency-building, and continuous monitoring [6].

Ireland has historically relied on a predominantly informal approach to dual career support, with provision varying across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and heavily dependent on individual goodwill and relationships. While substantial support is provided by HEIs, National Governing Bodies (NGBs), and Players Associations, this informal model has been shown to be restrictive and at times inconsistent. The absence of national policy structures means that athletes face inequities in support depending on their institution or sport.

A formal network of accredited dual career institutes offers a solution to this gap. Accreditation provides surety, clear minimum standards, and formal guidance to HEIs, while strengthening channels of communication between education and sport. This ensures that all high-performance student-athletes, regardless of scholarship status or sport type, can access consistent, high-quality support that aligns with international best practice [6] [8].

Since its launch in 2021, the Accreditation for Student Athlete Support (ASAS) has successfully transitioned the sector from informal support systems to a structured, nationally consistent model. The evolution of the tiered framework represents a significant enhancement, designed to align with and accredit the robust, evidence-based support structures currently operational within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

## The ASAS Structure

The ASAS accreditation is based on three core pillars that represent the progressive development of an HEI capabilities. A candidate HEI must demonstrate the actions put in place to meet the expectations expressed in the specifications.

### Pillar 1: Establish Foundational Dual-Career Structures

- Designation and training of dual-career coordinators and advisors.
- Provision of fundamental dual-career information, workshops, and support resources.
- Formal institutional policy/regulation endorsing dual-career initiatives.

### Pillar 2: Personalise Dual-Career Services and Competency Development

- Tailored advisory services addressing specific academic and sporting needs.
- Implementation of flexible academic policies and personalised academic planning.
- Structured competency training emphasising resilience, career management, and performance optimization.

### Pillar 3: Integrate Comprehensive, Multidisciplinary Support and Partnerships

- Establishment of multidisciplinary support teams (including medical, nutritional, psychological, and mentoring services).
- Development and strengthening of external partnerships for enhanced career opportunities.
- Robust monitoring systems and proactive measures for continuous improvement and support effectiveness.

## 2. The ASAS Accreditation Tiers

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The framework consists of three progressive tiers. The institution can apply for the tier that best reflects its current level of dual-career support.

### **GOLD TIER**

Signifies a fully integrated support system that proactively empowers student-athletes to achieve excellence in both their sport and their studies.

### **SILVER TIER**

Recognises that the institution provides individualised support and has embedded academic flexibility into its policies and culture.

### **BRONZE TIER**

Certifies that the institution has the essential policies and structures in place to create a dual-career-aware environment.

## 3. How to Achieve Accreditation: Requirements & Evidence

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This section details the requirements for each tier. To achieve accreditation, the institution must demonstrate that it meets all the criteria for a given level by providing the specified evidence.



## Tier 1: Gold Level Requirements

**Goal: To deliver a fully integrated and holistic support environment.**

Category	Requirement	Evidence to provide
<b>Integrated Support</b>	<p>Establish a multidisciplinary support team (psychology, nutrition, medicine, career services). Note: this team may be available as required and are not necessarily full-time staff.</p> <p>Provide access to high-performance services (e.g., S&amp;C, sports science) and comprehensive injury management.</p>	Submit Terms of Reference for the team, anonymised case studies, and details of facilities/staff.
<b>Individualised Planning</b>	<p>Develop Individualised Development Plans (IDPs) for each student-athlete. Offer customised educational pathways with proactive academic monitoring and at least two formal review meetings per semester.</p> <p>Ensure student-athletes have remote access to lectures and core learning materials when academic attendance is impacted by performance commitments.</p>	Submit anonymised IDP templates and evidence of the academic tracking system.
<b>Advanced Competency</b>	<p>Deliver a comprehensive life-skills program based on an established framework</p> <p>Run a structured mentorship program. This mentorship programme may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer to peer</li> <li>- Academic</li> <li>- Lifeskills/Career</li> </ul>	Submit the program curriculum, framework references, and details of the mentorship program.
<b>Placement/External Partnerships</b>	Evidence of a strong relationship between the LifeSkill support and Career placement officer. Provide structured internship/employment opportunities through corporate partnerships.	Submit copies of a list of corporate partners with placement examples.
<b>Monitoring &amp; Feedback</b>	Facilitate the administration of the annual ASAS National Student-Athlete Survey (provided by the Sport Ireland Institute) to gauge awareness and accessibility of services.	
<b>Role Modelling</b>	Actively and strategically promote dual-career success stories internally and externally.	Submit a portfolio of high-profile communications (e.g., videos, annual reports).



## Tier 2: Silver Level Requirements

*Goal: To provide individualised support and implement flexible academic policies.*

Category	Requirement	Evidence to provide
<b>Policy &amp; Commitment</b>	Implement official policies that provide clear options for academic flexibility (e.g., exam deferrals, flexible deadlines).	Submit the official academic regulations document outlining these provisions.
<b>Institutional Structure</b>	Provide dedicated dual-career advisors for ongoing, individualised support.  Mandate at least one formal meeting per semester between the advisor and each student-athlete.	Submit position descriptions for advisors.  Provide evidence of a scheduling/ reporting system for meetings (e.g., templates, screenshots).
<b>Institutional Culture</b>	Encourage the promotion of a dual-career culture by sharing regular communications and celebrating relevant events or achievements.	Submit a portfolio of promotional materials (e.g., news articles, social media campaign links).
<b>Competency Development</b>	Deliver a regular schedule of workshops on core dual-career competencies (e.g., resilience, time management).	Submit a detailed calendar and curriculum for the workshop series.
<b>Monitoring &amp; Feedback</b>	Facilitate the administration of the annual ASAS National Student-Athlete Survey (provided by the Sport Ireland Institute) to gauge awareness and accessibility of services.	



## Tier 3: Bronze Level Requirements

**Goal: To establish the core building blocks for a supportive dual-career environment.**

Category	Requirement	Evidence to provide
<b>Policy &amp; Commitment</b>	You must have a documented institutional policy statement expressing a formal commitment to supporting the dual-career pathway.	Submit the official, signed policy document.
<b>Institutional Structure</b>	Appoint a designated Dual-Career Coordinator (DCC) as a clear point of contact.	Provide publicly available contact information for the DCC (e.g., link to webpage).
<b>Student Support</b>	Provide access to support services for wellbeing and mental health.  Make available basic informational resources (e.g., online portal, handbooks) on dual-career support.	Share links to counselling services and student wellbeing resources. Provide copies of handbooks or links to the dual-career information portal.
<b>Competency Development</b>	Offer workshops covering fundamental skills like time management and stress reduction.	Submit the schedule of workshops offered during the academic year.
<b>Monitoring &amp; Feedback</b>	Facilitate the administration of the annual ASAS National Student-Athlete Survey (provided by the Sport Ireland Institute) to gauge awareness and accessibility of services.	

## 4. The Accreditation Process: A Step-by-Step Guide

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- 1. Self-Assessment:** Review this guide and determine the accreditation tier your institution aims to achieve.
- 2. Application:** Complete the official ASAS application form. You will be required to upload all the necessary evidence documents as outlined in Section 3.0.
- 3. Panel Review:** Your application will be reviewed by the ASAS Assessment Panel.
- 4. Site Visit:** Site visits are a mandatory component for Gold accreditation and may be conducted for Silver applications. These visits will use a clear methodology to verify the practical implementation of policies and to establish a collaborative approach to improving the proposed systems.
- 5. Accreditation Decision:** You will be formally notified of the panel's decision. Successful institutions will receive an accreditation pack.
- 6. Continuous Improvement:** Institutions are required to submit a brief annual progress report to maintain their status. A full re-accreditation application is required at the end of the term.

## 5. Benefits & Support for Accredited Institutions

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As an ASAS-accredited institution, you will gain access to a range of benefits and resources:

- **Enhance Prestige and Marketing:**
  - Use the official ASAS accreditation mark as a powerful marketing tool to attract high-quality student-athletes.
  - Gain recognition as a leading institution for dual-career support.
  - Benefit from dedicated promotion days on the Sport Ireland Institute Social Media channels.
- **Join a High-Performance Network:**
  - Act within a group of high-performance centres organised as a network to increase performance and share best practices.
  - Receive invitations to exclusive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events (such as the HPX Conference and annual DC conference) and Sport Ireland training sessions.
- **Access Centralised Resources & Platforms:**
  - Gain access for students and staff to the ASAS Learning Management System (LMS) platform, allowing student-athletes to access education on a variety of topics (e.g., life skills, nutrition, sport psychology).
  - The platform will be providing a comprehensive library of content, with access expanding based on accreditation level.

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