



SPÓRT ÉIREANN  
SPORT IRELAND

# Sport Ireland Athlete Welfare Policy for High Performance Sport

# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Building on the previous Athlete Welfare Policy, which was published in 2021 and in place for five years, Sport Ireland has established a new policy to reflect the current stage of the high performance system. This policy will be live from April 2026 and is subject to further review and updates throughout the remaining period of the High Performance Strategy 2021-2032.
- 1.2 Sport Ireland's High Performance Strategy 2021-2032 states 'our athletes and the people who support them are at the heart of everything we do'. This Athlete Welfare Policy assists National Governing Bodies (NGBs) to achieve this and covers:
  - the principles of athlete welfare;
  - responsibilities of members of the high performance system;
  - guidance for NGBs operating High Performance Programmes (HPPs);
  - dealing with dispute; and
  - system assurance.
- 1.3 For the purposes of this policy 'Welfare' is defined as:

*'the physical and mental health and wellbeing of an individual.'*

## 2. Principles of Athlete Welfare

### Life Affirming:

- Participation in high performance sport should be a positive experience.
- Athletes recognise they have a responsibility to improve the high performance system for themselves and future generations.
- Personal development should occur alongside performance/training.

### Athlete Centric:

- The athletes' voice is heard and welcomed by everyone in the high performance system.
- Athletes are empowered to own their journey in a system that supports them.

### Values-based:

- NGBs operate their HPPs in complete alignment with their values, and the values of the Sport Ireland High Performance Strategy 2021-2032.
- HPPs are led by Performance Directors (PDs) who are ambitious for their sport, and they are supported and held accountable by the NGB Chief Executive Officer and its high performance committee.

### Resourced:

NGBs have sufficient resources and support to deliver the aim of this policy.

## 3. Responsibilities of Members of the High Performance System

### 3.1 Sport Ireland:

- HPP funding.
- Direct athlete funding through the International Carding Scheme, the Golf Ireland Professional, and Hockey Ireland Player Funding Scheme.
- World class facilities for athletes to train and compete at the Sport Ireland Campus.
- Anti-doping education and testing.
- High performance system assurance.

### 3.2 Sport Ireland Institute:

The Sport Ireland Institute delivers services to athletes by experts in their respective field, through Performance Partnership Agreements between the Sport Ireland Institute and NGBs.

### 3.3 NGBs:

- Expert leadership.
- World class coaching.
- Optimum daily training environment.
- Domestic and international competition programmes.
- Policies and processes for the welfare and wellbeing of all members of its HPP.

### 3.4 Federation of Irish Sport:

The Federation of Irish Sport provides<sup>1</sup> the Athlete Support Manager (ASM) to:

- Offer confidential advice to all athletes<sup>2</sup> in dispute with their NGBs. This includes an assessment of the merits of a dispute; and, where options for informal resolution exist, acting as a critical friend to both athlete and NGB.
- Where requested, discuss welfare and safeguarding concerns on behalf of athletes with their NGB, and/or statutory agencies as required.
- Liaise with athlete representative structures in each HPP, to support them in their role.
- Support the work of Performance Life Skills service providers.

### 3.5 Principal Partners:

The high performance system has partnerships with the Olympic Federation of Ireland, Paralympics Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute, and Higher Education Institutions. These partners enhance the experience of Irish athletes, and they benefit from the successful operation of this policy, especially at the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

---

<sup>1</sup> Funded by Sport Ireland at 'arms-length' (the Federation of Irish Sport is a NGB member organisation).

<sup>2</sup> Carded Athletes.

## 4. Guidance for NGBs Operating HPPs

- 4.1 Strong athlete welfare is central to high performance and must be embedded in the ethos and approach of the HPP. Welfare is the responsibility of PDs, coaches, service providers, administrators, and the parents/guardians/support networks of all athletes, not just those under the age of 18; as well as the athletes themselves.
- 4.2 NGBs must designate a safeguarding/welfare officer to support the welfare of athletes on its HPP. While a welfare officer may work as part of the HPP staff, they should have direct access to the CEO for welfare and safeguarding cases.
- 4.3 HPPs provide exceptional and periodised levels of physical and mental challenge; and require high levels of support for all those involved. It is important the pressures associated with a HPP do not lead to, or justify, unacceptable behaviour (such as bullying, harassment, abusive or coercive conduct) by anyone.

Coaching/training for Performance is:	Bullying is:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consensual - discussed and agreed between athlete and coach/performance director.</li> <li>• Planned and evidence based with agreed performance objectives and outcomes.</li> <li>• Improving performance in a manner that is ethical and fair: to win and win in the right way.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not consensual – No discussion or agreement occurs between the athlete and coach/PD.</li> <li>• Lacking any performance objectives and outcomes.</li> <li>• Using training activities as punishment</li> <li>• Ongoing and deliberate misuse of power that intends to cause physical and/or psychological harm.</li> </ul>

- 4.4 NGBs and all members of HPPs must understand and fulfil the following obligations:
- NGBs shall have an athlete-centred culture that:
    - promotes diversity and inclusion<sup>3</sup>;
    - has a defined and understood code of conduct, which is consistently and fairly, applied;
    - has procedures for, and supports individuals to, raise concerns/complaints without fear of reprisal; and
    - allows individuals equity of opportunity and to advance according to merit.
  - Individuals (athletes, coaches, and performance staff) shall:
    - treat each other with dignity and respect; and
    - uphold the highest standards of behaviour in accordance with NGB codes of conduct.
- 4.5 **Working with Service Providers.** The relationship between NGBs and service providers is centred on performance support. By virtue of their role, service providers have a vital contribution to the overall physical and mental health and wellbeing of athletes. Therefore:
- they must be included in all athlete welfare forums and meetings; and
  - their opinions should be respected, even when they may not align with the coaching and performance staff.

Service providers are not expected to mediate on issues between an athlete and the coaches; if an athlete discloses a welfare issue to them, they should signpost them to the ASM<sup>4</sup>/NGB welfare lead.

<sup>3</sup> Acts of discrimination on certain grounds are prohibited by law. All individuals should be cognisant that the [Equal Status Act](#) provide protection against discrimination on certain grounds.

<sup>4</sup> The ASM can only support carded athletes.

If the athlete requests them to contact the ASM (or NGB welfare lead) on their behalf, they may do so and then withdraw. They should always use their professional judgement and seek guidance from their head of service and/or the Sport Ireland Institute senior leadership if appropriate. If the service provider is concerned the issue may have a safeguarding dimension, they must follow the relevant NGB/Sport Ireland Institute policy.

**4.6 Selection Process.** NGBs need a robust and transparent selection process, including selection panels, for: i) selection 'on to' and 'off' HPPs; and ii) team/individual selection for national representation (including Team Ireland). Selection policies should:

- be approved by the NGB board;
- include an appropriate level of independence on the selection panel; and
- include a final appeal using [Sport Dispute Solutions Ireland \(SDSI\)](#).

**4.7 Athlete Agreement.** NGBs must have agreements with each member of their HPP, to cover the obligations of both the NGB and the athlete for: i) behaviour; ii) the calendar of training and competitions; iii) programme expectations and costs; and iv) sponsorship arrangements. Athletes are expected to contribute to the HPP either financially and/or through public engagements. When athletes make financial contributions, there must be clarity on the purpose, and the NGB must ensure this contribution is kept to a minimum: further details are on page 19 of the [Carding Guidelines](#).

**4.8 Athlete Representation.** The athletes' perspective of the design and operation of many aspects of a HPP is important. NGBs are to have athlete representation/leadership structures to: i) facilitate involvement in HPP management; ii) engage with the Olympic Federation of Ireland and Paralympics Ireland Athlete Commissions; and iii) provide periodic updates to NGB board meetings. The ASM can assist in the development of this.

**4.9 Induction.** It is essential that new athletes are inducted on to a HPP, and there is an annual 'refresh event' for all athletes. A suggested syllabus is at Schedule 1.

**4.10 Regular welfare meetings.** PDs should meet regularly with welfare/safeguarding staff and service providers to review the welfare of all members of the HPP (both athletes **and** staff). These meetings should assess how well individuals are physically and mentally coping with the training/competition environment; and whether any specific intervention/support is needed: particular attention should be paid to those on injury recovery plans. Where a HPP is decentralised, PDs are to ensure the welfare processes can monitor and support all athletes, irrespective of location.

**4.11 Transition.** Transition activity begins when an athlete **joins** their HPP, occurring alongside their performance objectives: meaningful personal development is a performance enhancer, not an inhibitor. All athletes should have an 'Individual Athlete Plan' for each 12-month period, which includes performance **and** personal development goals; and athletes should be accountable for the achievement of **both** sets of goals. Transition plans will be developed collaboratively between the athlete, their NGB and the Sport Ireland Institute. The Sport Ireland Athlete Career Transition Programme (ACT) provides eligible athletes with significant financial and services support for 12 months after leaving the International Carding Scheme, provided they have engaged with the performance lifeskills team of the Sport Ireland Institute prior to this.

**4.12 Anti-Doping Violations.** All allegations of anti-doping are to be dealt with using the [Sport Ireland Anti-Doping Rules](#). However, NGBs should be aware that there may be a welfare dimension, and that this should be addressed as part of the overall response.

## 5. Dealing with Disputes

- 5.1 HPPs are competitive environments, so disputes may occur, with the potential to affect both athlete welfare and performance. CEOs and PDs must exercise leadership to ensure that, when disputes occur, they are dealt with objectively and effectively, whether through informal or formal means. This includes having effective and unconflicted channels of communication, which are trusted by athletes and staff.
- 5.2 **Informal Process.** In most situations, informal processes can solve the issue and improve relationships: the early involvement of the ASM will enhance this informal resolution.
- 5.3 **Formal Process.** More serious issues (such as bullying or harassment) will require a formal approach. At all times, the safety and wellbeing of an athlete must be protected. NGBs are required to have specific procedures for dealing with serious issues within their HPPs, these include:
- A code of conduct/charter.
  - A Complaints Policy.
  - A Whistleblowing Policy.
  - A Disciplinary/unacceptable behaviour Policy.
  - A Safeguarding Policy.
  - A Mediation Policy.
  - A Communications/social media Policy.

Sport Ireland has template policies that NGBs can adapt for their HPPs; and can assist in the drafting and education of their use.

- 5.4 **Statutory Agencies.** If a concern relates to a matter for [An Garda Síochána](#), [TUSLA](#) or another statutory agency, the NGB should consult with the relevant body before starting its own process.

Where an athlete is under 18 years of age, the NGB must follow the specified procedures outlined within the [Children First Act 2015](#) (Part 3), and in the [Sport Ireland Safeguarding Guidance](#).

- 5.5 **Notifying Sport Ireland.** If a dispute between a NGB and a carded athlete involves a formal process (disciplinary/complaints) and/or a statutory agency, NGBs are to inform the Sport Ireland High Performance Unit and Sport Northern Ireland<sup>5</sup> using the proforma at Schedule 3. The information will be retained in line with GDPR.

---

<sup>5</sup> For an athlete resident in Northern Ireland.

## 6. System Assurance

- 6.1 Sport Ireland is the state agency responsible for investing public money to support the development of sport. It has responsibilities for the effective operation of the high performance system: whereas NGBs are responsible for the operation of their HPPs. This will be achieved through the following activities.
- 6.2 **Annual Assurance.** All NGBs operating Sport Ireland funded HPPs are to provide an annual assurance to Sport Ireland High Performance Unit at the start of each year, using the proforma at Schedule 2.
- 6.3 **Cultural Evaluation.** All Sport Ireland funded HPPs will receive at least one culture evaluation per Olympic/Paralympic Cycle. This will provide NGBs with a better understanding of **how** their HPPs are operating. It is a combination of surveys, interviews, and on-site visits; and the anonymity of contributors will be protected. NGBs will receive formal feedback, which is briefed to all members of the HPP, to support cultural development plans.

## Schedules

---

1. Induction Syllabus
2. Annual Assurance Return
3. Sport Ireland/Sport Northern Ireland Incident Notification

# Schedule 1: Induction Syllabus

## Initial Induction (on joining HPP) - NGB led

- The NGB's values and code of conduct.
- Organisational design and individual roles:
  - Chief Executive Officer
  - Performance Director
  - Performance staff (incl. coaches)
  - Service Providers
  - Safeguarding/Welfare officer and welfare arrangements
  - Athlete Representation
- Athlete Support Manager
- Welfare and complaints policy
- Safeguarding
- Mental health and resilience awareness/training
- Programme for the year
- International Carding Scheme
- Anti-doping and betting/match-fixing policies
- Accommodation, travel, and other administrative arrangements
- Athlete Agreement to include Code of Conduct
- Sponsorship and athlete appearances
- Media appearances and social media
- Selection policy and appeals
- The Athlete Commissions of both the Olympic Federation of Ireland and Paralympics Ireland.

## Annual Refresh – Performance Director/Senior athlete led

- The NGB's values and code of conduct
- Welfare and complaints policy
- Safeguarding
- Mental health and resilience awareness/training
- Programme for the year
- Athlete Agreement
- Sponsorship and athlete appearances
- Media appearances and social media
- Selection policy and appeals
- Anti-doping and betting/match-fixing policies

## Schedule 2: Annual Assurance Return

### [NGB] High Performance Programme

Ser	Requirement	Y/N
(a)	(b)	(c)
1	NGB Welfare Policy (3.3)	
2	Additional policies (5.3) - Athlete Agreement. - Code of conduct/charter. - Complaints Policy. - Whistleblowing Policy. - Disciplinary/unacceptable behaviour Policy. - Safeguarding Policy - Mediation Policy. - Comms/Social Media Policy	
3	Safeguarding/Welfare Officer (4.2)	
4	Selection Policy (4.6)	
5	Athlete Representation Structure (4.8)	
6	New Athlete Induction Event (4.9)	
7	Annual Induction Event (4.9)	
8	Welfare Meeting Structure (4.10)	
9	Principal officers have been briefed on dispute resolution	

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Appointment: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Schedule 3: Sport Ireland/Sport Northern Ireland Incident Notification

From: \_\_\_\_\_

To: Sport Ireland/Sport Northern Ireland

Ser	Requirement	Details
(a)	(b)	(c)
1	Name of complainant	
2	Name of respondent	
3	Details of allegation	
4	Statutory agency involvement	
5	Actions and timeframe for resolution	
6	Any additional details	

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Appointment: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

When the incident is closed, this document will be deleted and the NGB informed accordingly.

**Confidential when Completed.**



SPÓRT ÉIREANN  
SPORT IRELAND

Sport Ireland Athlete Welfare Policy

Version 2: Published April 2026

Contact: [highperformanceunit@sportireland.ie](mailto:highperformanceunit@sportireland.ie)