

IFA CLUB LICENSING SCHEME

MA.03.1 Club Licensing Policy



Club Licensing Policy

The Club Licensing Policy is the plan of action developed by the Irish Football Association's Club Licensing Department. This policy aims to serve as a guide in the Department's efforts to bring about continuous improvement in all aspects of football in Northern Ireland.

The licensing scheme is progressive and is designed to assist clubs in NI to attain a level of play that will allow them to be sporting and commercially competitive on and off the field.

Upon consultation with a variety of bodies, the IFA's Executive Committee have agreed to the implementation of the licensing criteria stated in this policy. The criteria have been developed with the aim of evening out the standard of play among clubs in NI and Europe. The IFA Executive and Club Licensing Committees have the authority to review these criteria on an on-going basis and make recommendations towards the advancement of the scheme.

The Club Licensing Policy covers both the Domestic and UEFA Licensing Schemes and is divided into the following sections:

1. Affirmation of the Association's commitment to the Licensing Scheme;
2. Management of the club licensing scheme;
3. Review and evaluation of:
 - a) Clubs involved in the licensing process
 - b) IFA licensing scheme.

A great deal of care and attention has been given to the drafting of the licensing criteria. The focus has been on establishing a set of standards that are central to the development of football in Northern Ireland and Europe and from which clubs can accurately be assessed.

The five criteria that clubs are required to meet and are assessed by are:

- Sporting Criteria
- Infrastructure Criteria
- Personnel and Administration Criteria
- Legal Criteria
- Financial Criteria

The above criteria are consistent with UEFA standards where applicable and are specific to football Northern Ireland.

1.2 Affirmation of Commitment to Club Licensing Scheme

The IFA's Club Licensing Department and Club Licensing Committee (CLC) sets the standards for the licensing scheme. The IFA acknowledges its responsibility towards the clubs in the Irish Premier League and is committed to providing the best service to its clubs and football enthusiasts nation wide.

The Club Licensing Department is committed to fostering continual development in its licensing scheme. At the end of each year the Department will assess the Licensing Scheme to ensure compliance with both its own objectives and those of UEFA. Steps will be taken to rectify any areas where the scheme might be failing to reach its objectives.

The Licensing Department has established a benchmarking system that will allow the clubs to have a clearer view of their position within Northern Ireland and European football industry; benchmarking will allow clubs to plan more effectively for their future.

The licensing process is transparent which enables the Department to demonstrate to all their stakeholders i.e. clubs, public, football governing bodies etc., that they adhere to the highest ethical standards. All persons directly involved in the licensing process and who are privy to sensitive information are required to sign confidentiality agreements and confirm their independence at the beginning of all licensing meetings.

The IFA ensures that ethical values are maintained by ensuring that each applicant shall be treated equally and equitably and shall have recourse to the IFA to seek confirmation that all persons involved in the decision making process have no conflict of interest and are independent.

The IFA offers a sizeable portion of its resources towards managing the licensing scheme and makes available a number of funding initiatives during the year that clubs are encouraged to apply for.

The Department is staffed by qualified and competent individuals that administer the licensing scheme and assist the clubs through the licensing process.

The IFA club licensing policy has been developed in conformance with all applicable legislations, statutes and rules of FIFA, UEFA the IFA and in accordance with national law.

1.3 The Management of the Club Licensing System

The Club Licensing Department manages the Irish Football Association's Club Licensing Scheme for all football clubs that wish to apply for a licence that enables them to compete in the Irish Premier League and UEFA competitions.

The success of the licensing scheme depends largely on two principles working concurrently; clubs committing themselves to the licensing process and the Licensing Department providing the necessary support that will enable them to reach their objective of achieving a club Licence.

The Club Licensing Department will develop (with UEFA where applicable) all documents relevant to clubs applying for and receiving a club licence. Clubs will be provided with a reasonable timescales at the discretion of the Club Licensing Committee (CLC). Newly

promoted clubs will be given similar timescales to comply with the licensing requirements but will be provided additional assistance; however for UEFA club competitions, the minimum mandatory requirements will remain applicable for entry into all UEFA competition.

The Department communicates regularly with the clubs via circulars, emails, letters, site visits, seminars etc. Within the IFA, newsletters and memos are sent internally to keep the staff informed on all licensing principles and changes that may occur during the course of the year. Secure storage is provided in the Licensing Department Office for all documents submitted by each club and licensing affiliates. Additionally, information is stored electronically on specially created licensing folders which are backed up on the IFA server should the computer system fail.

The Department is committed to handling all information related to the licensing process appropriately and with full confidentiality. All persons involved in the process will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement specific to the licensing scheme at the beginning of their involvement. Each club that applies for a Licence (and hasn't already received a copy) will also be presented with a "Confidentiality Assurance" letter stating the confidentiality principles that the Department abides by. A copy of this letter should be photocopied and kept by the club and the original copy returned to the Department.

Please refer to the Department's *Code of Conduct* for further information on the scheme's confidentiality principles and the *Club Licensing Procedure* document for specific questions on document/information management.

The IFA via the Club Licensing Committee annual review meeting and the annual evaluation reports, set expectations for clubs to ensure the licensing process is being properly managed and its objectives being met.

1.4 Review and Evaluation of Licensing Scheme

In the interests of promoting a scheme with clear and measurable objectives and results, the Club Licensing Department has developed a benchmarking scheme that allows the Department to review and evaluate the overall performance of the licensing scheme. The Benchmarking Scheme will also enable the Department to see how the clubs that apply for a club licence are fairing against the criteria they are being assessed by and other clubs playing in the League.

For further information on the Club Licensing Policy, please contact Dave McVeigh at the Irish Football Association – Club Licensing Department, 20 Windsor Avenue, Belfast BT9 6EG or at 028 90 688424.