

IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION
NON-PLAYING STAFF – POINTS BASED SYSTEM SEASON 2026/27

The rules and criteria set out in this document will apply for the 2026/27 season and will be effective from 15 June 2026. The criteria will be reviewed across the 2026/27 season in order that revised criteria can be issued in advance of the summer transfer window in 2027.

Any queries regarding these criteria or the application process should be directed to registrations@irishfa.com

Please note that this guidance should be reviewed in conjunction with the relevant advice issued by the Home Office. The IFA is not registered to give advice on immigration routes or processes or to advise on an individual's immigration status and clubs should fully apprise themselves of their duties and responsibilities as sponsors. Information on aspects of immigration policy and law can be found on the Home Office website at www.gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration. You may also wish to seek advice from an Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) registered advisor or someone who is appropriately qualified but otherwise exempt from such a registration requirement, for example, a qualified solicitor. The UK Visas and Immigration Centre can be contacted on 0300 123 2241.

Clubs are advised to allow sufficient time for entry clearance or permission to stay to be granted. The time taken may vary depending upon where the Manager is making his or her application from. A guide to visa processing times is available on the Home Office website at: www.gov.uk/visa-processingtimes.

Please note that an individual's personal and immigration history may be taken into account when their application is being considered.

Consideration will be given to the following when applying the criteria: injury; a period of maternity or paternity leave; serious illness or any legitimate medical reasons; suspension; international duty; bereavement; or family crisis.

In order to obtain the GBE, the individual must not be subject to a provisional suspension or any unexpired period of ineligibility from playing and/ or coaching activities in any jurisdiction as a result of being charged with or found guilty of a corruption offence and/ or a doping offence and/ or another misconduct.

Clubs are reminded the onus is on them to ensure they are acting legally within the Immigration Rules and they must ensure any individual they wish to employ holds the right to work in the UK. Further information regarding a sponsor's duties can be found here:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/sponsorship-information-for-employers-and-educators>
- <https://www.gov.uk/check-job-applicant-right-to-work>

Please see the Glossary on page 9 for definitions of the terms used in this document.

In reviewing these criteria, the Irish Football Association confirm we have reread the Code of Practice for Sports Governing Bodies and agree to our roles and responsibilities as set out within. We confirm we have acted in full compliance with the principles of the Code during this annual review.

Prior to contacting the Home Office during the annual review of this criteria, the Irish Football Association confirms that it has consulted with Football Associations within the UK, as well as other interested parties related to football in the UK.

The Irish Football Association confirms the Football Association, the Scottish Football Association, and the Football Association of Wales have been fully consulted regarding the contents of this document.

GOVERNING BODY ENDORSEMENT REQUIREMENTS

GBE Status

- 1 Before a non-playing staff member is permitted to undertake any employment duties for the club, the club must have obtained a GBE in respect of the non-playing staff member and the non-playing staff member must have been assigned a Certificate of Sponsorship by that club and secured permission to stay under ISP of the PBS.
- 2 A club can apply for a GBE for a non-playing staff member at any time during the Season. In order to apply for a GBE, a club must hold a valid Sponsor's Licence under ISP of the PBS. In order to apply for and obtain a valid Sponsor's Licence, a club must have obtained an endorsement letter for a Sponsor's Licence from the IFA. If a Club's Sponsor's Licence is revoked, any non-playing staff member who has obtained a GBE in order to work for the Club may have his or her permission curtailed and may have to make a change in employment application which must be granted before the non-playing staff member can undertake any employment duties for the new club.
- 3 If The IFA grants an application for a GBE for a non-playing staff member in accordance with these criteria, the club is permitted to assign a Certificate of Sponsorship to the non-playing staff member for the period covered by the GBE. The GBE must be presented to the Home Office when the club applies for entry clearance on behalf of a non-playing staff member, which must be done within three months of a Certificate of Sponsorship being assigned. Any Certificate of Sponsorship and a copy of the non-playing staff member biometric residence permit must be submitted to The IFA by the club within three months of being assigned. Clubs must keep a copy of the relevant page of the non-playing staff member's passport evidencing their entitlement to work and contact details for the non-playing staff member, which must be provided to The IFA upon request. The club will also have to comply with any other criteria set by the Home Office in order to secure permission to stay under ISP of the PBS.
- 4 A GBE under ISP of the PBS will be granted for three years or the length of the non-playing staff member's contract (whichever is shorter). A non-playing staff member will not be eligible to undertake employment duties for the club beyond the expiry date of the GBE unless the club has applied for and obtained an Extended GBE before the existing GBE has expired in accordance with these criteria and the PBS.

Extensions to or Transfers of a GBE

- 5 An Extended GBE under ISP of the PBS can be obtained for three years or the length of the non-playing staff member's contract (whichever is shorter).
- 6 A non-playing staff member who has been granted a GBE under ISP (short term) of the PBS can apply (in country) to transfer to a GBE under ISP (long term) of the PBS. The club must submit a new application for a GBE and provide a pass certificate, or other written confirmation containing an appropriate reference number, from an accredited English language test centre that the Manager has passed the English language test required to secure permission to stay under ISP of the PBS.
- 7 A non-playing staff member who has been granted a GBE must submit a new application for a GBE if he or she wishes to take up that role with another club. If the GBE is granted, the non-playing staff member must submit a change of employment application to the Home Office, which must be granted before the non-playing staff member can undertake any employment duties for the new club.

- 8 Any application for an Extended GBE (in accordance with paragraph 6), a transfer of a GBE (in accordance with paragraph 7 or a new club application for a GBE (in accordance with paragraph 8 shall be considered as follows:
- a) If the non-playing staff member meets the criteria set out in paragraphs 16, a new or Extended GBE will be granted (as appropriate).
 - b) If the non-playing staff member does not meet the criteria set out in paragraph 16, the club must submit any information which it considers to be relevant to its application to the IFA. The IFA will then provide this information to the Relevant Football Bodies by email. The IFA and the Relevant Football Bodies shall consider this information, and any other information which they deem to be relevant in their absolute discretion, to determine whether the non-playing staff member remains of sufficient quality to be awarded a GBE. The IFA and the Relevant Football Bodies shall make a decision by simple majority and if a majority of The IFA and the Relevant Football Bodies recommend that the non-playing staff member should be awarded a GBE, a new or Extended GBE will be granted (as appropriate).
 - c) The non-playing staff member shall not have a new or Extended GBE granted (as appropriate) other than in accordance with paragraphs [8a](#) or [8b](#) above.
9. The club must inform the Home Office within 10 days if a non-playing staff member:
- a) does not turn up for employment;
 - b) is absent for more than 10 working days without permission;
 - c) has his or her contract terminated during the period that a GBE is effective;
 - d) is no longer sponsored by the club for any other reason; or
 - e) experiences any significant changes in circumstances (such as a change in job title, salary or location of employment),
10. The club must also inform the Home Office if there is a change of circumstances at the club within 20 working days. A change in circumstances might include changes of name, address or contact details, changes in structure (including mergers, takeovers and de-mergers), changes in financial circumstances (such as administration, receivership, company voluntary arrangement, debt arrangement scheme, liquidation or sequestration).

Application Process

11. A club must submit a fully completed application form for a GBE to the IFA's Player Status Department along with any evidence in support of the application.
12. The club must also pay an administration fee of £200 for each application.
13. If any information submitted as part of the GBE application process is amended (including the terms and conditions of a non-playing staff member's contract or scope, job description or nature of the role):
- a) before a GBE has granted and before the non-playing staff member has commenced his or her role, the club must inform The IFA who may require a new application to be submitted (and a new fee to be paid);
 - b) after a GBE has been granted but before the non-playing staff member has commenced his or her role, the club must inform The IFA who may require a new application to be submitted (and a new fee to be paid); or
 - c) after a GBE has been granted and after the non-playing staff member has commenced his or her role, the club must inform the Home Office via the Sponsorship Management

System. The Home Office will confirm whether they require a new application to be submitted (and a new fee to be paid).

14. If a new application is required in accordance with paragraphs [13.b\)](#) or [13.c\)](#), it will be assessed by reference to the criteria set out in this document and the Club must comply with these criteria in respect of the new application. The IFA may also inform the Home Office who may curtail the non-playing staff member's right to work.

MANAGER'S AND FIRST TEAM COACH'S CRITERIA

15. Governing body endorsements will be available for Managers / First Team Coaches if they meet the following criteria:
 - a) Managers and first team coaches must have Overall Responsibility for first team selection. Joint or partial responsibility for first team selection does not meet the criteria.
 - b) The Manager or first team coach must:
 - i. hold a UEFA professional licence or equivalent; and
 - ii. have Managed or coached in a league at Band 1 to Band 5 for at least two of the last five years; or
 - iii. have Managed or coached an international team with an Aggregated FIFA World Ranking of 70 or above for at least two of the last five years.
 - iv. have Managed or coached an international team with an Aggregated FIFA Women's World Ranking of 40 or above for at least two of the last five years.
 - c) The applicant club does not have an Existing Manager (or, if the club does have an Existing Manager, the club has confirmed to The IFA in writing that the Existing Manager will not be in post when the Manager commences his or her employment). Where a club has been issued with a GBE for an Existing Manager, a GBE will not be granted in respect of a new Manager until The IFA has received written confirmation that the Existing Manager is no longer working in that capacity for the club or will not be in post when the Manager commences his or her employment.
16. If a Manager is not granted a GBE in accordance with paragraphs 15 above, the Club may request that an Exceptions Panel consider the application. If the Club requests an Exceptions Panel, the procedure in paragraphs 27-35 shall apply.
17. If a Manager is not granted a GBE in accordance with paragraphs 15 or 27-35, they will have no further opportunity to apply for a GBE unless their circumstances change and will not be eligible to be the Manager/First Team Coach for the applicant club.

ASSISTANT MANAGER'S CRITERIA

18. Governing body endorsements will be available for Assistant Managers if they meet the following criteria:
 - a) The Assistant Manager will have Partial Responsibility for the first team of the applicant club.
 - b) The Assistant Manager holds a UEFA 'A' licence/diploma or equivalent.
 - c) The Assistant Manager has:
 - i. held the position of manager/head coach or assistant manager/coach at a club in a Top League for the Prescribed Time; or
 - ii. held the position of manager/head coach or assistant manager/coach of an international team for the Prescribed Time which had an Aggregated FIFA World Ranking of 50 or above for the entire Prescribed Time.
 - iii. held the position of manager/head coach or assistant manager/coach of an international team for the Prescribed Time which had an Aggregated FIFA Women's World Ranking of 40 or above for the entire Prescribed Time.

19. If an Assistant Manager is not granted a GBE in accordance with paragraph 18 above, the Club may request that an Exceptions Panel consider the application. If the Club requests an Exceptions Panel, the procedure in paragraphs 27-35 shall apply.
20. If an Assistant Manager is not granted a GBE in accordance with paragraphs 18 or 27-35, they will have no further opportunity to apply for a GBE unless their circumstances change and will not be eligible to be the Assistant Manager for the applicant club.

PERFORMANCE MANAGER'S CRITERIA

21. Governing body endorsements will be available for Performance Managers if they meet the following criteria:
 - a) The Performance Manager has responsibility for some (if not all) of the following activities:
 - i. Coaching teams, by demonstrating techniques and directing training and exercise sessions
 - ii. Controlling discipline and recruiting ancillary staff such as coaches or physiotherapists
 - iii. Monitoring and/or analysing technique and performance and determining how future improvements could be made
 - iv. Providing effective leadership to the performance team to support the strategic performance needs of the club
 - v. Providing expert performance advice to the manager and board on all performance matters
 - vi. Working and improving on the strength and conditioning of the first team squad
 - vii. Managing the key fitness, performance and sport science staff; and
 - b) The Performance Manager holds an undergraduate degree or masters in sport science or a related discipline; and/or
 - c) The Performance Manager holds a UEFA 'B' license/diploma or equivalent; and/or
 - d) The Performance Manager:
 - i. has been employed as a Performance Manager or equivalent role for at least five years in a Top League or national association; and/or
 - ii. has five years' experience in similar elite sports.
22. If a Performance Manager is not granted a GBE in accordance with paragraph 21 above, the Club may request that an Exceptions Panel consider the application. If the Club requests an Exceptions Panel, the procedure in paragraphs 27-35 shall apply.
23. If a Performance Manager is not granted a GBE in accordance with paragraphs 21 or 27-35, they will have no further opportunity to apply for a GBE unless their circumstances change and will not be eligible to be the Performance Manager for the applicant club.

DIRECTOR OF FOOTBALL'S CRITERIA

24. Governing body endorsements will be available for Director of Football if they meet the following criteria:
 - a) The Director of Football has responsibility for some (if not all) of the following activities:
 - i. Shaping the short, medium and long-term strategic footballing plan for the club
 - ii. Advising in relation to youth development issues
 - iii. Management of player transfers in and out of the club, including contract negotiations
 - iv. Control over player research and football staff recruitment

- v. Overseeing all aspects of sports science at the club, including fitness, rehab and medical
 - vi. Overseeing the development of the club's international profile
 - vii. Handling all aspects of commercial contracts requiring "football" involvement
 - viii. Managing the club's scouting department; and
- b) The Director of Football holds a UEFA professional licence or equivalent; and/or
- c) The Director of Football has:
- i. been employed as a Director of Football or equivalent role in a Top League during the Prescribed Time; and/or
 - ii. held the position of manager/head coach or assistant manager/coach in a Top League during the Prescribed Time; and/or
 - iii. held the position of manager/head coach or assistant manager/coach of an international team during the Prescribed Time which has an Aggregated FIFA World Ranking of 70 or above as at the date of the application for a GBE.
 - iv. held the position of manager/head coach or assistant manager/coach of an international team during the Prescribed Time which has an Aggregated FIFA Women's World Ranking of 40 or above as at the date of the application for a GBE
25. If a Director of Football is not granted a GBE in accordance with paragraph 24 above, the Club may request that an Exceptions Panel consider the application. If the Club requests an Exceptions Panel, the procedure in paragraphs 27-35 shall apply.
26. If a Director of Football is not granted a GBE in accordance with paragraphs 24 or 27-35, they will have no further opportunity to apply for a GBE unless their circumstances change and will not be eligible to be the Director of Football for the applicant club.

Exceptions Panel

27. If a club requests an Exceptions Panel, The IFA will appoint an independent panel of three members, who have relevant experience of professional football (the "**Panel Members**").
28. The IFA may also, at its absolute discretion, refer any question in relation to the interpretation or application of any aspect of these criteria to the Exceptions Panel) to determine. Any decision made by an Exceptions Panel under this paragraph shall be final and binding.
29. A fee of £500 will be charged for every Exceptions Panel, which must be paid before the application will be considered by the Exceptions Panel.
30. The club will be notified of the identity of the Panel Members and have the opportunity to challenge the appointment of any Panel Member on the basis of an actual or perceived conflict of interest. Each Panel Member shall also have the opportunity to declare an actual or perceived conflict of interest (of him or herself or any other Panel Member) to the Chair or, if the conflict of interest relates to the Chair, to The IFA. The Chair, or The IFA respectively, shall then determine whether the Panel Member should be excluded from participating in the application. If the Panel Member is excluded from participating in the application, The IFA will appoint a replacement Panel Member (to whom this paragraph shall also apply).
31. The Exceptions Panel can request any further information from The IFA's Player Status Department, the applicant club or any third party (via The IFA's Player Status Department) that it deems necessary, in its absolute discretion, in order to make its decision. If an Exceptions Panel meeting has been convened or is in progress when a request for further information is made, the Chair may adjourn the meeting to allow the information to be gathered. Where it is able to do so, the applicant club or The IFA's Player Status Department will supply the further information to the Exceptions Panel within a reasonable timescale.

32. The Exceptions Panel will make its decision, based on the papers submitted to it, at an in-person or virtual meeting at which The IFA will provide appropriate secretarial support. Each Panel Member has one vote and the decision will be made by a simple majority, with the chair having a casting vote.
33. The Exceptions Panel shall only recommend to the IFA that a GBE be granted if it is satisfied that the non-playing staff member is of the highest calibre and is able to contribute significantly to the development of the game at the top level in Northern Ireland.
34. If the Exceptions Panel recommends to The IFA that a GBE be granted, The IFA will consider whether to grant a GBE (but is under no obligation to do so).
35. The decision of the Exceptions Panel will be communicated to the applicant club within 5 days of the date of the hearing.

GLOSSARY

Aggregated FIFA World Rankings means the aggregated rankings list for senior men's international teams over the international reference period that are published by the IFA following publication of the FIFA World Rankings. This list is available on www.irishfa.com

Aggregated FIFA Women's World Rankings means the aggregated rankings list for senior women's international teams over the international reference period that are published by the IFA following publication of the FIFA World Rankings. This list is available on www.irishfa.com

Assistant Manager means any assistant first team manager or assistant head coach who is not a citizen of the United Kingdom or Ireland and has not acquired permanent residence in the United Kingdom, been granted pre-settled status or settled status under the EU Settlement.

Band 1 means the English Premier League, the Bundesliga, La Liga, Serie A and Ligue 1, English Women's Super League, French Feminine Division 1, German Frauen Bundesliga, National Women's Soccer League, Spanish Women's Primera Division, Swedish Damallsvenskan, the Vrouwen Eredivisie and the Italian Femminile Serie A.

Band 2 means the Portuguese Primeira Liga, Eredivisie, Belgian First Division A, the Turkish Super Lig, the English Championship, Australian W League, Brazilian Feminio Serie A, Danish Elite divisionen, Japanese WE League, Mexican Liga MX Femenil and Norwegian Toppserien.

Band 3 means the, Campeonato Brasileiro Série A, Primera División of Argentina, Liga MX, the USA's Major League Soccer and the Scottish Premiership.

Band 4 means the Czech First League, Croatian First Football League, the Swiss Super League, La Liga 2, Bundesliga 2, Ukrainian Premier League, the Greek Superleague, the Colombian Categoría Primera A, the Austrian Football Bundesliga, the Danish Superliga, Russian Premier League and Ligue 2.

Band 5 means the Serbian SuperLiga, the Polish Ekstraklasa, the Slovenian PrvaLiga, the Chilean Primera División, the Uruguayan Primera División, the Swedish Allsvenskan division, the Norwegian Elitserien division, the K League, the J League, the Hungarian Nemzeti Bajnokság I, Serie B, and Australian A-League.

Band 6 means all leagues not in Band 1, Band 2, Band 3, Band 4 or Band 5.

Certificate of Sponsorship means a certificate assigned to a non-playing staff member pursuant to a club's Sponsor's Licence.

Director of Football means a director of football, technical director or head of recruitment who is not a citizen of the United Kingdom or Ireland and has not acquired permanent residence in the United Kingdom, been granted pre-settled status or settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme.

Exceptions Panel means a panel appointed by The IFA to consider an application for a GBE.

Existing Manager means a first team manager or first team head coach of a football club who has Overall Responsibility.

Extended GBE means a new GBE applied for by a Club in respect of a non-playing staff member who has already received a GBE for that Club which is due to expire.

FIFA means the Fédération Internationale de Football Association.

GBE means Governing Body Endorsement.

Home Association means The Football Association, The Scottish Football Association, and The Football Association of Wales.

ISP means the International Sportsperson route.

ISP (long term) means an application for a period of stay exceeding 12 months.

ISP (short term) means an application for a period of stay of 12 months or less.

Managed means has been a first team manager or first team head coach and, in that role, had Overall Responsibility.

Manager means any first team manager or first team head coach who is not a citizen of the United Kingdom or Ireland and has not acquired permanent residence in the United Kingdom, been granted pre-settled status or settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme.

Partial Responsibility means responsibility for giving advice or assistance in respect of the first team to someone with overall responsibility.

PBS means the Home Office Points Based System.

Performance Manager means a performance manager or coach (including but not limited to a fitness, goalkeeping, youth, academy and/or throw-in coach) who is not a citizen of the United Kingdom or Ireland and has not acquired permanent residence in the United Kingdom, been granted pre-settled status or settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme.

Overall Responsibility means ultimate responsibility and decision-making authority for the first team and first team selection. For the avoidance of doubt, Overall Responsibility does not mean sole responsibility for the first team and first team selection. A Manager can have Overall Responsibility even where he or she is advised or assisted by others (for example, assistant managers or assistant first team coaches).

Prescribed Time means (a) a cumulative total of at least 36 months within the Reference Period or

(b) a consecutive total of at least 24 months within the Reference Period.

Reference Period means the five-year period immediately prior to the date of the application for a GBE.

Relevant Football Bodies means a representative of the league in which the Player plays in or will play in if the applicable for a GBE is successful.

Season means the period between 1 July and 30 June (inclusive)..

Sponsor's Licence means a licence obtained from the Home Office under the PBS.

Top League means any league in Band 1, Band 2, Band 3, Band 4, or Band 5.