



IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION CLUB LICENSING AND CLUB MONITORING POLICY

Club licensing and club monitoring policy

The club licensing and club monitoring policy is the plan of action developed by the Irish Football Association's Club Licensing Unit. This policy aims to serve as a guide in the 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 Northern Ireland to develop to a level that will allow them to be sportingly competitive on the field and commercially competitive off the field.

The IFA Board has agreed to the implementation of the licensing criteria stated in this policy and in conjunction with the Licensing Committee has 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 UEFA, Premiership and Championship Licensing Schemes.

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 in Northern Ireland.

Club licensing and club monitoring objectives

- **To promote and improve sporting standards of Northern Ireland clubs in both Domestic and European football.** The IFA will encourage coaches and managers to attend the best possible coaching courses. For UEFA licence criteria, a Pro Licence is required to manage the club, for Premiership criteria the 'A' Licence course must have been commenced whilst at Championship level the manager must hold the UEFA 'B' Licence. Academy training facilities and child welfare education are deemed to be of the highest importance with continued priority given to the training and development of young players in every club and to the level of qualification of coaches within youth academies.

- **To adapt clubs' sporting infrastructure to provide players, spectators and media representatives with suitable, well-equipped and safe facilities.** Stadiums throughout the Premiership continue to improve and all meet the Premiership Licence requirements with several grounds also meeting UEFA infrastructure criteria requirements. Stadiums that are subject to safety legislative requirements continue to meet the terms of their General Safety Certificate and those stadia who do not fall under the legislation, work effectively in partnership with their local authority in ensuring safety standards are maintained. The IFA must continue to encourage and assist clubs upgrade their facilities to meet the needs of football stakeholders.
- **To improve the economic performance and financial viability / sustainability of clubs.** The club licensing process assists clubs to improve their economic and financial capability as well as increasing their transparency and credibility. Club licensing also introduces more discipline and rationality in club football finances and encourages responsible spending for the long-term benefit of football. The IFA must continue to ensure that financial transparency and fair play receive the highest priority.
- **To continually monitor, assess and review the club licensing system and club monitoring process to ensure continued quality service delivery and a high level of stakeholder satisfaction.** The IFA must ensure that all clubs are dealt with efficiently and in a timely manner and that all necessary relevant information is communicated and available in good time. This will help to reduce the risk of poor performance by the licensor. The Irish Football Association will allow the development of benchmarking for clubs in financial, sporting, legal, personnel, administrative and infrastructure-related criteria throughout Northern Ireland.

Affirmation of Commitment to Club Licensing Scheme

The IFA acknowledges its responsibility towards licence applicants and as licensor will endeavour to provide the best possible service to its clubs including a commitment to:

- continually improve the effectiveness of the club licensing system and monitoring process
- provide the necessary support to licence applicants / licensees with regard to the club licensing system and monitoring process
- communicate the various rules and regulations to all relevant stakeholders in a timely manner
- behave in an ethical manner and respect the core values of confidentiality and independence

In order to continually improve the level of services we provide to our clubs and to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the club licensing and club monitoring process, the IFA will involve the clubs and all major stakeholders as closely as possible in the annual review.

The IFA offers a sizeable portion of its resources towards managing the licensing scheme and the club licensing unit is staffed by qualified individuals that administer the licensing scheme and assist all licence applicants through the licensing process.

The licensor is committed to communicating club licensing rules and regulations in a timely manner to all clubs engaged in the licensing process and will ensure that all relevant information is available to clubs to enable them to apply for a licence. The licensing unit communicates the club licensing policy internally to IFA staff including any relevant information and updates on club licensing and monitoring processes, with the policy also being published on the official IFA website.

The licensing process is transparent which enables the licensor to demonstrate to stakeholders that it adheres to the highest ethical standards necessary to maintain the credibility of the scheme. All persons directly involved in the club licensing system and monitoring process are required to sign confidentiality agreements and also declare in writing their independence upon appointment.

The IFA ensures that each licence 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 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.

Management of the Club Licensing System

The club licensing unit manages the Irish Football Association's Club Licensing Scheme for all clubs that wish to apply for a licence(s) that enables them to compete in the top division of domestic competition 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 unit providing the necessary support that will enable them to reach their objective of achieving a club licence.

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

The licensor remains committed to regularly communicating the various rules and regulations to all relevant stakeholders in a timely manner. Communication is made 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 unit 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.

Each club that applies for a licence will also be presented with a "Confidentiality Assurance" letter stating the confidentiality principles that the licensing unit abides by. A copy of this letter should be photocopied and kept by the club and the original copy returned to the licensing administration staff.

Review and Evaluation of Club Licensing System and club monitoring process

In the interests of promoting a scheme with clear and measurable objectives and results, the club licensing unit has developed a benchmarking scheme that allows the unit to review and evaluate the overall performance of the licensing scheme. Benchmarking will also enable the unit to see how clubs that apply for a club licence are faring against the criteria they are being assessed by and against other licence applicants.



Greg Shields

Director of Football Operations

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