

Sport Northern Ireland Athlete Awards 2025- 2026



Guidance Notes

Applications must be submitted by the governing body to Sport NI
by 4pm on Friday 14th March 2025

Email: performancesport@sportni.net

The *Athlete Award* is directed to athletes in Olympic/Paralympic and
Commonwealth sports only.



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1. ATHLETE AWARD

This investment is in line with Sport NI's Corporate Plan and strategic outcome two which is 'Our athletes among the best in the World'.

This programme seeks to help more NI athletes win at the highest level by targeting athletes who have the potential to achieve success and excel in Olympics, Paralympics and Commonwealth Games.

Where applicable, Sport NI will contribute to the essential personal living costs of an athlete.

1.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this investment aims to enable athletes to train in order to maximise potential. Those applying will be required to demonstrate the significant commitment required that their circumstances have changed, or need to change significantly, to allow them to adequately prepare for competition or to train as part of a National High Performance Programme targeting success in major international competition.

During assessment athletes who are transitioning onto or through National Sport programmes will be considered favourably. The intention of the athlete award is not long-term support but helping athletes at key times in the sporting pathway to enable their transition to the next level.

Sports may wish to consider athletes further down the Performance Pathway that have demonstrated financial need and have potential to develop towards National Programmes. This should be evidenced within the application and will be considered where young athletes are at risk from exclusion due to their personal circumstances.

The Athlete Award is not intended to meet training or competition costs for athletes where sports are in receipt of Programme funding. Sports who are not in receipt of the Sport Northern Ireland's 'Sports Systems Investment-Governing Bodies' programme may be able to demonstrate need where an Athlete Award could contribute to their sport costs.

In the 2025-26 Athlete Award year Sport NI will have a focus on athletes who can qualify and deliver performances at The Commonwealth Games 2026, and athletes on an Olympic/ Paralympic trajectory for Los Angeles 2028 , Dependent on budget available and the demonstrated need, athletes on a pathway for the Olympics and Paralympics in Brisbane 2032 may also be considered. These athletes may be able to achieve performances that demonstrate potential to transition onto World Class Programmes ahead of the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

When nominating athletes please ensure that the nominated athlete(s):

- Demonstrate an intention to change their circumstances to improve their performance levels, or that the athlete should be able to demonstrate that a change of circumstances has happened which has

been necessary for the athlete to improve their performance levels. **Examples** of these may include:

- Their training and competition programme significantly reduces their ability to meet the costs of daily living.
- The athlete faces additional costs due to relocation to ensure access to appropriate facilities and/or expertise.
- Athletes identified on National Performance Programme who have not yet reached the level to be funded by UK Sport or Sport Ireland.
- The financial burden of the sport is prohibiting the athlete from participating.

Nominated athletes must demonstrate anticipated financial need. The *purpose of this award is not a salary replacement scheme*. Sports should have a good understanding of the athletes' income and make the determination if an Athlete Award is appropriate. Sports must include in their consideration athlete income from sources such as sponsorship, prize money and Sport Scholarships to determine the need for additional financial support.

Sport NI may share details of athletes applying for Athlete Awards with the relevant national governing body and/or branch, UK Sport and Sport Ireland as appropriate. This will clarify the nature of any other support being provided to the athlete and the level of support required by the athlete to enable them to fulfil their performance programme.

More athletes transitioning into National programmes and onto National funding streams such as Sport Ireland's International Carding Scheme and UK Sport's Athlete Personal Award (APA) will also be an indicator of the success of the Athlete Award programme.

1.2 LEVELS OF AWARD

There are three levels of Athlete Award available, up to the following amounts:

1. £9,000
2. £5,000
3. £2,500

These are annual amounts and will be paid in two six-monthly instalments to the governing body in advance of the expenditure period. The sport is then responsible for distributing the award to the agreed named athletes. **This must be evidenced to Sport NI that this award has been received by the athlete through the subsequent submission of a bank statement/report.** Sports will confirm at each 6-monthly instalment that the named athlete(s) is (are) still competing and that circumstances of need for the award have not changed.

Governing bodies should note that when making amended or new applications at the half year stage, the amount of money available under each heading will be pro-rata i.e. 50% of the Full Year Award level. The amount of money (if any) granted to the athlete for the first half yearly allocation will also be taken into account.

Governing Bodies who do not apply at the annual stage of the Award nomination may submit a new nomination at the mid-year review. This will be considered and successful nominations will be dependent on budget available within the programme. These Governing Bodies may submit an 'Athlete Award Nomination' template by Friday 19th September 2025 to performancesport@sportni.net

1.3 ELIGIBILITY

Athletes that are in receipt of a UK Sport APA or Sport Ireland Carding will not normally be eligible. If there is a rationale as to how additional living cost support will allow additional benefits to be achieved by athletes, then this needs to be provided for consideration by Sport NI.

Sport NI recognise that athletes within the entry levels of UK Sport APA may have additional financial need where travel to mainland UK is required to attend national training. Sport NI also recognise that athletes in receipt of Sport Ireland's lower 'pool funding' system may still require financial assistance, where need can be demonstrated

It is the **responsibility of the governing body** to ensure that all athletes included in this application meet the following eligibility criteria:

- born in Northern Ireland; or
- born of a parent (or adoptive parent) born in Northern Ireland; or
- eligible to compete for Northern Ireland in the targeted competition.

2. ATHLETE NOMINATIONS

Nominations will normally be made by the Governing Body that is in receipt of 'Sports Systems Investment-Governing Bodies' investment*. It is expected that the Performance Lead will make the nominations and the athletes are identifiable on the sport's Performance Pathway.

**Sports not in receipt of 'Sports Systems Investment-Governing Bodies' 2025-26 investment may have athletes that are still eligible for Athlete Award investment and should provide the appropriate rationale for nomination.*

Please provide details of nominated athletes for an *Athlete Award*, providing the appropriate rationale on the 'Athlete Award Nominations' template. Please note the following points:

- Prioritise the athletes in terms of need for investment to enhance performance. This priority will be used by Sport NI in the event available funds do not meet demands for awards.
- Context of athletes' status within National Performance Programmes and level of funding received from the National Sports Council is required.
- The 'Impact of Award' section on the nomination form should demonstrate how the award will support your athlete(s) to "achieve success and excel in Olympics, Paralympics and Commonwealth Games."

Sport NI may require further detail about each athlete or their circumstances on receipt of the nominations.

If nominated athletes are successful in securing an Athlete Award, Sport NI may require further details about each athlete for records.

As awards are made in two six monthly instalments, Sport NI may consider similar nominations or changes to be made at the six-month review before the second instalment is paid to sports.

2.1 TEAM SPORTS

Team Sports will be dealt with differently than individual athletes as success depends on the strength of the team. Funding is not guaranteed and will depend on a number of factors including current performance standard, performance targets, affordability and partnership funding to which the sport has access.

Team sports should complete the 'Athlete Award Nominations' template and Sport NI will be in contact to discuss the need for an Athlete funding programme.

3. REVIEW AND REPORTING

The Athlete Awards will normally be an annual process with the award period from April to March of the following year.

Sports are required to provide up to date information on each athlete's performance and personal living circumstances and should notify Sport NI if these change during the award year. Prior to the release of the second payment, the sport would be required to demonstrate that the nominated athlete(s) is (are) still operating within their system.

Following each of the two Sport NI payments, it is the responsibility of the governing body to ensure that the amount paid to the governing body has been paid in full to the agreed recipient(s). Sport NI will require a bank statement/report to evidence that the award has been transferred to the athletes. If any bank fees are incurred in the onward payment to the athlete, these will be borne by the Governing Body.

Failure to submit all necessary information may result in a delay in making a decision and impact on the outcome of your application.

Sport NI will reserve the right to return applications deemed as 'incomplete' or 'inaccurate.'

3.1 ATHLETE PROGRESSION

Athletes being nominated or receiving awards year on year will be reviewed after 3 years. This Award is not in place to be a long-term solution to athlete living costs but a stepping stone to higher funding levels within the relevant National system (i.e. UK Sport or Sport Ireland). A '3 year rule' will apply where demonstrable progression within the sport must be evidenced by athletes who have accumulated 3 years on the Athlete Award. We understand that progression is sport specific and will consider this during the review. It is expected that athletes will transition onto UK Sport Athlete Personal Awards or Sport Ireland Carding Scheme (or similar scheme relevant to the sport).

4. CONDITIONS

4.1 ACCURACY OF INFORMATION

The Government's financial directions to Sport NI require us to obtain from award applicants whatever information may be necessary to safeguard funds, and to carry out random validation checks. Therefore, you should take care to ensure that the details you provide are correct.

4.2 SUSPECTED FRAUD

Applicants are advised that any materially misleading statements (whether deliberate or accidental) given at any stage during the application process or award period, could render the application invalid, the applicant invalid and the applicant liable to return any money already paid out on the programme.

Any allegations of fraud will be investigated and cases of suspected fraud referred to the PSNI. This includes falsification of information, inappropriate use of funds and misinformation at the application stage.

Information on applications is stored on computer and, in accordance with the Data Protection Act, such information is confidential. Any approach be it direct or indirect by an applicant, its officers, servants, contractors, personal or professional representatives or advisors made to members or officers of Sport NI, which, in the view of Sport NI or their advisors, constitutes an attempt in any way to influence the outcome of an application will, at the absolute discretion of Sport NI, render the application ineligible for further consideration.

4.3 DATA PROTECTION ACT 2018 & UK GDPR

Sport NI will use the information you give us on the application form during assessment and for the life of any grant we award you to administer and analyse grants and for our own research. Information will be kept for seven years after the programme closure.

Sport NI may give copies of this information to individuals and organisations we consult when assessing applications, when monitoring grants and evaluating the way our funding programmes work and the effect they have. These organizations may include accountants, external evaluators and other organisations or groups. Sport NI may also share information with other distributors, government departments, national anti-doping organisations, organisations provided matched funding and other organisations and individuals with a legitimate interest in applications and grants, or for the prevention or detection of fraud.

Sport NI might use the data you provide for our own research. Sport NI recognise the need to maintain the confidentiality of groups and their details will not be made public in any way, except as required by law.

4.4 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives members of the public the right to request any information that we hold. This includes information received from third parties, such as, although not limited to, grant applicants/recipients, grant holders, contractors and people making a complaint. If information is requested under the Freedom of Information Act Sport NI will release it, subject to exemptions, although Sport NI may consult with you first. If you think that information you are providing may be exempt from release if requested, you should let Sport NI know when you apply.

Applicants should note that in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, information regarding both successful and unsuccessful applications may be made available to the public via the World Wide Web and a variety of publications. This information will include, amongst other things:

- the applicant's name
- the list of athletes/teams
- the amount of funding applied for
- a summary of the application
- the amount awarded, if any
- monitoring information; and
- the duration of the award.

4.5 DECLARATION

We will take this form as confirmation that you understand our obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR that now applies in the UK as a result of Brexit, as well as and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and that you accept that we will not be liable for any loss or damage to you pursuant to our fulfilment of our obligations under the relevant law.

4.6 UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

Where an application is unsuccessful, Sport NI will issue a letter confirming its decision. Feedback will be available upon request.

Sport NI's Review Procedure is only relevant to decisions concerning applications for funding of £30,001 or more. Details of Sport NI's Review Procedure are available at <http://www.sportni.net/about/Procedures>.

4.7 SPORT NI'S DISCLAIMERS

Please read carefully.

A condition of the application to Sport NI for funding is that the applicant has read, understood and accepted the following:

1. Sport NI policies on funding are subject to change from time to time, including variations required to comply with directions on the distribution of funds. Sport NI reserves the right to amend, supplement and/or discontinue at its absolute discretion, for whatever reason, any or all of the policies, criteria and application procedures set out in its publications.

2. All applications are made entirely at the applicant's sole risk and Sport NI shall not be liable to any applicant or any other party in respect of loss, damage or costs of any nature arising directly or indirectly from:

- the application or the subject matter of the application or any part thereof; and/or
- the rejection for any reason of any application or any matter arising therefrom; and/or

- any delay in processing any application howsoever arising.

3. All decisions regarding applications are at the sole discretion of Sport NI.

4. Sport NI has used its best endeavors to provide clear and helpful guidance for potential applicants to the Athlete Award. Sport NI, its servants and agents shall not, however, at any time in any circumstances be held responsible or liable in relation to any matter whatsoever or whosoever arising in connection with the development, planning, operation, and/or administration of individual projects.

