

This guidance is to be used for all International Sportsperson governing body endorsement requests made on or after **1 August 2026**.

Section 1: Overview of governing body endorsements for the International Sportsperson route of the points-based system

This page provides a brief explanation of what endorsement requirements apply in respect of the International Sportsperson route of the points-based system. The Immigration Rules for the International Sportsperson route can be found at [Appendix International Sportsperson](#).

The **International Sportsperson** route is for elite sportspeople and coaches who:

- are internationally established and whose employment will make a significant contribution to the development of their sport at the highest level in the UK
- who will base themselves in the UK
- will be filling a post that cannot be filled by a suitable British citizen or person who has a right to enter or stay in the UK without restriction.

The application process explained: migrants applying to come to the UK under the International Sportsperson route need to be sponsored by an organisation that has an International Sportsperson sponsor licence.

If you wish to sponsor such migrants, you must have a sponsor licence. Before you apply to the Home Office for a licence you must be endorsed by the relevant **sports governing body** for your sport. This endorsement confirms to the Home Office that the application for a licence is from a genuine sports club (or equivalent) that has a legitimate requirement to bring migrants to the UK as sportspeople. Once licensed, you can assign certificates of sponsorship to a sportsperson or coach with a job offer that allows them to apply for entry clearance or permission to stay in the UK. Each individual must also have a personal endorsement from the relevant **approved sports governing body** for their sport before you assign the certificate of sponsorship.

An **approved sports governing body** is one specified in [Appendix Sports Governing Bodies](#) of the Immigration Rules. Each governing body must be recognised by one of the home country sports councils such as Sport Northern Ireland, and will have been approved by the Home Office before being included in [Appendix Sports Governing Bodies](#) of the Immigration Rules.

Sports governing bodies will work within the Home Office's '[Code of practice for sports governing bodies](#)' and must comply with any immigration regulations, UK legislation and the principles of the points-based system as detailed on the [GOV.UK](#) website.

Length of endorsement

Governing body endorsements should be issued for a period appropriate to the period of approval for sponsorship, that is:

Type of application	Length of endorsement
Sponsor	Endorsements for sponsors will not have an end date. They will be valid for as long as the sponsor holds a valid sponsor license.
Migrant	For an initial maximum period of 3 years, with a further extension of a maximum period of 3 years. If the contract is for fewer than 3 years, it will be issued for the length of the contract.

Change of employment

If a migrant is intending to change employer, their new employer must request a new governing body endorsement. The endorsement can be issued for the length of the contract or to the maximum period permitted within the route, whichever is the shorter. The new employer must assign a new certificate of sponsorship to the migrant to allow them to apply to the Home Office for new permission to stay. Permission to stay must be granted before the migrant can start work with the new employer.

Salary

The salary should be agreed as part of the contract between the migrant and the sponsor. This and the other conditions of employment should be at least equal to those normally given to a resident worker for the type of work undertaken.

Supplementary employment

International Sportsperson migrants are eligible to undertake supplementary employment under the Home Office supplementary employment regulations. The 'Supplementary employment' section [Workers and Temporary Workers: guidance for sponsors - Sponsor an International Sportsperson guidance](#) has more information on this.

Compliance with the Code of Practice for Sports Governing Bodies

In reviewing this criteria, the IRFU (Ulster Branch) confirm we have reread the Code 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.

Section 2: Requirements

This section explains the IRFU (Ulster Branch's) requirements under the International Sportsperson route for the 2026 to 2027 season.

Only the roles listed as part of this criteria are eligible for endorsement.

These requirements are applicable to Northern Ireland.

Consultation

IRFU (Ulster Branch) - Rugby Union Governing Body Endorsement Criteria

The requirements have been agreed by the Home Office following consultation with the IRFU (Ulster Branch), the IRFU and the other home nations governing bodies.

Prior to contacting the Home Office during the annual review of this criteria, The IRFU (Ulster Branch) confirm that full consultation has been carried out, this includes any organisation that could be interpreted as an interested party, such as clubs, bodies, or player associations related to rugby union in the UK.

Review

The requirements will be reviewed annually in June of each year. The next review will take place in **June 2027**. Clubs or rugby bodies who wish to propose changes for the review process to consider must submit those proposals to the IRFU (Ulster Branch).

Length of season

The season for rugby union runs from September to June.

Requirements

The table below shows the endorsement requirements for sponsors and migrants.

Category	Requirement	
Sponsor	The IRFU (Ulster Branch) may act as a sponsor in its own right, or issue a Governing Body Endorsement for a club to become a Sponsor if the club is participating in one of the following leagues: i. United Rugby Championship (URC)	
Migrant	Player	Initial applications

		In order for a migrant endorsement to be awarded, the player must meet one of the requirements listed below: i. A player must have played in at least one World Rugby ranking international test match (15-a-side), during the 24 months immediately prior to the date of application for one of the countries listed in the top 12 of the Men's World Rugby Rankings - Women's and Men's Rankings World Rugby - as of 1 July 2026. ii. A player must have played in at least three World Rugby ranking international test matches (15-a-side), during the 24 months immediately prior to the date of application for one of the countries ranking between 13th to 24th (inclusive) in the Men's World Rugby Rankings - Women's and Men's Rankings World Rugby - as of 1 July 2026. iii. A player must have played in at least one World Rugby ranking international match (15-a-side), during the 24 months immediately prior to the date of application from one of the countries ranking between 13th to 24th (inclusive) in the Men's World Rugby Rankings - Women's and Men's Rankings World Rugby – as of the 1 July 2026 and have played at least 50% of games during the 24 months immediately prior to the application in one of the leagues listed in v. below. iv. A player must have played in at least three World Rugby ranking international matches (15-a-side), during the 24 months immediately prior to the date of application for one of the countries listed at 25th or below in the Men's World Rugby Rankings - Women's and Men's Rankings World Rugby - as of 1 July 2026 and have played in a minimum of 10 full international matches (15-a-side), during their playing career.
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		v. A player must have played in at least 75% of matches, during the 24 months immediately prior to the date of application in the following leagues: • URC and EPCR Competitions • Super Rugby • Top 14 and EPCR Competitions • English PREM and EPCR Competitions • English Champ Rugby • French Pro D2 • Super Rygbi Cymru • Japan Rugby League One • Currie Cup • New Zealand National Provincial Championship vi. If a player is 23 or under (on the date of application) they must have played in at least 40% of matches, during the 24 months immediately prior to the date of application in the leagues listed in v. above vii. Should a player aged 23 or under (on the date of application) not have met the criteria as set out in vi. above, they must have played in at least 80% of World Rugby sanctioned U20 international match (15-a-side), during the period in which the player was eligible to participate in such fixtures. ‘EPCR Competitions’ shall mean the EPCR Rugby Challenge Cup and the EPCR Rugby Champions Cup (including the play-off matches for a position in the Champions Cup) Extension or change of employment application In order for a migrant endorsement to be awarded for an extension or change of employment application, the player must:
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		i. continue to meet the initial application requirements, or ii. have played in at least 75% of matches for their sponsor for the period of their previous permission in one of the following leagues: - English Champ Rugby and Premiership Cup - English PREM and EPCR Competitions - United Rugby Championship and EPCR Competitions - Super Rygbi Cymru Loans (temporary change of employment) A player may move temporarily to another club in the UK on a loan basis. The loaning club shall retain overall responsibility for the player (as the player's employer and sponsor) and the player will be granted permission to move temporarily under the provisions of their current leave, provided that the Certificate of Sponsorship issued by the loaning club is valid for the duration of the loan period. The player must be registered with the relevant governing body and club for whom they are competing, for the duration of the loan period. If the loan is subsequently made permanent, the new club will, at this time, be required to submit a new governing body endorsement application on behalf of the player to the relevant governing body and the player must be approved for a new grant of permission under the International Sports person route by the Home Office, before the player will be eligible to play as a permanent employee of that new club.
	Director of Rugby/ Head Coach	Initial, extension or change of employment applications In order for a migrant endorsement to be awarded to a Director of Rugby/Head Coach, a migrant must meet one of the requirements listed below: A migrant must have been contracted in a Director of Rugby or Head Coach role to a senior men's 15-a-

		side full international team that is currently ranked in the top 12 of the Men's World Rugby rankings - Women's and Men's Rankings World Rugby - as of 1 July 2026 for a minimum of 12 months, during the 48 months immediately prior to the date of application. OR A migrant must have been contracted in a Director of Rugby or Head Coach role to an U20 or Sevens international team competing in the U20 6 Nations, U20 Rugby Championship, Junior World cup or World Rugby SVNS Series for a minimum of 12 months during the 48 months immediately prior to the date of application. OR A migrant must have been contracted in a Director of Rugby or Head Coach role for a minimum of 12 months, during the 48 months immediately prior to the date of application for a team that is currently competing in one of the following leagues: • English Champ Rugby • English PREM • United Rugby Championship • French Pro D2 • Super Rugby • Top 14 • Super Rygbi Cymru • Japan Rugby League One • Currie Cup Premier Division • New Zealand National Provincial Championship It should be noted that a club/union may have only one migrant endorsement for either a Director of Rugby or a Head Coach. In addition, no endorsements are available for player/coaches. Applications will only be considered as a player or as a Director of Rugby or Head Coach.
	Assistant Coach / Skills Coach	Initial, extension or change of employment applications In order for a migrant endorsement to be awarded to an Assistant Coach / Skills Coach, a migrant must meet one of the requirements listed below:

	A migrant must have been contracted in an Assistant Coach / Skills Coach role to a senior male 15-a-side full international team that is ranked in the top 12 of the Men's World Rugby rankings - Women's and Men's Rankings World Rugby - as of 1 July 2026 for a minimum of 12 months, during the 48 months immediately prior to the date of application. OR A migrant must have been contracted in an Assistant Coach / Skills Coach role to an U20 or Sevens international team competing in the U20 6 Nations, U20 Rugby Championship, Junior World Cup or World Rugby SVNS Series for a minimum of 12 months during the 48 months immediately prior to the date of application. OR A migrant must have been contracted in an Assistant Coach / Skills Coach role for a minimum of 12 months, during the 48 months immediately prior to the date of application for a team that is currently competing in one of the following leagues: ○ English Champ Rugby ○ English PREM ○ United Rugby Championship ○ French Top 14 ○ French Pro D2 ○ Super Rygbi Cymru ○ Japan Rugby League One ○ Currie Cup Premier Divison ○ Super Rugby ○ New Zealand National Provincial Championship It should be noted that no endorsements are available for player/coaches. Applications will only be considered as a player or as an Assistant Coach / Skills Coach.
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	Head of Performance	Initial, extension or change of employment applications In order for a migrant endorsement to be awarded to a Head of Performance, a migrant must meet one of the requirements listed below: A migrant must have been contracted in a Head of Performance role to a senior men's 15-a-side full international team that is currently ranked in the top 12 of the World Rugby rankings - Women's and Men's Rankings World Rugby - as of 1 July 2026 for a minimum of 24 months, during the 48 months immediately prior to the date of application. OR A migrant must have been contracted in a Head of Performance role to an U20 or Sevens international team competing in the U20 6 Nations, U20 Rugby Championship, Junior World Cup or World Rugby SVNS Series for a minimum of 24 months during the 48 months immediately prior to the date of application. OR A migrant must have been contracted in a Head of Performance role for a minimum of 24 months, during the 48 months immediately prior to the date of application for a team that is currently competing in one of the following leagues: • English Champ • English PREM • United Rugby Championship • French Top 14 • French Pro D2 • Super Rugby • Currie Cup • Super Rygbi Cymru • Japan Rugby League One • New Zealand National Provincial Championship
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		In addition, the migrant must hold a degree in Sports and Exercise Science, Performance Analysis or a related discipline. It should be noted that a club/union may have only one migrant endorsement for a Head of Performance role.
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Injuries, Absences and Suspensions

Matches for which the applicant was unavailable for selection are to be excluded when calculating the applicant appearance percentage. Unavailable for selection means the applicant was not available to participate due to injury or suspension and written evidence supporting this, setting out the games missed and the reason(s), must be provided by the applicant's National Association or club doctor to the IRFU (Ulster Branch) for consideration.

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 governing body endorsement, 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 offence.

Dispute handling procedures

Where an application for either a player to play in a team or a coach to coach a team in one of the leagues covered by the requirements for a governing body endorsement (or for the IRFU (Ulster Branch) itself) as set out for International Sportsperson has been refused on the grounds that the player or coach fails to meet the published requirements, the sponsor may seek a review of the application. The sponsor will have 28 days to request such a review. In these cases the IRFU (Ulster Branch) will refer the sponsor's evidence to an independent panel as set out below.

Where possible the sponsor's supporting evidence will be sent to the panel in

advance for their consideration in order to allow an informed decision.

Sponsors should note that, in respect of any application, there will only be one panel available and the decision of the panel is final. Sponsors should therefore ensure that all evidence it wishes to present in support of its application is presented to the panel.

If the sponsor has previously made an application that was unsuccessful at panel a further panel cannot be requested for the same player during the season unless his status changes and he meets the requirements whereby a new application can be submitted.

a. The Review

The request for a review may only be made by the sponsor for whom the governing body endorsement has been initially rejected by the IRFU (Ulster Branch).

A review shall be commenced by the appellant lodging with the IRFU (Ulster Branch), a notice of appeal within 28 days of the decision appealed against. The notice of appeal shall

- i. set out details of the decision appealed against and, if the whole of the decision is not appealed against, identify that part of it which is appealed against; and
- ii. set out in full the grounds of appeal; an appellant shall not be entitled to rely in appeal any ground of appeal not set out in the notice of appeal.

b. The Panel

The panel will be appointed by the IRFU (Ulster Branch). The appointed panel shall consist of:

- (i) an independent Chairman (who should be a solicitor or Barrister not associated with the IRFU (Ulster Branch));
- (ii) one representative of the Irish Rugby Football Union; and
- (iii) one representative of the IRFU (Ulster Branch) Professional Game Committee.

c. Power of the Panel

An endorsement request may be refused if the migrant does not meet the relevant criteria set out in this document or fails to provide the mandatory documents. IRFU Ulster Branch will notify a sponsor in writing of any endorsement request which is refused setting out the reasons for refusal.

A sponsor shall have 7 days from the date of the written refusal to submit an appeal in writing to the IRFU Ulster Branch. A sponsor may only appeal on the basis that

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the IRFU have not applied the endorsement criteria correctly.

The IRFU Ulster Branch shall consider the appeal and any evidence submitted in support and shall, within 7 working days of the receipt of the appeal, notify the Player of its decision.

d. The Decision

The panel will make a decision using only the above criteria which shall be final and binding. There are no other grounds of appeal.

Section 3: Process for applying for an endorsement

Sponsors wishing to apply for governing body endorsements should apply in writing to the Chief Executive's Office, IRFU (Ulster Branch) with full details.

Further information

This information is available on the IRFU (Ulster Branch) website at www.ulster.rugby

For any queries relating to the requirements or the endorsement process please contact:

The Chief Executive's Office
IRFU Ulster Branch Stadium
134 Mount Merrion Avenue
BELFAST
BT6 0FT

Information on visas and immigration is available on the GOV.UK website.