

U18 ATHLETE RECRUITMENT POLICY

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1. PURPOSE

British Fencing (BF) recognises that athletes and, where an athlete is under 18, their parents or guardians have the right to choose where, and with whom, they train.

The athlete does not belong to a club or coach

Athletes may change clubs or coaches where they and their parent or guardian believe this is in their best interests. BF's role is not to prevent or unnecessarily restrict athlete movement. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that recruitment activity involving athletes under 18 is conducted ethically, transparently and in a manner which:

- 1.1 protects athlete welfare and choice.
- 1.2 prevents coercive, persistent or misleading recruitment.
- 1.3 prevents the misuse of positions of trust or influence.

- 1.4 prevents the inappropriate use of information obtained through British Fencing activities.
- 1.5 promotes professional relationships between coaches and clubs.
- 1.6 supports a healthy fencing ecosystem in which athlete development is at the centre.

This policy recognises both athlete choice and the need to regulate coach behaviour. This policy and the BF Good Practice Guide separates those two principles more explicitly.

2. PRINCIPLES

The following principles underpin this policy:

1. **Athlete choice** - Athletes and their parents or guardians have the right to choose their coach and club.
2. **Athlete welfare** - The welfare and long-term development of the athlete must take priority over the competitive, reputational or commercial interests of coaches or clubs.
3. **Ethics** - Recruitment must be honest, transparent and respectful.
4. **Freedom from pressure** - Athletes and families must be able to consider coaching and club options without coercion, persistent unwanted contact, threats or inappropriate inducement.
5. **Professional conduct** - Coaches and clubs should respect the legitimate role played by other coaches and clubs in an athlete's development.
6. **No detriment** - An athlete must not be disadvantaged within BF programmes, selection processes or services because of their choice of club or personal coach.

3. SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS

This policy applies to:

- British Fencing affiliated clubs;
- British Fencing licensed coaches;
- club officials and volunteers; and
- coaches and other personnel operating within British Fencing national squads, talent programmes, camps and other BF activities.

Compliance with the mandatory provisions of this policy is a condition of relevant British Fencing affiliation, licence or appointment.

The policy applies specifically to recruitment involving athletes under the age of 18.

Recruitment involving adults should follow the same ethical principles, but adult athletes remain responsible for their own decisions concerning club and coach.

For this policy the following definitions apply:

- **Athlete** means a fencer aged under 18.

- **Recruitment** means communication or conduct specifically intended to encourage an athlete to leave or materially change their existing club or coaching relationship in favour of another club or coach. For the avoidance of doubt, ordinary coaching conversations, open advertising, invitations to open training opportunities, competition conversations and legitimate cross-club training or sparring do not, by themselves, constitute recruitment.
- **Current Club** means a club of which the athlete is currently a member or at which they are receiving regular coaching.
- **Receiving Club** means a club which the athlete is considering joining or to which they are considering transferring.
- **British Fencing information** means non-public information concerning an athlete obtained by an individual through their BF role, including performance, development, medical, welfare or programme information.
- **Approach** means recruitment communication initiated by a coach, club official or someone acting on their behalf.

4. UNACCEPTABLE CONDUCT

A coach, club official, volunteer or person acting on their behalf **must not** engage in:

- 4.1 **Persistent or unwanted recruitment** - Repeatedly target an athlete or their parent/guardian for recruitment after they have indicated that they do not wish to pursue the conversation. Any recruitment approach must cease when the athlete or their parent/guardian asks for it to stop.
- 4.2 **Misrepresentation and disparagement** - Seek to persuade an athlete to change club or coach through knowingly false or misleading statements about another coach, club or British Fencing programme. A coach must not use inappropriate disparagement of another coach or club as a recruitment tactic. This does not prevent a coach from responding honestly to questions from an athlete or parent or raising legitimate welfare or safeguarding concerns through the appropriate channels.
- 4.3 **Offering inappropriate financial inducement** - Offer an athlete or family a financial benefit, gift or other material incentive where its primary purpose is to procure the athlete's transfer from another club. This does not prohibit:
 - publicly advertised membership or lesson rates;
 - introductory offers available generally;
 - sibling or family discounts;
 - hardship assistance;
 - bursaries or scholarships operating under published or objectively applied criteria; or
 - reasonable financial support provided for genuine athlete-development purposes.
- 4.4 **Coercion** - Apply pressure, threats or improper influence intended to cause an athlete to change club or coach. This includes suggesting that failure to change club or coach will adversely affect the athlete's access to British Fencing programmes, selection, coaching or other opportunities.

- 4.5 **Encouraging or facilitating breaches of existing obligations** - Knowingly encourage an athlete or their parent/guardian to breach a lawful existing contractual obligation to another club or coach. Nothing in this provision prevents an athlete or family from exercising any legitimate contractual right to terminate an agreement.
- 4.6 **Misuse of British Fencing information** - Use non-public information obtained through a British Fencing role, camp, programme or activity for the purpose of recruiting an athlete to a personal or connected club or coaching business.
- 4.7 **Misuse of training and sparring** - Use apparently neutral training or sparring invitations as a disguised means of persistent or coercive recruitment. Nothing in this provision prevents genuine cross-club training, sparring or development opportunities.

5. GBR PATHWAY COACHES

People operating in a British Fencing role hold an additional position of trust and influence. When acting in a BF capacity, they **must**:

- 5.1 Not use their British Fencing position to recruit an athlete to their own club, coaching business or another club with which they have a material connection.
- 5.2 Not state, imply or create the reasonable impression that an athlete's choice of club or personal coach will influence selection.
- 5.3 Not state, imply or create the reasonable impression that an athlete's choice of club or personal coach will influence access to British Fencing coaching, programmes or services.
- 5.4 Not initiate recruitment conversations while operating in a British Fencing capacity at camps, squad activities or competitions.
- 5.5 Not use non-public athlete information obtained through their BF role for personal or club advantage.
- 5.6 Declare conflicts of interest. Where a person involved in a recruitment concern has both a British Fencing role and a personal, club or commercial interest in the matter, that interest must be declared. They must not participate on behalf of British Fencing in any decision concerning that dispute unless BF determines that the conflict can be appropriately managed.

6. SAFEGUARDING

This policy does not prevent an athlete, parent, coach or club from taking necessary action to protect an athlete from harm. Safeguarding concerns must be reported in accordance with BF Safeguarding Policy ([REPORT A CONCERN - BRITISH FENCING](#)). Where a safeguarding concern arises during a proposed club move, safeguarding and athlete welfare take priority over normal expectations for communication between clubs. An athlete or family must **not** be required to contact a coach or club if doing so could reasonably create a safeguarding or welfare risk. Should safeguarding concerns arise the recruitment process should be paused whilst the concern is investigated.

7. REPORTING AND DETERMINATION OF CONCERNS

Concerns about possible breaches of this policy may be reported to British Fencing.

On receipt, BF will determine whether the matter is:

- 7.1 capable of informal resolution;
- 7.2 a potential breach of this policy or the BF Code of Conduct;
- 7.3 a safeguarding matter;
- 7.4 a disciplinary matter; or
- 7.5 outside BF's jurisdiction.

Where formal action may result in a sanction, the matter will be dealt with under the applicable British Fencing disciplinary, safeguarding or complaints procedure. The individual and/or club concerned will be informed of the substance of the allegation and provided with a reasonable opportunity to respond, subject to any safeguarding requirements. Any formal determination and right of appeal will be governed by the applicable BF procedure. Concerns about recruitment (irrespective of the age of an athlete) may be reported to BF using the forms available on the Contact Us page - <https://www.britishfencing.com/about-us-zone/contact-us/>.

8. OUTCOMES

Where appropriate, minor or inadvertent matters may be addressed through one or more of:

- 8.1 advice
- 8.2 education
- 8.3 facilitated discussion
- 8.4 mediation
- 8.5 agreed changes to future practice
- 8.6 formal disciplinary action.

No suspension, removal from a British Fencing appointment or other formal disciplinary sanction will be imposed solely under this policy without the process required by the applicable BF procedure.

9. ADDITIONAL RELATED DOCUMENTS

- a) BF Good Practice Guide
- b) BF's Code of Conduct - [Codes of Conduct - BRITISH FENCING](#)
- c) BF's Safeguarding Policies and Procedures
- d) BF's Disciplinary Code.

ATHLETE RECRUITMENT POLICY - DRAFT

Version History (can be placed at end)

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v0.3		DM/GU	Final checks and tidy for consultation

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