

U18 ATHLETE RECRUITMENT GUIDANCE

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Owner: Head of Olympic Performance

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1. PURPOSE

This good practice guidance is intended to support clubs, coaches, parents and athletes when implementing the BF U18 Athlete Recruitment Policy.

2. CONTEXT

Moving club or changing coach can be a significant decision for a young athlete. It can also be difficult for everyone involved. An athlete may have spent years with a coach and coaches may have invested considerable time and energy in the athlete's development. Alongside this, parents may have built a close relationship with a club and its wider membership.

BF wants these transitions to be handled in a way that puts the young person first.

The athlete does not belong to a club or coach.

Athletes and their parents have the right to decide where and with whom they train. British Fencing's role is to support athlete choice while encouraging respectful, professional relationships between athletes, parents, coaches and clubs. Good practice is

therefore about how that choice is supported, rather than whether the athlete should be allowed to make it.

3. GUIDANCE FOR ATHLETES AND PARENTS

If you are considering changing club or coach, you should feel able to explore your options.

- Speak to other coaches.
- Visit other clubs.
- Attend open sessions.
- Explore different training environments.
- Ask about coaching, costs and opportunities.
- Decide which environment best meets your needs.

You do not need permission from British Fencing or your existing coach to explore another club.

Where it is safe and appropriate, however, we encourage you to speak to your current coach before making a final decision. That conversation can be difficult, particularly where there is a strong relationship between athlete and coach. Parents and other trusted adults should help young athletes manage it.

4. GUIDANCE FOR THE CURRENT COACH

Finding out that an athlete is considering leaving can be disappointing. It may feel personal. Try not to make it so. Your role at this point is to help the athlete make the best decision for their development.

You can do this by

- Listening before responding.
- Asking what the athlete is looking for.
- Avoiding criticism of the receiving coach or club.
- Not placing the athlete under pressure to stay.
- Giving the athlete and family space to make their decision.
- Providing relevant information honestly.
- Making the transition professional if they decide to leave.

An athlete choosing another environment does not erase the contribution you have made to their development.

5. GUIDANCE FOR THE RECEIVING COACH

There is an important difference between providing an opportunity and recruiting an athlete away from somebody else.

It is entirely reasonable to:

- Respond when an athlete or parent contacts you.
- Explain your coaching approach.
- Explain your fees.
- Invite someone to an open session.
- Allow them to experience your training environment.
- Answer reasonable questions.
- Explain what opportunities your club provides.

You should not need to criticise another coach or club to explain the value of your own environment.

If an athlete decides that your environment is right for them, let the quality of that environment make the case.

6. COACH-TO-COACH COMMUNICATION

Where an athlete is seriously considering moving, open communication between coaches will often help. The receiving coach should normally encourage the parent to speak to the existing coach.

Once the family has indicated that they are seriously considering a transfer, and with their knowledge, a conversation between the two coaches may also be helpful.

What does this athlete need next?

That is a better starting point than asking: Who is entitled to coach this athlete?

There will, however, be circumstances where direct communication is inappropriate, particularly where there are safeguarding, welfare or relationship concerns. Athlete welfare comes first. If the coaches cannot have a conversation then the Club Welfare Officers of the clubs should.

7. SPARRING AND CROSS-CLUB TRAINING

BF wants athletes and coaches to collaborate across clubs. Training with another club should not automatically be treated as recruitment.

Athletes benefit from:

- Different sparring partners.
- Exposure to different styles.
- Training camps.
- Open sessions.
- Specialist coaching.
- Collaboration between clubs.

Receiving coaches should nevertheless be sensitive to how repeated invitations might reasonably be perceived. Where an athlete regularly trains at another club, transparent communication between the athlete, parent and coaches is usually preferable.

8. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Clubs may legitimately offer scholarships, hardship support, bursaries, discounted membership, introductory offers and other forms of athlete support. The important distinction is why the support is being offered.

Support designed genuinely to enable participation is positive. A private financial offer made specifically to persuade a particular young athlete to leave another club risks becoming an inappropriate inducement. Clubs should therefore make financial support arrangements transparent and, where possible, apply published or objective eligibility criteria.

9. GBR PATHWAY COACHES

GBR Pathway Coaches have nuanced responsibilities because athletes and parents may perceive them as having influence over selection and progression. A GBR Pathway Coach should therefore be careful to separate their British Fencing role from their club or personal coaching role. Athletes should never believe that joining a club where a GBR Pathway Coach is operating will improve their chances of GBR selection or programme support. Where a GBR Pathway Coach has a personal or club interest in an athlete's potential transfer, transparency is essential.

10. WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Not every disagreement about an athlete moving clubs is misconduct. Sometimes communication is poor, people are upset, assumptions are made, relationships break down, or coaches genuinely disagree about what is best for the athlete. Where possible, British Fencing encourages adults to resolve those situations professionally.

Concerns become more serious where there is evidence of:

- Persistent unwanted recruitment
- Coercion or intimidation
- Deliberate misinformation
- Inappropriate financial inducement
- Abuse of a national or other position of trust
- Misuse of non-public British Fencing information
- Safeguarding concerns.

Those matters will require British Fencing involvement.

11. A SIMPLE TRANSFER MODEL



Explore: The athlete and family explore their options without pressure.

Discuss: They speak to prospective coaches and, where appropriate, their existing coach.

Decide: The athlete and parent make the decision.

Communicate: The decision is communicated respectfully. Coaches speak where useful and appropriate.

Transfer: The clubs facilitate the transition professionally and put the athlete's continued development first.

Where appropriate, clubs are encouraged to consider a reasonable transition or return period so that a young athlete who finds that a move is not right for them can return without unnecessary financial penalty. Any such arrangement should be clear, proportionate and agreed by the relevant parties.

12. SAFEGUARDING

This guidance 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.

13. PRINCIPLE

The athlete chooses. The adults make the process safe, respectful and professional.

Version History

Version Number	Date Updated	Updated by	Comments
v0.1	10 September	Dusty Miller	First draft

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

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