Student Athletes

Policy
SEPTEMBER 2026

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Policy Information

Policy Name	Student Athletes
Policy Owner	UU Sport and Learning Enhancement Directorate
Policy Author	Talented Athletes Task and Finish Group
Policy Clinic	14th May 2026
Equality Screening First Signature	Professor Odette Hutchinson, 16th September 2026
Equality Screening Second Signature	Damian McAllister, 17th September 2026
Trade Union Approval	Not Applicable
Scrutiny Body	Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee
Approval Body	Senate
Date of Approval	16th September 2026
Version Number	1.0
Version Approval Date	16th September 2026
Next Review Date	June 2030

Queries relating to this document should be directed to the Policy Owner (sport@ulster.ac.uk). This document can be made available on request, in alternative formats and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English.

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Aims, Purpose and Scope

Ulster University acknowledges the value that sport contributes to individual development, university life, and wider society. This Policy formalises the University's commitment to enabling Student Athletes to succeed in higher education while participating in recognised sporting commitments at the highest levels. It provides a consistent institutional framework to guide staff and students in ensuring that Student Athletes are supported to pursue academic study and sporting achievement concurrently.

This Policy applies to all registered and occasional students of the University, particularly those classified as a Student Athlete under this policy. It also applies to staff involved in supporting these students. This Policy does not apply to associate and affiliate students who should seek guidance from their home institution if a similar policy exists for them.

Definitions

Student Athletes are students of the University whose sporting commitments are formally recognised under this Policy.

Talented Athletes (formerly known as **Elite Athletes**) are students who, prior to entry and through the agreed process, have been formally recognised by the University for their sporting achievements and who are admitted with tailored entrance requirements where applicable, and a package of support, with the expectation that they will represent the University at intervarsity (varsity) level in specified sports. Talented Athlete status only applies at first application to the university at undergraduate level and cannot be designated retrospectively.

A Dual-Career Athlete is a Student Athlete who combines higher education study with a high-level sporting career. This may include:

Performance Athletes are students with senior representative honours at county, provincial or national level, in line with the competitive structure of their sport and/or who are part of their governing body performance development programme (or equivalent) where such a structure exists.

High-Performance Athletes are students who are in receipt of a Sport Northern Ireland Athlete Award (or equivalent), who are a Carded Athlete under the Sport Ireland International Carding Scheme or are in receipt of an Athlete Performance Award from UK Sport. This may include students representing Northern Ireland, Ireland or Great Britain at senior international level in a sport with a Sport Northern Ireland, Sport Ireland or UK Sport recognised governing body, or international students representing their own country at senior international level (or equivalent) in a sport recognised by a body comparable to a governing body in that country. "Senior" refers to athletes competing in the adult category of their sport, which, depending on the regulations of the relevant governing body, may begin at age 18, 19 or 20.

Talented Athletes may seek additional designation as a Dual-Career Athlete. It is not a requirement to have been a Talented Athlete to seek designation as a Dual-Career

Athlete. The Policy may also apply, at the discretion of UU Sport, to a student of the University who has chosen to follow a Dual-Career pathway as a performance sport practitioner and can demonstrate that they are part of a national performance sport pathway.

Policy Statement

Admission as a Talented Athlete

The University will assist potential first time Level 3 applicants eligible for consideration as a Talented Athlete to gain admission to the University for full-time undergraduate studies. This includes tailored entrance requirements where applicable, and a package of support, as agreed at the beginning of the admissions cycle.

To be eligible for admission via this route, applicants must:

- Participate in a sport recognised by Student Sport Ireland and/or British Universities and Colleges Sport through which opportunities exist for students to compete at intervarsity level for Ulster University.
- Have been selected for appropriate competition within an agreed time period, as determined by the University at the beginning of the admissions cycle.
- Satisfy the general and specific conditions for the offer, including any additional selection methods required by the programme of study.
- Choose Ulster University as a “Firm” choice when making an application through the UCAS system.
- Agree to represent the University in their chosen sport throughout their undergraduate studies, subject to fitness and selection.

The University reserves the rights to vary the list of eligible sports and competition criteria, apply caps to the places available for Talented Athletes, and impose additional eligibility criteria such as interviews at the beginning of each admissions cycle.

Designation as a Talented Athlete cannot be granted after the admissions process has concluded. The University also reserves the right to withdraw designation as a Talented Athlete and/or access to related services if the Talented Athlete is no longer competing in the sport under which Talented Athlete status was achieved, or at a lower level than previously agreed, or if the Talented Athlete refuses to represent the university in said sport without good reason.

No specific admissions route for potential Student Athletes is available for postgraduate taught or postgraduate research programmes.

Designation as a Dual-Career Athlete

A student who has been admitted to the university seeking designation as a Dual-Career Athlete must apply in the manner and within the timeframe specified by UU Sport and will be required to provide appropriate documentary evidence of their sporting status.

UU Sport, with regard to this evidence and in consultation with relevant internal and external parties, will determine if the student meets the criteria of a Dual-Career Athlete, with regard to the level and nature of the student's sporting achievements, and, if successful, whether they should be designated as Performance or High-Performance Athletes.

Talented Athletes may seek additional designation as a Dual-Career Athlete. It is not a requirement to have been a Talented Athlete to seek designation as a Dual-Career Athlete.

Designation as a Dual-Career Athlete will normally apply for a defined period to be set by the University and may be reviewed, renewed, varied or withdrawn by UU Sport where the student's sporting commitments or academic circumstances materially change. Students must provide updated evidence on request.

Supporting our Student Athletes

UU Sport will assign a Dual-Career Co-ordinator to support Student Athletes and their development. Each School or Department should have a designated Student Athlete Academic Lead to act as a point of contact for all matters related to Student Athletes.

Student Athletes must remain in good academic standing at all times. If a Student Athlete is unable to remain in good academic standing, their status as a Student Athlete may be terminated.

Where the Student Athlete is following a Dual-Career Pathway, the Dual-Career Athlete, the Dual-Career Co-ordinator and the Student Athlete Academic Lead, in consultation with the Studies Advisor, Programme Director, Module Co-ordinator(s) and other relevant parties as needed, will agree an Individual Development Plan to ensure the best academic and sporting outcomes for the student while studying at the University. These Dual-Career Athletes must meet at least twice a semester with the Dual-Career Co-ordinator and, where required, with the Student Athlete Academic Lead, and Programme Director or Studies Advisor to review their progress and the contents of the Individual Development Plan.

Any intention to travel for international sporting representation, where known in advance, should be included in the Individual Development Plan from the outset. International students with permission to study in the UK remain subject to the conditions of their visa and to the University's duties as a Student Sponsor. Any support arrangements agreed under this Policy must therefore be consistent with the relevant visa requirements and the University's sponsorship responsibilities. Student Athletes, who are also international students, are responsible for seeking advice

from the University and UK Visas and Immigration before engaging in travel, sporting activities or amendments to their studies. They should also be aware that some provisions of this Policy may be limited or unavailable where visa requirements would be affected. Where there is a conflict or inconsistency between UKVI policy and this policy UKVI policy will prevail.

Scholarships and other forms of sport-related financial or in-kind support may be available to Student Athletes in accordance with the criteria, processes and conditions set by the University annually. Students applying for or receiving such support must comply with the requirements of the relevant application process, scholarship agreement and any associated University policies and procedures. Award of a scholarship does not remove the Student Athlete's responsibility to engage appropriately with their studies, maintain any academic, conduct or sporting requirements attached to the award, and comply with the expectations of this Policy. The University reserves the right to review, vary, suspend or withdraw scholarship support where the relevant conditions are no longer met.

Attendance and Authorised Absence

The University's General Regulations for Registered and Occasional Students state that students must be punctual and regular in their attendance at such classes or other forms of instruction as may be prescribed, and that students shall keep the prescribed dates for their programmes of study. However, given the demands of their sport, Student Athletes may be unable to be punctual and regular in keeping the prescribed dates. In the first instance, Student Athletes should follow the University's Policy on Attendance and Engagement, especially for non-sport related absences. Repeated unauthorised absence may lead to the Student Athlete being withdrawn from their programme. Student Athletes, who are also international students, should be aware that their visa requirements may limit the flexibility available for attendance and authorised absence.

Sports-related absences may include participation in trials, assessments or qualifying events organised by National Governing Bodies, recognised national or international competitions, participation in required official training sessions for these competitions, travel time to attend such events, competitions and training, and appointments directly related to sport performance or injury that could not be scheduled outside of the module's prescribed dates.

Sports-related absences do not include general training, conditioning or performance sessions, especially those than can be scheduled around academic commitments, participation in competitions below the Student Athlete's recognised level, non-competition events such as media appearances, and paid or unpaid unrelated sporting commitments such as coaching.

Absences related to sports-related illness, injury and prolonged medical treatment should be dealt with according to the same University policies as those for non-sports related illness, injury and prolonged medical treatment.

For sports-related absences, Dual-Career Athletes must attend the module's prescribed dates in line with their Individual Development Plan and agreed by the Dual-Career Co-ordinator, Student Athlete Academic Lead, other members of the

Programme Team and the Dual-Career Athlete. Where possible, planned dates of absence should be included in the Individual Development Plan from the outset.

Dual-Career Athletes should normally make sport-related absences not previously included in the Individual Development Plan known to the Dual-Career Co-ordinator, their Student Athlete Academic Lead and the relevant Module Co-ordinator at least three working days in advance of the absence and provide appropriate evidence in order for the absence to be recorded as authorised. Requirements not made known in this timeframe may lead to the absence being recorded as unauthorised.

Dual-Career Athletes may not be absent from their prescribed programme dates for more than five consecutive days at one time, unless agreed in their Individual Development Plan and with an Independent Study Plan put in place.

Absences greater than five consecutive programme days that are not able to be facilitated by Independent Study Plans as detailed below may require the Student Athlete to pursue part-time study, extended study or a Leave of Absence in line with the relevant University policies.

Student Athletes should be aware that significant absences may impact upon their ability to meet the requirements of their particular programme's Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies' (PSRB) requirements, and therefore interfere with their ability to obtain professional registration or accreditation. It is the responsibility of the Student Athlete to maintain awareness of the relevant PSRB requirements and act accordingly to maintain their standing in relation to these requirements.

Independent Study Plans

Where absences will exceed five consecutive programme days, the Student Athlete Academic Lead, members of the relevant programme team and the Dual-Career Athlete will agree an Independent Study Plan as an appendix to the Individual Development Plan. The Independent Study Plan will outline how module learning outcomes will be met outside of impacted module activities, the timing and manner of how these independent study activities are to be completed, the evidence required by the programme team to confirm the Dual-Career Athlete has independently and fully completed these activities, and how and which University colleagues will provide support to the Dual-Career Athlete in their independent study.

Where appropriate, individuals involved in the Student Athlete's sporting career, such as coaches or representatives of the relevant governing body, should be involved in discussions relating to the Independent Study Plan and may be invited to endorse the proposed arrangements. However, the University retains final authority for approving or amending the Independent Study Plan in order to ensure that academic standards are maintained.

The Dual-Career Athlete should recognise that provision of an Independent Study Plan is not feasible in all cases, particularly where there are heavy practical or skills-based teaching or PSRB requirements and they should be cognisant of the fact that an Independent Study Plan is not a direct replacement for the student learning experience facilitated by the standard study provision, including the impact this may have on their performance in assessment.

Assessment Arrangements

The University recognises that participation in national and international sport may occasionally prevent Student Athletes from completing assessments as scheduled. Flexibility will be provided to assessment arrangements provided it is academically and practically feasible to do so, and any flexibility needed for Dual-Career Athletes has been recorded on the Individual Development Plan well in advance of the assessment period.

Such flexibility may include extension of deadlines, rearrangement of dates of assessment activities and deferral of assessment activities to the next available opportunity. Alternative assessments may be provided in very exceptional circumstances. Flexibility is not automatic and may be subject to any restrictions imposed by the School or Department in which the Student Athlete studies. Programmes with PSRB requirements may be unable to provide flexibility in line with these requirements.

Part-Time, Extended and Interrupted Study

Generally, Student Athletes are expected to undertake their studies as full-time students, in line with similar students of the University studying on equivalent programmes. Where sporting commitments has made this no longer feasible, and where flexibility with attendance and assessment has not been of assistance, the Student Athlete may choose to reduce their study-load to part-time, as defined in the University regulations.

Where part-time study is not available, the Student Athlete may be permitted to reduce the number of modules taken within an academic year to below part-time credit levels, and spread the remaining modules across future academic years, provided all required modules can be completed within the maximum registration period for their level of study. This is sometimes referred to as *Slow Tracking*. The Student Athlete must be registered on at least one module per semester to remain an active student of the University.

Where extended study is not available, the Student Athlete should take a Leave of Absence, in line with existing University policies. Leaves of Absence are available for one calendar year, with the option to extend by a further year. Support is available for all students on Leave of Absence, and for students returning from Leave of Absence, from the Student Success Centre. Only one Leave of Absence is permitted during a student's degree programme.

All requests for the above altered study modes will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the School or Department. Approval is not automatic and may be subject to restrictions imposed by the School or Department in which the Student Athlete studies. It is the responsibility of the Student Athlete to understand and accept the financial, practical and personal implications of availing of these altered study modes. Student Athletes who are also international students should be aware that the availability of altered study modes may be limited or unavailable where visa requirements would be affected.

Communication, Implementation and Training

Further guidance for staff will be available on the webpage for Student Athletes. Further guidance for students will be available on the designated Blackboard support area.

An annual briefing for staff on Student Athletes will be provided in semester 2 and will be available on request to Schools or Departments from UU Sport. Please contact sport@ulster.ac.uk.

Support for School or Department staff on advising and planning for Student Athletes, particularly in regard to Independent Study Plans, is available from the Centre for Curriculum Enhancement and Approval. Please contact curriculumenquiries@ulster.ac.uk.

Appeals and Complaints Procedure

A Student Athlete may appeal a decision related to this Policy, on the grounds that:

- there has been a procedural irregularity in the making of said decision,
- and/or that new evidence has become available that could not have been made available to the decision-maker for a sound reason.

Students should appeal by notifying the Dual-Career Co-ordinator in writing, presenting the decision they intend to appeal, the grounds on which they are appealing, and any supporting evidence which forms the basis for the appeal relating to the grounds above. Appeals received within ten working days and demonstrating grounds for appeal will be considered by an Appeal Panel comprised of at least three members of relevant departments not previously involved in the case.

The Appeal Panel is not a re-hearing of the case, nor cannot it overturn the original decision; it can only direct the original decision-makers to reconsider the claim, having taken account of the new evidence and/or taken action to correct the procedural irregularity.

The Appeal Panel will normally communicate its outcomes in writing to the student within ten working days of the Appeal Panel meeting. The Appeal Panel will provide reasons for the decision that it has made. It will clearly articulate the outcome of the appeal (appeal upheld, appeal upheld in part or appeal dismiss), and detail its decision, with reasons, to consider or not consider the appeal, and if the claim is to be reconsidered by the relevant decision-makers.

Late appeals without good reason and corroborating evidence to support the late submission of an appeal and those which do not demonstrate sufficient grounds for appeal will normally be rejected with no further right of appeal.

Having exhausted the internal process, claimants should be signposted to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, where they may lodge a complaint on the grounds of maladministration.

Members of the University community wishing to raise an issue about this policy are encouraged to do so informally in the first instance through contacting UU Sport or the Learning Enhancement Directorate. Should that not resolve the issue, students may make use of the Ulster University Student Complaints Procedure. Staff members may do so first through their line manager, and then through the relevant grievance procedure.

Relevant Legislation

This Policy complies with The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 and The Northern Ireland Act 1998 with regards to Higher Education in Northern Ireland.

Related Policy Documents

- Admissions Policy
- Tuition Fee Liability Policy
- Attendance and Engagement Policy
- Deregistration Policy
- Student Conduct Ordinance
- Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure

Contact Details

This Policy will be reviewed every 5 years. If this Policy is not working for you and you have suggested amendments and or clarifications, please contact sport@ulster.ac.uk or curriculumenquiries@ulster.ac.uk