Northern Ireland International Representation Pathway Information

This document has been produced to enable athletes, coaches and parents within Northern Ireland informed of their choices in relation to international representation in orienteering.

Introduction - The Northern Ireland Act 1998

Within Northern Ireland all citizens have the following birth right;

"It is the birth right of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves . . . as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, and accordingly . . . to hold both British and Irish citizenship."

This internationally recognised agreement called the Belfast Agreement is encompassed in legislation through the Northern Ireland Act 1998, it allows the citizens within Northern Ireland to choose their identity and subsequently hold either a British or Irish passport or both if desired.

Sporting Landscape in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 impacts on every area of life in Northern Ireland and sport is not immune, however, the Sporting Landscape within Northern Ireland is very complex and diverse. We have a combination of Governing Bodies within Northern Ireland; All Island bodies, British bodies and Northern Ireland bodies who all affiliate directly to either a European or an international federation. Subsequently, the sporting pathways for athletes differ depending on the sport you play and its governing structure.

Governing Orienteering in Ireland and the UK

Orienteering Ireland (IRL) and British Orienteering (GBR) are recognised by the International Orienteering Federation (IOF) as National Federations.

The Northern Ireland Orienteering Association is a constituent association of British Orienteering and is in close co-operation with the Orienteering Ireland.

Orienteering's Commitment to The Northern Ireland Act

All Governing Bodies in the UK and Ireland have a duty to honour this international agreement which both the British and Irish Governments have signed up to. To honour this agreement, we must allow the people of Northern Ireland personal choice to identify themselves as British, Irish or both. Allowing personal choice, however, is not enough to ensure compliance with the legislation we also have a duty to promote the right of an athlete in Northern Ireland to compete for GBR or IRL .

This guidance outlines all routes within the UK and Ireland for any athlete within Northern Ireland to become an international orienteer. British Orienteering wants to ensure that any athlete within Northern Ireland can make an informed decision regards their potential orienteering career and ultimately, they can choose which nation they would like to represent.

IOF Participant Regulations

Below are extracts from the International Orienteering Federation rules relating to international eligibility:

- A competitor may represent only one Federation during any one calendar year
- Competitors who are representing a Federation shall have full passport-holding citizenship of the country of that Federation
- A competitor must have a valid IOF Athlete Licence

The full rules can be found at https://orienteering.sport/orienteering/competition-rules/

Eligibility Requirements to Compete for GBR – Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Eligibility Requirements to Compete for IRL – Republic of Ireland
Hold a valid British passport and be eligible to represent GBR in accordance with the rules of the International Orienteering Federation	Hold a valid Irish passport and be eligible to represent IRL in accordance with the rules of the International Orienteering Federation
Meet the age class requirements of the competition on 31st December in the year of competition	Meet the age class requirements of the competition on 31st December in the year of competition
Hold a valid and current membership of British Orienteering;	

Please refer to the website for each governing body for specific selection criteria and contact details:

- www.britishorienteering.org.uk/selection
- www.orienteering.ie

Home Internationals

It is important that all athletes from Northern Ireland are aware that whichever national federation an orienteer from Northern Ireland chooses to represent, they will still be able to compete for Ireland at Home International competitions. For the purposes of Home Internationals between British Orienteering constituent nations, "Ireland" is accepted as a special all-island entity (like Rugby) and so a Northern Irish orienteer can still compete for either IRL or GBR in IOF competitions but retain the right to compete for Ireland at Home Internationals if they desire to do so.

This document has been published in agreement between:

British Orienteering | Northern Ireland Orienteering Association | Orienteering Ireland