



THE NORTHERN IRELAND  
**FOOTBALL  
FUND**



Department for  
**Communities**  
[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

# THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOTBALL FUND PERFORMANCE PROGRAMME

## GUIDANCE DOCUMENT



# **The Northern Ireland Football Fund – Guidance Notes for Applicants**

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## Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide information on the Performance Programme of The Northern Ireland Football Fund and the application process to help you complete the application.

It contains information on:

- The Programme
- Who can apply
- What we can fund
- What we will not fund
- How to apply
- Essential criteria
- How applications will be assessed and prioritised
- What to expect throughout the assessment process

Having read these guidance notes, potential applicants will be able to make an informed decision as to whether their project is eligible for this Fund, the degree of priority it is likely to attract, and which tier of funding it will fall under.

## Legislative and Policy Basis for the Programme

The Department for Communities under the Social Need (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, has power to provide financial assistance for any body or person who provides or intends to provide community facilities in a district where areas of social need exist.

The aim of this programme is to improve the facilities of Performance Clubs, their sustainability and participation, through the outcomes listed below.

The Senior Responsible Owner for this programme is the Department for Communities Deputy Secretary for Engaged Communities Group, Emer Morelli.

During the development of this programme and the related processes, the Department has complied with its statutory duties set out in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

The S75 screening for The Northern Ireland Football Fund Performance Club Programme has been published and can be viewed here:

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/dfc-northern-ireland-football-fund-performance-club-strand-screening.pdf>

## Background to The Northern Ireland Football Fund

The Northern Ireland Football Fund (previously known as the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer) is a long-standing Executive commitment to invest in modernising our local footballing infrastructure.

The strategic outcomes for The Northern Ireland Football Fund are:

- **HEALTH:** To drive participation in physical activity through football which contributes to positive health and mental outcomes
- **SOCIETY:** Elevate pride in Northern Ireland and capture the public imagination
- **INCLUSION:** Develop new and refurbished football facilities which will contribute to positive outcomes for inclusion of underrepresented groups
- **ECONOMY:** Create sustainable football clubs that will contribute to a thriving and balanced economy in Northern Ireland
- **BEST PRACTICE:** Drive high standards including for climate action and effective delivery of capital programmes and sporting infrastructure

## The Northern Ireland Football Fund Strands

The Northern Ireland Football Fund will invest in three areas:

- Performance Programme
- Grassroots Facilities Programme
- National Football Centre

This guidance note only applies to applications made to the Performance Programme.

# The Performance Programme

## Performance Club - Definition

The Performance Programme funding strand is expected to be the most significant in terms of scope and complexity and only Performance Clubs (or the Owner of a football ground in association with a Performance Club) are eligible to apply.

Performance Clubs are defined as all current Football Clubs which are members of the Northern Ireland Football League or League of Ireland who play their home matches at a venue located in Northern Ireland.

## Owner - Definition

For the purposes of the Performance Programme an Owner of a football ground means the organisation that holds either (1) a freehold interest or (2) a lease that will expire no earlier than 1 January 2051.

## Performance Programme – Tiers

It is expected that individual project values are likely to vary in value from under £1.5million to over £20million. A tiered approach has been adopted whereby similar sized projects are scored against each other.

Within this programme there will be three funding Tiers:

- Projects with a total cost up to £1.5million
- Projects with a total cost above £1.5million and up to £6million
- Projects with a total cost above £6million

## What We Are Aiming to Achieve - Outcomes

We will assess each application under the following criteria and the contribution each project makes towards each of the following outcomes:

### Criteria – Footballing Need

- **Outcome - Modern Football Facilities:**



- Fit for purpose facilities which meet safety and footballing requirements
- Modern facilities which meet user expectations

#### Criteria - Benefits

- **Impactful and Inclusive Community Facilities:**
  - Impactful community, environmental and economic benefits
  - Highest standards of inclusion and disability provision

#### Criteria - Finance

- **Financially Sustainable and future proofed clubs**

If successful, we will monitor your project against the delivery of these outcomes.

## Funding Rounds

It is unlikely that the Department, or the market, will be able to support all the successful applicants to the Performance Programme at once. Therefore, it is expected that this will be an on-going programme with a number of rounds. Further funding rounds are subject to further consideration and approval by the Minister.

The application process will score and prioritise applications to determine which projects will be taken forward in the first round of funding. The projects taken forward in the first round of funding will be referred to as the 'Prioritised Cohort'.

## Who Can Apply

This application is open to Performance Clubs (as defined on page 5) or the Owner of a football ground (as defined on page 5) in association with a Performance Club.

Applications to the Performance Programme must be made by:

- a Performance Club who is the Owner of the football ground to which the application relates

or

- a Performance Club who intends to become the Owner of the football ground to which the application relates prior to the issue of the Funding Agreement for Construction Costs

or

- an Owner of the football ground to which the application relates and on which a Performance Club plays its home matches

**A legal charge /or (in the case of an Applicant who is a council) a Deed of Dedication in favour of the Department will be required over the football ground together with any other security documents that the Department considers appropriate to secure any funding.**

## What We Can Fund

Only items that are within each football ground's boundary will be considered eligible for funding.

Eligible items include spend in relation to ingress circulation and egress, main playing pitch, main playing pitch - side, main playing pitch - lighting, stands, club facilities, officials' facilities, players facilities, spectator toilets, media area, safety features, medical facilities, disability facilities, energy efficiency investment, non-football related accommodation (where this is linked to income generation). This list is not exhaustive.

Eligible items are listed in Appendix 1.

### A Note on EU REACH and its Impact on Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) with Rubber Infill

The rubber infill used in AGPs qualifies as a microplastic within the scope of EU REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals).

In September 2023, the EU announced that a transition period would come into force, meaning that from 1 October 2031 it will no longer be possible to purchase



rubber crumb within the EU. This restriction will also apply to Northern Ireland by virtue of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

For the installation of new AGPs, supplies of rubber crumb are likely to be exhausted before the pitches reach their expected lifespan. Applicants whose project involves an AGP with rubber infill will need to satisfy the Department that investment in this type of pitch (AGP with rubber infill) will offer value for money.

## What We Will Not Fund

Ineligible items include training pitches; equipment; fitting out of gyms, kitchens, bars, medical rooms.

This list is not exhaustive.

Ineligible items are listed in Appendix 2.

## How to Apply

An email will be sent to all Performance Clubs on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2025. This email will contain: a link to the application form; a copy of the Guidance Notes and a copy of the Scoring Matrix. **Only one application can be made per Performance Club football ground.**

When you submit your application, you will receive an email to acknowledge receipt. You must ensure that you are content with all aspects of your application and have answered all questions in full before submitting your application. If we need to clarify anything in your application then we will contact you, but if not, you will not hear from us until your application has been processed and a decision made.

The timetable for processing applications is as follows

	Date
Application opening date	30 January 2025
Application closing date	14 March 2025
Expected timeframe for notification of decision	Summer 2025

If you are unable to use the online application form and /or require further assistance please contact The Northern Ireland Football Fund Team via email

[thenorthernirelandfootballfund@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:thenorthernirelandfootballfund@communities-ni.gov.uk)

## Application Deadline

The closing date for receipt of completed application forms is 5.00 pm 14 March 2025

Late applications will **NOT** be accepted. Any applications received after the deadline will be rejected. Applicants may be permitted to apply to future application rounds, but this will be subject to further consideration and approval by the Minister.

## Application Form - Section 1 - Details

This section gathers details about your project that will help the Department to process your application.

### 1. Name of Applicant

This is the name of the Performance club (*as per the Organisation's Constitution or registered company name and number*) who is taking forward the project.

Or

The name of the Owner of the football ground (*as per the Organisation's Constitution or registered company name and number*)

### 2. Confirmation of Applicant's eligibility to Apply

The Applicant should tick one box to confirm which option applies to it.

If the Applicant is not a Performance Club they should select 'No' to this question.

### 3. Confirmation of Associated Performance Club where applicant is not a Performance Club

This question is only for applications made by the Owner of the football ground where this is not a Performance Club. The Performance Club that plays its home matches on the football ground must sign the application also.

### 4. Name of your project

This should be a few words to identify your project in the future, it could be the name of your Performance Club, or perhaps the name of your football ground. For example 'Northern Ireland Rovers Football Project'.

## 5. Estimated cost of the project (please include a breakdown of costs)

It is important that you breakdown these costs as much as possible, with a cost associated to each part of the project. You should detail where the costings were derived. Where costs are not known at this stage, you may wish to use Sport England Facility Costs Guide for guidance (see link below). Costs should include professional fees, optimism bias and Value Added Tax (VAT - where applicable).

Optimism bias – Project appraisers can often be optimistic in their project costs. To redress this optimism in relation to the construction costs of your project, an adjustment of 30% increase should be applied to your project costs.

Value Added Tax (VAT) – In determining total project costs, applicants should only include the true cost of their project. Reclaimable VAT is not an eligible project cost. VAT implications can vary and will likely be unique to each applicant. You may wish to seek professional advice regarding VAT costs. Please note project costs may not be able to be increased later.

Example:

Grandstand 500 seats, no undercroft: £825,000

Design Costs (inc. professional fees): £82,500

**Project Costs: £825,000 + £82,500 = £907,500**

Optimism Bias @ 30%: £907,500 x 30% = £272,250

**Total Project Costs: £907,500 + £272,500 = £1,179,750**

[https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-08/Facility%20cost%20guidance%20-%20Q3%202024.pdf?VersionId=KV.EIKyKaP3TknV746wfw3BFINt76\\_sp](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-08/Facility%20cost%20guidance%20-%20Q3%202024.pdf?VersionId=KV.EIKyKaP3TknV746wfw3BFINt76_sp)

## 6.Tier you are applying under

There are three tiers within the Performance Programme:

- Tier 1 - Projects with a total project cost up to £1.5million
- Tier 2 - Projects with a total project cost above £1.5million and up to £6million
- Tier 3 - Projects with a total project cost above £6million

Using the example above, the total project costs are £1,179,750, therefore the applicant should apply under Tier 1 of the Programme.

## 7.Address of the football ground, including postcode

Please provide full address including postcode of the football ground.

## 8.Name and contact details for the lead contact person for your project

This should be the name of the person who the Department would contact in the first instance for any queries regarding your project. As the project moves forward this will be a critical role and availability of this person will be vital to ensure the project delivers on time and meets the set milestone targets.

## 9.Name and contact details for second contact person for your project

In instances where the lead contact person is not available, you should provide details of a second contact person for any queries regarding your project.

## How We Will Assess Your Application

Sections two, three, four and five set out details of how we will assess your application. Please choose when to make your application carefully. Do not rush to submit an application before you are ready, and make sure you have thought through the best way to respond.

Unless we need to check anything with you, it is unlikely that you will hear from us again until we notify you of the decision.



## Application Form - Section 2 - Essential Criteria (Stage 1)

The first stage of the process will be an initial sift against essential criteria for the programme. The essential criteria are as follows:

### 1. Governing Body Member / Affiliation

Applicants (or Applicants applying in association with a Performance Club) should select the relevant box.

An Applicant must be (or is applying in association with) a current member of the Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) or affiliated to the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) (or is applying in association with).

### 2. Football Ground located in Northern Ireland

Applicants should select the relevant box.

The football ground must be located in Northern Ireland and in the main, benefit the residents of Northern Ireland.

### 3 and 4 Ownership (Security of Tenure)

3. Applications should select the relevant box.

4. You should only answer this question if you selected NO for question 3

The Applicant must confirm that it intends to become the Owner of the football ground prior to the issue of the Funding Agreement for Construction Costs.

If you can confirm this, select Yes, if not Select No.

If you are not the Owner of the football ground or cannot confirm that you intend to become the Owner of the football ground prior to the issue of the Funding Agreement for Construction Costs, you will not be eligible for this fund.

***Ownership of the football ground (either freehold or leasehold subject to the minimum term requirement stated herein) is a condition of construction funding.***

## 5 and 6 Financial Need

5. Applicants should select the relevant box.

The Department is a funder of last resort, and you should ensure that you have exhausted all avenues to raise the funds independently for your project.

6. You should detail the steps you have taken to fund the project yourself; this may include trying to secure loans, grants, fund raising etc. If your project is selected for the prioritised cohort (see page 34 for more information), this will be examined in more detail.

## 7.Partnership Funding

Applicants should select the relevant box.

You must be able to demonstrate that you have or will be able to raise, the full amount of partnership funding required for your project before the Funding Agreement for Construction Costs is issued.

### What Counts as Partnership Funding

Partnership funding could be:

- Bank loan
- Own Cash Reserves
- Governing Body Loan
- Philanthropic donation
- Fundraising
- Council grant

This list is not exhaustive.

Partnership funding is:

- 40% for council owned football grounds (where no long-term lease to Performance Club is in place)
- or
- 5% for all other eligible applicants

Partnership funding is based on the total project costs.

Example:

Using the example from Page 11, the total project costs are £1,179,750

Therefore, partnership funding at 5% is:

$$£1,179,750 \times 5\% = £58,987.50$$

Minimum Partnership Funding Required = £58,987.50

It is not a requirement of the fund to have all partnership funding in place at time of application. However, you must have plans to secure the partnership funding and **MUST** have partnership funding in place prior to the Funding Agreement for Construction Costs. Evidence of partnership funding must be provided to the satisfaction of the Department prior to the Funding Agreement for Construction Costs being issued.

If you do not meet all the essential criteria, your application will not proceed to the Assessment Criteria (Stage 2) of The Programme and we will write to you explaining why your application cannot be progressed.

## Application Form - Section 3 - Assessment Criteria (Stage 2) - Overview

Applications which meet the essential criteria will then be assessed against the following criteria:

- Footballing Need
- Benefits
- Finance

It is important to note that applications will be scored only on the information provided in the application form. Any information previously provided to the Department, including business cases, will not be considered.

## Application Form - Section 3 - Assessment Criteria - Footballing Need

This section of the application form focuses on the need relating to the Performance Club's football provision and how the project will meet the identified need.

There are two sections to this part of the application. You should complete **either**:

- **Section 3A** if your project is situated where you or the Performance Club named at Section 1, Question 3 currently play home matches  
**or**
- **Section 3B** if you are a Performance Club and would like to build a new facility at an alternative venue to where you currently play your home matches

## Application Form - Section 3A: Need - Existing Facilities (50 points)

A minimum score of 10 points is required, over the five areas in Section 3A, to be considered for inclusion in the prioritised cohort.

### Safety (20 points)

You should explain and reference why there is a need to invest in your project to improve the safety of your football ground for participants and supporters. This may also include any implications the safety need is having on the ability of your club or the Performance Club named at Section 1, Question 3 to deliver its business as usual.

In this section it is important that you demonstrate the need for investment (specific safety need), the impact this is having on the Performance Club and how your project will address the need.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports this need and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

### Current League Requirements (5 points)

You should outline the need for investment to enable your club or the Performance Club named at Section 1, Question 3 to meet current league requirements for the league in which the performance team plays. This should detail the need and the impact the need is having on the Performance Club.

Example:

If you are a premiership club and you do not meet the league licensing criteria as your football ground only has 3 turnstiles instead of the required 4 turnstiles for a Premiership league license, then this should be documented in the application.



In this section it is important that you demonstrate the specific need for investment (Current league requirement need), the impact this is having on the Performance Club and how your project will address the need.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports this need and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

### Other League Requirements (10 points)

This section should be completed if your club or the Performance Club named at Section 1, Question 3 requires work to meet other league requirements. This section only allows for ambition to the level/league above your club or the Performance Club named at Section 1, Question 3's current league.

Example:

You are a Championship club with ambition to play in the Premiership but have not been able to get a license for your current football ground as it does not meet the criteria for the Premiership or you may be a Premiership club who has had success in a European competition but your football ground does not meet the criteria to host a European match.

In this section it is important that you demonstrate the specific need for investment (other league requirements), the impact this is having on your football club, any history of previous success in the league above your current league and how your project will address the need.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports this need and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

### Football Ground Capacity (5 points)

This section allows you to detail the need for investment to increase your stadium capacity. You should set out data detailing your current stadium capacity, details of current demand / projected attendance growth. It is important that you set out the number of home matches played over a league season/s and the number of matches where a need is identified to increase capacity. This should be supported by

official NIFL figures, where available. This need may not only relate to your overall football ground capacity but could relate to increasing your seated capacity or the capacity of your home stand. Where increase is based on projected figures you should set out clearly how this has been determined.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports this need and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

### Modernisation (10 points)

You should demonstrate the need or the Performance Club named at Section 1, Question 3 needs to modernise its football ground for current and future spectators. It should include what features your project will include to meet the expectations of a modern-day fan, encouraging them to spend a longer period of time in the football ground and therefore increasing their spend.

Examples may include:

- enhancement of spectator facilities - fanzones, fan shops, museums
- Comfortable seating – seat with adequate foot room, covered seating with non-obstructing roof
- Range of concessions – range of food concessions to cater for a variety of tastes and budgets

In this section it is important that you demonstrate a need for your facilities to be modernised in relation to your current and future spectator numbers, to meet the expectations of a modern-day fan, the impact this need is having on your football ground, the features / initiatives that will be taken forward and how your project will address this need.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports this need and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

## Application Form - Section 3B: Need - New Build (50 points)

This section should only be completed if you are a Performance Club and would like to build somewhere other than where you currently play your home matches.

A minimum score of 10 points, over the five areas in Section 3B, is required to be considered for inclusion in the prioritised cohort.

### Current Facility (10 points)

You should use this section to document the reason/s why your current facility and/or facility arrangement is not meeting the needs of your club/members/fans etc. You should explain why it is no longer feasible for you to stay at this venue.

In this section it is important that you demonstrate why your current facility does not meet the needs of your club/members/fans etc. You should justify the reasons given, detailing the impact this need has on the club and how the new project will address the need/s.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports this need and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

### New Location (10 points)

You should detail reasons why the new location has been selected for the proposed site.

In this section it is important that you demonstrate in detail, the research carried out by your club to determine this location. You should document any risks considered and justify the reasons why this location was chosen as the preferred site option.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports this criterion and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

## Other Considerations (20 points)

You should detail how you have considered the following in relation to your proposed site location:

**Need (10 points)** – the need for the facility at the proposed project site.

In this section it is important that you demonstrate, in detail, the need for your project and the impact this need has on your club.

You should demonstrate how the project will address this criterion.

**Displacement<sup>1</sup> (5 points)** – If your project goes ahead, will it impact negatively on any of the local businesses within the area or the facility you are moving from?

In this section it is important that you demonstrate, in detail, that you have considered displacement and the impact your new facility will have on other local business / clubs. Where there is evidence of displacement, you should detail any mitigating action you propose to take.

**Environmental Concerns (5 points)** – Are there any environmental concerns in relation to your project – what work has the club taken forward to mitigate these?

In this section it is important that you demonstrate, in detail, consideration of the environmental impact of your project at the proposed site location and any mitigating actions you propose to take.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports this criterion and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

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<sup>1</sup> The HM Treasury Green Book (2022) states displacement is ‘the extent to which an increase in economic activity or other desired outcome is offset by reductions in economic activity or other desired outcome in the area under consideration or in areas close by. For example, where a supported business takes market share from an unsupported business.’

## Engagement with Local Community (10 points)

You should detail engagement that has taken place with the local community, businesses, councils etc in determining or agreeing the location and in support of the project.

In this section it is important that you demonstrate, in detail, the engagement your club has had with stakeholders to determine the need and support for the project. You should detail any concerns raised and how you propose to address these. You should also demonstrate any risks considered and how you will mitigate these.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that support this criterion and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

You should clearly demonstrate how the project will address demand/concerns.

## Application Form - Section 4 - Assessment Criteria – Benefits (40 Points)

A minimum score of 2 points is required in each of the four areas to be considered for inclusion in the prioritised cohort.

### Community (10 points)

A minimum score of 2 points is required in the Community Criterion to be considered for inclusion in the prioritised cohort.

This section will allow you to demonstrate the benefits your club offers the community.

You should detail:

- Current initiatives and the benefits these deliver for the community
- Proposed initiatives your project will deliver and the expected benefits these will provide for the community

What you should consider in your response:

- Different initiatives on offer – where, when, and how often these take place
- How many people your club currently reaches and how many more you would reach if your project was supported
- Community engagement you have undertaken to date and what the need is in the area

5 points will be allocated for current benefits.

5 points will be allocated for proposed benefits.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports your work with the community and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**



## Disability<sup>2</sup>(10 points)

A minimum score of 2 points is required in the Disability Criterion to be considered for inclusion in the prioritised cohort.

This section will allow you to demonstrate the benefits delivered for disabled people.

You should detail:

- Current features / initiatives and the benefits these deliver for disabled people.
- Proposed features / initiatives your project will deliver and the expected benefits these will provide for disabled people.

What you should consider in your response:

- Different initiatives on offer – where, when and how often these take place / will take place.
- How many disabled people your initiatives currently reach and how many more you would reach if your project was supported.
- Participation now, and expected participation if your project is supported, of disabled people in your club, at all levels (i.e numbers of volunteers, spectators, programmes participants, board / committee members).
- Any consultation you have undertaken with disabled people to identify and address the issues, barriers and disadvantages that can undermine equality of opportunity to participate in sport and physical activity or attend your venue as a spectator.
- How your project, if supported, will improve access to your club / stadia for disabled people.

5 points will be allocated for current benefits.

5 points will be allocated for proposed benefits.

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<sup>2</sup> The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) definition of disability under Article 1 of the CRPD: Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Disability Sport NI have developed a series of design and management guides to encourage and support the development and management of sports facilities, stadia and outdoor places which are inclusive of disabled people. These can be viewed by following this link.

<https://www.dsni.co.uk/resource-library-1/>

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports your work with disabled people and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

## Underrepresented Groups (10 points)

A minimum score of 2 points is required in the Underrepresented Groups Criterion to be considered for inclusion in the prioritised cohort.

This section will allow you to demonstrate the benefits your club offers underrepresented groups.

This may vary across clubs. For the purpose of this section of the application, underrepresented groups do not include disabled people as this group will be assessed separately in the Disability Criterion above.

You should detail:

- Current initiatives and the benefits these deliver to underrepresented groups.
- Proposed initiatives your project will deliver and the expected benefits these will provide for underrepresented groups.

What you should consider in your response:

- Different initiatives on offer – where, when and how often these take place
- How many underrepresented groups/people does your club currently reach and how many more you would reach if your project was supported
- Participation of people from underrepresented groups in your club, at all levels this may include volunteers, coaching, board, players, spectators, staff etc
- Any consultation you have undertaken with underrepresented groups/people and how your project will address the issues, barriers and disadvantages that can undermine equality of opportunity

5 points will be allocated for current benefits.

5 points will be allocated for proposed benefits.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports your work with underrepresented groups and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

## Environmental Sustainability (10 points)

A minimum score of 2 points is required in the Environmental Sustainability Criterion to be considered for inclusion in the prioritised cohort.

This section will allow you to demonstrate the benefits your club offers to improve environmental sustainability.

You should detail:

- Current initiatives offered to improve environmental sustainability and the benefits these deliver
- Proposed initiatives your project will offer to improve environmental sustainability and the expected benefits this / these will deliver.

What you should consider in your response:

- Green practices that help aid in the reduction of pollutants and provide an improved local environment. Five focus areas are listed below (this list is not exhaustive):
  - Improving **energy** efficiency
  - Reducing **waste**
  - Reducing **water** usage
  - Enhancing and encouraging **biodiversity** in the local area
  - Encouraging sustainable **travel** in the local area
- Any consultation or community engagement you have undertaken in regard to any initiatives you currently offer or hope to offer should your application be successful

5 points will be allocated for current benefits.

5 points will be allocated for proposed benefits.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports your work in relation to environmental sustainability and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

## Application Form - Section 5 - Assessment Criteria – Finance (40 Points)

### Financial Sustainability (10 points)

A minimum score of 2 points is required in the Financial Sustainability Criterion to be considered for inclusion in the prioritised cohort.

You should detail:

- How your project will help increase revenue with the aim of becoming more financially sustainable.

What you should consider in your response:

- New / additional revenue streams that could be impacted by investment in your facility
- Any consultation or community engagement you have undertaken in regard to any initiatives you currently offer or hope to offer should your application be successful, to demonstrate demand for initiatives
- Broken down estimate of maintenance costs of new facility
- Projected forecast of income from the revenue stream, to include an explanation of the data used.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports your work in relation to financial sustainability and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

## Partnership Funding - Above the Minimum Requirement (10 points)

Points will be allocated for partnership funding above the minimum 40% where a council is the applicant and 5% for any other eligible applicants.

If the venue is council owned, with no long-term lease to the performance club in place, points will be allocated as follows:

<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment – Finance (Additional Partnership Funding - Councils)</b>
1	1 point available 40-42.99% of total project costs
2	2 points available 43-45.99% of total project costs
3	3 points available 46-48.99% of total project costs
4	4 points available 49-51.99% of total project costs
5	5 points available 52-54.99% of total project costs
6	6 points available 55-57.99% of total project costs
7	7 points available 58-60.99% of total project costs
8	8 points available 61-63.99% of total project costs
9	9 points available 64-66.99% of total project costs
10	10 points available 67%+ of total project costs

All other eligible applicants, points will be allocated as follows:

<b>Score</b>	<b>Comment – Finance (Additional Partnership Funding – All other eligible Applicants)</b>
1	1 point available 5-7.99% of total project costs
2	2 points available 8-10.99% of total project costs
3	3 points available 11-13.99% of total project costs
4	4 points available 14-16.99% of total project costs
5	5 points available 17-19.99% of total project costs
6	6 points available 20-22.99% of total project costs
7	7 points available 23-25.99% of total project costs
8	8 points available 26-28.99% of total project costs
9	9 points available 29-31.99% of total project costs
10	10 points available 32%+ of total project costs

**Any additional partnership funding should include an additional amount for Optimism Bias at 30%.**



## Details of Partnership Funding (10 points)

You should detail:

- Source: Where the partnership funding came from / will come from.  
Examples could include a bank loan, own cash reserves, governing body loan, gift, fundraising.
- Amount: The minimum amount of partnership funding will be dependent on the total cost of your project.

Example:

Total Project Costs: £10m (including design fees and Optimism Bias)

Partnership Funding: £500,000 (5% of total project costs - £10m)

Below is an example of how the detail may look:

- Bank Loan - £400,000 – Secured – offer of loan received from bank
- Own Cash Reserves - £200,000 – Secured – Held in Bank Account
- Fundraising - £50,000 – On-going – list of fundraising activities planned as follows:
  - Go fund me page – expected £30,000 by May 2025
  - In Club Tournament – expected £10,000 by June 2025
  - Coffee Morning – expected £5,000 by June 2025
  - Ballot Sales (1-1 training competition) – expected £5,000 by August 2025.

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports your partnership funding and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

## Previous Capital Improvements Through Own Investment (10 points)

In this section you will be allocated points based on the amount of money you have invested in capital works to your football ground over the last 6 years. This does not include safety work carried out by Sport NI or general maintenance work.

Like Partnership funding, own Investment may include:

- Bank loan
- Own Cash Reserves
- Governing Body Loan
- Philanthropic donation
- Fundraising
- Council grant

This list is not exhaustive.

You should detail:

- The nature of the work completed
- When the work was completed
- The cost
- The source of this investment

Only costs associated with eligible items as listed in Appendix 1 will be considered for scoring.

In order to support this part of the assessment criteria, you must be able to provide invoices and / or bank loans agreements if requested to do so by the Department.

Example:

In 2021 the club took out a loan of £2million to lay an AGP, install floodlights, two dugouts and fencing around the pitch. The club can provide upon request, invoices associated with the costs and a copy of the bank loan agreement.

Points will be allocated as follows:

Score	Comment – Finance ( <b>Previous Own Investment</b> )
0	No previous own investment
1	Previous own investment equates to 0-2.99% of total project costs
2	Previous own investment equates to 3-5.99% of total project costs
3	Previous own investment equates to 6-8.99% of total project costs
4	Previous own investment equates to 9-11.99% of total project costs
5	Previous own investment equates to 12-14.99% of total project costs
6	Previous own investment equates to 15-17.99% of total project costs
7	Previous own investment equates to 18-20.99% of total project costs
8	Previous own investment equates to 21-23.99% of total project costs
9	Previous own investment equates to 24-26.99% of total project costs
10	Previous own investment equates to 27+ of total project costs

**You should reference any relevant documentation that supports your own investment and be able to provide this documentation on request from the Department.**

## Summary of Points Available

The main criteria will be weighted as follows:

Assessment Criteria	Points Available
Footballing Need	50
Benefits	40
Finance	40

As already detailed, the following criteria will require a minimum score against each of the needs/benefits to be considered for the next stage of the programme.

Footballing Need – A minimum of 10 points across the five areas

Benefits – A minimum of 2 points in each of the following

- Community (2 points)
- Disability (2 points)
- Underrepresented Groups (2 points)
- Climate (2 points)

Finance – A minimum of 2 points in the Financial Sustainability criterion

## Scoring

Application forms will be scored and ranked, within their relevant tier, by The Northern Ireland Football Fund Team, based on the information included in your application form.

## Sectoral Panel

Once applications are scored and ranked they will be considered by a sectoral panel who will provide strategic sectoral advice to the Minister to help inform final decisions regarding the size of the first cohort of projects to be taken forward under the Performance Programme.

Panel membership has been designed to bring together key knowledge and expertise (including needs, gaps and existing provision of football grounds).

Panel Membership is as follows:

- Northern Ireland Football League
- Irish Football Association
- Chief Leisure Officers Association
- Sport Northern Ireland
- Two Independent Members

The Minister will consider the advice from the sectoral panel and decide on the number of projects, from each tier, who will move forward into the Prioritised Cohort.

If, following scoring, two or more applicants have the same score and only one project can move forward, preference will be given to the applicant who has either not received any central government funding over the last 6 years or has received the smaller amount of central government funding. Where a project cannot be identified following this process a random draw will take place.

## Assessment Time

Once we have everything we need, we hope to be able to advise you of the outcome of the application process by the summer 2025.

## If Your Application is Not Taken Forward to the Prioritised Cohort

The application process is competitive and we cannot fund all of the good quality applications that we receive. If your application is not ranked highly enough to be taken forward to the prioritised cohort, we will tell you why and we may suggest that you make another application for future rounds, but you must talk to us about this before reapplying.

## Prioritised Cohort - Due Diligence Checks (Stage 3)

The Department will engage with applicants in the prioritised cohort during this stage to undertake:

- Financial due diligence checks
- Legal due diligence checks
- Feasibility check

### Financial Due Diligence Check

The Department will use this check to focus on financial position and financial sustainability. We are interested in the owner / operator of the football ground and the Performance Club named at Section 1, Question 3. This check is to ensure the Department is satisfied with the financial status of the Owner and the Performance Club named at Section 1, Question 3 and the degree of financial risk in any funding agreed.

This will include (but not limited to):

- Providing the Department with the last 2 sets of detailed accounts/ financial statements; and
- Meeting the Department's Finance Expert, who must be satisfied that all potential funding streams have been exhausted prior to funding, to discuss your partnership funding contribution.

## Legal due diligence checks

This check will be taken forward by the Department's solicitors and will include, but not limited to:

- Checks that the applicant holds satisfactory title to the proposed grant funded property or is able to demonstrate, to the Department's satisfaction, that this will be the case within an agreed timescale
- Checks that the applicant is properly constituted.
- Checks that the governing documents of the applicant align with the objectives of the Department's grant funding.
- Checks that the applicant has the necessary powers to deliver the grant funded project.
- Checks that the applicant has the power to enter into the Grant Funding Agreement and to grant a Charge / Deed of Dedication over the grant funded property.

## Feasibility meeting

This will be a meeting with the Department's sports expert who will discuss the feasibility of your project including, but not limited to:

- Scope of the project
- Capacity of applicant to deliver project
- State of readiness

The Department must be satisfied with the applicant and project following the financial due diligence check, legal due diligence check and the feasibility meeting to progress to Stage 4 (See Appendix 3 for details of application stages). Advice will be provided to applicants regarding any concerns that need to be addressed before proceeding to the next stage. Dependent on the action required and/or the timeframe to address any of the Department's concerns, the Department retains the right to remove the applicant from the prioritised cohort; in this case the applicant will not be taken forward in the first round of funding.

## Prioritised Cohort - Business Case Review (Stage 4)

Once the Department is satisfied with the applicant and project at the Due diligence stage, those applicants in the prioritised cohort will be asked to submit a business case for their project. For those applicants that do not have a business case, funding may be provided by the Department to assist the development of an Outline Business Case. During Stage 4 the following will take place:

- Business case developed/refined by applicants
- Business case – initial specialist's review and advice (Sports Ground Safety Authority, Disability Sport NI, Construction Procurement Delivery)
- Individual project level business case approval by business partners and DoF (if required)



## Prioritised Cohort - Funding Agreement for Design Costs (Stage 5)

Following Outline Business Case approvals, a Funding Agreement will be issued to applicants for their project's design costs (also referred to as ICT (Integrated Consultancy Team) costs) associated with investment. During this stage applicants will:

- Appoint Project professionals
- Establish project oversight arrangements
- Finalise project designs and secure planning permission
- Develop Full Business Case with detailed costings for construction stage

Specialists will review and approve your business case. This may include, for example Departmental Economists, Statisticians and partners such as the Sports Ground Safety Authority, Disability Sport NI and others to ensure that your project's benefits are maximised, and the project is feasible and demonstrates value for money. On approval applicants will be given permission to proceed to tender.

## Prioritised Cohort - Full Business Case Approval (Stage 6)

The Department will consider your final business case for approval. If the Department is satisfied with the project and that it reflects the application, the project will progress to Stage 7.

## Prioritised Cohort - Funding Agreement for Construction Costs (Stage 7)

Funding Agreement for Construction Costs issued.

**ALL AWARDS ARE SUBJECT TO THE AVAILABILITY OF FUNDING AND THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THE FUNDING AGREEMENTS**

## Grantee Responsibilities

If your application is successful and you are awarded funding you will need to comply with all Funding Agreements, the Programme's Grant Code of Conduct and Terms and Conditions of funding for this programme.

### Subsidy Control/State Aid

TNIFF Performance Programme is subject to the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

Where a public authority provides support to an enterprise that gives them an economic advantage, meaning equivalent support could not have been obtained on commercial terms; the awarding authority must consider if this support is defined as a subsidy and therefore subject to Subsidy Control/State Aid regulations.

Advice from colleagues in the Department for the Economy's Subsidy Control Advice Unit (SCAU) confirms that under the Act's 4 limb test, funding provided by TNIFF's Performance Programme will be defined as a subsidy for the purposes of the Act.

As these subsidies will not be provided to enterprises that manufacture or trade goods or wholesale electricity, and there is no foreseeable effect on NI-EU trade in goods, TNIFF will not be subject to EU State Aid regulations.

In accordance with the Act, an assessment of TNIFF Performance Programme has been carried out prior to the commencement of the competition. This assessment has determined that the design and operation of the Programme complies with all statutory requirements.

For your own information, we ask that you familiarise yourself with the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

Guidance can be found here: [UK Subsidy Control Regime: statutory guidance](#)

### The Government Funders Database

The Government Funders Database holds records of applications and funding provided to voluntary and community sector organisations. This enables public sector funders to share information.

It can simplify and speed up the application and decision making process for organisations. Summary information is also available on support that has been awarded to voluntary and community organisations.

The information which you have provided will be entered onto the Government Funders Database and will be available to other public sector funders.

### Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 2018

The Department is subject to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data protection Act 2018, and we will manage any information which you provide to us in accordance with this legislation. The Department's privacy notice in relation to this programme can be viewed here.

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/dfc-privacy-notice>

## Appendix 1 – List of Eligible Items

Category	Items
Ingress circulation and egress	Boundary Infrastructure
	Wall/Fence
	Exit / entry gates
	Turnstiles
	Car parks, footpaths, roads or landscaping
	Regeneration related refurbishment – e.g. facelift for external stadium public realm type resurfacing around periphery of football grounds.
Main Pitch	Install or upgrade in line with demonstrable need in relation to league requirements and playing time.
	Pitch Markings
	Pitch Heating or pitch cover
	Pitch draining or irrigation works
	Sustainable drainage systems/rainwater harvesting
	Pitch side infrastructure – advertising signs
	Pitch side access pathways
	Pitch perimeter protection (e.g. pitch side fencing)
Pitch Side	Player's seating/dug outs/substitute benches
	Safe and level warm up area.
Pitch lighting	LED Floodlighting
Goals	Ball stop netting and goal posts in line with league requirements (Ball stop netting only where it relates to Health and Safety).
Stands	Spectator stands/ viewing stands/ seating and stand structures
	Viewing stands related items such as handrails etc and crush barriers, etc
	VIP seats/ hospitality areas
	Media seating/ commentary boxes and camera platforms
	Demolition Works
Club Facilities	Club rooms (boardroom)
	Club staff offices / staff tea rooms
	Staff toilets
	Delegates room
	Fan zone space
	Merchandising infrastructure
Officials Facilities	Building or refurbishment of dressing rooms, showers and toilets
Player Facilities	Building or refurbishment of dressing rooms, showers and toilets
	Changing facilities specifically for disability teams (whether clubs already have a disability team or not)
Spectator Facilities	Toilets in line with ground capacity and purple guide
	Changing places toilets
	Baby changing
Media	TV gantries
	Media working area / room
	Photographers working area / room
	TV Studios
	Flash Interview Area
	TV Compound
	Press conference room

Category	Items
	Mixed zone – secure covered area between the stadium and the players could be used as a mixed zone for player interviews is not a strict requirement category but would be advantageous
Safety	Safety signage
	CCTV systems
	Control Rooms
	Emergency lighting
	Public address system
	Electronic counters added to turnstiles
Medical	Emergency medical room for players and officials/ first aid room
	Doping control room
Disability	Disabled facilities for officials, players, spectators and visitors (including those not visiting the football ground to watch football - e.g. public access Changing Places Toilets)
	Modifications to improve access for people with disabilities
	Spaces to meet inclusive access requirements - e.g. refuge areas/ quiet rooms etc
	Hearing loops etc
Climate	Modifications to sports facilities to reduce energy consumption
Fitness	Building or refurbishment of sports halls, gyms or fitness studios (all buildings must be accessible to people with disabilities) Space only
Fees	Professional fees (incl. Legal, Accountancy, Consultancy, Design, Feasibility studies, Certification)
Non-Football related accommodation	Bars, kitchens, social clubs (space only)
	Community rooms / space
	Office space for rental, function rooms, other social enterprise space
Other	The purchase of lease of land or buildings (conditions apply)

**This list is not exhaustive.**

## Appendix 2 – List of Ineligible Items

Category	Items
Ingress Circulation and egress	Flagpoles
Pitch	Training Pitches
Goals	Spare goals
Value added Tax	Reclaimable VAT
Equipment	Fitting out of gyms, football equipment.
Other	Projects (or elements of projects) where work has already commenced)
	Repayment of loans
	Advertising marketing and promotional materials
	Running or operational costs (including software licenses / subscriptions, consumables)
	Insurance
	Routine maintenance (including the resurfacing of artificial pitches funded by the SCEP in the last 10 years)
	Non-LED lighting - Non-LED floodlighting (including replacement bulbs) and Non-LED interior lighting (including replacement bulbs)
	Passenger Vehicles: Cars, 4x4s, Vans, Minibuses
	IT & Telecommunications equipment (incl. laptops, tablets, Smartphones) and associated software applications
	Sleeping accommodation
	Club/branded merchandise/leisurewear
	Hire/Rental of equipment/premises/facilities
	Cost associated with securing support of nearby neighbours.

**This list is not exhaustive.**

## Appendix 3 – Overview Process Stages/Funding Phases

