

IFR Rules Licensing

Introduction

These rules are made by the Independent Football Regulator under Part 4 and section 90 of the Football Governance Act 2025.

The purpose of the rules is to give effect to, and to supplement, certain provisions of the Football Governance Act 2025 relating to the licensing of clubs.

Failure by a person or a club to comply with these rules may constitute a "relevant infringement" for the purposes of Schedule 7 of the Football Governance Act 2025 and could be the subject of an investigation and enforcement action by the IFR.

Preliminary: Definitions and Interpretation

Purpose

1. The purpose of this preliminary section is to specify certain definitions and rules of interpretation which are to have effect in these Rules.

Definitions

2. Unless the contrary intention is clear, when the following words are used in any Rule, they shall have the meanings given to them below –

Act	means the Football Governance Act 2025, as from time to time either amended by statute or supplemented by the Rules.
Annual Declaration	in relation to a licensed club, has the same meaning as in Condition D of its licence.
Annual Fan Consultation Report	in relation to a licensed club, has the same meaning as in Condition C of its licence.
Application	has the meaning given at Rule C1.2.
Appropriate Individual	means, in relation to the preparation of certain specified documents by a Club, a director or an individual with the authority to approve those documents.
Automatically Promoted	in relation to a football club, means to have attained the right to be promoted to a higher league by virtue of its position in a league table at the end of a Regular Season.
Corporate Governance Report	means the report that the IFR must prepare in accordance with paragraph 6 of Schedule 5 of the Act.

Club	means: (a) in Sections A and D, a licensed club; (b) in Section B, a regulated club; and (c) in Section C, a football club.
IFR	means the Independent Football Regulator, established by section 5 of the Act.
Financial Plan	in relation to a licensed club, has the same meaning as in Condition A of its licence.
Regular Season	in relation to any league, means the period: (a) beginning with the day in a particular year on which the first match of that league is played, and (b) ending with the day in the following year on which the final match of that league, excluding for this purpose any play-off match, is played.
Rules	means the rules made by the IFR under section 90 of the Act, contained within this document, as amended or replaced from time to time.
Statement	in relation to a licensed club, has the same meaning as in Condition B of its licence.

3. Unless the contrary intention is clear, any word or expression which is defined in the Act shall have the same meaning when used in a Rule.

Rules of Interpretation

4. Unless the contrary intention is clear, the Rules shall be interpreted as if they were an enactment to which the Interpretation Act 1978 applies.
5. Where an obligation under a Rule is required to be satisfied by a specified date or within a specified period, but where the regulated club has not complied with the obligation by that date or within that period, the obligation shall continue to be binding and the duty to comply with it shall be treated as ongoing until such time as it is satisfied.
6. Unless the contrary intention is clear, any reference in a Rule to a numbered paragraph is to the paragraph bearing that number in the same Rule.
7. Any use in a Rule of the word 'includes' means includes without limitation.
8. Unless the contrary intention is clear, any use in a Rule of the word 'year' means a calendar year.

9. Where a date specified in a Rule falls on a non-working day (i.e. a weekend or a day designated as a Bank Holiday in England and Wales), that date is treated as being the next working day after that date.

Notice

10. Unless otherwise indicated, any notice or notification given in accordance with the Rules must be provided in writing, which includes email and submissions made to the online portal.

Section A: Mandatory Licence Conditions Reporting

A1 Financial Plan

- A1.1 The IFR may create and publish a template for the Financial Plan.
- A1.2 In the conditions set out in the schedule of a licence, the IFR may require a Club to use the template that it creates and publishes in accordance with Rule A1.1 when that Club prepares the Financial Plan as required by its licence. The Club must ensure that the form and content of the Financial Plan are consistent with that template.
- A1.3 The Financial Plan must be approved by a resolution of the Club's board. Where the Club does not have a board, it must be approved at an equivalent level of seniority within the Club.

A2 Corporate Governance Statement

- A2.1 The IFR may create and publish guidelines for the Statement.
- A2.2 In the conditions set out in the schedule of a licence, the IFR may require a Club to refer to the guidelines detailed in Rule A2.1 when that Club prepares the Statement as required by its licence. The Club must ensure that the content of the Statement is consistent with those guidelines.
- A2.3 In the conditions set out in the schedule of a licence, the IFR may require a Club to make the Statement as accessible and comprehensible as possible. In particular, the IFR may require a Club to ensure that:
- (a) for the purpose of its suitability for general publication, the Statement is written in terms that would be easily understood by the majority of readers among the general public, and
 - (b) when publishing each Statement, it is available in formats which make it accessible to all those who are likely to be interested in it, including persons with disabilities, in accordance with generally accepted best practice
- A2.4 The Corporate Governance Statement must be approved by a resolution of the Club's board. Where the Club does not have a board, it must be approved at an equivalent level of seniority within the Club.

A3 Annual Fan Consultation Report

- A3.1 The IFR may create and publish reporting guidelines for the Annual Fan Consultation Report.
- A3.2 In the conditions set out in the schedule of a licence, the IFR may require a Club to use the reporting guidelines that it creates and publishes in accordance with Rule A3.1 when that Club prepares the Annual Fan Consultation Report as required by its licence. The Club must ensure that the form and content of the Annual Fan Consultation Report are consistent with those reporting guidelines.

A3.3 The Annual Fan Consultation Report must be approved by an Appropriate Individual.

A4 Annual Declaration

A4.1 The IFR may create and publish a template for the Annual Declaration.

A4.2 In the conditions set out in the schedule of a licence, the IFR may require a Club to use the template that it creates and publishes in accordance with Rule A4.1 when that Club prepares the Annual Declaration as required by its licence. The Club must ensure that the form and content of the Annual Declaration are consistent with that template.

A4.3 The Annual Declaration must be approved by a resolution of the Club's board. Where the Club does not have a board, it must be approved at an equivalent level of seniority within the Club. The resolution or equivalent approval must be dated no more than three months before the Annual Declaration is submitted to the IFR.

Section B: Form of the Licence

- B1.1 The licence is that document which:
- (a) is prepared by the IFR in respect of a Club
 - (b) is granted by the IFR, in exercise of its powers under the Act, in respect of that Club, and
 - (c) comes into force on a date which is specified on the face of the licence and comes to an end in accordance with the terms of the licence and the provisions of the Act
- B1.2 The licence is subject to conditions which are set out in the schedule to the licence. These conditions reflect the mandatory licence conditions set out in the Act as well as such discretionary licence conditions as the IFR considers appropriate to impose in relation to a Club.
- B1.3 In the case of a provisional licence, the licence authorises a Club to operate a relevant team on a provisional basis prior to the grant of a full licence.
- B1.4 In the case of a full licence, the licence authorises a Club to operate a relevant team on an ongoing basis.

Section C: Provisional Licence Application Process

C1 Purpose and Definitions

- C1.1 The purpose of Section C of the Rules is to set out the requirements on Clubs and the IFR in respect of an application by a Club for a provisional licence, namely a licence authorising a regulated club to operate a relevant team on a provisional basis prior to the grant of a full licence.
- C1.2 An application for a provisional licence will be referred to as an **Application** for the purposes of this Section C.

C2 Preparing the Application

- C2.1 The Application comprises:
- (a) a strategic business plan, and
 - (b) a personnel statement
- C2.2 A Club must prepare the Application in accordance with the IFR's guidance on provisional licence applications.
- C2.3 The IFR may create and publish a template for each of the strategic business plan and the personnel statement.
- C2.4 In respect of each of the strategic business plan and personnel statement, a Club must:
- (a) prepare the document using the template created and published by the IFR in accordance with Rule C2.3, ensuring that the form and content of the document are consistent with that template, and
 - (b) ensure that the document is approved and signed by an Appropriate Individual of the Club who confirms that, to the best of their knowledge and belief, the information provided in the document is accurate and complete at the time that it is submitted to the IFR by the Club

C3 Submitting the Application

- C3.1 In accordance with the provisions of this Section C3, a Club must submit the Application to the IFR online.
- C3.2 In relation to a Club which is a regulated club during the 2026/27 football season, that regulated club must prepare and submit the Application to the IFR in relation to the upcoming 2027/28 football season by no later than **26 February 2027**.
- C3.3 In relation to a Club which is not a regulated club during a football season but will become a regulated club during the football season which immediately follows, that Club must prepare and submit the Application to the IFR in accordance with Rules C3.4 to C3.5.

- C3.4 Where a Club is not a regulated club during a football season, but will become a regulated club during the immediately following football season:
- (a) because it has been Automatically Promoted during the Regular Season, that Club must prepare and submit the Application to the IFR by no later than **five working days** after the last day of that Regular Season, or
 - (b) as a result of its performance in the play-off matches which take place after that Regular Season, that Club must prepare and submit the Application to the IFR by no later than **five working days** after the date of the last play-off match following that Regular Season
- C3.5 Where any Club is in, or anticipates that it may be in, the circumstances described in Rule C3.3, that Club:
- (a) may submit an Application to the IFR before the deadline specified in Rule C3.4 (as the case may be), but
 - (b) must not submit that Application prior to 1 March of the year in which it will, or anticipates that it may, become a regulated club
- C3.6 In exceptional circumstances, the IFR may permit a Club to submit the Application by such date that the IFR determines in its sole discretion, provided that the IFR is satisfied that to exercise its discretion to that effect is appropriate, having regard to all relevant circumstances. If the IFR exercises this power, the IFR must notify the Club of the date by which the Club must submit its Application to the IFR.

C4 Review of the Application: General

- C4.1 On receipt of an Application by a Club, the IFR must conduct an initial review to determine whether the Application is complete or incomplete as soon as reasonably practicable.
- C4.2 For the purposes of Section C4 of the Rules:
- (a) the IFR will determine an Application is **complete** where the IFR is satisfied that the Club has provided sufficient information to enable the IFR to decide whether or not to grant that Club a licence, and
 - (b) the IFR will determine an Application is **incomplete** where the IFR is not satisfied that the Club has provided sufficient information to enable the IFR to decide whether or not to grant that Club a licence
- C4.3 Where the IFR has determined that an Application is complete, the IFR must notify the Club that the IFR will proceed to review the Application in full and decide whether or not to grant that Club a licence.
- C4.4 Where the IFR has determined that an Application is incomplete, the IFR must notify Club of this determination and identify the specific information that the IFR requires in order to determine that the Application is complete.

- C4.5 A determination that an Application is complete does not prevent the IFR from seeking further information from a Club in order to decide whether or not to grant that Club a licence.

C5 Review of the Application

- C5.1 Subject to Rule C5.2, the IFR must review an Application submitted by a Club and decide whether or not to grant that Club a licence as soon as practicable by the date that is **three months** from the date on which the IFR notified the Club under Rule C4.3 of the IFR's determination of the completeness of the Club's Application.
- C5.2 The IFR may extend the assessment period detailed in Rule C5.1 by up to one month where the IFR considers that:
- (a) the Club in question is yet to demonstrate to the IFR the matters specified in section 17(2) of the Act, and
 - (b) it will be possible for that Club to demonstrate to the IFR the matters specified in section 17(2) of the Act during such extended assessment period.

Section D: Corporate Governance Report

D1 Preparing the Corporate Governance Report

D1.1 In the Corporate Governance Report, the IFR:

- (a) must include the content required by paragraph 6(3) of Schedule 5 of the Act, and
- (b) may include any of the information set out at Rule D1.2

D1.2 The IFR may include the following information in the Corporate Governance Report to the extent that it is available:

- (a) themes emerging, including any concerns, from the Clubs' corporate governance arrangements
- (b) best practices among the Clubs' corporate governance arrangements
- (c) analysis in respect of specific leagues, divisions, or such other groupings of Clubs as the IFR may determine, and
- (d) themes emerging, including best practices any concerns, from the Clubs' actions in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion

D2 Publishing the Corporate Governance Report

D2.1 The IFR must publish the Corporate Governance Report [on its website, at [address]]:

- (a) by no later than **31 October 2028**, and
- (b) every **two years** thereafter