



# **Policy on Exam Flexibility for UCC Sport and in support of the Sport Ireland Accreditation for Student-Athlete Support (ASAS) Programme.**

**Approved by UCC Academic Board October 2021.**

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**To Whom It May Concern:**

I wish to confirm that the University College Cork Academic Board discussed the proposal highlighted in the "Document on Exam flexibility for UCC Sport and in support of the Sport Ireland Accreditation for Student-Athlete Support (ASAS)" and compiled by Jeff Gomez (UCC Sport performance manager). The board reviewed the proposal and approved it in its entirety.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Stephen Byrne

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## 1. Sport Ireland Accreditation for Student-Athlete Support (ASAS)

Sport Ireland published a High-Performance Strategy in July 2021. A key initiative is to support dual career athletes. ASAS is an accreditation recently developed and launched by Sport Ireland aimed at providing equal opportunity to all high-performing student-athletes to combine sport and education.

Creating a formal network of dual-career accredited institutes will enable a more effective, structured, and consistent system, benefiting the athletes, third-level institutes, and sports. This will also help to provide surety and formal guidance to third-level institutes and assist in developing a more formal system of communication between sport and education providers. Sport Ireland wish to identify and establish a network of accredited institutes that support elite athletes to achieve dual-career excellence by applying guiding principles.

## 2. UCC Sport Performance Programme

The purpose of the UCC Sport performance programme is to support UCC teams and athletes perform to their full potential. The programme is aimed at our sports scholarship students, our leading teams and athletes performing at top-level sport in Ireland and internationally. We have an incredible range of athletes who are dedicated to performing in sport and academically.

We work with our club, coaches, and specialist staff in the area of sports science and conditioning, nutrition, sports medicine, sports physiology, and sports analysis. We also work in partnership with Sport Ireland in the delivery of the new [high-performance strategy](#); national governing bodies and provincial sports organisations.

UCC has long been committed to the provision of an extensive and wide variety of sport and physical activity experiences. We have 45 recognised clubs with a combined membership of over 4,000 students. We have a dynamic student population driving and leading sport and the UCC clubs, supported by the Department of Sport and Physical Activity, the Clubs' Executive and the Mardyke Arena. We have a leading academic programme offering a degree in sports studies and physical education. Our foundations are deep and strong and poised to expand. UCC has a long tradition of performing and winning in sport. Our athletes, squads and teams compete annually at the highest levels in Irish and global sport (i.e., the recent gold and bronze medals at the Tokyo Olympics).

## 3. Context

High-performance athletes have unique demands in comparison to the non-student athlete population (e.g., increased time and energy demands, increased accountability to various support providers, international travel and competition requirements), and require flexible and supportive structures to successfully attain a dual career. Creating an environment that supports dual career athletes is a key success factor. A suitable dual-career environment requires understanding and consistent, structured support. Differences in the recognition and availability of dual career support within third-level institutes exist worldwide. Research

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suggests that Ireland has a predominantly informal approach to dual-career support, meaning there are no formal policies or arrangements in place nationally. Both practice and research have demonstrated that this approach is not adequate and tends to be restrictive for dual-career athletes. In Ireland, a great deal of support is provided by third-level institutes, Sporting Bodies, and Players Associations nationwide, however much of this support is reliant on goodwill and relationships. Sport Ireland accreditation (ASAS) is the first of its kind in Ireland and provide an exciting opportunity to harmonize support structure and implement defined guiding principles.

The [Sport Ireland High-Performance Strategy](#) vision is to have “Ireland consistently achieving podium success on the world stage inspiring the nation and future generations” and as such “Ireland will be a 12-16 medal country consistently over the next two Paralympic cycles (i.e. Paris 2024, LA 2028) and will sustain that success in 2032”. Higher Education Institutions are at the core of the various strategic pillars of this High-Performance Strategy and this student-athlete accreditation represents a positive step in this direction.

Over the past number of years, various arrangements have been made to allow UCC students athlete to sit exams and facilitate participation in international sporting events occurring at the same time. This has always been generously facilitated on a case-by-case basis by the Exams Office and the relevant School/Department.

However, the recent High-Performance Development (Sport Ireland High-Performance Strategy and the ASAS accreditation) and the constant increase in the number of elite athlete’s student-athletes make the continuation of this arrangement challenging.

The Quercus programme for sport has an already agreed and approved exams flexibility and the purpose of this document is to seek an extension of this existing agreement to cater for a specific standard of elite student-athletes and competitions.

## 4. Policy

- a) UCC Sport Performance Manager (Jeff Gomez) UCC Sport Deputy Head of Sport Christine O’Donovan and will be the Dual Career Coordinators and the point of contact to:
  - Liaise with the elite student-athlete and key stakeholders (mentors/academic staff, Sport Ireland Institute, National Governing Bodies, and Players Associations)
  - Liaison between school/department and elite student-athletes.
- b) In the first instance, the student-athlete will have to register with UCC Sport, complete a performance plan and clearly highlight potential exam clashes.
- c) If these can be notified by the first week in October, then exam scheduling can still be amended.
- d) When the above two steps still do not meet the needs of the individual student, then it will be possible for the applicant to sit repeat exams without penalty.
- e) If it is not possible to sit repeat exams because of other external requirements (Further competitions etc.) then acceptable alternative assessment methods outside of the normal examination timetable may be offered by the School/Department in consultation with the Exams Office.

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## 5. Student-athlete standards

UCC Sport recognises that students participate in a wide range of sporting and recreational activities. However, only a defined student-athlete population (subsection 5.1) will be able to avail of exam flexibility. A flow chart is provided in subsection 5.2 for ease of understanding.

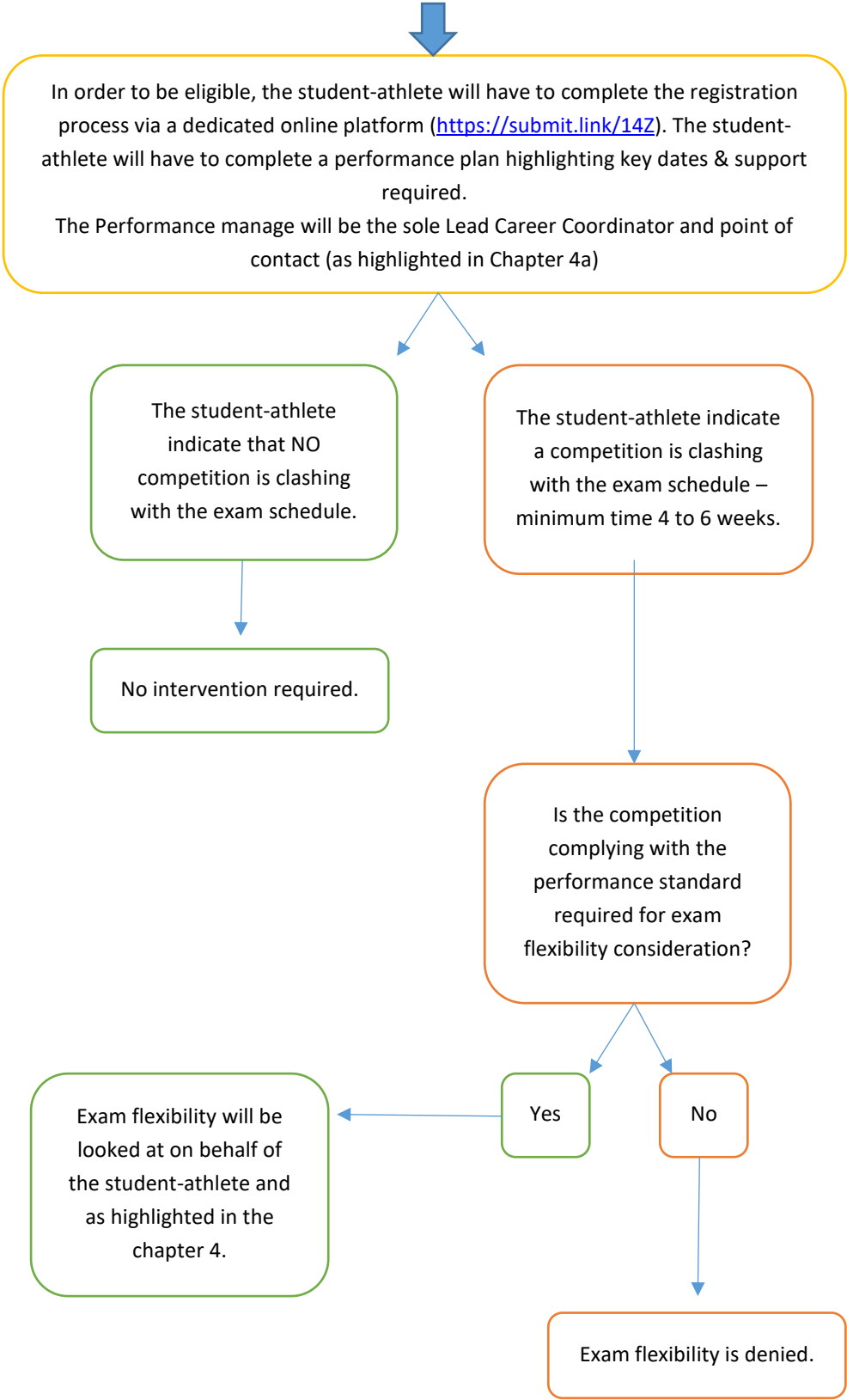
### 5.1 Student-athlete standards

As outlined in the Sport Ireland policy; Student-athletes should be recognised as a performance athlete by one of the following:

- Sport Ireland and Sport Ireland Institute
- A National Governing Body
- Players Association
- UCC Sport Scholarship and/or UCC Sport Performance Programme

## 5.2 Flowchart

Information regarding academic flexibility and the application process will be made available to student-athletes via the UCC sport website and communicated to the key staff (Sport Development Officers & Coaches). Potential student-athletes: 200. Eligible elite student-athlete 80 to 100. Only a small percentage will avail of this flexibility as a lot of key/end stage competitions take place over the summer.



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## 6. Management of the Programme

The process will be managed by the UCC Sport Performance Manager.

All UCC student-athletes; who are included in UCC sport performance squads, scholarship programmes are who are designated performance athletes; looking to avail of academic flexibility will be required to complete on an online form to register their requirements: [UCC Sport Athlete Academic Flexibility Form](#)

Performance athletes who may not have applied for a scholarship but are participating at top provincial/national and international levels in their sports. In any given year 20-30 athletes outside the performance sports are chosen to represent Ireland in a wide range of sports which are not classified as performance sport. The applications for inclusion as performance athlete is here: [UCC Sport Performance Athlete Application](#)

There also performance athletes who are provided for under our ASAS scheme which we are accredited by Sport Ireland and UCC. We ask them to identify themselves through completion of this form and we can formally support and recognize them: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/sport/performance/asas/>- sometimes there are students who play at the highest levels who are not representing UCC sport clubs but are full fee paying students and can access facilities including rugby/hockey/soccer and other sports.