



## Eligibility for Participation in Special Olympics

### Eligibility Definition

The Special Olympics General and Sports Rules set down the criteria for athletes to be eligible for Special Olympics from which the following is extracted:

#### **1. General Statement of Eligibility.**

Special Olympics training and competition is open to every person with a learning (intellectual) disability who is at least eight years of age and who is registered to participate in Special Olympics as required by the General Rules.

#### **2. Age Requirements.**

There is no maximum age limitation for participation in Special Olympics. The minimum age requirement for participation in Special Olympics competition is eight years of age. Children who are at least six years old may participate in age appropriate Special Olympics Training programmes.

#### **3. Identifying Persons with a Learning Disability.**

A person is considered eligible to participate in Special Olympics if the person has been identified as having a learning disability in accordance with the following definitions:

*'A condition of arrested or incomplete development of mind, which is characterized by impairment of skills manifested during the developmental period, which contribute to the overall level of intelligence, i.e. cognitive, language, motor and social abilities'* (World Health Organisation ICD-10)

In other words:

*'A significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence) with*

*A reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning)*

*Which started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development'*

(Department of Health (2001) Valuing People)

When an assessment of an individual's adaptive function is carried out it is important to draw on a variety of sources. In common with other national and international sports organizations, SOGB deems a person to have a learning disability if they have a full scale IQ score of 75 or lower. IQ tests are acknowledged to be limited that is why it is important to gather other information to assist in understanding an individual's abilities.

"Before Adulthood" means before the age of 18.

### Explanatory Notes for Parents, Guardians, Carers etc.

SOGB receives many enquiries from people who are uncertain whether their son or daughter is eligible to participate in Special Olympics. It is important to draw a distinction between people who have a general learning disability (who are eligible for Special Olympics) and those with a specific learning difficulty (who are ineligible). Conditions such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit disorder or challenging behaviour are not eligible for Special Olympics. Similarly people with a physical or sensory impairment do not qualify for Special Olympics unless they also have a learning disability.

A Special Olympics coach or volunteer, teacher, social worker or other person that works with people with a learning disability in a professional capacity is unlikely to be qualified to make a definitive judgment on whether someone is eligible for Special Olympics or not.

A word of caution about books, journals and the internet: These can be valuable sources of information about all forms of disability. However, definitions and terminology vary from country to country and it is not always easy to see where a book or article has originated from. If you find something that describes a particular condition as being a 'learning disability' it does not necessarily mean that it would be classified as such in the U.K.

Useful websites to gain information about learning disability are:

[www.easyhealth.org.uk](http://www.easyhealth.org.uk) – accessible health information

[www.intellectualdisability.info](http://www.intellectualdisability.info) – information about health issues experienced by people with learning disabilities

***Please note that other organisations providing sporting opportunities for people with a learning disability may have different eligibility criteria and may require additional evidence.***

### **Notes to Special Olympics Coaches/Volunteers**

It is the responsibility of all local Special Olympics groups to ensure that all Special Olympics athletes are eligible according to the above criteria. You will rarely have any cause to query an athlete's eligibility. However, if you are uncertain you have a responsibility to enquire into this with the athlete's parent, guardian or carer. It is far better to do this early in an athlete's involvement with Special Olympics rather than waiting until you wish to enter them into an event. Please remember that this is a sensitive issue and you should proceed with caution and tact.

Remember that by signing the SAM form the athlete or their parent/carer is declaring that the athlete meets the above eligibility criteria and that they accept that Special Olympics reserves the right to:

- **ask for proof of eligibility at any time**
- **specify the nature of the proof required**
- **refuse or withdraw the membership of any athlete who, in our opinion, does not meet the Special Olympics eligibility criteria**

**Any costs associated with obtaining the required proof of eligibility are the responsibility of the athlete concerned.**

If the potential athlete presents as high functioning or the information given on the SAM form does not give specific information as the nature of their learning disability then you should ask the athlete or their parent/carer whether they are able to provide any documentation that will help to prove that the athlete meets the eligibility criteria. Examples might be Statements of Special Education Needs or letters received following the assessment of the athlete by a clinical psychologist etc.

If no supporting information can be produced or the documentation does not make specific reference to learning disability or you are in any doubt as to whether or not the person meets the eligibility criteria you must seek guidance from SOGB National Office. You should explain to the parent/carer that this is what you are going to do and obtain their permission to forward copies of any documentation that they have given you. SOGB will obtain professional advice and inform you whether or not the athlete is eligible.

If an athlete is ineligible they may still participate in Special Olympics coaching programmes but cannot enter competition unless your group operates Unified Sports programmes in any sports in which case they can train and compete as a Unified Sports Partner.

Athletes that registered with SOGB prior to 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010 will not be asked to provide evidence of eligibility unless they are selected for international Special Olympics competition.