

## ELIGIBILITY FOR PARTICIPATION IN SPECIAL OLYMPICS - EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

### 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 an Intellectual (learning) Disability

A person is considered to have a learning disability for purposes of determining his or her eligibility to participate in Special Olympics if that person satisfies any one of the following requirements:

The person has been identified as having a learning disability:

*Which is defined as '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)

"Before Adulthood" means before the age of 18.

In common with other national and international sports organisations, Special Olympics GB deems a person to have an intellectual 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. In addition the individual is usually expected to have significant difficulties with self-care, adaptive behaviour and self-organisational skills. This definition covers adults with autism who **also** have learning disabilities, **but not those** with a higher level of autistic spectrum disorder who may be of average, or above average intelligence, such as people with Asperger's Syndrome.

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 learning disability is defined as '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, ie. Cognitive, language, motor and social abilities' (ICD-10 – specifically Blocks F06.7-F06.9 (Mental Disorder due to brain damage) F70-F79 (WHO terminology; mental retardation) F80-F89 (disorders of psychological development) and F90-F98 (behavioural and emotional disorders with onset usually occurring in childhood and adolescence) for full guidance refer <http://www.who.int/classifications/icd/en/bluebook.pdf>

### **Some indicators that suggest someone may have a learning disability**

- Did not go to a main stream school
- Finds it hard to answer questions
- Is unable to read, write, interpret and process new information
- Finds recalling information difficult
- Finds it hard to maintain their own self care
- Needs significant assistance to carry out their daily lives

### **People who DO NOT have a learning disability**

People with conditions such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome or challenging behaviour. Similarly people with a physical or sensory impairment do not qualify as having a learning disability unless they **ALSO** have a learning disability.

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

### **ALL CLUBS PLEASE NOTE**

All athletes **must be registered** with the organisation to compete at **ALL levels of Special Olympics competition** rather than just national level and above as before. Clubs can still apply for sanction to invite non-registered athletes to competitions, but they can compete as a 'guest' on one occasion only.

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.**

Partner organisation Mencap can provide key information and support on all aspects of learning disabilities <http://www.mencap.org.uk/all-about-learning-disability>