The Football Association's (FA) Dispensation Policy

Introduction

The FA has produced this guide to assist with understanding the policy for dispensation. This policy exists to ensure that children are able to play football with the most **appropriate age group** for their **size and development**, taking into account any relevant characteristics of the child's particular disability and/or significant physical developmental delay (''SPDD'').

It is important to ensure that the policy operates in a manner which is **fair for all**. This means that it must be fair not only for those children with a disability/SPDD, but also for their peers. The FA is required to have regard to the following whenever an application for dispensation is considered:

- no one is gaining an unfair advantage
- the system is free from abuse
- the safety of all children is of paramount importance
- increasing safety risks unduly for other children is avoided

Dispensations are **issued for a stated period** which is usually **one football season**. A dispensation may include conditions.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- assist applicants with understanding the policy
- explain who is covered by the policy
- provide details on how the policy works; and
- give details on the procedure to be followed, including how we notify applicants of the outcomes of the decision.

What is the Dispensation Policy?

The Policy enables disabled children to play football in an age group other than the age group prescribed by their date of birth.

Why is a Policy needed?

The FA's Rules, specifically The Standard Code of Rules for Youth Competitions (SCORY), prescribe age groups for children to play in which are designed to ensure that they compete with peers of similar size and development.

For some children with a disability or SPDD however playing in the prescribed age group would put them at a substantial disadvantage to their non-disabled team mates, discouraging them from being involved or making it impossible for them to access football altogether.

The FA, the County FAs and their affiliated Leagues are required by law (including the Equality Act 2010) not to discriminate against disabled children. This includes a duty to make reasonable adjustments to any policy which may have the unintended effect of discriminating against disabled children.

Who is covered by the Policy?

Any child who has:

- a disability OR
- a significant physical developmental delay (SPDD)

AND

- would be placed at a substantial disadvantage (as a consequence of that disability or SPDD) if required to play in his/her prescribed age group.

OR

Any child who has:

- delayed no more than one school year, based upon their early social or physical development and is therefore schooled no more than one year behind their 'chronological' age.

What is a disability?

A person has a disability if:

- he/she has a physical or mental impairment, and
- the impairment has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Further guidance on what constitutes a disability can be found in the Equality Act 2010, Schedule 1 or by following this link: https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010

Examples:

- Claire, aged 12, has a disability which means that she is physically much smaller than her age-group peers. Claire would be at a substantial disadvantage if she were required to play in her prescribed age group. Claire may request to play in the age group *below* her normal prescribed group.

- Alan, aged 8, has Asperger's Syndrome. This is an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) one of the features of which is an inability to cope with change or disruption. Alan has got used to playing with a group of close friends. Due to the Asperger's Syndrome, Alan could become significantly distressed by any forced changes to his patterns of behaviour. If required to play in his prescribed age group, Alan will be separated from those team-mates and coaches with whom he has become familiar over an extended period of time. Alan would rather not play football at all than join a team in his own age group. Alan may request to play in the age group *above* his normal prescribed group.

- Savita, aged 10, was delivered by an emergence caesarean, as she was at risk of umbilical cord strangulation. Delivered three months early, she was born in late July as opposed to October. It was deemed appropriate that due to her young age and development, she would delay her first year of schooling.

How does the Policy work? Step by Step process

1. Dealing with an application

Anyone in football (e.g. a County or League Welfare Officer) receiving a request for dispensation for a child with a disability or SPDD to play outside his/her prescribed age group should notify The FA's Player Status (PS) Department immediately.

2. Gathering the relevant evidence

The parent/carer will then be contacted by the Player Status department and will be required to submit detailed written evidence from a **medical practitioner** and/or **other specialist** which must (**as a minimum**):

- **identify the child's disability** or **SPDD;**
- **identify** any **particular characteristics of the disability or SPDD** which are **relevant** to consideration of the request **to play in an age group other than the child's prescribed age group**;
- **explain** how the **particular characteristics of the disability or SPDD** would place the child at a **substantial disadvantage** compared to his/her non-disabled peers if he/she were required to play football in his/her **prescribed age group ;**
- **explain** how playing in an age group other than his/her **prescribed age group** would **neutralise or reduce the disadvantage** caused by the child's disability or SPDD;
- **identify any increased or reduced risk** to the **child and/or his/her peers** by allowing the child to play outside his/her **prescribed age group**;
- **explain** why allowing the child to play outside his/her **prescribed age group will not endanger the health and safety** of the **child or any other person**.
- If the child has delayed a year at school, the FA will require a letter from the child's school and/or Local Education Authority and/or relevant Admissions Authority **explaining which year the child is in** and **why (based upon the child's early development) it was deemed appropriate for the child to delay a year of education.**

This evidence must **clearly** address these points. Any application which does not provide clear evidence in relation to these points will be returned.

The parent/carer will also be required to consent to the sharing of this information as required to process the request and, if successful, to ensure that the relevant parties in the League and County FA affected are aware of the dispensation and the reason for it.

3. Assessing the application

Once all the relevant evidence has been collected, it will be considered by The FA's appointed medical advisor and/or a specialist experienced in the relevant area of disability nominated specifically to assess the request.

PLEASE NOTE a dispensation will **only** be granted where the following criteria are fully satisfied:

(i) the child has a disability or a SPDD; **and**

(ii) having regard to the particular characteristics of that disability or SPDD, the child would be placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to his/her non-disabled peers if he/she were required to play football in his/her prescribed age group; **and**

(iii) allowing the child to play outside his/her prescribed age group would neutralise or reduce that disadvantage; **and**

(iv) the dispensation will not endanger the health and safety of the child **or** of any other child; **and**

(v) there is no other legitimate reason why the dispensation should not be granted.

The FA's appointed medical advisor or specialist will advise PS as to whether the criteria for granting the dispensation have been met.

4. Notifying the outcome

The FA will then notify the child (via the parent/carer) and the relevant County FA and League of the outcome of the assessment. The decision either to grant or refuse the dispensation will be **confirmed in writing to the applicant** and at the same time to the relevant **Club Secretary**, **League Secretary** and/or **County FA** as appropriate.

5. Other issues

When a dispensation is granted it will ordinarily be given for a stated period (usually one season) and may include conditions. The dispensation is not transferable and the parent/carer may be required to reapply for the following season for a further assessment.

If the Club, League or County FA receive any queries from third parties regarding the granting of a particular dispensation they should direct them to The FA's PS Department.

The County FA or League should notify its insurers where a child has been granted a dispensation. The County FA or League may share any information contained within the notification letter and this Guide with their insurers.

FAQs

Q: Will any child who is small for his/her age be granted a dispensation?

No. The Policy covers only those children who have a recognised disability or *significant* physical developmental delay. Evidence of developmental delay will be required from a medical practitioner and this will be carefully scrutinised by The FA's medical advisor.

Q: If a child is allowed to play down an age group, will this not make injuries more likely?

No. The assessment will take account of the physical characteristics of each applicant. A dispensation will only be granted where it will not endanger the health and safety of the applicant or any other child.

Glossary of Terms

PS	The FA's Player Status Department
SCORY	The Standard Code of Rules for Youth Competitions
SPDD	A significant physical developmental delay

Player Status Department
Football Operations
The Football Association

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