



THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION'S (FA) DISPENSATION POLICY

A guide for parents or carers

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 a 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:

- that 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**, any 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 range other than the range dictated by their chronological birth date.

WHY IS A POLICY NEEDED?

The FA's rules, specifically The Standard Code of Rules for Youth Competitions (SCRYC), specifies age ranges 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 specified age range 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 policies which may have the unintended effect of discriminating against disabled children.

WHO IS COVERED BY THE POLICY?

Any child who:

- has a recognised disability or SPDD; AND would be placed at a substantial disadvantage
- (as a consequence of that disability or SPDD) if required to play in his/her chronological age range.

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 chronological age group. Claire may request to play in the age group below her normal group.
- Alan, aged 8, suffers with 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 chronological 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 group.



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 the specified age range should notify The FA's Equality and Child Protection department (ECP) immediately.



2.

Gathering the relevant evidence

The parent/carer will then be contacted by the ECP 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 and any particular characteristics of the disability which are relevant to the request; and
- explain how requiring the child to play in his/her chronological age group would substantially disadvantage the child.

This evidence **must** clearly address these points. The evidence must provide details of the child's disability/SPDD and how playing in his or her chronological age banding would adversely disadvantage the child. 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:

1. the child has a recognised disability or SPDD; **and**
2. the characteristics of that 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 the specified age range; **and**
3. the dispensation will not endanger the health and safety of the child or of any other child; **and**
4. there is no other legitimate justification for refusing the dispensation.

The FA's appointed medical advisor or specialist will advise ECP 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 ECP 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.



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.



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

ECP

The FA's Equality and Child Protection team

SCRYC

The Standard Code of Rules for Youth Competitions

SPDD

A significant physical developmental delay



