



**FOR ALL**

# **DISPENSATION POLICY**

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# Introduction

The FA has produced this guide to assist with understanding the policy for dispensation and to:

- 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. It is important to ensure that the policy operates in a manner which is **fair ForALL**, not only for those children with a disability or impairment for example, 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

## WHAT IS THE DISPENSATION POLICY?

The Policy enables children with a disability, Significant Physical Development Delay (SPDD), or who are schooled no more than one year behind the age group prescribed by their date of birth (their “prescribed age group”) to play football outside of their prescribed age group.

## WHY IS A POLICY NEEDED?

The FA’s Rules 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 however, playing in the prescribed age group would put them at a substantial disadvantage to their teammates, discouraging them from being involved or making it impossible for them to access football.

## WHO IS COVERED BY THE POLICY?

Any child who:

- a) has a disability; or
- b) has a significant physical developmental delay (SPDD); or
- c) is schooled no more than one year behind their prescribed age group and would be placed at a substantial disadvantage if required to play in their prescribed age group.

## 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 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 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.

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>

## THE APPLICATION PROCESS

### 1) Making an application

A parent/carer seeking dispensation for a child under this policy should use the application pack set out at Annex 1 to this guidance. A completed Application should be submitted to The Equality, Diversity & Inclusion team (EDI) along with the appropriate supporting evidence as set out at paragraph 2 below.

Anyone in football (e.g. a County or League Welfare Officer) receiving a request for dispensation under this policy should notify The FA's EDI team immediately.

### 2) Gathering the relevant evidence

The parent/carer should ensure that the following detailed written evidence is submitted with the Application:

#### a) For children with a disability or SPDD:

**A letter from a medical practitioner or other specialist** which:

- i. identifies the child's disability or SPDD;
- ii. identifies any particular characteristics of the disability or SPDD which are relevant to the request to play in an age group other than the child's prescribed age group;
- iii. explains 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;
- iv. explains 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;
- v. identifies 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;
- vi. explains 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.

#### b) For children who are schooled a year below their prescribed age group

**A letter from the parent/carer explaining:**

- i. which year the child is being schooled in;
- ii. why it was deemed appropriate for the child to delay a year of education;
- iii. explaining how playing in his/her prescribed age group would place the child at a substantial disadvantage; and
- iv. explaining how playing in an age group other than his/her prescribed age group would neutralise or reduce disadvantage.

**In addition, a letter from the child's school and/or Local Education Authority and/or relevant School Admissions Authority confirming that the position as set out in the parent's/carer's letter is accurate.**

This evidence must **clearly address these points**. We recommend that you provide this criteria to the medical practitioner, specialist, or education establishment to ensure they cover all points.

**Any application which does not provide clear evidence in relation to these points may be returned.**

By submitting the above evidence, the parent/carer will be considered to have consented to the sharing of this information as required to process the request.

### 3) Assessing the application

Once all the relevant evidence has been submitted, it will be considered by an appointed independent medical advisor to The FA. Where appropriate, guidance may also be sought from a specialist experienced in the relevant area of disability nominated to assess the application.

The FA's appointed medical advisor or specialist will advise the EDI team 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 parent/carer** and at the same time to the relevant **Club Secretary, League Secretary** and/or **County FA** as appropriate.

When a dispensation is granted it will ordinarily be given for a stated period, which is usually one football 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.

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, significant physical developmental delay or are schooled below their prescribed age group. Evidence will be required from a medical practitioner or education establishment, as set out above, 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.

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

**Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Team  
The Football Association**

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