

Disability Sport Background information

Provision for disability sport has suffered in the past from a lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of providers and sporting organisations. It is still seen by many as a very daunting task that is beyond their capabilities. As a result, catering for the wants and needs of disabled participants has been poor. Many providers have lacked the skills required to enhance access, participation, facilities and coaching, thus allowing individuals to participate fully and maximise their sporting talents.

Defining disability has caused a considerable number of problems, especially in the area of sport. Sport has also encountered difficulties ensuring that the range of competition level activities offered cater for the many types of disability, and that an equitable approach is taken to all participants and competitors.

Sport England follows the Government's guidance on disability (taken from the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, see www.hms0.gov.uk for more detail). Disability is defined when a person is registered as having a limiting long-standing illness. A limiting long-standing illness (LLSI) is defined as a health problem which is expected to last for a period of time (specified as a year in the Labour Force Survey of 2001), which affects the kind or amount of paid work that might be done or limits day to day activities in any way.

To aid sports providers in defining various types of disability, Disability Sport England (see Partners below) has provided the following categorisation template covering various aspects of disability / ability:

Locomotion dysfunction – various levels of mobility and use of limbs

Sensory dysfunction – hearing or visual impairments

Cerebral dysfunction – learning disability

Other dysfunction – non specific impairments

Able-bodied

The Government has advocated the importance of providing equal access to all to facilities and services through the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 that became law in 1996. The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against people with disabilities in the area of employment and in the provision of goods, facilities and services. However, Sport England wishes to stress that making a facility accessible to people with disabilities does not automatically ensure that all the programmes of activities run within the facility, or the ancillary facilities are accessible and available to disabled people. In order to ensure full and equitable access to facilities it is necessary to consider more than mere physical adaptations. For example, the experience of people with varying disabilities can be invaluable in enhancing facilities for disabled use (see later; Participation).

Partners

Sport England's key partner for disability sport is the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS). The EFDS was established in September 1998 as an umbrella body to lead a unified, co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to sports development in England for disabled people. The EFDS brings together a number of established national and regional agencies with complementary roles. The national agencies are seven National Disability Sports Organisations (NDSOs) recognised by Sport England:

British Amputee and Les Autres Sports Association (BALASA)
British Wheelchair Sports Foundation (BWSF)
British Blind Sport (BBS)
Cerebral Palsy Sport (CP Sport)
British Deaf Sports Council (BDSC)
English Sports Association for People with Learning Disability (ESAPLD)
Disability Sport England (DSE)

The EFDS is made up of ten Regional Federations, which co-ordinate and support the delivery of EFDS' objectives across the country. They are involved in grass roots development, working closely with all local agencies to encourage participation. Disability sport has, through the EFDS, a stronger voice and more focused objectives concerning sports development across England whilst still retaining the specific expertise of the important member organisations. The EFDS aims to be the united voice of disability sport in England, promoting the ideal of sport as a right, not a privilege for everyone, including disabled people. It also aims to influence providers to include disability sport in all sports development plans, from grassroots to excellence, and to campaign for increased sporting choices and opportunities for disabled people.

Further information on the EFDS and its member organisations can be found in the contacts section under 'Further Reading'.

Research and statistics

Sport England has carried out detailed research into the participation of young people and also adults with disabilities in sport and further. Headline findings from the research can be found on the Sport England website and is also available from your Sport England Regional offices. The research can be a useful management tool when planning policy, programmes and activities for people with disabilities within your community. For instance their findings suggest a number of important issues, which include:

- People with disabilities experience very similar barriers to sport as non-disabled people and have many similar tastes in participation. It is therefore wrong to assume that people with disabilities favour certain sports over others or indeed are only able to participate in these sports.

- Sports participation rates for disabled adults are significantly lower than for non-disabled adults.
- Past interventions aimed at increasing participation in sport by people with a disability have not succeeded so far in terms of achieving parity with the non-disabled population.
- More needs to be done to provide competent human support, whether that is trained volunteers, sport centre staff, or carers, to enable people with a disability to have the confidence to take part in sport or to try new sports.

(Taken from *Adults with Disability & Sport National Survey 2000-01 – April 2002*)

However, as with all work on achieving sports equity and whilst these key issues are important as part of all the research findings, it cannot not replace local consultation, which is essential in planning increased and appropriate community sporting opportunities for disabled people.

Guidance for action planning

There follows advice on how to ensure a more equitable approach to your provision of sporting opportunities for people with disabilities, and guidance on the common areas for consideration in future planning. It highlights the importance of breaking down established perceptions and attitudes. These often form greater barriers to participation than the physical characteristics of sporting facilities. Sport England and EFDS believe there is often little need of special treatment for disabled users, just an appreciation of their differing needs. Sport England stress that people with disabilities are interested only in receiving the same level of service that non-disabled users receive and are allowed to take part, wherever possible, alongside non-disabled participants.

Fundamentals

The schools' National Curriculum stipulates that all subjects have to be delivered to pupils aged 5-16 on an equal basis. However, it is noted that some teachers can find the equitable provision of physical education for disabled children difficult, and may lack the resources or specialist knowledge to ensure these pupils gain the maximum benefit.

However, the 'Young People with a Disability and Sport Survey 2000' found that the frequency and variety of sports experienced within school lessons by young people with disabilities is less than that of non-disabled young people. It states that,

It is important that all young people have the opportunity to take part in a variety of sports frequently (at least ten times a year) if they are to develop skills that are sport specific, which can be used in a wider context...and taken with them into adult life. The number of sports undertaken frequently was

disappointingly low (as compared to the Young People and Sport Survey 1999).

The Youth Sport Trust, in conjunction with Sport England, has developed a number of excellent products that address the issue of inclusion. These are aimed at ensuring young people with disabilities are given equal opportunities to experience a variety of sports within school lessons.

A key feature of the YST's work on inclusion is the inclusive games programme **Sportsability**. This provides specially developed resources and equipment for young people with high support needs. Support is also provided through training programmes that enable teachers and support staff to provide a better level of physical education for all.

Engaging young people with disabilities in as wide a variety of sports as possible and having the correct resources to support them is no different to providing the best opportunities and positive experiences in school sport to non disabled young people. It is important that the products and guidance detailed above are used to enhance existing provision by ensuring it is specifically tailored to deliver activities inclusively.

Participation

The EFDS aim to promote the benefits of inclusive disabled and non-disabled sports participation, such as the way in which this can help educate people about disability sport. For instance, many disabled participants want to have the same level of access to services and facilities as non-disabled participants, and want to be treated as regular users.

The most daunting task for many clubs and organisations is appropriately approaching and engaging local disabled people. The EFDS once again stress that the barriers to disability sport are very similar to those of mainstream sport. Facility location, accessibility and cost are generic issues for clubs considering their membership. Strong findings from the research and fieldwork of both Sport England and the EFDS show that many disabled people will participate in sport at facilities, which are very inaccessible because being made welcome and treated as all customers are was a more important factor for them than accessibility. Sport England must stress that this is not an ideal situation and any future project aimed at encouraging disabled sports should be correctly designed, but providers of sporting opportunities should equally consider staff attitudes to and perceptions of disability.

The majority of disabled participants wish to use facilities and services at the same time as non-disabled participants. The EFDS are working towards changing local authorities' view that disabled people are off peak users or would not want to use a pool or sports hall together with non disabled people. Provided the correct resources are present, such that disabled swimmers can enter and exit the pool with ease, and staff are correctly trained to assist where and if necessary, inclusive provision can and should be ensured.

Coaching

Quality coaching is a key factor in ensuring that people with disabilities are given equal opportunities to participate, improve and gain positive experiences from sport in the community. Leaders and coaches who are appropriately trained and experienced in disability specific or inclusive sports are crucial to successful sports development for people with disabilities. SportsCoach UK, in conjunction with EFDS, provide excellent guidance and resources for all levels of coaching for people with disabilities. Sport England advocate that correctly trained staff are the essential starting point for any disability sports provision.

Performance and excellence

Providing extra curricular and community based sporting opportunities is no different for people with disabilities than for mainstream participants. However, young people with disabilities often find it harder to continue their sports participation outside of school than non-disabled young people. The need to enlist the help of the Governing Body of the particular sport is essential when considering performance based activities and providing opportunities for young people to progress to their potential.

The Sport England Governing Body Resource Pack “Making English Sport Inclusive: Equity Guidelines for Governing Bodies” advises that,

“Governing bodies should determine the development pathways for disabled participants who have been introduced to the sport and then demonstrate a desire to improve and develop. Come and try opportunities are of little use if ongoing provision is not available. Consideration also needs to be given to how talented disabled performers will be assisted in their development”

Sport England believes that the issues highlighted here are akin to those in mainstream sports provision. Without a network of support through coaching, resources and identified exit routes (via clubs and governing bodies) any sports development will be limited.

It is also important to note the need to provide a clear steer on competition. Using the classifications provided in the background section, Disability Sport England has devised a ‘Disability Profile’ for use with people wishing to participate in competitive sport, that takes into account their various levels of disability. The written definition on each person’s Profile uses medical terms to describe his or her locomotor (movement), sensory or learning disability. In addition, medical specialists from Disability Sport England, in conjunction with the governing body of each sport, advise on the type of physical and psychological needs for each sport. They then decide on Profile groupings for each sport that will provide the fairest competition. This ensures that people compete against others of a similar ability.

The EFDS has produced an Events Strategy that rationalises all the disability sports events in the country.

Furthermore and in common with non-disabled sport, as activities become more sports specific and technical, the correct resources and coaching expertise are essential. Organisations such as Sportscoach UK, the EFDS, the National Governing Body for the sport and Sport England are all essential partners for organisations planning at this level of sports development.

Management and organisation

“The majority of barriers faced by disabled people are those created by the negative attitudes and misconceptions of society. Some of these may result in physical barriers found in the environment, but it is often not these that cause the most frustration and anger. Such physical barriers are often reinforced with small language and behavioural details that may prevent someone participating in an activity as much as they would like.” Disability Sport England – Disability Etiquette

Whatever your level of sports provision, identifying the needs and demands of all your users will be the route to achieving not only sports equity but financial viability. Many sports providers believe that engaging people with disabilities is a very challenging task. Consequently for many, especially sports clubs and some local authorities, this will be the first time they have addressed the task proactively.

It is essential that organisations contemplating the introduction of activities or facilities aimed at encouraging participation by people with disabilities consult with specialists as part of their planning procedure. Amongst those they should approach are local organisations currently providing activities, schools that cater for disabled young people, the governing bodies of the specific sports considered and, the regional EFDS officer. It is also essential that the people at whom the activities will be aimed at are consulted.

The EFDS and its member organisations provide further guidance on engaging and providing for people with disabilities throughout organisations and / or clubs, including information about how to be proactive and provide what people with disabilities require.

Achieving equitable provision

Not just physical but attitude and cultural change

It is the opinion of Sport England and the EFDS that achieving equitable provision for people with disabilities need not always mean expensive changes to buildings, although there will be a requirement in the amendment to the Disability Discrimination Act in 2004. Equity is very much about making participants feel welcome. It is about not only providing for their needs, but also providing sporting opportunities that are on a par with those of all other users. Changes to buildings may be an ideal, long term requirement, but a

more easily realisable starting point should be to establish the needs and engage the enthusiasm of people with a range of disabilities.

For capital build projects clear advice and guidance can be gained from Sport England publications as well as EFDS and its member organisations.

Perceptions of disability sport and “barriers”

An essential step in achieving equity is to move away from the perceptions and stereotypes of disability. For the majority of disabled participants in sport (and those who wish to participate), disability does not mean illness, is not a reflection of their intelligence and is not being in a wheelchair. Therefore, whilst some adaptation of your facility may be required, attitude and education are the largest hurdles to overcome.

The ‘Adults with a Disability and Sport Survey 2002’, carried out by Sport England found that large majority of adult disabled users who had not played sport and were limited by their health stated that they did not require any type of specially adapted equipment to participate. Furthermore, the help most sought after by those surveyed concerned information and advice on the sports they could participate in given their health problem or disability.

Other types of support are still in need of development though, as recognising the variety of needs that disabled people have, and their differing levels and types of disabilities is central to addressing disability sport. The 2000 survey includes findings that will need much further consideration, such as the finding that adults with an ambulation disability were the least likely to have taken part in a sport, with just under a quarter of those surveyed having participated regularly in at least one sport (in last four weeks prior to survey).

Education and Inclusion

It is important that providers of sporting opportunities are armed with further knowledge. This will raise their awareness of what else can be done to make provision, at whatever level, more equitable for people with disabilities (and in general more equitable for the surrounding community).

Facilitators should prioritise and aid the education of any person who is aiming to provide sport and recreation for people with disabilities on their behalf or as part of a wider sports provision, as changing people’s attitudes and making them aware of the benefits of a positive equitable approach will ensure success. The EFDS should be contacted regarding the training of you and your staff and colleagues.

Finally, it is of equal importance to make people with disabilities themselves aware of the opportunities to participate in sport that are available to them. Frequently, in order to encourage the participation of young people, parents need to be advised that children’s disabilities need not preclude them from participating, and that their children can participate alongside non disabled friends. Assumptions by parents that their children would not be able to

participate in a particular sport often leads to missed opportunities. Once again, education and inclusion are the solution. In addition, marketing, through local community groups and current disabled sports networks, and advice on marketing from the Sport England's regional and local staff, EFDS, and the Governing Bodies of individual sports will assist you in making a positive impact.