

There are many different approaches and ideas about what “disability” is and how it manifests itself. For Forth Valley Disability Sport (FVDS) it is important to have clear criteria for what is considered a disability in terms of sport and physical activity. By having clear criteria, the programme can have a focus and direction rather than trying to be all things to all people. Scottish Disability Sport (SDS) is the National Governing Body for sport for people with a disability, so FVDS have taken their lead from here. The SDS eligibility criteria falls in line with the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), which recognises six different disability groups, and these are:

- Amputees
- Athletes with cerebral palsy
- Blind or visually impaired athletes
- Spinal cord injured athletes
- Athletes with an intellectual/learning disability
- Les Autres (the others) with a physical disability who do not fit into any of the above five groups, e.g. dwarfism

Athletes with an intellectual or learning disability is the most confusing area, because the term is often used interchangeably with learning difficulty despite there being a difference between the two. Mencap describe a learning difficulty as having a specific difficulty that impacts upon a specific area of a person’s life. For instance Dyslexia might mean that someone mixes letters and words, but their impairment will not normally affect their performance in sport. Other conditions classed as learning difficulties are Autism, Aspergers and ADHD, and people with these difficulties are not eligible to take part in disability sport.

On the other hand, participation is possible if these conditions are present alongside a learning disability. Mencap describe learning disability as something that affects every aspect of someone’s life. According to Mencap approximately 19% of school-aged population is classified as having a learning difficulty but only 2% have a learning disability. Someone may have a learning difficulty with reading, writing and number work but this may not be a learning disability due to his or her general ability being much higher. In other words, somebody with a learning disability may have learning difficulties but people with learning difficulties do not necessarily have a learning disability.

Within learning disability sport the minimum eligibility criteria is defined as the person must have an IQ of 75 or below; the person must have “adaptive behaviour” meaning they will need help with everyday tasks; and the learning disability occurred before the age of 18. Many different things cause learning disabilities and sometimes it is not even possible to say what they are. However, most are caused by the way the brain develops before, during or soon after birth. For example, a baby not getting enough oxygen or being born too early can cause a learning disability, as can an early childhood illness, a parent passing on a specific gene, or the mother having an illness or accident during pregnancy.

These classifications for learning disability sport are used on a national level and on an international level are even more stringent with a barrage of tests and reports that can become very expensive therefore should only be followed if an athlete displays potential to perform on the world stage. However on a local level we can have greater flexibility and given that diagnosis may not yet be present in all cases in primary school pupils, FVDS will adopt a common sense approach to entries for event entries from pupils who

**may** have a learning disability. Discussions with class, base and PE teachers as well as support staff along with observation of PE classes can be used to paint a clearer picture of the individual child and their suitability to disability sport. Trial periods within the programmes are also possible