



# **DISPENSATION POLICY**

## INTRODUCTION

The SYFA has produced this guide to assist with understanding the dispensation policy and to;

- Explain who is covered by this policy
- Provide details on how the policy works; and
- Give details on the procedure to be followed, including how we notify applicants of the SYFA decision.

While the overarching purpose of the dispensation policy is to allow participation for children who otherwise may be lost to the sport, it's also important to ensure that the policy operates in a manner which is fair for all participants in football, not only for those children with a disability or impairment for example. The SYFA is required to take into account the following points 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 dispensation policy allows requests to be submitted for children with a medical disability, neurodiverse features/ impaired development or who live in an eligible rural location, to play organised/structured football one age group below their own age group (as defined by their year of birth).

## WHY IS THE POLICY NEEDED?

In line with the Scottish FA Player Pathway, and as noted within our supplementary and playing rules, the SYFA has prescribed age groups which are designed to ensure participants within leagues and competitions under the jurisdiction of the SYFA compete with peers of a similar age and development. For some children however, playing at their own age group would put them at a material disadvantage to their teammates, which in turn may discourage them from being involved in football or make it impossible for them to access football.

## WHO IS COVERED BY THE POLICY?

Any child who is eligible to participate in organised activities under the jurisdiction of the SYFA, who;

- a) Has a disability, or
- b) Has neurodiverse features or developmental impairment, or
- c) Lives in a Rural location, in which there are no age eligible teams within a 20 miles radius
- d) Player is an asylum seeker or refugee and has been placed in a school year younger than their birth year

## **Additional Information Regarding Dispensation within Rural Areas**

In these circumstances, players can apply to play in a team which is one age group below their own age group and should be within 20 miles of their home address. We understand that in some rural areas there will be no teams of any age within a 20 mile radius and in such cases, applications can be made to play in a team which is one age group below their own age group, provided the younger team with which they wish to play is not of equal distance or beyond the closest age-eligible team.

### **EXAMPLES,**

**Penny, Aged 13** has a disability which means she is physically much smaller than her peers. Penny would be at a substantial disadvantage if she were to play within her own age group. Penny would be eligible to apply for dispensation.

**Sheldon, Aged 10** has a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome. Asperger's is an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) One of the key characteristics or features of this syndrome can be the inability to cope with change. Sheldon has become familiar and used to playing with a particular group of friends. Due to having the diagnosis of Asperger's, it's likely Sheldon would become significantly distressed by any forced changes. If required to play at his own age group, it may result in him giving up football. Sheldon would be eligible to apply for dispensation.

**Leonard, aged 8** was delivered by emergency caesarean 3 months early due to the risk of umbilical strangulation. Due to the significant developmental delays caused by the premature birth, the child was deferred from starting Primary School, and as such would be eligible to apply for dispensation.

**Amy, aged 14** lives in a rural part of the country where there are limited options in terms of clubs/teams. The only team within her own age group is 21 miles away; there are no teams within 20 miles at her own age group but there is a local team at the younger age group who are 10 miles away. Amy would be eligible to apply for dispensation.

Further guidance on what constitutes a disability can be found in the equality act 2010, schedule 1 or by following the link below

<https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>

## THE APPLICATION PROCESS

### 1) Making an application

A parent/carer seeking dispensation should liaise with the club secretary and team officials of the team the player is seeking dispensation for and use the application pack set out in Annex 1. The completed application form, supporting evidence as set out in paragraph 2 below and the completed checklist should be sent in by the **club secretary** to the following email address -

[syfadispensations@scottish-football.com](mailto:syfadispensations@scottish-football.com)

### 2) Gathering the relevant evidence

The parent/carer should obtain the following detailed written evidence which then must be ***submitted with the application form.***

#### **a)** For children with a disability

A letter from a medical practitioner or other specialist which:

- Identifies the player's disability
- Identifies any characteristics of the disability which are relevant to the request to play an age group below the player's own age group
- Explains how the characteristics of the disability would place the child at a substantial disadvantage compared to their non-disabled peers if they were required to play at their own age group.
- Explains how playing at the age group below would reduce the disadvantage caused by the player's disability.
- Explains why allowing the child to play in the age group below their own age group will not endanger the health and safety of any other child or other person.

#### **b)** For children with neurodiverse features or impaired development

A letter from a medical practitioner or other specialist which:

- Identifies the player's neurodiversity/ impaired development
- Identifies any characteristics which are relevant to the request to play an age group below the players own age group
- Explains how these characteristics would place the child at a substantial disadvantage compared to their neurotypical peers if they were required to play at their own age group.
- Explains how playing at the age group below would reduce the disadvantage caused by the player's neurodiversity/impaired development
- Explains why allowing the child to play in the age group below their own age group will not endanger the health and safety of any other child or other person.

**c) For players who live in a rural location \***

- Two forms of ID which confirms the parent/carer's address and must be dated with 3 months (this can be a utility bill, bank statement, NHS letter etc)
- A letter from the parent which confirms
  - their current home address
  - the name of the team they are looking for dispensation for, and
  - the nearest age-appropriate team
- A letter from the club which confirms the training venue, including postcode.

*\*those who live in an area where there are no age eligible teams within a 20 mile radius (home postcode to training ground postcode)*

Regardless of the reason for the dispensation request, evidence must clearly address the above points. We recommend that you provide these criteria to the medical practitioner, specialist or educational establishment to ensure all the points are covered.

Any application which does not provide clear evidence as noted above will automatically be returned and not considered. The SYFA will not retain an incomplete application while a parent/carer awaits supporting evidence.

**d) For a player who is an asylum seeker or refugee**

- a letter from the player's school
- a letter from children's services or housing office for the local council.

**3) Assessing the application**

Once the application has been submitted by the club secretary, it will be considered by the SYFA.

In the event dispensation is awarded, the SYFA will be responsible for updating the National Registration System and advising the club of such.

**4) Notifying of the outcome**

The SYFA will notify the child's club of the outcome of the assessment. The decision to either grant or refuse dispensation will be confirmed in writing to the club secretary. Any request to review an unsuccessful decision will not be considered and we cannot engage in dialogue on a decision once an outcome letter has been issued.

When dispensation is granted, this will **only** be for the current football season in which the application has been received. Dispensation is not transferrable therefore should the player move team mid-season, another dispensation application would need to be requested. Dispensation cannot automatically be granted for future seasons and another application would need to be submitted.

Dispensation can also be revoked at any time throughout the season.

## FAQs

**Q. Will any child who is small for their age be eligible for dispensation?**

No, the policy only covers those players with a recognised disability or impaired development.

**Q. Will a child who deferred starting primary school be granted dispensation to allow them to play with their school friends?**

No, not unless supporting evidence was received in line with the criteria noted above and significant information has been received which outlines the reason for the deferment of primary school and why this would prevent the child being able to play at their own age group.

**Q. A child's date of birth is close to the cut off for their own age group, will consideration be given to this?**

No, a player's date of birth is not a factor the assessment takes into consideration.

**Q. Dispensation was granted last year, do I need to apply again for the new season?**

Yes, an application for dispensation should be sought at the beginning of each season and dispensation being granted previously does not guarantee dispensation will be granted for future seasons. Each application will be assessed on the information submitted.

**Q. We stay in a very remote area and there are no local teams at the players age group, can dispensation be sought for the player to play down an age group?**

Yes, players with no age-appropriate teams in a 20 mile radius of their home address can apply to play for a team one age group down. This should be the team closest to their home address, and under no circumstances can players bypass an age-appropriate team to apply to play for a younger team.

**Q. The player isn't getting much game time at their own age group, can they seek dispensation to play an age group down to get more game time?**

No, only players with a recognised disability, neurodiversity/ impaired development or those who live in a rural area, supported by relevant evidence, can apply for dispensation in line with the criteria noted above.

**Q. A player had a speech delay as an infant/toddler and as a result the family chose to defer starting primary school. The player is no longer receiving speech therapy however his classmates are the year below his own age group, can the player request dispensation to play with classmates?**

No, dispensation would only be considered if the player had a diagnosed disability or a developmental impairment which impacted their ability to play within their own age group.