



DISPENSATION POLICY

Introduction

The FA has produced this guide to assist with understanding the policy 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 for ALL**, 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, whilst also permitting children who are struggling to play within their prescribed age group, due to opportunity and individual needs.

WHY IS POLICY NEEDED?

The FA’s Rules prescribe age groups for children to play in which they compete with peers of equivalent 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 POLICY?

Any child who:

- a) Has a disability; or
- b) Has a mental disorder or chronic illness; or
- c) Has a significant physical developmental delay (SPDD); or
- d) They are 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.
- e) Has no available opportunity within their permitted age group and chosen pathway (male, female, mixed, disability). You can find out more information around this new category along with further examples of who is eligible under availability of opportunity – [Click Here](#)
- f) Has individual needs; Those who have individual and specific needs, to play outside of their permitted age group provides them with either a) the opportunity to participate in affiliated football or b) the best opportunity to develop as a player that is within the talent system (girls) or has been recently released (boys). You can find out more information around the new individual needs category along with who is eligible – [Click here](#)

Examples:

- **Claire, aged 12**, has a condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for Claire to do certain activities, (activity limitation) or interact with the world around them (participation restrictions). 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.
- **Savita, aged 10**, was delivered three months early, she was born in late July as opposed to October. It was deemed appropriate that due to her immature age and development, she would delay her first year of schooling.

- **Asma, aged 7**, currently plays mixed football but wants to play girls only football. She lives in a rural area and at present the only accessible opportunity to her is a girl under 10 team. She would apply for dispensation under Opportunity of Availability.
- **Kate, aged 13**, currently plays at an Emerging Talent Centre and is looking to play outfield for a grassroots team. It would be most appropriate for her development for her to play U12s, and thus would need to apply for dispensation under Individual Needs.

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 head to myaccount.thefa.com. This will allow them to access the child's FAN (FA Number) records and apply – A full guide on how to complete the application can be found [here](#). A completed Application should be submitted to the first line triage team along with the appropriate supporting evidence as set out in paragraph 2 below.

2) Gathering the relevant evidence

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

Application Type	Evidence Required	Approver
Disability or impairment	<p>A letter from a medical practitioner or other specialist dated within the last 18 months (about 1 and a half years) which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. identifies the child's disability or impairment; ii. identifies any characteristics of the child's disability or impairment which are relevant to the request to play in an age group other than the child's prescribed age group; iii. explains how the characteristics of the disability or impairment 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 impairment; 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. 	FA Medical Advisor
Mental health or chronic illness	<p>A letter from a medical practitioner or other specialist dated within the last 18 months (about 1 and a half years) which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. identifies the child's mental health or chronic illness; ii. identifies the characteristics of the child's mental health or chronic illness which are relevant to the request to play in an age group other than the child's prescribed age group; iii. explains how the characteristics of the mental health or chronic illness would place the child at a substantial disadvantage compared to his/her peers if he/she were required to play 	FA Medical Advisor

	<p>football in his/her prescribed age group;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 mental disorder or chronic illness; 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. 	
Significant physical development delay (SPDD)	<p>A letter from a medical practitioner or other specialist dated within the last 18 months (about 1 and a half years) which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. identifies the child’s SPDD; II. identifies any characteristics of the child’s 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 characteristics of the child’s 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 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. 	FA Medical Advisor
Educational: For children who are schooled a year below their prescribed age group	<p>Within the “Nature of disability section” of the application the parent must provide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the year the child is schooled in; ii. why it was deemed appropriate for the child to delay a year of education; iii. how playing in his/her prescribed age group would place the child at a substantial disadvantage; and iv. how playing in an age group other than his/her prescribed age group would neutralise or reduce disadvantage <p>A letter from the child’s school and/or Local Education Authority and/or relevant School Admissions Authority confirming the year group of the child which must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Be dated within the last 12 months; II. Detail the Name, Job Title & signature of the individual confirming the year group of the child; III. Contain the school’s details, i.e., name and address of the school (a 	The FA – First Line Triage Team

	letter on the school's letterhead is preferred)	
Availability of Opportunity*	<p>Support evidence is required for this category, all templates can be found here. What is required:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Parent / carer – reason for application detailed by parent / carer II. Proposed new team – completed support template by team manager III. Existing team (if applicable) - completed support template by team manager IV. Proposed new league(s) - completed support template by league official 	County FA
Individual Needs*	<p>Support evidence is required for this category, all templates can be found here. What is required:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Parent / carer – reason for application detailed by parent / carer II. Proposed new team – completed support template by team manager III. Existing team (if applicable) - completed support template by team manager IV. Proposed new league(s) - completed support template by league official V. ETC (if applicable) - completed support template by ETC staff member or PL / EFL (English Football League) Academy (if applicable) – proof of release letter 	County FA

* Please note, this dispensation type is currently part of a pilot, The FA will send you an evaluation survey to complete towards the end of the football season to gather your views on the experience and impact of this on your child.

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

If you require any support with the support documentation you are able to find a full guide and support templates [here](#).

Any application which does not provide straightforward evidence in relation to these points may be returned or closed.

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.

1) Assessing the application

Once all the relevant evidence has been submitted, depending on the application type, the application will be reviewed by either a medical advisor to the FA (for Disability or Impairment; Mental Disorder or Chronic Illness or SPDD applications), The FA's First Line Triage team (for children who are schooled a year below their prescribed age group) or the County FA (Availability of opportunity & Individual needs) who will assess each application. Where appropriate, guidance may also be sought from a specialist experienced in the relevant area.

Under the individual needs and availability of opportunities there are set parameters which must be met for an application to be processed. Please visit the knowledge base to see who is eligible under this category - [Click here](#)

2) Notifying the outcome

The FA will then notify the child (via the parent/carer) and the relevant County FA of the outcome of the assessment. The decision to grant or close the dispensation will be confirmed via email to the parent/carer and the relevant County FA as appropriate.

3) Length and Transfer of applications

When a dispensation is granted, it will be given for a stated period, which is usually one football season, and may include conditions.

All dispensation applications are non-transferable between individuals however each category has different criteria in terms of individual moving team:

- A) **Applications related to Disability, SPDD, Mental Health, Chronic illness or Educational can be transferred if the child moves between teams within the same age group and clubs.** The parent/carer may be required to reapply for the following season for a further assessment. The parents must notify the First Line Triage via the support channels.
- B) **Applications in relation to Availability of Opportunity or Individual Needs are non-transferable** and must reapply if moving to a new team.

The County FA should notify its insurers where a child has been granted dispensation. The County FA may share any information contained in 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: Are clubs required to complete a risk assessment if they have a player that is granted dispensation?

No, clubs are not required explicitly to complete a risk assessment as part of the dispensation process but as it is good practice, risk assessments should ideally be updated to reflect the latest circumstances.

Q: If a child falls under more than one category of dispensation, which one do I apply for?

Apply for the category in which you have the most relevant information and evidence. If required, the first line triage can update the category to be more suitable to the application

Q: Am I able to apply under Individual Needs or Availability of Opportunity without the templated supporting documentation

No, we require the template supporting documentation to be used and filled in fully. If you have a party who do not want to provide evidence, this must be put in the support documentation.

Q: I am not able to provide the evidence you require for dispensation; can I still apply?

The supporting documentation is the most integral part of the dispensation process, without it the application will be unlikely to be processed due to the approver being unable to make a suitable decision. If you are struggling obtaining the documentation, please contact the first line triage team who may offer advice on what documentation to get.

Q: Will I be contacted if I apply under the pilot categories?

Yes, under the Individual Needs & Availability of Opportunities categories, we will contact you towards the end of the football season to find out how the pilot went.

Q: Can a player play for more than one team in a season if they are granted dispensation?

This is dependent on the category of applications that is applied for:

- **For Disability, SPDD, Mental health and Education:** the player is still permitted to play for another team within their prescribed SCORY age groups whilst also being able to play for any team within the dispensation age group.
- **For Individual Needs & Availability of Opportunity:** the player is still permitted to play for another team within their prescribed SCORY age groups. If wishing to apply to play out of age group for more than one team, then multiple applications must be made. A player is only permitted to apply for dispensation to play out of age group in one additional age group (i.e. they cannot apply to play both up and down).

You can find further FAQs within the support pages [here](#)

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 first line triage via the Grassroots Technology support pages – [Click here](#)

Useful links:

[Manage My Account](#) Start an application

[Dispensation Portal](#) - View ongoing applications and provide further updates if requested.

[Grassroots Technology Support Pages](#) – Supporting documents and guidance on how to access and complete an application. Also, contact link if you have questions about the dispensation process.

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