

Eligibility: Athlete & Unified Partner Membership Process

Special Olympics Great Britain (GB) exists to support and develop sports coaching and competition opportunities for people with an intellectual (learning) disability. Therefore we require each individual involved in an accredited Special Olympics programme, whether competing or in training, to register using the Special Olympics GB Athlete Membership (SAM) Process.

By completing this process we ensure all Special Olympics participants (athletes or Unified Partners) meet basic criteria, are eligible and covered by Special Olympics GB's Insurance Policy and that there is no health reason that would stop them from participating. Information provided as part of this process enables Special Olympics GB remain accredited to Special Olympics Inc. and allows us to assess the development and support needs of our membership.

The following information will, we hope, help you understand the membership process in full, from first meeting a new athlete (someone with an intellectual disability) or Unified Partner (someone without an intellectual disability taking part in Unified Sports®), to completing their SAM registration in full and providing National Office with suitable eligibility endorsement material.

The following resources are included on the [Resources section](#) of our website to help you through this process:

- Eligibility Officer Registration Form
- Special Olympics GB Eligibility Criteria
- Health & Information Form
- Athlete Eligibility Endorsement Form
- Athlete & Unified Partner Update Form
- Athlete & Unified Partner Membership (SAM) Form (including Easy Read Format)

Eligibility Officers

The knowledge required to sign off on someone's eligibility lies at the local level and with the people who work with the athlete on a day to day or regular basis through regular activity. In order to gather the necessary information required to complete the SAM process, each accredited Special Olympics programme should look to appoint and register an Eligibility Officer with Special Olympics GB. The Eligibility Officers role is to co-ordinate and support new athletes and Unified Partners through the membership process, by requesting suitable information and eligibility endorsement material from such individuals and their wider support groups.

The Eligibility Officer can be someone from within the programme, but they will need to have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the process outlined in this document and Special Olympics GB's Eligibility Criteria.

The Eligibility Officer will usually request information from a professional associated with the individual via an individual's parent / carer / guardian. Such professionals may be a Psychologist, Doctor, Head Teacher, local learning disability team advisor (local authority), Manager of a care home, CEO of an intellectual (learning) disability specific organisation or Social Worker. However Eligibility Officers may occasionally be required to contact a professional directly on behalf of and with permission from the new individual (athlete or Unified Partner).

Each Eligibility Officer should complete and submit the Eligibility Officer Registration Form to Special Olympics GB National Office. Accredited programmes may register more than one Eligibility Officer where required.

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1. Supporting interest from a new athlete or Unified Partner

Whenever a new athlete or Unified Partner makes contact with your accredited Special Olympics programme, you should provide them with some basic information, to ensure that any potential members are aware of any requirements and are able to fully understand what they must do in order to get involved in Special Olympics activity.

Some important pieces of information you should share with the individual and their parent / carer / guardian are:

- a) a basic overview of Special Olympics GB Eligibility Criteria and the all abilities principles
- b) the Health & Information Form, along with why it is required (see below)
- c) an outline of the complete athlete and Unified Partner membership process

You should ask the new individual to complete a Health & Information Form, to enable you to capture some basic information, but also to ensure there is no health reason that would stop them from participating in regular sports coaching and competition opportunities. This can be completed at the individual's 1st coaching session, but must be completed **before** any physical activity related to Special Olympics. The complete Health & Information should then be reviewed by the Eligibility Officer. If the Eligibility Officer is not available, suitable steps should be taken to ensure either the Head Coach or Main Contact receive and review the completed Health & Information form before the individual takes part in any physical activity.

2. Processing information from the Health & Information Form

All details provided on the Health & Information Form (in particular page 1) should be noted, copied and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and Special Olympics GB's Data Protection Policy, which is available on request. This includes storing data in secure locations such as locked cabinets or password protected documents and ensuring only relevant people have access to this data.

If the individual has answered "**NO**" to all of the 5 questions in the "Important Questions about your Health" section on page 1 and completed the questions on pages 3 and 4, they can now participate in coaching sessions.

If the individual has answered "**YES**" to any of the 5 questions in the "Important Questions about your Health" section on page 1, they should make an appointment to see their GP **before** taking part in any further Special Olympics activity. Their GP must be asked to complete the information on the page 2 of the form. Pages 1 and 2 must then be sent to the Special Olympics GB Medical Officer at the National Office, who will then review the information supplied and advise the individual and Club Eligibility Officer of any restrictions placed on their participation in Special Olympics activity. Any costs related to visiting their GP are the responsibility of the individual concerned. Please keep copies of anything you post to National Office.

To remain athlete centred and ensure our members are kept safe, Health & Information Forms should be kept with the Club who delivers sports coaching sessions. The forms should be made available at every coaching session by the Head Coach in case information is immediately required on any individual, whether for contact, medical or health reasons, either as part of an emergency or general enquiry. If the individual plans to participate in multiple coaching sessions, a copy should be made available at each session.

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3. Gathering Eligibility Endorsement Material

Each new athlete or Unified Partner should, where possible, be met by the Eligibility Officer who works with the individual and his or her parent / carer / guardian to gather all necessary eligibility endorsement material, to support their application for SAM registration information. This step should commence as soon as possible, and in general you should aim to complete this within a twelve week provisional period.

During this twelve week period and until membership is confirmed by National Office, the individual may only participate in coaching and **not** competition.

Eligibility endorsement material must be provided by a professional associated with the individual personally, in an appropriate position to understand what the definition of intellectual disability means, for example a Psychologist, Doctor, Head Teacher, local learning disability team advisor (local authority), Manager of a care home, CEO of an intellectual (learning) disability specific organisation or Social Worker.

Eligibility endorsement material can take many forms, including a letter or copy information from a professional (a clinical or educational psychology report, SEN report or letter from your GP), which contains outline evidence supporting the conclusion that the athlete has an intellectual disability in line with the Special Olympics GB Eligibility Criteria. An Athlete Eligibility Endorsement Form can be used if required, to acquire the relevant sign off from a professional, which may be submitted instead of letters or copy information.

If required, eligibility endorsement material can be provided for a group of individuals, only if the professional providing the material is associated with all individuals concerned. For example a letter that lists all names of the individuals applying for membership.

For athletes over 18 years old who may not be able to provide suitable endorsement material due to having no history of formal care services in place, please refer to the guidance in Special Olympics GB Eligibility Criteria and the “Key Indicators” which may help support their application.

People who do not meet the eligibility criteria to become a Special Olympics athlete can and should be offered where appropriate and required, opportunities to take part as a Unified Partner, volunteer or coach. Anyone without an intellectual disability wishing to register as a Unified Partner still needs to complete a SAM form, but does not need to submit eligibility endorsement material. They should tick the box “I am a Unified Sports Partner” on the SAM form.

A Unified Partner is someone without an intellectual disability who is participating in a recognised Unified Sport®. Unified Sports opportunities are in the main team sports such as Football, Basketball, Table Tennis (doubles) – we cannot accept Unified Partner SAM applications for individual sports which includes swimming, gymnastics, athletics etc.

Any individual who is not eligible to take part in Special Olympics activity and who does not take part in Unified Sports®, may still take part in coaching activities within an accredited programme, however they will not be covered by Special Olympics GB’s Insurance Policy. Such individuals will not be required to complete the Special Olympics GB membership process.

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4. Complete SAM forms with the athlete or Unified Partner

Once the Eligibility Officer is happy that he / she has gathered all of the necessary information from the Health & Information Form as well as suitable eligibility endorsement material, they or the athlete should complete a SAM form. SAM forms are also available in Easy Read format. To request paper based SAM forms please email cara.pears@sogb.org.uk. Otherwise, you can download SAM forms from our website [Resources](#) page.

On completion of each SAM form please remember to check all the information required is completed and attached as missing information causes delays in registration. If the photo is attached, ensure the individual's name and accredited programme name is written on the back. Alternatively, if the photo is sent electronically to info@sogb.org.uk, ensure the individual's name is included in the email subject heading and the date of email is written on the SAM form. The release form attached to the SAM form should be signed and dated either by the athlete (if appropriate) or by the parent / carer / guardian on the front page of the form.

NOTE: If attached, the blue carbon copy (if using the paper based SAM forms) should be detached from the SAM form once completed and kept by the Eligibility Officer for their records. It does not need to be sent to National Office.

As you should attach eligibility endorsement material which contains sensitive data, we recommend this information is sent via signed for or recorded delivery, where a signature is required from National Office upon delivery. We cannot accept responsibility for anything that is delayed or lost in the post. Please keep copies of anything you post to National Office. Please send all completed SAM forms, eligibility endorsement material and related queries to:
Karen Wallin, Special Olympics GB, Corinthian House, 1st Floor, 6-8 Great Eastern Street, London EC2A 3NT.

Once received at Special Olympics GB National Office the form will be logged and eligibility endorsement material checked. The Eligibility Officer will be sent confirmation of receipt and any further communications including further requests for information regarding the registration application. Special Olympics GB aims to complete and communicate a decision within 1 month of receiving information.

If all information is collated before the twelve week "provisional period", you do **not** have to wait until the end of the twelve week period before submitting it to National Office.

5. Receiving confirmation of SAM registration from National Office

If approved, the athlete or Unified Partner will be given a unique SAM number which will be emailed to the Eligibility Officer (or Main Contact if requested) unless otherwise requested. Special Olympics GB will add the individual's details to the main Special Olympics GB Database, which is stored in line with Special Olympics GB Data Protection Policy. A report or census of currently registered individuals can be made available on request to National Office.

SAM numbers are required to enter Special Olympics competition and events, so please ensure these details are stored safely and made available on all event entry forms. If any details change at any point of the year, including address, name, sports etc., they should complete an Athlete & Unified Partner Update Form, available on our website [Resources](#).

All 5 steps are laid out in diagram form on the following page for your reference.

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