



A Quick Guide to Special Olympics Competition

**Divisioning
Honest Effort
Quotas & Selections
Advancement
Frequently Asked Questions**



Special Olympics
Ireland
a place for everyone!



1. Divisioning

What is Divisioning?

The thing that makes Special Olympics unique and different to other sports organisations is that:

athletes of all ability levels are encouraged to participate
and
every athlete is recognised for their performance.

Divisioning is when athletes compete with other athletes of similar ability.

How does Divisioning work?

There are **3** key factors in divisioning:

Ability is the most important factor, followed by **Age** and **Gender**.

So, athletes are divisioned using the following steps:

Divide by Gender	Divide by Age	Divide by Ability
Firstly, athletes are divided by gender. Ideally females compete against females and males compete against males. When a team consists of both male and female athletes, the team is considered a male team and competes in a male division.	The next step is to divide the group by athletes' ages in the following categories: Individual sports 8-11 years 12-15 years 16-21 years 22-29 years 30 years and over Team sports 15 years and under 16-21 years 22 years and over.	To complete the process, divide the group according to their ability with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 8 athletes or teams of similar ability in each group.

What happens if this is not possible?

Sometimes there are too few athletes of similar ability, age or gender to make a quality competitive division, so:

- the age groups can be broadened
- **or** genders may be mixed
- **or** a one or two person division may occur. This should always be an exception as at all times the aim is to offer **a quality competitive experience** for all our athletes.

2. Honest Effort

When every athlete/team participates to the best of their ability in every division regardless of the level of competition, this is called **Honest Effort Participation**.

It was introduced by Special Olympics International in 1995 following repeated incidents of cheating, where athletes deliberately underperformed in preliminary rounds in order to be placed in a lower division giving them a better chance of securing a medal in finals.

Honest Effort applies in every Special Olympics competition but its application in timed and measured events, such as swimming, athletics and alpine skiing, is key.

At Area level, coaches submit entry forms with the times or scores of their athlete. Sometimes, because it is not practical to run preliminary rounds, athletes are divisioned based on these entry scores.

In finals, any athlete whose score is **15%** better than their entry score will be disqualified. The only exception is in developmental events where a **20%** margin is allowed.

The entry/divisioning score should be the best score of the athlete, their Personal Best. The idea is that a 15% / 20% increase on this score is a very fair allowance for performance improvement in a final.

What can a coach do to ensure an athlete is not Disqualified?

- keep accurate records of the athletes' times or distances over a number of training sessions
- consider if the athlete tends to perform better or worse in a competition environment and ensure they take appropriate care that the time/distance entered for the athlete will be reflective of his/her performance on the day
- update an athlete's score after the deadline for entry forms, but before the competition date itself, by submitting an **Improved Performance Form**. Each Regional Office has details on deadlines for submission of Improved Performance Forms.

Remember: It is the coach's responsibility to submit accurate and recently recorded times and distances for each athlete's entry score.

3. Quotas and Selections

What is a Quota?

A quota is the maximum number of athletes which may participate in any competition depending on:

the **size** and **space** in the venue

and

the **time** available to run the competition

Generally at Area level, any athlete who wishes to compete has the opportunity to do just that, so quotas are not particularly relevant. As athletes progress from Area, to Regional and Special Olympics Ireland level, quotas are established because of the number of athletes. Therefore, athletes must be fairly selected in order to advance through these levels of competition.

How does an athlete advance from one level of competition to the next?

Firstly, all eligible gold medal winners of every division may be selected to advance to the next level of competition.

Where there is a quota established, athletes are selected through a random selection process in order to fill the quota. In other words:

Random Selection Process

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
If the number of eligible athletes is the same as the quota, then all gold medal winners progress. For example, if the quota is 10 athletes and there are 10 gold medal winners, all athletes go through to the next level of competition.	If the number of gold medal winners exceeds the quota, then random selection of all gold medal winners , will take place. For example, if the quota is 10 athletes and there are 15 gold medal winners, random selection from the 15 gold medal winners will take place, to fill the quota of 10.	If there are not sufficient gold medallists to fill the quota, all gold medallists advance and the remaining quota is filled by random selection of all eligible silver medallists until the quota is filled. Again, if the quota is 10 athletes, but there are 5 gold medal winners only, these 5 automatically advance and the remaining 5 are filled, again randomly, from all the silver medal winners. This process will continue sequentially through bronze medallists, 4th, 5th and so forth, until all places are filled.

4. Advancement

What is advancement?

Advancement is when an athlete progresses from one level of competition to the next in a four year cycle.



Competitions run on a four year cycle with athletes progressing from Area to Regional, to Special Olympics Ireland Games and finally to a World Games, whereupon the cycle commences again. (see figure)

It is essential to adhere to the selection process for advancement because it:

- guarantees consistency and fairness
- ensures that every eligible athlete in every affiliated group has the opportunity to advance from one level of competition to the next.

Who is eligible to advance?

Athletes are eligible to advance to the next level of competition provided they:

- have participated in an eight week (minimum) organised training programme and prepared for competition in the specific sport and event consistent with the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules
- have participated and were placed in the previous level competition (e.g. if an athlete does not compete in an Area advancement event, he/she can not compete at a Regional advancement event)
- have not been disqualified or failed to complete their events. Disqualification = no advancement.

If a particular sport or event is not offered in the next level of the advancement cycle, athletes cannot advance in those instances.

5. Frequently Asked Questions

Does every athlete receive an award?

- Medals are presented to those athletes in 1st to 3rd place.
- Place ribbons are presented to athletes in 4th to 8th place.
- Participation ribbons are awarded, on the last place of the podium, to athletes who do not finish their event or who have been disqualified for technical rules infringements.
- No award is given to athletes who are disqualified for unsportsmanlike behaviour.

Is every athlete allowed to advance to the next level of competition?

Only if he/she has participated in the previous level of competition. For example, if an athlete does not compete in Regional competition, he/she is not eligible to advance to the Special Olympics Ireland Games.

Athletes who are disqualified or who do not complete their event cannot advance in that event.

Does the quickest or best score only advance?

All eligible athletes, in every division, have an equal opportunity to advance to the next level of competition because Special Olympics offers the opportunity for every athlete, regardless of their ability, to participate in competition.

Remember: Disqualification = no advancement.

What is random selection?

Random selection is the process by which athletes are selected to advance from one level of competition to the next. Random selection is the fairest way of ensuring that all athletes of all ability levels have the chance to compete at the next level.

Remember: Divisioning + random selection = fair competition for all.

If you have any questions or would like more information about the topics in this brochure please go to
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