

Advancement

What is Advancement?

Advancement is the process by which an athlete progresses from one level of competition to the next. Due to the size of the Special Olympics Ireland programme, advancement is managed over a 4 year cycle across winter and summer sports. Depending on the numbers involved in the sport it may start its advancement cycle in either year 1 or year 2 of the cycle.



After year 4 the cycle begins all over again.

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

- is transparent and guarantees consistency and fairness.
- gives every eligible athlete the same opportunity to compete at every level of competition.

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 have 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 highest level competition in their chosen sport (e.g. Advancement event, he/she cannot compete at a Regional advancement event if the athlete has not competed in the previous Area Event).
- have not been disqualified or failed to complete their events. **Disqualification = No Advancement**
- if a sport/event is not offered in the next level of the advancement cycle it is not possible for an athlete to advance further.

* Other factors that may affect the advancement are available from the Regional offices and detailed in the booklet *Regulations Governing Special Olympics Ireland Sport*.

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 to athletes that do not finish their event or are disqualified for technical infringements e.g. crossing lanes and impeding another athlete on the track or not touching with both hands in the pool.
- No award is given if an athlete is disqualified for un-sportsman like behaviour.

Does the quickest or best score only advance?

It is important to remember that Special Olympics offers the opportunity for every athlete, regardless of their ability, to participate in competition, therefore all eligible athletes, in every division, have the opportunity to advance to the next level of competition, provided the sport and event are offered.

What is random selection?

Random selection is the process used to select and advance Special Olympics athletes from one level of competition to the next. This together with the divisioning process for Special Olympics competition, are the key fundamental principles of the Special Olympics programme.



A Quick Guide to Special Olympics Competition

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Advancement

Frequently Asked Questions

Divisioning

What is Divisioning?

Divisioning is the process used by Special Olympics to ensure that athletes compete with other athletes of similar ability in competition.

What separates Special Olympics from other sports organisations is that : Athletes of all ability levels participate & Every athlete is recognised for their performance.

How does Divisioning work?

There are 3 key factors in the divisioning process; Gender, Age and Ability.

However ABILITY is the over-riding factor to be considered.

Divide by Gender

Ideally female athletes compete against female athletes and male athletes compete against male athletes and this is the first step in the process. When a team e.g. Relay, Football and Basketball etc. consists of both male and female athletes, the team is considered a male team and competes in a male division.

Divide by Age

The next step is to divide athletes into age groups which are: 8-11 years, 12-15 years, 16-21 years, 22-29 years and 30 years and over in individual sports, and 15 years and under, 16-21 years and 22 years and over, in team sports.

Divide by Ability

To complete the process, divide the group according to their ability with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 8 individuals or teams in each group.

While the aim is to have a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 8 athletes or teams in each division this isn't always possible given the set parameters.

What happens if it is not possible?

1. The age groups can be expanded

E.g. 8-11yrs and 12-15yrs may be combined to 8-15yrs

2. Or genders may be mixed

Male and female athletes compete against each other in the same division

Maximum Effort

Maximum effort refers to the participation of every athlete/team to the best of their ability, each time they participate, regardless of the level of competition.

Maximum Effort applies in every Special Olympics competition; however its application is only in timed and measured events and in the Special Olympics Ireland programme that applies to swimming and athletics only. Sports like alpine skiing and kayaking, while they are timed, maximum effort does not apply as performance in the sport can be adversely affected by the weather and water.

At the first level of competition, which for Special Olympics Ireland is area level in most sports, coaches submit entry forms with the times, scores or distances for their athlete. It is often not practical to run a preliminary round prior to finals, therefore athletes are divisioned based on these submitted scores.

In finals, any athlete whose score is 15% , 20% or 25%(depending on the event the athlete is entered in) better than their entry score, will be disqualified.

The submitted/divisioning score should be the best available score of the athlete i.e. their Personal Best. Therefore, the idea is that a 15% /20%/25% increase on this time is a very fair allowance for improvement in a final.

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

- consider if the athlete tends to perform better or worse in a competition environment and if so ensure they take appropriate care that the time/ score/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 will have details on deadlines for submission of Improved Performance Forms.

*** It is the coaches responsibility to submit accurate and recently recorded times and distances for each athlete.**

Quotas & Selections

What is a Quota

A quota is the maximum number of athletes which can be accommodated in any competition depending on the size, space and available time in the venue. Generally at local level, athletes, who wish to compete, have the opportunity to do so, quotas are not usually established. As athletes progress from Area, to Regional and to Special Olympics Ireland level, quotas are established so athletes must be selected in order to advance through to these levels of competition.

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

Firstly, all eligible gold medal winners from every division, regardless of ability, are eligible to advance to the next level of competition. Athletes are drawn randomly to fill the quota in their sport or event as follows:

STEP 1

If the number of eligible athletes is **the same** as the quota, then all gold medal winners progress. For example

- quota is 10 athletes
- 10 gold medal winners
- all athletes progress to the next level of competition.

STEP 2

If the number of gold medal winners **exceeds** the quota offered, then random selection of all gold medal winners, in every ability level, will take place. For example

- quota is 10 athletes
- 15 gold medal winners
- random selection from the 15 gold medal winners will take place, to fill the quota of 10

STEP 3

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.

- 10 athletes
- 5 gold medal winners only
- 5 automatically advance
- remaining 5 places are filled, again drawn 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.