**Pedagogical report**

Pedagogical report on the required learning outcomes necessary to promote participation in physical activities among individuals with intellectual disabilities in relation to the European Qualification Framework

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*The content of this report does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union.*

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# **Introduction:**

There is a considerable need for the development of educational training for staff and volunteers working with youths with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities based upon research from higher education. Especially in relation to physical activities. Down syndrome (DS) is a common learning disability and the condition occurs in approximately 1 in 700 births (*U.S Department of Health & Human Service, 2017*). There is no cure for the condition instead; interventions are encouraged to promote independence, social inclusion, physical and mental development (*European Commission, 2017, European Commission 2010, Heller et al., 2003*). Health care guidelines from adolescence to early adulthood for individuals with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities strongly suggest to encourage recreational activities and stimulate sport activities.

People working in vital societal organisations such as schools and sport clubs are feeling inadequately equipped on how to best support and include individuals with disabilities as they lack knowledge about the needs and strengths of people with the condition (*Thai & Kingsley, 2017; Sayers Menear, 2007; Jones, 2003).* People who have been given disability education or have had past experience of individuals with DS have attitudes that are more positive which subsequently show better social acceptance in workplaces and schools (*Campbell, Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2003; Pace, Shin & Rasmussen, 2010*). Social integration has not only an empowering effect on individuals with DS, but also challenges the negative attitudes towards people with disabilities in society (*Pace et al., 2010*).

Most individuals with DS have to overcome social as well as physiological barriers in order to participate in social, sport and recreational activities. In addition to an intellectual disability, several health problems such as heart disease, poor muscle tone, vision and hearing problems is associated with the condition (*Bull, 2011; Bertapelli, et al., 2016*). Even though studies have found cardiovascular improvements, weight loss and increased muscle strength in individuals with DS who take part in training programmes or undertake regular exercise, many people still have sedentary lifestyles with little physical exercise (*Balic, Mateos & Blasco, 2000; Esposito et al., 2012; Heller et al., 2003; Tsimaras&Fotiadou, 2004*; ). For individuals with DS, one of the primary reasons for participating in activities is not only for the health benefits, but the social interaction with peers (*Sayers Menear, 2007*). Being aware of needs and strengths can change attitudes and encourage staff to devise an integrational programme that promotes inclusion and engagement (*Campbell et al., 2003; Spencer-Cavaliere et al., 2017*).

The proposed project adheres to the European priorities agreed in: a) The European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A renewed commitment to a barrier-free Europe (November 2010), b) The Declaration of the European Parliament of 18 April 2012 on children with Down syndrome, c) The European Commission Communication ‘The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion’ (December 2010) and d) The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which entered into force in the EU in 2011.

The outcome will be a functional continuing education and training package for organisations who works or are interested to work with individuals with DS. This will enhance the possibilities for individuals with DS to participate in sport activities and at the same time have the increased opportunities to become more integrated in our European society, which will contribute to their empowerment. As outlined in the European directives, removal of barriers for equal participation and social inclusion of people with disabilities is a European priority and the training package is therefore best developed in a collaborative transnational project in order to consider social and cultural factors. A multidisciplinary approach, which includes universities, NGO’s such as youth and sport organisations and Down syndrome organisations, are more likely to identify the barriers that currently exist. Also, as indicated, this issue is a European wide problem. By utilizing a transnational project approach, a functional training material that take account of European social and cultural diversity in various settings will be generated and consequently the developed training material will be more easily adopted and utilised across Europe.

The developed material will include training about equality, diversity and inclusion in order to combat segregation and discrimination. By increasing knowledge and awareness within organisations, a broader social dialogue about attitudes and inclusiveness can open the possibility for measures to empower individuals with disabilities and ensure independence and occupational integration as part of their EU rights (*European Commission, 2010; European Union, 2012*).

# **Pedagogy**

There are undoubtedly numerous approaches to ‘successful’ teaching in today’s society. While some techniques may be considered more appropriate than others, the effectiveness of pedagogy relies on understanding the diverse needs and capabilities of different learners (Learningportal.iiep.unesco.org, 2019). Hamre & Pianta (2001) believe that teachers in elementary schools should not only teach academic skills, but also serve as role models, regulate interactions between students and should provide emotional support. It is arguable that teachers therefore need to adapt to how different individuals learn, to enhance all pupils’ understanding on a subject matter in the best possible way.

Pedagogy has been defined as the study of how knowledge and skills are exchanged within an educational context (Learningportal.iiep.unesco.org, 2019). While there appears to be an extensive amount of research based on classroom pedagogy, there is mere research-based knowledge on that of sport pedagogy to understand more about the consensus amongst physical educational professionals.

# **Sports pedagogy**

According to the Journal of Teaching in Physical Education (1990) knowledge results when information of sufficient quality is integrated into frameworks, offering individual and collective meaning; this suggests that in order for sports professionals to be able to teach students effectively, the guidelines that they themselves follow must be rich in detail and of great value. If teachers are expected to educate students, become their role models and provide emotional as well as academic support, they should benefit from training on how to accumulate all of these skills. This raises questions as to whether sports teachers are prepared enough in this field and if not, how can we ensure that they are?

# **Integrating pedagogy with learning difficulties**

Moreover, under the umbrella of pedagogy, is the complex and equally diverse concept surrounding students who have learning difficulties. While teachers make numerous decisions daily in response to the learning of students, unintentional limits may be imposed on those who experience learning difficulties due to teachers not knowing how to support these educational differences (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011).

For example, unknowingly many teachers carry a deterministic belief surrounding student ability. According to Hart *et al* (2007), this increases vulnerability to those with learning difficulties as it categorises these individuals separately from other learners and may lead to feelings of isolation and exclusion, which in turn can impede the ability to learn. As suggested by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), this vulnerability is compounded when teachers additionally believe that such students need specialist training which they themselves have not been trained to provide. Existing research suggests that teachers are often uncertain about their role and how to assist students who have experienced traumatic stressors, such as having a learning difficulty.

It is thought that students who have a learning difficulty experience symptoms of stress/ trauma, due to their educational differences separating them from peers (Alisic et al, 2012). For example separating students based on ability can damage self-esteem. While school is sought to teach children to become independent thinkers, as well as providing literacy and numeracy skills, it also prepares children for adulthood. It is often neglected that students who suffer feelings of exclusion during school, later on experience these feelings in their adult lives affecting relationships, social interactions and even potential careers. It would therefore seem logical to ensure all teachers are given the correct skill-set to cater to all individuals needs to ensure that students do not go on to feel this way in their adult lives.

Alisic et al (2012), found that teachers lacked guidance on how to balance the needs of children who had been exposed to stress, against other children within the classroom. Findings concluded that 1/5 teachers (within the Netherlands school sample) experienced a high degree of difficulty including lacking knowledge and the skills to educate children who have learning difficulties. This suggests that implementing new strategies for teachers is necessary to allow for the improvement of teaching. A strategy to consider is providing teachers with a deep and operational understanding of the learning outcomes approach.

# **Learning outcomes**

## What are ‘Learning Outcomes’?

Universally, ‘learning outcomes’ may be confused with ‘learning objectives’ as often teachers emphasise these objectives before the beginning of a lesson in their own way. The latter in fact directs focus to the material the teacher intends to cover within a session, whereas learning outcomes refers to what the student should realistically be able to complete / know by the end of an assignment or activity to set expectations for their individual learning (Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation, 2019).

It is suggested by some academics that successful learning, which derives from effective teaching all starts with the learning outcomes approach. This is due to learning outcomes providing students and teachers with a common reference point allowing for the potential to improve active learning processes alongside better-quality teaching (Cedefop, 2016). It is thus important to recognise that this shift to learning outcomes is what influences education and training and as such, is where our focus should be directed, within an educational context. In summary, acknowledging learning outcomes within the context of teaching, adds value to the educational process for those involved such as teachers, learners, parents and assessors as it sets expectations for achievability.

Some characteristics of learning outcomes have been defined by the Learning Outcomes article of 2012 (Lesch, 2012) to present what effective teaching should look like:

* Reflect essential knowledge, skills or attitudes.
* Focus on *results* of the learning experiences.
* Answer the question, “Why should a student take this course anyway?”

Moreover the article suggests that learning outcomes should reflect a movement towards outcomes based learning; which in turn creates a more accountable educational system as learner performance will become evaluated. If students with learning difficulties therefore show signs of not having processed information provided to them during a lesson, teacher analysis can be conducted to find out why and how this can be improved.

An outcomes based education is thought to provide:

* Consistency (in course offerings across the educational system).
* Accountability (the expectations for learning are stated clearly, whilst frequent assessments are emplaced to identify progress).
* Accessibility (clearly defined outcomes enables learners to demonstrate achievement through prior learning assessment processes).

Most importantly, outcomes-based education should consider and reflect the overriding principles of equity and fairness and **accommodate the needs of all diverse learners.** (Lamission.edu, 2019)

# **European Qualification framework**

One of the paramount tasks is to create clear guidelines about what constitutes a EQF level 4 in the following three areas:

* Knowledge
* Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work
* Skills
* A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work
* Competence

The proposal for the European Qualifications Framework was launched by the European Commission in September 2006. This recommendation outlined an overarching framework to be set up in Europe to facilitate comparison of qualifications and qualifications levels to promote geographical and labour market mobility as well as lifelong learning. The core of the framework consists of 8 qualifications levels described through learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competence).

The EQF level descriptions are from 1-8, but for the sake of focus, we only present in this report level 3-5 to show what we will focus on and the immediate lower and higher level of EQF descriptors.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| EQF LEVEL | KNOWLEDGE | SKILLS | COMPETENCE |
|  | **In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as *theoretical and/or factual*.** | **In the context of EQF, skills are described as *cognitive* (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking), and *practical* (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)** | **In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of *responsibility and autonomy*.** |
| LEVEL 3 | Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study | A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods | Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems |
| **LEVEL 4** | **Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study** | **A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study** | **Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities** |
| LEVEL 5 | Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge | A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems | Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others |

*Source:* [*https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/content/descriptors-page*](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/content/descriptors-page) *(12. January 2018)*

The European Qualification Framework (EQF) aims to increase the transparency of qualifications throughout Europe.

It provides a common European translation tool that facilitates the comparison of several thousands of different qualifications issued all over Europe. This European reference framework consists of eight levels that are defined according to so-called ‘learning outcomes’ – that is to say regarding the knowledge, skills and competences acquired. EU Member States can relate the levels of their national qualifications to the eight common reference levels. Using this tool, stakeholders abroad can make an assessment as to the level of knowledge, skills and competences that a qualification holder has acquired.

The EQF Recommendation requires that the link between the levels of national qualifications and the levels of the EQF is defined based on learning outcomes.

Moreover, the Recommendation also insists that individual qualifications should be described and defined in learning outcomes.

The ‘learning outcomes’ approach shifts the emphasis from the duration of learning and the institution where it takes place to the actual learning and the knowledge, skills and competences that have been or should be acquired through the learning process. Even though it is relatively new; the ‘learning outcomes’ approach has been applied in various countries, in various sectors and for various purposes.

The EQF was not designed to classify educational programmes or occupations, but instead focuses on qualifications systems and frameworks. The EQF levels do not reflect participation in any education programmes or competences required for tasks. The EQF focuses on learning outcomes in the form of knowledge, skills and competence; these are seen autonomously of education programmes or occupational contexts.

## 

# **Description of learning outcomes**

¨Learning outcomes are described in

* **Knowledge** “means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual”
* **Skills** “means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)”
* **Competences** "means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy”

# **UP & GO Training Curriculum framework**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Up & Go –****A training program development for organisations who would like to provide better inclusion of youth with Down syndrome, especially in relation to physical activities and social inclusion.** | |
| **Overall objective:** To equip teachers and trainers with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to facilitate sports activities and social inclusion for youth with Downs syndrome | |
| **Proposed EQF level:** 4 | **Target group:** Teachers & trainers |
| **TRAINING THEME OUTLINE** | |
| **Module/Unit 1: xx**  **Module/Unit 2: xx**  **Module/Unit 3: xx**  **Module/Unit 4: xx**  **Module/Unit 5: xx**  **Module/Unit 6: xx** | |
| **HOURS OF LEARNING** | |
| Lecture hours = xx  Self-study hours = xx Self-assessment hours = xx | |
| Total number of hours: | Total number of ECVET credits: 1 |

## Structure of each module or unit of learning outcomes

|  |
| --- |
| **Number and name of the unit:** |
| **1.** **XXX** |
| **Overall objective and methods of this unit:** |
| **Objective:** To equip the ***teachers and trainers*** with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to facilitate sports activities and social inclusion for youth with Downs syndrome  **Methods**: Lectures, self-study, discussions based on case studies, educational film, self-assessment   |  | | --- | | **Content:** | |
| **Professional competence & learning outcomes:** |
| **Knowledge - a*t the end of this module/unit the learner will be able to:*** |
|  |
| **Skills - *at the end of this module/unit the learner will be able to:*** |
|  |
| **Competences - *at the end of this module/unit the learner will be able to:*** |
|  |
| **Hours of total learning for the unit:** |
| Lecture hours = X  Self-study hours = X  Self-assessment hours =x |

# **ECVET and EQAVET recommendations**

## How can teachers adopt this approach?

Considering learning outcomes as a part of daily teaching is ideally how teachers will better improve their own performance hence improving student learning; however when considering this in the context of teaching sports to those with learning difficulties this alters the ideology slightly. It appears that there is current lack of training for teachers (in all countries) as shown in several online reports. Florian (2007) proposed that the key challenge facing teachers who wish to become more inclusive within their practice is, how to respect as well as respond to human differences in ways that include learners rather than exclude them from what is ordinarily available in the daily life of a classroom. In other words, teachers who are not readily prepared to teach those with learning difficulties will find it challenging, to say the least, to include all learners but provide the best possible teaching for all individual learning. According to Cooper and McIntyre (2006) “classroom teachers are themselves somehow deficient or lacking in the specialist knowledge and skill required to teach students who have been identified as having special educational needs.”

Explaining to sports teachers that they need to adopt the ‘learning outcomes’ approach may seem overwhelming for those who have never given it a thought, so introducing other means to improve teaching as a gentle push in the right direction may be more appropriate initially. Some strategies to effectively achieve this may include:

* Monitoring individual teaching across a number of schools in different countries to analyse teacher performance, including analysis of techniques and strategies to understand what ‘works’ and what can be improved.
* Ask sports teachers to consider what practices best promote collaboration between students (for example group activities, or individual activities that are shared amongst the class, games, quizzes, etc.)
* Ask sports teachers to consider whether including all students within all group activities proves to be more or less effective for the learning of all individuals, rather than separating students into groups based on performance ability. Make a note of results to give feedback to other teachers in the future.
* Offer an alternative perspective, to consider inclusive education and practice as oppose to traditional methods of teaching as follows:

1. Implement observations of teaching and subsequent interviews with teachers to encourage them to articulate how they themselves make meaning of the term ‘inclusion’ in teaching; and
2. based on the results from observations and feedback from teachers create a checklist highlighting:

* Areas of teaching to improve.
* Strategies to include within teaching which advance overall quality of teaching.
* Habits to avoid – such as presuming a student is unable/ unfit to complete a task.

(Some ideas suggested by Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011)

# How can sports teachers, educate those who have a learning disability such as down-syndrome?

With reference to teachers defining learners as ‘unfit to complete a task,’ Rietveld (2008) believes in an educational setting, this view towards children with learning difficulties places limitations on learning. It assumes that learning ability is limited, which in turn creates a sense of personal tragedy or a ‘charity view’ of disability (Oliver, 1996). What this suggests is if learners are even mildly discriminated based on performance ability it will create feelings of exclusion. This may later lead to students refraining from participating/ engaging in group activities within an educational context which will inevitably impede their learning experience.

A learning disability such as Down Syndrome, is the most frequent (genetic) cause of mild to moderate intellectual and developmental disabilities according to McFadden et al (2014). Despite this, for over a decade teachers have been reporting repeated issues of inclusion of a disability within their classes. This is due to problems such as limited resourcing, support issues and time constraints. (Shaddock et al, 2007). It is also argued that there is very little material produced by teachers for teachers about how to include children with a disability in classes.

Improving resources and support, would give teachers access to a wide range of material to help navigate teaching in a direction which better improves the learning of all individuals, including those with learning difficulties. Improving resources, may include promoting teachers with experience in the sports field, conversing with newer/less confident teachers to share experiences with them about what obstacles they faced during teaching (those with learning difficulties) and how they overcame them. One to one mentoring sessions may therefore be ideal as it would give teachers with little knowledge on the matter a chance to delve into the topic in great detail with those who have the required skills to teach disadvantaged students in the best possible way. As a result the newer teachers could learn from the more experienced teachers and therefore become more confident in educating intellectually impaired students. Shadowing experienced teachers in different schools would also give educators a chance to exchange knowledge in a real life setting and allows for potential observation and imitation.

What should also be considered and has been touched upon briefly in this paper, is the idea that students with learning difficulties may in fact be under a great deal of stress due to the fact they struggle with educational tasks, unlike other learners. Acknowledging that students feel this way and responding to them accordingly may boost students’ confidence, as by having someone to talk to about their difficulties can allow for improvements to be made to teaching, to ensure potential problems are minimized. If teachers received the appropriate training to recognise that a student is feeling stressed (due to their disability) this could allow the student to feel more comfortable in talking about their difficulties and by creating this dialogue could improve teacher-student relationships thus improving education.

# **European Qualifications Framework / Continuous Professional Development**

According to Cedefop (2016), reform in teacher training greatly impacts the future role of the learning outcomes perspective to achieve higher relevance of qualifications. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) defines the learning outcomes principle as the ‘glue binding’ of a wide range of tools and initiatives to improve transparency, comparability, and recognition of qualifications between different countries and at different levels. While the learning outcomes approach appears as the most effective way to improve standard of education in different countries, it has been acknowledged each country is moving at different speeds and from different starting points.

The EQF highlights Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as an important means to achieve successful teaching in today’s society. CPD refers to any activities aimed at enhancing the knowledge and skills of teachers by means of orientation, training and support (Coetzer, 2001:78). CPD therefore affects attitudes and approaches to overall enhance the quality of teaching. Lessing et al (2007) produced a report on the value of continuous professional development: teachers’ perceptions. It concluded that for teachers supporting learners with learning difficulties, a hands-on approach is necessary to provide the correct training for these teachers. A hands-on presentation was therefore used during a CPD workshop to ensure that teachers fully understood the use of the suggested teaching methods.

Some characteristics of successful CPD include:

* Successfully plan the workshop to focus on critical thinking, reflection and self-direction.
* Develop excellence by means of competence, confidence and enjoyment.
* Focus on teacher orientation, training and support to provide broadening new knowledge and skills allowing for professional growth.
* Focus on teachers’ teaching approach, to regard CPD as a continuous process allowing for flexibility, sharing existing knowledge and experience.

(Lessing et al, 2007)

**Conclusion**

In summary, there *are* numerous approaches to successful teaching in today’s society. While techniques vary, there are ‘dos and don’ts’ in the context of teaching which are important to be acknowledged and shared amongst teachers; as these become valuable tools for change and improvement. The aim of this paper has been to accentuate that teachers themselves need to be taught, how to teach sports to those with a learning difficulty. There is no ‘rule book’ to teaching, as well as the guidelines to successful teaching being blurred (as success will always be subjective to each individual student). However, what has hopefully been emphasized is there is a lack of knowledge and confidence in many teachers on how to practice inclusive teaching with those who have a learning difficulty.

Included in this paper, are some suggestions of how to promote inclusive sports teaching as stated in the checklist. To reiterate, these were techniques such as conducting teacher analysis, to highlight problematic areas within teaching. One problem that has been brought to light is that many teachers have a deterministic view on student ability which can be harmful to those with a learning difficulty. The idea behind inclusive teaching is to include all learners in an educational setting, to avoid feelings of isolation and stress by the student. By practicing inclusive teaching this can promote collaboration between students to enhance the overall educational experience for all learners.

The learning outcomes approach has also been mentioned within this paper to address the lack of dialogue currently between teachers and their students. By opening up this dialogue this will add value to the educational experience for all involved and can thus improve teaching. Furthermore, Continuous Professional Development as mentioned under the European Qualifications Framework has been suggested, as it will help to strengthen teachers’ ability in educating those with a learning difficulty as it provides essential training for teachers.

What can hopefully be drawn from this paper is the understanding that, sports teachers currently do not have enough knowledge/ skill to be able to teach those with a learning difficulty, effectively. Moving forward, to change this, support should be offered to teachers to allow for a deep and operational understanding of the learning outcomes approach; to direct attention to what the student should be able to know/ achieve by the end of the session. Furthermore, by teachers following CPD programmes this will allow for valuable improvements to be made to teaching and encourage teachers to exchange their experiences with one another. Teachers will thus learn to neglect former more traditional methods of teaching and progress towards practicing inclusive teaching.

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