

Inclusive Karate

Introduction

The English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) has recently published a guide for sports clubs, coaches and sports bodies called “talk to me”.

It points out that round 70% of people with a disability who do not currently participate in sport or recreation would like to try and become more active.

Apart from physical barriers (difficulties with access for wheelchair users, for example) the main barriers to participation are fear of the unknown and whether sports clubs can offer an appropriate teaching and support.

The English Karate Council (EKC) has published a four year Development Plan (which can be accessed on the EKC website), which identifies the challenge of increasing participation from people with a disability, as well as increasing participation from women and girls.

What is the Baseline?

Whilst the EKC member groups have records through their licencing systems of all 48,000 participants, the records do not offer an accurate picture of the number of karateka with a disability. Yet many clubs and associations have long standing members with a disability and in the KUGB, for example some of those members have gained high Dan grades. Part of the reason for the lack of detailed information is that many karateka who have a disability do not wish to be defined by that: they wish to be known as a karate student, participating to their best level.

In the future it is intended to develop a monitoring system, in conversation with disabled karateka that will more accurately reflect their participation.

Karate Instruction for inclusive Karate

The Instructor qualification programmes used by EKC members include sections on teaching students with special needs and requirements.

The EKC believe that, wherever possible, karateka with those needs should be included in a normal class and not segregated. Obviously those students with profound and multiple disabilities would need specific teaching. The disability Karate Federation has developed a programme for such students.

However the aim should be to include the student with a hearing or sight impairment or a learning or a physical disability in our normal classes.

The issue of instruction for those students is one which we are currently addressing.

The EKC Instructor programme is being revised and updated with support from sportscoachuk.

A two hour webex session was held recently with a senior sports coach advisor as part of this process. A key phrase used by the advisor was “teaching to the participants needs”. This resonates strongly with high quality instruction in that in a karate class there can be (and this is often the norm) a wide variation in standards from high kyu grades to Dan grades. And as all Instructors know there can be a huge difference in flexibility, co-ordination and speed of movement within students of the same grade.

Experience over many years has shown that it is possible to include students with special needs in a class and this has proved highly beneficial to those students and has helped the cause of an inclusive approach to disability by increasing acceptance and understanding by the other students. Nevertheless the EKC accepts that it needs to learn more about the best way to attract, teach and retain students with a disability.

This process has already begun with Board members engaging with Sports Development Officers who are providing multi-sport taster sessions for disabled groups, attending courses run by County Sport Partnerships on the requirements of students with a learning disability for example.

It is our intention to consult with our Instructors who are disabled and with our medical and other appropriate professional advisors and stakeholders and to build in their advice to the revised Instructor Programme which will be aligned with the UKCC (United Kingdom Coaching Certificate)

The Benefits of Karate for the disabled

Adam is a Dan grade in the KUGB. Adam has a learning disability and began his karate journey 10 years ago, joining a local club in North London. His karate journey has been challenging for him as the syllabus is the same for him as the other students. That is the way he wanted it. And the achievement of a Black Belt is all the more meaningful for Adam because he has had to work exceptionally hard to achieve it.

Karate has offered him so much more than the physical participation. Adam is a valued member of the KUGB events team and has volunteered at the National and other championships for many years. He has made many friends and received support and respect. Karate has made him much more confident and enabled him to overcome the negative experiences in his life (bullying at work, for example)

Adam’s story is just one of many in the inclusive history of karate. It is our aim to provide more opportunities for people of all abilities to take up karate in the future.

English Karate Council

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