Adapted Physical Activity
Ireland

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Introduction to Ireland and APA

Population

Ireland is a small country consisting of 32 counties with a total population of 3,621,035 people (Central Statistics Office, 1996). Within this population there are 360,000 people with a disability ranging from asthma to serious physical and learning disabilities. Half of this number is aged 60 and over (A Strategy for Equality, 1996).

The prevalence of disability in Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>No. in total population</th>
<th>% with disabilities</th>
<th>No. with disabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-14</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-59</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>550,000</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>180,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ages</td>
<td>3,550,000</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>360,000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(National Rehabilitation Board, 1997)

The scales of division between Mild, Moderate, Severe and profound learning disabilities are summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% with disability within total disabled population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>80-85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profound</td>
<td>1%</td>
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</table>
Situation of people with learning disabilities in Ireland and sport/Adapted Physical Activity

It is widely acknowledged that participation in sport and physical activity plays an important part in one's developmental process. This encompasses educational, physical, psychological, social and psychosocial benefits derived from physical movement, social interaction and fun and enjoyment to mention but a few. It is therefore vital that people with a disability are given the opportunity to partake in the sport/activity of their choice. However, “It is regrettable that Sportspeople with a disability in Ireland remain in a state of isolation and discrimination owing to present attitudes and practices” (Report of the people with a disability in sport taskforce, 1999).

Many reports and documents produced in Ireland have stressed the importance of participation, integration, equal opportunities and equal sporting status for people with disabilities been of paramount importance in government and sporting organisations policy provision. However, to date the provision of opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in sport ranging from recreational to elite level has been not only limited in service provision but has been an area which has been consistently overlooked by Irish sporting bodies including the government and some National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGB’s). Unfortunately many NGB’s do not have an all-inclusive policy for people with disabilities wishing to join their organisation.

The Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996) indicated that 20,800 individuals with a disability were participating in organised sporting clubs/events. These participants were affiliated to a number of bodies such as: Special Olympics Ireland, the Irish Paralympic Council, special schools competitions, and social and youth groups. However this number accounts for only 6% of the total population of people with a disability.

For many people with disabilities in Ireland, participation in sport or recreation has been a “No Go Area” either as participants or spectators for a variety of reasons.
Listed below are the main factors considered to be major participation barriers in the country:

- Access to information on services/facilities available
- Non-availability of transport
- Access to finance
- Lack of education and training
- Lack of motivation and interest
- Poor health

Listed below are the main organisations providing sport and Adapted Physical Activities for people with disabilities as well as a brief summary of their services:

*Special Olympics Ireland* -
Provides opportunities for athletes with a learning disability to participate in year round training programmes and competition events. There are 18 sports in SOI which are divided between (1) Summer sports, (2) Winter sports, (3) Motor activities and (4) Unified sports. The 2003 World Games are been hosted in Ireland—the first time they will be moved outside America. Because of this Special Olympics Ireland is currently receiving much media attention with on-going events and competitions been reported on local and national media.

*The Irish Wheelchair Association* –
Is the national organisation dedicated to the achievement of full social, economic and educational integration of people with physical disabilities as equal, independent and participating members of the general public. It is the IWA’s policy to develop and improve opportunities for people with physical disabilities to partake in a variety of sports from recreational to elite level. There are eleven sports currently on offer in the IWA. Unfortunately, media promotion and coverage is poor. Disabled sport is seen as a minority sport in Ireland thus it is difficult to gain recognition from the national media. However, local radio and newspapers are much more receptive in their coverage of IWA events.
The Paralympic Council of Ireland –
Promotes sports for high performance athletes with disabilities and is the representative body at Paralympic games and other multi-disability championships. Paralympic athletes compete in eighteen sports, 14 of which are Olympic sports. Paralympic sports only receive media coverage around the time of the Olympic games.

Target groups for Adapted Physical Activity

Adapted Physical Activity is not solely a distinct programme within the education system i.e. part of a PE or Sports science course. The relevance of the science of APA extends far wider drawing from many professional areas such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, motor rehabilitation, gerontology, physical education, sport science, paediatrics, recreation and psychology. Given the diversity of fields associated with APA, target groups concerned with aspects of the area are as follows:

- Neuromuscular disorders – Cerebral palsy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, MS, rheumatoid arthritis
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) – asthma, exercise induced asthma, bronchitis, cystic fibrosis
- Physical impairments – Cerebral palsy, spina bifida, amputations, spinal cord injuries, body mechanics
- Cognitive/sensory impairments – learning disabilities, mental illness, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, hearing impairment
- Metabolic disorders – obesity, diabetes
- Ageing – Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s disease, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis
- Psycho-social – eating disorders
- Cardiac conditions

(Adapted from Jakeman and Mac Donncha, 1998)
A Report on the People with a Disability in Sport Taskforce (1999) conducted extensive research in the areas of special schools, mainstream schools and third level colleges regarding APA education and training in Ireland. It was found that teachers involved in mainstream and special schools expressed a lack of self-confidence and fear due to inadequate training as an undergraduate student stating their training did not equip them to teach physical education (PE) to special needs students.

Regarding teaching staff and professional development in the primary sector, the class teacher is wholly responsible for the provision of PE in primary schools with only 11% of primary teachers having undertaken in-service training in APA.

In Ireland out of the 22 colleges and educational institutions that offer courses in PE or sports related courses 77% do not include modules in APA, while 27% (8) offer either optional (1) or compulsory modules (7) in APA.

Secondary schools- a new Applied Leaving Certificate programmes has been introduced in Ireland with a “Sports and Leisure” examination subject. Presently there is no reference to people with disabilities and sport in the syllabus.

The Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI)

It was determined by the task force report from PEAI memberships (i.e. PE teachers in Ireland) that only 22% of respondents stated they were offered modules in APA at an undergraduate level, with only 16% indicating that they actually undertook these modules. The remaining graduates (84%) did not attend any in-service training or courses in the area of APA. It was also stated that the majority of the PEAI members felt that the available resources for teaching students with special needs were totally inadequate in the country.
Specialised courses and research opportunities for APA in Ireland

Presently, no specific full-time year round mandatory course exists within the Irish education system based on Adapted Physical Activity. However, developments are in progress within various colleges offering elective modules with one institution having a 60-hour mandatory module in APA. All post-graduate research is on a non-taught basis and is usually carried out in the University of Limerick. Listed below are the courses and research opportunities available in the country:

University of Limerick

- BA in Physical Education and BSc in Sport Science
- APA modules have been drafted by the Physical Education and Sport Science Department (PESS) of U.L. but are not yet included as full-time modules in undergraduate courses
- Final year PE students spend eight ¾ hour contact sessions in centres for people with disabilities
- Postgraduate research opportunities are available in the PESS Dept.
- Members of the PESS Dept. are actively involved in research relevant to people with disabilities
- U.L. in the future hopes to produce a teacher support package in APA for use in secondary schools and to develop and provide a post-registration in-service course in APA for teachers and associated professionals
- A proposal for the establishment of an APA centre at U.L. has been drafted and is presently been submitted to the Higher Education Authority of Ireland

Note: It has been proposed that a centre for APA be developed at the University of Limerick. It is envisaged that the centre will cater for undergraduate, postgraduate and in-service courses in the area of APA coming from a broad area of professionals. The centre will be supported by a strong research base that exists within the Physical education and Sports Science Department. This initiative is coinciding with parallel initiative form the Department of Education aimed at developing the extent of education and service provision related to people with disabilities.
Institute of Technology Tralee

- BSc Degree in Health, Fitness and Leisure Studies
- Compulsory 60 hour module of APA in semester 1 of year 4
- Fourth year students have the option of a further elective in APA in semester 2

Post-graduate opportunities in APA

- The University of Limerick is an affiliated member of the EMDAPA Masters Degree
- Post-graduate research opportunities are available in the PESS dept. These are research masters where the student decides what area he/she wishes to specialise in i.e. physiology, psychology, pedagogy etc.
- Other sports related courses may offer post-graduate research if a student desired to study the field of APA

Despite the above opportunities, there is still the absence of a written policy on APA within the country. The University of Limerick is the only 3rd level college in Ireland that offers a PE and Sport Science Degree yet regrettably does not include a comprehensive APA syllabus within its curriculum.

Research studies both at under-graduate and post-graduate levels have been conducted in Ireland that are relevant to the area of APA, however these studies are few and far between.
Adapted Physical Activity in Ireland- organisations, laws and regulations

Organisations and providers of APA:

Elite Sports
- The National Coaching and Training Centre
- The Irish Wheelchair Association
- Paralympic Council of Ireland
- Special Olympics Ireland

Recreation
- Leisure centres
- Sports clubs
- Youth clubs
- Family and friends
- Residential full and part-time care centres

Rehabilitation
- The Central Remedial Clinic
- Dunlaoire Rehabilitation Centre
- Cerebral Palsy Ireland
- Care centres

Physical Education and sports related courses providing APA education
- The University of Limerick
- Institute of Technology Tralee

Government laws and regulations

Unfortunately, in Ireland government laws and regulations for people with disabilities are lagging far behind those of our European counterparts. This is due to the fact that the Irish government has never before placed the needs and rights of disabled people as a priority area in their policy and decision making agenda. The Irish government has consistently failed people with disabilities in providing services, opportunities and
access to not only sport, but also education and other basic requirements where people have a legal right to receive government support.

Regulations that do exist impacting on APA are:

**Building regulations**

The Building Regulations came into operation on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of June 1992 to provide safe and independent access for the disabled to all buildings. This was accompanied with a technical guidance document from the government under the Minister of the Environment to provide guidance to comply with these requirements.

However, there is no mandatory application of the Buildings Regulations in the country to date.

**Finance and Funding**

There is little appreciation of the funding required to properly prepare and assist people with disabilities and disabled athletes to compete either at recreational or elite level. Until very recently there has been little or no statutory funding for the bodies that represent disabled people i.e. Special Olympics Ireland, Irish Paralympics etc. Many disabled people including elite athletes have to raise their own funds to allow them to compete. Few, if any athletes qualify for elite grants that are given to their able bodied peers and there is no National Lottery funding available to disabled sport representative bodies in Ireland.

An example of the funding required by Special Olympics Ireland to run their programme is summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost of national sport development and training</td>
<td>£40-50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of regional sports development</td>
<td>£10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost to prepare Winter and European Games</td>
<td>£60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total annual cost to run Special Olympics Ireland</strong></td>
<td><strong>£500,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recent funding that has been made available to SOI due to the 2003 World Games:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Irish Sports Council</td>
<td>£160,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eircom</td>
<td>£100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total funding</strong></td>
<td><strong>£260,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Costs for Adapted Physical Activity participation for the individual**

Although there is no documented information on how much disabled people have to pay when wishing to participate in adapted physical activities, all recreation outlets e.g. gyms, swimming pools etc., do have cost allowances for disabled people wishing to use the facilities. Participation in APA involves transport, proper clothing and membership/entry fees. Transport costs depend on the distance the person has to travel to access facilities—Ireland would have one of the most expensive public transport costs in Europe with a ten mile taxi ride costing up to £15. Sports gear can cost anything between £30-£100. Membership to a gym is usually costly, however as stated previously discounts for people with disabilities are available.

Organisations providing adapted physical activities such as Special Olympics Ireland or the Irish Wheelchair Association have a yearly subscription fee of £40-50.

**Adaptive Employment**

In 1997, the rates of employment and work for people with disabilities in Ireland were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7,900</td>
<td>people with disabilities attend sheltered workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>people with disabilities are in sheltered employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>360</td>
<td>people with disabilities are in supported work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>people with disabilities are in supported employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8,580</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities was 70%.

(National Rehabilitation Board, 1997)
A pro-active adaptive employment initiative was taken by the Irish government through the Department of Justice, Equality Law and Reform and in partnership with the Equality Authority of Ireland. This initiative aims to achieve a 3% target rate for the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector by the year 2002. All public sector organisations are obliged to put arrangements in place to ensure this target is achieved or surpassed by the year 2002. The steps required to achieve this initiative are to develop a Code of Practice for adaptive employment, to ensure workplace accessibility, to obtain a positive attitude towards people with disabilities and to train key personnel to support the staff.

(Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2000)

_The Employment Equality Act, 1998_

This Act outlaws discrimination against people with disabilities and on other grounds relating to employment such as training, work experience, conditions of employment and promotion. The Act came into operation on 18 October, 1999 and since then employers are obliged to ensure their practices are favourable towards people with disabilities i.e. not discriminative.

(Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2000)

_EQUAL Community Initiative Programme 2000-2006_

Funded by the European Social Fund, EQUAL examines new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality experienced by people with disabilities currently in work and looking for future work. The programme ethos is to “…combat all forms of exclusion, discrimination and inequalities in the labour market.”

(Dept of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2000)

_National Training and Development Institute_

NTDI is Ireland's largest non-Government training organisation with more than 50 purpose built training and employment units nation-wide catering for over 2,500 students each year. Its objective is to assist people at a disadvantage in the labour market to learn the skills they need to build lasting careers in jobs that reflect their interests and abilities. This is achieved through a brand of training, education, employment access and enterprise development that is respected and often
replicated across Europe. The majority of NTDI’s students are people with disabilities.

**Rehabilitation**

*The Central Remedial Clinic*

The Central Remedial Clinic is a non-residential national centre for the treatment and development of children and adults with physical and multiple disabilities in Ireland. Services are provided for people with physical conditions ranging from the very rare to the more familiar, such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy and arthrogryposis. Services at the Clinic include clinical assessment, physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, social work, psychology, nursing, dietetics, orthotics, technical services, seating services, orthopaedics, paediatrics, parent support, vision and hearing specialists, transport and catering. These centres also provide social, physical, educational, rehabilitational, occupational and recreational activities for adults whose disabilities prevent them from participating in other training or work programmes.

Other organisations such as ENABLE Ireland provide some rehabilitative services but a large proportion of the disabled population receive their rehabilitation from the care centres, which they attend. These centres (not all of them) employ a physiotherapist or a physical therapist either full or part-time to provide physiotherapy for the clients if needed. Other people with disabilities - especially athletes - wishing to receive physiotherapy go to see one out of their own accord and pay themselves despite a visit to the physiotherapist costing up to £30.

**Attitudes of people towards persons with disabilities**

When it was reported five years ago, the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities noted that “public attitudes on disability are still based on charity rather than on rights, and the odds are stacked against people with disabilities at almost every turn…. they are seen to be treated as second-class citizens”.
Many people with disabilities in Ireland experience discrimination and have been excluded from participation in sport. This is primarily due to a lack of awareness and knowledge amongst government departments, service providers, leisure managers, National Governing Bodies, teachers and sports leaders as to the needs of people with a disability. It is regrettable that sportspeople with a disability in Ireland remain in a state of isolation and discrimination owing to present attitudes and practices.

PE teachers, coaches, sports leaders and service providers experience fear and apprehension in their ability to relate to and provide for persons with a disability. “Fear and apprehension cloud our ability to relate to people with a disability. The feelings of awkwardness and embarrassment inhibit us from overcoming our fears. But in order to overcome our fears we must confront them. This means we must realise the impact that some of the myths have had on our perceptions of people with disabilities”

(The National Coaching and Development Programme, 1999)

However, it must be said that progressive and innovative changes are in place to change the attitudes of society towards people with disabilities in Ireland. The National Disability Authority stated that one of its strategic priorities from 2001-2003 is to “Influence attitudes in Irish society” by identifying and developing public awareness of disability issues and mobilises support within Irish society for inclusive policies and practices.

**Children with disabilities**

The Council of Europe (1987) stated that children with a disability must have the same rights as able bodied to be introduced to sports and physical education in school. In Ireland special national schools currently cater for disabled pupil ranging from 4-18 years of age.

The Department of Education at present funds the employment of a PE teacher in a special school for a maximum of two hours a week per school. This provision falls wholly short in comparison with the funding made available to able body’s mainstream school (Department of Education, 1997).
School provision for children with disabilities and APA provision

The following is a brief summary taken from the Disability in Sport Taskforce Report (1999) of the present situation in both special and mainstream schools regarding the types of schools attended by disabled children and the status of APA within these schools.

Special schools

School Type: The categories of disability type catered for by the schools may be broadly grouped as follows: Learning disability 64%, Emotional disability 22%, sensory disability 3%, Physical disability 1%, Other categories 10%.

Physical Education teaching staff: 65% of respondents to the report questionnaire stated that they had undertaken in-service training to teach people with special needs. 49% of Special schools employ a PE specialist with the average teaching time per week been 105 min. The class teacher was responsible for teaching PE in 54% of the special schools.

School PE/Sports policy: 43% of the schools indicated that they had a written policy on PE/sport in their school while 74% stated they had some form (oral or written) of policy on PE.

Facilities: 78% of schools had some form of suitable indoor facilities for PE. 10% stated they had no form of indoor facilities while all respondents had outdoor facilities.

Primary schools

Incidence of students with special needs: There were 10% of students in the primary sector with special needs. The broad categories of special needs may be sub-divided as follows: Learning disability 43%, Physical disability 29%, Sensory disability 14% and Multi-disability 14%.
School PE/Sport policy: 93% of respondents stated they had a policy (oral or written) for PE, however only 54% of these indicated their policy was written.

Physical Education teaching staff: The class teacher is wholly responsible for the provision of PE in the primary sector.

Facilities: Teachers indicated that resources were inadequate to cater for students with special needs.

**Second level schools**

Incidence of students with special needs: There were 9% of students in secondary schools with special needs. The broad categories of special needs may be summarised as follows: Learning disability 51%, Physical disability 24%, Sensory disability 15 and Multi-disability 10%.

School PE/Sports policy: 86% of respondents stated that they had a policy (oral or written) for PE in their schools with only 33% of respondents indicating their policy was written.

Physical Education teaching staff: Only one respondent had undertaken an in-service course in APA with two thirds indicating they were willing to attend in-service courses in APA.

Facilities: All respondents indicated they had some form of either indoor or outdoor facilities for PE.
Discussion and conclusion

Ireland is a country that is steeped in a deep-rooted sporting tradition where so much pride and place is accounted for amongst its people. Many resources both financial and human have been invested into the improvement of Irish sport from recreational to elite level with the aim of continually improving the status of sport and recreation for Irish people. Nonetheless, there still exists a wide gap in the provision of sporting opportunities between the disabled and able bodied despite the acknowledgement of equal rights and opportunities for all in sport.

Ireland is slowly following in the footsteps of its European counterparts in its recognition and provision of sport and adapted physical activities for people with disabilities. People with disabilities tend to be segregated and not integrated into sport due to disabled sport not been an integral part of government policies relating to the area. The Irish government has failed to implement numerous recommendations from various bodies representing people with disabilities that would have a positive impact on participation in APA. Having written recommendations or proposals to improve the status of disabled sport participation in Ireland is insufficient. There must be adoption and legal implementation of such proposals in order to achieve equal par status between sport and APA.

Ireland has achieved significant social and economic progress in recent decades. Despite the increasing economic boom and decreasing unemployment, the experience of people with disabilities in relation to equal employment opportunities has not changed with the rate of unemployment at 70% amongst the disabled population. Positive initiatives and employment laws have been implemented but the government must ensure that they are been followed and adhered to by the labour market.

The status of Adapted Physical Activity education in Ireland is in its infancy as is research in the area. The current provision of an APA module in the University of Limerick PE Degree exits as part of an overall module that lasts for eight weeks in the student’s final semester in their final year. Likewise, the Institute of Technology Tralee offers a module in APA in the student’s final year lasting for one semester with the option to continue into the second. It would be extremely difficult to educate
students about an area that is broad, diverse and relatively new to this country resulting in an informed and educated outcome in the field within the current time allocated to the APA modules.

Immediate action is required to develop mandatory APA modules in PE and sports related courses at undergraduate level and to provide in-service training to teachers to facilitate the professional development of existing PE and primary school teachers. This calls for the drafting of a written policy on APA to be included in aforementioned courses resulting in school management having to formally address this aspect of the curriculum.

More opportunities for post-graduate research in the APA field are needed and even more so is the expertise and knowledge to oversee such research projects.

Recently an argument was put forward regarding the use of the word “special needs” in that the needs of many children with disabilities and attainments significantly below average are in fact “normal” but simply unmet by service providers. Likewise, the physical education needs of children with disabilities are not necessarily “special” or altogether different from mainstream students requirements but because of the lack of education and knowledge about the area, many PE teachers, coaches etc. deem the disabled students requirements as been too difficult for them to provide within the PE class structure.

Resources, especially financial are required to support students in their research whether it is through a Socrates grant, university department funding or some other means. APA has been an underrepresented area in terms of education and research for too long. PE, Sports Science and other relevant fields must embrace the current catalyst of APA and further develop the field through innovative and pro-active education and research.

Despite the above comments, it would be undeserved to say that developments are not in place in Ireland to promote the development of APA. Changes are taking place for the better but their development is slow. The proposal of an Adapted Physical Activity centre in the country is a significant step forward in developing services and
opportunities for people to develop their potentials and/or amelioration’s of their disability. Adapted physical activities should be made accessible from childhood where the roots are sewn for lifelong participation in physical activities.

Societal changes and peoples attitudes are beginning to take an accepting and positive approach, moving away from the fear and ignorance that pervaded the publics perception of people with disabilities for so long.

Finance to enable people with disabilities to participate in adapted physical activities is slowly been allocated to the various providers of APA from statutory bodies, although there is still a long way to go. The government is gradually recognising the necessity of funding to not only improve the current provision of APA in the country but to provide the various APA organisation with the finance required to allow disabled people in the country to participate in the activity of their choice through the support of these organisations.

Ireland is looking ahead to a bright future in its provision of sport and APA through partnerships with universities, sporting bodies and government departments. Together they are aiming to reverse the negative effects of yesterdays and move forward to an all-encompassing equal society in its provision of equal opportunities in sport for people with disabilities.
Bibliography


