



Accessing Physical Education Courses

Case study 3: William

'Yes, you can do Higher Physical Education. Let's sit down and look at what activities we can offer.'

Principal Teacher of Physical Education

What was the challenge?

William has cerebral palsy, which means he has an unsteady gait, finds walking tricky and his balance is affected. He drags his left leg slightly, but is quite mobile and moves reasonably well when required. His muscle definition was not good, due to degeneration of the tissue, but his upper body strength is particularly good and he relies on this in generic movement.

From S1-S5 William had participated in a range of activities but had not studied a certificated Physical Education Course in any form. During his school career he participated in various activities, including basketball, badminton, swimming and volleyball, but found participating in football, rugby and hockey difficult because of the contact and the nature of the activity. Speed, strength, change of direction and ball control were difficult skills for him to master. It was also difficult for him to cope with the unpredictability of the way other pupils move in contact team games.

When William said he wished to study Higher PE, the teaching staff discussed the nature of the course with him in terms of the activities that were on offer as well as the written aspect of the course. For the practical unit, it was fortunate that the three activities we covered were activities he had previously taken part in, and was comfortable and competent in them. The written work posed no problems as he had already gained Highers in S5 and had achieved good grades, particularly in English. He also had access to a laptop. It was therefore agreed that he could be accommodated on the course.

How did William access the course in class?

The three activities that defined the course — and were undertaken by all pupils — were basketball, swimming and badminton. William is a very competent swimmer and had competed in various events and competitions for disabled pupils, very successfully. He was also good at basketball, although he found marking his player in defence difficult if we were playing man/man defence. Nevertheless, he was a competent player and was an accurate shooter. He represented the school at senior level and in the Scottish cup. He found badminton to be the most difficult, mainly because of the quick movements required around the court, and reaching the shuttle if it was hit to the corners of the court.

William took part in all three activities for the whole year. Health and safety issues were discussed with him for all activities. In swimming, the main issues were getting in and out the pool, but he could competently dive into the pool and was able to support himself using the steps to get out. In basketball he had to be careful if there was any major contact as he might be less stable on his feet. Badminton really posed no concern due to the individual nature of the activity.

In swimming he was able to follow the whole course as the basic skills were covered and he could swim front crawl, back crawl and breast stroke. William was able to use his legs to a certain extent in front and back crawl as in these strokes the arm action is the main form of propulsion. He has strong muscular arms and this certainly aided his stroke. Technically he was very efficient in terms of arm action and breathing, but obviously less able to use the leg action effectively due to his impairment. Breast stroke he found difficult because of the more technically difficult leg action — he had a very limited kicking action. He was able to do both speed and stamina work and improve his starts and turns and recorded respectable times.

In basketball William was able to move up and down the court well, although slightly slower than his team mates. He was a good team player in terms of passing, dribbling and shooting, where he had a very good skill level. He was an able shooter and had a very accurate set shot from in and around the key area. Defending was more difficult as he found turning tricky, but his team mates often helped out. He found he worked better in zone defence, and was able to carry this out effectively. Often we played small-sided games in restricted areas, which helped him, but in any case this is a natural part of the course for all pupils as it allows all to get more involved and display and develop their range of attacking and defending skills.

In badminton he tended to play more half-court games. This was less difficult for William as the amount of court he had to cover was reduced. It also led to him being more competitive,

and allowed him to play the necessary range of shots. William found certain movements, where quick reactions were required, more difficult. However, he could still take part in good, competitive games. In full-court games we had to consider the standard of opposition he played, as the more technical players were able to place and vary the shuttle effectively and he often struggled in retrieving it.

How was William assessed?

The Course Arrangements state that the mark for the practical performance is based on the marks gained for two of the three activities. This helped in William's case as he was very good in swimming and basketball and less competent in badminton, meaning that his badminton mark did not count towards his final overall grade in practical performance.

When we applied the criteria to his performance we looked closely at the guidelines in the Arrangements document. In the criteria for the 18-20 marks band, the student is asked to demonstrate a broad and well-established performance repertoire, and show a high level of control and fluency in selecting, adapting and combining skills to perform at a high level in contexts offering a variety of options. We took into account the circumstances that William was performing in the activity and applied the marks accordingly.

In swimming, although his times were slower than others in the class, he could demonstrate that he had a well-established performance repertoire, as he could swim three strokes effectively in terms of technique. We applied this to all the mark bands, depending on which one he fell in to.

In assessing the other two activities we set up circumstances where William was able to select, adapt and combine his skills and technique in contexts offering a variety of options. These included small-sided games, cross-court games, and games with mixed teams in basketball; and in badminton half- and full-court games offering a range of opponents with different abilities.

How successful was the delivery of the course?

William was a great success on the course. He scored very well in the external analysis exam adding to his good practical mark, eventually gaining an 'A' pass, which was superb. His fellow students treated him as equal and made few allowances for him, especially in basketball and swimming. The fact he played basketball to the level he did, and played competitive cup games, speaks volumes about the type of student he was. Other teams

soon found out it was a mistake to feel sorry for him as he often scored baskets against them.

The delivery of the course was a success because we could offer activities that William could participate in and in which he could achieve a good grade. He felt he was one of the class, and worked hard to prove he could perform just as well as any other student. Other students on the course respected him and treated him accordingly.

Recently he came back to school and informed me that he was at university and was still taking part in sport although he had cut back on this due to the nature of his course. He still swam and played basketball when he had the time.

What advice would you give other teachers?

It is important to always have good dialogue with the pupil to discuss and look for ways to accommodate them so that they can access the course.

That may mean being innovative in activities, buying special equipment, and being able to set up circumstances where the pupil is able to show their skills. It is also important to remember that the criteria are the same for all pupils, but the way the criteria are applied will depend on particular circumstances as they arise.