

Development of Adapted Physical Activity at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University (1992–2025)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to trace the historical development of the field of Adapted Physical Activity (APA) at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University, between 1992 and 2025. The study situates the emergence of the field within its historical and legislative context and traces changes in accreditation, curricula, and student numbers. The paper also incorporates supplementary stakeholder perspectives and situates the programme within the international development of APA. The findings demonstrate a gradual professionalisation and systematisation of the field in response to societal and legislative changes.

KEYWORDS

adapted physical activity; higher education; disability; curriculum; inclusion

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INTRODUCTION

Adapted Physical Activity (APA) is an established interdisciplinary field within kinanthropology focused on promoting meaningful participation in physical activity for persons with disabilities and other specific needs across educational, sport, recreational, and health contexts. It integrates knowledge from physical education, kinesiology, special education, psychology, social and health sciences, with the aim of supporting lifelong engagement in physical activity and enhancing quality of life (Winnick, 1986; Kudláček, 2011, 2013; Faculty of Physical Culture, Palacký University Olomouc, 2024).

APA is grounded in the assumption that physical activity is a universal means of promoting health, social inclusion, and quality of life. As a multidisciplinary field, it encompasses the planning, implementation, and evaluation of movement-based programmes. Contemporary APA is typically structured into four domains: health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA), adapted physical education (APE), recreational activities, and performance-oriented sport, including para sport (Vařeková et al., 2022), all sharing an emphasis on participation, accessibility, and individualised support.

International context of APA

The broader roots of APA can be traced to ancient traditions of physical culture, including Chinese, Indian, and Greco-Roman systems, and later to European physical education traditions and educational thought (Kudláček, 2006; Strnad et al., 2019; Vařeková et al., 2021). However, these traditions represent historical antecedents rather than APA in its contemporary meaning. As a distinct academic and professional field, APA began to emerge more clearly during the twentieth century, particularly in connection with the development of rehabilitation practices, disability sport, and organised physical activity opportunities for persons with disabilities. Key milestones in this process include the Deaflympics (1924), the Stoke Mandeville Games (1948), the Paralympic Games (1960), and the Special Olympics (1968), which contributed to the gradual institutionalisation and professionalisation of the field (Kudláček, 2006).

In the contemporary international context, APA is recognised as a distinct academic and professional field with defined competencies, professional roles, and educational standards, developed through organisations such as the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA) and the European Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (EUFAPA), and reflected in the European Standards in Adapted Physical Activity (Kudláček et al., 2010; EUFAPA History, 2024). It has been embedded in higher education in many European countries through specialised study programmes and international joint degrees, including the European Master's Degree in Adapted Physical Activity (EMDAPA) and the Erasmus Mundus Master in Adapted Physical Activity (EMMAPA), with programmes established, for example, in Belgium, Norway, Finland, and France.

Alongside its links to disability sport and rehabilitation, APA has gradually expanded towards broader areas of inclusion, leisure, health promotion, and quality of life. This development has increasingly involved NGOs, community providers, and educational institutions, reflecting changing understandings of disability, participation, and social inclusion, and positioning APA as both an academic discipline and a socially embedded field of practice.

APA at Czech universities

Higher education training in Adapted Physical Activity (APA) in the Czech Republic developed after 1989 alongside broader social transformation, international cooperation, and legislative change. A pioneering role was played by the Faculty of Physical Culture, Palacký University Olomouc (FTK UP), where the study programme Adapted Physical Education was established in 1991 with key contributions from Hana Válková. The development of the field was subsequently supported by the establishment of the Sport Club APA Olomouc in 1993, co-founded by Ilona Pavlová,

Martin Kudláček, Monika Pavlíková, and Monika Řeháková, by the founding of the Czech Association of Adapted Physical Activity (2009), chaired since its establishment by Ondřej Ješina (Czech Association of Adapted Physical Activity, 2009), and by the launch of the national journal *APA v teorii a praxi* (APA in theory and practice) in 2010. The development of APA at this institution was further shaped by Hana Válková, Martin Kudláček, Ondřej Ješina, Zbyněk Janečka, Julie Wittmannová, Tomáš Vyhřídál, Ladislav Baloun and others, making Olomouc a key centre of the national APA movement.

At the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University (FTVS UK) the first study programme in the field of what would later be conceptualised as APA was launched in 1992 under the title Physical and Work Education for Persons with Disabilities. From the outset, it drew on medical expertise from the Department of Health Physical Education and Sports Medicine. Marie Kyralová and Josef Kvapilík, both medical doctors and parents of children with intellectual disabilities, identified the lack of integrated rehabilitation in APA and occupational therapy (which had not yet been established as a separate discipline) and contributed to the preparation of the first curriculum and graduate profile.

The programme was initially not institutionally anchored in a single department but developed through an expert committee led by Staša Bartůňková (Department of Physiology). Members included Marie Kyralová, Josef Kvapilík (teaching medical aspects of physical activity, disability theory, first aid, recovery techniques, and sports massage), and Pavel Strnad (health-oriented physical education). Jaroslav Potměšil (Department of Outdoor Sports), a skiing specialist with personal experience of APA through his son's spinal cord injury, supported the development across sport departments both professionally and personally.

Further contributors included Jan Hruša (Outdoor Sports), Jarmila Segetová (Athletics), Dagmar Šťastná (Gymnastics), Taťána Bělková (Swimming), Jan Kříček (Sport Games), and others. They also contributed to securing grant funding essential for the early development of the field. The committee addressed both operational and conceptual aspects of programme formation.

Despite the growing relevance of APA in practice, policy, and academia, a systematic historical and theoretical analysis of APA higher education in the Czech context remains limited. This study therefore aims to provide a chronological analysis of the development of the APA study programme at FTVS UK between 1992 and 2025 and to situate it within broader academic, legislative, and international contexts.

METHODS

Study design

This paper presents a historical-institutional analysis based on documentary sources and archival material to document the development of the Adapted Physical Activity (APA) study programme at FTVS UK between 1992 and 2025. The analysis combined historical inquiry with thematic document analysis to identify key developmental phases and changes in programme structure, curriculum content, graduate profiles, and student enrolment in relation to broader legislative and societal developments.

Data sources and analysis

Data collection took place between June 2023 and March 2026. Primary sources included accreditation documents, official study plans, internal faculty records, and annual reports of FTVS UK. Legislative documents and official institutional websites were used to contextualise programme development within broader policy and regulatory frameworks. Documents were selected purposively based on their relevance to programme development and analysed chronologically and thematically across pre-defined categories: (1) programme structure and accreditation, (2) curriculum content, (3) graduate profiles and professional orientation, and (4) student enrolment trends. Supplementary written recollections and consultations with current and former academic staff and graduates were used to clarify early developmental phases insufficiently documented in archival materials.

RESULTS

The development of Adapted Physical Activity (APA) at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University, reflects a dynamic process of curricular innovation, institutional restructuring, and changing societal demands. The programme evolved through several key phases characterised by structural and conceptual changes. Table 1 summarises the development of APA study programmes over time, including shifts in accreditation, study formats, and naming conventions within a broader legislative and institutional context. The following text outlines the main developmental phases.

Table 1 Development of APA Study Programmes at FTVS UK (1992–2025)

Period	Programme name	Degree structure	Mode	Key characteristics
1992–2002	Teacher Education – Physical and Work Education for Persons with Disabilities	Bachelor only	PT	Programme established; first cohorts incl. students with disabilities
1994–2003	Teacher Education – Dance and Artistic Education for Persons with Disabilities	Bachelor only	PT	Dance and Artistic specialisation introduced
1997–2009	Teacher Education – Physical and Work Education for Persons with Disabilities	Long-cycle Master	PT	Expansion and professionalisation phase
1998–2012	Physical Education and Sport – Physical and Work Education for Persons with Disabilities	Bachelor + Master	PT	Pre-Bologna and Bologna phase
2006–2015	Physical Education and Sport in combination with Special Pedagogy	Bachelor + Master	FT	Joint programme (FTVS and Faculty of Education)
2009–2019	Physical Education and Sport for Persons with Special Needs	Bachelor + Master	FT + PT	Renaming, inclusion paradigm introduced
2014–2025	Adapted Physical Education and Sport for Persons with Specific Needs	Bachelor + Master	FT + PT	Stabilised modern programme

Note: PT = part time; FT = full time

Establishment and early phase (1992–1997)

In 1992, the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport at Charles University introduced its first study programme focused on persons with disabilities: Physical and Work Education for Persons with Disabilities (PWEPD). The programme was initially designed as a five-semester part-time bachelor's programme and was later extended to six semesters (three years). From the second year onwards, students could choose a specialisation focused on a specific type of disability: physical, hearing, visual, or intellectual. The first cohort enrolled 80 students, approximately one quarter of whom had disabilities themselves. Applicants included educational and healthcare professionals, as well as workers from the social sector, including those in managerial positions, reflecting broad professional interest in developing competencies in this emerging field.

This early phase was characterised not only by the establishment of the programme but also by a strong emphasis on accessibility and inclusion. The programme represented one of the earliest university-level opportunities for individuals with disabilities to pursue specialised education in this field in the Czech Republic, reflecting broader post-1989 developments towards equal access and inclusion. The first graduates completed their studies in 1995.

In 1994, a specialisation in Dance and Artistic Education for Persons with Disabilities (DAEPD) was introduced, with significant contributions from Jaroslav Mihule, Jana Jebavá, Dagmar Šťastná, and Jan Thorovský, accompanied by international cooperation with the University of Cologne. This specialisation was offered once every two years. The PWEPD and DAEPD programmes continued until 2002 and 2003, respectively.

At the same time, institutional support structures began to emerge, including initiatives aimed at supporting university students with disabilities. In 1996, a Working Group for the Support of Students with Disabilities was established on the initiative of Jaroslav Potměšil from FTVS UK and involved representatives from multiple faculties. The resulting Consultation Centre assisted prospective and current students with disabilities in selecting appropriate study pathways and, where relevant, suitable sport and physical activity opportunities (Bartůňková, 2007).

Expansion, professionalisation and internationalisation (1995–2010)

The period between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s was characterised by substantial expansion and professionalisation of the programme. A key milestone was the introduction of a follow-up master's programme and, from 1997, a long-cycle five-year master's programme, both aimed at preparing professionals for pedagogical, sport-related, therapeutic, and social care contexts and significantly strengthening the professional profile of graduates in both specialisations (Bartůňková, 2007; Study plans of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, 1992–1997). Moreover, between 1997 and 2001, FTVS UK expanded international cooperation, particularly with institutions in Norway, Belgium, and Germany. Students participated in professional placements and exchange programmes in APA-oriented institutions; for example, Dominiek Savio Institute and Catholic University Leuven in Belgium or disability camp in Arendal, Norway (Bartůňková, 2007).

In 2001, accreditation was extended and programme restructuring aligned with the Bologna declaration, including adoption of a two-cycle degree structure and introduction of the credit system (Veľbil & Jansa, 2000). The transition from long-cycle master's programmes to a two-cycle structure (bachelor's and follow-up master's degrees) required substantial restructuring of curricula, study organisation, and accreditation frameworks. At the same time, the programme continued to expand in terms of content and professional orientation, incorporating a broader range of disciplines and strengthening its interdisciplinary character. In 2005, an application was submitted to extend the accreditation of the follow-up master's programme under the new designation Physical Education and Sport of Persons with Disabilities.

Concurrently, efforts were made to establish a separate bachelor's programme in Art Therapy; however, this programme was ultimately not implemented (Bartůňková, 2007).

During this period (2007–2010), it was also possible to study a specialisation Physical Education and Sport as a part of the study programme Physical Education and Sport. However, this specialisation did not attract many students and was subsequently cancelled.

Another important initiative aimed at integrating physical education teacher education with Adapted Physical Activity (APA) was the possibility to study a combined programme of Physical Education and Sport at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport (FTVS) together with Special Education at the Faculty of Education, Charles University. This pathway included a three-year bachelor's programme offered between 2006 and 2013, with a total of 55 enrolled students, of whom 30 graduated, and a two-year follow-up master's programme available between 2009 and 2015, with 21 enrolled students and 17 graduates.

Programme renaming and conceptual shift (2011–2018)

From 2011 onwards, the programme underwent significant conceptual and terminological changes, reflected in its renaming from Physical Education and Sport for Persons with Special Needs to Adapted Physical Education and Sport for Persons with Specific Needs (since 2014). These changes corresponded with updated graduate profiles, revised curricula, and more inclusive admission policies (Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University, 2012b). Curricular development emphasised adapted movement programmes, diagnostics, inclusive pedagogy, and interdisciplinary cooperation, with new subject areas including compensatory exercise, music therapy, ethics in helping professions, and sport for individuals with disabilities.

Although the number of graduates temporarily decreased, the period represents an important qualitative shift, aligning the programme more closely with contemporary international frameworks in APA. Moreover, the introduction of both full-time and part-time study modes within an independent APA programme – contrasting with the predominantly part-time formats of earlier programmes – contributed to a substantial enhancement of students' competencies, broadened their professional opportunities, and strengthened the visibility and recognition of APA as a distinct field.

Current phase (2018 – Present)

The most recent phase, beginning in 2018, can be characterised as a period of stabilisation and consolidation. In 2018, a new accreditation was approved, valid until 2028, covering bachelor's and follow-up master's programmes in both full-time and part-time formats. The programme emphasises APA, diagnostics, inclusive pedagogy, and interdisciplinary cooperation. Graduate profiles highlight competencies in designing and leading physical activity programmes for persons with specific needs across educational, community, and sport contexts (Hojka et al., 2020, 2021; FTVS UK, 2018).

Between 2018 and 2025, a range of day camps, sporting events, and educational seminars focused on inclusion and adapted physical activity were also organised. These activities were initially supported by the project *Movement for Inclusion*; subsequently, their organisation was assumed by the Department of Health Physical Education and Sports Medicine and the APA section within the University Sports Club (USC).

FTVS UK continues to collaborate with key partner organisations, including Czech Paralympic Committee (Český paralympijský výbor), Centrum Paraple, Sport Club of Jedlička Institute (Sportovní club Jedličkova ústavu), the APA section of USC Prague, and the Prague Wheelchair Sports Club (Sportovní klub vozíčkářů Praha), Czech Adaptive Sports, Paraswimming (Paraplavání ČR) among others.

Student enrolment has stabilised at approximately 60–80 students across cohorts (20–30 in bachelor's degree full time and 20–25 in master's degree both full time and part time), reflecting a mature and sustainable programme structure.

Application and societal impact of APA at FTVS UK

The programme has contributed not only to professional preparation but also to the development of elite sport careers of persons with disabilities, including Czech Paralympic athletes in cycling (Tereza Dieplodová), swimming (Kateřina Komárková, Dominika Míčková, Vít Šašek), and table tennis (David Půlpán).

In line with the university's third mission – alongside teaching and research, focused on societal engagement, knowledge transfer, and community outreach – APA at FTVS UK has developed as a practice-oriented field embedded in education, public sector cooperation, lifelong learning, and regional development. It functions both as an academic discipline and as a tool supporting inclusive practice in education and community settings.

A key example is the Centre for Sports Activities of Students with Disabilities, established in 2004 by the Rector's Board of Charles University. It provided inclusive sport opportunities for students with disabilities, particularly beginners, supported by trained instructors and student guides. Activities coordinated by Jan Hruša and Karel Kovařovic included methodological development, counselling on adaptive equipment, and regular sport programmes based at the Regata Boathouse in Prague-Podolí and the Tyrš House pool. The Centre organised winter and summer courses (skiing, canoeing, sailing, windsurfing), as well as swimming and cycling activities, integrating APA into university life (Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, 2012a; 2016; 2017).

Further implementation of the third mission is illustrated by the EU-funded project *Movement for Inclusion* (2018–2020), which strengthened inclusive physical educa-

tion in Prague primary schools. APA consultants supported teachers in inclusive PE, pupil participation in sport courses, methodological guidance, and school-based training activities, while also organising inclusive day sport camps for children with special educational needs and their peers, continuing beyond the project period (Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, 2019; 2020; 2021). The project built on similar initiatives at the Faculty of Physical Culture, Palacký University Olomouc (FTK UP), thereby fostering contemporary cooperation between APA-related fields at both universities.

The third mission is further realised through lifelong learning activities of the Department of Health Physical Education and Sports Medicine, including specialised courses on sport assistance for persons with special needs in summer and winter sport events, as well as conferences, workshops, and continuing education programmes supporting professional development and knowledge exchange.

DISCUSSION

The findings provide insight into the long-term institutional development of APA at FTVS UK and its interpretation within broader international and conceptual frameworks.

Institutional development and structural dynamics

The results show that APA at FTVS UK developed through overlapping phases of expansion and restructuring rather than a linear trajectory, reflecting responses to changing educational policies and societal demands. The initial phase in the early 1990s was shaped by post-socialist transformation, which enabled the emergence of new forms of higher education in disability-related fields. At the same time, the programme addressed a significant lack of specialised training in APA and represented one of the first opportunities in the Czech Republic for university-level study in this area.

The subsequent expansion phase (mid-1990s to late 2000s) was characterised by increasing enrolment, the development of structured study pathways including long-cycle master's programmes, and the gradual institutionalisation of the field. This period was also marked by growing international cooperation, which supported alignment with emerging European developments in APA. The Bologna reform represented a major structural transition, leading to a temporary decline in enrolment and graduate numbers. This change is best interpreted as an effect of institutional restructuring rather than reduced interest in the field, a pattern consistent with broader transformations in European higher education systems.

Conceptual development of APA

The evolution of APA at FTVS UK also reflects a broader conceptual shift from a predominantly rehabilitation-oriented perspective towards approaches emphasising participation and inclusion. This development corresponds with the transition from a biomedical model of disability to the biopsychosocial framework of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (Kostanjsek, 2011).

These changes are reflected in curricular innovations, particularly the increased emphasis on inclusive pedagogy, diagnostics, and interdisciplinary approaches. Overall,

APA has progressively developed as an interdisciplinary field linking education, sport, and health sciences, which prepares graduates for diverse professional contexts within both institutional and community-based settings.

Methodological considerations and limitations

This study has several limitations. It relies on aggregated institutional data that may contain minor inaccuracies due to overlapping enrolments, changes in programme accreditation, and incomplete archival records, particularly in earlier periods. In addition, the categorisation of development phases is interpretative rather than strictly chronological, as phases overlap and cannot be clearly delineated. Despite these limitations, the study provides an overview of long-term trends and structural developments in APA-related higher education.

Implications for future development

The findings suggest that future development of APA at FTVS UK should prioritise strengthening its research profile, international integration, and clearer definition of professional roles. At the same time, inclusion, participation, and quality of life remain central principles. Adapted physical activity is increasingly understood not only as therapy but as a means of social participation and personal development, with documented benefits for physical health, psychological well-being, and social integration (Díaz et al., 2019), supporting autonomy and independent living (Winnick, 1986; Kudláček, 2011, 2013). As such, APA functions at the intersection of education, healthcare, and social services, requiring interdisciplinary competencies and specialised professional preparation (Ghezzi et al., 2025).

Overall, the development of APA at FTVS UK reflects broader international trends, while further strengthening of its scientific and professional profile remains a key future direction.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a historical overview of Adapted Physical Activity at FTVS UK within its broader academic and societal context. The findings demonstrate a transformation from narrowly defined health-oriented physical education towards an inclusive, interdisciplinary APA framework reflected international standards. The field continues to respond to evolving societal needs and remains an important component of Czech kinanthropology and inclusive practice. The case of FTVS UK illustrates broader post-socialist transformations in disability inclusion, professionalisation of APA, and the institutional diversification of kinanthropology in Central Europe.

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