

Scottish Disability Sport

Appropriate Language and Terminology for Disability Sport

“Language is not only a means of communication but it also shapes perceptions.”

Aim of the Paper.

This paper seeks to offer advice and direction on appropriate language and terminology to be used by SDS and partners and encourage those charged with the responsibility of organising the Scottish national events programme to adopt a consistency in language across sports which is appropriate for our times. It is also hoped that the paper will encourage SDS personnel to embrace athlete friendly language and terminology.

Many excellent new initiatives have been set up with Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport, Local Authorities, Higher Education and the Voluntary Sector through Education and coaching in particular. Advice on language and terminology features regularly on course agendas. Being athlete centred or athlete focused is more than writing a statement or reading and agreeing to a slide. Respect is a word used extensively in sport but do we always apply the principles implicit in this word to disability sport? It has to be reflected in our everyday practices.

The perceived outcome of this paper is that SDS will introduce consistency in language and terminology which is appropriate and up to date. Most importantly, SDS personnel and key volunteers will lead by example and if necessary question their own language and use of terminology to ensure it is appropriate and respectful.

Setting the Scene

International disability sport is governed by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). Eligible Paralympic athletes and players are those with a physical, sensory or learning disability. The term “pan disability” is used to describe a major competition or club that involves athletes and players from different impairment groups. The parallel Games to the Olympic Games for deaf athletes are the Deaflympics, but all other eligible high performance athletes and players aspire to compete at the Paralympic Games, held every four years after the Olympic Games, in the same city. There is now a trend to title IPC sports as para – sports, and two of the newer IPC sports, triathlon and canoeing have adopted the names of para – triathlon and para – canoeing. The International Federation for Athletes with a Learning Disability or Intellectual Disability has adopted this new terminology. The name on their logo is “INAS – for para athletes with an intellectual disability”. The Commonwealth Games Federation has dropped the term “elite athletes with a disability” (EAD) in favour of the term para – sport athletes.

There are currently three ways in which sports for athletes and players with a disability are governed:

- Some sports are governed by an international organisation concerned with a specific impairment group e.g. International Blind Sport Association (IBSA - blind), Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association (CPISRA- cerebral palsy, head injury or stroke – football and boccia), International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Association (IWAS) etc.
- The majority of sports are governed by an International Federation concerned specifically with the sport e.g. International Association of Athletics Federations IAAF etc.
- Some sports have their own international organisation e.g. IBD (bowls for visually impaired and physically disabled bowlers.)

Within all of these organisations there is language and terminology which varies. Often it has been determined by historical developments in the country within which the organisation is based. In recommending a way forward, language and terminology used by these organisations has been adopted to ensure that SDS is seen as an organisation that is progressive and modern.

Language and Terminology explained

- **Language used in conversation and circulars, letters etc.**

An important section of the UK Disability Inclusion Workshops organised by SDS and partners in other Home Countries is language and terminology. UK-DIT recommends a number of relevant terms and appropriate language. When required to differentiate between “**disability sport**” and all “other sport” the popular terminology is “**mainstream sport**”. Some people prefer the term “non-disabled sport”. It would be appropriate for SDS to reach agreement on issues such as this and this paper attempts to “encourage” the use of the term “**mainstream sport**”.

References to “**disability sport**” are common place throughout SDS and this paper seeks to encourage key personnel and partners to adopt the term “**disability sport**” for many reasons, most importantly because it is in our title.

SDS has a focus on **children, athletes and players with a physical, sensory or learning disability** and this paper seeks to encourage the adoption of this strap line. It sits comfortably within the terminology used in mainstream sport and captures the priorities of the IPC, Paralympics GB and other influential disability sports organisations. This paper seeks to encourage SDS personnel to adopt this modern language and drop terms such as “LD” and “PD” and “VI” which do not reflect an organisation that is up to date and athlete centred. (The exception being where space is short and succinct writing is required)

This paper strongly recommends an immediate cessation of use of language that does not include references to athletes, players, bowlers, swimmers etc specifically prior to the inclusion of information about impairment.

- **Divisioning in Scottish Sport**

SDS published a paper which was approved by the Board on divisioning within Scottish sport. It attempted to promote simple language which is both meaningful and non-controversial. The divisioning paper had a series of notes, many of which are directly related to Education Services. The divisions are as follows:

- Children, athletes and players who are ambulant and have a physical impairment
- Children, athletes and players with a physical impairment who use a wheelchair
- Children, athletes and players who have a learning disability
- Children, athletes and players who are deaf or have a hearing impairment
- Children, athletes and players who are blind or have a visual impairment.

In all of the above terms, the child, athlete or player precedes information about the impairments. The Divisioning paper remains a live document and should be referenced wherever possible.

- **National Events**

Below is a list of titles used by SDS for specific national events. Every effort has been made to detail who can participate but at the same time be respectful and use modern language.

- SDS Lawn Bowls Championships
- SDS Senior Track & Field Championships
- SDS 7-a-side Football Championships
- Scottish Open Boccia Championships (players with a physical or learning disability)
- SDS Junior Championships for Physically and Sensory Impaired Swimmers
- SDS Junior Championships for Swimmers with a Learning Disability
- SDS Carpet Bowls Championships
- East Cross Country Series
- SDS Sports:Hall Athletics Championships
- SDS Cross Country Championships
- SDS Senior Championships for Physically and Sensory Impaired Swimmers
- Fife Open Disability Golf Competition
- SDS Senior Championships for Swimmers with a Learning Disability
- SDS Junior Athletics Championships

Event titles initiated by SDS over the years, attempt to be succinct, sport appropriate and descriptive of the event. Words like player, athlete and swimmer are introduced where possible and terms such as “LD” and “PD” are avoided. In most instances the

athlete and player information will precede impairment detail when this information is required.

- **Special Needs**

“Special Needs” has been used extensively within Education to describe individuals who have a Statement of Special Educational Need. The term is often used to describe intellectually disabled people / people with a learning disability, but in many areas of the country it has been superseded by the term “additional support needs” (ASN). Neither of these terms is appropriate for disability sport but SDS personnel should be sensitive to this terminology when dealing with Scotland’s Local Authority Education Services in particular.

The Way Forward

It is hoped that this paper will encourage SDS personnel and partners to reflect on their use of language and terminology. The author hopes that SDS going forward will adopt terminology similar to that listed below in all its communications and in key areas such as titles for Scottish National and Regional events.

- **Recommended terms:**

- mainstream sport
- disability sport
- child, athlete or player with a physical disability (impairment)
- child, athlete or player with a learning disability (intellectual disability when referencing performance or Paralympic sport)
- blind swimmer
- (football) player with cerebral palsy, head injury or stroke
- deaf rugby player

- **National Events Titles:**

- Scottish Championships for Swimmers with a Learning Disability
- Scottish Track & Field Championships for Athletes with a Physical Impairment
- Scottish 7-a-side Football League for Players with a Learning Disability
- Scottish Disability Sport (SDS) Lawn Bowls Championships

Above are examples of appropriate language and terminology which hopefully will be adopted or are currently in use within the Association. Standardisation could be introduced quickly and SDS would be sending out clear messages of being modern, consistent and respectful. After all communication is a key driver in the SDS Strategic Plan.

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