

Scottish Disability Sport Language and Terminology Paper

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

Purpose of the Paper.

This paper offers advice on language and terminology for SDS personnel and partners. It is designed to encourage those responsible for organising or delivering Scottish national events, festivals, courses, or training to adopt best practices and consistency of language and terminology. The desired outcome of this paper is for SDS personnel and partners to introduce appropriate and modern, participant-friendly language and terminology. Most importantly, they will lead by example and, if necessary, question their use of language and terminology to ensure it is appropriate and respectful.

SDS fully endorses the social model of inclusion across all aspects of Scottish society, including sport. In addition, a complementary ability-focused (functional) model is adopted in a sporting context to ensure meaningful inclusion for all participants and athletes with disabilities.

Being participant/athlete-focused is much more than writing a statement or reading and agreeing on the content of a slide. Respect (an SDS value) is a word used extensively in physical activity and sport, but do we always apply the principles implicit in this word in disability sport? It must be reflected and demonstrated in our everyday practices.

Scene setting.

- The Summer and Winter Paralympic Games are the major international multi-sport events for eligible athletes and players with physical, vision, or intellectual impairments. They are defined as parallel to the Olympic Games for Para athletes with disabilities.
- International disability sport is governed by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC).
- The term “pan disability” is used to describe a major competition or club that involves athletes and players from different impairment groups (physical/sensory/intellectual).

- The parallel Games to the Olympic Games for deaf athletes are the Deaflympics.
- The Summer and Winter Paralympic Games are held every four years, following the Olympic Summer and Winter Games, in the same city and using the same officials and venues.
- Paralympic, Paralympics and Paralympian can only be used with reference to the Paralympic Games.
- Sports whose International Federation (IF) is a member of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) or recognised by the IPC can be referred to with the word Para (capitalised and followed by a space) beforehand. For example: Para athletics, Para archery, Para swimming, Para table tennis, Para canoe.
- The Commonwealth Games Federation uses the term Para sport athletes.
- A general term for pro and amateur athletes with an impairment who play sport but have not competed at a Paralympic Games are referred to as a Para athlete.
- The term 'Paralympian' refers to an athlete who has competed in a Paralympic Games.
- The term 'Paralympic sport' is a general reference to any sport on the Paralympic Games programme. This is only used when referring to the sport's involvement in the Paralympic Games. The IPC must also recognise the International Federation of the sport.

Language and Terminology in Practice

National Events

Below is a short list of titles used by SDS for specific national events. Every effort is made to define who is eligible to participate and, most importantly, to respect the participants.

- SDS Junior Championships for Swimmers with Physical Disabilities, Vision Impairment and Hearing Loss
- SDS Junior Championships for Swimmers with Learning Disabilities
- SDS Senior Championships for Athletes with Physical Disabilities, Vision Impairment, Hearing Loss and Learning Disabilities
- SDS Junior Athletics Championships for Athletes with Physical Disabilities, Vision Impairment, Hearing Loss and Learning Disabilities

SDS event titles attempt to be succinct and sport-appropriate and describe who is eligible to participate. Where possible, words such as participant, player, athlete, and

swimmer are introduced, and collective 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.

An important section of the Disability Inclusion Training Workshops (UK-DIT) organised by SDS and partners in other Home Countries is language and terminology. UK-DIT recommends several relevant terms and appropriate language. When required to differentiate between “disability sport” and all “other sports”, the recommended terminology is “non-disabled sport”.

SDS focuses on participants and athletes with physical disabilities, vision impairment, hearing loss, or learning disabilities, and this paper seeks to encourage the adoption of this strapline. This terminology sits comfortably within non-disabled sport and captures the priorities of the IPC, Paralympics GB, and other influential disability sports organisations.

Divisioning in Scottish Sport

Divisioning is an initial non-assessed process that ensures fairness and a standardised approach to sport. A paper on divisions within Scottish sport was published. The [SDS Divisioning in Disability Sport Paper](#) attempted to promote simple language at stage one of the classification process in Scotland. The terminology is also used in Disability Inclusion Training (UK-DIT). The divisions are as follows:

Participants and Athletes

Athletes/Players with a physical disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Athletes and players who are ambulant and have a physical disability ○ Athletes and players who use a wheelchair for sports
Athletes/Players with a sensory impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Blind or vision-impaired athletes and players ○ Deaf athletes and players or athletes and players with hearing loss
Athletes and players with a learning disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participants with a significant cognitive impact on the ability to function within the activity.

In all the above, the word ‘participants/athlete’ may precede information about impairments that the individual or community prefers. E.g. a golfer with a vision impairment.

Participants/athletes/communities may prefer to have the participant first, i.e. a participant with a disability, or they may prefer identity-first language, e.g., a deaf footballer or autistic rugby player. The key message is always to ask the participant/athlete.

There is no distinct division within disability sport in Scotland at present for autistic participants with no secondary disability, and autistic participants should be supported to progress along the non-disabled pathway. VIRTUS (International Sports Federation for Athletes with Intellectual Impairment) is developing an I13 classification for autistic athletes. SDS will work with Scottish Governing Bodies to develop and enhance their pathways and events to be more inclusive for autistic athletes.

The Way Forward

This paper hopes to encourage SDS personnel and partners to reflect on their current use of language and attempt to use respectful, modern words and terminology that are in keeping with the recommendations outlined in this paper. Following consultation with our membership, SDS prefers to adopt person-centred terminology, e.g. participant with a disability.

Preferred Language

The table below provides examples of appropriate language and terminology that can be adopted throughout Scottish sport. These examples are modern and respectful and reflect the perceptions of the individual communicating the message.

Recommended Language	Avoid Using
Participant/ athlete with a Physical disability or impairment, e.g. a football player with cerebral palsy, head injury or stroke	PD participant/athlete
Participant/athlete with a learning disability (the term intellectual impairment when referencing performance or Paralympic sport), e.g. a	LD participant or athlete

swimmer with a learning disability or Para swimmer with an intellectual impairment.	
Participant/athlete who is blind or has vision impaired, e.g. blind swimmer or participant/athlete with a vision impairment	The blind
Participant/athlete who is deaf or has hearing loss, e.g.	Participant/athlete who is hearing impaired
Participant/athlete who is deafblind	
Participant/athlete who is deaf and non-verbal, e.g. deaf rugby player or rugby player with hearing loss	Participant/athlete who is deaf and dumb
Participant/athlete who is a wheelchair user	Participant/athlete who is wheelchair-bound
Participant/athlete has e.g. cerebral palsy	Suffers from e.g. cerebral palsy
Participant/athlete with a disability or impairment	Handicapped/retarded
Participant/ athlete of short stature/restricted growth Participant/athlete with dwarfism	Dwarf/dwarfism
Non-disabled sport	Mainstream/able-bodied sport/normal
Additional support needs	Special needs
Autistic athlete	Participant/athlete on the autism spectrum

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