

# Scottish Disability Sport

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## Appropriate Language and Terminology

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

### **Purpose of the Paper.**

This paper seeks to offer advice 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. It is also hoped that the paper will inspire SDS personnel and partners to adopt athlete / player friendly language and terminology.

Being **athlete centred or athlete focused** is much more than writing a statement or reading and agreeing to the content of 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 and partners will introduce **consistency in language and terminology** which is appropriate and up to date. Most importantly, SDS personnel and partners will lead by example and if necessary question their own language to ensure it is **appropriate and respectful**.

### **Scene setting.**

- The Paralympic Games are the major international multi sport event for eligible athletes and players with a physical, visual or intellectual impairment. The Paralympic Games are defined as the parallel Games to the Olympic Games for high performance athletes with a disability.
- 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.
- The parallel Games to the Olympic Games for deaf athletes are the Deaflympics.
- The Paralympic Games are held every four years, after the Olympic Games, in the same city.
- There is now a trend to title IPC sports as para – sports. Para – triathlon, Para – canoeing, Para – swimming and Para – athletics.
- 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 different 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. IBSA (blind), CPISRA (cerebral palsy, head injury or stroke, IWAS (wheelchair sports), CISS (sports for deaf athletes and players).
- The majority of sports are governed by an International Federation concerned specifically with the sport e.g. IAAF (athletics), FINA (swimming) etc.
- Some sports have their own international organisation e.g. IBD (bowls for visually impaired and physically disabled bowlers.)

Within these organisations there is sometimes language and terminology that varies. Sometimes it has been determined by historical developments in the country within which the organisation is based. In recommending the most appropriate 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 up to date.

## 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 be respectful to the participants.

- SDS Junior Championships for Physically and Sensory Impaired Swimmers
- SDS Junior Championships for Swimmers with a Learning Disability
- SDS Lawn Bowls Championships
- SDS Senior Championships for Physically and Sensory Impaired Swimmers
- SDS Senior Championships for Swimmers with a Learning Disability
- SDS Junior Athletics Championships

SDS event titles attempt to be succinct, sport appropriate and describe who is eligible to take part. Words such as 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.

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

An important section of the Disability Inclusion Workshops (DIT) 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”.

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. This terminology sits comfortably within mainstream sport and captures the priorities of the IPC, Paralympics GB and other influential disability sports organisations.

## **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. However 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.

## **Divisioning in Scottish Sport**

SDS published a paper on divisioning within Scottish sport. It attempted to promote simple language and stage one of the classification process in Scotland. 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.

## 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.

### Recommended terms:

- **mainstream sport**
- **disability sport**
- **child, athlete or player with a physical 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**

Above are examples of appropriate language and terminology which hopefully will be adopted throughout sport across Scotland. Modern, consistent and respectful are words that describe this approach.

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