

Terminology

The importance of terminology is often underestimated! The language we use underpins our beliefs and the way in which we communicate is not only indicative of our own opinions, but of the organisation we represent. UK Athletics is committed to increasing high quality opportunities for disabled people within all areas of athletics and the way in which we communicate this will begin to highlight our dedication.

It's a common misconception that terminology is always changing, and the phrase 'political correctness gone mad' is widely used. Using appropriate terminology, which has not changed since the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 was introduced, is purely an expression of respect and understanding. This is vital throughout all areas of athletics so that we can ensure that all disabled people involved in athletics in every area and at every level are respected and valued.

The history of the 'disability movement' in the UK has played an important part in the development of terminology. With the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 we formally moved from a Medical Model approach to a Social Model approach. The Medical Model, by definition concentrated on what a person 'can't do' because of their impairment. This led to a negative association which considered individuals only by their impairment and were therefore disabled by their impairment... The Social Model, developed and supported by disabled people, shifted thinking to encourage society to be aware of whose responsibility it is to create an inclusive environment in which everyone can live. This relates to the physical environment, for example ramps for wheelchair users as well as the need to change attitudes to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against. Disabled people are therefore *disabled by society* and this is something that can be directly translated to athletics. We must take responsibility for creating an inclusive environment and ensuring that disabled people are involved in a sport that includes and integrates.

Having moved away from the Medical Model approach, it is vital that we move away from references to an individual's impairment, for example, "a wheelie good performance" was a popular headline, yet is inappropriate!

There are often discussions about 'what to say and what not to say' and this is an area we need to be very clear about. Athletics is one of the most popular sports for disabled people in the UK and with the 2012 Games raising the profile of the Paralympics we need to ensure disabled people do not face discrimination and have a positive experience of sport through athletics. The following words are an example of some of the discriminatory language that our own disabled athletes have faced recently: *crippled, suffers from, handicapped, wheelie, blinkie, little person, person of restricted growth, spaz, normal, wheelchair bound, wooden leg...* This list could go on and on, but we need to ensure this no longer happens.

As well as terminology aimed directly at the individual, there has been negative association linked to the Paralympic Games and as we are hosting the 2012 Games and athletics is the largest component we need to lead by example! In the press recently there have been reports about *The Normal Olympics*, *The Real Olympics* and *The Para-Olympics*. UK Athletics is working towards excellence at the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Using correct terminology will have the knock-on effect of creating an inclusive environment for disabled people; this is a brief guide to correct terminology within athletics:

- Paralympian / Paralympic Athlete – someone who has competed at a Paralympic Games
- Paralympic Pathway – pathway open to classifications and related events that are included in the Paralympic Games
- Disability Athletics – the sport of athletics in which a disabled athlete competes at any level. The sport may or may not be adapted for the individual to take part.
- Disabled Athlete – a disabled person participating in athletics at any level
- Congenital Impairment/Acquired Impairment – the preferred terms to replace ‘born with...’ or ‘lost’ respectively.
- Disability – the way in which the impairment affects the individual due to social constraints
- Impairment – physical description

‘Able-bodied’ is widely used in athletics yet it is a term we need to refrain from using. In context, disabled and non-disabled athletes is appropriate.

First and foremost, UK Athletics is working with ATHLETES. At competitions, for example, it is preferable to list events only:

Men’s Discus

Women’s Discus

Men’s Discus (Ambulant)

Women’s Discus (Ambulant)

Men’s Discus (Seated)

Women’s Discus (Seated)

So, a commentator would announce, for example, ‘athletes competing in Women’s Seated Discus are...’

Then, in the literature and results is where the athlete’s classification is listed alongside their name, club and age. For example:

Tanni Grey-Thompson (New Marske Harriers), 38, T53

Within disability athletics, there is a classification system to ensure fair competition, and while this is based on an individual's impairment and functional potential, it is done so with a clear outcome and in such a way that it enables athletes to compete.