

Disability Guidance for Race and Event Providers

Road, Cross-Country and Fell

1. Introduction

This document is intended to provide guidance to race and event providers to enhance their knowledge and confidence in promoting the inclusion of disabled athletes in their events. It also aims to ensure they are working under the guidance of the England Athletics Inclusion Policy and within the requirements of the Equality Act.

It should be noted that the Equality Act is not just about access to facilities but is intended to promote a change in attitudes and to improve opportunities for disabled people to participate. The reasons disabled people take part in athletics are the same and just as wide ranging as for all people. With this in mind it should be recognised that disabled athletes will want to participate in events for the same reasons as all athletes, for enjoyment, to improve fitness and to experience the challenge and achievement of competition.

2. Legal Responsibilities

2.1 Definition of a Disabled person

The Equality Act defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. For these purposes:

- ◆ Substantial means neither minor nor trivial;
- ◆ Long term means that the effect of the impairment has lasted or is likely to last for at least 12 months (there are special rules covering recurring or fluctuating conditions); and
- ◆ Normal day-to-day activities include everyday things like eating, washing, walking and going shopping.

People who have had an impairment in the past that meets this definition are also covered by the scope of the Act. There are additional provisions relating to people with progressive conditions.

2.2 The key provisions of the Equality Act

Under the Equality Act it is unlawful:

- ◆ to discriminate against a disabled person because of their disability;
- ◆ for any organisation or service provider to treat disabled people unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of their disability, unless such treatment can be justified.

Organisations and service providers must also make reasonable adjustments for disabled people such as providing extra help or making changes to the way they provide their service and physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access. This duty to comply applies to all athletics clubs and race organisers, regardless of club/event size although what is considered reasonable will be relative.

For race organisers the Equality Act requires reasonable adjustments to be made to their events to ensure all disabled people have the opportunity to participate. It should be noted that many reasonable adjustments can be made very quickly and may not even have any financial implications. Whilst, it is recognised that

there may be events organised at venues where it will not be reasonable to make some adjustments for disabled athletes, it is the race organiser's responsibility to ensure that they have taken all reasonable steps to consider and implement any reasonable adjustments that could be made, whether to physical features of the premises/race route or to the running of the race more generally (for example, allowing wheelchair users to start ahead of other participants).

It should be noted that the law requires organisations and service providers to make reasonable adjustments **in anticipation** that they will have disabled members / participants. As a result, an athletics club or race organiser cannot wait until a disabled athlete makes a request to join the club or enter a race before taking action. They should instead identify what reasonable adjustments may need to take place to enable disabled people to participate and set out a reasonable timescale for the implementation of those adjustments.

Furthermore, to comply with the Equality Act organisations, athletics clubs and race organisers must consider what reasonable adjustments may be necessary to ensure that their club or race is accessible for disabled people who may wish to participate as coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators as well as athletes.

3 How to make an event/race inclusive

3.1 Provide a welcoming environment

Establishing a positive and welcoming approach is one of the most effective ways of encouraging disabled people to participate. Race organisers should think positively about how they can include disabled people rather than focusing on potential barriers to participation.

- ◆ Include a statement in event publicity or websites etc. such as "The [name of event or organisers] welcome entries from disabled athletes."
- ◆ Encourage disabled athletes to contact the club/race organiser in advance to discuss their needs and requirements to facilitate inclusion. Ideally a named contact should be provided on the race entry form/event publicity.
- ◆ Ensure that any queries from disabled people are dealt with by club officials or event organisers who have a positive and inclusive attitude.
- ◆ Do not tell disabled athletes that they are not eligible to participate without consideration of what reasonable adjustments would enable them to participate.
- ◆ Ensure any language used to describe disabled athletes is sensitive, appropriate and relevant. Language is continually evolving as awareness and attitudes change. There is no comprehensive terminology that is accepted by all but what really matters is that the language is acceptable to the individual or group concerned. If unsure, ask the athlete how they would prefer to be addressed. For further information please see England Athletics Terminology Guidance at www.englandathletics.org/disability-athletics/resources
- ◆ Try to develop the knowledge and understanding of key club or event officials, coaches and other volunteers of disability, equity and inclusive practice by providing appropriate guidance and training if possible.
- ◆ Consider obtaining details about disability sport contacts and organisations in the local area. These contacts can be used to promote the club or event and increase participation and to assist with any assessment of reasonable adjustments that need to be made.

3.2 Access to facilities

- ◆ Undertake a review of the accessibility of facilities including car parking, toilets, changing facilities, access to buildings and other facilities to consider their accessibility for athletes, coaches, officials and spectators.
- ◆ Discuss with the facility provider e.g. school or Local Authority about the provisions that they have in place to meet the requirements of the Equality Act.



3.3 Reasonable Adjustments

The race organiser has an obligation to demonstrate that all reasonable efforts have been made to enable a disabled athlete to participate and that inclusion not exclusion has been the priority.

- ◆ Race organisers should allow the disabled athlete and/or their coach to review the course if possible to assess its suitability for their participation and should discuss with athletes/coaches what reasonable adjustments might be appropriate.
- ◆ If reasonable adjustments are required to make an event accessible then those reasonable adjustments must be made. An adjustment is unlikely to be reasonable if it is so drastic that it will change the nature of the whole event.
- ◆ If reasonable adjustments require additional expense then the additional expense must be met by the race organiser. Additional expense will be reasonable where it is relative to the resources of the organisation.
- ◆ If a race organiser considers it is necessary to exclude a disabled athlete from participating in the event they must ensure that they can justify this decision and any justification should be on the basis of fact, not assumptions, and be supported by evidence such as a valid risk assessment or previous incidents/experience.
- ◆ If a risk assessment for the event indicates that the event is unsafe for disabled athletes then the person who has compiled the risk assessment must show that they have sufficient knowledge or experience in the area of disability or has consulted with an appropriate disability organisation or has been advised by someone with the necessary knowledge.

3.4 Race organisation – cut off times/lapped athletes

- ◆ Cut off times for events should be reasonable and not unfairly set to prohibit the participation of disabled athletes. The cut off time may be determined by a number of factors such as the need for sufficient time to dismantle the course before dark, the number of course marshals available for the event, the reasonableness of the length of time they will be required to marshal the course and numbers available to rotate marshals or allow breaks e.g. in cold or bad weather, police/local authority permission for road closures, permission for length of time to use the venue etc.
- ◆ Race organisers should consider if it is reasonable to allow any lapped athletes to continue and where possible should ensure that the course is appropriate for safe overtaking and passing lapped athletes who may or may not be disabled. Any rules on lapped runners should be clearly stated, be reasonable and be applied equally to all participants. Ideally race organisers should try to ensure that laps are of sufficient length to minimize the likelihood of lapped runners.

3.5 Specific adjustments that may be required

These are some of the more common adjustments that may be required. Other adjustments may also be required and any reasonable adjustments should be considered on an individual basis.

- ◆ Athletes with a visual impairment may need to be supported by a guide. Guides should be provided by the athlete and should not have to pay a race entry fee and will not be considered to be participating in the race in their own right. Ideally guides may be of either gender regardless of the restrictions of the race or the gender of the athlete. Guides should be identified in advance to the Race Referee and should wear some visible or warning clothing to identify them to other runners.
- ◆ In general the only acceptable footwear attire should be running shoes. However, those athletes with leg amputations should be permitted to use a flexfoot or like prosthetic.
- ◆ Disabled athletes should be permitted to use prosthesis, canes or crutches to ambulate the course.



- ◆ Athletes who use a wheelchair should take responsibility for ensuring that the wheelchair is fit for purpose to participate in the event. In general race organisers should not be responsible to inspect the condition of wheelchairs.

4 Removing Barriers to Participation

To enable race and event organisers to create a welcoming event for disabled athletes, physical barriers to their participation must be recognised. The table below details some common examples of physical barriers that are often found at races and some possible solutions to removing the barriers. Removing many of the physical barriers to participation can often be relatively simple and in some

Facilities and Organisation		
Parking	No disabled parking at venue. Wheelchair users will require wide bays to assist with entry/exit from their vehicle	Ensure there are some wide parking bays available at the race venue for disabled athletes
Registration/other facilities based on grass	Wheelchair users cannot access the area	Ensure registration tents etc are based in an accessible place and on an appropriate surface
Pre-Race/Event Briefing	No other methods of communication for athletes who are deaf or hard of hearing or athletes with a learning disability	Provide diagrams/written race briefing notes for athletes who are deaf or hard of hearing or athletes with a learning disability
Toilet facilities only accessible by signing out key from venue reception	Degrading for disabled athletes to have to ask to go to toilet	Ensure accessible toilets are open and no key collection is required
Race/Event details not displayed	Athletes who are deaf or hard of hearing may not be aware of changes to any information from race pack.	Provide diagrams/written race briefing notes for athletes who are deaf or hard of hearing or athletes with a learning disability.
Course		
Course not wide enough	For visually impaired athletes who are running with a guide or athletes running with aids (e.g. crutches)	Provide wider course to ensure there is sufficient space for athletes to pass
Inappropriate start position	Disabled athletes start from a position where they are jostled by faster athletes coming from behind	Provide guidance as to appropriate start position based on estimated finishing times and guide all athletes to appropriate start position
Very steep hill climbs/descents (20% +)*	This kind of climb may be too difficult for athletes using wheelchairs	Avoid very steep climbs or descents if possible or provide an alternative route if possible
Speed humps	This kind of obstacle may be dangerous and difficult to pass for athletes using wheelchairs.	Avoid very steep climbs or descents if possible or provide an alternative route if possible
Fields, sand or mud*	Wheelchair users may be unable to travel over this terrain	Avoid this terrain if possible or provide an alternative route for wheelchair users
Crossing roads	Disabled athletes may find crossing the road difficult or dangerous e.g. athletes who are deaf or hard of hearing, wheelchair users	Avoid crossing roads during the race. If impossible, have competent marshals positioned appropriately and use signposting on the road to warn road users
Change of terrain (e.g. grass over path)	Wheelchair users may be unable to travel over this terrain or find this difficult or dangerous	Avoid this kind or change of terrain or if possible provide an alternative route for wheelchair users

* Fell, cross country and multi-terrain events will include this type of terrain as an integral element of the event. Guidance applies to races where this terrain may be optional such as grass finishes on road races etc.

case completely expense free. Often the simplest way to remove barriers is to speak to the disabled person directly who will be best placed to make suggestions that will support them. Changes will also improve the experience for all participants not just disabled people. The examples listed are by no means exhaustive.

Removing many of the physical barriers to participation that were highlighted above can often be relatively simple and in some case completely expense free. The following list provides some examples of possible solutions to removing the barriers.

5 Fell and cross country events

Under the Equality Act disabled athletes are entitled to enter a race under the same risks as everyone else. Some events such as fell racing or cross country may involve greater risks than track or road racing. During fell or cross country events participants might reasonably expect to encounter

- ◆ Hard physical effort
- ◆ Adverse weather conditions e.g. Cold, wet, wind, snow
- ◆ Rough, uneven ground
- ◆ Mud and other slippery surfaces
- ◆ Trees (including roots and branches)
- ◆ Water hazards e.g. Streams, puddles
- ◆ Tight turns
- ◆ Steep gradients
- ◆ Jostling
- ◆ Possible contact from spiked shoes

It may be that for these events it would be unreasonable to make adjustments for all disabled athletes as such adjustments would significantly alter the nature and purpose of the event. If this is the case and if the risks for athletes with certain specific disabilities are deemed too great, there may be no option but to exclude some disabled athletes from the event. However, it is the club and race organiser's responsibility to ensure that they have taken all reasonable steps to consider and implement any reasonable adjustments which would allow disabled athletes to compete. In addition, as set out above, if a race organiser considers it is necessary to exclude a disabled athlete from participating in the event they must ensure that they can justify this decision and any justification should be on the basis of fact, not assumptions and supported by evidence such as a valid risk assessment or previous incidents/experience. If a risk assessment for the event indicates that the event is unsafe for disabled athletes then the person who has compiled the risk assessment must show that they have sufficient knowledge or experience in the area of disability or has consulted with an appropriate disability organisation or has been advised by someone with the necessary knowledge.

Where participation is possible, race organisers should allow the disabled athlete and/or their coach to review the course if possible to assess its suitability for their participation and should discuss with athletes/coaches what reasonable adjustments might be appropriate.

6 The International Paralympic Committee Classification System

6.1 Classification

UKA have adopted the International Paralympic Committee Classification System for disability athletics. This is a comprehensive classification system for disabled athletes who participate in paralympic competition under the rules of the



International Paralympic Committee. Classification is an integral part of disability athletics to ensure fair competition within disability athletics and operates in parallel to mainstream athletics.

Each group is subdivided into classes depending on the level of impairment. There are strict criteria attached to each class. The classification process identifies the athletes' functional ability in relation to the event group in which they are competing. The athlete undergoes a series of mobility tests and is seen in competition by IPC (International Paralympic Committee) qualified classifiers.

The IPC system operates purely to enable fair competition between disabled athletes and if an athlete is not eligible for the Paralympic Pathway they may still compete within mainstream athletics as appropriate.

