



Disability Inclusion at Aberdeen Amateur Athletic Club



A history of inclusion

Aberdeen Amateur Athletic Club has a history of being welcoming and eager to accommodate anyone who has wanted to participate in athletics, including those with disabilities. Before Neil Fachie made history as a cyclist, he was a sprinter with the club, making it to the finals in the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing. Later, Lewis Clow was introduced to the club and went on to compete in the Glasgow Commonwealth Games and the Cerebral Palsy World Games. These are two of the more high-profile AAAC athletes with disability, but there were and are others.

Inclusion is very important to the club. In fact, when the club's core values were created just a few years ago, *inclusion* was at the top of the list. Club members were asked for three words or phrases that they thought or that they wished described the club, and inclusion or something similar, was at the top of the list by far—about a third of the total responses.

The athlete pathway and coaching

We are fortunate in athletics that there is a pathway for able-bodied athletes and a pathway for para-athletes, covering beginners through to elite athletes. To accommodate this, AAAC have coaches working at different levels of the development pathway and athletes change coaches as they progress through the club. In most cases, the coach is aiming to develop athletes of all abilities towards the same biomechanical model, however the level of impairment needs to be considered. Training for all our athletes is individualized, regardless of disability. Coaching an athlete with a disability is fundamentally no different from coaching a non-disabled athlete, the coach just needs to make adaptations, modifying or adjusting the sessions to suit the athlete. Generally, sessions have not needed significant changes.

Welcoming

Most members attend an induction meeting to welcome them and their families, or occasionally, there are try outs or taster sessions. In either case it is an opportunity to have a conversation with the athlete, and sometimes the parents, to discuss what they feel they can or cannot do or if they have any personal needs. But again, we do this with nearly all our members and athletes, the conversation is just a little different for those with disabilities.

In general, club coaches and the committee have been happy for people with disability to join in. If an athlete with a disability has approached the club and the resources were available, they were placed in a coaching group and their training began.

A shift

To date, AAAC has been welcoming of athletes with disability, but now the club is taking steps to be more *actively inclusive*. As part of a bigger initiative to reach communities of Aberdeen high on the index of multiple deprivations, the club has also set a target to increase the number of members who have a disability.

In December 2020, the club added a weekly Frame Running session for members which continues to grow. Recently three AAAC frame runners traveled to Perth for an open competition and returned with three medals each!

The club continues to develop relevant links and partnerships with, for example, Scottish Disability Sport, Grampian Disability Sport, Scottish Athletics, Inverurie Youth Sports Foundation, Cerebral Palsy Scotland, and Finding Your Feet.

The club is doing more promotion, including a Disability Athletics page on the website and more photos, videos, and stories of para-athletes on our social media and blog, generally trying to help people with disabilities envision themselves in Aberdeen Amateur Athletic Club.