



International
Paralympic
Committee

Evidence Session - Paralympic Classification

UK House of Commons – Digital, Culture, Media and Sports Committee

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International Paralympic Committee

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1. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is the global governing body of the Paralympic Movement. Its purpose is to organise the Paralympic Games and Paralympic Winter Games, and to act as the International Sport Federation for 10 sports – Para athletics, Para powerlifting, Para swimming, Shooting Para sport, Para alpine skiing, Para biathlon, Para cross-country skiing, Para ice hockey, Para snowboard and Para dance sport. The [IPC Handbook](#) includes details about the duties and responsibilities of all IPC Members.
2. Classification provides a structure for competition. Athletes competing in Para sports have an impairment that leads to a competitive disadvantage. Consequently, a system has to be put in place to minimise the impact of impairments on sport performance and to ensure the success of an athlete is determined by skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus. This system is called classification. The process of Classification is governed by the IPC Athlete Classification Code ([IPC Handbook, Section 2, Chapter 1.3](#)). The current edition of the Code is the [November 2015 IPC Athlete Classification Code](#). The Code is supplemented by International Standards that provide the technical and operational requirements for Classification ([November 2015 IPC Athlete Classification Code](#), art. 1.4).
3. Classification is defined as “grouping athletes into sport classes according to how much their impairment affects fundamental activities in each specific sport and discipline” ([November 2015 IPC Athlete Classification Code](#), art. 2.1).
4. Complementing the substantive classification code is the process of Athlete Evaluation. This is the process by which an Athlete is assessed in accordance with the Classification Rules of an International Sport Federation in order that an athlete may be allocated a sport class and sport class status ([International Standard for Athlete Evaluation](#), art. 1.1). (All of the classification rules and regulations for the 10 sports are aligned with the provisions of the November 2015 IPC Athlete Classification Code and the supplementary International Standards.)
5. Athlete Evaluation encompasses:
 - a) an assessment of whether or not an athlete has an eligible impairment for a sport;
 - b) an assessment of whether the athlete complies with Minimum Impairment Criteria for a sport;



c) the allocation of a sport class and designation of a sport class status pending on the extent to which the athlete is able to execute the specific tasks and activities fundamental to the sport ([International Standard for Athlete Evaluation](#), art. 1.4).

In order to compete domestically, an athlete must undergo domestic classification from classifiers trained and appointed by the relevant National Federation. An athlete who wants to compete internationally must undergo further classification by the International Federation who will appoint an independent panel of trained classifiers to complete the athlete evaluation.

6. The Paralympic Movement offers sport opportunities for athletes with physical, vision and/or intellectual impairments that have at least one of the 10 eligible impairments identified in the [International Standard for Eligible impairments](#). Any athlete who wishes to compete in an International Competition must satisfy the relevant International Federation that he or she has an Eligible impairment before he or she can participate in an evaluation session with a classification panel ([International Standard for Eligible impairments](#), art. 5.1).
7. The persons responsible for the organisation, implementation and administration of classification for the International Sport Federation are called Classification Personnel ([November 2015 IPC Athlete Classification Code](#), art. 3.1). The provisions for Classification Personnel are detailed in the [November 2015 IPC Athlete Classification Code](#), article 3 and in the [International Standard for Classifier Personnel and Training](#). The International Sport Federation must provide training and education to ensure Classifiers obtain and/or maintain classifier competencies ([International Standard for Classifier Personnel and Training](#), art. 3.1).
8. Further detail on the (complex) matter of classification in the Paralympic Movement is available from the IPC website: <https://www.paralympic.org/classification>. This includes an [Athlete Reference Guide to the 2015 Athlete Classification Code](#) that addresses the most common questions from athletes about classification and an [Explanatory Guide to Paralympic Classification](#) in which an overview is provided of the different sport class structures by sport.
9. Each of the 10 sports for which the IPC acts as international federation reflects its own classification procedures in their respective Classification Rules and Regulations. Current editions are available on the respective sport websites at the following links:
 - [World Para Athletics](#)



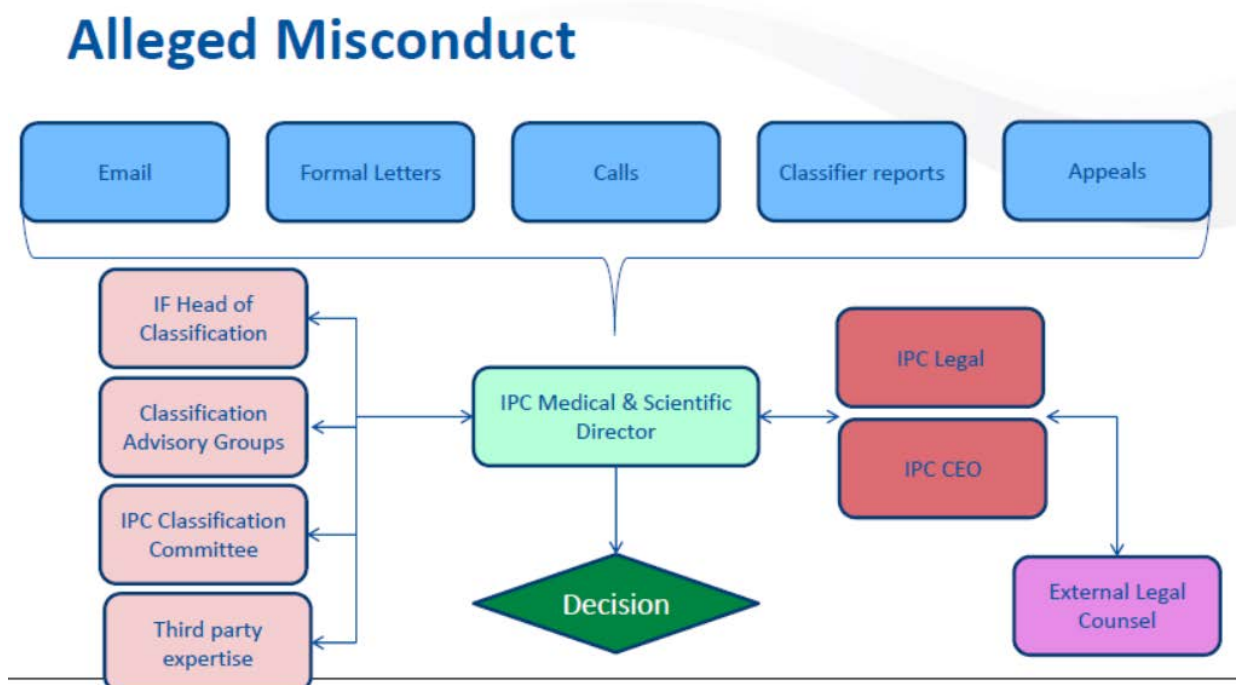
- [World Para Powerlifting](#)
- [World Para Swimming](#)
- [World Shooting Para Sport](#)
- [World Para Alpine Skiing](#)
- [Para Nord Skiing \(Para Biathlon and Para Cross-Country\)](#)
- [World Para Ice Hockey](#)
- [World Para Snowboard](#)
- [World Para Dance Sport](#)

10. The IPC Athlete Classification Code and Rules and Regulations for each sport will continue to evolve due to the IPC's commitment to ongoing research. For example, on 25 October 2017, World Para Athletics informed its membership on forthcoming changes to the World Para Athletics Classification Rules and Regulations, effective 1 January 2018 (<https://www.paralympic.org/news/world-para-athletics-announces-classification-changes>). These changes reflect the continued work of World Para Athletics to ensure classification in Para athletics remains robust, objective and transparent.
11. The 10 sports for which the IPC acts as international federation all offer classifier pathways and education programmes. Details of what is available from World Para Athletics and World Para Swimming can be found on the respective websites:
<https://www.paralympic.org/athletics/education>
<https://www.paralympic.org/swimming/education>
12. The IPC and these 10 sports remain committed to fair and transparent decision-making in classification, hence its efforts to regularly review policies and procedures, and amend athlete evaluation methodologies with increased knowledge.
13. In view of allegations presented in the last 24 months regarding classification, it is important to clarify that the Paralympic Movement does not categorise athletes by impairment. In other words, there is no specific sport class for athletes with e.g. Cerebral Palsy. Cerebral Palsy would be a Health Condition as identified in the [International Standard for Eligible impairments](#) that falls under the category of hypertonia, ataxia or athetosis ([International Standard for Eligible impairments](#), art. 2.6-2.8). Under the World Para Athletics Classification Rules and Regulations, these athletes are subjected to an athlete evaluation that consists of the measurement of hypertonia, ataxia or athetosis respectively ([World Para Athletics Classification Rules and Regulations](#), appendix 1, art.



2.1.1-2.1.3), after which a sport class will be designated in accordance with [World Para Athletics Classification Rules and Regulations](#), appendix 1, art. 3.1.3.1-3.1.3.4. As identified under section 10 of this report, changes to these measurement methods are due on 1 January 2018.

14. In the lead up to Major Events and Competitions, such as the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, it is not unusual for the IPC to receive complaints about alleged abuses in classification. Every single complaint undergoes an internal assessment that is coordinated by the IPC Medical & Scientific Director who also engages the International Sport Federation Head of Classification, Classification Advisory Groups, International Classifiers, IPC Classification Committee members and third party expertise, where circumstances warrant their respective involvement. In addition, the IPC occasionally will engage external legal counsel to compile information and intelligence on specific files. This is schematically represented as follows:





15. Ahead of the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, the IPC reviewed the individual files of more than 80 athletes from 24 countries across six sports. This followed a number of requests from various sources including National Paralympic Committees, parents, peer athletes, and spectators to review the classification of certain athletes. [All these requests were reviewed and on 11 August 2016, and the IPC published the results of its review.](#)
16. In Great Britain, Mr. Michael Breen compiled some complaints against British Para athletes. (We understand that Mr. Breen may be presenting the same or similar allegations to this Commission.) These files were passed on to the IPC on 29 May 2016. The cases referenced by Mr. Breen were assessed by the IPC in line with the processes and procedures outlined in section 14 of this report.
17. On 28 May 2016, one day prior to Mr. Breen contacting the IPC, UK Athletics requested the IPC to verify the classification of a number of athletes under their jurisdiction. This followed similar allegations made by Mr. Breen to UK Athletics. In its communication to the IPC, UK Athletics stated that it: *“would welcome any investigations from the IPC regarding these athletes as we believe (contrary to Mr Breen’s observations) that they are all in the correct class”*. UK Athletics further stated: *“We take a very hard-line approach to ensuring classification validity of athletes who receive government funding in the UK and as a result have significant additional medical information (scans/independent consultant reports etc.) on each athlete that should fill any perceived gaps in underpinning evidence. We are therefore proposing to share absolutely everything we have with you relating to these three athletes should you wish to review any of them following the information provided by Mr. Breen.”*
18. Following individual case assessment which included studying detailed medical diagnostic information, and contrary to Mr. Breen’s assertions, the IPC concluded that the athletes were appropriately classified. The IPC also confirmed to UK Athletics, following this verification, that the athletes named by Mr. Breen did not represent a concern to the IPC. In compliance with our requirements and standards on confidentiality, data privacy and data protection, the IPC will not name the individual athletes referenced by Mr. Breen.
19. The pre-Rio 2016 investigations were instructive in revealing a few dynamics that are worth bringing to the attention of the DCMS Committee. These include:
 - a) Team Selection Criteria: The vast majority of allegations were brought forward by athletes or parents of athletes who either missed out on the final team selection for



Rio 2016 or had an issue against the selection of other athletes in the team - in most cases these athletes were direct competitors. Globally, a small handful of parents have been very vocal, sending hundreds of email messages to the IPC President, IPC CEO and Senior Management, IPC Classification Committee, IPC partners and media. Responses by the IPC and its legal counsel clarifying the concept of classification, the applicable rules and policies and the procedures were issued, but these were deemed by the complainants to be unsatisfactory.

b) Understanding classification: Para sport is open to athletes with diverse types of impairment, which, in addition, may present with very diverse individual clinical manifestations. It is an intrinsic challenge to expect an in-depth understanding of classification and classification decision making by non-experts, such as parents of athletes.

20. Following 20 September's BBC Radio 4 'File on 4' documentary on 'Paralympic Sport – Fair Play?', the IPC was surprised to learn that an athlete planned to hand back her relay gold medal from the 2014 European Championships. The IPC and World Para Athletics remain unaware of any evidence that she may possess that may question the integrity of her teammates or indicate that they are in the wrong classification. In contrast, World Para Athletics possesses in-depth medical diagnostic information and classifier reports that support and indicate each of the teammates are in the correct class, a class for athletes with co-ordination impairments (i.e., not "cerebral palsy").
21. The 'File on 4' documentary also featured comments from people claiming that following London 2012, the IPC "opened up" the T30s class in Para athletics to include co-ordination impairments, as well as cerebral palsy. This is not the case. The T30s class always has been reserved for co-ordination impairments. There is no specific class solely for cerebral palsy. See section 13 of this report.
22. The success of the London 2012 Paralympic Games has led to a rapid growth in global Para sport participation and to the introduction of a new generation of high performance Para athletes. Like in all sports, whether Para or able-bodied, athletic performance constantly is improving. For example, in some classes of 100m races in Para athletics, the world record has improved by more than 1 second in the last 16 years. This is not because of improper classification, but the result of athletes benefitting from performance pathways and improved high performance training regimes.



23. A growing trend in Para sport in recent years has been for many leading countries to recruit, train and eventually select for major competitions - such as World Championships and the Paralympic Games - athletes at the higher end of a certain class. Countries are not breaking any rules by doing this as the athletes have been internationally classified and are in the correct class. Central to this approach, athletes are being recruited in view of their medal chances and in view of the financial support that may come with medal success as major events. This method is typical of any able-bodied sport where an athlete or team is selected solely on the desire to win a medal or a match.
24. Chelsey Gotell, the Chair of the IPC Athletes' Council, has noted: "Classification is fundamental to Para sport and is one of the biggest discussion points among the athlete community and within the IPC Athletes' Council.
"While we appreciate that athletes may have concerns regarding classification - and we are working hard with the IPC to make the system more robust - it is important that athlete concerns are substantiated by factual evidence rather than hear-say, rumour or suspicion.
"As the Paralympic Movement continues to grow, the depth of field within each sport and the classification system must also evolve. This is reflected in the new Athlete Classification Code and is something our council is committed to ensuring is as fair and athlete centred as possible.
"If an athlete has a concern regarding classification or any other issue relating to Para sport, one of the first things they can do is reach out to a member of the IPC Athlete Council. We can then help and guide them through the proper channels. At an athlete's request, their name can be kept confidential and we can ensure that the information or questions being asked receive the attention they deserve."
25. The IPC remains deeply concerned about the well-being and welfare of all Para athletes, and particularly about the well-being of those athletes who have been subjected to third-party allegations of improper classification. Although the athletes in question never have been named publicly, the athletes in question know full well that the allegations are being directed at them. Such repeated and unfounded allegations are causing undue stress and tension to these athletes. Consequently, and following September's 'File on 4', the IPC liaised with UK Athletics to ensure that assistance and care were being provided to this group of Para athletes.



26. The IPC thanks the DCMS Committee for its interest in and support of Para sport. The IPC is grateful for the opportunity provided by the Committee to the IPC to present the information contained herein.

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