



## **A Guide To**

# Delivering Equestrian Activities for Visually Impaired People



Riding for the Disabled Association  
Incorporating Carriage Driving

Produced by British Blind Sport in partnership with  
Riding for the Disabled Association

# A Visible Difference Through Sport

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# Introduction

Welcome to the British Blind Sport Guide To Delivering Equestrian Activities for Visually Impaired People, produced in partnership with Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA).

At British Blind Sport we believe that every person with a visual impairment has the right to participate in sport and physical activity. We understand that there are hurdles and barriers to overcome in order for each and every visually impaired person to have the same accessibility as a sighted person. This resource has been created to assist anyone who is delivering equestrian activities with ideas and guidance on how to support visually impaired people.

This resource will assist coaches, volunteers, and centre staff to:

- Learn about visual impairment and eye conditions.
- Have a better understanding of the needs of people with a visual impairment.
- Apply their knowledge to meet the needs of people with a visual impairment.
- Use communication skills to support the needs of people with a visual impairment.
- Understand where you can obtain further support to ensure your group is fully accessible and inclusive to people with a visual impairment.

**This publication can be requested in larger print, braille and on audio CD from British Blind Sport.**

People with a visual impairment can enjoy and succeed in all levels of equestrian activities. By making small and simple adaptations to the sessions that you already provide, your sessions will be enjoyable and inclusive. The information here is provided as a starting point, and is by no means a comprehensive list of rules or regulations. The most important thing is to use your existing knowledge and skills to develop methods that work best for each individual participant. We hope that the information and tips found in this resource will inspire you to feel confident and inclusive when working with visually impaired people.



# Supporting Statements

## Alaina MacGregor, CEO British Blind Sport

“British Blind Sport is committed to providing sport and recreational opportunities for all blind and partially sighted children and adults across Great Britain. Our work ensures that we are able to provide support from grassroots through to elite level. Sport and recreation can be so much more than the activity itself, as British Blind Sport sees sport as the springboard for wider opportunities, increased health benefits, new friendships and renewed confidence. The positive effects of participation in sport for a visually impaired person, irrespective of ability or experience, cannot be underestimated. We also know that ensuring participation in sport is a positive experience for a visually impaired person is often due to a skilled and confident coach or teacher. This resource is a fantastic tool for those coaches and teachers who want to help others achieve their goals and who are committed to making a visible difference through sport.”

## Ed Bracher, CEO Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA)

“At RDA we want to make equestrian activities such as riding, carriage driving, and vaulting accessible, challenging and fun for anyone who wants to get involved. We passionately believe that anyone with a disability can get real value and benefit from the activity, whether they want to compete, learn a skill or just have fun. I am delighted that we are working with British Blind Sport to ensure that we are including more visually impaired people and that we have the skills and confidence to ensure that they have an excellent experience in equestrianism. This is a brilliant resource that will help us work towards this aim. It brings together both organisations’ expertise and knowledge, and I hope that it can help you to involve more visually impaired people or work more effectively with those already involved.”

## Clare Salmon, CEO British Equestrian Federation (BEF)

“The BEF aims to get people from every walk of life to appreciate the benefits of equestrianism- irrespective of age, gender or disability- horses make no distinctions based on these things, and neither should we. People can get a unique experience from being around horses, whether for recreation, sport or solace. With this in mind, we welcome this collaboration between British Blind Sport and RDA, which will demonstrate that visual impairment need not be a barrier to being involved with horses and horse sport.”

## The Rt Hon. the Lord Blunkett

“Whether you join in sport recreationally or compete to represent your country, the positive experience of participating in sport starts with a knowledgeable trainer or teacher. British Blind Sport have recognised the need for those that deliver sport need to understand how to adapt sport and activities to be fully inclusive for visually impaired children and adults. These fantastic resources help to break down barriers to participation as well as assist and provide tips on how to make each sporting experience enjoyable for every visually impaired person regardless of their ability. We know sport can be the springboard for so many things for a visually impaired person such as increasing confidence, developing spatial awareness, growing a social network and providing a sense of accomplishment. With this in mind, I wholeheartedly support this educational programme as I recognise British Blind Sport’s ambition to make a visible difference through sport.”



# Understanding Visual Impairments

## The Facts

There are almost two million people in the UK living with visual impairments. This figure includes approximately 360,000 people registered as blind or partially sighted in the UK, of which over 25,000 are children (aged 0-16).

The number of people who have a visual impairment is set to increase in line with the ageing population: by 2050 the number of visually impaired people in the UK could be nearly four million.

## Terminology

Sight is classified in more than one measure. The main measures are 'visual acuity' and 'visual field'.

**Visual acuity** is a person's ability to see fine detail.

**Visual field** is the boundary of what a person can see in one instant i.e. the entire area that can be seen without moving the eyes.

There is often confusion between the terms blind, visually impaired, and partially sighted.

Visual Impairment is an umbrella term broken down into two main categories; severely sight impaired and sight impaired.

## Severely sight impaired

**This category is also known as blind.**

- Under government legislation, a person who is severely sight impaired would be unable to perform a job for which eyesight is an essential element for the task.
- They will not be able to see a demonstration.
- They may become quickly disorientated during an activity.

## Sight impaired

**This category is also known as partially sighted.**

- Partially sighted people will have some useful vision that they can use to navigate the world.
- They may not be able to see a demonstration fully.
- They may not be able to recognise you from a distance.

**Severely sight impaired (blind) and sight impaired (partially sighted) are collectively known as visually impaired.**

## Different Eye Conditions

There are a number of conditions that result in a visual impairment. These varying conditions affect people in different ways. For example, one person may be totally blind and unable to perceive any visual input, whilst another may have blurred peripheral vision but good central vision. There are four conditions that cause the majority of sight loss, and some information about these is provided below. However, it is important to remember that everybody has different levels of vision and varying support needs; the crucial thing is to discuss this directly with the participant and develop an understanding of their visual impairment and its effects.

## Macular Degeneration

Macular degeneration affects a small part of the retina at the back of the eye called the macular. It causes loss of vision in the centre of the visual field, affecting vision when looking directly at something. People with this condition will usually have peripheral vision, but may struggle to recognise faces, e.g. of their horse or coach.



## Glaucoma

Glaucoma causes a loss of peripheral vision due to damage to the optic nerve or increased eye pressure. This occurs gradually but will result in a significant reduction of peripheral vision over time. While treatment exists for glaucoma, it can not repair existing sight loss.



## Cataracts

Cataracts cause blurred or cloudy vision as result of yellowy pigment on the lens of the eyes. This condition is the main cause of visual impairment across the globe. To treat cataracts, surgery can remove the cloudy lens.



## Diabetic Retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy can affect anyone with diabetes. It causes floaters and blurred vision, resulting from damage to the retina due to high blood sugar levels.



## Other conditions

Along with these four conditions, there are many other causes of sight loss. Visit the RNIB website for information on a specific eye condition.

<http://www.rnib.org.uk/eye-health/eye-conditions>

# Coaching Case Study: Natalie O' Rourke, Park Lane Stables



I have been involved with horses from a very young age when I rode for the first time at a village fete. Despite my lovely dad telling me to 'get a proper job' I could not extinguish my passion for horses and decided to make horses my full time job, this was many years ago! Nine years ago I opened my own riding school aiming for friendliness and inclusion. I became involved with visually impaired riders when Action for Blind People approached me to take a group of young visually impaired people riding around five years ago. I had never met visually impaired riders before and it really opened my mind and made me think how we needed to tailor the sessions for these riders. I have never looked back and I'm very proud that we now have so many visually impaired riders.

To improve my coaching and understanding of the sensory experience of a visually impaired rider, I have mounted a horse blindfolded (with the help of a trusted colleague!) and ridden at a walk, trot and canter. It is a steep learning

curve but definitely enabled me to deliver better sessions to my riders. I quickly learned that my balance is affected greatly without the use of my sight and this must be borne in mind when our riders are new. Smooth wide turns are best to start with and plenty of warning is required when a turn is going to be made.

Before their first visit, one of the things I warn a new rider about is the smell of stables. To a person who is not used to being around horses and animals this can be overwhelming and a bit of a shock at first!

Although riding in an arena is great from a health and safety point of view, riding on sand or an all-weather surface is silent as hooves make no sound on sand! Hearing the sound of the hooves hitting the ground is hugely beneficial to Visually impaired riders and helps them to learn the beat and rhythm of the paces. The most important thing to remember as a coach to visually impaired riders is to keep talking! Silence is not reassuring to any rider, even if everything is going to plan!

Being a coach for visually impaired riders is hugely rewarding and their achievements really astound me. In my experience, many riders with visual impairments have a better sense of 'feel' than sighted riders as they are relying on other senses to ensure they are riding correctly and can tune in to the horse very easily. Many of our visually impaired riders have created a strong bond with their favourite mount. They create a love affair with a horse as well as improving their riding skills and confidence in general. Many of our riders make great friendships at the stables and meet people in similar circumstances to themselves who they can share experiences with.

# Encouraging Participation

This section will outline some key factors to consider when planning and delivering equestrian activities for people with a visual impairment, which will help ensure a quality experience for both providers and participants.

## Advertising

The promotion and marketing of your sessions, training events, and activities ensures that people are aware of what your centre offers, where you are located, and that you are accessible.

To ensure that your advertising is accessible to visually impaired communities, consider the following:

- Provide information in alternative formats if required (e.g. braille, plain text without images, or suitable electronic version for a screen reader). For help finding a suitable brailist, please contact British Blind Sport or RDA.
- Advertise your sessions with local and national visually impaired organisations such as British Blind Sport, RNIB, or your local Blind Society.
- Many county councils or local authorities provide a sight support service. This can be an excellent method to promote your club or sessions and engage with visually impaired communities. British Blind Sport can advise on your local contacts, contact British Blind Sport for further information.
- Use social media to promote your services as this is a very accessible and popular medium for visually impaired communities.
- Consider using images of visually impaired participants in your marketing material. Our VI Equestrian Activity Report has identified that a lack of diverse and inclusive images in marketing material can be a barrier to visually impaired people participating in equestrian activities.

## Travel

Travel has been highlighted as a key barrier to participation in both equestrian activities and sport and physical activity more generally.

As many visually impaired people rely heavily on public transport, it is advisable to check public transport options and promote the nearest train station or bus route in any promotional or marketing material.

Additionally, there may be community transport options available: local sight support services can provide information on available services. Some participants may rely on a sighted guide or support worker to assist with transport to and from your activity. To find local sight support services please contact British Blind Sport.

## First Contact Information

In addition to the general information you would discuss with all new participants, consider also discussing the following:

- Transport arrangements.
- Whether another person or a guide dog will also be attending.
- Any previous experience or knowledge of horses.
- Motivations and goals for taking up equestrianism.
- Any worries or concerns.

It might be necessary to provide a meet and greet service, especially on a first visit to a centre.

It is important that all volunteers and members of staff taking public enquiries are aware that your centre and activities are accessible to visually impaired people. It is recommended that a document providing visually impaired guidance is readily available, which includes information on facility access, guide dog arrangements, public transport links, and the first steps to taking part.

If possible, offer volunteers and staff disability awareness training; contact RDA for further information.

## Communication

It is important to understand the needs of each individual participant. Do not be afraid to ask questions to obtain information that will aid coaching and delivery.

- Remember to always introduce yourself by name to a visually impaired participant, even if you have already met before.
- Do not be afraid to ask about a new participant's level of vision.
- Find out whether the visual impairment is acquired or congenital, as this may affect their knowledge about horses and what to expect from sessions with you.
- Try to establish if there is a preferred situation or environment that promotes better vision, for example if someone has better vision in their left eye making a small change to where you stand to explain a task may make a huge difference.

- Speak directly to the participant, rather than to a carer or anyone else.
- Think about the acoustics of the area you are in and whether you can be clearly heard.
- Remember that visually impaired participants may not be able to see visual cues, e.g. a smile, and if so, ensure that you replace these cues with verbal feedback.
- A two-way radio can be a useful communication aid, particularly in large arenas or large/mixed groups.

## Correct Terminology

It is important to use the correct terminology when referring to people with a visual impairment and discussing visual impairments in general. Using the wrong language can create a barrier, whereas using appropriate terminology will help you build lasting relationships with your participants and grow your participation programmes.

**While it is important to use correct language, do not over think every sentence you say. For example, saying the term 'See you later' will not be offensive to the vast majority of visually impaired people.**

Words to use	Words to avoid
Person with a visual impairment	<u>The</u> blind
Person with sight loss	<u>The</u> handicapped
Visually impaired person	<u>The</u> disabled
has an impairment	Suffers from

# Guiding Techniques

For some people, a sighted guide may be required to assist with moving around your centre. Below are some key points and tips for best practice when providing sighted guiding. If you would like to develop your skills further, a number of organisations (e.g. Guide Dogs) offer training in sighted guiding techniques.

- Introduce yourself and ask if help is needed; not everyone needs or wants assistance.
- If assistance is required, then ask whether you should guide from the left or right hand side.
- Offer your elbow or shoulder for the participant to take hold of. If guiding a child, it is suggested they hold your wrist or just two fingers, depending on their height.
- Do not link arms with the person you are guiding. This presents a safety risk, as if one person falls the other person will too.
- Ensure you are always one step in front of the person that you are guiding, try not to walk too fast or too slowly, ask if the pace is ok.
- Communicate when there are changes in the ground surface, if there are steps (up or down), if and where there are handrails, and explain any unusual or loud noises.
- When guiding to a seat, place your hand on the back of the chair/bench so the person can follow your guide and find the chair themselves. Do not try to place people into the seat.
- When going through a narrow door or passage, move your guiding arm backward toward the small of your back, so the person being guided can step in single file behind you.
- When coming to a door, say whether the door opens toward or away from you, and whether it opens to the right or the left. Allow the person you are guiding to step behind you and take the weight of the door from you once you have passed through. Be mindful that the door does not swing back sharply or catch anyone's fingers.
- Keep your guiding arm still and relaxed. Do not wave it around or point at things.
- Remember to give the person you are guiding adequate space around obstacles.



# Case Study: Becky Forty-Flatters, Springbridge Driving for the Disabled Group



Becky has always loved horses and absolutely anything to do with horses. Since starting at Springbridge Driving for the Disabled Group over two years ago she now drives most weeks. Becky has passed the first three RDA carriage driving proficiency tests and regards her successes in carriage driving as her greatest achievement.

“I started carriage driving because I would have support from having someone sighted at my side. I could care for the horses, learn about them and drive as part of a team!” said Becky.

Becky now feels comfortable not only in the carriage but also around horses, and says that one of the greatest reasons for this has been the support team around her.

“Becky is a different person when she is around horses and her confidence has really blossomed. If it wasn't for her equestrian activities I don't think she would feel that she has a purpose in life. Carriage driving has helped her to lose weight and she now rides too” said her aunt, Debbie Flatters.

“I truly believe that if it wasn't for carriage driving Becky would not be the same person she is today. I can't really find the words to explain how she has advanced. Her confidence has grown as a result of the patience and knowledge the team have shared with her.”

“Generally people seem to be more worried about what can go wrong rather than what can go right and Becky realises this. Becky is very positive and needs positive people around her. She attends Springbridge Carriage Driving Centre whose attitude is spot on in this regard. They have a “can-do” attitude and are always willing to go the extra mile. This approach enables the centre to bring the best out of all of their drivers”.

Becky has yet to enter competitions and does have this in mind for the future, but realises this will depend on the support of others too. She hopes one day to own the horse she's working with to build an even better partnership.



# Volunteering Case Study: Megan Pritchard, RDA



I started riding in Cornwall three years ago with Duchy RDA. I hadn't left the house for almost 6 months, so my Mum arranged it and said "no arguments – you're going!" I was initially terrified of the horses as they seemed huge and powerful, which of course they are! It took a lot of support to get me through this, but once I started I never looked back. I now ride with Ride2Achieve in Hereford, and also volunteer with them. I have won RDA national classes in dressage and been placed in jumping; I hope to one day be good enough to join Paralympic training, preferably in dressage. I am also going to try both endurance riding and carriage driving in the near future. There have also been some murmurs about vaulting which sounds both terrifying and very exciting!

I volunteer as well as ride with Ride to Achieve. I have learned the centre's layout and can muck out stables, tack up horses and do most of the things other volunteers do. I also designed the latest leaflet and helped with

PowerPoint presentations to prospective funders. Some things have been more challenging than others, but I am honest with the staff if I am finding something difficult and we find ways to work around this. I prefer to be as independent as possible and Ride to Achieve has taken this on board. I especially like the freedom and feeling of self-worth that has come with volunteering and the chance to try new things and meet new people. It has helped me to feel both more confident and competent on and off the yard as a lot of the skills I have learned are transferable to other situations, such as decision making, planning, supporting others, empathy, problem solving and interpersonal skills. There was a point where I wouldn't have spoken to anyone I didn't know well, so volunteering has helped me to come a long way! It has also helped to develop my understanding of the horses and this helps me when I'm riding.



My advice to centres welcoming visually impaired participants for the first time is to have a plan in place before the visually impaired rider arrives to remove barriers to them taking part. Most new riders will be doing something totally new and be completely out of their comfort zone. Thinking about the little things like trip hazards and always putting things away in the same place so the rider can find things on future visits without continually asking can really help toward a feeling of independence and inclusion.

It is important to have a staff member who can read people well as the first contact and be the regular contact while the new rider settles. It's hard for a visually impaired person to pick up on social cues as many of us can't see facial expressions. If you don't recognise a person's voice it can be even more difficult, so introduce yourself often at first if you think they don't know who you are. I certainly appreciated this and I learned who people were from their voices far quicker. It is important to know that everyone is different and has different wants, needs and expectations.

Another piece of advice is that most of us are rational thinking adults and like to be treated as such. Verbal warnings are appreciated before doing something. I really don't like it when people grab hold of me when I am not expecting it or when I am being taken somewhere without telling me first. Mostly I prefer to make my own way so orientation was important to me, for a while people kept

reminding me of where things were. Saying things like "I'm just going to take your hand to show you how a bridle fits together" allows me to prepare myself and gives me an option in the matter.

Riding and volunteering has had a huge impact on my life. I am physically fitter and my depression is more manageable. I eat and sleep better than I have done for many years. It has allowed me to make new friends and we meet up outside of horse riding. We have a range of disabilities, none of which matters to us when we are together because we are all just people. It feels good to have the confidence to be myself and to not have to keep apologising because I didn't see something. It gives me a very empowering sense of freedom.

Before I lost my sight I was always a fairly daring person. If I was scared of something it only made me want to try it and conquer it more. I feel like myself again and not defined by my disability. In fact in terms of confidence all round, riding has been fantastic for me; for the first time since I lost my sight, I feel I have a future that is both one that I want and is driven by me.

## Volunteering

Volunteering in sport and physical activity can be very rewarding and offers the opportunity to:

- Develop new skills
- Make new friends
- Give something back to the community
- Improve understanding of the activity

# Equestrian Activities

Horse riding, vaulting, and carriage driving are all inclusive sports. Through RDA groups and at many other equestrian centres participants of all ages, genders, and abilities can enjoy being around horses.

Equestrian activities can develop a number of skills, improve self-esteem and create enjoyable experiences. Furthermore, as participants of all ages, genders and abilities can participate together, this enhances the social and inclusivity benefits.

As an equestrian coach, you will already have the skills that allow you to safely provide training, advice, and guidance to help participants achieve their goals. Ultimately, coaching visually impaired participants is no different to coaching any other participant in this regard, and is about using your core coaching skills to assess your participants' needs and help them develop accordingly. The following section of this resource contains some advice and ideas about how this may be done in an equestrian setting, based on our VI Equestrian Activity research and the experience of other coaches and participants.

## First impressions count

The first experience a participant is likely to have at a venue is meeting the coach and/or other organisers. First impressions are important. They help to put participants at ease in what can be an unfamiliar and potentially anxious situation. They also help to build a rapport between participant and coach. To improve the effectiveness of your communication with visually impaired participants, typical considerations include:

- Introduce yourself by name when approaching a person or group.
- Address the participant by name or lightly touch them on the side of the arm to indicate you are talking to them (always ask before touching).
- Do not rely on body language, facial expressions, or eye contact. Increase your level of verbal feedback.
- However, still smile and adopt a friendly and positive attitude; your demeanour will be reflected in your voice.

## Where to start

Remember that we are all different, so the sight levels, personality, ability, and fitness levels of each participant will vary. As a starting point, it is essential to determine the extent and type of visual impairment for each participant. This will enable the coach to ensure that they are providing the best possible support.

If working in a group consider taking time ahead of the session to ask any personal questions relating to the participant's vision or any other conditions that may affect their ability to take part. Whilst you should not be afraid to ask for this information, approach the topic with sensitivity, particularly if there are other people around.

Consideration should be given to the stability of the visual impairment. It may be that a visual condition is expected to deteriorate over time, and then this can be accommodated for when planning activities.

It should also be noted that a participant's level of vision may vary on a daily basis; vision may be affected by changes in lighting or general health. Consequently a participant may be able to carry out a task one day, but find it more difficult on another day.

Finally, remember that medical conditions must remain confidential. It is the choice of the participant as to whether they share information with others.

## Environmental Factors

Environmental factors may influence the session and a participant's performance. Discuss with each individual whether these are relevant and if so how negative impacts may be ameliorated. Note that the impacts of environment factors will not always be negative, for example, the change in light near a window may help with orientation.

Typical factors include:

- The amount of available light.
- Changes in light, such as cloud cover, time of day.
- Type of light (such as the sun, fluorescent lights, floodlights, skylights in ceiling where changes to outdoor light can affect indoor lighting).
- Overhead lighting and window light in indoor areas (e.g. the arena).
- Positioning of the participant and coach in relation to the light source; avoid having your back to a window or bright sunlight, as the reflection will make it more difficult to see you.
- Level of background noise and the likelihood of unexpected or unusual noises.
- The ground surface and whether it is consistent or if it varies, e.g. from concrete to mud.

## Equipment and Facilities

Very little specialist equipment is needed to support visually impaired participants, beyond that you will already have at your establishment. However, some simple considerations or adaptations may be useful in delivering your activity.

- Some surfaces (e.g. sand) will give very little sound from the hooves, and some participants may prefer to work on a surface that offers more auditory feedback (e.g. gravel when hacking).

- Can you establish the boundary of the arena better? For example by placing white boundary boards along the walls, painting the walls a different colour to the arena surface, or painting the fence white so that it stands out better against the background.



- Consider the size of arena lettering, and increase it if necessary.
- Also consider the colour and contrast of arena lettering and equipment – the contrast of colours should be high (e.g. black and white or black and yellow/avoid placing green cones on the grass when setting a course). The use of red and green should be avoided where possible.
- High visibility jackets may make you easier to identify.
- One simple thing is to ensure that equipment is returned to the same place each time. This small consideration can go a long way to making a visually impaired person feel confident.



**“One of the things that I like about the Ride2Achieve RDA group is that they have thought about what barriers there may be for me and they work out how to solve that before discussing it with me. This means that for me there never seems to be any barriers from my point of view – which is what I need. Other riders may vary!”**

**Megan Pritchard, participant.**

### Pre-Session Orientation

Coaches and organisers should provide ample time and assist new participants to orientate themselves properly with the venue. This has been highlighted as a particularly important process for both new visually impaired participants and for experienced visually impaired participants in new venues.

The goal of the first visit to the group should be to address any anxiety and enable the participant to feel comfortable in the environment. A visit to explore the venue prior to taking part in any activity is particularly helpful for some visually impaired participants. During this visit, explain the processes participants will go through when they visit your centre and show them where important things can be found (e.g. the tack, hats, toilets). Guide the participant around the stables and the yard while describing the surroundings and let them meet some of the horses, including if possible the one that they will work with.

Audio description is another useful tool to help people understand the layout of the centre and the arena. Audio description can be pre-recorded or live. A pre-recording can provide a thorough description of the centre as a foundation for the participant to work with. Arts and heritage industries (e.g. cultural landmarks, museums, and theatres) currently use audio description to great effect, and it would be great to see audio description used in a similar way to facilitate accessibility in the equestrian sector. Further information on audio description can be found on the RNIB website: <http://www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living-home-and-leisure-television-radio-and-film/audio-description>.

### Explaining Equestrian Activities

The way a coach explains techniques and equipment will vary depending on the visual ability and history of the participant. For example, a participant whose sight has reduced over time may have some understanding of what a horse looks like and how it moves. However, a participant who has never had sight may have a different concept.

Similarly, a partially sighted participant may be able to receive some degree of visual instruction and/or make use of visual aids, whereas a fully blind participant is likely to require much clearer verbal instruction.

Some general points for consideration when coaching:

- Ensure that verbal instructions are concise and accurate, for example, “the mounting block is on your left hand side” instead of “the mounting block is there.”
- Demonstrations may be useful; it may be helpful to walk a 20m circle on foot or lead a participant round initially.
- Try alternative ways of describing exercises, e.g. when driving a 25m circle, use a clock face analogy to help the driver visualise it and break it down into smaller segments.
- It may be helpful to draw school movements on the palms of hands to demonstrate a point.
- Wherever physical contact is required or would add value (e.g. for adjustment of hand position), ensure that the participant is comfortable with this: ask first.
- Maintain verbal communication with the participant when moving positions; for example, do not move from one side of the horse to the other unannounced as it may be disorientating.

It can prove very valuable for a coach to experience sight loss themselves by listening to coaching sessions either with their eyes closed, blindfolded, or using equipment which replicates a range of visual impairments (e.g. Sim Specs). It will help the coach to identify whether enough information was provided and whether the techniques required were adequately described.

### Creating a Relationship with the Equine

Unlike other activities, in equestrian activities there is a third party involved – the equine – and it is important for the participant and the equine to develop a trusting relationship. The sooner both feel comfortable around each other, the sooner they will be able to relax and progress together as a team.

Selecting the right equines is paramount to ensuring that any participant has an enjoyable and safe experience.

In addition to the standard considerations that you would normally take when choosing the appropriate equine, also consider:

- Spooky equines can be very disorientating, even for very experienced visually impaired participants.
- Many participants prefer to work with the same equine from one session to another, particularly when they are starting out. As each equines’ movement and coverage of distance is different, consistency can help with orientation.
- Take some extra time to allow the participant to familiarise themselves with the horse from the floor. Describe the equine and any equipment s/he may be wearing, and allow the participant to run their hand over the equine and any equipment. You can then describe what they are touching.
- Use any feedback or questions as an opportunity to help build a detailed picture of the equine and equipment.

- Explain to the participant that equines react to their environment and that it is normal, but that there are safety precautions (e.g. a leader) in place.

### Mounting/Dismounting

Mounting and dismounting are two of the most intimidating parts of the session for any new participant, so plenty of time should be allocated to this.

- If assistance is required to get up the mounting block or in the carriage, take some time to plan this and ensure everyone involved is assigned clear roles and responsibilities.
- Allow the participant to feel the equine or carriage, to help them gauge its proximity.
- During both the mounting and dismounting process of new or novice participants, it is best practice to have one person holding the equine’s head and an extra person on the ground to offer support if needed. These people should introduce themselves and explain where they are positioned before the participant mounts or dismounts.
- When carriage driving, it is also best practice to have an experienced coach already sitting in the carriage when novice drivers are mounting.
- Remember that you may have to increase your level of verbal feedback, talking through things (such as how to hold the reins) rather than using a visual demonstration.



## During the Session

Some general points for consideration during the session are:

- How will the participant become aware of any unusual circumstances (e.g. horses in a nearby field, machinery) that might require attention? It is the role of the coach to provide prompts initially; however, as the participant becomes more familiar with the environment and the activity, they can move towards independence.
- Remember that a visually impaired participant may not see obstacles and so may be unable to avoid them. Give detailed descriptions of the activity area and explain any obstacles or hazards in advance.
- Audio description (see Pre Session Orientation p18) can also be used during a session to provide additional visual information. The describer must be careful not to talk over the coach if describing during a session.
- In RDA Carriage Driving it is best practice to have an experienced coach in the carriage and another helper on the back in case of emergency (the backstep).
- If there are other people using the activity area, establish a system to accommodate for this, for example, a visually impaired rider may be given right of way on the track.
- Consider ways to make activities more sensory, incorporating more auditory, olfactory, and tactile stimuli: many RDA groups now run successful sensory rides.
- Keep considering how to progress sessions to challenge the participant and increase their independence.
- In the competition environment visually impaired competitors must wear a white armband.

- A fluorescent tabard saying 'blind rider/driver/vaulter' is an effective way to let others know that the participant is visually impaired, particularly in warm up arenas.

## Orientation

Orienting within the arena is one of the few extra challenges for coaches and visually impaired participants to tackle, and it will be helpful for you both to spend some time walking around the arena together (either on foot or on horseback/in the carriage). Allow ample time for the participant to develop an understanding of the arena and for you to develop an understanding of how the participant will orient themselves. Discuss what, if any, visual cues can be used, and where other cues (e.g. as mentioned in **Environmental Factors**) may be useful. Walk towards arena markers and ask the participant to tell you when they can see the letter. By approaching letters in this way, both from the side and from directly in front of the marker, you will begin to gain an understanding of the participant's level of sight. As you are going around ask the participant to point out any landmarks that they find useful, for example if one area of the school is lighter than another, or if one side of the school is open to the air.

Below are some examples of tools that may help with orientation. If you would like further assistance or to discuss these ideas in more depth, please contact RDA.

- Callers in the arena are often used, and can be used in competition. One or more callers (wearing hi-visibility tops if helpful) stand at arena markers, calling out their marker. There is not one standard method of using callers, so develop a strategy that works in your specific situation, remembering that this may change as participants gain experience. It is crucial that you, the caller(s) and the participant work as a team to ensure the callers communicate in a way that is useful, e.g. calling at a consistent volume.
- Another option is to place bells at the markers that can be rung by volunteers, or to place a bell on a lead rider when out hacking.

- Alternatively, technology (e.g. speakers or 'talking letters') can be used around the arena to notify the participant when they have arrived at each of the markers, in a similar manner to that described above (callers).
- A mnemonic can be used to help remember the order of the letters around the arena e.g. All King Edward's Horses Carry Many Brave Fighters.
- Counting strides can be a useful tool to help understand the movement of the horse. However, counting the number of strides is not recommended as a long-term tool to help orientation, as differences in the length of stride or direction of the horse's movement can easily influence how far they have travelled within the same number of steps.
- Two-way radios are particularly useful in group settings or competitive environments. With both parties wearing a headphone and a microphone, there can be an exchange of information as required. This can be used to provide feedback on technique or positioning in the arena, describe unknown noises, or communicate in an emergency.

## Reviewing the Session

Reviewing the session with the participant is a useful way of understanding what has and has not worked, as well as determining what should happen in the next session. Some questions you may want to ask are:

- How did you find the equine?
- Was there any part of the session where you did not feel confident and if so, why not?
- Were you comfortable?
- What do you want to do in the next session?



## Top Tips

- **Take time to understand a new participant's motivations and goals for starting in equestrianism.**
- **Do not be afraid to discuss a new participant's level of vision.**
- **Brief all volunteers and staff to ensure they are confident with sighted guiding techniques.**
- **Ensure there is someone to meet a new participant when they arrive and help orient around the centre.**
- **Provide as much time as necessary for the participant to orientate themselves on foot.**
- **Increase your level of verbal communication.**
- **Let the participant lead the session. Ask them what they want or need.**
- **Put equipment away in the same place each time.**
- **Do not be afraid of moving off the lead rein and promoting independence.**

## Trying Something New

Getting involved in equestrian activities can open up a world of fun and enjoyment. With suitable consideration to the participant's needs, there is no limit to the range of activities that can be enjoyed.

- Dressage
- Show Jumping
- Vaulting
- Handy pony/Countryside Challenge
- Endurance riding
- Carriage Driving
- Horse care

If interested in competition, contact the relevant governing body or RDA for details of dispensations that visually impaired competitors may be allowed.

# Carriage Driving Case Study: Simon Cruden, Shifford Driving for the Disabled Group

Simon was introduced to carriage driving four years ago and drives in Old Shifford, Oxfordshire. His friend encouraged him to come along and try the activity and as soon as he tried it he loved it.

"I very much enjoy carriage driving. It's a full experience. You feel the wind through your hair, the natural countryside smells and the coach usually describes what is around, such as the crops that are growing or machinery being used. I'm out in the wildlife and feed the horses. It's just a great experience."

"The driver sometimes lets me drive and tells me when to turn when it's safe. It's a nice feeling to have that control that I don't normally have."

"I've made new friends through the centre and we enjoy each other's company. The social side of the activity is something I really enjoy."

***"My advice to someone coaching a visually impaired person for the first time would be simply to talk directly to them, ask questions and listen to the information they provide. I understand it can be daunting working with someone who is visually impaired for the first time however they will have most of the answers you need to be able support them."***

## Safety Considerations

There are some health and safety considerations that coaches and parents/carers may need to take into account when a visually impaired person takes part in sport.

However, health and safety considerations should not be a barrier to including participants. Specific risks should be considered as part of the usual risk assessment for the activity and action taken to minimise any potential risks as much as possible.

Template risk assessment forms are available at [www.britishblindsport.org.uk](http://www.britishblindsport.org.uk) and [www.rda.org.uk](http://www.rda.org.uk).

### Fire Evacuation

Make sure that there is a procedure in place to support a visually impaired participant if they require it in a fire evacuation and that they know what it is, for example assigning a guide to provide assistance.

### Insurance

Ensure that there is adequate insurance to protect you, your participants and your centre. Having a visually impaired participant within your session will not affect your insurance cover.

### Further Information

HSE – Health and Safety Executive  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/>

# Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults

As a volunteer, coach, or member of staff it is vitally important to prioritise safeguarding the welfare of children and adults at risk.

In this resource the term 'children' refers to children and young people under the age of 18.

Different Home Nations have different legislations regarding the safeguarding of children and adults at risk. If your centre is affiliated with a BEF member body, please refer to them for further information and guidance. Alternatively, you can get good advice from the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) or your local authority.

Anyone directly or indirectly involved with providing sport and physical activity opportunities have a responsibility to:

- Recognise signs of abuse and understand the impact of abuse.
- Respond in an appropriate manner to children and adults at risk who may disclose that they are being abused.
- Know where to go for further information.
- Take appropriate action if concerns are raised.
- Ensure a clear process is in place for staff/volunteers to gain a disclosure check.
- Understand the need for photography, videography, and social media policies.

### Disclosures

Disclosures, be they DBS (England and Wales), PVG (Scotland), or Access NI (Northern Ireland) help employers make safer recruitment decisions and prevent unsuitable people from working or volunteering with vulnerable groups, including children. Anyone working with children or adults at risk has a legal requirement to ensure appropriate checks are made.

### Further Information

England - [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service)  
Scotland - [www.disclosurescotland.co.uk](http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk)  
Northern Ireland - [www.justice\\_ni.gov.uk/articles/about-accessni](http://www.justice_ni.gov.uk/articles/about-accessni)

Sport Coach UK offer a number of training courses and resource materials for sports people [www.sportcoachuk.org](http://www.sportcoachuk.org)

Child Protection in Sport Unit - <https://thecpsu.org.uk/>

National Society Prevention of Cruelty to Children - [www.nspcc.com](http://www.nspcc.com)

Childline - [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

# Pathways in Sport

Sport can provide many amazing opportunities. A number of sports offer exciting competition opportunities from local competitions through to international competitions such as the Paralympic Games. Equestrian is one of them!

As a sport coach it is important to have an understanding of the landscape of sport and the competitive opportunities that may be available to participants.

Visually impaired participants can compete in a range of equestrian disciplines and competitions. To find out more information about this contact the relevant member body of the British Equestrian Federation (e.g. British Dressage). Competitions may be organised by impairment for example with visually impaired specific classes, or be mixed disability. Within RDA, groups sometimes organise internal competitions, which are often a first opportunity to compete in a discipline. Organising your own mini-competition within your establishment, or attending small local competitions are good starting points.

RDA also organises regional competitions, where classes are offered for all disabilities. From there is the opportunity to qualify for the RDA National Championships - the biggest event of its kind in the world.

## World Class Programmes

Developed and funded by UK Sport, the World Class Programme covers all funded summer and winter Olympic and Paralympic sports. The programme operates at two levels:

- Podium - supporting athletes with realistic medal winning capabilities at the next Olympic/Paralympic Games (i.e. a maximum of four years away from the podium).

- Podium Potential – these are athletes whose performances suggest that they have realistic medal winning capabilities at the subsequent Olympic and Paralympic Games (i.e. a maximum of eight years away from the podium).

Team GBR equestrian is backed and managed by the World Class Equestrian Programme, funded by UK Sport. <http://www.equestrianteamgb.co.uk/>

Further information about World Class Programmes can be obtained via the UK Sport website. [www.uk-sport.gov.uk](http://www.uk-sport.gov.uk)

## International Competitions

Elite competition can bring life changing experiences and opportunities including; employment, sponsorship, overseas travel and the opportunity to compete on the world stage. It is important as a coach to understand the potential and possibilities available for visually impaired athletes.

## The Paralympic Games

In 1948 the first Games for Disabled was held at Stoke Mandeville Stadium. The official Paralympic Games took place in Rome, Italy in 1960. Great Britain has always had a record of performing exceptionally at Paralympic Games, in the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games 264 British athletes competed for Paralympics GB and won a total of 147 medals, finishing in second place behind China. Eleven para-equestrian events took place with Team GB winning eleven medals in total – seven gold and four silver.

## Other International and Professional Pathways

The Paralympic Games are not the only elite international competitions available to visually impaired athletes. Many sports do not have a Paralympic pathway, but athletes do participate professionally and compete internationally.

# Elite Para Dressage Rider Case Study: Nicky Greenhill



Nicky Greenhill is a five times national disability dressage champion, three times international champion and was short-listed for the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. Horses have always been a huge part of her life since her parents took her to her local riding centre at eight years old. Nicky enjoyed showjumping through her early horse riding career and worked as a groom after leaving college. Due to the deterioration of her eye sight she chose to move to dressage in her early 20s and progressed to competing in para-dressage since she was 30 years old.

“Horse riding has always been a huge part of my life. It’s great exercise, it’s very physically demanding. I really enjoy the outdoors as well as working with animals. When I’m riding I love the feeling of being able to control such a powerful animal,”

“My advice to anyone coaching visually impaired people for the first time would be to not be scared. People with sight loss are very capable people. It is an urban myth that visually impaired people have balance issues. In a lot of cases it’s quite the opposite!”

“I would also suggest allowing as much time as the rider needs to familiarise and orientate themselves in the new environment and to encourage questions. Even now when I go to competitions sometimes I walk around the ménage once and I can visualise the arena, but other times it can take longer and as many as five times. You can’t orientate yourself on the horse until you can do it on foot.”

“The most important thing to remember is to never give up, there’s always a way, but sometimes it just takes longer to find it... It’s really important to have a good team around you as the most critical thing a visually impaired rider needs is trust. They need to have trust in their horse as well as trust in their team.”

# Classification

Classification is the grouping of participants with equal impairment levels to ensure fair and even competition. It is a vital part of all competitive pathways.

Success at competitions should be defined by an athlete's skill and ability, not their impairment. The sight classifications should give all athletes the confidence that they are competing against others equally. The classification process groups athletes with a similar level of visual impairment together.

## Categories of Classification

There are five main categories of classification that British Blind Sport records. An athlete's category will be based on the visual acuity or visual field of the eye with the most vision. All classification tests will be conducted with the corrective glasses or lenses worn by the athlete.

## Types of Classification Testing

There are two main types of classification testing; British Blind Sport's classification process and the International Blind Sports Federation's (IBSA) international classification testing.

## British Blind Sport's Classification

- British Blind Sport is the leading organisation in the UK for sight classifications.
- This classification is relevant for people who want to compete in domestic or recreational competitions.
- An optometrist or ophthalmologist at a high street optician can complete a sight medical test form.
- Trained British Blind Sport classifiers interpret the medical test form and classify the participant.
- These classifications are not valid for international competition.

- Visit the British Blind Sport website for more information: <http://www.britishblindsport.org.uk/classification>
- For equestrian competition these classifications must then be processed by the relevant governing body. Below we have included examples of how the British Blind Sport classifications relate to the current RDA, British Dressage (BD), and British Showjumping (BS) classification systems. Other disciplines may vary. Please contact RDA or the relevant governing body for further information.

## Category

### B1 (RDA/BD Grade 4, BS Grade 4J)

Acuity – No light perception up to and including the ability to recognise hand movements. Field – Not applicable for the B1 category

### B2 (RDA/BD Grade 5; BS Grade 4J)

Acuity - Ability to count fingers at any distance to an acuity of to and include 2/60. Field – 5 degrees or less

### B3 (RDA Grade 6, not recognised in BD or BS para classes)

Acuity – Above 2/60 up to and include 6/60. Field – More than 5 degrees and less than 20 degrees

### B4 (May compete in some RDA competitions, not recognised in BD, or BS para classes)

Acuity - Above 6/60 up to and including 6/24. Field – Not applicable for the B4 category

### B5 (May compete in some RDA competitions, not recognised in BD, or BS para classes)

Acuity – Above 6/24. Field – Not applicable for the B5 category

Once British Blind Sport have issued a classification this must be converted to an equestrian classification by the relevant National Governing Body. Remember that while visually impaired competitors may compete in

para classes and there are visually impaired specific classes in some disciplines, visually impaired competitors are not limited to these and may compete in any competition/event where reasonable adjustments can be made.

## International Blind Sports Federation's Classification

- An optometrist or ophthalmologist completes a medical diagnostic form in the athlete's home country.
- Trained international classifiers interpret this form and classify the athlete.
- International classification can only happen at an IBSA-sanctioned event.
- These classifications can not be conducted outside of the competitive pathway.
- Visit the IBSA website for more information: <http://www.ibsasport.org/classification>

# Clean Sport

British Blind Sport and our partners are committed to supporting and encouraging clean sport.

Doping in sport is a significant issue. Supporters and spectators question the honesty and ethics of the competition and may lose faith in the sport. Clean sport - free of doping - results in fair competition, with supporters understanding that only the athlete's skill and ability is playing a role.

Along with affecting the integrity of competition, doping can have a significant impact on the health of athletes and can result in lasting health issues.

As a coach it is important that you share the values of clean sport and promote these values to your participants and the parents of participants to increase awareness of the seriousness of doping in sport.

UK Anti-Doping (UKAD) is the national organisation dedicated to protecting a culture of clean sport. The role and remit of UKAD includes:

- Raising awareness of the issues related to anti-doping.
- Ensuring sports bodies are compliant with the World Anti-Doping Code.
- The prevention of doping in sport through education programmes.
- Intelligence-led athlete testing across more than 40 Olympic, Paralympic and Professional Sports.

## As a coach you need to:

- Understand the role of UKAD and where to go to access further information.
- Develop a coaching environment that nurtures a culture of personal excellence, rather than win at all costs.
- Promote clean sport.
- Provide necessary information, timely and appropriate to the level of athlete that you are working with.

UKAD offer an extensive education programme for coaches, support staff, athletes and parents. Visit [www.ukad.org.uk](http://www.ukad.org.uk) for further information

## Reporting Doping

If you suspect doping in sport, contact UKADs anonymous and confidential Reporting Doping in Sport Hotline on 0800 032 2332.

## Further Reading

BBS and RDA Equestrian Activity Report  
BBS Barriers to Participation research  
BBS and Women's Institute: VI Women in Sport Research

<http://www.britishblindsport.org.uk/education/>

EFDS Inclusive Communications Guide – Access for all: inclusive communications  
[http://www.efds.co.uk/resources/case\\_studies/2697\\_access\\_for\\_all\\_efds\\_inclusive\\_communications\\_guide](http://www.efds.co.uk/resources/case_studies/2697_access_for_all_efds_inclusive_communications_guide)

EFDS Talk To Me Research  
<http://www.efds.co.uk/how-we-help/research/1878-talk-to-me-october-2014>

Media Guide to reporting on persons with an impairment; International Paralympic Committee  
[http://www.paralympic.org/sites/default/files/document/141027103527844\\_2014\\_10\\_31+guide+to+reporting+on+persons+with+an+impairment.pdf](http://www.paralympic.org/sites/default/files/document/141027103527844_2014_10_31+guide+to+reporting+on+persons+with+an+impairment.pdf)

Sport England Accessibility Audit Check List  
<https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/tools-guidance/design-and-cost-guidance/accessible-facilities/>

## About

### About British Blind Sport

British Blind Sport helps blind and partially sighted people get active and play sport. Sport and recreational activities can enhance the lives of people with visual impairments, by improving their health and increasing their social interaction. We encourage adults and children to participate in activities at all levels from grassroots to the Paralympic Games. British Blind Sport works across many areas to increase participation and ensure visually impaired people have equal access and a high quality experience of sport. Key work areas include:

- Competitions and leagues.
- National events.
- Creating local opportunities in partnership with local sports deliverers.
- Educating clubs, coaches and facility providers.

British Blind Sport is reliant on donations and the goodwill of the general public to deliver its services. Please donate now at [www.britishblindsport.org.uk](http://www.britishblindsport.org.uk).

### About Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA)

RDA is dedicated to improving the lives of people with disabilities through horse riding, vaulting, and carriage driving. Through a network of around 500 volunteer groups throughout the UK, RDA provides opportunities for therapy, achievement and enjoyment, improving health, wellbeing and self-confidence, and benefiting mobility and co-ordination.

- RDA brings together 500 volunteer groups throughout the UK.
- More than 26,000 adults and children enjoy the benefits of riding, vaulting, or carriage driving.
- Each year more than 19,000 dedicated volunteers give a total of more than 3.5 million hours of their time.

RDA is reliant on voluntary help, donations and legacies to deliver its services. Please donate now at [www.rda.org.uk](http://www.rda.org.uk).

## Contact Details

### British Blind Sport

Plato Close  
Pure Offices  
Tachbrook Park  
Leamington Spa  
Warwickshire  
CV34 6WE  
Phone: 01926 424247  
Web: [www.britishblindsport.org.uk](http://www.britishblindsport.org.uk)  
Email: [info@britishblindsport.org.uk](mailto:info@britishblindsport.org.uk)  
Registered charity number: 1168093

### Riding for the Disabled Association

1a Tournament Court  
Edgehill Drive  
Warwick  
CV34 6LG  
United Kingdom  
Phone: 01926 492915  
Web: [www.rda.org.uk](http://www.rda.org.uk)  
Email: [info@rda.org.uk](mailto:info@rda.org.uk)  
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**British Blind Sport is the leading voice for the blind and partially sighted community in sport and recreation in United Kingdom.**

Email: [info@britishblindsport.org.uk](mailto:info@britishblindsport.org.uk)

Website: [www.britishblindsport.org.uk](http://www.britishblindsport.org.uk)

Address: Pure Offices, Plato Close, Tachbrook Park,  
Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV34 6WE

Telephone: 01926 424247

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