



# Overcoming Barriers to Participation

A 2014 research study exploring how blind and partially sighted people overcome the barriers to participation to enjoy a lifetime of sport.



# Introduction

Thank you for your interest in our Overcoming Barriers to Participation research. This extensive study explored the barriers that restrict visually impaired people from enjoying sport and how successful participants have overcome those challenges.

While this research shows that some progress has been made in providing more accessible sporting provision, there is still more work to be done. We are keen to work with our existing partners and develop new relationships to ensure we provide greater sporting opportunities for people with sight loss.

I would like to thank all of our participants and Sportswise for conducting this research on our behalf.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Thomas Davies, our Insight & Information Officer:

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

Thank you,

Alaina MacGregor  
CEO, British Blind Sport

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# Research Objectives

At British Blind Sport, we help 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.

## **Business objectives**

To gain a detailed understanding of visually impaired people and where they sit within the sporting landscape. This will allow us to inform and assist national governing bodies in supporting blind and partially sighted people overcome issues and support further participation.

## **Project objectives**

- To identify the barriers to sporting participation for visually impaired people.
- To understand how visually impaired people have successfully overcome the barriers to participating in sport.
- To gain an understanding of the past sporting experiences of visually impaired people and how it affects their views on sport.
- To understand the motivations of visually impaired people for taking up sport.

# Methodology

We commissioned Sportswise to conduct an independent research study. They spoke to a large number of visually impaired people through telephone interviews and focus groups.

**207**

phone participants

**35**

focus group participants

## Phone interviews

Sportswise asked the 207 telephone participants a set of standard questions to ensure consistency. The topics included:

- Interest in sport
- Confidence towards being able to take part in sport
- Current participation level
- Experience of barriers

## Focus groups

The 35 participants were organised into 6 focus groups, spread across 4 locations:

- Birmingham
- Exeter
- Hereford
- London

# Findings: Phone interviews



# Phone interviewees

We spoke to 207 visually impaired people over the telephone. We had a varying range of telephone participants.

## Profiles

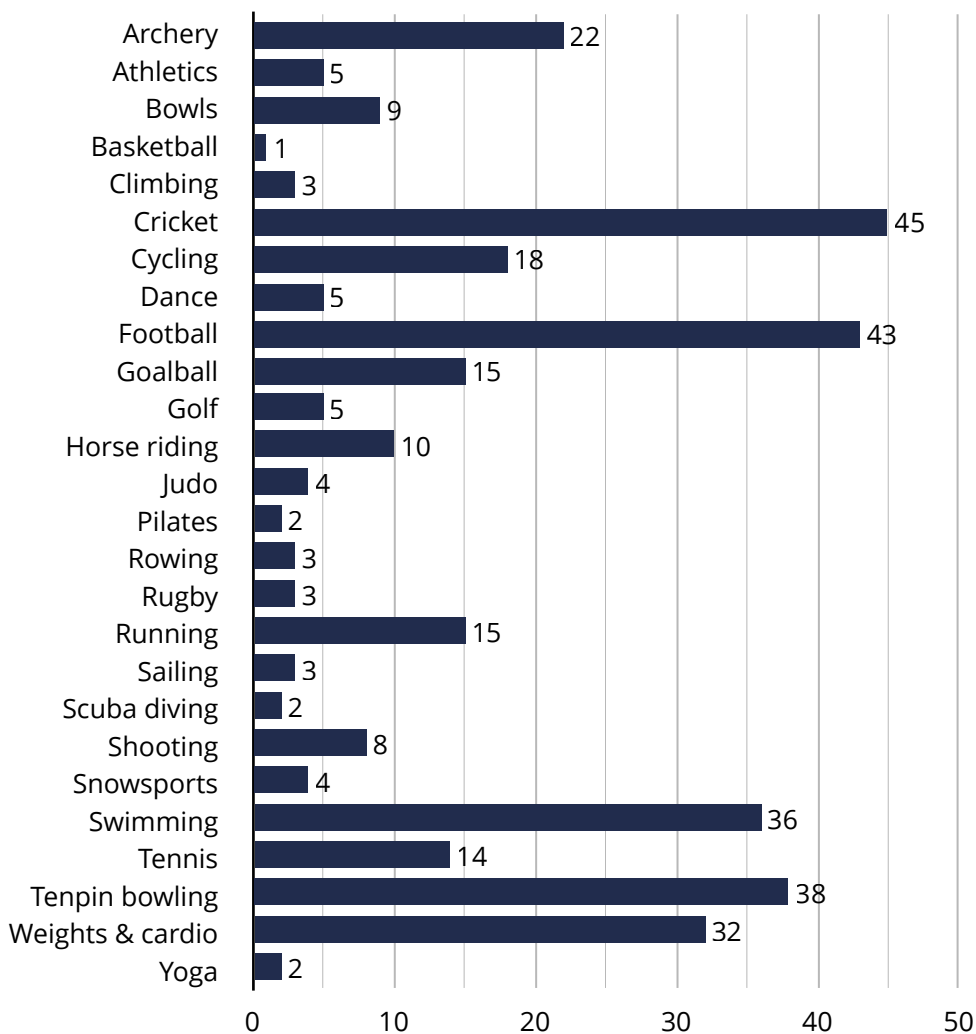
<b>77%</b> male	<b>23%</b> female	- not stated
<b>37%</b> blind	<b>61%</b> partially sighted	<b>2%</b> not stated
<b>47%</b> acquired	<b>50%</b> congenital	<b>3%</b> not stated
<b>75%</b> over 25 years old	<b>25%</b> under 25 years old	- not stated
<b>88%</b> BBS member	<b>12%</b> not BBS member	- not stated

## Activity levels

<b>80%</b> active for 30 minutes a week	<b>20%</b> inactive for 30 minutes a week
<b>41%</b> active for 3x30 minutes a week	<b>59%</b> inactive for 3x30 minutes a week

# Sports participation

Over 28 days in April and May 2014, our telephone participants took part in a wide variety of physical activity. Activities excluded were school curriculum activities, and cycling or walking unless it was for recreation.





# Findings: Focus groups



# Focus group attendees

We invited 35 visually impaired people to 6 focus groups. We had a varying range of focus group participants.

## Profiles

**69%**

male

**31%**

female

**50%**

blind

**50%**

partially sighted

**50%**

acquired

**50%**

congenital

**34%**

over 25 years old

**66%**

under 25 years old

**31%**

BBS member

**69%**

not BBS member

## Activity levels

**80%**

active for 30 minutes a week

**20%**

inactive for 30 minutes a week

**29%**

active for 3x30 minutes a week

**71%**

inactive for 3x30 minutes a week

# Early years experiences

*“At school, I wasn’t allowed to do any sports.”*

The sporting experiences that visually impaired people have at an early age has a significant impact on the long-term perceptions of their sporting abilities.

70% of visually impaired children attend mainstream schools and so had many of our participants. Several individuals said that they were often sidelined during PE lessons in mainstream schools. They believed this was due to staff members being uncertain about how to involve them in sessions.

These types of negative experiences affected our participants views on sport and many of them began to identify sport as something they just couldn’t do as a visually impaired individual.

*“When I was in a mainstream school, I just didn’t tell anyone I was visually impaired because I didn’t like the label of being disabled.”*

Some participants had positive experiences during their early years. These participants believed the help and support from family, friends and supportive teachers was vital to having a positive outlook on sport. This support helped many of our participants manage their impairment and lead an active lifestyle.

# Disability-specific vs inclusive sporting opportunities

The majority of our research participants felt they had a more positive sporting experience when they played with other visually impaired people, instead of sighted people. This was because everyone at the session would have an understanding of the challenges they have faced when participating in sport. Also, for many participants, it was the encouragement from visually impaired friends that was the catalyst for them to have the confidence to take part.

However, some of our participants were attracted to inclusive sport offerings with sighted people. For some, it was about being able to show others that they were able to achieve a similar level of athletic performance to their sighted peers.

*“It makes me feel more confident when people compliment my skills [when playing against sighted people].”*

For others, it was just a way to continue playing sports with their entire friendship group. To continue competing against sighted people, some participants felt they needed to hide their condition, often competing against sighted players who were unaware of their impairment.

# Acquired vs congenital

## **People who have acquired their condition**

*"I only take part because I want to hold on to that one thing that I did before I lost my sight."*

Those who acquired their conditions had a frustrated attitude towards sport. Several participants aged under 25 years old, said they only told trusted friends and families about their impairment. They didn't like being labelled as disabled.

Some of our participants believed attitudes towards them would change if their impairment was known. They were concerned that they may lose the confidence or the opportunity to participate against their sighted friends.

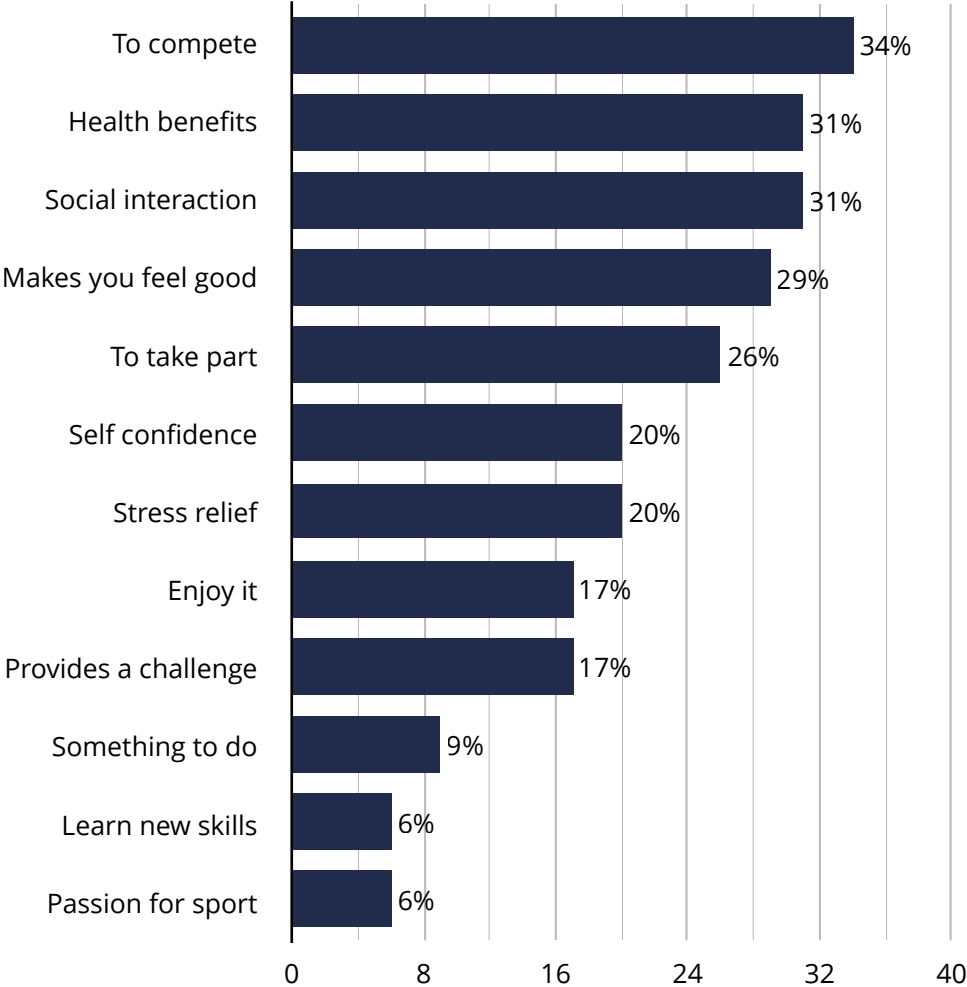
## **People with a congenital condition**

Our participants who have had their impairment since birth were more 'matter of fact' about their condition and how it impacts their sporting activities. These participants were more confident in travelling on public transport and accessing local facilities.

These people were more likely to have an established network of visually impaired friends and awareness of support organisations, compared to those who acquired their condition.

# Motivations for participating

Our focus group participants identified 12 motivations for taking part in sporting activities. A third of participants stated competition was their main motivation, followed by the health and social benefits of sport.



# Case studies



# Rosemary Howell



Rosemary has been blind since birth and did not take part in sport when she was at a mainstream school. During school, she was told that sport wasn't something she could participate in. This message was used consistently by the school and Rosemary began to believe it.

Rosemary moved on to a college for visually impaired people and took up goalball. After only 3 months, her lecturer suggested she participate in her first tournament. However, after her negative experiences in mainstream school, Rosemary initially refused. The lecturer was able to convince her and she thoroughly enjoyed the competition.

Rosemary believes it was her lecturer's encouragement and belief in her sporting ability that gave her the confidence to take part.

*"Playing sport internationally was just not something I ever thought I would do."*

Since this initial competition, Rosemary has played for the Great Britain goalball team. Even after representing her country, Rosemary would not class herself as someone interested in sport. She is more interested in having an enjoyable time, learning new skills and improving her fitness.



# Kiran Kaja



Kiran is a passionate cricketer. The sport was one of his only outlets during his sheltered childhood in India. During an awareness day for blind cricket in Calcutta, Kiran fondly remembers playing cricket alongside Kapil Dev, a former captain of the Indian national team. That experience made Kiran more determined to play sport and emphasised the importance of role models, whether they are sighted or visually impaired.

*"I am lucky where I live; Berkshire County Blind Society actively promotes sport and [has] an established infrastructure."*

Kiran now lives in Reading and continues to play cricket with the Berkshire Stags VI cricket club. He credits Berkshire County Blind Society for providing a variety of sporting opportunities. The society's Get Active Sports Club was launched to provide visually impaired people with the same sporting opportunities as their sighted peers. To assist their participants with travel issues, the society has a network of volunteers and minibuses.

There is often a perception that Kiran should have a carer because he is blind. In reality, a carer is not always needed. Kiran highlighted that organisers should not rely on family members to support a visually impaired relative.

# Todd Morgan



Todd is a keen footballer and plays for the Royal National College for the Blind's football team. He enjoys the challenge of playing in competitions and developing his skills.

However, Todd has not always been confident. Prior to college, Todd was taught in a pan-disability unit at a mainstream school. He was often bullied by his peers for being part of that unit. This made Todd feel bad and stopped him from participating in sport.

*"When it came to football during [mainstream education], I was made to just sit on a bench."*

Since joining the specialist college, Todd has flourished and regularly plays football, cricket and goalball. By playing alongside people with similar impairments, Todd has gained confidence and improved his sporting abilities.

As he reaches the end of this college education, Todd is concerned about the limited sporting opportunities outside the college. He feels that access to information about sporting opportunities for visually impaired people is a major barrier.

# How to overcome the barriers



# Information Barriers

*"A lack of information is holding me back."*

## **Finding Information about Opportunities**

Visually impaired people can often struggle to find information regarding accessible sporting opportunities.

### **Solution: Share your events with us**

We are happy to share your sports events on the British Blind Sport website, magazine, newsletter and social media accounts. Our events page is the most popular page on our website and we are keen to grow the amount of activities we share.

- Add your event to our website - [bit.ly/bbsevent](https://bit.ly/bbsevent)

## **Inaccessible content**

Poor and inaccessible content means that blind and partially sighted people may miss out on sporting opportunities as they can't access poorly formatted adverts or news stories.

### **Solution: Write accessible content**

It might sound scary, but it is actually quite easy to create accessible content for visually impaired people.

On the following page, we have included some quick tips for creating accessible content.

- Inclusive Communications Guide, English Federation of Disability Sport - [bit.ly/efdsguide](https://bit.ly/efdsguide)

# Quick Tips for Creating Accessible Content

## Social media

It's great to use images on Facebook and Twitter to quickly share information about your event. However, these images will not be accessible to blind people who use screen readers.

Always make sure the same information is available in both text and image formats.

The text of this tweet describes the important information from the image. A screen reader user has all the information they need.



See the stars of Goalball on [#NPD2014](#) in the Copper Box!  
Get your £5 tickets here [bit.ly/1w0CUMg](http://bit.ly/1w0CUMg)



Get your £5 tickets now at:  
[axs.com/national-paralympic-day](http://axs.com/national-paralympic-day)

NATIONAL PARALYMPIC DAY 2014

## Create webpages instead of documents

If you are primarily sharing event information on the internet, we recommend you share a webpage link, rather than a Word or PDF document. It is easier for other organisations to share links on social media instead of documents.

## Describe images

If you are creating a Microsoft Word document and are using images, make sure you provide alternative text descriptions.

- Right click the image > Format Picture > Alt Text
- Alternative Text, WebAIM - [bit.ly/aimalttext](http://bit.ly/aimalttext)

## Event Information

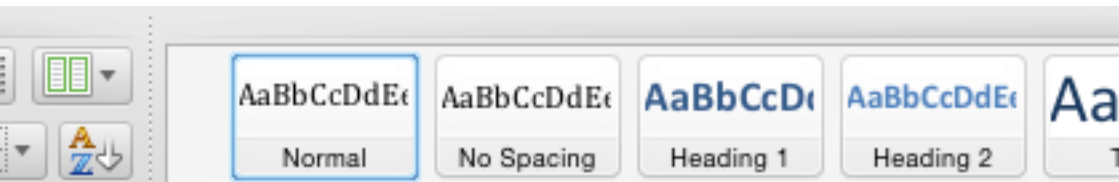
Make sure you share all important event information on your advertisements. To increase the likelihood of visually impaired people participating, we recommend you include:

- Event name
- Brief description of the activity
  - Who it is open to (example: gender, age)
  - Pricing
  - What they need to bring with them
  - Encourage family members to watch the session
- Venue
  - Include a postcode
  - Link to Google Maps (if a digital advertisement)
  - Nearest public transport options
- Start date and time, end date and time
- Single contact person
  - Email and telephone details if possible
  - Don't confuse participants by having several contacts

## Writing accessible documents

- Use at least size 14 font
- If someone requests large print, provide the document in size 16 font or above
- Use left alignment for documents, not justified
- Do not double space after a full stop
- Use line spacing of at least 1.5

To make this easy, we recommend you use style sets. They are easy to setup and helps make sure your documents are accessible.



- Microsoft Word Style Sets, Microsoft - [bit.ly/bbswordstyles](https://bit.ly/bbswordstyles)
- Accessible print guidelines, Action for Blind People - [bit.ly/bbstips](https://bit.ly/bbstips)

# Travel Barriers

*“Transport is a really big issue.”*

## **Expensive Travel**

Relying on public transport can be very expensive for blind and partially sighted people. Also, there can be additional travel costs for guides who accompany them.

### **Solution: Highlight public transport discounts**

Visually impaired people can be eligible for free or discounted travel on public transport. Recommend these links to your participants:

- Disabled Person’s Bus Pass, gov.uk - [bit.ly/bbsbuspass](https://bit.ly/bbsbuspass)
- Disabled Person’s Railcard, National Rail - [bit.ly/bbsrail](https://bit.ly/bbsrail)
- London Freedom Pass, London Councils - [bit.ly/ldnpass](https://bit.ly/ldnpass)

There may also be local community transport options in certain areas across the country.

### **Solution: Blue Badge scheme**

Many may not realise, but severely sight impaired people can take advantage of the car parking Blue Badge scheme for their driver.

- Check eligibility for a Blue Badge, gov.uk - [bit.ly/bbsblue](https://bit.ly/bbsblue)



## **Lack of Sighted Guides**

Some visually impaired people do not have carers or family members who can accompany them to events.

### **Solution: Guide Partnership**

Guide Dogs run a scheme that matches a visually impaired person with a trained guide volunteer. Recommend this scheme to your participants:

- My Guide Partnership, Guide Dogs - [bit.ly/bbsmyguide](https://bit.ly/bbsmyguide)

We are in the early stages of working with Guide Dogs to develop a service designed to increase the number guide volunteers in the sporting sector.

Local charities and blind associations may also have volunteer guide programmes.

## **Timings of Scheduled Activities**

Public transport times do not always suitably align with scheduled activities. While we can't control public transport, it is important to consider the impact on your provision.

### **Solution: Consider public transport limitations**

Where possible, select venues that are close to transport links such as train stations or bus stops.

Before deciding on the timings of your activities, check the arrival times of trains and buses to ensure there won't be any major problems.

# Perception Barriers

*“Most people [at sports facilities] are afraid of you. They don’t know what they should do.”*

## **Negative attitudes from sighted people**

Many visually impaired people are constantly told they can’t do sport. Mainstream PE teachers are often unsure how to integrate visually impaired students into their sessions.

### **Solution: British Blind Sport Educational Resources**

We are creating a set of sport-specific educational resources to help coaches who work with visually impaired people. Share the relevant resources with your coaches and volunteers:

- Swimming - [bit.ly/bbsswim](https://bit.ly/bbsswim)

### **Solution: Accessibility training**

We recommend you provide accessibility and awareness training to your customer-facing staff. There are many training providers that can help you.

It will help you and your staff consider the challenges faced by visually impaired people and improve your service.

## **Personal Opinion of own abilities**

Visually impaired people may have a low confidence in their abilities if they have had negative experiences in sport. Several participants indicated that they felt that the biggest barrier to taking part was themselves.

### **Solution: Celebrate VI Paralympic athletes**

After the London 2012 Paralympic Games, we have many role models who can show people that they can achieve great things, regardless of their disability.

Highlight the careers of some visually impaired athletes such as David Clarke (former blind footballer) and Libby Clegg (runner).

## **Protective families**

Family members can sometimes be very protective of their visually impaired children. This can result in children not having access to activities due to safety concerns and the family's lack of awareness regarding their child's ability.

### **Solution: Encourage families to attend**

Show parents that your sport sessions are safe by encouraging them to watch their child participate. Make sure you highlight this feature by including it on event literature.

### **Solution: Encourage families to play sport at home**

It is important that families continue the fun and games at home. The Government recommends that children should be active for at least 60 minutes a day. Encourage families to play together in addition to your activity sessions.

# Equipment Barriers

*“One of the big problems is the writing [legibility] on the machines.”*

## **Availability of adaptive equipment**

Finding quality, adaptive equipment for visually impaired sport can be challenging.

### **Solution: Identify providers of adaptive equipment**

If you are trying to source accessible equipment or you've had enquiries from participants, here are a few options:

- RNIB Shop - [bit.ly/rnibshop](https://bit.ly/rnibshop)
- Davies Sports - [bit.ly/daviessports](https://bit.ly/daviessports)
- Handi Life Sport - [bit.ly/handilife](https://bit.ly/handilife)

If you are struggling to find the correct equipment, please get in touch with us and we will help you:

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

## **Inaccessible equipment at facilities**

Facilities might have existing equipment that is inaccessible or difficult to use by blind and partially sighted people.

### **Solution: Conduct an equipment & facility audit**

While we always recommend selecting adaptive equipment, we are aware that existing equipment may not have been designed with visually impaired people in mind.

Test equipment with blind and partially sighted people to check if they are able to use it and identify problems. Blind and partially sighted people have different needs and may face different problems with equipment.

If you need professional support, inclusive design consultancies can provide auditing and design advice.

Sport England has an audit checklist for assessing if facilities are accessible for people with disabilities. We recommend you use this audit:

- Accessible sports facilities audit, Sport England - [bit.ly/seaudit](https://bit.ly/seaudit)

# Facility Barriers

*“You need to be prepared for negative attitudes [from staff].”*

## **Uncertainty about how to approach facilities**

It may take a few visits for visually impaired people to feel comfortable with your facility and the surrounding environment.

### **Solution: Describe the venue in event literature**

Make your participants comfortable about the venue by describing it in the event literature. If they are arriving on public transport or by taxi, explain that a volunteer will be waiting for them at the front of the venue.

Include a mobile telephone number that they can contact on the day of the event if they have any problems.

### **Solution: Encourage participants to talk about their needs**

Some people might not wish to ask for additional help. Therefore, it is important that you encourage open discussion with your participants.

Make sure you listen and accommodate their additional needs. If you are unable to make immediate changes, reassure them that you will resolve the issue for future events.

### **Solution: Experience it yourself**

If you are a sighted person, we recommend you experience the challenges faced by blind and partially sighted people at your venue. This shouldn't replace working with visually impaired people, but will show you the barriers they face.

Basic items such as blindfolds and simulation spectacles can be used to simulate sight impaired conditions.

## **Clubs and facilities worried about how to cater for impairment**

You might be scared by all the legal requirements, but it isn't that difficult to provide an inclusive environment for visually impaired people. With some thought and planning, you can make sure they will enjoy their time at your venue.

### **Solution: Accessibility training**

We recommend you provide accessibility and awareness training to your customer-facing staff. There are many training providers that can help you.

It will help you and your staff consider the challenges faced by visually impaired people and improve your service.

### **Solution: Conduct a facility audit**

Sport England has an audit checklist for assessing whether facilities are accessible for people with disabilities. We recommend you use this audit at your venue:

- Accessible sports facilities audit, Sport England - [bit.ly/seaudit](https://bit.ly/seaudit)



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