



**BRITISH BLIND SPORT**

# **Strategy 2023 - 2027**

# Chief Executive's Foreword



## OVERVIEW

We have all been impacted by the recent pandemic which affected each person in different ways, however those that society need to support the most have been disproportionately affected. For blind and partially sighted people (BPSP), the sense of isolation and being 'cut off from society' was never greater. As an organisation, we aspire to create a visible difference through sport, knowing that sport and physical activity can address numerous issues including social isolation, loneliness, health inequalities and confidence. Building on our last strategy plan, we have considered the impact of Covid 19 on our community and are committed to an ambitious 5 year plan to instil confidence back into both the sight loss and sport sectors by demonstrating what we can achieve together can create a visible difference for many.

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## WHO WE ARE

British Blind Sport (BBS) is the National Disability Sport Organisation set up to create and provide opportunities for blind and partially sighted people to experience positive sporting and physical activities whether at grassroots or elite level.





## OUR HISTORY

As a national registered charity (No: 1168093) that was set up in 1978, BBS was also established as a company limited by guarantee on 1st January 2017 (No: 10009918). The organisation was originally set up by a small group of BPS athletes who wanted to champion sport for people with sight loss enabling more accessible opportunities.

We are a membership organisation supporting individuals and affiliated sports clubs that are committed to BPS in the sporting and recreational environment.

Our membership consists of both children and adults, most of whom (approx. 96%) have varying levels of sight loss. Our remaining membership is made up from BBS volunteers and supporters.

## WHAT WE DO

As the National Disability Sport Organisation that represents BPSP across the UK, we offer a number of core services including:

- The delivery of freely available face to face and virtual events for all BPSP
- The funding and support to deliver member-led events
- The provision of a sight classification system to enable BPSP to participate in sport on a level playing field in a fair and transparent manner
- A programme to educate the sporting workforce to have broader knowledge of how to coach BPSP more effectively and confidently
- The provision of an information and advocacy service to signpost BPSP to the sport or physical activity of their choice in their local area
- An early intervention programme to assist BPS children and their families to grow confidence in sport and physical activity from an early age and encourage a sporting habit for life
- The set up and provision of local forums to empower BPSP to have an influential voice in shaping sport in their local areas
- A volunteers' leadership programme to enable BPS young people to demonstrate their individual value to sporting providers and influence positive change across the sector
- Liaison, advice and support to national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) to help them integrate and adapt their programmes to be accessible for BPSP
- We develop research in sport and physical activities for BPSP to better understand needs, barriers, and opportunities. Research is shared with our stakeholders within the sport and sight loss sectors
- We work in partnership with sports clubs, local authorities, NGBs and sight loss sector stakeholders to provide a number of services bespoke to the BPS community e.g. Find A Guide.

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## WHY DO WE EXIST?

There are almost two million people in the UK living with sight loss. This figure includes around 340,000 people registered as blind or partially sighted.

This number is set to increase to over 4 million by the end of 2050. This assumes that the underlying risk factors associated with sight loss do not change and that broad demographic changes, such as ageing population, will continue in coming years. **[1]**

People with sight loss are more than twice as likely to have experienced difficulties with unhappiness or depression than the UK average **[2]**

More than 40 per cent of blind and partially sighted people feel moderately or completely cut off from the people and things around them **[3]**



Half of blind and partially sighted people are always or frequently limited in the activities that they would like to take part in [4]

Many blind and partially sighted people have reduced opportunities to do the things they would like to take part in. This includes general leisure pursuits, and things like sports and fitness and access to volunteering opportunities [5]

BBS's own research indicates that BPSP see transport, cost and lack of understanding on the behalf of coaches, teachers and gym staff, as key barriers to them participating in sport and physical activities.

[RNIB statistics]


**Additionally, the impact of Covid has shown:**

66% of blind and partially sighted respondents feel less independent now compared to before lockdown.

The impact of COVID-19 was consistent across responses from NGBs and Clubs: a lack of resources (both financial and in terms of personnel); issues regarding transport and venue availability; nervousness to return; and disability-specific programmes facing funding cuts.

Blind and partially sighted people often rely on public transport to attend events, and the Lawn Tennis Association noted that those who rely on public transport were much slower to return to tennis activity post-lockdown than those who had private means of travel.

This tentative approach to return to sport has been quite apparent across other sport and physical activity organisations.



**“By not being connected to my groups during the pandemic, I’ve felt very lonely, isolated, vulnerable, and depressed. On several occasions I just stayed in bed being apathetic. My motivation has gone.”**

**\*See Sport Differently, BBS and RNIB report 2022**



## THE VISIBLE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

Sport and physical activity generate inspiration, passion, and excitement for all types of people regardless of age, gender or background. It challenges participants and brings a sense of purpose. Participating in sport or physical activity can improve health, a sense of wellbeing and increase confidence. In addition, it can help a person with sight loss to develop spatial awareness, improved orientation and higher fitness levels which can, in turn, benefit their everyday life.

Social inclusion and making new friends are key to BPSP, as is often the very nature of the impairment, he/she can feel 'cut off' or isolated in society. Participation in sport can make the difference between feeling lonely and being part of a group or team.

Along with supporting our community, our work enables coaches, club representatives, teachers and parents/carers to develop a greater understanding of the importance of assisting a BPS person to have a fulfilling and healthier lifestyle. We can equip others to make a visible difference to the lives of many.



## OUR CURRENT POSITION

As an organisation we are in a strong position, financially and with clear focus. British Blind Sport is still feeling the effects of the pandemic. Whilst our work never stopped during the crisis, we needed to respond quickly and adapt our services to continue to support BPSP across the country. One of the ways in which we did this, was to offer a virtual 'Active at Home' programme providing audio commentary to a range of fitness and activity classes so that people could exercise in the safety of their own homes during lockdowns. This unexpectedly required programme has taught us that many people, especially older people, like to exercise in the comfort of their own homes.

In addition, over the past two years we have worked with sector partners to provide guidance to NGBs and leisure providers on how to safely support BPSP back into their environments. Conversely, we have implemented and overseen numerous online consultations and workshops with BPSP to identify their concerns and reassure them of the work we do, and that of others in the sector, to help grow their confidence.

Our team has steadily grown over the past 5 years along with our offerings to assist BPSP with a range of diverse opportunities to suit age, gender, interest and budgets. Along with the newer programmes which include See My Voice, Active at Home and online education tools, in 2021 we established a new 3-year partnership with the RNIB, funded by Sport England, on a wide reaching and ambitious programme called See Sport Differently.

This year, Sport England has made a 5-year commitment to British Blind Sport which not only eases any immediate concerns regarding core funding but also recognises the organisation as a 'System Partner'. Giving British Blind Sport the opportunity to extend our reach through the sporting eco-system and having a 'seat at the table' amongst other sporting bodies provides new opportunities to increase our influence and impact.





## WHY ARE WE REVIEWING OUR STRATEGIC APPROACH NOW?

British Blind Sport has successfully grown over recent years and continues to be both ambitious and courageous in our goal to see sport and physical activities to more accessible and provide more opportunities for all blind and partially sighted people. Our strategy to date has proven to be effective however we are living in extraordinary times whereby every person and industry has been affected by the pandemic.

Given the disproportionate impact Covid 19 has had on disabled people and in our case, BPSP, it would be remiss of the organisation to not review how the world of sport has changed, what we have learnt from the pandemic and what can we put in place to lessen the equality gap in accessible sport and physical activities over the next 5 years. As much as the crisis proved to be a challenging time for the organisation it did bring about new and unexpected opportunities therefore as we ease ourselves out of the pandemic period, it is a good time to take stock and importantly, strategically plan for the coming years to further establish a stronger footing for BPSP everywhere in sport.





# OUR VISION

A world where blind and partially sighted people can have fair and equal access to sport and physical activity





# OUR MISSION

To use the power of sport and physical activity to positively change the lives of blind and partially sighted people





# OUR VALUES

Our values are important to us. They are the ethical code by which we work and that shape our behaviours and actions



## OUR VALUES: WE EMPOWER

- We are passionate about ensuring that the voice of blind and partially sighted people is heard and acknowledged in sport and physical activity
- We provide opportunities for BPSP to grow confidence in their ability to not only participate in sport but to be actively involved in shaping sport both locally and nationally
- We equip the sporting workforce with skills and knowledge that empowers them to positively work with BPSP
- We develop young leaders to create future influencers

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## WE CONNECT

- We recognise the power of collaboration to achieve greater outcomes for all
- We join the sight loss and sport sectors to create new and lasting partnerships
- We value and listen to the knowledge and experiences of our members and partners which helps us to learn and create improved solutions
- We identify new areas for partnership working to increase opportunities in sport and physical activity

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## WE EDUCATE

- We provide programmes to upskill the sporting workforce
- We share best practice to enhance BPSP's sporting journeys
- We research to widen our own knowledge and that of our partners to greater understand the needs of BPSP
- We develop team members to grow organisation stature and create future leaders
- Embed and share inclusive communications, resources and practices with others to enable the wider sport sector to engage more confidently with BPSP

## OUR GOALS

Our goals are to:

- Change society perceptions towards BPSP through sport
- Encourage the creation of more opportunities so more BPSP can access sport and physical activity
- Drive changes in the system so that BPSP are welcomed and included
- Ensure BPSP are heard so that they can influence the shape of sport
- Embed our organisation as a system partner to influence change across the sport and sight loss sectors.



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## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (SP)

Our strategic priorities give us a clear sense of direction, allowing us to focus our energies in order to achieve our goals.

### SP 1: REACH THE BPSP PEOPLE WHO NEED US MOST

There are 2 million people with sight loss in the UK, and while they have much in common, they also have specific needs that affect how we best can reach them.



We need to focus on the groups where we can make the biggest difference and, who need us most, especially:

- Older people, who make up 60% of BPSP
- Children and young people, who can be reached early to avoid a lifetime of health inequality
- People whose circumstances and backgrounds further exclude them from sport and healthy activity based on race, gender and sexuality
- People whose socio-economic status can make it difficult for them to access sport and physical activities



## SP 2: BUILD EFFECTIVE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

By working with well-chosen partners, we can ensure that we have the greatest possible, lasting impact on systems. We will focus on partnerships with both national and local organisations who can:

- Increase our reach and amplify our voice
- Make significant, lasting, permanent change at scale
- Help reach people in all levels of activity and sport – from walking groups to elite sporting bodies
- Offer tangible support to our grassroots networks and communities of BPS and sports organisations



## SP 3: RAISE THE VOICES OF BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED PEOPLE

BPSP are under-represented in sporting organisations and their needs are often not widely understood. We need to ensure they are heard directly and included in decision-making, particularly when it affects them. We will help the voices and experiences of BPSP be heard, by:

- Providing opportunities to develop leaders
- Helping BPSP into positions of power and influence
- Supporting and promoting role models
- Influencing decisions and make compelling demands for BPSP support through evidence gathering and research
- Increasing our membership and giving it a stronger voice to influence



## SP 4: ENGAGE, SUPPORT, AND CONNECT BPSP

BPSP value us as a route into sporting opportunities, and an expert broker between sectors. We act as a catalyst for local community and team activity to ensure sporting opportunities are widely available. We will:

- Connect BPSP to activities where they live, with support tailored to their needs
- Develop opportunities for the local needs of BPSP to be heard
- Function as the expert bridge between sports/ physical activity and BPSP communities
- Encourage grassroots community activity to build mutual support between families, friends and teammates

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## SP 5: ENSURE QUALITY EXPERIENCES FOR BPSP EVERYWHERE

BPSP often have demoralising experiences of sport and physical activity. We want to ensure that they have happy, memorable experiences that make them feel welcome, valued, and inspired to achieve through sport. We will strive on behalf of BPSP that they have excellent, life changing experiences of sport and activity by:

- Building a workforce that recognises, understands, and meets the needs of BPSP
- Share our knowledge to educate the wider sight loss and sport sectors
- Ensuring sport and leisure venues welcome BPS people – so that we can connect them with confidence to quality, supportive environments





## OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS WE WILL

- Reach over 30,000 BPS people through our programmes and platforms
- Engage with over 2000 people through our freely accessible Have A Go Day programme
- Work with over 500 young people and their families to create positive early sporting experiences
- Work with sporting and non-sporting partners (e.g. Age UK) to deliver a cohesion programme to reach over 1500 older people
- Reach more BPSP from ethnically diverse communities, including expanding resources into different languages
- Provide tailored support to at least 50 sporting and sight loss organisations, as a system partner, to ensure they provide improved sporting and physical activity opportunities and experiences for BPSP

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## KEY PROJECTS

**Alongside business as usual, focused on our strategic priorities, there will be some key projects we need to undertake to help us further develop our offer to meet the changing needs of BPSP, to continuously improve our services, and to ensure we stay sustainable. We will:**

- Redevelop and expand our membership offer
- Develop a new programme for older people
- Undertake a diversity and inclusion review
- Undertake a fundraising review to diversify income
- Maximise the opportunity and legacy of the IBSA World Games 2023
- Work with partners representing ethnically diverse communities to redevelop our Active at Home provision
- Review our range of activities for children and young people
- Deliver leadership development opportunities





# CONTINUING TO BUILD A CREDIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATION

Critical to the success of achieving our strategy is a financially robust, thriving and competent organisation.

British Blind Sport remains an ambitious organisation that sets our own bar high. We will continue to build on our credibility and track record of operational delivery to ensure we contribute to every goal that we have set ourselves. To make this progress requires robust governance, defined measuring capabilities and efficient operational planning. We are committed to investing in our programmes and our people to ensure we maximise all avenues of potential that will achieve positive outcomes. We believe in continual improvement and will endeavour to monitor and evaluate our work to provide the best outcomes for our community.

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## FINANCE AND FUNDRAISING

We will grow our unrestricted income to allow increased investment into our infrastructure such as: administration, IT and marketing communications. To this we will employ external expertise to work with us to newly identify diverse income streams. We will maintain clear and transparent accounting practices and procedures to provide assurance to our board and members.

We will continue to maintain and monitor healthy reserves.

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## SOLID GOVERNANCE

The foundations of our organisation are important to us. We will maintain high standards of governance, including ensuring that our board of trustees has the right mix of skills for future direction.

We will continue to ensure that we adhere to the Sport England Code of Sport Governance.

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## OUR PEOPLE

We will continue to invest in our staff and volunteers to ensure that the organisation has the correct skills and expertise to enable us to achieve our goals. We will review our structure to ensure that we have the right roles and responsibilities for our future direction. We will strive to continue to develop leaders, to ensure the sustainability of the organisation.