

VI EQUESTRIAN ACTIVITY REPORT **JANUARY 2017**





A VISIBLE DIFFERENCE THROUGH SPORT

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Executive Summary



A VISIBLE DIFFERENCE THROUGH SPORT

62[%]

Have heard of the Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA)

Have taken part Would take part

| Horse Riding | 61 % | 72 % |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Carriage Driving | 8* | 54 % |

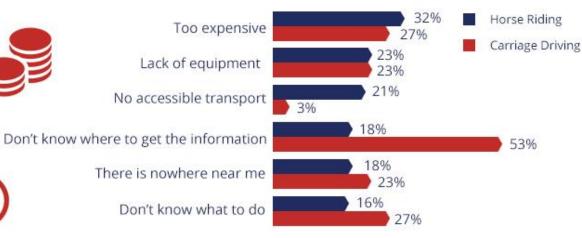
Top **issues** when taking part

Cost and **location** are the most critical factors that are most likely to prevent participation.

Other key issues:

- People's perception
- · Lack of information
- Lack of VI competition
- Unfamiliar venues





Main areas for improvement

Education of and communication with centre staff/volunteers

- Clear venue information to aid familiarisation
- Case studies on VI participants taking part in a range of ways
- Bursaries, budgets and sponsorship support opportunities
- Information on when and where to take part

50%

'Agree' that equestrian activities are accessible for VI people





INTRODUCTION

This research project is a joint initiative between British Blind Sport and the RDA (The Riding for the Disabled Association). The study aimed to make contact with a broad range of people with a visual impairment (VI) that may or may not have had any experience in taking part in equestrian activities. The target audience for the research were those aged 25 and above.

This report incorporates the findings from an online survey targeted at British Blind Sport members (n=85), interviews (n=12) and focus groups (n=22). The study was conducted between September and December 2016. Data on pages 6 – 19 were produced by online survey. Data on pages 22-30 were produced from interviews and focus groups.

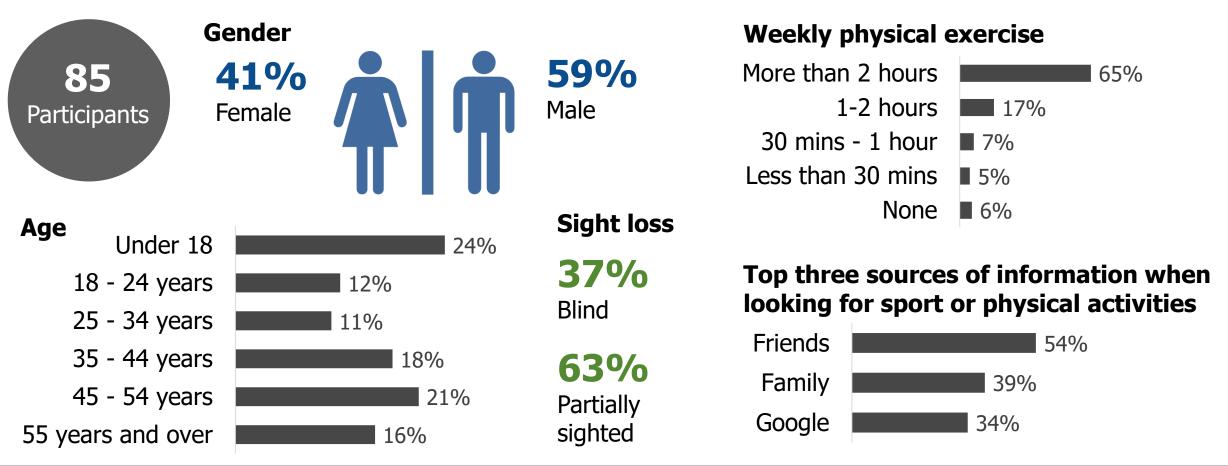






FINDINGS FROM ONLINE SURVEY

PROFILE OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

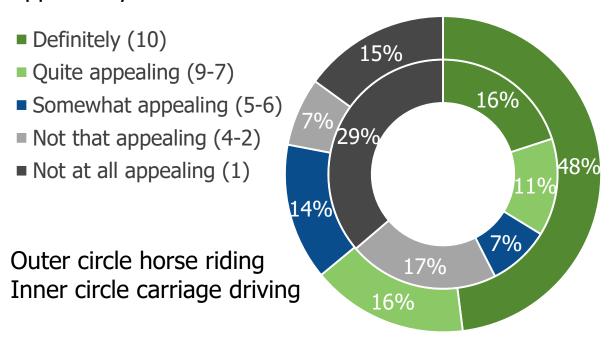


There was a slightly higher response from male participants, with approximately two thirds of responses from those aged 25 and over. Around two thirds of those surveyed were partially sighted compared to a third that identified as blind. Two thirds of the survey participants take part in more than two hours of physical exercise per week, with the main source of information on sport and physical activity being from friends or family.



APPEAL & PARTICIPATION

How much does horse riding/carriage driving appeal to you? Base =85



Are you currently horse riding or have done so previously? Base =85

61% 39%

Yes No

Are you carriage driving or have done so previously? Base =75

8% 92%

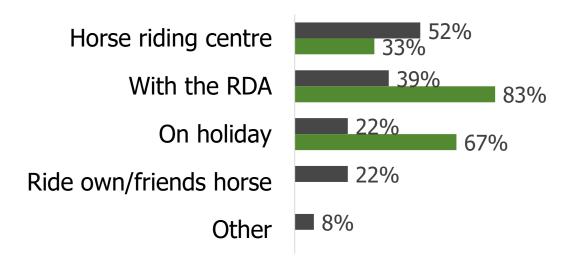
Yes No

Almost two thirds find horse riding appealing, with horse riding significantly more appealing than carriage driving. This is reflected in the level of participation with significantly more currently or have previously taken part in horse riding compared with carriage driving (61% vs 8%).



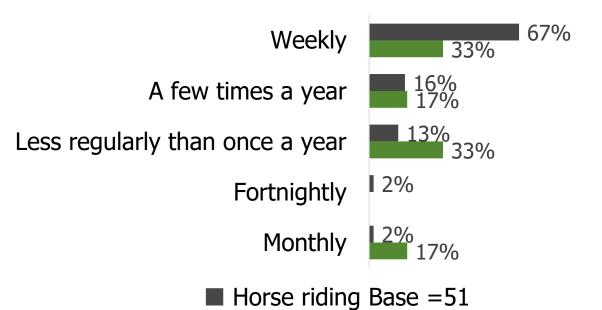
LOCATION AND FREQUENCY

Where do/have you ridden horses/carriage driven?



- Horse riding Base =51
- Carriage driving Base =6

How often do/did you horse ride/carriage drive?



■ Carriage driving Base =6
*Note carriage driving sample size is small

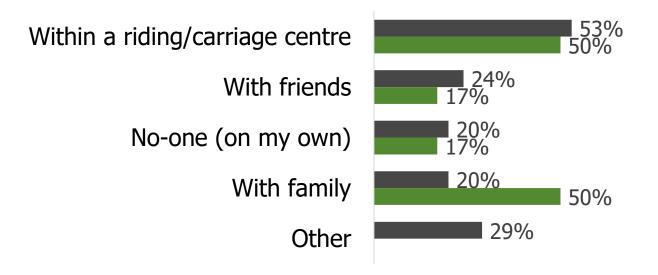
Horse riding centres and with the RDA (Riding for the Disabled Association) are the most popular locations for taking part in horse riding, whereas carriage driving (among the few who have taken part) is more popular through RDA centres or on holiday. Over two thirds of those that take part/did take part in horse riding ride weekly.



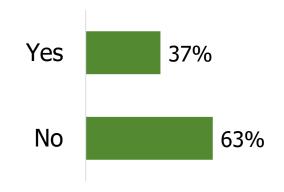
^{*}Note carriage driving sample size is small

COMPANIONS AND AWARENESS OF HORSE RIDING

Who do/did you horse ride/carriage drive with?



Does anyone you know horse ride? Base =51



■ Horse-Riding Base =51

Carriage Driving Base =6

*Note carriage driving sample size is small

Over half of those taking part in horse riding/carriage driving took part within a riding/carriage centre, with carriage driving also being something that is undertaken with family members. Among those who take part in horse riding (either currently or previously), only one in three know someone else who also rides.



Is horse riding an activity that you would consider doing in the future? Base = 79

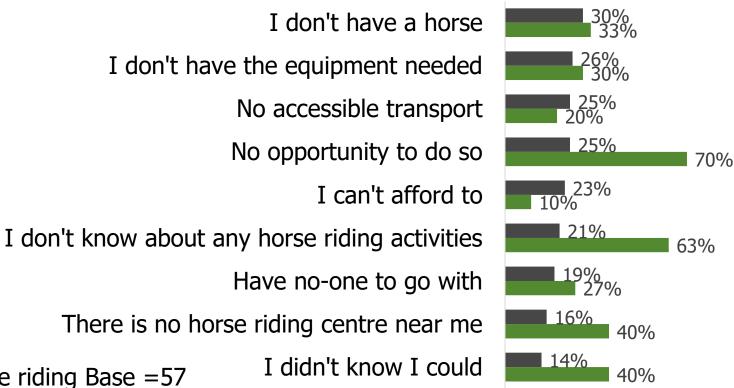
72% 28%

Yes No

Is carriage driving an activity that you would consider doing in the future? Base =65

46% 54%

Yes No You would consider horse riding/carriage driving, but have not done so yet. Why is this?



- Horse riding Base =57
- Carriage driving Base = 30

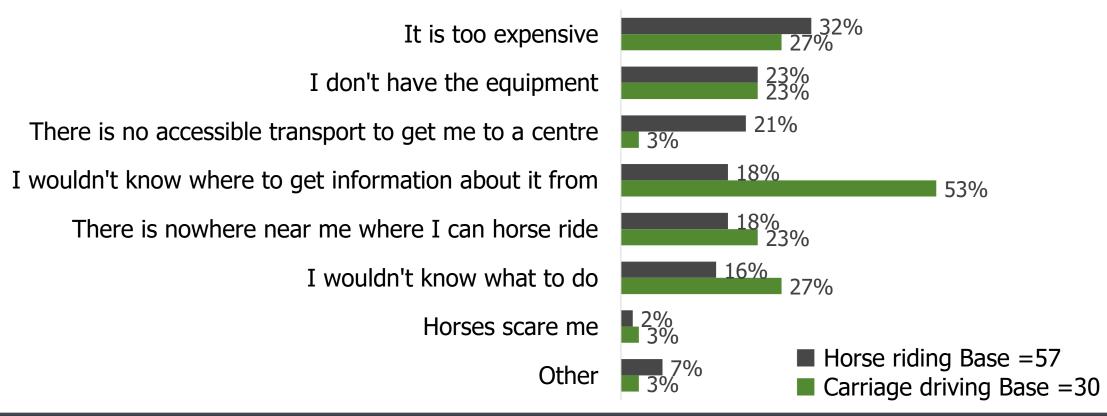
Other

There is a desire from 3 in 4 respondents to take up horse riding in the future. Carriage driving is less popular with around 1 in 2 indicating that they would consider it in the future. The main reasons for not yet having taken part in horse riding related to not having a horse, equipment or transport. Opportunity and cost were also issues. Opportunity and awareness of available activities were key barriers to carriage driving.



BARRIERS TO HORSE RIDING/CARRIAGE DRIVING

Is there anything that may prevent you from horse riding/carriage driving?

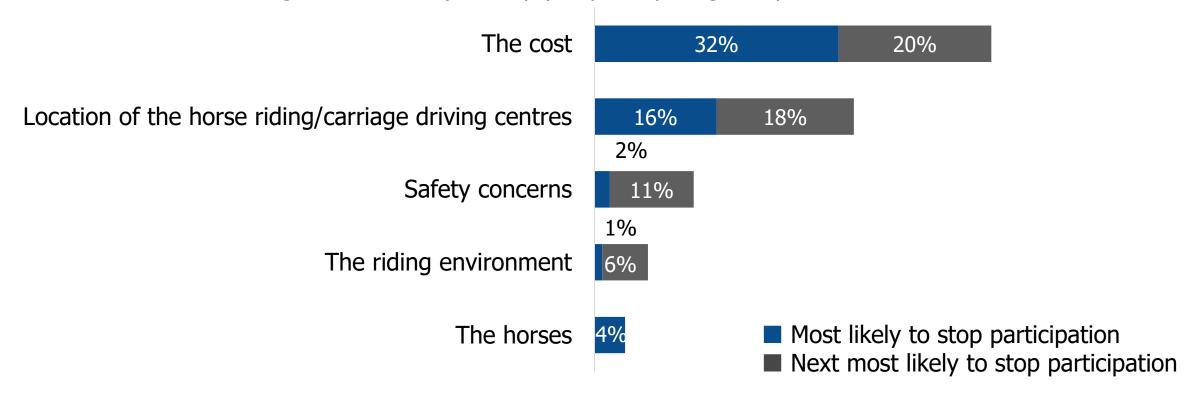


Expense, equipment and transport are key barriers to horse riding, whereas a lack of information appears more critical for carriage driving. This includes information about where to go and how to become involved, as well as what to do when carriage driving. Expense is a factor for both horse riding and carriage driving.



FACTORS AFFECTING PARTICIPATION

Which two of the following are most likely to stop you participating in equestrian activities? Base =85

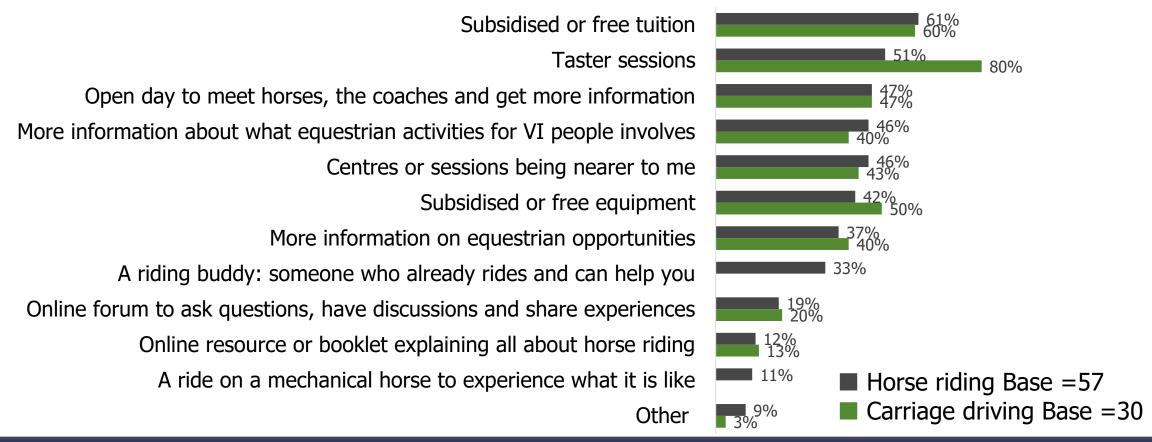


The cost and the location of horse riding/carriage driving centres are the key barriers which are most blikely to stop people taking part. Safety concerns, the riding environment and the horses themselves were less of an issue amongst those surveyed.



ENCOURAGING HORSE RIDING/CARRIAGE DRIVING

Would any of the following definitely encourage you to try horse riding/carriage driving?



3 in 5 people suggested that subsidised or free tuition would encourage participation. Taster sessions and open days to get to meet people and gain more information were also seen as approaches that would encourage participation in both horse riding/carriage driving.



WHY HORSE RIDING/CARRIAGE DRIVING IS

NOT CONSIDERED

Why is horse riding/carriage driving an activity that you wouldn't consider?

- Horse riding Base =22
- Carriage driving Base =35
- *Note horse riding sample size is small

It is too expensive
I don't have the equipment
I wouldn't know what to do
It's not for people like me

There is nowhere near me where I can horse ride/carriage drive

Horses scare me

Other

I wouldn't know where to get information about it from
There is no accessible transport to get me to a centre
The environment is smelly and dirty
The thought fills me with fear

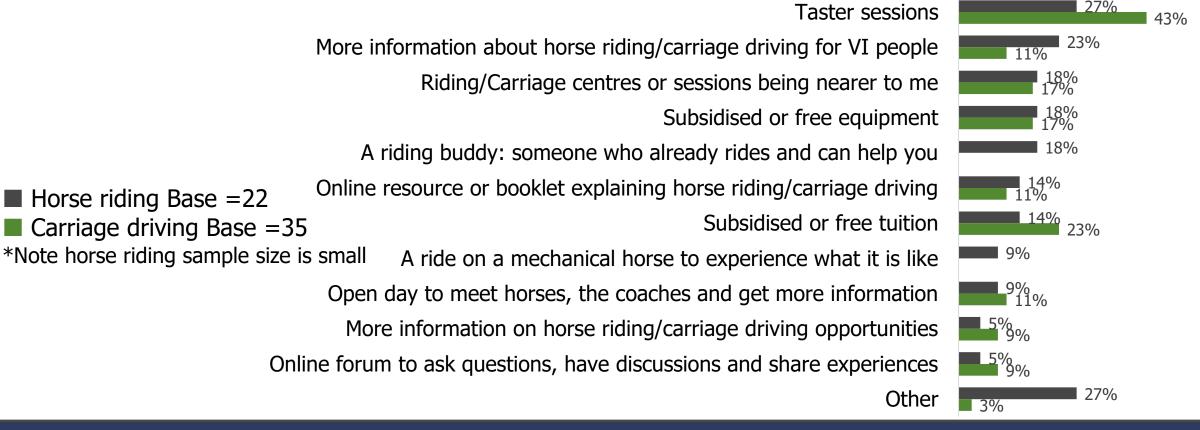
11% 9% 14% 23% 9% 9% 29% 9% 5% 19% 37%

For those who would not consider horse riding or carriage driving, the barriers are very similar to those who are interested but have not taken part yet. For those that will not consider horse riding in the future it is about expense, equipment, that they don't know what to do and that they feel it is not for people like them. In the case of carriage driving it is largely about not knowing where to get information from.



ENCOURAGING HORSE RIDING/CARRIAGE DRIVING

Would any of the following definitely encourage you to try horse riding/carriage driving?

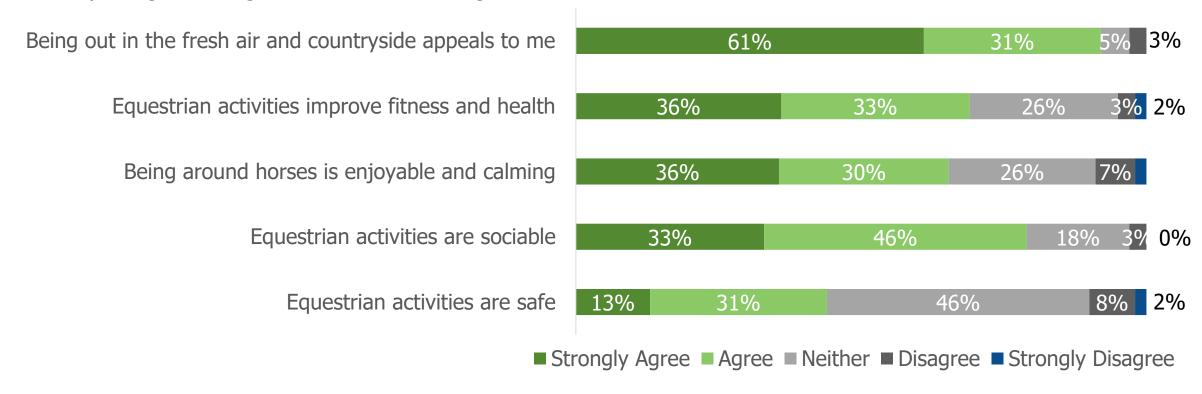


For those who stated that they would not consider horse riding or carriage driving, there are some areas that may encourage participation. Taster sessions and more information relating to VI participation would encourage participation in horse riding, whereas Taster sessions and subsidised or free tuition are key drivers for carriage driving.



PERCEPTION OF EQUESTRIAN ACTIVITIES

How much you agree/disagree with the following statements? Base=85

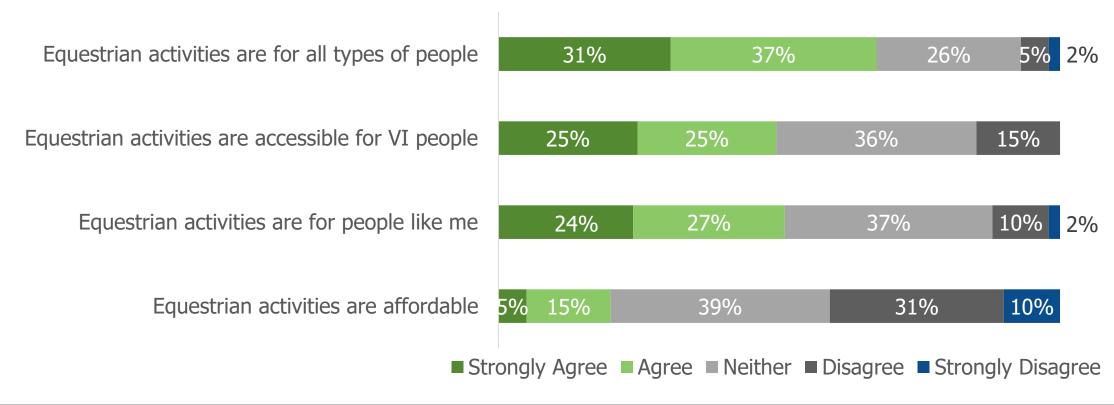


Around 3 in 5 strongly agree that being out in the fresh air and countryside is appealing. Around a third strongly agree that equestrian activities are a positive way to improve fitness and health, are enjoyable and calming and are sociable. The least positive response was given in relation to safety, with only 13% strongly agreeing that equestrian activities are safe.



PERCEPTION OF EQUESTRIAN ACTIVITIES

How much you agree/disagree with the following statements? Base=85



Equestrian activities are thought to be for all types of people, although there was a feeling that the activities are not affordable (41% disagreed with this statement). Only around half of respondents were positive about access for VI people and that equestrian activities are for people like them.

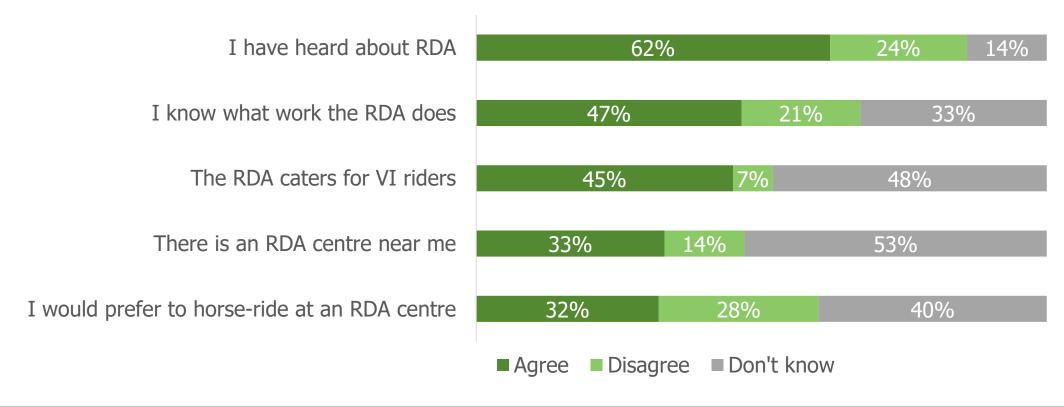




PERCEPTION OF THE RIDING FOR THE DISABLED ASSOCIATION

PERCEPTION OF RDA

How much you agree/disagree with the following statements? Base =58



Two thirds of those that completed a survey have heard about the Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA), although less than half know what the RDA does or that the RDA cater for VI riders. A third indicated that they knew of an RDA centre near them, whilst a third also indicated that they would prefer to take part in horse riding at an RDA centre.



THOUGHTS ON RDA

young people it develops a perception

that it is not for adults'

Imagery is focused on young riders
'Centres seem to promote images of

Perception of RDA being focused on children 'Am I too old to be involved with the RDA?'

'I only thought it was for children'

Great instructors and volunteers
'A brilliant RDA instructor built my confidence'



Lack of awareness of RDA within VI communities

'I have just never heard of them'
'I know nothing about them'

It is for people with more complex disabilities

'It still carries a stigma that it is for people with very severe disabilities'

'I had the impression that the RDA was for people with a disability not for those with just a visual impairment'

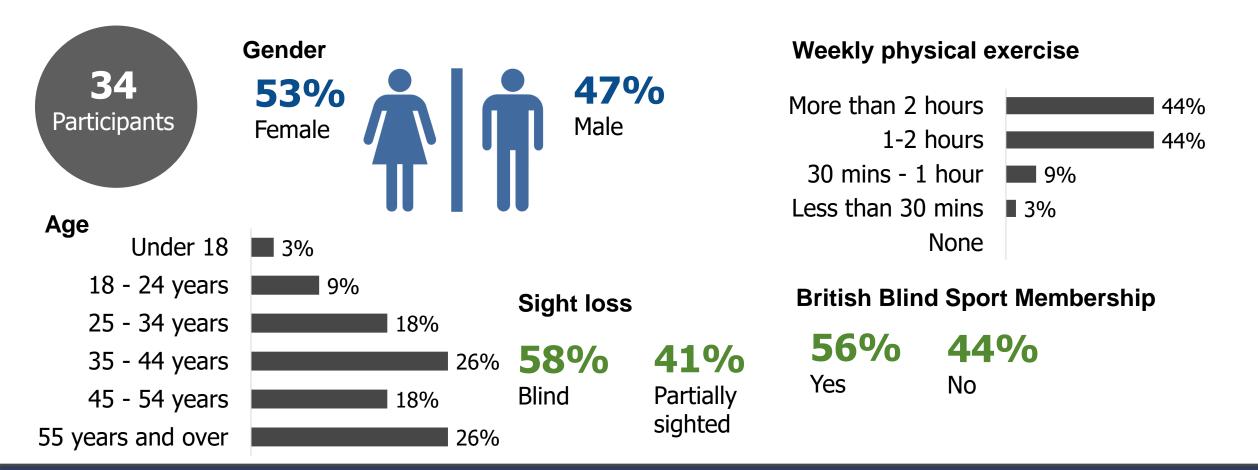
The focus group participants were also asked about their perception of the Riding for the Disabled Association. Whilst overall sentiment towards the organisation was positive amongst those who were aware of them, four key areas to address emerged from the findings relating to imagery, awareness, child focus and that it caters for those with more complex disabilities. The quotes above illustrate these findings.





FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

PROFILE OF FOCUS GROUP & INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS



A total of 34 participants took part in focus groups and telephone interviews, with slightly more female than male participants. There was a reasonable split between those that identified as blind and those that identified as partially sighted. Just over half of participants had British Blind Sport Membership. Most were active, with 88% taking part in physical exercise for over an hour a week.



Words associated with taking part in **sport:**

Happy Relaxing Sense of achievement Passionate Healthy Fitness Reaching goals Enjoyment Exciting Competitive Normality Healthy mind Social Independence Wellbeing Confidence

Words associated with taking part in **equestrian activities**:

Fitness Beautiful Helps with mood Achievement Daunting Social Fearful Free Connected Gentle Flying Responsibility Independence Confidence
Self belief Competitive Equal
Healthy No judgment Partnership Rehabilitation Reaching goals Strengthening Teamwork Wellbeing
A friend in the horse

In total 16 words or phrases were associated with taking part in sport compared to 26 associated with taking part in equestrian activities. There are eight words that appear on both lists: 'achievement', 'healthy', 'competitive', 'social', 'independence', 'wellbeing', 'confidence' and 'fitness'. Most words were positive although some words (e.g. 'daunting' and 'fearful') illustrate some negative perceptions of equestrian activities.



PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES OF HORSE RIDING

Four participants in the focus groups that were not attended by RDA participants had experience of equestrian activity in the past, none of whom currently take part.

- Two had negative experiences: they described their experiences as daunting, panicky and fearful. One was not put off being with horses whilst the other remains unsure of animals.
- Two others had positive experiences having ridden regularly when younger. One volunteered at RDA sessions at a local indoor arena but her progressive loss of sight has meant that she no longer volunteers. Another used to ride regularly, taking part in jumping, being led and independent riding. She became involved in other activities and no longer had access to the horses.

'My experience was pretty negative. I was quite young. It was daunting and the teacher couldn't comprehend my visual impairment - they just thought I was lazy or stupid.

'My instructor lets me be involved with clipping and helping with the horses. She lets me just have a go'





BARRIERS TO TAKING PART

Lack of information

In some areas there is limited information about horse riding/carriage driving activities, specifically in relation to where centres are located and the support for VI participants. There can be a reliance from the VI community on local support services, such as contact with sensory teams and social services, to provide information on available activities including horse riding. It tends to be down to the individual to be proactive in finding out about how they can take part. There are few opportunities for VI people who take part in equestrian activities at a similar level to meet and share information.

Lack of volunteers/support workers

Being able to take part in equestrian activities can be dependent on support workers and volunteers. There is a perception that volunteers can be put off by formal background checks and concerns over health and safety restrictions. Some volunteers in centres have confidence issues about working with VI people: they need knowledge and experience to become more aware of how to help.

'I only know where there are horse riding centres but I only know where they are through my partner. I have never been told about them.'

'How would you find out what you can do and whether it is accessible for you?'

'I would love to do horse riding. But where I live there isn't many places to take part.'

'Knowledge is something that is picked up as you go along and we are all different, with different levels of sight loss.'



Challenged by other people's perceptions or negativity

Participants identified that they are proud of their independence and the impression that they can give of not having an impairment. This can cause other people to react negatively as they are not aware of their VI status. There can be a lack of understanding from centre staff who presume that they are best placed to identify what VI participants can achieve rather than discussing with individuals their abilities and ambitions. For example at horse riding competitions some officials have had little contact with VI participants and the potential adaptions/rules that enable them to compete successfully. Negativity or a lack of understanding can upset VI participants.

Lack of VI competition

VI specific competitions are limited to May/June and are difficult to access, with some attendees travelling for several hours. The limit on the number of events is acknowledged to be due to a lack of VI competitors nationally. Some VI participants are happy to take part in able bodied competitions which results in a broader range of options to take part.

'Lack of positivity. I was recently regraded and someone from RDA told me you won't be able to do those tests because they are too difficult. Then you feel you have to go out and do it just to prove them wrong.'

'You can be seen as an alien, but that's how it is perceived. There are a lot of ignorant people out there but there are other people that just genuinely don't know enough about it [being visually impaired].'

'With carriage driving after passing levels 1,2 and 3 where do you go now? Is it competition? We just don't know where to go.'



Venue familiarity

Unfamiliar venues can cause problems for VI people, such as not knowing the layout of the facility and location of basic amenities. There are a number of busy equestrian venues where sighted people do not consider where they place horse riding equipment, making it difficult for VI people to feel independent. Not knowing a venue can be a limiting factor in making the decision of whether to attend a new centre or competition.

Urban vs rural

Those from urban areas felt that there are fewer facilities to take part in equestrian activities in cities compared to rural areas. Urban areas are perceived to have a higher concentration of VI participants and also a greater selection of sporting activities, so unless individuals are passionate about taking part in horse riding other activities may take priority. In contrast those from more rural communities felt that facilities and VI participants can be widely spread, which means that transport to equestrian centres, competitions or to specific VI groups can be challenging.

'There is a lack of training on how to use the arena. And training provided to callers as you are so reliant on only a few.'

'I had to wait in a place that was unfamiliar. It was open, windy and smelt bad. There was nowhere to sit and I didn't know anyone.'

'You get so bogged down with transport and who to meet. I hate going to new places'.



Varying experiences

Certain riding centres/groups are more restrictive in the activities that VI people can get involved with: some only permit activities on a lead rein and do not encourage further interactions with the horse. Other groups are more willing to let VI participants take part in activities in the yard and support riders taking part in more advanced activities and develop independence when riding. Restricting activities and not continuing to challenge participants by progressing activities can affect participant retention.

Travel

There are issues with organising and getting commitment for travel support, as VI participants are often reliant on friends and family for transport. Using public transport can be challenging due to the more remote location of some horse riding and carriage driving centres. This can result in using a combination of trains, buses and taxis. Some VI groups seek to organise transport collectively. Although this can work, it is often reliant on volunteers or centre staff/support workers committing to additional hours.

'When I first started I got bored very quickly. They didn't want me to come off the lead rein. I got bored going round in circles as I could only trot for as long as someone could keep up with me.'

'I booked into a [horse riding] session on a Sunday. The journey should have taken 30-40 minutes but took more than two hours. It involved two buses, changing trains and walking. The best thing was that I was met at the station and someone walked me to the session.'



Personal confidence

Of those that had little or no experience of equestrian activity, several expressed a lack of confidence around horses. In some cases there is a fear of working with such a large animal, both from a participant's and a carer's perspective. There is a certain level of personal confidence required to attend a new session or group. It was identified that attending sessions with other VI friends or as a VI group is a positive way to encourage attendance. In addition several individuals stated that English was not their first language which in some cases presented an issue.

Cost

Cost was seen to be a significant factor. However, this was often felt to be in relation to travel and equipment rather than the direct cost of taking part in the equestrian activity itself. It was acknowledged that costs are increased if there is a need for a carer/support team or for livery yards and horse transport for those with their own horse.

'I wanted to have a ride, but I was always scared of having a go. They are such big animals.'

'As a carer I had to get used to being with the horse. I am not scared of the horses now.'

'When you do have help some people are nervous, frightened of doing something wrong.'

'It's money isn't it. It all comes down to finances.'





SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INFORMATION PROVISION (1/3)

There is an opportunity to encourage members of the visually impaired community to take part in equestrian activities. Around 3 in 4 members expressed an interest in horse riding in the future and over half had an interest in carriage driving with very few having done carriage driving in the past. Promotion of carriage driving should include how VI participants can take part and what the experience may involve. The promotion of horse riding should cover these areas but also highlight that it is not necessary to have your own equipment or spend too much take part in the first instance.

'It is all under the radar.

Seriously, when do you ever hear about horse riding clubs?'

Promotional material should be careful in its use of imagery to ensure it reflects the diversity of participants, including VI participants of all ages taking part in dressage, jumps, lead rein and independent riding.

Information on where VI participants can take part should be distributed through a range of communication approaches including existing networks, websites, letters/brochures, email and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter). A range of communication methods should be used to ensure that materials are accessible for the blind and visually impaired, including use of video, audio or alt text on images.



INFORMATION PROVISION (2/3)

CASE STUDIES

Several VI participants had a determination to prove people wrong in relation to the activities that they take part in, with many applying a range of creative solutions to allow them to take on more challenging activities such as the use of primary colours, large print signs and specialist equipment such as two way radios. Simple case studies, such as videos/audio clips illustrating how VI participants had succeeded in equestrian activity, could inspire others.

EVENTS CALENDAR

An annual calendar of events and competitions that take place in each region should be made available. The calendar should include selected able-bodied events that encourage VI participants as well as VI specific events such as dressage and countryside challenge. Information should include details on how to take part, pre-qualification, venue location and layout, amenities and transport options.



INFORMATION PROVISION (3/3)

RDA WEBSITE

The RDA provide a local group search facility on their website, however many groups and centres do not have a detailed description. Developing the details on this site to include whether centres have opportunities for VI participants could be of benefit. There is also an option for volunteers to contact a local group: this could be developed to become a central source of information on volunteers who have experience working with a range of disabilities including working with the VI community.

The cost and location of venues were seen as the most likely factors to prevent participation. The RDA provide a mapping tool on their website that shows the location of groups across the country. However in some cases the information is very limited. Further developing this tool to include clear venue information, whether they support VI participants and, public transport routes, where available, providing further details about the groups may help to inform those hoping to take part.

'It would be good to be able to access a central hub of information.'



RECRUITMENT AND BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

TASTER SESSIONS

Free open days or taster sessions would be welcomed to enable participants to familiarise themselves with the venue and find out more information. The open days/taster sessions would be more appealing to the VI community if they are targeted at VI participants, but also encourage friends and family to attend for support. The sessions could include the opportunity to meet other VI riders and have specific support for travel from local transport hubs e.g. meeting from the station.

'I would like the chance to hear someone else's experiences and meet others having a go.'

PROMOTING POSITIVE IMPACT ON WELLBEING

Being around horses brings out a number of emotions, such as feeling calm, relaxed and confident. Many VI participants described an emotional connection with the horses and this having a positive impact on their mental health. The social aspects of being involved with the horses in group sessions and in having other yard based responsibilities are also important. These positive associations should be used to promote the impact that equestrian activities can have on VI participants and their overall wellbeing. This could be used to encourage others to take part and add leverage to bids to access additional funding from a range of agencies.



VENUES AND TRANSPORT

There should be an opportunity for group sessions to take place at horse riding centres so that new groups of VI people can come together with friends to be introduced to the activities that they could take part in. Going as a group with VI peers provides a support network in an unfamiliar environment.

'It is good to go as a group as we can work together to help each other out.'

VENUE FAMILIARISATION

Comfort and confidence is found in familiar surroundings. As equestrian centres are seen as an unknown environment there is a need for familiarisation sessions and clear guidance on how the venue is set out. This may include large print maps, a presession phone call from the group, audio description of the venue or pre-visits before starting a session to meet people and walk the routes required as part of the session. Where possible there should be safe area, with seating provided for VI people waiting to take part in the activity.

'Before a competition, packs are given out by 'Ride2Achieve' containing what facilities are available and details.'

TRANSPORT

Venue information should include local transport routes and details for requesting assistance to get to the venue, e.g. options for being met at local bus stops or train stations.



STAFF & VOLUNTEER EDUCATION (1/2)

Equestrian centre staff and volunteers are wide ranging in their level of experience of working with VI participants. Therefore there is a need to offer education for volunteers and professional staff involved in horse riding and carriage driving centres (not just RDA facilities).

Training and education within horse riding and carriage driving centres should seek to offer ways to make VI participants more independent. There should be open communication about what support individuals require and how it may change over time. To gain further wellbeing benefits consideration should be given with regards to how to involve VI participants in all aspects of working with horses.

Training and educational resources should support staff and volunteers in their understanding of ways to encourage VI participants including how to create a positive environment and draw on the experiences of and successful approaches used by VI riders, their trainers and coaches. The provision of simple examples of how a range of VI participants have taken part would be useful.

'Some people seem to think because you are blind you can't keep yourself safe. And that you don't have common sense or ability to figure things out for yourself.'

'It comes down to educating RDA volunteers and centres.'

'You need someone with strong positivity alongside you.'



STAFF & VOLUNTEER EDUCATION (2/2)

Training should, include examples of good practice from VI participants and centre staff and, where possible, offer shadowing/mentoring opportunities. The following topic areas are suggested:

- Accessing centres, timing of sessions and travel considerations
- Supporting individual learner needs and the role of volunteers and carers
- Ways to develop independent riding
- Arena/equipment adaptations and venue considerations
- Opportunities for VI competition and ways to integrate with able bodied competition

Volunteers or carers with no prior experience of horses could support VI participants who themselves have a knowledge of horses. Education opportunities focusing on how to work with horses whilst supporting VI participants should be available for volunteers and carers.

'I am mortified if someone thinks that I look blind, so therefore how do people know? You need to tell people that you have a visual impairment. It is about educating other people but you have to give them a chance.'

'They hadn't all had experience of working with people like us but they were willing to learn and for us to guide them. People will help if you have a chance to approach them in the right manner.'

'Where RDA are concerned there are training days for volunteers but there is nothing aimed at helping those with visual impairments.'



OVERCOMING FINANCIAL BARRIERS

More participants would be encouraged to take part by subsidised or free tuition; however this may not always be viable due to the running costs of the centres. Free taster sessions may incentivise participation initially, with other strategies in place for more regular participants.

BURSARIES, BUDGETS AND SPONSORSHIP

Information relating to bursaries, budgets and sponsorship opportunities should be collated annually so that BBS and RDA have a clear understanding of how VI participants are funding their equestrian activities. Guidance for accessing funding to support equipment purchases, session attendance, coaching and competition should be on hand and updated regularly.

Consideration could be given to starting a bursary scheme for VI participants, specifically for those competing for the first time. It is possible to combat cost barriers by accessing personal budget funding from the local council to support equipment costs, activity fees and travel to and from sessions. To access this funding, there is a need to demonstrate the entire wellbeing package and how taking part in horse riding/carriage driving can benefit the individual and meet the needs set out in their care plan. There are opportunities to have sponsorship for riders from local companies: guidance on ways to approach sponsorship could be useful.

'Riders at a certain level can become a marketable commodity. You can gain sponsorship from local businesses.'

'British Dressage used to offer travel bursaries but they now no longer do.'



OUR COMMITMENT (1/2)

British Blind Sport and Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) have a shared objective to increase the participation of people with a visual impairment in equestrian activities.

We will work together to ensure that the evidence from this research is shared within the wider sports industry and that the recommendations are implemented to ensure a good experience for people with a visual impairment in equestrianism.

To achieve this, British Blind Sport and RDA together commit to:

- Use our channels to share the findings and recommendations from this research to the sports sector and equestrian industry
- 2. Utilise shared events and exhibitions to promote equestrian activities as accessible for people with visual impairments
- 3. Develop an educational and informative coaching guide to up-skill the equestrian workforce when delivering equestrian activities to visually impaired people
- 4. Measure the impact of the research 12 months from the end of this project (March 2018)
- 5. Explore the opportunity to develop an e-learning module to further upskill the equestrian workforce



OUR COMMITMENT (2/2)

RDA commit to:

- 6. Maintain inclusive equestrian provision for people with visual impairments beyond the life of the project
- 7. Work with equestrian centres to activate the recommendations to benefit visually impaired people across the UK
- 8. Continue to listen to the wants and needs of visually impaired people who wish to participate in equestrian activities
- 9. Provide British Blind Sport with a list of RDA centres for signposting purposes

British Blind Sport commit to:

- 10. Continue to promote RDA activities
- 11. Provide support and advice in the development of future RDA resources
- 12. Act as a mechanism to link RDA centres to local blind associations
- 13. Signpost visually impaired people interested in equestrianism to their nearest RDA centre
- 14. Support the RDA to showcase this research to other National Disability Sports Organisations





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