



# See Sport Differently

A toolkit supporting sight loss organisations  
in sport and physical activities



In partnership with

Funded by





**1 in 3 blind  
or partially  
sighted people  
want to try  
a new sport**

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See Sport Differently is a Sport England-funded initiative in partnership with RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) and BBS (British Blind Sport)



**See Sport Differently**

which tackles the biggest barriers for blind and partially sighted people within sport and activity. We want more people with sight loss to get involved and feel the benefits as participants or spectators.

Through See Sport Differently, we are determined to challenge perceptions so that blind and partially sighted people can get involved with sport and activity however they want to. We know the positive impact sport can have on people's lives and that people with sight loss are involved in all types of sport and physical activity. But we also know there's work to do, as many people with sight loss are unable to access and enjoy sport or activity. Blind and partially sighted people are involved in all kinds of sports, from football and cricket to guide running and goalball. But sport is not just about team games and competition; it's about any type of purposeful movement, how it makes you feel and the confidence it gives you – from working out at home to attending a regular club or activity.

## What we have learnt

- Blind and partially sighted people are twice as likely to be inactive compared to their sighted peers.
- One in two blind and partially sighted people feel that having sight loss stops them from exercising as much as they want to.
- One in three blind and partially sighted people said there were sports or fitness activities they would like to try but haven't been able to.
- Accessibility and awareness, cost, confidence and transportation are all key barriers to accessing sport and physical activity for blind and partially sighted people.
- Sporting clubs and governing bodies struggle to reach blind and partially sighted people, and they sometimes lack awareness of the barriers faced by people with sight loss trying to access sports and activities.
- Blind and partially sighted people are half as likely to attend live sporting events compared to the England average. Venue accessibility is a major barrier.

**Image shows a woman using a bow and arrow** ▼



## Introduction

We want to make it easier for sight loss organisations and local sports clubs to support blind and partially sighted people to get involved in sport and physical activity. Our insight showed that there is excellent work happening in both the sports sector and the sight loss sector to support blind and partially sighted people in sport and activity, but often the two sectors are working in isolation and consequently seeing low levels of participation. These toolkits aim to provide helpful information to further enhance excellent local work that is currently happening, suggesting ways for clubs and sight loss organisations to work in partnership, as well as offering guidance for those who are in the initial stages of considering accessible and inclusive sport.

The toolkit is detailed, but there is always more information out there, so if you have specific questions or support needs then please do contact BBS or RNIB via the See Sport Differently mailbox ([SeeSportDifferently@rnib.org.uk](mailto:SeeSportDifferently@rnib.org.uk)).

## See Sport Differently Strategic Objectives

- Blind and partially sighted people have increased knowledge and awareness of the opportunities available to participate in sport physical activity, as well as role models to look up to, which leads to an increase in confidence, motivation to participate and overall wellbeing.
- Staff and volunteers working within sport have a closer connection with blind and partially sighted people and increased awareness of the barriers faced, as well as the skills and confidence needed to support people with sight loss to participate in sport/activity and provide accessible opportunities to get involved.

Based on insights from blind and partially sighted people, we have developed a programme of activity to tackle the biggest barriers we face. We are:

- Raising awareness among blind and partially sighted people about how to get active.
- Developing a peer support network of people with sight loss who are already active to champion local activities.
- Working with National Governing Bodies, sight loss organisations and local clubs to ensure activities are accessible and inclusive in design.
- Upskilling staff and volunteers, who work in sport and activity, to create a more inclusive participant experience for people with sight loss.
- Working with high-profile sports venues to create a more accessible and inclusive spectator experience for blind and partially sighted people.

# The importance of Staying Active

See Sport Differently is primarily aimed at adults. Sight loss affects people of all ages, but as we get older, we are increasingly likely to experience sight loss. According to RNIB, one in five people aged 75 and over are living with sight loss. Blind and partially sighted people are twice as likely to be inactive (defined as doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity a week) compared to the UK average (53% compared to 27%).

However, 80% of people with sight loss agree that it is important to them to exercise regularly, for enhanced physical, social and mental wellbeing, showing an imbalance between attitudes to exercise and uptake.

## Physical Wellbeing

Some examples of physical benefits of exercise include improvements in:

- circulation
- heart health
- bone strength
- muscles and joint strength
- weight management
- sleep
- mobility and coordination

We often hear 'trying exercise is pointless at my age', and 'exercise isn't safe for someone my age'. See Sport Differently is dispelling these myths; exercise is important for everyone. Being active does not mean that we have to go to the gym every day or run for an hour. Staying generally fit and healthy can mean simple everyday activities such as carrying groceries, reaching things on the top shelf, or moving about the home.

By being more active we can stay healthier for longer. Being in good health allows us to remain independent, to work and be involved in our local community, to maintain relationships with friends and family, and to carry out the day-to-day activities that enable us to lead a full and active life.

Those who are least active can experience significant improvements in their health and happiness from being just a little more active every day. Approximately 10% of falls resulting in hospital admission occur in blind and partially sighted people. Exercise can reduce the risk of falls (if performed in a safe environment) as it helps to maintain bone density, joint strength and centre of gravity.



▲ Image shows two adults playing doubles in tennis

It's important to recommend physical activity that is suitable for the person in question. For example, for people who are less mobile, it might be more appropriate to encourage chair-based exercises. For those who are less confident, at-home workouts or gentle walks could be encouraged.

So, be practical with your advice – build up activity slowly at a pace and level that feels right for the individual. Make it fun by having an audiobook or podcast or even exercising with friends. Make it safe, ensuring that clients have checked with their GP if exercises are safe for them, is the space clear, are they using suitable clothing and footwear, are they staying well hydrated?



▲ Image shows a coach supporting someone with how to hold a golf club

## Social and Mental Wellbeing

Not only does exercise improve our physical health, but it also improves social and mental wellbeing.

Almost half of blind and partially sighted people feel “moderately” or “completely” cut off from people and things around them. Older people with sight loss are almost three times more likely to experience depression than fully sighted people.

Physical activity is a way of meeting new people, getting out and staying social.

Studies show that physical activity has a positive impact on our mood. One study asked people to rate their mood after a period of exercise (i.e. walking or gardening) and after inactivity. Researchers found that people felt more awake, calmer and more content after physical activity.

Being regularly active is shown to have a beneficial impact on alleviating stress. It can help manage stressful lifestyles and can help us make better decisions when under pressure. Research into working adults shows that active people tend to have lower stress rates compared to those who are less active.

Physical activity has a big impact on our self-esteem: this is a key indicator of mental wellbeing. People with improved self-esteem can cope better with stress and improves relationships with others.

BBS' research into **Barriers to Sport and Activity** showed that 1 in 3 people with sight loss identify social interaction and 'feel good factors', were their main motivation to participate in physical activity. 1 in 4 participants stated self-confidence and stress relief as their main motivation.

Dave has been blind since birth and has never been sporty. He has recently taken up swimming, cycling, running and cricket after a few failed attempts to initially get active. "Mood follows action – we as blind and partially sighted people often don't become active due to practical issues with transport, equipment and venue accessibility which can prevent us from taking part and make us feel isolated, frustrated and defeated. But when these issues are overcome, and we find the right environment or person, it makes a massive difference, it makes us want to move and feel so much better."

It's important to encourage and promote sport and physical activity for people living with sight loss due to a range of proven benefits. As indicated above, exercise can aid both physical and mental health. It can improve cardiovascular health as well as provide greater security in terms of injury mitigation. Moreover, sport can aid in increasing social interaction or through stress reduction. Therefore, to engage in even moderate exercise can provide a raft of benefits for all, but especially due to the barriers faced by blind and partially sighted people specifically.

▼ **Image shows a man and his 'pilot' on a tandem bike**



# Links to Sport Provision

We often see the most successful and popular sporting options for blind and partially sighted people are where local clubs and local sight loss organisations use each other's strengths to coordinate and support with sport sessions: sports clubs often already have educated coaches, willing volunteers and facilities.

Sight loss organisations have knowledge around barriers to participation faced by people with sight loss and direct links to people who might be interested in trying sport.

National Governing Bodies (NGBs) are responsible for overseeing specific sports (e.g. The FA governs Football, Swim England governs Swimming etc.). Local clubs are affiliated to these NGBs, and receive support, funding, and training from the overarching NGB. You can find local sports clubs using BBS's [Activity Finder](#) (or searching for specific sports on NGBs club finders). A comprehensive list of all NGBs and how to access their club finders can be found here: [BBC NGB and Club Directory](#).



▲ Image shows someone lining up to take a penalty kick with the rugby ball



▲ Image shows a woman being coached by the baseball coach

[Active Partnerships](#) are also a core place to find sport offers in your region, apply for funding, and access support from clubs in your local area. Active Partnerships exist in each region to help people access sport and physical activity, bringing together people and organisations to increase physical activity levels.

BBS are working to establish new Visually Impaired (VI) forums which incorporate sports clubs and sight loss organisations from the local area. These forums discuss local provision, take up, and provide contacts across the sport and sight loss sectors.

If you would like to be involved in creating a forum for your area, or joining an existing forum, please contact: [info@britishblindsport.org.uk](mailto:info@britishblindsport.org.uk)

## South Yorkshire's first VI Tennis Club!

South Yorkshire VI Tennis Club was co-founded by Janiece, a visually impaired player and volunteer, and Ben, an LTA-qualified disability tennis coach. Janiece is partially sighted and has participated in a variety of inclusive sports since losing her sight. She is also a member of her local gym but wanted to increase her activity level and was looking for a sport that she could play indoors and outdoors post covid.

Janiece was first introduced to Ben in 2021 when he took her to a well-known tennis club in Northumbria to participate in a session with other blind and partially sighted players. Janiece and Ben also attended British Blind Sport's Have a Go Day in Sheffield where they met Annette, the Activities Coordinator at Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind (SRSB).

The event and the players' enthusiasm for the game inspired them to establish South Yorkshire's first VI tennis club, with the goal of encouraging more blind and partially sighted people to get active and play tennis in a welcoming environment. Ben and Janiece reserved tennis courts at the Hallamshire Club and worked with Annette to promote the sessions via SRSB's networks. Annette also arranged for a volunteer to drive a minibus and transport participants from Sheffield and Rotherham to the club's first taster sessions. The sessions have been very popular and, in the five months since its inception, the club has recruited 16 members ranging in age from 20 to 70+. All the players attend on a regular basis and have gained confidence and improved their skills.

We spoke to co-founder Janiece to find out more about how linking with local partners to recruit participants has helped the club.

### ***What got the club off the ground?***

"The relationship between myself and Annette was key. Although the club is now quite self-sufficient, the support from SRSB to recruit members and help with logistics like transport was crucial when we started out."



▲ Image shows four teenagers balancing sound tennis balls on rackets

### ***How else do you advertise and promote the club?***

“We have a Facebook page but rely heavily on partners. The SRSB include our club in their newsletter, their calendar, advertise us on their website and often do write ups and stories about the players and their journey in sport.

We also have huge support from Nuffield Health (local gym) who have supplied us with training t-shirts and second-hand tennis rackets, they take photos and put up posters around the gym to advertise the club and recruit volunteers.

They also support with fundraising, providing raffle prizes like a free day pass to the gym or a free personal training session.”

“We’ve been in touch with local schools that have sections for children with sight loss, and have contacted Sheffield Hallam University as well, trying to recruit both players and volunteers. As a new club we’re constantly looking for ways to fundraise and recruit”.

### ***How important is it to recruit volunteers?***

“The volunteers are really important. My husband volunteers through the minibus driving, and initially we relied on friends to help volunteer with the sessions, for ball-boy purposes and guiding, but since we’ve been advertised through the venues, we’ve managed to recruit volunteers in our own right.”

“Obviously we pay for Ben to coach us, but this month we’ve also got 3 coach volunteers from Hallamshire Tennis Academy, which means that they can cover sessions if Ben is on holiday. It was great having them here this month; they were able to give 1-1 sessions to new players while the session continues with more experienced players.”

### ***What is next for the club?***

“The biggest challenge we now face is fundraising to keep up with the demand! Our partners are great, and our members have a membership fee, but we are applying to grants to support our activity.

Brentwood Tennis Club, which is a tennis club nearby who often invite us down to join in with their sessions, host an annual tournament. We’re hoping to include some VI categories within that next year so we’ll be able to compete and showcase VI tennis to people who might not otherwise know about it”.

# General Advice for Organising a Session

This information has been provided to local sports clubs, but it may also be useful for your reference or to share with partners that you work with (e.g. local leisure centres).

It can be used as a checklist when setting up a session.

## Setting Up and Promoting a Session:

- Following inclusive marketing and communications guidelines and providing information in an accessible format (e.g. clear print or suitable electronic version for a screen reader). More info on this was provided to local clubs, and can be provided on request.
- Consider the use of photos in your promotion. Make sure to add an alt text description to all images, especially if you are creating a photo-based poster.
- Advertising your session with your local sight loss charity, as well as nationally with BBS.
- You can also advertise with your Active Partnership. [Find your AP here.](#)
- Consider advertising with ECLO (RNIB) networks, educational establishments and disability support network.
- Using social media to promote your services. Evolving technology makes social media a very accessible and popular medium for people with sight loss.
- Providing a named contact, email, and phone number on your event literature.
- Providing information about the nearest public transport options and provide a meet and greet service from there to the venue where possible.
- Encouraging participants to contact you in advance to discuss any additional support they need.
- Asking for disability information on pre-activity questionnaires or membership forms. This allows you to be aware of blind and partially sighted participants prior to the session (if it is a mixed session) and allows awareness of any additional needs.
- Contacting the participant (or their parents or guardians) before a session to identify the level and type of sight loss, whether they have had any sight previously and whether they require any further support or guidance.
- The impact of daylight on some eye conditions and organise sessions in good daylight where possible. Consider outdoor venues as these allow for better acoustics.
- Consider the use of contrasting colours when setting up a session, be it equipment in the session or the clothes that the coach is wearing in comparison to the venue and surroundings.
- Ensuring that front of house and receptionist staff at the venue have been briefed that people with sight loss are attending the session and understand communication needs.

## Communication with blind and partially sighted people:

- Good and clear communication is vital. Address people by name so they know you are talking to them.
- Always identify and introduce yourself verbally, so that the participants become familiar with the sound of your voice. Always introduce yourself using your name. If you go away within the session, re-state your name when you return, as participants may not be familiar with your voice yet.
- Don't assume all people with sight loss can't see anything.
- Remember everyone is individual and every eye condition is different, ask the participant what they can see and what support they need.
- Find out if the participant has had sight previously as this may impact their approach to sport and understanding of their environment.
- Establish if there is a preferred situation or environment that promotes better vision, for example a person may have better vision in their left eye, so by making a small change to where you stand to demonstrate a skill or task may make a huge difference.
- Don't be afraid to use everyday language such as "see" or "look."

## Guide Dogs:

Some blind and partially sighted participants may have guide dogs. Identify the best location in your facility where the guide dog can rest, whilst the owner is participating.

The best location is usually the reception or offices, where the dog can relax and be supervised. It is important to provide water for the dog to drink.

**Guide Dogs** can provide advice about how to ensure a guide dog is comfortable at your venue.



▲ Image shows two people walking across a sports pitch with their guide dogs

## Guiding blind and partially sighted people:

- Identify yourself and ask the participant if they would like some help. Do not presume they need your assistance.
- Offer your elbow or shoulder to the blind or partially sighted person for them to hold. Ask which side they prefer to be guided on.

- If you are guiding a child, they may want to hold your hand instead of your arm.
- Always ask which technique they would prefer.
- Make sure you are always one step in front of the person that you are guiding. Ask them if they are happy with the pace.
- Communicate at all times: describe what is around them and explain any changes in ground surface. Make sure the individual is aware of staircases as you approach them.
- When you guide a person to a seat, place their hand on the back of the chair. They will be able to sit down by themselves.
- As you walk through doorways, make sure the blind or partially sighted person is behind you. Be careful and make sure the door doesn't hit you.
- Explain any loud noises if they occur.
- Keep your guiding arm still and relaxed.
- Give the blind or partially sighted person adequate room around obstacles.
- There is more information about guiding on the [Guide Dogs](#) website and in this [video from RNIB](#).

## Health and Safety Considerations:

- Regularly reflect on your health and safety practices.
- Remember to treat participants individually; not everyone is the same.
- Allow time for participants to orientate themselves.
- Ensure any hazards are removed from the playing space.
- Regularly check any changes to the environment such as opened doors or new equipment in the playing area.
- For new participants, mobility could be a challenge. This is because their muscles might not be used to vigorous activity. Have regular water breaks to allow for this.
- Make sure there is a procedure to support blind and partially sighted participants in a fire evacuation. It's important that they understand the procedure, and who is assigned as their evacuation guide.
- Having someone with sight loss in your session will not affect your insurance but ensure that you have adequate insurance for running sports sessions.
- If other groups are using a nearby activity area, make their participants aware that you are coaching blind and partially sighted people.

## Activity Finder

British Blind Sport's Activity Finder provides information of inclusive sports opportunity and activities nationwide. The Activity Finder is a tool for blind and partially sighted people, family members and professionals to search for visually impaired-friendly clubs and community groups offering sport and physical activity.

Visit our website to see the huge variety of sports and activities that blind and partially sighted people can try – simply enter your postcode to see what is on offer near you!

<https://britishblindsport.org.uk/activity-finder/>

We know from our research that there are several additional barriers for people with sight loss to increase their activity levels: awareness (knowing where to find activities) is one of them. To overcome this barrier, British Blind Sport want to make it easier than ever for blind and partially sighted people and their support networks to find a wide range of activities on their doorstep.

Through the Activity Finder, British Blind Sport aim to:

- Be the go-to place for info about VI inclusive sports and physical activities in the UK, providing access to a wide geographical spread of activities.
- Showcase activities that feel able to support blind and partially sighted people and provide great experiences.
- Change the perceptions of what activities people think are possible for people with sight loss. We believe any activity can be adapted to be inclusive.
- Make all information fully accessible for users, as with all of BBS' communications.
- Support sight loss associations in signposting to sport and physical activity within their local communities.

**Image shows a man wearing eye-shades is defending the goal'.** ▼



There are around 800 offers currently registered on the Activity Finder, covering over 30 different sports and activities. British Blind Sport hopes that the Activity Finder can help other organisations and sight loss associations working with blind and partially sighted people to more easily and efficiently be able to answer queries around sports and physical activities.

We aim for it to be a universally helpful tool for anyone working with blind and partially sighted people.

We also want to encourage clubs, sight loss organisations and sports providers to continue to register their activities on the database so that we can ensure the Activity Finder is continuously growing and improving – this is one of the ways BBS signposts people to sport, so please do register your activities so we can help populate your sessions.

Whether you have lots of blind and partially sighted participants already and are looking for more, or you're starting from scratch, register your activities now by completing the short registration form on this page:

<https://britishblindsport.org.uk/activity-finder/>

We have many sight loss organisations registering their sporting provision on our Activity Finder, so please do log yourself as a provider.

If you are already a provider listed on our Activity Finder, please check and update the details provided to ensure they are still current.

You can do this by logging in to your account and then choosing the option 'manage your club listings'.

## Volunteering

The sport sector wouldn't function at the level it does without amazing volunteers.

If you'd like to register your interest to volunteer with either BBS or a local club near you, please check out our volunteering page:

<https://britishblindsport.org.uk/fundraising/volunteering/>

## RNIB Community Connections Facebook Groups

There are 12 regional Community Connection Facebook groups, covering different geographic areas across the UK. They are managed by RNIB and are a way for local blind and partially sighted people, their friends and family to come together, share advice, ask questions, and find out about what's happening locally. Each group has between 1000-2000 members.



▲ Image shows a BBS volunteer supporting with organising an event

We want to encourage you to use these Facebook groups to advertise your sessions, groups and activities. If you have regular training sessions aimed at blind or partially sighted people we advise the best way to advertise your regular sessions is by creating an event page in these regional Facebook groups. From here, RNIB can then invite members to the event pages and clubs can update interested people by regularly posting information in the event page. A walkthrough of the adding events process is detailed below.

Alternatively, if you do not offer regular or stand-alone sessions for blind and partially sighted people, but you run various activities that blind and partially sighted people are welcome to participate in, you can regularly post about these activities in the Facebook groups.

Please do join these groups as a means to advertise your activities and opportunities for blind and partially sighted people to take part in sport and physical activity.



▲ Image shows a young girl hitting the cricket ball with the bat

## Access the Events Section in the Facebook Group:

To create an event, you need to go into the events section of the Facebook group.

If you are accessing this from your computer, the events section can be found as a tab along the top of the group along with tabs such as discussion, photos, albums and so on.

If you are accessing Facebook from your phone then you need to click on the three lines in the top left hand corner of the group to access the events section.

## Create an Event in the Facebook Group:

Once you have clicked into the events section of the Facebook group, there will be a link that says 'Create an Event'. This will be found just above the current upcoming events. Click on 'Create an Event'.

Below are step-by-step instructions on how best to list your event:

**Step 1:** Select the in-person event option.

**Step 2:** Creating the event name. We recommend keeping this as the name of your club and name of activity. E.g. Leamington Goalball Club training session.

**Step 3:** Insert start date and time and end date and time.

**Step 4:** Insert the location/ address of where the activity takes place.

**Step 5:** Adding a description of the event. Include anything that would be helpful for people to know before attending your session/activity. E.g. Email contact address, does it cost to attend, where is the nearest bus stop to the venue, will equipment be provided etc.

**Step 6:** Once you have completed the description, you do not need to invite anyone to the event. You should be able to publish the event. However, if you do want to invite your friends who are also in the group to the event you can click the box at this stage that allows you to do this.

## Links to join your regional RNIB Connect Facebook group:

**London:** .....<https://bit.ly/LondonRNIB>

**East of England:** .....<https://bit.ly/EastEnglandRNIB>

**Yorkshire and the Humber:** .....<https://bit.ly/YorkshireRNIB>

**North East:** .....<https://bit.ly/NorthEastRNIB>

**North West:** .....<https://bit.ly/NorthWestRNIB>

**West Midlands:** .....<https://bit.ly/WestMidsRNIB>

**East Midlands:** .....<https://bit.ly/EastMidsRNIB>

**South East:** .....<https://bit.ly/SouthEastRNIB>

**South West:** .....<https://bit.ly/SouthWestRNIB>

**Cymru:** .....<https://bit.ly/CymruRNIB>

**Scotland:** .....<https://bit.ly/ScotlandRNIB>

**Northern Ireland:** .....<https://bit.ly/NIrelandRNIB>

A young woman with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a bright green long-sleeved football jersey and black shorts, is dribbling a white and green football on a blue indoor court. In the background, a male player in a similar green jersey is visible, gesturing with his hand. The scene is set in a well-lit indoor sports facility.

**1 in 2 blind  
and partially  
sighted people  
feel they don't have  
the opportunity  
to play sport**

# Spotlight on See Sport Differently Sports

As part of See Sport Differently, British Blind Sport and RNIB are working closely with six NGBs (National Governing Bodies) to develop opportunities and increase participation.

These six sports are: football, tennis, goalball, swimming, athletics and rugby. These sports were chosen from feedback as the most popular sports that blind and partially sighted people wanted to try.

However, we are of course aiming to increase participation across all sports – people with sight loss should have the same level of choice to participate in sports as their sighted peers.

The next pages of the toolkit contain some brief information about the 6 sports, adaptations, and ways to get involved. To find out more please contact the relevant NGB or visit the [Play Sports](#) section of the BBS website.

## Videos

We have created some short videos to highlight key adaptations involved in the six See Sport Differently Sports. Please feel free to use these videos where relevant in your work, for example, in raising awareness of activities that are available for blind and partially sighted people or advertising sessions.

- **[Football](https://bit.ly/BlindFootballVid)**: <https://bit.ly/BlindFootballVid>
- **[Goalball](https://bit.ly/GoalballVid)**: <https://bit.ly/GoalballVid>
- **[Guide Running](https://bit.ly/GuideRunning)**: <https://bit.ly/GuideRunning>
- **[Rugby](https://bit.ly/RugbyVid)**: <https://bit.ly/RugbyVid>
- **[Swimming](https://bit.ly/SwimmingVid)**: <https://bit.ly/SwimmingVid>
- **[Tennis](https://bit.ly/TennisVid)**: <https://bit.ly/TennisVid>

## Football

There are two versions of football for people with sight loss.

- Blind football: Only B1 classified players can compete (people with the lowest level of sight loss)
- Partially sighted football: B2, B3, B4 and B5 classified players can compete (athletes with some level of sight).

While the core game remains the same as sighted football, there are a few alterations to make football accessible to people with visual impairments.

## Blind football:

- 5 players per team
- 4 blind, outfield players and 1 sighted goalkeeper
- Ball bearings placed in the ball and make a noise when moving to allow players to locate the ball

## Partially sighted football:

- Uses a smaller and heavier size 4 football
- Played on an indoor pitch
- 5 partially sighted players per team

Taking part in visually impaired football is a great way to be active and meet other people with sight loss. Whether you are a beginner or an experienced player, football clubs will be happy for you to join.

## Get involved with visually impaired football?

You can find your nearest blind and partially sighted offers on the FA's Football Finder tool: <https://find.englishfootball.com/>

You can contact your County FA for opportunities in your area:

<https://www.thefa.com/about-football-association/who-we-are/county-fas>

You can also search on the BBS Activity Finder:

<https://britishblindsport.org.uk/activity-finder/>

## Equipment

Blind football uses an adapted audible ball. All outfield players must wear eye patching and eye shades to ensure a level playing field as some players may have a little light or shadow perception.

To facilitate the running of the game, sideboards are placed along the length of pitch to keep the ball in play and provide a reference point for the players when they are on the pitch.

Partially sighted football uses a futsal size 4 ball in a colour that clearly contrasts the pitch and lines.

It should be played indoors under constant lighting.



▲ Image shows two young people running after a football in a football match

### Useful Links:

- [County FAs](#)
- [Blind Football](#)
- [Partially Sighted Football](#)
- [Scottish FA](#)

## Goalball

Goalball is an exciting Paralympic, indoor, 3-aside team sport. The sport was originally devised in 1946 to help rehabilitate soldiers who had lost their sight during the war.

It has been played throughout the world ever since, at the highest level, by people who are blind or partially sighted.

The idea of the game is to score goals by bowling the ball along the floor, past the opposing team.

Goalball is a truly inclusive sport in that fully sighted players can also play domestically. This is because everybody is required to wear eye shades so that nobody can see.

Players therefore have to rely entirely on their other senses. The ball contains internal bells so players can track its

movement by its sound, whilst the court is marked out with tactile lines so players can feel where they are.

The aim of game is to throw the ball (along the floor) into the opposition's goal while defending your own goal. The team with the most goals win.

### Get involved with Goalball

To find your nearest Goalball club, please visit the club teams section of the Goalball UK website: <https://goalballuk.com/the-sport/clubs/>

or register your interest by calling: 0114 2235670

or emailing: [enquiries@goalballuk.com](mailto:enquiries@goalballuk.com).

### Equipment

The ball contains internal bells so players can track its movement by its sound, whilst the court is marked out with tactile lines so players can feel where they are. Everybody is required to wear eye shades.



▲ Image shows a woman wearing an eyeshade and preparing to attack the other team's goal

#### Useful Links:

- [Goalball UK website](https://goalballuk.com)

## Athletics

Athletics is one of the most popular and accessible sports for athletes with sight loss.

### Find A Guide

Running is a great way to get fit, enjoy the outdoors and meet other people. England Athletics and British Blind Sport have created the Find a Guide Database to help you start, get back to or stay running. If you are 18 or older simply search for guide runners near you using your postcode.

For more information contact [inclusion@englandathletics.org](mailto:inclusion@englandathletics.org).

Click here to go to the Find a Guide website: [FindAGuide.co.uk](https://www.findaguide.co.uk)

If you are interested in finding out more about becoming a guide runner and enabling blind or partially sighted people to get active please check out this information:

<https://www.englandathletics.org/coaching/development/sight-loss-awareness/>

### How to get involved with Athletics?

To find a club in your area please use the BBS Activity Finder or Find a Guide website. Parkruns are free, weekly, community events. Everyone is welcome to come along, whether you walk, jog, run, volunteer or spectate.

You can learn more by visiting the Parkrun website: <https://www.parkrun.org.uk/>

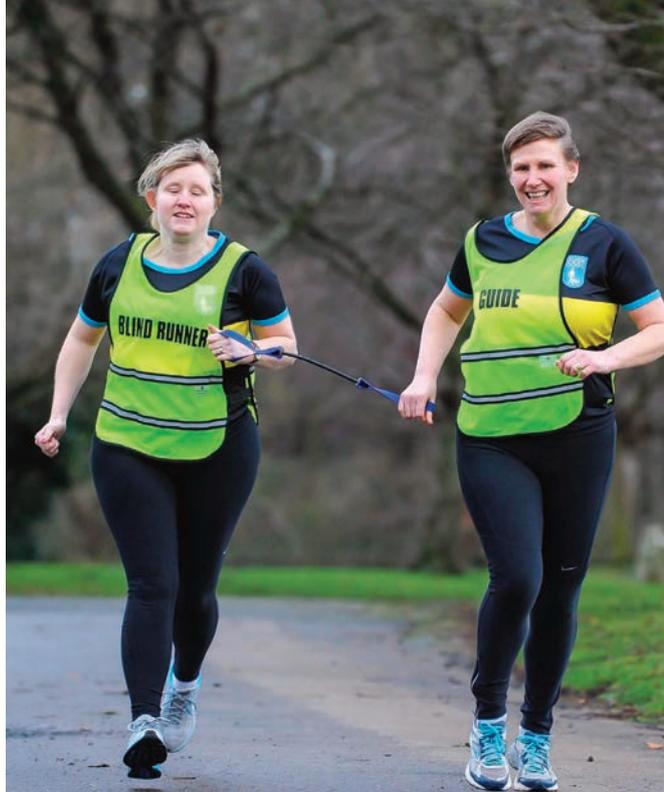
### Equipment

Reflective running gear will help keep you safe while you are out running. We've designed a collection of bright bibs and activewear for recreational blind and partially sighted runners to help you stand out and be easily identified when out running with your guide.

Visit: <https://britishblindsport.org.uk/product-category/products/>

Guide Running Tethers are also available to purchase from British Blind Sport.

Visit: <https://britishblindsport.org.uk/product-category/products/>



▲ Image shows a blind runner and a guide runner jogging through a park

#### Useful Links:

- [England Athletics](#)
- [Scottish Athletics](#)
- [Welsh Athletics](#)
- [Athletics Northern Ireland](#)
- [British Athletics](#)
- [FindAGuide.co.uk](#)

## Rugby

There are two formats of rugby suitable for blind and partially sighted people, called VI Rugby and Blind Rugby. Both formats cater for people across the spectrum of sight loss, from B1 to B5, and are based off the 7s format. The concept is the same as mainstream rugby – pass backwards and run forwards with the aim of scoring a try over the opposition's try line.



▲ Image shows a woman carrying a rugby ball and being 'touch-tackled' by an opponent

Blind Rugby was developed by the Worcester Warriors Community Foundation. It involves 7 players on the pitch and a B1 channel. Only the two players with the greatest sight loss (B1) and the player with the most useful sight (B5) are allowed in this channel. Tackles are made by wrapping your arms around the opposition like a hug.

The two teams each have a colour to call out so you can know where people are – for example the red team would call 'red, red, red' and the blue team would call 'blue, blue, blue'.

VI Rugby was developed by the Change Foundation. There are 7 players on each team with varying levels of sight loss, and tackles are 'touch' only. The referee commentates the game so players know where the ball and players are at all times.

### Get involved with VI and Blind Rugby

To find your local blind or VI rugby offer please visit:

<https://www.thechangefoundation.org.uk/contacts/>

<https://www.worcesterwarriorsfoundation.org/contact-us/>

Also check out the BBS Activity Finder:

<https://britishblindsport.org.uk/activity-finder/>

### Equipment

Both formats of the game use an audible rugby ball which is coloured fluorescent yellow.

Inflatable rugby posts are also used.

#### Useful Links:

- [Blind Rugby](#)
- [VI Rugby](#)

## Swimming

Swimming is a great recreational and elite sport and is a great way to increase positivity, sleep quality and mood whilst also teaching life-saving water safety. From learning to swim, to being involved in swimming competitively, anyone can get involved.

### Get involved with swimming

Any of your local public swimming pools should be able to make adequate adaptations for you to swim recreationally in the public sessions. If you want to get involved in swimming recreationally, then a few recommendations can be made to be as independent as possible in the water:

- Call ahead to your local leisure centre to make them aware of your visual impairment.
- Alert the lifeguard so they can make any necessary changes to fully assist you with your independence. Adaptations can include using anti-turbulent ropes instead of ropes standard ropes, placing brightly coloured markers on the bottom of, and around the pool.
- If swimming in a lane, count how many strokes it takes to reach a length in the pool. This will enable you to work out when you are approaching the end of the lane.
- Familiarise yourself with the pool and swimming area - shallow/deep end, step position to and from the pool.
- Place a brightly coloured marker, such as a beach towel or water bottle, at the end of the lane to help with turns and orientation in and around the pool.

There are many swimming clubs that are inclusive to individuals who are blind or partially sighted. Swimming with a club allows for you to improve your technique and enter competitions if you want to. Swim England operates 'Disability Hub Clubs', which are clubs that are inclusive of everyone.

The locations of these clubs can be found here: <https://bit.ly/36BxyRD>

You can also search on the BBS Activity Finder:

<https://britishblindsport.org.uk/activity-finder/>



▲ Image shows a girl swimming and being tapped on the head using a contraption called a 'tapper'

### Useful Links:

- [Swim England website](#)
- [Swim England para-swimming](#)
- [Scottish Swimming](#)
- [Swim Wales](#)
- [Swim Ireland](#)

## Equipment

The sport is adapted for people who are blind and partially sighted by using a sighted guide where appropriate, and by using a “tapper”.

This is an experienced guide who is trained to observe the swimmer’s stroke and “tap” the swimmer with a long pole/ woggle to indicate the lane ending and the need to make a turn. There is no standard “tapper” device – even at an elite level, swimmers must make their own. BBS suggest using a 4m retractable fishing pole, with a tennis ball covered in a deflated balloon (for waterproofing) attached to the end.



▲ Image shows a tennis coach demonstrating how to play VI tennis

## Tennis

VI tennis is one of the fastest growing VI sports in the UK with more and more opportunities for people who are blind or partially sighted to get involved. Players are classified according to their visual ability, ranging from B1 to B5.

The visually impaired version of tennis is similar to mainstream tennis with only a few adaptations. Just like standard tennis, you can play singles or doubles.

The ball is larger than a regular tennis ball with ball bearings in the centre which make a sound as the ball bounces on the ground. The game

can be played on a smaller court using shorter rackets and a lower net. B1 courts, which is the category for those with the lowest level of sight, also have tactile lines.

Depending on a player’s category they may have up to three bounces of the ball before they return it back to their opponent. Sighted players can play against visually impaired players, but they’re allowed only one bounce and no volleying.

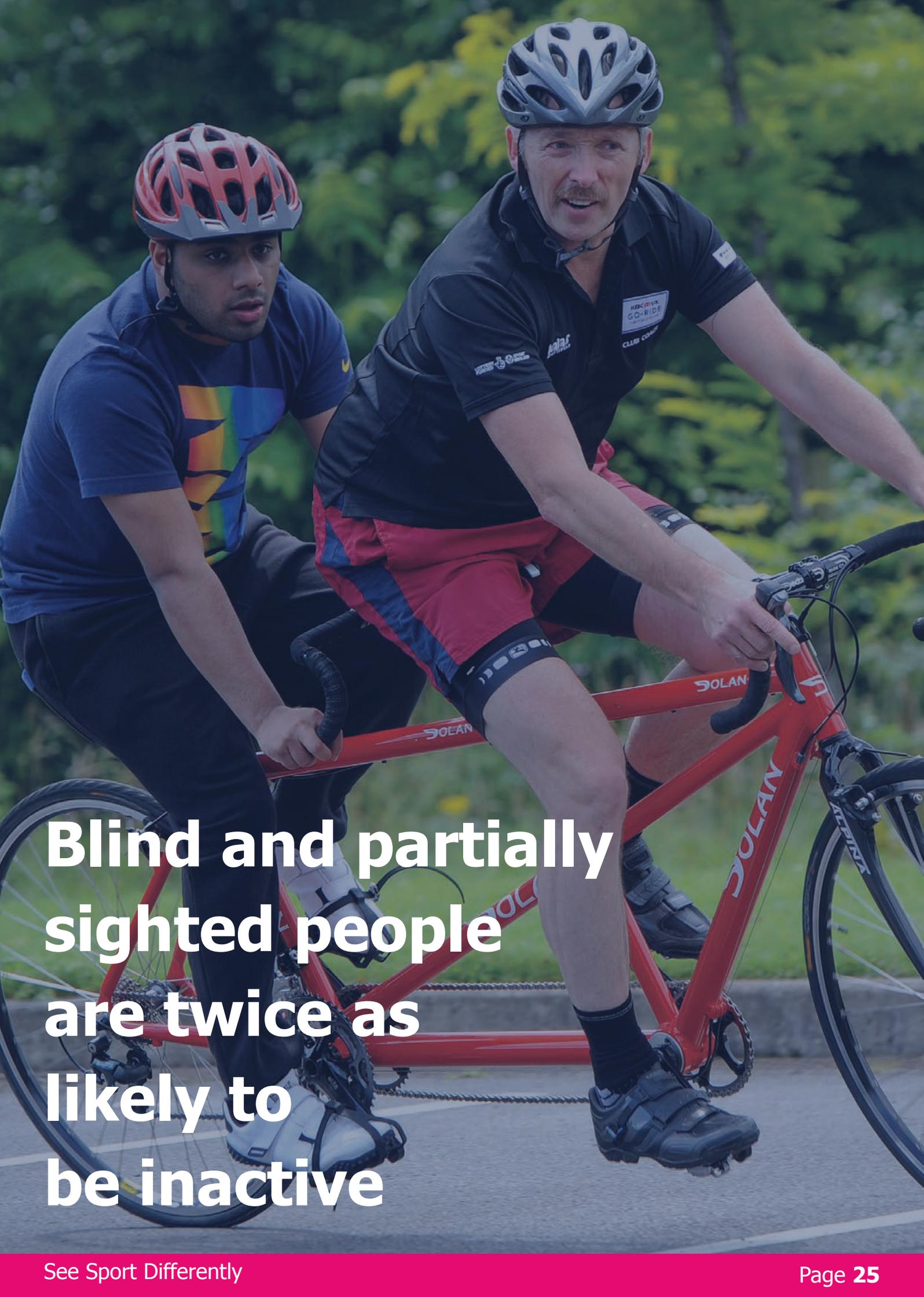
## Equipment

VI tennis uses a larger tennis ball, sometimes called a sound ball, which rattles during play so players can locate it. Balls can be either black or fluorescent yellow to give maximum contrast with the colour of the sports hall and aid those with some useful sight.

A lower net and shorter tennis rackets are also used.

### Useful Links:

- [LTA Website](#)
- [Find a Court](#)



**Blind and partially sighted people are twice as likely to be inactive**

# Equipment

To ensure someone with sight loss can be included in the sports session, it may be necessary to source some accessible equipment. Adaptations can be simplistic but need to be appropriately sourced.

Such adaptations can include larger equipment, equipment that is brighter or higher contrast to the surface being used, or audible equipment.

Sound balls (balls with ball bearings or bells inside) are popular sports equipment for VI sport. The majority of ball sports use audible balls when adapted for people with sight loss. These balls can be purchased via RNIB, Goalfix, Handi Life or via your NGB directly. Sound balls can also be used in mixed activity (for example a sighted person playing tennis with someone with sight loss) which helps include everyone in the same activity.

Other equipment includes tethers (for people who are running with a guide) and tappers (for swimmers with sight loss. Tethers are a strong piece of fabric, and the guide and the VI runner each hold an end in order to navigate a running route. Tappers are used to literally 'tap' swimmers on the head to warn them when they are nearing the wall.

Sometimes the extra equipment required might be a guide. A guide is a sighted person who assists with direction for the blind or partially sighted athlete. Guides are used in many sports ranging from cycling to snowsports, running to bowls.

Even if sports use adapted equipment, guides are often utilised to help with direction. In blind football, for example, one of the guides stands behind the opposition goal to assist with play.

Tactile grids are used in a lot of sports to help with coaching. These are handheld, smaller versions of the playing court, and tactile markers are used to show positioning of the playing area.

Some sports require the use of an eyeshade to ensure that everyone is approaching the sport from a level playing field and counter discrepancies in levels of sight loss.



▲ Image shows a group of 5 people with sight loss wearing their various sporting gear, smiling and ready to get active

Image shows a group of 5 people with sight loss wearing their various sporting gear, smiling and ready to get active ▼



When recommending sport and physical activity to blind and partially sighted people, it's important to clarify whether eyeshades are required, as often people are not confident to have the sight they do have taken away.

## The playing area:

It is important to use contrasting colours – so if your playing surface is blue, don't use a blue ball. Use a bright colour to provide a clear contrast against the playing surface. Avoid using green cones on grass. Wear brightly coloured clothes to ensure you are recognisable, and again, don't wear the same colour as the playing surface or background.

Tactile markings are important for blind and partially sighted people to be able to navigate around the playing area and understand the boundaries of the court or pitch. Markings can be made tactile by using raised tape or simply laying some string down and taping over the top of it. For example, tactile tape is used in goalball and tennis.

If the participant requires it, it can also be advisable to guide someone with sight loss around the venue and playing area to help with orientation. Consider the acoustics in your chosen facility – is it easy for instructions and explanations to be heard? It's also important to consider lighting and how this might affect someone's ability to participate. Where possible, constant, even lighting should be used.

## Find out more:

Some sporting equipment can be purchased on the [RNIB website](#), and it's also useful to see the range of equipment on offer and the adaptations that can be made:

<https://shop.rnib.org.uk/leisure/sports>

Goalfix are a world-leading equipment supplier for blind and VI sports, and are based in the UK. You can view their website and equipment here:

<https://goalfixsports.com/>

Handi Life are another renowned supplier of adaptive equipment. You can view their website here:

<https://handilifesport.com/shop/?segment=blind-sports>

You can also contact your National Governing Body for specific equipment considerations.

To read more about each individual sport and specific adaptations on a sport-by-sport basis, please visit the Sport section of the [British Blind Sport website](#):

<https://britishblindsport.org.uk/play-sport/links/>

## Why do people need a sight classification?

Sight classifications are important to ensure a fair and equal competition. 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.



▲ Image shows two people in a judo hold

For visually impaired sport, vision can be classified into one of five sight categories – **B1 to B5**.

There is sometimes a difference between blind sport and partially sighted sport, in addition to competing in different categories. For example, blind football is distinct from partially sighted football. Understanding someone's level of sight loss (and therefore their possible classification) is important to know to signpost them to the most suitable offer, and which adaptations may be appropriate.

It is OK to ask people about their sight level and how much they can see – sight loss is a spectrum, and different for everyone, so it's essential to understand that individual's sight to provide them with the best opportunities.

An understanding of someone's level of sight loss is important when they are starting out in sport, but classifications are often not imperative until the individual starts competing.

## What is a sight category?

A person's sight category is based on the level of sight and the visual field test. The level of sight is that of their better eye with optimal correction, e.g. with spectacles or contact lenses. This is the case even if they don't normally wear spectacles.

It is important to note that if someone is fully sighted in one eye they would not be eligible to compete in VI sport, although they can still participate recreationally. This is regardless of the sight level in their other eye.

## Classification involves categories B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5

B1, B2 and B3 sight categories are used by most sports for domestic, international & Paralympic sport competition however you should always check with the individual governing body for the exact requirements.

Only the British Blind Sport recreational classification system includes B4 and B5 sight categories. B4 and B5 sight categories allow people to participate on a level playing field for local sports within the UK. Please note that there are some exceptions to this standard, so please check with the sport which you are considering or with the British Blind Sport team.

- **B1** – this category includes: having no light perception in either eye, light perception and ability to perceive some movement in front of the eye but inability to recognise shapes.
- **B2** – partially sighted B2 athletes will have limited vision in both eyes either in how far or how wide they can see. This category includes visual acuity of up to and including 2/60. 2/60 means somebody within this sight category would see the top letter of the vision chart at a distance of up to and including 2 metres. A fully sighted person would see that letter at a distance of 60 metres.
- **B3** – B3 is the highest category used for most international & Paralympic sport and includes those with a level of vision better than 2/60 and up to and including 6/60. (Can see at 6 metres what a fully sighted person would see at 60 metres).
- **B4** – anyone with better vision than 6/60, and up to and including 6/24 would be within this sight category. (Can see at 6 metres what a fully sighted person would see at 24 metres).
- **B5** – this category is the highest sight level used within VI sport for those having a visual acuity of better than 6/24, but not better than 6/18. (Can see at 6 metres what a fully sighted person would see at 18 metres).
- Unclassified (better than B5) - better vision than 6/18.

## How to get a classification?

British Blind Sport are the domestic classifiers for sport in the UK and only classify for recreational sport rather than national or international competition.

Please bear in mind that classifications take 2 weeks to process, so ensure that applications are submitted in a timely manner if needed for a competition!

To find out more about British Blind Sport sight classifications or to speak to a member of the BBS Classifications Team please call [01926 424247](tel:01926424247) or email [info@britishblindsport.org.uk](mailto:info@britishblindsport.org.uk).

All British Blind Sport classifications are used for recreational play ONLY. To be able to compete at national and international competition you MUST have an IBSA approved elite classification, which would include a face-to-face appointment with an approved classifier and full medical data would be required. Recreational Classification will NOT be recognised by International Federations of Sports.

Please speak to your sport governing body for further information.

Please use the form link on the website for the most up-to-date classification form: [\*\*BBS Classifications\*\*](#).

### **Please Note:**

The current classification system was developed many years ago when visually impaired competitive sport was in its infancy. It is a universal system even though it is recognised that different types of sight conditions affect the usefulness of vision within sporting environments in different ways.

Determining sight requirement differences between sports would, however, require a large research project. Until the time that sport specific classification is available, we must use the system described above.

# Educational Resources

British Blind Sport is currently developing new e-learning resources alongside the six NGBs involved in the See Sport Differently Project. These are due to be released in early 2023 and will supplement our current Coaching People with a Visual Impairment course which can be found here: [Coaching People with a VI](#).

## **The current course will enable coaches and volunteers to:**

- Gain greater understanding of sight loss and eye conditions
- Explore practical solutions to barriers to participation and help meet individual needs
- Explore some of the safety considerations to ensure a fully accessible and inclusive environment for people with a visual impairment
- Learn how to make adaptations to specific elements of session planning and delivery using the STEP model
- Understand how to communicate effectively and guide individual
- Plus, you will be able to print out the UK Coaching and British Blind Sport certificate confirming you have completed the course.

## **The 2023 e-learning courses will enable coaches and volunteers to:**

- Gain greater coaching confidence within their specific VI sport
- Learn the importance of a 'person-centred approach' when coaching
- Differentiate between different levels of sight loss, and adapt where necessary, whilst coaching a group.
- Develop knowledge needed when teaching fundamental movement skills, which are essential for blind and partially sighted people to be physically active.

BBS also has an extensive library of pdf resources which can be accessed here: [BBS PDF Resources](#). These resources aim to provide information regarding sight loss and specific eye conditions as well as how to support, adapt and modify sports and physical activity to include visually impaired people into mainstream sessions and understanding the pathways available for blind and partially sighted people.



## Thank You

We hope you found this toolkit useful, be that all of it, or just using relevant sections.

Thank you to the clubs, NGBs and sight loss organisations that contributed to the research and development of this resource.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact British Blind Sport or RNIB using any contact emails provided throughout this document, or via the See Sport Differently mailbox: [seesportdifferently@rnib.org.uk](mailto:seesportdifferently@rnib.org.uk)



# See Sport Differently

See Sport Differently is a Sport England-funded initiative in partnership with Royal National Institute of Blind People and British Blind Sport.

**E-mail: [seesportdifferently@rnib.org.uk](mailto:seesportdifferently@rnib.org.uk)**

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