



We want to play!

A study of young
people with a visual
impairment and sport

by


SYZYGYLEISURE

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None of this would have been possible without the assistance of many people who helped along the way. Sadly there are too many to mention, but you know who you are. Thank you very much!

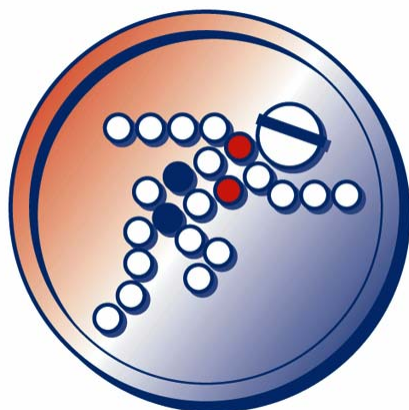
If you would like any more information about British Blind Sport then please contact them at:

British Blind Sport
4 – 6 Victoria Terrace
Leamington Spa
Warwickshire
CV31 3AB

Tel: - 01926 424247

Email – info@britishblindsport.org.uk

Website: - www.britishblindsport.org.uk



For more information about Syzygy Leisure Ltd please contact us at:

Syzygy Leisure Ltd
6 Church View
Moulton
Northants
NN3 7FZ

Tel: 01604 670222

Email – Syzygy@syzygyleisure.co.uk

Website – www.syzygyleisure.co.uk

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1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 British Blind Sport is the co-ordinating body of sport for the blind and partially sighted in the UK. As a registered charity it aims to encourage people with a visual impairment to participate in a wide range of sports. As a small organisation with only 4 full time and 3 part time members of staff it is limited in the range of opportunities that it can provide. It is therefore heavily reliant upon volunteers.
- 1.1.2 In 2003 BBS undertook a survey of its membership which resulted in a response of approximately 70 questionnaires; 7 of these came from people under the age of 18. Although a very small sample, the results were comparable with those from the Sport England work on “Young People with a Disability and Sport”
- 1.1.3 British Blind Sport was keen to enlarge this survey and in April 2005 commissioned Syzygy Leisure Ltd to undertake a larger research project. This was to investigate the sporting needs and experiences of young people with a visual impairment living in the South West, South East, East and North East regions of England. This research was to be finished by mid July.
- 1.1.4 The research was to include a combination of questionnaire, face to face and telephone interviews, as well as discussion groups. Information was to be gathered from other sources such as Sports Development Officers and other professionals working in the field of visually impaired sport. The research was to concentrate on people between the ages of 11 and 25 and on qualitative rather than quantitative information.

2 What is known?

- 2.1.1 In a review of the existing research about visual impairment and sport, it soon became obvious that there was very little data available. Whilst there is a moderate amount of information about disability sport, there is little that brings out the detailed issues about the often hidden needs of sensory impairment, let alone the specific issues relating to visual impairment.
- 2.1.2 The Department of Health publishes data relating to the number of people who are registered with councils as partially sighted or blind. The breakdown is given by broad age groups, and by local authority, but not by gender. Figure 1 shows the numbers of people registered within England in 2003.
- 2.1.3 It is important to recognise that these figures are significantly lower than the reality as it is not compulsory for people to register. It is stated that only “between a quarter and a third of visually impaired people are in fact registered with local authorities (Scottish Executive National Statistics).

	blind		partially sighted		total
		%		%	
0-4	725	0.02	585	0.02	1310
5 - 17	3230	0.04	4230	0.05	7460
18 - 49	17090	0.08	15315	0.07	32405
50 - 64	14520	0.28	12935	0.25	27455
65 - 74	15460	0.38	16640	0.41	32100
75 & over	105655	2.85	105525	2.85	211182
Total	156680	0.34	155230	0.34	311910

Figure 1 - Numbers of people registered with a visual impairment in England (Source Dept of Health – 2003)

2.1.4 In Scotland the data is more precise with more age groups and also gender defined. It is therefore possible to estimate the percentage of the population in each age group which may be broadly similar to that in England. This data can be seen in figure 2

Age	blind				partially sighted			
	m	%	f	%	m	%	f	%
0-4	39	0.03	54	0.04	28	0.02	17	0.01
5 - 15	181	0.05	151	0.05	198	0.06	166	0.05
16 - 29	304	0.07	242	0.05	271	0.06	199	0.04
30 - 49	1080	0.15	810	0.10	571	0.08	492	0.06
50 - 64	1051	0.23	938	0.20	640	0.14	636	0.14
65 - 74	1099	0.54	1265	0.51	754	0.37	1001	0.40
75+	4987	3.81	11356	4.81	2626	2.00	6844	2.90

Figure 2 – Numbers and % of people with a visual impairment in Scotland

2.1.5 The RNIB in 2000 stated that there were 22,000 blind and partially sighted children aged 16 and under in the UK (*Shaping the future - The experiences of blind and partially sighted children and young people in the UK RNIB, 2000*).

2.1.6 Beyond baseline statistics, perhaps the most significant piece of research was undertaken by the RNIB who published their report into *"Blind and partially sighted children in Britain: the RNIB survey. Volume 2"* in 1992. This was based on research amongst a sample of 285 children across the UK undertaken in 1988, and therefore dated. . It does however provide a benchmark about the range of activities that young people with a visual impairment were participating in at that time. It stated that:

"visually impaired children participate in a wide variety of sports; the most frequently mentioned were: "swimming" (45%), "rugby/soccer" (26%), "athletics/running" (20%), and "PE/PT" (17%). Only 17% of children were reported as not taking part in any form of sport at school."

2.1.7 Outside school the most popular activities were swimming (31%), rugby and soccer (16%). All other activities scored less than 5%.

2.1.8 Sport England's research - *Young people and sport in England, Trends in participation (1994-2002)* showed that the most popular activities outside school were football (15%), netball (7%), athletics (6%) and cricket (5%). Swimming was well down the list at 2%. Clearly there are local differences in the patterns of participation.

2.1.9 This research was followed up by the RNIB in 2000 with the document *"Shaping the Future"*. This found that:

- Three in four parents of children with complex additional needs said there were no suitable local play activities for their child to attend during holidays.
- Almost half of school-age children and young people of around average learning ability had experienced problems at clubs because of their impaired sight, prompting two in five of them to stop attending.
- More than one in four said there were clubs and activities which they would have liked to take part in at school, but had not done so, of whom one in six said this was due to their sight difficulty.
- More than one in three 16-25 year-olds had experienced problems at clubs or societies.

2.1.10 More recently the most comprehensive research was published by Sport England in 2001 in their *Disability Survey 2000 – Young People*

with a Disability & Sport. Whilst the research is comprehensive it is difficult to extract specific data relating to visual impairment and the sample of young people with a visual impairment is very small.

2.1.11 The report does however highlight a number of barriers which young disabled people as a whole face, namely:

- Transport
- Access to facilities
- Attitudes of staff and clubs
- Finance
- Lack of information

2.1.12 The Wales Council for the Blind in 2002 established their Sports and Leisure Development Project. This was based on research in the 1990's which found that most people were not taking part in sport for the following reasons

- lack of information
- lack of local facilities
- lack of transport
- lack of companions
- lack of trained staff

2.1.13 Following extensive consultation they established a Sports Development Project concentrating on surfing, canoeing, assault courses, line dancing, folk dancing, wall climbing and caving (at which the most successful person was the totally blind participant!). In each of these activities, the necessary personal support was arranged and the best way was found of adapting coaching and assistance to make them accessible to visually impaired people.

2.1.14 This was followed by the appointment of a full-time WCB Sports Development Officer, funded by the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. The idea was to work in a strategic way to raise awareness, to explain and to influence others to accommodate VI people rather than to run activities themselves. The Officer embarked on an intensive programme in all 22 counties of Wales and has been able to pool knowledge and experience of visual impairment with the sports expertise of leisure centres, sports professionals, governing bodies, Sports Development Officers and teachers throughout Wales.

2.1.15 There were various recommendations arising out of this work including:

- Those providing INSET training should design a course for P.E. staff on disability to cover VI specifically

- As a result of inclusion in mainstream education for VI children, providers of training for P.E. teachers should include in the training courses a module on disability to cover VI. specifically so that integration can become a realistic possibility

2.1.16 At a regional level, Syzygy Leisure undertook a research project on behalf of the English Federation of Disability Sport in the East of England. This examined the experiences of young disabled people in sport, both in schools and the community. Although the research concentrated on young disabled people as a whole, there were statistics which identified specific issues surrounding participation in sport at school by visually impaired pupils. The research found that less than half of visually impaired students were able to be fully integrated into PE lessons. Where they were not integrated, they were helping to organise activities, given alternative activities to do and asked to score or simply watch.

2.1.17 Diana Kelly undertook research for EFDS entitled *“Inclusive Leisure Opportunities”* in March 2005 across the South East of England. Again looking at disability as a whole, it identified a series of findings including:

- lack of reliable data,
- only 58% of leisure centres felt that they were inclusive,
- patchy opportunities for young disabled people to participate in sport

2.1.18 Other research more locally based included *“A study of the leisure needs of people with disabilities in Newcastle”* (October 2003). This identified some 5,500 residents who are blind or partially sighted. Provision for people with disabilities was limited. There was a need for good lighting for people with visual impairment in swimming pools, and sports facilities in the school for pupils with a visual impairment was

“environmentally and structurally inappropriate and until new facilities are provided at that school, the young people with disabilities will be at a disadvantage”.

2.1.19 Sports Development presented a rather disappointing picture of participation in sports developments activities by the disabled community – particularly children and young people. The words “No”, “Nothing” and “Not” were regularly used by development officers in response to questions about what activities were available for disabled people”.

2.1.20 The *“Audit of Sports Opportunities for Children and Adults with a Disability in Cumbria”* (Dec.2004) found that all the Local Authorities

have similar provision status. All areas have a severe lack of mainstream sports clubs to enable people with disabilities to become involved in sport, and all lacked fully accessible sports centres. Opportunities do exist in the areas for young people in the form of multi sports clubs; however this is segregated provision, held in urban areas. This leaves large areas of Cumbria without provision. Links between different sports initiatives are not well developed in any of the areas. They found a series of issues for lack of participation amongst all disability groups which were

- Inaccessible venues
- Lack of knowledge about what is available
- Cost
- Lack of suitable transport
- Lack of support when attending sessions
- A lack of understanding of disability issues by workers in sports and leisure and how to work appropriately with people with disabilities.

2.1.21 The *Greater Warwickshire Disability Sport and Physical Activity Research Project* (August 2004) is one of the few pieces of research which has identified some statistics relating to participation in sport by people with a visual impairment of all ages

2.1.22 The top 3 sports tried were:

- Swimming - 94%
- Ten pin bowling - 69%
- Football - 52%

2.1.23 The top 3 sports that people would like to try are

- Horse riding 53%
- Water Sports – 44%
- Bowls – 42%

2.1.24 They also found that only 10% of sports clubs in the area had coaches with experience of, or training in, working with people with a visual impairment. They concluded that there was much work to be done in this area.

2.1.25 It can be seen that current research relating to young people with a visual impairment and sport is very sparse. It is likely therefore that this project is of significance as it is probably the most comprehensive piece of work that has been carried out in the last 15 years.

3 Gathering Information

3.1.1 Syzygy's study in the 4 regions found there were almost 3000 people aged between 5 & 17 with a visual impairment registered with Social Services in 2003 (Department of Health). Our aim was to attempt to make contact with as many of these young people as possible, as well as those who were not registered.

3.1.2 Contact was made with all 57 local education authorities within the 4 regions of the South West, South East, East, and the North East of England. Each LEA was contacted via the nearest equivalent to the Visual Impairment support team. The initial contact was to make people aware of the research, to seek support and to identify where clusters of visually impaired people were located where interviews might be carried out.

3.1.3 In addition, almost 50 Further and Higher Education establishments were contacted with the hope of making contact with students. Again due to the time of year (midsummer), many students had left for the year and it was not possible to interview them directly. However many of the universities and colleges were happy to pass the questionnaire onto their students.

3.1.4 Other organisations were also contacted such as sports development units, visual impairment clubs and associations. Again this was with the purpose of raising the profile of the research and gathering information.

3.1.5 A questionnaire was prepared which was made available both in hard copy and on-line. This was distributed, with a freepost envelope to encourage return, via the contacts as well as British Blind Sport members. The questionnaire is included at appendix C.

3.1.6 A sample of schools was then established within each region which represented schools which were

- in rural areas,
- in urban areas
- specialist schools for the visually impaired,
- schools with visual impairment units

- mainstream schools which had a small number of pupils with a visual impairment.

3.1.7 Contact was then made with the schools to arrange for a visit to take place. Due to the time of year some schools did not feel that it was appropriate for us to visit as staff and pupils were involved in exams and other activities. We are grateful to the following schools for giving up their time and allowing us access:

- Bretton Woods School, Peterborough
- Hummersknott School and Language College, Darlington
- Belmont Comprehensive School, Durham
- Kings Academy, Middlesbrough
- Gosforth Middle School, Newcastle upon Tyne
- Gosforth High School, Newcastle upon Tyne
- The Toynbee School, Chandlers Ford
- Cornwallis School, Maidstone
- Dorton House School, Seal, Sevenoaks
- Oxted School, Surrey
- West of England School for Children with Little or No Sight, Exeter
- Heathfield School, Taunton

4 Results from Questionnaire

4.1.1 By the middle of July, 36 questionnaires had been returned. It is still anticipated that more will be forthcoming, but probably not in significant numbers. Figure 3 shows where questionnaires were returned from, as well as the location of BBS members under the age of 25. There is some correlation, but many people who have not been surveyed before have been included in these results.

4.1.2 The sample is small but does give some indications of trends of the young people. It is felt that there is some skewing towards those who are more interested in sport in the first place and therefore the results may not be fully representative of visually impaired people in general.

Issue – there may be some skewing of the data received due to the small sample

4.1.3 Of the 36 responses received, 23 were male and 13 were female. Although percentages of males and females in the age groups being sought by this study are not available in England, in Scotland the percentage of males who are registered blind or partially sighted is 54%. Therefore fewer females than expected have responded, which again is more in line with participation rates in sport.

Issue – the sample returned was more heavily weighted to males than females



Figure 3 – Map showing respondents to the questionnaire and where BBS members are located

4.1.4 Just over 25% of the respondents were being educated in specialist provision, with the remainder in mainstream. The amount of time spent in PE lessons varied considerably, with 14% having less than 1 hour of PE per week, and less than 30% meeting the government’s requirement of 2 hours PE per week.

Issue – many young people with a visual impairment do not have access to 2 hours of PE per week in schools

4.1.5 The quality of PE provision varied widely; only 29% feeling that they were fully integrated into the PE lesson. Details are shown in figure 4.

Issue – the majority of young people with a visual impairment are not being fully included in their PE lessons

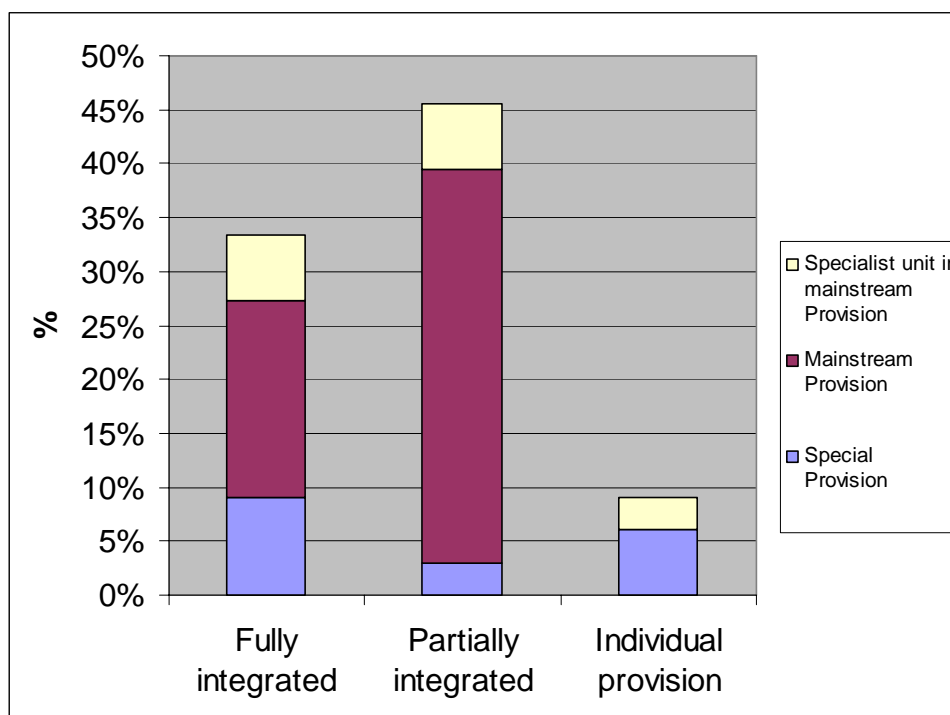


Figure 4 – Integration into PE lessons

4.1.6 80% of the respondents stated that they enjoyed their PE lessons, again indicating that the sample is not necessarily representative of this age group. The reasons given for enjoying their PE lessons included fun, being active, and competition. One comments was

“It’s good to get active because I don’t get the chance outside of school”

4.1.7 Reasons for not enjoying PE lessons were lack of involvement, not feeling part of the lessons, not liking sport and a limited range of activities.

Issue – lack of involvement and the limited range of activities are reducing enjoyment in PE

4.1.8 51% of pupils took part in some form of after-school sporting activity; this participation rate was higher amongst boys (50%) than girls (20%). Outside education over three quarters of young people took part in some form of physical activity (see figure 5). The range of activities varied; swimming, football and athletics being the most frequently mentioned activities. Details of the activities are shown in figure 6

4.1.9 These figures contrast with data from Sport England’s Survey of Young People (2002) which found that the percentages of young people that took part in sport outside PE lessons was as follows:

- Games 91%
- Racquet Games 65%
- Other Games 63%
- Swimming Diving and lifesaving 80%
- Dance and ice skating 39%
- Athletics 77%
- Outdoor adventurous activity 84%

Issue – Young people with a visual impairment take part in less sport outside PE lessons than their peers

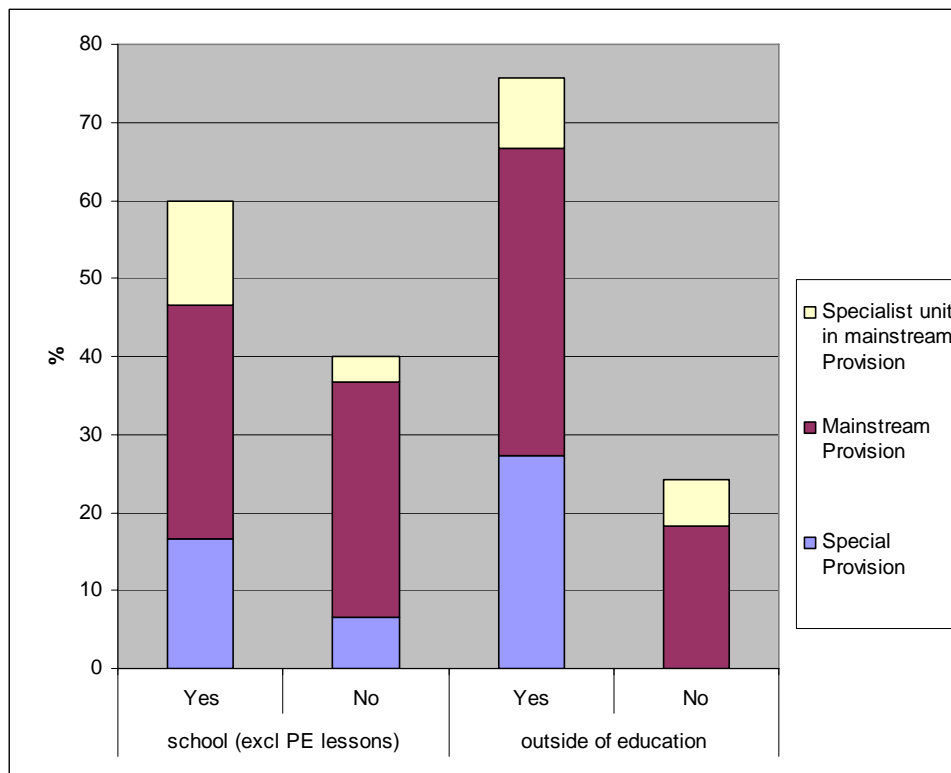


Figure 5 – Participation in sport outside PE lessons

4.1.10 Just over 55% of respondents were members of a club where sport was played, and nearly a third of these were members of a club for the visually impaired. Again boys were more likely to be members of clubs than girls. Young people who were blind (14%) were far less likely to be members of a club than those who were partially sighted (43%).

4.1.11 People had to travel considerable distances to take part in sport, with over a third having to travel over 11 miles. (See figure 7). There was heavy reliance (80%) upon family and friends to take them to activities.

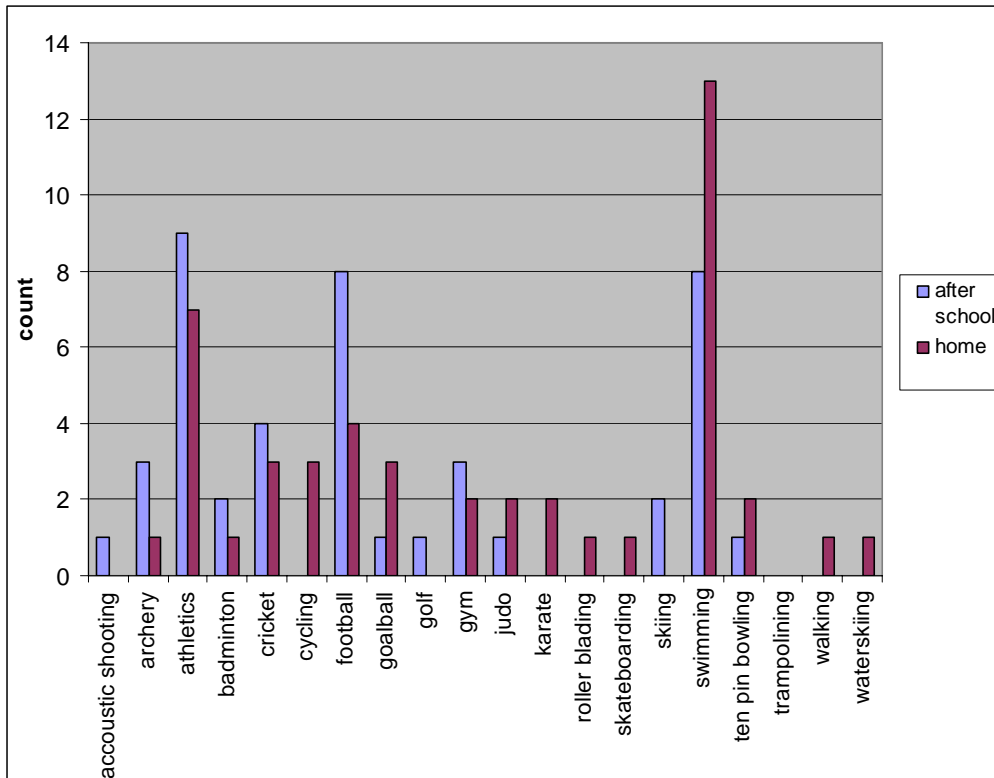


Figure 6 – Sports participated in outside PE lessons

4.1.12 .Despite the distance travelled 72% said that this was the nearest venue that they could use for participation in the sport of their choice, despite the fact that there was often a nearer sports venue. Where it was not, the quality of coaching and the availability of other players were key factors in their choice.

Issue – Young people with a visual impairment often travel long distances to take part in their chosen sport

4.1.13 Only 44% of the young people had taken part in any form of holiday sports activity. The main reasons for not taking part were lack of awareness as to what was available to them, or that there was nothing in their area that was suitable. Where they did identify activities, they were predominantly ones that were organised by disability organisations such as RNIB.

Issue - Young people with a visual impairment are often unaware of opportunities to take part in holiday activities or are limited in their choice

4.1.14 About half of the young people needed some form of specialist equipment to take part in sport, the availability of which varied considerably. 33% stated that this was hard to source, 21% had no problems and 46% were not sure.

Issue – a third of young people with a visual impairment who needed specialist equipment were finding it difficult to source

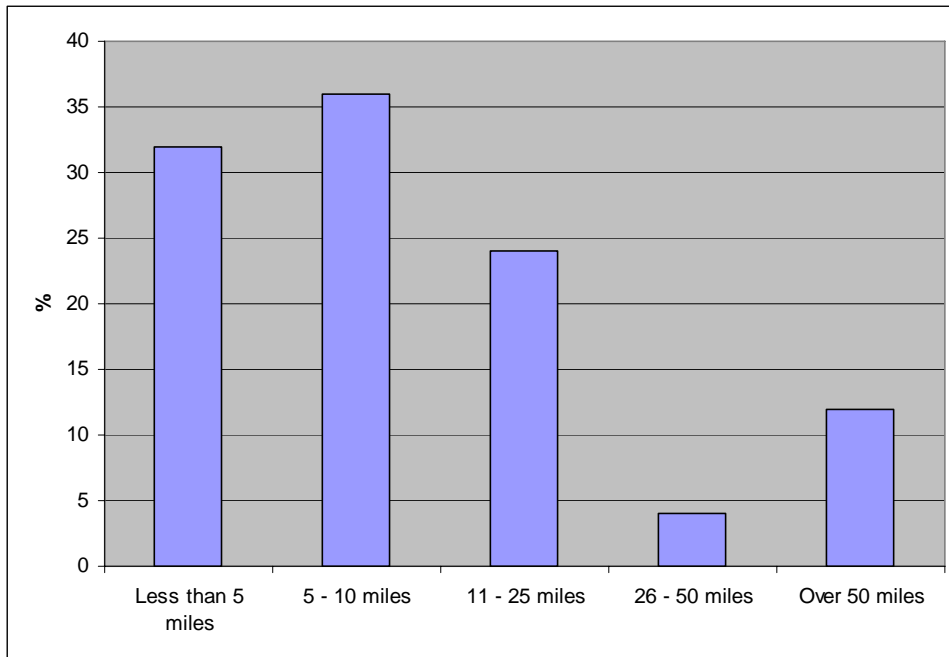


Figure 7 - Distances travelled to take part in sport

4.1.15 80% of respondents would like to take part in more sports. Most frequently mentioned were tennis and football (more details are shown in figure 8).

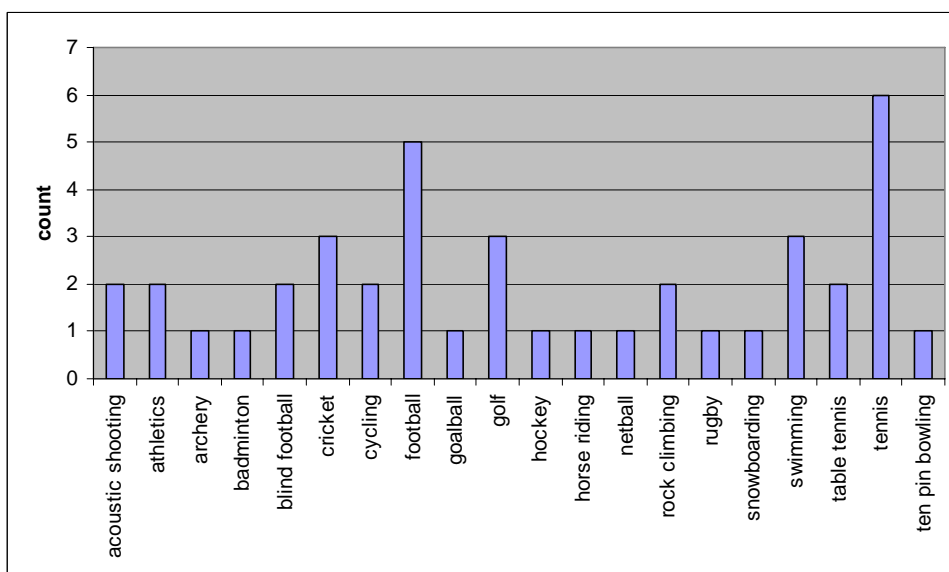


Figure 8 - Sports that young people with a visual impairment would like to play

4.1.16 The most common reason for not participating in sport was the lack of opportunities or resources, or knowledge of what was available in the locality. There also seemed to be a common worry that not being able to see the ball was also a reason for not playing sport. One person did not play sport because they were ***“not fit enough”***

4.1.17 Over 70% felt that if more funding were made available that this would allow them to take part in more sport. Their views are listed below in figure 9

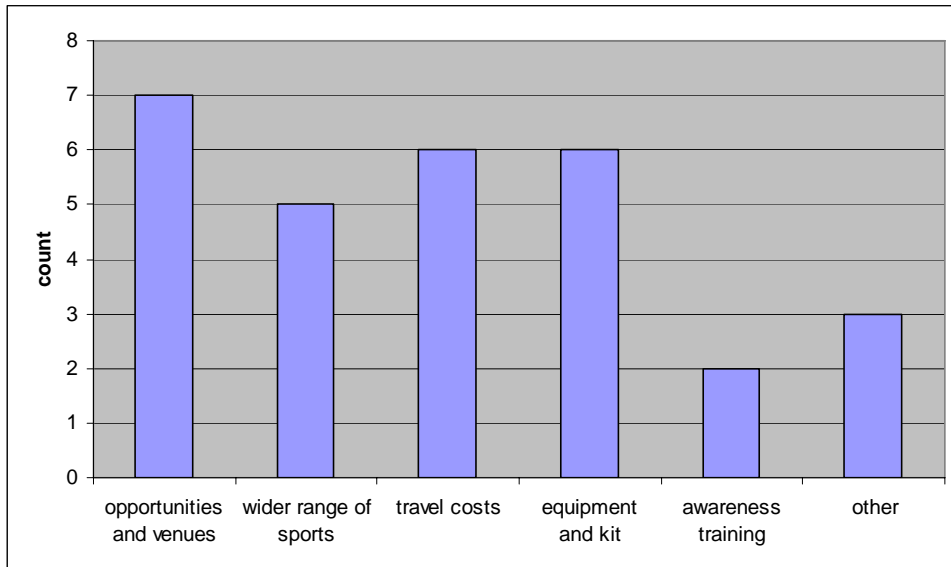


Figure 9 - How funding could be used

Issue – the majority of young people wanted to take part in more sport, but were hampered by lack of knowledge, opportunities or resources

Issue – there was a common perception that sport equalled ball sports and was therefore not for them

Issue – funding would help them to take part in sport especially by supporting more opportunities & venues, wider range of sports and travel

4.1.18 Overall the respondents were very willing to become involved with the running of sport. This is perhaps best summed up in the following statement:

“I could offer advice & help. I would like to demonstrate some activities & give instruction & encouragement”

4.1.19 Figure 10 shows the roles that young people would like to play in the administration and running of VI sport

Issue – many young people would liked to become involve in the planning and running of sport for the visually impaired

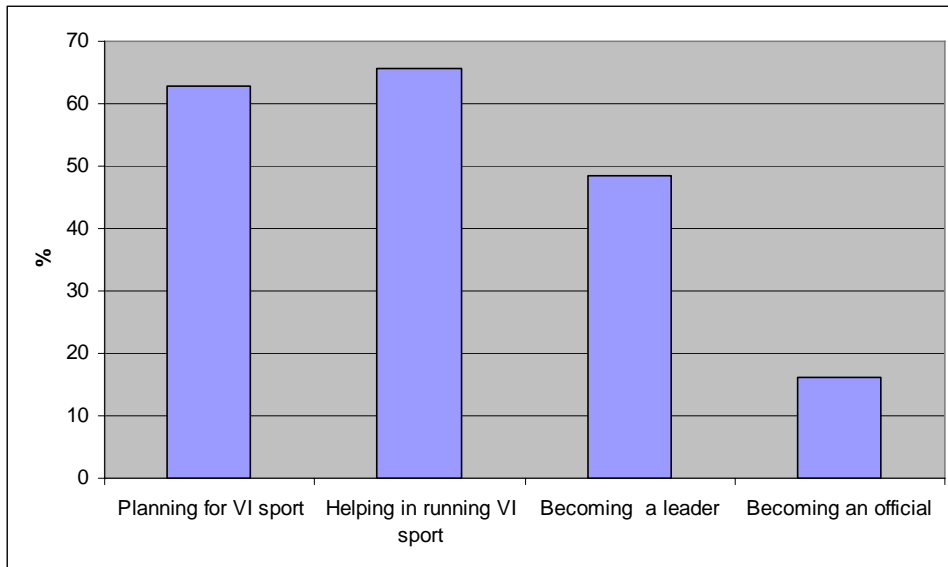


Figure 10 - % of young people with a visual impairment who are interested in becoming volunteers

4.1.20 Overwhelmingly the most important factors that they felt would make a difference to the number of visually impaired people playing sport were the need for more opportunities with lots of positive support. This is perhaps summed up best by the following comments:

- **“Encouragement and the chance to have a go and not to be taken the mickey out of if they get it wrong”**
- **“Equipment and an understanding teacher. A lot of support.”**

Issue – More opportunities and support were felt to be key factors in encouraging more people to play sport

5 Outcomes from site visits

5.1.1 During the course of the research we visited 12 schools across the country. These were a combination of specialist schools for the visually impaired, mainstream schools with visual impairment units and other mainstream schools where there were a number of pupils with a visual impairment. These schools are shown in figure 11.

5.1.2 In total 61 pupils were interviewed from years 7 to 11. Unfortunately it was not possible to interview any older pupils. This was because the research was undertaken during the peak exam period and many had already left school. The breakdown of year groups is shown below in figure 12.

5.1.3 Some detail of comments made during the interviews are included in the following section, in addition further observations are included at appendix B



Figure 11 – Location of schools visited.

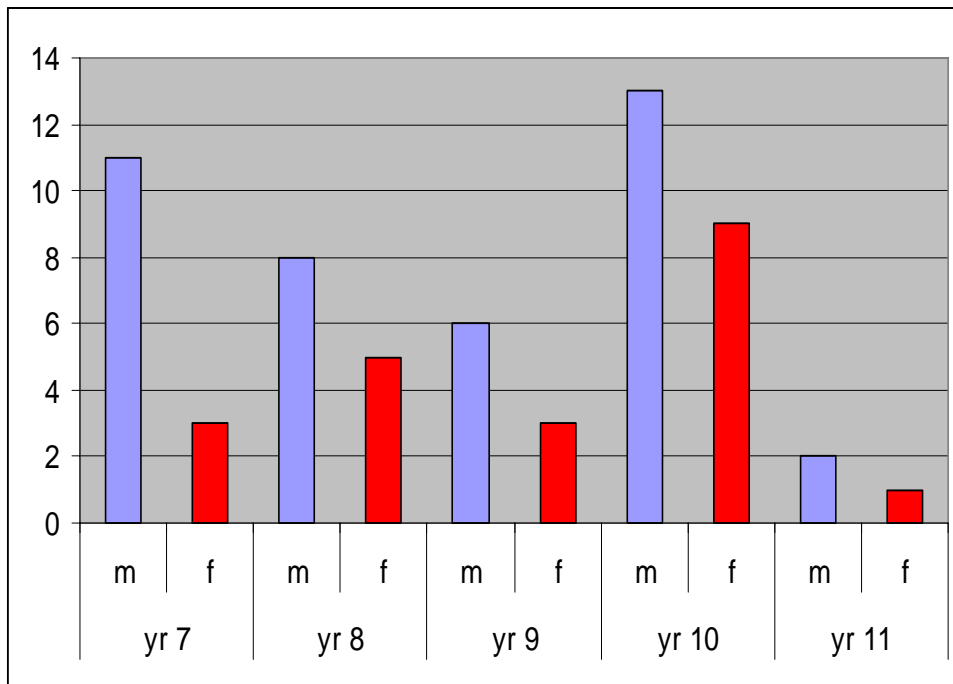


Figure 12 – Breakdown of pupils interviewed

5.1.4 The interviews were undertaken using a common format to try to understand more about the participation levels of young people with a visual impairment in sport, both in and out of school. The research also sought to use their views as to how sport could be made more attractive, and be developed for people with a visual impairment

5.2 **PE Lessons**

5.2.1 There was a marked difference in the way PE was being delivered from school to school; some pupils felt that they were fully integrated into lessons, whilst others were almost totally excluded. This variation was not in the main due to the type of visual impairment, but was more down to the willingness of staff to see pupils included. There was little variation by gender, with a normal mix of those who liked PE and those who did not.

Issue – staff attitude is a key factor in the involvement in PE

5.2.2 A selection of comments that were made about PE lessons is shown below:

- ***“Fantastic”***
- ***“Horrible, ridiculous, swine!”***
- ***“I was so embarrassed about what I was being asked to do in PE lessons that I stopped bringing my PE kit in”***
- ***“I was told to go for a walk”***
- ***“I just stood around for hours”***
- ***“Helpful staff”***
- ***“No one passed the ball to me”***

5.2.3 There were clear examples of where schools were providing an inclusive PE curriculum for their pupils. As would be expected, the specialist schools (West of England and Dorton House) were doing this, but mainstream schools (Toynbee and Oxted) were also able to provide this. It was clear in these schools that the relationship between the PE department and the Visual Impairment support staff was critical. One pupil spoke of the Learning Support Staff as being his ***“trademark”***, and that they ***“corrected PE staff”*** when basic communication errors were made. In another school VI support staff spoke of ***“battles with the PE staff”***, another of ***“significant problems with PE”***.

Issue – the relationship between VI staff and PE staff is very important in the delivery of a successful PE curriculum

5.2.4 It is clear that in some schools there are fundamental knowledge issues about the inclusion of visually impaired pupils in lessons. Young people who were happy to participate in sport were being put off from participating in lessons due to a number of factors; these included:

- Perceived Health and Safety Risks – there were several reports of activities being stopped due to fears of health & safety risks. One teacher had stopped cycling with VI pupils due to this factor. Several individuals were not being allowed to participate in a range of activities due to fears that an existing medical condition could be worsened
- Choice of sports on offer – the majority of schools were simply offering pupils with a visual impairment a range of sports which were patently unsuitable for their needs, the sports most frequently mentioned were tennis, hockey and cricket. Often no alternative was offered and pupils either took study periods or sat and watched
- Lack of suitable alternative facilities being available – one school spoke of the fact that having no access to a trampoline, fitness gym or swimming pool was significantly reducing the range of alternatives that they could offer VI pupils to the standard curriculum
- Lack of understanding of visual impairment – many students spoke of a lack of understanding of their condition by PE staff. explanations were poor, visual clues were not explained and a general **“lack of consideration”** was mentioned
- Poor choice of equipment being available – students spoke of their embarrassment of hitting people (in one instance in the face), not being able to see line markings, not being able to see the net or the ball. Simple solutions such as the use of bright colours were simply not considered.

5.2.5 In general many pupils felt that the range of sports that they could be offered in PE lessons should be increased to include sports that would enable them to participate in on an equal footing to their peers

Issue – young people were being put off PE by a combination of Health and Safety, choice of sports, lack of facilities, lack of understanding of VI and poor equipment

5.3 **After School Activities**

5.3.1 Once again there was a vast variation in the extra curricular activities that students took part in. For many there was simply no choice as transport only allowed them to go to, and return from, school for normal

class times. At other schools a range of activities was accessed by pupils.

- 5.3.2 For many students their lack of confidence dented their ability to participate in after school activities. Several stated that they **“were not good enough to take part”** and that the opportunities available were **“too competitive”** to allow them to become involved. One stated that he had joined the football club **“just to be sociable”** but had struggled to remain involved. For the vast majority, after school activities simply were not an option, the range of activities was not appropriate and held little attraction.
- 5.3.3 Toynbee School had made massive efforts to ensure that pupils with a visual impairment were provided with opportunities. Alternative transport arrangements were made and a suitable range of activities provided. The result was that 15 or 16 of the 18 pupils in the school with a visual impairment stayed after school to take part in sporting activities.
- 5.3.4 They had established a club which played VI sports such as goalball, and blind cricket. One student expressed that this club **“was great because for once I have an advantage over the sighted kids!”** The students also had access to a wide range of other sports including swimming, football, gymnastics, fitness and sailing.

Issue – inflexibility of the transport system hindered opportunities to take part in after school sports, along with a lack of perceived competence in sport
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- 5.3.5 At West of England School, a wide range of activities was provided which included archery, skiing, acoustic shooting, athletics, swimming and an opportunity to take part in the “Ten Tors Race”. The latter was described by one of the students at the school as **“a real sense of achievement”** and **“such a good experience”**.
- 5.3.6 Dorton House School in Seal, Kent is also well resourced, providing a large range of activities for its pupils. The school is located on a large site (adjacent to Dorton College of Further Education) and has many facilities on site including a swimming pool, dry ski slope and numerous outdoor facilities. It also runs a residential summer school for young people aged 11 -16 attracting young people with a visual impairment from all over England. The activities that they can experience include horse riding, swimming, camping, climbing, sailing and archery as well as other non sporting activities.
- 5.3.7 The sense of self esteem amongst the students at those schools who were offered a wider range of sporting opportunities was very strong when compared to pupils who were not given the same chance. One student spoke of the fact that being successful in **“swimming had given me the confidence to take part in other things”**. This was the same student who had nearly been expelled from his first school because of ignorance about his disability.

Issue – confidence was far greater amongst students who were being offered access to a range of sports

5.4 **Activities at home**

5.4.1 Participation in sport outside school varied considerably. It is clear that parental influence was very strong. This was especially marked where students were not receiving a positive experience of sport in schools.

5.4.2 One student spoke of the need for parents to be educated about the activities people with a visual impairment could take part in. She felt that parents were too over-protective about what she could or could not do. The need for education was reiterated by teachers in some of the schools who remarked about the low levels of motor skills that many visually impaired students demonstrated. For example, it was not uncommon for a year 7 pupil to be unable to jump properly. They quite simply had never been taught, and lacking the normal visual stimuli had not been able to acquire the skills in other ways.

5.4.3 The range of activities included:

- Horse riding
- Karate
- Cycling
- Rock climbing
- Actionnaires
- Gymnastics
- Motor bike riding
- Basketball
- Tennis
- Football
- Badminton
- Skateboarding
- Swimming
- Trampolining
- Surfing

5.4.4 In several instances people were participating in sports in their own free time despite the fact that they did not enjoy PE at school

Issue – parental involvement in sport was an important factor as to whether young people were involved in sport and in their acquisition of motor skills

Issue – there is a need for more education for parents of visually impaired children about physical activity

5.4.5 There were however a further list of sports that students wanted to try including:

- Boxing
- Scuba diving
- Tennis

- Ice skating
- Archery
- Target shooting
- Windsurfing
- Snorkelling
- Cricket
- Athletics
- Kick boxing
- Golf
- Sailing

5.4.6 There were many reasons as to why access to these sports was difficult. These varied from lack of support, transport, other people's perception and not being asked to take part.

Issue – young people wanted to take part in a wide variety of sporting activities, but were being prevented by lack of support, transport, perceptions

5.5 *Looking to the future*

5.5.1 Once the background of activity had been established it was important to involve the young people with visual impairment in the future planning of sport. With this in mind a series of questions was presented which sought to use the young people's experiences in accessing sport and how these experiences could be used to improve services.

5.5.2 For some young people especially amongst those who had enjoyed sport this exercise was easy. For those who had had a more difficult time it was much harder. There appeared to be a degree of correlation between the level of confidence of the young person and their positive attitude to sport.

5.5.3 For example one young person who had been participating in a full programme of sport had recently lost his sight. During the course of the interviews he had been given little positive encouragement to take part in any activity and was visibly frustrated by the experience. He was generally uncommunicative and mostly monosyllabic. The only time that eye contact was made during the session was when we discussed the types of activity that he could take part in. The activity that really caught his fancy was fencing. His whole body language changed from being very downcast to being far more animated. For him, living in his particular town, it would not require much effort for him to be given the opportunity to take part.

5.5.4 Those who were able to take an active part in sport were quite shocked by the lack of opportunities that were being offered to many of their peers across the country.

5.5.5 The most frequently mentioned change that would make a difference mentioned by the young people was equipment. Very simple changes such as the colour of the ball and of the net would make a big difference to many of the people that we spoke to. Balls and nets in bright colours were often not being offered. Balls that made a noise would also help. Some form of protective headgear would allow some people to take part in sport with less fear of further damage to their eyesight.

Issue – use of brightly coloured equipment and equipment that made a noise would make a big difference

Issue – suitable protective headgear would allow people to take part in a wider range of sports

5.5.6 Line markings in sports halls and on multi-use games areas were often found to be confusing. It was far easier where single sports were marked out, or where a mat was rolled out which was sport specific. Similarly ends of swimming pools could be far more clearly delineated thereby preventing a number of bumped heads! Fencing around pitches or courts helped to create a clearly identified boundary within which play took place.

Issue – clearer simpler line markings and delineation of playing areas and pool ends would assist many

5.5.7 Flat surfaces were another issue, with talk of rabbit holes, as well as uneven paving slabs or grassed surfaces causing difficulties. One person spoke of the benefits to him of Astroturf which prevented him from being hurt when he fell over.

Issue – good quality even surfaces would prevent many difficulties and injuries

5.5.8 Good quality lighting was also seen as important. Schools often have poor lux levels in their sports halls and this does not help people with a visual impairment. A further suggestion was given for the development of balls that flash or have some type of light reflective covering which would help in sighting the ball

Issue – Adequate lighting in sports halls would be beneficial to many participants

5.5.9 Helpers were frequently mentioned. These were seen as fulfilling a range of roles such as general help, as well as organising clubs and groups. Personal contact was very important. At Toynbee School it was clear that there was a very strong reliance upon the Support Staff and it was clear that the very positive relationship was having a significant effect upon the attitude of students.

5.5.10 Students wanted this relationship extended out of school. This confidence in the people helping extended beyond the actual sport. They recognised that volunteers would need support to fulfil their role adequately. Some of them wanted to find small clubs with lots of attention. Mention was also made of more holiday activities as many of them found that current activities were too far away

Issue – People to help in sports clubs were seen as very important and their regular presence helped to build up trust

5.5.11 It was felt that not enough use was made of role models. Several of the schools had students who were competing at national level, and many of them were happy to be used as role models to encourage more visually impaired people to take part in sport. It was felt that role models would also help in the “training” of parents and families in encouraging a more “can do” attitude rather than the more protective environment that some of them were experiencing.

Issue – Role models would help people to understand what sports people with a visual impairment can do

5.5.12 This awareness training needs to be expanded to include more than just parents and families. It should encompass schools, leisure centres, helpers and clubs in general, as well as mobility officers who have an often crucial role in what young people can access.

Issue – Awareness training needs to be made available to a wide range of people

5.5.13 Several students felt that they needed more familiarity in the buildings that they were going to use. This should not only be in the form of site visits, but also development of tactile maps which would help blind people to become more aware of the buildings.

5.5.14 Within sports buildings, fitness rooms were spoken about quite a bit. Signage was considered generally poor, even in those facilities that were registered under the Inclusive Fitness Initiative. For example help to tell how far people had gone on a bike needs to be developed in a different way; the use of different coloured signage for CV and resistance equipment could help. Routes around fitness rooms were difficult due to lack of space

Issue – signage and mapping of facilities needs to be improved, not just for buildings, but equipment as well

5.5.15 Provision of transport to get to and from activities would be helpful. Many students were very isolated, and unless they had parents who were able to transport them, it was difficult for them to make their own way. Public transport was mentioned; however buses presented difficulties as the students could not see the numbers, so alternatives

such as the Metro were preferred. Taxis could also be problematic as often **“they just parked outside and hooted their horns”** which posed all sorts of other difficulties

Issue – appropriate transport needs to be made available

5.5.16 The students often felt that the range of sports that was on offer to them within schools was limited, and not best suited to their needs. They wanted to see a wider range provided. This needed to be backed up by better links between specialist schools and mainstream schools to make the most of the best practice that clearly does exist, albeit infrequently

Issue – the range of sports provided in schools needs to be improved along with sharing of information between specialist and mainstream schools to share best practice

5.5.17 The final area that was clearly identified was information and publicity. Inevitably there was a range of options put forward. Different people preferred information in different formats, but in general it was felt that there was a lack of information about activities in the locality. Information needs to be made available in a variety of formats including large print, Braille and audio. In addition a website, with capability of being viewed in large print, was seen as being a good way forward. Links should be provided from the RNIB website. Direct mail outs of activities available in the locality would help young people to know what was available to them

Issue – access to information needs to be improved

6 Sports Development

6.1.1 Contact was made with a selection of 65 Sports Development Officers across the regions by email. This was to ascertain where sport for people with a visual impairment featured on their authority's agenda. It also asked Officers to provide any information about initiatives or specific examples of good practice in their area that they knew about or may have been initiated.

6.1.2 By mid July, 9 Sports Development Officers had responded, but more are anticipated. Nevertheless previous experience has shown that the response is representative of the work that is being carried out at a District or Borough level.

6.1.3 None of the responses indicated any specific activity for people with a visual impairment although many spoke of a general commitment to pan disability work. Several spoke of their willingness to work with visually impaired people, but identified a difficulty in locating people, or lacked information as to how to work with them. Some asked specifically for more information such as to how to advertise their

services and how to make contact. It also appeared that training was something that was just being initiated. More detail of comments from Sports Development Officers is included at appendix A

6.1.4 Interestingly the two regionally based officers working with the visually impaired mentioned the problems of identifying young visually impaired people and the difficulties of getting information through to them. Often the Data Protection Act was used as the reason. However headway was being made using the peripatetic teaching service as a conduit.

6.1.5 Despite these problems both officers spoke of a wide range of activities being established including goalball, cricket, football and cycling often run in partnership with other organisations

Issue – In general sports development is not providing a specific service for visually impaired people

7 Issues and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 The issues identified in sections 4 & 5 can be grouped into some common themes which are discussed in more detail in this section. The themes are:

- Equipment
- Facilities
- Information
- Opportunities
- School and PE provision
- Role models
- Social and perception
- Training
- Transport
- Travel
- Volunteering

7.2 Equipment

7.2.1 The use of appropriate equipment such as brightly coloured balls and nets clearly makes a massive difference to a person's ability to play sport, yet in many places these very simple items were not being provided. In schools some schools were using their budgets to purchase this equipment, but in others there was little evidence of this happening. Whether this was due to budgetary restrictions or knowledge about where to acquire the equipment is not known.

7.2.2 A significant number of the young people needed specialist equipment to take part in sport, but were finding it difficult to source. For example

the use of protective headgear would allow some people to participate in sports that would otherwise be not possible. There was an issue here with availability of suitable equipment which was acceptable to the young person, and yet still met the safety requirements.

- 7.2.3 The Youth Sport Trust has a considerable influence in the way school sport is being developed. Surely there should be a role for them to progress some of this work
- 7.2.4 It would be helpful if a list of suppliers of appropriate equipment was made available through British Blind Sport to all schools and on the BBS website. This would direct people quickly and easily to these sources. For schools which only had a small number of visually impaired pupils it might also be helpful for a bag of equipment, perhaps similar to those used in the TOPS programme, to be available on loan from a central source

Recommendation – Sources of equipment should be made available

Recommendation - Bags of equipment could be made available to schools

7.3 Facilities

- 7.3.1 The young people spoke of the need for basic changes to sports facilities which would make life easier not only for people with visual impairment, but many other people as well. Many of the changes which were requested were not expensive to deliver, but would make a big difference.
- 7.3.2 Good colour contrast is vital to being able to see doors, signage etc and can often be achieved as part of the general maintenance of a building. The Sport England Design Guidance Note “Access for Disabled People” should be used as a starting point for information. It is available from
- http://www.sportengland.org/index/get_resources/resource_downloads/design_guidelines.htm
- 7.3.3 Quality lighting in sports halls was seen as important for many people with a visual impairment. Again the Guidance Note should be consulted. The other issue that was regularly raised was that of line markings in sports halls. Many of the young people mentioned that they found them confusing and that there was a need for simpler layouts. It has been found in older sports halls that standard markings have not always been used. However there was a distinct preference for fewer markings. This should be considered for halls which will be used by significant numbers of people with a visual impairment. Where this is not possible it may be possible to supplement line markings with the use of cones which will help to make the lines in use more easily seen. For people who are blind tactile markings are required.

7.3.4 Acoustics within sports buildings are often difficult. While some preliminary work has been undertaken by Reading University into what makes a good sports hall acoustically, this should be followed up with more detailed research which will help improve the ambience of halls, by ensuring that a good balance between sound insulation and reverberation is achieved.

Recommendation – more work should be undertaken to create more understanding of what makes good acoustic conditions in sports halls

7.3.5 Signage in sports facilities has traditionally been poor. Good contrast and use of Braille and tactile signage would help many people. Maps of sports facilities would help people with a visual impairment to find their way around generally. The use of fitness rooms was seen as a popular activity for many young people, but finding their way around the equipment was difficult, compounded by poor quality signage... Many of these issues have been addressed by the Inclusive Fitness Initiative which has worked with many equipment manufacturers to ensure that equipment and gyms are more user-friendly for people with a visual impairment. This includes:

- Colour contrast
- Clear pathways
- Trip hazards
- Audio functions on equipment
- Signage

7.3.6 In addition they have been working on the development of a new European Standard for fitness gyms which will help to standardise equipment.

7.4 **Information**

7.4.1 Access to information about sport and leisure has often been cited as difficult for people with disabilities. Too often people are unaware of the opportunities that are available in their areas, and therefore their choices are limited.

7.4.2 Currently the BBS website appears to be primarily for the purposes of fund-raising and is not particularly member-, or young people- friendly; Overall few young people and schools had heard of the organisation. The profile of the organisation should be raised by means of a targeted campaign through schools and visual impairment support services.

Recommendation – The profile of BBS needs to be raised among young people through schools

Recommendation – the BBS website needs to be made more user friendly and hold more information about opportunities

7.4.3 Disability organisations should combine to provide a one stop shop for sporting information. This would avoid the need for link after link to be hit which is frustrating and time consuming. This could be developed in conjunction with the County Sports Partnerships who must take their role in disability sport more seriously. One of the few who does this successfully is Kent

Recommendation – Disability sports organisations and County Sports Partnerships should combine to develop a one stop shop for information about sporting opportunities

7.4.4 Under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act access to services by the whole community should be made easier. However it is rare to find the provision of information in alternative format. The young people were asking for this along with more direct mail outs. Additionally this work would encourage more Sports Development Officers to become engaged with visually impaired sport.

Recommendation – more work needs to be carried out with sports development officers at a local level to encourage their involvement with visually impaired sport

7.5 Opportunities

7.5.1 Opportunities for young people with a visual impairment to take part in sport were patchy. There were some excellent examples such as the Arsenal Football scheme and blind cricket in Brighton, but young people had to travel very long distances to access these. For many travelling these distances simply was not an option.

7.5.2 The Actionnaires Clubs (multi sport activity clubs), an initiative of the Action for Blind People charity have developed opportunities at a far more local level and are beginning, slowly, to expand their work across the country. Supported through 2 sports development officers in the North and South of the country, clubs have been established in 8-10 parts of the country, including Essex, Peterborough, Gravesend, Portsmouth and Sunderland. A few of the young people interviewed attended some of the clubs around the country, these tended to be the younger age groups.

7.5.3 While many wanted to take part in sport, the level of confidence to access these was absent. For many, sport was perceived as the “difficult” school sports, (usually ball sports) which were harder to play and therefore the young people had decided that sport was not for them. There is a need for significant work to be undertaken which will help to create a “can do” attitude, but this can only be achieved through personal contact.

Recommendation – There needs to be greater awareness of the range of sports available to people with a visual impairment. This needs to be developed through personal contact to build confidence

7.5.4 At present there is little structure within visual impairment sport which will permit this to happen. There is no way that the current limited resources of BBS can achieve this. The regional posts in London and Yorkshire are making an impact and being able to act as a co-ordinator between the various interested parties such as Action for Blind People and the county sports partnerships and Governing Bodies of sport.

7.5.5 Simply providing opportunities is not enough. A structure must be built which will help to promote opportunity, provide information, provide training, and create a focal point for the development of VI sport. This can be best achieved by additional posts being created at a regional level.

Recommendation – more staffing resources are required at a regional level to create more sporting opportunities for people with a visual impairment

7.5.6 This would allow a more co-ordinated structure of opportunities to be developed, which would be best provided using a ripple effect. Expertise can best be shared by working out from existing centres which are demonstrating success.

Recommendation – work should be initiated at a local level allowing for a strong infrastructure to be developed which can then spread to other areas

7.5.7 Developing on from this would be the creation of a competitive structure, (something that many young people with a visual impairment believe is not possible) which could create a stepping stone between current local provision and the national championships.

Recommendation – a competitive structure needs to be developed which will create more opportunities at a regional level

7.6 *Physical Education*

7.6.1 Some young people believed that their experience of school sport was a post-code lottery. They were not being given access to even a basic level of PE, let alone the 2 hours of quality PE that the government expects. Others were being given exactly that.

7.6.2 There should be more investment in schools to ensure that basic facilities are provided which would allow pupils access to alternative activities if they were unable to take part in standard lessons. These facilities should include fitness equipment, swimming pools and trampolines. In many instances use of a local fitness gym would be a perfect choice, but schools seemed to be reluctant to negotiate with private facility owners. A campaign is required to encourage this kind of initiative to be established.

Recommendation – schools need to be encouraged to develop access to a wider range of facilities which allow all pupils to access quality PE

7.6.3 In other instances specific sports for the visually impaired, such as goalball, could be introduced into the curriculum. This would result in total integration rather than segregation and put everyone on an equal footing. These sports should be promoted within schools.

7.6.4 There is excellent practice in some schools, but this is not the norm. Dorton House School, a specialist RNIB school for the Blind, has teachers experienced in adapting and developing sports for their visually impaired pupils. However, in discussions with one of the PE teachers, she stated that they had little or no contact with other schools about knowledge-sharing. Teachers did not come to shadow or observe PE methods in practice which they could then pass on to other staff. If this observation and practical teaching was a regular occurrence, it might significantly raise the profile and quality of provision in schools. The Sports College structure should make this easier, but many Partnership Development Managers may not themselves be fully aware of best practice. INSET training needs to be developed which will supplement the more practical elements

Recommendation - good practice needs to be shared more widely using existing expertise

7.6.5 Too often teachers hide behind Health and Safety legislation to avoid risk-taking rather than “being brave” and letting a pupil take part and feel as though they were succeeding. Sharing expertise would give some teachers the confidence to do this, as would the use of mentors.

7.6.6 Teachers can also share their expertise through publications such as “Fit for All” which is published by the RNIB and conferences such as those held by BAALPE and the Youth Sport Trust. Sharing of good information has to demonstrate that inclusion of students with a visual impairment is about a partnership between PE staff, VI support staff and the young people themselves

Recommendation – Teachers need to be given more opportunities to develop their expertise in sport for visually impaired through quality training

7.6.7 It is clear that young people with a visual impairment take part in less sport outside PE lessons. This is due to a number of factors which may be cumulative. They often:

- have poorer motor skills in the first place
- have a poor experience in sport at school
- have fewer opportunities to take part in sport after school due to lower skill levels and difficulties with transport.

7.6.8 It is not therefore surprising that sport does not feature very highly in their lives.

Recommendation – More opportunities need to be made available for young people with a visual impairment to take part in sport

7.7 Training

7.7.1 Training of people is not just restricted to staff within schools, but to the wider audience of sport in general. VI sport has a low profile, although events such as the Paralympics have helped. It is almost a “given” that disability sport is solely about ramps and easy access toilets. Too often people with sensory impairments are overlooked.

7.7.2 There is a need for the raising of the profile of issues relating to visual impairment to happen. This can be through magazines, conferences, fact sheets, websites and face to face training. It is the issue of attitude that requires a sea change. Quite simply most people do not even start to think about, let alone have the chance to understand, what visual impairment means.

Recommendation – the awareness of the needs of the visually impaired community need to be raised to a wider audience

7.7.3 Many leisure centres and sports clubs already have enough on their plates to devote time to considering these issues. They need assistance to bring the problems to their attention. Parents need to see for themselves what people with a visual impairment can achieve before they will permit their children to come out of the cotton wool blankets that they are wrapped in. This process should begin when the children are very young so that they are able to develop the basic motor skills that translate into sport at a later stage.

7.7.4 This can only be achieved if there are people who are able to break this cycle by effective demonstration. The ripple effect of good practice and achievement can allow progress to be made, however slowly.

7.7.5 Role models are a vital part of this process.

Recommendation – Role models are essential in encouraging people with a visual impairment to play sport

7.8 Travel & Transport

7.8.1 It is inevitable that when access to sport is under examination, transport becomes part of that discussion. In this study the problem of transport seriously affected participation in after school activities. Many pupils are brought to school by taxi. If they are on their own, then alternative pick up times could be arranged. Where they share, it is less easy to provide alternatives. The school day needs to be re-examined to see whether more time can be created through more

imaginative use of lunch breaks, creating shorter ones or lengthening the day thus creating an opportunity for an extra period. This would then reduce the need for alternative transport to be arranged.

Recommendation – schools need to identify whether out of school activities can be put on at alternative times or transport rescheduled to allow pupils with visual impairment to take part.

7.8.2 Many of the young people were already travelling long distances to take part in the sport of their choice. If more opportunities could be developed on a local basis this should reduce the need for many of them to travel.

7.9 ***Volunteering***

7.9.1 It was really pleasing to see that so many of the young people were willing to become volunteers. There was a general willingness to become involved in the organisation of sport. This willingness must be encouraged and developed to nurture the next generation of helpers from within.

7.9.2 Despite this, more support is needed from others to help create the opportunities for sport. It is critical that a supply of regular volunteers is developed who can build up trust with their own group and create a feeling of stability. Without this, there can be little hope of developing new participants. The success of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic bid now provides the greatest opportunity this country has had to develop that volunteer base as well as the structure of sport in general.

Recommendation – efforts should be made to tap into the willingness of young people with a visual impairment to become volunteers in sport.

8 **Conclusions**

8.1.1 It is clear that for young people with visual impairment there are real disparities in the experiences of sport that they receive. In some instances they are excellent and the young people are benefiting from this. In other instances, for a wide variety of reasons, they have little or no access to sport.

8.1.2 Attempts must be made to ensure that these young people have the opportunity to get the most out of sport as this will benefit them in a wide range of different ways. It will help amongst many other things to improve their:

- Physical health by making them fitter and therefore help in the battle against obesity

- Mental health
- Levels of confidence

8.1.3 With the advent of the 2012 Paralympics there is the opportunity to develop the next generation of gold medallists by giving these young people the opportunity to shine at the sport of their choice if they so wish, but the infrastructure needs to be developed further to give them this choice.

8.1.4 Finally we need to shout about what is clearly good in sport. More people must be persuaded and encouraged that this is possible, not only in isolated pockets, but everywhere.

8.1.5 All of this requires resources to make it happen through a co-ordinated plan of action which will harness the resources and expertise of many organisations. If this spirit of co-operation can be developed then young people with a visual impairment will be able to play!

Appendix A - Sports Development Officers' Comments

These comments are taken verbatim from phone conversations or emails from Sports Development Officers. (Some of the comments have been slightly amended to ensure anonymity).

“Regrettably we have not been able to organise anything specifically for this client group although we have in the past helped to provide opportunities in bowls and golf for adults who are VI. We have run programmes for other disability groups and we would be very interested in working with this group as well if there was an opportunity to do so. If you are in contact with anybody who would be interested in talking to us about a specific programme please pass on my details.”

“We do not have a specific focus on VI or blind young people. However, improving services for young people is one of the key service priorities for the Council. In addition there is also a continued commitment to services for the vulnerable and the elderly. The Leisure Developments team tries where possible to ensure that programmes are inclusive and accessible to all. We do however acknowledge that there is limited work specifically focused on young people with disabilities. Through the Youth Leisure Forum we work in partnership with Disability Challengers to help support and promote inclusive play.

Through the Youth Games programme we have actively supported and promoted a new boccia club locally which is open to all young people with disabilities. Two of the key members represented the Borough at this year's Games and came 3rd. A fantastic achievement as they were the only wheelchair team competing!

We do not have a special needs school for VI or blind young people and have not been contacted by any individual unable to take part in an activity of their choice. We appreciate that this does not necessarily mean that there is no demand but identifying need is always very difficult.”

“The Sports Development Service have a policy of inclusivity in all of our work- we therefore encourage any persons to be included within our programmes - we do not provide any different programmes specifically for VI individuals but will respond as appropriate to include them in any activities. We work closely with our 2 Specialist Sports Colleges within the borough -one of which does have VI young people within the school”

“The County Council has just employed a new member of staff whose specific role is to engage with people with disabilities, not just people with visual impairment but all disabilities.

The Borough Council are working closely with a new group which looks at integration into our Leisure Centres. This group are also looking at ways of funding a coordinator to coordinate activity for young people.”

“Whilst disability sport has been high on the agenda over the last 2 years it has been difficult to access young disabled people as a whole. It’s been particularly difficult to get into special schools.

An example of good practice is our local leisure centre. The Centre has used a visually impaired member of the public to review their facilities and advise on accessibility issues for the blind. The centre is due to become an IFI site soon.

SDOs need organisations such as BBS to provide simple advice to clubs and SDOs on how to advertise themselves and their services to VI and disabled people as a whole. Also on where to advertise, so that people can access that information easily.”

“At present we do not have any programmes or initiatives aimed specifically for the visually impaired-but it is certainly something I am interested in doing, maybe we could arrange a meeting to discuss any ideas further?

I work with the Leisure and Cultural Strategy-which has one of its main aims as developing access and opportunity for disabled people. I am currently working towards setting up a Countywide Boccia club, and have secured funding from Toshiba for this project. I am hoping I can extend the Boccia club to a multi sports disability club-so hopefully we may well get disabled people with visual impairment-but it will not be specifically aimed for them.”

“Thank you for your email, Sports Development currently have no groups specifically for visually impaired young people, however I work closely with Leisure providers and clubs in order to assist them to become 'inclusive' providing training, support and advice.

An example of this is that our local leisure centre now uses tactile buttons on equipment that a person with a visual impairment can recognise, and can if they desire at no extra cost be supported on their visit to the centres.

At present I only have 2 young people on my database with visual impairment, as you can appreciate it is very difficult to collect information on individuals, especially in the school environment due to data protection and confidentiality policy and procedure. If your association can help with identifying 'new bodies' I am sure our project could do a lot more for this client group.

We do have a young man who has a total visual impairment and he is in fact a support worker on a 6 week programme of activities for children with learning disabilities and Saturday Club.”

“Further to your e-mail in connection to British Blind Sports Research, we have not specifically targeted people with a visual impairment at this stage in terms of our Sports Development or Leisure Centres.

Our Service plan refers to hard to reach groups and removing the barriers which prevent people from accessing the services offered and as such we have carried out an access audit of all our physical facilities and are currently putting in place the recommendations from this.

In addition we have asked the County Disability Sports Development Officer to work with our staff to put in place a programme of training so that staff can be more informed about the issues around various disabilities and be more responsive and pro active to specific needs of individuals and groups - this is currently being developed.

We have not specifically put on activities for people with a visual impairment but we are aware of three local Blind Clubs who are attached to the County Blind Society who organise a number of functions for members one of which has been a link to a local Bowls Club.”

“The Community Development and Leisure Service's flagship disability sports provision is a weekly multisport/activity session at a local Centre catering for people of all ages with all types of disability including those with visual impairments (of which we've had two or three over recent years)

The leisure staff have all recently attended disability awareness training and in line with the DDA try to make services as accessible as reasonably possible to disabled people (e.g. brochures available in large print for partially sighted people). Additionally our swimming and fitness facility is pursuing an Inclusive Fitness Application

I'm not aware of any local blind schools or organisations that exist as focal points for people with visual impairments to create a demand to merit a large amount of specialised attention to sports development work in this area but we are a very responsive team and if we get/identify group or further individual queries we'd be very keen to do our best to support the sporting aspirations of people with visual impairments”

Appendix B – Case Studies – Experiences of four young visually impaired people

This appendix incorporates observations of some of the young people that were interviewed during the course of the research. For the purposes of confidentiality all the names have been changed.

James

James is a young man who now attends a specialist school; he is a gentle unassuming character with a visual impairment and is also a wheel chair user. He had only recently transferred to his new school following an extremely harrowing time in mainstream education. He arrived at his new school as an extremely frightened young man. When asked about his experiences at his old school he laughed in a somewhat cynical manner and proceeded to speak about being picked upon by other pupils, teased and spoke about what can only be explained as bullying. He used to come home from school crying. He had no self confidence.

At his old school he was put in goal during PE lessons, and was hit in the face by the ball. He had no support at all. His description of school PE was a basically a nightmare his statement of **“horrible, ridiculous, swine”** was delivered with venom which was in contrast to the rest of his interview. At his new school he found PE to be much gentler with good choice of equipment. In addition he had access to all of the facilities and was given full support

At his new school he was persuaded against his own judgement to take part in the 10 Tors race which he took part in on a specially adapted bicycle accompanied by 2 members of staff. He as he spoke about his coming **“first across the line”** in 2 hours 10 minutes and the fact that he wanted to try again next year in order to beat that time. Clearly what he spoke of as a **“really good experience”** had had a dramatic impact on his self esteem as his tone of voice became much more convincing and body language was much more positive

Matthew

Matthew as a pupil in a mainstream primary school again experienced real problems. He was nearly expelled from the school due to his aggression towards other pupils. He explained that due to his visual impairment he had no depth perception and when pushed or tripped he was frightened and used to turn round a hit the nearest person. Luckily for Matthew his mobility officer had heard of the specialist school that he was able to be transferred to and he has been at that school since that time.

He is now swimming at national level and has competed at meets in Holland and elsewhere. He was recently won 6 gold medals at the national swimming championships. He states that **“swimming has given him the confidence to take part in other things”**. He is very confident and articulate and would like to share his experiences with other visually impaired youngsters, stating that he doesn't **“want to be treated with sympathy”**, but simply to have a **“fair shot in life”**

Michael

Michael had only recently become visually impaired. In the space of 3 months he went from being a young man who was a keen sportsman and loved playing football. He played for his school and was clearly very athletic. Over the course of the summer holidays he had lost a lot of his sight and was at risk of losing what he had left if he had any kind of blow to his head.

The school were in a dilemma as to what he was permitted to do, as he was keen to do as much as possible, and his parents were basically stopping him from doing anything. Fearful of the health and safety responsibilities the school sought medical advice and were advised to restrict what he could do.

It was clear that Michael was very angry and frustrated, and being told to go for a walk or to go to the VI base was not meeting his physical needs. He was extremely uncommunicative during the interview and it was very hard to get anything from him other than single words. During the discussion we worked hard to with him to think of activities that he could do which would not put him at further risk, fencing seemed to appeal to him, but he had no idea as to where he could go to take part in the sport. It was not clear as to whether this activity would meet the approval of his parents

Adam

Adam was the only pupil in his school with a visual impairment. He was academically very able and very articulate and socially very confident although his self esteem was a little lacking. It appeared that he had the full support of his parents in what ever he wanted to do.

He was very active outside of school in sport taking part in swimming, gymnastics (although had given this up as he felt that he was too big), trampolining and went out running most days. He had achieved his grade 10 in trampolining. He used to cycle until he was told off by his mobility officer!

At school he had desperately tried to integrate into sporting life and had joined the football club "just to be social" but this had not worked out. In PE lessons he spoke of the teachers not being supportive and having no knowledge of his impairment. For the last 4 years he had basically watched during his lessons as it was easier than the "embarrassing position" that he found himself in such as hitting a member of staff in the face with a cricket bat. He had frequently resorted to forgetting his PE kit to avoid having to participate in things that he couldn't do.

Appendix C – Questionnaire