

How to...

Deliver a VI Taster Session

A great way to engage with people who are visually impaired and encourage them to try running and athletics is to host a Visually Impaired Taster Session or 'VI' Taster Session.

A VI Taster Session is a 'come and try' type event or session where anyone with a visual impairment can come along and have a go at running. It can be a good way to introduce people to the sport but also to your club or group and a chance for visually impaired people to pair up with a guide runner to help support them.

This 'how to' guide provides a step by step guide to organising your own taster session and provides advice and guidance to ensure a safe and enjoyable session.



Key Objectives

- ◆ Encourage more visually impaired people to participate in running.
- ◆ Promote guide running opportunities to anyone who is visually impaired and needs support to run.
- ◆ Link Guide Runners to visually impaired people.

Step 1: Identify a venue

A VI taster session should take place at safe and traffic free location. Either an indoor or outdoor venue could be used but an outdoor venue gives a better experience of running. Some possible options include:

- ◆ Outdoor space – playground, sports field, park, football/rugby field
- ◆ Athletics Track
- ◆ Indoor Sports Hall

If you are sharing the space with other users, for example an athletics track during a club session, ensure that other people are made aware that people with limited vision are also using the area.



Key considerations

Light – Both natural and artificial light can hugely affect a visually impaired person. Be conscious of how floodlights on an athletics tracks may affect a visually impaired person and where possible organise sessions during daylight hours.

If using an indoor space ensure that there is even natural light.

Location – A lot of visually impaired people use public transport so make sure this is taken into account when choosing a venue and try to use one with good public transport links

Terrain – Most importantly, ensure at least part of the space you are using is flat with hard terrain (like a track, dry grass or tarmac) and free of obstacles for when runners are first getting started. If you have access to an area with a variation in terrain, such as grass, track and tarmac, this could be an excellent space to host a taster session so that VI runners can experience running on different surfaces and progress as they build confidence. Likewise including some small, short inclines will help people further experience running.

Guide dogs – Some participants may have a guide dog. Find out if there is anywhere at the facility you use/meet at that the dog can be left whilst its owner is training. This is often in the reception or offices where the dog can lie down and be supervised. The temperature of this area needs to be considered and water should be made available for the dog to drink. If you, or the facility owner, have any questions about having a guide dog at a facility, speak to the dog's owner or contact Guide Dogs via their website www.guidedogs.org.uk.

Noise – It will be really important that participants can hear any instructions given by the session leader or by their guide. Make sure you consider this when choosing a venue so there is limited external noise, for example not by a busy road or sharing a sportshall with the local football team!

Step 2: Promote your sessions

Included in this 'How to Guide' is a template poster which you can edit to promote and advertise your taster session.

Information to include: date, time, venue, contact details, nearest public transport options – such as train or bus stations. Provide a named contact, email and phone number and encourage VI participants to contact you in advance to discuss any additional support or find out further information.

Key considerations

- ◆ Create any documents in both Word and PDF format so that they can be accessed by people who use a screen reader.
- ◆ Make sure any posters or advertising material use a minimum font size of 12 and good colour contrast. Use simple design and plain English.

For more information check out the EFDS Inclusive Communications Guide www.efds.co.uk/resources/case_studies/2697_access_for_all_efds_inclusive_communications_guide

- ◆ Use appropriate images of visually impaired runners in your marketing material (photos can be downloaded from www.engladathletics.org/photofolder).
- ◆ Inform British Blind Sport (BBS) and your local county sports partnership (www.cspnetwork.org) of your session who will be able to promote it via their networks and subscribers.



- ◆ Contact local VI organisations such as a local blind society or sensory services team to promote the session. These can be found through a basic internet search using key terms such as 'eye hospital, sensory services, blind society' etc.
- ◆ Consider linking with other VI sports clubs. Running could be used as part of another sports activity, for example in the warm up of a VI cricket, or football session or for fitness for the local goalball team. Contact British Blind Sport for support with linking to other local VI clubs
- ◆ Consider asking potential participants to 'express their interest' so you have a rough idea of how many people might turn up and therefore how many guides you might need to support them. Remember to ask whether they will require a guide, not everyone with a visual impairment will need one.
- ◆ Perhaps let participants know they can bring friends and family along who might not be visually impaired. This might give them more confidence to attend and ultimately will mean more people joining in the running session and hopefully joining your club or group too.



Step 3: Planning the session

- ◆ Try to gain as much information about the nature of visual impairment of the participants prior to the start of the session. This information could be collected using a participant registration form, or by speaking to the participant prior to the session.
- ◆ Do not be afraid to ask the participant what they can or cannot see at the start of the session as some certain elements such as the light may affect different participants.
- ◆ As with any running session a Risk Assessment is necessary. Consider surfaces, loose ground and obstructions as well as fire evacuation procedures for indoor facilities. See England Athletics template risk assessment provided as part of the Sight Loss Awareness and Guide Running workshop.

Equipment

Some runners may wish to use a tether. A tether is short strap/guide rope which is strong and not too stretchy. New VI runners will probably not have these so you will need to provide something suitable. You can use anything you like from a shoe lace to a piece of canvas tape with hand loops sewn at each end.

Meet and Greet

Consider organising a 'meet and greet' service where somebody meets participants at arrival locations for local public transport and guides them to the venue.

Pairings

If possible try to pair guide runners and VI participants of similar height and stride length.

The guide should be faster than the runner.

Pairs should be able to synchronise arm and leg movements although this will take some time to develop so don't worry if they can't at the start.

Coaches/leaders

It is important that coaches, leaders and volunteers are knowledgeable about working with visually impaired participants. See www.englandathletics.org/disabilityathletics for resources and support.

Step 4: Delivery of the session

A taster session will probably last around an hour, with short some breaks and should be led by an appropriately qualified coach or leader.

Example format

◆ Introduction: 15 minutes

Key objectives:

- ◆ Introduce any leaders or coaches and match up any participants requiring support with an appropriate guide.
- ◆ Give any guides and runners time to introduce themselves and practice walking up and down using a tether if needed.
- ◆ Introduction to cues and commands such as 'Stop', 'Go', 'Slow', 'change direction', 'easy' (these may vary by runner/guide pairing depending on their preferences).
- ◆ Orientation – walk the participants around the area or facility to help with orientation. Describe any particular features.

◆ Warm up – 10 minutes

Choose a warm up with some gentle walking/jogging, basic drills and dynamic stretches. If participants are new to running with limited sight and guides are inexperienced then KEEP IT SIMPLE!

Coaches/leaders can use this time to observe the participants to gauge their fitness levels and adapt the main activity accordingly.

◆ Main Activity – 15 minutes

The main part of the session should be planned by a leader or coach and should be fun but still challenge all participants. As an example, activity could include fartlek loops, meet and retreat loops or running for time. Give options for walking, jogging and running. Allow opportunities for guides and runners to practice synchronisation, verbal cues and changing pace.

Make sure you pick an activity that is easily adapted and allows people of different ability levels to take part. It should suit a mixed audience of VI runners and guides alongside people who are not visually impaired.

◆ Game – 10 minutes

Finish with a fun activity or game

◆ Cool Down – 10 minutes

Gentle jogging and walking followed by static stretching. Again KEEP IT SIMPLE! Perhaps pick two or three key stretches that will be easy to explain.

◆ Post session social activity

Why not arrange to meet afterwards for a coffee or something similar?

Hopefully the taster session will inspire and enthuse participants to continue with some form of running activity so make the session as fun as possible. Promote your club, group or event and other local opportunities and arrange for participants to come along.

For further information please contact

England Athletics disability@englandathletics.org
www.englandathletics.org/disabilityathletics

British Blind Sport info@britishblindsport.org.uk
www.britishblindsport.org.uk

