

British Fencing Level Access Survey 2023

Summary Report

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Based on a survey undertaken by Activity Alliance and prepared for British Fencing



Activity Alliance is the national charity and leading voice for disabled people in sport and activity.

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Introduction

Background

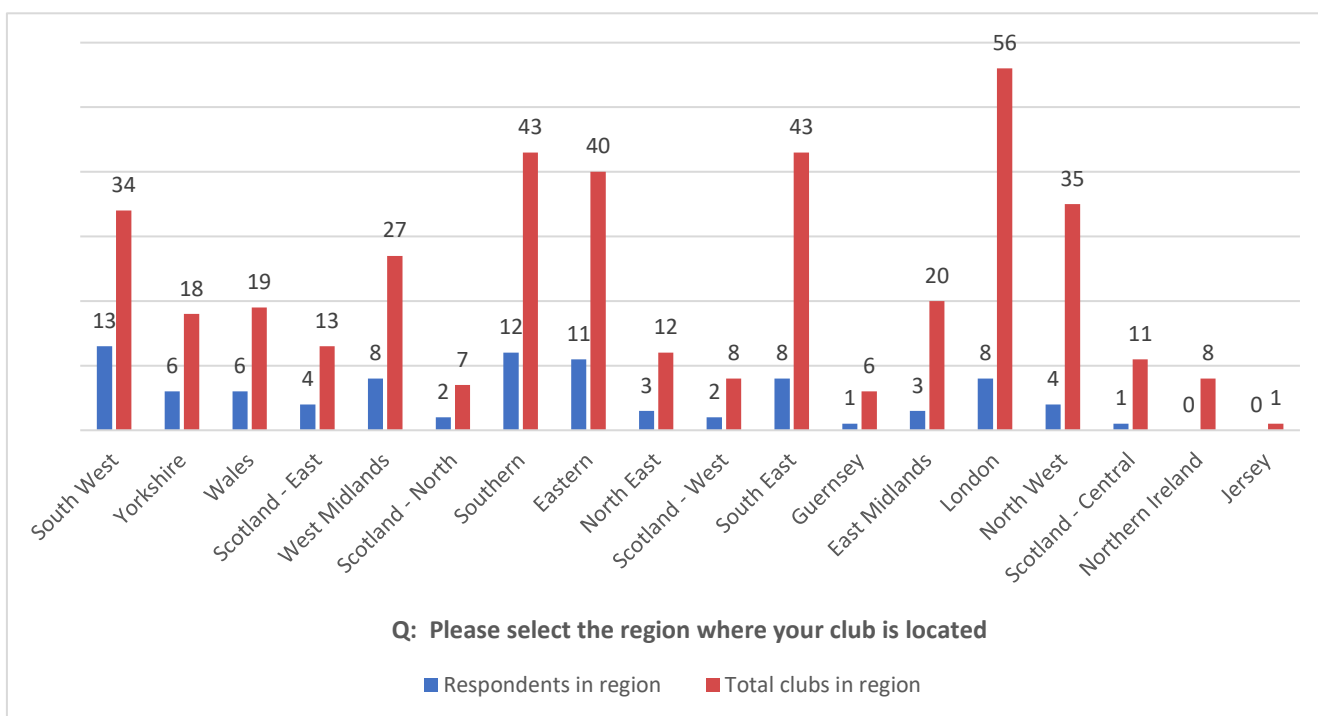
Disabled people remain one of the least active groups in our society. British Fencing worked with Activity Alliance to find out about current inclusive delivery at fencing clubs across the UK. The survey defined disability as anyone who has a long-term health condition, impairment, or illness, including deaf, blind, visually impaired, neurodiverse individuals, and those with learning impairments or other long-term conditions.

The project explored club's engagement of inclusive and wheelchair fencing through an online survey. This insight will help British Fencing to understand the current landscape of inclusive delivery and explore the support clubs may need to help more disabled people to take part in fencing.

Sample

Of the 401 fencing clubs within the UK, the survey was completed by 93 club administrators or owners from 88 clubs. This report presents the survey findings from the 88 clubs. Fieldwork took place from Monday 13 February to Sunday 5 March with British Fencing leading the dissemination through email and social media invites. The majority of respondents who completed the survey were from clubs located in South England. Figure 1 shows the number of survey respondents located in each region compared to the number of clubs located in each region. 38% of South West clubs completed the survey which is the highest proportion across regions.

Figure 1: Number of respondents and number of clubs located in each region



85% of respondents reported themselves as community clubs, followed by 8% as University clubs, and 3% as school clubs. Other clubs reported to be private, open, and children-specific (4%). The majority of clubs who completed the survey worked within school/education environments (47%) and/or leisure centres (46%).

Research findings

Club priorities

The survey was completed by 22% of fencing clubs across the UK. Of those who completed the survey, 61% of clubs currently work with disabled fencers. Of those clubs that don't currently work with disabled fencers, 38% feel their club prioritises working with disabled people as 'quite' or 'very' important with the majority at 54% selecting a neutral priority. The survey findings show North Scotland clubs report being the most inclusive, with 29% of clubs within the region who completed the survey working with disabled fencers. Overall, 58% of respondents prioritise working with disabled people.

Clubs that completed the survey perceive themselves to be most accessible for people with neurodiversity, mental health problems, or physical or mobility impairments but are not wheelchair users. They perceive themselves as least accessible to people with hearing, visual, or profound or multiple learning impairments.

Current landscape of disabled members

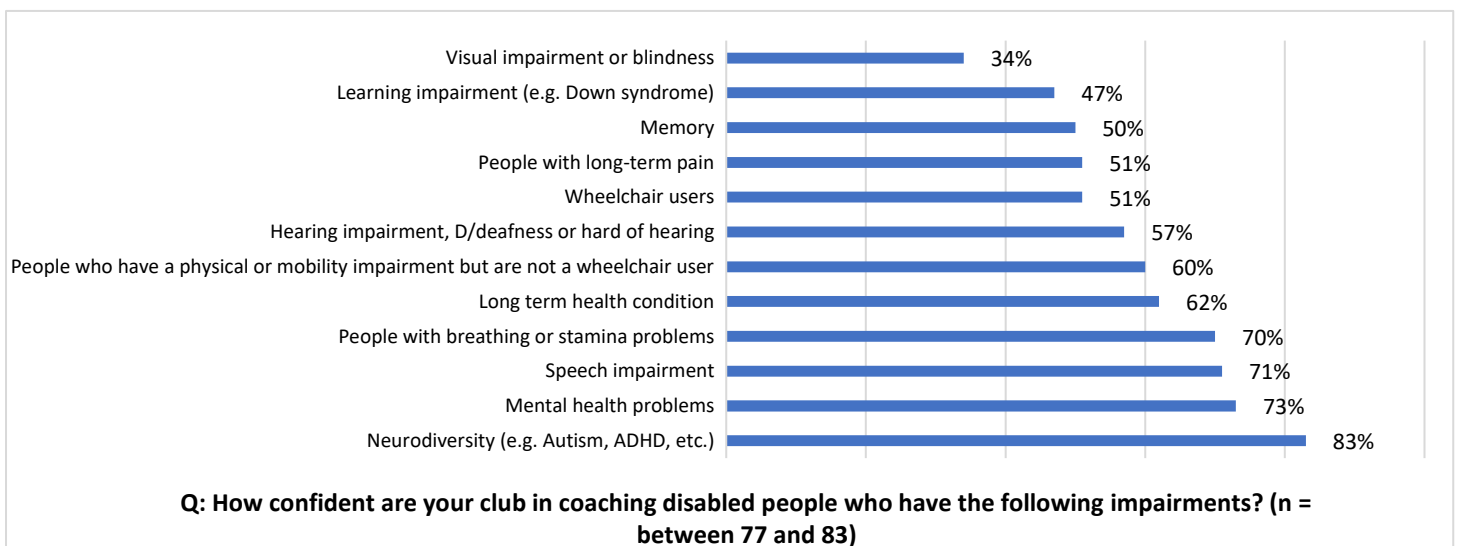
54 clubs that completed the survey currently work with disabled members (61%). Within the clubs that have disabled members, nearly 9 in 10 clubs (89%) have members with neurodiversity. The second most common disability among club members is mental health problems (53%) followed by people who have a physical or mobility impairment but are not wheelchair users (45%).

Nearly all respondents (98%) that have disabled club members offer mainstream sessions where disabled and non-disabled people can take part together. Two clubs offer separate sessions for wheelchair fencing and neurodiverse members, and one club offers separate sessions for D/deaf members and members who are blind or have a visual impairment.

Coaching disabled members

73% of respondents are confident disabled people are included and welcomed at their clubs. A third of respondents feel unsure or unprepared to facilitate disabled people to take part in their sessions. Respondents feel most confident coaching people with neurodiversity (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Proportion of confidence levels coaching people with different impairment types

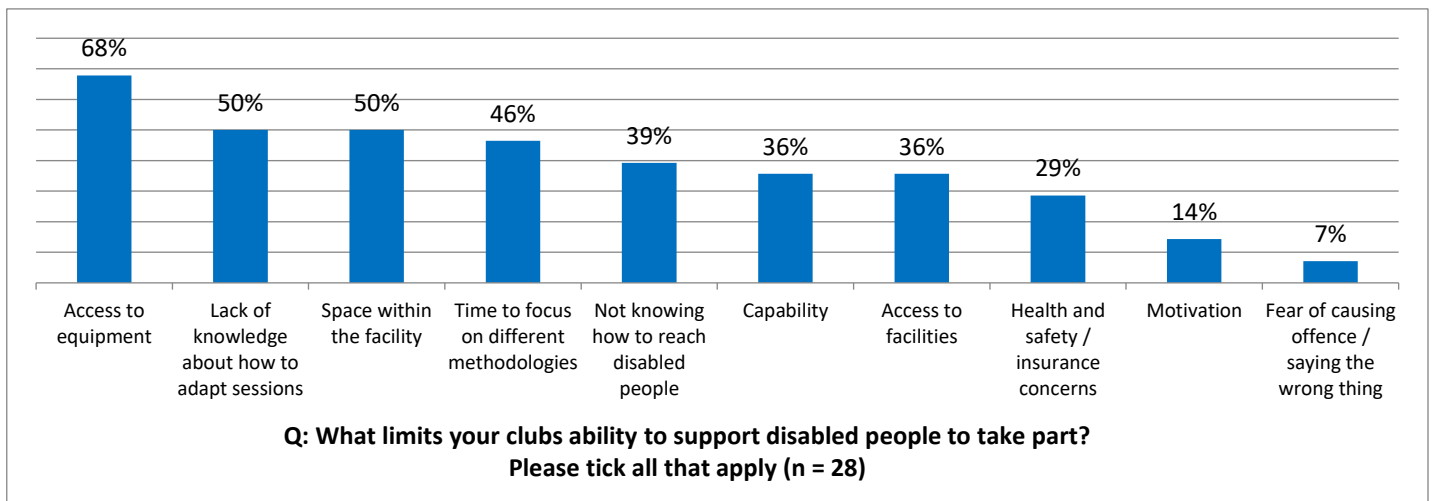


Of the 37 respondents that don't currently work with disabled fencers at their clubs or are unsure if they do:

- 63% are confident disabled people are included and welcomed at their clubs.
- 50% feel unsure or unprepared to facilitate disabled people to take part.
- Feel most confident coaching people with neurodiversity (69%) and least confident coaching people with visual impairments or blindness (13%).

Overall, access to equipment, lack of knowledge of how to adapt sessions, and space are the top barriers that limit respondents to support disabled people to take part (Figure 3). Activity Alliance's [Inclusive Activity Programme](#) and [Inclusive Club Hub](#) help to equip workforces with the skills and confidence to effectively engage disabled people in physical activity.

Figure 3: Proportion of barriers that limit clubs to support disabled people to take part



The majority of respondents (81%) say they don't have or are unsure whether they have the equipment to run Wheelchair Fencing opportunities. Of the 37 clubs that don't or are unsure whether they currently work with disabled fencers, two have equipment for Wheelchair Fencing.

Only 10% of respondents feel very capable working with disabled people at present. Nearly half of the clubs (45%) who took part in the survey scored themselves between a 6 and 7 on the 10-point capability scale.

Support clubs to be more inclusive

8 in 10 clubs who completed the survey say equipment will be useful in supporting them to work with disabled people. Understanding impairments and disabilities, coach development, and soft skills training are also highly rated as useful (78%, 70%, and 69% retrospectively).

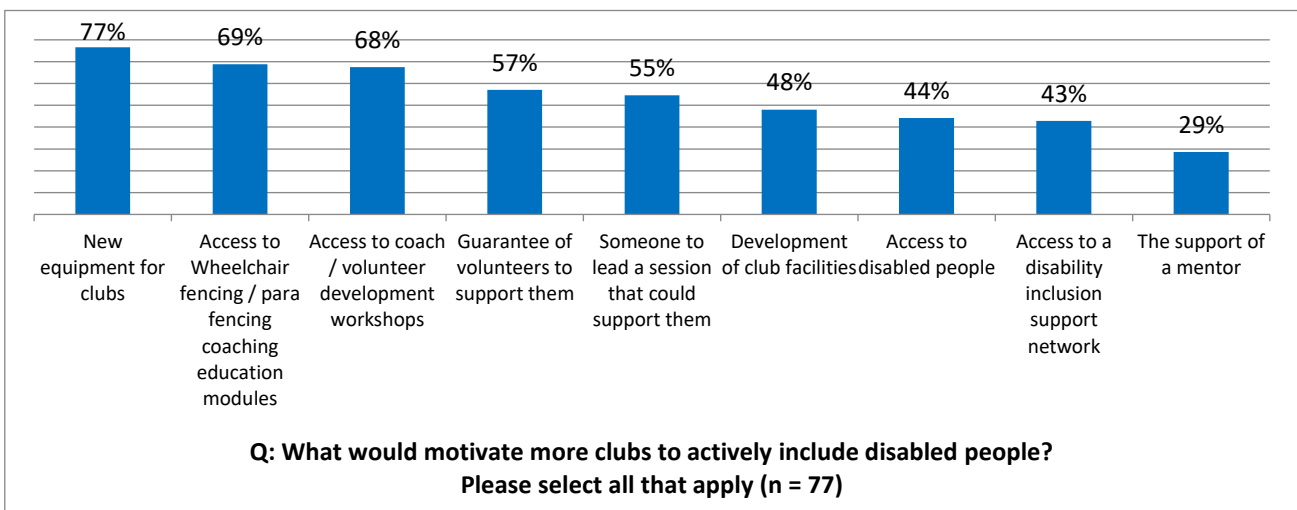
Other useful support commonly cited by respondents includes increasing staff numbers within club workforces, helping to increase the confidence levels of coaches to work with disabled people, and support with venue time and space to store equipment. More specific support relating to each club, such as access to para fencing frames, purchase of clear face masks, BSL training, etc. can be viewed within the raw data tables.

“Even as a coach with significant experience, I have little confidence I could run a safe and fun session for people with significant visual impairments... Similarly, I have seen wheelchair fencing, and had a go, but I wouldn't be confident in running a safe session.” **Fencing Club in South East**

Respondents recognise the many benefits of working with disabled people. Creating a more inclusive environment for everyone is rated as most the important benefit for clubs, with 90% rating it as important. Developing coaches’ skills and knowledge and meeting the needs of local communities are also viewed as important by over 80% of respondents. Other benefits alongside bringing in new members, income, and supporting funding bids include supporting personal and skill development of the workforce and members, fulfilling club missions as communities for all, and increasing the participation and popularity of fencing.

To access the benefits of working with disabled people, respondents recognise they need support. Support with equipment, wheelchair fencing/para fencing coaching training, and development workshops would help motivate over two-thirds of clubs who completed the survey to actively include disabled people (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Proportion of motivations to actively include disabled people



Future considerations

Feedback from clubs

Most respondents welcome the chance to be more inclusive. They recognise the benefits working with disabled people will have on their club and its members. Concerns are expressed by respondents and commonly cite access of equipment, funding, and workforce numbers. Respondents welcome the opportunity for training and many would like support accessing wheelchair fencing frames. Other common themes respondents say would be useful include support with outreach to disabled people, more support for smaller grassroots clubs, opportunities to bid for more funding, and the introduction of regional centres for inclusive prowess.

“Very exciting to see this progress, probably long overdue, but really keen to see a more inclusive sport.” **Fencing club in Wales**

“Take advantage of best practice clubs.” **Fencing club in East Midlands**