



Annual and Coaching Awards Guidelines 2026

Honouring exceptional dedication and long-service to RDA.

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Overview

The Annual and Coaching Awards celebrate excellence across the RDA community by recognising the outstanding contributions across 11 different award categories.

From the promising talents of young participants, volunteers, and coaches to the seasoned leaders and mentors whose dedication and impact have shaped RDA over decades, these National Awards celebrate the individuals and equines who make RDA truly special.

Whether it's through exceptional commitment, inspiring innovation, or remarkable achievements, these awards recognise and honor the extraordinary efforts that bring the RDA mission to life and inspire others across the community.

The award nominations are carefully reviewed by a panel of judges, including RDA UK Trustees and CEO Michael Bishop, as well as guest judges from Peoples Postcode Lottery. The results culminate in an inspiring Awards Presentation held at the RDA National Championships in July. This is an opportunity to shine a spotlight on the volunteers, coaches, participants, and equines who embody the spirit and values of RDA.

Purpose

The purpose of the Annual and Coaching Awards is to celebrate and honor the exceptional contributions of individuals and equines within the RDA community. These awards aim to:

- Recognise the dedication, passion, and achievements of volunteers, coaches, participants, equines across 11 award categories.
- Inspire others by showcasing stories of commitment, innovation, and impact.
- Strengthen the RDA community by fostering appreciation and pride in its members' contributions.

- Highlight the vital role of volunteers, coaches, and equines in delivering the mission and values of RDA.

The Categories & Criteria

Young Volunteer of the Year

Recognises a volunteer under the age of 25 who has demonstrated exceptional dedication and made a significant impact within their volunteering.

Specific Criteria: Must be aged 25 or under on 1st January 2026.

- Shows outstanding commitment and reliability in their volunteer role.
- Inspires others through their actions and promoting the values of the organisation.
- Actively seeks opportunities for personal development and takes initiative in learning new skills or gaining new experiences.
- Brings fresh ideas and creativity in their approach to volunteering.
- Has a positive and lasting impact on those around them.

Volunteer of the Year

Recognises a volunteer who has shown exceptional dedication and commitment through their volunteer role within RDA.

- Demonstrates significant contributions to RDA through their reliability, commitment, and dedication.
- Inspires others through their actions and supports the wider RDA community in meaningful ways.
- Shows personal growth through their volunteer journey, enhancing their impact within RDA.
- Creates positive and lasting benefits for participants, volunteers, and the broader RDA community.

RDA UK Volunteer of the Year

Recognises an outstanding RDA UK volunteer who has committed their time to an RDA UK role at a national, regional, or county level.

- Demonstrates exceptional contributions to RDA UK at a County, Regional, or National level.
- Improves experiences for volunteers, participants, and groups through their RDA UK role, delivering meaningful and impactful support.
- Provides significant assistance to groups or activities within their area, enhancing the overall impact of RDA UK.
- Strives to create positive change, collaboration, and enrichment within the RDA community.
- Serves as an inspiring role model for fellow volunteers and participants.

Participant of the Year

Recognises a participant who has demonstrated exceptional success, determination, and achievement in the past 12 months.

- Has shown significant progress in their personal development journey within RDA.
- Achieved notable successes that have had a positive impact on themselves and those around them.
- Demonstrates determination in overcoming challenges.
- Brings joy, positivity, and inspiration to others through their involvement with RDA.
- Stands out in their approach to participation, inspiring others with their resilience and achievements.

Equine of the Year

Honours an outstanding equine that has played a pivotal role in serving RDA and its participants.

- Demonstrates exceptional fitness, health, and active service, contributing to the success of the group.
- Has a significant impact on participants, improving their experiences and providing valuable support in their activities.
- Exhibits qualities and characteristics that make them particularly suited to their work with RDA.
- Actively engages with the group, whether as a long-time member or as a newly introduced equine that has quickly made a difference.
- Plays a vital role in supporting the well-being and development of participants, inspiring confidence and trust.

Susan Dudley-Smith Award

This award honours an individual volunteer who has made an extraordinary contribution to RDA Carriage Driving, often through their hard work and unsung efforts.

- Demonstrates exceptional commitment and dedication to RDA Carriage Driving
- Shows a deep passion for RDA Carriage Driving and has made significant contributions to the success of a Group, County, Region, or the National level of RDA Carriage Driving.
- Consistently goes the extra mile in supporting and enhancing the experience of participants and fellow volunteers.
- Has made a lasting impact within the RDA Carriage Driving community, inspiring others through their contributions.

Young Coach of the Year

Recognises an individual aged 25 or under who has invested time and effort into their development as a coach and has inspired those they coach to achieve their own goals.

Specific Criteria: Must be aged 25 or under on 1st January 2026.

- Has shown a strong commitment to their personal development as a coach, actively seeking opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge.
- Inspires and motivates those they coach, helping participants achieve their goals.
- Shows dedication to creating a positive, supportive coaching environment that encourages growth and achievement.
- Has made a significant positive contribution to the participants they coach, improving their experiences and helping them succeed.
- Serves as a role model to their peers and participants, demonstrating leadership, enthusiasm, and a passion for coaching.

New Coach of the Year

Recognises an exceptional coach who has become an RDA coach in the last two years and has made a significant impact on the participants they coach.

Specific Criteria: Must have become a coach at Group Coach Level or above, including Carriage Driving Coaches, Showjumping Coaches, and Vaulting Coaches, since 1st January 2025.

- Has made a significant impact on participants since becoming a coach, helping them achieve their goals and improving their overall experience.
- Actively invested in their development as a coach, seeking out training, support, or resources to enhance their skills and knowledge.

- Demonstrates a strong commitment to the RDA community, contributing positively to the Group, participants, fellow coaches and volunteers.
- Has implemented new strategies, ideas, or approaches that have led to improvements in their coaching practice.
- Their coaching has positively affected participants or the Group, inspiring others to grow and succeed.

Coach of the Year

Recognises an individual who has made an exceptional contribution to coaching, providing outstanding support and opportunities for participants and volunteers, while serving as an inspirational and positive role model.

- Provides outstanding coaching support to participants and volunteers, helping them achieve their goals and reach their full potential.
- Acts as a positive role model, demonstrating professionalism, empathy, and integrity in all coaching activities.
- Inspires and motivates others through their coaching style, fostering a supportive and encouraging environment.
- Shows dedication to personal growth and development as a coach, continually seeking opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge.
- Creates a positive, inclusive, and enjoyable environment where all participants feel valued and supported.

Coach Mentor of the Year

Recognises an outstanding Coach Mentor who has dedicated time to the development of another coach, making a significant impact on their coaching journey.

- Has provided consistent support and guidance to another coach or coaches, helping them improve their skills, confidence, and effectiveness.
- Demonstrates exceptional mentorship qualities, including guidance, encouragement, and knowledge-sharing, to foster the growth of others.
- Actively invests in the development of others by offering advice, resources, or feedback that supports their professional growth.
- Shares their experience and expertise to help mentees overcome challenges and succeed in their coaching roles.

Extra Mile Award

Recognises an individual who has gone above and beyond with exceptional dedication, perseverance, innovation, or selflessness at the Group, Regional, or National level over the last 12 months.

- Has demonstrated exceptional dedication or innovation, going the extra mile in their role to support RDA and its community
- Demonstrates selflessness and perseverance, consistently supporting the RDA community with a positive outlook.
- Made a significant and lasting impact at the Group, Regional, or National level through their efforts, improving experiences and outcomes for participants and volunteers.

Nomination Process

Who can nominate?

Anyone can make a nomination for the Annual and Coaching awards.

Nomination can be made via:

Online Submission: an online form is now available - [complete your nomination online here.](#)

If you require the nomination form in an alternative format please email coaching@rda.org.uk

Selection Process

Judging Panel:

The panel typically includes:

- The RDA UK Chief Executive Officer
- Chair of Regional Chairs
- Advisory Board Member for Volunteering
- RDA UK Trustee(s)
- Guest Judges, such as Award Sponsors

Judging Criteria:

- Each nomination is carefully assessed based on specific criteria tailored to the award category, focusing on qualities such as dedication, impact, innovation, and inspiration.
- Judges consider factors like the nominee's commitment to RDA's values, their positive influence on others, and their tangible achievements.
- For equine categories, attributes such as the equine's role in supporting participants and overall contribution to the group are evaluated.

- The panel, consisting of RDA leadership, Trustees, and guest judges such as award sponsors, ensures a fair and thorough review of all nominations.

Panel Decision:

- The panel's decision is final. Successful nominees will be notified by the Volunteering and Coaching Teams at National Office.
- The nominee's Regional Chair, Group Chair/Contact, and Nominator will also be informed.

Notification and Acceptance:

- Successful nominees will be asked to confirm acceptance of the award.
- They will be asked to provide personal details and specify the name they would like on the award certificate.
- Award recipients will also be asked to provide a photograph and a short quote about their time at RDA, sharing what it means to them and their group to be recognised for a RDA award.

Presentation of Awards

- The Annual and Coaching Awards are presented at an awards ceremony at the RDA National Championships in July.
- If recipients have specific accessibility needs or face barriers related to travel for receiving their award, please contact the Volunteering or Coaching Teams to discuss possible support.

Key Dates

Nomination Period

Nominations Open: Friday 16th January 2026

Nominations Close: Midnight on Sunday 1st March 2026

Award Presentations

The Annual and Coaching Awards will be presented during the RDA National Championships, which are taking place from Friday 10th to Sunday 12th July 2026.