**Vaulting and Riding Hats FAQ**

1. **Why are the guidelines for wearing a hat during vaulting changing?**

Vaulting involves performing gymnastics and acrobatics on a stationary barrel or a moving equine. It is a team effort between the equine, the vaulter, and the lunger (the person controlling the equine in a circle).

Currently, RDA participants are permitted to wear hats during vaulting activities. However, the following organisations and governing bodies do not specify the wearing of a hat during vaulting on a barrel or horseback:

* Scottish Equestrian Vaulting (SEV)
* British Equestrian Vaulting (BEV)
  + English Vaulting Squad (EVS) (as part of BEV)

To support peak visibility and to reduce the risk of neck injury during moves, RDA is aligning its guidance to vaulting governing bodies. In vaulting pairs work, hats or skull caps can interfere with movement by adding bulk around the head, reducing proximity and control, making it difficult for vaulters to align closely or support each other effectively. The added bulk also increases the risk of collisions, as a hat can shift or tip, disrupting timing and balance. Additionally, some moves require holding around the head or neck, and a hat can cause grips to slip leading to a fall or further injury.

However, riding hats or skull caps **must** continue to be worn by participants (and volunteers where applicable) for all other riding/driving activities. Please refer to your group guidelines on volunteer personal protective equipment if you are going to undertake lunging for vaulting.

1. **What are the risks of head injury without a riding hat?**

Non-disabled vaulting groups, both in the UK and internationally, have concluded that hats do not enhance safety for vaulters and have therefore discontinued their use.

Nonetheless, as accidents remain a possibility, it is essential that each vaulting group consider their risk assessment and their participants when making a decision regarding the wearing of hats. As per governing body guidelines. Individual participants who are required to wear a hat (by exception) must undergo a thorough risk assessment to ensure optimal safety during their session. Should it be determined that this cannot be adequately managed, vaulting on a stationary barrel rather than on an equine is strongly advised.

RDA Groups should only be using equines that have been thoroughly assessed for their suitability, aged seven or older and must be guided by a lunger to keep moving on a controlled circle. If there are any concerns around the equine’s suitability for vaulting, they should be removed from vaulting activities and reassessed. The assessment needs to be undertaken by a competent vaulting coach/trainer and documented as part of the risk assessment that the named horse is suitable.

The lunger and equine partnership **must** be assessed together for an appropriate amount of time (a session longer than 10 minutes) by an Advanced Vaulting Coach, or BEV Level 3 Coach, before allowing participants to take part.

Vaulting Coaches will train their participants in approved safe dismount techniques (further training can be offered on these techniques via the vaulting National Lead) appropriate to the participants' needs and will practice dismounts regularly to build coordination and reduce injury risk. Learning how to fall safely is also essential, helping vaulters develop body positioning and landing skills.

1. **Why change now if this has been common practice for a while?**

Many other vaulting groups, like SEV, BEV, and EVS, do not use hats. As these groups have:

1. undertaken suitable and sufficient risk assessments
2. significant expertise in vaulting safety protocols
3. have developed practices based on extensive experience and, evaluation,

It is important that RDA now reflects on the credibility of vaulting governing bodies and aligns its practices accordingly.

The new rule will come into effect from January 1st, 2025. From then on, participants can vault without a hat during training and RDA competitions (barrel and equine).

**Competitions** – unless an Alternative Hat Form is filled out it will be mandatory not to wear a riding hat during competitions.

**Group sessions** – we understand that this will be a large change for all involved. Therefore, any participant who would still like to wear a riding hat can still do so. An Alternative Hat Form will need to be filled out and a risk assessment.

1. **What else can be done to reduce risks and injuries?**

* The Vaulting Coach **must** write a detailed risk assessment which includes the generic risks and controls for vaulting without a hat. This mustbe implemented for the specific participant activities to ensure risks are reduced.
* If needed, the coach can consult a Regional Physiotherapist or any other person required to advise on the individual participants' needs.
* Individual risk assessment must be completed for any participant who needs to wear a hat by exception. Participants, and their carers or guardians, must be made aware of the risks.
* A participant assessment form must also be completed.
* All participants must be assessed on a vaulting barrel prior to moving on to an equine.

If there are any concerns by any party, the participant should wear a hat and remain on the vaulting barrel until further advice is received. Rugby-style soft skull hats may be considered, an Alternative Hat Form and individual risk assessment **must** be completed.

Further training can be made available on vaulting and risk mitigation if needed.

1. **How should this change be explained to participants?**

Refer to the information in the answers to Question 1 and Question 2.

1. **How should this change be explained to parents, carers, or schools?**

Refer to the information in the answers to Question 1 and Question 2.

1. **Vaulting Governing Bodies cater to a range of participants, including disabled and able-bodied people but typically for sport and competition. Some of our participants have complex needs and we feel that removing their hat would be riskier.**

Speak with a Regional Physiotherapist to ensure vaulting is the most suitable activity for the participant. Discuss the training (safe dismounting procedures, warm up and cool down). If the participant is still anxious about vaulting without a hat, a risk assessment will need to be completed, with vaulting only on the barrel. They would also need to vault individually (not as a pair) to reduce the risk of injury to others.

1. **Who can I speak to if I need more information?**

You can talk to your Vaulting Coach, Vaulting Advanced Coach, National Lead, or the National Office. You can also contact BEV.