



Mixed Ability Sports

An Introductory Guide

1st Edition, February 2019

Welcome

A warm welcome to the inaugural Mixed Ability multi-sport Guide! For the first time we have brought together the experiences of coaches and participants who believe that full inclusion should be part of our daily life.

The Mixed Ability Model embraces human diversity and gives real opportunities, for people of all abilities who are facing a wide range of barriers, to participate and work together whilst empowering themselves. They do this via training in a mainstream club, being equal members, striving to reach personal goals, and challenging stereotypes around the orthodoxy of sport (and disability sport along the way).

For some it is a chance to demonstrate their sporting know-how and commitment to inclusion, for others it's just about learning new skills or being part of a new family. It doesn't matter, we are all in the same boat.

In our Manifesto, we acknowledge that grassroots sports can also unknowingly engender exclusion. IMAS advocate to democratise sport participation across the world, giving people the right to join in community sports without being identified, separated, classified or labelled, promoting inclusion and equality through a sense of belonging and membership.

IMAS have been developing and sharing the Mixed Ability Model through our team of trainers since 2009. Initially working primarily with adults who have Learning Disabilities to co-produce and deliver accessible resources and presentations, we quickly realised that there was growing interest for the Mixed Ability Model beyond these groups.

We now work with a range of National Governing Bodies, grassroots clubs, health support networks, universities, and individuals who recognise IMAS as world leaders in inclusive sport. Theoretical and practical training is delivered to clubs, organisations, service providers, and healthcare professionals, reaching thousands of people across Europe every year. We are creating a social movement to revolutionise the way people think about sport.

We would love you to be part of it.

Martino Corazza and Mark Goodwin
IMAS Directors

Contents



IMAS Vision for Mixed Ability Sports	4
IMAS Manifesto	5
What is Mixed Ability?	6
Mixed Ability is not...	7
Participants Experiences	8
Coaches' Experiences	10
What do Mixed Ability Sports Bring to Grassroots Clubs?	13
Case Study – Heaton Tennis and Squash Club	14
Health Benefits	16
Mental Capacity	17
Frequently Asked Questions	18
How will IMAS Support You?	20
The IMAS Mixed Ability Awards Scheme	21
Notes	22
Acknowledgements	23

IMAS Vision for Mixed Ability Sports



International Mixed Ability Sports (IMAS) is at the forefront of a global movement challenging the orthodoxy of grassroots sports provision.

IMAS believes that everyone should be able to benefit from the transformational power of sport to create healthy and happy communities and yet, many people still face significant barriers to participating in mainstream sports through, for example, disability, age, gender background, poor self-perception or established social norms.

Mixed Ability sport takes an innovative approach to breaking down these barriers, revolutionising the way we think about sport participation.

The Mixed Ability Model promotes social inclusion through sport, education and by encouraging players of all abilities to be equal members of mainstream sports clubs.

To make this vision possible, IMAS provides interactive and accessible training delivered by participants from a range of backgrounds to create sporting environments that are safe, welcoming and non-judgemental. This has been shown to overcome a huge range of barriers for people who may otherwise struggle to participate, as well as benefiting clubs and the wider community.

Our vision is to radically change the way we think of, join in and enjoy sports, leading to a fairer and more equal society.

This is just the start. Sport is leading the way in inclusion – let society follow!



The Mixed Ability Model is about:



HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

Sport has the power to transform lives making us healthier and happier, and yet there are people excluded or segregated because of stigma, prejudice or personal perceptions of their capability.



INCLUSION AND EQUALITY

Too often sport is seen as the prerogative of elite athletes or established majorities. Grassroots sport can also be responsible for excluding minorities allowing access only to charitable or segregated activities.



MEMBERSHIP AND BELONGING

Mixed Ability recognises the right of everyone to participate in community sports without being separated, classified or labelled.



EQUAL PARTICIPATION

Mixed Ability is a social movement within sports, actively promoting inclusion and equality through a sense of belonging and membership to a group, team or club.



RULES AND REGULATIONS

Mixed Ability Sports follow the same rules and regulations of mainstream sports without adaptations, and only minor adjustments to take into account individual participant needs.



BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

In breaking down these barriers Mixed Ability Sport creates opportunities for marginalised communities to challenge the established status quo and affirm their right to equal participation.

BECOME A SIGNATORY by adding your name and endorsement to the list of people and organisations on our website. To find out more about our activities and IMAS affiliation please visit our website www.mixedabilitysports.org or email contact@mixedabilitysports.org

What is Mixed Ability?

Many people face significant barriers to participating in mainstream sport through, for example, disability, age, gender, background or poor self-perception.

Mixed Ability sport takes an innovative approach to breaking down these barriers. MA participants from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities share experiences

and learning through interactive and accessible training and resources.

This creates sporting environments that are safe, welcoming and non-judgemental as well as providing realistic role models.

Mixed Ability emphasises the importance of regular, frequent and sustainable activities, self-determination, club membership and opportunities for social interaction for all.



Mixed Ability is NOT...



TIME-LIMITED PROJECT

Mixed Ability is a long-term commitment, with frequent and regular sessions, not a box ticking exercise. All Mixed Ability activities are created with sustainability as a key objective.



DISABILITY SPORT

Mixed Ability is open to both disabled and non-disabled participants. Whilst Mixed Ability participants and teams do play against each other, we believe competing against mainstream opposition is key to accessing the full social benefits of the Mixed Ability model.



SEPARATE TO MAINSTREAM CLUBS

A Mixed Ability participant and team fits within a club in the same way any other member or team does. For example, Mixed Ability rugby teams play to the 'just another team' ethos.



QUICK FIX TO INCLUSIVITY

Simply hosting a Mixed Ability activity doesn't make a club inclusive, participants must be fully integrated in all aspects of a club.



POLITICALLY-CORRECT 'DISABLED SPORT'

The 'Mixed' in Mixed Ability refers to the variety of abilities that are competing together. We all are Mixed Ability players, regardless of dis/ability.



CLASSIFYING OR IDENTIFYING PEOPLE

Mixed Ability does not identify or classify participants based on their differences. Many participants join Mixed Ability activities as they do not want to be singled out.



ABOUT USING DIFFERENT RULES & REGULATIONS

Mixed Ability sports are played to the standard rules and regulations agreed by the national governing body. 'Reasonable adjustments' may be made, but without creating special rules.

Participants Experiences

Darren – Mixed Ability Boxing participant

Since joining Unorthobox sessions I have become much more confident. I have lost weight, I feel much fitter and haven't used my inhaler for my breathing for several months. I look forward to every class and can't wait to get on the pads with the excellent trainers. They know how to get the best out of me and push me every step of the way. They are very patient and understanding. Getting involved and helping with the Mixed Ability attendees is also fulfilling. Everyone helps each other which is great to see.

Mixed Ability Rowing participant

I did feel [a bit uncomfortable] but once I started becoming personally involved and being in a boat with [the MA participants], all that went away ... And I just thought "It's done me some good really, being part of this training session" ... For me it has made it easier to be around people when I don't understand what they're saying.

Keith Myers – Bradford Amateur Rowing Club

The Mixed Ability Model... made clear that people with disabilities wanted to take part in the club properly. They wanted to take part in the social life of the club rather than being in their own kind of ghetto or their own enclave. So, the whole point was participation in the wider club.

Tom – Mixed Ability Rugby player

As a profoundly deaf player with cerebral palsy Tom may have felt that contact rugby wasn't going to be a possibility. However, it is just 3 months since his first training session, and he has already represented Derby RFC in a full contact match and visited Sixways Stadium with the rest of the Derby Bucks MA team.

"Being involved in sport helps me by increasing my general happiness whilst also giving me the opportunity to make new friends. I'm happy whilst I'm playing and find it has built up my confidence. Afterwards I feel tired!"

"People with disabilities wanted to take part in the club properly. They wanted to take part in the social life of the club rather than being in their own kind of ghetto or their own enclave." Keith Myers



"I do not worry about whether I'm saying or doing the right thing. I see the person first" Jonny Myers

John Higginson – Mixed Ability Tennis player

"Who says 70 is old? I would just like to say a big thank you to all of those who have given me such encouragement to move forward with my tennis and racquet ball interests with IMAS. I couldn't even spell 'racquetball' before I arrived at Heaton Sports Club (probably still can't!), and my wife and I can hardly wait to get involved again after our initial apprehensive steps a few months ago."

Jonny Myers – Mixed Ability Rugby player

The biggest impact on me has been the change in my attitude to all people I come across now. I do not worry about whether I'm saying or doing the right thing. I see the person first.

Coaches' Experiences

Sarah-Jane Murray, Founder and Coach of Unorthobox

Sarah established Unorthobox and has been delivering Mixed Ability sessions across Yorkshire to a huge range of participants. She was inspired to promote Mixed Ability boxing after developing a long-term health condition. She wanted to create a space where others, like herself, could continue to embrace the sport they love. She has been a remarkable role model and ambassador for Mixed Ability.

"In our MA Boxing classes, we are promoting community cohesion, bringing people of all ages, genders, backgrounds, religions, abilities and disabilities together." Sarah-Jane Murray

"The time off got me thinking that there must be other people like me who love boxing but would not feel capable or comfortable attending a general session at a boxing gym.

Boxing can have a massive positive impact on people's lives. It's not just about physical health and fitness. In my experience boxing increases self-confidence, improves overall feeling of well-being, mental health, develops coordination, relieves stress and much more.

In our Mixed Ability sessions, we have also noticed other benefits. We are promoting community cohesion, bringing people of all ages, genders, backgrounds, religions, abilities and disabilities together. People who may not usually socialise are brought together by the wonderful sport of boxing"

Freya Stansfield – Bradford Amateur Rowing Club

Freya's company encourages employees to volunteer for two hours a month so she uses her time for the Tuesday morning MA session. She coaches the MA participants and says that it's no different to any other group she has been involved with.

"To be honest, it's just like coaching anybody else who's learning to row. You have to make everything simple; they make the same mistakes as everybody else. I think what I've learnt is to try and simplify things even further but other than that I don't really find that much difference really. I haven't worked with anyone of Mixed Ability before so it's been a learning experience but I haven't found it particularly challenging – it just works a bit differently. Things happen at a slower pace and you have to be a bit more patient."

"It's just like coaching anybody else who's learning to row." Freya Stansfield



"Coaching wise, my advice would be to take it slow. The lads needs to build confidence and as a coach you need an opportunity to work out how they learn best, how the team fits together and what adjustments you need to make." Stuart Hill

Stuart Hill – Halifax Magpies

When I was first asked to help set up a Mixed Ability rugby union team at Halifax RUFC, I was extremely sceptical. I was certain I did not want to be part of a game that would have to be adapted to a degree whereby the key aspects of rugby were lost and the game became a staged event.

In saying that however, my interest in how this concept would work in practice took me to a training session with the Bradford Bumble Bees. It was immediately apparent that my first thoughts were a long way off the mark and I started to think about what I could offer the game and vice versa.

Now part of the Halifax Magpie's we are five years in to Mixed Ability rugby. For me

the coaching goes well beyond the hours we spend on the park and I am immensely proud of the development the lads have shown both on and off the field. The rugby subculture is an excellent support for players of all abilities; the lads were immediately accepted as full members of the club and as a result of being in a typical rugby social environment have grown in confidence and self-esteem. The team in turn have proved to be a cornerstone of the clubs growing success.

From a personal perspective, the game has provided an opportunity to challenge myself, allowed me to learn and adapt but most importantly ensured my continued attachment with the club, and friends old and new.

Coaches' Experiences continued...

Gwilym Lewis – Llanelli Warriors MA Rugby

Gwilym was a guiding light in the formation of England's first Mixed Ability rugby team. He has been leading the Llanelli Warriors since 1995 and is working hard to promote Mixed Ability throughout Wales. He is a true ambassador and inspiration to many.

"I have found some of our disabled players are better than our non-disabled players, so I consider ability, size and experience rather than disability.

Disabled players are less likely to have much previous experience and there is a higher ratio of friends/family that also haven't played much. I have therefore emphasised skills and 'rugby' training over fitness.

We try to have several drills involving contact, especially if we have new players. Some players thrive on physical contact and some avoid it, all need to have some experience of it.

The real rewards in Mixed Ability rugby are not necessarily the victories. The victory in Mixed Ability rugby happens as soon as the referee blows to start the game, from that point on those people are rugby players. They will have joined the history of the game and will have something in common

with every other player and former player at every level of the game."

Helen Howes – Mixed Ability Swimming

When IMAS delivered a presentation to the Bradford MS Society, Helen immediately knew she wanted to create a Mixed Ability swimming group for her local community. A year on this has been a huge success attracting families and other participants of all ages and abilities. Helen is proof that Mixed Ability champions can bring about significant change in their communities.

"It is something I simply love to do and it's a pleasure to be part of it. I love the fact that the people who attend, love to come and have a great time while they are there." Helen Howes

"It is something I simply love to do and it's a pleasure to be part of it. I love the fact that the people who attend, love to come and have a great time while they are there."

"I have found though that some of our disabled players are better than some of our non-disabled players and so I consider ability, size and experience rather than disability." Gwilym Lewis

What do Mixed Ability Sports Bring to Grassroots Clubs?



New members

Fresh input into the club.



Feel good factor

Creates a new family within the club.



Diversity

Being more representative of the local community.



Local recognition

Strengthen the club position in the community.



Club heritage

Re-engage founding members.



Sustainability

Re-engage and retain new and returning members



Motivation

Older participants want to get involved.

CASE STUDY

Heaton Tennis and Squash Club

In 2017 we were considering new ways in which we could help promote our activities at Heaton. Heaton was always seen as a Tennis and Squash club and many people we ran other activities.

We were determined to change this, so, when we were introduced to IMAS we thought Mixed Ability was the right way forward to offering more to our local community.

Sport and physical activities have never been simple there is always a boundary somewhere down the line whether you are professional in sport or even doing it for a hobby or just for keeping fit. This wasn't the case with Mixed Ability, as it is all about removing barriers. The Mixed Ability model was such a great idea, people now have

the opportunity to take part in an activity irrespective of their ability, they would have never dreamed this was even possible.

Heaton now runs regular Mixed Ability classes on a weekly basis such as non-contact boxing with Unorthobox, Tennis for all and Racketball. Heaton has truly become a Mixed Ability hub attracting new members, re-engaging our existing ones and becoming more representative of the local community.

To see the enjoyment in people's faces, the constant smiles are really rewarding, but to see what impact these activities have had on the participants is amazing. These new activities have made a real difference to people's lives.

Alex Prytulak

Heaton Tennis and Squash Club Manager



Insert Joe's Youtube video once finished



Health Benefits

By Dr. Mark Purvis, Director of Postgraduate GP Education and Head of School of Primary Care, Health Education Yorkshire and the Humber.



Physical well-being benefits

As our nations face an epidemic of type 2 diabetes, we all need to become more active. We know that people with disabilities are disproportionately affected by physical health problems, not directly related to their primary disability. Active involvement in sport can significantly reduce the risks of major diseases like diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some cancers. The improved fitness that sport and exercise brings can enable people to participate more fully in other activities of daily living resulting in living fuller, healthier lives.

Mental well-being benefits

In addition to the well known physical benefits of sports and exercise, there are benefits to mental well being.

Sports and exercise can improve:

- Sleep patterns and quality
- Energy levels and feeling of well-being
- Self-esteem

Sports and exercise can reduce:

- Stress levels
- Depression

Anxiety

Sports and exercise can even reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

Social well-being benefits

Participation in sport increases self-confidence, creates a sense of belonging and builds social bonds. "Social capital" is an important component of resilience and enables people to function better in society. Participants learn values in sport that are of value off the pitch. Players who have overcome disability to participate in sport are often exemplars and an inspiration to other members of society to become more active.

Risks, capacity & autonomy

Many sports have an element of risk and there is the potential for injury. Some players with autism or disabilities may have a high pain threshold and not immediately be aware of the extent of an injury. We believe "if players have the capacity to understand potential injury risks in a contact sport then they have the right to play that game".

Risk mitigation

Players can be taught to respond to injury in themselves and in other players. Team managers and coaches should keep a record for each player that details: primary disability, other medical conditions, medications taken, medical contact information.

Mental Capacity

In all sports there is an element of risk of injury or harm, whether that be of an injury to self or another person.

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 states clearly that we should assume that everyone has capacity to make a decision unless otherwise proved.

If someone wishes to play contact sport, they must understand that even in non-contact activities there is a chance that they might get injured. It is important all participants understand what that means

regarding pain, treatment and possible consequences. Only in this way they have capacity to make that decision.

However if participants don't fully understand the full complexity of making that decision but want to play, then it could be decided that it's in their best interests to participate. This is dependent on the benefits of playing outweighing the deficits of possible injury.

If you are unsure that someone fully understands the risks then there are some simple things to do to help them understand.

Communicating the risks...



Easy read document



Show/use photos



Real life scenarios



Visual responses

"I have lost weight I feel much fitter and haven't used my inhaler for my breathing for about 3 months. I look forward to every class and can't wait to get on the pads with the excellent trainers." Darren

Frequently Asked Questions

Who can play Mixed Ability?

Anyone can play Mixed Ability sport, regardless of barriers faced in the past such as through disability, gender, age, background or self-confidence!

What kind of sport is it?

It is not adapted, segregated or classified. Mixed Ability is not a “special” project. Mixed Ability supports the choice of disabled players not to be identified and separated in tiers. Mixed Ability is not a politically correct term for disability sport. Mixed Ability teams are “just another team” within mainstream sports clubs, adopting the same rules and regulations established by their National Governing Bodies.

Are disabled players covered by insurance in the same way as regular club players?

Mixed Ability taster and start up training sessions need to be agreed by the host club, players will then be covered by club insurance as per rules and regulations established by the relevant National Governing Body.

Who needs to be DBS checked?

Coaches or anyone else who is likely to have sole charge of participants.

Why Mixed Ability?

Traditionally, sports participants with disabilities have been offered sporadic or irregular activities competing alongside others with disabilities. Mixed Ability encourages membership to and provides a sense of belonging to a club with able-bodied teammates. This goes beyond encouraging equal opportunities, inspiring real community cohesion between the sports clubs and people facing barriers to participation. This is well illustrated when you observe your Mixed Ability team socialising in the club.

Should I be worried about the risks?

All sports have an element of risk. Every sport activity needs the risk to be assessed and mitigated appropriately. Health inequalities are most marked in people with disabilities. We know that people with a learning disability die 15-20 years earlier than other people. (NHS Digital, 2019)

We need to contextualise risks taking into account the barriers to an active and healthy lifestyle faced by people with severe enduring chronic disease and learning disabilities. These include attempts to categorise and pigeon hole disabilities into a “special” category. Any risks of participation need to be framed in this context.



What are the jobs of the Managers or team Champions?

This is a crucial role for a Mixed Ability activity. Having some understanding or training about Mixed Ability is invaluable to guiding the team and the club in responding to the challenges of enrolment, retention and players individual needs.

Mixed Ability participants might need additional support, for example flyers or slips reminding them (and carers) of dates, times and kit required for training or games. This is best achieved by involving stakeholders including parent/carers and support organisations, forming committees or steering groups advising clubs of new access requirements and applications for funding. Showers are frequently highlighted as inaccessible for players with Cerebral Palsy due to dated design, Sport England regularly offer improvement grants for equipment and facilities.

Any advice on taking a Mixed Ability team on tour?

Our experience suggests that a 'buddy' system works well. This is linking one facilitator to a specific disabled player. Pairs often arise spontaneously, and that allows the disabled players to strengthen their self-confidence. There are numerous stories of players on tour having their first visits to nightclubs etc. In case of getting lost, a small printed laminated card is useful for all players with the tour manager's number and an introductory sentence explaining the player needs assistance.

Our game is built on teamwork, respect and enjoyment. As much as is possible treat players equally, Mixed Ability Rugby is an opportunity for people to enjoy and shine.

How will IMAS Support You?



The IMAS Mixed Ability Awards Scheme

A coach, club or National Governing Body can achieve an IMAS award by going through a process of IMAS training with associated resources. Three categories of award are available:

Mixed Ability Certification

For qualified coaches who demonstrate a commitment to providing Mixed Ability sessions and promote Mixed Ability sport.

Mixed Ability Accreditation

For clubs who demonstrate a commitment to providing a safe, welcoming and non-judgmental environment for all participants and promote Mixed Ability sport.

Mixed Ability Affiliation

For partners and National Governing Bodies who demonstrate a commitment to the IMAS Manifesto and promote Mixed Ability sport.

"This was one of the most positive and influential training events I have ever attended. Mixed Ability is certainly something I want to promote and be involved with."
York GP following an IMAS training course

Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank all those who contributed towards this guide, especially:

The IMAS 'Inclusion in Sport' Class.

Unorthobox and Sarah Jane Murray.

Bradford Amateur Rowing Club.

Celia Hickson.

Heaton Tennis and Squash Club.

Helen Howes.

Dr. Jen Dyer.





Sign the Manifesto

IMAS values are upheld in its Manifesto. To find out more about Mixed Ability Sports, and sign the Manifesto, visit the website: www.mixedabilitysports.org



@IMAS_sport4all



facebook.com/MixedAbilitySports



@IMAS_sport4all