

Evaluation of the Mixed Ability Sports Development Programme (MASDP)

Report from Workshop 2:

Knowledge sharing and learning from Year 1 to Year 2

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Introduction

On 2nd November 2017, a workshop was held at the University of Leeds as part of the evaluation of the Sport England-funded Mixed Ability Sports Development Programme (MASDP). The MASDP is coordinated by International Mixed Ability Sports (IMAS) as part of their promotion of inclusive sports through education, peer engagement and practical participation in the community.

Mixed Ability Sport (MA Sport) encourages social inclusion by integrating players regardless of (dis)ability into a mainstream sport setting in their local community. The Mixed Ability Model was first developed through Rugby but IMAS have now rolled the Model out to 7 new sports: rowing, cricket, boxing, tennis, golf, exercise, movement and dance (EMD) and bowls. In the first year of the two-year programme activities were concentrated in the Bradford area, but the start of the second year has seen them extend to Leeds, York, Liverpool and Manchester. The MASDP also includes an educational element through training, awareness raising activities and the 'Inclusion in Sport' class for participants, as well as a research element led by the University of Leeds and Loughborough University.

Research in the MASDP

The role of the research element of the programme is to evaluate the MASDP. This includes: assessing different stakeholder motivations, perceptions and attitudes; highlighting challenges faced in the various sports; reporting the impacts of the Programme on participants and the broader community; examining the consequences of the Programme, both intended and unintended; and gaining an insight into different participants' experiences. The research element is also informing the development of the MASDP and providing recommendations for the future sustainable development of MA Sport. The key research methods are interviews, surveys, in-depth participant case-studies, and three multi-stakeholder workshops. The session outlined here was the second of the three workshops (the first was held in January 2017) and focused on knowledge sharing and learning across years 1 and 2. Before detailing the workshop activities, key findings from year 1 of the research are outlined for context.

Key findings from year 1 research

Interviews and participatory research methods carried out in year one across the 7 new MASDP sports generated some interesting findings, which will be followed up and further explored in Year 2. These include:

- *Impacts of MA Sport* - MA Sports are reportedly having positive impacts for our case study participants at the individual level, including through providing physical benefits (e.g. increased mobility, weight loss and fitness) and additional advantages such as increased independence, social connections and overcoming negative self-perceptions. In year 1 case study Sports Clubs, MA Sports have increased membership and club usage as well as reportedly begun to shift the culture towards being more inclusive. For example, Heaton Tennis and Squash Club have widened their doors in order to allow access for power wheelchairs and Bradford Amateur Rowing Club (BARC) have established a rota for coaches to coordinate the weekly MA rowing sessions. Research undertaken in year 2 will aim to further examine these impacts with more case study participants and clubs, as well as explore broader community and National Governing Body (NGB) impacts.

- *MA as offering a 'safe' environment for groups beyond disabled people* - stakeholders involved in organising and delivering MA Sport provision report that MA Sports appear to offer a 'safe' environment for a range of people who have faced different and varied disabling barriers to participating in sport, but who do not identify as being disabled. For example, the MA Boxing at Heaton has attracted people from a wide range of backgrounds who have been put off sport through, for example, negative self-perception, age, and perceptions of boxing as not being suitable for them. Year 2 research will explore whether there is a larger gap in provision than is currently perceived for MA Sports, analyse the plethora of invisible disabling barriers to sports participation faced by people and consider if, why and how MA Sports might offer a more welcoming alternative.
- *Differences between who is 'driving' the MA sport initiative* – Comparing the new MA Sports, data suggest that MA activities appear to be more successful and sustainable where an individual driver with an attachment to the MA ethos is present. For example, in the case of Unorthobox, who have just celebrated their first anniversary of weekly sessions with a broad range of participants both with and without learning and/or physical disabilities, the driver is someone who was unable to take part in conventional sports provision due to chronic health issues and wanted to provide alternative provision to others in the same or similar situation. Year 2 research will continue to explore these trends and work with stakeholders to develop tools for when an individual driver is not present e.g. when introducing a new MA activity in a Sports club.
- *Defining and explaining the MA Model* - IMAS and other key stakeholders emphasise the challenge of explaining the MA model and some of the common misconceptions. For example, MA Sport is often seen as 'another form of disability sport' and non-disabled participants often perceive themselves to be 'volunteers'. The year 2 research will help inform IMAS on defining and explaining the MA Model more effectively, as well as relating this challenge to broader societal perceptions around social difference.
- *MA beyond rugby* - a key challenge emerging from the research data is how the MA Model translates to the new sports, both team-based and individual performance-based, and how the MA ethos is maintained across different contexts. This links to the challenges with defining MA and further work is needed to define the MA ethos. Year 2 research will explore the key elements of the MA Model across different sports.

Workshop aim & goals

The workshop aimed to share knowledge and learning from key stakeholders in Year 1 of the MASDP with key stakeholders in year 2 (see Annex 1 for a list of participants) as well as exploring some of the above research themes. The workshop was divided into three sessions (see Annex 2 for workshop timetable) as well as an introduction and evaluation session.

Session 1: Defining Mixed Ability

What does MA mean to you?

Given the challenge of defining and explaining the MA Model, which came through strongly in the research data from year 1, the morning of the workshop was dedicated to exploring this issue further. Workshop participants were asked to write 3 words that they felt defined MA on post-it notes and these were clustered into themes (see Picture 1a and b).

The following key themes emerged:

- Inclusive
- Fun
- Belonging
- Equality/equity
- Accessibility
- Rights and freedom of choice
- Challenging prejudice
- Enabling potential
- Learning new skills

Pictures 1a and 1b show post-it notes clustered into the above themes.



Picture 1a



Picture 1b

Feedback discussion from this exercise explored the themes further and emphasised a sense of belonging as being key to MA Sport. It was felt that MA Sport can provide a sense of affiliation as well as a competitive element, because competition is not the absolute focus. Participants discussed that some Clubs can be more welcoming than others and the ethos of the Club is important as to whether it would 'work' with MA Sport. However, it was also suggested that it might take time for the wider membership of clubs to fully understand and embrace the MA Model. It was noted, for example, that BARC are still adapting to the Model having introduced MA Rowing earlier this year. MA Rugby was mentioned as being easier to promote as once you play an MA team it is easier to see the model in action, but this is harder with sports such as swimming which are not team based. Interestingly, no one mentioned training or educational provision as being core elements of MA, despite them being central to IMAS' activities. This may suggest that educational elements are perhaps more implicit within club activities at present.

Although these themes provide some insight into the key tenets of MA Sport, a definition which could be used to clearly explain the Model to others unfamiliar with the concept was still elusive.

What does MA look like in your sport?

We continued exploring the definition of MA by giving those who were new to MA Sports the opportunity to discuss it with those involved previously in MA boxing, EMD, rugby, cricket and rowing. Feedback from these discussions revealed some interesting sport-specific points of interest and highlighted that the initiation, development and format of MA was likely to be different for each sport. This is interesting and has significant implications for the ongoing development of MA and for the role IMAS may play here. For example, MA Rugby has been established for longer than other sports and rugby representatives suggested they were hoping to move towards a 'no-fuss' point where MA teams are not viewed any differently from other teams. Furthermore, it was noted that IMAS had helped with supporting Premiership Rugby in being comfortable with the MA offering, suggesting a critical facilitating role for the organisation in working with clubs and other organisations. The importance of understanding MA in context was also highlighted in other ways. For example, boxing representatives noted that a lack of disability boxing role models and no disability-focused boxing at the international level could hinder development in their sport. Furthermore, dance representatives explained that the MA ethos sits well with community dance, but less well with progression programmes and professional dance companies, commenting that MA participants would likely face barriers to participation in these environments.

What are the key elements of MA?

At this point in the workshop, participants felt it was still hard to elicit what the key elements of MA Sport are in a practical sense and to identify elements that could support those wanting to promote and explain the Model to others. A diagram of a target was left for participants to fill in their thoughts on what elements of MA are common across all sports and what were particular to each sport; this was revisited later in the workshop.

Session 2: Taking stock

Reflections from IMAS on year 1, the manifesto and plans for affiliation


IMAS representatives, including participants in MA Sports, reflected on their activities in year one of the MASDP. They described their key achievements, which included the MA Rowing group having their first trip in the water in their new boats (see Picture 2) as well as attracting yoga, swimming, archery and table-tennis to the MA movement. These sports weren't included in the original Sport England-funded project but will be included in the research if time and resources allow, as these perspectives will undoubtedly contribute to the research conversation. IMAS also reflected on the benefits they felt MA Sport was having at the individual and club levels, as well as reactivating community assets. For example, Heaton Tennis and Squash Club has linked with local referral units and health practitioners, as well as Unorthobox and Bradford Council, to host MA Sports. It was interesting to note that their key lessons learnt closely mirrored the research findings, with mention of MA as providing a safe space for anyone who has previously faced barriers to sport, the crucial role of sport 'Champions' and the difficulties in differentiating MA Sport from disability sport when trying to promote MA activities.



Picture 2 - the first MA Rowing crew on the water at BARC (photo by Celia Hickson of BARC)


IMAS went on to present the MA Manifesto as a potential tool to help explain the concept (see Picture 3) and to discuss affiliation and certification. Participants were asked to note on post-its what they felt they needed from IMAS in going forwards with MA Sport and as part of affiliation or certification schemes. Responses were clustered under the following themes:

- Support with recruitment (particularly of non-disabled participants)
- Funding advice and guidance
- Assistance with networks e.g. links to governing bodies, partnerships with other organisations in IMAS group
- Training e.g. equality and awareness and sport-specific MA training
- Advice on context and how MA might work in different arenas e.g. Universities
- Support and advice for coaches and teachers
- Resources e.g. videos and pictures to support promotion



HEALTH & 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 & 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 & 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 & REGULATIONS

Mixed Ability Sports follows 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.

Picture 3 - The IMAS Mixed Ability Manifesto

Session 3: Towards Year 2 and beyond...

Rather than focus on 'hopes and fears for year 2', as per the original agenda, we decided to build on the morning discussions and further explore the key questions and themes emerging from the research that had been revisited during the workshop. Four questions were circulated around the room on flip chart paper and participants were invited to record their thoughts and discussions on each question. These are summarised below in Table 1.

Table 1 - Four key questions raised during research and workshop with participant thoughts and responses

<p>How to explain MA Sport to a new audience?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feel it - videos are effective as a way of highlighting what MA Sport is all about• Need a strapline e.g. 'it's nothing special!'• The Manifesto is useful as a tool for this• Non-judgmental ethos• All welcome - all abilities• Everything is possible - all you can do is YOUR best• People train together - regardless of physical and mental ability• Anyone can!• Not about disability	<p>How to attract non-disabled participants?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotion - presentations, flyers, social media• Considering the other benefits - social and mental wellbeing• Engage people that work at the club• Students - to give experience in coaching/volunteering or work experience as part of their course• Encourage family engagement• Plan when the activity happens (not in work time?)• Plan where the activity is - location, good venue, where other classes are happening• Don't focus on 'disability' - MA is for everyone• Use existing clubs• Promote as being a 'facilitator'?• Message of 'giving back to your sport'• Videos/live demos/statistics to back up message
<p>Why do you think training and exercise were not mentioned in the earlier activity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No fuss ethos• Is it needed? Experience is essential• We are the experts in our sports - add on modules are useful• We are already educated in our own sport - it would be different if we discussed doing a role in a different sport• Lack of availability and high cost of courses, lack of info on what is/can be studied• We aren't the educational element of sport - we are <u>sport</u>• Lots of repetitive disability training out there e.g. UK coaching, NGB disability modules, EFDS resources, National Disability sport organisations, NAS (Autism specific) - don't fall in the trap of these!	<p>How do we grow MA Sport?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online sharing• Posters and images in gyms, schools and general community• NHS, physios, doctors, referring• News media• Local events/workshops (seeing it rather than hearing about it)• Demonstrate the value of it• Statistics (Gooders doing lots of M&E)• Get governing/national bodies involved - being visible• More funding/fundraising• More sports• Highlighting some of the MA activities that might not be labelling themselves as MA at the moment e.g. university training sessions/goal ball• National campaign to raise awareness and bring all deliverers together• Training in good practice that builds confidence in delivering MA 'how to be inclusive', sports specific and led by the experts in that area/sport

These responses to the four questions provide some useful insights for IMAS and for the research evaluation. Some key messages coming out from the responses around how to grow, explain, and attract non-disabled participants to MA Sport are concerned with the need for tools to promote MA Sport e.g., straplines, the Manifesto and promotional material. Videos were agreed to be the best way, short of experiencing MA Sport, to give a sense of what it is all about. The theme of MA being for everyone and going beyond disability was reiterated here as well. This is interesting to note as it is suggesting that MA Sport is about removing 'disabling' barriers to participating in sport for all, not just those who are 'disabled', and creating an environment where all are equal. There still appears to be some confusion over the role of IMAS in training and education, in particular concerning why it is an important part of MA Sport and how IMAS training differs from the disability training already available. IMAS explained that the educational element of MA Sport represents a first step towards broader inclusion in sports clubs and is based around the fundamental values of inclusion, rather than being specific to disability, linking again back to the idea of removing disabling barriers to participating in sport for all. IMAS also emphasised the co-produced nature of MA resources and highlighted the importance of hearing a range of participant voices, which is often something that is missed from other training.

Wrap-up and evaluation

The workshop was rounded off with a chance for participants to mingle and share thoughts from the day. Anonymous evaluation forms were filled out by all participants. The majority of participants (11 of 14 feedback forms completed) stated that the workshop was 'very useful' with the remaining 3 saying it was 'somewhat useful'. As with the first workshop, participants overwhelmingly reported that the networking opportunities and the chance to share experiences, opinions and ideas amongst a range of stakeholders from a variety of organisations was the most helpful aspect of the workshop. This suggests that a community for MA practitioners would be useful and could be facilitated as part of the IMAS affiliation scheme. Participants made some excellent suggestions as to how future workshops could be improved, including: more examples of the educational content that has been produced; the inclusion of practical sessions; having more space for individual input; giving more time to speak to others; and having more workshop events.

Next steps

The data gathered in this workshop are valuable with regard to exploring the research outcomes from year 1 in more depth, as well as hearing how the MASDP has progressed over the first year from IMAS' and other stakeholders' perspectives. The workshop has also been valuable in highlighting both the consistencies and inconsistencies around MA Sport, which will usefully inform research activities going forwards.

We would like to say a big thank you to all the participants who volunteered their time and input to the workshop. We hope you found it useful and look forward to working with you further during the project.

Annex 1: List of participants

Names	Organisation	Email address
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Simon Pierce	North Yorkshire Sport	simon@northyorkshiresport.co.uk
Ross Bibby	Leeds City Council - Active Leeds	Ross.bibby@leeds.gov.uk
Helen Howes	Mixed Ability Swimming Lead	helenhowespdn@btinternet.com

Annex 2: Planned workshop timetable

Time	Session
10.15 - 10.30	Workshop introduction
Defining Mixed Ability	
10.30 – 10.45	What does MA mean to you?
10.45 - 11.30	What does MA look like in your sport?
11.30 – 12.15	What are the key elements of MA?
12.15 - 12.45	Lunch
Taking stock	
12.45 - 1.30	Reflections from IMAS
Towards Year 2 and beyond...	
1.30 – 2.00	Hopes and fears for Year 2
2.00 – 2.30	MA affiliation and certification
2.30 – 3.00	Wrap-up and evaluation