

Changing the world through Mixed Ability:

A systems approach



The Mixed Ability model

Sport and physical activity have the power to transform lives making us **HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER**. But many people still face barriers to participating in sport because of stigma, prejudice, or personal perceptions of their capability. IMAS exists to change this through the **MIXED ABILITY** model!

The Mixed Ability model brings together **SPORT, EDUCATION** and **ADVOCACY**, recognising the right of everyone to participate in community sport, as equal members, without being separated, classified, or identified.

Mixed Ability sport sees disabled and non-disabled participants playing together in the same mainstream environment. **This is different from disability-specific or 'special' sports provision because it emphasises:**

- Safe, welcoming, non-judgemental and accessible environments
- Regular, frequent, and sustained provision
- Same rules and regulations
- Opportunities for social interaction
- Equal membership
- Promotion of self-determination

Education is a fundamental component of the Mixed Ability model. IMAS educators with lived experience of disability co-produce and co-deliver **MIXED ABILITY TRAINING** and resources, sharing their learning and experiences with sports coaches, clubs, and National Governing Bodies, as well as a variety of other settings. These include **EDUCATION, HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE** and **COMMUNITY GROUPS AND CORPORATE**.

In this way, relevant voices are heard, realistic role models are present, and those who have the experience of overcoming exclusion can directly influence positive change.

These contexts all connect to create positive impacts at a system level



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To find out more about IMAS training, scan the QR code, or [click here](#)

Health and Happiness

Being involved in Mixed Ability sport can have many benefits. There are, of course, the 'usual' benefits you can get from doing sport regularly. For example:

- **Improved physical and mental wellbeing**
- **Friendships**
- **Personal development**
- **A sense of achievement**



"I've had certain health issues and this has provided a major outlet for us. It's given us both a fresh lease of life ... if I were a dead car battery, [Mixed Ability sport] has been our jump leads and given us a real kick into moving on a permanent basis towards full fitness and club involvement in the future."

- **John, Mixed Ability participant**

But there are also benefits beyond those! Mixed Ability sports participants are challenged to think differently about disability and diversity. **PERCEPTIONS** are **SHIFTED** around what ourselves and others can achieve and we reflect on what we have in common, rather than what makes us different!

"Being involved with Mixed Ability rugby has made me less quick to judge people and given me a much better understanding and awareness of people's needs and abilities."

- **Member of Sunday's Well Rebels, Mixed Ability rugby team**

All this fantastic stuff leads to A **FAIRER AND MORE EQUAL SOCIETY** and **REDUCED INEQUALITIES**.

"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."

- **Member of Bumble Bees RFC, Mixed Ability rugby team**

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To find out more about John's Mixed Ability journey, scan this QR code, or [click here](#)

Impacts for grassroots clubs

When IMAS delivers training into **EDUCATIONAL** contexts such as mainstream and SEND schools, or when it recruits through day services, they promote **EQUAL PARTICIPATION**. This creates a sustainable pathway for everyone into **GRASSROOT CLUBS**, which means everyone gets to experience **MEMBERSHIP AND BELONGING**.

GRASSROOTS CLUBS offering Mixed Ability sport have lots of benefits both economically and socially. Some of those we've noticed include:

- Fresh faces bringing diversity of membership and clubs becoming more representative of the local community
- Local recognition strengthening the club's position in the community
- Re-engaging and retaining existing and returning members making clubs more sustainable

Clubs are often initially concerned about the idea of introducing Mixed Ability sport but don't regret it when they do!



"Mixed Ability has massively changed the club! When we first mentioned the words 'Mixed Ability' and 'disability' it was like [sharp intake of breath] just because it's a very traditional club ... But now, [the members have] seen the effect it's had on people ... and they've got involved themselves, it's massively changed and they're all 'we want more Mixed Ability sports, we want more classes on'"

- **Representative of Heaton Tennis and Squash Club**

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To find out more about Bradford Amateur Rowing Club's (BARC) journey with Mixed Ability, scan this QR code, or [click here](#)

Challenging health inequalities

Health inequalities related to disabilities remain stark¹. IMAS is reducing these by offering training and placements for **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE** professionals and future workforce, in order to equip them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to work with disabled patients and involve them in their own care. They report:

- A greater understanding and application of healthcare concepts such as the social model of disability, assets-based and patient-centred approaches, and social prescribing
- An insight into individual experiences and impacts of disability, particularly related to accessing health care
- Challenging perceptions of disability and how access to physical activity can be a valuable and effective healthcare option

“It’s important for social workers and health staff to hear that, actually, you really need to hear what people are saying about their lives ... You don’t know better because you’ve had a textbook on it.”

- **Social Worker, Bradford Community Learning Disability Team**

Health and social care professionals also better understand the value of sport as a treatment option and are able to signpost people to Mixed Ability sport through **SOCIAL PRESCRIBING**.

“[I’m] more aware of inequalities and disadvantages within the community and able to communicate better with people. Also having an idea of the options that are out there in the community to support patients.”

- **3rd Year Medical Student, Sheffield University**



To find out more about IMAS’ experiential learning opportunities for health and social care professionals, scan the QR code, or [click here](#)



Impacts for the community

And Mixed Ability doesn't just benefit grassroots sports clubs and individuals! When IMAS delivers training into **COMMUNITY GROUPS AND CORPORATE** settings, **COMMUNITY ASSETS** are activated, people are encouraged to take a different approach to equality and diversity, and rethink inclusion. Often, people are inspired to set up their own Mixed Ability activities. IMAS calls these fabulous folk **COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS** and they **LEAD THE CHANGE** in their communities, creating more opportunities for perceptions to be shifted.

From all this exciting activity **NETWORKS** are **GROWN ORGANICALLY** between and within sport, healthcare, education, communities, and organisations, always keeping the voices of their experts with lived experience at the core of what they do! Even more good things arise from these networks including innovative **EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**.

A FAIRER MORE
EQUAL SOCIETY



COMMUNITY GROUPS
AND CORPORATE

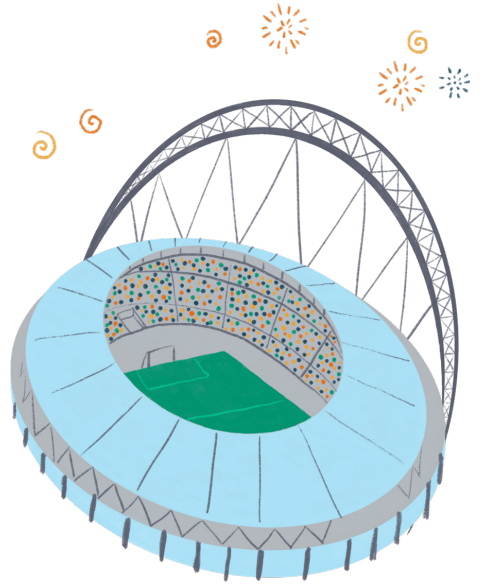


The bigger picture

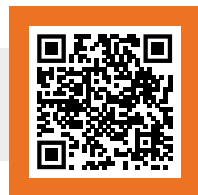
So where can this take us? It can take us to **TRANSFORMING POLICY** where the links between health, education and sport are aligned and where people are at the centre of decisions about their own lives and their own futures. It can take us to **REIMAGINING SPORT** where the focus is shifted away from performance and elite competition to community enjoyment and sport for wellbeing. And it can take us to an **INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT** where learning is shared globally for impact that is relevant in all contexts. After all, if this is possible in sport, what about the rest of society?

“If we were to start sport from scratch again, from the drawing board, we would more than likely end up with a Mixed Ability model.”

- Catherine Carty, UNESCO Chair MTU. Presentation at IMART 2022

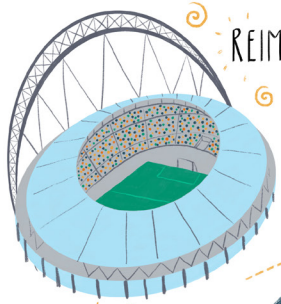


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REIMAGINING SPORT



EQUAL PARTICIPATION



A FAIRER MORE EQUAL SOCIETY

EDUCATION

TRANSFORMING POLICY



MEMBERSHIP AND BELONGING

GRASS ROOTS CLUBS

PERCEPTIONS SHIFTED

COMMUNITY ASSETS ACTIVATED

CHANGING THE WORLD THROUGH

MIXED ABILITY TRAINING

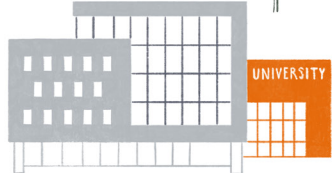
COMMUNITY GROUPS AND CORPORATE

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS LEAD THE CHANGE

NETWORKS GROWN ORGANICALLY

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

RESEARCH AND LEARNING



HEALTH AND HAPPINESS



HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

REDUCED INEQUALITIES

"I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH"
"THEY SAID I COULD NOT PLAY"

INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT



**All our work at IMAS
is evidence-based, and
RESEARCH AND LEARNING
underpin everything we do.**

To know more get in touch at:

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This resource was developed by IMAS in partnership with Nifty Sustainability: niftysustainability.org.uk

Illustrations by Megan Carter

References:

1 Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On - The Health Foundation