



# Mixed Ability Rugby

## *Start Up Guide*



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



# Welcome

A warm welcome to this revised edition of the Mixed Ability Rugby Guide, which has gathered experiences from all over Europe. This incredible work has been possible thanks to the support of the European Commission and the partners of the Erasmus+ Sport 'MIXAR' project, who passionately 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 by training in a mainstream club, being equal members, striving to reach personal goals, and challenging stereotypes around the orthodoxy of sports and the tradition of separating disabled participants

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



<b>Welcome</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>IMAS Vision for Mixed Ability Sports</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>IMAS Manifesto</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>What is Mixed Ability?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Mixed Ability is NOT...</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Participants Experiences</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Coaches Experiences</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>What do Mixed Ability Sports bring to Grassroots Clubs?</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Mixed Ability Rugby Laws</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Achievements so far...</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Referee Experiences</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Starting a Team</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Common Problems</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Health Benefits</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Mental Capacity</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Protocols</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Safeguarding</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Core Values</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Frequently Asked Questions</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>How will IMAS Support You?</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>The IMAS Mixed Ability Awards Scheme</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Notes</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>33</b>

# 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.

IMAS works with MA participants from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities to create and deliver 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.

**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!

# MIXED ABILITY manifesto



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.



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.



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.



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.



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



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.

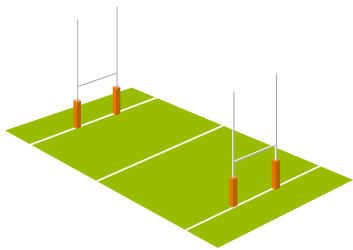
# About Mixed Ability Rugby

Mixed Ability rugby is played to the same regulations as mainstream rugby with competition against local social sides encouraged to spread the Mixed Ability model of inclusion. This ensures that Mixed Ability teams remain within the mainstream structure and aren't segregated to only play against other Mixed Ability teams in a separate league



# Mixed Ability Rugby Laws

Mixed Ability rugby is 15 a-side rugby union played abiding by World Rugby Laws for the game with a greater emphasis on rugby's core values (Spirit of Rugby) and the inclusion of all participants.



Full sized pitch



Uncontested scrums



All players can score a try



Rolling substitutions



All players should get match time regardless of their ability.



Mixed Ability rugby is a contact game. Contact is managed by the referee with players using their experience and common sense to identify what level of contact is required when making a tackle. Representatives from both sides can have a pre-match talk with match officials if requested by any party.

# What does Mixed Ability 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.

# What 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

## **Garrett D'Arcy, Rebels and Sundays Well RFC player for over 20 years (Ireland)**

When the Mixed Ability team started in Sundays Well, I was sceptical about its success. Nearly 6 years on and at 49 years of age I'm still packing the gear on a Friday and heading to training. The positive effect it has on the guys with disabilities is contagious. I've never played on a team that stayed this tight for so long. The bond between players of a wide variety of abilities and ages is amazing.

*"I've never played on a team that stayed this tight for so long. The bond between players of a wide variety of abilities and ages is amazing."*  
**Garrett D'Arcy**

## **Danny Lynch, Rebels Player (Ireland)**

I would really like to share my experiences with other rugby clubs to help them understand and see people's abilities not disabilities. Sundays Well Rebels is the best thing that has happened to me.

## **Federico, Unione Rugby Capitolina Mixed Ability (Italy)**

When I think about rugby, I feel happy, I like rugby. I feel respected. I learnt how to tackle a player, I learnt to attack. If something unexpected happens I feel more confident now. I am more self-confident.

## **Jose Manuel Gurrutxaga, Gaztedi RT (Spain)**

All this experience of the Mixed Ability world has meant our family has a shared area of enjoyment where all our members are included. We live it above all as something wonderful for Aritz, our son, seeing how comfortable he is in that environment.

## **Matteo Cena, Chivasso Rugby (Italy)**

No one is left behind, anyone can play and despite the difficulties, we help each other out all the time!

### **Player, Hasselt RC Mixed Ability (Belgium)**

I have struggled with depression for a long time. You know, I only realized the morning after the 1st training that I actually slept through the night and that the night before - during the training – I did not mumble at all, so I was absorbed by the session.

### **Ian Bourne, Hessle Vikings (England)**

Starting my sporting career at 51, I have now been playing rugby for the 'Hessle Vikings' Mixed Ability team for two years. I am proudly associated with some wonderful people who have made my dream of playing rugby and donning the colours of a sporting team come true.

*"All this experience of the Mixed Ability world has meant our family has a shared area of enjoyment where all our members are included." Jose Manuel Gurrutxaga*

### **Being part of the game**



# Coaches Experiences

## Stuart Hill, Halifax Magpies (England)

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.

*"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 adaptations you need to make."* Stuart Hill

## Gwilym Lewis, Llanelli Warriors MA Rugby (Wales)

Gwilym 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.”

### **David Vynck, RC Hasselt (Belgium)**

At RC Hasselt there was only youth activities and a 1st team, that was it. Through Mixed Ability, parents have started playing, retired players are returning to the field, players with a disability are also finding their way to our club. The emotions with which parents watch and sympathize during a session is what strikes me most. Those people suddenly find a lively network where everyone is welcome and appreciated. Oh and the post training get together in the bar invariably lasts longer than the time on the pitch!

### **Dan Cookson, Bumble Bees (England)**

Although you will be coaching an open age team you have to remember that your lads will not have had any junior rugby coaching or much experience apart from tag rugby, your new players will make up for this with tons of enthusiasm.

If you can, create a fun environment which

focuses on player strengths and not their limitations. Sometimes I find that a planned training session is too difficult for some players, I use the more experienced players and other coaches to carry out the plan whilst I focus on adapting and tailoring the session with those who are struggling.

In our first few games I found that all of our practice moves went out of the window but with persistence individual players became part of the team. Using set pieces also helps to get the lads with disabilities on the ball.

And don't forget, we don't need other teams to have players with disabilities for us to play against them; we just need them to be rugby players who can make it possible for everyone to be involved.”

### **Maeve D'Arcy, Sundays Well Rebels (Ireland)**

Do get started – if there are players who want to play then find a club and a pitch and just get going! It will grow best by word of mouth and support from the club, local community and governing bodies will all come once it's up and running. If people can see what it's about on the pitch then it is much easier than trying to explain it in a meeting room.

*“I have found 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*

# Video resources

## Changing the world through Mixed Ability



## The Erasmus+ MIXAR Project



## Mixed Ability sees the person first



## Coaching Mixed Ability rugby



# Referee Experiences

## Steve Richings

I have had the absolute pleasure of refereeing Mixed Ability teams a number of times. Games involving them are without exception a joy to participate in. My observation is that this is for a number of reasons. It is very clear that the players enjoy being part of a team where they are included and valued for the contribution they make. In an inherently physical and competitive game the care and compassion shown to other players captures the real spirit of rugby.

No matter their ability, it's very much part of the ethos that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully. I enjoy refereeing 2 or 3 times a week but the Mixed Ability games are the highlight of my season and I feel very privileged to be part of Rugby for all.

## Mike Dickenson

The first thing to say is that there is nothing to be scared of. It is true that there is a range of abilities and, while this presents a challenge, it is also the joy of refereeing these games. Seeing players of all abilities playing our game is a wonderful sight and, once seen, not easily forgotten. The abilities range from able-bodied players to players who have severe physical difficulties yet somehow the game manages to ensure that all are included in a competitive game of rugby.

The keys to refereeing the game successfully are manifold but the first and most important is preparation. A talk to both sides will establish the number and scope of abilities on either side. Talk through the protocols about what will happen in the event of certain players receiving the ball. In reality these players are easily identified and all the sides I have refereed have quickly caught on and adapted their game accordingly.

The next important thing to remember is that it is a game of Rugby and most of the players are able to run, tackle, pass, ruck and maul. Within reason, most of these players are competitive and want to win the game so referee that part of the game accordingly.

Finally, enjoy it. The players do. Join in, have a laugh and a joke. Everyone will appreciate it.





*"It is very clear that the players enjoy being part of a team where they are included and valued for the contribution they make." Steve Richings*

### **Refereeing Mixed Ability is a joy to the heart.**



*"There's no difference between Mixed Ability and mainstream rugby. The players know how to tackle, how to set a scrum, how to throw and jump into a lineout. The skills are incredible, the passion for the Game is the same. Refereeing Mixed Ability is a joy to the heart." Pedro Montoya, FER and Europe Rugby referee.*

# Starting a Team

**Decide if you have the time and enthusiasm to start up your own Mixed Ability team. If so, start putting a file together.**

Contact organisations who provide services to people with learning or physical disabilities (colleges, workplaces, day or residential services). Make contact with people who are enthusiastic about your idea and will help get the message into the local community.

Offer a fun taster training session at your club to make first contact with your potential players.

Use your club website, local newspapers, social media, posters and email details out to everybody.

Get contact details of players, in some cases it will be useful to get the contact details and support of parents/carers/staff.

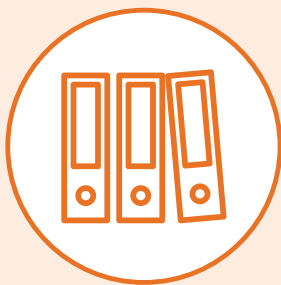
Organise a follow up training session inviting players from the first session to 'bring a friend' or give them a poster to stick up in their college, workplace, day service or shared home.

Word of mouth is the best recruitment tool of all and like any other team, player numbers will go up and down.

## What's needed?



**Players**  
(open age rugby\*)



**An organiser**  
(driver/champion)



**A coach**



**A club**

\*please follow your governing body's guidance.

*"I have Asperger Syndrome, It's hard for me to communicate but now I'm part of a team and socialise in the bar after training and games" Jagtar Bahra*

# Common Problems

Expecting players with learning difficulties to remember fine details can be unrealistic. To help parents, carers and/or support staff offer guidance, try producing a simple flyer to cover basics, such as:

## Boot studs

Players and support workers may be unaware that new boot studs require tightening. Old boot studs might get worn out and need replacement.

## Mouthguards

Players will usually require assistance to fit new mouth guards.

## Fingernails

Players and support workers may not realise that fingernails should be trimmed short to avoid gouging and scratch injuries on other players.

## Responsibilities and independence

Additional support might be required for newer players in order to help them navigate this very different experience and environment. All players should be encouraged to be as independent as possible and behave appropriately following the club code of conduct.



*"I would really like to share my experiences with other rugby clubs to help them understand and see people's abilities not disabilities. Sundays Well Rebels is the best thing that has happened to me."*  
Danny Lynch, Rebels Player

# 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 fully, more healthy 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 and becoming a member of a club builds social bonds. "Social capital" is an important component of resilience and enables people to function better in society. Rugby players learn values in rugby 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

Rugby is a contact sport 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

Games are played in a friendly spirit allowing passive scrums and rolling substitutions. 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.**

Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) gives disabled people the right to enjoy culture, recreation, leisure and sport on an equal basis to non-disabled people, in mainstream and non-adapted environments.

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...



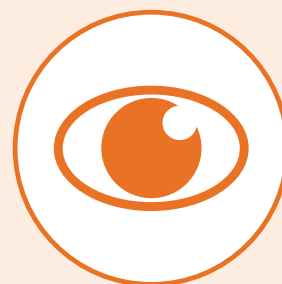
**Easy read document**



**Show them photos**



**Real life scenarios**



**Visual responses**

*"I have cerebral palsy and people weren't keen when I started to play rugby, now I can run, I feel stronger and more independent." Paul Whyatt*

# Protocols

**It is good practice to have a record of all players medical details at every training session and game which can be handed to medical personnel.**

Some players will have complex health conditions including: Diabetes, Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, Heart conditions and mental health difficulties. We need to acknowledge that all people will experience health problems at some point during their life time, and the line between disabled and able-bodied can be a fine one.

## **Before the match**

In order to ensure that the game is played in the right spirit, it is essential to give the other team a changing room talk and the referee a briefing before the match, so they know what to expect. Even when you have previously played against a local side, each game could have new players who are not sure what to expect.

## **Disabilities are not always visible or obvious**

Take some time at the beginning of the game to assess the level of contact that is required to stop a player. There will be players in every Mixed Ability side who do not require a hard tackle to stop them but the use of simple 'common sense' to hold and turn them. Similarly ripping the ball from an obviously frail player is not going to go down well.

**More experienced players should assist by:**

- Not playing for themselves and running through the opposition in this initial phase
- Communicating clearly with your disabled players so the opposition can gauge their ability and confidence with contact
- Keeping everyone calm when an individual from either team is not playing in the same spirit as everyone else
- Involving all the players ensuring even the most disabled get some "hands on", opposition teams will often facilitate this too.

## **Playing another Mixed Ability side**

To ensure that the game is played in the right spirit it is essential to check for small variations in playing styles, for example disabled players in the Clan and Swansea Gladiators are unmistakable as they wear head guards or different coloured shorts respectively. Bumbles and Warriors players have stated that they don't want to be singled out as "different to anyone else on the team". At the time of writing the governing bodies of the RFU and WRU support this choice option.

## Spirit of the game

Most players with disabilities have made it very clear they enjoy the physical contact and opportunity to expend some aggression on the pitch. Games between teams should be competitive but not humiliating or embarrassing; winning should not be at any cost.

Identification systems can be used if players feel the need, but no one can impose it, as many disabled players have clearly stated their intention not to be singled out. Each team knows what works best for their group of players, so it may not make sense to impose a single system. Different things work in different contexts.

Remember the key words are MIXED and ABILITY. If one side fields too many able bodied players, that may be through injury or lack of availability of disabled team members, it does not prevent facilitation on the pitch.

## Risk assessments

Injury prevention is best managed by undertaking risk assessments, focus on correct techniques (tackling for example), and having qualified and experienced coaches and referees who can teach and manage the game correctly.



# Safeguarding

**Safeguarding is a set in stone subject for all sports coaches and volunteers and is already well established in the area of Children and Young People in Sport. This must now be embedded in Adult Sport as we increase the participation of Vulnerable Adults at risk in mainstream sports.**

## **What does Safeguarding actually mean?**

The definition of the word 'Safeguard' is protection or safe conduct. Therefore, there is a responsibility to keep safe from harm, abuse or neglect as well as 'guarding' rights and well-being.

In order to protect vulnerable adults at risk, coaches and volunteers must have a basic understanding of abuse, maltreatment or neglect and how these may present themselves.

Despite the principles of 'Safeguarding' appearing relatively simple they can be more complex when put into practice. Therefore, in order to recognise or deal with a situation of disclosed harm, appropriate training must be delivered to all sports coaches and volunteers (not all players). This is key to ensuring national minimum standards are met and vulnerable participants are protected across all sports.

The key message is Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, at times we will be coaching and playing alongside vulnerable people. All sports clubs have a Children's Safeguarding Policy and we need to ensure procedures are in place for vulnerable adults at risk.

**Mixed Ability clubs follow their National Governing Bodies' rules and regulation on matter of safeguarding. If you need more information, please make sure you contact you club's Safeguarding Officer.**

*"I come down to the club to play rugby with my mates. I wish I could say it was purely selfless, but as much as I love helping the lads, seeing them improve and enjoy it, I also come down because I love it! Very proud to be a part of such an incredible bunch of lads!" Josh*

# Core Values

**In 2009 the World Rugby Member Unions identified Integrity, Passion, Solidarity, Discipline and Respect as the defining character-building characteristics of Rugby.**

These are now collectively known as the World Rugby Values and are incorporated within the World Rugby Playing Charter, a guiding document aimed at preserving Rugby's unique character and ethos both on and off the field of play.

The core values enable participants immediately to understand the character of the game and what makes it distinctive as a sport which is played by people of all shapes, sizes, and abilities.

## Integrity

Integrity is central to the fabric of the game and is generated through honesty and fair play and played within the spirit of the game. Victory at all costs is irrelevant.

## Passion

Rugby people have a passionate enthusiasm for the game. Rugby generates excitement, emotional attachment and a sense of belonging to the rugby family. For players and spectators enjoyment is paramount, officials and organisers should never lose sight of this.



## Solidarity

Rugby provides a framework leading to life-long friendships, camaraderie, teamwork and loyalty which transcends cultural, geographic, political and religious differences. Mixed Ability Rugby celebrates diversity and embraces all that it brings to the game.

## Discipline

Discipline is an integral part of the game both on and off the field and is reflected through adherence to the laws, the regulations and rugby's core values.

## Respect

Mixed Ability teams will have players of every standard. Respect for teammates, opponents, match officials and those involved in the game is a fundamental requirement for everyone involved. Praise efforts and commitment rather than criticising.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Who can play Mixed Ability Rugby?

Anyone can play Mixed Ability rugby, regardless of barriers faced in the past such as through disability, gender, age, background or self-confidence. Teams tend to be adults with and without disabilities. Some clubs are encouraging a pathway for children of all abilities to participate in non-contact rugby activities until they either have the confidence and skills to participate in their own age group rugby, or graduate into the adult Mixed Ability team. Participants often come together regardless of age or sex at the start of a training session for skills and touch games. Team organisers might want to consider Female Mixed Ability 7's as the popularity of inclusive rugby grows.

## What kind of rugby is it?

It is not adapted rugby, it is full contact rugby union following World Rugby Laws for the game with uncontested scrums (first introduced to allow players with Downs Syndrome and potentially fused neck vertebrae to participate in forward positions). Experience shows that having approximately 50% of players with disabilities and 50% acting as facilitators is a good balance.

## 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. Check your National Governing Body rules and regulations around Open Age rugby and insurance.

## Who needs to be CRB checked?

Coaches and volunteers, not players. All players are just teammates.

## Why Mixed Ability?

Traditionally, sports participants with disabilities have been offered sporadic or regular activities competing alongside others with disabilities. Mixed Ability Rugby encourages membership of a club with able-bodied teammates, this goes beyond encouraging equal opportunities inspiring real community cohesion between the rugby and disabled communities. This is well illustrated when you observe your Mixed Ability team players in the bar with the club's 1st team.

*"I joined because I wanted the chance to be part of a rugby team again after a career ending injury in March."* **Nick**

## Should I be worried about tackling disabled players?

All of the players have made a choice to play rugby and most will have observed or received the type of injuries consistent with any contact sport. Some of the players with disabilities will play a decent level of rugby and will require tackling in the usual way, as will the non-disabled players. If you have a more obviously vulnerable ball carrier coming towards you then a simple 'wrap up' tackle will suffice. Confidence on both teams comes with regular fixtures.

## What are the jobs of the Managers or team Champions?

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

A Mixed Ability team will probably require additional maintenance, 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.

## Any advice on taking a Mixed Ability team on tour?

Our experience suggests that a 'buddy' system works well. This is linking one non-disabled player 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*

## Notes

# Acknowledgements

This Guide has been made possible by the Erasmus+ Sport Collaborative Partnership scheme, supported by the European Commission.

We'd like to thank all those who contributed towards this guide, especially our MIXAR partners: Federazione Italiana Rugby, Federación Española de Rugby, Rugby Vlaanderen, Sundays Well Rebels, Per Formare, and the Instituto por la Inclusión en la Comunidad of the University of Salamanca.



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union





For help setting up your own Mixed Ability Rugby team or to find out more,  
please email [contact@mixedabilitysports.org](mailto:contact@mixedabilitysports.org) or visit us online...