

The Mixed Ability model: contributing to the SDGs and a more sustainable future

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The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent an urgent call for action and are at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Mixed Ability model combines sport, education and advocacy to reduce barriers to physical activity for groups that often face exclusion. As such, there are clear links between IMAS' work and the SDGs. Exploring these links is important given the SDGs represent a useful and well-recognised framing for how IMAS contributes to a more sustainable future.

This research summary explores these links and highlights relevant examples of IMAS' work. There are five SDGs that directly link to the Mixed Ability model and IMAS'. Two SDGs link indirectly to IMAS' work and a further two underpin key organisational aims. These are explored in turn below.



Find out more at: sdgs.un.org/goals

Ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all at all ages

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



The Mixed Ability model is contributing to good health and well-being through reducing barriers to physical activity for groups that often face exclusion and through providing learning opportunities for healthcare practitioners.

Removing barriers to physical activity has obvious physical and mental health benefits for those individuals involved. There are also broader wellbeing impacts associated with being involved with Mixed Ability sport including building social capital and connections, reducing isolation, building confidence, self-esteem and a sense of belonging.

“I am more confident and relaxed about being accepted and integrated by the group, they all make me feel part of the team, and they teach me the joy of sport!”

- Mixed Ability rugby player

IMAS' learning opportunities are also equipping healthcare practitioners with the knowledge, skills and confidence to support a diverse range of patients, thereby contributing to systemic improvements in good health and well-being.

Spotlight

IMAS experiential learning opportunities for healthcare practitioners



Health inequalities related to disabilities remain stark¹. IMAS are working towards reducing these by offering workshops and placements for healthcare practitioners in order to equip them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to work with disabled patients and involve them in their own care. **Workshops and placements involve a combination of educational, practical and reflective activities, which result in:**

- 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 useful to know how a disability affects someone from a personal experience because it’s all well and good reading about something in a textbook or something that’s a lot more generalised, but when you hear about a person with specific difficulties or what they feel in themselves it’s going to be very different on an individual level than on a group basis.”

- 3rd Year Medical Student, Sheffield University



Reducing inequalities

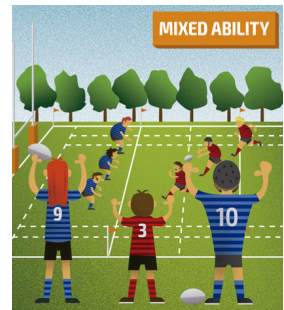
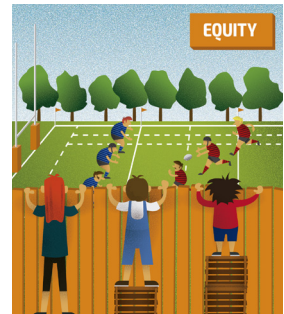
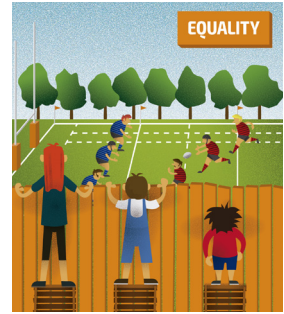
10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



The Mixed Ability model reduces inequalities for disabled people by increasing access to physical activity and sporting facilities but also to education, skills and other vital services such as healthcare.

IMAS Trainers, in particular, gain access to skills, education, healthcare and technology. For example, during the Covid pandemic, IMAS advocated for the Trainers to gain priority access to the Covid vaccine as frontline workers and ensured they were able to access to technology and remain connected to their networks.

In turn, the IMAS Trainers use peer-education to help remove barriers for others in society in accessing sporting environments.



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all



The Mixed Ability model promotes inclusive and equitable quality education for different groups:

- IMAS Trainers gain access to capacity building and skills in areas such as presenting and developing resources through their weekly workshop and associated activities, such as supporting student placements.
- The IMAS Trainers promote peer education. When combined with practical sports provision, this is very effective in encouraging people to reflect on issues of e.g. in/exclusion, preconceptions of dis/ability.
- Healthcare practitioners are equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to support a diverse range of patients.
- Sports coaches gain experience, training and confidence in working with diverse groups through Mixed Ability training.
- Corporate clients gain knowledge and experience, as well as the chance to reflect on individual and organisational practices around inclusion and diversity through IMAS' Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) activities.

Partnerships for the goals



- Underpinning IMAS' work are resilient, effective and long-lasting partnerships with a number of organisations from local to international scale and across the disability, health, education and sports sectors.
- These partnerships are built upon shared principles, values, visions and goals and have led to increased impact through sharing learning and resources.

Spotlight

Bradford Amateur Rowing Club (BARC)



BARC was the first rowing club to embrace Mixed Ability rowing as part of the Mixed Ability Sports Development Programme (MASDP) led by IMAS and funded by Sport England. The club is known for being friendly and welcoming, but wanted to become more inclusive and better represent the community.

Despite early concerns around risk and worries about communication with disabled participants, IMAS supported BARC to gradually develop a strong Mixed Ability rowing squad. At the club-level, this has resulted in a more accessible club culture, improved communication and an additional welcoming space for those who are struggling to participate in other rowing squads.

There was also ample evidence of perception shifts around disability:

“I’ll be honest and say I was expecting [the Mixed Ability beginners] to be slower to get to this level. One thing I wasn’t sure about was how good their coordination and balance would be. And with both of them their balance is superb which makes a huge difference. As I’ve got to know them, I can see they spend every day being very active - probably much more so than an adult with a desk job.”

- Member of the BARC Mixed Ability rowing squad

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



The Mixed Ability model contributes to making communities more inclusive and sustainable. Community-level impacts of the Mixed Ability model include:

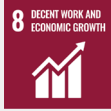
- Reducing barriers to participation in physical activities and society more broadly
- Breaking down perceptions of difference
- Reducing fear of communication
- Reducing social isolation
- Increasing wellbeing

Through peer education IMAS Trainers support local assets such as sports clubs and facilities to become more inclusive, welcoming and safer spaces for everybody. This also contributes to their financial sustainability and becoming more representative of the local community.

The Mixed Ability model encourages innovative thinking around, for example, employment, as the spotlight on Access Hospitality shows below.

Spotlight

Inspiring innovative solutions: Access Hospitality



Sam is a Mixed Ability rugby player with the Halifax Magpies and has learning disabilities. Over a post-training drink with teammate Stuart, he said he would like to work behind the bar. This simple statement led to the development of Access Hospitality, a social enterprise which removes barriers to employment for the mutual benefit of hospitality businesses and people with learning disabilities. **Sam is in charge of prepping venues and testing the technology prior to Access Hospitality working there:**

"I enjoy every aspect of my job and every day is different. My ideal would be to work for Access Hospitality for five days a week."

- Sam, Co-Founder of Access Hospitality

Access Hospitality currently has around 15 employees, trainees and volunteers working on the coffee cart, in regular bar positions and at events. **It's very much a two-way learning process and disabled**

employees are constantly informing how the organisation's practice evolves:

"These guys are really pushing the company forwards. We say this is training but they add so much value and are a joy to work with."

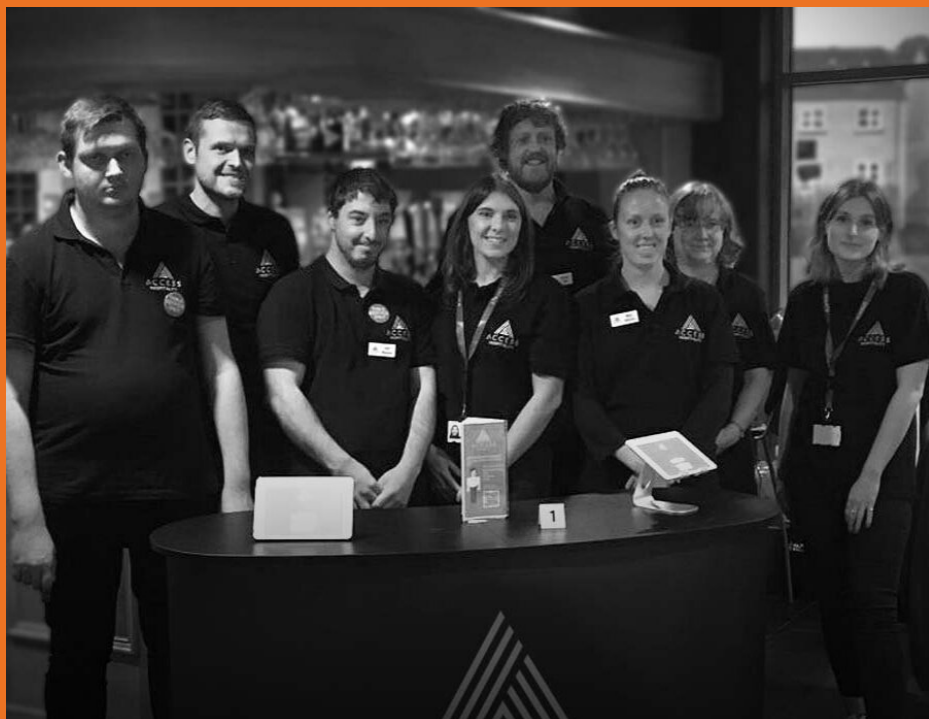
- Wayne, Access Hospitality

There are key overlaps between the Access Hospitality and the Mixed Ability model. **Not least the environment created:**

"Everyone makes you feel welcome. It's like one big family and people don't judge you. You can just be yourself ... It's helped get my confidence back up."

- Ella, Access Hospitality employee

The environment and experience is also empowering those involved. Ella is now setting up her own dog café business as a result of her experience on the coffee cart.



Access Hospitality, diversity at work



Sam, Co-Founder of Access Hospitality



“It’s made me more confident about doing other things. When I start learning new things and if I haven’t done it before I get really nervous ... and since I’ve come here I don’t feel I get nervous anymore.”

Antony Binns,
Mixed Ability boxing participant

What is Mixed Ability boxing?

Mixed Ability boxing allows participants of all abilities to take part in the same non-contact boxing sessions, regardless their age, gender or skills, providing a safe, enjoyable and non-judgmental environment, as well as building progress pathways.

Watch the full story here:



Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all



IMAS and the Mixed Ability model contribute to decent work and economic growth in a number of ways including:

- IMAS Trainers are paid living wage or in credits if they prefer.
- Increased and more diverse membership is leading to improved financial stability in clubs which have embraced Mixed Ability.
- There is potential for IMAS to contribute to more inclusive working environments through their corporate-focused ESG activities.
- As a community interest company, IMAS are contributing to an alternative economic system that doesn't put profit first.

End poverty in all its forms everywhere



The well-evidenced links between disability and poverty mean it is likely that, in working to reduce inequalities more broadly, IMAS will be contributing to reducing poverty for some.

Increased access to technology, skills and health and wellbeing are likely to increase economic capabilities. Being involved in Mixed Ability sport has led to a variety of opportunities for disabled and non-disabled participants alike to become economically active.

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

5 GENDER EQUALITY



Although this is not an area IMAS focus on explicitly in their external advocacy, they are ensuring that they are also removing barriers to physical activity for women and girls.

IMAS are proactive in ensuring they have representation of women across the organisation. They actively sought to recruit female Trainers in recognition that there was a gender imbalance after many Trainers came from Mixed Ability rugby, which was male dominated.

At IMART 2022, the first Mixed Ability women's rugby tournament will be held with four teams with players representing countries from across Europe and South America.



“I never thought I would get back playing sport, but Mixed Ability has given me that chance again.”

**- Ciara Ahern
Ballincollig Trailblazers**



Spotlight

Katrina's story



Watch Katrina's full story here:



Katrina joined IMAS in late February 2020 when she approached her GP with an interest in doing something active. She had previously been turned away from joining another sports club due to her disability. Her GP referred her to a Physical Activity and Health promotion workshop, where she met IMAS. Katrina immediately started attending the weekly IMAS Trainers' meeting and participating in weekly Mixed Ability rugby sessions. Katrina was the first female IMAS Trainer and encouraged her sister Bronte to join as well.

“Before I joined IMAS I didn't have much confidence, but now I'm with IMAS I've got more confidence. Now when people ask me, I can just do things and I couldn't do that before.”

- Katrina, IMAS Trainer

“If I was a dead car battery, I would say IMAS have been our jump leads.”

John Higginson,
Mixed Ability tennis participant

The Road to Activity - John's Story

Discover how John wrote to IMAS earlier in 2018 asking what Mixed Ability activities were available for him and his wife after a period of inactivity. And how their lives have been changed for good! His amazing story shows that we can achieve whatever we dream of.

Watch John's full story here:



Peace, justice and strong institutions



A recent UN report highlights that ending the marginalisation of disabled people is a justice issue and this clearly underpins IMAS' work.

The Mixed Ability model amplifies the voices of disabled people, and facilitates their active participation in society through sport, education and advocacy.

A particularly strong example of promoting justice is IMAS' response to the Covid pandemic, ensuring their community were able to remain connected throughout. IMAS' response was fundamentally underpinned by the organisation's commitment to an asset-based approach, an excellent knowledge

and understanding of the community they work with and their extensive networks across a range of different sectors including healthcare, sports, disability and education.

“[IMAS' Covid response] gave us the ability to keep relationships going and to reach those that may have become more isolated.”

**- Roy Smith, IMAS
Non-executive Director**

Conclusion

The case studies above have illustrated direct impacts and positive change as a result of IMAS' work and the SDGs represent a useful and well-recognised framing for how this contributes to a more sustainable future. Through sport, education and advocacy, the Mixed Ability model contributes directly to:



In doing so, the Mixed Ability model has indirect impacts for:



IMAS' work is further underpinned by:



References

- 1 [Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On - The Health Foundation](#)

About IMAS

IMAS believes that everyone should be able to benefit from the transformational power of sport to create healthy and happy communities. 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-judgmental. 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.



Sign our manifesto

IMAS' values are upheld in its Manifesto.

To find out more about Mixed Ability sports, and sign the Manifesto, visit the website:

 mixedabilitiesports.org

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