



Opening up the water to everyone

No matter your age, situation, or physical ability, All Aboard gives everyone the chance to experience water sports, all in the relative safety of Bristol's floating harbour

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nce confining its activities to sailing, this charitable

trust has charted a more varied course of late, adding power and rowing boats, canoes and kayaks to its equipment store, not to mention barrels, ropes and poles for making rafts.

This means there's a long list of options for all to try, along with qualifications relevant to each activity.

As the name suggests, the All Aboard watersports centre, at Baltic Wharf, is for everyone, not just fit young things with disposable income. There are sessions for children and adults of all ages, both able-bodied and mentally or physically disabled. Those who can afford to pay the going rate do, which helps to cover subsidised sessions for people on benefits and from deprived areas of the city.

At the helm is watersports activity and resources manager Hannah Trent, who's been in post since last April, but has been involved as a freelance instructor for several years.

She explains that All Aboard came into existence two years ago as a result of an amalgamation of three former organisations that were all based in the present building: West of England Sailing School Association, Bristol Community Sailing School and Bristol Sailability.

Of the now-thriving organisation, Hannah says: "We used to only do sailing and power boat trips, and we did a lot with disabled people, and we still do, but since we've become All Aboard we have started offering canoeing, kayaking, rowing and raft-building as well."

Rafting is popular as a corporate team-building task, for birthday parties and children's holiday clubs – and is handy as an added extra

when there's no wind and sailing is impossible.

Hannah continues: "We don't exclude anyone, but there are some activities targeted at specific groups, for example the Sailability sessions on a Saturday are aimed at people with disabilities, physical or mental.

"We have power boats with a flat surface and ramps for wheelchairs. People can be on a boat and take a trip around the harbour, with a bit of information and history, and there's a radio so we can play music as well.

"We also have sailing boats with a removable keel, so they can't capsize, so nobody can fall out and they've been set out so you don't have to move around the boat. You sit in one position and there is a joystick connected via ropes to the steering at the back. Anyone who has limited mobility can do that. We also have electric steering, with a button to go left or right, and a hoist to get people in and out.

"We also have katacanoes, which are like two canoes joined together, so they are very stable and again that means you can have mixed groups in there of up to six, so it gives disabled people the chance to be part of a group. For rowing there are two rowing boats with stabilisers so, again, they won't capsize.

"It's very much about the individual. We work out what each person needs and what equipment we have in order to get them on the water. We might need to get a seat that gives good support, or to have someone in a boat with them.

"In addition, we have two different projects for older people. We have some money from Bristol City Council to pay for sessions on our accessible power boats for individuals the council is working with, particularly people with dementia or other health issues. They can



All Aboard's katacanoes are very stable which gives disabled people the chance to be part of a group on the water

