



University of
Nottingham Sport

**EM
POWER**



Empower Impact Report

July 2025

University of Nottingham

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→ Background and Barriers

- **Of 20,000 self-declared women, only 27% were engaged in a programme within UoN Sport (including gym use) when Empower was bid for in January 2024**
- **Girls Night In had run since 2017 and was a popular offer, averaging 200-300 students per event**
- **Girls Night In feedback told us that girls were more likely to be active and engage with UoN Sport after attending Girls Night In**
- **National This Girl Can research identifies fear as a major barrier to engaging women and girls in sport and exercise, which manifests in multiple ways including lack of confidence in their own abilities, fear of judgement and time prioritisation.**
- **The enjoyment gap identifies that women are less likely to find sport enjoyable and satisfying than men, and this gap grows for women with protected characteristics, including black, disabled, and women with caring responsibilities.**
- **Negative experiences in PE lessons and extracurricular sport at school are also factors to consider in HE, with many women only experiencing sport and exercise in the context of mandatory PE lessons and bringing this perspective to University with them.**

→ Small steps to breakdown barriers

How Empower builds bridges to sport and exercise and reduces the impact of barriers

Lack of
Confidence in
own abilities



- Encouraged beginners to attend and advertised sessions as beginner-friendly, e.g 'Beginner friendly 2000s themed HIIT Class'
- Every sport session taught the basics of the sport, including fun-focused mini-games and introduction to basics, such as throwing and catching

Lack of
Enjoyment



- Adding a theme to popular exercise classes to focus on the music and vibe, rather than the physical exertion. Themes included Taylor Swift, 80s Disco and 2000s throwbacks
- Offering sports with a twist, e.g glow in the dark dodgeball to add a party feel to activity, as well as a clear throughput offer

Past negative
experiences



- Encouraging social interaction within the sessions so attendees could meet new people and build social connections (known to improve experience of sport and activity)
- Delivering activity student to student, where possible, to move away from PE lesson style activity. Attendees were encouraged to wear whatever they were comfortable to exercise in


→ Project Overview

- Empower is a collaborative campaign of targeted sessions and events to focus on tackling common barriers faced by women, trans and non-binary identifying students to participate in physical activity, exercise, and sport.
- Delivered via Empower weeks in October and March with Girls Night In kicking off the week on Sunday evenings, into a week of free Empower sessions in a range of sports and fitness activities.
- Alongside this, our Empower Leadership programme supports women, trans and non-binary identifying students at UoN to train as Empower leaders, who then deliver a unique sports and physical activity leadership programme in these schools. Our Empower leaders aim to inspire 'hard to reach girls' in these schools to inspire themselves and others in their schools to be more active.

➔ Objectives 24-25

- To increase engagement in physical activity and sport from women, trans, and non-binary identifying students, across UoN Sport and particularly participation offers.
- To help build confidence, wellbeing, and sense of belonging in women, trans, and non-binary identifying students to engage in sport and physical activity opportunities and progress into existing sport and physical activity offers.
- To educate, train and empower women, trans, and non-binary identifying students to develop their skills to lead, mentor and engage in volunteering opportunities working with secondary school pupils to inspire them and others in their schools to be more active.
- To raise awareness of barriers to women, trans, and non-binary identifying students that exist in sport and physical activity and begin to embed solutions for these within wider UoN Sport.





→ **Empower contributed to a 32% increase in female engagement in UoN Sport in 2 years**

Dec 2023

Bid for BUCS Active Wellbeing Fund for £5000 following insight that women were underrepresented in UoN Sport engagement



Feb 2024

Successfully received £4000 from BUCS AW Fund and started planning for our March's delivery (quickly!) We didn't have much time for insight pre-delivery so planned to gather this throughout the project

March 2024

Refreshed the marketing campaign from the pre-covid Empower programme and a new brand identity.

Delivered our first Empower Week across the 2 biggest campuses alongside Girls Night In



May 2024

Piloted an Empower week on our smallest campus but struggled with engagement and decided not to replicate it

Oct 2024

Empower Week no.2 delivered with better engagement and variation of sessions. Repeated popular sessions from March and expanded the sports offers to offer more progression into Just Play/ societies



Feb 2025

Empower sponsored the Headliner, our spectator headline volleyball fixture and was featured on Volleyball England's livestream and comms



March 2025

Empower Week no.3 delivered with the best engagement and retention! Introduced loyalty cards and rewarded 3 sessions with a t-shirt!



April 2025 - Present

Delivered an Empower presentation in collaboration with Loughborough University at BUCS Active Wellbeing Network Day.

Conducted 2 informal insight focus groups to further develop our insight with sports ambassadors.

→ Empower Week March 2025

Sunday 2nd – Sunday 9th March

Sunday 2nd

Girls Night In @
David Ross
Sports Village

Tuesday 4th
Thai Boxing

Monday 3rd

Futsal
Boxing
Learn to Lift

Wednesday 5th

Gymnastics
Pole Dance
Disco themed spin
class

Thursday 6th

Dance Workshop
Disney Channel
themed spin class
Flag Football

Friday 7th

2000s themed HIIT class
UV Dodgeball
Learn to Lift
Softball
Trampoline

Sunday 9th
Thai Boxing

➔ **Headline Impact**

46 Empower sessions delivered

750 Empower Tickets Sold

330 Empower Attendances

237 Unique Empower Attendees

Average 59% non UoN Sport members

5 Girls Night In events delivered

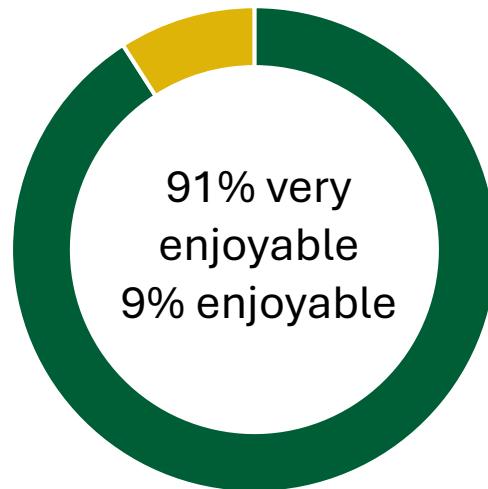
342 Girls Night In Attendances

Average 54% non UoN Sport members



→ Feedback from our March 2025 cohort

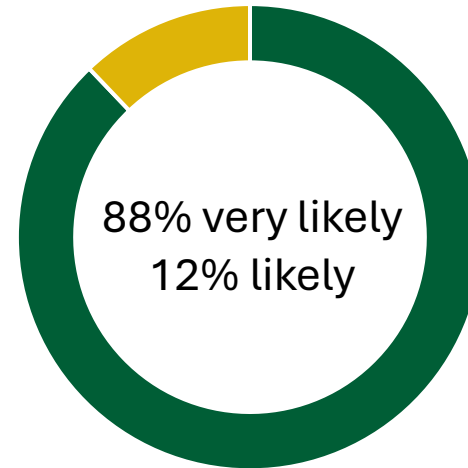
Enjoyment



■ Very Enjoyable ■ Enjoyable

*How much did you enjoy your Empower session?

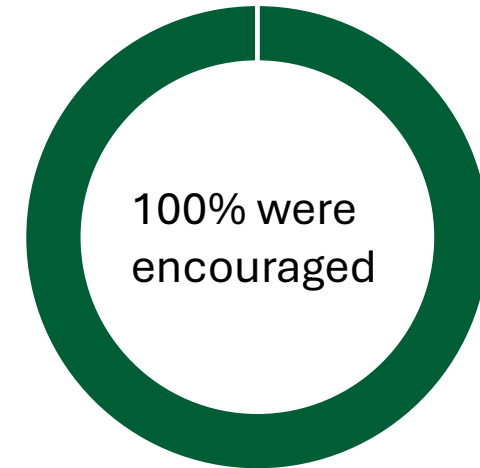
Recommend to a friend



■ Very likely ■ Likely

*How likely are you to recommend Empower to a friend?

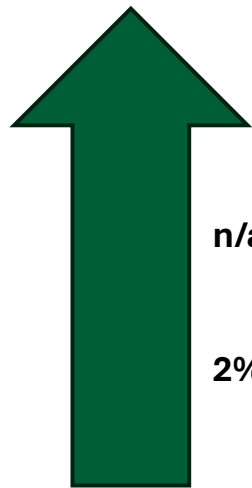
Encouraged to be more active



■ Yes

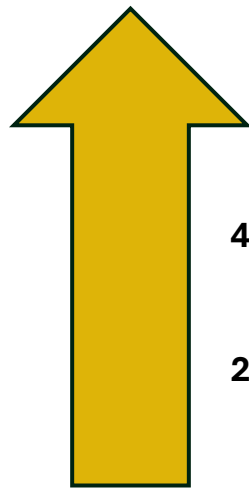
*Has attending this Empower session encouraged you to be more physically active?

→ Mental Wellbeing Impact – Oct 24 and March 25



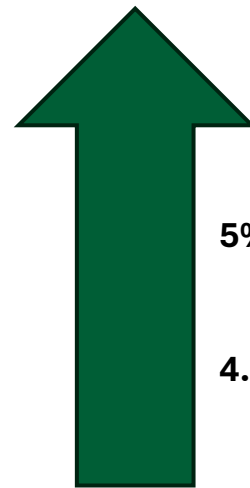
n/a October 24

2% in March 25



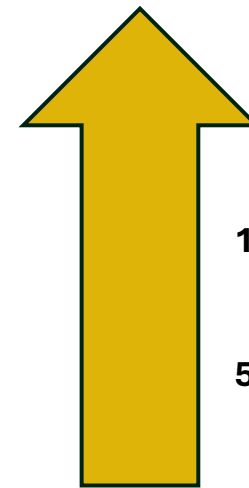
4% in October 24

2.1% in March 25



5% in October 24

4.3% in March 25



16% in October 24

5.7% in March 25

Wellbeing Score

Using Short Edinburgh-
Warwick Mental Wellbeing
Scale

*minimum score increased
from 7 to 14

Motivation to be
physically active score
Using Active Lives Questions

Sense of Belonging Score
Using TASO Access and Success
Questions

Confidence to be
physically active score
Using Active Lives Questions

→ Leadership Programme Impact

Our Leadership programme engaged with:

- 6 Nottinghamshire Secondary Schools
- 42 Y9 and Y10 pupils within these schools
- 10 UoN students (Empower volunteers) who mentor and support the programme
- 1 launch and 2 celebration events on campus



Kitty Beattie

Power Leader



→ Challenges and solutions

Facility Space to deliver sessions

We fit within existing activities and utilized Just Play/ free space

Finding women session leaders

We asked clubs to support us and highlighted that men could deliver sports if they were onboard with Empower's aims and objectives and upskilled them in this area

Finding women gym instructors in a male dominated team

We built a relationship with 2 casual women instructors so they could share the shifts and ensure consistency in their approaches

No-shows taking up the free spaces on the sessions

We increased the booking capacities, sent more reminder emails and stressed the importance of not taking up a space if you could no longer attend

Promoting Empower using our channels

We collaborated with other marketing channels, i.e SU/ central marketing, to share the load and increase our capacity, as well as reach the 'hard to reach' population

→ Sustainability

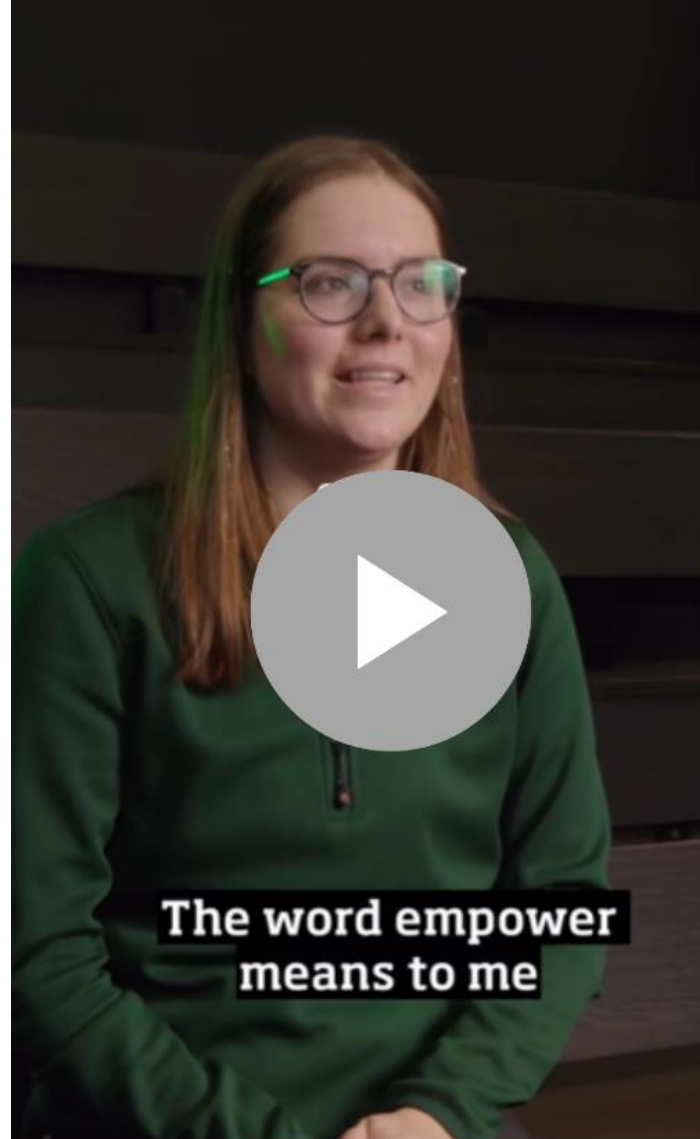
- Embedding Empower into the participation remit to ensure continuity and sufficient resource to move into the next academic year
- Securing sponsorship to further financially support the programme from UoN Sport partners
- Further exploring barriers and challenges to women, trans, and non-binary involvement in sport and physical activity, to ensure Empower continues to evolve and be fit for purpose
- Explore an Empower student led executive committee to increase capacity and ensure students are at the heart of the programme
- Exploring a women, trans and non-binary fitness provision





It was so much fun, really inspired me to go back to each and every one of those (Empower) sessions at some point during the year.... The whole atmosphere was inspiring and so much fun – *Empower attendee*

It was exactly what I needed. I was feeling anxious and quite down. Socialising with other girls, having the music playing, being pampered and doing activities that took my brain away from it all was very therapeutic. It's a great activity for maintaining mental health after a few weeks settling in at university – *Girls Night In attendee*





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**EM
POWER
ER**

Thank you for taking the time to read this report and for your interest in empowering women and girls to be physically active within HE.

We'd like to thank BUCS for their support of Empower throughout the last 18 months and look forward to any future partnerships with them.

Get in touch

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