



Sport

NTU SPORT GLOBAL GAME CHANGERS

Play for Fun
ntu.ac.uk/playforfun

**Transforming International Student
Wellbeing Through Sport**

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Background

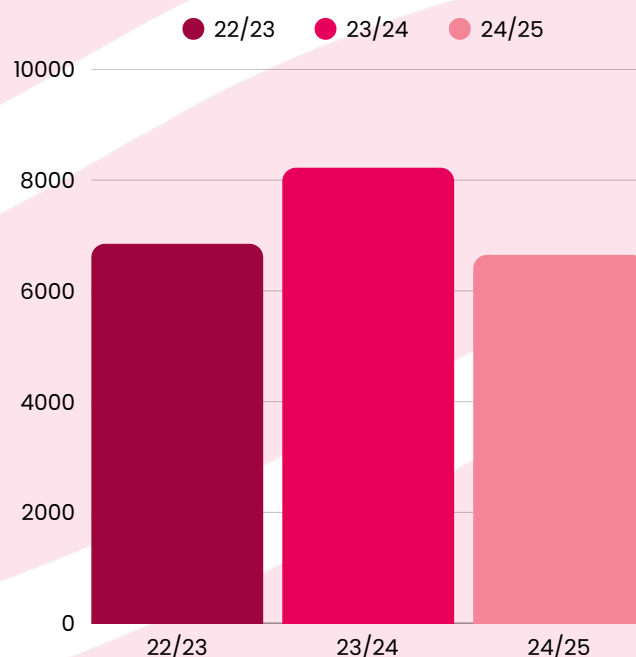
At Nottingham Trent University (NTU), we believe that sport is for everyone and are committed to using physical activity to drive positive change. Guided by our core principle to Change Lives, we place students at the heart of everything we do. One of our primary goals is to create an inclusive and diverse sport and physical activity programme that encourages 70% of NTU students to lead active lifestyles.

To achieve this, we focus on building a culture of equality, diversity, and representation—ensuring that all students, regardless of background, feel valued and included.

In the 2022/23 academic year, NTU welcomed over 7,000 new and returning international students—an increase of nearly 50% from 2018/19. These students made up 18% of the total student population, and projections suggested that international students would account for around 30% of new enrolments in 2023/24.

During the same year, NTU Sport engaged with 12,593 unique students, 2,016 of whom were international students. This data, alongside the increasing international student population, highlighted a clear need to broaden and adapt our sport offer to better serve this diverse community.

Number of international students at NTU



A review into the international student experience at NTU revealed key areas for improvement, particularly regarding integration and a sense of belonging. Many international students expressed concerns pre-arrival about making friends and socialising, and reported feeling less integrated into the wider NTU community. They expressed a desire for more opportunities to connect with UK students and form diverse social circles.

In response, NTU Sport recognises its vital role in creating international student integration and wellbeing. Through inclusive and engaging sport and physical activity opportunities, our aim is to help international students build connections, develop friendships, and enhance their university experience.



Project Overview

NTU Sport's project aim was to gain insight into the perceptions of sport and physical activity of international students and develop initiatives to increase engagement.

We did this by:



Together with the Global Student Experience team, we successfully recruited 3 Global Sport Champions that worked with us over the 18 month period. Doing this allowed us to gain insight into the perceptions of sport and physical activity of international students, and raise the profile of NTU Sport



In collaboration with the Global Student Experience team, we planned and delivered several events across the 18-month period. We supported 2 NTU Global Weeks, September Welcome, January Welcome and offered an extensive out of term Play for Fun programme.





Sport

Project Timeline

DECEMBER 2023

NTU Sport applied for £5000 from the BUCS Active Wellbeing Fund, with plans to recruit Global Sport Champions (GSC's) in February 2024 and launch the Global Game Changers programme.

FEBRUARY 2024

NTU Sport was awarded £3500 but due to the delay in being awarded the funding we were unable to start the programme and recruitment until March 2024

FEBRUARY 2024

As we didn't have time to recruit GSC's before this event, NTU Sport staff facilitated the stands at 3 Global Week fairs across 2 campuses. We promoted our Play for Fun, NTU Moves and Fitness Membership offers to international students. We created a Global Week Challenge on NTU Moves specifically for this week and saw 688 unique students engage with this challenge of which, 255 were new unique NTU Moves users which was a huge success for us.



MARCH 2024

We successfully recruited 3 GSC's who were international students from different undergraduate courses. Unfortunately, we lost 2 GSC's over the summer and recruitment to replace them was difficult, so we went into Welcome 2024 with just 1 GSC. We recruited a further 2 GSC's in November 2024, but unfortunately we lost another GSC which meant we finished the project with just 2 GSC's.



MAY 2024

The first task for the GSC's was to gather insight from international students to find out their engagement levels and barriers to engagement. This was carried out via a survey and results presented to NTU Sport Senior Management Team, including NTU Chief Operating Officer and Registrar.

JUNE 2024

Following the survey, the GSC's used the results to compile an Action Plan for the project. The Action Plan included improving marketing and communication, schedule out-of-term Play for Fun sessions, improving engagement with cultural societies and hosting a Global Sports Evening.



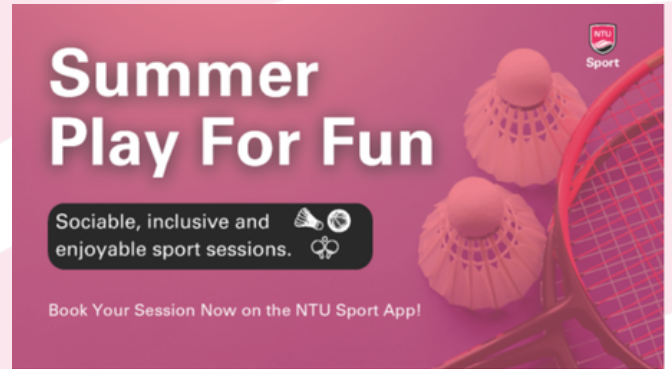


JULY-AUGUST 2024

We delivered a Summer Play for Fun programme where we had 3 different sports on the timetable. We delivered 45 sessions across Summer 2024 and had 74 unique international students engage.

AUGUST 2024

The GSC's worked closely with NTU Sport Marketing officer and NTU Global Lounge to design marketing content targeted towards international students – this involved creating a digital document highlighting all NTU Sport opportunities in one place, creating digital screen slides, social media content and how-to-videos to help break down some of the barriers highlighted within the survey.



DECEMBER 2024

We delivered a Winter Play for Fun programme over the Winter Break 2024 where we had 2 different sports on the timetable led by student volunteers. We delivered 9 sessions over the 2 week period and had 63 unique international students engage.



JANUARY 2025

Majority of our international students arrive at NTU in January and therefore, Winter Welcome is the perfect opportunity for us to engage with them. We supported 2 Winter Welcome Fairs across our City and Clifton campuses, where we mainly focused on promoting our social sport programmes, NTU Moves, volunteering and fitness memberships.

FEBRUARY 2025

We had the biggest presence at this years Global Week than we've ever had before. We covered 5 fairs across all 3 campuses and engaged with 343 students across the week. We focused on promoting our social sport programmes, NTU Moves, volunteering and fitness memberships; including giveaways for our Varsity Series as well as Spin the Wheel to win NTU Sport merchandise. We had 779 unique students engage in the NTU Moves Global Week challenge, with 157 new unique users. We also had 423 attendances at Play for Fun sessions during this week.



JANUARY 2025

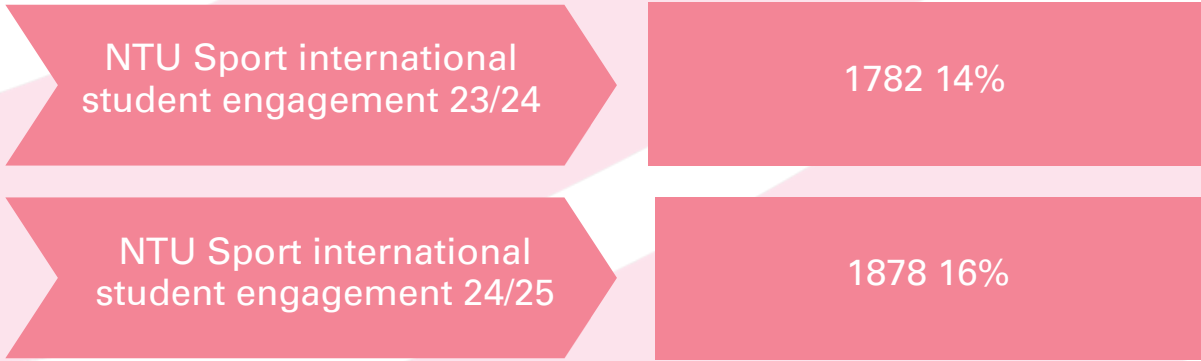
GSC's planned a Global Sport Evening specifically for international students, hosted within NTU Global Lounge; a dedicated space for international students. They put on a range of activities, such as bracelet making, tote bag decoration, spin the wheel and henna, as well as some food for all attendees. They used the event to promote NTU Sport opportunities





Impact

Data demonstrates the Global Game Changers programme has increased international student engagement across NTU Sport. Since 1st May 2024, we have seen a 4% increase in international student engagement in our Play for Fun programme and a 2% increase in international student gym users. These figures reflect the programme's effectiveness in engaging international students, promoting their physical and mental wellbeing. The programme's success is underpinned by a strong partnership with NTU Global. This collaboration enabled seamless integration of sport into wider international student support, with joint planning, delivery, and promotion.



Play for Fun international student engagement has increased from 21% to 25%

Regular workouts at the NTU gym and Play for Fun sessions have helped me manage stress, boost productivity, and stay focused. They've also been a great way to reset and connect with new people, positively impacting my university experience.

I've really enjoyed NTU Play for Fun sessions like volleyball, dodgeball, and kickboxing. They're a great way to meet new people, relax from university work, and feel included, even if you're not the best at the sport. I'd 100% recommend it to anyone!



Challenges

Challenges are an inevitable part of any dynamic and collaborative initiative, especially one as ambitious and diverse as the Global Game Changers project. Working with different cultures, varying academic expectations, and differing levels of familiarity with university extra-curricular programmes naturally introduces complexities. However, these challenges have served as valuable learning opportunities. They pushed us to adapt, innovate, and refine our approach—whether by improving communication strategies, enhancing recruitment processes, or developing more inclusive engagement methods. Each obstacle helped us build a more resilient and responsive programme, ultimately strengthening our ability to support students and create a truly global community. Below are some key challenges that we faced:



Recruitment of Global Sport Champions



Timing of international students arrival



Global Sport Champions availability



Language barrier



Competing with events within Global Lounge



Student motivation



Social media and marketing



Sport

The challenges we encountered encouraged us to adopt a more adaptable and creative approach, leading to improvements in key areas of our work. Since many international students arrive in January, when most sports clubs are already at full capacity, we tailored our marketing focus towards promoting our social programmes. This enabled more engaging and positive conversations with students, encouraging participation in flexible, low-commitment activities. Additionally, we collaborated closely with NTU Global to identify optimal times for GSC's to connect with students, avoiding clashes with other events. Looking ahead, we could further enhance our engagement by providing programme materials in multiple languages and introducing lesser-known sports from different countries, such as Kabaddi or Kho-Kho, to better engage international students.

Sustainability

As part of our commitment to the long-term sustainability of the Global Game Changers Project, the roles of Sport Global Champions are now being incorporated into the NTU Sport core budget. We have found these roles to be really beneficial in creating a link between NTU Sport and the international community.

To ensure continued impact and development, we will focus on the following key areas:



We will continue to collaborate with NTU Global Lounge and the Global Student Experience team and look to extend this further with other departments within the University



Delivery of out of term Play for Fun sessions for international students will continue to support year-round wellbeing and engagement.



We will continue to implement targeted marketing strategies and enhance the accessibility of information to ensure all international students are aware of and can participate in sport opportunities.



Regular reporting will ensure transparency, track progress, and support informed decision-making.



We will monitor trends and identify new opportunities through data collection and feedback to continuously adapt and evolve the programme.

These efforts reflect our ongoing commitment to embedding inclusive sport engagement opportunities for international students throughout the university experience. The project, along with the impactful contributions of the Global Sport Champions, played a key role in our achievement of the Physical Activity Excellence Award. We are proud to share that, in collaboration with colleagues from the Global Student Experience Team, we will be presenting this initiative at the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) conference on 25th June. We look forward to building on this momentum, continuing to make a meaningful impact, and celebrating further successes in the years to come.