



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Academy of Sport

AOS

AN INDEPENDENT SPORTS THINK TANK



SPORT OBSERVATIONS

Briefing Paper | January 2025

BRENTFORD FOOTBALL CLUB COMMUNITY SPORTS TRUST, COMMUNITY AND EMPOWERMENT

Ellen Jackson and Grant Jarvie¹

INTRODUCTION

1. As we continue to highlight the ongoing challenges for equity in girls and women's football, it is pleasing to share the efforts of another organisation seeking to use football to positively impact the lives of girls and women.
2. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust, Community and Empowerment is the 10th data driven report produced by the University of Edinburgh's Academy of Sport. The reports aim to: (i) support charities, clubs and national associations to better understand their communities and their impact, (ii) use data driven innovation as well as traditional methods of data collection to inform the football industry, and (iii) support the closing of data gaps where they exist.
3. The purpose of this briefing is to provide additional insight into the work of one grassroots community football organisation, Brentford FC Community Sports Trust. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust aim to remove barriers to football and build pathways that empower individuals to fulfil their potential on and off the pitch.
4. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust, Community and Empowerment is one of two reports that considers how community focused organisations in London use football to empower girls and women.[2]

BACKGROUND

5. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust was established in 1987, making Brentford FC one of the first football clubs to launch a community football project. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust was initially called Brentford Football in the Community and developed a key partnership between the two local councils – Ealing and Hounslow. [3]
6. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust has established itself as a pioneering organisation and “uses the power of sport to educate, motivate and inspire people from all backgrounds”. Working in partnership with Brentford FC, the Trust delivers a range of programmes in education, employability, sports participation, health and community engagement.[4]

[1] **Ellen Jackson** is a graduate of the Universities of Exeter and Edinburgh and is currently working with City Football Group based in Manchester. **Grant Jarvie** is Chair of Sport at the University of Edinburgh and is involved with various football club boards as Director and Non-Executive Director.

[2] The other report specifically focuses on the work of one football charity that supports Women and Girls in football in London and Mexico.

[3] Brentford FC Community Sports Trust (2024) - [irls United Impact \(2024\) https://www.girlsunitedfa.org/impact](#) Last Accessed 24 October 2024. Last accessed 15th November 2024.

[4] Brentford FC Community Sports Trust (2024) - <https://www.brentfordfcst.com/en/about-us> Last accessed 15th November 2024.

7. The mission of the trust is to create an exciting, progressive and socially inclusive multi-sports participation, coach education and facility development programmes, enabling participants, coaches and volunteers to realise their potential. The core values are to: i) inspire, ii) innovate, and iii) include. [5]

8. In the 2022/23 season, Brentford FC Community Sports Trust delivered 13, 476 sessions to roughly 12,235 unique participants.[6] This was across their Community Stadium Hub and Gunnersbury Park Sports Hub. Additionally, it was estimated that Brentford FC and Community Sports Trust made an economic and social contribution of £143,076,836 to west London during a three-year reporting period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2023.

9. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust runs programmes in west London in areas such as Hillingdon, Ealing, Hounslow and Richmond-Upon-Thames. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust has always aimed to bring football to the heart of the community, largely in the most deprived areas of west London. In 2022-23 Brentford FC Community Sports Trust delivered 526, 105 hours of sessions. 35% of participants were from the 30% most deprived wards in the country.

10. In a world where women and girls face inequality on and off the pitch, Brentford FC Community Sports Trust strives to enable a sustainable future for women's football with social impact at its core. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust has stated in its current plan that it aims to increase and diversify participation. Including increasing opportunities for women and girls and thus, increase their female-male ratio. [7]

11. Numerous challenges have been identified for girls and women in sport, including:

- Lack of confidence and fear of being judged
- Not feeling safe outside
- Raising levels of inactivity
- Far distances to travel, a lack of available sessions and unwelcoming environments
- Coaches that aren't representative or considerate
- More young people living in poverty
- Unprecedented levels of mental health issues
- Lack of support for the value of sport at home

12. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust was awarded a three-year Girls' Emerging Talent Centre [ETC] licence in July 2022. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust is one of 60 Trust's in the UK to hold a licence and one of only seven in London. The national network of girls' ETCs is aimed at girls aged 8 to 16 and the centres operate for at least 30 weeks per season.

13. ETC's are underpinned by five key areas: (i) better accessibility, (ii) more inclusivity, (iii) reducing the impact of early selection, (iv) more focused investment, and (v) providing more appropriate challenges. This is all with the aim of growing talent within women's football. [8]

[5] Brentford FC Community Sports Trust Strategy and Objectives Outline 2021-2024 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/581dc40bebbd1a19863bbb6c/t/65faf47f0aa1095b449a9239/1728295805437/impactreport2223.pdf> Last Accessed 25 October 2024. Last accessed 15th November 2024.

[6] Brentford FC Community Sports Trust Impact Report (2023) - [4] Girls United Impact Report (2023)- <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/581dc40bebbd1a19863bbb6c/t/65faf47f0aa1095b449a9239/1728295805437/impactreport2223.pdf> Last Accessed 25 October 2024. Last accessed 15th November 2024.

[7] Brentford FC Community Sports Trust Strategy and Objectives Outline 2021-2024 [4] Girls United Impact Report (2023)- <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/581dc40bebbd1a19863bbb6c/t/65faf47f0aa1095b449a9239/1728295805437/impactreport2223.pdf> Last Accessed 25 October 2024. Last accessed 15th November 2024.

[8] Brentford FC Community Sports Trust Emerging Talent Centre <https://www.brentfordfcst.com/en/emerging-talent-centre-etc> Last accessed 15th November 2024.

APPROACH

14. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust, Community and Empowerment involved four stages of data collection over 2024. These were as follows: (i) analysis of desk reports and documents relevant to Brentford FC Community Sports Trust, (ii) the piloting or research data collection instruments and obtaining ethical approval, (iii) the implementation of a focused survey with a sample of participants, and (iv) a series of follow up interviews with programme staff.

15. The desk research involved visiting the official webpages of 18 Community Football Organisations (CFO) in London and reviewing annual reports, programme descriptions, and any published research related to the organisations' activities.

16. The purpose of the desk research was to: (i) understand what existing research has found out about the role of community football organisations and independent football charities, and (ii) understand the specific efforts of interventions targeting adolescent girls in London.

17. This was viewed as a critical step towards understanding the landscape of interventions aimed at empowering adolescent girls in London. The desk research was used to analyse the organisation type, programme format, intervention style and target demographic of each CFO.

18. The survey allowed participants to give their perspectives on their experiences of programmes and the impact that engagement with Brentford FC Community Sports Trust has had on them. The survey focused on key areas:

- Demographic information
- Participation duration
- Physical activity levels
- Reasons for engagement
- Barriers to engagement
- Development of life skills
- Programme feedback and improvements

19. The semi-structured interviews with a small number of London staff members (4) aimed to generate an understanding of the challenges and opportunities of Brentford FC Community Sports Trust for promoting empowerment in adolescent girls. The interviews focused on the following areas:

- Background and role
- Aims of the programmes
- Football as a development tool
- Societal attitudes and cultural norms
- Promoting gender equality
- Engagement challenges
- Opportunities and strategies

IMPACT, COMMUNITY FOOTBALL ORGANISATIONS & INDEPENDENT CHARITIES

20. UNESCO's 2024 report, which analysed the social value and impact of sport, built upon previous similar reports. It concluded that investing in sport to achieve social objectives yields significant returns in areas such as health, education, peacebuilding and environmental sustainability.[9] The report noted that in some studies the return was more than three times the original investment.

[9] See **UNESCO (2024)** The Social impact of Sport: Unlocking the Potential of Sport to Drive Social Transformations. **ee United Nations (2016)** Football for Goals. <https://www.un.org/en/footballforthegoals>. Last Accessed 10/10/2024.

21. Football, with its significant scale and reach, has long been recognised as a useful social tool around which other outcomes can be enabled.[10] Since 2015, the United Nations has recognised sport as having a mandate to enable the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals[11], much of which is achieved through football.[12]

22. Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) specifically focuses on promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. Football, and sport in general, has been viewed as: (i) a cost-effective means of accelerating SDG 5, (ii) a force for challenging societal norms[13], (iii) providing a distinct platform to advocate for female empowerment[14], (iv) tackling stereotypes[15], and (v) providing access to education[16].

23. With specific regards to physical activity and adolescent girls, two key themes emerge from existing research: barriers to participation and strategies for retention. It is crucial to acknowledge that barriers are context specific but in general a number of key themes are repeatedly voiced by girls: (i) a lack of time, support and energy[17], (ii) gender norms[18], (iii) self-confidence and body image[19], and (iv) a lack of choice of sports[20].

24. Environmental factors also impact upon participation rates. In one recent systematic review, low socioeconomic status was observed to be associated with: (i) girls' poorer perceived outcomes of sport participation, (ii) lower perceived parental support, and (iii) greater barriers to participating in sports.[21]

25. Specific interventions such as the "Make Space" initiative was developed in response to recent findings by Women in Sport, showing that 49% of girls surveyed did not feel safe exercising in their local park while 79% indicated that access to appropriate changing facilities and toilets had a direct impact on their decision to participate in sport or not.[22]

26. Other examples include, Girls on the Field, which is a social initiative striving to break gender stereotypes through football, by providing leadership training and opportunities for volunteering.[23] Grassroots Soccer uses a football-based life skills curriculum to target adolescent girls at risk for HIV, violence, and reproductive health issues.[24] Findings from these interventions include improvements in gender equity, self-esteem, and participants' perceptions of power. Organisations such as these exemplify that football interventions can make meaningful contributions towards the empowerment of women and girls.

[10] See **Schulenkorf, N., Sherry, E. & Rowe, K. (2016)**. 'Sport for development: An integrated literature review', *Journal of sport management*, 30(1), pp.22-39.

[11] See **United Nations (2016)**. The Role of Sport in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/role-sport-achieving-sustainable-development-goals> Last accessed 10/10/2024.

[12] See **United Nations (2016)** Football for Goals. <https://www.un.org/en/footballforthegoals> . Last Accessed 10/10/2024.

[13] See **Hozhabri, K., Sobry, C. & Ramzaninejad, R. (2022)**. 'Sport for Gender Equality and Empowerment' In *Sport for Sustainable Development: Historical and Theoretical Approaches*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 55-66.

[14] See **LeCrom, C. (2022)**. 'An overview of Sustainable Development Goal 5'. In *The Routledge Handbook of Sport and Sustainable Development*. London: Routledge p.119.

[15] See **Kara, F., Ugurlu, A. & Karaca, G. (2023)**. 'Women's Empowerment within the Framework of the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case of "Girls on the Field"'. *Spor Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 8(3), pp.775-791.

[16] See **Giulianotti, R. (2012)**. 'The sport for development and peace sector: an analysis of its emergence, key institutions, and social possibilities'. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 18(2), pp.279-293.

[17] See **Zelenović, M., Manić, M., Stamenković, A. et al., (2021)**. 'Barriers to physical activity in adolescents: A systematic review', *Turkish Journal of Kinesiology*, 7(1), pp.22-30.

[18] See **Bevan, N., Drummond, C., Aberly, L. et al., (2020)**. 'More opportunities, same challenges: Adolescent girls in sports that are traditionally constructed as masculine', *Sport, Education and Society*, 26(6), pp.592-605

[19] **Rosselli, M., Ermini, E., Tosi, B. et al., (2020)**. 'Gender differences in barriers to physical activity among adolescents', *Nutrition, Metabolism and Cardiovascular Diseases*, 30(9), pp.1582-1589.

[20] Mitchell, F., Gray, S. & Inchley, J. (2015). 'This Choice Thing Really Works?? Changes in Experiences and Engagement of Adolescent Girls in Physical Education Classes, during a School-Based Physical Activity Programme', *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 20(6), pp. 593-611.

[21] See **Hopkins CS, Hopkins C, Kanny S, Watson A.** A Systematic Review of Factors Associated with Sport Participation among Adolescent Females. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2022 Mar 12;19(6):3353. Doi: 10.3390/ijerph19063353. PMID: 35329041; PMCID: PMC8950299.

[22] Women in Sport (2024)- <https://womeninsport.org/resource/make-space-for-us/> Last Accessed 24 October 2024.

[23] See **Kara, F., Ugurlu, A. & Karaca, G. (2023)**, 'Women's Empowerment within the Framework of the Sustainable Development Goals: The Case of "Girls on the Field"'. *Spor Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 8(3), pp.775-791.

[24] See **Merrill, K., Merrill, J. Hershov, R. et al., (2018)**. 'Linking at-risk South African girls to sexual violence and reproductive health services: A mixed-methods assessment of a soccer-based HIV prevention program and pilot SMS campaign', *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 70, pp. 12-24.

27. Why is this important beyond football? A significant body of research has indicated the importance of doing more to empower women and girls as gender equality is a “keystone of a prosperous, modern economy that provides sustainable inclusive growth”.[25] At the individual level, female empowerment leads to improved health, [26] reduced poverty,[27] and increased economic growth.[28]

28. Additionally, a ‘women’s disempowerment index’ has helped to produced evidence to conclude that countries with the greatest disempowerment have worse economic performance, worse governance, more conflict, and slower social progress.[29]

29. CFO(s) and independent football charities aim to generate a positive social impact, which has been described as “all consequences that have a direct or indirect impact on people’s lives... and alter the way in which people live, work and generally cope as members of society”.[30]

30. CFO(s) and independent football charities carry immense potential for advancing and enabling SDG5 by engaging girls and women through football. CFO(s) and independent football charities can provide powerful settings for reaching adolescent females and can provide a positive space for meeting like-minded people in a safe and accessible environment.[31] CFO(s) and independent football charities can further enable SDG5 by engaging adolescent females, who might be put off by the competitive focus of traditional sports clubs and school physical education.

31. Despite the plethora of studies on CFO’s, by comparison very little research has focused upon independent football charities and/or independent football charities that specifically focus upon altering opportunities and life chances for girls and women through football.

32. One small-scale, qualitative study of a programme delivered by an independent football charity located in several inner-city boroughs in London found that football operates as an effective “hook” to engage “at risk” youth populations.[32] A further study highlighted the effectiveness of “Street Games”, delivering sport on the doorsteps of young people in communities across the UK.[33] Despite the reported effectiveness of ICFC, most research in the UK has focused on crime prevention, increasing access to employment and fostering citizenship.

[25] See **OECD, (2018)**, ‘Gender equality: Gender, institutions and development database 2009’. OECD Social and Welfare Statistics database. Last accessed 10/10/24 from: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/data/oecd-social-and-welfare-statistics/gender-equality-gender-institutions-and-development-database-2009-gid-db_f3947736-en

[26] See **Reshi, I. & Sudha, T. (2022)**, ‘Women Empowerment: A Literature Review’. International Journal of Economic, Business, Accounting, Agriculture Management and Sharia Administration (IJEAS), 2(6), pp.1353-1359.

[27] See **Nadim, S. & Nurlukman, A. (2017)**, ‘The impact of women empowerment on poverty reduction in rural area of Bangladesh: Focusing on village development program’, Journal of Government and Civil Society, 1(2), pp.135-157.

[28] See **Duflo, E. (2012)**, ‘Women empowerment and economic development’. Journal of Economic literature, 50(4), pp.1051-1079.

[29] See **Hudson, V., Bowen, D. & Nielsen, L. (2020)**, ‘The First Political Order: How sex shapes governance and national security worldwide’, New York: Columbia University Press.

[30] See **Fiandrino, S., Scarpa, F. & Torelli, R. (2022)**, ‘Fostering social impact through corporate implementation of the SDGs: Transformative mechanisms towards interconnectedness and inclusiveness’, Journal of Business Ethics, 180(4), pp.959-973.

[31] See **Ubert, T., Forberger, S., Gansefort, D. et al., (2017)**, ‘Community Capacity Building for Physical Activity Promotion among Older Adults - A Literature Review’. International journal of environmental research and public health, 14(9), pp. 1058.

[32] See **Parker, A., Morgan, H., Farooq, S. et al., (2019)**, ‘Sporting intervention and social change: Football, marginalised youth and citizenship development’. Sport, Education and Society, 24(3), pp.298-310.

[33] See **McCormack, F. (2010)**, ‘Sport for good. Streetsport in Stoke-on-Trent. In Examining sports development. Oxon: Routledge, pp.211-224.

	Organisation Type		Targeted Female Age Group (years)			Program Format		Intervention Style Type				Football Type		Partnerships
	FCCT	ICFC	12-14	14-16	16-18	Single sex	Mixed gender	Football	Personal Skills	Mental Wellbeing	Education Training	Competitive	Recreational	Links with schools
CFO 1	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓
CFO 2		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
CFO 3	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
CFO 4	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
CFO 5		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CFO 6		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	
CFO 7	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
CFO 8		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
CFO 9		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
CFO 10		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
CFO 11		✓			✓	✓		✓			✓			✓
CFO 12		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓
CFO 13		✓	✓			✓		✓				✓		
CFO 14	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
CFO 15		✓			✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	
CFO 16		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
CFO 17	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
CFO 18	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 1: Types of intervention offered by each community football organisation (CFO) in London

33. Table 1 emerged from analysing official webpages of 18 CFO in London and reviewing annual reports, programme descriptions, and any published research related to the organisations’ activities.

34. Of the 18 CFO, 38.9% (n=7/18) were football club community trusts and affiliated with English Premier League teams. 61.1% (n=11/18) were independent football charities, thus evidencing a mix of organisational structures operate in London.

35. The demographic data of participants evidenced that 88.9% (n=16/18) of the CFO delivered programmes for 12–14-year-old adolescent girls, 83.3% (n=15/18) for 14–16-year-old adolescent girls, and 72.2% (n=13/18) for 16–18-year-old adolescent girls. This breakdown shows the age-specific focus of the programs and displays that most CFO cater for a range of ages of adolescent girls.

36. 88.9% (n=16/18) of the CFO delivered single gender programmes for adolescent girls and 22.2% (n=4/18) delivered mixed gender programmes.

37. When looking at the style and type of intervention, 77.8% (n=14/18) of CFO offered competitive football programmes. 88.9% (n=16/18) offered recreational football programmes for adolescent girls.

38. Alongside football, 55.6% (n=10/18) of CFO delivered interventions which involved personal skills development, 22.2% (n=4/18) incorporated mental wellbeing in interventions and 61.1% (11/18) combined education in programmes.

39. 72.2% (n=13/18) reported having partnerships with local London schools.

BRENTFORD FC COMMUNITY SPORTS TRUST SURVEY FINDINGS

40. The Brentford FC Community Sports Trust Survey was distributed through Brentford FC Community Sports Trust to adolescent girls enrolled in their ETC[34] programmes. Prior to any data being collected ethical clearance was secured through the University of Edinburgh ethics review process. Both parental and participant consent were collected.

41. All participants lived in London and were adolescent girls (aged between 10-19 years)[35], with a mean age of 13.2 years.

42. 54.5% of participants had been enrolled in the ETC programme for more than one year, 36.6% for 6-12 months, and 9.1% had been enrolled in a Brentford FC Community Sports Trust ETC for less than 6 months.

Physical Activity Levels

43. Physical activity levels were self-reported on a Likert scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being "not at all" and 10 being "a lot."

44. The average rating for physical activity levels before starting the ETC programme was 8.9; and after joining the programme the average rating of physical activity rose to 9.2.

45. This displays an average increase in physical activity levels of 3.4% due to engagement in Brentford FC Community Sports Trust programmes.

Reasons for Engagement

Why do you do the program at Brentford? (choose all answers that apply) 11 ⓘ

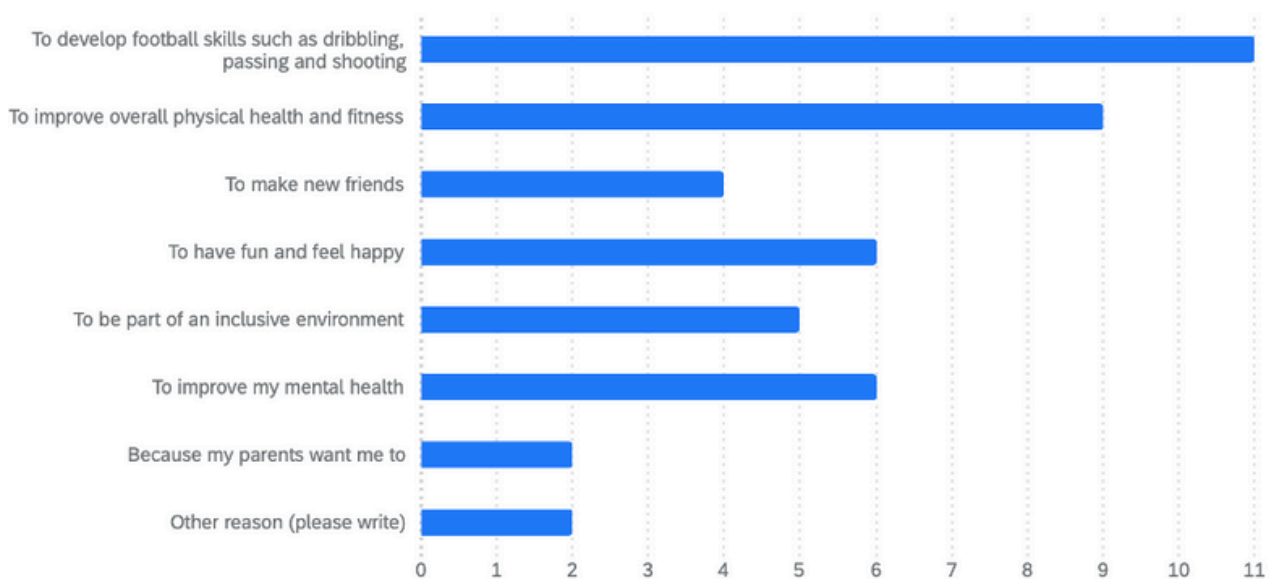


Figure 1: Reasons for Engagement

[34] The main purpose of an ETC is to identify and develop future potential layers by providing local, accessible, high quality training environments for Girls (England Football, 2024).

[35] UNICEF defines adolescence as the second decade of life, from the ages of 10- 19.

46. All participants cited engaging in Brentford FC Community Sports Trust programmes due to a desire to develop football skills (100%). The second most popular motivator for engagement was to improve overall health and fitness (81.8%).

47. This was followed by wanting to improve mental health (54.5%) and have fun and feel happy (54.5%). Other reasons included to wanting to be part of an inclusive environment (45.5%) and make new friends (36.6%).

48. Several participants cited engaging in Brentford FC Community Sports Trust programmes because their parents wanted them to (18.2%). One participant cited their desire to become a professional Brentford Football Player (9.1%).

Barriers to Physical Activity Participation

What challenges have you faced when doing physical activity? 11 ⓘ

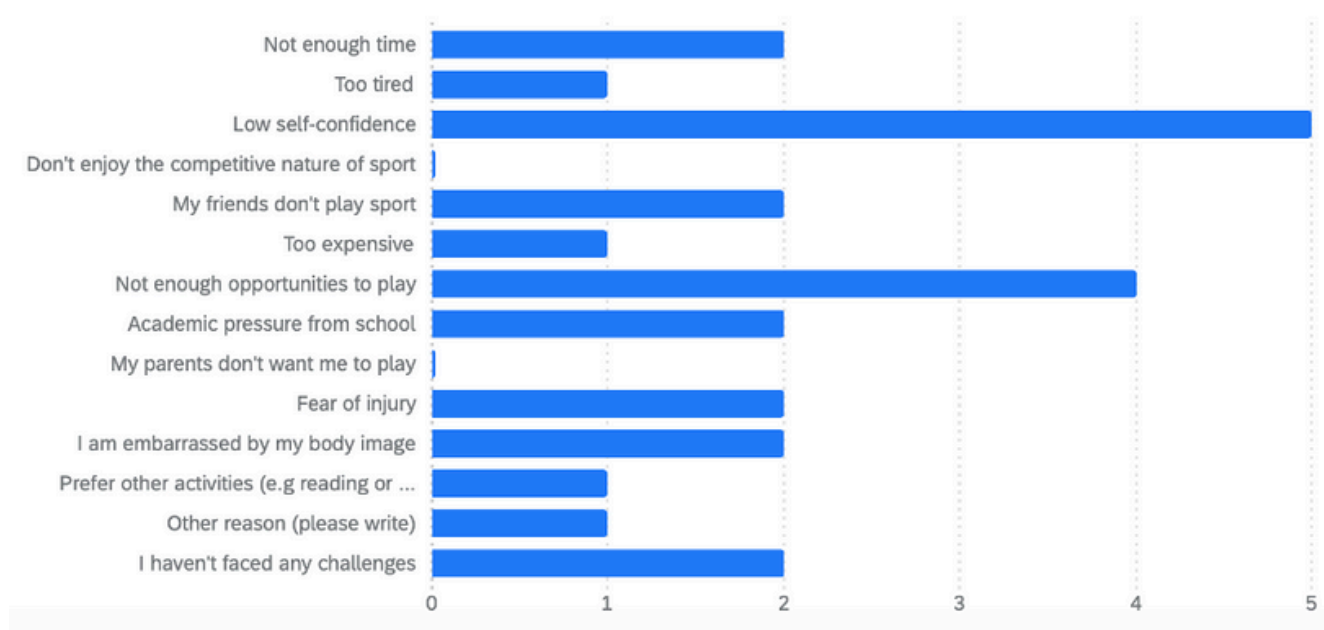


Figure 2: Barriers to Participation

49. The most common barrier to physical activity was low self-confidence (45.4%). This was followed by not enough opportunities to play (36.4%).

50. A smaller percentage cited lack of time, not having friends who play sport, academic pressure from school, being embarrassed about their body image and fear of injury (all 18.2%).

51. 9.1% highlighted financial barriers, being too tired and a preference for other activities. And one participant stated that there aren't enough places to play locally (9.1%).

52. No participants cited not enjoying the competitive nature of sport or lack of parental support as barriers (0%). Whereas 18.2% stated that they haven't faced any challenges when participating in physical activity.

Development of Life Skills

53. Participants rated their development of three key life skills—confidence, leadership, and teamwork—on a Likert scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being "not at all" and 10 being "a lot."

54. The highest reported skill improvement was teamwork with a mean score of 8.3, followed by confidence at 7.9, and leadership at 7.0.

Comparison with School Physical Education

55. Participants rated their enjoyment of both school Physical Education lessons and Brentford FC Community Sports Trust sessions on a Likert scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being "not at all" and 10 being "a lot."

56. The average rating of enjoyment of school Physical Education was 9.5, whereas for Brentford FC Community Sports Trust sessions was 8.7.

Engagement in other Sports Teams

57. Participants detailed the number of other sports clubs or a group they are a member of.

58. 0% of participants listed Brentford FC Community Sports Trust as the only sports club they participate in. 27.3% do one other sports club or group and 36.4% do two other sports clubs or groups. 36.4% confirmed that they do 4 or more other sports clubs or groups aside from Brentford FC Community Sports Trust.

Feedback and Improvements

59. Survey participants were invited to share their favourite thing about the Brentford FC Community Sports Trust programme and provided with a space to offer any feedback.

60. Answers which related to the football elements of the programme included: "The ability and chance to improve football skills.", "I get to play my way of football.", "Learning new techniques.", "Being part of an ETC".

61. Answers which related to the coaching team included: "The coaches are very encouraging but also firm to help you develop.", and "The encouraging coaches and inclusive environment they create."

62. Answers which related to social elements and friendships included: "The people you meet", and "Playing at a high standard with friends I know are at the same level as me".

63. Answers which related to new opportunities included: "It also provides lots of different opportunities like playing against other high-quality teams and going on trips like the Netherlands tour. It also helps me challenge myself by playing with other like-minded players who have ambitions similar to mine", "Opportunities to access elite level football", and "the opportunities you get".

64. Participants were invited to share their improvements for the Brentford FC Community Sports Trust programme and provided with a space to write their feedback.

65. Answers relating to more opportunities to train included: "Another session during the week.", "An additional training session offered.", and "A two-hour session instead of an hour and a half since we only have one training session a week."

66. Answers relating to more matches and fixtures included: "Take part in tournaments to bond the team together.", "More matches.", "Enter the Brentford Squad into a league to play weekly matches.", "more matches to local teams.", "a team in the JPL league and girls Academy.", and "Play more competitive fixtures ideally in a weekly league."

67. Answers relating to personal feedback included: "More individual feedback to improve.", and "more feedback to individual players". Answers relating to the session structure included: "Tougher and stricter coaching.", "More structured training sessions.", and "smaller numbers in training group". One participant also said, "better equipment".

BRENTFORD FC COMMUNITY SPORTS TRUST STAFF VOICES

68. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust staff voices explored a range of themes with Brentford FC Community Sports Trust staff members about the use of football as a development tool. 40% of participants interviewed were female and 60% male. The mean duration of employment at Brentford FC Community Sports Trust was 3.2 years.

69. The themes included:

- The global impact of football
- Football at a community level
- The challenges and opportunities for change through football
- Recommendations for community football organisations
- The challenges faced by Brentford FC Community Sports Trust to engage adolescent girls
- Organisational challenges

The Global Impact of Football

70. The scale and reach of football globally and locally continues to be documented. Reports on both the Future of Sport and the Future of Football regularly comment on the growth of women's football being a key driver. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust staff members recognise the scale, accessibility and potential of girls and women's football:

- "I think through football you will reach more people because of the popularity of the sport, and I think it is the most popular sport in world, isn't it?"
- "I think the sport itself is quite a global game and quite inclusive in terms of all sorts people from all walks of life"

71. Using football as a tool for development is not without its limitations and staff recognise that more work needs to be done:

- "I think there's still a lot of growth in terms of the respect side or the attitude."
- "Could there be more investment into using football as a tool for change? Of course... to truly create social impact, you've got to infiltrate so many lives."

72. The sport continues to require passionate people within the football space to continue to drive change.

Football at a Community Level

73. Football at the community level has been described as a powerful force, a traditionally male dominated space, and an area where perceptions need to continue to change. Staff members talked of the recent success of the England Women's football team as a pivotal turning point for women and girl's football:

- "We have had quite an influx, so especially after the women's EUROs, we had a massive influx of investment for girls"
- "So, England started doing a bit better and then all of a sudden women's football started getting a little bit more traction"

74. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust is but one example of pushing back against gender stereotypes and expanding the possibilities for female players in a setting that not only empowers participants but also contributes to changing perceptions and contributing to the reshaping of societal views on who belongs in the world of football.

75. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust football offers significant tangible and transferable benefits to participants, both physically and mentally. As one staff member commented on, football helps to build “resilience, teamwork, and perseverance,” which are skills applicable in everyday life.

76. In these and other ways, football becomes more than just a game; it becomes a tool for personal development and social change at the community level. A safe space that actively strives to enable, engage and empower girls.

The Challenges & Opportunities for Change through Football

Establishing Partnerships with Schools

77. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust staff highlighted the effectiveness of partnering with schools to engage adolescent girls by meeting them where they are. This approach is impactful because it removes barriers to participation, making the sport accessible to those who might not otherwise seek it out. In the words of the staff:

- "I think the school settings where it's massively at because that's where every kid is 9 to 3, everybody's in."
- "Go into school sessions and then invite these people outside of it."

Creating Positive Role Models

78. Coaches within the programme serve as important role models for the girls, who look up to them and see them as examples to emulate.

- "I think with the programmes, we've got a lot of role models in our coaching staff.... so, a lot of the girls do look up to us"

79. Coaches can also highlight professional footballers as potential role models to inspire the girls. However, it is important that there is an emphasis on professional women's players to provide relatable figures.

- "[other coaches] use a lot of examples from the men's game...I always use examples of WSL or championship as the standard."
- "I think it's important that I show them who my role models are, women's players as well."

Recommendations for Community Football Organisations

Creating an effective Organisational Environment

80. Good coaching is about more than just teaching skills—it's about creating an environment where players feel safe, confident, and empowered.

- "Another strategy is the environment that we've created... it's not like you're just here to play football, our coaches take time to understand their players and create an environment where they feel comfortable. "

81. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust staff underscored the significance of a supportive organisational environment.

- "We're a team. That's the big thing...And we're one and we make the girls feel so included within that as well. So, it is like one big family."

82. The inclusive team spirit is important as it extends to the sessions ensuring all the players feel involved. This environment is important to foster a sense of support, which is crucial for the achievement of wider non-sporting outcomes.

- "I think that's the biggest thing that we're really good at doing is creating an environment where people are welcomed and included."
- "We'll work as a team...and then that goes into the sessions, and then whoever's involved feels included within the session."

83. Building rapport between coaches and players was another key theme and the value of social interaction was commonly emphasised by Brentford FC Community Sports Trust staff.

- "you're building the rapport as soon as they turn up for their first session."
- "Doing that social element, having that [time] to talk about like their lives and their experiences is invaluable."

Fostering Player Autonomy

84. Staff members emphasised the need for fostering player autonomy and agency.

- "First and foremost, ownership. And ownership in the space. I always give my players ownership. I don't always make decisions for them about how we play the game, I kind of leave a lot of it up to them."

85. It is important to collaborate with the girls and co-shape the programmes around their needs. An approach that fosters a sense of ownership and agency among the girls will enhance their engagement and commitment to the programme.

- "We do things like planning coaching sessions with them, so they feel like they're a part of it."
- "Give some responsibility to the girls and see how they handle it. Let them try something new."

Accommodating Gender Differences

86. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust staff highlighted the differences in social dynamics in girl's football compared to boys.

- "I think the girls have a massive social side...Whereas the boys just they have like individual kind of groups from people that they've obviously played with outside of football, whereas the girls are all together. That's the big difference. "

87. If coaches recognise the importance of social interaction, they can integrate dedicated social time into their sessions and create a more enjoyable environment for the players. This understanding is key to building effective coaching strategies that cater to the holistic development of the players, both on and off the pitch.

- "I give my players social time. So, one thing I learned quite early on about girls football, is that you need to probably have that social time, otherwise it's going to happen during the session."

Challenges Faced by Brentford FC Community Sports Trust to Engage Adolescent Girls

The shortage of female coaches

88. A commonly cited challenge amongst Brentford FC Community Sports Trust staff was the shortage of female coaches. The need for intentional investment was highlighted to ensure their development and recruitment.

- "There's a shortage of female coaches working in the women's game...You have to invest in championing your female coaches, there has to be an emphasis on recruitment."
- "We could have more female coaches... every sideline that you look at has a male coach".

89. One participant built upon this and suggested that you have to consider passion for the women's game.

- "Sometimes you can get caught up in filling in a space with a coach rather than putting someone in place who is passionate about the women's game, not just football".

90. The importance of having female coaches is underscored by the belief that "no one understands women better than women". Female coaches bring unique insights and understanding to the game, particularly in coaching women and girls, as they can relate to the challenges and dynamics specific to female athletes.

- "No one understands the game, or no one understands women better than women, so it's just about helping those coaches get to that level, I think once they do it'll just transform the game."

91. The presence of strong female leaders and figureheads in coaching is vital, as they provide a visible roadmap for aspiring female coaches.

- "I think it's really important to have like a figurehead or like a female figurehead and just a clear pathway that really shows how you actually develop."

92. These quotes highlight the need for targeted efforts to recruit and develop female coaches to serve as role models and advocates for female empowerment.

Organisational Challenges

The critical role of funding and spaces

93. The expansion of programmes for adolescent girls faces significant barriers, with funding emerging as a notable issue.

- "Probably the biggest barrier is funding. I think that's probably the biggest challenge that I know we face. I know probably a lot of other companies face as well"

94. Finding and accessing suitable pitches and facilities is a persistent challenge, particularly as programmes look to expand into new areas.

- "My goal this year was to... look for additional pitches in different areas because we want to branch out". "It's not always feasible to get the locations".

Keeping up with the growth of women's football

95. One of the challenges identified by Brentford FC Community Sports Trust staff is keeping up with the rapid growth of girls' football.

- "I think at the minute we've overgrown what [spaces] we've got. So, our waiting list is very big at the minute"

96. The demand for women's football is growing faster than organisations can accommodate, leading to a gap between the program's potential and its current capacity.

- "Space and time more than anything else, I think our programme is growing faster than we can facilitate, unfortunately. The women's game is growing faster than we can facilitate, unfortunately."
- "I think the biggest issue is catering for the demand and sort of spacing around it and catering pitch allocation for the demand of the girl's environment now."
- "We've definitely expanded massively...we've even got like a waiting list now for girls to join our programme"

97. These narratives indicate a pressing need for resources to accommodate the increasing interest and participation in girls' football. Without this funding it is impossible for gender equality to be reached in football or society.

Recommendations and Observations

- RO1 Physical activity levels are enhanced from being involved in Brentford FC Community Sports Trust programmes.
- RO2 Life skills, particularly teamwork, are positively impacted through programme participation.
- RO3 Maintaining and promoting diversity throughout the programmes remains crucial to creating an inclusive environment. Diversity at all levels of the organisation (participants, coaching, staff) should continue to be pursued both in terms of scale and breadth of diversity and intersectionality.
- RO4 Programmes can facilitate cross-class interactions that support economic mobility, offering participants opportunities for broader social engagement.
- RO5 The recruitment and development of female coaches should be prioritised by providing targeted training programs and career pathways.
- RO6 Securing sponsorship is important to increase coaching investments to support further recruitment, mentoring, and training of women and girls as coaches.
- RO7 Continue to work with non-sport organisations that demonstrate readiness for collaboration and can help with scale and building capability around Brentford FC Community Sports Trust planned outcomes.
- RO8 Track and report on school-based participation data by those involved in Brentford FC Community Sports Trust Programmes.
- RO9 Continue to ensure that women and girls receive strong, affirming messages that they belong in sport and that sport is a natural part of their lives.
- RO10 Further encourage governments and programme deliverers to understand the varied needs of women and girls and intentionally design sport programmes that address these requirements.
- RO11 Use digital platforms and merchandising channels to share Brentford FC Community Sports Trust's success stories, driving community conversation. Brentford FC Community Sports Trust have many good news stories that should be a key element of growth and impact. A community-based model of growth has proved to be successful in the USA.
- RO12 Proactively plan and allocate resources to scale programmes in response to the rapid growth of women's football.
- RO13 Small, targeted interventions can have a meaningful, positive impact on participants' experiences and programme outcomes.

Ellen Jackson ellen.jackson@cityfootball.com

Grant Jarvie Grant.Jarvie@ed.ac.uk

Sports Observation Editors

Professor Grant Jarvie and Dr Yujun Xu

Grant.Jarvie@ed.ac.uk

Suggested Citation

Jackson, E. & Jarvie, G. (2025) Brentford Football Club Community Sports Trust, Community and Empowerment. Edinburgh: Academy of Sport: University of Edinburgh.

Creative Commons License

All Academy of Sport Sports Observation Papers are the intellectual property of their author(s) and are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. Sports Observation Papers may be distributed or cited as long as the author(s) is/are appropriately credited. Academy of Sport Papers may not be used for commercial purposes or modified in any way without the permission of the author(s). For more information please visit: www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/.



Academy of Sport

University of Edinburgh

Moray House School of Education and Sport

Holyrood Campus

St Leonard's Land

Edinburgh, Scotland UK

EH8 8AQ
