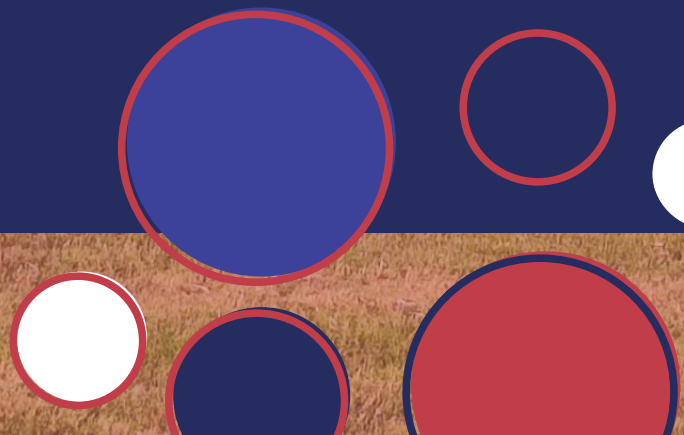




BEST PRACTICE HANDBOOK MIND BODY BOOST





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MIND BODY BOOST

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We want to thank all the participating universities and partners for their contribution to this best practice handbook.

Participating Universities:



Partners:



Table of Contents

Preface	08
Introduction	14
Best Practice Examples	18
Recommendations	34
Testimonials	44



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01 PREFACE



01 PREFACE

PREFACE - MICHELLE TANNER, DIRECTOR OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It is with immense pride that I introduce the 'Mind Body Boost' (MBB) handbook. This handbook is a culmination of dedication, knowledge, and a deep commitment to the betterment of student groups. The Mind Body Boost programme is an evidence-based intervention devised to support young people in managing their mental and physical health. Mind Body Boost addresses social isolation, poor lifestyle balance, mental health difficulties and low levels of physical activity of young people. Mind Body Boost is based on a 'social prescribing' model, seeking referrals from sport coaches, health professionals, and educators. This initiative is co-funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Sport programme, with a primary focus on encouraging social inclusion and equal opportunities in sport.



Any project that increases physical activity and improves mental wellbeing is to be celebrated, embraced, and supported. Trinity Sport were honoured to lead this project and collaborate with partners across Europe to make the Mind Body Boost programme's vision a reality. The collaborative nature of this project, with partners contributing and exchanging good practices and ideas, has been fundamental to its success.

The 'Mind Body Boost' project currently brings together seven institutions across Europe, each contributing their expertise and knowledge to this vital project. Trinity College Dublin leads the project and are joined by our partners who include the University of Galway; University of Stirling; University of Limerick; [European University of Lisbon](#); The Technical University of Munich; Vilnius University; and 'It's Great Out There' coalition. The European Network of Academic Sport Services have also provided us with invaluable support.

By embracing the practices and principles outlined in the Mind Body Boost handbook we have the potential to foster wellbeing and physical activity within our communities. I would like to extend a huge thank you to the Trinity Sport team and the Counselling Services, as well as all the dedicated MBB partners and individuals who have contributed to the Mind Body Boost programme and handbook. Together, we have set the stage for a brighter and healthier future for all. We have witnessed the positive impact of the programme and look forward to seeing the handbook used as a tool to enable engagement with more students who need a little bit of help to improve their physical and mental health.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Tanner,
Director of Sport and Physical Activity, Trinity College Dublin.

01 PREFACE

PREFACE - PROF. DR. RENATE OBERHOFFER-FRITZ, VICE DEAN TALENT MANAGEMENT & DIVERSITY OF THE TUM SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH

We, at TUM, are thrilled to have joined the Mind Body Boost Project in 2021. The programme offers a unique interdisciplinary approach that combines evidence based psychoeducation with physical activity. Starting from zero and not requiring any level of experience from the participants at all, it effectively reaches those who may be less responsive to traditional health and sports initiatives.



We therefore found that it is a great addition to the measures of our university's students health management and holds many benefits for marginalized students and those who have difficulties maneuvering through university life. The starting point of the project was in a time when covid-19 and the resulting restrictions determined everyday life. This was admittedly difficult for the project but on the other hand, the Programme came along just at the right moment, because the restrictions increased poorly physical and mental conditions of many students.

Developing and implementing such a remarkable project during these times, alongside competent partners across Europe, was an honor. It significantly enriched our university, improved student health management, and positively impacted the target group

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Renate Oberhoffer-Fritz,
Vice Dean Talent Management and Diversity,
Tum School of Medicine and Health

01 PREFACE

PREFACE - PROFESSOR HÉLIA GONÇALVES PEREIRA, RECTOR OF UNIVERSIDADE EUROPEIA, LISBON

At Universidade Europeia in Lisbon, we are very pleased to be part of the Mind Body Boost (MBB) Project. In the present context where global health concerns are rising, and specifically mental health disorders and low levels of physical activity are increasing across all the population, the higher education institutions are also struggling with similar issues. In fact, the transition to higher education involves adapting to new routines in university life. Students are often away from the family environment, facing new responsibilities, having to manage time and stressful events, meeting study demands, dealing with pressure for a good performance, coping with financial issues, and building interpersonal relationships, which can be really challenging aspects to deal with.



It is for these reasons that the MBB is seen by the Universidade Europeia as an opportunity to encourage equality, equity and inclusion, by facilitating access to all students. Thus, MBB can be a potentially relevant program for all as a preventive global health education program, and crucial for those struggling with psychological/mental health issues and low levels of physical activity, who for whatever reason through personal difficulties or other obstacles, have had limited opportunities.

The participants in MBB at Universidade Europeia responded positively to the program and reported a positive change in health behaviours, namely treating themselves kindly with an attitude of self-compassion and feeling more relaxed when dealing with emotional problems. The exercise moments in the MBB's sessions were experienced by the students as a way to improve their global energy, to feel better with themselves, and to meet new people. The next challenging step will be to implement the MBB at Universidade Europeia in Lisbon, as part of the support provided to students, and to maintain its sustainability.

It was a privilege for Universidade Europeia to be part of this ERASMUS project and this European multidisciplinary experience in MBB. It has provided us with such outstanding partners, whose networking we hope to maintain and increase in future initiatives.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Hélia Gonçalves Pereira
Rector of Universidade Europeia, Lisbon

01 PREFACE

PREFACE - PROF. VILMANTĖ PAKALNIŠKIENĖ, VILNIUS UNIVERSITY'S PRO-RECTOR FOR ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

"The MBB program at Vilnius University, led by the Health & Sport Center and Community Well-Being Center, targeted students facing emotional challenges, burnout, mood disorders, low physical activity engagement or limited social support. Participants were selected through surveys and selection interviews. On average, 25 students enrolled, with 15 completing each intervention.

In total, more than 45 students finished the program in Vilnius University. Students' feedback on Mind Body Boost programme proves that it was a successful and useful initiative in University. Testimonials of the participants show and emphasize changes in gaining better stress management skills, applying positive self-talk, feeling better inner-balance with themselves, better relationship with physical activity or forming a habit to use mindfulness and physical activity in daily life. The program provided tools on how to initiate the wanted change, how to start switching the habitual behaviour, because in most of the cases we can determine that there is a difference between the intention to change, and the action of starting to.

We should also not forget the factor that Mind Body Boost became a strong tool in social part of participant's life. Seeing people having similar issues, feeling that you are not alone, sense of being a part of something, really motivates not to drop out of the program, but educate yourself on topics like self-compassion, reflection on pattern of daily behavior, stress management, and more.

This program has a great potential of being a permanent part of the support system among University's community. It is an example of interdisciplinary collaboration and working towards improving balance between mental and physical health, strengthening the community. Moreover, it is a qualitative help, which could be seen as an assistance for university's department, responsible for psychological support", Pro-Rector shares her thoughts about Mind Body Boost.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Vilmantė Pakalniškienė
Pro-Rector for Organization Development and Community Affairs,
Vilnius University



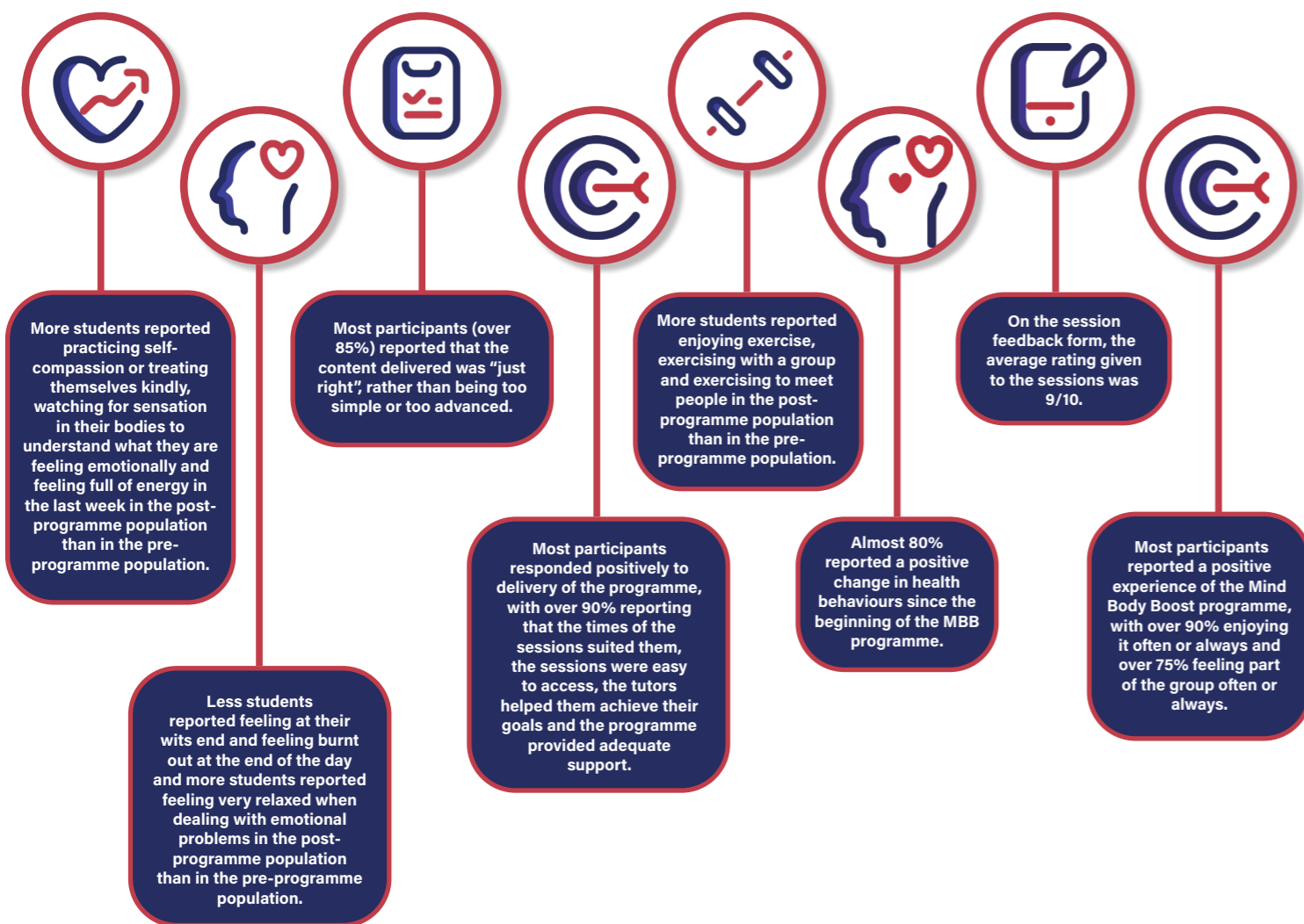
INTRODUCTION OF MIND BODY BOOST (MBB)

The overall aim of the Mind Body Boost project (MBB) is to 'Encourage Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities in Sport'. The project is a European collaboration of eight partners from six countries, supporting EU strategies in the areas of social inclusion and equal opportunities.

Mind Body Boost (MBB) is designed to encourage equality and inclusion in sport by facilitating access to training for students who have low levels of physical activity and mental health issues. The eight partner organisations have collaborated to develop this project and a range of resources, to enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of university students across Europe.

The project was financially supported by the European Union's Erasmus+ Sport programme.

KEY FINDINGS & RESULTS



PARTICIPATING UNIVERSITIES AND COUNTRIES

Here you can see an overview of the partner universities participating in the MBB project. On the project website you can find more detailed information about the partners.

- Ireland**
 - Trinity College Dublin
 - University of Galway
 - University of Limerick
- Lithuania**
 - Vilnius University
- Germany**
 - Technical University of Munich
- Portugal**
 - Universidade Europeia
- Scotland**
 - Stirling University
- Belgium**
 - It's Great Out There



BEST PRACTICE HANDBOOK

The Best Practice Handbook serves as a template for the design of localised Mind Body Boost programmes within a university setting. It will help universities and other interested organizations benefit from the knowledge, expertise, and experiences of the partners who delivered the MBB programme.

The chosen practice models presented in this booklet are based on qualitative evaluation and do not claim to be complete. These examples need to be adapted to contextual conditions such as resources and other circumstances. However, this handbook offers valid, practical models that have been previously tested on non-active, socially excluded student target groups. Therefore, they could serve as a basis for other Mind Body Boost projects promoting physical activity to similar groups.

The results of practices built and applied by local MBB partners have been collected and are published in this Best Practice Handbook.

LOCAL INTERVENTION PROGRAMME OF MIND BODY BOOST

One of the main pillars of Mind Body Boost was to implement a locally executed intervention programme to increase physical activity in students' university lives. Mind Body Boost caters to traditionally marginalised groups, disadvantaged students and/or those with low levels of physical activity and mild mental health issues. The long-term aim of Mind Body Boost is to promote the European values through sport in a university setting.

All MBB partners developed similar intervention programmes for the target group. The programmes are based on common structures for all partners but integrate local specialities and needs.

From November 2018 until 2020, two pilot MBB interventions were conducted in Trinity College Dublin. Since 2020, MBB interventions have been delivered in seven universities across 5 different countries. Each intervention ran for the duration of six weeks including pre- and post-health test. The Programme consisted of custom designed fitness and mental programme including mindfulness skills training and improved self-knowledge through psychoeducation.

On the homepage www.mindbodyboost.eu you can find the results of the evaluation.

TRANSNATIONAL MEETINGS

The first Mind Body Boost transnational meeting took place in January 2021. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the first three network meetings were conducted virtually and it wasn't until May 2022 that the first in-person transnational meeting was held. During the period between January 2021 and September 2023, partners attended five network meetings. The meetings took place in Stirling, Munich, Limerick, Vilnius, Lisbon. The final event was in Dublin in December 2023.

The network meetings formed the basic platform for project development and information exchange. The meetings were of major importance for overall project progression. During these meetings, partners formed sub-groups, such as the evaluation group, to exchange their ideas on a more detailed level. A project of this size requires consistent face-to-face communication to guarantee a comparable performance at all partner institutions.





03 BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK?

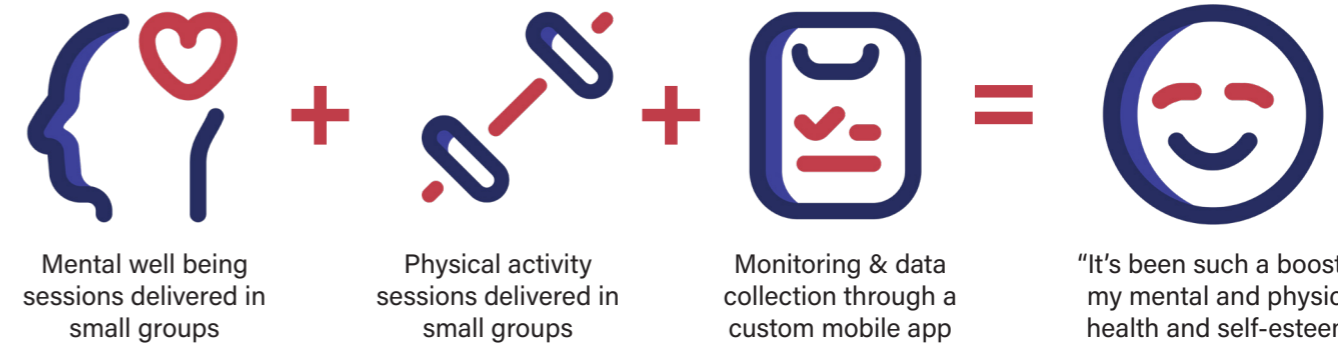
Find your inspiration here! Sharing our experience with Europe. Here you can find a Mind Body Boost toolkit and a collection of seven best practice examples which tested positively at MBB universities.

3.1 TOOLKIT

EQUIPMENT USED BY MBB PARTNERS DURING DELIVERY

Welcome Packs	Projector	Screen	Speaker	Classroom
Outdoor Space	Smartboard	Yoga Mats	Stools	Chairs
Personal Computer	LCD Monitors	Notepads	Pens	Balloons
Raisins	Gummy Bears	Light Weights	A Cosy Room	Food Vouchers
Reduced Rates on Membership	Sports Gear	T-Shirts	Gym	Gym Mats
Yoga Mats	Speed Ladders	Gymnastic Balls	Tennis Balls	Dodgeballs
Cones	Fitness Studio	Towels	Functional Training Equipment	Bottles of Water
Skipping Ropes	Spinning Bikes	Kayaks	Suspension Ropes	Gifts for Participants at the End of the Programme

MBB PROGRAMME FORMAT



MBB is a practical intervention programme consisting of a 6-week intervention aimed at third level students, delivered by the experts in the respective sport and counselling services. The project incorporates the fundamentals of physical literacy into the model, which will unite people to engage in combined physical and mental supports. MBB uses the proven anti-depressant effects of exercise to prevent the development of serious mental health problems in those at-risk and within hard-to-reach groups. The 6-week custom designed fitness and mental programme will include 45-minutes of mindfulness skills training and improved self-knowledge through psychoeducation followed by 45-minutes of physical training. By combining the elements of group inclusivity work, challenging physical activity and psychological support tools, MBB comprehensively and holistically addresses the societal issues of social isolation, mood, and stress management problems. Data collection regarding the impact of the intervention is collected through the MBB mobile application.



Session One

Theme	Purpose	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of Programme Introduction of facilitators and participants Introduction of structured exercise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explain basic exercises To emphasize the purpose behind each session To introduce participants to a light strength-based cardio workout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have all facilitators there to start the first session together

Session Two

Theme	Purpose	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of stress Introduction of group exercises and partner training Introduction of progressive muscle relaxation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide participants with a preventive strategy regarding stress To foster bonding between participants To explore the mind-body connection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce the origins of stress and its physiological meaning Explore how the participants feel in regard to their own stress perception Expand the array of exercises and increase the challenge imposed on participant

Session Three

Theme	Purpose	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of self-compassion Emphasising the importance of being kind to ourselves Exploring self-care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop competencies and brain systems that play important roles in threat regulation, well-being, and prosocial behaviour To demonstrate different kinds of physical training To acknowledge that it is not always easy to practice self-care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate discussion amongst participants regarding self-care routines Offer a Pilates/core strength class instead of a classic 'functional training' class Deliver a low intensity mat-based class

Session Four

Theme	Purpose	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring the benefits of physical activity Emphasising the concept of failure as a positive Integrating the power of habit and routine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To emphasise how things get easier with repetition To reassure participants that failure and struggle are important steps towards a goal To introduce physical training that couples physical activity and cognitive function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore what benefits exist from physical activity for body and mind apart from what is widely known. Draw attention to what physical activity and motor learning can do for the mind, for stress management, and for mood Encourage participants to try to do new things, even if the tasks are difficult

Session Five

Theme	Purpose	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of "the outdoors" Exploration of the benefits of outdoor physical activity Introduction of the healing/soothing effect of nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To help participants cope with stress To sensitize the participants for nature To facilitate participants using the sensory input of nature to experience the outdoors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go outside and take a hike/walk Rest at a suitable spot for a sensory activity Emphasise the differences between physical activity and sport

Session Six

Theme	Purpose	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recap of the last five sessions Reconnecting with values Re-evaluating goals and making healthy changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To recap the Programme To allow for questioning To show participants how far they've come 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a couple of minutes at the end of the sessions to allow for the participants to ask questions and to exchange contact details amongst themselves Incorporate partner exercises to strengthen the social cohesion within the group Highlight the supports available to participants



Pedagogical Guidelines

Pedagogical Guidelines, in both physical and electronic forms, were provided for staff delivering 'Physical Activity' and 'Mind' components of the project

The guidelines provided staff with the required resources to guide their delivery of the project

The pedagogical guidelines ensured that a deliverable, accurate, and consistent project format was achieved

The pedagogical guidelines also confirmed the final Mind Body Boost programme design



Online Application

The MBB app is a custom-designed online tool which the participants of the programme used to self-monitor their physical and mental wellbeing

The pre- and post-screening questionnaires and surveys were included on the app along with relevant pedagogical materials

The online application was developed for use on Android and Apple devices and was used to record all data collection as part of the project

The development of the application resulted in increased engagement from the participants and enabled data to be collected in a reliable and efficient way



Website Development

A website was created at the start of the project to disseminate information throughout the duration of the project

The Mind Body Boost website enabled the project team to publish ongoing progress of the project

The website published information that was relevant to all the partner organisations

A range of stakeholders were also able to learn from the results of the project

SELECTION OF TARGET GROUP

The MBB project was based on a social prescribing model, calling upon referrals from educational, health and sporting professionals. The Trinity College Dublin programme was open to all students and participants registered interest in advance via following a link.

Our students were selected initially through Student Counselling Services, TCD Disability Service, and Trinity Health referrals. MBB information was then circulated to the general population of TCD via Students' Union and Trinity Sport email and social media advertising.

TEAM/PARTNERS

Our core team consisted of Fitness Instructors and Sport and Physical Activity interns from Trinity Sport and Psychologists from Trinity College Dublin's Student Counselling Services. TCD's Students' Union, Disability Services and Health Services all collaborated as partners to ensure the success of Mind Body Boost in Trinity College Dublin

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overwhelming agreed learning was that the inter-departmental collaboration was key. We could not do have delivered Mind Body Boost without a strong working relationship with TCD Student Counselling Services. We also learned that it was much easier to receive applicants than retain participants. Over the course of the interventions, it became apparent that a small level of drop-out was inevitable.

We learned that indoor space could be a limiting factor – and we needed to be careful when recruiting to pick an appropriate number of participants. We also Learned that there was a consistent and significant gender imbalance in groups – with the vast majority being female. We would recommend that proactive and novel efforts be made to retain participants through the six-week programme.



"On the session feedback form, the average rating given to the sessions was 9/10."

SELECTION OF TARGET GROUP

We selected our participants through a registration form that students were able to access online. We used the homepage and social media of various student associations and committees in Technical University Munich, such as Students' Health Management, student counselling and other student services. We also used the newsletters of various institutions within TUM, like academic coaching and the student newsletter.

TEAM/PARTNERS

Our team consisted of a core team of four trainers. Two trainers were sports scientists who also coordinated TUM's Mind Body Boost programme. Within the delivery of MBB, these two trainers organised the formal matters and gave the physical activity part of the classes. The other two trainers were from the Sport Psychology Unit. They carried out the psychoeducation and the relaxation/meditation part of the MBB-sessions.

For advertising the programme, it was necessary to use the pre-existing networks, like student counselling and academic coaching, as well as students' institutions like the student associations and the General Students' Committee.

LESSONS LEARNED

We learned that the joint classes and interpersonal exchanges are very important for participants. We would recommend not overloading the sessions with too much input and allow time for questions, conversations, and exchange of experiences. We would also recommend thinking about how MBB is advertised – how could you involve more students?



SELECTION OF TARGET GROUP

The Mind Body Boost (MBB) programme was developed in a university environment, facilitating access for all students at the Universidade Europeia, encouraging social inclusion and equal opportunities.

TEAM/PARTNERS

The team was made up of two coordinators (one from the Sports Sciences area and the other from the Psychology area), and three trainers (two with a background in Psychology and one with a background in Exercise and Health).

The implementation of the MBB's interventions was supported by the Universidade Europeia's academic and communication services for the construction of the website, promotion and dissemination of the programme and application form to students.

put into practice of the contents of the previous session, helping them to understand and find strategies when appropriate. Finally, we would recommend reaching out to marginalised groups, and foster social inclusion and equality.



LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We learned that quality time, allowing participants to reflect and interact, is more important than covering a greater volume of content in each session. We also learned that the structure of the sessions should vary - starting sometimes with the mental component and sometimes with the physical component, depending on the purpose of the session and the message/task to take home.

We would recommend conducting interviews with candidates for the MBB programme to determine who could benefit most and who is motivated to participate in it. This can positively impact adherence to the intervention and reduce the drop-out rate. We would also recommend preparing a diverse set of content and activities related to the promotion of physical and mental health that allows the intervention to be customized according to the specific characteristics of each group, ensuring that the intended objectives are achieved. Next, we would recommend that after the first session, start sessions by listening to what the participants were able or not to

"Most participants responded positively to delivery of the programme, with over 90% reporting that the times of the sessions suited them, the sessions were easy to access, the tutors helped them achieve their goals and the programme provided adequate support."

UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

SELECTION OF TARGET GROUP

The University of Galway targeted first year undergraduates and international students for our Mind Body Boost interventions.

TEAM/PARTNERS

Mind Body Boost was a university-wide collaboration between the Department of Physiology, Student Counselling and Student Services.

LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

We learned that students are time-poor, so a recommendation we would have would be to consider reducing the programme length/length of sessions. We would also recommend giving adequate time for data collection so that we could improve things like the Mind Body Boost app.

Finally, we would also recommend trying to embed MBB into academia – we should attempt to create a culture change whereby Mind Body Boost is an integral part of university life and not an after-thought.

"More students reported practicing self-compassion or treating themselves kindly, watching for sensation in their bodies to understand what they are feeling emotionally and feeling full of energy in the last week in the post-programme population than in the pre-programme population."



UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

SELECTION OF TARGET GROUP

The University of Limerick selected Mind Body Boost participants mostly through social media and self-referral. We also had students come to us via the University of Limerick Chaplaincy and Student Union Welfare office. At the initial set-up of the project, we had great buy-in from UL Counselling Services. However, within two weeks of the start of the pilot, Counselling pulled out as there was a sudden cut in their staff numbers. Counselling Services had to withdraw from Mind Body Boost due to stretched resources. At short notice we turned to the UL Psychology department. The Head of Department was very interested and immediately appointed two Ph.D. researchers to work with us. Due to this new experience they opted to peer present, which worked well.

The buy-in from the support services was great, but when it came to recruiting, we did not get the expected support. Pretty much all the recruiting came directly through UL Sport. Chaplaincy were also very helpful in directing students to us.

TEAM/PARTNERS

The University of Limerick MBB team consisted of UL Chaplaincy, Student Life Welfare Office, UL Sport and Limerick Sports Partnership. Unfortunately, UL Counselling withdrew at the start of the project.

We learned that the time of the year and the time of day that Mind Body Boost is delivered affects drop-off rates. For the second round of MBB we only used one person to deliver the entire programme and blended the psycho-ed with the physical activity element. We learned that this worked much better and kept a good flow. The instructor found that she got to know the students better through blending the mindfulness etc. into the practical session. We would recommend surveying students in advance to get the best times that suit students i.e. the morning before college or the evening after college. Daytime sessions did not work as well as we had anticipated. We would also recommend increasing numbers and encouraging participants to 'bring a friend'! We learned that this worked better than individual students coming alone – it's easier to come with a friend.

Finally, we would recommend a "meet and greet" before each class as this proved to be a good ice-breaker, in particular the first two weeks as students became familiar with leaders and their surroundings. Coming into a sports complex can be 'intimidating' if you are a first-time visitor.



"Most participants (over 85%) reported that the content delivered was "just right", rather than being too simple or too advanced."

SELECTION OF TARGET GROUP

We selected forty participants per intervention. These students were positively impacted by the programme material and delivery.

TEAM/PARTNERS

The Mind Body Boost team in Stirling University included a personal trainer, academic lecturers, a mental health nurse and gym assistants. MBB Stirling also partnered with wellbeing support services and a working group that coordinated the data collection from each of the MBB delivery phases.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We learned that one of the biggest challenges was getting the institutions/participants to keep using the app. Some institutions did not understand how the app worked and how it could benefit the programme, some institutions decided not to use the app. A workshop was led during one of the Transnational meetings to educate the MBB trainers and project manager which has increased the overall use of the app across the institutions.



"Fewer students reported feeling at their wits end and feeling burnt out at the end of the day and more students reported feeling very relaxed when dealing with emotional problems in the post-programme population than in the pre-programme population."

SELECTION OF TARGET GROUP

Vilnius University's target group was students who experience emotional challenges, burnout, or mood disorders, and those who have little engagement with physical activity and low social support. We selected students based on their answers to the surveys and semi-structured interviews.

During the semi-structured interviews, we focused on creating connections and understanding each of the participant's situation and whether the Mind Body Boost programme would be a suitable tool for them at that moment.

TEAM/PARTNERS

The Mind Body Boost team at Vilnius University included the Health and Sports Centre: trainers (psychologist and physiotherapist), communication specialist, coordinator of the project; Vilnius University Students' Union, Vilnius University Counselling and Training Centre, and the Vilnius University Rectorat.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We learned from measurement and students' feedback that the Mind Body Boost programme has high effectiveness on students' well-being. We also learned that during the psychoeducational part it is useful to suggest the possibility of different sitting or standing positions while listening. Additionally, we learned that the education about engaging with physical activity and mindfulness should be included (for example, at first we start with small and regular steps such as morning or evening routine, physical activity should be fun and priority. Then we can add some more non-structured physical activity breaks during the day. Then we can add some more structures physical activity like workouts). Finally, we learned that it is very important to include reflection parts in the programme, to give space for students to talk with each other.

We would recommend adapting the Mind Body Boost programme to your group needs and group dynamics. The Mind Body Boost programme needs to be adapted to multicultural factors and the group preparation (consciousness levels, history with physical activity etc.), group dynamics (for example, time spent for reflections vs time spent for the psychoeducation, exercises on their own vs in pairs or small groups). For example, the used mind-body methods can be changed and be linked more to the session theme. We would also recommend that the trainers be really engaged with the material and each other while preparing and providing the programme. Another recommendation would be to integrate mindfulness all over the programme (i.e., in each of the physical activity exercises). Mindfulness should be understood as a lifestyle not as practice.

Finally, we would recommend that you provide information for students who can't make it to the session because of illness or study requirements overload. Providing information for students who can't make it to the session can boost their engagement with the programme and make less probability for students to drop out.



"Most participants reported a positive experience of the Mind Body Boost programme, with over 90% enjoying it often or always and over 75% feeling part of the group often or always."

IT'S GREAT OUT THERE COALITION

WHO ARE WE?

The It's Great Out There Coalition is an international not-for-profit organization based in Brussels promoting the positive impact of outdoor activity on individuals and society.

The Coalition was established in 2017 and aims to inspire generations of Europeans to embrace the outdoors by spreading the message that #itsgreatoutthere.

OUR ROLE IN THE MIND BODY BOOST PROJECT?

- Raising awareness around the benefits of being active in nature for the Mind Body Boost programme;
- In a dedicated online session for project partners and trainers, the It's Great Out There Coalition provided background about the physical and mental health and wellbeing aspects of spending time in nature.

THE BENEFITS HIGHLIGHTED INCLUDE:

- Overall, each additional visit to the natural environment for physical activity per week could be associated with about a 6% lower risk of poor mental health;
- Outdoor activity practitioners seem to develop better control of affective states, increased personal control and increased sensitivity to one's own wellbeing, self-regulation, emotional coping and better stress management;

Outdoor activity can also play a role in treatment;

- Providing practical guidance on how to incorporate outdoor activities in the programme;
- The Coalition provided practical guidance to project partners and trainers on how the outdoors can be incorporated in the programme.
- In comparison to indoor activities, different challenges have to be considered when going outdoors including how to prepare for rainy days, safety considerations and a comfortable environment.

- Leading the communications working package;
- Building on our activities in the outdoor sector, the It's Great Out There Coalition was asked to lead on the communications working package of the Mind Body Boost programme.





04 RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section you will find several tips and tricks for planning and implementing your organization's MBB project. We have collected different aspects of the project management based on the experiences of the MBB partners.

WHO TO COOPERATE WITH AND HOW

- Wellbeing services, gym team, academic staff. (University of Stirling)
- Cooperation between different stakeholders is fundamental for all stages of the programme: planning (coordinators, trainers, communication and academic services), recruitment of participants (coordinators, academic services, student counsellors, student union), preparation of the necessary resources (coordinators, trainers, academic staff), implementation, balance and communication of the intervention results (participants, coordinators, trainers, communication services). (Universidade Europeia)
- It's important to collaborate with Students' Union because the students are the target group, they have wider communication channels to reach students. (Vilnius University)
- It's important to collaborate with the Counselling services. Psychologists can suggest this programme as an additional tool for their clients or redirect them after the process. At the same time most universities have long waiting lists, it's useful for students to go for this programme instead of waiting. (Vilnius University)
- We found it beneficial to work together with the students counselling but also student associations to advertise the programme and gather participants. (Technological University Munich)
- Facility management to secure venues (University of Limerick)
- More alignment with Counselling, Chaplaincy, Student Services and Student Life (University of Limerick)
- We found it beneficial to have peer led support from the student body, they provided a strong connect to the participants and highlighted the programme in other workshops and student supports/service areas including study ambassadors. (University of Galway)
- There was a natural link with student counselling and the MSc Exercise Physiology and Practical Application course (University of Galway).

“Due to studying and having a side occupation I often feel stressed and overwhelmed. At university I learned about the MBB project and thought I should give it a try. There we learned a lot about self-care and stress management which helped me a lot!”

Student Testimonial – Technical University Munich



HOW TO WORK WITH TARGET GROUPS

- Some recommendations for dealing with the target group include: creating empathy, demonstrate openness to listening and dealing with different perspectives, do not judge, promote a socially and emotionally safe environment for the sessions. (Universidade Europeia)
- Be sensitive, gentle, understanding, supportive, non-judgmental, don't push, accept each person's individual journey to their healing and change of habits. It's a high-risk group so trainers should have knowledge in mood disorders and their treatment. (Vilnius University)
- The programme is designed for rather marginalized students who struggle with the demands of studying. They are not easy to reach and not eager to put themselves out there. We found, the more in detail you describe the programme, its target group and its content the more participants are willing to join the intervention, because they know exactly what they are up to. (Technical University Munich)
- Also, within the classes, active participation often came with time, so the trainers should not push it and don't make it a requirement for the success of a class. (Technical University Munich)
- Be empathetic, compassionate and warm. (Trinity College Dublin)
- Bring an open mind without prejudice, or assumption of ability. (Trinity College Dublin)
- Unfortunately, there was a sense that by having an incentive we would get more buy-in from students, used food vouchers for Just-Eat and offered reduced membership fee to join UL Sport (University of Limerick)
- Ice breakers are important – on 2nd programme we used the first session for 'getting to know us' (University of Limerick)
- Meet and greet very important as sports environment can be intimidating place if you are not a regular user / sporty. (University of Limerick)
- Consistent communication, follow-ups emails etc. Encouragement to attend sessions. (University of Stirling)
- Breaking down the programme, delivery, and expectation via an introductory session we believe is key. The initial reaction to 90-minute commitment is or can be viewed negatively by time poor students. (University of Galway)
- We were fortunate enough to get a sponsor for a rain jacket for our outdoor programme and supports from a health food provider. (University of Galway)

“With the beginning of my studies I somehow lost the connection to sports. MBB helped me to re-integrate physical activity into my daily life, which in turn helped me to be more balanced and to cope better with stress.” Student Testimonial – Technical University Munich



HOW TO WORK WITH TRAINERS

- Select trainers with complementary profiles (Psychology and Sport) and provide prior training to ensure that they master the content to be covered, the activities to be carried out and the approach to participants. It is recommended that two trainers be present at all times to ensure a better integration of the mental and physical health promotion components, along with greater safety in the development of the sessions. (Universidade Europeia)
- Trainers should be able to cope with the target group. The classes should be held with an appropriate amount of appreciation for the participants and they should be able to sell senses of achievement for each participant. It is important to be attentive to each participant individually. (Technical University Munich)
- It's important to find trainers who have a holistic approach to human health, mind-body connection and healing. (Vilnius University)
- They should want to collaborate with each other in the preparation and in providing the programme. (Vilnius University)
- Trainers should have inner motivation (such as helping people, interesting to learn new methods for work with mood disorders) and outer motivation (such as salary, enough time to prepare and collaborate). (Vilnius University)
- Educate, train, and make them comfortable with the project. (Trinity College Dublin)
- This was pretty straight forward as we met them in advance and went through requirements (University of Limerick)
- Great interest from all but found where we blended the delivery of both aspects of the programme ie psycho-ed and PA, by the same instruction worked better but might not always be easy to find someone with this expertise to deliver both elements (University of Limerick)
- Our trainers were recruited by and in conjunction with MSc. Exercise Physiology staff. They all received an overview of the programme and what we hoped to achieve. (University of Galway)

“I’ll definitely incorporate both the mindfulness and regular exercise into my day to day. For example, like when he did a quick breathing exercise, that’s like really quick and doable whenever.” Student Testimonial – Trinity College Dublin



WHAT TO OFFER?

- An intervention adapted to the characteristics of the target group. (Universidade Europeia)
- Coordination and trainers with specific training for the intervention and for the features of the target group. (Universidade Europeia)
- Follow-up through MBB App. (Universidade Europeia)
- Possibility of referral to specific services (e.g., psychological support office, or other). (Universidade Europeia)
- 6-weeks of education (Trinity College Dublin)
- Outdoor sessions were a big hit but depends on the environment – country V city landscape (University of Limerick)
- The psychoeducation might evoke strong reactions from participants from time to time. It is important to offer places of support (e.g., student support services) that students can turn to even after the session is over or between sessions. (Technical University Munich)
- Unique combination of mind-body methods based on science. (Vilnius University)
- A balanced approach to the Mind Body connection, with avenues of support if necessary and a follow on of opportunity after the programme to participate in physical exercise and /or meditation /Mindfulness programmes. (University of Galway)

WHERE TO OFFER

- Offer the MBB programme on the university campus and in student residences, in indoor and outdoor environments. (Universidade Europeia)
- The space has to be cozy; participants have to feel safe being there. It is good if the space has several zones - for participants to move and not to stay for most of the time of the session in the same place. (Vilnius University)
- It's important to include activities outside for mindfulness and body training. (Vilnius University)
- MBB should be hosted in a classroom environment followed by indoor/outdoor exercises space. (Trinity College Dublin)
- The space used for the body element of Mind Body Boost should be of an adequate size and not too exposed to be visible to passers-by and not too busy to cause distraction for participants. (Trinity College Dublin)
- We decided to hold the indoor classes in a gym with access to a smartboard, some chairs and yoga mats. We therefore could switch classes from psychoeducation to physical activity without having to change locations. (Technical University Munich)
- For the outdoor classes, we chose green spaces or sports fields at the university's property, that were a little bit sheltered from the busy university-life, so that participants did not feel exposed in front of other students. (Technical University Munich)
- Warm accessible space for all students including those who are deemed to have disabilities. Access to refreshments. The space should be suitable for functional exercises. Our programme was largely outdoors on our sustainable trail and out- door gym network. (University of Galway)

What have you noticed over the last 6 weeks?



PARTNER TESTIMONIALS

"Young people enter university, join really intense studies, as well as social life, and sometimes is too complicated for them to stay in balance while juggling all new obligations and challenges. I believe that university should and is able to provide them body-

mind tools to regain and maintain their general well-being in sound state, and these tools would be kept for life."

- Dr. Ramunė Žilinskienė - Head of Vilnius University's (VU) Health & Sport Centre

"I appreciate the program's diverse range of mind-body connection methods and its interdisciplinary approach, which efficiently caters to participants with varying needs. Witnessing the transformative journeys of participants as they navigate self-change is truly moving. Their openness, vulnerability, bravery, and resilience shine through as they heal from stressful or depressive periods. The positive feedback I've received from students further underscores the program's impactful influence on their daily lives.

However, the most profound change I observe is evident in the participants' eyes, where the spark for life is reignited. It brings me joy to see their inner world transition from chaos to a more balanced state."

- Jurgita Garšvinskaitė, Head of MBB project in Vilnius University

"The Mind Body Boost project is a beautiful initiative exploring the advantages and impact of a combined physical activity and psychoeducation intervention for students in tertiary education who are at risk of mental health issues in the largest sense.

Outside of this project, our organisation, the It's Great Out There Coalition, rarely actively seeks to combine physical activity and psychoeducation. That is because in nature, purely exposure to the natural environment already provides many additional benefits from a mental health perspective. Physical and mental health benefits are naturally combined when we engage in any kind of physical activity in a natural environment. Our role in the project was geared towards sharing those benefits, of simply being outdoors, as part of the programme. For each intervention, at least one of the sessions for all participants was also set to take place outdoors.

It was incredibly enriching to exchange with the other project partners on this subject. We learned a lot about the barriers tertiary education providers, and presumably many other organisations alike, face when proposing outdoor activities. We shared details about how outdoor activities can benefit students in the context of the Mind Body Boost programme and provided practical advice on how to approach the organisation of outdoor activities, how to deal with the risk of bad weather and where to find a beautiful place close to the campus.

Essentially I believe this is exemplary of what this type of project is about: exchanging good practices, learning from each other, adjusting our own practices, creating life-long connection and spreading what we learned beyond our project group."

- Margo de Lange - It's Great Out There Coalition

"The vision of the Mind Body Boost Erasmus project provided a platform of exchange for like-minded colleagues in third level institutions to work together across Europe.

As the Student & Staff Health and Wellbeing Lead and project lead for Mind Body Boost for the University of Galway, It was very rewarding to brainstorm, collaborate, design and bring to fruition a working model of physical activity and mental wellbeing for our students.

The programme taught in the University of Galway provided opportunities for a campus wide collaboration, with our student services, student

counselling and discipline of physiology all working with and supporting the aims and delivery of the Mind Body Boost programme. It also enabled a further collaboration with the Galway Sports partnership expertise.

The three-year pilot programme not only encouraged a community of sharing and a sense of belonging within our student participants but between the partners. The learnings from the project providing opportunities for all."

- Kathy Hynes, Ceannaire Sláinte agus Folláine Mac Léinn agus Foirne - University of Galway

"Working in a health-promoting university like Trinity College Dublin is a privilege. Not only is there great expertise in the community for supporting student health and well-being, but there is great enthusiasm among colleagues for collaborating towards this shared goal. Back in 2018, Trinity Sport and the Student Counselling Service (SCS) got talking: so many of our students report being anxious, physically inactive, isolated, stressed by constant peer comparison, and overwhelmed with competing demands. Our traditional service models – counselling and sports participation – garner excellent student feedback, but what about the students who are not reaching out for help or crossing the threshold of the Sports Centre? Could we, package our expertise into something to meet their needs? Mind-Body Boost (MBB) was thus born: a 6-week group intervention co-developed and co-delivered by mental health experts from the SCS and fitness / exercise experts from Trinity Sport.

The holistic approach of MBB makes sense. Exercise improves mental health, and mental health can in-turn lead us towards a healthier lifestyle. The evidence for this is clear: a recent meta-analysis by academics in Australia found that any type of exercise can have a positive effect on mental health (Singh et al, 2023), with higher intensity activities providing a bigger

"boost." Exercise increases our levels of endorphins, dopamine, adrenaline and endocannabinoid – all chemicals associated with feeling happier and more confidence, less anxious, and more able to cope with stresses.

Despite compelling science, we all know there can be a big difference between the desire to get active and the act of starting to exercise. For students, it is often the very factors that contribute to poorer mental health: anxiety, self-criticism, negative peer comparison, and a sense of disconnection that stop them from getting active. MBB addresses these barriers directly. It starts "where the student is at," not where she has told herself she should be. It is also essentially social - participants sense right away that they are not alone. Within the safety of this group, students are taught how to foster greater self-compassion, how to gradually build on their levels of activity, and how to set goals for further development. 5 years of positive student feedback tell us that MBB delivers on its initial mission. My hope is that it continues to meet the needs of Trinity students into the future."

Chuck Rashleigh - Outreach, Prevention and Outcomes Coordinator, Trinity College Dublin



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