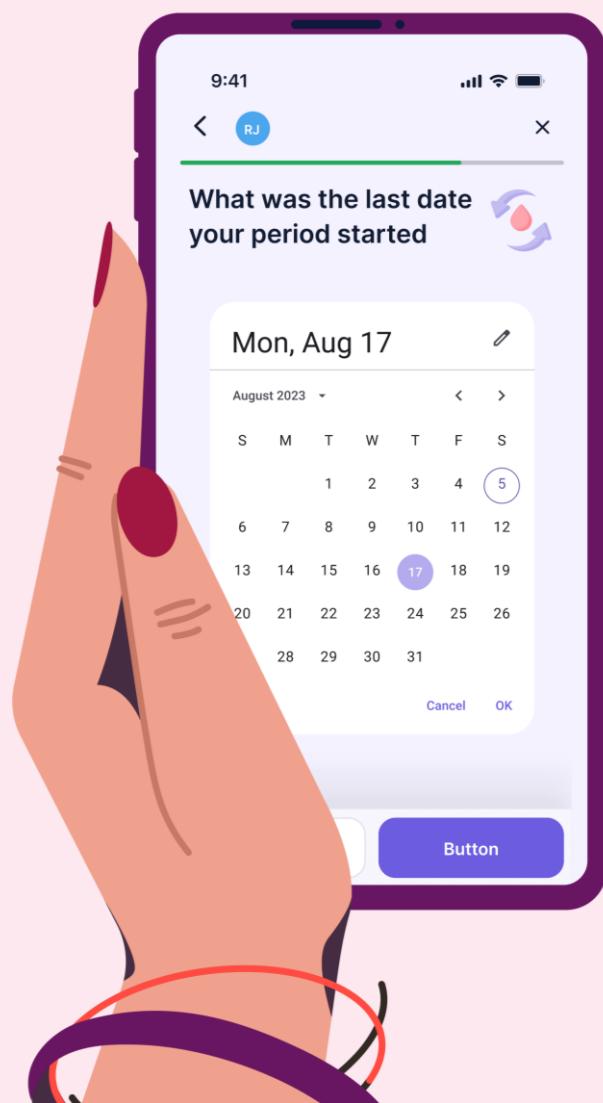


Menstrual Cycle Awareness and Embodied Technologies

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PROJECT SUMMARY

The *Menstrual Cycle Awareness and Embodied Technologies* project, led by Rikke Amundsen and Laura Gibson, explored how menstrual cycle awareness and digital technologies shape experiences of study and work in higher education. The project examined how institutional cultures, policies, and digital practices intersect with cyclical, embodied experience, responding to growing interest in menstrual health alongside increasing use of menstrual tracking technologies.

Working in partnership with Emily Stewart, Founder and Director of the Real Period Project, the team delivered menstrual cycle awareness information sessions followed by focus groups with students and staff at King's College London. Across in-person and online activities, the project brought together academic research, lived experience, and sector expertise to inform a publicly available report and policy-facing recommendations. The project contributes to wider conversations about equity, wellbeing, and ethical digital practice in higher education.

HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

The project emerged from Rikke Amundsen and Laura Gibson's shared research interests in digital culture, embodiment, and health, alongside growing concern about how menstrual health is addressed within higher education. While public conversations about menstruation and menstrual tracking technologies were becoming more visible, there was limited understanding of how these issues affected the everyday study and working lives of university students and staff.

Building on earlier pilot activity and supported by Arts and Humanities funding at King's College London, the project developed through collaboration with The Real Period Project. Emily Stewart was invited to deliver menstrual cycle awareness information sessions, which formed the foundation for a series of staff and student focus groups co-facilitated by Rikke Amundsen and Laura Gibson. The project was designed to combine research, education, and stakeholder engagement, ensuring that lived experience and sector expertise directly informed the development of findings and recommendations.



WHAT HAPPENED?

The project was delivered in two main phases, combining menstrual cycle awareness education with qualitative research activities. In the first phase, the team organised in-person information sessions and focus groups with students and staff at King's College London. These sessions were led by Emily Stewart from The Real Period Project and were immediately followed by focus groups co-facilitated by Rikke and Laura. This structure enabled participants to reflect collectively on the information shared and to discuss how menstrual health related to their experiences of studying and working within the university.

During the second phase, the project moved online to facilitate staff availability. Further information sessions and focus groups were delivered remotely for both students and staff, maintaining the same structure as the in-person activities. The shift to online delivery allowed the project to continue as planned while increasing accessibility for participants who were unable to attend sessions on campus. These sessions also enabled engagement across a wider range of roles and schedules, supporting sustained participation from both staff and students.

Across both phases, the project comprised four information sessions and eight focus groups, involving 19 members of staff and 19 students. Following the completion of the research activities, the team began synthesising findings from across the sessions into a policy-focused report. In parallel, plans were developed for an emerging findings workshop, intended to bring multiple stakeholders to reflect on the project's insights and to support discussion of their implications for menstrual wellbeing, institutional practice, and the use of digital technologies in higher education.



FOUNDATIONS OF Menstrual Education

We believe in a world that is respectful and curious about the menstrual experience.

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

The project generated significant insight into how menstrual health is experienced and managed within higher education, foregrounding the ways institutional cultures, policies, and digital practices shape the everyday lives of students and staff. Through focus groups and information sessions, participants reported increased menstrual literacy, greater confidence in recognising patterns and symptoms across the menstrual cycle, and a stronger sense of legitimacy in discussing menstrual health in relation to work and study. For many participants, the project provided one of the first structured spaces within the university to reflect collectively on menstrual experience.

The collaboration with Emily Stewart and the Real Period Project was central to the project's impact. The menstrual cycle awareness sessions equipped participants with practical knowledge while also challenging cultures of concealment and individualisation. This combination of education and facilitated discussion enabled participants to articulate how menstrual health intersects with workload, teaching schedules, deadlines, and access to facilities. Staff participants, in particular, reflected on how increased awareness could inform more supportive managerial practices and institutional approaches to wellbeing.

Beyond individual participants, the project produced a publicly available policy-focused report offering sector-facing recommendations for improving menstrual wellbeing in higher education. These recommendations address the built environment, organisational culture, institutional policy, and the ethical use of menstrual tracking technologies. By centring lived experience as a form of expertise, the project contributes to ongoing conversations about equity, inclusion, and ethical digital practice, positioning universities as key sites for leadership in an under-researched and politically sensitive area of health.

Finally, the project created momentum for ongoing engagement and collaboration. An emerging findings workshop brought together academic, charity, and sector stakeholders to reflect on the project's findings and explore their wider implications. The project provides a clear basis for future collaboration with institutional stakeholders, charities, and sector partners, supporting the development of more equitable policies, practices, and approaches to embodied health within university settings.

RIKKE'S TOP TIPS FOR IMPACT

1. Combine education with dialogue.

Creating shared moments of learning before discussion can help participants feel informed, confident, and legitimised in contributing their experiences. This is especially important when working on sensitive or embodied topics.

2. Build flexibility into your project design.

Research leave, workload pressures, and accessibility needs can shape participation in unexpected ways. Designing activities that can move between in-person and online formats helps sustain engagement and protects the project's momentum.

3. Work with partners who bring lived and sector expertise.

Collaborating with organisations rooted in practice can deepen both the relevance and credibility of the work. Valuing lived experience as expertise strengthens findings and supports more meaningful, equitable outcomes.

FURTHER READING

- Menstrual Cycle Awareness and Embodied Technologies in Higher Education (Amundsen, R. and Gibson, L., 2025). *King's College London* <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/ddh/assets/amundsen-gibson-menstrual-cycle-awareness-and-embodied-technologies-report.pdf>
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- Bobel, C., Winkler, I. T., Fahs, B., Hasson, K. A., Kissling, E. A., and Roberts, T., eds. 2020. *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://period.org/uploads/2020_Book_ThePalgraveHandbookOfCriticalM.pdf

“For once, having a period felt like a good thing!” This was one example of the kinds of positive reviews we received from King's College London (KCL) students and staff who attended the Real Period Project Information Sessions between 2024 – 25. Over several months, Emily partnered with us at KCL to research how universities can better support menstruating staff and students and how menstruators use—and might use—digital technologies to do this. Emily's sessions, whether online or in-person, were always safe and welcoming spaces to explore these ideas and ask questions, without any sense of shame, about things participants felt they should and needed to know. She brought kindness and laughter to the conversations, without holding back on some shocking realities about how little research there is into menstrual health. Participants came to the sessions from very different and diverse backgrounds, and for many, this was the first time they had had the opportunity to think and talk so openly about their periods. They left feeling empowered and wanting more! We hope this research is just the beginning of an ongoing and open conversation about menstruation in higher education and are bloody thankful to Emily for making this possible.”

Dr Rikke Amundsen & Dr Laura Gibson – KCL Department of Digital Humanities

This project was funded by an AHRC Impact Acceleration Account hosted by the Faculty of Arts & Humanities at King's College London, and supported by the Faculty's Impact & Knowledge Exchange team

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Or visit: www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/research/impact