

The Honorary Graduand: Mr Martin Bisp

Doctor of Education

Martin Bisp is a recognised social entrepreneur and the co-founder of the multi awardwinning organisation Empire Fighting Chance. Born in Bristol and educated at Mangotsfield School, Martin began his professional career as a business analyst in the financial and investment sector before dedicating himself to social change through sport.

Alongside co-founder Jamie Sanigar, Martin helped establish Empire Fighting Chance following a pivotal moment at the Empire Amateur Boxing Club in St Pauls, Bristol. After witnessing a drug deal involving local young people and intervening, the pair were struck by the challenges those young people faced and invited them back to the gym. That encounter became the catalyst for an organisation that has since transformed thousands of lives.

Empire Fighting Chance developed an innovative approach combining non-contact boxing, psychology, and therapeutic support to engage young people experiencing a wide range of challenges, from poor mental health and school exclusion to involvement in urban violence and knife crime. What began as a local initiative in Bristol has become a nationally recognised model for violence prevention and youth intervention.

Over the past two decades, Empire Fighting Chance has supported tens of thousands of young people across Bristol and the wider region. In doing so, the organisation has also generated significant social and economic impact, creating hundreds of jobs and contributing to safer, more inclusive communities. The organisation's success in Bristol led to the development of a national training and support network, with more than 150 organisations across the UK now delivering aspects of the Empire model. In the past year alone, this work reached more than 20,000 young people. The organisation has also begun expanding internationally through partnerships in Canada and the United States.

Martin has become a respected voice nationally and internationally on the role of sport in addressing social inequality, violence prevention, and mental health. He has worked closely with both city and national governments and has contributed to policy discussions around youth violence and prevention strategies. Through his involvement with All-Party

Parliamentary Groups and collaboration with MPs from across the political spectrum, he has helped shape conversations about innovative community-led responses to knife crime and trauma.

Internationally, Martin is part of a global network of cities committed to reducing urban violence through collaboration between civic leaders and grassroots organisations. He has developed partnerships with organisations and municipalities across North and Latin America and has spoken at major international forums, including The World Peace Talks in The Hague, where he addressed the importance of community-led approaches to peacebuilding and violence prevention.

Martin has been recognised as one of the UK's top 100 changemakers for his contribution to social innovation and community impact. Outside of his professional work, he is married with two daughters, both graduates of the University of the West of England, and remains a devoted, and long-suffering, supporter of Bristol Rovers F.C. He also volunteers his time mentoring organisations across the UK that use sport to create positive social change.