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Sports in the UK

Challenges and
future opportunities

Image courtesy of British Esports / Jonas Kontautas

Contents

CLICK ON LINK TO GO TO PAGE

04 Chapter 1
[Foreword by Ukie](#)

06
[Introduction by The Story Mob](#)

07
[About this report](#)

08
[Who is this report for?](#)

12 Chapter 1
[The current UK esports scene](#)

13
[The story so far](#)

14
[Key UK esports data](#)

16
[Top games](#)

18
[The strengths of UK esports](#)

20
[Highest esports player earnings by country](#)

22
[Tournament trends and the return of events](#)

25
[Collegiate esports and diversity](#)

29
[Sports crossover](#)

32
[Coping during the pandemic & community changes](#)

37
[Education](#)

38
[Team organisations and the quest for profit](#)

40
[UK Esports Team Committee](#)

41
[Sponsors, investments and revenue streams](#)

43
[Media, MPs and the mainstream](#)

46 Chapter 2
[The key players](#)

47 [Fnatic](#)

48 [EXCEL Esports](#)

49 [London Royal Ravens](#)

50 [London Spitfire](#)

51 [British Esports](#)

52 [Digital Schoolhouse](#)

53 [NUEL](#)

54 [NSE](#)

55 [University of Warwick](#)

56 [Top UK talent](#)

58 [Top teams](#)

60 [BLAST](#)

61 [Player1 Events](#)

62 [Morgan Sports Law & DotX Talent](#)

63 [The Story Mob](#)

64 [Hotdrop](#)

65 [Heaven](#)

66 [Hiro Capital](#)

67 [ESL](#)

68 [Esports Insider](#)

69 [Raven.GG](#)

70 [Eports Integrity Commission & MNM Gaming](#)

71 [Endpoint](#)

72 Chapter 3
[The future of UK esports and where the opportunities lie](#)

73
[Investments, inflation and innovation](#)

76
[Is Web3 and the metaverse the future of esports?](#)

81
[Mobile growth](#)

82
[Future facilities](#)

84
[Conclusion](#)

87
[The future of UK esports – 8 drivers for growth](#)

88
[The final word: Let's be mindful of our potential - and the pitfalls](#)

90
[Get in touch](#)



Foreword by Ukie

We know that esports has enjoyed periods of growth in recent years and is an exciting part of the interactive entertainment sector.

It has captured the interest of both professional players and casual viewers across the country. It has generated excitement and imaginative activations from brands in the worlds of games, sport and beyond. It is also viewed with increasing credibility by the wider world, with interest in esports coming from leading press, influential policy makers and even teachers looking to engage children in the classroom.

However, it can be difficult to fully appreciate the opportunity esports presents to the UK at large. It has been difficult to fully quantify the full value it brings financially and economically.

There have been problems identifying both opportunities and challenges within the domestic esports scene, especially considering its level of development and current fragmentation.

And while there is some excitement about the future of esports, we need to shape our understanding of the sector now to be better placed to craft its development.

In short, the story of the sector in the UK has not been told in a clear way that can help investors, politicians, press and other interested people to get to grips with the opportunity of the sector. Mapping out the industry in an easy to understand way could, therefore, have a profound positive impact on the next stage of the industry's evolution.

This collection of expert views, produced with the support of The Story Mob and YouGov, exists to correct that. It builds upon the work we did with Olsberg and Nordicity in 2019 to measure the economic contribution of the sector, but also the size and shape of the audience within the UK esports scene.

It examines the state of the UK esports scene, drawing on expertise from dozens of leading figures from across the sector to discuss its history, the state of esports in the UK and the developing trends that could shape the sector in the future.

It then closes with a range of conclusions on how the sector could be developed further, balancing the need to develop the next generation of esports talent with the ambition of unlocking the full growth potential of companies operating across the industry today. We know that the UK has, historically, been a leader in the sporting world. Esports is the natural next step, and evolution, of that and we hope this collection of expert views can play an important role in maximising the opportunities it provides in the coming years.

Dr Jo Twist OBE, CEO, Ukie

Introduction by The Story Mob

Founded by two of the esports industry's most seasoned communications experts, The Story Mob is the world's largest international communications consultancy dedicated to games culture. As strategic partners we help our clients, ranging from large established brands to smaller start-ups, cut the fluff and create impactful, authentic outreach to fans of games. We offer a wide range of services including communications strategy development, press communications planning and management, as well as editorial comms, executive positioning and media relations. Headquartered

in LA, we opened an office in the UK in November 2020 and have since grown from one to eight communications experts (16 globally). In the past year and a half, our growth has been rapid - a testament to the growing UK esports ecosystem. As a company who understands the value of the esports industry and its fans, we wanted to partner with Ukie on this report to further explore and highlight the recent growth in the UK while also looking ahead to its future potential. We're excited to be sharing these landmark findings and hope it will encourage more brands and investors to the space.

About this report

About Ukie

Ukie is the trade body for the UK games and interactive entertainment industry. With over 600 members, we represent games business of all sizes, from small start-ups to large IP owners, service companies, charities and academic institutions, working across PC, console, mobile, online, esports and immersive technologies. As well as supporting our members by connecting them with one another and promoting their innovative games and services, we keep policy makers informed, ensuring essential support measures are provided by

government for games companies and players alike. We support our esports members through promoting the opportunities of esports, influencing policy, insight and research, networking, and improving access to talent and growing grassroots participation. Our members make up the biggest network of esports businesses in the UK, including multinational IP owners, teams, platforms, hardware providers, event companies, media outlets, tournament holders, service providers, grassroots organisations and student leagues.

Image courtesy of VS Fighting X / Jacob Flannery

Who is this report for?

This collection of expert views is designed to educate and provide insight into the current state of esports in the UK, plus look at where its future lies, to help industry make informed decisions and activities in the market. It will also provide interesting insight for investors, angels, policymakers, VCs, Government and regional authorities.

What is esports?

Esports is organised competitive playing of multiplayer video games. The word 'esports' is short for 'electronic sports', though this longer description is very rarely used. Participants play video games against one another on PC, console or mobile (depending on the game) in a bid to win matches and tournaments. Like traditional sports, esports is both competitive and has a spectator element to it.

In esports, players often compete for a prize pool, with professional players also able to earn salaries and sponsorships. At the amateur level where prize pools are lower or don't exist, players may compete for bragging rights and the chance to reach the next tier of esports. Matches can be watched online on broadcast platforms such as Twitch

and YouTube, and in person at venues, where matches can be played 'offline' via LAN (Local Area Network). Esports is not the playing of casual games, for example playing Mario by yourself. However, there is a culture crossover, and so many esports followers may also describe themselves as players of games. Speedrunning, a separate competitive activity outside of esports, involves trying to complete a single-player game in the fastest possible time.

There are a variety of recognised esports games, with some of the most popular including 5v5 first-person shooter (FPS) Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, and multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) games like League of Legends and Dota 2. To name a few more, there are 1v1 games like fighting title Street Fighter and

1v1 and 2v2 football game FIFA, plus Rocket League, a 3v3 football game with cars zooming around the pitch instead of footballers. Unlike sports, esports does not have a governing body. Instead, the company who owns all intellectual property rights in the game, will often set the rules for its esports title(s).

Some will use third-party tournament operators to run a league or competition on their behalf. And like sports, esports has a whole ecosystem, including service agencies, broadcast talent such as hosts and commentators, as well as managers, coaches, producers, content creators, journalists and more.

For further information, view [ISFE's guide to esports](#) and [Ukie's esports page](#).

Publisher Power

While esports has fundamentally been a community and player-driven space, it owes a lot to the owner of the intellectual property (IP). Without this IP owner creating the game in the first place, esports would not exist. The IP owner can be the creator of the game or the games publisher, which are often one and the same. As mentioned, the IP owner sets the rules for its games' esports. They will sanction players where needed, ensure rules are being followed and step in where they're not, and will ultimately have the final

say on their own esports ecosystem. When teaming up with a third-party tournament operator, they will issue a licence for the partner to officially run a tournament using their game and intellectual property. For example, ESL has run the Intel Extreme Masters tournaments in Counter-Strike for many years now, through its licence from Counter-Strike developer, Valve. While tournament operators may require a licence from a games IP owner to host an esports tournament, smaller community-focused tournaments are typically free

to host, as long as the organiser follows some basic rules. Larger competitions with prize pools and sponsors could mean the tournament operator may need to pay the publisher or IP owner a contract first. Publishers and IP owners can also strike deals with broadcasters around a game or tournament. For example, in 2020 publisher Activision Blizzard signed a three-year deal with YouTube for the platform to broadcast its Overwatch League, Call of Duty League and Hearthstone esports products.





Publisher Power (continued)

Many major publishers have offices in the UK. Riot Games allows Freaks 4U to operate its European Regional League, the Northern League of Legends Championship, and Promod to operate its VALORANT Challengers Northern Europe Polaris tournament series (both tournaments are for teams specifically in the UK, Ireland and Nordics). Promod has worked on a number of UK tournaments in the past, including NSE, ESL Premiership and Rainbow Six UKIN broadcasts. BLAST has worked with Electronic Arts to deliver the FIFA ePremier League, Gfinity operates the F1 Esports Series from the UK

and ESL UK has produced a variety of ESL UK & Ireland Premierhips, including a recent Apex Legends Premiership with EA. Ubisoft also runs the UK & Ireland Nationals, Northern Premier League and more in Rainbow Six Siege. Game publishers earn recurring revenues through in-game transactions and game sales. Esports provides a valuable ongoing marketing and promotional vehicle for publishers and IP owners who have invested substantial sums in the creation and release of their games. Publishers recognise the enormous value and opportunity presented by esports and are central to its ongoing success.

Methodology

Ukie data partner YouGov, with its panel of approx. 2.7m people in the UK, provided insights from its weekly updated cloud platform Profiles, covering demographic, psychographic, attitudinal and behavioural consumer metrics. The data was exported in July 2022. Some questions were single-choice, while others were multiple choice. YouGov is able to structure esports fans from several angles, but for the purposes of this report, YouGov recommended using esports followers.

By using the terms 'watch/follow', or 'esports follower', YouGov means that a respondent either actively reads about esports on a regular basis, and/or watches live broadcasts or highlights of tournaments and events, whether online or in person. The term 'player' is used to describe someone who spends seven hours or more playing games per week, regardless of device, whether it's PC, mobile, console or browser-based games. Nationally representative (nat rep) figures have also been included, for

comparison's sake. This data covers the UK population aged 18+, equalling approximately 55.4m people in the UK, thus enabling YouGov to extrapolate a population estimate for a specific segment of the population.

The report has been written by Dominic Sacco, esports consultant and founder of online publication Esports News UK, who spoke to more than 20 key players in the UK esports industry, to gather expert commentary and case studies.

Chapter 1

The current UK esports scene

The story so far

The early chapters of UK esports may have seemingly been lost to time, buried beneath the pages of more recent success stories like world championships and mammoth esports prize pools. But there are those who remember them well - with warm memories that are sure to still bring a knowing smile - for esports has some solid roots in the UK.

The UK has a storied history in esports, from the first Insomnia LAN (Local Area Network) party in 1999, where guests bring their own PCs to play with friends and teams, to a competitive arcade scene at venues like the old London Trocadero. In the early days, we had a long list of talented players, from Rams 'R2K' Singh to Sujoy Roy, Paul 'astz' McGarrity and many others. The UK was home to old teams like Dignitas and 4Kings, and saw Birmingham Salvo win the old Championship Gaming Series and its \$500,000 (~£412,000) top prize - a huge amount for 2008. In the early 2000s, the UK played host to events including the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL), the World Cyber Games (WCG)

and more, with some attracting top global talent like Johnathan 'Fatal1ty' Wendel. Over time, through the golden years of online playing of games in the 2000s to the rise of the professional player, team and tournament organiser in 2010s, as fandoms have grown, so too has the appetite for esports competition and content. Communities rose up, businesses were born, and an entire industry flourished. Recognising this demand, game publishers and IP owners invested in esports through tournaments, broadcasts and prize pools.

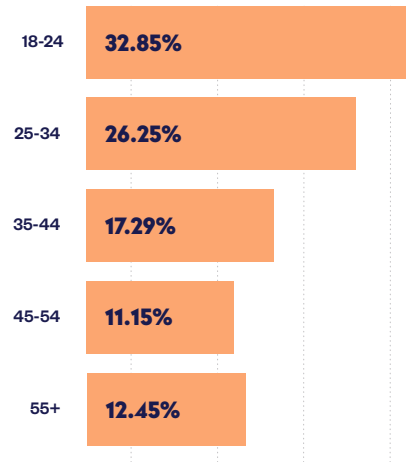
Today the UK is home to some of the biggest esports and games organisations out there, from Fnatic to EXCEL, Guild Esports (who famously have a partnership with David Beckham) and more. Competitive video games giants such as Twitch, Riot Games and FACEIT have offices in the UK. We also have some of the best esports journalists and broadcast talent in the world, from desk hosts to commentators, analysts, streamers and content creators. In recent years, several British pro players

have climbed to the top of their respective games, such as Fortnite player Jaden 'Wolfiez' Ashman and Fnatic's VALORANT personality Jake 'Boaster' Howlett.

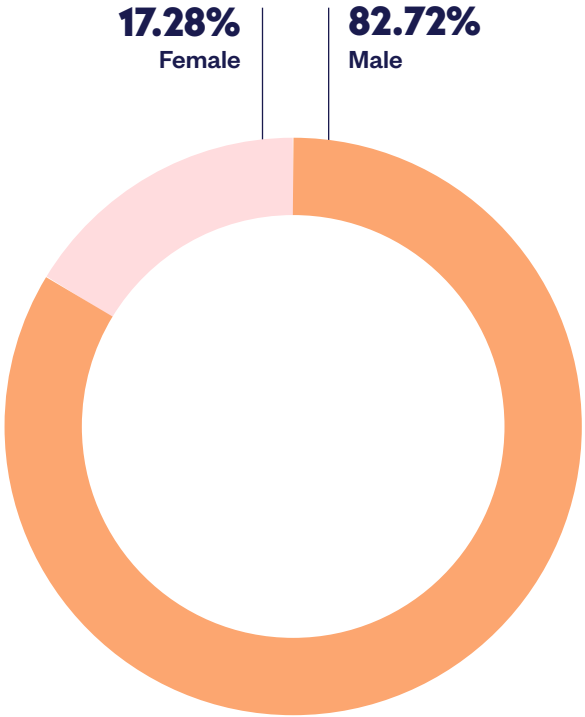
And yet, while the potential is huge, esports in the UK (and around the world) remains at some sort of impasse. Many teams are struggling to turn a profit. By its nature, esports is fragmented - just as football and golf are completely different sports, so too are League of Legends and Counter-Strike.

There also seems to be a lack of identity in UK esports. Some question what UK esports actually is, with several organisations based in the UK looking further afield to find success. Some are hunting for that next big thing, or wondering where the future opportunities lie (more on that later). Other territories like the US, China and South Korea are dominant, with European countries like Spain and France also a force in esports. For now, what does the current state of UK esports look like?

Age range for esports followers



Gender for esports followers



Key UK esports data

UK esports fans are young, male and represent a small percentage of gamers

While Ukie and others have worked to provide esports reports in recent years, such as the [value of esports in the UK \(2020\)](#), the region has a lack of data overall, making it difficult for interested parties to gain deep insight into the sector. However, new YouGov data has highlighted the buying, playing and following habits of players and esports followers in the UK in 2022, which we'll reveal at different sections throughout the report.

Players are those who spend seven hours or more playing games per week, regardless of device, and esports followers are those that actively reads about or watches esports on a regular basis. We've also compared these two, side by side, and added in a comparison with the general population so you can see the differences between players, esports followers and everyone else.

The data shows that in terms of age, esports followers and gamers are very similar, though the former skew slightly younger than the latter, with 26% of esports followers aged 25-34 years old and 21% of gamers in the same demographic. 11% of esports followers in the UK are aged 45-54, compared to 15% of gamers in the same age bracket. Just 3.78% of UK video game players say they regularly watch esports. A YouGov spokesperson says: "This is one of the

most interesting things I always find myself analysing, but no one really picks it up. With the playing of games being the bigger part of the iceberg below the water, and esports being the tip of the iceberg above the water - how big is this tip?

"The UK data shows the tip of the iceberg is very small. A small percent of UK gamers are esports followers. So it's not that much more than within the general population. Yes of course,

playing games is one way to become an esports fan, but it's not necessarily the reason for being an esports fan. And of course, not all gamers are automatically esports fans just because they play."

Esports is also more male-dominant than the general games playing population, with the male to female split at 83% to 17%, compared to players' more diverse 66.5% to 33.5% split.

3.78%

Percentage of UK gamers that are also avid esports followers



25%
Percentage of esports
followers in the UK who watch
Call of Duty, making it the UK's
most-watched esports

Call of Duty and Counter-Strike on top

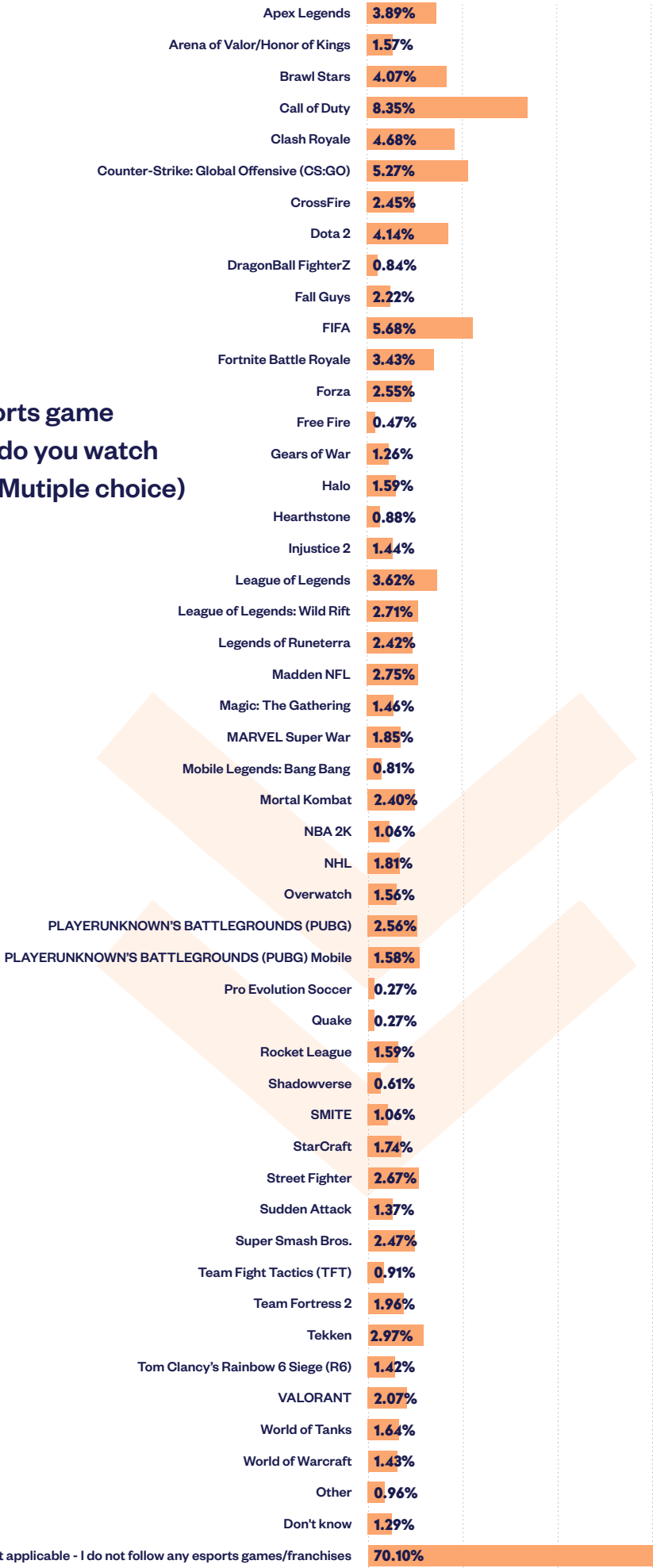
Given the UK's history in playing console games competitively, it's perhaps no surprise to see Call of Duty (CoD) as the most followed game among esports followers (25%) and gamers (8.35%) in the UK, followed by Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CSGO), which is watched by just over 23% of esports followers and 5% of gamers. Other shooters are also popular in the UK, including Apex Legends (17.7% of esports followers), Overwatch (11.45%), VALORANT (11%) and PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS (8.6%). Even 4%

of esports followers in the UK track classic arena first-person shooter (FPS) Quake, a nod to competitive shooters' roots, combined with the fact that the UK still has some solid playing talent in the title today. FIFA is also popular given the UK's football-centric fanbases (with 15.78% of esports followers following that, and 5.68% of video game players), as is football-with-cars franchise Rocket League, with 14.44% of esports followers.

The world's most popular Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) games, Dota 2 and League of Legends, fare less well than shooters, with 6% and 17.5% of esports followers watching both of those esports respectively.

Despite the UK having a passionate and tight-knit fighting game community (FGC), titles like Street Fighter and Tekken are not very well followed compared to other genres, with around 4% of esports followers watching those titles.

Which esports game franchises do you watch or follow? (Mutiple choice)



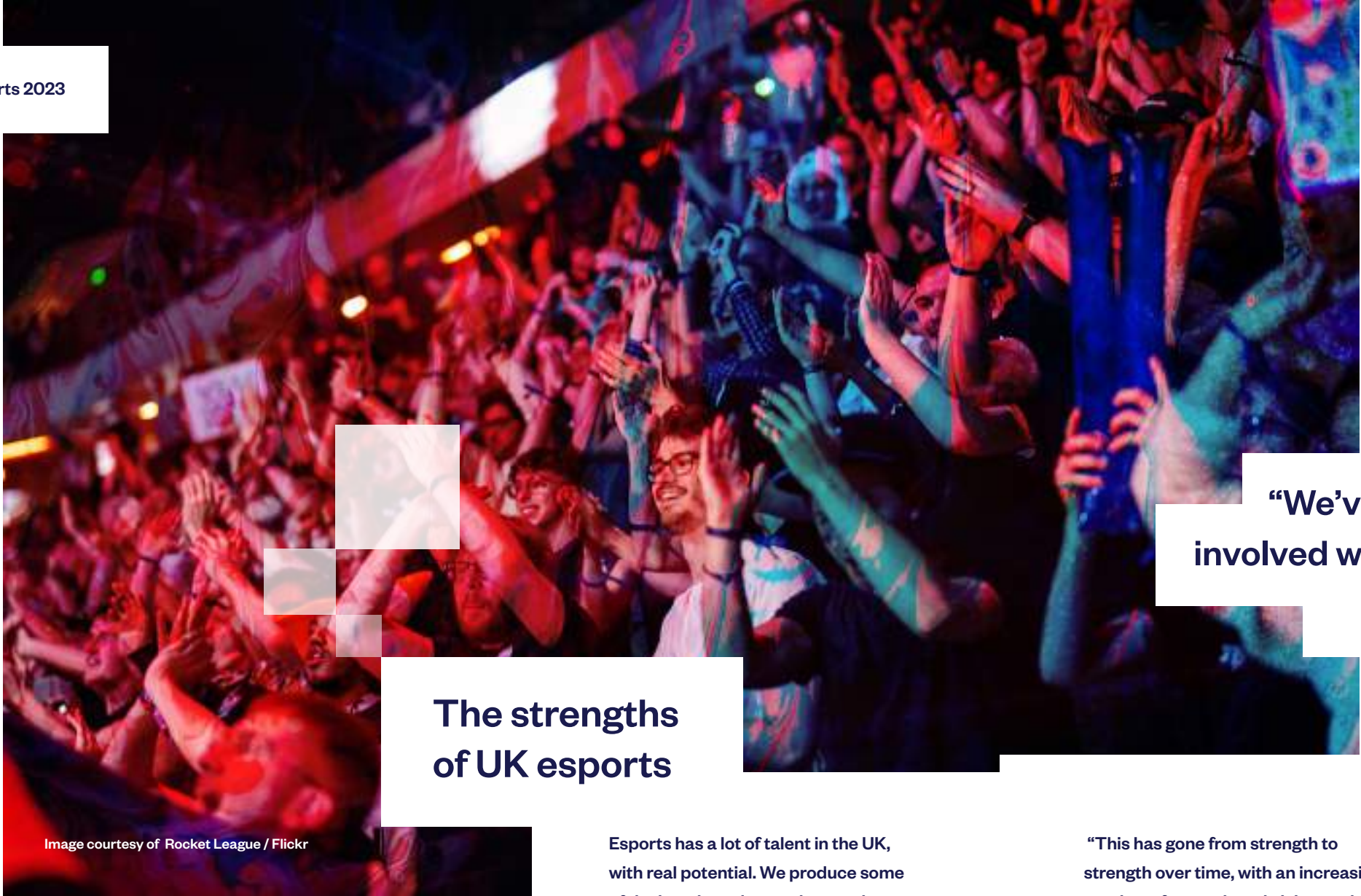


Image courtesy of Rocket League / Flickr

The strengths of UK esports

Esports has a lot of talent in the UK, with real potential. We produce some of the best broadcast talent such as desk hosts, analysts and casters (aka commentators). A lot of these, like Pansy, Machine and Medic, got their start at homegrown British games events like Insomnia and Epic.LAN.

“The number of successful UK exports who have made it to the world’s biggest stages as hosts or commentators is something I have tended to point towards as an example of a key UK strength specifically in esports,” says Mitsouko Anderson, head of partnerships at agency DotX Talent.

“This has gone from strength to strength over time, with an increasing number of new talent thriving as they expand into international markets and build global profiles as some of the leading names in a number of major esports titles. Whilst the UK’s talent pool is strong, we are still behind others in many ways: the number of professional players who come out from the UK to compete at the highest levels is lacking compared to that of the US or other notable European esports regions; the size and brand power of creators is significantly less so than that of major names in other countries, particularly the US; and we don’t have an abundance of top tier “identifiably UK-focused” teams who carry the same weight and fan interest

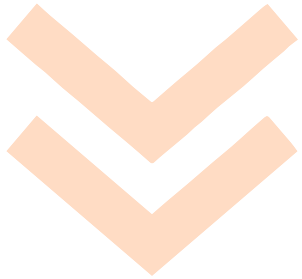
as established powerhouses like G2, TSM or FaZe. However, I think we’re in a great place to grow over the next few years and expect to see these areas develop further.”

Sam Wells, managing director of merchandise company Raven. GG, agrees: “I would suggest that esports in the UK is still a developing ecosystem – if you look towards the US and Asia, these markets are a few years ahead when it comes to esports and its adoption. They have the biggest teams and players, so I do think there is work to do within the UK to improve the development of new talent as well as elevating existing talent.”



“We’ve seen more and more students want to get involved with esports, casually or more competitively, and now the UK has the largest collegiate esports community in Europe”

Becky Wright, NSE





Highest esports player earnings by country

“The UK esports scene has experienced ebbs and flows of its reputation internationally,” admits Heather Dower, founder and CEO at Hotdrop, “but ultimately it is one the founding locations for our modern interpretation of esports, with international players regularly travelling to play UK LANs for decades as a key part of their respective competitive calendars. Whilst our endemic UK esports scene has struggled as of late, we still continue to export world-class esports talent

be that in broadcast and production, players and coaches, or in services such as marketing. UK esports is also seeing powerful crossover collaborations into other creative industries such as music, tech, traditional sport and events. These crossovers bring the opportunity to slowly create more jobs within the sector across various industries such as law, games development, broadcast and more, contributing a huge amount to the economy.

” Becky Wright, senior partnerships manager at university esports body, NSE, adds: “The biggest strength we have in the UK is the esports community and fans here. There’s a huge appetite for more events to take place in the UK as we’ve seen how popular major events have been in the past. Over the years, we’ve seen more and more students want to get involved with esports, casually or more competitively, and now the UK has the largest collegiate esports community in Europe.”

David Jackson, managing director of separate university tournament operator, NUEL, says: “It feels like we’re in the process of transitioning from cottage industry to professionalisation – which is necessary for the industry to grow and thrive, but comes with challenges and growing pains too; I think more help navigating this would be a really great investment by government or trade bodies like Ukie.

EXCEL esports Strategic advisor Wouter Sleijffers comments: “From a community perspective there’s a lot of pride and efforts that go into UK esports, as has always been the case. “There’s great talent on the international stage and equally there are so many initiatives in the amateur, grassroots and not-for-profit areas. But let’s not forget about the personalities, casters, creators and businesses who are based in the UK.

If you add it all up, a very significant amount of (competitive) gaming development has originated from the UK.” It’s true that the UK has a burgeoning grassroots scene with many entrepreneurial types and hard-working teams, as seen from the YouGov data which shows plenty of 18 to 34 year olds working in esports, some of which have organised their own events.



Tournament trends and the return of events

After two tough years since the outbreak of Covid-19, the UK esports community has welcomed the return of live events. The Rocket League Championship Series 2021-22 Spring Major took place in London's 7,500-seat Copperbox Arena from June 29th to July 3rd 2022, packing it out with its hordes of fans and creating an electric atmosphere. And two British players - Joyo and Rise - were on the winning team with Moist Esports along with French player Vatira. Birmingham also played host to the inaugural Commonwealth Esports Championships in August 2022, as well as VSFighting X and bring-your-own-computer esports event Insomnia Gaming Festival. University esports body NSE reported a 69%

growth in team numbers at its British University Esports Championship, the finals of which were hosted at Insomnia. Epic.LAN has also returned to the UK esports calendar, giving rising talent a chance to shine on a smaller esports stage. We have more cafes and centres nowadays too, from the likes of Sidequest to Pixel Bar, Meltdown, Belong and others, many of which will host their own grassroots tournaments. In 2023, London's Copper Box Arena is hosting several Apex Legends Global Series events, as well as the League of Legends Mid-Season Invitational. And industry events also returned, with the likes of ESI London drawing hundreds of people to Boxpark Wembley for conferences and networking, and

the ESIC Global Esports Summit also taking place at Excel London and the Esports Venue Summit in Swansea. Prior to the pandemic, the UK had been home to Wembley Arena's sold out League of Legends 2015 World Championship Quarter-Finals, and Arena Birmingham saw a footfall of more than 24,000 fans for the ESL One Birmingham Dota 2 event in 2019, while 306,070 tuned in to the broadcast online. We've also hosted the FACEIT CSGO Major in 2018, as well as the Clash Royale Crown Championship finals in 2017, which saw the London Copperbox stage transformed into a giant smartphone screen displaying the mobile game's action live.

League of Legends peak viewer numbers by tournament

2021 Global World Championship: 4m
Global Mid-Season Invitational: 2.19m
South Korean LCK: 681,000
European LEC: 342,000
European Masters: 296,000 (Spring)
USA LCS: 197,000
Chinese LPL: 121,000
French LFL: 210,000
Spanish Superliga: 205,000
DACH Prime League: 44,000
Polish Ultraliga: 20,500
UK/Nordics NLC: 14,000
Italian PG Nationals: 12,000
Greek GLL: 11,000 (Spring)
Portuguese LPLOL: 5,000
Balkan EBL: 4,000 (Spring)
Czech Hitpoint Masters: 4,000

Summer 2022 Seasons Esports Charts (unless stated otherwise)





In football, more fans will want to watch the World Cup and the Premier League over lower-tier regional leagues. And the same goes for esports. Speaking of football, the ePremier League is another well-polished tournament series the UK has to offer, featuring FIFA esports players representing the 20 Premier League clubs. Ironically, it was Norwich who won the virtual tournament in 2022, despite their physical team being relegated from the top flight of English football on the pitch. Robbie Douek, CEO of ePremier League tournament

organiser BLAST, says: “Leading game publishers are extending their reach and presence in the UK. We have been thrilled to work closely with EA Sports, who are doing exactly this with their commitment to the annual ePremier League. We saw an incredible uptake in participation for this tournament with thousands of players signing up and taking part in the event, where the final was then broadcast on mainstream TV via Sky Sports. “A huge strength of the UK scene is also the impressive and vital work British Esports is

doing to support grassroots esports and accessibility. British Esports is working hard to create pathways and awareness of esports, it only recently supported and played a key role in Birmingham hosting the inaugural Commonwealth Esports Championship. This event saw esports representation from countries all over the world - where England, Wales and Scotland all claimed medals. Hosting and staging events like this is key to the long-term success of esports in the UK.”

Collegiate esports and diversity

British Esports also runs the Student Champs for school and college students aged 12+ in games like League of Legends, VALORANT, Rocket League and Overwatch, and Ukie’s own Digital Schoolhouse initiative also caters to students aged 12-18, as well as those in junior schools aged 8-11 with competitions in Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Team Battle, Mario Kart 8 Deluxe and more. Going up to the university level, the UK has the likes of NSE and NUEL tournament series in multiple games including higher age rated titles like

Counter-Strike and Rainbow Six Siege, all providing that path to pro for young players of games to pursue through the years. While there are now thousands of students taking part in these tournaments, collegiate bodies have also implemented a greater focus on diversity in recent years, recognising a lack of female playing talent in esports, particularly at the top, professional level. British Esports has its Women in Esports initiatives, with its own Committee, women-only tournaments, panels and networking activities, while

NUEL and NSE also have Women and Non-Binary university esports tournaments. Other grassroots UK-based tournament providers have run women and non-binary tournaments, like The Goose House’s Birds of Prey, the FIFA ShEsports Cup and more. This is reflective of global esports diversity initiatives, like ESL Impact, VALORANT Game Changers, the GirlGamer Esports Festival and the work of FemaleLegends, Women in Games International and more.



“More casual tournaments are happening everywhere, both in person and of course online and this is bringing gamers together, across borders and cultures, which can only be a positive thing given the state of the world right now. This has seen esports being legitimised by media, policy makers and of course parents and carers.”

Andy Payne OBE, British Esports



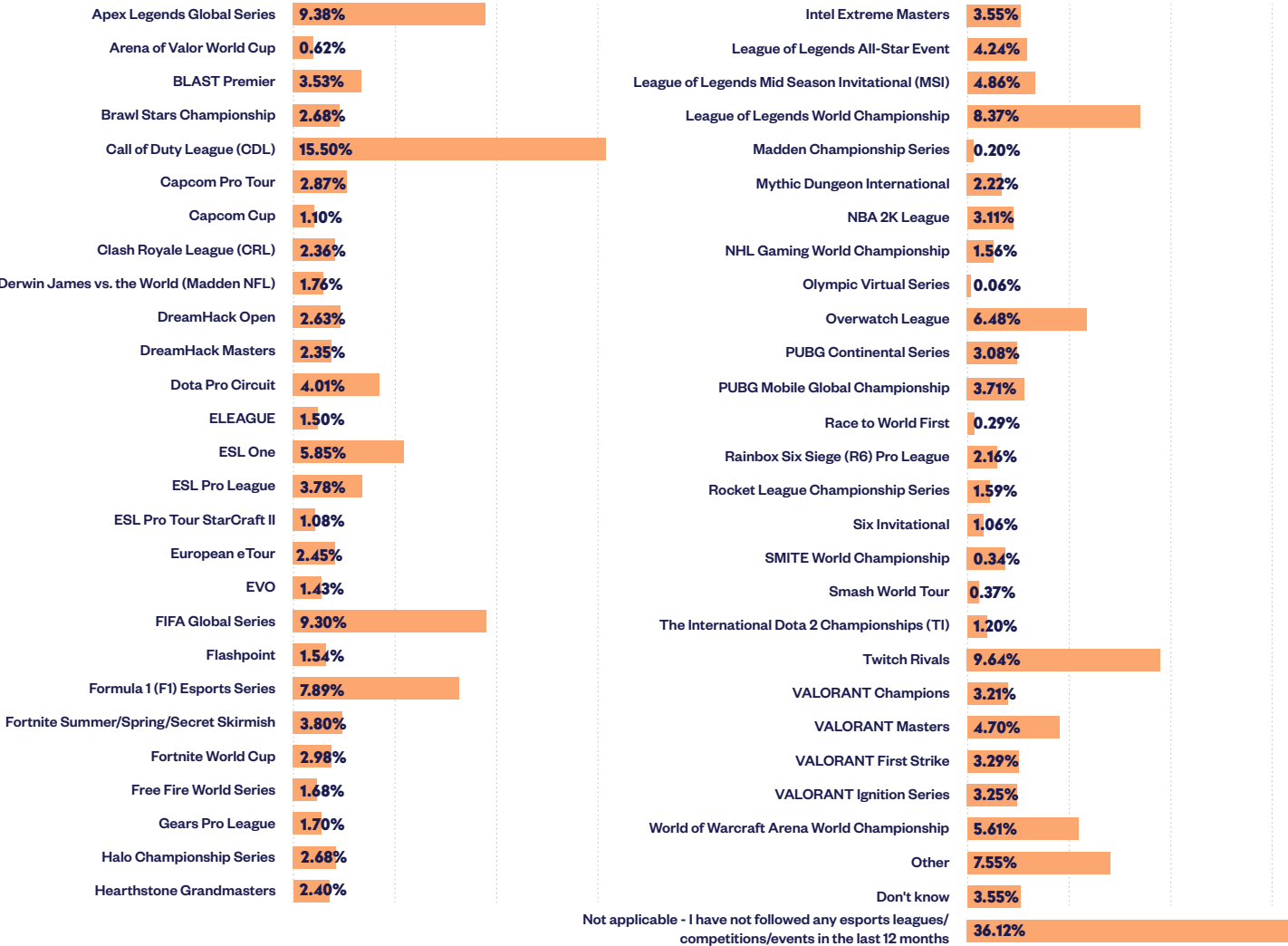
MSI 2023 Image courtesy of British Esports / Jonas Kontautas

Collegiate clout and diversity

British Esports chair Andy Payne OBE comments: “All publishers have community managers who work with the esports communities to encourage, support and sustain grassroots activity and we only see this activity increasing year in year out. More games, more players, more leagues, more teams and more communities. More casual tournaments are happening everywhere, both in person and of course online and this is

bringing gamers together, across borders and cultures, which can only be a positive thing given the state of the world right now. This has seen esports being legitimised by media, policy makers and of course parents and carers. I think, overall for UK esports, progress has been far more evolutionary than some would like to see, but steady progress over time is always preferable to revolutionary boom and bust.”

What tournaments do UK fans watch?

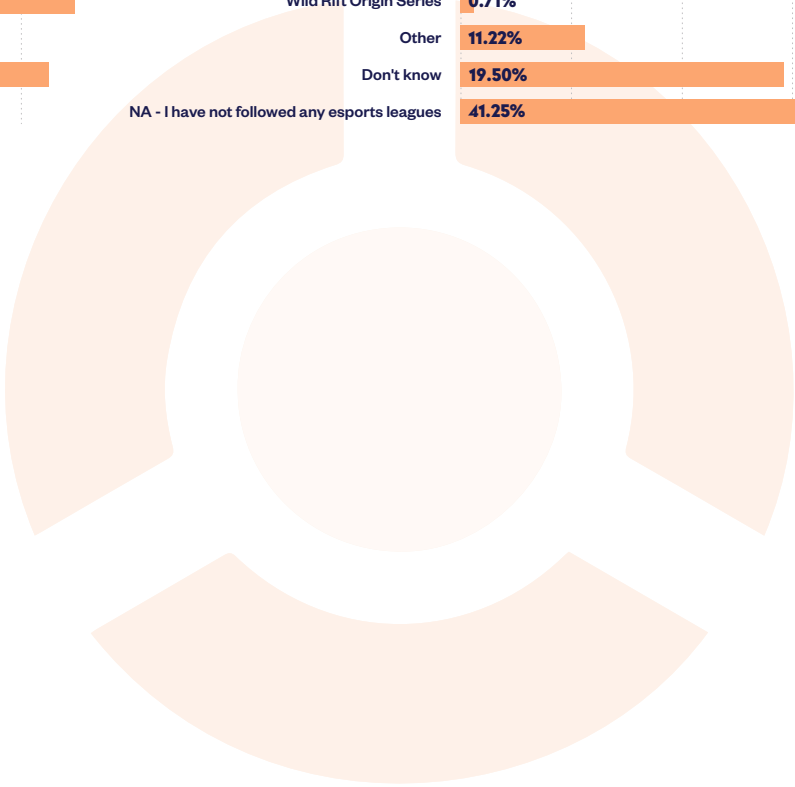
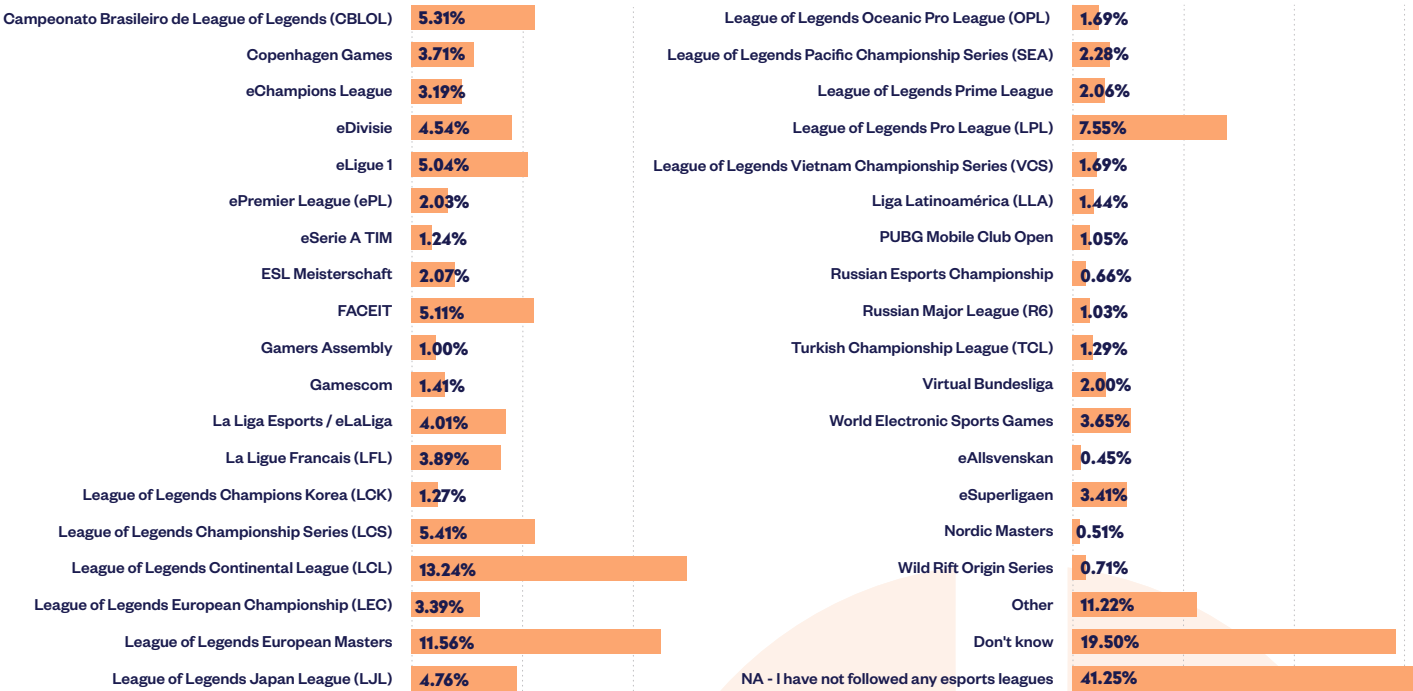


11.56%

Percentage of esports followers in the UK who watch the League of Legends European Championship (LEC)



What other tournaments do UK fans watch ?



Percentage of esports followers in the UK that also watch football

47%

“Esports crossing over with sports has both advantages and disadvantages. When the esports directly ties to the sport, then it is clear that the core media product will always be the sport as opposed to the esports, and it is important that the gaming and esports strategy reflects that reality. This provides a huge marketing machine to piggyback on with gaming and esports initiatives.”

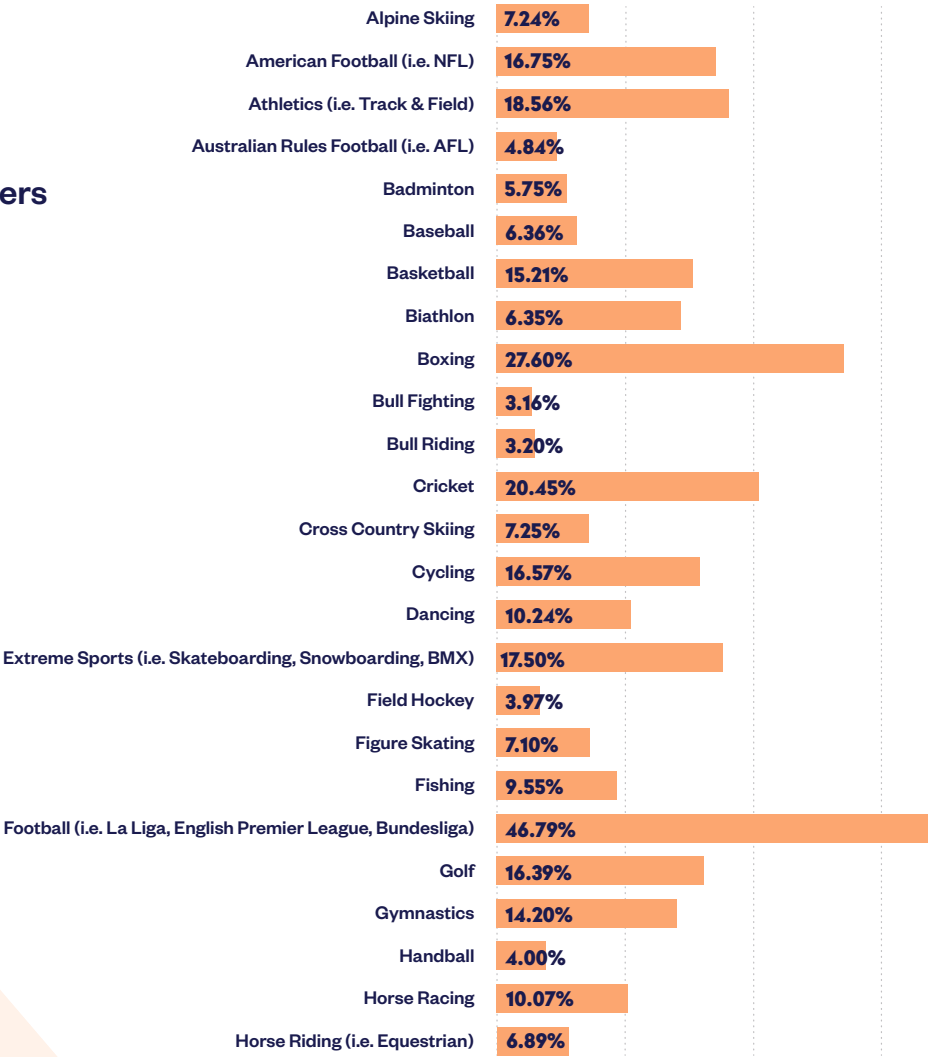
Kieran Holmes-Darby, Formula E

Sports crossover

The UK’s strong heritage in traditional sports has seen many athletes and clubs branch into esports. Initiatives like the ePremier League and Commonwealth Esports Championships, and notable English football clubs like Manchester City, West Ham and Wolves have made real inroads into esports. The latter partnered with North American games giants Evil Geniuses in 2021. Unlike other sports clubs, Wolves haven’t just stuck to virtual sports games like FIFA - they have teams around the world in more endemic esports titles like Rocket League and Rainbow Six Siege.

London-headquartered Fnatic have previously teamed up with football club AS Roma. British sporting personalities like David Beckham (Guild Esports co-owner) and Lando Norris (Quadrant founder) have embraced esports, bringing their millions of fans into the world of games through their team organisations. And global stars have partnered with UK and Ireland-based esports organisations, such as Usain Bolt with Ireland’s Wylde and Virgil van Dijk with Tundra Esports.

Which sports do game players and esports followers watch in the UK?



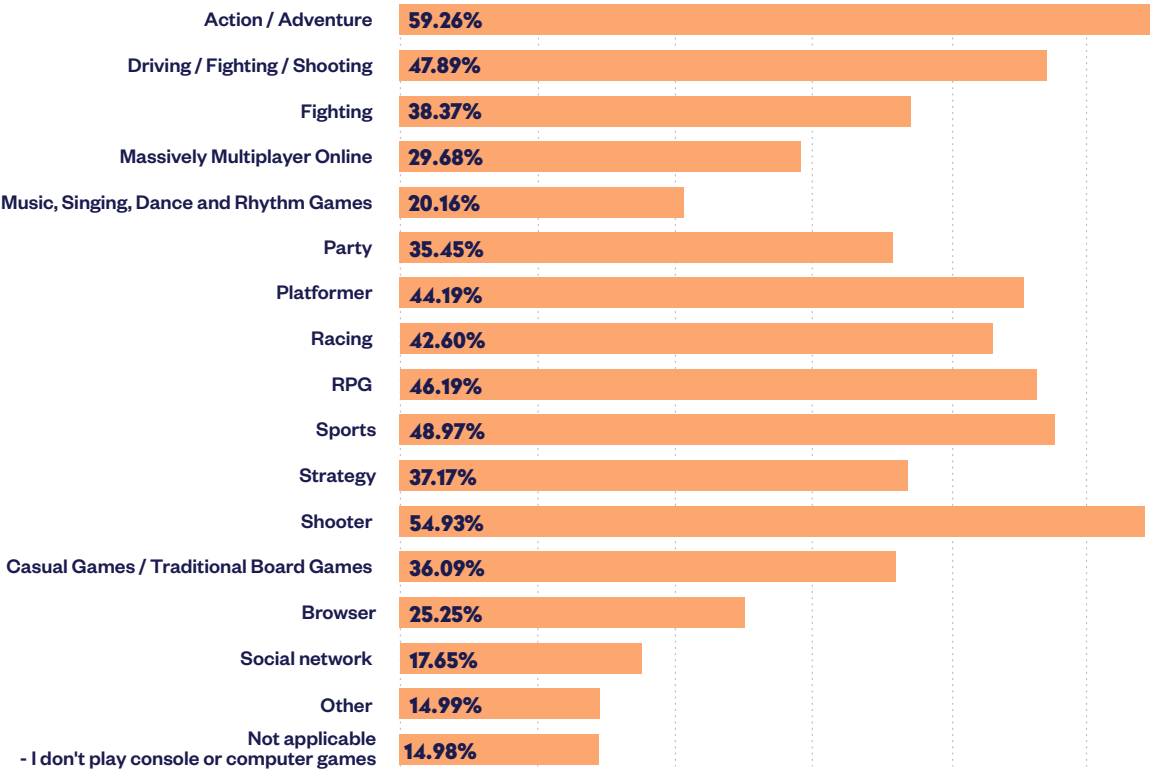
Esports is sedentary, but some games have tried to add physical elements to them. The International Olympic Committee has experimented with 'virtual sports' like baseball, cycling, rowing and sailing.

Augmented Reality (AR) game HADO, which sees teams target each other with attacks only visible to players and live feed spectators, partnered with the ESL UK Premiership tournament in 2022 and had matches take place at Insomnia Gaming Festival in Birmingham. Esports in the UK is not recognised as a sport, and the discourse has moved on from whether it is or not, to how esports is its own

legitimate activity in its own right and how sports wants a slice of it, regardless.

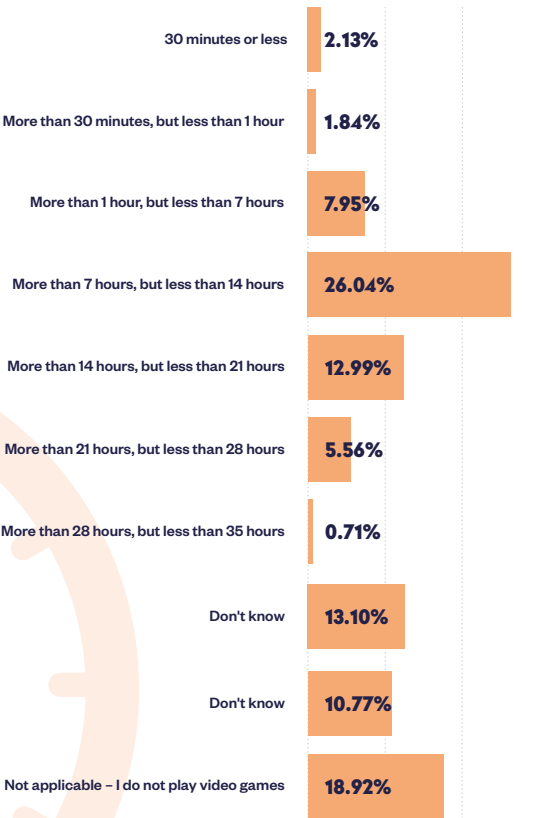
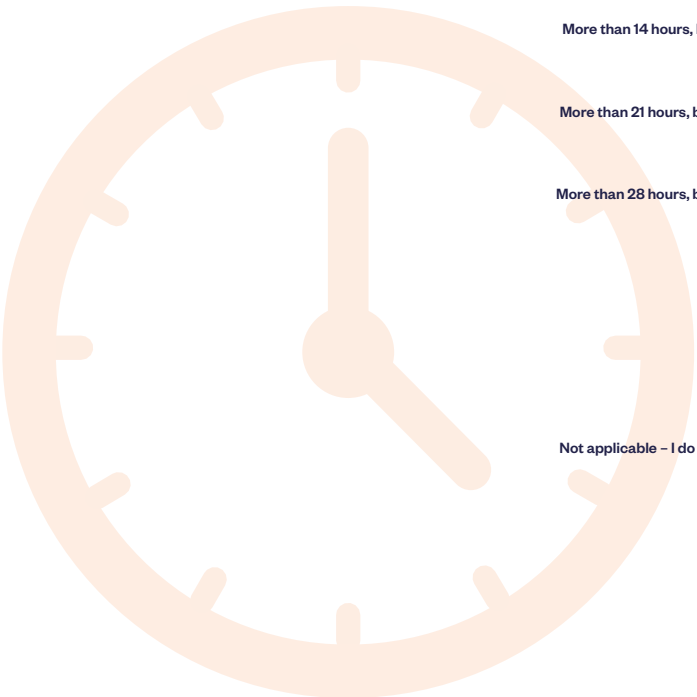
Kieran Holmes-Darby, EXCEL Esports co-founder and now Formula E gaming director, says of this ongoing convergence: "Esports crossing over with sports has both advantages and disadvantages. When the esport directly ties to the sport, then it is clear that the core media product will always be the sport as opposed to the esport, and it is important that the gaming and esports strategy reflects that reality. This provides a huge marketing machine to piggyback on with gaming and esports initiatives."

Which of the following types of games do you personally play on a console or computer?



YouGov data shows that UK esports followers are big watchers of football (47%), motorsport (37%), boxing (27%) and tennis (25%), while dedicated players who don't watch esports are also much less likely to watch traditional sports. 33% of gamers watch football, 14% watch motorsport, 15% watch boxing and 13% watch tennis. These differences are also reflected in the genre of video games which UK people like to play. Shooters and sports games are among esports followers' most played genres (55% and 49% of esports followers say they play those titles respectively), compared to 29% of video game fans who play shooters and 22% who play sports titles.

In a typical week, how much time, if at all, do you spend playing video games that require an occasional or full-time connection to the internet?



Persevering through the pandemic

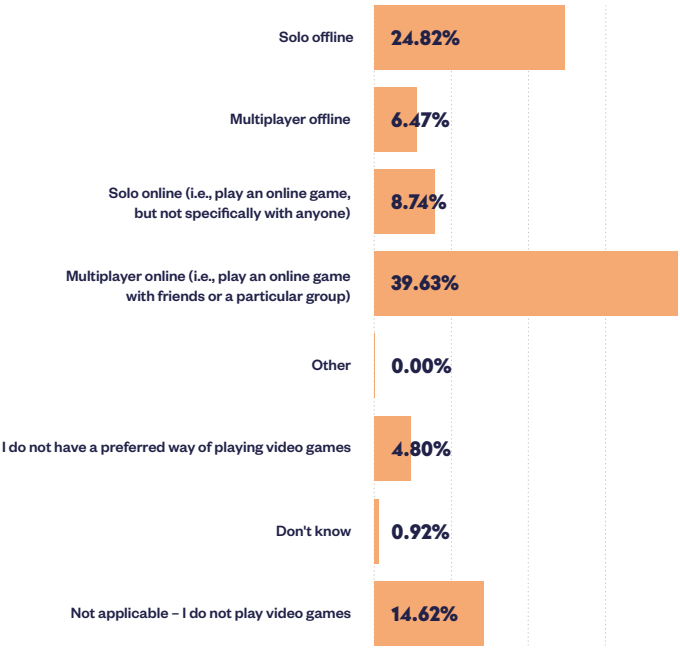
Esports’ handling of the pandemic illustrates the industry’s resilience and ability to adapt. Esports was one of the only sporting broadcasts that managed to continue through the pandemic, with tournaments going online-only, or, in the case of broadcasts like the League of Legends LEC, going ahead in the studio, with pro players of games playing remotely. The pandemic also changed our playing and viewing habits, with

YouGov data illustrating the behaviour of gamers and esports followers in the UK. A joint report by IDC and Esports Charts found that hours watched on streaming platform Twitch rose 99% from 867m hours in December 2019 to 1.7bn in May 2020, around the height of the pandemic. UK consumers spent £45.6m through donations and subscriptions on platforms like Twitch, making up for a notable decline in physical event revenues.

26%

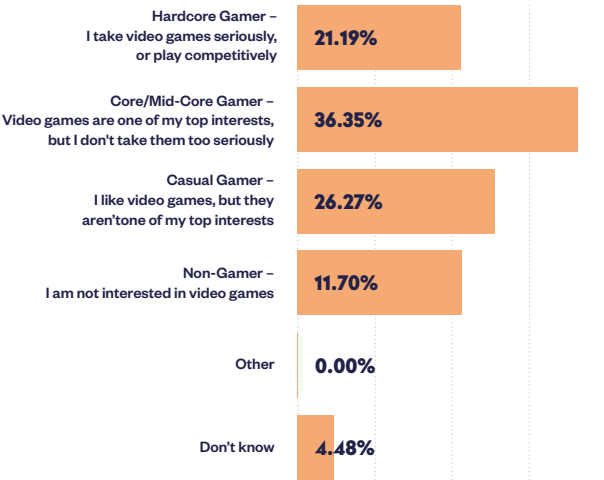
Percentage of esports followers in the UK that spend between 7 and 14 hours a week playing video games that require an internet connection

What is your preferred way of playing video games?



Esports has naturally evolved over the years. The UK scene is undoubtedly more professional than it was a handful of years ago, with more tournaments and more investment coming in over time. Where the 2016 Ukie whitepaper looked at what esports is, why it matters and where

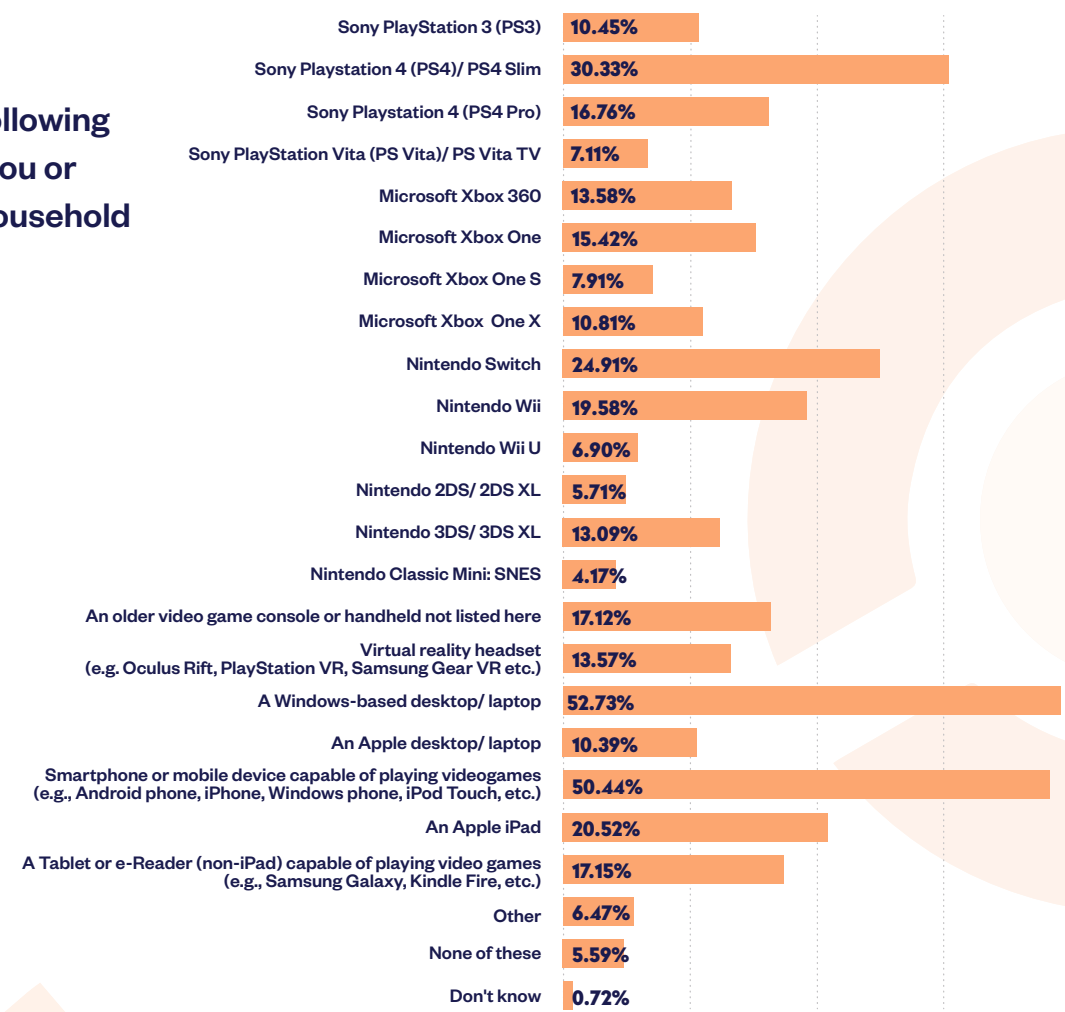
Which, if any, of the following categories best describes you?



it may go in the future, in 2020, we set out [esports principles along with various other games bodies](#) around safety and wellbeing, integrity, respect, diversity and more. This is a trend reflected by tournament organisers and teams in the UK and around the world.



Which, if any, of the following devices are used by you or anyone else in your household to play games on?



With more and more young people getting involved in esports, safeguarding has come to the fore, with more teams like Fnatic publishing safeguarding policies, as well as placing a greater emphasis on player, fan and staff wellbeing.

Overall, the pandemic also demonstrated the strength and unity of the esports community, with many coming together to raise millions of pounds for charities during lockdown through online game competitions, streams and other special online events.

“



“The pandemic increased engagement (to unrealistic levels) as people were forced to be inside and thus spent a greater percentage of their time online. We are seeing this level-off now, but the overall result is still an increase in followers. We also saw greater demand for both physical and digital products - our fan support has always been unmatched.”

Edward Gregory, Fnatic

“



“The pandemic gave more prominence to the ‘bedroom streamers’ to become larger personalities than the competitive gaming pros. Hence, I believe now it’s again a great time for the pro, and the fandom that’s created with the wins and losses. To show off skills when so much is at stake, when surrounded by friends and foes in a live studio or stadium, is simply of another level.”

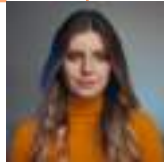
Wouter Sleijffers, EXCEL Esports

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“We were able to use it as a learning opportunity. Over the pandemic we learnt how to communicate more effectively in an exclusively online environment, which even post-pandemic has massively boosted the sense of community we strive for as well as strengthen our bonds with other universities.”

Kat Emery, University of Warwick



“The pandemic put the spotlight on the esports industry as there were a large number of digital events which highlighted how social esports is, especially to people outside of esports and to non-endemic brands looking at the industry from a partnership and sponsorship perspective.”

Becky Wright, NSE



“The shift in focus towards virtual events and online entertainment saw esports becoming a really powerful tool for brands to deliver marketing messages in a way they may previously have done through out-of-home activations or through sponsoring ‘real-world’ offline events.”

Mitsouko Anderson, DotX Talent



“The pandemic undoubtedly pushed esports further into mainstream consciousness, in turn we saw an increase in eyeballs on content and digital events. This generated further inbound interest from non-endemic brands, who are starting to take notice of esports and its ability to reach a younger hyper-engaged audience.”

Robbie Douek, BLAST



Esports and education

The UK today finds itself in a dominant position in the esports education space. Numerous esports degrees have launched including at Staffordshire University, Chichester, and the Confetti Institute of Creative Technologies.

The University of Roehampton are offering scholarships for esports and the University of York has launched an esports research group. A Level 3 Esports BTEC has been launched by Pearson and British Esports. New platform EQ launched in 2022 hoping to help young people secure employment in esports and the games industry and British Esports will open a performance and education campus at Riverside Sunderland. Institutions like Queen Mary's College and the

University of Warwick have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on their esports and games facilities. London-headquartered esports organisation Fnatic have launched a college partner programme in the UK to help young people get a career in the games industry.

EXCEL Esports have become one of the first esports organisations to partner with the Duke of Edinburgh as an approved activity provider. Some in the esports industry have welcomed a multitude of offerings for students, while others have remained cautious about there being a finite number of esports jobs for the large numbers of students who will be coming through in the coming years. Saying that, the first students from these early UK-based

esports degree have graduated, and are landing their first jobs in and integrating themselves into the industry.

Raven.GG managing director Sam Wells says: “I still feel there is growth to be realised within UK esports. The US and Asia seem to be a few years ahead when it comes to talent within esports. Ultimately, the more success UK esports finds, the larger the ecosystem will grow. Having esports integrated into schools is a good step, as it should create a pathway for talent to flourish. If you look towards the US, collegiate esports is a massive market and so the development of esports programmes in schools and universities is a great step forward for UK esports.”

Team organisations and the quest for profit

The UK has some well-known, well-established esports organisations in what is becoming an increasingly competitive space.

Fnatic's Edward Gregory says: "The UK scene is getting stronger all the time. We have seen EXCEL, Guild and Tundra esports all making significant strides forwards and securing titles in multiple games. As Fnatic we welcome the growth in the UK as the fan base exists and it is all about us as custodians of the esports space to ensure we activate them, engage with them and provide opportunities for people to work in this space as well as either become pro players or streamers. As we see new organisations enter the scene it also increases competition. Competition for fans, for players, for sponsors, and

this only pushes all the organisations to up their game in terms of fan experience, content, events and more."

Endpoint's Adam Jessop adds: "The UK esports scene is thriving both from a competitive standpoint as well as a talent representation point of view. We are constantly seeing a higher level of British representation within teams competing at a higher level. I think over time, we will see this continue to grow as more and more domestic investors and policymakers realise the true potential of the market and support and invest in more brands within the space."

The UK has several teams in franchised-style leagues, which adopt a US sports-style model, allowing a

team to buy in (for tens of millions of pounds) in order to gain a share of revenues from the league.

There is no relegation or promotion, and teams must follow rules such as minimum player salaries. In the UK, we have the London Royal Ravens in the Call of Duty League, the London Spitfire in the Overwatch League, and EXCEL Esports and Fnatic in the League of Legends LEC.

Despite this demand for top teams and the fact that some of the UK organisations often compete in some of the biggest esports leagues in the world, from the Rocket League Championship Series (RLCS), Dota 2 International (TI) and more, organisations are still struggling to turn a profit.



"Esports is dominated by sponsorships. These sponsors want young people using Gillette or driving a Volkswagen or whatever it is, to get customers using their product early, so it's better for them to spend a dollar on marketing to a young person who's watching esports than it is an older person. Sponsorship is so important to esports."

Spike Laurie, Hiro Capital

With staff and player salaries (at the top level players can command hundreds of thousands of pounds per year), office and travel costs and more, team overheads are high. Unlike football, esports does not have physical home and away matches or stadiums to fill out each week, meaning little in ticketing revenues. As such, most revenues for a team come from sponsorships, leaving everyone to effectively fight over the same slice of the pie. Even the majority of those headline multi-million pound prize pools are taken by the professional esports players, leaving team organisations with a small cut (10% is not unusual). Players will also have sponsorships and may earn money through Twitch donations and online content on their own individual channels, while game IP owners

will earn recurring revenues through in-game transactions and game sales, propped up by the ongoing marketing vehicle that is esports - broadcasts, activities and storylines that are constantly promoting their games.

As Spike Laurie of Hiro Capital explains: "Esports is dominated by sponsorships. These sponsors want young people using Gillette or driving a Volkswagen or whatever it is, to get customers using their product early, so it's better for them to spend a dollar on marketing to a young person who's watching esports than it is an older person. Sponsorship is so important to esports."

ODEE of the London Royal Ravens adds: "Everybody thinks they will get loads of money because they play

Call of Duty well, but it doesn't work like that (laughs)! But that's what the scene, fans and players think."

There are a few UK-based esports organisations who are public, and the outlook has not been fantastic - yet. Many marketing, talent and consultant agencies have cropped up in the UK and abroad in recent years, with several growing their teams, such as The Story Mob, Kairos Media, Hotdrop and DotX Talent to name a few. More legal firms in the UK have targeted esports too, like Sheridans, Billy Jenks and Morgan Sports Law. Other innovators are looking to solve problems and provide solutions in the UK, from custom game mice provider Mouseskins to matchmaking platform Teams.gg, performance company G-Science and lots more.

UK Esports Team Committee

Several UK esports teams have banded together with British Esports, with the aim of ‘progressing and growing the UK esports industry, and representing the voice of teams within wider industry discussions’. These include:

- Endpoint
- EXCEL Esports
- Fnatic
- FUTWIZ
- Guild Esports
- LDN UTD
- London Royal Ravens
- Manchester City Esports
- Method
- MNM Gaming
- Resolve
- Vexed Gaming
- Wolves Esports

What is the value of esports?

In the nine years since Ukie set up its esports group, the number of tournaments, teams, esports games and viewers has grown drastically worldwide. Newzoo reports that esports has gone from having a fanbase of 113m and generating revenues of \$250m in 2015, to having 532m fans in 2022 with revenues of nearly \$1.38bn from sponsorship. [Ukie's value of esports](#) found that the

UK esports sector grew at an annual average rate of 8.5% between 2016 and 2019, and supported £111.5m in Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2019. Granted, these numbers are small compared to the wider global games industry, which generates some \$200bn but also includes the sale of video games. However, esports is a dynamic, events-focused side of the playing of

games, and it drives sales of games, so the two are perhaps not as separate as some might think. Given the current economic conditions, esports faces a challenging time ahead. In a report released in July 2022, Ampere Analysis said the global video games content and services market will drop by 1.2% in 2022 to \$188 billion, following the pandemic boom, but is then set to rise to \$195bn in 2023.



“Building out sponsorships is working. Look at DHL and Intel now, they’re still there in esports, growing. That’s all filtering down - the whole industry will see benefit from that. And we’re scratching the surface still, genuinely.”

James Dean, ESL Gaming - Former Founder & CEO

Sponsors, Saudi investment and new revenue streams

There are several brands in the UK and abroad that consistently support esports. Intel immediately springs to mind, with the computing giant supporting everything from grassroots Epic.LAN events in the UK to ESL’s flagship Intel Extreme Masters events around the world. The UK is also home to many a system builder, which have embraced esports over the years, from Overclockers UK to Chillblast, Yoyotech, Scan, Ebuyer and more, either partnering with teams, producing games or esports-themed PCs, supporting schools, esports facilities and more.

The energy drink space has also become extremely competitive, with brands like G FUEL having a big impact. In recent years, there’s been a focus on sugar-free alternatives, such as Beyond NRG, which is billed as combining nootropics, vitamins and minerals. Beyond NRG has

supported many esports orgs in the UK, from Endpoint to EXCEL Esports, Clique Esports and Rize Gaming, as well as Germany’s SK Gaming. While many sponsors opt for content partnerships and logo placement with teams, some prefer to launch their own tournaments or teams. Red Bull has its Gaming Sphere in London, and regularly runs competitions in VALORANT, League of Legends and fighting games.

Big brands have backed UK esports over the years. Domino’s supported the previous Gfinity Elite Series in a deal worth a reported seven-figures. EE, JD and Just Eat are on board with EXCEL Esports, Guild Esports have Sky, Coca-Cola, Subway and cryptocurrency exchange Bitstamp, among others, while NSE has Intel, Monster Energy and Barclays.

While the biggest sponsorship

deals can be six, seven or eight figures, more money has also come into esports from elsewhere in recent years. In January 2022, two major esports tournament providers, ESL and FACEIT, were purchased by Savvy Games Group (SGG), which is 100% owned by Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund. The deal was worth a combined \$1.5bn, and exemplified Saudi’s increasing activity in esports. In 2022, several tournaments were held there, including Gamers8, Gamers Without Borders, the Global Esports Tour and more. In early 2023, ESL FACEIT Group acquired Vindex, which includes Esports Engine and Vindex Intelligence Platform, plus Savvy Games Group also announced an investment of \$265m into Chinese tournament operator and esports company VSPO.

James Dean, former ESL Gaming UK founder and CEO, comments: “With our DreamHack merger and then the recent buyout, the mandate for the UK changes again, in a way, because we have a UK business - the UK is a big part of our global offices. A large part of our operations is now in London and at the same time, we’ve got growth in the US, Germany and Poland, and now Saudi comes to the forefront as well.

“ESL has no interest in regulating the market, but it becomes a good way of collecting revenues, building out sponsorships that are really working. Look at DHL and Intel now, they’re still there in esports, growing. That’s all filtering down - the whole industry will see benefit from that. And we’re scratching the surface still, genuinely. Aggregate growth is still significant. And as an industry with a level of independence to the games themselves, it’s self-supporting.”

British Esports’ Andy Payne adds: “There has been huge interest in esports organisations these past few

years, not least the \$1bn acquisition of ESL and the \$500m acquisition of FACEIT by the Public Investment Fund of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the same day last year. Both companies were highly regarded as independent esports tournament organisers and certainly delivered shareholder and investor returns.

“We have also seen the acquisition of ReKTGlobal owners of the esports teams London Royal Ravens and Rogue amongst other esports related interests, for \$470m by Metaverse company, Infinite Reality. We could see this sort of activity replicated in the local UK market for sure, with UK-based esports teams being obvious targets, given the sheer cost of buying places in the big games franchised-style leagues, which have risen from early \$20m slots to twice that now. Add to that the fact that the sheer cost of setting up a (successful) esports team has now risen from around \$5-10m two years ago to north of four to six times that now, and you can see where activity may centre.”

London Royal Ravens’ former managing director ODEE adds: “Most of the money is in America, that’s the simple fact of it. Okay, there is investment in the UK now for some teams, but it’s just not on the scale that it is in America.

“I don’t know why, but there doesn’t seem to be that appetite here for someone to fully invest in the UK and make that happen. EXCEL has investment and Guild is on the stock market, but I’ve always thought in the back of my mind you can’t just be a team, you have to do something else to go along with it.”

Hiro Capital’s Spike Laurie states: “Because it’s a global phenomenon and the English language is global, the Americas are always dominant when it comes to business, in terms of revenues. Where the publishers and their global budgets exist, the US will inevitably dominate Western esports.”



“Mainstream media coverage of esports could be a lot better. Similarly, the lack of governmental support or initiatives is something which holds back esports in the UK. But, I believe there’s still plenty to be excited and optimistic about.”

Sam Cooke, Esports Insider

Media, MPs and the mainstream

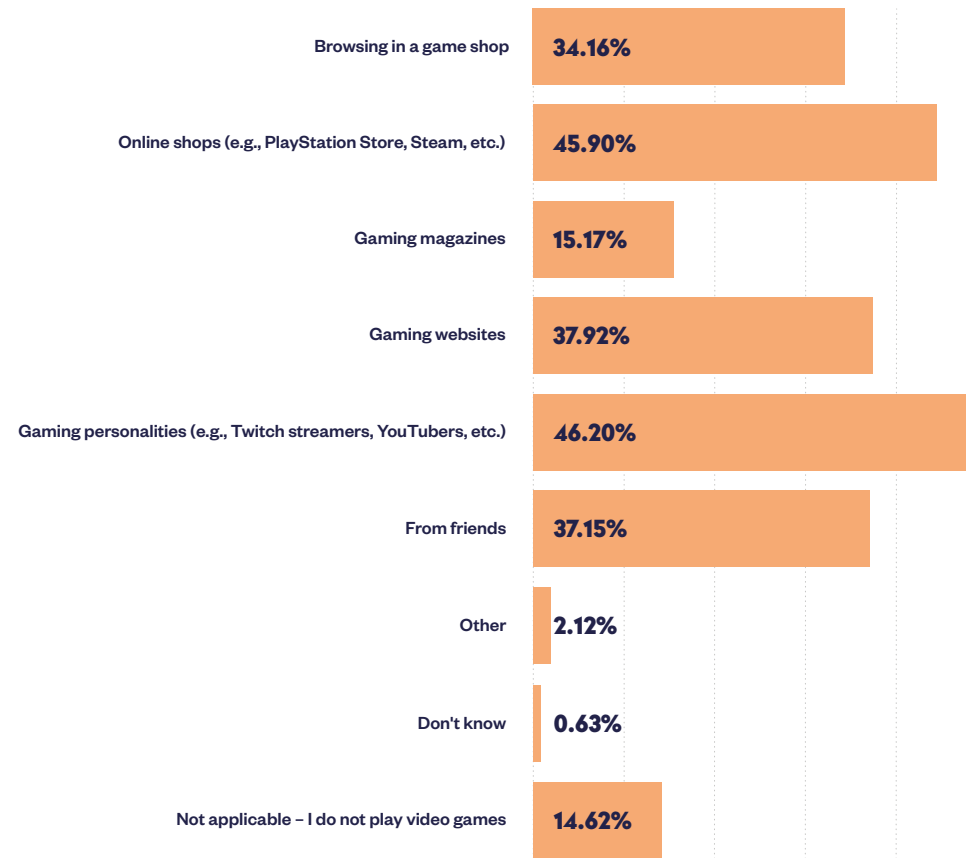
Major UK broadcasters like the BBC have helped with the awareness of esports, covering big events like the US’ Fortnite World Cup and the League of Legends World Championship (in particular, its coverage of the 2015 quarter finals at Wembley was praised). But the story often diverts to old debates and questions that have been answered a hundred times before: What is esports?

Is esports a real sport? Why aren’t there more women playing at the top level? Esports is surely just sitting down in a dark room playing games all day? While esports followers and games players in the UK tend to get their news from online streamers, personalities, websites and their friends, mainstream media still plays a vital part in the broader recognition - and acceptance - of esports.

46%

Percentage of esports followers in the UK that find out about new games through online personalities and streamers

From where, if any, of the following do you find out about new video games?



ODEE, formerly of the London Royal Ravens, is frustrated that major non-endemic publications don't often focus on what matters. "I think what the UK lacks is that esports stories don't get told," "Education on esports is always missing. Esports is fun, that's why people do it. And that's the biggest thing the UK [media] lacks, we miss the story"

Sam Cooke of Esports Insider agrees: "I believe 'mainstream' media coverage could still be a lot better. Gone are many of the lazy hit pieces crying, 'What's next?! Grand Theft

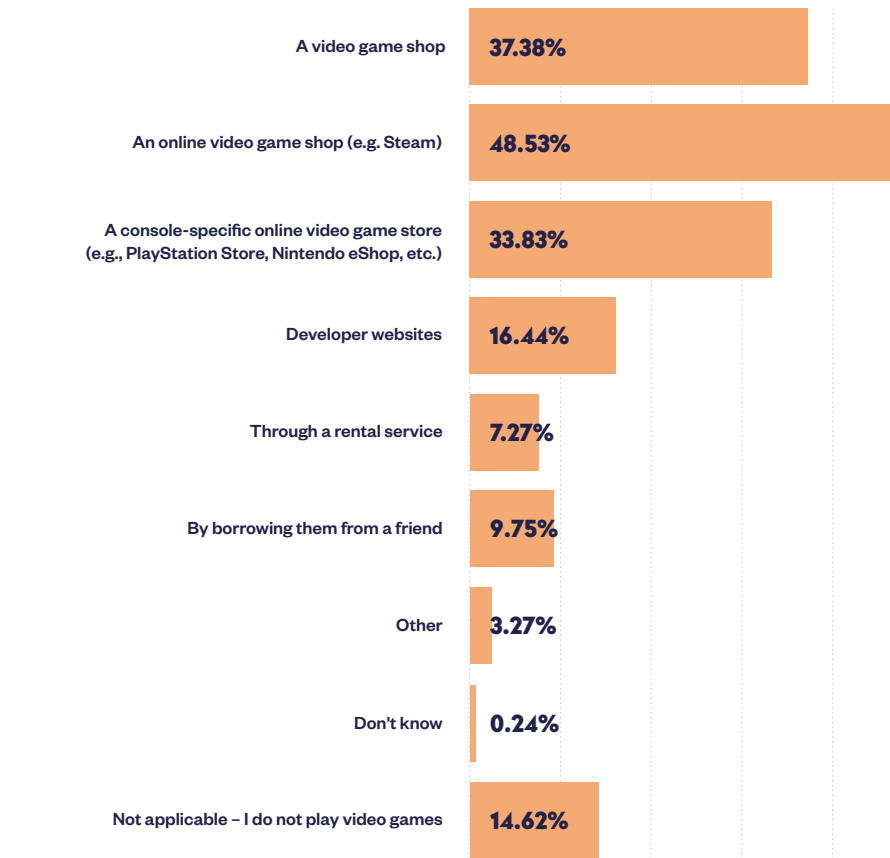
Auto in the Olympics?' but accurate, interesting, quality and consistent coverage remains sparse. The Government's support of esports has been mixed compared to other countries."

Ukie and British Esports have links with the Government, and there have been some efforts from ministers to better understand and support esports. Margot James, former Minister of State for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) notably showed a real interest in esports.

She publicly spoke about and visited ESL One Birmingham, met various esports companies in the UK, made an appearance on London Spitfire's victory tour and more. She also took the time to understand some of the issues UK esports faces.

For example, obtaining visas for esports talent has been a challenge for several organisations in the UK, and Margot responded to letters from members of the esports industry about issues such as Brexit, visas and more. It's not just Margot, of course.

From which, if any, of the following sources do you tend to acquire games?



The likes of Lynne Kilpatrick, Stephen Mayne, Ben Greenstone, Chris Hurne, Ed Vaizey and others have supported or looked into video games and esports in recent years, while MPs from other parties such as Labour's Tom Watson, Alex Sobel and Kevin Brennan have shown interest in this space too. But other countries are showing greater support. French President Emmanuel Macron invited French esports talent to the Elysee Palace ahead of the Trackmania Cup 2022 event in Paris, and the French president announced in September 2022 that Paris would also host its

first CSGO Major in May 2023. Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Denmark's former Prime Minister, opened the BLAST Pro Series CSGO tournament in 2018, calling the participants "true sportsmen" and he also visited Danish esports organisation Astralis, before speaking about the legitimacy of esports to media.

"Lots of youngsters are into gaming," Rasmussen said. "According to statistics, I think 96% of all Danish boys are playing at least twice a week. And they are in their rooms behind closed doors and parents are thinking,

'What are they actually doing?' "Parents can look at Astralis and see that gaming is about meeting people in real life. It's about good sleeping habits, nutrition and physical activity."

Similar interest in esports would be welcome from the UK Government. Here in the UK, more could be done around recognition, visas, SIC (standard industrial classification of economic activities) codes, macro trends such as inflation and more, which we'll cover in the next section, focusing on the future of UK esports and where the opportunities lie.

Chapter 2

The key players

The UK is home to several innovators in esports, and here we will throw a spotlight on these leading and notable brands at the centre of the UK esports scene, including teams, agencies, tournament organisers and more.

“The world of esports, despite its major increase in exposure and engagement, really is just getting started. The world of web3 and the metaverse are going to grow and gaming is uniquely situated to be able to capitalise on that.”

Edward Gregory, Fnatic

Fnatic

Founded in 2004 by Sam Mathews and with more than 300 trophies later, Fnatic are looking to even greater heights.

FNATIC’S headquarters might be based in the UK, but the esports organisation have a global presence, fielding teams in top esports like League of Legends, Dota 2, CSGO, VALORANT, Rainbow Six Siege, FIFA and more. In 2022, Fnatic opened a new performance facility in Berlin, home to their League of Legends team, and in 2021 they secured \$17m in funding to support their expansion into Japan and Asia-Pacific, before picking up a Japanese Apex Legends player roster.

“We have won over 300 trophies across a multitude of titles over an 18-year existence and been at the forefront of the esports space,” says Edward Gregory, Fnatic’s senior marketing manager for partnerships,

apparel and esports. “In terms of our CSR initiatives, we have a College Partner Programme where we deliver real-world resources and support to students at our partner colleges across the UK, regular charity initiatives with Special Effect / Women’s UN etc. Also our established Fnatic Network programme gives budding streamers the support needed to rise through the ranks and become global leaders in games streaming.

“We have also developed an in-house memberships programme with three tiers, with over 200,000 people claiming our free tier as well as almost 1,000 claiming our most expensive \$600 tier. We are constantly providing value to these members as we look

to grow our web3 strategy while providing real world tangible benefit. The world of esports, despite its major increase in exposure and engagement, really is just getting started. The world of web3 and the metaverse are going to grow and gaming is uniquely situated to be able to capitalise on that and ensure that we help develop the future of social interaction, self-expression and engagement.

“We at Fnatic are constantly looking at how we can better serve our fan base, increase our interactions with them and ultimately become the go to team within the space for fans to feel engaged, appreciated, supported and safe within the online space.”

“XLHQ is the UK’s best example of a place where the community, industry and talent can come together to do what competitive gaming is all about.”

Wouter Sleijffers, EXCEL

EXCEL Esports

Fuelled by their motto ‘The Power of Better’, EXCEL have made a name for themselves after securing investment, a franchise spot in the prestigious LEC and a focus on talent.

SINCE being set up by two brothers Kieran and Joel Holmes-Darby over a pint in their local pub in 2014, EXCEL have become one of the UK’s prominent esports organisations. They currently compete in the League of Legends European Championship (LEC), as well as VALORANT and FIFA, with the XLHQ opening in 2022. This offers workspaces, a content production studio, scrim rooms for competition practice, streaming pods and space for all kinds of events.

“XLHQ is the UK’s best example of a place where the community, industry and talent can come together to do what competitive gaming is all about,”

says EXCEL strategic advisor, Wouter Sleijffers. “What sets EXCEL Esports apart is that we’re the most forward thinking, innovative and community focused competitive gaming brand, taken to new levels by an amazing team of people. It’s maybe an open-door answer, but it starts with the combination of our vision, which we have embedded in our motto of ‘The Power of Better’, and the people who cherish that vision, bring it to life and further develop it. We challenge ourselves in everything we do and will not go with the status quo.

“An example of how we innovate is the story of Fight4First, which was

first narrated in the acclaimed BBC five-episode series (Fight For First). The concept and story are now continued in comic book style for our LEC Summer Split campaign and will essentially grow to continue the story for EXCEL Esports, and ‘The Power of Better’.

“Whilst we’re only part of the UK esports scene, we aim to be a major contributor to the growth of the community and the development of the UK esports industry. For example, we are a partner of the Duke of Edinburgh programme to facilitate work experiences for the next generation of talent.”

London Royal Ravens

The UK’s franchise team in the Call of Duty League saw their parent company ReKTGlobal acquired by Infinite Reality for \$470m

FOUNDER of esports organisation Dignitas, former chief gaming officer at Infinite Reality and former managing director of the London Royal Ravens, Michael ‘ODEE’ O’Dell, spoke about the team before leaving this role in June 2023.

“There’s a studio in Long Beach - it’s mind blowing,” ODEE says. We put on tournaments there, film commercials there and music videos... and then we have a services business, a media buy-in business, tech and apps with FullCube... we’re also working with five universities in America to help student athletes monetise themselves. In another studio, we have an 100ft

RX screen, the one they filmed the Mandalorian on. There are six or seven studios overall. The Ravens shot there all day with full on production and camera crews, there were 40 extras in that, it was amazing.”

The studios are a part of the takeover - Infinite Reality recently acquired [London Royal Ravens] parent company ReKTGlobal for \$470m in 2022. The plan is to float on the Dow Jones stock market, and be the second esports organisation in the US to do so after FaZe. But we’re bigger and have more to offer,” ODEE says. “And then with the metaverse, it’s mind blowing what we can do.”

While the Ravens team are based in the US, they represent the UK. And just before the pandemic, the Ravens held a homestand event in the UK with a passionate Call of Duty home crowd.

“While we’re doing a lot, we haven’t really done a lot in the UK yet. We activated at Insomnia Gaming Festival with our partner LG, and our Ravens team of players and streamers. It was a meet and greet, we were playing with fans, as the tournaments are over for us now this year.”

At the time of producing this report, ODEE has left the Ravens and reports suggest the Ravens could relocate.



London Spitfire

Cloud9 are one of the US’ biggest esports organisations, and they own the UK-focused franchise team in the Overwatch League: London Spitfire. General manager Ysabel Müller tells us more.

THE winners of the inaugural Overwatch League finals in 2018, London Spitfire have a passionate fanbase. Ysabel Müller, aka Noukky/Izzy, general manager for London Spitfire Overwatch and Cloud9 VALORANT, says: “I think one of the things that set us apart from other teams is the culture we build amongst teammates as well as staff members. We have a very level-headed approach to setting expectations and goals for player growth. This helped us a lot this season when exploring a totally new game and having the steady improvement that we have shown. The other important thing is that we are investing in the team, not only from a game perspective. We also invest in the holistic approach to mental and physical health and wellbeing. With the team here in Los Angeles we have access to all the Cloud9 facilities, gym, and health professionals the org provides for us - and we take every aspect a player wants to improve very seriously.” How has Noukky seen Spitfire’s fan habits - and esports in general - change during the pandemic? “I think esports has changed a big deal,” she says. “We all learned how to communicate better with each other through this time. Where many things were pretty hectic and last minute, I feel many have grown to be more organised, more precise and understanding of boundaries. We are still a rather young community and it’s really important to keep growing and adapting.”

“I am very proud of our work in esports education within the FE and HE sectors. Our partnership with Pearson has seen the creation of an esports BTEC with over 5,500 people studying it in 2022/2023.”

Andy Payne OBE, British Esports

British Esports

The not-for-profit set up to promote and improve esports in the UK has found its focus in the collegiate and education space with its British Esports Student Champs, the Pearson Esports BTEC and more.

BRITISH Esports was founded in 2016 as a national body. As chair Andy Payne OBE says, the group has come a long way in a relatively short amount of time. “We have specific aims and objectives, namely to promote esports in the UK, increase the level of awareness amongst players, parents and carers, media and policy makers to improve standards and, importantly, to inspire future talent. But as a national body, our aims are to support esports and provide expertise and advice to all those who want it.”

Andy adds “We are focused at the grassroots of esports and have established our British Esports Student Champs, competitive esports tournaments for school and college students aged 12 or over across the UK, and the 2022 finals took place in person in July at the Confetti Institute of Creative Technologies in Nottingham. We are a founding member of the Global Esports Federation (GEF) which promotes the credibility, legitimacy and prestige of esports globally. I think I can say our proudest moment in our short history was in Birmingham during the Commonwealth Games, where we signed a tri-party agreement with GEF and the Commonwealth Games Federation to host the inaugural Commonwealth Esports Championships. This saw 28 Commonwealth member nations compete against each other across Rocket League, Dota 2 and eFootball.

“I am also very proud of our work in esports education within the FE and HE sectors. Our partnership with Pearson has seen the creation of an esports BTEC (approved by the Department of Education) with over 5,500 people studying it in 2022/2023 and selling it to over five countries internationally.” On the future, Andy adds: “The big project for us will be the opening of our 12,000 sq ft National Esports Performance Campus (NEPC) in Sunderland and gaming houses. The NEPC will be a game changer for us and will see our staff triple in size when it opens.”

Digital Schoolhouse

Responsible for the UK’s first school esports tournaments, Digital Schoolhouse has helped bring coding - and esports casting - to the classroom.

UKIE’S Digital Schoolhouse is a not-for-profit programme which enables primary schools to experience free creative computing workshops from their local Schoolhouse. Combined with playful learning, the programme engages thousands of students with its pioneering and immersive careers education. Schoolhouses are not charged for their participation in the programme, nor for the support that they receive. Starting with only nine Schoolhouses in 2014, the network is now 85 strong (including 9 Schoolhouses in Lagos, Nigeria) and last academic year reached over 50,000 pupils and 2,000+ teachers.

Alongside their creative computing workshops, Digital Schoolhouse delivers esports tournaments to primary and secondary schools and colleges. Each tournament brings video games careers to life by teaching cross curricular transferrable skills that are proven to enhance student confidence and self-esteem. The DSH Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Team Battle is open to students aged 12-18. Now in its sixth iteration, previous years have reached up to 10,000 pupils and 1000 teams in

schools and colleges across the UK. Pupils take on real-life games industry roles to whittle down hopeful players in their school to a team of three, who will then do battle with other schools in the regional and national qualifiers ahead of the Grand Final.

The Junior Tournament, the counterpart for ages 8-11, was launched in 2021 following a successful pilot. Pupils compete with popular, age-appropriate video games on Nintendo Switch such as Mario Kart 8 Deluxe, Race with Ryan, Crayola Scoot and Ubisoft’s Just Dance 2022. The project-based learning approach allows aspiring learners to fulfil real job roles within the video games industry, resources are mapped to the UK primary curriculum for Computing, English, Maths, DT and PSHE, ensuring schools can easily deliver these unique lessons in the classroom. This experience is designed to bring computing education to life by demonstrating real-world applications of computer science, as well as highlight the full range of career paths available to young people in games and esports. And research by Digital Schoolhouse shows that the

programme works. In the 2021 Junior Esports Pilot Evaluation Report, 100% of teachers reported that pupils were more motivated to learn computing because of the pilot. 55% of teachers said that pupils achieved higher results in this work compared to their usual activities and no teachers said that the students performed worse than usual, showing no drawbacks to implementing the programme.

Meanwhile in 2018, the Esports: Engaging Education report into the Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Team Battle tournament found that almost all participating students reported an increased interest in computing, with the number of students more interested in studying computing rising by 40%. Additionally, 75% of students involved said they felt their communication skills improved and 79% said their team building skills improved. Some teachers also reported that cohorts of pupils who were usually uninterested in extra-curricular activities were engaged and encouraged by the programme.

NUEL

NUEL has taken its university esports tournaments to new heights with its partnership with Amazon University Esports.

FOUNDED in 2010 as the National University Esports League, NUEL today has more than 15,000 students from 110 universities taking part in tournaments and social games events throughout the year. UK NUEL teams also have the chance to progress to the Europe-wide University Esports Masters, and its partnership with Amazon University Esports has been integral to its growth.

David Jackson, managing director of NUEL, says: “We’re always looking for ways to improve and develop our online university tournaments. I’d say the two main new things we’re working

on right now are bringing back more in-person events – these have been sorely missed. We’re also developing our experience and capabilities in the wider grassroots space. I think the only thing for us is that, like most small businesses, we worry about the prevailing economic environment. It potentially impacts us from all angles, be that players’ disposable income, available sponsorship budgets, and the value of the money in my team’s pockets. So we’re optimistic for the future of esports and really excited about what we’re working on, but fingers crossed that the range of stakeholders in the industry will

continue supporting each other and finding opportunities to collaborate.” The NUEL also has Women’s and Non-Binary university tournaments, live events and activities for games societies in universities, and partnered with the Confetti Institute of Creative Technologies in Nottingham for the opening of a £5m esports complex there. NUEL also has a strong partnership with Riot Games, and teamed up with the League of Legends developer and GGTech to help run a women’s League of Legends tournament known as Rising Stars in 2022.

NSE

NSE (National Student Esports) operates the British University Esports Championship (BUEC), for universities.

NSE (National Student Esports) operates the British University Esports Championship powered by Intel, an esports competition for British universities. In the 21/22 academic year the competition saw over 2,100 teams from 100 universities compete across a number of esports titles, with circa 70% of participants enrolled on a STEM course. As the self-declared ‘official body of university esports in the UK’ through its partnership with British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS), NSE has established itself as a key figure in the UK esports industry with what it says is the most active grassroots games community in the country. NSE works with major

publishers including Nintendo, Riot Games and Ubisoft, and has long-term successful partnerships with Intel and Monster Energy.

“The British University Esports Championship has over 100 universities taking part and we are now the most active grassroots gaming community in the UK,” says Becky Wright, senior partnerships manager. “Something else we’re working on is the Intel FutureGen programme, which is an initiative that takes place each year and seeks to identify talented individuals amongst the student community who are interested in getting into the esports

industry after university. 20 students are accepted onto the programme each year and benefit from a series of guest speakers from senior industry leaders plus exclusive Q&As, workshops, a new industry buddy system, access to industry events and more.

“While the competitive season is a core focus, we’re also reassessing our wider community offering and initiatives, primarily our events for Women and Non-Binary people to see whether we can improve our support for those members in our community and continue to make progress with the gender split in our player base.”

University of Warwick

The winner of the UK’s Esports University of the Year for five years in a row are looking to maintain their dominant position.

WINNING breeds confidence, and for the University of Warwick, their esports teams are full of winners. They topped the standings in the British University Esports Championship (BUEC) once again for 2022/23.

It was the fifth year in a row for Warwick. They also finished second in the Esports Awards 2022 for the Esports Collegiate Program of the Year award, and teamed up with Esports Insider to host the ESI Next Gen conference at the university. Aside from the wins, Warwick invested heavily in a new esports centre and it has several initiatives on the go. Former Warwick Esports president

Kat Emery comments: “Over the last year, Warwick has pushed many projects, some of the stars among them being the WASD (Warwicks Awesome Speedruns & Demos), UKUHL - a university Hearthstone league hosted by the University of Warwick and The Pack. WASD is now the largest student-run charity speedrunning event in the UK - and has raised more than £6,000 for SpecialEffect to date. For 2022, this celebration of gaming tricks, skips, and feats was run as a joint collaboration between the UoW Computing Society, Warwick Esports student organisation, and the Warwick Esports Centre.”

“The Pack is our women and non-binary exclusive community here at Warwick Esports. It was founded by Kat Emery in late 2021 as a way to increase the representation of marginalised genders in the esports scene. Not only does it help promote inclusivity within gaming, but also creates a safe space for these women and non-binary individuals to freely be themselves. Since founding an initiative like this at Warwick, we have also seen similar projects pop up in other universities around the UK. We’re incredibly pleased the women and non-binary gaming community continues to grow to this day.”



British host Yinsu Collins interviews Canadian League of Legends player Eric 'Licorice' Ritchie at MSI 2023 in London (Photo by Colin Young-Wolff/Riot Games)

Top UK talent

Broadcasters

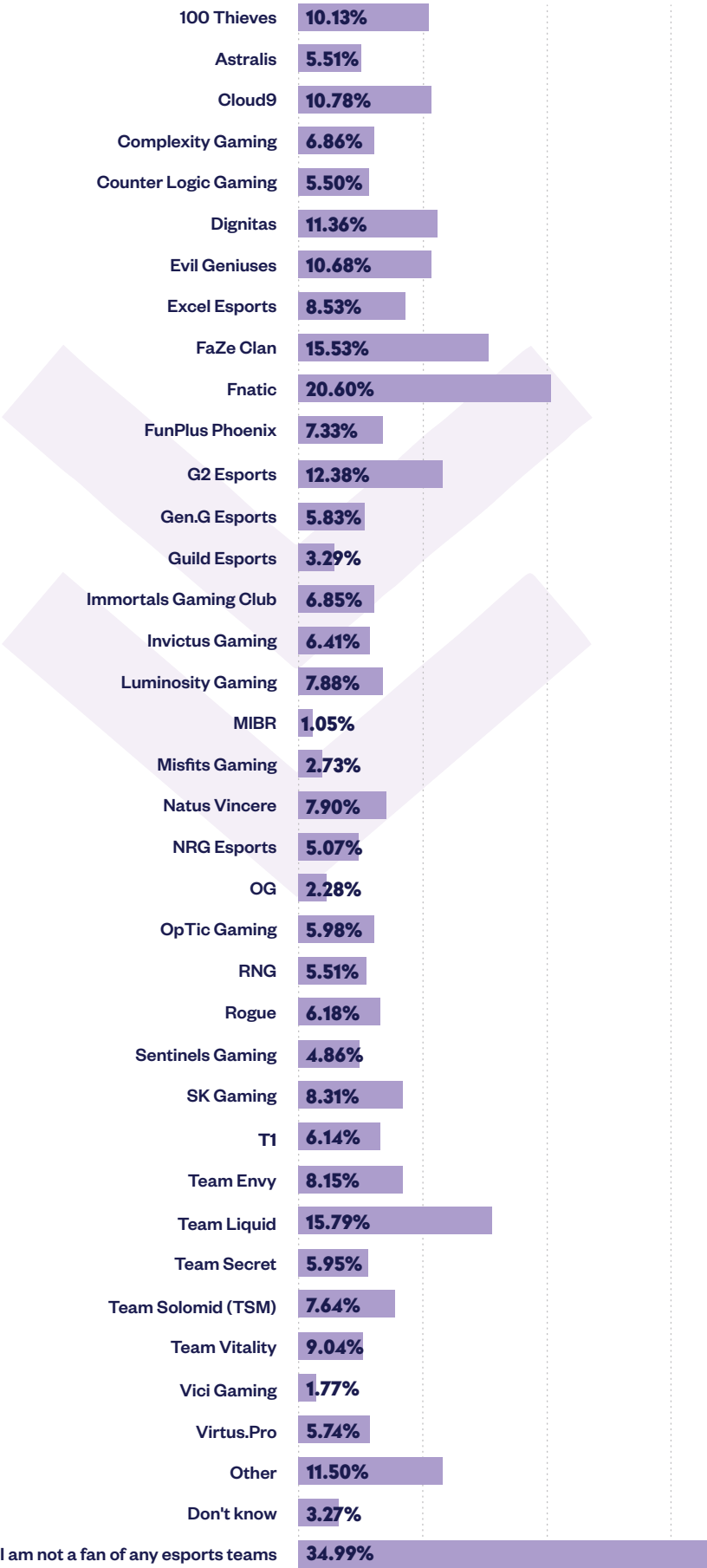
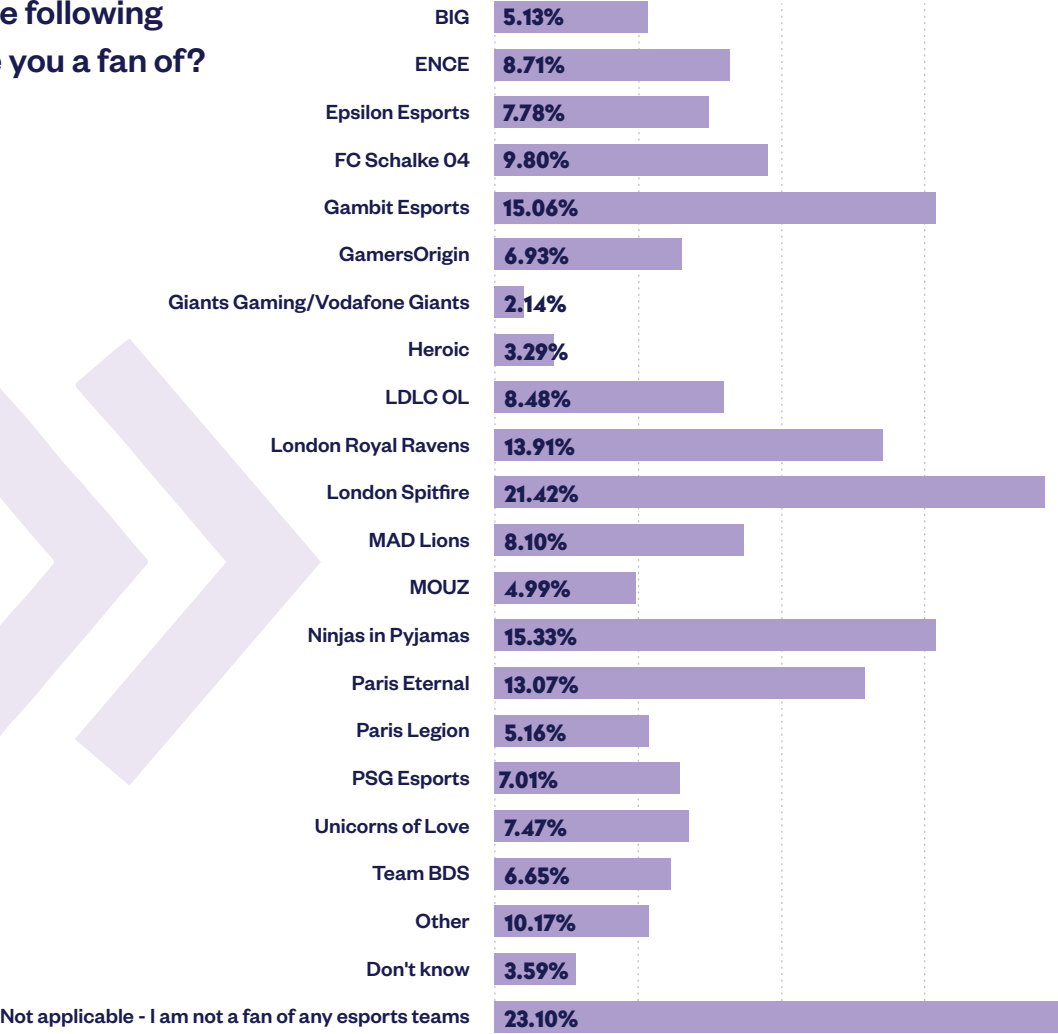
- Frankie Ward (host/interviewer)
- Pansy (CSGO/Valorant caster)
- Machine (CSGO host/caster)
- Medic (League of Legends caster)
- James Banks (CSGO, Valorant/various, host/caster/interviewer)
- Yinsu Collins (Valorant, host/interviewer)
- Dezachu (Siege caster/host)
- Fluke (Siege caster/host)
- Freya Spiers (CSGO host)
- Jamada (League of Legends caster/analyst)

Star players

- Wolfiez, Fortnite
- Tekkz, FIFA
- Tom Leese, FIFA
- ProblemX, Street Fighter
- Pac, Trackmania
- Mezii, CSGO
- James Baldwin, sim racer
- Joyo, Rocket League
- Boaster, Valorant
- Bance, Call of Duty

Top teams

Which, if any, of the following esports teams are you a fan of?



“In 2020, we hosted the inaugural BLAST Premier Spring Groups in London, which was watched by millions of people worldwide, while we also we hosted and operated the 2021/22 ePremier League Final at Here East in London’s Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.”

Robbie Douek, BLAST

BLAST

The tournament organiser hosts a variety of shows in games including CSGO, Fortnite, FIFA’s ePremier League, Dota 2, VALORANT and more.

BLAST says it’s on a mission to take esports to the next level of global entertainment.

“We work with some of the world’s best game publishers and brands to elevate games into amazing esports experiences,” says CEO Robbie Douek. We have a London office in the heart of Leicester Square, where a large part of our workforce and

operations are based. We have also delivered a number of leading events in the UK over the last few years. In 2020, we hosted the inaugural BLAST Premier Spring Groups in London, which was watched by millions of people worldwide, while we also hosted and operated the 2021/22 ePremier League Final at Here East in London’s Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Our Counter-Strike tournament

series, BLAST Premier, currently has two UK-based talent members in Freya Spiers and James Banks. Both have been working with us for a number of years and are important recurring faces of these global events.” More recently BLAST has been running the GSGO Paris Major in May 2023.



“For us, the challenge is keeping the grassroots aspect of our tournaments. We want to expand and become a household name in the industry but keep to our roots and our ultimate goal of giving players an entry point to the professional scene with our BYOC Open Tournaments.”

Matt ‘Kharne’ Macdonald, Player1 Events

Player1 Events

After a difficult two-year break around the pandemic, Insomnia Gaming Festival is back - and brings with it a host of in-person esports tournaments.

INSOMNIA Gaming Festival is a key event in the UK esports calendar, with fans and players across the UK bringing their own PCs to play in-person together.

“At Insomnia Gaming Festival, our focus is and has always been, the community. Not just our own that attend our events but expanding to the wider games industry, physically and online,” explains Player1 Events esports manager Matt ‘Kharne’ Macdonald. “We keep this in mind whenever we make any decisions about the event, always seeking feedback directly rather than making assumptions. This also incorporates

our esports tournaments and the way we run them. The Insomnia LAN is where we started and our esports offerings are a huge part of that experience. 2022 saw the launch of our new esports brand, The BYOC Opens, as a way to refresh our offering and reframe our direction as we move into a new world of live events post-pandemic. This includes tournaments in CSGO, VALORANT, Rocket League, Overwatch and League of Legends. The UK esports community is (and always has been) one of the core fundamental elements of the Insomnia Gaming Festival events. We have seen the scene go from its early roots back in the late ‘90s with Doom and Quake

and all the way through the 2000s with CS, UT and CoD, into the 2010s with the games we have now. As with any business, we’re always looking for the next big thing and ways to expand our offerings to the community. This can mean new games that are up and coming in the industry or even new formats that our community prefers. For us, the challenge is keeping the grassroots aspect of our tournaments. We want to expand and become a household name in the industry but keep to our roots and our ultimate goal of giving players an entry point to the professional scene with our BYOC Open Tournaments.”

Morgan Sports Law & DotX Talent

Legal firm and talent agency making waves in UK esports.

DOTX TALENT is a talent management agency focused on the games industry and esports, with the financial backing and support of Morgan Sports Law. “DotX works primarily with creators, broadcast talent, and players as their exclusive representative, helping to amplify their careers and reach new heights through an extensive service offering rooted in our staff member’s various areas of expertise,” says Mitsouko Anderson, head of partnerships and Nick Williams, barrister. “We wanted to go above and beyond what others offer, delivering through an approach that actually helps talent to excel and progress. We work closely with

our creators in particular to find partnerships that work for them. Leveraging the power of our analytics platform, we can deliver tailored advice to each client on their own personal brand and areas of growth. All DotX clients also get access to the legal expertise of Morgan Sports Law, who are accustomed to acting in the legal affairs of the biggest sports stars in the world. The rights of gaming and esports talent often get trodden on and having us in their corner helps balance out the power dynamic. A particular innovation we are proud of is our player transfer service that we announced in June 2022: a first-of-its-kind short-term representation

option that offers esports players accessible, conflict-free support around their transfers that does not require them to tie themselves to any agency in the long-term whilst still getting top-class representation and support.”

Nick Williams continues: “I am incredibly proud of how much we have been able to achieve in a short time. We believe no other gaming agency in the world matches the service offering that we provide to our talent. I genuinely hope that seeing what we are doing encourages our competitors to raise their games.”

The Story Mob

The Story Mob, a female-founded and led communications consultancy for the culture of games and immersive digital entertainment was established in 2018 and, in November 2020, opened its UK office.

MANAGING Director EMEA, Karen Low, says “Since the start of the UK Mob, we’ve worked with some of the biggest names in the scene: Riot Games, Team Liquid, Fnatic, DreamHack, Kinguin, the French Tennis Federation, and most recently BAFTA. The Mob’s clients have always loved our approach of pairing native gamers with high-level communications pros, giving us the flexibility to staff every project with a passionate gamer who won’t miss a newsbeat from their favourite game or pro, and the skills and expertise of an established comms thought leader.

“Our decision to start operations in the UK was driven by the belief that the UK esports industry had huge potential across the board: from new business opportunities, innovation in the scene, and the talent pool all the way to the pace at which we’ve seen

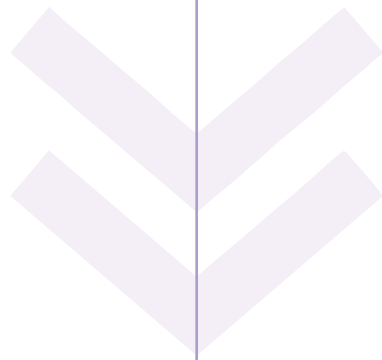
UK esports grow YoY since 2018. And it’s a decision we’ve never looked back on. Since we opened our doors we’ve grown the team from one to nine professionals and 2022 was our best year yet.

“The recent economic downturn has definitely had a ripple effect on esports, and I believe we will see further adjustments in revenue growth, valuations and most importantly brands and consumer spending in the market. That said, the UK has always been regarded as an innovative region and so, despite some gloomy forecasts, there is light at the end of the tunnel.”

In terms of what’s next, Karen says: “We’re thrilled to see the UK host the League of Legends Mid-Seasonal Invitational (MSI) in May! Having a major, massively popular and loved

by-fans event in the UK puts a much-deserved spotlight on the region, while also further strengthening the notion that there’s an appetite for such events in the UK. As a company built on the core belief that esports and gaming fans are the most passionate and valuable fans in the world, we know that for them, nothing beats being part of a crowd in a packed arena, cheering for the teams they’ve grown to love so much.

“If anyone in the UK still doubts the power esports has to bring people together and deliver an amazing show, then MSI was the place for them to test it out. Finally, on a personal level, 2023 is the year of massive growth for the Mob in the UK, and I’m excited to further engage with and work with more brands, publishers and individuals who truly want to make their mark.”



Hotdrop

Marketing agency Hotdrop has been on the up and up since being founded in 2019.

FOUNDER and CEO Heather Dower says Hotdrop was founded in 2019 to cater to a growing market demand for specialist agencies, in order to support brands in their efforts to engage audiences through games and esports.

“We are a creative marketing agency embedded in online culture and endemic to digital lifestyle,” says Heather. “Right now, we’re working on a range of exciting projects, from large non-endemic brands to well known

faces within the esports space. We are working on sustainable long term strategies with our trusted partners, where we are able to flex our creativity and push the boundaries of marketing norms on a regular basis. Hotdrop offers video production, creative design, photography and marketing services, social media and commercial support.

In terms of what’s next, Heather states: “Going forward, it’s about continuing to lead the way with our

culture and best practices we are building at Hotdrop, enabling us to innovate, create, and influence. We’re also excited to continue to expand our international client base by blending the words of many entertainment industries such as music, sport, film and beyond.” Lots of exciting things are on the horizon for us here at Hotdrop, we are continuing to scale and expand our services as an SME, despite no outside investment. Watch this space!”

Heaven

Heaven is a global Integrated marketing communications agency specialising in providing solutions for the games and esports industries.

Heaven gained its expertise by initially ingraining itself in many areas that esports operates in, including team and league ownership, as well as the organisation of both online and offline tournaments. Through their experiences, the team recognised the scalability of esports and decided to pivot to a place where it could share its expertise and guidance. “Having operated within esports over the past 15 years has given us the knowledge to provide guidance to our clients on what works best,” said Mark Reed, CEO of Heaven, “but beyond that, it’s through our collective experience

and, importantly, our mistakes, that allows us to advise on what not to do in a space where the stakes are high if you do not position your brand correctly. When you are able to unlock that connection with esports fans, the value you get in return will be almost limitless.”

With industry veterans sitting across press relations, influencer marketing, social media and esports, Heaven provides brands with a holistic approach that integrates esports as part of an overall strategy rather than an isolated part of a business. “By

understanding its shortcoming, we can also look at opportunities, like the hyper-regionalisation of the leagues and the tournaments, by changing the broadcast model. This can happen by implementing a pay-per-view system that allows for localised sponsorships that ensure the right fanbases are being targeted,” Mark Reed continues. “It is because of this deep understanding of the industry and the models they operate with as a whole, that we can help provide the correct approach to ensure that brands reach their audiences.”

Hiro Capital

The Luxembourg/UK fund has deployed hundreds of millions of euros into many investments, including global esports giant Team Liquid.

ESPORTS has attracted a lot of interest and investment over the years, and Hiro Capital is one such fund who has pumped money into it. After being founded five years ago, its first fund was €150m euros and it deployed that across 22 investments. Its second fund is now €350m, and it's done its first four investments - Team Liquid being one of them. "I once said I don't think Hiro would invest in esports teams," Hiro Capital partner

Spike Laurie admits. "But I think having looked at the landscape with my investor hat on for four years, and understanding how it works in esports, I think the time and opportunity came for us to invest in Team Liquid. And if you look at esports teams as one of those power law kind of businesses, the top couple of teams take up most of the revenue in esports. They're a premium team who can attract premium revenue sources.

"We also launched a SPAC (Special Purpose Acquisition Company) on the London Stock Exchange, we're looking to take a private business public. So in general the fund is going really well, it's been a great learning curve for me personally, and we now have 28 investments going in brilliant businesses all over the world at very different stages."

"We were fighting for an ESL One for years. Then we managed to get Dota 2 and we [hosted ESL One in Birmingham]. That didn't happen in 2022 because of event date clashes, but we're absolutely looking at bringing back big events back to the UK."

James Dean, former ESL Gaming UK founder and CEO

ESL

The UK operations of ESL have been integral to esports' growth in the UK, with the ESL UK & Ireland Premierships and ESL One Birmingham creating many memories and opportunities for talent.

JAMES Dean, former ESL Gaming UK founder and CEO, and co-chair of Ukie's esports sub group, talks about ESL's journey in the UK and innovations such as the Weavr tech project.

"If we think of where ESL has gone, back in 2012 the strategy at ESL was effectively to build out these regional hubs. Back then, ESL was very much a German organisation who had a German community and German events, like CeBIT," James says. "But obviously, the growth of esports comes from an international level downwards. So while grassroots is important, international is where the growth is. So ESL grew as a company, with regional hubs, the mandate changed. In the UK we took a particular approach to really hone in on growing the national league

for ESL and bringing big ESL stuff to the UK. We can set things up, find the venues, do the deals and lay the foundations for this. We've done that successfully several times. The first ever Pro League live finals were in 2016 in the UK. We were fighting for an ESL One for years. Then we managed to get Dota 2 and we hosted ESL One in Birmingham. That didn't happen in 2022 because of event date clashes, but we're absolutely looking at bringing back big events back to the UK. Then getting back to existing gaming events in the UK like Insomnia and EGX is very much on the cards. We've been at Insomnia already in April 2022 [with HADO]. "Back in 2017, we were working with York University on their AI data stuff. And at ESL One Frankfurt in 2017 became the first esports tournament with this level of automated AI-driven data analytics.

It had never been done before, and it was done by York University. This turned into Weavr. This was a massive win for us, it ended up being £7.2m in total investment across industry partners and government contributions. Over £1m of that went into York University to fund research projects and PHD students and facilities there."

So what's next? "What I'm keen to do is to consult with game developers, sport IPs, big properties like venue properties and help them realise the potential in the industry. And that, in my opinion, will not only help grow the industry, but also it'll create a lot of business for UK businesses in the space. It will almost help become a catalyst in growth - and I hope more people will do that over time," James concludes.



Esports Insider

ESPORTS Insider is a business with three pillars: media, events and its agency arm, Connect. The UK-based B2B-focused esports publication and media company has brought the industry together through its ESI conference and networking events. “On our events side,” explains Esports Insider managing director and co-founder Sam Cooke, “we’ve ESI Next Gen focusing on the convergence of the video games, esports and education sectors, as well as the evolution of The Clutch, our pitch

investment competition. I’m pretty excited for both of these. We established a Clutch Advisory Board in 2022 and will broaden its remit to include gaming and the creator economy alongside esports, whilst Next Gen is our first dive into the education sector. Furthermore, and further extending our reach outside of purely esports, there’ll be another two new launches alongside ESI London: checkpoint, which focuses on the business of the creator economy x video games and esports,

and the first ESI London Film Festival, a short film festival focused on gaming and esports stories. Both will feature as a part of ESI London in October, as will The Clutch. Going forwards we’ll continue to grow Esports Insider, expand the global ESI network, and develop more IPs and new brands (events, media, other) that bring together increasingly key and directly aligned industries; education, the creator economy, and of course, video games as a whole, and in turn help to better elevate the esports space.”

“I think over the past decade, esports and competitive gaming has seen a far wider adoption, especially with games such as Fortnite, which has brought through a new generation of players and watchers.”

Sam Wells, Raven.GG

Raven.GG

CLOTHING business Raven has struck partnerships with many esports teams and brands, from Renegades to SMPR, NSE and more. Raven.GG specialises in the esports and the games market, and aside from working with well-known teams, it also now allows users to make their own custom jerseys. Sam Wells, Raven.GG managing director, says: “We have launched an online platform, specifically made for esports, that allows individuals and teams to design, create and sell their own esports apparel. It’s a completely bespoke platform which gives teams

of all sizes the ability to grow their brand. We’re also working on a project we’ve termed “Raven ID” which is at the other end of the apparel spectrum – designed specifically for high performance athletes within esports. We’ve been focusing on how clothing can benefit competitors at a high level, just like in traditional sports, however we’ve tailored that towards esports and have created a product we’re really excited to show off. Having been involved in esports both as a competitor and business for over 10 years, it’s been great to see how

esports has developed in the UK. I think over the past decade, esports and competitive gaming has seen a far wider adoption, especially with games such as Fortnite which has brought through a new generation of players and watchers. The growth of brands such as Belong, adding more and more arenas across the country, shows how things have progressed from small, local LANs, to impressive events hosted in some of London’s greatest arenas. And I still feel there is growth to be realised within UK esports.”

Esports Integrity Commission

ESIC is a non-profit members’ association established in 2016 to promote and facilitate competitive integrity in esports. It takes responsibility for disruption prevention investigation and prosecution of all forms of cheating in esports, including, but not limited to, match manipulation and doping. It has many partners including Pinnacle, Midnite, Betway, the Gambling

Commission, and tournament operator members such as Promod Esports, WePlay Esports, ESL, Dreamhack, BLAST Pro Series and more. ESIC held its first Global Esports Summit in London in April 2022 and has big plans for the future, including a talent agent scheme, MOUs with IP owners s to ‘harmonise’ sanctions across esports, a specialised esports insurance product to cover travel,

prize pool risk and special esports risk, and more. ESIC Commissioner Ian Smith says: “I have so many ambitions within and without the esports ecosystem that I would, need an essay to set them out here. I love the esports community, but my ambition remains the same as it was six years ago – to become the trusted guardian of competitive integrity across the industry.”

MNM Gaming

“MNM Gaming is an esports entertainment brand who connects different cultures together, in particular British and Chinese culture,” explains co-founder Kalvin ‘KalKal’ Chung. “We represent millions of overseas Chinese as well as British culture, which we believe is different backgrounds coming together to do great things. Our purpose is to connect people and culture together through

the world of gaming and esports. We know there are millions out there looking to explore other cultures and MNM has a lot to offer. We will continue our message of positively spreading culture and esports.” This unique approach has not only set MNM Gaming apart from other organisations in the UK, it’s given the organisation and their fans an identity, and the passion from the staff and

followers shines through. In terms of recent and past successes, MNM have won several UK tournaments including the previous League of Legends ESL UK & Ireland Premiership, and have branched beyond the UK to participate in bigger global tournaments, such as the Trackmania World Cup, Rainbow Six Berlin Major, Six Invitational and more.

“We are constantly looking into ways we can promote inclusivity and have a strong focus on British representation within our teams and content creators.”

Adam Jessop, Endpoint

Endpoint

WITH unparalleled success in UK CSGO, a big partnership with retailer CeX and training facilities opening in Sheffield, Endpoint have gone from strength to strength. They were founded in 2016 with the purpose of representing British esports talent on the international stage.

“We pride ourselves on being the largest and most successful UK esports team outside of London,” comments Adam Jessop, founder and CEO of Endpoint. “We are constantly looking into ways we can promote inclusivity and have a strong focus on British representation within our teams and content creators. We are currently in the middle of building a unique fan engagement platform which will help us track and reward fan

interactions with our social profiles in a new and engaging way. This platform will belong to Endpoint and be piloted within our fanbase but also has the option to be multi-tenant and white-labelled to other esports and traditional sports organisations.

“As a company we have been able to increase our revenue by a CAGR of 131.23% over the last three years, as well as being a profitable company. This is from a renewed focus on marketing budgets from brands into the esports market. We were able to secure a number of multi-year partnership deals, none bigger than our seven-figure, five-year deal with high street second hand electronics retailer CeX. We found that our fanbase grew within the

COVID pandemic also, merchandise purchases have been more regular and we have witnessed an increase in community activity. Thankfully these fans appear to be continuing to support us and even cross over to the other games we compete in, outside of the one that may have engaged them initially. “We opened our dedicated training facility in Sheffield, which will be home to all of our professional teams as well as our backroom staff. With a dedicated studio space, four training rooms and other key areas, we are looking forward to being able to produce media and results on a bigger scale than ever before. We are actively looking for investors and partners to join us on this journey.”

Chapter 3

The future of UK esports and where the opportunities lie

Investments, inflation and innovation

It's true that traditional esports team organisations and tournament operators have had a tough time turning a profit. But esports is more than the teams - there are innovators, agencies and solutions providers emerging all the time.

As UK esports enters its next phase, investments will likely get smarter as interested parties get the intel required to enter the market. Kieran Holmes-Darby of Formula E says: "Investors can look at publishers, tournament operators or teams if they want to get involved at the core of the action. What is great to see is now the amount of ancillary esports products and agencies that are running great complimentary businesses, giving investors a much wider opportunity pool to fish in."

Morgan Sports Law barrister Nick Williams says: "I think the smart brands will focus mainly on activating with influential talent. The same is true for investors, who would do well to partner with creators on businesses that are complementary to that person's existing audience. People like to talk about media rights as the big future revenue driver for esports, in a similar manner to football. In theory esports media rights are incredibly valuable, but it remains to be seen whether enough of that revenue will get passed on to teams to mitigate their overreliance on sponsorship income. I suspect not." Hiro Capital partner Spike Laurie adds: "In the last three years the investment space has been supercharged. There's a lot of dry powder in the market."

You've got funds like Griffin Gaming that raised \$750m, you've got BitKraft raising big funds, you've got Hiro, you've got Makers Fund. The reason for that is interest rates were so low. If you're a super high net worth individual sitting on hundreds of millions of dollars, you need to put it to work.

"A good investor can find great opportunities, but the UK esports industry needs to be honest with itself about what the opportunities are for them, who might acquire them, how they might be acquired, who's going to invest in them, what an investor is looking for in terms of return - and can that business generate a return?"



“A good investor can find great opportunities, but the UK esports industry needs to be honest with itself about what the opportunities are for them, who might acquire them, how they might be acquired, who’s going to invest in them, what an investor is looking for in terms of return - and can that business generate a return?”

Spike Laurie, Hiro Capital

“In terms of the future, I think the market is crystalized. I think it will continue to grow steadily but I don’t expect a huge uplift. I think the market is solid, doing well. And I think more businesses will start to focus on profitability, now that the market is crystallising, and to think about what their piece of the pie is and how they can turn that into a valid business.”

James Dean, former ESL Gaming UK founder and CEO, says more funding coming into the grassroots of UK esports is key. “There’s got to be some sort of funding or understanding of how you can grow that,” he says. “It’s nice to empower the community to do that. Encouraging a startup environment to build on innovation is absolutely essential. Thinking about the end goal of monetisation, I think in reality the sponsorship would continue to grow, but the industry, which is currently relying on about 60% of sponsorship, the money needs to come from elsewhere. We’re missing this media rights piece.

You think about the sports IPs out there that want to use gaming to engage brands directly. And they’ll build properties in order to reach this younger audience, and I think that again will encourage service innovation and ultimately bring investment into the space. Esports is entrepreneurial. Every day I see amazing investment opportunities in esports. And there’s a level of naivety sometimes with organisations because you need to understand where the value lies, long term commercialisation and how it filters value in its market cap.”

Wouter Sleijffers, strategic advisor at EXCEL Esports, believes the key for entrepreneurs to gain investment in esports is “to be authentic and to keep listening, whether an investor, brand or business and to have a view on what’s long-term quality”. “The UK esports scene provides for a great opportunity in that it’s relatively small compared to the vast size of the UK gaming audience he says.

“It has a specific preference for games which is different from other countries and regions.”

Weavr is one example of innovation in UK esports. The Weavr consortium led by ESL UK and launched in 2019 received £7.2m in investment across industry partners and government match funding contributions to create new immersive audience experiences for esports fans.

Weavr’s mobile app and VR experience was unveiled to thousands of fans at ESL One Hamburg to watch Dota 2 action live. It gave fans more info on the performance of players and teams, as well as win predictions, and more. It’s tech like this that the esports industry would be wise to keep an eye on, but to also recognise that for a lot of fans, they like what they have now with their standard broadcasts. Speaking of technology and the future, Web3 is continuing to crossover into games and esports.



Is Web3 and the metaverse the future of esports?

The involvement of crypto and NFTs (non-fungible tokens) in esports has increased in prominence over the past year, with some in the community accepting it and others not so much. NFTs are unique digital assets - usually an image or a piece of digital art - with the buyer receiving a digital receipt saying they own it. NFTs can be bought and owned and re-sold, usually for cryptocurrency. And this trend is changing how esports teams think about crypto, as an offering for fans - and perhaps most importantly - an alternative revenue stream.

Endpoint CeX became the first UK esports organisation to launch a fan token, in partnership with blockchain provider Chiliz, LDN UTD have dabbled in the space and London-based Fnatic have experimented with blockchain-based membership offerings through NFT keys, following a partnership with Crypto.com.

Fnatic's first membership programme promises to offer fans 'an array of money-can't-buy rewards and features across content, digital and physical products, exclusive events and more', including the likes of

player meet-and-greets, Fnatic shop discounts, plus an annual pro jersey and more. Fnatic's Edward Gregory states: "The opportunities in esports are pretty endless at the moment. Raising capital is still important to esports organisations as they move their way towards becoming profitable.

"Digital revenues for esports and gaming are also increasing as publishers and organisers all try to ensure they are set-up to deal with the Web3 future. Fnatic, in particular, with the launch of their first-of-its-kind in esports NFT-based membership programme, are setting the standard in how to move forward in that space."

BLAST CEO Robbie Douek says: "The esports audience is young and by nature tech savvy. They are four times as likely to collect NFTs and more than nine times as likely to use crypto. Esports sits at the intersection of entertainment and tech with a booming audience who are eager to embrace new technologies. Therefore, esports has the potential to take advantage of emerging tech, be that through sponsorship or the

merging of the esports viewership experience into something that is more immersive."

ODEE, formerly of the London Royal Ravens and Infinite Reality, continues: "It's another revenue stream. In-game items are like NFTs in a way, they're cosmetics and are in your collection forever. Once publishers switch to this, imagine the revenue stream."

Beyond this, and perhaps a part of it in time, there's been a lot of talk over the past year of 'the metaverse', an interconnected virtual world that people can access to interact, communicate, trade and more. This has been part of the discussion around Web3 (or web 3.0), the next iteration of the internet tied in with the blockchain and decentralisation.

RTFKT is one UK-based business in this space. Founded in 2020 by [former Fnatic exec] Benoit Pagotto, Chris Le and Steven Vasilev, it was acquired by Nike in December 2021, and delivers collectibles that merge culture and games.



"The future is all about the metaverse; I don't think I have ever been more excited in all my years in games. It is off the scale and there are literally no limits. Wearable tech will get better, active tech will get more useful and reliable and live events will be accessible to all, for a cost, in a 'not in person' reality which will take online to a different dimension. Everything will be digital, accessible, collectible, tradeable and available. Everything and everyone will be connected."

Andy Payne, British Esports



British Esports chair Andy Payne OBE says: “The future is all about the metaverse for me, and that is already happening right now, although expect a steady evolution and not a revolution, just like we have seen with esports. Wearable tech will get better, active tech will get more useful and reliable and live events will be accessible to all, for a cost, in a ‘not in person’ reality which will take online to a different dimension.

“Everything will be digital, everything will be accessible, everything will be exclusive, everything will be collectible, everything will be tradeable and everything will be available, now. Everything and everyone will be connected. I don’t think I have ever been more excited in all my years in games, it is off the scale and there are literally no limits.”

ODEE agrees: “With the metaverse, it’s mind blowing what we can do. There’s only one metaverse, and there could be lots of metaverses in that metaverse. Now I’ve seen the possibilities, our bosses at Infinite Reality have gone through it and educated us on what could happen, and woah! That’s all I can say.”

EXCEL Esports strategic advisor at Wouter Sleijffers adds: “Whilst the metaverse might not be meaningful for competitive games in five years [time], I believe it will be very relevant as a fan and spectator experience. You can see early examples of that with the likes of UK based company Virtex Stadium.

“Of course, a major development is also the impact of blockchain applications in gaming and esports, as is with any other industry. In our case, the opportunity lies into

that in-game monetisation might ‘democratise’ which will also have a significant positive impact for competitive gaming. Thirdly, it’s the development of the further ‘enablers’ in our ecosystem such as distribution channels, dedicated infrastructure, relevant and useful data, associations etc. The market simply can’t go without the further development of it. I also hope that in five years from now, these leagues will have commercially recovered from the pandemic and fast-forward to a monetisation model that’s similar in other sports leagues.”

Mitsouko Anderson of DotX Talent is also expecting the virtual and real worlds to bridge in gaming and esports. “Esports was born from the digital world and is therefore the norm for the space: it’s not a novelty to have things exist in the online sphere for our community,” she says.



“Accelerated by the pandemic, I believe there’s an interest in doing things in the real world that exists alongside the buzz of virtual worlds. Offline events have a nostalgic freshness to them that, combined with gathering in person with fellow gamers or esports fans or even your favourite influencer, brings about a renewed interest that brands can capture and compare to all the noise and hype around the metaverse and virtual spaces.

“The UK in particular has a strong and engaged community, and the small size of the country – compared to places like the US – means that local events become much more accessible

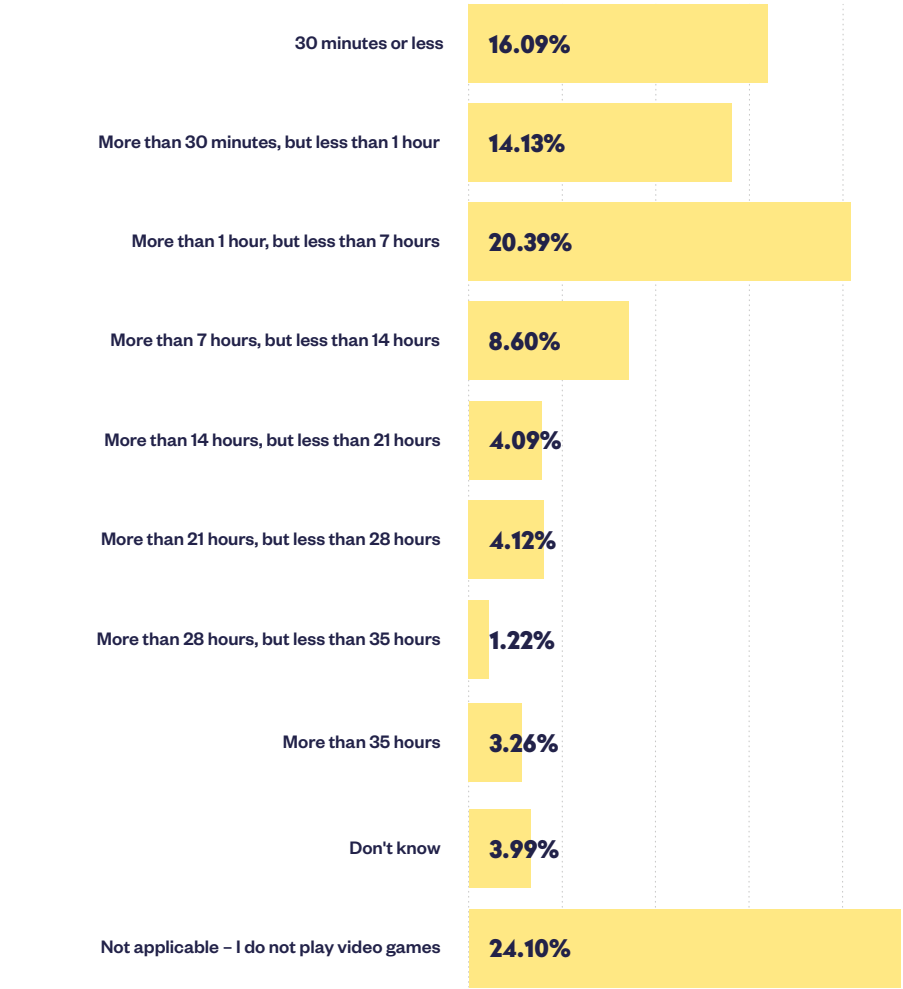
to those all across the country, and you can put on events that are not restricted to a certain city or audience based on their address. I look forward to seeing exciting ways of real and virtual worlds colliding through innovative offline events that marry up the two, and in seeing whether or not my theory around different ways endemics and non-endemics look to engage based on their typical/ historical sphere of interaction holds up!”

How will all this tangibly look in the world of esports as it is now? Former ESL Gaming UK founder and CEO, James Dean, says: “There’s always going to be MOBAs and FPS games,

but these will absolutely disperse into the real world, 100%. I think in the future you could be able to load up your FIFA team while playing a game in the park with your mates, and suddenly you’re playing a different format based on that IP.

“That convergence is so real [and is happening in competitive live entertainment, through things like HADO. Gaming is the digital metaverse, categorically. And I don’t think it’s one platform or one bit of technology or one IP - it’s all of it. We are the metaverse in the way we behave digitally. Gaming was just the first.”

In a typical week, how much time, if at all, do you spend playing video games on your mobile phone/handheld device?



Mobile growth

Coming back more towards the here and now, the playing of mobile games has been a prominent discussion point in the industry in recent years, with 5G technology on the rise but not quite entirely widespread across the UK yet. There are still many popular mobile esports games, from Clash Royale to PUBG Mobile, Brawl Stars, CoD Mobile

and more. While esports is still on the PC or console, some games lend themselves very well to the smaller screen, and this area should not be overlooked. We’ve shared YouGov data here to illustrate UK esports followers and gamers’ playing habits on mobiles and other platforms.

NSE senior partnerships manager Becky Wright says: “It’ll also be interesting to see the development of mobile esports. We’ve seen a variety of esports titles gain mobile versions so we’ll be keeping an eye on whether that trend continues and if the playerbase supports it.”

Future facilities

Esports has moved away from the 'games house' model to more professional training facilities and offices for esports organisations and their teams.

Hubs and clusters are cropping up around the UK. London is home to EXCEL Esports, Guild Esports, Fnatic and the Red Bull Gaming Sphere, with Endpoint having a dedicated space at CeX's headquarters there. Here East in Olympic Park has Staffordshire University's London campus where it teaches its esports degree, hosts Fourth Wall Esports Club events and the College of Esports nearby. HOST Salford at MediaCity has also brought together pioneers and industry for conferences with Esports Insider, and has partnered with the likes of UK esports organisation Vexed Gaming and the University of Salford.

On the bigger stage, there are several arenas set to open in the UK that have their eyes on esports. Southport Town Deal Board submitted plans to transform the coastal town in Merseyside and open a new convention and events centre, featuring a 1,200-seat auditorium for 'major esports events'. Elsewhere, a creative technology education faculty and 1,500-seat esports arena has been proposed for Bristol, while Wigan's Galleries Shopping Centre is to get its own esports venue as part of £130m redevelopment.

A brand new multi-purpose 4,000-seat arena is also being proposed for Dundee, which could play host to major esports events in the future. As mentioned, many major esports and games businesses have facilities in the UK. And more are cropping up. In July

2022, Riot Games opened a 50,000 sq ft Project Stryker broadcast production facility in Dublin, Ireland. It serves as a central broadcasting hub for both regional and global live esports productions across Riot's trio of esports titles: League of Legends Esports (LoL Esports), VALORANT Esports and Wild Rift Esports. Riot says Dublin stood out as the ideal destination for the European HQ for Project Stryker 'due to the quality of its infrastructure, position in the European market, talent pool and strategic location as part of the esports global ecosystem'.

British Esports will soon open its National Esports Performance Campus in Sunderland, which hopes to become a centre of excellence, providing access to state-of-the-art equipment, training and investment.

In June 2022, the Global Esports Federation announced a 10-year agreement led by the West Midlands Growth Company, to boost UK esports in the region, open a research centre and host tournaments. The region has history in esports, with Insomnia Gaming Festival, ESL One Birmingham and more taking place there, not to mention Birmingham Salvo's aforementioned success in the old Championship Gaming Series (CGS).

With greater facilities come greater costs, of course, and at the time of writing this report, the cost of energy, fuel and bills is rising to record levels. Macroeconomics will have an impact on esports, as it will other industries, but experts believe the Government can be doing more to help support esports. ODEE of London Royal Ravens says: "Once politicians really

understand that esports makes money, then they'll actually care about it, I think. What do they do at a local level around esports, or gaming? It's part of the culture now. I don't think the government does anything around esports, and I'd like to see that change.

"The simplest thing the government could do would be to sort the SIC (Standard Industrial Classification of economic activities) codes out for esports. Every esports company in the UK, all of the teams, probably has about six or seven SIC codes because nobody knows what esports is. If there were [esports] SIC codes for the government to see the revenue, then they might be interested."

Visas have also been an issue for esports in the past, in terms of talent

coming into the UK - and talent going out. "For UK visas now, I personally don't have to worry about that, because we can easily export our UK players and coaches to America," ODEE explains. "I think [the situation with visas for esports has] improved, but from listening to other teams, it's still painful."

MINM Gaming co-founder Calvin 'KalKal' Chung adds: "The growth of UK esports entirely depends on the individuals in the space, and the actions the government takes to give businesses the right foundation to grow, such as an SIC, initiatives and economic policies. It is not the government's role to grow business, but I believe it is their place to give us the right tools to grow."

Conclusion: UK esports has a bright future

UK esports has made fantastic progress over the past decade, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

How else do our panel of experts believe things will evolve in the future, and what must we focus on as a collective? What other opportunities are there?

David Jackson, managing director of university esports body NUEL, says: “Looking at our part of the esports universe, I think there will be a growing demand for new ways for people to interact with their favourite games and with each other, and grassroots esports tournaments and events will be an important part of that.

“We’re at a very interesting intersection of casual and organised play, so I’m interested to see how the esports ecosystem aligns itself to deliver this - such as whether publishers choose to take more in house, whether federations play a bigger role etc - as a tournament and event organiser obviously we believe we add value here. It also bears saying that there remain critical challenges in diversity and inclusion that we still collectively need to get to grips

with. I’ve met and worked with some amazing, dedicated people working hard on this and I think esports has a great opportunity to make a positive impact on the gaming space as a whole here.”

Heather Dower, founder and CEO of Hotdrop, believes that “gaming and esport programming or activations at large scale mainstream events, be that music or sport, will become the norm”.

She adds: “We also envisage that gaming and esports will find itself more commonly referenced in everyday context, becoming a core part of our cultural fabric, especially as the Gen Z population begins to enter the workforce. The biggest shift we are seeing, and will continue to see, is how the UK is merging with other regions to create premium competitions which enable greater market access, and potentially more revenue opportunities.”

Sam Cooke of Esports Insider says solving the accessibility challenge

will be key. “Many people don’t have the gaming PCs or consoles and kit required to play games competitively, or even be exposed to the potential for it,” he says. “This means we are missing out on the potential esports audience - both playing and watching.

“If you like football, you’ll play at school, possibly for a club at the weekend, as well as casually with friends. If you like Rocket League, generally anyway, your only option is that last one. And that likely means no formal coaching or guidance.

“The products, tools, and service providers are excellent opportunities too, see the likes of Belgium-based 3D Aim Trainer being acquired by SteelSeries recently. With the start-up culture in the UK, and London especially for tech, I’m sure we will see some success stories and major acquisitions, who knows, perhaps their journey will be through The Clutch at ESI London.”

BLAST CEO Robbie Douek would like to see more world-class esports events taking place in the UK. “The ever expanding esports market is still relatively nascent and this creates interesting opportunities for brands and investors to drive value for their audiences and create something truly unique,” he comments. “We are already seeing the world of traditional sport entering esports and harnessing this access to a younger tech savvy audience, Man City’s partnership with FaZe Clan and Wolves’ collaboration with Evil Geniuses are two examples of this.

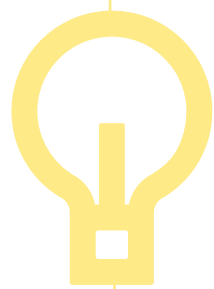
“The UK esports scene would benefit from more world-class events on a regular basis, particularly as English is one of the global languages of esports. There is a huge opportunity to really invest in the space and see returns nationally but also globally. We also hope to see the creation of a regular calendar for elite esports events being held in the UK. As mentioned previously, the work

Birmingham did with hosting the inaugural Commonwealth Esports Championships is a great example of what can be achieved. We have a yearly event in Copenhagen, Denmark, where our other office is based, while places like Germany and Poland have regular standouts - but the UK doesn’t as of yet.

“The global trend is moving back to amazing experiences for fans and players and that needs to happen here on a regular basis. More can be done around grassroots infrastructure and increased accessibility, we need to double down on creating more opportunities for players and talent. These surrounding support and development structures are crucial to the UK esports industry’s long-term success, this can be in the form of amateur leagues, collegiate activities, academy programmes and other pathways for players to become professionals or for talent to develop their skill sets.”

Esports Integrity Commission (ESIC) commissioner Ian Smith echoes this. “I think we have the audience to justify more large tentpole events in the UK and I’d like to see more Majors and World Championships in the UK to drive interest into the mainstream, but, ultimately, we need a top CS, LoL or Dota team to conquer the world,” he says. “[In terms of wider trends] I expect further consolidation around tier one CSGO as evidenced by the Savvy Group acquisition of ESL and FACEIT, but we need a new game to emerge to challenge the dominance of the big three. VALORANT may be the one. If I was betting, I’d go with VR tech, but which one is a hell of a punt.”

Infinite Reality chief gaming officer and London Royal Ravens managing director ODEE says: “I think teams need educating on what they’re offering, In terms of investment, the developers who create their own leagues - that’s where the opportunities are.”



The investment has to be part of something that's growing, and again, can you see that future of the fandom? I can. Once you get to that point, then the revenue streams will be like sports. "I think the bigger problem is not esports itself, it's the level below. There are so many things that encourage kids and so many jobs in esports now, and that's not shouted about. A lot of university courses are like event management courses, but on the technical side there are so many jobs in esports that weren't around years ago."

Kat Emery, former president of Warwick Esports at University of

Warwick, also thinks the education play is key, and is optimistic for the future of esports in the UK. She says: "The exponential growth of the esports industry is creating countless opportunities for young professionals who have the unique advantage of being the first generation to have lived through the booming of the esports scene as either a consumer or a player, allowing them to provide a valuable perspective on the space and its future. We would expect the esports space to start better integrating itself into the larger ecosystem as globally we are headed towards a more interconnected world, especially in regards to business. Along with

that, I would expect more investment into a grassroots talent to ensure the quality of the content produced in competitive esports is the best it can be. For us, that would look like funding training programs and salaried coaches as well as investing in the infrastructure to help develop our already incredibly skilled players into professional players.

"Overall I believe the UK esports scene has an overwhelmingly bright future, not only for the industry, but for the new generation that I'd dare say is more passionate than any we've seen before it."

The future of UK esports

8 drivers for growth

From speaking to leaders across the UK esports sector, here are eight areas where we need to work together as an industry to create more opportunities for all:

- **Industry promotion** – the esports industry must improve its communication about the economic, creative and social contribution of esports in the UK. The messaging needs to be bespoke for the key audiences – mainstream and industry media, policy makers, investors, and the general public
- **Events** – promote the UK as a destination for world-class esports vents and invest in the infrastructure required to deliver them
- **Investment access** – build connections with funders and investors at all levels to provide long term financial sustainability for the sector
- **Government relations** – establishing improved relationships with Government and policy makers, providing them with data driven policy requests
- **Innovate** - embrace and drive the adoption of new technologies, and strive for excellence in all that we do, from performance to wellbeing and professionalism
- **Educational standards** – build stronger links between educators and industry to ensure students have greater accessibility and develop the skills required by the esports industry
- **Diversity and inclusion** – drive increased diversity and inclusion throughout every component of the esports ecosystem
- **Promote our UK identity** - we must recognise and celebrate our own unique UK identity



The final word: Let's be mindful of our potential and the pitfalls

Comment by report author and
Esports News UK editor Dominic Sacco

IT'S been a real honour to put together this report on behalf of Ukie and to speak to some of the innovators and leaders in UK esports right now. The UK esports ecosystem is fragmented, and like the global space, feels up in the air right now given the economic climate and the financial challenges facing esports teams.

Yet the potential is massive, and has been for some time. As laid out in this report, we produce some of the world's best esports broadcast talent and communicators, we have a passionate fanbase and it's been encouraging to see more pro players reaching the higher levels of esports

in recent years. Despite this, it all feels a little anarchic in the UK. It needs people who are passionate about it and believe in it for the long-term. Those who are here for the long haul are those who will prosper. UK-based esports success stories like EXCEL and Fnatic all looked further afield to find success. Orgs like this play in top competitions like the LEC, in world championships. The same goes for players and talent. The best the UK has to offer don't stay here for long, they're off flying around for the big leagues. I understand esports is global, but it's sad the UK doesn't have some kind of world-class league that could

attract talent from overseas to the UK, rather than the other way round.

I'm encouraged by physical events returning, but remain cautious of all these new venues cropping up. Stadiums will be filled if you can attract the world's top talent, they won't be filled from grassroots tournaments. It's also been promising to see Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Ireland and the Isle of Man also push forward with their own esports initiatives.

When we think of UK esports, some think of English esports, and that shouldn't be the case. I'd like to see more reports and focus on the other nations that make up the UK and Ireland.

One thing I love about UK esports is the passion and steely determination from the grassroots scene. The UK will always have that fighting spirit, that underground level that produces the stars of the future. We have great grassroots initiatives in many sectors, from football to music and more, and esports is no different. It is dog-eat-dog at this level.

I often get asked about the future of esports, and my answer is often, this: expect the unexpected. VALORANT and Fortnite, two of the biggest competitive shooters out there, didn't exist a few years ago. The scene moves at a rapid pace, and the UK is no different. I do think the big will get bigger, and that diversity, crypto and NFTs will have a more prominent focus in the future, and external and overseas investment will continue to be looked at - and scrutinised. External investment in esports, such as Saudi Arabia's ownership of ESL and FACEIT, and its many esports tournaments and initiatives, will

remain a trend. The community is divided over this, with some against external investments coming into the ecosystem and others saying its inevitable.

Regardless, there is a lot for the UK to improve on. I want to see greater identities from businesses in the UK, and more data to demonstrate the size and state of UK esports as it evolves. I truly hope UK esports does become more profitable and investable in the future, while retaining its identity. As ever, my heart remains optimistic, but my head quietly cautious.

Image courtesy of Colin Young-Wolff/Riot Games



Get in touch

Ukie

For questions about this collection of expert views or how you can join UK games trade body Ukie as a member, please contact Sam Collins at Ukie on sam@ukie.org.uk, [@uk_ie](https://twitter.com/uk_ie) on Twitter or call 07702 735050.

The Story Mob

If you're looking for a strategic communication partner to tell your story, you can also contact The Story Mob at contact@thestorymob.com on email, [@thestorymob](https://twitter.com/thestorymob) on Twitter.

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