BRITISH ESPORTS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Pilot feedback, learnings and review
February – April 2018
The British Esports Championships pilot was a competitive gaming tournament specifically for students aged 12-19. It ran across three different types of educational institution: four secondary schools, eight further education colleges and four alternative provision schools (pupil referral units, or PRUs).

It took place from February 22nd to April 18th 2018 and was the first grassroots esports tournament of its kind for colleges in the UK. The pilot included three games: League of Legends, Overwatch and Project CARS 2.

Teams played against each other in competitive leagues, with weekly scheduled fixtures similar to traditional sports. There were two stages: a group stage with a league table followed by knockout-style playoffs. The championships were eventually won by Solihull School and Sunderland College.

Online safety was paramount. The pilot was a closed community with only those institutions registered for the pilot able to use the platform. Secure, unique log-ins were provided to each school or college.

Each team also had the option to order their own branded esports jerseys in conjunction with the British Esports Association.

As well as taking part in weekly matches, educational establishments were also encouraged to develop wider, non-playing roles, such as team manager and shoutcaster, modelling the structures of professional esports teams.

The British Esports Association worked with the teachers, school leaders and academics in esports to monitor the pilot, record results and demonstrate best practice.
This competition has been set up around the British Esports Association’s three main aims: to Promote, Improve and Inspire.

The Association wants to educate parents, teachers, children, the media and government that esports is a positive activity with intrinsic benefits when played in moderation. It develops teamwork, communication and leadership skills, improves confidence, decision making and reaction times, and can boost reading comprehension skills, cyber skills and improve dexterity and concentration.

By running esports championships in schools, more students will be able to try out esports for themselves and access a pathway to industry, and teachers and parents will be able to learn about esports’ benefits and job prospects, including casting, coaching, management and marketing positions. This pilot also enables us to experiment and understand what would be required for a larger series of full-scale championships running for the academic year 2018-19.

The activity in schools and colleges expands on a smaller pilot we conducted at Maida Vale Library in the summer of 2017, an after-school esports club which was held for two hours each week for a month. These pilots allow British Esports to understand the best, most effective ways of engaging young people with esports through schools, colleges and libraries.

**Why we did it?**

**COLLEGES:**
- Callywith
- NESCOT
- Sheffield
- Southern Regional
- Southport
- Sunderland
- Truro & Penwith
- West Cheshire

**SCHOOLS:**
- King Edward’s School (Bath/North East Somerset)
- Solihull
- The Peele Community Colleges
- Westminster Academy

**PRUS:**
- The Green Room (Kingsley)
- The Green Room (Windsor)
- North East Surrey Short Stay School (NESSSSS)
- Wey Valley College

**Who took part?**
WHO ARE WE?

The British Esports Association is a not-for-profit national body established in 2016 to promote esports in the UK, increase its level of awareness, improve standards and inspire future talent.

As a national body, our aims are to support esports and provide expertise and advice. We are focused on the grassroots level of esports and are not a governing body. We are not pushing esports as a rival to traditional sport, but as a credible activity in its own right which can have positive cognitive and other benefits when done in moderation. We help to educate parents, teachers, media, policy makers and government around what esports is and its benefits. We’re working with schools, libraries and other educational institutions to help them embrace esports, understand it and take part in some engaging and beneficial activities.

The UK is the fifth biggest consumer market for games but has been behind other territories in esports. We are looking at the bigger long-term picture with the goal of fostering more British esports champions and talent in the future.

www.britishesports.org

THE GAMES

Overwatch

Overwatch is a 6v6 team-based first-person shooter with a cartoon-like look and feel. It has a PEGI 12 age rating and is published by Blizzard Entertainment.

League of Legends

This is a PEGI 12 age-rated multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) title by Riot Games which pits two teams against one another. Each player selects a champion from a pool of more than 120, each with their own unique traits and abilities, and must work with their team to destroy their opponents’ base. While this game is usually 5v5, for the pilot we opted for the 3v3 Twisted Treeline map to make matches a little simpler and shorter.

Project CARS 2

Building on the success of its 2015 predecessor, Project CARS 2 is a driving game that allows esports players to take part in races across a variety of tracks and weather conditions. Project CARS 2 is developed by British company Slightly Mad Studios, published by Bandai Namco and has a PEGI 3 age rating.
The British Esports Association would like to thank all of the above participants and publishers for their involvement in the pilot. We would also like to thank DinoPC and Xbox for supplying systems to some of the educational institutions that took part.
I have been staggered by the overwhelming response to the British Esports Championships from students throughout the country.

As a teacher myself I thought I had an understanding of how popular esports is with young people, but the excitement, engagement and commitment of the students who were involved, and the clamour of those who were not, has been phenomenal and far exceeded our expectations. In one school, over 10% of the total student population signed up to be part of the trials for the school esports team. In another, 55 students took part in the trials to choose a final squad of six.

Teachers and senior leaders in schools and colleges across the country need to understand what esports actually is and appreciate how popular it is with young people. Once they understand this, they will start to realise how it can be used as a positive vehicle to engage and motivate their students.

The pilot has demonstrated how esports is open and accessible to all students from all backgrounds. It is gender neutral, allowing girls and boys to play together on the same team. Age is no barrier either. One school involved in the pilot had a range of Years 7, 8 and 9 in their team as they beat all the Year 10 and 11 students who took part in the school trials. Other institutions had teams comprising of older students.

Esports allows all students an equality of opportunity. It provides a ‘level playing field’ irrespective of gender or age.

“ESPORTS ALLOWS ALL STUDENTS AN EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY. IT PROVIDES A ‘LEVEL PLAYING FIELD’ IRRESPECTIVE OF GENDER OR AGE.”

One of my Year 9 students approached me this week after one of my lessons. He is a quiet, hardworking student who has never played in any of the traditional sports teams at school. However, he is an avid Rocket League player ranked at Diamond level. He knows I am involved with esports and asked me if I could help him find a team he could play with. This for me is the essence of the British Esports Championships. It will give a wider spectrum of students an opportunity to achieve success outside of the classroom and be celebrated for it.

Some of these students will achieve success on the stage or on traditional sports fields as well. For others, like my Year 9 student, the British Esports Championships will provide them with the opportunity to achieve success as part of a team and all the positive benefits this brings - and be recognised and celebrated in the same way as others are through more traditional activities.

We also face challenges moving forwards. We have to address potential misconceptions and preconceptions of key stakeholders, in particular parents, teachers and senior leaders in education. We must demonstrate that esports, played in moderation and with safeguarding practices in place, is a positive, beneficial, team-based activity for young people. We need demonstrate how it is different from normal ‘video gaming’.

We also have to address logistical issues regarding equipment. The funding situation in schools and colleges in the UK is in crisis, with institutions having to make significant cuts, including staff redundancies. Upgrading IT equipment to enable them to run games such as ‘Overwatch’ and ‘RocketLeague’ will be one of many jobs on ‘wish lists’ for schools and colleges.

Overall, the pilot has shown that esports provides an opportunity for schools and colleges to engage a broader spectrum of young people in exciting, team-based activities. It can motivate and engage students for whom the traditional extra-curricular activities – traditional sports, drama, music etc – do not appeal. It will therefore allow these students to gain all the holistic, wider character development benefits team-based activities bring. And that’s worth pursuing.
WHAT WE LEARNT: KEY FINDINGS

The pilot was a success, with 96% of surveyed participants saying they would love to take part again in the future. The one person who said no was purely because they would like to see more realistic shooters added, which we cannot and will not use.

There were many positives from the pilot, such as promoting leadership, teamwork and social skills, as outlined below, and only a few areas to work on for next time. Namely, that matches are prepared well in advance, teachers are better educated on the set up and format, and clearer, more thorough rules are listed.

A small number of students complained about connection problems, non-sportsmanlike behaviour or games/installs not being set up properly.

Our team and volunteer admins worked closely with participants to answer their questions, get games running smoothly and sharing their stories on social media, in mainstream outlets and via the British Esports website and newsletter.

As well as focusing on schools and colleges, the British Esports Championships pilot also targeted Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in order to be as inclusive as possible, to allow some children who are not in mainstream education to take part.

At the start of the PRU project, there were a range of positives seen in the attendance and behaviour of pupils. There were improvements seen in these areas at the start of the pilot because students had to hit certain levels of attendance and behaviour to play esports. However, there were some technical issues with two of the PRUs, as their internet and computer systems are run by third-party providers who didn’t make the changes needed.

Participants had all the kit and games ready to go, but the third-party network provider wasn’t able to take down the firewall so the pilot wasn’t able to go ahead in the PRUs.

Due to time constraints we were also unable to get the Project CARS 2 tournaments fully sorted in time for the Championships, so we had to take the unfortunate decision to drop the game from the pilot.

See more of the positives and areas to focus on ahead of the full British Esports Championships.
10 THINGS WE DID WELL

MOTIVATION:
Students travelled to different campuses outside of their comfort zone, two hours on a bus in one case.

LOCAL AWARENESS:
Helped to raise the profile of a school or college's esports activities and general publicity. Drew positive feedback from parents.

SKILLS:
Promoted teamwork, communication and leadership, and encouraged students to use their IT skills/help set up.

PUNCTUALITY:
Helped to encourage good attendance and ensured students were meeting academic deadlines and completing work on time.

FUN:
The championships was fun, engaging and built confidence. It also taught humility and sportsmanship.

CREATIVITY:
Encouraged creativity as students designed their own branding.

SOCIAL IMPACT:
Bringing pupils together, improving their relationships with each other, their teachers and other schools/colleges.

PR:
Drew excellent national coverage via BBC local and national radio and other brands including Sky Sports, Daily Mail and Esports Insider.

EDUCATION:
A good addition to existing level 3 Games, Animation & VFX courses and the AIM Level 3 Esports qualification. It also encouraged students to focus on academic performance, develop employability skills and can learn about esports career paths.

FUNDING:
Helps the school or college to apply for some funding to upgrade systems Colleges have been receiving positive feedback from parents - encouraging students to be social.
10 THINGS WE WILL IMPROVE

1. Better inform teachers, schools and colleges of the technical requirements and what’s needed to set up and take part

2. Set rules which are properly defined with consequences for rule-breakers and any toxicity

3. Teams and rosters should be clearly defined prior to the championships starting

4. Organisation could be improved; have the admins working closer with the teachers and participants and view matches

5. Set up more talks, career opportunities and give more advice to students taking part, perhaps after the tournament

6. Have an up-to-date leaderboard available to view online

7. Have the opportunities for B-teams and friendly matches

8. Perhaps host the championships on Twitch with shoutcasters

9. League of Legends participants would like to see 5v5 matches instead of 3v3

10. Better educate and help educational institutions acquire funding to purchase systems with materials and guidance
Here’s a small assortment of quotes and comments on the British Esports Championships pilot from students, teachers and more

MO FADL, HEAD OF UK ESPORTS, RIOT GAMES
“We are extremely excited to see the world of esports helping to foster the community and teamwork skills in schools across the UK.

“The next generation of young gamers are already proving to be more skilled and competitive than ever and with the right guidance, we may very well see some pros in the making. We can’t wait to see how players grow and develop both individually and as a team, and look forward to seeing the top teams battle it out in person!”

HARRY, 17, TRURO & PENWITH COLLEGE
“I LEARNT TO THINK MORE STRATEGICALLY”
“It was fun and engaging and I made friends that I wouldn’t have made otherwise. The matches were also challenging and engaging – they allowed normally more quiet people like myself to lead a team and think more strategically. “In terms of hardware, there should be sponsored setups built for the participating schools/colleges to allow an even playing field.”

CHASE, 16, NESCOT COLLEGE
“A TON OF FUN WITH LOADS OF COMPETITIVE MATCHES”
“I thought that it was a ton of fun with loads of cool competitive matches. It was nice to meet other people who are interested in the same game. Meeting new people, showing my true skills on a good PC rather than a bad one. The competitive environment got my blood pumping. I learnt that if I have a good PC I can be a viable member of the team. I learnt about teamwork and cohesion and I got the opportunity to meet new people.”

VANESSA PATEL, HEAD OF IT, SOLIHULL SCHOOL
“We were very excited just to take part in this pilot competition for the British Esports Championships, so to win it was extra special. The enthusiasm, motivation and wider skills demonstrated by the pupils was really astonishing. Pupils were from mixed years and mixed gender and yet they got on really well which was one of the best things we took away from the pilot. We have signed up for the Championships and I can’t wait to see what Solihull team will next.”
‘ESPORTS OPENS UP A RANGE OF CAREER PATHS’

I think the pilot was a success, with all colleges taking part having positive feedback. I saw changes in the students taking part, growing in confidence in both their gameplay and social skills. By the end, the pilot formed new circles of friends among college students that were otherwise unlikely to meet.

In terms of other positives, I think it’s important for colleges to stay current, both in trends and technology, in order to train students for their future.

I think esports is a rapidly growing sector that opens up a range of career paths for students. This pilot, along with the information, resources and contacts that came with it, provided the students with a valuable insight into this sector, beyond them just playing titles they love.

I think the pilot helped to build students team buildings skills, communication skills, patience and social skills. All students who took part have been positive about the experience, and are eager to see it grow.

I thought this pilot would be great for getting students together through extra-curricular enrichment, to get them enjoying their time at college and socialise. I am confident the college saw a positive impact, and would be involved for the foreseeable future.

I learnt much more about this growing sector and how we can encourage students to be part of it, and the many careers opening up in areas around esports.

‘THE PILOT ESTABLISHED A GOOD RAPPORT BETWEEN SCHOOLS’

“The British Esports Championships pilot was a really great experience! Working as a volunteer admin, it was great getting to know the participating schools and helping them with any queries.

I think that the main positive of the Championships was that it was good at creating communication and rapport between schools/further education colleges, whilst of course maintaining friendly rivalry! From hearing feedback from teachers on game days, nearly all of the teams involved seemed to be really getting excited about each game and becoming invested in the pilot, which I believe enabled them to get more out of the experience.

I think the main way to improve future Championships would be to allow for stricter rules in regards to in-game/lobby team communication (as some complaints and discussion of in-game language and toxicity was mentioned in the pilot) and more guidelines on disconnection procedures.

I learnt a lot from my experience as a volunteer admin for the championships pilot – the behind-the-scenes work that goes into creating a tournament, how to deal with problems efficiently and find out solutions. The whole process was really exciting and rewarding!”
NATASHA GRIFFIN, 18, SOUTHPORT COLLEGE

‘ESPORTS ALLOWS PEOPLE WHO ARE PHYSICALLY DISABLED TO JOIN A TEAM’

“I was very excited to play in the pilot and thoroughly enjoyed it. It allows people who are physically disabled to join a team, it allows people to pursue their passion in esports. I learned about the importance of teamwork and how much I enjoy esports. It’s made me eager to pursue it in the future. I heavily enjoy video games and esports, my esports idol being Sonicfox. I find that esports builds teamwork skills and offers an alternative to regular sports.”

CHRIS HAYTHORNTHWAITE, 40, ORGANISING TUTOR, SOUTHPORT COLLEGE

“It was a great experience for the students. It was a lot of work to organise and keep track of. I think there would be a lot of interest from the students in the future. The competition, the games design students getting to see and experience the esports competition was positive, as was the links forged with other institutions.

We wanted to get involved for the experience for the students; it gives some students the ability to compete who might not usually get the chance.

There was a surprising amount of interest from all over the college which shows how needed something like this is, it is arguably more inclusive that so-called ‘real’ sports.”

VLADIMIR KUZNETSOV, MD AND OWNER, DINOPC

“We at DinoPC are very excited to work with British Esports from the early stages. The gaming scene in the UK is very vibrant and diverse, but is lacking in co-ordination and support to nurture and manage young talent.

“With British Esports’ vision, drive and commitment, the future looks very exciting for UK gaming, and we can’t wait to see the impact and opportunities they bring with their fantastic team.”
Following the pilot, the British Esports Association has announced details of its first full competitive gaming Championships for schools, colleges and alternative provision schools. The not-for-profit organisation has entered into a partnership with streaming programme Twitch Student to grow the British Esports Championships and help give students support and opportunities. 

~Association of Colleges) and the British Esports Association to provide management and oversight of the competition via the College Esports committee. This new committee will ensure that esports is properly managed in colleges and is positioned as part of a balanced lifestyle alongside education and physical activity.

The British Esports Championships is for students aged 12-19, with each school or college allowed to enter teams for three different games. The first confirmed game is 5v5 League of Legends.

The Championships will begin on October 10th and run for two seasons, the first consisting of eight weeks of fixtures with breaks for half term and the second running in the New Year. The first six weeks will feature a Swiss tournament format, with Playoffs taking place during the remaining weeks.

Matches will take place for 90 minutes on afternoons after school or college, avoiding conflict with Wednesday afternoon sport or classes.

Depending on the number of sign ups, schools and colleges will be split into their respective regions. The top two from each region will get promoted to a Super League for Season 2.

The live finals are set to take place at the Insomnia gaming festival in Easter 2019 at the Birmingham NEC. Team sign-ups will open in the first week of September and will close on September 26th. Visit the dedicated Championships information coming soon on www.britishesports.org to sign up or read more information.
In terms of partnerships, the British Esports Association will adopt the Twitch Student Program, which helps schools and colleges learn how to stream so that friends, parents and others can watch their matches and other gaming activities live online. It has already been working with a number of colleges in the US, universities in the UK and now it’s embracing the UK schools and colleges space.

Twitch Student gives users access to ‘swag’ and privileges as they level up, such as special streaming features, subscription buttons and the chance to earn revenues, Twitch homepage promotions and more. It also helps students pitch their gaming ideas or community projects to teachers and schools.

In addition to the support of Twitch, the new College Esports committee will be working with the British Esports Association to promote the Championships to colleges throughout the UK.

AoC Sport says it’s been encouraged by the work of the British Esports Association in drawing parallels between physical sports and esports, engaging with education as well as developing skills in communication, problem solving, teamwork and more. The news also comes after British Esports appointed Natacha Jones as Student Esports Coordinator to develop the British Esports Championships.

Since January, Natacha has held the role of Twitch Student Program Manager at the National University Esports League, tracking the success of a pilot scheme for UK universities. She will be working closely with schools and colleges as part of the British Esports Championships and helping them integrate with the Twitch Student Program.

Please contact us on: champs@britishesports.org
IN SUMMARY

Our goal is to make the British Esports Championships the de facto esports competition for children, aged 12-19, in Britain.

We want to educate parents, teachers, children, the media and government that esports is a positive activity with intrinsic benefits when played in moderation. For example, it develops teamwork, communication and leadership skills, improves confidence, decision making and reaction times, and can boost reading comprehension skills, cyber skills and improve dexterity and concentration. There are also educational, social and mental health benefits, and we want to bring these benefits to the fore and show Britain what esports is all about.

We are passionate about esports and want to enable students and educational institutions to find out about the industry, its benefits and the career opportunities available. Through the pilot, we have learnt the most effective ways of engaging young people with esports through schools and colleges, now the hard work begins and plans for the full Championships can begin.

Make sure to check our website, follow @British_Esports on Twitter and sign up to our weekly email newsletter on the top-right of the www.britishesports.org website to stay up to date with us.

We can’t wait to get cracking on the next steps and we hope you’ll join us on this exciting journey.