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Esports: Transforming Education



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Executive Summary

Ukie's Digital Schoolhouse together with Nintendo UK uses play-based learning to deliver high-quality inspirational Computing opportunities for pupils and teachers.

As the flagship education initiative for the video games trade body Ukie, Digital Schoolhouse brings schools and industry together to provide creative approaches to developing digital skills and inform educational communities about the breadth of career opportunities available in the video games industry.

The Digital Schoolhouse (DSH) esports tournament offers an immersive careers educational experience enabling students, teachers and parents to understand more about the scope of careers in the video games and esports industry.

Now in its ninth year, the tournament has seen a huge increase in participation: from four schools in its pilot year in 2016 to 60 schools and colleges in 2024-2025.

The impact of the senior tournament (12-18 years) was evaluated in 2018 demonstrating clear positive impact on student confidence, development of friendships, interest in computing and awareness of careers in the video games and esports industry.

The junior tournament (8-11 years) was evaluated in 2021 with similar positive results.

In 2025 Digital Schoolhouse collaborated with the Institute of Education, University of Reading to evaluate perceptions of the development of esports initiatives in participating educational settings over time and its potential impact on these communities and their students.

The study focused on three research questions:

- A.** How was the DSH esports initiative introduced and implemented within participating schools, and what factors shaped its development?
- B.** What impact did the initiative have on student engagement, inclusion, wellbeing, and educational or career aspirations?
- C.** What challenges and barriers emerged during the initiative, and how might they be addressed to ensure equitable and sustainable delivery in the future?

The data demonstrated that the structured, well-supported DSH esports programme had a clear and positive impact on student engagement, career awareness, school participation, and confidence of both students and staff.

It also demonstrated that esports as a tool for social inclusion can be particularly impactful for marginalised as well as neurodivergent students, creating opportunities for social bonding, communication, and confidence-building.

The DSH framework enabled teachers, even those with minimal experience in playing video games, to confidently run esports activities. For many, initial participation was seen as an exciting and supported experiment.

After witnessing positive outcomes in the first year, schools and colleges chose to continue, with growing student demand often supporting schools to recognise and integrate esports in wider school practices. In some cases, teachers went on to organise their own in-house or trust-wide tournaments as well as enter external competitions.

While the findings come from schools and colleges already within the DSH programme, and therefore benefitting from its low-barrier, high-support model, the results suggest that structured, well-resourced esports initiatives have strong potential to create lasting educational and social benefits.

Future research could explore how these outcomes compare with esports programmes run without DSH's extensive support.



Findings by research question

1. How has it been implemented?

- **Partnership with Digital Schoolhouse (DSH):** Ongoing support via Academic Leads, CPD Ingenuity Days, active peer networks (e.g. WhatsApp group), and national tournament structures provide strong backbone.
- **Student-led ownership:** Students run clubs, manage kit, coach peers, and lead competitions, building responsibility and leadership.
- **Integration into school life:** Embedded through lunchtime clubs, curriculum links, house competitions, cross phase activities keep esports visible and valued.
- **Industry and community connections:** Sponsorships, guest talks, mentoring, primary school tournaments, outreach to SEND schools extend reach and recognition.
- **Facilities & resources:** Investment in dedicated esports labs and consoles supports wider engagement; challenges remain where equipment is limited.

2. What difference has it made?

- **Student engagement & inclusion boost:** Esports creates belonging for diverse groups, including SEND students and those previously disengaged. Safe, welcoming spaces build belonging and confidence.
- **Stronger gender representation:** Broader game choice and leadership opportunities increase female participation and visibility.
- **Wellbeing & behaviour gains:** Confidence, communication skills, attendance, and pride in school and college identity all show measurable improvement.
- **Skills for life and careers awareness:** Transferable skills include leadership, teamwork, event management, media production, and digital skills. Students progress into esports degrees, game design, graphic design and wider digital industries.
- **Catalyst for teacher professional development and growth:** Exposure to esports enrich professional practice and curriculum planning around game-based learning.
- **Wider cultural shift at the educational setting:** Esports is increasingly seen as on par with traditional sports, valued by Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) and celebrated within school and college culture.

3. What have we learned?

- **Sustainability Through Shared Leadership:** Moving from reliance on one “champion” to a team approach ensures continuity and resilience if staff change.
- **Teacher support:** dedicated workload support and targeted professional development opportunities can strengthen sustained esports provision.
- **Framing for Buy-In:** Positioning esports as skills-driven, career-linked, or analogous to traditional sport can enhance SLT, parent, and governor support. Explaining transferable skills and career links helps.
- **Games choice broadens the appeal:** Title selection influences participation demographics and can support further gender balance.
- **Gateway to Wider Learning:** Esports can be a stepping stone into STEM and creative pathways, aligning with future workforce needs.
- **Administrative & Resource Demands:** Esports programmes require time, planning, safeguarding, and technical setup; investment in staff time and kit is critical.





Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Introduction of a new GCSE qualification in Digital Creativity

Government:

- Introduce a new Digital Creativity GCSE to help develop students' digital literacy skills and fund the development of a supporting teacher training programme.

Industry:

- Support the proposal for a Digital Creativity GCSE and connect with local schools and colleges to share expertise.

Educators:

- Embed opportunities for students to be more digitally creative across multiple subjects; collaborating with fellow educators to see how esports can be used as a vehicle to support inclusive and creative learning and assessment opportunities.

Recommendation 2

Formal recognition of esports as a valuable educational tool

Government:

- Include esports as a named context in digital and creative sector careers policy documents.

Industry:

- Fund and participate in educational initiatives which use esports as an educational tool.

Educators:

- Include esports in primary computing and PSHE resource packs.
- Recognise esports qualifications as an interdisciplinary option for careers pathways.

Recommendation 3

Empower educators to use esports as an effective educational tool

Government:

- Fund teacher training and CPD in the use of esports for educational purposes.

Industry:

- Fund partnerships between schools and the games industry to deliver real-world career insights and access to mentors and role models.

Educators:

- Participate in peer to peer networks to share expertise around the effective delivery of esports within educational settings.

Recommendation 4

Close the digital divide to ensure equitable access

Government:

- Invest in esports-ready and future-proof infrastructure especially in disadvantaged schools: fast internet, gaming-capable devices, and safe access.
- Provide grants to schools in economically deprived areas to run esports programmes on equal footing.

Industry:

- Support device loan schemes to cover extracurricular and esports learning contexts across multiple educational settings.

Educators:

- Work alongside IT Support teams to enable safe access to educational video games and interactive digital learning tools, ensuring no one is left behind due to lack of devices or connectivity.

Recommendation 5

Foster parental and community awareness around the inclusive nature of esports showcasing educational and career benefits

Government:

- Fund the development of a portal for esports education that provides resources from learning to careers, supporting the transition from education to the workplace for all students.

Industry:

- Fund a communications campaign targeting parents to raise awareness of careers opportunities and the positive impact of video games and esports, for self-efficacy, learning and career awareness.

Educators:

- Map esports roles (shoutcasting, design, event management) to Gatsby Benchmarks and embed in careers guidance.

Both esports tournaments have grown year on year with over **59,403 students** from **1,679 schools** participating to date.

Introduction

History of Digital Schoolhouse (DSH) Esports

Digital Schoolhouse started its esports journey in 2016 with four schools and 480 students participating in a Rocket League tournament supported by PlayStation.

Now, backed by Nintendo, over 60 schools with hundreds of teams take part annually, delivering the esports tournament as an extracurricular activity for their students aged 12 –18.

In 2021, in partnership with Outright Games and Nintendo we created our Junior Tournament, the first ever esports tournament for primary school children aged 8 – 11.

Since then, both esports tournaments have grown year on year with over 59,403 students from 1,679 schools participating to date.

The tournaments have been consistently evaluated for impact since the inception of our work. Evaluation of our 2016 **pilot revealed positive impacts on student attendance, attitudes toward learning, and academic engagement**, with clear indications of the inclusive nature of the tournament

While the pilot had some success in increasing awareness of career opportunities, the effect was primarily observed among older students. So, in the next iteration of the tournament we made some distinct changes.

We worked with the esports industry to develop job descriptions for the students to take on.

Job roles such as Event Manager, Tournament Administrator and Community Management became jobs that students could undertake.

Each participating school was appointed an industry volunteer who would mentor the team and provide personalised careers advice.

In an effort to increase visibility and clarify the link to careers education, industry engagement continued to be integrated in multiple ways across the breadth of the tournament, including:

- 1. Mingle with the Pros.** At each knockout event organised by the Ukie team, industry professionals are invited to attend to network with the students and teachers; resulting in numerous personal and one-to-one careers education related conversations.
- 2. Behind the Scenes.** At the regional qualifiers and Semi-Finals event production and technical management is all carried out openly, providing students with the opportunity to see how such events are produced and live streamed. All students have the option to simply observe, query or take part in these processes.
- 3. Keynote speakers.** Each event, every Regional Qualifier, Semi-Final and Grand Final has at least one industry keynote speaker.





We also faced new challenges. With the tournament growing four times in size in just its second year, we had to tackle the practical realities of introducing esports into an education-based environment.

This included supporting schools and colleges with access to the necessary hardware and software and ensuring that firewall settings did not block essential game or platform access, both critical to running the tournaments smoothly on PC.

Celebrating the breadth of roles that the students take on is a key element of our tournaments.

Therefore, in addition to crowning our winning teams of players the tournament also awards a range of creative careers including, the best commentator, event manager, journalist, production manager, brand designer and content creator.

82% of teachers reported that participating primary pupils were more excited and engaged than in their usual lessons

The Junior tournament model for Primary Schools

In response to demand from our school networks, in 2020 we began investigating how esports could be adapted for delivery in primary schools.

This work resulted in the release of our [Junior Esports Tournament Pilot Evaluation Report \(2021\)](#), which assessed the effectiveness of running esports tournaments in primary schools, though a pilot conducted in 2020-2021.

The impact was clear: 82% of teachers reported that their pupils were more excited and engaged than in their usual lessons, 55% observed improvements in academic achievement, and every single teacher (100%) noted increased motivation towards learning computing. 91% also highlighted that their pupils developed strong interest in career opportunities within the video games industry.

One of the fundamental differences in approach between the Senior Tournament, (for 12-18 year olds), and the Junior Tournament (for 8-11 years), is the emphasis on flexibility for teachers to deliver esports during class time.

We adapted the tried and tested format of our Senior Tournaments into a curriculum mapped scheme of work. The Junior Tournaments are a cross-curricular teaching resource that enables pupils to develop not only digital literacy skills, but also literacy, numeracy, art, design and communication skills.

The lessons are structured to ensure that all pupils experience all aspects of the tournament, participating in roles they likely will not have previously considered.

Teachers have complete flexibility in how they take part: deliver a set of lessons to a single class, run competitions across multiple classes in their school or take part in one of our Regional Championships.

This flexibility, combined with strong scaffolding and clear guidance, has made the Junior Tournament easy to adopt and deliver, regardless of a teacher's prior knowledge of esports.

As a direct result, since 2021 we have seen significant growth, with accumulatively over 13,312 pupils from more than 1,021 schools across the UK taking part in the Junior Tournament of which, 3,906 pupils from 60 schools took part in the academic year 2024 – 2025.

Building on this success, the DSH esports approach for primary schools has also been incorporated into the Max Computing training resources, extending its impact worldwide.

**3,906 pupils from
60 schools took part
in the academic year
2024 – 2025**



Charting the Journey: From Foundation to Transformation

Our initial publication, Esports: Engaging Education (2018), was one of the first key studies in the UK to investigate the educational impact of esports. In addition to raising awareness of career pathways, the findings highlighted significant gains in students' confidence and social skills, particularly through the formation of new friendships.

The report focused on student voice only, drawing on questionnaires, interviews, discussion groups, informal feedback as well as case studies from ten esports teams during the Senior tournament.

It demonstrated the effectiveness of embedding careers education within esports delivery, supported by comprehensive and structured guidance for teachers on delivering esports. Notably, 94% of students reported increased interest in computing, while 88% expressed heightened enthusiasm for careers in the video games and esports industries.

The 2018 research focused on the early stages of esports integration in schools, revealing significant educational and social outcomes. Building on this foundation, the current research investigates the broader, longer-term potential and transformative role of esports within educational contexts.

It provides an evaluation of the pioneering school-based DSH esports initiative, designed to explore the role of competitive gaming as a tool for engagement, digital skill development, and career awareness. It examines how the esports initiative can be introduced and sustained within formal education settings.

This research engaged a diverse range of stakeholders, including students, teachers, and parents, in order to identify and analyse areas of change and the evolving role of esports across educational contexts. The aim was to construct a holistic understanding of how esports contributes to the development of learners and institutions alike.

While this report addresses multiple dimensions of this transformation, it also acknowledges that further research is required to examine specific areas of impact and participation in greater depth and build a more granular evidence base.

There is no intended comparison between the data from the 2018 and 2025 report, as the data collection approaches and contexts differed significantly. For instance, if data was compared between 2018 and 2025 students' reported interest in computing seems to have decreased from 93% to 50%. However, teachers report 91% increase in the present study.

The pandemic also contributed to changes in student priorities, access to technology, and perceptions of digital careers. The current findings suggest a broadening of students' career interests across the digital and creative industries, including esports, digital media, and game design tapping into the current lack of such opportunities within formal Computing curricula offers. The increase in the number of participating schools in the DSH esports Junior and Senior tournaments is itself a testament to positive change towards esports.



Methodology

This study draws on data collected from participants involved in the Digital Schoolhouse esports tournaments in 2024 – 2025.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the impact of sustained engagement with esports in educational settings.

The methodology was designed to capture both breadth and depth of experiences from multiple stakeholders, with a focus on long-term engagement and institutional change.

A grounded theory approach was employed to analyse the data from teachers, students, and parents. This enabled themes and patterns to emerge inductively, rather than being tested against pre-defined hypotheses.

The analysis systematically refined themes to build a narrative of how the esports initiative was introduced, implemented, and integrated into school culture, and how these processes influenced student engagement, inclusion, and aspirations.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through the following methods:

1. Questionnaires completed by Students (n=59), Teachers (n=26) and Parents (n=6) attending the finals of the Digital Schoolhouse Splatoon 3 Tournaments in 2024- 2025.
2. Interviews with Lead DSH Teachers (n=6).
3. Informal observations and discussion at tournament events with students and teachers and professional development days.
4. Two DSH students' reflective accounts, originally submitted for a journalism competition and later published by Esports News UK (Appendix 1 and 2). Their narrative provides qualitative insight into their journey and the tournament's impact.



Participants and participation patterns: Questionnaire data

All respondents to the questionnaire were participating in either the Junior (8-11 years) or the Senior (12-18 years) tournament. Over half of the schools (54%) participated in the competition with up to 49 students, while 31% had over 100 participating students.

Among the student respondents, 66% identified as male and 28% as female. Two students chose 'other', one selected 'prefer not to say' and one did not respond to this question.

All students were of secondary school age, with the largest groups of respondents from Year 9 (22%) and Year 8 (20%) while 24% were from Key Stage 5. For 85% of the students this was their first time participating in esports.

Most teachers (77%) attended the event being responsible for one or both tournaments. The majority of the respondent teachers were involved in the Senior tournament, with 77% having never participated in a Junior tournament.

For 35% of teachers this was the school's first year attending the tournament, while 38% had been involved for three years or more.

These results reflect growing recognition of the potential and positive educational impact of esports, and as a result schools' ongoing commitment despite current pressures posed by teacher workload.

The children of the small number of parents who completed the questionnaire were all first-time participants in a DSH esports tournament.

Two thirds of parents (67%) reported that their attitude towards esports had not changed since their child's participation as they were already happy and positive towards esports and video games. There were no negative comments about esports and 67% of parents also shared that they play video games with their children.

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Case Study Settings: Interview data

1. **Institution Type:** A diverse mix of secondary schools and Further Education (FE) colleges, was included to capture different operational models and demographic contexts.
2. **Geographical Diversity:** Institutions were selected from various regions across England to explore potential regional insights in impact or implementation.

At present there is no DSH representation in Wales while Scotland are at an early stage of participation to be included in interview data. Northern Ireland was incorporated through a dedicated case study.

3. **Sustained Development:** All selected educational settings had demonstrated consistent involvement with the Digital Schoolhouse programme.

They have been participating in the DSH esports tournament for a minimum of 7 years with some having been part of the DSH tournaments from their start in 2016.



Table 1: Educational settings involved in the interviews

Although the questionnaire was distributed to all schools participating in the 2024-2025 tournament, regardless of their length of engagement, institutions selected for interview were purposefully chosen to reflect sustained participation.

Name	Location	Phase	Type
School A	South East	All-through co-educational (5 – 16)	Free school
School B	South East	Girls Secondary (11 – 16)	Comprehensive
School C	South West	FE & HE College (16+)	College
School D	Inner London	All-through co-educational (5 – 16)	Academy
School E	East	Boys Secondary and Sixth Form (11-18)	Academy Grammar
School F	North	Secondary and Sixth Form (11 – 18)	Roman Catholic Academy

Contextual Considerations

While the educational institutions involved in the interviews and the case studies were active participants in the Digital Schoolhouse programme, not all schools competing in the esports tournament that completed the questionnaire were registered as DSHs.

Nevertheless, throughout the year they received the same level of structured and personalised support and access to training resources as registered schools.

Participation in a Digital Schoolhouse esports event is designed to be highly accessible, with a deliberately low threshold to entry.

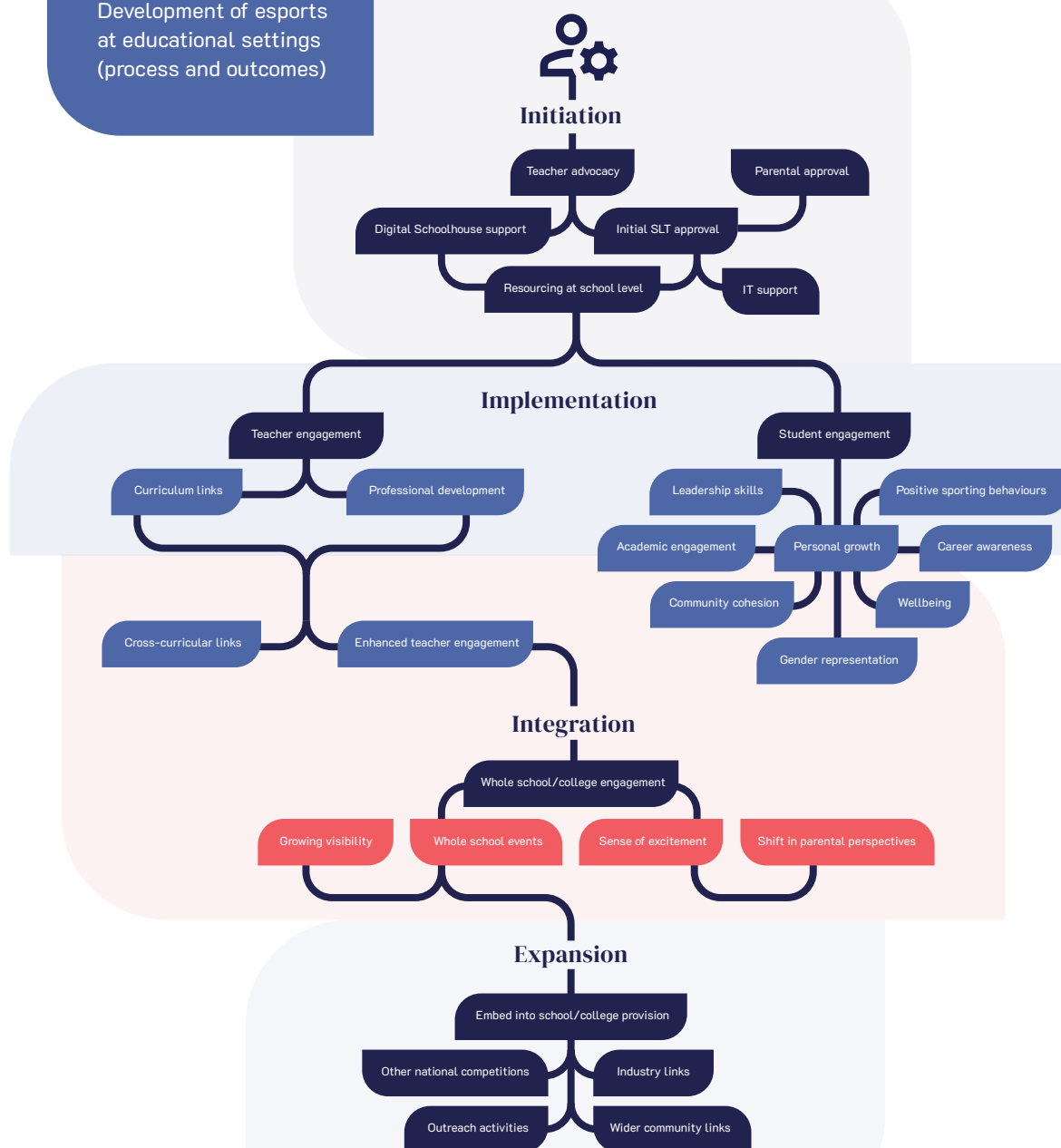
The programme assumes that participating teachers may begin with little or no prior knowledge of esports and provides comprehensive guidance:

from an introduction to esports itself, to advice on structuring tournaments, setting up classrooms, running extracurricular clubs, role descriptions that the students may be given.

The Digital Schoolhouse programme is committed to identifying the barriers to engagement and works proactively to remove them or support teachers in navigating them. As such the DSH schools benefit from further opportunities of support by DSH.

For instance, barriers related to hardware and software, commonly cited in the initial pilot and prior research, are proactively addressed through equipment provision by Digital Schoolhouse, courtesy of its industry partners.

Diagram 1.
Development of esports
at educational settings
(process and outcomes)



Key Findings

In order to reflect upon the progression and maturity of the initiative, the findings are structured around four key phases: Initiation, Implementation, Integration, and Expansion. These phases trace the journey from early concept to operational delivery, institutional alignment, scalable growth and community engagement. This framework was selected to reflect the evidence-driven insights gathered and the critical milestones of the journey of esports initiatives at the participating educational settings as identified through the data analysis.

Initiation (From Idea to Pilot)

Teacher-led innovation

In all participating schools the esports initiative was sparked through the proactive efforts of a forward-thinking educator who recognised both a need for innovation in student engagement and an opportunity to align with evolving student interests. Grounded in a vision to reach students often disengaged from traditional school activities, esports were identified as a high-potential tool to promote digital skills, collaboration, and belonging.

“I got started with the esports tournament as I saw it as an opportunity to take part in an event that was bigger than my school and would offer students who do not normally get involved in team or competitive events something that they could get excited about. I was also interested in the careers aspect of the tournament as it gave students who had interests on the periphery of the tournament, opportunities for experiencing running a large event.”

The type of school shaped how easily the initiative took root. All-boys schools, all-age settings and colleges reported a smoother start. By contrast, all-girls schools required more groundwork to challenge misconceptions about playing video games or that esports was “only for boys”.

Even in academically high-achieving girls’ grammar schools with a strong emphasis on STEMM, there were reservations about video games, particularly concerns over its potential impact on academic focus and engagement.

In these cases, lead teachers worked to position esports not as a distraction, but as a structured, skills-based activity aligned with the school's academic ethos, linking it to teamwork, communication, digital literacy, and career pathways.

The case study all-girls' school was a pioneer, and its positive outcomes helped shift perceptions about esports. Its success not only demonstrated the value of esports within an all-girls context but also paved the way for other girls' schools to join the DSH tournaments.

In some cases, esports began with some scepticism or uncertainty from the Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) and staff. However, curiosity and student enthusiasm, combined with the persistence of a teacher champion, helped establish it.

From the outset, there was a clear passion to showcase esports as more than "just gaming" and to change perceptions at leadership level.

At this early stage all esports initiatives relied entirely on a single staff member, making sustainability a risk if succession planning was absent.

“I want SLT to see and understand because I’m so passionate about esports myself. And I want the college to be proud of esports because I believe it has so much potential.”



DSH support as a catalyst

The DSH support contributed to this early adoption by developing further teachers' understanding of the growing relevance of esports and its potential as an inclusive educational resource and opportunity to raise further career awareness. It supported the school with the necessary resources to run esports: that ranged from hardware, industry links and detailed guides of how to run esports with minimal budget strain. As a result, the teacher championed a pilot programme at their school.

“We were one of the first colleges to set up esports thanks to Shahneila and Digital Schoolhouse.”

Active support from DSH has continued throughout the school esports journey.

Not only appointed Regional Academic Leads are in regular contact with their cluster school groups, but on an annual basis the Lead Teachers from DSH schools also attend CPD sessions (Ingenuity Days) that strengthen links with industry partners, foster active engagement with other Lead Teachers, and provide input on game-based learning to enhance teaching practice.

There is also an active WhatsApp group that serves both as a communication channel between the central DSH team and all DSH schools, and as a platform for peer support, professional advice, and the celebration of shared successes.

To embed this work, approval was sought and secured from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), alongside essential support from the IT department to ensure infrastructure and safeguarding compliance.

Even in schools where the SLT were not actively involved with the initiative, its low-cost entry point structure and minimal impact on existing budgets, was a decisive factor for SLTs who approved the pilot as a pragmatic way to test the benefits of esports within the school, especially where resources were tight.

Parental consent was integrated into the process when esports clubs grew and schools were involved in participation in regional or national competitions.

Institutional alignment

From the outset, the initiative prioritised institutional alignment. Using DSH resources, the Lead Teacher was able to demonstrate how video games and game-based learning could serve as a platform for skill development, career awareness, digital literacy, and inclusive participation, all priorities consistent with school improvement goals.

“Input from DSH was invaluable in giving us games such as Rocket League and Overwatch.”

Implementation (Gaining Momentum)

Participation growth

While initially the teacher took the lead in promoting the esports club and responding to student curiosity, the club quickly grew in popularity, to the point where in some cases it became challenging for a single teacher to manage within one room.

“I had at least 35 in a room every Friday lunchtime... lunchtime is definitely my killer time!” In Year 1, most schools reported between 20-50 student participants at the esports club.

By Year 2, 31% reported over 100 participants. In most cases, at this stage of implementation, the capacity of the room dictated the number of participants. “It was too much... we actually turned people away.”

“Average... consistent 40... because that’s the capacity of the room.” High and sustained levels of participation remained over the years with one teacher describing the energy and scale of participation:

“50 children in the room... like a beehive.”

While a core group of students took part in both the club and the tournament, others dipped in and out the esports club, joining on different weeks. In some schools, younger years (7-8) engaged more just to play any games but as they grew older, they joined to play specific games.





Teachers overwhelmingly identified esports as one of the school's most inclusive extracurricular activities,

Personal growth and individual transformation

Esports clubs and tournaments provided students of all abilities with a safe and welcoming space to develop confidence, skills, and engagement.

Teachers overwhelmingly identified esports as one of the school's most inclusive extracurricular activities, with 85% highlighting participation from a wide demographic, including school refusers, SEND students, and pupil premium recipients.

For many students, esports offered an opportunity to find their voice and feel a sense of achievement. One teacher observed, "It's quite a safe space for students to explore things... outside of their comfort zone... not so willing in a traditional classroom".

Another noted, "Students who would normally have a silent voice within school... this allows them to engage in something they enjoy".

“A boy was mute... until year 10 when he played Smash... then made friends and went out socially.”

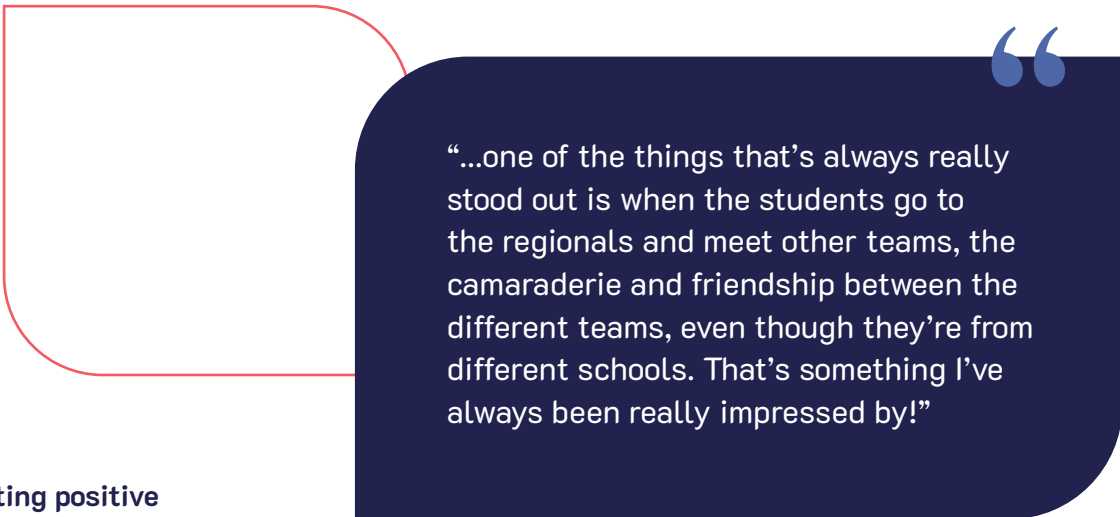
Neurodivergent and SEND students benefitted significantly from the structure and collaborative environment that esports provided. One teacher described, "We have a big cohort of neurodivergent students; their confidence is going up massively and that is picked up by other teachers, too."

Participation fostered teamwork, strategic thinking, and problem-solving skills, and teachers reported a correlation between students' increased confidence and improved engagement in lessons, contributing to academic success. Individual transformations were evident in specific cases.

For instance, a selective mute student began communicating regularly with peers and teachers through esports:

"A boy was mute... until year 10 when he played Smash... then made friends and went out socially."

Other autistic students developed social, emotional, and communication skills that had not been observed in other academic contexts. A parent highlighted the significance of esports for their child as "the reason my child came to school".



“...one of the things that’s always really stood out is when the students go to the regionals and meet other teams, the camaraderie and friendship between the different teams, even though they’re from different schools. That’s something I’ve always been really impressed by!”

Supporting positive sporting behaviours

Over the years, teachers explored different approaches to running esports clubs, adapting to limited resources and varying school contexts.

Smaller numbers in the first year provided the opportunity to establish a clear code of conduct and strong sportsmanship values. These early foundations became embedded in the club culture, helping to maintain a positive and respectful environment even as membership expanded significantly.

“We try to develop those leadership skills in the classroom. We set those expectations and we see students follow that way. So, leading by example.”

These strong foundations in conduct and sportsmanship likely helped students manage the pressures of competition. 6 students reported being nervous playing against others during the competition, but all also said that they would participate again, highlighting the capacity of the DSH tournament to provide a safe environment for personal growth and challenge.

There were no instances where reported stress was linked to unfriendly behaviours from other players or teams.

Teachers consistently described high levels of camaraderie, mutual respect, and peer-led conflict resolution among participants, qualities rooted in the strong sportsmanship foundations established early in the programme.

As one teacher observed, “...one of the things that’s always really stood out is when the students go to the regionals and meet other teams, the camaraderie and friendship between the different teams, even though they’re from different schools. That’s something I’ve always been really impressed by!”

Another reflected, “It’s kind of bizarre, but they are sorting things between each other, and it is working. We never had any sort of arguments in school for all these years.” This culture of respect extended into how students managed teams and supported one another.

Teachers reported examples of students discussing and managing team changes to improve performance. In one case, a team restructured itself to include a more skilled female player, with a male teammate willingly stepping aside committing to train for the following year. As one teacher put it, “The level of maturity in esports is just amazing.”

Development of leadership skills for students

As different types of student participation emerged, teachers supported students in developing leadership skills to take on aspects of club management, often through mentoring and coaching.

This ranged from guiding new and regular players, to club leaders taking on or self-selecting for roles, such as organising matches, managing equipment, or running tournaments.

The combination of explicit leadership development and trust from teachers meant that, in most cases, the clubs eventually operated largely under student direction. Teachers commented, “Running the club...they’re deciding who can do what, sending emails... They take ownership.”

“The kids just run the esports club themselves. I’m just a bystander really!” The tournament structure also provided opportunities for students to take on leadership and creative roles. Of the tournament participants, 54% engaged as players.



“The kids just run the esports club themselves. I’m just a bystander really!”



A further 17% combined playing with additional responsibilities, such as shoutcasting or event management, while 15% engaged in such additional tasks without actively competing.

14% of students attended as spectators or supporters only. Importantly, even in spectator roles, students were not passive; they observed strategies, developed self-confidence, friendships and learned from the experience.

Girls increasingly engaged with behind-the-scenes responsibilities such as managing Discord servers, running social media, and handling event organisation, with one teacher noting that the media and creative side of esports was “very girl heavy.”

Across all roles, the tournament created opportunities for active participation and meaningful learning, which was confirmed by the teachers as well.

“My girls are happy to be there, to play, and even congratulate each other when the other person wins. It’s the funniest thing! It does frustrate me sometimes because I’m quite competitive, but they are having a great time.”



Teacher professional development

As engagement with the esports activities grew and supported by targeted DSH resources, teachers increasingly incorporated game-based learning, esports concepts and connections to career opportunities further into their subject curricula whenever possible.

For instance, teachers reported teaching web development or animation and integrating discussions around career paths or teaching legal and ethical considerations around technology use and relating it to esports contexts.

Teachers also highlighted that it was the complete DSH approach, including unplugged resources, that genuinely influenced their teaching practice and supported the integration of innovative learning strategies.



56% of students said that esports strengthened existing friendships while 50% reported that it helped them form new ones. Teachers echoed these observations, with 96% identifying friendship development and confidence boost as a significant outcome. Additionally, 77% of teachers noted a positive effect on mental health and wellbeing, especially for students previously struggling with social interaction.

Integration (From Activity to Culture Shift)

Community cohesion and enhancing wellbeing

As esports activities became more established, their impact extended from individual development to wider school engagement. Survey data showed how participation nurtured connections: 56% of students said that esports strengthened existing friendships while 50% reported that it helped them form new ones.

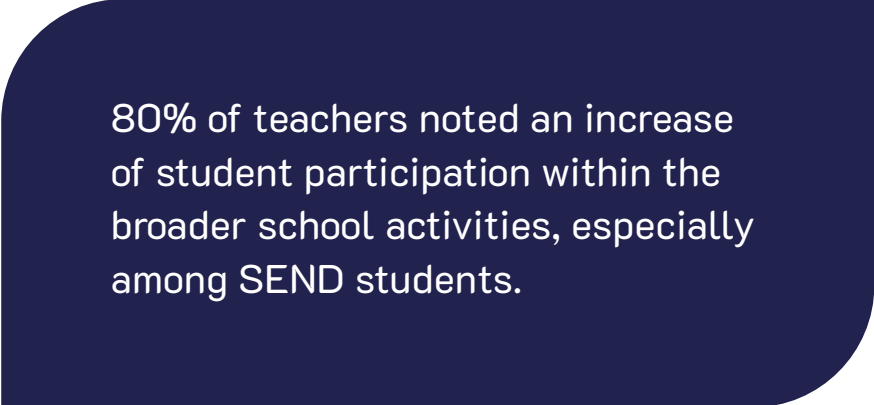
Teachers echoed these observations, with 96% identifying friendship development and confidence boost as a significant outcome. Additionally, 77% of teachers noted a positive effect on mental health and wellbeing, especially for students previously struggling with social interaction.

Importantly, no teachers reported any negative wellbeing outcomes; the remaining respondents held a neutral stance.

The value of esports inclusive environment was also recognised externally, with one school receiving a Gold Inclusion Award because “they were very... impressed with... this safe space for these children”.

Teachers noted a broader cultural shift that supported wider engagement: participation has been increasingly about “having a go” rather than only competing at a high level. This was not limited to gameplay.

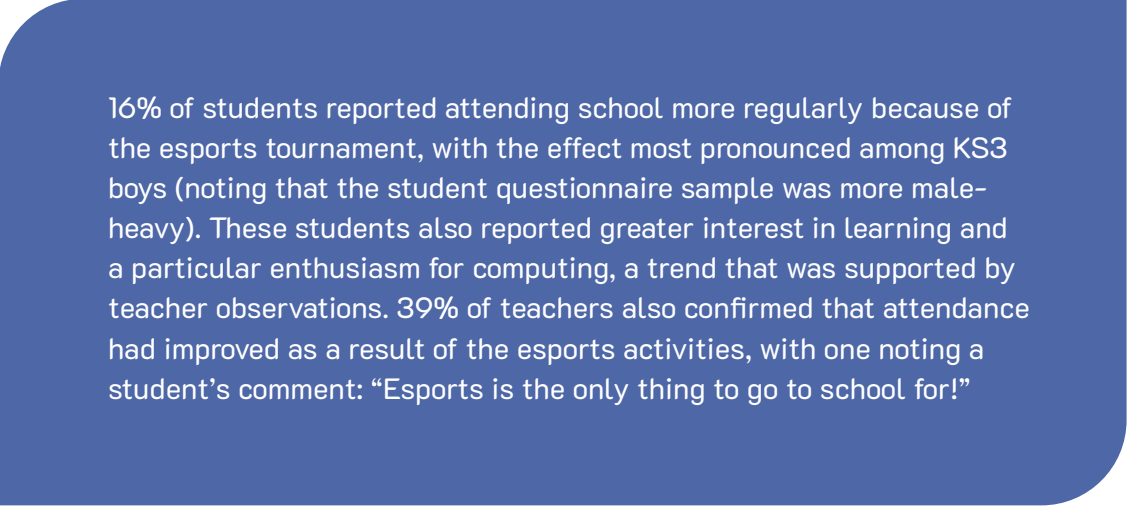
As students gained confidence, their sense of belonging and also wider engagement in school life and team activities grew. 80% of teachers noted an increase of student participation within the broader school activities, especially among SEND students.



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This inclusive culture extended beyond the student players competing to spectators and supporters, helping to build a broader community across year groups. Students themselves valued this social environment, with one commenting: “It’s a way for me to socialise with other people and either

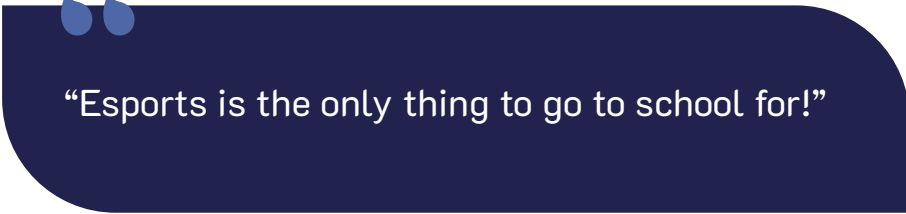
teach them or learn from other people that are participating.” Parents also praised esports for building their children’s confidence and social skills, with all agreeing it made their children happy, and five out of six describing it as a good pastime.



16% of students reported attending school more regularly because of the esports tournament, with the effect most pronounced among KS3 boys (noting that the student questionnaire sample was more male-heavy). These students also reported greater interest in learning and a particular enthusiasm for computing, a trend that was supported by teacher observations. 39% of teachers also confirmed that attendance had improved as a result of the esports activities, with one noting a student’s comment: “Esports is the only thing to go to school for!”



Though potentially exaggerated, the student statement above reflects the power of esports to engage those who may otherwise be disinterested in school.



“Esports is the only thing to go to school for!”

38% of female newcomers indicated that they would return, 48% were unsure, and only two students left the question unanswered.

Gender representation and shifting participation culture

While esports clubs in co-educational schools continue to show an overrepresentation of boys, teachers reported that the biggest change over time has been the growing number of girls willing to take part. Tournaments remain male-dominated but more girls are showing interest, especially since the introduction of the Nintendo Switch.

The questionnaire data supported this picture, though it also highlighted some disparities. Among first-time participants at the tournament, those identifying as female were more strongly represented at KS3 and KS4, but participation declined sharply at KS5. Returning participants followed a similar trend, with numbers of female competitors dropping significantly from KS3 to KS5.

Male participation remained higher among first-time entrants at KS3 and KS4, but among returning participants the gender balance was closer, with the only KS5 returner who completed the questionnaire being female.

Although the questionnaire data represented a small sample of the students competing in the tournament, it suggested encouraging progress in gender representation, which aligned with teacher testimony.

38% of female newcomers indicated that they would return, 48% were unsure, and only two students left the question unanswered. While the survey data implied challenges with retention, teachers offered a more optimistic account.

Game choice consistently emerged as a decisive factor in participation according to both students and teachers. Several schools reported that shifting from PC-based titles such as Overwatch to Nintendo Switch games like Super Smash Bros. and Splatoon 3 led to a noticeable increase in girls joining.

The portability of the Switch also allowed esports activity to move beyond computer labs, often perceived as male-dominated spaces, into more accessible, inclusive settings such as auditoriums, libraries, and other communal areas.

Teachers also highlighted the social dimension of esports, noting that girls were more likely to join when their friends participated. As one teacher commented, “Splatoon increased girls participating by quite a big margin.”



Academic engagement and awareness of career development

The establishment of the esports programme at school or college began to show strong links to academic engagement and future career aspirations.

Esports served as an entry point to academic fields like computing, graphic design, and event management. 48% of students reported increased interest in computing after participating. This was mirrored by teacher feedback, with 85% noting an increase in the number of students choosing GCSE Computer Science and Art.

50% of parents also reported that their children showed greater interest in computing, suggesting esports effectively bridged extracurricular and academic interests.

Participation in esports supported the development of teamwork, strategic thinking, and problem-solving skills. Teachers observed that increased confidence often translated into greater lesson engagement and, in some cases, improved academic outcomes.

77% of teachers believed that the tournament had influenced students' future educational pathways.

85% of teachers noted an increase in the number of students choosing GCSE Computer Science and Art.

While multiple factors influence academic progress, esports was identified in some schools as a vehicle to support KS4/5 assessments. Where assessment tasks aligned with esports activities that students enjoyed, learners were able to demonstrate their skills more effectively, leading to stronger performance.

When it came to career development, the results were nuanced. While 52% of students became more aware of career opportunities in the games industry, only 13% reported rethinking their career goals post-tournament.

Teachers perceived a much stronger link. 77% believed that the tournament had influenced students' future educational pathways. This gap may be due to many students already having an interest in gaming and tech-related careers prior to the programme. Still, role-specific engagement played a clear part in shaping ambition.

Students in creative and leadership roles reported greater awareness of career pathways than those who only played.



Empowering change, transforming practice

As the popularity of esports grew and its positive impact on student wellbeing and engagement became increasingly visible across the school, it evolved into a catalyst for further professional development and cross-curricular innovation. Esports not only engaged students but also created opportunities for colleagues to learn from each other and empowered them to extend game-based learning into a wider range of subject areas.

In some schools more teachers began to get involved, exploring how esports could be embedded beyond the club setting.

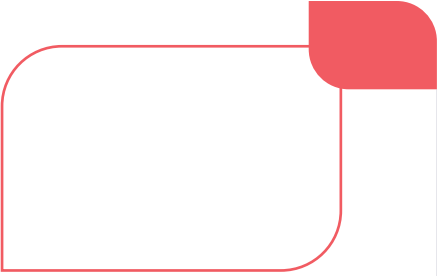


“It’s changed my approach to teaching because I really understand how it works. I’m now trying to use gaming as a tool in my classroom.”

One school reported students using shout casting (live commentary) as part of their spoken English assessments, while others leveraged their involvement for achievements such as winning the journalism award, an accomplishment the English department proudly showcased as evidence of creative learning in action.

In some cases the shift in mindset was significant. As one teacher recalled:

“When [colleague] said, ‘I want to do esports,’... I literally said, ‘What are we going to do, teach them how to play FIFA?’ Like a joke... that was my response. Why? Because I had no idea what it was. And now I’m fully invested. It’s changed my perception of what gaming is, and it’s changed my approach to teaching because I really understand how it works. I’m now trying to use gaming as a tool in my classroom.”



Ultimately, 67% of parents agreed that the video game industry offered viable job opportunities.

Shift in parental perspectives on esports as an educational resource

Initially, some parents in participating schools were sceptical about the educational value of gaming with 60% unaware of career pathways linked to esports.

However, school communications, including letters (68%), website and newsletter updates (36%), and information shared at parent evenings along with witnessing their children's enthusiastic response, contributed to a notable shift in perception.

Ultimately, 67% of parents agreed that the video game industry offered viable job opportunities. There were also initial parental concerns about taking students out of school to “play games all day”.

As one staff member explained, “That was a bit tougher... But the moment we talked about the wider careers opportunities and what we were doing, and the fact that a lot of the kids we were taking [to the tournament] wouldn't necessarily get this opportunity elsewhere, the parents were immediately on board. As soon as you talk about the opportunities this brings and the doors it opens, it's like, ‘Yeah, let's do it.’ We've not had one parent say no.”

Despite this positive shift, a small sample of parents (n=6) who completed the tournament questionnaire indicated that only 17% felt confident in understanding what their children would need to pursue careers in esports, highlighting a continuing need for clear communication around professional pathways.

In some settings, lead teachers organised parental events to address potential well-being concerns.





They highlighted the health and well-being practices of professional esports players, lessons that were also being taught to students. Such approaches also helped schools draw positive comparisons between traditional sports and esports.

In contrast, some schools reported no parental concerns about esports participation at all. Instead, parents expressed pride in their children's involvement in school-wide initiatives. One teacher reflected:

“No parent complaints... they see it as a point of pride.”

This positive reception was particularly evident among parents of students who might not typically engage with traditional extracurricular activities or mainstream sports.

As one staff member noted: “I can't recall parents complaining about a child's involvement in esports.

I think for the most part, parents have been quite pleased to have students involved in esports, and that's mainly because these students who typically, perhaps, will not engage with traditional extracurricular activities or sports, these are kids who typically will be gaming at home most of the time.”

Parents also directly expressed their appreciation for the opportunities esports offered their children: “I had a really nice e-mail from a parent recently saying how excited their daughter is about going to it and thanking me for taking them.”

Growing visibility and status

As esports matured in participating schools, they increasingly found a place alongside more traditional extracurricular activities, both in visibility and in status.

Teachers described a shift in how esports was positioned socially, no longer a niche hobby, but recognised with the same sense of pride as established school sports. As one teacher put it, “They’re... representing the school in a way that’s like being in a sports team.” Another teacher echoed this noting, “We’re seen in the same light as any other sports team.” In some cases, esports became fully embedded into existing structures, with a teacher explaining that it is “part of our House competitions.”

This institutional recognition was strongly driven by student enthusiasm and the sense of achievement it fostered. Teachers highlighted how esports built pride across the school community, particularly through the live-streamed tournaments that allowed the whole school to watch events in real time: “It was just wonderful to see somebody who was genuinely proud of what they’ve done.

After being featured in the live stream, they were often recognised by peers as “celebrities,” which boosted their confidence and reinforced their sense of achievement

So the Digital Schoolhouse tournament, obviously a lot of it gets streamed... I send the link to the stream to school in the morning when we’re there.

And when we get back, a lot of teachers have said, ‘Oh, we tuned in, we watched that, we saw a bit.’ I even had some put it on at the end of a lesson for five minutes for the class. So, there’s a lot of buzz around it.” Teachers also observed that this visibility translated into status for the players themselves.

When students returned to school after being featured in the live stream, they were often recognised by peers as “celebrities,” which boosted their confidence and reinforced their sense of achievement.

In some cases, this integration extended to whole-school events. One teacher described how participation in the Digital Schoolhouse tournament directly inspired the creation of an alternative esports sports day at their school:

“This year I have had the opportunity to run an esports day as an alternative to sports day. This has come about as a direct result of my taking part in the DSH esports tournament as I was able to use our Nintendo Switches and past tournament titles to run multiple mini tournaments. This has proved very successful with lots of feedback from staff and students alike saying how much they enjoyed the day and how engaged the students were”.

Equity and access considerations

The rapid growth and popularity of esports in schools demonstrated its potential to engage a wide range of students, but it also highlighted areas where further support could extend that inclusivity even more.

As participation increased, differences in students' prior access to gaming at home became more visible.

One teacher observed, “It really disadvantaged us as other schools had students who had gamed at home for hundreds of hours, and our students do not all have access to devices at home to do this, and we are not allowed to let them take the loan devices home.”

While this may have created initial disparities in confidence and performance during the tournament, peer support and camaraderie helped to bridge the gap.

Teachers emphasised that scaling esports requires equal access to equipment, reliable infrastructure, and additional staffing for roles such as shoutcasting.

“It really disadvantaged us as other schools had students who had gamed at home for hundreds of hours.”



Expansion (Scaling and Sustainability)

Embedding into school cultural identity

By the time the esports initiative reached the expansion phase, it had evolved from a pilot experiment into an embedded part of school life.

Participation had grown steadily, with sustained engagement from both regular players and those taking on creative or leadership roles. Teachers reported that the programme was now recognised as a legitimate route for skills development, fostering confidence, teamwork, and digital literacy in ways that complemented classroom learning.

The initiative featured in school calendars alongside traditional extracurricular activities, with some schools incorporating esports into enrichment days and targeted interventions for students at risk of disengagement.

In some schools, tournaments were live-streamed onto large screens across the school, further enhancing students' sense of achievement and pride.

While staff expertise had grown, in most cases infrastructure and resource allocation remained dependent on a single champion teacher, leaving momentum vulnerable to turnover.

Within that context teachers also began to explore creative ways to manage student demand and adapt tournament plans.

“

One teacher reflected, “I hadn’t anticipated how popular the tournament would be, so perhaps the biggest challenge was crowd control as I was overrun with students wanting to take part in the tournament. This made me think about how I would run the tournament in subsequent years and led to me having a strict schedule for the tournament rather than the free for all that I started with”.



Widening access and participation

As esports provision expanded, schools increasingly focused on widening participation and ensuring equitable access across different phases of education. Teachers' growing experience and confidence in running esports activities, alongside the formal establishment of esports at their schools, allow them to support activities and raise awareness about esports to the local community. Teachers reported using esports for transition activities from primary to secondary, helping young people form new friendships and feel part of the future school community.



“Helps them with transition... find friends outside primary school.”

Schools evolved into regional hubs for esports activity. Some were able to enhance their facilities and resources to support not only their own students but also those from neighbouring schools. It was usually colleges as they could

align esports with assessment pathways and structured industry links. This included outreach opportunities for students to explore esports and related disciplines such as programming and robotics.



“

“We do quite a lot of outreach work with schools. We’ve had special educational needs schools come in and use the facilities for their enrichment activities. They’ve got a sixth form campus on site, so we’ve had those learners come up and be a part of esports... they just absolutely love it.”

Outreach to special schools was also a key focus for some of the settings. They aimed to act as beacons for the wider community, showcasing the enriching potential of esports and ensuring inclusive opportunities for groups historically underrepresented in such initiatives. Such engagement activities ranged from one-off visits to a sustained termly programmes.

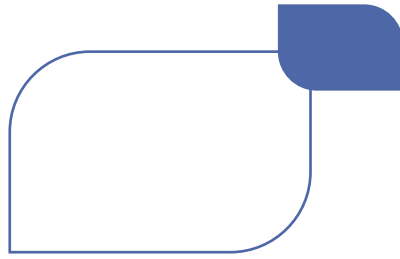
One teacher shared, “We do quite a lot of outreach work with schools. We’ve had special educational needs schools come in and use the facilities for their enrichment activities. They’ve got a sixth form campus on site, so we’ve had those learners come up and be a part of esports... they just absolutely love it.”

Maintaining equity of access remained a priority. Teachers were committed to keeping access to the tournaments free, ensuring all students could participate.

As one teacher explained, “I have always felt strongly that the tournament must stay free at point of entry for all students and that should a student be successful in winning the tournament and getting the opportunity to represent the school at the regional qualifiers they should not have to pay to get to the tournament.

To overcome this we have run a tuck shop, which has raised enough money to fund the cost of petrol in previous years.

Feedback to the Digital Schoolhouse (DSH) team also informed practical changes, such as adjusting the start time of regional qualifiers to allow schools to benefit from off-peak and discounted travel rates.



“We have our own jersey... having a kit and identity is so key and having that sense of belonging to something.”

Fostering sustainable ecosystems: local and industry partnerships

As the initiative matured, its influence extended beyond the school gates, fostering stronger connections with local communities and sparking ambitions to broaden provision, deepen employer engagement, and formalise external partnerships.

Schools hosted esports tournaments in professional-standard environments, including collaborations such as a junior competition run with a local football club.

Regional events enabled inter-school collaboration, offering students opportunities to network, share expertise, and experience competitive play. These activities helped shift public perceptions of esports, with parents and community members increasingly recognising esports as a legitimate pathway to further education and careers in the digital sector.

Plans included new events for more parents to gain understanding of the opportunities that esports offer. As one teacher outlined: “Next academic year... I want to make it compulsory that every single parent... comes in on a work evening.”

Lead teachers felt confident to explore purposeful partnerships with industry professionals, gaming organisations, and further and higher education providers. Guest speakers, career workshops, and live demonstrations exposed students to the breadth of roles available in the sector. Schools also explored sponsorships, not just for financial support, but to build identity and belonging for students:

“We have our own jersey... having a kit and identity is so key and having that sense of belonging to something.” Industry partners provided mentoring, coaching, and opportunities for students to develop transferable skills: “They [industry partners] can say... it’s not necessarily around the technical skills... but having the confidence and those social skills is really important.”

Over time, such external links created a stronger pipeline between school-based esports activities and potential post-16 or post-18 opportunities with teachers reporting on students progressing into further study or professional involvement in esports, or using their experience as a stepping stone into the wider digital economy.



Conclusion

Although this study offers insights relevant to the broader intersection of esports and education, it is important to note that the research primarily draws on schools supported by the Digital Schoolhouse model, including both formally registered DSHs and non-registered schools that nevertheless received equivalent support for the tournament.

As such, findings should be interpreted with caution when applied to esports initiatives that may lack comparable scaffolding or support.

Further comparative research is recommended to explore how the unique features of the DSH approach compare with other esports initiatives.



There is clear evidence of the positive and transformative effect that esports can have within educational settings.

When students are involved in the delivery of the tournament there is scope for far greater engagement, resulting in positive academic impact, raised confidence levels and improved wellbeing.

Esports, especially when delivered in different settings within the educational institution are an inclusive activity that appeals to a diverse population across the community.

New friendships are formed and existing friendships are strengthened. Students have the opportunities to develop a range of core skills including communication, team working, creative problem solving along with resilience and strategic thinking.

All key 21st century learning skills that need to be embedded within our curricula.

There is also clear evidence of teacher's professional development. Educators have reported having a better understanding of the career opportunities and pathways into the video games industry and related sectors.

In many cases cross-curricular learning opportunities are established that aim to maximise the potential of esports for students' academic achievement. Through improved knowledge and understanding, teachers seek to expand their provision.

Esports is a valuable interdisciplinary tool within education that provides educators with a vehicle through which to engage their students.

There are numerous opportunities for using esports not just to teach careers opportunities, but also cross-curricular digital skills.

Setting up the hardware, establishing the live stream, producing marketing materials to encourage signups, creating content to engage the wider educational community are all opportunities through which students use a variety of digital and communication skills to help deliver the tournament.

Its potential to help students develop their verbal and written communication skills for example should not be ignored.

Tapping into students' artistic skills to produce the team branding and then using this across content and assets developed to support the team through the tournament provides real world engagement.

They add relevancy and real-world context to classroom learning, which in turn not only deepens learning but can increase student engagement.

In a world where the need for friendship, empathy and teamwork has never been greater, esports is an innovative and effective way of bringing people together.

Working together to have fun, solve problems, address challenges, and strive towards a collective goal. The opportunity to address some of today's educational challenges is there; and esports clearly has a part to play in the solution.

But if we are to maximise the opportunities that this brings then it requires equitable access for all students, regardless of where they are born or which educational institution they attend. We all need to work together if we are going to achieve equality in provision.

Educators, industry professionals and the government. Mutually supporting each other, sharing knowledge, resources and expertise to give our students the best chance of success.

Its potential to help students develop their verbal and written communication skills for example should not be ignored.



Key takeaways for Educators and Educational Settings

Establishing a strong esports provision within an educational setting can be challenging, particularly if it is being done for the first time. The table below extracts some key findings from the research and sets out recommended next steps and key takeaways for educators to consider when establishing esports within their own institutions.

Key Findings

To initiate esports in an educational setting you need at least one dedicated, forward-thinking teacher who is willing to take responsibility for delivery. However, unless succession planning is built into subsequent years of participation then this may not be a sustainable model.

Implementation of esports activities is usually shaped by individual staff capacity.

There are widespread opportunities for interdisciplinary academic impact and additional learning opportunities.

Students who participate in the wider roles and responsibilities for the tournament are more likely to see a positive and informed impact on their attitudes towards careers.

We can see the gender gap narrow when tournaments are delivered in an inclusive and accessible way.

Esports has a positive impact on neurodivergent students, raising their self-confidence and self-belief and increasing their engagement in wider school life and academic study.

Parents may not be aware of the educational value of esports and career opportunities that esports offer.

Key barriers to participation remain availability of hardware and resources in educational settings as well as technical support and setup; including access to game servers to enable online and remote participation.

Next steps and key takeaways for educators and educational settings.

Recommend that schools designate a teacher who will take lead responsibility for delivery of esports tournaments. However, succession planning should be built in with other members of staff supporting the delivery where possible.

The planning phase for expansion of esports activities should incorporate a consideration of dedicated workload support.

Recommend that staff across subjects are consulted to identify learning and assessment opportunities for participating students.

Recommend that staff enable students to take on key responsibilities for esports tournament delivery, showcasing different careers opportunities available.

Recommend that educational settings consider their hardware and software choices carefully, enabling them to deliver the tournament across more openly accessible areas (not just computer labs).

Recommend that educational settings are open to the varied learning and assessment opportunities that esports can bring, and to utilise these to help neurodiverse students meet their full potential.

Recommend that educational institutions work more closely with industry and cross-sector skills organisations to help inform parents and the local community about the career opportunities and educational pathways that open up from participating in esports.

Recommend that educational settings work with their IT support teams to implement a strategy for esports delivery that identifies the specific challenges they will face. Together, they should then seek to identify possible solutions, where possible with the support of industry led initiatives.



Appendix: The Student Experience

1. Shoutcaster Experience

Author: Dax Khaymen

Date: May 14, 2024

Now published: [Click here to see article](#)

The Digital Schoolhouse Splatoon 3 finals recently concluded, with AGSB Esports taking first place. A mix of student talent also helped out with casting, producing and more.

Dax Khaymen from St John Fisher Catholic High School (pictured above) was not only amongst the student shoutcaster winners, but also selected by Esports News UK as the winner of the journalism award. Read Dax's winning article on how casting can lift your confidence below.

My experience as a shoutcaster

My voice... online... being heard by so many people? I would never have even dreamt of that. But then I took part in the Splatoon tournament. I genuinely never believed I'd win a competition because of being able to talk everyone's ears off.

I've regularly been told in school that I could talk anyone into turning their ears off! I thought it wasn't a skill and was instead a nuisance. Turns out that not only is it a skill, but it's also my amazing talent!

Splatoon was a game that I had always wanted to play. It's a game that's always captivated my attention whenever I see it getting streamed. I believe it's a great game to get you introduced to video gaming community.

It's a game that is simple to get your head around and easy to progress in. Splatoon helps to improve hand eye co-ordination as well as tactical analysis and team communication.

Playing it was a lot of fun and helped me learn to communicate properly after not being able to do this effectively previously. Splatoon is a way that I can escape regular day to day life and ignore the pressing things like exams and other stressful issues.

Shout casting is where someone does a voice over explanation of what is happening in a video game match. This is either in real time or over the top of a previously recorded game.

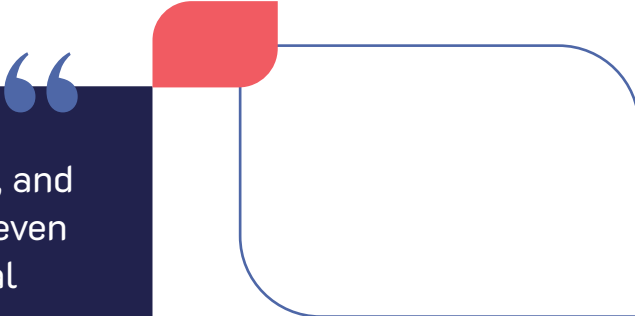
It allows for people to have a better perception on how the gameplay affects the players decisions and combat choices.

It a good thing to listen to when you're a practicing player or are planning to take part in a competition/ tournament. To be a shout caster, you have to have good analysis skills as well as explanation skills.

“

My voice... online... being heard by so many people? I would never have even dreamt of that. But then I took part in the Splatoon tournament.





It's an experience like no other, and a career that not many people even think of being part of the digital gaming scene.

Communication is exponentially important- you have to be able to talk and entertain people even when you're hiding behind a screen, especially when you are wanting to draw in and keep viewers.

It's an experience like no other, and a career that not many people even think of being part of the digital gaming scene. Being a shout caster is hard work and incredibly draining. You have to learn how to talk about strategies or players that you've watched, or give advice to teams when there's nothing happening, or when you know they won't hear you.

You have to be confident to insert your personality into the stream. Being happy and friendly even when no-one can see you is key. It's nerve racking. You have to think up of specific combat stats and all sorts of key elements to the game on the spot and stall when there are technology issues. Even after all that effort, it is incredibly rewarding and enjoyable.

Taking part in the Splatoon tournament originally was so that I could play video games competitively with my team. I never expected that I'd commentate for the regionals. I'd been given the opportunity to during one of the matches at the regionals, and I agreed- I didn't even know there was a competition for shout casting until the very end.

I enjoyed every second of it. The thrill of watching the matches and being able to state my opinion of play styles and tactics as well as describe the way the game works was beyond anything I've experienced before.

I loved being able to put across my passion for gaming in my shout casting and bring a whole new perspective on the game itself to those watching. After going again a second time, I felt so much more confident in myself. I was able to just be me and bring my personality to the table without being judged for my ability to word splurge. And then I got to go to the semi-finals!

On the way to Liverpool, I felt nervous as anything. The competition would be tight, and the shout casters would have been the best in their group at the regionals. They'd all be people like me who ended up being good enough to go to the semi-finals. It was terrifying.

Outwood calmed my nerves. As soon as we saw them there was a massive cheer and they were immediately chatty and comforting. After watching them take the win at the regionals, it felt like I was back in Leeds. Nothing was different. I imagined I didn't know about the competition again; I couldn't let the nerves and feelings that I wasn't good enough build up.



I watched the competition unfold on the screen, taking notes on consistent tactics and playstyles for each team to make sure I was fully able to describe reoccurring themes as well as emphasise good tactics. I made sure to look at advantages and weaknesses and on how the teams played together as a whole.

I had to think and write quickly as well as analyse the players with the camera angle consistently changing from map view to player view. Any tips or thoughts from others that I didn't have would be incredibly useful when it was my turn. I was full of lots of information and tips I'd been told by some of the teams on standby.

They were all super friendly and more than willing to help me out. Being social and making sure I took time to try and communicate with individual members of different teams, as well as the teams as a whole was essential to helping me commentate efficiently.

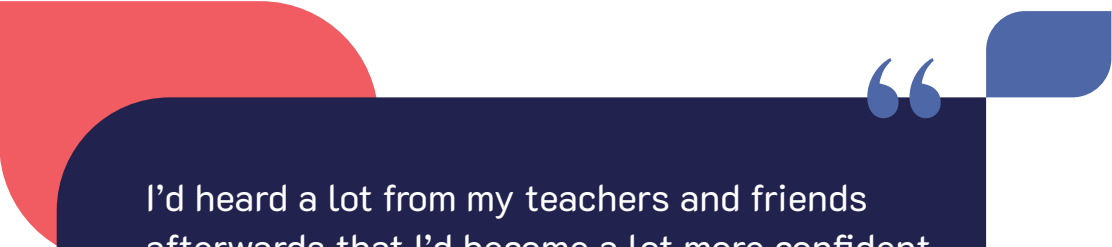
I found out things from the players that I would never have been able to figure out by watching the match play out. Key facts about the game and how different matches worked got me through splat zones and tower control matches.

And like I said before, the competition was tight. Outwood faced off in the final again, a match I co-shout casted on. The final match was extreme. Both teams more than deserved to be there and both of us commentators were on the edges of our seats. The matches were so close. Turf war finished on a point to the other team.

Outwood won tower control. It was at the splat zone match that everyone was holding their breath. Me and the other shout caster were causing competitive uproar in the standby area as we both supported opposing teams. We had to criticize our friends on the playing teams, as well as praise the opposing team. It was more than difficult.

We both wanted our friends to win but we could only have equal bias. Being friends with the players makes the job of shout casting even more difficult.

The shout casting not only was difficult, but it also was beyond exciting. After returning home, incredibly tired from the competition, I felt beyond happy. I was going to London for the finals! I couldn't wait at all!



I'd heard a lot from my teachers and friends afterwards that I'd become a lot more confident and positive, even more so than I was before. Teachers kept stopping me in the corridors to congratulate me and tell me about what they heard. I felt overjoyed.

I was being recognised for something that I didn't think any of the staff would be interested in. It was pretty life changing to say the least.

I'd started sticking up for others, being more active in my classes, and not worrying about talking too much about random topics. My skill is that I can talk loads about a small subject and I'm definitely never going to overlook it again.

I started to feel a lot more confident and happier on the daily. On average, I was a lot more positive a lot more frequently. I felt like I could smile all day and not get tired of it. The tournament made a very drastic change for me and my mental health! I've felt confident enough to help others and have general everyday conversations with people I probably would never have spoken to before.

I personally feel so much more like me now more than ever. I've started being more productive and generally happier throughout my day-to-day life. I've even started becoming more invested in the world of E-sports than I was before.

I'm looking into career paths to do with shout casting, even after thinking I knew exactly what I was going to do in the future. Given the opportunity, I would do this again and again until I couldn't do any more.

I didn't realise how much I would change because I talked for a while online, but I really does change your perspective of yourself and on the gaming scene as a whole. I would hope that other young people would get into the shout casting scene to, especially as it really helps improve confidence and general communication skills.

I absolutely loved my experience during the Splatoon tournament, and I hope to do more similar activities in the future.

I would definitely recommend anyone taking part, given the chance. It's more than enjoyable and you meet so many different types of people. I never would be the person I am today without taking part, or without the support from my teachers and friends.



2. Being Northern Ireland's first All-Female esports Team

Author: Orlaith Henry

Date: May 10, 2023

Full article published: [Click here to see article](#)

Article was later picked up by the BBC and published:
[Click here to see article](#)

This article was written by Orlaith Henry (pictured, middle), a student from St. Mary's College in Derry, Northern Ireland.

It was the winning article in a Digital Schoolhouse journalism competition judged by Esports News UK editor Dom Sacco (right). Orlaith plays in the college's Smash Bros team, along with Erin Campbell (left), in the Digital Schoolhouse esports tournament.

St Mary's College Esports Club currently consists of 18 young women and is the only all-female esports club in Northern Ireland, writes student Orlaith Henry.

Currently, there are three senior girls, 11 second-years, two third-years and two first years in attendance in the all-girls school; we are a relatively young group when you consider some of the FE students who compete!

The club is run by Ms R Poole on a Wednesday after school hours. We have competed in multiple competitions both online and in-person. These include the Digital Schoolhouse Super Smash Bros. Ultimate Team Battle competition and Belfast Metropolitan College's Rocket League competition.

The young women who attend our esports club are extremely friendly and fun. Many have us have really gelled and become firm friends, even though we are in different year groups. The club has also helped some of the more timid girls in school form relationships.

Our coach is Jay Dickson – he's a professional drummer, avid gamer (currently a Rainbow Six Siege aficionado) and regular competitor in worldwide Mortal Kombat tournaments. Jay teaches us about controls, characters and tactics which improves our technique and helps us perform better. Our coach also brings us snacks to fuel our practice every week!

Our progress in the game has been extremely impressive and it's amazing how much we've learned in only a matter months, with the support of our coach. While practising for the Super Smash Bros tournament, our school has kindly invested in some other games we are interested in, like Mario Kart, which we now have the option to play.

“Our team is growing each year as we have been working hard to promote esports in our all-girls school. We continue to become an increasingly competitive and formidable team – and we aim to achieve this by drawing more females from our area into the sport.”



We even have four Switch set ups thanks to Digital Schoolhouse, which supplies the consoles, and our school, which supplies the monitors, TV screens and projectors.

Outside of our tournament endeavours, esports club has also allowed us to get involved in other fun activities. Early in 2022, we got to go to a local gaming arena – the Belong Arena, Derry.

During our trip to the arena, we got to play on a range of consoles such as Xboxes, PlayStations and professional gaming PCs. We also managed to sneak in a cheeky McDonald's!

On January 12th, 13th and 16th this year, our club also had an amazing opportunity to promote esports to young pupils, as part of a series of 'taster' workshops ran to show primary schools everything St Mary's College has to offer.

Some of our members taught the primary pupils the basics of Super Smash Bros and they participated in a mini-tournament. They had a ball, and feedback forms showed some great interest in joining our team!

Our team is growing each year as we have been working hard to promote esports in our all-girls school. We continue to become an increasingly competitive and formidable team – and we aim to achieve this by drawing more females from our area into the sport.

The young women who attend our esports club are extremely friendly and fun. Many have us have really gelled and become firm friends, even though we are in different year groups



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