

ADDRESSING LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION AMONG AN AGEING POPULATION THROUGH ESPORTS

*Pilot esports education programme for people
aged 55 years and over in Greater London*

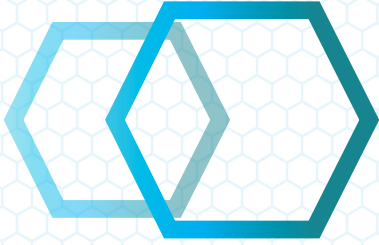


Registered with
FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR

ESI ESPORTS
INSIDER



ESG
Gaming



WELCOME TO ESG GAMING

Working collaboratively with our partners we want to facilitate and evaluate a pilot esports education programme. This programme will have two aims: Firstly we want to understand if esports can specifically reduce discrimination, loneliness and poor mental and physical health among people aged 55 years and older. Secondly, we want to understand if esports can improve cognitive abilities, such as memory, communication and reasoning among this population.

ESG Gaming is a trading name of ESG Corporate Community Interest Company. We are incorporated as a regulated not-for-profit with no share capital Community Interest Company (CIC). Our vision is to ensure that *consumers worldwide possess the skills, knowledge, resilience, and tools to engage with digital entertainment in a safe, responsible, positive, and inclusive manner.*

We deliver a handful of niche harm-prevention educational and research projects specifically focused on esports, web3 and emerging technology. Our work is guided by two White Papers from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS); Gambling Reform for the Digital Age and the Online Harms Safety Bill.

Our organisation was founded specifically off the back of gambling and digital harms and so we have direct lived experience of the potential harms that consumers may experience. Understanding and reducing these harms is as important to us as understanding how the wider digital entertainment ecosystem can also be a force for good.

The population of England and Wales has continued to age, with Census 2021 results confirming there are more people than ever before in older age groups. Over 11 million people – 18.6% of the total population – were aged in the 65 years or older category, compared with 16.4% at the time of the previous census in 2011. This is forecast to increase to 13 million people, or 22% of the population over the next five years. The fact that many of us are living longer is to be celebrated, but it's ensuring we enter the latter stages of life as happily and healthily as can be, which is and will prove a challenge. A growing number of people are experiencing poverty, discrimination, loneliness, and isolation including poor mental and physical health.

This paper follows a literature review of the research on gaming (specifically competitive gaming or esports as it is more widely known) among adults aged 55 years and older. In this paper, we will illustrate some of the research and use this as the basis to propose the pilot esports education programme for people aged 55 years and over in Greater London.



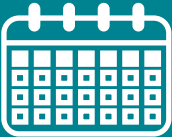
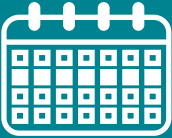
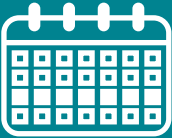
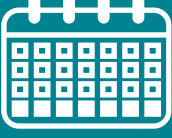
INTRODUCING OUR PROPOSED PROGRAMME

Working with a range of high-profile partners for this pilot, we envisage facilitating a four week, introduction to esports course for up to 25 people aged 55 years plus in Greater London. We would work with an older-persons charity to recruit members and one who would have a footprint across the United Kingdom to potentially scale this work. We would also look to partner with a high-profile, charity led venue with a connection to the local community, a strong interest in esports and the facilities to host. If the pilot proves a success we would seek to work with community venues across the United Kingdom to scale this pilot.

Each week would have two sessions which would be up to three hours in length, with lunch and refreshments included. Creating a social group atmosphere will reduce loneliness, encourage new friendships and provide participants an opportunity to learn the world that younger people, and for many, their grandchildren live in. In addition, participants will improve their cognitive abilities and their physical and mental health.

A range of facilitators would deliver the education session, with participants being provided with a London Travel Card and a High Street gift card for each session they attend.

The Advisory Group would be established to develop the programme content and a separate academic group would devise the evaluation framework. An example of the content of a programme might look like the below. The programme would have a strong emphasis on community and the bringing together of people to develop friends over video games, esports and home-cooked food:

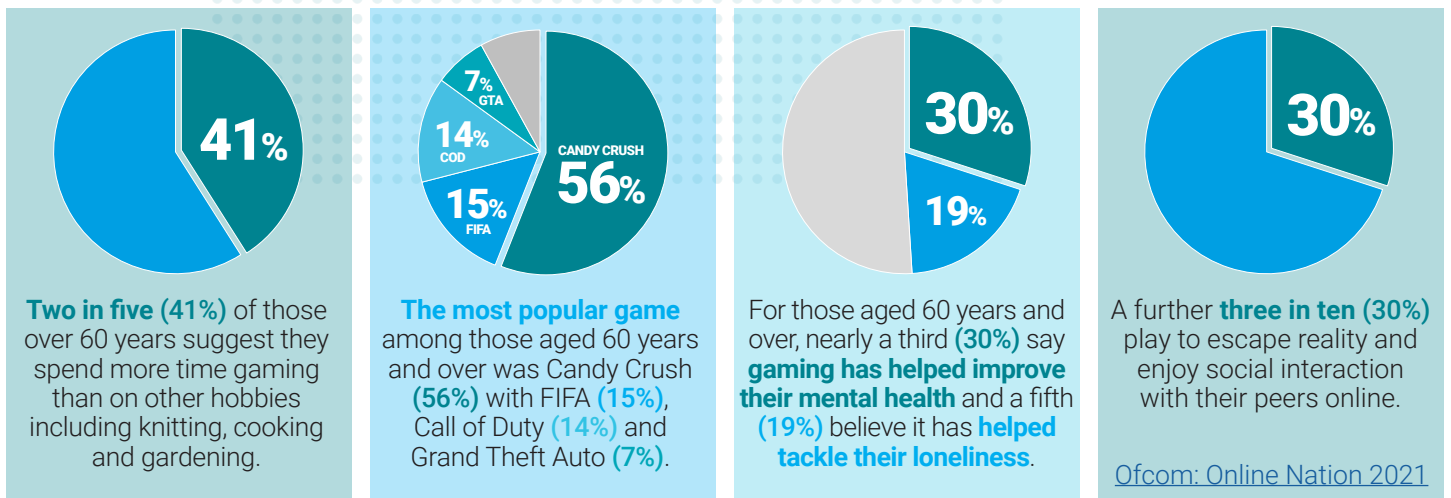
SESSION	CONTENT
Pre-course work	Participants asked to complete pre-course questionnaire and memory tasks
Week One 	<p>Introduction to your group members and practical overview of the pilot course including mutual aims, expectations and contributions.</p> <p>Introduction to the esports, the different games, scenes, teams and tournaments. Meet professional players and agree ways in which you can share life experience and knowledge.</p> <p>Starting out by learning the basics of your game. We will likely choose Rocket League, given its free to play, accessible on different platforms, cross platform and has a relatively low barrier to entry for beginners as well as being a fun, team game.</p> <p>Refreshments and a sandwich lunch will be provided at the end of the first session. Following the second session a delicious home-cooked English lunch will be provided to all participants along with a dessert of cream tea and scones.</p>
Week Two 	<p>Getting to grips with the game, and developing your gameplay and one-to-one coaching from esports experts and coaches, who are accredited by the Esports Coaching Academy.</p> <p>An interactive introduction to streaming, understanding platforms such as Twitch and YouTube, and how to discover your gaming community online, and interact there too.</p> <p>Refreshments and a sandwich lunch will be provided at the end of the first session. Following the second session a delicious home-cooked Thai lunch will be provided to all participants along with dessert of mango or banana sticky rice and tea.</p>
Week Three 	<p>Further developing your gameplay on Rocket League and receive one-to-one coaching from esports experts and play with other players in our community.</p> <p>Group planning around organising a show-match with another team.</p> <p>Refreshments and a sandwich lunch will be provided at the end of the first session. Following the second session a delicious home-cooked Middle Eastern lunch will be provided to all participants along with dessert of baklava and fresh tea.</p>
Week Four 	<p>Understand the mental & physical health aspects of gaming. Mindfulness and gentle exercise. Today is Show-match day – playing for the championship cup with another team.</p> <p>Refreshments and a sandwich lunch will be provided at the end of the first session. Following the second session a delicious home-cooked Jamaican lunch will be provided to all participants along with dessert of rum cake and tea</p>
Post-course work	Participants asked to complete pre-course questionnaire and memory tasks.

DO OLDER PEOPLE PLAY

VIDEO GAMES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM?



Gaming has become a significant part of the lives of people over 60 years, according to the latest Ofcom Online National Study:



Notwithstanding the Ofcom study, there is limited data on how older people play video games, particularly in the United Kingdom. However, a relevant report from Global Web Index has reported in the past three years, the number of mobile gamers aged between 55 and 64 has increased by 32% globally and is now one of the fastest-growing demographics.



32%

increase in the number of gamers between
55-64 yrs

[Global Index 2021](#)



17%

increase in the number of mobile gamers over
45 yrs

Compared with
13% for the 25 to 44 age group;
3% 13 to 24 age group and
9% 2 to 12 agr group

[ADP Replort 2021](#)



49%

of older gamers play on a smartphone

40%

play on a tablet

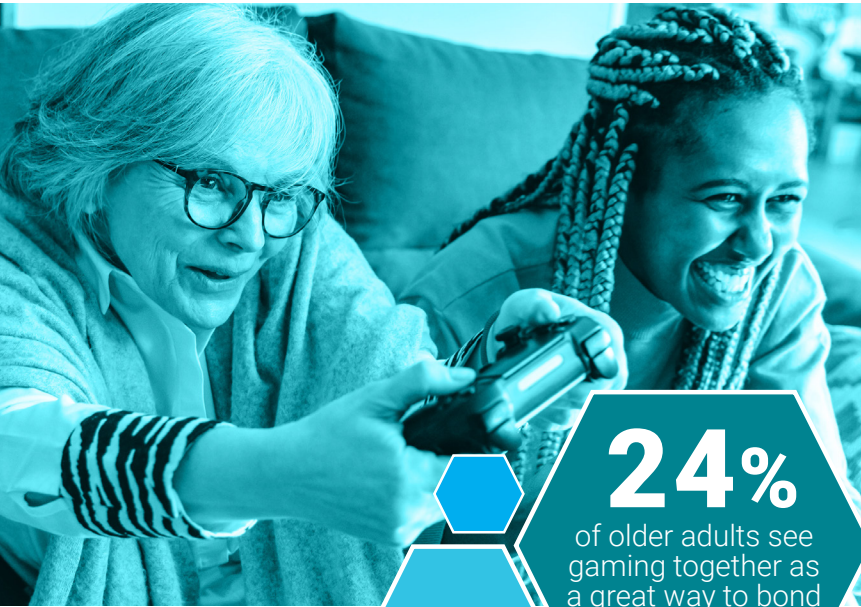
12%

on a games console

[Prospects Global](#)

WHY

ARE OLDER PEOPLE PLAYING VIDEO GAMES?



24%

of older adults see gaming together as a great way to bond with the younger generation

While it can be hard to pinpoint the exact reason why more and more older people are playing video games, it is clear that the pandemic may very well have been highly influential in boosting these figures. However, it could be more than the pandemic. For example, with accessibility improving, and the increase of video games becoming available on mobiles and tablets, no longer do you need a gaming console or PC. Additionally, older gamers simply have more free time on their hands, and they are turning their backs on the more traditional pursuits linked to their age group. Reading and knitting are taking a back seat in favour of more active hobbies or those involving technology.

Another interesting statistic highlighted by the Global Index report is that 24% of older adults see gaming together as a great way to bond with the younger generation. Some grandparents, confused by their grandchildren's talk about video games, have chosen to see what it was all about so that they could better understand their world. Gaming as the most powerful entertainment medium to better connect those from different generations seems undeniable, especially given the ability for family members to play one another regardless of physical location.

WHY ESPORTS

MAY BE THE BEST CHOICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Looking specifically at older people competing in competitive gaming, there are two good examples of success; the Senior esports team from Switzerland: [Gaming | Senior Esports \(senior-esports.com\)](https://senior-esports.com) and Phoenix Blue from Sweden: [Home - P XB - Bringing Swedish esports to the world](https://www.pxb.se). ESG Gaming is keen to work with partners to not only build insight, data and research into older people's gaming but also explore how gaming can be a force for good among this population.



Improved Cognitive Abilities



Improved interaction with peers and family



Improved Communications



Reduced loneliness



Improved Reasoning



Reduced social isolation



Improved hand-eye coordination



Being part of a community



Improved balance, reduced risk of falls



A sense of purpose and being more visible

[esports participation \(hidawi.com\)](https://hidawi.com)

COMBATING LONELINESS AND INCREASING BOTH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

There is overlap between loneliness and social isolation and naturally one can lead to the other, but they are not the same. Social isolation is a measure of the number of contacts people have; loneliness relates to the quality of their relationships. People may happily choose to have only a few contacts, but they would not choose to feel lonely. [The difference between loneliness and isolation | Age UK](#)

A report commissioned by the National Institute for Health & Care Research (NIHR) which included 39 separate studies from 29 countries and found that, on average, one in four adults over 60 reports feeling lonely. For those aged more than 75, the figure increases to one in three (31%).

[NIHR: National Institute for Health & Care Research](#)

Whilst gaming can be a pastime enjoyed solo (and there are plenty of benefits therein too), its competitive side, that is esports, is one which essentially demands socialisation. The majority of esports titles are more complex, strategic games, meaning more focus is required. Importantly, they're also largely team based which means communication and teamwork are required, and they tend to lead to the forming of bonds, highs and lows, as well as a healthy dose of competition and desire to win.



These two additional research papers illustrate the benefits of video gaming among older people and illustrate the type of research we are keen to produce with our academic partners arising from this programme

- Esports for Seniors: Acute Effects of Esports Gaming in the Community on the Emotional State and Heart Rate among Japanese Older Adults <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9517021/>
- Qualitative Study: Hong Kong & encouraging participation in esports amongst older people. <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/hbet/2023/6798748/>

When it comes to cognitive disorders such as dementia, there is reason to look to video games and esports once again. Newer research has suggested that gaming may help improve these cognitive skills. A study by the National Centre of Medicine explored research on the role of serious games in dementia care. During the review, the researchers explored three types of games and their benefits:

BOARD GAMES:



These can help with cognitive functions such as memory, communication, and emotional regulation.

VIDEO GAMES:



Video games can be customized to directly target different cognitive abilities, such as memory, communication and reasoning.

VIRTUAL REALITY GAMES:



These can provide both cognitive and physical reinforcement, depending on the type of game.

[National Library of Medicine](#)

Other potential health benefits of video games and especially esports are evidenced in this study from Japan which looked at the effects of gaming & esports on the heart rate and emotional state of older individuals in Japan (75+).

[Esports for Seniors: Acute Effects of Esports Gaming in the Community on the Emotional State and Heart Rate among Japanese Older Adults - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

THE UNITED KINGDOM GOVERNMENT'S POSITION



The work of ESG Gaming is guided by two White Papers from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS); *Gambling Reform for the Digital Age* and the *Online Harms Safety Bill*. We have three specific workstreams at ESG Gaming which this pilot education programme will dovetail and compliment. When the three workstreams are taken together, ESG Gaming will be able to deliver compelling social impact and insight that will not only affect those over 55 years who game, but society as a whole.

The two Government White Papers explicitly reference the esports sector, which is growing fast and has significant appeal to young and (in the case of this document) vulnerable people. The Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) *'Strong Appeal Guidance'* also recognises esports, like Premier League footballers and high profile Social Influencers, as high-risk content regarding its inherent appeal to young and vulnerable people. We believe it is essential to work collaboratively with the broader esports ecosystem to develop appropriate safer player messaging for consumers and players. This safer player messaging will be at the heart of our pilot education programme.

Specifically for this pilot education programme, we will work with the gambling sector to pilot innovation around sponsorship which will support this programme. Our pilot education programme will not only benefit those aged 55 years plus, but also wider society by (i) reimagining sponsorship by undertaking activities such as donating all surplus from this pilot education programme (through the distribution of charitable grants and donations to community organisations); (ii) combat loneliness by bringing together young and older players by encouraging families to enjoy video games together (including playing, watching, and just discussing) and (iii) the improvement of cognitive abilities, such as memory, communication and reasoning among players aged 55 years plus.

In order to contribute to further insight, ESG Gaming is also working collaboratively to develop *Team Excellence* which we feel contributes specifically to these areas of the White Paper. We want to recognise, celebrate and showcase the esports teams championing and epitomising outstanding leadership in player welfare and protection; equality, diversity and inclusion; and safeguarding customers. We aim to create an externally accredited quality standard for esports team leadership. We will collaborate with a range of partners to deliver and evaluate a meaningful quality standard. The proposed quality standard will be collaboratively co-created and peer-reviewed. An important part of this standard will be intergenerational gaming and the bringing together of older and younger gamers.

Finally, we need to research influencer-led gambling in esports and gaming on streaming channels (such as Twitch, YouTube, and Kick). The research should explore the behavioural (e.g., gambling activity) and environmental/technological (e.g., group and platform) characteristics of influencer-led gambling in esports and gaming through academic and lived-experience research. This research would extend the emerging literature on the role of gambling-type behaviours in gaming and streaming. The research will also be extended to consumers over 55 years old to understand if this influencer-led gambling has an impact on older players.

The White Paper seeks to challenge the sports and esports sectors and the industry to set a high standard for social responsibility, with the potential to improve standards in gambling sponsorship and provide a model for responsible support by other sectors. At ESG Gaming, we can positively contribute insight from our pilot education programme and associated research, *Team Excellence* and innovation around sponsorships.



THEORY OF CHANGE

PROBLEM STATEMENT

We have a challenge of loneliness, and social isolation among an ageing population and their disconnect to a technological society which is unrecognisable to many people over 55 years old.

OUR ACADEMIC RESEARCH CONSIDERED

- An analysis of the specific esports features, activities and experiences which related to risks, challenges, and opportunities for consumers, in the context of competitive (esports) and non-competitive gaming.
- Considerations of the different types of consumers, the user's awareness, and how this might influence the challenges risks and opportunities, in the context of competitive (esports) and non-competitive gaming.
- A contrast between the context of gaming with other risky activities to understand if gaming pose specific, similar or different risks and opportunities.
- The differences between web2 and web3, including some of the specific risks and challenges for web3 as well opportunities for consumers, in the context of competitive (esports) and non-competitive gaming.
- Loneliness and isolation among older people have how technology may have a role to play in reducing this.

OUTPUT

Develop an esports education and awareness course specifically for those aged 55 years and over.

OUTCOMES

- Through esports and home-cooked food, bring people over 55 years old from different cultural backgrounds together in a social setting.
- Improve the mental and physical health of people over 55 years old.
- Build awareness, understanding and appreciation among younger and older esports players.
- Expert discussion and learning to increase knowledge of esports and basic computer literacy.

THIS WILL MEAN

Older people be more aware of, and informed users, of esports. This will reduce loneliness and isolation and increase cognitive abilities among users. It will also increase community cohesion by bringing together different generations to build trust, respect and understanding

WE WILL ACHIEVE OUR MISSION

ESG Gaming is a passionate advocate of emerging technology and is committed to working alongside the digital entertainment sectors to ensure the experience is open, inclusive and positive for all.

AND DELIVER OUR VISION

To ensure that consumers worldwide possess the skills, knowledge, resilience, and tools to engage with digital entertainment in a safe, responsible, positive, and inclusive manner.



ESG
Gaming

ESG Gaming, 124 City Road, London, EC1V 2NX
E: hello@esggaming.org | T: 0203 488 5227 | www.esggaming.org

ESG Gaming is a trading name of ESG Corporate Community Interest Company.
Registered Trade Mark: UK00003764602

Regulated by the Community Interest Company Regulator

Company Registration number 13566221 | VAT registration number: 391 4171 96.
Corporation Tax reference number: 75315 26940 | Apprenticeship Gateway, account ID: JNK6NK