



University of
South Australia

FACILITATORS OF, AND BARRIERS TO, POSITIVE ESPORTS' BEHAVIOURS

FINAL REPORT

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Dear Ms Connolly and Dr Croser-Barlow

We are delighted to present this final report: *Facilitators of, and barriers to, positive esports behaviours: A pilot study* for your review and consideration.

This report builds upon the previously presented Interim Report, and completes the Stage 3, final component of this emergent design pilot study, comprising:

- Stage 1: *Narrative Literature Review*, with a focus on esports behaviours, context and governance; and
- Stage 2: an *Environmental scan and Website Analysis* conducted to gain an insight into the nature and types of governance and codes of conduct that are evident and accessible to stakeholders on esports related websites.
- Stage 3: an *Interview Study* of key esports stakeholders from the schooling sectors, community and wider industry.

Due to COVID 19 in 2020 the original design involving children and youth participation could not be undertaken. The focus was subsequently realigned in consultation, to consider the governance structures and Codes of Conduct which operate across esports, so as to inform policy and decision-making.

We hope you will find this report enlightening, with the promise to move forward to support South Australia's children and young people to be engaged, successful, safe gamers who can develop their skills and achieve their aspirations and goals.

Dr Carmel Taddeo
Dr Martyn Mills-Bayne
Dr Alan Barnes
Professor Barbara Spears (Adjunct)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would like to especially acknowledge the participants who were interviewed for Stage 3 of the project, and who so generously gave of their time. Their insights and perspectives were invaluable.

We also would like to acknowledge Dr Neil Tippet for his project management during the initial stages of the project.

This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol No. 202 223)

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RESPONSE OVERVIEW

The authors are pleased to present this Interim Report: Facilitators of, and barriers to, positive esports behaviours.

RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

University of South Australia

The University of South Australia (UniSA), Australia's University of Enterprise, is actively engaged in research collaborations across 45 countries and is a key partner in major national and stated-based research initiatives. UniSA focuses on end-user inspired research and industry-informed teaching and learning.

This pilot study aligns with UniSA's Research and Enterprise Strategy, under the portfolio of Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research and Enterprise. Through this Strategy, UniSA is committed to establishing close relationships with world-class researchers around the globe to support research that shapes the future.

UniSA Education Futures is home to more than 150 academic and professional staff working to deliver quality education and research in the field of education. It has two research centres: The Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion and The Centre for Change and Complexity in Learning. Collectively, the research focuses on scale and impact by establishing lasting partnerships with key stakeholders, such as government, industry groups, schools, teachers, learners and community.

Centre for Research in Education and Social Inclusion

The Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion (CRESI), undertakes research that contributes to creating a society that fosters educational and social inclusion. Our interdisciplinary research provides knowledge of systemic forms of exclusion; policy analysis and critique focusing on policies' effects; theory building to understand complex phenomena; and case studies of hopeful sites of educational and social inclusion. Our research will benefit Australian society through provision of evidence-based knowledge to inform inclusive educational and social policy and practices across the lifespan.

PROJECT TEAM

Dr Carmel Taddeo is a lecturer: Research Methods and Postgraduate Supervision: Education Futures, UniSA. Carmel has expertise in technology initiatives and change processes, particularly related to youth online safety and wellbeing. She has been involved in the education sector for over 30 years, in primary and tertiary settings. Carmel's

research interests include online research methods/design, change processes, youth wellbeing and the potential of technology to facilitate positive outcomes, both in learning settings and broader life contexts. Carmel has worked on several significant Australian research projects which have informed Australian policy and legislation. For further details see here.

Dr Martyn Mills-Bayne is a Senior Lecturer in Education at UniSA. Martyn has been involved in the education sector for the last 14 years as a classroom teacher, university lecturer and researcher. His research interests centre around Social Emotional Learning in the early years of schooling and the use of dialogic pedagogies to foster children's empathic reasoning and support their ethical reasoning capabilities. Dr Mills-Bayne has a keen interest in gaming and the parallels between in-game and out-game behaviour, dispositions, and ethical decision-making. For further details see here.

Adjunct Dr Alan Barnes is an adjunct Senior Lecturer at the UniSA. His career has focused on the emancipatory possibilities of digital technologies in Indigenous affairs, education and more recently, youth engagement with the Internet. His current interests include use of technologies in schools, online gaming and cyberbullying. He has taught undergraduate courses including Digital Citizenship which focuses on educating preservice teachers about cyberbullying, governance, legal and ethical aspects of the internet. Dr Barnes's long-term goal is for digital technologies to improve the human condition. For further information see here.

Ms Victoria Taddeo completed a Bachelor of Business (Marketing) and is undertaking a Masters by Research (UniSA) examining the preferences of age diverse audience in relation to micro-influencers' marketing strategies.

Adjunct Professor Barbara Spears is Adjunct Professor of Education and Social Development, Education Futures, UniSA. Her career has spanned over 45 years as an educator in both primary and tertiary settings. She is known nationally and internationally as a leader in bullying and cyberbullying research, including work on youth voice, mental health and wellbeing. She is a member of the Child Development Council of S.A. and the Australian Universities' Anti-Bullying Research Alliance (AUARA) which advises government on policy and practices related to student wellbeing. She led the Review of the National Safe Schools Framework, which has resulted in the current Australian Student Wellbeing Framework. For further details see here.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACMA	Australian Communications, and Media Authority
AECL	Australian Esports Clubs League
AEHSL	Australian Esports High School League
AEL	Australian Esports League
AESA	Australian Esports Association
AEUL	Australian Esports University League
AFLW	Australian Rules Football Women
AGM	Annual General Meeting
APA	American Psychological Association
ASX	Australian Stock Exchange
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BAM	Battle Arena Melbourne
BEA	British Esports Association
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
C20th	20 th Century
CCYP	Commissioner for Children and Young People
CDL	Call of Duty League
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CoC	Codes of Conduct
COVID-19	Corona Virus ID-19
CS:GO	Counter Strike: Global Offensive
CWL	Couch Warriors League
CYP	Children and Young People
DfE	Department for Education
DOTA	Defenders of the Ancients
DSM-5	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual v5
EA	Electronic Arts
EEG	Esports Entertainment Group
EGAA	Esports Games Association Australia
ES	Esports
ESA	Entertainment Software Association
ESIC	Esports Integrity Commission
ESRB	Entertainment Software Ratings Board
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
GEF	Global Esports Federation
GPA	Grade Point Average
GTAV	Grand Theft Auto V
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
HSEK	High School Esports League
IESF	International Esports Federation
IGD	Internet Gaming Disorder
IGEA	Interactive Games and Entertainment Association
IP	Intellectual Property
ICD	International Classification of Diseases
ISFE	Interactive Software Federation of Europe
KeSPA	Korean e-Sports Association
LA	Los Angeles
LAN	Local Area Network

LCS	League of Legends Championship Series
LEC	Legends European Championship
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Intersex, Queer, Asexual +
LoL	League of Legends
LPL	League of Legends Pro League
META	Mateship, Education & Learning, Talent & Growth, Authentic
NBA	National Basketball Association
NFL	National Football League
NOADE	Northern Adelaide Esports League
NSW	New South Wales
NZeSF	New Zealand eSports Federation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEGI	Pan-European Game Information
QLD	Queensland
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SA	South Australia
TI	The International
TSM	Team SoloMid
UK	United Kingdom
UniSA	University of South Australia
US	United States
WADA	World Anti-Doping Agency
WDF	Website Development Framework
WESA	World Esports Association
WHO	World Health Organization



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In partnership with, and funded by, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia, and the Department for Education, South Australia, a small pilot project has been conducted to investigate facilitators of, and barriers to, positive esports behaviours.

This Final Report details findings from all three stages of this Pilot Study and supersedes the previous Interim Report (October 2021).

Project Aim

The overarching aim of this study is to investigate facilitators of, and barriers to, positive esports behaviours. Specifically, to explore **esport governance structures and codes of conduct evident on esports related websites that support positive esport experiences for stakeholders;** and the **esport: (a) experiences; (b) attitudes; (c) behaviours; and (d) aspirations of stakeholders.**

Methodology

An emergent research design which supports a flexible iterative approach was employed and organised in three stages:

- **Stage 1:** Narrative Literature Review: esports context, behaviours, governance, and codes of conduct
- **Stage 2:** Environmental Scan/Website Analysis of esport-related websites to gain insights into the nature and types of governance and codes of conduct that are evident and accessible to stakeholders on esport related websites:
 - Macro (international and Australian esports associations);
 - Intermediate (international and Australian based esports leagues); and
 - Micro (international and Australian esports teams) levels.

In addition, a small sample of websites from software and video game industries e.g., Esports Entertainment Group, Entertainment Software Association, and two examples of online gambling sites also were included in the sample (N=21).

- **Stage 3:** Semi-structured interviews with esports stakeholders (N=23) to gain insights into the experiences, aspirations, attitudes and behaviours of esport stakeholders, including coaches, players, league organisers, in addition to their perspectives on governance and codes of conduct that can support positive esport experiences.
 - maximum variation sampling and applied Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) were employed.

Although not exhaustive, Figure i provides a representation of the esports industry ecosystem: drawn from the literature (Stage 1) and the Web Analysis (Stage 2) and clarified through Interviews (Stage 3).

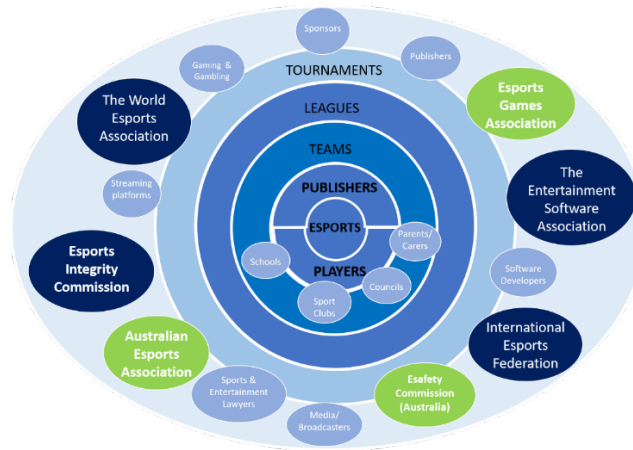


Figure i: esports industry ecosystem

Ethics

This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol No. 202 223).

Findings

The findings below address the following overarching and subordinate research questions:

What are the facilitators of, and barriers to, positive esports behaviours?:

What are the esports governance structures and codes of conduct evident on esports related websites? And

What types of governance structures and codes of conduct can support positive esports experiences for stakeholders?

Stage 1: Key Findings: Summary from the Literature

The literature review revealed the benefits of esports and the extent to which esports has risen in popularity with rapid expansion and commercialisation in recent years. This frantic rise, however, has exposed challenges and tensions within the esports industry ecosystem. Some of which reflect those of traditional sports, such as match fixing, privacy concerns and player exploitation, and others which are unique to esports such as e-doping, and betting on virtual items. Given many esports players are underage, and that legislation related to some of the esports specific contexts may not be as well understood, the responsibilities of governing bodies is further heightened. The distinctive nature of the relationships between esports stakeholders also is highlighted in the literature. Unlike traditional sports, where governing bodies oversee changes to rules and regulations and where no one entity “owns” a sport, in esports, game developers and publishers own the intellectual property related to their game and have considerable decision-making powers.

Whilst there have been collaborative efforts between governing bodies to address this power imbalance and to support players, governance frameworks appear fragmented, possibly due to the disparate nature of the games played and game specific rules. Further, unlike most traditional sports, esports has evolved from commercial enterprises and is not necessarily equipped to ensure adequate protection of players and vulnerable audiences, many of whom are minors. Greater awareness and dedicated actions are required across the esports ecosystem that extend beyond advocating for united principles and fair play. The responsibilities and accountabilities for youth

wellbeing and child protection, particularly for young players, requires attention and oversight from all esports stakeholders, including game developers and publishers. A cohesive approach to developing governance frameworks and to embedding codes of conduct and principles of fair play right from the grassroots level through to world class competitions is necessary to ensure beginners through to players who compete on the world stage are supported and protected.

Stage 2: Key General Findings Summary from the Web Analyses

When reviewing international and Australian esports related websites, analysis suggests:

- Rules, regulations, codes of conducts are predominately available on websites of organisations/associations and entities that are situated within 1) the macro level: the overarching esports entities/organisations and associations, and 2) at the intermediate level: the websites of esports leagues.
- There are entities at the macro level, such as the Australian eSafety Commission, which although not a dedicated esports site, can and do intersect with the esports space in different ways, such as providing support to esports players as part of their broader remit to educate and respond to critical esafety concerns.
- Esports teams were less likely, if at all, to provide information about governance, rules, and codes of conduct, with the information more likely to be about players and team profiles.
- There are a number of esports dedicated organisations at the international level, including International Esports Federation (IESF), Esports Integrity Commission (ESIC), World Esports Association (WESA) and at the Australian macro level Australian Esports Association (AESA), Esports Games Association (EGAA)
- Internationally, a number of game publishers and developers are members of overarching software and video gaming associations such as the Entertainment Software Association (ESA).
 - The associations released a unifying set of principles for esports engagement, which was developed collaboratively with international counterparts.
 - These core principles form a set of values applicable in all aspects of the global esports environments: safety and well-being, integrity and fair play, respect and diversity, and positive and enriching game play.
- Review of non-Australian based national esports organisations/federations websites, revealed considerable variation in the placement and content/coverage of governance details and rules and regulation. Governance and codes of conduct-related information featured on different levels of the various website navigation/menu bars and varied in the depth of the information provided. This variation highlights the opportunity for exploring ways to achieve greater consistency across esports websites at the national Macro level.
- Most websites in the Intermediate international and national level, that is, esports leagues provided rules and regulations about some of the general aspects of tournament regulations such as cheating and collusion, sportsmanship, and disputes, along with rules for specific esports games.
- At the Micro international and national level, that is esports teams, had limited, if any, information about esports governance, rules and regulations was evident on websites in this category, with content suggesting the primary purpose of esports team websites was the promotion, including merchandising, of esports teams and player profiles.

Stage 3: Key General Findings Summaries from the Interview Study

Benefits of Esports for Children and Adolescents in Schools and Communities

- Creating an inclusive space for students with a range of abilities,
- Providing opportunities for students who might otherwise be disengaged from learning,

- Supporting social emotional learning and dispositions about the self and others,
- Developing 21st century skills valuable for future career pathways and
- Setting a strong foundation for positive in-game and online behaviours beyond schooling.

Challenges and Concerns for Esports Related to Individuals, Communities, Schools and Industry

- Esports competition can involve high stakes and high stress for players and athletes, especially in casual open competition with limited governance,
- Esports can have faceless environments with limited repercussions for toxic, sexist and racist behaviour. Random matchmaking places players with random and anonymous teammates/opponents,
- Access to esports and other aligned communication/streaming platforms can be problematic in school settings where esports is being adopted. Esports in schools/community requires dedicated and knowledgeable champions to create sustainable learning,
- Esports has a public image problem with negative associations with gaming, addiction, child safety, sexualised content, gamer stereotypes and limited role models and
- Esports is an immature industry with a dynamic product that involves many stakeholders in a fractured ecosystem.

Codes of Conduct

- It is not an easy task to determine a unified Code of Conduct for all esports
- Players initially evolved their own ways of playing outside of adult role models and guidance
- Best to consider a game-by-game approach to Codes of Conduct as they are specific
- Most employ overarching/underpinning values of sportsmanship, respect, fair play and integrity, but there is a need for early education
- Setting the standards is complex
- Schools can play a positive part as they bring their values to play and to be upheld when students represent the school in esports
- There is a role for the eSafety Commission around the promotion of child -safe esports environments; assisting the general public to demystify gaming and supporting respectful play
- Community leagues combine both competition rules with community standards e.g., Council values of citizenship; University codes of acceptable behaviour
- High School leagues have the potential to influence up the chain through the flow-on effect of their rules, and schools' values and standards.

General Summary: Context of Esports Governance

- Existing governance structures do not appear to be meeting the needs of all esports stakeholders
- There is a need to define what is meant by governance through collective stakeholder voice and representation
- There are some stakeholders at all levels of the ecosystem who are keen to help shape and improve the ecosystem for the collective benefit of all stakeholders
- Buy in is critical from all stakeholders to progress esports governance agendas
- Governance is a necessary for a sustainable, cohesive esports industry

Governance at the Macro Level

- There is currently no peak overarching body for esports, and existing governance structures and bodies are primarily self-appointed
- Australia is currently not on publishers' radar due to its size, there is then a need for a collective voice, in discussions with publishers about governance
- Currently, there is minimal government involvement in progressing esports governance agendas, however, there is a role for a government body, such as the esafety commission to employ 'a light touch' in facilitating discussions about governance between publishers and other esports stakeholders
- Currently there equal and fair representation is not afforded to all esports stakeholders, yet sentiments from participants suggest strong support for all esports stakeholders should have the opportunity to be represented fairly.

At the Intermediate Level

- There are current efforts to progress positive esports agendas for stakeholders, particularly young players and particularly within school settings within existing governance structures
- There is awareness and in some instances adoption of principles from associations positioned at the macro level, specifically the Australian Esports Association (AESAs)
- Organisations/stakeholders adhere to their [parent] organisation's governance structures and processes when responding to esports related breaches or incidents
- Depending on the nature of the incident, AESA is made aware and communicates with publishers with a ruling then decided
- Discussions highlighted various perspectives regarding the benefits of governments recognising esports as a sport, with players in other countries able to apply for athlete's visas given their country has officially recognised esports as a sport
- High School leagues, are one example of a league which is well managed, providing a safe esports environment for students to enjoy

At the Micro Level

- Schools have an important role to play in the governance of esports
- Schools were part of a league and offered esports within this structure
- Were required to adhere to governance structures of the school and of the governing sector/department
- Schools have to manage risks, including legal risks and child safety
- Schools have to consider varying attitudes towards esports, and the value of esports and gaming
- Schools take a holistic approach to esports, including student wellbeing, skill development and training
- Parents considered governance from the perspective of monitoring their child's gaming practices
- Players not typically considered the centre of the esports ecosystem, unless it is considered within the context of a tournament or competition

Barriers to Esports' Governance

- Maturity of the esports industry
- Disparate motivations, aspirations underpinning stakeholders' involvement in esports
- The 'wild west' of esports
- Stakeholders, locus of control and governance

- Esports not esport: more than just one game
- Publishers, power, intellectual property, and the music industry
- Geographic boundaries

Enablers of Governance

- Government buy-in
 - Government regulatory bodies and dedicated resources for esports growth
 - Active promotion online safety: the role of governing bodies as part of esports governance
 - Government bodies, proactive influence and powers as part of esports governance
 - Reclassifying esports players as athletes
- Schools and esports governance
 - Empowering students and team governance
- Considering players' needs within governance structures and processes
- Education, awareness and governance
- Extending an open invitation to the table

Visions and Aspirations

- Range from playing for fun and enjoyment with friends to aspiring to pro status
- Interest in employment in the digital sector: as content creators; journalists, not just players
- Meeting like-minded people; travelling
- Develop a love for and engagement with the school from playing
- To be the home of esports in high schools in S.A.
- To be branded as an entrepreneurial school
- To build community; to see it as accepted as other sports
- To empower women and girls as players, creators, developers
- To bring together all education sectors to develop Codes of Conduct/Practice for esports
- To support players through associations
- To bring publishers to the table to engage in governance conversations
- To use the growth to capitalize on the skills it can develop

Concluding Statement

Findings have shown that establishing and sustaining global systematic, regulatory mechanisms and structures appears to have had its challenges thus far within the esports industry ecosystem. These challenges are likely to increase in complexities given the ongoing evolving nature of online spaces, technologies, and innovations such as a developing metaverse that will have the potential to change the way we interact, live, work and play. This highlights that more than ever, there is, and will continue to be, a need for a collective commitment to developing, and embedding governance frameworks, codes of conduct, regulations, and rules across all levels from grass roots through to the highest level of competition, and for all stakeholders. Accountability from all stakeholders will be necessary for a positive, well organised, technologically enabled, and competitive esports experience. Importantly, these efforts will need to sit alongside a shared responsibility and accountability for safeguarding and supporting all stakeholders, particularly young players, and to help ensure the integrity of esports is maintained.

The esports industry and 'gaming is not going away' and there is a need for those in education to work alongside esports stakeholders and community groups, but most importantly young people, to

codesign approaches that support and enable positive esports experiences and to provide education programs that help challenge gaming stereotypes, that help shift attitudes so that esports and gaming can be accepted into mainstream culture, just like traditional sports, and to provide gaming specific programs that encourage positive gaming behaviours through increased awareness about esports governance and codes of conduct. Whilst there are risks to be managed and investments required for resourcing and training, there is an imperative for schools, community groups, other grass roots organisations, and relevant government bodies to come together to provide safe, organised spaces for young esports players.

Future Directions

The findings from this pilot study are extensive and have identified critical areas for future research including a need to explore the esports/gaming experiences of students and schools and the types of resources and training to support the uptake of successful esports programs. There is also a need for dedicated investigations into the specific content of codes of conduct and any gaps that may need to be addressed. Further research also is warranted to explore ways and opportunities for facilitating connections across the esports industry ecosystem, particularly in Australia and potential role for government bodies with a view to increase awareness regarding governance structures, codes of conduct to support positive esports behaviours.

Recommendations

- That government proceeds on the basis of the evidence from this Pilot Study to:
 - A. facilitate connections between esports stakeholders and to
 - B. support safe, healthy, inclusive school and community esports involvement

Recommended Actions and way forward to meet Overarching Recommendations A & B:

1. **Convene a roundtable/summit with esports stakeholders**, particularly with High School and University Esports League, interested schools, community groups to consider codes of conduct and ways of supporting grassroots healthy gaming programs in schools and communities more holistically
2. **Convene a working party of representatives from each education sector to determine overarching Codes of Conduct for esports in SA Schools**
3. **Establish a youth brains trust and facilitate workshops with young people to understand their perspectives and codesign solutions for safe, healthy and positive gaming**
4. **Collaborate with stakeholders to promote consistent approaches** to ensuring Codes of Conduct and governance structures are accessible across all esports dedicated websites, particularly those based in Australia
5. **Review existing wellbeing and sports policies and resources and establish dedicated healthy gaming education programs** to include esports
6. **Determine technical, infrastructure, and wellbeing supports required** for healthy and positive gaming experiences in schools and community
7. **Build school capacity to support interested teachers** so they can confidently facilitate school based esports competitions, incorporate esports as a learning tool and champion innovation in gaming curriculum
8. **Adequately resource schools to enable esports** to be offered technically and safely within curriculum and co-curricular spaces, and to align with improved community resourcing (e.g., Local Councils)

9. **Identify, review, and promote governance models** that most clearly align with the needs of government and the esports industry with regard to child and youth safety
10. **Collaborate with whole of government (e.g., Education, Law, Health, Sports and Recreation, Child Protection), and esports stakeholders** to position South Australia as a centre for positive esports (Link to Game On 1.7)
11. **Collaborate with the eSafety Commission for the promotion of child-safe esports environments**; resources, support and guidance regarding online safety in gaming and esports, including in and out of game gambling
12. **Collaborate with stakeholders to develop education and marketing-styled campaigns to help parents/carers** understand (destigmatise and demystify) gaming as a contemporary growth area for recreation, skills development and career opportunities, and to address stereotypes of gamers to maximise inclusion and acceptance of all gamers regardless of gender, race or religion
13. **Align STEM and Social Emotional Learning with esports** and actively encourage girls to play, code, and create content



Image © Mills-Bayne, 2021

INTRODUCTION

In partnership with and funded by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia, and the Department for Education, South Australia, a small pilot project is being conducted to explore facilitators of, and barriers to, positive esports behaviours. Specifically, investigations will focus on **esports¹: a) experiences, b) attitudes, c) behaviours, and d) aspirations of esports stakeholders, and the e) governance structures and codes of conduct that can support positive esports experiences for stakeholders.**

Project Aim

To investigate facilitators of, and barriers to, positive esports behaviours. Specifically, to explore esports governance structures and codes of conduct evident on esports related websites; and the esports: a) experiences; b) attitudes; c) behaviours; and d) aspirations of esports stakeholders, that support positive esports experiences for stakeholders.

Background

There has been large scale growth and commercialisation of the esports industry over the past decade (Kelly et al., 2021). The **rapid expansion of the esports industry ecosystem**, which is inclusive of, but not limited to, players, spectators, game developers, tournament organisers, **has highlighted the complexities associated with the regulation and governance of esports and the need to explore opportunities for promoting and supporting positive esports behaviours.** These challenges are likely to become even more complex as new technologies continue to flood our society, and with increasing integration and blending of the worlds in which we live, work and play. Innovations, such as the creation of a metaverse which aims to combine elements of social media, online gaming, augmented reality, virtual reality, and cryptocurrencies potentially will enable interactions that cross boundaries of reality. Whilst the opportunities sound exciting, it will continue to be more important than ever to support and protect young and vulnerable people when gaming and interacting regardless of the technology, interface, platform or medium. To help ensure that the integrity of esports and the safety and welfare of its stakeholders, particularly younger players, is safeguarded in an everchanging online environment, an **understanding of the current context and the regulatory and governance challenges and opportunities in esports is needed** along with **consideration of stakeholder needs, education, safeguarding and welfare** (Derrington et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2021; Rippel-Szabó, 2019), **particularly of younger players** (Kelly et al., 2021). As such, this pilot study provides a basis for future research into this area.

¹ The Oxford English Dictionary adopts the spelling e-sports, however all variations are used regularly throughout the literature: Esports/eSports/esports/e-sports. ES will be used when abbreviated.

This pilot study comprises three stages:

1. **A Narrative Literature Review** on esports including esports growth, reach and magnitude, impact, education, and social responsibility and esports governance
2. **An Environmental Scan/Website Analysis** of esports-related websites. The websites generally included global and national esports organisations, leagues and teams, in addition to websites which although not explicitly dedicated to esports, represent stakeholders that form part of the esports industry ecosystem e.g., software and video game industries and gambling sites.
3. **Semi-structured Interviews** with a range of esports stakeholders, including players, coaches, league and tournament organisers.

Stage 1, narrative literature review is presented to provide context for the esports industry ecosystem. The review provides an overview of the origins of esports, the positioning, growth, reach and magnitude of esports; along with the demographics and intensity of esports and digital gaming. This is followed by a discussion on the impacts of gaming, esports education and social responsibility and esports governance. Stage 2 comprises an environmental scan and website analysis of esports-related websites to provide a snapshot of existing information on esports governance structures and codes of conduct evident on esports-related websites within the esports industry ecosystem.

To facilitate the collation of both international and Australian esports contexts, esports-related websites were organised under the following categories: macro which is inclusive of International & Australian **esports associations**; Intermediate, inclusive of International & Australian **esports leagues**; and micro which focuses on International & Australian **esports teams**. Other included a small sample of websites from **other stakeholders in the esports industry ecosystem** such as software and video game industries and gambling sites. In acknowledging there are laws and government independent regulatory bodies, such as Australia's eSafety Commissioner, that promote and protect online safety generally, including the safety of esports players, and in line with decisions made regarding project feasibility, Stage 2 will focus predominately on websites that are solely dedicated to esports.

The Website Evaluation/Development Framework (WEF: Taddeo, 2012; Taddeo & Barnes, 2016) was adapted and provided the theoretical underpinning for the website analysis enabling a systematic approach for charting the data (Levac et al., 2010). This was achieved by mapping key indicators of, and content related to, governance and codes of conduct by the following website characteristics and features:

- **Design** e.g., was governance a main tab in the website navigation bar, or was it located deep within the website site map?
- **Purpose** e.g., what was the main purpose of the esports-related website and where, and how was governance addressed?
- **Content** e.g., Currency and credibility of content? What type of information about governance was available on the website?
- **Indicators of governance and codes of conduct** e.g., descriptors, documents, policies, principles etc., which address or are indicative of governance and codes of conduct

This **Interim Report details the findings from the first and second stages of this pilot study.** Specifically, it presents a review of the literature, with a focus on esports behaviours, context, and governance, and outlines the methodology and results of the environmental scan and website analysis conducted to gain an understanding of the nature and types of governance and codes of conduct that are evident and accessible to stakeholders on esports related websites.

Stage 3 is in progress and involves interviews with adult stakeholders. Whilst the original sample for Stage 3 of this pilot study included schools and students, the impact of COVID19 on school settings required a shift to only exploring views of adult esports stakeholders. **These data once analysed will comprise the final stage of the pilot study, and combined, they serve to provide a foundation for undertaking a larger national Australian study which would include high schools esports programs and youth voice.**



Image © Mills-Bayne, 2021

STAGE 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

A general/narrative approach to reviewing the literature has been adopted, as it provides consideration of the most important and critical aspects of current knowledge on a topic. It provides an overview/introduction to the area and is guided by the nature and scope of the brief: to explore the facilitators of and barriers to, positive esports behaviours.

Specifically, this review will briefly explore esports contexts, behaviours, governance, and codes of conduct, with a view to setting the scene for future work in this area. This review will outline the nature of esports and the complexities surrounding it in terms of definitions, understandings, core aspects, and classifications. It will provide a contextual background and identify key issues for consideration moving forward.

Systematically examining esports from a research perspective, however, is a fraught process. Commercial interests abound, incipient gambling is rising, cyberbullying remains an issue, video violence is a psychological concern and the notion of sport in esports is highly contested. Moreover, while there is much academic interest in esports, the esports industry is evolving very quickly presenting challenges to analysing and critiquing an evolving domain.

This literature review will explore these competing dynamics. Esports and gaming generally now exceeds the movie industry in terms of income, and its number of players and viewers/watchers exceed traditional sport. Play is an holistic experience of immersion in which these dynamics are barely noticeable. But they are forever present in the *games* we play: they influence rewards, motivations, psychological health, and sporting contentment.

The review will also argue that online gaming education is a critical influence that may help balance any deleterious impacts and simultaneously offer new prospects for learning and development. This additional dynamic can influence the learning of collaborative, critical and strategic thinking for an uncertain future.

Bibliometrics Note. Searching bibliographic records for esports-related publications is a confounded process. Searches with the stem “esport” in a database like SCOPUS yields approximately 2/3 related to esport and 1/3 sport-related publications. This is because the word for “sport” in other languages captures the stem: for example, the Catalan word for sport is “esport” and in Portuguese it is “esporte” hence such a search catches general sports-related publications from Spain, Portugal and Brazil. Mechanically removing such languages from the search also excludes finding actual “esport” items in those languages. Staying with only English does not in fact remove all extraneous publications. Bibliographic research in esports is thus a tedious inspection process at this point in time, indicating that as the field develops, there will be greater clarity around key words and terms. The irony is not lost given some of the important literature concerns whether esports is a sport or not.

A further problem for searching is that gaming traditionally is also the term for *gambling*. Thus, the American Gaming Association, is the association for gambling. Using the stem “gaming” throws up many publications related to *gambling*. There is a second irony in that gambling in digital gaming is a growing issue and should be included in any comprehensive bibliographic study of esports.

There is one last irony. There are almost as many different esports as there are traditional sports. Each genre of esports has its own literature especially in the industry publications and organisations’ web sites, and each genre can be very different in game-play and in educational aspects of playing. Loyalty to particular genres is strong.

The many aspects of esports also lead to broad searches. Important among these are notoriously questionable Wikipedia entries covering games, gaming publishers and corporations. These have however, proved generally unbiased and reliable in relation to ES and gaming in general. Perhaps this reflects the passion and verve of this digital socio-cultural industry to always be updating their information to educate the masses. Google scholar has also been sourced for articles and Google more generally for high school-based material, news, and media material. The UK search engine Mojeek was also used for perspective. Meta level analysis of search sites such Google Trends are unreliable due to the language issues noted above.

Introduction: The Context

Electronic Sports (ES) (eSports/Esports/e-sports/esports) are organised, competitive, video-gaming experiences, which have dramatically increased in popularity in recent years, largely driven by technological developments such as streaming, accessibility to technology and access to elite competition, making it 'one of the most popular forms of digital entertainment' (Cranmer et al., 2021, p 116). It goes beyond mere entertainment, however, as ES is inclusive of gaming, media, pop culture and commerce, shifting it far from the arcade gaming of the past, to the complex digital ecosystem of today involving players, publishers, sponsors and audiences.

Video-gaming-specific streaming platforms such as Twitch and YouTube, now provide direct connections between viewers/audiences and players/teams, facilitating the social component, and growing the pop-cultural identity of ES. According to market reports there will be 26.6 million *monthly* ES viewers in the US alone this year (2021) (Esports Ecosystem 2021: The Key Industry Companies and Trends Growing the Esports Market, 2021).

Esports games cross a wide range of platforms (personal computers, gaming consoles) and genres (sports-themed; fighting; real-time strategy), where some games imitate actual physical sports, others simulate military battles and others are fighting/combat oriented. What is important, is that regardless of the game, there is some comparative measure used to determine a player's level of skilful performance (Seo & Jung, 2016).

Equally important, is the way stakeholders conduct themselves, and as ES have evolved, a nascent governance structure has emerged, to ensure consistent conduct among the various competitive computer-gaming practices. What will be evident however, is that this is a system undergoing change, and that there are some stakeholders with enormous power, such as the game publishers, who own the games, and other bodies with little power to do anything more than advocacy: those which try to unite players to protect them, for example.

There are many ways to classify the different genres of video games, and no one way has been determined, but a broad dichotomy can be seen between ES that simulate traditional sports e.g.,

- Grand Slam Tennis
- FIFA
- NBA
- Rocket League

and those that do not e.g.,

- *fighting games* (Mortal Kombat; Street Fighter)
- *real-time strategy games* (StarCraft; Command and Conquer)
- *first-person shooter games* (Call of Duty; Halo; Overwatch; Counter-Strike; and
- *multiplayer online battle arena games* (League of Legends; Fortnite; DOTA2).

Fantasy-based games, often involving violence, are the most popular, and lucrative, according to Windholz (2020), who noted that in 2019, ES based on games of violence, occupied nine of the ten top ranked positions, compared with the highest traditional ES games: FIFA #15; and F1 #23.

Dedicated ES statistics sites (e.g., <https://escharts.com/games>), reporting popular Twitch categories watched in the last 30 days (October 2021) support the assertion that fantasy and battle games were more popular than traditional sports genres:

- Just Chatting (201 Million Hours Watched)
- League of Legends (189.4 MHW)
- Grand Theft Auto V (127.07 MHW)
- New World (115 MHW)
- Dota2 (96.3 MHW)
- Minecraft (66.9 MHW)
- FIFA 22 (62.8 MHW)
- Apex Legends (62 MHW)
- Valorant (61.3 MHW)
- Fortnite (54.5 MHW)
- Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (54 MHW)
- Call of Duty: Warzone (47.6 MHW)

Windholz (2020) suggests that ES is a conundrum, with it simultaneously being: ‘a *sport*, a *technological innovation* and a *profit maximizing business*’ (p 1). As a *sport*, it aligns with what is commonly understood in traditional sports arenas: it has players, teams, and audiences/spectators; competitions and sponsors; broadcasters, and significant financial rewards/prize money at the elite level. It also has local and grass roots players. As a *technological innovation*, ES emerged on the wave of the internet and digital creativity, and subsequently has created new platforms, publishers, markets, and players not usually aligned with sport in a traditional sense. As a *profit maximising business*, ES pushes boundaries of how we understand sport per se: ES does not hold the same socio-cultural importance for the community, as, for example, traditional sports codes such as football, basketball, or soccer. Yet it feeds a powerful pop-culture and has seen an incredible rise in investment from venture capitalists and private equity firms in the past few years. Deloitte notes investments have risen from USD\$490 million in 2017, to US\$4.5 billion in 2018, and increasing (Esports Ecosystem 2021: The Key Industry Companies and Trends Growing the Esports Market, 2021).

Seo and Jung (2016) articulated a *social practices* approach to ES consumption: arguing that stakeholders are consumers who engage in *playing, watching and governing*, and that ES is at the intersection of computer games and professional sports, where “this form of computer game consumption has been fuelled by growing spectatorial followings and nascent governance infrastructures” (p 642). Of interest, is that players are *also* watchers, and Seo and Jung (2016) note that the act of watching ES “engenders an understanding of competitive gameplay as a form of sport” (p 646), which is not dissimilar to watching traditional sport, but could explain why so many ES spectators are players themselves. To move from amateur to professional levels, requires high skill levels and internalised understandings of the games being played and the rules of competition. Outsiders watching ES do not have the insights required to know what is happening necessarily, especially in strategy and battle arena gameplays. To become a knowledgeable player, one would need to also be a knowledgeable watcher. China’s new law concerning gaming restrictions for under 18-year-olds, therefore has significant implications for their ES industry: if they cannot play or watch as much, can they ever attain the highest levels of gameplay required for the international/world

competitions? This is a youth culture sport: players are young, and need to be recruited early, and train hard to reach their maximum potential by their 20s.

As a contemporary social and pop-cultural, global phenomenon, however, it remains contested, in terms of: definitions; core components; and classifications. The implications for children and young people (CYP) are that if esports (ES) are going to continue to be an increasing aspect of their digital worlds then clarity of terms, understanding of benefits and risks, facilitators and barriers, and layers of governance and Codes of Conduct will be required to ensure the digital safety, fair play and oversight of this form of entertainment.

Origin of Sport and Esports: A Precursor to the Ongoing Debates

In ancient times physical activity that led to sports were based on ritual, warfare, and entertainment (Nigel, 2007). Skills at wrestling, archery and athletics were depicted as far back as 10,000 BC in Egypt. In the middle-ages in England and Ireland whole villages might compete with each other in ball-based games. Indigenous cultures globally have given rise to many play-based activities, including early sports (Elliot & Gorn, 2004; Pope, 1997). Indeed, historically most cultures had some form of sophisticated game-play, if not sport as we currently know it.

Sports historians argue that modern sport is a western invention, most particularly by the British (Baker, 1988). Among the games they invented were tennis, football, cricket, bowling, cue sports (snooker, billiards, pool), hockey and equestrian events. British public schools were a major influence in the development and codification of these sports. Such sports changed as the technologies to play them developed. Foremost among them was the invention of the push lawnmower, in 1830, that allowed the preparation of the fields of play.

The British empire was the prime vector for the spread of sport (Perkins, 1989). Their rules of the game and their governance of games were features of play in the vast ranging British Empire. This was an empire with many different nationalities and cultures but their uptake of games to play against the coloniser was large. Indigenous players could play against the empire. Games became international, contests were played between nations, national pride became associated with national teams. Importantly the British upper class introduced *amateurism* and the notion of *fair play*, including a ban on *artificially induced* performance.

Characteristics of sports emerged. According to Jenny et al. (2017), a sport must:

1. involve *play*,
2. be *organised*,
3. include *competition*,
4. include *physical* skills,
5. have a *broad following*, and,
6. have achieved *organisational stability*

Increasing industrialisation and more leisure time brought larger spectator numbers by the early C20th, when sporting stars became national heroes and sports became commercialised.

With the rise of media in the mid-20th Century, sports became “big money”, a parallel seen with the emergence of ES following the advent of increasing internet bandwidth in the 2000s. A structure

emerged: national or international entities controlled when, where, and how, the “game” was to be played. A vast distance was opened between local sporting clubs and these entities. The money was made at the top, through marketing and stadium agreements. In some countries that money was distributed into promoting the sport but in others it simply served a growing elite of international sports bureaucrats. Such commercialisation changed the way games were played and laid the way for the ES structures which eventually followed.

By way of example, in the 1970's cricket was forced to change from 8 ball overs to 6 ball overs to increase advertising income through the provision of more ad-breaks on television. At the same time player payments increased enormously, elevating sporting stars to unheard of status. The temptation to cheat through drugs became stronger, and some sports such as cycling became dominated by doping and dopers, with the reputation of entire nations tarnished by systematic doping of their athletes.

Gambling had long been associated with sports, especially, horse racing, boxing and cricket, and while illegal gambling had always been a problem, match fixing and criminal involvement cast a looming shadow over sport. Through the latter part of the C20th, the commercial sporting status quo continued, dominating the media, the consciousness of children and social mores. These developments foreshadowed the potential risks associated with the development of digital gaming and ES.

Computer-based games emerged in 1962 with the first computer video game named “Space War” but with only a keyboard as an interface, gaming was restricted. Apple's mouse-based interface in the 1980's allowed games to be played across the screen: increasingly faster with a mouse compared to a keyboard, but it was not until computers became capable of true multimedia experiences around 1995 that modern gaming developed.

According to University of New Haven's (2021) infographic of the history of ES, five students from Stanford University competed in an “Intergalactic SpaceWar Olympics” in 1972, playing the “Space War” game developed in 1962. This first-ever competition, delivered a year's subscription the Rolling Stone magazine to the winner, setting the trajectory for competitive computer gaming with rewards and prizes in motion. In the decades to follow, shifts in size, scope, technology, audiences, and prize pools took place, culminating in the online streaming environment we now have. In 1980, more than 10,000 entrants tried to set a record score for Space Invaders, in the earliest large-scale game competition. In 1990, the first edition of the Nintendo world championships took place in 29 US cities. 1991 saw *Street Fighter* shift the focus from getting high scores, to face-to-face action. 1993 saw Doom's four-player deathmatch mode set the scene for online multiplayer in the future (e.g. Halo, Call of Duty, Overwatch, and CS:GO). The 2000s saw the rise in true ES with televised games shown across South Korea, France, Germany, UK and the USA. In 2011 Twitch emerged: the online streaming platform, which had over 20 million monthly visitors within a year. In 2019, The International (TI) Dota2 competition featured the largest ES prize pool in history at USD\$33.3 million, a far cry from the year's supply of Rolling Stone provided in 1972!

A feature of the new approach to gaming was the use of the “physics model” that controlled how actors in the games interacted with each other and their environment. Modern games use the laws of physics to achieve realistic behaviours and special effects (Bourg, 2004). Such a rule-based environment became the arena or “world” in which the computer game was based, and the only way you could obviate these rules was through “God Mode”: a “cheat” code which grants invulnerability to any attacks and makes your character invincible. These rules of course were introduced by designers of the game, but they *became* how the computer game was to be played. The major difference to physical games was it was almost impossible *not* to obey them.

At first, such games were played by individuals, but dramatic developments in Internet connectivity meant that *computers could be connected*. At first in the 2000's quality game play was only possible in local area networks (LANs) but these were incredibly popular. Many a millennial playing today had formative game playing experiences with LANs. As Internet bandwidth increased and server performance improved, quality game play became possible remotely, and *massively multiplayer online games* began to be played by millions of people. Amongst these were the *Battle Arena* games like League of Legends: combining first person shooter aspects *and* team play.

Esports may have “began” in 1999 when the *Online Gamer Association* launched *Eurogamer*, a British video game-related *website* owned by Gamer Website. But it wasn't until over a decade later that ES really came to public consciousness. In October 2014 over 8 million simultaneous viewers watched the play in a League of Legends championship. A year later some 40,000 fans sat and watched giant screens *in a stadium in Seoul*, South Korea to see a championship of League of Legends.

Are Esports Sports?

One of the key questions hotly debated and pervading this area, is whether or not ES are in fact sports. This requires consideration of how sport is defined. The United Nations, for example, identifies sport as “a tool for development and peace” (UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, 2003); and the Australian Sports Commission defines it as “a human activity capable of achieving a result requiring physical exertion and /or physical skill which by its nature and organisation, is competitive and generally accepted as being a sport” (Sport Australia, n.d.). This definition identifies core areas: competition, physicality and organised.

Esports might be provisionally described as “organised video games” (Jenny et al., 2017) yet there is a longstanding proposal that ES be included in the Olympic Games: raising the bar from its humble beginnings as simple video games, to join the pinnacle of elite sportsmen and women and the largest and most prestigious gathering of elite athletes and sportspeople in the world.

And this is where the contention arises in relation to ES. Is it a sport, some other type of competition or recreational activity? Or is ES a *process* such as *gamification* or *sportification* (Abanazir, 2019; Heere, 2018; Llorens, 2017; Wheaton & Thorpe, 2018; Parry, 2019)?

Critical to the debate are characteristics of sport such as Jenny et al.'s (2017) above, and conceptualisations such as Guttman's (2004) below. Esports clearly fit Jenny et al.'s (2017) first (involves play); the third (includes competition); and the fifth (have a broad following). It is arguable that currently they fit the second (be organised). Jenny et al.'s (2017) fourth characteristic is about a physical aspect of sport. It is clear given current interfaces that playing competitive video games does not require *considerable* bodily movement, nor physical engagement at the same level as other traditional athletes. The first of these may change in the near future, however, with untethered Virtual Reality helmets, facilitating gross motor movements in e-games.

Esports' perceived lack of physicality is one of the barriers to it being considered and accepted as a true sport by some. ES does, however, require its cyber-athletes to compete intensely for long periods of time, using complex fine motor skills to control technologies essential for the game play, and high levels of cognitive, psychological, and strategic intensity. In the similar way that other athletes have to train to develop the skills-sets they require for sports such as football and basketball, ES players also need to develop and refine *fast reflexes, hand-eye coordination and manual dexterity*.

Guttman's (2004) hierarchical conceptualisation of non-utilitarian activities (i.e., not essential for survival): *play, games, contests and sports* is also useful here. Here *play*, which is engaged in for *pleasure* of the activity itself, is assumed to be the most general category: which can be conceived as either spontaneous or organised (*games*). Guttman (2004) then proposes *games* can be either competitive (*contests*) or non-competitive. These competitive *contests* are structured so as to produce winners and losers: and there now exists a *reward*, either monetary (prize) or symbolic (medal or satisfaction), distinguishing it from *play*, which is undertaken purely for the pleasure of doing so. Finally, those *contests* can be either intellectual or physical, and when primarily physical, Guttman deems these to be *sports: organised/structured by rules, competitive and physical*.

Given the nature and complexity of defining ES remains contested, there are some common, recognisable elements however: ES are *organised; competitive* and involve some form of *video gaming*, which aligns with Guttman's (2004) conceptualisation of sports, being: organised, structured by rules, competitive and physical. Video games are played by people interacting/competing within computer generated and mediated environments: and usually require some physical or motion-related activity/engagement with the screen and technology: using a toggle; pressing buttons; or motion-held or virtual reality headsets, to action through the game. In essence, the players who are *outside* 'the game', are interacting *within* the virtual world on the screen, for the purpose of some form of competition. And others watch them compete. Using this conceptualisation of sport offers a gateway for considering ES as sports: whilst being intellectual, and strategic contests, they are also highly rule bound, competitive and grounded in the physical notions underpinning the genres of battle arenas, first-person shooters and fights, as well as requiring the co-ordination and physicality and endurance of athletes, to play and last for the duration of the contest.

Another problem concerns the stable structures that surround most sports, especially those that: set the rules of the game; that organise playing schedules; that arbitrate with players (for example around wages and behaviour); and that provide the referees. In many cases they also control and direct the income. Traditional sports have been evolving rapidly in terms of their playing *rules* each season (e.g., Australian Rules Football); the *types* of game to appeal to different audiences (e.g., cricket variations such as Test Matches, One Day Internationals, Twenty20 internationals) and who can play (the recent acceptance and evolution of women's leagues such as AFL Women).

By contrast, rule changes in ES are mostly changed with software upgrades, and then rarely. With a mix of competing corporations, and player groups it is not clear whether stability of administration will or even can occur. The "process" arguments are also interesting; some suggest if competitive games successfully sportify they should become sports. Esports adopt all the characteristics of sport: fair play; training; skills development; talent management; physical exercises; club creation; coaching, yet they are not considered sports generally. A parallel argument exists which notes that with the decline in actual physical sports' engagement at the community level, ES may be a way to engage with a new generation of young people through the sports/gaming interface.

Technological innovation has shifted the complexity, reality and engagement of video gaming to new levels, far removed from the early "pub-pong/space invaders/pac man" type video-games of a few decades ago and positioned it squarely in the sports frame. Today, technology enables and facilitates competitive, organised arenas whereby players are connected with others, to battle against each other using skills honed after hours of practice. Individually or in teams, they can compete in tournaments, or circuits across the year, reflecting real-world sports competitions, where the best players/teams qualify or are promoted to higher divisions for the next season, and the worst performers ousted to lower levels.

To differentiate ES from casual games played amongst friends, and to qualify as a “sport”, there also needs to be *third-party organisers*, where *game publishers*, such as Riot Games (League of Legends) arrange their own competitions, whilst others license others to do so for them.

Franchised leagues have private owners, who recruit players, and offer a select number of available “spots” reflecting such traditional sporting organisations as the Indian Premier and Big Bash (cricketing) leagues, and the prize pools which go with them (Sciberras, 2020).

Data on professional ES teams is released monthly, and it can be confusing to determine the hierarchy, but there is often a tussle for top spot. The top three franchised teams currently (Das, 2021), based on prize pool and viewership seem to be:

- Call of Duty League (CDL)
 - announced in 2019 with its inaugural season starting in 2020.
 - a professional esports league that was launched by Activision
 - there are permanent city-based teams that are backed by separate team owners.
 - all teams compete in a tournament point system which leads up to a playoffs format.
 - Viewership: May 2021: average audience of 206,000; Prize pool of USD\$5 million
- Overwatch League
 - Professional ES league, organised by Activision Blizzard
 - Global; 20 teams from around the world in 2021
 - Viewership: 186,000 viewers for the finals; Prize Pool USD\$ 4.25 million
- League of Legends Championships Series (LCS)
 - Top level of professional LoL in USA and Canada; owned by Riot Games
 - 10 Franchise teams
 - Europe has the League of Legends European Championship (LEC) and
 - China has the Tencent League of Legends Pro League (LPL).
 - The regional franchised leagues tie into Riot Games’ global esports and the league standings collectively determine which teams qualify for the world championships.
 - Viewership: over 416,000 concurrent viewers in April 2021; Prize Pool of USD\$2.25 million for the world championships

It is the standardised regulatory structures, and ways of enforcing sanctions and rules which form the central tenet of this exploratory review from here: the governance and codes of conduct expected when playing ES competitively, and not just gaming amongst friends. With this increasing shift to professionalism, of players and teams: managers and fan bases have arrived, which in turn have brought sponsors. There now exists an ecosystem of stakeholders: games publishers, organisations, players, teams, managers, audiences/viewers, and advertisers/sponsors and as such, the complexity of ES requires greater governance insights and capacities.

At the same time as recognising *positive* outcomes derived from playing games online, such as camaraderie, connectedness and belonging, and the benefits of playing in teams, the *negative* impacts and intrusions which come from organised competitions involving large sums of prize money are also emerging, and reflects much that accompanies traditional sports: such as player exploitations, streaming versus broadcasting issues, gambling dilemmas, match fixing, e-doping involving in-game changes; and susceptibility to gaming addiction (Johri, 2020).

The role of governance and Codes of Conduct are therefore fundamental to supporting children and young people as they enter the realm of ES at the grass roots levels.

The brief review which follows, expands on some of these issues, and highlights others, but most importantly, it contextualises the website analysis/study which follows.

A Data Snapshot: Growth, Reach and Magnitude

With data and statistics changing monthly in the fast-moving ES space, a brief snapshot provides some insight into the global reach and magnitude of this phenomenon.

The ES industry reportedly generated USD 1.2 billion in 2019 (Gawsysiak et al., 2020) and the ES finals in 2021 were predicted to attract 84 million viewers in the US, surpassing every other professional sports league (e.g., NBA, 63 million viewers) except the NFL. Windholz (2020) stated global ES revenue in 2019 was estimated at USD \$1,096 million, with a global audience forecast to grow to *645 million by 2022*. Over 4000 tournaments were played in 2019, with a total prize pool of over USD\$211 million, earning the winners and winning team members over US\$3 million: which Windholz (2020) noted was more than the winner of that year's Australian Open Tennis competition.

Statista (2021) predicts that by 2024, there are expected to be 577.2 million viewers of ES worldwide, a large increase from the 397.8 million in 2019.

As of April 2021, *ninja* (Richard Tyler Blevins) was the most followed live streamer on Twitch (the video streaming platform) with over 16.64 million followers. His rise to fame occurred when he was one of the first top-ranked players to stream Fortnite Battle Royale at the end of 2017/2018. The second-ranked *tfue* (Turner Tenney) has 10.2 million followers on Twitch.

Grand Theft Auto V (GTAV) was the *most popular title* on Twitch in April 2021, with approximately *239.5 million viewing hours generated during that month*. League of Legends (LoL), first released in 2009, ranked second with *157 million viewing hours generated*, but by October 2021, that had risen to 189.4 million hours watched. LoL is a fast moving online, multi-player battle arena game which generated 1.75 billion U.S. dollars in 2020. In 2016, there were 100 million monthly active users, up from 15 million in 2011. It is one of the most popular esports, with almost \$US 15 million in prize money available in 2018 in tournaments worldwide. The World Championship (2018) became one of the most watched esports events in history, with around *100 million viewers* tuning in.

In Australia, however, the scale is more modest. Slower internet speeds have appeared to impact on the uptake of gaming (Brennan, 2016), and the size of the market is subsequently much smaller. In 2018, it was estimated to be worth \$4 million, and tournament prize pools offered considerably less than their counterparts in the US (around A\$50,000), but with the increased availability of streaming and lure of the more lucrative global teams, there would be an expected increase in players and teams here.

Of interest, is that during COVID-19, when real-time sports such as Formula 1 could not take place, there was increased interest in how the ES platform might be optioned to fill the void (Kelly et al., 2021).

Clearly, ES is aligned with technological innovation, profit maximisation and sport and it is therefore critical to ensure that young people who play are supported appropriately through sound governance and Codes of Conduct which are relevant and considered.

Demographics and Intensity of Esports and Digital Gaming

Gamers are diverse: A recent study (Le Ngoc, 2020) shows that a significant share of gamers identify as: women: 45% across the U.S. and U.K., LGBQ+: 13% in the U.S. and 14% in the U.K, and disabled (including mental health or mobility): 30% in the U.S. and 20% in the U.K. A third of U.S. gamers are black, Hispanic, or Asian, while 13% of gamers in the U.K belong to an ethnic-minority group. Despite such diversity many gamers see diversity as under-represented within games.

A recent industry report from the *Interactive Games & Entertainment Association*, 2019 (Brand et al., 2020a), with 3,228 participants, suggests that on average Australians play interactive games for 81 minutes a day and children for 100 minutes. Males and females have similar gaming time. Parents are involved in children's gaming, whereby some 43% play with their children, mostly because it is family fun, children want them to, and because it is a way to spend time together. Some 25% of children from ages 1 - 4, 81% of children aged 5-14, and 83% of 15 to 24 years old, play interactive games. The average age of a game player is 34 years. Younger players play more frequently and longer than older players. Over a third of players have watched esports and 38% enjoy the culture of esports.

Preteens are also a focus for game designers and corporations. Young gamers become older gamers and are especially lucrative when they reach their twenties. The top games young gamers play in the US are: Roblox, Fortnite and Minecraft (Superdata, 2019). These games share similar elements: they allow children to create their own game spaces and they offer virtual hangout spaces allowing multiplayer sessions, they are also mobile friendly and cross platform, maximising multiplayer reach.

Game Genres are diverse: According to SuperData (2019), a games research company owned by Nielsen, digital games associated media generated \$120.1B in 2019 with \$64.4 billion in mobile, \$29.6 billion in PC, \$15.4 billion in gaming console, \$6.5B in video gaming content including esports and \$6.4B in the virtual and augmented reality sector.

According to Newzoo (2020), a gaming consultancy, the top core PC 20 games in October 2020 are those outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Top Core PC 20 Games 2020 Compiled from Newzoo (2020) and Wikipedia (2020).

Game	Description	Publisher/Corporation	Country	Company Income 2019
League of Legends	Battle arena	Riot Games/Tencent	China	\$5,225M
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege	Shooter	Ubisoft	France	\$510M
Among Us	Social deduction game	InnerSloth	USA	N/A
Minecraft	Non-violent simulation	Mojang/Microsoft	USA	\$2,831M
Valorant	Shooter	Riot Games/Tencent	China	\$5,225M
Rocket League	Football with cars	Psyonix/Epic Games	USA	\$1,800M
Overwatch	Shooter	Activision Blizzard	USA	\$1,749M
Apex Legends	Hero shooter	Respawn/Electronic Arts	USA	\$3,710M ¹
Genshin Impact	Action role play	miHoYo	China	240M ²
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare	Shooter	Activision Blizzard	USA	\$1,749M
Hearthstone	Digital card game	Activision Blizzard	USA	\$1,749M
Grand Theft Auto V	Action adventure	Rockstar Games/Warner Bros.	USA	\$565M
World of Warcraft	Action role play	Activision Blizzard	USA	\$1,749M

Game	Description	Publisher/Corporation	Country	Company Income 2019
Fall Guys	Battle arena	Devolver Digital	France	\$510M
Dota 2	Battle arena	Valve Corporation	USA	\$4,300M ³
PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS	Shooter	PUBG Corporation/Bluehole Corp.	South Korea	N/A ⁴
ROBLOX	Non-violent simulation	Roblox Corporation	USA	N/A
Phasmophobia	Action adventure	Kinetic Games	UK	N/A
Fortnite	Hero shooter	Epic Games	USA	\$1,800M ⁵
Counter-Strike: Global Offensive	Shooter	Valve Corporation	USA	\$4,300M ⁶

Notes: 1. EA Annual Report 2019, 2. Genshin Impact only since September 2020 release, 3.2017 data, 4 Biggest shareholder Tencent, 5. Fortnite only, large stake held by Tencent, 6. 2017 data.

It is clear from Table 1 that many top games are “shooters” of some type, and such games also tend to have the most players, viewers, and income. The battle arena style of “shooter” makes for esports viewing. Certain battle arena subtypes like League of Legends are designed for team play. The variety of games genres, however, is considerable, and games vary in cost from being free to play, to monthly rentals.

Audiences/Viewers are Conversants not just watchers: In 2019 some 944 million individuals watched digital games. Players are also *watchers* of services like Twitch and Youtube (others are Mixer and Facebook) to enjoy and learn about game play. Many will be *spectators* in the esports sense, that is they watched organised performance of digital games competitions streamed by major services. But players and watchers are also conversants who communicate about ES. The following chart shows the number of comments and posts in gaming communities on Reddit for October 2020.

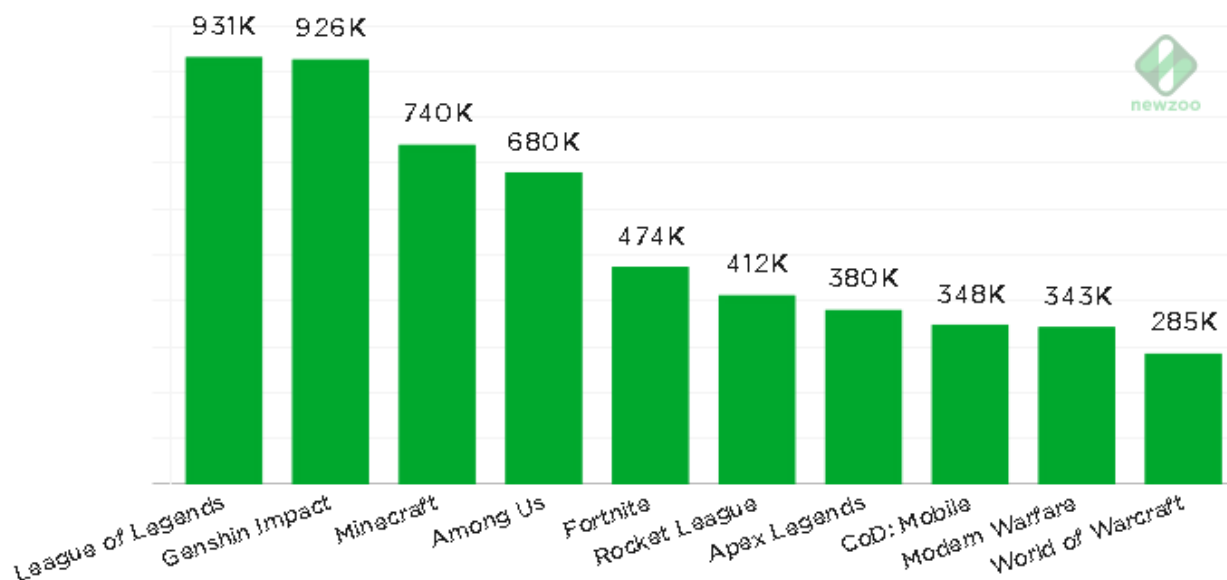


Figure 1: Numbers (in thousands) of comments and posts to Reddedit games communities October 2020. Source: Kemp (2020).

Playing, competing, watching and discussing are clearly all elements of the game player demeanour.

ES Publishers and Ownership are less diverse: Corporate ownership is narrowly based. Countries like France, China and the US have large global franchises. Small publishers and developers often produce titles that attract great public interest (like Fortnite) and draw the attention of the giant franchises who might try to buy them (as in Tencent) or mimic them (as in Apex Legends by Electronic Arts). Riot Games, the originator of League of Legends, was a US company in California in which Tencent acquired an interest during 2011 and bought it outright in 2015.

There is rapid “churn” in the industry as a simple trawl of ownership of the publishers through Wikipedia will show. A number of top corporations are entertainment companies, some are IT companies, *but none are sports companies*. Finally, all of the games on this list are there because their players and viewers value them: many games never make it to the top 100; they are released and fail; some games are held back because it is not the right time; some games are deliberately sabotaged, because the corporation already has a game of this type; and some never make it through development. Game development is a vexed, fast-paced, and precarious industry.

Industry metaphors: The games industry draws metaphors from book publishing and the movie industry. Games are “titles”, new versions are “sequels”, and they are revealed at grandiose “releases”. Their originators are praised for their creative brilliance and called “directors”, and “game communities” (book/film clubs) are there to serve them, and “commentators” and “critics” are in abundance. The hype surrounding the games industry is as intense as that of the film industry, the designers (directors), publishers (film companies) and best players (actors) are stars.

But games are serious competitions not simply entertainment and their ES aspects in particular needs a new paradigm, not just metaphors drawn from other areas.

Impacts of Gaming

There has been a long-standing discussion in the literature about violence and video gaming. The once ruling view held that video gaming involving violent play led to violence in real life (Anderson, 2004; Anderson et al., 2010; Huesmann, 2010), and protagonists of this argument took the high moral ground in the public consciousness.

But the evidence had always been ambivalent (Drummond & Sauer, 2019; Przybylski, 2014,) and a series of mass shootings in the US that had *nothing* to do with video games, served to diminish the public view somewhat (Campbell, 2018; Markey & Ferguson, 2017). New work by Kuhn et al. (2019) and Przybylski and Weinstein (2019) may well dispel the myth. In reality, by the 2000’s the majority of the West and Asia’s children *were playing games with violent (often cartooned) content* and their game playing parents were helping them do it. The arguments about impacts of gaming have subsequently turned to mental health.

In 2013 the American Psychiatric Association identified *internet gaming disorder (IGD)* for possible inclusion in the diagnostic and statistical manual (DSM-5) of mental disorders, but there was insufficient evidence at the time to determine if the condition was a unique mental disorder. It did recognise however, that it needed consideration, and noted that it must cause “significant impairment or distress” in several aspects of a person’s life, and that the diagnosis was limited to gaming, and did not include general usage problems with the internet, online gambling or use of social media or smartphones.

The proposed criteria for diagnosis of internet gaming disorder requires five or more of these within a year (Parekh, 2018):

1. preoccupation with internet gaming
2. experienced withdrawal: when gaming is taken away or not possible (sadness, irritability, anxiety)
3. developed tolerance: the need to spend more time gaming to satisfy the urge
4. loss of control: inability to reduce playing; unsuccessful attempts to quit
5. continued use, despite problems
6. mislead or deceiving family/others about the amount of time spent gaming
7. use as escape, to relieve negative moods, such as guilt or hopelessness
8. reduced interests, and giving up other activities
9. risked other opportunities; jeopardised or lost a job or relationship due to gaming.

The so called IGD-20 designed to test for internet gaming disorder was developed and trialled (Pontes et al., 2014). In 2018 such concerns with gaming led the World Health Organisation included gaming in both online and offline variants in its 11th edition of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). As the United Kingdom House of Commons Committee on “Immersive and addictive technologies” (2019) concludes:

“If you take the whole population of gamers, involving millions of people all around the world, only a very small percentage are developing problems that may be associated with addictions [...] Although we do not want to over-pathologise something that is a very enjoyable pastime activity for the large majority of gamers, we do need to be aware of the significant problems that a small minority do experience”

Despite a very small percentage, raw numbers are considerable, as one study (Przybylski, 2017) at the time concluded. Widespread *medicalisation* of gaming, may risk swamping services, something that warrants consideration.

There is much debate about this notion of a gaming disorder, and van Rooij (2018) argues there is simply insufficient scientific evidence to effectively diagnose such a disorder. Moreover, intense video gaming is not fundamentally problematic, with the amount of gaming time an unreliable predictor of problematic gaming using IGD-10 (Kiraly et al., 2017). There is an argument that there is an addiction related to problematic internet use that may be mediated by gaming, but also by social media, online gambling or even online shopping (Alexandraki et al., 2018; Brand et al., 2016a; Brand et al., 2016b). As such gaming is just another mediator for problematic internet use, and not a disorder of itself. Some research has been done on whether dark personality traits especially those of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism impact problematic internet use generally. The Bergen Internet Addiction Scale (Tousuntsu et al., 2018) was used in a study of 772 undergraduates in Turkey (Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2018). However, the multiple mediation models show that of these traits only the Machiavellianism trait impacts internet addiction through gaming; and with small effect ($R=.11$, $n=772$). Whereas dark traits impact internet addiction through social media, gambling, and other internet areas; and with considerably larger effects. The Machiavellian trait may be understandable given the gaming environment requires considerable subterfuge. This is a growing area of research.

Recently gaming disorder has come to be called “*dis-regulated gaming*” but questions remain of the relevance of this concept to competitive gaming. In the list of criteria for internet gaming disorder (above) it is interesting to note that *serious physical sport players (e.g. footballers) regularly exhibit to varying degrees: 1. (obsessed with footy), 2. (can't wait to get back from injury), 3. (watch games incessantly), 4. (put me on the field, I want to play), 5. (play even if injured and upset), 7. (into the game), 9. (has created new opportunities)*. On just these criteria the DSM and the WHO designation would catch all professional sport players. They are also true of esports players and are partially true of gamers generally.

Such features are also generally expected by coaches of professional players. Criteria 6, and 8 are more interesting. Misleading others about the amount of gaming, would not be a problem in the physical space, but in the digital gaming space it connotes obsessive behaviours. Reduced interests can mean the loss of all other engagements. The question of whether gamers actually lose these engagements is a good one, and not clear in the literature. Obversely, in recent times, traditional sports players have publicly admitted to a variety of mental conditions and it is now standard for professional sports in Australia to have mental health specialists at hand, in ways similar to other medical specialists.

Given the claim that gaming itself can lead to psychological problems many researchers have addressed the psychological benefits that may game play may confer. Certain levels of gaming may be of *benefit* to anxiety, stress, depression, and social connectedness, compared to low or negligible levels of gaming and very high levels of gaming (Spears et al., 2015). Indeed, there is growing evidence for an ‘inverted U shape’ rather than a direct linear correlation, with Allahverdipour et al. (2010) showing the so called “moderate” gaming led to better levels of anxiety, depression, social dysfunction, and somatisation than either “excessive” or “minimal” gaming. As did Przybylski (2014) and Weinstein (2017), with a study of mental health and gaming among some 120,000 English adolescents.

Experiencing, seeing and doing cyberbullying are significantly correlated with frequency of gaming, but ostensibly violent games like shooters (Call of Duty) are *less highly correlated* than ostensibly non-violent games (tetris, candy crush) (Barnes & Geer, 2012). Furthermore, genre analysis of games played suggests that generally *first-person shooter style games lead to better levels of anxiety, stress, depression and social connectedness outcomes than arcade style non-violent games* (Barnes et al., 2019).

There is a growing body of evidence that the opportunity for team play as opposed to individual play confers considerable benefits that may outbalance other countervailing factors (e.g., violence). Playing offline with people you know significantly predicted wellbeing (Vella et al., 2013). Playing with someone you know extends relationships with them (Shen & Williams, 2011). Playing against a co-located player led to more enjoyment and satisfying gameplay compared to playing a computer or another person online (Gajadhar et al., 2008). Trepte et al. (2012) studied 811 e-sports players in relation to team bonding and social capital and found that game play could increase offline social support. Other studies such as Yee (2006) who surveyed 3412 massively multiplayer online role-playing game players showed that playing social games can lead to meaningful relationships. *However, there is little research on the relation of team interaction to mental health for the dominant esports games.*

Lastly some gaming impacts can be beneficial.

Video games offer diverse experiences, playing different roles can improve empathy (Greitemeyer et al., 2010); help with pain management (Dahlquist et al., 2009); lessen life frustrations (Rueda, 2010); and inspire children to find solutions to life problems (Hull, 2009). Games can have cognitive benefits, helping to make faster decisions (Green et al., 2010); assist in managing dyslexia (Franceschini et al., 2013); and improve brain functioning (McCallum & Boletsis, 2013). Specifically, designed games can effectively promote health and behaviour change (Baranowski et al., 2008; Lu et al., 2012) and even improve eating habits.

Kovess-Masfety et al. (2016) provide a *list of benefits for young children*, that has been adopted by the esports industry, viz:

- hand-eye coordination,
- fine motor skills,
- eyesight,
- social skills,
- teamwork and cooperation,
- air play/good sportsmanship,
- capacity for learning,
- planning and problem solving,
- concentration,
- inductive reasoning and hypothesis testing,
- decision making,
- perseverance and resilience/handling challenges,
- coping (e.g., with short- or long-term illness),
- handling (and reducing) stress,
- self-confidence and perceived self-efficacy, and
- joy/well-being (Voll et al., 2016).

In an ingenious meta-study of the impacts of action video games versus physical exercise on cognition, Toth et al. (2020) found that such video games were superior to physical exercise at enhancing cognitive skills such as attention, task-switching, information processing, and memory abilities, despite the positive effect of exercise on mood and physical health.

Finally, children's education itself can be benefitted. An entire sub-field of educational design is devoted to converting learning objectives into game-play outcomes. So called *gamification* is widely applied in Western classrooms and has led to some very successful Australian education companies such as 3P Learning which publishes Mathletics internationally to help with mathematics learning in primary school. Indeed, the term "serious games" is broadly used to describe games whose major goal is learning rather than entertainment and serious games development is very considerable, as is the literature (Ibarra, 2020).

Education, Esport and Social Responsibility

Schools have traditionally had an important role in sports engagement and an ongoing role in talent development. Inter-school sporting competition is prevalent and lasts well past the school years. Indeed, some schools are well known as major sources of new athletes for major sporting codes. The "old boys" sides are a feature of many leagues. The imperative to *sportify* esports has led ES organisations to take a serious interest in *school-based esports*, a role in the development of esports' school competitions and an increasing focus on esports skill development.

One such organisation is *PlayVS* (incorporated in Santa Monica) which claims to be the home of high school, college and youth esports with the largest high school esports league in the US. *PlayVS* claims that schools who join can improve student engagement, attendance, and GPA (*PlayVS* 2020). In recent competitions the games played were *Overwatch*, *Rocket League*, *Rainbow Six: Siege* and *Hearthstone*, *Call of Duty*, *Counter strike*, *Minecraft*, *Valorant*, (top games in Table 1) and they even run a competition for the 1500 year old strategy-based board game called “chess”. They are also offering competitions in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand. *PlayVS* support esports being taught at schools and provide access to a semester length curriculum called “Gaming Concepts” (Custer and Russell, 2020) and claims a 20% increase in attendance and a 1.7 rise in overall GPA. *PlayVS* publish a parents’ guide arguing for the intrinsic value of esports engagement for children (*PlayVS* 2020). Prominent in their advertising is the claim that they are offering STEM.org accredited programs and curriculum. No published literature could be found backing such claims however.

Riot Games (owned by Tencent) is both the publisher of *League of Legends* and the promoter of esports competitions around the world. Its *League of Legends World Championship* is held annually with huge prize money (US\$6.45m in 2018: Ramsey, 2020) and to play in it is an aspiration of millions of teenagers. Following its first such championship in 2011, *Riot* embraced *sportification*: it hired sports programming producers, purchased broadcasting equipment, trained its professional gamers to be “TV-ready” and held its tournaments in large stadia with live audiences (Blakely, 2016).

Realising the significance of schools in sports development, *Riot* initiated high school championships in many countries including Australia. The Australian competition has been running for three years with some 100 high schools. State winning teams play in a national play off and the Australian winner gets to play in the Oceania championship and perhaps onward to the World Championship.

The *Riot* approach to schools is sophisticated. Teacher coaches are trained and provided with support materials. There are behaviour rules and sportsmanship is a central metaphor, practise is key and team building is a focus. *Riot's Australian Sportsmanship Teaching Guide* (2019) makes interesting reading with sections on sportsmanship, behaviour norms, connections with the Australian curriculum, and emphasises on ethical behaviour, moral values, and personal growth through the esports experience. There are no current research reviews of this material or the competition.

Riot's sophistication in the education arena can be contrasted with its issues. In the past it has had to address *systemic harassment in its games*, hiring psychologists to develop approaches (Hess, 2014; Scimeca, 2013), and in its own corporate behaviour such as organisational issues with *sexism and employee abuse*, with California State investigations and outstanding class actions. *Riot* is acquisitive in the Google/Facebook style buying companies that might compete and cancelling their game development. They also withdraw their games from third party competitions to considerable consternation. In a “massive blow to professional *League of Legend* players and esports generally” in the Oceania region in October 2020 *Riot* pulled support from the Oceania Pro League and closed *Riot's* Sydney based operation. Apparently, *Riot's* support moved from the marketing budget to be a line item whose profitability was insufficient. Some eight teams and their staff will be impacted with players going into the North American player pool (Lace, 2020).

University and college gaming has been growing rapidly, especially in the US where university esports teams play in a range of leagues. Universities' embrace esports as "sports" with teams, coaches, sports scholarships, training, esports "stadia" and fierce inter-university competition. Each university seems to adhere to some code of practice and provides some educational support. There is a plethora of ancillary organisations such as Varsity Esports (2021), HSEL (2021), and LFG (2021). The last involved in helping new students find a college esports playing team to their liking and seeking supporting scholarships. The Esports Education Foundation (part of Varsity Esports) produces educational material, although provides no research as to its efficacy.

The Australian Esports Association (AESA) provides an umbrella role for esports in Australia. This includes running the Australian University Esports League whose winners go through to the International Esports Organisation Championship. There are some 13 members of the university committee, but many of their links are inactive possibly due to the disruptive (COVID-19) events of 2020, with significant active sites being QUT, RMIT, and Murdoch. The association claims an interest in education and its president, Darren Kwan says education must be one of ES important priorities in 2021. Late in 2020 AESA hosted an online summit where esports and education featured prominently, as did grass roots esports and esports integrity (AESA, 2020).

While the high school and university sector has been a focus for ES development, there had been little development in primary and middle school. In 2020 Australian primary school teacher Daniel Aivaliotis-Martinez launched the Fuse Cup to provide just these children with ES competitions. The Fuse Cup partnered with Kids Helpline to design an esports experience emphasising the values of integrity, strength, inclusion and teamwork and promotes digital wellbeing (Fuse Cup, 2020). Its educational material appears extensive, and a cursory examination of its rules suggests considerable experience in working with children in this age group. Similar to PlayVS they have a well-developed parent guide. Again, there is as yet no analysis of the efficacy of this material. Interestingly, international schools are a focus for Fuse Cup.

Community based ES is yet another level where education and social values meet esports. Palmerston council is committed to developing its young people through ES. It has run the AEL Palmy cup in collaboration with the Australian Esports League with \$500 prize money in each game. (City of Palmerston, 2020a). It also runs Level Up events and the Geekfest Top End (City of Palmerston, 2020b). The initiatives are supported by free webinars and council staff working with youth. Salisbury council in South Australia runs the Northern Adelaide Esports League (NOADE) with a range of esports events and tournaments.

At a different organisational level are the esports team companies. These often have a stable of esports teams in different genres. In Australia, the Adelaide Crows and the Essendon football clubs have been involved in the purchase of esports teams. This changed for the Crows in November 2021 however, with the sale of Legacy Sports, but they are still involved with META, the high school esports league. But others such as Team Liquid are huge organisations with rigorous training programs. There are extensive training programmes, for example in the Esports Academy. The literature on educational value of these organisations' material is negligible.

Major international education providers/players are interested in esports. Pearson have partnered with the British Esports Organisation (2020) to provide diploma and certificate courses for careers in esports. They are accredited at level 2 and 3 of the British and Technology Education Council. These courses will be offered in UK colleges and high schools. Udemy and Coursera have a range of esports courses. The Staffordshire University has a BA(Honours) Esports which includes subjects on gaming culture, broadcasting and esports events. No systematic analysis of the merits of these courses has as yet been carried out.

Organisations in the ES space have committed to *sportification* and *education* strategies, some have also committed to broader socially responsible roles. In 2019 the *International Esports Federation* expressed this widespread organisational commitment when it put forward a commitment to practice social responsibility in their principles. These principles are as follows:

Safety and well-being

All esports community members deserve to participate in and enjoy esports in safe spaces and to be free from threats and acts of violence and from language or behavior that makes people feel threatened or harassed.

Integrity and fair play

Cheating, hacking, or otherwise engaging in disreputable, deceitful, or dishonest behaviour detracts from the experience of others, unfairly advantages teams and players, and tarnishes the legitimacy of esports.

Respect and diversity

Esports promotes a spirit of healthy competition. Whether in person or online, all members of the esports community should demonstrate respect and courtesy to others, including teammates, opponents, game officials, organizers, and spectators.

Positive and Enriching Game Play

Esports can help build self-confidence and sportsmanship and boost interpersonal communication and teamwork skills. Esports brings players and fans together to problem solve through strategic play, collaboration, and critical thinking. Participation in esports can also lead to the development of new and lasting friendships among teammates, competitors, and members of the broader esports community.

Esports is truly global and brings together players from different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. The broad and diverse player base of esports contributes to its success, and an open, inclusive, and welcoming environment for all, no matter one's gender identity, age, ability, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation is a fundamental premise.

The Australian peak body for video games the *Interactive Games & Entertainment Association* (IGEA) reflects some of these principles in its policies, which cover online safety, loot boxes (incipient gambling), and digital health (excessive gaming). In Australia, a study by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner (2018) offers a picture of the "state of play" with game use, games dangers and games benefits.

The extent to which these organisational commitments to social values are just value-signalling or a deeper commitment is not yet clear. There are as yet no mechanisms that ensure such principles are followed or to publicly report on industry performance. Principles are not a code of conduct and self-regulation may not be enough to ensure public confidence.

Governance and Codes of Conduct

According to the Governance Institute of Australia (n.d.), there is not one agreed upon definition of [corporate] governance, but they suggest:

Governance encompasses the system by which an organisation is controlled and operates, and the mechanisms by which it, and its people, are held to account. Ethics, risk management, compliance and administration are all elements of governance.

Other definitions relate to the set of relationships between a company's management, its board, shareholders, and stakeholders: providing a structure through which objectives are set and the means of attaining them and monitoring performance are determined (OECD). It is also defined as a framework of rules, relationships, systems and processes within and by which authority is exercised and controlled, and the mechanisms by which those in control are held to account (ASX Corporate Governance Council). Together these raise areas of concern which must be managed through good governance: viz, the stakeholder relationships within the eco-system, and the accountability standards to which they are held.

Codes of Conduct (CoC) are defined as collections of rules and regulations that include what is, and what is not acceptable or expected behaviour (Ethics & Compliance Initiative, 2021). In the case of ES, these would relate to how stakeholders: players and audiences, game publishers and sponsors for example, should behave and the consequences for failing to do so.

Given the rapid rise in the last few years of the ES phenomenon, the issues of good governance and Codes of Conduct emerge as significant factors in keeping the system functioning, and the players safe and well at all levels of play. In order to meet the policy, regulatory and legal challenges which may be faced, a brief exploration of the issues raised in the literature related to governance and CoC is warranted.

Notably, the ES industry does *not* have a unified source of governance. There is no one source of all information and data.

Rather, those largely providing governance, are the *game publishers*: those who control the current structure to maximise their commercial benefit. Importantly, they only "govern" their own games to ensure maximum profit and total control, and have little interest in the lower, non-professional levels. This means that there is no consistency, nor one entity/organisation in control of the phenomenon, yet this one set of stakeholders wields enormous financial and socio-cultural power.

This is a vastly different structure to that of traditional sports, which are likely to have an overarching, global body (e.g., FIFA) and a series of layers or levels of governance, which may include government support and oversight in some cases, and which radiate out: from elite sport to grass roots community levels (Peng et al., 2020).

Kelly et al. (2021) explain that there are critical issues existing in the ES eco-system due to a fragmented governance structure: particularly integrity and participant wellbeing. The fragmented structure refers to the split between publishers, and other national and international bodies which have arisen to support players and develop codes of conduct and principles and values of the sports.

The uniquely commercial underpinning, combined with the vulnerability of players and audiences who are largely minors, has the potential to create a perfect governance storm, one which governments, legal jurisdictions and regulators would be wise to pay attention to, particularly around the areas of child protection and youth wellbeing.

Protecting vulnerable teens from negative impacts of gaming, such as exposure to toxic behaviour as cyberbullying, abuse, racism, hate speech and discrimination would seem a prime function of governance and CoC. Kelly et al. (2021) identify that the legal and governance challenges in ES relate largely to: unregulated gambling; underage participants and the integrity issues concern match-fixing, doping and cyber-attacks. They propose a seven-pillar model of governance drawn from Burger and Goslin (2005): *accountability; responsibility; transparency; social responsibility; independence; fairness; discipline*. They draw attention to the ongoing challenges to governance monitoring, and enforcement however, simply because of the digital, commercial, and international nature of the sector.

Peng et al. (2020), in their paper exploring stakeholder dynamics and ES governance, used an exploratory case study research design: and employed secondary data analysis of documents and focus groups with stakeholders (N=26) to examine esports governance. Key questions concerned: the issues existing in ES; who should be responsible for ES regulation/governance and how can ES governance be improved. Following analyses, two main findings were derived: that

1. game publishers (those who ultimately own the video games' intellectual property) are the dominant powers in their own elite network; and can do what they like with their game; and
2. emerging stakeholders, with diversified interests, create fragmentation of ES governance.

Key issues identified related to the lack of interest by publishers in governing the entire industry, hence players lower down the ranks, were often harassed and abused, and amateur players were often exploited as they tried to shift into the professional leagues. Activities not coordinated by publishers, therefore, require others to step in, contributing to the fragmentation of governance.

Two types of stakeholders were identified with the potential to step in: (1) national and international ES governing bodies; and (2) self-proclaimed industry 'guardian' organisations.

Three organisations claim international governance responsibilities, but they operate without any real legitimacy, simply due to the fact that the game publishers control the actual games.

- International Esports Federation (IeSF)
 - with 111 national esports organisations as its members, aims to legitimise esports as a sport
- World Esports Association (WESA)
 - Result of joint effort between professional ES teams and tournament organisers
- Global Esports Federation (GEF)
 - partnered with one of the biggest game publishers, Tencent, to create industry guidelines.

One respondent noted that at the elite level "no-one cares about country versus country" (p 9) and another commented that "they have no clout". Without permission from publishers to "govern" a game, they can only position themselves as being national *advocacy* bodies in their respective countries.

An example of a guardian organisation, is the *Esports Integrity Commission* (ESIC), a non-profit organisation that partners with ES stakeholders to tackle such *threats* as match manipulations, and betting fraud. It has created voluntary codes of conduct for players, teams, tournament and league organisers and some national and international ES (governing) bodies. Another example concerns the group of international bodies which came together to create the suite of four principles noted earlier: *safety and wellbeing; integrity and fair play; respect and diversity; positive and enriching game play* (Valentine, 2019) —which are expected to be adhered to by the members of their organisations, including the game publishers (Provan & Kenis, 2008).

Governments can also be involved in regulation. South Korea, for example, has the Korean e-Sports Association (KeSPA) which, under their legal jurisdiction, has the capacity to charge players or teams with criminal offences. France regulates professional ES players through limits set on contracts, and players under aged 12 are not permitted to play in tournaments with prize money (Ionica, 2017). China's recent new three-hour video-gaming restriction for players aged under 18, designed to curb gaming addiction, has raised concerns that it could impede China's growth as a global ES entity, preventing the younger players from training as they need to (Horwitz & Yu, 2021). The Chinese government, unlike other countries, has the power to directly govern the ES industry in that country. The new rules are not laws per se that punish individuals but *place the onus on gaming companies*: which will be compelled to require logins with real names and national ID numbers. This enforced accountability and control at the government level is an area to watch.

Summary and Conclusion

As is evident, gaming is no longer a solely leisure-related activity. It has evolved into a fully-fledged, heavily contested world-wide sporting event, involving cyber-athletes, sponsors, watchers and as such, has been suggested as an Olympic event (Johri, 2020).

However, the rapid rise has not been matched by an equal rise in governance and codes of conduct. The existing fragmented and disparate governance framework is in direct contrast to that evident in many traditional sports. There are also ethical concerns which reflect traditional sports, such as doping, match-fixing but also unique privacy concerns relating to the misuse of player data and identity fraud simply because of the media. These require some administrative oversight by those who understand the industry, yet, those with the power are those who control the games, and the representatives of the players, can only advocate for united principles of good and fair play.

Some of the issues requiring ongoing consideration reflect the unique aspects of ES. Player exploitation is one, especially as the cyber-athletes are usually quite young, often beginning play in their early teens, and having short-lived careers, even if they make it to the professional levels, due to burnout from the high intensities of the gameplay. Entering into contractual agreements at young ages, with little or no player unions to support them, means that governing bodies which have come together to provide support for players, need to be aware of their responsibilities and accountabilities to youth wellbeing and child protection.

The disparate nature of the games played, the differing rules and ways of play, mean that implementing any coherent regulations is challenging. A key issue here is that developers own the intellectual property related to their game, meaning the commercial value of the game is under their control. This is different to traditional sports, where no-one "owns" football for example, but governing bodies oversee any changes to rules and the nature of the game.

A key differentiating aspect of ES is that it is now directly linked to streaming, and television broadcasting, the domain of traditional sports, is of less interest. Gambling, of course, is evident in both traditional and ES, but the online setting brings unique aspects of this: where virtual items can be bet on. Given most players are underage, this brings a responsibility of a different kind with ES oversight bodies, particularly as the legislation regarding betting on virtual items is less understood. Betting and gambling also underpin match-fixing, and the use of performance-enhancing drugs is also prevalent, as it is in traditional sports. Use of cognitive-enhancing drugs to support prolonged concentration and mental focus raises health concerns beyond the impact on their play capacity. Without one governance body, a complete anti-doping and drug-testing policy/approach to ES is problematic. A unique aspect of ES, is the notion of e-doping, where changes are made in the game: to programming and codes, and the Esports Integrity Commission (ESIC) published a code of conduct to guard against such events. The mental health and addictive concerns of prolonged play also require some oversight.

Putting in place a systematic, regulatory mechanism has proved to be difficult thus far. The International Esports Federation (IeSF) and the World Esports Association (WeSA) are both organisations which should have effect, but it seems they have failed to garner support from the stakeholders they are there to support. It would seem then, that there is much work still to be done.

Having evolved from commercial enterprises, ES is not equipped to ensure adequate protection of players and vulnerable audiences, many of whom are minors, as the governance structure is fragmented. Grass roots levels then, where players learn their craft, is where early codes of conduct and principles and values of fair play need to be embedded.



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METHODOLOGY

SUMMARY

- An overarching emergent research design was employed in this pilot study
- Stage 1 Narrative Literature Review
- Stage 2 comprises
 - An Environmental Scan (Phase 1)
 - Identifying the research question
 - Identifying relevant websites
 - Website selection; **and**
 - A Website Analysis (Phase 2)
 - Charting the website data
 - Collating, summarising (by employing Content analysis) and reporting results
 - Consultation (optional).
- **Website Analysis** was conducted with N=21 esports-related websites.
- Websites were organised under the following categories:
 - **Macro:** International & Australian esports associations
 - **Intermediate:** International & Australian esports leagues
 - **Micro:** International & Australian esports teams
 - **Other:** a small sample of websites from other stakeholders in the esports industry ecosystem e.g., software and video game industries and gambling sites.
- Stage 3 Interviews with esports industry stakeholders.

Context: An Emergent Research Design

A common overarching objective of qualitative methods is that of understanding through an iterative and emergent process (Forman et al., 2008). This qualitative pilot study applies a three-stage emergent research design (Figure 2). This design enables the collection of different, but complementary data from a range of sources including websites and stakeholders to inform understandings regarding the facilitators of, and barriers to, positive esports behaviours. Emergent design supports flexibility in methodology and methods, enabling discussions that challenge prior assumptions and existing knowledge and research, and further supports the exploration, critique, and realignment of boundaries to comprehensively address research questions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008).

The design allows for interpretations to evolve and be shaped by findings from each stage of the study. Figure 2 shows the relationships between each stage and the opportunities that the design affords to inform subsequent stages of the study and to revisit prior stages if necessary.

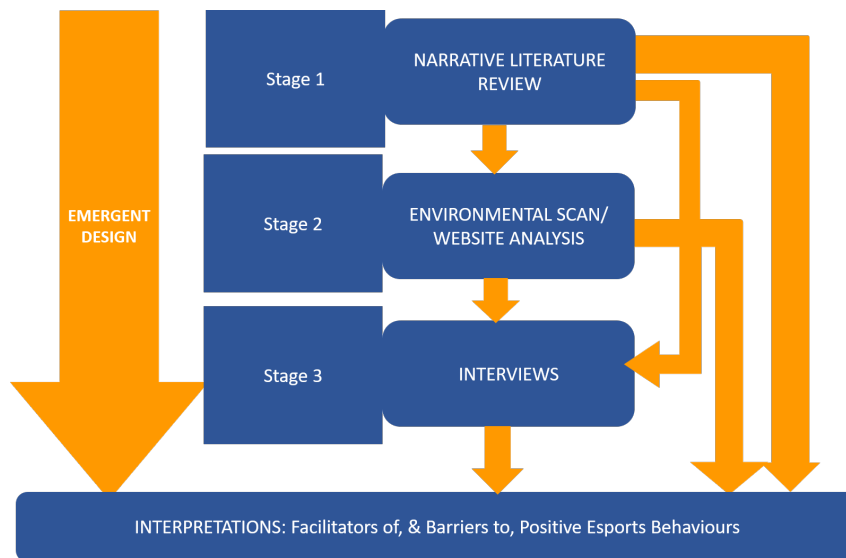


Figure 2: Emergent Research Design

Following the completion of the Stage 1 Narrative Literature Review, Stage 2, which involved an Environmental scan and website analysis was completed. Environmental scans can provide a particularly effective method for collecting information for various purposes and from a range of sources (Charlton et al., 2019). The Environmental Scan and Website Analysis will be followed by Stage 3 Semi-structured interviews to explore the esports: a) experiences b) attitudes, c) behaviours and d) aspirations of esports stakeholders, that support positive esports experiences for stakeholders. The research design will enable findings from the narrative literature review, the environmental scan/website analysis and the collective experiences of esports stakeholders to be brought together in an iterative, emergent process to inform future development and directions of esports governance and codes of conduct with a view to supporting and safeguarding positive esports behaviours.

Ethics

The principles outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007) govern human research activities. Research conducted within the University of South Australia involving human participants requires approval as per the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (UniSA HREC) policy which is based on the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)* (*National Statement*) and *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007)* (*Australian Code*).

This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol No. 202 223).

STAGE 2: ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN & WEBSITE ANALYSIS

Introduction

This section outlines the methodological approach employed in the scoping analysis of esports-related websites, to establish **insights into the types and nature of governance processes and structures** that exist **within, and across esports associations, leagues and teams, nationally in Australia, and internationally**. Given also, that the **esports industry ecosystem extends to additional stakeholders including game developers and publishers and given the gamblification of gaming** (Macey et al., 2021), a small sample of websites from software and video game industries and gambling sites have been considered in the scoping and analysis.

The researchers acknowledge there are laws and government independent regulatory bodies, such as Australia's eSafety Commissioner, that can and do play a role in regulating and safeguarding online safety generally, including the safety for those who engage with esports. However, **this environmental scan will focus predominately on websites that are solely dedicated to esports**, with some examples of websites where esports sits within the broader focus of the website and which may represent stakeholders who are positioned within the broader fringes of the esports industry ecosystem. For the purposes of this study, a website is defined as an environment that is accessed via connectivity to the Internet or remote service.

Methods

Stage 2 comprised two phases:

- Phase 1 involved the initial environmental scan to identify the types and categories of esports websites to include in the Phase 2 Website Analysis. Environmental scans have been employed across disciplines and are identified as a useful approach for collecting information for a range of purposes (Charlton et al., 2019). An environmental scan is defined as a process of collecting, analysing, and using information from the environment to inform decision making (Lester & Waters, 1989; Zhang et al., 2010). Conducting an Environmental Scan is, however, considered an information intensive process which requires information literacy (Zhang et al., 2010). As such, clear and replicable processes are critical for supporting a rigorous approach. Whilst there is no consensus on the best way to conduct an environmental scan, the literature identifies some key steps which have been adapted from the literature (Khalil et al., 2016; Levac et al., 2010) to focus on websites, rather than the generic term of 'study' which is often used. The steps include:
 1. Identifying the research question
 2. Identifying relevant websites
 3. Website selection
 4. Charting the website data
 5. Collating, summarising, and reporting results
 6. Consultation (optional).
- Steps 1 to 3 are completed within Phase 1 of the Stage 2 study, whilst Steps 4 and 5 above are employed within the Phase 2: Website analysis, which is outlined below. As a pilot study, the consultation stage was conducted within the research team, and will include consultation with the key stakeholders of this project subsequent to the delivery of this interim report.

- Phase 2: Websites Analysis. Comprises Step 4 and 5 of the approach outlined above. As part of Step 4: Charting the data, Levac et al. (2010) recommend the development of a data charting form. The Website Evaluation/Development Framework (Taddeo, 2012; Taddeo & Barnes, 2016), (Figure 3) was adapted and employed to guide the data charting stage. Specifically, to review esports websites with a focus on locating and analysing information about esports governance and codes. Identifying and examining the characteristics and features of websites as a source of data that could reveal insights into esports governance and codes of conduct was deemed appropriate and useful given esports in a technology enabled activity. As such esports-related websites were examined as stand-alone data source.

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content	Indicators of Governance
DETAILS	DETAILS	LEVEL 4D Website design incorporates/places governance & codes of conduct upfront with dedicated pages accessible on the navigation bar	LEVEL 4P Inform Communicate Engage Showcase innovation [in relation to approaches to governance and codes of conduct]	LEVEL 4C Comprehensive and extensive information/coverage about governance and codes of conduct and explicit evidence of Governance-related indicators - authority credibility/ currency/ transparency & innovation	LEVEL 4IG Descriptors indicative of transformative approaches to governance practices and codes of conduct
		LEVEL 3D Website incorporates/places governance & codes of conduct on a dedicated page but in the dropdown menu of the navigation bar	LEVEL 3P Inform Communicate Engage	LEVEL 3C Moderate information/ coverage about governance and codes of conduct and some evidence of Governance-related indicators - authority credibility/ currency/	LEVEL 3IG Descriptors indicative of that governance is a key consideration/ priority
		LEVEL 2D Website incorporates/ places governance & codes of conduct within a page of the website [not dedicated to governance or codes of conduct necessarily and may be difficult to locate]	LEVEL 2P Inform Communicate	LEVEL 2C Limited or irregular coverage about governance and codes of conduct and some evidence of Governance-related indicators. No explicit evidence of authority/ credibility	LEVEL 2IG Descriptors indicative that governance is acknowledged/ mentioned , but not in any dedicated/ comprehensive or explicit manner
		LEVEL 1D No indication that the website design has considered the placement of information about governance and codes	LEVEL 1P Inform	LEVEL 1C No or minimal coverage about governance and codes of conduct Incomplete/	LEVEL 1IG Descriptors indicative that governance is not a focus

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content	Indicators of Governance
		of conduct - information if included may be organised in an ad hoc manner and not considered in the design of the website.		Outdated Static information	

Figure 3: Website Evaluation/Development Framework (Taddeo, 2012) adapted for the Stage 2: Data charting form

Data Analysis

This section outlines the approach to data analysis for Stage 2 of the pilot study.

Phase 1 involved:

- Identifying the research question and sub-questions to help inform the roadmap for the remaining steps. This stage also involved operationalising ‘esports’ to inform the exclusion and inclusion criteria.
- Identifying relevant websites, developing a sampling strategy and search strategy.
- Website selection: refining and employing the search strategy. Website selection also involved “post hoc inclusion and exclusion criteria” which are based on the research question and on emergent knowledge through engagement and immersion with the websites/data (Levac et al., 2010).

Phase 2 involved:

- Charting the data: the Website Development Framework (Taddeo, 2012) which was revised and adapted to align website criteria and indicators with the esports governance focus provided the data-charting form (see Results section).
- Collating, summarising and reporting results. The adapted Website Development Framework (Taddeo, 2012) was applied to review esports websites for governance and code of conduct related content. A table was generated to detail information about the number and types of websites collected (see Table 2). A content analysis of the information/data on the selected websites was then completed (see Results section).

The specifics of the data analysis for each of the Stage 2 phases are provided below.

Phase 1: Environmental Scan: (Steps 1, 2 & 3)

Identifying the research question:

The research question for Stage 2 of this pilot study is framed within the overarching project research question, namely, *What are the facilitators of, and barriers to, positive esports behaviours?* and is informed by consultations with the project stakeholder, research team, and review of literature.

The research question for Stage 2 of this pilot study is:

What are the esports governance structures and codes of conduct evident on esports related websites?

Operationalising 'esports' to inform exclusion and inclusion criteria

In acknowledging that consensus on an esports definition is yet to be reached in related research fields such as gaming, sport management, psychology, computer science, marketing, health and economic fields (Cranmer et al., 2021; Steinkuehler, 2020), the working definition proposed by Cranmer et al., 2021, '**electronic sports (Esports) involves competitive, organised or technologically enabled activities encompassing varying degrees of physicality, virtuality and technological immersion,**' has been adopted to inform the methodology for this component of the study. Specifically, the definition will help frame the initial inclusion and exclusion criteria of esports organisations, associations, leagues and teams considered in Stage 2 of this project. The elements of **technologically enabled, competitive and organised** are key to identifying and selecting a small sample of esports associations, organisations and leagues that will be reviewed to gain insights into esports governance and codes of conduct.

Identifying relevant websites: Sampling

The initial broad level scoping exercise was conducted to identify entities that represented an esports body that enabled or hosted competitions through the provision of an organised structure for competitions, or alternatively, were an esports team that had organised competition teams and organisational structures in place. Following preliminary scoping, it became evident there were various categories which could be considered for inclusion in the scoping of esports websites, and which could be used to frame a coherent structure for discussion about esports governance and codes of conduct.

Specifically, to provide insights into both international and Australian esports contexts, it was deemed that esports related websites could be organised under the following macro, intermediate and micro level categories:

- Macro:
 - International esports associations based in countries other than Australia
 - Australian esports associations
- Intermediate:
 - International esports leagues: esports leagues based in countries other than Australia
 - Australian esports leagues
- Micro:
 - International esports teams: esports teams based in countries other than Australia
 - Australian esports teams

In addition, a small sample of websites from software and video game industries also were included for analysis given preliminary scoping revealed their recognition of esports as 'a thriving sector of the video games economy' (ISEF, 2021), and given there has been international collaboration across the software and video game industry to develop guiding principles 'applicable in all aspects of the global esports environments' (ISEF, 2021).

Further, given International and Australian online gambling associations also have an interest in competitive esports, two examples of online gambling sites, one international and the other Australian based, were reviewed for any evidence of content related to codes of conduct.

For further noting:

- some associations, leagues and teams consider themselves to be global entities, with players, teams and leagues that span a number of different countries. Where possible, and evident, information about the headquarters and legal jurisdiction of the entity was used to determine where the association, league or team was based.
- When reviewing international examples, specific countries were selected randomly from membership of the International Esports Association which has 104 member countries. The additional parameter was the need for the country to be English speaking, simply to enable analysis of the website content. The International Esports Federation is an organisation that acts as the overarching body for esports. A national esports organisation in a country may request to become a member of IESF, noting that only one body per each country can claim this membership.

Figure 4 below provides a visual representation of the esports industry ecosystem for the purposes of this report. This diagram was amended from the initial version for the Interim report as insights from Study 3 revealed some amendments were necessary in order to capture the perspectives of stakeholders who participated in the Interviews. Perhaps the most notable change is that Publishers have been placed at the centre of the ecosystem together with players, both fundamental stakeholders in the ecosystem. Whilst not exhaustive of all esports stakeholders, it does provide an interpretation of the esports ecosystem that has informed the selection and categories of websites to be considered for analysis.

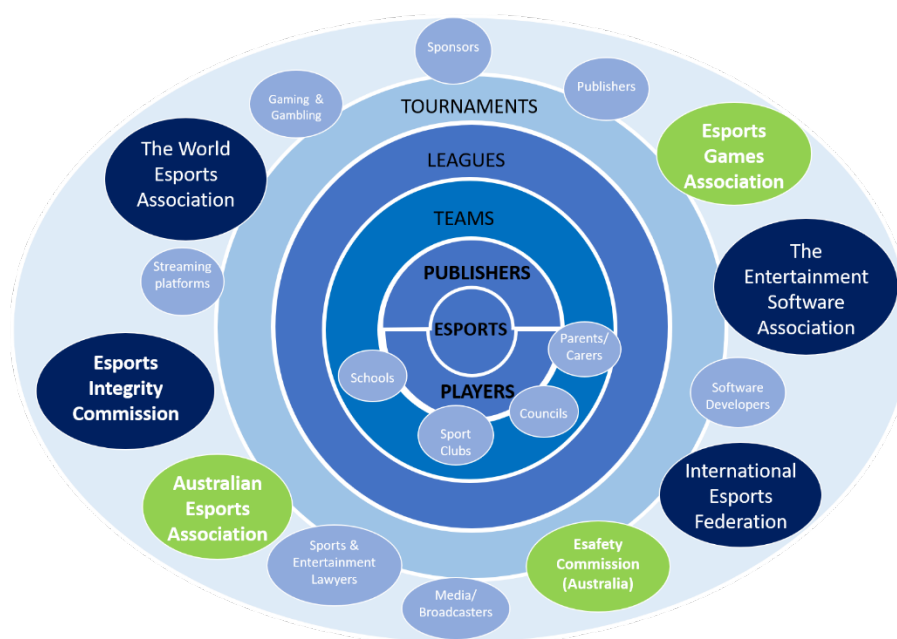


Figure 4: esports ecosystem

Identifying relevant websites: Search strategy

Search terms included variations of search strings with the following terms:

esports + global + world, international + Australia/n + British + Korea + regulation/s, rule/s, codes of conduct, charter/s.

Website selection

The search strategy generated a large number of hits, however only the websites which met the inclusion criteria outlined above were considered for selection and analysis.

Phase 2: Website Analysis (Steps 4 & 5)

Charting the data

Given the extensive amount of content on websites, the Website Evaluation/Development Framework (Taddeo, 2012; Taddeo & Barnes, 2016), which considers website design, purpose, content and technology integration, was adapted to provide a framework for extracting relevant information about the esports associations, leagues or teams in relation to governance and code of conducts. Thereby, providing a holistic approach to understanding the contextual setting of esports when discussing governance (see Figure 3).

Specifically, website:

- **design** was reviewed primarily to gain an understanding of the overarching site structure of esports websites, and importantly to ascertain if governance and codes of conduct feature prominently on the site, particularly on the navigation menu.
- **purpose** was analysed to gain some insight into the purpose and nature of the organisation and website, and if evident, to ascertain if the purpose of the organisation, association, or league's website includes informing esports stakeholders about governance structures and codes of conducts.
- **content** was examined to help determine the extent of coverage and possible stakeholder contributions in relation to governance and codes of conducts, and the extent to which there is evidence or indicators of authority, credibility, currency, transparency and innovation specifically related to governance and codes of conduct
- **Indicators of governance and codes of conduct**- descriptors, documents, policies, principles etc., which address or are indicative of governance and codes of conducts, particularly noting any that are leading and transforming practices in this space.

Collating, summarising, and reporting results

Levac et al., (2010) recommend a content analysis approach once the data has been charted. The esports-related websites accessed online, employed a directed/deductive content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000) whereby existing research, specifically the WEF (Taddeo, 2012) was employed to facilitate the charting and analysis of the data collected from the websites. Conducting qualitative content analysis requires:

- a) engagement and immersion in the data
- b) reduction and organisation of the data and
- c) interpretation of the data (Forman et al., 2008).

The WEF (2012) provided the initial key constructs and framework to help map and organise content/website text related to governance and codes of conduct. A key objective of this process was applying the coding rules/descriptors in the adapted WEF (Taddeo, 2012) to help identify and

organise explicit examples of text that indicated or provided evidence related to governance and codes of conduct on esports websites. Establishing and complying with a coding scheme contributes to increased validity of the study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). To further strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings from this stage of the pilot study, consultation with key project stakeholders will be conducted following this interim report and the results will be triangulated with data generated from Stage 3 Interviews.

Sample Characteristics: Stage 2 Website Analysis

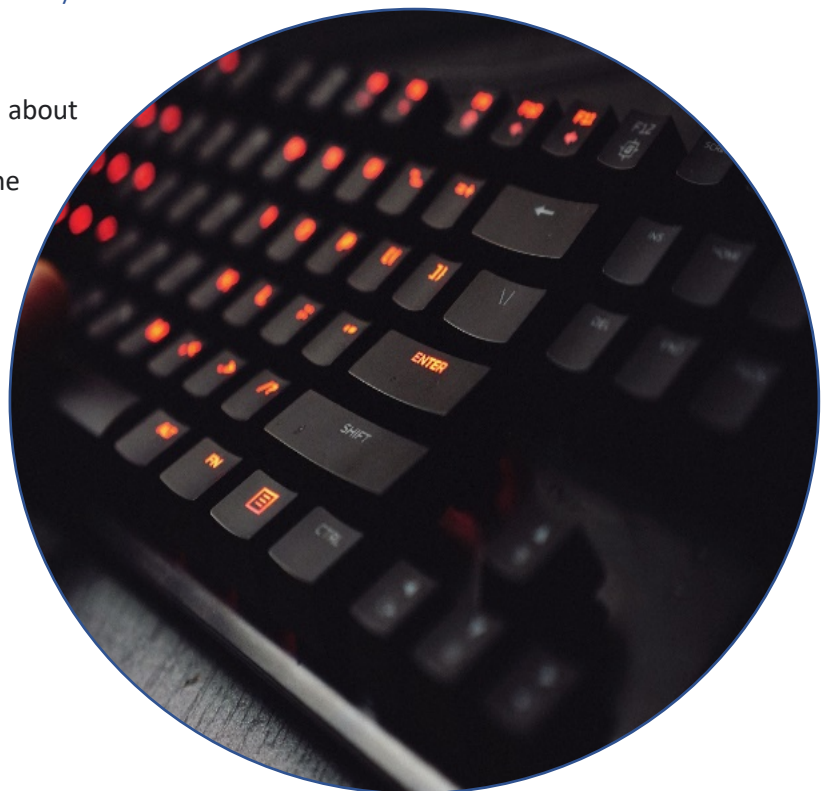
A total of 21 international and Australian based esports-related websites were reviewed and analysed by applying the Website Development Framework (Taddeo, 2012; Taddeo & Barnes, 2016). Table 2 provides details of the number of websites by international or national category and by macro, intermediate and micro level categorisation.

Table 2: Number of Websites by Categorisations

	Internationally based	Australian based	Total
Macro Category [e.g., esports associations] Software & Video Game Publishers]	7	2	9
Intermediate Category [e.g., esports leagues]	2	3	5
Micro-category [e.g., esports teams]	2	2	4
Gambling	1	1	2
Independent Government Regulator	0	1	1
Total	12	9	21

Findings: Environmental Scan & Website Analysis

Tables three to 11 below provide specific details about each of the core areas examined on the esports related websites. Some of the text included in the tables is extracted directly from the website as evidence of indicators and examples of the content. An additional modification was made to the WEF to facilitate the charting and organisation of the website data. Specifically, the content category was divided into three sub-categories, namely, *General*, *Governance Structures*, and *Codes of Conduct*.



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Table 3: International Esport-Related Organisations

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N	CoC Y/N
International Esports Federation	Republic of Korea [Founded in 2008] IESF may launch and operate branch offices within or outside the Host Country.	Home About IESF Governance Rules & Regulations Anti-doping Committees Esports Events Contact US	Nature of what the Assoc. does IESF is the unifying body for World Esports. An organization that acts as a national body for Esports in any country may apply for Membership in IESF. There can only be one organization acting as an IESF Member from each country The IESF Mission is to serve as the critical global organization representing, coordinating, harmonizing, and administrating Esports while preserving the rights and providing a voice to all Stakeholders of the Esports industry Global Standardization Creating disciplines and regulations alongside the stakeholders of the ecosystem for a fair and clean competitive space for Esports	General information includes: events including the upcoming 13 th World Championship Genres and Games Partners Esports market Esports = True Sports? News	IESF’s Statutes [Nov, 2020] Statutes detailed ‘The IESF Board was elected into office for the term of 2019-2022. It is composed of the President and five members elected by the National Members of IESF, as well as the Athletes representative.’	https://iesf.org/governance/regulations IESF Competition Regulations [Current Sept 2020] Provides a base for all IESF and its members' tournament rules. Every event should in addition be accompanied by an event guide, which should list things varying between events like the game specific rules, tournament format used and event specific venue information etc. This additional event guide should be treated as an equal value document to the ruleset itself. This ruleset base is provided as-is and the IESF recommends all its members to make their own localized versions of it Match Operation Regulations [Current, Oct 2020] an extension to the IESF Competition Regulations, and specifically for the 12 th world championships Scoring Regulations [Effective since Aug 2019] purpose is to outline the rules for the scoring method to determine the ranking of each member nation. Anti-doping regulations [Nov, 2020] ‘These Anti-Doping Rules are adopted and implemented in accordance with International Esports	Y	Y

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance		
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N	CoC Y/N
							Federation (IESF)'s responsibilities under the Code, and in furtherance of IESF's continuing efforts to eradicate doping in Esports. These Anti-Doping Rules are Esports rules governing the conditions under which Esports is played'		
Entertainment Software Association	US Based Washington Founded 1994 It is the industry body representing the \$43.4 billion U.S. video game industry	About ESA Policy positions State Impact News & Resources	'The Entertainment Software Association serves as the voice and advocate for the video game industry. Our mission is to expand and protect the dynamic worldwide marketplace for video games.' Also has The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) , which rates video games and provides info about the game's content 'Our Legal, Regulatory & Policy and Government Affairs departments provide key information, smart advocacy, and collaboration opportunities through a strong reputation and contacts.'	Website states 'Esports is made possible by compelling video games. The Entertainment Software Association's member publishers are the intellectual property owners of some of the world's most popular esports games.' The site links to policy position statements including In-game purchases Esports Violence Digital wellness Privacy etc 'In 2019, ESA and its international counterparts	Details are provided about the leadership team Members of ESA, among others include Activision Blizzard Capcom Epic Games Riot Games NExon To join the ESA, a "company must, among other things: Make video games, or software used primarily to make video games Have a significant presence in the United States	Provides a link to the Guiding Principles for esports on the ISFE website- see next row [The principles look to be a collaborative effort with international counterparts]	Y	Y	

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
			'ESA advocates for robust intellectual property protection and enforcement measures; standards that enable free cross-border data flows and the reduction of barriers to digital trade and services. The ESA provides information and communications support that helps members promote the industry, their products, and games' positive impact on society.'	released guiding principles for esports as part of the industry's ongoing efforts to promote a safe, fair and welcoming esports environment.'	The ESA is funded entirely by our members."			
Interactive Software Federation of Europe ISFE https://www.isfe.eu/ ISFE Esports [a branch of ISFE]	Belgium Brussels 1998 ISFE Esports launched August 2019 to represent and promote	The Industry Games in Society ISFE esports Policy Responsible Game play About ISFE News & Resources	'ISFE has ensured that the voice of a responsible games ecosystem is heard and understood, that its creative and economic potential is supported and celebrated, and that players around the world continue to enjoy great video game playing experiences.' ISFE represents the interests of game publishers and developers Provider of strategic data on the economics and demographics of the video	Key focus areas: Accessibility; Sustainability; Protection of Minors; Tech, Data & Privacy; Education and Skills, IP Content Protection; etc., The site explains PEGI (Pan-European Game Information) was founded in 2003 by ISFE as a self-regulatory age rating system for video games.	Details provided regarding the Board; Team and Membership which includes the major video game publishers & national trade associations in 15 European countries which in turn represent "thousands of developers and publishers at national level."	PEGI has a code of conduct that can applies to all interactive software Products, Products distributed electronically, Products which offer Online Gameplay ('Online Gameplay Environments') etc. Provide Guiding Principles for esports – in collaboration with US, Canada, Europe, New Zealand & Australia counterparts Principle: key headings: Safety and Wellbeing Integrity and Fair play Respect and Diversity Positive and Enriching Game Play	Y	Y

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
https://www.isfe.eu/isfe-esports/	the esports sector		<p>games ecosystem across Europe</p> <p>'We promote regulatory harmonisation and effective representation for the video games ecosystem across Europe.'</p> <p>'contribute to the development of smart regulations / policies and innovative projects that unleash the full potential of video games to enrich the daily lives of millions of Europeans.'</p> <p>ISFE Esports is a group that strives to promote the esports industry for the benefit of all its stakeholders and to provide a cohesive, reliable point of reference for this exciting sector.</p>	<p>For the European video game industry regarding age rating, labelling promotion and advertising of games and other interactive software products and maintenance of safe online game play'</p>	<p>Members include Activision Blizzard, Electronic Arts, Epic Games, Microsoft, Nintendo,</p>			
British Esports Association	Buckinghamshire, England Est. 2016	Home Latest Advice Student Champs Education Women in Esports	<p>"It is a not-for-profit national body to promote esports in the UK, increase its level of awareness, improve standards and inspire future talent. As a national body, our aims are to support esports and provide</p>	<p>Career advice</p> <p>Information about the Schools Championship Initiatives such as Women in Esports</p> <p>Host video gaming competitions for</p>	<p>Information about the team members, advisory board with representatives across various related sectors e.g. student rep, legal</p>	<p>Handbook Code of conduct General rules Overwatch ruleset (2020-21) Rocket League ruleset (2020-21) League of Legends ruleset (2020-21)</p> <p>https://britishesports.org/advice-and-information/</p>	Y	Y

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
		Events About Apparel Newsletter	<p>expertise and advice. We are focused on the grassroots level of esports and are not a governing body.”</p> <p>In April 2020, British Esports teamed up with global education publisher Pearson to develop the first esports BTEC qualification of its kind in the world.</p>	students aged 12+ in schools and colleges across the UK.	rep, Twitch broadcaster etc. Also have game advisors and use the PEGI scoring protocol			
New Zealand eSports Federation Incorporated	New Zealand Est. 2016	HOME Event Calendar About Us Regulations Membership Blog Contact	<p>Represent Be the voice of esports in New Zealand</p> <p>Promote promote participation in esports in New Zealand</p> <p>Regulate Act as the regulatory and development body for esports in New Zealand</p> <p>Engage To promote the educational, health and social benefits of esports participation”</p>	Provides information about the Federation, its beginnings, however the event calendar and information about event dates is not current. The website does outline that the NZeSF is a member of the IeSF.	Details about the members of the board	Regulations are clearly outlined under the first level menu tab. The regulations explain, competition rules, general provisions, sanctions, ranking doping and drug use etc.	Y	Y
World Esports Association	Switzerland Founded 2016	Home WESA Structure Executive Board	http://www.wesa.gg/ “WESA the result of joint efforts between industry-leading professional esports	Clear Mission Structures outlined News	WESA Executive Board manages the day-to-day affairs of WESA and	Emergency Arbitration Arbitration Rules WESA Code of Conduct Teams and Players	Y	Y

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
		Rules and Regulations Emergency Arbitration Rules Rules and Regulations WESA Social Media Policy and Best Practices Guidelines News Imprint	<p>teams and ESL, the world's largest esports company. Based on similar traditional sports associations, WESA is an open and inclusive organization that will further professionalize esports by introducing elements of player representation, standardized regulations, and revenue shares for teams. WESA will seek to create predictable schedules for fans, players, organizers and broadcasters, and for the first time bring all stakeholders to the discussion table."</p>	<p>Outlines Member Esports Teams</p>	<p>represents the organization towards third parties. It consists of 5 members: 2 are appointed by the Members (WESA Teams), 2 are appointed by ESL, and the Chairman of the Executive Board is chosen by all four. Regular office term of each member on the Executive Board is 3 years.</p>	<p>WESA Social Media Policy and Best Practices Guidelines</p>		
Esports Integrity Commission	Offices in the UK & Australia (NSW) Est. 2015	Home Who We Are Integrity Program Online Courses Members & Supporters News & Press Report a Breach Contact	<p>The Mission of ESIC is to be the recognised guardian of the integrity of esports and to take responsibility for disruption prevention investigation and prosecution of all forms of cheating in esports, including, but not limited to, match manipulation and doping,</p>	<p>The Esports Integrity Commission works with esports stakeholders to protect the integrity of esports competition. They are a body for players, teams, anti-corruption supporters, corporations, governments & sponsors</p>	<p>Governance Details are not evident, however any organisation, league, team or any entity which has involvement in Esports can become members and utilise the services of ESIC</p>	<p>Definitions Code of Ethics Code of Conduct Anti-doping Code Procedure ESIC Prohibited List Also have their own principles Integrity and Respect Fair Process Implementation, Education and Enforcement in Standardised Codes Recognition of Sanctions</p>	N	Y

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
			They provide details of sanctions and outcomes of any breeches ESIC exists to unite the industry under the shared values and visions essential to fight against corruption in any form. These values form the basis of the ESIC Program of Integrity measures. Each commission member has bought into these core principles so that, whilst many Members may be in competition with each other commercially, they are as one when it comes to protecting the sport. Each Member has signed their commitment to these Principles and ESIC will be diligent in making their regulatory ambitions for the sport a reality through the Codes and Procedures set out in its Program.	We are a not-for-profit members' association and we can help you, whether you're a tournament organiser, game developer, esports league or betting operator offering esports – join us!	Located details of Ian Smith Commissioner at Esports Integrity Commission (ESIC) who is 'an expert in sports governance and regulation, with a particular interest in integrity issues - anti-corruption and anti-doping.'	Sharing of Information Confidentiality		

NB GS: Governance Structures; CoC: Code of Conduct

Table 4: International Esports Leagues

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
ESL Gaming	Germany	About us 20 years Brands & Products Career Press & Media Contact	“The world’s largest esports company, leading the industry across the most popular video games with numerous online and offline competitions” Offices across America, Australia, Asia, Europe The company operates high-profile, branded international leagues and tournaments under the ESL Pro Tour https://about.eslgaming.com/	Provide a history of the organisation Information about their Leagues e.g. Pro League Featured Games Tournament and Championship Information Social Responsibility/ Gamers’ Outreach Current News and Press releases	Provide details about the Leadership Team- but this is limited	Game Rules Global rules “The league administration has the right to decide outside or even against the rulebook in special cases to guarantee fair play.” The rules are very explicit, address aspects such as Insults & offensive behaviour, spamming, deception, doping, match fixing etc they report and publish player bans or suspensions when there has been a breach. https://play.eslgaming.com/starcraft/global/sc2/challenger/tsl/teamliquid-starleague-5-qualifier-1-europe/rules https://play.eslgaming.com/rules	Y	Y
High School Esports League	Kansas City, Missouri. US	HSEL Roadshow Our Brands Middle School Esports League Generation	“Make esports available to every student as a legitimate varsity level sport in high schools across the nation.	Info about Esports games, tournaments, support for educators, calendar of events	No details	General tournament rules addressing aspects such as confidentiality, Requirement to maintain	N	Y

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
	2012 Sponsored by the United States Army National Guard	Esports Parks & Rec League School Programs Free Workshops for Teachers Why Esports Start a Team Partnership Perks Fund Your Esports Program Our Schools Gaming Concepts Esports Education Discount Equipment Health & Wellness Tournaments Full Calendar Summer Challenge Free Summer Programs Match Disputes Rules Pricing Help Login Sign up	<p>We achieve this by making it easy for faculty to offer students an opportunity to engage in healthy esports competition, surrounded by peers, and supervised by teachers. Through organized esports competition students will tie their commitment to gaming to their success in academics and future careers.”</p> <p>The League also runs a tournament in Australia</p>	<p>Benefits of Esports for students</p> <p>Discount equipment offers</p> <p>For additional cost they can provide a health and wellness program which features interactive educational content designed by leading physical therapists with 5+ years of experience in esports.</p>		<p>a GPA to be able to compete, streaming rights, cheating etc.,</p> <p>Specific Esports Game Rules for each game offered within the Middle School Esports League</p>		

Table 5: International Esports Teams

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N	CoC Y/N
Team SoloMid (TSM)	Los Angeles [Founded Sept 2009]	Facility Teams Careers Partners Branding /Gallery Store Contact	<p>“TSM is an elite, holistic gaming brand composed of championship Esports teams, world-class influencers, and gaming strategy platforms that level up the casual player all the way to the professional”</p> <p>LA & remote employees both in the country and across the globe, TSM fields Esports teams in a whole range of Esports Competitions [10 video game leagues] including League of Legends, Fortnite, Apex Legends</p> <p>It has Development programs- e.g. TSM Amateur Program & Collegiate Program</p> <p>Organisers of the World Championships</p> <p>overarching Mission as per below extract</p> <p>“The Senior Leadership team is committed to ensuring that everyone achieves great success as our team continues to scale.”</p> <p>TeamSoloMid’s estimated value is north of \$400 million, with a yearly revenue of about \$35 million</p>	<p>TSM seeks to provide maximum value through the competitive excellence of its teams and the creation of exciting, educational, and entertaining content that deliver the ultimate Esports and gaming fan experience.</p> <p>Striving for Excellence</p> <p>We’re working to build one of the most successful and recognizable Esports organization in the world.</p> <p>Calendar not current</p> <p>Player profiles available</p> <p>News articles</p> <p>Focus on inclusivity –</p> <p>Financial supporters of Pride Month/Initiatives</p>	<p>Information about the CEO etc of Executive Team; Benefits to employees & No indicators/ description of governance</p>	<p>No details or mention of Code of Conduct</p>	Y	N

			<p>'It is the most valuable Esports company in the US'</p> <p>https://tsm.gg/careers</p>					
Team Liquid	<p>Multi-regional professional Esports organization based in Netherlands founded in 2000.</p>	<p>News For Fans</p> <p>Players</p> <p>Partners</p> <p>Store</p> <p>About us</p> <p>Careers</p> <p>Login</p>	<p>Team Liquid is a global Esports enterprise "A world renowned professional gaming organization" They field over 60 championship calibre athletes in 14 of the world's top games. They are a multifaceted global company</p> <p>About Us - Team Liquid - Professional Esports Organization</p> <p>In September 2016, aXiomatic acquired controlling interest in one of the world's premier Esports brands, Team Liquid. aXiomatic, has a mission to build a portfolio of dynamic company holdings in the Esports and video gaming industry through strategic partnerships, investments, and acquisitions. Collectively, the group has expansive access to valuable Esports resources including venues, technologies, media content, distribution partners and investment capital. In addition, aXiomatic has made several strategic investments into Esports-related businesses and will continue to access all their resources to build new, richer player and fan Esports experiences.</p>	<p>It is an Esports team, and also a media enterprise. They have expanded from community sites, into other areas within the gaming ecosystem. 1UP Studios, our video content production arm, is a full service production company renowned for its high-quality documentary style filmmaking and creative commercial content. Our wiki network, Liquipedia, is the most widely used resource in all of Esports. We also manage some of the gaming space's most popular names through our influencer management agency, Liquid Media.</p> <p>Today, Team Liquid continues to lead in both competition and innovation from our headquarters, the Alienware Training Facility, a state-of-the-art Esports facility in Los Angeles. With plans for further investments into world class Esports athletes, facilities, and infrastructure, Team Liquid stands at the forefront of a thriving new industry.</p>	<p>The company leadership includes Co-Executive Chairmen Peter Guber, Ted Leonsis, Jeff Vinik and Bruce Karsh who together represent an team of sports, technology, entertainment and investment industry titans. Bruce Stein, an accomplished executive from technology, content and consumer product companies, leads aXiomatic as CEO.</p>	<p>No details or mention of Code of Conduct</p>	Y	N

Table 6: Esports and online gambling

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
Esports Entertainment Group	Birkirkara, Malta	Home About Us Investors News and Media Contact	<p>“Is a full-stack Esports and online gambling company Esports Entertainment Group and its affiliates are well-poised to help fans stay connected and involved with their favorite Esports. From traditional sports partnerships with professional NFL/NHL/NBA/FIFA teams, community-focused tournaments in a wide range of Esports, iGaming and casinos, and boots-on-the-ground LAN cafes, EEG has influence over the full-spectrum of Esports and gaming at all levels. Our mission is to help connect the world at large with the future of sports entertainment in unique and enriching ways that bring fans and gamers together.”</p>	<p>“Esports Entertainment Group is licensed and regulated to legally conduct esports wagering”</p>	<p>The site clearly explains the governance structure of the company Fiscal transparency-provision of reports Details about the Officers and Directors of the Board Governance Charter</p>	<p>Have a code of ethics – but related to ethical conduct of the business as an Esports gambling site</p>	Y	Y

Table 7: Australian Based Esports Organisations

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
Australia	Australian Esports Association (AESA) 2013	About Policies Committees Events News Contact	A national body actively involved in the development of policy, planning, infrastructure and initiatives for Esports in Australia. A member of the International Esports Federation (IESF) - national member representing Australia. The AESA is signatory to International University Sports Federation's (FISU) esports global collaboration memorandum laying the ground work for global university cooperation in esports. The Home Page explicitly mentions Advocacy Governance, Promotion Representation, The code; Athlete's Committee, Research & International Accreditation	Some of the events occurred over 2 yrs ago and no details regarding current events Website posts are not current- mostly from 2019 Information available for various stakeholders including research, athletes	Established as a non-profit Details of Board Members provided	The current revision of the Code of Conduct is 19 May 2019. A document which outlines conduct principles, values For all members of the Australian esports community and encourages all to adopt, promote and adhere to the Code Has an anti-discrimination policy Has an athlete's committee charter http://www.aesa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/AESA-Committee-Athletes-Committee-20180226.pdf	Y	Y
Australia	Esports Games	InEsports Newsletter Community News	At its core, the EGAA is an advocacy group for the esports industry	Monthly Livestream Show Monthly Newsletter	Details about the team, and the board are provided	Clear Codes of Conduct – including ESIC Codes	Y	Y

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
	Association (EGAA)	About us	An incorporated entity dedicated to growing and legitimising Esports in Australia and New Zealand. Working with players, teams, managers, organisers and sponsors, EGAA aims to set and improve standards for the whole industry to help advance the Australian Esports scene.	Quarterly Networking Events More coming soon		Every person and entity bound by this Code shall also be bound by the following schedules which may be/have been adopted by the EGAA, as amended from time to time: EGAA Member Protection Policy, incorporating the Child Safe Sport Code of Behaviour Any Key Keystone Code (as adopted by the EGAA, as they relate to conduct in preparation for, within, and immediately after competitions) Esports Integrity Coalition ('ESIC') Principles (as adopted by the EGAA) ESIC Anti-Corruption Code (as adopted by the EGAA) ESIC Anti-Doping Code (as adopted by the EGAA) ESIC Code of Ethics (as adopted by the EGAA) ESIC Code of Conduct (as adopted by the EGAA, as they relate to conduct in preparation for, within, and		

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the Assoc. does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
						immediately after competitions) ESIC Procedure (as adopted by the EGAA) To the extent that any of these conflict the EGAA Board shall use its sole discretion, with reference to its Objects, as to what takes priority in whole or in part. Also, codes/guidelines for Crowd Control Game Fixing and Bribes Social media Player Contracts Officials		

Table 8: Australian Leagues – Websites

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the league does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
Couch Warriors League	Australia	News Points System Events Rankings Contact	<p>Australian Esports events organisation</p> <p>National Fighting Game Esports League</p> <p>It is the premiership season of the Australian Fighting Game Community</p> <p>Australia's first unified fighting game circuit</p> <p>Provide offline live events in SA, QLd, NSW, Vic and online</p> <p>Each game awards prizes for its monthly & seasonal champions, as well as providing seeds for the CWL Finale</p> <p>Hosts of BAM: Australia's largest open Esports event, Battle Arena Melbourne.</p> <p>Comprehensive content</p> <p>Relatively easy to navigate</p> <p>Social media links</p> <p>Search function</p>	<p>Information about games: Tekken 7, Street Fighter V, Smash Bros. Melee, Smash Bros. Ultimate & DragonBall FighterZ!</p> <p>Links to stream channels</p> <p>Recap of games</p> <p>Tutorials</p> <p>Prizes information</p> <p>Merchandise</p> <p>Tournament Information</p> <p>Community Announcements e.g. AGM Information</p> <p>Current, with up to date information about tournaments, AGM etc</p>	<p>Not for Profit, incorporated association</p> <p>open, egalitarian group run by a committee formed of community members.</p> <p>Anyone is welcome to attend regular meetings and have input into the direction of events</p> <p>mix of newer members and players with experience and strong institutional knowledge for running events.</p> <p>Officer positions are determined at Annual General Meeting via nomination and election.</p> <p>Details of team/ committee members detailed</p>	<p>Tournament & game rules but primarily game specific rules</p> <p>Some information regarding disqualification, including inappropriate behaviour by players in the crowd.</p> <p>Rules were not upfront.</p> <p>Typed in Code of Conduct in search function with no hits then tried rules and tournament rules came up which they indicate generally apply across the board for them</p> <p>https://www.couchwarriors.org/battle-arena-melbourne-7/games-lineup-rules/tournament-rules/</p>	Y	Y

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the league does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
Australian Esports League	Australia Founded 2016	Home Leagues Rulebook High School League University League Clubs League Club Select Events [including second level headings] Rulebook Past Events Contact us	<p>AEL has three core Leagues: Australian Esports University League (AEUL) presented by Chatime Australia; Australian Esports High School League (AEHSL); and Australian Esports Clubs League (AECL)</p> <p>They have a vision of providing access to esports at all levels across Australia and elevating competition to the next level!</p> <p>We focus on players and community with our programs & events supporting grass-roots activities across Australia and the Oceanic region. AEL is positioned in the esports ecosystem to deliver highly sought after content featuring a wide variety of competition levels across a broad range of titles. Our focus is on producing an entertaining, engaging, and respected esports experience. Capability includes creative design, technical delivery,</p>	<p>Provide information about the timetable for the different leagues, registration, pricing etc</p> <p>Information about news, how to start a club</p> <p>Use of Discord to communicate results etc.</p>	No details about governance	Rule book addresses aspects cheating and collusion, sportsmanship	N	Y

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N	CoC Y/N
			<p>Nature of what the league does</p> <p>project management, and broadcasting of esports events. “Core Values: Dedication to excellence and providing a highly positive experience; Inclusivity for all peoples regardless of gender, race, culture, or religion; Maintaining the highest levels of integrity and honesty in all that we do; and A commitment to always act with social responsibility that puts the best interests of players and the community first.”</p>					
META High School Esports	Australia	News Join Meta Fixtures and Leagues Teacher/Parent FAQ About Us Partners	<p>“is more than just a league. We provide a competitive environment for aspiring esports players to compete against students from Australia and New Zealand in League of Legends, Rocket League and NBA2K.”</p>	<p>Information about games, schedules tournament details etc Benefits of esports Health and wellbeing Skill development Partners Information for parents/teachers</p>	Contact details for the League Commissioner and team members	Game rules are available for each Esports game	Y	Y

Table 9: Australian Esports Teams

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the league does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
Order Army	Australia	Teams News Shop About Careers	<p>“We aim to provide world class support and player development for our teams and players.”</p> <p>“We are consistently in the top 2 across League of Legends, CS:GO and VALORANT, the 3 biggest esports in Australia.”</p>	<p>Team profiles</p> <p>Current news stories about team members</p> <p>Career opportunities</p>	<p>Details about CEO with link to his Twitter account</p>	<p>No details</p>	<p>Y [Limited]</p>	<p>N</p>
The Chiefs Esports Club	Australia Founded August 2014	About Us News Contact Us	<p>The Chiefs are the premier Electronic Sports club in Australia, featuring top teams in various competitive video games</p>	<p>Information about teams, tournaments, current news updates about new team members, partnership news</p>	<p>Names of staff and roles with links to social media accounts</p>	<p>No details</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>N</p>

Table 10: Australian-based Gambling Site

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N	CoC Y/N
Picklebet	Australia Australian licensed company	A list of esports and sports on which bets can be placed esports Promotions Coverage/News Help [chat function]	Picklebet an esports betting site tailored for gamers in Australia but enables betting on esports matches and tournaments from all over the world.	Provides explicit instruction on how to place a bet and the esports competitions that are running Provides news updates and coverage and information about promotions and a live chat function for help with the option of being able to input search terms if looking for something specific Also provides information in the Help section on: How can I self-exclude? Responsible Gaming Policy, Terms and Conditions, Contest and betting Rules and a privacy policy	Not evident on the site – a search of the name Picklebet indicates it is 'One of the smallest Australian-owned bookies but is fast growing	Responsible Gaming Policy- that defines problem and provides a self-assessment tool to help self- determine whether or not the individual has a gaming problem. Provides a self-exclusion option and where to get help. And guidance for child protection and filters for minors	N	Y

Table 11: eSafety Commissioner: Australian Independent regulator for online safety

Name	Based	Website Design	Purpose	Content			Indicators of Governance	
				Nature of what the organisation does	General	Governance Structures Details	Code of Conduct Details	GS Y/N
eSafety Commissioner	Australia	Educators Parents Kids Young People Women Seniors Diverse Groups About Us Key Issues Also includes [Report Abuse and a Search Function]	'eSafety leads and coordinates online safety efforts across Commonwealth departments, authorities and agencies. The activities of the eSafety Commissioner are governed by the Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015 (Cth)' but recently their remit has broadened. They respond to complaints about serious cyberbullying of Australian children; about image-based abuse involving Australians; about illegal and harmful content, including child sexual abuse material. They provide online safety information and guidance, education and training, and develop special initiatives and programs in response to identified needs and have an esafety research program	Provide information for parents, educators, young people, kids, women, seniors, diverse groups To 'help safeguard Australians at risk from online harms and to promote safer, more positive online experiences.'	'The eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) is an independent statutory office supported by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).' The structure and legislative functions are outlined	Given the nature of the entity the information available in relation to gaming and esports focuses on information for parents and carers about online gaming , and descriptions of popular games, importance of monitoring time online, cyberbullying etc	Y	N/A

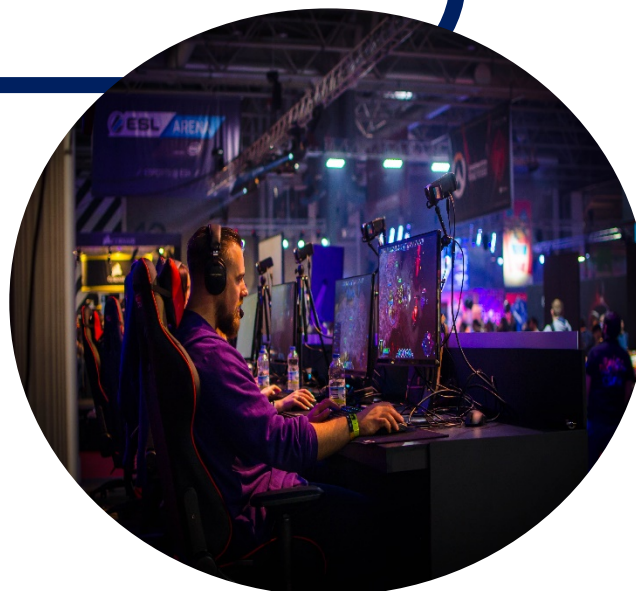
Discussion & Conclusion

General scoping of esports related websites revealed various governing structures and codes of conduct throughout the esports industry. This variation may be a result of the diverse stakeholders involved in esports, including, but not limited to, dedicated esports associations, esports leagues, esports teams and more generally, stakeholders from software, video game industries and the betting and gambling sector. In order to provide some structure to frame the review of governance in esports, governance and related terms such as regulations, rules, codes of conducts, charters were explored at the macro level, that is, governance of the esports industry as a whole, at the intermediate level, for example, governance of esports leagues or tournaments, and at the micro level, specifically, governance of esports teams.

KEY GENERAL FINDINGS

When reviewing international and Australian esports related websites, analysis suggests:

- rules, regulations, codes of conducts are predominately available on websites of organisations/associations and entities that are situated within 1) the macro level, that is, the overarching esports entities/organisations and associations, and 2) at the intermediate level, that is, the websites of esports leagues.
- There are entities at the macro level, such as the Australian safety Commissioner that may whilst not a dedicated esports site, can and do intersect with the esports space in different ways, such as providing support to esports players as part of their broader remit to educate and respond to critical esports concerns.
- esports teams were less likely, if at all, to provide information about governance, rules and codes of conduct, with the information more likely to be about players and team profiles.



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KEY FINDINGS MACRO LEVEL INTERNATIONAL WEBSITES

At the macro international level, the:

- **International Esports Federation** appears to be the unifying body for esports globally, whereby any country may apply for IESF membership, however only one esports association per country is eligible for membership. The IESF provides clear documentation regarding esports regulations related to competitions, match operations, scoring and anti-doping.
- **Esports Integrity Commission** has responsibility for preventing, investigating, and prosecuting any form of cheating in esports including, but not limited to, match fixing and doping. ESIC also provides comprehensive Codes of Conducts, which appear to be adopted by other esports stakeholders including the Australian Esports Games Association.
- **World Esports Association** appears to primarily focus on arbitration and provides a WESA Code of Conduct for Teams and Players, a Social Media Policy, and Best Practices Guidelines for esports stakeholders and clearly outlines the arbitration process, including emergency arbitration for player disputes, if required.
- Review of non-Australian based national esports organisations/federations websites, revealed considerable variation in the placement and content/coverage of governance details and rules and regulations. Governance and codes of conduct-related information featured on different levels of the various website navigation/menu bars and varied in the depth of the information provided. This variation highlights the opportunity for exploring ways to achieve greater consistency across esports websites at the national Macro level.

International Esports Associations

At the global level, the International Esports Federation appears to be the overarching esports body which promotes esports as “a true sport beyond barriers”. The Federation collaborates with national esports federations around the world to position and promote esports athletes as competitors just like their counterparts from the more traditionally considered sports, and who, as such are deserving of the same level of support and opportunities.

Governance is a first level tab on the IESF website menu bar, which suggests it is an aspect which has considerable prominence within the Federation’s scope of work. The leadership and governing structures of the Federation are transparent on the website and clearly outlined, with additional information about members and membership. The Board of the Federation comprises representatives from a range of countries, including the US, South Korea, Israel, Malaysia, and as of July 2021, the IESF has 111 national federation members across Africa, Asia, America, Europe, Oceania along with Affiliate Members. Important to note is that only one national organisation per country/nation can be accepted as a member of the IESF.

When reviewing IESF content under Governance tab, the following second level headings are revealed, Rules and regulations, Anti-doping and Committees. The regulations, which cover, match, scoring and competition regulations are comprehensive and current, that is, the documents are dated within the past year. The Federation also provides anti-doping regulations which have been developed in collaboration with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), to protect players' health and to help maintain the integrity of the sport. The regulations aim to provide a foundation for guiding and informing tournament rules for all nation members. The IESF further encourages its members to tailor the regulations to suit local contexts by adding to, or making, rules stricter. However, they do not advise removing any of the proposed rules and regulations without careful consideration. The rules are very explicit, e.g., outlining warnings which can be given for low, medium e.g., unsportsmanlike conduct or heavy level infractions such as use of ingame bugs/exploits which can result in a range of penalties ranging from point loss in a series or loss of a whole match series. Considerations such as data storage and confidentiality also are addressed in the regulations.

The World Esports Association (WESA) website also can be considered for analysis at the macro level, as it mentions developing and implementing global industry-wide standards that meet the needs of players, teams and leagues by representing players and developing and implementing elements of regulation. WESA came about from the collaborative efforts of industry-leading professional esports teams and ESL Gaming, which is considered the world's largest esports company. WESA aims to bring together esports teams and players to help generate sustainable growth of esports, incorporating more teams and leagues and further collaborating with game publishers to help ensure growth in available games. Integrity, fairness, and transparency are noted in WESA's mission statement, as is their commitment to upholding these values. Rules and regulations feature as a first level tab on the navigation bar of the website, again suggesting the priority this is given in the association. Aligning with WESA's focus on player representation are the second level tabs of Emergency Arbitration; Arbitration Rules; Rules and Regulations and WESA Social Media Policy and Best Practices Guidelines. The Emergency Arbitration page outlines the procedure to follow if a player is in a dispute and is considering initiating emergency arbitration proceedings. The Arbitration Rules page provides a comprehensive explanation of terms and outlines the process and WESA's role in the arbitration process, providing a link to more detailed information in a manual. On the Rules and Regulations page, there is a link to WESA's Code of Conduct for esports teams and players. The Code, dated December 2017, outlines WESA's values and principles and the consequent rules for behaviour and conduct both within WESA and for external parties. The Code addresses aspects such as jurisdiction of the executive board, sanctions, costs, conduct, confidentiality, loyalty, offering and accepting gifts and other benefits, corruption, discrimination, doping, failure to respect decisions, among other areas of consideration. In acknowledging the lucrative advertising and sponsorship potential of esports due to its reach and fan base, WESA also provides Social Media Policy and Best Practices Guidelines for all its members at all levels including individual players and teams.

The Esports Integrity Commission (ESIC) also is considered for analysis at the macro level. Established in 2016, ESIC is a not-for-profit organisation that works with esports stakeholders to protect the integrity of esports competition. They have responsibility for preventing, investigating, and prosecuting any form of cheating in esports including, but not limited to match fixing and doping. The membership and supporting partners comprise a number of government gambling commissions and boards, esports leagues, including ESL, betting, lottery and gambling agencies, national esports federations from countries around the world, including Switzerland, New Zealand, Portugal, The Bahamas. In the first level tab of the website, headings include Integrity Program and Report a Breach, which again provides an indication of the focus of the Commission. Under the first

level tab of News and Press, there is a range of news items reporting findings of recent investigations into breaches with details about sanctions handed down to individuals, in addition to news which is more general in nature, such as details about newly joined national federation members. ESIC appears very active in the governance space, under the Integrity Program tab, there are seven comprehensive documents, including Definitions, Code of Ethics, Code of Conduct, Anti-Corruption Code, Anti-Doping Code; Procedure; ESIC Prohibited List [of Substances]. Each document clearly outlines the scope and application of the Code, clarifies definitions, and then provides details about the specifics of each Code or Procedure. The Code of Conduct for example categorises offences under 4 levels, each level representing an increase in the seriousness of the offence. The code also outlines reporting, notification and disciplinary procedures, sanctions, appeals, recognition of decisions, amendment, and interpretation. The Anti-Doping Code explicitly outlines policy scope and application, prohibited conduct and offences, sample collection and analysis and additional details and procedures related to the scope and implementation of the Code. The website also provides a simple form to report a perceived breach.

National esports organisations based in countries other than Australia

When reviewing websites of national esports organisations/federations, not based Australia, rules and regulations feature on different levels of the various website navigation/menu bars. For example, the British Esports Association, is a not-for-profit body that promotes esports in the UK, and clearly states they are not a governing body but rather provide esports expertise and advice with a particular focus on grassroots level of esports. They host competitions for young people aged 12 years and over across schools and colleges in the UK and offer initiatives such as “Women in Esports”. The Association also uses the Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) scoring protocol to help rate video games in esports.

As a side note, the Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) age rating system was established in 2003 and developed by the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) to help parents make informed decisions when purchasing computer games. It is adopted throughout most of Europe, and supported by the major console manufacturers, including Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo, and publishers and developers of interactive games.

Content on the British Esports Association (BEA) website suggests varied and broad interests within the esports space. For example, they have expanded their focus and partnered with learning company Pearson to create a qualification for a career in esports. However, when searching for information about Code of Conduct it was not obviously evident and some drilling down through the first and second level website tabs and headings was needed to locate the information. Specifically, clicking on Student Champs in the first level tab on the website, then clicking on Register appears to take you to a different, but associated website, ‘British esports championships’, then clicking on the first level heading of Support on this site reveals second level headings including Code of Conduct, General Rules, Terms and Conditions, and Privacy Policy. This suggests the Code of Conduct is perhaps more relevant or of interest for visitors to the British esports championship website/page rather than BEA’s website.

The New Zealand Esports Federation, which was approved as a full member of the IESF in 2018 after a three-year trial, is another example of an esports website which provides information about regulations right up front as a first level tab on the website menu bar. It further explains that any events sanctioned by the NZESF “must abide by its rules and regulations (passed down by the IESF) to ensure integrity at the top level of competition.” This also helps explain the process which is undertaken by a national federation body in order to become a member of the International Esports

Federation. Among general esports-related information, the NZESF website provides information about accreditation, events and also provides a sparsely populated blog. The regulation page does provide comprehensive information about regulations and explains that as a member of the IESF and, subject to the NZeSF's Rules, it will adhere to IESF rules and regulations. The regulations on the NZeSF's website address aspects such as *General Provisions and Background, Non-discrimination, Promoting Female Participation, Doping and Drug Use, Indemnity, Intellectual Property Rights, Sanctioning of Members, Competitions, Selection of Players, and Disputes*. Interestingly, the event calendar did not appear to be current, as no upcoming tournaments or events appeared in the calendar for up to a year in advance. It is important to note however, that COVID19 restrictions may be impacting the hosting of esports events.

Australian National Esports Associations

KEY FINDINGS MACRO LEVEL AUSTRALIAN WEBSITES

At the macro Australian national level, the:

- **Australian Esports Association (AESA)** appears to be the overarching esports association in Australia, and is Australia's only member of the IESF, and a signatory to the International University Sports Federation's esports. Governance and the Code of Conduct are outlined on the website along with an anti-discrimination policy and an Athlete's Committee Charter.
- **Esports Games Association (EGAA)** is an advocacy group for the esports industry in Australia which collaborates with players, teams, managers, organisers, and sponsors to help establish and improve esports industry standards and to promote and advance esports in Australia. Information about governance is provided on the website, along with detailed Codes of Conduct referenced to ESIC. Additional codes/guidelines also are outlined for Crowd Control, Game Fixing and Bribes, Social media, Player Contracts and Officials.



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The Australian Esports Association (AESA) is a national non-profit body established in 2013 and examined at the macro level as an overarching esports association in Australia. AESA is the Australian member of IESF and is also a signatory to the International University Sports Federation's esports global collaboration memorandum laying the foundation for global university cooperation in esports. Details of AESA's board members are provided and a code of conduct current as of May 2019 is available on the site. The Code outlines conduct principles, along with values of fair play. The Association also provides an anti-discrimination policy and an Athlete's Committee Charter and appears to be developing a 'Member Protection Policy' to address the rights of esports athletes. Whilst information for various stakeholders including researchers and athletes is provided on the site, the currency of the website is difficult to confirm as website posts and details of events are mostly from 2019.

The Esports Games Association (EGAA) founded in 2017, also was considered at the macro level of analysis. EGAA is an advocacy group for the esports industry and aims to support the growth and legitimisation of esports in Australia and New Zealand. The Association works with players, teams, managers, organisers and sponsors to set and improve esports industry standards and to help promote and advance esports in Australia. The Association facilitates monthly livestreams and networking events and provides a monthly newsletter. Details about governance are provided, but this is predominately in relation to the Association's Board and team members. There is extensive and comprehensive information about Codes of Conduct with explicit reference to the ESIC Codes (see above), including Esports Integrity Coalition ('ESIC') Principles (as adopted by the EGAA), ESIC Anti-Corruption Code (as adopted by the EGAA), ESIC Anti-Doping Code (as adopted by the EGAA), ESIC Code of Ethics (as adopted by the EGAA), ESIC Code of Conduct (as adopted by the EGAA, and as they relate to conduct in preparation for, within, and immediately after competitions), and ESIC Procedure (as adopted by the EGAA). In addition, the site also provides codes/guidelines for Crowd Control, Game Fixing and Bribes, Social media, Player Contracts and Officials.

Whilst not necessarily dedicated esports websites, it is important to note that at the macro level there are additional entities that can intersect with the esports space in various ways, including providing support to gaming stakeholders, particularly players, and for parents/carers of younger gamers as part of educating and responding to critical esafety concerns. The eSafety Commissioner which is an independent statutory office supported by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, is one such entity, which has various powers and functions under Australian law to help safeguard Australians when online. Given esports is conducted online, the eSafety commissioner can investigate and act on any serious concerns that arise within the esports context and which affect Australians. As such, whilst entities such as eSafety Commissioner may not have a dedicated esports focus, nor specific esports-focused governance and codes of conducts, they do have a place and role to play within the esports industry ecosystem as part of safeguarding players and in helping to maintain the integrity of esports.

KEY FINDINGS MACRO LEVEL COMBINED INTERNATIONAL & NATIONAL

At the combined international and national macro level:

Although gaming and gambling sites and software and video gaming associations were not the focus of this website analysis, a small number of websites were reviewed to help provide additional context to the range of esports stakeholders.

- The Esports Entertainment Group, an international gaming and gambling website which promotes esports, provides a code of ethics which is related to the ethical conduct of the business as an esports gambling site as opposed to specific rules and regulations related to playing or facilitating esports.
- The Australian gambling website, PickleBet does have a dedicated esports betting section, and whilst information on the gambling website included responsible gaming policy, privacy policy, contest rules and customer queries, disputes and complaints policy, no specific esports code of conduct was evident on the site.
- Internationally, a number of game publishers and developers are members of overarching software and video gaming associations such as the Entertainment Software Association, with members including, among others, Activision | Blizzard, Capcom, Epic Games, Riot Games, Nexon, and the Interactive Software Federation of Europe with members including Electronic Arts, Epic Games, Microsoft, Nintendo.
 - The associations released a unifying set of principles for esports engagement, which was developed collaboratively with international counterparts. These core principles form a set of values applicable in all aspects of the global esports environments: safety and well-being, integrity and fair play, respect and diversity, and positive and enriching game play.

Review of the gambling sites, that either had a dedicated betting on esports section, such as the Australian based Picklebet or alternatively promoted esports, such as revealed either codes of ethics, a range of different policies such as, responsible gaming policy and privacy policy, contest rules mostly in relation to organisation and pragmatics of participation but not necessarily explicit esports codes of conduct.

The scoping of esports-related websites revealed that software and video gaming associations in both Europe and the US who appear to be overarching representative bodies for game publishers and developers including RIOT Games, Activision |Blizzard, Electronic Arts, Epic Game, Nintendo etc., demonstrate a commitment to promoting positive values and practices in esports. In 2019, the video game industry, including representatives from across Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, released a unifying set of principles for esports engagement (Appendix 2). These core principles were developed in a collaborative effort and form a set of values that are promoted as being applicable in all aspects of the global esports environments and address: safety and well-

being, integrity and fair play, respect and diversity, and positive and enriching game play. Whilst these are not regulations as such, they do suggest a united commitment to promoting ‘safe, fair and welcoming’ esports environment’ (ESA, 2021) across software and video gaming associations. However, as highlighted by ESA (2021) “esports is made possible due to compelling video games.” With members including publishers who own the IP to some of the most popular esports games, there may be tensions that could arise when the interests of publishers and game developers are considered and managed alongside the interests of other stakeholders in the esports industry, in particular its players. Locus of control and what this means for each of the key stakeholders in the industry warrants further investigation.

Intermediate Level Website Analysis

KEY FINDINGS INTERMEDIATE INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL: ESPORTS LEAGUES

At the international and national intermediate level, that is, esports leagues:

- Most websites in this category provided rules and regulations about some of the general aspects of tournament regulations such as cheating and collusion, sportsmanship, and disputes, along with rules for specific esports games.

Esports leagues based in countries other than Australia

A review of a small number of esports league websites revealed most provided rules and regulations about some of the general aspects of tournament regulations such as cheating and collusion and sportsmanship, but particularly about specific esports game rules, including aspects such as game coverage. ESL Gaming is claimed to be the world’s largest esports company, based in Germany, with offices across America, Australia, Asia, Europe, it “operates high-profile, branded international leagues and tournaments under the ESL Pro Tour.” Although not evident as a first level heading on the website navigation bar, the website does provide information about rules, which can be found on the ESL Gaming associated website/pages play.eslgaming.com. The link to this site can be reached by clicking on the link at the bottom of any page of the ESL Gaming main website. The regulations are explicit and cover general rules, code of conduct in relation to aspects such as matches, competitions, meetings, fraud and deception, player and team accounts, penalty points, and participation. In addition, when clicking on a particular esports games, game specific rules are also provided.

Review of the US Esports High School League website reveals an educational flavour to the purpose of the site, providing esports information for parents and teachers. The League aims to support educators across high schools in America to offer students an opportunity to engage in esports organised competitions. Although predominately US based, the League also runs a competition in Australia. Information about *Rules and Match Disputes* is located under the first level menu tab 'Tournament' where tournament rules such as maintaining confidentiality, streaming rights, cheating etc and specific game rules for each esports game offered in the League also can be found. The site also discusses requirements of students to maintain a certain GPA in order to be eligible to compete.

Australian Esports Leagues

At the Intermediate level of analysis, the websites of three Australian esports leagues were reviewed, namely Couch Warriors League; Australian Esports League and META High School Esports. The Couch Warriors League is a not for profit, governed by a committee of community members, and with Officer positions determined at the annual general meeting. In terms of governance, details about the team and committee members are provided on the website. The website also provides offline live events in South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria and hosts BAM: Australia's largest open Esports event. Additional information on the website includes details about Australian esports events and specific games and tournaments, with links to stream channels, game recaps, tutorials, information about prizes, merchandise and community announcements. The information is current and comprehensive. Whilst there is some information about general conduct such as disqualification, inappropriate behaviour by players in the crowd, tournament rules etc., the general guidelines were not easy to locate, and were primarily specific esports game rules.

The Australian Esports League was founded in 2016 with a vision to provide access to esports at all levels across Australia, further aiming to lift the esports profile and competition, with a particular focus on supporting grass-roots activities across Australia and Oceania. The AEL comprises three core leagues: Australian Esports University League (AEUL) presented by Chatime Australia; Australian Esports High School League (AEHSL); and Australian Esports Clubs League (AECL). AEL presents its values on the website which include integrity, excellence, inclusivity and social responsibility with content suggesting they focus on 'producing an entertaining, engaging, and respected esports experience'. The AEL also promotes its capability in creative design, technical delivery, project management, and broadcasting of esports events. No information about the governing body was evident, but rule books for each specific esports game and for each of the three leagues is provided on the website which cover aspects such as cheating and collusion, sportsmanship, tournament information, player eligibility, observers and streaming, penalties etc.

The META High School Esports League website provides information about games, schedules, tournament details, along with outlining the benefits of esports, health and wellbeing information, skill development, equipment requirements, IT support, along with esports information for parents and teachers. The League also supports high schools to introduce gaming and esports in their setting and provides a competitive supportive environment for esports players from Australia and New Zealand in three games, specifically, League of Legends, Rocket League and NBA2K. The League provides esports game specific rules which can be located by clicking on the esports game you are interested in and then clicking on the drop-down menu to indicate your region and then selecting game specific overview, rules or standing for the additional information. The League website also provides learning related activities and lesson plans through 'Learn with League' as an avenue for promoting esports competition and as an avenue to help teach 'about sportsmanship, resilience and teamwork.

KEY FINDINGS MICRO INTERNATIONAL & NATIONAL LEVEL: ESPORT TEAMS

At the international and national micro level, that is, esports teams:

- Limited, if any, information about esports governance, rules and regulations was evident on websites in this category, with content suggesting the primary purpose of esports team websites was the promotion, including merchandising, of esports teams and player profiles.
 - This highlights possible opportunities for websites categorised at this level to play a more prominent role in promoting positive esports behaviours, particularly given, these sites are likely to attract high volumes of traffic from esports players.

Esports teams based in countries other than Australia

When reviewing specific esports team websites in countries other than Australia, it was evident that each 'team' often comprised a number of teams which fielded different esports games. From this brief review of esports team websites, it appears the primary purpose of websites in this category is to promote the esports teams and its members. Most of the esports team websites did not mention codes of conduct, and had limited, if any, information about the governance structures, often providing names and social media accounts of CEO or staff, but limited, if any, detail about the governance structures.

Australian Esports Teams

Websites of two Australian esports teams, namely, the Chiefs Esports Club and Order Army were reviewed. Whilst the sites provided information about Current News stories, Career opportunities, and included an ecommerce element to their website with team merchandise, most of the information focused on details and profiles about teams and team members, and tournaments, with limited, if any, information about governance structure and no evidence of codes of conducts.

Stage 2 Summary

At the international macro level, there appear to be a number of globally focused dedicated esports organisations/ federations including International Esports Federation, Esports Integrity Commission and World Esports Association that play a specific role in promoting and supporting an ethical, positive and safe esports ecosystem and experience for stakeholders, in particular players. These roles include managing arbitration processes, providing comprehensive codes of conduct, providing documentation and guidelines regarding tournaments and policies including anti-doping, and match fixing. Whilst the role of these organisations/federations is outlined on their respective websites, there is opportunity for further investigations into how they are positioned in relation to each other and in relation to other organisations that form part of the esports industry ecosystem.

Review of national esports websites based in Australia, also revealed a number of key overarching organisations such as Australian Esports Association and Esports Games Association that have various responsibilities, including advocacy, governance, promotion and representation.

In addition to esports-dedicated websites at the macro level, there are other entities in the esports industry ecosystem that are based in Australia and internationally that were considered in this Stage 2 study. These included a small number of gambling sites, namely, Esports Entertainment and PickleBet, and software and video gaming associations who are overarching bodies that represent game developers and publishers in the video game industry. These websites included the Entertainment Software Association, with members including among others Activision | Blizzard, Capcom, Epic Games, Riot Games, Nexon, and the Interactive Software Federation of Europe with members including Electronic Arts, Epic Games, Microsoft, Nintendo. Both ESA and ISFE promote a unified set of principles for positive esports engagement, that address safety and wellbeing, integrity and fair play, respect and diversity, and positive and enriching game play.

It is important to note that there are additional entities and government independent regulatory bodies such as Australia's eSafety Commissioner, that intersect with the esports industry ecosystem and play a role in safeguarding people when online. However, given they were not a dedicated esports entity, they were not considered for review in this Stage 2 Pilot study.

The review of websites at the league or tournament level revealed most websites within this category focused on game specific rules and regulations, whilst the websites of esports teams provided no, or limited, information about governance and codes of conduct, focusing primarily on the promotion of the team and its players. This highlights possible opportunities for websites categorised at this level to play a more prominent role in promoting positive esports behaviours, particularly given these sites are likely to attract high volumes of traffic from esports players.

The environmental scan and website analysis process highlighted the roles of various stakeholders in the esports industry ecosystem, and the varying levels of commitment to governance and codes of conduct as established through content available on websites. However, given that few websites at the intermediate level and limited, if any, at the micro level provided information about codes of conduct or alternatively provided links to overarching organisations/federations who promoted esports codes of conduct, or regulations, suggests there may be an opportunity for a more unified approach to the promotion and enactment of these guiding codes, regulations and principles.

STAGE 3: INTERVIEW STAGE

STAGE 3 METHODOLOGY

- In line with the emergent research design, Stage 3 semi-structured interviews followed the completion of Stages 1 and 2
- Involved conducting interviews over a 3-week period
- Employed maximum variation sampling to purposely select diverse stakeholders within the esports industry ecosystem
- Involved establishing interview protocols, schedules and guiding questions to inform Stage 3 research questions, with a focus on participant information/demographics, personal experiences esports/gaming, concerns regarding involvement in esports, e.g., safety, bullying, grieving, attitudes about esports generally, community/School/ Esports organisation experience, governance and codes of conduct in esports, and associated perceived barriers and enablers, and vision for esports.
- Employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which involved:
 - multiple reading and making notes from interviews
 - identifying and transforming notes into a priori themes
 - seeking relationships and clustering of themes
 - writing up the narrative with quotes from participants

Introduction

As part of the emergent research design and following the completion of the Stage 1 Narrative Literature Review and Stage 2 Environmental scan and website analysis, this section will outline the methodological approach employed in Stage 3 of the esports pilot study, which specifically aims to address the following research sub questions:

- What have been the a) experiences, b) aspirations, c) attitudes and d) behaviours of sport stakeholders, including coaches, players, league organisers? and
- What types of governance structures and codes of conduct can support positive sport experiences for stakeholders?

This component of the pilot study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a non-prescriptive approach, and dynamic, flexible process with active researcher involvement (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The approach enabled collection of rich, descriptive insights from diverse stakeholders across the esports industry ecosystem, including players, parents/carers, teachers, coaches, leagues, and other stakeholders who represent various esports focused interests and organisations. Whilst the researchers acknowledge the diverse global and extensive number of potential esports stakeholders who could have been invited to participate, for the purpose of this pilot study, the focus of the recruitment was on stakeholders from the local esports context in South Australia and nationally across Australia. Important to note however, is that due to the global nature of the esports ecosystem, stakeholder interviews also provided valuable insights into the wider/international global esports context, and regions such as the Oceania.

A key underpinning of the IPA method is to facilitate research which aims to understand the way individuals interpret and make sense of their lived experiences and the worlds in which they belong engage and (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). To enable this process, IPA draws on fundamental principles of: phenomenology, which relates to identifying critical aspects of phenomena or individual's experiences which are uniquely different from others; hermeneutics, which posits that for researchers to be able to understand the information shared by a participant there is a need to try to understand the mindset of the individual in the first instance and the language used and idiography, whereby each individual case is thoroughly explored before producing comments of a more general nature (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Fundamentally, the IPA method can be considered a descriptive, interpretive approach which brings together the narrative of the experience or phenomena incorporating individual quotes to illustrate general themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Method

Stage 3 comprised interviews with stakeholders across the esports industry ecosystem. A semi-structured format was employed, which, in keeping with the emergent research design, enabled discussions of key themes identified in Stages 1 and 2, whilst still providing opportunities for open-ended exploration of stakeholders' lived experiences and insights.

To minimise interview bias and facilitate consistency in the interview format and questioning, interview protocols, including an introductory section outlining ethical considerations, and guiding questions were developed (Appendix 4) by the research team. The guiding questions addressed the following overarching key areas:

1. Participant information/demographics
2. Participant personal experiences esports/gaming
3. Concerns regarding involvement in esports, e.g., safety, bullying, griefing
4. Attitudes about esports generally
5. Community/School/Esport organisation experience
6. Governance in esports
7. Codes of conduct in esports
8. Perceived barriers and enablers of governance and codes of conduct in esports
9. Vision for esports

Interviews were conducted over a three-week period following the completion of Stages 1 & 2, as part of the emergent design. Interview duration proposed was 20 to 30 minutes, however, the generosity of the interviewees and their willingness to provide in depth insights into the esports resulted in most interviews lasting up to an hour.

Identifying Participants: Sampling

The approach to sampling and identification of key stakeholder categories was informed by the findings from Stages 1 and 2, along with consideration of the nature of the esports industry ecosystem. To help ensure project feasibility, and as outlined above, recruitment of stakeholders focused on the local South Australian and national Australian esports context.

The sampling strategy aligned with the sampling of the esports related websites, specifically, stakeholders were identified at the macro, intermediate and micro levels. Macro included

representation from Australian esports associations, Intermediate level included representation from Australian esports leagues, and at the micro level players at various levels and schools.

Data Analysis

This section outlines the approach to data analysis for Stage 3 of the pilot study.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom (Banyai, 1995) and recorded with participant consent. All three researchers attended nearly all of the 23 interviews conducted.

The IPA provides a flexible framework which was adapted to align with the research objectives and questions and was employed to facilitate data analysis. Whilst often considered a time consuming and complex process, which requires researchers to immerse themselves in the process and the data, it can be an exciting undertaking generating rich insights (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). As a researcher active process, engaging in reflexivity was critical throughout the IPA approach. The researchers engaged in reflexive commentary at the end of each interview as we were particularly mindful of a number of considerations that could impact the interview experience for the participant, such as, the platform used to facilitate the interviews, that is Zoom (Banyai, 1995), the preferences of camera on or off, the experience of having three researchers in attendance, particularly with younger players, and how they could impact on the interview itself and the information provided. As with any ethical research conducted, the interviewees were offered alternatives such as, phone instead of Zoom interview; camera off instead of on, recording yes or no.

Although interviews were recorded, as consent to record was provided by all interviewees, all three researchers took extensive notes during each interview, which were aligned with the interview guiding questions (Appendix 4) these were then uploaded to an excel file (Microsoft Corporation, 2018) which contained the notes from all three researchers. This enabled review and crosschecking throughout the APA process which was subsequently undertaken by all three researchers to facilitate comprehensive, trustworthy analysis of the data. The APA steps included:

- Multiple reading and making notes. The initial stage involved thorough reading of the transcript/notes numerous times by each researcher, enabling the researchers to immerse themselves in the data. During this stage, the researchers made any additional notes about their observations and reflections about the interview experience or any other relevant considerations of potential significance
- Identifying and transforming notes into a priori (present in the literature) and Emergent Themes. At this stage, the three researchers came together face to face, to review all notes taken from a small number of interviews and began the process of transforming the notes into emerging themes. Colour coding of the themes was completed within the collated excel file. This process helped ensure inter-rater reliability in the generation of emergent themes.
- Seeking relationships and clustering themes. The step involved looking for connections between emerging themes, grouping them together according to overarching areas of focus and according to conceptual similarities. Each cluster of broad level themes and sub-themes were assigned a descriptive label. This step was conducted in two stages, as explained in the preceding dot point, the researchers first came together to complete this step with a small number of interview notes and then proceeded to complete the coding process with the remaining notes/interviews independently, but with crosschecking throughout and when necessary.

- Writing up an IPA study. This involved taking each of the themes identified and providing a narrative around each one, with support from interview extracts and followed by analytical commentary by the researchers (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Sample Characteristics: Stage 3 Stakeholder Interviews

A total of 23 interview participants (M= 19; F= 4) took part in the Stage 3 study. Maximum variation sampling was employed as it enabled purposeful but diverse and varied representation of stakeholders (Patton, 2002), across the esports industry ecosystem. Given the representation of females in esports is increasing, we purposively approached women who have been/are active gamers/esports players, resulting in: a current team captain of a women's league team; one who plays community league at university level; one who plays purely with friends for recreation; and one who has carved out a career as a content creator game player. Similarly, the male participants all had a background or interest in gaming themselves, with some following career paths in key organisations related to the gaming and esports industries. The teachers involved, were either managing the school league team, or were trying to develop their school's involvement for the future. All had been interested in either traditional and/or esports themselves.

Table 2 below provides details of the number of interviews categorised by macro, intermediate and micro levels and by the geographic context they are based in, specifically, locally in South Australia or nationally elsewhere in Australia.

Table 112: Sample

	Australia nationally based	South Australia locally based	Total
Macro Category [e.g., esports associations, software & video game publishers]	2	0	2
Intermediate Category [e.g., esports leagues, media]	1	5	6
Micro-category [e.g., players, esports teams, schools, parents/carers]	1	14	15
Total	4	19	23

Findings: Interview Stage

The findings from Stage 3 Interviews are organised into sections which reflect the key guiding questions posed to the participants/stakeholders.

- Attitudes to Esports: Benefits and Enablers; Challenges and Concerns
- Codes of Conduct: The Problem; Setting the Standards
- The Esports Governance Context: Macro; Intermediate; Micro; Barriers; Enablers
- Vision and Aspirations

Findings are then summarised and discussed in terms of the aims of the study:

- What have been the a) experiences, b) aspirations, c) attitudes and d) behaviours of esports stakeholders, including coaches, players, and league organisers and
- What types of governance structures and codes of conduct can support positive esports experiences for stakeholders?

Attitudes to Esports: Benefits and Enablers

Key stakeholders were asked the key question:

What are your attitudes to esports to generally and what benefits or disadvantages do you see?

Stakeholder responses were separated into those seen as positive or beneficial in nature, and those seen as disadvantages, concerns or barriers to organisations. The findings highlighted benefits for individual players, competitors and associated content creators interested in esports and gaming in general, as well as benefits for organisations such as clubs, schools, local councils and macro level parties.

SUMMARY: BENEFITS OF ESPORTS FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

- *Creating an inclusive space for students with a range of abilities,*
- *Providing opportunities for students who might otherwise be disengaged from learning,*
- *Supporting social emotional learning and dispositions about the self and others,*
- *Developing 21st century skills valuable for future career pathways and*
- *Setting a strong foundation for positive in-game and online behaviours beyond schooling.*

Benefits for children and adolescents

All stakeholders explained that esports provided a range of benefits to children and adolescents. These benefits were seen to be available to children at all levels of involvement: whether learning about the esports industry; creating content through streaming, casting or more traditional media; organising teams and tournaments; or through actual involvement in casual or competitive esports gameplay. The six schools that participated in this research all had different ways of using esports: as an *intraschool* extracurricular activity; as an *interschool* extracurricular competition (via META High School League); as part of small-scale internal school events; or part of larger-scale student-led

community events; as part of the English curriculum; and as part of the Digital Technologies curriculum. Stakeholder Mi5M, the principal of an independent school stated that the benefits of using esports in the English curriculum included:

“... students working in teams developing 21st Century skills while using essential English through multimodal demonstration of learning that involved gaming reflections/journals, game reviews, strategy guides and esports features”. (Mi5M)

In this way, students were given opportunities to engage with learning through esports in a range of ways...not only through the playing of games as part of competitive esports tournaments. This was reflected in the microlevel community and council esports tournaments where adolescents were involved in roles beyond player involvement such as team and tournament organisation, technical support, casting competitions, and streaming events on media such as Twitch.

Esports provides an inclusive environment where students can engage in learning regardless of age, ability or gender. The stakeholder from a leading industry association (Ma1M) suggested that “... as a platform it shouldn't discriminate on gender or disability” and further that it “...promotes teamwork, gender equality and a level playing field”. This view was more strongly stated by a stakeholder with experience from the High Schools esports league (I1M) who suggested that this inclusive playing field could be further strengthened with appropriate investment, governance and community infrastructure:

“... Esports is potentially more inclusive than any sport we've had ever before as it's not bound by our physical bodies anymore. In esports it feels much more even already because already size and strength doesn't matter. Girls are playing more and more and if government funding and communities invest then all-girl leagues and programs can have great potential to break down barriers”. (Ma1M)

For the female content creators and esports athletes interviewed, whilst there was a heightened awareness of the toxic behaviours and gendered stereotypes that are often part of the broader gaming environment, the organised esports tournaments at high school and university level provided more supportive spaces where negative behaviours were not only called out, but where expectations and repercussions were codified within individual games (eg. League of Legends Summoner's Code & Learn with League guides) and esports competitions (META High School League; Australian Esports University League).

There is further work to be done in schools and communities if the inclusive nature of esports is to be built upon. As a female gaming content creator and media presenter/personality (I5F) suggests: “...there are fewer females playing competitive games, and the perception is women are not as good as men, ... women also not initially involved in the development of video games, but with women now more involved in the development of games they incorporate aspects that can appeal more to women- though the competitive games space is the last place women will join. At a grassroots level and at a school level there needs to be more of a push for women into STEM subjects in general”. Her recognition that there is a lot of work to do to support female players (despite the inclusive nature of esports), and that schools should play a part in providing safe spaces for girls to engage in esports as part of bigger push for interest in STEM subjects and careers highlights the potential benefits of high school and community based esports programs. Stakeholder Mi9F, a casual gamer said that she

prefers to play in close friendship groups because of some of the stereotypes and responses to being a girl, but that:

“... having more girl gamers stream so that there are more female role models would help to challenge stereotypes”. (Mi9F)

In relation to schools, students who were involved in team-based esports tournaments that were supported by teacher mentors were seen to benefit in ways that fostered powerful social emotional learning about the self and others. Esports helped develop teamwork skills such as: positive communication with teammates (and opponents where applicable); good sportsmanship; respect for the views and experiences of others; resilience and self-regulation; collegiality; a sense of belonging and school pride. Stakeholder I7M, founder of an esports broadcasting site, explained that: “... working in a team builds social capital with others ... to be able to lean on them and build on...it humanises it: if someone is sitting next to you, you’re not likely to tell them ‘You’re s**t mate!’ as that’s generally not a human thing to do... it can help to show that what you do can have an effect on other people. Schools are the safe environment where hopefully it doesn’t get to that anyway: it builds that positive environment”. One of the teachers interviewed, (Mi7M) added to this suggestion that esports builds teamwork skills:

“...a lot of the kids at the higher end will be thinking about how I can apply my learning at school into this game. It is not only just understanding spatial awareness, map use and that, but it could be they are articulating their higher-level understanding and are giving that to another player because they know their team is only as good as their weakest player so they want to increase the skill of their players, and one of the biggest benefits that I was really shocked with was the way they can communicate. Like when you are a team you play together and understand people’s skills and their advantages, but it is very different with a high-speed game because things can change very, very quickly”. (Mi7M)

Importantly it was suggested that these team benefits could have ongoing positive impacts on the in-game attitudes and resilience of these students as they engaged in games outside team-based tournaments with anonymous opponents and randomly assigned teammates in the ‘wild west’ of non-competitive casual esports. The values, skills and dispositions developed in high school esports tournaments could also be seen as these students moved into other competitive leagues or intervarsity tournaments as noted by stakeholder I2M, an esports journalist, content creator and chairperson of a university esports association, who stated that he has seen: “...values like ‘upholding the integrity of the club/university’ reflected in the high school students who come [into university esports] because they already have the values from school”.

High school esports programs have the opportunity to create grassroots change in the in-game behaviours of casual and competitive gamers by providing students with a set of values and codes of conduct derived from the explicit school values/expectations for behaviour and communication. Additionally, high school esports is supported by teachers and school communities where mentorship, guidance and restorative practices are provided by supportive role models. Industry stakeholder I1M associated with the High School League stated that high school esports is “...about showing kids how to behave...to help them to learn how to react and how to handle themselves

online". The benefit of bringing esports into the schooling environment is that it forms part of the overarching learning about appropriate behaviour and safe online practices that might otherwise be left to chance, leading to inappropriate online behaviours and in-game toxicity. Participant I1M goes on to explain that:

"...whatever team based competitive online game there is there's always the sport toxicity and it is a concern, but that's one thing where I think it's important where we bring it into the school system...all the online behaviours right now have happened because all the kids are playing outside of role models and guidance, so a big part of META is bringing it into a structured team-based environment to help alleviate those concerns". (I1M)

Teachers and school leaders who were interviewed saw improvements in engagement and attendance of students involved in esports programs, who might otherwise be disengaged from their schooling. One of the teachers interviewed (Mi2M) suggested that "...esports engages kids who are not necessarily engaged in any way in the school". Playing esports in schools can provide students with opportunities for learning that are relevant and meaningful to their lives as well as raising their awareness of alternate career pathways that may not yet exist. As stakeholder Mi14F, President of a university esports association and an intervarsity esports athlete stated:

"...if I'd had the opportunity as a kid, I would've engaged with esports in high school...it might have taken me from that solo RPG kid to being a team player earlier. There could have been other opportunities out there". (Mi14F)

Many of those interviewed saw the role that schools play in the esports ecosystem as critical to the positive evolution of this young industry. Stakeholder I5F a gaming content creator and media presenter/personality called for the stronger involvement of schools in esports as "...there is a pretty significant shift in young people to esports and away from traditional sports...so it is smart for schools to be investing in esports as much as they would any other sport ...and doing it in schools sets a foundation of sportsmanship and behaviour and taking it seriously so that it does become something that is invaluable for where Australia sits in global esports". Schools are key spaces where students learn how to interact with others in the world, and the online community beyond school and home is often the place where adolescents get their gaming values and role models from. Incorporating esports programs into more high schools will support the development of a more ingrained set of values and codes of conduct with the mentorship and guidance of teacher role models. Stakeholder I7M stated that:

"...the benefits of high school programs and comps is that it can give that safe space where every teacher is cleared to work with children, ...it gives the ability to build up those role models and those high school values ...the same as sport...people always know it's going to be safe in this great environment for kids to learn and grow. It takes it into the safe school space where they can do the team building, the bonding, and show the skills they are building off that". (I7M)

The benefits of esports for children and adolescents have the potential to not only improve the lives and experiences of individuals, but to support strong relationships and communities where acceptance and inclusion are central for children who may otherwise feel socially isolated from schools and communities. The benefits of esports for society are likewise strong, with the possibility of building awareness and capacity for students in schools to imagine career opportunities that they may have never considered, using 21st century skills and dispositions within their real world lives and the metaverse. Also, the benefits of esports in high schools reinforce the pivotal role that education can play in providing foundational social skills and role models that can help create a more positive online ecosystem for the future.

Given that these key stakeholders drawn from across the eco-system have outlined the positive benefits of esports for schools, students and communities, having an understanding of the challenges, concerns, barriers and key issues is necessary, so that Codes of Conduct and governance issues can be thoroughly contextualised. We acknowledge that there is a fear and a stereotype in the general community, that gaming and esports are unhealthy pastimes, with potentially toxic environments. The evidence presented here explores those issues and draws attention to the lived realities of those in the contemporary esports eco-system, and where appropriate, challenges the myths associated with gaming and esports.



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Key stakeholders were asked the key questions:

What are your attitudes to esports generally and what benefits or disadvantages do you see?

Have you ever had any concerns during your involvement in esports particularly regarding safety and bullying?

Stakeholder responses were separated into those seen as positive or beneficial in nature (see previous section), and those seen as disadvantages, concerns or barriers to organisations. The findings highlighted challenges and concerns at all levels of the esports ecosystem, at the individual (players, athletes), community/school (council, high school, university), and industry level (publishers, entertainment organisations, team owners, organisers of esports tournaments). The findings showed that stakeholders at all levels of the esports ecosystem had concerns regarding the safety and wellbeing of children and adolescents involved in esports (casual and competitive) and gaming in general but could see how schools and communities could be part of the solution.

SUMMARY: CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS FOR ESPORTS RELATED TO INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS AND INDUSTRY

- *Esports competition can involve high stakes and high stress for players and athletes, especially in casual open competition with limited governance,*
- *Esports can have faceless environments with limited repercussions for toxic, sexist and racist behaviour. Random matchmaking places players with random and anonymous teammates/opponents,*
- *Access to esports and other aligned communication/streaming platforms can be problematic in school settings where esports is being adopted. Esports in schools/community requires dedicated and knowledgeable champions to create sustainable learning,*
- *Esports has a public image problem with negative associations with gaming, addiction, child safety, sexualised content, gamer stereotypes and limited role models and*
- *Esports is an immature industry with a dynamic product that involves many stakeholders in a fractured ecosystem.*

Individual

All concerns and challenges to esports raised by stakeholders have an impact on the casual and competitive players involved. They are the ones who step out onto the playing field where the full range of stakeholders in the sports and gaming ecosystem have influence and control. The plethora of esports themselves are individual games created by development companies and controlled by the publishers, and in the end, the publishers have ultimate power. They create the games and decide the in-game rules, they often own and manage the playing field where players and athletes compete in esports, and they can choose which esports live and die. So, for many, the publishers sit at the centre of the esports ecosystem with all the power and control over the experience of the player and audience. It is not quite that simple though. While esports is largely analogous with the traditional sports industry, it is also part of the entertainment industry and may be more related to structures seen in the music industry where the artist/audience has a symbiotic relationship with the creators and publishers, and their interests and dollars can influence the longevity and success of

the product. Ultimately, competitive esports requires a sustainable and supportive community to organise, run and foster esports tournaments and events where casual players and athletes can play, learn and grow within the ecosystem.

Stakeholder Ma1M explained that “...open game play is like the wild west”, where players are matched with random opponents and are placed in random teams. In games such as League of Legends (LoL) for example, players are matched based on Riot’s matchmaking system known as Matchmaking Rating (MMR). This matches players with similarly ranked opponents and teammates by trying to balance three things: fairness, position preference, and fast queue times. In this way, players are matched with random players who are technically at a similar skill level. However, while players may have similar rankings, their game intentions may be very different which can cause some friction within teams. This creates a high stakes situation where “people can cost you your game: your rank” (I1M). This can create in-game friction between players, with the anonymity allowing for some toxic responses when a player might feel that one of their random teammates has cost them the game and lowered their rank. As a female esports athlete (Mi14F) said:

“...players sit alone and rank up or grind, so they develop self-centred behaviours, so it [competing in open play] because they were highly ranked players who were having trouble expressing themselves positively”. (Mi14F)

Some players play for fun compared to others who are playing to ‘grind’ for higher ranking or may be using the game as a ‘scrim’ for practice for competition. Players in open esports gameplay are mostly doing this alone without guidance or mentorship which can put players in high stakes, high stress situations that can lead to conflict and exacerbate negative behaviours. As another industry stakeholder that supports esports high school leagues (I1M) noted:

“...Coached gametime is minor compared to coach-less gaming where matchmaking puts players into random teams and exposes them to high intensity, high stakes scenarios without guidance”. (I1M)

Another concern noted was that this open gameplay presents children and adolescents with challenging social situations with random opponents where all parties are faceless with limited repercussions. A stakeholder who was a competitive esports athlete (Mi8M) explained that there was an acceptance of some negative behaviour in esports: “... anonymity and varying skill levels/approaches can cause issues, but you have to take negative behaviour and interaction with a grain of salt because any online community has concerns around this and esports/gaming no different”. While there is an acceptance of banter and some negative communications within esports, just as there is in all competitive and casual sports, several stakeholders explained that it can be difficult to know when this crosses the line into harassment and racism/ableism/sexism. A female content creator and casual gamer (I5F) noted:

“....in competitive games you are more likely to experience some negative behaviours- when you have a shared chat you can sometimes be exposed to negatives ...and women tend to be the target more than men”. (I5F)

This concern about female gamers and esports athletes being the target of both covert and overt harassment due to their sex was mentioned in some way by all females interviewed. One female, an esports athlete (Mi14F) explained that in tournaments or casual esports it was second degree commenters on game streams “...[which] are normally the ones where sexism occurs...a lot of obvious stuff. I’d rather it be overt ... then I can ignore it or tell them to get stuffed...I always go into group situations thinking the best of people until they prove me wrong”. Stakeholder Mi12F and Mi14F both played in women’s esports leagues where they explained the community was very supportive and inclusive, but that these competitions often attracted trolls and sexist comments on Twitch streams. However, because these were organised tournaments, sexist comments or toxic behaviour were dealt with by managers and moderators. A casual female gamer (Mi9F) suggested that “...having more girl gamers stream so that there are more female role models would help to challenge stereotypes”. Stakeholder I5F reflected on the fact that the gaming industry and esports were so new that there was a lot to be done to get the sort of recognition and respect that women’s (traditional) sports were starting to get. She explained:

“Women tend to be the target more than men...they are an easy target. There are fewer females playing competitive games and the perception is women are not as good as men, ... [and that] women also [were] not initially involved in the development of video games. Men created games that appealed to other men...women didn't see themselves in games...but with more women involved in content change, women are being represented in a more balanced way...but the competitive space will be the last place that even representation occurs”. (I5F)

The stories of these women represent some of the biggest concerns in competitive esports: *toxic sexist behaviour*. While most stakeholders downplayed the negative behaviours as being few and far between, or being dealt with through reporting and banning processes, this is still a concern that warrants immediate and ongoing consideration. Given that toxic behaviour seems to occur mostly in the wild in non-competitive casual esports spaces, a case can be made for increased opportunities for involvement in organised esports tournaments and events at industry, community and school levels to support positive behaviours through inculcated and reinforced codes of conduct that can ameliorate the toxicity found in the wild west of casual esports.

Interestingly, while Stakeholder Mi8M initially said that negative behaviour had to be taken with a grain of salt, when he was asked about any concerns he had about the esports/gaming environment he also described a serious incident where a friend experienced harassment that crossed the line between acceptable and unacceptable, and transcended in-game and out-game environments:

“...A friend experienced bad bullying and harassment that was occurring in game and IRL with friends at school. My friend ended up moving schools because of the harassment. Friendship issues played out in Discord and exclusion occurred between friendship groups”. (Mi8M)

This incident was one of only a handful described by stakeholders, with the majority stating that the perception of extreme and toxic behaviours was not as bad as the media reports, however this example highlights a major concern about how these sorts of incidents can be managed. Further, it is worth noting again that the incident described by Stakeholder Mi8M above happened in open

gameplay and not as part of any organised esports tournament where expectations and codes of conduct are reinforced, and monitoring of behaviour by moderators occurs. This distinction is important, as schools esports leagues are closed systems where conduct is monitored closely. After describing this incident, he went on to suggest that “...online safety education needed to support better conflict resolution and resilience”. The challenge for players entering this faceless environment of *open gameplay* is that the social norms are often unwritten, not monitored in-game, or unknown. Describing his own gaming experiences, Stakeholder I1M suggested that:

“...for gaming-endemic players a lot of social norms and how you communicate online was just naturally self-defined because there were no rules, no guidance, no schools introduced us to how you should behave online”. (I1M)

The positive role that schools and the eSafety Commission can play here is emerging. Flow-on from other traditional sports is also potentially important, as they seek to address racism, sexism and homophobia in those contexts. Concerns about toxic and sexist behaviour/communication in esports need to be addressed and children entering the online spaces where esports and gaming play out need guidance and sets of expectations and codes of conduct to limit this kind of damaging behaviour. Additionally, industry and community/school-based organisations and structures can better support these players to develop positive attitudes and resilience to the high stakes world of casual and competitive esports. However, this will require an increase in focus on this aspect, as one teacher and community esports tournament organiser (Mi13M) explained: “...there are not many formal/structured organisations developing or offering esports competitions at a community level”.

Community and Schools

Concerns at the intermediate level of communities and schools were largely related to issues of infrastructure and cost, as well as organisational rules, policies and systems that created barriers around firewalls, appropriate gaming equipment, IT support and staffing. A key finding is that schools and councils needed a dedicated and knowledgeable champion who could carry the esports torch and provide the passion, connection and mentorship to sustainably maintain esports long term. The popularity of esports and gaming in youth culture is undeniable, and a concern raised is that while many see the value of being involved and engaging children and adolescents in this area, that there is little done to sustain the infrastructure, and that once organisations have ‘cashed in’ on the popularity of esports, that this will not continue into the future. Stakeholder Mi13M suggested that:

“...Competitions or organisations seem to come and go rather quickly, possibly in relation to their funding: which in turn raises questions about the motivations for offering events and competitions at the community level, perhaps motivated by aspirations of ‘cashing in’ on the esports audience”. (Mi13M)

Each of the teachers interviewed described concerns and challenges related to how their schools (across all schooling sectors) support esports as part of the curriculum, or as a co-curricular activity. The curriculum head of sport in one school (Mi1M) explained that the running of esports added costs to the administration and staffing, with the expenses involved in providing this additional

staffing and time outside of the school curriculum “...*potentially diluted existing [traditional] co-curricular options*”. Firewall access was considered a challenge for many schools given the existing blocks on social media and other online material. This had particular implications for communication tools used alongside esports such as Discord or Twitch. While Discord was mostly seen as a positive tool that could be used to better regulate behaviour and support in-game communication, Twitch (an app used for livestreaming content) was viewed as an unregulated space where some of the more toxic behaviour was often seen. One teacher (Mi7M) explained why platforms such as Twitch was a concern:

“...A lot of the companies are changing what kids can say. Some companies like Twitch for instance (even though they are just a streaming platform) instead of saying we are going to do a ‘safe for kids’ and ‘not safe for kids’, they have just cut it out and it is just open slather now ... and that has actually made it really difficult for me to teach using that platform now...that is the issue with these kinds of esports platforms”. (Mi7M)

The head of digital technology at one school (Mi3M) highlighted concerns that any access and organisation of esports would need to align with the sector guidelines and rules. A broader concern that affects schools and community organisations is the barrier of distance and the globally poor internet speeds and connections experienced across Australia. The issues around ping and associated latency means that Australian esports athletes cannot compete globally. As Stakeholder 15F stated: “...*these speeds and infrastructure are essential to be able to play competitively on the global stage: but because of Australia’s distance, players who rise up the ranks often leave Australia to play overseas*”.

While these concerns pose challenges to organisations such as local councils, community organisations and schools in particular, stakeholders at this level were finding ways to continue to run esports as part of their obligation to youth in the community, or in response to student voice about a desire to play esports for their school. A balance needs to be struck whereby limitations on technology and access to the internet are weighed against the need to support grassroots esports competitions and curriculum that could play a part in fostering strong positive behaviours and developing 21st Century skills for future employment of children and adolescents playing esports at all levels.

Industry

Esports suffers from many of the same concerns plaguing the broader gaming community: that it is perceived generally to be an anti-social pastime; that it is only for pre-pubescent boys; that it breeds aggression and negative behaviours; that it is a gateway to gambling; and that it is an addiction that interferes with social connection, healthy lifestyle, and engagement with learning. Also, there are challenges around the inherent complexity of the esports ecosystem as opposed to traditional sport structures, so that any recognition of esports as a sport presents a double-edged sword with opportunities (e.g., Recognition as athletes with associated rights) and challenges (e.g., Sports-based gambling) for children, industry and the whole esports ecosystem in Australia.

Stakeholders expressed concerns at the industry level around the addictive nature of gaming with one teacher stating his concern about “...*particularly gaming addiction. We have had some issues in the past with this, so we need to get it right*”. One esports player (Mi8M) defined addiction as

“...when you are not able to control your own usage: not taking care of yourself, sleeping well, eating well, when you are shutting out everyone from your life”. He then described how gaming addiction is often assumed: when gamers set themselves a specific training goal, or focus to grinding to get to a higher level or refine some skills in-game. He explained:

“...A lot of people have symptoms of addiction – for example some might be working towards a goal and so are focused on achieving this and then move away once they have achieved the goal- that is why it is good to be surrounded by a team who can pull you up and say ‘step away’”. (Mi8M)

This reframing of the intense focus and drive that many esports athletes need to be able to grind and rank in individualised competitive gaming replicates the same focus we see in professional (and amateur) athletes in traditional sports who go through intense and intensive periods of focus on their craft to take their gameplay to the next level. This adds nuance to the blanket concern about gaming addiction and creates a grey area where it can be difficult to separate addiction from training for esports athletes, and players trying to improve their skills.

One parent (Mi6M) also raised concerns about his son being exposed to gambling influences and sexualised content or pornography, as well as concerns about computer viruses being spread: “...there are games in the wild that might have viruses themselves, that incorporate porn, or sexualisation of games...it can move through Whatsapp just like it moved around the playgrounds”. An esports broadcaster (I7M) suggested that a lot of the negatives are overexaggerated:

“...it is not as bad as people make it out to be...a lot of it can be mitigated like...if you have a young person gaming, keep tabs on them and that prevents any of the bad things from happening...kids are pretty savvy; they know the do’s and don’ts of online behaviour”. (I7M)

He went on to restate: “...there are negatives, but they are quite small in the scheme of things and I think governments or whoever it might be can play a part”. Concerns about gambling and sexualised content were not raised by many stakeholders, but still need to be a strongly considered aspect of the esports industry as part of the wider gaming community. Even a small concern in this space requires careful attention in the areas of governance and any codes of conduct. The notion that kids are savvy about their online behaviour, suggests that it is the adults who perhaps are projecting their inadequacies online. Indeed, evidence from the eSafety commission would suggest that young people are quite knowledgeable now compared to even five years ago in regard to their own online safety.

The inherent complexity of the esports landscape, with a plethora of different games across various genres, all managed by individual developers/publishers highlighted some concerns that stakeholders had at the industry level. Stakeholder Ma1M explained that:

“...esports is disparate ... with publishers producing games across genres, and games changing all the time as opposed to traditional sport...there is an inherent

conflict of interest between IP owners and competition runners with tension between publishers and users”. (Ma1M)

He went on to state that beyond the challenge of this conflict between the interests of publishers and players, that a further concern creating possible fractures in the industry was the “...challenges around control of the boundaries between the competition/gamespaces and the out-game or external spaces (Twitch/Discord etc.) which are beyond control of competition organisers/publishers”. This reflects some of the concerns raised by players and teachers about the kinds of toxic behaviour that can play out *alongside* esports competition on communication platforms and apps such as Twitch. It is clear that there are concerns at all levels of the esports ecosystem, and that these concerns need to be carefully considered especially when children and adolescents are engaging with esports in the wild west of casual gaming spaces in particular. The symbiotic nature of communication and streaming platforms such as Discord or Twitch present a unique challenge to community and schools at the intermediate level of esports engagement as these provide opportunities for positive communication, behaviour and learning, while also providing an unregulated space where some of the more toxic behaviours raise their ugly heads. Concerns about the disparate nature of the esports industry is a difficult problem to solve, and it may require time to resolve, with governments needing to be involved, but with the challenge of working across global boundaries and online spaces this is a wicked problem needing complex consideration. What is clear is that despite the concerns raised by stakeholders in this research, there is a desire to support esports at all levels of the ecosystem and to work together to create a safe, inclusive and positive space for children.



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Stakeholders were asked to specifically consider Codes of Conduct in esports relative to schools, the community and esports groups/organisations.

SUMMARY: CODES OF CONDUCT

- *It is not an easy task to determine a unified Code of Conduct for all esports*
- *Players initially evolved their own ways of playing outside of adult role models and guidance*
- *Best to consider a game-by-game approach to Codes of Conduct as they are specific*
- *Most employ overarching/underpinning values of sportsmanship, respect, fair play and integrity, but there is a need for early education*
- *Setting the standards is complex*
- *Schools can play a positive part as they bring their values to play and to be upheld when students represent the school in esports*
- *There is a role for the eSafety Commission around the promotion of child -safe esports environments; assisting the general public to demystify gaming and supporting respectful play*
- *Community leagues combine both competition rules with community standards e.g Council values of citizenship; University codes of acceptable behaviour*
- *High School leagues have the potential to influence up the chain through the flow-on effect of their rules, and schools' values and standards.*

Codes of Conduct (CoCs) refer to a suite/set of rules which outline the norms and acceptable practices and responsibilities of an individual or group. CoCs can also refer to the acceptable standards, principles and moral and ethical positions under which an organisation operates, and against which individuals are held to account.

"...there is an expectation... you know what sportsmanship is about... esports is no different to other sports". (I1M)

The Problem

At first glance, this would seem a relatively easy task: to arrive at an agreed-upon, set of acceptable esports behaviours and conduct. Games need rules to play: such as no cheating, or no harassment and abuse: but as is evident from the findings regarding barriers and enablers of governance, this is a fragmented eco-system, which has arisen rapidly, involves high stakes rankings and is without any overarching governance structure. As this stakeholder involved in high school esports (I1M) explained,

"...All the online behaviours right now have happened because all the kids are playing outside of role models and guidance". (I1M)

This “in the wild” approach to playing, means that until now “...social norms [around play/conduct] have evolved without adults” and that therefore,

“...to come up with unified codes of conduct – [we] need to consider that it is a game-by-game perspective - each game has a different type of community and there is a need to understand [their] protocols and spaces”. (I1M)

Each game, such as League of Legends, or Rocket League when played casually with friends or competitively under tournament conditions, has a “rule/code book” which outlines how it is to be played, and how players are to conduct themselves on the field/in-game. Fundamentals such as respect for other players, and good sportsmanship, no cheating are assumed, but not always adhered to, as with any sport. Recently, such integrity concerns as match-fixing, doping and gambling, similar to traditional sports have also arisen and it is these, along with conduct issues such as toxicity and harassment and abuse that CoCs aim to deal with.

As the parent of a 14 yr old boy who is a keen gamer (Mi6M) explained, there are complex rules of engagement, and unwritten social rules, depending on who you are playing and under what circumstances: revealing, in spite of his son “knowing” the right thing to do:

*“...I think he does cheat! ...He ‘mods’ the bejesus out of the games...but then, there is community regulation: when they [friends] agree to turn the mods off and play a Vanilla Version to accommodate someone else with lower skills”.
(Mi6M)*

He further explained that his son watches YouTubers [sic]: to learn “...what is acceptable; what things you can do [legitimately or otherwise]... but[asks] Where are the limitations? Who determines the standards?...” Similarly, one CEO (I1M) acknowledged that whilst “...a unified [approach] is preferred”... he queried: “How do we get to a unified place? How do you show respect [in the game]?”... and “Where is the line? Where should it be drawn?”. He finally reflected:

“...We are just not there yet”. (I1M)

Setting the Standards

...It’s about showing kids how to behave, but also how to deal with things that come at them sometimes... If we just ban everything: ban social media, ban internet, ban games... that is not going to help them learn how to live... because it’s just a matter of fact these days. (I1M)

Industry

At the industry level, one stakeholder closely involved with publishers (Ma1M), queried the expectations of their members, but noted that different publishers had different codes of conduct (CoCs) related to their games, but which were “...reflecting an overarching code”. Presumably this referred to the overarching notions of sportsmanship, integrity and fair play. He posed the question though, regarding whose responsibility it was to ensure teams and players had a level of awareness, especially as the “...specificity comes at the game level”.

At the heart of this issue in determining CoCs, lies the differences in the esports games; but also, differences and complexities arising from the distinctions between the types of players and how the genre or activity is conceptualised across the spectrum: “...casual versus professional ...gamer versus (e)athlete ...gaming versus esports... casual versus organised... game versus sport” (Ma1M).

The casual 14 yr old casual gamer previously mentioned, highlights this difference: he knows the “rules” (of play), and knows right from wrong (conduct re cheating and when to play vanilla versions); but seeks opportunities to learn how to ‘mod’ the games for gameplay advantage. As someone interested in being employed in the content developer scene in the future, learning how to legitimately modify gameplay, may stand him in good stead.

The industry stakeholder (Ma1M) further commented there were

“...unwritten expectations for code of conduct in general traditional sports, and gaming or esports, ...but as players move up and into competitions and higher levels towards pro play... these codes become more important/visible”. (Ma1M)

As this next stakeholder, an active gamer, content developer, and media presenter (I5F) also noted: “...Pro players are becoming the role models for gamers and content creators in the gaming/esports spaces” (I5F).

At this level, there would appear to be some need for cross-dialogue regarding responsibility between publishers, tournament organisers, content developers, pro players and team managers.

The stakeholder further noted that some CoCs could apply to the industry as a whole, that even though the three biggest genres [First Person Shooter (FPS); Fighter; & MOBAS (Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas)] are “wildly different...conduct rules would apply...

“...such as being respectful; not targeting others specifically; venting without harassment [which also relates to being online generally]”. (I5F)

She further noted that “...Live streaming and recording have made it easier to have evidence now: [of poor conduct/behaviour] [with] chat logs; video of play... but commented that “...Twitch, in spite of having guidelines, was a difficult space to control what people are putting out there “.

Making the analogy to the film industry, she stated:

“...we are still in the silent movie era of gaming... [it is] still so new - [we are]

grappling with how we keep the space safe”. (I5F)

With regard to whose responsibility it is for developing and monitoring conduct, she stated: “...*the publisher of the game itself... there is no one organisation*”. The lack of any overarching organisation is raised constantly in relation to governance of esports, and whilst codes of conduct have been developed to enable and facilitate high level competition/play, it remains a question of *who is actually setting the standards*.

Following the eco-system tiers, this stakeholder (I5F) explained that “*esports tournaments are at the behest of publishers: who have control...*” but noted that “...*some games have more toxicity [e.g., Counter Strike] ... [so it was] up to the publisher to ensure the developer has the tools to report ...and action is taken quickly*”. In terms for moving forward, this stakeholder suggested the following approaches: *[we need]*

- 1) broader social acceptance of video games - take them to the mainstream and*
- 2) more resources to make sure they are safe and harassment free*

She specifically mentioned the role of “cheating software” *[we are] working against it constantly...it is ruining the game”:*

“...we need good systems in place to report and identify toxic behaviour... [this is] part of the development of the game now”. (I5F)

It would seem there is a symbiotic relationship here: publishers, content developers, tournament operators all need and require CoCs to ensure a safe and legally accountable framework for gameplay. This has implications for community groups, schools and grassroots players who are just embarking on the esports journey, and need to learn to operate within such codes, especially as they climb the rankings.

“...What is appropriate behaviour is clear at the primary school level- ...but we need to look at ways of cultivating positive behaviours in games”. (I5F)

This stakeholder was constantly called upon by parents about bad language/negative behaviours in gaming, and commented: “*it is natural to vent... but considering the context is important – if it is aggression targeted at someone, that is different...but*”:

“...it is important to help build understanding about positive behaviours at the grassroots level”. (I5F)

What is evident is that esports is at the cross-roads: esports has grown fast and CoCs have developed on the run. The time is ripe for really engaging with all stakeholders to review and determine CoCs relevant to the new maturity of the industry, and especially to inform and support school leagues and players who enter at the grassroots levels. The role of the eSafety Commission

here could be significant in the promotion of safe esports environments, and dissemination of key messages to assist the general public in understanding gaming.

“...we need people to understand video games, ...[the] role of education is critical/important... [we] need to normalise the space”. (15F)

At the legal end of the industry spectrum, the stakeholder who operates in this space (Ma2M) decreed that the publishers are at the centre of the esports eco-system, and “*are the true controlling bodies*” but raised a caveat:

“...they are not set up to have Codes of Conduct as core business: ...they are there to promote and sell video games”. (Ma2M)

This cold harsh reality highlights the complexity of setting standards for the industry and players. He notes that publishers “*are concerned with their reputation...*” so will come to the table for discussions but:

“...there is so much competition between publishers ...[I] doubt you will ever get a common voice”. (Ma2M)

He further comments that “*the professional level of integrity is being applied to amateurs... it is a flawed model... [so] best to do it by game.*” This affirms the strategy of having CoCs relative to the specific game, rather than one unified set of behaviours for all esports. On the related topic of contracts, he stated that as CoCs “*...may not be directly in their [players] contract... we [specifically] wrote integrity clauses into players’ contracts (League of Legends, Oceania).*” This indicates the relatively recent industry maturity in relation to expectations of player behaviour, something that all traditional sports already have in place.

Given that probably now every publisher has such issues as toxic behaviours, doping, and gambling in their competition remit, it raises the concern for players around the bigger issues of integrity, where there is an “*asymmetry of power*” between the publishers and watchdogs such as the Integrity Commission, which may not have the resources for covering all esports. Stakeholder Ma2M noted players can also make use of “*the court of public opinion...[to] use Twitch and social media... [where] players can unionise or come together to share how they are being treated*”. Using social media and Twitch as leverage puts pressure on publishers as they want to protect their reputation, potentially leading to positive change insofar as players rights and responsibilities are concerned.

This stakeholder also drew attention to the need for *early education around integrity issues*: noting that there *is* a level of integrity in esports, and a *clear role for the grassroots levels of esports to educate players and their communities*. This raises the notion of whether or not CoCs should or need to be both simultaneously: top down (in terms of the rules of specific game play) and bottom up (in terms of the conduct online and in play/dealings with others).

This is the cross-roads esports is now at regarding CoCs: in the past, players have developed their own codes and social norms in the whirlwind of incredible esports' growth, largely without adults' guidance, as noted by stakeholder I1M at the beginning of this section. Now, we need to take stock as the shift from casual play to professional status has occurred relatively quickly and recently, and with the roll out of high school leagues, we need to make use of the online e-safety education that these new players are bringing to the games through their schools' and communities codes of conduct/behaviour when employed at the competition/leagues level. It is these young people who will contribute to the new directions and new standards of conduct for the industry as a whole. But that will require consideration of the powers in play: the publishers; and the lack of any coherent players' association/union which can support them as a whole.

Community

Codes of Conduct (CoCs) at the Community level represent an amalgam of both rules and codes required at the competition level, as set out by publishers specific to their games, along with those required by tournament operators, and the community organisations they align with.

As a stakeholder aligned with a local council (I4M) reported:

"...Players show a level of respect for each other regardless of age or ability... There are unspoken rules around respecting your competitors ...and stakeholders are encouraged to develop conversation skills and social skills by talking to their teammates and competitors before the game and during break times where food and drinks are provided". (I4M)

This level of social interaction and conduct in play, underpins the rationale for playing esports at the community level: it builds connectedness, belonging and community and provides safe spaces for playing socially, casually or competitively. He further notes that CoCs are *"rules managed by the council... and all stakeholders are required to fill out an agreement around behaviour and expectations while involved in esports tournaments and attendance on council property."* The team leaders are also held accountable *"to enforce the in-game expectations, which are based around META HSEL (META High School Esports League) expectations and flow from players involvement in these organised competitions"*.

Here we see the dominance hierarchy of the ecosystem at work. Councils have their own behavioural expectations, based on community standards of civil relationships and citizenry: sociable behaviours and respect of self and others, including property. The players operate in teams and have leaders, who enforce the CoCs and behavioural agreements, as established, which have been derived from the high schools' league competition program, which in turn employs those CoCs enmeshed with the publishers' specific games and the professional circuits. Both top down and bottom-up forces for positive behaviours and play are in operation at this community level.

At the stakeholder level of a community club associated with a University (I2M), the same dual forces apply: within and without the game; from the grassroots high school players who bring their school values with them, to those who have played in the high school leagues, to the larger university context of ethical conduct.

“... [we have] values like “uphold the integrity of [the university] ... [which are] reflected in the high school kids who come [to university] ... because they already have the values from school... It creates a positive space”. (I2M)

Specific to University esports clubs, is that it is embedded within another ecosystem: that of the University Sports clubs/sector, which has specific guidelines and protocols for playing sport under their banner. Like any university-run sport, if there is an incident, they:

“have to put in an incident report.... sometimes a simple chat is enough; ...elected leaders have to step up to “stop cheating ”; ... to uphold the integrity of the club; and report up the chain [to Uni Sport] [which] could lead to expulsion of the player”. (I2M)

They also have dedicated people in the university hierarchy who handle the protocols and guidelines for reporting incidents and poor behaviour/conduct. This stakeholder however, reiterated that incidents are few and far between, and suggested that *“an esports body for the promotion of positive behaviours would help guide behaviour in-game and in comms [sic]”*. Importantly, he commented that the players themselves are making contributions to positive behaviours:

“...the foundations of positive esports behaviours are beginning to flow on from players involved in high school esports competitions and programs”. (I2M)

This positive position means that the grassroots players are filtering up their values of sportsmanship/conduct learnt from school and presumably also their knowledge of online safety, and are making a significant contribution to the wellbeing and safety of esports in general at this level. This represents a shift in stereotype: most gamers are not the anti-social individuals, playing alone in darkened rooms on a couch, with no social interactions, and no community capacity many adults think them to be. They behave like other athletes and sportspeople: operating within a values system which is shaped by the communities they engage with.

High school gamers then, under leadership and supervision of teachers and school leadership, are beginning to shape the playing context for everyone through involvement in such organisations as the META High School esports League and their competition codes of conduct. The importance of this cannot nor should not be underestimated. Listening to youth, valuing their voice is well embedded in education contexts, and more recently with broader social and civic settings, such as local government which often has youth councils or youth brains trusts/consultative groups as part of their structures for community consultation. Most gamers are young. Esports is an industry for young players, with fast reaction times, and high level cognitive and strategic capabilities. They will become the employees and employers in the future. Their understanding of codes of conduct matter, and their ability to contribute to change, even as catalysts for change, are exciting, especially if they are bringing forward their values and ethics from school programs to community leagues.

Schools

This section reports across two levels: how external stakeholders view the role of schools and schools' leagues in developing and supporting CoCs for positive behaviours, and how stakeholders from the different schooling sectors have responded from within their own contexts.

External Stakeholder Perspectives

Regarding external views of the role of schools in developing Codes of Conduct (CoCs) and enacting those derived from further up the eco-system, such as publishers' codes specific to the games, Stakeholder I1M, noted that:

“...schools leagues can... [they] do it every day; little bit up front; penalising when they step out of line... but there is a discord between public versus private language... high schools can have an impact on behaviour”. (I1M)

He further commented that bringing esports into schools “*can provide the opportunity to build structure and provide the role models for how to behave...to help overcome toxicity*”. Matchmaking, the process of putting players randomly together to play, was an issue, as it had had “*zero repercussions for negative behaviours.... accountability is non-existent*”. When players know each other, they have greater accountability and responsibility to each other and the team, compared with playing with people you do not know.

Stakeholder Ma2M considered the role of schools from an industry perspective and was very clear:

“...Schools should be clear on expectations in game and out of game... If playing is part of the formal school offering... then anytime they represent the school, ... identify the guidelines, expectations [for] casual players versus esports players [structured competition] ...and what happens if I don't comply?”. (Ma2M)

He particularly noted when casual play moves to competition play: the importance of knowing the expectations: If a child is suspended from school sport, they are probably suspended from everything, but if they are suspended from an esports *game*, what does that mean? Can they play a different *game*, in the same way school *sports* are all different: hockey; football, soccer? This is part of the challenge of where esports are placed in schools: as general co-curricular activities alongside the likes of music, chess, and drama, or in the Sports' faculty: alongside football and soccer operating under the leadership of a sports master/captain.

A critical point aligned with schools as settings for esports, and CoCs, concerns child safety. The role of the eSafety Commission here is relevant, and the educative work done to date in schools concerning online safety and behaviour has set a strong foundation concerning online behaviour, and addressing risks, but this now needs contextualising for the esports context and children playing organised online gaming activities in school or after school, using school equipment, under teacher leadership and supervision. The stakeholder involved with legal aspects of esports (Ma2M) reflected that he thought schools were exemplary in handling CoCs:

“... [schools are] doing it well ... and [we] can use high schools to set the standards of behaviour... other levels above should at least have these behaviours”. (Ma2M)

Stakeholder I7M particularly noted the role of schools, and the META league in collaborating across their own rules and CoCs to build:

a digital community with common values and understandings:

“...META rules and high school rules work together...it’s on the schools and teachers to have their own rules and expectations, just like sports teams...they would all have their own rules and values around ...you know ...participation, rights and things like that...so it’s layers going down from each stakeholder ...Each school has its own cultural values and there is no reason why they can’t enforce it at their own level”. (I7M)

and sporting clubs of the future.

“... That is the same as grassroots sport: it’s the same thing...we talk about what does the club of the future look like: esports is leading the way on that front... building digital communities, communication, team-own branding”. (I7M)

Collectively, external stakeholders all saw the value in having esports in schools for the contributions made to the sports as a whole, and particularly in regard to developing positive behaviours and CoCs in-game and out of game, for now and into the future. This is also a critical moment in the development of esports within schools, for schools can use esports to their advantage as well. Recognising that they can connect with students who have been reluctant to become involved in sporting codes, or co-curricular events generally, feeds into their collective missions and visions as inclusive organisations, supporting the wellbeing of all students.

School Sector Stakeholder Perspectives

According to each of the stakeholders interviewed across three schooling sectors [viz, Department for Education; Catholic Education and Independent schools] ...schools are very clear that any venture into esports, either casually or competitively, must be embedded in their own school’s policies: re online and offline behaviour. Stakeholder Mi1M, a school sports leader explicitly stated:

“...students are held to a high standard of conduct whenever...”. (Mi1M)

This was reiterated by each school, tailoring what that ‘high standard’ meant in relation to their own contexts. This Stakeholder (Mi1M) for example noted that *“we would need a template ...and to align it with the school’s and the [sector’s] policies more broadly”*. Codes of Conduct espoused at this

school, which is just venturing into esports for middle school-aged students as a co-curricular activity, related to game specific behaviours employed further up the eco-system:

“...META guidelines are used...[we] follow META’s acceptable behaviours...META’s HSEL rules are used to reinforce and encourage [positive] behaviour”. (Mi1M)

Because students are playing from home in online spaces, however, there is a “*major difficulty in monitoring/recording/responding to negative behaviours/bullying...so we are reliant on player reporting*”. The onus at this school is on educating the players themselves to self-regulate and report code of conduct/negative behaviour issues: “*they report via email and have to provide evidence*”. This is setting them up for self-management and a reporting hierarchy to call out bad/poor/inappropriate behaviour, *using evidence*, aligned with some recognition and discussion of “*the cultures of tolerance and intolerance within games*”. Part of this school’s philosophy in regard to establishing *positive* esports behaviours, and calling out negative acts online draws strongly from their other sporting codes:

“...How did we change vilification [in football]? ...Stand up and applaud [the calling out of racism] ... [We] ...Have to make it OK for kids to say they are offended [by the behaviour] ... [and] get rid of 'dobbing'”. (Mi1M)

This school supports esports within the “sports faculty” and calls upon a teacher with knowledge in digital/technology to be in charge of this specific co-curricular activity. Having two individuals from different perspectives ensure that the CoCs reflect both on and offline positive behaviours and reflect the broader culture and values of the school. In this way, grassroots players are being educated and supported in ways of gaming/playing which have not necessarily been afforded to previous generations of gamers, and reflect the industry notions previously stated: of the impact that schools are having on play and conduct.

At a second school, which was completely different in terms of size, scope, mission, and system to the one above, the Principal (Mi4M) and the “esports” teacher (Mi5M) were interviewed, and they established that their CoC was situated in the context of a written agreement with students and parents concerning expectations for those involved. This was a specialist independent school with a small number of students, many of whom had left other schools because of victimisation or learning concerns:

“...KPIs [were set] re engagement with academic work; not falling behind; minimising attendance issues...”. (Mi4M)

The attendance issue was resolved [through engagement with esports] to such an extent, that they no longer needed a “number”: each case was now concerned with their *connection* to school, and *how they have improved their own attendance* rather than simply being there. On a more pragmatic playing level, they stated:

"...META have their own CoC ...and we have our own (values), ... so we [our values] are compliant with META guidelines". (Mi4M; Mi5M)

When asked about any issues and the process for dealing with them, the response was articulated within their values and behavioural and academic codes:

"... [we've] Never dealt with any inappropriate dealings with other students; ... [issues are] mainly related to academic tasks: [they] can't return to esports until they have been met; ... every student has a mentor teacher; ... [and] we have a daily briefing; set tasks". (Mi5M)

This interview (over Zoom) took place in the room where the students were actively engaged in esports competition in the background, and at one point the staff turned to them and asked:

Q: With casual gaming...do you uphold our school values?? ... A: (anonymously from the other side of the room (unseen): yes, just the same". (Mi4M; Mi5M)

Q: Do you banter more? ...A: (anonymously) "there is a difference since starting the esports academy". (Mi4M; Mi5M)

The stakeholders explained "this difference":

"We are building skillsets/sports qualities... Most of these students have been on the receiving end of bullying/harassment when they come to us, so don't engage in 'bullying/harassment as a rule". (Mi5M)

As an "academy", they have training sessions; a training plan; a focus on technical issues; and how to compete; how to regulate; and what makes a healthy gamer. They have also set up a school Discord server the students can use, and the teacher encourages its use outside of school, acting as the moderator, monitoring chat and, noting "it is used a lot outside of school!". This school had sought out and won a grant to purchase high-quality, high-performance gaming computers, so they could set up a space, where the whole school community can actually engage with them and watch them perform. They have adopted an entrepreneurial approach by establishing an "academy" for esports. They wanted the students to be able to play: "as a meaningful learning tool" and have constructed both an academic curriculum and a wellbeing and behavioural codes directly around it, to develop a "healthy gaming" landscape, and in doing so, have established a:

"Curriculum for life as well as a curriculum for learning, ... they have to live before they can learn". (Mi5M)

This philosophy extends to the language used: e.g. “X is a talented teammate”, and to building collegiality ... and calling out all poor behaviour, including esports. Their approach to CoCs, is to maximise every opportunity as a teaching moment, for the benefit of their students.

The Discord server was raised by others as being highly desirable to facilitate communications but the “red tape” around access through their school’s/sector’s safety policies and internet infrastructure and firewalls presented significant barriers to its use. Stakeholder I5F specifically commented on the benefits of Discord for the community and the individual: “Discord has been wonderful in building a positive community - when you join you are assigned a role and there is a hierarchy and all can play a role in moderating the space... people are so polite and friendly and kind: been one of the most positive spaces to meet like-minded people”. It would seem relevant to consider how this tool, or a modified/adapted version could work for schools in the esports space: as a teaching tool, where students can learn the roles of moderators and take on the responsibility of overtly enacting CoCs in a live space.

Another stakeholder who is a digital technologies coordinator and teacher (Mi7M) interviewed from a third school setting was also very clear that any CoCs related to esports reflected:

“... [their] own school ethos... where we want kids to be respectful ... to do the best they can... and be a representative of our school and our community”.
(Mi7M)

He was realistic however, to understand that what happens outside in the casual gaming community is different:

“...the code of conduct at school would be a lot stricter than community, ... the way that they can run with their sports and stuff would be very different... so you have a generalised sexism, racism unfortunately in the community”. (Mi7M)

And whilst he was unable to control that (outside), as a teacher, when he witnessed that at school, he was able to bring it up instantly as the “school is a closed environment... we can control it more ... and none of that gets across”. He then commented that the CoCs associated with esports groups and organisations “were fantastic; and we had lots of posters around the room; talking about teamwork and friendship and focus and excellence”.

“...They were incredibly strict with everything... they would record every single game, texts, everything... and they didn’t even have warnings.... It was like... ‘nope. Bam! ... you’re out’ kind of thing... which is fantastic when there’s so many people who want to be doing that... holding a high standard is a great way to go about it”. (Mi7M)

For this school, the language of the games as presented on the posters, entered their behavioural codes: e.g., “Always check the bush”; “You are finished when you are done”; “Keep doing until you are proud”. This teacher was involved in digital/technology, had been a gamer in his youth and had

experience with an esports high school competitive team in 2019. He commented: *“Generally the esports competitions that exist [are] focussing around 16 or older”*.

“...my argument is that younger kids could have access and it would help for developing things like behaviour, looking at bullying, looking at team work, all that kind of stuff”. (Mi7M)

The fourth school setting involved two staff members (Mi10M; Mi11M) who had been there 7-10 years, who both had their own interest in gaming and esports. One approached the Principal initially, after hearing a talk about esports, and put together a case that positioned the school as entrepreneurial, to win some funding. They subsequently developed and aligned an esports course to the Year 11 SACE curriculum, and were approved to run a trial: two single lessons involved theory; and a double lesson involves a practical. They employ Google Classroom and are able to monitor students through that. They rely on the school’s cybersafety policies, which filter down from the sector head office to oversee their codes of behaviour. Most of their commentary around CoCs however, acknowledged that it was *“really up to the teachers”* and whilst they indicated that students *“lost it”* [became angry/upset] from time to time, especially when they lost a game, the conduct debrief was around:

“...what have we learnt... individually and as a team?... What was the turning point for the anger/rage... Why did you feel like that?”. (Mi10M)

The focus then was on what they could do: strategies to manage their stress and feelings: *“get a drink of water... do some push-ups”* and then link it to their own school values and policies. Stakeholder Mi10M noted that there was:

“... sheer enthusiasm” [for the esports course] ... and that students dived right in; they were excited, and showed no apprehension, unlike a traditional Design and Tech course”. (Mi10M)

Each of these schools could be presented as unique case studies in their own right: one was just starting to get involved, and was setting up in-house gaming/esports competitions, learning about CoCs along the way. Another had already had experience previously in the High Schools league, and drew on their CoCs. The other two were currently involved and were serious about their ongoing engagement, having invested heavily in the students and the technology. All indicated that they had reaped the benefits: that young people who were not involved or engaged in school life generally, or sporting life in particular, became involved and engaged; attendance changed/improved; positive behaviour was being discussed through the CoCs imposed on the games, but were encapsulated within the values and codes of the schools and the systems they operated in.

What was most evident from speaking with all of these teachers: was their enthusiasm and commitment, which filtered directly to the students. The power of role models like these in schools, supervising young people and teaching them, and guiding them with their gaming and managing responses to difficult situations, is setting up the next generation of players for success, but also is

ensuring that as future employees they will have significant skillsets derived from gaming and esports, and the CoCs which provide the standards to be held accountable to.

The Esports Governance Context

The section aims to provide insight into the general context around esports governance, at the Macro level including overarching esports organisations, publishers, intermediate level including league and school level and at the micro player level.

SUMMARY: CONTEXT OF ESPORTS GOVERNANCE

- *Existing governance structures do not appear to be meeting the needs of all esports stakeholders*
- *There is a need to define what is meant by governance through collective stakeholder voice and representation*
- *There are some stakeholders at all levels of the ecosystem who are keen to help shape and improve the ecosystem for the collective benefit of all stakeholders*
- *Buy in is critical from all stakeholders to progress esports governance agendas*
- *Governance is a necessary for a sustainable, cohesive esports industry*

The next sections will present findings related to the general context of esports governance organised under macro, intermediate and micro headings.

Macro Level

SUMMARY: GOVERNANCE AT THE MACRO LEVEL

- *There is currently no peak overarching body for esports, and existing governance structures and bodies are primarily self appointed*
- *Australia is currently not on publishers' radar due to its size, there is then a need for a collective voice, in discussions with publishers about governance*
- *Currently, there is minimal government involvement in progressing esports governance agendas, however, there is a role for a government body, such as the esafety commission to employ 'a light touch' in facilitating discussions about governance between publishers and other esports stakeholders*
- *Currently there equal and fair representation is not afforded to all esports stakeholders, yet sentiments from participants suggest strong support for all esports stakeholders should have the opportunity to be represented fairly.*

According to many stakeholders there is currently no governing esports body. As highlighted previously, many described the esports industry ecosystem as an industry which is fractured, young and has experienced rapid growth, with its governance structures reflecting these tumultuous beginnings. One stakeholder (ISM) suggested that "... esports structures around stakeholders haven't

been built”, whilst another expressed that “... Industry bodies "are just people who came together”. Another stakeholder’s response also reflected this viewpoint:

“...There is no peak body; no government influence... Closest thing in esports to a peak body is publishers who are propping up the entire ecosystem. They built the community but are not necessarily looking to be responsible for the risk in governing”. (I6M)

Other stakeholders suggest that the esports industry is not well understood, and that there is potential to better manage the industry, especially from the perspective of promoting and maintaining integrity. Many also noted that with so many esports, creating one set of rules and governance structures would be difficult.

“...With so many esports it is hard to create one set of rules and governance structures. Governments are only a part of it...OCE has many nations beyond Australia so how can national rules work”. (I7M)

The control publishers have across the esports industry continued to be a key recurring theme across stakeholder responses when discussing the general esports landscape and ecosystem. Esports was recognised by some stakeholders as being “... a business”. A number of stakeholders noted that Australia does not feature highly on publishers’ lists as its esports involvement is considered small scale due to Australia’s size, and as such publishers show little interest in engaging with Australian stakeholders, particularly regarding governance related matters. To help address this, a need for more dialogue and a stronger collective voice across the Australian esports setting was suggested, with some proposing a government body, such as the eSafety Commissioner “...could bridge the gap” (I7M), and facilitate discussions with publishers, providing an avenue for bringing publishers to the table:

“...[we] need someone at the government level to speak with someone at the publisher level - how to bring publishers to the discussion table”. (I1M)

Some stakeholders noted the need for government to exercise a “...light touch” to help work through some of the challenges that exist within the esports industry including integrity issues, child safety/protection, healthy gaming, gambling, and public policy issues. Failure to do so could result in publishers retreating:

“...If Govt tries to over-regulate, they would pull the plug... not worth the hassle”. (Ma2M)

The importance of esports associations who are positioned at the macro level to work together with government agencies in order to help protect vulnerable people was identified as a key priority as

part of this process. However, bringing publishers together in itself has the potential to be problematic, due to the competitive nature of the esports industry, and particularly between publishers as highlighted in the following responses:

“...There is competition amongst publishers...they want to protect their [patch]. There is no one voice = the industry is not well understood... lots of turf wars”.
(Ma1M)

Others suggested publishers do not necessarily need to be at the centre of the ecosystem, with all stakeholders at the various levels acknowledged as being critical for the sustainability and growth of esports:

“...Publishers don't need to be at centre of [the] ecosystem if community runs tournaments. We are all one gaming community (publishers managing esports and players and audience as key to ecosystem)”. (Mi8M)

Whilst stakeholders acknowledged that professional leagues are more easily governed in relation to integrity and who is managing competitions (Ma1M), a need for an independent players' association which forms part of the governance structures also was highlighted. As was a need for all stakeholders to have the opportunity to be represented fairly. Identifying other peak bodies that fairly represent the esports ecosystem or have an interest in doing so, along with more meaningful engagement across the esports community would help strengthen the ecosystem. However, any efforts to address these challenges at this macro level requires consideration of the extensive nature and size of the ecosystem:

“... there is a plethora of sports; a plethora of teams and organisers/organisations; and messaging and applications across all layers...”.
(Ma1M)

A number of stakeholders who represented the intermediate level, specifically those who aligned closely with leagues strongly supported an active role of the eSafety commission at the macro level in terms of providing education and guidance and in terms of managing more serious negative behaviours through their take down orders. There was a sense that there is currently self-appointed governance, which perhaps is indicative of the fractured nature of the industry. One stakeholder (Ma2M) highlighted the need to create buy in, to standardise and formalise approaches to governance, suggesting that promoting integrity could be the draw card:

“...You need to create buy-in if you are the controlling body for your esports- you want buy in into this integrity”. (Ma2M)

SUMMARY: AT THE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

- *There are current efforts to progress positive esports agendas for stakeholders, particularly young players and particularly within school settings within existing governance structures*
- *There is awareness and in some instances adoption of principles from associations positioned at the macro level, specifically the Australian Esports Association*
- *Organisations/stakeholders adhere to their [parent] organisation's governance structures and processes when responding to esports related breaches or incidents*
- *Depending on the nature of the incident, AESA is made aware and communicates with publishers with a ruling then decided*
- *Discussions highlighted various perspectives regarding the benefits of governments recognising esports as a sport, with players in other countries able to apply for athlete's visas given their country has officially recognised esports as a sport*
- *High School leagues, are one example of a league which is well managed, providing a safe esports environment for students to enjoy*

Some stakeholders at the intermediate level suggested that there were efforts to progressing esports agendas for the collective good and particularly for young players, but they stressed a need for publishers and stakeholders at the intermediate level to work more closely together. One teacher using esports in the classroom (Mi7M) outlined that the online space comprised different spaces and recognition of this was necessary when considering any governance related matters. Stakeholders at this intermediate level (including teachers, school leaders, council and community organisers, content creators, esports team managers and broadcast creators) also acknowledged that trying to achieve one overarching governance would be problematic, and that governance was largely enforced/managed by the publishers particularly as the agendas of publishers was primarily to make money:

"... [it is] Tricky to have one overarching governance - publishers are there to make money; to sell games". (Mi7M)

A number of stakeholders who represented esports leagues, also discussed other stakeholders who sit within the esports ecosystem, including journalists, and organisations at the macro level such as AESA and the Esports Integrity Commission (ESIC). Some noted that in addition to general set of rules and common sense, AESA principles filtered down to the leagues, and in the instance of this participant were encouraged and enforced within the league they represented. When unpacking a scenario of how governance can be enacted, one participant also explained that in the event of a breach or incident, AESA is made aware and communicates with publishers and a ruling is then decided. As part of a larger organisation, one participant noted the role, and need to adhere to their organisation's governance structures and processes when responding to esports related breaches or incidents.

Discussions regarding the recognition of esports as a sport and what implications this would have for esports as an industry, for its governance structures and for the player revealed a number of different perspectives. One stakeholder explained the benefits particularly for esports players who would be able to obtain athlete visas when travelling overseas. Stakeholders who represent the macro level shared that the High School leagues were well managed, providing a closed environment for students to enjoy the esports experiences in a safe manner.

Micro Level

SUMMARY: AT THE MICRO LEVEL

- *Schools have an important role to play in the governance of esports*
- *Schools were part of a league and offered esports within this structure*
- *Were required to adhere to governance structures of the school and of the governing sector/department*
- *Schools have to manage risks, including legal risks and child safety*
- *Schools have to consider varying attitudes towards esports, and the value of esports and gaming*
- *Schools take a holistic approach to esports, including student wellbeing, skill development and training*
- *Parents considered governance from the perspective of monitoring their child's gaming practices*
- *Players not typically considered the centre of the esports ecosystem, unless it is considered within the context of a tournament or competition*

Esports context at the micro level, and particularly at the school level revealed nuances of the school sites were also reflected in the way esports training and competitions were organised and managed.

Some stakeholders noted that schools have an important role to play in governance, and the META High School league is an example of a league which is playing an important part of that. Schools also needed to be aware of age restrictions of games which meant that teams were in most instances organised by year levels not ability/skill sets. Most schools who offered esports games were part of the META High School League and as such the games schools participated in were the games offered by META. Schools acknowledged that whilst they may be participating as part of a league, the governance structures of the school itself, along with governance at the sector/department level would be consulted and adhered to when participating and offering any esports related activities. Stakeholders highlighted a number of tensions and risks that needed to be considered and managed as part of offering esports to their students. These included concerns about legal risk, challenges associated with balancing existing restrictions in relation to students' online communication options whilst trying to shift staff and leadership's negative attitudes towards gaming.

The focus at the micro level included training sessions and plans, teaching students about healthy gaming practices, self-regulation and how to compete and the management of any technical issues. Schools also discussed various approaches to help ensure the safety of students when participating in esports, ranging from disabling comments, school controls, regular email communication and managing after school competitions. Stakeholders also highlighted governance considerations

related to technical provisions and managing discord servers to help ensure a positive esports gaming experience for their students.

From a parent perspective governance was discussed in relation to monitoring their child's gaming, however, one parent acknowledged "...that kids are good at hacking" (Mi6M), so can often bypass any controls. Whilst some stakeholders acknowledged that "... teams do play a small part in governance", (I7M) when discussing the player and how they are positioned within the esports ecosystem, perspectives varied. Some considered players to be quite powerless, particularly in terms of advocating for themselves.

"...The player is quite powerless in esports. It is based on IP law and legal rights ... nothing can happen without IP licences agreement... like World Series Cricket ... at a pure esports level, - unless they [players] are unionised/based on solidarity and common intents... they are viewed as the product not a partner... Experience of the players can be advocated through the court of public opinion. They will rush to social media and exert external pressures/influences". (Ma2M)

Whilst others suggested that players can be considered to be at the centre of the ecosystem, particularly in the context of a tournament or competition.

Esports Governance Context Summary

The need to develop governance structures whilst not a straightforward endeavour for the esports industry is considered important by the majority of stakeholders:

"...If you want to build something big then you need governance - governance is important in the space". (I5M)

Whilst the existing efforts of the esports industry to provide some level of governance, does not appear to be adequately meeting the needs of all esports stakeholders, there are identified opportunities and interest from diverse stakeholders who represent different levels of the industry to take an active role in shaping the ecosystem for the collective benefit of all stakeholders.

From all accounts, publishers by the very nature of what they bring to the esports ecosystem are central to progressing governance agendas. However, whilst not discounting their contribution, buy-in is critical from all stakeholders from grassroots esports programs to elite players, from schools, teams and leagues to casual gamers, and from stakeholders within the software, entertainment, gaming and gambling industries to government bodies. Defining governance through collective stakeholder voice and representation, achieving buy-in, particularly from publishers and aligning governance structures and processes to the needs of the stakeholders across the macro, intermediate and micro levels is a complex, but necessary undertaking to help ensure the growth trajectory for esports is one which is underpinned by cohesive, organised, sustainable and positive governance.

Barriers to Governance

This section outlines various barriers to governance which have been considered from various perspectives and reflect the diverse esports backgrounds and experiences of stakeholders.

SUMMARY: BARRIERS TO ESPORTS' GOVERNANCE

- *Maturity of the esports industry*
- *Disparate motivations, aspirations underpinning stakeholders' involvement in esports*
- *The 'wild west' of esports*
- *Stakeholders, locus of control and governance*
- *Esports not sport: more than just one game*
- *Publishers, power, intellectual property, and the music industry*
- *Geographic boundaries*

Maturity of the esports industry

When discussing barriers to governance, most stakeholders highlighted that esports is a relatively young but rapidly evolving and growing competition. Whilst the expansion and uptake of esports was considered exciting, and generated opportunities for various stakeholders, a number of stakeholders highlighted the extent and nature of esports growth within a relatively short period, particularly when compared to traditional sports, has impacted opportunities for developing considered and collective approaches to governance across the esports ecosystem.

"...Esports is so young... it's still a baby and traditional sports have had time to grow and develop over hundreds of years". (Mi7M)

Disparate motivations, aspirations and governance

The wide-ranging motivations and aspirations of stakeholders at the various levels also was noted as a barrier to governance, given that values and motives underpinning a stakeholder's involvement in esports could differ considerably. For example, one participant highlighted that typically "*... the core business [for publishers] is to develop, promote and sell games*" (Ma2M), whilst other stakeholders from the schooling sector explained a key motivation for schools who offered esports was to provide more inclusive offerings for their students and were keen to leverage esports as an avenue for engaging youth who may have disengaged from mainstream schooling (Mi4M; Mi5M). A challenge then exists for stakeholders to consider how to fairly and equitably incorporate the unique voices and needs of the various stakeholders.

'The wild west' of esports

The complex and nuanced nature of the esports ecosystem also gives rise to challenges in governance, particularly in relation to establishing governance structures and achieving buy-in from all stakeholders. A number of stakeholders made reference to the "wild west" when describing the esports governance context,

“...there is a bit of the wild west”. (Ma2M); “still the wild west”. (Ma1M)

Whilst the reference to the ‘wild west’ suggests a ‘lawlessness’ and a lack of cohesive governance structures within the esports industry ecosystem, acknowledgement of the issue can provide a catalyst for change, especially as the industry enters a more mature phase.

Stakeholders, locus of control and governance

Specific questions were raised by some stakeholders regarding the locus of control when referencing governance. One participant provided a useful swimming competition analogy,

“...In a swimming competition, who controls the competition? Who controls the water? Who controls the state of the pool?”. (Ma1M)

Applying this analogy to esports highlights some of the broader level and complex considerations such as control, regulation, responsibility, accountability and intellectual property, that would need to be addressed as part of any effort aiming to establish unified governance structures. Control as it is enacted within specific stakeholder groups also was mentioned when discussing governance and intellectual property. One stakeholder at the intermediate level (I2M) explained that larger publishers tend to have a stranglehold on intellectual property while smaller publishers have less control. This suggests that challenges associated with locus of control need to be considered across multiple layers, including within stakeholder groups, perhaps even before consideration of control across stakeholder groups can occur.

Esports not sport: More than just one game

With its many game offerings, the need to consider esports as comprising more than one sport was a strong sentiment expressed by many stakeholders.

“...Major concern over past 5 years is a lack of understanding of esports as comprising different, individual games”. (Ma2M)

When drawing comparisons with governance of traditional sports, stakeholders noted that any endeavour to consider all esports games under the one umbrella would be problematic. One participant elaborated explaining just as you would not put all high school sports (e.g. hockey, netball, football) under the one umbrella for governance, trying to put all esports games under the one umbrella would be inappropriate, and would illustrate a lack of understanding about the nuances of the esports industry ecosystem where publishers own the IP to games, and where each game exists in its own right.

Publishers, power, intellectual property, and the music industry

The fractured and disparate nature of the industry was noted by many stakeholders. Most highlighted that publishers hold considerable power and could be positioned at the centre of the esports industry ecosystem:

“...With all the power held by the publisher level if you don't have their buy-in you won't have the traction. The publisher is at the centre of the ecosystem.... if you can't get their game.... what are you going to host?”. (I7M)

Stakeholders noted that the power publishers hold, as a stakeholder, is particularly unique to the esports ecosystem and any attempt to adopt traditional sporting governance structures would be inappropriate and not at all aligned with the needs of esports. One stakeholder suggested that to better understand the esports governance context, it was more appropriate to consider the music industry with its licensing requirements and arrangements than it was to draw comparisons to traditional sports.

“...Games like Fortnite ... they are their own sport ... and someone owns those and the IP...kind of like music”. (I7M)

Many stakeholders acknowledged the power of publishers and gaming companies filtered through, and was evident across and within all levels of the esports ecosystem. One stakeholder explained the extent of the power a publisher could exert.

“...publishers hold the real power - own all the IP - they can shut down a tournament- ban a player- change a game however they want”. (I6M)

The subsequent conflicts of interest that can surface given the extent of the power publishers held, including from the perspective of the game, were noted, with one stakeholder acknowledging there were challenges in managing conflicts of interest given publishers set the game rules.

“...Conflict of interest a problem with gaming companies setting rules”. (Mi8M)

Another stakeholder suggested there was a need to review publishers' roles and the relationships between publishers and other esports stakeholders, suggesting the relationships were currently problematic and not conducive to a healthy esports ecosystem.

“...the role of publishers needs to be reviewed - the relationship between esports and publishers is not healthy”. (I6M)

Stakeholders expressed that to achieve authentic buy-in, and interest in, establishing governance structures, there would need to be, in the first instance, a discussion about how stakeholders, particularly publishers, could benefit from supporting unified esports governance structures. That is, why would publishers want to come together with other esports stakeholders to discuss governance, when all other stakeholders exist in the ecosystem because of the publishers and their games. An acknowledgement of what each stakeholder brings to the ecosystem to ensure its continued success and growth, could provide a starting point for discussions around esports governance.

Geographic boundaries

Geographic boundaries and limitations with technology across expansive distances were noted by some stakeholders as a barrier to governance, particularly in relation to the Oceanic region, in which Australia competes. The region focused nature of esports tournaments and competitions was highlighted:

"...You are "bound to your region": publishers operate in regions - Aus/NZ/Pacific Islands". (M17M) ... "Oceania (OCE) is geographically distant which makes it difficult". (I8M)

Comments suggest geographic constraints not only present challenges for players in relation to ping and latency issues but also introduce challenges related to enforcing and enacting any governance processes, further raising questions regarding how governance structures can be enforced across jurisdictions.

Barriers Summary

Findings from this section highlight the esports industry, with its rapid growth within a relatively short period time, has, and continues to, experience barriers to the development, enactment and implementation of governance structures and processes. The very nature of the esports industry, as a global, multi stakeholder ecosystem is complex and as a fundamentally technology enabled industry there is also and as such needs to manage and keep abreast of changes in technology, further illustrates the multifaceted and complex barriers any effort would need to consider if aiming to achieve unified governance

... "Rapid growth industry; ...fragmented; ... global... Industry bodies are just people who came together: ...not state-based... Games are player-based... No sophisticated boards; ... Purists love ES ...Business people sniffing around - rapid growth - \$\$ driven. ... and governance is scrambling to keep up". (I3M)

Moving forward, the barriers discussed further reinforce the need for a tailored solution to esports governance. One which reflects the unique nature of the esports industry, the extensive networks and environment, multi-level interactions and interconnections that form part of the esports

industry ecosystem, and one that invites the voice of diverse stakeholders and discussions regarding power and locus of control to help ensure the continued growth and sustainability of the industry.

Enablers of Governance

Enablers of governance were discussed at various levels, primarily the perspectives reflected the nature of stakeholders' esports involvement and experiences, and included insights into governance from government regulatory bodies, school-related perspectives, and governance in relation to players' interests.

SUMMARY: ENABLERS OF GOVERNANCE

- *Government buy in*
 - *Government regulatory bodies and dedicated resources for esports growth*
 - *Active promotion online safety: the role of governing bodies as part of esports governance*
 - *Government bodies, proactive influence and powers as part of esports governance*
 - *Reclassifying esports players as athletes*
- *Schools and esports governance*
 - *Empowering students and team governance*
- *Considering players' needs within governance structures and processes*
- *Education, awareness and governance*
- *Extending an open invitation to the table*

Government buy-in

Whilst some stakeholders acknowledged that striving for one overarching governing body could be problematic, the role of government bodies at the macro level of governance to support the esports industry was noted. In acknowledging the different levels of esports, and that a collective voice across all the levels would be difficult to achieve, aligning with government bodies who represent government as overarching regulator was suggested as an option. This stakeholder, who is an industry lawyer (Ma2M) noted however, the importance of defining governance to help ensure clear expectations.

"...There are different levels- elite, semi-pro, amateur, competitive games, ...pathways into the pro- need to define governance - - can't have one voice for all ... esports need to align to broader govt agencies as govt is the ultimate regulator". (Ma2M)

For other stakeholders, government bodies providing accountability for industry stakeholders was considered, however there was simultaneously some uncertainty regarding what government regulation and role would look like, raising particular questions around the monitoring of behaviours,

“...Possibly for accountability... Govt agencies who could be involved ...but not sure what their role would be because they should be a part of the process ... how can the govt come in and say here are the rules ...but how would this be monitored -?... or is it more at the overarching level? ... if there were lots of issues with a particular game would they want to help sort it out or would they want to just stop it running/to take down the game... but not sure that could even work”
(Mi9F)

Government regulatory bodies and dedicated resources for esports growth

Examples of potential areas of involvement of government bodies included support for increased funding for esports initiatives and tournaments, and support for programs to help break down barriers particularly in relation to women and girls in esports. Further, investing in esports structures and processes to help Australia to retain its top esports players, which in turn was seen as having positive spinoffs for business with for example, tournament drawcards, rather than losing them to teams based overseas for big prize money, also was identified as an area which could enable positive esports growth, as highlighted by the response by one stakeholder:

“...you want high performing players to stick around in Australia so that government can create a steady business case e.g. tournament tourism”. (Ma2M)

Active promotion of online safety: the role of government bodies as part of esports governance

The eSafety commission, as a government body was recognised as an important stakeholder for supporting positive online behaviours (I2M) and for working with schools to facilitate opportunities for positive gaming experiences. The role of the eSafety commission was considered especially necessary at the grassroots level, providing a protective buffer and important support structures for young gamers and their parents/carers. The importance of considering child safety as part of governance was highlighted to enable students to play with minimal disruption and in a safe environment. With the grassroots level identified as an avenue for establishing positive behaviours and providing an opportunity for “... infiltrating gaming with positive behaviours” (I5F), support from government bodies, including Education Departments was considered critical,

“...Advice to the Department would be to get involved- support it, listen to young people- what do they want from it?”. (I7M)

One stakeholder highlighted that given the esports is a relatively recent activity and particularly for school sectors, there is a need to dedicate time to understanding this new space and how to best support young gamers,

“...it is just spending the extra time to understand how we can benefit and enable our kids/players to play with minimal disruption and enough that the school system we have in place isn’t being abused”. (Mi7M)

This was considered a collective responsibility across all key esports stakeholders, but particularly at the school level, if the school had made a commitment to supporting esports in their setting.

Government bodies, proactive influence and powers as part of esports governance

The extent of government’s influence and powers was discussed by some stakeholders. One teacher (Mi7M) highlighted there have been recent instances where governments in other overseas jurisdictions have enforced rule changes on publishers, particularly related to gambling and transparency in relation to prize money. There appear to be examples of legislation in countries overseas that may be worth closer scrutiny to help determine if similar legislation in Australia could be beneficial, and if so, what specifically this could look like in order to best serve the esports industry ecosystem.

Reclassifying esports gamers as athletes

The role of governments in recognising esports gamers as athletes was raised, with one stakeholder highlighting that Australian esports players face additional challenges in comparison to their New Zealand counterparts, as they are not formally recognised as athletes.

“...Currently Aussie players are disadvantaged compared to NZ players who are recognised by their government as athletes because esports is considered a sport there”. (I2M)

It was further noted that this had visa implications, a particularly important consideration for international esports players.

Schools and esports governance

Stakeholders from education settings positioned governance of esports within the broader school governance structures and values. Some explained that school rules and values strongly underpin/govern all behaviours regardless of the context the student engages in. Closed YouTube channels and school discord servers were utilised by some stakeholders to enable monitoring and governance of esports related activities, communication and tournaments, that had been facilitated by schools and their infrastructure. When discussing responsibility and governance – one of the school leaders (Mi1M) felt that if the competition was endorsed by the school, then responsibility sits within the school.

“...School values/rules govern all school behaviour regardless of in-game or out-

game interactions”. (Mi1M)

Some explained the use of agreements between parents and students to help ensure all parties were clear about expectations, particularly in relation to keeping up with schoolwork and in relation to upholding overarching school values (Mi1M; Mi2M). A number of stakeholders in the schooling sector highlighted that managing decisions in relation to esports was easier when schools were not required to navigate bureaucracy and had more autonomy to make decisions that would enable esports to be offered as part of their school’s curriculum and extra curriculum offerings.

Empowering students and team governance

The responsibility for governance at the more informal level was also extended to players, and in particular, was discussed in relation to students in school settings. Empowering students to take responsibility for some of the organisational aspects of esports, including competitions and management of teams provided avenues for developing student leadership skills,

“...organisation of competitions with students taking responsibility for creating lobbies and running own teams”. (Mi2M)

Empowering students to take responsibility for the various aspects required to host esports also provided opportunities for indirectly teaching students about governance through game rules.

Considering players’ needs within governance processes and structures

Discussion about governance also extended to implications for players. Some noted traditional sports had independent players associations to help manage aspects such as contracts and player wellbeing both whilst playing and when transitioning out of the sport. Then need for similar supports for esports players as part of broader governance structures was identified as being an important component of enabling positive well organised and managed esports industry (I6M).

Education, awareness and governance

The need to understand integrity and threats to integrity featured frequently in discussions about enabling positive and sustainable governance structures and processes. The opportunities and need for increasing awareness and education across the board, including providing education from the grassroots/school level was a recurrent theme and identified as a key enabler of governance generally, with the need for education at the school level specifically identified as fundamental to a healthy, vibrant esports program.

“...education is needed to understand integrity and threats to integrity and opportunities for all stakeholders - leagues, teams, publishers across the board”.
(Ma2M)

Extending an open invitation to the table

Stakeholder insights highlighted the need for esports stakeholders across the esports ecosystem, including governments, publishers, players, to engage with each other in discussions about governance. However, there is no suggestion that this would be an easy undertaking, as highlighted by some of the responses by stakeholders:

"...How do we do governance? Multiple stakeholders need to come to the table; How do we bring Government and Publisher levels to the table for win/win?". (I1M)

"...Tricky with esports being such a broad group of entities and game platforms. Individual games are treated as their own 'sports' which creates a fractured landscape for governance and codes of conduct around specific game rules etc. If there is no baseline, then we are the baseline, but we are operating in the darkness...so some overarching governance would help at the ground level". (I2M)

"...Governments should engage with the publishers- it is fractured but needs negotiations but there is a lack of interest from the governments- I understand this because esports is a small industry". (I6M)

Yet the fractured nature of the industry, multiple stakeholders with varying agendas, current game-specific rules, publishers' intellectual property and meeting the needs of all stakeholders from grassroots to pro shines a light on the need for progress in this space. It is difficult to predict what a unified approach might look like or even if it is feasible, however, there is a need for dedicated resources and conversations that aim to inform approaches to governance which will support collective benefits and positive experiences for esports stakeholders.

Visions and Aspirations

Key stakeholders were asked the question:

What is your vision for esports in your organisation/school/community?

Vision statements describe what an organisation desires to achieve, in the long run: they are future oriented, and provide some inspiration and aspiration for individuals and the organisation.

Stakeholder Visions of esports ranged from the individual level (as players); to school level (as organisers/facilitators); to council level (as supporting community) to broader parts of the ecosystems (industry).

SUMMARY: VISIONS AND ASPIRATIONS

- *Range from playing for fun and enjoyment with friends to aspiring to pro status*
- *Interest in employment in the digital sector: as content creators; journalists, not just players*
- *Meeting like-minded people; travelling*
- *Develop a love for and engagement with the school from playing*
- *To be the home of esports in high schools in S.A*
- *To be branded as an entrepreneurial school*
- *To build community; to see it as accepted as other sports*
- *To empower women and girls as players, creators, developers*
- *To bring together all education sectors to develop Codes of Practice for esports*
- *To support players through associations*
- *To bring publishers to the table to engage in governance conversations*
- *To use the growth to capitalize on the skills it can develop*

Individual / Player

At the top level, a former professional player (I6M) spoke specifically of his personal experiences as being ...*“not the norm, but it is what others want to achieve”* capturing the aspiration of all players who strive to move up the rankings. Esports rather unexpectedly, had given him:

“...a career; ... I travelled the world...I was a star player in one of the biggest games in the world... and have been an esports manager”. (I6M)

Indeed, he commented that he had not ever had aspirations of becoming a professional player or known where esports would take him. He was just playing ...*“for fun for the first few years”*, but was getting better, and ranking higher on the global rankings, eventually being “scouted” to become a professional player, which opened up a very different world and opportunities to him.

At the individual/player level, stakeholder visions and aspirations overall reflected the initial desire to play games to the best of their ability, to have fun and to compete: but also captured the ultimate end goal: of the possibility of becoming a professional player. One parent (Mi6M) however, particularly noted how quickly reality bit:

“... [My son, aged 14] wants to be a game developer, a coder, not a pro player... He is more interested in spectating and the ‘back end’...He has his own YouTube channel, and has recorded his play but knows he needs to be an entertainer as well as a player...He has worked out it is harder than it looks”. (Mi6M)

Similarly, stakeholder Mi9F, a female casual gamer in her early 20s, indicated she now plays “because I enjoy it” ... and only ... “wanted to get to a similar skills level as my friends.... I don’t aim to play to get to any particular level”. Her aspirations only related to being able to play as part of the friendship group. To not do so, would have meant she may have been excluded from the group’s discussions and activities outside of gaming. Another player (Mi8M), who ranks well locally, has moved into community leagues, commentating and managing tournaments, and his vision was for ... “esports and gaming to keep growing... [with the hope that] ...maybe it will overtake traditional sports. He particularly noted: ...“in my experiences, I have met a lot of people [I may not have met] highlighting how his involvement in gaming and esports have provided relationship avenues which may not have been available to him elsewhere.

School

Stakeholders associated with the schooling sector (Mi1M; Mi2M; Mi3M; Mi4M; Mi5M; Mi7M; Mi10M; Mi11M; Mi13M) suggested visions relating to their own school community, contexts, or for their students generally. Others reflected on the power of esports’ involvement in schools to contribute to the greater good of the industry. A Head of Sports from one schooling sector shared that his vision for esports was to have kids [sic] who play develop:

“...a love of representing the school, ...where sporty kids also play esports... and kids who play feel a sense of achievement ...belonging to the community, ...and that there is satisfaction with this new community”. (Mi1M)

This vision of esports sitting alongside traditional sports in terms of the pride it could engender in the students, was something they were actively trying to support and grow, and was common to all three sectors.

“... [Esports] presents an opportunity to give students (and eventual old scholars) ... to look back on their time at [the school] with pride at representing the school in competitions, state or national in the future...”. (Mi1M; Mi2M)

Along with this, sat the recognised need for them to bring their general community along with them in terms of understanding and accepting esports *as a sport*: i.e. as a worthwhile co-curricular activity with real benefits that was not just kids sitting on a couch, playing games online. They noted that through making esports available, they were giving ... “different kids the opportunity to represent [the school]” ... and “building connection [with them] as part of the larger school community”. These so-called “different kids” were those not usually involved in any sport or co-curricular activity, so it was an important recognition of the need to help connect with this group, and to build belonging to school, which they hoped would follow through to when they became old scholars.

The school leadership vision was driven, ...“largely by listening to the student voice calling for esports” to be added to the program of co-curricular offerings. Part of that vision meant students ... “represented the school in a classy manner and had fun” ... “building the [eventual] old scholar

network ...through creating a sense of connection and belonging to the school” (Mi1M; Mi2M). In the same way that adults/old scholars reflected with fondness back on their other sporting experiences when they left school, their vision involved young people building something that was equally fun and meaningful... *“Hey that was worthwhile... I will do it next year”.* This teacher (Mi2M) was involved in offering a casual esports program to the middle school students, and aspired to eventually have facilities at the school to play competitively, in the same way there were football fields and basketball courts offered as a matter of course for those students.

Another school leader and teacher from a small independent school, (Mi4M; Mi5M) who were “early adopters” of competitive esports, aspired for their school:

“...to be the home of esports in high schools in SA... We want to make the claim and back it up”. (Mi4M; Mi5M)

They saw “branding” as an esports school; having other schools visit; hosting events on site for other schools [as a hub] and linking with local councils” as part of their wider vision in supporting their students. They also had aspirations to explore the potential for ... *“esports scholarships at University level....so these kids can apply and have a pathway/opportunity”.* This follows the United States of America Varsity League which has scholarships for esports players, in the same way they have football and basketball scholarships. This school, through the vision of this entrepreneurial teacher and leader, had won a small grant (\$25k) to be able to provide their students with 12-16 high performance computers and set up a gaming suite, for their involvement in the High Schools Esports League with META sports. In doing this, the whole school community could become spectators, and support their team. In addition, they set up an “Academy”, an esports curriculum as part of their SACE Certificate, which linked attendance, skillset development; healthy gaming; and academic grades/improvements. They are already on their visionary, entrepreneurial pathway, and are continuing to pursue it, for the benefits of the school, the students and the community. Their initial vision entailed wanting their young people to be able to play as a *“meaningful learning tool, getting them outside of their bedrooms”*, into a team setting, using such enticements as:

“...Our tech is better... We will make you better gamers... We will develop a curriculum around gaming”. (Mi4M; Mi5M)

Another teacher from a different sector (Mi7M) commented/explained his vision for esports related to improving the community’s perceptions of offerings:

“...I would love to see it how they do sporting now... We have a specialist football subject at our school. I would love esports to be that kind of thing,... for students to have access to taking that kind of stuff seriously. ... I would like people to incorporate not just esports, but gaming into learning”. (Mi7M)

He acknowledged that at the moment it is seen as separate to other sports, and his vision was to have the community see that:

"...esports is enough ...so that people see it not as esports but as sports, ... put on the same level of focus". (Mi7M)

He particularly noted that already there were benefits for including esports, particularly in relation to inclusivity:

"...What I'm finding even better about esports is it doesn't care about what gender you are... you are there because you are a good player. There's no kind of segregation based on anything, so it's a bit more inclusive of what everyone is like and what they want to do". (Mi7M)

Teacher Mi3M, did not speak specifically about his vision or aspirations relating to esports, but as they were only just embarking on exploring esports, his vision of forming a team was 'vision in action':

"...to access and cater for a different demographic; ... There are a number of students interested in gaming; it is becoming more prevalent, ...gleaned from anecdotal conversations with students, and some student surveys in-house about how they spend their time". (Mi3M)

Teachers Mi10M and Mi11M were aspirational, as that was what had set them on the pathway of becoming an esports school. They envisioned an opportunity to use esports to support their students; and they found a way to present an approach to their principal to gain entrepreneurial funding to set them up. They now have over 20 students going into year 12 doing an esports course aligned with SACE. Their current vision is for years 11 and 12 to have choice to do a "passion subject .. And for it to be in every school; part of everyday .. just like the footy team is". It even has helped to paint teaching as a career in a new light for these students: the digital technology teacher and the IT teachers are modelling opportunities in IT and digital that are of interest.

Teacher Mi13M, works with community partners to plan and run community esports tournaments and gaming activations for local youth as part of a young adult focused program. His vision has not changed...

"...My vision is still (as it has been previously) for eSports to be accepted into the main stream culture of local Australian Communities in the same way that 'Traditional Sports' are. I look forward to a time when local community / Town based sporting organisations also have teams that play in community-based

eSports competitions and in doing so can access the benefits of support and possibly funding from government organisations that is available to other traditional community sports". (Mi13M)

Collectively, these teachers have provided clear visions for their students as players and learners, where esports is the conduit for their own aspirations and visions for their future.

At a different level, industry stakeholders also had visions for the school sectors in relation to their contribution to improving the context of esports:

"...Schools are the pathway to bigger brighter more self-regulated esports... We can embed great behaviours in school esports". (Ma2M)

This particularly relates to viewing esports through the lens of an inverted eco-system: where emerging grassroots players are learning and being educated about esports in schools and could thus contribute to a better playing climate/culture higher up the chain. Through their Codes of Conduct and keeping young people safe online, the vision is that young gamers would learn to play and improve rankings, and have opportunities to remain here rather than leaving for overseas to play or be employed in the sector. The vision for education about gaming, or the integrity of gaming was also related to the notion of healthy gaming:

"...Education around esports or Integrity?... Esports businesses lead to jobs, and training... ..that nursery ground ...we need to nurture and cultivate... to get to that endpoint... [so] our best players are staying home...[so its] just another option for them... like [trad] sport". (Ma2M)

Another player and current esports/gaming media presenter and content creator, particularly noted in her vision: the link with what is taught and opportunities for girls in esports:

"...At the school level there needs to be more of a push for girls in STEM... STEM is important". (15F)

She reflected on the gender split in schools, which she felt still leaned towards girls taking more creative subjects, rather than STEM subjects commenting strongly: *"That needs to change!"* especially *"if there were social attitudes that think that's not an area they should be pursuing"*. Her vision noted that schools had a role to play in esports; that it was *"smart to invest"*, that they could create the *"foundations of sportsmanship behaviours"* and essentially *"change attitudes towards gaming"*.

Finally, a female professional esports player and team captain (Mi12F) also noted the importance of having schools involved, particularly for girls' aspirations and visions for themselves as future players/employees in the industry, and especially for education of male players and organisations for healthy gaming.

“...Need to have support from both men and women Both get abused, and both need an equal playing field... All schools should incorporate it... there is a lot of responsible gaming aligned with curriculum ...teachers are encouraging it...teachers are supervising... Would like to see a lot of schools and organisations [doing it] ... providing safe gaming spaces; gaming for relaxation”. (Mi12F)

In summary, schools are viewed as places where healthy, safe gaming and esports can be introduced, monitored and supported, and can have significant influences on attitudes, behaviours and opportunities. But to do that, esports needs to be accepted as a co-curricular activity, aligned with traditional sports, including music, drama, chess and have equal investment in time, resources and support of leadership. For a school to be inclusive in rhetoric, it also needs to find ways to listen to and include the young people who are engaged in gaming and esports and see the potential social and employment pathways for them which could emerge in a digitally directed future.

Council/Community

Stepping beyond the school setting, the local council or community setting was also envisioned as playing a significant part in the overall eco-system: and one which could provide opportunities for young people to connect and belong.

A member of a local council initiative clearly stated that an aspirational goal was to have some “inter- and intra-council competitions”, and that

“...Councils ... should be involved in making esports spaces as natural as providing netball courts, running tracks and football fields ...so there are opportunities for people to come together in the same way that sports give....It should be the same way that kicking a soccer ball in your backyard by yourself is fun, playing soccer with a friend down the park is more fun, but going to the soccer club and playing should be the most fun”. (I4M).

Again, aligning esports to the provision of existing resources by councils for traditional sports raises the question of financing such an undertaking, but if attitudes need to be changed, then the argument for inclusion and the analogy presented above, regarding the difference between playing with a ball alone to joining a competition with a club, is robust.

The Game On report (p 5) stated that only 51% of South Australian youth (5-14 years) participated in sport and recreation at least once per week in 2018/19. There is opportunity for growth through participating in organised gaming and esports, but it requires vision and resourcing, potentially through provision of local government amenities:

“...If you are providing technology for esports... those computers should also be used for digital literacies, ... giving more people access to technology for free ...where people can feel welcome to play games and get connected”. (I4M)

The digital divide is well recognised, and most individuals do not have the capacity to outlay for high performance gaming consoles. Council vision and engagement in this space will ensure inclusion, opportunity, reward and benefit to their community of young people through the creation of connected youth and engaging spaces. Esports is a young person’s game: most players’ professional careers are over by their mid -late 20s, (if they can ever achieve that dream goal) largely due to the wear and tear on their physical and cognitive responses to fast moving decision-making, and creative problem solving in the game: there is always someone younger and faster. It involves high concentration and intensity levels. Councils through their vision, can provide a unique support mechanism as part of the larger esports eco-system, both for the casual and emerging player; and the aspirational player, but also for those interested in the employment opportunities throughout the eco-system generally. Twenty first century skills development can be fostered through such a vision of having esports spaces available *“as naturally as providing netball courts, running tracks and football fields”* (I4M).

Two casual players (I2M; Mi8M) involved in running community league events/tournaments also had visions for esports relevant to their playing communities. One, as Chairperson of a university esports club, had a vision for his university to be *“the destination of choice”* for gaming students. Citing that they *“had over 500 players, had won tournaments, improved their position and could be a good drawcard for international students”* his vision was to *“have a space for players to socialise, participate and compete”*. He envisioned it as *“a place for casters, journalists, fans etc coming together...to promote esports across SA – to win tournaments and get placements; building a space for hosting social and competition events”* (I2M). Yet, he was still struggling to get his own university to recognise it fully *“as a sport”*, as distinct from being a “club”. Such was his egalitarian nature, and his passion for gaming, however, he supported and helped set up another university to get on-campus facilities/internet café for their gamers.

The second gamer’s (Mi8M) vision related to *“seeing less stereotyped perceptions of gamers/gaming in the public/community”* and to *“having esports keep growing and overtake most traditional sports”*. Clearly this vision relates to the bigger picture: Australia is a small market/industry when compared to others; and it is little wonder that these are quite humble aspirations and visions by comparison to equivalent sectors overseas. In the United States, for example, thousands of schools compete in collegiate esports competitions. The National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE) <https://nacesports.org/about/> was founded in 2016, at the first ever collegiate esports summit: and by 2021, membership included over 170 collegiate organisations, offering competition in Rocket League, League of Legends, Overwatch and others. It boasts over 5000 student athletes, \$US 16 million in esports scholarships and aid; an annual national convention and a private discord server (voice over software) for athletic directors, coaches and others. They also offer a Job Seeker facility, for those seeking employment as coaches, analysts; directors and in marketing.

Bringing together the visions and aspirations of individuals, with schools and community can provide pathways not only for connection and belonging, in a community sense, but also for future employment and opportunity. What is relevant from this brief presentation of key stakeholder visions and aspirations, is that in Adelaide in 2021, we are only just asking the question *at the*

government level: what is esports and why should we know about it and invest in it for the youth of South Australia?

There are opportunities in these visions and aspirations for all South Australians, and it is timely to consider them and the role local government authorities, and community clubs can play. If it takes a village to raise a child, then local councils were the original villages in our communities. By looking back at those villages, perhaps we can find a way of engaging our youth now and into the future: by supporting them through local infrastructures, linking with schools, community and industry.

Industry

Another layer of stakeholders: those more closely aligned to the industry per se, had visions and aspirations which largely centred on governance and Codes of Conduct within the esports eco-system. Each reflected the actual sub-set of the eco-system they represented. Stakeholders here were: CEOs of organisations; entertainment and sports lawyers; Pro -team owners and managers; entrepreneurs; media and content creators and bloggers/journalists. Nearly all had been gamers in their youth, and all had found a career path related to esports which emerged for them.

The CEO of an organisation (I1M) which supported high school involvement in competitions noted his vision:

“Girls are playing more... and if government funding and communities invest... then all-girl leagues and programs can have great potential to break down barriers”. (I1M)

This aspiration relates to the fact that esports evolved from largely male-dominated games, where girls were actively discouraged from playing, and now find themselves on the receiving end of a lot of overt in-game harassment, abuse and bullying. Indeed, a female professional gamer supported this vision, as she already competes in all-girl teams, largely to overcome this darker side of the sport: where stereotypes portray that *‘females cannot play games well; and certainly, can’t play as well as males’* and where male attitudes are sexist and dismissive with comments like, *“Oh it’s a girl game”*, and *“Go back into the kitchen and make me a sandwich”* (Mi12F).

This is where schools and codes of conduct can play a significant part in contributing to better in-game behaviour. Gaming and esports grew rapidly, and there has been little in the way of control mechanisms, with many stakeholders referring to *“the Wild West”* aspect of it across many layers.

Whilst discussing difficulties in governing esports, this CEO (I1M) offered a vision/solution to improving governance and player behaviour: by utilising the grassroots perspective, and the codes of conduct and education capacity inherent in school settings, and for it to then filter up the eco-system, potentially weeding out poor playing attitudes which by 2021 standards are anachronistic.

“... [Greater] engagement in the school community [is needed]: if you take one State, and get all parties [education sectors] round the table (Government, Catholic, Independent) and come up with an overarching set of principles for

[esports in] education.... that is a great place to start... e.g. we don't cheat, take substances". (I1M)

In other corners of the industry, were stakeholder visions/aspirations relating to supporting players, and how the very fractured nature of the governance structure offered little in the way of career advice, development and protection. This was particularly important, given the young ages most aspiring professional players were. It also spoke to a vision of corporate responsibility similar to traditional sport models:

"...Need to see an independent players association - something like the AFL model - an association that would support esports players at the beginning of their career, but also at the end of their career ...and how to transition out - and in the short term would like to see deeper engagement between esports stakeholders". (Ma1M)

The vulnerability of players to the system was also noted by others in their vision response, particularly in terms of the control and power held by the publishers: those who control and own the IP and market the product (the game) to players and spectators.

"... [Vision for ...] better publisher relations: These are \$Billion companies ...but don't want to take on any risk; they don't share profits; they don't value teams... there is no acknowledgement through revenue share.... Very little money flows out; they are not supporting the eco-system; just marketing their game... this is entertainment, not mining!". (I6M)

The publishers hold all the power, they can change rules; restructure; force tournaments to end/change/shift/delay and so bringing them together to regulate/govern the industry is extremely problematic, especially given each game is different, (there are many esports, not just one) and there are many regions and jurisdictions. Australia is a small component of this behemoth and carries little clout: and certainly, any governance aspirations for Australia, would have no sway in other sovereign countries who may also be playing in the region, e.g, Oceania (OCE). Many stakeholders suggested *"working more closely with publishers"*, but one stakeholder with strong legal and international experience presented his vision and aspiration to help navigate this situation:

"... [Where] ... every publisher in esports... and every major tournament operator ...are recognised as the controlling bodies of their esports: ...empower them; ...build a framework around them; ...invite them into the eco-system; ...modify the National Integrity Framework for esports: ...have an opt-in basis;work with state-based agencies if you want to attract esports for your state. ...buy in to the framework". (Ma2M)

The vision links with the practical reality that no single government body can oversee esports in its entirety: hence by making them [publishers] responsible as their own controlling bodies, they then have a seat at any government table, as willing partners interested in protecting their investment, and simultaneously having some responsibility to the players and the laws of the land. Others expressed the need to see *“much deeper engagement with the esports community: and finding other peak bodies that fairly represent the eco-system”* (Ma1M).

Stakeholders which manage and own teams, held different aspirations: largely related to capturing market share and building from their existing fanbases in traditional sport:

“... [we] wanted to be the leading sports and entertainment franchise in Australia... to be an esports tournament operator of choice in Oceania... to be a sporting club of the future”. (I3M)

This notion of esports being part of the entertainment industry aligns with the way that traditional sports such as soccer, or AFL, or NBL have evolved into the corporate entertainment juggernauts they are today. To aspire to that, means that the fan base must be significant, and must be growing: which is true for esports: it is a growth industry, where *“kids are users... schools are enablers and customers are researchers, governments, and regulators”* (I3M).

Stakeholders who are active in the current esports space as bloggers and journalists, recognise that the growth vision is real: *“globally, it will keep going...”* but also recognise that change is part of that vision and brings opportunities with it.

“...We have not had a big shift in games: League of Legends has been going for 12 years.... And that [any change] will impact on the eco-system. ...Locally, [we would] want Australia to become the esports centre ...and Adelaide the esports capital....with gaming cafes... to have a slice of that”. (I7M)

This growth and opportunity relationship is reflected in the Game On report by the South Australian Government, specifically, recommendation 1.7: *Resolve the state government’s position on Esports to capitalise upon its growth*. Whilst framed under the *Lifelong Physical Activity* outcome, it notes the overarching issues relate to being time poor, and having competing priorities which prevent active engagement and the ways in which people can spend their spare time.

Of import here, is the realisation that healthy esports and gaming are *active* pursuits: physically and cognitively; and provide entertainment for many. They also provide opportunities for specialist employment/recruitment, through such avenues as the defence industry, which needs highly skilled, cognitively creative problem solvers and strategically, and technologically astute young people. As one last stakeholder noted:

“...Vision? A return to normalcy - after COVID... [We] had digital [tournaments] ...but will never replace the sold-out stadium appeal ... Once we start having

With this comment, we return to the notion of sports entertainment: and the vision and aspirations which accompany that: huge crowds of fans, elite athletes competing for big prizes, and the ecosystem of employment which surrounds it. The esports industry offers many opportunities, but is fragmented, which means that visions and aspirations must be tempered with the brush of reality. However, what is clear from this input from key stakeholders, is that teachers, school leaders, coaches, players, managers, content creators, bloggers, commentators, council representatives and club leaders all have visions and aspirations about esports which relate to themselves, their community or the industry. Investment in these would seem clear. Engaging young people in a system which supports, enables and protects is what is required. To do nothing, is to lose the skillsets of these young people who like to play games online, at the very time we should be mobilising their capital.

Stage 3 Summary

Whilst the absence of an overarching governing body can be considered a deficiency of the esports industry ecosystem, acknowledgement that this is an issue can provide the catalyst for stakeholders to engage in conversations about governance structures, processes and codes of conduct that can best serve the esports industry. In noting there have been well-meaning attempts to provide some level of governance, perspectives from stakeholders interviewed suggest that the entities have typically been self-appointed and buy-in from stakeholders has not necessarily been widespread. Perhaps the first hurdle then, is for stakeholders to define what is governance and how can it be shaped through collective stakeholder input and representation.

Encouragingly, there are esports stakeholders across all levels, who are keen to support efforts to unify the esports industry. Particularly as many recognised the potential of esports to provide positive experiences and benefits for stakeholders and more broadly across the wider community. Further noting, healthy and relevant governance would be needed if the potential was to be realised. Currently equal and fair representation is not afforded to all esports stakeholders, yet sentiments from participants suggest there is a need, and strong support, for all stakeholders to be represented fairly, including players, who currently do not have representation as a collective.

Given the disparate motivations, reasons and agendas that underpin stakeholders' involvement in the industry, and the level of control and power publishers have within the ecosystem due to owning the intellectual property of the games, there is a call for government buy-in to facilitate discussions about governance. This need was further reinforced by participants who noted Australia is currently not on publishers' radar due to its size when compared to more populous countries who have higher levels of esports investment and involvement. As a country with a growing esports community who competes in the Oceania region, representation at this macro level was considered essential to ensure Australia's esports interests and perspectives were heard and considered. The need for government to adopt 'a light touch' approach in any discussions or negotiations about governance with stakeholders, but with publishers in particular, was considered ideal and more likely to result in positive progress for the industry.

There also is opportunity for government support to extend to the active promotion and education on safe and respectful gaming practices. The need for this dedicated focus became very apparent throughout discussion with participants. Whilst many acknowledged that the esports community was supportive on the whole, there were still many examples of harassment in open gaming, which highlighted a level of unacceptable toxicity. In acknowledging that this typically originated in game there were instances where the harassment extended beyond, with very real potential to negatively impact a gamer's wellbeing. Whilst harassment often occurred regardless of gender, the harassment towards women gamers and members of the LGBTIQ+ community was particularly noted as being sometimes brutal. There is a role then for a government body, such as the eSafety commission to proactively support initiatives to address this challenge, to tackle racism, sexism and homophobia across the board.

There was consensus that the complex nature of the industry raises some esports specific challenges. For example, there is a need to promote greater understanding about the uniqueness of the esports industry, in particular, raising awareness that esports is more than just one sport or game was considered a critical starting point for discussions around governance. Some participants also highlighted the need for discussion with government regarding recognition of esports players as athletes. Officially recognising esports as a sport would afford players the benefit of being able to apply for an athlete's visa when competing internationally, however, there are additional considerations and consultations which would need to occur to better understand all the implications of such a decision.

Many participants also highlighted that the grassroots level and schools in particular have an important role to play in the governance of esports. There was acknowledgement that esports programs at the high school level are being managed well, further providing young players with positive esports experiences, with the potential for their positive experiences to filter up to higher levels. Whilst publishers of esports games set their own game specific rules, and leagues such as the META High School league and the University Esports League have their own governance structures and codes of conduct, adopted or modelled on principles and frameworks from esports associations positioned at the macro level, school governance structures and values provided the overarching framework for any school related activity, including esports competitions. This was necessary to ensure that any risks, such as student safety, legal and duty of care obligations were carefully and proactively managed within existing sector child safety, wellbeing and e-safety policies.

In acknowledging there has been some uptake of esports in schools as part of their extracurricular and curriculum offerings, there is still work to be done on a larger scale within the schooling sector, and together with parents and the wider community, to shift perceptions of gaming stereotypes and to promote the benefits that can be realised by adopting esports programs in schools. Anecdotally benefits have included greater connection with students disengaged from mainstream schooling, and opportunities for students to develop a range of skills, including technical, problem solving and strategic skills. Opportunities to empower students to learn about, and practice, governance as part of leadership and as part of being a member of an esports team and league also was highly valued.

Schools can provide a safe environment within which to support both skill development and positive esports behaviours, through targeted gaming education programs. Importantly parents also have an active role to play in supporting their child's interest in esports and whilst schools and leagues can provide safe structures for esports competitions, a child's involvement in esports is not contained by physical boundaries, with many a home bedroom set up for gaming. It was not surprising then that when discussing governance with parents, joining their child in "their gaming world" and monitoring their child's gaming practices were front of mind. There is also the reality that today's parents of young adolescents in particular are themselves more digitally savvy in ways the parents of the past generations of gamers may not have been. Parents should then be considered as part of a solutions-focused approach to having gaming and esports recognised as a potentially worthwhile activity and addition to school programs.

There are promising opportunities within the esports ecosystem that can be leveraged to advance the industry. However, currently esports governance structures and processes are not adequately meeting the needs of all esports stakeholders who work and play in the industry. There are Australian-specific constraints due to its geographic distance from other countries, and additional factors such as the rapid growth, immaturity and fractured nature of the ecosystem that do contribute to a unique set of challenges when addressing esports governance. However, interest in, and efforts to progress positive esports agendas for stakeholders, particularly for young players and particularly within school settings is encouraging. There are a number of schools who are embracing the opportunities esports provides, and achieving positive results, including increased student engagement. To help ensure collective benefits are realised, investment in grassroots and the wider esports industry, along with government and publisher buy-in and transparent conversations are all needed to support continued growth and sustainability of esports and to help establish a cohesive governance structure with more equitable distribution of power and representation, particularly of players.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

This section outlines the strengths and limitations of this pilot study.

A *narrative approach* to reviewing the literature was conducted in Stage 1. Notwithstanding some of the challenges associated with conducting searches for esports-related publications, particularly in relation to search terms, the review provided insight into some of the most important and critical aspects of current knowledge on the topic of facilitators of and barriers to, positive esports behaviours. The literature is an emerging domain as the field is moving faster than the literature, so there is reliance on non-formal /grey literatures, such as reports, blogs and online journalism. Whilst this has concerns, it demonstrates that the online space is capable of moving in synch with the industry, reliably, as it is constantly being watched and updated in real time, and more formal research channels, such as peer-reviewed publications, lag behind.

Stage 2 comprised an environmental scan and website analysis. A strength of the approach is the use of the published WEF (Taddeo, 2012; Taddeo & Barnes, 2016) to chart website data. It is important to note that whilst evidence of governance structures and codes of conduct may not be evident on the esports websites analysed in this study, assumptions cannot be made that the information does not exist, as the information may be available on some other platform or via alternative mediums. As such, conclusions can only be drawn about the availability of the information on the website of the esports organisation, league, or team at the time of this analysis.

Additionally, as a pilot study, the selection of websites is not exhaustive and Stage 2 includes only a small sample of possible associations, leagues, teams, game publishers and developers and betting sites. There are additional stakeholders in the esports industry ecosystem including streaming sites that could, and should, be considered in future research in this field. Additionally, considering the volatility in this field, where new stakeholders emerge and others disappear, a comprehensive analysis of all may not be feasible, but every major change in the ecosystem/environment needs to be examined. for the evolution of governance and Codes of Conduct (CoCs).

A strength of conducting environmental scans is the opportunity it offers for collecting comprehensive information on a particular phenomenon, which in this pilot study, was governance and code of conduct related information. However, there is potential to access large amounts of data, particularly when conducting a study online and as such the collection of data does need to be balanced with managing the feasibility and scope in relation to available timeframes and resources (Levac et al., 2010). Decisions should not compromise the study but in instances where constraints around searches for example are required then researchers should be able to justify their decisions and further note any limitations this may have introduced (Levac et al., 2010). Decisions to ensure the feasibility of this pilot study were made in the early stages of the Stage 2 Study, particularly in relation to operationalising the key terms e.g., esports, identifying inclusion, exclusion criteria and a sampling approach.

An additional strength of the website analysis approach to data collection is that content on websites is publicly accessible data and is thus an unobtrusive method of data collection which enables exploration of the phenomenon under review, in this instance, esports governance and codes of conducts.

In terms of the overall study design, there is recognised strength in emergent, sequential research particularly in such a fast-moving environment. It ensures that the data is current, and always looking forward to new learnings, triangulated with those just prior.

A limitation of this pilot rests with situations beyond our control, which have effectively prevented us from engaging directly with schools and young people and undertaking the study as originally intended. Delays in ethics approvals initially meant that the original study could not gather data from students involved in competition during the timeframe of the 2019 Meta League tournaments (approximately August – November). COVID 19 then interrupted everyone's worlds in March 2020 and interrupted the META league again, and prevented data collection in school settings with students, teachers and parents. The pilot was subsequently re-negotiated in 2021, with a focus on governance and codes of conduct, with adult stakeholders only. During this time there were also significant staff changes: Dr Neil Tippett's contract finished at the end of 2019; Professor Barbara Spears took extended personal leave due to family circumstances from March – November 2020, then retired from the University in December 2021; Dr Alan Barnes also was on extended leave during 2020 and retired in March 2021.

The strength of the current emergent design under these circumstances is evident: a review of literature established the context (Stage 1); a web analysis (Stage 2) revealed gaps in the information provided to stakeholders; and the interview study (Stage 3) capitalised on both by ensuring currency and relevancy of questions for stakeholders.

A particular strength of Stage 3 however, is the number of diverse stakeholders who participated in the interviews and provided insights into their experiences, aspirations, attitudes, behaviours and the types of governance structures and codes of conduct that can support positive esports experiences for stakeholders. By employing maximum variation sampling, purposeful and varied representation of stakeholders was achieved thus enhancing the validity of the process and enabling strong inferences to be drawn from the data to comprehensively address the research objectives.

Additionally, the IPA is a participant focused, interpretative phenomenological analysis approach which privileges the voice of participants and provided an opportunity for participants to express themselves and their lived experiences without judgement, further enabling participants to share subtle, personal, and nuanced accounts of their perspective and experiences (Jeog & Othman, 2016; Noon, 2018). The overarching narrative generated through the IPA approach remains personalised through the inclusion of individual quotes to illustrate general themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

The triangulation of interview findings with the literature and web analysis is a strength of this pilot and provides rich evidence for publications and future work in this space with young people specifically.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The esports industry is one with great potential, that can, and does, offer numerous benefits for stakeholders at all levels of the ecosystem. It is an industry which continues to experience considerable growth nationally and internationally, with the global esports market valued at just over 1.08 billion U.S. dollars in 2021. This rapid expansion has afforded the industry a number of opportunities in terms of commercialisation, impact and reach. The benefits of esports and gaming also have been well documented in the literature and include opportunities for players to build confidence, team building skills and improved cognition.

The findings from this pilot study also support the concerns noted more widely in the literature: that there are considerable issues in the industry with fragmented governance structures, that have not been developed through equal representation of, and contribution from, esports stakeholders, nor have they been uniformly adopted throughout the industry. Issues of power imbalance and locus of control between game publishers and developers and players, where publishers and developers control their game rules, leagues and to varying extent tournaments, highlights the need for national and international organisations to do, and be, more than advocacy bodies. Findings across all three stages exposed the need for a more unified approach to governance and codes of conduct for all stakeholders, particularly those based in Australia, in the esports industry ecosystem.

Whilst the website analysis and stakeholder interviews suggest there are some esports entities that have a focus on, and commitment to, supporting positive esports behaviours through the promotion of codes of conduct and transparent governance structures, the disparate nature of games played, that is, esports is more than just one game, the various game specific rules and number of diverse stakeholders, highlight the challenges in implementing any coherent regulations.

The challenges are particularly complex given the multiple stakeholders and the nature of the interactions and relationships between the various stakeholders in the esports industry ecosystem. Several critical considerations surface. These include IP, control of game rules, the commercialisation of games, under-age players and the potential exposure to gambling, along with the jurisdictional powers of potential esports governing bodies to manage breaches and enforce and promote practices that support the integrity and safety of esports. The competing demands and priorities of stakeholder groups which include governing bodies and associations, leagues, teams, players, observers, developers and publishers is particularly evident when young players are involved, and particularly for those who are considering a career in esports. How to manage the interests of players alongside game developers and publishers whose control can, and does, extend to their leagues and tournaments, highlights the need to manage tensions associated with competing priorities and loyalties. This is particularly pertinent given the appeal of gaming to young players, and the need to ensure they are supported and safeguarded. There is then a critical responsibility, indeed opportunity, for the industry at the grass roots level in particular to influence positive behaviours.

Education is needed to increase awareness about codes of conduct, positive behaviours and to build a strong foundation for the industry. Whilst esports experiences are predominately positive, with a strong sense of community, harassment, particularly in open games where more vulnerable players are more likely to be targeted, largely due to the anonymity of players and high stakes nature of the play with regard to rankings, is still a serious concern. Esports codes of conduct and education programs for all stakeholders, including players, parents/carers and teachers, that challenge gamer stereotypes and address and support the needs and wellbeing of young players needs to be a fundamental priority that will require input and buy-in from all stakeholders. An approach will be needed which does not simply attempt to transpose governance structures and codes of conduct

from the traditional sports sectors and industries to esports, as the literature has highlighted this is likely to be problematic. Rather, engaging all stakeholders and particularly youth to co-construct solutions that help achieve unified and fair governance structures and codes of conduct is critical. There is an important role for schools, community groups and high school leagues at the grass roots level, to provide safe gaming spaces and strong foundations in helping young people/gamers develop positive and respectful gaming practices. There are opportunities too, for schools to explore innovative approaches to incorporating gaming/esports as part of [extra]curricular activities and to further explore opportunities to work alongside community groups to support esports programs and competitions as an avenue for engaging youth and supporting the interests of young people.

The tensions of course will come with managing the commercial interests and growth of the esports industry and especially for game publishers and developers, alongside the recognition of, and commitment to, respecting players' rights and agency as key stakeholders in the esports industry ecosystem.

Whilst the website analysis suggests there have been efforts to provide unifying principles and codes of conducts across the esports industry, along with strategies to support responsible gaming, these were not always easy to locate on websites, and in some instances, information was either not evident, or did not appear to be up to date, which made it somewhat difficult to determine if the content was still relevant and current. In instances where information was available, mostly at the macro and intermediate levels, specific content about rules, regulations and codes of conduct was reasonably comprehensive and addressed aspects such as overarching principles for esports engagement, codes of conduct, tournament rules, arbitration rules and regulations, social Media policies, best practices guidelines, and specific game rules. Interviews with participants also revealed there was general awareness about game specific codes of conduct and the general social protocols when playing games, with many acknowledging game moderators or functions available within game can help players manage any harassment either by blocking, muting or reporting.

Responsibility and accountability for dealing with negative behaviours is complex. Findings revealed that with such close links to commercial enterprises, the agendas and priorities of the various stakeholders within the esports industry ecosystem can be conflicted, and the safety and protection of players and vulnerable audiences, many of whom are minors, may not necessarily be front of mind for some stakeholders. For example, the review of esports teams' website revealed limited or no information about governance and codes of conduct, focusing primarily on the promotion of the team and its players. This highlights possible opportunities for websites categorised at this level to embed codes of conduct and principles upfront on their sites and to play a more prominent role in promoting positive esports behaviours, particularly given, these sites are likely to attract the attention of players across all levels of expertise including grassroots players.

As part of the emergent research design employed in this pilot study, the findings from Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 have come together to:

- Contribute insights into the overarching question *What are the facilitators of, and barriers to, positive esports behaviours?* and specifically sub-questions: *What are the esports governance structures and codes of conduct evident on esports related websites? And What types of governance structures and codes of conduct can support positive esports experiences for stakeholders?*
- Inform the insights into the a) experiences; b) aspirations; c) attitudes; and d) behaviours of esports stakeholders, including coaches, players, league organisers.

Establishing and sustaining global systematic, regulatory mechanisms and structures appears to have had its challenges thus far within the esports industry ecosystem. These challenges are likely to

increase in complexities given the ongoing evolving nature of online spaces, technologies, and innovations such as a developing metaverse that will have the potential to change the way we interact, live, work and play. The everchanging nature of the gaming space, and society more broadly, highlights that more than ever, there is, and will continue to be, a need for, a collective commitment to developing, and embedding governance frameworks, codes of conduct, regulations, and rules across all levels of the esports industry ecosystem from grass roots through to the highest level of competition.

Importantly, to achieve a positive, well organised, technologically enabled, and competitive esports experience, and to help ensure the integrity of esports is maintained, these efforts will need to sit alongside a shared responsibility and accountability for safeguarding and supporting all stakeholders, particularly young players. The esports industry continues to experience rapid growth, with gamers very keen to assemble together in social and community spaces. Buy-in from all stakeholders is needed then to help realise collective benefits for the industry, but particularly benefits for young gamers.

A sentiment expressed by many who were interviewed was that ‘gaming is not going away’, further imploring those in education to ‘listen to young people.’ Whilst there are risks to be managed and investments required for resourcing and training, there is an imperative for schools, community groups and other grass roots organisations to come together. Particularly to provide education programs that help challenge gaming stereotypes, that help shift attitudes so that esports and gaming can be accepted into mainstream culture, just like traditional sports, and to provide gaming specific programs that encourage positive gaming behaviours and that increase awareness about esports governance and codes of conduct in order to provide safe, organised spaces for young esports players.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There is an opportunity, and need, for continued investigations into the specific details contained within esports codes of conduct and the regulations identified throughout this website analysis. Additionally, further investigations into the websites of other esports stakeholders who sit within the esports-industry ecosystem, including game publishers/developers and streaming sites is warranted. Dedicated investigations into the specific content contained in codes of conducts may help reveal any gaps that need to be addressed in relation to the development, promotion, and awareness of esports governance, rules, and regulations to ensure they remain relevant and current, particularly for the Australian esports context and community.

Further, investigations into other stakeholders in the esports industry ecosystem also can help inform the development of unified strategies and coherent structures for addressing jurisdictional challenges when trying to manage breaches.

Given the appeal of esports to young players and audiences, and the at times toxic nature of interactions and harassment that occurs mostly in open game settings, there is a need for future research to examine ways that governance frameworks and codes of conduct can be further developed, aligned, and promoted to safeguard and protect young people's interests and wellbeing, particularly for more vulnerable gamers, and to inform education programs that can proactively address safe and respectful online gaming practices. Future discussion about a possible role for government bodies, such as the eSafety Commission, could be especially useful, as could research into the types of support structures and services that could benefit gamers and their parents/carers.

Due to Covid19, high school students were not able to be recruited for the current pilot study. Future research, which invites their participation and explores the experiences of students and schools who participate in esports programs and competitions can help inform the uptake of programs at the grassroots level, including other school, education and community settings.

Conducting future research that identifies opportunities for government bodies to engage with esports stakeholders, particularly publishers, may help to progress esports governance agendas in transparent and equitable approaches.

Research too that helps inform how best to increase awareness about esports, particularly to support increased understanding in relation to esports comprising more than one sport/game, and to help break down gaming stereotypes is warranted. Additionally, investigations to explore the nature of the potential benefits and implications for players and other stakeholders, if esports was to be officially recognised as a sport could potentially create new opportunities for players with greater scope for competing internationally.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

- That government proceeds on the basis of the evidence from this Pilot Study to:
 - C. facilitate connections between esports stakeholders and to
 - D. support safe, healthy, inclusive school and community esports involvement

Recommended Actions and way forward to meet Overarching Recommendations A & B:

- 14. Convene a roundtable/summit with esports stakeholders**, particularly with High School and University Esports League, interested schools, community groups to consider codes of conduct and ways of supporting grassroots healthy gaming programs in schools and communities more holistically
- 15. Convene a working party of representatives from each education sector to determine overarching Codes of Conduct for esports in SA Schools**
- 16. Establish a youth brains trust and facilitate workshops with young people to understand their perspectives and codesign solutions for safe, healthy and positive gaming**
- 17. Collaborate with stakeholders to promote consistent approaches** to ensuring Codes of Conduct and governance structures are accessible across all esports dedicated websites, particularly those based in Australia
- 18. Review existing wellbeing and sports policies and resources and establish dedicated healthy gaming education programs** to include esports
- 19. Determine technical, infrastructure, and wellbeing supports required** for healthy and positive gaming experiences in schools and community
- 20. Build school capacity to support interested teachers** so they can confidently facilitate school based esports competitions, incorporate esports as a learning tool and champion innovation in gaming curriculum
- 21. Adequately resource schools to enable esports** to be offered technically and safely within curriculum and co-curricular spaces, and to align with improved community resourcing (e.g., Local Councils)
- 22. Identify, review, and promote governance models** that most clearly align with the needs of government and the esports industry with regard to child and youth safety
- 23. Collaborate with whole of government (e.g., Education, Law, Health, Sports and Recreation, Child Protection), and esports stakeholders** to position South Australia as a centre for positive esports (Link to Game On 1.7)
- 24. Collaborate with the eSafety Commission for the promotion of child-safe esports environments**; resources, support and guidance regarding online safety in gaming and esports, including in and out of game gambling
- 25. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop education and marketing-styled campaigns to help parents/carers** understand (destigmatise and demystify) gaming as a contemporary growth area for recreation, skills development and career opportunities, and to address stereotypes of gamers to maximise inclusion and acceptance of all gamers regardless of gender, race or religion
- 26. Align STEM and Social Emotional Learning with esports** and actively encourage girls to play, code, and create content

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

From: no_reply@unisa.edu.au
Sent: Wednesday, September 18, 2019 2:20 PM
To: Human Ethics; Neil Tippet; Alan Barnes; Barbara Spears; Carmel Taddeo; Martyn Mills-Bayne
Subject: Human Ethics: Application approved

Dear Applicant

Re: Ethics protocol "ESports Positive Behaviour Research: A pilot study" (Application ID: 202223)

Thank you for submitting your ethics protocol for consideration. Your protocol has been considered by the E2 Committee Review Group.

I am pleased to advise that your protocol has been granted ethics approval and meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Please note that the E2 Committee Review Group's decision will be reported to the next meeting of the Human Research Ethics Committee for endorsement.

Please regard this email as formal notification of approval.

Ethics approval is always made on the basis of a number of conditions detailed at http://www.unisa.edu.au/res/forms/docs/humanresearchethics_conditions.doc; it is important that you are familiar with, and abide by, these conditions. It is also essential that you conduct all research according to UniSA guidelines, which can be found at <http://www.unisa.edu.au/res/ethics/default.asp>

Please note, if your project is a clinical trial you are required to register it in a publicly accessible trials registry prior to enrolment of the first participant (e.g. Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry <http://www.anzctr.org.au/>) as a condition of ethics approval.

Best wishes for your research.

Executive Officer
UniSA's Human Research Ethics Committee
CRICOS provider number 00121B

This is an automated email and cannot be replied to. Please direct your query to humanethics@unisa.edu.au.

Appendix 2

Principle 1: SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

All esports community members deserve to participate in and enjoy esports in safe spaces and to be free from threats and acts of violence and from language or behavior that makes people feel threatened or harassed.

Principle 2: INTEGRITY AND FAIR PLAY

Cheating, hacking, or otherwise engaging in disreputable, deceitful, or dishonest behavior detracts from the experience of others, unfairly advantages teams and players, and tarnishes the legitimacy of esports.

Principle 3: RESPECT AND DIVERSITY

Esports promotes a spirit of healthy competition. Whether in person or online, all members of the esports community should demonstrate respect and courtesy to others, including teammates, opponents, game officials, organizers, and spectators. Esports is truly global and brings together players from different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. We believe the broad and diverse player base of esports contributes to its success. We support an open, inclusive, and welcoming environment for all, no matter one's gender identity, age, ability, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.

Principle 4: POSITIVE AND ENRICHING GAME PLAY

Esports can help build self-confidence and sportsmanship and boost interpersonal communication and teamwork skills. Esports brings players and fans together to problem solve through strategic play, collaboration, and critical thinking. Participation in esports can also lead to the development of new and lasting friendships among teammates, competitors, and members of the broader esports community.'

<https://www.isfe.eu/isfe-esports/>

Appendix 3: Glossary

This list is designed to offer a basic insight into competitive gaming terminology, which can vary greatly depending on the game in question.

GAME-SPECIFIC LINGO	DEFINITION
1337 (leet)	Leet speak is a language derived from the gaming world where numbers are used in place of a few letters. Using 1337 as an example: 1 = L, 3 = E, 7 = T which spells out LEET in English. Many gamer handles will incorporate a number in place of a letter, i.e. Fatality = Fatal1ty.
Activision	The oldest game company established in 1979 and the creator of the famous Atari system. They're known for a lot of older, console and PC, non-esports titles. They're more famous for being known to acquire more independent gaming companies (Vivendi, Blizzard, Sierra Studios) and bringing them under their corporate umbrella. Activision created the Call of Duty franchise which has a steady Esports following. Activision also bought Major League Gaming, one of the oldest gaming leagues that hosts online and live tournaments.
Admin	Someone who oversees forums or game channels or sometimes servers which games are hosted on. Duties include deleting undesirable posts and reprimanding troublesome users, and kicking players who are cheating or being destructive to the game. Can also be used intermittently as " <i>mod</i> ". See Mod(2).
Aggro	Aggro can refer to either a style of play where you play more aggressively, aiming to cause more pressure than your opponents, or the mechanic in some games that causes non player characters to attack players (i.e. to 'take aggro').
Aimbot	A cheat (in FPS games) that locks onto a player before shooting, usually with headshots. (Someone with four headshots in five seconds is probably using Aimbot.) If someone is aimbotting they've found an exploit in the game and will most likely be reprimanded and banned from the game for doing so.
Analyst	An expert that has a deep knowledge of specific esports title, the teams involved and current strategies. An analyst tends to feature on a panel (see definition) .
AoE	Stands for Area of Effect. This is usually a spell or attack that hits anyone standing in its vicinity.

	A form of attacking the opponent's base, commonly found in MOBAs or RTS games, where the enemy is not aware of your presence or you have already cause a lot of damage before they can react. A successful backdoor usually results in a win.
Assist	Although there are certain aspects of particular games that can be counted as assists, it is universally used to describe a player dealing damage to an enemy that a teammate then kills; this can be over a duration of time, too, depending on the game. For instance, if I land some hits on an opponent and then move away for a while, I will score an assist when my teammate kills them. Restoring full health in most games negates the assist because the damage dealt is reversed
Auto Attack	An auto attack typically costs no resources, it's enabled by pressing a particular button or mouse click to make the character automatically attack its target over and over again
Avatar	The game character's model or picture used to represent each player. Simple example: when you played Mario on nintendo, Mario was your Avatar.
Backdoor	When a player attacks the enemy's nexus (home base) while most of them, if not all of them, are occupied somewhere else.
Ban	A ban occurs during the draft (see definition) stage of an esports event, teams ban which heroes/champions/characters they don't want the other team to play in that match.
Babysit	When a player frequently assists a teammate in order to help them get more powerful
Bait	Feigning weakness or vulnerability to lure in or instill false-confidence in an opponent.
Betting	Placing individual money, or cryptocurrency, on a competitive match. This could consist of the overall winner of a match, down to the intricate details within a game. Most betting requires you to place bets before the match, but there are some mid-match bets that can be placed.
Blink/Flash	A Blink or Flash is a form of movement where a character disappears and reappears a short distance away.
Blizzard	An iconic gaming company created 1991 with its first hit being Warcraft, an RTS PC game, along with other titles: Diablo, Starcraft (a very popular, and one of the first true Esports titles), Heroes of the Storm, along with newer Esports titles: Hearthstone, and Overwatch. They also created World of Warcraft, an MMORPG with a smaller PvP Esports following. In 2013, Activision and Blizzard merged, publicly known as Activision Blizzard.

Bots	Artificial Intelligence in a game. They are programmed players who you can compete against in a multiplayer game. Think about the question “are you playing against the computer?” and that’s exactly what you’re doing. Players use bots to practice against, or if the internet is out you can play offline with them.
Bracket Reset	A term found in the final round of double-elimination tournaments. The winner’s bracket competitor has not lost a match yet, where-as the loser’s bracket competitor has. If the loser’s bracket competitor wins, it ‘resets the bracket’ so that both competitors have now lost a match. At that point, the next winner takes all.
Brush	Sometimes called bushes. These are areas of the map that block vision of a particular area. Players can usually stand in the brush to remain hidden from the enemy, unless there a ward or spell has revealed vision. If an enemy player also steps into the brush, any opposing players in there will be revealed.
Buff	A gaming term for a spell, ability or effect that strengthens a character's abilities. Buff is a word commonly used in MOBAs , MMORPGs and RPGs . An increase in a value that can be obtained in-game or put in place through patches from the developer; for example, a damage buff is an increase in the power of attacks.
Build	A build is how your character or base is improved through items, abilities or other upgrades. Different builds can focus on different areas, such as attack damage or defense.
Burst damage	When a lot of damage is dealt in a small amount of time
Camp	When a player digs in and remains in the same spot, usually in a corner or some spot with a minimal number of approach routes, and doesn’t leave for a significant amount of time.
Carry	MOBAs (see definition) contain a role called the 'carry'. A carry is traditionally vulnerable early in a game but becomes the main source of damage. The phrase comes from carrying the team to victory. When a player’s great performance balances out the bad performance of his or her team; when the rest of the team doesn’t pull their weight, a player with outstanding performance may carry the team to victory.
Caster	(also called a Shoutcaster) The gaming term for a commentator in a live event.
Casting	This has two definitions. In game, it is the period where an ability is being charging up before being used. Secondly, ‘casting’ is a definition that can

	also be used to describe someone casting (aka commentating) an esports match.
CC (Crowd Control)	<p>These are abilities that limit control of a character. Some common CCs are:</p> <p>Knockback – the character is pushed back or moved somehow.</p> <p>Root – when a character cannot move but can still use abilities.</p> <p>Stun – when a character is unable to act or move.</p> <p>Blind/Silence – the character cannot attack or use abilities respectively.</p>
Champ/Champion	The character that the summoner calls on and controls.
Channel	An ability where the character casting it cannot perform any other actions during the spell's casting animation
Cheese	A playstyle that revolves around using unknown, 'cheap' or 'non meta' mechanics or characters to gain an edge over the opposition.
Circuit	When referring to esports, a circuit is used as a word to discuss all the events in that year. For example, for Dota 2, there a circuit would include all Majors, Minors, charity events and The International .
Cooldown	This is the period after using an ability in which the ability cannot be activated again.
Comp (Composition)	<p>A composition is simply a specific group of in-game characters chosen to form a team. This can be specialised with certain goals in mind.</p> <p>The composition of a team. The strategy a team employs with how they take the field. Examples: Running 2 tanks, 2 DPS, and 2 healers in Overwatch. A traditional sports analogy would be the formation in Football.</p>
Console	<p>Console refers to a piece of technology that is used to play games other than a Computer. It is primarily used to talk about an Xbox or PlayStation.</p> <p>Console refers to a piece of technology that is used to play games other than a Computer. It is primarily used to talk about an Xbox or PlayStation.</p>
Denying	Denying is when you use your character to stop your opponent from attacking non-player characters, or when your character protects friendly characters so your opponent cannot. For example, you can 'deny' the enemy a kill.
Dive	Diving is when a character moves aggressively into an unsafe position, such as where they are outnumbered or where the enemy is heavily defended, usually to pick up a kill or score.

Draft	Certain esports titles have a period before a match called the 'draft'. The draft consists of two teams picking (see Pick definition) and Banning (see Ban definition).
Drafting/Picks and Bans	The period before a game where both teams will decide which characters they will play and which characters they will ban from the game.
EA (Electronic Arts)	Similar to Activision, they're an older video game publisher established in 1982. They're known for all of the popular sports titles: Madden, FIFA, NBA Live, along with a FPS Esports title: Battlefield. EA is not as involved in Esports, in the general sense, as the other studios due to their focus on the very popular PC/Console gaming titles geared towards casual gamers.
Esports	Esports stands for electronic sports. The word 'esport' is used to describe and video game that has a professional competitive scene. The most popular esports are <i>League of Legends</i> , <i>Overwatch</i> and <i>Counter Strike: Global Offensive</i> .
Farm	Farming is the act of acquiring virtual money throughout the game, normally by killing neutral targets to amass a high creep score.
Feeding	Feeding is when a character dies repeatedly to the same enemy or team. This normally results in the enemy being more powerful than the rest of the players in the game, and can result in them being labelled 'fed'.
Fighting Game	Fighting Games are traditionally 1v1 violent combat based game. Much like a boxing match, players control a fighter and try to knock each other out various using combinations and special moves. Games include <i>Streetfighter</i> and <i>Tekken</i> .
Fighting Game Community	Fighting Game Community (FGC) is an umbrella term to cover everyone interesting in any of the fighting game titles. Popular games include <i>Tekken</i> and <i>Streetfighter</i> .
First Person Shooter	First Person Shooter's (FPS) are combat based games viewed through the eyeline of the character you are controlling. FPS titles include <i>Call of Duty</i> , <i>Counter Strike: Global Offensive</i> and <i>Overwatch</i>
Flank	Coming up behind the enemy team. Some esports have characters or heroes specifically design for this purpose. Flanking heroes
Fog of war	Fog of war is a term used to describe an area of the map which is hidden from view. This is normally due to your character being too far away or if their view is obstructed.
Frag	An alternative term for picking up a kill in-game.

Freemium	A freemium game is one that is free to play up until a certain point, but to unlock addition levels/maps you will need to pay.
Free Agent Players	<p>Students participating on a Free Agent Team during an High School Esports League Open Tournament. These students do not need to attend the same school or be enrolled in the same (or any) team to participate on a Free Agent Team's Roster. Free Agents may only participate in the Challenge tournaments.</p> <p>School Team Players may participate in Challenge tournaments as Free Agent players for other teams.</p>
Free Agent Teams	<p>Teams formed of students from different high schools competing in a Challenge Tournament. Rosters created within a free agent team compete in the same divisions as school teams during Challenge Tournaments.</p> <p>Free Agent Teams are not permitted to participate in HSEL/MSEL/NJCAAE Major (Fall and Spring) tournaments, but this may vary in other communities.</p>
Free to play (F2P)	Games that cost no money to download and play.
Game Connection	<p>An individual's name which will display in-game for a specific game connected on their Generation Esports profile.</p> <p>See also: Gamertag, Ingame Name, Screen Name</p>
Gamertag/Screen Name	Unique custom name created by all players which can be seen in-game.
Game Developers	The people that construct the game from start to finish.
Game Publishers	The people/companies that are responsible for marketing and selling the games
Ganking	Ganking is the act of surprising an opponent, typically from behind, and aiming to take advantage of them while they are unprepared.
Gank	More than just 'double-teaming,' this is when multiple players attack a single opponent who is often alone. This is an important term to remember because those that survive a gank all on their own, without retreating or being helped by a teammate, or better yet, repel/kill the attackers are showing a lot of skill.
Ghost	To gain information from the opponent's perspective in order to get an advantage.
Glass cannon	A type of character who provides a large amount of damage while being fragile.

Gold advantage	Commonly used to show which team has the most gold in a game, casters will refer to this after teamfights or objectives to give the viewers an idea of how important they were. In certain games, gold can be spent on acquiring new items or powers.
Griefing	Playing with the intent to annoy or anger other players.
Grind(ing)	Grinding refers to the playing time spent doing repetitive tasks within a game to unlock a particular game item or to build the experience needed to progress smoothly through the game. Grinding most commonly involves killing the same set of opponents over and over in order to gain experience points or gold. Although other game genres require some grinding, role-playing games (RPG) – specifically massively multiplayer online role-playing games – are the most notorious for requiring this type of time investment from players.
Hack	A form of cheating. Common examples of “hacking” include scripting (see below), aim-assistance, gaining additional information about player/equipment location (map hack), and eliminating visual textures (wall hacking).
Harass/Poke	A strategy which involves staying at range and dealing small amounts of damage to your opponent over time, forcing them into a disadvantage.
Home Team/Player	The team/player that will set up the Custom Match (see custom match)
Initiating	The act of starting a fight/gank.
Inting	Short form for intentional. Used when somebody is intentionally feeding the enemy players or intentionally trying to lose the game. The verb is to ‘int’.
Invitational	A tournament with a limited number of players invited to compete.
Jersey	The official t-shirt an esports team wears at an esports event; it contains sponsors and organization (see definition) logos.
Juke	An in-game dodge or evasion that is considered to be difficult to execute. Juking is when you trick your opponent to move or attack in a direction away from yourself. It can also be used to describe baiting someone into an attack or move that misses.
Jungler Jungling	A character who focuses on attacking neutral NPCs and providing support for their team. Jungling is the act of clearing an area (or jungle) of NPCs, while occasionally ganking the enemy players.

	To just stay in the jungle in order to gain experience and gold instead of the lane killing neutrals
Kappa	A popular emoticon on the Twitch streaming platform, usually used to convey sarcasm or a joviality. Other Twitch emotes can be found here: https://twitchemotes.com/
KDA	Also written “K/D/A” = an acronym that represents the performance of a player by the number of kills scored, deaths taken, and assists given; it’s often displayed as a ratio and this ratio is calculated by dividing the number of kills by the number of deaths. So, if I have scored 20 kills and died 10 times, my KDA is 2.0.
Killstreak	Successive kills without dying, in many games these are rewarded with commendations (in-game medals) and abilities.
Kiting	Kiting is when a character is moving away from a character who is chasing them while staying at a relatively safe distance.
Ladders	Refers to the online ranking of players in a video game. Many games rank their players competitively based on wins/losses and other stats. To climb the ladder means to become better ranked
Lag	A slowed response time between a gaming device and the game’s servers.
Laning	This is a term used in MOBA games to describe the process of moving down a particular ‘lane’ in order to farm, push and engage with the enemy players. It’s usually in the early and middle portions of the game where characters are focused on gaining gold/experience for later on in the game.
Last hit	When your character deals the killing blow. In some games this provides a bonus to the gold and experience acquired from an NPC.
Leaderboard	A chart that displays the seeding of the players/teams for a specific game tournament.
Level Up	Most games have some form of level system. Sometimes you need to spend a lot of time completing objectives before you reach a level where you can face a bigger boss or upgrade your weapons, armour, etc. Leveling up is as simple as going from Level 20 to Level 21, most likely unlocking new gear and making your player stronger.
League	League refers to the game ' <i>League of Legends</i> '.
Lobby	The “waiting room” which all players connect to before the round begins.

Major Tournaments	<p>A Spring/Fall tournament hosted by HSEL or MSEL in which the players will be students all attending the same school, invited by an admin who is a teacher/faculty.</p> <p>Free Agents and Free Agent Teams are not permitted in Major tournaments.</p>
Make-up match	An additional match which can be played through the queue by any teams that were unable to play one or more previous matches in a tournament.
Match	Also known as a single bout of competitive play. A match may consist of a set of games (e.g. Best-of-3, Best-of-5, etc).
Match Chat	A public chat for all members in the game.
Match Dispute	<p>A support ticket that is submitted to Generation Esports staff to protest the result of a match or inform about rule-breaking.</p> <p>Examples for filing a Match Dispute are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Score incorrectly reported • Game rules/settings not followed correctly • Non-rostered player participating in the match • Suspicions of cheating • Unsportsmanlike conduct (toxic behavior)
Match-Making (matchmaking)	<p>A service that searches for opponents to play against.</p> <p>See also, Queue</p>
Match Page	Main page generated by the queue used to join the pre-lobby game screen.
Map	Where the game takes place. Some esports have multiple maps that require different strategies Replaces the traditional sports “court”, “field”, “pitch” etc.
Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game	An evolution of the classic <u>RPG</u> . In this style of game players immerse themselves into the role of a character. The difference between MMORPG's and RPG is the interactive online component; players share an open world style of game with other people around the globe. These styles of games tend to include both cooperative questing and a <u>PVP</u> element. Games include titles such as <i>World of Warcraft</i> and <i>Guildwars</i> .
Meta	<p>A common word used across various esports meaning; the most dominate strategies, card combinations, champions/heroes and builds in online multiplayer games. The 'Meta' changes when game developers provide ingame updates and patches.</p> <p>Meta is short for metagame. This describes the way a game can be played in a certain way, usually in a particularly effective style. This can be applied to</p>

	characters, play styles and team compositions. For example, it might become the norm to pick two particular characters in a certain game, simply because they are currently strong together in the recent meta.
Meta Shift	When the established meta begins to change through the addition of new characters, abilities, buffs/nerfs, or new strategies
Metaverse	<i>“The Metaverse is an expansive network of persistent, real-time rendered 3D worlds and simulations that support continuity of identity, objects, history, payments, and entitlements, and can be experienced synchronously by an effectively unlimited number of users, each with an individual sense of presence.”</i> Matthew Ball
Microtransactions	Microtransactions refer to small in-game purchases that either enhance the experience or cosmetics in a game title.
Minions/Creeps	A common term for non-player characters.
Mod(1)	Short for ‘modification’, are files created for a game to add functionality or change the behaviour of a game, written by people who don’t work for the game developer. Official developer-released modifications are called patches . E.g. Counter-Strike (the original game) was a modification of an existing game, Half-Life. Valve released a developer kit that engineers could use to create their own game, maps, etc.
Mod(2)	Short for ‘moderator’, which is someone who oversees forums or game channels or sometimes servers which games are hosted on. Duties include deleting undesirable posts and reprimanding troublesome users, and kicking players who are cheating or being destructive to the game. Can also be used intermittently as “ <i>admin</i> ”.
Multiplayer Online Battle Arena	Multiplayer Online Battle Arenas (MOBA) are singular map action games, usually consisting of 5v5, 3v3 or 2v2. They are fast paced and team oriented; each player on a team plays a specific role. The major objective of MOBAs are to destroy the enemies base before they destroy your team's. MOBAs include <i>League of Legends, Dota 2</i> and <i>Smite</i> .
Nerf	When the game publishers provide a game update, often items/characters/skills get tinkered with to create an even playing field. A nerf occurs when a certain item/character/skill was considered too strong, the word 'nerf' refers to something being reduced in effectiveness. When a character or item is weakened by the developers in a content update, usually for being too strong.
Noob	Noob describes a player that is new to a certain game title.
n00b/newb/nub	Short for newbie (or noobie) and refers to new players who lack skill or are otherwise clueless about the game. If you’re an experienced player and you

	get called a noob for doing something a new person would do, you would take offense.
Objective	Objectives can refer to certain goals or targets in a game which provide an advantage to your team, such as a destination, a tower to destroy or a large neutral monster that provides a buff or other benefit to your team
Official Match	An official match occurs during any Generation Esports (HSEL, MSEL, NJCAA, etc) tournament. Regular Season, Playoff, and Final matches qualify as official matches.
Online Collectible Card Game	Online Collectible Card Games (OCCG) are much like traditional collectible card games. Players collect, trade and battle using a vast range of strategies and card combinations. Popular titles include <i>Hearthstone</i> and <i>Magic Online</i> .
Online Subscription	An item purchased to play online in multiplayer games (e.g. Xbox Live and PlayStation Network).
Organization	Organization refers to an umbrella company that houses <u>teams (see definition)</u> over multiple game titles.
Panel	Before and after an esports match a group of experts, called the panel, will discuss all aspects of the of the match.
Party	Group of players and spectators from a roster that enter the matchmaking service together. Check your organization's and tournament's specific rules regarding spectators.
Party Chat	A private chat reserved for members of a Party.
Party Leader	The person who invited others to join the Party in game.
Party Member	A person who accepted an invitation to join a Party
Peel	Peeling is when you are aiming to save one of your teammates. This is usually done when a character stops fighting their current target and instead uses their abilities to help their teammate.
Pentakill	This is a feat of high skill: a player single-handedly kills all five of the opponents, thus the enemy nexus is free game.
Perks	Perks are certain characteristics of a player's character. For example, the Ghost perk in the Call of Duty franchise masks the player from detection.
Pick	A pick occurs during the draft (see <u>Draft definition</u>) stage of an esports event, teams pick which heroes/champions/characters they would like to play in that match.

Ping	The response time between a gaming device and the game's servers.
Platform	Software used to set up teams, roster, and tournaments. Additionally used to refer to the gaming system used to play (PC, Xbox, PlayStation, etc).
Playoffs	The playoff stage of the tournament is a single-elimination tournament among the highest placed teams/players from the regular season. The size of the playoff pool varies depending on the game being played. Playoff tiers include the per-quarterfinals, quarterfinals, semifinals, and finals/3rd place match.
Private Match (Custom Match)	A match created on a platform by a user (or tournament admin) for express purposes of practice, scrimmage, or tournament play. Private matches are disconnected from the game's greater community.
Prizing	Items awarded to players based on completion of quests, participation, performance, and standing after a competition.
Purchase Passes	My passes The area where you can see your active passes and order history. Payment Methods Credit Card or Debit Card.
Pro	A pro refers to a professional esports player.
Proc	A proc is when an ability/item with a random chance activates.
Push/Split-push	Split pushing is the act of focusing on dealing damage to your opponent's base/towers. Normally this is used to split your opponent's resources between your character and the rest of your team. Pushing is also a term used to command a team or players to attack or move forward to a particular area.
'Push' or sometimes 'Rush'	Advancement in play, typically where multiple teammates work together to conquer the same area and drive back the opponents; a blitz.
Quests	Activities that can be completed within the Generation Esports platform to earn prizing. Example: Win 5 matches.
Queue	The matchmaking service hosted by Generation Esports.
Quick Chat	A subset of text acronyms/presets used to convey a message, typically in the chat within a game.

QQ	Meaning either “go quit” or “go cry”. On Blizzard’s Battlenet platform, you could press ALT+Q+Q to exit. This is normally used as an insult against angry players. It’s commonly mistook as a pair of crying eyes
Recall/Teleport	When a character uses an item/ability to teleport to their base/another part of the map.
Real-Time Strategy	In Real-Time Strategy (RTS) games, players control entire armies rather than singular characters. These are played through birds eye view allowing the player to have a complete oversight of the terrain, buildings and units they control. Most RTS games are war based such as <i>Star Craft 2</i> and <i>Warcraft 3</i> .
Region	Esports competitions/leagues tend to group countries based on geographical locations (North America, South America and Eastern Europe etc.). Selection of the region you are playing from to have the best connection to the games' servers.
Registration	Signing up a roster for a tournament
Regular Season	The regular season stage of a tournament, which may also be referred to as the “Group” stage, is the tournament's main stage. During this stage, players/teams compete for the highest placements to move on to the postseason.
Rekt	A colloquial word used to described the act of beating someone with ease.
Riot	Creators of the most popular Esports title: League of Legends, back in 2009. It was one of the first games developed with a main intention being on the Esports aspect. It was also the first of its kind to give away the game for free, to anyone who wanted to download it. It’s a free-to-play model, but Riot makes its money with in-app microtransactions. In order for gamers to buy new skins, weapons, etc. you have to use real money to purchase these add-ons.
Rotation	Rotation can be used to describe a team’s movement from one area of the map to another. It can also be used as the optimal order in which abilities should be used.
Role-Playing Game	A single player game in which players immerse themselves into the role of a character. These are usually adventure style games which a large element of character progression. Games include <i>Fallout</i> , <i>The Witcher</i> and <i>Skyrim</i> .
Round	The player can play one match per round, but there can be multiple rounds per Stage .

Roster	<p>A group of users participating in a specific game during a tournament or competition. The size of a roster will vary depending on the tournament entered.</p> <p>Rosters are locked (cannot be changed) one week before the start of playoffs.</p>
Round Robin	A format of tournament in which rosters/players are placed into groups, and every member of the group plays an equal number of matches against everyone else in the group.
Rush	An action or style of play where you or your team attack the opponents quickly before they can defend.
Salty	This is a term used to describe a player who is particularly agitated, upset or annoyed at something.
Scholarships	Money awarded for academic use. Similar to terrestrial sports in gaining a scholarship to play sports.
School Team Players	Students who are currently enrolled in their school and are eligible to participate on that school's team for the High School Esports League. Players can participate in both the Major/Challenge tournaments with their respective schools.
Score Reporting	Using the platform to record what team earned the win/loss and the series score
Scrimmage (Scrim)	A practice match that does not have any bearing on any active tournaments. May be scheduled through the queue or privately arranged.
Script (Scripting)	The use of coding or game modifications to cheat. See also, hack.
Series (Best of #)	<p>Rounds/matches of competition which consist of a game being played multiple times, e.g. (Best of 3, best of 5).</p> <p>Exact rules may vary from game to game - some games may require different maps or characters played in each game within the series.</p>
Shotcaller	Refers to the player who decides what tactics will be used during the game. In short, they call the shots
Single elimination	A competition format where if you lose one match, you are eliminated.
Shutout	When a team prevents the opposing team from scoring or winning a round.
Skillshot	An ability which follows a path manually directed by the player

Skin	A unique cosmetic character or equipment design that the player can select.
Smoke	An ability/item which limits the opponent's vision.
Smurf	The secondary account of a player that is of lower level or rank; it's a double-edged sword because tilted players can earn some wins, but the more they play on their smurf, the lower their skill becomes.
Snowball	When a player or team has become more powerful than their opponents can deal with at that time.
Solo	Games that have teams of one player (1v1 games).
Spectator	An individual who is not playing the game, but watching through a player's point of view (e.g. broadcasters, see Streaming).
Stage	A specific portion in the progression of the season.
Stack	A group of players playing together, or the act of keeping your team/units very close together to hide from your opponent better. It can also be used to describe a particular effect stacking multiple times, for example if an item proc increases your attack speed by 2% and can stack, after five stacks your attack speed will have risen by 10%.
Strat	The word 'strategy' shortened. It is used to describe a play style that is used in a game.
Streamer	A streamer is someone that plays games and shares their screen online so others can view them playing. This is a massive aspect of the gaming community. Popular streaming platforms include Twitch, Facebook and YouTube.
Streaming	Using apps such as Twitch, YouTube, Facebook, or Discord to broadcast gameplay providing others a player's point of view in game. See the Knowledge Base for additional rules about streaming .
Substitute	An extra player on a team's roster who may not necessarily play in every game or match.
Summoner	<i>Term given to the players as they choose and summon a champion to the field and control them.</i>
Support	The term 'support' is featured in various esports titles; it refers to a play style that is very self-sacrificial for the good of the team.

Swag bag	An assortment of awesome gear from Generation Esports. See also, prizing.
Swiss	A format of tournament in which players with similar records are matched against each other.
Tank	The term 'tank' is featured in various esport titles, it refers a play style that is very aggressive. A tank is a durable character that is used to absorb large amounts of damage and aims to shield other team members. A character archetype that is distinguished by its survivability.
Team	A team refers to the group of professional players that compete together in an esports title. Organizations registered with Generation Esports must form an Esports Team. In the case of the High School Esports League, Middle School Esports League, or NJCAA Esports, teams must be composed of students from the same school. For team members to participate in events, the Team Administrator will create rosters from team members for the respective games and enter them into tournaments.
Team Administrator	The user who oversees the operations of a team and acts as a point of contact between the team and Generation Esports staff. For HSEL/MSEL/NJCAAE, Team administrators are faculty or staff of the school.
Team Captains	Players who assume the responsibility of serving as their team's point of contact. Team Captains are responsible for queuing their team for matches and reporting match scores. Team administrators may designate Team Captains.
Team game	A game that requires more than one person to make a roster.
The International	Dota 2's main event, it traditionally occurs in August every year. It holds the record for the highest tournament prizepool.
Tilt	When a player is playing badly or without confidence, usually due to anger or frustration, they are 'on tilt' or 'tilted'. This term comes from the 'tilt' feature in pinball.
Title	Used synonymously with "game".
Twitch	The most popular streaming platform for gamers, it is filled with amateur <u>streamers (see definition)</u> and professional esports events. The most popular platform for users to stream live gaming along with videos on demand. Established in 2011, it was bought by Amazon in 2014.

	Professional and casual gamers can stream themselves playing any video game title while others can watch live, chat, and even donate money to the streamer. Most professional gamers make extra income by streaming and growing their brand. Almost every Esports tournament will always stream live on Twitch. It has three other competitors: Hitbox , Azubu and MLG.tv
Tower/Turret	A structure building that serves as defense of the lanes and the base.
Tournament	Competition (for individual tournaments within a greater event).
Tournament Stages	Tournament stages are the designated rounds in which differing rules such as match length, new player/team registration, and match scheduling take place. For example, pre-season, regular season, and playoffs are separate tournament stages.
Toxic / Toxicity	Unsportsmanlike conduct is not welcomed in Esports. General examples include poor language or mindset. See Player Guidelines for more details.
Ultimate	A character's most powerful ability. It's normally on a long cooldown and is often referred to as an 'ulti'.
Unsportsmanlike Conduct	See Player Guidelines for more details
Unofficial Matches	Any match that takes place outside of any Generation Esports tournament. These matches include, but are not limited to, Scrimmage matches and Community Events.
Veto	A team rejecting a Ban selection.
Valve	Historic publishing company created by Gabe Newell (gaben as he is popularly called in the gaming community) in 1996. Their first game was Half-life, a first person shooter for PC which spawned popular modifications that became Esports titles: Counter-Strike, Day of Defeat, and Team Fortress. They created the popular cloud based PC client, Steam , which gives gamers the ability to purchase new games, buy add-ons, and manage all of their gaming titles, friends network, along with giving independent game creators the opportunity to upload their creations for purchase on their Steam Store
Vision	How much of the map your character or team can see.
Wards	Consumable items that are used in the fog of war to gain vision of a particular area.
Zerg	A method of play involving early and cheap aggression.

Zoning	When your character uses aggressive tactics to force an opponent to leave an area. Normally this is used to give your team an advantage by holding a more safe area.
Glossary/terms Sources: https://www.cynopsis.com/esports-glossary/ https://britishesports.org/general-esports-info/a-z-of-esports-terminology-competitive-game-jargon/ https://www.lineups.com/esports/esports-glossary/ https://www.roundhillinvestments.com/esports-glossary https://wrat.com/2020/05/28/a-beginners-guide-to-esports-terms-glossary/ https://help.generationesports.com/hc/en-us/articles/4402850393620-Generation-Esports-Glossary https://discoveresports.com/gamer-lingo/	

Table below sourced from: <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/esports-stakeholders/240440#:~:text=stakeholders%20in%20eSports%2C%20provides%20a,the%20future%20of%20th e%20industry>

Stakeholder Group	Descriptions	Examples	Importance
Publishers	These organizations own the intellectual property of the video games which eSports leagues, clubs and players compete in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riot Games Inc. • Valve Corporation • Activision Blizzard • EA Sports 	Very High
Developers	These organizations are the creators of the games on which play occurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NetherRealm • EA Sports 	Very High
Event Operators	Organizations or groups who organize and host eSports events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESL • FACEIT • Dreamhack 	Medium to High
Leagues	The competitive set of events or tournaments, where teams compete for an overall title (championship)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eSports Championship Series (ECS) • ESL's Pro League • The American Collegiate eSports League (ACEL) • The National Association of Collegiate eSports (NACE) • NBA 2K 	High
Teams/Clubs	Sets of players who compete as a group, as an identified team, in an eSports league	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fnatic • Astralis • Complexity Gaming 	Medium

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College Teams (e.g., Harrisburg University) 	
One-off Competitions	Major competitive tournaments that are not affiliated with a league	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The International Apex League of Legends India Champions Cup 	Medium
Streaming Platforms	Organizations who offer, manage and develop platforms for online media and streaming by fans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Twitch YouTube Gaming Twitter 	Very High
Broadcasters	Traditional cable broadcasters who also offer streaming and other media services and outlets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESPN Turner Sports 	High
Sponsors	Brands who invest resources into eSports in return for marketing rights to achieve their own objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intel Red Bull Samsun Coca-Cola Audi 	Medium
Players	The athletes/participants who compete as individuals or members of teams in leagues or competitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fatal1ty NaDeSHoT Ninja 	High
Gambling Organizations	Firms who offer fans and gamblers the opportunity to bet on eSports competitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unikrn Bet365 SkyBet 	Low
Federations and Associations	The governing bodies, typically not-for-profit organizations, who are responsible for the stewardship of eSports, its rules and its development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International eSports Federation 	Medium to High
Equipment and Apparel Manufacturers	The organizations who produce the equipment that players use to compete, the clothes they wear and the gaming accessories they use in competition and/or training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turtle Beach 	Medium
Ticket Sellers and Resellers	Organizations who sell tickets to eSports events in the primary market (i.e., direct from event itself) or secondary market (i.e., resale of tickets)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> eSports Tickets StubHub Vivid Seats Specialized Ticket Brokers 	Medium
Traditional Sport Clubs	Groups of players competing as a team in a non-eSports league, but who (as a club) have invested in the ownership or management of an eSports club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FC Schalke 04 West Ham United F.C. The NBA Clubs in NBA 2K 	Medium
Celebrities	Well-known figures from outside of eSports but who have invested in eSports through club or league ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stan Kroenke Michael Jordan 	Low
Fans	Followers of eSports leagues, clubs and/or players. They are often also amateur players themselves.		Very High

Appendix 4: Interview Protocol and Schedule

Interview protocol:

Thank you for your time today. For the purposes of the recording, could you please state your name and your association with/interest in esports (player/teacher/coach/organiser etc) (See Q1 & Q2)

All identifying information will be removed and a pseudonym allocated for analysis and reporting.

The deidentified transcript will be collated with others, and thematized to provide the collective insights into the attitudes, behaviours, interests, aspirations, governance and codes of conduct associated with esports.

This interview should take around 30 minutes, depending on how much you choose to chat to us about esports.

For the purposes of consent: can you please indicate that you understand the purpose of this interviewand that you understand that you can choose to stop at any time, and also to not answer any questions without penalty.

Do you consent?

Are you happy to continue?

If you would like you can switch off your camera.

Guiding questions

1. **Participant information/demographics: See above**
 - a. What community organisation do you represent/are part of?
 - b. How long have you been involved in esports with organisation?
2. **Participant personal experiences esports/gaming**
 - a. Can you provide some background into your experiences with gaming, and esports specifically? How long have you been playing/coaching etc.
3. **Have you ever had any concerns during your involvement in esports, e.g., safety, bullying? Griefing?**
4. **Attitudes about esports generally**
 - a. What are your attitudes about esports generally, benefits? Disadvantages, risks if any, as a player/coach/supporter?
5. **Community/School/Esport organisation experience**
 - a. Can you tell us about your organisation's involvement in esports?
6. **Governance: What are your thoughts about governance in esports?**
 - a. At your organisation's level
 - b. More widely e.g., tournament level
 - c. What are your perceived barriers and enablers of governance in esports?
7. **Codes of conduct: What are your thought about codes of conduct in esports? For:**
 - a. schools
 - b. community
 - c. esport groups/organisations
8. **What are your perceived barriers and enablers of governance and codes of conduct in esports?**
9. **What is your vision for esports in your organisation/school/community?**

Thank you for your time. This has been most helpful. Would you be willing to have a follow-up email should we have any other questions which may arise during this process, which we have not covered.

Please state your email address if so:

Questions to send if they can't do the interview but are willing to email their response.

1. What community organisation do you represent/are part of?
2. How long have you been at this community organisation?
3. Can you provide some background into your experiences with gaming, and esports specifically? How long have you been playing/coaching etc.
4. Can you tell us about your organisation's involvement in esports?
5. What are your attitudes about esports generally, benefits? disadvantages if any, as a player/coach/supporter?
6. Have you ever had any concerns during your involvement in esports particularly regarding safety and bullying?
7. What are your thoughts about governance in esports? a) At your organisation's level
b) esports team level and more widely at the tournament/league level?
8. What are your thoughts about codes of conduct in esports? For: schools, community and esports teams/leagues/organisations
9. What are your perceived barriers and enablers of governance and codes of conduct in esports?
10. What is your vision for esports in your organisation/school/community?

