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Unlocking Student Potential:

The Impact of the Esports Leaders Programme at Dearne Valley College

Leadership Skills Case Study



In 2024, Dearne Valley College became one of the first Trailblazer Centres in the UK to deliver the new Level 2 Qualification in Leadership Skills, developed in collaboration with British Esports and the Leadership Skills Foundation.

Delivered alongside the college's Level 3 BTEC Esports programme, the course's introduction was designed to formally recognise and reward skill development often overlooked in traditional curricula, particularly among students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Using a practical, esports-themed approach, the qualification enhanced students' confidence, attendance and engagement, while also providing a platform for career development and further education.

With attendance rates nearing 100%, strong feedback from local schools and several students progressing into leadership roles or higher-level studies, the programme has been hailed as a transformative success.

As a result, Dearne Valley College has expanded its cohort for 2024/25 and is exploring additional curriculum development, offering a proven model for institutions seeking to build real-world leadership skills through esports education.

100%
Achievement

18
Enrolled
18
Achieved

98%
Attendance

6 Learners
progressed on to
Higher Education /
University

100%
recommend the
course to other
learners

Over
100 Hours
of community
delivery through
esports events

Dearne Valley College, a pioneering further education institution in South Yorkshire, has built a reputation for embracing innovation in education.

With a modern £7 million campus in Wath-upon-Dearne and a mission to empower students from diverse backgrounds, the college offers a broad suite of academic and vocational courses.

Esports is a fast-growing focus area for the college, with programmes spanning Level 1 through to Higher Nationals in Esports.

In 2024, Dearne Valley College became one of 18 Trailblazer Centres to pilot the Level 2 Esports Leadership Skills Qualification, developed by the Leadership Skills Foundation, in collaboration with the British Esports Federation.

This qualification was offered as a complementary programme to a cohort of Level 3 BTEC Esports students already demonstrating leadership qualities.



Dearne Valley College had already established itself as a strong provider of esports education, offering the BTEC Esports programme from Level 2 to Level 3, and the Level 4 and 5 higher nationals in esports qualifications.

However, staff recognised a crucial gap in provision: while many students were already displaying natural leadership, there was no formal structure to recognise, nurture or develop these skills.

This need was especially significant given the wider context many students face, including socioeconomic disadvantage, personal hardship and a growing demand for education to support confidence, engagement and employability in new ways.

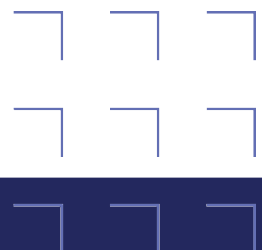
To address this, Dearne Valley College identified several strategic objectives:

- Boost student engagement and motivation by creating more dynamic and interactive learning experiences.
- Develop leadership, communication and teamwork skills to support personal growth and professional readiness.
- Enhance employability for roles both within esports and in wider industries.
- Introduce innovative educational opportunities that go beyond traditional classroom methods.
- Foster a safe, accessible, and inclusive learning environment for all students.

The goal was clear: to unlock student potential by creating meaningful pathways for leadership and personal development within esports education.

"The BTEC Esports programme is great and has had a huge impact, but there was something missing, the Esports Leaders Programme filled that by recognising the leadership skills that students were developing."

Lee Bowes,
Curriculum Team Leader for Esports,
Dearne Valley College



A Level 2 Qualification in Leadership Skills

In response, the college introduced the Level 2 in Leadership Skills Qualification, a programme designed to:

- Formally recognise and reward skill development.
- Complement the existing BTEC Esports curriculum by embedding real-world skills development.
- Reward high-performing students with additional recognition and responsibility.
- Create a stronger link between education and employability, supporting progression both in and beyond esports.

This qualification offers students a unique opportunity to build leadership confidence, gain transferable skills and thrive in a supportive, forward-thinking educational environment.

Unlike traditional methods, the Esports Leaders Programme offers a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring that students gain both an understanding of leadership principles and hands-on experience in applying them.

This approach offers several key advantages:

- **Relevance to Student Interests:** Esports taps into the existing passions of many students, increasing their engagement and motivation.
- **Practical Skill Development:** Students were actively involved in planning, organising, and running esports events, providing real-world experience in leadership roles.
- **Collaborative Learning:** Team-based games and activities fostered communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills.
- **Transferable Skills:** The skills developed through the programme, such as communication, delegation and conflict resolution, are highly transferable to various contexts, both within and outside of esports.

By integrating leadership skill development into the context of esports, Dearne Valley College provided its students with a learning experience that was:

- **Engaging:** Capturing student interest and motivating students to participate actively.
- **Relevant:** Equipping students with skills that are directly applicable to their future aspirations.
- **Empowering:** Building students' confidence and enabling them to take on leadership roles.

This adoption of the Esports Leaders Programme represents a significant shift towards a more innovative and student-centered approach to education, recognising the potential of esports to cultivate essential life skills and prepare students for success in the 21st century.

Programme Details & Implementation



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The Level 2 Qualification in Leadership Skills was delivered to a hand-picked group of 18 Level 3 BTEC Esports students in 2023/24.

Rather than mandating participation, this approach was seen as a way to foster greater engagement and motivation.

These students had already demonstrated leadership capabilities and were selected through a process that framed the programme as a reward, increasing their motivation.

The Level 2 in Leadership Skills Qualification includes 20 tutored hours and focuses on developing communication, teamwork, planning and real-world leadership skills through esports-themed activities. It blends theory with practical application, allowing students to:

- Plan and run esports events
- Take on roles such as shoutcaster, tournament manager, or team leader
- Engage in outreach activities, open evenings, and college-wide taster sessions

This practical application wasn't just about internal development; it was a powerful tool for wider community impact and social value. By having students lead these events, the programme significantly expanded the college's reach beyond its existing student body.

These events actively engaged diverse audiences – from prospective students attending open evenings, to parents and guardians witnessing their children's involvement and even curious grandparents discovering the positive aspects of esports.

The simple setups using PlayStations, Nintendo Switches, and even retro consoles were key to this broad appeal and inclusive delivery, ensuring sessions were engaging for a wide range of ages and backgrounds.

These activities were able to raise awareness of the college's wider programmes and its innovative approach to education. Furthermore, by positioning the college as a hub for positive, well-managed gaming events, it significantly enhanced its reputation within the local community, further developing trust and interest.

This proactive engagement is already showing promising signs for future recruitment into esports and other college programmes as a direct consequence of leadership activities.

Following the success of the initial cohort of 18 students, Dearne Valley College have expanded their programme to include 28 students, representing over 50% growth. The programme growth into 2025/26 reflects a strong student interest and impactful outcomes.

"We've basically done it with PS5s, Switches and some retro consoles, it's been as simple as that. It's not really about the hardware, it's about what you do with it."

Lee Bowes,
Curriculum Team Leader for Esports,
Dearne Valley College

Measurable Success: Outcomes That Matter



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The implementation of the Esports Leaders Programme at Dearne Valley College delivered exceptional outcomes, significantly benefiting students, staff and the wider college community.

1. Student Confidence and Personal Growth

A central achievement was the profound impact on student confidence and personal growth, cultivating a new generation of capable young leaders.

As Lee Bowes, Esports Curriculum Lead at Dearne Valley College explains, the initiative has been instrumental in fostering "a culture of young people who are seeking responsibility and who are going to be employable".

This transformative effect extended into students' self-perception, enabling them to truly grasp their inherent worth and potential. Lee further emphasised that the programme allowed students to realise "that they actually have value, they're worth something, they are employable".

A compelling example of this transformation is Evan.

Initially, Evan struggled with low self-confidence, describing himself as someone who "would really not speak to anyone at all. I'd just sit in silence..."

However, through his participation in the Esports Leaders Programme, Evan experienced a remarkable shift, stating, "This programme really helped me come out of my shell. I feel a lot more open to talking to more people in public".

Evan's experience was echoed by other students, who collectively reported significant improvements across several crucial areas.

Students consistently demonstrated enhanced public speaking abilities, more effective team communication, increased proficiency in event hosting and a notable surge in overall leadership confidence.

These tangible developments underscore the programme's success in equipping students with vital skills for both their personal and professional futures.

"As a student, I was kind of the quiet one. I just sat there and didn't talk to anyone at all. But after doing this, I talk a lot more to my classmates and people in general."

Evan
Student
Dearne Valley College

Measurable Success: Outcomes That Matter



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2. Academic Engagement

Beyond individual growth, the introduction of the Level 2 Qualification in Leadership Skills significantly boosted student engagement and enthusiasm.

Attendance rates were remarkably high at 99%, with students consistently turning up, motivated by the hands-on, rewarding nature of the learning.

This heightened engagement didn't just stay within the leadership sessions, with positive impacts on students' overall attendance and participation in their wider BTEC studies, contributing to a more motivated and committed learning environment.

Many graduates from the programme have not only progressed to higher education (Level 4 and 5 HNC/HND Programmes) but have also become valuable resources for the college, such as leading after-school and weekend activities, demonstrating the programme's lasting impact on their confidence and leadership abilities.

"The attendance was something ridiculous, like 99% of the programme. They wanted to be there... and that spilled over into their BTEC attendance."

Lee Bowes,
Curriculum Team Leader for Esports,
Dearne Valley College



Measurable Success: Outcomes That Matter



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3. Career Aspirations & Employability

The Esports Leaders Programme has played a significant role in enhancing students' career readiness and opening real-world opportunities.

Several students have since secured paid positions delivering events and supporting recruitment activities across the college.

Among them, Bib Smith, who now leads the F1 esports provision both at Dearne Valley College and at Sheffield Wednesday Football Club.

Evan, for instance, aims to pursue a career in Overwatch coaching, a profession that demands strong leadership and communication.

He recognises the programme's crucial role in preparing him for this path, stating: "For me, getting into coaching. You need good communication skills and confidence. So I feel like this was essential for me to do..."

Additionally, many students felt empowered to progress into higher education as a result of the programme, enrolling in Level 4 and Level 5 HNC/HND esports programmes.

The leadership qualification served as a vital confidence booster, reinforcing their ambitions and giving them a clearer pathway to esports-related careers.



Measurable Success: Outcomes That Matter



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4. College and Community Impact

The programme has had a transformative effect on both the college environment and its broader community connections.

It helped establish a strong network of student ambassadors who now play an active role in supporting college events such as open evenings and outreach initiatives.

The students' involvement has also received enthusiastic feedback from local schools and event attendees, who have recognised the professionalism and confidence demonstrated by the students.

This success has also helped inspire further expansion of the college's esports provision, reinforcing the programme's role as a catalyst for positive change.

"It's created a culture of young people who are seeking responsibility and who are going to be employable."

Lee Bowes,
Curriculum Team Leader for Esports,
Dearne Valley College

"The Esports Leaders Programme at Dearne Valley College has combined state-of-the-art facilities with an experiential learning and community outreach model, transforming students into confident, industry-ready professionals through real-world leadership experiences, enhancing progression into employment and higher education while growing and strengthening employer partnerships and enabling the college to be a national hub for esports talent, innovation, and opportunity."

Mark Ryan,
Vice Principal – Curriculum – RNN Group.



Forward Momentum: Plans & Prospects



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Following the success of the initial cohort, Dearne Valley College is committed to expanding its esports leadership offering.

For the 2024/25 academic year, 28 students are already enrolled in the programme with the college planning to introduce higher education pathways, including a Level 5 HND and a top-up degree in esports.

In addition, community delivery is now being developed through afterschool and Saturday clubs led by paid student leaders.

Facility development is also underway, with investments in new technology such as SIM rigs in partnership with Williams Esports to enhance hands-on learning and support public engagement.

"We're on a growth pathway here, we are going to continue to offer the Esports leaders programme as part of the Level 3 BTEC."

Lee Bowes,
Curriculum Team Leader for Esports,
Dearne Valley College



Recommendations for Other Institutions



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Dearne Valley College strongly recommends that other institutions adopt a similar approach by selecting students with leadership potential to maximise the programme's impact and positioning it as both a reward and a personal development opportunity.

Institutions should prioritise hands-on learning using flexible equipment and empower student leaders to support events and act as ambassadors.

By leveraging Dearne Valley's own successful adoption and approach, other institutions can deliver transformative experiences that prepare students for real-world opportunities and employment.

"It's offering the chance for the students to do something practical, that they can then take away with them into the real world and hopefully into employment."

Lee Bowes,
Curriculum Team Leader for Esports,
Dearne Valley College



About British Esports



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British Esports, established in 2016, is the UK's national body, fostering and developing esports from grassroots to professional levels.

They are committed to building an inclusive community where all can participate and thrive. A key focus of the federation is education, where British Esports has spearheaded the creation of a comprehensive academic pathway.

This integrates esports into the curriculum, enabling students to develop vital skills such as teamwork, communication, and critical thinking. Their nationwide tournaments provide platforms for students to showcase their abilities on a national stage.

Beyond education, British Esports actively supports the UK esports industry by collaborating with developers and organisers to create a sustainable ecosystem.

They offer guidance to aspiring professionals and advocate for esports globally, ensuring the UK remains a leader.

Through initiatives prioritising player welfare and education, British Esports is driving positive change and inspiring the next generation of esports talent.

Discover more at <https://britishesports.org>.



About Leadership Skills Foundation



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The Leadership Skills Foundation is a prominent awarding organisation dedicated to the development of leadership skills in young people.

For over 40 years, their practical qualifications have built confidence, communication and teamwork skills in over 2 million learners, fostering positive change in their communities.

One of Leadership Skills Foundation's most notable partnerships is with British Esports, which innovatively combines esports education with leadership skill development.

This collaboration leverages gaming to provide a dynamic platform for young people to hone essential 21st-century skills, positioning the Foundation at the forefront of accessible leadership skill development.

Discover more at <https://leadershipskillsfoundation.org/>.



Deliver the Esports Leaders Programme with British Esports and the Leadership Skills Foundation to unlock your students' leadership potential through the power of esports.

Our collaborative programmes provide a unique and engaging platform for students to develop crucial skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking – all within the context of competitive gaming.

Why Choose the Esports Leaders Programme?

- **Innovative Curriculum:** Our programmes blend cutting-edge esports education with established leadership skill development frameworks, creating a learning experience that resonates with today's students.
- **Engaging Format:** Through hands-on activities, team-based challenges, and real-world esports scenarios, students develop practical and essential leadership skills in an exciting and motivating environment.
- **Measurable Outcomes:** Witness tangible improvements in student engagement, communication, collaboration, and problem solving abilities, leading to increased confidence and enhanced employability prospects.
- **Expert Support:** Benefit from the combined expertise of British Esports and the Leadership Skills Foundation, receiving comprehensive support, resources, and guidance to successfully implement our programmes within your institution.

Get Involved

Ready to unlock your students' leadership potential?

Visit: <https://leadershipskillsfoundation.org/programmes/esports-leadership>

Contact us today to schedule a consultation and discuss how our esports leadership programmes can be tailored to meet the unique needs of your institution. Together, let's empower the next generation of leaders.

Contact Us



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Building The Leaders of Tomorrow Through Leadership in Esports.