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MoD Launches Esports Initiative to Strengthen Troops' Cyber Capabilities

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The UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) has unveiled a new esports programme designed to enhance British military personnel's digital and cyber skills. In collaboration with the British Esports Federation, the initiative will culminate in a pioneering esports tournament set for late 2026.

The International Defence Esports Games (IDEG) will serve as a platform to help personnel develop expertise in areas like artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and drone operations. According to officials, the tournament marks the first step in a broader plan to prepare the

armed forces for the realities of modern conflict, which increasingly includes digital and virtual threats.

The MOD drew on key lessons from Ukraine's defence strategy, particularly the development of drone simulator games used to improve reflexes and coordination. These insights have helped shape the UK's decision to integrate gaming into its military training tools.

Minister for Veterans and People, Alistair Carns DSO OBE MC MP, said the initiative reflects a necessary shift in training standards. "Esports will help attract, develop, and retain top cyber and digital talent, while fostering this government's Plan for Change. Our people must now be as adept with code, cybersecurity, and a game controller as they are with traditional combat skills," he stated.

Initially, the competition will be open only to serving military members and reservists. In time, the programme will expand to include cadets, civil servants, and other professionals working within the defence sector. The games will be hosted in the UK and supported by both major defence contractors and emerging technology firms in the military space.

Chester King, President of the British Esports Federation, welcomed the move, noting its impact on morale and skills development. "The UK's armed forces have recognised video games as a positive activity that can improve personnel welfare and morale, foster digital and cyber skills, and strengthen relations across the armed forces and beyond," he said.

Senior defence figures have increasingly acknowledged that battlefield preparedness now extends beyond physical drills. The growing role of drones, data, and cyber operations in warfare demands a workforce trained in digital responsiveness.

Lieutenant General Sir Tom Copinger-Symes KCB CBE highlighted this evolution. "Esports can contribute to the military's warfighting readiness," he said. "We've learned from our Ukrainian partners about how esports can train drone operators and cybersecurity specialists. People are quickly grasping how esports can change perspectives, enhance skills, and reach across borders with our international allies and partners."

He added that gaming helps troops "think, operate, and innovate across both the physical and virtual worlds," underlining the overlap between esports and real-life operational scenarios.

Over a year ago, the MoD formally recognised esports as an official military sport. That decision has helped unlock funding streams and created competitive opportunities for those in uniform, setting the stage for the 2026 IDEG.

While including video gaming in military training may raise eyebrows, officials insist that the strategy reflects a serious commitment to national defence modernisation. With growing cyber threats, drone warfare, and digital espionage shaping global conflicts, the armed forces are under increasing pressure to evolve.

By leveraging the popularity and accessibility of esports, the MoD aims to attract the next generation of digitally skilled recruits and enhance the UK's overall defence readiness in a fast-changing strategic environment.