

UK Ministry of Defence to Enhance Troops' Cyber Skills Through Esports

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The UK Ministry of Defence is set to bolster the cyber capabilities of its armed forces by introducing new training initiatives focused on the digital and virtual aspects of modern warfare. The upcoming event set to take place in late 2026 will feature the International Defence Esports Games, which aim to enhance the skills necessary for drone operation, artificial intelligence and cybersecurity areas vital to strengthening the UK's warfighting readiness.

The event is a direct response to lessons learned from the ongoing war in Ukraine, where Ukraine utilised drone simulator games to improve soldiers' hand-eye coordination and enhance operational efficiency. This innovative approach has demonstrated the benefits of using esports and gaming environments to develop crucial skills in a more accessible and interactive format.

Alistair Carns, the Minister for Veterans and People, stressed the importance of integrating esports into the military's training framework. He stated, "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.

The MOD aims to engage service personnel, including reservists, in esports competitions, with plans to expand the initiative to other defence personnel such as cadets and civil servants. The event will be supported by leading defence suppliers and smaller military technology companies, marking a significant shift in how military training is approached in the digital age.

Chester King, President of British Esports, commented on the evolving role of video games within the armed forces, stating that the MOD has recognised the positive impact of esports on personnel welfare, morale and skill development. He also highlighted the potential for strengthening relationships across the armed forces and broader sectors.

Lieutenant General Sir Tom Copinger-Symes KCB CBE also underscored the value of esports in enhancing warfighting readiness, noting that it helps personnel think, operate and innovate across both physical and virtual domains. He further noted the valuable lessons learned from Ukraine's use of esports to train drone operators and cybersecurity specialists. These skills, he says, are becoming increasingly important in modern defence and deterrence strategies.

Since esports was officially recognised as a military sport by the UK over a year ago, it has become an integral part of the MOD's efforts to ensure its personnel are prepared for the evolving nature of warfare. As the sector continues to develop, there is growing speculation that esports may eventually be considered for inclusion in the Olympics.

The UK's embrace of esports as a military training tool reflects a broader global trend of using gaming technology to build skills and foster international cooperation. With the IDEG

event set to take place in the UK, the armed forces' commitment to digital readiness is clear, ensuring that future conflicts are fought not only on the ground but in the cyber and virtual realms as well.