International Safeguards for Children in Esports

INTERNATIONAL
SAFEGUARDS
FOR CHILDREN IN SPORT

Introduction

Millions of children and young people around the world play and watch esports (organised, competitive video games) every day.

For some children and young people this is purely for recreation and fun. Others may participate in developmental programmes which use esports as an engagement tool. For some young people, esports may be their chosen future career, either as talented athletes, coaches or officials, or in a role in adjacent digital, creative or STEM linked industries. Esports may also be used as a wider vehicle, helping to support children and young people to develop future skills and contribute to their local communities.

Children and young people have the right to participate in esports in a safe and enjoyable environment. Their rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Research tells us that sport does not always put children's rights at the centre and sometimes fails to fully consider the risks to children and young people, leading to organisational cultures that do not allow for the discussion of abuse (Brackenridge, Kay & Rhind 2012).

Over the past 20 years or so, survivors/ victims of all forms of violence and abuse in sport have started to be able to have their voices heard and responded to. Until the later 1990s / early 2000s very few sports organisations had systems and structures in place to respond to complaints about the behaviour of adults or other young people.

The esports industry is very new in comparison to most other sports. As such, globally recognised standards, structures and associated professional expectations have not yet been fully developed and adopted throughout the esports ecosystem.

The esports industry should draw influence from the history and learnings of sport, both the positive and the negative, to establish professional standards to ensure children and young people are kept safe whilst participating in esports. In turn, these standards will also promote and support the integrity of esports, especially as it becomes increasingly aligned to sport through the International Olympic Committee and other similar organisations at both national and international levels.

We should all seek to ensure that esports provision takes place in safe environments. From sport more generally, we know that there are increased risks of all forms of violence and abuse to elite young athletes. We also know the **positive impact sport-based development programmes** can have on equity-deserving children and young people who may be affected by violence and abuse in their daily lives .

The same will apply in esports as well. However, given esports is inherently a digital, online, tech-based, globally connected ecosystem, there are also additional factors that must be considered when creating safe esports environments for children and young people.

In 2014, the International Safeguards for Children in Sport were launched, laying the foundations for a holistic approach to ensuring children's and young people's safety and protection in all sports contexts internationally.

These Safeguards have now been adapted and contextualised for esports; to lay the foundations for a holistic approach to ensuring children's and young people's safety and protection in **esports.**

Contents

Definitions

Safeguarding refers to the actions we take to ensure **ALL** children are safe from harm when involved in our clubs and activities.

Child protection is a set of activities that are required for **SPECIFIC** children who are at risk of/or are suffering harm.

Abuse refers to the acts of commission or omission that lead to a child experiencing harm.

Harm refers to the negative impact or consequences upon the child of those actions.

Violence refers "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse." (Article 19 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Esports refers to organised, human versus human video game competitions, both online and offline, and includes one-off events and season long league and tournament structures.

Gaming refers to playing mobile, PC or console games in a single or multiplayer game mode for leisure or entertainment purposes.

International Safeguards

These Safeguards aim to outline the things that should be put in place by any organisation providing esports activities to children and young people.

The Safeguards should be viewed as guides, which facilitate an organisation's journey towards safeguarding children, rather than an end in themselves.

They reflect international declarations, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, relevant legislation, government guidance, existing child protection/safeguarding standards and good practice.

They have been informed by research conducted by Brunel University with a diverse range of perspectives from different countries and stakeholder groups during an extensive piloting phase.

These Safeguards represent collective good practice at a point in time and will be subject to periodic review to ensure they reflect developments within safeguarding practice.

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Safeguards

8 Safeguards

1) Developing your policy.

2) Procedures for responding to safeguarding concerns.

3) Advice and support.

4) Minimising risks to children.

5) Guidelines for behaviour.

6) Recruiting, training and communicating.

7) Working with partners.

8) Monitoring and evaluating.

The Safeguards aim to:

1) Help create a safe esports environment for children wherever they participate and at whatever level.

2) Provide a benchmark to assist esports providers and funders to make informed decisions.

3) Promote good practice and challenge practice that is harmful to children.

4) Provide clarity on safeguarding children to all involved in esports.

The Safeguards are based on the following principles

- All children have the right to participate, enjoy and develop through esports, in a safe and inclusive environment, free from all forms of abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation.

- Children have the right to have their voices heard and listened to. They need to know who they can turn to when they have a concern about their participation in esports.

- Everyone involved in esports; organisations, teams and individuals, including games publishers, tournament organisers and national and international federations, has a responsibility to support the care and protection of young people.

- Organisations providing esports activities to children and young people have a duty of care to them.

- There are certain factors that leave some children more vulnerable to abuse, and steps need to be taken to address this.

- Children have a right to be involved in shaping safeguarding policy and practice.

- Organisations should always act in the best interests of the child.

- Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect and not be discriminated against based on gender, race, age, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, beliefs, religious or political affiliation.

- The processes and activities for the creation, development and implementation of safeguarding measures should be inclusive.

Please note that whilst these Safeguards have been developed in relation to children (aged under 18 years old) they can also provide a valuable framework for good practice in relation to other groups such as vulnerable adults.

The Safeguards

Safeguard 1:

Developing your policy

Criteria for Success

What — Any organisation providing or with responsibility for esports activities for children and young people under the age of 18 should have a safeguarding policy. This is a statement of intent that demonstrates a commitment to safeguard children involved in esports from harm and provides the framework within which procedures are developed.

Why — A safeguarding policy makes clear to all what is required in relation to the protection of children and young people. It helps to create a safe and positive environment for children and to show that the organisation is taking its duty of care seriously. It also takes account of specific factors that may leave some children more vulnerable.

- You have a safeguarding policy which is clearly written and easy to understand.

- The policy clearly describes your understanding and definitions of all forms of harm.

- The policy covers your organisation's commitment to safeguard children in all aspects of your work.

- The policy is clear that all children have equal rights to protection.

- This policy is officially endorsed by staff at the highest level of your organisation.

- Staff at the highest level of the organisation have the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the policy.

- All staff, volunteers, carers or other representatives have signed up to the policy.

- Your organisation has consulted with children, parents/ carers and staff as part of the initial development and/or on-going review of your policy.

Safeguard 2:

Developing a system to respond to safeguarding concerns

What — Procedures describe the operational processes required to implement organisational policy and provide clear step-by-step guidance on what to do in different circumstances. They clarify roles and responsibilities, and lines of communication. Effective systems are required which help to process any complaints or concerns and support any victims of violence. You should build on existing systems and understand your role with regards to relevant national systems and legislation.

Why — For safeguarding to be effective, procedures have to be credible for children. Procedures help to ensure a prompt response to concerns about a child's safety or well-being. They also help you to comply with and implement legislation and guidance. Violence against children is distressing and can be difficult to deal with. Organisations have a duty to ensure that advice and support is in place to help people to play their part in safeguarding children.

Criteria for Success

- There are clear procedures in place that provide step-by-step guidance on what action to take if there are concerns about a child's safety or well-being, both within and external to the organisation.

- Your organisation has arrangements in place to provide support to children, volunteers and staff during and following an incident, allegation or complaint

- There is a trained, identified member of staff in your organisation responsible for leading on safeguarding

- Your organisation provides children and young people with information about their rights and about who they can turn to if they are worried, in a process which empowers them

- Your organisation has made information available to children and their parents/carers, about what is likely to happen following a disclosure, in a format and language that can be easily understood by everyone

- Your organisation has a process for dealing with complaints in a fair and transparent way, that includes an appeals process

- All incidents, allegations and complaints are recorded, monitored and stored securely

- Your organisation has consulted with children, parents/carers and staff as part of the initial development and/or ongoing review of your response system

Safeguard 3:

Advice & Support

What — Arrangements made to provide essential information and support to those responsible for safeguarding children. Children and young people are advised on where to access help and support.

Why — You have a duty to ensure advice and support is in place to help people to play their part in safeguarding children such that they know who they can turn to for help.

Criteria for Success

- Contacts are established at a national and/or local level with relevant child protection agencies, NGOs and community groups providing support on child protection.

- Children are provided advice and support on safe usage and engagement in the online environment.

- Children are informed on their rights and expected standards of behaviours of themselves and those around them (on and off-line), and where and how to seek help if something does not feel right.

- Children are provided with advice and support on keeping themselves and one another safe.

- Your system acknowledges that children with additional vulnerabilities (for example, a disability) may face extra barriers to getting help.

- Parents/carers in the wider community are provided with information, advice and support on safeguarding children.

Minimising risks to children

Criteria for Success

What — Measures to assess and minimise the risks to children.

Why — Some people, who work or seek to work in esports in a paid or voluntary capacity, pose a risk to children. Children are also at risk when placed in unsuitable places or asked to participate in unsuitable activities, including age-inappropriate activities, over-training and through unrealistic expectations being placed on them. It is possible to minimise these risks by putting safeguards in place.

- Risk assessments are available and conducted for activities, transport, accommodation and spaces – online and offline.

- Steps are taken to minimise any risks identified through a risk assessment.

- If the risks are assessed to be too significant then the activity does not go ahead.

- Training is available to help staff and volunteers recognise the additional risks some children are exposed to, because of their race, gender, age, religion, disability, neurodiversity, sexual orientation, social background or culture.

Safeguard 5:

Guidelines on behaviour

What — Codes of conduct to describe what an acceptable standard of behaviour is and promote current best practice.

Why — Children's esports activities should be carried out in a safe, positive and encouraging atmosphere. Standards of behaviour set a benchmark of what is acceptable for all.

Criteria for Success

- Your organisation has written guidelines for behaviour (codes of conduct) which contain statements about treating people with dignity, respect, sensitivity and fairness.

- Your organisation has guidance and expectations around activities that include time spent away from home, including placing children in the care of others and overnight stays.

- Where organisations are involved in placing children in the care of others, frequent meetings are held with the child to discuss their experiences.

- Your organisation has guidance around working with children who have a disability.

- Your organisation has guidance around the appropriate use of digital technology, including social media, to make sure that children are not put in danger and made vulnerable to exploitation.

- Your organisation has guidance around working with children in the online environment.

- Your organisation has guidance on positive ways of managing the behaviour of children that do not involve physical punishment or any other form of degrading or humiliating treatment, and are age and gender appropriate.

- Your organisation has guidance on expected and acceptable behaviour of children towards others, particularly other children (for example, a learning agreement).

- There are clear consequences for not following the guidelines on behaviour that are linked to organizational disciplinary procedures.

- The highest level of the organisation has the responsibility to ensure that the guidelines are followed.

- Your organisation has consulted children, parents/carers and staff as part of the initial development and/or on-going review of your organisation's guidelines on behaviour.

Recruiting, training and communicating

What — Recruiting appropriate members of staff, creating opportunities to develop and maintain the necessary skills and communicating regarding safeguarding.

Why — Everyone in contact with children has a role to play in their protection. They can only do so confidently and effectively if they are aware, have the necessary understanding of, and the opportunity to develop, practice and implement key skills. Organisations providing esports activities for children have a responsibility to provide training and development opportunities for staff and volunteers.

Criteria for Success

- Job descriptions contain statements about treating people with dignity, respect, sensitivity and fairness.

- The recruitment process includes an interview, character/ employment references and a background check in line with local legislation.

- All staff, volunteers and other relevant people have been trained on safeguarding and child protection, including how to report concerns.

- The highest level of the organisation has the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the training.

- All staff, volunteers and relevant people with special responsibilities for safeguarding have access to regular additional training and specialist support.

- Your organisation has consulted with children, parents/ carers and staff as part of the initial development and/ or on-going review of your organisation's recruitment, training and development.

Working with partners

What — Action taken by the organisation to influence and promote the adoption and implementation of measures to safeguard children by partner organisations.

Why — Esports organisations can have a strategic and a delivery role in relation to children and young people. Where organisational partnerships and relationships exist or develop with other organisations, the organisation should use its influence to promote the implementation of safeguarding measures. The organisation should provide or signpost support and resources in relation to implementing adequate safeguarding measures. The organisation should actively promote the adoption of the International Safeguards for Children in Esports.

Criteria for Success

- Your organisation has worked with partners/members to ensure that there are shared expectations around safeguarding.

- Your organisation has worked with partners/members to agree how to share learning about making esports safer for children.

- Your organisation has shared written guidance on current best practice in relation to working with children (for example sharing the International Safeguards for Children in Esports).

- Your organisation's safeguarding policy represents an essential part of any partnership/membership agreements.

- Your organisation publicises information about your policy to your community, teams, partners and members.

- Your organisation works to sensitise your communities to the importance of safeguarding children.

Safeguard 8:

Monitoring and evaluation

What — The on-going monitoring of compliance and effectiveness, involving all relevant groups.

Why — Organisations need to know whether safeguarding is effective and where improvements and adaptations are needed, or recognise patterns of risk.

Criteria for Success

- There are systems in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your organisation's:

  - policy
  - system for responding to safeguarding concerns
  - advice and support
  - systems to minimise the risks to children
  - guidelines for behaviour
  - recruitment, training and communication
  - work with partners to safeguard children

- The highest level of the organisation has the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the monitoring and evaluation system

- Your organisation has consulted with children, parents/ carers and staff as part of the initial development and/or on-going review of your monitoring and evaluation system

International Safeguards for Children in Esports
Founder Members

The 'International Safeguards for Children in Esports' is based on the original work of 'International Safeguards for Children in Sport'.

It has been prepared by the following Founder Members:

* British Esports Federation
* Canterbury Christ Church University
* Global Esports Federation
* International Safeguards for Children in Sport

INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS FOR CHILDREN IN SPORT

BRITISH ESPORTS

Canterbury Christ Church University

Global Esports FEDERATION

BRITISH ESPORTS

Case Study: British Esports Federation

The British Esports Federation is the UK's national body for esports. It was established in 2016 and is not-for-profit organisation. It's goals are to Promote, Improve and Inspire and it focusses on Representation, Competition, Community, Education and Standards.

At the elite level, it facilitates teams to represent Great Britain in global, representative, medal-based competitions such as the Olympic Esports Week, Global Esports Games and Commonwealth Esports Championships. At a grassroots level it organises the British Esports Student Championships which sees over 700 teams and approximately 3000, 11 to 18 year-olds playing for their school teams online each week, as well as other community-focussed projects that use esports as a vehicle for development.

They have also developed world-leading, esports curriculum pathways spanning secondary, undergraduate and postgraduate levels. For example, the BTEC in Esports, which they developed in partnership with Pearson, the global learning company, has now been studied by 13,500 students in the UK over the last 5 academic years.

For more information on British Esports visit:
Britishesports.org

BRITISH ESPORTS

Case Study: Safeguarding in Esports

Based on recognised best practice from the sports ecosystem, British Esports acknowledged it had to make safeguarding a priority.

British Esports worked with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), the UK's leading children's charity and safeguarding experts, and their Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) to develop their own internal policies, procedures and systems linked to safeguarding.

The overview below provides a summary of British Esports' work and how this links to the core 8 Safeguards in 'International Safeguards for Children in Esports'.

- Worked with the Consultancy team at NSPCC, acknowledged experts in safeguarding, to develop, monitor and review safeguarding policies and procedures. (Safeguards 1,2,3,7,8)

- Developed clear processes for reporting safeguarding concerns along with detailed procedures, including roles and responsibilities, for responding to any concern. (Safeguards 2,3,6)

- Established an internal safeguarding team, led by the Designated Safeguarding Lead (who is also a Senior Exec at British Esports), who meet on a monthly basis and, together, have overall responsibility for safeguarding across the organisation. (Safeguards 1,2,3,5,6)

- Regular, clear communication with all internal and external stakeholders linked to safeguarding and behaviour expectations, including how to report concerns. (Safeguards 3,5,6,7)

- All British Esports staff and volunteers undergo regular safeguarding training and appropriate security background checks. (Safeguards 4,5,6,7)

- Developed a partnership with the NSPCC and their Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) to provide safeguarding advice, guidance, training and support to the esports ecosystem to help create a safer environment for children to play esports. (Safeguard 3,4,6,7)

BRITISH ESPORTS

Case Study: Coaching in Esports

Acknowledging the need to create safer environments for children and young people to play esports, British Esports have developed the 'Coach Development Framework' to create recognised standards for those individuals and groups involved in coaching esports.

It has been designed to identify core knowledge, skills and behaviours which coaches need in esports, whilst recognising the variety of esports titles and specialist skills and knowledge they require, including core 'Duty to Care' content.

They have developed e-learning programmes for the first two stages of the associated 'Coach Development Pathway':

Duty to Care in Esports:

FREE e-learning programme written by Subject Matter Experts including the **NSPCC, UNICEF UK** and **the National Crime Agency**, covering the following areas:

i)   Safeguarding
ii)   Online Safety
iii)   Child Rights
iv)   Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
v)   Mental Health
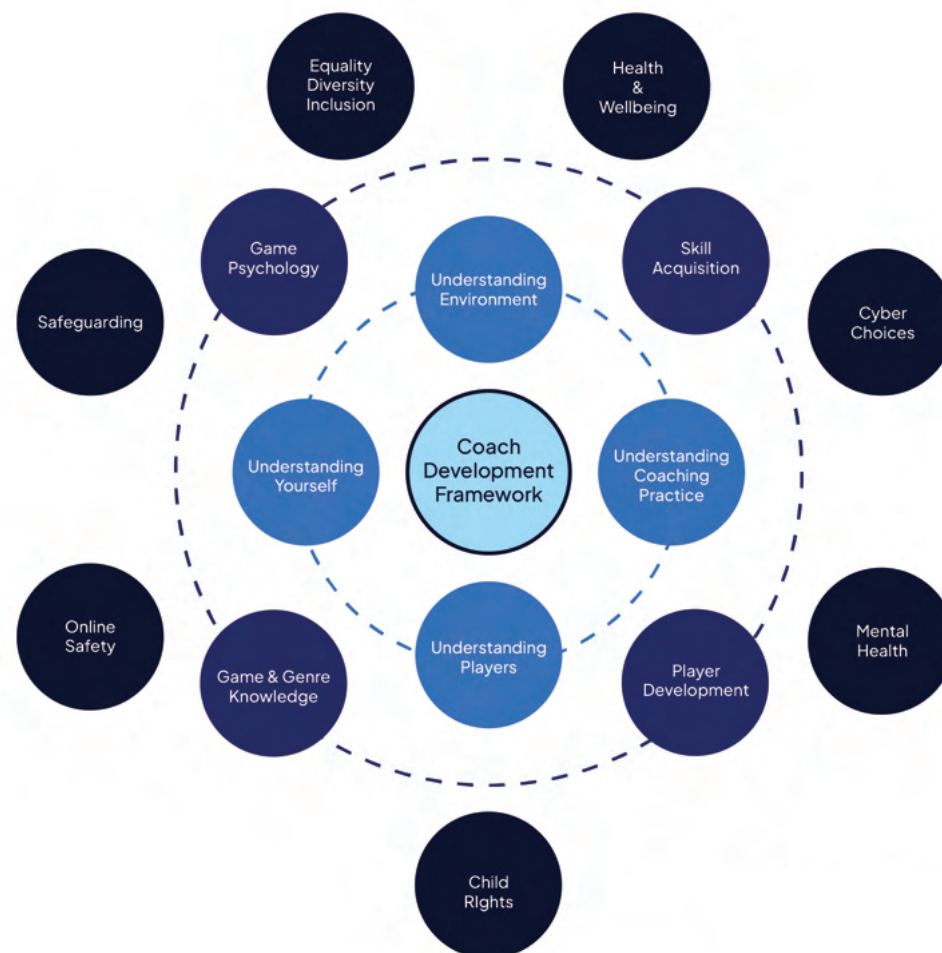vi)   Health & Wellbeing
vii)   Cyber Choices

Introduction to Esports Coaching:

Introductory esports coaching programme, endorsed and certified by **UK Coaching | 1st4sport** covering 4 key areas:

i)   Coach
ii)   Environment
iii)   Player
iv)   Game

For more information on these programmes visit:
Britishesports.org/esports-coaching

BRITISH ESPORTS

Coach Development Framework

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For next steps visit:
www.safeinsport.org

Or Email:
info@safeinsport.org