

A: Esports, an umbrella term for organised, competitive computer gaming, is big business, with the global industry forecast by analysts to reach a billion dollars by the end of 2020. Riding the wave of this rapidly expanding sector is Staffordshire University, which has just begun teaching undergraduate and masters courses in the subject. But who is studying for these esports degrees and what can they expect to learn? To answer these questions, I have with me in the studio Stuart Kennedy, who helped launch the university's new undergraduate course, and is lecturing on it. Stuart, perhaps you could begin by briefly describing your course.

B: Certainly. The course, which costs £9,250 a year, will focus on the business of esports, teaching students how to host and promote events, create businesses and build online communities. A big part of the three-year degree will be event organisation, with students expected to hold a large-scale expo in their third year.

A: And how did you yourself get into this area?

B: Well, I've always played video games and been interested in business, so it seemed like a good idea to combine the two things. In college, I was studying game design and I picked up my first Esport, League of Legends, a team-oriented strategy game, which really hooked me.

A: And I believe you've been exploring the economics of competitive gaming, what makes it the success it is, and how it will change in the future.

B: Yes, that's right. For me, gaming is about bringing people together, aside from the competitive aspect, and a lot of this course is about organising these big events. Ten years ago, not many people were doing a computing degree and now it's very popular. The esports industry is rapidly growing, and I believe it's going to be the same.

A: People might say it's a 'Mickey Mouse' degree?

B: There are a lot of misconceptions; obviously, people think you are going to be playing games for three years. In fact the course is like a business degree but in a new industry. In five or ten years it will be fully accepted.

A: How are Esports related to traditional sports like soccer and tennis?

B: Esports consists of many different games - although those games don't necessarily mimic traditional sports. Tournaments staged in front of live audiences can attract tens of thousands of fans, but online they are watched by tens of millions of viewers. In 2014, more than 40,000 people attended the League of Legends World Championship finals when they were held in Seoul.

A: I believe that the university's new degree course is in part a response to government plans to develop esports events in the UK?

B: Yes, Esports is one of the fastest growing entertainment media in the world, and anything that can help the UK establish itself as a centre for this exciting industry should be celebrated. Plans to grow the UK as an esports hub bring huge opportunities in job creation, and we are well placed as a university to explore that.

A: Do people now understand that studying esports is a legitimate business pursuit?

B: I think so. Companies are looking for people who are entrepreneurial and tech-savvy and the industry is driving the creation of new jobs. At the same time, parents are the generation that grew up playing computer games and there's now an acknowledgement that it is a viable career route.

A: And how has the course been received?

B: There has been lots of interest, and we've had no problem filling the course. I don't know the exact numbers, but it is over a hundred. It has exceeded our expectations.

A: I assume it mostly attracts young people who are interested in gaming.

B: While it appeals particularly to gamers, it's also attractive to anyone who wants to learn about this growing industry. One of the best stories has been that, on an open day, a father and son came. We were talking for five minutes, then 10 minutes, then 20 minutes, then the father said he wanted to apply, so the father and son will be taking the course together.

#### Summary

Esports, or organised, competitive computer gaming, is now a big global business, worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Staffordshire University in the UK has just begun teaching degree courses in the subject and one of the lecturers is interviewed. He explains that the course will focus on the business of esports, teaching students how to host and promote events, create businesses and build online communities. For him, the course is like a business degree but in a new industry. Esports is one of the fastest growing entertainment mediums in the world with tournaments attracting thousands of people and there are plans to grow the UK as an esports hub, creating new jobs in the process.

#### Questions

1. Would you be interested in such a course? Why (not)?
2. Do you think Esports should be included in the Paris Olympics?
3. What is the attraction of watching other people play video games?
4. Wouldn't people be better off playing real sports?