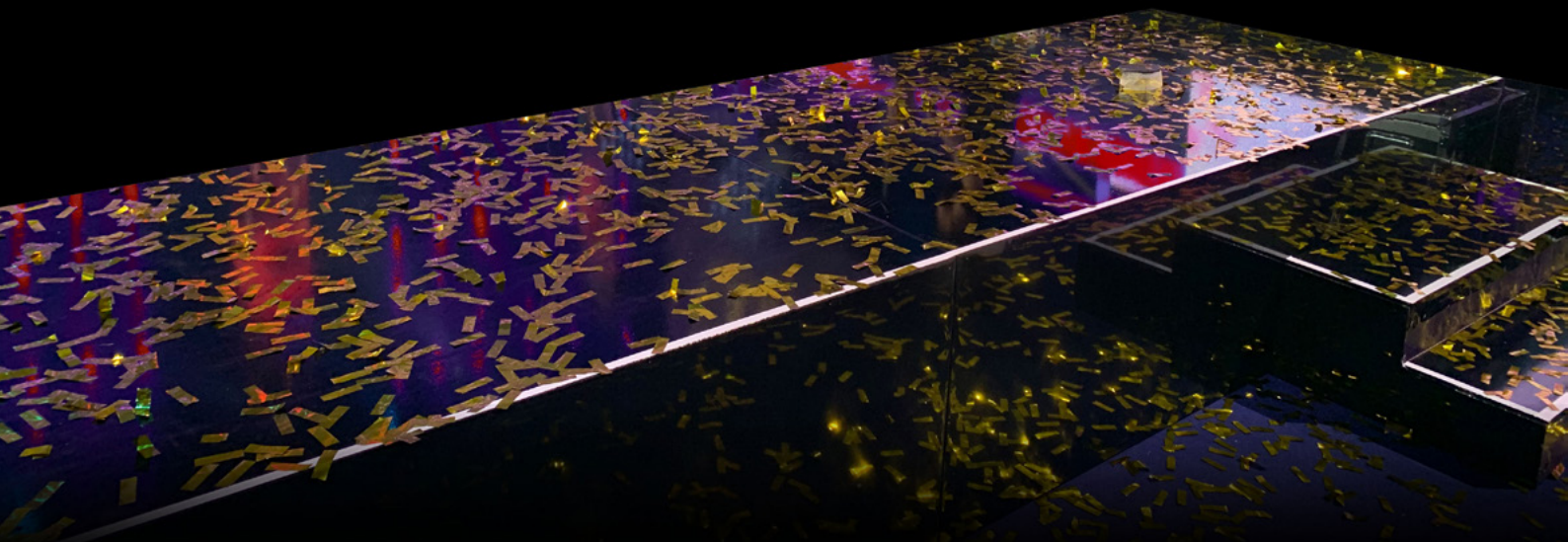


# HERE EAST AND LONDON OLYMPIC PARK WELCOME ESPORTS



As the inexorable rise in the popularity of esports continues across the globe, Here East in Hackney, London, has positioned itself as a hub for an esports cluster.

As the original home of all the TV studios for the **London Olympic Games** and about 20,000 accredited journalists, the venue is uniquely equipped to offer a home to a multitude of arts and technology-focused companies.

**Here East** is located in London's **Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park** and has become home to innovators, disruptors and visionaries who share in the making of game-changing innovations.

Gavin Poole, CEO of Here East, explains how the site became what it is today.

He said: *"Just before the Games in 2012 we were announced as the winners of a competitive tender process which enabled us to secure a 200-year lease on the site. The vision that won that was to create a campus dedicated to technology and the creative industries but to do it in a way that fostered innovation and collaboration and provided spaces for large global businesses and small start-ups to work side by side."*

*"Part of doing that was the creation of our own Innovation Centre, which is one of our central, key components to our vision. As we looked at building clusters, we looked around the world, and we realised that if you are starting a cluster pretty much from scratch, how important universities and academia are."*

*"We've now got three universities on-site and a music and media academy opening in September."*

Loughborough University London was on site from the very beginning, catering for sports technologies, science technology and innovation.

University College London has its design, manufacture and architecture school on site. There is an Institute for Robotics and Staffordshire University is running undergraduate degree courses in esports, esports management and animation game design and cybersecurity.

Poole said: *"Having universities close by, mainly at the Masters and the Postgraduate level, is important in driving technological cluster growth and that has worked."*

## PLEXAL, HERE EAST'S INNOVATION CENTRE

Poole highlighted Plexal, who are based on the campus, as a key component for Here East's success.

*"Our innovation centre, Plexal, is a space where start-ups can come and scale. It has a bit of co-working, it's a bit of managed office, it's got a large event space, it's got innovation rooms and then we built a team of consultants where we deliver innovation programmes for government, for government quangos, for enterprise businesses as well."*

*"Our signature programme would be our cybersecurity programme where we've accelerated 72 businesses over the last two and a half years. It's a £13 million programme delivered for the government to drive growth."*

*"The main thing for us is to make sure we work closely with global businesses like Sega, BT Sport, Ford and others to make sure that they look at the opportunities surrounding them by being here, both in terms of business opportunities through our network on-site, but also from the talent opportunity for being in East London"*



and what that talent consists of in the broader local market.

*"Also, to think through what it means to be on the home of one of the UK's largest sporting spectacles – the Olympics – and having a technology cluster on a place where sports and technology collide."*

Here East boasts 1.2 million sqft of space which is lettable to customers, including photographic studios, videography studios, TV production studios and dance studios.

Poole added: *"We've got a Robotics Institute, drone labs, vehicle testing, 3D printing, animation studios as well. The Victoria and Albert Museum also has space for their national collection and study and research into design."*

*"We've got a theatre space which has housed things like the Overwatch League. The London Spitfire's came and played demo matches after they won the original first season."*

## ENTRY INTO ESPORTS

Poole said that two and a half years ago Here East started to look very closely at the esports sector.

Gaming, VR, AR, robotics degree courses are all here. Mobile games developers are here.

We want to delve into the esports world and understand it from companies who are here – from a broadcast point of view with BT Sport who ran esports content during lockdown; through the universities who have got a PhD looking at esports growth. We ran our programme with students last year, setting them the challenge of coming up with the answers as to what drives a thriving esports cluster.

*"There are a lot of students from the Asia Pacific, which is a different dynamic. We started to get interested in understanding the growth of this sector by looking at places like Arlington Arena in Texas."*

He said the facility has currently got three empty studios which can be configured for different needs.

*"We're talking to different teams and different organisations at the moment. Our University partners are keen to engage as well, particularly Loughborough with their technology and sports science teams. They deliver elite athlete programme training to Team GB and, of course, the esports teams themselves are keen to develop their own elite athlete programmes."*

In terms of connectivity, all the major technology providers circle the site,

and five of them are connected into Here East's buildings. There is the equivalent of a tier 2 data centre on-site. *"We can deliver anything you want and more,"* Poole said.

*"The connectivity we've got is unparalleled and with the power that we've got and the space that we've got we believe it will be the enabler into a new esports capability."*

## ESPORTS ON SITE

Here East is already home to several companies working in the gaming world.

Poole said: *"BT Sport is a production company but is working very closely now with Excel, Fnatic, EA Sports and others. During lockdown, they did the draft followed by the FIFA tournament. They've been doing huge amounts in virtual racing and football. We've got companies who are engaged within the platform businesses which then create the esports tournaments."*

There are four music studios and three record labels already on-site OK, which feed into games publishers and developers.

*"We've got companies we're in discussion with for our Innovation Centre, which is a more flexible space, looking at agile mobile platforms to*

start creating their individual esports leagues, depending on what game you want to put together.

*"We have been talking to a couple of companies of late about hosting events here for next year. We're talking about a brand-new festival at the moment with a company that has been working very closely with Staffordshire University London to launch and come here as well.*

*"So, when you put all that together, we are still in the early stage of our journey. Our ethos here is very much focused around where are the growth sectors, what's the future of technology and how can we support the growth of that new exciting sector."*

## CONTENT IS KING

Content is the cornerstone for everything that happens at Here East, Poole said.

*"Whatever area you look at, content is king. Whether it's a University creating content for student development or student programmes, whether it's BT sports with their news sports entertainment content channels which took on the might of Sky.*

*"We have dance studios run by Wayne McGregor, one of the world's leading contemporary dance choreographers. His company is based here and produces fantastic content, with the use of technology within all of his performances. Sega is here with Football Manager and the content they produce. Matches Fashion is based here with 22 photographic and videography studios.*

*"Anywhere you look across the whole site it's all about content, and the content comes in different forms. Sometimes it's dance, sometimes it's data, sometimes it's visual, sometimes it's gaming, but for us, there is an interesting correlation between the majority of the tenants we've got here and their production of content into the consumer world."*

## OLYMPIC HUB

The positioning of Here East in the Olympic Park, with the London Stadium and Copper Box nearby, is also a key feature to the hub's success.

Poole said: *"If you look at where we are on the Olympic Park and the tangible assets around us then it's not only the studio spaces, the theatre space, the 350 fully equipped event spaces within our Innovation Centre, the esports training facility within the digital Institute of Stafford University on-site*

*and all of their playout capability, it's also only a five minute walk away from the Copper Box which has staged esports events.*

*"Over on Westfield you've got the Belong community gaming hub with the Stratford Spartans based over there, so there's already a vibrant community League around us.*

*"If you start to piece all of these things together, what you've got is the opportunity to create something. We've done designs, capability assessments, business modelling and now we're just looking at partners to come in and unleash the reality of being an enabler to the esports sector."*

Poole said, Here East can solve businesses real estate solutions by thinking outside the box.

*"We don't think in terms of the normal because we don't know what a typical real estate transaction looks like. We will make one up that fits the needs of our customers without being affected by any precedents. Our now owners think it's great fun because we're always challenging them and coming up with different ideas.*

*"Our role is basically to solve the real estate problems and to enable a business to do what they do, whether its events, venues, content creation, studios or whatever."*

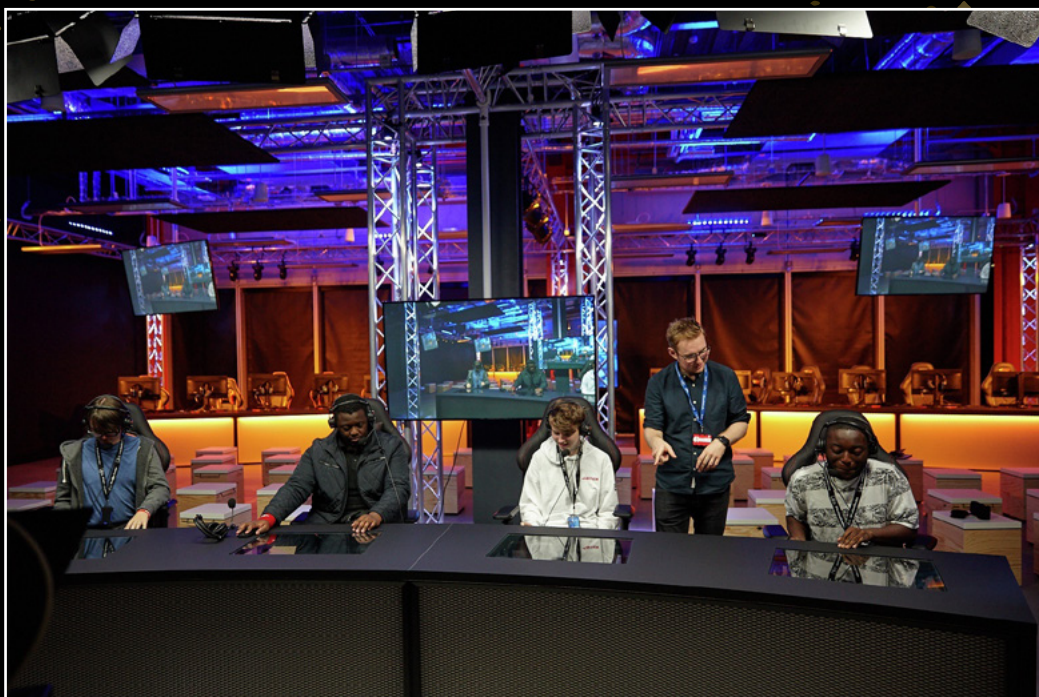


## LONDON AS AN ESPORTS HUB

Poole believes London is increasingly being seen as an important centre for the esports world.

He said: *"I've spoken to a whole bunch of people over the last six to 12 months and whether they are in Germany or America, Texas, Missouri, West Coast, East Coast, Philadelphia or Australia they all say that they see the UK very much as an emergent growth space for the sector.*

*"You've also got some big names based here already, and any international*



*publisher/developer that may want to do something in this sector will look across Europe and will still determine that London is probably their best bet for a whole host of reasons.*

*"It's very easy to set up a new trading entity. The legislative environment within which to set up a corporate body as an arm of your Topco in London and the UK is simple. It's stable despite all of the Covid stuff, which will pass.*

*"It's stable in terms of democracy. Brexit is Brexit, but we're talking about digital trade here, so that's too not too much of an issue. The talent is phenomenal still. We're still in the top thresholds of being able to churn talent out into organisations.*

*"Companies here who came with 100 people are pushing 165, and they've got another 20 posts on their website. All the digital games companies have seen prolific growth over the last two quarters and are hoovering up the talent around us at the moment."*

Poole said that London has fantastic access to capital in terms of people who want to invest in high growth areas.

*"We know the money is still there even with covid," he added.*

## COLLABORATION IS KEY

Poole said he has been impressed by the collaborative nature of the esports sector.

*"The one thing that impressed me the most by working in this sector and getting to know people by hosting numerous events is the openness.*

*"What they all buy into is that if we work together, we can grow the size of the sector and we can grow the value of the sector in London and in the UK.*

*"There is a collaborative nature in this sector which you don't find across many others. We found that appealing as that sits comfortably with our vision." ■*

