



Fresh Research Perspectives

# How gaming & gambling affect student life

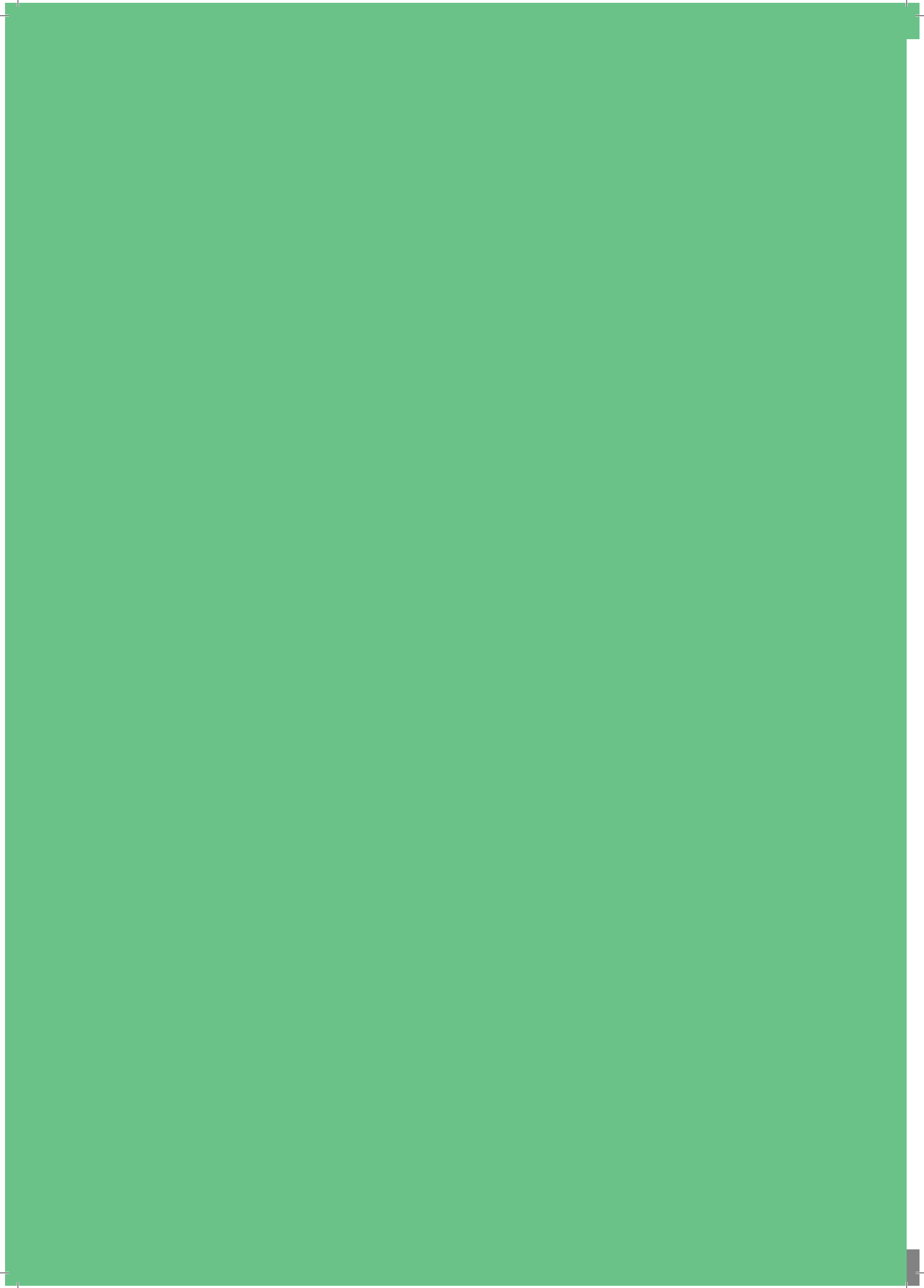
## Full Insight Report *September 2019*

**Young Gamers and Gamblers Education Trust**

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## Forewords

This is an extraordinarily insightful piece of research into attitudes and behaviours of students around gaming and gambling, which not only supports YGAM's University and Student Engagement Programme, but it will ideally result in follow up research, to unpick some of the findings.

Reading the report, I have both a sense of satisfaction and growing concern of the scale of the task at hand. Earlier in the year when I prepared the initial scope for this research, I was convinced this was a priority for YGAM so as to provide a platform to better inform our support to students, and to provide evidence to ensure the issues become more of a priority for policy makers and Universities. Some of the themes that particularly jump out are the scale of numbers of young people at risk, not just financial or digital resilience but also knock on factors such as mental health and wellbeing, stress, anxiety, sleep deprivation, academic performance and even the potential to drop out of their courses.

YGAM continues to be a contemporary and agile charity responding to young adults' education needs around safer gambling and gaming. I am looking forward to working with the YGAM team, higher education sector and the industries to make this more than just insightful research, it needs to lead to practical action.

**Mike Wojcik**  
Chair of the Board, YGAM



This insight report provides valuable statistics on the prevalence and behavioural habits for university students. Specifically, the report provides a detailed breakdown of gameplay, gambling behaviours, and the implications for student life. Representing university students is particularly important as university life provides potential vulnerabilities, such as the changes in financial circumstances and time management.

Gaming continues to be a popular past time among university students, with developments in technology creating more potential overlaps between gaming and gambling. Some of these developments include the gamification of gambling and increased accessibility of both gaming and gambling. Therefore, the merit of this report is shown through including and representing gaming and gambling behaviour together.

A further highlight of the report are the suggested recommendations to support university students with gaming and gambling. This data will provide value for researchers and practitioners, as well as those in Higher Education working with students, and the student population.

This combination of gaming and gambling behaviour also provides a good foundation for the following: further research in the area, teaching students about gaming and gambling behaviour, comparing and contrasting gaming and gambling behaviour, and developing further support for university students.

**Dr. Sarah Hodge**  
Lecturer in Cyberpsychology and  
Psychology, Bournemouth University

## Executive Summary

In 2019, YGAM commissioned this research study, with over 2,000 undergraduates and postgraduates, to look for the first time at higher education student attitudes to gaming and gambling and consider the related behaviours and challenges. YGAM uncovers the thinking and experiences of students, giving new understanding into the real-life situation for them, and insight for those working to support students.

### Student Life and Gaming

Digital devices are part of daily life for students. YGAM's research shows that 87% of students say the last thing they do before they sleep is look at their digital device(s). This increases to 92% for those who game every day. Gaming itself is widespread with 79% of students saying they game with 35% playing them on most days while one in six (17%) play every day.

Students play digital games for entertainment and **gain benefits including stress reduction, challenge and social interactions**. YGAM's insight identifies that while students use gaming as a pastime to help cope with the stresses of university life, regular gaming may impact a student's academic performance and affect their work ethic.



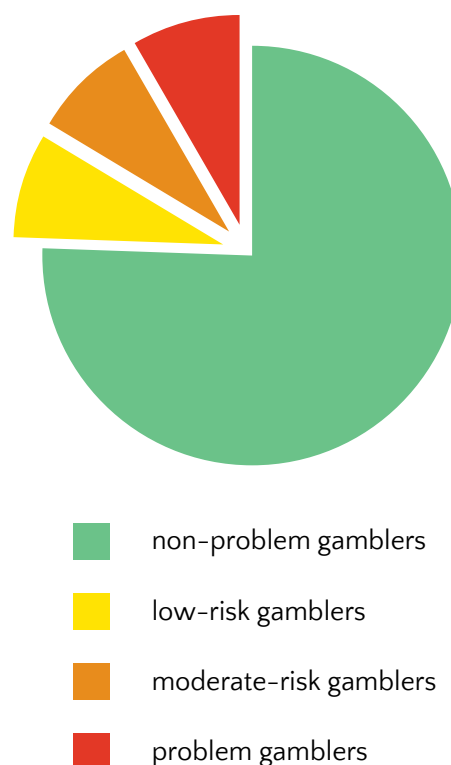
Nearly half of students felt **gaming has got in the way of their academic performance** with one-in-seven reporting that gaming often gets in the way of their academic performance. The findings also reveal that for those who game every day, one fifth have a **negative sense of belonging at university**, and over one-third say it has got in the way of their social life. With well-being and social isolation concerns on the rise for this generation of students, this insight adds to the knowledge and understanding of the student

experience and the potential responses that may help them.

### Student Life and Gambling

YGAM's survey identifies that 47% of students have gambled in the last 12 months. Of these, 16% can be identified as moderate risk or problem gamblers, meaning about 264,000 students in the UK are at some risk from gambling with around 88,000 already defined as problem gamblers.

#### Students who gamble



The findings show that students gamble to try to ease and improve their finances whilst at university. Of the students who have gambled in the past 12 months, nearly three-fifths (59%) say they are **always worrying about their financial situation** while 16% have gambled more than they could afford.



The research also reveals a link for this group with gambling to **escape the stresses of university**.

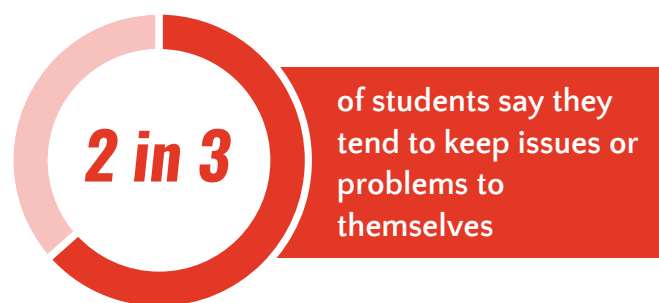
For students who are moderate risk or problem gamblers the findings show they are more likely to gamble to **cheer them up when they are depressed**, even though 9 in 10 feel guilty about the way they have gambled. One third of these students say their gambling habits have a negative effect on their well-being, over half have **considered dropping out of university** and one in seven have a negative perception of their overall university experience.

## Impacting Student Life

Gaming and gambling are prevalent in universities. Insight gained from students through this study show they report benefits from gambling and gaming, especially in reducing stress and social interaction. However, gambling and gaming are also linked with students seeking to escape the pressures brought on by being at university, and with poor well-being. These moments of stress appear to be coupled with greater feelings of uncertainty for students with YGAM's research revealing that students, may turn to gambling and/or gaming as they feel more 'in control' of what they are doing. The negative impact of gambling and gaming on student well-being, academic performance and social interaction becomes clear in the research, particularly for moderate risk and problem gamblers and those who game regularly.



## Improving Student Life



The findings are informing YGAM's University Student Engagement programme. YGAM is independently funded and able to work with universities, students' unions and others supporting students in higher education on the key recommendations from this research. With two thirds of students in our research saying they keep problems to themselves, the need for further support and action is compelling. YGAM's priority areas for action include:

1. **Increase understanding of the well-being and support services available and how to access them** aiming particularly to reach students for whom gaming, or gambling is negatively affecting them;
2. **Raise awareness of gambling and gaming as addictions** providing students with a safe space to explore the risks and seek support;
3. **Provide accessible budgeting and financial advice** particularly for students starting university;
4. **Create easy to access social events and communities** to help students build positive social relationships;
5. **Provide academic support** to reduce the anxiety about academic performance, workload pressures, uncertainty about the future.

In addition, YGAM's research identifies potential action at an industry and policy level. It raises questions about advertising around gaming and gambling and supports the need to reduce advertising for both. Credit card use for betting and student attitudes to loans/debt are also identified as areas of concern warranting further action.



## Research Report

### Building on Previous Research

In 2019, YGAM set out to better understand the attitudes to gaming and gambling, related behaviours and potential challenges facing students in higher education. The findings of the research would inform YGAM's University and Student Engagement programme, give those working in higher education practical insight to enhance their student support and well-being work, and provide additional evidence for policy makers, educators and key influencers in addressing public health issues.

This work mattered to YGAM as the risks for young people taking part in digital engagement, gaming pursuits and gambling activities are part of our daily narrative in 2019. The future well-being of generation Z<sup>1</sup>, growing up in this digital age, is a regular discussion. We know significant data is gathered annually on gambling participation<sup>2</sup> and the concerns at the number and age of problem gamblers are highlighted. Evidence shows that children and young people's use of the internet and social media has significantly increased over the past decade<sup>3</sup> and gaming is a popular pastime with 37.3m people in the UK estimated to play<sup>4</sup>. However, statistics don't really tell the story, and certainly not for higher education students. Research, case studies and new articles exist in themes around gaming, gambling and social gaming for young people. A growing body of research is looking at the transition stages into and through university<sup>5</sup> and significant insight is now available about student wellbeing<sup>6</sup>. However, there is limited insight into the effects of gaming, gambling and digital resilience for higher education students, and particularly their attitudes to these. Some small-scale research took place in 2018 into student gambling habits<sup>7</sup> in the UK which started to unpick the reasons why students may choose to gamble during their studies. Digital resilience, gaming and gambling are considered likely to have an impact on student well-being, financial stability, social interaction/isolation. However, insight direct from students in higher education has not explored these together, or

in depth. YGAM wanted to test this thinking.

The research was commissioned by YGAM and carried out by Red Brick Research, specialists in charity and education sector market research.

In this research study, Red Brick enable YGAM to look for the first time at higher education student attitudes to gaming and gambling and consider the related behaviours and challenges. The research uncovers the thinking and experiences of current students at studying university, giving new understanding into the real-life situation for them, and insight for those working to support students.



<sup>1</sup>Generation Z (Wikipedia)

<sup>2</sup>Gambling Commission Survey: Gambling participation in 2018 behaviour awareness and attitudes

<sup>3</sup>Young Minds – resilience for the digital world (2016)

<sup>4</sup>UKIE Research – The games industry in numbers (2018)

<sup>5</sup>Including Newcastle University Student Transitions Research

<sup>6</sup>Including GuildHE – Well-being in Higher Education and Student Minds Research

<sup>7</sup>Gambling Commission and NUS gambling habits survey with students

## Student Life and Gambling

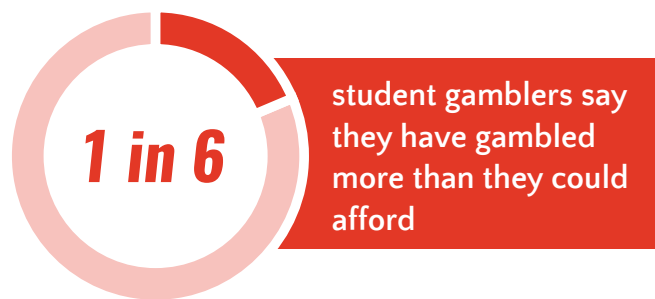
### Student motivations for gambling

Previous research shone a light on the financial motivations behind student gambling, with many wanting to supplement their income as they experience rising living costs. YGAM's research deepens what has been found in previous studies such as that conducted by The Gambling Commission and NUS.

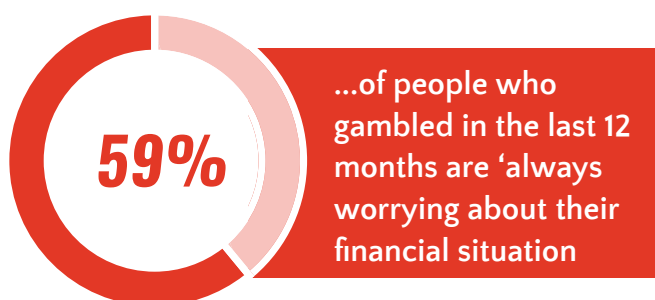
Figure 1 (below) shows the top four reasons why students decide to gamble. In line with the Gambling Commission & NUS research, the primary reason why students gamble is 'to try to win money' with 52% of students selecting this.

“Gambling at university becomes more attractive when you are low on funds, and need to pay for things such as rent”

Furthermore, when students who had gambled were asked whether they have gambled more than they could afford, 16% say that they have – which equates to about 1 in 6. This highlights a desire and / or need to win as the primary factor resulting in gambling amongst students.

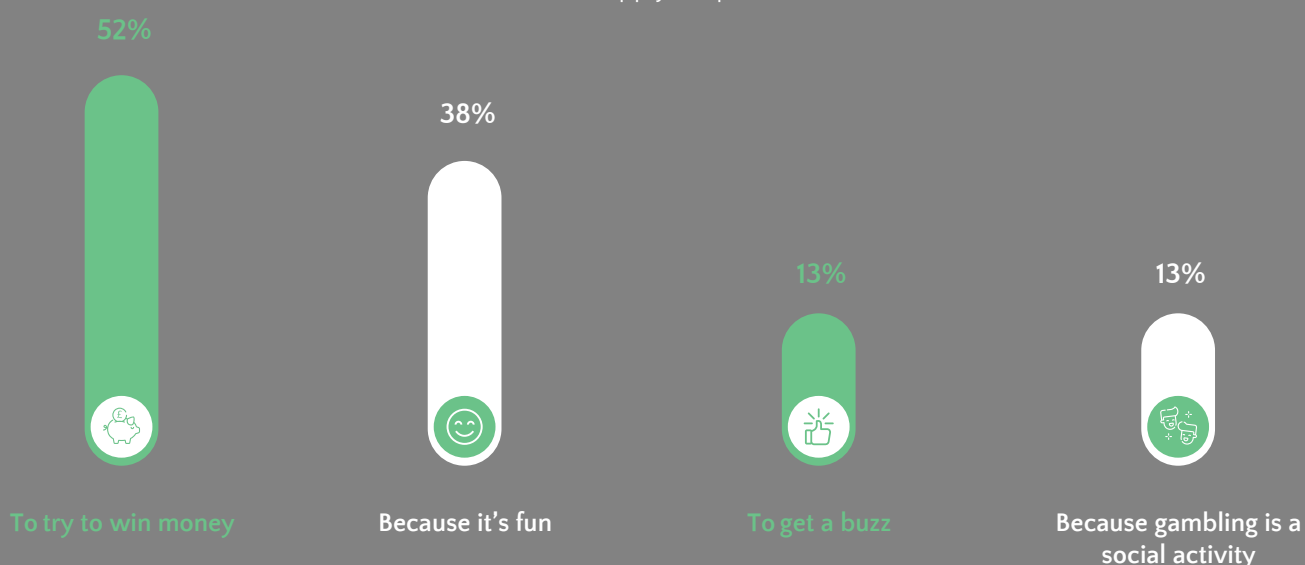


Looking beneath this, of the students who have gambled in the past 12 months, nearly three-fifths (59%) say that they are always worrying about their financial situation. Together this insight suggests that students are gambling to try to ease and improve their finances whilst at university.



However, the overall view for all students who gamble does not tell the full story. When analysing students who have gambled using the Short Form Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), other motivations come to the forefront.

Figure 1: Thinking about when you have spent money on gambling in the past 12 months, why did you do this? Select all that apply. (Top 4 answers)



## What is the Short Form PGSI?

The Short Form PGSI<sup>8</sup> is formed of three questions, all of which are scored on a 4-point scale (almost always / most of the time / sometimes / never / don't know) and are all asked to respondents who have gambled in the last 12 months.

The three questions asked were:

- (1) In the last 12 months have you bet more than you could afford?
- (2) In the last 12 months have people criticised your betting, or told you that you have a gambling problem, whether or not you thought it to be true?
- (3) In the last 12 months have you felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?

Responses are scored from 0 – 3 adding up to a total possible score of 9. Respondents are then categorised as follows:

1. Non-problem gambler
2. Low-risk gambler
3. Moderate risk gambler
4. Problem gambler.

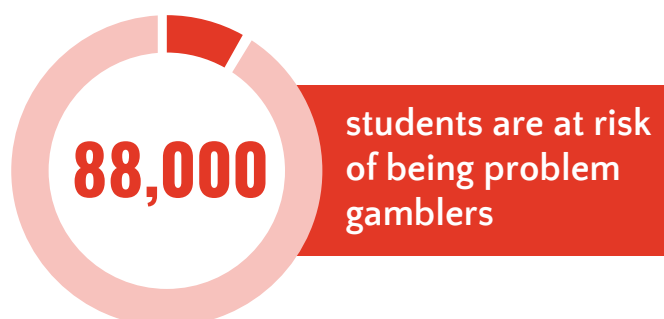
## Short Form PGSI and students

Around half of students (47%) in our sample have gambled in the last 12 months. Of these:

- 75% are classified as non-problem gamblers
- 8% low-risk gamblers
- 8% moderate-risk gamblers
- 8% problem gamblers.

Thus, around a quarter of student gamblers are at some degree of risk from gambling while one in six are at least 'moderate risk gamblers' and one in

twelve 'problem gamblers'. This equates to around 264,000 students at some risk from their gambling in the UK, and 88,000<sup>9</sup> who may be problem gamblers.



## Problem gamblers more likely to gamble to help them feel better

Figure 2 reveals that the main reason why problem gamblers are betting is because they are trying to win money (41% are). However, whilst this is their primary reason, they are less likely than the other types of gamblers to gamble for financial gains.

It is in fact low-risk gamblers who are the most likely to attribute their decision to gamble to win money (73%), and they are also the most likely group to gamble because they see it as a fun pastime. These findings suggest that low-risk gamblers perhaps view gambling as light entertainment, and something which may add to the excitement of watching particular sporting events, such as the football World Cup or the Grand National.

“Gambling helps to make sport more interesting, such as the football during the World Cup”

The question that needs to be asked then, is that if money is becoming less of an influence on the gambling behaviours of moderate-risk and particularly problem gamblers, what else might be directing them towards gambling?

<sup>8</sup> Developing a Short Form of the PGSI, Volberg 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Based on 2017-18 figures from HESA in which there were 2.34 million students studying at UK universities.



Figure 2: Thinking about when you have spent money on gambling in the past 12 months, why did you do this?  
Please select all that apply.

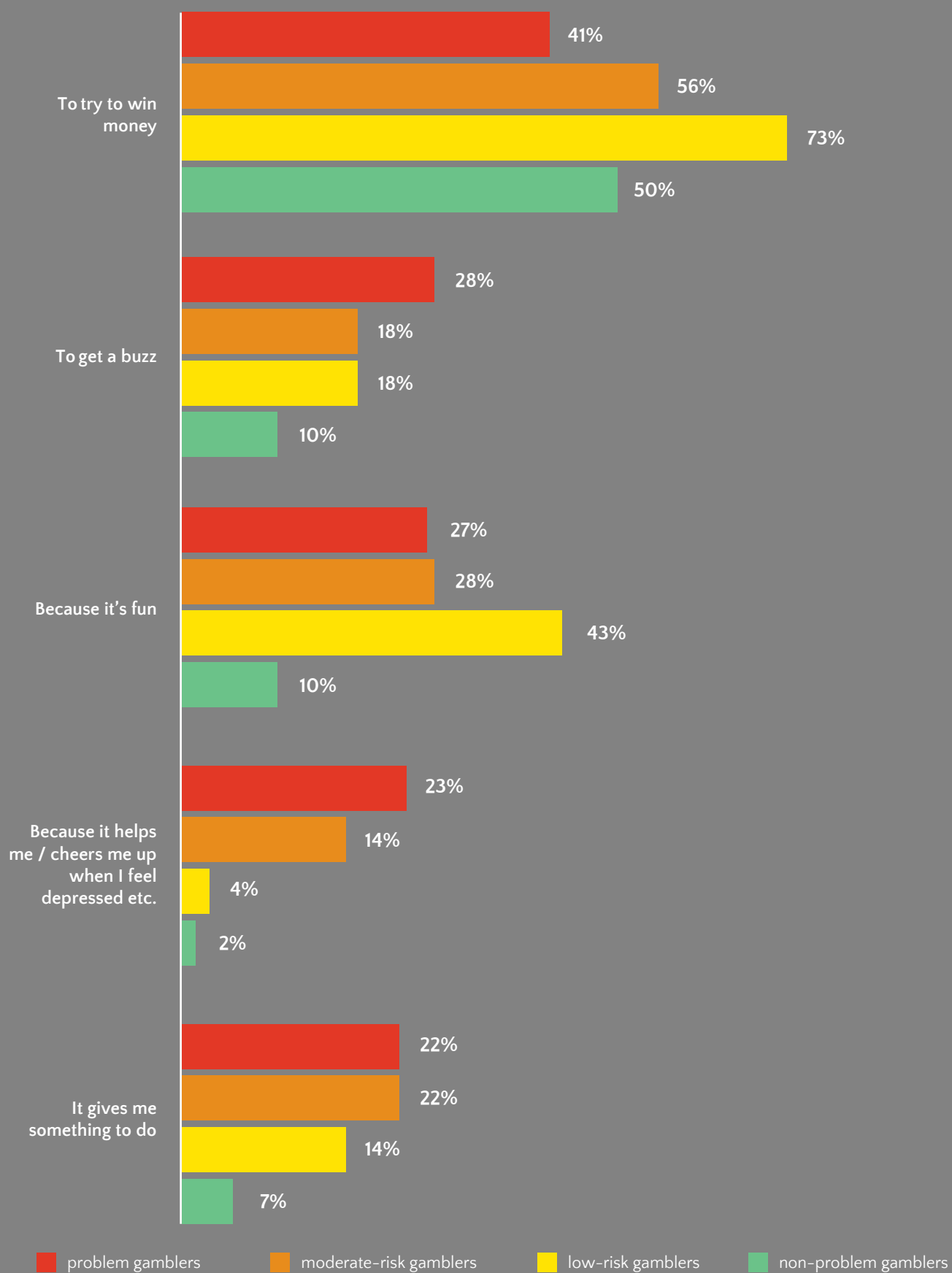


Figure 2, as already discussed, demonstrates that student problem gamblers are the least likely group to gamble for purely financial reasons. Interestingly, it also reveals that they, as well as moderate-risk gamblers, are more likely than the other remaining groups to gamble for the following reasons:

- To get a buzz (28%)
- Because it helps them / cheers them up when they feel depressed etc. (23%)
- It's something to do (22%).

For both moderate risk and problem gamblers it appears that there is a shift in their motivations. The element of fun in their gambling habits begins to fade away, as does the element of trying to win money. Instead, it seems as though they are now gambling because they are chasing a high, which may in-turn, help to cheer them up during their time at university.

“Gambling can act as a relief if I haven't been given any tips to dealing with stress whilst at university”

## Gambling as a form of escapism

Our research suggests that there is a potential link between a student's gambling behaviours and their academic confidence.

Of those who gamble because it helps them / cheers them up when they are depressed, a trait of both moderate risk and problem gamblers:

- Just over 1-in-5 (22%) have a negative perception of whether they will be able to fulfil their goals at university (vs. 11% for those who don't gamble to cheer them up);
- Nearly 1-in-5 (18%) have a negative perception of their academic performance (vs 9% for those who don't gamble to cheer them up).

This suggests that for both moderate risk and problem gamblers, gambling is perhaps a form of escapism – a chance for them to try and forget the pressures

that university life may bring. Such pressures could arise from trying to make sure they achieve the best grades, to trying to make sure they have the right skills that will make them more employable in the graduate jobs market. Either way, such pressures appear to be a factor in the gambling behaviours of those more at risk.

## A move to 'physical spaces' to gamble

In light of the findings above, it is interesting to note that both moderate risk and problem gamblers appear to turn to physical spaces to satisfy their gambling urges.

- 31% of these two types of gamblers personally visit a casino (vs 12% of all gamblers)
- 23% play fruit / slot machines at an arcade, pub, or club (vs. 13% of all gamblers)
- 18% personally visit a betting shop to place a bet (vs. 8% of all gamblers)
- 17% personally visit a betting shop to play gaming / gambling machines (vs. 5% of all gamblers).

Whilst it is to be expected that those gambling more often will be more likely to gamble in such places, the fact that they are more likely to leave university premises to gamble is interesting. It further adds to evidence that both moderate risk and problem gamblers are also gambling to mentally and physically get away from university. It also suggests that the apps which self-limit people's betting online are less likely to work on those at risk, as they are likely to visit betting shops or casinos to continue to gamble.

On the other hand, the research does show that those deemed low-risk gamblers are more likely to be gambling online through betting websites / apps, playing bingo / casino games online, as well as national lottery instant win games on the internet.

## Students feel gambling provides positive benefits to their social experience

Most of the findings from the research draw out the negative implications of gambling. It is briefly worth understanding the benefits many students feel they might obtain from this behaviour. For many non-problem gamblers, the social aspect of gambling is seen as a benefit to their university experience. Our research noted that 40% of non-problem gamblers gamble because it's fun, their gambling habits given them a sense of enjoyment in this regard.

However, when we extend this to people at risk it seems that gambling is perceived as helping them with isolation – this must be a concern if people with gambling problems and those at risk of developing them view gambling as important to helping them develop friendships and feeling less lonely.

It may be that students are in part gambling for social reasons. They see gambling as a social activity that they do with their friends.

“You do feel part of something when you're discussing with friends what bets you have put on”

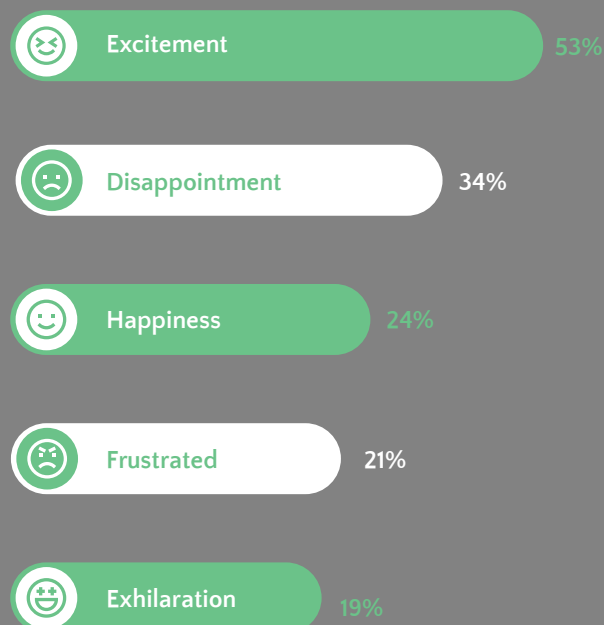
Meanwhile, the research suggests that others may turn to gambling, especially those who go to betting shops / casinos, to make up for a lack of friendships at university.

“There is an added social aspect of betting in a shop”

The worry here must be that some students might turn to gambling because of social isolation at university. The challenge is to make sure that students are supported in developing relationships, meaning they do not turn to gambling to help overcome this feeling of social isolation.

## Gambling creates mixed emotions in students

Figure 3: When gambling in the past 12 months, what emotions do you often feel? Please select all that apply.



Base: 973 (students who have gambled in the past 12 months)

Whilst over half of students feel excitement when gambling, they also feel disappointed and frustrated (see Figure 3 above)

As students become moderate risk or problem gamblers, these negative emotions, as well as other negative emotions, become more prominent. These students are more likely to feel frustrated, ashamed, impatient, angry, and unfulfilled. Furthermore, 9-in-10 of moderate risk and problem gamblers have felt guilty about the way they gamble in the last 12 months.

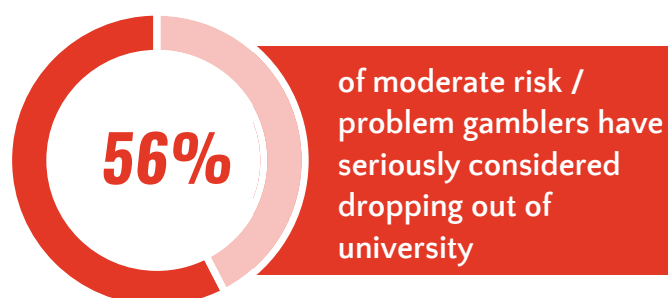


“ I’ve occasionally gambled too much, and I end up always regretting having spent the money ”

## Gambling negatively effects a student’s university experience

Experiencing such a range of negative emotions is likely to have a negative impact on a students’ university experience, and our research certainly backs this up.

One in seven moderate risk and problem gamblers say they have a negative perception of their overall university experience. Worryingly over half of this group (56%) say they have seriously considered dropping out of university – compared to just 35% of low-risk gamblers and 32% of non-problem gamblers.



It is difficult to assign cause and effect – whether gambling leads to the temptation to leave university or the other way around. However, it is clear that for many, certain patterns of gambling are a sign of potential difficulties and unhappiness at university more generally. On the one hand, universities need to provide support and advice to students who are facing a gambling addiction, but deeper than that they should be aware of the lower level risks and how they link to potential feelings of stress and even drop-out. How universities can best help students who gamble will be explored later in this report.

Overall, the research shows that gambling affects two particular aspects of a student’s life. Firstly, gambling has a negative effect on the financial pressures / debts faced by students. Two-fifths of moderate

risk and problem gamblers say their gambling has had a negative effect on this aspect of their student experience. Students, like all gamblers, appear to get trapped in the vicious circle of gambling as they seek to win money to help fund a better university lifestyle and to cover their costs, but ultimately end up chasing their losses leading to debts potentially spiralling out of control.



Secondly, one third of moderate risk and problem gamblers say that their gambling habits have a negative effect on their mental well-being. This may be part of the reason why over half of these students consider dropping out of university. Poor mental health at university can be a contributory factor to a range of issues, and in extreme situations, student suicide<sup>10</sup>. This further emphasises the need for universities to create and promote gambling-specific support and advice to their student population.

<sup>10</sup> Institute for Public Policy Research, 2017. Not by degrees: Improving student mental health in UK universities.

## Student Life and Gaming

Digital games are part of daily life. Over 5.7m young people in the UK aged 16–24 game<sup>11</sup> and the UK is the 6th largest global games market,

In 2018, a fifth of 16–24 year-olds spent more than seven hours a day online every day of the week<sup>12</sup> and that 90% of 13–18 year-olds in the UK play games online<sup>13</sup>. Previous research identified that young people believed the digital world offered positive social and emotional benefits with 4 in 5 of young adults aged between 16–24 years believe that digital technology plays a positive role in their relationships.<sup>14</sup> These cohorts will form our higher education students in the next 5 years.

Whilst gambling is already a well-known addiction – the same cannot be said regarding gaming addiction. However, the increased awareness of the risks gaming can present is evidenced by the fact that in May 2019 the World Health Organisation (WHO) recognised “gaming disorder” as addictive behaviour disorder for the first time.<sup>15</sup> YGAM therefore identified that it was important to understand university student participation in playing digital games<sup>16</sup> and the effect it may have on them, since they are more likely to be living independently and potentially have large periods of free time which may lead them to developing a gaming addiction or experiencing issues with digital resilience.

### Student attitudes to digital games

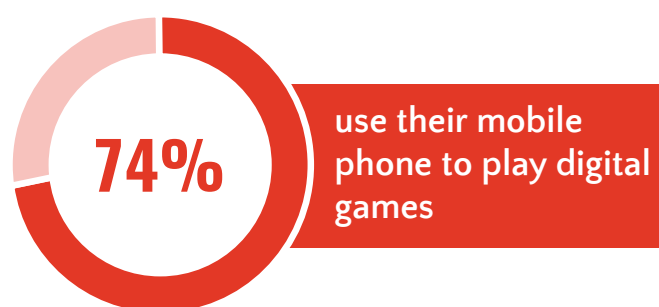
Our research has found that only a fifth (21%) of students have never played digital games – meaning four-fifths have. Meanwhile 17% of students play digital games every day and a further 18% say they play digital games most days. Considering that 53% of students say

they have never gambled; we can see that gaming is more of a widespread pastime for UK university students and therefore deserves increased attention.

Figure 4 (below) reveals the types of games students

are playing, with ‘puzzle / quiz’ games proving to be the most popular, especially among females. Of the females who play digital games, 74% play ‘puzzle / quiz’ games vs 39% of males. Game playing men, meanwhile, are more likely to play a wider range of games with 55% playing ‘Action’ games and 50% playing ‘First Person Shooter’ games.

Part of the reason why gaming may be more popular than gambling amongst students is due to the ease of access of games as well as, perhaps, a lack of digital resilience.



The most popular platform for gaming is a mobile phone with nearly three-quarters of all gamers in our sample saying they use this device to play games. Meanwhile, 35% use a laptop and 33% a games console. When looking at those who game every day, 87% use a mobile phone as the most accessible device.



<sup>11</sup> UKIE UK Games Industry Fact Sheet 2018

<sup>12</sup> The Telegraph August 2018

<sup>13</sup> Parent Zone – June 2018

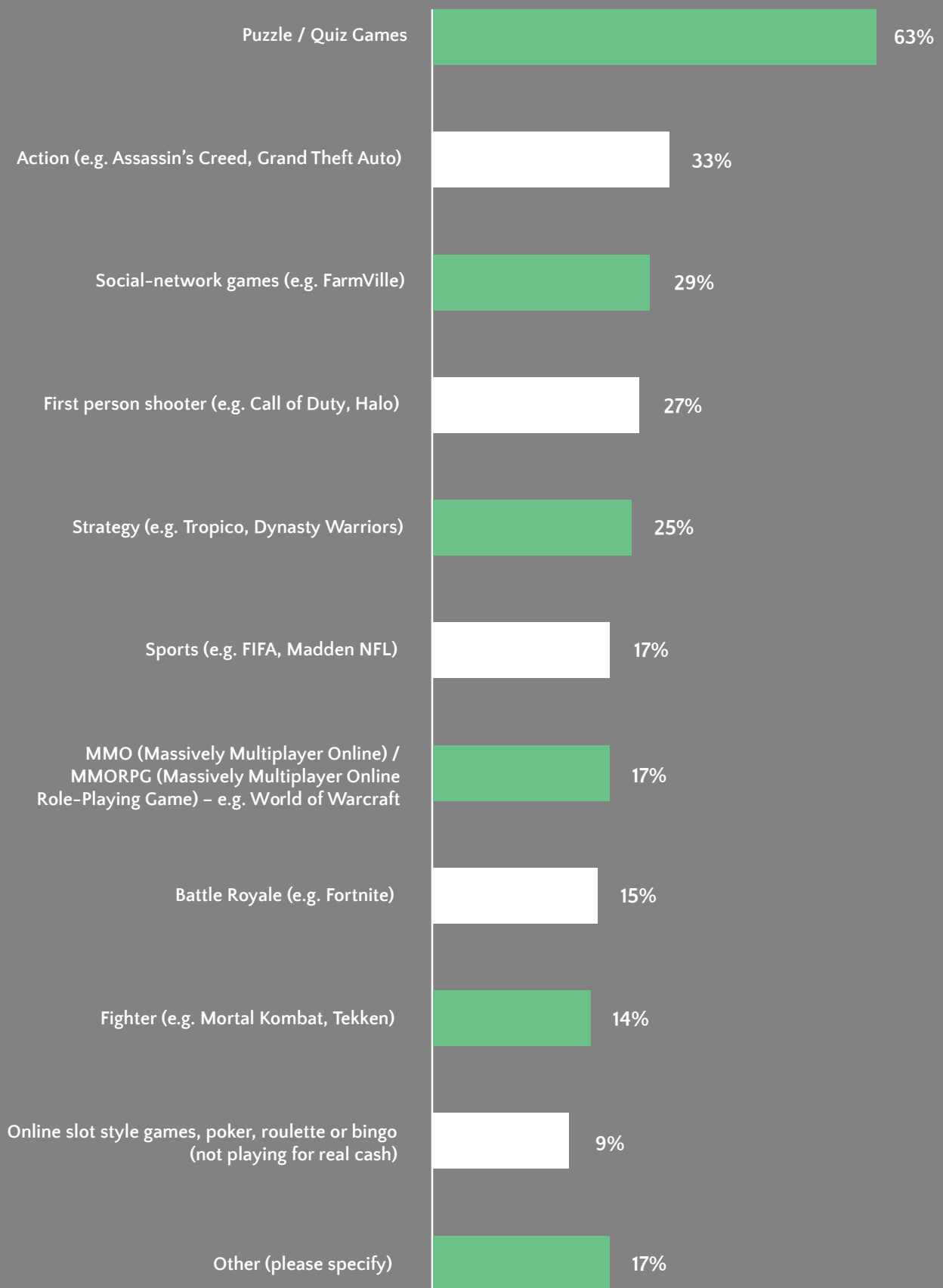
<sup>14</sup> Resilience for the Digital World – Young Minds

<sup>15</sup> World Health Organisation makes gaming addiction an official disease (Sky News): 27/05/2019

<sup>16</sup> Digital games include those one might play on a games console, computer (or tablet), or on your mobile phone.



Figure 4: What types of digital games do you currently play, or have you played in the past?



Base: 1,642 (all those who play digital games)

## Students and digital resilience

The idea that students may lack digital resilience is strengthened when we consider the following:

- Nearly half our sample spend over 4 hours a day on their digital device(s);
- One-third say they are not easily able to switch off their digital device(s).

When exploring this for those who game every day:

- 92% agree that the last thing they look at before they sleep is their digital device(s) (vs 86% of the remaining sample);
- 88% agree that they are regularly playing games on their device (vs 26% of the remaining sample);
- 86% agree that their digital device(s) is one of their most valued possessions (vs 77% of the remaining sample).

These statistics suggest that students gaming is a norm alongside high use, and potentially attachment to, their mobile phone or other digital device. The rise in digital technologies has made gaming more accessible to students during all hours of the day and raises concern about low digital resilience as well as students' gaming behaviours.

The next section of the report aims to increase the understanding of why students 'game', what benefits and drawbacks may be associated with gaming, as well as any similarities that may exist with gambling behaviours.

## Students are playing digital games for more reasons than it being fun

Figure 5 (below) reveals that those who choose to play digital games do so not only because it is fun, but because they feel they get other benefits from gaming – these include stress reduction, competition, and social interactions.

Interestingly, students who game every day or multiple days a week are both more likely to say that they play digital games because it:

- Is a good way to pass their time;
- Reduces their stress.

“ I enjoy playing online games with friends. It provides some stress relief from university work and it helps to pass the time when I'm playing games on my phone ”

Figure 5: Why do you participate in digital games? Please select all that apply. (Top 5 reasons)



Base: 1,642 students (all those who play digital games)

In a sense, this is similar to the motivations of students who gamble – especially those who are moderate risk / problem gamblers. This report has already discussed how these students turn to gambling not only to gain financial security, but also to escape from the pressures of university life. One might assume then that gaming shares the same drawbacks as gambling – and this appears to be largely true.

## Gaming can provide social benefits – especially online

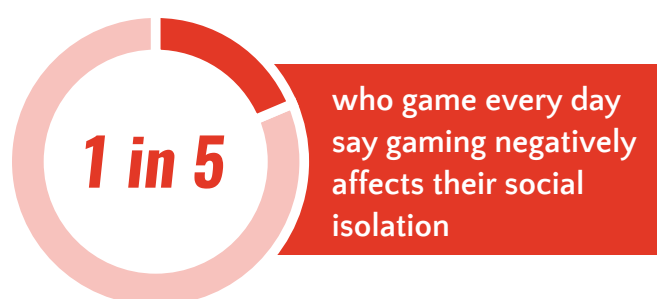
Figure 6 (below) demonstrates one of the benefits that students believe they gain from playing digital games, namely better relationships with their friends. It suggests that the more regularly a student plays digital games, the more likely they are to experience an improvement in the relationships they have with their friends.

Whilst initially this may seem a good news story, this may not necessarily be the case for students who game every day. These games often involve online communities, and so there is the possibility that the friendships they are building are online friends.

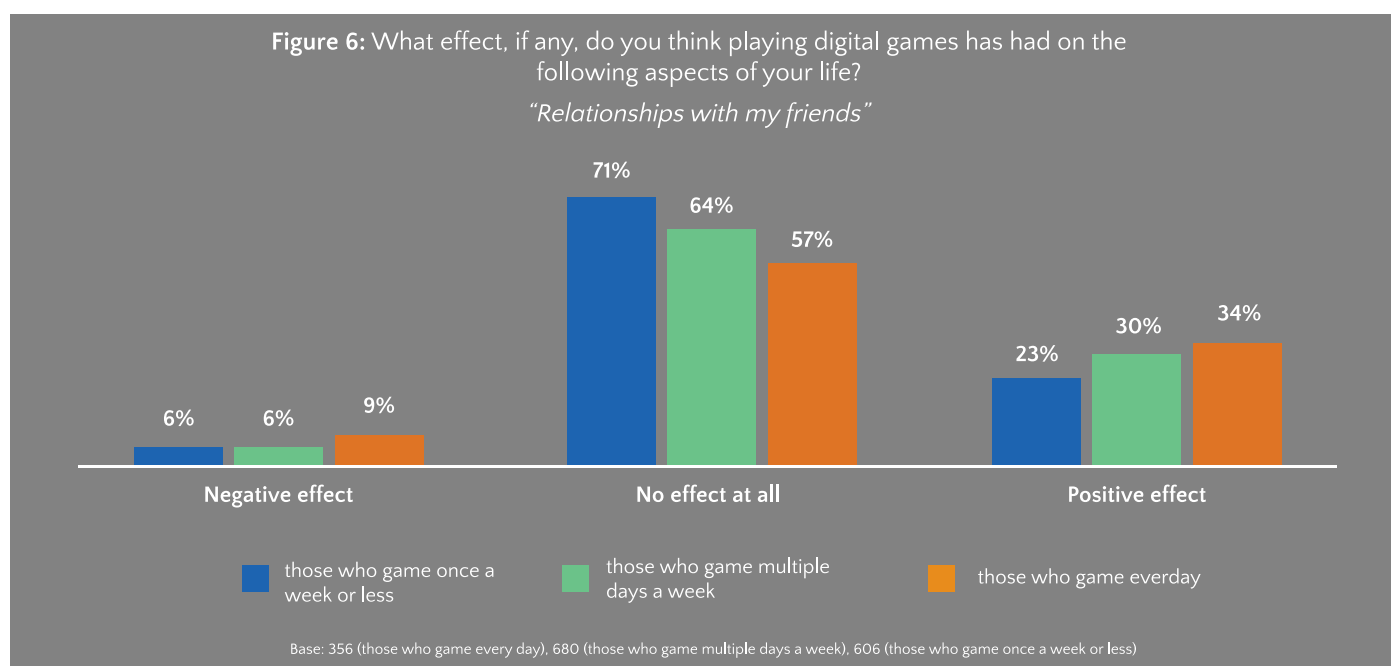
“I mostly get social benefits [from playing digital games]. I met my best friend through ‘Borderlands’.”

This suggestion is further backed up by further research findings

- Only one in five (20%) of those who game every day say that it has had a positive effect on their social isolation,
- One in three (34%) of those who game every day say there has been a positive effect on the relationships with their friends.
- A further one in five (21%) say that gaming has had a negative effect on their social isolation.



Overall, analysis of the research shows that more students who game say gaming has a negative effect on their social isolation compared to those who say it has a positive effect. However, the data does suggest that gaming may improve relationships with ‘digital’ friends which is why a higher proportion say gaming has had a positive effect on their relationships with their friends than helped with their social isolation.



This may also go some way to explaining why one-fifth of those who game every day have a negative sense of belonging at university, something which perhaps is not so surprising considering that over one-third of students who game every day say it has got in the way of their social life.

It appears that the mixture of gaming, and this being done on a digital device, or more specifically a mobile phone, adds further strains on a student's sense of belonging at university and may isolate them even further from the student community.

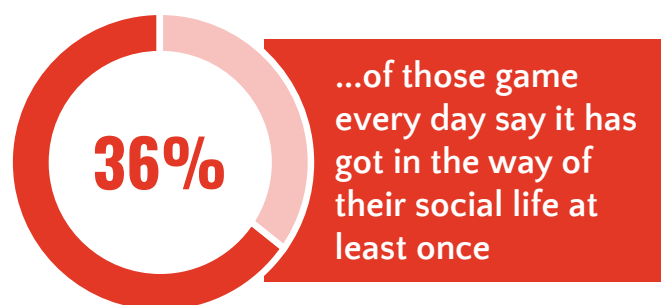


23% of those who have been told they are on their phone too much say that gaming has had a negative effect on their social isolation. Our data also shows that gaming has other implications for students including negatively affecting their physical well-being as well as their sleep.

Interestingly while nearly half of students who game every day say that it affected their studies, 28% of those who game every day say it has got in the way of their academic performance at university more than once or twice.

In addition, 21% of those who game every day say it has got in the way of their social life at university more than once or twice.

The statistics provide further evidence too that gaming every day encroaches on the social life and the sense of belonging of those students – with over one-third of those who game every day saying that gaming has at least once got in the way of their social life at university.

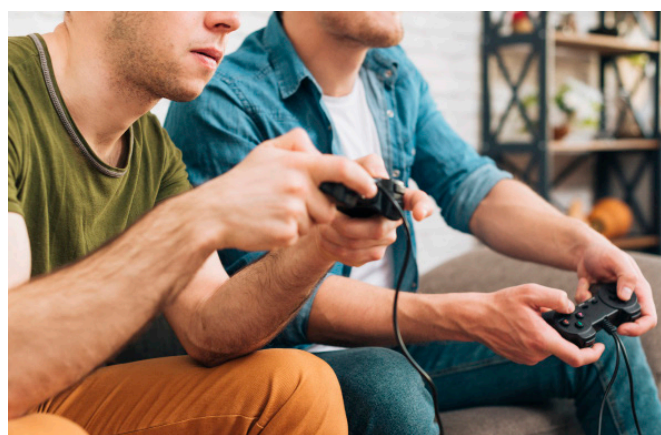


It is worth highlighting that three-quarters of students who game 2 to 3 days a week say that gaming has never got in the way of their social activities at university, while this proportion rises to 85% when analysing those who game once a week or less.

Thus, while moderate gaming does not seem to have many negative effects on students' lives for those who game frequently, and certainly those who game every day it can be a cause of social isolation as students forsake their university social life for socialising via online games.

“ At times, I've chosen to stay in and play rather than socialise with friends – gaming has had a negative effect ”

Similar to those who gamble, the worry here is that students do not feel as though they have the friendships they would like – hence why they appear to turn to gaming in an attempt to reduce their isolation. However, there are also those students who are gaming for fun which may, in-turn, contribute to one's social isolation. Either way, it demonstrates how vital it is that universities ensure there are enough activities and events to suit all students so as they can gain the element of socialising and excitement that they try to achieve through their gaming.



## Gaming affects academic performance

Nearly half of students feel gaming has got in the way of their academic performance. Whilst gaming may affect a student's social life, our research shows that gaming everyday has a greater impact on a student's academic work – with one-in-seven reporting that gaming often gets in the way of their academic performance.

Furthermore, nearly half (45%) of those who game most days say that gaming has got in the way of their academic performance. The challenge here is to make sure that students keep their gaming habits in-check, since those who game 3 days or less during the week become increasingly likely to say that gaming has never got in the way of their academic performance.

“Gaming has a negative impact on my work ethic because I know what I would prefer to be doing at any point”

This research also shows that it is not only a student's general academic performance which is affected, but also that their performance in exams suffers as a result.

- Of the 738 students who agree that they are regularly playing games on their devices, a quarter (27%) say their gaming habits have had a negative effect on their exam performance.

Adding this to the insight that shows that nearly half of our sample spend over 4 hours a day on their digital device(s), and one-third say they are not easily able to switch off their digital device(s), this adds further evidence to the belief that too much gaming, as well as low levels of digital resilience can affect numerous aspects of a student's experience including their social experience and academic experience.

Qualitative research with students revealed additional interesting insights into the relationship between gaming and a student's academic work.

“When I was extremely behind on my work, I ended up playing games instead of actually doing my work”

On the one hand, we have shown the negative effect that gaming can have on one's work ethic and academic performance at university – especially for those who game every day or most days. On the other hand, students mention that large amounts of academic work, and the stress that this brings, is also a cause for why they turn to play digital games.

“Gaming is mostly a second life escape. I don't have deadlines in games, apart from the ones I set myself”

Their reason for gaming is very similar to those of moderate risk and problem gamblers. Under academic pressure, students appear to turn to gaming and / or gambling to escape the current stresses of university which they are facing. Not only this, but there is a sense that students feel 'in control' of what they are doing when gaming / gambling – something which may be missing from their university experience. Some students can find the uncertainty of university distressing, unaware of what grades they will get in their exams, or what career they will embark on when they leave university. Such unanswered questions can weigh heavily on students. Our research suggests that some students look to one or both of gaming and gambling activities where they are in charge of what they do – whether that is in relation to a game or the stake they are placing on a bet. It is this element of escapism and control which appears to underpin the motivation for gaming and gambling.

“I think that having clear goals in a game and being able to achieve them is quite attractive, whereas at university half the time you don't know how well / poorly you're doing”



## Acting on the insight

This section begins to focus specifically on what could be done to support those students at risk or actually affected negatively by gambling or gaming whilst at university.

### Raising awareness of gambling and gaming as addictions

One of the first recommendations identified by students is to raise awareness amongst university student populations about gaming and gambling addictions. This is particularly important with regards to gaming, where students do not necessarily feel that gaming can be an addiction. The first hurdle is for society to change these perceptions.

“To be honest, I don't consider gaming to be an addiction in the first place”

### Improve awareness and accessibility of Advice Services

To have the biggest impact; awareness of the problem and of the available support must increase across the student population. Qualitative findings from this research show that amongst the student population, there is a lack of awareness about the type of support students can access in regard to gaming and gambling.

“There needs to be more awareness about the available support because I wasn't aware you could get help at university for this issue [gaming]”

It is recommended that universities, students' unions and specialist charities work together – in a dual approach – will be the best way to reach as many students as possible, to raise awareness of the potential risks, provide practical action, tackle current addictions and prevent students from having future risks or addictions too.

“I don't think there is enough advertisement or awareness regarding help with gambling”

When analysing the awareness of certain organisations amongst those who gamble (Figure 7 below) it was identified that moderate risk and problem gamblers are less likely to have heard of:

- Their university advice / student support service
- Their students' union advice centre.

This highlights that these students, those who are most likely to need help with their gambling, have a considerable lack of awareness of the type of help which their university and SU advice centre can offer. Part of this could be because they view their gambling addiction as a non-university issue and therefore have not thought about the help that could be available to them on their doorstep.

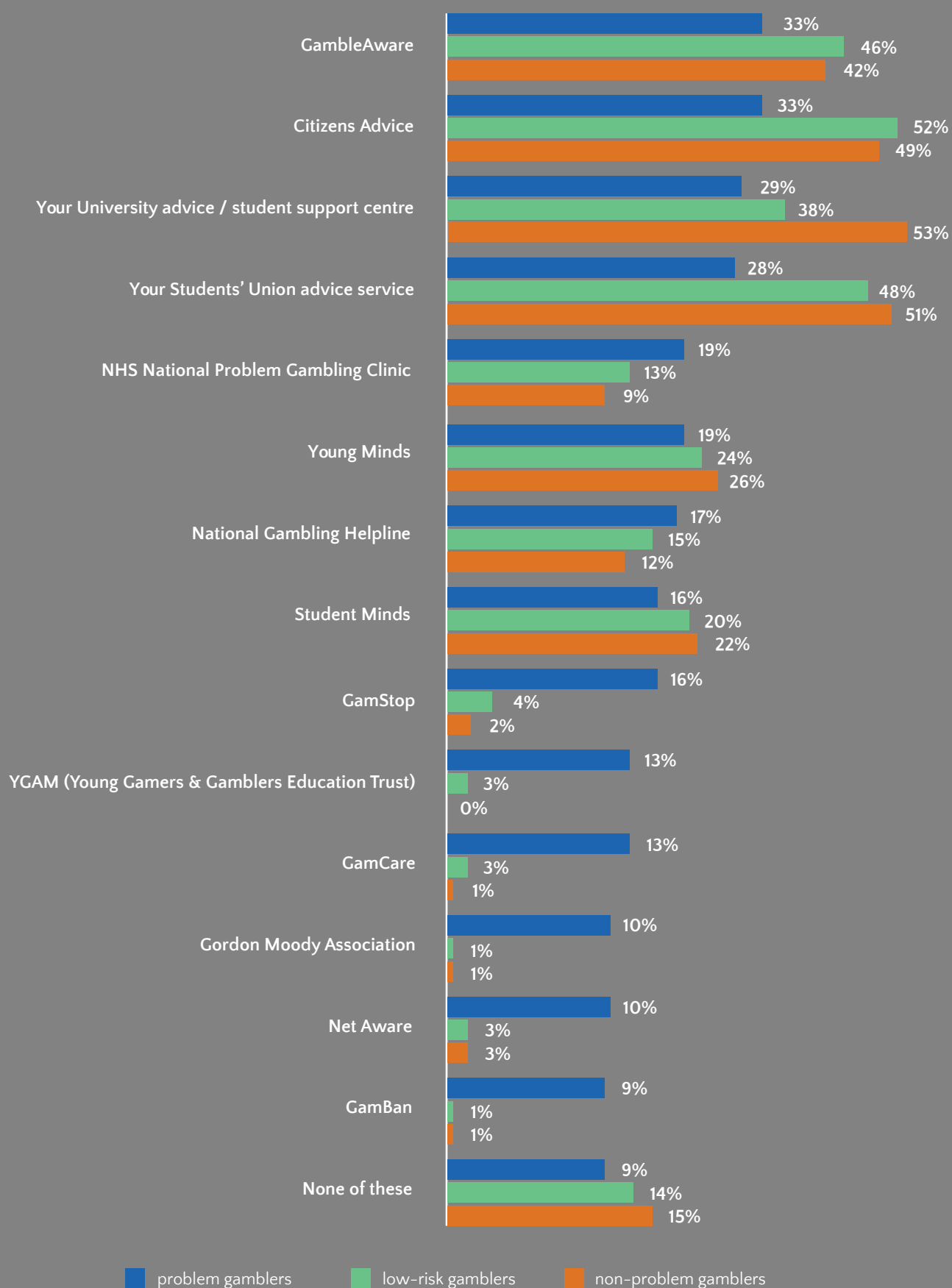
“Gambling charities & independent advice services offer more specific guidance on gambling”

However, these students are more likely to be aware of the following:

- GamCare
- GamStop
- Gordon Moody Association
- NHS National Problem Gambling Clinic
- YGAM



Figure 7: Which of the following organisations have you heard of? Please select all that you have heard of (by those who gamble).



Base: 160 (problem / moderate risk gamblers), 79 (low-risk gamblers), 734 (non-problem gamblers)

These organisations are more specialist in terms of their mission and have a focus on dealing with gaming and / or gaming addictions.

On the other hand, Figure 7 reveals that those who are deemed non-problem gamblers are more likely to be aware of their university advice / student support service's and their Students' Union advice centre. Whilst students often feel that such services offered by the university aren't specific enough, students are encouraged to go to them because of their proximity.

“ University / Union advice centres are easier to access for help you might need ”

The research identified that students feel there are pros and cons to accessing help from both types of support services. This emphasises the need for a dual-approach, especially with specialist external organisations, to tackle gambling and gaming and their potential issues at university.

Figure 7 also suggests that to target those most at risk from gambling, universities will need added help from organisations more well known among students as awareness of university services in relation to gambling and gaming is low within this group.

### The need for an open-door policy

“ I think the help for gambling is probably there [at university] but it's not spoken about as much as it should be ”

Two-thirds of our total sample say that they tend to keep issues or problems they might have to themselves.

This proportion increases for those who are moderate risk / problem gamblers as well as those who game at least multiple days throughout the week.

Whilst part of this issue may be due to students lacking in confidence to open up to someone, it may also be because they are unaware of the support available.



Either way, an open-door policy encouraging students to come forward to talk and to seek help will enable many students to face up to their challenges, and even addiction(s).

Not only should easy-to-access support help students to overcome their challenges or addiction(s), there is the possibility it will encourage students to remain at university. Of those students who have considered dropping out of university, 33% of our total sample:

- One-fifth disagree that they feel they have someone to go to for help with any well-being issues they might have (vs 12% of everyone else in our sample);
- 7-in-10 agree that they tend to keep issues or problems to themselves (vs 64% of everyone else in our sample).

“ Universities should be clearer and more open about how and where to get help to try and beat any stigma or taboo and make it easy for students to get help ”



This recommendation is especially important for undergraduate students who are more likely to disagree that they have someone to go to for help with any well-being issues they might have and who are more likely to keep issues or problems to themselves. This further emphasises the need for students to be

“ They should make it known that gambling help is provided, because most people don't realise that they can ask for help about this ”

made aware firstly of what help is available and how easy it is to access that help, but also to make sure students are made aware of this at the earliest point of their university journey – with welcome/freshers' weeks being the ideal opportunity.

What we have established so far is that universities, students' unions, charities and independent advice services must firstly raise the awareness of gaming and gambling as addictions. This awareness must be coupled with the appropriate help from both university / union advice services and independent organisations which are easy to access for students. But what help do students need to help them not gamble or game in the future?

Providing students with help regarding their finances, academic work and their social isolation  
The following section will explore the help universities could provide to help students who may be at risk from gaming and / or gambling, and from poor digital resilience, which were identified through our research.

### 1. Financial / budgeting advice

We have already seen in this report that both regular gamers and moderate-risk / problem gamblers find that their actions have a negative effect on their financial situation. Workshops focusing in on how students might better manage their money, combined with information based around the dangers of gambling and gaming to one's finances, could help bring the financial impact of these activities to the forefronts of the minds of students.

This may prove to be particularly important for first

year undergraduate students who have received their student loan for the first time and have to manage the money they have carefully. The window between exam results day and starting university is a specific opportunity for reaching new students.

“ More budgeting advice should be provided at the start of university ”

“ There should be advice and support around budgeting to help put our situation into perspective ”

### 2. Easy-to-access social events

Our research has also identified social isolation as a potential driver for those who game every day and / or are moderate risk to problem gamblers. The key for universities here is to make sure that students do not feel they have to gamble or game to replace their lack of potential social relationships at university. Social events could be based around encouraging students to talk about their experiences of gambling and / or gaming. Not only would an event like this help students to realise the risks, but an event like this would also allow students to meet people who may, like them, be searching for more friends to help reduce their social isolation.

### 3. Academic Support

We have also seen that students turn to gaming and / or gambling as an escape from the pressures of university life. Stressful situations that may cause students to turn to these pastimes often revolve around coursework and exams where workload pressures increase on students. Universities may need to provide greater academic support to students (or increase the awareness of such support) which enable students to develop the appropriate study skills which can make them feel more confident about the work they are doing. These skills can then be utilised during busy and potentially stressful periods to help students feel more in control about the weeks ahead of them.

“ I have had a more negative university experience...I’m not impressed on how little contact time we get with lecturers and it feels as though we have to teach ourselves most of the time ”

The recommendations so far have focused on what might be done within the university context to help with gambling and gaming behaviours. The next section will focus on what else might be done with the focus being on having a wider societal impact.

The need to reduce gambling and gaming adverts  
As might be expected, those who game regularly are more likely to see gaming adverts, while those most at risk of gambling problems are more likely to see gambling adverts and our findings are aligned with this.

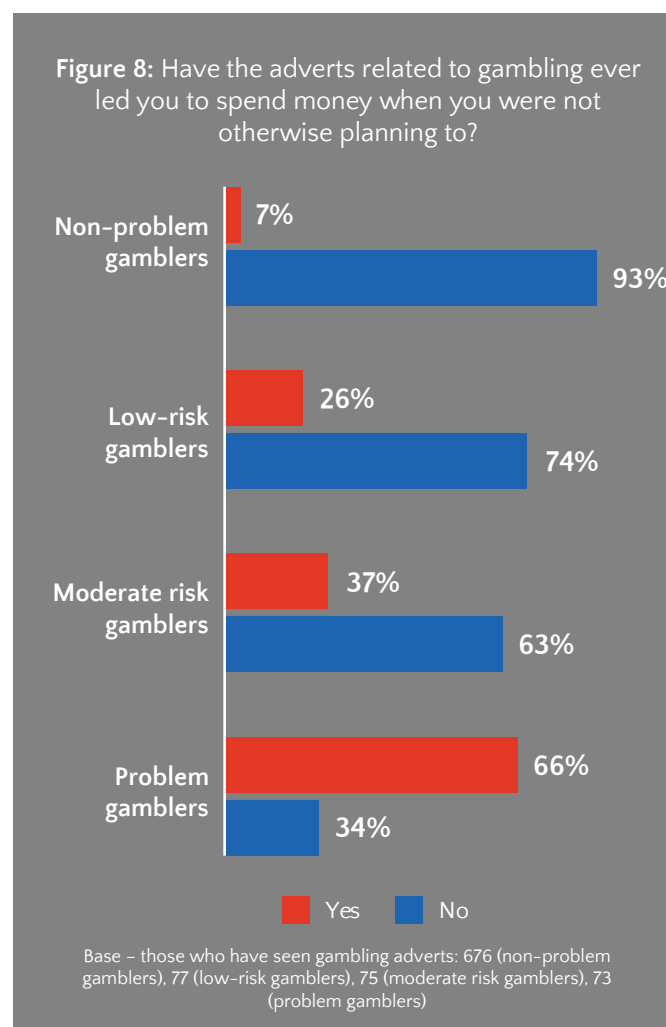
However, our research also highlights that those who gamble are more likely to see gaming adverts than those who do not, whilst those who game are more likely to come into contact with adverts relating to gambling than those who do not game. There does appear to be a natural link between gambling and gaming, and this link seems to be exacerbated by the placement of adverts.

- 37% of problem gamblers see adverts related to gaming every day (vs. 20% of everyone else in our sample);
- 28% of those who game every day say they see adverts related to gambling every day (vs. 18 % of everyone else in our sample).

Reducing the visibility of adverts becomes even more vital considering their effect. Figure 8 (below) reveals the effect gambling adverts have in regard to altering the spending habits of students who gamble, while Figure 9 (below) details the same for gamers

What we see is that adverts lead those most at risk from gaming or gambling addictions to spend money. Reducing the visibility of adverts related to gambling would potentially have a significant effect, and the industry is making some headway in this regard with GVC (which owns Ladbrokes, Coral and Gala)

proposing a ban on broadcast advertising, at any time of the day to “end all UK sports-betting, on live and repeated sporting events”.<sup>17</sup>



However, this conversation has yet to turn to focus on the adverts related to gaming. More research is required into the link between gaming advertising and negative outcomes, but these results suggest there is a potential link that should be explored.

## Banning the use of credit cards to place stakes online or in person

Recently the deputy leader of the Labour party called for a ban on people being able to use their credit cards to place stakes either in person or online<sup>18</sup>. Our research supports this suggestion – Figure 10 (below) reveals that moderate risk / problem gamblers are far more likely to use their credit cards ‘most days’.

Furthermore, our findings show that over half (54%) of moderate risk / problem gamblers believe that

<sup>17</sup> BBC News, New National Strategy to tackle problem gambling, 25 April 2019.





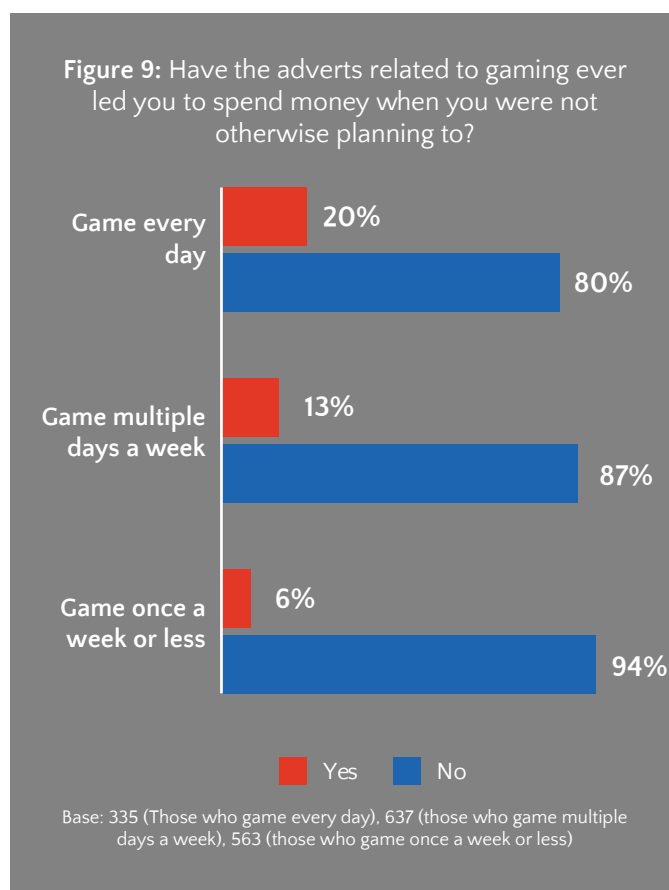
taking out a loan is a 'good thing because it allows one to enjoy life' as a student compared to 36% of our total sample.

These statistics are worrying as they highlight the more relaxed (or possibly risk-taking) attitudes gamblers have in relation to their finances. This issue

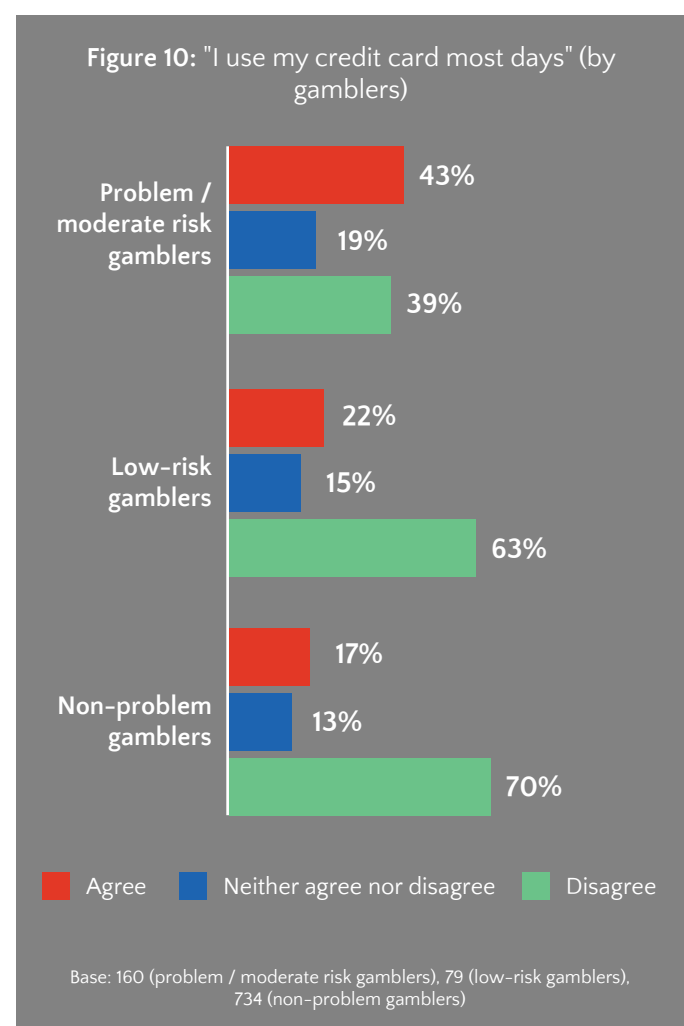


is further exaggerated as 61% of moderate risk / problem gamblers say they are 'impulsive with the purchasing decisions they make' compared to 34% of our total sample.

All this points to the idea that students may be willing to use their credit cards to fund their gambling behaviours. Helping to introduce a ban on the use of credit cards to place stakes could help to see a reduction in financial difficulties caused by gambling.



<sup>18</sup> 'NewStatesman'. Tom Watson: gambling may become a "public health emergency" (written by Rohan Banerjee); 13th May 2019.



## Conclusion

YGAM's research into the attitudes of students in higher education to gaming and gambling identifies that these activities can be considered harmful choices for many students which in turn can have a negative effect on the university experience. Students who game multiple days a week and / or who are moderate risk to problem gamblers are more likely than others to get involved in these activities because:

- They are seeking to escape from the pressures of university work;
- They are seeking to reduce their social isolation at university.

Overall, YGAM's research highlighted that gambling negatively affects a student's university experience. 59% of students who gamble are always worrying about their financial situation while at university. One in seven moderate risk and problem gamblers say they have a negative perception of their overall university experience while over half this group say they have seriously considered dropping out of university – compared to just 35% of low-risk gamblers and 32% of non-problem gamblers. It is difficult to assign cause and effect – whether gambling leads to

the temptation to leave university or the other way around. However, the insight YGAM has gained shows that for many, certain patterns of gambling are a sign of potential difficulties and can be linked to unhappiness at university more generally.

Gaming has very high participation levels with higher education students. The prevailing attitude to gaming is that it is a positive pastime and gaming is not seen as a possible addiction. There is limited recognition of the negative impact gaming can have even though nearly half the survey respondents identified gaming had impacted their academic performance. Within the reasons for gaming clear well-being challenges are also evident.

Analysis of students' motivations for gaming reveals they are similar to those of moderate risk and problem gamblers to gambling. Under academic pressure, students appear to turn to gaming and/or gambling to

escape the current stresses of university which they are facing. Not only this, but there is a sense of control they feel is missing from their university experience. Some students find the uncertainty of university distressing, unaware of what grades they will get in their exams, or what career they will embark on when they leave university.

## Improving Student Life

### YGAM Responds

The insight from this research is informing YGAM's University Student Engagement programme. YGAM is independently funded and able to work with universities, students' unions and other organisations supporting students in higher education on the key recommendations from this research.

YGAM's University Student Engagement Programme works in partnership with Universities and Students' Unions to deliver a unique peer-led education programme. Our goal is to give students in higher education information and tools that support safer gaming and gambling and build digital resilience. We want students and those around them at university to be more aware of gambling and gaming, how it could affect them and what to do if they have concerns.

For students in higher education our experience shows that the peer to peer model of support works most effectively. Students can communicate and understand in a way that the best-intentioned university and YGAM staff can't and can serve as role models for action or change. Peer educators can pass on information formally or informally, responding to the context and experience of students in a relevant and relatable way for their community and generation.

Supporting this established part of YGAM's work, YGAM recognises that it has a key part to play in responding to the findings of this research into higher education student attitudes to gaming and gambling and the related behaviours and challenges that arise from this new understanding. As a result, YGAM has identified a number of areas it will champion and seek to work in partnership with those supporting students in higher education to address the challenges low digital resilience, gaming or gambling may present.

**Increase understanding of the well-being and support services available and how to access them** aiming particularly to reach students for whom gaming, or gambling is negatively affecting them.

**Raise awareness of gambling and gaming as addictions** providing students with a safe space to explore the risks and seek support.

**Provide accessible budgeting and financial advice** particularly for students as they start university.

**Create easy access to social events and communities** to help students’ build positive social relationships.

**Provide academic support** to reduce the anxiety about academic performance, workload pressures, uncertainty about the future.

### Methodological Note

This research seeks to explore the attitudes and behaviours of students who gamble and / or game to help further understand what drives students to partake in these activities, and what actions may need to happen to help these students within the university landscape and wider society.

This research was carried out in a two-part process, outlined below

1. A 15-minute online survey consisting of both undergraduate and postgraduate students studying in the UK. In total, the survey achieved its target of 2,000 responses, reaching 2,080 completed surveys from current students. 1,531 undergraduates responded and 549 postgraduates broadly matching the proportion in the University population as a whole.
2. Six online focus groups (which ran for approximately 1 hour each) were then conducted with a total of 47 participants. The groups explored areas of interest which were identified from the survey analysis. In total there were two groups with undergraduate gamblers, two with undergraduate gamers, and one postgraduate group for each activity.

The make-up of our sample from the survey can be seen in Table 1. The sample slightly under-represents males. Considering that 50% of moderate risk gamblers and 60% of problem gamblers in our sample are male, it is reasonable to assume that our research actually underestimates the number of gamblers in Higher Education.

Table 1: Demographic Breakdown

	Our Sample	Total University Population 2017/18
Male	28%	43%
Female	72%	57%
Undergraduate	74%	76%
Postgraduate	26%	24%
UK students	74%	80%
Non-UK students	26%	20%

Table 2: Gamblers vs Gamers

	Our Sample
Gambled in the last 12 months	47%
Not-gambled in the last 12 months	53%
Have played digital games	79%
Have never played digital games	21%

### Further Information

If you are interested in establishing a YGAM Student Engagement Programme at your university or students’ union, please contact:

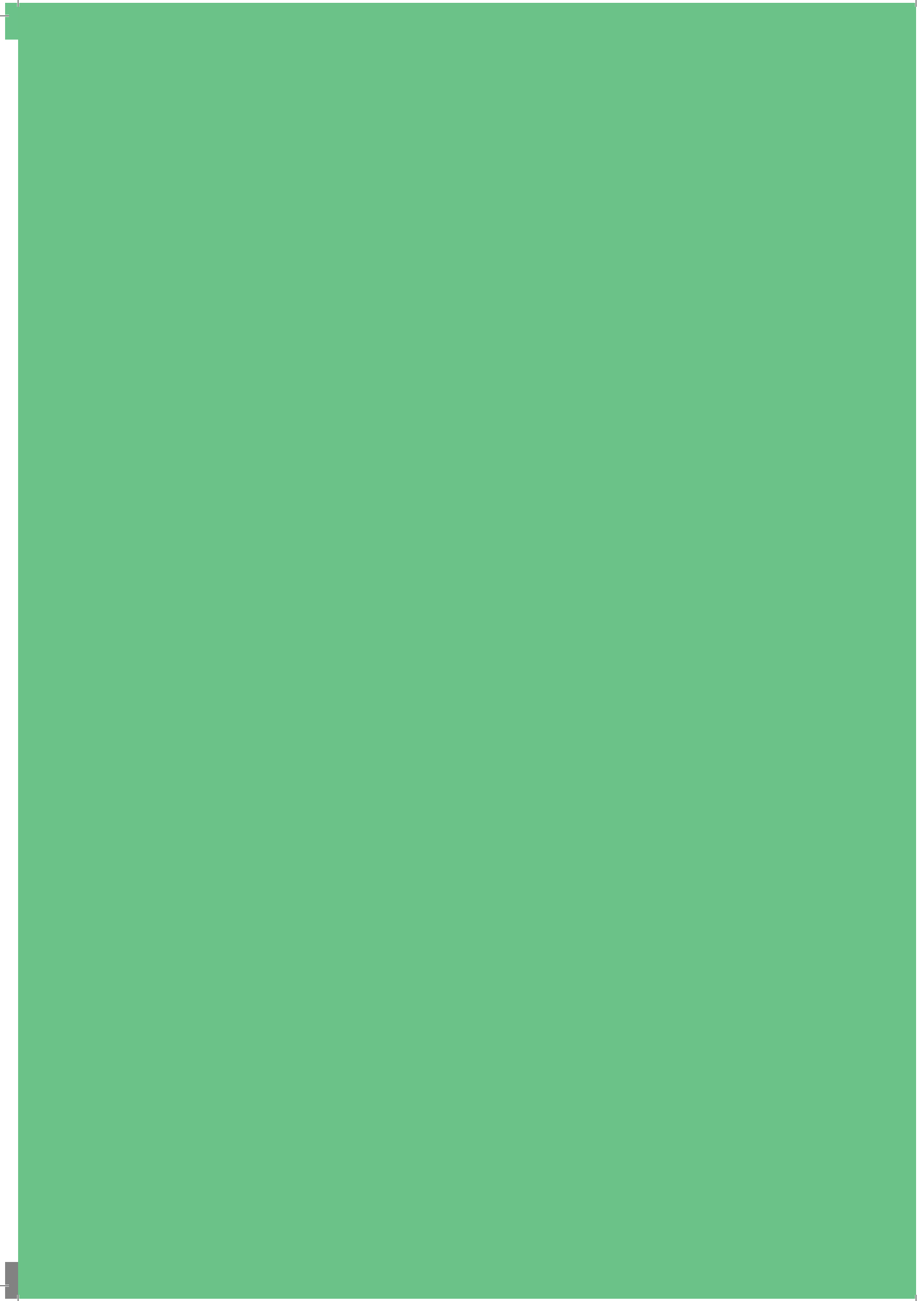
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