

Key points

- Nearly one in four (23%) 11 to 16-year old gamers said they had paid money to open loot boxes
- One third (31%) of young gamers said they struggled to keep track of how much they spent on loot boxes and one third (33%) said they did not feel in control of their spending on loot boxes
- One in four gamers spend over £100 on loot boxes on average over the course of a game
- One in six (15%) had taken money from their parents without permission to buy a loot box; and one in ten (9%) had borrowed money they couldn't repay, while one in ten (11%) had either used their parent's credit or debit card, or borrowed money from friends or family to do so
- Nearly a quarter (24%) of gamers said they felt addicted to loot boxes and, because of the feeling of being cheated or ripped off by loot boxes, over one third (44%) said they experienced feelings of frustration and anger more often than they otherwise would have



What are loot boxes?

Loot boxes are virtual treasure chests contained inside video games, where the contents are randomly selected. Players acquire the loot boxes, often paying for them with 'real-world' money. It is a gamble because they have no idea whether the box contains an item which they want (to improve or customise their experience of the game), or the odds of it doing so.

Loot boxes are big money for major games publishers, accounting for between 11% and one third of the annual sales of publishers like Activision Blizzard, Take-Two Interactive Software and Electronic Arts.¹ In the UK, it is estimated that over £700 million is spent each year on loot boxes.²

Who buys loot boxes?

Gamers of all ages buy loot boxes – they appear in over 70% of the most popular games on the gaming platform Steam³ and in 60% of the top mobile games on Google Play and the Apple app store.⁴ Many games that contain loot boxes are popular with younger players. In a 2019 survey by the UK Gambling Commission,⁵ nearly one in four (23%) 11 to 16-year olds said they had paid money to open loot boxes; a survey by Parent Zone⁶ found 40% of young people had done so; and the Royal Society for Public Health found that 27% of 11 to 14-year olds had bought a loot box in the week before completing the survey.⁷

The Gambling Health Alliance (GHA) surveyed gamers aged 13 to 24 (Oct-Nov 2020) to find out how much they spent on loot boxes. Buying loots starts at a young age: over a third (34%) first spent money on a loot box when they were 13 years old or younger, and there are no age restrictions on playing a game which contains loot boxes. For instance, FIFA, where players in 'Ultimate Team' mode build their teams by opening loot boxes to find new players, has a PEGI rating of 3, which means it can be played by anyone. Yet 79% of respondents who played FIFA said loot boxes had negatively impacted their gaming experience, citing: the amount they had to spend to play competitively, the poor odds of getting the most valuable players, and the fact that with each new edition of the game, you would have to start spending all over again to put together a new team as players could not be carried over.

¹ <https://www.barrons.com/articles/videogame-publishers-face-scrutiny-over-the-use-of-lock-boxes-51555120828>

² <https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2019-11-26-a-tougher-stance-on-online-video-games-opinion>

³ <https://psyarxiv.com/u35kt>

⁴ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/add.14973>

⁵ <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/PDF/Young-People-Gambling-Report-2019.pdf>

⁶ <https://parentzone.org.uk/system/files/attachments/The%20Ripoff%20Games%20-%20Parent%20Zone%20report.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/policy/gambling/skins-in-the-game.html>