



2024 Sustainability Report

**MERKUR UK: Investing in the High Street,
revitalising Local Communities**



WE ARE MERKUR GROUP UK

MERKUR Group UK is part of the Germany head quartered GAUSELMANN GROUP of companies, a Euro 3.6 billion turnover international business active in the delivery of safe gambling entertainment experiences. Established in 1957, Gauselmann remains a family-owned company, employing 15,000 people worldwide. Since 2000 we have invested over £500m in the UK and we are one of the country's largest operators of High Street gaming centres and we also operate three Bingo Clubs. Our UK Bingo portfolio also includes Europe's biggest venue, the 2,200-capacity club in Cricklewood, North West London.

At the heart of our business in the UK is an absolute commitment to deliver a safe and enjoyable gambling experience to every customer across every one of our venues. This sustainability report brings that commitment to life and shines a light on how we are doing this and the social impact we are creating in communities across the United Kingdom.



Our Vision

MERKUR Group UK is unequivocal in its commitment to deliver a safe and enjoyable gambling experience to every customer across every one of its venues. The MERKUR UK Vision is to uphold the highest possible standards of social responsibility and be recognised by external stakeholders for setting the safer gambling benchmark for the UK's low-stake, low-prize gambling sector.



Our Mission

We want to be recognised by external stakeholders for setting the safer gambling benchmark for the UK's low-stake, low-prize gambling sector.



Our Brands

The Gauselmann Group has invested over £500 million in the UK since 2000 and is one of the Country's largest operators of High Street Gambling Centres and Bingo Clubs. Our current brands comprise of:



Previously MERKUR Casino, this is a new brand into the UK showcasing the latest digital 'slot gaming' products in convenient High Street locations.



Our first traditional casino experience. Situated in the heart of Aberdeen, we boast a modern and sophisticated ambience, a vast range of table and slot games plus regular live entertainment.



Here we pride ourselves on providing an experience, which is not just about Bingo but also about community, ambience, safety and fun in a modern environment.



Dedicated machine technical support service to the MERKUR UK Group.

Our Behaviours

Investment in our people, research and development and venue environment have been key to the MERKUR Group's success.



Over 2,500 people are employed in the UK – from venue staff to engineers/software developers/IT workers, and over 15,000 jobs created worldwide. Great service and standards are at the heart of all we do.

Our Values

We support our local communities through our MERKUR UK Initiative program. We have raised over £1.2 million supporting charities and good causes. We seek to support charity and our local communities, 'championing innovation' in social responsibility.



Investing in the High Street, revitalising Local Communities

We are delighted to present our most recent annual Sustainability Report. MERKUR UK continues to invest significantly in the United Kingdom economy. Over £500 million has been invested since 2000, and we remain one of the country's largest operators of High Street Gaming Centres and Bingo Clubs. In 2023 alone, we opened a further 19 venues providing local employment opportunities for 190 people. All of these venues are located at the heart of the High Street. We have been able to revitalise vacant premises, give the community a new social hub and support the government's levelling-up agenda. MERKUR UK now employs over 2,500 colleagues in a wide range of high-skill customer service, technology and engineering roles across the United Kingdom.

However, 2023 has not been without its challenges as we continue our post-pandemic recovery plan. Wage inflation, energy costs and the general cost of conducting business in the United Kingdom have created a challenging period, and while we have been able to create new employment opportunities, many of our long-serving colleagues who returned home during the pandemic, haven't returned to the United Kingdom. Therefore, we have had recruitment challenges, but we have sought to use this as an opportunity to refresh our approach, by, for example, launching a new graduate program in 2023 attracting new graduates to MERKUR UK. In addition, MERKUR UK secured its first Casino License, opening a casino in the heart of Aberdeen, which has safeguarded around 40 jobs.



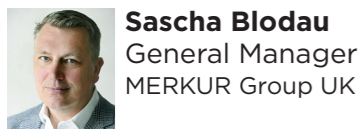
From left to right Mark Schertle, Irina Ruf and Sascha Blodau from MERKUR Casino UK at the opening of the new Aberdeen casino

The progress of the United Kingdom Government's Gambling White Paper has been welcomed, representing the first statutory review of gambling legislation in over a decade. The government has recognised some of the needs of the land-based sector, which is the sector in which we operate. We remain optimistic that regulation to support our sector more broadly could be introduced in mid-2024.

In addition to our work to respond to the Gambling White Paper, we have continued supporting and working closely with industry trade associations such as bacta, The Bingo Association and The Gambling Business Group. Our focus and input has been around social responsibility, technical guidance and the political work required to engage with the Gambling Commission and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). Our industry-leading MERKUR UK 360 Program has gone from strength to strength and remains our principal vehicle to co-ordinate, scrutinise and evaluate our social responsibility commitments, particularly around safer gambling. We have facilitated several consumer insight workshops in 2023, seeking customer input on further strengthening their experience, and we have implemented new technology in venues giving customers readily available information to gambling support organisations such as GamCare and GambleAware. Our venue teams have benefited from continued training from Ygam.

Finally, alongside our investment in the High Street, our unwavering commitment to supporting local charities and good causes has remained a principal driver for contributing to revitalising local communities. In 2023 we supported over 50 good causes across the United Kingdom, all nominated by our venue teams.

We hope you find this Sustainability Report a purposeful read, and we very much look forward to welcoming you to one of our venues and working with you in 2024.



Sascha Blodau
General Manager
MERKUR Group UK



Tony Boulton
Director of Public and
Political relations
MERKUR Group UK

Sector Contribution and Nationwide Job Creation

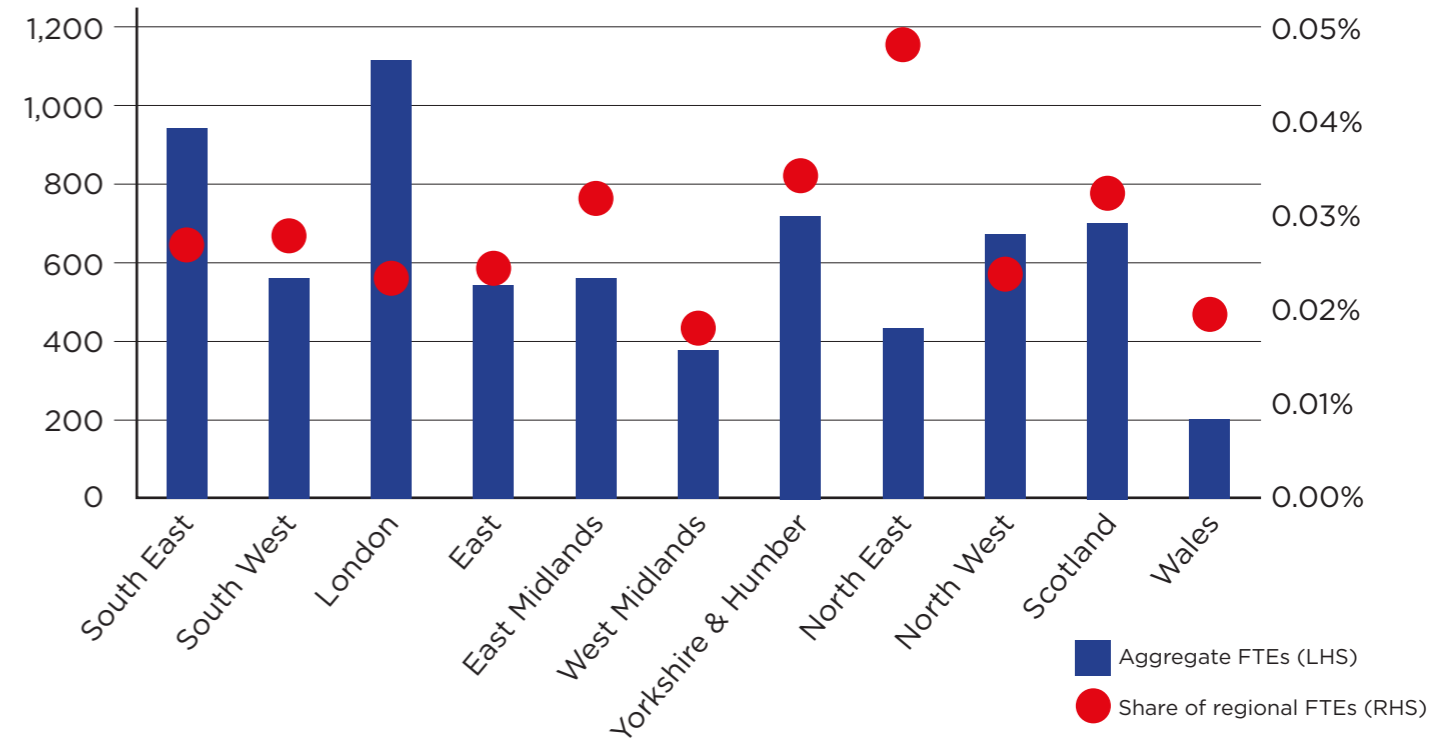
Total Contribution

£750m	£398m	7,254	£203m
Turnover	Gross Value Added	Jobs	Wages



For every 10 jobs in High Street Gambling Centres, another 7.2 are supported in the wider economy

Job Creation Nationwide



Strategic Approach to Sustainability

MERKUR UK has continued their investment in the High Street by opening brand-new High Street Gaming Centres in Basingstoke, Bolton, Bracknell, Camberwell, Leicester, Preston, Slough, Stockport, Stoke Newington, Tooting Bec, Tooting, Trowbridge, Upton Park, Waterloo and Woolwich. The brand-new venues creating **10 new local jobs in each of those areas**.

Continuing to invest in the High Street and giving customers access and experiences in locations MERKUR UK didn't previously have a presence, we are able to support local communities with new job opportunities. Our hope is to create at least **500 jobs by the end of the year** with new venues opened and more future venues planned.

19 Brand-new High Street Gambling Centres

10 new local jobs at each new location

500 jobs by the end of the year



Watford High Street gains a £200,000 investment

In July MERKUR UK invested a massive £200,000 into The Parade in Watford, doubling the size and re-opening the local MERKUR UK High Street Gaming Centre. This investment in the local community and the transformation of the local Watford venue underline a long-term commitment to the town and a pride in continually investing and innovating in local areas to help create vibrant High Streets that generate employment and encourage visitors.



Our Impact Across the United Kingdom

-  Over **2,500** jobs created
-  Raised over **£1.2 million** for charities and good causes
-  Over **3.5 million** complimentary cups of coffee given away
-  Invested over **£500 million** in the UK
-  Supported over **100** local charities
-  Welcomed over **60** MPs to our venues or virtually via video feed
-  Planted **25,000** trees, offset **2,000** tonnes of CO2e and contributed to a windfarm in Ski Lanka with Ecologi

International Women’s Day 2023: Showcasing female leadership at MERKUR UK



MERKUR UK marked International Women’s Day 2023 with sponsoring The Women in Business review in the sector’s leading B2B publication, Coinslot.

Opening the 54 page review, featuring thirty-one interviews with women from all sectors of the amusements, gaming and hospitality sector, MERKUR UK’s General Manager, Sascha Blodau called on the industry to engage with the diversity and equality message, writing: *“For everyone who is able to influence policy-making I believe that it is our collective responsibility to create industry-wide career paths and opportunities across disciplines - including safer gaming - that we would feel comfortable recommending to our daughters onto our grand-daughters.”*

With MERKUR UK becoming the first sponsor of the Coinslot feature, Blodau delivered a thought-provoking assessment of the progress made by businesses on the road to delivering a diverse, equitable and inclusive industry.

He noted: *“I have always felt that low-stake gambling entertainment recognises talented, ambitious people irrespective of their gender. But it is only when you step outside of your own business and into industry-wide gatherings that you see how few women are literally ‘in the room’.”* And he warned: *“As an industry, we cannot and should not hide from the fact that there are too few women holding senior industry positions.”*

It was a pitch-perfect introduction to The Review which included contributions from Amanda Thompson OBE, Kate Nicholls OBE, Brigid Simmonds OBE, Michelle Michael MBE; chief executives including Anne Ackord, the first female Managing Director of Merkur Casino Irina Ruf, deputy CEO of the Gambling Commission Sarah Gardner and business owners, marketing and sales directors, licensing experts and High Street bingo managers. And the message from Blodau to all the contributors was a rallying call of support: *“We have a shared and collective responsibility to address this imbalance, and I believe that starts with broadening the recruitment net and extolling the benefits and opportunities of following a career in gaming/amusements as opposed to the perception of the sector simply providing a short-term job opening.”*

Opposite are some of the MERKUR UK female leaders who share their insights on why International Women’s day is important.



Irina Ruf says...

“There are still challenges which every woman has to face in everyday business life. But that is why it is still important to me to stay true to your goals and maintain a network of supporters who share the same mindset.”

Nicola Wallbank says...

“Women’s leadership needs to be supported more, it should be an industry celebration of the great women we are surrounded by who help contribute to make land-based gaming what it is today. We should all be looking at our recruitment processes and how we can attract more young people as well as more females into our industry.”



Nadia Timofeev says...

“I have also been blessed to have great mentors who are free of prejudice. I am more concerned when I see it somewhere else, when women are not heard or are ignored.”

Sophie Pope says...

“She was actually really smart for a woman!” is the kind of thing I’ve heard before - potentially well-meaning, if I’m being generous, but highlights the work required across wider society.”



Sophie Chester says...

“We’re blessed at Blueprint that we’re ahead of the curve in this respect. I consider it to be a company that leads the way in diversity and inclusion and not just for the sake of doing so. We’ve long understood that by nurturing diverse recruitment and advancement policies, our business then enjoys much greater scope to attract the right talent at all levels.”



MERKUR UK

Leading the Social Responsibility agenda nationally.

Merkur UK was praised for its support of an 'outstanding' bacta social responsibility Exchange in November 2023.

Tony Boulton, MERKUR UK's Director of Public and Political Relations believes the 2023 bacta social responsibility exchange was a powerful representation of the UK land-based sector's commitment to safer gambling and a measure of the progress that's been made by the industry over the last decade.

Reflecting on the Exchange Tony Boulton said: "bacta chief executive John White, National President John Bollom, Liz Speed who chairs bacta's social responsibility Committee and bacta operations manager Sarah Dhakshina-Murthy should be congratulated on delivering what was an outstanding and powerful event which succeeded on many different levels.

"As a company that places safer gambling at the heart of the business MERKUR UK had six of our senior venue team present at the Exchange all of whom confirmed that it was one of the most useful Social Responsibility events that they had participated in.

"The Breakout sessions provided invaluable insights covering the techniques and technologies deployed by operators to minimise the record low percentage of players who experience problems."

He added: "Whilst there can never be any room for complacency I believe that everyone involved in our sector can reflect on the progress that it has made and continues to make in order to ensure that low-stake gambling entertainment is a mainstream leisure activity that's enjoyed responsibly by millions of adults on High Streets throughout the country."

MERKUR UK was the principal supporter of this annual event and hopes to support again in 2024.



2022/2023 Highlights

Hammersmith hosts the Minister for Gambling



The state-of-the-art MERKUR UK Slots in Hammersmith, West London, opened its doors to a very important guest recently when it welcomed the Minister for Gambling, The Rt Hon Stuart Andrew MP.

Mr Andrew, who was on a fact-finding initiative to experience the latest in low-stake gaming entertainment, was hosted by MERKUR UK General Manager, Sascha Blodau, Director of Public and Political Relations Tony Boulton, Operations Director Steve Ambrose and Head of Compliance, Amanda Kiernan.

The visit comes at an extremely important time for the business as the Government's White Paper on gambling reform maps out the future for the low-stake High Street gaming sector.

Reflecting on the visit Tony Boulton said: *"We are extremely grateful to the Minister for taking time out of what must be a punishing schedule to look around the fantastic MERKUR UK Slots 100% digital venue at Hammersmith."*

General Manager Sascha Blodau used the opportunity to explain the unique operational issues which face our sector, demonstrate our status as a highly accomplished High Street retailer and detail our industry-leading commitments to safer gambling."

He added: *"The White Paper proposals are crucial to the business and having had the opportunity to meet with Tony, Steve and Amanda I'm certain the Minister completed his visit to Hammersmith equipped with a better understanding and appreciation of the business."*

MERKUR UK Team is the best in the business



Rebecca Pow, the Conservative MP for Taunton Deane was the guest of the company when she visited our new gaming entertainment centre located in the Somerset town.

She was the fourth MP in the space of a month to learn more about MERKUR UK's safer gambling undertakings and joined fellow MPs Alex Davies-Jones, Shadow Minister, Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Jonathan Djanogly, Conservative MP for Huntingdon and Matt Warman the Conservative MP for Boston and Skegness.

A total of 60 MPs have been hosted in their local MERKUR UK Slots and according to Tony Boulton, who is the company's Director of Public and Political Relations, it has proved to be a hugely positive exercise.

"For the majority of our MPs it has been their first time inside a High Street gaming entertainment centre" stated Tony. "Some of them have no doubt arrived with little knowledge of our business but without exception all have left genuinely impressed by what they've seen and what they've experienced speaking with the venue teams and our customers."

Tony believes that the MERKUR UK venue teams play an invaluable role representing the business and what it stands for.

He confirmed: *"Having the venue managers and customer-facing staff explaining to their MPs the training that they complete, what we do to identify and help the small percentage of players who might be experiencing problems, the age profile of machine players and how venues serve as an important meeting point for customers has all provided an authentic and powerful insight to what we are all about."*

"There's no doubt that all of the MERKUR UK venue staff have been superb ambassadors for the company and what MERKUR UK stands for."

MERKUR UK Serve-up world class brand ambassador



World number one and former Strictly Come Dancing star Will Bayley MBE has brought his insight and inspirational personality to promote the community credentials that are at the heart of the MERKUR UK Initiative program

World number one Paralympic table tennis star Will Bayley has been unveiled as MERKUR UK's first Brand Ambassador.

Will, who has appeared in a number of TV shows, most memorably the 2019 edition of Strictly Come Dancing where he was forced to withdraw after sustaining a serious leg injury, will take a central role in the development of the MERKUR UK Initiative program which has provided financial support to 50 community-based charities and good causes over the last 12-months.

Welcoming Will to the MERKUR UK family, General Manager, Sascha Blodau said: *"First of all it's a total pleasure to have the World Number 1 join the winning team at MERKUR UK! Will has a remarkable story having been born with arthrogyrosis, a rare congenital disorder that affected all four of his limbs."*

He underwent numerous operations at Great Ormond Street Hospital from the age of just three months and returned to the acclaimed children's hospital for chemotherapy treatment after he was diagnosed with non-hodgkins lymphoma aged 7-years. Having taken up table tennis while recovering from cancer he has gone on a remarkable and inspirational journey to become the most successful British Paralympic table tennis player of all time and was confirmed as the World Number 1 at a recent tournament in Finland. His fascinating story also includes a period attending the Brit School for performing arts and drama as well as being made an MBE in the 2017 New Year's Honours List."

He added: *"Will has overcome so many challenges and demonstrated the fortitude and skills which have seen him succeed on a whole range of different levels. His motto is 'Inspire: Believe: Achieve' and I look forward to working with him on a program of activities not least our inspirational MERKUR UK Initiative scheme which has already helped over 100 charities and good causes nominated by our venues for their outstanding work in the community"*

"It is a great honour for MERKUR UK to be supporting Will as he prepares for the next Olympics in Paris 2024."

Speaking at a photo-shoot to launch the partnership Will added: *"I am really looking forward to working with Sascha and the team at MERKUR UK. The work they are doing in the community is outstanding and I hope to be able to contribute my insight and life experience, working with the team to identify recipient charities, seeing how they are progressing and doing what I can to help, I can't wait to get started!"*



Responsible Gambling



Think
25



At MERKUR UK we're committed to providing our customers with a safe environment to enjoy gambling, as part of a broader range of leisure activities they enjoy. That means we always take a proactive approach to protecting customers from gambling related harm.

We recognise that the majority of our customers are able to use our gaming products in a sensible and responsible manner, however, there may be occasions where a player struggles to control their gambling and will need our support and protection.

We believe that communication and education around responsible gaming is an important part of harm prevention. As such we offer full guidance and support in all of the following areas:

- Safer gambling tools, such as limit setting
- Support groups & organisations contact information
- Staff training on Think 25
- Information on National Self-Exclusion Scheme
- Advice on staying in control

By utilising our MERKUR UK 360 Program, Think 25 and Staying in control in-venue tools we offer a full range of support and advice to our customers. More information can be found on our website at <https://MERKUR UKcasinouk.com/safer-gambling/>

Customer Dispute Resolution



MERKUR UK's aim is to ensure that all customers always have an enjoyable experience when using our services.

However, we recognise there are occasions where we may not have been able to meet your expectations, and when that is the case, we would like to hear from you as soon as possible so we can resolve your concern quickly and fairly.

Our customer service team is highly trained to resolve any queries and will always try to provide a satisfactory outcome.

On the rare occasions where this is not possible, you can request that your complaint is escalated to our complaints team, who will independently review and seek a resolution to your complaint.

To make a complaint you can email us at complaintsUKGC@MERKUR UKslots.com or visit our website.

Our complaints procedure is regulated and monitored by the UK Gambling Commission.

Ygam - Young Gamers and Gamblers Education Trust



The Young Gamers and Gamblers Education Trust (Ygam) is an award-winning national charity with a social purpose to inform, educate, safeguard and build digital resilience amongst young and vulnerable people. Ygam are working with MERKUR Group UK to design and implement a bespoke socially responsible training program for consumer-facing staff.

MERKUR UK Supporting new safer gaming research



MERKUR UK has been praised by one of the country's leading safer gambling and gaming experts for 'championing innovation' in social responsibility.

Lee Willows, who founded ESG Gaming following his tenure launching and establishing Ygam highlighted the work of MERKUR UK. He said: *"MERKUR UK is supporting ESG Gaming with a two-year funding commitment which has enabled us to undertake powerful safer-gambling research."*

The year one donation was used to support academic research into safer gambling and gaming within Web3 and focused on what would be appropriate customer protection considerations in an immersive environment. The academic research was carried out by Bournemouth University.

The donation for year two will see ESG build a prototype Web3 environment where consumer protection tools can be evaluated.

Tony Boulton, Director of Public and Political Relations at MERKUR UK, stated: *"Through initiatives such as the 360 program we have demonstrated our commitment to safer gambling and how it's possible to instil a social responsibility culture throughout an organisation."*

As advocates of innovation in safer gambling we are extremely proud to support the work of Lee Willows and the team at ESG Gaming, who are undertaking some pioneering insights, exploring how technology will change the customer journey and the way in which consumers will use gambling products in the future."

Lee Willows confirmed: *"The longevity of support from MERKUR UK has been really welcome and I am humbled by their support during our start-up phase. Their generous contributions have enabled ESG Gaming to ensure that our work is robust, evidence-led and makes an important contribution to the safer gambling and gaming debate."*

360 Program



One of the most tangible features of the 360 Program, and one which drives its objectives throughout our business is the 360 Program Board. On the board, we have a number of group executives from the Merkur UK businesses, who sit alongside experts from the safer gambling community.

Sascha Blodau, General Manager MERKUR Group UK explained:

"When it comes to protecting the vulnerable and the very small percentage of players who may experience problems from low-stake gambling entertainment, you can never do enough. We believe it's a journey without there actually being a final destination as technology and customer behaviours evolve. I believe that in the 360 Program, we have created the most comprehensive safer gambling program in the UK to complement what is the UK industry's most professional and dedicated consumer-facing team."

Mental Health Research



Always an advocate and supporter of mental health, MERKUR UK made a donation to Mental Health UK to help their charity. Below is a statement from David Riggs on behalf of the trustees of Mental Health Research UK:

"Thank you for donating to Mental Health Research UK, it is very much appreciated."

The money will go towards one of our latest PhD research scholarships and help to continue our efforts to find more effective treatments for mental health problems."

Thank you for supporting Mental Health Research UK"

Ride2Give among latest charity recipients



MERKUR UK Initiative, the social purpose program created to identify and support worthy causes that have been nominated by team members and venue customers, has made its latest round of awards.

The eight organisations receiving funding comprise of Age UK, Beat SCAD, Cat Protection, London Air Ambulance, Macmillan Cancer Support Trust, Ride2Give, Spinal Muscular Atrophy and The British Dyslexia Association.

MERKUR UK Initiative has now supported over 100 worthy causes since it was launched in summer 2021.

Sascha Blodau MERKUR UK General Manager said: "Our program provides staff and customers with an opportunity to nominate organisations which have a personal connection to them and their community.

"These include less-famous charities such as Beat SCAD whose mission is to increase awareness of a coronary condition which impacts mainly young to middle aged women.

Similarly, Ride2Give was launched by the biking community to help those with illnesses, disabilities or who are suffering financial hardship."

Reflecting on the challenges which face smaller organisations he noted: "We know from speaking with people active in the charity sector the impact the financial strain is having on donations.

The Charities Aid Foundation said that 3.2 million people have reduced or stopped a regular payment to charity as a direct result of the rising cost of living.

That's a huge gap to fill which is why programs such as MERKUR UK Initiative are so important."



All Roads lead to Paris!

World number one Paralympic table tennis star Will Bayley is recording a series of exclusive MERKUR UK video diaries as he outlines his route to the Paris 2024 games!

In the twelve months that Will Bayley has been MERKUR UK brand ambassador he's made quite an impression – both at and away from the table!

The weekend after launching the agreement which was sealed at a photo-shoot with MERKUR UK General Manager, Sascha Blodau, Will was back training for the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Will provided an emotional insight to his life, the challenges he's faced and his inspiring personal philosophy to 200 MERKUR UK Slots Venue Managers – an address which touched everyone present and earned him a spontaneous standing ovation.

He then interrupted a busy training regime to hot foot it to the Blueprint Operations stand at EAG and present a MERKUR UK cheque for £5,000 to the bacta charitable trust.

Will's been an outstanding Ambassador and has kept an active interest in the work of our MERKUR UK Initiative community support program as well as the brand's industry leading commitment to safer gambling.

With the 2024 Paris Games fast approaching, Will is going to provide all members of the MERKUR UK team with a series of video diaries updating us on his progress, his hopes, dreams, insights and aspirations for what promises to be an unbelievable and unforgettable period in his life.

Will takes the very best wishes of the MERKUR UK team as we follow his route to Paris!



MERKUR UK 360 Program funds the planting of 25,000 trees



Helping the environment to thrive long into the future is no small task but following an introduction to the climate action platform Ecologi, MERKUR UK is making a contribution providing funding to plant some 25,000 trees. The company has said it's proud that the initiative will provide a sanctuary for nature as well as a source of enjoyment for future generations.

MERKUR UK has underlined its credentials as one of land-based gaming's most progressive corporate citizens by joining-up with Ecologi, the leading climate action platform whose stated mission is to 'inspire and empower businesses to accelerate global climate action'.

The initial engagement with Ecologi, which includes entertainment/creative industries brands Ubisoft and BAFTA Albert among its supporters, has seen MERKUR UK pay for the planting of 25,000 trees extending its 2021 environmental initiative when it underwrote the costs of planting 1,500 trees in support of the National Trust's Woodland Appeal.

Tony Boulton, MERKUR UK's Director of Public and Political Relations explained that the association with the National Trust and this year's latest initiative with Ecologi are part of the company's broader 360 social purpose program. He noted: "Although 360 is most often associated with MERKUR UK's unstinting commitment to safer gambling it was established with a remit to address broad social responsibility issues not least those related to the environment."

The Ecologi platform has more than 40,000 customers funding tree planting and high quality climate solutions all of which are independently certified. The planting of trees is crucial on many different levels: it helps improve valuable habitats, increases biodiversity by providing sanctuary for wildlife and it makes an impact on carbon emissions that contribute to climate change.

In two years Ecologi has succeeded in tripling its funding of trees to an amazing 65 million and MERKUR UK is delighted to be able to contribute to such a fantastic program of work. I'm looking forward to working together on this initiative and exploring how we can build on it moving forward."



MERKUR UK Expand safer gambling commitment with web3 research funding

MERKUR UK has extended its industry acclaimed 360 Safer Gambling program to support research which seeks to understand the dominant trends in the relationship between gaming and gambling.

The research will examine the differences between Web2 and Web3 gambling, with specific reference to Web3 gambling features, platforms, activities and experiences.

MERKUR UK is playing an important role in supporting the research to help society understand the relationship between gaming, gambling, and the transition to Web3. The work is being led by ESG Gaming the not-for-profit Corporate Community Interest Company founded by Lee Willows. The findings will be presented at a Parliamentary Symposium held in 2024.



Explaining the importance and topicality of the initiative, Lee Willows said: "Video games are one of the most popular recreational activities for adults and young people.

Esports - defined as competitive spectator-driven video gaming played by professional gamers - now has upwards of 470 million spectators worldwide who are able to gamble on the outcome of an event in a way that's similar to sports betting. As a consequence, the risk is that younger people are being drawn to gamble.

We have established an independent governance structure, for the initiative and the support from MERKUR UK will enable ESG Gaming to undertake timely and purposeful research which will then be used to co-develop digital content with partners aimed directly at casual players to reduce harms.

MERKUR UK has set a high standard in terms of the implementation of safer gambling for the land-based High Street Gaming Centres sector and we see this as a natural evolution of that work."

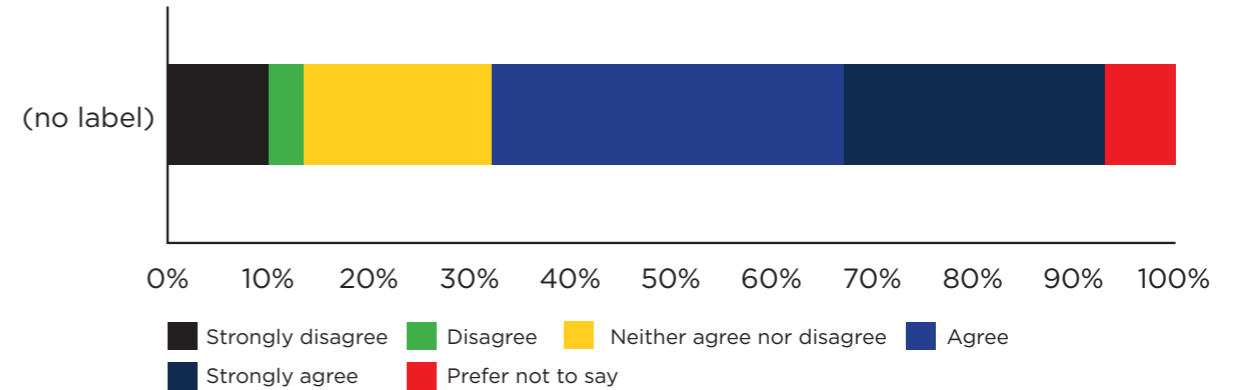
Sascha Blodau general manager for MERKUR UK believes in the importance of taking a broad approach to safer gambling. He stated: "Supporting ESG Gaming to undertake this pioneering research with their academic partner will form the bedrock of an authentic outreach digital program to engage with players and high-risk spectators alike. It will also enable us to re-imagine safer gambling initiatives as the world moves to Web3. It promises to be an important and illuminating piece of work, conducted by experts and we are delighted to support it."



MERKUR UK Survey of 1350 players

MERKUR UK recently conducted a survey of 1350 players asking their views on the visibility of MERKUR UK in view of supporting and promoting responsible gambling. Below are the results of the survey:

How strongly would you agree with the statement: **I can see MERKUR UK visibly support and promote responsible gambling and that information and advice is readily available.**



Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Prefer not to say	Total	Weighted average
9.85%	3.89%	18.59%	34.71%	26.13%	6.83%	1,259	3.68
124	49	234	437	329	86		

MERKUR UK Customer Experience Groups

A series of focus groups have been held over the past 2 years, with both High Street gaming and pub customers, with the participants being selected on the basis of being regular users of MERKUR UK Slots or pub machines.

The aim of the project was to provide MERKUR UK with a snapshot of the business through the eyes of the customer. Focused on the key areas of customer engagement, product and service and understanding customer spending and gaming habits.

The report outlines the findings of the customers in relation to any conversation and feedback relating to social responsibility, highlighting staff support and personal management techniques.

Overview of participants

The participants were selected for the sessions based on their willingness and ability to share their views on their customer experience with MERKUR UK as well as their gambling preferences. The selection process ensured there was a mixed customer profile and geographical demographic.



Willen Hospice Donation



MERKUR UK donated £1,110 to the Willen Hospice that funded their Christmas meals for patients project and help to support their families, staff and the supporting staff running the hospice.

This donation made a huge difference in lifting everyone's spirits over the festive period and the nursing staff passed on their personal thanks to MERKUR UK:

"Those of us that have worked over the Christmas weekend would just like to pass on a very big thank you to those who provided us with some beautiful food and goodies to all staff and patients/visitors over the Christmas period! It was very much appreciated and everyone has commented on how lovely the food was!"

- Jayne Lewis, Deputy Sister

In a closing statement Willen Hospice commented they would love to work more with MERKUR UK and offered their personal support in future fundraising events.

A big thank you to MERKUR UK from Bromley Children & Families Voluntary Sector Forum



Below is a thank you from Samantha Britnell, Chief Operating Officer of Bromley Children and Families to MERKUR UK

I would like to take this opportunity to say "Thank You" for your donation to The Bromley Children & Families Voluntary Sector Forum.

We have been working tirelessly to support over 200 charities and community groups, supporting children and families in Bromley since 2013, and your donation of £500.00 has made a huge impact on the support we have been able to offer. We identified a number of young people who would benefit from the MHFA (Mental Health First Aid accreditation www.mhfaengland.org), and we are delighted to be able, with the help of your donation, provide 5 young people with an introduction to mental health and the factors that can affect people's well-being.

This would not have been possible without your amazing support and we look forward to a long relationship with MERKUR UK

Huntingdon RAF Wyton Armed Forces Charity Raffle



Sappers Morgan and Turnbull, based at RAF Wyton, were running the London Marathon on the 23rd April to raise funds for SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity. At 19 years old, Sapper Turnbull is the youngest runner we have for SSAFA.

They needed to both raise £2500 each to qualify for entry (not to mention being able to run 26 miles!).

They asked local businesses for small contributions of raffle prizes to help raise this money.

MERKUR UK in support donated £250 to help the cause. Below is a statement from Marco Turnbull in response to the donation:

"Training is the easy bit. It has been more tough raising enough money to run for SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity. This year it was particularly difficult because last year's marathon was delayed to September, so there were only seven months to raise money in. MERKUR UK donating £250 gave me a massive boost; I'm really grateful."

As a charity we are massively grateful. If we can work together in the future, just let me know.

Building on external insight

Bacta, Chief Executive Officer, John White said:

"MERKUR Group UK has established clear and defined Social Responsibility targets and the seniority of the team involved in delivering them provides a standard which I am sure it will meet. I am also sure that the focus the 360 initiative provides will uncover lessons for the whole industry which I know MERKUR UK is keen to share and I for one will be keen to hear."

Chairman of the Board of G4 (Global Gambling Guidance Group), Pieter Remmers said:

"Our teams undertook an external evaluation of the MERKUR Group UK and we found venues are highly attractive, scrupulously clean, welcoming and well managed. High standards of hospitality and customer service are evident across all venues. Regulatory compliance is exemplary, and the professionalism and commitment of all staff involved is readily apparent. Management systems are backed by a robust internal audit infrastructure which would appear to be a significant contributor to organisational effectiveness. Key strengths we found included: (i) Customer care is of an exemplary standard in all MERKUR UK venues; (ii) Regulatory compliance and audit procedures are well adhered to, and provide a strong foundation for consistent approaches to RG across the estate and (iii) Venue managers and staff are of good quality, care deeply about their customers and the success of the business, and are eager to learn and develop"

ESG Gaming, Chairman, Lee Willows said:

"I have had the opportunity to join the MERKUR UK 360 Social Responsibility Program Board meetings as a guest and contribute lived-experience insight across a number of strategic areas to build upon MERKUR Group UK's safer gambling approach. We have specifically worked together to further strengthen customer interactions, safer gambling training and the governance of the 360 program. I have contributed my time voluntary and also had the opportunity to learn from colleagues such as Pieter Remmers which I have valued enormously."

Lee Anderson, MP said:

"After meeting with Tony Boulton, MERKUR UK's Director of Public and Political relations, Mr Anderson said: "It is reassuring to hear MERKUR UK is committed to training its staff properly and ensuring customers game responsibly."

"While gambling can be an enjoyable pastime and a way to relax, it is important businesses play their part in protecting their customers from the real harm the adult gaming industry can present."

"I am glad the Government has established the Gambling White Paper, which sets out a list of proposals and reforms to the gambling sector."

"With the rise of the internet, it is clear the risks of online gambling have increased."

"However, I welcome the work MERKUR UK is doing to protect the people that use its venues and the fact it is putting social responsibility first."

Nigel Huddleston, MP posted this on his website:

"I visited the MERKUR UK adult gaming centre in Evesham last week to meet with company executives and the local team. I enjoyed hearing about their operations and what they are doing to encourage responsible gambling in light of the recent government White Paper."

Rebecca Pow, MP said the following on a coinslot article:

"I'm always keen to meet with new businesses attracted to Taunton; and was particularly interested to learn about the staff training programs and the practical measures in place as part of the company's commitment to being a socially responsible business. I also took the opportunity to discuss issues relating to the Gambling White Paper."

BRINGING THE MERKUR 360 Program TO LIVE WITH POSITIVE IMPACT

- 
OCTOBER 2023: MERKUR UK confirms sponsorship of bacta Social Responsibility Exchange.
 MERKUR UK has broken new ground by becoming the first entertainment brand to sponsor bacta's Social Responsibility Exchange
- 
SEPTEMBER 2023: MERKUR UK expands headquarters in Milton Keynes with the city's biggest commercial letting of the year.
 Merkur UK has agreed a 10 year lease on office space at Matrix House in Central Milton Keynes
- 
AUGUST 2023: MERKUR UK Initiative announce latest charity recipients.
 MERKUR Initiative, the social purpose program created to identify and support worthy causes that have been nominated by team members and venue customers has made its latest round of awards. The eight organisations to be recognised by the MERKUR Initiative program comprise Age UK, Beat SCAD, Cat Protection, London Air Ambulance, Macmillan Cancer Support Trust, Ride2Give, Spinal Muscular Atrophy and The British Dyslexia Association.
- 
JULY 2023: MERKUR UK Portal puts the customer experience front and centre stage.
 Ensuring that customers enjoy their gambling entertainment experience responsibly and safely sits at the core of the MERKUR UK philosophy. Whilst great customer service is delivered by the quality of human interactions the new Portal developed by IHL has helped the national operator to complement the experience with the appropriate processes and protocols
- 
JUNE 2023: Regal research provides powerful insights into the motivations of pub machine players
 Latest research looks into the motivations of pub machine players and ways we can strengthen our social responsibility controls
- 
MAY 2023: MERKUR UK rise to the challenge during Mental Health Awareness Week.
 As part of its commitment to place wellbeing front and centre stage MERKUR UK has been raising awareness of key issues surrounding mental health
- 
APRIL 2023: MERKUR UK move forward with MP engagement program.
 Merkur UK play host to their 65th MP as political engagement program continues to gain traction
- 
MARCH 2023: MERKUR UK's commitment to promoting a diverse workforce has long since been bearing fruit
 International Women's Day (IWD) is a day to celebrate the achievements of women globally and has several missions to help forge a gender-equal world. Celebrating women's achievements and increasing visibility while calling out inequality is key. Five of our leaders share their experiences with a global audience.
- 
JANUARY 2023: MERKUR UK make £5,000 donation to bacta Charitable Trust.
 Merkur UK brand ambassador and World Number 1 Paralympic table tennis star Will Bayley made a guest appearance on the Blueprint Operations stand at EAG to present the bacta charitable trust with a donation of £5,000. The donation was part of Merkur UK's inspirational Initiative program which has seen it support in excess of 100 charities following its launch in summer 2021
- 
DECEMBER 2022: Jimmy Thomas Rising Star Award vindicates Blueprint 'future leaders' philosophy.
 Blueprint Operation's philosophy of developing ambitious young talent has been recognised by the industry with the brand's Business Development Executive Alex Jones receiving the inaugural 'Jimmy Thomas Rising Star' award. The presentation which was made by bacta chief executive John White at the trade association's recent parliamentary reception, is a tribute to the progress made by the 27-year-old who prior to joining Blueprint spent eight years as a professional footballer
- 
NOVEMBER 2022: MERKUR UK Initiative makes 50th award in partnership with Blind Tiger Inns.
 MERKUR Initiative, the acclaimed social program which was launched to help support good causes throughout the country, has made its 50th award in just over a year, providing shopping trolleys packed with essential food items to Blind Tiger Inns for onward distribution
- 
SEPTEMBER 2022: MERKUR UK extend support to ground-breaking web3 research.
 The relationship between gaming and gambling and its transition to web3 has gone largely under the radar. So Merkur UK is working with ESG Gaming to understand this transition and its impact on consumer protection

What we will deliver in 2024

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Using technology to deliver safer gambling, we will introduce Information Pods in 2024 into our venues. These will feature a dedicated section for safer gambling.
- 
We will launch Merkur Community, which will serve to support community initiatives through our venues. These initiatives will be organised as local activities such as a litter pick; cleaning a riverbank; providing equipment to local sports clubs or sponsorship of local business events.
- 
We will support the annual bacta social responsibility exchange which brings together stakeholders to focus on corporate social responsibility.
- 
We commit to planting a further 50,000 trees with ecologi to offset our carbon footprint.
- 
We will continue the development of our ethical game design work to make sure that our games are designed with safer gambling as part of the design process.
- 
We will continue to have all our companies audited by G4 to ensure that safer gambling sits centrally to all our activities.
- 
Expand and improve our staff training program, working with external organisations such as Ygam and build on our lived experience work.
- 
We will continue to support local charities, nominated by our venue staff.

MERKUR UK 360 SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PROGRAM: ADVISORY BOARD



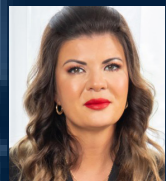
Sascha Blodau
General Manager
MERKUR GROUP UK (member)



Tony Boulton
Director of Public and Political relations
MERKUR GROUP UK (member)



Pieter Remmers
Chairman of the Board of G4
GLOBAL GAMBLING GUIDANCE GROUP (member)



Irina Ruf
Managing Director
MERKUR CASINO (member)



Andy Tipple
Managing Director
BLUEPRINT OPERATIONS (member)



Steve Sharp
Chair
GAMBLING BUSINESS GROUP (member)



Lee Willows
Chair
ESG GAMING (guest)





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