# Duolingo quietly acqui-hires NextBeat team to fast-track Duolingo Music and open UK base



Duolingo has quietly moved to deepen its play in music education by scooping up the 23‑person team behind London‑based music gaming studio NextBeat in what industry observers describe as an acqui‑hire. According to the original report, terms were not disclosed, but the purchase is aimed squarely at accelerating Duolingo Music — the company’s music‑theory offering launched in 2023 — and establishing Duolingo’s first operational base in the U.K.

NextBeat is best known as the studio behind Beatstar and Countrystar and was formed as a spin‑out by veterans of mobile games developer Space Ape. The deal transfers the core NextBeat team into Duolingo, a move the company framed as a strategic “bet on talent.” Duolingo’s chief business officer, Bob Meese, said in a statement the hire will “make our music course and the entire Duolingo platform more delightful, immersive, and effective.” NextBeat’s chief executive, Simon Hade, similarly said the two companies “shared the same values” and that joining forces enables the studio to bring its skills to “a platform that is redefining how people learn,” he said in a statement.

The acquisition builds on Duolingo’s multi‑subject push that first opened out beyond languages in late 2023, when the company announced Music and expanded Math content for its flagship app. In that investor release, Duolingo described Music as a gamified, bite‑sized curriculum teaching foundational music theory through an on‑screen keyboard and interactive exercises — a format it says already includes more than 200 songs in course material. The NextBeat team’s gaming background is therefore an obvious fit for the interactive, song‑centred approach Duolingo has been developing.

The timing of the deal is notable against the backdrop of an internal pivot at Duolingo toward heavier use of generative AI. In April, CEO Luis von Ahn set out a plan for the company to become “AI‑first,” saying contractors would be scaled back where automation can replace routine work — a move that prompted public pushback over the prospect of job reductions and product quality risks. At the same time, Duolingo’s second‑quarter 2025 results showed strong commercial momentum: the company reported year‑on‑year revenue growth and an increase in subscription income, and it raised its full‑year guidance, developments the company says vindicate its product‑led strategy and wider investments in AI and new subjects.

Duolingo and observers cast the NextBeat hire as both a people play and a product acceleration. Beyond consumer offerings, the company has been extending reach into K‑12 through tools such as Duolingo for Schools — a free product pitched as aligned with recognised language learning standards and accompanied by professional development resources — and the new musical expertise is presented as another way to make the platform more “immersive” for learners of all ages.

The same bulletin that covered Duolingo’s move also reported separate activity in the European ed‑tech scene: German start‑up paddy has raised €1 million in a pre‑seed round led by High‑Tech Gründerfonds, with participation from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, KfW Capital and dozens of family offices and companies. Paddy, founded in January 2025, markets an AI‑powered teacher assistant designed to reduce repetitive tasks such as lesson planning and grading; the company reports having about 12,000 active users and says it aims to expand across the German‑speaking DACH region.

Taken together, the transactions underscore the patchwork nature of ed‑tech growth in Europe. Investors and founders point out that K‑12 adoption on the continent remains more nascent than in the U.S., where schools often run dozens or hundreds of specialised products; by contrast, many European institutions use fewer, broader applications. At the same time, recent surveys suggest particular receptiveness in parts of the DACH region: parents in Austria and Germany rated AI as an effective educational tool at higher rates than many other European countries in a 2024 tutoring‑sector poll, a signal that startups seeking to introduce AI‑augmented workflows to teachers may find fertile demand.

For Duolingo, the NextBeat deal is a low‑profile, talent‑first manoeuvre that neatly aligns gaming expertise with its pedagogy‑centred product roadmap — but it also sits against the company’s controversial push toward automation. The management case is that better tools and more interactive content will drive engagement and subscribers; critics will watch to see whether those gains come at the cost of human roles or classroom quality. With deal terms undisclosed and the industry in rapid flux, the acquisition is best read as one step in a broader experiment: can gamified design, AI tooling and new subject verticals be married in a way that scales both learning outcomes and commercial returns?

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## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://marketbrief.edweek.org/strategy-operations/duolingo-to-expand-in-music-education-after-uk-acquisition-german-ed-tech-startup-raises-1m-in-pre-seed-round/2025/08), [[3]](https://www.pocketgamer.biz/duolingo-acquires-london-studio-nextbeat/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://marketbrief.edweek.org/strategy-operations/duolingo-to-expand-in-music-education-after-uk-acquisition-german-ed-tech-startup-raises-1m-in-pre-seed-round/2025/08), [[3]](https://www.pocketgamer.biz/duolingo-acquires-london-studio-nextbeat/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://investors.duolingo.com/news-releases/news-release-details/duolingo-launches-music-and-math-its-flagship-app)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.theverge.com/news/657594/duolingo-ai-first-replace-contract-workers), [[6]](https://investors.duolingo.com/news-releases/news-release-details/duolingo-reports-41-revenue-growth-46-subscription-revenue), [[1]](https://marketbrief.edweek.org/strategy-operations/duolingo-to-expand-in-music-education-after-uk-acquisition-german-ed-tech-startup-raises-1m-in-pre-seed-round/2025/08)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://marketbrief.edweek.org/strategy-operations/duolingo-to-expand-in-music-education-after-uk-acquisition-german-ed-tech-startup-raises-1m-in-pre-seed-round/2025/08), [[4]](https://investors.duolingo.com/news-releases/news-release-details/duolingo-launches-music-and-math-its-flagship-app)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://marketbrief.edweek.org/strategy-operations/duolingo-to-expand-in-music-education-after-uk-acquisition-german-ed-tech-startup-raises-1m-in-pre-seed-round/2025/08), [[7]](https://www.edtechinnovationhub.com/news/german-edtech-startup-paddy-raises-1-million-in-pre-seed-funding)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://marketbrief.edweek.org/strategy-operations/duolingo-to-expand-in-music-education-after-uk-acquisition-german-ed-tech-startup-raises-1m-in-pre-seed-round/2025/08), [[2]](https://marketbrief.edweek.org/strategy-operations/duolingo-to-expand-in-music-education-after-uk-acquisition-german-ed-tech-startup-raises-1m-in-pre-seed-round/2025/08), [[7]](https://www.edtechinnovationhub.com/news/german-edtech-startup-paddy-raises-1-million-in-pre-seed-funding)
* Paragraph 8 – [[6]](https://investors.duolingo.com/news-releases/news-release-details/duolingo-reports-41-revenue-growth-46-subscription-revenue), [[5]](https://www.theverge.com/news/657594/duolingo-ai-first-replace-contract-workers), [[1]](https://marketbrief.edweek.org/strategy-operations/duolingo-to-expand-in-music-education-after-uk-acquisition-german-ed-tech-startup-raises-1m-in-pre-seed-round/2025/08)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://marketbrief.edweek.org/strategy-operations/duolingo-to-expand-in-music-education-after-uk-acquisition-german-ed-tech-startup-raises-1m-in-pre-seed-round/2025/08> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://marketbrief.edweek.org/strategy-operations/duolingo-to-expand-in-music-education-after-uk-acquisition-german-ed-tech-startup-raises-1m-in-pre-seed-round/2025/08> - This EdWeek Market Brief article reports that Duolingo has acquired the team behind London-based music gaming startup NextBeat to accelerate Duolingo Music and establish a U.K. base. The piece explains that the 23-person NextBeat team, creators of Beatstar and Countrystar, will join Duolingo in an acqui‑hire whose terms were not disclosed. It summarises Duolingo’s broader moves into music and K‑12 offerings such as Duolingo for Schools, notes executive quotes about the deal being a strategic bet on talent, and outlines the simultaneous news that German ed‑tech start‑up paddy raised €1 million in pre‑seed funding.
3. <https://www.pocketgamer.biz/duolingo-acquires-london-studio-nextbeat/> - PocketGamer.biz covers Duolingo’s acquisition of the majority of the team at London studio NextBeat, describing it as an acqui‑hire designed to enhance Duolingo Music. The article, dated 6 August 2025, notes that 23 NextBeat staff will join Duolingo and that the move establishes Duolingo’s first official UK presence. It gives background on NextBeat’s origin as a spin‑out from Space Ape and its association with Beatstar and Countrystar, quotes Duolingo’s chief business officer Bob Meese on the strategic talent play, and reports commentary from NextBeat CEO Simon Hade about shared values and learner‑centred design.
4. <https://investors.duolingo.com/news-releases/news-release-details/duolingo-launches-music-and-math-its-flagship-app> - Duolingo’s official investor relations release from November 2023 announces the company’s multi‑subject expansion, launching a Music course alongside updated Math content in its flagship app. The statement outlines the pedagogical approach: bite‑sized, gamified lessons teaching foundational music theory using an on‑screen keyboard and interactive exercises, with over 200 songs in the curriculum. The release explains how the move fits Duolingo’s mission to make education universally available, cites expected benefits of music education, and quotes executives on extending Duolingo’s model beyond languages. It also signals partnerships and roadmap items intended to scale the Music offering within the main app.
5. <https://www.theverge.com/news/657594/duolingo-ai-first-replace-contract-workers> - The Verge reports on Duolingo CEO Luis von Ahn’s April 2025 all‑hands message declaring the company will become ‘AI‑first’. The article explains that von Ahn said Duolingo will gradually stop using contractors for tasks AI can handle, incorporate AI use into hiring and performance reviews, and only grant headcount where automation is not possible. It covers the ensuing backlash from users and commentators concerned about job losses and product quality, and places Duolingo’s move in the wider context of firms prioritising AI in operations while noting the company’s assurances about training and support for employees amid the transition.
6. <https://investors.duolingo.com/news-releases/news-release-details/duolingo-reports-41-revenue-growth-46-subscription-revenue> - Duolingo’s shareholder letter and press release for second quarter 2025 presents financial results showing 41% year‑on‑year revenue growth and a strong rise in subscription revenue, with revenue of $252.3 million and improved profitability. The release highlights user metrics such as growth in daily active users and paid subscribers, explains product drivers including AI features and new subjects, and states the company raised its full‑year guidance. It frames the quarter as evidence of product‑led growth and cites executive commentary on momentum, while providing links to the webcast and investor materials for further detail.
7. <https://www.edtechinnovationhub.com/news/german-edtech-startup-paddy-raises-1-million-in-pre-seed-funding> - EdTech Innovation Hub reports that German ed‑tech start‑up paddy raised €1 million in a pre‑seed round led by High‑Tech Gründerfonds, with participation from public and private investors. The article describes paddy as an AI‑powered teacher assistant platform launched in January 2025 by Matty Frommann, Lukas Portmann and Tobias Schröder, aiming to reduce teachers’ administrative burden through lesson planning, material generation and grading support. It notes the company claims around 12,000 active users, outlines plans to expand across the DACH region, and includes an HTGF investment manager’s quote praising the team and the product’s potential to lower teacher stress while introducing pupils to AI.