

GEN Z RESEARCH REPORT

Executive Summary Dec 2024

Tencent



ukie



FROM STAGE TO SCREEN TO STREAM:

HOW GEN Z IS PUTTING ESPORTS CENTRE STAGE IN UK ENTERTAINMENT

Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is the first generation to grow up with esports as a viable career path, reshaping both the gaming industry and broader entertainment landscape. From professional players to streamers, tournament organisers and broadcasters, Gen Z is embracing esports as more than just a hobby –

it's a passion and a profession.

Tencent plays a leading role in the global development and growth of the esports industry creating innovative IP and fostering a vibrant community that connects players, fans and creators worldwide.

We see the UK as having the potential to play a key role in the global esports industry. With a well-established video game industry, several well-known venues that can support international audiences, and a sizeable talent pool, the UK provides a positive environment for esports growth.

Meeting the current and future needs of Gen Z talent while building a more sustainable industry to support the growing interest in esports careers is vital to seizing this opportunity. To better understand how to support their passion and ambition, we surveyed 2,000 UK Gen Zers aspiring to careers in entertainment.



GEN Z WANTS IN, BUT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IS KEY

For Gen Z, gaming and esports represent a dream career. Over 40% of this cohort are considering video game related jobs, with more than 20% drawn specifically to esports.

They also recognise that passion alone isn't enough:

TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION

45%

FOLLOWED BY STRATEGIC THINKING

42%

AND FOCUS AND CONCENTRATION

40%

topped the list of skills they see
as critical to a career in esports.

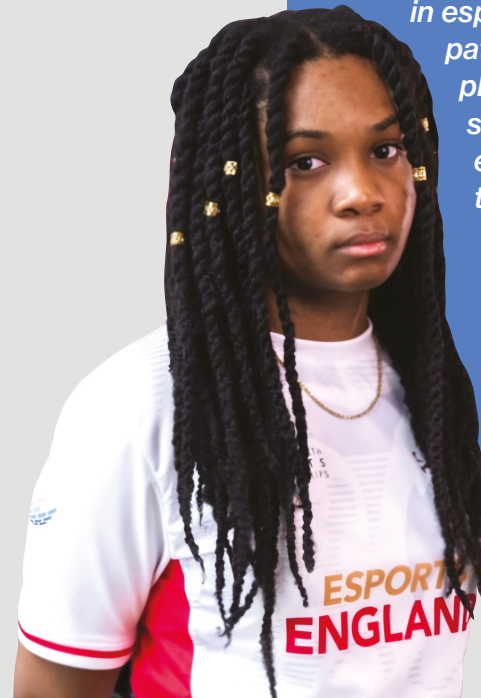
Many are already preparing for their future through skills development, underscoring the need for clear professional pathways. By signposting opportunities and nurturing both technical expertise and soft skills, the industry can empower this generation to thrive.

By fostering transferable skills and providing real-world applications, esports plays a pivotal role in preparing individuals for dynamic career opportunities both within and beyond the gaming industry.

INDIA 'ALANIS' BROWNE
Professional Esports Player

“

Breaking into today's esports industry is not easy. It requires talent, commitment, connections and a lot of luck. The industry would greatly benefit from a more structured and accessible system to support emerging talent. Imagine the potential we could develop if we had dedicated academies where players could scrim, refine their skills, cultivate good gaming habits and even receive mentorship. This would create a much clearer path for those dreaming of going pro or pursuing other career options in esports. By building better career pathways, we are not just helping players succeed; we are strengthening the entire esports ecosystem, from fans to players to organisations.”



TOM DORE

VP, the British Esports Federation



Esports curricula in Secondary, Further and Higher Education, such as the Pearson Level 2 & Level 3 BTECs in Esports, are equipping young people with the skills needed for careers in esports, gaming and the wider digital, creative and STEM sectors. However, support and recognition from video game publishers and industry stakeholders are crucial to driving sustainable growth, grassroots development and clear career pathways within the esports ecosystem.

“We recently partnered with Tencent Games for a first-of-its-kind mobile esports tournament² for Further Education colleges. Initiatives like these demonstrate the powerful impact of public-private collaboration. The UK needs more of these partnerships to fully unlock the potential of esports.”



EDUCATION:

THE FOUNDATION FOR VIDEO GAMING CAREERS

75%

Education is central to shaping future talent, with 75% of Gen Z advocating for esports in school curricula. Support is even stronger among recent graduates **[81%]** and young professionals **[77%]**, reflecting the importance of early exposure to esports.

Higher education is responding. The UK boasts 16 institutions offering 23 degree programmes in esports, with that number set to grow.³ Almost two thirds **[64%]** have engaged with academic esports-related activities at school or university in some form.

Certain disparities do exist: Participation in academic esports skews heavily toward men **[76%]** over women **[55%]**, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds engage less **[36%]** than their wealthier counterparts **[76%]**.

Careers in esports benefit from expertise in related fields, such as film production and broadcasting, which are becoming integral to the industry. Closing participation gaps through inclusivity and access will unlock the full potential of esports education.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ENTRY

TOP THREE CHALLENGES TO PURSUING A CAREER IN ESPORTS OR GAMING:

36%

financial barriers

33%

lack of clear pathways

28%

social stigma

Compared with more traditional careers such as law, medicine and engineering, **58%** of Gen Z feel that esports is more accessible⁴ to them.

However, there are some barriers to overcome. When asked what they see as the biggest challenge to pursuing a career in esports or gaming, respondents cite financial barriers **[36%]**, lack of clear pathways **[33%]** and social stigma **[28%]**.

Geographic and demographic perceptions of accessibility also vary: **64%** of those from Greater London feel esports careers are attainable, compared to just **46%** in the East Midlands.

The skills developed through esports are highly sought after. Addressing talent and skills gaps through grassroots initiatives, training and mentorship, will ensure equitable opportunities while delivering valuable skills to the economy.





BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR ESPORTS IN THE UK

The entertainment industry has long been defined by iconic stages, captivating screens and world-renowned creative talent. But as digital transformation reshapes every corner of culture, esports is emerging as the next frontier, redefining what it means to have a career in entertainment.

Sustainable growth for esports in the UK depends on public-private partnerships and collaboration between video game publishers, industry associations, government and educational institutions. In support of this, UK Sport (UKSP), an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), recently included esports in its new ten-year event strategy.⁵ Additionally, techUK, in its recent gaming and esports report⁶, highlighted technologies like AI, AR and VR as key areas where the UK can excel, establishing long-term UK leadership and attracting investment for esports.



Equally important is addressing the needs of everyone looking to enter, particularly Gen Z, who are passionate gamers eager to develop their skills at every opportunity. Their expectations and potential should be recognised, as they represent the future workforce that will drive innovation and global growth for years to come.

Tencent



ukie

Tencent, British Esports and Ukie are calling for more strategic public-private partnerships to unlock the full potential of this vibrant and dynamic sector by:

1. FOSTERING COLLABORATION

Encourage partnerships among video game publishers, industry associations, government and educational institutions. These partnerships are essential to expand esports career opportunities and ensure long-term success for the industry.

2. DEVELOPING A TALENT PIPELINE

Establish initiatives and provide accessible opportunities for training, development and mentorship to build a strong talent pipeline. This will help break down barriers and create a more sustainable and supportive ecosystem for aspiring professionals.

3. SHOWCASING DIVERSE OPPORTUNITIES

Highlight the wide range of career opportunities in esports beyond playing. Emphasise how esports education equips students with valuable transferable skills for digital, creative and broader STEM careers.

NICK POOLE
CEO, Ukie



Esports plays a key role in shaping the future of work and creativity, offering young people opportunities to develop skills and pursue careers at the intersection of technology, media and interactive entertainment. The UK is uniquely positioned for growth in this sector, with its strong track record of hosting major global tournaments and home to Europe's largest community of student esports players. To build on this momentum, we must continue to invest in education, infrastructure and cross-industry collaboration. Initiatives like Ukie's Digital Schoolhouse and the proposed Digital Creativity GCSE are essential for creating pathways for the next generation, ensuring the UK remains a global hub for digital innovation and empowering creative talent."



STEPHANE DECROIX
VP, TENCENT GAMES EUROPE

“

From stage to screen to stream, Gen Z is the first generation born into a world where esports careers are accessible from the very start of their working lives. Esports has evolved beyond a pastime—it's now a gateway to professional opportunities and is redefining the entertainment industry.

“However, we're at an inflection point. With the right initiatives and actions, esports can create meaningful value and significant job opportunities for economies and future generations. Collaboration across industry and government bodies is going to be key. Tencent is committed to creating innovative IP and fostering a vibrant community that connects players, fans and creators worldwide. We are excited to play our part in making esports in the UK a reality.”

REFERENCES

1. The study, conducted by Censuswide and commissioned by Tencent Games in collaboration with British Esports and Ukie, surveyed 2,000 UK Gen Z respondents (aged 16-27) interested in the creative and entertainment industry. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles. The survey took place between 13.11.2024 - 19.11.2024. The respondents' demographic profile was determined by natural fall out, as there is no reliable data available to represent the national population. All data is based on this survey unless otherwise stated.
2. BEF PUBG Mobile Student Esports Tournament, in partnership with Tencent, <https://britishesports.org/the-hub/press-releases/british-esports-pubg-mobile-launch-student-esports-tournament-for-uk-colleges/>
3. UCAS. Esports Courses United Kingdom. <https://www.ucas.com/>
4. Very accessible' and 'Somewhat accessible' answers combined
5. UK Sport, 10 year event strategy, <https://esports-news.co.uk/2024/03/07/esports-uk-sport-event-strategy/>
6. techUK, Gaming and esports report, <https://www.techuk.org/resource/techuk-s-first-gaming-and-esports-report-is-now-live.html>

