DIFFICULTY LEVEL: RELOADED

Into Games: promoting and supporting social mobility in the games development sector

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Background

The UK games sector is a £7.6 billion industry that drives creative employment and economic growth. Our Difficulty Level report published in 2024 shows that up to 65% of game development graduates come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, yet only 13% of employed game development graduates come from under-resourced households. The result is a talent pipeline that is both socially inequitable and economically inefficient, a workforce that under-represents half the nation's youth, leaving creative potential untapped and an important demographic left unheard and under-utilised.

Into Games seeks to change this scenario by providing affordable, flexible training, low-barrier mentorship, confidence-building support, and targeted bursaries that enable students from working-class and low-income backgrounds to complete and showcase their game-development projects, connect to employers, and secure meaningful roles.

Recommendations for policy

1. Create a UK Games Equity Fund – a dedicated grant stream (≥ £1m annually) that pays for high-spec hardware, software licences, and can help initially finance games studios to take on high-quality talent from working-class and low-income backgrounds. Our estimations show that if £1m was invested per year, that would equate to an additional 285 people from underresourced backgrounds employed in UK studios - this would equate to 50% of all new hires based on current UK hiring at entry level.

2. Mandate Flexible, Bite-Sized Training Credits for higher-education providers for in-need games skills, funded through the National Skills Fund, to deliver 2- to 4-week modules that can be completed alongside part-time work. Addresses the "low-commitment" learning needs identified by participants ("*I would love to have a very short training course.*"). Enables work-integrated learning that reduces dropout.

3. Implement Low-Barrier Mentoring Schemes – Establish a national register of trained games industry mentors who can commit ~5 hours per month, paired via a matching platform with students, funded through local enterprise partnerships or delivered through existing provision such as Limitbreak. Responds to the call for "support groups or buddying" and "low-barrier mentoring" ("*It can be overwhelming … we could do low-barrier mentoring.*"). Improves confidence, reduces imposter syndrome.

4. Establish a dedicated fund for Universities to support students who are not in education, employment or training access further and higher games development education. Mitigates barriers to entry and offers wider opportunities to lower SEC students. Encourages inclusive recruitment and gives students clearer pathways.

5. Fund a National Games Funding Hub – a government-sponsored website that consolidates bursaries, equipment loan schemes, and step by step guides for studio set-up, fully searchable by postcode. ("*First step was finding out how to set up a studio/company.*") Solves the "barrier to entry" and "resource navigation" issues. Increases visibility of opportunities for those who lack industry knowledge.

Our Research

Methodology: Thematic analysis of 12 semi-structured interviews with game-development students and studio representatives across the UK telling the stories behind the statistics. Participants ranged from university graduates to boot-camp attendees, including neurodivergent and low-income backgrounds.

Key Themes

1. **Affordability** – upfront hardware/software costs are prohibitive.
2. **Learning Flexibility** – short, modular learning preferred.
3. **Peer & Mentor Support** – need for accessible guidance and confidence building.
4. **Industry Access** – gatekeeping and networking are major barriers.
5. **Visibility of Funding** – lack of awareness of existing bursaries and grants.

What We Found: Narrative of the Journey & Barriers

> *"Hardware and software… it's expensive … you need a reasonable amount of RAM … you need space to set up that stuff."*
>
> *"There is so much free information available … What people need is money."*

The typical journey for a low-income student starts with self-education: watching tutorials on YouTube, testing free engines, and building a small prototype on a budget laptop.

> *"First step was finding out how to set up a studio/company."* Basic skills such as profit/ loss accounting, people management and legal practice have inadequate support and are rarely developed in academic programs.

Once a project is ready, the student faces a resource-navigation hurdle; they lack knowledge of LinkedIn, professional networking platforms, and how to format a portfolio. Even those who attend university find that employment support stops at graduation; the moment when they need help the most.

When seeking formal training, the student finds that traditional boot-camps demand significant upfront payment and long, intensive modules that conflict with part-time employment or caring responsibilities. The "bite-sized, low-commitment" approach is often absent.

Mentorship, when available, can be overwhelming for the neurodivergent: mentees professionally navigating their way among a large number of peers and dealing with rejection sensitivity, which leads students to disengage. Participants express a desire for a low-barrier mentoring model; short, structured check-ins that fit around other commitments.

> *"There might be an opportunity with lecturers at uni… to match people."* We wish to support Universities in establishing equity champions within faculty; lecturers and staff who are resourced to provide additional support for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Simultaneously, students grapple with imposter syndrome: feeling "not validated" when their work is compared to peers' polished portfolios. Confidence-boosting and personal resilience initiatives are rare, leaving many to rely on self-motivation and trial-and-error learning, which can be discouraging.

Employment prospects hinge upon who you know. Where job opportunities circulate primarily through personal networks and create a stark divide. A 2024 report noted that 78% of new hires come from within the industry, 21% as recent graduates, and only 2% from apprenticeships. Participants who lack connections find themselves stuck outside the hiring funnel.

> *"I had this guy who wanted to start a studio; I said I'd love to be the project manager."* Game development professionals at all levels tend to present an intrinsic need to collaborate and work with others, but more support for finding and associating with others is required to realise this need more

Finally, financial and material barriers compound these challenges. Without equipment loans or bursaries, students must either self-fund expensive hardware or forego opportunities that require higher specifications (e.g., real-time rendering engines).

Further information

To speak to someone about the information in this policy brief:

Email: hello@intogames.org
Or visit: intogames.org
DOI: https://zenodo.org/records/18891341