

NEW ZEALAND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE
Manatū Aorere

MAY 2026

The United Kingdom Gaming Sector: Opportunities for New Zealand Businesses

MARKET INTELLIGENCE REPORT

Summary

For New Zealand gaming businesses seeking international growth, the UK combines a large consumer market with direct access to publishers, investors and specialist partners that can accelerate commercialisation and global expansion.

UK Gaming Market: At a glance

- Consumer market worth approximately £8.8 billion (NZ$20.9 billion)
- Around 2,000 gaming businesses
- More than 73,000 jobs supported
- Access to major publishers, investors and global distribution networks
- Strong government support, including a £30 million (NZ$71 million) Games Growth Package
- Opportunities in co-development, mobile gaming, AI, XR, simulation and digital content
- Supported by the New Zealand-UK Free Trade Agreement

Getting Started in the UK market

- Attend Develop:Brighton conference to connect with publishers and investors.
- Engage with the London Games Festival and Games Finance Market.
- Explore publisher partnerships with companies such as Team17, Kwalee, Jagex and Slitherine.
- Connect with industry body Ukie and regional gaming clusters including London, Leamington Spa and Dundee.

Report

The UK is one of the world's largest gaming markets and one of Europe's leading centres for game development, publishing and investment. A shared language, strong legal protections for intellectual property, transparent regulatory settings and extensive international business networks reduce barriers to market entry for New Zealand firms. The New Zealand-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) supports the game development sector and other innovative creative tech enterprises through trade enabling provisions that can reduce or remove regulatory barriers, as well as its broader invocation-focused framework. For example, commitments in the temporary entry chapter can provide visa pathways for companies sending specialist staff to the UK for a range of activities. For New Zealand businesses, the UK can serve both as a destination market and as a platform for expansion into Europe and North America.

Market size and structure

The UK's gaming sector comprises approximately 2,000 businesses spanning game development, publishing, mobile gaming, digital distribution, esports, game development services and related creative technologies. The sector contributes approximately £6 billion (NZ$14 billion) in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the UK economy and supports more than 73,000 jobs.

Alongside the industry itself, the UK consumer games market was valued at an estimated £8.76 billion (NZ$20.9 billion) in 2025, underscoring the scale of domestic demand. The wider ecosystem extends beyond entertainment products into immersive technologies, simulation, artificial intelligence, film, television and digital content creation, creating opportunities for New Zealand businesses across a broad range of creative and technology disciplines.

Growth is increasingly driven by digital distribution, downloadable content, live-service business models, subscription services and mobile gaming. The industry has more than doubled in size over the past decade and continues to benefit from strong investment, world-class talent and globally recognised intellectual property protections.

The UK’s Gaming Ecosystem

The UK’s position as a global gaming hub is supported by a mature ecosystem spanning developers, publishers, investors, universities and public-sector support programmes. Industry body UK Interactive Entertainment (Ukie) plays a central role in advocacy, industry engagement and international promotion, while the UK Games Fund provides direct support to emerging studios and new intellectual property. The sector also benefits from targeted government support through the Government’s Industrial Strategy and a network of innovation and creative industries programmes.

Reflecting the sector's contribution to innovation, productivity and high-value employment, the UK Government has committed a £30 million (NZ$71 million) Games Growth Package over three years to support studio growth, strengthen the talent pipeline and attract inward investment. The package includes enhanced funding for the UK Games Fund between 2026 and 2029 to support new UK-developed titles and skills development while leveraging private-sector co-investment.

A notable feature of the UK market is the strength of its regional gaming clusters. Leamington Spa, commonly referred to as “Silicon Spa”, is one of Europe’s most significant concentrations of game development talent and is home to studios linked to major international publishers. Other important hubs include Dundee, which has developed a strong reputation for games education and innovation; Guildford, with a long-established game development community; and London, which serves as a centre for publishing, investment, esports and business services. This geographic concentration of capability creates opportunities for New Zealand firms seeking commercial partnerships, talent and market intelligence.

Government support and incentives

The UK offers one of the most established fiscal support regimes for game development globally. Through the Video Games Expenditure Credit (VGEC), qualifying companies undertaking eligible game development activity in the UK can access tax-based support on eligible expenditure. Combined with the UK Games Fund and other creative industry support programmes, these settings help attract inward investment, support studio growth and contribute to the UK's competitiveness as a destination for game development activity. New Zealand firms with an interest in establishing or expanding a UK presence may wish to consider how these incentives interact with their broader growth and investment strategies.

Opportunities for New Zealand Businesses

Co-development and specialist services: industry representatives note that increasingly complex development cycles and pressure to control costs have accelerated the use of co-development models across the sector. International studios are commonly engaged to provide engineering support, art production, quality assurance, live-service operations, user experience design and specialised technical expertise. As development teams become more distributed, New Zealand firms may find opportunities to position themselves as long-term development partners rather than solely creators of standalone intellectual property.

Mobile Gaming: mobile gaming remains one of the fastest-growing segments of the UK market. Opportunities exist for New Zealand companies specialising in free-to-play business models, user acquisition, monetisation, analytics, live-service support and casual gaming. Success in the segment increasingly depends on data capability, customer retention and continuous content development rather than one-off product releases.

Immersive technologies and XR: the UK has a growing interest in virtual reality, augmented reality and mixed reality technologies across industry and the public sector. Many of these technologies have their origins in gaming and are increasingly being applied in training, defence, healthcare, manufacturing, architecture and tourism. New Zealand firms with expertise in XR technologies may therefore find opportunities beyond traditional entertainment markets, positioning themselves as both gaming and productivity solution providers.

Visual effects, animation and digital storytelling: the convergence of gaming, film and television continues to create new commercial opportunities. New Zealand's internationally recognised strengths in visual effects, animation and digital storytelling are increasingly relevant as game publishers seek to expand intellectual property across games, streaming platforms, film, television and merchandising.

Artificial intelligence: is beginning to transform the economics of game development. AI is being deployed for asset creation, quality assurance, user support, localisation and content generation. UK developers are actively exploring these technologies and New Zealand software businesses may find opportunities supplying tools and specialist expertise rather than competing directly as game developers.

Serious games and simulation: the strongest growth opportunities may sit outside traditional entertainment markets. Defence, healthcare, emergency management, education and workforce training increasingly rely on gaming-derived technologies. New Zealand capabilities in aerospace, emergency management, agriculture and health technology could be combined with gaming technologies to create specialised solutions for UK customers.

Māori content: demand for authentic and culturally distinctive content is growing globally. Māori-led developers and content creators may find opportunities to create experiences that differentiate themselves from mainstream offerings. The Indigenous Trade Chapter in the FTA provides a positive platform for showcasing indigenous innovation and creative capability in the UK market.

Key UK publishers

Potential commercial partners for New Zealand game developers include UK-based publishers such as Team17, Kwalee, Jagex and Slitherine. Of particular relevance are Team17 and Kwalee, both of which actively partner with and publish games developed by independent studios internationally, providing support across funding, marketing, localisation, distribution and commercialisation. These publishers have established relationships with major digital distribution platforms and can provide pathways for studios seeking to scale internationally while retaining ownership of their intellectual property.

Regulatory developments to monitor

Although the UK remains a relatively straightforward market in which to operate, the regulatory environment continues to evolve. Areas of growing relevance include online safety requirements, protections for children online, digital consumer protection, platform responsibilities and the use of artificial intelligence in creative industries. While major distribution platforms often manage many compliance requirements on behalf of developers, changes in regulation can influence content moderation, product design and commercial practices. Monitoring these developments will remain important for New Zealand firms operating in the UK.

Major conferences and events

The UK hosts several internationally recognised industry events that provide opportunities to build relationships with publishers, investors, technology providers and potential partners.

Develop:Brighton is the UK's leading conference for game developers and is one of the most valuable networking events for studios seeking publishing, investment and commercial partnerships. The next conference will be held from 13-15 July 2027.

London Games Festival provides broad access to investors, publishers, developers and policy stakeholders, with the next festival to be held from 12 – 19 April 2027. Its associated Games Finance Market is one of Europe's leading platforms for connecting developers with potential investors and commercial partners. The UK Government is investing in the London Games Festival to strengthen connections between developers, publishers and investors, with the aim of doubling the value of private investment deals facilitated through the festival to £30 million (NZ$71 million) annually, including through deeper engagement with regional gaming clusters.

Pocket Gamer Connects London is relevant for businesses operating in mobile gaming, user acquisition, monetisation and emerging digital technologies. The next conference is scheduled for 18 – 19 January 2027.

More info

More reports

View full list of market reports from MFAT at www.mfat.govt.nz/market-reports

If you would like to request a topic for reporting please email exports@mfat.govt.nz

To get email alerts when new reports are published, go to our subscription page.

To learn more about exporting to this market, New Zealand Trade & Enterprise's comprehensive market guides cover export regulations, business culture, market-entry strategies and more.

To contact the Export Helpdesk

email exports@mfat.govt.nz

call 0800 824 605

visit Tradebarriers.govt.nz

Disclaimer

This information released in this report aligns with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982. The opinions and analysis expressed in this report are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views or official policy position of the New Zealand Government. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the New Zealand Government take no responsibility for the accuracy of this report.

Copyright

Crown copyright ©. Website copyright statement is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. In essence, you are free to copy, distribute and adapt the work, as long as you attribute the work to the Crown and abide by the other licence terms.