LEVEL UP
STEM Connex: VR & Gaming
2025 H1 Salary Guide

STEM CONNEX

START

| Development & Testing | Full Salary Guide | Production |
| Design | 2025 | Design |

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Introduction from UK and Europe's Head of Gaming - Bruce Simpson

Welcome to the VR and Gaming 2024 review, salary and contractor rate guide for the UK.

It's once again been a tough year for most in the VR & Gaming industry, I think it's fair to say we are all glad to see "Game Over" for 2024 and a good time to hit the reset button in preparation for 2025.

One thing that has remained a constant is our commitment to providing the best possible experience for the studios we work with and the amazing talented candidates we represent.

We saw a lot of studios start 2024 with stabalisation high on the agenda, whilst many other industries were looking to continue to downsize through redundancies and mitigate costs, we continued to support studios in a transformative market. Towards the end of H1 conversations started to pivot towards Cost Mitigation through our suite of solutions.

Studios we partner with were wanting solutions that reduce costs without sacrificing quality. With studios weighing up options, many had to make difficult decisions in H2 through redundancies

Trusted by
16 Studios
across the UK &
Europe to hire top
talent

Games Engineer

8% ↓

Down on salary year on year

Top level summary of 2024 Trends in the Gaming and VR Industry

With the unfortunate circumstances not just in the Gaming and VR Industry in 2023 many studios were forced to make difficult decisions whilst the market corrected and aligned itself. This led to the supply of candidates on the market, significantly outweighing demand from studios to hire. We have seen several knock-on effects from this the most noteworthy being that candidates are being more flexible when it comes to salary expectations, with the trade-off being that they are looking for studio stability and opportunities for individual growth. One of the most common talent insights we got asked for across 2024 is the benchmarking of salaries so that studios are positioning salaries inline with candidate expectations.

Another prominent trend is the rapid expansion of cloud gaming and subscription services in the UK which has created new job opportunities, shifted skill demands, and increased competition for talent within the gaming and tech sectors. What this has meant for studios looking to hire within Cloud is that they are going up against tech sectors who have established foot in hiring personnel in this tech vertical. In addition to this many cloud-related roles allow for remote work, creating competition between UK studios and international firms hiring UK-based talent.

Art & Animation

As the gaming industry thrives on innovation, the collaboration between artists and animators stands as the driving force behind the creation of unparalleled gaming experiences. In 2024, the marriage of art and animation has not only seen enhancements in the visual allure of games but has seen storytelling and player engagement to new heights.

In 2024 we have seen advancements in animation technology which has given rise to characters that exhibit a level of expressiveness previously unseen.

Motion capture, AI and procedural animation techniques contribute to characters that move, emote and react with realism that forges deeper connections between players and their virtual counterparts.

What all this has meant from a staffing perspective is that niche requirements have been more prominent as essentials when a studio is looking to hire someone from the Art/Animation genre. With candidates in plentiful supply in 2025, competition for positions has been fierce.

Permanent				Contractor					
				Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside	Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside	Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside
	Low	Medium	High	Low		Medium		High	
Design									
Technical Artist	£37,000.00	£46,000.00	£61,000.00	£380	£455	£505	£610	£585	£700
Game Artist	£30,000.00	£38,000.00	£44,000.00	£250	£300	£475	£570	£540	£650
3D Game Artist	£39,500.00	£53,500.00	£56,250.00	£340	£410	£450	£540	£600	£720
2D Game Artist	£34,000.00	£42,000.00	£53,000.00	N/A		N/A		N/A	
Environment Artist	£42,500.00	£50,000.00	£70,000.00	£325	£390	£440	£530	£525	£630
Concept Artist	£39,000.00	£55,000.00	£76,000.00	£360	£430	£460	£550	£510	£610
VFX Artist	£28,000.00	£38,000.00	£55,000.00	£240	£290	£382	£460	£450	£540
Gameplay Animator	£35,000.00	£43,750.00	£52,000.00	£260	£310	£300	£360	£380	£460
Technical Animator	£38,000.00	£46,000.00	£67,000.00	£330	£395	£415	£500	£490	£590

82% of Technical Artist positions filled

Design

In the ever-evolving landscape of gaming in 2024, design emerges as the linchpin that weaves together innovation, functionality, and player immersion.

The emphasis on user-centric design has reached new heights in 2024, with games seamlessly integrating intuitive interfaces, player-friendly mechanics, and adaptive gameplay elements. Designers are orchestrating experiences that cater to a diverse audience, ensuring that both novice players and seasoned veterans find joy in navigating the intricacies of game world.

As game development becomes more complex and diversified, there will be a demand for professionals with specialised skill sets. This includes expertise in areas such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, blockchain and advanced programming languages.

	Permanent			Contractor					
				Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside	Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside	Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside
	Low	Medium	High	Low		Medium		High	
Design									
Game Designer	£32,500.00	£48,000.00	£68,500.00	£410	£490	£505	£610	£585	£700
Technical Designer	£42,000.00	£51,000.00	£62,500.00	£415	£500	£475	£570	£540	£650
UI Designer	£40,000.00	£61,000.00	£85,000.00	£325	£390	£450	£540	£600	£720
UX Designer	£36,000.00	£58,000.00	£84,500.00	£325	£390	£500	£600	£640	£770
Level Designer	£30,000.00	£36,000.00	£47,500.00	N/A		N/A		N/A	
Product Designer	£43,500.00	£65,000.00	£87,500.00	£430	£515	£550	£660	£750	£900

Production

The landscape of game production has evolved into a finely tuned orchestration of creativity, technology and project management, driving the creation of immersive worlds and unforgettable player experiences.

At the core of this transformative process is the seamless integration of cutting-edge technologies. From advanced game engines to revolutionary artificial intelligence, the production pipeline leverages the latest innovations to bring to life visually stunning and intellectually engaging games. Teams collaborate with an ever-expanding toolkit, where virtual and augmented reality, sophisticated physics engines and realistic simulations contribute to the construction of digital universes that captivate the imagination.

What this has meant for staffing in this genre is traditional resumes may not fully capture a candidate's capabilities in game development. We often need to evaluate portfolios and assess completed projects to gauge a candidate's skills and creativity before providing a medium list of candidates to studios.

	Permanent			Contractor					
				Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside	Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside	Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside
	Low	Medium	High	Low		Medium		High	
Production									
Gaming Producer	£42,500.00	£58,500.00	£82,500.00	£460	£550	£535	£640	£710	£850
Gaming Product Management	£44,000.00	£67,500.00	£82,500.00	£390	£470	£530	£635	£685	£820
Gaming Project Management	£39,000.00	£54,500.00	£65,000.00	£395	£475	£510	£610	£595	£715
Storyboarding	£32,000.00	£47,500.00	£54,000.00	N/A		N/A		N/A	

98% of UI Designer positions filled

STEM Connex

In 2024, game development teams are envisioned as eclectic ensembles, blending the expertise of seasoned programmers, imaginative artists, forward-thinking designers, and methodical project managers. The industry continues to recognise that diversity fosters creativity and innovation, and our VR & Gaming Division actively seek candidates whose unique perspectives contribute to the rich tapestry of gaming narratives.

Development and testing has been unquestionably our most in demand area of recruitment within VR and Gaming, we saw an uplift in live vacancies in 2024 compared to 2023, which has gone against the grain compared to other verticals hiring within VR and Gaming.

With the likes of BioTech and Medical Manufacturers increasingly opening doors into the VR space, traditional gaming developers in particular Unity Developers are being approached and recruited within different industries, with indicators pointing that these industries are set to continuing to grow within 2024/2025. We could see a candidate shortage within some development disciplines which traditionally sat within gaming.

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				Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside	Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside	Off Payroll/ Outside	On Payroll/ Inside
	Low	Medium	High	Low		Medium		High	
Development & Testing									
Unity Develooer	£38,000.00	£55,000.00	£85,000.00	£315	£380	£430	£510	£550	£660
Unreal Developer	£36,000.00	£57,500.00	£88,500.00	£285	£340	£435	£520	£565	£680
Gameplay Programmer	£39,000.00	£57,500.00	£67,500.00	£350	£420	£450	£540	£535	£640
Animation Programmer	£42,500.00	£51,000.00	£68,500.00	£340	£410	£415	£500	£520	£625
AI Programmer	£37,000.00	£50,000.00	£67,000.00	£400	£480	£580	£700	£690	£830
UI Programmer	£35,000.00	£50,000.00	£75,000.00	£325	£390	£450	£540	£600	£720
QA Teste.	£28,500.00	£41,000.00	£70,000.00	£375	£450	£520	£625	£690	£830
Ga mes Tester	£26,000.00	£32,000.00	£39,500.00	£280	£340	£340	£410	£485	£580

QA Testers

8% ↓

Down on salary year on year

> " It has been great working with STEM Connex! Hiring analysts for market analytics in gaming comes with additional challenges - its nearly impossible to find candidates with previous gaming experience. STEM Connex were not only patient understanding our requirements, they were meticulous in screening and only sent candidates across that really were an exceptional find! I have thoroughly enjoyed working with STEM Connex and recommend them personally as my go to recruiter in the gaming space! I will continue to work with them in the future."
> *Head of Marketing Analytics at Miniclip*

100% of Unity Designer positions filled

What trends we can look forward to in 2025

Growth of Cloud Gaming & Subscription Services

Services like Xbox Game Pass, PlayStation Plus, and NVIDIA GeForce Now continue to gain traction, offering gamers access to extensive libraries without the need for high-end hardware. The UK's strong internet infrastructure supports this shift, making gaming more accessible.

AI Integration in Game Development & Player Experience

AI is revolutionizing game development by assisting with procedural content generation, NPC behavior, and personalization. AI-powered chatbots and voice recognition are also enhancing customer support and in-game interactions.

VR & AR Innovations

With Meta, Sony, and Apple pushing VR/AR technology, immersive gaming experiences are expanding. The UK's development scene is embracing mixed reality for gaming and interactive storytelling.

The Influence of the Metaverse & Web3 Gaming

While the hype around blockchain gaming has cooled, some studios are still exploring the use of NFTs, digital ownership, and metaverse elements in gaming, though with mixed reception from players.

Increased Representation & Inclusivity in Games

The industry is making strides in diversity and inclusivity, with more games featuring diverse characters, accessibility options, and inclusive narratives. UK-based studios are actively embracing these changes.

Full Salary Guide

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