

Commissioner
for Children and
Young People

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Our Approach to Gaming



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The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent position, established under the Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016 'the Act'.

Our Approach to Gaming

Children and young people have been telling the Commissioner how important gaming is to them, not only as a recreation activity but as a connector to a social community. The Commissioner has had many conversations with children and young people on the meaning of gaming in their lives. They have spoken about gaming as a sport, as an industry, and its potential for employment from careers in professional gaming to being game developers, sound engineers, broadcasters, commentators and event coordinators.

The overwhelming majority of the young people emphasized the positive potential of gaming. They wanted more structured competitions and pathways to elite gaming and gaming related careers. They want schools and community groups to have gaming clubs like other sports clubs.

They also spoke about the skills they learn in gaming and the way it makes them feel including:

- Teamwork and friendship skills
- Communication skills
- Access to competition at a global scale
- Providing a sense of belonging and identity
- Fair play values
- Rewards and recognition from peers.

Educators have also spoken about using young people's interest in gaming as a means of engaging them in school and learning. They see the potential for gaming to be a way of supporting appropriate online behaviour and relationships and achieving results in teams.

There is value in creating a positive experience of school for those involved in school based gaming teams and in the development of supportive relationships between adult coaches and team members.

We are equally aware of the need for special requirements to ensure the design of games prioritises the needs and interests of children within a child rights approach. We need to work with the gaming industry to

ensure their business behaviours with regards to children are regulated. They should operate within contemporary socially acceptable standards in relation to 'habit forming' design and they need to anticipate potential difficulties for children of different ages and stages and always put the best interests of children first.

We want to work with industry and others to develop a child centric ethical framework that includes information to enable children to make informed choices about games and gaming. We want to support children who have problems with gaming to develop self-help strategies. We need to give them easy access to support services and technical solutions.

Two billion people in the world play video games. Here in SA a staggering 98% of homes with children have computer games and it's a similar picture right across Australia.

Video games are polarising and the research community is divided on the effects of games on aggression. We recognise the concerns regarding exposure to violent games and translation to violent behaviour, addiction to gaming and other antisocial behaviour. We are mindful of the potential of some young people to engage negatively with online gaming and we need to support them to have a healthy engagement with gaming. It's extremely important that parents take an interest in what their children are playing online, be involved and ask questions about what they are playing. Parents should find out if the game is appropriate or if there is a better option, and if they are balancing their gaming with other aspects of life so as to have a healthy relationship with gaming.

We also acknowledge the research into the skill benefits, social connections and improved thinking from gaming. Games are changing, they are interactive and social, they are also creative and increasingly game skills and processes are translating to real world rewards.

The Commissioner's approach to gaming is comprehensive and includes:

1. Support to develop support structures, clubs and competitions for gaming in SA.
2. Introduction of respectful and positive messaging to young people involved in gaming.
3. Problem gaming prevention and early intervention.
4. Promotion of opportunities and pathways for gaming as a career.
5. Protection of children and young people through formal recognition of esports and the development of policy, regulation and codes of conduct.
6. Partnership with researchers to examine impact of gaming on social behaviours.

Support to develop support structures, clubs and competitions for gaming in SA

Children and young people have told the Commissioner about the importance of gaming and esports as a recreational activity. This was consistent across the State although in regional SA it took on a greater meaning due to a lack of activities and recreational options outside traditional sport.

Children and young people consistently asked the Commissioner to develop and promote new opportunities for participation in community activities. The Commissioner's support of the development of a structured esports league is a way of engaging with and building an active and diverse gaming community and places where young people can meet other young people with similar interests. Our support extends to the development of a guide for local government stakeholders across SA to use to develop leagues in their community.

Introduction of respectful and positive messaging to young people involved in gaming

The High School esports League Competition (HSEL) is an innovative esports high school program that provides the opportunity to deliver contemporary positive messages to gamers and promote respectful communication and behaviour when playing online. The Commissioner is also interested in promoting healthy gaming behaviour and in preventing problem gaming behaviour and early identification of need for harm mitigation strategies.

The Commissioner will work with Leagues to proactively support children who are struggling to manage their use through access to supports to tackle compulsive use.

The Commissioner will provide access to information for parents and children about persuasive design features of games. She will support young gamers to develop information for parents on early warning signs on problem gaming and peer support strategies.

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Promotion of opportunities and pathways for gaming as a career

The SA government has announced \$2m digital gaming development fund to further develop the industry. The intention is to position the state as a national leader in the rapidly growing gaming industry and drive investment from game developers from around the nation and the world. It is expected to generate many local jobs and encourage more gaming in the workplace.

The gaming industry offers numerous career pathways not just for developers but associated roles including illustrators, musicians, technicians, commentators, streamers, elite players and promoters to name a few. As an emerging industry it has potential to offer career opportunities into gaming and other industries.

Protection of children and young people through recognition of esports

Given the increasing focus of gaming products and marketing directed at children and the use of persuasive design strategies within games that imprint habit forming behaviours, it is important that children's interests are protected and that gaming standards are set through industry regulation. We will work with industry and children and young people to establish a charter that informs industry of practical child centric standards for games and gaming.

Partnership with researchers to examine impact of gaming on social behaviours

The potential for gaming and esports leagues to have an impact on cyber safety/ anti-bullying behaviour is considerable. There is a need for benchmarked data on experiences, attitudes and behaviour of SA esports players, teachers and communities.

The impact of gaming on behaviour and the development of positive attributes and attitudes in games is an area that requires fuller research. The Commissioner has invested in a research collaboration to create an evidence base for future investment.

We'd love to hear from you. Get in touch through commissionercyp@sa.gov.au and we'll answer any questions or queries you might have.

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