

Minutes of the Meeting
of the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Video Games Technology

11th December 2013, Committee Room 3

MSP Attendees:

Clare Adamson MSP
George Adam MSP
Mark McDonald MSP

Non MSP Attendees:

Brian Baglow (BB)
Jo Commander (JC)
Gavin Driver (GD)
Olivia Feng (OF)
David Hartley (DH)
Gina Jackson (GJ)
Lindsay Kirk (LK)
David Martin (DM)
Iain Martin (IM)
Helen Mullen (HM)
Fiona Mushin (FM)
Louis Natanson (LN)
Andrew Nicholls (AN)
Morgan Petrie (MP)
Colin Riley (CR)
Elaine Russell (ER)
Yann Seznec (YS)
Mili Shukla (MS)
Alasdair Smith (AS)
Graeme Strachan (GS)
Dr Malcolm Sutherland (DMS)
Kraig Walker (KW)
Daniel Wood (DW)
Paul Durrant (PD)
Peter McArthur (PMc)
Paul Thompson (PT)

Welcome

Clare Adamson welcomed attendees to the CPG and apologies were noted

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minute of the previous meeting was agreed as a correct record, moved by BB seconded by LN.

There were no matters arising

Skills and Training in the Games World

David Martin of Skills Development Scotland (SDS) gave a presentation to the CPG with an update on Creative Industries and Skills Development

Skills Development Scotland is charged with developing skills investment plans and is currently engaged in identifying strategic priorities. They are also looking at what investment is available for delivery. From early 2014, it is expected that identified priorities will be moved forward through an action plan.

The goal of the programme is to deliver young people to the industry with the skill set the industry needs.

In pursuit of this goal SDS are looking at what potential there is to develop modern apprenticeship working within the games industry.

Mili Shukla (SDS) then updated group on the Certificate of Work Readiness being developed with the SQA linking learning with employment. The Games industry could both contribute to this and benefit from it by having a pool of young people to draw from who are work ready and oriented to the industry.

This initiative could at present support up to 30 young people into creative industries and is generally supporting young people into positive destinations. Completion of the Certificate in Work Readiness acts as a reference for young people.

Currently a pilot is planned to run in Dundee supporting 10 young people into placement in the creative industries..

Alasdair Smith, Creative Skillset:

Alasdair spoke about improving pathways into the Sector. Creative Skillset is keen to work with colleagues in the industry to identify what the skills issues are. Creative Skillset are engaged in gathering intelligence and resources in order to address, to lobby and to campaign to the public sector and private sector employers to invest in training.

He advised that funding is available to support skills development and to make the industry more competitive. Creative Skillset has millions of pounds to invest....some is Government funding, some of it from the industry.

Creative Skillset has been gathering industry intelligence on skills gaps, shortages, and pressures. Much of the research already done has been across the UK. This material is useful but, when disaggregated to Scotland or to sectors such as film or TV, it is indicative rather than statistically valid.

They will be carrying out research in the New Year through a survey of the Scottish Industry. Through Brian (Bagelow) they will be coming to the field for more detail.

19% of UK Games industry is in Scotland; around 100 companies; some 800 – 1000 employees. The field is currently graduate dominated. Creative Skillset are trying to open up different pathways. They are working with Colleges on HNC & HND programmes. Whilst the HND does not necessarily take people directly into employment in this field, it does articulate with a degree.

They are also developing National Occupational Standards, looking at individualised competencies for individual jobs. The Certificate of Work Readiness will be geared to industry requirements.

Creative and Digital Modern Apprenticeships are being developed and they will be looking at pathways into the industry. There is currently a Modern Apprenticeship in social media for marketing but other pathways could be opened up. Industry engagement through feedback would help this process.

Creative Skillset accredit Higher Education degree programmes. There are 6 accredited courses currently in Scotland out of 17 in the UK as a whole. Five of the six are at Abertay.

Graduates are 3 times more likely to be employed after completion of an accredited course

Gina Jackson, Skills Investment Fund (SIF)

Gina reported that the fund comes from the Department of Media, Culture and Sport. The UK Government will match every £1 put forward by industry but this has to be employer led.

There was currently no Scottish membership of the Council but Brian Bagelow recently joined.

Skills Priorities for the Games Sector.

- Digital Publishing.....how to get direct to consumers
- Advanced Management....at all levels
- More Specialised Production Skills

The Skills Investment Fund can be used for

Trainee finder....to help find and bring in new recruits

Approved training

Challenge fund

Industry panels – Gina can provide more detail

The Fund will provide 50% of a training allowance for a new trainee. (Anyone with less than 12 months industry experience). The Fund already has 174 potential trainees already “on its books”, including CVs, contact details, etc. OR companies

can provide/recruit their own trainee. Developers, publishers, service providers and distribution all qualify. The Fund will provide 50% of the cost of delivery of training. This can be external or in-house.

The Challenge Fund is a 2 year programme which can fund from £10k to £1M investment over 2 years. Companies were encouraged to come forward with proposals in the New Year. The Fund can support a wide range of approaches such as mentoring, apprenticeships, etc.

Gina reported that the response from the Games Industry had been slow so far.

Any bid to the Fund needs to be from 2 or more companies or to demonstrate that it will benefit two or more.

The Skills Investment Fund will be coming back to Scotland in February and can do employer workshops. They are keen to receive at least one application from Scotland.

Question & Answer Session

There followed a lively session of questions and answers.

Questions covered:

Timescale for spending the Challenge Fund – Answer: March 2015

Entry to the profession graduate dominated – what about modern apprenticeships and what about gender split? Answer: In the UK, 20% of entrants in 2000 were female. The figure is now 14%. Discussion needed with the industry on how to encourage women in and how to encourage them to see it as a career path in Higher Education.

The point was made that the gender split is the same in schools as in universities. The value of STEM Ambassadors promoting the video games industry in schools was discussed.

There was discussion on how to encourage industry contributions for Challenge Fund applications as working capital is so tight for many. The Group was advised that contributions in kind count.....e.g., premises. A contribution of one day a month to a salary would count. This Fund considered easier to access than previous arrangements.

It was noted that Film & TV were used to a levy model.

Individual company bids would have to demonstrate benefit to more than one company.

It was noted that very new companies may lack management skills and this could be a relevant area for funding support joint bids.

Agreed that presentations would be circulated.

Update on the launch of the Scottish Games Network. (SGN)

Brian Baglow updated the Group on developments.

SGN had existed for some 9 years as a grassroots community. It needed to become more formal and to promote the interface between the industry and funders and between private and public sector.

The Games sector is young and does not have an infrastructure like Film and TV. SGN will now be the industry focus. It is looking at how the UK and Scottish industries can work together.

A number of Scottish public sector organisations are also looking to engage with the industry – SDI, Scottish Enterprise, Creative Scotland, etc. and they have funding available. There is a business knowledge gap in the industry but the industry fundamentally wants to make games...not manage. However, it needs to avoid just moving from project to project without any strategy.

SGN will be a forum where members can raise issues, get information. It started in September and is preparing a manifesto and a strategy. It's building a website to include information on – how many companies there are in Scotland, what they are producing and how they are doing it.

SGN looking to promote interaction with other sectors, allowing all to reach full potential.

They will be looking to bring together an advisory group focusing on skills, money and raising the profile/visibility of members. The latter is low in Scotland despite being leaders in the field.

There was concern that Innovation is missing from discussion in Scotland, that it is a deeper, unspoken problem and needs to be actively addressed.

There needed also to be discussion of which countries are “doing it right.” This is a short list but impressive when you see what can be achieved. This is usually characterised by a high-level, funded Innovation Centre.

The suggestion was made that a £1million fund for an experimental games centre should be set up for 2 to 3 years.

Clare Adamson MSP drew attention to the Horizon 2020 (European) Fund which has large sums available.

It was suggested that someone come to speak to this at the CPG.

It was also noted that video games were not often recognised as creative which was very frustrating.

Clare noted that these were all good points to consider at future meetings.

Other possibilities for topics – “How to get into the Games Industry...”

“How can creators work more closely together...?”

Suggestions for speakers would be most welcome.

It was agreed that the Group should look to meet 3 times in 2014 – preferably evening meetings.

It was also suggested that the use of recording and video-conferencing facilities be explored.

Clare thanked all for their attendance and offered best wishes for the Festive Season.

LB/March 2014

