

Cross Party Group on Video Games Technology

AGM Minutes

14th May 2013, Committee Room 5, 5:30-7:30pm

MSP Attendees:

Jenny Marra MSP (JM)
Clare Adamson MSP (CA)
Gordon Macdonald MSP (GM)
Mary Scanlon MSP (MS)

Non MSP Attendees:

Richard Wilson (RW) – TIGA
Jim Scullion (JS) – University of the West of Scotland
Dr John Sutherland (DJS)
James Flowerdew (JF) – Imidea/Gamevial
Dan Wood (DW) – UKIE
Paul Durrant (PD) – University of Abertay
Louis Natanson (LN) – University of Abertay
David Hartley (DH) – Scottish Enterprise
Diane Campion (DC) – Scottish Government
Malcolm Sutherland (MS) – The Computer Games Journal
Dave Sapien (DS) – Me And The Giants
David Goutcher (GT) – Polybius Games
Peter Van Der Watt (PW) – Blazine Griffin
Michael Boniface (MB) – Reloaded Productions
Melissa Knox (MK) – Reloaded Productions
Maxine Dodds (MD) – Scotland's Women In Games
Elaine Russell (ES) – University of Abertay
Pete Roobol (PR) – Imigea
David Thomson (DT) – Ludometrics
Kirsty Gibson (KG) – Abertay University
Iain Martin (IM) – University of Dundee
Sophia Goring (SG) – College Public Policy
David Farrell (DF) – Glasgow Caledonian University
Brian McDonald (BM) – Glasgow Caledonian University
David Martin (DM) – Skills Development Scotland
Kraig Walker (KW) – Apehlio Limited
Colin Riley (CR) – Codeplay Software
Dan Hinkles (DHi) – Serious Parody
Brian Baglow (BB) – Scottish Games Network

The meeting was chaired by Jenny Marra MSP

1. Overview – presented by Brian Baglow, Scottish Games Network

BB presented a general overview of the industry, with a focus on how the industry had changed since the late 1980s, from around 6 developers to around 89 developers now working in Scotland.

The presentation also highlighted **Dare to be Digital** – the competition now reaches an estimated 10,000 individuals and has been recognised with its own Bafta category. It also looked at some of the organisations which provide support to the industry.

The presentation also looked at the future of the industry and identified a number of potential challenges to ensure that the industry remains

- Successful
- Competitive
- Sustainable

Following the presentation, questions were invited from other attendees and a number of issues were raised.

Game Jam

- This was raised as another example of innovative work being done to raise the profile of the industry within Scotland.
- Run in conjunction with both Abertay and Glasgow Caledonian Universities, it brings together over 200 developers in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee, and has been running for 5 years.
- More information is available at scottishgamejam.net and globalgamejam.org

Mobile Phone technology

There was some discussion over whether the recent boom in apps and phone-related developments would slow with perceived limitations on screen qualities etc. as expectations of users continue to rise and the impact this would have on programming – though all were keen to stress the much mentioned ‘death of programming’ was unlikely to happen.

The meeting decided to move to the final agenda item to further develop some of the issues being raised as a result of BB’s presentation.

2. AOCB

A number of individuals raised a range of issues:

Skills development

- DM highlighted that the Scottish Government is undertaking a skills investment plan across the entertainment industry through Skills Development Scotland (SDS).
- They would be looking at the skills required in Scotland to ensure the industry can continue to compete.
- This would include a review process, which would seek to get feedback from voices in the video games technology industry.

Women in the Gaming Industry

- MD highlighted the low number of women working in the industry but emphasised that there are some very successful role models working in the industry and it was felt that more could be done to use these women to promote the industry to girls.
- LN noted that this was something Abertay would like to help with, and echoed the sentiment that more should be made of the existing role models within the industry, particularly as a lot of leadership is coming from women.
- MD noted they were working with SDS on a ‘My World of Work’ video featuring women in the games industry.

- DW highlighted UKIE's Ambassadors Scheme which provided a vehicle for industry folk to go into schools with 50 ambassadors across the UK, 4 of whom are in Scotland. The scheme is being re-launched in June.
- The deputy convenor, JM, asked if any of the ambassadors were women and suggested Maxine Dodds work with Dan Wood on this.

Actions:

- ❖ Maxine Dodds to liaise with Dan Wood of UKIE to possibly develop use of women ambassadors within UKIE's Ambassadors Scheme
- ❖ Companies were encouraged to engage with the SDS's review process

Sustainability of the Games Industry

- DT raised the issue of the visibility of the industry and making people aware about the Scottish industry. He highlighted 'Made In Scotland', a label created to go on games developed in Scotland – he felt branding would go too far, but the 'Made In Scotland' label was a good way of showing the strength of development.
- More information is available at www.madeinscotland.co
- BB said there was an issue with recognition and whilst good work was being done by the likes of Scottish Enterprise but a more joined up approach was needed.
- ER highlighted IndieFest as a way of highlighting independent developers.
- It was also raised that Scottish companies need to get to the 'next stage' to develop companies further. There was some feeling that Scottish companies face challenges because of a lack of experience, particularly when it comes to helping companies grow and retaining intellectual property rights, rather than selling IP to big companies, as well as developing marketing and processing strategies.
- It was noted that the Intellectual Asset Centre, which is part of Scottish Enterprise, is helping but more is needed.
- PD highlighted the Prototype Fund, which received about 300 applications, 100 of whom were in Scotland and 25-6 received funding. Companies that were not successful commonly lacked an entrepreneurial influence to harness the creative energies of the team, in order to make a sustainable business model.
- It was noted that many companies in the UK are run by creative people who sometimes or often lack business experience – there is a need for more people with business experience within the industry, to provide information and expertise.
- It was also noted that while there are a lot of organisations in place which have the expertise and provide guidance, such as SE, IDEa Scotland, Digital Enterprise Scotland etc., there is no central resource – in some ways, there is almost too much information.
- It was felt more work needed to be done to bring these organisations together.
- RW noted that TIGA supply mentors and some access to lawyers regarding IP issues but felt there as more that could be done to encourage entrepreneurship, and promote financial sustainability – including through moves such as the granting of tax breaks. In the UK, there appears to be a tradition of successful companies selling out.
- KW mentioned, in response to a question from CA, that they had engaged with Espark regarding business mentoring and they provided help to his company with office space and other issues. He also highlighted the Business Gateway and Cultural Enterprise Office.
- DC welcomed the positive feedback about these agencies and mentioned that Edge Fund was part of John Swinney's funding announcement and also highlighted that the industry needed more than just financial help. DC also mentioned the Started for Six programme, developed by NESTA, which encourages the development of network support.
- There was some discussion about following the US example at MIT and inviting a high profile speaker over.

- There was also some discussion about ways in which more could be made of the success of the Scottish industry.
- MS suggested the group may like to look at ways in which the Parliament could be used to promote the industry, through members' debates, or an industry reception in the Parliament or similar.

3. **Tax Breaks for the Games Industry**

- RW gave a presentation updating the group on the work TIGA have been doing with regards to the proposed Tax Break and the European Commission's announcement that they would be investigating the UK Government's plan to give the industry tax breaks.
- Noted that it would not distort the European market – since the tax break was introduced in France, no other countries have expressed an interest in introducing it, other than the UK.
- RW also noted that the EU Commission did investigate the French proposal in 2007, and again in 2012.
- DW noted UKIE were in agreement with TIGA and also noted that the EU Commission had previously stated they would look at each case individually.
- There was some discussion around the cultural test, and whether this meant games had to be culturally British, and how responsive to global culture new games were supposed to be.
- Anyone considering submitting a response to the Commission was encouraged to speak to the Treasury, TIGA and UKIE for a full update.
- There was general agreement that the industry needed to present a united front on tax breaks, and it was noted also that the Scottish games industry has managed to expand.

It was decided, due to time constraints, to delay the other agenda items to the next meeting of the group, which will be confirmed at a later date.

4. **Election of office bearers**

- Clare Adamson MSP and Jenny Marra MSP were elected as co-convenors of the group.