

Cross-Party Group on Scottish Games Ecosystem

12th March 2024

Minute

Present

MSPs

Clare Adamson MSP
Michael Marra MSP
Natalie Don MSP
Richard Lochhead MSP
Ross Greer MSP

Invited guests

Hilde van Galen
Carlo de Schryver
Reese Wright
Dan Wood
Mark Wong
Emma Williamson
Marc Williamson
Gregor White
Lauren Watson
Michael Watson
Calum Watson
ABS Unknown
Samantha Tremble
Ross Stoddart
Fiona Stewart
Silviu Soare
Ashley Smith-Hammond
Ashley Smith-Hammond
James Rodgers
James Rodgers
Andrew Reid
Dale R Murray
James Oliver
Nathan Noble
Sol Nicol
Dominic Murphy
Thomas McShane

Connor McQueen Johnston
Mark McPhee
Kevin McLennan
Mark McCready
Paul McConkey
David Martin
Kenneth MacLeod
Michael Lubker
Oliver Lloyd
Paul Leishman
Greg Lee
Jade Law
Jade Law
Ross Laurie
Ross Laurie
Garry LM Sands
JamesKyle
Roisin Kelly
Isabel Jones
JamesHood
Elena Hoege
Elena Hoege
Douglas Hare
Hallidonto Halliday
Nicholas Gurley
Craig Gunn
Gareth Griffiths
Anthony Gowland
David Goutcher
Michael Gallegos
Paul Gallanagh
Jason Fiddes
Paul Farley
Malath Evans
Jonathan Else
Allan Dumbreck
Iain Donald
Dimitrios Darzentas
Dr Daniel Livingstone
Jaime Cross
Efrain Colina
Matt Colgan
Declan Cassidy
Declan Cassidy
Jenny Caplan
Gemma Campbell
Marco Cafolla
Cat Burton
Brendan Burns
Nils Bunnefeld

Alexander Bradley Duthie
John Bradley
Gregor Boyd
Gregor Boyd
Matthew Barr
Jamie Bankhead
Neil Alexander
Arman Akhmetov
Malath Abbas
Brian Baglow
Ruby Sweeney

Non-MSP Group Members

Dan Wood
Roisin Kelly
Mark Wong
Emma Williamson
Gregor White
Lauren White
Dale Murray
Nathan Noble
Sol Nicol
Dominic Murphy
Thomas McShane
Mark McPhee
Mark McCready
Kenneth MacLeod
Paul Leishman
Greg Lee
Jade Law
Ross Laurie
Isabel Jones
James Hood
Elena Hoege
Douglas Hare
Gareth Griffiths
Anthony Gowland
David Goutcher
Michael Gallegos
Jonathan Else
Jaime Cross
Declan Cassidy
Jenny Caplan
Cat Burton
Brendan Burns
Nils Bunnefeld
Alexander Bradley Duthie
John Bradley
Gregor Boyd

Matthew Barr
Malath Abbas
Organisations
Scottish Games Network (Secretariat)
Devolver Digital
Scopely
Squidgeroo Ltd
Dovetail Games
Newdime Entertainment
Edinburgh Napier University
Ludus Pax Studios
Creative Scotland
Fish Tin Games
Abertay University
Dundee and Angus College
The Great Beyond Company
Koin Games
Z Game Energy
Skills Development Scotland
Raftur Games
Dink
Reforged Studios
World of Turnips
RNIB Scotland
Square Go Gamers
Yaldi Games
Hallidonto.com
Sea Stories Creative Studios LLC
Dunoon Grammar School
Firestoke
UWS
Edinburgh Napier University
The Glasgow School of Art
Cognition Events
Into Games
Stormplay
Konglomerate Games

Apologies

N/A

Agenda item 1

Welcome and Introductions

- **Michael Marra** welcomed attendees and introduced the purpose of the meeting as the inaugural gathering of the cross-party group on the Scottish games ecosystem.
- Noted that **Clare Adamson**, due to chair the meeting, could not attend in person but joined online.

Purpose and Context of the Group

- **Michael Marra** outlined the purpose of the cross-party group:
 - To increase understanding and support for the video games sector in Scotland (commercially, creatively, socially, and culturally).
 - Highlighted the gaming sector's potential, noting that gaming generates more revenue globally than film and music combined.
 - Emphasised gaming's applications in various sectors such as education, healthcare, manufacturing, culture, and environmental policy.
 - Noted Scotland's pioneering role in gaming since the 1980s and expressed a desire to focus on the future growth of the sector.

Goals and Vision for the Group

- The group aims to:
 - Provide a platform for public engagement with gaming as a policy issue.
 - Foster a thriving gaming ecosystem to benefit Scotland's future as a digital and entrepreneurial society.
 - Act as a force for policy action to advance the gaming sector in Scotland.
- The group will challenge ministers, the government, and parliamentarians to focus on key priorities and hear from industry voices.

Call for Suggestions and Topics

The meeting will focus on hearing from participants regarding potential themes and topics for future discussions.

- Emphasised the importance of contributions from attendees to drive the cross-party group forward.

Agenda item 2

Administrative Formalities and Election of Officials

- **Election of Co-Conveners:**
 - Proposed that Michael Marra and Clare Adamson share co-convenership.
 - **Proposer:** Ross Greer; **Second:** Mal Abbas
 - Both were elected as co-conveners by unanimous vote.
- **Election of Secretariat:**
 - **Brian Baglow** was proposed as the secretariat for the group.
 - **Proposer:** Michael Marra; **Second:** Clare Adamson
 - Brian was unanimously elected as the secretariat.

Agenda item 3

Presentations and Updates

- **Update on Scottish Games Week and National Strategy:**

- **Presenter:** Brian Baglow, Scottish Games Network.
- Highlighted ongoing work on the creation of a national strategy for games in Scotland, following support from the Deputy First Minister and the Business and Innovation Minister during Scottish Games Week [Link to presentation: **Scotland's Games Ecosystem**]
- Collaboration with **Techscaler** to conduct 15 workshops across Scotland to gather input for the creation of an 'action plan' as part of the overall strategy.
- Workshops are aimed at understanding where games fit within the tech, screen, and creative sectors and addressing key issues like education, employment, business creation, skills, training, infrastructure and funding
- Seeking broad participation to create an inclusive and actionable plan similar to the 2020 Tech Ecosystem Review (aka The Logan Report).

Questions and Discussion

- **Dan Wood (UKIE):** Asked about emerging themes from the workshops.
- **Brian Baglow (Scottish Games Network):** Responded that common themes include funding, skills, and representation. The key themes are in the complete data set and are being summarised on the Scottish Games Network **website**.
- **Dan Wood:** Enquired about using other regions/cities as examples of focused support for games (e.g. Birmingham, Berlin, etc.)
- **Brian Baglow:** Replied that many of the neighbouring regions and countries which have dedicated games support are involved in the work around the action plan including Game Republic, Screen Northern Ireland and NeoGames in Finland.
- **Clare Adamson (MSP):** Stated that it will be important to position games correctly in terms of ministerial portfolio and definition of the sector as 'scree', 'tech' or 'creative industries. Ms Adamson also noted the work being done in other countries, such as Spain to ensure local languages such as Catalan) are incorporated and supported in games - and asked if there were any similar programmes for Gaelic.
- **Malath Abbas (Biome Collective, Creative Scotland Board Member):** Noted that the games ecosystem is large, diverse and evolving, making it hard to 'pin down' as a sector. He stated that the while the sector on a global level is enormous, it's composed of increasingly smaller organisations, businesses, and individuals including freelancers. Support for the commercial aspects of gaming from Scottish Enterprise seem to have reduced in recent years and without support for smaller studios, the opportunity to build larger, sustainable and successful companies will be reduced.
- **Jade Law (WarDog Studios):** Stated that by trying to support the entire diverse games 'ecosystem' we risk not supporting the 'industry' and the specific needs it has in terms of infrastructure and support.
- **Jenny Caplan (Wee Tattie Studios):** Noted that many graduates are finding it difficult to secure roles in games with no industry experience. Ms Caplan has

launched a new distributed studio with over 120 graduates volunteering their time to gain work experience and credits on games and asked for more support for recent graduates to secure roles in the industry rather than leave for other sectors.

- **Brian Baglow:** Noted that there is a lack of data at all levels across Scotland's games ecosystem, with no readily available data on student numbers, graduate outcomes or business creation.
- **Michael Marra:** Noted that the cross-party group might be the forum to bring the commercial public sector bodies together (Business Gateway, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Development International, etc.) to ask about the support available for games businesses. Mr Marra also asked about other sectors with examples of good data sets. Data, Fintech, AI and Cyber were offered as examples by Mr Baglow.
- **Natalie Don (MSP, Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise):** Noted that a cross-portfolio approach from government would enable games to be discussed by multiple ministers and ensure areas such as education, mental health and wellbeing are included.
- **Jaime Cross (IWGB Game Workers Union):** Queried whether the games strategy would have any focus on workers rights, workplace conditions or salaries to make Scotland a leader in a more inclusive and fairer games industry.
- **Brian Baglow:** Responded that all input would be welcome and included in the data gathered across the workshops and consultation across the ecosystem.
- **Marc Williamson (Tag Games/Scopely):** Noted that not all games businesses generate new and original IP and that many studios in Scotland are co-development and service providers and should not be excluded from the action plan or strategy.
- **Neil Alexander (Hunted Cow Studios):** Expressed concern at the recent mass-layoffs and redundancies across the games industry and reiterated support for the inclusion of workers rights and salary pay gaps in the action plan/strategy.
- **Kat Burton (Vesper Studios):** Noted that support for companies registered overseas with key staff in Scotland - such as Vesper - is not available which, given the new focus upon remote working, leaves a large gap in the opportunities to encourage more talent to move to Scotland and grow the ecosystem.
- **Brian Baglow:** Stated that he is attempting to gather that data to try and understand how many people across Scotland work in games for international companies, but that better resources are required.
- **Ashley Smith-Hammond (Creative Scotland):** Responded to Ms Burton and stated that support from public funds is focused within Scotland, but that the increasing numbers of globally distributed teams means that the current approach may need to change to recognise the global nature of many games companies.
- **Jade Law:** Noted that co-development companies do not qualify for any type of support (such as Videogames Tax Relief (VGTR)) and that WarDog Studios was set up in Scotland and hires global talent to come to Scotland, despite receiving no support or assistance from any level of government or public sector.

- **Paul Leishman (Team Terrible):** Stated that the provision of office space in Dundee and across central Scotland is difficult for smaller games studios as so much real estate is being converted to student accommodation.
- **Clare Adamson:** Noted that understanding the funding mechanisms and support available across other regions and countries in the UK is important. She noted a trial programme in Ireland/Northern Ireland which gives a universal basic income to 2,000 creatives across all disciplines. Ms Adamson also noted that the education sector in Finland has a focus upon tech which is supporting the sector there in a way which is perhaps not happening in Scotland.
- **Andrew Bailey-Smith (More Fun With Games):** Noted that the shared heritage with board games and the increasing use of digital media within physical games means they should be included in the action plan moving forward.
- **Dr Niels Bunnefeld (University of Stirling):** Noted that the university is using games in a variety of ways to gather data on subjects such as climate change, biodiversity, conflict, etc. He stated that games have a role outside of the entertainment sphere and are valuable tools in a variety of other ways. He noted the difficulty of finding 'service provider' companies who can help to realise these new approaches and expressed gratitude to the games companies attending.
- **Malath Abbas:** Stated that the ongoing evolution of games means that the potential for transformational change is growing and that Scotland is uniquely positioned to incorporate and support games for the public good and become a leader in this space.
- **Ross Greer (MSP):** Noted that as a member of the culture committee, a review into film and television was carried out approximately 10 years ago. At that time the sector was poorly supported with little infrastructure. The creation of Screen Scotland has moved the sector forward enormously and we have growing inward investment and increasing amounts of new studio space coming online. Mr Greer noted the success of Screen Northern Ireland and the inclusion of games alongside film and television, and across the organisations' work in education. Mr Greer stated that the conversations within the current meeting mirror those from 10 years ago in film and television and that the model of Screen Scotland could be a valuable approach for the games ecosystem and is a model and approach understood by the government.
- **Jaime Cross:** Highlighted the benefits of universal basic income (UBI) in derisking business startup or game development for younger/smaller creators and retaining talent within Scotland.
- **[Unknown]:** Stated that he was working on an innovative new metaverse project which is a physical opera and a metaverse video game and using blockchain technologies to build social equity and using NFTs in ways that that way to employ people from socially, and economically challenged and disabled backgrounds and that innovation and redefining how we work and the roles within the wider creative industries are changing.
- **Dale R Murray (Scottish Esports Network):** Stated that the esports community across Scotland was growing and may be entirely disconnected from discussions around the games 'industry' and the work of the CPG but should be included in discussions moving forward.
- **Michael Andre Gallagos (Relentless Games):** Stated that immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) can have multiple applications -

simulation, training, medicine, etc. and will have a role in 'content creation' and esports.

- **Richard Lochhead (MSP, Minister for Business & Innovation):** Noted games are a high-growth industry alongside areas such as biotech. He stated that advances in technology are driving change and that innovation is being driven up the agenda as a key driver of Scotland's future and economy. Games are a key part of this innovation but may not yet get the recognition or support it deserves. Mr Lochhead noted that sectors such as medicine, defence and design companies are now using games technology and that cross-pollination between sectors is a critical part of the innovation agenda, as is telling the world about the advances being made in Scotland. Mr Lochhead noted his own Moray constituency is home to a mini games cluster and that fostering innovation across the whole of Scotland was an important goal. Mr Lochhead acknowledged the issues around the positioning and definition of games within tech, screen or the creative industries was a key issue for discussion, alongside addressing basic infrastructure.
- **Gareth Griffiths (Relentless Games):** Queried Mr Lochhead about his plans for helping the games industry to network more effectively.
- **Richard Lochhead:** Mr Lochhead noted a key element of the national innovation strategy was to 'declutter the landscape' and explore ways of bringing the innovation community together on a national level. He stated that games should be at the heart of such a community. He stated that the first meetings were underway and that several participants noted they had never all been convened before.
- **Brian Baglow:** Noted that the Scottish Clusters Ecosystem Alliance group exists, having been established by ScotlandIS and pulls together many of the sectors Mr Lochhead mentioned.
- **Richard Lochhead:** Noted he will make introductions when the time is right and discussed several of the infrastructure projects in Scotland, including the exascale computer project and that bringing together all of the participants and stakeholders is an important part of creating the innovation economy.
- **Update on Scottish Games Week and National Strategy:**
 - **Presenter:** Dr Amanda Ford, West College Scotland. Founder, Scottish Games Education Network.
 - Dr. Ford's presentation highlighted the need for a more coordinated and responsive approach to games education in Scotland, ensuring that students are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the rapidly evolving games industry.
 - **Formation of the Network:** Dr. Ford established the Scottish Games Education Network to foster collaboration and communication among educators in the field.
 - **Curriculum Alignment:** The network aims to ensure that educational programs align with industry needs and prepare students for successful careers in the games sector.
 - **Outdated Qualifications:** The current HNC/HND Computer Games Development qualification is outdated and requires revision to reflect modern industry standards.
 - **Industry Input:** The network seeks input from industry professionals to identify the most in-demand skills and update the curriculum accordingly.

- **Articulation Challenges:** Ensuring smooth transitions for students moving from college to university is a key priority.
 - **Remote Work:** The increasing prevalence of remote work highlights the need for flexible education models and support for remote students.
 - **Collaboration and Partnership:** The network emphasises the importance of collaboration between educators, industry professionals, and government bodies to drive positive change in games education.
- **Jade Law:** Introduced herself as a university dropout and stated that her studio focuses upon training and does not see university as a prerequisite for a job in games, or necessarily an advantage. Ms Law noted that she would like to work with universities to create courses aligned with industry needs, but has met with little interest. She noted that the Dutch system in which the final year of a degree is spent doing work experience as a model worth investigating. She concluded that the current system in Scotland is not satisfying either graduates or employers.
 - **Jenny Caplan:** Agreed with Ms Law on the quality of education and noted that the specialisation required in industry is absent from the education system in Scotland. She stated that her studio (Wee Tattie) has to teach Scottish students SCRUM management, as it's absent from their education, despite being a commonly used technique across the games sector. Ms Caplan also noted that stronger links between education and industry could be beneficial in terms of portfolio reviews and building greater connections between students and potential employers.
 - **Dan Wood:** Noted this is a UK-wide issue and explained that despite the large number of vacancies across the UK games sector, many of the roles were mid and senior level positions, with relatively few entry-level positions on offer. He noted that there is currently no way to share skills requirements on a national level with academia, which needs to change. He also detailed how games-adjacent sectors such as film and television have built sophisticated skills and training strategies which they fund, resource and deliver themselves, as well as liaising with government, gathering data and operating on a national basis. Mr Woods noted that the Skills Investment Fund, which operated in 2015-17 across all screen industries was having a significant impact in skills and training. When that funding ended the film and TV sectors found it so useful, they continued to fund it directly and support programmes including apprenticeships. Mr Woods noted no such scheme operates within the games sector and games lacks any sort of cohesive strategy around skills.
 - **Jaime Cross:** Highlighted the value of ensuring roles outside coding and programming are made more visible to encourage more people to consider careers within the games ecosystem.
 - **Calum Watson (Firestoke):** Noted that his company were attempting to work with their local college to have some work done by students, but that they were finding it difficult to navigate and the response from colleges underwhelming. He noted the acceptable routes into the industry were narrowing with the accepted college-university route, with relevant degrees excluding many people who might otherwise find employment within games and urged a more open-minded approach.
 - **Michael Marra:** Asked is there was any response from the SQA regarding an update to the guidelines for games courses?

- **Dr Amanda Ford:** Responded that she had not yet been given a date for discussions
- **Michael Marra:** Asked if this was an ACTION he and Clare Adamson could undertake as co-chairs, to write to the SQA and request an update and more information.
- **Mark Wong (University of Glasgow):** Noted that other sectors have accreditation systems based upon professional experience and noted a disconnection and difference in understanding across multiple education organisations (Education Scotland, SQA, etc.) and asked that the industry be more flexible and open to alternative routes into employment and the options for upskilling and asked for this to be addressed at a future meeting of the cross-party group.
- **Matthew Barr (University of Glasgow):** Advocated for the creation of games apprenticeship frameworks in Scotland and noted the value of graduate apprenticeships in getting people into the workplace productive within approximately six months and contributing to the economy, the business and developing vital skills in a way that can't be offered within a university course. He further noted that a framework for work experience which supports smaller studios would have real value.
- **Tony Gowland (Ant Workshop):**Noted that in the current financial climate in the games sector, smaller studios have problems recruiting junior staff who have to be trained, rather than more experienced staff who can immediately start contributing. He agreed with Dr Barr that an apprenticeship scheme, combined with funding, would help new talent enter the industry.
- **Matthew Barr:** Added that research shows that mentors within an apprenticeship programme can improve diversity and support for people from marginalised backgrounds.
- **Mark Baxter (Digitalnauts):** Noted that there are a wide range of transferable skills from games-related courses and students can move into a range of other sectors.
- **Brian Baglow:** Gave a summary of plans for Scottish Games Week 2024.

Agenda item 4

Key Points Addressed

- Formation and formalisation of the cross-party group.
- Election of co-conveners and secretariat.
- Introduction of the group's goals, focusing on gaming's potential in Scotland.
- Discussion on creating a national strategy for games in Scotland through inclusive workshops.

Takeaways for the Audience

- The group seeks active participation and input from all stakeholders in the gaming ecosystem.
- The national strategy will be developed collaboratively and aims to have practical recommendations for government action.

Action Points for the Next Meeting

1. **Attendees:** Share feedback and suggest themes for future discussions.
2. **Brian Baglow:** Continue to conduct workshops and gather insights for the national strategy.
3. **Group Leadership:** Plan future meetings and thematic discussions based on input received.

Next Meeting: November 18th 2024
Location: The Advanced Research Centre (ARC), Glasgow University