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How to retain those with the necessary creative skills in Scotland

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Observations and Recommendations

The committee will naturally be presented with a weight of evidence relating issues of business growth and technology development when considering the Creative Industries, and the games sector is no exception. However, special consideration needs to be given to initiatives that retain talent in Scotland. We would recommend that in its considerations that the committee gives fair weighting to ‘Creativity’ itself – for without the creative spark to develop new ideas, future businesses will struggle for global recognition, and home grown talent will continue to be drawn away to larger hubs in the South East of England or elsewhere.

The committee should consider the ‘Glasgow Miracle’ and its impact on Creative Arts in Scotland as a model for boosting creativity in the games sector as it continues its transition into an increasingly auteur/creator driven micro-business based industry.

We believe that the following steps would be helpful in retaining creative talent in Scotland:

1. Support for the graduate job market.
2. Support creative work spaces.
3. Support for events for networking and collaboration.
4. Support development of business skills for creative practitioners.
5. Improve understanding of the success factors that fed into the ‘Glasgow Miracle’, to support a future ‘Digital Miracle’ across Scotland’s creative hubs.
6. Explore ways to extend support beyond hubs.

We also note that inward investment can have a significant impact, but in the games sector Scotland is competing with many other regions globally for similar investments.
While the presence of an office of Disney Research may help bring other companies in, we do not consider the long term, high cost, efforts in attracting such investment to be effective or worthwhile to address immediate concerns.

**The Creative Economy vs The High Tech Economy**

NESTA have produced charts which highlight the national variations in the strength of the Creative and High-Tech economies across the UK. While Scotland performs reasonably well in the high-tech economy, it performs poorly in the Creative Economy which is highly concentrated in and around London¹.

This produces a ‘drain’ effect, with talent graduating in Scotland being drawn South. This was very much a problem in the Visual Arts, with access to international markets and galleries requiring a London presence. But this can be countered. The Glasgow Miracle saw a reversal – with artists increasingly choosing to continue to work in Glasgow while travelling and exhibiting internationally, and still able to develop strong international profiles with a notably strong success for young artists in the Turner Prize.

Moira Jeffrey in the Guardian noted that the ‘Glasgow Miracle’ should surprise no-one, but has been built on hard work and ambition, but also that ‘Judicious public support has underpinned achievement².

We note the success of Art Schools and Universities, as hubs and hot-houses of creativity, in helping strengthen Scotland’s global recognition in the creative arts and industries. While the post-1991 HEIs led in the development of programmes addressing the needs of the games industry, Art Schools have also been active in this area, and the more established HEIs also provide graduates moving into the sector.

For example, with programmes in ‘Digital Culture’ and the world-leading ‘Product Design Engineering’ that marry creativity and technology, close collaboration between the Digital Design Studio and Historic Scotland (as well as with engineering firms and medical schools and colleges), The Glasgow School of Art is engaging with a range of the creative industries.

Support for collaborations between HE and practitioners and support for developing a new generation of digital creatives will be key to digitising the miracle.

**Support from Public Bodies**

1. Support for the graduate job market

The first year of employment after graduation is a critical time to creative industry graduates - with many being forced to move further afield. Immediately after graduation

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¹ http://data.nesta.org.uk/creativity/Cartogram.html#stemecon
² http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/may/10/dont-call-glasgow-contemporary-art-scene-a-miracle
is also a point where individuals are at their most mobile, so keeping talent in Scotland at this point could have a large impact on retaining talent.

In 2011, Glasgow City Council launched the Commonwealth Graduate Fund\(^3\), to encourage SMEs to employ recent graduates, and support the costs of such hires. If aimed at small games studios (of under 25 employees), this could help underwrite the costs of growth while providing more opportunities for graduates to obtain employment in Scotland.

Support for graduates to start their own businesses is the natural complement to this. Working with the HEI sector, business incubators and artists studios to create, publicise and support initiatives here could help grow businesses. The Prototype fund (administered by University of Abertay) provides one model, allowing a range of costs to be underwritten.

Support should also encompass micro-studios, which may involve only very small scale collaborations, and individual game creators. This will allow for a greater range of experimental are expressive works, and help drive creativity more broadly

2. Support creative work spaces

Scotland has a number of business innovation and incubation focussed centres that include support for game development studios within a technology and innovation focussed remit. However, as a creative endeavour, increasingly games are being developed with a more arts based focus, rather than technology innovation. For example, Scottish game-developer Jack King-Spooner recently released ‘Beeswing’\(^4\), a semi-autobiographical game about life in rural Scotland which is finding an audience outside of the traditional ‘games’ sector. Beeswing has been reviewed in the visual arts press and featured on The Culture Studio (Radio Scotland). While arts games will only be a small part of the overall sector, a successful art-games community will help drive innovation and creativity in the more commercially oriented parts of the sector.

Social enterprises such as WASPS\(^5\) have been long established in the Visual Arts - providing low cost studio space to artists. Business incubators and innovation centres provide professional office space and business support to technology oriented businesses. The games sector would benefit from more spaces that blend the creative energy of artists studios with the technical facilities (but not the more sterile environment) of a business incubator.

3. Support for events for networking and collaboration

\(^3\) [http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CommonwealthGraduateFund](http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CommonwealthGraduateFund)  
\(^4\) [http://www.theartsdesk.com/gaming/beeswing](http://www.theartsdesk.com/gaming/beeswing)  
\(^5\) [http://www.waspsstudios.org.uk/](http://www.waspsstudios.org.uk/)
Networking across the games industry can help drive novel collaborations and developments. There are a number of bodies in Scotland that organise events, but many of these would benefit from increased support. Game Jams\(^6\), Hackathons, festivals, meet-ups\(^7\) and conferences all present opportunities for networking and the development of new collaborations.

Support development of business skills for creative practitioners

This is addressed elsewhere in this submission.

4. Improve understanding of the success factors that fed into the ‘Glasgow Miracle’, to support a future ‘Digital Miracle’ across Scotland’s creative hubs

There is without doubt a good talent base already working in Scotland, and many graduates produced annually. An understanding of the factors that let to artists increasingly staying to work in Scotland and eschew the traditional path South should be used to inform future plans to retain talent\(^8\). Development of effective networks of support, communities of practice and judicious public support will all have a role to play.

5. Explore ways to extend support beyond hubs

Polybius Games of East Kilbride\(^9\) provides tailored digital games experiences to hotels worldwide. Hunted Cow develop and publish games to an international audience of over a million players from their base in Elgin\(^10\). Physical location in a hub is not a requirement in an industry with digital goods. An understanding of how physical hubs and clusters can be supplemented by digital networking and clusters to support the development of creative industries outside of the main hubs in Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow has potential to bring a wider range of unique voices and visions to the Scottish games sector. Existing groups such as IGDA Scotland\(^11\) & Scottish Games Network\(^12\) and social networks should be embraced and ways found to extend their reach.

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6 [https://www.facebook.com/pages/Scottish-Game-Jam/136412446403315](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Scottish-Game-Jam/136412446403315)
7 Some meetups are very informal, and do not require regular support - BertWednesdays in Dundee and Glasgow and GameDevEd in Edinburgh. But their lack of formality and marketing mean that many developers (new developers in particular) may not be aware of their existence.
8 Previous projects on The Glasgow Miracle have produced accessible archives which could inform this work, [http://glasgowmiracle.blogspot.co.uk/](http://glasgowmiracle.blogspot.co.uk/)
10 [https://www.huntedcow.com/](https://www.huntedcow.com/)
12 [http://scottishgames.net/](http://scottishgames.net/)