

Minutes of the Cross-Party Group on Scotland's Games Ecosystem

Date: Tuesday, 22 April 2025

Time: 18:10 - 20:00

Location: Committee Room, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh & Online

1. Attendees

Conveners:

- Clare Adamson MSP
- Michael Marra MSP

Secretariat:

- Brian Baglow (Scottish Games Network)

MSPs Present:

- Patrick Harvie MSP

Industry, Academia & Public Sector Attendees:

Chloe Corcoran
Trevin York
David Wright
Marc Williamson
Rebecca Warner-Perry
Phillip Vaughan
Leo Tan
Ashley Smith-Hammond
Nicholas Shearer
Colin Riley
Morgan Petrie
James Oliver
Andrej Ninkovic
Marly Muudeni Samuel
Verda Munir
Conor McKeown
Mick McGowan

Ellis McCusker-Thompson
Mark McCready
Gary McCartan
Jess McBeath
Iain McAllister
Kim Macaskill
Kenneth MacLeod
Paula Lucas
Lindsay Law
Jade Law
Garry LM Sands
Eveliina Kuitunen
Roisin Kelly
Daniel Jordan
Fred Jefferiss
Corrie Green
Clive Gillman
Robert Gelb
Michael Gallegos
Kenneth GM Anderson
Amanda Ford
Dimitrios Darzentas
Claire Colston
Sam Collins
Catherine Duthie
Cat Burton
Nils Bunnefeld
Tom Brock
Alexander Bradley Duthie
Rosario Blue

2. Welcome & Housekeeping

- Clare Adamson MSP opened the meeting and welcomed all attendees.
- The meeting also served as the group's Annual General Meeting (AGM). Formal business was deferred until a quorum of MSPs was present.

3. Presentation: Scotland's Games Action Plan (Draft 2)

- Brian Baglow provided an overview of Draft 2 of the Scottish Games Action Plan, a document created with the backing of the Scottish Government to improve support for the games ecosystem.
- The draft has been refined from 58 initial recommendations to five key strategic pillars based on feedback from industry and the public sector.

The Five Key Recommendations:

1. **Formal Recognition & Strategic Alignment:** Recognise games as a key industry for Scotland's future, taking a cross-portfolio approach within government to move it beyond a single ministerial portfolio. A crucial part of this is establishing official data collection for the sector.
2. **Dedicated Funding & Investment:** Convene stakeholders (e.g., Scottish National Investment Bank, government) to establish a sustainable, dedicated funding model for games, addressing the lack of specific support like the UK Games Fund.
3. **Industry Collaboration & Cluster Development:** Expand the capabilities of existing networks like Techscaler to provide tailored support for games companies, from start-up to internationalisation.
4. **Skills & Talent Development:** Create a more cohesive strategy to address fractures in the talent pipeline, bringing together industry and academia. Also, explore the role of games in wider education (e.g., online safety, digital citizenship).
5. **Scotland's Games Innovation Centre:** A "moonshot" proposal to create a single, national focal point for the entire ecosystem, bringing together all stakeholders to drive innovation and provide data-backed insights.
 - Brian Baglow invited all attendees to provide further feedback on the draft via a Google Form to create a "bulletproof" case for ministers.

4. Main Discussion Points

A wide-ranging discussion followed the presentation, with key themes emerging from both in-person and online attendees:

- **National Identity vs. City Silos:**
 - Multiple speakers (Jade Law, Kim MacAskill) expressed frustration that Scotland's games ecosystem is often discussed as separate city-based clusters (Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow) rather than a unified national entity.
 - It was argued that this weakens Scotland's international narrative and that a "Made in Scotland" approach is needed.
- **National Games Innovation Centre:**
 - There was broad support for the concept of a national centre.
 - A significant discussion took place regarding its potential location, with concerns raised about the political challenges of choosing a single city.
 - The idea of a distributed, non-physical, or multi-hub centre was proposed as a potential solution to avoid regional rivalries.
- **Talent Pipeline & Graduate Employment:**
 - Kim MacAskill highlighted the difficulty of securing entry-level jobs for graduates within Scotland compared to other countries.

- It was noted that Scotland "bleeds talent" as graduates often have to leave the country to find sufficient opportunities.
- The need for better bridges between universities and industry was emphasised, along with support for the full spectrum of skills, from high-level programming to business and publishing.
- **Funding & Investment:**
 - The lack of dedicated early-stage funding ("rolling the dice" money) for new studios was identified as a major barrier by Marc Williamson.
 - The financial challenges for service-based studios were raised by Jade Law, who noted a lack of support and tax breaks compared to international competitors.
 - The limitations of existing funding pots (e.g., Creative Scotland's £150k limit for games) were discussed, with Kim MacAskill arguing it is insufficient for the scale of modern game development.
- **Industry Positioning (Tech vs. Creative):**
 - A robust debate took place on whether games should be positioned within the 'Tech' or 'Creative Industries' sector.
 - **Argument for Tech (Kim MacAskill):** The financial scale, reliance on engineers and programmers, and the rise of AI-driven experiences mean games align more closely with the tech sector, which could unlock larger funding.
 - **Argument for Creative (Jade Law):** Games are a creative medium that leverages technology. Over-emphasising 'tech' risks negating the cultural impact and the vital role of artists and writers.
- **Inclusivity and Diversity:**
 - It was stated that the national strategy must include non-video games (tabletop, RPGs, board games).
 - The need to embed accessibility, sustainability, workers' rights, and support for remote work from the outset was highlighted.
 - Jade Law raised the issue of low working-class representation in the industry and advocated for games as a tool for social mobility.
- **International Context & Collaboration:**
 - Finland was cited as a key example of a country of similar size that has successfully built a multi-billion-pound games industry through strategic government support post-Nokia.
 - Kim MacAskill offered to facilitate a knowledge exchange with PlayFIN, Finland's industry body.
 - Ken Anderson spoke of the intense global competition (e.g., India) and the need for Scottish studios to collaborate as "Scotland, the studio" to compete internationally.

5. AGM Formal Business

- The minutes of the previous meeting were proposed by Brian Baglow and seconded by Michael Marra MSP.
- **Election of Office Bearers:**
 - Clare Adamson MSP and Michael Marra MSP were re-elected as Co-Conveners.
 - Brian Baglow (Scottish Games Network) was re-elected as Secretariat.

6. Next Steps & Actions

1. **Games Action Plan:** Brian Baglow to produce Draft 3, incorporating the evening's feedback.
2. **Finland Knowledge Exchange:** Brian Baglow to follow up with Kim MacAskill to facilitate an introduction to PlayFIN.
3. **CPG Priorities for 2025-26:** The conveners will distil the discussion into a set of priorities for the group for the coming year. Key themes identified include:
 - Supporting the Games Action Plan and using it as a "provocation" with government.
 - Engaging with the ongoing review of Creative Scotland.
 - A potential standalone event or piece of work focused on diversity and inclusion.
4. **Manifesto for 2026 Election:** Clare Adamson MSP suggested the group create a manifesto of "asks" for all political parties ahead of the next Scottish Parliament election.

7. Date of Next Meeting

- Tuesday, 23rd September 2025, 18:00 - 20:00, in Committee Room 3, The Scottish Parliament.

The meeting concluded at 20:00.