OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 16 May 2024

Session 6

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Thursday 16 May 2024

CONTENTS

STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
13th Meeting 2024, Session 6

CONVENER

*Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
*Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Catherine Fergusson

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

Thursday 16 May 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Cross-Party Group

The Convener (Martin Whitfield): I welcome everyone to this meeting of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. We have a number of agenda items, but the first is a cross-party group application. We are invited to consider an application for recognition of a proposed cross-party group on the Scottish games ecosystem. I welcome Michael Marra MSP to the meeting. Michael is a proposed co-convener of the proposed group on the Scottish games ecosystem.

Good morning, Michael. I invite you to make an opening statement about the intentions of the group.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Thank you, convener, and thank you to the committee for its time this morning. I am sure that you have a busy agenda ahead, so I greatly appreciate it.

First, I apologise for Clare Adamson MSP, who is the proposed co-convener of the cross-party group. She is also the convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, which is sitting at the moment, otherwise she would have been here today with me.

I am here to propose forming a cross-party group on the Scottish games ecosystem. Many of you will be aware of the importance of the industry to Scotland. It employs 6,400 people in Scotland and accounts for about 11 per cent of the United Kingdom total.

Scotland has a long history in computer games and the gaming ecosystem in what has now become the largest entertainment industry in the world bar none. Scotland does not just have a great legacy in its history of developing some of the most renowned titles globally and having big hits in the industry; there is huge potential for growth in the sector for Scotland in the years to come. The sector is estimated to be worth around £350 million to the Scottish economy annually.

There are innovations in gaming technology that apply in education, healthcare and environmental policy. It is not just the fact that many people will have grown up with and been aware of "Grand Theft Auto" and "Mario Brothers"; it is the broader application in technology, service delivery and service design across all parts of our economy. The industry has huge potential for the country.

The purpose of the cross-party group is to bring together the industry, parliamentarians and policy makers. One of the key challenges that came up in our scoping discussions with the industry and stakeholders is that the sector does not fit neatly into any area of policy. The technology and the business space are not supported by policy and provisions for the screen sector, and it does not sit within the education sector. The games sector spans a wide array of areas, which has been a persistent problem in the policy space for the industry for years. That is why establishing a cross-party group is the right thing to do.

On 12 March, we had an inaugural meeting in the Parliament to test the waters, and there was a huge turnout of people coming to their Parliament to discuss this area, for which they have a huge passion as developers, users and business owners. There is a real appetite for engagement.

Why now, at this moment in time? We are at a crucial juncture. In February this year, the Scottish Government backed the creation of a national games strategy. As its first task, we want the cross-party group to engage on that action plan with the Scottish Government, to inform the development of that strategy so that it is founded on real engagement with the sector. We are keen for that to be the group's principal role.

The Scottish Games Network is the organisation that would provide the secretariat to the cross-party group. It organises Scottish games week on an annual basis. For the past two years, Clare Adamson and I have assisted in hosting the Scottish games week in the Parliament, to increase the visibility and policy awareness of that community and to build engagement. The cross-party group is a natural evolution of that, and we think it is an ideal forum.

We are keen to pursue three key themes in the first year of the group. The first is education. A number of institutions at college and university level are intensely involved in this work, but there are some challenges in the sector. The relationship between the industry and the education side of it needs to be addressed. There are concerns about the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the qualifications that it offers in this area, so we are already facilitating better engagement between the SQA and the industry.

The second theme is the Scottish Government's action plan and national games strategy, which I have mentioned.

The third theme is visibility and ambition for the sector. As politicians and parliamentarians, we can all lift the ambition nationally to meet the opportunity that we have as a country in this area. Thank you.

The Convener: Before I throw you to the lions of the rest of the committee and their questions, you will be aware of the substantial number of CPGs that exist and you will also be aware of the obligation that Clare Adamson and you will take on as co-conveners. I know that you have had an offer of secretariat support from outwith the Parliament, which is good to hear, so I will phrase this as carefully as I can. You do understand the personal and individual responsibilities of an MSP as a co-convener to comply with the rules, standing orders and expectations. I know that some members have found the time commitment to be challenging.

Michael Marra: Very much so, convener. I know that Clare Adamson has a long-standing commitment to the issue. She has a background in technology and a real commitment to it. My commitment comes very much from a Dundee perspective—I am a Dundee MSP—because of how important the sector has been to my city for many decades. We are both very committed in that regard.

I would say that, as I have said to the convener previously that I am very much of the belief that, if the groups do not work, they should be stopped. We will keep the group on a recurring evaluation at the end of the year, and we will look at whether we meet the objectives that we have set out in the work plan at the start of the year. If not, we will move to dissolve the group.

The Convener: As no members of the committee have any questions, I will ask a final one, which is an important one, although you have answered it in the application. Are there no existing cross-party groups that cover in any way, shape or form the proposal for a group for the games industry?

Michael Marra: I think that there are cross-party groups that touch on parts of the area, but, as I said in my opening statement, the fact that there is not a key focus on it is part of the challenge. Of course, there is the cross-party group on the creative economy, which maybe encompasses a small part of this area, but it does not provide the focus that the area will require, particularly on the Government policy development that we want to engage in over the next year.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The convener has touched on the point that there are quite a lot of cross-party groups out there. Would you consider occasional joint meetings with some of the other groups that you have mentioned, as a way round that challenge? I know that other cross-party groups have tried to do that, to avoid stretching MSPs too thinly every time there is a meeting.

Michael Marra: That is a very good suggestion from Dr Allan, and it is something that we could consider in the group's work programme—particularly letting the other cross-party groups know of our existence once we have started up and seen where there might be opportunities to engage.

The Convener: Excellent. As there are no further questions, I thank you for attending the committee this morning. We will consider whether to approve the application for recognition at agenda item 2, and the clerks will inform you of the committee's decision in due course.

Michael Marra: Thank you.

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is, as discussed, consideration of whether to accord recognition to the proposed cross-party group on the Scottish games ecosystem. Does any member have any comments to make before I formally put the question?

It is nice that Michael Marra and Clare Adamson recognise the number of CPGs that exist. Michael raised the point that this particular group seems to cross a number of other areas, so it will be interesting to see whether they follow your suggestion, Alasdair, about joint working.

If we are happy with that, is the committee prepared to grant the group recognition?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Excellent. That brings an end to the public part of this meeting.

09:39
Meeting continued in private until 18:04.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba