

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT TECHNICAL SKILLS NATIONAL PROGRAMME FEASIBILITY REPORT

Created by: Gateshead College

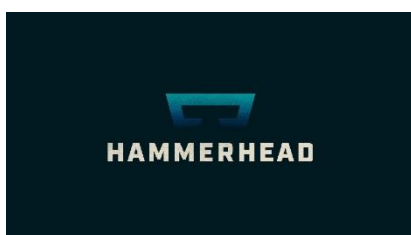
January 2019

Managed by





tombola



Contents

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT 1

Abstract	4
Rationale	4
Key Partners	6
Options analysis	8
SWOT Analysis – Option 2.	11
Addressing Weakness and Threats	12
Resource requirements and example costs	14
Conclusion	15

Abstract

We aimed to look at how feasible it is to create an incubation studio as a transitional stage for students progressing from college game development and digital courses into the creative digital sector, specifically focused on the Games/Virtual & Augmented reality industries. An incubation studio in this instance is envisaged as an intermediate platform for learners to engage in high quality, industrially informed education working on live briefs in a professional environment located external to college facilities.

A fundamental focus of this project has been outstanding teaching, learning and assessment and how this type of provision could enhance our existing offer as well as preparing for the future challenges associated with the changes to the post 16 landscape. Collaboration with industry as well as education partners from both mainstream and specialist providers will be key to informing not only a tradition syllabus, but also to realise a wider range of PSD and employability skills to equip our alumni with the skills and qualities they will need to become successful participants in the economy and society at large.

Rationale

Multiple factors contributed to the need for this project, some of the primary drivers were:

- The proposed substantive work-placement requirements for the incoming T Level qualifications and the particular challenge of finding these placements in the creative technical industries, specifically:
 - Many creative digital and games studios often require the signing of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) which cannot be signed by 16-17 year olds due the highly secretive nature of the industry and strict intellectual property (IP) issues.
 - The nature of the industry (dominated by SMEs) could make it particularly difficult for indie studios to take on placement students.
- A significant minority of our learners have specific education needs (SEN), the vast majority of whom are on the Autistic Spectrum. For Year 2 Level 3 games provision the ratio is around 1:3 and our HE provision in games the ratio is 1:2. The majority of SEN learners do well here in college but often have difficulties when moving to HE at other institutions or do not go on to find employment (nationally “Only 16% of autistic adults in the UK are in full-time paid employment,¹). It would be hoped that an incubation studio could be a vehicle for developing employability and social skills and as a means of getting SEN students used to working with people in the “world of work”.

¹ The autism employment gap. National Autistic Society, 2016

- Employers at the steering groups said they often felt there were advantages to working with people on the Autistic Spectrum, but were often unsure how to best meet their needs and make reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act. This studio could act as a bridging mechanism for employers to work with people with ASD benefitting their own practice.
- An incubation studio would allow use to change the way we deliver content, in addition to traditional classroom based practice, the studio participants “employees” would learn using a problem based approach i.e. Real world commissions. PSD opportunities for communications and employability skills could be greatly enhanced, giving learners a safe, negotiated environment in which to interact with employers. Each learner developing a unique personal development plan catering to their specific social needs. These plans would be developed in collaboration with employers so that it works for both parties.
- The college is geographically located next to a developing “Tech Park” and we were looking for a way to capitalise on this opportunity to develop our links with employers.
- The LEP priorities for the region are focused around innovation and digital skills, this is an opportunity for the college to help realise this regional strategic plan.

Key Partners

The project has been inherently collaborative in nature and has cross-linked a range of diverse organisations. Broadly speaking these have fallen into 3 categories: education providers, local authority funded digital innovation organisations and commercial businesses both in and outside of the games industry.

We have worked with many different organisations, many of whom are SMEs – however some key stakeholders have been critical to the project, these are:

Proto – Gateshead Council funded centre for digital innovation – focused primarily around emerging tech and supporting SMEs to grow, with a priority to make Gateshead a digital innovation hub. Their input has been invaluable on the steering group and as a bridge to other digital organisations. They also provided large amounts of information on equipment needs and physical resources.

Software City Sunderland – Government run organisation that fosters the development of tech companies within the North East of England. Jill McKinnie has advised on a range of issues regarding skills and put us in touch with several major companies and organisations, including Tombola LTD. She has also been a key member of the steering group.

Creative & Cultural Skills – Melanie Shea MA. FRSA. has advised on her experience of setting up incubation studios in the past and has been a key member of the steering group.

Digital Catapult North East & Tees Valley - support businesses from across the North of England to encourage the adoption of emerging technologies and educate on the potential impact that this can have on productivity and performance. Digital Catapult NETV have helped shape the curriculum model and refocus us away from just the games industry as many of the potential clients for a studio would be from a very diverse range of organisations.

Cumbria University – one of our key education partnerships has been with Katy Little and her team at Cumbria university (Game Design), she has been a key member on the steering group, has advised on the HE curriculum model and has advised on issues such as software licencing and who owns the IP students would produce.

ESPA – Education Services for People with Autism – another key education provider who have advised on working with people on the Autistic Spectrum and have provided key CPD for both ourselves and the organisations we have worked with.

Keighley College – Part of the Leeds City Group, Keighley College have given feedback on our proposals and discussed how they are working with organisations outside of a major urban centre to provide meaningful work experience with the creative/digital students.

Tombola LTD – Tombola have been an enthusiastic and critical partner on this. Debra Ballantyne (Head of People) and her team have advised on how the service agreements and client structure could work, how and incubation studio could be financed, and has interacted with students (career advice and potential placements).

Northumbrian Water – have provided live briefs as part of the test for how commissions could work. Students have visited their facilities and are working on a number of commissions for NW.

Hammerhead VR – offered input for live briefs (some learners are now play testers for Hammerhead), and career pathway advice, and Sally Blunt a senior producer at hammerhead would like to be on the advisory board for this project.



Figure 1 - Senior GC Staff meeting PROTO & Gateshead Council management

Many permutations of how the incubation studio could manifest were considered, after consultations with various partner organisations 3 proposed options were shortlisted in the end these were:

Option 1 – T Level placement vehicle- (separate commercial entity)

A completely separate commercial entity would be established for the purpose of meeting the T Level substantive placement requirements. This may or may not be staffed by alumni or year 2 students on our HE programme.

Strengths

- The separate commercial entity would be able to meet the requirements of the T Level placements which require *“The industry placement must take place with an external employer (such as, it is on a site external to the student’s learning environment and not on another site operated by the provider).”*
- As an SME this would meet the criteria for being able to locate in Proto or similar facility (restriction on the EU funding for the build require that it is exclusively for the use of SMEs).
- IP ownership would not be an issue, all original work would belong wholly to the studio, 3rd party IP could be guaranteed using industry standard contracts.
- Eliminates any state aid controversy.

Weaknesses:

- The T Level curriculum for Digital: digital production design and development is not suitable for a creative game development (including the use of VR/AR), no reference to narrative, creative design skills, concept art, audio production, animation, 3D modelling and 2D digital imaging are all omitted from the core content² for this is focused very heavily on software development and traditional computing.
- Sustainability, as this would have to commercially funded, economic viability in the long term would be much harder to plan for and sustain.

² <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/media/1874/digital-digital-production-design-and-development.pdf>

- Set-up costs would be high; staffing, Legal, software, marketing etc. all at commercial rates.

Option 2 – HE Students (External to the college - eventual separate commercial entity).

Students who have completed year one for the HND games programme would staff the incubation studio with the ambition of becoming a separate commercial entity (that in turn could then offer T Level placements). These HE students would choose a specialism pathway mix to form a cohesive skills set based on potential client need. They would work on real world commissions/ funding possibly funded by commercial sponsorship. The studio would be located externally from the college in the tech hub and branded separately (though still being wholly part of the college). ***This is the preferred model based on Employer/Partner feedback.***

Strengths:

- External location is better suited to working with clients and on live briefs as a learning environment (especially for students with ASD), would allow for professional networking with other start-ups and gaming/VR/AR developers.
- Pearson qualification already in place and in use as qualification aim for students, this is highly adaptable to local need. Suitable for suggested specialist pathways (see Curriculum model).
- Eliminates T Level substantive placement restrictions.
- Allows for multiple specialist pathways to be chosen by students (in conjunction with employer input), specifically Developer/3D/Animation & narrative pathways.
- Lower start-up costs as still a part of the college.
- Tombola LTD have floated the idea of possible sponsorship for this as a funding model (that could potentially provide a surplus for the college and be a sustainable funding model long term).

Weaknesses

- Would not be useful in the transition to T Levels for Level three students as it would not meet the requirements of “externality”.
- Would not meet the SME requirements to be in Proto or other EU Regional Development funded facilities, so alternative accommodation would be required – though this would preclude being in Baltimore house, or the NDC.
- Moderate to high start-up costs – no use of educational software licences etc.
- Long term sustainability could be an issue without commercial funding (if sponsorship was not

sufficient).

- Perception by other SMEs – could be seen as a state funded competitor.

Option 3 – HE Students (Internal to the college).

Similar to option two but would be located within an existing college facility and not requiring sponsorship.

Strengths:

- Low set-up cost, we would re-use existing equipment.
- No need for a studio manager role.

Weaknesses:

- Difficult to foster as a “separate entity” due to physical locations.
- Lack of credibility as a studio as on college site, both by students and by commercial partners.
- Limited opportunity for students to network with other creative in other companies.



Figure 2 - Staff CPD at the Immersive LAB

SWOT Analysis – Option 2.

The project has had a number of steering groups to inform its content and direction, at the third steering group in October we asked the participants to create a SWOT analysis based on their knowledge of the sector and the project. It should be noted that the participants mainly come from outside education and this is reflected in the content of the SWOT.

Participants were: **Debra Ballantyne** – Director of People Tombola LTD, **Mark Scott** – Recruitment Business Partner – Tombola LTD, **Melanie Shea** – Partnership Manager – Creative & Cultural Skills, **Katy Little** – Course leader Game Design University of Cumbria, **Jill McKinnie** – Innovation and

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Allows for Flexibility/ Fast Prototyping</p> <p>Fosters Talented Students</p> <p>Employability skills development</p> <p>Opening up previously unknown opportunities</p> <p>Facilitates the creation of an advisory board</p> <p>Offers sources of CPD and Staff training</p>	<p>Long-term funding could be difficult</p> <p>Clarification of project scope</p> <p>Employers may not be ready for employment challenges</p> <p>*Skills of existing workforce (neurodiversity)</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>*Skills of existing workforce (neurodiversity)</p> <p>Free Training (upskilling of staff)</p> <p>Employers get to work with people on Autistic Spectrum (CPD).</p> <p>Employer Access to talent streams (Students accessing employers)</p> <p>Sponsorship opportunities (as potential funding model – Service level agreements)</p> <p>Bring together big employers to affect landscape of NE</p> <p>Massive opportunity for young people.</p>	<p>IP issues</p> <p>New project – no precedent</p> <p>Timeframe to establish and not lose momentum.</p> <p>Potentially seen as competition by SMEs and smaller start-ups</p> <p>Need for appropriate location.</p>

Addressing Weakness and Threats

Weaknesses

Long-term funding could be difficult

Some concern was raised over funding challenges. Meeting with the College business development team have been fruitful in this respect. There are various funding streams available to address capital expenditure and the college has some experience of positive bids for this.

Tombola have suggested a sponsorship based model could be used, with different levels of sponsorship available to employers – Gold, Silver, bronze for example. This would be similar to a retainer system and would also help determine the employer board and skills mix of the studio. They are happy to consult on how this could be achieved and even as a potential surplus generator for the college.

Clarification of project scope

As a result of this concern, we narrowed down the project scope to option 2, clarifying what the studio would be. Some issues around scale still exist, these would be dependent on funding as outlined above.

Employers may not be ready for employment challenges

This concern was around the inexperience of some managers being unused to working with people on the Autistic Spectrum. ESPA are going to provide CPD sessions around this, as well as college staff working with managers for partner organisations in order to facilitate professional development around these E&D issues and support our partners.

***Skills of existing workforce (neurodiversity)**

Some debate around this area stated this was seen as both a weakness currently – too small a talent pool in certain areas has created significant wage inflation. This was also seen as an opportunity by employers as a means of addressing these shortages by creating and influencing the talent pipeline.

Threats

IP issues

This was always going to be a potential issue, as to who would own the Intellectual Property rights for

the work the students were creating, it was suggested that a standard client contract would deal with this issue. Succinctly, clients would retain all IP right to their property. This commerciality would also require the need for commercial software licences.

New project – no precedent

Due diligence, transparency and regular communication with partners should mitigate most concerns around this.

Timeframe to establish and not lose momentum

It was felt that whilst this is an exciting project, the timescale needed to establish this could be a factor in losing momentum as other priorities jostle for attention. It was agreed that should the studio go ahead a dedicated project/studio manager would be needed to maintain momentum, develop new client bases and keep partnerships running smoothly.

Potentially seen as competition by SMEs and smaller start-ups

This would need to be addressed sensitively, both in how we pitch partnerships to other tech companies, but also in how we bid for business. Marketing to work on stressing that we are a supportive presence and can be used as a resource by the local business community to the benefit of all.

It was also suggested that we could use our own social capital on this, especially at industry networking events.

Need for appropriate location.

All parties felt that it was in the interest of the project that it be located either in PROTO or in the tech park developing in Gateshead. That to locate elsewhere would diminish the prestige of the project in the eyes of both employers and potential students, and would lead to a simulated feeling as opposed to the real life studio experience.

It was also noted that a significant amount of collaboration and cooperation occurs in centres like PROTO and that the value of this is often underestimated.

Resource requirements and example costs

The following are example resource requirements and costs (as of December 2018), this list is not exhaustive and is based on an initial cohort of around 10 students working in the studio. A complete business plan would be created to finalise funding and cost requirements should we proceed.

- 35-40 sq Meters of work space – negotiated from Council (possible peppercorn rent).
- 11 desks & chairs³ - £5k
- 11 high-end PC workstations £12k
- Graphics Tablets x 11 £1k
- Hi-resolution Printing facility - £600
- Design software
 - Adobe CC x6 – approx. £4k/yr
 - Unity x2 – approx. x2 – approx. £3k/year
 - Unreal Engine – no cost
 - Maya & Studio Max x3 £7.5k/yr
- Project manager - £26k
- Branding & Marketing – (done in-house by marketing team)
- Administration services (in house at college)

Estimated start-up cost (with 20% contingency) approximately £70k.

³ 6 if the studio is staffed pro-rata (2 cohorts working part time over a week would reduce costs and space requirements).



Conclusion

We hope to proceed with the creation of the incubation studio, based on the significant opportunity it presents, most significantly, but not exclusively in:

Educational benefit – our partners unanimously agree that this is a fantastic opportunity from an education perspective. Not only does the studio give the incentive of real work experience, the entire point of it is the “soft skills”, social and employment that it would foster.

Confidence and interpersonal skills would be boosted by the networking and collaborative opportunities of working within a studio.

Problem based learning/problem solving – a critical skill in all aspects of life, but particularly in the creative sector, where interpretation of brief/client needs is imperative.

A critical aspect to the development of OTLA for the studio would be an individualised learning and development plan. This plan would be multi stranded and informed in a collaborative way. The learner would be at the heart of this plan. Learners would self-identify (where possible) their own social and

learning priorities, in much the same way they feed into an Educational Health Care Plan, along with, teaching staff and LSOs. Additionally, partner businesses would input into this process, so that it is informed by potential future employers.

Learners would review these and regularly set targets and KPIs for their progress, similar to the way an appraisal system works. Barriers to success could be quickly identified and targets and coaching support from staff set to help overcome these.

The portfolio of work the learners would amass and curate would be informed by a supportive network, this in turn would be used as assessment evidence for the qualifications, building on the courses existing success in using a range of non-traditional assessment methods.

Aligns with LEP/College Values/ Feedback from employers – this project would align with the North East LEP focus areas, specifically: *innovation, skills, and employability and inclusion*. When bidding for capital funding it is critical that we align with these priorities.

Employers have repeatedly told us that there is a skills shortage in this area, and particularly in the North East region, leading to costly wage inflation for roles that would not usually attract the kinds of salaries that they do here. Add in the uncertainty of Brexit and the high proportion of non-British, EU nationals who work in the industry and this could give those organisation a collaborative opportunity to develop a significant talent pipeline, creating jobs, fulfilling the skills gap and cementing the college's reputation for outstanding customer service to all our stakeholders.

Sustainability - once sustainable and potentially a separate commercial entity, the studio could be an excellent vehicle to help facilitate work placements for L3 students on T Levels, this could be a rolling programme and in addition to our studio, the partnerships we make with other creative digitals could lead to a network of future placement providers.

Inclusivity - at the heart of this project has been a way to build on the success we have working with students who have SEN issues. This project could be an amazing incubator for students with SEN needs, giving them the life and career opportunities that they are statistically likely to be denied.

Student impact of the project so far has been significant for a number of our students with SEN; to give a salient example – one student who is working on the Northumbrian Water commission who was unable to speak to staff at start of his Level 3 course, now able to present to employers **and reactively** engage with individuals in a professional manner despite the difficulty of Asperger's in social setting (especially dynamic and unusual situations).

Gateshead College - from a Gateshead College viewpoint, this project aligns with all 6 of our values, further capitalises on and grows our reputation of working with innovative, successful, forward looking organisations.

If successful this could be a marketing and reputational coup, building on similar success stories such as the prestigious Plan B. This project is our opportunity of working with globally and nationally significant businesses and organisations to develop the most highly prized students in the jobs market, truly giving our games graduates the Employment Edge.