



Connétable Steve Pallot
Chairman, Digital Skills Scrutiny Sub-Panel
Scrutiny Office
States Greffe
Morier House
St Helier
Jersey
JE1 1DD

Wednesday 19th February 2013

Dear Connétable

Digital Skills Review

I write in response to your letter dated 18th November 2013. Firstly, please accept my apologies for the delay in responding and making this submission. It is something that I am pleased to be able to do and hope that it will be of benefit to you and your panel.

In order to add context to my submission I thought it would be best to give a brief outline of E-scape and the nature of business we undertake, along with some of the challenges that we face as a rapidly growing digital business based in Jersey.

E-scape Interactive Limited

E-scape is a digital agency solely based in Jersey. The company has been operating since 1998 and at present employs 21 people in Jersey. We service many local clients, however some 65% of our clients are based outside of the Island.

Our work ranges from digital marketing, which takes the form of planning, running and monitoring digital campaigns for our clients, to developing complex online software platforms, websites and mobile applications.

For over 10 years we have also been developing online niche gaming products, with one of our largest clients being Camelot, the holders of the license to operate the UK National Lottery. We are also working with Lottery agencies in the US and are actively developing relationships with gaming operators across the globe. Our gaming products are also being integrated into social gaming products. We anticipate that this will be a huge opportunity for our business.

Generally, our skills requirements are broad and include disciplines such as coding, design, user experience, project management, digital marketing techniques, statistical analysis, game development and mobile application development.

The company has seen strong growth over the past 4 years and plans to grow by a further 35% over the coming 24 months. We consistently find the recruitment process to be time consuming, expensive and restrictive upon growth. At present we have three significant vacancies within the business and, having struggled to find suitable candidates with the relevant skills locally, we have been forced to look outside of the Island.

E-SCAPE INTERACTIVE

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E-scape recognise that there is a skills gap in our sector on the Island and as such we actively make every effort to do what we can to narrow that gap.

We are actively involved in the Project Trident programme and we provide places for undergraduate work placements. In fact we have one working in our offices at present. We also provide summer placements to university students.

We have provided trainee places to employees and actively mentor and train staff from within and, where necessary, send staff on industry specific training courses or bring trainers to the Island.

We also run training courses for our clients and their employees, particularly in the digital marketing arena and have worked with Highlands College to provide lectures in digital.

So you can see that it is important to us that a higher level of digital skills is achieved locally.

Moving on to look at your Terms of Reference, I can say without hesitation that we fully support the initiatives and objectives of Digital Jersey and the Vision for IT in Education. Clearly, with the impact that the skills gap is having on the growth of our business, any initiative which lessons that gap would benefit E-scape.

Looking more closely at the targets that have been set for growth in terms of jobs in the sector by Digital Jersey I would say that they do seem extremely ambitious but their approach appears sound and I am a fan of the initiatives they are putting in place such as the Digital Learning Hub.

I anticipate that the TAG group for Education formed under Digital Jersey will drive the relationship between business, education and government when it comes to embracing and encouraging the interest and need from a more digitally enabled society.

However this enthusiasm and drive will need to be sustained over a considerable number of years in order for it to bear fruit. Also, if the way in which we adopt digital technologies continues to change at the pace we are experiencing at present, then any approach adopted will need to be flexible in order to accommodate that change.

I believe that there is going to be a job of work to do to get the teaching skills in relation to digital up to a sufficient level of understanding of the subject matter. I am not questioning the quality of teaching, more I wish to stress that teachers need to recognise the challenge and be prepared to embrace it. The likelihood is that we will need to import talent into the teaching fraternity in order to expedite this, even if it proves a difficult pill to swallow.

As you can see from the breadth of skills that just our small business requires there is not just a need to develop a workforce filled with coders, but more a workforce which has an awareness of how digital technology influences or can be used to influence all aspects of business.

It is down to Digital Jersey to lay the framework for digital style business locally that will encourage school leavers and graduates to take an interest in working in the local industry. We must have a strategy that avoids delivery of a first class education which is then swallowed up by more attractive opportunities offered outside of the Island. I believe that this can only be achieved by some form of incentive scheme.

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Over and above the considerations I have mentioned I can say that I am extremely excited about the opportunities that these initiatives present us with and if there is any way that E-scape can contribute to these initiatives we would like to offer our help.

One starting point which may spark the interest in school children might be to let them see some of the work E-scape are doing. The game development we are engaged in may well be a useful fit.

If you would like to discuss any of the comments made then please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Steve Hickson

Director

E-scape Interactive limited

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