

Advertisement

We're here to get you there.

[BOOK NOW](#)

Hertz

Paid content About

Creative leaders of tomorrow

Game on: the grassroots initiative helping indie game developers flourish



Mark Smith
Mon 20 May 2019 14:28 BST

[f](#) [t](#) [e](#)

Investing in an untapped pool of talent helps the country's gaming industry stay competitive internationally



▲ Toxic Games were able to expand their team after joining the Greenshoots programme, meaning that they were able to include ideas in QUBE 2 that were too ambitious for the original game

From seminal 80s gaming hits written by students in their dorms and bedrooms, to blockbusters that have redefined a whole generation of modern video games, the UK has had an undeniable impact on the international gaming scene.

Now the third biggest producer of games in the world, after Japan and the US, the UK industry is worth more than £3.86bn and accounts for more than half of the country's entertainment market, making it more valuable than music and video combined.

But with studios from Tokyo to San Francisco – and everywhere in between – competing for a bigger slice of that lucrative market, the race is on to find and nourish the best up-and-coming talent. To this end, Creative England and Xbox have been working together on the Greenshoots investment initiative, which provides investment support and advice to help independent developers get their ideas to the next level.

Nurturing new talent

Set to open for applications on May 21, Greenshoots is pitched at independent developers in England (but outside London), and has funds of up to £100,000 per company to help them turn their projects into the next big blockbusters.

Caroline Norbury, Creative England's CEO, says the need for schemes such as these is made all the more urgent by the fact games companies are still considered "high risk" by some investors. While they're willing to inject cash once they can see a product that's starting to realise its growth potential, many are reluctant to take a chance early on when that money is usually needed most.

"SMEs working in the games sector offer a high return on investment at later stages in their growth, and so are attractive to business angels and venture capitalists once they have a product and market traction. But private funders don't often make the very early-stage investment that would enable these businesses to get on the first rung of the business growth ladder," Norbury explains.

Since 2013, the scheme has made 28 investments, providing finance of just over £1m, including several on ID@Xbox – Microsoft's self-publishing platform for independent developers. These have included titles such as Aaero by Mad Fellows, and QUBE 2 from Toxic Games.



▲ 'It's quite eye-opening to see new players try out the game – you often return to the studio with ideas and improvements,' says Toxic Games' Jonathan Savery

Investment in action

They say that mighty oaks from little acorns grow, and the same is true for video games, with popular titles and even entire studios having very humble beginnings. Manic Miner, for example – one of the genre-defining hits of the 80s and still widely lauded by games fans as a title that helped shape the industry we see today – was programmed by 17-year-old Matt Smith in just six weeks. So one of the beneficiaries of the Greenshoots programme – Toxic Games – is certainly in good company.

Now an award-winning independent game development studio based in Bristol, Toxic Games was set up in 2010 by former classmates, Daniel Da Rocha, Jonathan Savery and Dave Hall, who began development of first-person puzzler QUBE as a student project at university in 2009, later releasing it in 2011.

Things started to take off in 2016, when they climbed aboard the Greenshoots programme, using the investment to expand their team as well as pick up expert advice and showcase their work to press and public at international events.

The sequel of success

Last year Toxic Games released their sequel, QUBE 2 on PC, Xbox One and PS4, and this year it was launched on Nintendo Switch.

"We had notable success with the first QUBE game and we'd have many requests from fans for new content or a new game, so a potential sequel was always on the table," says Da Rocha.

"There was also a whole range of puzzles, mechanics and ideas that were left out of the first game and were too ambitious to create with the small team, especially without a coder," he continues. "Therefore, we had a lot of content that could be evolved into exciting and challenging new puzzles."

It wasn't just about the investment though, explains Savery, citing industry advice and the chance to be involved at industry events such as Gamescom, EGX and PAX West. "It's effective promotion of your game and can help you gain followers of your launch campaign and also help you get attention from the press and publishers," he explains.

Seeing your pride and joy played by real gamers, and getting instant feedback, was also helpful when it came to reshaping the game play into something consumers would eventually want to buy, he adds.

"As developers, we're often too embedded in the gameplay and know it particularly well, so it's quite eye-opening to see new players try out the game. With QUBE 2 for example, there were puzzles we thought were relatively simple, but then they'd stump a majority of the audience – so you often return to the studio with ideas and improvements," says Savery.

Gaining a platform

It's not just the developers who stand to benefit from grassroots schemes, but games businesses too, as these exciting new creations can attract gamers to a company's platform.

Agostino Simonetta, ID@Xbox regional lead, says working with Creative England on the project allows him and his team to see some of the best emerging talent around and get them on to their platform.

"We're committed to supporting independent studios. We started ID@Xbox more than five years ago and now have more than 3,000 studios making games with more than 500 new studios added to the programme in 2018. We also have studios in 67 countries and every continent apart from Antarctica," says Simonetta.

"We know that gamers love playing these games and independent studios working with us are seeing success, with more than \$1.2bn in revenue generated since the programme's inception," he says.

"I can't wait to see the Greenshoots submissions come through."

Discover tomorrow's creative leaders and check out the full CE50 list at creativeengland.co.uk/ce50

Topics
Creative leaders of tomorrow
advertisement features



[Reuse this content](#)

Advertisement

accenture

DISCOVER YOUR POWERFUL MIND

EXPLORE OUR APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMMES

Advertisement

In a villa?

HomeAway

Related content



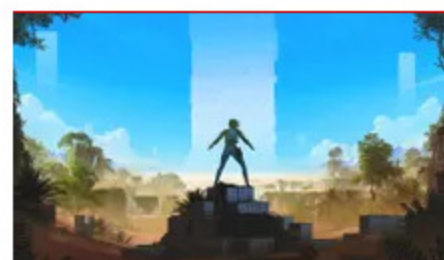
Creative businesses coming to a screen near you

Paid for by
creative england



Horror games and holograms: how creative startups are making waves home and away

Paid for by
creative england



Game on: the grassroots initiative helping indie game developers flourish

Paid for by
creative england



How leading tech firms find creative ways to finance growth

Paid for by
creative england

Sign up to our daily email

Email address

[Sign up](#)

About us
Contact us
Complaints & corrections
SecureDrop
Work for us
Privacy policy
Cookie policy
Terms & conditions
Help

All topics
All writers
Modern Slavery Act
Digital newspaper archive
Facebook
Twitter

Advertise with us
Guardian Labs
Search jobs
Dating
Patrons
Discount Codes

Support The Guardian

Available for everyone, funded by readers

[Contribute](#)

[Subscribe](#)