

SUPPORTING INFORMATION FOR SECTION 3 in Halfbrick's Senate Inquiry submission 18092015

Over the years, we have experienced a number of difficulties in the immigration process. With that, due to the closure of many games studios, we have noticed a significant reduction of local talent. Talent that existed has either been absorbed by the remaining companies, relocated overseas or abandoned the games industry. This significantly hinders our access to new industry knowledge vital to strategies and growth.

A byproduct of this has been the need for Halfbrick to access the knowledge of established and successful companies in the northern hemisphere to continue to develop our organization as an industry leader, while the marketplace continues to change. Unfortunately, the games industry has not been recognized as a career path in regards to visas and we are often involved in dragged out processes as we are trying to tailor our submissions to the existing guidelines that are rigid and out of alignment of the roles we hire for. We have identified areas that Halfbrick could use support in immigration, skills shortage and financial investment through grants.

Barrier with Immigration

i) ANZSCO Classifications

ANZSCO classifications are a skill-based classification used to classify all occupations and jobs in the Australian and New Zealand job market.

(<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/C5D9FD131FCB6A73CA257B95001310EE?opendocument>) These classifications are provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and collated through their independent research. These classifications are then defined within more specific subgroups. These subgroups are then the benchmark for all skills based applications to the Immigration Department for skilled working visas in Australia.

The ANZSCO classifications were only partially updated in 2014 and that was based on a minor update to the 2009 review, which again was only a minor update to the 2006 initial introduction of the system. Therefore, at this moment the ANZSCO classifications do not include games or mobile skill sets. Furthermore, it hasn't provided any additional subclasses or amendments to the existing IT subclasses which are also dangerously out of date. This then affects all stages of the process (i.e. EOI submissions and skills assessment), which are purely graded against ANZSCO definitions.

Due to the rapid growth of the games industry, Australia's need for skilled workers is well beyond the current resources we currently have in our country at this moment. This becomes significantly more problematic as the growth and evolution of the games industry continues to progress, and more specified and newly created positions emerge.

Recommendation

A complete overhaul of the ANZSCO classifications which has not been updated since before the introduction of the iPhone and the whole mobile technology emergence globally. This would include full updates to the IT sector and the inclusion of the classification of the mobile and games industry.

Skills Assessments

Skills assessment also has not taken into account the actual age of the industry. Apple released the iPhone in 2007, which was only 8 years ago. Skills assessments for more senior positions expect at least 5 years of industry experience in a senior position. This significantly hinders our access to talent as there are few people who are in the mobile industry that really fit that brief. Typically, it is the entrepreneurs, innovators or early adopters that are the most valuable candidates, however, they may not satisfy the tenure necessary for the positive skills assessment and as a result, will not be eligible to bring their talent and knowledge to the Australian market.

Recommendation

Reduce threshold for time in the industry in a related seniority. It is understandable to have a related field of expertise, but the seniority is not feasible due to the fledgling nature of the games industry.

Visa eligibility

There are a number of specified visas for the entertainment community that focus on films, TV and stage performances which presents a very interesting logic flaw in the process. These productions are able to apply for the 420 entertainment visa for employees, and if any of these entertainment industries based in Australia decided to develop an app to support their production, then they can apply for the 420 visa that will allow an experienced app developer to come to Australia and work on that app. However, if an app developers in the games industry based in Australia applied for a visa to hire the same talent they would not be eligible for the 420 visa and would need to investigate only 457, 190 and 189 visa options which are extremely complex procedures that do not align to our fast moving and every changing mobile games industry.

Recommendation

An alternative would be to amend existing, relevant visas to cater for mobile/games. Specifically, catering the 420 visa to include the games industry as an entertainment group and having their eligibility included in this application.

Skilled Occupations List (SOL)

In the similar vein as the Skills Assessment, the application for some visas rely on that skill set being represented. In the case of the Skilled Occupations List, the games industry are not catered for. Therefore, applying for skilled migration visa like the 457, 190 and 189 visa (which are in most cases our only option) are not approved due to the role not appearing on the Skills Occupations List.

There is however, a large push to represent the IT community on the Skilled Occupations List, but these specifications are again linked to ANZSCO (which does not acknowledge games) so we are again not represented as a needed skill for migration.

Furthermore, there are games specific roles that do not exist in Australia such as User Acquisition experts, Manual Quality Assurance testers, Advertising Operations Managers and Games Data Analyst, Economy and monetization experts.

Recommendation

Include mobile and games in the IT requests in the Skilled Occupations List. Furthermore, include roles that are not specifically related to game development such as game economy experts, user acquisition and digital marketing experts.

Visa processing and communication

In recent applications, we have found that we do not have a specific contact with the government to assist us in applications for visa. We need to email questions to a generic email address that takes at least 1 week to respond. In many cases, the response is related to eligibility in submitting our visa requests when we don't actually have a specific visa that relates to our field (as per our previous points regarding ANZSCO and SOL). These email discussion may take over a month to conclude which delays our application.

Furthermore, the 400 visa is processed offshore with absolutely no team to contact regarding requests for more information or processing times. As a result, we are often waiting with no response for visa processing that affects the start date for a number of our skilled talent from overseas.

Recommendation

A state government body (such as Trade and Investment Queensland) should be a centralised hub for the games industry to access the wider immigration processing centre so we have a central point of contact and an avenue to escalate late processing times and/or issues with applications.

Grant schemes to support skills and business growth

Internships and internal business projects

Halfbrick continue to hire straight out of University graduates and invest heavily in their training and development. However, our current operation will only be able to support a small amount of the talent financially, but it is not enough to significantly improve our base skills in the industry. With grant support, we can continue to hire interns and graduates and expose them to exciting new R&D projects that we do not currently have the bandwidth or allocated budget to investigate.

Halfbrick also aims to create a games incubator and look to support up and coming talent. With tailored grant initiatives, we can create start up business opportunities with the potential future leaders of our local industry. These opportunities could include R&D projects and gamification projects that we do not have the bandwidth to take on.

Recommendation

Developing a grants program that allow established business that are able to take on interns and graduates while they expand. This grant would be there to offset the financial burden onto companies for taking on unskilled labour. The company would take on part of the financial burden, but will in kind provide actual employment and training to improve our national skill base. This grant could also assist in taking on PhD or Honours students to work on R&D opportunities within these businesses.

Travel grants

Due to our established brand, we have had huge success in securing brand partnerships from international industry events such as GDC, China Joy and E3. At these conferences, we were able to secure or establish partnerships with Skittles, Fox Entertainment, Universal/NBC and a number of other major partners that we are investigating opportunities with. Travel however, is a significant outlay of costs that have very little early return and a number of businesses are opting out of these trade fairs. Which as a result, reduces the representation that our country, states and overall industry have on the global stage. There are a number of businesses in Australia that would have very similar traction at these trade shows, so financial support for travel to these events would be crucial in the ongoing growth of industry opportunities.

Recommendation

A travel grant that is managed by state level industry representatives such as Arts QLD, to assist in companies in each state representing their businesses to international partners. The grants would need to be at least \$15,000 per company but would be focused on the major industry showcases such as Google IO, E3, GDC, Tokyo Game Show and a few other key showcases. These events are essentially trade missions to international players.

