

Inventors gathering steam

Games from a college business accelerator programme are going global next month, Jayne Atherton reports.

Two games developed by entrepreneurial students have been accepted in record time for listing on a global website dedicated to commercial games distribution.

The games, called "Dolly" and "Split" have been created in the studios of Auckland's Media Design School.

Starting out as academic projects, they were taken up by the school's new business accelerator programme and introduced to the world via the online gaming community, "Steam Greenlight."

US-based Steam Greenlight is owned by Valve which is one of the world's biggest game development studios. Each of the Kiwi games was accepted in a record 10 days after votes poured in from international gamers who tested out the prototype.

Now, both games are being polished in preparation for launch on the fully commercial site "Steam": next month and both teams have won scholarships to the Games Development Conference in San Francisco in March.

It's a first success story for the Media Design School's year-old Studios programme, which aims to develop students' design and game development skills but also to hone their business know-how to propel them into a commercial career.

The five-strong Split team has formed its own company to market the game called "It's Fine" games.



The team behind the development of Split, left to right, Brianna Fromont, Claire Barilla, Tom O'Brien, Brian Rochat, and Kelsey Schevrich. Below, a screen shot from Split and right, Dolly developer Blake Wood. CHRIS SKELTON / FAIRFAX NZ

Team member Tom O'Brien said: "We are thrilled by our success as we were only second year students at the time of developing the game and really didn't expect it to get such a warm reception on the international stage.

"The game is based on a puzzle – a cube with splits into minicubes which go on a journey through different environments. The aim is to reassemble the original cube at the end of the journey."

First year student Blake Wood is the designer of "Dolly", a whimsical game which allows

gamers to experience the world of a young woman facing death from a terminal illness.

Wood, who gave up a job in graphic design, to go back to college to follow his dream of becoming a games artist said: "I am really surprised by the success of the game and really looking forward to getting it launched and onto the market."

The school's accelerator programme offers students industry mentorship and help with licensing and other regulations to allow them to commercialise their academic projects.

Programme director, Jackie Young said both games showed a



level of sophistication and maturity which was remarkable to young people at their stage of development.

"Typically, a game, if it is going to get through the Steam process for example will take about four weeks or more to be accepted and many never are," she said.

In New Zealand, the direct contribution of the games industry to the national economy was \$98m in 2014.

