

# Art of the Possible: Building Inclusive & Accessible Immersive Experiences

## Webinar Transcript

FIONA KILKELLY:

Welcome everybody to our early lunchtime session today. Thank you for making the time to join us for our session on building inclusive design and accessibility into the development of immersive experiences. As Bea said, my name's Fiona Kilkelly, I'm executive producer here at story Futures Academy which is the UK's National Center for immersive storytelling in partnership with Royal Holloway and NFTS.

But before we get started I wanted to share some background as to why we made the time today to bring us all together, those of us with an interest and a passion for immersive and inclusive design.

Over the last 4 years, StoryFutures Academy, we've been designing and delivering a range of development opportunities to support our UK creative community, to make world leading immersive content and products and services and we've been looking at how we can help immersive content creators to design develop and produce immersive storytelling experiences that are the best quality experience possible for everybody in a way that everyone can enjoy.

And the way that industry best addresses this and does this really well is by building inclusive and accessible design approaches in the immersive content creation development and production process.

So why should you and the immersive storytelling community learn more about taking that approach?

Because embedding inclusive design in the innovation process, not only improves the reach, it improves the user experience and consistency of immersive content experiences for all audiences. And that might feel really obvious because everybody benefits the creators development - developers and users benefit - taking an accessible and inclusive approach ensures quality of design, excellent user experience, and much larger audiences, experiencing what you make.

However, we regularly come across people who struggle with making that a reality in their work, because they may not know where to go to for advice or where to turn to for support, and how to do this or for fear that they might get it wrong. So that awareness has led us to becoming more involved in building the support into the programs that we run and collaborations with fantastic partners and experts in this space has been really crucial in helping us do this.

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



So in 2022, we ran an inclusive design, challenge and partnership with INGAME and Open Inclusion, where we helped teams learn to apply innovative approaches and toolkits to design, test and deliver immersive content that's more accessible to those with permanent and lived experiences of disability. So we took 8 teams through a innovation design lab and followed that up with an accelerator and funded 2 projects to create prototypes that demonstrated best in class inclusive design practice.

We also designed and delivered one of the UK's largest community, immersive storytelling projects ever, called StoryTrails which was led by StoryFutures Academy. And this allowed people to experience their towns in completely new ways through augmented and virtual reality, and we trained 50 young creatives in immersive storytelling to work with hugely diverse teams, the length and the breadth of the UK. And at the heart of the StoryTrails project, really is a project that focuses on accessibility and inclusive design with the communities that they co-created those experiences with.

And lastly, in development, is a new £1 million project supported by AHRC, and led by Royal Holloway, called The Sensational Museum. And this is being led by Hannah, who's on our panel today. And she's working with researchers across the UK and looking at how to transform access and inclusion within the Museum sector by putting disability at the centre of museum practice.

So today, we wanted to bring all of those insights and experiences together and share them with you through our wonderful panel, and to hopefully help you better understand how to work and create in this way, and to demystify the process and assure you that you can do it it is achievable and with a little knowledge and support, it's all within reach.

So on that note I'm delighted to introduce you to our panel, here today with the intention to support you all in accessing that opportunity.

So I'd like to introduce Searra Leishman. Searra is a UX/UI Design Manager at Hyper Luminal Games and Independent Studio in Dundee, and Searra was a participant on our StoryFutures IDA accelerator in 2021. She's an avid champion of inclusive design methodology, and has spent the last 18 months working with the leadership team at Hyper Luminal to build accessibility and inclusive design into the ethos of the studio. Welcome, Searra.

We have Will Humphrey, who's Creative Director at Sugar Creative, a creative technology studio based in the UK. Will has led the delivery of some of many genres redefining AR experiences, including *Wallace and Gromit* and *Dr. Seuss*. He is a keen advocate of the ability of emerging technologies to act as a catalyst for positive change. Will also participated in our IDA accelerator last year, where they developed a visual language integration toolkit and BSL content for their new immersive game called *The Monsters Brawl*.

Next is Patricia Lalla. Welcome, Patricia! Patricia was a creative practitioner on the aforementioned StoryTrails. Patricia made an augmented reality hidden history trail about

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



the brilliant Trinidadian artist and pianist called Winifred Atwell. He was the first UK black music artist to top the charts, and who also opened one of the first hair salons for black women in the UK, in Brixton. And she's developing an augmented reality experience which focuses on all kinds of minority people through her company Will Skill.

Next we have Professor Hannah Thompson. Welcome, Hannah! Hannah is a partially blind Academic and activist, and her research focuses on the intersections between critical disability studies and French studies. She was production consultant on the Donmore Warehouse's installation, *Blindness*, in 2020, and she's leading on The Sensational Museum, the AHRC project that I mentioned earlier at Royal Holloway.

And lastly, but by no means least, is Christine. Welcome Christine, Christine's an inclusive researcher, designer and innovator. She is the founder and managing director of Open Inclusion, a global agency, based here in the UK, that she founded in 2015 to bring the value of disability and age inclusive insights to design and innovation. So Christine has been a core partner on our previous programs, and we've absolutely enjoyed discussing today. And she is going to generously facilitate our panel, and we will make sure we leave plenty of time for our discussion and Q&A towards the end of this session.

But I'm going to hand it over to you, Christine. Thank you.

CHRISTINE HEMPHILL

Fiona, thank you so much and welcome everyone to today's session. It's a real pleasure to be here with such an amazing panel for you.

I'm just going to start with a really simple question to everyone. There is so much movement in the world of immersive, it is a very fast-moving part of technology and engagement. What are the current leading practices? Recognising that they are always moving in this sector, in terms of where inclusive design has been put at the heart of a project. And just to start off, I might start with you, Will. Do you want to share some of your experiences about where leading practices with inclusive design centred in them are at the moment.

WILL HUMPHREY

I love the characterization that it's a simple question, because I think there can be no more complex question than how to integrate that. In terms of best practices I think the key change that I've seen is the "when", so not what is done, but when it's done. To, instead of look at things being bolted on at the end, but to put it right at the start, and not just right at the start, but right at the start, with an act involvement in going "What am I doing?" The excludes. So, instead of making a thing and saying, "How can we include people?" after the fact, putting it right at the start and saying, "What are we doing? What are we choosing?", that is then excluding people, and the impact of that is huge.

CHRISTINE

Will I absolutely love that, and certainly you know, in inclusive design we always say 1% at the beginning equals up to 200% at the end. So both in terms of cost, but also in terms of the

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



impact on experience and the exclusion, you know, we talk a lot about exclusion footprint. Everyone has one bit like an environmental footprint, there's no harm in having one, but be very conscious of what it is, and work very actively to minimise that. So to really beautiful points, there. Searra, if I can go to you.

SEARRA LEISHMAN

Yeah, I think those are really great points that, starting to look at it earlier in the process is so vitally important. I think the other thing that is really critical in terms of that process is understanding right at the beginning that it is not the responsibility of one individual. It takes a village, and the more that you can get that buy in from the rest of your team, from the stakeholders, from investors, Well, then, it's got much more opportunity to succeed, and I think the other part of that is exactly as you said, Christine, thinking about that footprint like. Who are you actually unintentionally excluding? And making sure that your entire team understands that from every angle of that production process, so it's not just falling to a UK designer to think about how to design around it, it's actually, you know, something that everyone is starting to co-design around and understand the problems better together.

CHRISTINE

Searra, I really love that, you know. Inclusive design is a team sport, and in fact, it almost has to be, because no single person, whether they identify as disabled or having an access need or not, can possibly have the lived experience of every everyone and the more perspectives, we bring to it both personally but also professionally the more different roles within the creative process that are involved, the more easily you'll solve some of these complex problems, because what might not be able to be solved for example, in design might be able to be solved in dev . What might not be able to be solved in one group might have an alternate so thank you again, a really beautiful point.

Hannah, I'm going to come to you next, but actually give you a slightly different question. We've heard about some of the points of which, and the who of which, but in terms of approaches to engage a audience broader audience, what some of the practical how's that you have been involved in, that you'd recommend to people to think about an approach that really works, to engage with inclusive design.

PROF. HANNAH THOMPSON

So I think the the point about starting, you know, early and embedding it from the beginning is absolutely crucial. In terms of engaging with a wide range of experience, there are 2 things that I say work. The first is to make sure that your team includes people who might, who might belong to the traditionally excluded groups. So, you know, have a kind of a diverse team of people, and also make sure that if you're bringing consultants in, or you're bringing kind of people with lived experience in that, they're properly recognized and and paid for their for their time. And then I guess going on from that, the whole issue of co-creation is really important to to kind of try and use that as an approach. It's not always that easy. It can be. It can be really time consuming, and it can be more expensive than kind of traditional ways of creating, and it can be quite destabilising, because your ideas are always being

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



challenged and you're kind of always having to think about various different options. But it can lead to much more authentic experience, I think.

CHRISTINE

I absolutely love that. And I think we talk a lot about, for, with or by. Are you designing for that group over there? With that group? Or is it designed by that group? And that yeah, you've beautifully kind of illustrated there, in when do you bring people in? And where in the creative team that fair remuneration, but also fair sharing of power. Not just listening, and then still making the decisions separately, but actually that are created by rather than just with. So, thank you. And the last thing I picked up there is that complexity. It is complex, working with more constraints, but working with more constraints, creates much more beautifully differentiated and powerful content. So, for all that this is complex, it has an incredible power, by working through that complexity, to an outcome that will just be so much better.

Patricia, I want to bring you into this in terms of approaches. What's worked for you, and what would you recommend to the audience here today?

PATRICIA LALLA:

I think what's worked for me is that I agree with everyone talking about how you need to think about these processes at the very beginning. I think the approach is really, if you're a creative person, you're lateral thinker. So, really, perhaps the best way to approach it is to think of it in this way, and actually your projects could be a lot better if you're thinking about inclusivity. So it's almost like taking the stigma away, which is being something that maybe has come down through the twentieth century. You know we're in a new century now, and perhaps we will need to start thinking about things in a new way. So I think it's almost like a change of mind frame, basically, how you approach projects completely.

CHRISTINE

I think that really calls out something that is worth noting to people, that this we're not starting from a neutral position. I had the pleasure of hearing David Olusoga the other day, talking at the Market Research Society about how history impacts the present, and I think you talk about stigma - it is in the way we design things today, it is embedded in the water that we swim in, and we don't necessarily see it. So we're not starting from a neutral point. And it's really important to recognise our starting point and then work forward very proactively. Will, I would love you to jump in on that, please.

WILL

I just wanted to add to that that what we've been describing there is something which is better. And when we talk about commercial experiences, better becomes quite a complex question. And where we've seen creating things which are morally and intellectually better, more inclusive, not rooted in traditional institutional racism, for example, what we've ended up with is not just a better product intellectually, but actually a better product commercially, as well. That these are things which are not just moral questions, or we should do them, it makes it more complicated, blah blah. These are things that have a real tangible benefit on

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



the quality and commerciality of a product. And I think it's key, because what we're saying here is not is not just theoretical. Where we put this into practice, it's been hugely beneficial.

CHRISTINE

Thank you Will. And actually Searra, I don't know if you want to add to that, because you, too, have both done this and experienced it. You know this, it is valuable as well as value driven. So it is both sides of it, and it's highly differentiating, because we're starting from an environment that is not equal or equally considerate of all people's needs. Yes, Searra, do you want to share some of your experiences in that, and what that's meant to you as an organisation.

SEARRA

Yes, certainly, I mean, I think, as an organisation, Hyper Luminal is very passionate about its people, but we're also an ethos. Our studio is making games better, and that's not just about making good games, it's about really trying to change the development process, to make the environment somewhere that's safer, that's more inclusive, that is a safe environment for more diverse people to join the studio. And we do see that a lot in terms of the footprint of our staff. But that also reflects in the games that we're trying to deliver. We have a focus on wholesome gaming content, and so for us, inclusive design is just a natural fit for that, because it just means more people get to benefit from that right? And I think that's a really critical point, I think. In the past, trying to implement inclusive design and accessibility into projects you're always faced with the same issues of resource and budget, and ,you know, can you get investor backing and all of those things that are there sort of working against you. And actually, we need to change the conversation away from what is the cost to who benefits from this?

CHRISTINE

I absolutely love that, and when you put it so succinctly as that, it's like who wants to turn up to work to create a game that is not fun to play or not able to play for people. I mean, nobody. And what this is is a set of practices that you, as a group, as a paddle here, are sharing, that can allow people to turn up to work, to do what essentially most people want to do, which is create delightful, consistently usable, and enjoyable experiences.

In terms of, again, just getting to some of the practical, how; Hannah, if I can go to you and if you can share some of your experiences through your museum project. How does co-creation work in practice, and what's made it really useful and helpful, but also easier to integrate into the design outcomes in the work that you have done.

HANNAH

So, I mean in terms of in practice, it's about getting, we do this literally, it's about getting different people in a room early on and asking everyone to kind of contribute, not just to the to kind of an assessment of the product, but also to the methodology that we're going to use to create the product. So co-creation needs to be part of the methodology of the whole project rather than coming in at a later stage and what one of the things that I wanted to say about co-creation is that, I mean we've mentioned that it can be time consuming and it can

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



be expensive, so it's really important to take that into account and to budget for it properly. But its advantages hugely outweigh any potential costs, because everyone has a different perspective. And as a single person or as part of a smaller team, it's impossible for you to kind of appreciate or understand other people's perspective. They don't even occur to you as options until someone says them, and then you think, "Oh, well, that's just completely obvious, I can't believe I didn't think of that".

But quite often a pressure that exists is that you end up having conflicting desires or conflicting priorities. So you know, someone might say, "Oh, sound is really important," and I, you know, for me, that's the key thing, and it has to be it has to be really, really incorporated to everything. And someone else might say, "Well, actually, no, for me, I really need visual clues", so if it's thought about creatively, it can lead to a really interesting kind of a kind of optionality. So I think it's important, when you're thinking about inclusive design, to remember that not everyone needs everything. So a kind of user led set of choices or customizable setup, or that kind of thing can work really, really well, because it acknowledges the fact that we all engage with content differently. And we all have preferences, and also it acts to the kind of excitement of playing the game, right? Because you can choose, you can make choices, and you can customise. But it's not a kind of set of add-ons. It's there for everyone.

So, whether or not you have any access needs, you can experiment with different ways, different modes of playing. And for me, this kind of access works best when it's marketed to everyone rather than being, you know, talks about special feature. But if it's there for everyone. I mean subtitles are a really good example of this. You know, they started out as an access kind of tool for people. But now a lot of people who wouldn't define themselves as having a hearing loss use them for all kinds of reasons to do with learning a different language, or playing in a noisy environment, or whatever it is. So, making the kind of access tools mainstream is the best way to make everything inclusive. I've answered a slightly different question, but...

CHRISTINE

No, it's a number of really important points that you've just shared there, Hannah. And just to call out a few, that findability of optional engagement approaches is something we find over and over again is a critical element of good immersive experience that is inclusive. So not just creating it, but making it easy for people to find however they identify with- whether they identify as disabled, whether they just are in a noisy environment, or whether they have an access need just because they are getting older but don't identify as disabled, and would like it pervasively. So I think that findability, once it's created, is a really important point. That creative tension as well of what universal design can do, that kind of idea of one solution fits everyone which it works to a point, but beyond that, that having to build optionality and use eccentricity into it. So not to try and make something that will work everywhere for all people, at all times, but actually from the start, recognises the need for the user to change and modify at will. And actually Patricia, if I can go to you in terms of your work with StoryTails. How did that work in StoryTrails? And what would you like to share about that in terms of the actual co-creation process and outcomes?

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



## PATRICIA

Yeah, I mean, basically for StoryTrails, we had a crazy schedule, so that impacted on quite a few things. But I would say for me, the research element at the very beginning was really key. So basically, it really was focused around telling a story that you really wanted to tell, a hidden history, unless you know, hidden histories are hidden for a reason. So I found myself sort of actively going out and listening to people that are not necessarily the loudest voices. So those are the people that I really wanted to hear from in the local community. So really, it was like I was not making a brand film. It was something that was gonna really punch through, that could have universal appeal, but I really felt that I wanted to create something for people that don't necessarily have things created for them, which actually might appeal to a lot of other people. So for me, the research element, talking to people face to face or on the phone, that was a, you know, a really key aspect to the co-creation process.

## CHRISTINE

I love that, and it's finding those underheard voices that actually you find the very powerful stories that because they're underheard, they're actually particularly powerful and resonant for so many people because they're new, They're fresh, They're engaging in a new way that is not generally generally put in culture.

I'd love to go to Searra yourself, and then to Will in terms of the process of co-creation, really picking up on what Patricia just talked about in the research, and how the engagement worked. I know both of you engaged really, really, actively, throughout the accelerator process, with your design. What worked, what was challenging, what was exciting, what was different about that as a process?

Searra, you first, and then across Will.

## SEARRA

Yeah, I mean, I think Patricia hit it perfectly. That research part at the beginning of the process was really valuable, not just in terms of helping us to understand some of the barriers that we were facing, but I think also to create real and genuine empathy, right? Cause, it's so easy to think about accessibility and to treat it as a bunch of statistics instead of real people. And so, sitting down with a panel of people, and hearing what their barriers are, and what access needs that they deal with on a day-to-day basis makes it extremely human. Right? And then, when you're starting to design these things, you're thinking about real people. And I think that's so important.

And the other thing, I think, that really stuck out to us as a team was the fact that no one person, generally speaking, will deal with just one access need their often multi layered different access needs that they are battling with on a day-to-day basis and you have to understand when you're designing that you can't just design to solve for one access need, because that may still not solve the problem of access for that person.



# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



CHRISTINE

That is, again, a couple of really important things that people, not personas, that genuine humanness of the human, not some kind of cardboard cut out of a 2D persona created by someone without access needs, and that lived experience themselves is just so much easier to design, for one. It's more fun. Technically, it's more genuine. But it's also so much easier to anchor design decisions around, and that no jam jars that you know, putting a label as well, like "now let's design for people with sight loss, or people with difficult dexterity conditions", or what have you so many people actually more than half the people that identifies disabled have more than one co-occurring disability. So, humans are wonderfully human and have multiple, you know, potentially co-occurring needs together. So designing for whole humans, and by engaging with people at the start that makes it so much easier.

Will, your experience? Yeah, what was your experience in this?

WILL

Alongside the sectionality you just mentioned, which I think speaks very clearly to Hannah's point around having options like that was super important. The other thing that really came to forth was the paradox of ignorance. The fact that we don't know what we don't know. So when it came to research a lot of the times, it was not research into something that we wanted to research, but allowing it to be unguided, to go, "what is it that out there that we think that we know we just haven't even considered yet?", and I call that a paradox because you, as humans like, we all do it. We go "These are our experiences". What we know is intrinsically the limit of what we know and so we don't consider what lies beyond it. But obviously you are someone and they say, "obviously there's things I don't know" but when it comes to actual decision making, you can't include the things that you are not aware of, so it becomes paradoxical until you have that open, free discussion where you embrace not knowing and embrace finding that you're wrong or ignorant in some way, cause that opens your choices up significantly.

CHRISTINE

I think again, it's just such a beautiful comment. A lot of people have heard me, and I'll probably misquote it, now. I use the Mark Twain quote that "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so". And that's that unknown unknowns, and that learning we have that needs to be unlearned, essentially. And there are so many practices and underlying assumptions in the way we design, particularly technology, that are quite flawed. And the best way to challenge that is to just engage with people with very, very different experiences to your own. We often use that acronym SWIM TO SUCCESS, which is someone who isn't me, and as far as who isn't me as possible. And then, if you brought a third person in someone who's as far as those 2 people as possible. So go right to the edges to learn what those unknown areas are, so that you can actually deal with that paradox of ignorance essentially, by at least unpicking where the ignorance is.

And we all have that. So there's no judgement in that. That's just the reality of a complex, busy world that is centred around our own lived experience. So that's just the truth. It's the process that makes it easier to unpick that makes that a joy rather than a fear.

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling

NFTS

NATIONAL  
FILM AND  
TELEVISION  
SCHOOL



Arts and  
Humanities  
Research Council



INDUSTRIAL  
STRATEGY



Talking about choice and fears. What are the issues or challenges in doing this? We've talked about how we can do this, and some of the processes and practices that really work. This is an emerging technology as opposed to a very mature technology. In immersive, specifically, what are the issues in creating in a really inclusive way that exists within this technology range of formats. I don't know who wants to pick it up first, I might start, Hannah, with you. But please jump in, anyone, after Hannah, who would like.

HANNAH

Yeah, I mean, I'm not an immersive expert, and I'm not a tech person, and I'm not a designer, so I can't talk about the kind of practical things. But what I can say, and it kind of follows on from what you were saying, Christine, is that I think one of the issues is that people are a little bit frightened of making mistakes. And so prefer to er on the side of "Let's just do what we know already works". But actually I think now is the time, I think there is kind of a shift at the moment. You know, Searra was talking about kind of asking different questions, and I think now is the time to acknowledge that we've tried stuff - this didn't work, this did work - but also be open and honest, and say, "You know, we know this isn't ideal, but it's where we are at the moment" and just kind of like, as you said. Christine, embrace your lack of knowledge, but be honest, and you know, kind of be authentic about that. I think that people really appreciate that.

CHRISTINE

Hannah. Thank you for starting us there, because you will go to complexity in the moment in technical complexity. But human fear is such an important barrier to inclusive design, and actually, there's a lovely quote from Brené Brown, which is "People opting out of vital conversations around diversity and inclusivity because they fear looking wrong, saying something wrong, or being wrong, choosing our own comfort over hard conversations is the epitome of privilege. It corrodes trust, and moves us away from meaningful and lasting change" and I think it's so important to recognise, it is uncomfortable, not knowing, but everyone doesn't know. And that's okay. And actually, that's almost where working in a creative and emerging technology space. This is unknown to all of us in so many different ways, so don't dive into that unknown, and enjoy it rather than finding that that's fearful. If you turn up with respect and intent actually, that fear goes away very, very quickly.

WILL

If I may jump in Christine very, very quickly.

CHRISTINE

Please, Will.

WILL

Just on that fair thing, I think I'd be a little bit more didactic than Hannah was, and say you will fail. Failure is intrinsic. It is in it, a vital part of it, and where we found a lot of that affair can be mitigated is going in knowing that we will be imperfect, and in that imperfection, what we will be able to achieve is better than before, and growth. So a better product, a better outcome, a better level of accessibility. But understanding that that fear of failure is irrelevant

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



because we will be imperfect. I think that took a lot of the shackles off when we adopted that company wide.

CHRISTINE

I think that's the creative process. You need to be brave to create something that is powerful. So, you know, just taking that off and going "We are going to have difficulty a long way. There is going to be stuff that we have to U-turn, there will be stuff that we get wrong". If you want to create something powerful, that's the reality on any bend, including inclusion.

Does anyone want to jump in in terms of tools and technology, in the complexity of designing and developing in an emerging technology?

SEARRA

Yeah, I'll jump in on that, Christine. I think it's a really interesting space at the moment where I think we're starting to see a lot more leaders in the industry starting to think about accessibility. You know, we talked a lot last year about Triple A games and a great example is *The Last Of Us 2* which has an awful lot of accessibility settings in it. More recently, we've seen in games like *God Of War: Ragnarok*, which is great, but these are obviously, you know, huge big Triple A studios with 400 plus people, and a very large budget to be able to deal with some of those design problems.

And at the moment, what's really still lacking is open resource, open source tools that any developer can pick up and use and plug into their game to make it more sustainable for smaller teams. And so that's something. I think we're gonna start seeing a shift in. And it is something we internally had to build a tool for. I know Will and Sugar Creative ended up doing something similar. And it's something we've talked about internally is, do we want to actually share this software in this tool out to other developers, so that actually, we're sharing the load a little bit and making it a bit more accessible for other people to get onto the sort of the thought train, as it will.

CHRISTINE

I really love that, and yeah, we often talk about tool sets, skill sets and mindsets, and all 3 of them are progressing quite well. Mindset is turning up with the right mindset and recognition that this is just really valuable and powerful and generates value as well. Skill sets and tool sets are developing quite quickly, so you will share some resources at the end of this, as well. But that sharing that you and Will you have talked about doing? You've created a tool, you've created an approach that's reusable and really efficient.

And then I might actually, Patricia, go to you. You know, the other thing is, technology is creating more efficient ways. Do you want to talk about some of the emerging technology, particularly things like using quantum computing or AI to help create solutions? But also the risk of letting technology be part of the creative process.

PATRICIA

So I'm not a massive tech person that's all, as Will will probably tell you as well.

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



WILL

You do yourself a disservice, there.

PATRICIA

So basically, I actually love knowing what's under the herbs, as a creative person. And I think there is a bit of a myth that, you know, you're either in the creative camp, or you're in the tech camp. Tech people aren't creative, creative people can't be technical. And I think that might be another hang up from the flat screen world which might come from TV. That kind of stuff. I think that for creative people, if you can get hands on experience, all of these sort of game engines like UNITY, and UNREAL, they're free to use. You can download them. Just get learning, there's free tutorials on Youtube. If you basically step by step, learn to engage with the technology, just take it in kitten steps, you'll find out things about yourself and be able to actually build things yourself. So I'm very much all for getting hands on with technology. Also, don't get swept away by the latest thing, which is, you know. Artificial intelligence, it's great, but it might not be for everyone. So it's almost like keeping your eyes on the prize. What do you want to achieve as a creator, or whatever you are going to be? Read up on things, there's loads of resources, but also, you know, think about what you want to achieve and who you are achieving it for. That particular bit of technology might not fulfil that. So, you know, don't get swept away by the latest and greatest new trends.

CHRISTINE

I love that, and I think you know, AI obviously has a lot of complexity, has some real power, some real efficiency, but it does embed from past data and past practices, and if past practices have led to data and outcomes that are highly distorted and particularly exclusionary, it can amplify it forward without it being unpicked and seen very easily.

Now I'm very conscious of time and I want to leave time for questions now, but I'm just going to go around each of you in turn. If there is one thing, and if you can just keep it to kind of one or 2 sentences, for people to start, who are kind of going. "Yes, this is great. Where do I start?" What would your guidance be? As a kind of first step to get into it, depending on where people are at

Searra, if I can start with you.

SEARRA

Yeah, I think the very first step is speaking to the community. I think that's such a vital part, whether you've got a specific project in mind that you're looking to make more accessible, or whether you're just maybe looking to create a tool or a piece of technology specifically for something, get there and talk to the community and find out, you know what barriers do they face? What are they struggling with? What could you potentially add value to?

CHRISTINE

Thank you, Searra. Hannah?

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



HANNAH

So Searra kind of took my point there a little bit, but the second thing I would do is play with the different games and different settings, and you know, take yourself as a user out of your comfort zone and see what happens if you interact in different ways, but think about it always in terms of benefits. So what's doing something differently going to bring as benefits?

CHRISTINE

Thank you, really powerful. Will?

WILL

Let me turn on its head slightly. Not what you can do, but what you should avoid doing is assuming that you don't have anything valuable to add, assuming that it's too complex. So that thing that you think "oh, I'm sure everyone has already thought of that" has a good chance that they haven't, because we're all just a bunch of humans trying to make something that's better than before.

CHRISTINE

Brilliant. Patricia?

PATRICIA

Yeah, just say, once you've decided on what it is that you want to achieve, think about which immersive platform would be the best one for you. Because there's so many different, you know, different types of realities and it's good to explore each of them, I think. Because, you know, you never know, you might surprise yourself using a different platform from what you originally envisaged you were going to.

CHRISTINE

Well, I mean what wonderful 4 kind of key points. I've got: ask and listen; play and engage; don't assume; and explore the options in terms of formats and approaches.

Thank you so much. I'm going to go to questions now. Fiona, do you want to tell us which question you'd like the next?

FIONA

Great thank you, Christine. There's some really good questions coming in. James Taylor, if you wanted to kick off of the first one. That would be great. Welcome, James.

QUESTION 1 (JAMES TAYLOR)

Hello there. Sorry. Can you hear me? Okay, I'm in the middle of the teaching at the same time. Just asking the question around of course, there's a huge interest in the moment of ChatGPT, and its benefits on, kind of, scripting design and kind of various elements of immersive storytelling and immersive experience design. But do you see their potential for a benefit to inclusive design and accessibility? Or do you see that there's potential here for a negative impact on it, due to biases in the data that's being used to run these algorithms?

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



FIONA

Great question. Who wants to pick that up. Will!

WILL

I'm happy to jump onto that. It's a tool. It's an incredibly powerful tool, but it's one of amalgamation. So it's drawing, and it's amalgamating and spitting up one thing. What it doesn't do is deal with intersectionality, which is combinations of unique conditions, unique needs. So, whilst it can be incredibly powerful, and I do see a real role in it. I do think that using it in isolation will be incredibly reductive. So it is, as with a lot of tools, it will be using it in parallel with direct and much more detailed analysis.

CHRISTINE

If I can just jump in and add a little bit there. I think this is something we're thinking about quite a lot at the moment. Generative AI is, as Will said, incredibly powerful, and it will come in in places we don't see. So the ethicist in me would say, really challenge how you're exposing the failure of it, and considering how and who it might fail. Because it can be very convincing, but not necessarily highly truthful or real. And especially as I mentioned before, the thing about AI is it does predict forward from the past, and our past has a lot of failure in it, specifically, around inclusion.

FIONA

Alright! Thank you, Christine. I'm gonna move on to the next question. Are there already standards or assets for inclusive design and social VOR. You're nodding, Christine.

CHRISTINE

I just spoke. I'd wish that someone else... There are lots of resources, we'll put some of them in at the end. Right now, today, yesterday Axe-Con is on, which is one of the accessibility conferences, and I know a number of the talks there. It's run by DEQUE, which is D-E-Q-U-E dot com, SXSW, so on... There's a number again, of really good presentations on inclusive immersive. There XRA, which is the XR Association in the US has got their developers guide. Chapter 3, Able Gamers, and Can I Play That are different communities of disabled gamers who are getting involved in making sure that they're in that co-creation process. W3C, which is the World Wide Web Consortium, they run the accessibility guidelines that I work at, the content accessibility guidelines in 2D. They have XAUR, which is their XR guidelines that are really just requirements at the moment, as opposed to guidelines. And then there's lots of papers. So things like the IMAC paper which is I-M-A-C Peat dot org, put a paper out last year on immersive environments for inclusion. Please reach out for more. And XR association, So XR Access, actually has a really good summary of lots of resources that are trying to keep it up to date at all times.

FIONA

Great, and panellists you can always put into the chat any other ideas that you want to contribute to participants on resources whilst answering the questions. Thank you. Fantastic. A question coming in "When creating immersive experiences people have different styles of engaging, for example, an older person has to understand how every button on a remote

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



control works before they begin to engage” This question is, whether you think of a person as a player first, or a person with an impairment first, and how do you blend? Searra, you might want to pick that one up.

SEARRA

Yeah, so I mean, I think in traditional game design, we always tend to think about player first and player personas, because we wanna get to the essence of what is the fun that we're trying to design with the game that we're developing. But what we started to think about having done the accelerator last year was making those player personas more rounded and starting to think about other characteristics. So not just, how does a person play and what platform might they be playing on? But you know, who are they as a person? Do they have a particular characteristic that we can add to that persona? So that we're thinking about a little bit more about who they are, as well as how they play.

FIONA

Anybody else want to quickly pick up on that.

PATRICIA

Yeah, just add to that you'd also build into your process testing with your audiences. So you'll be able to find out what works for them and what doesn't work for them as you're developing your project. And that is a really valuable resource. Get the people that you're building it for actively using it as early as possible, so you can develop it with them in mind.

WILL

And just very quickly onto that. Players can't become players until the person knows how to play. So again it loops it back to the idea of, from the start exclusionary design. What have you done to provide a barrier to entry? And that may be something that you're not doing, maybe actively, but they actually need to understand. So that's where we always start.

CHRISTINE

Alright, If I can just add a little bit to that. A little bit light, early and often, is something we always say with research, and rather than trying to do it then and more with this big piece, just a little bit of engagement that just comes all the way through a project this is so much more powerful and efficient and - there was something else, but I have forgotten

FIONA

Doesn't matter. I'm sure it will come up in another question. Another good one here. How do we evaluate the level of inclusion of your design or product? How do we know if the situation's really improved?

CHRISTINE

Audience engagement and asking people. You're seeing who's there and who's not so this is where quant and qual kind of need to match together. So I think there's, a who is using various assets? So you've got StoryTrails. You've got the Museum Project. You've got Hyper Luminal and Sugar Creative. Things going out into the world, who's using them? And can

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



you actually engage with and see what characteristics they have? And thinking through how you're actually learning about different uses. So you can do the call to say, "Oh, we know we've excluded this group", but also go to places where some of that is, "I've mentioned able gamers, and can I play that?" so if you put something out there, going and seeing what people are saying about different experiences as well. Do the work yourself, but then, once things are out in the wild, you can go to the wild to find out.

FIONA

Right. Another question has come in on. Perhaps if one or 2 of the panellists could just touch on some of the accessibility features that you found were the most successful in your productions, and I'm sure that's going to vary from experience to experience, but one or 2 that really made a difference in terms of user and accessibility.

Would you like to pick that up, Hannah or Searra? I'm thinking Hannah, maybe, of some of your previous work.

HANNAH

Yeah, I mean, I can answer that more as a kind of user, than as a developer. So, in terms of sight loss, or blindness gain, as I like to call it. It's important to remember that there's people who would define themselves as blind or partially blind have some sight and so tend to function using a variety of different methods.

So things like high contrast and yeah, it's a really good example of something that you think. "Well, you know, let's just make it. Let's just include high contrast as a way of using colour for the game as a whole", because it's not gonna disadvantage or hinder people who don't need it. But it will really, really, really make a difference for people who do need it.

Text, like font size, text size is another one that people tend to think aesthetically that small is good in terms of text interventions, but if we kind of flip that and thought well, what about actually celebrating big fonts. I've never I've never come across, I mean, I'm thinking about museums more than immersive, but I've never come across someone who said, "Oh, I didn't like that exhibition, because the labels on the wall were too big, the text was too big," you know. But there are these kinds of aesthetic rules that curators and designers kind of have about things being minimal.

And then I mean I already mentioned captions. Obviously, that's a much more embedded kind of way of understanding. But voiceovers, you know, so if you, if you could hear a character kind of, or a avatar kind of thinking aloud, that can give really really important clues as to what's happening on location of objects so, I guess, making audio descriptions part of a narrative part of the game play rather than something that is additional that you'd switch on or off. So making it kind of designing it in the world of the game, I suppose, is what I'm trying to say.

FIONA

Great. Anybody else like to pick up on that one?



# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



PATRICIA

I was just thinking StoryTrails, we had remote versions of each of the hidden history trails, and that was really helpful for people who couldn't walk the trails. And I just think also, if you can't go to another part of the country, and you want to enjoy this in StoryTrails it was just a really great way of making something accessible to people. Just a really simple, effective way of making this project stretch stretch further.

FIONA

Right. And there's probably a couple of minutes left. I'm just wondering, Christine, is there anything you want to pick up on in terms of directing people for support? Next steps... You touched on a couple of resources earlier, and I see in the Q&A, there's a lot of new suggestions that people can look to. But yes, I think for those moving into the space, and a lot of our questions are focussing on, where do I go next? What do I do next?

CHRISTINE

I think one of the things I would really encourage people to do is to, and this is something Will does really beautifully and regularly, is to flip it on its head and go "Huh! How could taking an inclusive mindset actually change the problem we're trying to solve, the opportunity we're seeing?". So actually, rather than seeing this as, how might we just not exclude people? How might inclusion create an experience that is so much more powerful? And when you add to that, how might immersive creation in which we can solve old problems in new ways? There is so much power in that.

And you're just 2 little anecdotes on that one is Representation. So people seeing themselves in a virtual world in the way that they wish, and really thinking through a very inclusive way of allowing people to self represent, and that being much more open than it is today. And secondly, thinking about how the immersive world could actually showcase a more inclusive society faster than the physical built environment the current world can. So actually using this as a leader in how society can adapt to just the reality of human diversity and immersive is so powerful for that. So, rather than just seeing this, as how might we not fail? or how might we not exclude? How might we solve current major social issues and also major gaps in value that are sitting latent across society and fulfil them much more powerfully?

FIONA

Well, I just wanted to say thank you to our wonderful panellists for sharing their experiences. The good, the bad, the highs, and the lows, because it's a learning process for everybody. We are still very much in the early days of seeing wider adoption across the Immersive Sector, but there's such an increasing level of interest from the immersive community, and a growing body of support and resources.

And we know that the community and the creators and developers in this space: We know you want to get it right, we know you want to work in this space, and we know that the intention is there.

# StoryFutures

National Centre for Immersive Storytelling



I think, for those of us who are already practising and working in inclusive design and accessibility is to be there to support people and ask, how do we enable your intent to do this as efficiently as possible?

Remembering the words that I think have echoed from this panel today, which is embrace the not knowing that there's no wrong or right approach if the intention is there. So thank you very much, Searra, Patricia, Hannah, Will. And thank you so much, Christine, for facilitating a fantastic discussion. Close captions are available. The transcript will be available to download as well. The webinar chat, with all those resources. And Bea, thank you so much for supporting us, Bea, and facilitating the webinar in the background.

And thank you to all of you for joining us and taking time, and taking an early lunchtime to have this discussion, and please stay in touch with StoryFutures Academy for more support, more activity, and do let us know your feedback and how you enjoyed today. And we look forward to seeing you again in the future. Thank you so much.

Bye-bye.