



**StoryFutures R&D Seed Funding:  
Call for Industry-Academic Collaborations  
BRIEF FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS**

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## 1. The R&D Seed Funding Opportunity

StoryFutures exists to fuel innovation in storytelling through immersive technologies by bringing together creative companies and academics to work on cutting edge Research & Development. Our work so far has shown that such collaborations can generate exciting, blue sky ideas combined with pragmatic thinking about audiences, markets and business models, resulting in pilots that can scale into real-life products and experiences. We would like to enable more of our Universities' researchers to contribute to such work and grow a base for future collaborations.

We are excited to announce a seed funding call to support up to 8 new collaborative projects between academic experts and SMEs based in our region. Our academic community encompasses Royal Holloway University of London, Brunel University, the University of the Creative Arts and the National Film and Television school whose expertise spans creative, audience, technology and social considerations relevant to new forms of storytelling. Our geographic area of the Gateway Cluster and Greater London is home to some of the world's leading creative and digital innovators. StoryFutures will facilitate the academic-SME matching process by shortlisting academic colleagues, then advertising the opportunity to SMEs in our network.

We will fund projects that speak to the possibilities of storytelling – broadly understood – and next generation technologies. Our funding will prioritise projects that explore this application in the following areas:

- Marketing, including visitor experiences, and social media;
- Health and wellbeing;
- Games;
- Sustainability;
- Ideas that speak to the aims and purposes of [Festival UK\\* 2022](#), for which StoryFutures/Academy has been shortlisted; and
- Open call for ideas in areas not listed above.

Each project will receive £8,000 in funding, nominally split equally between the researcher and the SME. The projects will:

- Focus on early-stage innovation and concept development for creative, risky ideas that have potential to move immersive storytelling forward – whether in story form, technology or how they address audiences or markets – or a combination of these;
- Develop new relationships and partnerships between academic researchers and SMEs to build foundations for future work;
- Deliver any of the following:



- Early stage concept paper prototype: e.g. wireframes
  - Development of an existing prototype
  - A research funding application or clear draft and identified call to which the collaboration will apply
  - An industry or academic collaborative research report/article with an identified audience
- Produce a short research report including a plan for further development and sources of funding.

## 2. Process and eligibility

The opportunity is for academics at Royal Holloway, University of London, Brunel University, University for the Creative Arts (Farnham) and the National Film and Television School. We are looking for researchers interested in immersive and next generation storytelling and technologies – experience in this area is not required as this will be provided by the collaborating SME. We welcome researchers from the arts, humanities, natural and social sciences whose interests are relevant to immersive storytelling, technologies, business models or audiences.

Technologies we generally work with include Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, Immersive Audio, Artificial Intelligence and Haptics.

StoryFutures will advertise the opportunity to the SMEs once the academic participants are shortlisted for this particular call.

SME partners will be creative and or digital businesses based in the [Gateway Cluster and Greater London](#), with under 250 staff and €50m in turnover.

Successful applicant pairings will receive £8,000 to work on an R&D project together.

We generally expect these to be split 50/50 between the academic and the SME but there is flexibility if a different split is more suitable to the project, based on discussions between the academic and the SME collaborator. The SMEs will be asked to provide a match contribution to the value of £4,000 (e.g. staff time, IP, facilities or value of equipment used for the project).

**SME collaborators' geographic base**





### 3. What is on offer?

Academics researchers will benefit from:

1. A chance to work on an exciting, blue-sky R&D partnership to develop creative ideas and conduct exploratory research with leading immersive innovators;
2. £4,000 to enable their participation in the R&D process to use for administrative support, teaching relief, travel and subsistence, hardware relating to the project, research assistance and other similar costs;
3. Introduction to new companies and networks in the creative and digital sector;
4. An opportunity to develop new innovation and R&D collaboration skills, and a knowledge of immersive technologies for storytelling;
5. A new partnership opportunity and a foundation towards future collaborations and grants and impact case studies;
6. Demonstrable impact, external engagement and knowledge exchange with creative industries.

Researchers' commitment is expected as follows:

4. Contribute 10-15 days of your time to the collaboration offering expertise and co-developing ideas with the SME, supporting the SME in setting out the research questions, and in designing research and/or user testing activities (if applicable);
5. Co-write the end of project report setting out the key outcomes of the collaboration and next steps. You can find a report template [on this link](#).

We ask that researches seek the support of their Head of Department to take part in a possible R&D project before expressing interest in the call.

We will have other opportunities in future and will keep a register of academic interest for possible collaborations.





## 4. R&D Topic Areas

We welcome expressions of interest from researchers across academic disciplines who are interested in immersive storytelling R&D collaborations. Researchers can offer expertise in one of two ways:

1. Expertise in relation to immersive storytelling for example, creative development, formats, technologies, audiences or markets; or
2. Expertise in, or that can be applied to, any of the topic areas listed below.

The topics we will welcome interest in are:

- Marketing, including visitor experiences, and social media;
- Health and wellbeing;
- Games;
- Sustainability;
- Ideas that speak to the aims and purposes of [Festival UK\\* 2022](#), for which StoryFutures/Academy has been shortlisted; and
- Open call: ideas in other areas with strong innovation potential.

These are based on priority areas for StoryFutures and/or the immersive sector more broadly based on our existing expertise, the priorities of our partners, or where we see particular transformative role of immersive storytelling at this time. We are open to researchers proposing other areas of interest.

Projects can take many forms and may involve early stage prototyping, grey boxing, audience testing, exploratory experiments, or research and market analysis work. Ideas may focus on telling stories or engaging audiences in new ways, or have a more technology or market-specific aspect. They may focus on specific communities, age groups and/or settings, or have a broad application.

Technologies may involve virtual, augmented, mixed reality, immersive audio, artificial intelligence, haptic and biofeedback technologies. You will discuss specific ideas with the SMEs during and after the sandpit event.

We encourage academics with interest in StoryFutures or related work to express interest – even if your current idea does not fit this particular call, we will keep your interest on our register for future opportunities.

Example R&D collaborations we have supported are:

- [Kagenova](#) and Dr Elisa Ferre worked together on user research to understand the effectiveness of cutting-edge software aimed to reduce the nausea effects of cyber-sickness in VR;





- An innovative approach to interactive audio stories developed by Dr Nuno Barreiro and [To Play For](#) to accompany an interactive graphic novel;
- [Figment Productions](#) collaborated with Professor Mark Lycett and Ian Ferris to develop a successful bid to Innovate to support a new application of a room-scale immersive platform that has led to the Royal Opera House's first 4-D hyper-reality experience: [Current, Rising](#);
- [Reality Check Productions](#) are working on a new end-to-end Augmented Reality theatre app and benefited from advice on creative and audience considerations by Prof Jen Parker-Starbuck and Prof Helen Nicholson, and audience insight support from Dr Elisa Ferre.

## 5. Timeline and How to Express Interest

We will run a simple selection and matching process designed to be light-touch and foster collaborations with future potential, as follows:

**Stage 1:** We invite eligible Academic researchers to [express interest](#) by 6th December 2020. We will shortlist the ideas based on their likelihood of finding a partner and alignment with current sector priorities, and will inform academic colleagues of the outcome by 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020;

**Stage 2:** We will put a call out to SMEs 15th December 2020, shortlisting 10-16 SMEs to join the sandpit event;

**Stage 3:** A sandpit event on 27 January 2021 for academics leading shortlisted topics and SMEs to discuss their interests and start developing collaborative project ideas; and

**Stage 4:** SMEs submit proposals by 10 February 2021. Academics may hold a meeting with each SME to help them shape the ideas towards the application. Awards will be confirmed by 20th February 2021.

The projects will run during March-May, culminating in an event to share and showcase the work in June 2021.

**How to express interest:**

Please complete our short [expression of interest form](#) before 6<sup>th</sup> December.

