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**AHRC and BBC
Knowledge
Exchange
Programme**

AHRC and BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme FINAL REPORT

Reference: AH/H500057/1

University Partner

Organisation	University of Westminster
Department	School of Media, Arts and Design

Title of Project [up to 150 chars]

Knowledge Infusion Funding: Audience and producer engagement with immersive worlds

Start Date and Duration

Start date	12/01/09	Duration	3 months
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Project Summary

This project extended the original study on the BBC's virtual world for children, 'Adventure Rock,' which had considered how children inhabit and engage with immersive digital environments, and whether virtual worlds designed for children reflected natural imaginative play. The extended study had several aims, firstly to find out whether the children who participated between December 2007-January 2008 still visited the 3D virtual world, 12 months later. The study also sought to find out whether any of the other virtual worlds for children described in their media diaries were still popular and to explore findings on player orientations in a slightly different setting (requested by BBC Children's).

In addition the researchers organised two workshops for adults on the theme 'Public Service Virtual Places and Spaces' in order to infuse the knowledge (a) across the BBC into departments making content for non-child audiences and (b) to propose consideration of the idea of public service virtuality to scholars across the UK. Finally, responding to the call to work towards the production of a prototype, a week of work articulating three expressions of public service virtuality was organised with a designer from BBC Children's.

The original children from the London schools (one group aged 7-9 and a second group aged 10-11) were invited back to the BBC for a one day workshop. The children were first asked whether they still visited 'Adventure Rock'; only 20% of the younger children still visited the world and none of the older children did. The 22 children were next presented with eight orientations to 'Adventure Rock' and asked to 'be BBC Children's producers for the half-day', working in groups to imagine and design a virtual world, or place for one of the characters they found particularly attractive. The activity was also to test whether children would enjoy being involved in designing their own media, rather than simply testing producer-designed media prior to launch. The children explained their work and two designs were taken forward for consideration and discussion with the designer.

Two workshops with adults were then organised in BBC Television Centre in London and at BBC Manchester. 65 participants came forward from BBC departments across the country and from universities across the UK. There was a particularly good response from scholars interested in digital media and from producers interested in gaming, virtuality, public service media, and from media archives and history departments. The organisation for independent producers assisted by promoting the event to their members therefore there were also commercial producers present who were interested in making public service media for the BBC. Both workshops mixed producers and scholars equally around tables for the three hour creative session. The findings from the first study were presented to the participants for comment and this led into the setting of a challenge to build an impression of a public service virtual place or space in Plasticine (using methods based on those presented by Gauntlett, 2007). The groups discussed the value and potential of their idea together and then the concepts were presented to the room for discussion and review. The workshop closed with a presentation of the new beebac knowledge exchange network for producers and academics around public service media.

Thirteen ideas were presented to a designer in BBC Children's and three detailed scenarios were produced for presentation to the Future Media and Technology 'Rapid Prototyping Group', a workshop with the Rapid Prototyping Group is being organised. A workshop for BBC Children's producers is also being organised to review the findings from the original study and the extended findings from the second workshops for children and adults. Findings on how children might begin to take more responsibility for their own safety within immersive media and how parents might be able to help their children set a level of risk and/or a level of engagement by using 'dashboards' will be presented at the annual 'EU Kids Online' Conference on 11 June 2009.

Achievements against project objectives

The specific objectives of the extended project were:

(1) To build on our previous AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange project.

Our success criteria for this was whether we managed to aggregate producers and scholars interested in the potential of virtual worlds or immersive media for public service purposes – ‘strategic value’. This was achieved and indeed the London workshop was over-subscribed (therefore we operated a waiting list). One scholar travelled from Spain to attend, suggesting that the interest in the AHRC/BBC collaborative research projects has extended beyond the UK.

(2) To ‘infuse’ knowledge within the BBC and the academic community.

We have created an interest group of producers and academics who sent emails saying that they had enjoyed the day, had found it informative and instructive, and they wished to be kept informed of future workshops or meetings which might be organised to exchange knowledge between the two communities – ‘knowledge infusion’ and ‘knowledge exchange’. The knowledge which was ‘infused’ had several strands: Findings on behaviours of audiences in virtual worlds, the consideration of how virtual media might offer value for audiences and creative opportunities for producers, and the realisation that there is a community who have shared interests around the topic from industry and academia. The geographical distribution of the community was found to be far larger in the south of the UK but a strong group of producers and scholars was in evidence in the north (Manchester, Newcastle, Glasgow).

(3) To work towards the production of a prototype, within the three month timescale.

Our measurements of success were to (a) produce a ‘kit of parts’ from which the BBC’s R and D teams could begin to build a prototype; this was achieved. Three articulations of virtual environments were taken to the design stage. The first explored how a 3D interface might assist the audience (particularly children) to access and engage with the BBC’s history archives through a model of the Medieval London in 1066, the second imagined a future immersive collaborative newsroom where professionally produced content was supported by user-generated content, in a pan-platform way. The last idea was to produce an ‘Eco-world’ which offered the ability to explore a endangered habitats such as the Rainforest, Antarctica or under the oceans, to play games, to hold conferences and to access an archive of content on climate change and the ecology. The second criteria for success was to show ‘Innovation’ in action; we feel we achieved this well.

Other success criteria for the project:

(a) ‘Building on our understanding of children’s behaviours in virtual worlds’ - this was partly achieved. Our finding that ‘Adventure Rock’ – a world of solo play – was more attractive to younger children (aged 7-9) was again validated in the 2009 workshops, but it was not possible to explore the eight player orientations in detail in one workshop, particularly as the younger children’s attention span is much shorter than the older children. All the children were keen to be involved in creative work and planning or the exploring of ideas with BBC Children’s in the future, showing our finding that children want to take part in the making of media was sustained.

(b) ‘Value for Money’ – We used many of the materials from the last project and kept the expenses to a minimum. It was possible to organise three workshops and two trips to disseminate the findings. The public service broadcaster of Catalonia and the University of Vic near Girona requested presentations on the findings, and National Public Radio in the USA. During each visit in addition to presenting the findings the existence of the new beebac network was discussed. There was some indication that, if the AHRC/BBC knowledge exchange network is opened out to producers and scholars interested in public service media outside of the UK, there would be interest.

Project achievements against the objectives of the Knowledge Exchange Programme (see Funding Call Details, paragraph 4 http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/images/ahrc_bbc_funding_call_details.doc)

The aim of the programme is "to support individual or teams of arts and humanities researchers and BBC Future Media and Technology staff to work together on well defined collaborative research and knowledge exchange projects. The benefits from the outcomes and outputs of these projects should be of equal significance to both partners". Our existing partnership with BBC Children's has been consolidated and we have arranged a meeting in July to talk about future research collaborations. In addition, there has been interest from books and journals expressed which will result in further publications. All the research partners from the AHRC/BBC collaborative funding call will contribute to a book; *UGC at the BBC*. The researcher will provide a chapter provisionally titled '*Adventure Rock*': *Public Service Virtuality*.

Overall Project Outputs

Output/Outcomes	Code (For office use)	No.	Details and current status of each output or outcome, covering publisher information for text-based material; and venue, dates and description for performance/exhibition/ people-based activities. Indicate where audiences/activities are likely to be non-academic and/or international and where outputs are forthcoming rather than achieved.
Paper/Printed Outputs			
Book (authored)	A1		
Book (edited)	A2		
Book (chapter)	A3	2	<p>A chapter titled 'Adventure Rock', public service virtuality' will be written for a book on the AHRC/BBC collaborative research projects; <i>UGC at the BBC</i>.</p> <p>A chapter titled 'Facilitating Creative Audiences: Sociable Media Theory and Practice', for <i>The Public In Public Service Media: Ripe 2009</i>, to be published by Nordicom, December, 2009.</p>
Critical Edition	A4		
Journal Article (refereed)	B1		
Journal Article (non-refereed)	B2		
Conference Paper	B3	2	<p>'Virtual worlds -- Users and producers, A collaborative journey', Serious Games Conference, London, 7, May.</p> <p>'The Value of Risk', a paper on parental dashboards and virtual worlds for 'EU Kids Online' at the London School of Economics, 11 June, 2009.</p>
Catalogue (exhibition etc)	C		
Electronic Outputs			
Software development	E		
Database, digital archive or dataset	F		
Website	G	1	
Other electronic output (please specify)	D2	1	Blog entries for the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Blog
Performance/Visual Media Outputs			
Exhibition or other presentation	H	2	<p>Workshop for BBC Children's producers to provide an overview of the project is being arranged.</p> <p>Presentation for the BBC Future Media and Technology 'Rapid Prototype' team will be arranged to present the articulated ideas for public service virtual environments.</p>
Performance, Recording, Film or Broadcast	I		
Artefact/work of art	J		

Design	K		
Composition – score or choreography	L		
Composition – creative writing	M		
Other (please specify)	O	1	Trip to National Public Radio, USA, to explore interest in the AHRC/BBC knowledge exchange network and to present findings, informally, on user and producers and virtual space.
Outcomes			
Patents/Licenses	N		
Projects – collaborative	P1	1	We are discussing future collaborative research with BBC Children's.
Projects – commercial or consultancy	P2	1	We contributed to the AHRC/BBC day launching and presenting the eight projects by offering an indepth analysis of our collaborative working methods. This was expressed as a graphical map and as an explanatory presentation.
Projects – other	P3	1	We are providing a researcher, Lizzie Jackson, to run the AHRC/BBC Knowledge exchange network and have consulted with the BBC and the AHRC on the facilities required and online community management.
Printed press coverage	Q1		
Radio/TV coverage	Q2		
Review in specialist publication	Q3		
Conferences/seminars (facilitator/organiser)	R11		
Conferences/seminars (presentation-not keynote)	R12		
Invitations to be conference chair/panelist	R13	1	Panel discussion at eWeek, University of Vic, Catalonia, Spain, 5 May, 2009.
Invitations to give plenary or keynote presentations	R14	1	'BBC Virtual Worlds' – Keynote speech, eWeek, University of Vic, Catalonia, Spain, 4 May, 2009.
Visits made by overseas visitors	R2	1	
Invitations to visit overseas HEIs	R21		
Membership of academic network	R4		
Advisory position on academic panel	R51		
Advisory position on non-academic panel	R52		
Adviser to individual, private or public body	R53		

Inflow of students (eg for PG supervision)	R61		
Other outcome	R6	1	Invitation to advise on a book on eCommerce and Virtual Worlds and to assist with reviewing chapter submissions, Virtual Worlds and E-Commerce, Walsh College, USA.

How will the outcomes of the project feed into and benefit BBC strategy? How will the outcomes be utilised more widely?

The outcomes/findings of the project have benefited BBC Strategy by providing:

- An in-depth discussion with 65 scholars, BBC and independent producers on the value and potential used of virtual spaces and places for public service media.
- Developed the use of creative workshops to encourage the formulation of metaphors and explorations of the potential of a new genre of programming for the BBC, building on the findings from the case study 'Adventure Rock'.
- Extended the work on children's immersive media to include content which would be of interest to adult audiences.
- Examined how a new kind of media, which was previously the province of commercial media outlets could be adopted by public service media.
- Explored how prototypes could be initiated from creative work with audiences, showing a clear process from imagining to the presentation of organized scenarios. This was to encourage the idea of involving creative audiences in the making of media.
- Presented the eight 'orientations' to children to see if they were attractive and a useful stimulus for media making.
- Checked the difference in responses between children aged 7-9 and children aged 10-11 to shared space virtual environments; it became clear younger children are more tolerant of solo play, but older children require sociable immersive environments in order to retain their attention. This was useful for BBC Children's who have said they are reorganizing their online content to group content together which would be suitable for their younger/older child audiences.
- The importance of ensuring children gain easy access to the new complex immersive environments was again stressed as the 2009 workshop showed children were put off by large downloads.
- The ideas from the adult participants showed the imagined public service virtual environments fell into several groups (a) virtual clones of existing BBC brands (virtual EastEnders, virtual Olympics Aquatic Centre), (b) complex and interlinked environments which offered a range of different areas to explore (Eco-world), (c) challenges which provided a learning environment (Bringing up Baby) and (d) virtuality used as a form of navigation to get to existing BBC content.
- Lastly the Knowledge Infusion three month project provided a 'seed' group of producers and scholars interested in exchanging knowledge through a knowledge network in the future.

What impact or influence will the project outcomes have on academic research or practice?

Building on the previous study of 'Adventure Rock' and other virtual worlds for children, the value of creative and visual research methods was extended to adult participants to find out if it was a suitable way to involve the audience in media making. The first study found it would be useful to involve the audience in the development of new forms of media, particularly of complex environments which are costly to produce and particularly during the conceptual stages. Given the workshop participants were producers and media scholars they cannot be said to represent the audience, however, it was useful to explore whether individuals could think through a complex media environment to a stage where a designer could articulate those expressions. The resulting scenarios were found to be interesting enough to be taken forward to a 'next stage'. This work assists the reframing of the audience as media makers, reinforcing the value of linked production and reception studies in a new media context.

In practical terms the project brought direct, measurable benefits for academic practice in the form of:

1. The identification of a community of interest around the potential of virtual environments which comprises both academics and producers. The workshops proved to be a stimulating forum for the exchange of ideas and an opportunity to gain an understanding of the different creative cultures, but of shared goals and interests.
2. The exploration of creative methods to explore virtuality for adults.
3. The exploration of the potential value of public service virtuality.
4. Additional findings which add to the growing body of knowledge on immersive media.
5. The validation that older children need to be offered sociable environments online, but younger children find some interest in solo play in immersive media.
6. It was clear children quickly tire of virtual worlds – although this needs to be tested with a larger group(s) in the future.
7. The testing of an intellectual process which linked the intellectual exploration of media-making to prototyping (theory with practice).
8. The consolidation of collaborative research practices, researchers working with producers towards shared aims.

What specific challenges were raised by the project? How were these challenges overcome?

It was not possible to invite all the child participants from the previous study due to the three month timescale. Some of the children had also left to go to other schools, however most of the London children were able to attend the workshops. The schools were happy to release and supervise one half-day visit, but the timing of the project (January-March) meant the workshop had to take place before the children began to study for their 'SATS' exams. The workshops with the children were organised during the first week of the project in order to overcome this problem.

BBC Children's managers were keen to explore the eight 'orientations' to virtual worlds, but this was difficult to achieve in the single workshop with the children. The eight 'orientations' were therefore presented again at the workshops in March 2009 for producers and academics to see if they were relevant to adults. One group then, for instance, created 'Ecoworld' (nurture or destroy the planet) as they felt it would be suitable for the 'Fighters' and 'Nurturers' orientations.

It was difficult to maintain a balance between BBC producers and academics; there were more academics interested in the workshops on public service virtual environments than BBC producers. Those BBC producers who attended the workshops said they were worthwhile, however the immediate value to producers needs to be made clear as well as the longer term value. Academics were interested in the possibility of future face to face meetings and several wished to support beebac however they were unable to register when they went to the network online. Lizzie Jackson has suggested the network be moved to 'Ning,' an alternate platform which is used by several communities of practice.

What 'good practice' advice can you provide to others working on collaborative projects of this nature?

The difference in output speeds needs to be accommodated; BBC producers wish to have findings quickly, before they have been fully substantiated. In order to resolve this one solution was to organise workshops for producers which offer initial findings and then produce more substantiated findings for academic use later.

Two different kinds of outputs need to be developed:

- (a) BBC producers like to have summaries, 'bullet points' and information presented in a very visual form; they are also not likely to be interested in the methods used to obtain the findings.
- (b) To show the collaborative findings to both communities the AHRC/BBC blog was useful.
- (c) The visual material produced for BBC producers was useful to illustrate the substantiated findings at conferences and presentations.
- (d) The idea of a book compiled from the eight projects increases the value of the projects as a resource.

It was very useful to be able to purchase services from the BBC for the project via an account and 'cost code' issued by BBC Children's. This greatly simplified the setting up of the workshops (room, IT and hospitality). Locating the workshops at the BBC increased the number of participants who wanted to take part.

How worthwhile and beneficial was the collaborative/IP agreement to the partnership? Please comment on how it contributed to the operation of the project.

The shorter project documentation for the second project was welcomed. It is clear the collaborative projects can proceed with less administration.

Do the partners have plans for further collaboration? Yes No

(If yes, please specify below)

Yes — we will be meeting Rachel Bardill, Executive Producer, BBC Children's to talk about a future collaborative research project in July.

Please give details of any changes in personnel engaged in the project

None.

BBC Partner comments (Please provide additional comments on any of the above.) What do you consider to be the measures of success for the BBC (tangible or intangible)?

This added piece of research was useful for CBBC to provide our development process with further stimulus in the realms of virtual worlds, moving on the thinking and learning from the Adventure Rock project.

This piece of research was useful for us to see first hand how our audience would shape a virtual world environment, expand our thinking around a virtual environments, with tangible designs at the end of the process.

I look forward to the workshop – which for me is the first measure of success. The second measure of success is if any of the models of virtual worlds would be taken to any further development stage.

Rachel Bardill
Interactive Executive
BBC Children's, East Tower

Declaration

I declare that the information contained in this report is to the best of my knowledge correct and accurately reflects the conduct and outcomes of the project.

Academic Partner

Signature <i>David Gauntlett</i>	Date <i>8 June 2009</i>
Print name DAVID GAUNTLETT	

BBC Partner

Signature <i>R. Bardill</i>	Date <i>26-6-09</i>
Print name RACHEL BARDILL	

If you would like to provide confidential comments on any aspect of your involvement with this project, please do so by email to: s.amor@ahrc.ac.uk

Budget Statement

(Please explain any variations between actual and forecast expenditure. You should attach a copy of any correspondence authorising significant virements.)

Because we were able to save money on the cost of workshops, and spent less than budgeted there, we were able to spend more than originally budgeted on travel to increase the number of international dissemination opportunities (as listed above – see 'value for money' under 'Achievements against project objectives').

	Paid to Date	Actual Expenditure
DI - Staff	£7462.00	£7462.00
DI - Travel and Subsistence	£964.00	£1609.77
DI - Other Costs	£3180.00	£2279.35
DA - Investigators		
DA - Estates Costs	£997.00	£997.00
DA - Other Directly Allocated		
IC - Indirect Costs	£4431.00	£4431.00
Total	£17034.00	£16779.12

I confirm that the grant has been spent in accordance with the terms and conditions of awards.

Award-holder's signature

Head of Department signature

David Gantlett

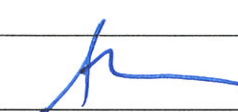
Date: 8 June 2009

Peter Goodwin

Print name (including title)
DR PETER GOODWIN

Date: 30/6/09

Institutional authorisation (for example Head of the Research or Finance Office)

Signature	 ALUN TLUSTY - SHEEN ACTING DIRECTOR - WestmARC 30th JUNE 2009	Institutional stamp:
Print Name (including title)		WestmARC UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER CAVENDISH CAMPUS 115 NEW CAVENDISH STREET LONDON W1W 6UW
Position		
Date:		

Please enclose any relevant publicity material that has arisen as part of the Fellowship or its outputs (if not previously supplied).