

Immersive Accelerator: Programme Guidance

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Programme overview

XR Stories Immersive Digital Accelerator aims to bring diverse new talent into the XR industries in the Leeds City Region. According to statistics from DCMS, the creative economy employs a lower proportion of women than the wider UK economy with **37.1% of jobs** in the creative industries filled by women compared to **46.9%** across other sectors in the UK - this inequality is something we are actively looking to address. Open exclusively to women, people of marginalised genders and the LGBTQ+ community, our programme is aimed at a broad range of applicants from all walks of life – from developers, animators, and recent graduates to producers or writers looking to up-skill into XR.

We are looking for passionate storytellers and technologists keen to explore the potential of immersive and interactive digital storytelling to produce new and innovative digital experiences. The programme aims to support a diverse range of creative talent in the Leeds City region; applicants do not need to have come from a traditional background in either the screen industries or software development in order to apply.

Immersive digital media technologies provide a wealth of opportunities for creatives, technologists, storytellers and producers. During the **8-week** course participants will explore what makes engaging and compelling experiences in virtual reality, learn the latest software and design frameworks used to develop content for immersive platforms and get hands-on with rapid prototyping of ideas.

The sessions will be designed and run by [BRiGHTBLACK](#), a company working at the intersection of immersive, live experience and video game technologies. BRiGHTBLACK ran the Storylab project with XR Stories in 2021 and has delivered successful training and development programmes both nationally and internationally.

Our aim is to provide participants with an opportunity to gain a new technical skill-set, promote divergent thinking and to nurture creative development. Inspiring a new generation of talent to move into the emerging XR immersive sector.

What are the objectives for XR Stories for this programme?

The Yorkshire and Humber creative screen industries are a huge success story. The region's strong growth over the last decade has been consolidated by high profile moves to the Leeds City Region, from broadcasters like Channel 4, and significant parts of global media organisations like Sky. The area also has a thriving independent sector, with a large number of freelancers and micro businesses, and the games and interactive media industries are recognised as areas of key strengths.

Digital technologies are dramatically transforming the ways stories can be told. We are increasingly seeing new forms of technology-mediated stories: interactive narratives through subscription video on demand (SVOD) platforms, immersive narrative games, VR cinema and theatre, hybrid forms of film and TV through mobile phone augmentation and narrative

experiences in augmented reality. The creative possibilities seem endless and the audience appetite for these new stories is increasing.

The Immersive Accelerator has two main objectives:

1. To open up opportunities into the immersive sector for women and marginalised genders and those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community.

2. To address the skills gap in immersive and address EDI issues in the creative industries

What support is available?

Training programme duration:	8 weeks
Number of places on the course:	up to 12 (limited to one applicant per SME)
Equipment	Loan of a gaming laptop if required:
	Processor: Intel Core i7 11800H
	RAM: 16GB DDR4
	Graphics: NVIDIA GeForce RTX 3070
	Operating System: Windows 10

Who is eligible to apply?

The Immersive Accelerator addresses the lack of gender diversity in the creative industries. As such, the programme will be open exclusively to **women**, individuals from marginalised genders and those who are part of the **LGBTQ+** community **only**.

Sole traders applying to the programme must ensure they meet the gender eligibility criteria. For SMEs registering interest on behalf of employees, please ensure this is clearly stated and that the nominated individual meets our gender eligibility criteria.

The scheme is funded by the European Regional Development Fund. The scheme will only be open to eligible individuals registered as sole traders or SMEs in the Leeds City Region, as defined by the [Local Enterprise Partnership \(LEP\)](#). A geographic overview of areas included in the Leeds City Region can be found [here](#).

Applicants must meet the following criteria to be eligible for this scheme:

- If you are applying as part of a business, your business must be classified an [SME](#)
- If you are applying as a self-employed individual, you must be registered as a sole trader
- Your business must have employed fewer than 250 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in your last full accounting period
- Your annual turnover must be less than 50,000,000 euros. See the [latest exchange rate](#)
- Your annual balance sheet total must be less than 43,000,000 euros
- Your business should have received less than 200,000 euros in state-aid over the last three fiscal years
- Your business is registered on Companies House with a valid VAT number

- Your business should be less than 25% owned by another company or combination of companies

It is necessary that we follow-up with all applicants to confirm the above details and eligibility during/following the application process.

For sole traders applying to the programme, you must be able to evidence you are trading in the Leeds City Region.

For SMEs registering interest on behalf of employees, please ensure this is clearly stated and that the nominated individual meets our eligibility criteria.

What information will I need to supply with my application?

To apply for the programme you will need to follow the link outlined in the application call and create a Submittable account. Applicants will then be asked a series of questions, which will help us to establish your suitability to the programme such as:

1. Outline why this training scheme is relevant to you and how it would benefit your career development or business
2. Outline what relevant skills and experience you would bring to this programme
3. Outline your interest in XR technologies and immersive storytelling

Where relevant please include project examples and case studies to support your application.

Company Data Capture

XR Stories has overarching objectives to support the growth of the regions' screen industries through the companies we work with. We collect information about the individuals and SMEs to be involved in the project, to revisit later and see how we can evidence your growth and the impact of our funding.

How will applications be evaluated?

Applications will be assessed by an internal panel of assessors with a broad range of experience of immersive and interactive storytelling.

The main things we are looking for in applications are:

- A clear and compelling story as to why this individual is suitable for the training programme
- Passion for exploring the potential of XR technologies
- Any relevant case studies or evidence to support the application

What is the format and timeline for the training?

This course will provide an overview of XR creation and explore the creative possibilities of immersive technologies. With a focus on the games engine Unity, the course participants will gain practical hands-on development and creative skills training in how to develop a concept in Unity.

Learning outcomes:

- An understanding of XR technology and the creative possibilities
- A foundation level knowledge of how to use Unity
- An understanding of how to produce compelling stories in XR
- A practical roadmap on how to apply XR to concept ideas or existing projects

How the course would be taught:

8-week course, with a mix of both physical workshops at our lab at the Guildhall in York, online tutorials and Q&A and mentoring sessions.

Course will include training in the following areas:

- Introduction to XR technologies
- 3D modelling
- Narrative design and spatial storytelling in XR
- World design + creation
- Prototype production planning & workflows
- Prototype building
- Interaction design + C# Visual Scripting
- Sound creation/design
- Technical troubleshooting

What the participants will receive:

- The loan of a gaming laptop for the duration of the course (where required)
- A 4 day workshop
- Access to video course content
- Cohort Q&A sessions
- 1-2-1 mentoring

The Immersive Accelerator will run to the following timeline:

	From	To
Apply	19/09/2022	24/10/2022, 11pm
Selection	25/10/2022	28/10/2022
Places awarded	31/10/2022	
Introductory call with trainers	01/11/2022	
Course start date	08/11/2022	
Programme end date	12/12/2022	

XR Stories Business Support

The business support stream of XR Stories is funded by the European Regional Development fund and aims to help small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the screen industries (TV, film, games, performance, arts and live events) sector in the [Leeds City Region area](#) exclusively. It increases levels of Research and Development (R&D) and innovation in rising to the challenge and opportunity offered by new immersive and interactive technologies for digital storytelling. In May this year, we opened our immersive and interactive media lab located in the Guildhall in York, from which the project supports businesses through three key strands: expertise; equipment and technology; and events and workshops. Supported businesses will have access to guidance from our team of Creative Producers and Creative Technologist, and a range of state-of-the-art equipment, free of charge. These resources allow the support team to provide bespoke creative, technical, commercial, business growth and innovation support for R&D, depending on SME needs. XR Stories aims to assist businesses in bringing new products to their firm and the industry market, and improve employment opportunities within the sector.

In addition to the Immersive Accelerator training programme applicants will have access during and after the course to all outlined support strands subject to the completion of all relevant forms.

Applicant Commitment

By applying to this training programme we ask you to consider:

- Do you meet the eligibility criteria for the programme?
- Are you comfortable filling in relevant forms and paperwork required from our funders to participate in the training programme?
- Are you able to commit to up to four days of physical workshops and between 2-3 hours each week to watch course videos, participate in the Q&A sessions and work on practical tasks such as prototype development.
- Are you able to attend the full 8 weeks of the training programme? Should you be unable to attend the full course, please highlight in your application how you intend to catch up any time missed.

Outputs

At the end of the programme you will be required to complete the below:

1. Fill in relevant forms and paperwork for our funders
2. Provide feedback on the programme
3. Return any equipment loaned through the programme