



Organising Inclusive Informal Events in the Games Industry

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DECEMBER 2021



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Acknowledgements

We offer our sincerest appreciation to all collaborators, interviewees and participants who kindly offered their help, knowledge and time during every step of this project. We could not have carried out the project in seven months, without every single person's added efforts.

We thank our main partners (Ukie, Women in Games) for their time and guidance in developing this project. We especially thank Luke Hebblethwaite and Emma Cowling for providing their time, support and feedback throughout this project.

Furthermore, we wish to mention all our project partners (including SIGN, University of York Research Center for Social Sciences), who were supportive and understanding while we worked on the final version of this report. Finally, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who participated in the knowledge exchange portion of the project, whether it was during interviews or conversations with us.

Their personal input and experiences have been of great help and support to this project.

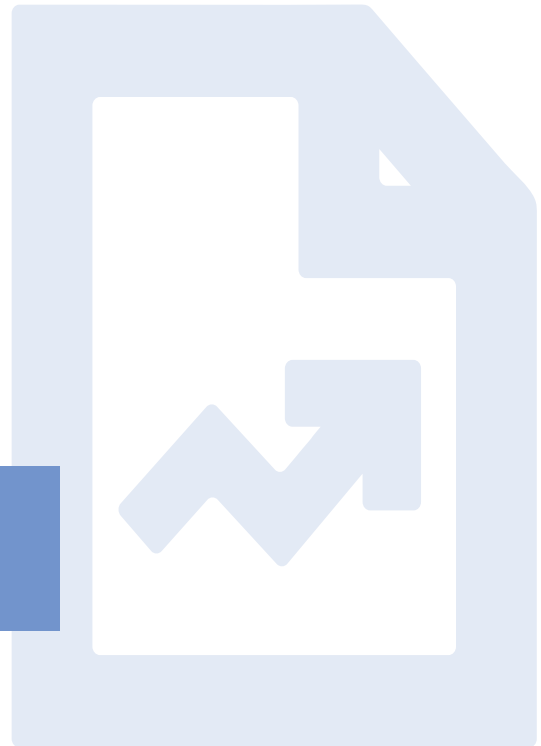
They include (in alphabetical order):

Malath Abbas (Biome Collective), Nida Ahmad (POC in Play), Declan Cassidy (Into Games), Leon Cliff (Ukie), Sam D'Elia (BAFTA Games), Alex Davis (GameGam, Glass House Games), Kate Edwards (Global Game Jam), Kirsty Fraser (Rainbow Game Jam), Samantha Greer (Glass House Games), Kish Hirani (BAME in Games), Luci Holland (Freelance composer/events organiser), Marie Claire Isaaman (Women in Games), Leon Killin (Balance Patch), Jake Mackey (Autistica Play), Tara Mustapha (Code Coven), James Parker (Bristol Game Hub), Alex Perry (Media Molecule/Game Rats), Shahneila Saeed (Digital Schoolhouse), Suneet Sharma (Out Making Games), Dom Shaw (Ukie), Iain Simons (National Videogame Museum), Rosie Taylor (Safe in Our World), Shay Thompson (Level Up Link Up), Dr Jo Twist (Ukie).

Finally, we would like to thank Jay Roerade for the design of this report. Thank you all for your support.

Anna and Carolina

Summary of key findings



Informal learning spaces and the games industry

- Informal learning spaces, such as workshops, meet-ups, games jams and conferences, are vital to the development of the games industry. For both commercial and non-commercial game development, informal learning spaces bring in new talent and provide job opportunities, knowledge exchange and skill development.
- The interviewees acknowledged that attending industry events contributes to their career development and informal events provide spaces for informal knowledge exchange and belonging. However, some of interviewees also experienced direct and/or indirect discomfort or exclusionary practices during informal events. Such experiences indicate a need for improvement in organising more inclusive events for the games industry.
- The interviewees noted the importance of developing codes of conduct and holding organisers accountable. This awareness also informed a need to develop industry-wide guidelines for preparing events in terms of codes of conduct and safety policies.
- There is evidence of a growing demand for and recognition of the importance of organising inclusive informal learning spaces. According to the interviewees, many organisations supporting marginalised groups in the games industry are a driving force behind addressing some of the barriers to entry into the sector. These organisations not only contribute to discussions about equality and diversity in the industry but also aim to introduce actionable solutions.

Organising events

- There is a need to think intersectionally about the experiences of people entering the industry and to acknowledge why people decide to stay or leave. Greater emphasis should be placed on the intersection of lived experiences for people in marginalised groups, including those marginalised on the basis of gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, age, geographical location, neurodivergence or accessibility issues.
- The interviewees indicated that preparing codes of conduct is an important step in ensuring inclusivity and providing a welcoming environment during events. Codes of conduct should not only clearly outline event guidelines and organisers' values but should also be enforceable (i.e. provide directions for reporting improper behaviour and outline the consequences of such behaviour).
- The interviewees emphasised accountability and reflecting on attendees' feedback as ways to improve inclusivity and diversity in informal learning spaces. Because events are often unpredictable and dynamic, event organisers should be engaged in constant reflection and improvement. Having dedicated feedback channels (e.g. in person or online) and understanding one's community are crucial to delivering inclusive events.
- Informal learning spaces should clearly define the scope of the event and its dedicated audience (i.e. if the event is dedicated to a specific marginalised group). There are spaces to organise different types of events for different types of participants, but it is important to be transparent about for whom the events are designed.
- When events cannot offer comprehensive inclusivity measures and support to all participants, transparency is most important. Potential attendees should be informed in advance about the event's content, venue/location and support offerings.
- The interviewees noted the importance of advertising events outside known networks to invite people with different lived experiences and backgrounds. They also encouraged others to invest in inviting people new to the industry to speak during events.
- Organising alternative types of events was often cited as a possible solution to breaking the stereotypical forms of networking, such as late-night or game-making events (e.g. 48-hour game jams). Alternatives include shorter events, splitting events over several days, events without alcohol or events that occur during different times of the day (e.g. lunchtime talks or game jams that are spaced over a few days or weeks).
- The interviewees also highlighted using online infrastructures to improve accessibility (e.g. joining the event online, livestreaming or live captions). The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has prompted reflections on how digital tools can be used for different types of events. During the pandemic, emphasis has been placed on using mixed types of participation.



Organisers

- The key players working towards making industry events and organisations more inclusive and diverse often contribute significant emotional and volunteer time to sustain communities. Therefore, change is being driven by already marginalised communities, which need more resources (including financial resources) to thrive.
- The organisation of events should focus not only on the participants but also on the organisational team and their work (i.e. the emotional labour, commitment, necessary training and need to protect people from problems at work).
- The interviewees often cited problems with establishing sustainability and contributing to meaningful change in the industry. Financial support is key, but establishing further collaborations within the industry (e.g. among companies and organisations) was discussed as beneficial to support different types of events.
- While the financial needs of an event depend on its purpose, scope and content, there was recognition that further guidance in how to approach sponsorship relations and collaborations with other organisations would be useful to event organisers.

Introduction

Informal learning spaces play an important part in the games industry by facilitating the exchange of knowledge, skills and practices and the development of talent. Under the umbrella term of informal learning spaces, we can include different sizes of conferences, workshops, game jams, meetups, networking events, and practical courses directed to a variety of audiences, from aspiring to established game workers.

Such game events, while informal in character, are important for the games sector ecosystem because they both facilitate career development in the sector as well as remove barriers when breaking into the games industry. Such learning spaces share the benefits of collegiality, flat hierarchical structures and opportunities, but are sometimes governed by exclusionary practices that prevent people from marginalised groups from attending and partaking of the knowledge they make available.

For example, a variety of care responsibilities might limit one's time for attending networking events while costs of the events might prevent people from lower socio-economic backgrounds from attending. This exclusion is driven by structural factors of society at large and by the games industry's socio-historical development.

The acknowledgment of such social inequalities requires the recognition of a variety of lived experiences, i.e., taking an intersectional approach that recognises that people are positioned along multiple axes of identities which define the disadvantages and privileges in a society.

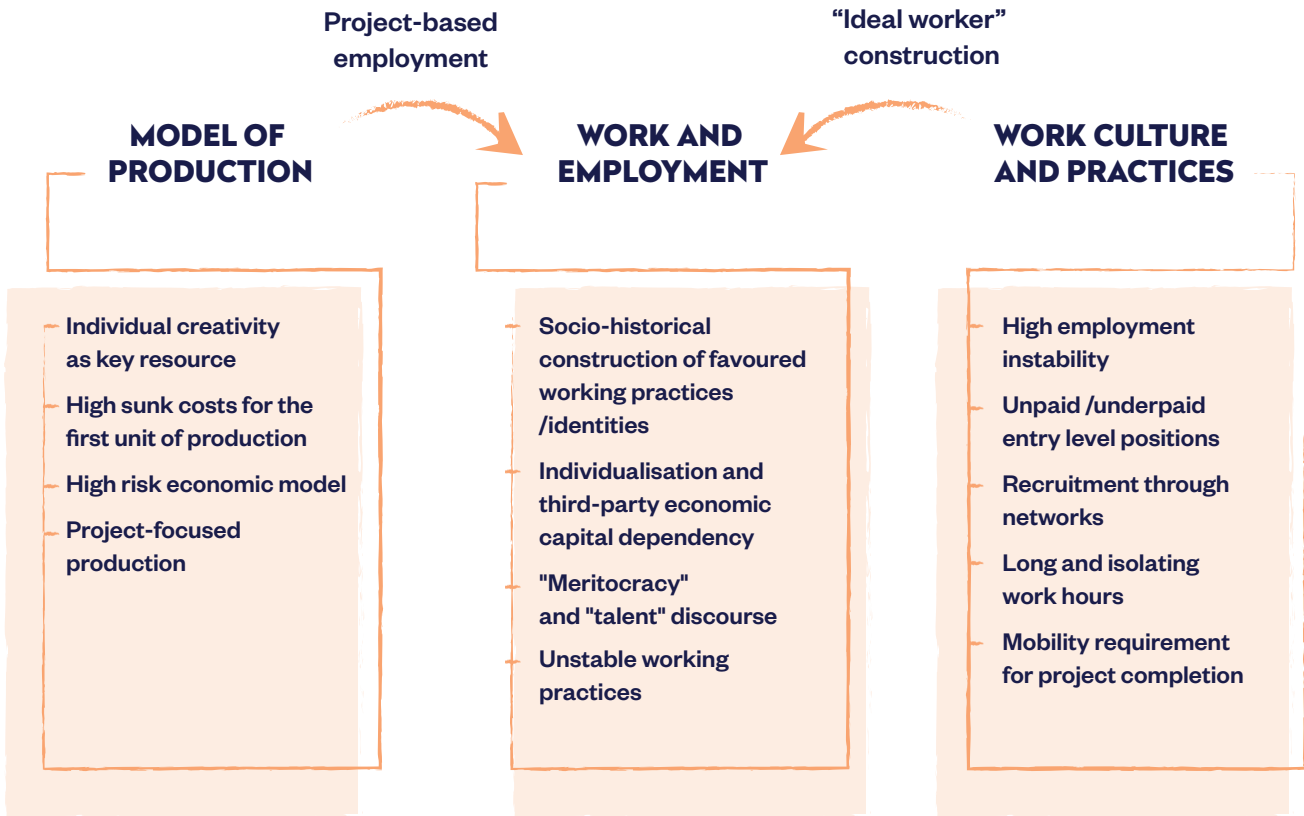
Therefore, while thinking about supporting career development in the games industry and formulating questions about diversity and inclusion, it is not only important to look at workplace and formal educational provisions, but also into informal spaces where knowledge about the games industry is shared and developed. These informal learning spaces should be understood holistically within the structures of the industry and society.

In this report, we are recognising the above-mentioned challenges, discriminations and exclusions as parts of broader structural problems that need to be addressed for understanding the dynamics of work, training and informal learning events in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), and especially the games industry.

To understand them within this context is to consider more broadly how the experiences of workers are shaped by the variety of positions they hold in the games industry and in society at large.

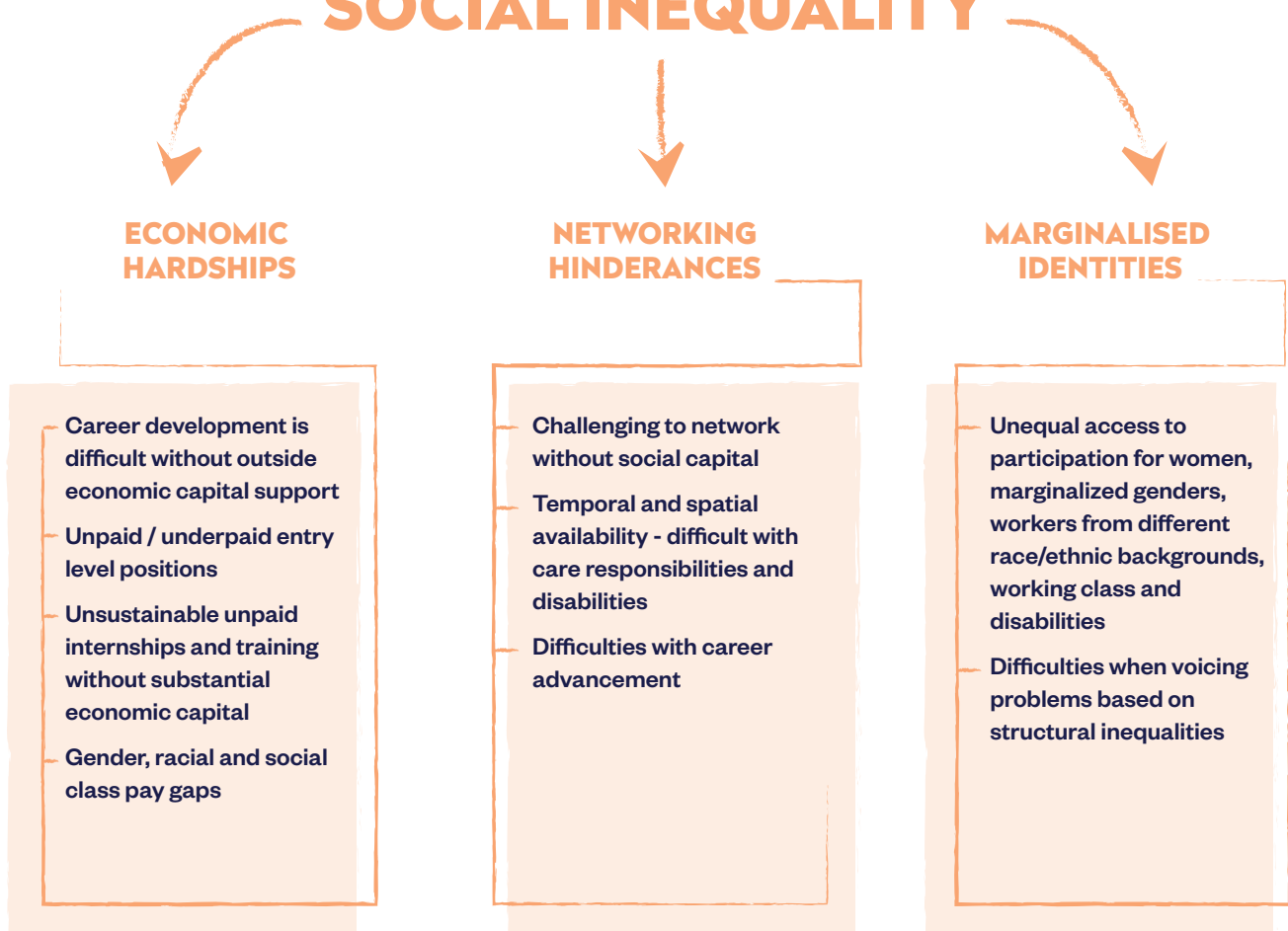
Please see the graph illustrating various elements of work in CCIs that contribute to inequalities:





All enable together:

SOCIAL INEQUALITY





1.1.

About the project

The organisation of events in the games industry plays not only an important social function but also a significant role in people's acquisition of knowledge towards employment opportunities, work practices and engagement with games culture. These spaces are also vital for newcomers to the industry since pathways for entering or 'breaking into' the industry are not fully formalised, unlike other screen industries.

While some formal educational programs to enter the games industry have been established, they are still not as culturally legitimate as in other media, such as film and television, which have a longer history of formal educational accreditation (Harvey, 2019:757).

However, it is worth recognising that the majority of training and skills/knowledge development opportunities in the CCIs is undertaken informally (ScreenSkills, 2019). The division between formal and informal learning spaces can be difficult to distinguish because even formal education courses draw on or implement elements of

informal practices and events (such as game jams or networking) (see Harvey, 2019). Therefore, while boundaries between formal and informal learning spaces can be blurry, for the purpose of this report, we propose the following definition:

Informal learning spaces: '(...) are informal in the sense that they are usually not formally accredited and are not typically classroom based' (Kerr et al. 2017:4). These types of events can include meetups, knowledge exchange events, networking events, hackathons, game jams and workshops. In this project, we refer to various types of events and courses which are not officially accredited, often organised by grassroots or non-profit organisations.

We are also acknowledging that various games industry-oriented events combine different types of informal activities, for example a conference will also host a networking event or a game jam. Furthermore, these events can be carried out in different formats, including in-person, online or mixed approach (both online and offline) events.

Informal learning spaces serve an important role in bringing people together, enabling them to develop ideas and connections, both for commercial and non-commercial game development. The informality of game events is part of the games sector's socio-historical development, which has emphasised collaborating with colleagues, like-minded groups that could determine one's personal and professional visibility on the job market.

The informality of the learning events and networks in the games industry can have an exclusionary character, accessible only to participants from certain backgrounds and with access to specific social, cultural and economic capital.¹

However, changes in thinking about diversity and inclusion in the games industry often come from the grassroots work of both smaller and larger organisations (e.g. local networking event organisers, dedicated non-profit organisations)

committed to supporting marginalised individuals with a variety of lived experiences in acquiring knowledge, skills and networking opportunities in the industry. Therefore, this project draws on the experience of people already supporting the games industry through the organisation of learning events and who speak openly about making the industry more welcoming.

This report is not the first to draw attention to different types of informal learning spaces; many other useful resources have been developed by the industry and academics, especially game jams (e.g. Kerr et al. 2017; Hara and de Jesus, 2019).

This report approaches informal learning events more broadly, recognising the multiplicity of game sector events and spaces oriented towards knowledge and skills development, as well as networking. However, this study is exploratory in its design and encourages further collaboration and research into specific issues concerning organising inclusive informal learning spaces.



¹ The rule of informality, such as acquiring knowledge about work practices and employment opportunities in the CCIs, is often cited in research as one of the exclusionary factors in these industries (e.g. Lee, 2011; Grugulis and Sotyanova, 2012; Gill, 2013,) and is also mentioned in the context of the games industry (Kerr, 2020). (Kerr et al. 2017; Hara and de Jesus, 2019; ChangeCatalyst, 2017)

1.2.

Research methods

This report presents the results of an eight-month knowledge exchange project (November 2020 to June 2021).

This project was funded by the University of York, ESRC IAA – Social Science Enterprise Scheme under the title ‘Diversity and inclusion in the informal learning spaces in the video games industry’.

This project’s aim was to address the following three research questions:

- What kinds of guidelines for organising diverse and inclusive informal learning events are present in publicly offered materials developed by games industry organisations?
- How do organisers of informal learning events in the UK games industry approach questions of diversity and inclusivity?
- What kinds of challenges do organisers of diverse and inclusive informal learning spaces experience in the organisation of such events?

The findings of this project draw on the analysis of secondary sources (e.g. reports, codes of conduct and guides about the organisation of inclusive events) and **22 in-depth interviews** with people from the game sector directly or indirectly engaged in the organisation of industry events. The full list of interviewees can be found in the appendix 1.

This is a qualitative research project focused on collecting data about the experiences of people directly or indirectly supporting the organisation of game events. Therefore, the majority of presented findings are based on qualitative, in-depth interviews that reveal individual opinions, reflections and experiences².

It is worth acknowledging the limitations of the presented findings. Due to the study’s resources and time frame, we cannot address all the issues related to the organisation of informal learning spaces in the games industry. Consequently, these findings are only exploratory.

Furthermore, the authors would like to acknowledge our own positionality in this project, recognising that while we are embodying marginalised positions in certain aspects of our lives, we are aware of the privilege we hold as white, neurotypical researchers in a higher education institution.

Our interviewees are experts in their fields with unique experiences and different positionalities in approaching inclusivity and diversity in informal learning spaces.

We also would like to express gratitude to our participants and collaborators in taking part in this project during the Covid-19 pandemic. We are grateful to our interviewees for giving us their time and sharing their experiences and expertise in developing this project.

² The interview data was collected between December 2020 – May 2021. We used Nvivo 12 to code all interviews and secondary sources. Thematic analysis was used to establish themes which emerged from interviews.



1.3. Structure

This report consists of two sections:

The first section includes an analysis of the findings from 22 in-depth interviews with people directly and indirectly engaged in organising events in the games industry.

The second section combines the findings of this project in the form of a **best practice guide**.

2

Reflections on organising informal learning spaces



“ One of the features of the games industry versus film or TV is how many networking events and games events there are, our industry is extremely networking focused. ”

DR JO TWIST OBE, UKIE

2.1 Informal learning spaces in the games industry

As part of this project, interviewees shared their opinions on and experiences with attending and organising informal learning spaces (events) in the games industry. There was an acknowledgment that networking and attending various events (e.g., workshops and game jams) connected to

the industry or game development (commercial and non-commercial) was vital for one's career development and for developing knowledge about game making. Some of the interviewees shared their personal stories of breaking into the industry thanks to developing connections during events.



“ Like, the games industry is fairly closed. I'm very well-connected, right, so I can go to a couple of different events in the same week, and I'll probably meet a lot of the same people, but I'm someone who didn't study games. I studied psychology at university, and the only way I found out about games was because I was based near a games hub. ”

NIDA AHMAD, POC IN PLAY

The above quote also draws attention to different barriers—in this case, geographical location—which interviewees listed in relation to attending the events. In discussing these barriers, interviewees often turned towards describing problems with typical games industry events, which attract similar demographics (white, cisgender and middle class) and can be intimidating and isolating for marginalised people in the industry.

👉 In the workplace where you are the only female, or only queer person, only person of colour. Like you're probably going to feel isolated at work, never mind, I guess, if you go to bigger industry events where it's just going to be amplified, potentially. 👉

KIRSTY FRASER, RAINBOW GAME JAM

Focusing on developing more inclusive informal learning spaces was therefore seen as an opportunity to address the various needs of attendees, direct attention to the needs of specific groups and allow for safe spaces for the expression of different identities and ideas. The increasing awareness of the need for more inclusive and diverse informal learning spaces was also dictated by observed changes in the industry itself and the history of exclusionary patterns in the industry.

Interviewees who were engaged in organising inclusive events discussed the importance of these spaces both online and offline. However, the interviewees also pointed out that current discussions about diversity and inclusion in the industry need to place further emphasis on translating these discussions into 'practical actions', positioned within a system of accountability and cooperation with grassroots organisations and marginalised groups.



👉 We [the industry] need to make ourselves look 'diverse, open and palatable'. That is great, but we need more than just superficial change. We need structural change and that comes with accountability. **You have to have a mechanism for accountability and allow key critical voices otherwise you're gonna get nowhere.** You know, you're not gonna be taking on things on-board, you're not going to be integrating your feedback properly and you're not going to be able to create the best positive impact. 👉

SUNEET SHARMA, OUT MAKING GAMES



“We [the industry] need to be more diverse. What should we do? Well, let’s share what our experiences have been. Okay, cool but where’s the action? There are lots of events that are centred around “let’s talk”. And very rarely they actually move into action.”

LEON KILLIN, BALANCE PATCH

The changes in the industry’s approach to diversity and inclusion were not expected to be fast and smooth in their implementation. Interviewees argued, however, that lobbying for actionable change, supporting initiatives, investing in mentorship programs, fighting for representation and, most importantly, making educated steps about possible areas of improvement are essential to removing barriers for participation and facilitating

career development for people from different lived experiences and backgrounds. Mistakes and tensions are expected to occur, but according to the interviewees, this should not prevent anyone from trying to improve the industry. However, equality, diversity and inclusion in the industry should not be seen as a bonus but as goals at the core of organising initiatives, supporting others and reflecting on activities that had been carried out.



“I think it’s about [running initiatives], you know what I think it’s about mindset, to be honest. I think it’s about you’ve got to be in the right mindset as somebody who’s designed an initiative for something, it’s got to be important for you. And the best will in the world I know, we know that there are people out there that will do certain things because it’s a buzzword or **it’s a trend and you pay lip service to it and it’s not truly a priority**. And for those people it then becomes I guess a bit of a pain, it’s like I’ve got to make huge changes. But if it’s in your mindset then I think from the outset the way you view things, the way you view a model and a construction of that, you’re always thinking about inclusion, it’s in your mind. And therefore, your designs and your solutions and everything like that seem to revolve around that.”

SHAHNEILA SAEED, DIGITAL SCHOOLHOUSE



Biggest things are to make sure that you do have stuff in place like a safe space policy and that is public facing, the people are aware of it and it's on the website.

ALEX PERRY, GAME RATS

2.2 Code of conduct

The code of conduct refers to a set of rules around behaviour for the attendees of a designated event. The preparation and presentation of the code of conduct is just a first step in fostering inclusive and welcoming events. Interviewees who developed their own guidelines argued that the code of conduct should be enforceable, that is, associated with a set of procedures and guidelines that allows attendees to report improper behaviour and outlines the consequences of not following the guidelines.

However, the enforceability of the code of conduct depends on the further availability of resources at the organiser's site in terms of the possibility of providing training to staff members (formal or informal) or the financial means to have security on site. Based on the interview data, Table 2.2a presents a summary of the key considerations that must be taken into account while preparing and enforcing the code of conduct:

Key considerations when thinking about codes of conduct

1. Reflect the values and commitments of the organisation
2. Review and adjust according to the scope of the various events and participant feedback
3. Publish in easily accessible places (e.g., website, event page)
4. Signed and acknowledged by organisers and participants
5. Reiterated throughout the event (e.g., before presentations)
6. Enforced through clearly outlined, confidential procedures for reporting inappropriate behaviour
7. Clearly outlined consequences of inappropriate behaviour
8. Develop training materials for staff members responsible for resolving reported issues

(Table 2.2a)

The code of conduct serves as an organisation's mission statement and demonstrates its commitment to prohibit inappropriate or abusive behaviour. Interviewees stated that the code of

conduct should be easily accessible through the organisation's website or promoted through the event's organisation/promotion site (e.g. Eventbrite).



“ I think it’s a “rising tide raises all ships” - be that tide, but in terms of actionable things. You know when it comes to safe space it’s just, I think acknowledging people’s experiences, setting up as much as you can. I try for example with any presentations that I give to kind of give an outline of: “OK, this is my name, this is what we are going to cover”, and then I’m going to open it up for a Q&A. If you want to ask questions please do so you know, but start with your name, give me your pronouns and then ask your question so that I can know how to pronounce your name properly... it’s almost showing your work throughout every single step so that people feel like they know what’s coming, they know how to prepare. ”

TARA MUSTAPHA, CODE COVEN

They also stated that it should clearly describe what kind of behaviour would not be tolerated during the event and in its associated spaces (e.g., online spaces). Interviewees also argued that reiterating the code’s main points at the beginning of events or presentations helps to establish the organisation’s credibility and its commitment to creating safe spaces.

However, presenting the code of conduct should go beyond a simple declaration; it should be enforceable and actionable. In other words, organisers should be prepared and have procedures in place to address unacceptable behaviour.



“ That’s really important [having a code of conduct] but that doesn’t make the problem disappear. We also need to develop actionable ideas around how we actually execute those spaces, and learn from how different places, different festivals, different kinds of events [...] and just start to share some of those experiences. [...] I don’t mean this as cynically as it’s going to sound - **simply saying that you’ve declared a safe space doesn’t mean it’s a safe space.** ”

IAIN SIMONS, NATIONAL VIDEOGAME MUSEUM



“ I expect that from the industry to go: ‘Actually events are good for us broadly speaking, we should have a template safe space policy that everyone should adhere to’, that kind of approach I think is really important. ”

MAL ABBAS, BIOME COLLECTIVE

Enforcement procedures should involve a confidential system of reporting unacceptable behaviour both during and after the event. It is important to know who in the organisation is handling conduct issues, how people can be contacted and how the case will be resolved. However, interviewees also acknowledged that enforcing a code of conduct is sometimes problematic because of the lack of a reporting system and clear rules.

At the same time, inexperienced organisers may be exposed to further inappropriate behaviour. It is also worth noting that certain situations that could arise during events that require further legal support or training to provide the best service to participants. This form of guidance was discussed as a rationale to provide support to and receive support from the games industry in establishing a common set of rules and guidelines for creating inclusive events.



It's still pretty much a kind of voluntary gig for most of us. We've not had any support, particularly from local government, national government or funding things. We just do it because there's a kind of intrinsic benefit for us in having good people around, knowing who's doing what and seeing the region kind of be promoted and be successful.

JAMES PARKER, BRISTOL GAME HUB

2.3

Funding

The financing of events depends on their scope, available infrastructure, planned content and location (e.g., geographical location, online or offline events, or hybrid events). Unlike major organisations, which have sufficient funds and the organisational infrastructure to set up events, smaller and non-profit organisations experience

problems securing funding for events and the ongoing operating costs of an organisation. Consequently, interviewees often referred to their organising events through unpaid volunteer work or paying for the organisation of events (e.g., promotion and refreshments) and additional activities out of their pockets:



I have to find money myself, which I do primarily through arts funding. Applying for funding requires one to have a specific skillset—finding a resource and doing things in a sustainable manner. It's quite easy to get a lumpsum of money to conduct an event, but it's extremely hard to justify something like, "Oh no, actually I need more than that because not only do I want to put this event on, I also want to document it and I want some money to keep in reserve for the next event."

MAL ABBAS, BIOME COLLECTIVE

Challenges in securing funds were further associated with discussions about using volunteer work to support events, ticket prices for the event, paying speakers' fees or investing in additional resources (e.g., expanding to different types of events). The scope of events and thinking about the inclusivity of the events were often restrained by financial resources. Unsurprisingly, the biggest challenges were experienced by smaller

organisers or newer organisations, which often felt that they did not have a long track record of successful events to demonstrate their credibility to potential sponsors. Even organisations that manage to engage sponsors in supporting their events often contend that it is hard work to convince people and companies to provide sponsorship:

💡 If I've managed to source some funding or sponsorship, which is always amazing, and I'm always very grateful to be able to put money in to pay people and [. . .] just make it the best as it can be, but being by yourself comes with its own amount of extra responsibility that can be quite daunting. 💡

LUCI HOLLAND, FREELANCE COMPOSER

However, in an attempt to finance events and achieve some level of sustainability, organisations often turn to local governments and granting systems to obtain more substantial support.

This route is often also challenging because of the time, effort and knowledge required to apply, follow the grant rules or establish rapport with people in local government:



💡 Sustaining us as an organisation is very difficult, so we, you know, how we get funds—a bit from Ukie, a bit from sponsorship, a bit from grants—is all over the place. And you spend 30% of your time on the actual work that you want to be doing. 💡

DECLAN CASSIDY, INTO GAMES



“ I was filling in an application once for some sort of grant or some sort of programme, and it was a programme that was supposed to help marginalised people or women seeking funding [...] but the application itself was really official. It was the most intimidating, horrible application I think I’ve ever tried to fill out. ”

TARA MUSTAPHA, CODE COVEN

The organisation of events that are oriented towards inclusion and welcoming or the expansion of organisational operations to support specifically marginalised groups, as well as other organisations, have struggled to maintain financial sustainability.

This struggle often also means an unstable working environment in which one does not know whether the organisation or the informal learning spaces can be sustainable in the long term or just in the short term. In other words, smaller, less established or sometimes even more recognised organisations often have limited resources to pay volunteer workers and speakers or to choose the

best infrastructure to make their events more inclusive. In a sense, organising events requires a more expansive funding system at the industry, government or regional institutions. It is a balancing act to secure funding and support people and to make events inclusive and sustainable simultaneously.

The financial struggles also relate to work performed by organisers for free and in addition to their daily jobs. Therefore, thinking about who is making these spaces more inclusive, welcoming and diverse is also conditional on people’s unpaid work, support systems and networks.

2.3.1

Costs for participants

The financial situation and structure of an organisation will impact entry fees. While some events with proper sponsorship do not have to charge admission, other events use funds from ticket sales prices to secure venues and speakers as well as maintain an organisational infrastructure.

Interviewees acknowledged that the ticket prices for major industry events are often prohibitive, especially for students, newcomers and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It is worth acknowledging, however, that ticket prices depend on an event's location.

Therefore, they are only one of many financial considerations (others include accommodation, transportation, food and payment for supporting caring responsibilities, such as payment for daycare) for attendees in discussing the price of attending events and their subsequent accessibility/inclusivity.

The financial burden, and the associated emotional burden, of attending an event, is often placed on the individual, thus restricting participation in events, including networking events, for many people. Interviewees pointed out that the solution to this problem, aside from holding free events, is to offer various tiers of ticket levels and bursaries:



💡 I'd probably [think] of better ways to work with that, but basically [we need] different tiered tickets that don't challenge someone to go, 'Oh, I should feel bad for my situation'. It's like, 'No, we're considering your situation, and we've made the ticket price to try and get you involved as possible', because, again, we've got student and industry tickets, but I think, actually, we need to go beyond just student and industry tickets. We need to think instead of, two-tier tickets, and maybe for those costly events, five-tier tickets. 💡

DOM SHAW, EDI COORDINATOR UKIE

Some organisations that took part in this project (e.g., POC in Play and BAFTA) offered bursaries for attendees. These organisations emphasised the importance of allowing people from different geographical locations to attend their events by compensating them, for example, for their travel costs. The cost of events was also evaluated considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic

and the proliferation of online events/spaces. Interviewees referred to the possibility that attending the events online or through livestreaming would eliminate some barriers: transportation and accommodation costs and entry fees. However, online events have many benefits and challenges in the context of informal learning spaces (see section 2.4).

2.4.

Content of the events

Organising inclusive events means thinking about addressing and presenting in comprehensive the content of the events. This involves clearly outlining the desirable audience, establishing the themes, thinking about promotional strategies and taking inventory of the invited speakers and collaborators and the prepared and delivered materials. However, the components of the events cannot be improved and tailored without support and insight from the participants and community members to which they are oriented.

Accountability and willingness to listen to feedback were two of the main characteristics needed for improving events, making them more inclusive and supporting marginalised groups and individuals (see section 2.6.3). Interviewees stated that thinking about inclusivity and equity in these events and their content started long before the organisation of the events themselves. The summary of key considerations which needs to be taken into an account while preparing an event are presented in table 2.4a:

Key considerations for inclusivity when planning an event

(Table 2.4a)

1. Define the audience

2. Theme of the event

3. Planned activities

4. Organisational team (required training, support for the event)

5. Language used by the organisers (to describe and promote the event, language use within the space)

6. Support structures in place (e.g., code of conduct, feedback forms, accountability measures)

7. Transparent and accessible information about the event

8. Preparation of additional materials in accessible manner (e.g., handouts, audio or video materials, website optimisation)

9. Inviting speakers, mentors and collaborators (e.g., reflecting on diversity of lived experiences and professional expertise)

10. Information about the venue (type of space, transportation links, accessibility, drink/food options, access to gender neutral bathrooms)

The above-presented table includes only some of the elements which should be reflected on before the planning of the event, included on the event's website or ready to be discussed with potential attendees. It has been widely recognised that not every event or organisation can cater to the needs of all participants, either because of financial, time or organisational resources (i.e. the scope of the event).

There is a need to be transparent and open about the information on what a given event entails, from its themes, activities, locations and venue layout to the available infrastructure. In other words, it is not about providing all possible options but rather being transparent about what people can expect from the event and its organisers and being willing to listen to participants' feedback.



2.4.1.

Who is the event for?

When considering inclusive informal learning spaces, the interviewees suggested that these spaces need to clearly indicate to whom the event is dedicated. They accepted different approaches to organising informal learning spaces as long as these openly signalled who was invited to participate in the event.

This signalling does not imply exclusion of other attendees; the point is only to clearly indicate who is the primary audience of the event, what its focus and theme are, and how other attendees who want to support the event (e.g., as allies, mentors, supporters) can also participate.

For example, some informal learning spaces were organised with a focus on and primarily in support of marginalised groups, like women or LGBTQ+ communities. However, clearly articulating the organisation's policy, the event's purpose and who was welcome and for what kind of activities was crucial in creating inclusive events. Providing a clear definition makes the event inclusive and



signifies that organisation care about different lived experiences. Making educated choices about the use of language to invite attendees prevents misunderstandings. The example of defining the event's audience was discussed by Leon Killin from Balance Patch in terms of his experience in receiving invitations for games sector events:

“I was seeing a move from “women in gaming” to a space that’s kind of “women and non-binary”. And it troubles me deeply because it shows a kind of misunderstanding about what marginalised gender identities are, how they work and how different genders are differently oppressed in different overlaps of intersectionality. And I’ve had many conversations with people who have said, “Hey, are you going to come to this event?” I [have] said, “No, I am not a non-binary person nor a woman. I am a trans man”. But you're welcome to attend the event. But that doesn't . . . that's not what your event is signalling to me.”

LEON KILLIN, BALANCE PATCH

The above quote presents an example of evolving thinking about game events organised for ‘women and non-binary people’. However, it still excludes people identified as other marginalised genders.

Therefore, while events can be directed to different audiences, there is a need to define them clearly to avoid excluding people from the events and to clarify who is welcome. Furthermore, outreach/promotional documents and information should include a clear statement of ‘to whom’ the event is dedicated.

Among the interviewees engaged in organising different types of events, there was a consensus that participants need to have all relevant information to decide prior to the event whether they are comfortable attending.

This information should be easy to find on the website, or there should be open access to communication channels with organisers to find out about these spaces.

In other words, transparent and clear communication and the use of inclusive language in inviting people to spaces might have a huge impact on how people decide whether to engage during or join an event.

Furthermore, listening to feedback from participants and/or other organisers allows one to further decide on and focus the purpose of their event, designated audience and proposed activities.



💡 I just used social media, which is funny because I actually really hate social media. But I realise that's where a lot of people kind of live and look for these sorts of things. So yeah, I was like, 'Right okay, this is what I wanna do'. Eventbrite, Instagram ads and then just kind of fired it out there. 💡

SHAY THOMPSON, LEVEL UP LINK UP

2.4.2

Promotion and outreach

The interviewees drew attention to the importance of reaching out and promoting the events outside of well-known networks and social circles to attract different types of attendees. Greater discoverability of the events was usually achieved using social media (see section 2.5.1).

In the case of educational events, this outreach was also directed to different age groups, locations and parents to emphasise the existence of various courses and workshops associated with developing skills about the games industry and game production.

Promoting their events required significant work on the part of the organisers to engage with different audiences and reach out to different participants and networks.

It required scheduling additional time to assure the circulation of messages about the events and inviting speakers and collaborators. The promotion-time aspect was important because it gave people time to decide to attend the event and arrange the time to do so.



💡 That's a big part of the work that POC in Play does: is kind of ensure we have a variety of attendees from, like, very experienced people in the industry to, like, new people and people wanting to get in so that we can get those conversations started. And we keep our events very casual and relaxed because of that so that people feel comfortable and safe. 💡

NIDA AHMAD, POC IN PLAY



💧💧 The worst thing they can say is, ‘Oh, we’ve got a panel, but we’re missing a female’. That is the worst insult ever. Or, ‘Hey, we’re doing an ethnic minority panel and we don’t have enough brown people on there’ [. . .] There [have been] a number of times I’ve actually said “no” to being on a panel because they just wanted [to] tick a box [of] representation on there. That’s why, on our panels, we are deliberately talking about people’s work and their life journey as opposed to ticking boxes. 💧💧

2.4.3.

KISH HIRANI, BAME IN GAMES

Speakers

Another identified outreach problem was finding speakers for events. As mentioned by numerous sources, people organising all white, male, middle-class panels in the industry with one panel about ‘diversity’ is not an inclusive practice and does not represent the industry, its variety of experiences and its expertise. Furthermore, offering panel space to experts from marginalised groups as a ‘box-ticking exercise’ was discussed as offensive and a performative gesture.

Interviewees engaged in scheduling industry talks acknowledged that the representation and promotion of diverse talent and experts at different career stages is crucial for the further development of a more diverse and inclusive industry. People who are role models in the industry or who could serve as mentors can provide invaluable support to others, especially people who aspire to break into the industry or further develop their careers.

To collaborate with people with different lived experiences and career stages, the interviewees often relied on their own connections or used social media (most cited Twitter) to connect with people from the industry. However, sometimes interviewees struggled to find speakers; the solution for this was to build in additional time to

reach out to different organisations and people and establish connections beyond the well-known networks. One interviewee cited a situation where speakers from marginalised groups, especially individuals with caring obligations (usually women), might have difficulties committing to events:

Due to the nature of how a lot of women find [that] their lives are shaped by society, even when you're trying to make the effort to create a space for women speakers [. . .], a lot of the time, they're not available, or they've got just so much more on their plate that they can't always say yes to it. So often, that has been a problem for us in the past, where we're trying to book more varied speakers, and then just really [due to] the nature of what's going on in their lives, careers or what's happening, they've [had] to pull out.

LUCI HOLLAND, FREELANCE COMPOSER

In the situations described above, there is a need to reflect on additional support for speakers, such as financial or childcare assistance. The interviewees also discussed how important it is

to not only bring in 'veterans' to speak but to also allow young talent and people new to the industry to offer them a chance to present their expertise and develop confidence in public speaking.



And after every single meetup, I always talk to the panellists, and I just say, 'Wow, you are amazing', which they are. [I ask], 'How come I haven't seen you speak before?' Pretty much every single person says the same thing back: 'Kish, nobody else has asked me before to speak', and that is terrible.

KISH HIRANI, BAME IN GAMES

2.4.4.

Materials and delivery of content

Apart from curating the event in terms of promoting it and choosing speakers and collaborators, the interviewees also mentioned the need to address how to deliver event content to participants. These discussions usually referred to the possibilities of delivering events in person, online or in a **'hybrid' method** that mixes in-person and online participation.

In terms of delivering event content, there was consensus that this information should be available on the events' websites or in communications with the participants and should involve, for example, information about the event and materials (e.g. handouts) for specific workshops or game jams. Knowing the event's content in advance was seen as reducing potential participants' stress and supporting planning further ideas.

The level of detail provided was also deemed important for assuring potential participants that the event was inclusive and helping them to decide



whether to attend (see section 2.3.1). Interviewees noted that the issues to address in terms of the presentation and content of event materials should include optimising the website and its information for those who have different needs when accessing visual information.

Interviewees also noted that positive networking experiences can increase the degree to which event participants feel cared about and welcome.

To reinforce the event's inclusivity, participants can be provided with name badges, a pronouns policy and specific guidance for those not wanting to be included in any event materials, including photographs or social media tags. In other words, the event should emphasise respect for people's choices and their presence within the space.

Furthermore, inclusivity practices should not be seen as additive to informal learning spaces, but instead normalised and used by organisers and included in the event's policies.



👉 This is practical stuff now. Like this is like the bread-and-butter stuff that you have to kind of be doing, otherwise you'll not be inviting people in an inclusive way. It's things like, for example, for our launch event we had badges for everybody, but we had little red stickers that went on each of the badges. The reason for that is that a number of people who attend our events, because we are an LGBTQ+ network, may not have been out and don't want to be seen in videos or in photography and you know, they find it very sensitive their involvement in our events. 👉

SUNEET SHARMA, OUT MAKING GAMES



👉 Don't treat diversity and inclusion as this kind of separate thing that you need to tack onto your organising. It needs to be something that is just—something you embody from the beginning. Like I remember I had labels, I mean this is not an original idea, but when people would come in, they'd get given a label, they'd write their name and their pronouns on it and that was it. There was never this awkward moment of, 'Oh I don't know how to refer to you'. Right, take all that awkwardness away. And it's like you can't pat yourself on the back for thinking of those things because they're not original thoughts. And that's the thing, I'm like you should treat them as things that are natural and that you should just be doing regardless. 👉

SHAY THOMPSON, LEVEL UP LINK UP

As the above quotes illustrate, a careful approach to respecting the identities and private lives of attendees is also important when circulating the content of an event online.

This care includes preventing or minimising any harm that could be caused by making pictures or other materials public. Interviewees also reflected on the practice of asking attendees

for permission to record the Q&A sessions. Sometimes, suspending recording of a Q&A session encourages more open conversation.

Decisions about recording and publishing the content of an event should be discussed with speakers, collaborators, and attendees; and these decisions should take into account its theme and scope.

2.5

**Geographical
location, infrastructure
and event timing**



“ You find that people have travelled from London to attend an event in Manchester so it is not serving any purpose at all. Regionality is a real issue, so it is important to make sure you are serving the whole industry and not just people who have the funds and time available to travel to London for a networking event. ”

SAM D'ELIA, BAFTA

2.5.1

Geographical location

An event's size and type determine which location is selected as the best place to host it. In terms of location, while the games industry, in contrast to other screen industries, is more geographically dispersed in the UK (ScreenSkills, 2019:18), the concentration of specific events in major cities can prevent many potential participants from attending because of limited financial or time resources. The diversity of events and the demographics of people attending the events vary across the UK.

Therefore, the requirement for travel to different events might be related to the operations of particular organisations dedicated to specific marginalised populations. In other words, it is not only a question of whether events are offered around the UK but also what kind of events they are and for whom they are offered to in different locations. Taking this into account, some of the interviewees pointed out financial barriers to attending events in different cities.



“ Networking can be like really useful in terms of getting your foot into the industry. [...] like with most industries, particularly the creative ones, it's who you know is what gets your hire, but this is a part of the problem because there's limits on how that stuff works. Game jams are great but it's like you have these questions, 'Where are they?' Like if these game jams are set around big cities like London, that limits the kind of people that can attend them and in terms of, you know, running them over several days. Just people being able to afford to travel in is very difficult. ”

SAMANTHA GREER, GLASS HOUSE GAMES



♥♥ I get the frustration of having everything in London. However, if we're gonna move it to like Leamington Spa because that seems to be a really big hotspot for games, so is Brighton, I think Newcastle as well, you then get an even whiter demographic. ♥♥

SHAY THOMPSON, LEVEL UP LINK UP

However, Shay Thompson uses the example of London to emphasise that different demographics attend events in varying locations.

Therefore, events dedicated to specific marginalised groups might be more prevalent or organised more frequently in major cities. This perspective points out the responsibility of individuals from marginalised groups to travel

to distant locations to attend meetings with specific organisations. This draws attention to the importance of bursary availability to alleviate the financial burden of attending events as well as expanding the reach of particular events and organisations (either physically or through online infrastructure).

This approach was discussed by Nida Ahmad:



♥♥ Last year we started POC in Play North for people in the northern part of England. We have done some events there because travelling to London can be really horrible for a lot of people. For our monthly meetup events, we always have a £200 bursary available that will cover accommodation and transportation for anyone who wants to visit. It is usually assigned to one person at each event. ♥♥

NIDA AHMAD, POC IN PLAY

In other words, questions about location are also entangled with ideas about accessibility and discoverability for participants and organisers. Discoverability, in the sense of promoting the events, makes wider audiences aware of the existence of supporting organisations and hosted events.

Sometimes as interviewees argued, even in bigger cities and locations, the problem is not with the availability of events but making people aware of their existence and operation. As part of this project, we also interviewed individuals and

organisations that host their events entirely online, by design or force, because of safety regulations imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interviewees reflected on this transition to online environments by discussing the possibility of attracting wider and more diverse pools of participants by alleviating the financial burdens of attending events and allowing participants with different personal preferences towards networking and disabilities to be more flexible in attending the events (see section 2.3.4).



📍📍 In the sense of in-person [events], when making those kinds of party events and such, not only do you think about your accessibility into the venue, but you've also got to think about **the use of space** [...] You've got the bar, but, like, have you got a safe space room or comfortable space, you know, quiet space? Have you got room for your stage? Have you got room for people to move around? For example, if a person with a wheelchair comes in, they don't feel like they're squished. [...] For an event and even if it's a real event, like, the use of space is so vital cause, literally, if you have an outside area, inside area, quiet space at minimum, so any event you do in-person has those three spaces, there will always be a place for someone. 📍📍

2.5.2.

DOM SHAW, EDI COORDINATOR UKIE

Venue

The most important thing about the venue was to think about the 'use of space' in creating an accessible and inclusive environment. Accessibility refers to ensuring that the venue meets the needs of participants with disabilities (access to the venue, flexibility of movement within the venue, accessible bathrooms, technological infrastructure to support accessible delivery of content) ³.

Another important measure is in thinking about how the space is presented and labelled for people with different experiences and/or identities. For example, access to gender-neutral bathrooms (e.g., how bathrooms were labelled), or how the quiet room is presented to the event attendees. This approach requires thinking about the variety of experiences a person can have when entering the event space.

³. Furthermore, according to interviewees, finding a suitable venue for an event is also associated with safety measures and concerns.

Thinking about the 'use of space' also relates to the scope and type of planned activities during the event. For example, Kate Edwards reflects on the extensiveness of provisions that must be

provided during the organisation of an onsite/ physical game jam to provide comfort for participants:



♥♥ During an onsite game jam, there are a lot of things that may be obvious but people sometimes overlook, such as you've got to have a physical space, along with security, and fundamentals like power, internet, heating or cooling in the building, - all of those essential logistical items. You also have to think about how the people consume food and drink, and if you're supplying those. They also need somewhere where they can sleep in their sleeping bags, or however they want to do it. There's a lot of really fundamental stuff which is not insignificant. Many game jams are thinking, 'Oh, I want to do a game jam. It will be so exciting,' but you have to think about the basic physical and mental well-being of your participants. ♥♥

KATE EDWARDS, GLOBAL GAME JAM

The important aspect of reflection about the 'use of space' (both in terms of its online and offline components) referred to engaging with anticipatory care for prospective attendees, in other words, how proposed activities within the chosen space can be carried out to provide comfortable and welcome attendees with different needs. For example, interviewees drew attention to the importance of having a quiet room available for people who can get overwhelmed

during the events and may feel the need to relax or pray. A quiet room can fulfil different functions for different people, but it is most often to alleviate the stress of attending the event. Jake Mackey (Autistica Play) argued that there is a misconception about quiet spaces, which can be considerably basic in their décor and design. What is important is their availability to event participants:



♥♥ It [the quiet room] doesn't need any fancy lighting or don't try to add, like, a mood light or anything like that. It can just be a room that's just devoid of the majority of sensory inputs and that's it. Obviously, take into consideration your lighting because you don't want to use fluorescent lighting because that can be uncomfortable for people. ♥♥

JAKE MACKEY, AUTISTICA PLAY



💡 When we did, I think it was Muslim representation, we had a separate room set aside for people who wanted to pray at that time, or like, if they just felt too overwhelmed, they could just go into their room and relax and chill and then come back feeling more refreshed. So accessibility in terms of mental health needs as well is an important one 'cause, [the] games industry is very brutal and hard to work in, especially in the development mode. Creating those spaces where people can wind down is a big one, I think. 💡

NIDA AHMAD, POC IN PLAY

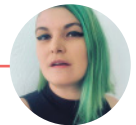
The above examples refer to adapting the space to the needs of participants, it being a quiet or prayer room. Acknowledging the different needs of attendees directs our attention to required flexibility in finding and also reorganising venue space. It is also important that the venue should be tailored to the variety of activities presented to people—for example, where workshops or game jams require increased collaboration

among participants (see Kerr et al. 2019). Accessibility related to questions about difficulties in finding a suitable venue (e.g., because of financial constraints) to host events in terms of convenient and accessible transportation for attendees. While larger organisations had the convenience of financial support or their own spaces, smaller organisers needed to balance their budgets with finding venues.



📍📍 We're London based, so that was then even more of a problem because even though there are lots of spaces in London, there are also lots of events in London so there was trying to find a space that was within kind of zone three basically. (...) That was an issue as well, and again is directly tied to the money side of things because had we had a bit more money to spend on it we could have probably found something, you know, more central. 📍📍

ALEX PERRY, GAME RATS



📍📍 Breaking down everything about a venue; like, the venue has this; the venue has that. Like the more information you can give somebody before they take the plunge to come to your event, the more chances you've got of them coming and coming feeling safe. 📍📍

ALEX DAVIS, GAME GAM

Therefore, because of the need to balance the event's budget, available venues, their location and venue accessibility and layout, interviewees suggested being transparent about what attendees can expect from the venue. One of interviewees, Alex Davis (Game Gam), pointed out that while it is hard to find a perfect venue for the event and address all the needs of attendees, it is important to provide transparent and clear

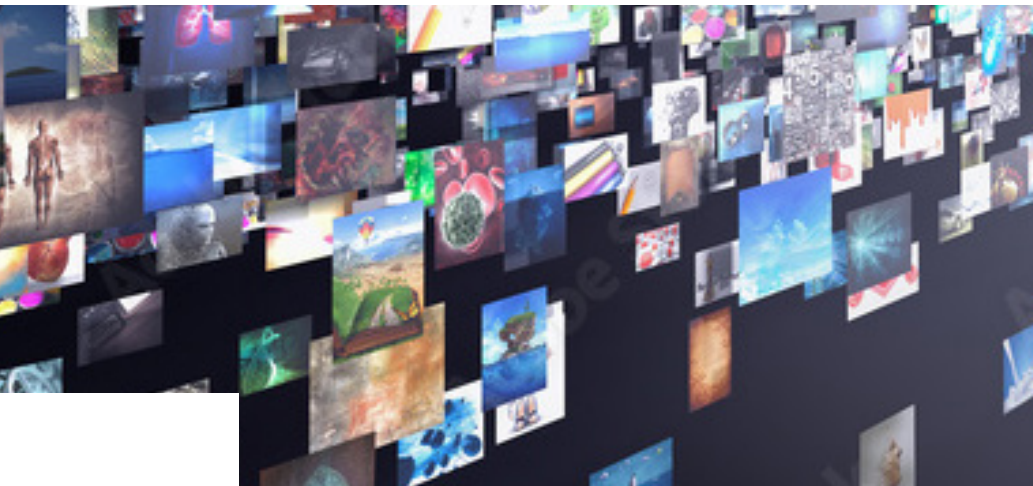
information about the venue and what people can expect from the aforementioned space.

Transparency and seeking feedback from participants about future improvements to the event/venue/location was decidedly the most inclusive option, instead of hiding information or ignoring the lack of accessibility and inclusivity during the events.



📍📍 Like prior to coronavirus, we recorded a lot of the talks that we did, but we never like did them live really. I think I did one student conference live where it was streamed, and that was only because the university had the capabilities of doing that. 📍📍

LEON CLIFF, MEMBER RELATIONS MANAGER UKIE



2.5.3. Technology and infrastructure

Delivery of the events' digital content relies on access to technology and infrastructure available at the given venue, for example, ensuring that speakers can be heard and seen properly by participants (e.g., audio and presentation support) and ensuring access to computers and internet infrastructure during practical workshops or game jams (see Kerr et al. 2020).

In terms of content delivery, interviewees often indicated that the possibility of live streaming the

event or making videos of the event available post-event increases access for participants who, due to multiple reasons, cannot attend the event in person.

The suggestion of using live streaming technology and promoting online events was also related to the increase in these types of events during the Covid-19 pandemic when many organisations cancelled their in-person events and shifted to online spaces⁴.

⁴ However, it is worth noting that some of the study participants were only engaged in delivering online events before the pandemic began.



💡💡 If I do a presentation or webinar, most platforms have some type of speech to text functionality. If they don't, ask to change the platform. For example, when I'm presenting using PowerPoint, it's really simple. You just click a button, and it changes. Obviously, it depends on your accent, as sometimes it incorrectly interprets what I say. But the majority of the time, you can get your message across. 💡💡

JAKE MACKEY, AUTISTICA PLAY

Interviewees reflected on the potential of using online spaces and live streaming to be more inclusive and allow for participation by attendees with different life experiences—including different geographical locations, socio-economic backgrounds, caring responsibilities or disabilities. Furthermore, interviewees argued that the use of captions during presentations, while imperfect, allowed for the delivery of more inclusive and accessible content to wider audiences.

Furthermore, the possibility of joining an online or live-streamed event was also potentially beneficial for people who were not comfortable with stereotypical, extroverted approaches to networking and felt more comfortable connecting with people from the safety of their homes. Therefore, interviewees reflected on how to use of online spaces better in the future and maintain them after the pandemic, directing our attention to the increasing use of “hybrid” events:



💡💡 Do we need talks in person in the event that is not a panel or something that's interactive with the audience? If someone asks a question and they want audience feedback straight away, does it need to be in-person or can it be done online with the in-person stuff dedicated to socialising activity? Or is there a nice balance between the two where people online can get involved with the people who are in person? 💡💡

DOM SHAW, EDI COORDINATOR UKIE



👉 I've recently observed that at some events you can watch lectures for free, but you're required to pay a fee if you want to take part in the workshops. This isn't an issue, but I think that at least some people who otherwise don't have the means to participate in these events should be given the chance to do so, and I think that going forward it'll be interesting to see if large events such as the GDC and Gamescom become hybrid events. 👉

LEON CLIFF, UKIE MEMBER RELATIONS MANAGER

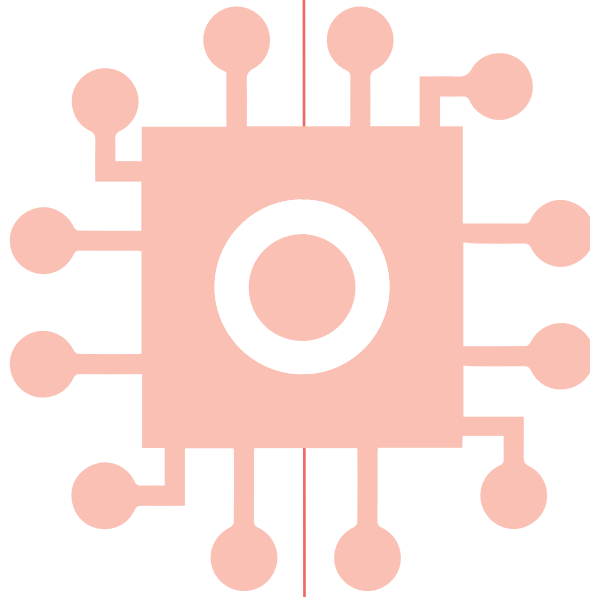
While the introduction of 'hybrid' events or fully online events removes certain barriers to participation for attendees and some considerations regarding the 'use of space' for organisers (see Section 2.5.2), it introduces new

dynamics of participation and collaboration online, raising questions about the moderation of the online event, collaborations among attendees and the time zone of the event.



👉 For an online event, which is what we had to do in 2021 due to the pandemic. All the physical comfort and physical logistics we're obviously not a factor. So while you don't need to worry about all of the onsite logistics, running a virtual event is a whole new issue. In a physical space, all the participants are right there together, and you can make announcements and go room to room and make sure everyone is notified. In an online space, you have to find a way to anchor your site together. For example, we use platforms like Discord or Slack to connect with each other and keep the conversation going. But even then, it's a much different dynamic because at live game jam sites, you typically have the teams working together and talking amongst themselves, and then, they might talk to some of other participants around them. [...] When we were thinking through last year how to pivot our event to a virtual format, we identified is that the connection between sites is obviously not based as much on geography. The cultural/proximity connection has some relevance but the bigger factor is the simple reality of time zones. When you're in the same time zone together, that time zone is what really connects you more than anything. This then allows jammers across cultures and geographies – but in the same time zone – to collaborate together during the jam in a way they couldn't at a physical site. 👉

KATE EDWARDS, GLOBAL GAME JAM



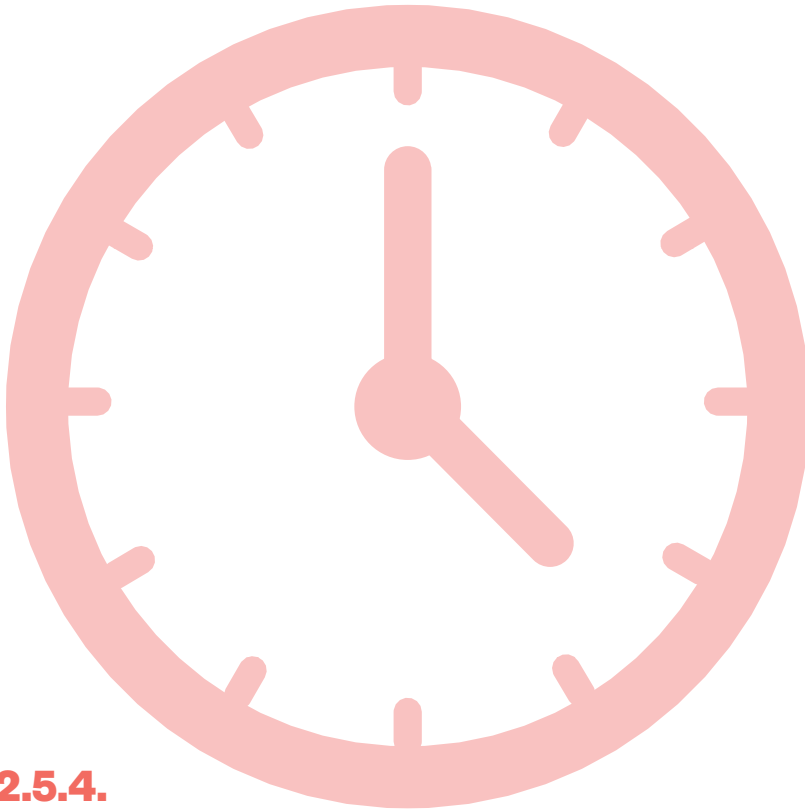
However, for others, participation and organisation of online events was challenging, especially for delivering purely networking-focused events, to which the interviewees spoke about problems with establishing rapport with participants or reading social cues. While some organisations successfully expanded their portfolio of activities to online-based events, others struggled with increasing the number of participants during online events.

Furthermore, it is worth acknowledging that access to technology and infrastructure is not equal or universal. Therefore, while for some participants the possibility of accessing events through online access presents significant benefits, we must be aware of inequalities in access to hardware and software infrastructure.

The discussions about these inequalities were visible in reference to the organisation of game jams or workshops, which require further reliance on technological infrastructure. In situations where particular events experienced barriers in

accessing hardware infrastructure, for example, Global Game Jam distributed funds to support some infrastructure (e.g. accessibility fund) or partnered with the games industry to deliver hardware to schools or communities without easy access to computers or laptops (Digital Schoolhouse).

Looking at these examples, therefore, it is worth recognising inequalities in access to infrastructure (hardware and software) when organising inclusive events and addressing various forms of exclusion and barriers to participation.



2.5.4. Time

The consideration of ‘time’ in relation to events was associated with various facets of informal learning spaces, as mentioned above in the report, from their geographical locations, modes of delivery and venues to the scope of the proposed

activities. Overall, the time consideration could be broadly related to concerns about ‘event scheduling’, which are dependent on a variety of external and internal factors (see Table 2.5.4a).

Key Considerations about Event Scheduling

(Table 2.5.4a)

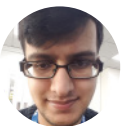
Time of day	Offer alternatives (e.g., lunch/brunch-time events, short courses)
Mode of delivery	Think about incorporating in-person and online participation
Length of the event	Plan shorter events, breaks during these events & breaks between events
Preparation of materials	Provide participants with information about the event or any additional materials beforehand (if applicable)
Feedback	Obtain feedback about the length of the event, breaks and the event frequency. Adjust the time of the event to the needs of the participants

Interviewees reflected on the time of the proposed events in discussing how to make different workshops, courses or game jams more inclusive. Deciding on the time of the event was also an important aspect of defining the event's inclusivity for some organisers and for participants with different needs. The majority of attention in terms of time within game events was directed towards game jams and their intensity, as they usually last around 48 hours.

However, various organisations supporting the planning of game jams advocate for different formats for these events to accommodate the various living situations of people attending them, such as carers (e.g. Gamerella, 2019; Rainbow Game Jam). It has been widely acknowledged that all-day and all-weekend events exclude people with caring responsibilities as well as people with different capabilities to participate in intense

and short-term events (e.g. different capabilities for absorbing information). However, while some workshops, conferences and events can afford to support carers through offering payment for childcare or free childcare at the event's location, late-night networking events often exclude carers from participation. Interviewees suggested that some problems could be alleviated by providing access to 'hybrid' events (online and in-person events), spacing out the event's duration (removing time pressure) or offering alternative event times.

In other words, the solution was not to replace the events but offer alternatives or reorganise patterns of socialisation to address the needs of various participants. Interviewees recommended organising different types of networking outside of late-night hours in the form of lunch/brunch-hour chats.



💡💡 Things like cut-off time for events, you know, having standard cut-off times, events that don't run too late, events that don't run too early and events that are in lunch hours. Like having that range is really important. All of our lunch-and-learns are 45-minute sessions that can be done over a lunch period and everybody's welcome to bring their lunch. 💡💡

SUNEET SHARMA, OUT MAKING GAMES

Two weeks is great because people can do their normal day job – you know, kids, any other stuff that they’ve got – and also do the game jam, you know, in those sorts of environments.

KIRSTY FRASER, RAINBOW GAME JAM

The time frame of the event was also associated with different forms of socialisation and entertainment patterns, with alcohol most likely to be served during late-night events (see the section on Catering, 2.5.2).

Including alcohol in these events perpetuates the assumption that game meetups necessarily default to a socialisation context of “beer and pizza,” thereby excluding those who are uncomfortable with alcohol for health, religious, or other reasons.

As in the cases of late-night networking or workshops, which are common within game jam time constraints (48 hours of work), it was

recommended to provide alternatives to people who cannot participate or would like to participate at their own pace and convenience.

The most recommended solution was to extend the timing of the game jam across one or two weeks. Spacing out events over a few weeks was also recommended for workshops to allow people to recharge and absorb information in a more comfortable manner.

In terms of game jams, time pressure associated with the event was also preventing people with caring responsibilities from attending if childcare support/help was not offered during the event.



With the Autistica Play Jam, for me it was just about making it as accessible as possible. And for me a part of that and a big part of, taking into consideration, consideration of neurodiversity when we do things in a physical space – which, again, is why this whole digital landscape evolution is fantastic – a lot of the physical activities that we provide can be very exclusionary in just, just the environment of getting to the space. And the sensory overload that can come with physically being in an environment like that with no accessible space to kind of reset or decompress so even if you're able to get there, getting there and staying there is going to be even more stressful, so remove that factor.

JAKE MACKEY, AUTISTICA PLAY

In terms of game jams, time pressure associated with the event was also preventing people with caring responsibilities from attending if childcare support/help was not offered during the event.

Because of the more intense and longer format of game jams, there is a need to schedule regular breaks and provide a support structure by creating a supportive environment for participants (see also Gamerella, 2019).

It is also important to think not only about how to schedule events in terms of time but how to organise a game jam without the time pressure which could make participants uncomfortable and unwilling to join the event. One suggested solution was to allow people to pick different supporting roles during game jams to alleviate the pressure of full-time, intense participation, such as support in testing games.

Participation in online game jams instead of physical events was also seen as beneficial in terms of addressing the pressure and sensory overload of in-person participation.

Overall, reflections on the timing of the events were intended to lead to offering alternatives to known and often exclusionary formats and thinking about a variety of lived experiences that prevent individuals from attending.

Furthermore, these changes via alternative events and reorganisation of informal learning spaces should be reflected on and done in consultation with attendees and communities to understand what the best approach in scheduling time for the events would be.

2.6

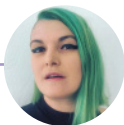
Positive Networking Experiences

2.6.1

Organisational work and emotional labour

Interviewees argued that inclusive informal learning spaces are co-constructed by the organisational teams through different activities and on-site support, fostering positive collaborations and spotting inappropriate behaviours. This discussion also concerns the acknowledgment of emotional labour⁵ performed by organisers in supporting planning, organisation and managing feedback after events.

Inevitably, the scope of organising specific activities and providing care/support to the attendees depends on the type of the event and its length. For example, interviewees and secondary source materials both indicate that specific attentiveness to in-person game jams and workshop events is needed to regulate group work dynamics⁶. However, it is not to say that other events (i.e., meet-ups, networking events), online or offline, do not require specific organisational structures and support to foster positive networking experiences.



“ I think at the beginning of the event, some people who didn’t know anybody were just sitting there waiting but I’ve got quite good mates, so I could go around and send some people off to talk to people —and that’s [just] keeping an eye on it. ”

ALEX DAVIS, GAME GAM

Some desirable elements of organising informal learning spaces are covered in previous sections of the report, for example in thinking about approaching codes of conduct or feedback and self-reflection about organising events. This section focuses on interviewees’ experiences with delivering care and support during the events to attend to the general needs of attendees.

Interviewees who had experiences with organising networking events drew attention to the organisers’ responsibility to provide structure for activities and a welcoming environment, especially to newcomers to the events or participants who do not feel comfortable in meet-ups or networking situations. The simple solution for creating an inclusive event was to designate specific organisational team members to greet attendees and facilitate new connections:

⁵ Emotional labour refers to individual acts of emotion management to render them appropriate to social situations (usually defined in professional settings) (see Hochschild, 1983). In the case of events, emotional labour refers to functions (professional or semi-professional) of caring for attendees during the events performed by organisers, volunteers or employees.

⁶ In this study, the majority of interviewees referred to positive collaborations and activities from the perspective of meet-ups, networking events and educational workshops. However, while some of their perspectives are valuable to apply in the context of game jams, game jams require a different methodology and assessment, which could be explored in other reports (Kerr et al. 2020; Hara and de Jesus, 2019).



“People just spread out into their cliques basically and if you are new to the industry and you go to that event and you’re sort of looking around, it’s quite intimidating to work out how you are going to make any sort of friends or new contacts. I think it just goes back to that needing to add elements of curation.”

SAM D’ELIA, BAFTA



“A good event should have some structure. As a student, I used to attend events alone, and I had no idea what to do. I’d just stay in a corner. Some events consisted only of networking and drinking the whole time. I had assumed that something was going to happen or that there was going to be a talk.”

NIDA AHMAD, POC IN PLAY

This approach was also important in recognising that attending events can be intimidating and that not everyone has the same knowledge and skills about networking to make new connections quickly. Attentiveness to inviting people to conversations and activities within their scope of comfort was an important part of creating an inclusive environment.

Furthermore, creating positive networking and collaboration activities also relies on clearly defining the activities and the content of the event before establishing expectations for attendees.

Emotional and organisational support were required to recognise that not everyone is accustomed to different types of activities in game events (such as first-time game jams attendees, conference attendees) or comfortable or confident in their networking skills.

Therefore, fostering positive collaboration and interactions required vigilance and attentiveness from the organisers. This included attentiveness to attendees’ needs and spotting potentially problematic behaviour or any signs of discomfort from participants.



Another thing I think that is vitally important is that a couple of times at events, people have left the space and they could be ignored or forgotten because you just think they're leaving, but if you have someone that kind of pays a bit more attention to things, you can see that they left out of distress. So having someone that has that understanding to go out and communicate with them, make sure that they're okay [...] It's just about being more aware of your audience and your surroundings and making sure that you're taking care of the people that come to your environment.

DR JO TWIST OBE, UKIE



Networking events can be really difficult and taxing and testing. As one of the main gateways to get into the industry, it's not great for a lot of people. There's a really large group of people for whom that just isn't a viable option. I mean, it's not even a question of effort. You can have all the enthusiasm in the world for it, but if you struggle with reading social cues—if that's part of you and it's not something that you have a lot of control over, regardless of putting yourself in that situation and trying—you don't necessarily... you're not necessarily going to be able to navigate that in a way that's going to convince whomever that you should be part of the industry. And that shouldn't be the case; that shouldn't be a barrier to people being in games.

SAMANTHA GREER, GLASS HOUSE GAMES

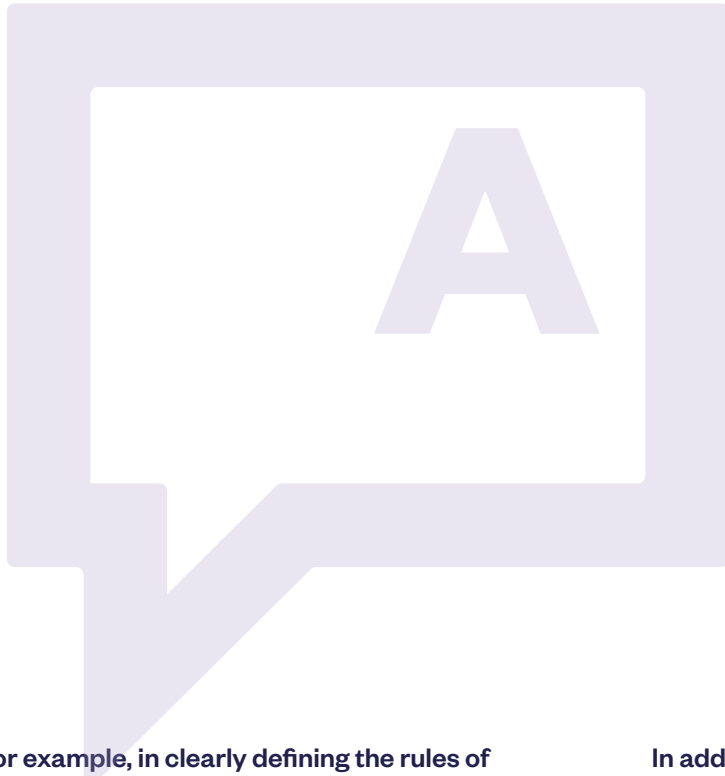
In other words, it was acknowledged that it is good practice to be vigilant of who is leaving the space and seeking reflection or feedback and of what can be improved in these spaces to make attendees feel comfortable.

Furthermore, the level of comfort for attendees also depends on the types of socialisation dynamic fostered by certain environments. Interviewees pointed out that stereotypical, unstructured forms of networking can lead to the further exclusion of attendees⁷. Therefore, the introduction of various

activities and flexible forms of participation should provide a opportunities for participants who want to engage in different types of networking.

This type of responsibility, while it can be performed by anyone associated with the organisational team, requires further support, resources and training to be performed in appropriate manner. The responsibility of dealing with attendees and possibly distressing situations also requires further care and support for the organisational team staff members.

⁷. The exclusionary forms of networking were also discussed in a study conducted by Nixon and Crewe (2010).



For example, in clearly defining the rules of conduct, materials about dealing with attendees in distress or events dealing with potentially abusive and harmful behaviour should be provided.

The latter also requires, at a minimum, being prepared to deal with various situations, from simple misunderstandings to situations that can have legal consequences⁸. Therefore, creating inclusive and welcoming informal learning spaces requires thinking not only about attendees but also organisational team members and providing support and training in dealing with different types of social situations.

The variety of social situations and interactions that can take place during events (within informal learning spaces) further emphasises the importance of a clearly defined code of conduct and its reinforcement, as well as support structures (e.g., reporting inappropriate behaviour confidentially, handling sensitive cases, treating attendees with respect).

In addition, as previously emphasised, interviewees addressed that the ability to join, re-join or leave an event, whether online or offline, creates greater flexibility and inclusivity for attendees with different lived experiences who may not be able to attend the events or feel uncomfortable in attending the events in person.

In addition, dynamics among people depend on the type of the event, with game jams and collaborative workshops being more difficult in the context of regulating human connection and group dynamics.

Therefore, offering different types of events with a variety of attendance times, speakers, themes, age groups and forms of participation (offline or online) is one possibility for expanding participation and fostering good networking behaviour.

⁸ These types of situations can range from establishing procedures to reporting incidents or harassment to authorities, as well as providing onsite support with care and respect for attendees. Furthermore, instances of misbehaviour in informal events, especially networking or socialisation sessions, can escalate into violent behaviour, therefore raising questions about who is responsible for the de-escalation of conflict, reporting such conflict and ensuring the safety of attendees. The interviewees of this project did not recollect instances of encountering violent behaviour during the events. However, because of possibility of such incidents, further discussion about onsite security and other safety measures should be discussed in follow-up projects.



2.6.2.

Catering

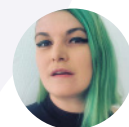
Organisers of informal learning spaces offer a variety of drinks and food options, dependent on the scope and size of the proposed event. For example, there were more discussions about food options for longer events, such as game jams, where some spaces rely on participants bringing their own catering. If applicable and affordable, offering various food options based on participants' dietary requirements and preferences was widely agreed upon.

However, the subject of alcohol consumption during the events was perceived as not inclusive if no alternatives were offered, or if there was no clear code of conduct in place to regulate behaviour in these spaces. Some of the interviewees used examples of late-night parties and socialisation around alcohol to describe situations that make them feel uncomfortable or pressured in these spaces.



💡 For me, the hard one has been the focus on alcohol and evening-style events. When I was studying and I was trying to get into the industry, it was very weird for me to go to events like that cause I'm like, 'Hey, I want to learn. I don't want to get drunk,' but for a lot of you, it's fairly normal. I found that fairly inaccessible. 💡

NIDA AHMAD, POC IN PLAY



“ There are so many different reasons why people don’t drink and don’t like drinking culture, which is fair. I think splitting it out and having both, so having a during-the-day tea and cake, and kind of really trying to make it special and not just substituting with, ‘Well, we sell soft drinks.’ I think completely changing the time and completely the tone is the only way you can combat the booze thing because I really think you can’t have booze and non-booze in the same space. ”

ALEX DAVIS, GAME GAM



“ You’re not really addressing the issue, which is that marginalised people aren’t feeling comfortable at these events because people who wield a lot of power are able to exert that power at these events. [...] If you want to have events that don’t have alcohol and aren’t centred around alcohol, fine. Do that as well. But don’t pretend that this is the problem. ”

SHAY THOMPSON, LEVEL UP LINK UP

There was an awareness that deciding to engage in these types of networking events depends upon a variety of lived experiences, from personal preferences to health reasons, to religious and cultural backgrounds. The solution for this situation was to provide alternative drink options or organise alternative types of events for participants who feel more comfortable in spaces without alcohol.

However, interviewees also drew attention to the main problem of socialisation in spaces with alcohol, which is not the possibility of having a drink, but the lack of accountability and clear policies to organise inclusive events and prevent inappropriate behaviour. Therefore, they were thinking about activities within informal learning spaces and the organisation of events as positioned within broader power structures.



“ It is just making sure you have more than one person’s perspective on throwing the event. ”

ALEX PERRY, GAME RATS



“ When you encourage people to be vulnerable and encourage them to have that space and to understand you know, the perspective that they’re coming from, it really opens you up to making the best impact. But it takes a lot of time and a lot of effort and that’s why you know, there are eight of us on the committee, the big committee of Out Making Games, just because you need the manpower to make those connections and do that leg-work. ”

SUNEET SHARMA, OUT MAKING GAMES

2.6.3.

Feedback and accountability

Obtaining feedback about events from the community and participants was an important part of developing more inclusive events, since it allowed direct input from the events’ demographics and their individual experiences, and reflected on organisational practices.

This approach was highlighted as crucial for the organisation of inclusive events, as every type of event, workshop, conference, or game jam will attract participants with different lived experiences.

Therefore, it was encouraged to have formal and informal mechanisms to collect feedback from participants and organisational teams, which would allow for improvement of future events. These areas of feedback and self-reflection are a part of developing events holistically, from

acknowledging the language used to promote the events, using distribution channels appropriately, reinforcing the code of conduct, being transparent about the event’s content and purpose to supporting all event participants (from audiences to organisers).

Willingness to receive feedback was also associated with accountability in terms of organised events. Interviewees acknowledged that the organisation of any event is unpredictable, and mistakes are common and expected.

However, what is important is to be accountable as organisers to change and improve future events and take responsibility for unexpected situations that may lead to exclusion or new problems in the community, learning and growing from these situations.

2.7.


Summary

This report summarises the main points from the interview data about organising events in the games industry. The presented themes included reflections on the interviewees' experiences of organising events, of addressing challenges in planning and delivering events and in areas that require further development and consideration when preparing inclusive events.

The interview data drew attention to various perspectives on organising welcoming and inclusive events. They also emphasised challenges faced by individuals and organisations, from obtaining event funding to enforcing codes of conduct and carrying out emotional labour in supporting attendees during the events. This report, therefore, highlights various elements, including funding, geographical location, venue and infrastructure, which contribute to organising and constructing successful informal learning spaces.

The collection of data during the Covid-19 pandemic also directs our attention to organising online events and the importance of using online infrastructure, whether for fully online or mixed online/offline events. The data include interviewees' reflections on the ongoing use of online infrastructure or its integration into events to increase their accessibility.

Interviewees highlighted the importance of thinking intersectionally about the various forms of oppression and privilege that are present in the organisation of events in the games industry and create further barriers for people who would like to join the industry, exchange knowledge or develop their careers. Organisations dedicated to supporting diversity and inclusion in the industry play a pivotal role in pushing for change in the sector.



However, these organisations operate in structures that challenge their sustainability and within a system that needs more actionable change than performative approaches to diversity and inclusion. Interviewees argued that diversity and inclusion are not simply additives to events but should be part of the events' core values and commitment to change, visible in the event organisation, organisational team, approach to attendees and accountability in relation to feedback and encountered difficulties.

Interviewees emphasised and reflected on the value of obtaining feedback from attendees in addressing inclusion and diversity through an intersectional lens. To organise inclusive events means to consider a variety of experiences—e.g., race and ethnicity, geographical location, socio-economic background, sexuality, gender identity, neurodivergence, and mental health support—and understanding that a given audience or community needs to be engaged in shaping events so that the events fulfil their needs. To create effective events means to think about how to improve and how to consider and anticipate the needs of participants.

By design, this report presents exploratory findings about interviewees' reflections on organising informal learning spaces in the games industry. The ideas presented should be developed further to explore the in-depth needs of particular communities or organisations (according to their size and location). Furthermore, this exploratory study should be expanded in collaboration with organisations and communities and revised according to their feedback to reflect dynamics of thinking and the development of informal learning spaces accurately.

2.7.1.

Further Areas of Development

Funding and sponsorship

The project's findings suggest that some organisations struggle with the sustainability of the events and securing sponsorship support. Therefore, there is a need to explore funding for events and sponsorship in greater detail to assess the extent of the problem and provide adequate support.

One of solutions would be to provide resources and guidelines for how to approach potential sponsors or how to apply for grants related to development of activities for the game industry. Furthermore, according to interview data, there is evidence that greater collaboration among organisations will alleviate some of financial problems and knowledge gaps about organising events (among smaller, newer organisations).

Technology and infrastructure

The following project was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic when increased reliance on online events was necessary because of social distancing rules.

The increased engagement in the organisation of various online events drew attention to how technology and online spaces can be used for a variety of activities as well as for promoting greater inclusivity during game industry events (by alleviating problems of access, the cost of the events or facilitating participation).

Therefore, there should be further inquiry into how to organise inclusive online events through engagement with organisations that only operate online, based on lessons from organising online events during the pandemic.

Discoverability

The findings of the project suggest that sometimes the problems of accessibility and inclusivity are also connected to questions about the 'discoverability' of the events and networks supporting career development in the industry.

While it is impossible to keep track and promote every single event in the region, we believe event organisers would benefit from dedicated actions to achieve engagement in underrepresented demographics. For example, the creation of a platform dedicated specifically for the promotion and distribution of events, both online and offline and particularly smaller-sized events, would improve discoverability and outreach.

Industry-wide guidelines

The aim of this project, in combination with both the results of the knowledge exchange project and all secondary resources was to provide some exploratory insights into an organisation's experiences of planning and delivering events in informal learning spaces in the game industry.

Many of the presented findings in the report require further investigation because they generate more questions than answers about organising inclusive events. Therefore, there is a need for further discussions and consultancy with industry organisations to develop industry-wide guidelines for approaching the organisation of events. These discussions should also consider the variety of events and their specificity, and how this translates into specific needs to make informal learning spaces more welcoming, inclusive and diverse.

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Appendix 1 - List of Interviewees

Interviewee	Organisation	Role
Abbas, Malath	Biome Collective	Co-founder and event organiser
Ahmad, Nida	POC in Play	UX designer, member of the main team
Cassidy, Declan	Into Games	Chief executive
Cliff, Leon	Ukie	Events manager
D'Elia, Sam	BAFTA Games	Games awards officer
Davis, Alex	GameGam/Glass House Games	Digital event host, event organiser
Edwards, Kate	Global Game Jam	Executive Director
Fraser, Kirsty	Rainbow Game Jam	Co-founder and event organiser
Greer, Samantha	Glass House Games	Journalist and producer
Hirani, Kish	BAME in Games	Founder
Holland, Luci	Freelance composer	Games composer
Killin, Leon	Balance Patch	Founder
Mackey, Jake	Autistica Play	Games Ambassador
Mustapha, Tara	Code Coven	CEO and founder
Parker, James	Bristol Games Hub	Co-founder, producer
Perry, Alex	Media Molecule/GameRats	Co-founder and event coordinator
Saeed, Shahneila	Digital Schoolhouse	Head of education and programme director
Sharma, Suneet	Out Making Games	Leadership team member
Shaw, Dom	Ukie	EDI Coordinator
Simons, Iain	National Videogame Museum	Creative director
Thompson, Shay	Level Up Link Up	Founder
Twist, Jo (Dr, OBE)	Ukie	CEO

Appendix 2 - Coffee Mornings with Women in Games Ambassador Network

Meeting theme	Organisation	Role
Organising inclusive and diverse events in the game industry	4th of February 2021	Emma Cowling (Women in Games Ambassador)
Caring responsibilities and events in the game industry	29th of April 2021	Emma Cowling (Women in Games Ambassador)

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Growth Network

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in games



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