

More than a game: Exploring new digital frontiers

Eurekaalert!

A groundbreaking new initiative led by the University of York, with partners at Cass Business School, part of City University London and Durham University Business School, aims to unlock the potential for scientific and social benefits in digital games.

The £1.2 million project aims to bring the UK digital games industry closer to scientists, teachers and healthcare workers to harness their ingenuity and innovation to contribute to advances in science and society.

Researchers will work with games companies and industry network associations to explore ways to promote the production of more games with a social and scientific purpose.

The New Economic Models and Opportunities for digital Games (NEMOG) initiative, funded jointly by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council, will employ three post-doctoral researchers. It also has an advisory board reflecting the support of more than a dozen games companies and nine creative industries network organisations.

Principal investigator Peter Cowling, an Anniversary Professor based in the York Centre for Complex Systems Analysis (YCSSA), said: "Every action in an online game, from an in-game purchase to a simple button push, generates a piece of network data. This is a truly immense source of information about player behaviours and preferences. We will develop new algorithms to "mine" that data to better understand game players as an avenue for making better games, societal impact and scientific research."

Researchers will investigate sustainable business models for digital games, particularly those with scientific and social goals. This will help to guide how businesses can start up and grow to develop a new generation of games with the potential to improve society.

They will also build simulation models to investigate what might happen if, for example, Government policy were to encourage the development of games with scientific and social benefits.

Professor Cowling added: "The numbers of games sold and the numbers of game hours played mean that we only need to persuade a small fraction of the games industry to consider the potential for social and scientific benefit to achieve a massive benefit for society. Potentially this will start a movement that will lead to mainstream distribution of games aimed at scientific and social benefits.

Professor Nicola Spence, the chief executive of Science City York, who chairs the

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NEMOG Advisory Board, added: "It is an ambitious programme, but the potential benefits if we are even partially successful could have a huge impact on children, science and wider society, as well as the digital economy."

The NEMOG research team consists of Professor Peter Cowling, Dr Ignazio Cabras and Dr Daniel Kudenko of the University of York, Professor Feng Li, of Cass Business School, and Professor Kiran Fernandes, of Durham University Business School, with three postdoctoral researchers to be appointed and a wide range of games companies, network organisations and potential users of games for scientific and social purposes.

The digital games manufacturers supporting the project are: 4 Door Lemon, AI Factory, Albino Pixel, Complex City Apps, Creative Assembly, Introversion, LimbsAlive, MiniMonos, Playgen, Red Kite Games, Revolution, WeR Interactive, ZumFun.

Network organisations supporting the project are: AIGameDev.com, the Creative Industries Knowledge Transfer Network, City of York Council, Digital Shoreditch, Game Republic, Science City York, the SiDE Social Inclusion through the Digital Economy Hub, Tech City, TIGA.

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