Organising Inclusive Informal Events in the Games Industry: Best Practice Guide
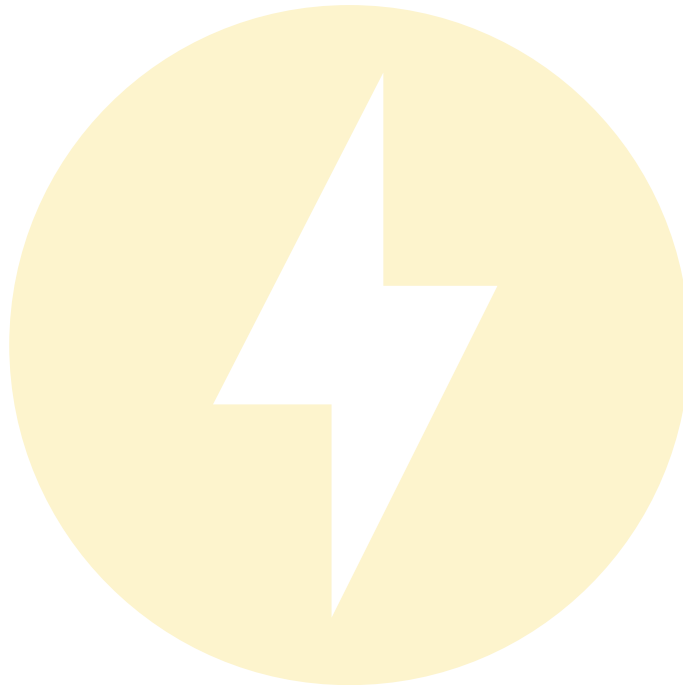
By Dr Anna Ozimek and Carolina Rueda

ukie   UNIVERSITY *of York*   sign_ Screen Industries Growth Network   women in games   UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

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Disclaimer

This best practice guide includes a series of recommendations and guidelines compiled from the information we have gathered from interviews. Interviewees' insights are further supplemented by data from secondary sources about organising inclusive events.

This document consolidates a variety of tips and ideas which you may find useful when organising your event.

Please do keep in mind that these guidelines are not all-encompassing and cannot be applied to every single event. We recognise that each event is different in its size, content, purpose and targeted audience.

Therefore, this guide provides general ideas for reflection in planning the events. Some of the presented challenges in organising events required further reflection and research in preparing materials useful for the games industry. As such, we recommend that you make use of what you believe is most relevant to your kind of events and complement it with your own experience and ideas.

The guidelines established in this document are provided as a starting point for the understanding, discussion and application of inclusivity in informal games events going forward. We encourage users of this guide to continue to be open-minded to further feedback from both attendees and other organisers and to continue iterate on the practices described here as required.

Code of conduct

A code of conduct (CoC) plays an important part in transparently articulating your organisation's values and event rules. It also allows for articulation of ground rules that ensure attendees are provided with a welcoming and inclusive environment.

- Prepare your own code of conduct. You should reflect on your own code of conduct and revise it to make sure that it presents in a transparent manner your organisation's values and that it appropriately addresses the types of activities planned for your events.

- A code of conduct should be easy for attendees to find; it should be clearly and concisely presented in spaces such as your website or associated event webpage (e.g. Eventbrite). You can also send your code of conduct in an email to attendees before the event.

- A code of conduct should be reinforced through repetition of the practice of its core values during the event. For example, the organisers can mention the importance of creating welcoming and inclusive spaces before the start of the event, before presentations or before defined activities. This practice allows the audience to know that a) the event is governed by a code of conduct, b) where the code's specifics can be found and c) that the organisers are committed to a particular set of values.

- Codes of conduct need to be enforceable. Therefore, you should focus on how to act on the values presented in the code of conduct and not purely on its existence as a set of guidelines on the website. Please consider the following:

- Organisations or event organisers must decide in what way the code of conduct will be reinforced (e.g. repetition or presentation on the website).

- Reflect on the mode of participation in the event and how participants' behaviour and activities are monitored in the space. This will differ significantly among the events—for example, working in groups during workshops presents different challenges than supporting networking events.

- Reflect on how inappropriate behaviour and other concerns should be addressed before, during and after the event (e.g. in person and online).

- Define who is responsible, as a trusted member of the organisers, to respond to attendees' concerns. This member should receive training or have resources to provide immediate support for a person in need—e.g. directing an attendee to a quiet space, advising on the possibility of filing a complaint or directing a person to further resources on available support.

- Ensure efficient and confidential reporting of any concerns or misbehaviour.

- Reflect on how, as an event organiser, you will respond to concerns and inappropriate behaviour (e.g. removing a person from the space (online or offline) or issuing warnings).

- Reflect on and collect feedback about your enforceability of code of conduct. Is the reporting system efficient and easy to understand and access for your event/community?

Define the purpose of your event and your audience

Clearly defining the audience of your event plays a crucial role in establishing rules of participation and in attracting a wider pool of participants who will benefit from the event. It is not a problem to organise events dedicated to different groups/interests or events that are open to everyone. However, in thinking about inclusivity and diversity, it is important to transparently state for whom the event space exists.

What kinds of activities and collaborations are you expecting from people (e.g. networking, mentoring, and speaking opportunities)? Defining your audience should also be included in any promotional and outreach materials to promote the event widely, and these materials should be distributed outside traditional/well-known channels and groups.

- Define clearly for whom the event is being organised. For example, is the event open to everyone who is interested in developing a career in the game industry or game development activities (e.g. non-commercial game development). Is your event organised / for a specific marginalised group? Is it more open to participation from other groups? This information can be a deciding factor for people looking to join different game industry events.

- If you plan to organise an event to include a specific marginalised group, please directly consult this group regarding your event theme, activities and audience. Consult your use of language, venue choices and other possible solutions in designing, organising and promoting the event.

- Defining the structure of the event and the proposed activities (what people should expect from the event) will also provide greater clarity for prospective audiences.

- Problems with the discoverability of the events can hinder attendance. It is considered good practice to promote your event outside of known networks and usual audiences. This practice expands social media outreach and event promotion to people who might be interested in a career change (i.e. expanding interest in the industry).

Speakers and collaborators

Inviting diverse speakers and collaborators for attendees to engage with in your events plays a significant role in your communities to demonstrate a variety of experiences, job roles and career trajectories. While discussions about the composition of panels and speakers during the events were the most widely commented on by interviewees, there is also a need to think about the diversity of your organisational team, volunteer team, and collaborators (e.g. teaching staff, support people).

- Allocate sufficient time to contact potential speakers and collaborators. Consider that people with different lived experiences have different capacities to attend events (e.g. because of family and caring responsibilities). Therefore, discuss how you could facilitate speakers' participation—for example, providing flexible forms of participation (e.g. online).

- Depending on the size of your organization and available budget, offer compensation for speakers' participation in your event. Be transparent about your financial ability to compensate, and express your gratitude to speakers.

- Be transparent about how the speakers' content should be delivered and what will happen with the content. Some speakers may not wish for their presentations to be distributed online (e.g. through social media) or discussed online. Be ready to discuss any safety concerns and solutions with the speaker.

- Remember to reach out beyond well-known, established networks to access people who would be excellent speakers and collaborators by operating outside of your connections. The interviewees indicated the use of social media such as Twitter to start establishing connections outside of their own networks before planning the event.

- Don't be afraid to invite new people (e.g., entry-level collaborators) as speakers to your events. Engaging new people in presenting their ideas allows you to expand your networks and train new talent in the industry. You should also reflect on how you can support talent development by preparing resources for people who want to develop their public speaking skills for industry events.

In this project, interviewees focused mostly on discussing engagement with speakers at events and organisational teams. However, it is also important to further discuss other forms of collaborations (e.g. support during game jams and workshops) in the context of the industry events. For example, information about discussing the dynamics of collaborations during game jams could be found in the following defined reports:

Hara and de Jesus (2019), Kerr et al. (2020). Furthermore, for specific types of events (such as educational outreach), there is a need to develop more detailed guidelines of activities and collaborations in both online and offline spaces.
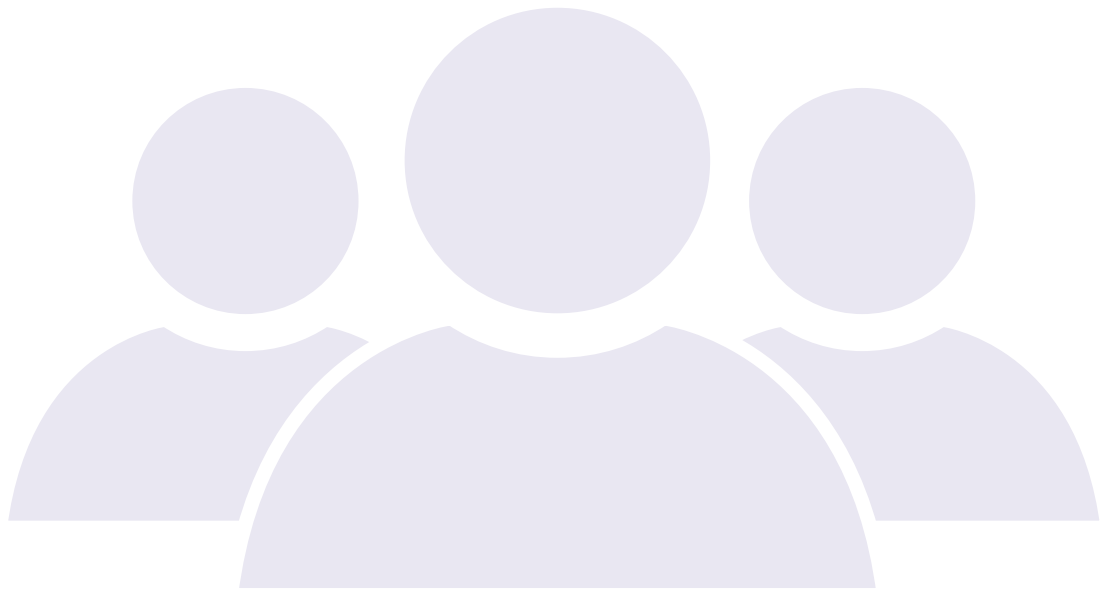
Materials and content delivery

Materials and content delivery refers to resources provided to facilitate prospective attendees deciding to attend the event as well as to improve participants' engagement with speakers/collaborators, content and activities of the event. In thinking about preparing materials and content delivery, it is important to reflect on the following:

- Designated audience members and their needs

- Type of activities
  (e.g. networking events, workshops)

- Available infrastructure
  (physical, online or 'hybrid' spaces)

Transparency

- Be transparent in providing prospective attendees with information about your event. This approach involves transparency and honesty about what you can and cannot provide during the event. This includes providing detailed information in advance about the scope and type of planned activities, transportation links, venue, access to bathrooms, accessibility needs or modes of participation.

- If you cannot provide certain information or accommodate the specific needs of participants, don't hide information; be transparent about the shortcomings of your venue, infrastructure or event activities
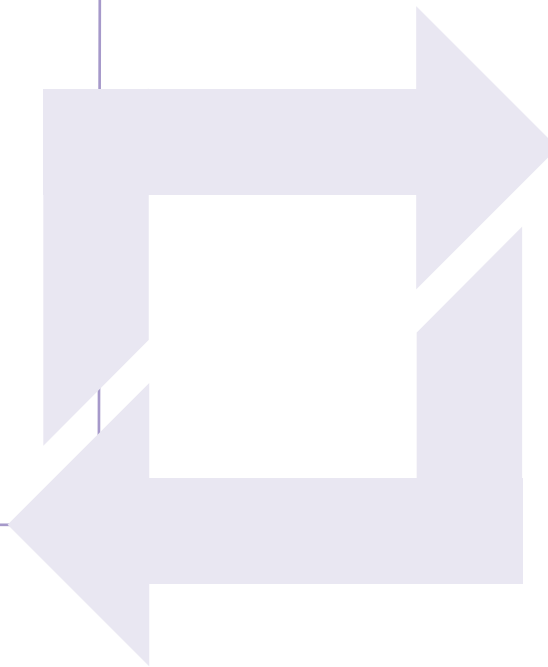
Facilitate social interactions

- Prepare name badges for participants.

- Have a pronouns policy for your event—provide space for pronouns on participants' name badges and encourage attendees to introduce themselves with their pronouns.

- Reflect on how you would like to encourage interaction among participants.

- Reflect on feedback from your attendees and community to facilitate further social activities/support.

Materials offered in advance and after the event

- If your event requires participants to engage with materials during the event—for example, reading instructions for workshops or becoming familiar with additional resources such as speakers' presentations—make sure that these materials are available online or distributed to participants in advance. Everyone absorbs information at different paces, and making materials available in advance facilitates participation and reduces stress.

- Adjust the volume and scope of your material to the needs of your participants. The pace of content delivery (e.g. presentations or workshop activities) is also important to ensure more inclusive participation.

- If possible and applicable to your event, make sure that the prepared materials and content of your event are available after the event—for example, providing access to recorded talks or a summary of key points from the event.
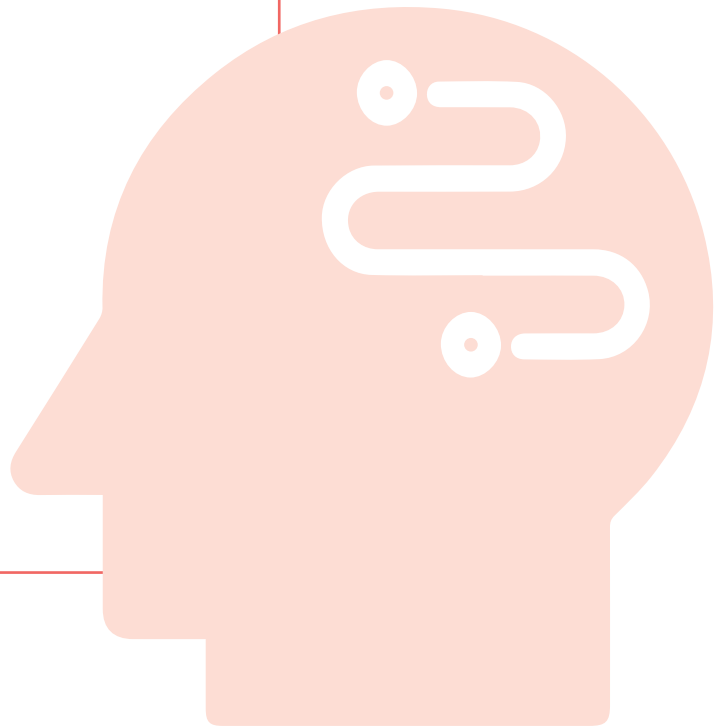
Mode of delivery

- Reflect on how your event's content can be delivered in a variety of ways - for example, through offline, online or 'hybrid' participation. The project's findings suggest that offering participation possibilities through livestreaming provides greater inclusivity for attendees.

- Inform your audience about how they can join the event and interact with others. This approach requires constant reflection and negotiation of guidelines on how content can be delivered. Therefore, while making the event content accessible online after the event is considered a good practice, it should be done with care and by limiting participant discomfort and potential harm (i.e. distributing sensitive content without proper consent).

- However, allowing for flexible forms of participation, both online and physical, requires further recognition of the necessary moderation and establishing ground rules of interaction:

1) All attendees should be informed in advance that the event will be livestreamed and/or recorded. They should also know where the content will be available post-event and for how long it will be available on specific platforms.

2) All attendees need to have an opportunity to opt in or opt out of being visible in any audio-visual materials such as photographs taken during the event or recordings of presentations during the event. One solution for signalling consent during offline events could be to include visual marks (e.g. stickers) on the attendees' badges to avoid any misunderstandings or harm.

3) Establish clear guidelines about the attendees' online distribution of event content. For example, an individual (attendee or speaker) should have a right to opt out from their content and engagement being captured by others and distributed through social media. Therefore, make sure to clearly articulate these guidelines and, if necessary, provide adequate disclaimers about your policy before presentations and event activities.

4) Reflect on which parts of your event may and may not be recorded and distributed. For example, some organisations record main presentations and activities but do not allow recording and distributing online Q&A sessions.

5) When possible, provide live captions of presentations to make communication more accessible for audiences.

Geographical location

In the UK, the game industry is more geographically dispersed than other cultural industries, which tend to cluster in London and the south-east of England. Furthermore, events organised for the game industry are also carried out online, which alleviates barriers to event attendance. The geographical location of the event raised issues about access to the events, their discoverability and costs of attending (including costs of transportation, accommodation, and childcare/caring responsibility). To address these barriers, please reflect on the following:

Information and transparency

- Promote the event well in advance to allow potential attendees to organise their participation accordingly.

- Provide links and detailed information about transportation (and its accessibility) to the event and venue.

- If applicable to your event, provide detailed information about accommodation and dining options. Consider different levels of affordability of accommodations and dining options.

Alleviate the cost of participation

- If possible, provide bursaries for attendees to alleviate the costs of attending the event. Participation in the event is more than a cost of entry fee and often includes transport, accommodation and additional costs (e.g. the cost of home childcare if not possible to attend with children).
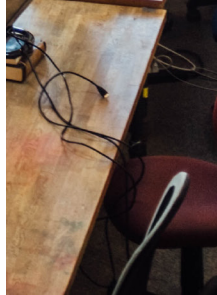
Think about alternatives

- Offer alternative forms of participation—for example, through joining the event through livestreaming, access to some of the event's materials online post-event and/or designated forums to foster networking.

- Offer alternatives to physical forms of networking and participation—for example, online forums, networking and/or 'hybrid' participation.

- Reflect on the possibility of expanding your events to different cities and regions. This might be possible through establishing partnerships with other organisations.

Venue

The creation of a more inclusive, accessible environment for the events is defined by the spaces in which the events take place—both in terms of online and offline environments. In this project, the interviewees mostly focused on the accessible, inclusive features of offline events. The main advice given on the accessibility and inclusivity of a venue was to reflect on 'the use of the space' in providing access, support and facilities that would make attendees more comfortable and facilitate interaction.

Detailed Information and Transparency

Provide detailed information about the venue in terms of the following:

- Accessibility to the venue—transport links (also see the Geographical Location section)

- Accessibility within the venue. Ensure that your attendees do not have a problem accessing and moving around the space.

- The capacity of the space—the number of seats and the available standing room. Determine the capacity of the space for emergency and safety procedures.

- Information about types of accessible facilities: bathrooms, quiet rooms, prayer rooms and catering areas.

- Available technological infrastructure (e.g. access to an internet connection)
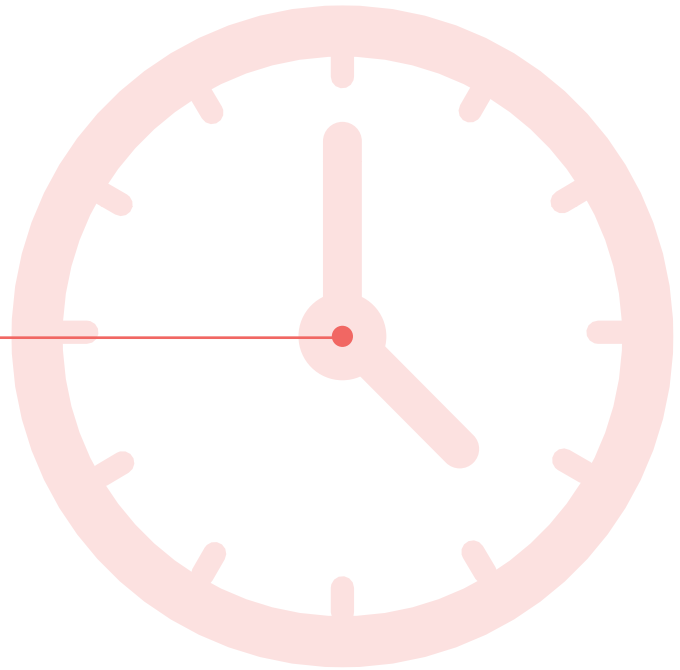
Not all accessibility and inclusivity solutions can be implemented in different venues and spaces. However, the project's interviewees were encouraged to be transparent about the venue and the available facilities and to be open to feedback in introducing new solutions.

It is important to acknowledge any potential problems in advance and provide potential participants with reliable, transparent information so that they can make informed decisions about attending an event. It is crucial to show effort and respect your attendees by anticipating their needs.

Activities and interactions within the space

- Reflect and define how you imagine attendees would use the space. This reflection will depend on the planned activities. For example, during workshops, people might want to collaborate and thus move chairs and tables around more freely.

- Provide access to a quiet room for attendees who would like to spend some time in less noisy, more comfortable spaces. The quiet room does not have to include any specific equipment but should not include any disruptive elements that will lead to sensory overload (e.g., bright fluorescent lights and loud music).

- Provide information about bathroom options in the venue—including information about how bathrooms are labelled in terms of gender—to ensure that attendees can make decisions based on their gender identity.

- If gender neutral bathrooms are unavailable, consider changing the labelling of bathrooms and providing additional information about the bathrooms' facilities. Furthermore, provide relevant information to the organisational team to direct attendees to specific bathroom options.

Time

The time of an event, in terms of both the time of the day and its duration, significantly impacts prospective attendees' decisions to attend the event. The stereotypical late-night networking meetings or time-pressured game jams present considerable barriers for people to attend.

Therefore, the organisers should reflect on what kind of time and duration of the event would be the most suitable for their audiences. Based on interview data and the analysis of secondary sources, the consensus is to offer a variety of events at alternative times of the day or of different durations. The time of an event refers to the time of the day, and the duration of an event refers to the time pressure built into the event for completing certain tasks and the flexibility for participation. To allow for the participation of attendees with different lived experiences, the organisers should consider the following:

Time of day

- Organising a variety of events and offering alternatives. Offering alternatives to late-night networking events, such as lunchtime events, afternoon networking events and brunch events. Providing alternative events to allow attendees who cannot participate in late-night networking or feel uncomfortable participating in such events to still attend events, particularly to network with people from the games industry.

- The duration of the event should also be adjusted to meet the needs of attendees and the given community. For example, intensive weekend-long workshops could be taxing for participants and prevent attendees with parental and caring responsibilities from attending. In this situation, it was acknowledged as good practice to space out workshops over a couple of days or weeks to allow participants to have recovery time or to adjust their schedules.

- Similarly, the traditional structuring of game jams as 48-hour events is neither suitable nor comfortable for everyone. Therefore, offering extended events over a couple of days or weeks was considered a means of allowing for more inclusive participation.

Flexibility of participation

- Time pressure related to certain events, such as workshops or game jams, might make them less inclusive. Consequently, building flexibility (e.g., flexibility in joining and leaving the events) and alternatives to the events is an important component of encouraging attendees with different lived experiences to attend. If possible, the attendees should also be able to attend the events online or in 'hybrid' mode to remove some of the time pressures associated with the events.

Drinks and catering options

In discussing creating a more inclusive, welcoming environment, interviewees mostly referred to the dominant role of alcohol use at networking spaces. To address the preferences of different audiences and attendees, it was considered a good practice to offer non-alcoholic alternatives to alcoholic beverages and to ensure that the event would include networking that is not centred around alcohol.

However, it is worth emphasising the redefinition of power structures and the dynamics of events, rather than strictly focusing on the presence of alcohol. In other words, interactions within the space should be structured to follow a safe space policy in monitoring behaviour (see the Code of Conduct section).

Catering options

- If serving food during an event, please consider various dietary requirements. Attendees could provide their preferences during the signing-up process for the event.

- Longer events, for example, some of the workshops or game jams, often include more extensive catering options (see for example a guide prepared by Hara and de Jesus, 2019).

Drink options

- Ensure the availability of different drink options, including non-alcoholic beverages.

- Consider offering a variety of events, such as events that do not centre on late-night networking with alcohol but do provide the same networking opportunities as those that do (see the Time section).

- Reflect on power structures and the composition of your attendees—the presence of alcohol might not be a problem, but a lack of acknowledgement of power structures and imbalances of power in interactions among people is. Therefore, providing clear guidance for attendees (in the form of a code of conduct) and on-site support is important during such events.

Organisational team

Your organisational team that supports planning, delivering and reflecting on an event is also important for ensuring greater inclusivity and diversity in the industry. It is worth emphasising that the organisation of events requires support and collaboration from people who contribute a significant amount of emotional labour to ensure that events are successful.

- Reflect on the demographic composition of your own organisational team; inclusion and diversity begin with your team and its commitment. Organisations consisting of individuals with diverse lived experiences also allow for bringing new voices, experiences and networks to the process of creating inclusive events.

- If possible, compensate your staff members for their work. If financial rewards are not possible, consider other ways to express your gratitude.

- If appropriate, people engaged in supporting the organisation of the events should have the opportunity to access resources and undergo training to facilitate their work.

- For example, this can range from providing instructions and guidance to tutors for how to conduct workshops to providing support and resources for enforcing the code of conduct if inappropriate behaviour is reported.

Accountability and feedback

In the categories presented above, certain types of activities and approaches to organising inclusive and diverse events were mentioned repeatedly and emphasised. Because of the variety and scope of the events organised by the games industry, it is difficult to provide specific guidelines.

However, the project's findings suggest that organisers need to strive for constant improvement and engage in reflection when approaching the organisation of events.

Transparency: This refers to being clear about your approach to planning and delivering the event. Delivering events is a complex task and often certain things can be misunderstood, difficult to deliver or constrained by external factors. Therefore, it is important to be open, honest and transparent about what the event can and cannot deliver.

Feedback: You should seek feedback about your events and treat it seriously. Event attendees and members of your organisational team will provide you with information which could be used to improve your events and provide you with new perspectives. Feedback from attendees can be formal (forms sent to the participants after the event) or informal (chatting with your attendees), but it should be a central part of striving to organise more inclusive events.

Reflection and Accountability: Feedback from the attendees should be reflected upon and discussed with your team. While mistakes, misunderstandings and problems are unavoidable, there is immense value in holding the organisational team accountable and addressing the problems and introducing changes to your events. Therefore, the organisation of inclusive and diverse events should be an iterative approach that is based on gaining additional experience and feedback about organising different events.

Further areas of development

This section briefly addresses areas for the development of additional research and consultancy with industry partners to reflect on organisation of more inclusive events.

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 the project's participants, 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. Therefore, further research and consultancy in preparing a database and a map of events, networks and initiatives organised by the game industry, both online and offline, would be beneficial for assessing the scope and dynamics of the growth of informal learning spaces.

Industry-wide guidelines

The aim of this project 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 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.