



Pervasive Media Studio Report

April 2023 – March 2024



pervasive media studio

WATERSHED



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Image: How (not) to get hit by a self-driving car by Studio Playfool and Tomo Kihara. Photo by Jack Offord

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jo Lansdowne, Watershed Executive Producer



First Friday, Photo by Jack Offord

The Studio is a marvel, an oasis, a thing of wonder, and I don't think we would have come into being without it. Plus you're always up for bonus malarkey. Thank you.

Comment from Resident Survey

Pervasive Media Studio supports a creative community to make extraordinary and inspiring work. We foreground the power of art and the imagination to direct technology towards a more inclusive, playful and sustainable world.

Over the past year we have had 10 residents join us on a permanent basis and 58 temporary residencies, including 16 through programmes targeted at specific groups that are underrepresented in the cultural sector. We offered 324 timebank sessions for advice in marketing, producing, creative technology, inclusion, business advice, as well as 428 hours of one-to-one support from our team of producers, and 48 accountancy and law clinics. Our residents had networking opportunities through 12 monthly studio lunches as well as themed community conversations on issues of interest to the community (including Hope and Hardship, Death and Technology and Faith and Technology).

Our drive to engage publics with research and development has gathered real momentum. Alongside our popular First Friday and Lunchtime Talk programme we ran workshops with families, schools, pop-up sessions with customers in the bar, standalone showcase events and bespoke testing sessions – a total of 120 events reaching public audiences of 21,273. A sample survey of audiences revealed that 42% of attendees

had not engaged with Pervasive Media Studio before, and 100% would recommend the event to a friend or colleague.

We completed our series of Alternative Technology workshops, bringing Residents and Researchers together to playfully interrogate technologies such as the Metaverse, Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence and City Scale Engineering. Building on this foundation, in September 2023, we also began a year-long programmatic focus for the first time - [Other Minds](#). Launching with our Artist Residency programme and spanning talent development, commissioning and public events this theme positioned an exploration of Artificial Intelligence within the context of many other intelligences in the world (animal, mechanical, collective) – intelligences which technology might help us to collaborate with, rather than to dominate.

It has also been a significant year for raising awareness of our work at a national level. In collaboration with Jerwood Arts, we published [Random Selection: A How To Guide](#) sharing not only our learning from incorporating random selection into our processes, but a range of case studies from other organisations. And in December we discovered we were the successful bidder to the new Xrtists programme (Immersive Arts) - the sole consortium to receive this unprecedented combined funding from AHRC, Arts Council England, Arts Council Wales, Creative Scotland and Arts Council Northern Ireland - taking our leadership profile to a whole new level.

Resident Annual Survey headlines (158 respondents)

Every year we undertake a survey of our residents to understand what value they get from the studio and to analyse the make up of our community. This year, by refining our survey questions and approach, many more Residents completed the survey (an increase of 56). This means that while we have seen growth in every area below, the figures do reflect the higher response rate. The headlines:

- Total annual turnover £6,357,140
- Average resident turnover is £42,954 (approximately £4k higher than last year)
- Total funding leveraged £3,119,059
- Employees (includes freelancers) 480
- Audience reached 175,027,004

Last year we reflected on the severe impact that the economic climate was having on Residents' finances (as well as their wellbeing). The slight increase in the Resident turnover this year gives us reason for cautious optimism but it still remains significantly lower than in previous years.

'I've had a challenging year in many ways - including working hard to create a new business / studio and residency programme which was unexpectedly lost; but PM Studio really stepped in to support me with an emergency grant and a lot of friendship, emotional support and a sense of security which I was deeply grateful for.' Studio survey comment

TALENT DEVELOPMENT



Christmas Family workshop, Photo by ShamPhat Photography

"I feel much more confident in my ability to pursue and R&D this kind of work, and to back myself in being more experimental. It was the first time I had spent time being so self-directed, so it was a huge learning curve re: what does/doesn't work for my brain and energy levels, which has changed how I approach new projects." Winter Residencies Participant 2024

"I'd like to do more things like this! A mix of craft and tech is great!" Family Workshop Participant (8-13 years old)

"A huge thank you for putting on the whole work experience week. I've had a really great time, both working on my project and getting to know new people (which is not something I thought I'd say before this week!) Completing work experience has definitely above all else really improved my confidence, and my ability to access similar opportunities in the future." Participant feedback

Family offer

Building on the success of the Studio Open Day, we offered free (universally sold out) Creative Technology Family Workshops, aimed at 8–13 year olds during the school holidays. These workshops were facilitated by our team in collaboration with Studio Residents, offering activities that combined craft and technology including; creating musical instruments out of ordinary household items, making Christmas themed robots (snowbots!), building an interactive cardboard race track and creating sound from light and shadow.

Work Experience

We hosted a fortnight of work experience for 31 students spanning years 10-13 who came to Watershed from 11 schools across Bristol for an eclectic programme of film, creative technology, sustainability and storytelling. The fortnight coincided with our Playable City showcase week, so students were set the challenge of building a play activity over the course of their placements. During their time with us students met with Residents and Watershed staff members to explore storytelling, audience building, game mechanics, user testing and projection. The teams built games filled with joy, engaging people in tense moments with weighing scales, inviting them to new worlds articulated through graphic design, and into extreme environments avoiding lava flows using floor projections.

Make Shift

Make Shift is our engagement platform for early career creatives, offering monthly facilitated meet ups, signposting and bespoke opportunities. In August, six early career creatives were selected to take part in the first [Make Shift Camp](#). Inspired by the work of the late David Graeber, Campers were challenged to collaboratively develop artworks that responded to the theme of 'Making the World Differently'. The group developed two prototypes: a bus stop quiz, inviting the public to collaborate to answer questions and be the best bus stop in Bristol; and 'Chatterbox' an installation that invited users to consider what it means to connect with someone through conversation. These collaborative projects were shared at an event at the end of their week and then showcased again at First Friday.

Other Minds Artist Residencies

Our Winter Residencies support artists to research and develop blue skies ideas. This year we supported Dave Evans and Elinor Lower to explore Other Minds. Liverpool based artist Dave Evans made Investigating a Domestic Vocal System, a new artwork exploring how spaces can be given 'voice' as opposed to simply making sound or noise. Dave has been livestreaming the sounds of mundane domestic tasks over the internet since 2022 as part of Peripheries. This project raised questions around audibility, who or what is allowed to make noise, and how livestreaming potentially offers an opportunity to disrupt these conventions. Elinor Lower is a Bristol based writer, theatre-maker and participatory artist interested in how we are hyper-individualised as workers, citizens and humans. She created 'we meet in the woods', a place-based multiplayer theatrical game exploring forest intelligence and the ways in which tactile technology, can remind us of the parts of ourselves we have forgotten.

Making the World Differently Fellowship

Creative practitioner and educator Frazer Meakin began a Fellowship hosted by us in partnership with the University of Bristol's MyWorld Skills and Training team. He connected with industry and education bodies plus policy makers such as WECA, Bristol WORKS, Bristol Education Partnership, Business West, Thangham Debonnaire (former MP for Bristol West & Shadow Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport) and South Bristol Youth. Frazer then used this network to deliver a Skills Roadshow for school/college age students, visiting 10 schools/colleges including 2 SEND schools, plus a careers fair at the Bottle Yard, engaging 340 students in hands-on creative technology workshops and conversations. This was followed by a number of schools visiting Watershed to experience hands-on workshops with Studio and MyWorld practitioners.

MAJOR RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS



Patterns in Practice showcase at Strange Brew, Photo by ShamPhat Photography

"...I just wanted to say a big thank you and well done to all of you at the Watershed team for organising such an excellent Playable Cities event. I thoroughly enjoyed listening in to the conversations that took place in the morning. What an amazing group of creative people as well! Each of the projects sounded incredibly exciting. I found the House of Weaving Song prototype from Fozia and Ayan particularly moving and thought-provoking. I look forward to seeing what everyone involved goes on to do in the future."

AHRC's Investment Manager; Cities and Urban Environments

I wanted to get in touch to say what an incredible piece of work the Just Transition report is. I have been through it a few times now and the ways in which it confronts the key issues and brings forward the emergent themes and recommendations is done in such a positive, practical, hopeful and transformative way, despite what I have no doubt was a deeply challenging and triggering process for many if not all involved, is honestly remarkable. Even more so considering the timelines in which this work happened given the difficulties we had in having the funding allocation signed off. Massive congratulations to you and the team that brought this together. It feels like something which can hopefully contribute to creating tangible and significant change.

Matt Burrows, University of Reading

Immersive Arts (AHRC, Arts Council England, Arts Council Wales, Creative Scotland and Arts Council Northern Ireland)

In January Pervasive Media Studio announced our success as lead hub for the £6m Immersive Arts programme. Working in partnership with cultural organisations in Belfast and Derry (Nerve Centre), Cardiff (Wales Millennium Centre) and Glasgow (Cryptic), Immersive Arts will generate a rich programme of

inclusive and accessible opportunities, breaking down the barriers for artists of all backgrounds to engage with immersive tools. The training and showcasing programme will be led by Crossover Labs and we will have strategic input from Unlimited, Immerse UK and XR Diversity Initiative. We also have a brilliant international Advisory Board including Sundance Institute, PHI Centre, IDFA DocLab, Julie's Bicycle, Black Xtended Realities Network, RSC, HTC Vive Arts, Limina Immersive and others.

MyWorld (UKRI Strength in Places)

Building on the existing creative strengths in the West of England region, [MyWorld](#) is led by University of Bristol in collaboration with UWE Bristol, University of Bath, Bath Spa University, Watershed, Digital Catapult and other cultural organisations in the city. The programme is set up to explore the future of creative technology innovation by pioneering new ideas, products and processes. Pervasive Media Studio leverages a community of experimental practice for the Open Innovation, Audience and Network Development and Experimental Productions work packages in particular to draw from and feed into.

We produce a Fellowship programme which supported 29 Fellows this year, connecting research, practice and industry. Highlights included running an Experimental Audio Camp in partnership with the world-leading facilities at Real World Studios. Exploring the future of immersive sound, 10 creatives paired up to create 5 original pieces of music that were shared with an invited audience at Dolby Studios in London. We also supported Fellow Clarice Hilton to convene a group of Fellows with lived experience of disability to explore Access Design in VR.

[Playable City Sandbox](#) culminated in a showcase in which almost 8,000 came to play with the 6 brilliant prototypes. The teams are continuing to develop their work, with projects touring to London, Leicester, New York, Tokyo, San Francisco and beyond. We launched [More than AI Sandbox](#), as part of Other Minds, receiving 96 applications from a wide range of companies looking to explore Artificial Intelligence.

[Container](#) is an online magazine that takes a human look at technology, exploring how people use it for creative projects, community-building and social justice. This year Container published pieces on; Cyberfeminism in electronic music & sound, Blackness, Glitch Feminism and Evasion, Designing a Degradable Video Game, Mapping as a Defence Against Climate Crisis, Engineering Futures in Nigeria's Rice Culture, Tech Revolutions and Drag Performance.

Grounding Technologies (AHRC)

[Grounding Technologies](#) was a pilot project exploring how creative technology can be utilised locally in service of a just future. Building on our climate action research within Bristol+Bath Creative R+D, we brought together a new research team from the same core partnership of UWE Bristol, University of Bristol, Bath Spa University and University of Bath plus the West of England Combined Authority. Over the summer of 2023, we invited those working at the emerging intersections of community climate action, art and technology to two ideas labs, to meet, discuss and digest. We then invited participants to apply for six pots of £15k for ideas that explored these questions with us. Our brilliant teams brought together activists, artists, producers, gardeners, technologists, designers, lawyers, cartographers and musicians. In our [final report](#), we share grounding principles for what responsible, grounded, technological work could be, as well as key areas for developing creative approaches to climate action and the green economy.

Patterns in Practice (AHRC)

[Patterns in Practice Residency](#) is a research project led by the University of Sheffield and UWE Bristol in partnership with Watershed. The collaboration came about through Dr Erinma Ochu from the Digital Cultures Research Centre who was Arts Lead on the project. We supported composer, improvising guitarist and sound artist Craig Scott to explore the tension between human and machine made music using robotics and custom

An inclusive Pervasive Media Studio is one where all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute to the community's success. The Studio reviews both the demographic balance of the community and their sense of belonging once a year through a carefully designed survey. Because of the relatively low number of people in the community, and our commitment to confidentiality, we are not sharing the raw data but Watershed's Head of Data, the

Executive Producer, Studio Community Lead and Inclusion Producer look through all of the detail and will publish a full report later in the year alongside our priorities for the year ahead.

Resident Reps

Over the year we worked alongside our Resident Reps Imwen Eke and Lucy Turner to explore how the Resident community can be better represented in our decision making structures. Imwen and Lucy ran workshops with other Residents, held individual conversations and we spent time together as a team and partnership reflecting on their findings. The result is some specific actions that evolve our current system and some longer term questions that we can hold as we build engagement, confidence and experience around governance in the community. Over the next 18 months we will:

- commission a designer to create a visual map of how the Studio decision making works, to be displayed in the space (and online).
- pilot a Resident Advisors group to feed into existing decision making processes (interview and selection panels, theme development, Studio Development fund assessment).
- trial some other mechanisms where decision making is more complex

Micro-Residencies

Our Micro-Residencies focus on supporting artists who are underrepresented in our community. Within Other Minds, we collaborated with Bristol & Bath Creative R&D to support poet Akulah Agbami to explore how AI might connect us more deeply with the languages and mysteries of nature and advance us in our quest for equality. Akulah spent 4 days researching and 1 day creating poetry in response to the findings.

The above were in addition to our ongoing commitments to EDI e.g. using inclusive recruitment and commissioning processes, offering Access Riders to all residents, signposting to our Quiet desks and Quiet Room, asking all Residents to sign up to our Inclusive Behaviour Commitments. This year the team also had specialist training in recognizing white supremacy and Anti-Racist Facilitation.