Academic Briefing Pack

With over £300,000 available to draw our leading academics into the StoryFutures R&D project, this briefing pack is aimed at outlining the project and the opportunities. Opportunities are open to colleagues on research and/or teaching contracts. We welcome interest from the arts and humanities, social and hard sciences.

Find out more at a briefing event or via Jen.Parker-Starbuck@rhul.ac.uk or storyfutures@rhul.ac.uk (after 5 Nov, subject line: StoryFutures Academic)

Table of Contents

1. What is StoryFutures
2. What are the aims of StoryFutures?
3. How does StoryFutures work?
4. What opportunities are there to get involved?
   T1 StoryLab:
   T2 Value Networks:
   T3. Data in the Creative Workflow
   T4. Audience engagement
5. What do academics gain from involvement?
1. What is StoryFutures

StoryFutures is a 4.5 year £12m (FeC) project led by Royal Holloway. It is a new kind of research project that brings together a consortia of HEIs and creative industries companies. It is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of an unprecedented investment in creative industries R&D via the Creative Industries Clusters programme.

Our aim is to create innovative and risky projects that address the need to create compelling content and story experiences in next generation technologies, focusing particularly on Virtual, Augmented and Mixed Reality. StoryFutures focuses on the future of

1. Story form;
2. Business models;
3. Creative data processes; and
4. Audience experiences.

What is the Creative Industries Clusters Programme (CICP)?
The CICP is part of the Government’s Industrial Strategy and comprises nine creative clusters. Each ‘cluster’ tackles a unique R&D challenge identified by industry in a bid to unlock economic growth for the UK, create jobs and opportunities and develop a highly-skilled workforce. The aim of the programme is to create jobs and new companies, products and experiences within our region (see below).

What’s different about the CICP is that moves academic research from being about the creative industries or even with the creative industries to being for the creative industries. The outputs from StoryFutures will not be measured in traditional REF terms of publications (written, creative or other). Instead, our project’s key KPIs are around economic growth for our partner companies and our region.

Who is involved in the StoryFutures partnership and where is it located?
StoryFutures is led by Royal Holloway. It is located in the the ‘Gateway Cluster’, to London’s immediate west. Our partnership spans film, TV, gaming, VFX and immersive. Our partners include: Pinewood Studios, Immerse UK, Pact, Ukie, Resource Productions, BFI, Connect TVT, Imaginarium Studios, The National Gallery, BBC Studios, Sony Interactive Entertainment, nDreams, Heathrow as well as our Local Economic Partnerships: EM3, TVBucks and TVBerks.

But the partnership is dynamic and we’ll be looking to bring in more partners – both large and small – over the duration of the project. As we explain overleaf, StoryFutures is not a linear
research project but instead offers an architecture for innovation that is dynamic – drawing in researchers, companies, cultural and government bodies during its life cycle.

2. What are the aims of StoryFutures?

StoryFutures is a R&D base for screen industries to meet the challenge of next-generation storytelling, producing compelling content for emerging creative technologies. The stories of tomorrow will reach audiences in new and complex ways, fuelled by immersive technologies, data-driven personalisation, smart devices and AI alongside evolutions in contemporary screen form that threaten our very conception of the 'screen'. Screen industries' creative story processes, techniques, business models, value networks and workflows are thus challenged to iterate a next generation of storytelling that can engage audiences in novel and commercially viable experiences.

Seems a bit broad, what are your funding objectives?

StoryFutures will be assessed against its 5 core aims:

1. **Innovation**: Enable cluster companies to undertake risky, cross-sector innovative product and service development;
2. **Economic Growth and Jobs**: Grow IP, revenue, exports, jobs and investment readiness by brokering collaborative partnerships, supporting prototypes and pilots to reach audiences and industry-facing platforms;
3. **Cluster Connectivity**: Strengthen collaboration and networking amongst Gateway Cluster screen and createch industries, developing a long-term R&D base via (a) and (b) to ensure that the 'Gateway Cluster' is recognised as a blueprint for regional growth;
4. **Next Generation Talent**: Create a next-generation of diverse innovators in story and technological form, emphasising increased female representation;

Underpinning the above is an objective to enable collaborative R&D that brings together sectors and disciplines, connecting the region's creative businesses in film, gaming, visual effects, immersive theatre and experiences, television and software applications, with each other and the cluster's createch sector to enable innovative new products, content, services and experiences.

What are some of the KPIs for the project?

StoryFutures will provide a wider understanding of the creativity of conurbations to act as a blueprint for nationwide growth, producing 155 R&D projects, 20% increase in funding success, 55 jobs and reach over 1m audiences. R&D will benefit policy stakeholders, trade bodies and networks nationally via reports, showcases, and network events to ensure companies outside the cluster gain insight to support innovation for competing at global scale in next generation story form and products. Example KPIs include:

- 56 Jobs created or saved in the region
- 10% increase in partner size
- 15% increase in SMEs receiving R&D funding
- 10 New skills programmes created

3. How does StoryFutures work?

StoryFutures responds to partner-defined challenges in an age where immersive technologies are shifting our conception of the screen and AI troubles our notions of storyteller and participant/audience. Such challenges require innovative solutions for how creative audiovisual screen industries: (1) tell stories; (2) create business models; (3) develop workflow processes; (4)
engage audiences. These partner-defined challenges shape the 4 themes StoryFutures addresses, underpinned by a concern with collaborative creativity across disciplines:

**T1. StoryLab:** How do creatives harness emergent and established storytelling forms on new platforms to prototype and build new products that broker new audience relationships?

**T2. Value Networks:** What are the production networks, revenue streams, collaborations, business models and IP opportunities for Next Generation stories?

**T3. Data in the Creative Workflow:** How can increasing volumes of data/metadata in production be better managed and processed to enable commercial prospects and greater collaboration?

**T4. Audience engagement:** How can mixed methods form richer understandings of user experiences and needs, such as embodiment, trust, personalisation and ethics?

**How do these 4 themes work in practice?**

Our framework is dynamic, recognising that even large partners in our sector have difficulty committing to long-term horizons or forecasting budgets in 2-3 years’ time, enabling creative industry partners and academics to take part in short, medium and long-term time frames. Continuous R&D across the 4 themes will enable far-sighted research to inform collaborative innovation via StoryLab challenges that work within realistic company time frames, whilst our responsive mode scheme supports emergent SME needs.

**StoryFutures R&D**

**Learn, Iterate, Commercialise, Grow**

**1. Story Lab**
- Innovation in story form by:
  - Real world challenges
  - Pilot & Prototypes
  - Brokering creative story-driven responses

**2. Value Networks**
- Business Development:
  - Business support & innovation
  - Cluster networking
  - Take to market

**3. Creative Data**
- New workflow tools:
  - Map data flows and user needs
  - Create efficiencies
  - Develop AI-driven tools for production sector

**4. Audience Insight**
- Audience research toolkit:
  - Test productions with real audiences
  - Bespoke measures
  - Provide value add to Story Lab productions

**What is StoryLab?**

StoryLab is a key entry point for our work. StoryLab will develop use-case prototypes and pilot creative projects that fund SMEs to work with an R&D budget (ranging from £10k to £500k) to create innovative story forms that respond to scalable opportunities scoped with our ‘challenge partners’. These challenges represent industry wide barriers to growth in the creative exploitation of next generation technologies to stimulate growth and de-risk further investment.

StoryLab will run innovation events to broker innovative SME responses to our partners’ challenges, funding a winning pitch for each challenge we run. We then support the winning SMEs in the creation of these products, both creatively and through business development. We then test these pilot and prototype productions with audiences, utilising cutting-edge research in cognitive
psychology, neuroscience and media research to fuel commercial growth and create enthralling experiences for the public (see diagram).

StoryLab operates at commercial and student level, with an on-going Writers’ Room programme to develop next generation talent and ideas for immersive and AI-driven storytelling.

4. What opportunities are there to get involved?

If you’ve read this far, we hope you think it sounds great. We envision academic involvement in the themes in the following ways:

**T1 StoryLab**: Collaborations between academics and creative companies to harness next generation technologies for new storytelling experiences.

1.1 **StoryLab Facilitators**: Engaged to be part of the 2-day innovation StoryLab event to help SMEs respond to the challenge with innovative ideas. They will
   - Foreground the story elements of the challenge
   - Look at narrative structures, dramaturgy, innovative storytelling across the technological platforms within the challenge remit.
   - Push the SME beyond the business need to R&D in innovation in story form

1.2 **StoryLab Consultants**: From 1.1, with the challenge setter and successful company, we will select an academic from the facilitators involved in the challenge events to act as a StoryLab Consultant. These academics will provide ongoing expertise in story form to the development of the prototype or pilot. They will:
   - Push SMEs beyond a routine or tech-led solution throughout the production and development process.
   - Act as a key contact point for SMEs during production with the StoryFutures team and Challenge setter, including monitoring against KPIs and reporting infrastructure.

1.3 **StoryLab Inspiration Pieces**: Providing creative companies access to cutting edge R&D from across the arts, social sciences and sciences currently locked up in our institutions. Inspiration pieces will be invited and/or solicited in response to the challenge need. Potential examples include Professor David Howard’s (Electronic Engineering) ‘Vocal Tract Organ’, which uses MRI technology to produce and recreate sounds from throat cavities. Or Polly Dalton’s (Psychology) research into multi-sensory attention and the applications for technological innovation.

1.4 **Student challenge leaders**: Providing leadership to a group of students responding to the same StoryLab challenge, which can be showcased at future StoryLab events. There is a particular emphasis on written and low-fi responses to the challenge brief. They will:
   - Scope the challenge to be suitable for student participation
   - Curate students either from taught courses, extra-curricular or with StoryFutures partners to provide widening participation opportunities e.g. with Richmond-Upon-Thames-College, Resource Production, Screen South, Connect TVT.
T2 Value Networks: Researching the production networks, revenue streams, collaborations, business models and IP opportunities for Next Generation stories. Opportunities from Theme 2 include:

2.1 ‘StoryLab Inspiration Pieces’ on innovation, business models, value networks, economic geography, etc. (See 1.3 above)

2.2 Responsive mode commissioned research: throughout the project we will be looking for academics, particularly ECRs and PhD students, to provide short ‘sprints’ of work.

T3. Data in the Creative Workflow: Analysis around increasing volumes of data/metadata in production and explorations of how it can be better managed and processed to enable commercial prospects and greater collaboration. Academic opportunities here will be responsive to work packages developed as the project progresses. They are likely to occur from October 2019 onwards. Academic work includes:

- Secondments: to work inside creative companies on the development of data and design tools.

- Responsive mode commissioned research: throughout the project we will be looking for academics, particularly data scientists, designers and HCI researchers to get involved with short sprints of work that may then gain further funding from partners.

T4. Audience engagement: Testing and examining mixed methods of engagement to form richer understandings of user experiences and needs, such as embodiment, trust, personalisation and ethics.

4.1 ‘StoryLab Inspiration Pieces’ on attention, audience behaviours, etc.

4.2 Responsive mode commissioned research: throughout the project we will be looking to access particular areas of expertise in short sprints to progress our research.

5. What do academics gain from involvement?

There are a range of benefits to getting involved with the project.

**StoryLab Facilitators.** Benefits include:

- Access to creative SMEs and world leading creative organisations to showcase their expertise and develop future collaborations
- Travel and subsidence
- Cost of a teaching replacement up to an agreed amount if essential

**StoryLab Consultants.** Benefits include:

- Privileged access to the production of innovative SME prototypes.
- Production credit on the prototype/pilot
- Opportunity to be involved in any further development of the project, subject to contractual negotiations
- Budget for teaching remission (subject to approval of line manager)
- Travel and subsistence to an agreed value.
- REF/TEF output (subject to NDAs)
● Ongoing relationships with Creative Industry Partners for own research/student professionalisation.

**StoryLab Inspiration Pieces.** Benefits include:

- Knowledge transfer of your research via dissemination to creative industries
- Impact for your research in those prototypes or SMEs that take up your ideas
- Access to creative SMEs and world leading creative organisations

**StoryLab Student Challenges.** Benefits include:

- Budget for teaching remission (subject to approval of line manager)
- Travel and subsistence to an agreed value.
- TEF output and teaching materials/case studies
- Ongoing relationships with Creative Industry Partners for own research/student professionalisation.

**Responsive mode commissioned research.** Benefits include:

- Budget for teaching remission (subject to approval of line manager)
- Potential for REF/TEF output (subject to NDAs)
- Ongoing relationships with Creative Industry Partners for own research/student professionalisation.