

SPECTRUM: Shaping Policies for Equity in Creative Tech and Immersive Media

Professor Sarah Atkinson (Department of Culture, Media & Creative Industries), in partnership with Ida XR Studio and featured panellists Kady Marriott (WithYouWithMe), Sara Whybrew (British Film Institute), and Nicalia Thompson (Black XR Network UK).





This paper identifies critical workforce challenges in the immersive technology sector and outlines potential policy interventions to address them.

To evaluate the effectiveness of these proposed interventions, we have developed a set of key questions that will guide a panel discussion at the BEYOND conference in Salford on the 26th of November 2024.

PROJECT SUMMARY

SPECTRUM, led by Professor Sarah Atkinson, explored how policy can better support equity in the UK's immersive technology sector. The project took the form of a public intervention at the BEYOND 2024 conference in Salford, where a co-produced panel and policy briefing brought together government, industry, and academic voices.

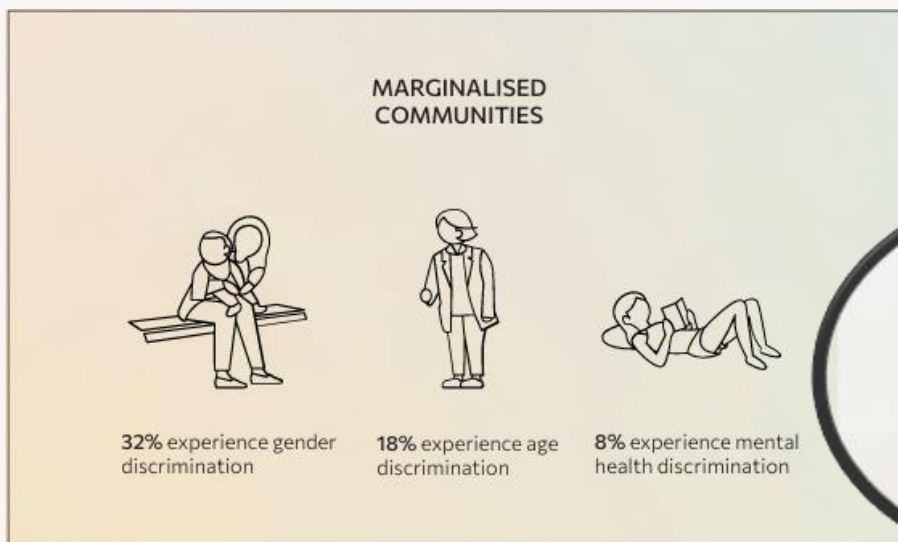
In collaboration with Ida XR Studio, the project highlighted structural inequalities affecting women, trans and non-binary individuals working in immersive media. It translated research into action by convening a live discussion and distributing a 16-page briefing to conference delegates. By focusing on policy levers for inclusion, SPECTRUM offered a timely and practical contribution to the wider debate on equity in creative tech.

HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

SPECTRUM was developed as a direct outcome of Professor Sarah Atkinson's participation in the King's Policy Primer training programme, which supports researchers in translating academic insights into real-world policy impact. The programme offered a timely opportunity to build on Sarah's collaboration with Ida XR Studio, an organisation advancing gender equity in immersive and emerging tech.

Together, they saw the need for stronger policy engagement around structural inequalities in the immersive tech sector—particularly those affecting women, trans and non-binary professionals. Their goal was to translate existing research into actionable, public-facing outputs that could resonate beyond academia.

In this way, the project placed the act of convening itself—bringing people together in a shared public forum—as its core method and outcome.



Equity and diversity is a key driver to economic growth, productivity and innovation.

A SILENCED SECTOR: EDI ISSUES IN THE IMMERSIVE AND VIRTUAL PRODUCTION INDUSTRIES, WITH IDA XR STUDIO AND XR NETWORK+

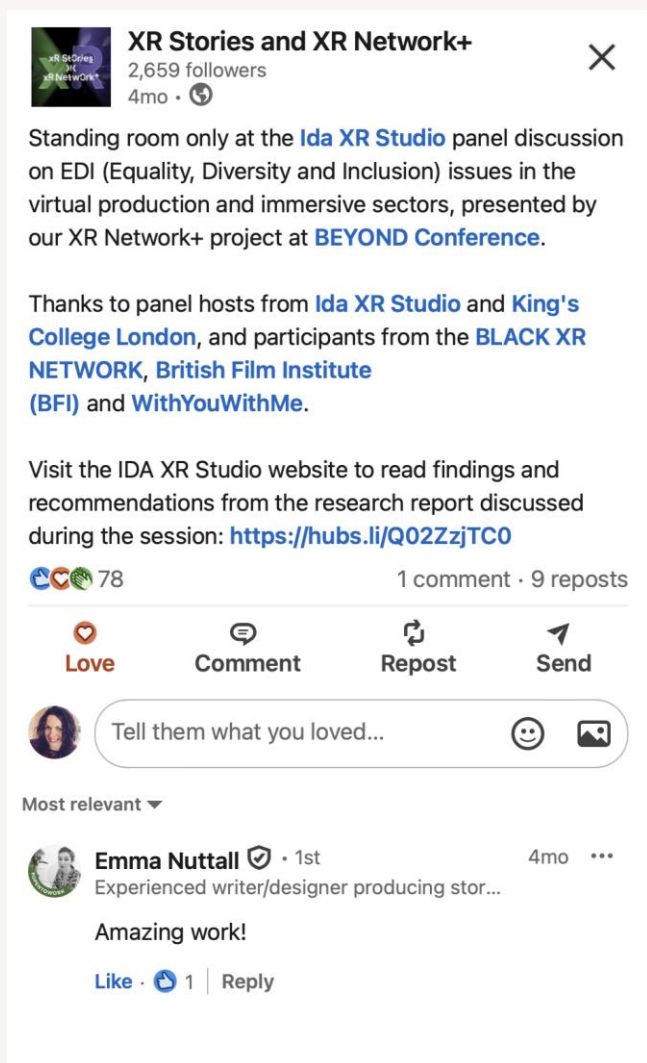
Join us for a lively discussion on the health of the immersive sector, covering topics like work culture, automation, AI, and job security. We'll explore how these factors affect industry prosperity, especially for marginalised groups. This will be an inclusive conversation, and we encourage participation from underrepresented voices as we examine the evidence needed for equitable policy interventions.

WHAT HAPPENED?

SPECTRUM culminated in a panel event at BEYOND 2024, co-convened by Professor Sarah Atkinson and Ida XR Studio, and designed to spotlight the equity challenges shaping careers in immersive and creative technology. The session brought together key voices from industry and policy: Sara Whybrew (British Film Institute), Kady Marriott (WithYouWithMe), and Nicalia ThompSon (Black XR Network UK). Each panellist shared insights from their respective sectors, sparking a grounded and practical conversation around how systemic change might be achieved.

Alongside the panel, the team produced a 16-page printed policy briefing, distributed to all attendees. The briefing was designed to be visually engaging and easy to digest, drawing on current research and sector data. It addressed three urgent challenges—negative work culture, the impact of automation, and precarious employment—and connected these to live policy initiatives including the *Good Work Review*, the *Employment Rights Bill*, and the *Pissarides Review into the Future of Work*.

The event was intentionally structured as a live intervention: a space for policy conversation grounded in the lived experiences of those often left out of industry narratives. The briefing was shared with all delegates, with additional copies circulated online and through professional networks. After the event, the team held a reflection meeting to assess feedback and identify next steps for keeping the conversation and collaboration going, including plans for wider dissemination and further funding opportunities.



WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

The SPECTRUM session drew over 100 attendees at BEYOND 2024—so many that there wasn't enough seating to accommodate everyone. Each delegate received a printed policy briefing, and the session prompted real-time engagement and post-event interest from key figures in research and innovation, including UKRI and Surrey University's Games and Innovation Nexus.

Online, the project gained further visibility. A single LinkedIn post about the panel reached over 1,500 views, with strong engagement from professionals across the creative and tech sectors. Feedback on the event and its materials was overwhelmingly positive, with calls for continued dialogue and shared action.

For those involved, the project created space to connect academic insight with lived experience. For Sarah, it reaffirmed the value of working with practitioners who are “on the front lines”—embedded in communities, navigating real-world inequalities, and driving grassroots innovation. The project allowed underrepresented voices to shape the policy conversation and demonstrated how immersive media could be reimagined through a lens of inclusion. The collaborative model was seen as a blueprint for future engagement between researchers, industry, and marginalised communities.

The success of SPECTRUM is already contributing to a developing REF impact case study and informing new funding bids aimed at supporting gender-diverse participation in digital creativity.

SARAH'S TOP TIPS FOR IMPACT

1. Let community expertise lead.

Work with people who are already on the ground doing the work. Partnering with Ida XR Studio brought lived experience, credibility, and insight that shaped every aspect of the project—from design to delivery.

2. Design for dialogue, not just delivery.

Think beyond “outputs.” The SPECTRUM panel wasn’t just about presenting findings—it was about convening people with different kinds of knowledge into a live policy conversation, grounded in openness and inclusion.

3. Keep the message clear and actionable.

The 16-page briefing was intentionally designed to be visually engaging and easy to use. Strong design, focused messaging, and clear policy links made it easier for delegates to take the content forward in their own work.

FURTHER READING

- Atkinson, S. & Callahan, V., (2025). *Mixed Realities: Gender and Emergent Media*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Kelan, E., (2025). *Patterns of inclusion: How gender matters for automation, artificial intelligence and the future of work*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Kurta, L., & Pernice, G. (2024). *A Silenced Sector: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Challenges in the Immersive and Virtual Production Industries*. London: King's College London.
<https://doi.org/10.18742/pub01-176>

BEYOND

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Or visit: www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/research/impact