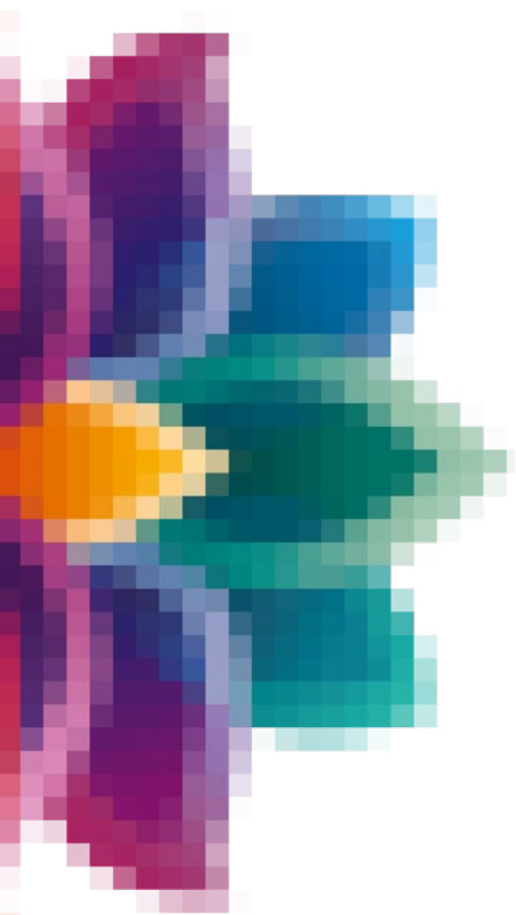# Inclusivity in Games

a Critical Reflection Toolkit

More inclusivity and diversity in the games industry - whether supporting greater diversity and inclusion in the games industry workforce, designing for diverse audiences, or showing a wider spectrum of representation in games in terms of e.g. gender, ability, sexuality, religion, class, race, etc. – offers significant benefits both for the industry and society. However the games industry often struggles to ensure it is an inclusive place to work and, in mainstream games in particular, diverse audience needs are not often met, and representation of diverse people and stories can be limited. Hindering creativity and innovation in a flourishing sector that drives both business and cultural development.

This worksheet offers some key questions and resources to support you to reflect on your own approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. This includes thinking about how you can create games that are more accessible and inclusive of diverse players, to nurture an inclusive culture in your own workplace or practice, and how to reflect on the representation of diverse people and experiences in your games. These questions are not exhaustive but are intended to be a starting point to help you review what you are doing and how you will ensure that your work and approach is consistent with best practices.

We recommend that you think of this as a living document – something you revisit and use as a starting point to review your own practice, to talk with colleagues, to update as you go, and use to identify any areas where you may need more advice and expertise.

For a wider look at ethics issues including inclusive practices, please see the Creative Informatics Ethics Statement 2.01, which contains a detailed risk assessment tool for a range of issues relevant to the gaming industry and beyond. You can also see an example Creative Informatics Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Action Plan2, and a related research publication, Inclusion activities within Creative Industries Clusters3 which compared EDI approaches across similar creative clusters across the UK, that helps put a range of tactics in context.

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1 https://zenodo.org/records/11261004

2 https://zenodo.org/records/5227270

3 https://zenodo.org/records/8114197

What is Equality Diversity and Inclusion?

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), sometimes referred to as "DEI" – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, refers to policies and practices that help ensure that workplaces, products, experiences, practices are inclusive of the wide diversity of society and that individuals are not excluded (intentionally or unintentionally) because of who they are or where they come from. There are some important legal obligations surrounding characteristics (e.g. race, ethnicity, age, gender, (dis)ability, etc.) but fundamentally EDI is about a culture of including people in meaningful ways, and of representing diverse lives and experiences. Legal obligations are a part of this, but best practices extend beyond this and are not about compliance but genuinely making people from diverse backgrounds feel welcomed and included.

Which aspects of diversity and inclusion are most challenging in my area?

This can vary wildly. In many parts of Europe there are well documented challenges and inequalities around sex or gender presentation, with women and/or trans* people facing higher barriers, unequal treatment, and a lack of access to opportunities. Similar issues are common in many parts of Europe for people from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, or national backgrounds. However, inequalities are often not as visible or obvious, including barriers faced by people from less privileged or significantly disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, barriers faced by those with cognitive differences or with mental health conditions, or barriers faced by those with less visible physical disabilities (e.g. hearing loss, visual impairment, chronic fatigue syndrome).

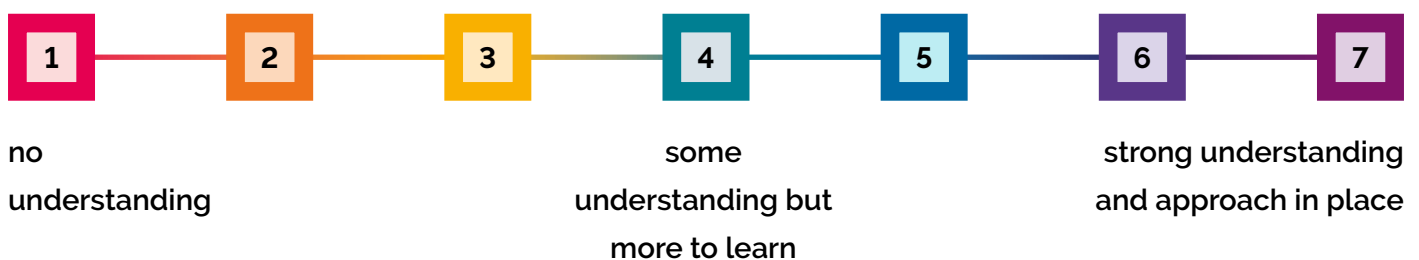## Why does diversity and inclusion matter for games?

There is a wide range of research showing benefits of diverse workplaces, diverse businesses, and inclusive practices. However for the games industry two of the key considerations – both of which relate to the ongoing economic and cultural impact of the industry are: (1) ensuring a wider range of audiences from diverse backgrounds are represented in games and included in games design (both in terms of accessibility and game play dynamics) to build and develop new markets for games and (2) cultivating and nurturing a diverse and inclusive games industry workforce which, if truly included and valued, can contribute new ideas and perspectives contributing to innovative approaches to games design rather than reinforcing the status quo.
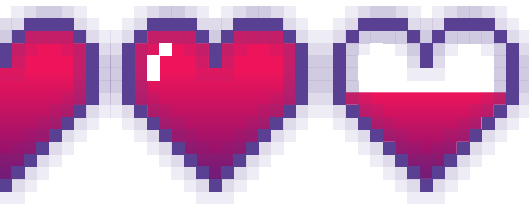
Diversity & Inclusion Healthcheck

Think about your own current practices – whether you are an indie games developer working on your own, part of a larger company or organisation in the industry, or work in policy supporting the industry. How would you rate your own awareness and performance at the moment?

At the moment my/my organisation's knowledge of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is...

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

no
understanding

some
understanding but
more to learn

strong understanding
and approach in place

My practice/business is an inclusive place to work and welcoming of people from diverse backgrounds

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

not at all
inclusive or
diverse

somewhat inclusive,
room to improve

very inclusive
and diverse

I/my business includes contributors, contractors, and/or project partners and collaborators who are:

From diverse racial and ethnic groups

never   rarely   sometimes   often   regularly

Gender diverse – including women, trans*, non-binary etc. people

never   rarely   sometimes   often   regularly

Diverse in physical abilities – e.g. d/Deaf and hard of hearing, those with visual impairments, those with different capacity to engage with games controllers due to limited mobility, limb loss, etc.

never   rarely   sometimes   often   regularly

Diverse in mental health and wellbeing – e.g. those with experience of depression, those with long term mental health conditions

never   rarely   sometimes   often   regularly

Cognitively diverse and neurodiverse – including autistic people, people with dyslexia, etc.

never   rarely   sometimes   often   regularly

I/my business includes contributors, contractors, and/or project partners and collaborators who are:

From a diverse range of age groups – including older and younger people

☐ never　　☐ rarely　　☐ sometimes　　☐ often　　☐ regularly

Representative of the range of sexualities present in societies

☐ never　　☐ rarely　　☐ sometimes　　☐ often　　☐ regularly

From a diverse range of backgrounds in terms of privilege, income, social advantage, class etc.

☐ never　　☐ rarely　　☐ sometimes　　☐ often　　☐ regularly

From a diverse range of religious experiences and values – including those who have strong faiths and religious cultures, but also those with no faith at all

☐ never　　☐ rarely　　☐ sometimes　　☐ often　　☐ regularly

This is not an exhaustive list but reflects some of the largest and most notable diversity characteristics. Groups that are often excluded from society but are not included in formal "protected characteristics" include: those who have been "looked after" by the state or are care leavers; those who are or who have been refugees; those who have previously been convicted of a crime, especially if they have received custodial sentences; those who have experienced or are currently facing homelessness.

My/our team and/or the people who write, design and develop the game/s I/we make includes people from a diverse range of backgrounds that is reflective of wider society.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Maybe ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ I don't know

How do you know this is the case? (e.g. do you undertake any monitoring, recruitment or periodic staff surveys, etc.)

I/we know how to support and nurture colleagues from diverse backgrounds to ensure they feel included, valued and respected.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Maybe ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree ☐ I don't know

I/we have workplace awareness and training in place around equality, diversity and inclusion and have a good awareness of industry best practices.

■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Maybe   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly Agree   ■ I don't know

My/our workplace could be a more inclusive place to work if...

My/our audience and/or the people who play my games includes people from a diverse range of backgrounds that is reflective of wider society.

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Maybe	Agree	Strongly Agree	I don't know

How do you know this is the case? (e.g. do you undertake any monitoring, surveys, stakeholder engagement?)

My/our audience and/or the people who play my games are able to tell me/us about key inclusion aspects including:

How well represented they feel in my/our game/s

Strongly Disagree · Disagree · Maybe · Agree · Strongly Agree · I don't know

How well the interface/s support them to use and play our game/s

Strongly Disagree · Disagree · Maybe · Agree · Strongly Agree · I don't know

How the community they engage with around the game includes or excludes them

Strongly Disagree · Disagree · Maybe · Agree · Strongly Agree · I don't know

What they would like to see us do to better include their experience in our game/s

Strongly Disagree · Disagree · Maybe · Agree · Strongly Agree · I don't know

Are there areas of your games business/practice/experience where you would like to make changes to become more inclusive? (e.g. recruitment, ways of working, support for employees, development of ideas, the audiences you engage with)

Follow up: How might you make a positive change in this direction?

Follow up: Why haven't you done this already? What has held you back?

Follow up: Is there information or support or access to resources you would need to do this? Are there things you want to do, but don't know where to start?

Looking back at the above, how do you feel about your own business or practice – do you include a diverse range of people and perspectives, or do you have room to improve?

Becoming more diverse and inclusive

This section focuses on key questions for your business and how you will plan going forwards, thinking about your compliance with legislation, and what you might do next. This section should help you to think about how you put what you have learned into place in the form of organisational policies and practices, and where there is scope to make changes.

Equalities and Human Rights Legislation

Are you aware of all the equalities and human rights legislation requirements that apply to the games you create, distribute or contribute to? This could be at the national, EU[1,2,3] or international level[4,5,6] depending on the markets you operate in. How are you ensuring that your games and business comply with these requirements?

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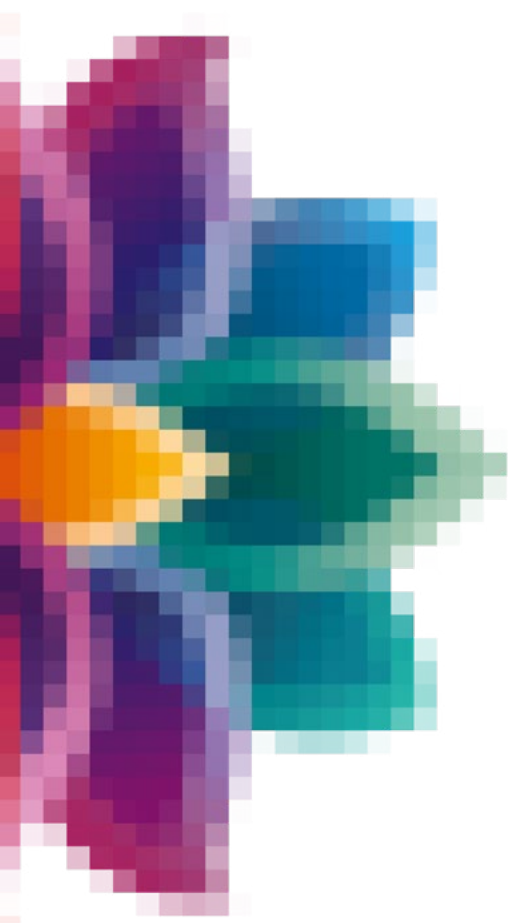
1   European Convention on Human Rights: https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-convention/our-rights

2   For more on EU level equalities and human rights see: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/chapter/13.html

3   EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Chapter III: Equality, Article 21: Non-discrimination: https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/21-non-discrimination#explanations

4   E.g. guide to wider EU human rights legislation can be found at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/impact-convention-human-rights#/

5   E.g. The Americans with Disabilities Act (USA): https://www.ada.gov/

5   E.g. The Human Rights Act 1998 (UK): https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/human-rights/human-rights-act and associated Guide for businesses: https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/business/guidance-businesses

Accessibility

- *What measures are you taking to ensure that your games are accessible to those with disabilities?*

- *Do you have an accessibility statement?*

- *Do you have any adaptable features for people with different needs (e.g. captioning, audio description, colourblind accessible design choices, alternative colour or contrast modes, customisable controls, adaptable difficulty levels)?*

- *Are you aware of relevant standards and tools to check compliance with accessibility standards?*

Inclusion

- *How are your games inclusive to people from all abilities, backgrounds and circumstances?*

- *What steps are you taking to become aware of any barriers to access faced by people trying to use your games?*

Representation, Dignity & Respect

- *How does your game respect diverse populations and cultural backgrounds?*

- *Does your game include characters from a range of different races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, and physical abilities?*

- *Are these characters represented in leading as well as supporting roles?*

- *Do the acting, voice acting, character design, etc. talents that you employ also drawn from diverse backgrounds of the characters being portrayed?*

Holistic Stakeholder View

Inclusion isn't just about your players: it's about ALL the stakeholders who may be impacted by your games.

How are you ensuring that you address the considerations above for everyone (collaborators, employees, subcontractors, passive spectators, etc)? What stakeholders can you identify, and how might you go about figuring out what their needs are?

Next Steps

Now that you have taken the time to think about what you do, how you work, who you represent, and who your work reaches, what will you do next to make a positive change?

What is your top priority for improving how diverse and inclusive your work is in the next 6 months:

- *For you/your organisation, collaborators and the way you work?*

- *For of who your games represents and how you represent them?*

- *For your audience and how you support those with diverse needs?*

Do you have a long-term stretch goal to improve how diverse and inclusive your organisation and/or your work is - something it would be hard but highly impactful to do?

We hope you have found this a useful resource and we would welcome your feedback on how we might improve and further develop it in the future. Please email designinformatics@ed.ac.uk with any comments or feedback. This resource is provided under open license (CC-BY-4.0) and we also encourage you to adapt, develop, remix, translate, etc. as you find useful – although we would appreciate you also letting us know if you do so we can also help share new or adapted versions.