# Into Film Games Programme Summary Report

October 2024

Department for Communities

Northern Ireland screen



**70%**

of the population play video games



In 2023, the value of the UK video game market was over

**£7.8 billion**



**88%**

of young people read text while playing games



**84%**

of young people wrote text to friends or family while playing games

*"From problem-solving and critical thinking to teamwork and creativity, games education equips students with essential transferable skills that are highly sought after in a variety of fields. Northern Ireland Screen is committed to continued support and encouragement of games education by fostering innovation and adaptability, preparing students to succeed in an increasingly digital and interconnected world."*

David McConnell
Head of Education, Northern Ireland Screen

# Introduction

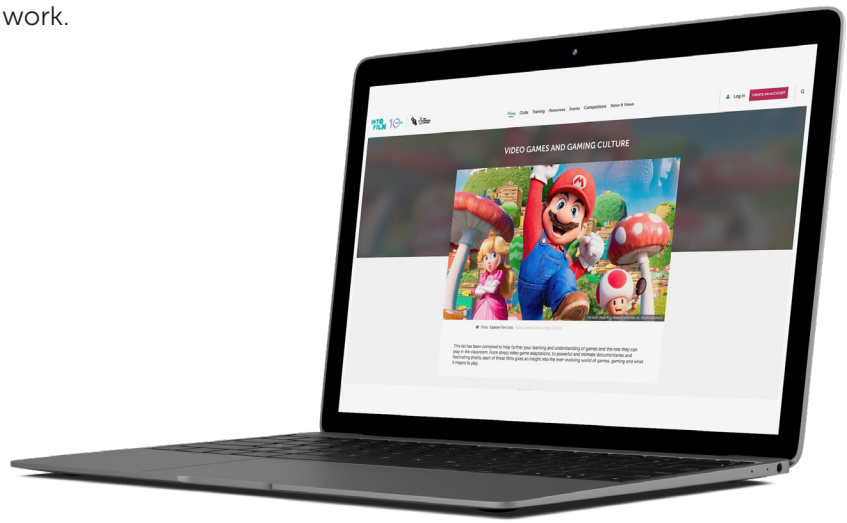
From board games to video games, games provide an immersive source of entertainment. Games also offer young people an opportunity to develop their literacy and thinking skills, and increase their confidence levels, as well as providing scope to show their creativity in a collaborative way. Making Games research carried out by games industry body TIGA has demonstrated that video games remain one of the UK's creative industry success stories.

In research published by the National Literacy Trust in 2021, video games were found to provide young people aged 11 to 16 with a route into reading, encourage creativity through writing, support positive communication with friends and family and have potential benefits for increasing empathy. In addition, the benefits of playing video games for literacy were found to be strongest for boys and reluctant readers.

In the Northern Ireland Screen Strategy for 2022–2026 'Stories, Skills & Sustainability', the emerging importance of the Interactive (Games Development and Animation) sector is recognised. Northern Ireland Screen is committed to support and encourage the development of highly skilled teams and to build momentum behind Northern Ireland being acknowledged as a locally and internationally recognised hub for games creation providing talent pathways.

The Games Programme has been developed by Into Film as a part of existing funding received from Northern Ireland Screen. Into Film has explored the potential to extend its offering beyond film to include the games industry, to gain a better understanding of the educational value of games. Through the development of games resources and associated support measures, staff have engaged directly with educators and young people to establish demand for this type of support, as well as raise awareness of the career opportunities that this sector will offer in the future to ensure growth can be maintained.

Into Film Northern Ireland commissioned Brian Stratford & Associates to produce a report documenting the development and delivery of the Games Programme to date, to identify learning gained and to make recommendations for the future delivery of this work.





**1,437**

young people engaged with Story Builder: Games and Games Lite resources



**75**

Story Builder: Games and Games Lite workshops with young people and educators



**91**

educators engaged through workshops and events



**65%**

of schools are in areas of deprivation and disadvantage



**186**

Games Reviews submitted by young people



**29**

schools engaged with Games Programme (24 post-primary, 2 primary and 3 SEN schools)



**203**

young people and 28 educators participated in Replay Games interactive exhibition

# Development of the Into Film Games Programme

## Big Games Review 2021

A competition to encourage young people aged 5-19 to submit game reviews.

## Research and development

Research and development into existing offers for games in education took place. Examining existing approaches and resources established a gap in the market. Research continued with industry stakeholder consultation, forming partnerships with key organisations, attending industry and educational conferences and exploring game content. Extensive research into game design took place over a year for the development of a core resource, Story Builder: Games.

## Story Builder: Games 2022–2023

An introduction to game design in a resource suitable to be used around any curricular topic. The resource explores the creation of stories and how they can be developed as games, including areas of branching narrative, character, settings, game mechanics, level design, sound design and pitching ideas. It allows young people to generate ideas, make decisions and create narratives.

Designed as a physical workbook to ensure that young people would not be excluded by any accessibility issues, a prototype test was completed with the British Academy of Film and Television Awards (BAFTA) Young Game Designers Awards team.




## Games Review Competition 2023

A review-writing resource with scaffolding and critical analysis prompts. Promoted to schools with a prize each term of a Nintendo Switch Lite.

## Story Builder: Games Lite 2023–2024

Created in response to the success of Story Builder: Games, the resource was designed to be used as an introduction to game design for younger people or quicker engagement.

## Games Career in-school events

An in-school event model where partner school cohorts partake in a schedule of games careers activities including screen industry speakers, Story Builder workshops and idea-pitching panels.

## Supporting resources 2023–2024

A supporting suite of resources including Teaching with Story Builder: Games, the Games Glossary and a Playtest form.

The Into Film Games Programme has been framed around 3 main strands:



1
Games in the Classroom

2
Games as Culture

3
Games as a Career

## Replay Games

A curated games console archive and video game catalogue presented as an interactive game exhibition to educate on game design history and development.

## Delivery of the Games Programme

The overall aim of the work has been to increase the value educators place on games for teaching and learning, and as a potential career pathway for young people. The Into Film Games Programme has been framed around 3 main strands:

## 1: Games in the classroom

Games (both video and board) to support teaching and learning in the classroom through resources, workshops and continued professional development (CPD).

School staff have been blown away by the resources in terms of their production value and contents. The resources have been shown to be

- visually captivating,
- easy to be shown to others, including parents,
- adaptable for use in both primary and post-primary sessions, and on the needs and circumstances of the group of young people engaged with them, and
- changing the perception of games as a pastime or hobby into something that can be so much more.

The Games Programme's CPD support offers teachers and decision-makers in schools the opportunity to explore the 'why games?' question. The skills development potential, including the transferability of essential and life skills to other aspects of young people's education and other areas of the screen industries is highlighted throughout the resources.



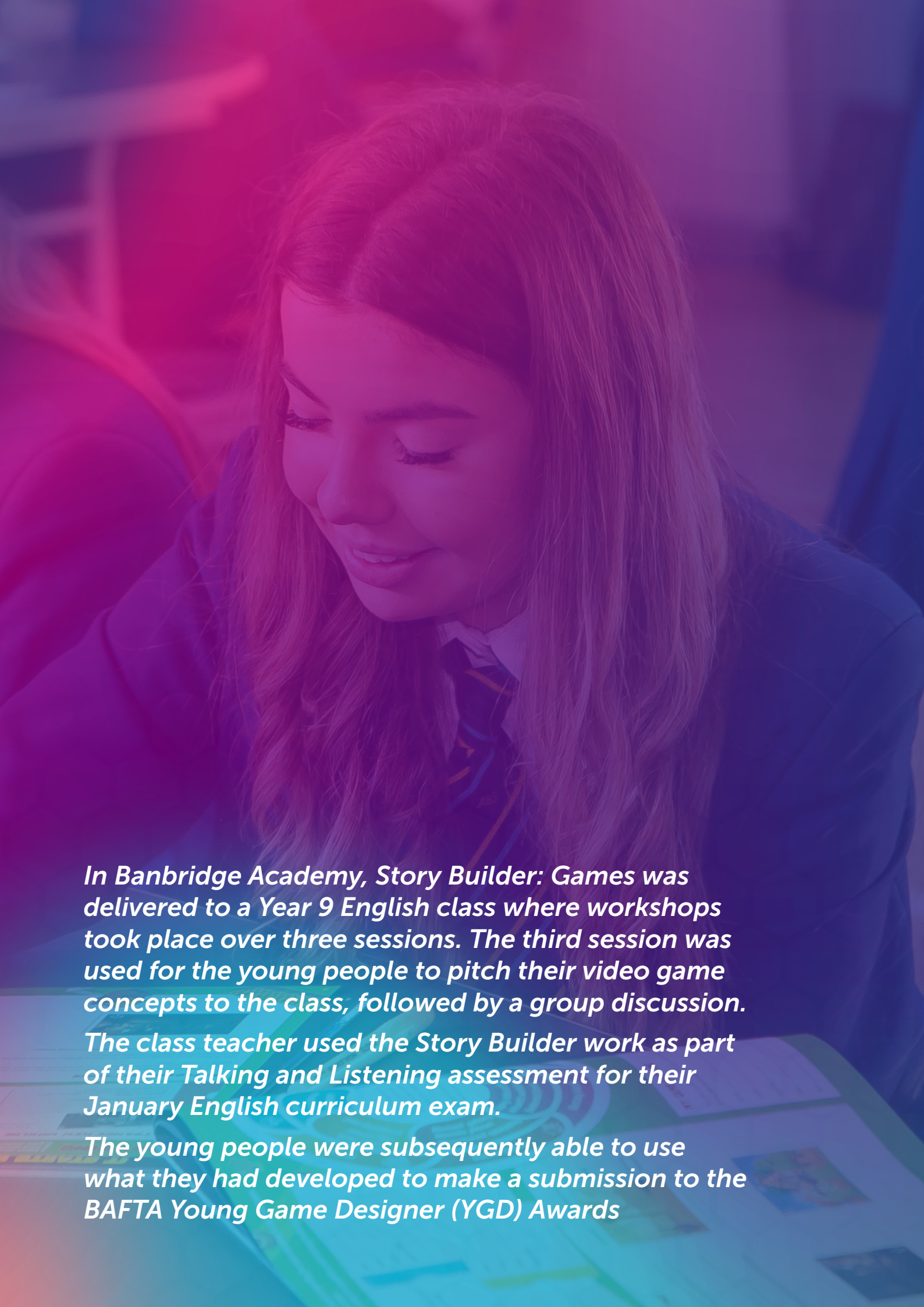

## 2. Games as culture

Viewing games as a cultural art form, this strand is made up of two main areas.

## Games Reviews

Young people are encouraged to review games in the same way they would for a book or film, encouraging both critical analysis and literacy skills. The initial winner of the games review competition was a 9-year-old girl from a rural primary school in County Tyrone which had received remote support from Into Film during the pandemic. The winner completed a review of Roblox presented in terms of her personal experience and playing the game with her family.

Review submissions are accepted in the chosen medium of the young



*In Banbridge Academy, Story Builder: Games was delivered to a Year 9 English class where workshops took place over three sessions. The third session was used for the young people to pitch their video game concepts to the class, followed by a group discussion.*

*The class teacher used the Story Builder work as part of their Talking and Listening assessment for their January English curriculum exam.*

*The young people were subsequently able to use what they had developed to make a submission to the BAFTA Young Game Designer (YGD) Awards*

person (written on a bespoke activity sheet, audio, video, or by using symbols or drawings), as poor written literacy skills could act as a barrier for some young people. A Year 9 boy displaying learning difficulties, a limited ability to write and who was supported by a care assistant while at the school also submitted a games review. Despite the communication issues that he experienced, his detailed review completed on screen for Mario Kart was the winning entry. This appeared to have a significant boost not only for him but also his parents and the school.

## Replay Games




This interactive exhibition of archive video games and consoles encourages participation, celebrates game playing as a cultural art form and demonstrates how games and gaming has developed.

Replay Games was launched in June 2024 as part of Digital Schoolhouse's Festival of Play in Belfast where approximately 200 young people engaged with games consoles dating back to 1977.

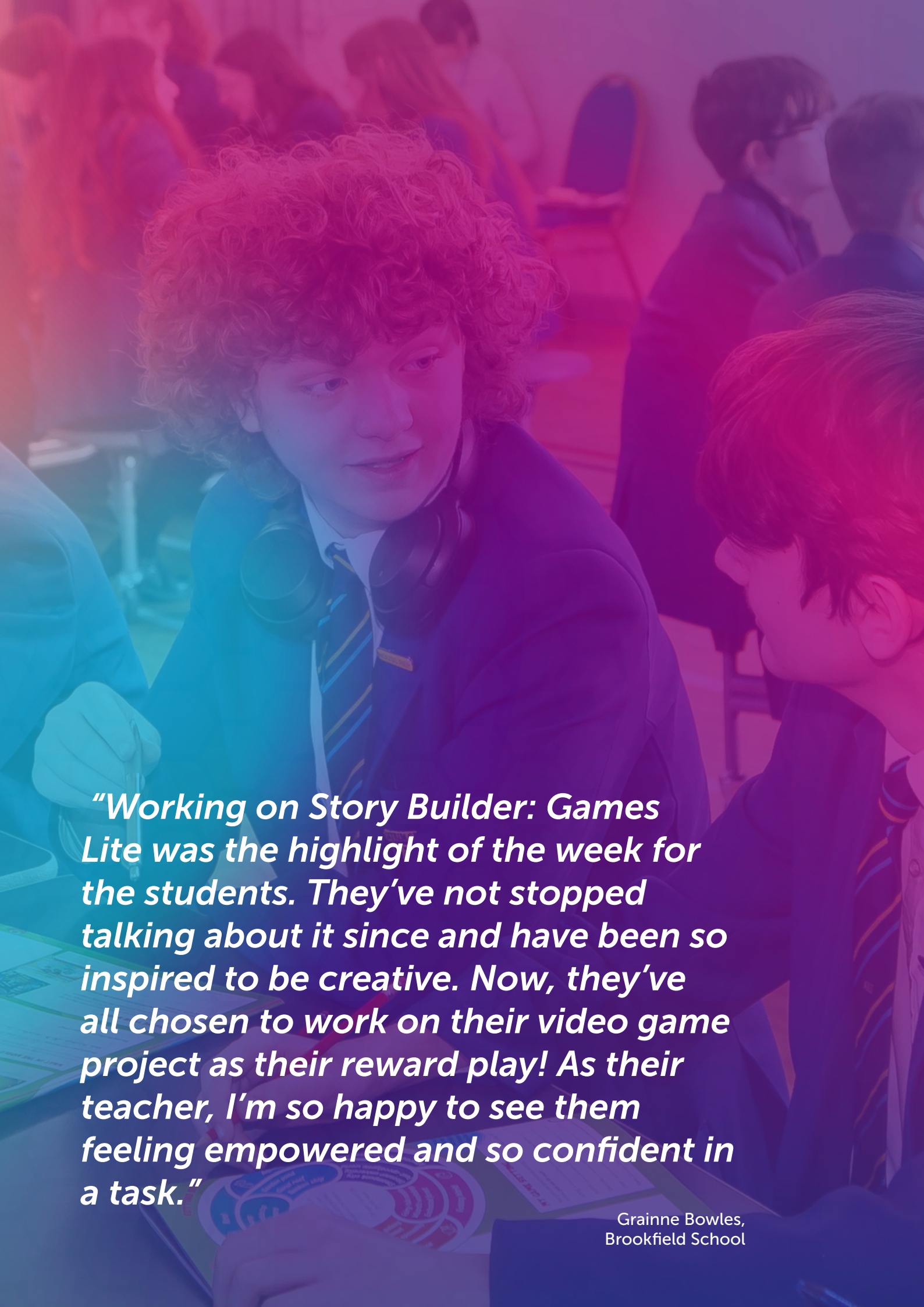
## 3. Games as a career

The career element of the Into Film Games Programme acts as a culmination to the other activities, as an effective pathway option for the young people engaged. The workshops bring the games industry into the classroom and aim to show the young people that a career in the industry is a viable possibility for them. It is about changing the perception of what is possible, about the range of different roles that there are in the games pipeline and the different skills required to do each, recognition of these job roles, and that these jobs exist. Outlining potential progression pathways for young people can lead on to other initiatives, including Into Film's Careers Hub and ScreenWorks work experience programmes.

In the development of the resources and the delivery of the workshops, staff have sought to apply industry-recognised standards, including references to terminology that would be used in the games industry as well as mentioning organisations that are active in gaming.




Consultation has highlighted high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the resources developed. This has included from many industry professionals working in the local games industry, anecdotally stating that they had wished there were similar resources available when they were in full-time education or entering the sector. The iterative design approach used helps with the development of thinking skills and personal capabilities.



*"Working on Story Builder: Games Lite was the highlight of the week for the students. They've not stopped talking about it since and have been so inspired to be creative. Now, they've all chosen to work on their video game project as their reward play! As their teacher, I'm so happy to see them feeling empowered and so confident in a task."*

Grainne Bowles,
Brookfield School

# Future delivery

## Northern Ireland

Delivery of the Into Film Games Programme has been largely tailored to a Northern Ireland context thus far, and the knowledge that staff have of this market has contributed to its success. There is scope to further develop programme delivery in Northern Ireland through longer engagement with a smaller number of schools to achieve improved outcomes.

## Rest of the UK

The new Labour government has recognised the importance of the role creativity has to play in education, with a plan to address the decline in arts subjects in schools. This plan will include:

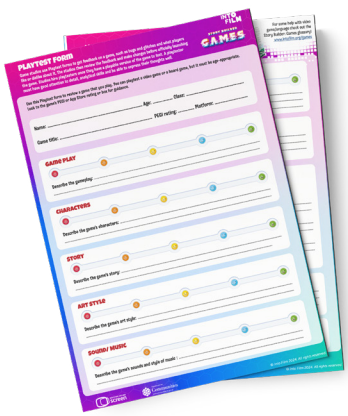
- A review of the curriculum to improve access to arts subjects and weave creativity and oracy into all subjects
- An increased commitment to and funding for teacher training on existing good practice
- A greater alignment between training provision and creative industry needs, particularly for those entering the sector.

The Games Programme, with its focus on cross-curricular application as well as training provision for both educators and young people, would represent a good example of how the government could deliver its planned reform of creativity in education.

There is scope for Into Film to expand the delivery of this type of work to elsewhere in the UK. The model of delivery is established, and the resources created should be applicable in any educational setting.

An important part of the offering has been tying the Games Programme to the requirements of the Northern Ireland curriculum, and a similar exercise would be required in other regions. This would include carrying out research into the games industry in that region to identify the local games-in-education organisations, their offer and collaboration potential.

Into Film is ideally placed to develop and deliver this type of work, not only in Northern Ireland but also as a charity with a UK-wide reach. As an organisation active in both the screen and education sectors, Into Film has valuable relationships with many of the screen industry professionals and organisations that will help the Games Programme to develop and grow.




## Games education organisations

Into Film has sought to engage with and potentially collaborate with other organisations that are active in the games-for-education space where there is a mutual benefit to be achieved. By working together, the number of 'competitors' in a space is reduced, there is less chance for duplication of effort, and organisations deliver based on a clear understanding of where their strengths lie and where they can best add value. The consultation suggested



*"Story Builder: Games is an invaluable resource that enhances young people's idea development and literacy skills in a fun and creative way. We look forward to seeing their game ideas come together and maybe even spot some future BAFTA Young Game Designers – one of our flagship programmes to inspire the next generation."*

Lisa Prime,
Head of Children & Young People's Programme, BAFTA

forming a working group of organisations interested in the development of support for games in education across the UK.

There is scope for Into Film to further develop its relationship with the trade bodies that oversee the games-in-education space. For the Association of UK Interactive Entertainment (UKIE), it will be important to demonstrate that the offering from the Into Film Games Programme is additive to what is already available.

For BFI, games is mentioned in the most recent Screen Culture 2033 Strategy but it is currently unclear as to how BFI intend to provide direct support to this screen sector.

BAFTA has been keen to support Into Film's Games Programme, recognising the importance of educational resources like this in engaging young people in creativity. Having offered the Young Game Designers Awards since 2010, BAFTA has signposted to the Into Film games resources and are keen to use them in the future and play a role in further development work.

There is scope to engage with games development companies, to encourage their involvement in the delivery of the Games Programme and to explore opportunities for additional resources. There is also a potential role for games designers to provide feedback to young people, and this could be particularly effective where local and 'near-to-peer' opportunities exist.

## Funding

The potential for the commercial use of Story Builder with games development companies has been explored and has been identified as a possible source of future funding. Games studios recognise the importance of supporting the skills pipeline to encourage young people to consider a career in the games industry. The Story Builder resources explain the games industry and demystify some of the elements that may have acted as a barrier to entry in the past.

Further expansion of the Into Film Games Programme, in terms of resource development or the delivery of workshops, will require additional funding, likely from a cocktail of sources.






Department for Communities

NORTHERN IRELAND screen

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