Oscar winning VFX studio Industrial Light & Magic host Uxbridge College students on a remote work experience placement

NextGen students at Uxbridge College were recently invited to join the multi-award winning VFX studio Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) for an inspiring three-day remote work experience placement! Since being founded by George Lucas in 1975, Industrial Light & Magic has set the standard for visual effects, creating some of the most stunning images in the history of film. They have won 16 Best Visual Effects Oscars for their work on films including Star Wars, the Jurassic Park and World films, and Pirates of the Caribbean.

Students were tasked with responding to a sample moodboard brief from ILM to "Redesign the Production of the Jurassic Park car interior scene." This is similar to a real brief that a VFX Production Designer/Concept Artist within their Art department would receive.

Overall, 31 students from 11 NextGen colleges were invited to join the remote programme, with two students from Uxbridge College taking part. The students worked collaboratively with their peers from across the NextGen network to brainstorm, research and create their moodboards and designs before pitching their work to a panel from ILM.

ILM artists and staff were on hand throughout to support, answer questions, and inspire the students. As well as dedicated staff offering real-time feedback, students attended masterclasses on the VFX production pipeline hosted by ILM artists. They were also given access to resources and presentations from the ILM archives to help with their work.

Amy Backwell, Emerging Talent Specialist at ILM, said of the work experience:

"We recognise that Nextgen is a centre of excellence for developing young talent in the Games, Animation and VFX industries. We currently partner with NextGen for our apprenticeship programme as well as training for our Production Support Trainees on the Kickstart scheme.

"We wanted to offer our established 3-day online programme to Level 3 students specifically at NextGen colleges in order to help feed into our existing talent pipeline. At ILM, we really care about diversity & inclusion and so developing a programme aimed at young people from different backgrounds is at the top of our strategic plan.

"The programme incorporates a mixture of department talks with artists and team projects, as well as problem-solving and presentation exercises. All of these are skills that we feel are vital for a successful career in VFX, and it's useful for students to have exposure to early on. We hope it inspired and engaged the students so they went away from the placement feeling motivated, and hopefully helped solidify their decision to join the visual effects industry."

Mohammed Kurdi, a second year student on the Aim Qualifications Level 3 Extended Diploma in Games, Animation & VFX at Uxbridge College, said: *"My work experience at ILM was amazing! Seeing all the hard work that goes into making the top films was incredible and has helped me gain a new appreciation of the art form!"*

Secander Sadat, who is in the first year of Aim Qualifications Level 3 Diploma in Games, Animation & VFX at Uxbridge College, said: *"My favourite part of the work experience with ILM was being surrounded by like-minded individuals with a passion for 3D and Visual Effects. Thanks to informative talks and demonstrations held by industry professionals, I have a great understanding of the VFX production pipeline, and I can look forward to specialising in my own sector. While working on a mock industry brief, I've learnt just how essential good teamwork is in this field of work and now I'm always striving to be a supportive and collaborative worker.*

"My team got along very well, and we still keep in touch today, so I've managed to use this experience to make connections that may help me further down the line."

Luke Vinicombe, Section Leader & Course Team Leader, Computing and IT & Creative Technology, at Uxbridge College, said: *"The work experience that students have been able to attend with ILM (Industrial Light and Magic) and 4wardFutures, has provided fantastic opportunities for them to engage with the creative industry in ways in which they have not been able to before. It has given them the first-hand insight into the expectations of employers and working practices, and the ability to develop industry-ready skill sets.*

"During the 4wardFutures week-long work experience, all learners had the opportunity to gain vital feedback from different industry professionals, in which they exceeded the expectations of industry with what they were able to produce in the short time that they had.

"For students, these exceptional opportunities to learn and be inspired by industry professionals are a must when introducing them to the creative fields they are looking to work in. It provides vital knowledge & understanding of the working world and the requirements they need to strive towards for their prospects.

"I am extremely proud of the students' professional behaviours and the dedication they displayed with this fantastic experience."

Other Uxbridge College students also took part in a range of work experience placements, with industry professionals from *Playstation & Xiotex Studios, @Playtra,* Team17 & Activision, New Star games, and Framestore, as well as independent consultants. Warrington based charity 4wardFutures, which supports young people to access career and progression opportunities, also ran a week of remote work experience.

First year learner William Ralph took part in a one-day programming challenge with *Byron Atkinson-Jones, Principal Software Engineer at Playstation & Founder of Xiotex Studios, and Riccardo Amico, Co-Founder & Head of Development @Playtra.* This one-day against-the-clock challenge gave William and students from other colleges the chance to develop their programming skills, programming a text-based RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) combat cycle, including creating a data structure for the player, enemy, weapon and attack types.

Student William Ralph, on the Aim Qualifications Level 3 Diploma in Games, Animation & VFX, said: *"I had a fun time figuring out how I should do my project. It was nice working on it for a whole*

day in the 9 to 5 experience. I want to do something close to programming, I want to know how I can implement my knowledge into engines like Unity, as they said in the feedback."

In feedback on William's work, Byron Atkinson-Jones, Principal Software Engineer at Playstation & Founder of Xiotex Studios said: *"With the nature of my job, I see a lot of code, and this is incredibly readable compared to what I see from seasoned professionals … I might have to send some of these seasoned professionals your (the tutors') way to learn!"*

"I'm impressed to see people doing flow charts and pseudo code … It shows you are thinking about the problem instead of diving into it. Very well done."

First year Uxbridge College student **Awaiz Khan** joined a group including students from a number of other colleges, all taking part in the week of work experience with 4wardfutures. The students had to develop a game about sustainability, during a 9am-5pm professional working week, while using up-to-date industry production management practices to organise and work effectively to complete their games.

Student Awaiz Khan, on the Aim Qualifications Level 3 Diploma in Games, Animation & VFX, said: *"My favourite part of the work experience and challenge day had to be coming up with concept art for the main character, and working alongside my peers to produce all the sprite work and artwork.*

"From this work experience, it's given me insight into what an actual day as a games developer is - which entails a lot of communication and work which allows me to see that in certain workplaces it would be really hard to meet deadlines because of things such as lack of communication or cooperation.

"It also helped me learn a bit more about pixel art so now I have somewhat experience with making pixel art. I realised that I am pretty inexperienced with making background art but I've also realised how quick I am to pick up learning a type of art style."

Giving feedback for the 4wardFutures group, employer Mark Waters said: *" …With all of you (students) here, from last year and today, the amount of work you have done in two and a half days, with no idea what you were going to do until Monday morning, to actually research, get your ideas together, collaborate virtually is just incredible…How you coordinated and collaborated, is really impressive."*

Stephen Hey, an indie game marketing consultant also working with students on the 4wardFutures placement, praised the students' commitment and teamwork, saying: *"This is what I am talking about with the talent and the future of the games industry being here. What you have done here in three days is pretty incredible really. I love the fact you are working as a professional team using GitHub and Trello…"*

"This is kind of incredible really, if we could get this team on the next 'Red Dead Redemption' we would probably have it released by Christmas! Incredible. Absolutely amazing."

There was also a two-day industry challenge which all the first year learners took part in, led by Game Designer John Dennis from Team17 & Activision and New Star games, and Adam Smith from Framestore. Participants had to work against the clock to develop a low poly 3D model spaceship and team working skills. They had to come up with ideas for a fleet and its backstory, create the models, and update their spaces on the Miro board with their sketches, backstory, and models.

Are you interested in studying Games, Animation and VFX and having the opportunity to learn from industry? Find out more about our NextGen programme here:
[AIM Awards Level 3 Diploma/Extended Diploma in Games, Animation & VFX Skills (uxbridgecollege.ac.uk)](uxbridgecollege.ac.uk)

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