

# Industry Interviews

## Summary



EMERGING MEDIA EXPLORATION



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## Summary

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## Interview partners

Name, Role	Company
Graham Thomas	BBC
Stephan Schindler, Head of people and culture	Exozet
Dirk Martens, CEO	House of Research
Fax Quintus, CEO	I-Immersive
Annette Wilson, Head of Innovation projects	RBB
Zakaria Jaiathe, CEO	Xibit

## Cooperation

One interview partner (Exozet) stated that while they frequently work with students, they have not worked with universities as organisations so far. They like to completely integrate students in their teams and give them longer-term contracts. They deem it complicated to cooperate with universities on an organisational level, with the exception of long-term research projects. The lack of commercial pressure on the part of the university is cited here as both an advantage and challenge, i.e. they have the time to really focus on issues, but have less incentive to stick to short-term deadlines.

I-immersive experienced the university as the partner to providing the frame and the room (in the spatial and metaphorical senses) for common projects and I-immersive would contribute their special knowledge and insights on relevant themes. In addition to from student collaborations, I-immersive sometimes subcontracted universities to do research.

House of Research usually works with PhD students and occasionally with master students working on their final thesis. Sometimes the major part of project supervision lies with HoR, sometimes with the university. This seems to depend on who owns the project, e.g. whether House of Research gave the briefing or the university. The cooperation appears to be more centred around individuals and usually does not involve classic teaching, i.e. presentations to larger groups of students.

At BBC Research, most cooperative projects with universities are funded by the UK government and other funding bodies. They also deliberately cooperate with universities in areas where the university partners have access to further funding programmes for particular areas. The hosting of PhD students is at the

core of most cooperation. The students spend a number of months at the BBC premises to do their research and collaborate with other students and BBC staff there, but they also do hours at their home university.

Usually, the students study for about four years and cooperation projects are planned for similar time frames. Preferably, the students would have research contracts with their universities and the BBC pays the university for the cooperation to compensate for the time they spend at the BBC premises. So far, the BBC has created a very large network of university cooperation partners. In former times, the BBC randomly approached universities at academic conferences to ask whether they had students looking for supervisors. However, recently they are trying to focus by creating theme-related clusters of core university partners.

During the cooperation, partners work with technology, content or data that the BBC owns or develops. Motivation to work with universities includes special expertise, labs or test environments. The BBC does not have access to affordable staff and usually compensate the university for the time the PhD-students work in the BBC lab.

For the BBC, a key point in communicating with students is bringing them onsite to their lab. They point out that in cooperation's where students were working in academic environments with minimal weekly or monthly meetings with BBC, there was a danger that the project would be overly influenced by the academic supervisor and the prime motivation would become the publishing of another paper. The BBC underscore that "if the students spend a significant proportion of their time in our lab [...] it's the key to get everything working well".

Xibit give the impression that there is a disconnection between universities and the start-up scene, making it difficult to create relevant industry contacts for start-ups. At the same time, they feel that they reflect too little on how students could actually contribute to their projects.

RBB's closest cooperation is with the journalism school EMS. While it is partly owned by RBB, the school also trains journalism students working at other companies. The focus of the school is multimedia journalism, meaning that the students get a broad training across all media. The students are tightly integrated into journalistic projects and learn about the day-to-day business at a media publishing house. Apart from that, RBB has a network of European universities with whom they cooperate in international research projects. These cooperations may involve students, but usually this is handled by the university and RBB staff do not get in direct contact with students (with the possible exception of PhD-level students).

## Initiation

I-immersive state that they do not actively look for university partnerships. Once when trying to initiate a cooperative project, feedback from the university side was too slow, so they abandoned the project.

For HoR, project initiation may come from both sides. Sometimes they need to tap into specific knowledge and identify a professor to approach. In other cases, individual professors or students approach them with an idea. Even though they regularly do have university cooperations, HoR note that some universities are difficult to understand from the outside and that structures and modalities under which cooperations may happen are not transparent.

The start-up Xibit has few opportunities for getting in contact with universities and would prefer universities to be more pro-active in approaching start-ups.

RBB coordinates the students' assignments with the EMS and as far as possible accommodates themes the students have chosen. For EU-funded research projects, RBB is often contacted by its international partner network.

The BBC would briefly sketch an initial idea and then approach academics as to whether they were interested in disseminating the idea to their students. The students would then further frame the research project with guidance from their academic supervisor. Their focus is usually on longer-term PhD-projects.

## Collaboration Methods

Exozet sees practical problem solving as the essential skill learned by students in company settings, as well as gaining access to professional technologies.

I-immersive wants students to conceive and create new stories and aesthetics. They consider it a challenge to bring students into the right mind-set and to brief them accordingly, emphasising it takes time and energy, "but once you achieve this, usually they are quicker to find the perfect solution". Yet they also mention that there is always a natural range of performance in the group and, from their point of view, usually only a couple of students deliver satisfactory results. They usually start with a lecture delivering input about the particular project field, along with existing examples of good practice. This is followed by a phase where the students do research by themselves and share their findings with their peers. The concept phase starts with brainstorming in groups or individually and can take the shape of a Design Thinking workshop to push people to spontaneously create ideas. This is followed by a 3-day prototyping phase and a final pitch presentation.

When working with master students, HoR prefers short-term projects with intense contact. They employ daily design sprints to keep the pace.

Xibit so far had no collaboration with student projects, but is in talks with a university institute on giving workshops or showcases of their technology and then providing it to the students to see where it might lead. However, Xibit have

also been working with student groups at their premises, where the student teams are completely integrated into their team, without the university acting as mediator.

BBC researchers regularly give university courses and conference presentations.

In the case of RBB, the journalism students are completely responsible for the conception and production of their content.

## **Motivation for Collaboration**

HoR sees value for the students in their provision of authentic project cases and industry contacts, along with some funding allowing the project to be more elaborate than a regular university project.

In case of university collaborations, RBB sees access to new technology and knowledge, as well as research expertise as motivation.

For the BBC, access to specific expertise, lab or testing environment is a motivation for collaboration with universities. Also, universities sometimes have access to selected funding for particular topics.

## **Nature of the Results**

I-immersive emphasises that there is a great variation among the results by the student groups: some stay close to the briefing, others create surprising results while others stray off topic without reflection. I-immersive view obtaining usage rights for the results as a follow-up negotiation with the respective students after the workshop.

The BBC usually secures all relevant rights to research results. They are interested in practical and focused results from an industrial point of view. If they fund the student themselves, they use their own contract template. If the idea comes from a university, it would be the university's agreement that is used. Even though the BBC is eager to retain commercial rights, the university usually keeps the right to freely use the results in research and development or teaching. Students are also free to publish their thesis unless there is any confidential information, which is described as a rare case.

HoR usually deals with the problem of confidentiality by having students write selected passages in a more abstract manner.

In the short-term, RBB is interested in attractive content in new and unusual forms and their long-term perspective is in acquiring well-trained journalists with a deep understanding of the modern media landscape. Project results are published and featured by RBB. All rights of the results of student projects belong to RBB under their apprenticeship contract.

## Talents

Exozet is generally very satisfied with student employees, to the extent that they often obtain a full-time position after they graduate. University staff, especially professors, help by recommending students for different positions. In general, Exozet is looking for long-term engagements of students, as it takes a long time to onboard and integrate them into the team. This is why they usually do not take interns for only for a couple of months but prefer to give annual part-time contracts (20h/week). Currently, Exozet are especially looking for students with expertise in Virtual Reality and immersive media technologies. They also need people who know both about game engines and camera capture technologies.

I-immersive works with interns, who sometimes become employees. They are looking for a broad range of skills in animation, virtual environments, storytelling, virtual cinematography. They also express a special need for the theme of live streaming in virtual environments and people who can combine interaction design with artistic approaches.

HoR work with interns and students from a variety of fields, with a focus on computer sciences and social sciences, where the latter have basic technology skills. Most of the interns remain on on a student employment contract until graduation.

The BBC is particularly interested in computer sciences, human-computer-interaction, software engineering, psychology and related areas. They have had very good experiences with (PhD) students, particularly as they spend a lot of time in the BBC lab.

## Themes

With regard to the theme of emerging media, Exozet envisions a world where production and production tools for creating digital media content of any kind are completely democratised and accessible for all.

HoR gives a rather broad assessment in that they see potential for Virtual Reality in gaming and business, but not so much in the domain of cinema. In a project with master students, HoR developed a tool for media analysis, which analysed the music played by every radio station in Germany for a period of one year. On occasion HoR also provided their own tools for the students to work with, e.g. a special application to measure media perception.

Exozet sees the field of immersive media as offering potential for companies to learn from universities.

I-immersive is interested in developing worlds and assets for sets and installations. They work a lot with live streaming cameras in collaboration with film students. This is currently a more technical task but could be extended to format development.

The BBC shapes the topics of student collaborations together with the respective student and the university. In general, they are interested in exploring all forms of media and their potential uses for different audiences. This currently includes VR, XR, AR and AR audio, incorporating aspects of human behavior and psychology but also politics. A particular cornerstone of their research agenda is the concept of object-based media, which allows the adaptation of the media experience on the side of the receiver, delivering a personalised and contextualised experience.

They mention various example projects: one student is looking at information presentation in augmented reality, conducting such experiments as providing an AR TV programme guide. Another student is working on the theme of “narrative importance”, to improve the way audio is mixed for TV programmes, to make it easier for people with hearing problems to follow the narrative of a TV show.

Xibit has a number of research projects that include machines, in which they would like to involve students. They want to use both new and existing technology to communicate in new and different ways. For RBB, Emerging Media includes “all new media formats, technologies, distribution and consumption forms”.

## Duration

I-immersive suggests intense, short-term projects to keep the focus with student groups, preferably of one week’s duration. Middle or long-term planning of student collaborations is difficult because of the intense co-working needed to realise such projects and potential collision with students’ regular curriculum.

HoR prefers shorter periods from a day to a couple of weeks depending on the scope of the project. HoR projects tend to be realised faster than university projects, as HoR clients often want their projects to be realised within a couple of months, and sometimes have fixed deadlines in form of exhibitions or other specific events.

The BBC has the longest engagements, often spanning over the full PhD qualification cycle of four years, but they also take interns, who stay for three months over the summer. Usually, BBC projects with universities aim at the long-term perspective and they prefer longer cooperations to deliver substantial results.

Exozet sees a challenge in university collaborations regarding reliable deadlines and communication, especially during semester breaks.

Xibit prefer a limited time frame of one to two months for collaborations, feeling that students might lose interest if the interaction takes place over a semester-long course of two hours per week.