HyperActive

BEDFORD CREATIVE ARTS

Aviation and aeronautical engineers!

Can you help us inspire the next generation?

A bit of background to the Airships XR project

In 1930, Bedford was in a global spotlight for airship engineering. When the R.101 airship crashed it ended Bedford's airship dream. Since then, incredible companies have continued to explore the future of flight, but much of that is hidden from the public eye.

Since discovering that 95% of local young people don't know what an airship is, we're using this romantic story of folly and human error to inspire children, young people and adults to learn more about the engineering concepts behind airship and aeronautical aviation.

This is a story of the importance of engineering in safety, travel and making dreams a reality.

Why this project?

Young people's interest in science and computing has dropped significantly since 2019 (source: Engineering UK).

- Only 39% of parents are confident advising their children about engineering careers
- Only 16% of girls think engineering is a suitable career for them
- 68% of GCSE students want to do more hands-on practical science work

We need young people to be inspired to consider careers in all forms of engineering. Through a story that invites them to learn about their local heritage, discover local engineering companies, apply STEM learning, and embrace new digital technologies, we hope over 600 young people will engage in a workshop experience in the first year alone.

Why us?

Bedford Creative Arts (BCA) is an arts charity that creates art with, for and inspired by local communities. Our work shapes and enriches communities by helping local people have a sense of identity, belonging, agency and pride in where they live. Through the Airships XR project we want the people of Bedfordshire to be proud, inspired and galvanised by the aviation innovation of our local past, present and future.

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What we are building

We have created a set of digital immersive environments that invite audiences, and especially young people studying STEM subjects, to learn about why rigid airships failed and why we need the aviation engineers of the future to keep dreaming. This includes:

- A digital immersive airship gallery
- A mixed reality 3D model of an airship explaining engineering principles and challenges
- Augmented Reality trails
- Scanned models of real airship objects from national museum collections
- Teaching & learning resources for Key Stage 3 and above

The experiences we have created can be used in schools, museums, galleries, further education colleges, and even in the home to help people learn about airship heritage and aeronautical engineering concepts.

How you can help

We're looking for engineers to help in different ways. We can offer you training – all we need is your time.

Advice: We're building immersive environments using Virtual and Augmented Reality technology. Your engineering knowledge can help ensure we get the science right and we'd invite you to test what we create and give us your feedback.

Talks: In our virtual airship gallery, we can deliver public talks in VR. We're looking for people who can deliver talks for public audiences that bring the story to life and connect it to local engineers and engineering firms.

Support pop-up VR events: We would love to have real engineers to help deliver events where young people and the general public can experience the immersive environments. These could be visits to schools or weekends at museums, helping people to jump into a VR headset and have an explore.

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Benefits to you

- Feel good about inspiring young people into an engineering career
- Learn skills in new technologies (VR, AR, MR)
- Develop public engagement skills that could support your organisation's outreach programmes
- Raise the profile of your employer
- Develop your confidence in public speaking
- Give back to a local charity
- Make connections to other local engineers
- Attend training that provides CPD

How it works

If you're interested, we will work with you to use your time on the aspects of the project that work best for you. This might include:

- Undertaking a skills audit to see where your talents best fit the project
- Attending short training sessions – these could be online or face to face
- Attending meetings with the creative team to try out experiences and offer your advice
- Delivering a talk in VR – perhaps as an avatar!
- Attending pop-up events either in schools or at weekends in public venues
- Attending an evaluation meeting to provide your feedback

We're anticipating a commitment of 4-12 hours between February to July 2026. You could be reimbursed with a stipend for your time if your employer isn't able to support you in this opportunity in work time. Travel expenses will be covered.

This project is being delivered in partnership with Hyperactive Developments Ltd and Dr Atif Ghani, an award-winning educator from the Royal College of Art.

Collaborators include Bedford College, The Higgins Bedford, Shuttleworth Collection, Airship Heritage Trust and RAF Museum (Hendon). It is funded by Arts Council England, Royal Academy of Engineering (Ingenious programme), The Connolly Foundation and our charity donors and supporters.

Photo credits: Hyperactive Developments and Andy Willshire

To find out more, go to bedfordcreativearts.org.uk/projects/airships-xr