

Game On Goes OnLine

On 18 October 2002, Game On opened at the Royal Museum in Edinburgh. It was the first major exhibition in Scotland to explore the fascinating past and diverse future of videogames. From the first ever computer game, Spacewar!, made in 1962, up to the latest not-yet-released products, Game On looked at the people and technologies that have revolutionised games and how we play them. In the 15 weeks it was open it attracted 46,000 visitors.

The exhibition revealed how some of the most popular games such as Grand Theft Auto III, Pokémon, The Sims and Final Fantasy were created. Original artwork, concept design and prototypes from developers were on display. Game On also included dedicated areas looking at sound, cinema and the games culture in Europe, USA and Japan.

With over 120 playable games throughout the exhibition, visitors were allowed to experience the best of new and retro games from around the world on vintage arcade cabinets, classic consoles, PS2, Xbox and GameCube.

Using IT to interpret and educate

To complement the exhibition an education programme was designed to encourage schools to use computer games as a stimulus for learning in key areas across the curriculum. This programme consisted of workshops, a conference, teacher training, an online resource and video.

The aims and objectives of the education programme were to:

- Explore the innovative use of computer games as a stimulus for learning.
- Encourage a critical understanding of the politics and culture of computer games.
- Inspire creativity through digital media and the development of skills across the curriculum.
- Encourage pupils to explore the creative technologies involved in games manufacture.
- Leave an ongoing legacy of knowledge and resources for schools.
- Provide links between the computer games industry and the education sector.

The online resource was funded by NESTA, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. The resource has been developed to support the 5-14 National Guidelines at Levels C, D and E. In doing so it provides mainstream education with a mechanism for harnessing the learning power of computer games.

The resource allows pupils to design their own computer game, including creating characters, developing puzzles and composing music. This process enhances the pupils understanding of games and how they are constructed. It also encourages the development of skills in the use of new technologies and inspires creativity.

In order to ensure that the online resource would meet the needs of its users, extensive evaluation was carried out throughout its development. As the resource was created each new element was tested in six Primary Schools and with the National Museums of Scotland Junior Board. The Junior Board is a group of ten pupils aged 10 - 14 from across Scotland. They evaluated everything from the five characters that appear in the on-line resource to the games and worksheets.

The resulting resource provides users with mechanisms to:

- Explore existing computer games through deconstructing their content and form.
- Examine the processes involved in producing a new game.
- Design and develop their own game.
- Explore the use of ICT as a tool for realising pupils ideas.

The online resource has added depth of knowledge for pupils visiting the exhibition. It enables them to understand the processes behind the development of a computer game. It also helps them express their own ideas through the use of new technologies. Importantly the resource also stands alone and can be used by schools not visiting the exhibition. This allows the National Museums of Scotland to fulfil its national remit and extends the 'virtual' life of the exhibition.

It is also hoped that through exploring this resource pupils may as a result be inspired in their career choice and pursue a job in the games industry. The online resource is accessible through the National Museums of Scotland web site at www.nms.ac.uk/gameon. A supporting video can also be ordered free of charge.

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1 The exhibition was organised by the Barbican Gallery, London, in collaboration with the National Museums of Scotland, and was sponsored by Shepherd and Wedderburn.

"It would appear we have reached the limits of what it is possible to achieve with computer technology, although one should be careful with such statements as they tend to sound pretty silly in 5 years."

John Von Neumann, c. 1949

Research Review