

NOT-EQUAL

EPSRC NetworkPlus: Social Justice through the Digital Economy

Project Review Form - Mid-Term Review Pilot Project

Please submit this form before the deadline of 5pm on the 13th December to notequal@ncl.ac.uk.

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Lead Applicant (PI): Ben Kirman	Co-Investigators (names and organisations):
Email address: ben.kirman@york.ac.uk	Oliver Bates, Lancaster University
Job Title: Lecturer in Interactive Media	Supporting Partner(s):
Department: Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media	Co-operatives UK, Miralis Data, Future City Logistics
Organisation: University of York	Project Title: Switch-Gig
	Project Reference Number: NE84

1. SUMMARY

Please provide a summary of the activities and/or initial findings of your research project to date. This also includes events, engagement activities with non-academic partners and any other activities. Please include any images or website links that could be used for dissemination purposes (at least 500 words).

At the centre of Switch-Gig is a series of design research workshops with gig-workers. To date, the effort in the project has been working towards the implementation of its design research workshops, and in particular developing strategies to deal with the specific issues around working with precariously employed, highly-mobile and transient gig-workers in ways that do not create additional conflict or unnecessary pressures.

For example, in developing communications with couriers we have discovered it is important to make it clear that our research interests lie in better understanding couriers' current work situations, as opposed to exploiting their perspective for the purposes of creating a market-viable technological solution to some of the issues they face; thus potentially profiting from the creative outputs that the project seeks to co-create with these workers. Given these are not the aims of the project, we have been carefully shaping the language used in our documentation and resources, working to ensure that these best communicate our interests, and the purpose of co-designing speculative technologies together with them, as an activist endeavour. In response to this we are also adjusting the point at which it is appropriate for our industry partners to engage in the process, as their presence at the design workshops could convey a disrespect to the current power struggles of gig workers.

We have gone through rigorous ethical design and review process at the University of York, and have been working on the advice of expert collaborators to be sure that the project continues with full consideration and respect for the workers we are engaging. In addition we have developed a good relationship with a community of



couriers in York, who have been very supportive in helping us connect to workers in the city, and related organisation efforts through IWGB (Independent Workers of Great Britain) and new co-operative courier movements. Plans around participant recruitment have needed to become more flexible, given the specific challenges of recruiting on-the-go gig-economy workers, across two urban centres (i.e. York and Manchester). With no specific bounded space nor dedicated formal community that we can actively or physically approach, we are having to think creatively and considerably about how we approach these mobile, flexible and often fragmented workers, to garner their interest in taking part. We are also digitising our resources (<https://switchgig.wordpress.com>), specifically: a layperson's explanation of design probes, and the workshop itself, as well as some more informal blog pieces about our interests in forms of courier work.

Alongside these activities, more organisational efforts have been carried out in the employment of two research associates: Carolynne Lord (Lancaster) to conduct and implement some of the project's plans, and to aide in the running of the workshops, and Hayley Alter (York), a designer, who will be providing input not only in terms of the planning and running of the workshop, but who will also be working with the outputs of these workshops, to generate speculative technologies that speak to the future of the gig-economy.

Please indicate if these details can be shared in a blog post on the Not-Equal website **NO**

Again, sorry - we are really being exceptionally careful with how we talk about our interactions with workers, to avoid putting them in awkward positions with their employers.

2. WORK PLAN

Please explain any deviations from your work plan, the reasons for this and plans to address the issue (up to 250 words)

The main deviations to the plan have been in timescales. In particular, due to challenges getting staff in place on a fractional basis over longer terms, work has shifted to be a shorter, more intense period. This has not affected the overall budget or scope of the project, just made this period of the project more intense. Both RAs on the project are now in place and we are in the midst of a lot of fast-moving work on the project.

In addition, working with gig workers has been considerably more complicated than initially envisaged for a few reasons. Firstly, the challenges of engaging such a mobile and often transient community has created extra work as described earlier. The timeline for the workshops has been pushed back multiple times. Christmas and New Year are a busy time for couriers to take time away from work, and various industrial actions by both couriers and now academics has now pushed the workshops to mid-March.

In the meantime, project effort has gone into preparations, such as drafting and finalising the supporting documentation and materials as well as planning the content and activities for the workshop itself.

The aims, objectives and methods remain the same, and as a team we are confident in the plans for the rest of the project. There is a huge amount of momentum in the project, and although we've faced challenges, these directly feed into project outcomes, and have created knowledge, expertise and helped forge new relationships with a challenging but important community.



Further Information

If you have any further questions regarding this form, please contact notequal@ncl.ac.uk or 0191 2088268.

