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New animation challenges stereotypes of benefit claimants

An academic from Northumbria University, Newcastle has produced a new animation which has been screened at the House of Commons to challenge stereotypes relating to welfare reforms.

Funded by the National Lottery and supported by Leeds University and GIPSIL - a charity for independent living in Leeds - this ground-breaking film project, entitled 'All in this together: Are benefits ever a lifestyle choice?', enlisted the expertise of Northumbria's Senior Lecturer and internationally recognised film-maker, Ellie Land, to bring new research to life through animation.

The film builds on a three-year research project, led by Ruth Patrick from the University of Leeds, to explore the impact of welfare reforms between 2011 and 2013. Eight out-of-work benefit claimants calling themselves the Dole Animators took part in the making of the film, working alongside Ellie and two of Northumbria's Animation students, Lauren Shepherd and David Burnett. The primary aim of the film is to give the participants themselves a voice during a time of much debate on welfare reform between key decision makers in Westminster.

Ellie said: "I was delighted to be asked to lead on the production of this film, not least because of my research interests in the process of participatory led animated documentary film making, working alongside community groups to develop the content and creative direction.

"Not only will this film challenge stereotypes in relation to benefit claimants and give participants a voice, it also has the potential to influence new welfare reforms. Many projects of this type are reflective in nature, but this is a powerful tool which can be used to shape future policies."

The animation has also provided students Lauren and David with the opportunity to gain valuable experience by working on a live, professional project. While the participants' narrated their own stories, Lauren and David created animated characters to protect anonymity, in a Claymation style similar to that used in Aardman animation hits Chicken Run and Wallace and Gromit. The film also features a cut out collage style.

Ellie said: "Northumbria is committed to providing its students with industry opportunities to ensure that when they graduate, their CV has a competitive edge to aid their transition into a full time career. Not only has the project created this kind of opportunity, it has also provided a national platform to showcase our burgeoning talent – at none other than the House of Commons. What a great achievement to add to a graduate CV!"

For further information about the project, visit www.doleanimators.org

For more information about Northumbria University's Animation programme, sign up for Northumbria's open day on Saturday 26th October by visiting www.northumbria.ac.uk/openday.

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