Mick:

Hi, I'm Professor Mick Grierson, and I am research leader at the UAL Creative Computing Institute.

Robyn:

My name is Robyn Steward. I'm a member of the core team at Heart n Soul at The Hub. I'm a co-designer and co-researcher. I was involved with helping to make the app and role model to co-researchers that they can do research.

Tim:

I'm Tim Adnitt. I'm product director for music production at Native Instruments, so looking after our keyboards, grooveboxes and audio interfaces. And also a trustee for Heart n Soul.

Robyn:

It's really good to have it in a video to explain the process. And I think what Lilly said, she really articulated how people can feel about surveys, online surveys. I think that the issues that we got around, like having to create an account and instead we had a phone number or an email address, and I thought that was really important. And also that near the beginning there was, what I learnt from Google Classroom, is called an empathy map, and I think that's really good, because we didn't call it that and I think that's probably a good thing because we don't use jargon and that would demonstrate that it is actually possible to do what other people would describe as high level work. We can do that without it being jargon-y.

Mick:

Yeah. It's really interesting for me looking at that video, because I remember when we were writing the grant, all of the ideas that were swirling around, and looking at that video we did so much more than I thought we would do. It was so much better than I thought... We got so much further than I thought we could ever get with the project, because the method works. That idea we've been talking about for years. I think when we started, certainly working with Heart n Soul is... I've been working with Heart n Soul for a long time now, and always it's been that idea that working with people who see the world in a different way is good for everyone. And that benefit is a real universal benefit. That's really unpopular in the computer science community. It's a really unpopular idea in human/computer interaction. Sorry, there's some jargon for you there. This is the community who feel like they have all the knowledge in this domain.

And the fact that to say, well, actually, that's just wrong. It's wrong. People will always write papers about design process, and people would say, this is rubbish because you've not identified what the person's needs are. Everyone has different needs, and you've not got one problem, you've got 10 problems and you're not being clear about it. And I remember getting very upset and finding it very difficult. And we just thought, we've just got to keep doing what you believe in doing. And the fact that watching the video, it's just really emotional for me because it worked, it worked. The process worked really well. And we knew exactly what to do because we asked people what they wanted. It's just like... And when we published a paper on it and the reviewers went, "This survey systems really cool," and I was like, "Yeah. It is really cool. And it's because of the people who are involved and

their perspectives." And so, yeah. It's really moving, watching that through.

Tim:

Yeah. I mean, I would really echo a lot of that. I think for me, the interesting thing is I've also always held this belief, making something accessible makes it better for everyone. I think the interesting thing about the survey app, and the whole user centered design, sorry for the jargon, but again, the user centered design, design thinking, Heart n Soul, my impression of Heart n Soul, they've just done that always. It's not this kind of, okay, there's this methodology, let's take this methodology and apply it. It's just really in the DNA, and I think that really comes through for me. Not just watching the video, but in general with the survey work. And I think what's particularly interesting, and something that really made me think is, of course doing what I do, we do a lot of research and I also actually come from product design within NI originally.

So, yes, you do research and you have certain tools at your disposal. Thinking of survey tools, they're generally pretty horrible to be totally honest, what's available out there. But I think the interesting is, by making the survey application accessible, you make the survey application better for everyone. But the implications of that beyond that point are also huge, because you're then able to take this input, take this data, and from that, in our case we're creating products, those products have been informed by that process and therefore, again they can be more accessible, therefore they're better for everyone. So, for me, it's such a key piece of the puzzle to really get that right and I think you've done an incredible job of doing that, I have to say.

Mick:

You know what? That whole thing about using video in both directions, to both ask questions and receive information.

Tim:

Yeah.

Mick:

Theoretically, and from a traditional design and comp side perspective, computer science perspective, and psychology, there's problems there, because you've got confounds, there's loads of... By which I mean, there's lots of information coming to the person from the screen, which might influence the decisions they make. And how do you account for that? And in a way, we just came to a point where we thought, well, we'll just park all of that over there because there's this other thing we might get. We might get this richness of interaction. We might get the other value that we get from having that person ask the question and for getting information back in the same way. And it's worth the risk of these confounds to see whether this works. And that for me is one of the things that makes it so much fun.

But also there's other things, little things, like the way the sliders work. All of that stuff was really thought about by everyone in the chain. And the thing about Lilly when you hear her talk about it, is that she's absolutely on it about every single thing. And I think that... But it's that notion that you feel free to say what's on your mind. That often people feel in those situations that they're not free to say what's on their mind. And I think that... For example, that's because of the way these types of research are done, it's almost worse if it doesn't have a

personality. It's almost worse if it is completely dry, because then people, they feel, they get coaxed in other ways to say things that they may not even feel.

Tim:

Yeah. I think, you talk a little bit about identity as well. I think that's pretty important because I remember doing the survey and it's a long time ago now, obviously, but looking at it again with a different pair of eyes almost, with preparing for this, everything about it has an identity that's Heart n Soul. And it's a survey. But everything still has identity and I think that's something that's really magical about it. And I think for me, touching on the whole idea of being able to answer with photos, with video, with audio or with text, in the end people communicate comfortably in different ways. And I'm really with you with that, that actually just getting this kind of natural response rather than having to funnel this response... And by everyone, I mean everyone. And I think just forcing someone through this funnel of text only, and have it all filling in dots on a rating of one to five 50 times that we've all seen in so many surveys.

Mick:

It does have that in it, I've got to say. It does that-

Tim:

I mean, it does, but not 50 times. It does it has to crop up.

Robyn:

And those matrix things, they're really annoying.

Mick:

Right. That's just the same thing. It's like, Oh, they want a short survey. Let's just cram everything into one big matrix.

Tim:

Right.

Mick:

It's like VCS3. There's two things about that makes it interesting. It makes me think of the fact that you could just respond musically, for example, if you wanted to. Right. And it's up to the researchers to qualitatively evaluate that. And although that takes longer, there's something fun about the fact that you could do that. Also, there's something that's potentially revealing about it. And I think being able to take those risks, I think, is part of the personality of it.

Robyn:

It was interesting to see almost like a story about the person filling out the survey evolved as you read through the questions. I think we got a better depth of knowledge.

Tim:

Yeah. I mean, it's really wonderful to hear about the responses, obviously that's a side of it I haven't seen, but I'm really happy to hear that. And I think it's interesting because I was also thinking of course about this year and how challenging it's been and we're currently going through a process of, okay, well, how are we going to do user interviews and speak to people about all these things in the current

climate? And again, looking to that survey and hearing what you've just said, Robyn, I think is also very relevant. But creating that kind of conversational aspect, and that natural response, in a survey that can potentially be sent out to tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people, that's a really huge... Has huge implications, especially in a year like the one that we're currently in. Just being able to get that very honest input.

So, yeah. I'm really pleased to hear that. And I can definitely relate to that myself now you say it. I hadn't thought about it, but it does make you make you react in a certain way, because I mean, you're not exactly having a conversation with someone, but obviously you're having... For me, at least, it's touching all the senses where you're hearing someone, you're seeing someone. I love the use of the text even on the video as well, for some of the key comments I noticed that throughout. And it just encourages that, that kind of interaction almost. I know it sounds crazy because you're not actually having a conversation, but I could totally see that. I hadn't thought about it at the time as I say, but I can definitely see it now in my responses when I did it, all that time ago. How much iteration was there throughout the process? How many times were you doing something and then reworking it, versus getting it straight in there?

Robyn:

Oh, I think that was quite a constant thing. I think, as the co-researchers we're asking questions, I think, as a problem came up. I remember that Will, one of the coders, he was often in the hub doing coding. And I think that that was quite an ongoing thing.

Tim:

When you were creating this, and obviously it was part of the application as well, how much were you focused on this specific research project versus this idea of creating a more universal tool for surveys?

Mick:

The idea was that the project had two phases, and that the first phase had to be to make a better tool. Because I knew, I think we all knew, that we couldn't get the survey made if we had to use Qualtrics or some other system or Google Forms.

Robyn:

We tried Qualtrics. It was rubbish.

Mick:

It's horrible. And I think that we knew that there were problems with the whole process of research. And for me, that always starts with the tools, and the perspective behind the tools. And it's so much better to have something which is just the way you see it, or the way as a community we see it. And so the idea was to spend a very small amount of time at the beginning, making a simple tool that we all loved. It took a bit longer than that, but we did do it. And then, so everyone would feel like it was our thing. Also, because how can we do it? How can you get to a point where everyone's asking, where Heart n Soul are asking its questions of everyone in Heart n Soul? The people are doing that. If you're having to negotiate Qualtrics or Google Forms.