Project Overview: Animating Minds

Children today grow up surrounded by screens. From TV programmes to online videos, digital media plays a big role in how they learn, play, and understand the world.

Because early childhood is such an important period for brain development, the UK Government and health organisations such as the World Health Organisation and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that young children watch limited amounts of **high-quality, age-appropriate content**.

However, what actually makes content "age-appropriate" is not always clear to families or to those creating it.

What is Animating Minds?

Animating Minds (project website) is a research project that brings together experts in child development, education, and children's media to better understand how screen content affects young children—especially those aged **3 and 6 years**.

The project focuses on an important set of skills called **executive functions**. These include abilities like:

- Paying attention
- Remembering instructions
- Managing emotions
- Controlling impulses

These skills are essential for school readiness and everyday learning, and they develop rapidly during the early years.

What will the project do?

Animating Minds aims to:

- **Understand what makes content suitable for different ages** by working closely with experienced children's media creators
- **Study how different types of programmes influence children's attention.**
- **Test how small changes in content (such as pacing or visual style) affect children of different ages.**

- **Develop practical ways to help identify content that supports healthy development.**

Why does this matter?

This research will help:

- **Parents and carers** choose content that supports their child's development
- **Teachers and early years professionals** better understand how media can support learning
- **Content creators** design programmes that are engaging *and* developmentally appropriate

Ultimately, the goal is to make it easier for everyone involved in a child's life to feel confident that the media children engage with is not only enjoyable, but also supports their growth, learning, and wellbeing.