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**GAME WORKERS UNITE IRELAND 2021:
PAY TRANSPARENCY REPORT**

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1.0 Executive Summary

This report summarises the findings of a game worker pay transparency survey in the games sector in Ireland. The survey was designed and administered by Game Workers Unite Ireland¹ in affiliation with the Financial Services Union². The findings of this survey provide some initial insight into pay in the games sector based on occupational role, company size, work experience and gender among other indicators. The report is intended to be used as a resource for game workers and it accompanies the launch of a private GWUI pay transparency database which members can collectively build and use as a resource in the mapping of pay related work conditions across the sector.

1.1 Key Findings

The survey identified a number of key pay related issues experienced by workers across the games industry in Ireland:

1) Pay is highly differentiated by occupational role and gender.

The findings of the report demonstrate the high levels of differentiation in annual salaries based on occupational role and gender. Game workers employed in programming roles within the sector are the highest paid, with 78% earning above €40,000 followed closely by those working in production and management roles (63.5%). In comparison, people employed in essential support services roles are the lowest paid across the sector (100% of respondents working in QA and administration earn *below* €40,000 , with 75% earning below €30,000 in localisation); and those employed in other content development positions were paid less than their software development counterparts. This is one of the main drivers of gender inequality within the sector as female workers are concentrated in lower paid roles.

2) Pay across the game sector is privately determined and individualised.

There is a notable lack of transparency for pay related information within the sector according to the experiences of respondents. Most annual pay increases (90.5%) and occupational pay ranges (72.5%) are not published by employers, obscuring the wider

¹ See <https://gwuireland.org/about/>

² See <https://www.fsunion.org/>

context of employment for individual workers and leaving them at a disadvantage in promotion or pay related negotiations.

3) Overtime pay and pension contributions are notably lacking.

There is a prevalence within the sector and across respondents for unpaid overtime (82% of respondents, including those who receive other forms of compensation through for example gift cards), leading to an infringement on the basic employment rights of workers to receive compensation for their labour. Moreover, the small number of workers covered by employment pension plans (78% do not receive employer pension contributions) raises serious concerns about the future sustainability of a career in the game sector in Ireland.

1.2 Key Recommendations

The following recommendations can be made based on the findings of the report and the future objective of developing greater pay transparency in the sector:

1) Establish a permanent pay transparency survey instrument.

The production of a pay transparency database will provide much needed insight into pay related conditions across the Irish games sector. These insights will be a useful resource in helping game workers navigate their experiences with work and the labour market. The creation of a permanent pay transparency survey instrument will allow for the continued growth of the database as new participants share their experiences and contribute to the robustness of the information.

2) Develop a dissemination plan for the distribution and support of the survey instrument.

Critical to the continued growth of the pay transparency database is the development and implementation of a dissemination plan for the survey. The FSU and GWUI organisers should devise a strategy that involves the GWUI membership and will drive the increase in survey responses and the growth of the database, resulting in an increasingly robust database that will become representative of the sector.

3) Diversify the range of questions and standardise the use of categories to help with the scalability of the database and subsequent analyses.

The development of a robust survey instrument with a broad range of questions (e.g. on contract type, occupational title etc.) and the standardisation of the range of responses for closed, categorical questions will help with expand the possibility for analysis and insight and will allow for the seamless comparison of past and future reports and the ultimate scalability of the pay transparency resource.

4) Prioritise and push for the introduction of a living wage and annual gender pay gap reporting in the game sector.

With the economic impact of the pandemic and the unrelenting rise in housing costs across Ireland since 2019, the case for the introduction of a living wage tied to the costs of living is strengthening. The Irish government has formally committed to “*progress to a living wage over the lifetime of the government*” and the Low Pay Commission has begun inquiries into its implementation ([Gov.ie](https://gov.ie)). Game Workers Unite Ireland and the Financial Services Union should work to ensure that low paid game workers are accommodated within any transition to a living wage and that inaccurate assumptions about high pay in the games sector do not hamper this.

International research and the findings of these GWUI surveys on pay and working conditions establish that pay within the games sector is highly differentiated by occupational role and gender. Furthermore, occupational roles within the sector are extremely gendered. In order to ensure adherence to gender pay equality, it is in the interest of game workers and GWUI-FSU to prioritise and push for the introduction of annual gender pay gap reporting across the sector. Considering the difficulties with the transparent sharing of information on working conditions identified by respondents in both surveys, gender pay gap reporting is essential for both ensuring pay equality and the wider push for more open, transparent employment practices in the sector.

2.0 Introduction

This report provides a summary of the Game Workers Unite Ireland (GWUI) pay transparency survey which was conducted online from 2020 to 2021. The survey was developed following the publication of a report by GWUI on working conditions within the game sector in Ireland where 67.5% of respondents wanted greater wage transparency, and the majority wanted the introduction of formal pay ranges for job postings and the use of worker provided information on conditions within the sector. This report provides information on base salaries and other pay related compensation including bonuses, pensions and work from home contributions.

The pay transparency survey was conducted online through the Game Workers Unite Ireland site³ from 2020 to 2021. The purpose of the survey was to provide information on pay across the sector and to begin the creation of a pay transparency resource capable of providing increasingly representative insights on pay conditions.

In total, 62 respondents completed the survey working in the following occupational roles: programming, art, design, localisation, quality assurance, management and more. The survey was analysed using SPSS statistical analysis software and based on the respondents, this report provides an overview of the different dimensions of pay in the sector while identifying the cohorts in/not in receipt.

3.0 Survey Demographics

There were 62 respondents to the survey at the time of analysis and most identified as male (75%), while 18% identified as female and 5% as non-binary, respectively. Although this distribution is largely in line with national and international gender demographics of game workers, this survey recorded a higher number of male responses compared to the previous FSU/GWUI survey on working conditions in September 2020⁴. One of the persistent challenges in tackling the atomization of work in the games sector, and which acts as a barrier to the construction of worker solidarity, is the barrier to transparency and the sharing of information. The lower turn out in comparison to the previous survey is likely driven by the

³ Link to the official GWU Ireland website: <https://gwuireland.org/>

⁴ See report at: <http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/13739/>

prevalent use of non-disclosure agreements within employment contracts in the sector, and through fear of employer hostility and potential repercussions.

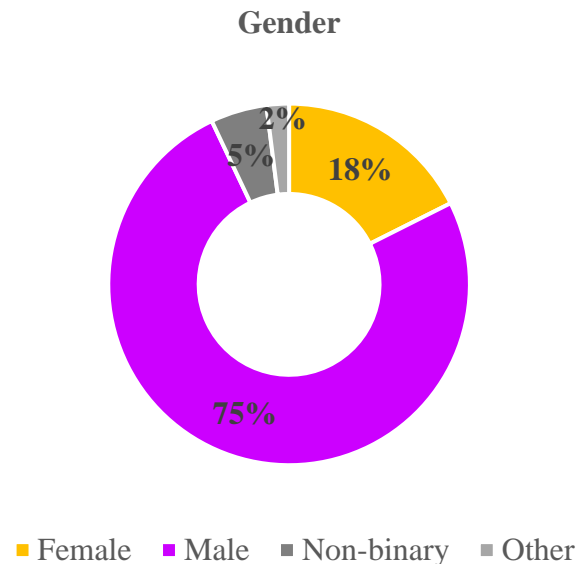


Figure 1: What gender do respondents identify with?

Despite the possibilities of mobile and remote work due to the digitally mediated nature of game production, the majority (97%) of respondents were residents of Ireland, with 1.5% resident in the UK and another 1.5% in Greece, respectively. Similar to the wider high-tech sector in Ireland, the games sector is geographically concentrated in the main urban centres and this is reflected in the location of respondents' workplaces. Most (79%) of the respondents work for companies located in Dublin, while 13% are located in Galway and further 6% in Cork.

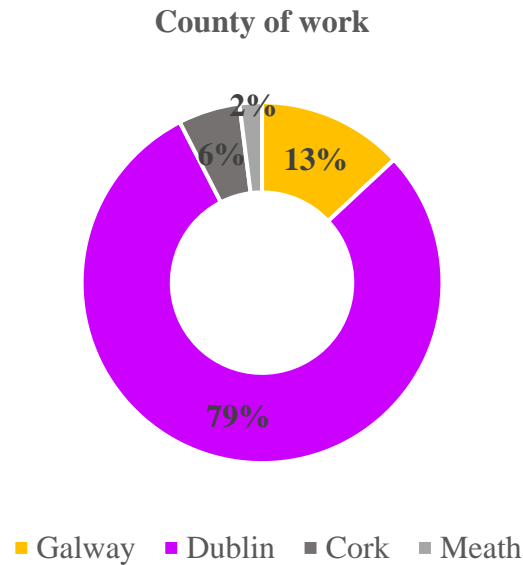


Figure 2: County of workplace.

Positioned between software production and services and creative media, the game sector is comprised of a workforce oriented around core content development on the one hand and essential services on the other. Game workers are often highly educated with many holding formal degrees in game production, programming and design. This is reflected in the survey sample as 55% hold an Ordinary or Honours degree, with 24% having completed a Master's degree or Postgraduate Diploma (see fig 3 below).

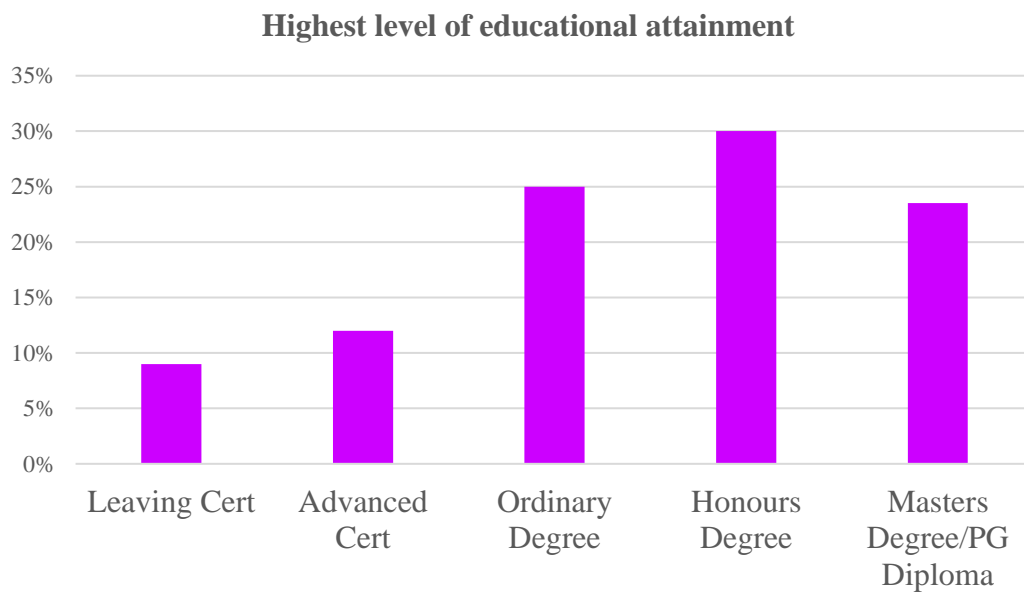


Figure 3: Educational attainment of respondents.

3.1 Work Experience

The two charts below demonstrate the range of work experience respondents have in the game sector and the number of years they have been working with their current employer. There are evident similarities across both indicators for respondents, with the majority of respondents working in the games sector for 2-5 years (29.5%) and working with their current employer for the same period (36%). This pattern continues for each category and these similarities point to a strong correlation between work experience and the current employment relationship, suggesting that many respondents have remained with their current employer for the period of their game sector careers to date.

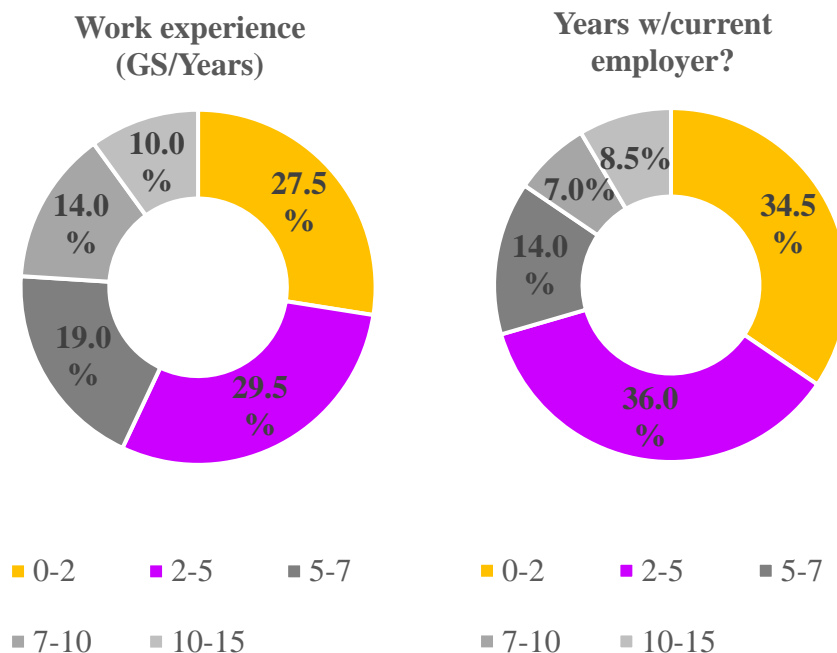


Figure 4: Years working in games sector.

Figure 5: Years with current employer.

This correlation is indeed the case as figure 6 below illustrates. Most of the respondents to the survey have been working with their current employer since entering the game sector

workforce. This indicates that there has been little mobility between organisations for respondents.

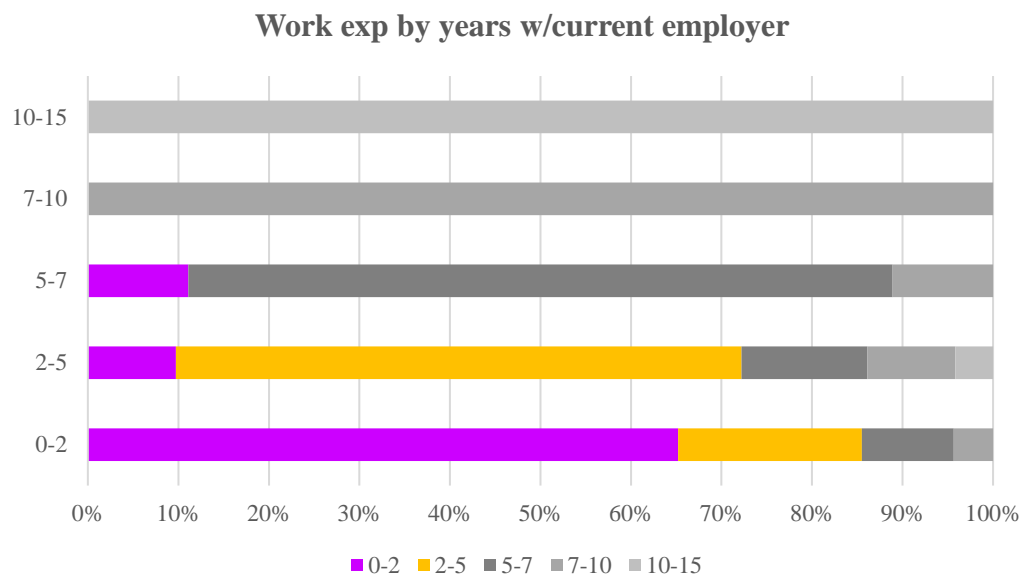


Figure 6: Work experience by years working with current employer

3.2 Occupational Roles

Building upon the previous FSU/GWUI working conditions report (Moody and Kerr 2020), the occupational roles that respondents were employed in span core development roles such as programming, design and narrative, and essential support roles across localisation, administration and quality assurance. Overall, the current survey sample has a similar distribution to the previous working conditions survey, although the smaller number of responses appear to be concentrated in programming (34%), with localisation (7%) and quality assurance (9%) roles recording lower rates. In total, the core development roles of programming, art, design, narrative and audio accounted for 69.5% of responses, while support services accounted for the remaining 30.5%.

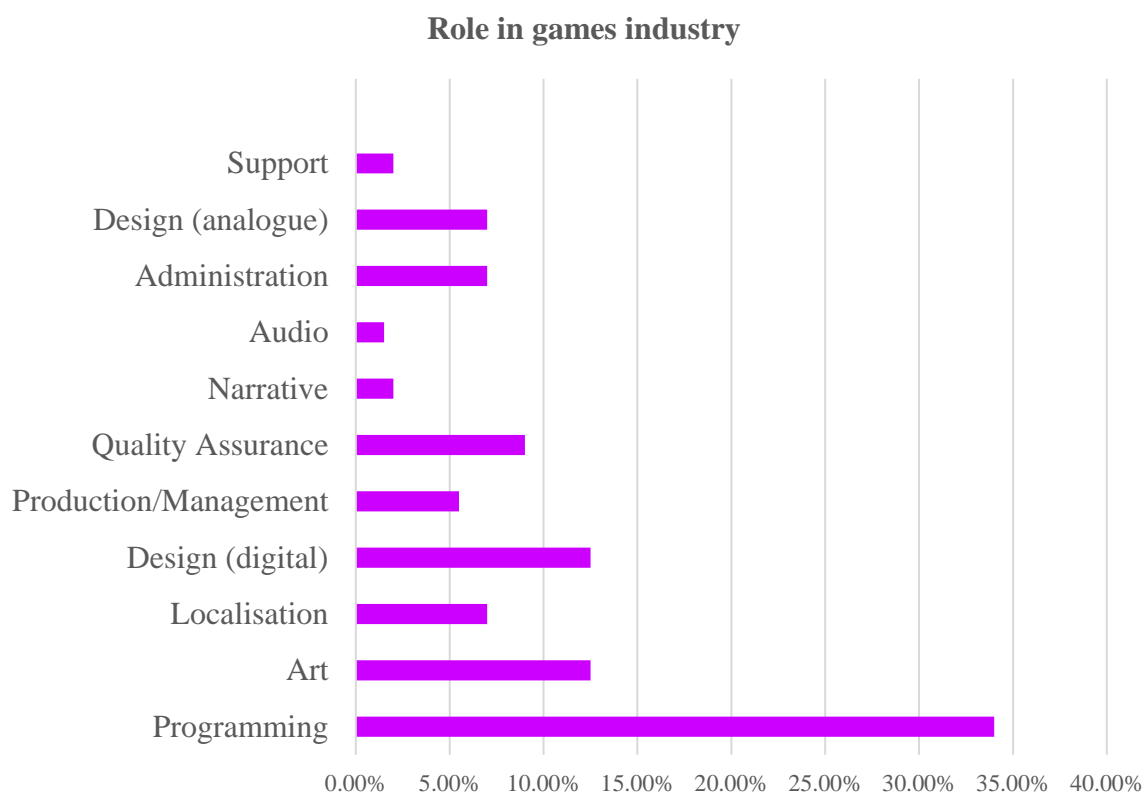


Figure 7: What are the roles respondents are working in?

The increasing disparities in the occupational roles of respondents is an important factor to consider when observing the gender breakdown of roles as those occupying programming positions within the sector tend to be primarily male. The chart below confirms this with most

male respondents working in either programming or digital design and the majority of female respondents working in art and support services.

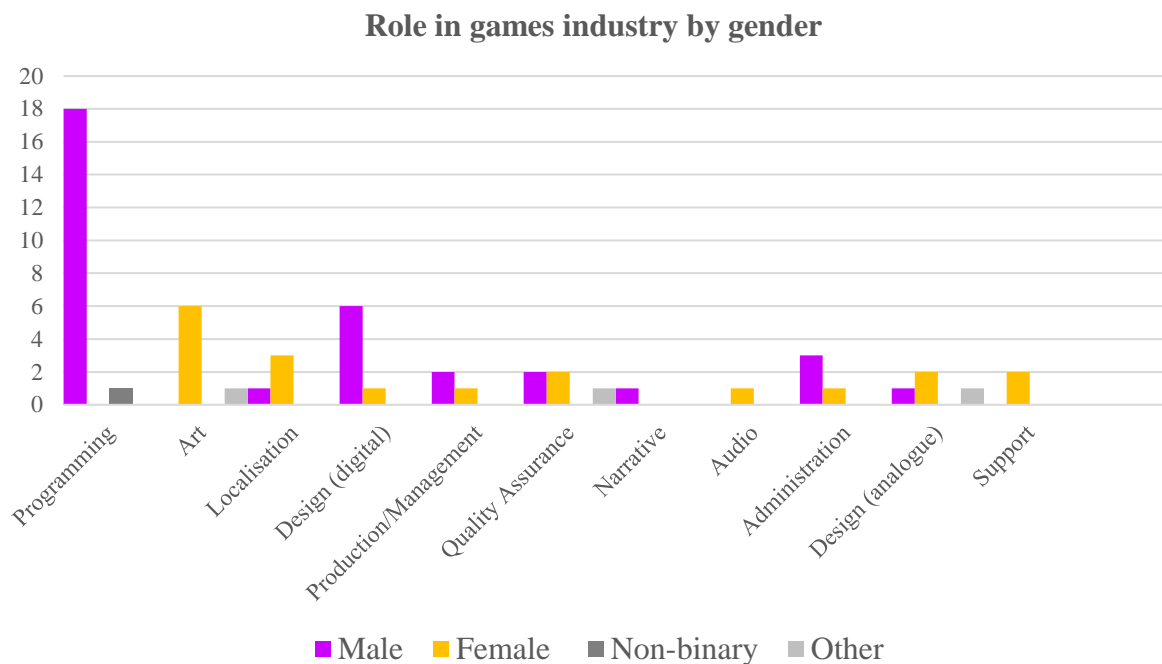


Figure 8: Number of respondents working in different occupational roles/gender.

Furthermore, the lower number of respondents from roles such as localisation and quality assurance must be accounted for when considering pay as the previous report showed that core development roles were significantly higher paid than their essential support services counterparts⁵.

⁵ See page 20: <http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/13739/7/JM-GWU-IRELAND-SURVEY-REPORT-2020.pdf>

4.0 Pay in the Games Sector in Ireland

4.1 Salary, Gender and Role

The first report published by GWUI provided some initial insight into pay within the sector, highlighting the prevalence of low pay across quality assurance, localisation and design roles. This report explores pay in further detail, beginning with base salaries before identifying the distribution of other pay related compensation. The median gross annual salary of the survey respondents was €38,250. This figure is slightly bolstered by some outliers at the top end of the salary distribution⁶. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents 27/52 earned below €40,000. Importantly, 11/52 reported gross earnings below €30,000, with 8 of those respondents earning below the Irish living wage of €12.30 per hour⁷.

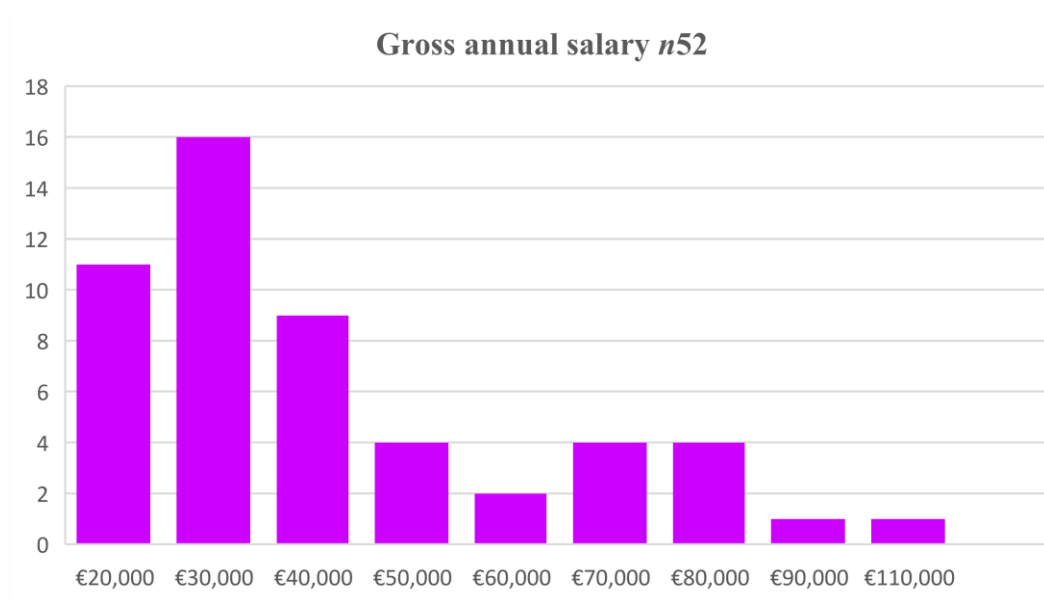


Figure 9: Gross annual salary of respondents.

The survey displayed similar patterns to the previous report on gender differences in pay, with male respondents recording a greater range of salaries and female respondents concentrated in

⁶ The outliers were two responses within programming roles with gross annual salaries of €95,000 and €117,000.

⁷ The 'Living Wage' is "intended to establish an hourly wage rate that should provide employees with sufficient income to achieve an agreed acceptable minimum standard of living" ([Livingwage.ie](https://www.livingwage.ie/)) and as of September 2020 this rate was €12.30 per hour.

the lower ranges. For comparison, 57% of male respondents reported annual gross salaries of €40,000 or more compared to just 20% of female respondents. This is due to the concentration of female workers in lower paid roles.



Figure 10: How does gross annual salary differ by gender?

As the chart below illustrates, roles in quality assurance, administration and localisation were the lowest paid across the sample. All of the respondents working in QA and administrative roles earned less than €40,000 and 75% of respondents working in localisation earned below €30,000. The highest paid roles were in programming and production and management, with 78% of respondents working in programming earning more than €40,000 and 66.5% of those working in production and management.

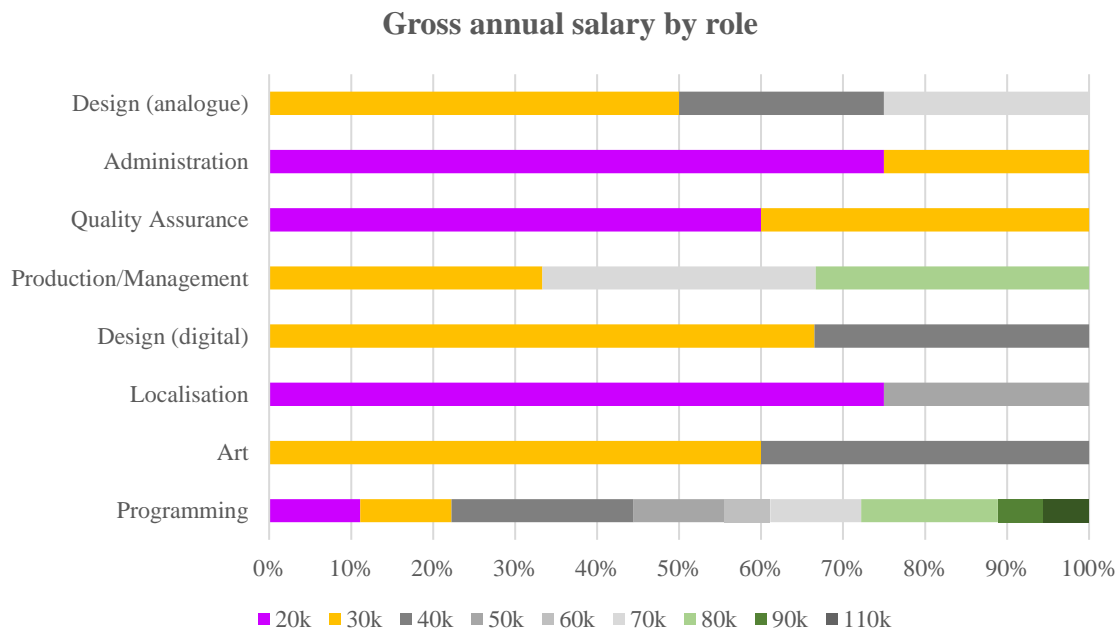


Figure 11: How do different roles in the games sector differ by gross annual salary? *based on percentage of respondents.

Annual salaries based on years of industry experience were varied. There are respondents in quality assurance, localisation and analogue design earning less than €30,000 with 7-15 years' experience working in the games sector. For comparison, Game Workers Unite Australia⁸ have produced a wage guide based on the national Professional Employees Award 2020, a legislative ruling on minimum pay that covers game workers. The award criteria is based on qualification and years of experience where the minimum annual salary of employees with 4 years' experience must be \$61,817AUD, and euro equivalent of €39,210. In contrast, all respondents earning €60,000 and more with 2 or less years' experience in the games sector are working in programming roles. This is possibly due to the hiring of senior developers from the broader software sector, and future research should indicate occupational titles (i.e Senior Software Developer etc.) to provide further insight on whether this is due to the high levels of labour market mobility enjoyed by software developers compared to other more sectorally confined roles.

⁸ See: <https://www.gameworkers.com.au/income/game-developer-employee/>

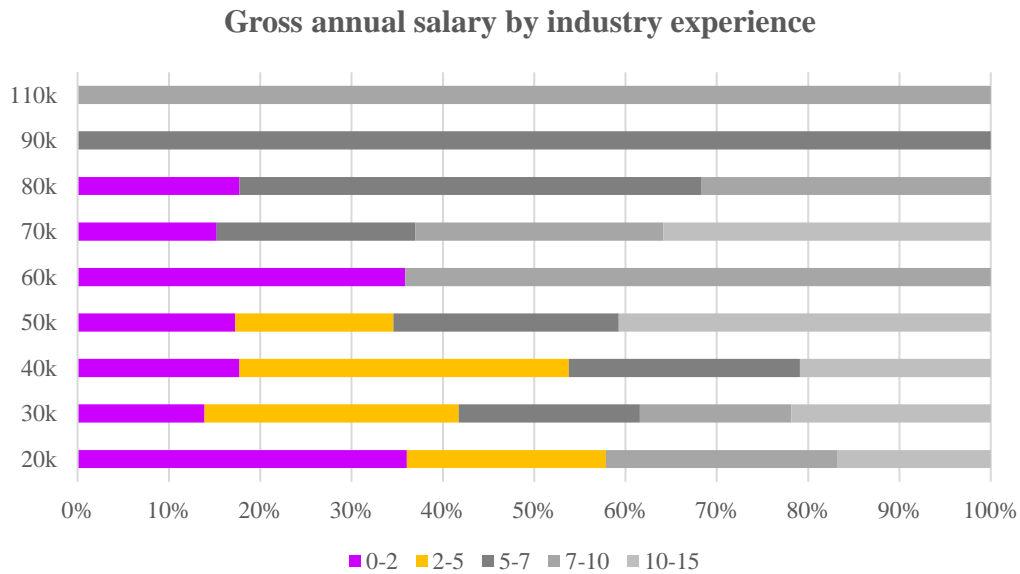


Figure 12: Gross annual salary by industry experience.

The base annual salaries of respondents varied greatly based on the size of the company they were working for. Notably, all 14% of respondents working within companies with 200-300 employees earned the lowest annual salaries, with 62% earning below €30,000 and the remaining 38% earning below €40,000. Game production and services companies with 50-200 employees employed the greatest number of respondents, with 24% working in companies with 50-100 workers and 26% working in larger organisations with 100-200 employed. The highest earners worked within the larger of these two groups, with the smaller group skewed towards to lower end of the salary range.

Gross annual salary by company size

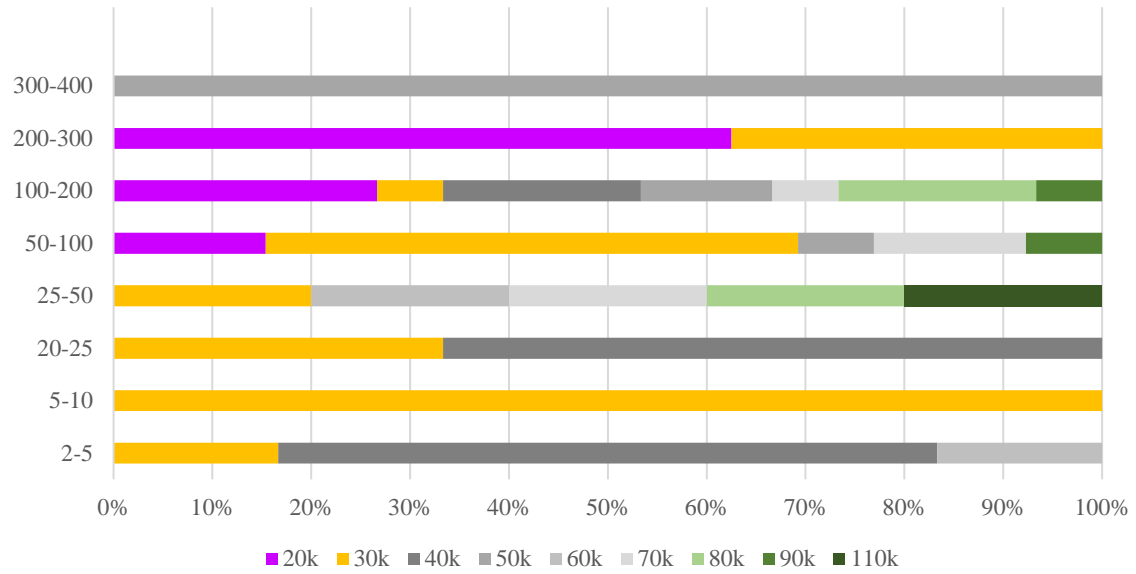


Figure 13: Gross annual salary by company size

4.2 Annual Salary Increases and Pay Transparency

Employment compensation comes in various forms, with base salary being the standard foundation of most roles. Annual salary increases are a common feature of many employment relationships within the economy. However, a high number of survey respondents (42.5%) are not in receipt of an annual pay increase. When observing how annual pay increases are distributed across the different occupational roles, over half of respondents in all roles apart from art, localisation and production and management do not receive annual pay increases.

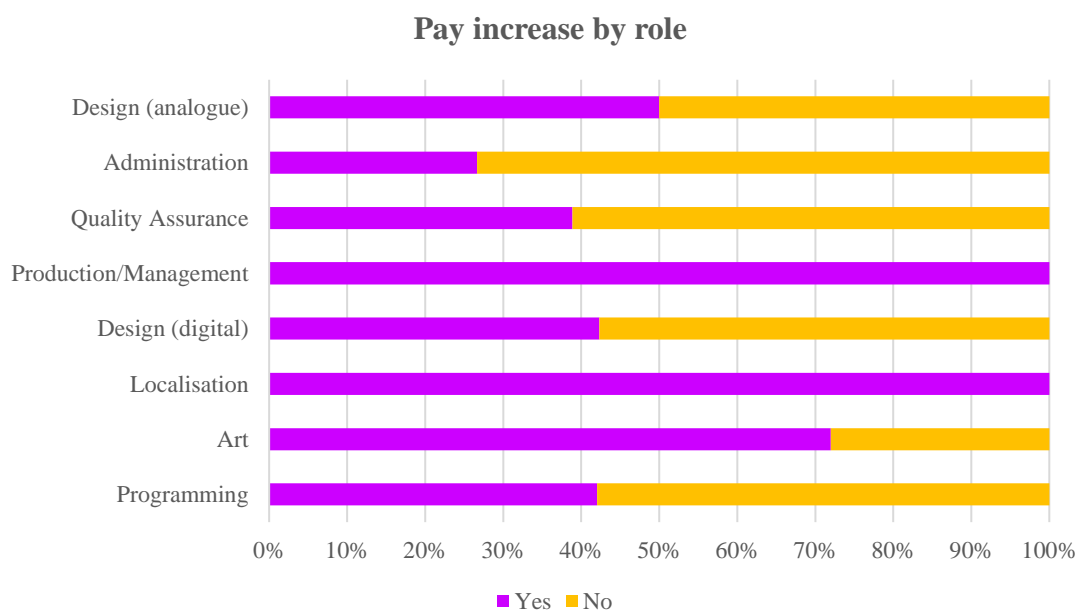


Figure 14: Pay increase by occupational role.

For those respondents in receipt of an annual salary increase, there were variations based on the percentage of the pay increase awarded across occupational roles. Respondents working localisation and analogue design received the lowest increase with all analogue design respondents in receipt of a 1-2% increase and 68% of those in localisation in awarded of 1% or less. The remaining roles are largely in receipt of annual pay increases of 2% and above.

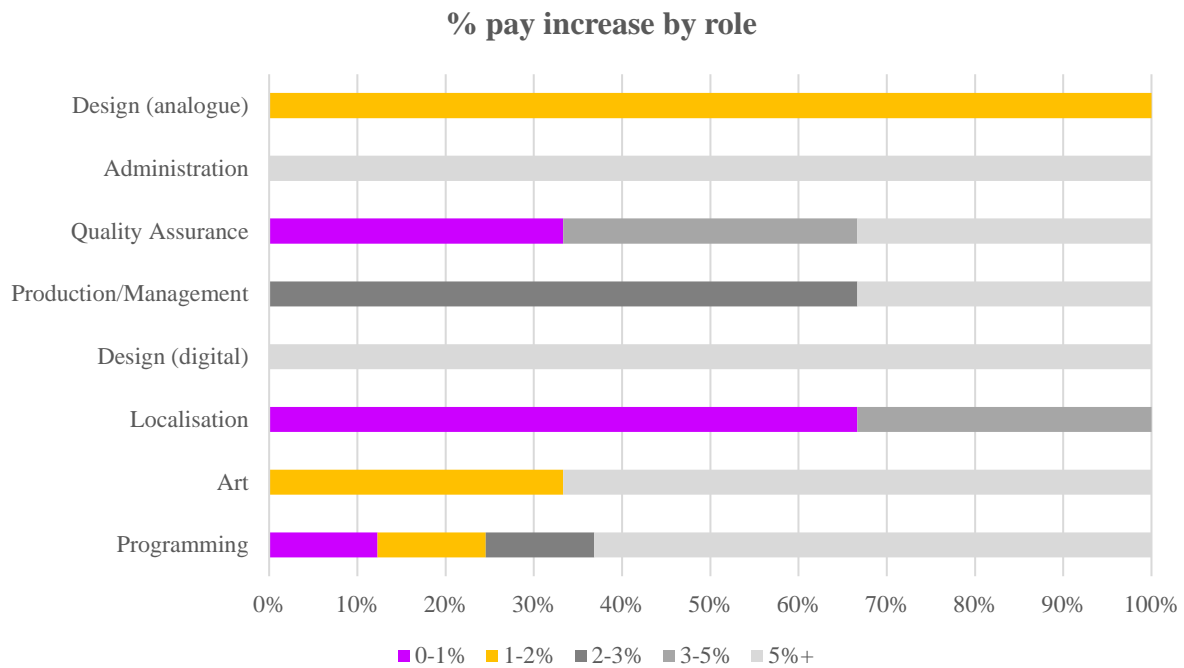
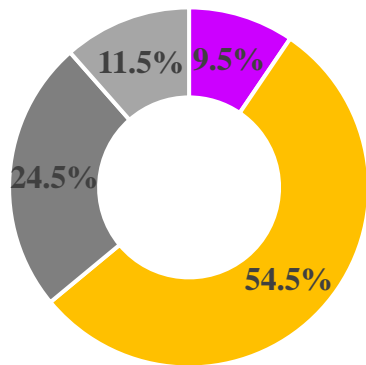


Figure 15: Percentage of annual pay increase by occupational role.

An important factor in the achievement of equitable and democratic workplaces is the role of transparency in key decision-making processes. As an emerging and relatively new sector, game production like many other technology and media related sectors are not covered by sectoral employment and employment regulation orders that provide guidance on rates of pay and other forms of compensation and protections. The lack of collectively bargained agreements on standards and processes means that employment benefits operate on an increasingly individualised basis within and across companies. This results in annual pay increases and pay ranges for occupational roles being obscured, privatised and often operating on an individual basis (see charts 16 and 17 overleaf). The majority (54.5%) of respondents' workplaces do not publish annual pay increases for staff, furthermore, the number of workplaces not sharing this information increases to 90.5% of respondents when NDA's and private sharing are accounted for. Somewhat more challenging for workers, 72.5% of workplaces do not publish the pay ranges for different occupational roles, producing an environment of ambiguity and uncertainty on the labour market and removing the access workers have to essential information which is needed to navigate the labour market.

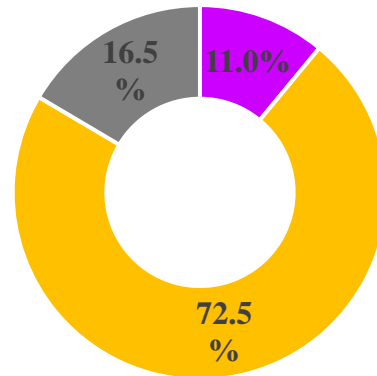
Pay increase published?



■ Yes
■ No
■ Privately shared
■ Contractual non-disclosure

Figure 16: Do employers publish pay increases?

Pay ranges published?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Individualised pay

Figure 17: Are pay ranges for roles published?

4.3 Overtime, Bonuses, Pensions and Working from Home Contributions

Past research and the previous GWUI report has highlighted the prevalence of crunch time for game workers where deadline or scheduled release periods result in extreme overtime. In total, 81.5% of respondents reported working overtime. Compensation for overtime has emerged as an important issue in the current survey (see fig 18 overleaf), with 31.5% of respondents not receiving any form of compensation for overtime worked. Furthermore, only 15% reported being paid for working overtime, with the majority (35%) receiving some other form of compensation such as time in lieu. These figure include those respondents who are not required to work overtime, if removed the figures increase to 38.5% unpaid, 18% paid and 43.5%

receiving some other form of compensation. Annual or company and individual related performance bonuses were also an important factor of pay for respondents, with 51% of respondents receiving some form bonus, 39.5% receiving no bonus and 9.5% receiving gift cards in place of monetary bonuses.

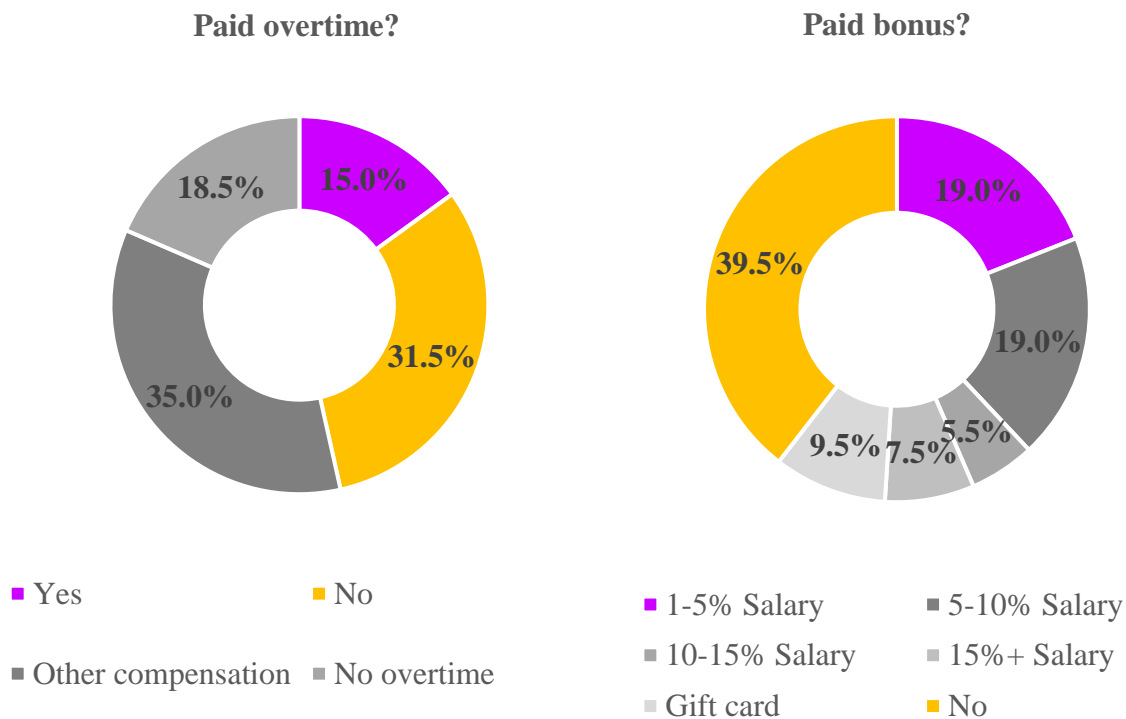


Figure 18: Are respondents paid for overtime?

Figure 19: Did respondents receive bonuses?

Payment for overtime worked varied by role (see fig 20). Most notably, respondents working in core content development roles such as programming, art, digital design, audio and narrative were not paid for working overtime, although some receive other forms of compensation. In comparison, the majority of respondents working in support services, production and management and analogue design are paid for any overtime worked. This in part could be due to the different characteristics of the work involved in content development compared to potentially more organisationally based work in services. The production of content whether through design or programming tends not to be bound by organisational space or time and the work involved can, and often does take place at any time and place.

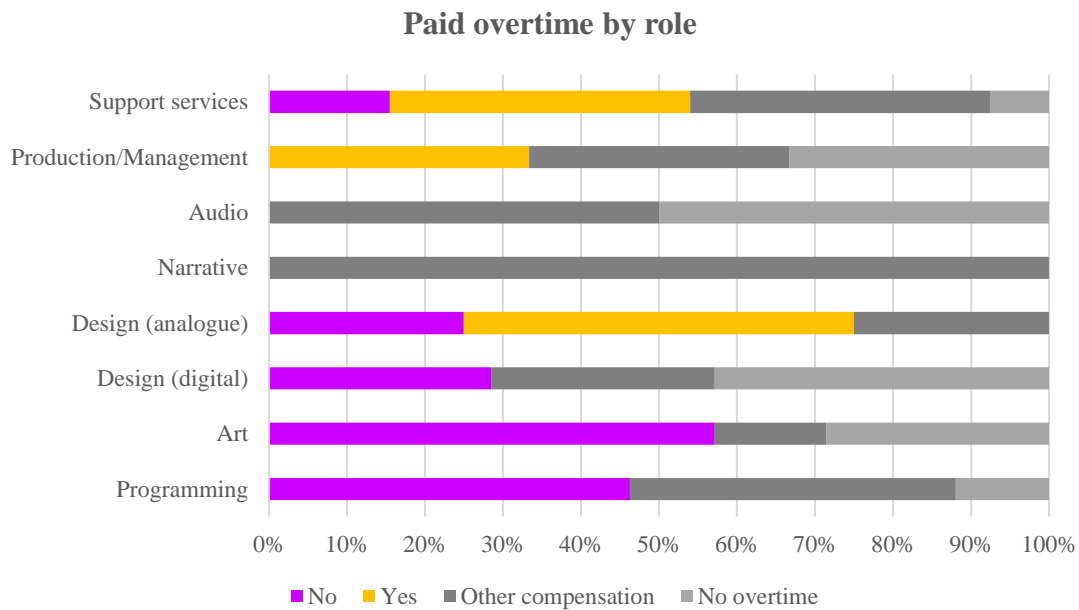


Figure 20: Overtime pay by occupational role.

The importance of employment pensions for the future security of workers and for financial stability during retirement is unrivaled and there is a need for employer pension contributions to be a basic employment right. Similarly to the previous report on working conditions in the games sector in Ireland, the majority of respondents here (78%) do not receive any pension plan or contributions from their employer.

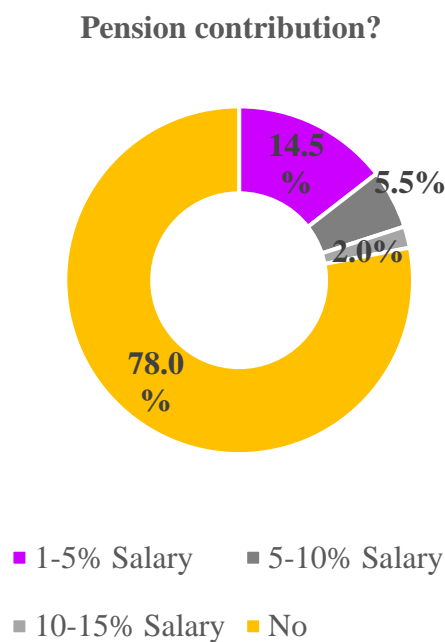


Figure 21: Employer pension contribution.

Most of the respondents working in production and management roles are in receipt of employer pension contributions, with 30% receiving 1-5% of their annual salary and 32% receiving between 10-15% of their annual salary in employer pension contributions. In contrast, a combined (80.5%) of content development and support services roles were not in receipt of any employer pension contribution, and the smaller numbers in those roles with pensions were in receipt of lower rate (14% receive 1-5% and 5.5% receive 5-10%). Of those employers with pension contributions, the larger game sector companies paid higher rates.



Figure 22: Employer pension contribution by occupational role.

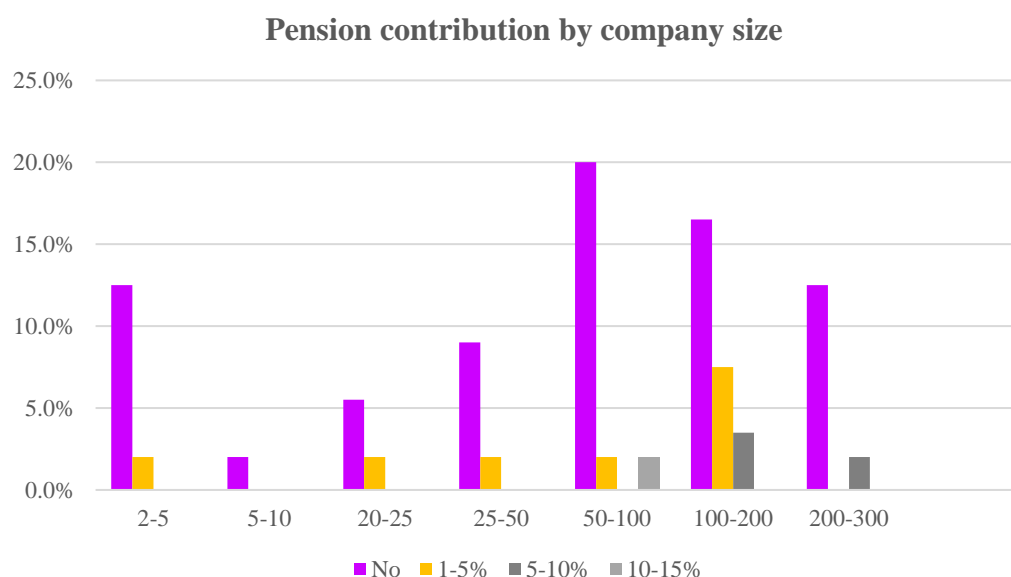


Figure 23: Employer pension contribution by company size.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and societal restrictions have seen many digitally mediated jobs turn remote as employees work from home. There is a notable increase in the share of respondents working from home compared to the previous report, with 85.5% of respondents currently WFM compared to the 58% in working conditions survey.

WFH contribution?

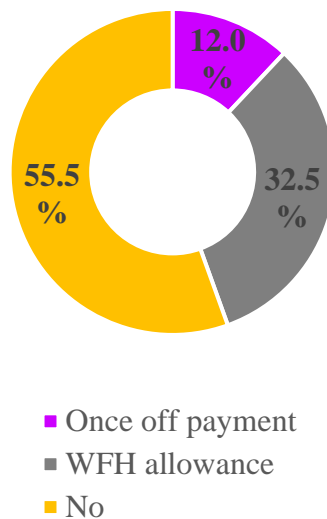


Figure 24: Do employers provide a working from home contribution?

Of those 85.5% of respondents, the majority (55.5%) are not receiving any form of compensation or WFM contribution from their employer. The remaining 44.5% in receipt of a WFM contribution are paid either a once off payment (12%) or a WFH allowance (32.5%). There were differences across those receiving WFM contributions based on occupational role (see fig 25 overleaf). All the respondents working in digital design receive no contributions from their employer home working expenses and the majority of those working in art (72%) and programming (62%) also receive no contributions. A continuous working from home allowance is paid to all of the respondents working in production and management, and most of those employed in localisation and quality assurance roles. These contributions were also highly polarized by company size (see fig 26) and most companies with 50 or less employees were not providing WFM contributions compared to a majority of companies with 50 or more employees who provided working from home allowances and some once off payments.

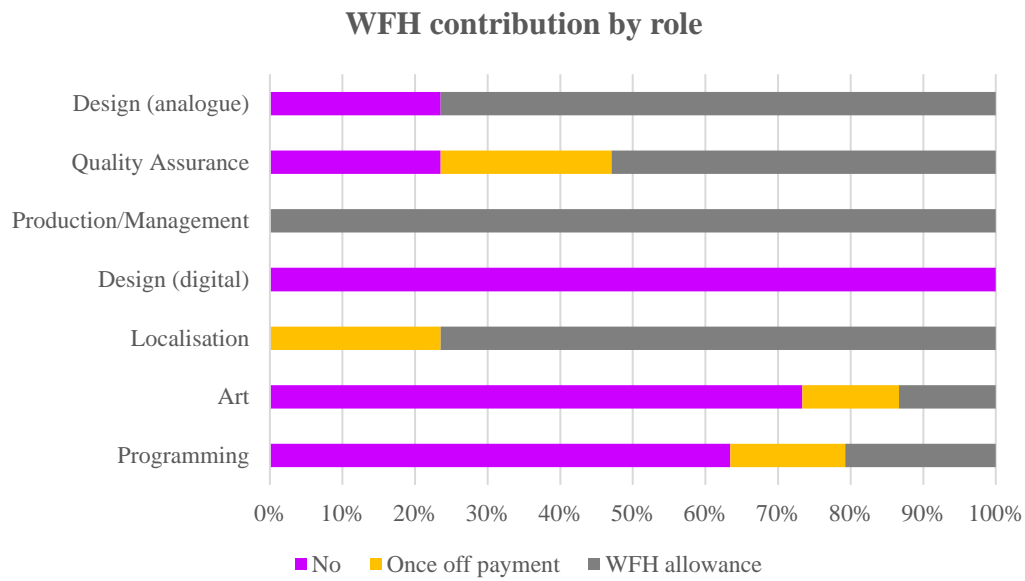


Figure 25: Working from home contributions by occupational role.

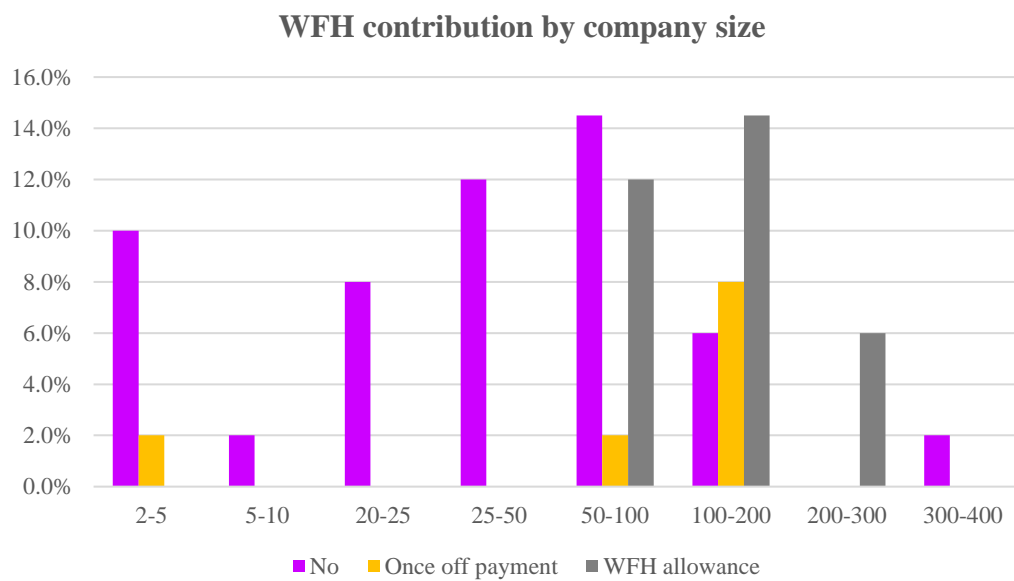


Figure 26: Working from home contributions by company size.

5.0 Concluding Remarks

This report has provided a summary of a survey on pay conditions in the game sector in Ireland. The findings explored the demographic breakdown of respondents based on gender, location, education and work experience. The key findings demonstrate the differentiation of income by occupational role and gender, the lack of transparency on pay related decisions within companies and the prevalence of unpaid overtime and no employment-based pensions. The individualised nature of work in this sector puts game workers at a disadvantage on the labour market and in negotiations for decent conditions within their organisations by obscuring information on pay for workers. The development of a comprehensive pay transparency resource built by and for game workers will help remove some of the uncertainty and individualising nature of work in the sector by providing much needed and desired transparency and information for workers.

6.0 References

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