WHAT'S THE SCORE?

Surveying Game Workers in Ireland 2020

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GWU IRELAND

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Game Workers Unite Ireland 2020:
Surveying Game Workers in Ireland

Report

By

Joshua Moody

&

Prof. Aphra Kerr

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Contents of Report

1.0 Executive Summary

This report summarises the findings of a survey of workers and working issues in the games sector in Ireland. The survey was designed and administered by Game Workers Unite Ireland in 2019. GWUI is an affiliated branch of the Financial Services Union in Ireland and part of an international organisation with branches in a number of countries. The findings of this survey will inform the GWU charter in Ireland.

1.1 Key Findings

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

1) Increasing pay

- 64% of respondents have experienced low pay in the games sector in Ireland and 17% of respondents have experienced missed payments, while 45% note working unpaid overtime.

2) Ending crunch and unpaid overtime

- 55.5% of respondents have been required to work crunch time in their jobs.

3) Securing stable contracts

- 62% of survey respondents do not have secure employment contracts, while 43% of respondents note experiencing frequent job instability, including through lay-offs and impermanent contract status.

4) An end to harassment, bullying and discrimination

- 12% have experienced harassment and/or intimidation based on their gender, ethnicity, age or sexuality. Furthermore, experiences of discrimination came in the form of interpersonal relations (20%), working conditions (10%), workloads (8.5%), pay and bonuses (8.5%) and more.

Are there any positives?

- 65% of respondents want the support of an organised community of workers and 63.5% are interested in collective bargaining to improve wage standards.

1.2 Key Recommendations

A number of recommendations can be made following the analysis of the survey and the developments of GWU movements internationally:

1) Foster confidential dialogue across the game sector workforce.

Stimulating the conditions for workplace and sectoral dialogue between game workers is vital for the development of worker solidarity and awareness. The use of online communications tools such as Discord by GWU UK has been hugely beneficial for providing a confidential space for game workers to share their experiences with anonymity (Ruffino and Woodcock 2020), an essential protection for workers as they begin the process of organising. Facilitating an online community through communications tools that game workers are familiar with can help foster the dialogue needed to begin this process.

2) Begin to build collective representation and voice to combat the individualised nature of work

One of the most striking characteristics of emerging forms of tech work, including those found in the games, animation and the creative sector, is the individualised nature of employment. Not only do these sectors lack union representation and collective worker voice, the character of their production processes and their high job turnover/mobility mean that workers take on more individual risks in the management of their careers. Building collective representation across these sectors can provide a universal safety net and communal stability for workers as they navigate their careers.

3) Facilitating worker assemblies with the aim of establishing clear priorities and tactics for addressing work and employment issues in the sector

Game workers face many issues in their work, with low pay, unpaid overtime and a lack of benefits widely experienced. Workers assemblies can provide a democratic environment where key issues can be detailed and strategies for tackling them developed. It is essential that any measures to address structural issues in the sector are targeted, effectively communicated and based on empirical evidence of the experiences of workers.

4) Grow membership and support for GWU Ireland and leverage the collective to provide essential insight into the sector and services to benefit workers.

A key benefit to unionisation is the returning strength of numbers as workers within and across workplaces and occupations unite. Unionised workers can leverage their communities to share information on conditions, benefits and pay. With greater insight into work and employment in the sector, essential services can be provided to workers such as pay transparency through the sharing of information confidentially among members.

5) Liaise with union members, labour organisers and employers' associations to begin the process of developing standard employment practices within the game sector

The informal, individualised and often precarious conditions in the game sector need to be addressed through dialogue with the social partners where minimum standards and best practices can be developed and set in place to address issues such as insecure contracts, low pay, quality of internships and worker recognition and accreditation.

2.0 Introduction

This report provides a summary of the Game Workers Unite Ireland (GWU) survey which was conducted online from 2019 to 2020. The survey explored the conditions experienced by workers throughout the sector in Ireland and this report provides an overview of employment in the sector, identifying key issues and providing the basis from which game workers in Ireland can begin to organise as a community and collectively bargain for better conditions.

Games Workers Unite is an international worker-led movement to organise and unionise global game workers[1] in pursuit of fairer working conditions. Game Workers Unite Ireland is the official Irish chapter of GWU and has established official union status through its affiliation with the Financial Services Union (FSU)[2]. The Irish chapter is worker-led and collaborates with union organisers and academics to build an organised community which can represent workers across the industry.

The Irish games industry has experienced a period of growth over the past two decades from what was originally a very small base. An early report by Prof Aphra Kerr and Dr. Anthony Cawley into the industry estimated that there were circa 300 people employed in the sector in 2002, and the first official mapping of the sector by Forfás the following year estimated that 400 were employed across 22 companies (2004). Employment in the sector has continued to grow since then, Kerr and Cawley's (2009) report showed a growth in employment of over 400%, estimating that circa 1,469 were employed in the sector. The most recent statistics on employment in the games sector in Ireland in 2016 concluded that there was 1,890 employed across all sub-sectors in the value chain and between 40-50 game development companies (Olsberg SPI 2017: 17).

3.0 Methods

The survey was conducted online through the Game Workers Unite Ireland[3] site from 2019 to 2020. The questions were designed by union organisers in collaboration with game workers and the survey was delivered through Typeform. The purpose of the survey was to provide

[1] See https://www.gameworkersunite.org/about-us
[2] See https://www.fsunion.org/
[3] Link to the official GWU Ireland website: https://gwuireland.org/

insights into working conditions, to identify key issues and to begin to build the GWU Ireland membership.

In total, 223 respondents[4] completed the survey working in occupations from programming, localisation, art, audio and design, to production, administration, community management, quality assurance and more.

The survey was analysed using the SPSS statistical analysis software by two independent academics. This report provides an overview of employment in the sector, identifying the key issues experienced by workers and exploring how they are experiences by people in different demographic categories, occupational roles and company types.

[4] This sample represent roughly 11.5% of the game sector workforce in Ireland according to the most recent employment estimates (Olsberg SPI 2017).

4.0 Survey Demographics

Of the 223 survey respondents, the majority identified as male 72%, with 23% identifying as female and just under 3% as non-binary. The gender breakdown of respondents is largely in line with international trends in the games industry where women and those identifying as non-binary are underrepresented in what is historically and currently a highly gendered sector (Kerr and Savage 2020).

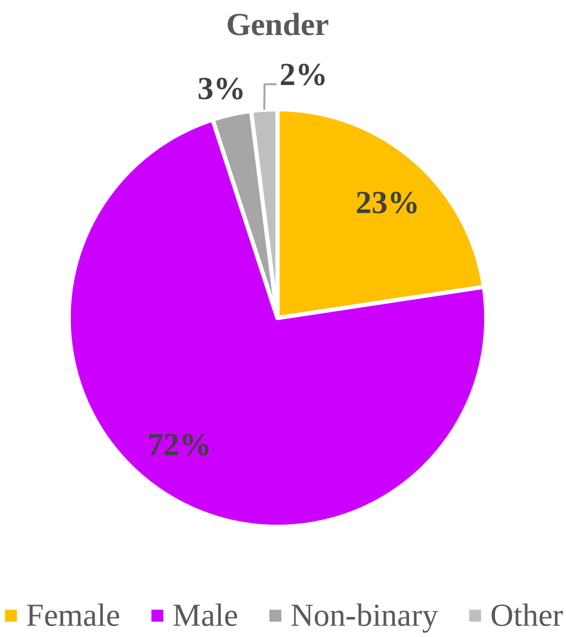

Figure 1: What gender do respondents identify with?

The ethnic diversity of the survey respondents was low, with the vast majority (81.5%) of respondents identifying as Caucasian, Irish, white or European. The next largest groupings identified as mixed-race (4%), Hispanic (3%), Middle Eastern (2%) and Black (1%).

The games industry is typically made up of relatively younger employees and the findings of this survey follow this trend. The majority of respondents were aged 18-30 (57%), while just under 33% were between the ages 30-40, with below 7% aged 40-50 and the remaining 3% of respondents aged 50 and over. This trend is also evident in the years of experience that respondents have working in the games sector, with 46% working in the sector for 3 years or less (see figure 2).

Figure 2: How many years' experience do respondents have working in the games sector?

4.1 Employment Status and Company Type

Over three quarters (71.7%) of respondents were employed on a full-time basis, with 8.1% working as freelancers/contractors, 5.4% were unemployed and 4.5% were employed part-time. The remaining 10.3% were dispersed almost evenly across the remaining categories (self-employed, intern, student).

In terms of where (or how) people were employed, companies were categorised based on whether they were indigenous firms, multinationals or indigenous firms that were subsequently acquired by MNC's. Out of the 135 responses to company type, 27.5% of respondents work for indigenous companies (see figure 3 below), with 17 % employed by multinationals, 15% with MNC-indigenous firms and 1% working freelance respectively. Although the impact of foreign-direct investment in the Irish games sector is low compared to tech more widely (Romero 2015), there is still a significant MNC presence in the sector (Kerr 2012).

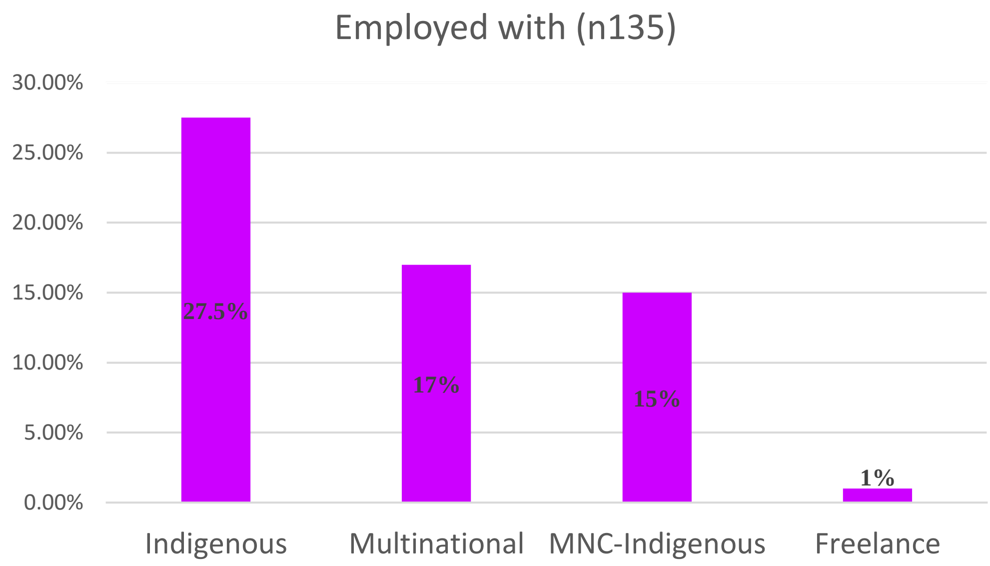

Figure 3: What type of company are respondents employed with?

The number of employees working within the respondents' companies varied. 35% of respondents work in small organisations that employ less than 50 people, while 51.6% work in small-medium sized companies that employ between 50-300 employees. A further 8.9% work in medium-large sized organisations with between 300-1000 employees while 4.5% work in large firms that employ over a 1000 (see figure 4 below).

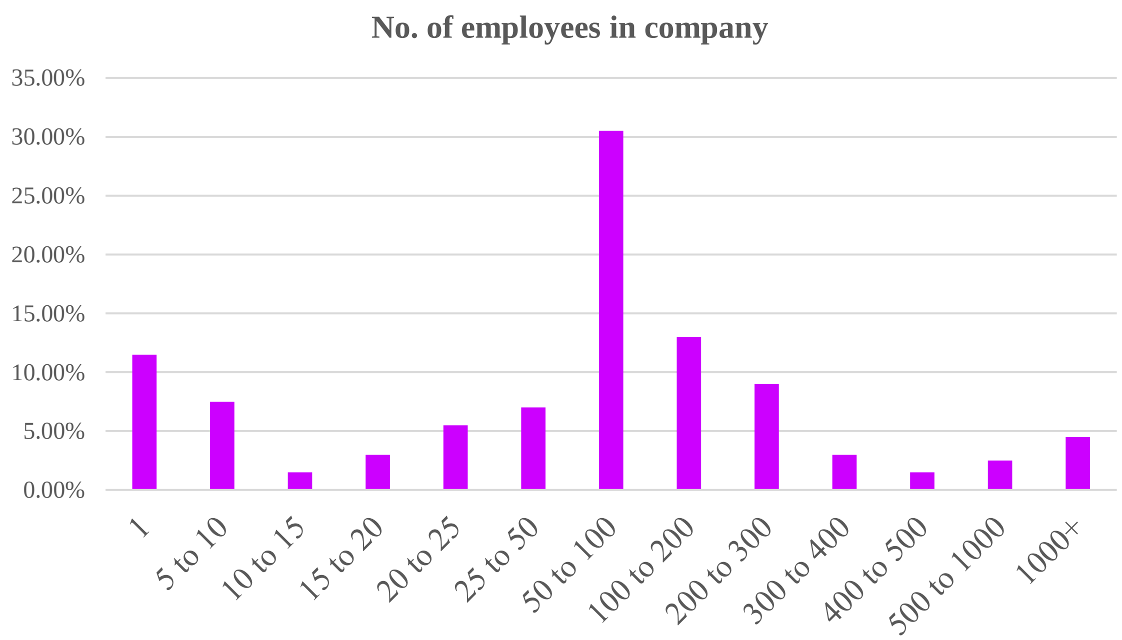

Figure 4: Number of employees working in each respondent's company.

Indigenous companies in the digital technology sectors tend to be smaller than their multinational counterparts, and this was particularly the case in the previous study of game development companies in Ireland where the majority of indigenous companies employed >15 (Kerr and Cawley 2009). However, the respondents to this survey are predominantly employed in medium to large companies. The chart below shows the number of employees working across the indigenous sector and gives a clear indication that indigenous firms have been growing in size over the past decade. In contrast to past findings, the majority (84%) of indigenous firms employ 15 people or more, with most companies having between 100-300 employees (36%), followed then by 11.5% of smaller firms who employ 25-50 people.

Figure 5: Number of people employed in indigenous companies.

4.2 Occupational Roles

Respondents were employed across a range of roles in the games sector, ranging from programming, art and design, to localisation, production, quality assurance and more. The Irish games sector has historically been dominated by localisation, quality assurance and support services with a notable lack of core development functions such as design and programming (Kerr and Cawley 2012). The most recent report by Olsberg SPI with Nordcity on behalf of the Irish government in 2016 stated that “the vast majority of the employment impact [of the Irish games sector] was associated with the publishing (and middleware) industry, which includes the distribution – physical and digital – and marketing of video games, as well as the customer support and localisation activities of foreign-owned games publishers with offices in Ireland (Olsberg SPI 2016: 18).

This survey, however, has reached people working in support services as well as content development roles (see figure 6). The majority of respondents work in programming roles (21.5%), with art, localisation and quality assurance the next largest category (11.7%), followed then closely by design (11.2%), production and management (10.8%), with the remaining 21% of respondents working across various roles from narrative to marketing respectively. Although localisation, QA and production still account for a large share of employment based on the survey responses (34.2%), the core development functions of programming, design, art, narrative and audio account for 52% of respondents.

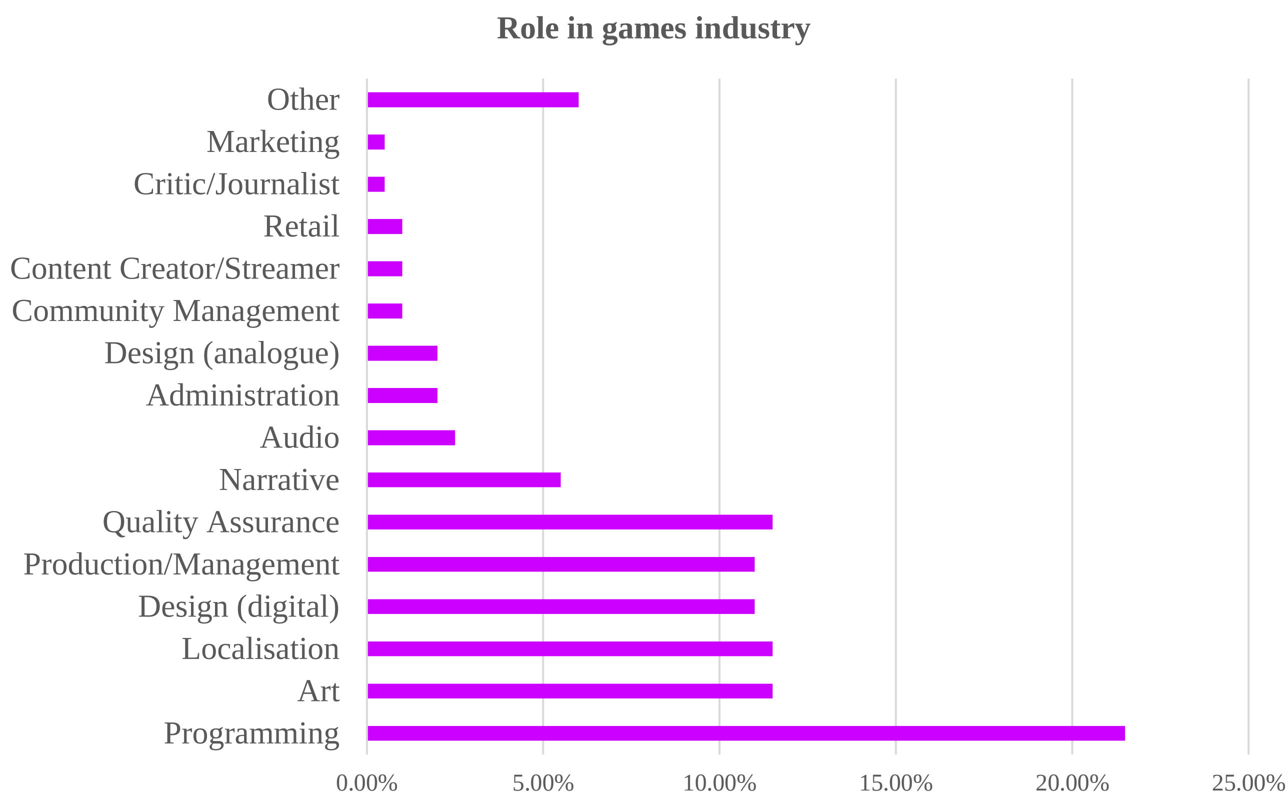

Figure 2: What are the roles respondents are working in?

The global games industry is highly gendered in its makeup, furthermore, women tend to be employed in the wider support services functions of the sector as opposed to content development functions (Kerr and Cawley 2012). The below chart shows the distribution of respondent roles based on gender (see fig. 4). The vast majority of female respondents are employed across localisation (46%) and quality assurance (46%) with higher numbers also represented in administrative and community management roles. As a comparison, respondents who identify as female represent 23% of the overall survey respondents, however, when these wider support services are removed females constitute just 6% of respondents working across other parts of the industry. In contrast, men dominate the core content development roles in the sample. Men account for 89.5% of those working in programming, 84% of designers, 83.5% of those in production/management roles, and 65.5% of respondents working in art functions.

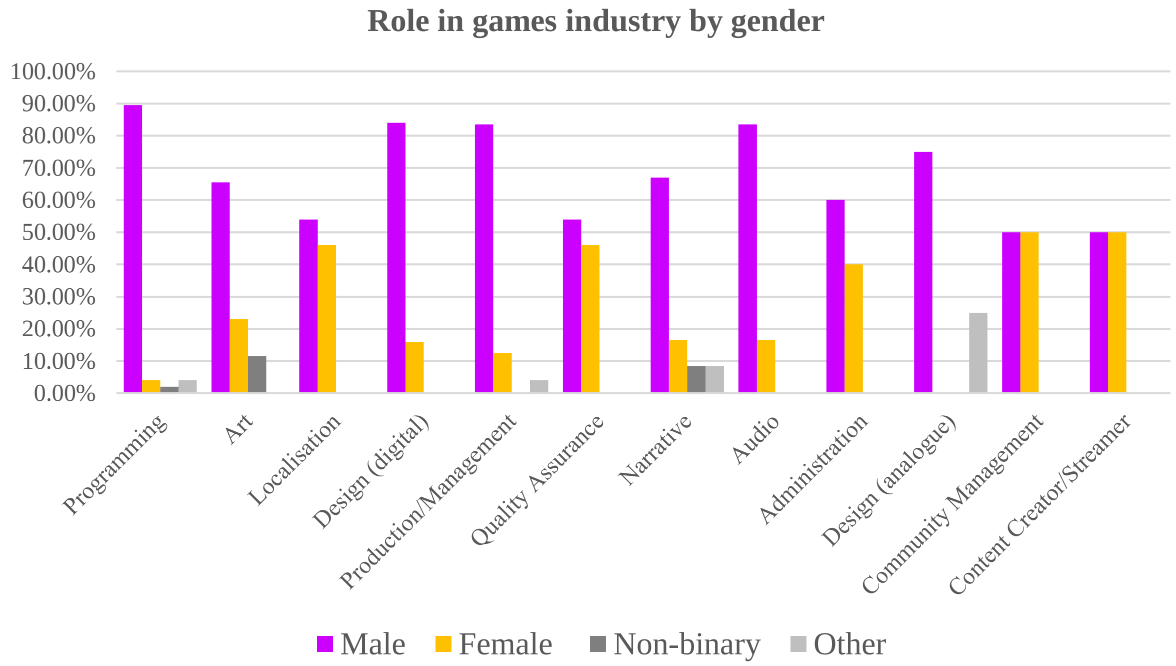

Figure 3: How does gender intersect with different occupational roles? Only roles that have recorded more than one gender have been included.

The survey demographics presented above provide some insight into the makeup of respondents to the Irish games sector. In summary, the Irish games sector predominantly employs men under the age of 30 in content development roles such as programming and design. Those who identify as female, non-binary and other genders are underrepresented in the sector as a whole, but in particular in core development roles and they tend to be employed in support services functions. The responses show a relative balance between indigenous firms and multinationals, and both types of companies tend to employ more than 50 people. The following sections explore the working conditions within the Irish games sector and consider their implications for different genders, occupational roles and company types.

5.0 Working in the games sector in Ireland

5.1 Informal Expectations on Workers

Work processes in the games sector and the wider cultural and creative industries tend to be characterised by a general informality, digital mediation and a perception of work as play. The cultural and creative nature of the products being produced often invoke passionate attachments to both the work, product(s) and culture of making games. However, this informality can lead to increasing pressures on the workers as the boundaries of work time, workplace and work roles stretch.

30% of the survey respondents are expected to be available to take phone calls and answer emails outside of their contracted and paid working hours. Although crunch time often comes to mind when thinking about the pressures of time in the working conditions in the games sector, the informal expectations that workers are so often subject to put upward pressure on working time and work intensity. Expectations on employees to be available outside of working time and their formal workplace have been increasing over the past two decades as work processes and communications become increasingly digitised through phones, email, team working platforms and workplace communications tools such as Slack and Discord. Research has also shown that these expectations can come from colleagues as well as management as the merging of informal, passion driven work with digital information and communication technologies can create such expectations through workplace culture (Mazmanian et al. 2013).

Another example of the informal expectations on workers throughout the games sector comes through the experiences of having to take on additional roles and responsibilities in the workplace (see fig. 5). With 43% of respondents stating that their employer expects them to take on additional duties beyond their position and pay, this casual stretching of boundaries can result in increases in working time and may lead to higher levels of work intensity and stress by employees as the demands on their time increase.

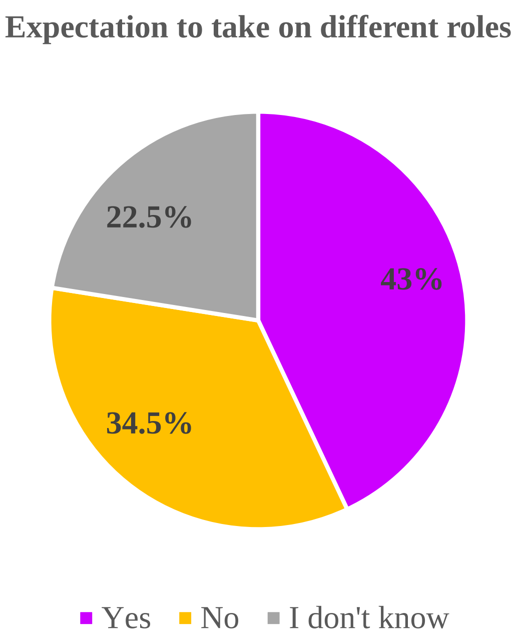

Figure 4: Are respondents expected to take on additional roles and responsibilities beyond their position?

Furthermore, some roles in the sector appear to experience these expectations more than others.

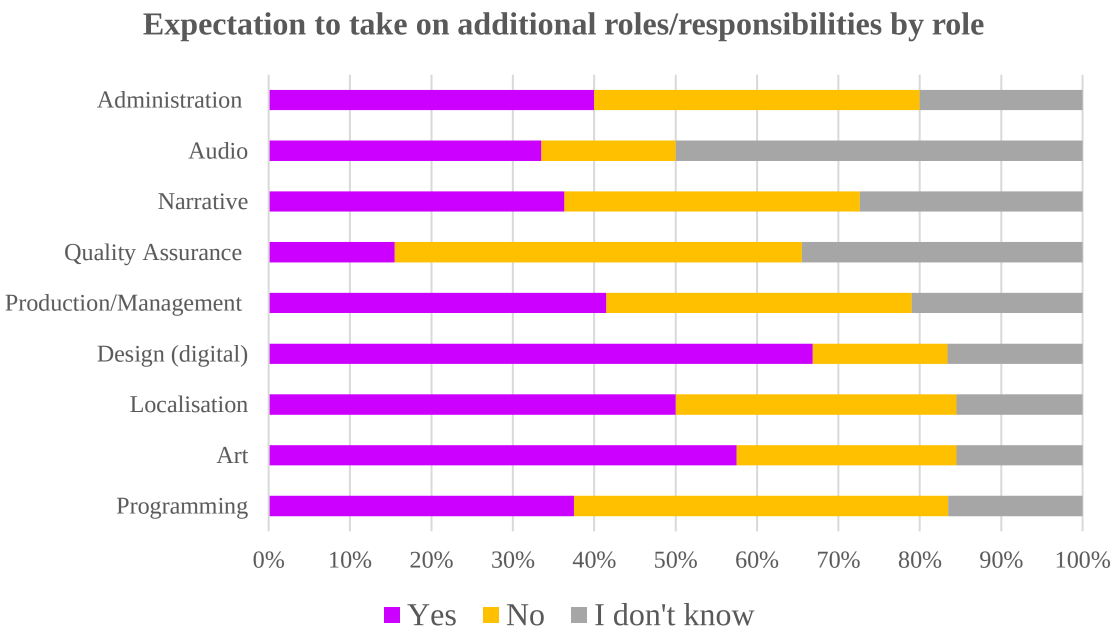

Figure 5: Which roles are expected to take on additional roles and responsibilities beyond what they are paid to do?

The above chart (figure 6) compares how the expectation to take on additional roles differs by occupational role in the sector. Those working in design (66.5%) and art (57.5%) roles in particular often experience these pressures. When expectations are examined by company type, the chart below shows that respondents working in both indigenous firms and foreign owned multinationals experience similar levels. What is interesting to note though, is that respondents working in the indigenous companies that went through MNC acquisitions have recorded significantly higher levels of expectations in this respect with 84.5% stating that they are expected to take on additional roles and responsibilities.

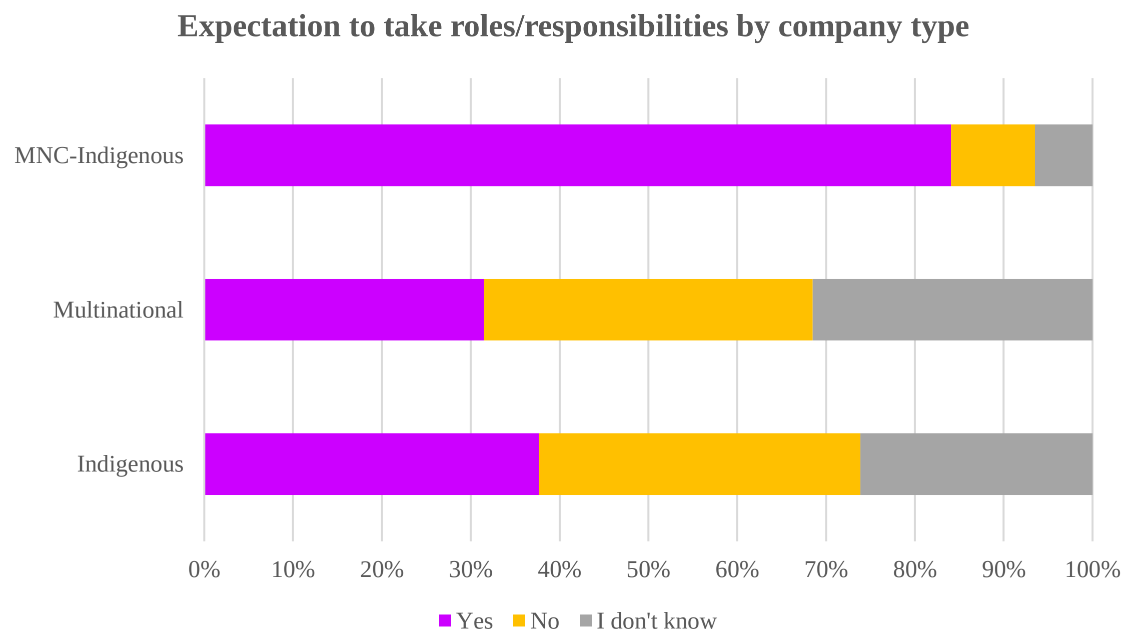

Figure 6: Which company types expect their employees to take on additional roles and responsibilities beyond what they are paid to do?

5.2 Working Hours

The games industry has become notorious for its working time culture and the prevalence of "crunch time" towards the end of projects (Rufino and Woodcock 2020). Overall, 55.5% of survey respondents have had to work crunch time throughout their careers in the games sector. Crunch time most often arises due to poor project planning and leads to intense demands on employees to work overtime to meet deadlines. The majority (44.5%) of respondents whose work currently involves crunch time are required to work between 40 – 55 hours per week, with another 14.5% working from 55 to in excess of 70 hours per week. Crunch time remains as an important headline issue that reveals some of the working practices in the industry, however, the demands on employees working time does not only come from these controversial bursts of work intensity as people regularly work more hours than they are paid to work (see fig.8).

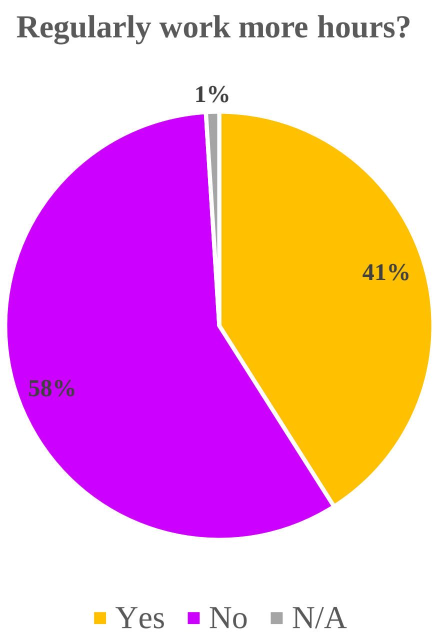

Figure 7: Do respondents regularly work more hours than they are paid to work?

In fact, 41% note regularly working more hours and these experiences vary based on the occupational roles of workers, with content development functions experiencing higher levels.

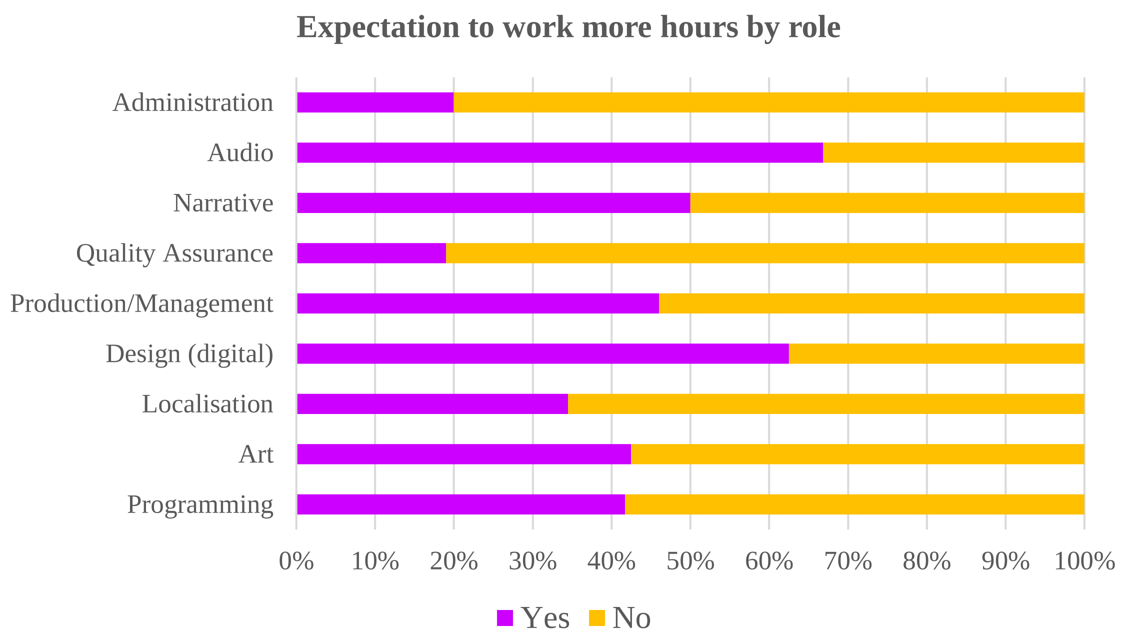

Figure 8: Which roles are expected to regularly work more hours?

Demands on the time of workers come in more forms than informal expectations and crunch time. Frequent overtime is also a persistent issue in the games sector and 45% of respondents note working overtime without any pay.

5.3 Pay and the Cost of Living

Low pay in the Irish games sector emerged as a headline issue from the survey and 64% of respondents expressed that they have experienced low pay throughout their careers. Furthermore, 17% of the survey respondents mentioned that delayed/missing payments for work completed was an issue while 16.5% have had to work unpaid, raising questions about the effectiveness of payment processes and the industry's use of unpaid internships as a free source of labour. Figure 10 (below) shows the distribution of gross monthly income across different pay brackets. What is most evident is that the pay of game workers in this survey is skewed towards the lower end, with the vast majority (73.5%) of respondents earning less than 3,000 per month[5].

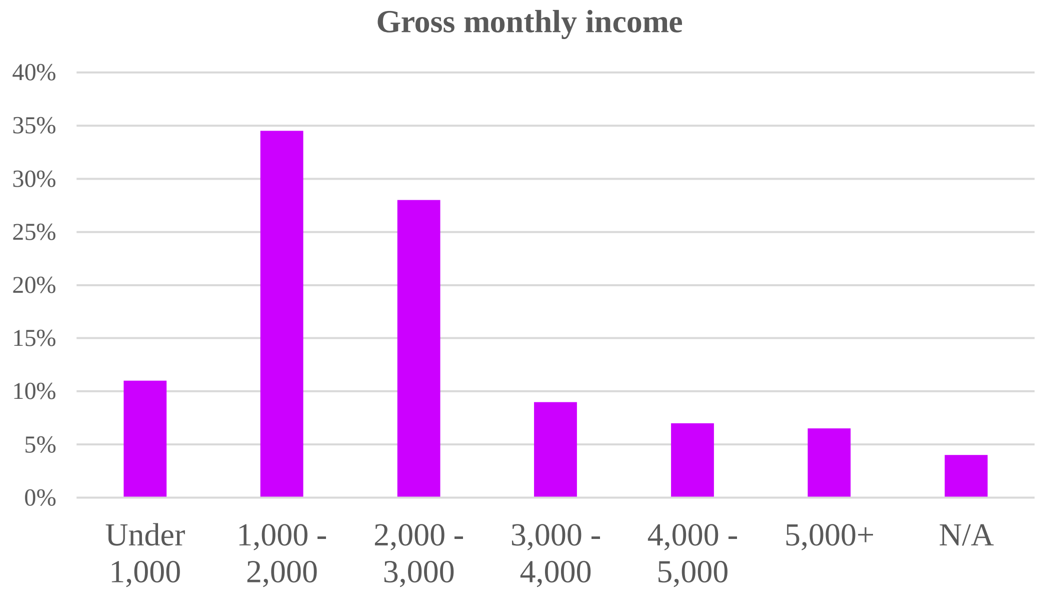

Figure 9: Gross monthly incomes of respondents.

For comparison, the average gross industrial wage in Ireland in 2019 was €40,284 (CSO 2020) meaning that 82.5% of respondents working in the games sector earn below the states average wage. Moreover, game development activities are typically categorised under the Information and Communication sector in the NACE categories used by the Central Statistics Office. Applying this comparison paints a much starker picture of low pay in the sector – the information and communication sector represent the highest gross earnings in the state in 2019

[5] This survey was open to games workers across the island of Ireland and the original question on income therefore asked for earnings in € or £. The comparisons with current average wages in Ireland therefore must take this into account.

at €64,345 annually while the GWU Ireland survey results show that only 6.5% of respondents earned this average wage or more.

Although low pay is perhaps one of the most pressing issues facing workers in the Irish games sector, this is exacerbated by increases in the cost of living in Ireland, particularly for housing. The chart below shows the percentage of monthly income that respondents spend on housing, with 68.5% of survey respondents spending over 30% of their monthly income on their housing needs, including 24% who spend over 50% of their income on housing.

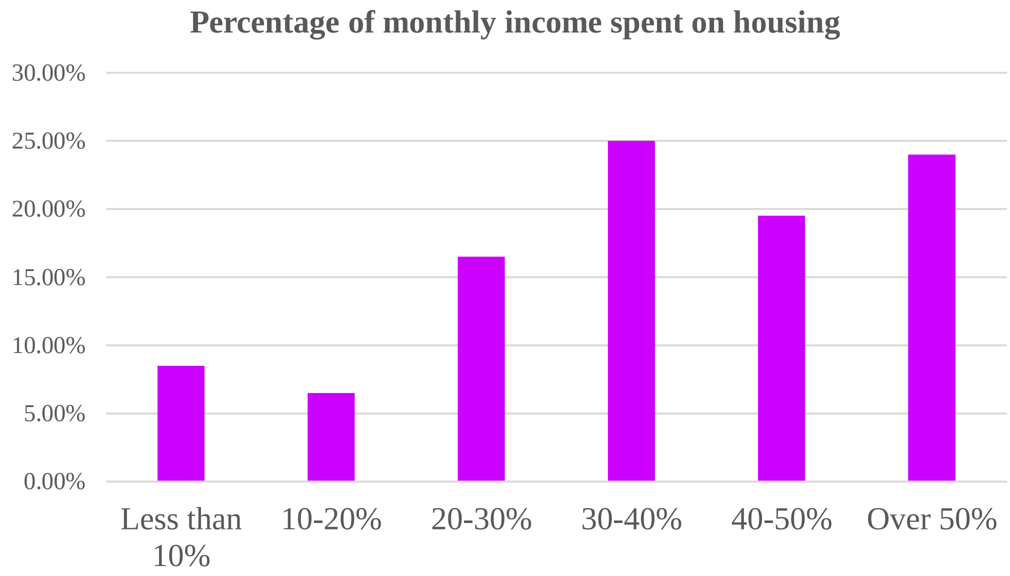

Figure 10: What percent of monthly income do respondents spend on housing?

These findings point to real quality of life issues experienced by game workers in Ireland as the combination of low pay and high housing costs leave little room for financial comfort and security. The instances of low pay in the sector, however, are also unevenly distributed across different occupational roles. Past research has shown that the games sector, much like the wider cultural and creative industries, contain a hierarchical occupational structure where pay and benefits differ considerably (Kerr 2017). As figure 12 shows, those working in quality assurance, localisation, digital design and art are the lowest paid in the sector, with programming, production and management the highest paid. 84.5% of respondents working in QA earn less than 2,000 gross per month, followed by 61.5% working in localisation, 56% in digital design and 50% in art respectively.

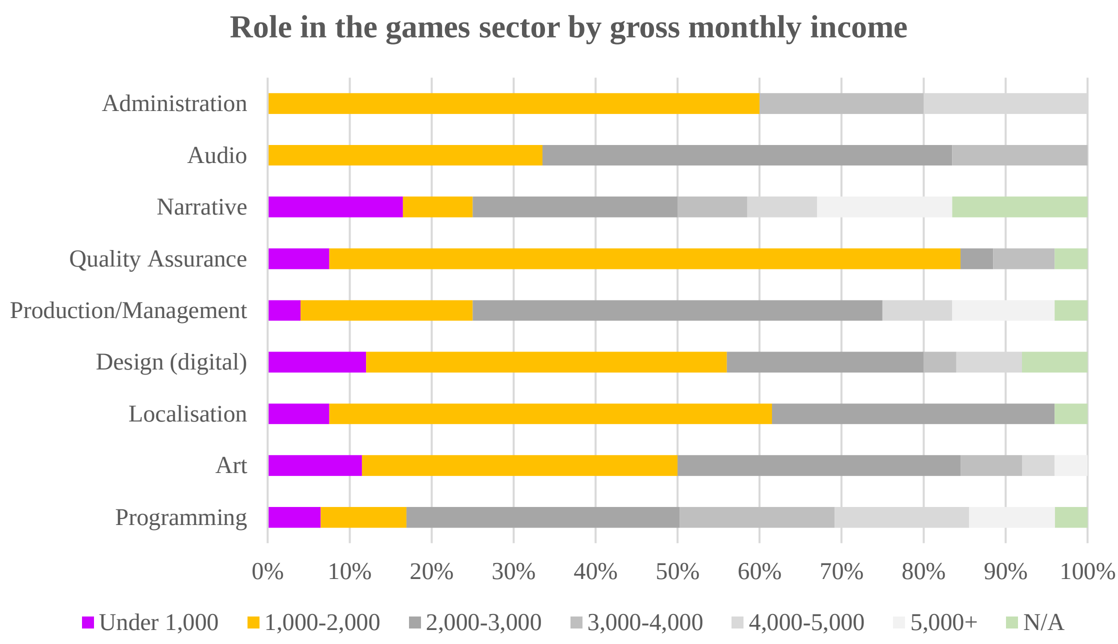

Figure 11: How do different roles in the games sector differ by gross monthly income? This chart is based on 222 responses and contains roles where more than five are employed.

Pay in the sector is also highly gendered, with women earning considerably less than their male counterparts. 86% of female respondents earn less than 3,000 per month, for comparison, 58% of males earn 2,000/m or more while 72% of females earn 2,000/m or less.

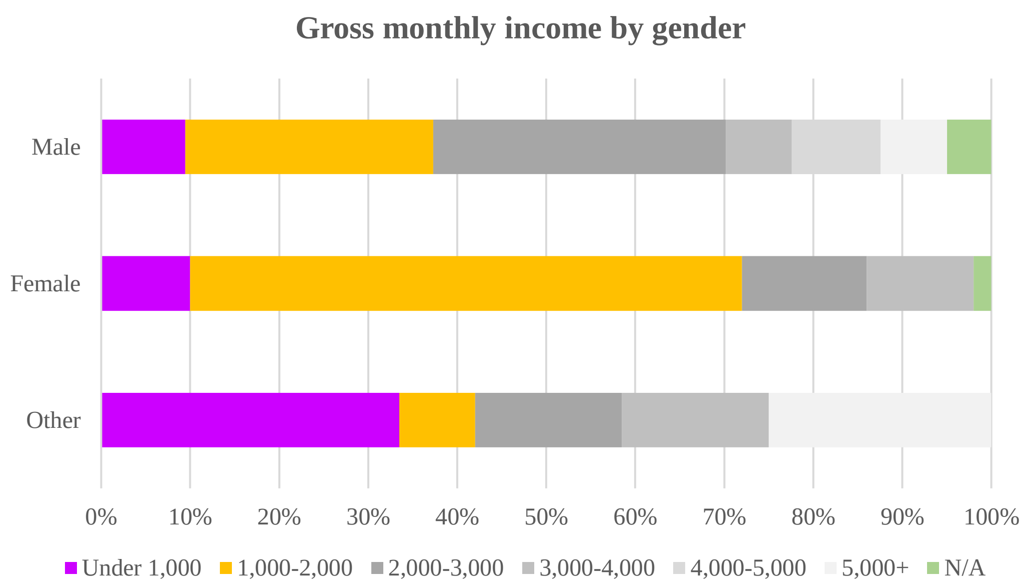

Figure 12: How does gross monthly income differ by gender identification?

5.4 Worker Recognition, Harassment and Discrimination in the Workplace

The game development industry is similar to other cultural and creative industries such as film, animation and design in the respect that they produce cultural artefacts as commodities protected by intellectual property rights and copyright regulations. The recognition of workers and creators in the production process is an integral part of these industries where public credits and reputations are important not just for recognition of a creator's work, but also for their ability to navigate a career. Over 50% of respondents to the survey have worked on a game in which they received no public credits for their contribution (see table 1).

Have you ever worked on a game in which you received no public credits for your contribution?

	Percent
Yes	50.2
No	40.8
Prefer not to say	9.0

Table 1: What percentage of respondents have not received public credits for their work?

Moreover, some occupational roles experience this lack of recognition more than others. Localisation (84.5%), QA (73%), production/management (54%) and programming (50%) have received the least recognition through public credits.

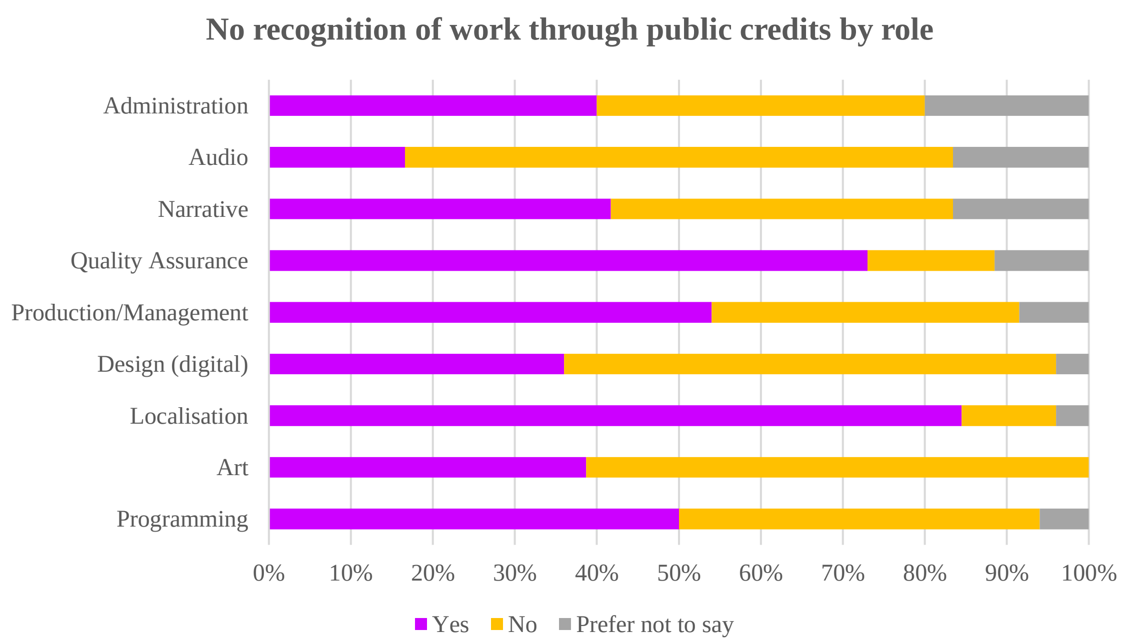

Figure 13: Which roles have not received public recognition for their work?

The global games industry has become known for its challenges with harassment, sexism and bullying and the gamergate[6] controversy which began in 2014 brought these to the fore. The survey findings reveal that 12% have experienced harassment and/or intimidation based on their gender, ethnicity, age or sexuality. A further 18.5% stated that they were unsure about whether they were at the receiving end of discrimination, highlighting the covert manner in which harassment and bullying can take place.

Experienced discrimination through

	Percent of Cases
Workload	8.6%
Pay/monetary/bonuses	8.6%
Social/interpersonal	10.4%
Microagressions	9.5%
Hiring process	5.4%
Promotion	8.6%
Disciplines/roles	6.8%
Working conditions	9.9%
Dismissal	4.1%
I don't know	18.5%
None	53.2%
Other	1.4%

Table 2: In what ways have respondents been discriminated against?

Table 3 (above) lists the forms through which respondents experienced inequity in their workplaces. The majority of discrimination came in the form of interpersonal relations (20%) followed by; working conditions (10%), workloads (8.5%), pay and bonuses (8.5%) and the promotion process. These forms of harassment, discrimination and inequity are also gendered in that they are disproportionately experienced by women. Respondents who identify as female, non-binary and other genders consistently experience more forms of discrimination than their male counterparts. In fact, 60% of male respondents have experienced none of these forms of discrimination, compared to 38% of females and 33% of those who identify as another gender.

[6] See Mortensen, Torill Elvira. 2016. "Anger, Fear, and Games: The Long Event of #GamerGate." *Games and Culture*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412016640408.
http://gac.sagepub.com/content/early/2016/04/13/1555412016640408.abstract.
for a useful overview.

Female respondents have experienced unequal treatment in almost all of the listed forms (above) nearly twice as much as male respondents, as displayed in figure 15 below.

Figure 14: How are different forms of discrimination in the workplace distributed by gender identity?

5.5 Job Benefits

The table below lists in descending order some of the benefits that respondents receive from their employer. What is most notable is that of the top benefits listed, almost 29% of workers receive no holiday pay and 50% of workers receive no healthcare or insurance.

What benefits does your employer provide?

	Percent of Cases
Holiday pay	71.6%
Healthcare/Insurance	50.0%
Sick pay	48.2%
Secure contract	38.1%
Maternity/Paternity leave	33.9%
Pension	21.6%
N/A	12.8%
None of the above	7.3%
Other	6.9%
Living support (rent etc)	3.2%
Childcare	0.9%

Table 3: The list of benefits that respondents receive from their employer.

A staggering 62% of survey respondents do not have the basic stability of secure employment contracts, while 43% of respondents note experiencing frequent job instability, including through lay-offs and contract status. What should be essentials such as sick pay, maternity and paternity leave and pensions are also in short supply within the Irish games sector. Almost 66% of game workers are not provided with maternity/paternity leave by their employer, highlighting one of many issues that leads to the underrepresentation of women within the sector. Furthermore, 78.4% do not have the security of a pension within their employment relation which raises serious concerns for the sustainability and longevity of a career in making games as many also struggle with structurally low pay conditions.

44.5% note the lack of benefits in the sector as a persistent issue while 47% state the lack of training and mentorship in organisations, a problem that has been raised also by Romero's (2015) report into the current state of the game industry in Ireland. Interestingly, that share of job benefits did not differ significantly by gender, however, different roles within the industry enjoy some benefits more than others. Programming, production and management roles have the highest instances of secure contracts, sick pay, healthcare insurance and pensions while those in art, narrative and quality assurance roles receive the least job benefits.

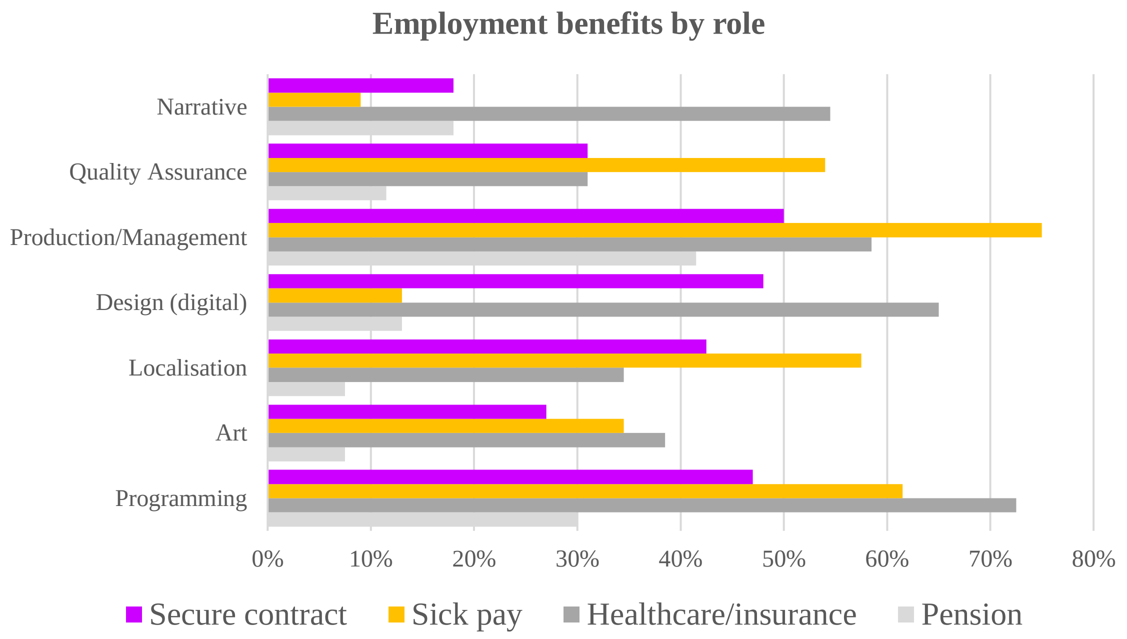

Figure 15: How different roles enjoy different levels of employment benefits. This above chart includes roles which have <10 respondents.

Collective organisation against harassment, intimidation and bullying is integral to the GWU global movement and is one of the pillars in the GWU Ireland charter.

6.0 How can GWU Ireland/FSU support workers?

This report has provided an overview of employment in the Irish games sector as part of the development of a Game Workers Unite Ireland local chapter. The findings of the survey underpinning the report provided insights into the working conditions and key issues and pressures experienced by respondents throughout different occupational roles in the industry. Unionisation and workplace collective bargaining are tried and tested ways of creating equitable, fair, decent and sustainable working arrangements and worker unions have been responsible for most of the benefits that employees enjoy to this day such as weekends, sick pay, pensions, and protection against layoffs. What is notable is that most of the game workers surveyed here are not in receipt of most of these benefits. Table 4 below indicates that there is both a need and a widely shared enthusiasm for game workers in Ireland to organise through a Irish game workers union.

What services would you like to receive from an Irish Game Workers Union?

	Percent of Cases
Greater wage transparency	67.4%
The support of an organised community of fellow workers	66.5%
Advice from professionals about employment and worker rights	63.8%
Bargaining to improve wages by setting standards for pay rates	63.3%
Lobbying the Irish government for greater investment in the games industry	58.4%
Bargaining to improve wage by setting standards for transparency of pay in job postings	57.0%
Information about the industry gathered from members	55.2%
Lobbying the Irish government for legal standards within the industry	54.8%
Bargaining to set standards for crediting workers	48.9%
Bargaining to improve working conditions	48.4%
Advice regarding best practices within a standard company setup/ co-op setup	47.5%
Bargaining to improve hours by setting hard limits	43.9%
A place to report harassment which is not incentivised to prioritise employers or companies	41.6%
The option to strike	41.2%
Lobbying the Irish government for greater unemployment benefits	36.2%
None	3.6%
Other	2.3%

Table 4: What supports and services would respondents like to receive from an Irish game workers union?

The tech industry has a history of anti-unionisation and their methods of undermining workplace collective bargaining have been gaining increased attention such as that seen with Google, Facebook and Amazon. 'Union-busting' is a real and effective strategy used by employers to coerce and/or manipulate workers against organising. Game Workers Unite (2019) outline some of the most common union busting methods that employers use such as "open-door policies", threats of outsourcing/cuts or more subtle ways such as invoking conceptions of guilt or "company unions"[7]. The term 'strategy' is used here as opposed to

[7] See the Game Workers Unite Zine for further information on these strategies: https://zines.gwumtl.com/en/

‘tactic’ to emphasise the fact that the coordinated strategies of employers differ from the tactics of people who are on the receiving end of workplace processes and policies because employers operate from a position of power over employees (de Certeau 1984).

In conclusion, the global games industry has been embroiled in controversies over the working conditions and harassment experienced by workers throughout the industry. The findings of this report have revealed widespread instances of low pay, unpaid work, insecure employment arrangements and a general lack of employment benefits across all of the respondents’ occupational roles. Moreover, these issues are experienced more often by women and those working in a select few roles throughout the sector such as quality assurance, design and localisation.

7.0 The Impact of COVID-19 on Game Workers

Following the outbreak of the COVID pandemic and the subsequent society-wide lockdown in Ireland, a COVID-19 survey of game workers was designed and administered by GWU Ireland and the FSU. The survey recorded 43 responses and the following presents a summary of the findings.

58% of respondent were working remotely as a result of the pandemic and 11.5% were temporarily laid off without the option to work from home. The sudden shift to mass home working has inevitably resulted in some fractious experiences for workers as they attempt to manage work demands in a non-work environment. 16.5% of respondents expressed that their working day had become longer since the pandemic while 14% note a shortening of the day, with 30% recording no significant changes to the length of the day. Moreover, 23.5% state that they are taking less breaks and working more than they would in the office environment and 46.5% have experienced physical (back, eye, other etc) strain from inadequate desks and prolonged use of computers. Almost half (49%) felt that their mental health has suffered due to the sudden change in their working circumstances combined with the existing pressures of work..

8.0 Concluding remarks

This survey has provided a summary of the work conditions and experiences of some of Ireland's game workers and the findings have shown the general lack of benefits, low pay, and the informal nature of the work that can often lead to increased demands on workers effort and time. What is evident, however, is that these conditions are experienced disproportionately through by different groups (gender, occupational role etc.) as employment relationships in the game sector mirror those of the wider tech sector and the cultural and creative industries in their individualisation. The negotiation of workplace conditions such as pay, benefits and promotions are individualised across these industries which offloads responsibilities from employers to workers. Unionisation and collective bargaining from labour can begin to rebalance the unequal power relations between employers and workers and begin the process of establishing sectoral and industry wide standards and regulations for pay, benefits, conditions and workers voice.

Although the global trade union movement remains strong and well supported in some areas of the economy, liberal market societies such as the US, UK and Ireland tend to shift the balance of power towards employers and union representation across these states is low. Emerging economic sectors and new forms of work and employment such as tech work (software, videogames, animation, digital media etc), platform gig work, freelancing and temporary contracts have posed challenges to workplace organising because of their largely individualised, fragmented and short-term character. New forms of labour organising have become integral to building solidarity and unity of purpose across workers in emerging forms of work (Martínez Lucio et al. 2017). There appears to be an appetite among the global game making community to improve these conditions and to ensure the equitable and sustainable development of the game industry. The momentum behind the Game Workers Unite movement and its global affiliations with union organisations such as the Independent Workers Union (IWGB) in the UK and the Financial Services Union (FSU) in Ireland suggests that this time has come. Surveys of local working conditions are crucial to informing and developing locally appropriate strategies and benchmarking progress.

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This report summarises the findings of a survey of workers and working issues in the games sector in Ireland.

The survey was designed and administered by Game Workers Unite Ireland in 2019. GWUI is an affiliated branch of the Financial Services Union in Ireland.

This research will inform future work and campaigns by GWU Ireland.

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