

# **The Games industry in Ireland 2009**

by

**Dr. Aphra Kerr  
&  
Dr. Anthony Cawley**

**October 2009.**



**NUI MAYNOOTH**  
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad



**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH



## **Introduction**

This report provides a summary and a first analysis of a survey conducted by Aphra Kerr, based at the National University of Ireland Maynooth, and Anthony Cawley, from the University of Limerick, over the summer of 2009.

The online survey aimed to explore the demographics and functions of game companies on the island of Ireland and to trace the geographical spread of their linkages.

## **Methods**

The survey was set up using Survey Monkey. The draft questions were piloted with a number of people who are familiar with the industry. A database of companies was developed, and the survey was publicised on gamedevelopers.ie and at the Irish Game Dev. 2.0 event in the Science Gallery at Trinity College Dublin in May 2009.

Companies whose main function was game related were invited to participate. In total, thirty-three invitations were sent out by post and e-mail to companies in the Republic and the North of Ireland.

Ten companies failed to respond, while two companies failed to complete the survey. The survey, therefore, is based on responses from twenty-one companies on the island of Ireland. It is in our view a comprehensive view of full time game companies in Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank all the companies who participated in the survey and who gave of their time to collate the required information.

## **Numbers employed and occupation**

In March 2002 Aphra Kerr launched a report called 'Loading ...Please Wait: Ireland and the Global Games Industry'. The research was based on fifteen face to face interviews, seven of which were with people in the Irish games industry, including Funcom, Havok, Kapooki, Eirplay and Vivendi. The rest were with government agencies, retail and media commentators.

Kerr's 2002 report estimated that there were just over 300 people employed in the games industry in Ireland in 2002. The bulk of these, 165, were employed in localisation, with another one hundred or so in middleware and animation services, and the remainder in content development.

A Forfás study on the industry the following year estimated that there were 400 people employed across twenty-two companies (2004: 5). At the time the wider digital media industry in Ireland was estimated to consist of 280 companies employing from 4,000 to 4,500 people.

Our 2009 survey found that the games industry has expanded significantly in the past eight years. The twenty-one companies who responded employ a total of 1,277 full time permanent employees plus 170 contractors and twenty-two freelancers. This gave a total of 1,469 and represented growth of over 400% in seven years.

Of these, almost 900 are employed in 'other' areas, including online customer/player support, while a further 198 are employed in quality assurance. Of the balance, 104 are employed in management, seventy-two in programming, fifty-nine in localisation, and a further sixty in art, design and audio. Twenty-six are employed in marketing.

The areas of most dramatic change are online customer support and localisation. Online support was not even in evidence at the time of the last survey and has grown rapidly. Localisation, meanwhile, has declined by almost a half. Growth in programming and art jobs has increased steadily, as has employment in management and marketing.

## **Size, age and ownership of companies**

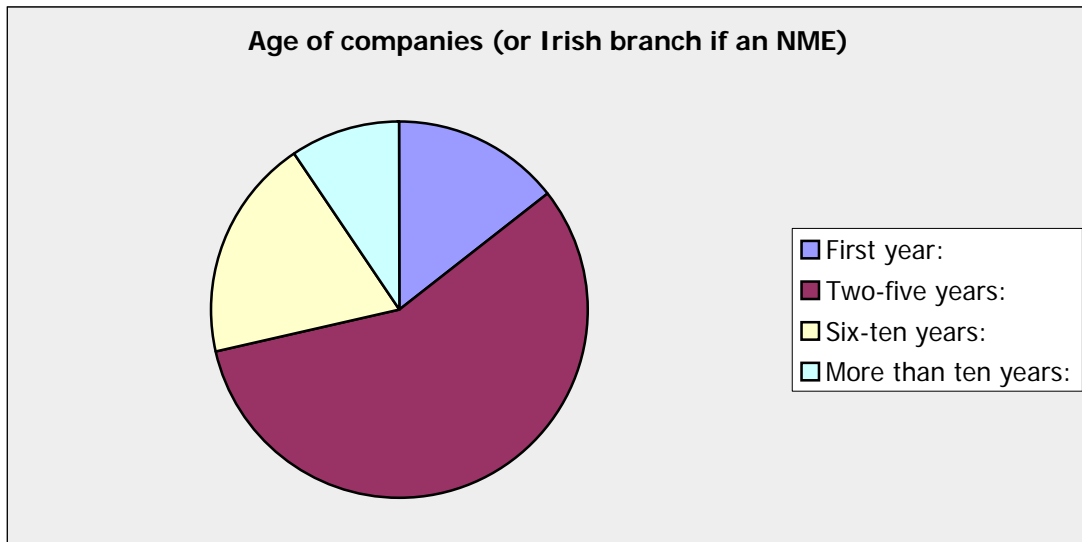
The last five years has been a period of growth in the establishment of companies in Ireland. Significantly, thirteen of the companies who took part in the survey had been established in the last two to five years. Only two companies were older than ten years, and four respectively had been formed in the last year and were between six and ten years old.

Indigenous game development companies tend to be small, with less than fifty employees. Indeed, the majority of indigenous companies that responded to the survey employed less than fifteen (n=8).

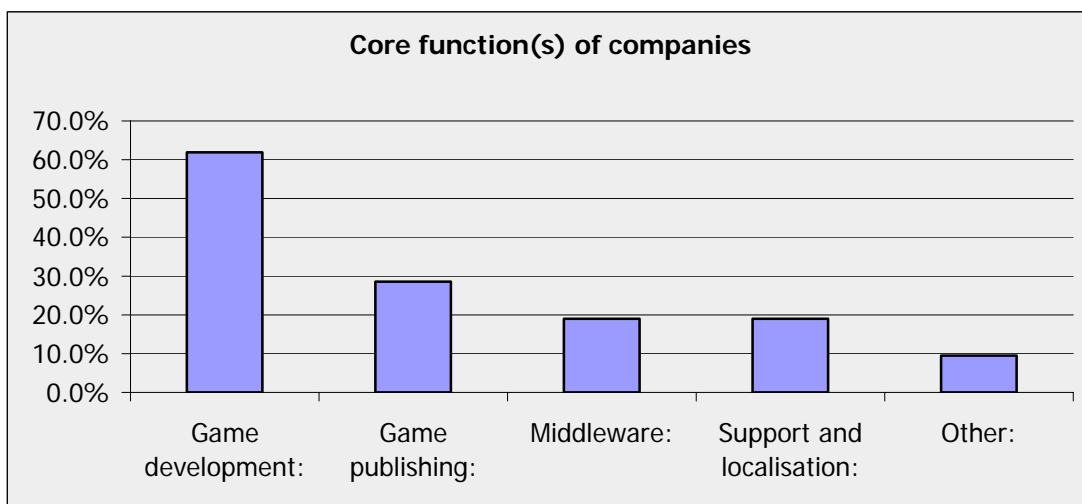
Foreign owned multinationals tended to operate in different functional areas and employ greater numbers, i.e., from thirty to fifty employees, with one or two examples employing over 150. A couple of newly established multinationals have

fewer than ten employees. The two companies which have existed for more than ten years were foreign owned multinationals.

While the two oldest companies were foreign owned, and operating primarily in support and localisation, the four companies in the six to ten year old category were Irish owned and were active in middleware, content development and publishing for mobile/web platforms.



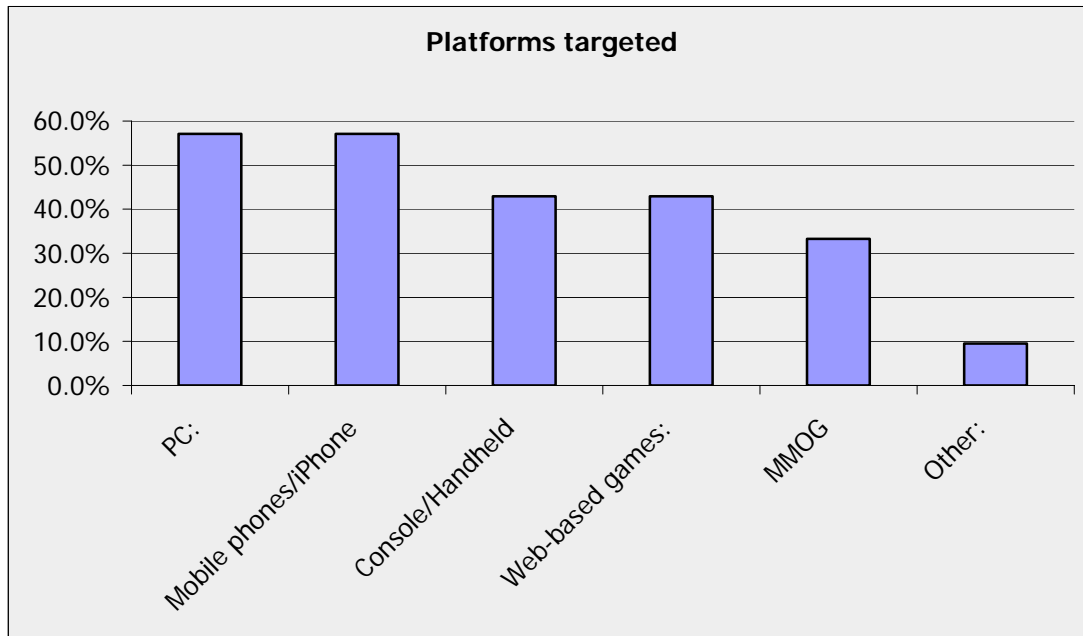
### Function of companies



Thirteen companies or just over 60%, replied that game development was their core function. A further 30% identified game publishing. The remainder were involved in support and localisation (n=5), middleware (n=4), and two stated other functions.

Most companies focused on a single function, with only one company involved in development, publishing, support and localisation. A further two companies were involved in development and support and localisation.

## Platforms



Many companies are working across multiple platforms, particularly those involved in support, localisation and middleware. Smaller, indigenous companies who are involved in game development tend to focus on PC, web and mobile platforms. There are two indigenous game development companies working on console/handheld game development.

PC/Mac are the most popular platforms, followed by mobile/iPhone, and then console and web based games. Eight companies are involved in massively multiplayer online games.

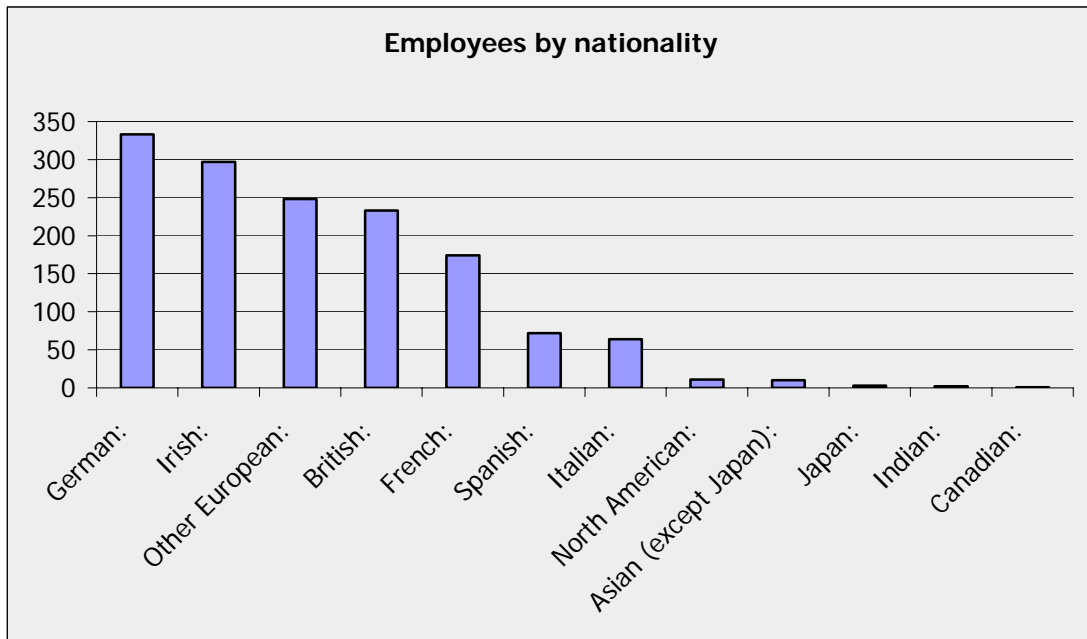
## Employment demographics

Females constitute 13% of the total numbers employed, although if we take out those involved in online community support they constitute just under 7%. Employment areas where women tend to be found are quality assurance, administration, management and localisation.

Without customer support the overall percentage would be lower than the UK average for women employed in the computer games industry (12% in 2006, according to Skillset) and much lower than the average for the media industries more generally (38% in 2006, *ibid*).

Almost 43% of employees in these companies are aged between twenty-six and thirty-five years, with a further 30% aged between eighteen and twenty-five years. By nationality, the greatest number of employees are German (n=333), followed by Irish

(n=297) and other European (n=248), i.e., not French, German, Spanish or Italian. The fourth largest nationality group is British.



### Location in Ireland



Thirteen of the companies who responded were located in the greater Dublin area, with nine of these stating they were located in Dublin city centre. A further five were located in Munster, with three in Ulster.

Almost half of companies had an office outside of Ireland, with a majority of these located in Europe, followed by the United States. Canada and Asia (except Japan) were joint third. Two thirds of companies had located their headquarters in Ireland. Of the third that did not, most of these (n=6) had headquarters located in the United States.

When asked why they were located in Ireland, the companies provided an interesting mix of responses. While availability of skilled labour was the most significant reason for almost half of respondents, this was followed closely by an ability to attract talent, even if it wasn't available locally, i.e., access to Europe and an English speaking workforce. In addition, four companies cited grants and financial incentives, and one identified links to universities.

A significant issue mentioned was the fact that people were living in Ireland when they founded the company. For some, even if they subsequently moved to live elsewhere the company remained registered in Ireland.

The IDA and Enterprise Ireland were the main public sector bodies contacted for finance and advice, with three companies seeking advice from the Digital Hub and two from County Enterprise Boards. More than half of the companies had not obtained advice or finance from a public sector body.

### Client markets



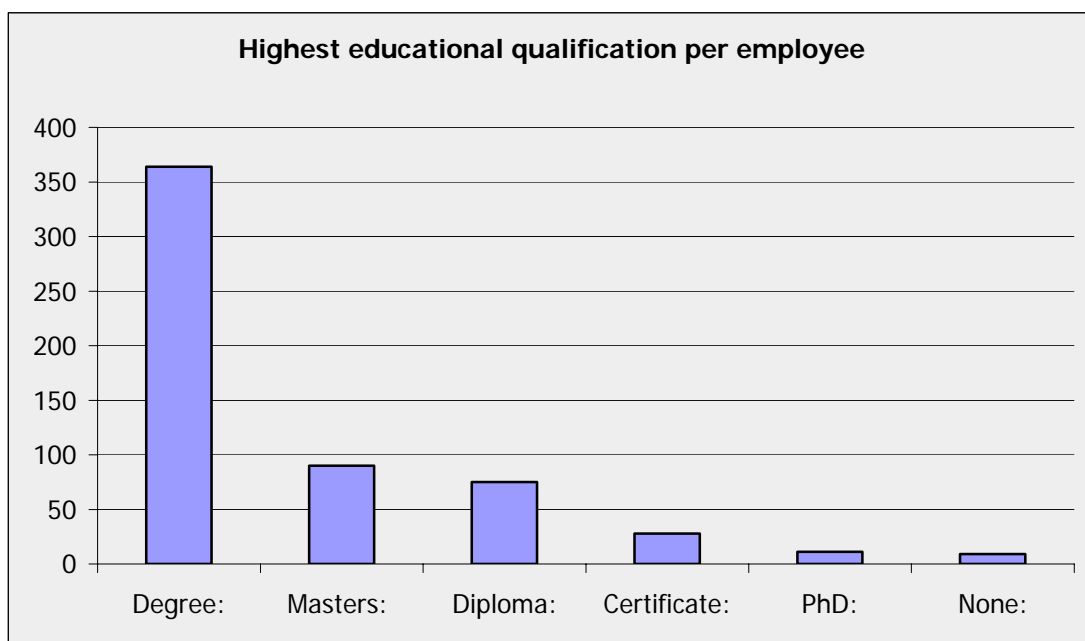
Given the small size of the Irish market it is not surprising that 86% of companies were selling into the European market (n=18), followed closely by the North American market (n=14) and the Irish market (n=14).

A relatively large number of companies were selling into Asia (except Japan) (n=9) and Japan (n=7), as well as sales to Australia, Latin American and Africa.

Twelve companies signaled that they engaged in outsourcing, with QA/localisation and content development the most likely areas to be outsourced. These functions tended to be outsourced elsewhere in Europe, Ireland and the UK.

By contrast, membership of international and national professional associations was low. A small number of companies (n=6) have employees who are members of the International Game Development Association (IGDA). One is linked to IBEC and one to Mobile Entertainment.

### Qualifications and Links to education



The data for educational attainment is rather partial because figures were given for only one third of employees. Some respondents stated that this data was difficult to collate. The data provided, however, would suggest that a degree and above is the norm, although there are some employees with certificates and diplomas.

Good linkages exist between the third level sector and the industry, and respondents indicated a willingness to improve them. Just over half of companies offer internships to students. Five are involved in giving guest lectures, and four have been involved in course development. Nine companies would be interested in greater involvement and links with Irish universities and colleges.



## **Final remarks**

We believe that this survey provides a comprehensive view of a growing Irish games industry. The Irish games industry is networked internationally with clients in Europe and the United States, and with a significant number of companies linking into Asia.

The Irish industry profile is growing internationally, helped in no small part by the success and acquisition of indigenous middleware companies like Havok and Demonware but also by the arrival of multinational players such as Gala Networks, Goa, Blizzard and Activision.

In the last seven years there has been a significant shift in the size and focus of the games industry. Employment has grown by about 400%, with an important expansion in online customer support. Localisation, while remaining important, has declined in employment terms within Ireland. Content development, while not the main employer, is a core function for many companies.

If we examine the industry across the value chain it is clear that some functions are more employment intensive than others. This is particularly the case in relation to publishing, localisation and online support. Game development companies tend to be much smaller in size and more focused on that particular function.

Human capital and labour are clearly important issues for these companies. Given the development of a range of new third level courses in the country in the past seven years it will be interesting to see if locally available talent will replace ability to attract talent in the coming years.

The location of companies largely in the cities of Dublin and near Cork may be related to this ability to attract talent. Ability to work across multiple platforms and linguistic skills are also clearly of importance to existing companies.

Issues that will need to be addressed include the gendered nature of the industry and the fact that few women are employed in core programming and art/design functions.

Further, it is significant that half of respondents have not had support from local enterprise development agencies. There is a need to support companies into middle age (i.e., beyond five years). Further analysis of the data will, we anticipate, lead to further insights.

We hope that this survey will contribute to a better understanding of the place of the Irish games industry within the local digital media industry and globally within the games industry.

## Related documents

Forfás (2002) A Strategy for the Digital Content Industry in Ireland. Dublin: Ireland. Available at <http://www.forfas.ie/publication/search.jsp?ft=/publications/2002/Title,882,en.php>

Forfás (2004) Electronic Games Study. Unpublished internal report.

Forfás (2006) International Digital Media Industry: Implications for Ireland. Dublin: Ireland. Available at <http://www.forfas.ie/publication/search.jsp?ft=/publications/2006/Title,757,en.php>

Kerr, A. (2002). *Loading... Please Wait. Ireland and the Global Games Industry* (No. STeM Working Paper No 1). Dublin: STeM, Dublin City University. See <http://www.stem.dcu.ie/>

Kerr, A. (2003). Live Life to the Power of PS2: locating the digital games industry in the new media environment. *Irish Communications Review*, 9. See <http://www.icr.dit.ie/>

Kerr, A. (2006). *The business and culture of digital games: gamework/gamplay*. London: Sage.

## Author Bios:

Aphra Kerr is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the National University of Ireland Maynooth. Her research focuses on the production and consumption of digital media and in particular digital games. See established [www.gamedevelopers.ie](http://www.gamedevelopers.ie) in 2003. For more see <http://sociology.nuim.ie/AphraKerr.shtml>

Anthony Cawley is a research scholar in the Institute for the Study of Knowledge in Society (ISKS), University of Limerick. His research interests include innovation in digital media and online journalism. For more see [www.ul.ie/isks](http://www.ul.ie/isks).

## Further information on [www.gamedevelopers.ie](http://www.gamedevelopers.ie)

The concept for [gamedevelopers.ie](http://www.gamedevelopers.ie) was developed by Dr. Aphra Kerr while working at the Centre for Society, Technology and Media (STeM) at Dublin City University in 2000/01.

Financial assistance from O2 and Nokia, and creative input from John Lynch and Paul May, then two multimedia students in DCU, brought the idea to fruition. The site was launched in April 2003 and since then has become a vibrant networking and information resource for the Irish game development community.

Gamedevelopers.ie is currently supported by Demonware and run by volunteers from industry and academia, including Dr. Aphra Kerr.

