



**BECTU**

a sector of Prospect

# Conditions in the Games Industry

---

A survey by Bectu

**[bectu.org.uk](http://bectu.org.uk)**

[info@bectu.org.uk](mailto:info@bectu.org.uk)

## Background/Industry Information

- Data from 2015 indicates that 19% of games workers are women and 4% are BAME.<sup>1</sup>
- The screen industry sector employs comparatively fewer people with disabilities than the UK economy.<sup>2</sup>
- 133 games companies listed as being in Scotland.<sup>3</sup>
- The average annual income of games workers in 2015 was £34,200.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2013, the UK video games industry directly employed 12,100 workers.<sup>5</sup>
- It is estimated that 16% of games workers are freelance.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2104, the Next Gen Skills Academy surveyed women working in the games industry and 33% of respondents (311) had experienced direct harassment or bullying because of their gender.<sup>7</sup>
- There are around 2,200 active video games companies in the UK, 95% of businesses are micro or small businesses.
- Video games are created by developers which range from large companies employing hundreds of workers to small independent studios that may only have a handful of employees. 95% of games companies are small businesses that do not submit data to Companies House.<sup>8</sup> The average size of the larger companies is 120.
- Companies with more than 250 employees have to report gender pay gap data. The highest gender pay gap of the large games companies is 66% at Rockstar North, which also reported a bonus pay gap of 85%. Games companies typically report gender pay gap of ~20% and bonus pay gaps of 33%.
- The industry uses the term AAA to describe game companies publishing blockbuster games, generally with larger development and marketing budgets. Some studios publish games directly while others use games publishers who undertake the marketing and distribution of the games.

## BECTU Survey

BECTU is a trade union representing members in the creative industries, including games workers. We decided to conduct a survey to find out more about their experiences at work. We sent the survey to our members who work in the games industry and asked them to send it to co-workers and contacts in the industry. We also promoted the survey through our social media accounts and games industry contacts. Overall, we had 305 responses. As the questions were optional, not everyone completed all of the questions. We had around 235 answers to our general questions.

All survey data was collected between 20 June and 6 July 2019.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.screenskills.com/media/1562/2015\\_creative\\_skillset\\_employment\\_survey\\_-\\_march\\_2016\\_summary.pdf](https://www.screenskills.com/media/1562/2015_creative_skillset_employment_survey_-_march_2016_summary.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://gamesmap.uk/#/map>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ukie.org.uk/sites/default/files/UK%20Games%20Industry%20Fact%20Sheet%20October%202018.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/economic-contribution-of-the-uks-film-high-end-tv-video-game-and-animation-programming-sectors-report-2015-02-23.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>

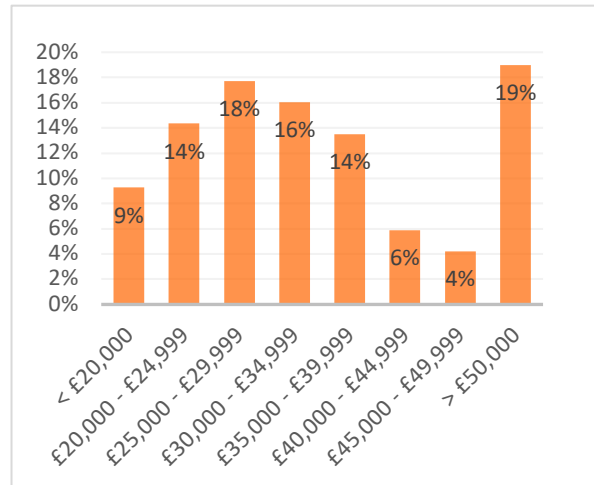
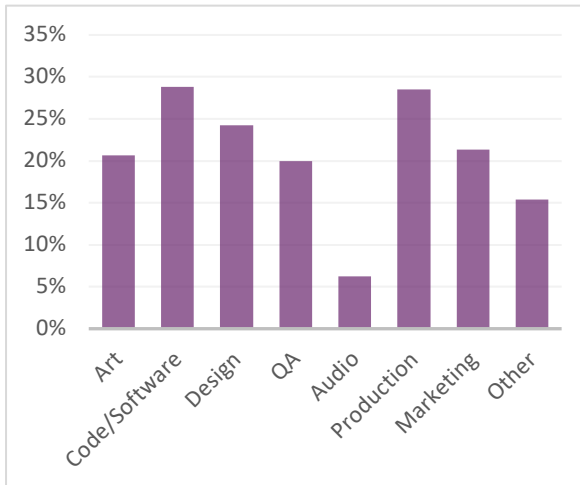
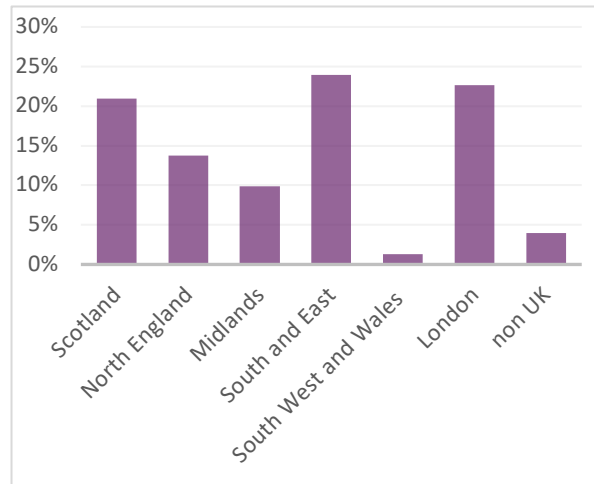
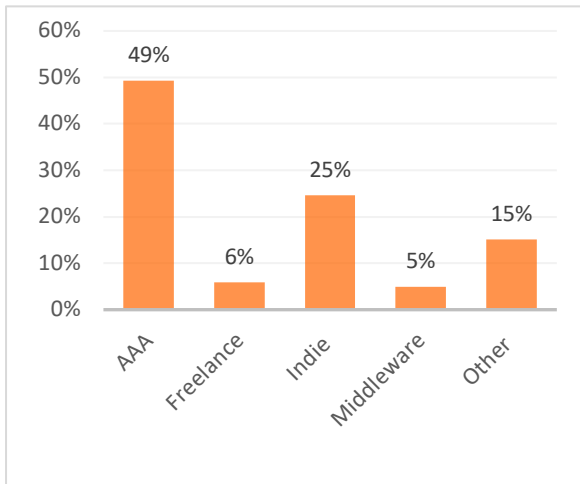
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2015-01-13-survey-45-percent-of-the-uk-industrys-women-feel-gender-is-a-barrier>

<sup>8</sup> [https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/map\\_uk\\_games\\_industry\\_wv.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/map_uk_games_industry_wv.pdf)

## About the respondents

Respondents worked in a variety of different job roles within the games industry. We received responses from a wide range of companies of different sizes, with a variety of pay scales and across all the different job roles. We estimate that we have captured feedback from more than 100 different workplaces.

We had respondents working in all areas of the UK. The largest numbers were from London and the South East, but significant numbers were based in Scotland, North of England and the Midlands. A small number of respondents (12) now worked outside of the UK but still wanted to tell us about the conditions they had experienced whilst working in UK companies.



## Job Type (301 responses)

The majority of respondents (87%) said they had a permanent contract. 5% of the respondents worked on a freelance contract and 8% were on short or fixed term/temporary contracts. Freelance and non-permanent contractors were not linked to any particular job role.

## Company Type (304 responses)

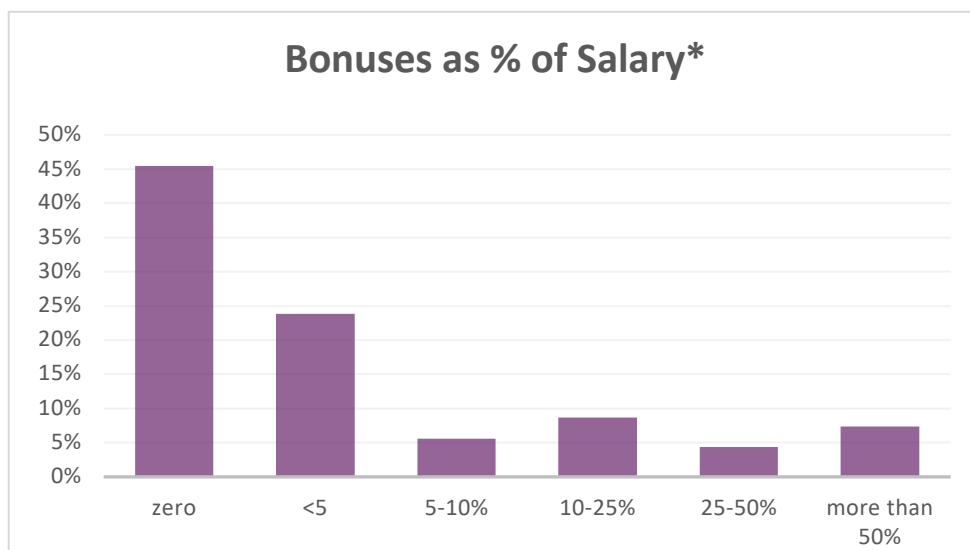
Just under half (49%) of the respondents worked for AAA games developers and 25% were from independent developers. Of the 'other' categories, some workers found it hard to define their company - the line between indie and AAA is not always clear - some respondents worked in mobile games or other aspects of the games industry such as e-sports, games journalism, retailers and publishers.

## Salary (237 responses)

The survey was not intended to be a salary survey; we gathered the data in order to collect responses from those working in a variety of salary bands. 22% of the survey respondents chose not to tell us their salary. Of those that did reveal a salary band, 19% of respondents were high earners (greater than £50,000) but of those below this threshold, the most common salary bracket was £25,000-£29,999. In section 2, we assessed the results to see if the higher earners had a different pattern of responses to the rest of the respondents in our survey.

We also asked about bonuses and had 231 responses. The bonus paid varied quite dramatically with some extremely large figures. Bonuses tended to be related to salary, with some people reporting the bonus as a percentage of salary. We used the data given to estimate the bonus as a percentage of salary and found that 45% of the respondents reported receiving no bonus at all and 24% had modest bonuses (up to 5% of salary). The average (mean) bonus reported was £8,091, the median bonus was £2,000 and the maximum was £100,000.

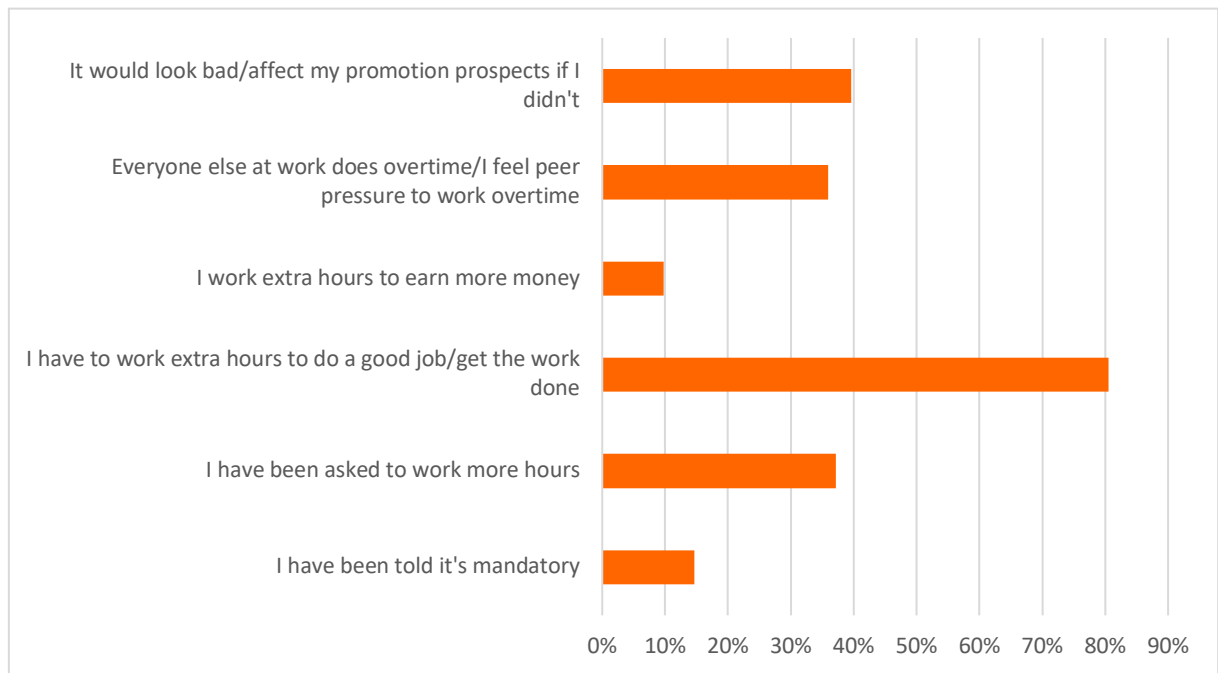
**“Because it's a popular industry, staff are taken for granted. There's no sense of holding on to staff or having a life-time career. The salary is always low, apart from for those at the top of the company. I would absolutely like to see more care taken to keep staff happy”**



### Overtime (236 responses)

We asked the respondents about overtime working. 57% of respondents said that they normally worked overtime hours; 41% said that they did not. 80% of respondents said that overtime at their company would be unpaid. Of those that said they did overtime regularly, only 12% said that their overtime was paid.

The reasons given for doing overtime differed but the most common response was that overtime was needed in order to do the job.



### Working Time Directive (235 responses)

We asked respondents if they had been asked to opt out of the working time directive. The results were mixed, with 43% saying that they had not been asked to, 27% saying that they had and 31% responding that they didn't know. Those who worked at AAA companies more frequently reported that they had been asked to opt out (36% - Yes) than those in Indie companies (14% - Yes) or any other category (22% - Yes).

Of those that were asked to opt-out, a large number suggested that they didn't know of any specific reason for this and that the opt-out happened at the time of them signing the contract. Most felt that this was a difficult time for them to ask questions about the opt-out or that they were unaware they could opt back in.

A very small number of people objected to the tone of the survey, suggesting that we were leading the questions on overtime. They felt that if people choose to put in long hours then this was acceptable and that the other benefits offered by the companies made up for the long working hours.

However, the vast majority made comments about the negative impacts of long working hours.

“unless legislation is brought in to prevent companies compelling employees having to sign contracts with clauses such as 'you hereby waive your right to the working directive' or 'you will be required to work extra hours and weekends where the business demands you do so', nothing is going to change...”

### **Work/Life Balance (235 responses)**

Just over half of our respondents (53%) said that their employment status or working hours had negatively affected their personal or home life and 27% said that they had had difficulty taking holiday/leave. Comments on overtime/working hours were on the whole negative. Respondents reported that their physical health and mental wellbeing had been affected by long working hours and in particular the effects of crunch. Some comments were made about the need for 34-hour working because of the requirement for companies to link up with those in the USA and Japan. The negative comments were not universal, however, and some respondents said that they had seen improvements recently and that they were able to balance personal and working lives. There were descriptions of crunch working – up to 80 hours per week for six week periods – and, similarly, reports of 12-16 hour days and regularly working through weekends.

A very small number of respondents (3) objected to the questioning of overtime. They suggested that people be allowed to work as much as they desired and suggested that such working practices were necessary, particularly for small companies to survive and thrive.

“There is no time for personal growth under long hours; you get home from work and you have time to feed yourself and clean the house and then if you want to get enough sleep to do your job right, it's straight to bed. Your weekend is spent doing nothing to recover. And that's me as a single person, no dependents. Work has to get all of me, then chores, then what's left of that has to be diced up between friends and family. How do people with children do it?”

“I'm frequently asked to work weekends - in previous jobs by going in to the office, but in this one just managing external teams that work weekends - which means I can't relax on weekends and have to be watching out for work emails”

“The games industry focuses a lot on Japan and US. Those time zones often have to sync up with our working hours which can negatively affect our social and personal life”

“I’ve missed events with my kids, not able to go on family holidays, stress in my relationship with my spouse because of late hours. I’ve seen teams work 60-hour weeks with no extra pay”

“My former company tried to get people to sign away their rights under the EU working time directive. During crunch they would expect people to work weekends despite the number of hours worked during the week or even how much work they had”

#### **Promotion and Career progression (235 responses)**

Only 26% of respondents said that their company offered training relating to their work, 11% said they didn’t know and 63% said that no training was offered. Responses about promotion prospects were more positive, with 46% respondents feeling that they had an opportunity for promotion or change in job role at the company. 32% said No and 22% didn’t know if there were any opportunities.

We asked if members could see a future career in the games industry. Of those who answered the question (168), most felt they would stay for the next five years, but only 61% of these could see themselves still working for the games industry in 10 years’ time. The comments on longevity suggested that a long-hours culture was something only tolerable for younger workers and therefore the work was likely to become less attractive to older workers. One respondent, aged 40, suggested they were no longer able to ‘compete’ with younger colleagues who were prepared to work long hours.

“Of the people I started in the industry with 25 years ago, just about all burned out and are doing 'normal' jobs now”

“I recently turned 40 and I am concerned with keeping up with employees in their 20s who don't mind working extended overtime/crunch”

In the free comments about career, the majority of the respondents noted that their company had little or no commitment to training and developing their staff. There were

a number of examples of companies suggesting employees learn new skills in their own time rather than at work.

“At my last job I was told I needed to ‘improve my xxxx skills’ but that I would have to do it in my own time. When I pointed out I didn't own a copy of xxxx and couldn't afford to get it I was provided with ‘a copy’ and told to install it at home and learn it in my own time. No real in-work training was given and you were expected to know everything at the get go”

“My employer doesn't usually promote training or development of new skills or even making sure that employees are up to date with new tech or knowledge. I have to pay from my own money and take away from my own free time to invest in education”

**What is good about the industry?**

‘making games’

‘creativity’

‘relaxed atmosphere’

‘a product I care about’

‘variety’

‘teamwork’

‘informal’

‘flexibility’

The most common response was quite obviously, the chance to make video games. Responses to this question reflected the passion and commitment that respondents had to the games industry. Many liked that office environment that they worked in was relaxed, with a casual dress code and the workplaces were fun and friendly. The creativity and the challenge of creating new games made the work interesting. A number of respondents commented that they felt lucky to be able to combine their passion with their career.

“I love games and always will. And I love developing them, because at the same time that is quite



challenging it also is very rewarding in end. My employer makes games that sell very well. Everyone knows us and there are positive perks from knowing that I'm working on a game that millions of people will play. They have the potential to be one of the greatest companies to work for, but they are not quite there yet!”

**What would you most like to change about the industry?**

‘crunch’

‘unpaid overtime’

‘more transparency’

‘clear career paths’

‘training and development’

‘better diversity’

‘less of a gap between highest and lowest paid’

The impact of long working hours was the most common complaint along with a lack of transparency in pay and promotion. Some commented that the creative and relaxed atmosphere allowed for a toxic culture to develop in some areas and there was a lack of awareness or training for managers.

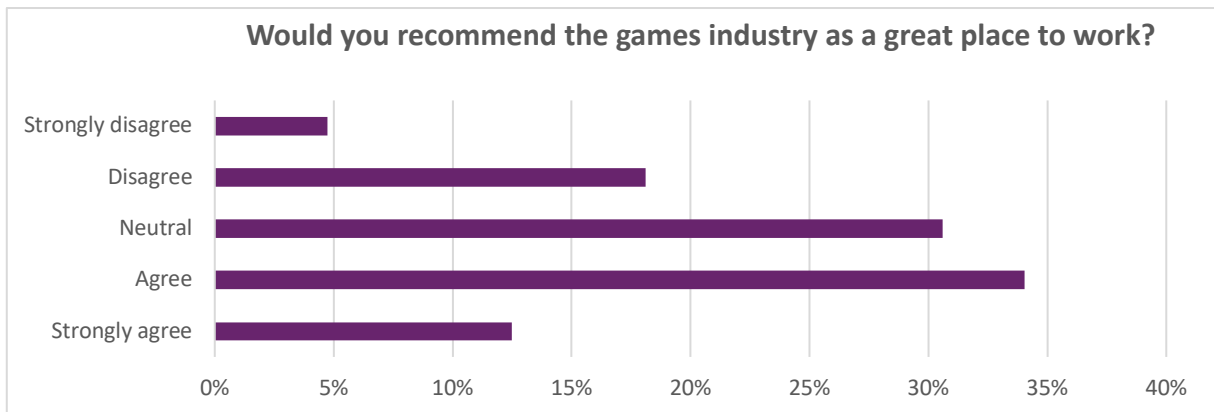
“Pay people a fair wage, train them, value them. I feel the industry undervalues their testers and their artists a lot”

“All companies need to respect the time and labour involved in developing games. There should be no unpaid work. Crunch is a failure of management”

“The industry thrives on the passion of its employees which it too readily exploits with poor hours, benefits and working conditions”

## Would employees recommend the games industry as a great place to work?

We asked respondents if, on balance, they would recommend the games industry as a great place to work. Overall the respondents felt that they would recommend the games industry as great place to work. 47% of respondents either agree or strongly agreed with the statement, 31% had a neutral response and only 23% were overall negative about the industry. This represents a positive attitude to the industry and suggests that there is a good chance that, by engaging with the workforce, employers can take the necessary steps to change the issues that are of most concern.



## Bullying and harassment (226 responses)

57% of the respondents said that they had witnessed bullying and harassment at work. Unfortunately, the majority also felt that bullying and harassment would not be dealt with appropriately if reported. Those that had personally experienced harassment were more likely to feel that it wouldn't be dealt with properly.

We had a number of people share harrowing personal experiences of harassment; the details have not been included here. Some of this was from personal experience. Those who had witnessed bullying and harassment were far more likely to say that it wouldn't be dealt with appropriately. Many of the responses suggested that bullying and harassment was taking place at a very high level and in these cases there was no way to deal with it appropriately. A number of respondents noted that they worked in small teams where there had been no incidences of harassment but equally no policy to deal with it if it did happen.

	Positive that it would be dealt with properly	Negative that it would be dealt with properly	Don't know if would be dealt with properly
<b>Haven't Experienced Harassment (98)</b>	57%	22%	22%
<b>Experienced (128) Harassment</b>	22%	70%	9%

“I was treated verbally insulted/harassed by one particular member of my team almost every day. It was my breakthrough job into the industry so I didn't say anything. I didn't feel like my Lead liked me when I started so I didn't feel I could go to anyone about it. He never did anything about it, but eventually I did gain his respect which eased some of the pressure I felt”

“I've worked with abusive bosses for most of my 11 years-long career at the games industry. Getting harassed and laughed at was the norm until recently and you had to put up with it if you didn't want to be left out of promotions”

“I've been told that I am the problem for a project being delayed. That I'm not working hard enough when I'm burnt out and working constant overtime. That everyone else is counting on me to work harder to be paid when I haven't been paid either. Whenever I've been bullied it's always been when I'm dealing with extreme mental stress and anxiety. Studios should cater more for burnt out employees”

## **Diversity**

We asked respondents how well they agreed that their workplace was welcoming to women, BAME people, LGBT+ people and people with disabilities or long-term ill health. The results overall were encouraging, but to get a true picture it would be essential to survey those who were living these experiences. For most of the categories, the majority of respondents agreed. The most striking difference was the response relating to people with disabilities or long-term ill health. Although 'Agree' was still the most common answer in that category, the results were skewed closer to a neutral response rather than a positive response. 24% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that their workplace would be welcoming to people with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

The free comments included many individual negative experiences but also some very positive ones. There were examples of good practice in the industry.

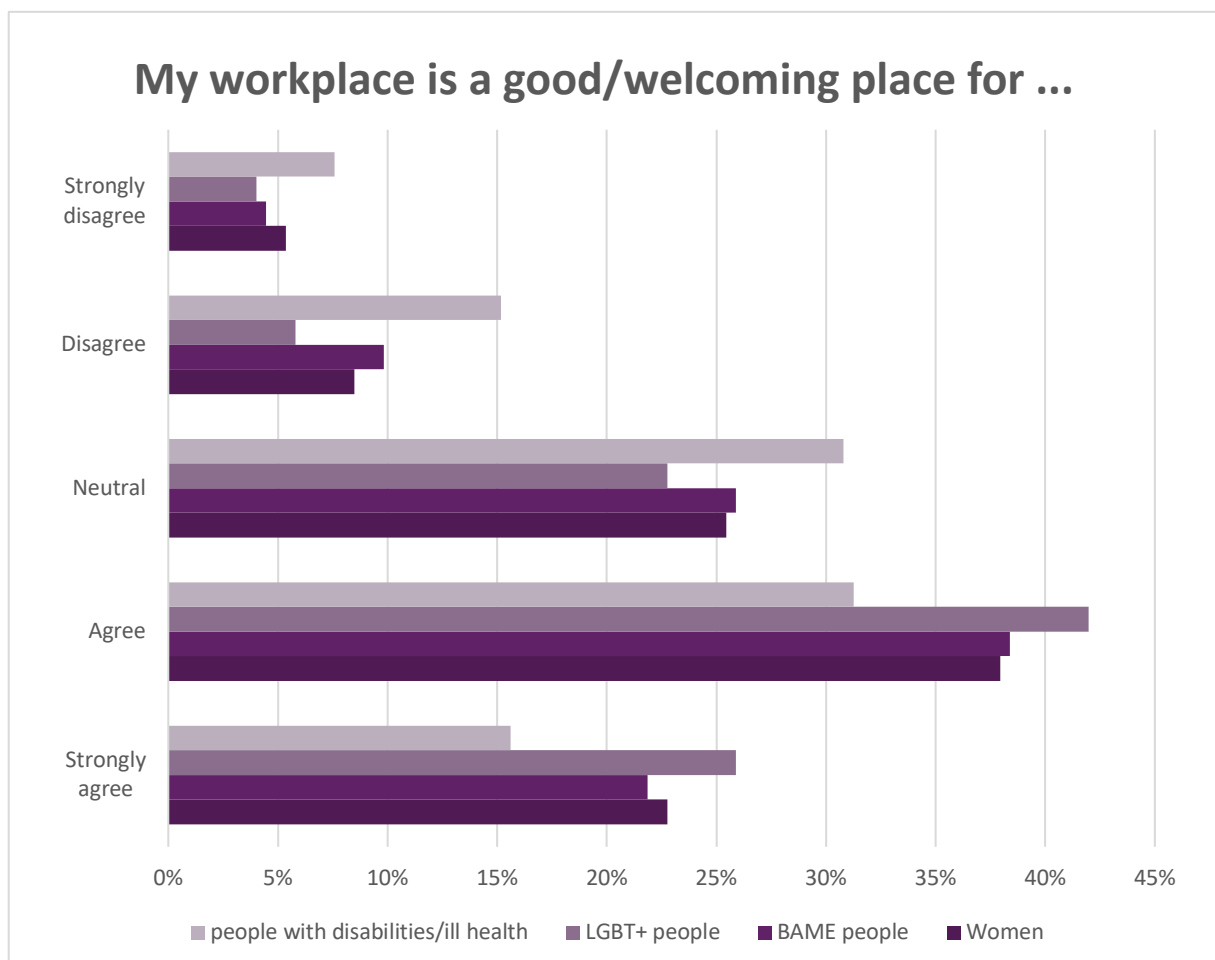
“My bosses frequently make sexist and homophobic remarks and occasionally make racist comments too. I'm bisexual, but feel deeply uncomfortable about my employers knowing”

“People with long-term health conditions would not be able to keep up with the heavy workload, stress and hours required during busy period”

“My office has no affordances for disabled people, especially those with mobility requirements. If I were disabled and applied to work here, I wouldn't even be able to get to the interview”

“I'm a female, mixed race, queer developer who wants to build an inclusive team who collaborate to share and develop a diverse range of ideas”

“Push back against toxic gamers; take a public stand against racists/sexists/homophobes. It doesn't have to be much, a simple ‘We as a company/industry do not agree or condone this behaviour’. The customer isn't always right”

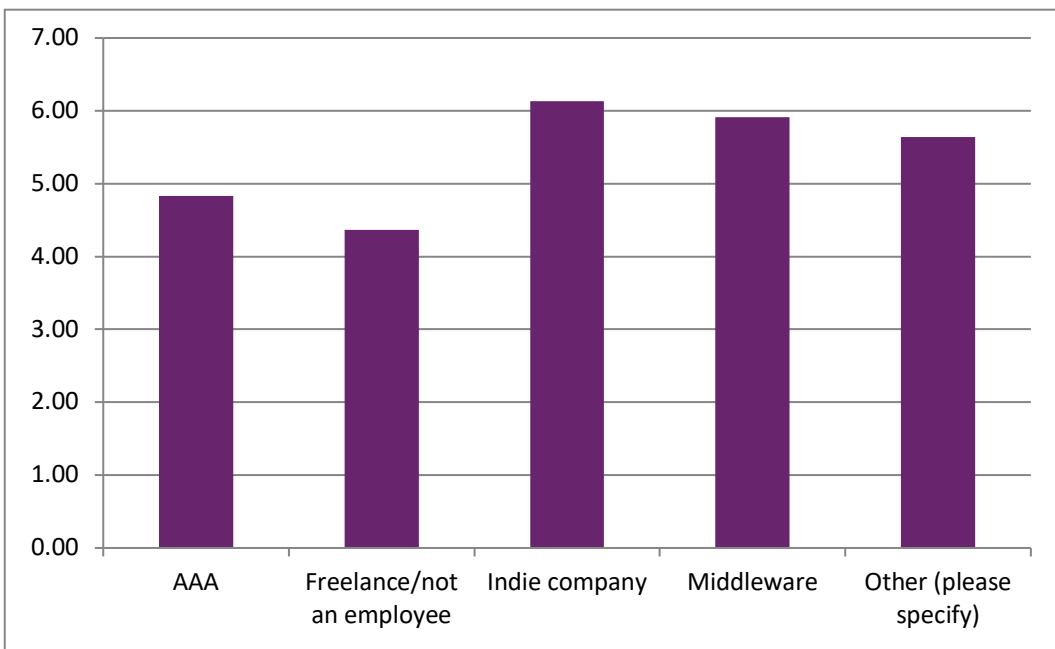
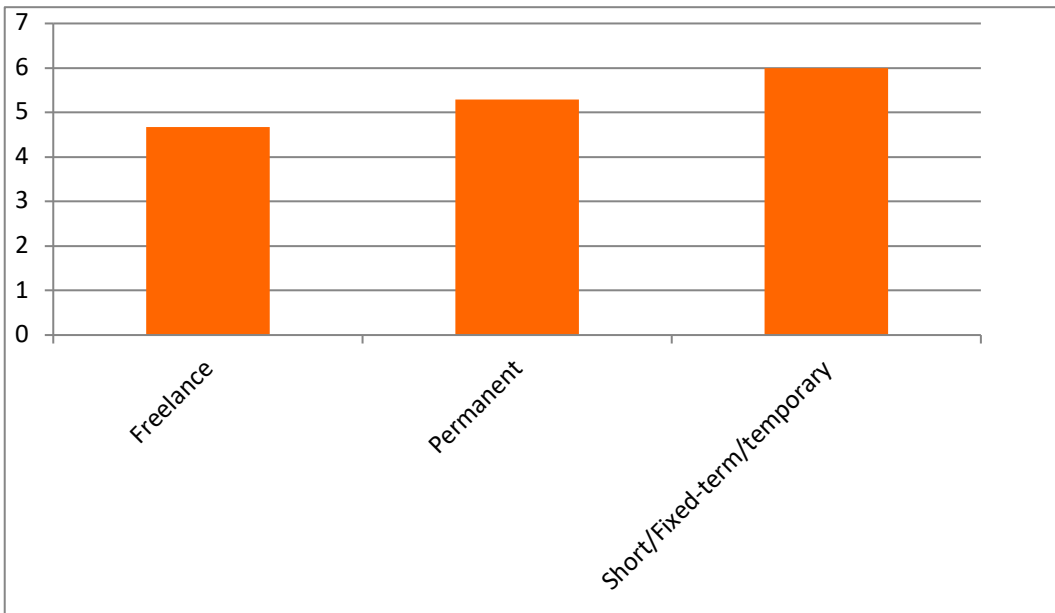


## Positive Scores

Everyone who answered the following questions was scored by giving them 1 point for each positive answer (see example in table below). The maximum total positive score was therefore 12. The average score of all the respondents who answered the questions (237) was 5.3. The scores were then used to see if responses differed significantly between company type, salary scale, and contract or job role.

Is overtime paid or unpaid?	Paid
Have you been asked to opt-out of the working time directive?	No
Have you had any difficulty taking holiday/leave?	No
Have your employment status or working hours negatively affected your personal/home life? (This could be caring responsibilities, social life, personal relationships, health and wellbeing).	No
Does your company offer training related to your work every year?	Yes
Do you have opportunities for promotion or a change in job within the company you are working for?	Yes
We want to understand, overall, how would you rate the working conditions in the games industry. Comparing this to your experiences elsewhere please respond to the following statement. I would recommend the games industry as a good place to work?	Agree or Strongly Agree
Have you ever experienced, or witnessed, bullying/harassment at work?	No
My workplace is a good/welcoming/supportive place for women to work	Agree or Strongly Agree
My workplace is a good/welcoming/supportive place for people who are black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME)	Agree or Strongly Agree
My workplace is a good/welcoming/supportive place for people in the LGBT+ community	Agree or Strongly Agree
My workplace is a good/welcoming/supportive place for people with disabilities or long-term health conditions	Agree or Strongly Agree

There is no direct relationship between salary scale and total positive score, although respondents with a reported salary of >45,000 scored slightly higher than those on lower salaries. Those who worked freelance scored lower than those on contracts (permanent or short term). Indie and Middleware companies scored higher than those in AAA companies. Those who worked in Art and Design reported the lowest scores and those in Audio and Marketing had the highest scores.



<b>Job Role</b>	<b>Average Score</b>	<b>Number</b>
Art	4.54	63
Code/Software	5.41	88
Design	4.39	74
QA	5.04	61
Audio	6.20	19
Production	5.09	87
Marketing	5.91	65
Other	5.71	47