

# Game On!

Imagine going to college to play Nintendo Wii, Playstation 3, Nintendo DS and Xbox 360! This is the dream course just launched by the National Learning Network at Roslyn Park College in Dublin.

**S** O ARE THE STUDENTS REALLY PLAYING GAMES all day long in class? "Not quite," says Enda Connolly, the Head of Department at Roslyn Park College responsible for the course. He explains, "They do get to try the games out, but it's more about evaluating them to study and critique them – how does the Xbox or Nintendo work, how easy is it for the user to follow, does it freeze, how do graphics compare with other games? We look at different types of games, from strategy games like chess, to arcade games like Supermario, to simulation games like flying. The course is aimed at people who want to learn how to design programmes, games or websites, and who wish to progress to university or gain the knowledge required to start their own business. Students learn the basics of writing computer software and how to write their own computer games as well as more sophisticated computer programmes."

Students on the course choose from a selection of modules including the theory and principles of computer programming, game design, website development, mathematics and enterprise development, as well as information and communication systems. Other modules include business communications, customer service, personal effectiveness and time management. The two-year course is supported by FÁS and is Ireland's first FETAC-accredited (level 5) course in Computer Programming and Game Design.

"The course was set up in response to the growing importance of computer gaming within the software industry – a sector that is now worth billions of euro – and the huge interest in the area," Connolly continues. "Today, people are often now first exposed to computers through computer games and it's a really good hook to get people interested in programming. Even if people don't end up working on games, the course exposes them to so many other aspects of computing which they can apply to areas other than gaming."

"There are a lot of small companies in Ireland producing games or parts of games for the big computer companies and so there are some real opportunities for our graduates

to pursue a career in the digital entertainment industry. Of course, others will go into traditional computing roles, for example, software writing and sales, or on to third level."

Carol Redican, the Course Coordinator, has a track record in the software development industry and played a key part in the course's development. She welcomes all potential applicants. "You don't need to have any experience to get on this course, just an interest and an aptitude for the work," she enthuses.

"We have continuous intake, so people are at different stages. For example, at the moment, we have two students who are in the process of designing interactive animated games with different levels and scoring. They are loving it and really passionate about it. Already we have had people who have gone on work experience being snapped up and offered exciting jobs."

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Enda Connolly says Microsoft is a key partner in the delivery of the course. "The course has extensive contacts with software development companies and has an ongoing relationship with Microsoft's European headquarters in Sandyford which participates in the College's work placement programme. To date, over a dozen students from Roslyn Park College's computer courses have gained invaluable work experience by spending a minimum of six weeks with Microsoft. They are given real tasks to do, from adapting software to local needs to doing quality assurance and checking software for bugs, providing students with a great insight into how the big companies operate."

So is there a typical student on the course? "We have 12 students at the moment. While you might think it would be made up of younger people, we have people from a range of backgrounds and ages. The course is very flexible so that participants can work at their own speed depending on their personal skills and aptitudes."

Enda Connolly believes the technology being used by games today will be used in our office computers tomorrow. "The technology and software being used in games now gives a real indication of what we can expect in the future. I believe we will see keyboards becoming less relevant and much more use of touch screen. I think we will also see different ways being used to communicate with your computer so that instead of using a mouse, we'll see people using joysticks and wands".

Whatever about those predictions, there can be no doubt that this course is magic for anyone considering making a living out of playing computer games! ■

## Who to contact

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