**Knowledge-Intensive Firms in the UK and Ireland:**

**Influences, Strategies and Skills**

We conducted a comparative research project on knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs) in the UK and Ireland, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the UK. We worked in collaboration with a partner team at Dublin City University funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) who collected comparable data in Ireland. Data collection instruments were designed by the whole research team. However, the ESRC funding covered just the UK data collection, which is described below. The project started on 1st December 2008 with the final ESRC report due at the end of November 2010.

**Objectives**

The purpose of the project has been to compare and contrast approaches to supporting and managing KIFs in the UK and Ireland, focusing on the pharmaceutical and software/IT services sectors. Specific questions the research addressed are as follows:

* What general management, knowledge-sharing and HR systems best facilitate innovation and successful performance of KIFs?
* How have these sectors performed over recent years and how has government policy and support affected this?
* How do Britain and Ireland compare in their attempts to supply both sectors with the skills and human capital they require, and what has been the impact of policies adopted?
* What are the skills and broader employment and wage outcomes for individuals in these sectors? How have these been affected by the institutional environment in each country?

The data collection had three phases:

* Phase 1 comprised 16 face-to-face interviews with policymakers and industry representatives from the software and pharmaceutical sectors in the UK. These were selected on the basis of relevance to the study objectives and willingness to be interviewed. Interviewees were asked about the stance their organisation took towards the industries, their views on the success of government support for the industries and their views on likely future developments.
* Phase 2 comprised in-depth case studies involving questionnaires and interviews within firms within the two industries. We have data comprising both questionnaires and interviews from six firms and data comprising just interviews from nine further firms. Firms were selected according to specific criteria such as the presence of an R&D operation in the UK and firm size, alongside willingness to participate. It was harder to secure access than we had envisaged due to the economic downturn, industry-level changes and concerns over confidentiality given our focus on R&D activities. Securing access therefore took considerably longer than we had envisaged. Questionnaires were sent either to a random sample of knowledge workers, all knowledge workers (in the case of smaller firms) or particular departments recommended by the organisation. The questionnaires asked respondents for their views on knowledge sharing and exchange, job design, experienced HR practices, career development, innovative work behaviour, wellbeing and performance. Interviews were held with HR and training and development professionals, senior managers, line managers and knowledge workers.
* Phase 3 comprised a large-scale questionnaire survey to firms in the two sectors (one respondent per organisation). For the software sector, we partnered with industry body Intellect in surveying their membership. For the pharmaceutical sector, we developed a comprehensive listing from public sources of firms in the industry, which we surveyed. We had 65 responses from pharma firms and 62 from software firms. Questions covered general firm background, perceptions of government support for the industries, and personal experiences of using government programmes.