GUIDE TO THE 2006 SKILLS SURVEY

This document describes the 2006 Skills Survey, whose main fieldwork began in April 2006 and was completed in March 2007. It is intended as background to the papers and reports, and as a brief guide for potential users of the data. The data has been deposited at the UK Data Archive – SN 6004 – Skills Survey, 2006.

1. Introduction and Background

British social science has developed a unique sequence of surveys that have measured skills trends and their implications for work experience and job quality across time - from the mid-1980s to 2001. Within European social science research on work, these surveys have delivered a strong and unique empirical basis for studying work and employment.

The initial research to find valid measures of the skill requirements of jobs and to measure the distribution of broad skills in Britain was carried out as part of the ESRC's Social Change and Economic Life Initiative surveys in 1986. Its focus was on the skills required of employees in their jobs. The Employment in Britain Survey in 1992, included the same measures together with much more extensive information on job quality, thereby giving us the first rigorous evidence on trends over time.

The Skills Survey, which was ESRC funded, was carried out in 1997. It extended the evidence about trends across time in broad skills while providing much more detailed knowledge about particular skills. Its primary innovation was that it enabled the measurement of ten generic skills and in addition computing skills. This survey was a nationally representative survey of 2467 individuals in employment, aged between 20 and 60.

The 2001 Skills Survey was funded by the Department for Education and Skills. A sample of 4470 respondents was interviewed. All the key questions on job analyses and skill requirements were repeated identically. The survey thereby enabled an updating of the picture of the distribution and trend of broad skill requirements, and for the first time gave measures of the trends in utilisation of generic skills. The survey extended the work of the 1997 survey by including a richer set of measures of other aspects of job quality that allowed comparisons with the 1992 Employment in Britain Survey.

The central objective of conducting the 2006 Skills Survey was to update this series. The detailed objectives follow below. This survey was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and a consortium of government agencies: the Department for Education and Skills, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Learning and Skills Council, the Sector Skills Development Agency, Futureskills Scotland and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Future Skills Wales, the East Midlands Development Agency and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland.

2. Objectives for the 2006 Skills Survey
The 2006 Skills Survey provides a resource for analysing skill and job requirements in the British economy in the middle part of the current decade, thus providing continuity with the previous sequence of surveys, and a benchmark for comparison with the past and possible future surveys. Stemming from this overarching aim, there were several specific objectives of the survey:

**Objective 1**: to provide an analysis of the level and distribution of the skills - both broad and generic (including computing) skills - being utilised in British workplaces in 2006.

**Objective 2**: to provide a picture of recent trends in broad and generic skills.

**Objective 3**: to update our knowledge of the valuation of skills, and of the association of skills usage with other worker rewards and indicators of well-being, and of how skills are related to the evolution of inequality.

**Objective 4**: to provide a description of the work preferences and work motivation of those in employment in Britain, and for the first time a systematic analysis of how preferences and motivation relate to the skill development that people experience in their jobs.

**Objective 5**: to develop further our knowledge about the relationship between employers' human resource practices, the competitive environment in which they operate, and the level and development of their employees' skills.

**Objective 6**: to provide detailed analyses of skills levels and distributions within and between regions of the United Kingdom.

In addition to the above specific objectives, the overarching objective of generating the survey data has been to facilitate the pursuit of many other research objectives of great potential value to the academic and policy-making communities.

### 3. The Academic Research Team.

The survey was designed by Francis Green (Professor of Economics, University of Kent), Duncan Gallie (Professor of Sociology, Nuffield College, Oxford University), Alan Felstead (Research Professor, Cardiff University) and Dr. Ying Zhou (Research Assistant at Nuffield College, Oxford University).

### 4. Survey Design: Basic Details.

The core target population comprised those in employment at the time of interview, aged between 20 and 65. The survey achieved a core sample of 4800. A clustered random
sampling method was used. Respondents were interviewed in their homes, and computer-assisted questionnaires administered. The core sample was drawn from England, Wales and Scotland (south of the Caledonian canal). Supplementary samples were interviewed in certain regions of the UK. These are: Scotland, including the Highlands and Islands; Wales; the East Midlands; Northern Ireland. The full sample (core plus supplementary) comprised 7,787 cases. It is possible to weight analyses to allow for the oversampling of these regions.

The questionnaire, common to all regions, was designed by the research team to maintain the highest possible level of data consistency with the earlier surveys, while exploring new issues under objective (4). The survey funders, members of SKOPE and other potential users contributed during a consultation process that took place in the Summer and Autumn of 2005.

The questionnaire contains the following question blocks:

- Broad questions about job characteristics.
- Detailed job analysis.
- Computing skills and qualifications.
- Work attitudes.
- The work organisation.
- Pay.
- The job five years previously.
- Recent skill changes and future perspectives.
- Demographic data.

5. Related Survey Series.

There is a little overlap and much complementarity between the scope of the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS2004) and that of the 2006 Skills Survey. Together, these surveys enable social scientists to develop a thorough understanding of the nature of British workplaces in the middle of the current decade.

The WIRS/EMPSPS/WERS series, beginning in 1980 and repeating in 1984, 1990, 1992, 1998 and 2004, have been an invaluable source of data for social scientists trying to understand the evolution of employment practices and relations in Britain. These are establishment-based surveys, though small establishments are not sampled. The series of individual skills surveys beginning with the 1986 Social Change and Economic Life Initiative, continuing with Employment in Britain (1992), and the 1997 and 2001 Skills Surveys have constituted a parallel and complementary set of data for understanding skills and other aspects of individual jobs. Whereas the establishment-based surveys gleaned information from managers and worker representatives about industrial relations and human resource practices, the individual-based surveys have shown how the jobs themselves have changed. The WIRS/WERS series began in 1998 to simultaneously examine the experiences of a sub-sample of employees in a short questionnaire, with little emphasis on employees' skills.
Another parallel series is made up of the Employer Skills Surveys, conducted in 1999, 2001 and 2002, followed by the National Employer Skills Surveys in 2003 and 2004. These surveys are a partial continuation of the Skills Needs in Britain surveys, running from 1990 to 1998. This series has focused on the recruitment practices and problems of employers in Britain, as well as on managers' assessments of the skills deficiencies of the workers in their establishments, and on workforce development activities. They generate evidence about the distribution and trend of skills shortages. The interviews for these surveys, which are entirely government-funded, are carried out by telephone.

In addition to these series, there are individual surveys that reproduce some questions from the SCELI/Employment in Britain/Skills Survey series, and thereby enable trend analyses in certain instances. A prominent example is the Working in Britain survey of 2001/2002.

6. Outputs

Outputs of this research to date (February 2009) are:

This has been deposited at the UK Data Archive – SN 6004 – Skills Survey, 2006.

6.2. Main report.

6.3. Papers in Refereed Journals

6.4. Contributions to Edited Books

6.5. Discussion Papers


6.6. Papers in Preparation


6.7. Other Reports


7. Survey Management and Conduct.

The research team was guided by a steering committee, comprised of the Director of SKOPE (Ken Mayhew), as Chair, and representatives of each of the funding agencies that contributed to the funding of the core sample, and representatives from the research team.

Overall management of the survey was undertaken by Francis Green on behalf of the University of Kent.

The survey fieldwork was undertaken by British Market Research Bureau (BMRB).

8. Timetable

Survey design work began during the summer of 2005. Following a cognitive pilot survey of certain questions in November 2005, and a dress-rehearsal survey in January 2006, the main fieldwork began in April 2006. Data collection was completed for the core sample in September 2006, and in all the supplementary regions by March 2007. With the exception of the Northern Ireland sample, a very large majority of the interviews in other regions were completed before the end of 2006.