

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 several forthcoming papers and reports, and as a guide for potential users of the data from 2008 onwards.

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.

This survey series has spawned many scientific publications about work in Britain. We have attempted to compile a list, which is given at the link [Skills Survey Publications](#). We apologise if we have missed some, and welcome information about references to add to the list, including unpublished working papers and PhD theses.

The central objective of conducting the *2006 Skills Survey* has been to update this series. The detailed objectives follow below. This survey has been 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 are 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.

There is also the possibility (conditional on further funding) of using the 2006 survey as the launch-pad for a two-period longitudinal study. Such a longitudinal study, in which respondents would be re-visited after two or three years, would enable a huge leap in our understanding of the processes of skills development that are taking place in British workplaces, and contribute much useful empirical evidence as a basis for lifetime learning policies.

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 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.

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 will 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 SCEDI/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

Several outputs of this research are planned and in the process of being produced:

i) Data.

This data will be the basis both for the specific research outputs funded under this proposal and for other research projects by the research team and by others. Initially the data is available to the research team, and to the funding bodies for their own internal use. The survey data will be deposited in the UK Data Archive within the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDN) in 2008.

As part of the project, and to facilitate work by others, the data from the 1992 Employment in Britain survey has been prepared and lodged at the UK Data Archive.

ii) An overall report of the main findings of the new survey, entitled: **Work Skills in Britain, 1986-2006**.

This report covers the distribution of skills of all types, according to the main socio-economic categories (industry, occupation, gender, region); and changes since earlier surveys.

A technical annexe with a full report of the survey methods will be available for data users at a later date, but in any case is summarised in the above report.

iii) A paper updating earlier findings about the valuation of computing and other generic skills, entitled “**Computer Skills and Pay**”.

iv) A paper which traces the link between work organisation (job design and human resource management practices) and individuals' skills and their development.

v) A paper examining hypotheses about the relationships between skills development and motivation, social mobility and, hence, social cohesion.

vi) A paper about team-working skills

vii) A paper about gender, full-time/part-time status and skills

vi) Separate reports on skills and related job characteristics in regions of the United Kingdom.

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 contribute 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. The project itself, including the analyses and papers noted above, will conclude in 2008.

About the Research Team:

Francis Green

is Professor of Economics at the University of Kent, where he has been employed since

1998. His research focuses on labour economics, with special interests in skills, training, work quality and industrial relations issues. He has published several books in these areas, and many articles in major economics and interdisciplinary journals and in book collections. He has served on several academic research advisory committees for the UK Department for Education and Skills, has recently been a consultant on skills issues for Eurostat, and is currently acting as expert consultant to the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competences co-ordinated by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Currently an editor of the British Journal of Industrial Relations, he has extensive experience in research management, and in survey design work relevant to labour market issues, including both employer and employee surveys.

Duncan Gallie

is an Official Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford, and Professor of Sociology of the University of Oxford. He is Fellow and Vice-President of the British Academy. His research has been primarily on the sociology of employment and of labour markets. He co-ordinated the ESRC's Social Change and Economic Life Initiative in the 1980s and was co-Director of the Employment in Britain Survey, conducted in 1992. He collaborated with Professors Green and Felstead on the Second Skills Survey (2001). He has been co-ordinator of three collaborative projects on labour markets for the European Union (DG Employment and DG Research). He has been a member of the ESRC's Future of Work Advisory Committee and is a Member of the EU's (DG Research) Advisory Group on 'Social Sciences and Humanities in the European Research Area'.

Alan Felstead

is Research Professor at Cardiff School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University. His research focuses on non-standard forms of employment, the spaces and places of work, training, skills and learning. He has completed over 30 funded research projects, produced five books, written over 60 journal articles and book chapters and held six ESRC projects. In addition, he has given labour market advice to a range of policy-makers, including the Department for Education and Skills, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), the Japanese Institute of Labor and a number of Regional Development Agencies. He has also acted as a consultant to the Work Foundation and to Samsung.

Ying Zhou

received her B.A. in English and Literature at Beijing Foreign Studies University, then graduated with M. Phil in sociology at Oriel College, Oxford University. She is currently completing her PhD thesis at Nuffield College, Oxford University, entitled "Trends, determinants and implications of British employees' organizational participation".