

Review of the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) 2004 – Survey of employees questionnaire

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Introduction

This document reviews the content of the Survey of Employees Questionnaire used in WERS 2004. It aims both to identify those existing questions which may be in need of modification or replacement, and to propose new items which may be worthy of inclusion. However, it is recognised that there is a need to maintain continuity in order to map changes over time and so the intention is to balance this need against the benefits of making changes that are likely to improve the quality and value of the data collected.

The document begins by providing background information on the 2004 SEQ. It proceeds to describe the materials which have been drawn upon in the preparation of this review and the principles which have guided the process. The proposals which emerge from the review are then summarised. The Appendices provide more detailed information on these proposals in relation to the content of the 2004 SEQ (Appendix A) and also in terms of possible extensions (Appendix B).

It is intended that these proposals will form a primary input into the broader consultation over the form and content of the SEQ in WERS 2011. It is to be expected that this consultation will reveal differences of opinion from those proposed here, both in relation to the utility of some of the existing questions and in relation to any new topics which might be usefully added to the survey. The proposals put forward are not considered in any way definitive, but are instead intended to serve as a stimulus for further discussion.

Following the consultation period, the WERS research team will be charged with any subsequent redesign of the SEQ (to include formal testing of any new or revised questions). This will take place under the direction of the WERS Steering Committee which includes representatives from both the policy-making and academic communities.

Summary of current SEQ

The 2004 SEQ was an eight-page booklet, distributed to up to 25 employees in each workplace that participated in the management survey. It was divided into five sections, collecting information on the employee, their job, the workplace, their views on the employer and arrangements for employee representation. Many of the topics are addressed through batteries of questions which capture a range of different facets of some particular aspect of work e.g. job satisfaction. The feasibility of increasing the length of the SEQ, given the impact that this might have on response rates, is currently under consideration.

The review

Since one of the aims of WERS is to map workplace employment relations in Britain and changes over time, it is important that there is consistency in the wording of questions used in successive waves of the SEQ. As a result, a guiding principle in

this review was to ensure that changes to questions were proposed only where flaws were sufficiently serious to raise significant doubts about the value of the data collected. Nonetheless, this document does highlight some questions which are now thought to be a lower priority for inclusion than in 2004, and which might now be considered for deletion. The review also identifies additional topics which might usefully be added in 2011.

A wide range of sources have been consulted in the process of conducting the review. A prior review (Forth and Bewley 2009), which sought to identify questions that could be used in employee surveys when seeking to test the impact of Acas' workplace interventions, identified questions which were already in use in other surveys and so provided a useful starting point. Timming's (2009) critique of the 2004 SEQ was also informative, as was a response prepared by members of the 2004 research team (Forth et al, 2009). Those comments received from users during the period in which the WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service was active were also drawn upon.

In addition, the questions included in the 2004 SEQ were compared against those used on other surveys. In the case of regular or periodic surveys, the specific year focused upon was either the most recent edition that was publicly available (as in the case of the British Household Panel Survey) or an edition containing a pertinent module on employment-related issues (as in the case of the European Social Survey). The specific surveys are listed below. They were also consulted to identify questions which might guide the measurement of new topics.

- British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) Wave 18
- British Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS) 2006
- Census 2011 (Draft questionnaire dated 11th October 2009, as used in the 2009 Census Rehearsal)
- English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) Wave 3
- European Social Surveys (ESS) Rounds Two to Four
- European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) 2005
- Fair Treatment at Work (FTW) Survey 2008
- Family Resources Survey (FRS) 2007/2008
- General Household Survey (GHS) 2007
- Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) Waves Two to Four
- National NHS Staff Survey 2009
- Quality of Working Life Survey (QWLS) 2008, Finland
- Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) 2008
- REPONSE employee survey, France
- Skills Survey (SS) 2006
- Survey on Information and Consultation (I & C) 2009
- Working In Britain (WIB) 2000
- Work-Life Balance Survey (WLB) 2007
- Workplace Health and Safety Survey (WHASS) Programme: 2005 Worker Survey

Summary of proposals

In relation to the existing SEQ, it is proposed that 54 items are retained without modification, 19 are deleted and 22 are modified or replaced. The full list of proposals in relation to the existing set of questions is presented in Table 1 below. Appendix A provides more detailed information on the reasons for each proposal and possible alternatives to the existing questions where modifications or additions are suggested.

It is also proposed that seven additional topics are considered for possible inclusion. These additional topics are listed below; Appendix B provides further details. The focus is deliberately upon those topics which are considered priorities for inclusion and where the prospects for successful measurement in WERS are thought good.:

- The degree of social support received from line managers and colleagues
- Employee benefits (including pensions)
- Migration
- Intrinsic motivation
- Work-related injury or illness
- Name of the union to which the employee belongs
- Whether the employee is a union or non-union representative

Table 1 – Summary of proposals in relation to existing questions

Question	Topic	Proposal
Section A: About your job		
A1	Tenure	Retain
A2	Contract type	Retain
A3	Usual weekly hours	Retain
A4	Usual weekly overtime	Consider replacing A4 with a question asking for contracted hours of work
A5	Long hours	Consider deletion and replacement with a question on the importance of long hours to career advancement.
A6a, A6b	Job demands	Retain
A6c	Job security	Retain
A6d	Work-related anxiety	Consider deletion
A7a-A7e	Job control	Retain, but consider clarification of A7c
A8a-A8f	Job satisfaction	Retain, but consider modification of the wording of item A8d
A9	Work-related well-being	Retain, but consider the addition of a three or six-item depression-enthusiasm scale.
Section B: About your workplace		
B1-B3	Flexible working practices and caring arrangements	Consider deletion.
B4	Receipt of off-the-job training	Retain

B5	Skills match	Retain
B6	Rating of managers' information provision about workplace changes	Retain
B7	Helpfulness of different communication mechanisms in keeping employees informed	Consider deletion
B8	Rating of extent to which managers allow employees to influence their decision-making	Retain
B9	Satisfaction with degree of co-determination	Retain
Section C: Your views on working here		
C1	Affective commitment	Retain, and extend to cover continuance commitment and normative commitment if space permits.
C2a-C2c	Trust in managers	Retain
C2d	Agree that managers are understanding of responsibilities outside work	Consider deletion and replacement with measures of work-life conflict.
C2e	Whether managers encourage skill development	Retain
C2f	Whether managers treat employees fairly	Retain
C3	Quality of relations between managers and employees	Retain
Section D: Representation at work		
D1	Union membership	Retain
D2	Representation	Retain, but consider modification of response categories
D3	Managers' attitudes to union membership	Retain
D4	Union recruitment activity	Consider deletion/modification.
D5	Any union at workplace	Retain
D6	Attitudes to unions	Retain, but consider adding an equivalent question for non-union representatives.
Section E: Finally, about yourself		
E1	Gender	Retain

E2	Age	Retain, but consider sub-division of category for '65 or more' years
E3	Marital status	Retain, but consider the impact of civil partnerships on consistency of response across the series
E4	Dependent children	Retain, but consider modification to collect the number of children in each age band
E5	Caring responsibilities	Retain
E6	Health and disability	Retain, unless ONS depart substantively from the current approach
E7, E8	Academic and vocational qualifications	Retain, but update lists of qualifications as necessary
E9	Computer use	Retain
E10	Gender balance	Retain
E11, E12, E13	Job title, job description and supervisory responsibilities	Retain
E14	Ethnicity	Consider modification in line with official surveys
E15	Pay	Consider modification to account for changes in the pay distribution
E16	Hourly pay	Consider deletion and replacement with a question on how the employee is paid.

References

- Forth, J. and Bewley, H. (2009) *The Development of Structured Employee Attitude Surveys*, Acas, mimeo. September 2009.
- Forth, J. Bewley, H., Bryson, A., Dix, G., and Oxenbridge, S. 'Survey errors and survey costs: a response to Timming's critique of the Survey of Employees Questionnaire in WERS 2004'. under review.
- Timming, A (2009) 'WERS the validity? A critique of the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey of Employees', *Work, Employment and Society*, 23(3), pp. 561-570.

Appendix A – Proposals in relation to questions in the 2004 SEQ

SECTION A: ABOUT YOUR JOB

A1: Tenure

The use of a banded response scale is unusual on other surveys and Timming argued that the survey should ask for the exact number of years. However, the banded response scale was adopted in 1998 after the use of a continuous scale in the pilot led to a relatively high degree of non-response.

Proposal: Retain

A2: Contract type

Some surveys use more detailed categories of non-permanent contracts (e.g. seasonal, casual), but these more detailed categories largely reflect differences between sectors in the way that temporary contracts are described, rather than capturing any additional useful information as to the permanency or otherwise of the contract.

Proposal: Retain.

A3: Usual weekly hours

Some other surveys prompt the respondent to think about explicitly about both unpaid and paid overtime, but such a modification to the question prompt on A3 would arguably lead to only a marginal improvement in data quality at the expense of discontinuity.

Proposal: Retain.

A4: Usual weekly overtime

Respondents may find it easier to recall their contracted hours, rather than having to first calculate their usual weekly hours (at A3) and then deduct contracted hours from the figure given at A3 to estimate weekly overtime. A4 attracts a low level of non-response (less than 0.1 per cent of the total), but the answers may not be accurate if respondents make computational errors or provide estimates. One possible question for adaption is Q698 from BSAS 2006.

Proposal: Consider replacing A4 with a question asking for contracted hours of work.

BSAS 2006 Q698 – Face to Face

What are your basic or contractual hours each week in your main job - excluding any paid and unpaid overtime?

ROUND TO NEAREST HOUR.

*IF RESPONDENT CANNOT ANSWER, ASK ABOUT LAST WEEK.
IF RESPONDENT DOES NOT KNOW EXACTLY, ACCEPT AN
ESTIMATE.*

FOR 95+ HOURS, CODE 95.

FOR 'VARIES TOO MUCH TO SAY', CODE 96.

Range: 0 ... 96

98 (Don't know)

99(Refusal)

A5: Long hours

The question was introduced in 2004 to provide information on frequency of long-hours working following the introduction of the Working Time Regulations. This type of information is not provided in other similar surveys, but the demand is likely to be lower in 2011 than in 2004. A5 might usefully be replaced with a question on the importance of long hours to career advancement within the workplace (the so-called 'long hours culture'), along the lines of Q554 from BSAS 2006.

Proposal: Consider deletion and replacement with a question on the importance of long hours to career advancement.

BSAS 2006 Q554 - Face to Face

I'd like you to think about how people in your kind of job move up the ladder at your workplace - for example, by getting themselves promoted. Do you agree or disagree that people who want to do this usually have to put in long hours?

1 Agree strongly

2 Agree

3 Neither agree nor disagree

4 Disagree

5 Disagree strongly

6 (No-one moves up ladder/gets promoted)

7 (It depends)

8 (Don't know)

9 (Refusal)

A6a, A6b: Job demands

The demands of the job are a key facet to be measured in their own right, as well as being a key determinant of work-related well-being. There is variation in responses between the two measures, indicating that they measure different aspects of job demands (total effort vs. tightness of deadlines). Both questions appear in other surveys.

Proposal: Retain.

A6c: Job security

This question might be improved by asking the respondent to rate their job security over a specific period e.g. the past 6 or 12 months. However, this modification is not sufficiently important to justify the introduction of a discontinuity into the series.

Proposal: Retain.

A6d: Work-related anxiety

With the addition of the question on job-related well-being in 2004 (A9), there does not appear to be a strong argument for retaining this item, which covers similar territory.

Proposal: Consider deletion.

A7a-A7e: Job control

A similar set of questions is used on other surveys. However, queries could be raised in respect of A7c and A7e. In respect of A7c, it is arguably unclear as to what aspect of job performance is being captured. It seems most likely to relate to the methods that may be used to achieve particular tasks (e.g. whether a wall is painted with a brush or roller), but 'How you do your work' could also be interpreted more broadly as an overall assessment of job control – indeed some comments of this nature were registered in cognitive testing in 2004. The item may benefit from further testing and subsequent clarification. In respect of A7e, Timming questioned whether some employees might decide their start or finish time, but not both; however, the use of the phrase 'start or finish time' would appear to accommodate this.

Proposal: Retain, but consider clarification of A7c

A8a-A8g: Job satisfaction

Some surveys use a seven-point response scale, rather than a five-point scale, but changing to such a scale would affect comparability over time within WERS and so is not recommended. There are no other obvious problems with these measures, although the wording of A8d (satisfaction with training) may merit some modification. A8d might usefully be broadened in scope to cover skills development more generally, particularly in view of the limited provision of formal training in smaller organisations. Questions M3(4) in the Working in Britain Survey and A10Ba in the QWLS survey provide possible templates, although a preferable form of words might be 'Opportunities to develop your skills', reflecting the wording used in the measurement of the level of provision in C2e. Going one step further, A8d could even be modified to capture satisfaction with the opportunities for career development within the workplace, thus capturing both skill development and promotion opportunities.

Proposal: Retain, but consider modification of the wording of A8d.

WIB M3(4) – Face to Face

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the work you do?

The chance to develop yourself (7-point response scale)

QWLS A10Ba – Face to Face

If you think about various aspects of your work, how satisfied are you with the following:

Opportunities for development in your work? (5-point response scale)

A9: Work-related well-being

A9 attracted a high level of response (98%+ on each item), despite some unease about the personal nature of the question within the cognitive test in 2004. One limitation, however, is that it only covers the anxiety-contentment dimension of job-related wellbeing (as measured in the scales devised by Peter Warr), and ignores the depression-enthusiasm dimension. One argument for doing so in 2004 was that depression-enthusiasm was to some extent captured by the job satisfaction ratings captured in A8.¹ However, it would be more satisfactory to capture both dimensions of job-related well-being using the Warr scales. This could be achieved by adding a further six-item scale or, if space is restricted, by following Wood's proposal to replace the positive items on the anxiety-contentment questions with the negative items from the depression-enthusiasm scale.² The full six-item scale is employed in the 2006 Skills Survey, which utilises the same response scale as WERS (albeit in reverse order, from 'Never' to 'All of the time').

Proposal: Retain, but consider the addition of a three or six-item depression-enthusiasm scale.

Skills Survey 2006 (KSmiley to KOptim) – Self-completion

Thinking of the past few weeks, how much of the time has your job made you feel each of the following...?

**Enthusiastic
Cheerful
Depressed
Gloomy
Miserable
Optimistic**

¹ Wood S (2007) 'Well-being in the Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004' in K Whitfield and K Huxley (eds) Innovations in WERS 2004, ESRC and Cardiff University.

² Op. Cit.

SECTION B: ABOUT YOUR WORKPLACE

B1-B3: Flexible working practices and caring arrangements

WERS 2004 had a particular interest in access to flexible working arrangements following the introduction of the right to request flexible working (also the right to emergency leave). This topic is now covered comprehensively in the periodic Work-Life Balance Survey, although admittedly one does not have access to linked employer data in that survey. A further observation is that B1 attracts high rates of non-response and, whilst this is partly informative as to the salience of the issue to the employee, it also tempers that value of the question as a comprehensive measure of access. They may be greater value in collecting measures of the extent to which employees experience work-life conflict: see later proposals in respect of C2d.

Proposal: Consider deletion.

B4: Receipt of off-the-job training

The obvious limitation of this question is that it includes only off-the-job training. However, as the Specialist Team noted in 2004, it is difficult to devise a catch-all question. More informal forms of staff development are also arguably captured by C2e. Timming proposed the use of a continuous response scale, however this brings the inevitable risk of non-response if the respondent is unable to recall the precise number. .

Proposal: Retain.

B5: Skills match

Question proposed by Specialist Team in 2004. No obvious problems.

Proposal: Retain.

B6: Rating of managers' information provision about workplace changes

Timming makes the observation that it is unclear as to which managers exactly are being evaluated (i.e. line managers, senior managers). One can also note that other surveys address this broad topic through the use of satisfaction scales (e.g. Ecomsat in the 2006 Skills Survey); moving to such a scale would bring the evaluation into line with A8. However, one can expect that the introduction of the Information and Consultation of Employees (ICE) regulations in 2004 will mean that there is considerable interest in mapping the change from 2004-2011 on these items. Continuity is thus important.

Proposal: Retain.

B7: Helpfulness of different communication mechanisms in keeping employees informed

These questions on communication mechanisms were of particular interest around the time of the development of the ICE regulations. However, one might expect there to be limited interest in mapping change over time. Not used outside of the 2004 sourcebook as far as we are aware.

Proposal: Consider deletion.

B8: Rating of extent to which managers allow employees to influence their decision-making

Whilst we agree with Timming's argument that managers may treat employees and their representatives differently, and that the question glosses over such differential treatment, we would nonetheless make the same arguments here as in respect of B6 about the likely importance of continuity.

Proposal: Retain.

B9: Satisfaction with degree of co-determination

It is odd that this item is not placed alongside the other satisfaction items in A9 and, similarly, that it does not include a 'Don't know' option as do those other items. However, we would make the same arguments here about the interest in mapping change as in respect of B6. Continuity is therefore important.

Proposal: Retain.

C1: Affective commitment

These three questions are intended capture the core of the notion of affective commitment (emotional attachment to one's employer). They have been reasonably well used and have been found to possess good scale properties.³ We thus propose their retention. If space permits, there may be merit in also seeking to measure continuance commitment (i.e. the individual commits because of the high cost of leaving) and normative commitment (i.e. feelings of obligation); these are the other two components of Meyer and Allen's commonly-cited typology.⁴

Proposal: Retain, and extend to cover continuance commitment and normative commitment if space permits.

C2a-C2c: Trust in managers

The three items were proposed by a Specialist Team in 2004, being among the key characteristics identified as likely antecedents of workplace trust. They have good scale properties: factor analysis confirms that the three items emerge as a single

³ Green F (2008) "Leeway for the loyal : a model of employee discretion", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 46, 1: 1-32.

⁴ See, for example: Allen N and Meyer J (1990) "The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organization", *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 63: 1-18.

factor, whilst a scale compiled from the items displays a high Cronbach alpha.⁵ They will surely continue to be of interest, and the argument for continuity of question wording is arguably more compelling than concerns about the lack of clarity as to which managers exactly are being evaluated (i.e. line managers, senior managers).

Proposal: retain.

C2d: Agreement that managers are understanding of responsibilities outside work

Timming notes that there may be variation between managers, so there is a case for specifying which manager (e.g. immediate manager/line manager), as some other surveys do. However, it could be of greater value to move away from a rating of the employer towards a measurement of the employees' actual experience by asking about the extent to which employees experience work-life conflict. Data from the management questionnaire on the provision of work-life balance practices within the workplace could be used to explore the variation in employees' responses. Possible measures of work-life conflict were included in BSAS 2006 (see below), although one might wish to modify those questions by (i) broadening the scope from 'family responsibilities' to 'responsibilities outside work'; and (ii) aligning the reference period with A9 (i.e. the past few weeks). It would probably also be necessary to accompany these questions with a new question in Section E on the employment status of any partner (full-time, part-time, not employed).

Proposal: Consider deletion and replacement with measures of work-life conflict.

BSAS 2006 C30 – Self-completion

How often has each of the following happened to you during the past three months?

b. It has been difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spent on my job

d. I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities

- 1=Several times a week
- 2=Several times a month
- 3=Once or twice
- 4=Never
- 6=Doesn't apply/no job

⁵ Guest D et al (2007) "The study of workplace trust and partnership", in K Whitfield and K Huxley (eds) *Innovations in the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey*, Cardiff University.
Guest D et al (2008) "Does partnership at work increase trust? An analysis based on the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey", *Industrial Relations Journal*, 39, 2: 124-152.

C2e: Whether managers encourage skill development

A product of the Specialist Teams in 2004. We see no compelling need to change it in any way. It provides a potentially useful accompaniment to the 'training days' question (B4), which can be expected to capture more informal development.

Proposal: Retain.

C2f: Whether managers treat employees fairly

The question arguably lacks focus: it could capture general ill-treatment or inequitable treatment, or both. Separate questions on these specific dimensions are available in other surveys. Question I7b in the *2000 Working in Britain Survey* covers inequitable treatment, whilst A21e in the *2006 British Social Attitudes Survey* covers generalised ill treatment (the latter is broadly equivalent to APHRAS02 in the management questionnaire). However, it will be important to have some consistent measure of perceived fairness in 2004 and 2011, particularly in view of the economic downturn. Accordingly, we propose the retention of C2f.

Proposal: Retain.

C3: Quality of relations between managers and employees

This item was carried over from the management / worker rep questionnaires when the Survey of Employees was first introduced in 1998. It has been well used and shown to be a valid measure through its correlation with managers' reports of disciplinary sanctions and collective disputes.⁶ The response scale differs slightly from that used for the equivalent question in REPONSE (Calm; Generally calm; Rather tense; Tense), but continuity with previous WERS surveys is arguably more important than strict equivalence with REPONSE.

Proposal: Retain.

⁶ Bryson A (2005) "Union effects on employee relations in Britain", *Human Relations*, 58, 9: 1111-1139.

SECTION D: REPRESENTATION AT WORK

D1: Union membership

The question usefully distinguishes between employees who have never been members of a trade union or staff association, and those who are not current members but were in the past. Some other surveys distinguish between trade unions and staff associations, but such a distinction is likely to add limited value.

Proposal: Retain.

D2: Employee representation

Timming commented on limited usefulness of categories 'another employee' and 'somebody else'. The provision of an option write in other answers is unlikely to be feasible, due to the cost of coding such information. However, it may be sensible to revisit the number of response categories that are provided, perhaps adding 'line manager' as an option for pay and training items and 'legal representative' for the disciplinary item, if tests indicated that these were the most common missing alternatives. Note that some respondents ticked multiple boxes in 2004, contrary to instructions.

Proposal: Consider modification of response categories.

D3: Managers' attitudes to unions

Around half of respondents tick the 'don't know' option for this question, but this is informative in itself. A similar question is asked within the management interview, but asking this within the SEQ is useful as it provides the employees' perspective for comparison.

Proposal: Retain.

D4: Union recruitment activity

There appears to have been little use of this item outside of the primary analysis. This may be due to limited interest, or the phrasing of the question, which provides no indication of how recently an employee was asked to join a union or staff association. The question could be modified to ask whether employee asked within a specified time period, such as the last 12 months.

Proposal: Consider deletion or modification.

D5: Any union at workplace

A useful indicator of the union's visibility when compared with the manager's report, and needed as a filter for D6. As noted for D1, some surveys provide a distinction between trade unions and staff associations in the response categories, but we consider that this would add limited additional value here. Some surveys (e.g. *Fair Treatment at Work*) ask whether there is a union at the workplace that 'someone in your job could join', but the existing WERS question has the benefit of simplicity and retaining it would ensure continuity.

Proposal: Retain.

D6: Attitudes to unions

This question is filtered from D5 which led to some confusion among respondents. In part this may be due to the layout of the questionnaire; the degree of mis-routing may be reduced if D6 appeared directly underneath D5. Timming commented on the double-barrelled nature of D6a, but separating this out would arguably provide little additional information. At present there is no equivalent evaluation for non-union representatives, this could prove a useful addition but would require extra space and a new filter question.

Proposal: Retain, but consider adding an equivalent question for non-union representatives.

SECTION E: FINALLY, ABOUT YOURSELF

E1: Gender

Inclusion of this question is essential.

Proposal: Retain

E2: Age

Timming proposes the use of a continuous scale, but we consider that the use of a categorical scale is less sensitive and thus more likely to encourage a response. That said, it may be useful to sub-divide the category for '65 or more', for example into '65-69' and '70 or more', given the increasing interest in the ageing workforce and changes to policy in this area (such as rising retirement ages).

Proposal: Consider sub-division of category for '65 or more' years.

E3: Marital status

The question currently proposed for use in the 2011 Census (see below) has nine response categories, which include: (i) two separate categories for those who are divorced and those who are separated but still legally married; and (ii) four separate categories covering same-sex civil partnerships. These categories are arguably more detailed than is necessary in WERS, where the legal nature of the relationship is less pertinent than living arrangements. However, some particular consideration might be given to whether (and if so, how) the recent introduction of civil partnerships might affect consistency of response on the existing WERS question between 2004 and 2011.

Census 2011 – Self-completion

Q4 – On 11 October 2009, what is your legal marital or same-sex civil partnership status?

Never married and never registered a same-sex civil partnership

Married

Separated, but still legally married

Divorced

Widowed

In a registered same-sex civil partnership

Separated, but still legally in a same-sex civil partnership

Formally in a same-sex civil partnership which is now legally dissolved

Surviving partner from a same-sex civil partnership

Proposal: Retain, but consider the impact of civil partnerships on consistency of response across the series.

E4: Dependent children

The existing question only identifies whether respondents have children in the specified age groups, whereas Timming argues for the identification of the total

number of children. It would arguably be most valuable to combine the two approaches, by identifying the number in each age group. This approach does not appear to have been tried elsewhere. One approach would be to ask the respondent to write the exact number of children they have in the response box next to each age band; however, these figures would have to be manually entered after fieldwork. A more efficient approach would thus be to offer the respondent specific options against each age band (e.g. none, one, two or more), thereby relying on tick-boxes, which are more amenable to automated scanning. However, testing would clearly be important here.

Proposal: Retain, but consider modification to collect the number of children in each age band.

E5: Caring responsibilities

We note that the current version of the 2011 Census questionnaire includes 'neighbours or others' alongside family members and friends, and also uses the term 'mental ill-health' rather than 'mental illness'. However, continuity with WERS 2004 is arguably more important than modification of the question wording along these lines. The response categories in the Census are also broader (none; 1-19 hours; 20-49 hours; 50+ hours), but these seem too broad for a survey of employees. One might ask respondents for the actual number of hours spent on caring responsibilities, rather than the existing banded options, in common with some other surveys. However, this may invite some additional non-response.

Proposal: Retain.

E6a, E6b: Health

We note that the current version of the 2011 Census questionnaire uses the term "health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months". This is more concise than the current wording of E6a, but continuity with 2004 is arguably more important. E6b combines the two aspects which are covered in separate questions in the LFS (limits on the amount of work, and limits on the type of work). Again, continuity with WERS 2004 is considered important. Nevertheless, there are concerns that the form of words used in WERS and LFS reinforces a medical, rather than a social, model of disability. The ONS Working Group on Health and Disability are currently formulating a harmonised suite of health and disability questions, some of which seek to conceptualise disability in terms of social and environmental barriers. Their work should be monitored.

Proposal: Retain, unless ONS depart substantively from the current approach.

E7, E8: Academic and vocational qualifications

These questions work well but the list of qualifications should be updated as necessary, and any modifications should have some regard to the National Qualifications Framework. In respect of E7, Timming suggested asking for years of education, but information on the actual qualifications obtained is likely to be more informative and also easier for respondents to recall. In respect of E8, the merit of the separate question on vocational qualifications has sometimes been questioned,

but this separate information has been shown to be useful. We note that the 2011 Census question includes VCEs, although these are no longer available.

Proposal: Retain, but update lists of qualifications as necessary.

E9: Computer use

Existing research has found this to be useful. Should be retained in its current form for continuity.

Proposal: Retain.

E10: Gender balance

Not aware of any issues with this question. Similar questions used in other surveys, but no alternatives found that were considered to be superior.

Proposal: Retain.

E11, E12, E13: Job title, description and supervisory responsibilities

These are standard survey questions used for coding to the *Standard Occupational Classification* and are thus critical for inclusion.

Proposal: Retain.

E14: Ethnicity

In the measurement of ethnicity, WERS should continue to align itself with best practice in official surveys. We note, for example, that the question which is being developed for the 2011 Census has a separate category for Arabs.

Proposal: Consider modification in line with official surveys.

E15: Pay

It is proposed that the pay bands are reconsidered to ensure that they continue to capture the breadth of the pay distribution. It may be necessary to add an additional category at the top end of the distribution, for example, to account for wage inflation.

Proposal: Consider modification to account for changes in the pay distribution.

E16: Hourly pay

This question was introduced as a means of categorising employees on the basis of their hourly wage (particularly in view of the salience of the National Minimum Wage). In practice, the data have rarely been used. It may be more useful to replace E16 with a question on how the employee is paid (e.g. whether any performance-related element). Examples of potential questions for adaptation include L6a from the *Working In Britain* survey and EF6 from the *2005 EWCS*.

Proposal: Consider deletion and replacement with a question on how the employee is paid.

WIB L6(a) – Face to Face

Do you receive any incentive payment, bonus or commission based on

...

READ OUT AND CODE EACH 'YES' OR 'NO'

- a) your own performance
- b) the performance of the team or group to which you belong
- c) the results achieved by your organisation or your workplace

EWCS EF6 – Face to Face

What does your remuneration include?

SHOW CARD EF6 - READ OUT - MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE!

- A - Basic fixed salary/wage
- B - Piece rate or productivity payments
- C - Extra payments for additional hours of work/overtime
- D - Extra payments compensating for bad or dangerous working conditions
- E - Extra payments compensating for Sunday work
- F - Other extra payments
- G - Payments based on the overall performance of the company (profit sharing scheme) where you work
- H - Payments based on the overall performance of a group
- I - Income from shares in the company your work for
- J - Advantages of other nature (for instance medical services, access to shops, etc.)
- K - Other (SPONTANEOUS)

Appendix B – Proposals for possible new topics to be included in the 2011 SEQ

Social support

The degree of social support in the workplace is argued to be a key factor (alongside job control) in shaping the relationship between job demands and psychological well-being. Questions on other surveys typically seek to identify the supportiveness of the supervisor or of colleagues, or the availability of more general social support within the workplace (e.g. the friendliness of colleagues). We consider that the supportiveness of line managers and colleagues to be the most relevant issues; the 2005 EWCS provides some illustrative questions.

Proposal: Consider the addition of questions to capture the degree of social support received from line managers and colleagues.

EWCS Q25 – Face-to-face

For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation.

A You can get assistance from colleagues if you ask for it.

B You can get assistance from your superiors / boss if you ask for it.

- 1 Almost always
- 2 Often
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Rarely
- 5 Almost never
- 8 DK
- 9 Refusal

Employee benefits (including pensions)

The receipt of fringe benefits is an important element of the reward package which is currently given only marginal attention in WERS. Pension provision is one area of particular interest, given concerns about the low level provision of workplace-based schemes among small employers and low levels of employee take-up more generally. Questions FENTITL and FOTHTITL in the management questionnaire ask about the provision of a specified list of benefits to managerial employees and members of the largest occupational group respectively, but the survey gains no other indication of variations in the receipt of fringe benefits according to occupation or other employee characteristics. It would thus arguably be more valuable to collect such data in the employee questionnaire. FOTHTITL/FENTITL could provide the template, or one could consider the use of K1a from the *Working In Britain Survey*. In either case, the item covering pension provision would need to refer to the receipt of employer contributions, since the simply provision of a scheme is now a legal requirement for all employers with 5 or more employees.

Proposal: Consider the addition of a question on fringe benefits.

WERS 2004 MQ – FOTHTITL / FENTITL

Looking at this card, are [title of largest occupational group / managers at this workplace] entitled to any of these non-pay terms and conditions?:

PROBE: Which others? UNTIL 'None'.

- 1) Employer pension scheme
- 2) Company car or car allowance
- 3) Private health insurance
- 4) **More than** four weeks of paid annual leave (excluding public holidays)
- 5) Sick pay in excess of statutory requirements
- 6) *None of these*

WIB K1(a) – Face to Face

SHOW CARD 27.

Which of these benefits do you get from your employer or are available to you if you need them? You can just read out the numbers of the ones which apply.

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

- 1=Occupational pension scheme, beyond the basic state scheme.
- 2=Sick pay, beyond the basic government scheme
- 3=Use of a company car or van
- 4=Free transport, or other help with travel costs
- 5=Goods or services at a discount or preferential rate
- 6=Subsidised or free meals
- 7=Finance or loans, such as for house purchase
- 8=Private health scheme (e.g. BUPA)
- 9=None

Migration

Migration is of significant interest but few surveys can say much about the employment experience of migrants (as opposed to their employment prospects, which can be investigated using household surveys). WERS has the ability to make a substantial contribution in this area. The most pertinent means of identifying foreign workers would appear to be to ask about country of birth and date of arrival in the UK, as is done in the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS shows that 13 per cent of all those in employment in the UK in 2008 were non-UK born, and that around half of the current stock of migrants has arrived since 1997.⁷ Questions on country of birth and date of arrival are also included in the current version of the questionnaire intended for the 2011 Census, which is necessarily a self-completion instrument. However, these require the respondent to write in both their country of birth (if outside the UK or Republic of Ireland) and to write in the month and year of arrival. A tick-box format which presented respondents with a list of specified options

⁷ Clancy G (2008) "Employment of foreign workers in the United Kingdom, 1997 to 2008", *Economic and Labour Market Review*, 2, 7: 18-30.

(at the very least: UK-born; Other EU; Outside EU) would be more amenable to the automated scanning that is used in WERS. It should also be noted that the Census focuses on the most date of the most recent arrival, whilst the LFS analysis mentioned above focuses on the date of first arrival.

Proposal: Consider the addition of questions to identify the country of origin and year of arrival of foreign-born workers.

Census 2011 – Self-completion

Q7 – What is your country of birth?

England
Wales
Scotland
Northern Ireland
Republic of Ireland
Elsewhere, write in the current name of country

Q8 – If you were not born in the United Kingdom, when did you most recently arrive to live here?

Do not count short visits away from the UK

Month
Year

Intrinsic motivation

Employee involvement and engagement continues to be a prominent topic in both academic and policy circles (see, for example, the MacLeod review of employee engagement). WERS already measures some issues related to employee engagement: affective commitment; autonomy; reward. However, the SEQ currently has no measures of the extent to which employees find their work interesting or worthwhile. The closest measures in the current questionnaire are perhaps A8h (satisfaction with the work itself) and A8a (satisfaction with sense of achievement). Questions on interesting and valuable work can be found in ESS and EWCS (see below).

Proposal: Consult over the inclusion of questions to capture employees' perceptions of the extent to which their work is interesting or valuable.

Interesting work (ESS3 E50) – face-to-face

How much of the time do you find your job interesting?

00 None of the time
01
02
03
04

05
06 All of the time

Valuable work (EWCS 2005, Q25j) – face-to-face:

For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation.

You have the feeling of doing useful work

1. Almost always
2. Often
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Almost never

Work-related injury or illness

Work-related ill health is increasingly of interest from social and economic perspectives (see also Dame Carol Black's review on health, work and well-being). WERS currently contains measures of the incidence of work-related injuries and illnesses in the management questionnaire (Section I), however these are limited by managers' recall ability and honesty of reporting. There appears to be the prospect of matching workplace records from WERS to workplace-level data on workplace incidents collected under the RIDDOR regulations. However, the collection of employee-level data would enable one to investigate the effectiveness of workplace health and safety arrangements (say) whilst controlling for a wide range of workplace and employee characteristics, including occupation. Existing surveys take different approaches, asking variously about: the degree of perceived risk (Skills Survey; EWCS; ESS); whether work affects the employee's health (EWCS); or whether the employee has experienced any work-related accidents or illnesses over the past 12 months (LFS, FTW, WHASS). We prefer the latter approach as it obtains a factual answer rather than a perception. However, the proportions reporting incidents which arose in the previous year can necessarily be expected to be low (around 2% in the case of work-related injuries and around 1% in the case of work-related illnesses, according to the HSE and Labour Force Survey).

WHASS qWinj – telephone

Thinking of the last 12 months, have you had any accident resulting in injury at work or in the course of your work?

Note: Road traffic accidents while commuting to or from work do not count as work-related injuries

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

WHASS qWill – telephone

In the last 12 months have you suffered from any illness, disability or other physical or mental health problem that was caused or made worse by your job or by work done in the past?

Yes

No

Don't Know

Name of union to which the employee belongs

There are currently no representative datasets which allow one to explore whether different unions are more or less effective in representing their members. The WERS management questionnaire identifies which unions are known to be present in the workplace, but it is not possible to determine which of these unions an individual union member identified in the SEQ belongs to. If such data were collected, it would enable analysis of items such as D6 (effectiveness of workplace union representation) and D2 (preference for union representation) by union identity. There are, however, no examples of such a question in any other survey we have consulted. While offering a write-in option is not likely to be feasible, because of the cost of coding the information after fieldwork, it would be possible to construct a tick-box question which listed the five or six largest unions by membership, along with an 'other' category. The question would be routed off D1.

Proposal: Consider the addition of a question to identify the union to which an employee belongs.

Whether the employee is a union or non-union representative in their workplace

There are currently no surveys which provide a representative sample of workplace employee representatives. The WERS Survey of Employee Representatives is deliberately targeted at senior representatives, since many of the questions concern the details of engagement with management and thus require the respondent to possess a certain amount of knowledge about the representative structures in the workplace and their operation. If the SEQ were to include a question asking whether the respondent were a union or non-union representative in their workplace, this would necessarily provide representative samples of union and non-union employee representatives, from which much could be learned about their characteristics, employment experiences and attitudes. Valuable comparisons could also be made with the wider population of employees.

Proposal: Consider the addition of a question to identify whether the employee is a lay union representative or a non-union employee representative.

