

**DESIGN ISSUES FOR A  
FIFTH WORKPLACE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS SURVEY  
(WERS5)**

**January 2003**

**Department of Trade and Industry**

**Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service**

**Economic and Social Research Council**

**Policy Studies Institute**

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the WERS Series

The Workplace Employment<sup>1</sup> Relations Survey (WERS) is a survey mapping the state of employment relations in workplaces across Great Britain. Data are collected from interviews with workplace managers who have day-to-day responsibility for personnel matters, interviews with worker representatives (where they are present), and from employees via a self-completion questionnaire. WERS is co-sponsored by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and the Policy Studies Institute (PSI).

The last WERS was carried out in 1998<sup>2</sup> (WERS98). This was the fourth in the internationally renowned series of employee relations surveys. The previous surveys, known as the Workplace Industrial Relations Surveys (WIRS)<sup>3</sup>, were conducted in 1980, 1984 and 1990. The 1998 survey covered workplaces with 10 or more employees in Great Britain. Over 3,000<sup>4</sup> managers were interviewed face to face, together with nearly 1,000 worker representatives. Nearly 30,000 employees completed and returned the self-completion questionnaire. The high response rates achieved for the 1998 survey<sup>5</sup> means that the results are statistically reliable and representative of all but the smallest workplaces.

Outputs from the 1998 survey included: a *First Findings* booklet, which informed debate during the passage of the Employment Relations Act 1999; a sourcebook of findings, *Britain at Work*, based primarily on the cross-sectional survey; and, a companion volume, *All Change at Work*, which provided analyses of change over time based on the 1998 panel survey and the WIRS series.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The 1998 survey was known as the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey. Future surveys will be known as the Workplace Employment Relations Surveys. The surveys in the series were also known as the WIRS series, these will now be known as the WERS series.

<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork for WERS98 took place between October 1997 and June 1998.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 1 regarding the name change.

<sup>4</sup> This figure comprises both the number of interviews with managers as part of the 1998 cross-section survey (2191 interviews) as well as the number of interviews as part of the 1990-98 panel survey (882 interviews).

<sup>5</sup> The management questionnaire attained a response rate of 80 per cent; the worker representative questionnaire attained a response rate of 82 per cent; the survey of employees attained a response rate of 64 per cent and the panel questionnaire attained a response rate of 85 per cent. Further details can be found in the Technical Report for the study. See Airey et al., (1999).

<sup>6</sup> Further information on the 1998 survey can be found at the following websites: [www.dti.gov.uk/er/emar/1998wers.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/emar/1998wers.htm); [www.niesr.ac.uk/niesr/wers98/index.htm](http://www.niesr.ac.uk/niesr/wers98/index.htm)

## **1.2 A fifth WERS?**

The sponsors of the 1998 WERS (WERS98) are actively considering the case for a fifth WERS, subject to securing the necessary funds. The sponsors provisionally expect that fieldwork would take place in 2004.

Like other surveys in the series, the key aims of WERS5 would be to:

- (i) map workplace employment relations in Britain and changes over time;
- (ii) provide a comprehensive and statistically reliable database on British workplace employment relations, which is made publicly available and easily accessible; and,
- (iii) inform policy development and stimulate and inform debate and practice among employers and workers, their organisations and the academic community and beyond, through the provision of a first findings booklet and full report presenting a primary analysis of the survey findings.

## **1.3 WERS5 Consultation exercise**

To inform the sponsors' thinking on the overall design and scope of another WERS, the broad user and potential user community were consulted and views sought on all aspects of WERS, including: its broad design; the sampling population; survey content; and, survey outputs. A consultation paper<sup>7</sup> outlining the key questions to be addressed was published on the sponsors' websites, the WERS Data Dissemination website run by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) and in the August edition of the IRS Employment Review. The consultation began on 14 June and closed on the 16 September 2002.

The focus of the consultation was to collect comments on the broad objectives, coverage and architecture of WERS with the possibility of conducting further limited consultation on specific issues, such as question content, later in the year.

There were two distinct elements to the consultation exercise: (i) the consultation with the academic community led by the ESRC; and, (ii) the consultation with practitioners and think-tanks and, policy-makers and analysts across government led by the DTI.

The ESRC-led consultation exercise involved the following: a presentation and the launching of the sponsors' consultation paper at the annual conference of the British Universities Industrial Relations Association (BUIRA) conference; the posting of information on the exercise and a request for

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<sup>7</sup> A copy of the consultation paper is available at [www.dti.gov.uk/er/emar/wers5.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/emar/wers5.htm)

comments on the websites of BUIRA, the British Academy of Management (BAM) and the British Sociological Association (BSA); the distribution of information and a request for comment via the distribution list of the Employment and Education Economics Group (EEEG); a national workshop held at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research; and visits to the Universities of Cambridge and Warwick.

In order to both inform and complement the ESRC-led consultation, the DTI commissioned NIESR to conduct a systematic review of the use made of the WERS98 datasets in secondary analysis. The review comprised two elements: (i) an examination of the extent and nature of analysts' use of the data from WERS98; and, (ii) a synopsis of the problems and issues encountered by analysts in their use of the data from WERS98.

The DTI also commissioned IRS Research to facilitate a series of workshop events as part of the consultation with practitioners and think-tanks. The following organisations participated<sup>8</sup> in this element of the consultation: the Campaign for Racial Equality (CRE); the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC); Federation of Small Businesses (FSB); Incomes Data Services (IDS); Low Pay Unit (LPU); Small Business Research Centre (Kingston University); The Work Foundation (formerly the Industrial Society); Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD); Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF); and Unison. The DTI also received written responses from the Association of Colleges and the Passenger Transport Executive Human Resource Group.

DTI conducted the consultation with policy-makers and analysts across government. This involved a combination of workshop events with officials from the DTI and a series of bi-lateral meetings with the following government departments: the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP); the Health and Safety Executive (HSE); the Small Business Service (SBS); the Low Pay Commission (LPC). A written response was also received from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

The results from the consultation exercise together with the findings from the review of WERS98 were presented to the sponsors on the 27 September 2002.

#### ***1.4 Maintaining consistency***

The broad design of WERS98 underwent a significant overhaul. For example, with respect to the cross-section survey there were two major innovations to the design: firstly, lowering the employment size threshold from 25 to 10 employees; and, secondly, surveying employees within workplaces by randomly distributing up to 25 self-completion questionnaires. Changes were

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<sup>8</sup> Bi-lateral meetings were held with CIPD and EEF at DTI Headquarters. A written response was received from the Small Business Research Centre. The TUC attended the national workshop held at NIESR.

also made to the survey content in the existing manager and worker representative questionnaires.<sup>9</sup>

There are clear arguments for maintaining consistency in design. Like other surveys in the series, a key aim of the fifth WERS will be to provide an analysis of change in the system of employment relations (see section 1.2, above). Moreover, it is worth noting the timing of the previous survey. Fieldwork for WERS98 took place during October 1997 and June 1998, i.e. before the government's programme of employment legislation reform was enacted, including the introduction of a National Minimum Wage, and the 1999 Employment Relations Act (ERA99)<sup>10</sup>. Hence the 1998 survey serves as a "baseline" to evaluate the impact of changes in employment legislation since 1998. A survey in 2004 would yield data that could be used to measure the impact of changes up to and including those arising from the Employment Act 2002 (EA2002)<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, consistent measures are needed to maximise the scope for evaluation. In addition, a fifth WERS will mean that the survey data will span almost a quarter of a century, thus consistency in design to maximise the scope for analysis of the longitudinal data is essential.

Results from the consultation exercise also indicated that continuity in design was important. However, suggestions for improvements to both the broad survey design as well as the survey content have been put forward as it was felt that changes have occurred since the last survey was conducted, both in terms of employment relations and legislation but also in terms of survey design. The sponsors recognise that the design of the fifth WERS will need to reflect these changes, partly because the fifth WERS will be establishing a new baseline against which to monitor change. However, these changes will need to be balanced against the need to maintain consistency in design to maximise analysis of change since the last survey was conducted.

### **1.5 Structure of the paper**

This paper summarises the sponsors' decisions on how the next WERS will proceed. These are both informed by the responses to/results of the consultation exercise as well as the need to achieve the survey's broad aims bearing in mind financial and staff resource constraints. The paper is split into three sections:

- Section 2 outlines the broad survey design for WERS5 including, the survey structure; sampling stratification and design; the scope for

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<sup>9</sup> For example, new to the cross-section survey were topics such as equal opportunities, training, team working and performance monitoring. Areas such as flexible working and performance monitoring were also strengthened. Topics on areas such as union organisation, pay determination and industrial action warranted less attention. The worker representative survey also underwent some changes, including dropping questions where it was felt that the manager was better placed to answer them and a greater focus on the role and activities of the worker representative.

<sup>10</sup> See [www.dti.gov.uk/er/erbill.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/erbill.htm)

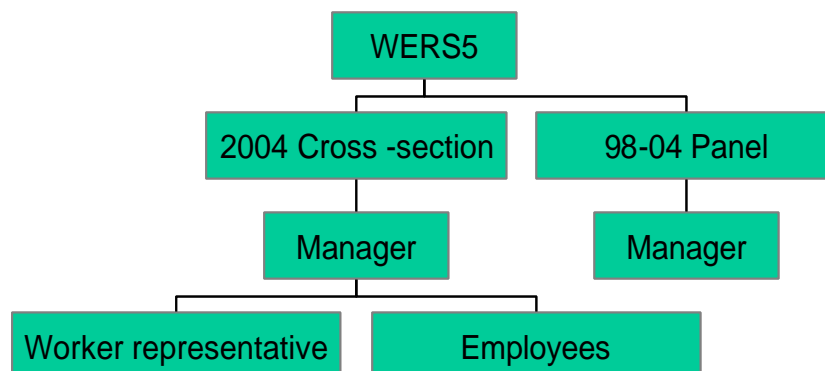
<sup>11</sup> See [www.dti.gov.uk/er/employ/index.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/employ/index.htm)

expanding the employee survey; and, issues around linking WERS to other datasets.

- Section 3 considers the survey content including, the need for greater consistency in measures used; the question areas to be expanded or included; and, areas which warrant less attention.
- Finally, Section 4 looks at survey outputs and the sponsors' initial plans for dissemination.

## 2. Survey Design Issues

Figure 1: WERS5 Survey Design



### 2.1 Survey Structure: 2004 Cross-section

Strongly in line with the results from the consultation to maintain continuity in design, is the sponsors' decision to retain the three-way (linked) design of the cross-section. The Initial Review of WERS98 undertaken by NIESR (Forth, 2002<sup>12</sup>) showed that the cross-section data is extremely well used, with 276 registered users in July 2002 and 76 papers<sup>13</sup> published based on analyses of these data. Further, the linked element of the cross-section appears to have worked well with only a small number of papers being focused on analysis of a single survey. Extensive use has been made of both the data from the Management Questionnaire (MQ) as well as the Survey of Employees (SEQ). Further, analysts have commonly made use of these data in combination with 49<sup>14</sup> out of the total 82 WERS98-based publications being based on these matched data.

Apart from conducting a review and making changes to the survey content (see Section 3, below) the sponsors will not be making any additional changes to the broad design of the MQ (i.e. in terms of survey length – previously 90 minutes duration on average). However, the sponsors will consider the suggestions made during the consultation to expand the scope of both the Employee Profile Questionnaire (EPQ) as well as the Survey of Employees (SEQ). Decisions to expand each of these elements will be dependent on the impact on response rates, the financial costs involved as well as the practicability. Should a decision be taken, both the EPQ and SEQ

<sup>12</sup> Forth, J (2002) *Initial Review of WERS98*. Final Report to the Sponsors of WERS98. NIESR.

<sup>13</sup> This includes publications based on solely the Cross-section and the Cross-section and Panel data. 70 out of the 76 papers are based solely on analysis of the cross-section data.

<sup>14</sup> This figure is comprised of the 46 papers based on solely matched data from the MQ and the SEQ together with a single paper based on analysis of the linked MQ, SEQ and WRQ plus 2 papers based on data from the MQ, SEQ, and the Panel.

would be carefully piloted. The new question areas considered to be priority areas for inclusion are outlined in Section 3 of the paper.

The review of WERS98 noted that the Worker Representative Questionnaire (WRQ) was the least used element of the cross-section, with just 6 papers published using these data. The academic consultation suggested that a possible reason for this was that the extensive analysis presented in *Britain at Work* may have crowded out/dissuaded researchers from exploring the data further.

A strong argument expressed during the consultation from both academics and policy-makers for retaining this element was that, in the near future, workplaces with 50 or more employees will have established or revised existing representative structures in light of the Information and Consultation Directive. The WRQ element of the fifth WERS would thus provide valuable information on the role and activities of employee representatives and establish a baseline against which the impact of these regulations can be measured. The survey importantly provides balance to the two other accounts of the state of employment relations and, also provides information on the state of employment relations and on areas such as union organisation and activity within the workplace from an informed respondent.

The sponsors will be critically reviewing the content of the WRQ.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the Initial Review of WERS98 noted that very little use had been made of the data on non-union worker representatives possibly because of the small number interviewed. Indeed of the 947 interviews achieved with worker representatives only 70 were with non-union representatives. The sponsors will be reviewing the selection criteria for worker representatives to see if it provides an appropriate match with the requirements to consult employee representatives in respect of health and safety, redundancies and the forthcoming information and consultation regulations.

The academic consultation also noted that the 'WRQ mirrors the MQ too much and the SEQ too little.' Further, there was a suggestion that all worker representatives could be asked to complete a SEQ as it was considered that their views as employees were of interest. The Sponsors will consider the possibility of compiling additional data through a self-completion questionnaire to role-holders (possibly worker representatives and managers).

## **2.2 Survey Structure: 1998-2004 Panel**

The panel element of the survey is essential to understanding the dynamics of change and why a change has come about, not simply what has changed. By using data from the panel it is possible to explore whether change has occurred because of a change in the behaviour of on-going/surviving workplaces or whether change has come about because of a change in the composition of the population of workplaces. It was the 1990-98 panel which established that the decline in trade union recognition identified by the 1990

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<sup>15</sup> See Section 3.8 of the paper on 'Taking the design of the survey content forward.'

and 1998 cross-sections had come about not because surviving workplaces had chosen to de-recognise unions, but because of compositional change in the population, with new workplaces less likely to recognise unions.

There are also technical advantages of using panel data, including overcoming causal inference problems and dealing with unobserved heterogeneity.

Despite the panel's clear advantages the review of WERS98 revealed that only 12 papers had been published using these data<sup>16</sup>. The academic consultation highlighted that like the analysis of the WRQ reported in *Britain at Work*, the analysis more generally conducted for *All Change at Work* was so comprehensive that this may have dissuaded researchers from conducting additional analysis. It was also noted that low use for secondary analysis may also have been because the panel dataset was considered to be complex and difficult to use. In addition some researchers noted the difficulty in conducting analysis of panel data per se.

It was clear from the consultation exercise that there was great interest in a panel element to the fifth WERS given the programme of employment legislation reform since WERS98 was conducted. The sponsors agree that the 1998-2004 panel will be a key tool for evaluating the impact of the government's programme of employment legislation reform and should be retained. It will also be important for distinguishing between behavioural and compositional change in employment relations (ER) structures, and estimating the effects of ER structures on workplace outcomes.

The design of the 1990-98 panel questionnaire (PQ) was based on the 1990 managers' questionnaire. As described in the introduction many changes had been made to the design of the 1998 cross-section, including the MQ, such that the content of the PQ looked very different to the content of the main element of the survey. In addition the size threshold for the PQ remained at 25 or more employees in line with the threshold for the 1990 survey.

The sponsors consider that the design of the 1998-2004 PQ will be based on the 1998 MQ. The 1998-2004 PQ will be simpler and shorter compared with the 1990-98 PQ. The survey will focus on identifying change particularly in areas where change may have occurred because of changes in employment legislation over the 1998-2004 period.

The 1990-98 panel was based on a sub-sample of workplaces and was stratified. The size threshold was also workplaces with 25 or more employees, consistent with the threshold for the 1990 survey. Consideration will be given to increasing the sample size for the 1998-2004 panel subject to resources as well as the need to maintain a workplace size threshold this time round. All remaining workplaces that are not selected to take part in the survey will be

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<sup>16</sup> This is despite there being 109 registered users of the panel data.

approached to identify whether these workplaces are continuing, have closed down or have fallen out of scope of the survey.

### **2.3 A panel of employees?**

There was a suggestion from the ESRC-led consultation with academics that a panel of employees should be included. This would involve interviewing a sample of employees alongside the panel of workplaces, but not necessarily the same employees. The sponsors do not propose to take this forward for the following reasons: (i) the additional costs of conducting this element, including the design of the employee panel, the cost of fieldwork and management costs; (ii) it is not clear what this element adds to the analysis as the same respondent would not be re-interviewed and so it would not be possible to control for individual effects; and, (iii) concerns over whether its inclusion could damage the overall response to the main MQ panel element as it would entail additional burdens on the employer.

### **2.4 Sampling Stratification and industry exclusions**

The sample for WERS98 excluded workplaces in SIC92 Section A (Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry), Section B (Fishing), Division 10 (Coal mining), Section P (Private Households with Employed Persons) and Section Q (Extra-Territorial Organisations and Bodies).

In addition the sample was stratified by industry, with SIC92 Major Groups E (Electricity, gas and water supply), F (Construction), H (Hotels and restaurants), J (Financial intermediation) and O (Other community, social and personal service activities) over-sampled and by workplace size, with larger workplaces also over-sampled. The sample is stratified in this way to enable separate reporting and analysis across groups and in the case of the over-sampling of larger workplaces to improve the precision of estimates of employees within establishments. (See Purdon et al., 2001<sup>17</sup>).

Views expressed during the consultation exercise were mixed regarding the need to stratify by industry and to over-sample certain industries. The academic consultation raised the question of whether there was in fact any need to over-sample certain industries given few had focused their analysis on particular sectors. Some users also raised concerns regarding the impact the complex sampling strategy had had on the precision of survey estimates. On the other hand policy-makers welcomed the over-sampling of certain industries as this meant that comparisons across and within industries could be made.

The Sponsors will consider whether the same degree of over-sampling required for analysis in WERS98 is similarly required for WERS5. The

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<sup>17</sup> Purdon, S. and Pickering, K. (2001) *The use of sampling weights in the analysis of the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey*. Prepared for the WERS98 Data Dissemination Service at the National Institute for Economic and Social Research.

Sponsors will also look carefully at whether the degree of over-sampling can be reduced partly through the combination of certain industries.

## **2.5 Workplace size threshold**

Workplaces with less than 10 employees were excluded from the sample for WERS98, primarily because it was considered that these workplaces were less likely to have formal employment practices in place. Views expressed during the consultation exercise over a possible reduction in the size threshold for WERS5 were mixed. There was strong support for a reduction in the size threshold from employer representative bodies, academics with a specialist interest in small firms as well as policy-makers. The following arguments were put forward in this respect:

- (i) the sample design as it stands is not entirely representative of the population of workplaces. Data from the April 2002 IDBR<sup>18</sup> indicate that workplaces with 1-9 employees account for 63% of workplaces in Great Britain (accounting for 18% of all employees), with 50% accounting for workplaces with 1-4 employees (accounting for 9% of all employees).
- (ii) a reduction in the threshold is required to enable analysis of certain sectors where small firms are prevalent (e.g. the hospitality industry);
- (iii) if a key aim is to assess the impact of employment legislation reform and monitor the impact of any subsequent changes, then the sample should include smaller workplaces, particularly as these workplaces are sometimes thought to be disproportionately affected by these changes.

However, the academic consultation also noted some resistance to a move to incorporate smaller workplaces in the sample. Their concerns focused around the following issues:

- (i) the implications for design effects, including the implications for weighting and the precision of survey estimates;
- (ii) the potential impact on response rates; and,
- (iii) the implications for the design of the questionnaires.

In terms of design effects, results from a recent study commissioned by DTI and conducted by the National Centre on sampling issues for a fifth WERS<sup>19</sup> suggests that by lowering the size threshold from 10 to 5 employees the loss of precision in 5+ and 10+ establishment estimates would be relatively small and acceptable to most WERS users. This conclusion was based on an analysis of effective sample sizes for 5+ and 10+ establishment estimates<sup>20</sup>. It

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<sup>18</sup> In line with the exclusions from the sample for WERS98 these figures exclude workplaces in the following industries: Agriculture, Hunting and Forestry; Fishing; Coal mining; Private Households with Employed Persons; and Extra-Territorial Organisations and Bodies.

<sup>19</sup> Purdon, S. (2002) *Sampling Issues for a Fifth WERS (WERS5)*. Prepared for the DTI.

<sup>20</sup> In making estimates of effective sample sizes the effects of differential sampling rates by size were taken into account. Differential sampling rates by SIC were not considered though,

was assumed that the issued sample size for the 5-9 group was about 350 (similar to the sample size for the 10-24 group) and that the overall sample size was kept the same. In addition the same paper assumes that the response rate for workplaces with 5-9 employees should not differ markedly from those with 10-24 employees.

The Sponsors will consider carefully the risks involved in reducing the size threshold to workplaces with 5 or more before a final decision is made. The sponsors will consider the experience of other surveys of employers which have incorporated smaller workplaces into the sample and also in order to inform their thoughts regarding the implications for the design of the questionnaires, the Sponsors will be consulting a team of specialists with expertise in small firms/SMES (see Section 3.8 of the paper).

### ***2.6 Alternative to reducing the workplace size threshold: a separate survey of micro-establishments?***

The academic consultation suggested that an alternative to reducing the size threshold would be to conduct a separate survey of micro-establishments. It would entail a mixture of a postal questionnaire and a telephone survey. It would include some questions drawn from the main WERS MQ so that a broad comparison of micro-establishments could be made with larger ones and some questions that were specific to micro-workplaces.

The sponsors do not propose to take this forward for the following reasons: (i) Evidence from a study conducted by the National Centre into the design effects of lowering the employment size threshold suggests that these effects are likely to be minimal which questions the added value of conducting another survey; (ii) there are cost implications both in terms of financial resource (piloting and fieldwork costs) as well as staff resource including, time spent on management and design of the survey; and, (iii) more recently there have been a number of examples where surveys of employers have included 5 or more employees and have been executed successfully. Again, this raises the question why an additional survey is required.

### ***2.7 Introducing geographical representativeness into the design***

The sample design for WERS98 was neither representative at a country level nor at a regional level. Views over the introduction of a geographical dimension to the sample design were explored during the consultation exercise and were found to be mixed. The sponsors have decided not to pursue incorporating a geographical dimension into the sample design because of the impact it would have on the precision of estimates. The recent study by the National Centre into sampling issues indicated that there would be a loss of precision at both the country and dramatically at the regional level. To overcome the loss in precision would require an increase in the

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as these are considered to be relatively small. It was also assumed that the survey estimates being measured did not differ greatly between size groups, countries or regions.

overall sample size for country level estimates and significantly at a regional level. Evidently this would increase the costs of fieldwork.

The consultation exercise highlighted some interest in incorporating Northern Ireland (NI) into the sample. The sponsors similarly do not propose to incorporate NI into the sample because of the impact not only for the precision of estimates, as over-sampling would be required, but also because of the implications this would have on the design of the questionnaires. This is because although legislation in NI mirrors GB legislation in most areas, there are important differences, notably with respect to equality.

### ***2.8 Number of employees sampled at the workplace***

There was a suggestion from the academic consultation about whether a greater number of employees should be sampled at the workplace. The sponsors have decided not to pursue this because of concerns over its practicability.

### ***2.9 Employees versus workers***

With the increasing importance of non-standard labour in workplaces and the blurring of the distinction between these workers and employees in the eyes of employers, the consultation exercise considered whether such a distinction should continue to be made. For the purposes of sampling by workplace size, the sponsors consider that this will still be restricted to the number of employees at the workplace as there is no other sampling frame available which provides such information.

### ***2.10 Scope of data collected through the SEQ***

There were a number of suggestions for additional data to be collected through the SEQ, for example, collecting wider aspects of job satisfaction, (see Section 3 of the paper on Survey Content). The sponsors will consider these in turn and dependent on the cost implications may consider piloting a longer version of the self-completion employee survey.

### ***2.11 Linkage to other datasets and confidentiality issues***

The consultation exercise also highlighted users' interest in linking WERS to other datasets, e.g. the Annual Business Inquiry (ABI). In addition frustrations were expressed regarding the procedure for accessing the restricted datasets<sup>21</sup>, which was seen to act either as a barrier to, or a cause of delay to, conducting secondary analysis.

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<sup>21</sup> The following data are restricted as part of the 1998 cross-section: main activity coded using the 1992 Standard Industrial Classification to industrial class; regional identifiers – both Government Office Region and Standard Statistical Region; unemployment rates and vacancies (average number unfilled and rates) by Government Office Region, Standard Statistical Region and Travel to Work Area (banded); the full text of all questions which were partially open or fully open; and the IDBR employer size variable, the IDBR record of Industrial Classification (SIC 92) and the outcome of contacting participating organisations.

The sponsors recognise the utility of good data linkage and of reducing/eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy associated with accessing data. At the same time, the integrity of the survey series and future surveys in the series depends on respondents having confidence that their data will not be used in a way that breaches their confidentiality. Any linkage should be on the basis of formal consent. The sponsors believe that it should be possible with the appropriate modifications to allow greater linkage to other datasets, whilst at the same time maintaining the principles of informed consent. The sponsors will also review the restricted access procedure adopted last time round.

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The following data are restricted as part of the 1998 panel: Standard Statistical Region at the time of the 1990 interview; Standard Statistical Region, Government Office Region at the time of the 1998 interview; Standard Industrial Classification (1980 classification, Activity level) at the time of the 1990 interview; Standard Industrial Classification (1980 classification, Activity level) at the time of the 1998 interview; and verbatim textual responses to each of the open-ended questions.

In order to apply for WERS98 restricted data, candidates need to fill out an application form and sign an undertaking form. Once the form reaches the department, the application is processed and sent to the WERS Data Users Sub-Committee for consideration. Once the sub-committee agrees on granting access to the files, the department informs the Essex Data Archive.

The reason for placing these data in restricted files is to meet DTI obligations to survey respondents to protect the anonymity - both of individuals and firms. The main criteria against which applications are judged are the rationale under-pinning the proposal and the steps that will be taken to preserve the anonymity of the data.

### **3. Survey content**

#### ***3.1 Maintaining consistency over time***

In respect of the survey content the sponsors wish to maintain as much consistency in the design of the questions/topic areas as possible. However, a number of issues have been raised during the course of the consultation, which challenge the issue of maintaining consistency in design which are considered in this section of the paper.

#### ***3.2 Triangulation***

The findings from the academic consultation indicated that there is a need for greater consistency in the wording of questions which appear in each of the cross-section surveys. This would enable greater triangulation between responses and allow researchers to determine more accurately whether there were differences of opinion between three parties within the workplace. An example given was in relation to questions on consultation and communication. In the MQ the questions focus on whether there is a method or practice in place whilst in the WRQ asks whether management uses a range of methods. The sponsors agree that the wording of questions across the three surveys should be reviewed in order to improve triangulation.

#### ***3.3 Treatment of the 'largest occupational group'***

Linked to the triangulation problem discussed above is the issue of linking responses from the MQ on the incidence of practices where they apply to the 'largest occupational group' and whether these apply to individuals sampled in the SEQ. In addition it was noted that the use of the 'largest occupational group' limits analysis of segmentation of the workforce. The sponsors recognise the difficulties arising from the use of the largest occupational group and will consider its treatment in the survey.

#### ***3.4 Employees versus workers***

With a high proportion of workplaces using sub-contractors and a growing number using agency workers and employing people on a fixed-term basis, asking employers to make a distinction between these and employees with a strict contract of employment will be difficult. The sponsors recognise this to be a problem but to include all groups would add greatly to the complexity of the questionnaire in some workplaces. The sponsors will consider *collecting* additional data about the incidence of these workers through the EPQ.

#### ***3.5 Re-design/amendment of existing question areas and areas for new and expanded questions***

Many suggestions were received for amendment/review of specific questions and sets of questions as well as for either new or expanded question areas. Limited available questionnaire space means that there is a need to prioritise.

The sponsors have identified the following question/topic areas to be high priority for review, expansion and inclusion in a fifth WERS:

- Financial performance;
- Fair treatment at work (including equal opportunities, family-friendly balance practices, health and safety outcome measures, including stress);
- Job satisfaction;
- Skills and training;
- Impact of employment legislation;
- Partnership;
- Beyond the workplace/corporate governance; and,
- Technology measures.

### **3.6 Areas to be reduced in scope**

Unfortunately the consultation exercise did not identify significant areas which could either be reduced in scope or dropped from the survey. The Initial Review of WERS98 identified a number of blocks of questions in the MQ which were 'least-used' by WERS users (see Table 1, below). However, this is not the sole criteria upon which decisions over slimming down question areas are made. For example, Table 1 highlights that only four papers have been published with respect to disciplinary procedures and sanctions. However, in light of the recent 2002 Employment Act which introduced minimum internal disciplinary and grievance procedures to encourage internal resolution of workplace disputes, a fifth survey would be clearly remiss if it did not collect information on this area. Further, policy interest will also focus on the incidence of tribunal claims where workplaces have these minimum procedures in place, although this too has been identified as one of the least-used blocks.

**Table 1: Least-used blocks of questions in Management Interview<sup>22</sup>**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>No. of papers</b>
B-3	Sources of external advice	1
G-2	Threat of industrial action	4
H-2	Disciplinary procedure and sanctions	4
H-3	Industrial Tribunal experience	4
E-3	Non-union representatives	6
G-3	Incidence and effect of industrial action	6
F-2	Last pay review	8
M	Employment relations climate	9
E-4	Scope of bargaining and consultation	9

The Initial Review of WERS98 also noted that 'Monitoring of Performance' was the least used of the new question areas in the MQ.

<sup>22</sup> Table 1 is taken from page 10 of the *Initial Review of WERS*, conducted by John Forth (2002).

In terms of the SEQ, the academic consultation noted that there was a problem with the organisational loyalty question (B5). The Initial Review also noted low usage of the following questions: reasons for working overtime (A6); discussions with supervisors (B1); helpfulness of notice-boards, email etc (B6). With policy interest in the long hours' culture reasons for working overtime is also likely to be of interest.

Given that few suggestions have come forward in this respect, this effectively imposes a constraint on the new and expanded areas to be included in the fifth survey. As part of the development work for the fifth survey the WERS Research Team will be reviewing the content of the existing questionnaires to identify areas that could be reduced in scope.

### ***3.7 Content of the 1998-2004 Panel Survey***

The starting point for the design of the 1998-2004 panel will be the 1998 management questionnaire. As discussed previously the panel will be a key tool for evaluating the impact of the government's programme of employment legislation reform. An example being examining the impact of statutory recognition procedure brought in under the Employment Relations Act 1999. For example, where it is identified that a workplace has a recognised union in 2004 but not in 1998, the aim will be to find out why this change has occurred.

### ***3.8 Taking the design of the survey content forward***

The Sponsors will be consulting with teams of specialists regarding designing or re-designing questions and, in some cases, question areas. The following areas/issues will be considered by the specialist teams: (i) technology issues/performance; (ii) stress, job satisfaction and skills; (iii) partnership; (iv) corporate governance/beyond the workplace; (v) the worker representative questionnaire; and, (vi) the implications for the design of the survey instrument of including small firms/SMEs. This work will run alongside the development work undertaken by the WERS research team who will be responsible for designing the draft questionnaires prior to the appointment of a fieldwork contractor.

## **4. Survey Outputs**

### **4.1 Data**

Like previous surveys in the series, data from WERS5 will be available from the Data Archive at the University of Essex. It is expected that the data will be deposited and available prior to the publication of the sourcebook (full-report) of main findings from the study. As before, those conducting early analysis of the WERS data will be expected to sign an undertaking that no work will be published until the survey sourcebook is published.

### **4.2 Publication of findings**

There was uniform positive feedback from the consultation exercise regarding the inclusion of a *First Findings* booklet. This initial summary of findings will be retained.

The consultation exercise also indicated that there were significant demands for another survey sourcebook. There will be a single integrated descriptive account of the survey findings.

### **4.3 Other means of dissemination**

ESRC funded NIESR to run the WERS98 Data Dissemination Service to promote the use of the data among the academic and wider community. The technical expertise and support provided by the Service was widely praised and noted by the academic consultation.

The consultation also suggested that there may be a demand for access to the data beyond the findings presented in the sourcebook but not necessarily through the Data Archive. A suggestion was also made for on-line access to the data to be made available similar to data made available through ONS' Statbase. There was also a suggestion for a CD containing tables with standard break variables to be included alongside the sourcebook. The sponsors will consider these suggestions.

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