



Pilot employer survey on skill needs in Europe: outcomes of pre-tests and effects on the pilot survey

Expert workshop, 20-21 October 2011, Bratislava

Summary and conclusions

Background

The expert workshop was organised by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), within its network of experts in the field of early identification of skill needs 'Skillsnet' and hosted by Institute of Banking Education NBS in Bratislava .

The workshop gathered experts from different fields (experts on surveys, statisticians, representatives of employers, etc.) to discuss results of the development work achieved so far and steer next steps of the project. The specific objective of the workshop is getting expert's feedback and input on:

- the results of both conventional and cognitive pre-tests;
- the proposed improvements of the questionnaire based on pre-tests results;
- the final implementation/fieldwork strategy, in particular strategies to ensure high response rates and reliable data by employers.

Measurement concept and general results of the pre-tests

The workshop started with a presentation of an overall measurement concept and questionnaire at a glance. It was followed by presentation of the pre-test concept and objectives as well as general fieldwork reporting. The open discussion revealed the following main ideas:

- Discussion about occupational titles brought up the suggestion to use national classifications (national titles) if possible to ensure that respondent understands well the titles coming from ISCO. *It is concluded that it is not necessary to change the approach used at this stage as ISCO proved working well in the pre-test. However, one might use adequate "national titles" or, as stated by respondents, "job-titles" as explanation to exclude misunderstanding.*
- For the selection of sectors it was proposed to reflect on the economic importance of various sectors for the given country (e.g. tourism in Spain) and similarly suggested to add 1-2 country specific occupations in addition to those pre-selected for international comparisons. *Acknowledging that for the pilot a common set of sectors should be considered across countries, it has been decided that the current approach will not change for the pilot but the proposals might be used for the full survey. In the pilot, in line with the main objective of the survey to recognise changing/emerging tasks/skills, sectors are selected according to the*

dynamism/innovation and skill levels (more in research paper on phase 1). At least regarding employment, the following sectors are top in Spain (ranking; NACE digit 1):

- 1 Wholesale and retail trade; repair of....
- 2 Manufacturing
- 3 Construction
- 4 Public administration
- 5 Accommodation and food service activities
- 6 Human health and social work activities
- 7 Education

Therefore, selected sectors are not either too bad for Spain. As regards country-specific occupations, what might be interesting in a full survey is information as such on new (national) occupations (with new tasks).

- Proposal to re-think the selection process for the occupational group to be covered in the given questionnaire to allow proper international comparability in light of the planned large-scale survey was one of the major issues. *It was decided to change the selection process from respondents choice of changing occupation to random selection. But we have to consider the coverage of those occupations with specific task list to reliably evaluate the measurement concept. In this respect, it was also decided to reduce the number of occupational groups in each sector to 3 (7*3=15 occupational groups in total). This will provide higher number of observations per occupation and will allow for a more reliable evaluation of this innovative measurement concept.*
- The discussion also brought up the issue of importance of module 4 and (sometimes limited) ability for the HR people to answer; use of mixed mode (CATI, CAWI, etc.) for the fieldwork as a current trend in employer surveys; the importance of the preparatory phase (especially the strategy for large companies to get the right respondent) and various improvements for the motivation letter (to stress benefits for employers, provide report/benchmarks on exclusive basis which would be short, sharp and timely). *All these suggestions will be taken into account when analysis the results from the pilot and when preparing the recommendations for the European large-scale survey.*

Introduction and respondent identification

- Suggestion to change the wording in the introduction to “the European Union Centre for the development...” , “survey of employers” as well as swapping the task and the title in the respondent identification *was applied for the final questionnaire.*
- Suggestion to leave out the word “skills” from the title of the questionnaire and possibly also from the introduction not to scare the employers and to add word “business” in there *was also considered for the final questionnaire.*

Module 1

- *Several suggestions were made in relation to Module 1 of the questionnaire and the following were applied in the final version: keep Q100a on single independent organisation; insert in Q105 on skills and training needs analysis the word “usually” or “regularly”; in Q106 to modify the wording to simplify the question or split in two questions (the latter is applied) and to change “in the past year” to “in 2011” as well as to add obligatory “by law”; Q108 is delete because the selection of occupational group changed to random; change Q109 to identify the largest occupational group in the establishment due to the change in the selection of occupational*

group; in Q104 “university degree” was changed to “university level degree” to capture all tertiary level education and “usually” require was added.

- Suggestion to add similar question to Q105 but on task analysis *was not taken on board at this stage as it might be confusing and there is a preference to see first the results of the pilot on Q105 before any new similar question is introduced.*
- Suggestion for Q113 to quantify hard to fill vacancies (e.g. 8 weeks) *was also not applied as the approach of the UK NESS is used where “hard to fill vacancies” are those classified by respondent as hard-to-fill. It is left to the respondent to report about those vacancies that are according to his recent experience and under given relevant conditions “hard to fill”. We would like to compare hard-to-fill vacancies as perceived by employer; therefore it’s not a comparability problem, in our view. Any duration might actually counteract. Respondent might think/say that 8 weeks (or any other duration) is not relevant to him.*
- Suggestion to follow up on Q114 with question on BA/MA degree or technical/non-technical orientation or to enquire education or certificates specific for the group *was also not applied as it would add methodological difficulties (in particular across countries) and the precise qualification is not a primary objective of the survey. “BA/MA” might not be clear to all respondents, also “technical/non-technical”.*

Module 2

- Based on the suggestions to delete “notably”, especially if we decide for random selection and voices against the new dichotomy scale for change, *it has been decided to re-insert the 3-point scale for change (increasing, decreasing or staying about the same) and to delete “notably” as well as “currently”. “Currently” will, however, be kept as a hint for interviewers in case respondent would seek a timeframe.*
- Suggestion to cluster systematically the generic domains to reduce the monotony, to keep the respondent interested and to structure the questionnaire for him/her *is to be considered in finalising the questionnaire.*
- As regards the generic domains, from suggestions to cut “green” domains, reading, writing and math, *it has been decided to delete Q230 on rules and standards on environmental protection.*
- Suggestion to ask “have you observed” in change questions *is not applied in the final version due to the limited time and insertion of this would increase the monotonousness as well as the length.*
- Suggestion to take out “often” in Q242 to be more neutral *is applied (also in all similar questions).*

Module 3

- The discussion of occupation-specific module revealed the methodological problems and questioned the use of ISCO for tasks but in general the module *is accepted and will be tested in the pilot survey.*
- A considerable interest was generated by the newly emerging tasks; many participants were in favour to bring this to the core of the questionnaire and to include some follow-up questions. *Follow-up question are inserted in the final questionnaire focusing mainly on the availability of training courses and providers and availability of staff to recruit to perform newly emerging tasks. This will serve also as a kind of back-up plan in case the occupation-specific task module proves difficult in the pilot.*

- Remark for Q303 that newly emerging tasks need clear timeframe *is not applied to remain consistent across the questionnaire* but suggestion to bring in a special introduction for the newly emerging tasks in interviews where the occupation-specific tasks are not asked *is applied (otherwise respondents might refer to generic tasks).*
- Based on the proposals, Q304 asks to list again all named newly emerging tasks in the final questionnaire.
- Proposal to validate newly emerging tasks and drivers of change by organising few additional face-to-face interviews *will be taken into account for analysis of the pilot results.*

Module 4

- Suggestion to insert sales and marketing innovations in Q400 *is applied in the final questionnaire* whereas the suggestion to split outsourcing and alliances *is not applied at this stage mainly due to the questionnaire length issue and according to the example from the CIS survey.*
- Suggestion to reformulate Q402 *is applied in the form of “...or standards and regulations”.*
- Q404 and Q405 *are reformulated in light of the change in the occupational group selection procedure to random.*
- Suggestions to add forward looking question on intentions (investments) and more information about the enterprise (e.g. if growing or declining enterprise) *are not applied at this stage mainly due to the questionnaire length.*

Implications for the full large-scale survey

Based on the discussion in the workshop the following issues are to be looked at when recommendations for the full large-scale survey are drafted:

- Mixed mode of data collection will be thought upon
- Additional question to allow matching of different data sets; check for countries where linking is possible
- Sampling for the full survey has to be clear and matrix with expected outcomes has to be done to suggest what kind of analysis can be expected, incl. level of detail (tabulation)
- Regularity should be ensured to give credibility; avoiding only one-off survey
- Results of the pilot should be shown to subject matter experts for validation and plausibility

Next steps

- Eurofound will supply to Cedefop their work on transition from ISCO88 to ISCO08
- Finalisation of the Phase 2 report or initial stage of Phase 3 will include:
 - o Matrix with expected outcomes for analysis/tabulations as mentioned above (at least few tables and indicators)
 - o Analysis of open questions on emerging tasks
 - o Analysis of the respondents who did not feel to be the right ones
- Modifications to the questionnaire based on the decisions above
- Final master questionnaire to participants will be sent to participants
- The pilot survey will be prepared and run in the beginning of 2012
- Based on the results the decision on if and when the data could be available to researchers will be taken
- Pilot validation workshop with experts to be organised in May 2012

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