

MINUTES of third STILE WP5 user group meeting Ireland

Date: 21/2/03 14:00-15:30

Venue: Buswell's Hotel, Molesworth Street, Dublin

Present:

Nicola Tickner, Central Statistics Office;
Imogen Bertin, Cork Teleworking Centre;
Paula Carey, Irish Congress of Trade Unions;
Ivica Milicevic, Work Research Centre;
John O'Flaherty, MAC, University of Limerick (representing the Ework Action Forum);
Timo Kauppinen, European Foundation

Apologies:

Katie Connolly, IBEC, Paul McGrath, UCD and Michael McGloughlin, Amarach.
Both Katie and Michael reported their general agreement with the conclusions of the final user group meeting after reviewing the draft minutes.

1. CSO release

Nicola distributed printed copies of the CSO release of the QNHS teleworking module from Autumn 2002. She recapped the main findings.

- Overall level of home teleworking is about 2.3% of workforce or 39,000 people.
- The figures exclude agricultural workers although there are about 2000 people in this sector who fit the teleworking definition. Including them does not alter the overall figures.
- Two-thirds of teleworkers are male.
- Over 70% have a third level qualification compared to 40% of the non-agricultural workforce as a whole.
- A group of women with children under 5 show a greater likelihood for teleworking than other females.
- About 40% are in the Dublin region (the same as the overall population distribution)
- Four-fifths are in managerial/professional occupations
- Only a half usually telework. About a further quarter sometimes telework and had worked from home during the reference week. A further quarter had not worked from home during the reference week.

John commented that the level of education indicated that the old stereotype of teleworking as a form of low-paid exploitative piecework was clearly inaccurate. He also felt the definition of having a PC with a telecommunications link in use which was necessary to complete the work might be too restrictive, and so in his view the overall level of teleworking was somewhere between the 3.5% level for those who had a PC with a telecommunications link but did not actually require the link and the 2.3% figure for those who did need their link.

Ivica commented that the results were very much in line with the SIBIS survey. He said he would circulate the SIBIS results when they become available in the next few weeks. There is to be a SIBIS highlights document, a pocketbook of statistics but unfortunately there is no decision-makers survey for Ireland for budgetary reasons. Details of the GPS for Ireland should also be available.

Paula was interested to see that clerical/administrative teleworking was so low, and commented that she was personally finding it extremely difficult to manage a project of this nature due to the extra time involved in dealing with colleagues at a distance.

Imogen commented that although the questions had picked up a group of women with small children who were teleworking, there was no evidence of an over-representation of self-employment in this group, unlike the situation found by Joanne Pratt in the US. Ivica said that the FAMILIES project case studies had indicated women certainly did not replace childcare with teleworking – it was additional, usually there was also still a childcare requirement.

Imogen also said that the self employment rate was quite high in Ireland compared to other countries – around 50% compared to the UK, where 43% were self-employed, and the US, where 30% are self-employed. There was some evidence from the time series in the UK LFS figures that self employment drops as a percentage as teleworking develops in that it tends to remain static while employed teleworking increases.

Nicola pointed out that as more men are self-employed than women anyway this might explain the difference.

Ivica was concerned that the questions were missing the mobile teleworkers and therefore could be an underestimate based on the SIBIS results. Imogen briefly spoke about the results of the Austrian Microcensus survey which seemed to show that in fact very few people were teleworkers who never worked at home, so it might not be much of an underestimate. John felt from his personal experience in the software industry that this wasn't the case, and that mobile teleworking is becoming a more integral part of normal work practices. Imogen agreed it would become more prevalent as Wifi hotspots and broadband technology become more widely available. There was agreement that the Austrian approach of separating the location of work from the method of delivery of the results was interesting. Ivica said that Statistik Austria is represented on the SIBIS user group and seems to be very active in this area.

2. Minutes of last meeting

These were approved.

3. WP5 recommendations

The group considered the two pages of the WP5 recommendations document which covered the questions proposed (attached separately). There was general agreement that the core questions and additional questions did cover all the relevant indicators.

Imogen explained that placing the ICT question first has less “filtering effect” than placing the location question first because about 40% of the workforce use a computer but only 10% work away from the traditional workplace or at home. However, there had been some problems with the pilot questionnaire because of the complexity of the location question. Question D was an attempt to ensure that the locational information was not just general locational information but did relate to teleworking activities including ICTs.

In relation to the order of questions, there was general agreement that it was important to begin with the simpler ICT question and that there was added value in finding out who was using a computer and/or the Internet at work.

The group also considered the issue of measuring telework intensity. Paula pointed out that there is a concept in employment law, which was important in relation to part time work, of continuous work which does not necessarily have to be consecutive. Imogen felt there was a difference between someone who perhaps once every three months spent several days at home, and someone who regularly spent a small amount of time such as half a day once a week.

Imogen suggested adding something like “Do you do this regularly yes/no” after the question about hours per week spent teleworking. Nicola pointed out that the interviewers would need specific guidance on what “regularly” meant. There was no general agreement on what it might mean (more than 50% of working weeks including some time spent teleworking?). Paula asked how the question on part-time v. full time employment in the QNHS is defined. Nicola explained it

is up to the respondents to define themselves as fulltime or part time. The group decided to recommend that the question on regularity should be left up to the respondent to decide.

4. AOB

There had been coverage of the CSO release in the Irish Independent, Irish Examiner and Irish Times. Unfortunately the piece in the Irish Times appeared to have been subedited incorrectly and give the impression the telework rate was less than 1%. Imogen asked if anyone sees any other coverage of the release to inform her so she could collect the clippings.

Imogen also explained that there would be another set of questions on teleworking in Autumn 2003 as part of the Eurostat ICT module which would provide a lot more information on the technology issues. However, the questions would not be directly equivalent to Autumn 2002 so they would not provide any time series.

All present said they would like to receive the results of this module, which Nicola thought would be available in early 2004.

It was agreed that draft minutes of this meeting be circulated to all user group members to allow those not present to make an input by email.

Imogen repeated the invitation for user group members to attend the Rome meeting but unfortunately everyone reported that they were too busy to attend.

Timo commented that he would be interested to receive any input from the user group members to the European Foundation's knowledge society foresight activities.

5. Thanks

Imogen thanked all the user group members on behalf of the STILE project for giving up their time so generously to advise the project. The teleworking work packages were now drawing to a close, although CTC and the CSO would continue to do some work on the occupational and sectoral coding issues for the project.