

## **MINUTES of first STILE WP5 user group meeting Ireland**

Date: 23/4/02 15:00-17:00

Venue: Davenport Hotel, Merrion Square, Dublin

Present:

Nicola Tickner, Central Statistics Office;

Imogen Bertin, Cork Teleworking Centre;

Paula Carey, Irish Congress of Trade Unions;

Katie Connolly, Irish Business and Employers Confederation;

Timo Kauppinen, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Ivica Milicevic, Work Research Centre

John O'Flaherty, MAC, University of Limerick (representing the Ework Action Forum)

Paul McGrath, Smurfit Business School, University College Dublin

### **1. Introduction**

Imogen Bertin briefly explained the background to the project including:

- the aims of the user group
- the plan to include some questions in the Irish QNHS this year
- the Eurostat ICTNEED question (and its delay to 2005)
- the application for an ad hoc module to be decided in June by the National Statistics Board
- the use of the list of indicators by other partners to pilot a survey with 200 teleworkers
- the availability of funding for any member of the user group who wished to attend the Ghent conference

Partners then introduced themselves.

Imogen Bertin said she worked as an independent consultant and was interested in finding out about the true level of eworking so that appropriate policy responses could be made. She was a member of the Ework Action Forum and had also been involved in drawing up the Code of Practice. She had recently carried out work for the EMERGENCE project which indicated that levels of demand for ework in Ireland appeared to be well below European averages.

Paula Carey explained that she had been a member of the original National Advisory Council on teleworking and had also been involved in drawing up the Code of Practice. ICTU had a specific interest in family friendly policies. ICTU itself was currently taking on two disabled teleworkers and encountering the practical problems first hand. Also there was pressure building up among public sector workers who wished to have access to eworking as a family friendly option, in line with the commitment in the Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness resolution on teleworking.

Nicola Tickner explained that she was the main labour market statistician in the CSO looking at this issue and had been involved in drafting the questions which will be included in the QNHS this year. Her role was also to advise on what sort of questions could be sensibly asked through a survey like the QNHS, and also to ensure that the list of indicators did not produce an unrealistic burden of questions or data processing.

Timo Kauppinen said that the Foundation had been involved in telework research since the late 1970s. Interest had declined for a while when it became clear teleworking wasn't going to take over the world, but had increased again recently. The Foundation was currently involved in a programme of activities on knowledge society foresight, and was assessing tenders from member states to run national Knowledge Foresight Centres.

Katie Connolly reported that she had also been involved in drawing up the Code of Practice and was a member of the Ework Action Forum. IBEC had been collecting information on the incidence of teleworking through various of its surveys. It was also interested in the broad range of family-friendly policies. Katie has also been involved in the UNICE/ETUC negotiations for a European framework agreement on teleworking.

Ivica Milicevic said that the Work Research Centre had been working on teleworking issues since the mid-1980s, including the major ECATT survey carried out in 1999. In addition the WRC was involved in the SIBIS project, and in the FAMILIES project which was looking at the effect of new forms of work on family life. In general he felt the figures for teleworking incidence had remained stubbornly low.

Paul McGrath explained that he had become involved in the user group by a roundabout route when the ESRI had no-one to put forward and that his background was management practices. He was generally sceptical that telework was a separate phenomenon. For example, consultants had always worked in a location-independent way but were enabled to do so more intensively by ICTs. He was concerned that work by consultants on customer premises appeared to be excluded by the initial list of indicators. He was also involved in a research project on call centre management techniques.

John O'Flaherty explained that his role was liaison between the user group and the Ework action forum and that he had been involved in a wide range of Information Society Technology projects for the Commission in the past, as well as in evaluating projects.

## **2. General background**

Imogen reminded the group that their basic task was to ensure that the information gleaned was useful to their users, and also for reasons of practicality, to cut back and prioritise the number of indicators included in the IRES list.

She gave a summary of the likely data users and their information requirements. She felt all data users needed certain essential pieces of information:

- Extent (numbers)
- Working patterns (duration, location)
- Equipment used
- Demographic profile
- Sectoral/occupational profile
- Nature of work contract

In addition there was a raft of other pieces of information of use to policy makers and researchers:

- Journey substitution
- Land use and planning
- Employment/enterprise creation
- Labour shortage/skill retention issues
- Family friendly initiatives
- Regionalisation
- Productivity (compared to conventional workers)
- Work opportunities for the socially excluded
- Health and safety (isolation, ergonomics, working hours)

The first point which needed to be discussed was whether the approach in use in the UK LFS and now in the QNHS, which tried to extract the conjunction between work location and ICTs (disaggregation approach) was the best one, or whether there was an argument for using a definition of ework or telework.

The second very important point was the issue of whether or not to include the self-employed. The Eurostat proposals appeared to exclude this for reasons which were not clear, especially as in most surveys they make up one third to one half of teleworkers. The reasons might be because of differences between self employment definitions in different countries, or because Eurostat was only interested in trip substitution (telecommuting). There was also the problem of whether self-employed teleworkers were intensively teleworking, or if they were “e-enabled” – ie as Paul McGrath had said, they just used the technology to work in the way they had always worked.

Nicola Tickner explained that it was quite open to the national statistical bodies to use the Eurostat approach but to include the self employed in their analysis.

Finally, Imogen felt that it was going to be important but difficult to ensure that it wasn't just homeworking which was analysed, but also other forms of location-independent working such as mobile teleworking, hotdesking and working on client premises.

### **3. Essential indicators**

The group was broadly in agreement with the IRES proposals here that the key indicators are:

- Work taking place away from the conventional office (subdivided into homeworking, mobile working, use of hotdesk or other remote site)
- Existence and nature of ICT link necessary to complete the work
- Time spent eworking (duration and regularity).

Paula Carey made a strong case for including motivation as an essential indicator. If the results of the research were to have any practical effect on business practice or government policy, the reasons why people wanted to telework, who initiated the arrangement and whether it was considered permanent would be vital information. Otherwise it would be yet another unused set of statistics gathering dust. ICTU felt there was huge demand for teleworking but at the moment only “professionals” were allowed the option by their employers.

Ivica felt that a GPS survey could only give one half of this picture since it would miss the view of the manager/employer/customer – this was why ECATT had been designed as a pair of surveys – one of managers and one of the general population.

The user group agreed with Paula's suggestion and gave some suggestions for answer codes on motivation: to increase productivity, to avoid interruption, to improve work life balance, to reduce commuting time, required by job/employer. Paula also wanted to include a question on whether they wished to continue teleworking to examine the importance of the reversibility issue (this is currently proving controversial in the UNICE/ETUC negotiations but is likely to be resolved long before the STILE results will be available).

Timo was concerned that the indicators must look at whether mobile teleworkers such as engineers were increasing the length of their working day since this had been found in Finland and elsewhere. Nicola pointed out that the QNHS would pick up the length of the working week as a piece of standard information.

### **4. Other indicators**

There was considerable discussion about item 4.1 “Kind of activity done from a distance”. The conclusion was that the level 1 occupational categories (Manager, Clerical etc.) should be given as answer optional codes here because what we want to know is what sort of activity the person is carrying out when teleworking and whether this is different to their main occupation in any way. Ivica was concerned that as we cannot directly compare many of the question answers to non-teleworkers, it's important to be careful with the filtering so that, for those who spend part of their time in the office, the differences between what they do there and what they do when teleworking are brought out.

Paul was concerned that the issue of changes to relations with colleagues should be examined since it was his experience from research that colleague relations were more affected than manager relations.

Katie felt there was a lot of occasional or ad hoc teleworking going on, and that this would increase as more and more technology became available. The informal teleworkers were actually the largest group, about whom the least information was available. It was important to establish whether or not the teleworking arrangement was informal or formal, regular or occasional.

Paul felt that the list of indicators was still a little unclear on who the target grouping was – would it include consultants working on customer premises? What should be done with the “e-enabled”? He himself was a teleworker by most definitions but in fact, as a lecturer, he had always worked part time at home and part time in the college. Technology just made him more productive.

Imogen said she felt the only practical approach was to start by filtering for people working outside the conventional office, followed by a technology filter. However, there was another possible approach suggested by Ursula Huws, which was to filter by use of ICT and then ask for the location of the ICT use.

## **5. Restructuring**

The group felt that the current list of indicators was in need of some restructuring.

*[Note: we did not use the latest list of indicators including the Hungarian comments as we found this list impossible to use due to complexity – the discussion was based around the list with initial Irish recommendations submitted to IRES on 25<sup>th</sup> March].*

John felt there were duplications and some inaccurate terminology (Timo felt that section 8 entitled labour relations was actually about communications). There were also some omissions. As there was insufficient time to revise the list appropriately in the meeting, and it is clear that it will be the subject of considerable discussion in Ghent and Kinsale, it was decided to provide a list of comments to aid the restructuring instead, including recommendations for deletion.

Section 4 should be a section on work environment. In addition to looking at what activities are carried out while teleworking, it should include information on:

- whether it is a formal or informal arrangement
- the question on motivation (see above)
- who initiated the arrangement
- whether they want to continue teleworking (demand for reversibility)
- whether the workspace for the telework activity has been assessed for health and safety
- differences in how work is measured or appraised while teleworking (formerly question 13.1 measurement/assessment of work).
- level of control over working pattern (there are some questions from a previous Eurostat/QNHS module which could be used here)
- whether the interviewee feels they have sufficient workspace available to them for teleworking (this avoids having to ask a series of time consuming questions about size of house – Timo pointed out that there are technical issues here as a number of countries use total square metres, whereas Britain and Ireland use number of rooms. Imogen pointed out in terms of suitable working space for teleworking, it is usually a separate available room which is required)

The group was agreed that, while there is no point in including questions on pay because it reduces the response rate, it would be useful to ask how people are remunerated (piece work/project work/hourly/weekly/monthly/salary).

Some pieces of information which are collected as standard in the LFS questionnaire are missing from the existing list and should be included. These include:

- Length of time in current job
- Highest education level attained
- Trade union membership

It was pointed out that since most current teleworkers were professionals, they might well be in professional associations rather than trade unions but we decided not to pursue this issue in the interests of keeping the number of questions down.

In relation to the ICT link, there is clearly a tension between the number of questions and the information that can be gleaned. A question along the lines of "How many times a day do you collect email"? was felt to be useful in establishing internet use and intensity of ICT use in a concise way that was not technology dependent. A question on duration/percentage of PC use in the working day (if concise) would also be useful (cf Helen Hootsman's recent work on teleworker productivity).

The following questions should be deleted as unimportant:

6.3 Quota of colleagues/clients involved in telework

7.1 Telework training

All of section 8 should be deleted except that the question about formal/informal arrangements which is moved to section 4.

9.1 How extra time gained from lack of movement is used

Question 9.3 Assessment of effect of telework on personal life should be changed to "Has teleworking improved your quality of life?"

Question 10.1 Task content is a repeat of 4.1 and should be deleted.

Questions 10.4-10.6 and 10.9 (feedback, degree of complexity/difficulty, challenging nature of job, intention to change job) should be deleted

Katie and Paula felt 10.7 and 10.8 (career opportunity and job security) should be asked of employed (dependent) teleworkers.

Section 12 should be scrapped apart from standard sectoral and occupational data normally collected in the LFS surveys.

Question 13.1 has been moved to section 4.

Section 14 should be based on the CLFS travel to work ad hoc module questions (see WP2 report for this).

Nicola pointed out that just asking questions 1 to 3 could possibly take up half the space normally devoted to an ad hoc module so it was clear further pruning would be required at a later date.

John requested that for the next meeting a set of draft filtered questions be available as the current list was confusing to read.

## **6. Next meeting**

This is likely to be held in early June, after the Ghent and Kinsale meetings.

## **7. Expenses**

Members are asked to submit any expenses to Imogen Bertin.