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Better Knowledge Better Society

Data Brief: Skills and
Employment Survey

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The Skills and Employment Survey (SES) dataset contains a nationally representative sample of individuals in employment aged between 20-65. This data brief focuses on the latest two surveys conducted in 2006 and 2012. The surveys provide a unique source of information on skill and employment in Britain, including questions on: employment, occupation, duties, skills and qualifications, work attitudes, the employing organisation, pay and conditions, job and skill changes and future perspectives, as well as demographic characteristics.

This data brief summarises the data items that are available and particular issues surrounding the use of the SES.

Mae cronfa ddata'r Arolwg Sgiliau a Chyflogaeth (SES) yn cynnwys sampl sy'n gynrychioliadol o'r genedl gyfan o unigolion sydd mewn gwaith ac sydd rhwng 20 a 65 oed. Mae'r crynodeb data'n canolbwyntio ar y ddau arolwg diwethaf a gynhaliwyd yn 2006 (SES 2006) a 2012 (SES 2012). Mae'r arolygon yn adnodd ar gyfer dadansoddi anghenion sgiliau a swyddi ym Mhrydain. Mae'r arolwg yn cynnwys cwestiynau am: gwaith, galwedigaeth, dyletswyddau, sgiliau a chymwysterau, agwedd tuag at y gwaith, y sefydliad cyflogi, cyflogau ac amodau, newidiadau i swyddi a sgiliau, a phersbectifau'r dyfodol, yn ogystal â nodweddion demograffig. Felly, mae'r arolwg yn ffynhonnell unigryw o wybodaeth am sgiliau a chyflogaeth ym Mhrydain.

Mae'r crynodeb data hwn yn crynhoi'r eitemau data sydd ar gael ac yn nodi problemau penodol ynglŷn â defnyddio'r data.

Introduction

The Skills and Employment Survey (SES) series contains nationally representative samples of individual-level data on employed people between the ages of 20 and 65. It contains extensive data on many aspects of work, but with a particular emphasis on the skills and quality of jobs.

The SES series is made of six distinct cross-sectional surveys. The first, the Social Change and Economic Life Survey (SCELI), was carried out in 1986, followed by Employment in Britain (EIB) in 1992 and the Skills Survey in 1997. Although the latter had a narrower focus than either the SCELI or EIB it

carried a number of common questions and addressed a number of common themes. The Skills Survey 1997 was repeated with amendments in 2001 and 2006. In 2012 it was broadened slightly to include more survey items on the quality of jobs and so the survey was renamed the Skills and Employment Survey, a label now used to describe the six-survey series.

This data brief describes the last two in the series – 2006 and 2012. Both were funded by a variety of government departments and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), with area boosts supported by agencies with geographical responsibilities.

Structure and Contents of the Skills and Employment Survey

The 2006 survey sample comprised 4,800 workers in Britain and an additional total of 2,987 boost interviews conducted across the East Midlands, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In 2012 the survey sample comprised of 3,200 people in paid employment in Britain, south of the Caledonian Canal. Of this 418 cases were part of a sample boost for Wales funded by the Welsh Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD).

Both employees and self-employed workers were eligible for interview provided they were aged between 20 and 65 and were paid for at least one hour of work per week at the time of interview. This represents a change from previous surveys where individuals were aged between 20 and 60. Information about the sampling procedures can be found with the SES 2012 technical report.

The surveys were conducted at the home of respondents by trained interviewers who used computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) techniques. For the 2006 survey the mean interview length was 53 minutes and the response rate obtained was 57% of screened eligible respondents. For the 2012 survey the mean interview length was 59 minutes and the response rate obtained was 49% of screened eligible respondents.

The surveys have three objectives:

- 1) To chart the level and distribution of skills requirements of jobs as well as the incidence, volume and quality of training and learning in Britain.
- 2) To describe and analyse the level and distribution of key aspects of workers' experiences of their jobs – such as the level of job control, work intensity, insecurity and well-being at work – and make comparisons over time.
- 3) To make the data available for further analyses by academic or policy-based researchers in the field of skills and job quality.

The 2006 and 2012 surveys are built upon similar content, though some new questions were added in 2012 to complement existing questions and explore emerging issues. New questions were subject to cognitive pre-tests to ensure they were appropriate.

The questionnaires were comprised of eleven sections focusing on specific areas. These were:

- A - Checking eligibility (age and whether in paid work in the last 7 days)
- B - Broad questions about the current job
- C - Detailed job analysis questions
- D - Computing skills and Qualifications questions
- E - Work attitudes
- F - The employing organisation
- G - Pay questions
- H - The job five years ago
- I - Recent skill changes and future perspectives
- J - Personal details
- K - Details of organisation and re-contact

A wide variety of information concerning skill, training and the job are therefore available within the data. Key areas include: skills (qualifications, skills necessary for the job, informal learning at work, employer training); quality of work tasks (job task discretion, work effort, task characteristics (eg. repetitiveness)); work organisation (types of teamwork, direct participation, union involvement); and employment conditions (pay and hours, contract status, promotion opportunities, job security). Questions are also asked concerning job satisfaction, motivation and well-being.



Observations within the Skills & Employment Survey

Table 1 shows the percentage of participants by gender, age and occupational classifications for both surveys. The representativeness of the achieved survey samples is compared to data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) (Quarter 2) for each of these years. Compared to population estimates derived from the LFS, males

and those aged 20-29 are under-represented within the achieved survey samples. The under-representation of these groups is apparent within both the 2006 and 2012 Surveys. To take account of this, depending upon the sub-sets of data that can be used, a number of different weights are attached to the data. The variation in sample weights are due to the need to account for differential probabilities of sample selection caused for example by

multiple persons eligible for interview within one household, or over-sampling of boost populations. Weights were created using LFS distributions across a range of socio-economic indicators including gender, age and occupational group.

Further information on weighting is contained within Felstead *et al.* (2013).

Table 1: Representativeness of the Skills and Employment Surveys

	2006		2012	
	SES	LFS	SES	LFS
Gender:	%	%	%	%
Male	49.6	54.0	47.6	53.8
Female	50.4	46.0	52.4	46.2
Age:	%	%	%	%
20-29 yrs	16.5	21.0	17.5	21.8
30-39 yrs	26.5	25.7	21.7	23.2
40-49 yrs	28.9	26.9	28.6	27.2
50-60 yrs	24.1	22.2	25.7	22.7
61-65 yrs	4.1	4.3	6.5	5.2
Occupation (SOC 2000 Major Group):	%	%	%	%
Managers & Senior Officials	15.4	16.0	10.4	10.4
Professional	12.2	13.8	18.1	20.2
Associate Professional & Technical	15.8	15.0	14.9	14.3
Administrative & Secretarial	12.6	12.2	10.5	11.2
Skilled Trades	11.1	10.7	11.6	10.8
Personal Services	8.2	7.8	11.7	9.0
Sales & Customer Services	6.4	6.5	6.8	7.6
Process, Plant & Machine Operatives	8.1	7.7	6.3	6.5
Elementary	10.1	10.4	9.7	10.0

Consent to link

Within both surveys, participants were also asked for consent to link the data given to other data. Where obtained, the SES data can be linked to other survey data and administrative datasets – for example, health, earning or education data held by government departments. Participants were asked: “It is sometimes possible to link the data we have collected from you with other surveys or datasets, to which our clients have authorised access. In doing this, we assure you that your confidentiality will be respected and the linked data will be anonymised and used for statistical and analytical purposes only, with only authorised researchers having access to the linked data. Would you be content for our clients to do this, as it can provide potential for further analysis?”

Table 2 shows the number of respondents who consented to have their data linked and how the proportion who gave their consent varies by country, gender and age. Within both surveys, almost 80% of respondents gave consent for their data to be linked (2006: 79.7%; 2012: 77.2%). This results in a potentially linkable sample size from the 2006 survey of 6,185 individuals and from the 2012 survey of 2,470 individuals. However, it is important to consider the representativeness of those who gave consent to link compared to those in the original sample. The issue of sample selection has been considered in the context of randomised control trials of follow-up samples. This reveals that dropping out of such trials is not random. Hence selection biases are introduced which, if not uncorrected, will bias the results (Hemming et al

2008). Data in Table 2 does not appear to suggest the presence of systematic differences in the propensity with which different groups of respondent provided their consent for data linking in 2006.

Regression analysis confirmed that there is no bias in terms of consent to link by gender, age or country in 2006. However, in 2012 respondents in Scotland were significantly less likely to provide consent compared to respondents in England and Wales, and older respondents were also less inclined to provide consent compared to those aged 20-29. Combined analysis of the 2006 and 2012 data also revealed that there was a greater propensity for respondents to provide their consent to link in 2006 than in 2012.

Table 2: Number of respondents and proportion of consent to link

	SES 2006		SES 2012	
	%	N	%	N
Full Sample	79.7	6,185	77.2	2,470
Country:				
England	80.1	4,872	78.4	2,406
Wales	80.0	325	74.5	437
Scotland ¹	78.6	1,102	70.5	146
Northern Ireland	80.5	397	-	-
Sex:				
Male	79.8	3,130	77.2	1,163
Female	79.7	1,572	77.2	1,307
Age:				
20-29 yrs	80.2	939	82.3	391
30-39 yrs	79.5	1,649	77.4	556
40-49 yrs	79.8	1,767	77.8	717
50-60 yrs	80.2	1,443	75.2	582
61-65 yrs	77.9	387	72.0	224

¹ NB: Scottish figures refer to lowlands only

Previous Research Using the Skills and Employment Survey

The SES series has been used to research employment and skills in Britain. The datasets have allowed researchers to trace the changing world of work since the 1980s. A number of ‘first finding’ reports have been published for the SES 2012 which can be found at www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/ses2012. An edited collection of essays is also available (Felstead et al., 2015). Topics that have been explored using the SES include skill-utilisation, job insecurity, worker well-being and fear at work. Example publications are provided within the references section (for a complete list of examples see http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/___data/assets/pdf_file/0005/119777/SES-known-publications.pdf).

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