



**Feasibility study for a harmonised opinion  
survey on vocational education and training**

**Final report**

**by**

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## Executive summary

### The project

Cedefop commissioned The HOST Consultancy (HOST), in association with the Training & Employment Research Network (TERN), to design and conduct a feasibility study for a harmonised EU-wide opinion survey on vocational education and training (VET).

The project explored the viability for a harmonised opinion survey with national and international agencies, the core activities of which were a postal survey of appropriate agencies in 11 Member States and more intensive face-to-face discussions in Ireland, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The survey was extended to include agencies in Canada, Switzerland and the United States.

### Overview of findings

The survey of agencies in the EU Member States showed very little activity in collecting individual opinion on VET-related matters. However, evidence of opinion-related research was found, but mostly in the form of omnibus surveys.

Current pan-EU surveys such as the Labour Force Survey were considered as potential vehicles for asking additional questions on VET, but were eventually discounted because of the broad nature of their structure and questioning.

The current European Community Household Panel Survey (ECHPS) and the Eurobarometer survey have the advantage of being opinion-based, but are disadvantaged by their generality and (especially for the ECHPS) national definitions that might apply.

Definitional problems may present further obstacles to harmonising opinion research on VET. In particular, the understanding of the concept of training may vary, and definitions of VET between Member States differ.

In developing a typology for the types of opinion-based indicators that might be used, four approaches have been identified as follows:

- (a) *scoping* indicators covering general attitudes to training activity;
- (b) *needs-based* indicators covering personal needs for training;
- (c) *experiential-based* indicators covering opinion on recent personal experience of training; and
- (d) *future training* indicators covering the perspectives of individuals on their future training needs.

A harmonised opinion survey may focus on just one of these or a combination of them.

Interest in the potential findings from a harmonised opinion survey tended to vary between Member States. Those agencies with a direct implementation role for VET tended to display different priorities to those agencies fundamentally concerned with policy matters. Other complications include the degree of regional devolution.

Three key options for moving forward were considered as follows:

- (a) make use of existing national surveys;
- (b) use an existing EU-wide survey instrument;
- (c) create a new EU-wide survey of VET.

Using existing national surveys was considered the least feasible option because of the difficulties in using existing national methods and definitions.

Using an existing EU-wide instrument such as Eurobarometer has the advantage of a broadly suitable existing methodological base. However, the multipurpose nature of the surveys would mean that only the broadly-based scoping type of opinion could be sought, which would be of relatively limited value for policy-making.

The creation of a new EU-wide survey offers the best solution for seeking opinions that go beyond the broadly-based questions. However, it represents the most expensive choice and requires careful consideration as to methods of delivery, extent of questioning, sample size and frequency.

Overall, the study shows that there is considerable potential for a harmonised opinion survey on VET. The results of such a survey would help fill the real gap in knowledge between the established enquiries on participation in VET and the more quantitative data based on participation and outcomes from that participation, and could therefore give added value to existing data on VET.

Further work in this area should concentrate on understanding cross-cultural differences on VET, establishing a clear rationale for the research and agreeing among stakeholders key policy themes. All this needs to be discussed in the context of a timeframe for the work and building up the necessary commitment from relevant agencies in Member State and EU-wide agencies.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the study

In May 1999, Cedefop commissioned The HOST Consultancy (HOST), in association with the Training and Employment Research Network (TERN), to design and conduct a feasibility study for a harmonised European opinion survey on vocational education and training (VET).

The rationale for the study is that policy-makers at EU, national, regional and local levels need information on the effectiveness of VET-based programmes and initiatives to target and guide further investments. This is an evolving area for EU-level developments, and the project aims to address an important gap on the impact of current policy focus and efforts on the opinion and attitudes of those reentering or moving into the workforce. Although a range of research instruments and evaluation material contributes to quantitative and other structured information on issues such as employer participation in VET, qualification engagement and relevance, skill attainment and mobility, very little is known of the cultural or attitudinal underpinning of this amongst individuals.

## 1.2 Objectives of the study

This project is especially concerned with assessing the scope for an opinion survey, the focus of which includes reviewing, for example, the following elements:

- (a) attitudinal indicators of key determinants of individuals' current or prospective participation in initial and continuing VET;
- (b) key measures of the image of VET, including attitudes of individuals to the value, utility and attainment of skills and qualifications;
- (c) assessment of recent participation of individuals in VET, its determinants - and key outcomes;
- (d) selected indicators on individuals' experience of the quality of VET provision and delivery;
- (e) awareness of selected VET initiatives and investments, and of information channels, access to them and their utility - aimed at informing individuals' decision-making on participation.

On the basis of the findings, the study would also explore the practical issues associated with such a survey, including the approach to sampling, questionnaire content and design, costs and other related issues.

### 1.3 Method of approach

Under the feasibility study, the aim has been to explore, with a range of national and other agencies, the viability for a harmonised approach to such intelligence gathering, the key elements of which include the following:

- (a) mapping any current national and subnational efforts at collating such data and relating this to the scope for European-level collation and/or analysis;
- (b) reviewing the content and comparability of such efforts - including frequency, sampling focus, response characteristics (and bias), survey methods and costs and cost-effectiveness in collating the likely core attitudinal information;
- (c) appraising the development of research tools, and in particular methodological developments relating to key attitudinal indicators of individual engagement, and experience of VET;
- (d) integrating the collated information from the above to produce prototype approaches and options for a harmonised European-level approach and including initial development of a research instrument.

To achieve these goals, the project identified and critically reviewed experience in all EU Member States.

Our work to date has involved two distinct, though interrelated, approaches to understanding more fully the extent of current opinion research in VET, as follows:

- (a) postal survey of appropriate agencies in 11 EU Member States (namely: Belgium, Denmark, France, Spain, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Finland);
- (b) more intensive face-to-face discussions with appropriate agencies in four EU Member States (namely: Ireland, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom).

For the postal survey, a questionnaire was developed (see Annex B) and made available in English or French. The agencies to which it was sent were identified from two initial sources, as follows:

- (a) Cedefop's documentation network;
- (b) Eurostat's working group on education and training statistics.

These contacts were seen as initial points of entry to the information on each Member State and often proved to be effective in directing the research to more appropriate agencies, rather than being particularly useful in themselves.

For the more intensive discussions in Ireland, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom, use was also made of contacts in the two networks, but supplemented by others identified over initial telephone enquiries and through preexisting network contacts. In these discussions, use was made of an interview checklist (see Annex C) which allowed a structured approach, but without sacrificing flexibility.

During the course of the work, further potentially useful contacts were identified outside the original framework, and these were pursued selectively. In particular, the national statistical institutes in Canada, Switzerland and the USA were included in the circulation list for questionnaires (as sent to the 11 EU Member States) and the results of this are included in Chapter 2 of this report.

The project was guided by a small steering group comprising a representative of Cedefop (Pascaline Descy), a representative from Eurostat (Spyros Pilos) and the two principal researchers on the project from HOST (David Parsons) and TERN (Kenneth Walsh). The steering group met on two occasions, in June 1999 at the start of the project, and in early September 1999, when the interim report was discussed and agreement was reached on the subsequent second stage of the work.

It was at the second steering group meeting that members agreed to alter the reporting format of the study, following a review of the findings from the first stage work. In particular, the decision was taken to give this final report a more conceptual focus. Central to this would be the development of a series of 'key attitudinal indicators' that would show the potential range of questions that could be used in an opinion survey and, at a later stage, provide the basis for the development of a questionnaire. This is covered in Chapter 4.

## **1.4 Report structure**

This report consists of five chapters. Chapter 2 covers the findings from the survey of the 11 Member States, plus the three additional countries sent questionnaires. It describes the approach taken (a copy of the questionnaire used in Annex B), summarises the response and draws out the issues for the study. For the four Member States where more detailed discussions were held, Chapter 3 reviews the main findings and implications for the study and the more detailed individual case studies are in Annex A.

Chapter 4 draws on the findings from both the survey and case studies to formulate our views on those attitudinal indicators of value in the VET context, with additional ideas on their use in questionnaire design. This then leads on to consideration of the feasibility and options of a harmonised opinion survey on VET in Chapter 5, thus forming the overall conclusions to the study and some ideas on the way forward for Cedefop and Eurostat.

# Chapter 2: Assessing individual attitudes to training in the EU

## 2.1 Introduction

An important part of the review has been mapping and looking at current practice on the assessment of individual attitudes to training across the EU. This has involved a two-stage process - a survey of all Member States, and a more detailed national-level review in four countries. This chapter looks at the first of these, the in-depth review, which has been our richest source of evidence on current practice.

Our focus here has been on national-level assessment. From the outset of the project, this was agreed as the most likely focus for Member States investigating this area. Here we have not restricted ourselves to regular surveys involving reviews of individual attitudes to training, but have sought to obtain evidence from irregular or ad hoc survey activities. Our main emphasis, however, has been on official surveys commissioned or conducted by government departments, agencies and semi-official bodies (e.g. social partner representative groups operating at national level or government advisory structures). Our starting point, however, is a brief review of the pan-EU sources available.

## 2.2 Pan-national assessment

The Cedefop review is centred on the likely relevance and feasibility of conducting a survey of individual attitudes to training on a pan-EU basis, and to a harmonised process. The precedents for conducting harmonised surveys on training issues are now extensive.

The household-based Labour Force Survey has been developed as a flexible survey of individuals with a core data set for comparative analysis. Although collecting some evidence of training participation, this is essentially descriptive and behavioural in focus, and does not touch on relevant attitudinal data. Of more recent origin is the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) - although focused on training activity and participation, its focus is on evidence drawn from enterprises. Any attitudinal information it might contain in the future relating to individual attitudes would be on a proxy basis (i.e. managers' perceptions of individual opinion).

Only two pan-European sources seem to offer any evidence or methodological experience of collecting attitudinal information on training from individuals. In both cases, they provide for very limited evidence and little experience on which to start to develop a more refined tool or process for collating attitudinal information on an effective harmonised basis.

**Eurobarometer:** This represents a rolling panel survey aimed at collating opinion-based data on a systematic and comparative basis across the EU. Its focus on training related attitudes has been limited. The approach has been to assess generic

attitudes to provide for a replicable and cross-cultural comparative measure. Two have been used:

- (a) *will continuing training and education improve working life?* The measure is output-specific, but of limited empirical value as it fails to distinguish between what could be seen as of non-specific value (i.e. how continuing training might benefit working life on a cross-cultural basis), and attitudes that might directly influence the behaviour of respondents themselves (i.e. how continuing training might directly influence decisions or behaviour of self);
- (b) *does the European Union have a role to play in continuing training and education?* The measure is again generic and comparative, but is probably of limited value to understanding attitudinal determinants of training participation and impact.

The main advantages of the Eurobarometer include its frequency (held twice a year in Spring and Autumn), its consistency in approach, and the rapid turnaround in the preparation of the results.

**European Community household panel survey:** The use of attitudinal information here has centred more on attempting to unpick experience on the effectiveness of training. For example:

- (a) *formal training and education has provided skills needed for your present work.* The indicator is highly generalised and seems to be open to cultural misinterpretation (in 1995, 100% of the respondents in the Netherlands reported positively, compared to 29% in Italy and Portugal, and little more in Greece). If it has any value, it is likely to need to be contextualised with reference to the formal VET systems in Members States - reducing its comparability;
- (b) *formal training and education have contributed a lot/fair amount to present work.* The indicator is attitudinal and more precise than the above, and seems less open to cultural distortion. It remains, however, a blunt tool in understanding individual experiences.

Other indicators in the household survey seem to be more descriptive (e.g. of employer policies) or behaviour linked.

There is consequently little on a pan-EU basis on which to draw relevant experience, although all seem to offer viable routes for assessing a limited range of attitudinal data in the future.

A wider review of cross-national sources through the OECD suggests little to add to this. Although there is activity relating to attitudes to key skills development (specifically adult literacy), this seems to be mainly developmental in focus, aimed at sharing methodological experience and building comparability. The relevance of this to the current project is difficult to determine but, at best, seems to be limited to how some of the participating statistical agencies and national policy bodies have addressed the post-collation contextualisation of data.

The one area where there seems to be more extensive experience on a pan-national (five-country) basis is the *Nordic harmonised opinion survey*. Although not restricted to EU members, and providing less of an in-depth review of individual attitudes to training than household surveys in some individual Nordic countries (notably Finland), the pan-Nordic survey does seem to illustrate how relevant opinion-based data can be collected on a harmonised basis. The focus seems to be on generalised opinion data to support the Nordic Council of Ministers, although its emphasis seems to centre more on education opinion. The survey has common publication of the comparative report and national branched reports.

### 2.3 The comparative survey of assessment in Member States

At the start of the project, we anticipated that most relevant experience would be collated at national level. A survey was consequently developed to identify and collate basic information on any surveys or related systematic work which fell within the scope of this inquiry. Our focus in this was activity by national statistical agencies and national policy-making bodies within the past five years, which might have supported work on assessing individual attitudes to training activity. We were equally interested in work conducted directly by these agencies - or subcontracted by them.

A sample of 46 agencies was identified (Figure 2.1) from HOST records and from information supplied by Cedefop and Eurostat. This involved some judgement on who was likely to fall within scope of the exercise, and some editing to exclude agencies not normally associated with statistical collation. The sample was restricted to the 11 EU Members States, excluding those who were to be part of the in-depth review (reported in Chapter 3).

**Figure 2.1: Distribution of agency sample**

	Number of sampled national agencies	Responding agencies	% response
Austria	3	1	33
Belgium	7	3	43
Denmark	4	3	75
Finland	4	4	100
France	6	4	67
Germany	4	2	50
Greece	4	2	50
Luxembourg	6	4	67
The Netherlands	4	3	75
Portugal	4	3	75
Spain	5	2	40
EU - 11*	51	31	60

\* Excludes representation from Ireland, Italy, Sweden and UK which were the subject of more intensive reviews (see Chapter 3).

Source: HOST-Cedefop agency survey, 1999.

It was expected that a large number of the sample would be inactive in this area, but might be able to identify other agencies nationally with recent experience. The survey consequently provided an option for respondents to identify referral agencies. Over two thirds of the respondents did so, although in all but a handful of cases these were already part of the wider sample. Five agencies not identified originally were, however, added to the sample through this snowballing device, bringing the total sample size to 51 national agencies.

The survey was aimed as a filter device to identify those with relevant experience rather than as a tool for collecting detailed information. The evidence sought was:

- (a) type of respondent organisation;
- (b) if they have carried out relevant individual opinion surveys in the field of VET;
- (c) how such surveys were conducted; and
- (d) if the mode of conduct was internal or externally commissioned.

For each of the relevant surveys identified, core information was collected on:

- (a) the title and timing of the survey, and its broad content;
- (b) VET-related content;
- (c) means of dissemination.

The questionnaire was available in English and French to optimise response, and supported by a telephone and e-mail help-line at HOST. Very few took advantage of the telephone help-line and most communication from the respondents was through e-mail.

In the event, the survey attracted the following response:

- (a) fifteen agencies saying they had no activities in terms of individual attitudes to training (but most referring us on to others - who also mostly had little or no experience);
- (b) seven providing very limited experience;
- (c) ten providing more complete details;
- (d) there were 19 non-respondents.

The national coverage was strong, and the survey only failed to secure a response from Greece and Luxembourg. The effective response rate was 60%<sup>(1)</sup> In at least two Member States, Belgium and Austria, there was evidence of some dialogue between the sampled agencies, with the result that only one was delegated to reply

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<sup>(1)</sup> Particularly important gaps seem to have been the failure to secure responses from BIBF in Germany, OEEK and Ministry of Education in Greece.

on behalf of at least some of the others. This seems to have been a fairly informal process between practitioners. This may also have operated in other countries - raising the likely practical response to closer to three quarters.

Respondents were principally from the public sector, all but one of those reporting some experience being either a government department or agency. Statistical agencies predominated, but this may reflect a skew in the sample emphasising these bodies as the most likely source for initial information or national referral.

Taken with the evidence of limited additionality in suggestions for other agencies to contact, the response suggests that the survey secured very good coverage of experience at national level. However, the timing of the project did mean that the initial mailing was conducted over the July-August period when many of these agencies may have had key staff on summer leave. We cannot discount the possibility that some relevant experience has not been identified, although in our judgement this is likely to be limited.

## **2.4 Conducting attitude surveys**

The survey (taken with our in-depth findings) shows that most EU Member States have some experience of conducting surveys that include some information on individual attitudes to training. In general, however, these involve a small number of attitudinal indicators being attached to more general household or similar surveys - in some cases paralleling the generic indicators of Eurobarometer or ECHPS. Dedicated surveys focused on individual attitudes to training are comparatively rarely conducted by national agencies. More specifically, the results from those with some experience showed:

- (a) there were only two genuinely dedicated surveys identified in these 11 Member States;
- (b) where national surveys have used indicators of attitudes to training, these have mainly been through omnibus household surveys collating a very wide range of opinion evidence;
- (c) the scope for a VET focus within these more generalised surveys is usually limited to a handful of generic questions. As these have national roots, there is little comparability or consistency in use across those Member States with such sources;
- (d) regular surveys (annual or biannual) predominate, although there are examples of more experimental surveys aimed at testing the viability of such indicators;
- (e) the most common theme in the omnibus surveys seems to be attitudes to the work-based relevance of recent training and attitudes to the work value of continuing education.

Figure 2.2 summarises the experience of attitudinal surveys on training across the Member States.

**Figure 2.2: Identified national sources for individual attitudes to training**

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Austria:	Arbeitsgemeinschaft Berufsbildungsforschung
Belgium:	VDAB, FOREM
Denmark:	DEL, Ministry for Education
Finland:	National Board of Education
France:	Ministrie de l'emploi et de la solidarité, Centre INFFO
Germany:	BIBB
Greece:	None
Ireland:	Bureau of Labour, FAS
Italy:	ISFOL, ISTAT
Luxembourg:	None
Netherlands:	CINOP
Portugal:	CIDES, DAPP
Spain:	INEM
Sweden:	Statistics Sweden
United Kingdom:	DfEE

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*Source:* HOST-Cedefop survey, 1999 and case studies of Ireland, Italy, Sweden and UK.

## **2.5 Issues from the cross-EU review**

The survey evidence needs to be treated with some caution. Clearly, an intensive inquiry of this nature is dependent on the quality of information submitted by national agencies. Richer information is provided by national case studies where researchers can explore more directly a range of agencies and sources.

However, the survey does raise some important issues:

- (a) Is the apparent lack of activity cost driven? In particular, is it a consequence of reliance on omnibus surveys as cost-effective tools (but providing little scope for in-depth review of training opinion)?
- (b) Is the lack of dedicated activity a reflection of methodological difficulties in tackling training opinion, or doubts in agencies about the value of efficacy of this?
- (c) How recent is current experience, and what are the motives driving agencies to include training opinion indicators in existing surveys?
- (d) In particular, does the growing policy interest at national and EU-level in the continuing training and development of those in or seeking work, and other adults, provide a timely starting point for a harmonised survey?

The questionnaire survey did not provide a platform for addressing these questions. However, these are some of the issues explored in the following chapter through our in-depth reviews in four countries.

## **2.6. Overview**

The picture across the EU, if a little fragmented, shows very little activity by the agencies we have reviewed (or their suppliers) in collecting individual opinion on training and related matters. Clearly, the vehicles for this are in place, but are used only to a limited extent to test these matters. Indeed, the main vehicle, the omnibus opinion surveys, by its very nature limits coverage of individual opinion on training to just a handful of generic variables.

The results consequently show that a dedicated survey on these matters will be a novel concept for most of the national statistical and policy agencies likely to have an interest in it. The limited experience nationally also suggests that there is little experience on which to base the harmonisation of such an inquiry.

## **Chapter 3: Review of Member State case studies**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In four Member States - Ireland, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom - detailed discussions were held with a range of agencies considered to be involved in VET planning and research, and these form the case studies. This chapter summarises the findings from the four Member States, in particular covering the following issues:

- (a) the agencies involved with VET and the collection of data;
- (b) activities in monitoring and evaluating VET;
- (c) sources of opinion-based information; and
- (d) the potential and support for a harmonised VET survey.

The chapter concludes with a review of the findings and an interpretation of their implications for this study. The full case studies on each of the four Member States are in Annex A along with the discussion guide we used (Annex C).

### **3.2 Agencies involved with VET and data collection**

The range of organisations we contacted normally included a mixture of government bodies, quasi-governmental organisations and independent bodies, as appropriate for the particular Member State concerned. So, in the case of Ireland, discussions were mostly with government agencies, in particular the Training and Employment Authority (FAS) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), though other contacts, such as with the independent research institute ESRI, proved particularly useful in gathering a full picture.

In the UK, the main focus was also with the principal government body concerned with VET policy, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), while in Sweden, the main contacts were with the relevant governmental agencies such as the Swedish Council for Work Life Research and the EU Programme Office. In Italy, at national level, the discussions with ISFOL, the specialist government agency concerned with the development of VET, proved useful, as did those with the national statistical agency, ISTAT. However, the role of the national statistical institutes in the case studies tended to vary, reflecting their relative interests in both VET and opinion-based information sources.

In the cases of Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom, the national statistical institutes were included in the discussions, though it was really only Statistics Sweden who had the more developed role in gathering and interpreting VET information, and even here the quantity of opinion-based data was very limited. In the United Kingdom, the Office for National Statistics is not directly concerned with

VET information aside from including relevant source material in its more general publications, and this was a similar situation to that in Ireland. Here, the Central Statistics Office has a clear quantitative role and does not get involved with opinion or attitudinal data collection.

Project resources did not permit us to carry out a more detailed examination of the availability of relevant source material at a subnational level, though indications are that it is particularly relevant in the case of Italy, and could be important in the other Member States as well. In Italy, for example, the regional dimension to government is very strong and this permeates through to the collection of information. It is likely, therefore, that some opinion-based inquiries are held in the regions, but mostly these would be on an ad hoc basis. In the other three Member States, there will also be relevant studies at regional or subregional levels. In Ireland, for example, while the regional structure for government is not strong, there is a growing emphasis on community-based solutions to labour market problems which will undoubtedly create the need for local information to feed the development of policy.

### **3.3 Monitoring and evaluating VET**

In examining the general monitoring and evaluation of VET in the four Member States, account should be taken of the different emphases given to the development of VET. This is reflected in such factors as the integration of initial and continuing training, the existence of a formal qualifications structure (which provides an effective means of comparison) and the types of organisations charged with the task of implementing VET policy.

In Ireland, the monitoring and evaluation of VET is mostly government agency led. Here, there is a significant influence exerted by the requirements of the European Social Fund (ESF) since most labour market programmes are supported in this way. Within the DETE there is a specialist ESF evaluation unit, and this is a natural focus for specialist ad hoc studies. However, the government agencies tend to subcontract specialist research organisations to complete the fieldwork involved, and in the case of opinion and attitudinal information this normally involves specialist market research companies with the staff and resources to complete the work.

The practice of subcontracting the fieldwork involved in evaluation studies is also common in Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Certainly in Sweden and the United Kingdom there is a tradition of government departments subcontracting all aspects of a research project to an external organisation, and inevitably this has spawned the growth of a range of support organisations vying for the work. It involves traditional research institutes based in universities, smaller not-for-profit specialist institutes and private sector providers of all sizes, including the international consultancies. However, the seeking of opinion or attitudinal information is seen as a sufficiently specialist area to encourage the existence of specialist market research organisations to carry out this part of any research programme. However, many of these providers do not necessarily specialise in labour market or VET research and normally pass the information over to the commissioning organisation to carry out the interpretation.

Much of the more broadly-based research on VET concentrates on measuring participation levels and outcomes. This is certainly the case in Italy, for example, where even at the regional level the emphasis is on gathering quantitative data on VET. In Sweden, the recently launched Adult Education Initiative is to be subjected to thorough evaluation at both local (municipalities) and national levels, and these have been contracted to various universities in the country. In the United Kingdom, the various agencies based in the regions (such as training and enterprise councils in England and Wales and their equivalents in Scotland, local enterprise companies) with a clear VET responsibility also carry out their own research for their patch.

### **3.4 Opinion-based information sources**

The findings from the four case study Member States suggest that the explicit collection and use of opinion-based information on VET is limited. However, there are some examples where such opinion is sought, but within larger inquiries, and so with less emphasis than is attached to other forms of VET information.

In the United Kingdom, for example, there does not appear to be a high level of recognition among policy-makers and academics of the value of opinion research on VET. This is indicated by the fact that it is over ten years since the last really substantial national piece of work was carried out (i.e. *The training in Britain survey* in 1988). There have been some recent developments that signal a move towards gathering more opinion-based views, influenced by the remit of the skills task force set up in 1997 with a remit to promote the development of training at all levels. One of its early findings was that the information available on training was deficient in some important areas. In particular, the need for good, reliable subnational data was highlighted, alongside the shortcomings in the current Labour Force Survey (LFS).

The United Kingdom conducted the national adult learning survey in 1997, and this contained significant opinion-based content on VET and non-VET activities. The sorts of questions asked included the following:

- (a) satisfaction with current job at the time of learning;
- (b) opinions of employer contributions to the cost of learning;
- (c) reasons for starting the learning;
- (d) perceptions of the learning experience;
- (e) opinions on the quality of learning;
- (f) opinions on the benefits to the individual of learning.

Some of the questions could be considered attitudinal rather than straightforward opinion-seeking but, nevertheless, the survey has provided a useful source of information hitherto largely neglected.

In all four Member States, the LFS is seen as an important source of information on training, though not for seeking opinion. It also suffers the problem of a relatively small sample size, limiting disaggregation of the results by sector or occupational group, for example.

In Ireland, there is a long tradition of seeking the opinions and attitudes of individuals, but normally as part of a wider VET or labour market analysis. The European Community household panel survey was mentioned as a potentially useful source here and in Ireland this is carried out by the independent research institute, ESRI. This multipurpose survey covers around 10,000 individuals in Ireland (4 000 households), but the VET content has been very small to date. In fact, most of the detailed opinion research on VET has been carried out through the FAS, the government organisation with responsibility for the national employment service and programmes for the unemployed. FAS has commissioned many studies seeking the opinions of users of its services and programmes on both a regular and ad hoc basis.

The other main player in Ireland, the DETE, also carries out research studies that often include some opinion-seeking activities. However, these are often focused on particular sectors or subgroups in the labour market. For example, recent studies have covered apprenticeship training, training for prisoners and training for the crafts industry. Another important dimension to its work is the tendency to combine information from individuals with that from employers.

In all four Member States, there is also a significant amount of research and data-gathering activity for mainstream education provision. This includes those in and leaving the education sector, for example, and can sometimes have important vocational dimensions. In Italy, for example, ISTAT carries out a number of inquiries of graduates and school leavers, and ISFOL has recently held a survey of school leavers in their transition to work, though the opinion element in this is relatively minor.

### **3.5 Potential for a harmonised opinion survey**

In the discussions with the agencies in each Member State, views were sought on the potential for a harmonised opinion survey on VET. Interviewees were asked to give their views on whether such a survey would render useful information for their country, whether it would then be useful to have comparable information from other Member States and, finally, what the shape of any such inquiry should be. Broadly, the objective was to assess the level of support for such a survey and to get some ideas on the perceived problems in implementing it.

In Ireland, there is now a growing emphasis on community-based solutions to labour market problems, and so this coloured the response. There would be a need to disaggregate any such data to inform the local areas, otherwise any inquiry would have limited impact. Furthermore, there was no clear support for such a survey, though the government agency contacts felt there to be some potential value in taking a systematic approach to collecting this information, rather than the somewhat fragmented approach that currently prevails.

In Ireland, it was felt that holding such a survey on an annual basis would be unnecessary, since the basic responses are unlikely to alter much within a year. It was suggested that maybe an ad hoc approach would be better or, at the most, it could be held on a triennial basis. More importantly, there was some concern that a completely new survey would be unnecessary in the light of existing source material that could be pulled together and better coordinated. However, it was equally clear that there was no obvious survey vehicle that could be used at present to gather such information.

In Italy, there was little support for a new opinion survey on VET and a low level of recognition of the potential value of such information across the EU. Principal concerns were focused on the different definitions used in Member States and the problems of comparability this would cause. To be of any real value, any such survey would also have to be able to be disaggregated regionally, with the implications this has on effective sample size and the associated costs involved.

Similar concerns were expressed in Sweden, where the definitional problems were considered insurmountable at the present time to make such an EU-wide survey viable. The situation in Sweden already suggests that the population is generally very positively disposed to education and training, and there was some feeling that such a very general survey (for it would have to be so if it was to be held across the EU) would render little of interest.

Finally, in the United Kingdom, the views of contacts were mixed. It was often recognised that there was a critical gap in the information on VET that opinion-based inquiries could help fill. However, this assessment of its value was tempered with concern over definitional and methodological issues associated with EU-wide surveys. The work on common definitions on VET that is feeding into the Leonardo CVTS II work was highlighted as a possible approach to take. However, the general feeling was that the most effective way forward on this was to make use of an existing EU-wide instrument of inquiry to develop the VET-related questions.

### **3.6 Summary**

In assessing the views of the Member State agencies we contacted, it should be remembered that at the time we were unable to provide any firm ideas of what a harmonised opinion survey on VET would look like. Consequently, it may not be surprising that interviewees were less than clear on the potential of such a survey, and a little sceptical about the value.

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the absence of much opinion survey-based information on VET represents a gap between the established inquiries on participation in VET activities and the more quantitative data based on participation in VET and outcomes from that participation. However, any attempt to plug that gap will require strong justification to the Member States on cost grounds alone.

## Chapter 4: Development of opinion indicators

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapters 2 and 3 show that developing a dedicated harmonised opinion survey on individual attitudes to VET has little past experience - at cross-national or national level - on which to draw. However, if it is not possible to piece together a model approach by drawing on national evidence, some of the surveys we have drawn attention to provide a basis to suggest some of the more likely opinion indicators and how these might be used. These surveys also enable us to draw on some of the methodological experience gained at national level - which in a few cases<sup>(2)</sup> has been reviewed in considerable detail.

In this chapter we attempt to draw together some of this experience by looking at:

- (a) definitional questions;
- (b) what sort of indicators;
- (c) a typology for indicators - and some illustrations of use; and
- (d) process of selecting indicators.

We have also tentatively set out a model structure through which Cedefop and its partners might start to make choices about likely content for a harmonised survey.

### 4.2 Definitional questions

A harmonised opinion survey of individual attitudes to VET will be presented with a number of challenges of definition. These assume the need for a consensus to be developed in the focus for such an exercise among policy-makers, and in classifying opinion-based responses in a way that is meaningful across the different circumstances of Member States. National experience can provide little insight on these matters, but three issues are likely to be of particular importance:

- (a) defining what is meant to be covered by 'training' to better focus individual responses;
- (b) establishing what groups of people are to be involved;
- (c) defining what is needed of comparative analysis.

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<sup>(2)</sup> DfEE, *Adult learning in Britain*. Report of the first national survey of adult experience of learning. Department for Education and Employment, Sheffield. United Kingdom, 1998.

**What is meant to be covered by ‘training’:** clearly, there are accepted EU definitions of what is meant by training - particularly through the development work that has gone into the CVTS survey. As a result there are some recognised common approaches on which a harmonised opinion survey could draw. However, these definitions have centred on surveys whose focus was managers or practitioners in enterprises or providers, and this may not translate readily to getting a practical working definition which can mean something to end-users.

There is some relevant experience on producing definitions of training which can be used in opinion surveys - principally from Canada, the USA, and the UK. This suggests ‘training’ will mean rather different things to those from different education backgrounds and with different experiences of work-related training and learning. A robust approach to definition consequently needs to be both **precise** (minimising the scope for respondent confusion or misunderstanding) and also **user-friendly** (phrased or presented in such a way that it is readily understood by a wide audience of respondents).

In general, past approaches seem to have preferred a written or read-out definition<sup>(3)</sup> of what is meant by training as a starting point for the survey. These approaches are often complex - needing variously to encompass a variety of activities and modes of delivery of training (and continuing learning):

- (a) structured off-the-job training and formal courses (on-site at company learning centres or through computer-based training, at colleges or other places of education, or through open or other forms of distance learning), leading to - or likely to lead to - a work-related or similar qualification;
- (b) structured off-the-job training and formal courses not expected to lead to a qualification, but related to work or related development;
- (c) structured off-the-job training and formal short courses;
- (d) unstructured on-the-job training and formal coaching for developing skills, equipment or related knowledge, or practical techniques;
- (e) formal non-course training and learning through secondments or sabbaticals to other organisations or jobs;
- (f) informal learning at, or related to, work through methods such as mentoring and job shadowing.

The definition for a harmonised opinion survey would consequently need to address both situational issues - where and why the training was conducted, as well as mode and even form of delivery. This provides for appropriate precision in the definition. Anything less risks a misunderstanding by the respondent as to what is meant by training - and consequent distortion in the analysis. The combinations are extensive

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<sup>(3)</sup> Written definitions usually for postal surveys or as a hand-out card for personal interviews, and read-out (by interviewers) for telephone or personal interviews. Both usually take the form of a lengthy explanatory statement of what is covered.

and with a growing policy emphasis on continuing learning for adults, the scope for this definition is likely to be wider rather than narrow.

Meeting the second requirement - being user-friendly - presents an equal challenge. In practical terms, producing a single statement of scope which is digestible to a wide range of end-users presents considerable difficulty. In the UK, a single statement of what was covered was the approach taken in the 1997 pilot of the first national adult learning survey. In practice, this proved cumbersome (a 45-word definition was not retained or well understood by interviewed respondents). It was replaced in the main survey by a series of filter questions relating to whether the respondent had any personal experience for all of the specific elements of the definition - each being tested separately. This was followed by a statement that, in the rest of the interview, they were interested in any and all of what had been covered in these filter questions. Although effectively reducing the usable content of the interview period, this approach was found to be more robust.

**What groups of people are to be involved:** this presents a simpler challenge for a harmonised survey but it remains an important issue of definition. Different approaches to defining the scope of the population to be surveyed, and its particular focus, will affect not only sampling but also subsequent content and design issues. The national experience of surveying individual attitudes to training - where it exists - has tended to adopt a broad approach, although a number of the surveys have focused on adults only. However, there is scope for a more targeted approach by activity or socio-economic characteristics - or more likely a combination of both.

In particular, a harmonised survey will have a more precise evidence base if we focus on people's attitudes where there is recent experience of training - since it reduces problems of recollection or of rationalisation of experience. Such a focus might be empirically sound, but would mean we could lose valuable evidence on those who do not have recent experience - an important group for policy.

Beyond this, the definition of the population may need to be segmented to key groups for policy - reentrants, long-term unemployed, young people, older people, etc. This is largely a sampling challenge. However, this needs to be led by a clear statement for some combination of these or other groups for whom we need attitudinal information. Again, there may be different options and combinations here.

There is no model approach to defining the required population or mix. If past national experience has taken a largely generic approach - or limited any sampling restrictions to those excluding young people - this need not be the inevitable emphasis for a harmonised opinion survey. We propose that the most appropriate focus is likely to be:

- (a) generic (all individuals irrespective of the currency of their training experience);
- (b) broadly based - excluding only young people most likely to be in compulsory education and training or in initial training (say under 18 years); and

- (c) segmented - ensuring that the subsequent national samples have viable cohorts for the long-term unemployed, adults of working age who are not economically active, as well as those currently in work.

Whatever approach is taken, definition should be policy-led so as to establish a clear rationale for who is to be covered and why.

**What is needed of comparative analysis:** a harmonised opinion survey will be of little value if it does not have within it attitudinal indicators that can be comparative across Member States. There are likely to be a number of facets to comparability, but the evidence presented in Chapter 3 suggests two seem to be of particular importance.

Firstly, a number of the national agencies interviewed in the in-depth analysis in Ireland, Italy, Sweden and the UK have expressed concerns over different cultural interpretations, and that this must inform the choice (or definition) of indicators. In some cases this is informed by practical experience of designing harmonised surveys - such as in CVTS or the development work for comparative indicators of adult literacy. For example, does the distinction between on- and off-the-job training mean different things in different institutional structures of Member States? Is the difference between structured training and more informal approaches to learning - widely recognised in Northern Europe - meaningful in Member States of the South? Problems of comparability such as this are difficult to anticipate, and suggest the need for robust piloting of any indicators - and their assessment through focus groups interviewing in each Member State.

A second issue of comparability is affected by the decisions taken on defining the survey population. If a harmonised opinion survey is to take a generic approach, it suggests the need for indicators with broad application across different participation levels and activity groups. Some potential indicators may have different meaning for different groups. For example, do those who have been or remain long-term unemployed have a different understanding of indicators concerned with continuing education and training? Will those who are self-employed or owner-managers relate any indicators exploring the relevance of recent learning to work in a very different way to those who are employees?

Again, this suggests the need to be able to understand such contrasts by robust validation through focus group or parallel interviewing before a harmonised survey is undertaken. A failure to do so may lead to confused and even misleading analysis.

### **4.3 What sort of indicators**

The national experience (Chapters 2 and 3), although limited, does illustrate the wide range of potential indicators that are relevant to a harmonised opinion survey. It also shows some confusion in their use which stems from the lack of any coherent approach to design or recognising that different indicators need to be contextualised.

In reviewing the experience collated from Member States, it seems that there are at least four areas where indicators could apply to building an understanding of individual attitudes to training:

- (a) general attitudes to training activity and its value - **scoping** indicators;
- (b) individual attitudes to personal needs for training - **needs-based** indicators;
- (c) opinions on recent personal experience of training - **experiential-based** attitudinal indicators; and
- (d) perspectives of individuals on future needs - attitudes to **future training**.

A harmonised opinion survey may focus on just one of these, or some combination of them. However, each of these have different implications for those concerned with informing or developing policy. Some of the areas of use and example indicators are considered below.

#### **4.4 Scoping indicators**

Most past experience of assessing individual attitudes to training has emphasised highly generalised opinion indicators. These seem to be most concerned with establishing the scope for positive attitudes to training among a wide cross-section of the population - and are referred to here as scoping indicators. These consequently have a very specific use in establishing the context - and change - in the general climate of opinion or expectations of training, and are essentially descriptive rather than analytical in focus.

Scoping indicators might include highly general indicators - as in the recent Eurobarometer question:

‘Do you believe continuing education improves working life?’

This is a highly generalised use. Such indicators could take a more precise focus - crucially on reviewing the underpinning values that influence individuals’ response to training need or opportunity. For example, the ECHP Survey has asked if:

- (a) ‘formal education and training have provided the skills needed for my present type of work’;
- (b) ‘formal education and training make a contribution to my present work’.

An even sharper focus in the use of scoping indicators comes from the Canadian and Finnish surveys. These are concerned with unpicking motives for participation in training, for example:

- (a) ‘How important do you consider upgrading your skills or knowledge for your current job?’

(b) 'How important do you consider acquiring formal qualifications to improve job prospects?'

Other possible scoping indicators could be:

(a) 'How important do you consider upgrading skills/knowledge for your current job?'

(b) 'How important do you consider upgrading skills/knowledge for a future job?'

(c) 'How important do you consider upgrading skills/knowledge for advancing your position at work?'

(d) 'How important do you consider upgrading skills/knowledge for obtaining better pay or conditions at work?'

The permutations of this approach are almost endless. In particular, there is also scope to test attitudes to different forms of training focus or delivery:

'Which in your opinion is the most important training ... apprenticeship training, other initial skills training, skills development through coaching on-the-job, skills development through company-provided off-the-job training, skills, and knowledge development outside work through taught courses at college, etc.'

Scoping indicators would be applicable to all activity groups, current, new and ongoing training participants (and non-participants). It could also be depersonalised - 'In general do you think...', or personalised - 'For you personally, how important is/has been...'

For a harmonised opinion survey the most likely application is through inclusion of a small number of carefully chosen indicators in an appropriate existing European-level survey to review current general attitudes and expectations. Their value in this context, however, will be partly in contrasting general opinion between Member States and different socio-economic groups within these, and in trend analysis - where the survey becomes an annual or biannual monitor of changing attitudes. Its use to policy-makers would be largely confined to monitoring the general climate of opinion, with little to be said about individual training experience, use and motivations.

## **4.5 Needs-based indicators**

An important potential use for policy-makers would be to develop indicators within a harmonised opinion survey which would look at the attitudes of individuals to their needs for training. This would provide valuable general insights into prospective demand, and also evidence which could relate this expressed demand to individual characteristics. Sophisticated multivariate analysis would enable this to make some judgements about contrasts between probable needs<sup>(4)</sup> and expressed needs - a

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<sup>(4)</sup> For example, those at most risk of job change or social exclusion, low qualification groups, those without recent training experience, those likely to experience early impact of technological change, etc.

demand gap which could be very important evidence for policy-makers seeking to build European competitiveness.

Unlike the scoping indicators, where opinion could be personalised or depersonalised, needs-based indicators could only be personalised. The use could be in seeking more precise, but retrospective, needs opinion 'In the last year...', or essentially speculative 'Do you consider that...'.

In all cases, needs indicators would be looking to assess peoples' views on their perceived need for training and/or its likely value. It would be context specific - individuals in or out of work looking at what need they had for training.

There is little practical evidence on which to draw from our review of national experience. The education opinion survey in Finland seems to be more highly developed in this respect with indicators in a variety of areas, such as:

- (a) 'Do you need more training to carry out your job well?'
- (b) 'My present job corresponds well with the skills I have developed';
- (c) 'My present job does not use many of the skills that I have';
- (d) 'To what extent are your knowledge and skills needed in your present job based on - basic/preemployment education ... additional training in your current occupation or work ... on work experience rather than training ... on independent study in connection with your work?'
- (e) 'Would further training be of help to you in: ... advancing your career ... securing higher pay ... changing job to one you would prefer ... keeping your current job?'
- (f) 'In the near future would you be interested in attending further training related to work/occupation?'
- (g) If you are likely to start training in the near future is your interest influenced by any of the following factors (higher pay, possible unemployment, etc.)?'

The use of needs indicators in a harmonised opinion survey could provide a powerful tool for those concerned with evaluating or developing policy responses. An appropriate range of indicators would present a valuable analytical tool capable of better understanding the needs/wants gap, and critically reviewing the determinants of contrasts at national level. Taken with other evidence on employer practice (e.g. CVTS), sector competitiveness and labour market change (e.g. LFS), it could be a tool helping policy-makers to take a more proactive and preventative stance on unemployment and social exclusion.

## 4.6 Experiential indicators

Experiential indicators within a harmonised opinion survey would have a specific focus on attitudes among those with recent training experience to the use and impact of training. Such indicators might also have particular value in looking at actual determinants of training activity.

Beyond the recent French survey<sup>(5)</sup>, this does not seem to have been an area where many national agencies have tested specific indicators. Consequently, outside France, national experience is very thin on the ground. Possible indicators might be:

- (a) 'When you started (your recent training) was it because you thought it could help you with your current job?'
- (b) 'When you started (your recent training) was it because you thought it could help you with a job you were thinking of doing in the future?'
- (c) 'Thinking about (your recent training), did you undertake this for any of the following reasons: ... getting a job ... getting better pay ... Get new skills for your current job ... help perform new tasks at work ... help perform more demanding tasks at work ... etc.?'
- (d) 'Thinking about (your recent training), did you undertake this for any of the following reasons: ... to get new skills for your current job ... help perform new tasks at work ... help perform more demanding tasks at work?'

A specialised aspect of experiential indicators would be to focus on the attitudes to the outcome from recent training experience, for example:

- (a) 'Which, if any, of the following things happened to you as a result of your recent training: getting a job ... getting better pay ... getting new skills for your current job ... help perform new tasks at work ... help perform more demanding tasks at work ... etc.?'
- (b) 'What did you gain from taking part in this training: more interest in my current job ... greater confidence at work ... new skills to apply in my current job ... new skills to help in getting a job.... etc.?'
- (c) 'To what extent did what you gained from this training meet your expectations of it?'
- (d) 'To what extent are you now using the skills/knowledge gained in this training in your current job?'
- (e) 'To what extent are you now using the skills/knowledge gained in this training in your personal life?'

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<sup>(5)</sup> *Les Français et la Formation Professionnelle*, Paris, Ministère du Travail, 1998.

This is a potentially rich area for a harmonised opinion survey. It could be the sharpest tool for policy-makers, since it relates attitude to a specific training event in an individual's experience. It would risk some rationalisation among respondents, but its main limitation is that it would be limited to 'users' and, by definition, could say little about the training experiences of those who had not recently undertaken such activity.

#### **4.7 Attitudes to future training participation**

Scoping, needs and experiential indicators will centre on collecting opinions of individuals based on retrospective or current assessment of training. A strong case could be made in any analytical approach to a harmonised opinion survey for including some indicators to test attitudes to future training activity.

This raises many methodological challenges - and not the least a concern about the quality of individual speculation about future behaviour. Statisticians are rightly sceptical about opinion data based on prospective behaviour where there are not clear conditions likely to inform this. Policy-makers might have greater interest arguing that attitudes to likely future training, rather than personal circumstances, may be a key influence on future activity by individuals - even if the conditions for this cannot be easily predicted.

Whatever the case, there is very little past experience on which to frame possible indicators. It seems likely that these would be most valuable when personalised:

- (a) 'Do you think that you are likely to undertake more or less training in the next 12 months than in the last?'
- (b) 'Are there any obstacles that are likely to prevent you from taking up training in the next 12 months? If so, what is the nature of these obstacles (probe for such things as childcare, finance, etc.)?'

However, some speculative or depersonalised indicators could be usefully added to any survey which focuses on more general scoping indicators, for example:

'Should people in or seeking work undertake more or less training in the near future?'

Whatever approach is adopted for a harmonised opinion survey, the value of such indicators will be greatest where they test the conditions or determinants under which increased - or decreased - activity might take place. For example:

- (a) 'If you undertake more training in the next 12 months than in the last, will this be for: advancing your career ... securing higher pay ... changing job to one you would prefer ... keeping your current job, etc.?'
- (b) 'If you undertake more training in the next 12 months than in the last, will this be to: get new skills for your current job ... help perform new tasks at work ... help perform more demanding tasks at work?'

- (c) 'If you undertake more training in the next 12 months than in the last, is this likely to be mostly paid for by: yourself - from income or savings; by a grant; by obtaining a loan or by other borrowings; your family; your employer?'
- (d) 'If you are to undertake less training in the next 12 months than in the last, will this be because: you do not see the need for new skills or qualifications in your work; you plan to leave work shortly; your employer does not support or encourage you to do more training; you do not have the time to take on a training commitment; you do not have the income or savings to pay for training; you cannot get financial support to pay for training?'

There are many permutations. For policy-makers the most valuable approach to assessing opinion on future training is to combine an assessment of likely activity with determinants and through multivariate analysis explore the most and least favourable conditions. Taken with other activity and demographic data from a harmonised survey, this may enable those implementing policy to improve the additionality of existing programmes. It will also help those concerned with cost effectiveness and impact to target active policies on barriers affecting certain subgroups in the population rather than taking a more generic (and less effective) approach.

## **4.8 Process of selecting indicators**

This review - and the illustrative indicators - has set out a simple typology which might be used in helping to determine the focus and shape of a harmonised opinion survey. There is no shortage of possibilities in using and combining opinion indicators. The challenge is more likely to be in determining which to develop further and test.

In practice, selection will have a number of influences:

- (a) key policy themes and issues influencing the focus of the survey - in terms of content and audience;
- (b) available resources for development and testing, and the funding mechanism for conducting a harmonised opinion survey;
- (c) the timeframe available for initial development through to early results;
- (d) any integration required with other data collection exercises at EU or national levels;
- (e) the level of commitment to such an activity from national (and other) statistical agencies, and their willingness to contribute to development fieldwork and roll-out.

In practice, these issues are inter-related. They are far more likely to define the limits of the harmonised survey than methodological considerations - which provide for a wide range of options. In fact, the concept of a harmonised opinion survey is made perhaps more attractive because it is flexible and can be shaped to fit a range of circumstances and needs.

This is perhaps the limit of this analysis. We do not think we should second guess the outcomes of Cedefop and Eurostat discussions with other stakeholders on these (and other) issues.

The final influence on the selection of indicators is likely to be on the survey vehicle to be used. HOST recognises that this may be a condition of content rather than an outcome of it. Here, we believe, Eurobarometer, ECHS and, to a lesser extent, the LFS, could pick up an extended and more refined approach to scoping indicators, but would have little opportunity to go into detail on needs-based or experiential or future use indicators. However, a dedicated survey would have much greater flexibility across the typology set out here, and would build up a detailed picture of relationships and conditions. It would also provide for more flexibility in the definition of the survey population.

#### **4.9 Towards a model structure**

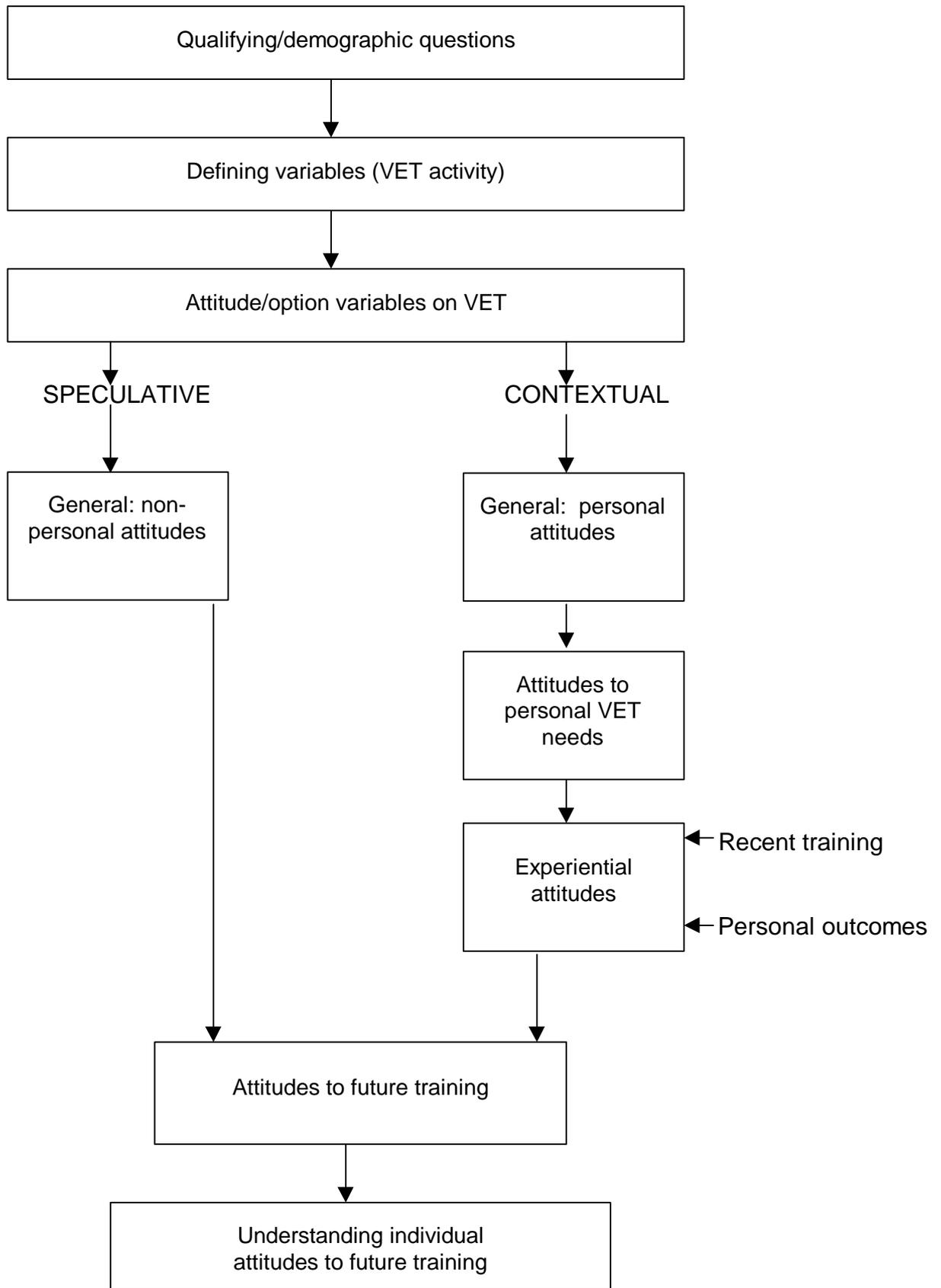
Whatever approach and mix of indicators is adopted, a harmonised survey will be of value only if it collates a range of conditioning information against which to unpick the attitudinal evidence. To further guide choices and development activity, we propose a simple model (Figure 4.1) within which an appropriate survey vehicle can be developed after considering some of the issues outlined in section 4.8 above.

We believe a harmonised survey can pursue one of two viable pathways:

- (a) a speculative review of general opinion;
- (b) a contextual review of personal attitudes and determinants of current and future training behaviour.

**A speculative review of general opinion:** A harmonised survey taking this approach would require some qualifying data on the characteristics of the individual against, and defining data on current and recent VET activity and qualifications. This would be important to not only more fully using the available data (e.g. how attitudes of long-term unemployed vary from those in work), but also in seeking to understand some of the contrasts between Member States and socio-economic groups. Its subsequent focus will be essentially on depersonalised scoping indicators aimed at providing an overview of the general climate of opinion across the EU on training.

**Figure 4.1: Understanding individual attitudes to training**



Source: HOST, 1999.

By regularly monitoring these using core indicators, a picture could be built up of how key attitudes were changing - where, how and why. It would have some analytical capability, but this would be limited since we are essentially talking about highly subjective material. Its main value - as with Eurobarometer for example - would be descriptive.

A speculative review would have very little or no scope to look at needs based, or experiential, indicators and little prospect of collecting sensible opinion evidence on future activity. It would consequently involve a shorter data collection exercise and would be suited to integration with an existing harmonised survey.

**A contextual review of personal attitudes:** This would also collect a range of qualifying and defining information - although probably more extensively than for the speculative focus. Its emphasis would be more precise - looking not at general opinion but at an individual's personal experience and expectations of training, although this could be easily combined with speculative data.

It would be essentially an analytical tool - attempting to assess the association and conditions of past, current and future training activity with individual attitudes. It is likely to require sophisticated multivariate analysis, and this would be essential if it was expected to produce the needs-wants gap analysis outlined in section 4.5 above.

Its design focus would consequently depend on the needs of policy-makers and others of it, but it is likely to draw on some appropriate combination of personal scoping indicators, needs and experiential indicators. The inclusion of future activity indicators seems dependent on how much confidence and value is placed on such material by policy-makers.

It is unlikely that linking these information needs to an existing survey could accommodate the range of data to be produced - whether at national or pan-EU levels. A contextual approach therefore assumes access to a dedicated survey.

## **4.10 Summary**

This chapter has explored some of the options available in both deciding on the type of survey needed and the sorts of questions that might be included. It shows that there are sets of indicators that offer different potential results, and it is important to decide upfront on the rationale for the survey and what it is attempting to show or what questions it will be required to answer.

The danger in constructing any survey that attempts to ask the same questions across countries is that to avoid the dangers of incomparability, a common denominator is chosen that fails to answer anything but the simplest of questions. This chapter has tried to address this issue and at the same time show that it is possible to develop indicators that have some value, yet can take into account the inevitable differences between Member States in definitions and experience of VET.

## **Chapter 5: Feasibility and options considered**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This final chapter of the report concentrates on summarising the various arguments for a harmonised opinion survey on VET across the EU and discussing the options available. It draws on the previous chapters, adding some additional information on such aspects as the costs of holding a survey. It has not been possible to provide precise information on the associated costs of choosing the various options since they are dependent on too many variables. However, we have considered these variables and how they might affect not just costs, but also such operational matters as sample size and survey frequency.

### **5.2 Support for a harmonised opinion survey on VET**

The evidence from the trawl of current activities in the EU suggests that there is only very limited attention given to assessing the opinions of individuals on VET. At Member State level, typically a few relevant questions may be added to an existing survey rather than holding a dedicated VET survey.

At pan-EU level, previous parts of this report have explored the possible vehicles that could be used for an enhanced opinion survey on VET. The Labour Force Survey, while harmonised across the EU (and increasing in other countries such as those former States of central and eastern Europe applying for EU membership), is not an appropriate vehicle because of the broad nature of its structure and questioning. The CVTS offers a more focused approach, but is enterprise-based and so could only elicit information on the attitudes of individuals through proxy.

This leaves the established EU-wide surveys - ECHPS and Eurobarometer - as worthy of further consideration. Both have the advantage of being essentially opinion-based, yet the ECHPS has problems in being too generalised and subject to national definitions that may devalue the results when used at pan-European level. The Eurobarometer survey also suffers from the problem of generality, yet appears to offer more scope than the ECHPS in asking broadly-based attitudinal questions.

Chapter 2 raised some important questions as to why there does not already exist a richer source of information from Member States. One of the issues raised was that of cost and whether this was an impediment to more attention to the VET issue in opinion surveys. Evidence from the four Member State case studies suggests that there is no shortage of opinion surveys in general, but few cover VET. The implication is that funding can be found for those issues accorded sufficient importance in the policy context and, to date, VET has not risen up the league table.

Another question raised was whether methodological difficulties in measuring VET opinion was the obstacle, or was it more a question of doubts about the efficacy of such inquires. Again, from the case studies, it is apparent that there is not a great

deal of enthusiasm for VET opinions because the findings would have only marginal impact on policy. In the Swedish case, for example, it was clear that the overall perception of the policy-making agencies was that individuals held very positive attitudes towards education and training, and this inevitably reduced the perceived value of further surveys.

There is no doubt that levels of interest in VET are growing in Member States, as employability and lifelong learning are accepted as keys to sustaining and increasing employment levels in the EU. However, while some case study respondents were willing to concede that more information on attitudes would be useful in forming policy, the interest was very much internal and often conditioned by a desire for regional or even subregional information. If this is the case, then the ability of an EU-wide survey to deliver meaningful information for local areas is called seriously into question.

On a more positive note, most of the EU Member States have considerable experience with opinion-based research. More precisely, the results of opinion surveys have been used to inform many aspects of policy, though the surveys themselves are often carried out by specialist market research agencies who have the dedicated resources to do the field work efficiently. Unfortunately, the specific questions on VET are few, and those that are asked tend to be tagged on to a larger survey, perhaps dealing with a range of issues. Of course, there is methodological sense in asking questions in the correct context of other questioning, though there could be reverse effects if the context of the questioning is not relevant or conditions the response of subsequent questions.

When considering the options, it is important to consider the potential of using any survey tool in a context wider than the present EU15. The commitment to expansion of membership means that any survey instrument developed in the near future should be capable of being applied to any new Member States of the EU. This inevitably means further attention to definitional issues and is likely to lead to a dilution of the sorts of questions that can be realistically asked.

### **5.3 Is an opinion survey worthwhile?**

Perhaps the central issue for Cedefop and Eurostat is whether, on this evidence, a harmonised approach to delivering an opinion survey on VET is actually worthwhile. Many of those interviewed were cautious. However, many of these had little (or no) experience of developing or using such intelligence. Some were also openly sceptical of the value of attitudinal data in influencing policy decisions at national or cross-national levels. Their perspectives are an important context, which need to be taken into account - but not accepted without looking at other issues.

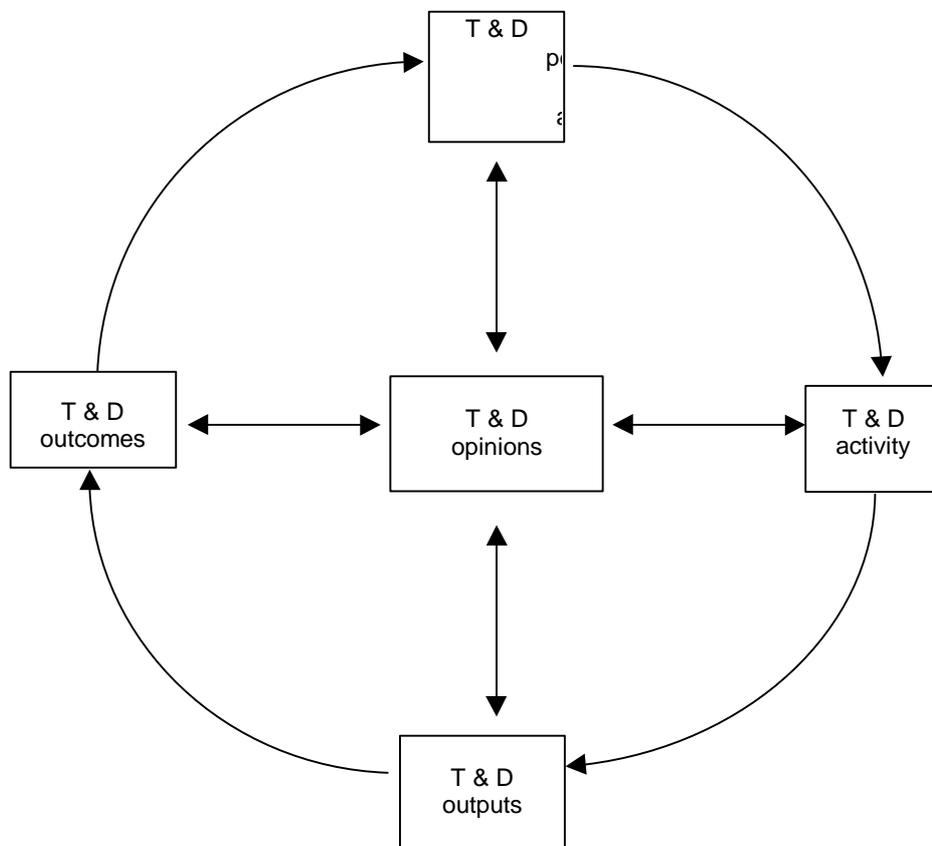
If the value of VET opinion data from individuals is unclear to those who might be charged with collecting - or interpreting - it, there seems to be a stronger rationale for the policy-makers. The rising importance of VET as a public policy tool in addressing inequity in the labour market, and in building employability and economic competitiveness, has directly affected the amount of data on which policy-makers can call. Although little of this is collected on a harmonised basis across Europe, in general most Member States are able to call on various data concerned with

individuals' participation (or lack of it) in VET, the outputs that stem from this, and usually evidence of what impact on economic behaviour this participation has. Some of this data has also been investigated at national level through multivariate analysis and qualitative work to look at some of the inter-relationships between participation, outputs (VET performance) and outcomes.

As Figure 5.1 suggests, all this provides policy-makers with process and evaluation evidence on which to assess the utility of current policy and initiatives. Is it enough?

The process evidence is patchy, but suggests that participation and subsequent outputs are likely to be directly affected by individuals' attitudes to the likely value of the training. At present the evidence presented to policy-makers rarely takes account of this - providing them with what may be only part of the explanation for any underpinning success or failure of programmes. Perhaps the most persuasive argument for understanding individual opinions of VET is in relating participation and outputs to outcome. Our (present) inability to differentiate attitudinal characteristics in participants leaves us without intelligence for policy-makers on one of the crucial factors which influence how individuals use the results of their participation. As a result, some programmes may have weak performance built into them because of a failure to take account of attitudinal contrasts and expectations - leading to effectively wasted public funding (and individual energy).

**Figure 5.1: Why a harmonised opinion survey?**



Source: HOST, 1999.

Without robust evidence of individual opinion, those informing policy-makers may be able to supply extensive intelligence on the apparent performance of programmes - but will fail to have a full picture explaining this. Looked at in this way, individual opinion data on VET might be seen as a missing link which policy-makers need to ensure the more effective focus and management of programmes - and use of public funds at national or European levels to support this. Without they have only part of the picture!

## **5.4 Definitional problems**

The basic difference between 'opinion' and 'attitude' is not the basis for a technical debate, but one more based on semantics. In survey jargon, an opinion can be held by someone who may not necessarily have an experience base in the subject matter to draw on. So, for example, a respondent may be asked for his/her opinion on training, even though they may never have had any. Clearly this sort of questioning is valuable in trying to understand perhaps the profile of training, but it says little about why this respondent has the view expressed. It would be more useful to explore the basis for training opinion or attitude towards it, and here the sort of questioning needed really falls into the behavioural field.

Much of the relevant research identified in this study is of the behavioural sort, where respondents are asked to relate their experience rather than their views or simple opinion. In reality, much of the opinion survey research in Member States is associated with the more ephemeral forms of inquiry such as those testing consumer tastes, for example.

The problem of the comparability of VET definitions across the EU is a perennial one that emerges in virtually any international comparison of VET activity. Yet it is a very real problem and one that, if not addressed, could hamper the value of any cross-EU opinion inquiry. The problem is most manifest in the definitions applied to, for example, levels of skill and qualifications. However, it can also be found in the basic approaches to VET in each Member State that see a varied range of programmes aimed at, say helping the unemployed retrain. It raises the question of how a common basis of understanding can be agreed on these programmes, sufficient to allow similar VET questions to be asked.

Finally, there is the issue of what individuals themselves understand of VET. Even with some national definitions and standards to work from, it is likely that an individual's understanding of what is meant by training, for example, will vary; those that are used to education and training may not consider short spells of gaining experience as formal training, perhaps. Similarly, those with a strong VET background will tend to be more critical (admittedly from an informed base) of current VET they are participating in than those without such a background. These varying interpretations are likely to be influenced by the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of respondents and it may therefore be necessary to adjust for these factors in any survey.

The case studies in particular illustrated the differences to be found in each Member State in terms of those agencies with an interest in VET. Here, the degree of interest might fall into two areas:

- (a) those agencies with a direct implementation role; and
- (b) those agencies with a policy role.

There could easily be other levels of interest to consider, but these represent the principal factions. However, each Member State has its own structure and in the case of Ireland, for example, this was spread across at least seven government agencies. In Italy, the emphasis was even more fragmented, with a strong regional structure to contend with. Furthermore, the role of national statistical agencies is mixed, though the majority show little direct interest in attitudinal information with the possible exception of Statistics Sweden from the four case studies.

## 5.5 The options considered

From the foregoing analysis, there are a number of possible options to consider if it is accepted that there is a broad need to develop an EU-wide opinion survey on VET. These can be summarised under the following three headings:

- (a) make use of existing national surveys;
- (b) use an existing EU-wide survey instrument;
- (c) create a new EU-wide survey of VET.

Each of the approaches needs to be linked to the sorts of indicators developed in the previous chapter.

**The first of the options**, making use of existing national surveys, has many attractions, not least because it would use existing methodology to deliver the information. That said, using national surveys would inevitably compound the problem of different national definitions, as well as custom and practice which, as already discussed, would be extremely difficult to overcome. However, if there were suitable surveys to supplement with relevant VET questions, it probably represents the cheapest option of ensuring a relatively useful sample size. For example, indications are that in Ireland the costs of including extra questions in, say, the ECHPS, would be marginal provided the target group of respondents was the same. However, costs would be substantial if it was considered necessary to increase the sample size.

**The second option** of using an existing EU-wide survey instrument to develop opinion-based questions on VET also has some attractions. Going down this route has the advantage of relatively low cost and an existing methodological base to use. The disadvantages include the multipurpose nature of these inquiries, their limited sample size and need to develop indicators that fit the lowest common denominator

needed to be admissible across the EU 15. It is also likely that this form of survey can only deliver broadly-based scoping type opinions which have limited appeal and value to the policy-maker.

Nevertheless, despite these obvious drawbacks, it is realistic to explore this option in greater detail and, of the existing inquiries, the Eurobarometer arguably offers the best existing option.

Eurobarometer has the following features of particular relevance to the inclusion of questions on VET, summarised as follows:

- (a) basis for the survey is consistent across the EU15, covering same sample of those aged 15 years and over;
- (b) held twice a year in the Spring and Autumn (since 1973);
- (c) face-to-face interviews, home-based;
- (d) results are compared with the total universe and the turnaround of the data is rapid (four to eight weeks after the survey);
- (e) possibility to augment main sample with subsample (e.g. in a particular age range).

On the downside, there are concerns over the all-purpose design of the survey and the relatively small sample size of 1 000 individuals in each Member State<sup>(6)</sup> which would render most disaggregations invalid. The questions are also limited in length, and this may not allow full questioning in some areas.

The cost involved in using the Eurobarometer is reasonably clear and, as a guide figure, the charge involved in adding extra questions is around EUR 10 000 per question. However, this applies across the EU15 and includes analysis of the results. Augmenting the sample size would, of course, add considerably to these costs.

On frequency, there is unlikely to be a need to ask the VET questions in every survey (i.e., twice a year). The sorts of broad scoping questions that could be covered here would really lend themselves to a biennial or triennial survey.

**The third option** of creating a new EU-wide survey is therefore attractive and is really the only method for conducting any survey with indicators that go beyond the simple scoping activity. Such a survey would be able to deliver a range of indicators that could address previous, current and future attitudes towards VET. However, this option also represents the most expensive choice, and Member States would need to be convinced of its value. There is also the added complication that, in the case studies, Member State agencies were suggesting that if this route was followed, it would have to be wholly financed from non-national sources.

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<sup>(6)</sup> The sample size of 1 000 persons applies to most Member States with the following exceptions: Luxembourg 500; United Kingdom 1 000 covering England, Scotland and Wales, plus 300 in Northern Ireland; Germany, 1 000 in the western *Länder* and 1 000 in the eastern *Länder*.

It is difficult for us to give much clear guidance here on aspects such as sample size, frequency and cost of such a survey, though it may be helpful to provide some thoughts on these important issues.

On sample size, the likelihood is that national agencies will have their own needs and agendas to meet that may dictate the size of sample in each Member State. For example, those where there is a need for regional analyses will need to ensure that sample size can stand up to the levels of disaggregation needed. However, even where the desire is for a broad national picture, sample size still needs to be large enough to provide a usable response that reflects different subgroups in the labour market (differentiated, for example, by age, social group, educational background, etc.) and this suggests a national sample size well in excess of the Eurobarometer and even the ECHPS.

As far as the frequency of such a survey is concerned, this will depend on the coverage of the questions and their potential contribution to policy-making. For example, if the survey is covering the needs-based questions which, as indicated in Chapter 4, represent the most useful tool for the policy-makers, then this would suggest the need for an annual survey. However, where there are less focused needs, then a biennial or triennial survey might suffice. One further option worth considering is to hold a survey each year with a limited number of core questions, enhanced as required by others focusing on particular themes or on the opinions of respondents on the future. These other questions could be repeated every three years, thereby providing trend data on a much larger range of questions.

The costs of holding such a pan-EU survey will, of course, be dependent on a range of factors, the principal ones being as follows:

- (a) size of survey;
- (b) complexity of the questionnaire;
- (c) who does it;
- (d) requirements for the analysis of the results.

It seems likely that any such survey would have to rely on the relevant national agencies either carrying out the fieldwork themselves, or, as is more likely, commissioning a specialist national agency to do the work for them. Whatever the route chosen, it is likely that the main national agency would retain control over the fieldwork and analysis, passing on the results to Eurostat or Cedefop for EU-wide collation and analysis, similar to, say, the current arrangements for the LFS.

One further option here would be to commission one organisation (or consortium) to carry out the survey across the EU15. However, even in this case it is likely that the fieldwork would be subcontracted to specialist agencies in each Member State.

In terms of the coverage of questions in such a survey, it is difficult to be precise about content. Chapter 4 explored some of the options available, making the important point that the eventual form of the questions should be policy-led and with

a clear rationale of what issues want to be addressed. In the case of a dedicated, harmonised VET survey, clearly the possibilities for including a combination of indicators exists, though the danger of trying to include too many is ever present.

In reality, the limits of the survey will be influenced by a combination of methodological and other factors, the latter including the available resources for the survey and the pressures on delivery of the information. The constraints could, of course, be fleshed out in a comprehensive piloting of the survey, should this become the chosen route.

## **5.6 Overall summary and conclusions**

This analysis has drawn partly on our review of past experience and partly on the evidence from those Member States which already have some experience of conducting opinion surveys on individual attitudes to training. However, there are substantial gaps in this experience and we have sought to fill them by producing a rudimentary typology of opinion indicators in Chapter 4, their scope, inter-relationships and possible use. This provides a starting point for reviewing the most appropriate positioning of a harmonised opinion survey as covered above.

What emerges from this review is the considerable potential for such a survey and the flexibility offered by the possible indicators in its focus and scope - a potential, it must be said, that is not fully realised by the Member States. Although we set out various options, those taking these forward from this assessment need to be cautious. Opinion data can be notoriously unreliable where careful attention is not paid to terminology, sequence and logic in questioning and classification.

In assessing the uses to which a harmonised survey could be put, we could add that the real value of such evidence could also be compromised unless considerable attention is paid to the following factors:

- (a) understanding cross-cultural differences that might impact on definitions, and translation of the indicators and the implications for testing at national level prior to any pilot activity;
- (b) establishing a clear rationale for the audience that the survey aims to look at (and any key segments within it) and for the precise use to which the opinion data is to be placed;
- (c) agreeing among stakeholders key policy themes and issues influencing the focus of the survey, including any integration required with other data collection exercises at EU or national levels;
- (d) establishing against this background the likely timeframe available for initial development through to early results;
- (e) building the necessary commitment to such an activity from national (and other) statistical agencies, and their willingness to contribute (as appropriate) to development fieldwork and roll-out.

Establishing the answers to these issues, rather than a further technical review of the ideal mix of indicators, is likely to be the foundation for taking forward the harmonised opinion survey.

**Annex A**  
**Case studies**

## **Annex A: Case studies**

Case study A: Ireland

Case study B: Italy

Case study C: Sweden

Case study D: United Kingdom

# **Feasibility study for harmonised opinion survey on vocational education and training**

## **Case study A: Ireland**

### **Organisation context**

Discussions were held with a range of key organisations in Ireland involved in some way with the preparation of relevant information on VET. In particular, detailed interviews were held with representatives of the following bodies:

- *Foras Aiseanna Saothair* (FAS), the Training and Employment Authority;
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE);
- Department of Education and Science (DES);
- Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

Preliminary enquiries revealed that these bodies included the main commissioners and users of relevant information on VET, though not exclusively so.

The absence of the main national statistical agency, the Central Statistical Office (CSO), may seem an omission. However, prevailing enquiries indicated little interest in the specific VET field and also a limited interest in opinion-based enquiries.

A feature of the situation in Ireland is a rather complex 'second tier' of information sources, fuelled by some national organisations (in both the public and private sectors) and regional bodies. VET concerns at a national level, for example, cut across some nine government or quasi-government agencies. Furthermore, a good deal of relevant research is carried out in small-scale studies through individual researchers (perhaps based at a university) or through individual providers of VET. It was, therefore, not possible to gather a comprehensive picture of the situation because of this, though it is evident that the main sources have been captured at this stage.

Some additional lines of inquiry remain open and will be pursued during the second stage of the project. For example, the Chambers of Commerce of Ireland have recently published some relevant material.

### **Involvement in VET**

The organisations interviewed for this case study comprise mainly government departments or agencies, and even ESRI, the research body, is largely dependent on government funding for its activities. A brief overview of each of them is given below:

- (a) DETE: the key focus here is the dedicated European Social Fund evaluation unit, which, as the name implies, is concerned with evaluation of the effectiveness of all human resource interventions supported by the ESF. The unit aims to allow the DETE and the ESF to judge the effectiveness of programmes against objectives, and a significant part of its work does focus on VET programmes, simply because they continue to form a significant part of the overall programme of active measures;
- (b) FAS: this is an agency of the DETE and operates in a quasi-independent way. It has overall responsibility for the provision of employment services to job seekers and employers with vacancies, with a network of 57 offices throughout the country. The FAS also works with the expert skills group<sup>(7)</sup> to identify the future skills requirements for Ireland and to offer appropriate training programmes. Other key emphases are on the provision of assistance to smaller firms with training costs (training support scheme) and through the community employment programme, with local self-help employment creation projects in local communities throughout Ireland. FAS is thus the immediate focus for much of VET that attracts some element of state support;
- (c) DES: this is the government department concerned with the development and implementation of education policy. Its primary focus is on education provision to age 18, and much of its work is naturally focused on this. Ireland has an evolving system of education with an increasing emphasis on introducing vocational elements into the pre-18 curriculum. DES works closely with other agencies involved with the education sector, such as the Higher Education Authority which funds and monitors higher education in Ireland;
- (d) ESRI: this is the largest independent research body in Ireland dealing with employment, education and training issues relevant to this study. The institute receives funding through commissioned research and directly from government, though it has an independent board. ESRI works closely with the FAS in carrying out some of its research needs.

There are many other organisations involved with employment and training issues, not least the key social partner bodies of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the Irish Employers' Organisation, and the various local chambers of commerce, brought together under the Chambers of Commerce of Ireland. There has been a tendency towards inclusiveness in the determination of employment policy, and a key part of this is the government's *employment action plan* which lays down the objectives for assisting with the reduction of unemployment.

Ireland has been experiencing very strong economic growth over the past few years and this has enabled unemployment to fall significantly, but it has also put pressure on the supply of skills. A particularly vulnerable skills area is the growing information technology sector, where a skills strategy has been developed alongside forecasts of significant growth in demand.

## Monitoring and evaluating VET

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<sup>(7)</sup> The expert group on future skill needs is an interorganisational body established by the Irish Government in 1997 to assess, mainly through sectoral studies, the emerging skill needs and to inform appropriate policy responses.

Three of the four organisations interviewed are government departments or agencies (e.g. FAS comes under the jurisdiction of the DETE), and so their main concern as far as VET is concerned is its development and delivery. The DES is primarily concerned with the school sector and post-compulsory school destinations and activities, while the FAS is fundamentally about the delivery of employment services and VET (both initial and continuing). As the overseer of the FAS, the DETE is concerned with the effectiveness of policy, and to this extent has a dedicated evaluation unit comprising seven staff who work under a European Social Fund (ESF) banner (virtually all active measures are part-funded by the ESF).

However, while there is a significant amount of in-house evaluation of measures in all government agencies, there is also a thriving independent sector which, to a great extent, relies on the work issued by the government departments themselves. This is where research bodies such as ESRI enter the scene, performing primary research activities for the relevant government agencies on a contract basis. It is normal practice, for example, to commission externally a survey where the awarded organisation would have overall responsibility for the conduct of the work, though under the overall steer of the contracting agency. This collaboration would certainly be evident, for example, in the design of questionnaires and selection of samples.

The most common way of conducting an opinion survey would be to use an external market research company, of which there are at least three used regularly by various government agencies.

The regional structure of Ireland is not particularly strong and, from discussions at the centre, it was felt that there are no major sources of relevant information there. However, there is an increasing emphasis on the development of community-based solutions to labour market problems, and this has inevitably generated considerable interest in the operation of programmes between regions. Thus, a good deal of the national evaluation studies will draw on local programmes for comparative purposes, with the consequent implications on sampling size and structure.

## Opinion-based information sources

Seeking the attitudes and opinions of both individuals and employers on VET has been a consistent theme of inquiry in Ireland. However, much of this work has been part of a much wider range of inquiries, with a variable VET content. Nevertheless, while much of the content of a survey may not be directly on VET-related issues, it is likely that a good deal of the questioning will provide a useful context for understanding the responses to the specific VET questions.

There are a number of relevant opinion-seeking surveys in Ireland, and these are briefly described below:

- (a) **household panel survey:** this is a multipurpose survey commissioned by the government, but run on its behalf by ESRI. The sample size is some 4 000 households throughout Ireland, achieving a sample of around 10,000 individuals. The results of the survey also input to the *Eurobarometer*, though the questions on VET directly are few;

- (b) **national survey of participants on training courses:** this is run by the FAS, the survey work for which is externally commissioned (the latest one for 1998 was carried out by ESRI). It is essentially a follow-up survey of those that have participated in FAS training courses over a specified quarter, with the survey taking place approximately one year later. For example, the latest survey had a sample of 2 284 participants (12.5% of the population) and achieved a response rate of 67% using a mixture of postal, telephone and face-to-face methods. A significant proportion of the questions sought the opinion of respondents on their experiences of their training, as well as some more specific information on their current labour market position. The results of the survey are made public through a report available on request;
- (c) **FAS customer attitude survey:** as the agency responsible for the provision of employment services in Ireland, the FAS regularly seeks the opinion of its users. This survey is not necessarily held each year, though there was such a survey in 1999 (previous ones were in 1996 and 1990). Basically, it is contracted to a market research company which randomly selects individuals leaving employment offices and seeks their views on the services they have just received. The 1999 survey had over 700 respondents spread across 30 local offices. Another survey on employers' attitudes to FAS services was carried out in 1996 and involved 1 000 firms. The principal objectives of the survey were to assess the extent of skill shortages and to obtain information on employers' use and satisfaction with FAS services;
- (d) **annual labour force survey of the Chambers of Commerce of Ireland:** the survey draws on the membership of the constituent chambers of commerce, and asks firms about their current employment experiences. In the latest survey for 1999, there are also some basic questions about the experience of firms with training (how much, its perceived benefit to the business, etc.).

These form the core of the opinion-based information sources which have some degree of regularity. The *Labour Force Survey* has not been listed but is, of course, the largest household inquiry in Ireland, though its coverage of VET is not as significant as in other Member States.

In addition to the above regular or semi-regular surveys, there is a plethora of ad hoc studies, many of them of direct relevance to VET. The ESF evaluation unit of the DETE, for example, carries out a number of evaluations each year, most of which contain surveys of typically around 250 individuals, normally interviewed face-to-face. Recent relevant evaluations have included the following:

- (a) standards-based apprenticeship and traineeship approaches to skills training;
- (b) responsiveness of ESF-supported education and training to skill needs of industry;
- (c) training for prisoners;
- (d) training for agriculture and rural development;
- (e) training for the crafts industry.

The emphasis on studies that examine particular sectors is also evident in the recently completed studies by the FAS. Here, they have looked at skills supply and demand issues in various critical sectors, and involving surveys of individuals and employers. Furthermore, individual providers of VET, perhaps funded through FAS programmes, are

encouraged to carry out their own evaluations of provision, though no attempt is made to coordinate this information.

Increasingly, there has been a move away from the more traditional forms of inquiry, such as face-to-face interviews, to include focus group discussions and especially telephone methods.

In the area of education, there are a number of regular inquiries involving individual participants. The most significant of these is the annual *survey of school leavers* (carried out by ESRI). This normally involves following up leavers aged 16 approximately two years after they left, and included are some basic questions on their current education and training. There is also some similar questioning in the annual *first destination of award recipients in higher education*, produced by the Higher Education Authority.

### **Potential for harmonised opinion survey**

There was no clear indication of support for a more focused and harmonised opinion survey on VET among the Irish discussants. However, certainly in those agencies most directly concerned with the issues (such as the FAS and DETE), there was perceived to be value in a more systematic inquiry, and one that provided a sound basis for understanding EU-wide comparisons.

The main issues emerging from this part of the discussions are outlined below:

- (a) there was little support for a regular (e.g. annual) survey, largely because it was felt that the information would not change greatly from year to year. However, there was some support for an ad hoc survey which tackled specific VET issues, and maybe one on a triennial basis;
- (b) in carrying out any harmonised survey, there would be significant problems in agreeing common VET definitions and standards. It was pointed out that work was already under way at EU level on some of these issues, but progress had been slow, indicating the difficulty of the job;
- (c) limiting any such inquiry to the views of individuals would be a restricting factor and would only serve to get half the story;
- (d) information on VET in Ireland is very fragmented at present, with a lot of agencies doing their own thing and not coordinating the results. It was felt that a lot could be achieved by just making more use of existing sources of information;
- (e) the issue of funding any harmonised survey was raised repeatedly. It is unlikely that any national agency could, or would, be prepared to underwrite the costs, and so only external funding could make it happen;
- (f) any new information source on VET would have to pay particular attention to the basis for analysis. The regional dimension would be important, as would the ability to see the findings from the socio-economic group perspective, and both these requirements would have significant implications for sample size;

(g) because there was no obvious existing vehicle for such an inquiry, it would not be possible to augment an existing survey with extra questions. The only answer would be a new, dedicated survey with the consequent implications for cost.

These points form the overall impression on the potential of a harmonised opinion survey on VET. Basically, there was lukewarm support and a very real feeling that the problems of definition and cost would weigh against this limited degree of interest.

# Feasibility study for a harmonised opinion survey on vocational education and training

## Case study B: Italy

### Organisation context

The case study is based on limited discussions with some of the key players nationally, but also with some notable exceptions (e.g. the Ministero Pubblica Istruzione), due to the limitations of resources and the availability of experts in these organisations.

Interviews did take place with the following national agencies:

(a) ISTAT - the *Istituto Nazionale di Statistica* (broadly, the Institute of National Statistics);

(b) ISFOL - *the Istituto per lo sviluppo dell formazione professionale dei lavoratori*.

It became clear that a comprehensive review for the purposes of the project would require direct contact and/or visits with key organisations in each of the 21 Italian regions or their research partners (e.g. a university). This was clearly not possible within the limited resources we were able to devote to the case studies. This case study therefore provides an outline overview based on visits with the two key bodies mentioned above and a review of literature gathered as part of the research exercise.

### Involvement in VET

The organisations interviewed are essentially government statistical agencies that conduct their own research; that is to say, they do not subcontract their research to other organisations.

The VET system in Italy is well documented, not least by Cedefop, so it is not repeated here other than to reinforce the point that there is decentralisation of Vocational Training (VT) and VET qualifications to the 21 regions, making national statistical overviews difficult to obtain, as any related survey activity is also region-based.

Many young people remain at school by attending *Istituti Tecnischi* (technical institutions) or *Istituti Professionali* (professional institutions) operated under the Ministry of Education, while some 13% of young people of 21 years of age have undertaken some vocational training. Respondents suggested these two parts of the system (technical instruction and vocational training) do not communicate well. For the future, there are plans to collect consistent information from both. At present, however, research is not coordinated. In addition, each region has its own system, making it difficult to collect information in order to develop a national picture.

In most Italian-wide reports, the regions are grouped, for ease, into the following levels:

- (a) the north west: Valle d'Aosta;  
Piemonte;  
Liguria;  
Lombardia;
- (b) the north east: Prov autonoma di Bolzano;  
Prov autonoma di Trento;  
Friuli Venezia Giulia;  
Veneto;  
Emilia Romagna;
- (c) the centre: Marche;  
Umbria;  
Toscana;  
Lazio;
- (d) the south: Abruzzo;  
Molise;  
Campania;  
Puglia;  
Basilicata;  
Calabria;
- (e) the islands: Sardegna;  
Sicilia.

As already mentioned, any opinion-related work of relevance to the Cedefop inquiry is likely to need to be found at regional level.

## **Monitoring and evaluating VET**

Any monitoring or evaluation is extremely difficult owing to the system of decentralisation and most surveys that are conducted are quantitative, not opinion-based.

Of the many research studies reviewed from the available literature, the most relevant in terms of monitoring and evaluating VET on a national basis comes from ISFOL and is entitled *Trainers standards (1998) - a national standards model for trainers* and covers competences towards the accreditation of qualifications, part of a European-wide survey which appears to have been stimulated by the recognition of the need to determine common and/or fundamental nuclei of competence for trainers.

One quote of particular relevance to our study for Cedefop goes as follows:

'...the Italian case appears characterised by various different specific features where the main feature results from the deep institutional ambivalence of VT.

In fact, this system is based on “weak links” with a low level of identity and cultural legitimisation, often subordinated to other worlds (school or production contexts).’

The research did canvas opinions, for example, on the personal qualities of the regional VT trainer. The Italian interviewees mainly assessed three as being somewhere between very and quite distinctive: professionalism, open-mindedness with respect to innovation, and responsibility. The research also asked opinions on a range of alternatives envisaged for the regional VT.

It should be noted that the relevance of this report to the Cedefop research was not recognised by the ISFOL interviewee - the report was part of a package of previous reports passed on post-interview. This again highlights misunderstanding in terminology - the research was seen as experience-based questioning, not opinion.

## **Opinion-based information sources**

This was the most difficult aspect of the interviews, owing to the fragmentation of research in Italy. Key research to note includes the following:

- (a) ISTAT does conduct a survey of the labour market outcomes of graduates and people who completed school. This was the only cited survey with an opinion-related aspect. The questionnaire asks two relevant opinion questions, mainly aimed at determining the satisfaction of graduates on aspects of the training they have received from teachers (such as the presentation of the lessons, rapport with students, etc.);
- (b) ISFOL conducts a similar survey, but by telephone, aimed at first degree participants and another questionnaire survey of those in the upper second of schools. The ISTAT and ISFOL questionnaires, according to respondents, have a similar content;
- (c) in terms of labour market information, ISFOL produces an annual review of regional survey results, though this rarely contains any opinion-related research overview. However, as part of their research, the region may have included opinion questions;
- (d) ISFOL is currently working on the results of a wholly Italian survey of people of 21 years of age relating to school-to-work transition - asking about satisfaction with training (but note, ISFOL do not consider these questions as asking an ‘opinion’). The key opinion-related question relates to whether certain aspects of training are relevant for work. The report will be published in October, but ISFOL stressed the ‘opinion’ element is a very small part. The sampling approach was to select 2 500 young people from the whole of Italy (out of 800 000) with a near 100% response. The sample was selected from the electoral list and questionnaires sent to home addresses.

It is clear that there may be more information available from the individual regions. For example:

- (a) *Gli Esiti Occupazionali della Formazione Professionale* produced by ERVET in the region Emilia Romagna - includes questions on motivation and satisfaction;
- (b) *Esiti Occupazionali del Sistema Formativo Regionale* produced by the Lazio region in association with the University of Rome - includes questions on motivation and satisfaction.

This suggests that much regional research is done in collaboration with other bodies, such as universities, and this may be worth investigating further.

More detail could be gleaned from some of the documents collated if, for example, questionnaires and methodologies were translated in detail. Information is available, for example, on sampling.

Little evidence was forthcoming about such issues as cost of surveys, and interviewees were reluctant to enter a discussion in this respect.

### **Potential for harmonised opinion survey**

Those interviewed did not know how to respond, initially, to questions regarding the potential for a harmonised opinion survey. Much was made of the fragmented nature of survey exercises in Italy and how attempts to coordinate any activity across the Italian regions had been largely unsuccessful. One interviewee felt it would be impossible to coordinate an opinion survey across Europe if they, Italy, would not even be able to do so in their own country. Mention was made of the Italian contribution to the European labour force survey and the difficulties inherent in coordinating Italy's contribution to that.

As discussions progressed, however, some possibilities were explored. It was felt that a specific new survey would not be easy and they would not favour that approach, not least because of the costs involved. One option was to insert, say, two or three questions and no more (a point made forcefully) in an existing survey. The LFS was seen as one possible vehicle. There was unease, however, about doing this for more than one cycle unless the need for a continuing and cyclical survey was proven.

Where the money would come from, and who within Italy would administer the exercise, were two key issues. ISFOL would be keen to be involved. However, for opinion surveys to be relevant to the Italian VET situation, the information would have to be capable of substance disaggregation to regional level. It is possible that in approaching the regional organisations individually, they (or their research partners) might agree to participate in a harmonised survey, but unless all regions agreed to participate, the data collected could not be said to be representative of Italy as a whole. Again, the issue of administration, coordination and funding was key.

In summary, therefore, if cooperation was required of them, it might be possible for Italian institutions to contribute to a harmonised survey exercise. It would not, however, be their recommendation unless it could be marginalised to two or three questions tagged on to an existing survey.

# Feasibility study for harmonised opinion survey on vocational education and training

## Case study C: Sweden

### Organisation context

This case study is based on interviews with representatives for the following institutions:

- (a) the Swedish Council for Work Life Research (*Rådet för arbetslivsforskning*);
- (b) The Swedish EU Programme Office - Education, training and competence development (*Svenska EU Programkontoret för utbildning och kompetensutveckling*);
- (c) Statistics Sweden (*Statistiska Centralbyrån*) - SCB.

**The Swedish Council for Work Life Research**, established 1 July 1995, is a governmental agency whose main responsibility is the planning, initiation and support of research and development activities within the realm of work life. An important part of the mission is the dissemination of research findings and results from R&D projects sponsored by the council. The council only rarely conducts research itself, but offers grants to scholars and research bodies, eg university departments, and an important part of the council's responsibility is the screening and evaluation of research proposals sent in to the council.

**The Swedish EU Programme Office** is a governmental agency launched in 1995 which primarily aims at assisting those who want to obtain EU support for projects involving education, competence development and/or vocational training. Subsequently, the office assumes responsibility for the implementation of such EU-initiatives as Objective 4, Leonardo, ADAPT, Socrates and Employment, to mention just a few examples. The office is a member of the Cedefop documentary centre and, in that capacity, commissioned the Swedish Council for Work Life Research to prepare the monograph *Vocational education and training in Sweden*<sup>(8)</sup> which was published in 1999 and which is the best and most current overview of VET in Sweden.

**Statistics Sweden** is responsible for all official statistics in the country, including population statistics, national accounts, labour market and educational statistics and welfare and social statistics. The bureau, which is a governmental body, does not limit itself to the mere production of crude statistics, but also publishes a huge amount of in-depth analysis of national statistics, one of which, the *Yearbook of educational statistics 1998*, will be referred to later in this case study.

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<sup>(8)</sup> K Abrahamsson, *Vocational education and training in Sweden*, Cedefop, 1999.

## Involvement in VET

All three organisations approached in this case study are governmental bodies dealing, with the exception of Statistics Sweden, mainly with planning and coordination of research and policy development. Actual VET research, as well as the delivery of VET services, is carried out by various agencies, most of which are affiliated to universities, consultancies and/or labour market organisations, trade unions and employers' associations. The number of projects and publications is high, and it is not easy to get a comprehensive view of either VET activities or of VET-related research in Sweden.

Swedish educational policy is characterised by a strong ambition to further individual and social development among the whole population and to level out differences and discrepancies, whether these are cultural, socio-economical or regional. As a corollary of this basically political idea, the Swedish educational system is marked by a very uniform and comprehensive structure.

As a result of these and similar considerations, the Swedish government (in 1995) appointed a parliamentary commission, **the Commission of adult education and training**, with a specific assignment to:

- (a) propose goals for the nation-wide promotion of adult education and training;
- (b) assess the kinds of continuous and supplementary adult education and training that adults need;
- (c) decide on the allocation of responsibility for and financing of, adult education and training for adults;
- (d) consider measures capable of stimulating the development of educational theory and methods in adult education<sup>(9)</sup>.

In December 1995, the commission appointed a specialist group with instructions to investigate the need for skills development in the employment market. The most important offspring of the commission's work is the so-called **Adult Education Initiative (AEI)**, a five-year programme initiated by the Swedish government and launched in July 1997, aimed at boosting participants' job-related skills. The target group for this initiative is unemployed adults without three years of upper-secondary school education (in Sweden, upper secondary education to the basic level required for entrance to higher education generally covers three years). The aim is to enable people to acquire improved self-confidence, to increase their employability and to make them more able to make use of opportunities for furthering their own development in their work. The programme is designed to assist participants in achieving the necessary qualifications and competence to study at a higher level, and to lay the foundations for lifelong learning<sup>(10)</sup>.

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<sup>(9)</sup> <http://utbildning.regeringen.se/klk/commiss.html>. This website contains a 13-page presentation in English together with references to recent publications from the commission, most of which, however, are in Swedish.

<sup>(10)</sup> [www.kunskapslyftet.gov.se/dokument/adult.doc](http://www.kunskapslyftet.gov.se/dokument/adult.doc)

This initiative, and the preceding deliberations, clearly indicate where the emphasis in the Swedish debate about VET lies, namely in the conviction that the needs of the present, and in particular the future, labour market are best met with a two-fold strategy, consisting of measures aiming at:

- (a) developing general (basic) knowledge and skills among individuals and thereby enhance their capacity to learn on their own and thus increase their employability;
- (b) creating a system of continuous, lifelong learning, which offers the individual the possibility to combine work with learning and competence development, and which meets the demands of an ever-changing society and work-life.

Apart from conducting numerous surveys of the Swedish educational system, **Statistics Sweden** has been responsible for carrying out the Swedish part of the Unesco-sponsored project international standard classification of education - ISCED<sup>(11)</sup>. Naturally, the interviewees from Statistics Sweden attach great importance to this attempt to create an international standard for classifying and evaluating education.

The **Commission on qualified vocational training (QVE)** (not personally approached in this study) has been commissioned (since 1996) to run a pilot project which is a new form of post-secondary education, in which one third of the time is based on advanced application of theoretical knowledge at a workplace. What this involves is not the traditional traineeship period, but active workplace learning and problem-solving in an overall educational context. The courses are based on close cooperation between enterprise and various course providers (upper secondary school, municipal adult education, higher education, and companies)<sup>(12)</sup>.

This special provision for QVE again reflects the idea that successful education and training for today's and tomorrow's work-life must focus on basic and general knowledge and skills.

## Monitoring and evaluating VET

**The Adult Education Initiative (AEI)** which is now under way, and which comprises some 110 000 educational seats for the above-mentioned target group, will be subjected to thorough evaluation from independent bodies (mainly departments of education at several Swedish universities) of six aspects of the project, namely:

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<sup>(11)</sup> *Förslag till klassificering av svenska utbildningar enligt ISCED 97*, Statistiska Centralbyrån, Örebro, 1998.

<sup>(12)</sup> [www.ky.gov.se/inenglish](http://www.ky.gov.se/inenglish)

## **1. The municipalities' implementation of AEI and individuals' development.**

The first evaluation project focuses on the municipalities' implementation of AEI and the development among individuals that has taken place within the programme.

It comprises several subprojects, which can be divided into the following two groups:

- 1.1 **municipal studies: how is the new adult education taking shape?** This study concerns the ways in which reformed adult education is emerging at municipal level. The purpose is to describe and analyse changes in the structure of adult education at local level, and the decision-making process underlying these events;
- 1.2 **nationwide representative questionnaire surveys: AEI recruitment, teaching process, results and impact.** Subproject 1.2 is based on analysis of questionnaire replies from a nationwide representative selection of students in municipal adult education and folk high schools, and also teachers in AEI;

**2. Students' and unemployed people's encounter with AEI.** This second evaluation comprises two in-depth studies, focusing on participants and non-participants in AEI, here designated 2.1 and 2.2:

- 2.1 **in-depth study - participants:** the researchers intend, through in-depth fieldwork, to clarify the preconditions, process and outcome of AEI among the participants;
- 2.2 **in-depth study - non-participants:** this second subproject focuses on unemployed people who are not participating in AEI. The subject of investigation is how unemployed people's notions of work, unemployment and education relate to the ideas they encounter among outreach staff and recruiters with a background in the education system, the employment service or trade unions.

**3. Analysis of selection, mobility and economic outcome.** The third major project has a socio-economic focus and comprises three subprojects:

- (a) the selection process;
- (b) geographical and occupational mobility;
- (c) the economic outcome of AEI for individuals and society.

The overall aim of the project is to monitor AEI participants in terms of variables reflected either in SCB's ordinary statistics or in the National Labour Market Board's (AMS) figures on education, unemployment, employment, incomes and other relevant variables.

## **4. 'Early warning system' using statistics on municipalities and individuals.**

The study is focusing on how AEI is developing in certain measurable dimensions. This project is based on current figures concerning municipal conditions and also the

students' choices and characteristics, and it is intended to serve as an 'early warning system' for rapid feedback to decision-makers.

**5. Municipalities' AEI costs.** The costs of AEI incurred by the municipalities is being studied by the Swedish Agency for Administrative Development (SAFAD). This survey is aimed mainly at ascertaining whether the government grant received by the municipalities as part of AEI is reasonable. SAFAD also intends to provide a picture of which types of course provider are most commonly used.

**6. AEI as a model and method of cooperation and control.** In cooperation with the secretariat of the Commission for adult education and training, SAFAD is analysing the model for implementation of AEI that the government has chosen.

The final report on the Adult Education Initiative is due to appear in Spring 2000.

## Opinion-based information sources

It proved rather difficult to identify opinion-based information sources according to the study focus. By far the most important, recurrent source of general information about education and training in Sweden is the aforementioned *Yearbook of educational statistics*, published by Statistics Sweden. This comprehensive collection of statistics covers almost all aspects of the Swedish educational system. It is published every third year and comes in two volumes: one containing the pure statistical figures and another with summaries, diagrams and concluding comments to the figures.

Statistics Sweden (under the heading *Statistiska meddelanden*, but with summaries in English) also issues more detailed studies of various aspects of the Swedish educational system, some of which are:

- (a) *Entrance to the labour market (1998)* which contains a nationwide survey among those who left upper secondary school and those who passed their undergraduate or postgraduate exams at the university in 1994/95, demonstrating, among other things, that 70% of postgraduates from universities had a permanent job one month after graduation, but that after three years only 40% of those who left upper secondary school had found a job;
- (b) *Education and training of the labour force 1996 and 1997* reports that, out of a total of four million employed in Sweden, 1.5 million participated in some kind of staff training programme, and that civil servants, salaried servants, middle-aged, full-time employed and women were above the average among those being subjected to staff training programmes.

Another important source of information about current assessment and evaluation projects on Swedish VET is the Swedish Council for Work Life Research which in a report now being prepared (Summer 1999), presents some 200 research and development projects on almost all aspects of VET.

## Potential for harmonised opinion survey

The idea of a harmonised study of attitudes to VET among the EU Member States does not seem to have very much support from the Swedish interviewees and there are several reasons for this attitude.

Firstly, and most fundamentally, there is a feeling that the difficulties in finding a common definition of VET applicable to all Member States are too overwhelming, and without such a definition a harmonised opinion survey will run into both theoretical and methodological difficulties. How do you compare results from different countries unless you know what has been measured?

Quite apart from the methodological problems, interviewees also expressed some doubts about the usefulness, or rather the applicability, of harmonised EU data about opinions relating to VET. Given the marked differences between Member States not only in economical structure and technological level, but also in culture and tradition, how is the data to be interpreted and applied about opinions and attitudes to the current need to transform industry and work-life in any single Member State?

Secondly, and from the Swedish point of view, there is already an abundance of statistics and other data available in Sweden and it should not be too difficult to extract information from these sources about the opinions on VET among Swedes.

Thirdly, available data strongly support the conclusion that Swedes generally are very positive about education, and there are no particular difficulties in recruiting participants or in persuading employers to send personnel to various kinds of VET activities.

Instead, the main obstacles to the renewal both of the industry and the workforce in Sweden are structural rather individual in nature. Unemployment is high in spite of the fact that Sweden has one of Europe's best educated populations and there are no signs of a rapid improvement in the situation.

Reflecting on the unemployment situation, one interviewee even launched the idea that the target group for a possible study of attitudes to VET in Sweden perhaps ought to be politicians, trade unionists and other decision-makers, because they are the ones, rather than the general public, who need to change their point of view of current labour market issues.

The most viable way to harmonise and align the European labour markets lies, it seems, in further developing systems for comparing education and professional experience, so as to make it easier for individuals to present themselves accurately to prospective employers outside their home country.

# **Feasibility study for a harmonised opinion survey on vocational education and training**

## **Case study D: United Kingdom**

### **Organisation context**

The case study has involved a number of separate but inter-related discussions with key agencies in the UK. These include:

- (a) Centre for training studies (CTS), University of Sheffield;
- (b) Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) at London, Sheffield and Doncaster;
- (c) Office for National Statistics (ONS), London;
- (d) Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD).

Supporting discussions have also been held with the Employment National Training Organisation (Employment NTO), National Foundation for Education Research (NFER), Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR), and other colleagues in HOST - as bodies having conducted parallel research in the UK and following leads suggested at the main meetings. DfEE is the main policy focus for VET matters in the UK, and also the major commissioning body for related research. It has consequently been the main focus for our discussions - with six of the 11 staff interviewed overall.

The picture provided is partial. In particular, no account can be taken of non-government-funded work in, for example, universities, trusts or foundations, or of regional or sector-level work.

### **Involvement in VET**

The main organisations involved in the interviews are policy or delivery bodies for VET analysis and data collation. However, with the exception of the ONS, much of the development and delivery work relating to VET data in the UK is subcontracted to university or contract research bodies. Delivery experience among these agencies is consequently limited largely to the perspective of design, project management and policy integration. More specifically:

- (a) CTS: this is a small, university-based contract research and consulting group specialising in training policy studies. It currently holds the Leonardo contract for developing the second phase of the continuing vocational training survey (CVTS II), and is working with a collaborative network of statistical agencies and others across 23 countries to provide a framework for this;

- (b) DfEE: DfEE is the lead government department for VET policy and programmes. Interviews here involved a range of staff concerned with analytical services, European liaison, comparative statistics, and the adult learning survey. Regional activity is essentially devolved to government offices - and their equivalents - in the 12 UK regions, each with links to designated regional development bodies or agencies (two in the case of Scotland). In practical terms, major research activity on VET is centralised and the regions have little or no methodological or delivery input to the areas of application that are the focus of this review;
- (c) ONS: this is the government-funded agency concerned with the collation, presentation and publication of government statistics. It remains the main focus for contracting for government's continuing 'omnibus' surveys that have some relationship to VET - notably Labour Force Survey (LFS). Most specialist survey work tends to be subcontracted by DfEE direct to independent research centres, commercial survey companies or expert bodies;
- (d) IPD: this is the professional body representing and developing the personnel and training activities of public and private sector firms, and independent consultants. It covers the UK and the whole of Ireland. Although active in the early 1990s at UK and European levels in policy research on VET, it now conducts little empirical research - drawing mainly on primary and secondary sources. Most VET activity would be centred on the attitudes and practices of firms - not individuals in the labour market.

The additional bodies interviewed are principally specialist research groups (HOST, NFER and SCPR) - and have been the main focus for research identified by DfEE and others as having some relevance to this project. The employment NTO is the national body tasked by government as having responsibility for standards developments in the employment arena - including the acquisition and use of information on individual attitudes to VET - but largely within the context of organisational development.

VET policy in the UK has long recognised the deficient skills base at craft and intermediate level, and also weaknesses in basic skills and continuing education. Comparative analysis of the UK's performance in this area remains an important driving force in the policy profile of these issues. Policy responses have, until recently, largely stressed 'remedial' training for young people and disadvantaged adults - areas where the 'market' was seen to fail individuals. There has also been some specific training aimed at tackling skill shortages and, more occasionally, in helping firms to build their own capacity to train.

This has adapted over the last five years to increasingly emphasise the responsibility of individuals to commit to, and part-fund, their own training and learning. A package of policy measures are now in place which support earlier national initiatives (e.g. career development loans), and which aim to support self-directed and continuing learning among those of working age - and notably individual learning accounts, the University for industry, and Learning direct. Most of these were anticipated in the current government policy manifesto of 1997/98, but refined ideas are being guided through a series of Green and essentially consultative White papers, and also by the national skills task force set up by government to advise ministers on needs and responses.

The workplace is seen to be an important focus for such enhanced VET activity, but to this can be added a more integrated approach to active labour market policy (New Deal, New Start, ONE) which includes some remedial skills training elements. A variety of initiatives also continue to try better to adapt the provision of post-16 education and training to the needs of employers. These and other developments have been underpinned by a plethora of research and evaluation activity. However, within this, surprisingly little has focused on individual opinions on VET - despite the increasing policy focus on the role of individuals and their responsibilities within self-directed learning. Recent research by DfEE (NFER and HOST) seems to have developed recognition that this is a major information gap, given the shift in policy direction to emphasise individuals' commitment to learning.

## **Monitoring and evaluating VET**

DfEE remains the major focus for national-level VET research. Key sources include the skills in Britain survey - an employer-based review of skill needs, responses and shortages - and for individuals, the generic sources are mainly the census of population and the LFS. The former is conducted only once in 10 years, and the latter is generally regarded as having too small a sample size to be of value for assessing VET activity in smaller economic activities or at subregional level.

Most other relevant national sources of information are essentially ad hoc - responding to particular evaluation or monitoring needs, policy intelligence, or to support the now wide spectrum of local and subregional agencies concerned with building responsiveness of provision to VET needs. The Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) in England, and Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) in Scotland, together with over 70 sector-based National Training Organisations (NTOs), are a major focus for much of the non-centralised VET research, but recent research for government (HOST, DfEE) has shown that much of these data are irregular, of poor quality, and also lack comparability.

The national skills task force has picked up some of these issues, and has been an important focus in its own right for skills-related research. It has identified VET research development issues, but has yet to provide coherent recommendations on improved practice in intelligence generation - and little that seems to relate to the apparent discontinuity between policy directions and the lack of evidence on individuals' opinions on VET. These may be issues on the developing agenda for the task force.

Most recently, government has set up a national survey on adult learning - reviewed below. This is the only coherent and up-to-date source of information on individual behaviour and attitudes in VET, although it does not fit the scope of an opinion survey very well in the context specified by Cedefop. The motive for introducing this seems to have been a recognition that government was producing a diverse policy agenda which encouraged continuing learning - especially among adults - yet it had little discrete evidence on their experiences of it, achievements and aspirations. This was partly because the wealth of policy-related research and VET evaluation of the mid-1980s onwards had focused on the major financial focus then for policy - young people.

Beyond this, the evidence (and methodological experience) on opinion surveys within VET are highly fragmented - and difficult to unpick from the plethora of ad hoc research conducted by or on behalf of government. What research there is on individuals - as with LFS - largely focuses VET investigations on levels of achievement and recent VET behaviour. Attitudes and opinions have largely been neglected, as has work that attempts to relate activity and behaviour to opinions. One exception seems to be some of the follow-up work on ESF participants that is coordinated through a cross-project annual follow-up survey of around 6 000 participants. Its focus is on ESF engagement, but this contains some opinion evidence of VET behaviour. Discussion suggests that this methodology is evolving and has some flaws in identifying discrete VET inputs.

Development proposals on an opinion-based inquiry in the UK are unclear. Recent secondary research for DfEE by NFER (as yet unpublished) has reviewed past evidence on attitudes of young people to pre-16 and post-16 VET, and shown an evidence base that is '... patchy, largely out-of-date, largely programme-centred, and not usually based on the opinions of individuals'. There was also commentary that policy makers seem to take small account of the little opinion evidence that does exist. DfEE has concluded there is a need for systematic work in this area to fill the observed gap, and that this should combine analysis of individual attitudes to VET that are wider than programme-specific opinions, and linking this with young people's VET behaviour. The aim would seem to be to observe causal relationships between opinion and decision-making. There seems no commitment to undertake such work, and a decision is unlikely before early in 2000. There is no parallel analysis - or commitment - on adult opinions.

## **Opinion-based information sources**

Attitudes towards VET among individuals has consequently not been an important feature of UK policy research. It also seems to have been something of an under-developed subject for academics. The most substantive evidence is now over 10 years old, and dates back to the survey of individual opinions and behaviour conducted as part of the *Training in Britain* survey, published in 1988. There has been some subsequent work, and notably the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) survey on *The learning divide* in 1996, although this has centred mostly on participation and not attitudes to learning.

There seem to be four more recent sources of VET information drawn from a cross-section of individuals of working age, although the 'opinion' content of these is limited:

- (a) Labour Force Survey;
- (b) National Adult Learning Survey;
- (c) Market research for individual learning accounts;
- (d) Adult Literacy Survey.

There is also a range of ad hoc input - but some of this is now dated (e.g. work on individual commitment to learning in 1994/95), and is not considered here.

**(a) Labour Force Survey:** the content and scope of this is well established. A household panel survey, conducted on a rolling quota basis, it contains information on recent VET engagement but little more. It is likely that additional education and training modules on participation will be added from Eurostat at the next round. Sample sizes in the UK are relatively small, and have been criticised by the national skills task force for not providing for adequate breakdowns for niche economic activities, and for subregional analysis.

**(b) National Adult Learning Survey:** this is an important initiative. In Autumn 1996, DfEE commissioned SCPR to design and conduct a survey of adults' experiences and attitudes towards learning. The survey was the culminating stages of a wider programme - also conducted by SCPR, which had:

- i. conducted a test survey of 1 400 individuals exploring learning attitudes;
- ii. developed and tested a generic questionnaire for use in a wider adult survey;
- iii. reviewed policy interest and needs of such a survey across DfEE, and the extent to which these needs could be met by existing sources.

The full survey - NALS - was conducted in Spring 1997, and was the first to include significant content on opinions, and to look at both vocational and non-vocational learning. The sample was 7 144 with 5 653 achieved interviews. Fieldwork was conducted by personal computer-assisted interview at households selected from the Postcode Address File (PAF), with up to two persons interviewed in each location. The age focus was 16 to 69, and interviews were conducted only in England and Wales. Data are weighted to correct for different household selection probabilities, for different selection probabilities of individuals, and for non-response.

Content was extensive - a 10-page questionnaire, looking at:

- i. extent and characteristics of people taking part in different forms of learning;
- ii. the costs of doing such learning;
- iii. individuals' experiences of participation in selected learning activities - including problems encountered;
- iv. perceived benefits of participation;
- v. barriers to learning.

As such, the content was mainly centred on participation factors and experience rather than opinion. The opinion and attitudinal material covered included:

- i. satisfaction with current job at the time of learning;

- ii. opinions of employer contributions to cost of learning;
- iii. reasons for starting the learning;
- iv. perceptions of the learning experience;
- v. opinions on quality of learning;
- vi. opinions on benefits to the individual.

There were some attitudinal questions relating also to guidance concerning learning, and a small number of tested attitude statements on employer valuing of learning and qualifications, age and learning, and intrinsic value of learning. The choice of these areas seems to have been driven by specific and current areas of policy interest, rather than an attempt to build replicable indicators of opinion.

The main design problems encountered seem to have been on how to define learning in a practical way that is not too restrictive or over-inclusive - a conceptual issue. Linked to this was the issue of how to phrase questions in such a way that they would effectively and consistently communicate the definition. To help self-definition, SCPR developed a 10-category typology of taught and non-taught learning, and filtered individuals by asking if they had recent experience of one or more of these.

The report was first published in Summer 1998. A repeat survey is planned for later this year, with results available Spring-Summer 2000. Content is not yet approved, but is set to include some core questions which are comparable with 1997, and some others. Unlike the 1997 survey, non-learners are likely to be an important focus.

**(c) Market research for individual learning accounts:** government's intention to launch individual learning accounts (ILAs) has generated a range of market research from DfEE on individual attitudes to learning. This seems to have centred on work over the past year, and a mixture of omnibus market research - often riding on the back of MORI and other general opinion surveys. Most of this has centred on market definition work to inform financial institutions who are being encouraged to back ILAs. There has also been some focus group work - mainly to test current ministerial goals for ILAs. None of this material has been published, and it seems of limited relevance to the scope for a harmonised opinion survey.

**(d) Adult Literacy Survey:** This has been conducted by ONS as part of the IAL survey. Its opinion content is fairly peripheral to the focus of the survey on basic skill needs.

## Potential for harmonised opinion survey

Respondents' views on this were mixed. In general, people were in favour, and some felt this was a crucial information gap that needed to be addressed. There was more concern over focus and costs. Others were unclear about its value and preferred to see a rationale in terms of content. Issues that did emerge included:

- (a) the survey could only be cost-effective if centred on a small number of key indicators, and 'piggy-backing' these on to an existing opinion survey;
- (b) others felt that the Leonardo CVTS II model would be a better approach - albeit with individuals being the enquiry point and not employers. If nothing else, considerable work had gone into developing some common definitions (e.g. 'fields of training') on this that would be useful integrated in any opinion survey across the EU;
- (c) a comparative cross-national approach would be valuable, but would raise problems in defining generic indicators of cross-cultural relevance.

In general, expectations of such a survey were not high. Few doubted that this was a strategic information gap for policy-makers. However, experience of assembling VET opinion indicators is so weak that most felt it very difficult, except in very general terms, to relate to the idea.

**Annex B**  
**Postal survey questionnaire**  
**(English and French versions)**

**Your address is given below. Please can you check and confirm details, making any alterations as necessary.**

Some definitions may help you fully understand the coverage of this feasibility study:

*Vocational education and training* includes all education and training undertaken of relevance to current or future activity in the labour market. As such, it includes initial vocational education and training, on-the-job training, seminars, distance learning, apprenticeships, etc.

*Opinion survey* refers to any instrument of inquiry that asks respondents about their feelings and expectations of the subject. So, for example, it would include here views on the general image of training, its practice, quality and effect on employment prospects, etc.

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. Which of the following best describes your organisation? *(Please tick only one box)*

- |  |                          |   |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| Government Ministry or Department.....                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 |
| Agency of Government.....  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 |
| Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO).....                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 |
| Research Institute/Consultancy.....                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 |
| University or similar academic organisations.....                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 |
| Representative Body (eg trade union, employers' association etc..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6 |
| Other <i>(Please specify below)</i> .....                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7 |

2. Does your organisation carry out any relevant opinion surveys in the field of VET? *(Please tick only one box)*

- Yes  1      No  2      Not sure  3

3. If yes, please indicate how these opinion surveys are conducted *(Please tick all those boxes that apply)*

- |   | In-house                 |   | Externally commissioned  |   |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|---|
| Dedicated VET survey.....   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1 |
| Part of another survey of wider coverage.....                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2 |
| Adding questions to a survey being conducted by another body..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3 |
| Focus groups and other similar activities.....                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4 |
| Other <i>(Please specify below)</i> .....                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5 |

4. For each of the inquiries you have indicated above, please provide the following details, continuing on a separate sheet if you have conducted more than two:

a) In-house (for externally commissioned activities, please go to b):

i. Title (name) of survey

.....

Brief description of survey

.....

.....

VET-relevant content (eg if not dedicated to VET issues, then estimate the proportion of survey relevant to VET)

.....

Details of the main means used to disseminate the results (eg, publication, internet, etc)

.....

ii. Title (name) of survey

.....

Brief description of survey

.....

.....

VET-relevant content (eg if not dedicated to VET issues, then estimate the proportion of survey relevant to VET)

.....

Details of the main means used to disseminate the results (eg, publication, internet, etc)

.....

b) Externally commissioned:

i. Title (name) of survey

.....

Organisation responsible (name, address, telephone, fax and e-mail numbers and named contact)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Brief description of survey

.....

.....

VET-relevant content (eg if not dedicated to VET issues, then estimate the proportion of survey relevant to VET)

.....

Details of the main means used to disseminate the results (eg, publication, internet, etc)

.....

ii. Title (name) of survey

.....

Organisation responsible (name, address, telephone, fax and e-mail numbers and named contact)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Brief description of survey

.....

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.....

.....

VET-relevant content (eg if not dedicated to VET issues, then estimate the proportion of survey relevant to VET)

.....

Details of the main means used to disseminate the results (eg, publication, internet, etc)

.....

5. Do you know of any other relevant opinion surveys in your country? *(Please tick only one box)*

Yes  <sub>1</sub>      No  <sub>2</sub>      Not sure  <sub>3</sub>

If so, please give the following details:

i. Title (name) of survey

.....

Organisation responsible (name, address, telephone, fax and e-mail numbers and named contact)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Brief description of survey

.....

.....

.....

.....

VET-relevant content (eg if not dedicated to VET issues, then estimate the proportion of survey relevant to VET)

.....

Details of the main means used to disseminate the results (eg, publication, internet, etc)

.....



## Etude de faisabilité pour une enquête d'opinion harmonisée européenne

**Votre adresse est mentionnée ci-dessous. Pouvez-vous, s'il vous plaît, la vérifier et nous confirmer que toutes les coordonnées reprises sont correctes. N'hésitez pas à effectuer les corrections nécessaires.**

Quelques définitions pourront vous aider à comprendre l'objet de cette étude de faisabilité.

*Formation et enseignement professionnels* (FEP) inclut tout enseignement ou formation pertinent pour une activité courante ou future sur le marché de l'emploi. En tant que tels, ils incluent la formation et l'enseignement professionnels initiaux, la formation sur le lieu de travail, les séminaires, l'enseignement à distance, l'apprentissage, etc.

**Enquête d'opinion se réfère à tout instrument d'enquête qui demande aux répondants d'exprimer leur sentiments ou leurs attentes sur le sujet concerné. Donc, par exemple, elle inclurait leurs vues sur l'image générale de la formation, sa pratique, sa qualité et ses effets sur les perspectives d'emploi, etc.**

**Répondez, s'il vous plaît, aux questions suivantes**

1. Laquelle des propositions suivantes décrit le mieux votre organisation? (*Ne cochez qu'une possibilité*)

Ministère ou département du gouvernement.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Agence du gouvernement.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Organisation Non Gouvernementale (ONG).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Institut de recherche/société d'études.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Université ou institution académique similaire.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	5
Partenaires sociaux (par ex. syndicat, association d'employeurs, etc.).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	6
Autre ( <i>précisez ci-dessous</i> ).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	7

2. Votre organisation réalise-t-elle quelque enquête d'opinion dans le domaine de la FEP (*Ne cochez qu'une possibilité*)

Oui  1      Non  2      Ne suis pas sûr(e)  3

3. Si oui, indiquez, s'il vous plaît, comment ces enquête d'opinion sont conduites (cochez toutes les possibilités appropriées)

Interne

Commanditée

			<b>de l'extérieur</b>	
Enquête FEP spécifique.....		1		1
Partie d'une autre enquête de couverture plus large.....		2		2
Questions ajoutées dans une enquête organisée par une autre institution.....		3		3
Ciblage de groupes et autres activités similaires.....		4		4
Autre (spécifiez ci-dessous).....		5		5

.....

4. Pour chacune des enquêtes indiquées ci-dessus, pouvez-vous préciser les détails suivants. Continuez, s'il vous plaît sur une feuille à part si vous avez organisé plus de deux enquêtes.

a) Interne (pour les activités commanditées de l'extérieur, répondez en b)

i. Nom de l'enquête

.....

Brève description de l'enquête

.....

.....

Contenu pertinent pour la FEP (par ex. si l'enquête n'est pas spécifique à la FEP, estimez la proportion qui traite de la FEP)

.....

Information sur les principaux moyens utilisés pour diffuser les résultats (ex: publication, internet, etc)

.....

ii. Nom de l'enquête

.....

Brève description de l'enquête

.....

.....

Contenu pertinent pour la FEP (par ex. si l'enquête n'est pas spécifique à la FEP, estimez la proportion qui traite de la FEP)

.....

Information sur les principaux moyens utilisés pour diffuser les résultats (ex: publication, internet, etc)

.....

b) Commanditée de l'extérieur

i. Nom de l'enquête

.....

Organisation responsable (nom, adresse, numéros de téléphone et de fax, courrier électronique et nom des personnes contacts)

.....

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.....

.....

.....

Brève description de l'enquête

.....

.....

.....  
Contenu pertinent pour la FEP (par ex. si l'enquête n'est pas spécifique à la FEP, estimez la proportion qui traite de la FEP)  
.....

Information sur les principaux moyens utilisés pour diffuser les résultats (ex : publication, internet, etc)  
.....

ii. Nom de l'enquête  
.....

Organisation responsable (nom, adresse, numéros de téléphone et de fax, courrier électronique et nom des personnes contacts)  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Brève description de l'enquête  
.....  
.....  
.....

Contenu pertinent pour la FEP (par ex. si l'enquête n'est pas spécifique à la FEP, estimez la proportion qui traite de la FEP)  
.....

Information sur les principaux moyens utilisés pour diffuser les résultats (ex: publication, internet, etc)  
.....

5. Connaissez-vous d'autres enquêtes d'opinion liées à notre étude dans votre pays? (ne cochez qu'une possibilité)

Oui  <sub>1</sub>      Non  <sub>2</sub>      Ne suis pas sûr(e)  <sub>3</sub>

Si oui, donnez-nous, s'il vous plaît les informations suivantes:

i. Nom de l'enquête  
.....

Organisation responsable (nom, adresse, numéros de téléphone et de fax, courrier électronique et nom des personnes contacts)  
.....  
.....  
.....

.....  
.....

Brève description de l'enquête

.....  
.....  
.....

Contenu pertinent pour la FEP (par ex. si l'enquête n'est pas spécifique à la FEP, estimez la proportion qui traite de la FEP)

.....

Information sur les principaux moyens utilisés pour diffuser les résultats (ex: publication, internet, etc)

.....

ii. Nom de l'enquête

.....

Organisation responsable (nom, adresse, numéros de téléphone et de fax, courrier électronique et nom des personnes contacts)

.....  
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Brève description de l'enquête

.....  
.....  
.....

Contenu pertinent pour la FEP (par ex. si l'enquête n'est pas spécifique à la FEP, estimez la proportion qui traite de la FEP)

.....

Information sur les principaux moyens utilisés pour diffuser les résultats (ex: publication, internet, etc)

.....

Merci d'avoir répondu à ce questionnaire: renvoyez-le, s'il vous plaît, le plus rapidement possible à HOST par fax : +44 1403 251866 ou courrier électronique : [info@hostconsult.co.uk](mailto:info@hostconsult.co.uk). Si vous avez des questions, contactez, s'il vous plaît, soit **Ken Walsh** (téléphone: +44 1746 718530, fax: +44 1746 718728, courrier électronique: KenWalsh1@compuserve.com) soit **Dorothy Berry-Lound** (téléphone: +44 1403 211440, fax +44 1403 251866, courrier électronique: Dorothy@hostconsult.co.uk).



**Annex C**  
**Interview checklist**

# Feasibility study for a harmonised opinion survey on vocational education and training

## ***Objectives of interview***

- *To understand the context of national VET policy and how it is assessed (eg, methods, processes, etc);*
- *To identify those particular forms of inquiry that involve seeking the opinion of the respondent on VET;*
- *To assess in detail the objectives, content and processes involved with the relevant opinion inquiries;*
- *To discuss the potential of conducting a harmonised opinion survey on VET in the Member State, drawing out any problems and discussing the best options for doing so.*

## **1. Organisation context**

- a) Type of organisation (eg government department, NGO, research organisation, etc);
- b) Role of interviewee(s);
- c) Knowledge/involvement of Cedefop and/or other parts of the European Commission;
- d) Principal activities.

## **2. Involvement in VET**

- a) Organisation's involvement/role in VET (probe for local/regional/national dimensions, etc);
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b) Main emphasis on VET policy in the Member State (get some background on VET policy in general; probe for main features).

## **3. Monitoring and evaluating VET**

- a) What does the organisation do in terms of monitoring VET (probe for types/methods of information collected, etc)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b) What does the organisation do in terms of evaluating VET (i.e. using the information to assess the efficacy of VET programmes, etc)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c) Identify those sources of information involving seeking the opinions of VET users (including individuals, employers and others);
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- d) What was the motive/need for introducing opinion-related VET information?

- e) Are there proposals for introducing/changing what is done on opinion-based VET information?
- f) Do they know of other sources of information on VET opinions - *ad hoc* studies or formal surveys - what, coverage, contact?

#### 4. Opinion-based information sources

For each identified (own) source of opinion-based information, seek out the following details:

a) Background:

- Title of inquiry;
- Focus of the inquiry;
- Coverage of VET in the inquiry (eg wholly VET or covering other issues);
- Organisation responsible for conduct of the survey;
- Organisation responsible for using (disseminating the survey results);

b) Coverage of the inquiry:

- Geographical;
- Coverage of individuals, companies, households, etc;

c) Periodicity of inquiry - current/planned;

- d) Reference period of inquiry;
  
- e) Main VET/other topics covered by the inquiry (list headings);
  
- f) Specific VET opinion topics covered in detail;
  
- g) Survey design:
  - Sample frame;
  - Sample selection;
  - Sample size;
  - Method of data collection;
  
- h) Adjustments made:
  - Seasonality;
  - Sampling/non-sampling errors;
  - Weighting;
- i) Dissemination:
  - Key publications;
  - Electronic means;
  - Confidentiality issues;
- j) Costs/resources:
  - Overall cost of the inquiry;
  - Unit cost per completed interview (or some other unit measurement);
  - Who pays for it;
  
- k) Development plans for VET opinion information;

For each relevant inquiry, the following information should be requested for taking away:

- Coding instructions;
- Questionnaire;
- Survey specification;
- Interviewer's instructions;
- Latest published information of survey results.

## **5. Potential for harmonised VET survey**

- a) Views on the value of a harmonised VET survey in the EU;
  
- b) Who should be the focus of such a survey (eg, individuals, employers, etc) and at what point in their VET (eg, during, on completion, 12 months after completion, etc)?
  
- c) Ideas on sample frame, sample size and other methodological issues;
  
- d) Explore the potential for using existing means of inquiry for the VET survey;
  
- e) What are the cost and resourcing issues for the Member State?
  
- f) Other obstacles/problems foreseen.

***On conclusion of the interview:***

- *Ensure that any relevant documentation on the inquiries is gathered together;*
- *Mention that we may have to get back to them for clarification on certain points in September, but it will be by electronic means;*
- *Mention that summary information on the findings of the research will be made available by Cedefop, though it is likely to be towards the end of 1999.*
- *Thank them for their involvement.*