

EIRO-Comparative Studies

Beitrag aus dem

Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln

zum

European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO)

Oliver Stettes

Quality in Work and Employment

The case of Germany

Content

- 1 The importance of quality in work and employment**
- 2 Career and employment security**
- 3 Health and well being**
- 4 Skills development**
- 5 Worklife balance**
- 6 Annex – Country data**
- 7 Annex - Questionnaire**

Quality of work and employment is back at the top of the European employment and social policy agenda. At the first Informal meeting of Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs held under the German Presidency on 18/20 January 2007 in Berlin, agreement was reached on a set of policy principles covering what the Presidency termed 'good work' – a new EU terminology following on from the ILO use of 'decent work, and the more established EU mantra of 'more and better jobs'. This is the contribution of Germany.

1 The importance of quality in work and employment

As changes in organisations and the structure of the economy have accelerated since the beginning of the 1990s, well-educated, experienced and motivated employees have increasingly been regarded as a key factor in companies' economic success and competitiveness. Therefore, the issue of improving the quality of work has become of interest to politicians, unions, employers and the general public in Germany. The growing importance of the quality of work and employment is, in particular, reflected in the 'New Quality of Work' initiative (Initiative Neue Qualität der Arbeit, INQA); this has been running since 2001. INQA is a joint initiative by the Federal Government, the federal states, trade unions, employers' and business associations, social security organisations, foundations and individual companies. Its goal is to combine employees' expectations of healthy and satisfying working conditions with the need of enterprises to be competitive in an internationally integrated economy. INQA promotes projects and models of good practice. Concerning the latter, a database provides quick and easy access to best practices. Moreover, INQA aims to facilitate the exchange of ideas and to increase cooperation among companies.

Several initiatives have been launched within INQA. They deal with the various challenges that firms and employees face as a result of society and the work force ageing as well as from skill-biased technical and organisational change. Committees, networks and working groups run the operations of these initiatives.

Some initiatives deal with general aspects of the quality of work. Among these are, for example:

- ‘Lifelong learning’: The goal of this committee is to enhance knowledge on how a healthy and safe environment both at home and at work affects lifelong learning and efforts to remain employable.
- ‘New quality of clerical work’: The aim of this working group is to improve the conditions of office work with respect to ergonomics and the user-friendliness of products and services.
- ‘30, 40, 50plus - healthy work into old age’: This campaign’s objective is to make both companies and the public aware of demographic changes. It provides practical support and advice to firms on how to reintegrate older persons back into work as well as on how to sustain the employability of ageing workers.

Other initiatives focus on specific occupational groups or a single industry. Among such initiatives are, for example:

- ‘Overcoming traumatic events at work’: The committee pursues the development and dissemination of measures that aim to care for those employees who work in an occupational group that provides aid to others when accidents or catastrophes occur.
- ‘The safe handling of chemical products’: This working group conducts networking and provides information on how to improve safety at workplaces at which chemicals are used.
- Two other networks aim to improve the working conditions in the construction sector and in the health care sector. The former network focuses, in particular, on measures that boost the efficiency and profitability of firms that operate within highly competitive markets, whereas the latter disseminates information and provides advice on how to prevent a high level of employee fluctuation among those whose work is highly demanding in physical and/or psychological terms.

The initiators of INQA emphasise that the aims of creating jobs and enhancing the quality of work and employment can both be attained at the

same time. Nevertheless, attempts to combat high levels of unemployment in Germany by fostering job creation remain the most prominent political goal. This goal was, once again, stressed by the coalition partners in their coalition agreement that was reached last autumn. In this respect, the access of unemployed persons to job opportunities should be improved by reforming labour market regulations, advancing various measures contained within active labour market policies and tailoring policies to meet the demands of specific groups, such as youths, older persons and the low- or unskilled.

The national debate on the quality of work and on job creation has, of course, been embedded within discussions and developments at the EU level. Both the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (Bundesvereinigung der deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände, BDA) and the Confederation of German Trade Unions (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, DGB), which are the national umbrella organisations of the social partners, have committed themselves to the goals outlined in the Lisbon strategy. In a recently published memorandum on the forthcoming German EU presidency, the BDA, however, recommends forgoing any further extension of social policies at the EU level. The BDA argues that any such extension could adversely affect the incentive for firms to create new jobs. The DGB, on the other hand, claims that social policies need to be extended in order to implement effective minimum standards concerning working conditions and employees' participation across Europe.

2 Career and employment security

The use of the term 'flexicurity' is rather uncommon within the public debate; it is, however, more common in the academic literature. Nonetheless, the idea of increasing labour market flexibility while sustaining/reforming welfare systems has, of course, influenced the national debate. In recent years, the latter, in particular, has centred on several issues of which, perhaps, the most important have been:

- The so-called Hartz IV reform that merged the general social welfare benefit (*Sozialhilfe*) with unemployment assistance (*Arbeitslosenhilfe*).

- Minimum wages and wages subsidies.
- The reform of employment protection along with the regulation of temporary employment.

On 1 January 2005, the Hartz IV law came into effect. One of the reform's goals is to provide public employment services to recipients of former general social welfare payments. In this respect, all persons who are available for work can be placed with a company if a vacancy exists. The law applies to persons who have regularly been unemployed for spells of more than 12 months or who, in general, have not been looking for work. The Chancellor, Ms Merkel, and the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Mr Müntefering, declared that the merging of the two welfare systems into one (unemployment benefit II) was appropriate and that slightly modified regulations would be proposed in autumn 2006. In a comment published on 24 May 2006, the DGB cast doubt on claims that the Hartz IV reform had, in general, facilitated the integration of the persons mentioned above into employment. On the whole, the BDA welcomed the reform, but called for an extensive revision of the existing rules.

Since the Hartz IV law came into effect, the social partners have, in particular, been concerned with the publicly provided job opportunities for which beneficiaries of unemployment benefit II receive small additional payments to cover outlays (*Ein-Euro-Jobs*). Both unions and employers' associations fear that such job opportunities may crowd out regular jobs. The Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, BMAS) and the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie, BMWI) commissioned a report from the German Council of Economic Experts (Sachverständigenrat zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Lage, SVR) on transforming unemployment benefit II into a 'real wage plus top up' benefit system (*Kombilohn-/Kombieinkommensmodell*). The debate on a 'wage plus top up' benefit system has arisen at the same time as calls have been made for an increase in the number of low-paid jobs for unskilled and low-skilled people (*Niedriglohnsektor*). The DGB opposes the nation-wide extension of a scheme for those in low-paid jobs who receive benefits that top up their wages. The unions, instead,

favour the implementation of legally binding minimum wages (of at least 7.50 euros per hour) and the extension of an intermediate labour market for long-term unemployed persons. The BDA has strongly rejected calls for any kind of legally binding minimum wage and has claimed that any wage plus top up benefit system must be based on an individual's need for assistance.

Fostering job creation by reducing employment protection and facilitating fixed-term/temporary agency employment has been one of the most controversial issues between unions and the employers' associations.

Therefore, the social partners have widely differed in their evaluation of recent labour market reforms; such reforms include the increase in the threshold (to 10 employees per establishment) from which the Dismissal Protection Act (Kündigungsschutzgesetz) applies and the debate on fixed-term employment regulations. The BDA has called for an extensive liberalisation of labour market regulations to foster job creation; the DGB, on the other hand, resolutely rejects the idea that a further deregulation of labour laws would have a positive effect on employment.

3 Health and well being

Within INQA several initiatives/committees deal with the topics of health and well-being at work. For instance, there is an initiative on 'overcoming traumatic events at work', and one on 'the safe handling with chemical products' and, in part at least, the two sector-specific initiatives mentioned above. In addition, further initiatives focus on the topics of 'physical strain', 'psychic stresses', 'body, soul and work', 'mobbing', and the 'prevention of lung diseases'. The domains of these initiatives partly overlap. The growing significance of health and well-being issues at work has been highlighted by many projects and research reports that have been initiated by INQA since 2002.

Both trade unions and employers' associations address health and well-being issues at work by emphasising their significance for both individual well-being and the firm's competitiveness. According to information on such issues provided on its website, the DGB claims that the growing mental stress of work (which results from the flexibilisation of production processes), the increasing pressure to perform well, the fear of losing

one's job and/or information overload 'prevent today's work from being human and good'. The umbrella organisation of the German trade unions emphasises that works councils can contribute effectively to the reduction of mental stress in the workplace. The Works Constitution Act (*Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*) stipulates that works councils have to supervise employers whether they adhere to the law governing health and safety in the workplace. In a declaration published on 7 June 2005, the DGB claimed that the 'dual system of monitoring health and safety at work' (*duales Arbeitsschutzsystem*), which consists of monitoring by public authorities and by the providers of accident insurance, should be extended rather than scaled down. In this respect, the prevention of health problems that could arise from jobs that are mentally stressful should be given more attention in policies and in monitoring. The BDA, however, stresses that the system to monitor health and safety at work is already overregulated. Therefore, the BDA firmly objects to any extension of regulations that aim to implement general inspections of workplaces in which jobs that are mentally stressful could be carried out. Only if sufficient evidence suggests that mentally stressful jobs are carried out within a specific workplace should an inspection be conducted.

Both the BMAS and the DGB stated that mental stress might result in mobbing strategies to cope with conflict situations arising from growing pressure at work. The DGB provides a list of activities which might be deemed to be mobbing. If mobbing occurs due to discrimination as defined by the General Law on Equal Treatment (*Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz*, AGG), employees can appeal to the Federal Office against Discrimination (*Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes*, ADS). The BDA points out that mobbing can severely damage the atmosphere at work. Therefore, management should handle conflicts with care and should involve impartial parties, such as mediators or the works council. The BDA, however, claims that the AGG results in bureaucratic costs and impedes the implementation of voluntary mechanisms that aim to prevent discrimination at the workplace. All of them, the social partners and the government, admit that mobbing is not a phenomenon that has emerged only recently.

As far as the health of older workers is concerned, the BMAS recently called for applications to be made for the funding of projects that imple-

ment measures in establishments of various sizes that can, firstly, sustain the health and employability of employees aged 55 and older and can, secondly, serve as best practices. The BMAS will grant allowances up to 70% of the total expenditures for, at most, 3 years. The tender is part of a BMAS programme that aims to prevent diseases that can be caused by work. The programme was launched in 2001.

4 Skills development

The ageing of the workforce, the declining number of graduates from schools and universities as well as the high share of those pupils who fail to achieve the educational standards required for entering vocational apprenticeship programmes have spurred the debate amongst politicians and representatives of trade unions and employers' association not only on lifelong learning, but also on the efficiency and effectiveness of education and training systems. This is, for example, highlighted by the 'Strategy for Lifelong Learning' (Strategie für lebenslanges Lernen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland) presented by the Federal Government and the federal states. The strategy not only provides information on the status quo of lifelong learning in Germany, but also shows the possibilities to support lifelong learning. It covers good practices as well as public programmes. The BDA published its views on every stage of the educational process, from early childhood education through to continuous vocational training. The BDA's guiding principles are the promotion of quality and competition in education as well as the modernisation of the vocational training system and the unburdening of firms from regulations that hamper continuous training. The DGB has also compiled a list of its views and preferences on education and training. Among other proposals, the DGB, for example, has called for, in general, higher expenditures on education that should amount to 6% of GDP (or at least 5.5% to reach the level of 1975) in order to foster both quality and equality in education and training.

To facilitate the integration of young people into employment and to reduce youth unemployment several public initiatives have been implemented. Since the publication of the results of the PISA study, the government and social partners have been very concerned about the high share of pupils who lack the basic abilities to join regular vocational train-

ing programmes successfully. Unions and employers' associations, however, differ in their views on whether less demanding apprenticeship programmes should be provided for such school leavers. Several public programmes have been initiated to reduce youth unemployment directly. Some of the measures were eventually added to the Social Security Code III (Sozialgesetzbuch, SGB III) that covers young persons who are eligible, firstly, to receive unemployment benefits and, secondly, to join active labour market programmes. In addition, the Pact on Apprenticeships (*Ausbildungspakt*) has been running since 2004. This initiative was launched by the Federal Government, the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BA) and employers' and business associations in order to suspend the imposition of a training levy by the Federal Government; the training levy had been a contentious issue between unions and employers' associations. The DGB has strongly criticised the Pact on Apprenticeships since its implementation.

As far as the continuous training of employees is concerned, data reveal a mixed picture. The participation rate of persons in such training schemes declined between 1997 and 2003, whereas the willingness of firms to provide further vocational training increased. Due to shorter amortisation periods, older workers do not invest in human capital as much as young workers do. This also holds true for women. The provision of training for low-skilled persons is deterred by their higher effective training costs. In April 2006, a collective agreement in the metal industry was concluded that contains measures to foster continuous training. Research results, however, reveal that the influence of collective agreements on continuous training activities was weak in Germany prior to 2005, when the study was conducted. Nonetheless, unions and employers' associations are aware that continuous training will become more important if impending skills shortages are to be overcome. This holds true not only because the workforce is ageing, but also because the human capital that is acquired in apprenticeship programmes depreciates faster than in the past due to increases in the rate of technical progress.

5 Work life balance

With respect to average working times, the extent of flexible working arrangements and the shares of women and men working part-time, statis-

tics reveal that the conditions to maintain the balance between working and family life have improved since 1991. Moreover, three quarters of the respondents in a representative poll among employees aged between 16 and 44 reported that their firms took work-life balance issues into consideration. According to a survey conducted by the Cologne Institute for Economic Research (Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln, IW) in 2003, 46.4% of the firms in Germany had already implemented family-friendly policies, such as teleworking or flexible working-time arrangements. In most cases, the policies were based on collective and works agreements, but about a quarter were introduced by firms on their own initiative and were based on their firm-specific codes of conduct. In this respect, initiatives were predominately developed jointly. A compilation of good practices was published in 2005. Although the figures and the growing number of good practices suggest the wide dissemination of work-life balance policies, the IW survey in 2003 also indicated that such policies continued to be considered of relatively low importance by firms in comparison with other issues.

Since 2003, several initiatives, under the rubric ‘Alliance for Families’ (*Allianz für die Familie*), have been launched to foster an improved balance between working and family life. The umbrella organisations of businesses, employers and unions have been involved in, and have strongly supported, each of the initiatives. For example, work-life balance policies have been promoted by competitions, such as the ‘Family as Factor of Success’. In 2005, this prize was awarded for the fourth time. Moreover, the ‘Local Alliances for Families’ initiative (*Lokale Bündnisse für Familie*) has been promoting, among other things, family-friendly policies in firms at the local level since 2004. More than 1,200 firms have already joined such alliances at the local level. These firms have been providing training and reintegration courses for persons during/after parental leave, jointly providing childcare services or jointly running an informal employment-agency service. A network has been established that should disseminate knowledge on the possibilities and impact of family-friendly policies. This network should also facilitate the exchange of experiences and foster cooperation among firms.

The Law on Part-Time Work and Fixed-Term Work (*Teilzeit- und Befristungsgesetz*, TzBfG) allows every employee to move from full-time to

part-time work if he or she has been working for the firm for six months and if the firm regularly employs more than 15 employees. In this respect, the TzBfG strengthens the employee's position when both sides negotiate the conditions surrounding the reduction of an individual's working time. The BDA has heavily criticised the TzBfG. The BDA contends that it has increased red-tape costs and that it prevents firms from matching the interests of the employees with the firm's need to run production and services effectively by voluntarily offering part-time arrangements. In a brochure on the expectations that a family-friendly firm should meet, the DGB stated that the TzBfG had facilitated the balancing of work and family life and emphasised that the employees who care for relatives at home would appreciate a reduction in their working time.

6 Annex – Country data

Place of work and work organisation	EU27	DE
q11f. Working at company/organisation premises	72.8	78.6
q11g. Teleworking from home	8.3	8.5
q11j. Dealing directly with people who are not employees (e.g. customers)	62.4	60.8
q11k. Working with computers	45.5	53.5
q11l. Using internet/email for work	36.0	39.3
q20a_a. Short repetitive tasks of <1m	24.7	21.7
q20a_b. Short repetitive tasks of <10m	39.0	42.8
q20b_a. Working at very high speed	59.6	72.2
q20b_b. Working to tight deadlines	61.8	70.9
q21a. Pace of work dependent on colleagues	42.2	39.2
q21b. Pace of work dependent on direct demands from customers, etc.	68.0	68.9
q21c. Pace of work dependent on numerical production/performance targets	42.1	46.3
q21d. Pace of work dependent on automated equip-	18.8	19.5

ment/machine		
q21e. Pace of work dependent on boss	35.7	31.5
q22a. Have to interrupt a task in order to take on an unforeseen task	32.7	23.7
q24a. Can choose/change order of tasks	63.4	52.4
q24b. Can choose/change methods of work	66.9	70.6
q24c. Can choose/change speed of work	69.2	62.2
q25a. Can get assistance from colleagues if asked	67.6	64.9
q25b. Can get assistance from superiors/boss if asked	56.1	58.3
q25c. Can get external assistance if asked	31.6	29.5
q25d. Has influence over choice of working partners	24.2	17.9
q25e. Can take break when wishes	44.6	26.6
q25f. Has enough time to get the job done	69.6	60.5
q26a. Task rotation	43.7	51.1
q26b. Teamwork	55.2	59.1
q31. Immediate boss is a woman	24.5	18.2
Job content and training		
q23a. Meeting precise quality standards	74.2	71.4
q23b. Assessing quality of own work	71.8	64.8
q23c. Solving unforeseen problems	80.8	77.4
q23d. Monotonous tasks	42.9	28.5
q23e. Complex tasks	59.4	71.6
q23f. Learning new things	69.1	66.1
q25j. Able to apply own ideas in work	58.4	49.8
q27. Job-skills match: need more training	13.1	21.8
q27. Job-skills match: correspond well	52.3	50.6
q27. Job-skills match: could cope with more demanding duties	34.6	27.7
q28a1. Has undergone paid-for training in previous 12 months	26.1	25.3
Violence, harrassment and discrimination		

q29a. Threats of physical violence	6.0	4.5
q29b. Physical violence from colleagues	1.8	0.5
q29c. Physical violence from other people	4.3	3.5
q29d. Bullying/harassment	5.1	4.1
q29f. Unwanted sexual attention	1.8	1.1
q29g. Age discrimination	2.7	2.9
Physical work factors		
q10a. Vibrations	24.2	28.8
q10b. Noise	30.1	32.9
q10c. High temperatures	24.9	23.7
q10d. Low temperatures	22.0	18.3
q10e. Breathing in smoke, fumes, powder or dust, etc.	19.1	19.3
q10f. Breathing in vapours such as solvents and thinners	11.2	13.8
q10g. Handling chemical substances	14.5	15.5
q10h. Radiation	4.6	6.8
q10i. Tobacco smoke from other people	20.1	25.6
q10j. Infectious materials	9.2	10.5
q11a. Tiring or painful positions	45.5	46.4
q11b. Lifting or moving people	8.1	6.9
q11c. Carrying or moving heavy loads	35.0	31.8
q11d. Standing or walking	72.9	73.5
q11e. Repetitive hand or arm movements	62.3	56.9
q11m. Wearing personal protective clothing or equipment	34.0	34.7
Information and communication		
q30b. Consulted about changes in work organisation, etc.	47.1	42.2
q30c. Subject to regular formal assessment of performance	40.0	39.4
q12. Well-informed about health and safety risks	83.1	89.4
Health		
q32. Consider health or safety at risk because of work	28.6	18.0
q33. Work affects health	35.4	23.7

q33a_a... hearing problems	7.2	4.8
q33a_b... problems with vision	7.8	3.4
q33a_c... skin problems	6.6	5.0
q33a_d... backache	24.7	18.8
q33a_e... headaches	15.5	12.0
q33a_f... stomach ache	5.8	4.2
q33a_g... muscular pains	22.8	14.8
q33a_h... respiratory difficulties	4.7	1.9
q33a_i... heart disease	2.4	1.4
q33a_j...injury(ies)	9.7	8.2
q33a_k...stress	22.3	16.0
q33a_l...overall fatigue	22.5	11.3
q33a_m...sleeping problems	8.7	4.4
q33a_n...allergies	4.0	2.3
q33a_o...anxiety	7.8	1.5
q33a_p... Irritability	10.5	5.4
q35. Able to do same job when 60	58.2	73.6
q34a_d. Absent for health problems in previous year	22.9	28.2
q34b_ef. Average days health-related absence in previous year	4.6	3.5
Work and family life		
q18. Working hours fit family/social commitments well or very well	79.4	85.5
q19. Contacted about work outside normal working hours	22.1	25.8
ef4c. Caring for and educating your children every day for an hour or more	28.8	18.0
ef4d. Cooking and housework	46.4	40.9
Job satisfaction		
q36. Satisfied or very satisfied with working conditions	82.3	89.2
q37a_ef. I might lose my job in the next 6 months	13.7	12.7
q37b_ef. I am well paid for the work I do	43.2	58.4

q37c_ef. My job offers good prospects for career advancement	31.0	30.4
Structure of workforce		
q2d_ef. Seniority (mean years)	9.7	10.2
Working time		
q8a_ef. Mean usual weekly working hours	38.6	37.7
q8b. % usually working five days per week	65.1	73.0
q9a. % with more than one job	6.2	6.4
q13_ef. Daily commuting time (return, in minutes)	41.6	45.0
q14e_ef. Long working days	16.9	12.9
q16a_a. Work same number of hours each day	58.4	57.4
q16a_b. Work same number of days each week	74.0	74.3
q16a_c. Work fixed starting and finishing times	60.7	65.9
q16a_d. Work shifts	17.3	15.7
q17a. % with less flexible schedules	65.3	70.2
Source: European Foundation		

7 Annex - Questionnaire

The results of the 2005 Working Conditions survey for the EU as a whole will be published in November 2006. This year, the Foundation will also issue *national* fact sheets containing indicators for each country (with EU comparators) drawn from the Foundation's fourth European Working Conditions survey (see Annex). These statistical annexes will accompany national reviews of quality in work and employment which are to be prepared by the national correspondents.

For information, the national fact sheets will cover:

1. A range of indicators grouped under the four broad headings established by the European Foundation in its research on quality in work and employment, namely:

- Career and employment
- Health and well-being
- Skills development

- Work-life balance

2. A selection of indicators concerning gender

3. A selection of indicators concerning the structure of the labour market. National correspondents should prepare national reviews of key aspects of quality in work and employment in the light of the questions set out in the questionnaire below, which also follows the same overall structure as the national fact sheets.

Further details of the European Foundation's work on quality in work and employment can be found through the following link:

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/areas/qualityofwork/index.htm>

Last year the European Foundation issued a report bringing together much of the available data on quality in work and employment from a variety of sources. This is available in electronic format:

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/htmlfiles/ef05129.htm>

Employment goals

Employment is a fundamental goal and concern in the European Union and, over recent decades, the emphasis has been on expanding the number of jobs available in order to meet the needs of those wishing to work.

The main indicator, or measure, of success – as set out in the Lisbon strategy – has been the employment rate. This is defined as the number of people in employment as a proportion of the number of people of working age (commonly considered as 16-64, although working life is now extending beyond the conventional retirement age of 65). In comparing such performance between Member States, account is also being taken of the extent of part-time working in the different countries, with the 'volume' of employment created being calculated in full-time equivalents. While increasing the *quantity* of employment remains the key policy priority in the EU today, increasing attention is being paid to the issue of the *quality* of the jobs created, with some concern that efforts to raise levels of employment may be being pursued in part, and at times, at the expense of quality.

This concern has been reflected in the restatement of the European Union's political goals concerning employment as 'more and better jobs' – echoing the aims set out in Article 2 of the Treaty.

The debate on quality in work and employment led to policy action at EU level during the Belgian Presidency of the Council in 2001, with the focus on identifying appropriate indicators to measure the various key dimensions of quality in work and employment. This led to a European Commission policy communication in 2003 on 'Improving quality in work':

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexplus!prod!DocNumber&lg=en&type_doc=COMfinal&an_doc=2003&nu_doc=728

Quality in work and employment remains a key dimension of the European Employment Strategy and of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008), as well as the work programme of the European Foundation.

Measuring job quality

For most people a 'good job' is probably seen (but not necessarily in this particular order of priority) as one that is:

- Intrinsically interesting
- Well suited to their skills and abilities
- Adequately and appropriately paid
- Secure in terms of continuing employment
- Within reasonable travelling distance of home
- With working hours and arrangements compatible with life outside work

It is also important that the job offers:

- Scope for personal initiative where appropriate
- Opportunities for career and personal development
- Good working relations with colleagues
- Freedom from discrimination and harassment
- Safety in terms of health and safety considerations

with appropriate arrangements for being informed and consulted about issues that concern them, and with the opportunity to undertake further training and education as required.

Considerable progress has been made in developing indicators that can measure, or at least give insights into, these different dimensions in order that these factors can be considered alongside the more conven-

tional quantitative material – of the sort collected routinely through the European labour force survey.

Through this work it is becoming possible to gain deeper insights into the nature and content of work, workplace relationships, and the relationship between work and life generally.

Questionnaire for Correspondents

1. The importance of quality in work and employment

- Is the overall issue of quality in work and employment (or any analogous concept) seen to be important by politicians, trade unions, employers, press, and other interest groups? Is the issue growing in importance?
- Is there concern about a possible conflict between job creation and the pursuit of quality in work, or are the two aspects seen to be complementary?
- Is the national debate being influenced by policy discussions and developments at EU level?
- Are any particular aspects of job quality (as listed above) seen as especially important?
- Have any major initiatives been taken by any of the interested parties, either separately or together, with respect to quality in work and employment?

2. Career and employment security

The pursuit of increased labour market flexibility, while maintaining protection for workers affected by change, has led to the promotion of the concept of ‘flexicurity’ at EU level, reflecting the apparent success of such mutually re-enforcing labour market and social policies, notably in some Nordic countries.

- Has the concept of ‘flexicurity’ entered the national debate on employment and social policies between politicians, trade unions, employers, press and other interest groups?
- In your national context, is it likely to be helpful in promoting a new consensus regarding positive labour market and social policy reforms, or is there a risk of it becoming more of a verbal compromise between different interests?

- In such discussions, is the nature of the employment contract - notably between permanent full-time job contracts, and those that are not – a central issue?
- Are there other concerns in such debates – such as appropriate levels of unemployment compensation, or the need to link flexibility and security with increased investment in human resources in order to cope with structural change?

3. Health and well being

Manual work continues to be the major source of traditional health and safety concerns at work, despite declining employment in manufacturing and agricultural sectors.

At the same time, the progressive move towards increased employment in services - where work is generally less physical – has been accompanied by the emergence of new kinds of health concerns, from stress to back and mobility problems.

- To what extent is there public awareness of this evolving agenda? How far are employers and trade unions – together or separately – addressing these new issues?
- How far is the health of older workers seen to be an issue in relation to the debate about increasing the effective retirement age?
- How important are workplace relations for well-being? Is the main focus on violence, harassment or abuse, or are there other, more general, concerns?
- To what extent is there recognition that men and women may often suffer from somewhat different work-related health problems?

4. Skills development

With global economic integration, the EU's comparative economic advantage is shifting towards sectors and activities that use more non-manual skills – not only in performing intellectual or creative tasks, but in handling inter-personal relations and contacts.

- Has the need for life-long learning in order to cope with continuous structural change been accepted by the government, social partners and the public at large?

- Has the fact that demand for manual skills is falling, and demand for non-manual skills rising, been reflected in the type of support provided by the educational and training systems in your country?
- To what extent have specific actions been developed to help those most at risk of being left behind – notably workers in areas dominated by traditional industries and agriculture?
- To what extent are employers, trade unions and government working together – at policy or company level - to address these or related concerns, such as the better integration of young workers, or the retention of older workers?

5. Work life balance

Maintaining a balance between working life and life outside of work is a growing challenge for individuals, and especially for those with families.

- How far is this being achieved successfully in practice in your Member State?
- In so far as new working time arrangements are being developed, are the initiatives coming from employers, or from joint initiatives with their employees and/or trade unions?
- To what extent is public policy playing a role? What sorts of actions or initiatives have there been? Do gender or parenting policies play a particular part? Do these include childcare arrangements?

Long, or ‘unsocial’ working hours can be a particular cause for concern, whatever the intrinsic quality of the job or the pay being received. Likewise, reasonable proximity to one’s place of work will limit the amount of time lost in travel. How do these issues rank as concerns with the public and workforce?