

# The 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS 2004): An Introduction

## General information

The **2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS 2004)** is the fifth in a series of surveys that aims to provide a nationally representative account of the state of employment relations and working life inside British workplaces.

The survey series is jointly sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry ([DTI](#)), the Economic and Social Research Council ([ESRC](#)), the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service ([Acas](#)), and the Policy Studies Institute ([PSI](#)). Previous surveys were conducted in 1980, 1984, 1990 and 1998.

### Purpose:

The purpose of each survey in the series has been to provide large-scale, systematic and dispassionate evidence about numerous aspects of employment relations across almost every sector of the economy in Britain. This evidence is collected with the following objectives in mind:

- to provide a mapping of employment relations practices in workplaces across Great Britain, and to monitor changes in those practices over time;
- to inform policy development, and to stimulate and inform debate and practice;
- to provide a comprehensive and statistically reliable dataset on British workplace employment relations that is made publicly available for research.

### Units and methods:

In broad terms, the scope of **WERS 2004** extends to cover all but the smallest workplaces in Great Britain. It covers both private and public sectors and almost all areas of industry.

The **principal unit of analysis** is the establishment or workplace. A workplace is defined as comprising the activities of a single employer at a single set of premises. Examples include a single branch of a bank, a car factory or a school.

In keeping with its predecessors, WERS 2004 contained both a **cross-section** and a **panel** element.

The **2004 Cross-Section Survey** contained the following five components:

- Self-completion questionnaire for the main management respondent about the composition of the workforce (four pages)
- Face-to-face interview with a main management respondent (average two hours)
- Face-to-face interview with union and non-union employee representatives, where present (average 45 mins)
- Self-completion questionnaire distributed to a random selection of up to 25 employees (eight pages)
- Self-completion questionnaire for the financial manager about the financial performance of the establishment (four pages).

The **1998-2004 Panel Survey** returned to a random selection of workplaces that had participated in the Cross-Section element of the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey. A face-to-face

interview was conducted with a main management respondent (average 40 minutes), with the specific intention of identifying change since 1998.

Around 2,300 workplaces, 1,000 employee representatives and 22,500 employees took part in the 2004 Cross-Section Survey. Around 950 surviving workplaces participated in the 1998-2004 Panel Survey. Response rates of **64 per cent** for the Cross-Section's main management interview and **77 per cent** for the Panel Survey give a clear indication of the quality of the resultant data.

Further details on the methodology of WERS 2004 are provided in the later sections on the 2004 Cross-Section Survey and the 1998-2004 Panel Survey.

### **Topic areas:**

The central focus of the survey series has been the formal and structured relations that take place between management and employees at the workplace, although this focus softened somewhat in WERS 1998. Principal topics covered in WERS 2004 include:

- Workforce composition
- Management of personnel and employment relations
- Recruitment and training
- Workplace flexibility and the organisation of work
- Consultation and information
- Employee representation
- Payment systems and pay determination
- Grievance, disciplinary and dispute procedures
- Equal opportunities, work-life balance
- Workplace performance
- Employee attitudes to work

### **Publications:**

The **primary analysis** of WERS 2004 is reported in two stages. A free 40-page booklet of First Findings was published by the DTI in July 2005, whilst the full report (the sourcebook) was published by Routledge in July 2006. An accompanying 120-page report provides a descriptive portrait of employment relations in small and medium-sized enterprises.

Kersley B, Alpin C, Forth J, Bryson A, Bewley H, Dix G and Oxenbridge S (2005) *First Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey*, London: Department of Trade and Industry. [Download from DTI web-site](#)

*Hard copies of the First Findings are also available free-of-charge from the DTI Publications Order line. Phone 0845 015 0010, citing reference URN 05/1057*

Kersley B, Alpin C, Forth J, Bryson A, Bewley H, Dix G and Oxenbridge S (2006) *Inside the Workplace: Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey*, London: Routledge. [Visit book's homepage](#)

Forth J, Bewley H and Bryson A (2006) *Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey*, London: Department of Trade and Industry. [Download SMEs report](#)

The WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service also maintains a database of **further research** based on WERS 2004 and earlier surveys in the series. [Browse WERS based research](#)

## WERS 2004 Cross-Section Survey

The Cross-Section Survey was based on a random sample of establishments in existence in 2004, and thus provided a snap-shot of employment relations at that time. The Survey took place at workplace level and contained five components:

- **Employee profile questionnaire:** Four-page self-completion questionnaire for the main management respondent about the composition of the workforce
- **Main management interview:** A face-to-face interview (average two hours) with the senior person at the workplace with day-to-day responsibility for industrial relations, employee relations or personnel matters.
- **Interviews with employee representatives:** Face-to-face interviews (average 45 minutes) with a senior union representative and a senior non-union representative, where present.
- **Survey of employees:** Eight-page self-completion questionnaire distributed to a random selection of up to 25 employees in each workplace
- **Financial performance questionnaire:** Four-page self-completion questionnaire for the financial manager about the financial performance of the establishment (new in WERS 2004)

Data was collected from around 2,300 managers, 1,000 employee representatives and 22,500 employees. Each dataset may be linked to another by means of a unique workplace identifier.

### Scope:

The scope of the WERS 2004 Cross-Section extends to cover all workplaces with 5 or more employees, located in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and engaged in activities within Sections D (Manufacturing) to O (Other Community, Social and Personal Services) of the *Standard Industrial Classification (2003)*. The survey covers both private and public sectors.

The Cross-Section Survey covered 30 per cent of all establishments in Britain (a total of 697,000 establishments). Those outside the coverage of the survey comprised: establishments engaged in primary industries and private households with domestic staff (7 per cent of all workplaces); and establishments in Sections D-O of the *Standard Industrial Classification (2003)* with fewer than five employees (60 per cent of all workplaces).

The principal change in the scope of WERS98 Cross-Section when compared with earlier surveys in the WERS series was the extension to cover workplaces with 5-9 employees. The 1998 survey had a minimum size-threshold of 10 employees, whilst earlier surveys in the series had a size-threshold of 25 employees.

### Sampling frame:

The sample for the WERS 2004 Cross-Section Survey was taken from the [Inter Departmental Business Register \(IDBR\)](#), maintained by the [Office of National Statistics](#). The IDBR also provided the sample for WERS 1998. It is the successor to the Census of Employment: the sampling frame used in the first three cross-section surveys in the WERS series.

### Dates of fieldwork:

Fieldwork for the WERS 2004 Cross-Section began in February 2004 and came to a close in April 2005. The median management interview took place in July 2004.

## Management Interview

The **management interview** in the WERS 2004 Cross-Section consisted of a face-to-face interview with the senior person at the workplace with day-to-day responsibility for industrial relations, employee relations or personnel matters. In some cases this would be a personnel specialist. In others, it would be a general manager or a person with a different functional specialty, such as finance.

Interviews were conducted with managers in a total of 2,295 workplaces from an in-scope sample of 3,587 addresses, representing a response rate of 64 per cent.

### The conduct of the interview:

A four-page self-completion **Employee Profile Questionnaire** (EPQ) was sent to the workplace in advance of each interview, to be used for the recording of workforce data that may require the respondent to consult workplace records (e.g. the detailed occupational breakdown of the workforce). The **Management Interview** itself was conducted on-site by a trained interviewer, using Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) technology. Data from the EPQ was entered at the beginning of the interview. The average interview lasted 118 minutes.

The EPQ and Management Questionnaire are available from the table of documentation at the bottom of this page, along with documentation that outlines the coding and editing of the resultant data.

### Core topics:

The management interview covered a range of topics, from management attitudes to work organization, and from employee consultation to equal opportunities. The broad range of topics can be summarized as follows:

- Workforce composition
- Management of personnel and employment relations
- Recruitment and training
- Workplace flexibility and the organisation of work
- Consultation and information
- Employee representation
- Payment systems and pay determination
- Grievance, disciplinary and dispute procedures
- Equal opportunities, work-life balance
- Workplace performance

The principal changes from the WERS 1998 management questionnaire are as follows:

- New questions on trust, business strategy and computer use
- Expanded questioning on consultation, dispute resolution, work-life balance and equal opportunities
- Revised questions on organisational status, employee representation and payment systems.

## Employee Representative interview

The **Employee Representative Interview** in the WERS 2004 Cross-Section consisted of face-to-face interviews with a senior union representative and a senior non-union representative, where present. Eligible union representatives were the senior lay representative of the largest recognized union at the establishment or, if no unions were recognized, the largest non-

recognized union. Eligible non-union representatives were either the senior non-union representative on the most wide-ranging joint consultative committee, or, if there was no committee at the workplace, the senior stand-alone non-union representative.

A total of 1,203 eligible employee representatives were found to be present in 1,072 of the 2,295 workplaces that participated in the WERS 2004 Cross-Section Survey. Interviews were achieved with 984 of these employee representatives, representing a fieldwork response rate of 82 per cent. Of the 984 achieved interviews, 735 were conducted with a union representative and 249 with a non-union representative.

#### **The conduct of the interview:**

The presence of eligible employee representatives was established through questioning in the Management Interview. At the end of this interview, the management respondent was asked if they would permit the interviewer to conduct short interviews with the senior union and non-union representatives and, if permission was granted, contact details were collected. The **Employee Representative Interview** was conducted on-site by the same interviewer, using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology. Union employee representative interviews lasted for 52 minutes on average, whilst non-union employee representative interviews lasted an average of 43 minutes. The Worker Representative Questionnaire is available from the table of documentation at the bottom of this page, along with documentation that outlines the coding and editing of the resultant data.

#### **Topics covered in the questionnaire:**

- Structure of representation at the workplace
- Time spent on representative duties
- Means of communication with employees
- Incidence of negotiation and consultation over pay and other matters
- Involvement in redundancies, discipline and grievance matters
- Incidence of collective disputes and industrial action
- Relations with managers
- Union recruitment

The principal changes from the 1998 worker representative interview are as follows:

- A revised selection criteria that gives equal weight to union and non-union representatives;
- A reduction in the number of questions which are duplicated from the management interview; and,
- More questions that are relevant to non-union representatives

#### **Survey of Employees**

The **Survey of Employees** in the WERS 2004 Cross-Section consisted of an eight-page self-completion questionnaire that was distributed to 25 randomly-selected employees in each workplace (or, to every employee in workplaces with between 5 and 24 employees).

Permission to distribute the Survey of Employees Questionnaires was given by managers in 1,967 (86 per cent) of the 2,295 workplaces that participated in the WERS 2004 Cross-Section Survey, although managers appear to have actually distributed the questionnaires in 76 per cent of all workplaces. Around 37,000 questionnaires were distributed in these 1,733 workplaces. Some 22,451 were completed and returned, representing a fieldwork response rate of 60 per

cent. The mean number of completed questionnaires returned in each workplace was 13, covering a mean of 29 per cent of the total workforce in each establishment.

The survey design provides a nationally representative sample of employees in workplaces covered by the WERS 2004 Cross-Section.

#### **The conduct of the survey:**

In workplaces where managers permitted the Survey of Employees to take place, the interviewer conducting the management interview obtained a list (from the employer) of all employees at the establishment who were on the payroll at that time. The interviewer selected 25 employees at random from this list and left a named questionnaire for each selected employee, to be distributed by the manager. In workplaces with between 5 and 25 employees, a named questionnaire was left for each employee. Each questionnaire was to be placed in a sealed envelope upon completion. The completed questionnaires were either posted directly to the fieldwork office by the respondent, or collected at the workplace and returned in a single batch to the interviewer or by post.

#### **Topics covered in the questionnaire:**

- Working hours
- Job influence
- Job satisfaction
- Working arrangements
- Training and skills
- Information and consultation
- Employee representation
- Pay

The principal changes from the 1998 employee questionnaire are as follows:

- New questions on well-being, trust and computer use
- Revised questions on job satisfaction, work-life balance and consultation.

#### **Financial Performance Questionnaire**

The Financial Performance Questionnaire was a four-page self-completion questionnaire that was left with the management respondent at the end of the management interview. The questionnaire was to be completed either by the management respondent, or by another manager who was better placed to report on financial matters. The questionnaire was placed in 2,076 workplaces and 1,070 questionnaires were returned. When expressed as a proportion of those placed, this represented a response rate of 51 per cent, whilst the response rate expressed as a proportion of productive management interviews was 47 per cent.

The Financial Performance Questionnaire was a new innovation in WERS 2004.

#### **Topics covered in the questionnaire:**

- Turnover (or budget if public sector)
- Value of assets
- Capital expenditure
- Purchases of goods, materials and services
- Employment costs
- R&D activity

## 1998-2004 Panel Survey

The **1998-2004 Panel Survey** in WERS 2004 returned to a random selection of the 2,191 workplaces that participated in the 1998 Cross-Section, with the express purpose of investigating the changes that had taken place in those workplaces over the preceding six years.

Some 1,479 workplaces from the 1998 Cross-Section were selected to be traced for re-interview in 2004. The survey, with a response rate of 77 per cent, yielded an achieved sample of 956 continuing workplaces. The remaining 712 establishments were contacted by telephone to establish whether the establishment had survived over the period and, if it continued in existence, to establish the current number of employees.

### Survey scope:

The WERS 1998 Cross-Section Survey, which formed the first wave of the panel, was representative of all workplaces with 10 or more employees in 1998, located in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and engaged in activities within Sections D (Manufacturing) to O (Other community services) of the *Standard Industrial Classification (2003)*. The survey covered both public and private sectors.

The same restrictions of scope were reapplied to the subset of workplaces that were still in existence in 2004 and therefore eligible for re-interview in the second wave of the panel. Hence, for the purposes of the second-wave interview, a continuing workplace was defined as one that was in-scope in both 1998 and 2004 and that had continued to operate throughout the intervening period. Some 1,247 of the 1,479 selected to be traced for re-interview were in-scope in 2004 and met the definition of a continuing workplace. As stated above, 956 of these 1,026 workplaces participated in the second wave of the panel.

### Dates of fieldwork:

Fieldwork for the first wave of the 1998-2004 Panel Survey took place between November 1997 and July 1998. The median interview took place in January 1998.

Fieldwork for the second wave took place between February 2004 and April 2005. The median interview took place in June 2004.

### The conduct of the 1998 and 2004 interviews:

**1998:** In the first wave of the panel, a self-completion **Basic Workforce Data Sheet (BWDS)** was sent to the workplace in advance of the interview. The **Management Interview** was conducted on-site by a trained interviewer, using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology and lasted an average of two hours. Interviews were also conducted with a senior **employee representative** (usually a union representative) and self-completion questionnaires were distributed to up to 25 **employees**.

**2004:** In the second wave of the panel, a self-completion **Basic Workforce Data Sheet (BWDS)** was again sent to the workplace in advance of the interview. The **Management Interview** (the sole interview in the second wave of the panel) was again conducted on-site by a trained interviewer using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology. The management questionnaire was a shortened version of the 1998 management questionnaire, containing around one third of the original questions. The average interview lasted 42 minutes.

## Topics covered in the 1998 and 2004 questionnaires:

The 2004 questionnaire was both shorter and more focused than the questionnaire used in the WERS98 Cross-Section Survey. However, both questionnaires covered the same broad topic areas:

- Workforce composition
- Management of personnel and employment relations
- Recruitment and training
- Workplace flexibility and the organisation of work
- Consultation and information
- Employee representation
- Payment systems and pay determination
- Grievance, disciplinary and dispute procedures
- Equal opportunities, work-life balance
- Workplace performance

## Obtaining the data

The publicly available data files from WERS 2004 are available from the [Economic and Social Data Service](#) (ESDS). The data files can be located in the on-line Data Catalogue by entering either of the following terms in the search box:

<b>Title:</b>	WERS 2004
<b>Study Number:</b>	5294

Entering Study Number **33176** will locate catalogue entries for all five surveys in the WIRS series.

The data available via the ESDS have been anonymised to protect the identity of individual respondents and participating establishments.

## Further information

The **WERS 2004 User Guide** contains a number of documents giving further information on the conduct of the survey. These include the WERS 2004 Technical Report, which provides a detailed account of the design and conduct of the survey, and copies of each of the survey questionnaires.

Each element of the WERS 2004 User Guide may be downloaded from the web-site of the [WERS 2004 Information and Advice Service](#) or, alternatively, from the web-site of the [Economic and Social Data Service](#)