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## GUIDELINES FOR THE RESEARCH OF EMPLOYERS AND MARKET NEEDS

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## GUIDELINES FOR THE RESEARCH OF EMPLOYERS AND MARKET NEEDS

### INTRODUCTION

**ImproVET** project addresses the development of high quality labour-market relevant skills by tackling mismatches between the industry's needs and education in particular sector. The general objective of this project is to increase the employability of young people and contribute to the development of a highly skilled, qualified and mobile workforce from which companies should also benefit and to support joint developments in VET in Europe and strengthen overall its quality, relevance and attractiveness.

The purpose of this document is to provide project partners with an overview and introduction to detection of educational needs in the labour market. This document will propose and describe the process to research employers about educational needs in one or more countries. It will propose methods to be used and it will identify sample of employers that will be approached. In this document we will find template of questionnaire that will be used, as well as report template to fill the findings. The motivation behind this document is to guide partners in implementing the Working package 3 of **ImproVET** project.

Main aim of the WP3 – Research of Employers and Market Needs is to define competencies and employer's needs regarding workers skills (sector specific professional skills and general/transversal skills). This activity will be the basis for drafting qualification profile.

The objectives of the guidelines are:

- To propose methods to be used;
- To identify sample of employers that will be approached.

### WHAT IS THIS GUIDE ABOUT?

This guide presents a *qualitative research methodology* for investigating the labour market needs with special attention on knowledge, competencies and skills. There are various methods for investigating labour market needs and one could broadly categorize these into quantitative and qualitative approaches. Briefly, a quantitative approach collects data under investigation in numerical form, often from a probability-based sample of the population and analyses these data using statistical methods. In contrast, a qualitative approach collects non-numerical (narrative) data and searches for patterns and connections between various aspects of the problem. In our case, the decision to use qualitative research method is determined by the research focus - the aims, the research questions and the nature of information sought.

This guide suggests practical methods and tools for collecting and analysing data from employers about employment needs and their opinions about necessary knowledge, competencies and skills of new or future workers.

The EU market has increased the demand for internationally comparable data on occupations and qualifications. Occupational profiles include *descriptive information* on job content, skills,

competencies and knowledge requirements, detailed descriptions of occupations, required level of qualification etc. The category of "occupation" is quite clear in itself and it is safe to assume that most employers will have an idea of what is being researched. However, the problem can arise when describing and grouping skills and knowledge, which is why it is important to collaborate with an expert who will guide the whole process.

An employer's survey should be considered in the broader context of other available data in a particular country or internationally, and the data obtained through survey should be combined with data from other sources and analysis of labour market trends.

Jobs are changing over time, but this is not clear in itself from available statistical data on occupations and no future development can be foreseen.<sup>1</sup> Employers are usually in the best position to provide an overall perspective on activities within a workplace or company, and hence, employers' research provides a unique perspective for understanding the skill problem. Employers are the most relevant source of information about an occupation because they set up working conditions that require skills.

## KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND COMPETENCES

The project follows the definitions of the Council of Europe<sup>2</sup>

- 'knowledge' means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;
- 'skills' means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);
- 'competence' means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.

ESCO distinguishes four levels of skill reusability i.e. how widely a knowledge, skill or competence concept can be applied<sup>3</sup>:

- Transversal knowledge, skills and competences are relevant to a broad range of occupations and sectors;
- Cross-sector knowledge, skills and competences are relevant to occupations across several economic sectors;
- Sector-specific knowledge, skills and competences are specific to one sector, but are relevant for more than one occupation within that sector;

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5536\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5536_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 of April of 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning  
<https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/en.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/document/hr/0a89839c-098d-4e34-846c-54cbd5684d24>

Occupation-specific knowledge, skills and competences are usually applied only within one occupation or specialism.

## WHY USE A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH?

This research guide adopts a qualitative approach to the investigation of labour market needs. For us it is important to understand what it is a qualitative research approach, when this approach is appropriate to use, and why this was chosen for our study.

Qualitative research is essentially interested in gaining insight into, and understanding a phenomenon – what is going on in the sector, what kind of competencies are needed, which activities and responsibilities derive from a specific occupation and what new development (e.g. new technology, Industry 4.0,...) mean to the persons experiencing the phenomenon. A qualitative study would seek information about what are task that are needed, how new competencies can be reached and what criteria or considerations did the parties take into account for example when describing new educational need.

Our set of methods relies on persons to talk about their experiences, perceptions, beliefs, etc. through working situation and working experience in the individual interview. These are open and flexible methods of data collection. The data collected are non-numeric; the analysis is narrative and non-statistical e.g. description of the task needed to perform some activity. The choice of specific qualitative methods to use depends on the research questions, the subject under study and intended sources of data. Because these methods are quite time-intensive, qualitative studies often rely on relatively *small samples* of the population or phenomenon under investigation. These small samples are not based on probability sampling and thus do not produce estimates or results that can be generalised to the universal population. This is not the aim of qualitative research; its aim is to determine and establish patterns that exist within the population under investigation. These are valuable information in themselves. A challenge for a qualitative study is to apply a sampling design that would minimize the patterns that it fails to capture. By choosing to provide a qualitative research approach, this guide does not in any way argue that this is better than quantitative methods. Each approach has its respective strengths and limitations.

*The research focus of this guide calls for a qualitative approach for three principal reasons:*

- a) First, perceptions and experiences of employers regarding their needs are qualitative, non-numerical information as we have already stated before, the data are descriptive, and are difficult to capture in pre-structured questions.*
- b) Second, practices about development of new work or tasks are deeply set on individual mind and set in the person's consciousness and this need additional questioning.*
- c) Finally, in many cases, there is little empirical knowledge about new employment, new skills, and new competencies in particular sector.*

## TARGET GROUP

Target group is composed of potential employers in one or more sectors in two or more countries, who are faced with the lack of adequately skilled workers.

Target group within the organization: people with knowledge of work tasks, organization of work, technology, etc. In small and larger companies that should be a person in an occupation, that is the subject of the survey; in larger companies, this can also include HR managers.

Possible Sample Definition Principles to be considered when mapping out companies:

- size of the company
- economic sector
- location of the company

## DATA COLLECTION METHODS

This research guide presents one method of data collection that is proposed for a qualitative research on labour market needs, namely, **in-depth interview**. We suggest using individual in-depth interview principally to determine factual information about employment needs, knowledge, competencies and skills.

### In-depth interviews

An individual interview allows for in-depth focus and detailed investigation on the individual participant, on his/her experience and thoughts. Individual in-depth interviews are optimal for collecting factual information about each individual's experiences and needs. By collecting information from several or more individuals, the experiences of these various individuals can be analysed to identify *common patterns* and to compare patterns between different countries.

## TOPIC GUIDE FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Interview topic questionnaire was structured into main topics and subtopics. See questionnaire in the sub section of this document. This has been done to ensure similar understanding of the scope of each sub-topic among the researchers/interviewers, and consistency in data collection, key issues under each sub-topic were listed and presented in the form. These detailed topic guides will not be shown to the interview respondents so as not to disrupt the natural flow of the conversation. Interviewers *had to be well-prepared and versed* in the content of the topic prior to embarking on the field research. It is highly recommended to test questionnaire before embarking to the field. It is also recommended to *look into existing occupational standards related to certain qualification*. Although the topic guide follows a logical topic sequence, the actual interviews could take different routes to the topics.

## SURVEY ELEMENTS

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE EMPLOYER AND THE WORKPLACE (basic information on the employer and profile of the person completing the survey)

PART II: DESCRIPTION OF KEY TASKS AT THE WORKPLACE (Describes the complexity, scope and level of responsibility of the job. Due to the importance of this section, it is important to have accurate, concise and complete description of the tasks and responsibilities of the job)

Task types:

1. Analysis, planning and organization of work

2. Preparation of own work or work post
3. Commercial work
4. Administration
5. Leadership/management
6. Supervision of work
7. Quality assurance
8. Maintenance
9. Communication
10. Health and environment protection

PART III: WORKING CONDITIONS (The working context refers to the conditions under which the job is performed and the requirements of this job)

PART IV. WORKING TOOLS/EQUIPMENT (Use of special machines, tools, software etc.)

PART V. TRAINING FOR THE WORKPLACE

In order to determine what makes the general knowledge necessary for successful job performance in a certain occupation, we need to identify the associated tasks. Employers are asked questions about the tasks that a certain employee undertakes and about the related knowledge, competencies and skills necessary for the proper performance of this job. Employers think easier in terms of production processes, tasks to be accomplished, and goals that need to be achieved.

For each key task we propose to ask to:

- list related knowledge, competencies and skills
- assess the need for that competence, skill and knowledge in the future (in 3 years' time)

## SAMPLING: CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS

Qualitative research is fundamentally oriented towards understanding a process flow – what are its facets, processes and dynamics. A study may look into only one instance, case or example of the phenomenon, a few examples or many examples. By investigating several examples, one could compare similarities as well as differences across them for a better understanding. How should one select these cases or examples (the “sample”) and how many cases should be selected? These are important methodological questions.

The sampling is determined by the research focus and questions, which determine the base population of the focus of investigation and by practical and logistical considerations, including available resources and time. The qualitative study does not aim to draw statistical inferences about the base population but rather to understand educational needs in specific sector for specific occupation.

We suggest starting with mapping of potential respondent. Perfect mapping is difficult to achieve, important respondent could be easily missed. In addition, researchers might concentrate on obvious locations, and with this missed important ones.

## What is the right number?

The sample size should be “large enough” for the research to find and identify the range of consistent patterns in the problem under investigation. The larger the sample, the less likely it is that one would miss a case or an experience. However, there are real logistical limits to how big a sample a qualitative study could handle properly. *In-depth interviews* produce huge volumes of data.

In principle, one should keep interviewing individuals as long as different answers are being generated. To determine the saturation point during field work, the researchers must process and analyse the data while they are being generated through the interviews. While the idea of saturation point makes sense conceptually, it is not always easy to follow on a practical level, particularly when a study has to be organized and completed within a defined timeframe and budget.

The literature shows a wide variety in what is believed to be a good minimum sample size for qualitative studies, ranging from 10, 20-30, 5-25, 50, 60 to 70 individual interviews or “encounters”. There is no definitive answer. **Our working group decided that we will use a sample of 7-10 employers in each country.** For this reason we opted for qualitative research as in contrast large samples usually are covered by quantitative surveys.

In our project employers which are close to the schools will be sampled and used as the principal entry points to the target populations of the study. The selection of respondent should be targeted, aimed specifically to particular sector that would most likely have employed certain qualification.

## RECRUITING INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

Potential respondents for the in-depth interviews should be mapped in advance. The assistance of local chamber or association of employers should be sought. Respondents should be informed about the objectives of the study and confidentiality issues, and should be asked if they would like to participate.

## FIELD RESEARCH OPERATIONS

Research manuals provide comprehensive guidelines on how to organize and conduct interviews. This guide does not intend to duplicate these guidelines; however we would like to stress out:

### Confidentiality

We have to stress out that the result will be used just for the study and anonymity will be protected in case of future sharing of data with others.

### Orientation and training of researchers

Field researchers should possess the required skills and disposition to do interviews. Basic knowledge about occupational standard included in the educational programme for certain qualification. Researchers require basic knowledge on the subject matter and understanding of the *concepts and definitions covered by the research questions*.



## Conducting interviews

The research team should be prepared to adopt flexible or various schedules for interviews in order to accommodate different situations of potential participants. Employers may not be available during the day or they might have irregular working hours.

Interviews should be conducted where interviewees feel comfortable.

## ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

With qualitative research, it is important, first of all, to read through interviews and be familiar with the content and scope of the data sources. One should not jump to analysing only passages of data without having seen and reflected upon whole picture.

Description is the essential first step in qualitative analysis. One can describe the demographic profile of the sample and the context of the study; and describe what participants said about a specific theme.

Analysis should draw and define typical type of activity under each subsection. Compare these activities between categories. A template for country report is presented in this document.

## CONCLUSIONS

All relevant documents to conduct *in-depth interviews* are included in this document. In conducting interviews we should be goal oriented, we need to find out, what employers really need from their future employees. And we have to always keep in mind that we need to adapt or re-shape educational programme to their needs.

## FIELD WORK PLAN

As we have already written, the main purpose of the interviewing process is to determine whether the educational programme for certain qualification is adequate and what are employer's needs in certain sector.

In this chapter, experts should determine timeline of the interviews, target group (goal number of interviewees) by the country. Also, they should determine number of institutions representatives who are familiar with the methodology and who will conduct interviews and determine their roles and responsibilities. After the conducted interviews, each of the partners will prepare according to the template so called national report containing the results of the interviewing process. Then, afterwards, the working group leader will prepare a summary containing the results of the all countries. As a result of the entire process, the Final Report should be prepared.

## IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **Employers' survey – English version**

#### **PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE EMPLOYER AND THE WORKPLACE**

## 1. Organization Name:

The survey is intended for people who have the best overview of tasks and skills requirements.

## 2. Information about the person completing the survey:

a) Workplace:

b) Occupation:

c) Years of professional experience:

List the jobs that would ideally employ a person with a \_\_\_\_ qualification.

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Below describe the workplace that is most often represented in your company?

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**PART II: DESCRIPTION OF KEY TASKS AT THE WORKPLACE**

For each task type mention at least 3-5 key tasks which are important for the workplace at the moment. It is necessary to describe what the workplace requires.

## 1. Task type: Analysis, planning and organization of work

Is this type of task performed at the workplace: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Assess the need for that skill/knowledge in the future

KEY TASK:		
REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (for each key task specify what knowledge and skills the worker has to have, i.e., everything that he / she needs to know and be able to do, to successfully perform that key task)	Assess the need for that skill/knowledge in the future (in 3 years' time)	
	YES	NO

## 2. Task type: Preparation of own work or work post

Is this type of task performed at the workplace: ☐ Yes ☐ No

KEY TASK:		
REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (for each key task specify what knowledge and skills the worker has to have, i.e., everything that he / she needs to know and be able to do, to successfully perform that key task)	Assess the need for that skill/knowledge in the future (in 3 years' time)	
	YES	NO

### 3. Task type: Operational work

Is this type of task performed at the workplace: ☐ Yes ☐ No

KEY TASK:		
REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (for each key task specify what knowledge and skills the worker has to have, i.e., everything that he / she needs to know and be able to do, to successfully perform that key task)	Assess the need for that skill/knowledge in the future (in 3 years' time)	
	YES	NO

### 4. Task type: Commercial business

Is this type of task performed at the workplace: ☐ Yes ☐ No

KEY TASK:

REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (for each key task specify what knowledge and skills the worker has to have, i.e., everything that he / she needs to know and be able to do, to successfully perform that key task)	Assess the need for that skill/knowledge in the future (in 3 years' time)	
	YES	NO

#### 5. Task type: Administration

Is this type of task performed at the workplace: ☐ Yes ☐ No

KEY TASK:		
REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (for each key task specify what knowledge and skills the worker has to have, i.e., everything that he / she needs to know and be able to do, to successfully perform that key task)	Assess the need for that skill/knowledge in the future (in 3 years' time)	
	YES	NO

#### 6. Task type: Leadership/management

Is this type of task performed at the workplace: ☐ Yes ☐ No

KEY TASK:		
REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (for each key task specify what knowledge and skills the worker has to have, i.e., everything that he / she needs to know and be able to do, to successfully perform that key task)	Assess the need for that skill/knowledge in the future (in 3 years' time)	
	YES	NO


## 7. Task type: Supervision of work

Is this type of task performed at the workplace: ☐ Yes ☐ No

KEY TASK:		
REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (for each key task specify what knowledge and skills the worker has to have, i.e., everything that he / she needs to know and be able to do, to successfully perform that key task)	Assess the need for that skill/knowledge in the future (in 3 years' time)	
	YES	NO

## 8. Task type: Quality assurance

Is this type of task performed at the workplace: ☐ Yes ☐ No

KEY TASK:		
REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (for each key task specify what knowledge and skills the worker has to have, i.e., everything that he / she needs to know and be able to do, to successfully perform that key task)	Assess the need for that skill/knowledge in the future (in 3 years' time)	
	YES	NO

## 9. Task type: Maintenance

Is this type of task performed at the workplace: ☐ Yes ☐ No

KEY TASK:		
REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (for each key task specify what knowledge and skills the worker has to have, i.e., everything that he / she needs to know and be able to do, to successfully perform that key task)	Assess the need for that skill/knowledge in the future (in 3 years' time)	
	YES	NO

## 10. Task type: Communication

Is this type of task performed at the workplace: ☐ Yes ☐ No

KEY TASK:		
REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (for each key task specify what knowledge and skills the worker has to have, i.e., everything that he / she needs to know and be able to do, to successfully perform that key task)	Assess the need for that skill/knowledge in the future (in 3 years' time)	
	YES	NO

## 11. Task type: Health and environment protection

Is this type of task performed at the workplace: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Newly emerging key tasks (Innovation: new products, systematic improvement, organization, digitization)

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**PART III: WORKING CONDITIONS**

## 1. Place of work: (in workshop, production facility, construction site, office etc.)

- a) In the room/indoor
- b) Outdoors
- c) Both in the room and outdoors

d) Other (please specify)

2. Characteristics of working time (work in one shift, shift work, flexible ...)

(Please check the appropriate response for each item):

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
work in shifts					
work in the evening					
work at night					
work on Saturdays					
work on Sundays and holidays					
flexible working hours					
Other (please specify)					

3. Characteristics of the working environment (please select all the options that apply):

- a) high temperature
- b) low temperature
- c) humidity
- d) unclean
- e) noise
- f) sudden temperature changes
- g) vibrations
- h) radiation
- i) explosives
- j) artificial lighting
- k) air flow
- l) hazardous chemicals
- m) none of the above
- n) other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Physical activities typical for this job (please select all the options that apply):

- a) long-term seating
- b) working in a hunched position
- c) frequent climbing
- d) long-term balancing
- e) frequent bending
- f) long-term walking
- g) long-term standing
- h) long-term squatting
- i) long-term kneeling
- j) working in a lying position

- k) frequent throwing
- l) long-term coordinated work of hands and feet
- m) long-term pushing
- n) none of the above
- o) other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Type of work (individual, group work, teamwork, work with clients/customers, mentoring work)

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
individually					
group work					
work with clients/customers					
mentoring work					
other (please specify)					

## PART IV WORKING TOOLS/EQUIPMENT

1. Use of special machines and devices: specify tools, machines, software ...

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## PART V. TRAINING FOR THE WORKPLACE

2. How much on average does the introduction of new workers in this workplace last?

- A person who did not have previous work experience?

- a) It is not necessary to introduce job
- b) Up to 3 months
- c) 3 to 6 months
- d) From 6 months to one year
- e) More than a year

- A person who has had previous work experience?

- a) It is not necessary to introduce job
- b) Up to 3 months
- c) Up to 6 months
- d) From 6 months to one year
- e) More than a year

3. In addition to a certificate or diploma obtained by a high school education, is it necessary for the employee to have an additional certificate of education, a license, a certificate and so on? formal education



a) Yes, state the name of the required document and who issues it:

---

b) No

4. Is there a need for additional informal training for work in this workplace? (more responses possible)

1. Yes, employee self-development
2. Yes, internally organized training
3. Yes, training conducted by external providers of educational services
4. No

5. Please estimate whether at the workplace in your organization only persons with an occupation that is the subject of this survey can perform the job or is that valid also for employees with another occupation.

- a) only persons with an occupation that is the subject of this survey,
- b) persons of other occupations currently work or had worked at this workplace,
- c) persons with other occupation may also work at this workplace.

## ANNEX 1: FEEDBACK REPORT TEMPLATE

PLEASE NOTE: Each partner should organise in-depth interviews with at least 10 respondents. Please review the findings and complete Feedback Report template per partner.

Partner Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Country: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date(s) of interviews: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ till \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this section, provide a summary of the key findings.

[0.5 page]

### METHODOLOGY

In this section, please describe the methodology used to conduct the in-depth interviews, including information on:

How you recruited the participants;

Format of the participants;

Duration of the session;

Please highlight any challenges or difficulties faced when organising interviews.

[0.5 page]

### Profile of Participants

In this section, please provide a brief overview of the interviewing participants, including a short summary of the company.

Please complete the following table:

	Company name and participant	Company profile
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

9.		
10.		

Add more rows as necessary

[1 page]

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND FINDINGS

Please provide a summary of the responses under each of the Questions.

[2-3 pages]

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, please provide an overview of any comments or recommendations made by participants.

[0.5 page]

## CONCLUSION

In this section, please provide a synopsis, highlighting the key points of the interviews.

[0.5 page]