

## Highest post-school qualification

### 2001 Census question

**24** Apart from secondary school qualifications, do you have another qualification?

**DON'T count**

- incomplete qualifications
- qualifications that take less than 3 months of full-time study to get

yes       no, go to **25**

↓

Print your highest qualification, and the main subject, for example:

*qualification* NATIONAL CERTIFICATE LEVEL 4

*subject* HORTICULTURE

*qualification*

*subject*

### Background

Redeveloping the 'highest post-school qualification' question was a high priority for the 2006 Census. The factors influencing redevelopment included:

- development of a new standard Statistics New Zealand classification
- data users' concerns about item non-response and data quality
- the high cost of processing associated with the 2001 write-in question.

Discussions with data users also highlighted concerns that the write-in question format used in the 2001 Census may have under-counted people with trade certificate qualifications.

### Development objectives/plan

The objectives identified for the 2006 development were to improve non-response rates and data quality and reduce processing problems by:

- trialling various question formats
- examining any impact of changes to the question
- ensuring the question met the classification.

To meet these objectives a comprehensive programme of testing was conducted including cognitive testing, analysis of data from field tests and consultation with key stakeholders.

## **Cognitive testing**

The cognitive testing programme was conducted between April 2003 and May 2005 with respondents of varied age, gender and ethnicity. Interviewers observed respondent form-filling behaviour and asked a series of follow-up questions.

The 'highest post-school qualification' question was redeveloped and tested during all rounds of the cognitive testing programme.

## **Cognitive testing results**

### **Round one: April and May 2003**

In round one two questions were tested. The first question had a list of response options containing the names of various qualifications and their levels. The second question asked for the main subject of the highest qualification and had two specific examples, 'Electrical Engineering' and 'Aged Care Nursing'.

#### **Round one**

##### ***a) Level***

The majority of test respondents experienced several problems with this question, most notably question length and the inability to relate to the categories and identify their qualification from the list of options. Generally, the respondents who marked 'other' and wrote in their qualification answered as intended. Of the respondents who marked that they had no formal qualification, the majority followed the routing, however, two respondents missed the routing instructions.

##### ***b) Subject***

Overall, respondents gave specific answers to this question. However, in two cases respondents answered the qualification and subject questions for different qualifications.

### **Round two: June to December 2003**

The tick-box list of qualifications question version was cognitively tested until June/July 2003, but showed no marked improvement in data quality or fitness for use. The length of the question continued to make it burdensome to read through for many respondents. To address these issues the tick-box list of qualifications was abandoned and replaced with two questions.

The first was an indicator question where respondents answered 'yes' or 'no' depending on whether they had any post-school qualifications. The second question was a redeveloped version of the 2001 write-in format and was only asked of respondents who had answered 'yes' to the indicator question.

Testing in round two showed that the majority of respondents did not experience any major problems with the write in version and it was reported to be significantly more user-friendly than the earlier question version.

Most test respondents followed the routing without problems. The majority of respondents gave what appeared to be a specific subject response, although a small number gave their highest subject in fairly general terms. Two respondents wrote their qualification and subject in the same write-in space; however, one of those respondents self-corrected.

### **Round three: March to July 2004**

To encourage those with trade qualifications to answer this question the example 'Trade Certificate Electrical Engineering' was used. To help respondents answer as fully as possible a reminder prompt saying '(and level, if applicable)' was inserted beside the word 'qualification'. 'Level' is a term used primarily in conjunction with some New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) approved qualifications and is important information that helps ensure qualifications are coded correctly when census forms are processed. This version was tested in rounds three and four.

Most respondents tested in round three marked an answer to the indicator question and routed correctly. Two marked 'no' and routed incorrectly, and one answered incorrectly. Testing found that generally respondents appeared to understand what the reminder prompt '(and level if applicable)' meant. However, many respondents had difficulty remembering the exact name of their qualification.

### **Round four: November 2004 to May 2005**

As found in round three, most test respondents marked an answer to the indicator question and routed correctly. The write-in boxes for qualification and subject were difficult for some respondents who:

- had more than one post-school qualification
- were not sure if qualifications gained at high school were actually post-school qualifications
- were not sure if their qualifications should be counted (eg music)
- had English as a second language.

In most cases respondents appeared to understand the concepts 'qualification' and 'level'; however, not many respondents actually applied it to NZQA qualifications. As seen in round two, a few respondents wrote the name of their qualification and the subject in the qualification write-in boxes instead of using the separate write-in boxes for subject.

## **Field test results**

### **Field test: November 2003**

A list of response options was tested in November and the distributions of post-school qualifications were quite different to 2001. Generally, there was a notable increase in the proportion of people with a post-school qualification, and a corresponding decrease in the proportion of people with no post-school qualification (this decrease was quite dramatic and could only be put down to the format of the question).

Respondents who were coded to advanced vocational qualifications in 2001, which is the level below Bachelor (including many nurses and teachers) appeared to have ticked the Bachelor level in the November test.

The listed response option format in this test appeared to have the same problems as the listed response option format used in the 1991 Census – namely, a large proportion of people in the 'other' box.

The indication from this analysis was that there would once again be a significant discontinuity in the time series if a tick-box question was reintroduced. After analysing the results it was recommended that the 2001 write-in question format be retained for the 2006 Census to preserve time series continuity.



**Future development**

Any development undertaken for 2011 will depend on whether the redeveloped write-in question format was successful in reducing the non-response rate and improving data quality.

Although not seen in cognitive testing, data from previous censuses has shown that a relatively high proportion of respondents who do not answer this question also have no high-school qualifications. It appears that these respondents may think this question does not apply to them. Future development should continue to investigate ways to ensure that everyone who is meant to answer this question does so.