

Highest secondary school qualification

2001 Census question

23 What is your highest secondary school qualification?

none

NZ School Certificate in one or more subjects, or National Certificate Level 1

NZ Sixth Form Certificate in one or more subjects, or National Certificate Level 2

NZ University Entrance before 1986 in one or more subjects

NZ Higher School Certificate, or Higher Leaving Certificate

University Entrance qualification from NZ University Bursary

NZ A or B Bursary, Scholarship, or National Certificate Level 3

other NZ secondary school qualification. Print the qualification below:

overseas secondary school qualification

Background

Redeveloping the 'highest secondary school qualification' question was a high priority for the 2006 Census. The factors influencing redevelopment were education sector reform, a new qualifications framework and a review of Statistics New Zealand's classification for this topic. The review aimed to result in a standard classification that could be used by any organisation wanting to collect information about secondary school qualifications.

Development objectives/plan

The objectives identified for the 2006 development were to redesign the question to:

- incorporate the new NCEA qualifications at each response level
- ensure the question met the classification
- look at any impact of removing/retaining the write-in text boxes for 'other NZ secondary school qualification'
- improve the question's readability.

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 secondary school qualification' question was redeveloped and tested during all rounds of the cognitive testing programme.

Cognitive testing results

Round one: April and May 2003

The question version tested in this round had some of the response categories used in 2001 merged and/or shortened to try and simplify it, and the write-in text box for 'other NZ secondary school qualification' was removed, owing to the small amount of data involved.

Testing found that the length of the response option categories made this a wordy question, but that the majority of respondents appeared to find their qualification in the end. It was important to older respondents that 'older' qualifications were included so the response categories remained relevant to them.

To address the question length and readability issues, and to make it relevant for all respondents, the question was changed by:

- replacing the response option categories that had qualifications listed horizontally and separated by commas with qualifications listed vertically, stacked one above the other
- reinstating the write-in boxes for 'other NZ secondary school qualification', due to changes in the education sector
- adding in the new NCEA qualifications.

Round two: June to December 2003

The new question format led to significantly fewer reports of reader fatigue from test respondents. However, some respondents did find the new question version challenging. The new NCEA qualifications confused some older respondents.

Testing highlighted other general issues such as confusion caused by respondents missing the words 'secondary school' or 'highest' in the question. Respondents without qualifications sometimes expressed discomfort when answering this question.

Round three: March to July 2004

For this round, the two 'other' categories were amended to help respondents better differentiate between secondary school qualifications sat and gained in New Zealand (other than those listed) such as University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) and those sat and gained overseas.

As found previously, there was a high cognitive load and reading burden on respondents as they worked their way through all the response options. However, respondents were usually able to identify their qualification. Therefore, the question was working as intended.

As found in round two, the newer NCEA qualifications confused some older respondents, and a few respondents missed the words 'secondary school' in the

question. For two respondents their qualification, or the qualification they were working towards, was not listed, but they marked 'other' and used the text boxes to write an answer.

The amended 'other' categories generally worked well, however there were some respondents who marked 'other gained overseas' when they should have marked 'other gained in NZ' and written in their qualification.

Round four: November 2004 to May 2005

For this round two groups of students were targeted. The first group was tertiary students who had sat NZ Scholarship level 4. This is the last of the NCEA qualifications that would be available by 2006 and testing focused on ascertaining how they would answer if this qualification was not included in the listed response options. The second group was secondary school students whose only qualification was an international one that had been sat and gained in New Zealand.

As found in previous testing rounds, there was a high cognitive load and reading burden on respondents, with a significant number experiencing problems. However, most respondents were eventually able to identify a correct response.

Results confirmed round three findings that the 'other' categories generally worked well. The majority of the secondary school students tested whose only qualification was an international one answered correctly. They wrote in their qualification but some of them did not mark the indicator 'other' as well. These respondents wrote in the name of their qualification in a variety of ways, eg 'Cambridge', 'The Cambridge IGCSE', 'IGCSE O Levels' and 'Cambridge IGCSE level'.

There were mixed responses to the limited testing undertaken with respondents who had sat NZ Scholarship level 4. Some respondents marked 'other secondary school qualification gained in NZ' and wrote in their qualification. Another respondent marked 'NCEA level 3' because that response option also included the word 'Scholarship'.

Field test results

Field test: November 2003

The November test data and the 2001 data saw the distributions matched fairly closely. The additional categories for secondary school qualifications were satisfactory as far as could be determined from the limited output options.

Dress rehearsal: 8 March 2005

Overall, the 2001 Census data and dress rehearsal results were similar, with the dress rehearsal results possibly of better quality.

