

Study/unpaid activities

2001 Census question

- 41** Mark as many spaces as you need to answer this question. In the last 4 weeks, which of these have you done, **without pay**?
- household work, cooking, repairs, gardening, etc, for my own household
 - looking after a child who is a member of my household
 - looking after a member of my household who is ill or has a disability
 - looking after a child (who does NOT live in my household)
 - helping someone who is ill or has a disability (who does NOT live in my household)
 - other helping or voluntary work for or through any organisation, group or marae
 - attending or studying for 20 hours or more per week at school or any other place
 - attending or studying for less than 20 hours per week at school or any other place
- or
- none of these

Background

During the public consultation round for the 2006 Census, Statistics New Zealand received submissions from a number of data users requesting revisions to the way that participation in study information is collected within census. Quality concerns with the 2001 data on study were affected by:

- timing issues (with the census occurring around the start of the academic year)
- phrasing and placement issues (with the previous three censuses having seen a number of changes in the question format, wording and time period referred to. For example, varied use of the phrases 'one week', 'in the 7 days ending on the Sunday before census' and '4 weeks'.

A stand-alone study question in 1996 asked respondents about full-time or part-time study. In 2001, study was incorporated into the unpaid activities question and respondents were asked about 20 hours or more, or less than 20 hours, per week of study.

At the start of the 2006 development cycle, participation in study was originally included in unpaid activities. Developing a separate study question required that the study response options be removed from the unpaid activities question for the 2006 Census. No other redevelopment work was undertaken for the unpaid activities topic.

Development objectives/plan

The objectives identified for the 2006 development were to improve data quality by:

Primary Objective:

- developing a separate study question
- attempting to retain some consistency with questions used previously in the census and other Statistics New Zealand surveys
- distinguishing between respondents studying full-time and part-time
- attempting to capture respondents intending to study during the academic year who may not have started their study at the time of census.

Secondary Objective:

- assessing whether it was possible to capture total participation in study as opposed to only those in formal study.

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, including some targeted testing with students. Interviewers observed respondent form-filling behaviour and asked a series of follow-up questions.

The study/unpaid activities question was redeveloped and tested during rounds three and four of the cognitive testing programme.

Cognitive testing results

Round three: March to July 2004

Three versions of this question were tested during round three. The first two versions yielded results that showed the time period and the forward-looking intention (encapsulated in the word 'enrolled') were difficult for respondents to comprehend, and so many answered incorrectly. The inconsistent interpretations suggested there would be problems with the reliability, validity and usefulness of the data. Removing the date and time period to capture 'snapshot' data helped respondents answer correctly.

Overall, respondent understanding of the concept 'school or anywhere else' was good.

Respondents provided a range of answers about what full-time meant to them. For example, many respondents thought 40 hours a week was full-time, while others thought it was more than 30 hours, or studying for as many hours a day as you would be going to school, with others saying it depended on how many papers they were doing.

The meaning of part-time also yielded a wide variety of answers from respondents. Some thought it could be anything, or it meant that you were working as well as studying, while others thought part-time was 15 to 18 hours or 10 to 15 hours a week.

Testing undertaken with apprentices appeared to show that they did not consider themselves to be studying, and therefore capturing apprentices was likely to be problematic.

It appears high-school students saw the word 'course' and assumed the question did not apply to them.

Round four: November 2004 to May 2005

Early testing results indicated that capturing all secondary school students, particularly 15 and 16-year-olds, was difficult due to the question wording.

To address these issues the dress rehearsal version was amended. The first change involved inserting the words 'at school or anywhere else' into the question itself and removing them from two response options. This change was made to help secondary school students see the word 'school'. The second change involved deleting the word 'course'. These amendments made the question shorter and easier to read.

Limited testing (due to time constraints) was conducted with this new question version. Results suggested there was an improvement in the way secondary school students answered as most of those tested answered correctly.

Tertiary students did not appear to have any problems answering the question correctly despite the word 'course' being removed. As found previously, overall respondent understanding of the concepts 'school or anywhere else' was generally good.

The majority of respondents asked said they would mark either full-time or part-time depending on what course they were enrolled in; therefore, the forward-looking intention of the question was working as intended.

Field test results

Dress rehearsal: 8 March 2005

A higher proportion of 15 to 18-year-olds said they were not studying in the dress rehearsal compared with both 1996 and 2001.

There was also a high non-response rate to the study question in the dress rehearsal, compared with 2001 and 1996, and this will be monitored for the 2006 Census.

Changes made for the 2006 Census

29 Are you attending, studying or enrolled at school or anywhere else:

full-time (20 hours or more a week)

part-time (less than 20 hours a week)

or neither of these

For 2006 participation in study will be collected in a stand-alone question. Respondents who are attending, studying or enrolled at school or anywhere else are asked if they are studying full-time or part-time. Full-time is defined as 20 hours or more a week, and part-time is defined as less than 20 hours a week, because cognitive testing showed that respondents had a wide variety of interpretations for what these terms meant. This suggested there would be data quality issues because the split would be meaningless without a definition.

The 'study' question has been placed next to the education questions and the 'study' response options have been removed from the unpaid activities question.

Future development

An ongoing issue with this question is that too much information is trying to be collected:

- school and post-school students
- a time period (this year, this week or today)
- apprentices (if possible)
- the numbers of hours of study each week
- formal (leading to the award of a formally recognised qualification) versus informal study – it is difficult to exclude those 'studying' pottery in an evening class.

Compromises need to be made as it is not possible to reliably collect all the information required in one census question.

For the 2011 development it may be worth considering the possibility of having two questions – one for secondary school students and the other for everyone else who is studying. However, two questions will require extra space on the form and this topic can only provide indicative data.

Alternatively, this question may be better placed in a dedicated education survey and could be removed from the census altogether.