

TESTING OVERVIEW

Key to Statistics New Zealand's redevelopment process was a pre-testing programme which encompassed successive rounds of cognitive testing across a two-year period. This programme was further supplemented by findings from a field-testing programme that consisted of five field tests, including a full dress rehearsal in March 2005.

Cognitive testing programme

The results from over 250 cognitive tests were instrumental in informing the final design of the forms. The cognitive testing programme was the key method used to develop and evaluate the 2006 Census forms.

Cognitive testing is a pre-testing technique used to test how well questions function in practice. It involves one-to-one interviews with respondents who complete a census form while being observed by the interviewer. Respondents are encouraged to think aloud throughout the process. Interviewers use concurrent and retrospective questions to obtain explanation about how the respondent selected their answers and to identify the cognitive processes involved.

Using this technique, the form design team was able to identify questions that were difficult for the respondent to answer, and to pinpoint probable causes. Because cognitive testing is an iterative process, it provides the opportunity to test and evaluate each subsequent redraft of the questionnaire.

Field testing programme

A comprehensive field testing programme was undertaken to confirm that the forms were collecting reliable information and that field and processing procedures for the 2006 Census would work effectively. A series of five tests, including a dress rehearsal, was conducted in various city and rural locations across New Zealand. The individual tests are outlined below.

March 2003 test

This first test on 2 March 2003 had approximately 2,000 dwellings selected from the Auckland and Christchurch regions in the sample. The primary objectives for this test were to maximise the potential take-up of the online forms, and trial enumeration procedures for apartment dwellings. Therefore, this test was targeted towards dwellings that had average-to-high Internet access (based on 2001 Census data) and private apartments in Auckland.

November 2003 test

This second test was conducted on 18 November 2003, with approximately 8,800 dwellings selected from the Auckland, Waikato, Wellington, Nelson/Marlborough and Canterbury regions in the sample. The primary objectives for this test were to assess the take-up of the online forms in both urban and rural areas, and to assess the communication and management systems for the processing centre and field staff.

A follow-up survey was conducted after the November field test to identify quality concerns and problems respondents may have had filling in their forms.

March 2004 test

This third test was conducted on 2 March 2004 and there were approximately 400 dwellings in the sample. The focus of this test was to trial field procedures for apartment buildings and the selected sample was apartments in central Auckland. This field test also used a split sample to test two different versions of the census forms. As this was a very small sample, any results need to be interpreted with care.

June 2004 test

This fourth test was conducted on 8 June 2004 and there were approximately 400 dwellings selected from the Gisborne, Wellington, Marton and North Shore regions in the sample. The focus of this test was to trial field procedures, particularly for distribution of the Māori/English forms. No online questionnaires were used in this test.

A follow-up survey was conducted after the testing to identify quality concerns and problems respondents may have had filling in their forms. As this was a very small sample, any results need to be interpreted with care.

March 2005 dress rehearsal

A final full-scale dress rehearsal was held on 8 March 2005 and there were approximately 13,000 dwellings selected from the Northland (Kaitaia, Hokianga and Whangarei), Manukau, Manawatu, Blenheim and Oamaru regions in the sample. The dress rehearsal was used to test all operations including the questionnaire, field procedures, scanning and inputting of data.

A follow-up survey was conducted after the dress rehearsal to identify quality concerns and problems respondents may have had filling in their forms.

The results from all field tests and follow up surveys were only indicative, as none of the samples were representative of the total population. Therefore, the field test results documented in this report identify general trends only. Comparisons made between field test results and 2001 Census data used the same geographic areas and not the total population. The only figures presented are from the follow-up surveys and the March 2004 test, which used a split test sample that enabled comparisons to be made between two versions of the census forms.

A summary of the testing undertaken for each redeveloped topic for the 2006 Census follows.