# AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS Canberra 

# INFORMATION PAPER : QUESTIONNAIRES USED IN THE LABOUR FORCE SURVEY 

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the recent changes made to the labour force questionnaire used in the ABS Population Survey. Copies of the old and new questionnaires are attached.
2. ABS has been conducting quarterly labour force surveys since 1960 to collect labour force and other characteristics of the population; these surveys are being conducted on a monthly basis from February 1978 onwards. Details of estimates derived from the survey and descriptions of the methodology of the survey and its sample of dwellings are published in Unemployment (Preliminary Estimates) (6201.0), The Labour Force (Preliminary) (6202.0) and The Labour Force (6203.0).
3. The questionnaire used in the survey for the collection of labour force data has undergone little change since 1960 except for the inclusion since 1975 of additional questions on job-seeking. A new questionnaire was introduced in November 1977 to provide more accurate information on the labour force.
4. The labour force survey questionnaire is a document used by interviewers, who are required to ask questions exactly as they appear on the questionnaire in order to ensure consistency of approach in all interviews. Interviewers are trained in the manner of their approaches to households, the significance of the questions in relation to the objectives of the survey, and to assist respondents to appreciate the relevance of the questions to their particular circumstances in order to obtain accurate responses. While the questionnaire may appear formidable if simply read through from beginning to end, in practice a trained interviewer, by following the sequencing of the questionnaire, puts questions appropriate to each person's labour force experience in a manner easily understood by respondents. In addition to initial training, all interviewers are regularly supervised and retrained.
5. The design of a questionnaire to measure labour force characteristics accurately is a complex operation. The new questionnaire was designed and thoroughly field tested over a twelve month period, involving a careful assessment of the responses obtained to alternative formulation and sequencing of questions.
6. Prior to revising the questionnaire a thorough review of labour force concepts and definitions was carried out, taking into account international recommendations and the practices of major overseas countries. This resulted in only minor adjustments to the concepts and definitions. These definitional differences are not expected to have any significant effect on the comparability of survey results.

## REDESIGN OBJECTIVES

7. The main objectives in designing the new questionnaire were:
(a) to improve the structure of the questionnaire and make it easier for interviewers to use by simplifying complex question sequences and by avoiding the need to recode question responses in certain instances (see old question 22).
(b) to make some questions easier to understand and less likely to be misinterpreted. For example, question 18 on the old questionnaire on whether respondents were looking for work became two separate questions covering full-time and part-time work (questions 55 and 56).
(c) to eliminate the old lead-in question (question 8) on major activity. This question had confused some respondents whose labour force activity in the survey week was only a minor part of their normal activities during that week.
8. Generally, the new questionnaire is more easily understood by respondents and more easily handled by interviewers, and the combined effects of both will provide more accurate labour force information.

## DEFINITIONS

9. To understand the objectives of the labour force questionnaires it is necessary to relate the questions asked to the various labour force categories used in the survey. The labour force classification used in the survey conforms closely to that recommended by the Eighth International Conference of Labour Statisticians, 1954. The labour force category to which a person is assigned depends on his actual activity (i.e. whether working,
looking for work, etc.) during a specified week, known as survey week, which is the week immediately preceding that in which the interview takes place. The principal categories of the labour force recorded by the labour force questionnaires are defined in the following paragraphs.
10. The scope of the survey includes all persons aged fifteen years and over except:
(a) members of the permanent defence forces
(b) certain diplomatic personnel of overseas governments, customarily excluded from Census and estimated populations
(c) non-Australians on tour or holidaying in Australia, and
(d) members of non-Australian defence forces (and their dependants) stationed in Australia.
11. The following definitions relate only to those persons within the scope of the survey.
12. The labour force comprises all persons who, during the survey week, were employed or unemployed as defined below.
13. Employed persons comprise all those aged 15 years and over who, during the survey week:
(a) worked for one hour or more for pay, profit, commission or payment in kind in a job or business, or on a farm (including employees, employers and self-employed persons); or
(b) worked for 15 hours or more without pay in a family business or on a farm (i.e. unpaid family helper); or
(c) were employees who had a job but were not at work, and were
(i) on paid leave; or
(ii) on leave without pay for less than four weeks up to the end of the survey week; or
(iii) stood down without pay because of bad weather or plant breakdown at their place of employment for less than four weeks up to the end of the survey week; or
(iv) on strike or locked out; or
(v) on workers' compensation and expected to be returning to their job; or
(vi) receiving wages or salary while undertaking full time study;
or
(d) were employers or self-employed persons who had a job, business or farm, but were not at work.
14. Unemployed persons are those aged 15 years and over who were not employed during the survey week, and
(a) had actively looked for full-time or part-time work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the survey week and:
(i) were available for work in the survey week, or would have been available except for temporary illness (i.e. lasting for less than four weeks to the end of the survey week); or
(ii) were waiting to start a new job within four weeks from the end of the survey week and would have started in the survey week if the job had been available then;
or
(b) were waiting to be called back to a full-time or a part-time job from which they had been stood down without pay for less than four weeks up to the end of the survey week (including the whole of the survey week) for reasons other than bad weather or plant breakdown.
15. Persons not in the labour force are those aged 15 years and over who were not classified as employed or unemployed as defined above. This category includes persons who
(a) were keeping house (unpaid), attending an educational institution (school, university, etc), retired, voluntarily inactive, permanently unable to work, inmates of institutions, trainee teachers, members of contemplative religious orders, and persons whose only activity during the survey week was jury service or unpaid voluntary work for a charitable organisation, as long as they
(b) had not actively looked for work in the four weeks up to the end of the survey week, and in the survey week:
(i) were without a job, business or farm; or
(ii) worked for less than one hour for pay, profit, commission or payment in kind; or
(iii) worked for less than 15 hours without pay in a family business or farm; or
(iv) were stood down without pay for four weeks or more up to the end of the survey week.
16. These definitions are slightly different from those used in the old questionnaire, but as mentioned earlier these definitional differences are not expected to have any significant effect on comparability of survey results.

## GUIDELINES FOR FOLLOWING THE QUESTIONNAIRES

## General

17. Although the new questionnaire is longer (four pages against two pages) the two questionnaires are still very similar in the range of material covered and the actual number of questions asked for any individual respondent is much the same. The difference is mainly a revised layout and sequencing of questions, which are easier for the interviewer to handle. The new questionnaire is structured so that details are collected as follows:

Page 2 Persons who actually worked during the survey week
Page 3 Persons who had a job but were not at work during the survey week
Page 4 Persons looking for work and final determination of persons not in the labour force.
18. The new questionnaire attached will be used in the February, May, August and November surveys. In the remaining months of the year a slightly modified questionnaire (not attached) will generally be used. This other questionnaire will not ask for occupation, employer and industry details of those who are employed.

## Identifying Unemployed Persons from the

 Questionnaires19. In order for a person to be classified to the "looking for work" sub-category of the unemployed, the following three conditions must be fulfilled in the following order:
(a) Persons have to answer "Yes" to a question which asks whether they have looked for work at any time during the last four weeks, that is:
Old questionnaire - Answer "Yes" to question 18
New questionnaire - Answer "Yes" to question 55 or question 56
(b) persons must have taken an active step during the last four weeks to find work, that is:

Old questionnaire - Answer categories 1 to 4 to question 20
New questionnaire - Answer categornss 01 to 07 to question 57
(c) persons must fulfil the availability for work conditions specified in the definition given above (see paragraph 14a). Availability is determined by:

Old questionnaire - question 21
New questionnaire - questions 59 to 64
20. In order to be classified to the "stood down" sub-category of the unemployed (normally very few in number), persons must fulfil the conditions as specified in the definition given above (see paragraph 14b). The questions that determine if these conditions are fulfilled are:

Old questionnaire - questions 15 and 22B
New questionnaire - question 44 and questions 47 to 52

## Questionnaire Conventions

21. The reasons for different type faces on the questionnaire are:

## Capitals:

This is used for all the questions that need to be fully read out by the interviewer. For some questions (e.g. new questionnaire questions 20 and 57) the interviewer must also read out the categories down the page until a positive response is given.
Lower case:
This is reserved for the coding of answers given by respondents. These words are not read out by the interviewer.
Italics:
This is used for all instructions to interviewers.
22. The labour force survey is conducted on the basis that any responsible adult member of the dwelling should usually be able to answer the questions pertaining to all the residents. In the design of the questionnaire, use has been made of ". . ." when someone's name or a pronoun is to be inserted in the sentence e.g. sometimes "you" will be inserted and sometimes "your husband" etc.

## R. J. CAMERON <br> Australian Statistician

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8. MOST OF LAST WEEK DID

WORK AT A JOB OR BUSINESS OR DO SOMETHING ELSE?

9. DID .... DO ANY PAID WORK AT ALL LAST WEEK OR WORK WITHOUT PAY IN A FAMILY BUSINESS?
$\left.\begin{array}{lllllll}\text { Yes } & \ldots & \ldots & . . & . . & . & .\end{array}\right) .$.
10. HOW MANY HOURS DID .... WORK LAST WEEK AT ALL JOBS, INCLUDING; OVERTIME AND EXCLUDING TIME OFF?

Note :
HOURS
If 01.34 hours, go to Q. 12.
If 35 hours and over,
go to Q. 23

11. (If "Had a job but not at work' in Q.8, ask Q.12)
EVEN THOUGH .... DID NOT WORK LAST WEEK, DID ...
HAVE ANY JOB, BUSINESS
(OR FARM)?
Yes $\square$ (Ask Q.12)
No (Go to Q.18) $\qquad$
12. DOES .... USUALLY WORK LESS THAN 35 HOURS AT PRESENT JOB(S)?


No (If Q. 10 not asked, go to Q.15; otherwise, go to Q.23)
14. WHY DOESN'T .... WORK LONGER?

No work
All other reasons


Note:
If Q. 10 not asked, ask Q 15; otherwise, go to Q. 23.
15. WHY WAS .... AWAY FROM WORK LAST WEEK?


Note:
If Q. 10 not asked and box 5, 6.7. 8 or 9 above, go to Q.22B otherwise go to Q.23.
18. (1f "Looked for work" in Q.8. ask Q.19)

HAS .... BEEN LOOKING FOR WORK AT ANY TIME DURING THE PAST FOUR WEEKS?

Yes

(Ask Q.19)
No (No more questions)
19. HAS .... BEEN LOOKING FOR FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME WORK DURING THE PAST FOUR WEEKS?

Full-time work

20. WHEN LOOKING FOR WORK DURING THE PAST FOUR WEEKS -

WAS .... REGISTERED WITH
THE COMMONWEALTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICE OR OTHER EMPLOYMENT AGENCY?

DID .... APPLY TO
PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYERS IN PERSON?

DID .... APPLY BY POST OR TELEPHONE?

DID .... DO ANYTHING ELSE?

Active
Non-active
(Specify on field query
form)

21. IF .... HAD FOUND WORK IS THERE ANY REASON WHY .... COULD NOT HAVE STARTED LAST WEEK?

Yes - own temporary illness or injury
-- child care problems

- going to school
- made arrangements to start a new job;
- preferred to start in survey week
- preferred to start after survey week
other reasons
(Specify on field query form)
 query


22A. WHEN DID .... BEGIN LOOKING FOR WORK?

22B. WHEN WAS .... LAID OFF/WHEN DII) ... GO ON STRIKE?

WEEKS AGO

Note:


Record whole weeks to end of survey week. If box 5.6.7 or 8 in Q. 15 probe whether period 4 weeks or less; recude if necessary. Ask for last job in Q. 23 to Q. 26.
23. WHAT WAS .... OCCUPATION LAST WEEK?
$\qquad$

24. FOR WHOM DID .... WORK LAST WFEK? (Name/Full Address)
$\qquad$
$\qquad$
25. IN WHAT KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY DID .... WORK LAST WEEK?
$\qquad$

26. LAST WEEK DID .... WORK FOR AN EMPLOYER FOR WAGES, SALARY, KIND ETC?
IN OWN BUSINESS WITH EMPLOYEES? WITH NO EMPLOYEES? WITHOUT PAY IN FAMILY BUSINESS?

Never worked
$\cdots \square_{4}^{4}$

8. SCHOOL ATTENDANCE
(If age 15 to 20)
Date of leaving school
(month and year)
Still attending


## INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU
ABOUT THE WEEK STARTING MONDAY THE ......... AND ENDING LAST SUNDAY THE .......... THAT IS, LAST WEEK.


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55. AT ANY TIME DURING THE LAST 4 WEEKS HAS . . . . BEEN LOOKING FOR FULL-TIME WORK?

Yes (Go to Q.57)

56. HAS . . . BEEN LOOKING

FOR PART-TIME WORK
AT ANY TIME DURING THE
LAST 4 WEEKS?

| Yes | . | . | $\square_{1}$ |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| No (No more questions) | . | $\square_{2}$ |  |

57. AT ANY TIME IN THE LAST 4 WEEKS HAS . . .

CHECKED OR REGISTERED
WITH THE COMMONWEALTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICE? CHECKED OR REGISTERED VITH A PRIVATE
EMPLOYMENT AGENCY?
WRITTEN, PHONED OR APPLIED IN PERSON TO AN EMPLOYER FOR WORK?

ANSWERED A NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT FOR A JOB?
LOOKED IN NEWSPAPERS?


DONE ANYTHING ELSE TO FIND A JOB?

Advertised or tendered for work
Contacted friends/relatives
Looked on factory or employment service notice boards

59. IF . . . HAD FOUND A (PART-TTME) JOB WERE THERE ANY REASONS . . . . COULD NOT HAVE STARTED WORK
LAST WEEK?

| Yes | $\ldots$ | $\ldots$ | $\ldots$ |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| No (Go to Q.65) | $\ldots$ | $\square_{2}$ |  |
| Don't know (Go to Q.65) |  | $\square$ |  |

60. WHAT WERE THE REASONS
.... COULD NOT HAVE STARTED WORK LAST WEEK?
Own illness or

61. WHEN WILL . . . . BE STARTING WORK IN THAT JOB?

62. IF THE JOB HAD BEEN AVAILABLE LAST WEEK, WOULD . . . . HAVE
STARTED THEN?

63. WHY WOULD . . . . NOT HAVE STARTED WORK LAST WEEK?

64. UP UNTIL THE END OF LAST WEEK, HOW LONG
HAD . . . BEEN ILI?
$\begin{array}{lll}\begin{array}{l}\text { Less than } 4 \text { weeks } \\ 4 \text { weeks or more } \\ \text { (No more questions) }\end{array} & \ldots & \square\end{array}$
65. WHEN DID . . . . BEGIN

LOOKING FOR WORK?

Less than 2 week

66. HOW LONG AGO IS IT SINCE . . . . LAST WORKED FULLTIME FOR TWO WEEKS OR MORE?

Under 2 years (no. of weeks)

2 years or more (No more questions)

Never worked (No more questions)

67. WHAT KIND OF WORK DID . . . . DO?
$\qquad$
$\qquad$

68. WHO DID . . . . WORK FOR? (Name/Full address)
$\qquad$
69. WHAT KIND OF INDUSTR X , BUSINESS OR SERVICE WAS CARRIED OUT AT THAT ADDRESS?
70. DID .... WORK -

71. WAS . . . . BUSINESS A LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY?


