# Australian Bureau of Statistics INFORMATION PAPER 

# QUESTIONNAIRES USED IN THE LABOUR FORCE SURVEY 

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## Introduction

This paper discusses 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 population surveys since 1960 to collect labour force and other characteristics of the population. The surveys were undertaken on a quarterly basis prior to February 1978 and monthly since then. 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 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.
4. Until November 1977, the questionnaire used in the survey for the collection of labour force data had undergone the following minor changes:
(a) the inclusion in August 1966 of some additional questions on the steps taken to find a job by persons looking for work;
(b) the introduction in November 1972 of questions seeking information on country of birth and period of arrival in Australia; and
(c) in February 1975 persons who were not employed were asked whether they were looking for work during the previous four weeks instead of during the previous week only. Those who were looking during this period were asked whether they would have been able to take a job in the survey week had one become available.
5. The questionnaire was substantially redesigned in November 1977 to provide more accurate information on the labour force, to improve the structure of the questions asked and to make them easier to understand and less likely to be misinterpreted. Details of the changes made to the questionnaire and the reasons for the changes were published in March 1978 in Information Paper: Questionnaires Used In The Labour Force Survey (6232.0).
6. In November 1981 a number of minor amendments have been made to the questionnaire, mainly to take account of new administrative arrangements within the Commonwealth Employment Service.

## Amendments to the questionnaire, November 1981

7. Question 57. Persons who are registered with the Commonwealth Employment Service and seeking unemployment benefits are no longer required to contact the Commonwealth Employment Service on a regular fortnightly basis. Question 57, which seeks to determine whether or not persons reporting that they are looking for work have taken an active step to find a job during the previous four weeks, has been re-ordered and some categories re-worded to take account of these changes in administrative procedures.
8. Question 26. A minor wording change to this question has been made to ensure respondents refer to the job or jobs held during the survey week.

## Definitions

9. To understand the objectives of the labour force questionnaire 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 questionnaire are defined in the following paragraphs.
10. The survey includes all persons aged 15 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) overseas visitors 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 helpers); or
(c) were employees who had a job but were not at work and were: on paid leave; on leave without pay for less than four weeks up to the end of the survey week; 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; on strike or locked out; on workers' compensation and expected to be returning to their job; or 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 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 who, during the survey week, were not in the categories employed or unemployed, as defined in paragraphs 13 and 14. They include persons who were keeping house (unpaid), attending an educational institution (school, university, etc.), retired, voluntarily inactive, permanently unable to work, inmates of institutions (hospitals, gaols, sanatoria, etc.), 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.

## Guidelines for following the questionnaires

## General

16. The questionnaires attached relate to the February, May, August and November surveys. For the remaining months of the year a slightly modified questionnaire (not attached) which does not ask for occupation, employer and industry details of those who are employed is generally used.
17. The questionnaires are 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.

## Identifying Unemployed Persons from the Questionnaire

18. 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:

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 01 to 07 to question 57.

New questionnaire-Answer categories 01 to 07 to question 57.

It should be noted that comparability between old and new questionnaires has been maintained even though question 57 has been re-ordered and some categories re-worded.
(c) persons must fulfil the availability for work conditions specified in the definition given above (see paragraph 14(a)). Availability is determined by:

Questions 59 to 64.
19. In order to be classified to the stood down subcategory of the unemployed (normally very few in number), persons must fulfil the conditions as specified in the definition given above (see paragraph 14(b)). The questions that determine if these conditions are fulfilled are:

Question 44 and questions 47 to 52.

## Questionnaire Conventions

20. 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. 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.
21. 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

Australian Statistician


## INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

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


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

| Yes (Go to Q.S7) | .. | $\ldots$ | $\square 1$ |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| No | .. | $\ldots$ | $\square 2$ |

56. HAS . . . BEEN LOOKING FOR PART-TIME WORK AT ANY TIME DURING THE LAST 4 WEEKS?
$\begin{array}{llll}\text { Yes } & \ldots & . . & \square_{1} \\ \text { No (No more questions) } & . & \square_{2}\end{array}$
57. AT ANY TIME IN THE LAST 4 WEEKS HAS . . . .
CHECKED OR REGISTERED WITH THE COMMONWEALTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICE? CHECKED OR REGISTERED WITH 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?

$$
\begin{array}{ll}
\text { Yes } & 0 \\
\text { No } & 0
\end{array}
$$

DONE ANYTHING ELSE TO FIND A JOB?

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

| Yes | $\ldots$ | $\ldots$ | .. |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| No (Go to Q.65) | $\ldots$ | $\square$ |  |
| 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?
$\begin{array}{lll}\text { Less than } 4 \text { weeks } & \text {.. } & \square \\ 4 \text { weeks or more (No } \\ \text { more questions) } & \text {.. } & \square\end{array} l$
62. IF THE JOB HAD BEEN AVAILABLE LAST WEEK,
WOULD.... HAVE
STARTED THEN?
$\begin{array}{cccc}\text { Yes (Go to Q.65) } & \ldots & \square 1 \\ \text { No } & \ldots & \ldots & \ldots\end{array} \quad \square 2$
63. WHY WOULD . . . . NOT HAVE

STARTED WORK LAST WEEK?

64. UP UNTIL THE END OF

LAST WEEK, HOW LONG
HAD . . . BEEN ILL?
$\left.\begin{array}{lll}\text { Less than } 4 \text { weeks } & . . & \\ \begin{array}{lll}4 \text { weeks or more } \\ \text { (No more questions) } & . . & \\ \hline\end{array} & \square & \\ \hline\end{array}\right)$
65. WHEN DID . . . . BEGIN

LOOKING FOR WORK?

Less than 2 weeks
No. of weeks
66. HOW LONG AGO IS IT SINCE . . . . LAST WORKED FULL. TIME FOR TWO WEEKS OR MORE?
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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)
69. WHAT KIND OF INDUSTR' BUSINESS OR SERVICE WAS CARRIED OUT AT THAT ADDRESS?
70. DID . . . WORK -

FOR AN EMPLOYER
FOR WAGES OR
FOR WAGES OR
SALARY? (No more questions)
IN OWN BUSINESS -
WITH EMPLOYEES?
WITH NO EMPLOYEES?
WITHOUT PAY IN A
FAMILY BUSINESS? (No
more questions)

| WHAT WERE .... WORKING |
| :--- |
| ARRANGEMENTS? |
| Payment in kind (No |
| more questions) |
| Unpaid voluntary |
| work (No more questions) |

71. WAS . . . BUSINESS A LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY?
$\begin{array}{llll}\text { Yes (No more questions) } & \ldots & \square & 1 \\ \text { No (No more questions) } & \ldots & \square & 2\end{array}$



## IN CONFIDENCE

## INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

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


## AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS

POPULATION SURVEY




