# Australian Bureau of Statistics INFORMATION PAPER 

## QUESTIONNAIRES USED IN THE LABOUR FORCE SURVEY


#### Abstract

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## Introduction

This paper discusses the major underlying concepts and the questions used in the Labour Force Survey and changes made to the questionnaire. A copy of the revised questionnaire is attached.
2. ABS has been conducting labour force surveys since 1960. The surveys were undertaken on a quarterly basis prior to February 1978 and monthly since then. Details of estimates derived from the surveys and descriptions of the methodology of the surveys and the sample of dwellings are published monthly in The Labour Force, Australia (Preliminary) (6202.0) and The Labour Force, Australia (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.

## Development of the labour force survey questionnaire

4. Since 1960, the questionnaire used in the survey for the collection of labour force data has undergone the following development:
(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;
(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;
(d) a substantial redesign 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;
(e) in November 1981 a number of minor amendments were made, in particular to the questions which seek to determine whether or not persons reporting that they are looking for work have taken active steps to find a job during the previous four weeks. This change was made mainly to take account of revised administrative arrangements within the Commonwealth Employment Service.
(f) in October 1982 additional questions, were asked to enable the identification of usual residence and family relationship. An additional response category was included to identify persons whose standard working arrangements were less than 35 hours in the survey week. There was also some minor rewording and re-ordering of questions.
5. Further details of these changes made to the questionnaire and the reasons for the changes were published in previous issues of this publication in March 1978 and December 1981 and August 1984.

## Amendments to the questionnaire, Aprill 1986

6. In April 1986 the Labour Force Survey questionnaire underwent a substantial redesign. The number of questions was increased to accommodate additional topics and some revisions to existing questions were necessary to cater for minor conceptual and definitional changes. In addition, to simplify the questionnaire for both interviewing and survey processing, the format and sequencing of the questionnaire were revised.
7. Marital Status(Question 4). An additional response category for persons who volunteer that they live in a defacto relationship has been included.
8. Question 17 has been included to enable the identification of persons aged 15-24 years attending an educational institution full time. This question also allows the identification of dependent children on an equivalent basis to that published in Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families (Catalogue No. 6224.0).
9. The definition of employed persons has changed. Previously, unpaid family helpers who worked 1 to 14 hours per week were not regarded as employed. The new definition of employed persons includes unpaid family helpers who worked 1 hour or more per week. This revised definition results from changes to international standard definitions by the International Labour Office (ILO) and has resulted in the following questionnaire changes:
(a) response categories for Question 34 D have been amended. In the previous questionnaire separate categories existed for respondents who worked 1-14 hours and 15-34 hours per week. In the revised questionnaire these have been combined to form a single category for 1-34 hours. Response categories for less than one hour and no hours have been combined;
(b) The sequence guide in Question 33 of the previous questionnaire, which identified unpaid family helpers working 1-14 hours so as to further establish their labcur force status, has been deleted.
10. Questions 83,85 and 86 are additional questions which determine the reasons, either voluntary or involuntary, why persons ceased their last full-time job held within the last two years.
11. The inclusion of Questions 87 and 88 allows the identification of persons whose last job was in part-time employment (within the last two years) and establishes the time elapsed since ceasing that part-time employment.
12. The general revision of the layout and the use of the triangular symbols in the questionnaire have been used to improve the data entry stage of survey processing.

## Definitions

13. The labour force category to which a person is assigned depends on the actual activity undertaken during the survey week (i.e. whether working, looking for work, etc.). The following definitions, which conform closely to the international standard definitions specified by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), relate only to those persons within the scope of the survey.
14. 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 residents in Australia; and
(d) members of non-Australian defence forces (and their dependants) stationed in Australia.
15. The following definitions relate only to those persons within the scope of the survey.
16. The labour force comprises all persons who, during the survey week, were employed or unemployed as defined below.
17. 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 one hour 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, self-employed persons or unpaid family helpers who had a job, business or farm, but were not at work.
18. 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.
19. 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 17 and 18. 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. Specific surveys of persons not in the labour force indicate that a number want to work but are not classified as unemployed because they were not actively looking for work and/or were not available to begin work in the survey week. Included in this group are the discouraged jobseekers and other persons marginally attached to the labour force.

## Guidelines for following the questionnaires

## General

20. The questionnaire attached relates 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.
21. The questionnaires are structured so that details are collected as follows:

Page 1 Demographic and survey control information

Pages 2-3 Persons who actually worked during the survey week

Pages 4-5 Persons who had a job but were not at work during the survey week

Pages 6-7 Persons looking for work and final determination of persons not in the labour force.

## Identifying Unemployed Persons from the Questionnaire

22. 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 68 or question 69.
(b) persons must have taken an active step during the last four weeks to find work, that is;

Answer one of categories 01 to 07 in Question 70.
(c) persons must fulfil the availability for work conditions specified in the definition given above (see paragraph 18(a). Availability is determined by:

Questions 71 to 75.
23. 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 17(b)). The questions that determine if these conditions are fulfilled are:

Question 55 and questions 58 to 63.

## Questionnaire Conventions

24. 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 30 and 40) 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.
25. 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', 'your wife' etc.



## 4. MARITAL STATUS

8. SCHOOL ATTENDANCE (If age 15 to 20) Date of leaving school Enter month followed by year

Still attending
9. PERSON TYPE

Usual resident of P.D. (Go to Q.11, complete Q. 12 to Q. 15 when editing)
S.D.
10. WHAT IS THE POSTCODE OF OR TOWN USUARL

## A.

S.D. Institutionalised person
(No more questions)
S.D. Boarding school pupil
(No more questions)
S.D. Other
6. COUNTRY OF BIRTH

Australia (Go to $Q .8$ )
U.K. and Ireland

Italy
Greece . .
Yugoslavia
Holland
Germany
New Zealan

Other

. If still attending school ('1111'in Q.8), go to Q. 18

- Otherwise, go to Q. 17

IN CONFIDENCE

## AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS <br> POPULATION SURVEY <br> 

| 12. HOUSEHOLD TYPE <br> 1 (Nothing further) <br> 2. . . <br> 3. <br> 4. <br> 5. . <br> 6 (Complete Q. 14) <br> 7 (Complete Q. 14) <br> 8 (Complete Q.14) <br> 9 (Nothing further) | $\square$ 1 <br> $\square$ 2 <br> $\square$ 3 <br> $\square$ 4 <br> $\square$ 5 <br> $\square$ 6 <br> $\square$ 7 <br> $\square$ 8 <br> $\square$ 9 |
| :---: | :---: |
| 13. Husband (Complete Q.15) <br> Wife (Nothing further) <br> Son/daughter (Nothing further). |  |
| 14. Father/mother <br> Son/daughter (Nothing further). |  |
| 15. If Household Type 2, 3 or 6 in $Q .12$, nothing further. <br> If Household Type 4, 5, 7 or 8 in Q. I2, enter number of children aged 0 to 14 years |  |
| 16. OFFICE USE ONLY <br> Relationship .. . . A <br> Family No. <br> Children 0-14 years . . <br> UR scope/coverage exclusion <br> Incomplete $\mathrm{H} / \mathrm{H}, \mathrm{L} / \mathrm{U}$ <br> Schedule, initial response <br> Schedule, final response |  |

FORM S1






FORMSI


