

**AV-CC**

**Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee**  
(ACN 008 502 930)

and

**GCCA**

**Graduate Careers Council of Australia**  
(ACN 008 615 012)

## **CODE OF PRACTICE**

for the public disclosure of data from the

Graduate Careers Council of Australia's

Graduate Destination Survey,  
Course Experience Questionnaire  
and

Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire

January 2001  
Canberra

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#### **Policy Statement**

One of the primary functions of the Graduate Careers Council of Australia's Graduate Destination Survey (GDS), Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) is to provide feedback to institutions, which, in conjunction with other indicators, may assist planning and the development of quality improvement initiatives. The GDS, CEQ and PREQ are also important in providing information for current and prospective students, to university careers services and to others in the education field (including the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs).

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) supports the public disclosure of institutional data derived from the GDS and CEQ under the conditions and guidelines specified in this document. Support for the public disclosure of institutional data derived from the PREQ is contingent on further successful development of the instrument.

#### **General Conditions**

- The use of GDS, CEQ and PREQ data in public statements, advertisements or promotional activities should be only for the purpose of assisting the public to develop informed judgements, opinions and choices.
- It follows that the data should not be used in false, deceptive or misleading ways, either because of what is stated, conveyed or suggested, or because of what is omitted.
- Institutions are at liberty to make whatever declarations they feel are appropriate about their own statistical data, provided disclosure accords with the principles above and the guidelines on the interpretation of survey data contained in this Code of Practice.
- Institutions and non-institutional users of survey data must not utilise GDS, CEQ or PREQ data to knowingly undermine the reputation and standing of institutions.
- The use of, or referral to institutions' data beyond that which is in the public domain requires the prior consent of the institution(s), and prior consultation to ensure accuracy.

- Public comment on the GDS, CEQ and PREQ data must be supported by appropriate interpretation of the data, with any necessary qualifications (e.g. cell size, response rate, special local issues) to be spelled out explicitly.

## **Optimal Use of Survey Data**

Although some institutions and users of the GCCA data may wish to compare survey data across institutions, or to compare individual institution data against national means, such comparisons should only be made after taking into consideration the following guidelines and qualifications concerning the appropriate use of the data and its interpretation.

If comparison between GDS results is made, the most effective level is between like fields of study amongst institutions with similar survey response rates, with like student demographics, and in like labour markets. Even in this context it has to be appreciated that the differing missions of institutions can result in a situation where judgements about, for example, differing percentages of graduates moving into postgraduate study rather than employment, can be invalid. As such, users are advised that in many cases it is inappropriate to make inter-institutional comparisons. The greatest value of the GDS data is likely to be derived when the data are considered over a period of years. The GCCA now has a time-series of over twenty-five years of GDS data.

The most effective CEQ and PREQ comparisons are within an institution, for the same field of study, across several years. Where comparisons are to be made across institutions, the optimal use of the CEQ and PREQ data is in evaluating an institution's courses against comparable courses elsewhere to identify best practice. It is therefore critical that comparisons are made between like courses, in like institutions with similar survey response rates.

## **Release of Data**

Release of data will be at the discretion of GCCA based on advice from the Survey Reference Group.

In principle, GDS and CEQ datasets will be released for bona fide purposes either directly or via the Social Sciences Data Archive (SSDA) in Canberra. Requests for data will need to be accompanied by documentation describing the aims of the research, and users will be required to lodge a copy of any published results with the GCCA.

In instances where institution-level data has not previously been published by GCCA, users of survey data will not be permitted to name institutions in their analyses without the prior consent of the institutions themselves.

Fees (if any) for non-commercial access to data or related documentation will be limited to cost-recovery. Fees for commercial applications of data will be determined at the discretion of GCCA.

Users of survey data, including institutions, are not to pass on the raw national survey data to any third party, other than to those within their own organisation.

## Research Ethics

The GDS is conducted within the ethical guidelines laid out in the National Statement on Ethical Guidelines in Research Involving Humans<sup>1</sup>.

The rights of the respondent must be respected. In terms of use of data, information should not be used in a manner which identifies individual subjects.

## Guidelines for the Interpretation of Survey Data

Some specific points to be taken into consideration when interpreting the survey data are outlined below.

- The GDS, CEQ and PREQ data are not suitable for making simplistic (i.e. unqualified) **inter-institutional comparisons**. Institutions can have vastly different histories, missions, geographic/socio-economic situations, enrolment profiles (including high percentages of mature-aged, part-time or pre-employed graduates) and course mixes. If comparisons are made across apparently comparable institutions, care should be exercised. Aggregations beyond the field of study level (for example, to total university level) need to be interpreted with caution.
- A total institutional **response rate** of at least 70% is desirable and achievable for the GDS and the CEQ. Any data which are disclosed publicly should be accompanied by information on the number surveyed and the response rate<sup>2</sup>. Any GDS or CEQ survey data with an overall institutional response rate below 50% should not be disclosed publicly.
- While individual institutions can generally calculate response rates for the majority of their individual fields of study, for reasons including the incidence of graduates with double majors and/or double degrees, it is not currently possible for GCCA to provide accurate response rate data by individual fields of study. If comparisons are made across institutions at the field of study level, caution should be exercised because of variations in response rates across institutions.
- Due to the variation in **cell sizes** in particular fields of study, it is not possible to be prescriptive about the interpretation of data where very small numbers of graduates are involved<sup>3</sup>. Caution should be exercised when drawing conclusions from small cells with low response rates, and this point should be noted clearly in any reference to such data. CEQ and PREQ data are even more sensitive to cell size than GDS data.
- In interpreting survey data, it is recognised that due to the **timing** of the surveys, there can be different results for different fields of study, in terms of their graduates' likelihood of being in employment, further study, various modes of compulsory postgraduate training/internship, meeting requirements for professional registration, and so on.
- The GDS is a 'snapshot' survey, producing information on the proportion of graduates involved in various activities, including those in full-time employment, those looking for full- or part-time employment, those going on to further full-time study (including honours year students), and those not actively seeking work, on 30 April (or 31 October for mid-year

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<sup>1</sup> National Health and Medical Research Council, 1999, National Statement on Ethical Guidelines in Research Involving Humans, AGPS.

<sup>2</sup> The PREQ remains in a development phase during which aggregated national data will be published and institutional response rates will be monitored to determine desirable levels.

<sup>3</sup> The GCCA urges caution when dealing with cell sizes smaller than ten.

completers). It is a pertinent source of information regarding the employment experience of graduates but is subject to many influences and should be used as an **indicator** only. Many graduates classified as 'seeking full-time work' may be waiting for work appropriate to the level of their qualifications, rather than accepting other, less challenging employment. It does not, for instance, examine labour market experience in the period since completion of requirements for a degree, and therefore cannot indicate how long a graduate has been looking for work.

- **Differences** in CEQ scores which can be considered worthy of note are those that exceed one-third of the relevant standard deviation.
- Disparities in GDS outcomes by **sex** are often explained by differences in the mix of enrolments for males and females (e.g. about 10% of engineering graduates are females, compared with their being about 70% of humanities graduates). This does not, however, explain some disparities in starting salaries within fields of study and indicates the need for considered analysis of sex-based differences in GDS survey outcomes.
- Requirements for **professional registration** that affect employment practice and starting salaries immediately following graduation mean that it is difficult to devise meaningful national GDS statistics for some fields of study. In the case of law, for example, some graduates attend a postgraduate legal institution for practical professional training, whilst others are employed as articulated clerks. Architecture and pharmacy graduates have to undertake a year of supervised employment before registration, which affects starting salary levels more than employment status.

*For further information:*

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