



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

## **CODE OF PRACTICE**

FOR THE PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF DATA FROM THE  
GRADUATE CAREERS COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA'S

GRADUATE DESTINATION SURVEY  
AND  
COURSE EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

September 1995  
Canberra

**CODE OF PRACTICE**  
for the Public Disclosure of Data from the  
Graduate Careers Council of Australia's  
Graduate Destination Survey and  
Course Experience Questionnaire

**Policy Statement**

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

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) supports the public disclosure of institutional data derived from the GDS and the CEQ under the conditions and guidelines specified in this Code of Practice.

**General Conditions**

- The use of GDS and CEQ 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 must not utilise GDS and CEQ data to knowingly undermine the reputation and standing of other institutions.
- The use of, or referral to other institutions' data beyond that which is in the public domain requires the prior consent of the other institution(s), and prior consultation to ensure accuracy.
- Public comment on the GDS and CEQ 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 may wish to compare their survey data against data from another institution, or 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 which achieved similar survey response rates, in like institutions, 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 survey 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 years of GDS data.

The most effective CEQ comparisons are within an institution, for the same field of study, across several years. For the CEQ, 1994 was the first year of participation of all universities. If comparisons are to be made across institutions, the optimal use of the CEQ data is in evaluating an institution's courses against best practice elsewhere, ensuring that comparisons are made between like courses, in like institutions which achieved similar survey response rates.

## 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 and CEQ 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. Even where comparisons are to be made between apparently comparable institutions, considerable care should be exercised. As aggregating CEQ scores within a university does not produce a meaningful result, comparing aggregated scores between universities is pointless.
- A national average **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. Any GDS or CEQ survey data with an institutional response rate below 50% should not be disclosed publicly, because it is likely that the response rate will be inadequate for inter-institutional comparison purposes.
- 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 to be made between institutions at the field of study level, caution is needed 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. 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 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 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.
- With respect to the current method of presenting CEQ scores on a +100 to -100 scale, 25 points, or half a standard deviation, is the level at which **differences in CEQ scores** can be considered worthy of note.
- Disparities in GDS outcomes by **gender** 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 about 70% of humanities graduates). This does not, however, explain disparities in starting salaries within fields of study and indicates the need for considered analysis of gender 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 articled clerks. Architecture and pharmacy graduates have to undertake a year of supervised employment before registration, which affects starting salary levels more than employment status.

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