

AV-CC

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

and

GCCA

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

Standard Recommended Methodology
for the
Graduate Destination Survey,
Course Experience Questionnaire and
Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire

January 2001

<p style="text-align: center;">Standard Recommended Methodology for the Graduate Destination Survey, Course Experience Questionnaire and Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire</p>

Overview

The intention of the Standard Recommended Methodology is:

- to describe a practical and valid survey methodology for the GDS and CEQ;
- to highlight the importance of the consistent application of this methodology across universities;
- to outline considered use of the data, observing the issues discussed in the AVCC Code of Practice;
- to encourage ongoing monitoring of institutional response rates; and
- to emphasise the need to ensure that students are not being over-surveyed with CEQ-type instruments leading to survey fatigue by the time they get the GDS/CEQ form.

Summary of Main Methodological Steps

The dot points that follow represent the main steps undertaken in conducting the GDS. Important details concerning each can be found in the body of this document.

- Institutions order questionnaires from GCCA or art for printing can be supplied.
- All institutions use the standard question set.
- The survey population is the group of people who had completed requirements for any higher education qualification in the previous calendar year, including overseas or international students.
- Institutions conduct an initial mailing of GDS forms to graduates along with at least two follow-ups of non-respondents.
- Some institutions also conduct follow-ups via telephone.
- Completed survey forms or data files are returned to the GCCA for processing.
- GCCA returns a set of standard tables and the cleaned data.

Introduction

The aim of the Graduate Careers Council of Australia's (GCCA) annual Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) is to collect information about the activities of graduates after the completion of their degrees. The intention of the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) is to gather data about graduates' perceptions of their higher education experience. The responses to these surveys provide valuable feedback to universities, and their staff and current students. They also provide information for prospective students to assist them in making informed course and career decisions, and careers advisers can integrate the survey results into their counselling practices.

To improve the quality of the data gathered in the GDS, CEQ and PREQ, it is vital that all universities conform as closely as possible to a standard survey form and methodology. Each institution runs its own part of the GDS, CEQ and PREQ, and the variation in departments handling the work and their expectations of the data and the resources they could call upon have been considered in the development of these guidelines.

The issues discussed in this document represent recommended standard methodological practice aimed at ensuring a consistent and high level of quality in the management of the major aspects of the survey process. Some major non-methodological issues relevant to the project are also discussed. New data gathering and analysis processes made possible by technology are also canvassed.

As the CEQ is a component of the GDS, the points discussed in this document regarding the latter generally cover both instruments. The PREQ is currently under development independent of the GDS and is discussed in a separate section in this document.

GDS and CEQ Survey Management

Each year the GCCA issues an updated *Manual of Operating Procedure, Coding and Data Punching Instructions* which encapsulates the main standard management and methodological issues for the GDS and CEQ.

The conduct of the GDS/CEQ is overseen by the GCCA's Survey reference Group (SRG) which is currently made up of representatives from the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC), the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB), operational survey managers from university careers services and planning and statistics departments, and the GCCA. Graduate employers and student bodies have been represented in the past but are currently inactive in this area.

A copy of the SRG's Terms of Reference is included in Appendix B to this document.

Institutional Survey Managers

Each university is asked to appoint a 'survey manager', a member of the university's staff who acts as the liaison with the GCCA and conducts the GDS/CEQ for the

university and on behalf of the GCCA. Survey managers are generally based in career services, statistics and/or planning units, and in other administrative areas.

The staff member appointed to the position of survey manager should be of sufficient seniority in the university to ensure the work is properly conducted in a manner that meets the recommendations outlined in this document. He or she should also be in a position to communicate issues of significance to the university's top management.

The GCCA arranges State-based meetings of survey managers as often as possible to encourage institutional input into the research work. It also maintains regular contact with survey managers through its Newsletter, emailed circulars to survey managers, and general mail-outs related to particular issues.

Individual survey managers are encouraged to contact the GCCA with comments on the survey, and those survey managers working in careers services can also ensure input to SRG discussions by contacting the members of the SRG who are also National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (NAGCAS) members.

Computerised Survey Management

For the October 2000 round of the GDS, the GCCA introduced a computerised survey management package based on one developed at QUT. The 'eGDS' package, as it is known while in its development phase, will be distributed to institutions free of charge.

It is a database shell (an unpopulated database) into which institutions download data from their student administration files to create a record for each graduate (or graduand). Institutions then use this partially populated database to conduct GDS mail outs, mark off respondents, conduct follow up mailings to non-respondents and (after the collected data are added to the database) and produce a final data file for GDS and CEQ analysis.

The eGDS will ensure that vital variables such as field of study are coded correctly, enabling more accurate analysis of data. It will also ensure greater consistency across institutions in the way data are gathered and allow the ongoing monitoring of response rates.

In the next few years, respondents will also have the option of completing the form on-line, via a web. This could see a reduction in postage costs and the completion of forms electronically would also see some of the data entry done at the same time. It is unlikely, in the foreseeable future, that this method would become the only way of completing the survey forms.

The eGDS form carries fewer questions than the standard GDS form, the questions dropped being the ones for which data can be downloaded from an institution's records. Reference to GDS in this document includes eGDS except where noted.

Questionnaires

Decisions regarding the content and layout of the GDS and CEQ forms are made within the SRG. However, advice is sought from people outside the SRG (including from survey research specialists and additional sources within the AVCC, NAGCAS, and institutional survey managers) when the need arises. Ad hoc comment is also welcomed by the SRG and is always given serious consideration. It is an aim of the GCCA and SRG to ensure that the GDS, CEQ and PREQ are directed by the needs of the higher education sector.

All universities should use the standard GDS questionnaire. The GCCA's Survey Reference Group should approve deviations from the standard questionnaire.

In the past, concerns have been raised regarding the overuse of the CEQ instrument or instruments like it, with reports of students completing such surveys at the end of each year, and in some cases at the end of each unit (or equivalent). Such additional uses should be considered with caution, as they could lead to respondent fatigue and result in a lowering of the response rate to all such surveys.

Supply of Questionnaires

The GCCA supplies questionnaires, which are ordered by survey managers and carry the university's name and a GCCA institutional code number. The GCCA takes all possible steps in getting survey forms to universities in an efficient and timely manner, however survey managers should ensure that they allow six weeks between ordering their forms and their mail-out date/s.

Structure of the Questionnaire

The GDS form has developed from a relatively rudimentary questionnaire in the late seventies to a well-refined set of questions in recent years. The major requirement that the questionnaire be broad enough to suit the needs of every higher education institution in the country has kept the examination of complex issues out of the survey, and this might be considered one of the survey's many strengths. It is a straightforward document with few, if any, problem areas.

The GDS form asks respondents about their just completed qualification, work in their final year of study, their major activity on the referent date, details about their employment and/or further study, and collects demographic and equity group information.

The SRG seeks to meet the needs of users in fine-tuning current questions and coding practices or adding new questions where it is considered useful. It is also understood that there is always room for improvement in layout and presentation. The questionnaire must be kept reasonably attractive to look at and easy to read.

The CEQ instrument is derived from the work of Professor Paul Ramsden, and has been tested separately by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and Professor Ramsden. It is expected that refinements to the CEQ will occur from time to time, in discussion with interested parties and only after rigorous testing.

Survey Population

The target population for the GDS is the group of people who had completed requirements for any higher education qualification in the previous calendar year, including overseas or international students. For example, the 2000 GDS included information relating to those who had completed requirements for a qualification in the calendar year 1999.

The population includes all students who completed the study requirements for award of a bachelor degree or three-year diploma, a graduate or postgraduate diploma, a graduate certificate, or a higher degree.

Students continuing with honours courses which include an additional year of study, and who have thus met the requirements for the award of a pass bachelor degree, should also be sent a survey form. This is done because some universities graduate such people while others do not, and to maintain a consistent approach, all are included. It is also felt that the decision to undertake an honours year is important in terms of education and career, and that this factor should be tracked. Thus in the GDS/CEQ the term 'graduate' may be used to include some honours students who technically remain 'graduands'.

Students completing a two-year associate diploma should also be included where possible, although their responses are reported separately from degree or degree-equivalent respondents. Students completing two-year undergraduate certificate courses will be included in this category.

In instances where graduates have completed (graduated from) the first half of a combined or double degree, they should receive a survey form. They should also receive a survey form when they complete (graduate from) the second half of that combined degree. If a university graduates combined or double degree students only after they have completed both parts of their qualification, they should receive one survey form only.

Survey Methodology

Initial Mail-out of Questionnaires

Some universities do a single mail-out of questionnaires aimed at arriving with graduates on or around the referent date. However, most universities distribute the questionnaires to coincide with mail-outs to graduands concerning their graduation ceremonies, and this decision is generally made to reduce postage costs and increase efficiency. This approach can result in some graduates getting their survey form a number of weeks before the referent date. Either process is considered acceptable by the GCCA, and the instructions on the front page of the survey form tell respondents that if they receive the form before the referent date, they should either:

- hold the form until the referent date and then fill it in and return it; or
- if they are reasonably certain of what they will be doing on the referent date, fill it in and return it.

Obviously, if the respondent receives the form after the referent date, they can easily fill it in as at that date.

It has been argued by some that the distribution of GDS forms some weeks before and after the referent dates constitute a weakness. Certainly, it would be preferable if all forms were sent out at the same time. However, given the size and nature of the task and the available technology, the SRG believes that the method as it currently stands is simple and cost-efficient. It fits in with institutional timetables where possible, to reduce, across two or more projects, the resources required for the mailing.

The GCCA recommends that universities either supply a pre-addressed reply-paid envelope for the return of the form, or make other arrangements such as establishing a ‘free-post’ address.

Follow-up of Non-Respondents

Survey Managers should keep track of the return of forms by respondents by, for instance, crossing their names off a master mailing list or indicating their return in the eGDS package (a few institutions use bar codes and scanners to do this work). **The GCCA recommends** at least two follow-up mailings to non-respondents.

A number of universities perform the first follow-up by sending out a postcard sized reminder, without a questionnaire, as it helps to cut the university’s costs of doing follow-ups (for example, in terms of stuffing envelopes and printing follow-up covering letters). However, research into ‘good practice’ in survey methodology suggests that this approach may not be optimal for response rates (Guthrie 97).

At the moment, the majority of universities perform their first follow-up by re-mailing the questionnaire together with an explanatory covering letter and reply-paid envelope. Second and subsequent follow-ups are also conducted by re-mailing the questionnaire together with an explanatory covering letter and reply-paid envelope.

Telephone Follow-ups of Non-Respondents

Some universities conduct additional (third and subsequent) follow-ups by completing the GDS via telephone. This can be a relatively labour intensive process, and universities need to consider its cost-effectiveness and the difficulty, most particularly, of completing the CEQ in this manner.

While it is preferable that the entire GDS form be completed, survey managers conducting telephone follow-ups of non-respondents should ensure that the following questions are answered (question numbers are based on the April 2000 standard GDS form): Q1b (major field of study), Q1c (level of qualification), Q3a (study at time of GDS), Q3b (work at time of GDS), all of Q4 if respondent is in full-time employment, all of Q5 if respondent is in full-time study, and Q6a-6g.

The GCCA suggests that the CEQ be not completed in telephone follow-ups. One problem here is the additional time required doing so. Another potential problem is that the effect of verbal completion on the CEQ's psychometric properties is currently unknown.

Information From Sources Other Than the Graduate

To maximise their response rates, many universities gather information from sources other than the graduate. The GCCA believes that (a) *accurate* and relevant information compatible with the GDS should not be ignored, and (b) universities deserve every assistance in achieving the recommended response rates¹.

Student administration records are often used to collect data about graduates who went on to further full-time study at the university from which they had just graduated (including pass degree to honours year people). These people must be sent a survey form so that their CEQ responses can be collected. Survey managers are advised, after the follow-up procedure has been completed, to 'create' responses for non-responding students undertaking further study by using the student records to complete the necessary questions. These include; field and level of study just completed, further full-time study indicator, details of further study undertaken, and demographic data including sex and age. In these cases, the CEQ will necessarily remain blank.

Relatives can sometimes provide *accurate* information about graduates' activities, and this is seen as acceptable by the GCCA. Some survey managers also gather data from their university's schools and faculties which maintain a systematic record of where their graduates go. This can be used to fill in information when the graduate has not responded to the GDS, *and when the survey manager considers the alternate source accurate*.

As a point of information, in the GDS-equivalent survey run in the UK, obtaining destination information from relatives is considered a normal part of the process.

In general, the GCCA believes that the graduate should be the primary source of information. However, the GCCA accepts that, where it is not possible to obtain information directly from the graduate, it may be useful to obtain it from other sources, as long as the information is *accurate*. In some cases, the accuracy of such information might be subject to the survey manager's judgement. In all cases, the CEQ section must remain blank.

Survey Referent Dates

Course completions may occur at any time of the year, however the majority of completions take place in mid-year or at the end of the year. In recognition of this, the GDS is conducted

¹ The AVCC document *Code of Practice for the Public Disclosure of Data from the Graduate Careers Council of Australia's Graduate Destination Survey and Course Experience Questionnaire* suggests that a national average GDS response rate of 70% is "desirable and achievable". It also says that GDS and CEQ data for institutions should not be disclosed publicly when an institution's response rate is below 50%. See 'Response Rates' section below.

in two 'waves' with separate referent dates: October 31 and April 30. The GCCA supplies survey forms noting the relevant referent date for each wave.

October 31

The first wave of any given GDS is a survey of those who complete the requirements for their qualification in the first half of the calendar year. The referent date for that part of the GDS is 31 October (so, for example, those who completed in the first half of 1999 were surveyed as at 31 October 1999).

The October survey is conducted (initial distribution and follow-up mailings) from early September through to early December. Returned forms should be bundled and labelled clearly and kept for processing with those returned from the following April wave.

April 30

The main referent date of the GDS (in terms of the number surveyed) is April 30 (i.e., the second wave) and includes those who completed the requirements for their qualification in the second half of the previous year (so, for example, those who completed in the second half of 1999 were surveyed as at 30 April, 2000). Data from the first wave are combined with those from the second wave and the results are reported as being the 'destinations of graduates in the first months after the completion of their degrees'.

This second wave is generally conducted between late February through to July (initial distribution and follow-up mailings).

Data Preparation

Coding

Some universities prefer to code their own survey returns using the *Manual of Coding and Punching Instructions* while others make use of the GCCA's central coding service. This facility sees the GCCA coding a university's forms free of charge in return for that university achieving a reasonable response rate (see comments on response rates, below), and arose out of a recognition that some survey managers were not being resourced sufficiently to allow adequate completion of the survey process.

Currently, around half of the forms returned in the GDS are coded by the GCCA, with many others being spot-checked by the GCCA's coders to ensure compatibility. The central coding process generally runs between late August and late October.

Data Entry

The majority of forms are also keyed at GCCA cost. Some universities key their own data, and send a data file via email to the GCCA for processing.

Universities keying their own data should ensure that the file returned conforms to the format outlined in the *Manual of Coding and Punching Instructions*.

Returning Forms or Data Files to the GCCA

Universities returning data files to the GCCA for processing should ensure they are delivered by the first week of October. Those returning coded survey forms should get them back by mid-September at the latest, and those returning uncoded forms should get them back by the first week of September. Survey managers are informed of actual dates annually.

Data Processing

At the GCCA, all data are initially processed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). This involves the formatting of data files to GDS specifications, the cleaning of the data (for example, to remove out-of-range answers), and the production of Summary Tables which give basic destination information broken down by level of qualification and sex. These Summary Tables are returned to universities for their immediate use and comment.

Survey managers should check their summary tables to ensure that there have been no gross errors in coding or data entry, informing the GCCA should problems be found.

The SPSS data cleaning and cross-tabulating program code is available to all universities, on request, for their information and use. Universities can also request that their data be returned to them in various formats, including SPSS, spreadsheet, and database compatible files. These, along with output files, can be transferred via email.

After the production of Summary Tables, institutional data are sent to a computing agency (the University of Melbourne's Information Technology Service (ITS)), where a further set of tables is produced, and where the national data are stored. This second set of tables (referred to as Table Fours) showing more detailed destination by field of study and sex, is distributed a few weeks after the Summary Tables. The time lag is to allow survey managers to report on any anomalies found in the Summary Tables before processing goes too far.

Each university currently receives its own results, its State's results, and national results. Institutional data processing usually runs between mid-to-late September and early November.

Anticipating the needs of universities, provision has been made to allow universities to add additional course and/or faculty codes to their questionnaires. Universities are encouraged to use these course identifiers to allow them to analyse their data in ways more specific to their own course mix, going beyond the broader field of study analysis necessary in the production of national results. It is likely that these institution-derived codes will play a greater role in output in the future, and **the GCCA recommends their use.**

When collection and processing of institutional data are completed, they are combined into a national file and the national tables are produced by ITS. A media release and *GradStats* (a four-page summary of results) are prepared, and results are usually released in the first or second week of December. The aim is to make the main results available in the calendar year in which they are collected.

The data are sent to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) for CEQ analysis to commence. A summary report is produced for institutions and detailed tables are

prepared with the aim of posting them on the AVCC web site at <http://www.avcc.edu.au/gcca> before the end of December.

Production of the national report then continues through December into early February, with a finished report usually available in April-May. Some parts of the report (large tables) are now only available on the world wide web at <http://www.gradlink.edu.au>. It is anticipated that in future, publication of many GCCA reports will be via a combination of traditional hard copy and electronic versions (Adobe Acrobat²). As well as allowing earlier, quicker and wider distribution, printing and distribution costs are also lowered by taking advantage of electronic dissemination.

Response Rates

Response rates are of constant interest and concern to the GCCA and institutional survey managers, and the GCCA argues that given the size and nature of the task, current national response rates which are in the low to mid sixties are reasonable (albeit with room for improvement). The AVCC, in its *Code of Practice for the Public Disclosure of Data from the Graduate Careers Council of Australia's Graduate Destination Survey and Course Experience Questionnaire* (see comments below regarding this document), states that a national response rate of at least 70% is achievable and desirable for the GDS and CEQ.

The level of national response rate has fluctuated between the low seventies and low sixties since 1978, with a high of 72.0% in 1988 and a low of 62.2% in 1994.

In agreement with the AVCC, the GCCA has been arguing that an institutional response rate of at least 70% is desirable and achievable. At the same time, it is recognised that some universities, such as those with highly mobile students and graduates and/or with a higher than average proportion of overseas students, will face greater difficulties in achieving such levels.

Survey managers returning low response rate data sets often refer to their lack of resources with which to complete the work, and the GCCA continues to argue in all available forums that the GDS should be resourced to an adequate level at institutions.

Ultimately, the GCCA has no power to raise university's resourcing of their GDS and thus no power to influence their response rates other than by advising on best practice. The solution to a great deal of the variability in institutional response rates lies with those universities returning low response rates to give greater recognition to the value of 'outcomes' data from the GDS and CEQ and greater support to their own survey managers.

Study of Non-Response

The validity of low response rate data sets obviously suffers, and the addition of low response rate data sets to the national data also acts to reduce its validity. Higher response

² Adobe Acrobat PDF files can be read on any computer platform by using the freely available Adobe Reader (which can be downloaded from the Adobe web site). This means that page formatting is not lost when the files are read on different computers.

rates will result in greater validity, but the users of any survey data set have to work with the knowledge that there is a degree of uncertainty about whether their figures are representative of the whole survey population. A study of non-response to the GDS and CEQ (Guthrie and Johnson, 1997) suggests that GDS and CEQ respondents are at least an adequate reflection of the population.

Further GCCA research which audited institutional GDS methodology in 1996 identified 'best practice' with a view to helping institutions achieve better response rates.

Following are the relevant points arising from the audit (Guthrie 97):

- The responsibility for the running of the GDS was most often in the hands of the institution's careers service, with other institutions running the GDS from their planning and/or statistics offices, quality offices, and other administration departments.
- Considering the audit figures, the GDS is best managed in a careers service or planning and statistics or quality department, where there is likely to be some appreciation of the value of the exercise.
- The initial mailing of the GDS form with graduation ceremony information may add to the importance and legitimacy of the GDS in the eyes of the graduand.
- The institutions which achieve average or better response rates started their distribution of GDS forms early in the year.
- Over a quarter of responding institutions do not include a copy of the GDS form in **all** of their follow-up mailings. However, of the high response rate institutions, 82.4% (14 of 17) **did** include a form with all mailings. It might be the case that the inclusion of forms with all mailings, while more expensive, is conducive to good response rates.
- Institutions which achieved average or better response rates were over-represented in those still conducting follow-ups in August.
- Almost three-quarters of institutions used identifiers such as student numbers or course codes on their survey forms in order to allow more detailed analysis at institutional level. Fears about respondent concerns regarding confidentiality may be over-stated.
- Over a quarter of institutions surveyed used incentives to encourage responses to the GDS. However, slightly less than half of those who used incentives felt that the incentives had worked.
- The main issue relating to non-response identified by survey managers was out-of-date graduate contact information. The high response rate group was far less likely to mention out-of-date contact information as a non-response issue than the total group. This seems to confirm the importance of good address information to achieving high response rates.

- Survey managers were asked to name the issues they saw as being key in achieving good response rates. The most mentioned point was the systematic follow-up of non-respondents.

Reporting GDS National Results

Due to funding constraints, the analysis and reporting of GDS and CEQ results has been largely restricted to national aggregations of bachelor degree graduates (with a small group of three-year diplomates included). Additional funding from DETYA now allows the production of institutional tables, and a report of the destinations of postgraduates.

The annual GDS national report presents initial tables of broad results by level of degree (from bachelor degree to doctorate) and then generally restricts itself to describing and analysing the results for bachelor degree graduates only, with the recent addition of a set of time series tables examining various levels of qualification. This includes a description of overall results including analysis based on factors such as sex, field of study, and the sub-group which was involved in the full-time labour force.

For the last four years, each report has examined additional issues, in an attempt to both react to and anticipate users' needs and interests. Examples of such additional issues have been: graduate mobility; credit transfers; graduates in part-time employment; overseas respondents; comparison of GDS results for those in part- and full-time attendance; initial nursing education; graduate salaries; graduates in the recession; arts, humanities and social sciences graduates; science graduates; graduates in employment during study, graduates from a non-English speaking background, and further full-time study. The discussion of these issues is often limited by space, and is generally restricted to use of GDS figures only (so do not represent wide-ranging reviews of the areas).

The annual GDS report includes coverage of GDS results by university, based on bachelor degree graduates, including an examination of graduates aged less than 25.

As always, users' comments are welcomed and taken into account (a number of the additional issues noted above arose from users' requests). The re-visiting of areas already covered when it might produce new information can always be considered.

Each report also carries a summary of results by aggregated field of study (40 in all) which includes basic destination figures and major areas of work undertaken. Also included are full destination details by disaggregated field of study (approximately 160 in all) in spreadsheet format. Thus reports try to meet the needs of as many users as possible by including a discussion and summary of national results (for all users), simple (i.e., quick to use) tabular and graphical description at aggregated field of study level (for example, for careers advisers and students), and more detailed results (for example, for academics, educational researchers, government departments).

Reporting CEQ National Results

The national report of the CEQ has, in past years, been produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research. It includes a summary of the national figures and is generally based on results for bachelor degree graduates.

Figures are posted on the AVCC web site every year at <http://www.avcc.edu.au/gcca>. Various spreadsheet data files present CEQ figures by institution and field of study in various permutations. These files appear on the web site in mid-December of the year following the survey.

Code of Practice

As a result of problems arising with some universities and some areas of the media misinterpreting GDS and CEQ figures, the AVCC and GCCA have developed a *Code of Practice for the Public Disclosure of Data from the Graduate Careers Council of Australia's Graduate Destination Survey and Course Experience Questionnaire* regarding the uses of and precautions about interpretation of the survey results (see Appendix B). The current *Standard Recommended Methodology* and the *Code of Practice* can be considered companion documents.

Research Ethics

The GCCA surveys are conducted within the ethical guidelines laid out in the National Statement on Ethical Guidelines in Research Involving Humans (NHMRC 1999). The rights of the respondent must be respected.

The key point is that of informed consent. The subject must understand the nature of the survey, its aims, and the use to which the data will be put before deciding to complete the survey form/s.

In terms of use of data, information should not be used in a manner which identifies individual subjects.

These issues are canvassed in the standard text on the front of the questionnaires.

Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire

The aim of the PREQ is to gather data regarding the experience of research higher degree graduates, a group not adequately covered by the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ). The PREQ remains under development at the time of writing. At some stage in the future, it might be combined with the GDS for the research postgraduate survey population (who will then no longer receive the CEQ on the back of their GDS forms).

Currently, the PREQ is a separate survey on a single A4 page. The PREQ form has demographic questions on the front page and the PREQ items on page 2.

PREQ Survey Population

The target survey population for the PREQ is all higher degree research graduates (ie., masters research and PhD graduates). The last PREQ survey included people who

graduated from an institution in the period 1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999. They were surveyed in late 1999 with a report appearing in May 2000 (GCCA 2000).

By 'graduate' it was meant those people who had actually been awarded their testamur at a graduation ceremony or in absentia in the period. If there was a graduation ceremony during the actual survey mail out period, it was acceptable to include relevant people from that group in the survey group. As with the GDS, both local and overseas/international graduates were included in the survey group.

Coursework masters graduates who had a research component were not included in the survey population.

Initial Mail-out of PREQ Questionnaires

Institutions were asked to conduct an initial mail-out of the PREQ form, with two follow-ups of non-respondents. It was suggested that covering letters should be adapted from the institution's GDS mailing process.

Processing of PREQ Questionnaires

Returned PREQ forms were sent to the GCCA for coding and data entry. The forms had an area on the back page for institutions to add a faculty or course code for their later analysis. The use of this additional code is optional and was found to be popular in the GDS and CEQ. Data files were later returned to institutions.

References

AVCC/GCCA (1995), *Code of Practice for the Public Disclosure of Data from the Graduate Careers Council of Australia's Graduate Destination Survey and Course Experience Questionnaire*, AVCC, Canberra.

GCCA (2000), *Evaluation and Validation of the Trial Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaires*, EIP 99/10, Higher Education Division, DETYA, Canberra.

Guthrie, B. (1997), *1996 Graduate Destination Survey Audit*, Graduate Careers Council of Australia, Parkville

Guthrie, B., and Johnson, T. (1997), *Study of Non-Response to the 1996 Graduate Destination Survey*, EIP, DEETYA, AGPS, Canberra.

NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council) (1999), *National Statement on Ethical Guidelines in Research Involving Humans*, AGPS, Canberra.

Appendix B: GCCA Survey Reference Group (SRG)

Terms of Reference

1. The SRG reports to the GCCA Board, via its Executive Director, on the conduct of surveys and research, as referred to it by the Board.
2. The SRG may be invited to either *act* as an “advisory committee” or to *supply representatives* to advisory committees - for example, those required by Commonwealth-funded programmes such as DETYA’s Evaluations and Investigations Programme.
3. Indicative but non-exclusive roles for SRG members:
 - provide information, ideas, guidance and recommendations to the Executive Director and Research Manager of GCCA, in the conduct of nominated survey and research programmes.
 - ‘conduct of programmes’ may include
 - decision to tender for or initiate programmes
 - development of business plans for programmes
 - operational issues
 - stakeholder liaison
 - generation of reports
 - publication, publicity, media releases
 - feedback loop on programmes: success, evolution of extant programmes
 - participate in discussion/consultative processes within the Group to arrive at a consensus on recommendations for action by GCCA or recommendations to related stakeholders for their consideration.
4. Members of the SRG (other than employees of GCCA Ltd) hold no executive responsibility for the conduct of funded programmes. Legal responsibility for the timeliness, quality, delivery and financial integrity of programmes rests with the Executive Director and Board of GCCA.
5. Membership: the Board of GCCA Ltd. shall approve all appointments to the SRG. The basic structure of the membership shall be
 - GCCA: Executive Director
 - GCCA: Research Manager
 - DETYA: one nominee
 - DEWRSB: one nominee, **or alternatively** an additional nominee from DETYA
 - AVCC: three nominees, including one from the AVCC secretariat, and two from the AVCC membership, and representing Research, Teaching & Learning, Academic or Senior Administration.
 - operational Survey Managers: up to three including representation from both Planning and Careers areas, to be nominated by the GCCA Board.

Other persons may be co-opted or invited to observe meetings at the SRG’s discretion, and the SRG should be gender-balanced, as far as is reasonably possible to achieve.
6. Term of appointment: the normal term of appointment shall be two calendar years, renewable with Board approval.
7. Convenor: the Convenor of the SRG will be determined by the GCCA Board following consultation with the AVCC and DETYA, may be additional to the Membership as described in (5) above, and shall attend GCCA Board of Management meetings.
8. Meetings: while occasional meetings occur via teleconference, most meetings will be ‘in-person’ and will rotate between Canberra and Sydney or Melbourne, occasionally Brisbane. There are usually up to six meetings per year, lasting at least half of a working day.

9. Conditions: as in the case of the GCCA non-executive directors, no GCCA remuneration is paid to SRG members other than GCCA employees. Travel and accommodation are also administered by and to the account of individual members and their employers. In the case of longer meetings or overnight events, meals are normally to GCCA account.