

CODE OF PRACTICE

for the public disclosure of data from the
Australian Graduate Survey

Graduate Careers Australia

June 2010

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Introduction

Graduate Careers Australia's (GCA) Australian Graduate Survey (AGS) includes the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS), the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). These instruments provide data to higher education institutions and, in conjunction with other indicators, may assist in the planning and the development of initiatives leading to the improvement of higher education at the institutional and national level.

The AGS also provides information for current and prospective higher education students, to careers services, and to other organisations with an interest in the Australian education sector, such as Federal and State government departments, media and publishers.

The intention of this Code of Practice is to ensure that all those using AGS data for research and those presenting the data in some form to an audience can be confident that they are doing so in a manner which respects the nature and integrity of the data and the methods under which they were gathered. As such, this document is intended for all users of AGS data.

This document is split into two sections. This first section presents higher level policy statements regarding sector expectations of AGS data use. The Appendices to this Code outline recommended procedures and practices data users should observe and expand on many of the issues raised in this first section.

The principles of appropriate AGS data use are

- The data should be used with impartiality, objectivity and integrity
- The data should be analysed using methodologically sound and transparent methods
- The data should be used and presented in ways that assure the privacy of respondents and the confidentiality of their responses

General Conditions of AGS Data Use

- Raw GDS, CEQ or PREQ data with, or results based on, institutional response rates below 50.0% should not be disclosed to any individual or organisation beyond the originating institution except in the case of the type of 'acceptable users' listed in Table 1 in Appendix 1 (also see Appendix 1 for a discussion of responses and response rates)¹.

¹ Graduate Careers Australia, in consultation with the higher education sector, will review the 50.0% response rate limitation for data use and publication for the next iteration of this Code, or when AGS methods change sufficiently to make a review feasible.

- Any GDS, CEQ or PREQ data gathered in a manner that deviated from the standard AGS methodology should not be disclosed to any individual or organisation beyond the originating institution or to the scheduled 'acceptable users' noted above without prior approval from GCA, even if the response rate is 50.0% or greater (see Appendix 1 for a discussion of institutional data collection methods and the AGS Post-Survey Operations Checklist).
- Any release of raw AGS data should be accompanied by this Code of Practice.
- The use of AGS data or results in public statements, publications, 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 or results 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 data and results, provided disclosure accords with the principles and guidelines contained in this Code of Practice.
- Users must not employ AGS data or results to knowingly undermine the reputation and standing of institutions or the Australian higher education sector.
- Comment on data or results must be supported by appropriate interpretation of the data, with any necessary qualifications stated (e.g. cell size, response rate, special local issues) and an explicit explanation of all analytical methods used.
- The rights of the respondent must be respected. In terms of the use of data, information should not be used in a manner which identifies individual subjects.

Optimal Use of AGS Data

The greatest value of the AGS data is likely to be derived when the data are considered over a period of years, within an institution, for the same field of education, examining year-to-year changes. Alternatively, analysis over a period of time for a similar group of graduates can also be an effective use of the data.

Appendix 1 expands on aspects of appropriate analysis.

Code Ownership

This Code of Practice was developed by Graduate Careers Australia in co-operation with the two main AGS stakeholder groups: Universities Australia, and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. It will be reviewed every three years by GCA and key stakeholders.

Code Compliance

Departures from this Code should be reported in writing to the GCA Executive Director.

*Executive Director,
Graduate Careers Australia,
PO Box 12103, A'Beckett Street,
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Reports should contain full details and should not be anonymous. When a complaint is made, the Executive Director will write to the data user in question to investigate the circumstances of the alleged non-compliance. Following this exchange, the Executive Director will refer back to the complainant and report to the GCA Board and Survey Reference Group.

Should further action be seen as necessary, GCA will form an ad hoc committee of Code stakeholders to consider and address the stated concerns.

At no stage during the investigation of the complaint will the identity of the complainant be revealed.

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APPENDIX 1

1 June 2010

This Appendix to the GCA Code of Practice outlines the procedures and practices data users should observe and expands on many of the issues raised in the Code. While the Code of Practice will be reviewed every three years, this Appendix might be updated more frequently depending on the needs of data users for clarification or additional information.

The dates of the versions of the Code of Practice and related Appendices will appear on the title page of the Code. This version of the Code applies to the analysis, release and disclosure of all AGS data and results from 1 June 2010, including data gathered prior to that date.

Optimal Use of AGS Data

The greatest value of the AGS data is likely to be derived when the data are used to examine change in outcomes over a period of years, within an institution, for the same field of education. Analysis over a period of time for a similar group of graduates can also be an effective use of the data, for example by identifying centres of good teaching practice via CEQ data.

Users are directed to GCA's annual research reports for discussions on data limitations and appropriate analytical techniques. Advice can also be obtained from GCA and a Code of Practice FAQ page is available on GCA's START website at <www.graduatecareers.com.au>.

Institutional comparisons

AGS 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 employed students) and course mixes. If comparisons are made across (for example) institutions and/or fields of education, care and responsibility should be exercised.

Some institutions and users of the AGS data may wish, for benchmarking purposes, to compare survey data across institutions, or to compare individual institutional data against national means. Such comparisons should only be made after taking into consideration the issues raised in the Code of Practice and the following guidelines and qualifications concerning the appropriate use of the data and their interpretation.

If comparisons between institutions' AGS results are to be made, the most effective would be between similar fields of education and levels of award amongst similar institutions, with an appropriate level of survey response, and with similar student demographics, and (where

appropriate for the analysis) in similar labour markets. As such, users are advised that in many cases it is inappropriate to make inter-institutional and even inter-field comparisons.

Where possible, data from the same AGS data collection period should also be used. If this cannot be done, data from varying collection periods should be clearly identified as coming from a different AGS period.

If broader comparisons are to be made (across all institutions, for example) the differences between institutions should be controlled for in a methodologically appropriate manner. Prior to use, the treatment (filters, formulae, syntax, for example) of any AGS data aimed at making such comparisons should be discussed with GCA (and any institution that has authorised the use of its data). Methods of data analysis should be made clear and should give sufficient detail to allow the analysis to be replicated by other researchers.

Where comparisons are to be made across institutions, the optimal use of the CEQ and PREQ data is in evaluating an institution's fields of education against comparable fields offered elsewhere, at similar institutions, in order to identify best practice. Comparisons made between similar fields and in similar institutions, and taking respondent demographics into account, will provide the most useful results.

Data Release, Responses and Response Rates

Institutions should not release their raw AGS data or results to any individual or organisation beyond the originating institution (except in the case of the type of 'acceptable users' listed in Table 1) if their response rate is below 50.0%. This means that institutional data or results from each of the components of the AGS (the GDS, CEQ and PREQ) cannot be released if the institutional response rate for the relevant component data is below 50.0%.

- For example, an institution can release its GDS data or results externally only if it has an overall 50.0% response rate. The institution can also release its CEQ data if it has a 50.0% CEQ response rate. If it has 51.0% for the GDS data and 49.0% for the CEQ, it can only release its GDS data.
- Similarly, an institution might have a 49.0% overall (domestic plus international graduates) response rate but a 55.0% response rate for domestic graduates only. In this case, the institution can release its data and results for domestic graduates but not for its total (49.0% response rate) population.

All uses of AGS data should be accompanied by information about the relevant response rate. Individuals or organisations to whom data files are released may not pass the data on to other parties.

Table 1: Schedule of 'acceptable users' of AGS data when response rates are below 50%.

Acceptable user type	Comments
The institution that gathered the data or a research organisation contracted by the institution	For use solely within that institution and with the response rates noted
Federal and State government departments and statutory bodies	Response rates should be noted
Professional bodies	For purposes such as course accreditation, etc. Response rates should be noted
External auditing bodies	Response rates should be noted
Academic researchers	Response rates should be noted
Graduate Careers Australia	Response rates should be noted

The 50.0% target response rate is an agreed figure, not selected on a statistical basis, which has been set to ensure that the number of AGS responses is adequate to populate cells down to as detailed a level as possible. This is done to ensure that institutions get maximum value from their data sets, as when AGS data are disaggregated by level of award and field of education, cell sizes can become very small.

The 50.0% target response rate also has the benefit of

- ensuring that at least one in every two graduates have had a voice in giving feedback about their higher education experience
- providing adequate information about graduate outcomes (including the names of employers of graduates) for careers advice and institutional marketing departments
- being a simple and known (prior to the conclusion of data gathering) target for institutions to meet.

While a minimum response rate of 50% strengthens the face validity of the AGS, more importantly this figure has been set after long-term discussion with interested parties and acknowledges that the AGS is not a sample survey and is therefore not subject to sampling theory that would lead to a lower response rate providing acceptable data².

For the purposes of defining a GDS 'response', any cases included by GCA in cleaned national and institutional AGS data files can be considered valid responses. For the purposes of defining a CEQ or PREQ 'response', a respondent should have given a valid GDS response and a response to at least one of the overall satisfaction items (variables CEQ149 or CEQ249 or PREQ28) or enough responses to form at least one CEQ or PREQ scale³.

All data users should exercise judgement when analysing and reporting AGS data so that individual respondents cannot be identified via small cell sizes and/or other methods of displaying data or results.

While individual institutions can generally calculate response rates for the majority of their individual fields of education, for reasons including the incidence of graduates with double majors and/or double degrees, it is not currently possible for GCA to provide accurate response rate data by individual fields of education. If comparisons are made across

² For the AGS to use sampling techniques but still collect sufficient data to enable analyses similar to those done under current methods, the number of responses could be as high as currently collected and would require a far more complex survey process.

³ Please refer to GCA's Graduate Course Experience and Postgraduate Research Experience reports for further information.

institutions at the field of education level, caution should be exercised because of variations in response rates across institutions.

Release of Data by Institutions

When an institution releases (or authorises the release of) its AGS data or results, the institution should only do so having ensured that the data or results will be used in accordance with its wishes and this Code of Practice. In such a situation, an institution should get written agreement from the proposed user to abide by this Code.

Appendix 2 has a checklist of issues that an institution might wish to consider in such negotiations and a template form that might assist in assessing a request for the release of data.

The onus is on the institution releasing its data to ensure that they are aware of the uses to which their data will be put, the analytical techniques that will be used, and the ways in which the results will be published.

Release of Data by GCA

Beyond the supply of AGS national data files to participating institutions and DEEWR, the release of raw AGS national data files will be at the discretion of GCA based on advice from the Survey Reference Group and will be dependent on the applicant indicating their agreement to abide by this Code of Practice.

In principle, AGS datasets will be released for bona fide purposes either directly by GCA or via the Social Sciences Data Archive (SSDA) in Canberra. Requests for data 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 GCA.

Users of AGS data, including institutions, must not pass on the raw national survey data to any party, other than to those within, or contracted by, their own organisation.

Institutional Data Collection Methods

As of the 2010 AGS, GCA will collect detailed information from institutions regarding their data collection methods and publish it in the AGS Post-Survey Operations Checklist which reports on the conduct of the AGS. Institutional data cannot be released until the AGS Post-Survey Operations Checklist is published.

If an institution has collected data in a manner that deviates from standard AGS methods, that data should only be released with the agreement of GCA that the deviation from the standard methodology has not unduly compromised the quality of the data obtained.

Research Conduct and Ethics

The AGS is conducted within the ethical guidelines laid out in the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research⁴.

⁴ National Health and Medical Research Council and Universities Australia, 2007, www.nhmrc.gov.au/index.htm.

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APPENDIX 2

1 June 2010

This Appendix to the AGS Code of Practice contains a sample template for an application for the release of an institution's AGS data or results. It is intended to assist institutions in the process of exploring and reaching agreement with parties (not listed in Table 1 in Appendix 1) requesting access to their AGS data.

Issues that an institution needs to consider during negotiations for the release of their AGS data include:

- The requesting user has seen and agrees to abide by the Code of Practice
- Use of the data is restricted to that agreed upon
- The period of time during which authorisation is granted (i.e., a date beyond which authorisation for use is withdrawn)
- The potential user has revealed how the data will be used in terms of
 - The intention of the use (research question/s, expected outcomes)
 - How the data will be presented (e.g., tables, graphs, comparative ratings)
 - How the data will be changed and analysed (e.g., syntax, transformations)
 - How and where the data will be published
 - Who the expected audience is
 - How the data will be stored

REQUEST FOR THE RELEASE OF AGS DATA

The undersigned requests the release of the named AGS data and/or results for the purposes agreed upon and identified below. The undersigned has seen and agrees to abide by the **AGS Code of Practice**.

Name, institution and contact details (telephone and email) of requesting user:

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Data requested (year/s of survey, GDS, CEQ and/or PREQ data, etc):

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Planned Data Use

What is the intended use of the data (research questions, expected outcomes)?

What is the nature of the project? Please indicate all that apply:

Pure research []	Teaching purposes []
Thesis or coursework []	Government research []
Commercial research []	Government-funded research []
Research consultancy []	Personal interest []
Other (specify) []	

How will the data/results be presented (e.g., tables, graphs, comparative ratings)?

How will the data be changed and analysed (e.g., syntax, transformations)?

How and where with the project results be published?

Who is the expected audience?

How will the data be stored?

Signed:

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Date:

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