

Code of Practice FAQ

This FAQ is intended to explore and flesh out aspects of the GCA Code of Practice. These issues have been considered by our Survey Reference Group (SRG) and added here to assist institutions to work within the Code.

The Code notes that 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

Q: I sometimes see AGS data used by institutions for marketing purposes and some of the claims and comparisons made seem unfair.

A: Use of the AGS data for marketing purposes is one of the areas that draws the most comment and criticism. The Code is explicit on uses of AGS data which result in comparisons, be they between institutions, or between an institution's results and some chosen benchmark such as a State or national total.

The key points in the Code are

- *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.*

So, use should be fair and supportable and in line with the Code of Practice. It should represent an 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. Figures should be referred to as 'estimates' to acknowledge the inherent sampling error.

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.

Sometimes when an institution's marketing area makes use of the data, best practice in terms of the Code and data use gets lost. GCA encourages Survey Managers to ensure that other users

within their institutions understand and abide by the Code, however Survey Managers are not considered responsible for others' poor usage.

We understand that Survey Managers are not always aware of how AGS data are being used within their institutions and even if they are, might not be in a position to prevent improper use. We are always happy to discuss the Code and AGS methods and intended uses with institutional staff.

Q. What kind of marketing-type comments are acceptable under the Code of Practice?

A: Most importantly, all usage must abide by the code. Here are some sample interpretations and claims and our comments regarding them.

- **<Institution> has the highest rate of employment for health graduates in <state>.**
- **Graduate Destinations Survey employment results over the last five years show that a degree from <institution> will increase your chances of finding a better job.**
- **<Institution's> graduates have consistently enjoyed stronger employment rates when compared to graduates from other <state> universities.**
- **<Institution's> graduate median salaries are higher than the national median**
- **For the last four years graduates of <institution> aged less than 25 and available for full-time work have achieved the highest employment rate nationally.**
- **For the last four years graduates of <institution> aged less than 25 and available for full-time work have achieved the highest employment rate nationally.**

Broad comparisons made against State and national means are less likely to cause concern than comparisons against other institutions. Obviously, statements like these need to be demonstrably correct via analysis of data filtered in accordance with the Code.

- **<Institution's> graduates have consistently enjoyed stronger employment rates when compared to graduates from other <state> universities.**

Statements that make claims about an institution's performance against other institutions are more concerning in terms of the Code and the comments above and are probably best avoided, especially when less problematic approaches are available.

- **Results from the 2010 AGS show that 86.7 per cent of bachelor degree graduates from <institution> had found a full-time job within four months of completing their courses.**
- **96% of <institution's> health graduates were in full-time employment four months after completing their degrees**

- **The 2010 Graduate Destination Survey showed that 86.7 per cent of Bachelor of Accounting graduates who were available for full-time work had found a full-time position at the time of the survey.**

Straight statements of fact that make no comparison are rarely a concern when demonstrably correct.

Q: Some institutions have been quoting AGS results via a secondary source, such as a guide to universities, and they seem to be ignoring the Code in the manner in which they do so. Are these institutions attempting to circumvent the Code in this manner?

A: As discussed elsewhere in this FAQ, sometimes when an institution's marketing area makes use of the data, best practice in terms of the Code and data use gets lost. GCA encourages Survey Managers to try to ensure that other users within their institutions understand and abide by the Code, however Survey Managers are not considered responsible for others' poor usage and we are happy to discuss the Code and AGS methods and intended uses with institutional staff.

If a user chooses to quote AGS data and information derived from the AGS by another party, it is good research practice, not to mention fair, to ensure that the original data source is properly acknowledged and that the Code is recognised in this secondary use.

Some sample uses include

- **In 2010, <institution> received five star ratings from the Good Universities Guide for**
 - **Graduate Satisfaction**
 - **Graduate Starting Salary**
 - **Generic Skills**
 - **Positive Graduate Outcomes**
- **Good Universities Guide ratings - graduate starting salary: 5 stars (2007, 2009), 4 stars (2008, 2010)**

In usage such as the example above, it would be preferable if institutions indicated that the data originated from the AGS and they should also observe, as far as possible, the Code. In a situation such as this where the institution's Vice-Chancellor has authorised the Good Universities Guide to use the data, it is assumed that this authorisation assures that the Code will be observed. However, comparative statements should be made with caution.