

Review of the Australian Graduate Survey

A Submission from Graduate Careers Australia



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Graduate Careers Australia

Dr Noel Edge, Executive Director

L10, 313 La Trobe Street, Melbourne

Noel.Edge@graduatecareers.edu.au

(03) 9605 3740

Key points summary

This submission from Graduate Careers Australia (GCA) is in response to the DEEWR *Review of the Australian Graduate Survey* discussion paper published in December 2011.

Conducted in various forms since 1972, the Australian Graduate Survey (AGS) is currently administered annually by GCA to new graduates from all Australian universities, as well as a number of non-university higher education institutes and colleges in Australia. The survey response rate for domestic graduates, the primary focus of the AGS, typically ranges from 60 to 65 per cent. The AGS comprises two distinct instruments: the *Graduate Destination Survey* (GDS) and, since 1993, the *Course Experience Questionnaire* (CEQ). In place of the CEQ, higher degree research students are instead given the opportunity to complete the *Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire* (PREQ). The GDS collects data on graduates' post-study labour market outcomes and other activities (such as further study), while the CEQ and PREQ investigate graduates' perceptions of their higher education experience.

GCA has been primarily responsible for administering the national graduate survey since 1974. In order to facilitate this administrative role, GCA maintains an extensive relationship network throughout the Australian higher education sector. GCA's long history with the AGS, coupled with its considerable experience in higher education research, has seen the organisation come to occupy a highly regarded and specialist role in the Australian higher education sector. (Detailed background information on the AGS and GCA are presented as appendices to this submission.)

This submission is based around a proposed model for a renewed and strengthened AGS, which addresses the key points and issues raised in the aforementioned discussion paper. This model has been developed with particular emphasis placed on operational efficiency (including timely delivery of data), standardisation and transparency of processes, and the validity, reliability and generalisability of the secured survey responses.

The key aspects of this proposed model are as follows:

- Full centralisation of the AGS administered by GCA, including the management and deployment of survey instruments, as well as the management of the data collection process which is currently decentralised in participating institutions.
 - Data collection would be undertaken by a single body, reducing costs through economies of scale while at the same time enhancing the consistency, auditability and quality of the data.
- The use of a standardised online questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument, supplemented with telephone data collection for any necessary follow-ups late in the survey process. The use of hardcopy mail questionnaires would cease altogether.
- The current approach of a census-type survey with a blanket 50 per cent response rate threshold would be dropped in favour of an approach based around a stratified probability sample with a focus on the representativeness of the secured responses. This would likely allow for a lower permissible response rate while still increasing the quality of the data.

- The CEQ would be reviewed in order to ensure that it is appropriate for the needs of the sector, with specific regard to its ability to investigate the course experience perceptions of a diverse range of marginalised and under-represented cohorts. The popular CEQuery software package would also be redeveloped to extend its lifespan.
- The formal scope of the AGS would be extended to cover the years immediately following graduation, to investigate how graduates' outcomes and experience perceptions vary during their early career years. This role is currently filled by the Beyond Graduation Survey (BGS), which is currently administered by GCA without Commonwealth support.

Under this proposed model, GCA would continue to champion the AGS, to ensure wide use of the data by a wide range of users. Broad participation in the AGS is critical for the survey, both in terms of the usefulness of the secured data and the cost-effectiveness of any centralised research process.

Several points have also been presented for consideration:

- HEIMS data could be used as a population frame for the survey, and could be used to pre-populate the data file with demographic and enrolment information.
- A separate AGS could be developed and administered to graduates who completed their degrees as international students, to ensure that the outcomes and experiences of this important cohort are properly represented in the data.
- A high degree of consultation and engagement with the higher education sector would be critical in terms of transitioning from the current AGS to any new model of this survey.

In full recognition of the importance of the AGS to Australian higher education, both now and in the years to come, GCA encourages the implementation of this new model (or some variant following sector consultation) to allow the realisation of more stringent survey management processes. Having developed, redeveloped and successfully managed the AGS over many years, GCA is committed to continuing on this path, ensuring that the survey evolves to meet the many new needs of the higher education sector, while ensuring that its existing needs are not overlooked.

Review of the Australian Graduate Survey

This submission from Graduate Careers Australia (GCA) is in response to the DEEWR *Review of the Australian Graduate Survey* discussion paper published in December 2011. GCA has also made a separate submission to the discussion paper *Development of Performance Measurement Instruments in Higher Education*.

We¹ have based our submission around a proposed model for the Australian Graduate Survey (AGS) which, in our view, addresses the key points and issues raised in the discussion paper, and may be considered an ideal best-practice approach to administering a national graduate survey. These points and issues are noted and addressed throughout this submission, as are the questions listed for consideration. A summary of the key points appears at the end of this submission.

Background information on GCA and the AGS, including the role of its constituent surveys in the Australian higher education sector, is presented in Appendices A through D for the interested reader. Much of the information contained in these appendices is taken from the discussion paper.

A proposed model for a strengthened AGS

In order to respond to issues and questions in the discussion paper in greater context, GCA developed a broad model for a strengthened AGS, outlined over the next few pages. The touchstones at every stage will be

- operational efficiency;
- consultation with the sector;
- complete standardisation of processes;
- complete transparency of processes; and
- data that are valid, reliable, and generalisable to the target population.

We have considered the AQHE discussion papers and relevant sector communications from recent years, and have drawn on our extensive experience and reviews of the AGS² in order to develop this proposed model, the key components of which are listed below, expanded upon in subsequent discussion and summarised at the conclusion of this submission.

AGS to be fully centralised with GCA: This will include the management of the survey and the instruments (as is currently done), but will also see the deployment of all instruments (assuming the legalities of the release of graduate contact information to GCA are accounted for) and the receipt of all responses completed by GCA. GCA will work with institutions to provide regular response updates

¹ Reference to 'we' and 'our' in this submission always refers to GCA.

² See Guthrie, B., & Johnson, T.J., 1997. *Study of Non-Response to the 1996 Graduate Destination Survey*. Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs and Coates, H., Tilbrook, C., Guthrie, B. & Bryant, G., 2006. *Enhancing the GCA National Surveys: An examination of critical factors leading to enhancements in the instrument, methodology and process*. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.

and work towards ensuring representative institutional response by encouraging and assisting institutions to take measures to ensure student and graduate awareness of the survey by emphasising the salience of the outcomes to them.

Additionally, we will continue to broadly engage and consult with the sector in the research process and maintain the already close relationship that GCA and the sector enjoy. National reporting and analyses will remain with GCA.

The primary survey instrument to be a standardised online form with telephone interviews to be used for final follow-ups: Online AGS instruments have already proven to be quick, robust and cost-effective, and this change will allow greater flexibility than hardcopy survey forms, making it possible for institutions to deploy variations of their instrument to different members of their survey cohort (so that external, Indigenous, international and low SES graduates get a relevant CEQ scale, for example). While institutions will have the benefit of diversity in their instruments in terms of new and current optional CEQ scales, the process will be efficient, completely standardised and independent of institutions.

One constraint on this approach will be the quality of email contact information collected by institutions (this refers to personal email addresses and not institutional student email addresses). Institutions will need to be encouraged to improve their collection of personal email addresses for post-study contact with graduates. In the interim, a strategy already employed by GCA in our trial of centralised AGS work is to write to graduates at their postal address inviting them to complete the online survey which can assist with responses rates for institutions with poor quality email addresses.

GCA proposes the use of closely targeted telephone interviews for late follow-ups rounds to achieve final representative data files.

The minimum 50.0% response rate to be dropped in favour of a stratified random sample and final representative data set³: The 50.0% response rate required by the current GCA Code of Practice should be dropped in favour of a scientifically selected stratified random sample drawn from the target survey population, the size of which will be statistically determined to ensure that the final national and institutional data sets are representative, with a sample size to achieve sufficient statistical power.

Advice from experts in the field will be employed to ensure that the sampling process meets the needs of the sector in terms of key aspects such as the sample selection and size and the need for oversampling to ensure that groups of interest such as external, Indigenous, international and low SES graduates are represented. Sector views and expert advice will also be taken to inform decisions regarding appropriate target response rates (most likely 35-40% based on previous GCA analysis⁴) and any post-stratification weightings required to achieve final representative data.

³ It should be noted that this model has been designed to work equally as well as a census or a combination of sample and census.

⁴ For example, see related discussion in Coates, H., Tilbrook, C., Guthrie, B. & Bryant, G., 2006. *Enhancing the GCA National Surveys: An examination of critical factors leading to enhancements in the instrument, methodology and process*. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.

This post-fieldwork quality assurance work would see institutional and national data files and results delivered at the same time every year, and not staggered as is the current practice.

Data collection and processing to be conducted by a single body: We believe that AGS data collection and processing (which includes cleaning and coding) should be project managed by GCA and outsourced to a single independent survey fieldwork services provider, who will, under GCA direction, develop and maintain the online survey form and telephone script, conduct the data collection, initial data cleaning, coding and processing using their established infrastructures. This will provide AGS data that is independently collected in a standardised manner.

GCA has already trialled, employing two different models, a centralised process with a number of institutions currently providing graduate contact information either to GCA or to an independent third party organisation to allow the outsourced conduct of AGS data gathering. Through this process, GCA has established successful relationships with a number of external data collection organisations and developed a sound understanding of issues involved in such an approach.

Timely delivery of data files and survey results: The combination of a centralised model, the primary use of an online instrument, the dropping of the 50.0% response rate minimum and an earlier fieldwork closing date for the survey will allow more timely delivery of final data files and survey results to the sector.

Conduct a review of the CEQ⁵: work with all stakeholders to

- review the CEQ in terms of the sector's current needs for graduate feedback, including the ways in which results are reported;
- reassess the current CEQ in terms of its psychometric properties and its fitness for purpose;
- ensure the complementarity of the CEQ and UES to inform continuous quality improvement efforts;
- develop new CEQ scales to better represent the diversity of Australian higher education and the experience of external/distance students, Indigenous students, international students, students from a low socio-economic status background, and (if needed) other under-represented and marginalised student groups, such as rural and regional students and those with disabilities; and
- conclusively establish whether different data collection modes (e.g. online and telephone) produce equivalent results and, if they do not, develop an appropriate weighting scheme to allow these data from different collection modes to be reliably pooled for analysis.

The Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ), while not central to the current discussion, should also be included in the CEQ review.

Redevelop CEQuery software: the popular CEQuery software is currently used to analyse the qualitative text responses to the two open-ended questions at the end of the CEQ. The software

⁵ GCA has already been in discussion with Dr Paul Ramsden, one of the original developers of the CEQ, regarding this work and he has signalled his interest in assisting.

automatically classifies comments on the CEQ into five main domains (Outcomes, Staff, Course Design, Assessment, and Support) and 26 sub-domains. Launched in 2004, the software has been extensively implemented across the Australian higher education sector since that time, but is fast becoming unusable in its current format due to advances in software technology⁶ and is in need of updating. GCA provides CEQuery support and training around the country.

It is possible that new CEQuery software could be similarly used in the UES analyses.

Expand the AGS to include investigation of the subsequent early career years of graduates:

integrate into the AGS GCA's Beyond Graduation Surveys (BGS), which follows up AGS respondents three and five years after their original AGS response, and the Graduate Outlook Survey (GOS) which gathers data regarding the experience and intentions of graduate recruiters. Participation by institutions and recruiters in these surveys is already very strong, with almost 85% of universities participating in the BGS in 2011, and over 500 graduate employers participating in the 2011 GOS.

Continue to champion the AGS and its data in the widest possible context: as discussed later in the submission, AGS data are accessed by a very wide variety of users, including institutions, government, students and their families, secondary and higher education careers advisors, graduate recruiters, industry peak bodies, PhD candidates, and media and are employed in a wide variety of ways. GCA has always promoted the wide availability and use of the AGS data in order to achieve the greatest possible level of penetration for the data.

Ongoing management and development: GCA will work with the sector to set in place arrangements for an ongoing project advisory panel, perhaps based around the current Survey Reference Group (SRG), to monitor the implementation and ongoing development of the new AGS.

For consideration – use of HEIMS to establish survey population and pre-populate data files: as noted below, there are potential accuracy and timing problems with using HEIMS. The outcomes of the current review will feed into this decision.

For consideration – develop a separate AGS for international students: AGS data collection for the international graduate population has long been problematic. As well as having issues around the definition of this complex group (for example, those who achieve permanent residency status as a result of the completion of their award), the separation of those who return home and those who stay in Australia has made the surveying of these graduates more complex in terms of the timing and logistics of instrument deployment and the questions being asked. This is particularly so for those returning to their home countries quickly after course completion as they can be hard to contact and they haven't had enough time in the labour market to return meaningful employment information. These issues combine to see low AGS response rates for this important group of graduates and suggest that consideration of a separate outcomes survey for international graduates is needed.

⁶ The current CEQuery software will only operate in a Windows XP environment.

Additional factors that make a separate survey for internationals worthy of contemplation are

- the wording of some questions could be examined for cultural differences;
- CEQ scales could be developed to gather feedback about their experiences of studying in Australia;
- anecdotally, the name “Australian Graduate Survey” might be causing some internationals to assume the survey instrument is not intended for them; and
- given the known current difficulties in getting responses from international graduates and GCA’s plans for employing a stratified random sample in the new AGS, the inclusion of international graduates in a single AGS might result in notable problems in achieving a representative data set.

For consideration – transitional arrangements: the sector needs to plan for the introduction of the new AGS model to ensure a smooth transition for institutions and to ensure they have time to implement the changes necessary for the strengthened AGS. Additional consideration concerning the need for an updated Code of Practice, and the changes in, or loss of, time series, will also need to be taken into account as will the potential for the AGS to be required to cover a large number of additional private providers of higher education.

In addition, transitional arrangements should include a monitoring of the process by the SRG or its successor group and plans for validation of the new instrument and a review of the performance of the new model after a suitable settling in period. This should include analysis of the performance of the data for uses such as on the *MyUniversity* website.

Principles

(Review of the AGS 2.1)

DEEWR’s stated principles for the guidance for the development of the performance measurement instruments under discussion (which, beside the AGS, include the University Experience Survey (UES) and an Australian version of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) tool) require that they be

- Fit for purpose – information is used to suit the purposes and objectives for which it has been designed to be used;
- Consistent – information is consistently collected and applied across uses and time;
- Auditable – information can be scrutinised;
- Transparent – information has clear meaning; and
- Timely – information readily enables institutions to enhance their quality of teaching and learning.

The stated principles are clear and easily interpreted. Needing to cover three somewhat disparate instruments, they need to be high-order rather than detailed, allowing varying application to each.

In terms of AGS data and processes, the principles of consistency, auditability and transparency are met by the proposed AGS model outlined above, as is the need for the timely delivery of data and results.

We feel that the principle of 'fit for purpose' should include sector-wide agreement on what data are being collected, why, and how they will be used, along with an appropriate code of practice for the use of the data (if necessary) and a planned schedule of reviews to ensure the instruments remain fit for the purposes for which they are being used (and that the uses are valid in terms of the instruments). It is important to recognise that survey instruments and their data can be important to the sector without being used as performance indicators.

This 'fit for purpose' aspect should also include consideration of the multiplicity of uses for (and users of) a data set. An issue that some in the sector often find confusing is the separation between the purposes of the AGS instrument and the uses of the resultant data. Those involved with using AGS data purely for institutional performance benchmarking (as it was used in the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, for example, and potentially for the *MyUniversity* website) are sometimes unaware of the fact that the data are also used for other important purposes within institutions, including careers advice and for tracking the detailed year-to-year performance of courses in terms of the quality of teaching and the outcomes of graduates.

One additional principle that should be considered is that the instrument should be cost- and resource-effective, and should not place undue additional burdens on the sector. In fact, it would be hoped that a rationalisation of performance measurement instruments will result in a reduction in burden. GCA actively promotes the AGS data to ensure that taxpayers get value for their research dollar. In the last five years, GCA has extended this reach by developing, on our own initiative, additional surveys such as the BGS (discussed below) that are used by higher education institutions and other bodies but currently attract no Commonwealth funding.

Considering the wide array of uses and users of AGS data, we believe the data delivered by this research already offers a very strong return on investment and, with considered changes to the methods employed, this return will only increase.

GCA also feels that the sector should embrace diversity in terms of the instruments and the organisations managing them. Diversity in terms of the instruments ensures that a range of aspects of the higher education experience is captured. Diversity in terms of the organisations developing and managing the instruments and data collection processes will enhance the objectivity of the process, ensure that the performance measurement instruments reflect a plurality of approaches to the issues and are not subject to a single set of educationalist views and style of management, and guarantee that the broader value of data to a wider set of users is not lost. These issues will be of no small importance to the sector.

Submissions, considerations and eventual decisions made regarding the future development of the AGS, including both the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) and the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), will need to take the varied uses and users of the data into account.

Student life cycle framework

(Review of the AGS 2.2)

DEEWR has identified three phases in the student life cycle that represent potential key points for the gathering of pertinent data

- pre-entry;
- university study (earlier years and later years); and
- post-study.

GCA is encouraged that a student life cycle framework is central to the development of these instruments, as it acknowledges that students themselves, their well-being and experience, are central to the purpose of this exercise. Beyond this, the context of the student life cycle for current purposes makes broad sense.

Consideration might be given to understanding the student life cycle in terms of the most appropriate points for gathering information, compared with the points at which the dissemination of information is of value to the student and institution. For example, information about the post-study labour market status of graduates is obviously gathered after course completion, but is of great interest to students at all points in the cycle.

The discussion paper addresses both sides, but as the AQHE initiative enters later phases and as the instruments in question begin to take greater shape, clarity regarding when particular measures are gathered, as well as when the data are of value to the sector, will be useful.

A particular challenge for GCA, found in the Bradley Report, is the recommendation that all accredited Australian higher education institutions participate in the GDS and CEQ, which carries with it the potential for the current AGS institutional participation to grow markedly. GCA already has long experience in dealing with such smaller private providers and is aware of the limits they face and their needs for research support.

A challenge for the entire sector arising from the Bradley Report is to raise the percentage of 25-34 year olds in the Australian population with a higher education degree. Getting more students enrolled is only one part of the task. Keeping them in the system is the other part.

Given the planned flood of undergraduates into the system, including high numbers from low SES groups, a separation of the 'university study' group into 'first year' and 'later years' groups would seem appropriate. This would allow the particular issues relevant to first year students to be identified and addressed via the instruments, as this is obviously the group most vulnerable to the problems and stresses that lead to attrition.

GCA feels that the post-study phase need not be limited to immediately after graduation (as is the case with the AGS) but should be extended to a few years post-study. While people are typically enrolled as undergraduate students of an institution for anywhere from three to eight years, they

are its graduates for life, and GCA believes strongly that longitudinal outcomes surveys (labour market status and reflections on the student experience) are appropriate for some years post-study. This is particularly so following the 'Dawkins era' which saw the first wave of what some called 'mass higher education' result in notable increases of higher education graduates and the dilution of what were seen as traditional employment destinations of graduates.⁷

Beyond the traditional role of institutions in training new professionals, the increase in generalist graduates has seen them enter the labour market in roles that would have been identified as non-graduate in the 1980s and prior decades. Few would argue that this increase in graduate numbers is a negative development. However, it often sees graduates enter employment immediately post-study in occupations that are not necessarily reflective of their degrees, their immediate aspirations, or their later career prospects, particularly given the relatively short four month period between course completion and the AGS.

To this end, GCA has developed and instituted a series of Beyond Graduation Surveys (BGS) which follow up AGS respondents three and five years after their original AGS response⁸. The BGS has already proven useful in identifying positive degree-appropriate changes in labour market status, occupation and employer types and earnings in those first years following graduation. Maturing reflections on the university experience via CEQ-type survey items also show positive changes in the graduates' perspectives.

GCA believes the AGS should expand to include the BGS, making it a longitudinal study of higher education graduates in order to give the original data greater context in describing the transition from education to the labour force and the early careers of graduates. This is an all-important period, given the need to encourage greater enrolment in higher education. Clear demonstration of the success of recent graduates will be an encouragement to potential and early year students. With the experience of the BGS already having been administered by GCA three times without dedicated Commonwealth funding, we feel this could be achieved at minimal additional cost to the sector. As evidenced by scholarly research already published on the basis of BGS data,⁹ the collection of longitudinal data as a standard component of the AGS would also open up the possibility of other specialised analytical approaches not possible with cross-sectional data, such as panel data analysis.

While the discussion paper and this submission are essentially restricting themselves to a discussion of undergraduates, it is worth noting that GCA is currently working with the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR) to develop an instrument based on the BGS that will be used to track the early careers of research higher degree graduates.

GCA also has notable experience in the design and conduct of surveys of the employers of graduates via our Graduate Outlook Survey (GOS) and we would encourage the consideration of an on-going project, linked to a strengthened AGS, to measure the way in which graduates are absorbed into the wider labour force in terms of their work readiness. This is an issue largely unexamined on a national

⁷ These changes can be tracked over time via GCA's Graduate Destination Survey reports.

⁸ Graduate Careers Australia. (2011). *Beyond Graduation 2010*. Melbourne: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/BeyondGraduationSurvey-2010.pdf>

⁹ Carroll, D., and Tani, M. (2011). "Labour market under-utilisation of recent higher education graduates: New Australian panel evidence", IZA, Discussion Paper No. 6047. Retrieved from <http://ftp.iza.org/dp6047.pdf>

basis and, as the sector seeks to advance its understanding of the development of generic skills during university study, a complementary assessment of graduates by their employers would seem useful. Such an examination would not need to be conducted across all graduates annually but could focus on particular groups of graduates or industries, changing from year to year to meet information needs.

Future strategic position of the AGS

(Review of the AGS 3.4)

DEEWR's discussion paper summarises the path which has led to the review of the AGS as part of the AQHE initiative. In summary, the key drivers are

- The inclusion of AGS data on the *MyUniversity* website;
- A changing higher education environment and introduction of new performance measures which will also supply data on institutional performance;
- the need to re-assess and re-position the AGS within this new environment;
- the need for a review of the current decentralised census approach used for the AGS;
- the fact that the UES will occupy some of the ground that the CEQ currently does and how the UES might interact with the CEQ;
- that the GDS, measuring the labour market outcomes of new graduates, will not replicate any other data gathered by the proposed new instruments.

From this discussion, DEEWR puts a number of questions to the sector for response.

Questions for Discussion

Is joint administration of the GDS and CEQ under the AGS still appropriate?

Will the GDS and CEQ adequately meet future needs for information in the student driven environment?

Should the basis of the AGS be modified to improve fit with other indicators or to reduce student burden? Would a survey sample be a more appropriate option? What are the implications for the development of the UES for the CEQ?

Continued joint administration of the GDS and CEQ

This submission argues that the CEQ has an important future place in the sector and, with review and development, will deliver more and richer data about study outcomes of graduates in general and for specific groups in particular. Clearly, a survey that combines the investigation of graduates'

post-study outcomes and higher education experiences will be of value to the Australian higher education sector, including students themselves, over the coming years.

Graduates' post-study outcomes and their course experience perceptions are often interrelated, and with the potential for a wave of new students, not least those from the lower SES groups, a research and analytical approach that investigates both of these aspects concurrently can clearly offer richer data than approaches that investigate each aspect in isolation. As such, we firmly believe the GDS and CEQ should continue to be jointly administered under the umbrella of the AGS.

Within the remit of the current review, it would seem appropriate to consider ways in which the AGS might be modified to complement the proposed suite of performance measurement instruments, and consideration of the survey methods, including the possibility of moving to a sample survey, must be a part of this consideration.

Census or sample

As already flagged, GCA strongly recommends that the AGS moves to a centrally managed survey based on a stratified probability sample, with the goal of delivering a series of institutionally representative data sets that can be combined into a nationally representative data set.

The AGS has, historically, been conducted as a decentralised (in terms of instrument deployment) census largely for the purposes of keeping the model uncomplicated to ease implementation by multiple institutions with varying skill and resource levels. The administration of a decentralised survey using a stratified sample, while theoretically possible, would, across the 50+ institutions currently in the AGS, have left too much chance for error in the selection and application of the sample if done by institutions.

However, a centralised AGS would allow GCA full access to the target survey population from which an appropriate stratified sampling frame could be drawn. This approach assumes that institutions gather accurate post-study contact information and can address the legal and confidentiality issues required to let them give GCA access to contact information for their survey cohorts.

It is most likely that this sample would need to be large, at least for certain cohorts within the survey population. For the purposes of the simplest analytical breakdowns by sex, residency, age group, detailed field of education, level of award, and mode of attendance (some of which would most likely form the key sample strata), and for the purposes of tracking the performance of degrees and awards offered from year to year, some institutions might need to employ very large samples (approaching a census), as noted in DEEWR's discussion paper.

Sector views and expert advice will be taken to inform decisions regarding appropriate target response rates and, where an institution's final raw data file did not achieve representativeness, appropriate statistical weighting using an agreed-upon methodology may need to be employed.¹⁰

¹⁰ Post-stratification weighting was previously used to effect by GCA to correct for non-representativeness in the 2008 University & Beyond (U&B) data set. Graduate Careers Australia. (2009). *University & Beyond 2008: Research Methodology*. Melbourne: Author.

A key issue here, and one that must not be ignored, is that the AGS should not be seen simply as an instrument for the gathering of highly aggregated institutional performance data. It started as a survey to gather information about graduate outcomes and delivers rich data to institutions about the employers of their graduates, the industries and occupations that they enter, their earnings, their labour market status if not employed full-time, their job search strategies, any further study undertaken and related information.

The addition of the CEQ was intended to deliver year-to-year data on the graduates' perceptions of their course experience, with a view to informing institutions of problem areas in teaching at course and field of education level, and leading to remediation of those problems and the tracking of changes in results in following years. Institutions can add additional identifying data to responses to allow the analysis of AGS data at course, faculty and/or school level, allowing very specific levels of internal analysis.

The CEQ and the UES

The DEEWR discussion paper asks about the implications for the CEQ brought about by the development of the UES. While the report of the UES pilot¹¹ suggests there is more work to be done, it offers a firm enough view about the direction in which the instrument is developing to make it possible to discuss the strengthening of the CEQ.

GCA recommends that, once the UES is finalised as an instrument, the CEQ should come under review to assess its future role. This review would be wide-ranging, and assess the value of its current scales, their validity in terms of the relationship between the items and the nature of higher education as it now stands, and the use and value of the data to institutions and the sector.

In the interim, the CEQ should continue in use as it is currently, providing continuity of data and a useful opportunity to provide comparative data for the nascent UES which will take a few years to find its place in sector processes, including, where appropriate, an assessment of construct validity.

Possibilities for the CEQ, following the review, could include some or all of

- the maintenance of current CEQ scales (allowing continuity of current CEQ data sets);
- the development of new scales (allowing the addition of new optional scales to better represent the diversity of Australian higher education and the experience of particular student groups of interest, such as external/distance, Indigenous, international and low socio-economic students and others, such as those from a rural and regional area and those with disabilities);
- the addition of UES scales to the CEQ (with some wording adjustment and testing) to allow UES-compatible measures to be gathered post-study; and
- the development of new scales aimed at gathering data about maturing reflections of recent graduates on their university experience and their transition to the work force. BGS analysis suggests that graduates three years out have more positive views of their

¹¹ See Radloff, A., Coates, H., James, R., and Krause, K., (2011) Report on the Development of the University Experience Survey, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra.

study years. A re-designed CEQ that focuses on the years following course completion (including the already developed Workplace Relevance Scale¹²) would seem to offer a valuable new source of information as well as a useful point of comparison for the UES data gathered in the study years.

This list is not necessarily exhaustive.

Given our long experience, expertise, sector networks and highly refined infrastructure in the area of surveys regarding student surveys, the sector should consider the task of conducting the ongoing UES, once the instrument is finalised, falling to GCA. This is a project for which GCA is well positioned.

Administration issues

(Review of the AGS 4.0)

DEEWR's discussion paper addresses issues of AGS administration including the model used to manage the survey, the timeliness of the data delivery and funding arrangements.

In summary, the key points are

- The need to consider alternative methods for the conduct of the AGS
- The need for the AGS to deliver more timely data and results
- The need to review current funding arrangements for the AGS

DEEWR also canvasses the possibility that their Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS) data base might form the basis for a sampling frame for performance measurement instruments.

Questions for Discussion

Is the current partially decentralised mode of delivering the AGS still appropriate?

How can the timeliness of AGS reporting be improved?

Are current funding arrangements for the AGS appropriate? What alternative funding arrangements should be considered?

Decentralisation, centralisation and independent deployment

GCA feels strongly that a key feature of the AGS in the future must be a model which sees the AGS fully centralised with GCA. However, under the model outlined earlier in this submission, GCA would

¹² The Workplace Relevance Scale was created as an outcome of the development of the CEQuery software.

work closely with institutions to fully engage them and the broader sector throughout the research process.

Additionally, institutions will also be able to continue to engage with the research via the current established modes of advisory groups, information forums, and similar communications efforts, and, of course, via the returned data sets. National reporting and analyses will remain with GCA.

This mixed-mode approach to data collection would typically feature initial rounds of online surveying and non-respondent follow-ups, followed by, if necessary, a final round of telephone interviews to achieve a representative data set. Such an approach has been shown to provide a cost-effective survey method¹³, which will result in the timely delivery of final data via an AGS process which is transparent, standardised and independent of institutions.

Timeliness of AGS reporting

The current timeframe for AGS data processing and reporting is limited by a number of factors, including the use of a decentralised model and hardcopy forms, and the minimum 50.0% response rate required by the Code of Practice which sees institutions given as much time as possible to conduct follow-ups in order to meet that target. GCA's proposed new model AGS will remove all of these factors, which will allow for the provision of a notably earlier final data set.

The proposed model, featuring an online survey instrument as the primary data gathering mechanism, telephone interviews as a secondary mechanism, with responses cleaned and processed as they arrive, will allow more timely delivery of final data files and survey results to the sector.

Current funding arrangements

GCA has been in talks with the sector for some time regarding the adequacy of the current funding arrangements for the AGS. Put simply, following the last round of AGS standardisation, the level of current funding no longer meets the cost of the project.

It would be prudent, when costing this new model, to include some level of funding for regular AGS review, research and development activities, to allow the further enhancement of the process, including aspects of data collection, processing, analysis, reporting, and administration process improvements. Larger specific research and development projects can be handled as per current additional funding submission arrangements.

The current review needs to include, as part of the consideration of the instruments in question, discussions between institutions and DEEWR as to how the projects will be funded.

¹³ See Radloff, A., Coates, H., James, R., and Krause, K., (2011) Report on the Development of the University Experience Survey, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra.

HEIMS use

The useful suggestion is made that the HEIMS database might form the basis for a sampling frame for performance measurement instruments. While this is sound (assuming the legal requirements are in place), it might be problematic for the AGS given that course completion indicators in the data collection are not always available in a timeframe that is suitable for use in the AGS in its current model. In the past, this information has been too late to be used by most institutions in assembling their AGS population.

Consideration about the quality of the HEIMS data should also enter into this review, as vital indicators such as major field of education are not always recorded in to the level of detail required for analysis.

Using HEIMS would most probably require a change to the timing of the AGS, perhaps to a one-year out survey. This would not necessarily be a negative modification and would fit in with the three- and five-year out BGS waves. It would, however, place considerable emphasis on the collection and maintenance of long-term graduate contact information by institutions, and ongoing engagement with graduates (e.g. through alumni offices) to ensure that they would still complete a graduate survey after an extended period of time spent away from the institution. The BGS has proved that such an approach is far from impossible, but would require commitment from the higher education sector as a whole in order to be successful.

Another issue to consider in any changes to the AGS and the way in which the sample frame is arrived at, is the potential for a wave of smaller private providers to join the survey. There are currently between 10 and 12 smaller providers taking part on an annual basis and some of these are under-resourced in terms of meeting the cost and staff demands of the work. If more institutions such as these are to be included in the AGS, a model that suits Table A institutions might not be relevant to them.

In principle, GCA supports changes that would increase the centralisation of the survey process and reduce the burden on institutions, while keeping institutions engaged with the project. If the use of HEIMS can be made to work, that will potentially improve the process and the resulting data quality. Additionally, it might enable the Commonwealth to pull together data from a range of data sets to make macro-analyses based on multiple data sources possible.

Survey methodology and data quality issues

(Review of the AGS 5.0)

DEEWR's discussion paper addresses issues of AGS methods and data, particularly in terms of the quality of the data and the high stakes nature of the outcomes, noting that "it is important that indicators are soundly based, reliable and transparent, and that they are seen to be so by stakeholders" and that there is a number of areas in which the AGS could be strengthened. The key drivers, some of which are adapted from the discussion paper, are summarised below.

- Sector concerns regarding the current decentralised nature of AGS methods, perceived lack of transparency and the possibility that institutions might 'game' the system.
- Despite recent moves to increase standardisation, there is a number of areas where inconsistencies remain, including
 - *Communications with graduates*; Engagement material, instrument distribution letters, et cetera are not standardised, although GCA provides details of recommended and inappropriate practices and scrutinises such material when submitted by institutions under a voluntary system;
 - *Modes of collection*; Institutions can choose to use hardcopy mail out surveys, emailed surveys or online instruments, while some universities distribute forms at graduation ceremonies;
 - *Survey instruments*; Hardcopy forms and telephone scripts have been standardised, but online instruments have not (although GCA tests any online instruments developed by universities to check for compliance with standards);
 - *Non-response follow-up*; Some, but not all, institutions follow up non-respondents by telephone to improve response rates;
 - *Data processing*; Some universities forward completed survey responses to GCA for processing while others undertake this task themselves. There is potential for inconsistency in coding, imputation, dealing with ambiguous responses, data checking, et cetera; and
 - *Incentives*; GCA suggests that appropriate incentives can improve timely responses, but ultimately leaves the issue of incentives to institutions' discretion.
- Concerns about non-response biases and general confidence in the precision of results, particularly at the sub-institutional level.
- The question of the value of a sample survey over a census model.
- The need for more systematic quality assurance than is currently built into AGS practice.

DEEWR notes that "It is not clear what impact, if any, these inconsistencies in survey practice are currently having on overall data. Once again, however, there is the potential for these issues to undermine sector confidence in AGS results".

Questions for Discussion

Will AGS data continue to be reliable enough to meet the needs of the sector in the future? How can data reliability best be improved?

Would moving the AGS to a centralised administrative model improve confidence in results?

Would moving the AGS to a sample survey basis improve data quality?

GCA strongly believes AGS data will continue to be important to the sector's needs, but that it does need to evolve. Reliability is always a requirement with any data set, particularly a high stakes data set such as the AGS. Our proposed model, which includes centralised survey administration, data collection and processing, will further improve data quality and sector confidence in the AGS results.

Our proposed model addresses the majority of the key points mentioned in that section of the discussion paper. Built into the model would be a regular investigation into non-response and an audit of student population information supply at the institutional level, should the HEIMS option not prove viable.

Issues around communications with graduates, modes of collection, survey instruments, non-response follow-up, coding and data processing and incentives will all be standardised under this proposed model.

The transparency of, and sector involvement in, the AGS process will see quality assurance issues regarding the collection of data addressed and the target of a representative data set will give further assurance and confidence about the value of the results. Related to this, the availability of a national survey population with biographic and course details will allow simple analysis of non-response.

Above all, the proposed model will allay many of the sector's concerns regarding inconsistencies in the current AGS method, whether significant or minor.

Aspects of student experience

(Review of the AGS 6.0)

The DEEWR discussion paper indicates that "the AGS review should consider how aspects of student experience might be better captured for external/distance students, Indigenous students, international students and students from a low socio economic status (SES) background".

In summary, the key points are as follows:

- While GCA currently publishes AGS results for the external, Indigenous and international cohorts, corresponding response rates are not published;

- Previous GCA work¹⁴ suggests that AGS data are broadly representative for the external and Indigenous cohorts but not for internationals;
- The current CEQ might not adequately measure the higher education experience of these groups;
- The current AGS administration model lacks the flexibility to address the need to gather additional data regarding these cohorts; and
- It is currently not possible to reliably identify the low SES cohort.

Questions for Discussion

Does the AGS adequately measure the diversity of the graduate population and how might it be strengthened in this regard?

GCA recognises the desirability of gathering more data concerning these important graduate cohorts to aid in continuous quality improvement. To date, the decentralised nature of the current AGS model and its inability to target a sample have restricted GCA from being able to collect enough information on these cohorts to conduct detailed analyses on them. For example, the difficulty in getting reliable and timely population summaries from institutions has meant that the calculation of response rates for these groups is difficult and, in some cases, impossible.

Similarly, the problems in surveying the international cohort (discussed previously) have seen AGS response rates lower than those for domestic graduates.

So while we have done a sound job of describing the outcomes and experience of the diverse range of the graduate population within the constraints of the current model, the proposed model (along with the low SES identifier promised by DEEWR) will ensure even better representative data for these important groups.

The development of new CEQ scales to get at the experience of the cohorts in question (and others if needed), and the potential to separate international graduates into their own specific outcomes survey, will deliver a richer data set with results reflecting the experience of a diverse graduate population.

¹⁴ See Guthrie, B., & Johnson, T.J., 1997. *Study of Non-Response to the 1996 Graduate Destination Survey*. Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs and Coates, H., Tillbrook, C., Guthrie, B. & Bryant, G., 2006. *Enhancing the GCA National Surveys: An examination of critical factors leading to enhancements in the instrument, methodology and process*. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.

In sum

In order to pull the diverse facets of this submission together into a coherent whole, we will now re-visit the proposed model and examine how it will address the concerns of the current review.

AGS to be fully centralised and administered by GCA:

- deliver complete national standardisation of the AGS, from survey management, methods, data collection and processing, and quality assurance to reporting;
- address key principles and need for consistency, auditability and transparency;
- engage sector ensuring the AGS remains fit for purpose;
- create potential to reduce total cost of AGS.

The primary survey instrument to be a standardised online form with telephone interviews to be used for final follow-ups:

- deliver complete national standardisation of survey instruments;
- address key principles and need for consistency, auditability and transparency;
- create potential to reduce total cost of AGS;
- generate flexibility in modifying survey instruments via the addition of current optional CEQ scales (and new CEQ scales that may be developed) across institutions as needed, while maintaining overall standardisation of the survey process;
- allow for different questions to be asked of different graduate cohorts while using the same instrument (which is not possible with hardcopy mail surveys);
- ensure instrument reach to some graduate cohorts, with international graduates outside Australia a notable example, more effectively than hardcopy mail surveys.

The minimum 50.0% response rate to be dropped in favour of a stratified random sample and eventual representative data set:

- address need for assurances of greater data reliability;
- allow analysis of non-response profile;
- ensure more timely delivery of data and results due to an earlier survey closing date made possible by other changes to the process;
- create potential to reduce total cost of AGS.

Data collection and processing to be conducted by a single body:

- deliver complete national standardisation of survey processes;
- address key principles and need for consistency, auditability and transparency;
- create potential to reduce total cost of AGS.

Timely delivery of data files and survey results:

- ensured by an earlier survey closing date made possible by other changes to the process.

Conduct a review of the CEQ:

- review the CEQ with specific regard to the sector's current needs for graduate feedback;
- capture richer data concerning the diversity of experience in Australian higher education (e.g. external/distance, Indigenous, international students, students from a low socio economic status (SES) background, and other marginalised and under-represented student groups, such as rural and regional students and those with disabilities);
- ensure the complementarity of the CEQ and UES.

Redevelop CEQuery software:

- allow ease of analysis of rich CEQ text responses.

Expand the AGS to include investigation of the subsequent early career years of graduates:

- deliver richer and more relevant graduate outcomes data to the sector on the basis of a longitudinal research design;
- assist sector to advise and encourage new higher education entrants and reduce early year attrition.

Continue to champion the AGS and its data in the widest possible context:

- ensure continued wide use of data and cost-effectiveness of survey, resulting in a greater return on investment.

For consideration – use of HEIMS to establish survey population and pre-populate data file:

- address key principles and need for consistency, auditability and transparency;
- deliver complete national standardisation of survey population.

For consideration – develop a separate AGS for those who were international students:

- allow collection of more reliable data concerning the outcomes and experiences of international graduates.

For consideration – funding and transitional arrangements:

- ensure smooth transition from current AGS model to new one via sector engagement.

The AGS has evolved into an important research project which gathers vital data for a wide range of uses and users in the Australian higher education sector. Whether used for continuous quality improvement, advising students and graduates of study outcomes, or any of the other myriad uses to which the data have been put, GCA recognises that the project is increasingly high stakes, and strongly encourages the implementation of this new model (or some variant following sector consultation) to allow the realisation of more stringent survey management processes.

Graduate Careers Australia considers itself an integral part of the Australian higher education sector, having developed and long managed the AGS for and with institutions and the Commonwealth. As such, we are strongly committed to continuing on that path, ensuring that the AGS evolves to meet new needs while championing long-standing uses and values. We look forward to continuing our important work.

APPENDIX A: Graduate Careers Australia

Graduate Careers Australia is a not-for-profit company governed by a Board of Directors, with a Chair appointed by convention from one of two Universities Australia (UA) Vice-Chancellor representatives and with membership also comprising representatives from business, DEEWR, and the National Association of Graduate Career Advisory Services. The Board also includes two skills-based Directors specialising in matters of governance and finance.

The GCA Board is informed by advice concerning the Australians Graduate Survey (AGS) from the Survey Reference Group (SRG), which is itself comprised of representatives from DEEWR and the higher education sector, including UA and institutional representatives. The SRG (which is a committee of the Board) meets regularly to monitor, and advise on, the conduct of the AGS. GCA maintains an extensive relationship network with key AGS stakeholder groups including Universities Australia, government departments, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA¹⁵), research colleagues in institutions and other research organisations and expert advisory structures, both formal and informal, all a part of GCA's focus on providing high quality research work.

A vital part of this network is our working relationship with the Survey Managers who work with the AGS in each participating institution. This is maintained via an annual Survey Manager Information Forum and workshops, regular email updates, newsletter correspondence, conference attendance and presentations, and a dedicated website.

Our long experience and considerable expertise in the area of research into higher education outcomes has seen us develop a highly regarded and trusted specialist survey role in the sector. The GCA research team has a valuable range of skills, ranging from policy analysis to survey and research design and practice, data analysis, reporting and communications.

We welcome the AQHE initiative and the opportunity to re-develop and position the AGS to continue to meet the needs of the higher education sector. This submission limits itself to addressing the review of the AGS in terms of the strategic position of the instrument, and matters of the future management and conduct of the survey.

With an infusion of funding to allow a review and redevelopment of the current AGS, GCA believes a new strengthened AGS model will deliver data which will meet the sector's needs and expectations for enhanced and timely data while simplifying the data collection process, all without reducing the wide utility of the survey results.

This sees GCA well positioned to continue its important work for the sector in the long-term development, management, and conduct of the AGS and other related student and graduate surveys in the future.

¹⁵ GCA is currently in discussion with TEQSA regarding processes for making AGS data available to them.

APPENDIX B: Overview of the AGS

Following the piloting of the precursor of the AGS in 1972, GCA assumed responsibility for the survey in 1974, conducting it on a national basis and eventually attracting funding from the Australian Government to assist in supporting the task. GCA has continued to maintain and develop the AGS since 1974.

GCA has thus had a long-term (almost forty year) role with the AGS, from taking it on from the original pilot team and ensuring its survival in the mid-1970s, to seeking and gaining support and funding from the Commonwealth, to developing the project to meet needs expressed by the sector and working through the politics of the process. As a result, we have an enormous sense of intellectual and professional investment in the AGS, and pride in what we, as a small not-for-profit organisation, have achieved for the sector.

The AGS provides detailed information on graduates' satisfaction with their tertiary study experience, as well as labour market outcomes for graduates and other post-study activities undertaken, such as further study. GCA produces a range of free, publicly available information based on AGS data. Key results are published annually in the reports *GradStats* and *GradFiles*, while more detailed data are published in a series of research reports covering course experience, graduate destinations and graduate salaries. Graduate destination and salary information is also available through the *Grad Jobs and Dollars* section of our website¹⁶. Results at the institutional level are not publicly released by GCA but are made available to Survey Managers and institutional careers advisors.

The AGS includes two distinct instruments – the *Graduate Destination Survey (GDS)* and, since 1993, the *Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)*. For postgraduate students, the CEQ is replaced by the *Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ)*. While they are administered jointly, with the GDS and the CEQ serving distinct purposes, analysis of the relationship between CEQ results and labour market outcomes is always undertaken.

The AGS surveys new graduates from all Australian universities, and a number of higher education institutes and colleges, approximately four months after they complete the requirements for their awards. The survey response rate for domestic graduates—the current primary focus of the AGS—typically ranges from 60 to 65 per cent. While GCA co-ordinates and oversees the administration of the AGS as a whole, individual universities are currently responsible for administering the survey to graduates from their institution.

The AGS has a Survey Reference Group (SRG), which has, for decades, provided a valued conduit for ensuring the survey is 'of the sector' and not imposed on it.

As it stands, the AGS occupies ground that will, for the most part, not be covered by the proposed new performance measures (the University Experience Survey (UES) and the Collegiate Learning Assessment tool (CLA)). Data from the GDS will remain unique, and while there will be some overlap

¹⁶ Grad Jobs and Dollars remains the highest traffic area of the GCA website.

between the CEQ and UES, this presents the sector with the opportunity to maintain and develop both as complementary instruments which can assess both student and graduate feedback in an ongoing manner and also aid, in the short-term, in assessing the performance of each instrument, including construct validity. These issues are discussed in detail below.

The DEEWR discussion paper which is the subject of this submission proposes a series of topics and points with questions for comment. This submission will refer to and comment on each in turn, with a focus on the AGS, and will offer a broad model for a re-developed AGS for consideration.

APPENDIX C: Role and purpose of the CEQ

Introduced nationally in 1993, the CEQ asks graduates about their course experience perceptions. The CEQ is designed to measure the most significant aspects of the student learning experience; it is not designed as a measure of all aspects of the student experience. Rather than seeking to measure the full range of factors that combine to form the student experience, the development of the CEQ was premised on the association between the quality of student learning and student perceptions of teaching as reflected in formal student evaluation.

Respondents are asked to express agreement or disagreement on a five point Likert-type agreement scale to 13 core items. The core items administered by all institutions constitute the Good Teaching Scale (six items), Generic Skills Scale (six items) and the Overall Satisfaction Item (one item). Originally, there were a further three scales included in the CEQ – Clear Goals and Standards, Appropriate Assessment and Appropriate Workload. In the late 1990s, additional scales were developed to measure factors affecting student experience which do not relate to formal classroom learning.¹⁷ From 2002, universities have been able to include a selection from eight optional scales in the survey they administer to their graduates alongside the 13 core items. These optional scales are:

- Clear Goals and Standards Scale
- Appropriate Workload Scale
- Appropriate Assessment Scale
- Intellectual Motivation Scale
- Student Support Scale
- Graduate Qualities Scale
- Learning Resources Scale
- Learning Communities Scale

The CEQ currently serves two main purposes:

1. *Continuous improvement.* Universities are able to compare their graduates' perceptions of course experience on a year-to-year basis with national benchmarks, either at the institutional or field of education level. This allows universities to focus their efforts on improving the student experience.
2. *Performance measurement.* The CEQ has formed part of sector-wide performance measures in a variety of forms for over a decade, first published in 1998 by the then Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs.¹⁸ From 2006-2010, CEQ results were used to allocate funding from the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund. DEEWR consulted with the sector on the indicators to be used in future performance funding through the Discussion Paper *An Indicator Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding* (2009), which flagged the ongoing role of the CEQ as a performance measure. Universities' CEQ results will be published on the *MyUniversity* website from 2012.

¹⁷ McInnis, C., Griffin, P., James, R. and Coates, H. (2001). *Development of the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)*. Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

¹⁸ Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (1998). A second edition was also published; Department of Education, Science and Training (2001).

Being gathered approximately four months after course completion, the views of graduates are based on their reflections of their complete higher education experience. These views are mediated by the short intervening period, often in employment or further study, during which their views will have had the opportunity to mature.

As an outcome of CEQ participation, institutions receive

- **Cleaned institutional data** for internal analysis with the potential to have filtering variable specific to the institution.
- **Cleaned national data** for internal analysis and benchmarking.
- **A range of standardised CEQ tables** showing comparative national and all institutions' CEQ results broken down by institution, field of education and level of award.
- **A national report on the CEQ results.**

Because the public release of CEQ data currently requires a 50.0% response rate, data quality is high and institutions have access to a rich data set allowing deep 'drill-down' concerning their graduates' experience of higher education and institutional performance in the area of teaching quality. A 50.0% response rate also ensures that at least half of an institution's graduates have been able to give voice to their views and to inform institutions in their efforts to achieve continuous quality improvements.

APPENDIX D: Role and purpose of the GDS

The Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) is an annual examination of the activities and salary outcomes of recent higher education graduates. It looks at participation in further study, full-time or part-time employment, whether graduates are seeking employment, or whether they are unavailable for work or study. Of those graduates employed, the GDS records the employer name and information on salaries, as well as the occupation in which they are employed. Additional analyses, including information about the nature of the employer, successful and unsuccessful job search strategies, and the relationship between employment and the degree and field of education are also undertaken.

The GDS meets a variety of needs for information:

1. *Labour market analysis.* The GDS provides a detailed picture of the labour market for recent graduates, including salary information. This is of use for employers, students and careers advisors considering study options, and government (including Skills Australia) when developing policy and programs in areas such as education, workforce development and immigration.
2. *Continuous improvement.* As with the CEQ, the GDS can be used by universities to examine the labour market outcomes of their recent graduates in comparison with national benchmarks.
3. *Performance measurement.* Like the CEQ, the GDS has a well established place in the evolving field of higher education performance measurement. From 2006-2010, GDS results were used to allocate funding from the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund. Universities' GDS results will be published on the *MyUniversity* website from 2012.

The GDS represents an important national resource regarding the outcomes of higher education in this country across a range of years that include economic boom and bust. The GDS undoubtedly has a vital ongoing place in the higher education sector into the future. As an outcome of GDS participation, institutions receive

- **A list of the names of the organisations that employed their graduates** – invaluable in offering advice to current and intending students as to the potential outcomes of their studies, and in assisting faculties and institutions in developing and maintaining relationships with the employers of their graduates. This information also goes to the institution's careers service. (The decision to enter the name of the employer is optional and rests with the institution.)
- **Breakdowns of post-study activities by field of education, including full-time employment figures** – again, invaluable in offering advice to current and intending students as to the potential outcomes of their studies, and in informing faculties and institutions about the success of their graduates in the labour market. This information also goes to the institution's careers service.
- **Cleaned institutional data** for internal analysis with the potential to have filtering variable specific to the institution. A cut-down version of this file also goes to the institution's careers service.

- **Cleaned national data** for internal analysis and benchmarking.
- **A range of standardised tables** showing comparative national, state and institutions' employment and salaries results.

Because the public release of GDS data requires a 50.0% response rate, data quality is high and institutions have access to a rich data set concerning their graduates' transition to the labour market and the organisations employing them.

Importantly, the GDS is now complemented by the Beyond Graduation Survey (BGS), which is currently designed as a three- and five-year follow-up of the GDS. The result is a longitudinal study of the early developing years of new graduates' careers, which provides context and a more complete picture of labour market outcomes for institutions' graduates as they transition to the work force. This is particularly of value in those fields of education where graduates take longer to find relevant graduate positions than the four month period employed by the GDS allows.