THE GRADUATE DESTINATION SURVEY:
AN OVERVIEW

Version 3, updated May 2006

Prepared by Policy and Planning
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1. Background

The Graduate Destination Surveys (GDS) is a national survey of higher education students conducted around four months after the completion of their award. It collects information about their course, any work in their final year, their status regarding work and study four months after graduation, and methods they have used to search for jobs.

All universities in Australia survey their graduates using the GDS, and every graduate is sent a questionnaire. The survey has existed in some form for over thirty years.

In 1993, the GDS was extended to also incorporate the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), which gathers perceptions of graduates about the quality and usefulness of their programs. In 2000, it was further modified to include the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ), rather than the CEQ, for relevant graduates.

While each university has some responsibility for conducting the GDS amongst its graduates, the Graduate Careers Australia (GCA), formerly known as the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA), provides the overall management and maintenance of the survey.

At RMIT, the Survey Services Centre manages the administration and data collection of the GDS.

2. How is the GDS conducted at RMIT?

The Survey Services Centre (SSC) has responsibility for the administration of the GDS/CEQ at RMIT. The analysis of GDS/CEQ data has resided with Policy and Research since 2002. Previously the Careers Development and Employment Unit had administered these two instruments.

Each April, RMIT surveys all its graduates from the previous year. In accordance with GCA guidelines, RMIT:

- Designs and prints questionnaires and reply-paid envelopes in March/April
- Posts a questionnaire and a reply-paid envelope to all graduates at the end of April
- Posts reminders to graduates who have not replied at the end of May and June
- Follows up domestic graduates who have still not replied by late July via telephone
- Progressively codes up all questionnaires and enters the information into a database
- Sends the final dataset to GCA at the start of September.
The Graduate Destination Survey: An Overview

A few universities ask GCA to print the standard GDS questionnaires for them. RMIT, along with most of the larger institutions, prints its own questionnaires. This is for two reasons. Firstly, RMIT adds a small number of its own questions to the survey. Secondly, RMIT scans all the questionnaires using specialist software and hardware, and the questionnaires therefore have to be designed and printed appropriately.

Similarly, GCA provides an opportunity to use their web-survey, and provides a data-entry and coding service. Again, for the reasons given above, RMIT generally chooses to process its surveys in-house.

3. Who does RMIT survey?

3.1. The sample

All higher education undergraduate, postgraduate by coursework and higher degree by research students who graduate in the previous year are surveyed in the following April, approximately four months after graduation.

The GDS methodology does not require an institution to survey their international offshore graduates. Nevertheless, RMIT surveys, not only their domestic and international onshore graduates, but also their offshore graduates.

In recent times, RMIT has surveyed up to almost 7,000 graduates each year.

3.2. The response rate

Approximately half of all RMIT graduates respond to the GDS – see the table below. The response rate for the CEQ and PREQ is slightly lower (around 40%): this is because the CEQ and PREQ are not administered over the telephone. These rates are broadly similar to the average across Australia.

The response rate from international graduates is significantly lower than that for domestic graduates. This is partly because address details appear to be less reliable, but also because, for reasons of economy, no telephone interviews are attempted with international graduates. As can be seen from the table below, the response rate from overseas graduates has not improved.

The overall, and domestic response rates, are higher in 2005 primarily because of a more intense wave of telephone interviewing.
4. What information is available?

4.1. Graduate Destination Survey (GDS)

In addition to collecting basic demographic and program information from each graduate, the GDS also collects the information in sections headed as follows:

- Work in your final year
- What you were doing on 30 April
- Main paid work
- Job search methods
- Further study

This information is available, not only for RMIT, but also for all other Australian universities.

Appendix A provides a greater level of detail regarding the information available. Although this appendix specifically relates to the GDS 2005, most of the information is collected every year.

4.2. Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)

Traditionally, the CEQ has consisted of twenty-five questions (items), twenty-four of which could be associated with six scales:

- Good Teaching Scale (GTS) – 6 items
- Generic Skills Scale (GSS) – 6 items
- Overall Satisfaction Item (OSI) – 1 item
- Clear Goals and Standards (CGS) – 4 items
- Appropriate Workload Scale (AWS) – 4 items
- Appropriate Assessment Scale (AAS) – 3 items
Since 2002, the thirteen questions associated with the first three scales listed above (GTS, GSS and OSI) have continued to be compulsory for all Australian universities. However, along with the three other scales, five further scales have been added to an optional list of questions to make a total of thirty-six optional questions. The five new scales, which RMIT does not currently use, are:

- Intellectual Motivation Scale (IMS)
- Student Support Scale (SSS)
- Graduate Qualities Scale (GQS)
- Learning Resources Scale (LRS)
- Learning Community Scale (LCS)

RMIT continues to use the six original scales, plus an additional scale that is administered solely by three of the Australian Technology Network (ATN) institutions – the Work Relevance Scale. The Work Relevance Scale does not form part of GCA’s established methodology.

Appendix B provides more information about the CEQ, its development, and the various items that go together to make up each of the standard scales used by RMIT.

4.3. Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ)

The PREQ consists of twenty-eight questions (items), which can be associated with seven scales:

- Supervision – 6 items
- Intellectual Climate – 5 items
- Skills Development – 5 items
- Infrastructure – 5 items
- Thesis Examination – 3 items
- Goals and Expectations – 3 items
- Overall satisfaction – 1 item

Appendix C provides more information about these scales.

5. Where can I access more information?

Information can be accessed from a variety of sources, both within RMIT and outside.

5.1. Information available within RMIT

The Survey Services Centre have enabled graduates to complete online the GDS, CEQ and PREQ at [http://www.rmit.edu.au/gds](http://www.rmit.edu.au/gds). The GDS online is available from early May until June 2006.
A very comprehensive set of GDS, CEQ and PREQ information and tools has been developed by the Policy and Planning Group at http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/ircu/outcomes/outcomes.php. This includes Student Outcomes Reports, Analytical Tools, Information and Reports on CEQuery, and a report on Improving CEQ results for RMIT. This website is soon to be remodelled to make it more easy to use. More details on each of these reports and tools follow.

5.1.1 RMIT Student Outcomes Reports

These include:

- A summary report on Student Outcomes 2003-2005, which looks at key trends from GDS/CEQ/PREQ in terms of some of RMIT’s strategic priorities.

- The Graduate Destination Survey Report 2005, which provides a comprehensive analysis of key GDS information across various student cohorts, and by portfolio.

- Institutional Rankings by CEQ scale, which compare RMIT’s performance against other universities for the Good Teaching Scale, Generic Skills Scale, and the Overall Satisfaction Item. They also make comparisons across Field of Study and Level of Qualification.

- A report on the CEQ Work Relevance scale, which focuses on vocational outcomes.

5.1.2 Analytical Tools

Users can access all of RMIT’s CEQ data from 1998-2005, and straightforwardly build their own time-series reports by portfolio, school, or individual program. This can be done for any CEQ scale or item-by-item. Analyses show both percentage agreement, and the proportion of graduates responding to each of the five points on the scales.

Additional analysis options are available for the Good Teaching Scale. For any program, its percentage agreement can be compared with the same figure for the relevant programs in the same field of study or field of education for:

- All Australia
- Australian Technology Network (ATN)
- Group of 8
- Innovation and Research group of institutions
- Victoria
- Each Victorian institution individually.

Simple menus guide the user through the process that can produce publication quality Acrobat (*.pdf) output, Excel output (*.xls), or simple web (screen) output. Login required.

5.1.3 CEQuery – RMIT Qualitative Comments

Policy and Planning has published a CEQuery webpage that allows a user to download the CEQuery software and analyse graduates’ qualitative comments for 2004, 2003 and 2002. (http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/ircu/outcomes/cequery.php). For example, this enables a user to examine all the comments for a program, school, or portfolio, in terms of domestic or international students.

At the end of the CEQ, there is a question that asks graduates to provide open-ended comments about the best and worst aspects of their program.

Essentially, CEQuery makes feasible the analysis of these positive comments (“Best Aspects of the Program”) and negative comments (“Aspects of the Program which Need Improvement”) separately.

Qualitative comments are assigned to one or more of five “domains”. These domains can be broadly characterised as follows (Richardson, 2003):

a) **Assessment** – characterized by “assignments, assessment, and feedback”.

b) **Course Design** – characterized by “units, year, courses, subjects, information, education, time (linked to attendance) and content.”

c) **Outcomes** – characterized by “knowledge, theory, skills, practice, practical experience, work relevant real, management and research.”

d) **Staff** – characterized by “lecturers, teachers, tutors, quality, class, teaching, staff and time (student accessibility - allocating time for follow up).”

e) **Support** – relates to the level of responsiveness & relatedness to students – characterized by “support, helpful, understanding, excellent, great, people and interesting”.

Each of the five domains is made up of several sub-domains into which qualitative comments are also classified. The domains and sub-domains are associated as shown below:

a) **Assessment** consists of *Expectations, Feedback, Marking, Relevance, Standards, and Unspecified.*

b) **Course Design** - consists of *Flexibility, Methods, Practical-Theory Links, Relevance, Structure, and Unspecified.*

c) **Outcomes** - consists of *Further Learning, Intellectual, Inter-personal, Knowledge/skills, Personal, Work Application, and Unspecified.*

d) **Staff** - consists of *Accessibility, Practical Experience, Quality, Teaching Skills, and Unspecified.*

e) **Support** - consists of *Infrastructure, Learning Resources, Library, Social Affinity, Student Administration, Student Services, and Unspecified.*

The webpage also contains a report on RMIT’s 2004 qualitative comments derived from a CEQuery analysis, and comprehensive verbatim listings of qualitative comments by program within portfolio.

As of May 2006, qualitative comments from the 2005 CEQ round are being prepared.

5.1.4 Improving CEQ results for RMIT
The Graduate Destination Survey: An Overview

In 2002 a report was commissioned by the PVC Learning and Scholarship to examine how CEQ results might be improved, and the parameters that might be holding improvement back. This report was prepared as part of RMIT’s desire to improve the quality of its teaching and learning. This report is available at http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/ircu/docs/outcomes/improvingceqresults.doc

5.2. Information available outside RMIT

• The GCA provide a considerable amount of information about the GDS on their gradlink site at http://www.gradlink.edu.au/
  
  o gradsonline (http://www.gradsonline.edu.au/gradsonline/) gives an insight into the types of activities, salaries and jobs for graduates from different disciplines.

  o GCA summarise the findings from the GDS in the Grad Files and GradStats each year (1999 to 2005) – see http://www.gradlink.edu.au/content/view/full/24

  o Their ‘Research Centre’ provides more specialist and technical information about the GDS (http://www.gradlink.edu.au/content/view/full/57)

• For the more analytically inclined, the AVCC publish some summary GCA data for 1994-2005 on their website as Excel files at http://www.avcc.edu.au/content.asp?page=/policies_programs/graduates/index.htm
  
  For example, this information allows comparison between any program and the national average for the relevant field of study/education for any particular CEQ scale.

  To give greater detail, the following Excel files are available for 2005 on the website:

  o CEQ figures by institution, level of qualification and ASCED field of education. The mean and standard deviation are shown for each scale, and the national scale mean and N size is also shown.

  o CEQ figures by institution, level of qualification and institution-generated faculty/degree/course code variable (where an institution included it). The mean and standard deviation are shown for each scale, and the N size is also shown.

  o There are 11 files showing the percentage disagree-agree on the 5 point Likert scale by ASCED field of education for each scale and the overall satisfaction item. Column headings used are SD% (% strongly disagree), D% (% disagree), U% (% undecided), A% (% agree), and SA% (% strongly agree).

  o There are 11 files showing the percentage disagree-agree on the 5 point Likert scale by the institution-generated faculty/degree/course code variable (when used by an institution). Column headings used are SD% (% strongly disagree), D% (% disagree), U% (% undecided), A% (% agree), and SA% (% strongly agree).
6. Data Caveat about the GDS and CEQ

The Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) is administered by individual institutions with the primary purpose of ascertaining employment and study status of graduates within a few months of graduation, and the inclusion of the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) extends the scope of the survey by recording graduates’ perceptions of the quality of their teaching and learning experiences at program level.

A few observations about the data collected:
- The GDS and CEQ are considered a census of graduates, not a survey.
- Not every graduate responds to both the GDS and CEQ.
- Some graduates choose not to respond to some items.
- GDS data is collected by a diversity of modes: online, mail and telephone, whereas CEQ data is only collected via mail and online.
- If a graduate continues into further study at the same institution and such a graduate has not responded to the GDS, his/her demographic and further study activity information are drawn from the RMIT student system. Other institutions have similar practice.
- Whilst all institutions ask the same GDS questions, not every institution asks the same CEQ questions.
- Participating institutions are bound by a code of practice – although institutions adhere to it, practices vary between institutions.

All of the above can have an impact on the overall scores for either instrument.

According to GCA, RMIT has recorded a combined GDS and CEQ response rate of 71% in 2005 for domestic students only; if international students are included the response rate drops to 60%. Institutional response rates to the CEQ ranged between 25% and 67% with an overall average of 45% in 2004. It should be noted that interpretation of the institutional data requires considerable caution when response rates are low. Differences in the GDS and CEQ response rate are mostly due to the way in which some GDS responses are gathered which makes it difficult or impossible to gather related CEQ responses.

The GCA urges caution when dealing with cell sizes smaller than ten. Particular caution should be exercised when drawing conclusions from small cells with low response rates. CEQ and PREQ data are even more sensitive to cell size than GDS data. The code of practice for the public disclosure of data from the Graduate Career Australia’s (GCA) Graduate Destination Survey, Course Experience Questionnaire and Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire states that due to the variation in cell sizes in particular fields of education, it is
The Graduate Destination Survey: An Overview

It is not possible to be prescriptive about the interpretation of data where very small numbers of graduates are involved.

When disaggregating data at the program level, it is also difficult to be prescriptive about the minimum response rate and/or number of responses deemed acceptable for analysis. However, it could be considered that programs that range between 5 and less than 30 program completions, a response rate between the ranges of 40% to 50% is deemed suitable.
### Appendix A - Information available from the GDS 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Your course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Title of program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Major field(s) of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Level of award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is this qualification part of a combined or double degree?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Type of fees (HECS, fee-paying, Other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In what year did you commence this award?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Type of attendance (Full-time/Part-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mode of study (Internal/External)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether received any credit or advanced standing towards the award</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Work in your final year</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Whether had a paid job in final year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Type of employment (Full-time/Part-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether employer provided financial support for studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether employer provided time off in lieu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether still with employer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. What you were doing on 30 April</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Position regarding study (Full-time/Part-time/None)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Position with regard to paid work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>4. Main paid work</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Employer’s name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Location of employment (Australian postcode, or overseas country)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Type of employer by sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Type of business carried out by employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Date of starting job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Main tasks or duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Number of hours worked in main paid job in an average week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Type of employment (Permanent/Short-term/Other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gross annual salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If your job is full-time, is this your first full-time job of any sort?</td>
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<tr>
<th>5. Job Search methods</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- During the last year did you actively seek employment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Methods used to look for employment in the last year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If in employment, how first found out about job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. Further Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Title of award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Major field(s) of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Level of award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Type of attendance (Full-time/Part-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mode of study (Internal/External)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Name of institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Month of beginning award</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued overpage)
7. About you
   - Gender
   - Age at 30 April
   - Whether a permanent resident (Australian postcode, or overseas country)
   - Type(s) of disability (if any)
   - Are you of Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent?
   - Do you come from a non-English speaking background?
   - Highest previous educational qualification (Title and Level)
Appendix B - The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) at RMIT

Introduction

The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) gathers perceptions of recent graduates about the quality and usefulness of their programs. At RMIT, the CEQ consists of 25 GCA approved questions i.e. items to which respondents are asked to state a level of agreement or disagreement. All items are coded on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree'. In addition, RMIT includes seven additional items which make up the Work Relevance Scale and which are used by three of the ATN universities, and one further item.

The CEQ forms part of the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS), which is administered annually by the Graduate Careers Australia (GCA). The CEQ and GDS are mailed out four months after graduates have completed their award program.

CEQ Brief Background

In 1991 the Federal Government commissioned the Performance Indicators Research Group (‘The Linke Committee’) to examine indicators of performance in Higher Education. An outcome of the group’s recommendation was the creation of the Course Experience Questionnaire. According to GCA, Paul Ramsden and Noel Entwistle used the basic form of the CEQ in studies of undergraduate students in the United Kingdom. During 1989, Ramsden and colleagues tested a later version in Australian universities.

In 1993 the CEQ consisted of twenty-five compulsory items asked by all universities. The CEQ was further expanded in 2002 so that it now includes up to forty-nine items, thirty-six of which are optional. RMIT has continued to use the original twenty-five items.

Universities incorporate the CEQ into formal planning processes and recognise CEQ results as indicators of program quality.

The CEQ Scales

Thirty-two of the thirty-three items used by RMIT measure agreement or disagreement to a statement about one of the following program aspects:

- Quality of teaching
- Clarity of goals and standards
- Nature of assessment
- Level of workload
- Development of generic skills
- Work relevance (Three ATN universities only)
- Overall satisfaction

Items are grouped into 'scales' according to the program aspect they address. For example, the item 'The course (program) developed my problem solving skills', addresses generic skills and is part of the Generic Skills Scale.
The Graduate Destination Survey: An Overview

RMIT generally reports the proportion of graduates who ‘agree’ with each item (or scale): this is the proportion rating the item (or scale) in either of the top two categories out of five. Below is a brief description of each CEQ scale used by RMIT.

**Good Teaching Scale (GTS)** measures respondents' perceptions of teaching standards. It focuses on teachers' feedback, motivation, attention, understanding of problems and skill in explaining concepts. Research undertaken by GCA indicates that a high score on this scale is associated with the perception that there are good practices in place, conversely lower scores reflect a perception that these practices occur less frequently.

- The teaching staff of this course motivated me to do my best work.
- The staff put a lot of time into commenting on my work.
- The staff made a real effort to understand difficulties I might be having with my work.
- The teaching staff normally gave me helpful feedback on how I was going.
- My lecturers were extremely good at explaining things.
- The teaching staff worked hard to make their subjects interesting.

**Clear Goals and Standards Scale (CGS)** measures respondents' perceptions of the clarity with which teachers communicated expected academic standards and course goals.

- It was always easy to know the standard of work expected.
- I usually had a clear idea of where I was going and what was expected of me in this course.
- It was often hard to discover what was expected of me in this course.
- The staff made it clear right from the start what they expected from students.

**Appropriate Workload Scale (AWS)** measures respondents' perceptions of the appropriateness of their course workloads. High scores indicate perceptions that workload levels were adequate but not so excessive so as to be detrimental to learning.

- The workload was too heavy.
- I was generally given enough time to understand the things I had to learn.
- There was a lot of pressure on me as a student in this course.
- The sheer volume of work to be got through in this course meant it couldn't be all be all comprehended.

**Appropriate Assessment Scale (AAS)** measures respondents' perceptions about the extent to which assessment stresses the recall of information rather than other intellectual skills. High scores indicate that respondents perceived that skills other than recall were critical to successful academic performance.

- To do well in this course all you really needed was a good memory.
- The staff seemed more interested in testing what I had memorised than what I understood.
- Too many staff asked me questions just about facts.
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**Generic Skills Scale (GSS)** measures respondents’ perceptions of generic skill development (e.g. problem solving, communications, planning, team working) achieved in their courses.

- The course developed my problem-solving skills.
- The course sharpened my analytical skills.
- The course helped me develop my ability to work as a team member.
- As a result of my course, I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems.
- The course improved my skills in written communication.
- My course helped me to develop the ability to plan my own work.

**Work Relevance Scale (WRS)** measures respondents’ perceptions of their readiness for the workplace.

- The course developed an understanding of workplace skills
- The course provided the opportunity for putting theory into practice
- The skills developed in the course were useful and relevant
- The course developed current professional skills
- The course was a good combination of theory and practice
- What I learnt benefited my future work
- The course helped prepare me for the workforce

The 31st item says “*The assessment methods employed in this course required an in-depth understanding of the course content*”.

The 32nd item asks graduates to indicate their Overall Satisfaction with their courses - 'Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of this course'.

The 33rd item says “*The course prepared me very well for my employment as at April this year*”.

**Notes on Interpreting CEQ data**

Analyses undertaken by the Policy and Planning Group in interpreting CEQ data are in accordance with standard practices as recommended by the GCA in its annual statistical reporting.

There are two approaches to reporting the five-point scale CEQ items:

- A mean score and standard deviation can be ascribed to each item by scoring the five points 100, 50, 0, -50 and –100.

- A percentage agreement, being the proportion of respondents choosing the top two points on the five-point scale, can be ascribed to each item.

RMIT analyses of CEQ data generally report the percentage agreement by item (or scale). The percentage agreement refers to the percentage of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the item. In tables reflecting CEQ ranking, percent agreement has been used as the basis for the ranking. The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) also
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uses percent agreement as the basis for analysis – however DEST uses the term ‘broad agreement’ since it includes three points (agree, strongly agree and neutral / undecided).

Thus, for example, one cohort of students can be compared to another on the basis of their agreement with a particular scale such as ‘Good Teaching’ (provided the sample sizes are adequate).

It would not be appropriate to compare the percentage agreeing with two different scales e.g. between the percentage agreeing with the Good Teaching Scale and the percentage agreeing with the Appropriate Workload Scale. This is because each scale contains a unique set of items which, due to differences in wording, may draw different response levels and hence, levels of agreement.

Care should be taken in comparing results across universities. Differences in disciplines and student profiles need to be considered when analysing results. Certainly, aggregations beyond the field of education level need to be interpreted with some caution.

Further advice on interpretation of the CEQ results is in the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee's (AVCC), Code of Practice the Disclosure of Data from the GDS/CEQ. This document guides readers in interpreting CEQ data and drawing conclusions.

Further Reading

Guthrie, B and Johnson, T (1997), Non-Response Rate to the 1996 Graduate Destination Survey, Evaluations and Investigations Program, DETYA, Canberra.


RMIT University (2002), Improving Course Experience Questionnaire Results for RMIT
Appendix C - The Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ)

Introduction

The Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) is a survey of research degree candidates at the conclusion of their program of study. The CEQ consists of 28 GCA approved questions i.e. items to which respondents are asked to state a level of agreement or disagreement. All items are coded on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree'.

The PREQ forms part of the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS), which is administered annually by the Graduate Careers Australia (GCA). The PREQ and GDS are mailed out four months after graduates have completed their award program.

PREQ Brief Background

GCA and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) developed the PREQ, and first implemented it in 1999. It has a number of potential uses: providing a national overview of broad issues; setting a context against which institutions might undertake their own analyses; and identifying examples of good practice.

The PREQ Scales

The twenty-eight items measure agreement or disagreement to a statement about one of the following program aspects:

- Supervision
- Intellectual Climate
- Skills Development
- Infrastructure
- Thesis Examination
- Goals and Expectations
- Overall satisfaction

Items are grouped into 'scales' according to the program aspect they address. For example, the item 'The thesis examination was fair', addresses examinations and is part of the Thesis Examination Scale.

RMIT generally report the proportion of graduates who ‘agree’ with each item (or scale): this is the proportion rating the item (or scale) in either of the top two categories out of five.

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1 Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire 2002, GCCA
Below is a list of items making up each PREQ scale.

**Supervision**

- Supervision was available when I needed it
- My supervisor/s provided helpful feedback on my progress
- My supervisor/s made a real effort to understand difficulties I faced
- My supervisor/s provided additional information relevant to my topic
- I was given good guidance in topic selection and refinement
- I received good guidance in my literature search

**Skills Development**

- My research sharpened my analytic skills
- My research further developed my problem solving skills
- I learned to develop my ideas and present them in my written work
- Doing my research helped me develop my ability to plan my own work
- As a result of my research, I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems

**Intellectual Climate**

- The department provided opportunities for social contact with other postgraduate students
- I was integrated into the department’s community
- A good seminar program for postgraduate students was provided
- The department provided opportunities for me to become involved in the broader research culture
- The research ambience in the department or faculty stimulate my work

**Infrastructure**

- I had access to a suitable working space
- I was able to organise good access to necessary equipment
- I had good access to the technical support I needed
- I had good access to computing facilities and services
- There was appropriate financial support for research activities

**Thesis Examination**

- The thesis examination process was fair
- I was satisfied with the thesis examination process
- The examination of my thesis was completed in reasonable time

**Goals and Expectations**

- I developed an understanding of the standard of work expected
- I understood the requirements of thesis examination
- I understand the required standard for the thesis
The 28th item asks graduates to indicate their Overall Satisfaction with their research experience - 'Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of my higher degree research experience'.

Notes on Interpreting PREQ data

Analyses undertaken by the Policy and Planning Group in interpreting PREQ data are in accordance with standard practices as recommended by the GCCA in its annual statistical reporting.

There are two approaches to reporting the five-point scale PREQ items:

- A mean score and standard deviation can be ascribed to each item by scoring the five points 100, 50, 0, -50 and –100.
- A percentage agreement, being the proportion of respondents choosing the top two points on the five-point scale, can be ascribed to each item.

RMIT analyses of PREQ data generally report the percentage agreement by item (or scale). The percentage agreement refers to the percentage of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the item.

Thus, for example, one cohort of students can be compared to another on the basis of their agreement with a particular scale such as ‘Supervision’ (provided the sample sizes are adequate).

It would not be appropriate to compare the percentage agreeing with two different scales e.g. between the percentage agreeing with the Supervision Scale and the percentage agreeing with the Skills Development Scale. This is because each scale contains a unique set of items which, due to differences in wording, may draw different response levels and hence, levels of agreement.

Care should be taken in comparing results across universities. Differences in disciplines and student profiles need to be considered when analysing results. Certainly, aggregations beyond the field of education level need to be interpreted with some caution.

Further Reading
