

Role and relevance of the Performance Indicators and the Performance Indicators Steering Group

PISG 11/06

Issue

1. The role and relevance of both the Performance Indicators Steering Group (PISG) and the Performance Indicators (PIs) themselves were briefly discussed at the PISG's meeting in March 2011. Given a changing landscape in higher education (HE) the group felt that it was an appropriate time to revisit the context in which the PIs were providing information and the roles that the PIs and the PISG played in the wider HE environment.

Recommendations

Recommendation: PISG to consider the role and relevance of the Performance Indicators and PISG.

Recommendation: PISG to consider and prioritise areas of focus and future meeting agenda items for the group.

Discussion

2. At their March 2011 meeting the PISG considered their terms of reference and touched on the coverage, priorities and relevance of the PIs, and on the role and working of the PISG. At that time members noted that the HE landscape was due to encounter a number of developments, and that a wider discussion of the topic would be appropriate at their next meeting once some of the developments were known.

3. Members were invited in July to provide comment on the role and relevance of the Performance Indicators and PISG. The secretariat received a small number of responses and this paper summarises those alongside information/intelligence that the secretariat have collected in recent years.

4. This discussion is broken down into two parts. The first provides members with some broad topics that they may wish to consider when discussing the PIs and PISG. The second allows for a discussion of potential future agenda items following the consideration of the broad topics and asks the group to consider the relative priorities of these items.

Broad topics

5. The following is a list of broad topics that the group may wish to consider when discussing the coverage, priorities and relevance of the PIs, and on the role and working of the PISG.

- Higher education policy evolution across the devolved nations of the UK. For England, this includes policies arising from BIS's "Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System" paper¹. These include (although the policies listed below refer to England, the issues arising for PIs potentially apply across the all the devolved nations)² :

"...Many part-time and distance-learning students will also be able to access loans to cover the full tuition costs for the first time."

[Do the PIs sufficiently cover and explore issues relating to non-full-time provision?]

"We will expect higher education institutions to provide a standard set of information about their courses, and we will make it easier for prospective students to find and compare this information";

[How does PISG interact with others taking forward public information proposals such as the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group?]

"We will ask the main organisations that hold student data to make detailed data available publically, including on employment and earnings outcomes.."

[Do the PIs capture sufficient information on employment outcomes?]

"We are committed to opening up the higher education market, including further education colleges and alternative providers, ..."

[What issues arise from an increased focus on non-HEI alternative providers including the institution coverage of the PIs; future data sources; and membership of PISG?]

¹ <http://discuss.bis.gov.uk/hereform/white-paper/>

² Wording in quotes taken directly from the BIS paper. Comments in italics are examples of issues that arise from the policy.

“All institutions which charge more than £6,000 must agree Access Agreements with the Director of Fair Access setting out what they will do to attract students from disadvantaged backgrounds.”

[What issues arise from the use of PIs in influencing the access agenda? In England, this involves the use of PIs in OFFA access agreements.]

“As part of HEFCE’s revised remit as the sector regulator, it will be given an explicit remit to protect the interests of students, including by promoting competition where appropriate in the higher education sector.”

[How does PISG and the PIs identify areas of interest for students? Are the current set of PIs sufficiently student focused?]

- PISG’s relationship to similar existing sector-wide institutional focused indicators and benchmarking processes. These include: indicators used within the HESA run Higher Education Information Database for Institutions (HEIDI)³; indicators used in newspaper league tables; and indicators produced by other national bodies (such as HEFCE, HEFCW, SFA).
- PISG’s role in awareness raising activity in terms of visibility, value, and relevance of the existing PIs;
- Recent recommendations coming from the UUK Efficiency Task Group that national benchmarks against which increasing efficiencies can be monitored should be examined⁴.
- PISG’s horizon scanning role in terms of identifying the links between emerging policy areas and PIs, and ensuring that PIs measure activity that the public take a long-term interest in;
- PISG’s role in providing advice and comment to government and related bodies on issues relating to measuring institutional performance;
- PISG’s role in reacting to comments in the public domain on PIs;
- The impact of BIS’s consultation on statistics that measure the progress of children from disadvantaged backgrounds to higher education⁵ which is

³ <https://heidi.hesa.ac.uk/>

⁴ <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/POLICYANDRESEARCH/POLICYAREAS/EFFICIENCY/Pages/default.aspx>

proposing changes to the key headline indicators for monitoring young people's achievement in reaching higher education;

Recommendation: PISG to consider the role and relevance of the Performance Indicators and PISG.

Potential future agenda items

6. The following is a list of some of the potential future agenda items. This should not be considered as an exhaustive list of all potential items and should be used as a prompt for discussions:

- Reviewing the relevance and effectiveness of existing indicators (this could take the form of a fundamental review of all indicators; or a targeted review of a particular group of indicators such as the widening participation indicators, research indicators or indicators covering part-time provision);
- Differences in coverage of indicators by the devolved UK regions;
- Development of the employment indicators to include alternative measures of occupational types;
- Appropriateness of current benchmarks;
- Considering the inclusion of measures of postgraduate widening participation, completion and retention rates;
- Extension of WP and retention indicators to provision registered at further education colleges (and other alternative providers);
- Reporting of institutional level satisfaction scores in the National Student Survey and other similar surveys;
- Other priorities generated from the early part of this paper.

Recommendation: PISG to consider and prioritise areas of focus and future meeting agenda items for the group.

⁵ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/c/11-965-consultation-statistics-disadvantaged-children-higher-education>

Further information

7. For further information contact Mark Gittoes (Phone: 0117 931 7052; e-mail: m.gittoes@hefce.ac.uk) or Alison Brunt (Phone: 0117 931 7166; e-mail a.brunt@hefce.ac.uk).