

# Performance Indicators contextual information and commentary

**PISG 12/03**

## Issue

1. At the July 2011 meeting of the Performance Indicators Steering Group the group requested that the Performance Indicators Technical Group provide initial advice to them on the potential for improvements to be made to the contextual information and commentary published alongside the PIs on HESA's website to address visibility, awareness and understanding of the PIs. In particular, it was requested that this work focus on providing accessible information regarding the use and content of the indicators.

## Recommendations

2. That members consider and agree the modifications recommended and suggested by the PITG, taking into consideration the comments as noted.

## Discussion

3. As part of their discussion of the role and relevance of the PIs at their July 2011 meeting, the PISG identified a requirement for a program of work to address visibility, awareness and understanding of the PIs. In particular, and in the first instance, it was felt that this work should focus on providing accessible information regarding the use and content of the indicators. The PISG asked the PITG to provide them with initial advice on the potential for improvements to be made to the contextual information and commentary published alongside the PIs on HESA's website.

4. Following the request of the PISG, HESA brought a list of suggested ways to improve the contextual information and commentary and accessibility of the PIs publication on HESA's website to the November 2011 meeting of the PITG. Further discussions at that meeting resulted in additional suggestions from the members of PITG that the group felt that the PISG may wish to consider.

### Modifications proposed by HESA and recommended to the PISG

5. The following suggestions were proposed by HESA<sup>1</sup> and discussed by members of the PITG during the meeting. It was agreed that the proposed modifications should be recommended to the PISG:

- Re-structure the introductory pages creating an initial basic introduction page explaining what the PIs are and how they should be interpreted.
- Have a separate FAQ section to replace the existing "guide to PIs".
- Have a separate page about PISG and the PITG sub-group with papers from PISG meetings [action from PISG, agreed by PITG and implemented].

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<sup>1</sup> The suggestions detailed here were proposed to the PITG in paper PITG 11/09.

- Re-work the definition sections making them more accessible with plain English text followed by additional information referencing the relevant HESA fields. For example, a simple definition explaining the various levels of study followed by a list of COURSEAIM codes applicable to each category.
- Simplify the technical documents explaining them in more straightforward terms with examples followed by formulae and references to the relevant HESA fields.
- Add a basic feedback form to the site with comments or queries being sent to the HESA PI team for action.
- Extend the PIs tables (excluding T6 which is Welsh institutions only) to include the full list of UK HEIs making table comparisons between tables more straightforward.
- Raise the profile of summary information and time series through the use of easily accessible charts.

6. The PISG are invited to refer to paragraphs 9.1 and 9.2 of the minutes of the PITG meeting on 25 November 2011 for the PITG's discussion of the HESA's proposed modifications to the Performance Indicators contextual information and commentary.

#### Further suggestions of the PITG

7. The following suggestions were made and discussed by members of the PITG during the meeting. It was agreed that the PISG should be invited to consider these suggestions further:

- Include a short survey on the HESA website allowing users to comment on the individual tables, their usage and possible improvements. In the first instance, an e-mail could be sent to all institutional PI contacts at institutions encouraging them to complete the survey. The survey could remain on the site long-term with any key messages and suggestions being fed-back to PITG and PISG.
- Raise the profile of summary information and time series through the use of accessible charts.
- Provide an alternative structure of PI information: an institution focussed structure as well as the current indicator focussed structure. i.e. introduce an ability to look at all indicators available for a particular institution in a given year. Members noted that this may align well with other areas of the Public Information agenda.
- Provide an ability to retrieve PIs for a particular grouping of institutions. For example, allowing you to just select the Welsh institutions or the institutions within your own English region.
- Review the presentation of the PI tables and the appropriateness of the contextual information provided within them. Members recognised the importance of contextual information in accurate interpretation of the indicators but noted that

some tables were very large on account of its inclusion. Alternative layouts may be able to alleviate some of this and could be explored.

- Provide links to supplementary information, for example data prepared by the devolved nations that focussed specifically on institutions in that nation. Members agreed that while this would be possible it was not necessarily desirable: if the supplementary measures were sufficiently valuable to warrant this approach then the PISG should be advised to consider them for inclusion within the official PIs. Otherwise, there was a risk to the interpretation of the PIs and their value, as well as the risks arising from an inability of the PISG to exercise control over these supplementary measures.
- Review press relations and engagement with institutions with regards to interpretation of the PIs, and consider the potential for a dissemination seminar.

## **Further information**

1. For further information contact Suzie Dent (Phone: 01242 211109; e-mail: [suzie.dent@hesa.ac.uk](mailto:suzie.dent@hesa.ac.uk)).