

Unknown information in the benchmarking groups

PITG 13/03

Issue

1. When an institution has a high proportion of individuals with unknown information in a benchmarking factor, it can lead to a high proportion of individuals being placed in the unknown groups when benchmarking.

Discussion

Data with unknown information

2. Currently there are no restrictions on the proportion of records within benchmarking factors (such as subject of study or entry qualifications) that should be known in order for an institution to be included in the benchmarking calculation. This could lead to a high proportion of records in the unknown groups when performing the benchmarking calculation.

3. Records returned with unknown data are diverse in nature as the reasons for being unknown vary record by record. For example, students with atypical entry qualifications may be reported with unknown entry qualifications alongside those where the student has a remote relationship with their registering institution (such as a franchise arrangement or distance learner). This diversity means that very different students with very different characteristics are being benchmarked against each other, which can lead to unreliability for the institutional benchmarks.

Suppression approach by HEFCE

4. This issue has been addressed within the HEFCE further education indicators¹ by removing institutions from the benchmarking calculation that have a proportion of students in the unknown categories above a given threshold.

5. The threshold used is fifty per cent (i.e. if half of the institutional population has an unknown value in at least one of the benchmark marking factors). For the HEFCE publication, only the qualification on entry benchmark factor has an unknown category. Two additional columns will be published in the tables to show the number and percentage of unknown entry qualifications which makes it clear why an institution has no benchmark.

¹ Forthcoming 2013 HEFCE publication "Higher education indicators for further education colleges".

6. In addition to the institutional benchmark being suppressed, the suppressed institutional information is not included and does not contribute to the benchmark calculations for other institutions.

Illustration using the Low Participation Performance Indicators

7. For information, a threshold of at least fifty per cent known entry qualifications would have little effect on the 2010-11 low participation performance indicators. For tables T1a, T1b, T1c and T2a there are no institutions with more than fifty per cent of the entry qualifications unknown. For table T2c there are two institutions that have more than fifty per cent of the entry qualifications unknown.

Outcomes

8. The Performance Indicators Technical Group to provide advice to the Performance Indicators Steering Group on:

- a. Whether a methodology dealing with unknown information used in benchmarking is appropriate within the HE Performance Indicators.
- b. If appropriate the publication approach that should be applied.

Further information

18. For further information contact Emily Thorn (Phone: 0117 931 7268; e-mail: e.thorn@hefce.ac.uk).