

UK Performance Indicators Steering Group

As per the decision noted at paragraph 4.4, the Performance Indicators Steering Group will henceforth be referred to as the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group. Similarly the Performance Indicators Technical Group will be referred to as the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group, and the Performance Indicators will be referred to as the UK Performance Indicators for Higher Education. The changes in naming convention have been reflected throughout this set of minutes.

Minutes of the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group held at 12.00 on Monday, 16 September 2013 at Finlaison House, London

Present:

Members:	Heather Fry	Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) [Chair]
	Alison Allden	Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)
	Colette Eley	Welsh Government
	Celia Hunt	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)
	Debbie McVitty	National Union of Students
	Dr Kevin Mundy	Higher Education Wales
	Martin Smith	Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
Secretariat:	Alison Brunt	HEFCE
	Mark Gittoes	HEFCE
Presenting (present only for agenda item 3):		
	Emma Pollard	Institute for Employment Studies (IES)
	Emma Drever	National Centre for Social and Economic Research (NatCen)
Apologies:		
	David Barrett	OFFA
	Mark Corver	UCAS
	Bryan MacGregor*	Universities Scotland
	Neil MacLennan	Scottish Government
	Professor Geoffrey Petts*	Universities UK
	Paul Rasch	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)

Jonathan Waller

HESA

Awaiting nomination

Department for Education and Learning,
Northern Ireland (DEL)

*Comments were received in advance of the meeting from those members unable to attend and marked with a * in the list above. The secretariat passed these comments on to the UKPISG at the appropriate points in the meeting and these minutes reflect their inclusion within the group's discussion.*

1. Welcome from the chair

1.1. Following introductions, the chair welcomed members to the meeting and gave apologies received from Universities Scotland, Universities UK, BIS, DEL and Jonathan Waller.

2. Summary of October 2012 business of the Performance Indicators Steering Group

2.1. The summary was accepted as a true and accurate record of the business that the group had undertaken by correspondence, including that on 13 January 2013.

ACTION: HESA to publish the Summary of October 2012 business of the Performance Indicators Steering Group on their website alongside associated content relating to governance of the UKPIs.

3. Matters arising

3.1. Members were invited to discuss the potential for OFFA and the NUS to be given representation on the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group, as suggested at paragraph 2.2 of the summary October 2012 business. The group considered the added value that a technical representative from each of these organisations could contribute to the UKPITG; relative to both the added value of their representative on the UKPISG, and to the value in keeping the technical group membership focussed and manageable.

3.2. As an organisation with a remit in England, members noted a concern that OFFA's representation on the technical group was not appropriate and recognised a danger that they could be perceived to have been granted too great an influence over a set of UK-wide measures. DM acknowledged that NUS representation on the UKPITG would likely be of limited value, particularly in light of the finding of the fundamental review that students should not be considered a direct audience of the UK Performance Indicators for Higher Education (UKPIs).

3.3. The group agreed that OFFA and the NUS would not be invited to join the UKPITG. Advice would be sought from technical colleagues within OFFA and the NUS on a case by case basis and only when pertinent to the issue(s) under consideration.

4. Fundamental review of the Performance Indicators (PISG 13/01†)

4.1. As chair of the UKPI review project group, CH reminded members of their previous discussions of the need for a fundamental review of the UK Performance Indicators, and noted that the group had been prepared for proposals for fundamental change to arise from that review process. It was reported, however, that the review had shown that the UKPIs were valued as a way to measure HE and that the current

approach was appropriate, so recommendations for change were of a less radical nature. Before inviting the researchers to present their findings to the group, CH noted that the identification of the audience as being Governments and institutions - rather than students – was a particularly helpful outcome of the review, as was recognition that the UKPIs should be UK-wide measures throughout.

4.2. EP and ED then joined the meeting and presented their findings to the UKPISG, and summarised that the review process had identified no appetite to discontinue any of the areas covered by the UKPIs, but a desire for improvements to be made to the current set of indicators and for consideration of broadening of the measures and the population they covered. Three opportunities had been identified by the research:

- (a) to refine the current set of UKPIs;

Among the existing set of indicators, the researchers identified the Widening Participation indicators as attracting the most criticism during their review process, with widespread acknowledgement of the challenges and concerns that accompanied measures in this area. It was felt that the research indicators had not attracted a significant number of comments on the basis that they were under-used, rather than because there were no issues with respect to these measures.

Additionally, a need to improve understanding of the benchmarks accompanying the UKPIs was identified, with the aim of building user confidence of these tools. The researchers noted that the benchmarks were generally supported, considered well developed and seen to provide useful contextualisation. However, being perceived as a specialist tool, the researchers relayed a worry of some respondents that they were not suitably 'qualified' to use or interpret the benchmarks.

- (b) to broaden the coverage of UKPIs;

The researchers reiterated the finding that the current UKPIs were felt to cover relevant topics but no longer reflected the full make-up of provision and failed to reflect the full range of HE sector activity. It was reported that a need had been identified to assess the feasibility of extending the coverage of the UKPI populations in terms of institutions, students, and study modes.

- (c) and, to introduce new UKPIs.

The potential for indicators of 'value-added' and 'teaching quality' was reported to be most frequently referenced in terms of new UKPIs for introduction. The proposition was said to have been made by stakeholders and institutions in equal measure with respect to the online consultation conducted by the review. However, many recognised the concepts as being difficult and institutions showed reluctance towards such measures when they were discussed in detail at the review's deliberative events.

ACTION: EP and ED to provide to the UKPISG a more in depth understanding of the positions held by institutional respondents' to the review process, without breaking confidentiality.

4.3. The UKPISG thanked EP, ED and their team for the work they had done on the review, as well as the UKPISG secretariat and the UKPI review project group for their guidance of the review process. Members reiterated the value that recognising the sector's good will towards the UKPIs would serve, and the significant help that the review documents would provide to the UKPISG going forward. The group acknowledged a need to keep the momentum initiated by this review process while the audience for UKPIs remained engaged in these issues, but recognising the time lags involved in any decision making process and introduction of changes. EP and ED extended their own thanks to all those who had participated in the review process, and in particular to the UKPI review project group, CH and the UKPISG secretariat.

4.4. Following the departure of the researchers, members noted that the review process had highlighted the potential for confusion to arise in relation to the terminology "performance indicators" and its abbreviation to "PI". 'Performance indicators' was felt to have particular management connotations, as well as a negative association with performance against targets, and it was not unusual for 'PI' to be confused with the abbreviation of 'public information'. The group recognised that 'performance indicators' was an established terminology and that there was understanding within the sector as to the measures being referred to, but the value of a distinctive branding recognised. It was agreed that, henceforth, the 'performance indicators' would be referred to as the UK Performance Indicators for Higher Education, or the UKPIs. The groups governing these measures would be renamed accordingly, as the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) and the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG).

4.5. The UKPISG then commenced a discussion about their response to the recommendations made to them by the review and presented in paper PISG 13/01:

Recommendation 1

Accepted.

Recommendation 2

Members of the group were concerned that the recommendation as worded did not necessarily align with proposals for sector-level measures in areas where the challenges of UK-wide alignment were prominent, for example in the case of the WP measures. It was felt that acceptance of the recommendation should not prohibit the adoption of nation-specific approaches if they were deemed necessary in particular circumstances. The group agreed that they would accept the recommendation subject to a minor revision: "In principle, UKPIs should continue to have UK-wide coverage".

Recommendation 3

The group accepted the recommendation. It was noted that the recommendation may need to be revisited in the longer term if the make up of the sector changed significantly. For example, and in terms of identification of sector level priorities, a tension may be introduced if private or alternative providers were to be included alongside the established sector in UKPIs in future.

Recommendation 4

AA noted that the Higher Education Information Database for Institutions (HEIDI) was currently only accessible to full subscribers. The group accepted the recommendation subject to a revision in wording, to be supplied by HESA and to accurately reflect the availability of HEIDI.

ACTION: HESA to provide appropriate wording to revise the recommendation to reflect the availability of HEIDI.

Recommendation 5

Accepted.

Recommendation 6

The group considered the recommendation in two parts. Members accepted the recommendation that the key features of the current UKPI approach should be retained. The recommendation that a set of core principles should be developed was also accepted, and the group proceeded to discuss the principles proposed. It was felt that particular care needed to be taken with the wording of the principles. The wording of some of the proposed principles was considered a little too specific; as such they could potentially be restrictive with functionality greater than that of *core* principles. Others, such as C2, required greater specificity to ensure that the principles were understood to be applied within the bounds of legal limitations, such as the Data Protection Act.

The UKPISG agreed that, as a group, they should take ownership of a set of guiding principles to be employed with respect to the UKPIs and to be refined by members of the group by correspondence. The principles should be given in the context of a description of their anticipated use, and this contextual wording should also make clear the ownership of the principles as well as the group's ability to revise them over time as required or appropriate. The secretariat would compose a revised set of principles on the basis of suggested wording or amendments received from members. Once agreed, the four UK funding bodies would write to the heads of institutions in their nation to invite feedback on the proposed set of principles, before they were formally accepted by the UKPISG. The latter action would be in line with a review finding that institutions in particular wanted to be involved in the on-going development of the UKPIs.

ACTION: Members to provide comments, wording and amendments relating to the proposed set of principles to the secretariat at their earliest opportunity. The secretariat to revise the principles accordingly, with the revised set to be agreed by the UKPISG by correspondence or at the next meeting, depending on what timings allowed, but as soon as possible.

ACTION: Once agreed, the four UK funding bodies to write to the heads of institutions in their nations, inviting their feedback on the proposed set of guiding principles circulated to them. The UKPISG to formally accept an agreed set of principles at a subsequent meeting.

Recommendation 7

Members agreed that it was not feasible to address or accept recommendation 7 in its all-encompassing form, but recognised the need to address the issues it raised so as to

better represent all UK HE. Rather, the group felt that considering the feasibility of extended population coverage would be included within the actions undertaken to implement recommendations 8 and 9. As an example, the potential to extend the coverage to include HE activity at further education colleges would depend upon the accessibility of data (and/or the burden of additional data collection) and this was likely to vary according to the UKPI topic area under review (recommendation 8), and/or the nature of the measure proposed for introduction as a new UKPI (recommendation 9).

The group noted that care would need to be taken to ensure that extensions of coverage were made on a consistent basis wherever possible to avoid confusion. They agreed that the recommendation would therefore be rejected and that the action it detailed should be undertaken within the implementation of recommendations 8 and 9, but that the UKPISG should reflect at an appropriate time on the consistency of extensions made or proposed.

Recommendations 8 and 9

Accepted.

Recommendation 10

The group felt that the word 'consultation' would be perceived to convene a specific process, which would not always be applicable and/or proportionate to the change or introduction, or to the context in which it was being made. The UKPISG accepted the recommendation subject to a minor revision to the wording: "The introduction of any additional UKPIs or amendments to existing UKPIs must involve further dialogue with the sector to ensure buy-in".

4.6. The UKPISG considered the priority with which recommendations 8 and 9 needed to be addressed. It was agreed that the group had neither the time nor the resource available to enable them to address both recommendations in parallel, and that a pragmatic approach was required to ensure that the group's priorities were not misinterpreted by the audiences of, and stakeholders in the UKPIs. It was felt that the introduction of new UKPIs was of a lower priority than ensuring that the existing ones were fit for purpose. It was further acknowledged that in some of the areas suggested, work currently ongoing in the sector would serve usefully as preparatory work to enable the UKPISG to better understand the issues and existing measures in these areas before taking any decisions. An example was the suggestion relating to financial sustainability and the work of the Financial Sustainability Strategy Group and the British Universities Finance Directors Group in this area.

4.7. With respect to recommendation 8, the group considered the priority order in which the current UKPI topic areas would be subject to review. On account of the seeming poor usage and the timings involved, it was agreed that a process for the potential discontinuation of the current research UKPI Table R1 should be explored. Members agreed that they should capitalise on the opportunity of engaging with the heads of institutions (in relation to the principles for the UKPIs), to seek the sector's views regarding the potential discontinuation of Table R1. This engagement should be extended to include other stakeholders, such as the UK Research Councils. In particular, this engagement with the sector should be used to determine not only the future of Table

R1 but also preferences as to whether other existing measures (such as the Research Excellence Framework) are adequate for users' purposes in this area, or whether a replacement UKPI is wanted. If a replacement UKPI is wanted, it would then ask whether the existing measure should be phased out only when new measures are available to be phased in, or whether the existing measure should be discontinued at the earliest opportunity with research becoming a 'new' area in which to introduce UKPIs.

ACTION: HESA to confirm the Official Statistics requirements relating to the discontinuation of Table R1.

ACTION: The four UK funding bodies to include in their correspondence with heads of institutions in their nations, a proposal for the discontinuation of the Research UKPI, Table R1 and an invitation for feedback on the approach to its replacement. The secretariat to ensure that the views of the UK Research Councils and other relevant stakeholders are captured in the same way.

4.8. Members agreed that the WP UKPIs were the highest priority for a detailed review process. The issues identified through the course of the fundamental review with respect to the UK wide aspect of these measures seemed to suggest an urgency for an in depth review of this area. It was felt that it would be preferable to ask the UKPITG to undertake an options analysis with respect to this set of measures, rather than to commission consultants to review the area. The UKPITG should be asked to provide advice to the UKPISG as to the benefits and disadvantages of different options that might seek to address issues relating to the coverage, definition and UK-wide nature of the WP UKPIs.

ACTION: The UKPITG to begin the process of reviewing the WP UKPIs in depth.

4.9. While the employment UKPIs were acknowledged to require review, particularly given the current prominence of issues relating to graduate employability, it was agreed that this area should form the basis of a second tranche of detailed review work. Members noted that the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey would be considered within a wider review of public information being overseen by the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG), and that the potential for linked HMRC data was a developing matter. As such, it was agreed that detailed review of the employment UKPIs would not commence until progress had been made in those areas of work.

ACTION: The UKPISG to consider review of the employment UKPIs as a second tranche of review work, to be discussed at a subsequent meeting of the group once progress had been made in related areas of work.

4.10. Members acknowledged that the fundamental review outcomes suggested that issues relating to the retention UKPIs were relatively small in both number and magnitude. As such, it was agreed that this area was the lowest priority with respect to a detailed review process of the current UKPI areas, to be revisited at the following meeting of the UKPISG.

ACTION: The UKPISG to consider the feasibility of reviewing the retention UKPIs at their next meeting.

5. Update from the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (Oral and UKPITG minutes from February 2013)

5.1. MG reported to the group on the matters discussed by the UKPITG at their February 2013 meeting.

(a) Impact of changes to XTARIFF and XPDLHE02

Following a change made by HESA to the standard DLHE population, analysis of the impact of the change on the Employment UKPIs would be provided to members of the UKPISG and the UKPITG for their information in due course. Members of the UKPITG had recognised the potential for the impact of this change to be unevenly distributed across the sector, and a possible need for careful interpretation of the Employment UKPIs in this eventuality. The evidence of the impact would be circulated to the two groups when it became available.

ACTION: HESA to implement the removal of data for suppressed institutions from the calculation of totals and benchmarks in the 2014 and subsequent publications of Tranche 1 of the UKPIs.

(b) Removal of data for suppressed institutions from the calculation of totals and benchmarks

MG informed the group that erroneous data relating directly to the population definition or characteristic that the indicators were measuring led to the suppression of all of an institutions' data within the institution-level information. To date, those data had not been removed from the calculations of totals or benchmarks. On the basis that any use of data that was known to be erroneous could not be justified, the group agreed the recommendation from the UKPITG that data for suppressed institutions be removed from the calculation of totals and benchmarks in the 2014 and subsequent publications of Tranche 1 of the UKPIs.

ACTION: HESA to implement the removal of data for suppressed institutions from the calculation of totals and benchmarks in the 2014 and subsequent publications of Tranche 1 of the UKPIs.

(c) Suppression approach in the event that an institution has 50 per cent unknown values within benchmarking factors

The group were invited to note that the suppression discussed in the point above only related to erroneous data relating directly to the population definition or characteristic that the indicators were measuring. To date, no suppression was implemented on the basis of incomplete information relating to the benchmarking factors and this may subsequently affect the reliability of the benchmarks calculated for all institutions. The group agreed the recommendation from the UKPITG that an institution has no benchmark published in the event that their data contains more than 50 per cent unknown values.

ACTION: HESA to implement the suppression of an institution's benchmark in the event that their data contains more than 50 per cent unknown values within the benchmarking factors. The approach to be implemented in the 2014 and subsequent publications of the UKPIs.

- (d) Qualification on entry benchmarking groups for Tables T5, T7 and E1
MG reminded members that full use had been made in the benchmarking for Tables T1, T2 and T7 of the improved qualifications on entry data that had been available since the 2007-08 HESA student data collection. On account of the use of historic data informing the benchmarking for Tables T5, T7 and E1 it had not so far been desirable to update the benchmarking groups to fully exploit the improved qualifications on entry data. The historic information employed with respect to Tables T5, T7 and E1 was now sufficiently recent to enable those improved data to be utilised. The group agreed the recommendation.

ACTION: HESA to implement use of the more up to date qualification on entry benchmarking groups in the 2014 publication of the UKPIs, for Tables T5, T7 and E1 as proposed by the UKPITG.

- (e) Inclusion of students on integrated foundation years
The UKPITG had considered a range of arguments and counter arguments relating to whether or not students on integrated foundation years should be included within the non-continuation indicators. That group had concluded that such students should continue to be included in all UKPIs according to their eventual qualification aim. The UKPISG accepted the recommendation.

ACTION: HESA to continue to include students on integrated foundation years in all UKPIs according to their eventual qualification aim.

6. Papers proposed as exempt from immediate publication (those marked with † on the agenda)

6.1. On the basis that paper PISG 13/01 consisted principally of a pre-publication version of a forthcoming report, members agreed that this paper should be exempt from immediate publication on the HESA website.

ACTION: HESA to publish the Summary of October 2012 business of the Performance Indicators Steering Group on their website alongside the UKPIs and related content.

7. Date of next meeting

7.1. The group agreed that they would prefer to meet again in advance of the 2014 publication of tranche 1 of the UKPIs; in January / February 2014, with dates to be agreed by correspondence.

7.2. Given the nature of the business discussed at this meeting, members highlighted the importance of the minutes accurately reflecting both the discussion and the agreed actions to be taken forward in preparation for the next meeting.

ACTION: Members of the UKPISG to carefully consider the minutes of this meeting upon their circulation to the group, and alert the secretariat to any inaccuracies or lack of clarity at the earliest opportunity.

8. Any other business

8.1. The UKPISG were invited to acknowledge notable areas of shared interest across their own work and that of the HEPISG and the Higher Education Data and Information Improvement Programme (HEDIIP). Members agreed that there would be

value in improving communications between the three governance structures and for the UKPISG to receive an annual update from each of HEPISG and HEDIIP.

8.2. As a member of the HEDIIP board, AA agreed to provide an annual update to the UKPISG on the work being undertaken in that area. Members agreed that consultation with the Chair and secretariat of the HEPISG was required in order to identify an appropriate means of receiving annual updates on the work of that group.

ACTION: HF to liaise with the HEPISG to secure annual updates on the work of that group.

Meeting closed 14.10pm