

Review of the Widening Participation UK Performance Indicators

UKPISG 14/01

Issue

1. As part of their initial response to the 'Fundamental review of the UK Performance Indicators' the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group asked the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group to provide advice to support a process of in-depth review of the Widening Participation UKPIs.
2. As part of this advice, UKPITG have also considered the fit of the current WP UKPIs against the guiding principles proposed for UKPIs, and the potential areas for future coverage within WP UKPIs suggested by the UKPISG.

Recommendation

That members consider the two questions posed to them with respect to the priorities for WP UKPIs.

That members discuss the next steps required to establish an effective process for reviewing the WP UKPIs.

Discussion

3. At their September 2013 meeting the UKPISG accepted a recommendation that the current set of UKPIs should undergo more detailed review. The steering group agreed that the WP UKPIs were the highest priority for an in-depth review process, and that a rolling process should be commenced whereby the WP, employment and retention UKPIs were reviewed in turn.
4. As part of their initial response to the 'Fundamental review of the UK Performance Indicators' the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group have asked the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group to provide advice to support a process of in-depth review of the Widening Participation UKPIs.

UKPITG role

5. At their November 2013 meeting UKPITG considered the role that they are able to play with respect to an options analysis to be undertaken regarding the potential for UK PIs in different areas of WP (both including and beyond those areas in which current UK PIs exist).
6. UKPITG discussions questioned whether they had a sufficiently explicit set of policy objectives to work to. Members also expressed concern that the group had neither the detailed specialist technical expertise nor the available resource to undertake an in-depth consideration of the possibilities regarding the WP UKPIs.

7. The initial outcome of UKPITG discussion was to ask HEFCE and HESA to research potential organisations, groups, committees or departments who may be able to provide the required expertise to undertake in-depth reviews of the potential measures of disadvantage for WP UKPIs.

8. The shared secretariat of UKPISG and UKPITG has concerns regarding the potentially conflicting expectations of each group with regard to the roles of each group in this review process. UKPISG expectations on UKPITG appear to be for a set of options on potential WP indicators from which UKPISG can identify the most appropriate indicators for the sector's policy and strategic needs. However UKPITG expectations of UKPISG are to provide a specific well-defined set of policy objectives from which indicators can be identified by UKPITG.

9. However, how this is handled may depend on what the UKPISG sees as the next steps arising from the analysis presented below.

Existing WP UKPIs fit with proposed principles

10. The UKPITG went on to consider the fit of the existing WP UKPIs with each of the principles proposed for the UKPIs. Based on this discussion, a series of tables have been constructed which outline the fit of the current WP indicators with those principles, along with details of the weaknesses identified by the UKPITG. The existing WP UKPIs are listed at Annex A of this paper. The UKPITG's assessment of the fit for each indicator is given in Annex B. Each group (A-F) of principles are reported separately.

Areas proposed by UKPISG

11. In 2013, UKPISG also proposed areas that could be considered within the future coverage of the WP UKPIs. Within the constraints of UKPITG concerns regarding a specificity of policy objectives (see above), they discussed these with a focus on current data availability in each of the areas. Members identified a number of concerns and issues for some of the areas suggested, including the variation in availability of comparable data across the UK nations, and the range of potential measures with regard to school-based disadvantage.

12. Fuller details are provided in the UKPITG minutes but UKPITG identified two actions following these discussions:

Representatives of the four UK administrations to explore links and/or representation on the Four Nations Deprivation Working Group with a view to securing advice regarding the use of IMD on a UK-wide basis, their constituent indicators and data availability.

The Four Nations Deprivation Working Group comprises producers and representatives from ONS's Population Health and Regional Analysis Directorate. The group meets periodically to discuss issues in measuring multiple deprivation, including comparability across the UK.

While each of the four UK administrations produces a composite index of multiple deprivation (IMD) based on a range of statistical data about small areas – including

income, employment, health, housing, education, access to services, and crime – there is no corresponding IMD covering the UK as a whole. The Four Nations Working Group has previously concluded that there was little user demand for a UK-wide index but that there was a need for guidance for policy users.

Initial work to secure advice from this group has begun and a paper will be taken to the next UKPITG meeting, pending the decisions taken at this meeting by UKPISG.

UKPITG secretariat to draft a paper to the UKPISG reflecting the discussions regarding group-based measures compared with individual-based measures, and seeking the required steer regarding the intended focus of UKPI measures.

UKPI secretariat have drafted a paper but due to the UKPITG concerns on the broader approach to the WP UKPIs, the paper has not been brought to this meeting due to the detailed nature of the issue. This paper will be presented to UKPISG at a more appropriate point in the review cycle.

Recommendation: That members consider the following two questions:

Q1. Is there a policy requirement for WP UKPIs to measure any of the following?

- a. **Financial disadvantage.**
- b. **Educational disadvantage.**
- c. **Socio-economic disadvantage.**
- d. **A single measure of multiple deprivations (a composite measure of disadvantage).**

If so, which of these four is considered the highest priority for coverage within the WP UKPIs?

Are there any other areas which you might consider higher priority for coverage within WP UKPIs?

Is there any further guidance that the UKPISG would wish to provide to the UKPITG with regard to the priority areas identified? For example, would the UKPISG wish to provide any advice to the UKPITG with regard to individual-based or group-based measures?

Q2. Given the priority areas identified in Q1, is there any potential for one or more of the existing WP UKPIs to satisfy the policy requirement that has been identified?

With regard to this question, the group may wish to consider the points below.

Is it possible to improve the fit of the existing WP UKPIs with principle A1? That is, to extend their coverage to better reflect the totality of higher education provision and institutions across the UK?

Is it possible to improve the fit of any of the existing WP UKPIs with principle B2? That is, are there any existing WP UKPIs for which it may be feasible to make genuine improvements to the quality and robustness of the information presented by the indicator?

Is publication of UKPIs around 18 months after the entrant cohorts commenced their programmes of study considered timely? If not, is it feasible to improve their timeliness?

At what point in an in-depth review process would it be appropriate to review the benchmarks provided in association with UKPIs?

Recommendation: That members discuss the next steps required to establish an effective process for reviewing the WP UKPIs.

Further information

18. 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).

Annex A: Existing WP UKPIs

The existing UK Performance Indicators in the area of 'Widening participation of under-represented groups' are:

Table 1 – Young full-time undergraduate entrants by state school marker, NS-SEC marker and low participation marker. The table is published for three populations.

Table T1a considers young full-time first degree entrants

Table T1c considers young full-time other undergraduate entrants

Table T1b considers all young full time undergraduate entrants

Table 2 – Mature full-time and part-time undergraduate entrants by low participation marker. The table is published for three populations.

Table T2a considers all mature full-time undergraduate entrants by level of study and low participation marker

Table T2b considers part-time undergraduate entrants by age marker and low participation marker

Table T2c considers mature full-time other undergraduate entrants by low participation Marker

Table 7 – All undergraduates by level of study, mode of study and DSA (Disabled Students' Allowance) marker.

Annex B: Fit of the current WP UKPIs with the proposed guiding principles

A: Coverage and scope	Table 1 (a, b and c)			Table 2 (a, b and c)	Table 7
	State school marker	NS-SEC	POLAR3	POLAR3	Disabled students' allowance
A1: UKPIs should normally seek to reflect the totality of higher education (HE) provision and institutions across the UK.	The indicator does not consider mature, part-time, non-UK-domiciled or postgraduate populations, nor does it include students registered at publicly-funded FECs or at privately funded institutions (except University of Buckingham).	The indicator does not consider mature, part-time, non-UK-domiciled or postgraduate populations, nor does it include students registered at publicly-funded FECs or at privately funded institutions (except University of Buckingham).	The indicator does not consider mature, part-time, non-UK-domiciled or postgraduate populations, nor does it include students registered at publicly-funded FECs or at privately funded institutions (except University of Buckingham).	The indicator does not consider non-UK-domiciled or postgraduate populations, nor does it include students registered at publicly-funded FECs or at privately funded institutions (except University of Buckingham).	The indicator does not consider non-UK-domiciled or postgraduate populations, nor does it include students registered at publicly-funded FECs or at privately funded institutions (except University of Buckingham).
A2: UKPIs should measure what matters, notably underpinning long-term policy goals for the sector and reflecting the core mission of a significant proportion of institutions. In some areas sector-level only measures might be more appropriate than those at institution level.	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied

<p>A3: UKPIs should, as standard, provide an aggregate picture of UK HE and allow institutions to compare themselves to other institutions in the different nations across the UK. In addition there may be a requirement for a small number of nation-specific indicators that reflect differing national contexts.</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>The POLAR3 measure is not considered to be relevant to institutions in Scotland, given the higher levels of participation in higher education in this country</p>	<p>The POLAR3 measure is not considered to be relevant to institutions in Scotland, given the higher levels of participation in higher education in this country</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>
<p>A4: Taken together, the UKPIs and their associated benchmark values should provide information in the public domain that is not otherwise easily available. There must be a value to a wide range of stakeholders in publishing the UKPI and benchmark values at institutional level.</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>

B: Quality of data	Table 1 (a, b and c)			Table 2 (a, b and c)	Table 7
	State school marker	NS-SEC	POLAR3	POLAR3	Disabled students' allowance
B1: UKPIs should be produced by a credible and independent organisation.	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied
B2: UKPIs should be evidence-based and statistically robust, conforming to recognised best practice in the production of statistical information. Data used for the indicator should be of high quality collected in a consistent and fair way across the sector; they should have a good sample base, use consistent definitions, and use a transparent methodology.	Classification of state and independent schools lacks coherence and consistency of collection.	Data used for the indicator are widely acknowledged to be of poor quality.	Satisfied, but issues relating to the relevance of the measure to institutions in Scotland, given the higher levels of participation in higher education in this country	Satisfied, but issues relating to the relevance of the measure to institutions in Scotland, given the higher levels of participation in higher education in this country	Scope to improve quality of data used for the indicator. Not clear that DSA eligibility is consistently defined across the UK nations.

<p>B3: UKPIs should normally have longevity/continuity, enabling a time series to be developed and the ability for users to conduct longitudinal analysis.</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>
<p>B4: UKPIs should be produced in a regular and timely fashion and where possible, be produced annually. However it is acknowledged that it may not be sensible for all new UKPIs to be produced annually, especially where to do so would be costly or put too much of a burden on institutions.</p>	<p>The indicators are published around 18 months after the entrant cohorts that they consider commenced their programmes of study.</p>	<p>The indicators are published around 18 months after the entrant cohorts that they consider commenced their programmes of study.</p>	<p>The indicators are published around 18 months after the entrant cohorts that they consider commenced their programmes of study.</p>	<p>The indicators are published around 18 months after the entrant cohorts that they consider commenced their programmes of study.</p>	<p>The indicators are published around 18 months after the entrant cohorts that they consider commenced their programmes of study.</p>

C: Dissemination	Table 1 (a, b and c)			Table 2 (a, b and c)	Table 7
	State school marker	NS-SEC	POLAR3	POLAR3	Disabled students' allowance
C1: The UKPIs and their associated benchmark values should be free and available to all.	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied
C2: Details of the methodology and benchmarking process used in the production of the UKPIs should be published for the benefit of institutions, bodies acting on behalf of institutions, government bodies and agencies and any other interested parties. No institutional-level results should be published before giving the participating higher education providers an opportunity to correct errors of fact.	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied

<p>C3: Publication of the UKPIs and their associated benchmarks should include appropriate guidance and contextualisation so as to facilitate accurate interpretation of the measures and the outcomes that they seek to represent.</p>	<p>Satisfied, but acknowledge scope for continual improvements to guidance and contextualisation.</p>	<p>Satisfied, but acknowledge scope for continual improvements to guidance and contextualisation.</p>	<p>Satisfied, but acknowledge scope for continual improvements to guidance and contextualisation.</p>	<p>Satisfied, but acknowledge scope for continual improvements to guidance and contextualisation.</p>	<p>Satisfied, but acknowledge scope for continual improvements to guidance and contextualisation.</p>
---	---	---	---	---	---

D: Benchmarking and enhancement	Table 1 (a, b and c)			Table 2 (a, b and c)	Table 7
	State school marker	NS-SEC	POLAR3	POLAR3	Disabled students' allowance
D1: UKPIs should be directional and attributional measures. There must be general agreement as to what represents a positive or a negative outcome, and that movement in values can be attributed to changes in sector or institutional activity rather than solely reflecting wider extraneous factors. This enables users to understand the direction of travel of the sector and of individual institutions, and so UKPIs can be used to underpin policy development and evaluation as well as institutional performance enhancement.	Caution required with regards to this measure, where it is feasible that the indicator could reach a level at which it was too high, and not representative of the wider population.	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Acknowledge that changes in the way DSA is allocated could lead to changes in the indicators that are unrelated to performance.

<p>D2: There should be an expectation that institutions will take note of their indicators and benchmarks, look carefully at any differences occurring with a view to further exploring areas of weakness in their institutional performance, and ultimately strive to improve.</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Acknowledge that in some circumstances a student group may be represented in an institution's statistics to a level where further progress or 'improvement' may not be feasible, or desirable</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Acknowledge that in some circumstances a student group may be represented in an institution's statistics to a level where further progress or 'improvement' may not be feasible, or desirable</p>
<p>D3: UKPIs and their associated benchmarks should not be presented in such a way as to imply any institutional ranking. They should provide information for external policy-making stakeholders that is suitable for informing policy, and information for institutions that is suitable for internal use.</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>	<p>Satisfied</p>

<p>D4: The benchmarks provided in association with UKPIs should take account of context and differing institutional characteristics, thereby supporting fair comparison of indicators between institutions.</p>	<p>Satisfied, though the benchmarking approach has not been subject to review for a number of years.</p>	<p>Satisfied, though the benchmarking approach has not been subject to review for a number of years.</p>	<p>Satisfied, though the benchmarking approach has not been subject to review for a number of years.</p>	<p>Satisfied, though the benchmarking approach has not been subject to review for a number of years.</p>	<p>Satisfied, though the benchmarking approach has not been subject to review for a number of years.</p>
---	--	--	--	--	--

E: Burden of data collection	Table 1 (a, b and c)			Table 2 (a, b and c)	Table 7
	State school marker	NS-SEC	POLAR3	POLAR3	Disabled students' allowance
E1: Where possible, existing data sources should be used to develop new UKPIs and/or to improve existing UKPIs. Any proposal to collect further data should be carefully costed through dialogue with the sector or their representatives, and justified in terms of anticipated use and usefulness. The UKPISG should be mindful that the UKPIs should not place undue burden on the sector.	Satisfied, but acknowledge the opportunity to determine the potential for reducing the burden of producing these measures.	Satisfied, but acknowledge the opportunity to determine the potential for reducing the burden of producing these measures.	Satisfied, and acknowledge a more limited opportunity to reduce any burden of producing measures on the basis of POLAR3. This indicator is based on postcode, which is collected routinely in administrative data for a wide and established range of uses, rather than just the production of the UKPIs.	Satisfied, and acknowledge a more limited opportunity to reduce any burden of producing measures on the basis of POLAR3. This indicator is based on postcode, which is collected routinely in administrative data for a wide and established range of uses, rather than just the production of the UKPIs.	Satisfied, but acknowledge the opportunity to determine the potential for reducing the burden of producing these measures.

F: Influence on behaviour	Table 1 (a, b and c)			Table 2 (a, b and c)	Table 7
	State school marker	NS-SEC	POLAR3	POLAR3	Disabled students' allowance
F1: Publishing UKPI and benchmark values at institutional level must not knowingly create perverse incentives or lead to perverse behaviour.	Satisfied	Satisfied	The risks of perverse behaviours were most likely to concern the targeting of particular areas, as opposed to the targeting of particular types of students, but this gives rise to concerns regarding the measure's adeptness to capture the specific, individual-level characteristics that might be of primary interest. Using a range of measures has helped prevent such perverse behaviours.	The risks of perverse behaviours were most likely to concern the targeting of particular areas, as opposed to the targeting of particular types of students, but this gives rise to concerns regarding the measure's adeptness to capture the specific, individual-level characteristics that might be of primary interest. Using a range of measures has helped prevent such perverse behaviours.	Satisfied

F2: UKPIs should comply with all relevant legislation and evolving best practice, particularly in the areas of statistical disclosure control and support of fair competition between institutions.	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied
---	-----------	-----------	-----------	-----------	-----------