

Incorporation of HE in FECs into future UKPIs

UKPISG 15/02

Issue

1. The currently published UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) for higher education (HE) do not cover HE registered at UK further education colleges (FECs) and this compromises their fit with an agreed principle for UKPIs that “*UKPIs should normally seek to reflect the totality of higher education provision and institutions across the UK*”.
2. The UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) has noted some immediate issues arising in relation to the incorporation of HE in FE provision within UKPIs. However, UKPITG have highlighted a requirement for some fundamental questions to be addressed by the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) before they can consider these issues further with a forward-looking perspective.

Recommendation

3. That UKPISG provide a steer to UKPITG as to whether UKPIs should seek to measure HE provision according to the institution with formal responsibility for the student (registering institutions) or according to the point of delivery (the teaching institution).
4. That UKPISG agree to the in-depth reviews of different UKPI areas each including a specific strand of work to explore the incorporation of HE provision registered at FECs.
5. That UKPISG consider whether UKPITG should be asked to examine the feasibility of the incorporation of HE provision registered at FECs into existing UKPI measures which are not yet subject to in-depth review.
6. That UKPISG consider whether UKPITG should be asked to provide an overview of the existing data collection systems with regard to HEIs and FECs across the four nations, and the opportunities and difficulties of those systems in terms of future production of consistent UK Performance Indicators.

Discussion

7. At the February 2014 meeting of UKPISG members noted that, in alignment with an agreed principle for UKPIs that “*UKPIs should normally seek to reflect the totality of higher education provision and institutions across the UK*”, an extension of UKPIs to cover HE delivered by FECs would need to be reconsidered.
8. The group agreed that consideration needed to be given to the effort required to increase coverage of future UKPIs relative to the information gained from such an increase, and UKPITG were asked to consider this matter further. In particular, UKPITG were asked to focus on data and collection issues related to such incorporation, and did so at their March 2014 meeting.

9. UKPITG members representing the four UK administrations noted some immediate issues, but reported that it would be difficult to make a further assessment with regard to future UKPIs without a clear understanding of what those future UKPIs might be seeking to measure. The immediate issues were recorded as:
 - a. HE provision registered at FECs was known to be significant in Scotland, and data collections from those providers were established. However, data collections were not as extensive as those operated by HESA so concerns were raised regarding the availability and comparability of any data to be used in future UKPIs.
 - b. There were only four FECs in Wales delivering directly funded HE: three of these were said to be very small with one FEC with a larger amount of HE provision. Data were collected via the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) though data collection arrangements were currently being reviewed.
 - c. Northern Ireland was said to have around 4,000 full-time HE learners at FECs and 7,000 part-time, and reported that they published limited information on some of these students in their own existing indicators. It was unclear whether the 11,000 HE in FE learners were registered at the FECs in question, or taught there under franchising arrangements (and hence already captured in the UKPIs), and whether or not this sector was expanding or contracting in Northern Ireland.
 - d. It was noted that HE provision registered at FECs was significant in England and that progress had been made in aligning student data and reporting across all publicly-funded HE providers.
10. However, UKPITG noted that it would be particularly important to understand whether future UKPIs should seek to measure HE provision according to the institution with formal responsibility for the student (registering institutions) or according to the point of delivery (the teaching institution).
11. UKPITG also reported that future indicators might consider data other than that relating to individual students and that data issues to be considered in this area might not be limited to one type of data source. For example, if future UKPIs were to consider an institution's financial sustainability, issues could be associated with availability and collection of data from FECs that was equivalent to the HESA finance statistics return (FSR) made by HEPs.
12. As a result, UKPITG have proposed that the current (and planned) in-depth reviews of the different UKPI areas should each include a strand of work to explore the incorporation of HE provision registered at FECs. This would mean the availability of HE in FE data being tested in relation to specific indicators as they are being refined or developed within the context of an existing in-depth review. UKPITG felt that this would be a preferable alternative to them attempting to undertake one stand-alone exercise that would need to consider a diverse and disparate range of issues arising across all current (and potential) UKPI areas.

Recommendation: That UKPISG provide a steer to UKPITG as to whether UKPIs should seek to measure HE provision according to the institution with formal

responsibility for the student (registering institutions) or according to the point of delivery (the teaching institution).

Recommendation: That UKPISG agree to the in-depth reviews of different UKPI areas each including a specific strand of work to explore the incorporation of HE provision registered at FECs.

13. While at the time of writing the widening participation UKPIs are currently subject to an in-depth review, it is considered that in-depth reviews of the non-continuation and employment UKPIs are unlikely to commence in the immediate future. As such, and in the context of the agreed 'totality of HE provision' principle for UKPIs, it may be possible for UKPITG to make greater progress with consideration of the incorporation of HE provision registered at FECs into existing UKPI measures in these two areas.

Recommendation: That UKPISG consider whether UKPITG should be asked to examine the feasibility of the incorporation of HE provision registered at FECs into existing UKPI measures which are not yet subject to in-depth review.

14. Many of the immediate issues noted by UKPITG and reported in paragraph 9 were concerned with the extent and alignment of student data collections from FECs with those returned to HESA by HEIs, and, from 2014-15, some alternative providers (APs) of higher education in England (as discussed further in paper UKPISG 15/03). Given the different volumes of HE in FE provision said to exist across the different UK nations, and the different data collection mechanisms employed, it is considered that gaining a more complete understanding of those existing systems would be advantageous in terms of further consideration of the incorporation of HE provision registered at FECs into UKPIs. Such an exercise could usefully highlight the opportunities and challenges that may exist in relation to HE in FE data collection with regards to future production of consistent UK Performance Indicators.

Recommendation: That UKPISG consider whether UKPITG should be asked to provide an overview of the existing data collection systems with regard to HEIs and FECs across the four nations, and the opportunities and difficulties of those systems in terms of future production of consistent UK Performance Indicators.

Further information

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