

Incorporation of HE in APs into future UKPIs

UKPISG 15/03

Issue

1. The currently published UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) for higher education (HE) do not cover HE registered at alternative providers (APs), 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*". Given the return of student data to HESA by some APs in relation to academic year 2014-15, the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) is invited to consider the potential for incorporation of HE delivered by alternative providers within future publications of UKPIs.
2. It is anticipated that representatives of the four UK HE funding bodies will report to this meeting on the numbers and significance of APs in their jurisdiction. This expectation arises on account of an action outstanding from the February 2014 meeting of UKPISG: this paper has necessarily been formed on the basis of the understanding assembled with regards to APs in England as the only one available at the time of writing.

Recommendation

3. That UKPISG consider whether they wish to pursue the incorporation of HE delivered by APs within the UKPIs at the earliest opportunities.
4. That UKPISG consider whether they wish to delegate authority to the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) in the event that low levels of data quality require a decision to be taken as to the feasibility of the incorporation of HE delivered by APs within 2016 UKPI publications.
5. That UKPISG consider whether they wish UKPITG to explore the use of alternative data sources in order to facilitate the incorporation of HE delivered by APs within UKPI publications.
6. That UKPISG consider whether they wish to recommend to Government, and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in particular, that extensions are made to the coverage of data items and/or populations within HESA student returns.

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 APs would need to be considered. UKPISG members representing the four UK funding bodies were at that time asked to explore the numbers and significance of APs in their nation.
8. At the February 2015 meeting of the UKPITG BIS alerted members to increasing numbers of enquiries as to plans for UKPI-type measures relating to HE provision delivered by APs in England. There was said to be an expectation that measures of

non-continuation in particular would be published at the earliest opportunity, following the requirement for a substantial number of APs to return student data to HESA from the 2014-15 academic year for those students on courses designated for receipt of full-time student support via the Student Loans Company.

9. In the shorter term, it was reported that work was underway within BIS and HEFCE to produce indicators for APs based on existing data that employ similar concepts and methodologies to the UKPIs. UKPITG noted that implications could arise for the UKPIs if similar but not strictly consistent measures were generated and published with respect to APs, and that a watching brief needed to be maintained.
10. In the mid- to long-term, BIS reported an expectation that these providers would be incorporated into the UKPIs: an expectation that was in alignment with the principles agreed for UKPIs.

AP's reporting requirements

11. From 2014-15, APs in England who meet specific criteria laid out BIS are required to subscribe to HESA. Those criteria relate to APs who have courses designated for full-time student support in 2014-15 and have 50 or more full-time students across all years of study receiving student support, and to any AP linked to another AP with designated full-time courses.
12. These criteria result in 64 of these 'large' APs returning 2014-15 student data to HESA: between them, they are expected to return data on in excess of 40,000 students. Of these 64 APs, five have previously returned student data to HESA in relation to academic years 2012-13 and 2013-14. One AP, University of Buckingham, is excluded from these figures on the basis that it has been fully subscribed to HESA for an extended period of time and is already included throughout the UKPIs.
13. APs who have courses designated for full-time student support and have fewer than 50 full-time students across all years of study receiving student support ('small' APs) have had the option of subscribing to HESA by choice.
14. It is currently unclear whether the criteria requiring an AP to subscribe to HESA will be extended by BIS in future: at the time of writing, BIS are engaging in a consultation exercise with APs that includes within its coverage issues related to the provision of information by APs in England. For example, in future BIS could require APs who have 50 or more students receiving student support to subscribe to HESA, where that 50 includes any full-time, part-time or distance learning students.
15. APs subscribing to HESA for 2014-15 are not required to submit a full HESA student return. The AP student record will be collected in respect of all students registered in the reporting institution who follow full-time and part-time undergraduate courses which have been designated for student support purposes irrespective of whether the student is in receipt of SLC funding, taught by a franchise partner in whole or in part.
16. The AP student record will not collect any information in respect of students who follow HE courses which have not been designated for student support purposes, even if, offered by a publicly-funded HEI, those courses would attract student support. Information on the proportion of an AP's HE provision which is designated for student support purposes is not available. This marks an important difference to

HE providers in the publicly funded sector (and University of Buckingham, who submit a full HESA student return for all of their students) where coverage of the population registered on HE qualifications within HESA student records is known to be broadly complete. Particular concern has been noted in terms of the extent to which the potential for APs to make use of 'shadow courses' could compromise comparability with publicly-funded institutions.

17. While the submission required of APs who subscribe to HESA for 2014-15 is not that of a full HESA student return, it does include within it a range of data items that would support the production of the existing UK PI measures (and their associated benchmarks) for these providers: postcode, previous institution attended and receipt of disabled students allowance, as well as date of birth, ethnicity, sex, subject area of study and qualifications held on entry. Socio-economic classification (SEC) is not required within the AP student return and nor are other data items related to a students' UCAS application. In the context of proposals already raised in relation to the in-depth review of the WP UKPIs (and considered in relation to paper UKPISG 15/01) it may be pertinent to consider the potential impacts of the more limited range of data items included within the AP student return.
18. APs subscribing to HESA for 2014-15 can choose whether or not to submit the UNISTATS element of the AP student record, and institutions who choose this option will, potentially, submit data on a broader number of courses as well as submitting the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) record. A consequence of this is the element of choice associated with completion of the DLHE survey upon which Employment UKPIs are based. As at mid-March 2015, 13 APs had indicated an intention to submit the UNISTATS element of the AP student record, while five were still to confirm the extent of their data return.

Potential timing of incorporation within UKPIs

19. The reporting requirements outlined above would initially suggest that HE delivered by APs could potentially be incorporated within UKPIs according to the timescales indicated in Table 1.

Table 1 – Potential timing for UKPI incorporation, by table and measure

UKPI table and population	Measure	Data quality permitting, earliest opportunity for publication within UKPIs
Table 1 (a, b and c): Young full-time undergraduate entrants	State school marker	2016 publication
	POLAR3	2016 publication
	NS-SEC	Unknown
Table 2 (a and c): Mature full-time undergraduate entrants	POLAR3	2016 publication
Table 2 (b): Part-time undergraduate entrants	POLAR3	2016 publication

(split by age)		
Table 7: All undergraduates (split by level and mode of study)	Disabled students allowance marker	2016 publication
Table 3 (a, b, c and d): Full-time undergraduate entrants (split by age, level of study and low participation/previous HE marker)	Continuation status in year after entry	2017 publication
Table 3 (e): Part-time first degree entrants (split by age)	Continuation status two years after entry	2018 publication
Table 4 (a and b): Full-time undergraduate entrants (split by age and level of study)	Resumption of study status	2018 publication
Table 5: Full-time first degree entrants	Projected outcome	2018 publication
Table E (a, b, c and d): Leavers obtaining undergraduate qualifications (split by mode and level of study)	Employment or further study destination	2016 publication

20. Given the expectations outlined at paragraph 8 and reported by BIS, UKPISG are invited to note that the timescales indicated in Table 1 may be those anticipated and perceived by external stakeholders.

Recommendation: That UKPISG consider whether they wish to pursue the incorporation of HE delivered by APs within the UKPIs at the earliest opportunities.

21. It should be noted, however, that feasibility of these timings currently remains untested, including by UKPITG. For example, if levels of data quality are low in the first year of this data return, calculations of either the indicator(s) themselves or their associated benchmarks may not prove reliable. The applicability of the benchmarking approach (including the factors and groups included) to provision at APs has not been considered by UKPITG. Timing and resourcing requirements for quality assurance and other UKPI related processes (such as documentation of definitions, explanations and interpretations) are also yet to be considered in detail.

22. It is likely that issues of data quality or applicability of approach would become apparent only on receipt of the student data late in 2015, and in application of UKPI methodologies. It can be anticipated that such issues would require assessment by UKPITG as to their significance and implications, and timescales are likely to be constrained.

Recommendation: That UKPISG consider whether they wish to delegate authority to UKPITG in the event that low levels of data quality require a decision to be taken as to the feasibility of the incorporation of HE delivered by APs within 2016 UKPI publications.

23. Should issues of data quality or applicability of approach be of particular concern given the unknowns related to the 2014-15 AP student return, UKPISG is invited to note the report at paragraph 9. The BIS and HEFCE work highlights an opportunity to explore the use of alternative data sources (to HESA data) in order to provide supplementary information on HE delivered by APs. It is, however, likely that many of these alternative data sources will be similarly constrained to HESA data (in terms of their coverage being limited to students following designated courses).

Recommendation: That UKPISG consider whether they wish the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) to explore the use of alternative data sources in order to facilitate the incorporation of HE delivered by APs within UKPI publications.

24. This paper has highlighted a number of issues related to the coverage of the AP student data return, with regards to: the range of data items included; the optional completion of the DLHE survey; and the omission of students who follow HE courses which have not been designated for student support purposes. In the context of the (planned and ongoing) in-depth reviews of the UKPI areas, it may be pertinent to consider whether these issues of coverage could become a more prominent issue as UKPIs are developed and refined.

Recommendation: That UKPISG consider whether they wish to recommend to Government, and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in particular, that extensions are made to the coverage of data items and/or populations within HESA student returns.

Further information

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