

UK Performance Indicators Steering Group

Minutes of the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group held at 13.00 on Monday, 27 April 2015 at Finlaison House, London

Present:

Members:	Heather Fry	Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) [Chair]
	David Barrett	Office for Fair Access (OFFA)
	Colin Campbell	Universities Scotland
	Colette Eley	Welsh Government
	Celia Hunt	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)
	Kieran Mannion	Department for Education and Learning, Northern Ireland (DEL)
	Kevin Mundy	Higher Education Wales
	Paul Rasch	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
	Ryan Scott	Scottish Government
	Martin Smith	Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
	Jonathan Waller	Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)
	Adam Wright	National Union of Students (NUS)
Secretariat:	Alison Brunt	HEFCE
	Mark Gittoes	HEFCE

Apologies:

Mark Corver	UCAS
Professor Geoffrey Petts	Universities UK

1. Welcome from the Chair

1.1. Following introductions, the chair welcomed members to the meeting and gave apologies received from those members unable to attend. It was reported that Alison Allden had retired from HESA since the last meeting, and members expressed their thanks for her contribution to the group.

2. Update on business of the UKPISG undertaken by correspondence in June 2014, and matters arising (Oral item and summary paper)

2.1. Members were invited to note that they had agreed the minutes of their February 2014 meeting by correspondence, and to consider the actions arising from those minutes alongside the actions arising from the summary of business undertaken by correspondence during June 2014.

2.2. It was reported that all actions had been completed with the exception of two related to the formation of roundtable discussions on the future of the research UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs), documented at paragraph 6.5.2 of the summary document. While some nominations for attendees had been secured from members, those roundtable discussions were yet to take place and members were asked to provide any further nominations to the secretariat at the earliest opportunity.

ACTION: UKPISG members to provide further nominations for attendees at roundtable discussions on the future of the research UKPIs to the secretariat at the earliest opportunity.

ACTION: UKPISG secretariat to establish roundtable discussions on the future of the research UKPIs as soon as possible, with a view to those discussions taking place before mid-July 2015.

2.3. Members were reminded that the discontinuation of the existing research UKPIs had been announced in July 2014 in alignment with the requirements of Official Statistics, and that they had previously considered that the results of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) would provide interested users with other measures in the research area during 2015. On the basis that omission of measures in the research area in subsequent years of UKPI publications was not desirable, and that progress would need to be made if new measures were to be introduced in a timely manner, members proceeded to consider the timings to which new research UKPIs might feasibly be developed.

2.4. It was noted that the responses to the "Invitation to comment on future changes to the UK Performance Indicators" in late 2013 had generated a number of initial suggestions from respondents as to replacement measures. It was anticipated that roundtable discussions of the future of UKPIs in this area would build on these initial suggestions to formulate a number of options for UKPISG and the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) to consider further.

2.5. Members agreed that the established protocols existing in relation to Official Statistics as to the publication of new measures as 'experimental statistics' were helpful and should be utilised in the development and introduction of new research UKPIs. JW noted that Official Statistics requirements in relation to experimental statistics included the gathering of feedback from users of the measures. It was felt that this could be helpful to UKPISG in terms of ability for user feedback to influence future iterations of new measures before a stable methodology and definition was agreed for use as a formal UKPI and an Official Statistic. Members agreed that this approach could facilitate the timeliness of development that would be useful in this area.

ACTION: UKPISG members to provide timely input to consideration of measures emerging from roundtable discussions and elsewhere in order to identify those that may be actionable with regards to publication as 'experimental statistics' in 2016.

2.6. Members agreed that a communications strategy would need to be developed in order to communicate the group's agreed approach to development of measures in this area to stakeholders and the sector. However, it was agreed that similar consideration would need to be made as to communication of decisions to be taken with regard to other agenda items, and that a holistic approach would be helpful. This issue was subsequently considered in more depth later in the meeting.

2.7. In addition to advice required from the Research Councils as to the range of measures currently used and available in relation to the research area, members highlighted two other areas of work that may prove helpful to UKPISG in taking forward the development of UKPIs in this area. HEFCE highlighted work commissioned to review the use of metrics following the REF, and BIS noted work underway to examine international benchmarking in research. It was agreed that it would be helpful for BIS and HEFCE representatives to report back to UKPISG as to progress or outcomes of these projects.

ACTION: BIS and HEFCE representatives to secure clarification of the objectives and (if possible) findings of work underway to examine international benchmarks and metrics respectively, and to share understanding with UKPISG members at the earliest opportunity.

3. Report from the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (Oral item and minutes from the February 2015 UKPITG meeting)

3.1. JW informed the group that the substantive item discussed by UKPITG in February 2015 was the review of the widening participation UKPIs, and that this discussion was captured within paper UKPISG 15/01.

3.2. The group were reminded that during their June 2014 correspondence they had given their approval for UKPITG to undertake a fundamental review of the benchmarking approach. It was reported that a conflict of interest had arisen in relation to the statistical methodology and schools of statistical thinking, which had delayed the review process commencing. UKPITG had determined an approach to progressing the review by apportioning responsibility for different components of that review across UKPITG member organisations and the secretariat. This approach was endorsed by UKPISG.

3.3. It was anticipated that the fundamental review of the benchmarking approach would progress during Summer 2015, but members were alerted to the scale of the work regarding the statistical methodology. It was considered that there may be a requirement for some financial support from UKPISG member organisations to facilitate the development of this aspect of the review process.

3.4. Members were then updated on three aspects of UKPITG discussion in particular. The first centred on publication timings for UKPIs, where JW noted that Tranche 2 of the 2015 UKPIs were due to be published on Thursday 2 July 2015. UKPISG approved the proposed publication date.

ACTION: HESA to publish Tranche 2 of the UKPIs on Thursday 2 July 2015.

3.5. UKPISG considered that concerns were justified where they had been raised in relation to the apparent lag in the publication of Tranche 1 of the UKPIs relative to the submission and publication of the HESA student data returns. In the context of HESA's CACHED programme members agreed that pressure for the earlier publication of Tranche 1 of the UKPIs was likely to increase, and would be welcome and helpful in a number of regards. In particular, those members who wished to engage in dialogue with institutions on topics measured by UKPIs noted that the potential for an institution to derive measures such as UKPIs upon submission of their own student data records to HESA in October could prove problematic when the funding, regulatory or other sector bodies did not gain access to the same information until the following March.

3.6. JW drew the group's attention to the advice of UKPITG that the complexities of the linking approach underlying the non-continuation measures severely limited the scope for earlier publication of these indicators. It was reported that achieving an earlier timetable would require the component parts of Tranche 1 to be published separately. While some members recognised that separation (and differentiation) of the WP and non-continuation UKPIs would be helpful, others felt that the inter-relationships between the two sets of measures were important in terms of telling a more coherent story around student access and success, and that this outweighed issues associated with earlier publication timing.

3.7. It was agreed that communication of the coherence afforded by the consideration of the WP indicators in conjunction with the non-continuation ones needed to be enhanced in the UKPI publications. Members felt that such enhancement could mean the value of the inter-relationships between the two sets of indicators being retained while ambitions relating to the publication of WP indicators in Early-Mid February were also realised.

ACTION: HESA to publish the WP UKPIs separately to the non-continuation UKPIs and at to the earliest possible timetable, with this change being made at the earliest opportunity.

3.8. HESA noted that the feasibility of introducing the change to the 2016 publication of WP UKPIs would be dependent on the scale and nature of any changes the group proposed making to this package of indicators in their subsequent discussion of the next steps in their in-depth review.

3.9. A second aspect of UKPITG discussion reported on was the presence of FE funded students in the HE populations considered for UKPIs. On the understanding that these were currently a very small and poorly understood population that had some potential for change in the future, UKPISG agreed with the recommendation that such students remain in the UKPI populations until such time as clarity can be obtained as to the nature of provision being recorded in this way.

3.10. UKPISG provisionally agreed to a recommendation from UKPITG that disaggregated information for the Open University be included in UKPI publications. Members concurred that it would be helpful to consider students registered at the Open University on the basis of the institution's National Centres. However, UKPISG felt that

they needed greater confidence that Open University students were assigned to National Centres on the basis of their registration directly with those centres as opposed to assignments being made on the basis of their domicile. Clarification would also be helpful with regards to registration practices relating to students living in border regions and to students relocating to a different UK nation.

ACTION: HESA to seek clarification from the Open University as to registration practices and assignment of students to their National Centres.

4. Review of the WP indicators, and next steps (UKPISG 15/01†)

4.1. MG introduced the paper and highlighted that the roundtables convened in December 2014 had generated a number of suggestions: UKPISG now needed to make progress with the next steps of the review process. Two of the key messages that had emerged from those roundtable discussions were that publication of a range of WP UKPIs would be helpful, and that measures based on the characteristics or experiences of an individual were considered to be a 'gold standard' relative to measures based on aggregation of a cohort.

4.2. UKPISG agreed that their ambition was to identify a small number of the suggestions that had been made which members felt could be developed by UKPITG and published as 'experimental statistics' in 2016. It was considered likely that the group would identify other suggestions worthy of further consideration by UKPITG where the development work required was more substantial or of lower priority, and that the final timetable for a more complete set of new or revised WP indicators becoming available was necessarily less well defined. Meanwhile, existing indicators would not be withdrawn, with one exception (as described at paragraph 4.3.9).

4.3. The group considered suggestions made in relation to a number of topics in turn:

Measures of disadvantage related to a student's school circumstances

4.3.1. Members concurred that the impacts of school-related disadvantage were different for young and mature entrant populations and agreed that it would be helpful to construct a range of measures that would ensure complete coverage of the population with appropriate measures. The group considered that UKPITG should be asked to focus first on the development of a given measure with reference to the population of young entrants, before considering as a second stage whether that measure could be applied to a mature cohort, in either the same or a revised format.

4.3.2. UKPISG considered that a measure based on pupils' attainment earlier in education was not necessarily a measure of school 'quality'. Additionally, given the role of information, advice and guidance in influencing pupils' examination results and onward HE participation, members felt that the measure proposed was indirect and felt more like contextual information than a measure of an HE provider's performance. As a result it was considered that this measure was of a lower priority for development and did not warrant further exploration at the current time.

4.3.3. The group instead considered that, in view of developing measures that provided consistency across a pupil's lifecycle in education, pupil outcomes relative to the characteristics of a school's intake could be a useful indicator. Similarly, an

articulation of a journey through education could be explored through application of WP entry measures to a qualifying cohort too. Or a composite measure considering participation characteristics throughout education. While members acknowledged a lack of clarity around the feasibility of what could prove quite complex measures, they expressed interest in considering these types of value-added or learning gain measures further.

ACTION: HEFCE to report on current work underway with regards to learning gain and differences in degree outcomes at the next meeting of UKPISG to inform discussion in this area.

ACTION: UKPITG to explore the development of a UKPI measure based on value added or learning gain measures as a matter of lower priority, for possible introduction to longer time scales (likely beyond the 2017 publication of UKPIs), and with particular consideration as to the presentation of the measures.

4.3.4. On the basis that this measure was not directly related to HE progression, it was considered that an indicator based on the proportions of entrants from schools with high numbers of leavers who were NEET (not in education, employment or training) was of a lower priority for development. It was considered that higher education providers' inability to influence drivers of NEET, coupled with year-on-year fluctuations in NEET numbers, compromised the value that might be achieved from this sort of measure.

ACTION: UKPITG to explore the development of a UKPI measure based on schools with high numbers of leavers who were NEET as a matter of lower priority, for possible introduction to longer time scales (likely beyond the 2017 publication of UKPIs).

4.3.5. The group considered that an indicator based on the proportions of entrants from schools with low numbers of pupils progressing to further study (low progression schools) was of a higher priority for development. Members noted that the measure would be sensitive to school-based decisions as to the guidance provided in relation to progression into apprenticeships, job creation, higher education and so on. It was felt that publication of this measure in conjunction with the previously discussed measure based on NEET could assist in interpretation of the measure in this regard.

Members also agreed that concerns regarding the introduction of a 'cliff face' boundary were justified and indicated a preference for measures in these two areas to make use of schools grouped into quintiles in their derivation.

ACTION: UKPITG to explore the development of a UKPI measure based on schools with low numbers of pupils progressing to further study as a matter of higher priority, for possible introduction to the 2016 or 2017 publication of UKPIs.

4.3.6. UKPISG considered that measures articulating progressions from further education were, in effect, a refinement of the existing UKPI measuring the proportion of entrants from state schools (within table T1). In view of the political associations with the existing measures, it was suggested that they should be retained in their current form and supplemented by a more refined version, at least in the shorter term.

ACTION: UKPITG to explore the development of a supplementary UKPI measure based on proportions of entrants from different school or further education institution types as a matter of higher priority, for possible introduction to the 2016 or 2017 publication of UKPIs.

Pupils in receipt of free school meals (FSM)

4.3.7. UKPISG acknowledged that a measure based on pupils in receipt of FSM were of a higher priority for further exploration, and links with existing measures used in relation to schools as well as high correlations with HE participation observed by DELNI reinforced the potential value of measures in this area. The group expressed a particular preference for measures that were based on individuals (rather than schools) and that considered pupils in receipt of FSM for an extended period of time (rather than just one academic year). However, the group also acknowledged that issues of feasibility and technicalities, especially with regard to comparability in eligibility criteria and data availability, could require significant work by UKPITG.

ACTION: UKPITG to explore the development of a UKPI measure based on pupils in receipt of FSM as a matter of higher priority, for possible introduction to the 2016 or 2017 publication of UKPIs. UKPITG were asked to consider how fundamental variations in eligibility criteria actually were if they were acknowledged.

Area-based measures of disadvantage

4.3.8. Each of the UK nations expressed a desire to retain the use of area-based measures of disadvantage within the UKPIs, but members acknowledged that measures such as POLAR3 or Indices of Multiple Deprivations (IMDs) would not facilitate one UK-wide measure. UKPISG agreed that area-based measures would be taken forward as nation-specific indicators, but should be based on areas grouped into quintiles so as to avoid the introduction of 'cliff-face' boundaries.

ACTION: UKPITG to explore the development of nation-specific measures of area-based disadvantage as a matter of higher priority, for possible introduction to the 2016 or 2017 publication of UKPIs.

Socio-economic disadvantage

4.3.9. On the basis of the advice received from both the technical group (in their assessment of fit of the existing WP UKPIs against the principles agreed for UKPIs February 2014) and from the roundtable discussions, UKPISG agreed that the existing UKPIs based on the proportion of students from NS-SEC classes four to seven would be discontinued at the earliest opportunity. It was agreed that the discontinuation would be communicated along with the other outcomes of this discussion, and that the 2016 publication of the WP UKPIs would make the formal announcement that they would not be published from 2017 onwards.

ACTION: HESA to include within the 2016 publication of WP UKPIs an announcement that the existing NS-SEC indicators would be discontinued thereafter.

4.3.10. Members agreed that a measure of financial disadvantage should be developed on the basis of information on students' household residual income collected within Student Loans Company data. It was considered that this information

could provide a useful and accessible measure, and that the coverage and granularity of the data should be explored more fully.

ACTION: UKPITG to explore the development of a UKPI measure based on household residual income as a matter of higher priority, for possible introduction to the 2016 or 2017 publication of UKPIs.

4.3.11. UKPISG agreed that a non-financial measure of disadvantage or social background could be desirable if a robust data source could be identified, and if reassurance could be provided in terms of the correlation of the background characteristic with disadvantage experienced in HE participation. Examples discussed were parental occupations when the student was aged 14 and parental experience of HE, though members acknowledged that alternative sources of data would need to be located.

ACTION: UKPITG to explore the development of a UKPI measure based on social background, for possible introduction to longer time scales (likely beyond the 2017 publication of UKPIs).

4.3.12. The group concurred with UKPITG's initial comments in relation to both equality and diversity characteristics and the measures listed as 'other suggestions', and determined that these suggestions need be progressed no further at the present time.

4.4. Members agreed that the recommendations that they had arrived at would necessitate the development of a communications strategy to deliver the engagement with the sector that had been committed to within the principles agreed for UKPIs. At this stage members felt that the four UK funding bodies for HE should be asked to distribute a circular letter at the earliest opportunity that would communicate the decisions taken by UKPISG as to the future of the WP UKPIs. Members noted that the circular letter could also communicate the next steps in the review of Research UKPIs, as discussed in paragraphs 2.4 to 2.6 above. That letter should invite feedback to the UKPISG secretariat (to be considered at the group's next meeting) and be accompanied by the publication of papers and minutes related to this topic that had previously been made exempt from immediate publication.

ACTION: Secretariat to draft a circular letter to the sector outlining the decisions taken by UKPISG and described above. That letter be agreed with UKPISG by correspondence, with feedback invited and to be received before the group's next meeting.

ACTION: HESA to publish papers and minutes previously considered exempt from immediate publication on their website alongside associated content relating to the governance of the UKPIs. Publication to occur in conjunction with the distribution of the circular letter described in the previous action.

4.5. HESA noted that UKPISG's request for UKPITG to develop 2-4 new measures for introduction to the UKPIs as experimental statistics in the 2016 publication meant that it was very unlikely that timing of the publication of WP UKPIs would move forward to February in that year. Members agreed that their priority in the shorter term was to

improve the quality of the UKPIs available to users and that a March publication date for the 2016 WP UKPIs was acceptable on this basis.

5. Incorporation of HE in FECs into UKPIs (UKPISG 15/02)

5.1. MG introduced the paper and noted that UKPISG were being asked to consider four specific recommendations as to the manner in which HE provision registered at further education colleges (FECs) and other publicly-funded colleges delivering HE should be incorporated within the UKPIs.

5.2. Members noted that systems, including those related to student support, were moving to consider and require information about the institution at which a student was registered, as opposed to the institution at which they were taught (when these were different). Consistency of approach and accountability was felt to be increasingly important. On the basis that UKPIs were concerned with issues of accountability UKPISG agreed that it was appropriate that UKPIs should seek to measure HE provision according to the institution with formal responsibility for the student (the registering institution).

5.3. It was noted that results of the National Student Survey were reported according to both the registering and the teaching institutions. Members felt that this approach was taken because of the use of those survey results in the provision of information to prospective students, and that in the context of student information the use of this approach provided users with some helpful context and transparency. It was agreed that UKPI measures should report on HE provision according to the registering institution as standard, but that it could be helpful in future to enable further consideration of whether additional disaggregation by teaching institution would be a useful supplementary output.

5.4. The second and third recommendations were both agreed by members on the basis that these courses of action were likely to prove the most timely and the most efficient use of resource in terms of incorporating HE provision registered at FECs within the UKPIs. Members agreed that the fourth recommendation presented to them needed to be integrated within the actions agreed in the second and third recommendations: understanding of the existing data collection systems was considered to be integral to UKPITG work to incorporate HE in FEC provision into existing and emerging indicators.

ACTION: UKPITG to explore the incorporation of HE provision registered at FECs as a specific strand of work within the development of WP UKPIs detailed in item 4.

ACTION: UKPITG to examine the feasibility of incorporating HE provision registered at FECs into existing non-continuation and employment UKPIs at the earliest opportunity.

6. Incorporation of HE in APs into UKPIs (UKPISG 15/03)

6.1. MG introduced the paper and highlighted the expectation that members representing the four UK HE funding bodies would update the group as to the numbers and significance of alternative providers (APs) in their jurisdiction.

- a. HF confirmed that APs were numerous in England and were becoming a significant policy concern: UKPISG were invited to note the emergence of this issue in terms of requirements that had already necessitated the production of indicators for APs by BIS and HEFCE. The indicators had been based on existing

data and employed similar concepts and methodologies to the UKPIs. Larger APs and possibly others with specific course designation (SCD) would start returning limited data to HESA

- b. Northern Ireland noted that the theological colleges present in their jurisdiction were currently linked to Queen's University Belfast, so at this point in time they had no providers considered to be APs. DELNI reported that they were maintaining a watching brief on this issue and that if this provision were to develop in Northern Ireland, they would wish for it to be incorporated into UKPI measures.
- c. SFC reported that there were very few APs within their jurisdiction, but that they would clarify specific numbers and Scotland's intentions with regards to the future reporting of APs in measures such as UKPIs.
- d. HEFCW reported that there were 66 APs in Wales with specific course designation, but that all were very small and only eight currently reported more than 10 HE students. HEFCW echoed Northern Ireland's ambition to incorporate this provision into the UKPIs at such time that these providers were working with sufficient numbers of HE students to reach the UKPI publication thresholds.

6.2. On the understanding that this was, therefore, currently an England-focussed issue, UKPISG considered the four recommendations that had been put to them with regards to the incorporation of HE registered at APs into future UKPIs.

6.3. Members were conscious of the lack of direct comparability with the publicly-funded sector and University of Buckingham in so far as the coverage of the AP student record was limited to those HE students on courses designated for student support only (whereas coverage of the whole population registered on HE qualifications was available for publicly-funded institutions and University of Buckingham). However, it was noted that the criteria by which BIS were requiring an AP to subscribe to HESA were still evolving, and that concerns over comparability of coverage could diminish in future. And that those concerns were outweighed by the ambition that "*UKPIs should normally seek to reflect the totality of higher education provision and institutions across the UK*", in alignment with an agreed principle for UKPIs.

6.4. It was considered that careful presentation, and communication of definitions and coverage, within the UKPI publications could be used to help facilitate user interpretation of UKPI measures including provision registered at APs. Members agreed that UKPITG should be asked to pursue the incorporation of HE delivered by APs within the UKPIs at the earliest opportunities, including within the 2016 UKPIs where Table 1 of the paper indicated that this could be feasible. They also agreed that authority should be delegated to UKPITG in the event that low levels of data quality in 2014-15 HESA AP student data returns required a decision to be taken as to the feasibility of the incorporation of HE delivered by APs within 2016 UKPI publications.

ACTION: UKPITG to examine the feasibility of incorporating HE provision registered at English APs with SCD into existing UKPIs at the earliest opportunity.

6.5. With regards to the third and fourth recommendations, UKPISG agreed that these considerations needed to feature within the development work necessitated by their

acceptance of the first recommendation, and through the ongoing work associated with the in-depth review of the WP UKPIs.

ACTION: UKPITG to explore the incorporation of HE provision registered at English APs with SCD as a specific strand of work within the development of WP UKPIs detailed in item 4.

7. Papers proposed as exempt from immediate publication (marked †)

7.1. Members agreed that only paper UKPISG 15/01 should be exempt from publication until such time that the communications strategy discussed under item 4 was implemented later in 2015. It was considered that the paper could be published in conjunction with the circulation of a letter to the sector from the four UK funding bodies for HE.

8. Date of next meeting

8.1. The group felt that they should next meet in Autumn 2015, after roundtable discussions on the future of the Research UKPIs and after the UKPITG had convened their own next meeting. It was likely that UKPISG would meet in September or October 2015, with dates to be agreed by correspondence.

9. Any other business

9.1. No items of any other business were reported.

Meeting closed at 15:10