

Next steps in the review of the WP indicators

UKPITG 14/01†

Issue

1. The UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) identified a need to establish a Widening Participation (WP) expert group to undertake roundtable discussions as the next step in the in-depth review of the WP UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs). With a view to advising the UKPISG, the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) have been asked to provide suggestions of representatives of organisations, groups, committees or departments that may join a roundtable discussion of future WP UKPIs.

Recommendations

2. That members provide suggestions of representatives of organisations, groups, committees or departments that may join a roundtable discussion of future WP UKPIs.
3. That the UKPITG consider any further advice that they can provide with respect to the format or content of a roundtable discussion on future WP UKPIs.

Discussion

4. At their November 2013 meeting the UKPITG highlighted particular concerns regarding the role that they had been asked to play in an in-depth review of the WP UKPIs. One of those concerns regarded the level, depth and breadth of specialist knowledge required to take forward an in-depth review. The UKPITG's concerns were considered by the UKPISG in February 2014.
5. The UKPISG acknowledged that the in-depth review process was a sizeable responsibility and that there could be value in reducing the task to more manageable undertakings.
 - 5.1. Members of the steering group noted that considering the fit of the set of existing WP UKPIs with the principles agreed for UKPIs had been a worthwhile exercise. This was seen as a good starting point which had helped guide the UKPISG to some initial policy steers and provided a foundation for the subsequent review processes. The UKPITG would be asked to undertake similar analyses when other sets of UKPIs were reviewed in future.
 - 5.2. The UKPISG agreed to establish a series of expert groups (or roundtables) to provide access to the level, depth and breadth of specialist knowledge that might be required to advance any in-depth review process.
 - 5.3. The UKPISG agreed that there would be value in developing and improving existing measures if it was possible that, with further work, they could meet both the principles and policy objectives for UKPIs. Roundtable discussions would be asked to indicate any potential for the development of existing UKPIs.

† Proposed as exempt from immediate publication

- 5.4. Roundtable discussions would also be asked to highlight any need for the development of a new UKPI. The UKPISG would then carefully consider the guidance and policy steer that they needed to provide to the UKPITG to begin development work, if appropriate. It was acknowledged that such direction would need to be quite specific in some cases.
6. It was felt that roundtable discussions which brought together representatives of appropriate organisations, groups, committees or departments with members of the UKPITG and/or the UKPISG would help understanding of the latest issues and interests with regards to a specific area covered by UKPIs.
7. It was felt that the principles for UKPIs should be used to provide a focus and structure for roundtable discussion, and some specific questions for those discussions were formulated by the UKPISG:
 - 7.1. The UKPISG agreed that there was a policy requirement to measure each of financial, educational and socio-economic disadvantage, and that the WP roundtable discussions should focus on the priorities and possibilities in these three areas.
 - 7.2. It was suggested that if a range of WP UKPIs could be developed to suitably address the three areas in 6.1 then there was seemingly no requirement for a single measure of multiple deprivations (a composite measure of disadvantage). The WP roundtable discussions were asked to consider this position.
 - 7.3. The UKPISG noted that the problems associated with the Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA) indicators and their fit with the principles for UKPIs were not fundamental. However, it was unclear whether the DSA indicators truly belonged among a set of WP indicators, or would be better situated among a set of diversity UKPIs. If the latter, further questions were likely to arise as to whether, in the longer-term, UKPIs should seek to measure diversity in its own right, or to capture an intersection of diversity with socio-economic factors. It was agreed that feedback from roundtable discussions on this matter would be valuable.
 - 7.4. The UKPISG acknowledged that although many of the issues associated with the NS-SEC indicators were not fundamental, the problems highlighted in relation to the quality of the data underlying these measures were fundamental and this was felt to be the overriding issue. WP roundtable discussions were asked to consider the longer-term viability of the NS-SEC UKPIs.
 - 7.5. The UKPISG recognised the strengths of the POLAR methodology but agreed that Scotland did not have much of the type of disadvantage measured by POLAR3 (i.e. geographical areas of low participation in higher education). As such, if UKPIs were to seek a UK-wide comparison of educational disadvantage it may not be appropriate for those UKPIs to be based on a methodology that identified a type of educational disadvantage that did not exist across the whole of the UK. WP roundtable discussions were asked to consider the potential for POLAR3 measures to be published as nation-specific indicators for each of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

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8. In order to inform thinking, the UKPISG felt that roundtable discussions could usefully consider both inputs (data collections) and outputs (users and interpretations) related to the given UKPI area under consideration, including considerations specific to different UK nations.
9. On this understanding of the requirements and expectations of the WP roundtable discussions, the UKPITG have been asked to provide suggestions of representatives of organisations, groups, committees or departments to join a roundtable discussion of future WP UKPIs.

Recommendation: That members provide suggestions of representatives of organisations, groups, committees or departments that may join a roundtable discussion of future WP UKPIs.

Recommendation: That the UKPITG consider any further advice that they can provide with respect to the format or content of a roundtable discussion on future WP UKPIs.

Further information

10. 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).