

Update on progress in the review of the WP indicators, and next steps

UKPITG 15/01†

Issue

1. To consider the discussion points arising within the roundtable discussion of the future of the Widening Participation (WP) UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) for Higher Education (HE). While the note of those discussions is currently uncorrected and therefore should be considered as draft, any reaction that the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) feels able to provide in relation to the suggestions made within those roundtable discussions would be welcome.

Discussion

2. Following the 2013 fundamental review of the UKPIs, and on the advice of UKPITG, HEFCE coordinated a roundtable discussion on the future of the WP UKPIs. These discussions were intended to provide access to the level, depth and breadth of specialist knowledge that is required to advance the in-depth review of the WP UKPIs.
3. The UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) were seeking to gain a good understanding of WP priorities, such that they might subsequently identify those that could be both important and appropriate to measure in UKPIs. Fundamentally, therefore, the roundtable discussions sought to canvass as many priorities and possibilities for measuring disadvantage or under-representation within the UKPIs as possible.
4. The roundtable discussions were held on Thursday, 18 December 2014 and were chaired by Heather Fry (HEFCE's Director of Regulation and Assurance, and Chair of UKPISG). A total of 26 attendees from a range of organisations participated in part or all of the roundtable discussions. Delegates included a small number of UKPITG and/or UKPISG members.
5. A note of the roundtable discussions follows this cover paper. UKPITG members are invited to consider the concerns and suggestions recorded there, and provide any initial responses that they are able to offer. Along with the note of the discussions, initial advice provided by UKPITG will be shared with UKPISG members at their next meeting, who will then seek to identify those possibilities that they wish UKPITG to explore in greater depth.
6. UKPITG members may wish to note an expectation that the group will commence a programme of work during Spring/Summer 2015, to explore specific proposals regarding future WP UKPIs at the request of UKPISG.

Recommendation

7. UKPITG members are invited to provide any initial responses that they are able to offer to UKPISG in respect of the concerns and suggestions raised at the roundtable discussions on the future of the WP UKPIs.

Further information

8. For further information contact Alison Brunt (Phone: 0117 931 7166; e-mail: a.brunt@hefce.ac.uk) or Mark Gittoes (Phone: 0117 931 7052; e-mail: m.gittoes@hefce.ac.uk).

DRAFT: A note of the roundtable discussion ‘The future of the Widening Participation UK Performance Indicators for Higher Education’

Discussions held on Thursday, 18 December 2014 at Finlaison House, London.

1. The roundtable discussions described here have taken place in the context of outcomes and recommendations which have followed a 2013 fundamental review of the UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) for higher education (HE). This context and background is described further in a paper circulated to delegates in advance of the roundtables and available at Appendix 1.
2. The UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) have acknowledged that there is work to be done to bring the existing set of Widening Participation (WP) UK Performance Indicators into closer alignment with a broader and more current view of WP. To do this requires the UKPISG to develop an enhanced understanding of current practices – and priorities – spanning the whole ‘life cycle’ of a student in higher education.
3. Fundamentally, therefore, the intention for this roundtable discussion was to canvass as many priorities and possibilities for measuring disadvantage or under-representation within the UKPIs as possible. The discussions were framed within the broad question of: ‘What are the purposes, priorities and policies that it is now appropriate or necessary for a set of WP UKPIs to serve?’.
4. If UKPIs in this area are to be developed or revised then it is important that the UKPISG are able to gain a good understanding of the issues, and to then subsequently identify those that might be both important and appropriate to measure in UK PIs. To this end, the UKPISG were seeking to receive advice on a number of topics and some specific questions were posed to the expert group.

Discussion points

Context and use of WP UKPIs

5. Delegates discussed an institutional perspective on the use and priorities of the WP UK PIs. In particular, that institutions may use WP measures selectively in ways recognisant of institutions being autonomous bodies with different missions and ambitions, and operating in a diverse range of contexts. Be those related to students, provision, localities, initiatives or politics. It was important to acknowledge that whatever were to be measured in the UKPIs, institutions would most likely continue to consider measures of success that were specific to the WP initiatives and interventions that they were implementing.
6. The importance of a national set of measures providing an identified set of consistent WP metrics for institutions to report against was recognised. And there was agreement that these should provide longevity, and span the WP priorities of all four UK administrations.
7. However, it was also important that UKPIs were clear on what they were (and equally were not) seeking to measure, and on the behaviours that they were seeking to incentivise. It was reinforced that crude attempts to target disadvantaged or under-represented students could be damaging, and that efforts should be made to avoid the unintended displacement of the genuinely disadvantaged. It was inevitable that any one WP measure would identify both high and low performers, so the breadth of the set of WP UKPIs would be particularly important. An

ability to access a range of measures would prove valuable in attempting to understand the performance of an institution, within the context of its own mission.

Generic concerns affecting any WP UKPIs

8. Delegates highlighted a number of potential concerns that would affect any WP UKPI measure being developed or revised. These concerns are described in paragraphs 9 to 19.

Presentation and interpretation of WP measures

9. It would be important to strike an appropriate balance in establishing UKPI measures such that they were informed by available and appropriate data; simple enough to facilitate a common understanding and interpretation; but not too blunt to be considered useful or progressive. The need for clear definitions, interpretations and impacts would be central to effective communication of the measures being used to evidence performance against WP priorities.

10. Delegates noted the range of WP measures used or produced by organisations including HESA, OFFA, UCAS, HE funding bodies and UK Government administrations. If users of WP measures had such a range to choose from, without clear communication of interactions or overlaps of the different measures, unintended consequences could affect institutional, school or student behaviour, and public perception of evidence in this area. These issues became particularly prominent when under-representation was being considered in one of either a local or a national context, and a risk was introduced that good performance was being masked by consideration of one or another of these contexts.

11. It was acknowledged that any UKPI measure would most likely have imperfections – related to its definition, intersections (with characteristics such as subject area of study, or students' equality and diversity) and interpretation. A nuanced approach would therefore be required to ensure that measures remained accessible and able to move forward understanding and performance. In this regard, supplementary data facilitating wider contextualisation was considered more helpful to users than unduly complicated indicator definitions.

Individual-level or cohort-based measures?

12. Individual-level data (directly capturing the specific circumstances of those students being measured) would be a 'gold standard' in the identification and measurement of disadvantage or under-representation, but such data being available consistently and completely across different student cohorts was known to be rare. While cohort-based or aggregate measures would therefore be necessary (which would assume that an individual student has experienced the same circumstances as others who attended their school or lived in the same area), it was important that these were as refined as possible.

13. If UKPI measures were likely to influence or evaluate WP intervention activities then currency of the data informing the measures would be important. Time lags and year-on-year fluctuations were known to exist in cohort-based measures (such as those based on a student's school or postcode) such that a student could be measured against a cohort that was potentially quite different to their own.

14. Cohort-based measures also had the potential to introduce arbitrary boundaries to disadvantage or under-representation that could prove unhelpful, particularly if the metrics being reported against were used as targets or for targeting. For example, a cohort being considered

as disadvantaged if fewer than 20 per cent exhibited a given characteristic or behaviour. Introducing such a 'cliff-face' boundary could facilitate unintended consequences if, for example, a cohort were deprived of a WP intervention on the basis that 21 per cent exhibiting a given characteristic was not considered disadvantaged.

Data availability

15. If disadvantaged or under-represented students (including mature or part-time learners) were more likely to access HE via routes other than a central admissions process then over-reliance of UKPIs on data collected through those processes would prove problematic. However, the subjectivity of and systematic misrepresentation within self-report measures was also known to be problematic where behaviours were perceived in relation to the use of that information.

16. Political influences and Government policy were known to exhibit an influence over the availability and continuation of data sources. Linkages, limitations and accountability for indicators and data sources would require particular explanation to users, particularly when those being judged in performance measures were not those accountable for a data source or had a very limited ability to influence the disadvantage being measured.

17. The introduction of measures that facilitated peer group comparisons, especially with those not entering HE, could be helpful in a WP context. However, this ambition may not prove feasible given that engagement with, or capacity to take advantage of, HE opportunities were very difficult to quantify.

Interpretation of WP across different cohorts

18. Bearing in mind the principles that had been agreed for UKPIs (provided at Annex A), and in particular that the "UKPIs should normally seek to reflect the totality of HE provision and institutions across the UK", delegates noted some specific concerns regarding the implications of this. Under-representation in postgraduate cohorts, for example, could take a very different form or meaning to that recognised among undergraduate students, such that application of a single measure across both cohorts could be inappropriate. There was also a danger of arriving at narrow definitions or measures of postgraduate cohorts, on account of the simplest metrics likely to be those derived from consideration of masters study undertaken sequentially following undergraduate study.

19. Similar concerns were raised around the comparability of cohorts studying full-time and part-time, or at higher education institutions, further education colleges (FECs) and alternative providers. And around the comparability and availability of data and definitions with regards to young and mature students. Constraints here may focus on data availability rather than the meaning or intention of a measure, and if complete data coverage was not likely to be possible within any one individual measure then this would reinforce the need for a range of measures which could, between them, provide such coverage.

Potential measures for inclusion within WP UKPIs

20. A number of suggestions were made by delegates in relation to potential WP UKPI measures. During discussion, delegates expanded on the perceived value or need for the measure that they were suggesting. On the understanding that development of UKPIs needed to be alert to specific issues or considerations related to the suggestion (particularly in terms of some of the concerns described above), delegates were also invited to highlight any such issues

that they were aware of. Paragraphs 21 to 36 describe the suggestions made by delegates, where those descriptions seek to reflect both the value and the issues that were identified.

Measures of disadvantage related to a student's school circumstances

21. Delegates noted that the question of the cut-off point for the applicability of school-related measures would apply across all of the school-related suggestions made. That is, to what extent can a student's school circumstances be considered to follow them through their subsequent HE or life experiences? Should WP measures be considering school circumstances as a measure of disadvantage for a student beginning postgraduate study at age 30, for example?

22. Similarly, questions relating to pupils who changed schools were also applicable to many of the cohort-based measures of school circumstances. This could be a particular issue if the transfer from GCSE to A-level study (and all equivalent moves) involved a marked change in the type or location of school experienced.

23. While school quality or performance was both attractive and important as a WP measure, UK-wide comparability in school systems and data collections, and the wider concerns relating to cohort-based measures more generally, mean that the construction of measures such as the below would be open for further debate.

- Schools with high numbers of leavers who were NEET (not in education, employment or training) pupils

NEET numbers were available UK-wide so issues noted were largely related to Government policy regarding the education participation age, alternative pathways to employment for school leavers (such as apprenticeships) and youth unemployment. All of these could serve to influence future numbers of NEET pupils, and neither schools nor HE providers could be considered accountable for those influences, or any changes in NEET numbers occurring as a result.

- School quality, as measured by pupils' attainment at age 7, 11, 14, 16 (in GCSEs and equivalents) or 18 (in A-levels and equivalents)
- Schools with low numbers of pupils progressing to further study (known as low progression schools)
- Articulation of progressions from further education (A-levels and equivalents) to HE, in terms of the proportions entering HE from FECs and other types of education provider. Or in terms of an individual's prior attainment and those entering HE with advanced standing.

Such measures could be constructed on the basis of schools and their cohorts, or on the basis of individual pupils, and this could be open for further debate. Prior attainment could potentially be considered (via data linking in future, at least in England) in terms of attainment at age 7, 11, 14, 16 or 18.

Pupils in receipt of free school meals (FSM)

24. Delegates felt that FSM was an important measure and a very current issue, including politically (though this made it susceptible to the risks outlined in paragraph 16). It was recognised that FSM would be an indicator of financial disadvantage, but that there were clear links to educational disadvantage too. Year-on-year fluctuations in take up meant that it might be

more appropriate to consider the proportion of pupils receiving FSM for any three or more academic years within their secondary education.

25. Concerns were noted as to the UK-wide comparability of eligibility criteria for FSM, the UK-wide availability of data pertaining to FSM, and the lack of data available in relation to mature or non-UK student populations. It was also noted that there had been something of a stigma associated with the uptake of FSM (though schools were doing a lot of work to remove it) and that this introduced the potential to misrepresent the genuinely disadvantaged. Geographical variations in take up of FSM were known to exist across the UK.

Indices of multiple deprivations (IMD)

26. Composite measures were known to be helpful, for example when there were known to be significant school effects on pupil outcomes and HE participation, but when it was not possible to attribute this to any one characteristic of a school experience.

27. It was noted that the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivations (SIMD) formed a strong focus within long-term Scottish WP priorities, and outcome agreements in Scotland required institutions to report against this metric in terms of both participation and retention. In Scotland, data sources were sufficiently joined up to make these measures easy for institutions to work with, but this may not be the case UK-wide.

28. The added value that measures such as IMD/SIMD would provide to a sufficiently wide ranging set of WP measures was unclear, particularly when existing composite measures typically included a range of factors unrelated to HE concerns. Although IMD might prove feasible on a UK-wide basis, and income was reported to form the largest component of the IMD, it was unlikely that this component could be considered in isolation.

Parental income, occupations and HE experience

29. Existing NS-SEC information regarding a student's social class was known to be flawed in a number of fundamental ways, and measures in this area were largely rejected. However, it was acknowledged that coverage of social class was unavoidable in discussions around social mobility and that a wider cultural hierarchy made this an important issue to users. Delegates felt that indicators examining parental HE experience (or similar) could be a preferable alternative which, captured well and completely, could act as a reliable proxy for a range of other types of disadvantage, including social class.

30. While information on parental HE experience was not available across all cohorts, in future data linking would facilitate the development of such measures for most UK-based students. In the meantime, use of students' school circumstances was considered an appropriate and pragmatic alternative.

31. Parental income (as measured via tax records) or household residual income (HRI, collected in means testing on admission) was considered a helpful, individual-based measure in understanding any financial disadvantage experienced by a student. But it was important to acknowledge that policy priorities seemed to be moving away from a sole focus on income-related measures so this would be unlikely to suffice in isolation.

32. While HRI data was captured by the student loans company (SLC) and was available consistently across the UK, there were concerns related to the coverage, accuracy and disclosure of those data. Not all full-time undergraduates accessed student support via the SLC,

and not all of those who did completed the means tested element, whereas very few part-time students would feature within the SLC data.

33. Parental occupations captured for pupils when they were aged 14 could be considered as a useful measure on the grounds that it reflected a pupil's circumstances at the point that they were making GCSE or similar decisions that could influence the availability of HE choices. It was acknowledged that these data did not currently exist.

Equality and diversity (E&D) characteristics

34. While measurement of E&D characteristics appeared to be an omission within the UKPIs, it would be important to bear in mind the uses of UKPIs and the articulation of the indicators. Given the potential for UKPIs to incentivise behaviour, it would be unhelpful to develop measures that could prompt confusion or perverse effects.

35. It was noted that participation, attainment and outcomes of students with different E&D characteristics was becoming a more prominent issue. However, there was a need for a clearer evidence base to understand their interaction with WP considerations, as well as with aspects such as subject choice, in order to develop sufficiently nuanced indicators in this area.

36. The fundamental review of UKPIs had found that institution level operational indicators that moved beyond general priorities should be developed using the improved functionality and accessibility of the Higher Education Information Database for Institutions (HEIDI), rather than developed as separate UKPIs. It was felt that at this stage, E&D measures interacting with WP considerations were likely to fall within this category.

Other suggestions

- Measures based on an HE provider's spend on access initiatives and interventions, though this were unlikely to be appropriate to mature, part-time or postgraduate cohorts.
- In England, the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) was considered preferable to the IMD, but it was noted that this measure was not available UK-wide.
- Refinement of measures based on POLAR3 data to consider young people entering HE as a proportion of all young people holding Level 3 (Key Stage 5) qualifications facilitating their entry to HE.
- Measures examining the HE attainment of students, and/or their progression to paid employment, relative to the proportion of the HE provider's local population claiming job seeker's allowance.
- Measures quantifying the attrition of potential students between application to HE and the point at which they may be expected to commence HE study. Such measures could usefully inform WP debates around the accessibility and perceptions of HE to disadvantaged students if they were sufficiently refined to consider attrition of potential WP students or applications. Consideration would also need to be given to the partiality of the coverage of such measures (for example, HE in FE students were substantial in Scotland and often they did not enter HE via UCAS).

Appendix 1 – Background paper circulated to delegates

Roundtable discussion: The future of the Widening Participation UK Performance Indicators for Higher Education

Background to the UKPIs and their review

1. The UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) for higher education (HE) provide information on the nature and performance of the HE sector in the UK. They are intended as an objective and consistent set of measures of how a higher education provider is performing. The first set of UKPIs was published in 1999, having been developed out of recommendations of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Report) to provide suitable indicators and associated benchmarks of the performance of the HE sector.

2. The development of the UKPIs over time has been governed by the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG). This collaborative governance arrangement continues to bring together representatives of the four UK funding bodies for HE, the Higher Education Statistics Agency, government departments, HE institutions and other appropriate bodies to steer the development of these measures. For more information, see 'Performance Indicators' on the HESA web-site¹.

3. At present:

- there are two levels of indicators: (i) institutional indicators published alongside associated benchmark values, and (ii) sector indicators
- the UKPIs cover four areas: (i) widening participation, (ii) non-continuation/retention, (iii) employment outcomes, and (iv) research²
- the population covered can vary by (i) mode of study (full-time, part-time), (ii) level of study (first degree, other undergraduate), and (iii) age of student (young, mature)
- the UKPIs cover all publicly-funded higher institutions in the UK and one privately funded institution, The University of Buckingham (i.e. they do not include HE registered at further education colleges, or at other privately funded providers).

4. A fundamental review of the UKPIs was commissioned by UKPISG in early 2013, in the context of large-scale, fast-paced changes in the HE sector, and differing policies for HE between the UK nations. The overarching aim of the research was to review the rationale, purpose and policy drivers of the UKPIs, the usage and the users of the UKPIs; and whether the existing UKPIs were still fit for purpose. The review engaged with a wide range of interested bodies and organisations, and was published in December 2013.

¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2072/141/>

² Note that the current set of research UKPIs have been discontinued and Table R1 (Research output) will not be published in 2015 and subsequent UKPI publications.

Review outcomes to date

5. 'How should we measure higher education? A fundamental review of the UK Performance Indicators'³ found that UKPIs are valued as a way to measure HE provision, and that the current approach to UKPIs is appropriate. However it also determined that:

- a) the current set of UKPIs requires some refinement
- b) there is scope to introduce a small number of additional UKPIs to take account of the wider role of HE
- c) there is a desire to broaden the populations and institutions covered by UKPIs to take account of the changing make-up of HE provision and of the HE sector.

6. Upon their acceptance of a set of recommendations arising from the review process, the UKPISG committed to engage with the sector as change is taken forward. It has been considered that full implementation of the recommendations accepted by the UKPISG will take time and need to proceed in stages. The UKPISG have envisaged a series of engagements with the sector and other relevant stakeholders as areas of possible change are addressed.

7. The first of such engagements was an invitation issued in December 2013 for comment on some of the first actions proposed by UKPISG in its initial response to the findings of the fundamental review of UKPIs. Specifically, the UKPISG asked for comments on a revised set of principles for the UKPIs. A series of guiding principles for the UKPIs has now been formally accepted, and these are shown at Annex A. The principles will be used by the UKPISG to guide its governance of the UKPIs, and to assess the utility of the UKPIs to their key audiences. It should be noted that UKPISG intends the principles to be guiding rather than binding and reserves the right to revise the set of principles over time, as required or appropriate to ensure its continued successful governance of these measures.

In depth review or the Widening Participation UKPIs

8. The current WP UKPIs include three tables⁴, which provide information as follows:

- Table series T1 looks at the percentage of young, UK domiciled, full-time entrants from state schools or colleges, specified socio-economic classes (NS-SEC classes 4-7) and low-participation neighbourhoods (as defined using the Participation of Local Areas (POLAR3) classification).
- The indicator used for mature, UK domiciled, full-time entrants is the percentage, in a slightly adapted form, who come from 'low participation' neighbourhoods and do not have a previous HE qualification. Similarly, the same indicator is used for UK domiciled, part-time entrants. These measures are provided in Table series T2.
- Table series T7 provides information about the percentage of UK domiciled undergraduate students (rather than just entrants) who are in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance.

9. An in-depth review of the widening participation UKPIs has now commenced. As a first stage in this process, the UKPISG have considered the current UKPI measures with regards to

³ <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2013/ukpireview/#d.en.85232>

⁴ Available at <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/urg> and <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/dsa>

their fit against the guiding principles agreed for UKPIs. A number of weaknesses of fit have been identified, including: the lack of UK wide coverage (the low participation neighbourhood indicator is not published for institutions in Scotland), that data used for the NS-SEC indicator are widely acknowledged to be of poor quality; and that the coverage of the indicators does not extend to postgraduate populations, nor does it include students registered at publicly-funded FECs or at privately funded institutions (except University of Buckingham). The UKPISG are also aware that the UK administrations make use of alternative measures of widening participation (instead of and/or alongside the UKPIs) because of differences in some jurisdictions.

10. The UKPISG has now brought together an expert group that will explore current and new measures of widening participation that could be appropriate for use in the UKPIs and/or of interest across a range of stakeholders. Measures of widening participation extend beyond those currently used in the UKPIs, and this exploration may include entirely new concepts or measures that are already known to the sector but that have not been used in the UKPIs to date.

11. Following the 2012 fees and funding reforms for HE, and the 2013 review of the UK PIs, there is an increasingly awareness that the debate around widening participation has moved beyond just widening access. HEFCE in particular have continued to emphasise - with renewed focus - that addressing widening participation relates to the whole 'life-cycle' of a student in HE. Including pre-entry, through admission and fair access, study support and successful completion at undergraduate level, to progress on to further study or employment, and social mobility.

12. The UK Performance Indicators Steering Group have acknowledged that there is work to be done to bring the existing set of WP UK Performance Indicators into closer alignment with this broader view of WP, and that to do this requires an enhanced understanding of current practices – and priorities – spanning this 'life cycle'. The UKPISG and the WP expert groups may wish to consider these further matters⁵.

Intentions for this roundtable discussion

13. Fundamentally, the intention for this roundtable discussion is to canvass as many priorities and possibilities for measuring disadvantage within the UKPIs as possible. The discussions will be framed within the broad question of: 'Bearing in mind the large-scale and fast paced changes in the UK HE sector that have occurred in recent years (and continue to occur), what are the purposes, priorities and policies that it is now appropriate or necessary for a set of WP UKPIs to serve?'

14. If UKPIs in this area are to be developed or revised then it is important that the UKPISG are able to gain a good understanding of these issues, and to then subsequently identify those that might be both important and appropriate to measure in UK PIs. To this end, the UKPISG have identified a number of topics on which they would like to seek the advice and input of

⁵ Note that the 'life cycle' referred to here encompasses the retention and non-continuation of students in HE. The UKPI measures of non-continuation will be subject to a separate in-depth review in the coming months, and we would intend to share any relevant feedback from this roundtable discussion with that review process. However, we note that the fundamental review of the UKPIs found that they should focus on UK-wide sector level priorities: specific individual institution level operational indicators that move beyond general priorities should be developed using the improved functionality and accessibility of the Higher Education Information Database for Institutions (HEIDI), rather than developed as separate UKPIs.

attendees to these roundtable discussions. Some specific questions have been devised by the UKPISG, and these will be posed to the expert group for discussion within the breakout sessions included within the agenda.

Annex A – Guiding principles for the UK Performance Indicators

1. Recommendation 4⁶ for the future of the UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs), as accepted by the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG), states that:

‘The key features of the current UKPI approach should be retained. A set of guiding principles should be developed (building on those from a 2006 review of the UKPIs) and used by the UKPISG to judge the appropriateness both of making changes to the existing UKPIs and of introducing any new UKPIs suggested for the future.’

2. In response to the recommendation outlined above, and building on suggestions made by the ‘Fundamental review of the UK Performance Indicators’, a set of guiding principles for UKPIs was proposed by the UKPISG. It is anticipated that these principles will be used by the UKPISG to guide its governance of the UKPIs, and in particular to assess the utility of the UKPIs to their key audiences. Any new or amended UKPI will be assessed against each of the principles listed below to explore whether it should (and, to some extent, could) be produced at sector and individual institution level, or at sector level only. It should be noted that UKPISG intends the principles to be guiding rather than binding.

3. The UKPISG notes the collaborative nature of its governance of the UKPIs, with representation from Government, funding bodies and the sector. It is within this context that UKPISG reserves the right to consider the merits of any new or amended indicators on a case-by-case basis as necessary. The group also reserves the right to revise the set of principles over time, as required or appropriate to ensure its continued successful governance of these measures. Notwithstanding this, the group notes and will stand by Recommendation 9 of those recommendations accepted by UKPISG, which states that:

‘The introduction of any additional UKPIs or amendments to existing UKPIs must involve further dialogue with the sector to ensure buy-in.’

Proposed guiding principles for UKPIs

A: Coverage and scope

A1: UKPIs should normally seek to reflect the totality of higher education (HE) provision and institutions across the UK.

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.

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.

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.

⁶ The recommendations accepted by the UKPISG are listed at Annex A of ‘Invitation to comment on future changes to the UK Performance Indicators’ (HEFCE Circular letter 33/2013) available at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/cl332013/#d.en.85233>

B: Quality of data

B1: UKPIs should be produced by a credible and independent organisation.

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.

B3: UKPIs should normally have longevity/continuity, enabling a time series to be developed and the ability for users to conduct longitudinal analysis.

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.

C: Dissemination

C1: The UKPIs and their associated benchmark values should be free and available to all.

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.

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.

D: Benchmarking and enhancement

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.

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.

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.

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.

E: Burden of data collection

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.

F: Influence on behaviour

F1: Publishing UKPI and benchmark values at institutional level must not knowingly create perverse incentives or lead to perverse behaviour.

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.