

UK Performance Indicators Technical Group

Minutes of the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) held at 13.30pm on Wednesday, 11 February 2015 at Northavon House, Bristol and via video conference

Present:

Members:	Jonathan Waller	Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) [Chair]
	Gordon Anderson	Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
	Matthew Bollington	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
	Suzie Dent	HESA
	Hannah Falvey	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)
	Jovan Luzajic	Universities UK, Universities Scotland, Higher Education Wales, GuildHE
	Michael MacNeill	Department for Education and Learning, Northern Ireland (DELNI)
	Richard Puttock	Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
	Chris Williams	Welsh Government
Secretariat:	Alison Brunt	HEFCE
	Mark Gittoes	HEFCE

Apologies:

Awaiting nomination	UCAS
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1. Welcome from the chair

1.1 Following introductions, the chair welcomed members to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

2.1. The group noted that they had accepted the minutes of the previous meeting by corresponding during June 2014, and that the minutes had since been published on the HESA website alongside associated content relating to governance of the UKPIs. The group considered the actions arising from those minutes.

2.2. DELNI reported that they expected to complete work to explore the feasibility of looking at disadvantage from the perspective of intersecting categories of disadvantage within the next year. The work was exploring a number of different angles, including the relationship to student outcomes, and the group were advised that they would receive a more comprehensive update when it was appropriate.

Action: A paper summarising work to explore the feasibility of looking at intersections of categories of disadvantage to be prepared by DELNI and taken to a future UKPITG meeting at an appropriate point in that project.

2.3. The group noted that a number of the actions arising from the minutes were addressed by items on the agenda. Other actions arising in relation to the use of linked HE data, and the inclusion of HE delivered by FECs, would require discussion at subsequent meetings.

3. Update on business of the UKPISG undertaken by correspondence during June 2014 (Oral item and summary paper)

3.1. JW updated the group on the key points of the UKPISG business undertaken. This was primarily concerned with the detail of establishing roundtable discussions relating to the in-depth review of the widening participation and research UKPIs.

3.2. It was reported that the UKPISG secretariat had secured nominations from members as to attendees at a roundtable discussion of the WP UKPIs, and that such a discussion was convened and occurred on 18 December 2014. It was also reported that nominations had been secured as to attendees at a roundtable discussion of the research UKPIs and that that discussion would be convened in due course.

3.3. JW reminded members of a discussion that they themselves had engaged in by correspondence during June 2014 in relation to revisions required to the entry qualifications groupings used in the benchmark calculations for the employment UKPIs. UKPITG's recommendation had been accepted and approved by the Chair of UKPISG (under Chair's action, on account of the very short timescales involved), and noted by UKPISG members during their correspondence in June. The group agreed that the additional paper prepared for UKPITG and detailing this issue should be published in the usual way.

Action: HESA to publish paper UKPITG 14/04 on their website alongside associated content relating to the governance of the UKPIs.

4. Update on progress in the review of the WP indicators, and next steps (UKPITG 15/01†)

4.1. AB introduced the paper and noted that the roundtable discussions of 18 December 2014 had generated some promising suggestions with respect to the future of WP UKPIs. In addition, it was highlighted that the roundtable discussions had demonstrated strong support for the principles that UKPITG and UKPISG had defined for UKPIs, and that answers had been provided to some of the questions previously posed by the two groups.

4.2. It was intended that paper UKPITG 15/01 (or a version of it) would be taken to UKPISG alongside any context or comment that UKPITG members were able to provide during this discussion that may be useful in terms of guiding the future direction of work to develop the WP UKPIs. The group were encouraged to think actively about the processes, timescales, issues and possibilities involved in actioning the indicators that had been suggested. Members agreed that the exercise would aim to direct UKPISG as to issues of highest priority within the suggestions that had been documented.

4.3. Members of UKPITG requested that a small number of clarifications were made to the paper before it was presented to UKPISG.

Action: Secretariat to modify paper UKPITG 15/01 according to the suggestions made by UKPITG members, before circulating to the next meeting of UKPISG.

4.4. The group then proceeded to discuss the specific suggestions documented in the paper.

4.5. With regards to measures of disadvantage related to a student's school circumstances, the group considered the issues raised in turn:

4.5.1. **Paragraph 22, relating to the cut-off point for applicability of school-related measures.** UKPITG members considered that it would be advisable to differentiate any school-based measures of disadvantage by the entrants' age. It was felt that impacts of school-related disadvantage were different for young and mature populations and members agreed that a range of different measures would be needed for different subsets of the entry cohort to ensure its complete coverage. However, it was not possible to identify the specifics required within the range at present, and members highlighted a need for a greater understanding of the implications of the use of such a basket of indicators on institutional behaviours (particularly regarding recruitment from populations that would not necessarily be intended).

4.5.2. Additionally, members reflected on the use of school-related measures of disadvantage in the context of the student life cycle. While it was considered that school circumstances might help to explain why mature students were entering HE later in life and contribute to debates around social mobility, the technical complexities were felt to be significant. For postgraduate populations, entrants could be linked back to their undergraduate student records to ascertain more complete details of their school circumstances. However, in order to be useful, measures would need to capture school-related circumstances at the time that they were experienced, and it was known that the quality of individual schools changed over time: the experiences of a student who left a school in 2012 could be entirely different to those of a student who left the same school a decade earlier. For postgraduate and other mature populations, it would therefore be a very significant undertaking to attempt to define the circumstances of the school experience at whatever point in time that they were experienced.

4.5.3. **Paragraph 24a, relating to the consideration of school-leavers who were NEET (not in education, employment or training).** UKPITG noted that while NEET was similarly defined across England, Scotland and Wales, and was used by the Department for Education (DfE) in England, it was a measure that was only applicable to a young cohort. The group highlighted a need to determine the availability of this information across both the school and further education sectors across the UK, and reinforced the concern noted in paragraph 24a regarding institutions' ability to influence the drivers of numbers of NEET pupils. While NEET was not a measure of educational disadvantage specifically, it was considered likely that NEET would capture factors correlated with educational disadvantage. However, the extent to which a NEET measure would reflect on school circumstances as

opposed to extraneous factors would require greater clarification and this was considered by UKPITG members to be a measure worthy of further exploration.

4.5.4. Paragraph 24b, relating to pupils' attainment at different ages.

UKPITG members agreed that there would be value in going back to pupils' attainment in earlier years of school, and that consistency with other existing measures used in relation to school attainment would be helpful in the context of understanding a student's full life cycle in education. Members felt that they would need to further explore the measures currently being utilised, especially in different parts of the UK where comparability and consistency of the measures was not clear, especially given the divergence in examination systems and changes to those systems. It was considered that deriving the 'Proportion of students achieving the equivalent to five or more A* to C grades at GCSE level' could have particular potential.

4.5.5. Paragraphs 24c and 24d, relating to progression of pupils into further study.

It was noted that the timing allowed for progression to be captured would be important in generating useful measures in this area. Allowing pupils two academic years in which to progress to further study would allow for gap years and provide comparability with existing measures in England and Wales. There would however need to be further consideration of measures in this area in terms of their fit within a range of measures: members noted that if a school had a high number of leavers who were NEET then they would have low progression to further study, and vice versa. The interactions between the two measures could need careful management to avoid the introduction of conflict. While the introduction of the 'cliff face' boundaries cautioned against in paragraph 15 of the paper would also need further consideration, UKPITG agreed that measures in this area were likely to prove suitable for further exploration.

4.6. UKPITG members felt that the measures suggested in relation to pupils in receipt of free school meals were of a lower priority for further consideration. On the basis that the lack of UK-wide comparability in eligibility criteria was a fundamental issue, members agreed that it was unlikely that it would be feasible to develop measures in this area that would satisfy the principles agreed for UKPIs.

4.7. Measures suggested in relation to the indices of multiple deprivations (IMDs) were also considered as less feasible for introduction as UKPIs. Members noted that the UK-wide consistency and comparability of IMDs had previously been considered in depth and the extensive evidence gathered during that examination had been found to present fundamental issues in the context of UKPIs. UKPITG members noted little change since the previous examination that would suggest those issues could now be overcome. In addition, they reiterated concerns that the comparison of relative proportions (as required by the use of IMDs) would be difficult for users to interpret. It was agreed that UKPISG should be advised that the component parts of IMDs that would most likely facilitate sensible comparisons were covered in other suggestions raised in the paper.

4.8. With regards to measures considering parental income, occupations or HE experience, UKPITG reinforced concerns raised by the roundtable discussions as to the collection issues associated with data of this nature. In particular, they noted the known

issues relating to the perception and subjectivity of self-report measures, and coverage in administrative data. Members also recorded a correction that linking to parental income or HE experience would not be possible in administrative data without collecting parental names, dates of birth and postcodes at age 18 in student data. As a result, the coverage of household residual income information in Student Loans Company data was likely to become central to discussion of measures in this area. Despite the problems, it was felt that measures in this area would be individual-based ones which were likely to act as a good proxy for any financial disadvantage experienced. The group considered that the value proffered by measures in this area would need to be weighed carefully against the known issues.

4.9. UKPITG members made no comment on the discussions noted around measurement of equality and diversity characteristics, and moved on to discuss the other suggestions made:

4.9.1. Suggested measures based on HE providers' spend on access initiatives and interventions were felt to lack focus. UKPITG felt that any measures in this area would need to be concerned with effective spend on access, but that this then enhanced concerns regarding the availability of consistent and comparable data across the UK nations.

4.9.2. As with measures based on receipt of free school meals, UKPITG members felt that the inability to consider the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) on a UK-wide basis made this suggestion infeasible for further exploration within the context of WP UKPIs.

4.9.3. Members felt unable to comment extensively in relation to the suggestion made regarding refinement of measures based on POLAR3 data. The group noted a likelihood that refining the measures in the manner suggested would narrow the differentials between local areas and so was unlikely to effectively discriminate between HE providers' performance. UKPITG felt that a more appropriate measure for UKPISG to consider might be the refinement of POLAR3 that considers the unexplained gaps in an area's young participation rate (on the basis of pupils' ethnicity and GCSE and equivalent attainment). However, it was unclear how effective this measure would be UK-wide and further exploration would be required to determine whether use of the measure would remove or reduce some of the current issues associated with POLAR3.

4.9.4. UKPITG members noted that HE providers were mostly national recruiters so measures relative to characteristics of an institution's local population seemed infeasible for further consideration.

4.9.5. Issues related to the partial coverage of data on attrition of potential students between application to HE and commencement of study were highlighted by UKPITG, and said to be particularly noteworthy with regards to HE provision in Scotland. Given the substantial levels of HE provision delivered in Scottish FECs, where applications were typically not routed via UCAS (except recently with respect to initial teacher training provision), the partial coverage of the data was expected to be particularly problematic.

5. Review of benchmarking approach (UKPITG 15/02†)

5.1. MG introduced the paper and noted that the secretariat would normally coordinate and lead such a review, but highlighted the conflict noted within the paper as to the statistical methodology and schools of statistical thinking. It was suggested that even if HEFCE were to engage independently with the review process, a conflict of interest was likely to be perceived.

5.2. Members considered that the review of the benchmarking approach should provide the groundwork in support of both the existing set of UKPIs, any new indicators developed as a result of the in-depth reviews of UKPI areas, and subsequent review of the detailed factors to be included in benchmark calculations for a given indicator. It was also noted that progress would need to be made with the review during Summer/Autumn 2015 in order to effect change in the 2016 publications of UKPIs

5.3. The group considered that the review could be separated into distinct parts in order to facilitate the sharing of responsibility among UKPITG members and the secretariat. It was agreed that sub-groups could be established in order to progress each area of work.

5.4. Specifically, it was considered that an academic could be invited to lead an independent assessment of the statistical approach to the benchmarking. That academic could not be expected to undertake the full assessment in isolation: it was unlikely that an approach based on one statistician alone would meet requirements of the UKPIs as official statistics. UKPITG members were invited to consider any contribution that they may be able to make to the expenses of commissioning an academic to undertake such work.

5.5. HEFCE and HEFCW committed to coordinate work to review the principles employed in the selection of factors to include in the benchmarking calculations, as well as review of the methodology employed to define the groupings used within the benchmarking factors. It was noted that care would need to be taken not to pre-judge the outcomes of the work to review the statistical approach. However, members felt that there were known issues and concerns on which work could commence within the timescales required.

5.6. SFC and the Welsh Government agreed that they would contribute to work to undertake a user consultation with regards to the benchmarking approach.

Action: Secretariat to liaise with UKPITG members by correspondence in order to establish sub-groups that could help to progress each area of work outlined.

6. Publication timings for the UKPIs (UKPITG 14/03†)

6.1. SD introduced the paper and noted that the publication schedule being proposed was consistent in its approach with that employed in previous publications. Members noted that the proposed publication of Tranche 1 of the UKPIs on Thursday, 26 March 2015 coincided with the HEFCE recurrent grant announcement and was close to the commencement date of the pre-election period of Monday, 30 March 2015. It was agreed that Tranche 1 would be published a day earlier than proposed, on Wednesday, 25 March 2015.

6.2. Tranche 2 of the UKPIs would be published as proposed, on Thursday, 2 July 2015 (subject to the statistical first release of the 2013-14 destination of leavers from higher education survey going ahead as planned at the end of June 2015).

Action: HESA to publish Tranche 1 of the UKPIs on Wednesday, 25 March 2015, and Tranche 2 in July 2015 as proposed.

6.3. UKPITG members discussed the concern raised within paper UKPITG 15/03 in relation to publishing the UKPIs to an earlier timetable than the one actioned in recent years. Members agreed that it was difficult for them to articulate when challenged the reasons why Tranche 2 of the UKPIs could be published almost immediately after the publication of HESA's DLHE statistical first release, but Tranche 1 was not published until two months after the publication of the student data SFR. In the context of emerging discussions regarding the potential for live, in-year data collection and reporting, it was reported that earlier publication of Tranche 1 would be helpful to Government departments across the UK, as well as other member organisations.

6.4. Members agreed that publication schedules should not be expedited at the expense of the data quality and assurance processes, particularly if new measures were going to be introduced to the UKPIs as a result of the in-depth reviews of UKPI areas. The pressures arising in relation to the publication of new and additional indicators were currently difficult to qualify. However, it was emphasised that progress towards an early to mid-February publication date was desirable.

6.5. HESA reported that at present it was deriving and checking the linking processes required in the generation of the non-continuation UKPIs that took the most significant length of time. The group then considered the potential advantages and disadvantages of separating the WP and non-continuation indicators into two publication tranches. It was suggested that such an approach could enable the WP UKPIs to be published to an earlier timetable. However, the WP and non-continuation UKPIs were often considered to sit together to tell a coherent story, and as such separating the two could have implications for their interpretation.

Action: HESA to examine their publication schedules with a view to determining the potential for earlier publication dates of Tranche 1 of the UKPIs: as a complete tranche, and with regards to its component indicators.

Action: UKPITG to seek a steer from UKPISG as to the potential separation of the WP and non-continuation indicators into two publication tranches.

7. Technical changes to the UKPIs (UKPITG 15/04)

7.1. SD introduced the paper and took UKPITG members through the changes under consideration.

7.2. The issues emerging in relation to the classification of state and independent schools were outlined and members discussed the potential mappings available between UKPRNs and a classification of school types across the UK. Members agreed that the DfE's EduBase or NPD could be used to source this information for schools in England. The Welsh Government noted that they would be able to provide equivalent information in relation to schools in Wales.

7.3. Northern Ireland and Scotland representatives reported that lists of school types were available but that they were not defined in terms of schools' UKPRNs on account of the partial coverage of UKPRN assignments to schools in these administrations. Both nations reported that projects were underway to improve the coverage of UKPRNs to all state schools, but that timings were unclear as to when the aims of these projects would be realised. It was said to be likely that UKPIs would be reliant on the use of the generic school codes in the shorter term.

Action: CW to liaise with HESA colleagues to share a classification of school types defined in terms of UKPRNs for use in UKPIs and data validation processes.

Action: MM and GA to investigate timings and potential for extended coverage of UKPRNs across schools in Northern Ireland and Scotland respectively, and report back to the next meeting of UKPITG.

Action: HESA to consider the validation processes being implemented with regards to the PREVINST variable in order to help avoid overuse of the generic 9999 code.

7.4. With regards to FE funded students in the HE population, members noted that these were a very small population of students concentrated at only two institutions, who were currently not well understood. The group were aware that numbers of such students could change with the development of Higher Apprenticeships in England, and the ongoing development of the funding models being implemented with respect to these programmes. Given the lack of clarity as to the nature of that change in student numbers and the type of provision being classified in this way, the group agreed that it was not appropriate to exclude FE funded students in the HE population until that clarity was obtained. Members felt it would be important to continue to monitor the numbers of students being reported as FE funded students in the HE population, including in the Skills Funding Agency's Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data.

Action: UKPITG to recommend to UKPISG that FE funded students in the HE population remain in the UKPI populations until clarity can be obtained as to the nature of provision being recorded in this way.

7.5. On the basis that the Open University's National Centres were subject to different funding environments, and exhibited different recruitment behaviours and trends, UKPITG members expressed support to disaggregate the Open University according to the country of their national centre in data published at HE provider level. The group noted that the change in publication practice was requested by HESA's statutory customers and that the Open University was content with the proposed change.

7.6. A number of potential concerns were discussed. UKPITG agreed that the speed at which such a change could be implemented should be explored, and HESA were asked to include the disaggregated information in the UKPI publications at the earliest opportunity. Members requested that publications should be bridged with respect to the change, with both the existing and the proposed publication approaches being employed concurrently for at least one year. In particular, it was noted that statistics published by DELNI did not disaggregate provision at the Open University and UKPIs would subsequently be incomparable with those data. Bridging the publication approaches would overcome this issue in the shorter term, and provide DELNI with an opportunity to

consider the consequences of this inconsistency beyond that. In this regard, it was noted that provision of a clear narrative around the change would be important to help user understanding.

Action: UKPITG to recommend to UKPISG that disaggregated information for the Open University be included in the UKPI publications at the earliest opportunity, with the publication approaches bridged for at least one year and a suitable narrative being published to explain the change.

7.7. The group noted that the Open University's provision was excluded from the calculation of benchmarks published in Table T7 of the UKPIs. It was agreed that it was not clear that the historic reasons for this exclusion (the potential for the Open University's distinct provision to dominate its own benchmark calculation, coupled with differences in eligibility rules for receipt of Disabled Students Allowance among distance learners) were still appropriate and warranted further investigation. Such investigation could usefully explore whether inclusion of distance learning as a benchmarking factor for Table T7 could help to facilitate the inclusion of the Open University in these benchmarks.

Action: UKPITG to recommend to UKPISG that introduction of disaggregated information for the Open University in UKPI publications take account of potential revisions required to the benchmarking calculations employed with regard to Table T7.

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

8.1. Members agreed that the papers proposed as exempt should be considered as exempt from publication on the basis that they related to ongoing reviews in development. A publication date with respect to these papers would be agreed by the UKPITG at a future meeting.

Action: HESA to publish the agreed non-exempt papers from this March 2015 meeting on their website alongside associated content relating to governance of the UKPIs.

9. Date of next meeting

9.1. Members agreed that the group would next meet following the April 2015 meeting of the UKPISG, with dates to be agreed by correspondence.

10. Any other business

10.1. BIS alerted members to increasing numbers of enquiries as to plans for UKPI-type measures relating to HE provision delivered by Alternative Providers in England. There was said to be an expectation that measures of non-continuation in particular would be published 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 student support via the Student Loans Company.

10.2. In the shorter term, work was underway within BIS and HEFCE to employ similar concepts and methodologies to existing data relating to provision at APs. Members noted that implications could arise for the UKPIs if similar but not strictly consistent measures were generated and published with respect to APs. Particular care would need to be taken to clearly articulate the uses, interpretations and meanings of any measures published, as well as the differences between those measures and the UKPIs. UKPITG

agreed that they would maintain a watching brief as this area of interest developed further.

10.3. In the mid- to long-term, it was expected that these providers would be incorporated into the UKPIs. Members agreed that this expectation was in alignment with the principles agreed for UKPIs and something that should be pursued as appropriate. However, it was noted that UKPISG processes that would be required to facilitate this could be more time consuming than stakeholders might expect.

Meeting closed 15.20

Actions arising:

Paragraph 2.2: A paper summarising work to explore the feasibility of looking at intersections of categories of disadvantage to be prepared by DELNI and taken to a future UKPITG meeting at an appropriate point in that project.

Paragraph 3.3: HESA to publish paper UKPITG 14/04 on their website alongside associated content relating to the governance of the UKPIs.

Paragraph 4.3: Secretariat to modify paper UKPITG 15/01 according to the suggestions made by UKPITG members, before circulating to the next meeting of UKPISG.

Paragraph 5.6: Secretariat to liaise with UKPITG members by correspondence in order to establish sub-groups that could help to progress each area of work outlined.

Paragraph 6.2: HESA to publish Tranche 1 of the UKPIs on Wednesday, 25 March 2015, and Tranche 2 in July 2015 as proposed.

Paragraph 6.5: HESA to examine their publication schedules with a view to determining the potential for earlier publication dates of Tranche 1 of the UKPIs: as a complete tranche, and with regards to its component indicators.

Paragraph 6.5: UKPITG to seek a steer from UKPISG as to the potential separation of the WP and non-continuation indicators into two publication tranches.

Paragraph 7.3: CW to liaise with HESA colleagues to share a classification of school types defined in terms of UKPRNs for use in UKPIs and data validation processes.

Paragraph 7.3: MM and GA to investigate timings and potential for extended coverage of UKPRNs across schools in Northern Ireland and Scotland respectively, and report back to the next meeting of UKPITG.

Paragraph 7.3: HESA to consider the validation processes being implemented with regards to the PREVINST variable in order to help avoid overuse of the generic 9999 code.

Paragraph 7.4: UKPITG to recommend to UKPISG that FE funded students in the HE population remain in the UKPI populations until clarity can be obtained as to the nature of provision being recorded in this way.

Paragraph 7.6: UKPITG to recommend to UKPISG that disaggregated information for the Open University be included in the UKPI publications at the earliest opportunity, with the

publication approaches bridged for at least one year and a suitable narrative being published to explain the change.

Paragraph 7.7: UKPITG to recommend to UKPISG that introduction of disaggregated information for the Open University in UKPI publications take account of potential revisions required to the benchmarking calculations employed with regard to Table T7.

Paragraph 8.1: HESA to publish the agreed non-exempt papers from this March 2015 meeting on their website alongside associated content relating to governance of the UKPIs.