

UK Performance Indicators Technical Group

Minutes of the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) held at 13.00 on Wednesday, 10 February 2016 at Westward House, Bristol and via telephone and 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
	Elizabeth Heal, attending on behalf of 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)
Secretariat:	Alison Brunt	HEFCE
	Mark Gittoes	HEFCE

Apologies:

Chris Williams	Welsh Government
Awaiting nomination	UCAS

1. Welcome from the chair

1.1 The chair welcomed members to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

2.1. The group sought clarification on some points of detail within the minutes of the previous meeting. Subject to some minor rewording to reflect those clarifications, members accepted the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting. It was noted that actions arising from the minutes were addressed by items on the agenda for this or a future meeting.

ACTION: HESA to publish the minutes of UKPITG's December meeting on their website alongside the UK Performance Indicators and associated content.

3. Update on business of the UKPISG undertaken by correspondence during December 2015 (Oral item)

3.1. JW updated the group on the key points of the UKPISG business undertaken by correspondence in December 2015. UKPITG's recommendations for the 2016 publication dates for UKPIs and for the 2016 publication of UKPIs to be made available under an open data licence, were both put to the steering group. Those recommendations had received UKPISG's approval and both had been actioned with regard to the first tranche of 2016 UKPIs, which had been published on 4 February 2016.

3.2. UKPITG's recommendation regarding an increase to the response rate thresholds at which the employment UKPIs would automatically suppress an institution's indicator was not approved by UKPISG. Members of the steering group had been unable to reach a consensus and expressed concern that they did not have a sufficient evidence base on which to base any decision. In particular, UKPISG members were keen to understand any potential implications of their decision on wider uses of the measures, including development of the Teaching Excellence Framework in England. The matter would require further consideration by UKPISG at a future meeting.

ACTION: UKPITG to provide a UKPISG with a more comprehensive analysis of the potential options available with regard to suppression thresholds for the employment UKPIs.

4. Suppression thresholds within the UKPIs (UKPITG 16/01)

4.1. JW introduced the paper and noted that the issue had arisen from the discussions of UKPISG via correspondence in relation to the response rate thresholds at which the employment UKPIs would automatically suppress an institution's indicator. The paper was an initial response to UKPISG's request for a consistent and coherent approach to suppression throughout the UKPIs.

4.2. Members considered that there was an initial and fundamental question that needed to be considered in relation to survey non-response or missing data: whether measures such as the UKPIs should seek to suppress or impute that data. It was noted that there were a number of precedents with regard to both approaches.

4.3. It was noted that the UK Statistics Authority and the Office for National Statistics routinely queried statistics producers' approaches to dealing with missing data. The ONS were expected to query whether and which methods of imputation would be used in relation to non-response in their assessment of data sources that the TEF was likely to draw upon.

4.4. BIS and HESA both reported that imputation was not used within their own statistics, with HESA noting that their preferred approach was to publish the proportions of unknown or missing data and allowing users to make their own judgement on suitability of the data for a given use.

4.5. HEFCE reported that results of the National Student Survey were suppressed in Unistats and the KIS if they did not achieve a response rate of 50 per cent or more, and salary information was also suppressed if fewer than 50 per cent of respondents provided

their salary to the DLHE survey. There was no imputation or reweighting included in these outputs.

4.6. The group considered the scope for challenge if imputation were to be introduced to the UKPIs. Members noted that the data was provided and signed off by institutions as factual, and queried whether challenge would arise if UKPIs were presented as anything other than a simple articulation of those facts. Transparency and complexity were considered to present further opportunity for challenge, with a strong likelihood that institutions would question whether the correct factors, assumptions and distributions were being used in any weighting, modelling or imputation of the data. While the risk of challenge was felt to be higher in the event of a large volumes of non-response or unknown data, members noted that in the UKPI measures missing data was likely to be biased in some way, and that this would be a more fundamental concern with regard to any chosen method.

4.7. UKPITG agreed that it would be useful for them to secure a better understanding of approaches to imputation, reweighting and suppression used elsewhere. For example, what approach (if any) did the Department for Education take in their statistics? HEFCE noted that their ongoing literature review in support of the benchmarking review could be extended to attempt to locate any examples of different standards and approaches being used. This should provide an indication of the measures for which different approaches were used, the associated data sources and the scales of unknowns included within them.

ACTION: HEFCE to provide an understanding at the next meeting of UKPITG as to the approaches to imputation and missing data used by other bodies in their statistical outputs.

4.8. BIS noted that their access and use of the HMRC data would give rise to some comparisons of that data to the DLHE data. This was likely to provide an enhanced understanding of the nature of some of the missing data within the DLHE data, which BIS could share with the group. The ONS were also likely to have completed their assessment of data sources informing the TEF development by the next meeting, which could potentially aid further thinking.

ACTION: BIS to provide an understanding at the next meeting of UKPITG as to any potential learning points arising from engagement with the ONS and from the HMRC data.

5. Progress to date on the development of new WP indicators (UKPITG 16/02, plus oral updates)

5.1. UKPITG received updates from representatives of Northern Ireland and Scotland as to the feasibility of extending UKPI coverage to include HE registered at further education colleges. DELNI reported that existing measures derived in relation to HE in FE study were not directly comparable with UKPI measures, and that the current inability to access linked schools data meant that it would not be possible to derive some of the new or existing WP indicators. It was also reported that the structures of HE in FE provision in Northern Ireland could potentially complicate interpretation of non-

continuation indicators, while the underlying data content may not lend itself to some measures, including the DSA indicators.

ACTION: DELNI to clarify specifically which UKPIs might prove feasible through the use of linked schools and FECs data, and to maintain a watching brief in relation to those indicators that were currently less feasible.

5.2. SFC reported that the DSA indicators would be feasible but that there would be difficulty in calculating a number of the WP UKPIs: previous school and socio-economic background were not collected in FECs' data returns. It was considered that linked schools and FECs data could facilitate some of the proposed experimental statistics, but this data was not yet available. As in Northern Ireland, it was considered that the structures of HE in FE provision could complicate the non-continuation indicators. In addition, the relative rarity of degree study within HE in FE provision could render Table 5's calculation of projected outcomes implausible.

5.3. UKPITG proceeded to consider the proposed WP experimental statistics in turn.

School-based measures

5.4. BIS provided an update on their previous action to liaise with DfE in relation to their approach to facilitating the sharing of progression statistics derived from linked schools data. While email correspondence had begun, BIS were yet to receive an answer on whether or not raw data underlying their Key Stage 5 progression statistics were shared back to schools.

ACTION: BIS to circulate a further update on the outcomes of their enquiry with DfE, and circulate to UKPITG as soon as possible.

5.5. HEFCW reported that their investigation of school categorisations had identified the use of different school typologies that were difficult to align with categorisations used in relation to English schools. In addition, further changes expected in categorisations mean that the issue would not resolve itself. It was agreed that development of a nation-specific indicator should be explored.

5.6. DELNI reported that securing access to linked schools data was an ongoing project, which had not yet moved forward significantly. The processes involved and the need to engage with the Education department meant that timescales for progress were difficult to predict.

5.7. Members considered whether there were any implications should the publication of experimental WP statistics, and those covering HE in FE provision, progress only for English institutions, and Welsh institutions where possible. It was considered that the nature of these statistics as developmental and experimental allowed for this type of differentiation.

Receipt of free school meals

5.8. UKPITG members noted that developmental issues in relation to pupils in receipt of free school meals had not been progressed.

Household residual income

5.9. SFC noted some confusion around the range of income measures available for use within the student loans company data, and the differences in their use and definition. In Scotland it was reported that all students were entitled to some level of student support, but based on a measure of household gross income before tax, students from households with incomes below £34,000 were entitled bursary support.

5.10. In Northern Ireland, the thresholds were reported as £19,203 for entitlement to full grant and £41,500 for entitlement to partial grant. As in Scotland, further clarity was required in relation to the income definition to be used, and variability in interpretation and thresholds. It was considered that there was value in liaising directly with the SLC to understand this variability.

ACTION: HEFCE to liaise with SLC and the UK funding bodies to secure access to the clarity required regarding definitions of household income measures.

Area-based measures of disadvantage

5.11. HEFCW reported that they intended to make use of each of POLAR3, communities first areas, and the Welsh index of multiple deprivations (WIMD) in their area-based experimental statistics.

5.12. The group also discussed the need to revisit the advantages and disadvantages of using indices of multiple deprivations within area-based UKPI measures. HEFCW reported that work had been done to investigate the communality of data sources used in the WIMD across the UK: it had been determined that ONS and census data was the main contributor, so data should be available on a UK-wide basis in a majority of cases. It was noted however, that interpretation in a UK-wide context was a separate concern.

5.13. Members were reminded of discussions between UKPISG and the UK IMD Group that had taken place in 2007, in which UKPISG had submitted a set of questions to the group around the appropriateness of use in that UK-wide context. It was recalled that the UK IMD Group's response had indicated that it was preferable to take information directly from the census, rather than to draw on the IMDs for UKPI purposes. The concept of rankings within each of the four indices was also noted as adding complexity to a UK-wide concept. Members also recalled a more recent study comparing the four indices and the effects of making comparisons between them.

ACTION: Secretariat to circulate a copy of the relevant 2007 UKPISG papers/minutes which documented previous engagement with the UK IMD Group, to be shared with UKPITG members by correspondence.

ACTION: HEFCW to circulate a link to the more recent study of indices comparisons, to be shared with UKPITG members by correspondence.

ACTION: Secretariat to provide feedback to the next meeting of UKPISG that progress was being made in relation to the use of IMDs UK-wide, through examination of historical documentation and academic research.

6. Progress to date on the review of the benchmarking approach (UKPITG 16/03, plus oral updates)

6.1. UKPITG members leading on the four areas of the review work updated the group.

Work area (a) - Independent assessment of the statistical approach to the benchmarking

6.2. JW updated the group and noted that previous discussions had focussed on a proposal to issue an invitation to tender with a view to commissioning an academic to lead the required assessment. It was reported that JW had since engaged with the ONS methodology unit, who were said to be keen to undertake the assessment work and who would offer a number of benefits:

- + Since UKPIs are Official Statistics, a formal review by ONS would carry a great deal of weight and credibility.
- + An ONS review would likely be less costly and more efficient in terms of selection processes required to formulate a small review team.
- + The benefit of academic statistician involvement would still be delivered if ONS felt that expertise beyond their own was required.

6.3. UKPITG agreed that their preferred approach would be for the ONS methodology unit to undertake the work, and to do so during April/May 2016. However, it was noted that restructuring within the unit had resulted in the introduction of a new project approvals process. This process was new and untested, which meant that the timescales for gaining the required approvals was unknown and so the point at which work might commence was unclear. However, UKPITG noted that procurement processes involved in a commissioning model could prove just as time consuming as waiting for the ONS approvals. On the basis that the request for the work had already been placed with the ONS, and the wider benefits of securing their involvement, UKPITG agreed to pursue this option and await the outcome of ONS' approvals processes.

6.4. UKPITG agreed that the costs of the work would be split across the four UK nations according to the usual model. JW would communicate the required contributions for each part of the UK once they were known from the ONS.

ACTION: JW to provide UKPITG members with an understanding of the costs of the work, and the contributions required of the four UK nations, as soon as they were known.

Update subsequent to the meeting: the ONS approval process has cleared the benchmarking assessment and therefore ONS will commence this work in April 2016.

Work area (b) - Review of the principles employed in the selection of factors to include in benchmarking calculations

6.5. HEFCE reported that a literature review was now underway in support of this work area, and in its early stages. The focus was not academic papers (as work area (a) would do this), but rather the practical application of principles and other examples of use and practice.

ACTION: HEFCE to provide an updated report on their literature review at UKPITG's next meeting.

Work area (c) - Review of the methodology used to define groupings used within benchmarking factors

6.6. HEFCW reported that a literature review was now underway in support of this work area, and in its early stages. The focus had so far been on the past papers of UKPISG and UKPITG meetings, as well as an internet search looking at examples of other practice.

ACTION: HEFCW to provide an updated report on their literature review at UKPITG's next meeting.

Work area (d) - User consultation with regards to the benchmarking approach used within UKPIs

6.7. An update on the work had been provided electronically by CW in advance of the meeting. Members were asked to consider the groups that had been suggested to date, and comment on their appropriateness, or on any omissions by correspondence.

ACTION: UKPITG members to consider the groups suggested by CW, and provide any comments to the secretariat as soon as possible.

7. Next steps in the review of research UKPIs (UKPITG 15/09†)

7.1. MG introduced the paper and outlined the background to the review process to date. In particular, it was noted that the indicators outlined within the paper had arisen as a result of roundtable discussions with an expert group, and from UKPISG's interpretation of the priority development areas for research UKPIs. These were: citation-based measures; PGR student success measures; and diversity measures for research student and staff populations. Given the intention to publish experimental research statistics in December 2016, the group were alerted to the need for particular consideration of: the availability of expertise and resource within UKPITG member organisations; any requirement to call upon external expertise; and any known previous work undertaken in the given area.

a. Expertise

HEFCE noted that they had expertise in relation to each of the three proposed measures, but that this expertise was largely restricted to knowledge of issues for England and English institutions. Two specific issues which were known to extend UK-wide included defining the relevant populations for inclusion in the measures, and the appropriate timing for measuring a student's background characteristic(s).

HEFCW noted that their in-house experience was very limited, but that they had had some involvement in citation-based measures through a previous engagement with Elsevier. BIS noted a similar position in terms of their abilities to contribute.

DELNI reported that they did not have any direct history with any of the proposed measures, and as such no expertise that they could contribute.

SFC indicated that colleagues had some experience and knowledge relating to each of the proposed measures. Known issues included a concern about citation-based measures, and that consideration of PGR student success and diversity had not been considered on exactly the same basis as in England.

UUK noted that the three proposed measures were all areas of interest, but that the organisation had limited experience in terms of defining and developing metrics themselves.

b. History and previous work undertaken

Members agreed that each would provide an outline of their organisation's previous work with regards to the three measures proposed and the issues they covered. These outlines should be circulated to UKPITG by correspondence, and should include an indication of ability to contribute some resource to the development process. In particular, HEFCE would provide a description of the two approaches that they had used to date in relation to published measures of PGR success rates, and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

ACTION: UKPITG members to each document any existing work or measures in the areas proposed for experimental research statistics, and circulate to the secretariat before the end of March 2016.

c. Requirements to call upon external expertise

Members agreed that there was a need to engage both Research Councils UK (RCUK) and the Equalities Challenge Unit (ECU) in a future discussion of measures to be developed in the three areas proposed. UKPITG members were asked to identify any specific contacts within these and any other relevant bodies, to the secretariat. It would be desirable for RCUK and ECU representatives to attend a future meeting, and to provide the group with a presentation of their own work in the same areas along with any known issues or considerations.

ACTION: Secretariat to secure the attendance of RCUK and ECU representatives at the next meeting of UKPITG, including the preparation of an appropriate briefing note for those participants.

7.2. Members noted that their discussions had not covered the issues of production, process and coverage, included in the recommendations of paper UKPITG 15/09. It was considered that a clearer understanding of what the new research measures might be, and how UKPITG would actually progress developmental work, were required before those more detailed issues could be examined.

ACTION: UKPITG to return to issues of process and production for experimental research statistics at their next meeting.

7.3. UKPITG also acknowledged that their current workload involved the development of new WP and research measures, and a fundamental review of the benchmarking approach. As a result it was considered likely that initial consideration could not be given to lower priority areas of development for research UKPIs (including impact and access) until 2017. Members agreed that they would revisit the development requirements in early 2017, with a view to forming an indication of likely timings for development work thereafter.

ACTION: UKPITG to return to lower priority areas of development for research UKPIs in early 2017, and at that point in time establish a time scale for the development work.

8. Any other technical issues related to the UK Performance Indicators (Oral item)

8.1. There were no technical issues or changes to discuss.

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

9.1. Members agreed that paper UKPITG 15/09 proposed as exempt should be considered as exempt from publication on the basis that it related to an ongoing review in development. A publication date with respect to this paper would be agreed by the UKPITG at a future meeting.

ACTION: HESA to publish the agreed non-exempt papers from this February 2016 meeting on their website alongside associated content relating to governance of the UKPIs.

10. Date of next meeting – Thursday 7th April 2016

10.1. The group would next meet on Thursday 7th April 2016.

11. Any other business

11.1. BIS requested clarity on the ownership of the UKPIs, and the extent of Government's responsibility and accountability for their release and quality assurance. Members were invited to note that the UKPIs were owned by the four funding bodies for higher education, who held responsibility and accountability for the measures. Although Official Statistics, the UKPIs were separate to the statistical first releases HESA published and BIS' role with regard to the quality of the statistics was fulfilled through their membership of the UKPITG.

ACTION: HEFCE to share original documentation of the funding bodies' ownership of the UKPIs with members by correspondence.

11.2. JW reminded the group that he had represented UKPITG on UKPISG with HESA represented on that group by their Chief Executive. It was now proposed that JW would represent both of these parties in a dual role on the UKPISG. Members agreed that there was no conflict of interest in JW occupying this dual role, and that the shared secretariat of the two groups helped to diminish any risk of misrepresentation of UKPITG discussions. JW confirmed that he would preface his contributions to UKPISG discussions with an indication of the role from which he is speaking, and would keep his role under review should any conflicts of interest arise.

Meeting closed 15.00

Actions arising:

Paragraph 2.1: HESA to publish the minutes of UKPITG's December meeting on their website alongside the UK Performance Indicators and associated content.

Paragraph 3.2: UKPITG to provide a UKPISG with a more comprehensive analysis of the potential options available with regard to suppression thresholds for the employment UKPIs.

Paragraph 4.7: HEFCE to provide an understanding at the next meeting of UKPITG as to the approaches to imputation and missing data used by other bodies in their statistical outputs.

Paragraph 4.8: BIS to provide an understanding at the next meeting of UKPITG as to any potential learning points arising from engagement with the ONS and from the HMRC data.

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Paragraph 6.4: JW to provide an UKPITG members with an understanding of the costs of the work, and the contributions required of the four UK nations, as soon as they were known.

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Paragraph 7.1: UKPITG members to each document any existing work or measures in the areas proposed for experimental research statistics, and circulate to the secretariat before the end of March 2016.

Paragraph 7.1: Secretariat to secure the attendance of RCUK and ECU representatives at the next meeting of UKPITG, including the preparation of an appropriate briefing note for those participants.

Paragraph 7.2: UKPITG to return to issues of process and production for experimental research statistics at their next meeting.

Paragraph 7.3: UKPITG to return to lower priority areas of development for research UKPIs in early 2017, and at that point in time establish a time scale for the development work.

Paragraph 9.1: HESA to publish the agreed non-exempt papers from this February 2016 meeting on their website alongside associated content relating to governance of the UKPIs.

Paragraph 11.1: HEFCE to share original documentation of the funding bodies' ownership of the UKPIs with members by correspondence.