

The Higher Education and Research Bill: implications for UKPIs

UKPISG 16/01

Issue

1. To begin to understand the possible implications of the Government's Higher Education and Research Bill for the UK Performance Indicators, their governance and future development.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that UKPISG consider whether there is a need to review the UKPISG's Terms of Reference, membership, and potential future scope of remit if the Government's reforms go ahead.

Discussion

3. Following a November 2015 Green Paper, the Government published their Higher Education White Paper "Success as a knowledge economy: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice" on 16 May 2016¹. This White Paper sets out a range of reforms to the higher education and research system in England, and the 2016 Queen's Speech at the state opening of Parliament on 18 May announced the Higher Education and Research Bill within the government's legislation for the year ahead.
4. The vision set out in the white paper includes reforms intended:
 - to boost competition and choice in higher education,
 - to promote teaching excellence and social mobility,
 - to deliver good value for students, employers and taxpayers,
 - to boost productivity in the economy,
 - to strengthen the UK's world-class capabilities in research and innovation.
5. In particular, the following reforms laid out in the White Paper may have implications – direct or indirect – for the UK Performance Indicators, their governance and future development:
 - establishing the Office for Students (OFS) as the new regulator for all higher education providers in England, in place of HEFCE;
 - establishing UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) as a single, strategic funding body for research that will incorporate the functions of the seven Research Councils, Innovate UK, and HEFCE's research funding functions;
 - implementing the Teaching Excellence Framework;
 - establishing new safeguards to protect students and the sector's reputation, with a risk-based quality system and approach to regulation;

OFS and UKRI

6. The planned reforms would create two bodies whose main focus is on different parts of the sector, with the OfS' focus on students (and by implication, widening participation, learning

¹ Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-success-as-a-knowledge-economy-white-paper>

and teaching, and student outcomes), and the UKRI's focus on research and knowledge exchange. Currently the UKPISG have oversight of Performance Indicators that cover all of these aspects. In addition, the White Paper's approach to risk-based quality assessment will also require the OFS to make greater use of key indicators in annual provider monitoring in England and there is potential overlap with the functions of the UKPIs and the UKPISG.

UK coverage of the UK Performance Indicators

7. The White Paper is almost exclusively focussed on changes in England, with the functions and scope of the UKRI being the exception. The proposed changes for England may make it increasingly more challenging to identify and implement UK-wide decisions due to diverging policies. With significant reforms already being established in England, the timescales for required development of metrics and indicators in England are likely to significantly outpace the rate of development achieved in UKPIs in recent years.

Teaching Excellence Framework

8. As discussed in the White Paper, the Teaching Excellence Framework is already being established and will make heavy use of metrics and indicators. The TEF technical consultation discussed how many of the methodologies and indicators contained within the UK Performance Indicators are being used and modified in the development of the TEF.
9. The TEF is developing its own governance structures to cover decisions on all aspects of the TEF including the membership of and processes around TEF panels, and the features of the metrics and indicators used. With regard to indicators and metrics, some decisions already made by the TEF oversight groups mirror the historical decisions of the UKPISG. However there is some divergence between the two governance groups including: the TEF proposal to provide significance markers using lower thresholds than those used in the UKPIs (2 standard deviations/percentage points rather than 3); and the classification of those not available for employment, travelling or, retired to be included in the not employed group (in TEF employment outcome metrics) compared to being placed in a neutral group for UKPI purposes.
10. The TEF oversight groups have also asked for reviews of some data sources that will be used by TEF. This review has been carried out by the ONS and an interim report was published in May 2016. The report is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-framework-interim-review-of-data-sources> . The Government's technical consultation on the TEF is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/teaching-excellence-framework-year-2-technical-consultation> .
11. On the basis that the data sources and methodologies intended for use in the TEF overlap significantly with those used in the UKPIs, UKPITG members considered ONS' interim report and any potential implications for existing UKPIs or their future development at their June 2016 meeting. In particular:

“Recommendation 3: Further analysis of the characteristics of responders and non-responders should be carried out. If differences are found, determine weights to adjust for the differences. One way of exploring this is to follow-up on non-responders and to persuade them to fill-in the questionnaires; this is usually not easy. However, with HESA student record data, there is already a rich source of student data available to use to identify whether characteristics differ between responders and non-responders.

Traditionally, weights can be used to adjust for differences between responders and non-responders.”

12. UKPITG members concluded that they were unable to provide a clear direction to UKPISG on suppression and/or imputation approaches within the UKPIs at the present time. Without an understanding of the conclusions made in the final ONS assessment and of the decisions taken with regard to the approach to be implemented in TEF, UKPITG considered that some fundamental questions remained unanswered.
13. UKPITG felt that necessity would demand that approaches adopted by TEF in relation to suppression and/or imputation would be underpinned by a strong evidence base which demonstrated a material impact on the indicators and their interpretation. If this were to transpire, it may be difficult to oppose full application of a suppression/imputation approach (across the source dataset and all measures drawn from it). In the absence of such an evidence base, risks relating to the transparency and complexity of indicators may begin to counter some of the perceived benefits of a given suppression/imputation approach.
14. Given all of these points, members may wish to consider the Terms of Reference of the UKPISG, membership, and potential future scope of the group if these reforms go ahead. These are given in Appendix 1.

Further information

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

Appendix 1 – Terms of membership

Terms of reference for the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG)

1. The UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) was established in 1998, and is made up of representatives of the funding bodies, HESA, government departments, HE institutions and other interested bodies. The group's original brief was to take forward the recommendations of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, and the request of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to develop appropriate performance indicators and benchmarks for families of institutions with similar characteristics and aspirations.
2. Since its foundation the UKPISG has overseen the implementation, management and ongoing development of the institutional UK Performance Indicators for higher education through the advice it provides to the UK funding bodies and other relevant bodies. The group will continue in this role, which includes defining and keeping under review the role and relevance of an appropriate set of UK Performance Indicators. This will involve conducting reviews and receiving such reports and papers as to enable the group to:
 - a. Be responsible for the publication of the UK Performance Indicators on an annual basis.
 - b. Agree new UK Performance Indicators, taking technical advice from the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (PITG) as appropriate.
 - c. Identify any changes in the coverage of the existing UK Performance Indicators.
 - d. Consider changes in definition of the existing UK Performance Indicators, taking technical advice from the UKPITG as appropriate.
 - e. Advise on the use and interpretation of the UK Performance Indicators to stakeholders, including to HEFCE, as appropriate.
3. Through its members and in its own right the UKPISG will be expected to:
 - f. Maintain a sufficient technical understanding of the UK Performance Indicators for HE in order that the group take informed policy decisions.
 - g. Receive the advice of specialists (in addition to the members of the UKPITG) when it is called upon for particular topics.
4. The UKPISG will:
 - h. Normally meet one to two times per year.
 - i. Carry out a review of the membership of the UKPISG and the UKPITG every five years, or earlier if such a review is deemed necessary by the Chair of the UKPISG.

Membership

5. The chair of the UKPISG will be a senior member of staff from the Higher Education Funding Council for England and will be nominated by HEFCE.
6. The membership of the UKPISG should be those who are suitably placed to take a strategic view with regard to issues surrounding UK Performance Indicators for HE. Members

should be able to balance their policy expertise and knowledge of context with a capability for broad understanding of technical issues. Organisations should take these factors into account when making nominations.

7. The members of the UKPISG will be nominated by the following organisations, and need not necessarily be officers of the organisations:

- h. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
- i. Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland
- j. GuildHE
- k. Higher Education Funding Council for England
- l. Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- m. Higher Education Statistics Agency
- n. Higher Education Wales
- o. National Union of Students
- p. Scottish Funding Council
- q. Scottish Government
- r. UCAS
- s. Universities UK
- t. Universities Scotland
- u. Welsh Government
- v. Office of Fair Access.

8. The chair of the UKPISG will endorse (or not) the nominations made.

9. The chair of the UKPITG will also be a member of the UKPISG. They have primary responsibility for managing the interaction between the two groups and will be an individual who is able to strike a balance between policy and technical articulation.

10. Each organisation listed will have one member of the UKPISG apart from the organisations from which the chairs of the UKPISG and the UKPITG are drawn. These organisations (currently HESA and HEFCE) will be invited to nominate one member each to the UKPISG in addition to their member fulfilling the role of chair.

11. Observers are permitted at each meeting at the discretion of the chair of the UKPISG.

12. The secretariat of the UKPISG and the UKPITG will be the same to ensure consistency in communication and content. They will aid the chairs in the interactions between the two groups, although the UKPITG chair has primary responsibility for ensuring such interaction. HEFCE will normally provide the secretariat.

Annex A: Terms of reference for the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG)

1. The UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) is a sub-group of the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) that was established in 2010. Made up of technical representatives drawn from the funding bodies, HESA, government departments and other interested bodies, the UKPITG provides advice to the UKPISG on technical aspects of the institutional UK Performance Indicators for higher education.
2. Through the advice it provides, the UKPITG will support the UKPISG in its role in the implementation, management and ongoing development of the UK Performance Indicators. Drawing upon the knowledge and expertise of its members the UKPITG will:
 - a. Advise the UKPISG on the technical development of new UK Performance Indicators.
 - b. Advise the UKPISG on implementation of changes to coverage of existing UK Performance Indicators.
 - c. Ensure that the definitions of existing UK Performance Indicators remain fit for purpose, to include alerting the UKPISG when there may be policy considerations of decisions made regarding the definitions of existing UK Performance Indicators.
 - d. Advise the UKPISG on interpretation of existing, and potentially new, UK Performance Indicators.
 - e. Advise the UKPISG regarding decisions that relate to the UK Statistics Authority's conditions for Official Statistics.
3. Through its members and in its own right the UKPITG will be expected to:
 - f. Take forward any other technically-related recommendations of the UKPISG directed to the UKPITG.
 - g. Receive the advice of specialists called upon for particular specialist technical topics.
 - h. Maintain a policy perspective on the context within which the UK Performance Indicators operate.
4. The UKPITG will:
 - i. Normally meet a minimum of two times per year; where it will be ensured that timings of meetings are compatible with providing up-to-date advice to the UKPISG.

Membership

5. The chair of the UKPITG will be a senior member of staff from the Higher Education Statistics Agency and will be nominated by HESA. They will be the sole member of the UKPITG who will also be a member of the UKPISG. They are responsible for managing the interaction between the two groups and will be an individual who is able to strike a balance between policy and technical articulation. They will also provide an institutional perspective on technical matters.
6. The other additional members of the UKPITG will be nominated by the following organisations:
 - h. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

- i. Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland
- j. Higher Education Funding Council for England
- k. Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- l. Higher Education Statistics Agency
- m. Scottish Funding Council
- n. Scottish Government
- o. UCAS
- p. Welsh Government
- q. A single member drawn from Universities UK, Universities Scotland, Guild HE, and Higher Education Wales.

7. The UKPITG is a sub-group of the UKPISG and as such the latter will have a role governing the relationship between themselves and the UKPITG. In particular, the UKPISG will endorse (or not) the member organisations nominated to join the UKPITG.

8. Each organisation listed will have one member of the UKPITG apart from HESA as the organisation from which the chair of the UKPITG is drawn. HESA will be invited to nominate one member to the UKPITG in addition to their member fulfilling the role of chair.

9. Observers are permitted at each meeting at the discretion of the chair of the UKPITG.

10. The secretariat of the UKPISG and the UKPITG will be the same to ensure consistency in communication and content. They will aid the chairs in the interactions between the two groups, although the UKPITG chair has primary responsibility for ensuring such interaction. HEFCE will normally provide the secretariat.