

UK Performance Indicators Steering Group

Minutes of the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group held at 13.00 on Friday, 17 June 2016 at Finlaison House, London

Present:

Members:	Christopher Millward	Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) [Chair]
	Neha Agarwal	Office for Fair Access (OFFA), attending on behalf of David Barrett
	Colin Campbell	Universities Scotland
	Colette Eley	Welsh Government
	Celia Hunt	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)
	Kieran Mannion	Department for Education and Learning, Northern Ireland (DEL)
	Kevin Mundy	Universities Wales
	Professor David Phoenix	Universities UK
	Martin Smith	Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
	Jonathan Waller	Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and Chair of the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG)
	Adam Wright	National Union of Students (NUS)
Secretariat:	Alison Brunt	HEFCE
	Mark Gittoes	HEFCE

Apologies:

	Mark Corver	UCAS
	Paul Rasch	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
	Ryan Scott	Scottish Government

1. Welcome from the Chair

1.1. Following introductions, the chair welcomed members to the meeting and gave apologies received from those members unable to attend.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting, and matters arising

2.1. Members approved the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting. It was noted that actions arising from the minutes were mostly addressed by items on the agenda for this meeting.

ACTION: HESA to publish the minutes of UKPISG's October 2015 meeting on their website alongside the UK Performance Indicators and associated content.

3. Report from the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (Oral item)

3.1. JW updated the group on some of the items discussed by UKPITG since the steering group had met in October 2015. UKPITG had met three times in this period, largely to process the large volume of development work that they had been tasked with, and which would be covered elsewhere in the agenda of this meeting.

3.2. UKPITG had also considered a number of other areas of work at the request of UKPISG. These included:

- a. Reconsideration of the potential for use of the indices of multiple deprivations (IMD) within the UKPIs

JW noted that UKPITG had reviewed and revisited the existing material related to the use of the national IMDs within UK-wide indicators, including that provided to the Performance Indicators Steering Group by the UK IMD Group in 2007. It was reported that the Social Mobility Advisory Group's work in this area was ongoing and that HESA and JISC were working together on a project that might also prove relevant in the fullness of time. As such, a paper was planned for the next meeting of UKPITG and a further update would therefore be available for the next meeting of UKPISG.

ACTION: UKPITG to provide further updates to UKPISG as to the potential use of national IMDs within the UKPIs at future meetings.

- b. Visibility of the principles agreed for the UKPIs

It was reported that HESA had updated their website to improve this content.

- c. Completion of the PREVINST variable in 2014-15 data returns

UKPISG were invited to note that concerns over the completeness of this data, and its potential impact upon the robustness of the state school information within the Widening Participation UKPIs, had proved largely unfounded. Following the change in reporting practice to require the use of UKPRN codes within this field, this proved to be an issue isolated within a small number of providers and following some work with UCAS to patch data appropriately, the data proved fit for publication.

3.3. It was also noted that HESA's Chief Executive had expressed a preference for JW to represent HESA as a member of UKPISG, and that JW accepted this role. It would mean that JW performed a dual role for UKPISG: as HESA's representative member and as Chair of UKPITG, and that this introduced potential for conflicts of interest. Members agreed that they were happy for JW to fulfil this dual role and that the risks of conflicting interests were manageable. It was confirmed that JW would take on this role, taking care

to always provide clarity on the role in which he was commenting within UKPISG discussions.

4. The Higher Education and Research Bill: possible implications for UKPIs (UKPISG 16/01)

4.1. CM introduced the paper, and the group engaged in a wide ranging discussion of the issues raised within it. Of particular focus was the question of sustaining the good reputation of UKPIs (as established, robust and evidence-based) in the current landscape for HE data and metrics and its quick pace of change and development.

4.2. Members representing the devolved administrations reflected on their nations' and their providers' desire for UKPIs to remain UK-wide, addressing common and long-standing policy priorities. At the same time those members recognised the impacts that England-specific developments were having on the wider landscape for HE data and metrics, as well as the impacts of policy divergences and increasing use of localised institution-level performance measures in their own administrations.

4.3. HESA reported that they were increasingly seeing policy divergence introducing divergence into data models and infrastructure, and noted that the development work undertaken by UKPITG had further highlighted the challenges of UK-wide data sources, definitions and concepts. It was acknowledged that the need for clarity around data development, coverage, gaps and interpretations was already heightened and being enhanced in the current landscape. The use of commercial, regulatory and market languages was felt to provide a good example of the need for clarity on guidance and communication regarding these aspects of HE data and metrics, as well as on the uses to which they are put.

4.4. The implications of overlapping remits across OfS, UKRI and other existing UK-wide sector agencies were also considered to require particular care in order to ensure a consistent and joined up approach to data and metrics. Similarly, careful navigation of the remits of multiple groups now in existence in the data landscape, serving similar but different purposes and operating with different national coverages, would also be required.

4.5. Members reiterated their aspiration for a core set of UK-wide, comparable and long-standing indicators with a clear UKPI identity. It was felt that the group should seek to maintain an appropriate balance of its priorities; retaining clarity of UKPISG's strategy and remit, including the extent to which they are responsive to and/or shaping the wider direction of travel. Proposals related to the Teaching Excellence Framework's metrics were cited as an example in this regard; UKPISG considered that they should maintain their existing approach, in which they make an evaluation of the underpinning evidence base, and continue to take their own, informed decisions based on its merits.

4.6. On the basis of their discussions, members identified a need to consider their Terms of Reference at their next meeting; the nuances that they contain and the membership of the group. For example, members noted that the absence of representatives of FECs and APs within the group's membership required attention, as would the representation of UKRI or a related body (depending on the progression of the Higher Education and Research Bill through parliament).

4.7. In particular, the group expressed a desire to reinforce within those Terms of Reference the roles and responsibilities of the group with regard to reviewing the strategic need and fit of UKPI indicators. Within these Terms of Reference it was also agreed that UKPISG would seek to establish a form of words that provided a statement on their overall approach (including the role of UKPITG) and the long-standing nature of the policy interests the UKPIs are serving. That statement should be robust on features of UKPIs that UKPISG wish to preserve in order to effectively serve the strategic priorities of the indicators.

ACTION: UKPISG to consider the group's Terms of Reference at their next meeting, with a view to reinforcing their roles and responsibilities with regard to reviewing the strategic need and fit of UKPI indicators.

5. Publication plans for new WP indicators (UKPISG 16/02†)

5.1. MG introduced the paper and noted that UKPISG had previously given a clear steer on the need for new WP indicators to be made available during Summer 2016, in order to fill the gap created by the removal of the NS-SEC based indicator and provide fuller coverage across the spectrum of disadvantage experienced by students.

5.2. In line with previous discussions by UKPISG, members were invited to note that the intention was to publish the new measures as Experimental Statistics and to facilitate the availability of a diverse but manageable basket of WP indicators that would allow comparisons and relationships between measures relative to a user's interests.

5.3. The group discussed three key areas of concern.

Articulation of underpinning assumptions and definitions

5.4. Members were concerned that both providers and end users would struggle to participate effectively in the feedback loop that underlies the concept of Experimental Statistics (in order to evolve new statistics' definitions into a stable form that can be migrated into an Official Statistic).

5.5. Discussion focussed on the proposed indicator examining the proportions of students from selective schools, where the group felt that complexities of the secondary school sector and the associated parameters of its definitions and classifications, would require a level of expert user knowledge that could hinder the testing mechanisms afforded by Experimental Statistics status. Although the indicators were transparent in making use of existing Government definitions, how would users understand what the statistics were actually telling them if they didn't understand the nuances of the how schools came to be considered as 'selective'. Providers in particular would have difficulty testing the statistics when they did not have access to the underlying national pupil database records.

5.6. It was considered that the descriptions of the new indicators did not provide adequate detail of the assumptions, definitions and parameters of the technical methodology underpinning their creation. This information would be important for the contextualisation and onward interpretations of the measures, and UKPISG requested that UKPITG provide them with a more complete articulation in advance of any publication of the new indicators.

ACTION: UKPITG to provide UKPISG with an articulation of the assumptions and definitions underpinning the new WP indicators, by correspondence and in advance of any publication.

UK-wide coverage

5.7. The group acknowledged that progress had been made with respect to the development of new WP indicators applicable to providers in England, but that the same progress had not been achieved in relation to providers in the devolved administrations. UKPISG felt that this position proved problematic for them.

5.8. Discussion focussed on the need to balance the scope within the principles for UKPIs to introduce nation-specific indicators and the desire for UKPIs to deliver UK-wide coverage. Given the continuing development of the equivalent indicators covering providers in other parts of the UK, members were concerned that a staged introduction (as indicators came on stream) and initial publication with coverage limited to a single nation could have a damaging impact on the value and relevance of the statistics in a UK-wide context.

5.9. The group considered the level of national coverage that they felt would be appropriate for the introduction of a new UKPI measure, and confirmed that they wished to prioritise the UK-wide principle of UKPIs. It was proposed that within their revisit of their Terms of Reference at the next meeting, they take a formal view of the level of national coverage of the four UK administrations that would need to be achieved at the point of first publication of new indicators.

ACTION: UKPISG to consider their Terms of Reference at their next meeting, with a view to formalising the level of national coverage required at the point of first publication of new indicators.

Timing of further development work

5.10. Building on the discussion of differing progress across the UK with respect to the development of new WP indicators, UKPISG were keen to better understand the country-specific data access and indicator feasibility issues in more detail. The group requested that clarity be provided as to the current state of development and the levels of resource investment required to achieve publication.

5.11. Recognising the risks associated with a slow pace of development (real or perceived), members discussed the need to show development and progress in order to remain relevant and continue to contribute to the wider dialogues regarding the current landscape for HE data and metrics. It was suggested that in the event that outstanding development work relating to coverage of new WP indicators in the devolved administrations extended beyond a year, publication based on England-only coverage could be acceptable. Otherwise, their preference would be to delay publication until such time in the next year that more complete coverage could be delivered.

ACTION: The Secretariat to canvass UKPITG members representing the four UK administrations to provide an understanding of the country-specific data access and indicator feasibility issues in more detail, to include clarity on specific timescales within which publication could be delivered.

ACTION: The Secretariat to update UKPISG by correspondence on the scale and timing of outstanding development work relating to coverage of new WP indicators in the devolved administrations

5.12. The recommendation included in the paper was rejected.

6. UK Performance Indicators for alternative providers and further education colleges (UKPISG 16/05†)

6.1. MG introduced the paper and noted the interaction of this topic with the discussion under the previous agenda item. The group acknowledged that while there was a concentration of APs based in England, they also existed in other parts of the UK, and that the absence within UKPIs' coverage of HE students registered at FECs was equally an issue across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It was considered that the priority was to seek extended coverage of the existing indicators to the different provider types at the earliest opportunities.

6.2. Members considered that their concerns regarding the UK-wide coverage of outputs including APs and FECs differed to the concerns that had been expressed with regard to the introduction of new WP indicators, as the outputs involved included both new and established indicators. The group agreed a principle such that:

- a. New UKPI indicators would require an agreed level of national coverage of the four UK administrations to be achieved at the point of first publication of those indicators, or a realistic expectation that this level of coverage would be delivered within 12 months of the first publication.
- b. The coverage of established UKPI measures would be extended at the earliest opportunities, and incrementally by country if required.

6.3. The group endorsed the recommendations included within the paper.

ACTION: HESA and HEFCE to work together to enable publication of UKPI employment measures for HE students at English APs and English FECs as experimental statistics during Autumn 2016, and publication of UKPI non-continuation measures as experimental statistics during Spring 2017.

7. Progress to date on the review of the benchmarking approach (UKPISG 16/03†)

7.1. JW introduced the paper and invited members to note the progress that was being made.

7.2. The group discussed a further update on the work that the ONS would be undertaking, and members noted that the UKPI approach to benchmarking had not been included in the scope of the work that ONS had completed so far, and so would be an entirely new view from them. The group recorded the need to be clear that UKPISG would not necessarily be drawn by the conclusions that ONS had reached in their work for BIS. In particular, they noted that to the extent that their review work was independent from considerations for the TEF, UKPISG would be able to respond accordingly to ONS' conclusions for UKPI purposes specifically.

ACTION: UKPITG to provide further updates to UKPISG as the benchmarking review work progresses.

8. Progress to date on the review of research UKPIs (UKPISG 16/04†)

8.1. MG introduced the paper and gave an update on the development work described in the paper and currently ongoing within UKPITG. It was noted that the steering group's view as to the timing of the release of new research UKPIs aligned with the one that they had taken earlier in the meeting, and that publication would not occur before an agreed level of coverage was achieved with respect to the UK nations included in the new indicators.

8.2. Members noted the development work undertaken by UKPITG to date, and recorded their support for the sharing of work and responsibility across the sub-groups that were being established to further progress these developments. The group noted their concern for the onward use of student-based research indicators with respect to year-on-year variation and granularity for institutions with small cohorts of PGR students. It was requested that UKPITG take particular care in their future reports back to the steering group to include a full and formal assessment of the issues of volatility and small cohorts.

ACTION: UKPITG to provide further updates to UKPISG as development work on research UKPIs progresses, taking care to address issues of volatility and small cohort sizes within their reports.

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

9.1. Members agreed that the papers proposed as exempt from immediate publication should not be published until such time as the indicators or review outputs to which they refer are suitably developed to allow their release into the public domain.

ACTION: HESA to publish paper UKPISG 16/01 on their website alongside the UK Performance Indicators and associated content.

10. Date of next meeting

10.1. The group felt that they should next meet in Autumn 2016. It was likely that UKPISG would meet in October or November 2016, with dates to be agreed by correspondence.

11. Any other business

11.1. There were no items of any other business.

Meeting closed 15:05

Actions arising:

Paragraph 2.1: HESA to publish the minutes of UKPISG's October 2015 meeting on their website alongside the UK Performance Indicators and associated content.

Paragraph 3.2.a: UKPITG to provide further updates to UKPISG as to the potential use of national IMDs within the UKPIs at future meetings.

Paragraph 4.6: UKPISG to consider the group's Terms of Reference at their next meeting, with a view to reinforcing their roles and responsibilities with regard to reviewing the strategic need and fit of UKPI indicators.

Paragraph 5.6: UKPITG to provide UKPISG with an articulation of the assumptions and definitions underpinning the new WP indicators, by correspondence and in advance of any publication.

Paragraph 5.9: UKPISG to consider their Terms of Reference at their next meeting, with a view to formalising the level of national coverage required at the point of first publication of new indicators.

Paragraph 5.11: The Secretariat to canvass UKPITG members representing the four UK administrations to provide an understanding of the country-specific data access and indicator feasibility issues in more detail, to include clarity on specific timescales within which publication could be delivered.

Paragraph 5.11: The Secretariat to update UKPISG by correspondence on the scale and timing of outstanding development work relating to coverage of new WP indicators in the devolved administrations

Paragraph 6.3: HESA and HEFCE to work together to enable publication of UKPI employment measures for HE students at English APs and English FECs as experimental statistics during Autumn 2016, and publication of UKPI non-continuation measures as experimental statistics during Spring 2017.

Paragraph 7.2: UKPITG to provide further updates to UKPISG as the benchmarking review work progresses.

Paragraph 8.2: UKPITG to provide further updates to UKPISG as development work on research UKPIs progresses, taking care to address issues of volatility and small cohort sizes within their reports.

Paragraph 9.1: HESA to publish paper UKPISG 16/01 on their website alongside the UK Performance Indicators and associated content.