

# Responses to “Invitation to comment on future changes to the UK Performance Indicators”, and consideration of UKPISG’s next steps

UKPISG 15/04

## Issue

1. In July 2015, through a letter to the heads of higher education providers, the four funding bodies for higher education invited comment on future changes to the UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs)<sup>1</sup>. In the letter, respondents were invited to comment on the extended coverage and scope agreed for UKPIs, as well as on the proposed new Widening Participation (WP) indicators.
2. Members are invited to consider the summary of responses to the “invitation to comment” and to consider any next steps that are required.

## Recommendations

3. That members identify the next steps with regards to the development of research UKPIs, and any specific work that they wish the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group to embark upon.
4. That members consider whether and when further dialogue with the sector may be required in relation to the next steps in the development of research UKPIs.
5. That members agree a timetable for the publication of the responses to the invitation to comment.

## Discussion

6. In July 2015, through a letter to the heads of higher education providers, the four funding bodies for higher education invited comment on future changes to the UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs)<sup>2</sup>. In the letter, respondents were invited to comment on the extended coverage and scope agreed for UKPIs, as well as on the proposed new Widening Participation (WP) indicators.
7. The UKPISG secretariat received 55 responses to the invitation to comment. The total numbers of respondents by type are set out in Table 1. The majority of responses from institutions came from their planning offices and departments.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2015/CL\\_172015/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2015/CL_172015/)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2015/CL\\_172015/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2015/CL_172015/)

**Table 1: Numbers of respondents by type**

<b>Respondent type</b>		<b>Number of responses</b>
English HEIs/APs		35 (including 2 APs)
Scottish HEI		4
Welsh HEI		6
Northern Irish HEI		3
Further Education College		4 (one of which represented the views of a group of 5 local colleges)
Representative bodies		1
Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission		1

Note: 'HEI' = 'higher education institution' 'AP' = 'alternative provider'.

8. In its consideration of the responses received, the UKPISG secretariat has considered the quality of the arguments advanced rather than a simple numerical account. However, it is relevant to group responses – as in Table 1– to understand the constituency of respondents and the distribution of response types.

### **Coverage and scope**

#### The proposals

9. UKPISG agreed that higher education registered at further education colleges, sixth form colleges and alternative providers should be incorporated into UK Performance Indicator measures at the earliest opportunities.

#### Respondents' comments relating to coverage and scope

10. Approximately two thirds of respondents (64 per cent) made comments about the proposed coverage and scope of the UKPIs; of these respondents, 89 per cent welcomed, supported or agreed with them. However, most respondents, even if they supported the proposals, raised concerns about the possible impact of extending the coverage of the performance indicators on benchmarks published within UKPIs. Paragraphs 11 to 14 below elaborate on the arguments advanced.

11. To enable valid comparison of benchmarks, some respondents suggested that data for different types of HE provider should not be aggregated, on the basis that it might be appropriate to calculate benchmarks only on the basis of data for 'similar' institutions. The nature of these responses appears to indicate that the benchmarking approach employed within UKPI publications is not fully understood.

12. It was suggested that HE provider type should be clearly distinguishable, thus enabling the data to be split easily by institution type. Provision of information about the number of each different type of HE provider contributing to an institution's benchmark was also considered useful by some of those commenting.

13. One respondent raised a concern about the timing of the publication of UKPIs incorporating provision registered at alternative providers (APs). It was considered unlikely that the HESA data relating to APs, and becoming available for use in 2016 publications, (relating to academic year 2014-15) would be of sufficient quality and coverage to facilitate their inclusion.

14. Another respondent focussed on the reporting of HE provision delivered by FECs: support for UKPIs to report on the institution at which the student is registered, rather than the institution through which the provision is delivered, was expressed. Additionally, it was requested that incorporation of HE in FE provision into the non-continuation measures take full account of students transferring between HEIs and FECs.

## **Widening Participation**

### The proposals

15. The widening participation indicator based on National Statistics Social Economic Classifications 4 to 7 will appear for the last time in the 2016 publication of the widening participation UKPIs: it will not be published in 2017 and subsequent UKPI publications. There is no suggestion that collection of NS-SEC information within HESA student data collections will cease: the data will continue to be available to interested users.

16. The development of widening participation indicators based on the following measures and priorities will be explored in the second half of 2015 by the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG), with the ambition of publishing them as 'experimental statistics' in 2016:

- schools with low numbers of pupils progressing to further study
- proportions of entrants from different school or further education institution types
- pupils in receipt of free school meals (with particular consideration of the extent to which variations in eligibility criteria for free school meals across the UK nations may be considered fundamental)
- household residual income of entrants to higher education.

17. The UKPITG will also explore the development of nation-specific measures of area-based disadvantage for possible introduction to the 2016 publication of UKPIs.

### Respondents' comments relating to widening participation

#### **a. Removal of UKPI based on National Statistics Social Economic Classifications (NS-SEC) 4 to 7**

18. Almost half (45 per cent) of those who responded to the invitation to comment expressed support for the proposal to remove the widening participation indicator based on NS-SEC, on the basis that they agreed that the information it provided was not sufficiently robust. A similar proportion of respondents made no comment on the removal of the NS-SEC indicator, and 11 per cent of respondents had concerns about, or were opposed to, its removal.

19. Among some of the respondents supporting the proposal, there was a suggestion that it would be preferable to have a transition period where both NS-SEC and the new experimental WP indicators are published, until the new UKPIs have had time to become fully established. A number of respondents indicated their support for the proposal that alternative measures of

students' social backgrounds be developed over the longer term as a replacement for NS-SEC, and suggested measures focused on economic and/or social deprivation.

20. Some respondents with concerns about the removal of the NS-SEC indicator urged UKPISG to instead take steps to improve the quality of the data underpinning this measure. Suggestions included working with UCAS to increase the response rate and reliably code the parental occupation question to NS-SEC classes; reporting data on the basis of the three-class version of the NS-SEC framework; undertaking analysis to understand whether non-response to parental occupation differs by social background; and combining NS-SEC with 'low participation neighbourhood' or 'first in family' to give more robust measures.

21. Some of the reasons given for opposition to this proposal included:

- A view that 'compelling evidence that the issues with data quality are sufficient to justify abolishing the indicator' had not been presented.
- One respondent noted that 'discontinuing the indicator would be less problematic if the new suite of indicators provided sufficient information to track outcomes for young people from working class backgrounds, but we do not think it does'. This aligns with a sense from another respondent that, as an individual measure of disadvantage, NS-SEC had some value relative to other group-based WP indicators. And with the view of another respondent who felt that rural poverty and disadvantage, in particular, were not measured effectively through other measures.

22. A number of respondents sought clarification about whether NS-SEC data would continue to be collected by UCAS and returned to HESA. In particular, use of this indicator in Access Agreement and other institutional monitoring/targeting was highlighted by some respondents, who felt the loss of continuity was a retrograde step.

23. As noted at paragraph 15 there has been no suggestion that collection of NS-SEC information within HESA student data collections will cease: the data will continue to be available to interested users.

#### **b. Development of experimental statistics**

24. Almost half of all respondents (44 per cent) indicated that they supported the development of a new, wider set of widening participation experimental statistics. Some of the key comments about the development of experimental statistics included:

- Some respondents felt that new UKPIs should adhere to some specific principles. The nature of these responses, and the principles described, appear to indicate a potential lack of awareness of the principles that UKPISG have already established for UKPIs.
- Most respondents who commented here felt that experimental indicators needed to be clearly contextualised and published as a distinct set of statistics, separate from the current UKPIs.
- A concern was expressed that the experimental indicators suggested are based on 'schools data' while a significant proportion of HE entrants are not direct school leavers. Respondents indicated that they would welcome measures that are relevant to mature, part-time and distance-learning students. The potential to examine low prior educational qualifications or occupational status was mentioned by some respondents.

- Alternative measures suggested by respondents included: first in family to access HE; indicators for retention, success and progression of WP students; learning gain and value-added; measures based on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and Income Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI); ethnicity; disability; housing tenure/type.

25. A number of respondents indicated that they would appreciate clarification from UKPISG about where the underlying data to be used in the new indicators would be sourced from, and how institutions will be given access to this data. Several respondents noted that it will be important to provide further information and consultation around how these PIs might be used in the context of the development of the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework.

**i. Schools with low numbers of pupils progressing to further study**

26. Almost half of all respondents (44 per cent) specifically commented on the proposal to develop experimental statistics based on schools with low numbers of pupils progressing to further study. Of those who commented on this proposal, ten (38 per cent) indicated that they were broadly supportive of developing this as an experimental statistic. Some of the comments in support of the proposal indicated that the resultant UKPI could provide institutions with supporting data for use in contextual admissions, as well as allowing them to better target their outreach and schools liaison work.

27. Three of those commenting on this proposal indicated that they were opposed to the development of this as an experimental statistic. There was a concern that the data likely to be used as the basis for this statistic was not of sufficient quality, was incomplete and poorly maintained. Some respondents were concerned that the data for this UKPI would only capture the 'previous institution' attended, which may be an FEC attended for repeating or sitting A-levels, rather than the post-primary school attended over a number of years. One respondent was concerned that the locus of responsibility for interventions and progress rests predominantly with schools and the DfE, and was therefore out of the direct control of HEIs and their interventions.

28. One respondent highlighted the regional variation that exists in the numbers of local schools with low progression rates; another commented that progression rates are likely to be heavily influenced by pupils' exam results. Both respondents suggested that these differences would need to be taken into account in the benchmarking or contextualisation of the indicators.

29. Many respondents sought further clarification about how this indicator would be measured, areas where clarification was sought from the UKPISG included:

- The definition of 'further study' and whether this indicator would track all post-16 progression routes, including 11-16 schools whose pupils then transfer to post-16 providers for level 3 study, or relate only to those students progressing from institutions providing post-16 education.
- Where the school destinations data would be sourced for this measure, and how frequently the classifications of schools would be updated (as there could be a time-lag for rapidly improving/failing schools. Controlling for the size of the school would also be necessary.

- A small number of respondents queried whether the indicator would describe admissions to a given institution from schools that have low progression to HE generally, or to that HE provider specifically?

## **ii. Proportions of entrants from different school or FE institution types**

30. Almost half of all respondents (44 per cent) specifically commented on the proposal to develop experimental statistics based on the proportions of entrants from different school or FE institution types; of those who commented on this proposal, 25 per cent indicated their broad support for this indicator, and 21 per cent indicated their opposition.

31. Respondents from Northern Ireland identified a concern that this UKPI would not have any relevance due to the structure of the post-primary education system in Northern Ireland.

32. Some of the wider concerns raised about this proposal included:

- That the measure may reveal more about the educational structure of the recruitment area, than about the institution – the respondent commenting here felt that the context would need to be made clear if this statistic was to be a useful measure. A lack of clarity as to how comparisons of this nature would be helpful and interpreted nationally was also expressed.
- That the indicator may not prove sufficiently nuanced to be an effective measure of widening participation or disadvantage as it does not provide information on the profile and background of the students recruited from within each school type. It was also suggested that the measure may give little indication of the performance of individual schools.
- That there could be difficulties in classifying school types when schools can convert from one type to another or schools change names.

33. Several respondents requested that further clarification was sought from the UKPISG about the definition of ‘different school types’, how the information about school type would be captured and coded, and how this indicator would fit in with the existing state school indicator.

## **iii. Pupils in receipt of free school meals**

34. Half of all respondents (51 per cent) specifically commented on the proposal to develop experimental statistics based on pupils in receipt of free school meals; of those who commented on this proposal, 36 per cent indicated their broad support for this indicator; and 40 per cent opposed the proposal or had concerns.

35. Several respondents were concerned about the disparities known to exist between the proportion of students in receipt of free school meals and those who are eligible for free school meals but do not take them up. Respondents expressed a clear desire that, if this measure goes ahead, it reflect the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals rather than in receipt of them.

36. A couple of respondents raised concerns about the potential volatility of using this as an indicator due to its reliance on Government policy and spending in this area. For example, any further extension of the free school meals policy to pupils of all ages, as has happened for all KS1 pupils in England, was considered to have the potential to affect longevity and robustness of this UKPI over the longer term.

37. There was a further concern from some respondents about an over-emphasis of this UKPI on students coming straight from school and the relevance of this UKPI as an indicator for mature students. It was considered that, without targeted WP intervention, pupils receiving free school meals are less likely than their more affluent counterparts to apply for selective institutions and that this could be a concern in terms of the interpretation of the measure. A couple of respondents suggested that eligibility for Pupil Premium might be considered as a better measure to use within the experimental statistics.

38. There were a number of areas where further clarification was sought from the UKPISG, and these included:

- Detail on how pupils who become eligible/ineligible throughout their education may be treated within this indicator, and at what point in time data would be referenced.
- Whether this indicator would include a measure of the length of time a student had been in receipt of free school meals, or whether eligibility for free school meals at any point up to the age of 16 would be sufficient to count towards this indicator.
- What source this information would be collected from, and if/how the data would be made available to institutions.

#### **iv. Household residual income**

39. Almost half of all respondents (46 per cent) specifically commented on the proposal to develop experimental statistics based on household residual income; of those who commented, 44 per cent indicated their broad support for this indicator; and three (12 per cent) indicated their opposition.

40. Some of the concerns raised about this proposal included:

- A few respondents raised concerns about whether this indicator would be representative of the entire student body. For example, noting this data may not be available for most entrants from higher income household: one institution commented that over half of their new entrants had not had their household income assessed by Student Finance England. The measure was also felt to have limitations as an indicator for mature students.
- A few respondents commented that household residual income does not equate to disposable income due to differences in living costs depending on location, and expressed a desire for this measure to be adjusted to reflect regional differences.
- It was noted that this information is not routinely available until after the admissions process is complete, so one respondent acknowledged that it would not be possible for institutions to use it to provide additional contextual information for recruitment or to target pre-HE outreach work.
- There was a concern expressed by some respondents about the use of non-HESA data source, and potential for difficulties with collation and robustness of information. One respondent claimed that the measure has been brought into disrepute by the rules around single parent support as students only need to declare the income of the parent they are living with, even if their other parent is providing support.

41. Areas where further clarification was sought from the UKPISG included:

- Further detail was felt to be needed to understand the precise definition of 'household residual income' and how it would be calculated. Some respondents felt that it would be imperative that the measure aligned with Student Loans company definitions and calculations.
- A suggestion was made by one respondent that 'unknown' income should be included in the high income category and not excluded from the denominator - as parents from high income backgrounds are more likely to opt out of sharing financial information than parents from low income backgrounds.
- Confirmation that data protection concerns had been considered and clarity over any intention to include this information in the HESA student record.
- Detail around the benchmarking approach to be employed with regard to this indicator and whether benchmarks would be adjusted for location. It was suggested that consideration be made of the costs of living in different localities and travel costs (in particular for those students from rural areas).

**c. Development of nation-specific measures of area-based disadvantage**

42. Almost 40 per cent of respondents commented on this proposal; two thirds of those who commented on this indicator supported the proposal, and there were no respondents indicating their opposition to the proposal.

43. A general concern expressed by respondents who commented on these indicators was that use of different measures by different nations could lead to additional complexity for HE providers and mean students from across the UK are potentially treated inconsistently. An inability to make UK-wide comparisons was also considered unhelpful by some.

44. Several respondents spanning the UK expressed their support for the development of area-based measures which considered the 40 per cent most deprived, or the bottom two quintiles. In England, such an approach was said to add value by bringing the UKPIs into alignment with HEFCE's Student Opportunity funding. And respondents commenting in relation to Scotland expressed their support of the use of Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation at either SIMD20 or SIMD40.

45. One respondent commenting in relation to Wales expressed concern about using Communities First areas as a measure given the concentration of these areas within specific regions of Wales. Another suggested that a student being in receipt of an education maintenance allowance at level 3 could be added to the information used within the indicator. Support for the use of the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure was expressed by those commenting in relation to Northern Ireland.

46. One respondent commenting in relation to England made a suggestion that an alternative geographical proxy based on a smaller scale (for example the Index of Multiple Deprivation) may prove beneficial and provide further context. Another respondent queried the intentions with regard to an area based measure in England, and also noted whether consideration of an IMD or similar measure might be beneficial in terms of aiding comparability across the UK.

## Research

### What is happening?

47. An expert group would explore the latest issues and interests relating to research UK Performance Indicators, as well as new or current measures of research activity that could be of use or interest.

### Respondents' comments relating to research

48. Just over two thirds (69 per cent) of respondents commented on the proposal to review research UKPIs. Of those who commented, approximately half indicated that they supported the proposal, a number of respondents simply noted the proposal, and no respondents indicated their opposition. Many respondents would welcome the opportunity to be involved in the further development of these indicators.

49. Some of the comments received about this proposal included:

- Some respondents felt that it would be important for the development of research UKPIs to acknowledge the wider research environment. One commented on the potential in to include college-based HE research in the UKPIs. Another acknowledged the role of applied research in terms of innovation, and highlighted the importance of links between universities and business and industry with regards to research activity. A third highlighted the role of research UKPIs in facilitating international comparisons.
- Several respondents commented in relation to the potential duplication of existing processes or approaches. Consideration of the research assessment undertaken through the REF was highlighted in this regard, as was the work being undertaken by the Snowballs Metrics project.
- The use of standard measures was also commented upon. Some felt that those measures used in the REF (research income and PhD/research student completion and retention) seemed sensible, while others highlighted a desire for a balance of input, process and output measures.
- It was considered by many that the method of calculation needed to be transparent and simple, and that research indicators should be developed from existing and preferably annual datasets (there was a feeling from some respondents that the timeliness of REF measures would be problematic). However, there was also acknowledgement that indicators would need to account sufficiently for institutional differences and discipline bias.
- A number of respondents felt that research grant applications should not be included as it could have a negative influence over behaviours. It was felt by some that success rate by funding source could be a useful indicator. One respondent said that they would welcome the reintroduction of the previous indicators (using QR funding as the denominator), to enable like-with-like comparisons.
- Other measures suggested included: those based on field-normalised citations; research degree qualification indicators which included each of home, EU and international students; measures of return on investment from inputs; diversity measures, research intensity (in terms of understanding institutional commitment to research and

research-informed teaching). One respondent felt that any academic staff indicators should be based on contracted research FTE.

- One institution noted that they had developed metrics for measuring research based on the research degree-awarding powers (RDAP) guidance, and that they would be happy to share experience with UKPITG if this was considered useful.

50. Respondents were generally concerned that the expert group needed to be fully representative of the differing HE providers across the sector, and indicated that they would welcome further information about the membership of the expert group and its remit.

### **Other feedback received**

51. The consultation responses also included a number of comments which did not relate to any of the specific proposed indicators. Some of the key points are summarised below:

- A number of respondents identified a need for measures developed as UKPIs to possess specific qualities. These included: robust and high quality data sourced from existing data collections; longevity and alignment with long-term policy interests; clarity of purpose and audience; and the ability to provide benchmarking. Members will recognise that assessments of conformity with the principles for UKPIs will address all of these issues raised.
- The omission of any coverage of the employment UKPIs and teaching quality measures (referenced in the 2013 fundamental review of the UKPIs) was recognised by some respondents. Strong support for review and refinement of the employment UKPIs was reiterated, and the emergence of the Teaching Excellence Framework was cited as requiring the close engagement of UKPISG on a range of matters, including that of previously suggested teaching quality indicators.
- A wish to see the membership of the UKPITG expanded to include experts on social measures and WP from within HE providers was also expressed.
- One respondent noted that the administrations in Scotland and Wales already included those with caring responsibilities in their widening access approaches. It was suggested that it might therefore be sensible to construct a broader basket of measures for England.

### **Further information**

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