

Guiding principles for the UK Performance Indicators

1. Recommendation 4¹ for the future of the UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs), as accepted by the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG), states that:

‘The key features of the current UKPI approach should be retained. A set of guiding principles should be developed (building on those from a 2006 review of the UKPIs) and used by the UKPISG to judge the appropriateness both of making changes to the existing UKPIs and of introducing any new UKPIs suggested for the future.’

2. In response to the recommendation outlined above, and building on suggestions made by the ‘Fundamental review of the UK Performance Indicators’, a set of guiding principles for UKPIs was proposed by the UKPISG. It is anticipated that these principles will be used by the UKPISG to guide its governance of the UKPIs, and in particular to assess the utility of the UKPIs to their key audiences. Any new or amended UKPI will be assessed against each of the principles listed below to explore whether it should (and, to some extent, could) be produced at sector and individual institution level, or at sector level only. It should be noted that UKPISG intends the principles to be guiding rather than binding.

3. The UKPISG notes the collaborative nature of its governance of the UKPIs, with representation from Government, funding bodies and the sector. It is within this context that UKPISG reserves the right to consider the merits of any new or amended indicators on a case-by-case basis as necessary. The group also reserves the right to revise the set of principles over time, as required or appropriate to ensure its continued successful governance of these measures. Notwithstanding this, the group notes and will stand by Recommendation 9 of those recommendations accepted by UKPISG, which states that:

‘The introduction of any additional UKPIs or amendments to existing UKPIs must involve further dialogue with the sector to ensure buy-in.’

Proposed guiding principles for UKPIs

A: Coverage and scope

A1: UKPIs should normally seek to reflect the totality of higher education (HE) provision and institutions across the UK.

A2: UKPIs should measure what matters, notably underpinning long-term policy goals for the sector and reflecting the core mission of a significant proportion of institutions. In some areas sector-level only measures might be more appropriate than those at institution level.

A3: UKPIs should, as standard, provide an aggregate picture of UK HE and allow institutions to compare themselves to other institutions in the different nations across the

¹ The recommendations accepted by the UKPISG are listed at Annex A of ‘Invitation to comment on future changes to the UK Performance Indicators’ (HEFCE Circular letter 33/2013) available at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/cl332013/#d.en.85233>

UK. In addition there may be a requirement for a small number of nation-specific indicators that reflect differing national contexts.

A4: Taken together, the UKPIs and their associated benchmark values should provide information in the public domain that is not otherwise easily available. There must be a value to a wide range of stakeholders in publishing the UKPI and benchmark values at institutional level.

B: Quality of data

B1: UKPIs should be produced by a credible and independent organisation.

B2: UKPIs should be evidence-based and statistically robust, conforming to recognised best practice in the production of statistical information. Data used for the indicator should be of high quality collected in a consistent and fair way across the sector; they should have a good sample base, use consistent definitions, and use a transparent methodology.

B3: UKPIs should normally have longevity/continuity, enabling a time series to be developed and the ability for users to conduct longitudinal analysis.

B4: UKPIs should be produced in a regular and timely fashion and where possible, be produced annually. However it is acknowledged that it may not be sensible for all new UKPIs to be produced annually, especially where to do so would be costly or put too much of a burden on institutions.

C: Dissemination

C1: The UKPIs and their associated benchmark values should be free and available to all.

C2: Details of the methodology and benchmarking process used in the production of the UKPIs should be published for the benefit of institutions, bodies acting on behalf of institutions, government bodies and agencies and any other interested parties. No institutional-level results should be published before giving the participating higher education providers an opportunity to correct errors of fact.

C3: Publication of the UKPIs and their associated benchmarks should include appropriate guidance and contextualisation so as to facilitate accurate interpretation of the measures and the outcomes that they seek to represent.

D: Benchmarking and enhancement

D1: UKPIs should be directional and attributional measures. There must be general agreement as to what represents a positive or a negative outcome, and that movement in values can be attributed to changes in sector or institutional activity rather than solely reflecting wider extraneous factors. This enables users to understand the direction of travel of the sector and of individual institutions, and so UKPIs can be used to underpin policy development and evaluation as well as institutional performance enhancement.

D2: There should be an expectation that institutions will take note of their indicators and benchmarks, look carefully at any differences occurring with a view to further exploring areas of weakness in their institutional performance, and ultimately strive to improve.

D3: UKPIs and their associated benchmarks should not be presented in such a way as to imply any institutional ranking. They should provide information for external policy-making stakeholders that is suitable for informing policy, and information for institutions that is suitable for internal use.

D4: The benchmarks provided in association with UKPIs should take account of context and differing institutional characteristics, thereby supporting fair comparison of indicators between institutions.

E: Burden of data collection

E1: Where possible, existing data sources should be used to develop new UKPIs and/or to improve existing UKPIs. Any proposal to collect further data should be carefully costed through dialogue with the sector or their representatives, and justified in terms of anticipated use and usefulness. The UKPISG should be mindful that the UKPIs should not place undue burden on the sector.

F: Influence on behaviour

F1: Publishing UKPI and benchmark values at institutional level must not knowingly create perverse incentives or lead to perverse behaviour.

F2: UKPIs should comply with all relevant legislation and evolving best practice, particularly in the areas of statistical disclosure control and support of fair competition between institutions.