

## **UK Performance Indicators Technical Group**

Minutes of the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) held at 11.00am on Monday, 18 November 2013 at Northavon house, Bristol

### **Present:**

Members:	Jonathan Waller	Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) [Chair]
	Gordon Anderson	Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
	Heather Brown (attending on behalf of Matthew Bollington)	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
	Suzie Dent	HESA
	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)
	Chris Williams	Welsh Government
Secretariat:	Alison Brunt	HEFCE
	Mark Gittoes	HEFCE

### **Apologies:**

Awaiting nomination	UCAS
---------------------	------

## **1. Welcome from the chair**

1.1. Following introductions, the chair welcomed members to the meeting.

## **2. Minutes of the previous meeting**

2.1. The group were invited to note that the minutes of the previous meeting had been accepted by correspondence as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

2.2. On account of it being superseded by the fundamental review of the UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) undertaken during 2013, it was acknowledged that a broad summary of the business of the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) and the UKPITG over the previous year was no longer appropriate. As such, the group agreed that the action arising at paragraph 2.4 of the previous minutes had been discontinued.

### **3. Matters arising**

3.1. The action arising at paragraph 3.2 of the previous minutes requested that HESA provide an indication of the impact of the change to the standard DLHE population (XPDLHE02), which had been agreed in December 2012. Members were invited to note that approval of the change had not been contingent on the analysis of its impact, and that the update was being provided for information only. It was noted that the change only affected tables E1c and E1d.

3.2. HESA indicated that the impact of the change had been very limited, with only two or three institutions seeing a substantial increase in their standard DLHE population as well as movement in their benchmark(s). This movement was said to be small, with no change to the associated significance markers, and HESA informed the group that they had not received any queries from institutions about the results.

3.3. HESA provided the group with a similar assessment of another previously-agreed change to the tariff calculation (XTARIFF). Again the change was reported to have had a limited impact, with differences observed felt to be in-line with previous year-on-year differences. As with XPDLHE02, HESA had not received any queries from institutions about the differences in the results which could be taken as a further sign of the change having had minimal impact.

3.4. The group were invited to note that if the approval of a change was not contingent on analysis of its impact then there was a risk that the UKPITG undermined confidence in its decision making by undertaking such analysis following a change having been made. Members agreed that such analyses should be avoided in future unless there was a very strong case for undertaking it.

### **4. Update from the September meeting of the UKPISG (Oral item)**

4.1. JW was not able to attend the September 2013 meeting of the UKPISG so MG updated the group on the key points of discussion. It was noted that the steering group's substantive item of consideration was the findings of the fundamental review of the UKPIs, and as this was covered elsewhere in the UKPITG meeting, it was not discussed here.

4.2. Members were invited to note that the indicators as well as the technical and steering groups had all been renamed to include the prefix 'UK', for the reasons outlined in the minutes of the UKPISG meeting. Namely, to make a greater distinction between the abbreviation 'PI' for Performance Indicators and for Public Information, and to better articulate the UK-wide nature of these measures.

4.3. The group had previously noted the possibility of OFFA and the NUS being represented on the UKPITG. The UKPISG had now discussed the matter and agreed that they would seek advice from these two organisations on a case by case basis when it was pertinent to the issue(s) under consideration. OFFA would not be invited to join the technical group's membership as their remit is limited to England, rather than UK-wide. In light of the finding of the fundamental review that students should not be considered a direct audience of the UKPIs, the steering group agreed that NUS representation was not appropriate either.

4.4. Acknowledging notable areas of shared work, the UKPISG had agreed to implement a process of giving and receiving annual updates to and from both the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG) and the Higher Education Data and Information Improvement Programme (HEDIIP). This process would be managed by the members of the UKPISG who had links to those groups.

## **5. Findings of the review of the UK Performance Indicators, and the UKPISG's response (UKPITG 13/09†)**

5.1. MG introduced the paper, noting that, in broad terms, the review of the UKPIs had found that fundamental change was not required, that the UKPIs were valued as a way to measure HE and the current approach to the measures was appropriate. The group were directed to the series of recommendations that the steering group had accepted and committed to implement, as well as to three strands of forthcoming work proposed by the UKPISG.

5.2. The group considered the recommendations (listed as Annex A to the paper) in turn. It was noted that an expansion of the UKPIs in the long term, in line with Recommendation 6 (to explore the feasibility of broadening the coverage of the UKPIs into new areas), would introduce the potential for different and wider uses and users of the indicators. A consequence of this could be a more significant role for the UKPISG and the UKPITG with respect to presenting and communicating the information that the measures provided.

5.3. Members noted that there were three strands of forthcoming work proposed by the steering group.

5.4. The first strand of work related to establishing a series of guiding principles proposed for the UKPIs, which would involve engaging with institutions across the UK in late 2013 to gather their feedback. The UKPITG welcomed this engagement with the sector.

5.5. The second strand of work related to conducting in-depth reviews of the current set of UKPIs. This process would begin with the UKPISG seeking the views of a range of relevant users and stakeholders in relation to a proposal from the UKPISG that discontinuation of the current research output indicators was considered. Members noted that the research area was one of particular political sensitivity, and that careful consideration would need to be given to any new measures that might be introduced to replace the current ones, in the event that they were discontinued. The UKPITG agreed that they would seek to provide further advice to the UKPISG on this matter once feedback from users and stakeholders had been received. The review of the current widening participation UKPIs that they had been asked to undertake would be discussed in the next agenda item.

5.6. The final strand of work concerned the introduction of new UKPIs and the group noted that the UKPISG did not intend work to begin until the first two strands of work had been completed. Members agreed that the delayed start of this strand of work was a sensible decision on account of time and resource requirements, and as such recognised that it did not require further discussion at this meeting.

## 6. In-depth review of the WP UK Performance Indicators (UKPITG 13/10†)

6.1. The group first considered their own role in an in-depth review of the WP UKPIs. They noted that they had been asked to provide an options analysis with respect to the WP UKPIs, but questioned whether they had a sufficiently explicit set of policy objectives to work to. Members noted that these indicators were very high profile and that there could be an expectation of changes being made in relatively short timescales. It was suggested that it would be ambitious to make any substantial changes in time for the 2015 publication of the UKPIs, and that implications regarding timescales for change should be borne in mind whatever direction the review process took.

6.2. Of particular concern was the belief that the UKPITG had neither the specialist technical expertise nor the available resource to bottom out an in-depth consideration of the possibilities regarding WP UKPIs. Concerns were also raised that the UKPITG may provide advice that was too prescriptive or limited relative to that which may be obtained from other experts in this area (be this consultants, Government statisticians or academic researchers). It was proposed that the best options with regards to the WP UKPIs may only become clear through a wider consideration of the possibilities, and a process more detached from those with a direct involvement with the current measures.

Action: HEFCE and HESA to research potential organisations, groups, committees or departments who may be able to provide the required expertise to undertake in-depth review of the potential measures of disadvantage for WP UKPIs. The research would consider different review structures to pool expertise in different areas of WP: entirely collaborative or with a central organisation coordinating activity. UKPITG representatives to provide comment or insight as possible.

6.3. The group then considered the existing WP UKPIs in relation to their fit with the principles proposed for the UKPIs (and discussed in paragraph 5.3).

6.3.1. Coverage and scope: While the existing indicators all satisfied principles A2 and A4, they did not currently fulfil principle A1. In particular, the indicators did not currently extend to all students, providers (notably, HE in FE), modes or levels of study. Additionally, the indicator relating to low participation neighbourhoods (LPN) also failed to satisfy principle A3 as the POLAR3 measure was not accepted with respect to institutions in Scotland.

6.3.2. Quality of data: With the exception of principle B2, the existing WP UKPIs were felt to satisfy the principles around quality. The indicators relating to National Statistics Socio Economic Classification (NS-SEC) were considered to fail principle B2 outright on the grounds of the underlying data quality being widely acknowledged as poor. It was acknowledged that there was scope to improve the quality of data used for the indicators relating to students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), and that it would be worthwhile to check that DSA was still consistently defined across the UK nations. The classification of state and independent schools could be also more coherent. The LPN measures were considered to fulfil this principle, though acceptability of the measure with respect to Scottish institutions remained an issue.

Action: Representatives of the four UK administrations to confirm eligibility definitions for DSA in their nation and report back to the UKPITG at the next meeting.

- 6.3.3. Dissemination: The existing indicators were considered to fulfil all of the principles relating to dissemination. Members noted that there was scope for continual improvements to guidance and contextualisation in line with principle C3.
- 6.3.4. Benchmarking and enhancement: The UKPITG expressed concern that careful interpretation of principles D1 and D2 was required. In particular, explicit reaction by an institution (D2) may not be feasible, or desirable, with respect to some of the more precise measures such as those relating to DSA or NS-SEC. There were also concerns regarding the state school indicators, where directional measures as described with respect to principle D1 could reach a level at which they were too high. However, the group acknowledged that there were more fundamental concerns regarding the state school UKPIs and otherwise, the principles were satisfied by the existing WP UKPIs.
- 6.3.5. Burden of data collection: Members agreed that the principle was fulfilled by the existing WP UKPIs, but noted that reviews of the measures should seek to determine any potential to reduce the burden of their production.
- 6.3.6. Influence on behaviour: The UKPITG noted that at present the risks regarding perverse behaviours were limited to the LPN measures. These behaviours were most likely to concern the targeting of particular areas, as opposed to the targeting of particular types of students, and this gave rise to concerns regarding the measure's adeptness to capture the specific, individual-level characteristics that were of primary interest. Members noted that using a range of measures had and could help prevent such perverse behaviours.

6.4. In light of their discussion of the existing WP UKPIs, the UKPITG agreed that a paper should be drafted and agreed by correspondence ahead of the next UKPISG meeting in February 2014. This paper would outline the fit of the existing WP UKPIs with the proposed principles, highlighting the weaknesses identified above and their potential impact on those principles, as well as implications for the onward review and development of the indicators.

Action: UKPITG secretariat to draft a paper to the UKPISG outlining the fit of the existing WP UKPIs with the proposed principles for these measures, to be agreed with the UKPITG by correspondence.

6.5. Areas proposed by the UKPISG for future coverage within WP UKPIs were then discussed in turn, with a focus on current data availability in each of those areas.

- 6.5.1. Area-based disadvantage: The UKPITG noted that the area-based WP UKPI was currently based on the POLAR3 classification, which was not generally accepted with respect to institutions in Scotland. However, and in line with the proposed principles regarding dissemination of UKPIs, they noted that it would be helpful to clarify the specific reasons why the

POLAR3 classification was not considered a meaningful measure UK-wide.

The group then discussed the potential use of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Members noted that the IMD measures had been discussed in relation to UKPIs previously, and at that time had been found to be unsuitable for such use. It was agreed that those previous discussions should be revisited, but members recalled issues relating to the comparability of the IMD measures across the UK. In particular, care was needed on the basis that the IMD were constructed from a portfolio of different indicators. Some of the indicators within the portfolio are unlikely to be relevant to the purposes of the UKPIs (such as those relating to air pollution or access to GPs). Members were also unclear as to the availability of data relating to some of the constituent indicators, which may prove to be available at different geographies and UK-wide. It was noted that exploring IMD, their constituent indicators and data availability would not be an insignificant undertaking. The UKPITG should seek to establish whether the Four Nations Deprivation Working Group could provide any advice or comment on the potential for use of IMD in this context.

Action: Representatives of the four UK administrations to explore links and/or representation on the Four Nations Deprivation Working Group with a view to securing advice regarding the use of IMD on a UK-wide basis, their constituent indicators and data availability.

More generally, the UKPITG noted a more fundamental concern that area-based measures could cover students from a wide range of backgrounds, and advantaged students also lived in disadvantaged areas. Members recognised that individual-based measures overcame this issue but were notably more sensitive to data quality issues and, potentially, perverse behaviours.

6.5.2. School-based disadvantage, free school meals: Members noted that school-based measures were subject to similar issues as area-based measures with respect to capturing a broad range of backgrounds. In particular, schools' catchment areas could be very wide and, as such, represent a range of individuals' backgrounds.

Notwithstanding these issues, there was potential to consider a number of school-based measures. Free school meals (FSM) were available UK-wide but there were likely to be considerations around UK-wide comparability of both eligibility criteria and recording of eligibility and/or take-up of FSM. The feasibility of calculating school-based HE participation measures UK-wide would need to be explored. Similarly, the calculation of school attainment levels would need to consider UK-wide comparability, particularly given the divergence of GCSEs across the UK nations and the study of Highers in Scotland. UK-wide comparability and

changes to national policies were likely to be considerations with respect to the potential for measures based on school leaving age.

- 6.5.3. Social class / socioeconomic status: The group reinforced the concerns raised in paragraph 6.3.2 regarding the quality of data collected with respect to NS-SEC, and its increasing unsuitability for use in the UKPIs on this basis.
- 6.5.4. Parental income: Members noted that while it could be feasible to make use of Student Loan Company data to derive an indicator relating to parental income, these data would be partial and potentially biased. Given the intention for UKPIs to reflect the totality of HE provision and populations, the partial coverage of SLC data may make them unsuitable for the purposes of UKPIs.
- 6.5.5. Sex, ethnicity, qualifications on entry: It was noted that these characteristics were collected routinely in administrative student data though there may be variations in data quality across providers and UK nations. However, in light of the discussion noted under paragraphs 6.5.1 and 6.5.2, the group noted that greater clarity was required with respect to the benefits and disadvantages of individual-based measures compared with group-based measures. Members agreed that they should seek a steer on how specific (or otherwise) the UKPI measures were intended to be before considering these characteristics further.

Action: UKPITG secretariat to draft a paper to the UKPISG reflecting the discussions regarding group-based measures compared with individual-based measures, and seeking the required steer regarding the intended focus of UKPI measures. The paper should be agreed with the UKPITG by correspondence and representatives of the devolved nations should be invited to outline the case for the POLAR3 classification not being a meaningful measure UK-wide.

6.6. Members noted a desire to consider the potential for longitudinal and relational measures of widening participation. That is, measures of disadvantage at the point of entry to higher education linked to measures of student retention and outcomes, and intersections of categories of disadvantage. The group were invited to note that DELNI were undertaking work to explore the feasibility of looking at disadvantage from the perspective of intersecting categories of disadvantage, and would report back to the UKPITG in due course.

Action: DELNI to prepare a paper for a future meeting of the UKPITG to report on the feasibility of looking at intersections of categories of disadvantage, when known.

6.7. Given some of the issues identified with respect to the existing indicators and the areas proposed for coverage within WP UKPIs in future, it was noted that a more detailed discussion of the priorities was required by the UKPISG where consideration was given to both the policy perspective and the known practicalities related to each priority.

## **7. Impact of increasing the suppression threshold for UKPIs (UKPITG 13/11)**

7.1. SD introduced the paper and informed the group that further analysis undertaken by HESA had shown that increasing the suppression threshold from 22.5 to 52.5 would lead to a notable loss of information provided by the UKPIs, relative to the gains in terms of disclosure control.

7.2. Members agreed that while there was little to justify an increase in the suppression threshold, development and review of the UKPIs should consider disclosure control when considering the splits of tables to be published. In particular, a characteristic should be justified as a split of a table as opposed to a benchmarking factor if it is considered worthy of distinct examination within the UKPI.

Action: The UKPITG to recommend to the UKPISG that the 2014 publication of the UKPIs should retain the suppression threshold of 22.5.

## **8. Options with regard to the use of linked pre-HE administrative data in the UKPIs (UKPITG 13/12†)**

8.1. The group agreed that, in light of the discussion regarding the in-depth review of the WP UKPIs, it was preferable to postpone this paper until a later meeting when clarity was available regarding the future policy objectives for the different sets of indicators.

Action: Paper UKPITG 13/12 to be carried forward to the agenda of a future UKPITG meeting.

## **9. Changes within factors used in the UKPI benchmarking groups (UKPITG 13/13)**

9.1. SD provided the group with a summary of the changes that had occurred within the factors used in the UKPI benchmarking groups. These related to a series of qualifications newly included in the UCAS tariff, and HESA's proposals for their inclusion in the qualifications on entry benchmarking groups. The introduction of a new version of the JACS coding framework for subject areas was also noted, but reported to have no impact on the subject area of HE study benchmarking groups.

9.2. Members noted the changes and agreed with the recommendation to retain the existing subject groups and amend the qualification on entry groups as proposed.

Action: The UKPITG to recommend to the UKPISG that the 2014 publication of the UKPIs should retain the subject area benchmarking groups and map the newly included tariff qualifications to qualification on entry benchmarking groups as proposed by HESA.

## **10. Publication dates of the 2014 UK Performance Indicators (UKPITG 13/14)**

10.1. SD introduced the paper and noted that members were being asked to highlight any issues or concerns regarding the dates which had been proposed. The group confirmed that they were not aware of any such issues and agreed that the proposed dates should be recommended to the UKPISG.

Action: The UKPITG to recommend to the UKPISG that the 2014 publication of the UKPIs should proceed according to the proposed time table.

## **11. Papers proposed as exempt from immediate publication (marked with †)**

11.1. The UKPITG agreed that sensitivities regarding the content of paper UKPITG 13/09 would cease once the review publications became available early in December 2013. As such, members felt that the paper should only be considered exempt from publication until that time, and agreed that when published, Annex C of the paper should simply reference the published review documents.

11.2. Members agreed that papers UKPITG 13/10 and UKPITG 13/12 should be considered exempt from publication until progress had been made in the areas that they covered. A publication date with respect to these papers would be agreed by the UKPITG at a future meeting.

Action: HESA to publish the agreed non-exempt papers from this November 2013 meeting on their website alongside associated content relating to governance of the UKPIs.

## **12. Date of next meeting**

12.1. Members agreed that the group would next meet in March 2014, with dates to be agreed by correspondence.

## **Meeting closed 13.00**

### **Actions arising:**

Paragraph 6.2: HEFCE and HESA to research potential organisations, groups, committees or departments who may be able to provide the required expertise to undertake in-depth review of the different elements of the existing and proposed areas for WP UKPIs. The research would consider different review structures to pool expertise in different areas of WP: entirely collaborative or with a central organisation coordinating activity. UKPITG representatives to provide comment or insight as possible.

Paragraph 6.3.2: Representatives of the four UK administrations to confirm eligibility definitions for DSA in their nation and report back to the UKPITG at the next meeting.

Paragraph 6.4: UKPITG secretariat to draft a paper to the UKPISG outlining the fit of the existing WP UKPIs with the proposed principles for these measures, to be agreed with the UKPITG by correspondence.

Paragraph 6.5.1: Representatives of the four UK administrations to explore links and/or representation on the Four Nations Deprivation Working Group with a view to securing advice regarding the use of IMD on a UK-wide basis, their constituent indicators and data availability. Relevant members to report back to the UKPITG at the next meeting.

Paragraph 6.5.5: UKPITG secretariat to draft a paper to the UKPISG reflecting the discussions regarding group-based measures compared with individual-based measures, and seeking the required steer regarding the intended focus of UKPI measures. The paper should be agreed with the UKPITG by correspondence and representatives of the devolved nations should be invited to outline the case for the POLAR3 classification not being a meaningful measure UK-wide.

Paragraph 6.6: DELNI to prepare a paper for a future meeting of the UKPITG to report on the feasibility of looking at intersections of categories of disadvantage, when known.

Paragraph 7.2: The UKPITG to recommend to the UKPISG that the 2014 publication of the UKPIs should retain the suppression threshold of 22.5.

Paragraph 8.1: Paper UKPITG 13/12 to be carried forward to the agenda of a future UKPITG meeting.

Paragraph 9.2: The UKPITG to recommend to the UKPISG that the 2014 publication of the UKPIs should retain the subject area benchmarking groups and map the newly included tariff qualifications to qualification on entry benchmarking groups as proposed by HESA.

Paragraph 10.1: The UKPITG to recommend to the UKPISG that the 2014 publication of the UKPIs should proceed according to the proposed time table.

Paragraph 11.2: HESA to publish the agreed non-exempt papers from this November 2013 meeting on their website alongside associated content relating to governance of the UKPIs.