

Incorporation of HE in FECs into future UKPIs

UKPITG 14/03†

Issue

1. The currently published UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) do not cover higher education registered at UK further education colleges (FECs), and this compromises their fit with an agreed principle for UKPIs that *“UKPIs should normally seek to reflect the totality of higher education (HE) provision and institutions across the UK”*.

Recommendations

2. That the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) provide advice to the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) on the data and collection issues associated with extending future sets of UKPIs to include HE registered at FECs.

Discussion

3. The 2013 fundamental review of the UKPIs¹ highlighted a desire from the sector to incorporate higher education provision at FECs and alternative providers into the UKPIs. This desire was reflected in the set of principles agreed by the UKPISG in response to the recommendations of that review process and supported by the sector.
4. At their February 2014 meeting the UKPISG considered the analysis undertaken by the UKPITG in November 2013 with regards to the fit of the set of existing WP UKPIs with the principles agreed for UKPIs. In relation to principle A1 that *“UKPIs should normally seek to reflect the totality of higher education (HE) provision and institutions across the UK”*, the UKPITG had made the acknowledgement that the current sets of UKPIs did not include higher education students registered at publicly-funded FECs nor at privately funded institutions (except University of Buckingham).
5. The UKPITG were asked to reconsider the incorporation of FECs within future UKPIs, with a particular focus on the data and collection issues related to such incorporation. A separate strand of work would explore some of the key considerations associated with the incorporation of HE provision registered at alternative providers within future UKPIs. This is not the first time that the UKPITG have considered the incorporation of FECs within the UKPIs, although previous consideration focussed very much on their incorporation within the set of UKPIs existing at that time².
6. There are a number of reasons why HE provision registered at FECs have not historically formed part of the coverage of the UKPIs including:

¹ “How should we measure higher education? A fundamental review of the Performance Indicators”, <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2013/ukpireview/#d.en.85232>

² Paper PITG 12/01 and the associated PITG minutes of 29 June 2013, available at http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2331&Itemid=141

- 6.1. The number of data sources that cover HE provision registered at FECs across the UK.
- 6.2. The early Performance Indicators focused on full-time first degree provision. At that time, the level of full-time first degree provision registered at FECs formed only a small minority of the total full-time first degree provision.

Previous discussion in this area

7. An interest previously expressed by HESA in obtaining HE in FEC data from all four administrations (for reasons beyond just the UKPIs) provided some scope for UK wide development of HE in FE indicators in the longer term. However, it has previously been recognised by the UKPITG there would be a number of challenges to be overcome first in terms of understanding the consistency, quality and availability of HE in FE data across the UK. Members have previously acknowledged that the value added by the incorporation of HE in FECs would only materialise if indicators could be produced that were consistent and considered appropriate across all of the UK administrations involved.
8. Members of the UKPISG agreed in February 2014 that consideration needed to be given to the effort required to increase coverage of the UKPIs relative to the information gained from such an increase. HE provision delivered in FECs was considered to be a substantial omission for England and Scotland whereby UKPISG felt that addressing the imbalance and providing more complete information would be of particular value.
9. However, HE in FEC provision in Wales and Northern Ireland was said to be almost negligible and the UKPISG have recognised that minimal information would be gained through its incorporation within the UKPIs. Concerns regarding data quality issues (and little scope to rectify them on account of the size of the provision involved) had also been raised in earlier UKPITG discussions.
10. HEFCE work to produce annual sets of indicators for HE provision registered at FECs in England since Summer 2012 has found that, although a number of the technical challenges relating to the incorporation of HE in FECs within the low participation neighbourhoods (LPN, table series T1), non-continuation (tables T3a and T3d) and employment (table E1) indicators for full-time entrants, some issues remained:
 - 10.1.1. Table T5 would not be possible on account of HE in FEC student numbers simply being too small to support that methodology;
 - 10.1.2. Franchising and accountability would need to be addressed in respect of reporting by teaching or registering institution;
 - 10.1.3. Boundary definitions in respect of HEFCE- and SFA-funded HE provision in English FECs would need to be addressed, where SFA-funded HE is not prescribed HE.

† Proposed as exempt from immediate publication

Current discussion in this area

11. The UKPITG have been asked to consider data and collection issues associated with extending future sets of UKPIs to include HE registered at FECs. Members are invited to consider whether this incorporation should extend across all four UK nations or only those for whom the omission of HE provision delivered in FECs from UKPIs is considered to be substantial. Members are also invited to highlight any pertinent issues or changes relating to definitions, timing or coverage.

Recommendation: That the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) provide advice to the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) on the data and collection issues associated with extending future sets of UKPIs to include HE registered at FECs.

Further information

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