

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Invitation to comment on future changes to the UK Performance Indicators

Date: 16 July 2015
Reference: W15/14HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales
Response by: **Friday, 18 September 2015 to the UKPISG Secretariat ukpisg@hefce.ac.uk**
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This circular invites comments on future changes to the UK performance indicators (UKPIs) as part of a UK consultation process. The proposals look at coverage and scope, widening participation and research output UKPIs. Responses should be returned to the UKPISG Secretariat.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please telephone us on (029) 2068 2225 or email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



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Introduction

1. This circular invites comments on future changes to the UK performance indicators (UKPIs) as part of a UK consultation process. The proposals look at coverage and scope, widening participation¹ and research output UKPIs. Responses should be returned to the UKPISG Secretariat.

Background

2. The UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) is considering a number of changes to the [UK Performance Indicators \(UKPIs\)](#). The UKPIs are currently published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) on behalf of the four UK higher education (HE) funding bodies.
3. The possible changes outlined in this letter arise from a series of actions and decisions taken by UKPISG following the 2013 publication '[How should we measure higher education? A fundamental review of the UK Performance Indicators](#)'. As part of the review, UKPISG committed to engage in dialogue with the sector as change is taken forward.
4. UKPISG first invited comment from the HE sector and its representative bodies on actions proposed in 'Invitation to comment on future changes to the UK Performance Indicators' in December 2013 ([W13/40HE](#)). Having taken account of the responses, UKPISG published 'Responses to the invitation to comment on future changes to the UK Performance Indicators' in July 2014 ([W14/26HE](#)) which outlined a series of agreed next steps.
5. This circular provides an update on three of the matters outlined in these previous communications – the coverage and scope of the UKPIs, UKPIs for widening participation and UKPIs for research output – and invites comments on further proposals about changes to be implemented in the 2016 publications of UKPIs. Further details on the history and context are given in **Annex A**.
6. The proposals in this circular include the publication of possible new UKPIs as 'experimental statistics' before they are confirmed as formal UKPIs. This will enable further testing of and feedback on the proposals. The coverage of UKPIs will also be extended as soon as possible to include HE provision registered at further education colleges, sixth form colleges and alternative providers.

¹ Referred to as 'widening participation' in this circular regarding a UK consultation. In Wales 'Widening Access' is a key strategic theme in HEFCW's Corporate Strategy.

Proposals

Coverage and scope

7. UKPISG propose 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.

Widening Participation

8. The widening participation indicator based on National Statistics Social Economic Classifications 4-7 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.
9. 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.
10. The UK Performance Indicators Technical Group will also explore the development of nation-specific measures of area-based disadvantage for possible introduction to the 2016 publication of UKPIs.

Research

11. An expert group will 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.

Further information/responses to

12. All UK providers of HE are being asked by their relevant HE funding body to submit any feedback that they may have about these proposals, or other aspects of this circular, to the UKPISG secretariat at ukpisg@hefce.ac.uk by **Friday, 18 September 2015**.
13. Any queries about this HEFCW circular can be directed to the HEFCW contact, Celia Hunt (29 2068 2224, celia.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk).

Annex A: History and context

The future coverage and scope of the UKPIs

14. In December 2013, following a fundamental review of UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) for higher education, 'Invitation to comment on future changes to the UK Performance Indicators' (HEFCW circular [W13/40HE](#)) invited the sector's comment on a set of guiding principles to be established for UKPIs. In July 2014 the UK Performance Indicators Steering Group (UKPISG) communicated its formal agreement to the set of guiding principles for the UKPIs in 'Responses to the invitation to comment on future changes to the UK Performance Indicators' (HEFCW circular [W14/26HE](#)). Included among these principles are four that relate to the coverage and scope of UKPIs. In particular, Principle A1 states that 'UKPIs should normally seek to reflect the totality of higher education (HE) provision and institutions across the UK'².
15. UKPISG has determined that UKPIs will continue to report on the institution at which a student is registered (rather than the institution responsible for teaching the student, which may be different under franchising arrangements and the like). It is intended that careful presentation and communication of definitions and coverage in the UKPI publications will facilitate user interpretation of the new scope of UKPI measures.
16. At its April 2015 meeting³, UKPISG determined that it was no longer acceptable for the currently published UKPIs to compromise principle A1 by not covering all of higher education, especially for students registered at further education colleges, sixth form colleges and alternative providers. The UK Performance Indicators Technical Group (UKPITG) will therefore examine the ways to incorporate this provision and providers as part of development work related to the in-depth rolling review of UKPI areas. This includes the widening participation and research review processes that this letter also describes.
17. UKPISG has therefore agreed:

That higher education registered at further education colleges and sixth form colleges, and alternative providers will be incorporated into existing UK Performance Indicators measures at the earliest opportunities⁴.
18. UKPISG will work with UKPITG to determine whether it will be possible to include HE data from these providers in the 2016 publications of UKPIs. Data from different types of provider may be incorporated to different timescales.

² See circular [W13/40HE](#) Annex B, 'Proposal for guiding principles for the UK Performance Indicators'

³ [Minutes](#) of UKPISG April 2015 meeting

⁴ Indented and italicised quotes are taken from the minutes of the April 2015 UKPISG meeting.

The future of the widening participation UKPIs

19. HEFCW circular W13/40HE outlined a commitment to undertake an in-depth rolling review process of the indicators in the current set of UKPIs to ensure that the existing measures are fit for purpose. This review process began with the indicators relating to widening the participation in HE of under-represented groups.
20. UKPISG brought together an expert group to advise on the in-depth review of the widening participation (WP) UKPIs. Roundtable discussions with the expert group were held in December 2014 and sought to canvass as many priorities and possibilities as possible for measuring disadvantage or under-representation in the UKPIs. A total of 26 attendees from a range of organisations participated in the roundtable discussions, and highlighted strong support for the principles defined for UKPIs.
21. The discussions generated a number of specific proposals with respect to the future of WP UKPIs, which were considered by UKPITG and UKPISG early in 2015. These discussions focused on identifying the proposals of the highest priority or greatest potential for inclusion in the WP UKPIs, and considerable thought was given to the processes, timescales, issues and possibilities involved in putting into practice the indicators that had been suggested by the expert group. A record of the discussions and decisions taken is provided in the minutes of the April 2015 UKPISG meeting (see footnote 3).
22. The in-depth review of the WP UKPIs generated a number of specific proposals which are set out below.

Existing WP UKPIs, including the National Statistics – Socio Economic Classification (NS-SEC) indicators

23. UKPISG has determined that the existing WP UKPIs will not be withdrawn in the immediate future, with one exception.
24. Stakeholder consultation within the 2013 fundamental review of the UKPIs reinforced existing UKPISG concerns that the data underlying the existing UKPIs that consider the proportion of students from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 was of poor quality⁵.
25. Further advice now received from UKPITG (in an assessment of how well the existing WP UKPIs match the principles agreed for UKPIs) and during roundtable discussions with experts has led UKPISG to confirm that the existing UKPIs based on the proportion of students from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 will be discontinued at the earliest opportunity. UKPISG has therefore agreed that:

⁵ 'How should we measure higher education?' See www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/Year/2013/ukpireview/

The Widening Participation UK Performance Indicator based on National Statistics Social Economic Classifications 4-7 will be published for the last time in the 2016 publication of the WP UKPIs: it will not be published in 2017 and subsequent UKPI publications.

26. This decision was taken on the basis of further expert advice which confirmed that the data used for the indicator is widely acknowledged to be of poor quality. This conflicts significantly with the agreed Principle B2 that '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'⁶.
27. As the removal of the NS-SEC UKPI indicator is in line with feedback already received from the sector in the 2013 consultation, UKPISG felt able to take this decision without further input from the sector.

New WP UKPI measures

28. UKPISG has agreed that a small number of the proposals arising from the in-depth review can be developed by UKPITG and published as 'experimental statistics' in 2016⁷.
29. UKPISG has agreed that established protocols for Official Statistics and the publication of new measures as experimental statistics should be used in the development and introduction of new WP UKPIs. User feedback on the experimental statistics provides an opportunity for the sector to influence future iterations of new measures, before a stable methodology and definition is agreed for use as a formal UKPI and an Official Statistic. UKPISG has therefore agreed that:

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, with the ambition of their publication as 'experimental statistics' in 2016:

- a. *Schools with low numbers of pupils progressing to further study.*
- b. *Proportions of entrants from different school or further education institution types.*
- c. *Pupils in receipt of free school meals (particular consideration will be given to the extent to which variations in eligibility criteria for free*

⁶ See circular [W13/40HE](#) Annex B, 'Proposal for guiding principles for the UK Performance Indicators'

⁷ Experimental statistics are series of measures produced part way through a well-defined development programme while they are in the testing phase and still subject to modification (on account of their volatility or ability to meet user needs). For further information see www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/general-methodology/guide-to-experimental-statistics/index.html

school meals across the UK nations may be considered fundamental).

- d. *Household residual income of entrants to higher education.*
- e. *In addition, the development of nation-specific measures of area-based disadvantage will be explored by the UK Performance Indicators Technical Group for possible introduction to the 2016 publication of UKPIs.*
30. This development arises from UKPISG's acceptance that no one measure of area-based disadvantage exists in a comparable form across the four UK administrations and provides an acceptable measure of the educational disadvantage experienced by entrants to higher education. As documented in the minutes of UKPISG's April 2015 meeting, UKPISG has agreed that development of area-based measures in the UKPIs will be taken forward as nation-specific indicators.
31. It is likely that other proposals in which the development work required is more substantial or of lower priority will be progressed according to more elongated timescales. The presentation, communication and interpretation of measures in these areas are felt to require particular consideration. They include:
- schools with high numbers of leavers who were not in employment, education or training (NEET).
 - social background of entrants to higher education.
 - value added, or learning gain, facilitated by higher education.
32. As noted above, UKPISG has agreed that higher education delivered by further education colleges and alternative providers will be incorporated into future publications of UKPIs. This aim will be pursued as part of the development work associated with each of the new and revised WP UKPIs proposed above.
33. As a result of all of the considerations outlined in this letter, a final timetable for availability of a more complete set of new and revised WP indicators has not yet been set.

The future of the research UKPIs

34. HEFCW circular W13/40HE described a proposal that the existing research output UKPIs should be discontinued, and invited respondents to consider their support (or otherwise) for the proposal, as well as what might follow from it.
35. In HEFCW circular W14/26HE, UKPISG published the responses to that invitation to comment, and documented a series of decisions about the future of the research UKPIs including that the existing set would be

discontinued with effect from the July 2015 publication, and that new UKPIs were needed in the area of research.

36. HEFCW circular W14/26HE communicated UKPISG's agreement that new research UKPIs should be developed and that UKPISG would work with others to explore new and current measures of research activity that could be of use or interest if applied across a range of stakeholders.
37. A majority of those respondents to the December 2013 invitation to comment who had indicated the need for the development of new indicators, did not suggest what form these should take. However, those who did highlighted the following areas and indicators:
 - postgraduate research completion, retention, qualification or success rates
 - undefined innovation measures
 - statistics derived from the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) or the Research Excellence Framework (REF)
 - Snowball metrics
 - research grants and income, or postgraduate research students, per academic full-time equivalent
 - research grants applied for
 - research income secured
 - impact of research on wider society.
38. UKPISG has established an expert group to provide access to the level, depth and breadth of specialist knowledge required to advance the development of measures to be introduced as research UKPIs. The expert group includes representatives from Government and Research Councils as well as the sector and its representative bodies, and will engage in roundtable discussions during September 2015.
39. As well as its own suggestions, the expert group will be asked to consider each of those listed at paragraph 37 in greater depth. The expert group's discussions will also assess how well any suggestions conform to the principles for UKPIs.
40. In seeking to understand the latest issues and interests relating to research, as well as work underway in the sector to develop new measures, UKPISG agreed that:

An expert group will 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.
41. Following the expert group's discussions in September 2015, UKPISG anticipate following similar processes to those employed for the widening participation UKPIs, as follows:

- a. A summary of the discussions and recommendations of the expert groups will be shared with UKPISG and UKPITG during autumn 2015. These groups will work together to identify proposals with the greatest strategic priority and technical feasibility for inclusion in a future set of research UKPIs.
- b. UKPISG will request that UKPITG explore the development of UKPI measure(s) based on those proposals identified in a. above. UKPISG's request to UKPITG will indicate that development should aim to facilitate publication of a small number of new research measures during 2016, in the form of Experimental Statistics.
- c. UKPISG will invite further feedback during winter 2015 as to the specific proposals that UKPITG will develop into Experimental Statistics. Further feedback will be facilitated by the status of the measures as Experimental Statistics during 2016.
- d. Into the longer term, UKPISG will consider the conversion of some or all of the new measure(s) into formal UKPIs (and, as such, Official Statistics) and/or the development of a wider range of proposals to more extended timescales.

New areas for UKPIs

42. UKPISG maintains its commitment to exploring the feasibility of broadening the UKPIs into new areas beyond those covered by the current set. However, in previous communications UKPISG has recognised that it has neither the time nor the resource available to undertake this exploratory work in parallel with conducting in-depth reviews of the current UKPIs. At this time, UKPISG invites the sector to note that:

Exploratory work relating to new areas remains unlikely to commence until the in-depth reviews of the existing UKPIs have been completed.

Providing feedback

43. Further information regarding the background to the review work underway in relation to the UKPIs, as well as some of the proposals outlined above, is available from the minutes of the meetings of UKPISG held since 2010. These minutes are available alongside the UKPIs and associated content on the Higher Education Statistics Agency web-site (see footnote 3).
44. All other enquiries on the proposals, and all feedback, should be submitted to the UKPISG secretariat at ukpisdg@hefce.ac.uk. Feedback should be submitted before **noon on Friday 18 September 2015**.