



EAUC Consultation response: Measuring higher education – a review of performance indicators.

7th June 2013

This is the consultation response of the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges which is the sector sustainability body.

I am grateful to the many members who contributed to this response and in particular to Board Member Helen Manns at the University of Northumbria.

Iain Patton, CEO

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Written submission

Q1. What measures are your organization aware of, or do you use, that assess the performance of higher education institutions?

This might include a range of measures from different sources. Please be as specific as possible and provide examples of practice from across different parts of your organization where possible.

We are aware of a wide range of performance indicators used to measure HE performance and appreciate that these serve a clear purpose for many of the sector's stakeholders. However, as an organization our mission is to "... lead, inspire and support Members and stakeholders with a shared vision, knowledge and the tools they need to embed sustainability and facilitate whole institution change through the involvement of everyone in the institution". We do not feel that current indicators in general use by the sector support this important area of work.

The indicators currently cover the following data:

- widening participation indicators
- non-continuation rates (including projected outcomes)
- module completion rates
- research output
- employment of graduates.

With the exception of the widening participation indicators, the current indicators fail to recognise and value the contribution an HEI makes towards a sustainable economy, society and environment.

A commonly accepted definition of sustainability is "**..development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs**" World Commission on the Environment and Development (Brundtland).

With its teaching, research, community engagement and campuses, universities are exceptionally well placed to generate a better economy, society and planet. Our view is that this should be recognised, valued and then measured.



Q2. How does your organization currently use these measures, and the UK Higher Education Performance Indicators specifically?

The current set of UK Higher Education Performance Indicators includes information around:

- Widening participation of under-represented groups
- Non-continuation rates and module completion
- Employment destinations of leavers
- Research outputs.

Again, please be as specific as possible and provide examples of practice from across different parts of your organization where possible. If you don't currently use the UK Higher Education Performance Indicators, please use this box to provide the reasons why.

The EAUC does not currently use these indicators in its work. Although there is potential for all to be adapted to some extent to provide indicators for sustainable development, in their current form they are not specific enough.

Q3. Please list up to three strengths and three weaknesses with the existing UK Higher Education Performance Indicators. Again, please be as specific as possible. If you don't think there are any strengths or weaknesses, please write "none" in the appropriate section of the box below.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Q4. What do you think the purpose of the UK Higher Education Performance Indicators should be?

Please be brief, limiting your response to up to 500 words. If you do not think performance indicators serve any purpose, please use the box to explain why.



- To support continuous improvement of the associated agenda by informing institutional strategy and decision making
- To inform stakeholder decision making (importantly students and funding providers)
- To facilitate benchmarking

We need a sustainable development indicator in order to move this agenda forward in the sector. If it remains absent it will also remain absent from university internal priorities.

Q5. In which specific areas do you think we need formal performance indicators to measure institutional performance in the higher education sector? Please list up to six topic areas. These can include areas covered by the existing UK Higher Education Performance Indicators or other sources, as well as areas not currently measured. If you do not think we need any performance indicators, please write “none” in the box below.

We would urge the inclusion of an indicator for sustainable development. In developing such an indicator we recognize the need for it to meet certain parameters:

- Data is readily available (preferably already measured) in an appropriate and consistent form across all institutions
- The indicator is quantitative and not time limited in order to satisfy the need to measure continuous improvement
- The indicator has meaning to a range of stakeholders
- The indicator is capable of providing a robust proxy for sustainable performance

Given the breadth of the sustainable development agenda it may be very difficult to agree an indicator that would satisfy the last of these criteria.

It is tempting to see carbon production as a potential indicator. HESA manages the Estates Management Report and this already collects quantitative carbon data across the sector. In Scotland, the EAUC has been leading the development of carbon reporting through our Universities and Colleges Climate Commitment Programme see <http://www.eauc.org.uk/ucccf/home> We think there is value in the review considering this option as it meets the above criteria and the data is already being collected by all institutions in Scotland. This model could be extended throughout the UK.



That said, there is a question if such an indicator would engage and mean much to many other stakeholders. Plus, carbon is of course only one aspect of sustainability and does not reflect the overall positive contribution a university makes to society.

Our recommendation therefore would be to use one indicator that provides a summative measure for a range of indicators – and we argue that the LiFE Index currently being piloted by c24 HEI's in the UK and Australia has the potential to do this.

The LiFE Index development has been funded by all UK HE Funding Councils and is a comprehensive performance improvement system developed specifically to help colleges and universities to manage, measure, improve and promote their social responsibility and sustainability performance.

LiFE is the UK contribution to a global move to better measure and benchmark the contribution Higher Education makes to a more sustainable society and planet. HE sustainability performance assessment systems now exist in USA, France, Australia, Netherlands, South Africa, Japan and Spain with others in development. The EAUC is co-ordinating the development of a global platform which brings these tools together to better support HEIs, see www.sustainabilityperformance.org The platform now benefits from UN recognition as an implementation tool of the recent Rio+20 Earth Summit.

The Rio Summit Output Paper – The Future we Want, clearly and powerfully called on the Education Sector to step-up in its role as a delivery agent for a sustainable economy, society and environment.

For this reason it is imperative that sustainability becomes a key indicator by which universities are measured and their contribution recognized.

Thank you for your written contribution. It will be reviewed along with others in due course and incorporated in a report to the Performance Indicators Steering Group by summer 2013.

