

Response on UKPI measure on ‘research outputs’

1. Would you support the proposed discontinuation of the research output UKPIs (Table R1)?

- 1.1 Yes, the Russell Group would support this proposal. Research Output PIs give only a partial picture of research performance.

2. Would you consider that other existing measures (such as the Research Excellence Framework, performed every 6 to 7 years) are adequate for your purposes with respect to institution-level information on research activities?

- 2.1 The most important indicator of research performance is the RAE/REF results, which measures research quality. The RAE/REF results, alongside the direct (or raw) HESA data showing the number of PhDs awarded, the total research grants and contracts income and the total academic staff costs per institution present a reasonable picture of research activity within the UK’s universities. It is unclear what additional value is added by aiming to normalise data through statistical methods to generate the existing PIs showing outputs per inputs.
- 2.2 It is difficult to consider the research PIs alongside the RAE results because attempts to map RAE/REF Units of Assessment (UoA) with HESA cost centres are problematic. Until there is a direct and consistent mapping between UoAs and cost centres, there will always be difficulties in making meaningful correlations between differently coded research datasets.
- 2.3 The research PI relating to PhDs also fails to account for research and teaching splits in the academic staff denominator, resulting in a failure to recognise and acknowledge the importance of quality in postgraduate supervision. We would expect the highest quality postgraduate research supervision to be conducted by active research academics.
- 2.4 It is important for the sector as to the intention of measuring research input, via HESA data or research output, via RAE/REF. It would be helpful if this distinction were made clear.
- 2.5 The increasing importance of internationalisation of higher education activities also requires institutions to make use of international benchmarks and associated information sources where possible.

3. Alternatively, is a replacement research-related UKPI desirable?

- 3.1 No, the Russell Group would be content with using the RAE/REF results as a better guide and comparator for institutions’ respective research performance.

3.2 If a direct replacement is sought, then there is some value in UKPISG monitoring the set of benchmarks currently being developed through a sector-led initiative in the form of the Snowball metrics.¹

4. If a replacement UKPI is desirable, would your preference be to phase out the existing Table R1 measures only when new measures are available? Or would you support the discontinuation of Table R1 at the earliest opportunity, with new measures to follow in due course? (Bear in mind that this would most likely necessitate a period of time in which no UKPIs were published in relation to research activities.)

4.1 It would be acceptable if the Table R1 were to be phased out.

¹ <http://www.snowballmetrics.com/metrics/>