

## Responsible Use of Education Data and Metrics

### Background

1. The vision of the university in education is to provide a “*transformative education...supporting every student from every background to achieve outstanding outcomes; preparing our students to thrive in their future lives and nurturing our community of educators to support and promote student success*”. Our approach to decision-making and evaluation of our progress towards achieving our vision is evidence-based. The evidence base will include, but not be limited to, use of metrics. This paper sets out our approach to considering a range of educational metrics.
2. In May 2019, Senate approved a paper concerning the Responsible Use of Research Metrics drawing on the UK Forum for Responsible Research Metrics (FFRRM)<sup>1</sup>. Five principles on the responsible use of research metrics were highlighted from the FFRRM. These were: robustness, humility, transparency, diversity and reflexivity.
3. Education Committee in June 2019 agreed that principles on the responsible use of education metrics should be developed. The five principles of the FFRRM can be usefully considered in relation to education metrics as follows (deletions struck through and new text underlined):
  - i. *Robustness*: basing metrics on the best possible data in terms of accuracy and scope;
  - ii. *Humility*: recognising that quantitative evaluation should support, but not supplant, qualitative, expert assessment;
  - iii. *Transparency*: that those being evaluated can test and verify the results;
  - iv. *Diversity*: accounting for variation by discipline, and using a range of indicators to reflect and support a plurality of career paths across the system;
  - v. *Reflexivity*: recognising and anticipating the systemic and potential effects of indicators, and updating them in response.
4. There are a range of education metrics available which are relevant to our mission in education and which feed into the KPIs of our University Strategy 2019-2025. These include:
  - a. Student feedback on student experience (KPI 1, KPI 3, KPI 4, KPI 6). Student voice is a vital indicator of a transformative education and is reflected in a number of metrics, including national surveys as well as internal data.
    - i. The National Student Survey (NSS) surveys final year undergraduate students. The data allow ranking of performance nationally at institutional level and by subject. NSS data is also used in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) which allows benchmarking of the data by factors including discipline, student characteristic etc.
    - ii. The United Kingdom Engagement Survey (UKES) surveys non-final year undergraduate students. The data allow comparison of performance at institutional level and by subject area. However, not all HEIs use UKES and response rates are often below 50%.

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<sup>1</sup> FFRRM is a partnership between HEFCE, Research Councils UK, the Wellcome Trust, Universities UK and Jisc. See <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/topics/research-and-innovation/uk-forum-responsible-research-metrics>

- iii. The university is currently taking part in an OfS pilot student satisfaction survey for PGT students. The extent to which there will be effective benchmarking of the results is as yet unclear. Until this is clearer, we will be using the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES).
  - iv. The university is piloting an internal PGR student satisfaction survey. Benchmarking data will not be available.
  - v. Student module feedback surveys. All modules gather end of module feedback from students as well as within module feedback.
- b. Continuation, retention and progression data (KPI 1; KPI 3, KPI 6)  
The university receives data continuation data from HESA which allows comparison with national rates and with selected peer groups at university level. This data is also used in TEF which allows benchmarking of the data by factors including discipline and student characteristic. This data is the basis of the completion rate used in the Times Good University Guide. HESA continuation data (and thus TEF continuation data) has a considerable lag on its release and so the university also produces its own internal monitoring of completion rates, retention and progression rates. There is no available benching data for the internal continuation, retention and progression data.
- c. Employability data (KPI 1; KPI 5; KPI 6)  
The university receives data concerning the proportion of its graduates in employment and/or further study 15 months after graduation (Graduate Outcomes) and on their earnings at 1, 3 and 5 years following graduation (Longitudinal Educational Outcomes). The data allow comparison against national averages and also consideration by factors including discipline and student characteristic. These data are also used in TEF. There is considerable lag in release of employability data and so the university also gathers data on a range of activities that are indicators of engagement with career development. These include numbers of students attending at career events, those undertaking placements, numbers taking up career coaching etc. There are no available benching data for these measures. The relationship of these data to the externally gathered employability data is still being assessed.
- d. Research degree completion (KPI 7a)  
The university records submission within 12 active terms at institutional level and by department. There is no benchmarking data available but the university compares its performance against the UKRI minimum submission threshold.
- e. Research degrees awards (KPI 7b).  
The university records average number of doctoral awards per FTE of academic staff with research in their contract at departmental and institutional level. Benchmarks are available from REF data and the university compares its performance against that of other research-intensive Universities.
5. Within Essex, education metrics could be used in a variety of internal contexts including, but not limited to:
- i. During preparation and assessment of cases for permanency and promotion;
  - ii. In staff performance and development reviews;
  - iii. In departmental periodic reviews and departmental strategic reviews;
  - iv. In strategic planning;

- v. During TEF preparation and/or submission;
- vi. As key performance indicators;
- vii. In benchmarking against comparator institutions;
- viii. In selecting partnerships.

6. We are committed to using education metrics responsibly. To guide this, we have drawn up the following seven principles as a Guide the Responsible Use of Education Data and Metrics at the University of Essex:

*i. Measure performance against the educational mission of the institution, school, department, course or educator.*

We are committed to deliver a transformative education of the highest quality which allows students to thrive in their future lives. To this end, both publicly-available and internally monitored indicators will be used as evidence to guide our activities and to monitor our progress against these strategy themes. The best possible data in terms of accuracy and scope will be sought. Where ever possible we will seek lead indicators as early indicators of trends.

*ii. Quantitative evaluation should support existing expert assessment processes*

The value of indicators to support qualitative, expert peer review is recognised. We will not base judgements on the performance of individuals, modules, courses, or departments solely on metric indicators. These indicators will be used in conjunction with relevant qualitative data, expert judgements and expert assessment of the context in which the data sit. To this end, we will use benchmarked data wherever possible.

*iii. Keep data collection and analytical processes open, transparent and simple*

The data considered will include nationally (and where appropriate internationally) available benchmarked metrics wherever possible. Internally generated data will also be considered as advance indicators of trends (lead indicators). Where lead indicators are used, evidence of their relationship to the education mission will be sought and the indicators will be revised where appropriate.

*iv. Allow data and analysis to be verified*

Staff managing the collection and presentation of educationally relevant metrics will endeavour to ensure that data are as accurate and robust as possible. Academics will be able to see data relating to their education contributions and make corrections where necessary. The data will be made available at the level of the individual, teaching team, department or school as appropriate.

*v. Account for variation by discipline, subject area and student characteristic*

It is recognised that metrics such as continuation or employability rates vary markedly by discipline. There are also systemic biases which result in differential outcomes in metrics such as employability by student characteristic. We will use metrics to identify where these are occurring and put measures in place to mitigate against them. Consideration of metrics will take into account such variations.

*vi. Base assessment of individual educators on a qualitative judgement of their portfolio*

Indicators of the performance of individuals may be affected by factors such as career stage or discipline (for example it is recognised that some topic areas are inherently less popular with students and so may attract lower student feedback scores). In addition it is

recognised that factors unrelated to teaching quality (such as gender or ethnicity) may affect student feedback on an individual's contribution. These factors will be taken into account in interpreting metrics (see ii above). It is also recognised that academics undertake a wide range of valuable education activities, not all of which can be easily measured (e.g. personal tutor). When weighing metrics concerning the performance of individuals, the full range of their educational expertise, experience, and activities will be considered.

*vii. Recognize the systemic effects of assessment and indicators and scrutinise regularly*  
As the education activity in the university and in the external environment develops, the indicators we use should be revisited and revised where appropriate.

All education data will be processed and handled in line with the [University Data Protection Policy](#) and the [University's data protection principles](#).

**Approved by Senate on 22 January 2020**