

# BERA DIALOGUES

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## Performance Indicators

# Performance Indicators

Edited by  
**Carol T. Fitz-Gibbon**

Performance Indicators arrived in the world of education to a sometimes puzzled and uncertain reception. This book provides an important but mercifully brief series of readings designed to document and clarify the practical and policy issues surrounding them. The readings first provide an historical perspective and then illustrate the various responses of Local Education Authorities. Present developments are examined in relation to previous movements towards accountability: inspection and school self-evaluation. Subsequent chapters look to the future: to the design of systems for performance monitoring, stressing the need for contextualising outputs; to the use of statistical methods with care and adequate data; and to outcomes which include but are not limited to examination results. Some chapters are exhortatory while others aim at explanation and the illustration of techniques which will be needed if fair performance indicators are to be developed. A particularly useful feature is an annotated bibliography critically reviewing a selection of important publications from both sides of the Atlantic.

As information becomes increasingly computerised and therefore manageable and accessible, information systems will continually develop. Whether or not the elements of these systems are called Performance Indicators remains to be seen, but the topics covered in this timely addition to the British Educational Research Association's *Dialogues* series will remain important to all concerned with education: teachers, governors, LEA inspectors/advisers, policy makers, legislators, examination boards and educational researchers.

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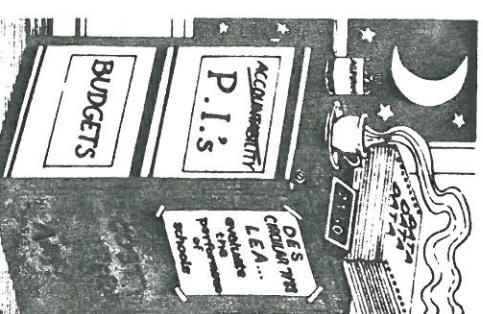
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A performance indicator can be defined as an item of information collected at regular intervals to track the performance of a system. Performance Indicators (PIs) are collected in many complex systems which, like education, deliver a service. Thus 'near-misses' are recorded to monitor air transport; the percentage of trains running on time is recorded by railways; the length of hospital waiting queues is recorded by the Health Service. These indicators are not perfect measures, without error or problems of definition and interpretation, but they are important pointers to the functioning of the system and keeping track of them is one aspect of quality control. Persons responsible for the management of large and complex systems, such as the Health Service or the education service, need some key indicators to assist them.

Recent legislation in the UK has assigned to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) some responsibility for the monitoring of the education

service: 'The Secretary of State will expect schemes submitted to him for approval to include the following elements: . . . the monitoring and evaluation procedures to be applied under the scheme, including the measures the LEA propose to use to evaluate the performance of schools. (Department of Education and Science, Circular 7/88, p.31. Emphasis added.)

It can be argued that to undertake the monitoring task effectively will require the development of useful and beneficial performance indicators and, indeed, only one of the contributors to this publication has questioned the need for Performance Indicators. Rather their concern is to find the right indicators for the job. This is not to say that arguments against performance monitoring could not be advanced. A punitive, heavy handed surveillance which was perceived as unfair could conceivably be more damaging than a laissez faire, hands-off policy.



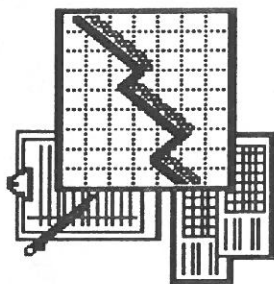
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## PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

### A BERA DIALOGUE



As part of its series of occasional publications  
on topical issues, the  
**British Educational Research Association**  
will be offering a short and readable booklet on  
**Performance Indicators.**

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## CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Introduction and Overview	C.T.Fitz-Gibbon [Editor]
Chapter 2	Great Performance Indicators of the Past	G.W. Hogg
Chapter 3	Working Documents of the Present A. Public Examination Performance at 16+ B. Performance Indicators C. Indicators for Schools	P. Boulter R. Gamble J. Livingstone
Chapter 4	Reactions from a CEO	C.Tipple
Chapter 5	Performance Indicators: The Search for the Holy Grail of Quality	B.Wilcox
Chapter 6	School Self Evaluation	P.S. Clift
Chapter 7	Performance Indicators and the Social Organisation of Evaluation: Some Proposals for Change	J. Gray
Chapter 8	Analysing Examination Results	C.T. Fitz-Gibbon
Chapter 9	The Need for Pupil Level Data	G.Woodhouse
Chapter 10	Attitudes as Performance Indicators	R.D. Hazelwood
Chapter 11	Information, Accountability and Educational Performance Indicators	D. Jesson and D. Mayston
Chapter 12	An Up-and-Running Indicator System	C.T. Fitz-Gibbon
	Annotated Bibliography Notes on Contributors Glossary Index	P.B. Tymms C.T. Fitz-Gibbon