



Higher Education Policy Institute

## **HEPI advice to authors**

If you are interested in writing for HEPI, please stick to the following style guidelines, which are designed to ensure consistency and clarity.

### *General rules*

1. Keep HEPI's key audiences in mind. Above all, they are:
  - policymakers (such as civil servants and politicians);
  - senior university managers (such as vice-chancellors and pro-vice-chancellors);
  - university governors; and
  - the media.
2. Do not assume all readers have much prior knowledge. They may be new to higher education or work mainly in a different sector. If you write with ignorant-but-intelligent readers in mind, this will increase the number of potential readers.
3. HEPI publications are short enough to read on a single train journey. They are generally between 6,000 and 10,000 words. There is an inverse correlation between the number of words and the likelihood of readers reaching the end. Although our occasional collections of contributions can amount to 15,000 words, this is too long for a regular HEPI paper.
4. Avoid acronyms where possible. It is acceptable to use acronyms that are very common in higher education, such as UCAS and HEFCE. Yet, even then, the name should be written out in full for its first use, with the short form in brackets afterwards – for example, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

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5. Convey the argument in memorable ways so that busy people can summarise the document in just a few sentences. We generally include an Executive Summary for people who do not have the time or inclination to read a whole document.
6. We are the Higher Education Policy Institute, not the University Policy Institute. So we are interested in all higher education, not only what goes on in those institutions labelled universities.
7. Remember the 'P' in HEPI's name stands for 'Policy'. We are a policy organisation, so a publication that criticises without proposing better alternatives is unlikely to be published by us. Constructive criticism is better than destructive criticism.
8. The currency of policymaking is killer facts, so always include some little-known or wholly new facts that are likely to grab the attention of the reader.
9. While HEPI publications often include wholly new evidence and analysis, they sometimes seek to convey knowledge that is already understood inside higher education institutions to a wider audience.
10. HEPI papers are different to academic journal articles in many ways, but mainly because:
  - they are written in a more accessible style for non-specialist readers as well as specialist readers;
  - they avoid academic terms; and
  - they aim to have a more rapid impact on policy.
11. Our future publication schedule is determined by HEPI's Advisory Board and Trustees, who meet in person three to four times a year, in conjunction with HEPI staff.

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12. HEPI blue books are more analytical and HEPI yellow books are more polemical. HEPI staff decide the colour of each paper, after discussion with the Advisory Board and Trustees.

### *Language and grammar*

13. We do not have a banned words list ... but if we did it would be siloed off into a new holistic paradigm. In other words, avoid using nouns as verbs and resist the temptation to use vague and clichéd terms. They reveal flabby thinking and conceal a clear line of argument.
14. If referring to the current Government or a specific Minister, use a capital letter. If referring to government in general, then use a lower-case first letter. So it is 'research has long received public funding from government, including under the Coalition Government of 2010 to 2015'.
15. Similar rules apply to universities. When writing on universities in general, use a lower case first letter. When writing about a specific university, use a capital letter and check how the institution styles itself. For example, it is the University of Oxford but Oxford Brookes University.
16. While we aim for a less formal style of writing, we avoid using contractions. So use two words rather than 'don't', 'didn't' and 'can't'.
17. Use prose wherever possible. So write 'for example' rather than 'eg' and avoid 'ie' and similar terms. Never use 'etc'.
18. Avoid using speech marks or italics to give extra emphasis to individual words. A clear sentence should not need them.
19. Compound adjectives should have a hyphen (higher-tariff institutions, better-skilled staff).

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20. Foreign words, unless they have been fully assimilated into English, are italicised.
21. Although 'z' and 's' are often interchangeable in British English, we use the 's' for the sake of consistency and simplicity. So it is 'organised' not 'organized'. For this at least, do not assume your computer's spell checker will do the job.
22. Avoid American spellings. So use 'the labour market' rather than 'the labor market'.
23. Use standard punctuation. Dashes are an acceptable way to mark out a sub-clause and can sometimes be used in place of commas.
24. We usually avoid the Oxford comma, which comes before the final item in a list. So it is 'Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh', rather than 'Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Edinburgh'. We make an exception where the absence of an extra comma could hamper understanding.
25. Do not be scared of full stops. If a long sentence can be written as three sentences, do it.
26. We give academic disciplines a capital letter and write them in full, so it is 'Mathematics', not 'maths'.
27. Many people dislike split infinitives (for example, 'to fully understand'). Others do not care. We steer clear of them.
28. Use brackets sparingly. Never hide a killer fact inside.
29. If in doubt about anything else, consult the *Guardian* style guide, which is freely available online.



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30. The *Economist* has a useful style guide too. This refers to the valuable advice that 'it is usually easier to write a double negative than it is to interpret it.'

### *Formatting*

31. Avoid clever formatting, such as coloured subtitles and automatic breaks at the end of paragraphs. These will be erased before any text is sent to our designers, so there is no point adding them.
32. The main text should be justified. In other words, it should be squared off at the end of each line, rather than aligned to the left only. This note is justified.
33. Chapter breaks should be used. When published, new chapters start on the right-hand side of a double-page spread (known as 'recto' in the publishing industry), with the chapter title in the centre and in bold.
34. Sub-headings are another useful way to break up the text. They appear in italics.
35. Charts and diagrams that aid understanding are welcome, whether in colour or black and white.
36. We write out the numbers from one to nine in full (except when it is a percentage), but use numerals for numbers above this. We try to avoid starting sentences with a number.
37. When using percentages, we write 'per cent' out in full rather than using the % symbol, with a space between the number and 'per' and between 'per' and 'cent'. We sometimes make an exception to this rule, but only for reports that focus heavily on data from surveys.



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38. Italicise the titles of publications, including newspapers and academic journals. So it is the *Independent* and the *Oxford Review of Education*.
39. Lists should begin with a colon and the items should be separated by semi-colons (with an 'and' after the final semi-colon). Use bullets or numbers to show the list is different to other text.
40. Quotations of more than three lines should be italicised and indented and do not need speech marks. This helps them stand out and also usefully breaks up the text.
41. We use single speech marks, except for quotations within quotations, when double speech marks can be used. If, and only if, the end of a quotation is also the end of a sentence in the original source, then the punctuation should appear inside the speech marks. Never change the punctuation or spelling in a quotation, even where it is different to HEPI's house style, except where it is necessary to use double speech marks.
42. We use endnotes rather than footnotes and the standard format is: First and Second Name of author, *Title*, Year of publication, page number. So it is Nick Hillman, *A guide to the removal of student number controls*, 2013, p.4.
43. Where an endnote is marked in the text, there should be a Roman numeral in superscript after the full stop. The most common error in drafts submitted to HEPI is strangely-placed references that appear, for example, in the middle of sentences or just before full stops. When unsure, look at a recent HEPI publication.
44. At least until any text is professionally typeset, we generally use 14-point Verdana or similar for the main text and 12-point Verdana for endnotes. This may seem large but it

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helps the editing process. (This note is in 14-point Verdana.) Avoid serif fonts, which are the ones with swirly bits. They can be harder to read on screen and are often disliked by people with dyslexia.

45. Bibliographies are not necessary because we include sufficient details of the relevant source material in the endnotes.
46. Blue books generally have numbered paragraphs while yellow books do not.

Nick Hillman  
5<sup>th</sup> May 2016