



Higher Education Policy Institute

HEPI advice to authors

Last updated May 2020

If you are interested in writing for HEPI, **you must stick to the following style guidelines**, which are designed to ensure consistency and clarity. Areas where our authors commonly fall down are highlighted in yellow, so need particularly careful consideration.

Sticking to these rules makes the design, printing and production processes simpler and quicker, which is to the benefit of authors as much as to HEPI. For example, our formatting rules on issues like font size are designed to make the process of commenting on drafts easier. **So the rules must be applied during the writing process rather than at the very end.**

Consistency across HEPI's output also helps to increase our impact, which again benefits our authors as well as HEPI.

We reserve the right to refuse considering draft publications that do not follow the rules outlined here.

Charitable purpose

HEPI is a registered charity. Our output must keep to our charitable objectives, as outlined in HEPI's *Articles of Association*, which are:

to promote research into and understanding of all aspects of higher education and to disseminate the useful results of such research for the education and benefit of policy makers and the general public in the United Kingdom.

General rules

1. **Keep HEPI's key audiences in mind.** Above all, these are:
 - i. **policymakers**, such as civil servants and politicians;



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- ii. **staff in higher education institutions**, including vice-chancellors and pro-vice-chancellors;
 - iii. **university governors**;
 - iv. **students**, including students' union office holders; and
 - v. **the media** and other opinion formers.
2. Do not assume all our readers have much prior knowledge. They may be new to higher education or work mainly in a different sector. **Write with ignorant-but-intelligent readers in mind, as this will increase the number of people who engage with our output.**
3. **Complicated points can almost always be expressed in simple ways.** Our output is not dumbed down, but it is accessible, readable and clear. Killer facts and short snappy sentences are our trademarks.
4. **HEPI has five main outlets for research, which are listed below.** Occasionally, we produce reports in other formats too, especially when working jointly with another organisation. We typically decide on the format of any specific piece of research after it has been completed, as we like the form to follow the function and seek to avoid placing too many limitations on authors in advance:
 - i. **Blogs**, which tend to be around 1,000 words or less in length, and which are circulated electronically to everyone who has signed up for email updates.
 - ii. **Policy Notes**, which tend to be between 1,000 and 3,000 words.
 - iii. **Blue books or HEPI Reports**, which are full-length analytical publications of between 6,000 and 10,000 words. Occasionally, they are collections of essays by different authors, when their length increases to between 10,000 and 15,000 words.

99 Banbury Road Oxford OX2 6JX

+44 (0) 1865 284450 admin@hepi.ac.uk www.hepi.ac.uk

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- iv. **Red books or Occasional Papers**, which are also full-length evidence-based publications but are more polemical than blue books.
- v. **Analytical Reports**, which are occasionally produced to provide a detailed review of one part of the higher education landscape. They may be a little longer and a little less focused on policy than most of our output.

5. **HEPI reports serve a number of purposes.** For example:

- increasing knowledge;
- bringing together existing knowledge as a way of exploring new policy options;
- putting other countries' higher education systems under the spotlight to see what lessons there are for the UK;
- providing a space for opinion pieces by people with long experience working in higher education; and
- offering a guide for non-experts on topical and tricky issues.

This is a non-exhaustive list. While HEPI publications often include wholly new evidence and analysis, they can sometimes seek to convey knowledge that is already understood by the *cognoscenti* on any particular issue to a wider audience.

6. **HEPI publications are generally designed to be short enough to read on a single train journey.** This means we rarely publish papers of more than 10,000 words. Remember: there is an inverse correlation between the number of words and the likelihood of readers reaching the end.
7. The art of changing minds is to use your strongest arguments to maximum effect. **Convey the argument in memorable ways so that busy people can summarise the document in just a few sentences.**



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8. **To encourage people to read, digest and recall our longer reports, authors should include an Executive Summary.** This counts towards the total word count.
9. **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 and help promote media coverage and wider discussion.
10. Many HEPI papers are controversial in that they challenge existing assumptions and push an alternative point of view. **Stimulating controversy can be an effective way to increase engagement, but HEPI papers are never controversial for the sake of it – only when the evidence justifies it.**
11. **Avoid acronyms wherever possible.** The only acronyms that are acceptable are ones that are exceptionally common in higher education and / or the main way an organisation is known (such as UCAS). Even then, the name should be written out in full the first time, with the short form in brackets afterwards. If you are uncertain whether to use an acronym, do not do so.
12. **We are the Higher Education Policy Institute, not the University Policy Institute.** So we are interested in all higher education, including non-traditional provision and higher education delivered in further education colleges, and not only what goes on in institutions labelled universities.
13. **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 HEPI: falling into this trap is the most common reason why we turn work by academics down.

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14. **Constructive criticism is better than destructive criticism.**
15. We are keen to publish output by academics more often than we have in the past. Our output is different to that of peer-reviewed journals, but we are not interested in publishing academic papers that have already been rejected by such journals for being low quality. The main differences between HEPI papers and regular academic journal articles are that HEPI papers:
 - i. are written in a more accessible style for non-specialist readers (as well as specialist readers);
 - ii. avoid academic terms; and
 - iii. **have a quicker turnaround time and aim to have a more rapid impact on policy.**
16. **Our future publication schedule is largely determined by HEPI's Advisory Board and Trustees**, who meet in person with HEPI's staff three times a year. When an issue is particularly time-sensitive, we may consult the Advisory Board and Trustees outside of their regular meeting schedule, but we aim to keep such instances to a minimum and authors should not assume this will happen.
17. We welcome reports written by people employed by other organisations. However, **the HEPI Advisory Board is unlikely to agree to publish anything that reads like an advert for another organisation**. Blogs that are disguised advertorials will also be rejected – the offer of money will make no difference.
18. **Feedback on our reports suggests our readers particularly value case studies**. These typically explain what works and what lessons can be learnt from successful practice in institutions in the UK or abroad. However, case

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studies should be from a range of places and not only from the author's own institution

19. Even if we were producing the best research in the world, it would have no impact unless people were engaging with it. So it is crucial to consider the way in which we are likely to talk to others about your research during the entire writing process. For example, this means **thinking throughout the writing process of what the press release on the report is likely to say when it appears.**
20. Policymakers often like to have their views confirmed by new evidence and data. Some HEPI reports will do this. But **it is also important that we provide counter-intuitive evidence and challenging narratives where we believe policymakers or others are not following the evidence.**

Language and grammar

21. 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'.
22. 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.
23. We do not have a banned words list ... but if we did it would be siloed off into a new holistic neoliberal 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.



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24. Avoid terms like 'this year', 'last March' and 'next election'. We hope our reports will have longevity and you do not know when someone will be reading what you have written. So your 'today' may well be far in the past for a reader.
25. While we aim for a less formal style of writing, we still avoid using contractions. So use two words rather than 'don't', 'didn't' and 'can't'.
26. Use prose wherever possible. So write 'for example' rather than 'eg' and avoid 'ie' and similar terms. Never use 'etc'.
27. Avoid using 'speech marks' or *italics* to give extra emphasis to individual words. Clear sentences do not need them.
28. Compound adjectives should generally have a hyphen (higher-tariff institutions, better-skilled staff).
29. Foreign words, unless they have been fully assimilated into English for a long time, are italicised.
30. 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.
31. Avoid American spellings. So use 'the labour market' rather than 'the labor market'. Making sure your software is using English (UK) rather than English (US).
32. 'Data' began as the plural of the singular word 'datum'. For this reason, it takes a plural verb in HEPI publications. Beware of other words which are already plurals too, such as 'agenda' – so avoid 'agendas'.
33. Use standard punctuation. Dashes are often a clear way to mark out a sub-clause – like this – and can sometimes be

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used in preference to commas. We follow the common practice in the media of including a space before and after a dash. **Dashes are longer than hyphens.** Never use more than two dashes in one sentence, as more than two causes confusion.

34. Do not be scared of full stops. If a long sentence can be written as three sentences, do it. Although very short paragraphs are acceptable, no paragraph of a standard length should be just one sentence long.
35. **We give academic disciplines a capital letter and write them out in full, so it is 'Mathematics', not 'maths'.**
36. **Many people dislike split infinitives (for example, 'to fully understand'). Others do not care. We steer clear of them.**
37. Use brackets very sparingly. Never hide a killer fact inside them.
38. Make sure apostrophes are used properly – for example, after the 's' with a plural and to denote the possessive (where something is 'of' something else). If in doubt, they can often be avoided: 'the University of Cambridge's students' can become 'students at the University of Cambridge'. Where a word already ends in 's' but needs an apostrophe, we add a second 's' after the apostrophe if the word would sound like it has a second 's' when read aloud. So we would write, 'Harper Adams's students'.
39. Avoid putting a double space after one sentence and before the next, as was common in the days of typewriters. Leave it to our designers to work out the right spacing between words.
40. We often receive draft papers where the word 'that' is spread liberally around the text like confetti, sometimes appearing hundreds of times in one short paper. While the word can

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sometimes aid reading, its overuse is diverting and therefore counter-productive.

41. If in doubt about anything else, consult the [Guardian / Observer Style Guide](#), which is freely available online. The *Economist* style guide is also useful. It refers to the old-but-valuable advice that 'it is usually easier to write a double negative than it is to interpret it.'

Formatting

42. Do not use complex formatting, such as coloured subtitles. Please also avoid Microsoft's document templates, as features like automatic paragraph breaks (rather than just leaving a blank line to denote a new paragraph) complicate the process. Our designers need the text to be delivered to them in a straightforward fashion. So there is no point adding bells and whistles, which will add unnecessary time for the author. Any reformatting also creates new opportunities for errors to creep in.
43. The main text should be justified. In other words, it should be squared off at the end of each line. This note is justified.
44. Chapter breaks should be used in longer reports. 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.
45. Sub-headings are another useful way to break up the text and can be used in Policy Notes as well as full-length reports. Sub-headings appear in italics at the same font size as the rest of the text; they should not be enlarged, emboldened or underlined.
46. Charts, tables and diagrams that aid understanding are welcome, whether in colour or black and white. They should



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have an italicised title above them and, if lifted from elsewhere, a clear reference immediately underneath.

47. 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 avoid starting sentences with a number.
48. When using percentages, we generally 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 make an exception to this rule for data-rich reports, when we use the % symbol.
49. **Italicise the titles of publications**, including newspapers and academic journals. So it is the *Independent* and the *Oxford Review of Education*.
50. 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 and to provide variety to the eye.
51. **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.
52. **We use single speech marks, except for quotations within quotations, when double speech marks are 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.
53. **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***

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removal of student number controls, 2013, p.4. We occasionally break this rule but it is critical that each publication is consistent throughout the whole document in its approach.

54. Where an endnote is marked in the text, there should be a Arabic numeral (1,2, 3 not i, ii and iii) in superscript after the full stop. There should be no more than one endnote referred to at the end of a single sentence, though the accompanying reference can include multiple sources. One of 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.
55. Please use 14-point Verdana for the main text and 12-point Verdana for endnotes. If you do not have access to Verdana, use Calibri. This note is in 14-point Verdana. It may seem excessively large but this is necessary for the editing process – for example, it allows sufficient room for handwritten comments. Always avoid serif fonts, which are the ones with swirly bits. They can be harder to read on screen and tend to be difficult for people with dyslexia.
56. Bibliographies are not necessary because we include sufficient details of the relevant source material in the endnotes. (except on rare occasions when we use the Harvard referencing system, when a bibliography is essential).

Nick Hillman
26 May 2020