

*'The Higher Education Policy Institute has been questioning and advancing our understanding ... for over 20 years.'*

**The Rt Hon. Robert Halfon MP, Minister for Higher and Further Education  
at the HEPI Annual Conference, June 2023**

*'really important data for policymakers'*

**Matt Western MP, Shadow Minister for Higher Education on the  
HEPI / Advance HE Student Academic Experience Survey, June 2023**

## Summary

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) is an Oxford-based charity founded in 2002/03 'to promote research into and understanding of all aspects of higher education and to disseminate the useful results of such research for the education of policy makers and the general public in the United Kingdom'.

During the 2022/23 academic year, the organisation passed its 20th birthday, which was marked in July 2023 with a celebration where 200 guests heard from speakers including the Rt Hon. the Lord Willetts and the Rt Hon. Margaret Hodge MP. The occasion was also marked by a substantial collection of essays on the previous two decades of higher education policy.

HEPI is funded by higher education institutions and other organisations that wish to see a vibrant higher education policy debate shaped by evidence. We are very grateful for this continuing support. During 2022/23, the number of HEPI University Partners grew to the highest ever number (136), as did the number of other organisations (18) supporting HEPI through the corporate Partnership programme.

Above all, HEPI seeks to conduct and publish research into higher education to improve the quality of debate and, ultimately, to help those making policy at Westminster and Whitehall, in the devolved administrations and within higher education institutions. Engagement with policymakers, the higher education sector, the media, students and the wider public is primarily undertaken via our reports, our events and our online presence. As a micro-organisation, we always look to work collaboratively with other organisations and individuals committed to good public policy and a better higher education sector.

In 2022/23, HEPI cemented its post-pandemic recovery and built upon the achievements in the organisation's first two decades by publishing more major pieces of original research (35) than in any previous year, hosting more events than ever before (32) and receiving a record number of website hits (810,000). While this record surpasses every previous year, it is likely that HEPI – in conjunction with other organisations – would have been in a stronger position had the pandemic not occurred.

The HEPI staff team is guided by an Advisory Board. In early 2022/23, Professor David Maguire and Professor Mary Stuart left the Advisory Board, and we thank them both for their considerable contribution to HEPI's work. We were delighted to welcome Professor David Sweeney CBE, the former Executive Chair of Research England, and Professor Sir Chris Husbands, the outgoing Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield Hallam University, as new members of the Advisory Board in January 2023 and July 2023 respectively.

This Annual Review provides further detail on HEPI's performance in 2022/23, reflecting our long-standing commitment to being more transparent than most UK think tanks, including much larger organisations.

Looking ahead, HEPI is being affected like every other organisation by the wider economic challenges, including the big increase in inflation, which is necessitating the first ever increase in the standard annual donation from HEPI University Partners since the programme began around 15 years ago.

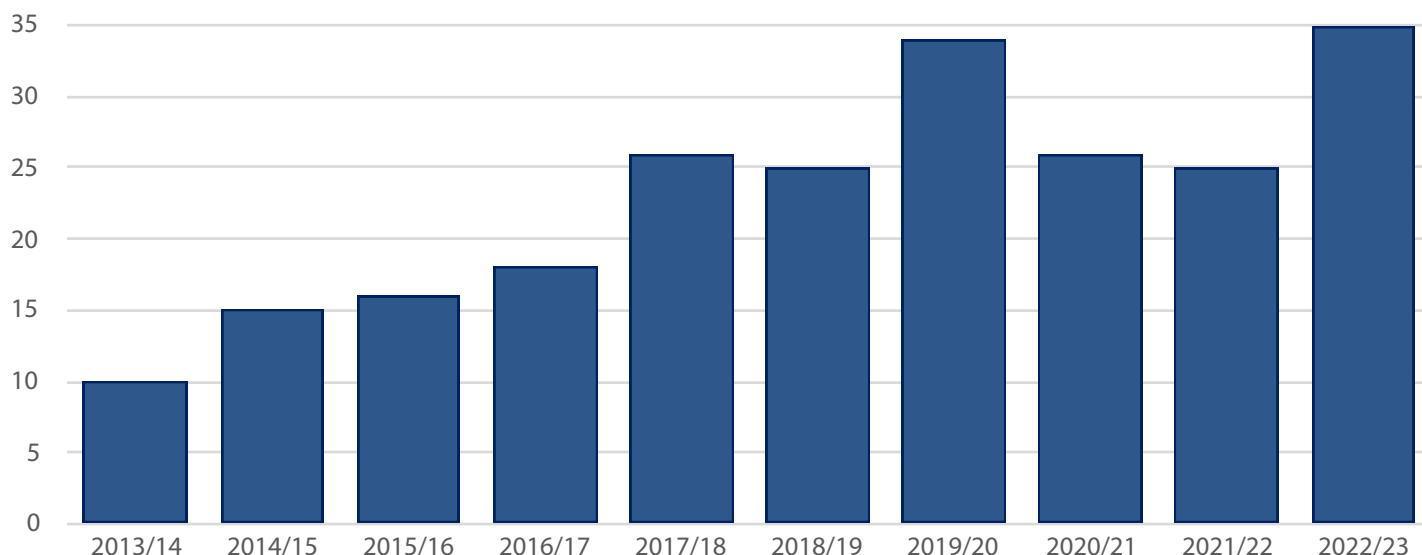
In addition, the organisation's Trustees and Advisory Board members plan to mark the start of HEPI's third decade by undertaking some strategic planning about the future, including reassessing our own success criteria, with a view to helping ensure HEPI's next decade is as successful as its first two.

## 1. Publications

In 2022/23, HEPI produced 35 pieces of published research, or one every 10 days on average: 12 Policy Notes; 11 HEPI Reports; five detailed reports with other organisations; three Policy Briefing Papers; two Occasional Papers; and two press notices based on new data (on where world leaders were educated and students' political opinions).

This is the highest number ever – a little higher even than in the year most affected by COVID, when we refocused resources from events to greater written output – and is up from 25 in 2021/22, 26 in 2020/21 and 34 in 2019/20.

*Number of HEPI publications*



A number of reports, produced in conjunction with other organisations, were particularly substantial relative to HEPI's usual output, including:

- an analysis of academics' terms and conditions, produced with SUMS;
- an assessment of the financial contribution of international students to the UK, produced by London Economics for HEPI, Universities UK and Kaplan International Pathways; and
- a collection of essays, sponsored by Elsevier and edited by Dr Helen Carasso, on the last two decades of higher education policy.

As usual, we sought to cover a wide spectrum of higher education policy issues, with a particular focus in 2022/23 on:

- **research**, including full-length reports on how to talk to policymakers about the value of research, on research leadership and on universities and Foreign Direct Investment (in conjunction with the Midlands Engine, the National Centre for Universities and Business and Universities UK International), plus a collection of essays on the future of the Research Excellence Framework and a Policy Note on Horizon Europe and so-called Plan B;
- **admissions and the student experience**, including the 2023 *Student Academic Experience Survey* with Advance HE, a report on what it is like to be a student in London and a survey of students' views of careers support – we also worked with Unite Students, a HEPI Partner, on their *Applicant Index Report 2023*; and
- **regulation, leadership and governance**, including full-length reports on improving governance, lessons from the regulation of higher education in Australia and running small and specialist institutions as well as Policy Notes on the tenure of vice-chancellors at post-92 institutions and on quality assurance and some personal reflections on running a university in the recent political and economic environment.



*Professor Dame Sally Mapstone, Chair of HEPI, welcomes attendees to the 20th anniversary celebration*



*Bahram Bekhradnia, HEPI's President, speaking about the early years of the organisation*



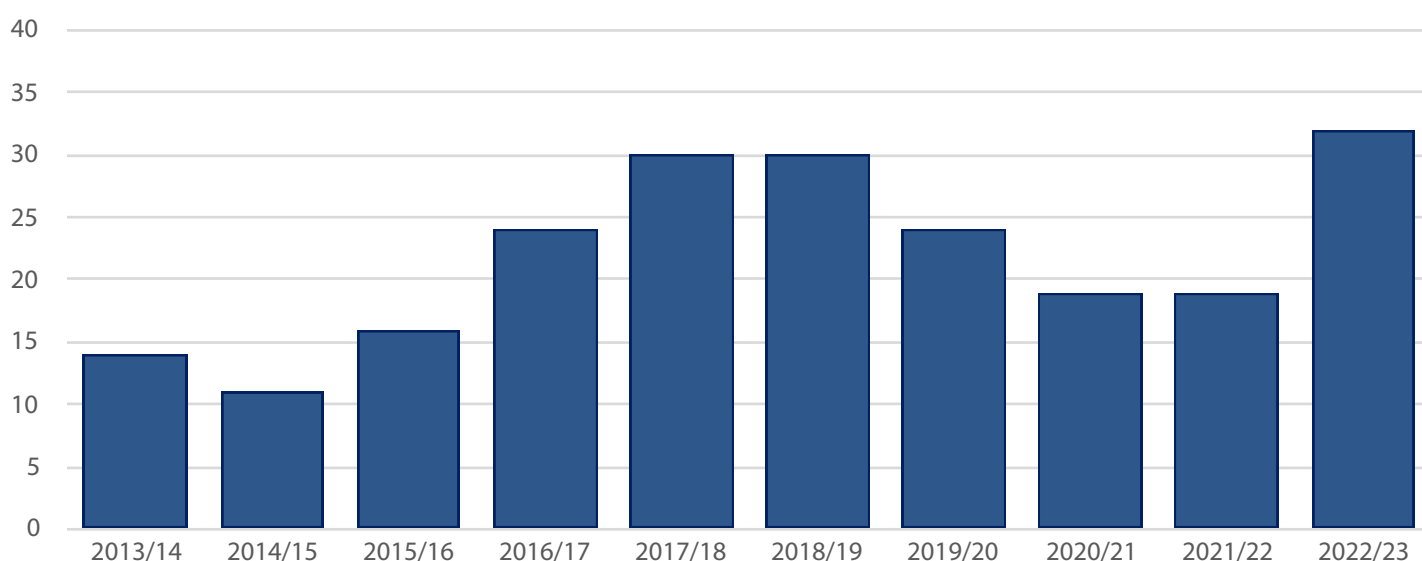
## 2. Events

In 2022/23, HEPI hosted 32 in-person, online and hybrid events, including:

- **eight dinners with HEPI Partners** on issues ranging from modernising medical schools, digital learning resources, university careers services and good governance
- **seven webinars in conjunction with HEPI Partners** on issues including higher education admissions, climate change, educational gains, open access and research and the Graduate Route visa
- **three hybrid events with other organisations** on international students, public attitudes towards higher education and student funding
- **a series of events with Advance HE**, consisting of two parliamentary breakfasts and one webinar
- **two HEPI Partner Dinners**, with Professor Edward Peck CBE, Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University and the Government's Student Support Champion, and Viv Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK
- **two fringe events at the Labour and Conservative annual conferences**, on student access and success
- **the HEPI Annual Conference** on 'The future of higher education at a time of technological innovation, changing regulation and political uncertainty', featuring the Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP (Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships, Department for Education), Matt Western MP (Shadow Minister for Further Education and Universities) and Susan Lapworth (Chief Executive at the Office for Students)
- **an Annual Lecture** on 'Is higher education fit for the future?', with Andreas Schleicher of the OECD
- **a research conference** on 'UK Research Looking Forward', with HEPI Partner Elsevier, and a keynote speech from George Freeman MP, the Minister for Science, Innovation and Technology
- **a lunch for President Michael A Fitts of Tulane University**, with the UPP Foundation on 'Transforming communities: academic institutions and the cities we call home'
- **a seminar with London Higher** on life as a student in the capital city
- **a 20th birthday party** celebration and dinner
- **a press briefing** on the HEPI / Advance HE 2023 *Student Academic Experience Survey*

This is the highest number of events that HEPI has ever hosted in any one year, a little ahead of the number of events held each year before COVID, and notably higher than in the three COVID-affected years of 2021/22 (19), 2020/21 (19) and 2019/20 (24).

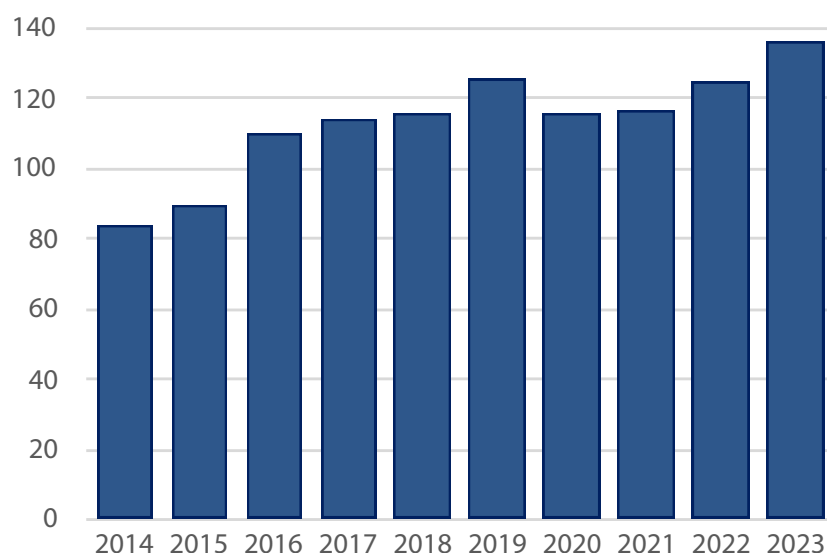
Number of HEPI events



## 3. Engagement

HEPI continued to increase the number of organisations with which it works in 2022/23. The number of University Partners, which dipped during COVID, grew to 136, the highest number ever and 10 institutions more than the previous high point. The number of corporate Partners also rose to a record number (18), with the addition of Curio London, Kortext, QS Quacquarelli Symonds and TechnologyOne.

Number of HEPI University Partners



HEPI corporate Partners at the close of 2022/23

1. Advance HE
2. Curio London
3. Elsevier
4. GatenbySanderson
5. Handshake
6. iQ Student Accommodation
7. Jisc
8. Kaplan
9. Kortext
10. Lloyds Bank
11. Mills & Reeve LLP
12. QS Quacquarelli Symonds
13. Research England
14. Taylor & Francis
15. TechnologyOne
16. Times Higher Education
17. Unite Students
18. UPP Group Limited

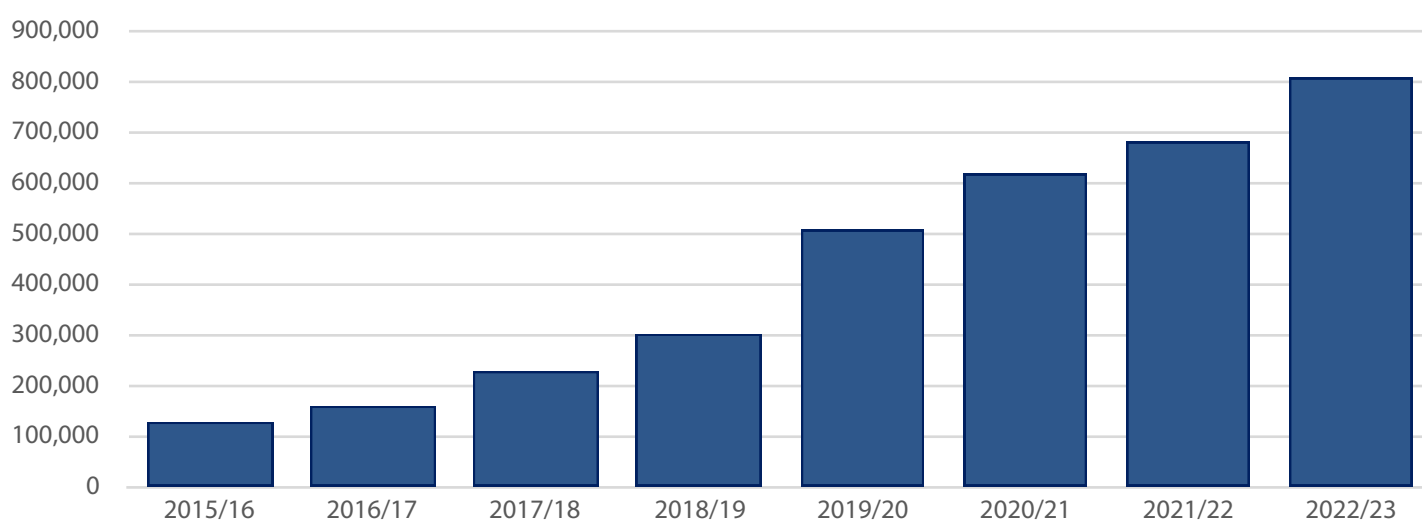
In 2022/23, HEPI achieved record engagement online after many years of fairly consistent growth. By the end of July 2023, there had been 810,000 website hits, which is an absolute record, nearly 20% higher than in 2021/22 and more than two-and-a-half-times the number of hits scored in every pre-COVID year.<sup>1</sup> There were around 265 separate blog entries, slightly more than in any other year, with one new piece each working day (except for a mini-break over Christmas) and a number of 'WEEKEND READING' pieces.

The most well-read new blog posts were on international students (by a former Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, Lord Johnson of Marylebone), on higher education admissions (by Clare Marchant, Chief Executive of UCAS) and on the role of the Russell Group (by a HEPI Trustee, Mary Curnock Cook).

We maintained the innovation first instituted in 2021/22 of running blog series on specific topics, enabling a deeper dive into topical issues – most notably, a series on employability in conjunction with the National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education (NCEE). In addition, we featured more blogs by serving vice-chancellors, which made up around 10 per cent of the total, higher than in earlier years, providing an important independent forum for sector leaders to contribute to high-profile policy debates.

While website hits provide a rough proxy for trends in engagement with HEPI's work, they only capture a minority of interactions. We also publicise our work on a daily basis through direct communications via our electronic database of over 12,000 people (meaning around 4 million emails in 2022/23), by posting out nearly 700 hard copies of each major publication to influential people in the higher education sector and beyond, by attending other organisations' events to talk about our work and by working through specialist, local and national media outlets.

HEPI website hits



<sup>1</sup> Since the addition of a GDPR-compliant cookie pop-up at the end of 2020/21, we have added an estimate of unrecorded hits to the total, in line with advice from our website provider.



#### 4. Staffing and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

For much of 2022/23, HEPI was not fully staffed as it took time to fill two vacant policy-focused positions after the departure of two key members of staff. In autumn 2022, we said goodbye to HEPI's Director of Policy and Advocacy, Dr Alexis Brown, who moved to a senior role at the British Council. She was replaced in spring 2023 by Rose Stephenson, who joined HEPI from her previous role as Policy and Projects Manager at the University of Bath. In the winter of 2022, Dr Laura Brassington, HEPI's Policy Manager, left to take up a new academic position as well as a policy role at Universities UK. She was replaced in the summer of 2023 by Josh Freeman, who had worked as HEPI's postgraduate intern in mid-2022 and who joined HEPI as a permanent member of staff after completing a postgraduate degree at the University of Oxford.

In 2022/23, four women and one man served as HEPI Trustees (in stark contrast to HEPI's earliest days, when all the Trustees were men), while HEPI's Advisory Board was made up of three men and two women and, at the end of the year, the staff team comprised three women and two men. There were more male (60%) than female (40%) authors of HEPI reports, which is a slight retrograde change from the previous year (56%:44%), and a gender imbalance remained among those blogging on the HEPI website (56% male; 44% female), though this was a very slight improvement on 2021/22 (57%:43%). There were slightly more female speakers (52%) at HEPI events than male speakers (48%), with the proportions here exactly the same as in 2021/22. We have strived to ensure diversity on panels at HEPI's events in 2022/23, including – for example – hosting a student-only panel at the HEPI Annual Conference to discuss the results of the HEPI / Advance 2023 Student Academic Experience Survey.

In 2022/23, some HEPI reports had a particular focus on EDI, including a Policy Note on the educational outcomes for students previously eligible for free school meals, two analyses of how the proposed changes to UCAS Personal Statements are likely to affect people from different backgrounds, a Policy Note on student belonging and a report on the Graduate Route visa for those from other countries. In addition, we continued to expand the EDI focus of the HEPI / Advance HE Student Academic Experience Survey, with for example more analysis of the results by LGB+ status.

During 2022/23, we also started work on various projects with a focus on EDI that will see the light of day in 2023/24, including papers on the gender pay gap in higher education and on how the cost-of-living crisis is affecting different students.

#### Conclusion

As 2022/23 marked HEPI's twentieth year as well as our first fully normal year after the crisis caused by the pandemic, it has felt like passing a big milestone in the organisation's history. HEPI's Founder and President, Bahram Bekhradnia, wrote in his contribution to HEPI's 20th anniversary collection of essays that, 'I am pleased – perhaps even a little surprised – that HEPI will soon have achieved its 21st year.'

The organisation ended the 2022/23 year in a strong place. But there is an obstacle course to negotiate in the coming years and months, with a continuing adverse economic situation, new challenges for those managing and governing higher education institutions and political uncertainty, with an approaching general election – the sixth since HEPI's foundation in 2002/03.

HEPI has long sought to avoid passing on extra costs to those that support its work and the standard University Partnership donation of £2,000 (plus VAT) has not increased since it was first instituted around 15 years ago, when HEPI had a much lower annual output in terms of reports and events. We have had to revisit this issue and, on the advice of HEPI's Trustees, will implement a modest increase of £200 to the standard donation in 2023/24, rising to £2,200 per subscribing institution. To put this in perspective, if the University Partnership donation had kept in line with inflation, it would now be over £3,000.

**Nick Hillman (Director)**

**October 2023**



*The HEPI staff preparing for the 20th anniversary celebrations (from left to right: Josh Freeman, Rose Stephenson, Lucy Haire, Emma Ma and Nick Hillman)*

