



Higher Education Policy Institute

2023/24

# Annual Review

## Summary

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) is an Oxford-based charity founded in 2002 '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'.

HEPI had its most successful year ever during 2023/24, whichever way that is measured – for example, the number of institutions supporting HEPI's work, the number of HEPI publications and events and the level of engagement with HEPI's output all ran at record levels.

In part, this reflected the heightened interest in public policy during an academic year which ended with a watershed general election, but it also reflected the slightly larger and more stable HEPI staff team and a growth in the number of organisations wanting to work with us.

During the year, alongside our regular output, such as the HEPI / Advance HE *Student Academic Experience Survey*, we placed a particular emphasis on institutional and student income (including the launch of the HEPI / TechnologyOne *Student Minimum Income Standard*), the lives of early career researchers (including work with the British Academy, GW4 and the Society of Black Academics) and election-themed research.

If 2022/23 was primarily about fully recovering to a pre-COVID position in terms of our output, then 2023/24 was mainly about surpassing pre-COVID highs and moving into the position we would have hoped to have occupied earlier had the pandemic not occurred.

Looking ahead to 2024/25, HEPI plans to work closely with policymakers of all colours as institutions continue to feel under threat, sometimes existential threat, and to assess our own corporate identity and processes.

The HEPI staff team is guided by an expert Advisory Board. In early 2023/24, Professor Carl Lygo left the Board after seven years of loyal service. During the year, we welcomed four new Advisory Board members: Professor Nishan Canagarajah; Anne-Marie Canning MBE; Andy Forbes; and Professor Julie Sanders. The five HEPI Trustees, chaired by Professor Dame Sally Mapstone, continued to oversee the organisation's work.

This Annual Review provides further detail on HEPI's performance in 2023/24, reflecting our long-standing commitment to be more transparent than the vast majority of UK think tanks, including much larger organisations.

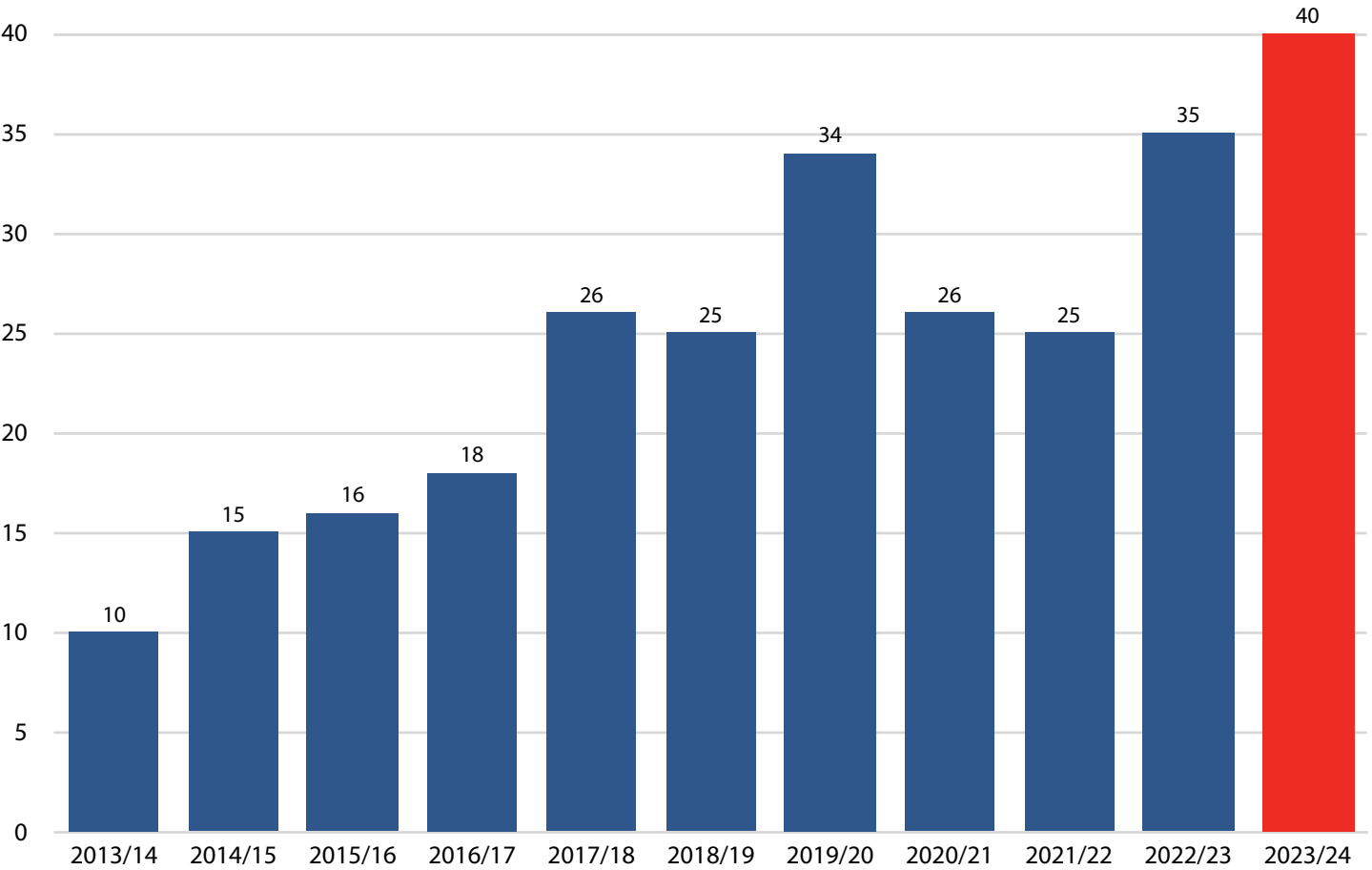
1. Publications

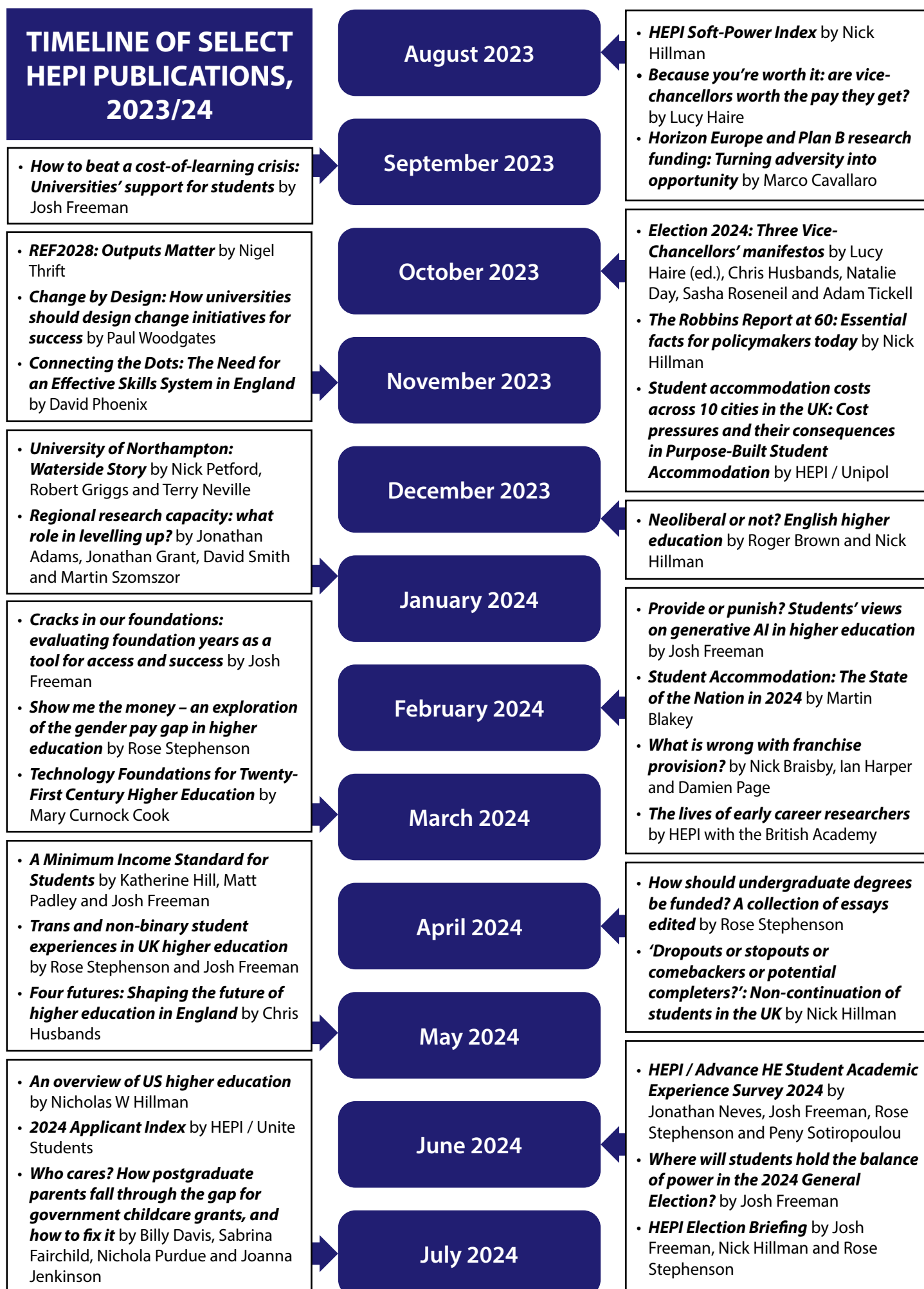
In 2023/24, HEPI released 40 pieces of original research, more than one every nine days on average (or one every six working days):

- 14 HEPI Reports, with a particular focus on institutional and student income, the future of higher education institutions and the lived experience of early career researchers;
- nine HEPI Policy Notes, including pieces on the 60th anniversary of the Robbins report, edtech and student accommodation;
- five HEPI news releases with previously unpublished data, such as the Social Mobility Index, the Soft-Power Index and constituency-level data on international students;
- four joint reports with other organisations, including the HEPI / Advance HE *Student Academic Experience Survey*, the HEPI / Unite Students *Applicant Index* and the HEPI / TechnologyOne *Student Minimum Income Standard*;
- four reports worked up by London Economics and the Nuffield Foundation on higher education finance and funding in each part of the UK;
- three HEPI Debate Papers on vice-chancellors’ remuneration, the redevelopment of the University of Northampton and neoliberalism and higher education; and
- one HEPI Policy Briefing Paper covering a range of topical higher education issues.

This is the highest number of published pieces HEPI has produced in any academic year, far ahead of the total in the pandemic-affected years but also ahead of every year before then. The total was boosted by additional election-themed work that would not have occurred without the 2024 General Election and is likely to fall back somewhat in 2024/25.

Number of HEPI publications by year





2. Events

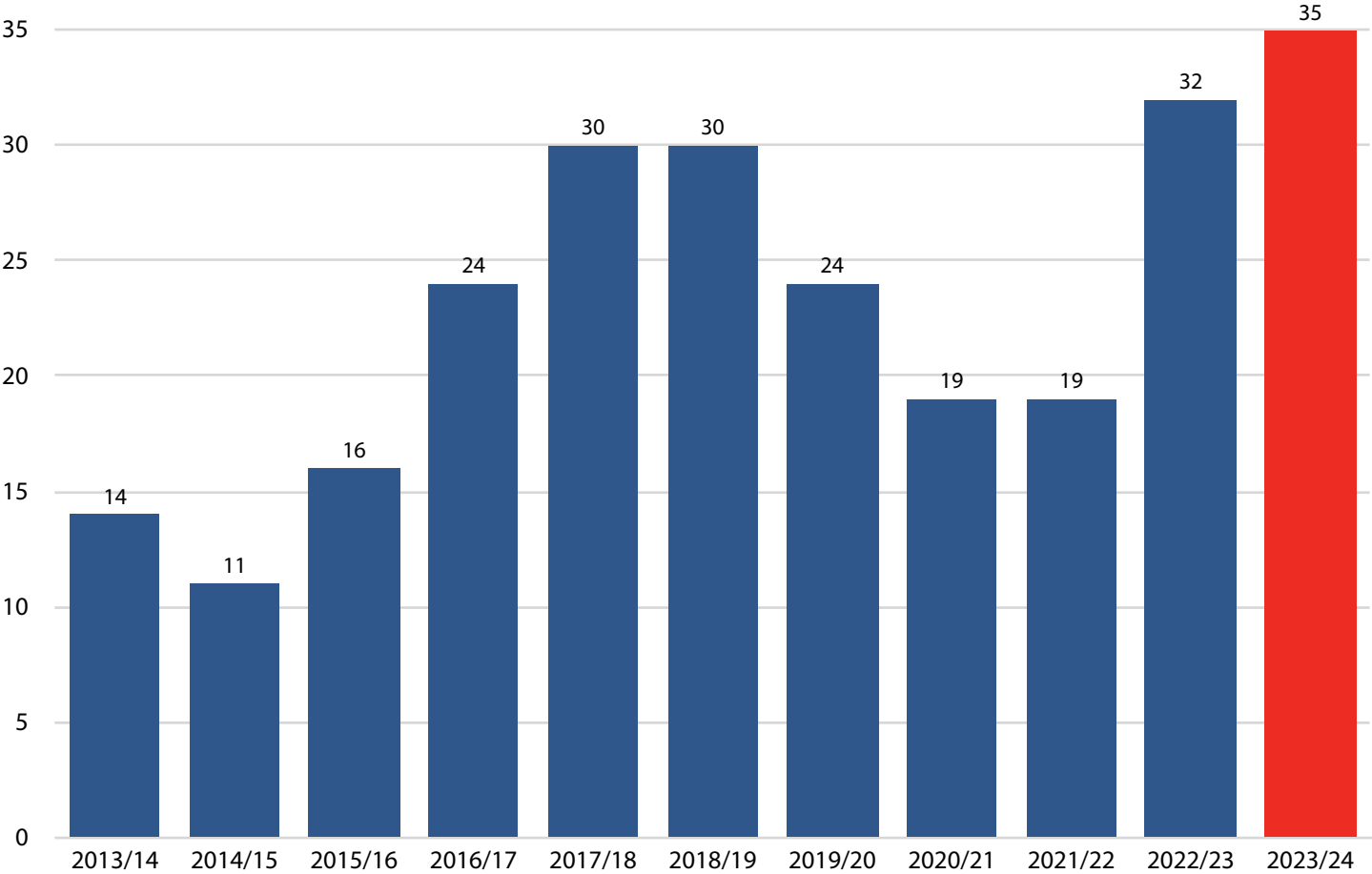
In 2023/24, HEPI hosted 35 in-person and online events, including:

- 14 dinners with HEPI Partners on the contribution of UK research to building a more productive workforce, the climate emergency, artificial intelligence, what keeps research leaders awake at night, student income, funding options, international students, research culture and higher education since 2010;
- eight HEPI webinars, which were open to the public and free to attend, on university admissions, student wellbeing and climate change, the relationship between teaching and research, tertiary education, student incomes, non-continuation, scenario planning and the Australian Accord process;
- four free public events, one in each part of the UK, on the different student funding models in place in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, hosted in conjunction with London Economics and the Nuffield Foundation;
- three events with Advance HE, two in Parliament and one online, on freedom of expression, the approaching general election and tertiary education;
- events at the Labour, Conservative and Universities UK Annual Conferences, variously sponsored by a range of universities and also Unite Students;
- two media briefings on major pieces of forthcoming HEPI research, one online and one in person; and
- the flagship HEPI Annual Conference, sponsored by Kortext and TechnologyOne and featuring speeches by Rob Ford (Professor of Political Science at the University of Manchester), Amira Campbell (incoming NUS President) and Paul Johnson (Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies) as well as a panel of student political activists and the launch of the HEPI / Advance HE Student Academic Experience Survey.

This is the highest number of events that HEPI has ever hosted in any one year, surpassing the previous year’s record of 32. Over the preceding 10 years as a whole, the average annual number of events was 22.

New webinars are generally made available on our YouTube channel immediately afterwards, raising our engagement and impact further and providing a record for posterity.

Number of HEPI events by year



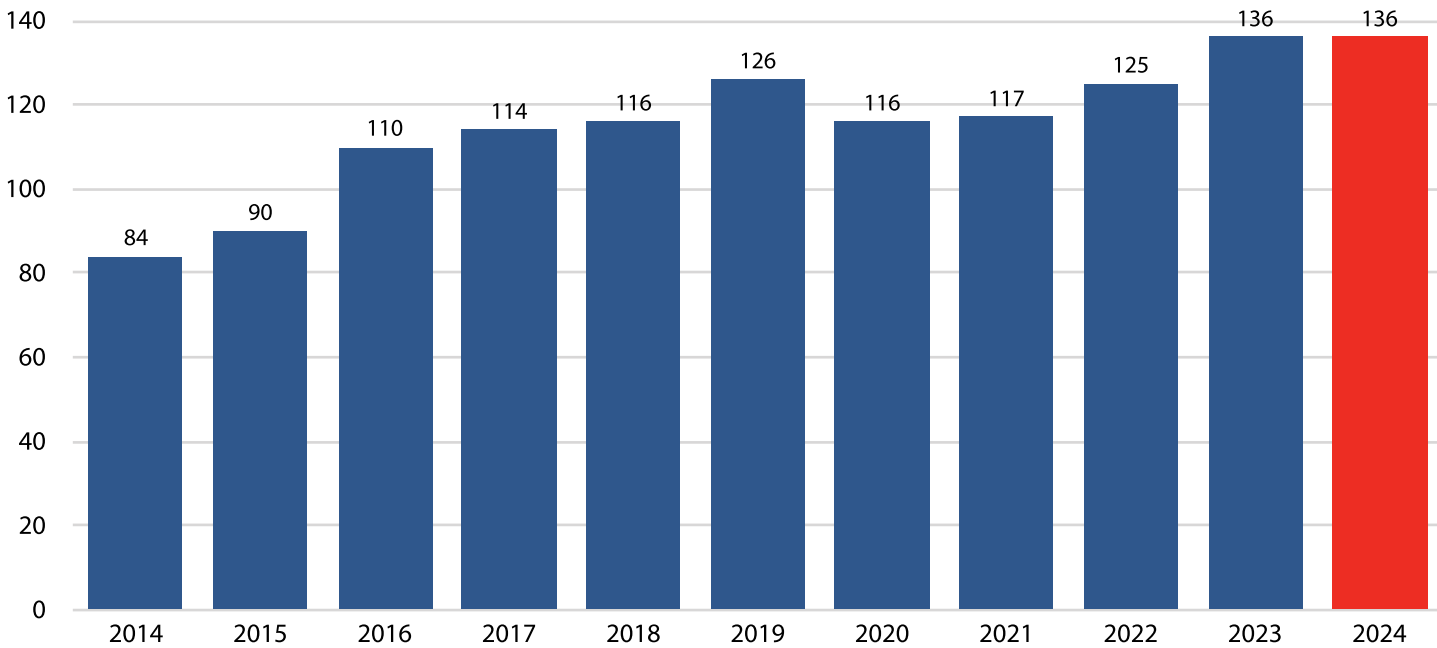
3. Engagement

HEPI continued to increase the number of organisations with which we work in 2023/24. By the end of the year, the number of corporate Partners had risen to a record number (20), with the addition of Chegg, Studiosity and Instructure, while the number of University Partners, which had dipped during COVID but grew again afterwards, was the same as in the previous year (136), matching the highest total ever.

In 2023/24, HEPI achieved record engagement online, breaching the one million mark for the first time and comfortably so: by the end of July 2024, there had been 1.25 million website hits – around 10 times higher than eight years previously, when comparable records began. This represents year-on-year growth of over 50%, greater than the more steady increases of other recent years.

HEPI corporate Partners at the close of 2023/24	
1.	Advance HE
2.	Chegg
3.	Curio London
4.	Elsevier
5.	GatenbySanderson
6.	Instructure
7.	iQ Student Accommodation
8.	Jisc
9.	Kaplan
10.	Kortext
11.	Lloyds Bank
12.	Mills & Reeve LLP
13.	QS Quacquarelli Symonds
14.	Research England
15.	Studiosity
16.	Taylor & Francis
17.	TechnologyOne
18.	Times Higher Education
19.	Unite Students
20.	UPP Group Limited

Number of HEPI University Partners by year



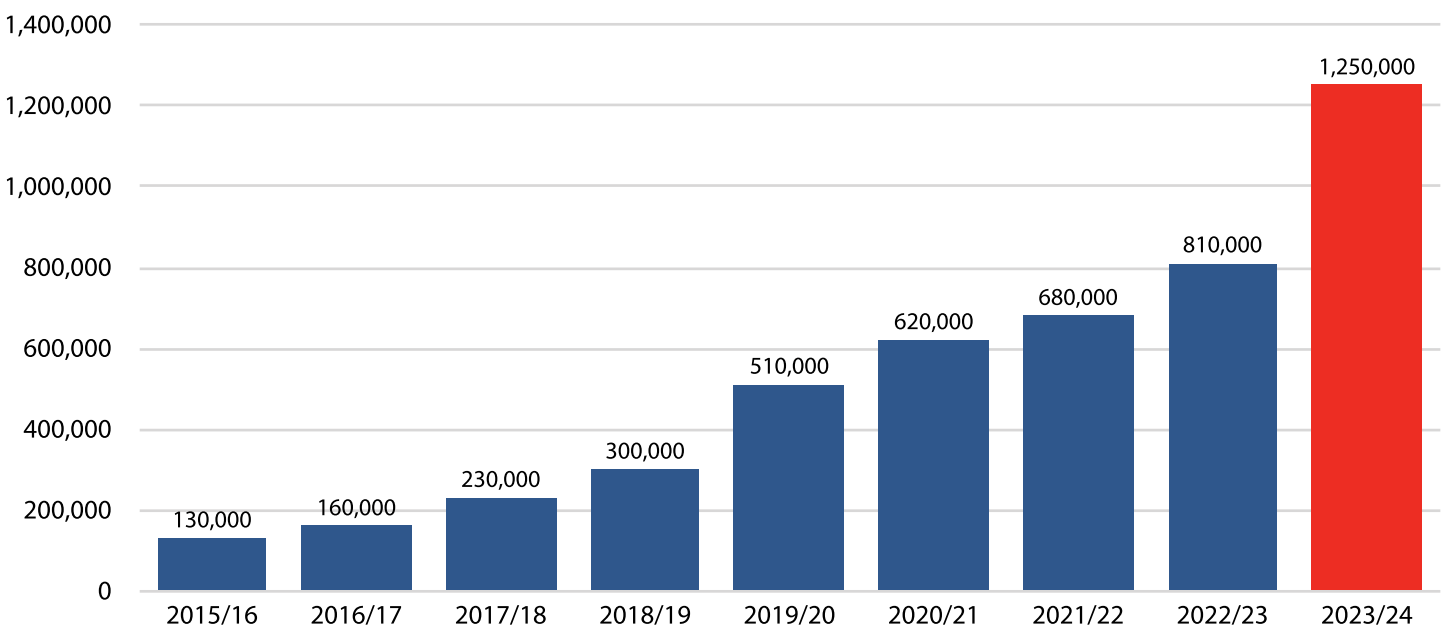
There were 293 original blog entries, an 11% increase on the previous (record) year. The most well-read pieces included a piece reviewing PwC’s assessment of the financial health of higher education institutions by HEPI Director Nick Hillman, a piece on quality by the Chief Executive of the Quality Assurance Agency, Vicki Stott, and an outline of an alternative model for funding undergraduate higher education by the Managing Director of dataHE, Mark Corver.

We ran a number of blog series to mark topical issues, most notably at the time of the 60th anniversary of the Robbins report, on the Research Excellence Framework and on key election issues. We also adopted an agile approach, publishing quick responses to major policy developments such as a House of Lords’ Committee report on the Office for Students, the Migration Advisory Committee’s review of the Graduate Route visa and a live regularly updated blog analysing the political parties’ commitments on higher education.

While website hits provide a proxy for overall engagement, they are only one way in which HEPI’s output reaches people. We also distribute printed versions of our reports to around 700 senior people and our daily blog and publications are emailed to around 13,000 subscribers. On social media, we have seen a steady increase in followers on Twitter / X and growth of 38% on LinkedIn, from around 12,000 to around 17,000 during 2023/24. HEPI also continues to contribute to the national debate through strong engagement with specialist, local and national media and HEPI staff frequently attend others’ events to talk about the our work.



HEPI website hits



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

In 2023/24, there was consolidation and growth in the HEPI staff team, as Carole Cox joined the team as HEPI’s Events and Communications Administrator in February 2024. The whole team, which is made up of four women and two men, can be seen in the picture taken on the occasion of the 2024 HEPI Annual Conference.

For much of 2023/24, four women and one man served as HEPI’s Trustees while HEPI’s Advisory Board was made up of two women and three men. However, in the second half of the year, we welcomed Anne-Marie Canning MBE as the newest Advisory Board member. Moreover, various additional changes were agreed during 2023/24 that will alter the make up of the HEPI Trustees and Advisory Board for the future.

After eight years of long service each, for which we are very grateful, Professor Dame Helen Wallace and Sir David Bell will be standing down from the Trustees, to be replaced by two Advisory Board members, Professor Sir Chris Husbands and Professor Nick Pearce. Additionally, we are welcoming three new Advisory Board members: Professor Nishan Canagarajah; Andy Forbes and Professor Julie Sanders. This means that, from early 2024/25, HEPI will have three women and two men serving as Trustees and four women and three men serving as Advisory Board members.

There were more male (61%) than female (39%) authors of HEPI reports, at a rate that is comparable with the previous year (60%:40%), and a gender imbalance remained among those blogging on the HEPI website (57% male authors and 43% female authors). Again, this is comparable with the previous year (56% male; 44% female). There were more male speakers at HEPI events, with 60% of speakers being male and 40% being female, in contrast to 52% female speakers at HEPI events in the previous year.



The HEPI staff team on the day of the 2024 HEPI Annual Conference in June 2024 (from left to right / top to bottom): Lucy Haire, Nick Hillman, Josh Freeman, Carole Cox, Emma Ma and Rose Stephenson

Representation by gender, HEPI 2023/24



We have strived to ensure full representation on panels at HEPI's events in 2023/24, including – for example – hosting a student hustings of diverse young political activists from the main political parties at the HEPI Annual Conference ahead of the general election.

In 2023/24, a number of HEPI reports focused on EDI matters, including pieces on the gender pay gap in higher education (with Durham University), the trans and non-binary student experience, supporting the progression and promotion of Black academics (with the Society of Black Academics), a collection of essays (with the British Academy) looking at various challenges faced by early career researchers (for example, one powerful chapter was on 'Chronic Illness and Disability in Academia') and a Policy Note on the lack of childcare support for postgraduate students (with GW4).



We also published the latest iteration of the LSBU *Social Mobility Index* and the write up of the 2024 HEPI / Advance HE *Student Academic Experience Survey* had a clearer focus on specific under-represented groups, such as those with experience of care, than in previous years.

### Conclusion

HEPI ended 2023/24 in a strong place but also facing some challenging winds, given the financial issues facing the UK higher education sector, a new Government at Westminster and continuing global political uncertainty.

Looking ahead, HEPI plans to continue publishing reports and hosting events on topical higher education and research issues, deepening our relationships with higher education institutions and other organisations that work within the UK higher education sector across the UK and improving our internal organisation, with the goal of setting HEPI in good stead for the future as a permanent feature of the educational policy landscape.

**Nick Hillman (Director)**

**September 2024**



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