



Higher Education Policy Institute

2024/25

Annual Review

Overview

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'. This Annual Review looks at the work of the Institute between August 2024 and July 2025.

HEPI had a successful year, whichever way that is measured. Most notably, perhaps, the number of HEPI's corporate Partners was at its highest ever level. As a result, aside from the previous year (which included the 2024 General Election), the number of HEPI publications and events were at record levels. The available evidence also suggests HEPI's work had more impact among policymakers, regulators and institutional leaders.

Key pieces of research in 2024/25 include HEPI's regular surveys: the HEPI / Advance HE *Student Academic Experience Survey*; the HEPI / Kortext *Student Generative AI Survey*; and the HEPI / Unite Students *Applicant Index*. We also published the annual HEPI / LSBU *English Social Mobility Index* and the *Soft-Power Index*.

Other notable themes covered by HEPI's full-length reports in 2024/25 include: the role of third-space research professionals; the lives of Black early-career researchers (with the Society of Black Academics and GatenbySanderson); awarding gaps by gender at Oxbridge (written by one of HEPI's graduate interns); the educational underachievement of boys and young men (sponsored by Ulster University); the extent to which school and college curricula prepare people for higher education (sponsored by the University of Chester); what devolution has meant for higher education 20 years on (sponsored by the Education Group); the impact of menstruation on learning (sponsored by the University of St Andrews); the continuing decline of language learning (sponsored by Duolingo); and entrepreneurial leadership (with the NCEE).

There were 33 HEPI events in 2024/25, higher than in every previous year except for the election year of 2023/24. These included 13 roundtable discussions hosted with HEPI Partners, 11 webinars and nine in-person events. The HEPI Annual Conference, which had the title 'Before, During, After: The route through higher education in changing times', included presentations from the Chief Executives of Universities UK, UCAS and the Office for Students.

HEPI's impact was felt in Government, Parliament and the media, with the organisation's work being regularly quoted in official documents, ministerial speeches and parliamentary debates as well as in national, local and specialist media. In June 2025, HEPI's impact was publicly marked when the Director, Nick Hillman, was awarded an OBE in His Majesty the King's Birthday Honours for 'services to higher education'.

If 2022/23 was primarily about fully recovering to a pre-COVID position in terms of HEPI’s output and 2023/24 was partly focused on election-themed work, then 2024/25 was characterised by a near-record output while undergoing modernisation – including a major visual rebrand and a new website, both going live early in 2025/26, and progress on the adoption of a new Customer-Relationship Management (CRM) tool.

The HEPI staff team was generally stable in 2024/25, though we sadly said goodbye to our Policy Manager, Josh Freeman, at the very end of the year, when he left to become a Strategy Manager at the Office for Students. There was also stability among HEPI’s Trustees and Advisory Board, with continuing oversight from HEPI’s Chair, Professor Dame Sally Mapstone.

This *Annual Review* provides further detail on HEPI’s recent performance and is part of our long-standing commitment to be to be one of the most transparent think tanks in the UK.

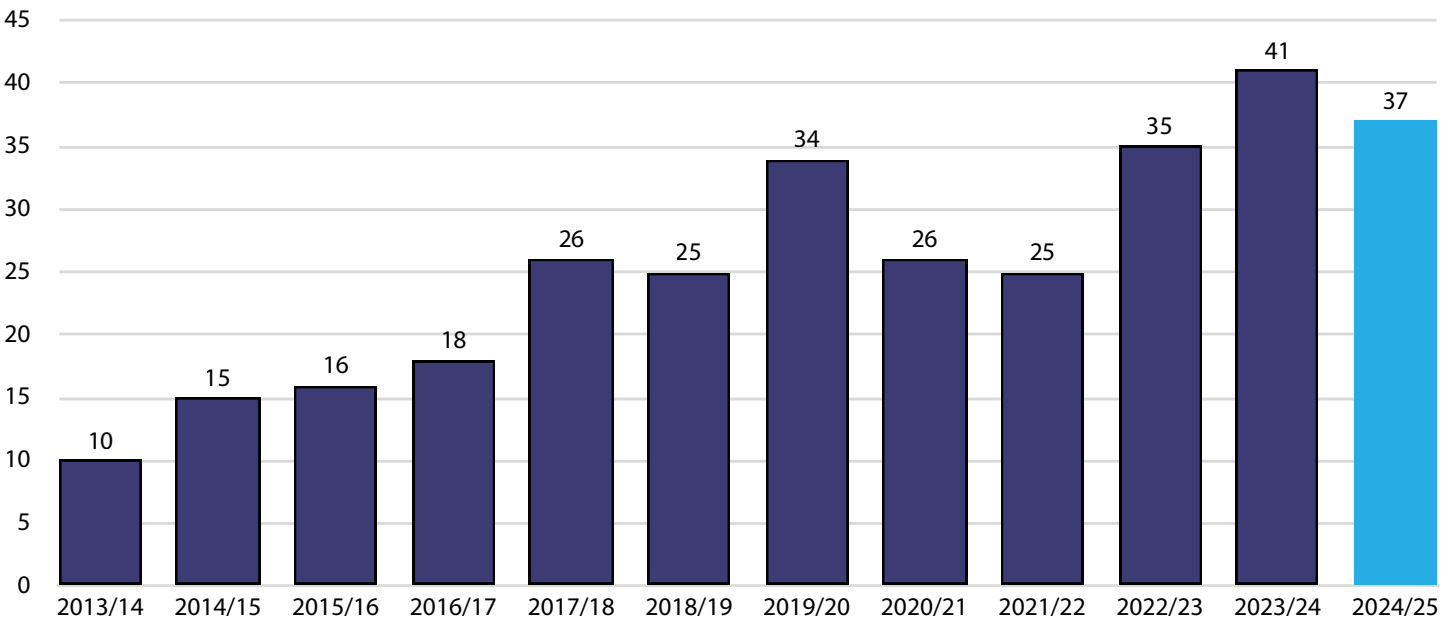
1. Publications

In 2024/25, HEPI released 37 pieces of original research, more than one every 10 days on average:

- 17 HEPI ‘blue book’ Reports (up from 14 in 2023/24);
- eight HEPI Policy Notes (nine in 2023/24);
- three ‘red’ HEPI Debate Papers (three in 2023/24);
- four joint reports with other organisations (four in 2023/24); and
- five HEPI news releases with previously unpublished data (five in 2023/24).

This is the highest number of pieces HEPI has produced in any academic year except for 2023/24 (when the total was boosted by work focused on the July 2024 General Election).

The number of HEPI publications



2. Events

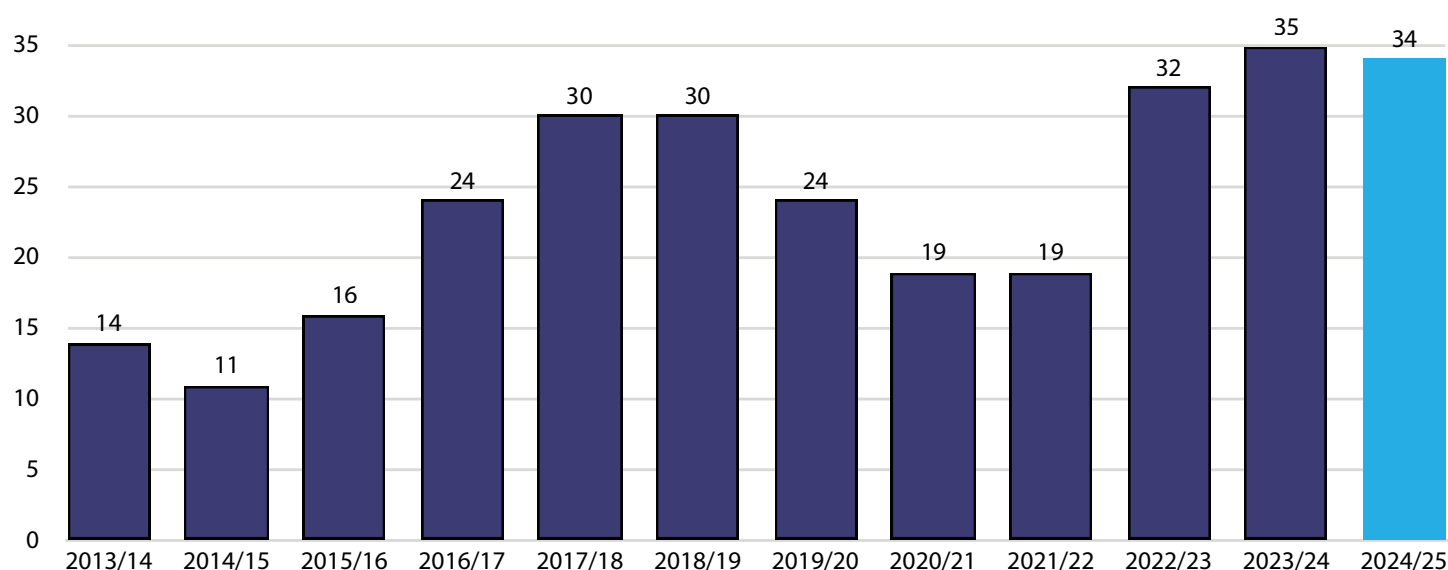
In 2024/25, HEPI hosted 34 in-person and online events, including:

- 14 roundtable events with HEPI Partners (14 in 2023/24), including sessions on AI with TechnologyOne, interdisciplinary research with Taylor & Francis, universities and growth with Lloyds Bank, innovation and growth with Elsevier, technology and the student experience with Kortext and teaching and learning with Studiosity;

- 11 webinars – free and open to all (10 in 2023/24), on topics including higher education applicants with Unite Students, vice-chancellor recruitment with GatenbySanderson, efficiency with Interpath, employability with the UPP Foundation, transnational education with Lancaster University, earning and learning with Advance HE, collaboration versus competition with Jisc, social mobility with London South Bank University and admissions with UCAS; and
- nine other in-person events (11 in 2023/24), including fringe events at the Labour and Conservative party conferences, seminars in Parliament with Advance HE on inclusion and future operating models, report launches with the University of Bristol and Unipol, a symposium on funding with the Council for the Defence of British Universities and the HEPI Annual Conference, which was sponsored by TechnologyOne, Kortext and Unite Students.

This is the highest number of events that HEPI has ever hosted in any one year, aside from in 2023/24 (when there was just one more).

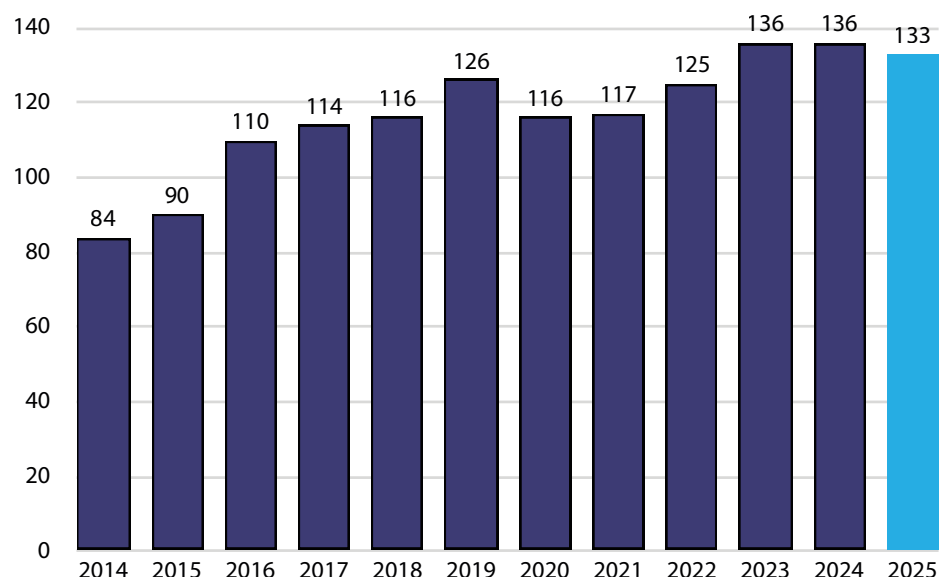
The number of HEPI events



3. Engagement

HEPI continued to increase the number of organisations with which it works in 2024/25. By the end of the year, the number of corporate Partners had risen to a record number (21), while the number of University Partners was broadly static, maintaining most of the post-COVID increase.

Number of HEPI University Partners



HEPI corporate Partners

1. Advance HE
2. Cambridge University Press & Assessment
3. Duolingo
4. Ellucian
5. Elsevier
6. GatenbySanderson
7. Instructure
8. Interpath
9. iQ Student Accommodation
10. Jisc
11. Kaplan
12. Kortext
13. Lloyds Bank
14. QS Quacquarelli Symonds
15. Research England
16. Studiosity
17. Taylor & Francis
18. TechnologyOne
19. Times Higher Education
20. Unite Students
21. UPP Foundation

In 2024/25, the total number of hits on HEPI's website was very similar to the previous year, with just under 2,500 registered hits each day on average.¹ The three best performing posts were a blog by the Director on tuition fees for EU students in the UK, the HEPI / Kortext *Student Generative AI Survey* and a piece on visa applications by the Chief Executive of ApplyBoard.

However, website hits are only a rough proxy for overall engagement. HEPI distributes printed versions of our reports to around 600 senior sector figures and our daily blog and publications are emailed to around 15,000 subscribers. On social media, we have around 22,000 followers on X (formerly known as Twitter) and have recently built up close to 4,000 followers on Bluesky.

In 2024/25, HEPI was also increasingly active on LinkedIn, increasing the number of followers to 20,000. HEPI regularly contributes to the national debate through engagement with specialist, local and national media and frequent attendance at others' events to talk about HEPI's work, so much of our engagement is via intermediaries.

4. Impact

In 2024/25, HEPI's impact was felt in Government, Parliament and the national media. We also worked with people from other countries to deepen understanding of UK higher education.

HEPI's output was quoted extensively in documents from the Home Office, the Scottish Government, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Students, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the Russell Group Students' Unions (RGSU) / the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA), the Qatari Embassy and Universities UK, as well as in House of Commons Library Briefing Notes for parliamentarians on international students, teachers' pensions, student mental health and maintenance support.

In July 2025, as a direct result of HEPI's work, the Government were defeated in the House of Lords on the Renters' Rights Bill over which properties should count as student properties.

In 2024/25, HEPI's research was quoted by the Minister for Skills (Baroness Smith), the Mayor of London (Sir Sadiq Khan), the Leader of the Opposition (the Rt Hon. Kemi Badenoch MP), the Shadow Minister for Education (Neil O'Brien MP), the Liberal Democrat Education Spokesperson (Munira Wilson MP) and the First Minister of Scotland (the Rt Hon. John Swinney MSP) among others. In addition, HEPI's work was quoted in parliamentary debates on higher education reform, the Renters' Rights Bill and the challenges faced by boys and young men.

HEPI's Director of Policy served as a Commissioner for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Students, supporting the development of a report identifying the urgent challenges facing universities today.

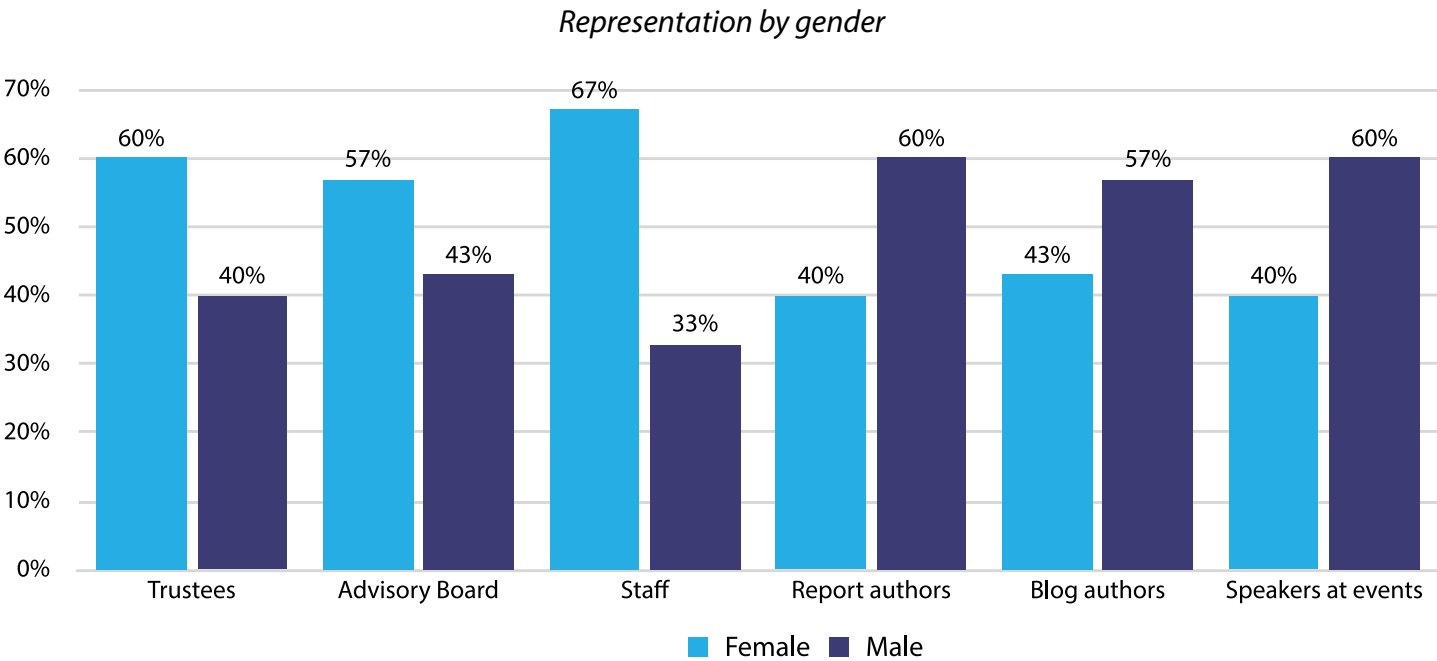
As in previous years, HEPI's work and staff featured throughout the year in national, local and specialist media outlets, including *Nature*, the BBC News website and all the main national broadsheet newspapers. For example, in March and April 2025, HEPI's Director appeared three times on BBC Radio 4's flagship Today programme to discuss boys' education, the financial position of higher education universities and the performance of the Student Loans Company. The BBC presenter Justin Webb described HEPI as 'a very well thought of think tank'.

Our work to build understanding of UK higher education with people from other countries included HEPI's Director briefing Finland's Minister for Universities and Science (Sari Multala) and the Ambassador of Finland (Jukka Siukosaari), presenting to a delegation from the University of São Paulo at the invitation of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and meeting with the Board of Trustees of Singapore Management University. In June 2025, we hosted a dinner to bring together senior sector figures from the UK and Australia, with opening remarks from the President of Universities Australia (Luke Sheehy), the Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University (Professor Theo Farrell) and Professor Diana Beech from City St George's, University of London.

Towards the end of the 2024/25 year, HEPI's Director, Nick Hillman, was awarded an OBE in the King's Birthday Honours for 'services to higher education'.

¹ Due to improvements in the collection of data, these numbers are not directly comparable with those published in HEPI's *Annual Review* for earlier years.

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



In 2024/25, three women and two men served as HEPI’s Trustees while HEPI’s Advisory Board was made up of four women and three men. (However, one Advisory Board member, Anne-Marie Canning MBE, was on maternity leave for much of the year.)



Some of HEPI’s Trustees and Advisory Board members (L-to-R: Professor Nishan Canagarajah; Mary Curnock Cook CBE; Professor David Sweeney CBE; Professor Julie Sanders; Professor Nick Pearce; Professor Sir Chris Husbands; Professor Dame Sally Mapstone [Chair]; Alison Allden OBE; and Andy Forbes)

HEPI’s staff team was stable throughout 2024/25 until late July 2025, when Josh Freeman departed for a new role at the Office for Students. Prior to this, the staff team was made up of four women and two men (66:33) but, as the female members of staff worked on a part-time basis while the two male staff members were full time, on a contractual hours basis the female:male gender split was 59:41. In addition, during 2024/25 HEPI took on two female graduate interns and one male school pupil on work experience.

There were more male (60%) than female (40%) authors of HEPI reports, at a rate that is comparable with the previous year (61%:39%) and a gender imbalance remained among those blogging on the HEPI website (57% male authors and 43% female authors, the same as in 2023/24). There were also more male speakers at HEPI events, with 60% of speakers being male and 40% being female – again, this is the same as the previous year.



HEPI Director, Nick Hillman OBE, at the 2025 HEPI Annual Conference

In 2024/25, a number of HEPI reports focused on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion issues. These included a report on Black early-career academics produced in conjunction with the Society of Black Academics and GatenbySanderson, a report on the under-researched issue of the impact of menstruation in higher education, a report on the educational underachievement of boys and young men and a report by intern Famke Veenstra-Ashmore on the first-class degree awarding gap at Oxford and Cambridge.

We also published the latest iteration of the LSBU *English Social Mobility Index* and the *Scottish Social Mobility Index*. In addition, we had a particular focus this year on international students, including via reports on the Chinese student

experience and the state of transnational education as well as by putting a new focus on international students in the HEPI / Advance HE *Student Academic Experience Survey* and the *Unite Students / HEPI Applicant Index*.

Conclusion

HEPI ended 2024/25 in a good position but facing challenging headwinds. The financial position of UK universities continues to deteriorate, with a majority forecast to be running deficits in 2025/26. The small increase in tuition fees in England for home students has been swallowed up entirely by the increase to employer National Insurance Contributions and research spending has been frozen (in real terms) for the foreseeable future.

The ambitions of the Government at Westminster on higher education have taken time to emerge since they were elected to office in July 2024, but it is expected that Ministers will want higher education institutions to do even more – whether on access, civic engagement or working with employers – without material increases in spending. In Scotland and Wales, there will be elections to the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd in 2026, which could alter educational and other priorities, with elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly following in 2027.

Looking ahead, HEPI plans to continue publishing reports, hosting events and building our relationships with higher education institutions and other interested parties while seeking to maximise our impact through improved internal organisation. These changes will be reflected early in 2025/26 via a new visual identity and a new website, with the goal of cementing HEPI's position as a permanent feature of the educational policy landscape.



The HEPI staff team in 2024/25 (L-to-R: Lucy Haire; Nick Hillman OBE; Emma Ma; Carole Cox; Rose Stephenson; and Josh Freeman)

Nick Hillman (Director)
August 2025



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