



Policy Briefings

A policy brief is a concise document that presents research findings to policy makers, highlighting its relevance and use to their specific interests and/or policy and offering recommendations for change.

Who is a Policy Brief for?

- Policy actors are those who can inform public policy, these may be politicians, staff at legislative institutions (e.g. European Union, United Nations) or lobbyists, such as think tanks, trade unions and NGOs.
- Exactly who a policy brief should be written for depends on its aim and whether its scope is regional national or international. Who sits on relevant committees, has spoken on relevant topics or has an interest stated on their personal page or through membership of an All Party Parliamentary Group? – Also [how will you reach them?](#)
- Identifying the right person and their needs from your briefing is essential to ensuring its impact. Read our guide to influencing policy for more advice finding relevant actors.

What are you trying to influence?

- Consider what you want to achieve from the recommendations of your brief. Are you aiming to influence agenda setting or policy formulation, implementation or change?
- Policy makers want relevant solutions that they can feasibly implement. To achieve its purpose a policy brief should clearly lay out evidence informed solutions to a problem that the specific actor is interested in. These solutions should be realistic, feasible within the current political climate and cost effective.

What does a policy briefing look like?

- Policy Briefs should be able to be read as a stand-alone document on a single topic, consisting of no more than 2-4 pages (1,500 words).
- It's important to 'top-load' information, so that the most important features such as key findings and recommendations are on the front page.
- See below for our guides to [layout and presentation](#), or examples in our reading list.

When Do I Write a Policy Brief?

- Writing a brief soon after research is published, or further corroborated with new evidence, allows it to benefit from the momentum and being based on new information.
- Think about the wider context behind publishing your policy brief that will make policy makers more interested in policy solutions, has the issue been prominent in media coverage or Parliamentary activity? Has there been a recent crisis or evidence of a problem with current policy?

Policy Brief Layout

There is no set format for policy briefs, other than a recognised need to feature the most important information at the front. It is important to create a clear structure that allows readers to follow a clear line of argument, from context and research, to evidence and conclusions, leading to policy recommendations

Below is a heading guide, however different topics might require different styles, so try looking for similar examples by searching for published policy briefs in relevant institutions and centres.

Introduction

This should act as a short summary of the policy issue and how the research addresses this. Make sure it offers a hook to draw readers in by directly addressing their needs and concerns, is your brief related to a recent headache for the reader? How will it help them?

Key Findings

Bullet point 4 – 6 key findings, choosing the ones that will have the biggest impact and clearest policy implications. Remember, readers will want high impact, practical solutions from these.

Context

Put the research into context by outlining the wider environment (e.g. binge drinking's effect ; agricultural policy's effect on flooding), why you have done the research and how it relates to policy. Then explain why your research is relevant to this and why readers need to be aware of it.

Policy Implications

What do your findings mean for policy and why? Don't be afraid to use opinion here based on your findings, but back these up with evidence for a persuasive argument.

Any suggestions must be evidence based and actionable within real life contexts. Remember that policy makers are looking for easy wins, preferably within their term in office, so try to make any actions clear and within a 3 – 5 year timeframe.

Methodology

Briefly explain how you conducted the research to back up your case and demonstrate the validity of the research.

Contacts

Your name, job title, department and university, with a website for more information on the author and your email address.

Further Information

Links to further information relevant to the briefing and references to sources used in your briefing.

Creating and Distributing an Effective Brief

Language

- The purpose of a policy brief is to recommend action, so arguments must focus on convincing the target audience, linking clear reasoning to practical solutions that would deliver a result to the reader.
- Link arguments and suggestions to real world context and practice, mentioning the way current policy works, without being overly critical, and proposing recommendations which seem realistic to the reader.
- Avoid jargon and technical where possible to improve readability. Try passing it by non-specialist friends and family to check.

Presentation

Research has shown that visually stimulating briefings are rated more highly by policy makers:

- Use visual aids to highlight key issues and break up text, i.e. text boxes to highlight key recommendations, clear graphics and graphs to clearly illustrate research findings and potential outcomes.
- Use a bold heading print and consider 1-2 relevant pictures to improve the overall image.

Publicising your Policy Brief

- Can you work with other established researchers or professional / campaigning groups to create or publicise your brief? Policy makers will react to recognised names, so collaborating with others or distributing your brief through them can help to distribute your message and increase attention.
- Target key policy actors directly, ensuring you identify the right person and sending your brief in paper version as well as email. Follow this up with a phone call after a reasonable time. Read our [Influencing Policy](#) guide to identify routes to policy makers.
- Can you follow up the brief by holding or appearing at an event? These may allow you to follow up with relevant policy makers and identify further routes in. See page 3 of our [Influencing Policy](#) guide for more information.
- Work with your PR Team to assess whether your work can be publicised through media outlets, policy makers do read press and this has potential to bring them to you. They may also be able to identify online outlets such as blogs, The Conversation or social media.
- Ensure that your briefings are easy to access where possible, for instance on your own or your school's website, as well as any external organisations you may be associated with.