

Appendix D Guidelines for external authors

Standards for research and evaluation reports published by HEFCE

1. Reports commissioned by HEFCE need to meet minimum standards of clarity, accuracy and accessibility. They are paid for by public money, and we have a duty to ensure that this money is properly used.
2. When these reports are written by external authors, they are expected to meet the following standards.

Clarity

3. The report should be clearly and logically structured, with:
 - an A4 format
 - an executive summary (see paragraph 5)
 - clear sections or chapters
 - supporting information in appendices as appropriate
 - a logical and consistently applied hierarchy of headings and sub-headings and paragraph numbering. Do not mix different styles of paragraph numbering, or have one number system for headings and another for paragraphs
 - pages numbered consecutively throughout.
4. Text should be clear and legible. We recommend a font such as Arial for body text, in at least 11pt. If you choose a typeface such as Times New Roman, the body text will need to be larger to be as legible. Footnotes and labels on graphs can be smaller than the body text, but must be at least 9pt.
5. The executive summary will be the most widely read part of the document. It must be intelligible to the **educated lay person**, and be an accurate summary of the report. Specifically it should:
 - be concise
 - be free of jargon
 - contain the key messages, findings and conclusions.
6. In our own documents, we try to communicate clearly and concisely by avoiding unnecessary jargon, long rambling sentences and verbosity, and by using the active voice. We expect the external reports we commission to take the same approach.

Accessibility

7. HEFCE normally expects to publish a report as both a Word and PDF. It will agree to publishing only a PDF if an accessible version has been supplied – one that confirms to BIS accessibility guidelines, which are outlined in full below:
 - document reads logically when reflowed or rendered by text-to-speech software

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- language is set to English (in File > Properties > Advanced)
- structural elements of document are properly tagged (headings, titles, lists etc)
- all images/figures have either alternative text or an appropriate caption
- tables are correctly tagged to represent the table structure
- text is left aligned, not justified
- document avoids excessive use of capitalised, underlined or italicised text
- hyperlinks are spelt out (e.g. in a footnote or endnote).

8. Over-use of abbreviations is a barrier to the reader, so:

- avoid abbreviations and acronyms where possible, for example if they are only used a few times in the report
- if you do use them, always spell out abbreviations on first mention, use them consistently, and list them with the full versions at the end of the document.

9. People who use screen-reading software to view our documents on the web cannot 'see' charts and diagrams. If the title of the chart is in the Word text, then at least they know there is something there. So, to assist such readers, ensure the titles of charts and diagrams are part of the Word text and not embedded in the chart itself.

10. For easy reference, any tables should be numbered consecutively throughout the document (Table 1, Table 2 etc); charts, figures or diagrams should have a separate numbering system (Figure 1, Figure 2 etc). Always include the source of data for tables and figures.

11. Many readers will print out documents rather than reading them on screen. So ensure that any charts, figures or diagrams that are produced in colour will also be clear when printed out in black and white. Type used in tables, figures and diagrams must be legible when printed out (see guidelines in paragraph 4).

12. Large file sizes are slow to download, and should be avoided where possible. Logos and over-elaborate graphics dramatically increase the file size. Logos on every page are also a distraction for those with screen-reading software. Please use your company logo on the inside cover only, and keep graphics clear and simple.

Accuracy

13. The following are some common problems of accuracy found in consultants' reports submitted to HEFCE:

- contents list that does not match the contents
- incorrect titles for people, organisations and publications
- out-of-date or mistyped URLs
- incorrect cross-referencing within the document.

Quality control and advice

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14. When a first draft of an external report is available, HEFCE editors carry out a 'structure check' designed to give early warning of any issues which will need fixing. This will include an assessment of what needs to be done to make the executive summary clear and useful to the reader. The HEFCE project manager will feed back any comments or queries so that the authors can respond and make any amendments required. Authors must provide an editable document (usually Word) for this check to enable the editor's comments to be made on the document.

15. Later, before the final draft of the report goes on the web-site, HEFCE editors will flag up any remaining structural issues and proofread the document.