

# Developing a Policy Brief

## **What is a Policy Brief?**

A policy brief aims to provide a quick but thorough briefing of research, relevant findings, policy implications and also potential policy recommendations. It will need to outline the problem to be solved (research focus/policy issue) and the solutions suggested in response to the research itself. A policy brief can be described as a vehicle for providing evidence-based policy advice to policy makers and commissioners.

When implementing research, policy briefs can be a useful tool to reach a large audience in an easily accessible format.

## **Who is the audience for a policy brief?**

Policy briefs can be developed for a specific audience, which could be international, national, regional or local. For example, Parliamentary Select Committees, Government Departments, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), local government committees and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

## **When should a policy brief be written?**

Ideally, policy briefs should be written as soon as the research has been published or initial findings have been identified, to maintain momentum. Policy briefs can also be written to coordinate with key national or regional reviews (eg Care Review). Policy briefs can also be written to coordinate with national campaigns.

## **What is the structure for policy briefs?**

Policy briefs should be easy to read with a clear, concise and logical format and structure. There are many examples of policy structures. A few examples (with links to the source of the information and additional resources) have been shared below. A suggested template to start developing a policy brief has also been added to the end of this document (see page 5).

## Structure 1: NIHR Policy Research Unit in Behavioural Science

Section	Required?	Position in document
Title	Necessary	Beginning
Overview (or Executive Summary)	Optional	Beginning
Recommendations/focus on key research findings	Necessary	Beginning
Introduction	Necessary	Middle part
Main text/Discussion (potentially broken down into sub-headings)	Necessary	Middle part
Policy implications (can be placed at the end, if not presented earlier in the brief)	Necessary	Beginning or end
Conclusion	Optional	End
References	Necessary	End
Contact details/Author info	Necessary	End
Appendix	Optional	End
Boxes and sidebars	Optional	Middle or end
Cases	Optional	Middle or end
Tables	Optional	Middle or end
Graphics	Optional	Middle or end
Photographs	Optional	Middle or end

### More information:

[Guide to writing policy briefs](#)

## Structure 2: Research to Action

**a) Title:** Keep it snappy, short and informative.

**b) Executive Summary:** Two to three sentences summing up the entire brief. Use recognisable buzzwords and emphasise the relevance of the research to policy to draw the policy actor's attention to read on.

**c) Introduction/Summary of the Problem:** Explain the policy issue and why it is particularly important or current. Put the research into context.

**d) Methods, Approaches and Results/Body:** Present the research/project findings in an accessible way for a non-specialist. Explain the methodology used to reach the results, such as a synthesis of existing research/literature or new research data. A policy actor wants to see robust results that are repeatable or corroborated by others.

**e) Conclusions:** Reinforce the key message to take away from the policy brief. Remember the executive summary is where typical conclusion content is, do not simply repeat it.

**f) Policy Recommendations:** Try and make only one feasible policy recommendation. If you are making more than one recommendation, differentiate them clearly e.g. in bullet points and keep it to a maximum of three.

**g) References and Suggested Sources:** Use references sparingly and suggest a few additional sources at the end to give either background or more detail to the policy issue.

**h) Acknowledgements, Author Details and Disclaimers:** Detail any funding used for the research, note down the author's current positions and contact details, if the policy brief is being produced by an institution a disclaimer may be needed.

**More information:**

[Policy Brief Week: How to plan, write and communicate an effective policy brief - three steps to success](#)

### **Structure 3: International Centre of Policy Advocacy (ICPA)**

1. Title
2. Executive Summary
3. Rationale for action on the problem
4. Proposed Policy Option(s)
5. Policy Recommendations
6. Sources consulted or recommended
7. Link to original research/analysis
8. Contact details.

**More information/resources:**

[International Centre for Policy Advocacy: policy brief](#)

[International Centre for Policy Advocacy: an essential guide to policy briefs](#)

### **Structure 4: Northern Bridge – Public Policy Engagement Toolkit**

1. **Title:** Should be short and clearly indicate the topic.
2. **Executive summary:** Should summarise the issue, the relevance of your research/project/proposal etc. and the recommendations. This should be no more than one or two short paragraphs. Can be bullet points.
3. **Issue:** Briefly summarise the issue. Although you should not include substantive background or context, this must accurately communicate the issue to anyone who does not read the 'background' section.
4. **Recommendations:** The possible solutions you want considered and – importantly – the concrete next step towards adopting them. Where you give a range of recommendations and indicate the preferred option.
5. **Background:** Summarise the story to date, including any background information which will aid understanding, such as a brief (recent) history of the issue, previous

policy decisions and their impact, previous research on the issue, or other contextual information.

6. **Argument:** Here you set out a more detailed rationale behind your
7. recommendations, explaining the considerations, in light of the background above and your own research, which led you to make them. This is the place to include a more substantive discussion of your research/project and the implications of your findings. This will probably be the longest section, but it should still not exceed two pages.
8. **Appendices:** Any data, reports, articles or other material you wish to be considered should be attached as an appendix. However, do not assume it will be read: the brief must stand on its own.

#### **More information:**

[Doctoral Training Partnership - Public Policy Engagement Toolkit \(Northern Bridge\).](#)

#### **Other Resources:**

[How to write a Policy Briefing \(UK Parliament\)](#) (if link does not work, please copy URL into your web browser: <https://post.parliament.uk/how-to-write-a-policy-briefing/>)

[Top Tips - Writing a Policy Brief \(University of Reading\)](#)

[How to write a policy brief \(University of Exeter\).](#)

[Claire Vella](#) – Research Fellow, Starting Well; Children's Mental Health, NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS).

[Becca Randell](#) – Children and Young People's Mental Health Implementation Lead, Kent, Surrey and Sussex Academic Health Science Network and ARC KSS.

[ARC KSS Starting Well: Children's Mental Health](#)

# Policy Brief template

[Insert Logo (s) at top of page]

**Kent Surrey Sussex  
Academic Health Science  
Network**

**NIHR** | Applied Research Collaboration  
Kent, Surrey and Sussex

[insert picture/photo]

[Insert Title]

[Insert short summary of issue to catch readers attention]

## Why do something different?

[Information about the issue that needs to be addressed. Add striking insights and/or practice/policy failures to explain why the issue is currently important. Aims to put the research into context]

*[Space to continue addressing policy issue as needed. Keep as concise as possible.]*

*[Information about what this policy brief includes and who it is aimed for e.g. Department for Health and Social Care, NHS England, etc.]*

## Research Overview

[Overview/summary of the research project(s) that informed this policy brief. Include essential information about the research methodology and research findings/outcomes. This section should be easy to understand by a non-academic/non-specialist audience. Avoid this section being a short version of a published research manuscript – think about the key information you need to share reinforce this policy brief. You could include sub-headings. You can add pictures/graphs/tables to share information.]

*[Space to continue research overview as needed. Keep as concise as possible.]*

## SUMMARY

[Insert executive summary

For example:

- Summary of specific issue/problem addressed in the brief.
- Summary of most striking policy failures or insights identified].

## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

[Insert summary of main policy recommendations/ implications]

## Policy Recommendations

[Insert policy implications and policy recommendations. This section is an opportunity to share the potential ways in which the issue you have described can be addressed, and the essential next steps for these solutions to be adopted and implemented. Try to limit the number of recommendations you make. Be clear about the preferred option.]

## Further Information/Sources

[Insert funding information]

[Insert any further relevant information, such as the expertise of the stakeholders involved in the research project(s) or the development of this policy brief]

[Insert key references/sources of information]

[Insert logos]

[Insert any disclaimers]

[Insert contact details]

### **[ADD ARC KSS Funding statement here - as below]**

This research was funded\*/supported\* [\*delete as appropriate] by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

