

March 2007

# **Independent review of the Higher Education Policy Institute**

**A report to HEFCE by SQW Ltd**

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# Executive summary

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## Context

1. SQW Ltd was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in September 2006 to carry out an independent review of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI).
2. The project sought to:
  - evaluate the extent to which HEPI has achieved its mission and objectives
  - provide evidence to enable HEFCE to assess HEPI's capability to achieve its mission and objectives in the future.

A specific set of research questions were agreed and are set out in paragraph 1.10 below.

3. HEPI's role is to raise issues, stimulate discussion, disseminate research findings and thus inform and publicise debates in higher education policy. The key audience for its work is people interested in higher education more generally, but who do not necessarily have a requirement for a very detailed knowledge of particular issues. It carries out its role through a series of activities which were investigated in the research. HEPI currently receives a core grant from HEFCE.

## Interpretations and conclusions from the research

4. HEPI has been remarkably successful in reaching its primary audience and influencing higher education policy. It has exceeded the expectations, so far as we can tell, of all those involved in setting it up and in its relatively short life has established itself as a significant part of higher education (HE) policy debates.
5. HEPI is particularly effective at informing managers in higher education institutions (HEIs), politicians, government officials and people working in other public bodies.
6. The short summaries of the HEPI reports, printed in the 'blue books' are a major contribution for much of HEPI's audience. In general the full reports, available on the HEPI website, are less useful to some academic researchers, higher education institutions and representative bodies.
7. HEPI has tackled important subjects, contributed to the debate and has been influential with decision-makers and opinion leaders. Its work tends to inform stakeholders rather than having a direct impact on specific policies, but it does influence policy and is positively viewed for its role in stimulating interest in developments in HE, and its attitude to publicity. However, it might be helpful to consider a small increase in the variety of contributors to its work as well as trying to reach specific groups of stakeholders for particular reports.

8. HEPI has raised awareness of HE policy issues and has challenged policy directions. This volume of press comment based on HEPI's work suggests the press picks up policy issues as a result of HEPI's interventions.
9. There are differences of opinion on how academic HEPI reports should be. HEPI has high appeal for those looking for a well argued brief but is seen as less impressive by those who wish to see more detailed analysis drawing on a wider range of interpretations and evidence. HEPI does not claim to produce academic research but it has to be credible with those who work in a traditional research environment and with such a wide ranging audience there will inevitably be some differences in judgements of the quality of its outputs.
10. The identification of topics for research could perhaps benefit from a more explicit framework to guide choice but should retain the responsiveness to current debates which is valued.
11. HEPI has generated 45% of its total income from sources other than HEFCE since it was established, and over 60% of income for the financial year to the end of July 2006 but none of its income sources are completely reliable. It is well-placed to continue to obtain income from current sources though none will be easy to acquire.
12. HEPI has provided a voice which is independent and valuable, adding to the existing provision in the sector. There is wide agreement that there is a need for an independent think tank challenging policy and government and other major players.
13. HEPI and HEFCE are broadly positive about their relationship.

### Issues, opportunities and risks

14. The blue books, conferences and seminars are well regarded and have reached broadly the same audience of senior academic managers, policy makers and journalists. HEPI could consider whether this is the only or primary audience, and how it might reach others more effectively.
15. The membership of the Advisory Board might be widened, or temporarily extended from time to time, in order to ensure that a range of concerns at all levels of higher education are considered for further research.
16. With its present mission and remit, HEPI must retain its independence to remain credible. Some self-funding is therefore essential. Sponsorship and endowment options appear to be possible but are unlikely to provide more than a small proportion of HEPI's requirements.
17. If HEPI is not to spend its time generating income at the expense of producing reports, or become solely reliant on consultancy, it will need some core funding. It provides a source of policy ideas, increases public awareness of higher education policy issues, and provides a useful service to public bodies. Some element of public funding may therefore be relevant.
18. HEPI could consider the potential for a small degree of expansion, and for succession planning for staff and the Advisory Board to carry on the work of the Institute in the longer term. It has been running for four years and it would be timely for HEPI to review its future

direction and pattern of work, in order to build on its work to date, and further strengthen its role and reputation.

# 1: Introduction

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## Context

- 1.1 SQW Ltd was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council in England (HEFCE) in September 2006 to carry out an independent review of the Higher Education Policy Institute.
- 1.2 The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), which was set up in October 2002, describes itself as a ‘higher education think tank’. Its aims, as discussed with HEFCE, are:
- ‘to identify important policy issues in higher education – both immediate and long-term
  - to identify research and experience relevant to these issues, both in this country and overseas
  - to identify further research needed to illuminate those issues, and to facilitate that research or to undertake research and policy analysis ourselves; and most importantly
  - by publishing reports, by arranging seminars and conferences and by other means, to alert policy makers, as well as those who influence policy and the wider public, to the issues, to current experience and to relevant research.’
- 1.3 HEPI’s mission is to ensure that higher education policy-making is informed by evidence, particularly research and the experience of others and it sees its main role being ‘to raise issues, stimulate discussion and disseminate research findings’<sup>1</sup>. It is a company limited by guarantee, and a registered charity. It has become a widely referenced source of ideas and comment since it was established in 2002, and is frequently quoted in the educational press. It has a regularly updated website ([www.hepi.ac.uk](http://www.hepi.ac.uk)), has published research papers and commentary on a very wide range of policy areas in higher education (HE) (published in hard copy and online) and holds seminars and lectures on key issues for higher education policy.
- 1.4 HEPI’s website states that ‘HEPI is not only a research body: it does not simply undertake original research itself. It also identifies and synthesises research carried out by others and analyses experience elsewhere; and it produces reports and other papers, and runs seminars based on these, using these to inform the policy community and the general public’.
- 1.5 It therefore sees its key activities as follows:
- conduct and commission research
  - keep in touch with research conducted by others
  - produce reports, and ensure they are widely disseminated to key players

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<sup>1</sup> From HEPI website: <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/>

- arrange seminars to discuss issues and ensure that the evidence underlying these is widely understood
  - maintain bilateral contacts with policy makers and those who influence and are affected by higher education policy
  - place articles in the press and use other media for information dissemination.
- 1.6 HEPI receives a grant from HEFCE, which funds education, research and associated activities at universities and other higher education institutions. However, HEPI is independent of HEFCE: it does not design HEFCE policy, nor is its research limited or controlled by HEFCE.
- 1.7 The first (and current) Director is supported by a research officer seconded from HEFCE and an administrator. There is also an Advisory Board which guides the work of the Institute and suggests areas for research. The Board comprises some of the leading thinkers in HE, all of whom have been, or continue to be, actively involved in the sector.
- 1.8 Between its founding and 2007-08, HEPI will have received just over £1 million in grant from HEFCE (as well as the cost of the researcher seconded from HEFCE). The proportion of income provided by this grant is reducing, and HEPI has sourced income from alternative providers including charities and commercial organisations.

## Aims of the review

- 1.9 This project sought the views of stakeholders, including HEFCE officers and users of HEPI outputs and reviewed a HEPI self-assessment and the outputs and media coverage of HEPI's work in order to:
- evaluate the extent to which HEPI has achieved its mission and objectives
  - provide evidence to enable HEFCE to assess HEPI's capability to achieve its mission and objectives in the future.
- 1.10 The agreed terms of reference for the project sought answers to the following questions which will be taken up again in the concluding chapter:
- a. Has HEPI alerted its stakeholders, those who influence and make higher education policy and the sector in general, to important issues, current experience and relevant research in HE?
  - b. Has it produced outputs that are well-regarded?
  - c. Has it informed HE policy?
  - d. What other impact have HEPI's activities had?
  - e. How is it perceived by its stakeholders?
  - f. What proportion and amounts of non-HEFCE income has HEPI generated itself and are these or other similar sources of income likely to be reasonably reliable in the future?

- g. To what extent have HEPI's activities been additional to, and/or added value to, what has been provided by others?
- h. Are its processes and management and governance arrangements efficient and effective?
- i. What are the issues, opportunities and risks for HEPI in terms of its future capability?
- j. Has the relationship between HEPI and HEFCE worked effectively?

1.11 In order to answer these questions our research covered the following topics:

- the extent to which and how HEPI has informed higher education policy
- whether HEPI has alerted stakeholders to key issues in higher education
- the selectivity of policy areas covered in reports, lectures and seminars
- the quality of HEPI's outputs (in particular, printed reports and summaries)
- other impacts (for example, the impact of seminars and lectures)
- the additionality provided by HEPI and its outputs
- HEPI's relationship with HEFCE and other stakeholders
- the efficiency and effectiveness of process and governance and management arrangements
- the future sustainability of the Institute, including the issues, opportunities and risks for HEPI in terms of its future capability
- revenue streams
- staffing and planning issues.

1.12 A steering group, comprising HEFCE staff responsible for liaising with HEPI, was convened for the evaluation. The steering group provided contact details of identified stakeholders with previous contact with or knowledge of HEPI, and commented on the research instruments produced for the evaluation tasks. The SQW research team met with members of the steering group on two occasions during the course of the evaluation.

## Overview of the methodology

1.13 The evaluation involved a multi-strand approach in order to assess HEPI's work and impacts in different areas and on different groups of stakeholders, as well as users of HEPI's outputs. (These groups are not mutually exclusive: most stakeholders use HEPI's outputs, but users are not necessarily stakeholders as they may be members of a wider public who do not necessarily have a role in HE policy making, or contribute to or act on HEPI's findings.) A key requirement of our work was to establish a view on the quality and range of HEPI's outputs and the extent to which they have been able to influence policy discussions and understandings of the context of HE.

The evaluation included:

- a HEPI self-assessment, based on the review questions in paragraph 1.10 above
- discussions with HEPI's Director
- the identification of relevant stakeholders and users of HEPI's outputs
- consultation with relevant stakeholders and users of HEPI's outputs
- a review of a range of HEPI reports from 2002 to date
- an assessment of HEPI's media impact (in terms of the print journalism responses to all HEPI outputs since its inception, as well as references to HEPI's work in general in the media).

1.14 These are considered in turn below.

### ***Self-assessment***

1.15 HEPI produced a self-assessment which provided useful background information and gave the research team a benchmark against which to carry out the review. It reduced the requirement on the research team to ask basic questions of HEPI researchers and staff, allowing a more in-depth coverage of issues that may arise in future and more qualitative discussions.

1.16 Bahram Bekhradnia, the Director of HEPI, was interviewed at the start of the project, and reviewed the self-assessment with the SQW project director. This exercise helped to inform the structure of the interviews with other stakeholders, as well as providing an invaluable view of how HEPI perceives its mission, role and performance.

1.17 The self-assessment also covered internal management and governance arrangements, and a review of purchasing and income systems.

### ***Interviews***

1.18 Interviews were carried out with a range of consultees. HEPI provided a list of people who had had professional contact with HEPI, as Advisory Board members, co-authors or clients for reports, or as consumers of reports or attendees at seminars. The final list of consultees was drawn up by the research team in consultation with the HEFCE steering group and took into account the list provided by HEPI.

1.19 HEFCE identified key stakeholder groups for HEPI as follows:

- education researchers
- Universities UK (UUK) and other representative bodies
- higher education institutions
- politicians

- journalists
  - other public and charitable bodies
  - Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and select committees
  - HEFCE.
- 1.20 The choice of stakeholders from these categories was important to ensure a balanced review of HEPI's work. Consultees were identified from the above categories, as well as from bodies such as HM Treasury and other think tanks, and categorised by type of background and nature of involvement with, or likely knowledge of, HEPI. Minimum numbers of interviews were set for each stakeholder type, and interviewees drawn from the wider list. Some interviewees could not be contacted, but the vast majority were pleased to participate in the evaluation. The list of 22 consultees is given in Annex A.
- 1.21 The majority of interviews were conducted by telephone, with some face-to-face interviews. An aide-memoire was drawn up to facilitate comparison between interviews and ensure that all relevant aspects of the evaluation were covered. This also allowed results to be drawn out under broad headings. The aide-memoire was sent to interviewees before the interview on request. It was balanced between comprehensive coverage of the key issues and appropriate length to maximise responses.

### ***Review of HEPI reports and media response***

- 1.22 A selection of reports from different stages in HEPI's life was reviewed to gain an understanding of the type of research and analysis conducted by HEPI, its contributions to wider policy debates, and differences between the full reports and summary versions published as 'blue books'.
- 1.23 The blue books are printed and sent to a wide range of stakeholders within higher education, and have a wide circulation. Their impact is such that it is important to assess the type of information, analysis and level of detail provided by the summaries. The research team looked in detail at one publication drawn from the early years of HEPI's existence, *Widening Participation and Fair Access* (February 2003), one from the middle years, *'HE demand to 2015'* (July 2005), and one more recent report, *'Using Metrics to Allocate Research Funds'* (March 2006).
- 1.24 Comments from consultees, which are referred to in subsequent chapters, cover a very wide range of HEPI publications. Frequently general comments would be made and then expanded through reference to one or more specific publications.
- 1.25 In addition, a review of references and responses to all HEPI publications in the press was carried out through a web search, including specific searches of The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES), The Independent and Education Guardian archives. This review provided a view of HEPI's work in terms of responses to reports at the time of publication, allowing a judgment of their influence, as well as an assessment of the changing impact of HEPI reports over time.

## 2: HEPI activities and structures

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### What HEPI does

- 2.1 HEPI's role is 'to identify important policy issues in higher education – both immediate and long-term; to identify research and experience relevant to these issues, both in this country and overseas; to identify further research needed to illuminate those issues, and to facilitate that research or to undertake research and policy analysis ourselves; and most importantly by publishing reports, by arranging seminars and conferences and by other means, to alert policy makers, as well as those who influence policy and the wider public, to the issues, to current experience and to relevant research'.<sup>2</sup> It carries out its role through the activities we have already set out in chapter one.<sup>3</sup>
- 2.2 HEPI has carried out all of these activities, particularly the production of reports and publicity for its work. HEPI's self-assessment, produced in Summer 2006, states that: 'In four years, HEPI has produced:
- 37 reports (including six produced in the context of HEPI seminars)
  - 18 seminars, of which four in 11 Downing Street, and nine in the House of Commons
  - six seminars for journalists
  - four major conferences, each attended by over 250 people
  - five lectures (including four annual lectures given by major international figures and attended by 200+ people, and webcast by the BBC)
  - 12 or more newspaper articles
  - two free standing supplements in the THES and The Guardian
  - 10 or more radio and TV appearances – including three Today Programme appearances and the World Tonight
  - an average of 350 page views per day on the HEPI website
  - around 6,000 document downloads recorded each month
  - 300 site visitors signed up to receive email alerts of new publications.'

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<sup>2</sup> HEPI website

<sup>3</sup> Conduct and commission research; keep in touch with research conducted by others; produce reports, and ensure they are widely disseminated to key players; arrange seminars to discuss issues and ensure that the evidence underlying these is widely understood; maintain bilateral contacts with policy makers and those who influence and are affected by higher education policy; place articles in the press and use other media for information dissemination.

- 2.3 The self-assessment states that HEPI events attract an influential and well-informed public, as well as publicising issues in higher education policy to a wider audience (both through the press and wide circulation of reports).
- 2.4 Current projects emphasise a focus on topical issues: HEPI is working on a study of employer engagement, and one on vocational and academic routes into higher education. These fit in with wider development in higher education policy, including the need for employer-led courses and developing pathways for students between higher and further education.
- 2.5 The number of reports and articles in the press has increased since the self-assessment was carried out: the most recent HEPI report, ‘The Academic Experience of Students in English Universities’, has been widely referenced in the media, including articles in The Guardian, THES, The Independent and on the BBC website, radio coverage and responses by several universities.
- 2.6 However, the extent to which HEPI meets its wider aims as discussed with HEFCE (set out in paragraph 1.2), as well as publicising policy debates, is not determinable from a simple review of quantity of outputs. The quality and nature of contribution HEPI makes to debates in higher education policy, and the extent to which it alerts policy makers and influences policy rather than publicises issues, is discussed in the review of consultations, reports and media coverage in chapter three.

## Role of the Advisory Board and trustees

- 2.7 The Advisory Board has 15 members, all of whom have experience of, and are influential in, higher education policy. The Board meets four times per year, and plays an important role in helping to define options for topics for reports. Discussions at the Advisory Board provide many of the ideas for HEPI’s research – often topics which are important but have low awareness among a wider audience. The Board members are also in contact through email and discussion lists, and, according to a number of Board members, this has provided a fertile source of ideas and opportunity to share views. Reports are discussed at Board meetings before publication, and the input of Board members is important in refocusing and refining reports where necessary.
- 2.8 The current members of the HEPI Advisory Board are as follows:

**Table 2-1 Members of the HEPI Advisory Board**

Sir Graeme Davies	Sir Howard Newby	Ruth Silver
Professor Roger Brown	Lord Oxburgh	Professor Steve Smith
Professor David Eastwood	Dr David Potter	Quentin Thompson
Sir Brian Follett	Sir Gareth Roberts <sup>4</sup>	Baroness Diana Warwick
The Hon. Sara Morrison	Professor Peter Scott	Professor Sir David Watson

*Source: HEPI website*

<sup>4</sup> We were saddened to hear of Sir Gareth Robert’s death on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2007.

- 2.9 The quality of membership is impressive. HEPI has gathered together some of the UK's foremost thinkers on higher education policy. This is an indication of HEPI's standing in the sector and suggests discussions within the Board will be knowledgeable.
- 2.10 The HEPI trustees at the time of writing<sup>5</sup> are:
- Sir Graeme Davies (also Chair of the HEPI Advisory Board)
  - Sir Brian Follett
  - Lord Ron Oxburgh
  - Sir Gareth Roberts.
- 2.11 The role of Trustees is to oversee the work of HEPI, and ensure that it is acting in line with its aims and objectives. They also take responsibility for the financial aspects of the organisation. The HEPI Trustees are all also members of the Advisory Board. The Trustees would step in for the Director for a limited period if necessary, were he to fall ill or become incapacitated, thus providing stability for the organisation.
- 2.12 The Trustees have also considered a possible business model and future directions for HEPI, including securing alternative sources of foundation support, becoming a research institute, increasing consultancy output or moving to a subscription model. They resolved that making fundamental change in HEPI's nature would not be appropriate.

## Generation of revenue

- 2.13 HEPI's total income to July 2006 was £1.46 million, of which £800,000 was provided by HEFCE. The amounts and proportion of total income raised from sponsorship and other revenue-generating activities is increasing. It amounts to 45% of total income since HEPI was established, and over 60% of income for the financial year to the end of July 2006.
- 2.14 HEPI has good financial reserves which will mitigate the impact of any potential short-term reductions in income. The Chief Executive (the HEPI Director) is responsible for all expenditure and to HEFCE for accounting purposes, as well as accountable to the trustees collectively for HEPI expenditure. The Board Chairman is the Chief Executive's manager, and a Countersigning Trustee is required for cheques over £500. The office administrator maintains the accounts, and ensures that budgets are in good order, and internal audit follows procedures adopted by HEFCE. HEFCE has reserved the right to audit HEPI's governance and management arrangements but has never opted to do so.
- 2.15 HEPI receives a grant from HEFCE, from which it covers staffing, office and IT costs, as well as the costs of publications. In addition, it derives its own income from the following sources.

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<sup>5</sup> January 2007

### ***Grants from foundations and charities***

- 2.16 Grants to HEPI from foundations and charities usually have few or no strings attached, but relevant opportunities can be difficult to find. The Gatsby Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies have both provided funding to HEPI.

### ***Grants from commercial bodies***

- 2.17 Sponsorship might be provided for the Annual Lecture or House of Commons seminars, or for a particular piece of work. It is important for HEPI to avoid (perceived) conflicts of interest, and HEPI makes clear that sponsors do not influence or determine HEPI's investigation and findings. Funders have included Pearson Education and Oracle.

### ***Consultancy and other similar fee-earning activities***

- 2.18 Consultancy and fee-earning activities are welcomed by HEPI as long as they do not shift the focus from HEPI's key areas of work. Ideally, HEPI intends that topics should be relevant to its wider work, with generalisable conclusions.

### ***Speeches and articles***

- 2.19 Speeches and articles are not always revenue-generating: it depends on the audience and what is in HEPI's wider interest. For example, no charge might be made in cases where the activity provides a better understanding of the topic to a wide audience, or for the purposes of publicity.

### ***HEPI conferences***

- 2.20 Conferences are an important HEPI output and are undertaken for topics which lie within the objects for which HEPI has been established. The trustees and members of the Advisory Board are consulted before any decision to run a conference is made.

## 3: Interpretation and analysis

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- 3.1 This chapter brings together the findings of the different elements of our work. It draws on the consultations carried out with stakeholders and different audiences for HEPI's outputs, the documentary analysis carried out by the research team and HEPI's self-assessment.

### Analysis of media coverage

- 3.2 In order to obtain a wide assessment of HEPI's work as a policy think tank, press coverage of all publications was reviewed by the SQW research team in November 2006. We recognise that press coverage does not include all references to HEPI's work, for example, it does not include evidence given to Select Committees, appearances on radio programmes or television news. We have used the media analysis as a source of evidence of HEPI's impact to put alongside other information, not as a comprehensive assessment of its output. The number, length and content of articles provides a view of how HEPI's outputs are received, and the level of debate stimulated.
- 3.3 Press coverage of HEPI reports is generally very positive and uncritical. Responses published by other stakeholders may argue against the conclusions made in HEPI reports, but rarely about the content of the reports themselves. However, the references to the blue book summaries rather than full reports in some cases means that methodologies are not always well understood. In addition, caveats made in the full reports may not be picked up by those who then publicise the findings.
- 3.4 Some reports recorded no press coverage: this may be because press articles, in which references would be found, were not available for web-searching (though this is unlikely); it is more likely that the topics were not deemed suitable for coverage in the UK press. Little or no press coverage was more common for early reports, and the most recent reports have had strong coverage in the specialist higher education and wider press.
- 3.5 Journalists interviewed felt that HEPI was an invaluable source of information, and particularly appreciated the Director's engagement with the press and understanding of media coverage, both in terms of the coverage of specific reports as well as articles on general higher education policy development and issues. HEPI's approach to publicising its work means that contact with the media is mutually beneficial.
- 3.6 Press coverage was also more extensive for reports published when the issue in general was being covered in the press: for example, the review of the Research Assessment Exercise, or the impact of top-up fees. Additionally, reports which caught the public's attention, such as 'The Academic Experience of Students in English Universities' were well-covered in the mainstream as well as more specialist press, but the coverage of findings, and implications drawn from HEPI's work, was sometimes partial and not always wholly accurate.
- 3.7 Wider references to HEPI's work, as well as press articles referring to reports in the years after publication, suggest that HEPI is seen as a useful and important source of information on policy issues. The press articles do not always focus on the reports in-depth which is to be

expected of reports in daily or weekly journals. The volume of reports in the news media suggests that the key audience for HEPI's work is people interested in higher education more generally, but who do not necessarily have a requirement for a very detailed knowledge of particular issues.

- 3.8 The search of media responses to HEPI focused on print journalism and was threefold. Each report was searched by title on Google, and relevant references noted. Secondly, searches were conducted for each report title on the THES, Guardian, Telegraph, Daily Mail and Independent websites. Searches were also made for general references to HEPI, in order to identify articles which might not have mentioned the reports by name. This strategy may not have found all references to HEPI reports, but it is unlikely that any systematic bias was introduced.
- 3.9 Table 3-1 below should therefore be seen as reflecting patterns in references to HEPI's work, rather than a definitive list. It lists the coverage given to HEPI reports by the sources listed above, starting with the latest reports and moving through to the oldest. Some reports have no coverage in these publications but it is informative to note the increase in press coverage over time. In 2003-04 HEPI's work on the demand for HE was well reported but many other reports had only limited coverage. More recently, HEPI's work appears to be reported in the press systematically. The numbers of references tends to increase over time: no mentions of some of the earlier reports were identified, whereas more recent reports triggered several articles per publication.
- 3.10 As can be seen in the table, the majority of reports were referred to in THES and Guardian articles. Coverage in the Independent was also strong.
- 3.11 This search does not reflect coverage on themes which were publicised by HEPI, where no mention is made of its role, or where it may have played a role in publicising issues and widening debate. It is therefore likely to underestimate HEPI's influence on bringing issues to wider attention.

Table 3-1: Press coverage of HEPI reports

Report title	Date published	Coverage
The Academic Experience of Students in English Universities	October 2006	<p>Guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New and improved October 31 2006</li> </ul> <p>THES (all 02 November 2006)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader: Mixed messages about teaching</li> <li>• Size shouldn't matter but the logistics are at breaking point</li> <li>• 13% misled by brochure</li> <li>• Postdocs cover for teaching shortfall</li> <li>• Huge disparity in hours raises question of value</li> <li>• Spiralling workloads stifle staff retention</li> </ul> <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bahram Bekhradnia: Should humanities students work harder?</li> </ul> <p>1. 02 November 2006</p> <p>Telegraph</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One degree can make such a difference 01 November 2006</li> <li>• Getting a first has become a lottery for brightest students 31 October 2006</li> </ul> <p>BBC website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student work rates 'vary widely' 31 October 2006</li> <li>• Degrees of different workloads 31 October 2006</li> <li>• No whizzbangs here....02 November 2006</li> </ul>
The prosperity of English universities: income growth and the prospects for new investment	September 2006	<p>THES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soaring revenues stoke pay debate</li> <li>• HEPI referred to as 'highly influential' in Today's news (07 November 2006)</li> <li>• Leader: Rising revenue is not risk-free (08 November 2006)</li> <li>• Cash boost may raise pay hopes (08 November 2006)</li> </ul>
Using metrics to allocate research funds: initial response to the Government's consultation proposals	June 2006	<p>THES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today's news: 22 June 2006 brief para</li> <li>• 'Flawed plans' rapped by HEPI 23 June 2006</li> <li>• Income gains may backfire 30 June 2006</li> <li>• Beat the odds in an all-new game 18 August 2006</li> </ul> <p>Guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research funding proposals 'lack detail' 22 June 2006 (refers to HEPI conference)</li> </ul>
How good is the UK research base?	June 2006	None found
Using metrics to allocate research funds - updated with new annex	May 2006	<p>Guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statistics to dominate research assessment 13 June 2006</li> <li>• Study warns of dangers of scrapping RAE 27 April 2006</li> </ul> <p>THES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader: Be sure next step is no leap in dark</li> <li>• Major grant shake-up on cards under new metrics : 28 April 2006</li> <li>• Brief mention of report in 26 May 2006</li> <li>• Tomorrow's stars at risk if RAE is ditched 28 April 2006</li> </ul> <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bahram Bekhradnia: Is this the best way to kill off the RAE? 2. 30 March 2006</li> </ul>
How exposed are English universities to reductions in demand from international students?	March 2006	<p>Guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International rescue 18 April 2006</li> </ul> <p>THES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear for funds if foreign intake falls 31 March 2006</li> </ul>
Demand for HE to 2020	March 2006	<p>THES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today's news 21 March 2006 – short overview</li> <li>• Leader: Time to focus on the real numbers 24 March 2006</li> <li>• Population dip could spark crisis: 24 March 2006</li> </ul> <p>Guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teenage angst 21 March 2006</li> <li>• Targets, tax and transparency 21 March 2006</li> <li>• Rammell rejects 'pessimistic' participation figures 21 March 2006</li> </ul> <p>BBC website</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working class students 'to fall' 21 March 2006</li> <li>Student target 'will be missed' 14 July 2006</li> </ul>
Development of third stream activity: lessons from international experience	January 2006	None found
The Education and Training of Medical and Health Professionals in Higher Education Institutions	November 2005	<p>Guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nursing school chief calls for training overhaul 19 January 2006</li> <li>'£200m black hole' in medical student funding 04 November 2005</li> </ul> <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why does training some doctors cost three times as much as others? 03 November 2005</li> <li>Tax payers' alliance work</li> </ul> <p>THES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Opaque' course costs set alarm bells ringing: 04 November 2005</li> </ul>
Non-clinical researchers and clinical academics	October 2005	None found
Brain Drain: Migration of Academic Staff to and from the UK (+ supporting reports)	October 2005	<p>THES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no 'brain drain' from the UK, concludes new report 05 October 2005</li> <li>Leader: The world still rates UK highly 07 October 2005</li> <li>UK brain drain myth exposed: 07 October 2005</li> </ul> <p>Guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have PhD, will travel October 4 2005</li> </ul>
Demand for Higher Education to 2015-16	July 2005	<p>THES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boys jeopardise Blair's target 15 July 2005</li> <li>letter: Boosting the boys 22 July 2005</li> </ul> <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bahram Bekhradnia: A case of flying pigs and impossible targets... 14 July 2005</li> </ul> <p>Telegraph</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EU students to help meet university shortfall 14 July 2005</li> </ul> <p>BBC website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student target 'will be missed' 14 July 2005</li> </ul> <p>Guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University attendance has 'no chance' of hitting 50% target 14 July 2005</li> <li>50% higher education target doomed, says think tank 14 July 2005</li> </ul>
Postgraduate research degree programmes in English universities - costs and revenues	March 2005	<p>THES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Think-tank: beware gap in research funding 18 March 2005</li> </ul> <p>Independent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Counting the cost 14 April 2005</li> </ul>
Mission Critical? Modernising Human Resource Management in Higher Education	March 2005	<p>Guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University administrators voice management frustrations 11 March 2005</li> </ul>
Spent force or revolution in progress? eLearning after the eUniversity	February 2005	None found

The Student Experience Report	January 2005	None found
Non-Completion at the University of North London and London Guildhall University: a case study	January 2005	THES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dropouts soared as UNL widened access 14 January 2005</li> </ul>
Postgraduate Education in the United Kingdom	November 2004	Independent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is this a research Masters? 02 December 2004</li> <li>The end of an era? 10 February 2005</li> <li>What's hot on campus 02 December 2004</li> </ul> THES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Postgrad boom for ex-polys 12 November 2004</li> <li>Summary of report</li> </ul> Guardian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you got a masters plan? 15 March 2005</li> </ul>
Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and the Bologna Process: an Overview	October 2004	Guardian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Red tape damaging Europe's education agenda 28 October 2004</li> </ul>
Conservative Proposals for Higher Education Funding Reform	September 2004	THES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tory interest payments 'will hit poor hardest' : 17 September 2004</li> </ul> Guardian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Ingenious' Tory fee plans hit the poor 10 September 2004</li> </ul>
Internationalism in Higher Education: A Review	July 2004	THES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leader: Find a balance in foreign equation 23 April 2004</li> <li>Dash for foreign cash may scupper research : 20 August 2004</li> </ul>
Higher Education Supply and Demand to 2010 – an update	April 2004	Guardian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demand for university places to soar 11 May 2004</li> </ul> THES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leader: A likely vote-winner 14 May 2004</li> <li>£1bn needed for rise in places 14 May 2004</li> </ul> Independent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why can't we get physical? 18 May 2006</li> </ul> BBC website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demand for universities 'to soar' 10 May 2004</li> <li>Student growth prompts money call 04 March 2004</li> </ul> Daily Mail <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>£1bn funds needed for extra university places 11 May 2004</li> </ul>
Projecting demand for UK Higher Education from the Accession Countries	March 2004	Guardian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New EU students will boost UK economy 05 March 2004</li> </ul> THES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why we should welcome an influx from overseas 05 March 2004 does not explicitly mention HEPI</li> <li>EU influx to push for places in UK 05 March 2004</li> </ul> Daily Mail <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minister rejects EU influx warning 04 March 2004</li> </ul> BBC website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More EU students head for UK 6 March 2004</li> </ul>
Research and regions: An overview of the distribution of	March 2004	None found

research in UK regions, regional research capacity and links between strategic research partners		
New Dogs and Old Tricks: What Can The UK Teach the US about University Education?	March 2004	None found
Government, Funding Council and Universities: How Should They Relate?	February 2004	None found
What Future for Dual Support?	February 2004	THES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard-up research 'heading for crisis' 27 February 2004</li> </ul>
HE Bill and Statement: Implications of the Government's Proposals	January 2004	THES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £1bn boost if bill survives 16 January 2004</li> </ul> BBC website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caution over funding prediction 20 January 2004</li> </ul>
Implications of the Government's proposals for university title: or What is a University?	November 2003	THES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University title free-for-all 21 November 2003 (no direct reference to HEPI)</li> </ul>
Demand for HE to 2010: Some Political and Policy Implications	September 2003	THES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministers 'outspun' on top-ups 03 October 2003</li> <li>• Leader: Sour notes lost in political noise 03 October 2003</li> </ul> Independent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £3,000 fees will 'leave universities £1.6bn short' 30 September 2003</li> </ul> BBC website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blair defends top-up fees 30 September 2003</li> <li>• Tories' anti-fees text prize draw 24 September 2003</li> </ul> Guardian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Betting on uncertainty 30 September 2003</li> <li>• Clarke stands firm on fees 30 September 2003</li> <li>• Ministers 'outspun' over fees 30 September 2003</li> </ul>
Graduate Supply and Demand: A Consideration of the Economic Evidence	September 2003	THES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foundation drive takes off 19 September 2003</li> <li>• Leader: Employers will always be sold on graduate skills 19 September 2003</li> <li>• EU's graduate deficit rings alarm bells: 09 January 2004</li> </ul> Guardian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Between up and out 21 October 2003</li> <li>• Crying out for graduates? 16 September 2003</li> </ul>
Higher education supply and demand to 2010	June 2003	Independent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who wants a sub-degree? 03 July 2003</li> </ul> BBC website

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Big rise in student numbers predicted 3 July 2003</li> <li>• Potential shortage of student places 04 July 2003</li> <li>• Degree course for first-aiders 29 July 2003</li> </ul> Guardian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University demand set to surge 02 July 2003</li> </ul>
Widening Participation and Fair Access: An Overview of the Evidence	February 2003	None found

Source :S<sup>Q</sup>W research

## Consultations

- 3.12 Unsurprisingly our consultations produced a mixed response to many of the questions posed. Virtually all consultees had more than a passing view about HEPI. It has clearly established itself and is listened to by many individuals and institutions. Some disagreed with HEPI's interpretations but in most cases where pleased attention was being drawn to the topics covered.
- 3.13 HEPI is reaching a number of different audiences who have different needs and different connections with the sector. Its appeal is stronger for some audiences than others. We will refer to these differences again towards the end of this chapter. Before that, the next sections assess HEPI's influence on, and contribution to, higher education policy.

### How, and to what extent, has HEPI informed higher education policy?

- 3.14 HEPI has tackled a range of important subjects. It has clearly contributed to the debate and has been influential with important decision-makers and opinion leaders. There is some dispute among consultees about whether this constitutes a contribution to policy rather than a comment on it. A minority of respondents have argued that policy would have developed in the way it did without HEPI's interventions. Most consultees have commented that HEPI is regarded as authoritative by the sector, trade press and within government and political parties. Its interventions are seen by many as adding helpfully to policy debate and providing improvement to the evidence base. HEPI is quoted in Parliament when HE is debated and we are told that Ministers look at HEPI reports. HEPI has also given evidence to a number of Select Committee meetings and has been quoted in Select Committee reports.
- 3.15 The perception of many consultees is that HEPI does not simply comment on current issues; it is seen as informed, independent and worth listening to and good at spotting issues which are moving up the agenda. There is relatively little writing on HE in the public domain outside the professional journals and HEPI is seen as introducing new debates, as well as stimulating journalists to write about new subjects. For example, the reports on student demand in the future have been very useful and are seen by a number of consultees to have filled a gap. Consultees more heavily involved in policy development and implementation are more restrained. They agree that HEPI has provided important information. For them the

information is not usually new, though it may not have been introduced to a wider audience before.

- 3.16 Consultees cited many examples of valuable contributions from HEPI drawn from a relatively wide range of topics: work on demand for HE, widening participation, the prosperity of English universities, the brain drain, third stream activities, the critique of metrics and the latest study on teaching hours.
- 3.17 The point made by many is not that HEPI has set out new policy directions but that it has ‘elevated questions into a debate’, ‘has certainly enriched the environment’ and is ‘helping to cut through the confusion’. HEPI carries out interesting and provocative work and for many consultees this is an important contribution.
- 3.18 The publication of summaries of full reports in the blue books, also available on the web, has been significant in making the debates accessible. HEPI is seen as able to turn round contributions quickly and to comment on topical issues in a timely way. This level of accessibility is significant for a big proportion of HEPI’s audience. Those interested in HE policy, but not working in an academic environment, value the briefings provided by the blue books. They are not necessarily looking for a lengthy considered piece of academic research but want clear analysis set out in an easily accessible way with the confidence that it is based on a knowledgeable interpretation of properly considered evidence. Few commentators accessed the full reports on the web, relying largely on the summary reports.
- 3.19 A minority of commentators however are less enthusiastic. HEPI is seen as high profile but they argue it is difficult to judge the impact HEPI has had on HE policy. HEPI events are well attended by the right people, they say, and HEPI has certainly informed debate and individuals, as well as some higher education institutions (HEIs) but it has influenced the debate around policy rather than policy direction in itself. It is seen as well-connected with the press, by these commentators, and gets its ideas and name across well in the media, which is appropriate for a think tank, but, they argue, column inches are not necessarily a good guide to its level of policy influence.

### ***Alerting stakeholders***

- 3.20 There is no doubt that HEPI has alerted its stakeholders to important issues. It is not a lobbying organisation and is able to reach wide groups and introduce a range of voices. The stakeholder and user group includes those directly working in the sector in the UK, including journalists and other media. HEPI reaches a more general education and research audience in the civil service and government and there is some evidence it has alerted HE interests overseas.
- 3.21 It is seen by many consultees as one of the most accessible sources of comment on HE issues. Other sources, such as the funding councils, membership organisations and HEIs, are seen in some cases as less competent or unable to be completely open in their comments. Some are viewed as knowledgeable and competent but driven from a particular interest. HEPI is regarded as an independent voice which is prepared to be provocative. Such a position is valued by stakeholders even when they disagree with HEPI’s interpretation of an issue. It raises the profile of the issue and can open up the debate to a wider audience.

### ***Selectivity of policy area***

- 3.22 There is a relatively widely held view that the selection of areas for debate by HEPI shows no obvious pattern or theme. There is recognition, however, that HEPI has been in existence for only a relatively short period and could not be expected to give comprehensive coverage of HE policy in that time. It is also acknowledged that HEPI is a small institution with limited capacity and should focus on what it is good at and the areas it knows well.
- 3.23 Others argue that it is not appropriate for HEPI to seek comprehensiveness. It should seek out important topics in a timely way so that it informs the debate on current issues or encourages debate on topics which are becoming important. Many of its contributions have been very timely, for example conferences on topics for which important government interventions had just been declared.
- 3.24 HE policy is seen as under-researched by some commentators which leaves space for inputs from a think tank. This places some responsibility on the think tank to identify the key issues of the moment and longer term issues which may not be fully in the public eye. Our discussions with members of the HEPI Advisory Board indicate that it is the intention of HEPI to carry out those roles. The Board has discussed HEPI's approach and, we understand, has expressed a wish to maintain a wide-ranging approach which is not constrained by specifying in advance the topics to be covered.
- 3.25 The Advisory Board is made up of highly knowledgeable individuals with long experience of HE policy development and its implications. It does not cover all stakeholder groups in HE, however. It is possible that the choice of topics for HEPI research and other outputs might be different if HEPI had a slightly wider reach. All members of the Board are widely experienced but there was broad recognition from our consultees, including some members of the Board, that there may be benefit in further broadening HEPI's reach into areas such as communities not traditionally associated with HE. Some of this could be carried out through a wider range of invitations to seminars or conferences, for example, and engagement with bodies such as the equalities commissions.

### ***Quality of outputs***

- 3.26 HEPI's key outputs are the full reports it produces and their summaries. Breakfast seminars and conferences are also important. In addition HEPI carries out some consulting, for which it earns revenue, and through which, among other things, it keeps itself informed of significant issues.
- 3.27 The reports are widely referenced and generally welcomed. Many reports are effective because they are focused on a clearly defined theme so that, for example, in the case of higher education supply and demand, HEPI is becoming recognised for its knowledge in the field. Most report summaries are widely regarded as accessible, punchy, well-written and robust outputs aimed at busy people with limited time.
- 3.28 There are clear differences of opinion on the appropriate academic approach to HEPI's reports, however. One comment suggested that HEPI's reports are superficial as research reports. The data analysis sometimes appears to be limited to plausible interpretations, the

commentator said, rather than detailed analysis: HEPI's outputs do not pass muster as serious pieces of research.

- 3.29 Some of the reports are regarded by some consultees as not particularly well-written: those reports can be hard-going and do not appear to be written for a general audience. Some consultees also suggested that reports and their summaries are sometimes too technical and contain too much jargon, which can get in the way of understanding. A minority of consultees suggested that more time could be spent drafting and in wider discussion of initial findings. The design of the blue books is seen as weak by commentators but this is not a significant point for them. These are strong reactions but this is to be expected and HEPI would not be effective if it was seen as bland or always ready to compromise.
- 3.30 More positive views are more widely held: a different commentator claimed, for example, the outputs are well-regarded and statistically grounded and that they focus on HE and unusually are not politically motivated, so can be trusted. This view is not contradictory with those above so much as expressing a different interpretation of the appropriate comparators and evaluative criteria for HEPI's outputs. HEPI has high appeal for those looking for a well argued brief and is generally well-regarded but sometimes seen as less impressive by those who wish to see more detailed analysis drawing on a wider range of interpretations and evidence.
- 3.31 HEPI does not claim to produce academic research. Given its topic area, it has to be credible with those who work in a traditional research environment, however, and there will therefore inevitably be some differences in judgements of the quality of its outputs. For its primary audience, HEPI outputs, whilst necessarily varied in their approach and style, are undoubtedly fit for purpose.
- 3.32 Conferences and the annual lecture have drawn in a wide range of participants. They have not tended to move the debate on but have opened up issues to a wider audience. By their nature they are aimed more directly at policy makers and opinion leaders than academic researchers. The conferences were widely appreciated by consultees though the most recent annual lecture (May 2006) was of interest to a smaller audience.
- 3.33 Breakfast seminars are even more targeted and draw an interested, influential group into the debate who wish to be better informed. The group are not academics and in some cases may not be centrally involved in HE. All have an interest in HE or a responsibility for some part of its work or on work which touches the sector. HEPI's objective, in this context, appears to be to influence opinion and therefore to focus on topics which can be influenced. Comments from consultees suggest that HEPI has been successful in meeting its objectives for the breakfast seminars.

### ***Other impacts***

- 3.34 HEPI is good at generating publicity. It will provide articles and opinion pieces for newspapers and interviews and comment to the broadcast media. This has contributed to more informed journalism. It has helped and required policy makers to pay more attention to the issues. There are very few other sources of comment on HE which do not represent a particular group.

- 3.35 When first established, HEPI filled a gap in provision: there was no existing think tank carrying out the same work. There was a vacuum partly because a number of other providers, such as those mentioned below, had left gaps which they had previously filled. The position is now changing. Other players appear to be moving into HEPI's area of work and this may have implications for HEPI's future direction. For example, the Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE) appears to have renewed its interest in policy areas and Universities UK (UUK) is setting up a new policy unit. Both of these are membership organisations, however, and have different, though overlapping, audiences from HEPI.
- 3.36 For the majority of those we consulted HEPI is considered to have an independent voice. It is not seen as a mouthpiece of HEFCE nor of HEIs. Some commentators are surprised at HEPI's independence of line from HEFCE given it is partly funded by the Funding Council, others argue that it is relatively unsympathetic to higher education institutions. Such differences should not be interpreted as inconsistencies, in our view, but imply an independence of thought in HEPI.

### Additionality

- 3.37 We are confident HEPI provides additionality through its work. HEPI provides a particular kind of policy comment and analysis which is not easily available elsewhere. Its primary audience appears to be policy makers and opinion leaders who are looking for a clear brief but are not interested in, or have insufficient time for, a careful reading of academic research. It does not therefore appeal so much to an academic research audience, though it is valued by academics teaching about HE policy. There are very few providers of this kind of output and, from our consultations, there appears to be a demand for it.
- 3.38 Alternative institutions provide a number of similar outputs but the full range is not available from a single source. Consultancies and think tanks, institutions such as the Council for Industry and Higher Education, the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, SRHE, the Higher Education Academy, UUK, GuildHE and the Funding Councils all provide valuable outputs but none have the range of HEPI and many are seen to represent particular interests and therefore to offer a particular, or constrained, commentary. HEPI is seen as distinctive.
- 3.39 A number of consultees argued there is a need for an independent think tank not owned by government but challenging policy and government. HEPI is outside HEFCE so that it is able to challenge policies promulgated by major players, including political parties, and other interests. Academics provide some of these challenges but in general they are less accessible to the general public and less aware of relationships with the media.
- 3.40 Our consultations suggest that there may be some benefit in HEPI pursuing the possibility of greater partnership with other policy bodies. It has worked with other bodies in the past and does not reject partnership working. In most cases policy bodies will have different interests from HEPI on a number of issues but there may be areas where joint-working could be beneficial. For example, the UUK policy team, which is currently being reshaped, is able to make effective commentaries on policy developments and there may be some synergies where the specific interests of HEIs are not part of the equation. The Chief Executive of

UUK is on the HEPI Advisory Board. Some commentators have questioned whether there will be a role for HEPI once UUK has established its new unit. Our view is that UUK would not be able to take on HEPI's current role because it is ultimately, and rightly, working for its members but we can see potential for joint conferences or seminars or other shared projects. HEPI clearly needs to retain an independence from UUK and other similar bodies in order to maintain credibility but more, selective partnership according to topic may be beneficial. A further opportunity could be work with a major pharmaceutical company or scientific/medical trust in considering health or medical research.

- 3.41 HEPI plays an important role in contextualising the position of the HE sector and publicising and interpreting issues. It has increased the awareness of the position of the HE sector in public policy as a whole. Rankings created out of research assessment scores or other HE characteristics, or, for example, issues relating to fees and access have brought HE policy matters to the attention of those working in the sector, and to the wider public, more directly. From our research, it is clear HEPI has been seen as an authoritative voice in interpreting these matters.

### Relationship with HEFCE and other stakeholders

- 3.42 Corporately HEFCE does not influence HEPI though its Chief Executive is an *ex officio* member of the Advisory Board. The Chief Executive brings a HEFCE perspective to the debate but does not try to influence HEPI except in ensuring that the quality of outputs is satisfactory. Within HEFCE there is broad agreement that HEPI provides a distinctive, respected voice which HEFCE should embrace, though HEFCE officers by no means always agree with HEPI's interpretations. HEPI, through its trustees and Advisory Board as well as its Director, values HEFCE's hands-off approach which enables HEPI to achieve its mission using its own best judgements. HEPI engages with very serious people whose views are not trivial nor ill-thought through. Its independence is seen as valuable by those with whom we consulted.
- 3.43 Other consultees are aware of the relationship between HEPI and HEFCE to different degrees. They know that HEFCE provides funds to HEPI but it is not seen as an offshoot or servant of HEFCE.
- 3.44 The Advisory Board is seen as independently minded but may over-represent the views of senior directors and strategic policy officers. It is in the nature of an advisory board that members will have substantial reputations and be well established in their careers and there is no doubt this applies to HEPI's Board. Broadening Board membership in some way to include, for example, more relatively young academics and others with an interest in HE policy is seen as worth consideration by a range of commentators.

### Governance and management

- 3.45 HEPI has robust processes in place. It follows procedures adopted by HEFCE. There is a publicly available agreement in place between HEPI and HEFCE which describes HEPI's accountability obligations to HEFCE in return for the HEFCE grant. It is a small organisation and works through trustees who, from the evidence we have gathered, appear to take their

responsibilities seriously. The relationship between the Chair of the trustees and the Director of HEPI is key to ensuring these matters are dealt with properly. The evidence we have reviewed in consultations and from HEPI's self-assessment suggests that governance and management procedures are appropriate and effective.

## **Sustainability**

- 3.46 There are a number of considerations in relation to the long-term sustainability of HEPI. The first is to establish in what form, if any, it is desirable for HEPI to continue. Assuming a positive answer to that question, institutional sustainability then depends upon the recruitment and retention of appropriate staff and the availability of financial resources to employ them.
- 3.47 The majority of consultees argued that the continuation of HEPI was desirable. Not all saw its future structure in the same way but there is a widely held view that an independent think tank to consider HE policy is valuable and that HEPI carries out this role effectively.
- 3.48 The potential range of organisational structures for the future is not wide. A small unit is appropriate though some would see a small expansion in scale as worthwhile to enable a wider range of issues to be addressed. Partnership arrangements with other bodies which have interests in (particular) policies might be another possible direction.

## **Revenue**

- 3.49 An independent think tank requires independent funding if it is to be credible. Arm's length public sector funding is one such source but is insecure. Academic freedom is fragile even in those universities which are protected by royal charter, and public funding cannot be guaranteed for a think tank which is intended partly to challenge government. Government priorities change and may result in changes in funding to institutions such as HEPI. An ideal source of revenue for the long-term future of HEPI would be entirely independent of government.
- 3.50 Such income comes potentially from two sources. Firstly HEPI could earn it. Secondly it could work with charitable foundations or endowments which are prepared to provide funds without restriction.
- 3.51 HEPI already generates significant revenue from consultancy, conferences and seminars, as discussed in chapter two. Consultancy takes senior staff away from the primary function of the Institute and cannot be easily expanded, though it may be worth considering a more formal relationship with a suitable partner so that existing leads can be handled and developed by other staff alongside HEPI.
- 3.52 In the light of comments from a number of consultees and a brief review of prices charged by other providers, it is our view that fees for conferences may be below the market rate. There is also potential demand for a greater number of conferences, if there were supply side capacity to run them. One way to acquire such capacity is to consider increasing partnership with other sympathetic organisations. HEPI could carry out market research into the potential for this part of its operation. It may also be worth carrying out market research into sponsorship charges for seminars. It is less easy to establish the market rate for sponsorship,

partly because HEPI's seminars are unique in HE and partly because the scale of sponsorship for similar kinds of activities is not readily accessible. The benefit to sponsors from HEPI's seminars, however, appears to be substantial.

- 3.53 Charities have already been approached and have been forthcoming but not all existing funders are able to continue to provide revenue and there are few, if any, obvious charities to fill the place of existing support. From our consultations, we believe that it may be possible to extend existing support in some cases however, and that the funders value the benefits they receive from their association with HEPI.
- 3.54 Endowment income may be possible. HEPI currently has a high profile and strong reputation making it an appropriate time to seek endowments. However, whilst endowment income may be a suitable long-term source, it does not seem likely that it could provide more than a small proportion of HEPI's needs.
- 3.55 Given the experience of HEPI staff and trustees in fund raising, it may be sensible to seek support and to approach other funders for grant income to pay for some market research and short-term fund raising expertise. Part of this work would sensibly be benchmarking against other institutes serving similar needs in their sectors, or in HE in other countries.

### **Staffing**

- 3.56 HEPI is small and vulnerable. It is heavily dependent on its Director who in turn requires the support of an Advisory Board of real quality. HEPI would be unlikely to survive without a Director with extensive experience and personal skill, and a substantial Advisory Board.
- 3.57 Succession planning for the Director is necessary. It is not urgent, so far as we know, but the post requires skills which are not widely available. Different individuals could carry out the task but need to be highly knowledgeable about the sector and respected by key players within the sector and those associated with it. The Advisory Board and trustees will play important roles in taking this forward and will also need to undertake serious consideration about their own succession planning and appropriate reach.
- 3.58 Partnership working is one possible option, referred to by a number of consultees, which could be expanded to give more capacity for the range of HEPI activities.

## 4: Conclusions

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### Has HEPI alerted its stakeholders and others to important issues, current experience and relevant research in HE?

- 4.1 HEPI has alerted its stakeholders and other audiences effectively. Different audiences have different perspectives on HEPI's outputs. It is particularly effective at informing senior managers in higher education institutions, politicians, government officials, journalists and people working in other public bodies.
- 4.2 The short summaries of the HEPI reports, printed in the blue books and widely circulated, reach a major part of its current audience very effectively. The responses of specific segments of the audience to HEPI's reports vary: for the prime audience they are very popular, but the short format of the blue books, and research methodologies used, makes the reports less useful to some academic researchers, some higher education institutions and representative bodies.
- 4.3 The blue books are considered particularly good at briefing stakeholders on topics with which they are not necessarily familiar. The length is ideal for reaching a wide, busy audience, although neither the blue books nor the full reports are always as relevant for academic researchers, for whom more detailed research output would be more useful. However, the format and layout of the blue books could be improved.
- 4.4 HEPI's work tends to inform stakeholders rather than having a direct impact on specific policies, but makes a useful contribution to debate. Journalists are particularly positive about the role of HEPI's reports in stimulating interest in developments in HE, and its attitude to publicity.

### Has HEPI produced outputs that are well-regarded?

- 4.5 Many of HEPI's outputs are well-regarded as set out above. It has tackled a range of important subjects, has clearly contributed to the debate and has been influential with important decision-makers and opinion leaders. It is regarded as authoritative by the HE sector, trade press and within government and political parties.
- 4.6 HEPI's willingness to be provocative, and to put messages across simply to a range of stakeholders through its report summaries and media contacts, is a particular strength, and it should not lose this focus. Within this framework, it might consider increasing the variety of contributors to its work (as guest researchers) as well as trying to reach specific groups of stakeholders for particular reports. In some topic areas, working with similar institutions at an early stage of research would also help to ensure that potential differences of interpretation are understood.
- 4.7 HEPI's conferences and seminars have been high-profile and attracted a high-level audience. The conferences and seminars tend to reach the same audience (which finds them particularly

interesting – both in terms of official lectures and for networking and discussing policy development) as reached by the blue books.

### **Has HEPI informed HE policy?**

- 4.8 On a number of topics, such as the demand for higher education, HEPI is seen as informing policy. More generally it is seen as informing stakeholders rather than having a direct impact on policy. It is valuable in enabling a more informed debate which is likely to have a positive influence on the quality of policy decisions.

### **What other impact have HEPI's activities had?**

- 4.9 It is clear from consultations that by alerting stakeholders and others to important debates and producing readily accessible outputs, particularly in its blue books but also in conferences and seminars, HEPI has raised awareness of HE policy issues and has challenged policy directions more publicly than might otherwise have been the case. This is further evidenced in the increasing volume of press comment suggesting an increasing probability of the press and other media picking up policy issues as a result of HEPI's interventions.

### **How is HEPI perceived by its stakeholders?**

- 4.10 Overall, HEPI is seen by stakeholders as a useful, well-run and informed institution, and its reports, seminars and conferences viewed positively. However, for many the identification of topics for research could benefit from a clearer framework to guide choice but, importantly, which retained the opportunity for responding to current debates. A more structured set of outputs could promote HEPI as a source to which people turned automatically for information on policy developments.

### **What income has HEPI generated itself and are these or other similar sources of income likely to be reasonably reliable in the future?**

- 4.11 HEPI has generated 45% of its total income since it was established, and over 60% of income for the financial year to the end of July 2006.
- 4.12 Income sources are not reliable. Charitable donations are essentially short-term and substantial endowment income is very hard to find. Public sector support cannot be assumed for an institution that challenges policy developments, particularly if there is institutional or political change. Consultancy is time-consuming and competitive. Notwithstanding these comments, HEPI is well-placed to obtain income from all these sources though none will be easy to acquire.

### **To what extent have HEPI's activities been additional to what has been provided by others?**

- 4.13 HEPI has provided a voice which is independent and valuable, adding to the existing provision in the sector. There is wide agreement among those with whom we consulted that

there is a need for an independent think tank which challenges policy and government and other major players, including political parties, and other interests. Academics provide many of these challenges but their work is less accessible to many of the informed public at whom HEPI aims.

### Are HEPI's processes and management and governance arrangements efficient and effective?

- 4.14 HEPI has robust processes in place. The evidence we have reviewed suggests that governance and management procedures are efficient and effective.

### What are the issues, opportunities and risks for HEPI in terms of its future capability?

- 4.15 Issues for consideration relate to the extent to which HEPI meets the needs of its primary audiences. Currently it is fulfilling this role effectively. Opportunities exist in building on its current profile and continuing to reach those interested in HE policy. The primary risks relate to financial sustainability and staff planning.
- 4.16 The blue books, conferences and seminars are well regarded and have reached broadly the same audience. HEPI could consider whether this is the only or primary audience, and how it might reach others more effectively.
- 4.17 In addition, the membership of the Advisory Board might be widened, or perhaps temporarily extended from time to time, in order to ensure that a range of concerns affecting those at all levels of higher education are considered for further research.
- 4.18 Stakeholders felt that, with its present mission and remit, HEPI must remain independent, and be seen to be independent, or it will lose its deserved credibility. Some element of self-funding is therefore essential: this will ensure that HEPI keeps its finger on the pulse, and allow it accurately to judge the extent to which its outputs and style of work are meeting demand. Sponsorship and endowment options appear to be credible but it seems highly unlikely they could provide more than a small proportion of HEPI's requirements. Collaboration with other institutions and other researchers may be worth pursuing.
- 4.19 However, stakeholders felt that in general an element of core funding from some source is needed, so that HEPI does not have to spend its time generating income at the expense of producing reports, or become solely reliant on consultancy, which would limit the issues it can consider and outputs it can produce. As HEPI provides a source of policy ideas, increases public awareness of higher education policy issues, and provides a useful service to public bodies as well as private individuals and organisations, some element of public funding may be relevant.
- 4.20 The medium- to long-term sustainability of the Institute depends on its financial security, staff and Advisory Board. HEPI could consider the potential for a small degree of expansion, and for succession planning for staff and the Advisory Board to carry on the work of the Institute in the longer term. The current Director has a strong mix of skills and understanding of the

higher education policy context, as well as valuable contacts, which any successor would take time to develop.

- 4.21 HEPI has been running for four years and has made an important contribution to researching and publicising issues in higher education. At this stage, it could be appropriate for HEPI to review its future direction and pattern of work, in order to build on its work to date, and further strengthen its role and reputation. It has established itself as a valued part of policy debate in HE to an extent which is perhaps greater than expected when it was first established. It is timely to reflect on those successes and consider the extent to which its structures and practices are appropriate for a long-term contribution to the sector.

### Has the relationship between HEPI and HEFCE worked effectively?

- 4.22 Both HEPI and HEFCE are broadly positive about their relationship. HEFCE requires outputs of sufficient quality to inform public debates about policy and would intervene only if it believed there was a failure in this regard. HEPI, through its trustees and Advisory Board as well as its Director, values HEFCE's hands-off approach and is committed to making effective, thoughtful contributions. The formal requirements of the relationship relating to accountability and audit have been undertaken effectively.

### Final conclusions

- 4.23 HEPI's mission is to ensure that higher education policy making is informed by evidence, particularly research and the experience of others and it sees its main role as 'to raise issues, stimulate discussion and disseminate research findings'. HEPI has provided evidence-based research and other comments on HE policy as set out above.
- 4.24 It has clearly achieved its mission. It has:
- identified important policy issues in higher education, as well as relevant national and international research and experience
  - identified, facilitated and undertaken further research and policy analysis needed to illuminate those issues
  - alerted stakeholders to the issues, current experience and relevant research.

## Annex A: List of consultees

Name	Position	Organisation
Bahram Bekhradnia	Director	HEPI
Professor David Eastwood	Chief Executive	HEFCE
Sir Graeme Davies	Vice-Chancellor Chair of HEPI Board	University of London
Steve Egan	Deputy Chief Executive	HEFCE
Abbie Maxwell	Productivity Team	HM Treasury
Barry Sheerman	Chair of Education and Skills Select Committee	Labour MP
Clare Sanders	Journalist	Times Higher Education Supplement
Lord Ron Dearing	Former Chair of HEPI	HEPI
Lorna Cocking	Education Director	Pearson
Lucy Hodges	Journalist	The Independent
Mike Prosser	Director of research and evaluation	Higher Education Academy
Professor Alasdair Smith	Vice-Chancellor	University of Sussex
Professor Janet Finch	Vice-Chancellor	Keele University
Professor Peter Scott	Vice-Chancellor	Kingston University
Professor Roger Brown	Vice-Chancellor	Southampton Solent University
Dr Ranjani Naidoo	Director, Doctorate of Business Administration in Higher Education Management	University of Bath
Richard Brown	Chief Executive	Council for Industry and Higher Education
Tim Stevenson	Chair of Governors	Oxford Brookes University
Tony Bruce	Director	Universities UK
Mike Hipkins	Director, Student Finance Strategy	Department for Education and Skills
Ian Mitchell	Deputy Director, Analysis/ statistics	Department for Education and Skills
John Williams	Principal Officer, Gatsby Technical Education Projects	Gatsby Foundation