

Policy brief template

Notes for use

Prepared for **policy@manchester** by Linstock Communications

INTRODUCTION

Policy@manchester is an initiative aimed at raising the awareness and impact of research and expertise on public policy making at University of Manchester

In common with many institutions, our University is home to a wealth of knowledge, insight and understanding that can greatly enhance the effectiveness of public policy.

Politicians and policy makers are subject to a wide range of (often irrational) pressures and, as such, often turn to more readily accessible (and translatable) influences. Party political policy officers, think tanks and media commentators provide workable solutions to immediate concerns and avoid the complexity and nuance necessarily found in academic material.

However, as they also lack the rigour of academic work, the resulting policies are not always as effective as they might otherwise have been. The challenge therefore is to develop a mechanism to convey complex academic material to policy-making audiences in a way that is immediately accessible and useful.

Briefing notes are a regular feature of the political and policy landscape. They are the way in which key facts and points of reference about a given issue are conveyed to decision-makers for a specific purpose. Examples of their use include:

- **Notes written by Government officials to Ministers to inform their decisions on key policy matters;**
- **Notes written by Parliamentary researchers to allow Members of Parliament to make informed contributions to debates;**
- **Notes written by central party offices to encourage local politicians and activists to promote national policy positions;**
- **Notes written by local authority executive officers to elected council members to recommend particular courses of action.**

In all cases, an effective policy briefing note should conform to three criteria:

It should be useful to the reader.

A good briefing note allows the reader to achieve something that is beneficial to them. This could be as straightforward as speaking credibly in a debate about urban planning policy, or as sensitive as addressing public concerns about migration. The material should always be reliable, with any ambiguity or gaps in knowledge made clear. Each reader will be under different pressures at different times, and have to satisfy a range of different interest groups. A good briefing note is written with these concerns in mind and provides means with which to address them.

It should present information in the most concise way possible.

The political and policy making agenda moves incredibly fast and decision-makers are subject to a wide range of potential influences. To cut through in this hectic environment information needs to be presented in its most distilled form, with the precise point and (potential) implications of information about an issue made immediately apparent. **Ideally a policy briefing note should be composed of short bullet points and be no more than two or three standard A4 sides of clearly presented text (excluding cover page).**

It should serve a specific purpose.

Information for its own sake is not as salient as that which informs a specific action (or actions). This doesn't have to mean a specific piece of legislation or policy guideline; it could simply be to ensure that a particular item of evidence or point of view is represented in a debate. A good briefing note should show a clear sense of purpose by directing all information towards a specific call to action.

EDITING CHECKLIST

Once the drafting of the note is complete, it should be checked against the following checklist.

What to check	Yes/No
Is the note focussed on a specific, identifiable policy issue?	
Is the note written with a specific reader in mind?	

Does the briefing note address the interests and concerns of the intended reader?	
Does the note demonstrate that it is a reliable source of information by making clear the credentials of the author?	
Does the note demonstrate awareness of the background to the issues and the current situation?	
Is the purpose of the briefing note clear?	
Is the language simple, economical and clear?	
Is everything there that needs to be there?	
Is everything included essential to the purpose?	
Does the note propose realistic, tangible actions for the reader to take?	
Is the note as short as it can be without harming the quality of the material?	
Is the note easy to read, understand and remember?	
Do the sections lead logically from one to another?	
Is the note designed so that it is inviting to the reader?	
Is there a good balance between white spaces and text?	
Has the briefing note been carefully edited and proofread?	

DISTRIBUTION VIA DODS DATABASE

As well as sending briefings to your own networks, distributing at your events, and promoting them on the Web and via social media, you could consider accessing the Dods database of MPs, Peers, Civil Servants and Special Advisors, if your institution has access to this.

KEEP US INFORMED

We are keen to monitor the use of this template and toolkit by our researchers – if you are producing a briefing, please drop a line to NWCDTP Administrator Carole Douguedroit Arrowsmith: Carole.Arrowsmith@manchester.ac.uk. We may be able to feature your brief on our blog and twitter feed.