



**Centre for
Food Policy**
Shaping an effective food system

How to Write the Perfect Policy Brief

Wednesday, Oct 23, 2024
3:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Dr Christian Reynolds

Centre for Food Policy School of Health and Medical
Sciences
City St George's, University of London

Email: christian.reynolds@city.ac.uk

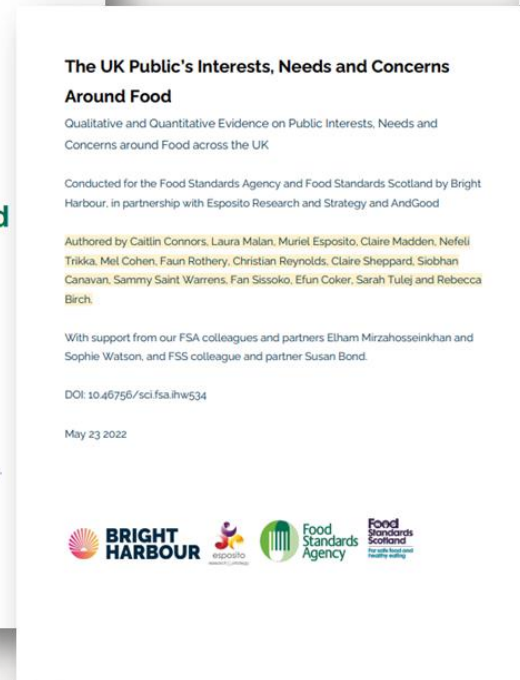
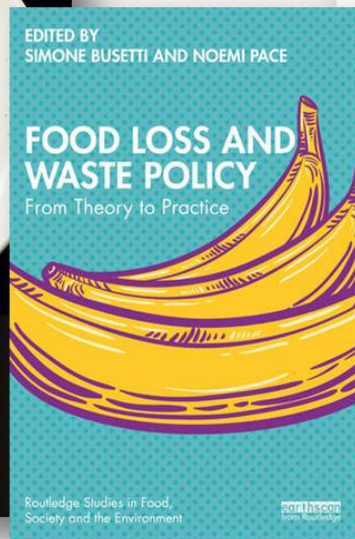
Twitter: @sartorialfoodie

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/christianjreynolds/>

Who am I?

Reader at the Centre for Food Policy, City St Georges, University of London.

- Teach on the Master in Food Policy, City St Georges, University of London.
- Research Focus on sustainable food systems and food waste.
- Supporting UK National, Devolved (Scottish/England) and Local (Sheffield/Islington)
- Nutrition Society Food Systems theme lead. IFST Sustainability working group.
- Recent publications:



What is a policy brief?

- short document
- about a particular policy-related situation or problem
- provides evidence and analysis
- gives recommendations
- for a particular audience



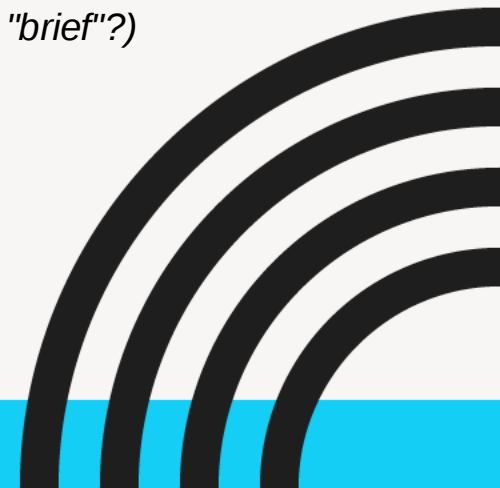
What's the format?

- Well organized
- Structured
- Clear and concise
- Read in a hurry by a busy, senior figure
- Should not be long or wordy
- Internal vs External briefs



**Different detail in the
brief depending on
page length**

(is anything over 3 pages a "brief"?)



Signposting and framing is key

- Ensure you're **framing** the issue in a way that builds support.
 - Does your framing work for your target audience? *Understanding who your audience is and what their job entails is crucial. What is their sphere of influence and what change can they implement?*
 - Be very clear: what the current policy you want to change is.
 - Set the scene: Identify the shortfalls of the current policy. Where is this policy failing, why and how can your recommendations improve the status quo?
 - Be aware of how policies are made in your specific institution.
-
- *Use non-technical, clear and coherent language.*
 - *Use active not passive language – engage, deliver etc*



Crafting Policy Recommendations

- Advice designed to influence policy decisions targeted at an individual or group with the authority to make them; what policy should they adopt?
- Designed to shift decision-makers faced with different options on what to do towards the recommended policy.
- Often draws on evidence of what causes the problem the policy is designed to address and/or evidence of impact of the recommended policy.
- Extend beyond providing “policy options” or “policy implications” to recommending the course they take.
- Is there a best option or are these a raft of policy recommendations to be used together?
- **Incrementalism** – policy change is often small and incremental, you need to give a range of options.



- **Keep your narrative and argument in the policy recommendations.**

- **Adviser's approach.** This involves trying to write down the best set of measures to tackle a particular problem.

- *"the list of recommendations actually represents a good programme of action for government to take".*
- *"it doesn't put a premium on originality. After all, most good policy ideas aren't original, and most original policy ideas aren't good."*



- **Wonk's approach.** Here the point is to be original, ideally in a way that proceeds directly from the argument of the rest of the book

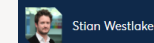
- *"reader gets ideas they haven't heard before (or at least, a strong rationale for ideas that are rarely proposed)"*
- *"a) It generally doesn't aspire to be a complete solution to the problem – the point is to say something new and Interesting rather than to list all the things that need to be said. (b) The advice is on average more likely to be wrong than if you follow the adviser's approach"*



When bright people make dull policy recommendations

Why do so many interesting books contain uninteresting policy recommendations? Perhaps it's because we often think about policy recommendations in the wrong way.

27 January 2016 | In Government innovation | Innovation policy | 4 min read



Stian Westlake

Make your policy recommendations (super) SMART

Setting SMART goals

BiteSize Learning



Specific

The goal is concrete and tangible - everyone knows what it looks like.



Measurable

The goal has an objective measure of success that everyone can understand.



Attainable

The goal is challenging, but should be achievable with the resources available.



Relevant

The goal meaningfully contributes to larger objectives like the overall mission.



Timely

This goal has a deadline or, better yet, a timeline of progress milestones.



Include the right information in your policy recommendation

To increase the chance of your policy recommendations being adopted and implemented, propose them with the following seven key pieces of information:

- **Specific target population:** Who is the policy aimed at? Who is doing the changing?
- **Responsible actor:** Who is responsible for delivering the policy?
- **Monitoring or evaluation plan:** How will the policy be monitored and evaluated and will that be conducted independently?
- **Time frame:** What is the time frame of the policy? Is the time frame defined or ongoing?
- **Cost and budget:** How much is the policy likely to cost and is there a budget allocated?
- **Evidence:** What evidence is the policy based upon?
- **Theory of change:** How is the policy theorised to work? What are the key assumptions underlying how it is theorised to work? (is my recommendation viable? Does the recommendation seem feasible?)

Theis (2022) “How to turn your policy ideas into reality” <https://castfromclay.co.uk/how-to-guides/how-to-turn-your-policy-ideas-into-reality/>



Further reading – when academics write policy briefs etc.

- **Musandu (2016)** “How to write actionable policy recommendations” <https://www.researchtoaction.org/2013/07/how-to-write-actionable-policy-recommendations/>
- **Parsons, Headings, Doherty, Barling, and Heron. (2022)** “Making policy recommendations: a fine balance between demonstrating relevance and demonstrating naivety” in “Guiding Principles for translating evidence on diet shift for people in the real world” Food Standards Agency <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/consumer-interests-aka-wider-consumer-interests/guiding-principles-for-translating-evidence-on-diet-shift-for-people-in-the-real-world?print=1>
- **Wolfe, R. (2013)** 'Policy Briefs: A guide to writing policy briefs for research uptake'. Available at: [blogs.lshtm.ac.uk › griphealth › files › 2017/01 › Policy-briefs-guide_2015](https://blogs.lshtm.ac.uk/griphealth/files/2017/01/Policy-briefs-guide_2015)
- **Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology** (n.d.) 'How to write a policy brief'. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/bicameral/post/about-post/writing-a-policy-brief/>
- **Tyler, C. (2013)** 'Top 20 things scientists need to know about policy-making' Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/dec/02/scientists-policy-governments-science>



School of Health & Psychological Sciences

City, University of London

Northampton Square

London

EC1V 0HB

United Kingdom

T: +44 (0)20 7040 5060

E: department@city.ac.uk

www.city.ac.uk/department