

Guidance on writing Plant Health Centre reports

Each project has a PHC project manager/point of contact. Authors should provide the PHC contact with a Word version of their report along with any graphics and three photos for the front cover. We will arrange the formatting of the output.

Reports should be a maximum of 20 pages (excluding appendices and references), written in sections, each with a section heading, and sub headings. However, if a customer requires a longer report then this limit is flexible. All outputs must be submitted to PHC **before** the specified deadline.

The guidance below is to aid the preparation of reports but is flexible. Projects often have different needs to reflect different audiences.

Reports should include;

1. **A title** that accurately reflects project aims
2. An **executive summary** that will also be published as a separate report. The summary should range from one to four (maximum) pages and include:
 - The **title** followed by the **key research question**. This may be a more descriptive or longer version of the title and needs to clearly say what your work sets out to achieve
 - **Main findings** from your work. For example, 'this research demonstrated...illustrates...clearly shows. How does your research inform current policy? Do your findings suggest the need for a policy change?
 - **Background**, give a brief explanation of the issue, why it is important, and why it needs to be examined. What is the starting point for the research?
 - **Research undertaken**: Please add a summary of what you did, the general methods or approaches
 - **Recommendations** (if needed) and next steps
3. **Table of contents**, showing section headings and subheading
4. **Lists of tables and figures** (where appropriate)
5. A full report including **introductory and concluding** sections (ensure conclusions are accurately reflected in executive summary)
5. **List of references**
6. **Appendices** (where appropriate)

Authors should also provide:

- **3 suitable photographs for the cover page** of the report with acknowledgements (e.g. photos courtesy of)
- The **names of the research team and contact details**
- The **logos** of research organisations involved
- Any **acknowledgements** of people assisting the research that they would like to include in the report.

Style Guidance

PHC outputs are put directly into the hands of policymakers who often want to use them immediately to inform policy decisions. Outputs for **PHC** must be written in a clear, concise and readable style. It is particularly important that the main findings are clearly presented in the executive summary. Outputs must be impartial.

All draft outputs should be sent to PHC in the first instance. PHC will arrange for its review prior to being seen by the policy customer.

How to write for PHC

- **State the question:** **PHC** projects start with a question asked by a policy colleague. All outputs should start by setting out the question. The report should then answer this question directly.
- **Keep it simple:** Outputs should be accessible to a non-expert audience and written in plain English. Specialist vocabulary needs to be explained, and a glossary provided if the report has extensive use of this.
- **Keep it accessible:** Make sure your output looks attractive and readable. Break up the text with sub-headings, and bullet points where possible. Use graphics.
- **Keep it short:** Research reports should normally be no more than 20 pages long (excluding references, glossary and any appendices). They should include an executive summary of 4 pages maximum.
- **Keep it professional:** Do a final proof-read. Make sure there are no spelling mistakes/unintentional ambiguities/waffle in the final version. Also check your work is relevant, factually accurate, impartial and readable.

Tips

1. **Keep your sentences short:** 15-20 words in a sentence. Most commas can be replaced by a full stop.
2. **Use active verbs:**
 - x A review of the plan will be undertaken by government next year.
 - ✓ Government will review the plan next year.
3. **Use 'you' and 'we':** Be as personal as you would be if you were speaking to your reader.
4. **Use words that are appropriate for the reader:** Using everyday language and terms does not make your text less credible, it makes it more accessible.
5. **Avoid nominalizations:** Use a verb instead of making it into a noun:
 - x The introduction of the scheme was successful.
 - ✓ Introducing the scheme was a success.
6. **Don't be afraid to give instructions:** If you want the reader to do something specific don't say that they 'should consider', say that you want them to.
7. **Try not to sit on the fence:** If possible be clear about consensus on a topic, and say there are dissenters.

***If in doubt, please ask contact info@planthealthcentre.scot**