

## Contacting Politicians

It is important to engage with politicians and let them know about the issues that are important to you. With preparation and thought, your communication with decision makers will become an effective and rewarding method of direct activism.

### Before making contact

Choose something that specifically interests you, and focus your advocacy efforts in that area. Identify one or two particular problems or concerns.

Research your issue. If you can, support your views with up-to-date information from respected sources (publications, studies, statistics, etc). Be absolutely accurate.

Prepare the facts about the matter you want to discuss, and put together tidy notes – use these to help you when you do make contact. Be informed, and keep track of proposed legislation/votes/debates that may be relevant.

### Personal meetings

Personal meetings with a politician and/or relevant staff member are the most effective means of communication.

A meeting needs to be arranged well in advance. Be flexible with meeting times, ask when best suits them – don't tell them when best suits you!

Be punctual, well-dressed, and neatly presented.

Don't be disappointed if you meet with a staff member. These are the people you will work with over time, and it helps to build a good relationship from day one.

Take your notes with you, and refer to them if necessary. This shows you've made an effort, and are serious about the issue.

Don't be afraid to say 'I don't know', but always offer to find out. Follow up as quickly as possible with accurate information. Don't ever pretend to know something if you really don't.

Politicians are humans, too. They have their own views and opinions, and if you want them to listen to you, you need to listen to them. Always be respectful, calm, and courteous.

Send a follow-up letter thanking them for taking the time to meet with you.

Make sure you stay in touch with your 'contact person' in that office. Politicians and their staff are extremely busy, so ensure that any contact you make and any information you provide is relevant, and useful to them as well as to you.

### Letters

A well set out, neatly handwritten or word processed and signed letter is an effective means of communication. It is far better than form letters, postcard or email campaigns, or emails in general.

Keep it short (two pages at the absolute most), polite, and factual.

If you are nervous about personal meetings, communication by letter is a great alternative. Raising an issue by letter, and using that letter to request a personal meeting, can also be extremely effective.

Remember to carefully proof-read and edit your letter before sending it.

### Telephone calls/faxes

A phone call to a politician's office is a quick way to get in touch. Make sure you introduce yourself clearly, and give a very brief statement about what you'd like to discuss. Ask if this is a convenient time. If not, arrange when to call back (and make sure you do).

Think about what you want to say, and jot down key points so that you don't forget. Have your notes next to you so you can refer to them.

A fax is about as effective as a phone call, but yours may get lost if the office receives a high volume of faxes.

### Emails

Some politicians do not read email, and others receive so much that their office cannot respond to it. Emails can get lost among spam. However, it is far better to send a carefully written email than to do nothing! Try making time to follow it up with a phone call or letter.