

# Campaigning

*How to make your group effective campaigners for refugees*



## Introduction

Campaigning is about working together to change things for the better. The STAR network has thousands of members across the UK and when thousands of people ask for the same thing it can really make a difference.

For example STAR members joined in the national campaign to end vouchers for asylum seekers and the government changed it's policy – we won! Asylum seekers now get cash so they can buy anything they want from anywhere they want (although people who have been refused asylum still get vouchers – so we're still campaigning!).

STAR National works with other agencies who also want to improve conditions for refugees to make our campaigning really effective e.g. Amnesty, TUC and Refugee Council. This means that STAR members become part of something even bigger.

STAR has a fantastic campaigning resource – you! Thousands of dedicated and creative activists ready to express their support for refugees and demand that our government improves conditions for those who come to the UK for protection. You are a key part of the movement advocating for refugees. If we work together as a network we can make a difference.



## STAR campaigns

### Equal Access

Asylum seekers do not have the same right to university education as their British born peers. As a student network STAR believes that this is wrong and that we are uniquely placed to correct this injustice.

STAR will lead a campaign to ensure that asylum seekers have equal access to higher education and can join us at university as equals.

### Campaign Aims

- ★ Universities will allow asylum seekers to pay home fees
- ★ Vice Chancellors will sign the pledge to support national policy change

Each STAR group can lobby their own university to demand equal access for people seeking asylum.

Contact the STAR national team to find out what you can do.

**STAR is also an active supporter of the following campaigns:**

### **Still Human Still Here**

The 'Still Human Still Here' campaign highlights the plight of tens of thousands of refused asylum seekers who are being forced into abject poverty in an attempt to drive them out of the country. STAR is working with organisations such as Amnesty and Refugee Action to end destitution.

STAR is calling on the Government to:

- ★ End the threat and use of destitution as a tool of Government policy against refused asylum seekers
- ★ Continue financial support and accommodation to refused asylum seekers as provided during the asylum process and grant permission to work until such a time as they have left the UK or have been granted leave to remain
- ★ Continue to provide full access to health care and education throughout the same period

### **Right to Work**

The Right to Work campaign is dedicated to promoting the solution of the right to work for asylum seekers to allow them to support themselves while their claim is processed and to help combat the destitution of refused asylum seekers. STAR is working with organisations such as Refugee Council, TUC and Brighter Futures to demand permission to work for those claiming asylum.

STAR is calling for the Government to grant entitlement to work for:

- ★ All asylum seekers after 6 months of making a claim
- ★ People who have been refused asylum but cannot return

Go to the STAR website to find out what you can do: [www.star-network.org.uk](http://www.star-network.org.uk)

### **Other Campaigns**

Campaigning is generally the highest profile activity of STAR. To be effective it is important to maintain clear and focused messages. As a charity STAR also has a legal responsibility to campaign only on those issues that are stated as our charitable objectives.

If you want to campaign on issues outside of STAR's charitable objectives then you cannot use the STAR name and logo. STAR's objective is to support refugees in the UK.

This means that STAR cannot campaign on general human rights issues or those relating to migrants in general rather than refugees and asylum seekers. This is regardless of whether we are supportive of the cause or not.

If your group is planning a campaign not officially supported by STAR it is essential that you discuss this with the STAR national team.

When engaged in activity gaining public attention you are using STAR's reputation. Please keep in mind that you are part of a national network and that other student groups may be affected by your actions.

## Taking Action!

What you need to do to achieve your campaign aims will depend on who you are trying to reach and the change you are seeking. But there are some standard campaigning tactics and it's important you know how to take action effectively. Below is some advice on passing a motion at your Students Union, lobbying your MP and gaining support on campus.

## Passing a Students Union (SU) motion

### What is a Students Union motion?

The student executive committee (made up of sabbatical officers) at your university student's union is there to represent the interests of all your university's students. So getting the backing of your union can be a powerful thing. An SU motion is the democratic tool students can use to set their SU's policy.

### Why pass a motion?

- ★ To raise awareness of an important issue with students
- ★ To compel your SU to take action on your campaign. For example, writing to the Vice-Chancellor or posting info about the campaign on the union website
- ★ To add weight to your demands. Letters sent on behalf of the SU may carry more weight, plus they may have valuable contacts or access to decision makers.
- ★ To gain access to those at the top of your university. SU Presidents have regular meetings with their Vice Chancellors (VCs). Other SU Sabbatical Officers will have contact with Pro-Vice Chancellors, Deans and other senior University staff. This relationship means that Sabbaticals are in a good position to lobby the University.

### How do I do it?

The procedures will vary by university, so contact your SU to find out exactly what you need to do. Each student union will have a student representative body. This may be called Union Council or Union Executive. These representative bodies meet regularly to discuss business. Some will have one meeting each term, others every week – find out from your SU. Anyone can attend these meetings and put forward motions, but voting is restricted to the elected members.

You need to get the motion on the agenda:

- ★ **Write a motion.** The STAR national team has template motions you can use, so get in touch.
- ★ **Submit your motion.** There will be a deadline for submitting a motion, often several weeks before the meeting.
- ★ **Find a proposer.** You will need 2 students; one to act as 'proposer' & one to be 'seconder'. Some SU's may require you to find a specified number of people to support your motion (e.g. 30 student signatures) before it can be put forward.

**Once on the agenda, you need to:**

[www.star-network.org.uk](http://www.star-network.org.uk)

- ★ **Raise awareness of your motion before the vote.** Get an article in your student paper, hand out leaflets, put posters up, or hold a debate to generate interest. Get as many supporters there as you can!
- ★ **Every vote will count.** Find out who can vote and ensure those people who are supportive will attend the meeting to vote for your motion.
- ★ **Prepare a speech and your arguments.** You will likely need to make a short speech or presentation to explain and give reasons why the meeting should support your motion. Be prepared for an opposing speech against your motion and be ready to answer questions about it too.

**Success!** If your motion is passed then make sure it is implemented! Talk to union staff & sabbaticals. Now celebrate and get some publicity! Tell your student paper and STAR national.

### **Try passing a motion at the NUS Annual General Meeting (AGM)**

Union societies, with the official support of their SU can have a big influence over NUS policies and in the past specific activities of societies such as STAR and People and Planet have been officially supported by NUS at AGM

Each Union delegation must be voted for by your campus. Therefore, if you are really serious about getting your campaign debated at NUS AGM then you should consider standing as a delegate yourself, or lobbying those who have been elected. Speak to your union executive committee about when NUS AGM delegation elections will be happening.

### **Win the support of lecturers and university staff trade unions**

Getting the support of a trade union behind you could take your campaign to a national and much broader audience and, being university students, you have a natural affinity with those unions representing teaching and university staff. They represent a good starting point in getting your message out beyond the university or local community.

Get in touch with union representatives in your area. For example, the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) has a representative (who will be a member of staff) at almost every university across the country. The local union rep would be your first point of contact. You can find out how to contact them via the UCU website: [www.ucu.org.uk](http://www.ucu.org.uk) and click on 'Contacts'.

## Lobbying your MP

An important aspect of many campaigns is gaining the support of MPs. They will be able to communicate your objection to government policy and push for a change.

### What is lobbying?

Lobbying is about influencing the thinking of legislators or other public officials to come round to your point of view. Lobbying can take many different forms and can be done by paid lobbyists from the charity or corporate sector or by grass roots activists and members of the public.

If an MP receives a certain number of contacts about an issue, they are then likely to raise the issue either in Parliament or with the relevant government ministers.

### You can lobby your MP in the following ways:

- ★ Write to them – the more letters an MP receives from constituents on a certain issue, the more likely they are to take notice and do something about it.
- ★ Arrange a meeting – you can meet your MP at their constituency office during their ‘surgery’ time or at the Houses of Parliament.
- ★ Arrange a mass lobby - a large number of people can try to meet their MPs in the Houses of Parliament at the same time

### What you can aim for your MP to do:

You can request that your MP act on your behalf in one of the following ways:

- ★ Raise your concerns with the relevant Government minister
- ★ Raise your concerns with a Parliamentary question
- ★ Sign an Early Day Motion\* in Parliament supporting the issue
- ★ Make commitments addressing the issue within your community

**\*Early Day Motion (EDM)** - The name for when an MP gives notice of a motion for which no date has been set to debate. EDMs are very rarely debated, but it’s a good way for your MP’s opinion on the subject to be recorded. Your MP can also use an EDM to gauge levels of support for an issue amongst other MPs and to raise awareness. MPs also find EDMs useful for local press releases.

See <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/p03.pdf> for more information.

### How do I contact my MP?

- ★ Find out who your MP is:

Go to [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com) and type in your postcode.

Or call the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272.

Or search by name, constituency or postcode at <http://www.locata.co.uk/commons/>

- ★ Write to them:

All MPs have Westminster offices and will make arrangements for their mail to be dealt with or redirected when they are away from London:

*Name Surname* MP

House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

★ Email them:

Find out MP e-mail addresses at [www.parliament.uk/directories/hciolists/alms.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/directories/hciolists/alms.cfm)  
Contact them via the [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com) website

★ Phone them:

You can contact your MP's office at the House of Commons by asking the switchboard to put you through: 020 7219 3000. You should be able to find out the phone number via your MP's website or at your local library.

### Writing to your MP

- ★ Introduce STAR – this will mean subsequent correspondence has more impact, and your MP will be more likely to accept future invitations
- ★ Be concise and precise – inform them about the issue, your views and suggested solutions, but remember that they receive a huge amount of correspondence.
- ★ Be clear what you are asking - let them know what you would like them to do (e.g. that you would like to meet them, or you would like them to sign an EDM in support of the campaign, etc)
- ★ Request a reply - Ask for a specific response.

### Meeting your MP

**At Westminster** - You can arrange to visit your MP when the House of Commons is sitting. You will need to make an appointment to see them in the Central Lobby in Parliament.

**In their constituency** - MPs also hold regular 'surgeries'\* in their constituencies. You can find out details from their office. Groups such as STAR often visit their local MPs.

- ★ Introduce STAR – explain who you are and why you want to meet them
- ★ Be realistic – make sensible aims about what you can cover in one meeting. List the most important things you want to cover.
- ★ Go as a group - attend the meeting as a (small) group and decide who will speak on the issue
- ★ Have a clear aim - be clear about what you want your MP to do as a result of the meeting, such as writing to a minister or asking a parliamentary question
- ★ Predict their responses – research your MP and their party and use this to predict their responses. Prepare yourself to respond effectively if they disagree.

**\*MP surgeries** – A set opportunity for you to meet your MP to raise any issues or concerns that you have. Most MPs hold surgeries at least once a month, details of which you can find out from their websites or offices. Some MPs operate an advance bookings policy. Others you can just turn up to on a 'first come, first served basis', so it is best to check before hand and, if necessary arrange to meet another time.

### Follow Up

- ★ Always write and thank your MP, include the main points agreed and any action that has been promised on either side.
- ★ Record any additional information you found out about your MP
- ★ Consider inviting your MP to a follow up event at your union. If you can make the event a photo opportunity, so much the better. You can speak to your MP's secretary to help with getting some media coverage.

### **Contacting a Member of the House of Lords**

Members of the House of Lords have an important role to play. It is often in the Lords that a government loses a vote on legislation. Members attend the House on a voluntary basis and only a few have an office or any staff. This can make it tricky to contact them directly, but here are some ideas. A full list of Lords can be found at [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldinfo.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldinfo.htm)

### **Writing a letter to a Member of the House of Lords**

Name, Surname and title  
House of Lords,  
London,  
SW1A 0PW

For information about how to address Members in letters and on envelopes go to [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldinfo/ldadds.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldinfo/ldadds.htm)

### **Phoning a Member of the House of Lords**

Telephone the switchboard (020 7219 3000) who will either transfer you to the relevant office or take a message. Alternatively you can leave a message with the 'message service' 020 7219 5353.

## Getting support on campus

Here are some favourite actions for winning support for your campaign among fellow students and demonstrating that you've succeeded!

### Raising awareness

Ways to inform other people and increase their understanding on a topic:

- ★ Refugee speaker
- ★ Public meetings and film showings
- ★ Leafleting and info stalls
- ★ Chalking campaign slogans
- ★ Holding debates
- ★ Organising a conference on the issue in your area
- ★ Host a theatre performance
- ★ Putting up posters about the campaign
- ★ Eye-catching stunts such as sitting in a cage
- ★ Poetry readings from students
- ★ Having a banner drop at various location on campus / in town
- ★ Themed entertainment events, e.g. world food / world music night
- ★ Street theatre about the campaign topic

### Demonstrating support

Ways to show that there is wide support from the public for your campaign:

- ★ Organise a petition and send it to your target
- ★ Organise a mass letter writing to your target
- ★ Holding a sleep out
- ★ Arranging a demo or march
- ★ Pledges from key campaign supporters
- ★ Passing a Students Union motion
- ★ Holding an action to mark an event that relates to your campaign
- ★ Hold a vigil