

2.1 Lobbying & effecting legislative 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.

MPs are expected to answer questions from constituents on a diverse range of subjects, so won't have in-depth knowledge of many issues. Having been involved in STAR and having volunteered with local refugee agencies / projects you are likely to be more informed about refugee and asylum issues than your MP! If an MP receives a certain number of contacts about an issue, s/he is then likely to raise the issue either in Parliament or with the relevant government ministers – the persuasive power of a heavy postbag is high!

But remember, MPs have huge demands on their time. To stand the best chance of getting your voices heard, think about **WHEN** you contact your MP. Is there a hook that you can hang your enquiry on that will catch your MP's eye?

Good times to contact your MP would be:

- When the issue you are campaigning on is being debated in Parliament
- When new legislation relating to your issue is being debated in Parliament
- When the issue is getting a lot of news coverage
- When there is a major development in your issue locally

What activities constitute lobbying

- Writing a letter to your MP The more letters an MP gets from constituents on a certain issue, the more likely they are to take notice and do something about it.
- Arranging to meet your MP at their constituency office or at the Houses of Parliament
- Arranging for a large number of people to meet their MPs in the Houses of Parliament at the same time – A mass lobby

What you can aim for your MP to do

- Raise your concerns with the relevant government minister
- Raise your concerns via a Parliamentary question
- Gauge concern about the issue among MPs by submitting an Early Day Motion*
- Make commitments to addressing the issue within your community

Contacting MPs

Finding out who your MP is

Call the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272.

Search by name, constituency or party at <http://www.parliament.uk/directories/directories.cfm>

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

Writing a letter to your MP

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

Faxing your MP

You can send a free fax to your MP via www.faxyourmp.com

Emailing your MP

Find out MP E mail addresses at www.parliament.uk/directories/hciolists/alms.cfm

T a k i n g a c t i o n

Phoning your MP

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.

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

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

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.

Contacting a member of the European Parliament

You can contact any member of the European Parliament, the Committee on Human Rights and/or Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs at

Rue Wiertz

B-1047 Brussels

Belgium

You can contact MEPs at

Council of the European Union, General Secretariat / Justice and Home Affairs

Rue de la Loi 175

B-1048 Brussels

Belgium

Writing to your MP

- Introduce STAR, so subsequent correspondence will have more impact, and your MP will be more likely to accept future invitations
- Inform them of the issue, your views and suggested solutions. Be precise, get to the point and use examples if you can
- Let them know what you would like them to do about it. E.g. you would like to meet them, or you would like them to sign an EDM in support of the campaign, etc

Meeting your MP

At Westminster - You can arrange to visit your MP in the Central Lobby in Parliament, when the House of Commons is sitting. You will need to make an appointment to see them, to check they're going to be around. **NB** you need special permission to organise a mass lobby.

In their constituency - MPs also hold regular 'surgeries'* in their constituencies, (find out the details from their office) and groups such as STAR often visit their local MPs.

- Be realistic about how much you can cover in one meeting
- Introduce STAR and why you have asked to meet them
- List the three most important points that you want to get across
- Consider attending the meeting as a (small) group and decide who will speak on the issue

T a k i n g a c t i o n

- 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
- Using the information that you know about the MP and their party, predict some possible responses you are likely to get. If you think that your MP will not agree with your position then rehearse your arguments.

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