

Promoting your campaign

Winning support from members is only the start of your campaign. Posters, meetings and newsletters will help raise the profile of your issue. However, you will also need to think about how best to promote your ideas to a wider audience of university/college staff, students, and the local community. If you have a good case then tell people about it. This guide looks at some basic ideas to help promote your campaign, and how to continue to gain support on campus. Raising the profile of the branch/local association (LA), and your particular campaign, will increase awareness of the union among non-members.

Letters and postcards

This tactic is basically a more sophisticated form of a petition. By producing a draft letter or a campaign postcard/Christmas card/birthday card and getting people to send them to the target of your campaign you can signal that a lot of people feel strongly about the issue. This tactic can be divided into two separate parts.

Draft letters

Produce an outline of the arguments and the points you wish to make in a letter and then ask your activists and members to produce their own personal letters using your draft outline in their own way. This allows people to use their own experience and is far more likely to be read than a pile of letters that are exactly the same, which is just a petition on more pieces of paper. This is especially true of letters to politicians who have a track record of ignoring standard letters but realising that a series of individual letters means that there is a strong feeling about the issue.

You are likely to get less people prepared to undertake this tactic because of the work involved which is why individual letters, with their personal touches, are so important to this tactic. Your briefing should be one side of bullet points putting the key arguments and asking people to include them in their own letter. You should also ask the respondents to copy you in on the letters they send for your records. This tactic can be done by email but there is still something psychological about receiving large numbers of letters on paper that works better than email.

Advise people to keep their letter short, maximum two sides of writing paper, as this will mean they are far more likely to be read. Also ask people to request a response and get them to copy that response to you.

Postcards

These can be simply signed by the campaigner, perhaps with a short hand-written personal message in a space provided, and then either sent individually or delivered as a mass by UCU. These are different to the draft letter as they require less time from the member/supporter and they make a visible impact through the picture on the front of the card.

Each card should have:

- a striking design on the front linked to your campaign
- a campaign message on the back/inside
- the address of the person to receive the cards (even if they are being collected centrally and handed in together)
- space for a signature and a short message of support
- the UCU logo.

Be aware when using both of these tactics that there is a possibility that some supporters may get too excited and write things, for example, abuse, or inappropriate language that you will not want to be associated with. If you get copies of the cards, then look through them and remove ones you are worried about. If you get a copy of a letter that has already been sent then be prepared to apologise to the recipient if need be, while still supporting the sentiment of the letter and the letter writer for merely being too passionate about this important issue. You should never publicly attack a member for the letter they send if it is in support of your position, no matter how much you may feel this is necessary, as it makes it less likely that people will support you in this way in the future.

Letters to newspapers

Sometimes campaign issues are fought out in the letter pages of local papers. It is a useful way of getting your issue debated in public, and by encouraging supporters to write letters for publication you can involve people in the campaign. A letter from UCU outlining why it is campaigning on an issue may encourage the target of your campaign to respond in kind thereby bringing the issue into the public eye.

The trick to winning the campaign in the local press letters page is to encourage activists to write in separately supporting your campaign. But similarly to writing letters described previously, these can include personal experience thereby making them more attractive to print. This part of the campaign will probably involve the least amount of activists as newspapers will only print so many letters on a particular subject; but it will raise the profile of your campaign quite considerably.

A briefing to activists outlining what should be in letters to the press should be prepared in the same way as the briefing described above (under 'Draft letters'). The most important thing about letters to the media is that they should be short, probably no longer than 250

words. They should include the key messages you want to get across in the first paragraph. You should not encourage members to send a standard letter to the press as they will only print one of them, with the result that your activists will have wasted their time.

Lunchtime picket or demonstration

There are many laws governing the organisation of pickets and demonstrations and if you decide you wish to organise one, you should contact your regional officers for advice on the correct procedures. These are tactics that should be used very sparingly and should be designed to cause the least amount of disruption to students and other members of staff as possible. The objective of a lunchtime event like this is not to bring the university/college to a halt, but merely to raise awareness of the issue and give activists a voice. These events should be well publicised in advance to give as many people as possible the opportunity to take part.

The event itself could involve a short march, speeches at a rally, handing out leaflets throughout the university/college, some press coverage by informing the local media, but should definitely involve as many people as possible. The end of the demonstration could also include the handing in of a petition, postcards etc to the target of your campaign, or a representative should they choose not to be involved.

It is important that you ensure the event is properly stewarded by official UCU stewards and that one person has responsibility for informing the university/college, or if taking place off university/college grounds, the local police. Remember, this is a campaign tactic and not official industrial action.

In order to undertake a lunchtime picket or demonstration you should ensure:

- you have the relevant permission to be where you want to hold the event
- you have leaflets and stickers so that those involved and other supporters can show their support
- you have publicised the event well in advance
- you have appointed stewards who can be readily identified on the day
- you have alerted the local media
- you have enough people to make it worthwhile doing
- you have organised a speaker/handling in of petition or some such like to give the end of the event a focus
- you have UCU recruitment forms
- you have a banner or posters, with UCU branding, outlining your case
- you have checked local by-laws with the relevant authorities – normally local councils – to make sure you are not acting illegally.

Before you organise anything you should seek support and guidance from your regional officers.

This tactic can be a good focus for a campaign, giving activists something to work towards and creating a higher public profile for your campaign. But if you do not follow the rules, or not enough people turn up, you can set your campaign back. So publicise well, get guarantees of attendance and seek advice. But above all have fun, shout, sing, wave banners, hand out leaflets, and have a drink afterwards.

Once you have evidence of wider support – how do you use it?

All of the tactics described above are designed to show that the campaign you are leading has the widest possible support, particularly among your membership but sometimes in the wider university/college or local community. The basis of all of these tactics is raising the profile of the issue and building the strength of your campaign, but once you have people on board, you have your petition, your letters etc, what do you do then?

It is not worth doing all of this work unless you make the most of it by showing the target of your campaign that they are not just facing the branch/LA executive or a few activists but are on the wrong end of an argument which people feel strongly about. Therefore, you must ensure that the target of your campaign and the wider university community know about it and the support it has raised. There are various ways of doing this.

Presentation to campaign target

The major objective of all of this work, as well as increasing your activist base and creating some excitement among your members, is to get something done about your issue. The best way of doing this is to prove to the target of your campaign that there is a wide-range of opposition lined up against them, and the best way to do that is to show them.

Therefore, you should hand in your petition or postcards in as public a way as possible. We have already mentioned doing this at the end of a demonstration, but another way may be using the media to photograph, or even better film you, handing them in at a meeting or other event. If you wish to give the target room to compromise you may just wish to write to them saying you have a petition of (fill in number) university/college staff and students who oppose them and you wish to get together and discuss the issue with them. If nothing comes of this you can still fall back on the public route, with the added high-moral ground of having offered to negotiate and been rebuffed. The main point of a petition, meeting, letters, website bulletin board, poll or survey is to let your target know you have them.

Media release/event

The local media will always be interested in a story about a campaign in which an organisation is in conflict with another publicly.

If you have conducted a poll or survey showing support for your position, press release it. If you have a petition showing support and intend to hand it in, press release it. If you have had a successful campaign meeting and have a plan of action, press release it. If you have started a web petition, press release it (this will still be new to most local media and the concept of a web petition may be a story in itself). If you have sent letters or post cards to the target, press release it. If you are going to have an event, either to hand in a petition, organise a lunchtime demonstration or run a stall, press release it.

The morale of this story is, if you are campaigning and want to increase the profile of your campaign, do something and then ... you guessed it ... press release it.

Keep in contact with your supporters

There is nothing more dispiriting for your activists than taking part in a campaign and then receiving no further news about how it has gone. When you organise a petition or anything else that involves non-members signing up to your campaign, ensure the piece of campaign material they includes sign a box for them to tick if they do not want to receive further information on the campaign and other UCU campaigns. If they tick this box, then do not record their details electronically and do not send them anything further; but if they do not tick it, continue to contact them.

Once you have your petition, emails, letters, postcards, and meeting lists back, then create a database of their names and contact details so that you can update them on the campaign, ask for further help or send them information on other UCU activities and campaigns. It is important that you give them the opportunity not to receive this information under the Data Protection Act, but if they do sign up for further contact make sure they get it.

This contact could be in the form of a letter updating them, a regular email or a specifically designed campaign newsletter, and don't forget to include a UCU membership form. This list should build up throughout your campaign and should give you an increased base of support next time you wish to run one.