



Getting your message

# ACROSS



**A COMMUNICATIONS AND LOBBYING TOOLKIT FOR UCU ACTIVISTS**




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# Introduction

 Our political strength as a trade union matters. To be effective we have to start from the ground

With the squeeze on public finances and an uncertain political climate, now more than ever UCU needs to be making its voice heard in the corridors of power.

Getting our voice heard as trade unionists can be difficult. Our elected representatives are deluged with letters, emails and phone calls about hundreds of issues each week. Press outlets receive hundreds of press releases and phone calls. If UCU wants to stand out and make an impact we need to be professional, well organised and effective.

Our political strength as a trade union matters. The stronger we are politically, the stronger we are industrially and the more we can improve pay and terms and conditions for our members. To be effective we have to start from the ground.

Local members and activists are on the frontline of every UCU campaign. This toolkit is designed to assist you in communicating effectively in the press and with politicians in order to affect real change for our members. It focuses on practical advice and suggestions and is aimed at every activist, whatever their level of experience or knowledge.

## Golden rules

Much of what is enclosed in the toolkit is common sense or based on successful (or unsuccessful!) experiences elsewhere but there are a few keys tips to always keep in mind:

📣 **If you aren't sure, ask!** UCU employs a political team, campaign staff and press officers specifically so that you can get help when you need it. Pick up the phone and you will be able to get the help you need.

📣 **Time spent planning is time well spent!** It can be tempting to rush into your campaign or activity, especially when members are demanding that you act or if you have a journalist on the phone demanding a comment. But take time to plan what you are going to say or do – it will pay dividends down the line and it will help avoid mistakes.

📣 **Keep it simple!** The chances are that in most situations we will have a greater knowledge and understanding of post-16 education issues than the people we are talking to. It is vital that in everything we do, our message is clear, concise and to the point.



📣 If you aren't sure – ask! Pick up the phone to UCU and you will be able to get the help you need

## Using the toolkit



**📣** This toolkit covers how to work with and influence your MPs and councillors, and how to get your message across in the local media

This toolkit is designed as a practical guide to effective political lobbying and press work, but it also contains some useful resources and materials to help make your life easier.

It focuses on three main activities:

- 📣 **There when we need them:** building a relationship with local politicians
- 📣 **Getting what we want:** running an effective political campaign
- 📣 **Getting our message across:** using the media – new and old.

Some key points about the toolkit:

- 📣 The toolkit is a basic guide. Every member and activist has different levels of experience so you will probably find some sections more useful than others.
- 📣 The toolkit includes a checklist that all branches should be using whether they are running a campaign or not, as well as ideas for actually making your campaign more effective.

📣 You may not necessarily find everything in the toolkit useful for every campaign you are running. It is intended to be there for activists to dip in and out of when they need it.

📣 The pack mostly covers how to work with and influence your MPs and councillors, and how to get your message across in the local media, for example how to write a press release that will get published.

📣 If the information you need isn't in the pack then please contact the UCU political team or press office – see contact information below.

For questions, information or help with something not covered, then get in touch:

**Political:** Lisa Johnson on 020 7756 2603 or email [ljohnson@ucu.org.uk](mailto:ljohnson@ucu.org.uk)

**Press:** Alex Rossiter on 07977 562 686 or email [arossiter@ucu.org.uk](mailto:arossiter@ucu.org.uk)

# Political context



Before getting started it is important to understand the political context in which we are all operating. It will help you to frame your activity and to better understand the other factors and pressures bearing down on MPs, councillors and the media – and how to use these to our advantage.

## 1. Cuts, cuts and more cuts

There are immense pressures on public finances nationally and in local government. Cuts will impact on the political debate, what MPs and councillors can promise or will be willing to campaign for and what the government is willing to deliver. Most importantly, with such a squeeze on resources we will need to be more organised than ever before if we are to get what we want. With fewer resources to go round, how effectively we campaign could make the difference to the jobs of our members. The most common question when lobbying on any policy change is ‘but how would you pay for it?’

## 2. What happens in 2012?


There are local government elections taking place across the country in 2012. All political parties will want to return an increase in local seats to show that the electorate supports their national message. Conservatives will want proof that the public agree with their austerity agenda; the Liberal Democrats will want to reverse the massive losses they suffered in 2011 and the Labour Party will want to prove they can win a general election. In many areas the Green Party will be campaigning to pick up disaffected voters from other parties and seeking to build on their success in having their first MP elected. All of these factors mean that politicians will be interested in winning the votes of our members.

## 3. Coalition politics

It won't be a surprise to anyone who picks up the occasional newspaper that the Tories and Lib Dems don't always agree. Splits in the coalition are newsworthy and keep the press occupied for hours. As we saw with tuition fees, if there is big disagreement between coalition partners, it is big news. This does, however, also make politicians from the governing party very cautious not to say or do anything that could be portrayed as a potential ‘coalition rift’.

### Please note


UCU is a non-affiliated trade union. It is against UCU rules to donate to or explicitly support any political party. You should keep this in mind when planning political campaigns and press releases.


 Cuts will impact on the political debate, what MPs and councillors can promise or will be willing to campaign for, and what the government is willing to deliver

# Building a relationship with local politicians

 Our work needs to be focused on building a relationship with local politicians on a year-round basis, as well as being effective and organised when we need their help with a particular campaign

## Summary

 Building a good working relationship with your local MPs and councillors matters. We will need them on our side during a dispute, budget cuts or policy changes. Getting their support will be easier if they already have a relationship with us. We know colleges and universities work hard to get support from politicians – this means we have to as well.

 This is an all-year-round activity. And it doesn't have to take too much time and effort.

## Introduction

The links that you can build with your local MPs and councillors are a vital part of our political and campaigning work. We know that institutions in both further and higher education spend time courting politicians, so it is vital that we create opportunities to influence them as well.


It is important that this isn't work we do just when we need their help. If a relationship already exists it makes getting help and support much easier.


So our work needs to be focused on building a relationship with local politicians on a year-round basis, as well as being effective and organised when we need their help with a particular campaign. It is important that we don't neglect councillors in this work. While education policy is decided in Westminster, local authorities have a huge role in providing education services, especially further education.


Always remember that your branch/LA could have more than one political representative – this will almost certainly be the case with councillors. Members at your institution will live in a number of different wards and constituencies, and building a relationship with representatives from all of those areas, as well as the politicians where your physical campus resides, is important.

## How to do it

Building a relationship with your local representatives doesn't have to be difficult or complicated. In fact, it is really basic stuff that doesn't involve a huge amount of leg-work and which will really pay dividends in the long-run. Here are few quick ideas to help you get started:

 **Call their local office and ask for an introductory meeting** A good starting point is for your MP to know who you are and why UCU and your branch is relevant to them.

 **Invite them to speak to a meeting of the branch or local association** Invite the politician along to update members on what is happening in Westminster/Council and to take questions and views from local members.

 **Ask them to write an article in the next newsletter** Offer the politician the opportunity to write a short article for your next local newsletter, for example on an important local issue or their views on education policy. Alternatively, do a Q&A with the politician for the newsletter. Most politicians will jump at the chance to have their opinions put in print to our members.





## How to lobby effectively

### Offer to host a local advice surgery

All politicians hold constituency advice surgeries, so offer to help organise a special advice surgery for UCU members at the college/university.

### Offer to advertise local surgery details at the campus

Offer to advertise the details of local surgeries on the UCU noticeboard (either physically or online).

The work of building a relationship with local politicians helps to make UCU more visible on campus and in the wider community, which all helps to improve our industrial strength.

### Who should contact politicians?

An effective way to establish and maintain contact with politicians is designating a branch level political liaison contact. This person can then act as the 'go to' person at a local level for councillors and MPs. Having one or two people be the main point of contact for politicians means that a personal relationship can be built up over time and the politician knows where to go when they need something from us.

MPs only deal with cases for their own constituents but as a representative of all members, you are getting in touch with the politician on behalf of people living in their constituency.

Many branches/LAs have people within them who are active in their local political parties. These members will generally know politicians within their own party and can help to build a relationship with UCU as well.


Building a relationship with a local politician is something which can be done steadily and over time. However, when we are running a particular campaign or we are fighting to save jobs, the intensity of our activity and lobbying has to step up a gear. As someone representing people who live in council wards or parliamentary constituencies, this can be as easy as picking up the phone and asking for an appointment.


The most effective way to lobby politicians is to meet them directly. This is as simple as it sounds. There is no substitute for meeting face to face with our elected representatives and putting our case to them directly.

### Making the most of the meeting


Politicians, in the main, will want to be seen to support a high-profile local campaign, especially if political opponents are doing so – but we have to ask for that support.

Below are some practical tips on how to use the meeting effectively.

 **A proper meeting** Meet face to face with the politician. Where possible, don't rely on just exchanging emails or letters. It is important to get a proper meeting where you will have the time to put across your arguments. Don't accept being told you can come to a constituency advice surgery or meet with a member of staff. We are a trade union representing potentially hundreds of their constituents and as such we deserve the opportunity to meet and to put our case fully.

 There is no substitute for meeting face to face with our elected representatives and putting our case to them directly, although there are also other ways you can lobby effectively

# How to lobby effectively

 Make sure you ask the politician to show their support in some way. This might be asking them to write a letter to management or the minister, or to table or to sign a motion

 **Be professional and organised**

Politicians have incredibly busy diaries so we need to ensure that we use the time we have available effectively. Put together a short agenda of the items you want to discuss and send through to the politician a few days before the meeting. Agree within the branch/LA what the key messages will be at the meeting and who will lead on each item if there are a number of you attending.

 **Tailor your message**

Unless your MP is the Secretary of State for Education (and sometimes even then) you should remember that on most post-16 education issues, you will have more information and more expertise than the politician concerned. You need to make sure your message and lobbying are tailored to the MP's level of knowledge, not yours.

 **Prepare for questions**

Take some time to prepare answers to any questions the politician might have. Don't be surprised if these questions are similar points to the ones used by employers. Remember, they will be lobbying too.


 **Ask the politician to take action**

Make sure you ask the politician to show their support in some way. This might be asking them to write a letter to management or the minister, or to table or to sign a motion – most likely an Early Day Motion (EDM) – in Parliament. EDMs are non-binding motions which can be tabled by backbench MPs and are a useful way for them to raise awareness of an issue and for other backbench politicians to show their

support. This isn't just an opportunity to get our point across to the politician – it is also about getting their support for the campaign and building up pressure from it.

 **Leave the politician with information**

Always take a well-drafted, concise briefing for the MP/their staff to take away from the meeting. The staff member will use it as a resource for any follow-up actions and it will be handy as a reminder to the politician about your conversation.

 **Follow-up**

If you think it is needed, make sure that any follow-up action has been agreed. For example, if the meeting is positive and they are fully supportive, offer to put out a press release about the meeting to thank them for their support.

**Note:** *Be careful here not to endorse them as a candidate or as a party representative. It has to be about thanking them for their support.*

If you offer to provide more information or take further action, make sure that you do so quickly and efficiently after the meeting. Failure to follow up on commitments will lose credibility for you, your branch/LA and the union.

## Other ways to lobby and to add pressure

Although meeting face to face with politicians is the best way to get our case across and to ask for support, it shouldn't be the only thing you do.



As a trade union our greatest asset is our membership. This gives us access to a network of people (members, their friends, family and students) who either live or work in the constituency represented by a politician. Using this network to lobby and to apply pressure will be a vital part of your campaign. The quality of the argument you deploy in your meeting with a politician is important, but so is the sheer volume of constituents who are making it.

Here are some practical suggestions to help you to get influence from politicians:

**Local petitions** Getting signatures on a petition is a great way to rally support from within the college or university and from the local community. It shows local politicians that the people they represent care about an issue. It also raises the profile of the union on campus. You should always make sure that petition signatories include their name, address, postcode and email. Besides helping us to follow up on their support, it confirms to the MP that the people who have signed the petition actually live in their area. Take membership forms with you when asking colleagues for signatures and try and recruit any non-members. If they see UCU being active and engaged on an issue they care about, they are more likely to join.

**Organise a mass lobby of councillors** A mass lobby of councillors can be an effective tool if organised properly. Councillors are generally not used to being lobbied in the same way as Members of Parliament. It may be difficult to turn up at the Council chamber and find them all there but there is no reason


why members can't write to them and request a meeting. You can find who your councillors are by visiting [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com) – this site will also have relevant contact details.

**Set up an email network** Set up a network of members, family, friends and students who will email their local MP or councillor to ask them to support the campaign (NB: the MP for the area where you live may be different from the one who covers the area where your college/university is situated).

Nearly all politicians receive and reply to email correspondence so it is a great way to get the message out quickly and cheaply. Put together a template email and send it to members. As well as asking them to send it to their MP, ask them to send it to any family and friends who live locally so that they can do the same thing. This way five members who are prepared to send an email could result in twenty or thirty emails going to your local MP with relatively little effort.

You should, however, use this with care. Constantly bombarding your MP with emails could eventually lead to them ignoring communications from us.


**Use social media** A number of politicians use Twitter and Facebook to stay in touch with constituents, let people know what they are up to and generally to communicate what they are thinking. Conversing with your representatives online helps to build a relationship – many MPs will be reading Twitter more often than the letters they receive in the post.


 Getting signatures on a petition is a great way to rally support from within the college or university and from the local community

It shows local politicians that the people they represent care about an issue



## Getting started: planning your campaign

 Asking students to send an email to a politician will have a big impact and will show that our campaign is about defending educational provision as well as the jobs of our members

 **Engage students** When we have common cause with students they can be really useful supporters in a campaign. Asking students to send an email to a politician will have a big impact and will show that our campaign is about defending educational provision as well as the jobs of our members.

It is an iron law of organising that the more thorough your preparation and planning, the more effective your campaign is likely to be. A badly planned campaign will most likely fail and you will lose the argument and future credibility.

Communications and lobbying should always fit within the wider structure of your campaign. Your political strategy should run alongside and be informed by your overall campaign message. Planning is crucial to making sure all aspects of the campaign work together. Putting in the ground work beforehand will pay dividends later so don't see it as wasted time – but be careful not to become so distracted by it that you put off getting the campaigning started. You don't need a 20-page document about the campaign, but you do need to be clear about what you want to achieve and how you are going to do it.

To help you get started here is a quick checklist of issues you need to consider when planning your campaign.

**1 What do you want to achieve?** Think carefully about what it is you actually want to achieve and decide early on what the key objectives are. Are you trying to get a change of policy at your institution, a cut in the number of job losses, or is it a broader aim of raising awareness of a particular issue? When taking any action during the campaign, everything should be filtered through the prism of: 'Will it help us achieve our goal?'

**2 What are your key messages?** A campaign will be 'dead in the water' if people (including yourselves) are



unclear about what you are trying to say. If you aren't clear about what you want to communicate then no one else will be clear either. Ask someone to write down the four or five key messages of the campaign. This can be used by activists when lobbying politicians, talking to the media or to members. These messages should run through all lobbying, communications and press releases.

### 3 Who do you need to influence?


Deciding on who your audience is will help you to prioritise your time and resources. By focusing on the people who can actually help you get the result you want you can then decide how best to influence them. For example, are you lobbying MPs to get them to put pressure on your institution, or are you targeting governors or the institution itself? You may have more than one target audience, so you still need to decide your order of priorities so that resources are used effectively.

**4 What are you going to do?** Once you have accomplished steps 1 to 3, you need to decide what you are going to do. Think about what will get the attention of those you need to influence and how it will help to achieve the goals that have been set. In the pack are some practical tips on how to get your message into the media, how to lobby politicians and raise awareness of the issue.

**5 How do you follow up?** Communicating to others how the campaign is going and what you have been doing is really important. By letting members know


what is happening, you can encourage them to become more active and show them why their membership matters. By telling other staff, you can encourage them to join a union that is active and fighting for their interests. Follow-up with members and staff when the campaign is over to encourage them to get involved or join. Always have membership forms with you when talking to colleagues about the campaign or when on a demo/at an event. During a campaign is the best time to target new members as this is when the union is the most visible.

To help co-ordinate and organise the campaign, you should use the model campaign grid in the resources section of this toolkit.

 If you aren't clear about what you are trying to communicate then no one else will be clear either

Ask someone to write down the four or five key messages of the campaign

# Working with the media

 Whether for a specific campaign or for the whole year round, it is important to have just one person who liaises with the media on behalf of the branch

The media is a vitally important part of communicating our message. This means we can't afford to ignore it, even if sometimes you are unsure of where to start or what you should or shouldn't say to a journalist.

It is important that as trade unions we aren't afraid to use the media to help in our campaigns. Remember that a local journalist will often be overworked and under pressure to find good local stories. Very rarely will they be out to trip you up. If you have a good local story they will want to talk to you and they are unlikely to have enough expertise to ask a tricky question you can't answer.

In this section is a quick checklist of tasks for the branch/local association, tips on dealing with the media and some basic pointers on how to write a good press release. Finally, there is a press release template and a list of your local media contacts to help you get started.

## Checklist

Below is a short checklist of actions you should undertake before starting any campaign. These are simple things which help ensure that you are ready to use the media as effectively as possible.

**1 Appoint a press officer** Whether for a specific campaign or for the whole year round, it is important to have a designated person who liaises with the media on behalf of the branch/LA. This could be two people as a maximum. As a union we all need to be saying the same thing and it is important that journalists know who they can go to at the branch to get an official comment.

It is important that this person is contactable, so make sure it is someone with a mobile phone and who checks their emails on a regular basis.

**2 Contacts** The first thing for the press officer to do is to set up a list of press contacts. Use the list in this campaign pack as a starting point, but remember that it won't be a complete list and you should use local knowledge to add to it where necessary. Some local papers may have a dedicated education correspondent, so start with asking for that person. If they don't have a specific education correspondent, you are more than likely going to be put through to one of the reporters on the newsdesk.

**3 Introduce yourself** The press officer should contact each organisation on the contact list to introduce themselves and to tell them how they can get in touch. This way, journalists know who to go to when they want a comment from UCU on a story and who they can expect press releases to come from. This is especially important where other unions are competing for members at an institution: making sure that UCU is the main contact for the local press will help recruitment and retention.

**4 Deadlines** When you introduce yourself make sure to ask what deadlines the journalists work to. This will help give your story or press release the best possible chance of being covered. The earlier you can give the journalist the story the better chance it has of being covered, so knowing what the deadlines are is essential. No matter how



strong the story, it will have no chance of getting covered if it is given to the reporter after the deadline.

### Tips for dealing with the media

Below are some simple tips that will help you to deal with the media effectively. They will help you to avoid the main pitfalls of dealing with journalists and will help you get better coverage.

**Be realistic** A realistic approach to press work is absolutely essential to ensure you don't get too disappointed, and to give you the best chance of getting good coverage. Whether we like it or not, there are always two sides to every story. The key is getting your message across clearly, concisely and in a way that invokes sympathy to your cause. No matter how passionately you feel about a subject, that will not be enough to guarantee that it ends up in the press. You must remember that there are hundreds of other people who are equally passionate about their story and you are all competing for space on the page or in the news bulletin. Not every story or press stunt you try to get coverage for during the campaign will get picked up. That is just the reality of doing press work.

**Don't be afraid to use the media** With that realism in mind, another good tip is not to be afraid to use the media. Local journalists are nearly always over-worked and under pressure to find good local stories. They are rarely, if ever, looking to trip up local organisations that have a story to tell. With good planning, a good local story and a

well written press release you will get good coverage (see below). However, always be cautious when speaking to the press. There isn't a professional press officer out there who hasn't been caught out by a journalist in the past. You should always be careful but don't let that put you off speaking to them altogether.


**Advance notice** Don't leave the press work until the end of the campaign. Integrate it into what you are going to do right from the start. A good rule of thumb is that the earlier you give a journalist notice of an event or campaign the more likely it is to get coverage. Send a diary marker to give the press advance notice of your event and make sure you send the full press release to them in plenty of time before their deadline. The more notice you can give the more likely you are to get a photographer along to any demo or event. They are nearly always booked up in advance.

**Call them back** If a journalist calls you up for a comment on a story don't be afraid to tell them you will call them back. Tell them that now isn't a convenient time to talk, ask them what they want and what their deadline is. Even if you know the journalist it always pays to take time to think through what you want to say and to do a bit of research into the issue. If you prefer, send the comment through on email rather than giving it over the phone. That way you have a record of what it is you actually said and you can challenge it if you are misquoted.


**With good planning, a good local story and a well written press release you will get good coverage**


**Send a diary marker to give the press advance notice of your event and make sure you send the full press release to them in plenty of time before their deadline**




 Most local papers are desperate for good local letters. Use them to get extra coverage for your issue

It all adds to the profile of the union and helps to get our message across

 **Take notes** Whenever you speak to a journalist takes notes of what is said. Ninety-nine per cent of the time they aren't looking to trip you up, but it is always useful to have your own record of what has been said in case you need to challenge or correct something at a later date.

 **Follow up** If you get good coverage it is always good to drop the journalist a quick email to thank them for the story. This helps to build a good relationship with the journalist and increases the likelihood of good coverage next time too. Likewise, if you want to complain about a story, then pick up the phone and speak to the journalist. Don't shout or get angry, but talk to the journalist and put down a marker for the future.

 **Use the letters pages** Most local papers are desperate for good local letters. Use them to get extra coverage for your issue. For example, write to the paper to thank students and parents for their support in the campaign, to respond to something that management said in the previous edition or to ask readers to write to their local councillor or MP. It all adds to the profile of the union and helps to get our message across. Letters pages are well read in local papers – but there is nearly always a lack of quality letters to publish.



## Writing a good press release



Writing a good press release is as much a skill as writing a good essay or a coherent piece of research. Unfortunately they are very different skills and very different styles of writing need to be used. A well written press release has more chance of getting coverage than one that is poorly written, unclear, rambling and poorly laid-out.

Journalists receive dozens of press releases from a variety of organisations every day, but although other organisations are competing for their attention there are a few tips you should follow to give UCU the edge. A staggering 97 per cent of press releases end up in the bin and a newspaper receives anything between 200-1,000 releases a week, depending on its size and importance. So just because you think something is important and newsworthy it doesn't mean anyone else will, and it doesn't mean that it will make the paper.

Below are some basic pointers and tips for writing a good press release. However, don't be afraid to ask for help and even if you want to do the first draft yourself send it to the UCU press office for them to take a look over and to suggest amendments. They are paid to get good press coverage so lean on them for help and their expertise. See the contacts section of this toolkit for further advice.

**News upfront** Good stories can be lost in a sea of waffle where key facts/news is hidden away. To give yourself the very best chance, you need to grab the attention of the journalist or editor. You need to do that in the first paragraph. If you look at most news articles you'll notice that the first paragraph captures

exactly what the story/news is. Considering the sheer volume of releases an editor/journalist gets each day there is no point making them look for a story, because they won't. Make sure that the story is in the first paragraph and headline so you can grab their attention.

**Headlines** Papers have sub editors to come up with clever or witty headlines. Your job is to relay the information and get their attention. It's important to be short and to the point and make them read on. Alliteration or Sun-style word play can make your email look more like spam than a serious news story so choose your words carefully.

**Date and embargo** Make sure you put the date on your press release and an embargo – the time after which your release can be reported – if necessary. If you have an event or rally taking place in the near future, you may wish to send the release out in advance so people can make space in their diary/on the pages and come along. The embargo ensures that nobody will write about the event in advance, and you can co-ordinate the coverage on the day. Plus, people who cannot attend will still have sufficient information to write about the event.

**First paragraph** The first paragraph is where you will either get your story written up/ followed up or binned. You must make sure that the news is in that first line. The very nature of the word news means whatever your story is, it must be current. A good checklist for your first paragraph is to ask

**A well written press release has more chance of getting coverage than one that is poorly written, unclear, rambling and poorly laid-out**

**Don't be afraid to ask for help. Send your first draft to the UCU press office and ask them to take a look over it and to suggest amendments**

## Writing a good press release



**Local papers and local radio are only interested in stories which are local and that would interest their local media**

**Use local examples and quote a local member who actually teaches at a college or university in the area the paper covers**

whether you have answered these questions – who, what, where, when, why and how.

- 1 Who is doing what?
- 2 What are they doing?
- 3 Where are they doing it?
- 4 When are they doing it?
- 5 Why are they doing it?
- 6 How are they doing it?

**If it's local, keep it local** As a local branch/association, the majority of your press work will be focused on your local media. Local papers and local radio are only interested in stories which are local and that will interest their readers and audience. Use local examples and quote a local member who actually teaches at a college or university in the area the paper covers. For a local paper don't be tempted to go into detail about the nuance of education policy – they will only be interested in the impact this will have on the local area. One big advantage your story will have over lots of other press releases sent to local papers by national PR companies is that it is local. Don't throw away that advantage: if it's local, keep it local.

**Use facts, figures and real life examples** An average story or press release can come to life with some good facts and figures. Use the number of potential job losses or the percentage/real terms cut in a budget to highlight your story. If you know that a

particular department or course is under threat, use this to highlight your story. Journalists love examples like this as they help make a story newsworthy and interesting.

**Length of the release** The purpose of a press release is to get key information across. You can list notes at the end of the release to include more general information if you think it's necessary – the general secretary's biography/list of life time achievements is never necessary. Don't fill the body of your release with piles of useless information. Four to five paragraphs totalling about 400 words maximum will do the trick.

**Quotes** A quote should be used to get a point across that is not fact. Make sure that everything in your release that is not in quote marks is fact or covered by saying 'UCU believes...' Like everything else in your release, a quote needs substance and should not be used to blow your own trumpet for the sake of it. Make sure the quote isn't just some kind of mission statement, but actually comments on the issue that your release is based around.

**Contact details** Make sure you give full details of who to contact for further information. This must include an office telephone number and email, but most importantly a mobile number. There is no point in a journalist deciding to run with the story and then not being able to contact you for any further information they require.

**📣 Making sure** Nothing looks less professional than a press release with typos or spelling mistakes. After you have checked it through, get someone else to check it and then check it again. Then read through it and look for the story – check that it is right up there in the first paragraph and the only story on offer. Make absolutely sure there isn't anything else in the release that a journalist could investigate or probe that would lead them to a different story.

Good press work isn't just about issuing a press release and then crossing your fingers to see if it makes it into the paper. You need to make sure it is going to the right people and that you follow up afterwards to make sure that it has arrived and someone has taken notice.

**📣 Distributing a press release** There is no point sending it to the wrong person or calling at the wrong time. The greatest job cuts campaigning story in the world is not going to get coverage in 'Baseball Today'. Identify the key journalists and make sure your press release goes to them. There is little point in sending your release out to all and sundry. If it's irrelevant to them you're likely to annoy journalists or get a reputation for sending junk mail.

**📣 Chasing the story up** Before calling the journalist make sure you have checked the release for any other angles a journalist might pursue. Write down all the questions that spring to mind – especially awkward

ones – then jot down answers to all of them so you're covered if they ask those awkward questions. You are sending out the release to set the agenda for the story so don't let that change. When answering questions you want to turn the conversation back to your story, don't become engaged in long conversations on a different issue.

#### **Dealing with the media at a UCU event**

If you're promoting a rally or an event then you will hopefully have journalists coming along to it. If this is the case then you need to be prepared to look after them. If you have a guest or key speaker then make sure they are available to speak to the press and make sure the press know what time they can speak to them.

The key is to make sure the journalists are satisfied. If they go away unhappy then no matter how good your event was it won't be well reported in the press. Be courteous and check with them that have got everything they want when they are leaving. Ask them to contact you if they do need anything else.

**📣** The key is to make sure that journalists are satisfied. If they go away unhappy then no matter how good your event was it won't be well reported in the press

Be courteous and check with them that have got everything they want when they are leaving



## Your resources

In this section are some basic resources to help you plan and carry out your campaign. These are suggestions only, although using them will help to make your life easier and make best use of your already hard-pressed time and resources.

It contains:

- Model campaign grid
- Example of a message paper
- Model diary marker
- Model press releases (three examples)

The resources in this section of the toolkit are not exhaustive. They are here to help.

If you have examples you think other activists should see then please email them to Lisa Johnson at the UCU political team: [ljohnson@ucu.org.uk](mailto:ljohnson@ucu.org.uk)

# Campaign plan

Use this form to record what is agreed when discussing your campaign. Make sure someone is responsible for all agreed action points and that deadlines are set for when tasks should be completed.



TASK	AGREED POINTS	ACTION POINTS	WHO RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DUE
Objectives				
Messages				
Who to talk to				
Activities				
Follow-up				



## Model message paper *Lampeter*

### Key messages

- Lampeter University is proposing to cut 25 per cent of all academic staff. This is a huge cut and the equivalent to over 650 jobs at Cardiff University.
- This will have a devastating effect on Lampeter town. These are jobs the town can't afford to lose. These are jobs the West Wales economy can't afford to lose.
- The way these cuts are being made will weaken the new university to be created between Lampeter and Trinity. A lack of funding means that the job cuts will come from the younger staff. They are the future of the new university and the future of Lampeter town.
- The Welsh Assembly Government has to step in. Without extra funding the redundancies at the university will leave the new institution weakened and devastate the local economy.
- The voters of Lampeter are on our side. Our campaign is gathering support and the politicians have to act.

# Model diary marker

Send out your diary marker as early as possible before an event to give a newspaper or broadcaster enough time to send through the story



## UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION (UCU) PRESS RELEASE

**Date: Thursday 23 June 2011**

**For immediate release**

### Merseyside protests confirmed for 30 June strike day

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) from across Merseyside will be on strike on Thursday 30 June in a row over changes to the Teachers' Pensions Scheme (TPS). The action is part of a national day of strikes by teachers, lecturers and civil servants, which will close schools and colleges across the country.

Staff from Liverpool Community College, Knowsley Community College, St Helens College, Wirral Metropolitan College, Liverpool Hope University and Liverpool John Moores University will walk out in a row over plans for greater pension contributions from staff in return for reduced benefits and an increase in the retirement age.

After attending picket lines from 8am, UCU members from across the region will assemble at the top of William Brown Street at 11.30am, where they will be joined by members of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) unions, who are also taking strike action.

Members from the four unions will then march to the Black-E arts centre on Great George Street for a rally at 12.30pm (see notes).

More information on the TPS dispute can be found here at:  
[www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5212](http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5212)

More events for 30 June are still being planned. For the latest on what is happening, click here: [www.ucu.org.uk/30june](http://www.ucu.org.uk/30june)

ends

### NOTES

<http://tinyurl.com/5w8dgc8> - Directions to William Brown Street

<http://tinyurl.com/68kp3xw> - Directions to Great George Street

### CONTACTS

UCU Merseyside contact: Lynn Collins m: 07977 131 380; e: [lcollins@ucu.org.uk](mailto:lcollins@ucu.org.uk)

UCU national contacts: Dan Ashley t: 020 7756 2600; m: 07789 518 992;

e: [dashley@ucu.org.uk](mailto:dashley@ucu.org.uk)

Alex Rossiter t: 020 7756 2598; m: 07977 562 686;

e: [arossiter@ucu.org.uk](mailto:arossiter@ucu.org.uk)

# Model press release 1

## UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION (UCU) PRESS RELEASE

Date: Monday 15 June 2009

For immediate release

### Staff strike at City College Birmingham

City College Birmingham will be brought to standstill tomorrow (Tuesday) as staff go on strike in protest against 76 job losses and longer teaching hours. The industrial action by members of the University and College Union (UCU) comes just 12 months after a previous staff cull saw 75 teaching jobs go. If the latest round of cuts goes ahead the college will have lost nearly a third of its teaching staff in just over a year.

On 5 June lecturers voted overwhelmingly for taking the strike action, with 95 per cent of those balloted saying yes to walking out. Pickets will take place from 8am at the college's main Handsworth site, and there will be a rally in Handsworth Park at 1pm (see notes for directions).

City College Birmingham works with some of the most underprivileged communities in the city and the union said today that it is deeply concerned about the impact job losses and worsening conditions of service will have on key social programmes. Under the proposals provision for students with learning difficulties will be halved and young people needing support will have to attend bigger classes.

The redundancies will mean bad news for the staff that survive the cull as the college also plans to massively increase the teaching hours of those lecturers left in post. Non-teaching staff are also at risk from the proposals. The union blames poor management, expensive consultants and the failings of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for the proposed redundancies.

Ivan Davis, a former student at City Birmingham College, who completed an access course between 2005 and 2006, said: "These job losses would be a disaster for the local community. The teachers and staff helped changed my life and gave me career options. I am now in higher education, studying social work and have a real sense of direction. People from communities like the one I grew up in need to be encouraged to study, not cut adrift. Students, especially those with learning disabilities, need to have access to courses locally."

UCU regional official, Nick Varney, said: "The college needs to take a long hard look at itself. Management can point to a failure in funding as much as they like, but introducing draconian changes to the contracts of staff and slashing jobs is simply not the answer. This will undermine the quality of provision and lead to more cuts down the line. It is criminal that at a time when we should be looking to extend further education's ability to meet the needs of our communities, City College Birmingham is looking to get rid of staff and key courses. If these cuts go ahead it will be the most socially deprived areas of Birmingham that suffer the most."

**ends**

### NOTES

Directions to Handsworth site: [www.streetmap.co.uk/map.srf?x=404893&y=289399&z=0&sv=B21+9DP&st=2&pc=B21+9DP&mapp=map.srf&searchp=ids.srf](http://www.streetmap.co.uk/map.srf?x=404893&y=289399&z=0&sv=B21+9DP&st=2&pc=B21+9DP&mapp=map.srf&searchp=ids.srf)

Directions to Handsworth Park rally: <http://www.tinyurl.com/CCBMarch>

### CONTACTS

Local contact on day: Nick Varney t: 0121 634 7382; m: 07966 255 594; e: [nvarney@ucu.org.uk](mailto:nvarney@ucu.org.uk)

UCU press office contact: Alex Rossiter t: 020 7756 2598; m: 07977 562 686; e: [arossiter@ucu.org.uk](mailto:arossiter@ucu.org.uk)



# Model press release 2

## UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION (UCU) PRESS RELEASE

Date: Tuesday 29 March 2011

For immediate release

### Staff to strike at Newcastle College

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) at Newcastle College have today (Tuesday) voted to strike in their fight to save jobs.

Over four-fifths of members (82%) who voted, supported strike action and over nine out of ten (91%) agreed to action short of a strike. The college has presented the union with plans for over 170 redundancies of which over three-quarters are teaching posts.

The union has accused senior management of 'jumping the gun' and using the current funding difficulties in further education as an excuse to make cuts. UCU said the plans would have a devastating effect on the local economy, which has already seen a large increase in unemployment, and make it harder for the region to recover from the recession.

The result of today's ballot is further embarrassment for the college after it was revealed earlier this month that the principal, Jackie Fisher, enjoyed a whopping 32% annual pay rise for 2009/2010. More on that story can be found here- <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5369>.

UCU regional official Iain Owens said: "Today's result shows the strength of feeling against the job cuts here at Newcastle College. Management has decided to make redundant the very people whose job it is to retrain the unemployed and help rebuild the economy.

"We are not blind to the troubles facing the further education sector. However, we believe the college has jumped the gun and staff have every right to be sceptical about the need for widespread job cuts when they learn of the whopping pay rises earned by those at the top."

ends

### CONTACTS

Local UCU contact: Iain Owens m: 07773 283 191; e: [iowens@ucu.org.uk](mailto:iowens@ucu.org.uk)

National UCU contacts: Dan Ashley t: 020 7756 2600; m: 07789 518 992; e: [dashley@ucu.org.uk](mailto:dashley@ucu.org.uk)

Alex Rossiter: t: 020 7756 2598; m: 07977 562 686; e: [arossiter@ucu.org.uk](mailto:arossiter@ucu.org.uk)

ISDN line: 020 7388 1794

# Model press release 3

## UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION (UCU) PRESS RELEASES

**Date: Wednesday 1 June 2011**

**For immediate release**

### More jobs to go at Salford University

Over 100 more redundancies are planned at Salford University as the university continues to spend millions in the ambitious MediaCityUK project.

The university has announced plans to axe 119 more jobs on top of the 218 it said were to go in April. The institution has already made hundreds of redundancies over the past few years in attempts to free up money to invest in projects such as MediaCityUK. Despite the fact no teaching is yet taking place at MediaCity, Salford is reported to have spent over £40m on the venture.

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) at Salford University have not ruled out the possibility of strike action in the fight against the job losses they say are being pushed through with indecent haste. The union added that the MediaCityUK venture was supposed to provide jobs for the local area – not take them away.

UCU said that as well having a devastating impact on the local community, the university's plans would remove vital student services, increase workloads and do little to encourage future students to apply as we move to a competitive world of higher fees.

UCU regional official, Martyn Moss, said: 'The MediaCityUK project is fast becoming a white elephant. It was supposed to reinvigorate the area and provide thousands of jobs. However, 150 staff at Salford University lost their jobs to fund it and around 350 more now face the axe to service it.

'Getting rid of staff, who provide much-needed personal contact, advice and support for students, will do nothing for the university's reputation in this difficult and uncertain time of increased tuition fees. The university is acting with indecent haste in its efforts to axe staff. It needs to think again and we will be doing our utmost to ensure it does.'

ends

### CONTACTS

Local UCU enquiries: Martyn Moss t: 07989 473 086; e [mmoss@ucu.org.uk](mailto:mmoss@ucu.org.uk)

National UCU enquiries: Dan Ashley t: 020 7756 2600; m: 07789 518 992; e: [dashley@ucu.org.uk](mailto:dashley@ucu.org.uk)

Alex Rossiter t: 020 7756 2598; m: 07977 562 686; e: [arossiter@ucu.org.uk](mailto:arossiter@ucu.org.uk)

## Useful UCU contacts

UCU employs people with specialist skills and knowledge to make sure that you have the support and advice you need to campaign on behalf of our members.

### UCU Parliamentary and external affairs (political team)

Liz Shannon – Head of Parliamentary and External Affairs  
Tel: 020 7756 2603. Email: [lshannon@ucu.org.uk](mailto:lshannon@ucu.org.uk)

Lisa Johnson – Political Liaison Officer  
Tel: 020 7756 2605. Email: [ljohnson@ucu.org.uk](mailto:ljohnson@ucu.org.uk)

### UCU Press office

Dan Ashley, Head of Press  
Tel: 020 7756 2600. Mobile: 07789 518 992. Email: [dashley@ucu.org.uk](mailto:dashley@ucu.org.uk)

Alex Rossiter, Press Officer  
Tel: 020 7756 2598. Mobile: 07977 562 686. Email: [arossiter@ucu.org.uk](mailto:arossiter@ucu.org.uk)

### UCU Campaigns team

Justine Stephens, Head of Campaigns  
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