

How to approach a potential member

The three core 'secrets' of a successful one-to-one recruitment approach are:

- the approach itself
- the central message conveyed
- the 'exit strategy'.

Each will be dealt with in turn.

The approach

Many members, including experienced representatives, still find approaching non-members a daunting prospect, and the key cause of this nervousness is the 'how to' question - how do I start a conversation on such a potentially sensitive topic?

The answer is simple: preparation. Any approach needs to be set in context - so think about why you want to ask people to join UCU, and against what background you might make an approach. A number of suggestions below might help.

- If your branch/local association (LA) is taking part in the national mail shot activity, then use this as an opportunity to follow up the mail shot letters. This has a number of advantages. The potential member has been exposed to key UCU messages, will not be surprised (and probably pleased) to be contacted with an offer of further information or clarification, and has an application form in their in-tray.
- If this is not applicable, why not send out an email to all staff in your department reminding them that you are a UCU rep, then follow-up to check if the email was received by potential members (and members alike).
- Seek opinions or information on a current topic (workload, for example) then follow up to check.
- Send out up-to-date information from UCU to all staff in your department, then follow up to check it was received, or what recipients thought of it.
- Call a departmental meeting to discuss a current issue (for example, a motion on reduction of fixed-term contract use) then follow up to see who will be attending.

The central message

Having found an introduction- 'Did you get my email about x?' or 'Will you be coming to the meeting on Wednesday?' you can then move on to the central message you want to convey - why join UCU?

Try to get across three messages in your approach:

- UCU as the voice of post-school education professionals (useful if the approach is tied to a forthcoming meeting)
- UCU as the local union speaking up for you and your colleagues (if the approach is tied to a current, local issue)
- UCU providing first class services (i.e. the Legal Protection at Work Scheme, or free legal advice helpline).

Having communicated your key messages, you should have a good feel for whether the person approached is likely to join. Don't forget, of course, to LISTEN to what they might have to say, and to answer questions as fully as you can. If you don't know the answer, then promise to find out and get back to them. See *How to answer the 'why join' questions* for more help with talking to potential members.

The exit strategy

Ideally, our potential member will be more than happy to fill out the form on the spot (and you can sell this as taking less than a minute), but if not, or if there are questions outstanding, then the best approach is to guarantee yourself a return visit. If questions need to be answered, then ask for a convenient time to go back and provide the information requested. If the purpose of the approach was to advertise a meeting, then make sure you feed back the results of that meeting if the potential member does not attend.

And finally, after the encounter, spend a moment or two making notes about the issues raised, questions asked, and attitude of the potential (or new) member so that you can target any return visit. And good luck.