Further Education. It's ours

Building political power

UCU
University and College Union

ucu.campaigns ucunion ucu ucu.org.uk educationitsours.org.uk

The purpose

Turn local evidence about funding, jobs, courses and provision into sustained parliamentary engagement – with a clear ask, a prepared meeting, follow-up action and coordinated support from UCU.

What's in this guide?

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1. Why targeted lobbying matters

Higher education and further education funding is a UK-wide issue, but its consequences are local. Universities and colleges are employers, educators, research institutions, and anchors for their communities. Branches are therefore well placed to show MPs what funding pressures mean in practice: jobs at risk, courses and provision under pressure, worsening workloads, impacts on students, and consequences for the local economy and community.

The wider *Education. It's ours* campaign is built around strengthening branch and regional power, building political influence through lobbying and direct engagement, shifting the narrative around the value of higher education, and mobilising members and allies.

This handbook focuses specifically on the parliamentary part of that work. It is designed to make lobbying practical: identify the relevant representatives, secure contact, prepare a short local case, make a specific ask, and use the parliamentary tools available to turn local concerns into action.

TIP:
Do not treat a meeting as the end point. A meeting is the start of a relationship and a route to a concrete parliamentary action.

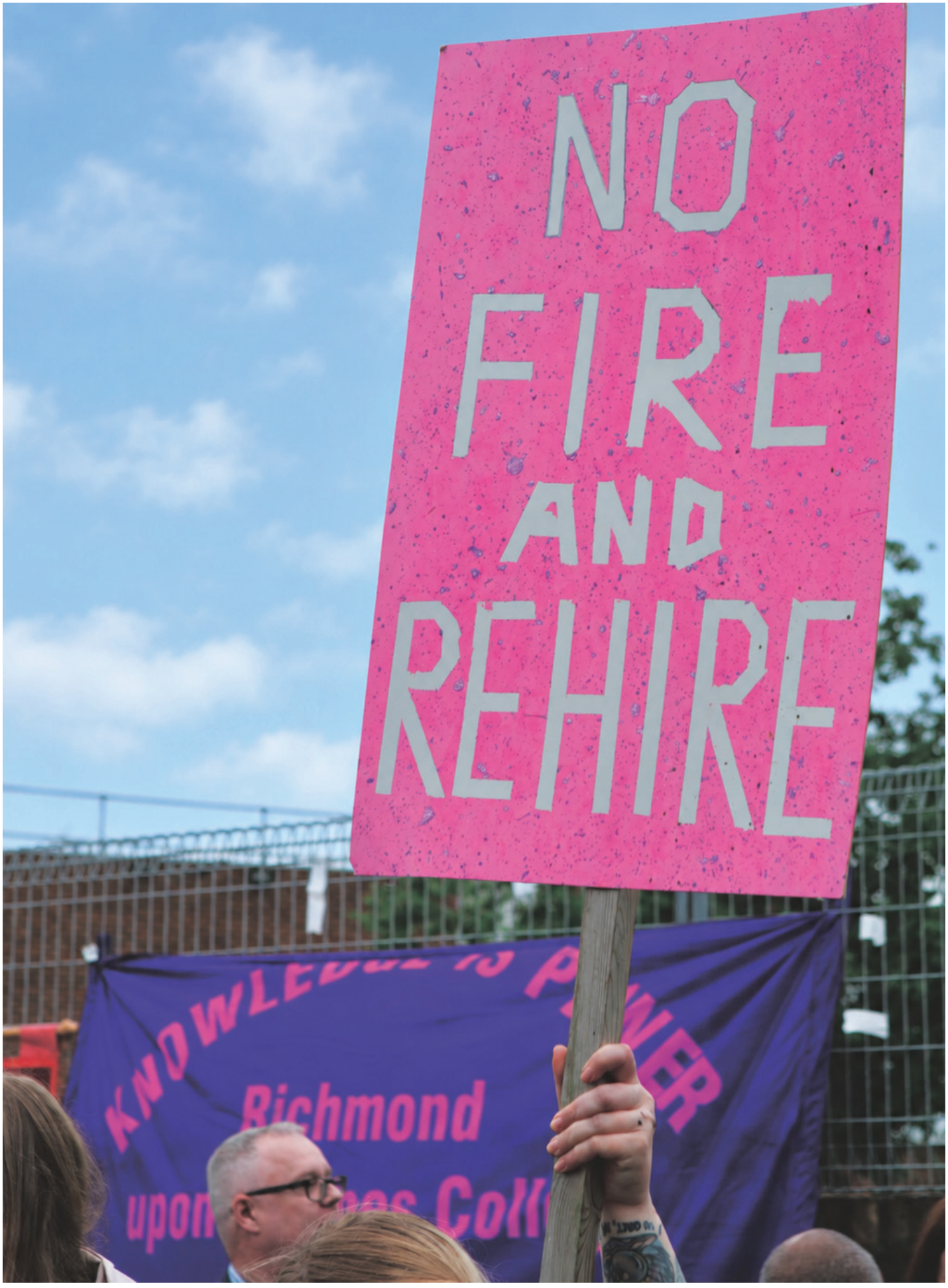
2. What UCU is asking for

The campaign calls for:

- Immediate increased and sustainable funding for further education.
- Protection for jobs, pay and pensions.
- A commitment to transform the long-term funding model.
- Pay parity with school teachers.
- National agreements on workloads.

These demands are set out in the campaign handbook and provide the UK wide framework for local lobbying.

Your branch should connect these national demands to a small number of concrete examples from your institution and constituency. The strongest local case is usually specific, evidenced and easy for your local political representative to repeat.


NO
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AND
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Richmond

3. The public affairs support available to branches

The UCU public affairs team can support branches with practical parliamentary work. Branches should use that support early, rather than waiting until a meeting is already arranged.

The public affairs shopping list

- Contacts with MPs – help identifying and establishing contact with the relevant MP or MPs for your workplace and local campaign.
- Briefings for MPs – concise, tailored briefings that set out the national campaign asks and the local evidence an MP can take into meetings, correspondence or parliamentary activity.
- Meeting preparation – help with the agenda, key messages, asks, supporting evidence and allocation of speakers.
- In-person support for meetings, where necessary – public affairs staff can support a branch delegation directly where the circumstances and capacity make this appropriate.
- In Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, your regional official can also help.
- Parliamentary questions – help identify and develop opportunities for written or oral questions on the local context and the wider funding crisis.
- Urgent Questions – help with making the case for an Urgent Question where there is a sufficiently pressing parliamentary issue and a relevant procedural opportunity.
- Early Day Motions – help draft and lay EDMs that bring a local higher education issue to parliamentary attention and give MPs an opportunity to support it.
- UCU Parliamentary Group access – support branches in connecting local issues to the work of the UCU Parliamentary Group.
- Regional MP meetings – UCU is setting up regional meetings bringing groups of MPs together around higher education funding and local sector pressures.
- Coordination – help connect branch activity with national campaign activity and other branches where issues overlap.

HOW TO REQUEST SUPPORT

Email politics@ucu.org.uk for support with lobbying your MP or coordinating a meeting of MPs local to your workplace. Copy relevant branch colleagues and your regional office so that political activity is visible and coordinated across UCU.

4. Build your local parliamentary map

Start with the representatives who have a direct connection to your institution and its community. The aim is not to create a ranking of MPs, but to understand who can speak directly to the local issue and what parliamentary route is available. In past disputes – most notably USS – MPs who we may not have considered to be aligned with our aims have supported our campaign, so don't write anyone off.

Identify

- The MP whose constituency contains your main campus or workplace.
- Other MPs whose constituencies contain major campuses, facilities, student populations, research sites, or significant numbers of affected staff.
- MPs who have previously engaged with your institution or with higher education issues.
- Relevant regional or devolved representatives where the local context makes this appropriate.
- Existing UCU relationships that can help secure an introduction (email politics@ucu.org.uk for help).

Map the local issue

- What is happening at your institution?
- How many staff, students, courses, or services are affected?
- What is the local economic or community impact?
- What decision or intervention are you asking the MP to pursue?
- Which parliamentary mechanism could carry the issue forward?

The campaign handbook recommends charting relationships and power mapping to understand local networks, stakeholders and routes to influence.

5. Prepare the case

Keep the briefing short

Aim for a two-page briefing maximum wherever possible. An MP should be able to understand the issue quickly and reuse the material. Public affairs can help prepare or tailor the briefing.

- The UK wide problem: one short paragraph explaining the funding issue.
- The local evidence: three to five facts about your institution or constituency.
- The human impact: one or two short member or student examples, with consent where required.
- The local significance: employment, skills, research, public services, culture, or economic impact.
- The ask: no more than three specific actions for the MP.
- The next step: say what you would like the MP to do after the meeting.

TIP:
Ask your MP if they are a member of the UCU Parliamentary Group and put their office in touch with politics@ucu.org.uk if they are not.

Make the ask concrete

Examples of parliamentary asks include asking an MP to raise the issue with the Secretary of State for Education; submit a written parliamentary question; seek an oral question where appropriate; support or sponsor an EDM; raise the local issue through the UCU Parliamentary Group; raise to local issue directly with your VC or Principal, attend a regional meeting of MPs; or meet UCU again to discuss progress.

6. Get the meeting

Use the branch first

1. Agree who will lead the request.

2. Choose two or three speakers rather than sending a large group.

3. Send a short request explaining who you are, the local issue, and the meeting's specific purpose.

4. Offer dates and times and be clear about whether you are asking for a constituency office or workplace meeting.

5. Copy branch colleagues and the regional office on the request or internal correspondence, so everyone knows what is happening.

6. If you need help establishing contact, ask public affairs for support.

JOBS
FIRST
SAY NO TO CUTS
"When class-robbery is abolished every man will reap the fruits of his labour."
William Morris, 1884
Lecturer at The Working Men's College
fund adult education NOW!

LEWISHAM COLLEGE
UCU OFFICIAL DISPUTE
SUPPORT THE STRIKE
FAIR PAY IN FURTHER EDUCATION
Honk your support!
OFFICIAL PICKET
KNOWLEDGE IS POWER
UNITY IS STRENGTH

7. Take the meeting

Suggested 30-minute structure

- **2 minutes** – introductions and why the branch has asked to meet.
- **5 minutes** – the specific funding case and UCU's campaign demands.
- **10 minutes** – local evidence and personal experiences.
- **8 minutes** – the parliamentary asks: agree what the MP can do.
- **5 minutes** – confirm next steps, timescales and who will follow up.

Roles

- **Chair:** keeps the meeting moving and returns to the ask.
- **Local evidence speaker:** explains what is happening at the institution.
- **Member/student voice:** gives a concise first-hand example.
- **Parliamentary lead:** makes and records the specific asks.
- **Note-taker:** records commitments, names, deadlines and follow-up.

TIP: DO NOT LEAVE WITHOUT AN ASK
Before the meeting ends, ask: "Will you do X?" Then confirm exactly what X is, when it will happen, and whether the branch can provide anything needed to support it. touch with politics@ucu.org.uk if they are not.

8. Turn a meeting into parliamentary action

Written and oral questions

A local case can often be translated into a parliamentary question. The team (politics@ucu.org.uk) can help identify an appropriate question, draft wording, and connect the local issue to the wider campaign.

Possible structure

- Name the local institution or constituency context where relevant.
- Identify the concrete problem.
- Ask what the government is doing, plans to do, or will assess.
- Avoid packing several unrelated issues into one question.

Urgent Questions

Where an issue is genuinely pressing and the parliamentary circumstances make an Urgent Question appropriate, public affairs can help a branch develop the case for one and support contact with MPs. An Urgent Question is a parliamentary procedure, so timing, relevance and the Speaker's decision will matter; support from UCU does not guarantee that one will be granted.

Early Day Motions

The UCU public affairs team can help branches develop an EDM about their local context and work with an MP to lay it. The purpose is to put a clearly defined issue on the parliamentary record and provide an opportunity for other MPs to add their names.

Letters and ministerial engagement

An MP can also write to the Secretary of State or relevant minister. A short local briefing makes this easier: give the MP the facts, the specific question or concern, and the action you want government to take.

This can be backed up with a letter from the union's general secretary if appropriate.

9. The UCU Parliamentary Group

The UCU Parliamentary Group was founded in January 2026. It provides an important parliamentary forum through which UCU can connect local and sector-wide higher education issues to MPs at Westminster.

Branches should use the Group as one part of a wider lobbying plan, rather than treating it as a substitute for constituency engagement. Public affairs can help branches connect a local issue to the Group, develop a parliamentary ask, and identify opportunities for questions, EDMs and wider parliamentary discussion.

What to ask the public affairs team to help with

- Whether your local issue is suitable for discussion through the Parliamentary Group.
- Which parliamentary mechanism best fits the issue.
- Drafting an EDM or parliamentary question.
- Helping an MP understand the local evidence quickly.
- Connecting MPs facing similar higher education pressures across different constituencies. If you need help doing that, email politics@ucu.org.uk

10. Regional meetings of MPs

UCU is setting up regional meetings of groups of MPs around further education funding and the pressures facing colleges in their areas. These meetings are intended to create a space where MPs can hear from UCU collectively, compare local evidence, and discuss the wider funding case.

Branches can help make these meetings useful by providing concise local intelligence and identifying the specific questions or examples that MPs need to hear.

Branch preparation

- Send public affairs a short description of the local issue.
- Provide the strongest, verified local facts and one or two illustrative examples.
- Identify what you want MPs to do after the meeting.
- Tell public affairs about any relevant existing MP relationships.
- Copy your regional and devolved national office so the branch's activity can be coordinated with regional work.

11. Follow-up, coordination and escalation

The campaign handbook stresses that lobbying should sit inside a broader organising strategy and that tactics should build support, demonstrate power and apply pressure.

Within 48 hours

- Send a short thank-you.
- Confirm the MP's commitments in writing.
- Send any promised briefing, evidence or data.
- Copy branch colleagues and regional office.
- Share whatever feedback you can with your members. This could be a branch update via email, through a reps network, a branch meeting, or social media content.

Then track the action

- Has the question been tabled?
- Has the EDM been laid and circulated for signatures?
- Has the MP written to the minister?
- Has the MP raised the issue publicly or in Parliament?
- Has the MP attended or agreed to attend a regional meeting?
- What response has government provided?
- What is the next specific ask?

Escalate through activity, not just correspondence

If a meeting produces no action, consider a constituency delegation, a workplace visit, a public meeting, further evidence, or a coordinated approach with other branches. The campaign handbook describes escalation as a series of actions increasing in visibility and impact, supported by national and regional staff.

TIP: COORDINATE EVERY STEP

Copy branch colleagues and your regional office into political correspondence wherever practical. This helps UCU build a live picture of parliamentary activity, avoid duplicated approaches, and connect local work to regional and national opportunities.

We have gathered together details of all the disputes on our solidarity map. You can request that your dispute be added and link to it here.

ucu
Don't Like
Funding To
ESOL
NO Job
NO Hope
PLEASE
SA VE
OUR

Construction
and Plumbing
Science
and Forensics
Business
Engineering
University
UNITY
IS
BACK
MARCH
FOR LOVE.
FOR UNITY.
FOR HOPE.
TOGETHER
ON STRIKE
TODAY
UCU AND
PROUD
ucu
MARCH
TOGETHER
LOVE HOPE UNITY
AGAINST THE
FAR RIGHT
Saturday 28th March
Central London
LOVE
IS
BACK
HOPE
IS
BACK

12. Quick checklists

Before contacting an MP

- We know the local problem.
- We have three to five strong facts.
- We have a clear national campaign link.
- We have one to three specific asks.
- We know who will lead the contact.
- We have copied branch colleagues and regional office internally.
- We have contacted public affairs if support is needed.

Before the meeting

- Briefing sent.
- Speakers agreed.
- Questions and likely responses prepared.
- Specific parliamentary actions agreed.
- Note-taker assigned.
- Public affairs support arranged if needed.

After the meeting

- Commitments recorded.
- Follow-up sent.
- Questions / EDM / letter progressed with public affairs.
- Regional office and branch colleagues updated.
- Next action and date agreed.
- Outcome logged so it can inform wider UCU parliamentary work.

Contacts and support

For support lobbying your MP or coordinating a meeting of MPs local to your workplace:

UCU Public Affairs politics@ucu.org.uk

For wider Education. It's ours campaign support, contact campaigns@ucu.org.uk
campaign website: educationitsours.org.uk

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