Briefing: How to lobby your MP

What’s going on?

The Government is withdrawing a significant financial contribution to adult education, leaving adults high and dry. At the moment, if you’re aged 24+ and you want to take A levels, or a BTEC, or a level 3 apprenticeship, the Government pays 50 per cent of your course fee. From September 2013, anyone aged 24 and above who wants to study a level 3 qualification will have to pay full fees.

This cut in funding will be hugely damaging to further education, normally a place where adults can get a second chance if they’ve been failed the first time around.

- How will adults re-train to find work in the current economic climate?
- How will they access higher level apprenticeships?
- And how will they afford Access to HE courses?

The Government is introducing a system of student loans into further education, to cover the course fee at level 3. This means if you want to take a level 3 course and then go to university, you may have to take out two student loans. And if you want to take a level 3 apprenticeship, you’ll have to take out a loan to go to work.

This policy doesn’t make any sense. We say ‘No to FE Fees’. If you agree, get behind the campaign and tell your MP what you think by joining the National FE Constituency lobby day on Friday 22 June.

What is lobbying?

Lobbying is about raising issues with and seeking to influence elected representatives – councillors MPs and Lords. It can take many different forms, e.g. sending letters, signing petitions, face to face meetings, and organised protests and rallies, to name a few. It can be done by paid or professional lobbyists or by grass roots activists and members of the public. Lobbying of MPs can take place in Parliament when it is sitting, or in a MP’s constituency.

We want to get as many people as possible lobbying their MPs in their constituencies on the issue of FE fees on Friday 22 June.

Why should I lobby my MP?

Your Member of Parliament is your representative in Westminster, where new laws are made and
government policy is scrutinised. They deal with bigger issues, like national government policy on schools, hospitals and transport. It is their job to voice your concerns, as one of their constituents, in the House of Commons. Your MP can ask questions in the House of Commons for you, write to ministers (senior members of the Government) on your behalf and sponsor and vote for new legislation.

It is important that you, your colleagues, friends, neighbours and family contact your MP about your concerns regarding FE fees and loans. The more people an MP has contacting them on the same issue the more likely they are to do something about it.

*Every letter counts!* Not that many people write to their MP, so those that do make an impact. Your MP wants your vote – the least they’ll do to try and get it is respond to you (and you don’t have to tell them if you are too young to vote yet). They *do not* have to respond to your letter but they are shooting themselves in the foot if they don’t. If they don’t reply to you, write to them again, express your disappointment, and ask them for a response!

**What is an MP ‘surgery’?**

You can lobby your MP in your local area by arranging to go along to one of their constituency ‘surgeries’.

Most MPs hold surgeries – many hold them every week, some hold them once a month. The surgeries are an opportunity for MPs’ constituents to raise personal concerns and seek their MP’s help with their problems.

MPs often use local party offices, church halls or rooms in pubs or community centres as the venues, with a number of surgeries possibly being held at different venues around a constituency. They are traditionally held on weekends when MPs have returned from sittings of parliament in London. Some MP surgeries are drop-in sessions operating on a first come, first served basis, whilst others require a pre-arranged appointment.

It’s therefore best to give your MP’s office a call beforehand to check whether you need to make an appointment. Call them as far in advance as possible because if an appointment is required, they tend to get booked up weeks ahead of a surgery. If it is a drop in session, turn up early to ensure you have the opportunity to see your MP and enough time to raise your concerns.

**Meeting your MP**

**Step 1: Find out who your MP is**

If you are not sure who your MP is you can find out by:
- Checking out [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com). Simply type in your postcode and it will tell you which constituency you’re in, who the MP is, and how to contact them.
- Calling the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272 quoting your address and postcode.

**Step 2: Make an appointment with your MP**

The easiest way of making an appointment is simply to call up the constituency office. MPs receive piles of letters, so you may not get a timely response if you write. Simply ask to speak to the MP’s diary secretary, explain to him/her that you are a constituent and that you would like to meet with your MP, and briefly explain the reason for the meeting.
Ask to make an appointment to meet them at the surgery on Friday 22 June if they have one then, or at the next available opportunity (please note that MPs are usually only around for local meetings on Monday mornings and Fridays as they need to be in Westminster the rest of the week). If your MP is a minister, it is still best to contact them at their constituency office rather than their ministerial department.

To be super-effective, you can target the MPs who represent the constituency where your college is located, and the constituency where you live during term-time (if it’s different), and also your home constituency. This is because as a student you have a right to be registered to vote in both your college and home constituencies.

**Step 3: Register your attendance at the FE lobby day**

When you have arranged a meeting with your MP, please register your attendance for the lobby. The reason we ask for you to register before the event is to ensure that all MPs are being targeted. We can work out where there are gaps and try to fill them prior to the lobby.

Register your attendance by visiting [www.surveymonkey.com/s/FEConstituencyLobbyDayReg](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FEConstituencyLobbyDayReg)

**Step 4: Prepare for the meeting**

Before you meet with your MP it is important that you have familiarised yourself with the arguments, and have done a bit of research on your MP.

You can investigate:

- What party is your MP a member of?
- Are they a back-bencher?
- Do they always vote with the party?
- Did they vote for the rise in tuition fees in December 2010?

These questions should tell you a bit about your MP and about what arguments they care about. Again, [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com) is a useful website to find out all this information.

If you are seeing your MP along with other constituents, agree on roles between yourselves. You could have, for example: a facilitator who introduces everyone, coordinates the contributions and summarises; people to introduce the various different aspects of the issue; a note-taker who listens to the MP and records the discussion, especially notable comments.

**Step 5: The meeting**

Assume that your MP won’t know too much about the issues you raise. Make sure you clearly set out who you are, identifying yourself as a constituent, and where you study. Use the tips below to get your message across in a clear, courteous and concise manner.

- Thank the MP for seeing you and establish how much time you have to talk to them
- Outline the background to the issue
- Tell your MP how and why it impacts on you – use examples if you can
- Tell your MP how it affects your area – use examples if you can
- Be specific about what your MP can do to help and what exactly you are asking them to do, e.g. to write to the Minister; to sign an Early Day Motion; to seek a parliamentary debate on the issue. A separate briefing on the specific ‘asks’ for MPs will be available at [www.nusconnect.org.uk/notoFEfees](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/notoFEfees) nearer the time.
- Ask your MP to keep in touch and update you on what they do following your meeting. Make sure you give your full name and address.
Step 6: After meeting your MP

- As soon as possible after the meeting, send a letter/ email of thanks to your MP. In your letter you should also summarise what was said. This will remind them of the issues you discussed and any actions they have said they will take
- Send a copy of the above letter or email to campaigns@nus.org.uk along with any reply you receive. This will ensure we can gauge the views of MPs and concentrate our lobbying efforts in the future.

Top Tips

- Don’t worry! Be confident in putting across your argument and case – remember that you are the expert as you have personal experience of the issue. MPs have to keep up to date on a huge range of issues – chances are you will know more than them on the issues you really care about.
- Use personal stories and examples in your argument. This is likely to have more of an influence on your MP.
- Be clear about what you expect your MP to do following your meeting and that you would like a response/update from them.

Latest information

Keep up-to-date with the latest information:

- ‘No to FE Fees’ Day of Action Facebook event
- Twitter – use hashtags #NotoFEFees #FElobby
- Check www.nusconnect.org.uk/notoFEfees – for the latest briefings and news stories
- Let us know how you get on by dropping us a line at campaigns@nus.org.uk

Good luck lobbying your MP!