Practical Workshop on Engaging MPs

Young Legal Aid Lawyers
(with thanks to Mike Kaye from Still Human Still Here)
You can find all your elected representatives (MP, MEPs & Councillors by typing in your postcode at: https://www.writetothem.com/

Find your MP by typing in your post code at: http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/

Write to your MP to request a meeting at their constituency surgery or ask if they are doing talks for constituents and sign up for alerts. Or email your views.

Research your MPs interests and what positions they hold in Parliament: http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/

Don’t forget social media – are they on twitter?

Use campaign leaflets for how to contact other local candidates
Preparing for meetings – do your research

Reliable evidence and good analysis are essential to support advocacy positions and to counter arguments and assumptions.

However, facts do not speak for themselves, they need to be communicated in a language that your representative will respond to. Presentation is therefore key to success.

Consider the issue from their perspective. Linking your objective to one of their existing priorities or areas of interest will make it relevant to them. Place your objective within the existing policy framework wherever possible and try to present it as consistent with their established policy positions. Think about local issues too. How can you address their concerns?
Preparing for meetings – do your research

- Don’t ask for the impossible, but for things that the relevant decision-maker can do;
- Know when you are being presented with an excuse or a genuine problem which makes it difficult to implement your proposal;
- Establish credibility with the decision-maker;
- Even if your MP doesn’t agree with you they can still advocate for you and help you gain access to information that you may need (Government plans, statistics, budgets, forthcoming legislation, etc.).
Making the case to decision makers

- Communicate the benefit of pursuing your proposed policy (prestige, budgetary savings, avoiding political embarrassment, simplicity, efficiency, etc.).

- Be polite, and don’t be intimidated. Remember if you’ve done your research you are likely to know more than them. But don’t bamboozle with too many figures!

- Let them speak so you know what they think.

- Be ready to answer direct questions, such as: How much will this cost? Who else supports this proposal? What do you want me to do?
What can MPs do - legislation

- First Reading – Bill is printed and name read.
- Second Reading – Debate in Commons on general principles of Bill
- Committee Stage – detailed consideration of Bill and amendments in Standing Committee
- Report – Further debate and amendments
- Third Reading – final debate and vote on Bill
- Stages repeated in the House of Lords and then returns to the Commons. After approval it goes for Royal Assent and becomes an Act.
What can MPs do?

Parliamentarians can:

- Sponsor or support amendments to a Bill
- Raise an issue with the Minister – private and personal
- Lobby internally for changes to their own parties policies or priorities
- Put down a Parliamentary Question, written or oral, or a PMQ – indicates concern, can educate or obtain information. Must be a question not a statement
The Secretary of State was asked—

Legal Aid

3. Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What his future plans for legal aid are. [903095]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): We are implementing the reforms of litigation procurement and Crown court advocacy fees that we announced last month. Although making fee reductions is unavoidable, we have listened to the professions wherever we can and taken concrete steps to ease the impact of the changes. Moreover, the Justice Secretary has given a personal commitment that this Government will not seek further savings from criminal legal aid.

The Ministry of Justice and the Legal Aid Agency keep the operation of both the criminal and civil legal aid schemes under continual review. The Government plan to undertake a post-implementation review of the legal aid provisions within the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 within three to five years of implementation. That review will include an assessment of the impact of the reforms implemented during that period.

Paul Blomfield: After a legal aid-funded judicial review of a negative reasonable grounds decision, the Home Office agreed that a Sheffield resident was a victim of trafficking. Under the new regime she would not pass the residence test for legal aid. The Government have been making much recently of their commitment to tackle human trafficking, so will they now reconsider their decision to reject the recommendation by the Joint Committee on Human Rights to exempt from the residence test all cases where the status of a trafficking victim is contested?

Mr Vara: We have made it absolutely clear that for the residence test it is important that they are our people—that they have some link to this country. We have set out where there are exceptions, and that has been made abundantly clear.
What can MPs do?

- Sponsor or sign an Early Day Motion (EDM) – provides a test of backbench support and list of interested MPs.

- Huge number are tabled each session, many dismiss this procedure and either cannot or will not sign.
Early day motion 1220

- **LEGAL AID AND ADVICE**
- Session: 2013-14
- Date tabled: 24.03.2014
- Primary sponsor: Miliband, Edward
- Sponsors:
  - Khan, Sadiq
  - Thornberry, Emily
  - Leslie, Chris
  - Slaughter, Andy
  - Winterton, Rosie
- That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Civil Legal Aid (Remuneration) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2014 (S.I., 2014, No. 607), dated 12 March 2014, a copy of which was laid before this House on 14 March, be annulled.
What can MPs do?

- Raise issue during appropriate debates or put down for an Adjournment debate (balloted each week)
- Take up issue via Select Committees
- Attend All Party Parliamentary Group meetings
- Table a Private Members’ Bill (around 20 a session)
- Host a meeting in Parliament or elsewhere
What can Councillors do?

- Councillors are elected for four years and can be contacted in the same way as MPs.
- They take decisions on local issues like housing, transport and education.
- They can raise issues at Council, including by putting forward motions for discussion.
What can candidates do?

- They can raise issues from you within their parties about what the electorate wants.
- They can feed your points into manifestos in advance of the “short campaign” starting after 30 March.
- They can raise points you put to them in debates with other local candidates to give them a public airing.
Key points summary

Identify your MP and prepare your arguments. You should be able to outline:

- What the problem is and why it is urgent;
- What the solution is and what the benefits of the solution are;
- What you want the decision maker to do.
What now?

- Got a tip to share with other YLALs for our pre-election website info hub? Email ylalnorth@gmail.com
- Join YLAL’s APG group
- Check out the website of YLAL and Justice Alliance for handy leaflets, facts and soundbites to share with your candidates
- Tell us how it goes!