



How to Lobby Politicians



Gateways School Amnesty Group & Fabian Hamilton MP

Lobbying is a powerful communication channel straight to the heart of government.

By lobbying your elected representatives in Westminster, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast and Europe, you can help persuade them to take action against international human rights abuses.

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Glossary: UK Parliament and Government (Westminster)

Constituencies

The UK is divided up into areas called **constituencies**, and each constituency elects an MP. The average constituency size is approximately 74,000 voters.

Members of Parliament (MPs)

The UK currently has 645 MPs – one for each **constituency**. MPs represent the concerns of the people in their constituency (their **constituents**). They check what the Government is doing, and suggest ways of doing things better. They also examine, debate and approve new laws. Together the 645 MPs make up the **House of Commons**. They meet in Westminster, London, but they also have offices in their local constituencies.



MPs are sensitive to the opinions of their constituents – even if they disagree with them. They will always give high priority to requests from constituents and are very aware of local publicity. So remember that you are important to them!

The Government

It is important to understand the difference between the Government and MPs. Out of 645 MPs, around 90 are in the Government. These MPs are called **Ministers**.



Ministers run the country and decide how to spend our taxes. They are appointed by the Prime Minister and are usually given roles in government departments, for example the Department for Health or the Department for Transport.

The Cabinet

The 22 most senior Ministers are called Secretaries of State, and they make up the Cabinet.

The main opposition parties also appoint a 'shadow' cabinet – MPs who 'shadow' the Secretaries of State, asking them questions about government policy and offering alternative suggestions.

The House of Lords

The House of Lords has about 720 members, known as **Peers**, who are not elected but who have been selected by the Prime Minister and appointed by the Queen. There are some Peers in the Government and in the Cabinet.

Glossary: Scottish Parliament and Government (Edinburgh)

Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)

There are 129 MSPs. 73 of them are constituency MSPs; they represent the same 73 constituencies as Westminster MPs, but focus on certain matters affecting Scotland (called 'devolved' issues). The other 56 MSPs are regional MSPs; they represent the 8 Scottish regions (7 MSPs per region) and also focus on devolved issues.



Each Scottish resident is therefore represented by eight MSPs (one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs) as well as one Westminster MP.

The MSPs meet at Holyrood in Edinburgh. They pass laws on devolved issues like health care and education, and they check what the Scottish Government is doing. MSPs also have offices in their local constituencies.

The Scottish Government

It is important to understand the difference between the Scottish Government and MSPs. Out of 129 MSPs, 16 are in the Scottish Government. They are called **Cabinet Secretaries** and **Ministers**, and they are responsible for spending Scottish Government funding, introducing new policies and running the government departments like Health, Education, Justice and Transport.



The Cabinet

The 6 most senior members of the Scottish Government make up the Cabinet:

- the First Minister
- the Deputy First Minister
- 4 Cabinet Secretaries



First Minister of Scotland Alex Salmond receives the first copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Scots

Glossary: Welsh Assembly and Welsh Assembly Government (Cardiff Bay)

Welsh Assembly Members (AMs)

There are 60 AMs. 40 of them represent the same 40 constituencies as Westminster MPs. 20 are elected on a top-up regional system: each of the 5 Welsh regions has 4 regional AMs. This means that you have the option of lobbying your constituency AM, and/or your 4 regional AMs, as well as your Westminster MP.



AMs meet at the Senedd in Cardiff Bay. They pass laws on certain matters affecting Wales (called 'devolved' issues) and check what the Welsh Assembly Government is doing. They also have offices in their local constituencies.

The Welsh Assembly Government

It is important to understand the difference between the Welsh Assembly Government and AMs.



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Out of 60 AMs, 15 are in the Welsh Assembly Government. They are called **Ministers**, and they are responsible for spending Welsh Assembly Government funding, introducing new policies and running the government departments like Health and Education.

The Welsh Assembly Government is currently made up of members of the Labour party and Plaid Cymru.

The Cabinet

The 9 most senior members of the Welsh Assembly Government make up the Cabinet:

- the First Minister
- the Deputy First Minister
- 7 other Ministers (appointed by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister)

There are also 4 Deputy Ministers, but they are not part of the Cabinet.

The opposition parties also appoint a 'shadow' cabinet – AMs who 'shadow' the Welsh Ministers, asking them questions about government policy and offering alternative suggestions.

Glossary: Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive (Belfast)

Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)

There are 108 MLAs, representing 18 constituencies. That means that each constituency has 6 MLAs (as well as 1 Westminster MP).

MLAs meet at Parliament Buildings in Stormont, Belfast. They debate issues and introduce laws on certain matters affecting Northern Ireland. They also check what the Northern Ireland Executive is doing, mainly through 11 statutory committees (one for each government department). Each committee advises the Minister (who leads the department) on policy, budgets and laws. Committees can also initiate inquiries and new laws themselves.



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

The Northern Ireland Executive

It is important to understand the difference between the Northern Ireland Executive and MLAs.



**Northern Ireland
Executive**

Out of 108 MLAs, 12 are in the Executive. They are:

- the First Minister
- the deputy First Minister and
- 10 Departmental Ministers (each in charge of a government department)

They are responsible for spending Northern Ireland Executive funding, introducing new policies and running the government departments like the Department of Education, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and the Department of the Environment.

Glossary: European Parliament

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)

There are 736 MEPs, representing the 27 Member States of the European Union (including the UK). 375 million people were eligible to vote in the European elections in 2009.



The European Parliament has power to make European laws, and approves the budget of the European Union.

Step-by-Step Guide to Lobbying Your Elected Representatives

1. Find out which politician to lobby

The first thing you should do is to find out which representative you should be lobbying – this will change depending on the issue. Each parliament or assembly is responsible for different areas or work, so you need to make sure you have targeted the right one (see the table below).

Area of work	UK Parliament	Scottish Parliament	National Assembly for Wales	Northern Ireland Assembly	European Parliament
Foreign affairs – relationships with other countries	✓				☐
International arms treaties	✓				☐
Policing	✓	✓		*	
Tasers in the UK	✓	✓		*	
Courts and criminal justice	✓	✓		*	
Immigration policy	✓				✓
Violence against women	✓	✓	✓	✓	☐
Services for asylum seekers	✓	✓	✓	✓	☐
Health care	✓	✓	✓	✓	☐
Education	✓	✓	✓	✓	

- * *These areas of responsibility are expected to become devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly in the near future.*
- ☐ *The European Parliament has an informal role in these areas. MEPs can speak out on these issues, but don't have the power to make laws.*

As you can see, it is possible for two or more parliaments/assemblies to have responsibility for a particular area of work. In these cases, Amnesty International will make it clear who you should lobby.

Example: human trafficking in Wales

The UK Government is responsible for tackling human trafficking, but the Welsh Assembly Government is responsible for providing a safe haven for victims of trafficking.



Ysgol Gyfun Gwyr from Swansea present their 'stop trafficking' petition to the Home Office, a department of the UK Government in London.

2. Find out who your elected representative is

Find out as many basic details about your elected representative as possible, such as his/her name, party and constituency.

MP (UK Parliament)

Go to <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk> and enter your postcode.

MSP (Scottish Parliament)

www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/membersPages/MSPAddressPostcodeFinder.htm

AM (National Assembly for Wales)

www.assemblywales.org/memhome/member-search.htm

MLA (Northern Ireland Assembly)

www.niassembly.gov.uk/members/constmap_res.htm

MEP (European Parliament)

www.europarl.org.uk/section/your-meps/your-meps

3. Decide how you want to approach them

You have 2 options:

a) Arrange a meeting

Normally MPs will only be able to meet with you on a Friday as the rest of the week they are generally working in London. Sometimes you might have to take time off school for the meeting, so make sure you ask permission. You can also ask your MP to have the meeting after school hours and he or she should be willing to do so. The meeting with the MP will normally take place in their constituency office.

MSPs, AMs and MLAs are also usually in their constituency offices on Fridays.

b) Invite them to attend an event

MPs and other elected representatives are usually keen to participate in local activities, particularly if the local press is involved, so you might want to invite them to attend an event you have organised. Remember to get permission from your school first!

4. Contact them

If you want to arrange a meeting, write to your representative explaining that you are part of an Amnesty International Youth Group and stating what you would like to discuss. If possible, include some information on the subject (e.g. an Amnesty International leaflet). Remember, elected representatives are very busy, so don't send too much information! If you do not hear back after 2 weeks, follow up your request by 'phoning.

Once they've replied back to you, you should be able to schedule the meeting over the phone with their secretary. If you tell them what times you're available, they will then schedule a date and check with you that you can make it too.

If you want to invite your representative to an event, write to them explaining that you represent an Amnesty International Youth Group and give details about your event. Again, if you do not hear back after 2 weeks, follow up your request by 'phoning.

How to contact them:

MP (UK Parliament)

By post

.....[insert their name here]..... MP
House of Commons
London
SW1 0AA



By 'phone

Calling with a simple question might get a faster response than writing. Phone the House of Commons switchboard on 020 7219 3000 and ask for your MP by name. They will put you through to a staff member in your MP's office.

By email

MPs' email addresses always follow the same formula: surname followed by initial @parliament.uk

e.g. If your MP is Hilary Benn, his email address is bennh@parliament.uk
If your MP is Geoffrey Cox, his email address is coxg@parliament.uk
If your MP is Angela Smith, her email address is smitha@parliament.uk

MSP (Scottish Parliament)

By post

.....[insert their name here]..... MSP
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP



By 'phone

Call the National Assembly on 0131 348 5000 or 0800 092 7500 and ask for your MSP by name.

By email

MSPs' email addresses always follow the same formula, with their firstname.surname.msp followed by @Scottish.parliament.uk. If you wanted to contact Margaret Smith, e-mail her at Margaret.Smith.msp@scottish.parliament.uk

AM (National Assembly for Wales)

By post

.....[insert their name here]..... AM
The National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA



By 'phone

Call the National Assembly on 0845 010 5500 and ask for your AM by name.

By email

AMs' email addresses always follow the same formula, with their first name.surname followed by @wales.gov.uk. If you wanted to contact Carl Sargeant, e-mail him at carl.sergeant@wales.gov.uk

MLA (Northern Ireland Assembly)

By post

.....[insert their name here]..... MLA
Parliament Buildings
Belfast
BT4 3XX



Or find their constituency office address on this website:

http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/members/constmap_res.htm

By 'phone

Call the Northern Ireland Assembly on 028 9052 1333 and ask for your MLA's telephone number.

By email

MLAs' email addresses always follow the same formula, with their first name.surname followed by @niassembly.gov.uk. If you wanted to contact Sean Neeson, e-mail him at Sean.Neeson@niassembly.gov.uk

MEP (European Parliament)

Find your MEP's contact details here:

www.europarl.org.uk/section/your-meps/your-meps



5. Plan your meeting / event

If you have arranged to meet your representative at their constituency office:

Decide who in your group will go to the meeting – preferably not more than three.

Decide on an agenda for the meeting, for example:

1. Introduce your Youth Group
2. Explain that Amnesty International does not support or oppose any government or political system.
3. Give some brief background information on the subject/ campaign/ prisoner you are there to talk about.
4. Ask your representative to take some form of action, for example:
 - write to a foreign embassy or government
 - ask a parliamentary question
 - write to a Minister
 - sign an Early Day Motion (an expression of concern, support or dismay, often about something the government has or hasn't done. EDMs can encourage government action and attract press coverage)
 - do a publicity stunt with your group

You will also need to decide which member of your group is handling which part of the agenda. It is well worth doing a **mock meeting** so you can rehearse your argument thoroughly. Someone will have to play the role of the MP!

Prepare yourself for counter arguments. Use the internet to find out if your representative already has an opinion on the issue you're raising. There are some useful websites for doing this, such as www.theyworkforyou.com. Think through all the reasons your MP might give as to why she/he is unable to take the action you request. Be ready to convince them! If you want some support and advice, please contact us on student@amnesty.org.uk

6. At the meeting

- Dress to impress
- Be punctual and polite
- Ask your MP to send you copies of any letters, responses or parliamentary questions on the subject you are discussing

If you have invited your representative to an event at your school

The advice above still applies, but there's no need to limit numbers to 3 students – the more the merrier!

7. Follow up

- Write and thank your representative for the meeting, or for coming to your event
- Find out if your representative has taken the action they agreed to take

Useful websites

www.parliament.uk/education/index.htm

The official UK parliament website has useful educational resources.

www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk

The UK Youth Parliament provides opportunities for 11-18-year-olds to use their voice in creative ways to bring about social change.

<http://www.theyworkforyou.com>

This is a very useful website for finding out about your MP, MSP, MLA or MEP. It can tell you what responsibilities your representative, and what issues they are concerned about.

The official site of the Scottish Parliament is www.scottish.parliament.uk

The official site of the Scottish Government is www.scotland.gov.uk

The official site of the National Assembly for Wales is www.assemblywales.org

The official site of the Welsh Assembly Government is www.wales.gov.uk

The official site of the Northern Ireland Assembly is www.niassembly.gov.uk

The official site of the Northern Ireland Executive is www.northernireland.gov.uk

The website for the UK Office of the European Parliament is: www.europarl.org.uk



Amnesty supporters take to the steps of Parliament Buildings, Stormont, Northern Ireland