



# **A Guide to Campaigning**

## **Thinking of Campaigning?**

Campaigning has a long standing tradition in education – many of the parents and carers who are active in education politics started out campaigning about issues in their school or local authority.

But although there is a strong tradition, it seems every group has to start from scratch by working out how to run an effective campaign. So we decided to produce some guidance which we hope will be useful to parents and carers who find they have issues they want to campaign about.

## **There's strength in numbers!**

Numbers make a difference, so try to get as many parents and carers involved as possible. It may be that this issue affects others (for instance, teachers), so you may be able to join together with another group, but make sure you are absolutely clear that you have the same goals.

## **What's it all about?**

Make sure you have your messages straight. What exactly is your campaign about and, most importantly, what solution do you want? Is there a compromise that would be acceptable to you? Just saying “no” tends not to be effective, so consider what alternative solutions you can put in the pot.

Once you have decided what it's about, think up a catchy name for your campaign. The media in particular will use it as shorthand for whatever your group does, so make it easy for them. It's also better that you give it a name you're happy with, because if you don't then someone else may dream up a name you don't like!

## **Communication is key**

Wherever you are, but particularly in rural areas, ensure you establish strong methods of communication between all involved. You can set up an online group

(such as a Yahoo Group) where you can upload information and share emails. You could also use Facebook or a similar social networking site to share information.

Bear in mind that Facebook is open to anyone to view, so if you want to keep things confidential (such as plans for protests or exchanging sensitive information) then you would be better with an e-group. You can also use Twitter to share information – though you have to decide if your tweets are to be public or private (and there is no middle ground).

## **Gather your friends**

Give some thought to the people you want to get on your side. Think also about Community Councils and other local groups. If this is a local authority issue you will want to speak to your local Councillors and possibly MSPs and MP. What about the local police if, for instance, it is a traffic or safety issue?

There may be local or national charities or bodies who have an interest in the subject. Think also about well-known figures who have a profile in your area and who may be interested in championing your cause, whether an author, pop star, television presenter or other well-known public figure.

Ask all of your group to think about who they know and what connections they have – it's always surprising to find the connections people don't necessarily realise they have.

## **Map out your Campaign**

Having worked out what you want and started to gather your group together, work out what the campaign will look like. Remember timing is everything – when is a final decision going to be made? When are relevant meetings scheduled? What deadlines are you working to, whether they are published or unpublished? Things to consider include:

- Use the media (see below)
- Ask for meetings with Councillors and others to argue your case – you should find contact details for all your Councillors on the local authority website or phone and ask for the information to be sent out. Get your local Councillors on side as far as possible! Do the same with MSPs and MPs – even though they may not have a direct say, they may influence Councillors who belong to the same party, and criticise those who don't!
- Put together facts and figures if you can – pull together a dossier of facts, relevant examples of how children are/will be affected. Personal stories have a lot of impact.
- Launch a petition, in hard copy and online if possible.
- Organise events – rallies and protest marches give a strong focus to your campaign and provide the media with lots to write about. Can you think of someone high profile who could speak/lead?
- If you need to make a freedom of information request then go to the Scottish Information Commissioner's website ([www.itspublicknowledge.info](http://www.itspublicknowledge.info)) where you will find a resource called "*you only have to ask*". This provides guidance on FOI rights and how to use them.

## **Media**

If possible, find someone on your team who is used to writing press releases and articles for the media, and ideally who already has good contacts with your local newspapers and radio. If you don't know, simply phone to find out the names of the reporters who are likely to cover your area or the topic of your campaign – don't forget online news outlets. Make sure the media know who they should contact if they want information on the campaign.

Nominate a lead spokesperson who will always be the name people associate with the campaign and who will answer media enquiries – it's important to have one person who can be relied upon to keep to the agreed line. However, also have a pool of other people who are willing to speak to the media – your lead person can nominate someone else if they are busy or if someone else has a relevant story to tell.

Make sure you let the media know in advance if you have any events planned and let them know on a regular basis how things are going.

As far as possible, write the media story for journalists. This makes sure, as far as you can, that everything will be accurate. Journalists also like it because it saves them time. But be prepared to provide more information or a quote that will make their story unique.

Local newspapers particularly like to use photographs, so when you are planning events think about what photograph you might be able to offer. Remember children can only appear with their parents' permission – be sure to ask and get the OK in writing if you plan to have children appear in your photographs. Generally local newspapers will send their own photographer but if you have someone on your team who can provide good digital photographs, that could be useful.

Remember also to use letters pages in local and national newspapers, and a Facebook page or similar makes it very easy to keep people – journalists included – up to date.

## **We would like to know**

Did you use this leaflet? Did you find it helpful? Please give us your comments.

## **About SPTC**

You may be interested to know that we offer our members a range of benefits including our membership insurance scheme which covers:

- Public Liability
- Personal Accident
- Fidelity Guarantee
- Employer's Liability
- Extended Public Liability for hired-in entertainers
- All-Risks (for equipment purchased by the Parent Council/PTA)
- Short-term all-risks insurance for special events.

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SPTC, 53 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 2HT

Tel: 0131-226 4378/1917

Email: [sptc@sptc.info](mailto:sptc@sptc.info) Website: [www.sptc.info](http://www.sptc.info)