



# ACT FOR GIRLS: INFLUENCE

Everything you need to know to influence a decision maker!



## Foreword by Amika George

As girls, we're often taught to suppress the anger that stirs inside of us when we witness injustice, bite our tongues rather than speak up about discrimination or inequality, and quietly accept the status quo. But right now, as the world feels so dark and so much change is needed, why shouldn't we be the ones who decide to change it? Why shouldn't YOU be an activist who campaigns to change our world for the better?

When I was 17, I started a campaign called Free Periods, after I discovered that period poverty was denying thousands an education and perpetuating gender inequality. It broke my heart to read about how some schoolchildren would stuff toilet roll or newspaper into their underwear, in order to attend school whilst menstruating. What angered me most, though, was that it seemed like MPs and decision-makers were refusing to address this devastating issue. I decided to do something about it and committed myself to campaigning. Today – many meetings, countless articles and interviews, hundreds of Instagram posts, and thousands of shameless emails later – the government has given funding to every school and college in England to provide free menstrual products to its students.

Activism isn't easy, but it does work. It can be an exhausting and sometimes thankless task, but I promise it's the best thing you'll ever do. This guide will equip you with tips on how to get started in influencing those who can help you make change, from finding out who your MP is to the best way of contacting them. I can't wait to see what you achieve.



Plan International / Rob Beechey

Front cover image: Joseline, 18 came from Rwanda to speak about female representation in politics at the Breaking the Barriers takeover event at the House of Lords

This image: Young people from across Rwanda take part in a power mapping exercise to determine who to target with their campaign

# WELCOME

Welcome to the Act For Girls Toolkit by Plan International UK – here to give you all the tools you need to campaign to make the world a better place! The toolkit has four components:



## 1 ACT FOR GIRLS: ORGANISE

Everything you need to know to plan your own campaign for change!



## 2 ACT FOR GIRLS: INFLUENCE

Everything you need to know to influence your decision maker!



## 3 ACT FOR GIRLS: CREATE

Everything you need to know to campaign creatively!



## 4 ACT FOR GIRLS: AMPLIFY

Everything you need to know to get the word out!

[Plan International UK](#) is a global children's charity, we strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls.

Around the world, including here in the UK, girls still don't have equal rights – and that has to change. We believe that young people have the power to change this by taking action on the issues that matter to them most, such as tackling street harassment, ending period poverty and calling out discrimination.

That's why we have created this Act For Girls Toolkit – to empower and support you to become an activist for change.

You can find out more about Plan International's campaigning as well as find the other Act For Girls Toolkit guides [here](#).

This guide **Act For Girls: Influence** is the second in the series and will support you to think about how to contact a decision-maker relevant to your campaign and influence them to support your cause.

Let's get started!

## GLOSSARY

Here's some terms you'll see throughout this guide:

**Campaign** A series of organised, planned actions which are done for one purpose – to create a specific change.

**Lobbying** To directly try to influence or persuade somebody (for example your campaign target) to support your campaign. This could be for example by meeting with them to discuss your campaign.

**Change objective** A short sentence which clearly states the change you are trying to achieve through your campaign.

**Campaign target** An identified person who has the decision-making power to make your change objective a reality.

**Decision maker** A person who has the power to make key decisions that could lead to you achieving your campaign goal.

**MP** A Member of Parliament (MP) is a person who has been elected by voters in a certain geographical area to represent them in the Houses of Parliament.

**Constituents** The UK is split in 650 'constituencies' which are geographical areas each represented by one MP, the people in a constituency are known as 'constituents'

**Opinion piece** An opinion piece or 'op-ed' is an article in which the writer expresses their own personal opinion on a topic.

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO INFLUENCE?

**A vital element of successful campaigning is influencing your campaign target. This means changing their mind to support your campaign.**

First you need to work out what is the specific change you want to see (your change objective) and who can make the change (your campaign target). If you haven't already, use [Act For Girls: Organise](#) to help you with this.

Your campaign target is the decision-maker who has the power to enact the change you want to see. There are many, many different possible decision-makers – for example it could be a Government minister, your local councillor, your head teacher, a local business owner or your local Member of Parliament.

At the right time, it will be important to contact your campaign target in some way to set out your case.

In this guide we will use the example of contacting Members of Parliament (MPs) – this is because they are often a key element of campaigns, either as the campaign target, or a route to influencing your campaign target.

However, many of these principles apply whoever your decision maker is: identify them, find an appropriate way to contact them, do your research and preparation, and make sure to follow up.



**By using this guide to help, you will know:**

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## STEP 1

# WHO IS YOUR MP?

### USEFUL INFO

The UK is split into 650 geographical areas that are known as ‘constituencies’ – each constituency is represented by one Member of Parliament (MP). An MP is voted in by the adults who live in their constituency, and they represent their constituents in the Houses of Parliament in London, where laws and policies are decided. You can contact the MP for your local constituency about an issue that is impacting you or that you are concerned about.

MPs work for us!

You can find out who your MP is by entering your postcode on [this website](#). You will see their name, their photograph and which political party they belong to. (There are many different political parties in the UK, you can see a list of those that are represented in the House of Commons [here](#).)



Girls speak out at the European Parliament in Brussels to ensure girls' rights are kept high on the agenda

## HOW CAN YOUR MP HELP YOU?

Once you know who your MP is and have found out a little bit about them, it's great to have a think about what actions you might ask them to take in support of your campaign.

It might be that your local MP is the direct campaign target. For example, if there is a vote on a new law relevant to your campaign in the Houses of Commons. You can ask your local MP to vote in a way that helps support your campaign.

Your MP can help you

More commonly though, it's likely that your local MP won't be the main decision-maker, but they can almost always help you to influence your campaign target, be that a government minister, a private sector company or the local council.

We've included a list of ways your MP might be able to help you below (but there might be lots of other ways too, depending on your campaign – and you can ask your MP for their ideas too).

### USEFUL INFO

Parliament is made up of the House of Lords and House of Commons and exists to represent the views of constituents and hold the Government to account. The House of Commons is made up of MPs and the House of Lords is made up of Peers who are appointed, rather than elected. The Government is made up of ministers who are MPs (and sometimes Peers) who are given a specific responsibility.

## Ways your MP could support your campaign:

### Through parliamentary process (the formal processes by which MPs can influence the government)

- MPs vote on new laws. For a new law to pass it needs to win a series of votes in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Therefore, if your campaign is related to a specific new law you can ask your MP to vote in a way that supports your campaign.
- MPs can ask questions of the Government – either by asking an 'Oral Question' in a debate in Parliament or by submitting a 'Written Question'. This can be a great way to get attention for an issue and see if the Government is taking action on it, or ask them to support it.
- MPs can advance issues through their work on 'committees.' These are cross party groups of MPs who have specific powers to scrutinise the work of government on specific areas like education, international development and women & equalities (full list [here](#)). If you are lucky enough to have your local MP sitting on a relevant committee you can ask them to advance your campaigning goal there. If they're not on the committee you could also ask them to raise your issue with an MP who is, ideally the chair of the committee because they are the most powerful.

## Raising it with government or the local council

- MPs can highlight issues (for example your specific campaign ‘ask’) directly with the Government by raising it with the relevant minister – this could be by writing to them, meeting with them or speaking to them about it when they see them around Parliament.
- MPs can raise issues with the local council. They can write to, meet with or speak to your local councillors or the council leader. If the local council is your target it’s best to try to contact them yourself first and then ask your MP to get involved if the council aren’t prepared to adopt the change you want to see.



## Influencing non-political audiences

- MPs can also help to influence non-political audiences. This could be a local private sector company, your school, local newspaper, or community organisations like a local football club. MPs are influential outside of Westminster, and in lots of cases direct contact from an MP, be that a phone call, meeting or a letter from your MP can help affect change.

## Creative campaigning

- MPs can also get involved in your creative campaign tactics. Check out [Act For Girls: Create](#) for ideas. For example, could you invite them along to a local campaign event, activity or campaign stunt you are planning, could they come with you to hand in a public petition to your campaign target, could they be a guest on a podcast or show you are creating? It’s a good idea to get them involved right from the start, so invite them well in advance, as their diaries get very full. Weekends and Fridays are the best days to ask your MP to attend anything in the constituency as Monday–Thursday they are in Westminster, but they do have a long break from Parliament in the school holidays so that could be a good time too.



## Amplify your campaign

- MPs can tweet about your campaign to help spread the word. This works really well if they have a photo from an event/campaign stunt or a meeting with you to share.
- MPs could also help you by authoring a blog or an opinion piece with you for local, or even national, press or a blog page.
- Many MPs have their own websites and write newsletters to keep their constituents updated about the work they are doing, so your MP could include your campaign in their communications.

Use the list above to come up with some ideas of what you can ask your MP to do to support your campaign – they might also have some ideas and suggestions about what they can do to help.

*What do you think?*

## HOW CAN I CONTACT MY MP?

Once you have identified your MP and thought about some ways they could support your campaign – it's time to get in touch with them!

MPs have two offices – a 'constituency' office in your local area, and a 'parliamentary' office in the House of Commons in London. Most MPs will list contact details for both offices – they may list their phone number, email address, postal address or social media handles or a combination. Think about which way you would like to contact them.

Don't be shy about getting in touch – it's an MP's job to listen to and represent their constituents (the people who live in the area they serve) in Parliament. MP's receive communication from their constituents all the time. They have staff members working with them to help make sure everyone gets a reply. Do be patient as it might take them a few weeks to get back to you.

Why not give it a go



### Writing a letter/email:

- Address your letter/email to your MP and explain that you are a constituent, including your address. It's parliamentary protocol that MPs only respond to their constituents so don't forget to include your postcode.
- You could consider getting a group of people to 'sign-on' to your letter. This just means that instead of signing off the letter just from yourself, you would have a list of people who support your letter, for example other local constituents. This can be a great way to increase the power of your letter. Make sure you get their permission and they are very clear about what they are signing on to.



### Engaging on social media:

- Many MPs are on social media sites such as Twitter or Instagram, so you could consider contacting them via these platforms by tagging them in a post. Remember this is a public way of contacting them, which could be good as it may make them more likely to take action and for others to join your call. However, it could also mean that you receive responses from people that disagree with you.
- Check the bio on their social media profile as they may indicate there what is the best way to contact them.



## Meeting face-to-face:

- It can feel intimidating to consider meeting your MP in person, but it can be the most effective way to get your campaign across. MPs hold regular opportunities to meet with constituents, known as ‘surgeries’. Often these are weekly, in your local area, and you can book a time slot – you just need to send an email to your MP’s constituency office to request a slot.
- Try to meet your MP in a small group, if you can, to show the strength of support for your issue, but also so that other people can share the responsibilities. For example, consider allocating someone to take notes, someone to lead different sections of the conversation, etc.
- If you do meet with your MP, consider asking them for a photo so that you can publicise the meeting. You could take a board with your campaign name/slogan on it and ask your MP to hold it in the photo. Make sure to send the photo to the MP so they can use it too. Consider writing a press release to your local newspaper (see [Act For Girls: Amplify](#) for more information on how to do this).



## Calling on the phone:

- If there is a phone number listed for your MP then consider contacting them by phone. Don’t worry, it’s unlikely that the MP themselves will answer, instead it is likely to be one of their staff members who will be able to pass on a message or get you the information you need.
- Calling on the phone can be a great way to get an immediate response, especially for example if you are chasing up an invitation you have sent to your MP.
- Consider writing out what you want to say before the call so that you can read from it if you need to.



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Atlanta and Lauren presented their petition to Deputy Mayor Bev Hughes and told her about their experiences of street harassment.

## STEP 4

# MAKE SURE TO FOLLOW UP!

It is important to make sure to follow up any contact with your MP, especially if you met them in person. Even if they didn't agree to everything you wanted, it is still good practice to say thank you to them for being in contact. Make sure to summarise the interaction and relay this back to them, for example by sending an email after you meet them in person. It is particularly crucial to remind them if they agreed to take any action and what this was, and it's a good idea to share any photos or press releases you have.



The following principles are important whichever way you contact them:

Do some research about your MP in advance (you could give the 'influencer mapping' exercise in [Act For Girls: Organise](#) a try). For example, see if you can find out about their interests, what their record in parliament is like, what is in the press about them, which party they are in, if they hold a position, or if they are on any committees.

Prepare the information you want to get across (whether this will be written, face-to-face or over the phone). You can do this by using your campaign 'elevator pitch' from [Act For Girls: Organise](#). It is important to get across (briefly) the problem your campaign is seeking to fix, the solution you are proposing, what action they can take and why you care about it. The more personal you can be the more compelling your argument will be. Also consider if there are any facts, statistics or evidence to back up what you are saying.

Always ask them to do something. It's your job to ask them to take action. This can be big or small depending on your campaign objective, and you can ask them for more than one if you want. Use the section above to help you come up with some ideas.

Remember however you contact them and however they respond: always be kind, honest, clear and concise.



In Spain youth advocates installed 100 briefcases outside their Parliament, each with a demand for gender equality.

PONER FIN A LA VIOLENCIA  
HACIA LAS CHICAS

## HOW WE DID IT

### Stop the exploitation of girls at work

In January 2019 youth advocates Fiona, Rowlings and Faridah (pictured left to right) launched their campaign in Uganda to stop the sexual exploitation of girls at work. They wrote a letter to their government asking for an Inquiry to uncover this widespread abuse.

They launched a global campaign asking members of the public to join them and sign their letter in support. Over 50,000 people from across the world stood in solidarity with them. Together, their campaign secured a commitment by the Ugandan Government to launch a review into the sexual exploitation of girls and young women at work.



### Stop trafficking in Nepal

In 2018 the political structures in Nepal changed with greater decision-making powers being given to the local level. For the first time, newly-elected local Mayors had the power to develop local laws and action plans. Sabina and Sarita (pictured left to right) wanted to use this opportunity to ensure that their local Mayor took a stand against the trafficking of girls in Nepal. They live in a border area of Nepal where the risk of trafficking is a terrifying reality for many girls.

They wanted their Mayor to publicly commit to ending this abuse. They launched a campaign asking the public from around the world to stand with them and the response was overwhelming, with more than 46,000 adding their name.

They gave this petition to their local Mayor and he agreed to take action. As a result, a new public awareness campaign will be launched, to make sure every girl in their area knows about the risks.

Yes, you did it!

**So now you know how to contact your MP or decision maker – over to you to make it happen!**

Do make sure to check out the other guides in the Act For Girls Toolkit [here](#).

Please feel free to get in touch with us at Plan International UK on [youthengagementteam@plan-uk.org](mailto:youthengagementteam@plan-uk.org) with any questions, comments or for further information. And do let us know how you get on, we would love to hear all about your campaigning!

## Further reading:

**UK PARLIAMENT EDUCATION** <https://learning.parliament.uk/resources/>

**BRITISH POLITICS:** A Very Short Introduction by Tony Wright

**ACT FOR GIRLS: ORGANISE** Everything you need to know to plan your own campaign for change!

**ACT FOR GIRLS: CREATE** Everything you need to know to campaign creatively!

**ACT FOR GIRLS: AMPLIFY** Everything you need to know to get the word out!

Booklet design: Philippa Thomas ([philippa-thomas.com](http://philippa-thomas.com)) Booklet illustrations: Jessica Nugent ([@hellojesspanu](https://twitter.com/hellojesspanu))

Maisie debates sexism in education at the Breaking the Barriers event at the House of Lords



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