

General Election 2015

Contacting candidates and organising hustings events

A UCU guide

Why should I contact candidates in my area in the run up to the general election?

The period before a general election is an ideal opportunity for UCU members to try to influence the views of the person who may become their next MP. Education is a key election issue for each of the political parties; the candidates in your area will want to be fully informed about both local and national education issues.

Some of the benefits to contacting your local candidates include:

- establishing a relationship with the successful candidate prior to their election
- influencing candidates' views on issues of local concern
- answering candidates' questions on education and employment related issues
- obtaining commitments on education policy from candidates before the election.

When should I contact the candidates?

As early as possible; candidates will become increasingly busy as the general election approaches.

How do I identify candidates in my area?

UCU's public affairs team can help you identify your local candidates as well as providing you with contact details and background information - contact publicaffairs@ucu.org.uk.

Alternatively, you can find and contact your candidates directly on the UCU election toolkit webpage: <http://ge2015.web.ucu.org.uk/>

What is a hustings event?

It's a meeting where election candidates or parties debate policies and answer questions from an audience. Meetings can be open to the public, or restricted to members of a particular organisation.

Who holds hustings events?

They are usually held by organisations, such as community groups or campaigners, so that voters can ask candidates about issues that are important to them.

What are the rules for holding a public hustings event?

If you're holding a public hustings event, the most important rule is that the event must not promote one candidate or party over another.

The simplest way to ensure that you're not giving any candidate preferential treatment is to invite all the relevant candidates in the area. However, this may not always be practical. For example, there may be so many candidates standing in a constituency that a meeting would be hard to manage.

If you decide not to invite all candidates, there are some good practice recommendations you should follow to show your hustings event is genuinely not promoting particular candidates more than others.

To show your local hustings event is genuinely non-promotional you should:

- Be able to give objective reasons* why you have not invited particular candidates. And you should be prepared to explain your reasons to candidates who you haven't invited.
- Make sure that candidates you invite represent a reasonable variety of views, from different parts of the political spectrum.
- Be transparent in your publicity for the meeting, about who is arranging and funding the event and the reasons you are holding it.
- Allow each candidate attending a fair chance to answer questions, and where appropriate, a reasonable opportunity to respond to points made against them by other candidates.
- Inform the audience at the meeting of candidates standing who haven't been invited.

Electoral commission guidance states that objective reasons may include local prominence, the number of elected representatives at local level or recent election results in the area. They **do not include subjective reasons such as your views of the policies of a candidate.*

Electoral law does not require you to invite all candidates, so you can decide what is most appropriate. However, you need to have impartial reasons why you have not invited particular candidates or parties and you should be prepared to explain your reasons to candidates or parties you haven't invited.

Private hustings events

Private hustings events are not subject to the rules about not promoting one candidate over another. If you choose to run a private hustings event, you can pick and choose certain candidates to take part but you must not advertise the event to anyone outside UCU or invite any media. Otherwise the hustings will be subject to rules on election spending.

Practical considerations for your hustings event

Hustings events have no set structure but are normally conducted as follows:

- Welcome by the chair, who also describes the way in which the meeting is to be conducted
- Brief introduction by the chair of the candidates by name and party
- Short statement by each candidate (a couple of minutes)
- Questions from the floor, allowing each candidate to respond
- Final few sentences from each candidate

Further information

For more information about the rules for hustings events, see the Electoral Commission guidance: http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/169480/sp-hustings-npc-ukpge.pdf

For information on your local candidates and general election campaign materials, visit the UCU election toolkit: <http://ge2015.web.ucu.org.uk/>

If you have any questions, contact publicaffairs@ucu.org.uk