

Follow-up

There is a long-established tradition whereby members of the public present petitions at the door of Number 10 Downing Street. It is now possible to do the equivalent of this through the use of email. The e-Petitions Service, as it is known, has been designed to offer a modern parallel, one which is more convenient for the petitioner. Unlike paper-based petitions,

the service also provides an opportunity for Number 10 to respond to every petitioner via email. Since their launch in November 2006, ePetitions have become a part of the landscape of debate in the UK.

Young people can formulate a petition and get as many signatories as possible. Eventually each person on the list will receive a reply from Number 10, and can use this for further awareness-raising and lobbying.

Identity, Empowerment and Change, Handout 23

Writing to Your Representative, Some Tips

On its own, your letter may not have much impact. But if quite a few other people write on the same theme, expressing the same views, your letter will almost certainly have some effect.

It's virtually essential to give your name and full address. Anonymous letters may be discarded, unless a very good reason is given for remaining anonymous.

Letters should be brief, factual and polite. Take special care not to sound aggressive or offensive. By all means, though, stress that you feel strongly.

There's no need to use elaborate and formal words and phrases. On the contrary, the more natural your tone and style the more your letter will seem personal.

If you use a sample letter or template suggested by someone else, make sure you introduce some personal tweaks and references of your own. Elected representatives tend to be suspicious of letters that appear to have been drafted centrally rather than by an individual working alone.

Write as if you take for granted that the person you're writing to is open to reasoned argument.

Say a little about yourself if you wish, to give a sense of who you are and why you are interested.

It used to be said that representatives tend to pay particular attention to letters that have 'been written by someone sitting at their kitchen table' – in other words, in handwriting. Nowadays, so many people use a keyboard that it's entirely OK to use typing rather than handwriting.

Indicate, as appropriate, what you expect your representative to do. For example, ask them to tell you their own views and how they will vote. In the case of MPs you can ask them to forward a copy of your letter to the relevant minister.

Indicate that you expect a reply. It may be useful to mention that you will be sharing your representative's reply with friends or contacts.

In the case of MPs, the usual way to start is 'Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms ...' having put at the top of the letter their full name followed by 'MP'. If your MP is a Privy Councillor, or has been, then it is slightly different – they are Rt Hon (Name) MP. In the case of local councillors, it is conventional to start 'Dear Councillor (name)'.

It is usual to sign letters to elected representatives with the phrase 'Yours sincerely'.

It is usual for letters to members of the House of Lords to start with the phrase 'Dear Lord (surname)' or 'Dear Lady (surname)'. For more detailed information on conventions connected with ways of addressing people in official positions, go to <http://www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/forms-of-address.htm>.