



Faculty of Public Health

of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom

Working to improve the public's health

Guide to Advocacy

Advocacy refers to activities carried out by individuals or groups to influence decisions and gain support for a cause. Advocacy can be aimed at anybody, including politicians and policy makers, and even members of the public such as friends, family, and local community. It is not a one-off event but may need repeated approaches to bring supporters on side as time and context shift.

The issue

- Is this a local, national or global issue? National includes the four countries of the UK, which all have their own systems and government.
- Is this an issue just for Specialty Registrars or the wider Public Health system? If wider, ensure the purpose aligns with wider Faculty strategy.
- Involve the Faculty executive and policy and communications staff at the earliest opportunity. They can offer direction if your issue is relevant, and discuss how much FPH can support.
- All work that will be reported or badged as coming from the Faculty **must** be signed off by the Faculty centrally. This process is designed to manage reputational risk and allow the Faculty to support members to promote a particular message.
- Engage with special interest groups (SIGs) and the Faculty committees – they are your subject experts and can offer guidance, wisdom and support.
- Are there other Royal Colleges who need to be involved? Are there other organisations involved in the same arena? Many voices with one message can be highly effective. But consider if this is helpful or potentially obstructive. For example, including partners who are disliked or distrusted by the decision makers can reduce the effectiveness of messages. Again, keeping the policy and communications staff in the loop is vital in terms of keeping the message 'on track' with Faculty policy.
- Also consider who is the message coming from? The President, the SIG lead, a committee?

Define the Situation

- Start with something positive around current actions (even if they are small or only partially relate to your issue).
- What are your aims and objectives? Have a long-term goal, but several short-term SMART objectives.
- Are there common misconceptions? Might your audience be affected by these?

Who is the audience?

- Would this best be aimed at a certain individual/ department with decision making ability? Or would a wider audience influence the decision makers?
- Map your stakeholders to identify the key players
- Understand your audience – what are their key interests/ priorities? And how can tackling your situation help meet their goals?
- For wider audiences, consider your media. Letters to newspapers may gain a wide audience if the issue is topical, but alternative media such as videos, images and podcasts may be



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more widely shared on social media. Other organisations may welcome you to guest write for their blog, which is a great way to influence other specialities / professions.

What are your key messages/ key facts?

- Use a variety of evidence-based sources and robust data to support your key messages.
- Keep the message clear, concise, consistent, compelling, and convincing.
- Have one primary focus and 2-3 secondary messages.
- Give these on a scale relevant to your audience, for example sharing national stats, key-in nation inequalities, international comparisons.
- Stay professional but understandable to lay people. Avoid acronyms and jargon.
- Consider the use of simple documents, such as infographics and case studies, to highlight facts.

What are the key opportunities and obstacles?

- Is this the right time? And why is this the right time?
- Try to aim for a win/win outcome – for example, active transport improves air quality, reduces congestion, keeps people healthier and reduces risks from accidents.
- Will decisions impact on the private sector, and if so, what would be the win for them?
- Stay apolitical with regards to parties but take account of party-political values. Try to sense political, social, legal and economic drivers for change (these can be barriers and opportunities).
- What are the policies or activities you want to achieve? Be realistic, offer examples of where this has worked.
- Is there evidence of widespread support for your interventions? If not, why would it be in the interests of the audience to tackle the concern?
- The message should create action – not just provide information. Be clear about what action you would like the audience to take.
- Think about using case studies - Keep to the facts, but also appeal to the emotional (politicians may relate more to anecdotes than data). Focus on the people involved.

Think about follow up

- Always say thank you in return for any response.
- Are you planning to call, or reply to your audience?
- News may be interested in further information / coverage – have people ready to be interviewed – both “talking heads” and that are representative of the population who may be interested / affected by the issue.

Events

- Holding an event to launch your topic can gain publicity.
- Give yourself plenty of time and plan an organisational timetable.
- Invite respected and engaging speakers but brief everyone to ensure you stay on message.
- Ensure you have an agenda that is shared with everyone before the event.
- Invite media/ journalists. Have a named person sharing messages from the event via social media whilst ongoing.
- Offer to run fringe events at conferences.