

Tips On How To Have Good One-on-One Conversations with Members and Non-Members about Joining a Marking and Assessment Boycott

Our strength as a union comes from our willingness to take action as a collective. *The bigger our numbers, the greater our impact.* But growing participation in the MAB isn't a task for reps alone -- it's on all of us! In this interactive training, we'll be learning from one another about how to have effective organising conversations with co-workers during the MAB and beyond.

>> A one-on-one organising conversation is different than an ordinary conversation because you have a clear purpose and a short timeframe to accomplish it.

Here are some suggested steps:

1) Greet your coworker in a friendly manner and explain that you are a UCU member (or rep, if relevant) and are doing the rounds of offices in your department to talk about the upcoming marking and assessment boycott. For conversations with non-members, clarify that you are seeking to speak to everyone about the MAB as the outcome of our negotiations affects all of us. Please remember that we are aiming to speak both to academic staff and to Professional Services staff with admin responsibilities for marking and assessment.

2) Give your co-worker a chance to respond/ask questions before you go on. Typically, people will take the opportunity to ask questions or share their views on the disputes or other workplace issues. Remember: *demonstrating genuine care and trust lies at the heart of all good organising conversations and we do this in part by really listening to our co-workers!* You should aim for a 3:1 listening to speaking ratio. (See list of do's and don'ts below for more tips).

3) Respond to any questions raised about the union, the disputes and/or the MAB and *validate any concerns*. Explain that we are organising for an MAB, which is a different form of action than the actions we have taken previously and that we believe this form of action will provide us with greater leverage at the bargaining table because of the impact on awarding degrees and financial implications of this for our employers. For specific questions regarding the dispute, you may *refer them to the fliers, website or other UCU materials for further details*. If you don't know how to respond to particular questions or concerns, that's not a problem: just note down what they've said and take down their name and contact information. Let them know that you will get back to them – and then *follow up as soon as possible with answers from the branch*.

4) As you proceed with the conversation, gauge their level of familiarity with the union and the dispute. Co-workers will range from those who are very supportive of the action to those who might have an active antipathy towards the union – and everything in between! **Do not make assumptions about people's trade union backgrounds, knowledge base or views of the dispute.** Instead, respond on the basis of what is arising in the conversation and *meet people where they are at* (i.e., if the person you are speaking with seems unclear on what a trade union is, you will need to explain that first.)

5) “The Ask”. This is, for most of us, the most uncomfortable part of having one on one conversations but **it is the most important**. Before you leave, be sure to **ask your co-worker directly if they will commit to participating in the MAB – including if they have not yet been assigned marking and assessment responsibilities for this term**. If they are a ‘yes’ or a ‘maybe’ and are not currently a member, please encourage them to join the union. To help facilitate this, take down their name and contact information and *follow up as soon as possible* with a short email directing them to the link to join: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/join>.

6) **Answer any additional questions**, let them know about upcoming branch or departmental meetings or other union activities. **Reaffirm** that our strength in bargaining is our numbers and that you were glad to have a chance to talk with them.

IMPORTANT REMINDER: If you don’t know the answer to a question, that’s ok! Just take down your co-worker’s contact info and tell them that you will check with the branch and get back to them on this – and then be sure not to drop the ball! Remember: building genuine trust is essential to successful organising.

How do you handle objections or resistance from co-workers?

1) Acknowledge/Affirm

Acknowledge and affirm the feeling that someone has expressed if they are unsure about joining the union or about the marking and assessment boycott.

2) Address/Answer

Address the underlying concern or question that has led to the objection (for example: fear, disappointment in the union’s record to date, lack of information).

3) Return

Ask a question that takes people back to the issues at hand: we can both validate our co-workers’ feelings (i.e., fear, skepticism) and at the same time encourage them to see that we have the potential for a big win if we take this action together.

DO	DON'T
Listen more than you speak (3:1 ratio)	Talk down to people or over-intellectualise
Practice active listening: repeat and reflect	Be antagonistic or assume bad faith
Validate and empathise – take time to talk through concerns	Minimise or brush away concerns
Respect people’s intelligence	Assume you know better – everyone is in an expert on their own experience
Speak from the heart about why this matters to you and convey hope that we can win	<i>Remember: the root of all good organising is genuine trust and care. You’re not there to sell something or win a debate but to help your co-worker feel confident taking action!</i>

