



# UNA-UK Hustings Guide

UK GENERAL ELECTION 2010

### **About the author**

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### **About UNA-UK**

The United Nations Association of the UK (UNA-UK) is the UK's leading source of independent analysis on the UN and a grassroots membership organisation. UNA-UK's objectives are to increase knowledge about the United Nations and stimulate thought and debate about how to make it stronger, more credible and more effective.

UNA-UK works to promote support for the UN and multilateralism in four key areas:

- the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development
- peace and security
- human rights and humanitarian action
- strengthening the UN system

With its network of branches, regions and affiliated organisations, UNA-UK has a nationwide membership and supporter reach. UNA-UK also has a dynamic Youth and Student Association (UNYSA) and a strong Young Professionals Network (YPN), and is part of the World Federation of United Nations Associations, a network of UN Associations from around the world.

For more information about UNA-UK and our work with Parliament, contact Georgina Banks on [banks@una.org.uk](mailto:banks@una.org.uk) or 020 7766 3457.

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*“Support for the United Nations is not a contentious issue in the election. All three main parties have given the UN and UNA-UK their full support.*

*What is important is to get as many candidates as possible to publicly commit to our two main objectives – completing the inadequate accord on climate change reached at Copenhagen and setting a new direction of travel on multilateral nuclear disarmament aimed at securing a world free of nuclear weapons and on preventing the erosion of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. And if you can get candidates to take an interest in other aspects of the UN’s work – such as human rights, peacekeeping and the Millennium Development Goals – that will help our advocacy after the new Parliament assembles.*

*Britain needs a strong and effective UN; and the UN needs a British government that supports it with deeds and not just words.”*

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LORD HANNAY OF CHISWICK, CHAIR, UNA-UK

# Introduction

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This publication is designed to help UNA-UK members place international issues on the agenda during the forthcoming general election campaign. It gives step-by-step tips on how to go about organising a hustings meeting, looks at what a hustings can achieve, and considers what else members can do to raise international issues at this important time.

Holding a hustings is not only a fantastic way to raise key issues and find out where candidates stand on them. It also provides a great opportunity to publicise the activities of UNA-UK and appeal for new members. Make sure you have plenty of UNA-UK literature to distribute, including copies of the new membership and UNA Trust leaflets. If you would like extra copies, please contact Rich Nelmes on [membership@una.org.uk](mailto:membership@una.org.uk) or 020 7766 3456.

## UNA-UK and Parliament

UNA-UK interacts with British parliamentarians and the government in a number of ways:

- UNA-UK acts as the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the United Nations (UN APPG) – a cross-party group of parliamentarians supporting the aims and ideals of the UN. The primary objective of the UN APPG is to raise awareness of the work of the UN among MPs and Peers by highlighting its myriad contributions across the areas of peace and security, development, and human rights. The UN APPG recently co-hosted the UK parliamentary launch of the report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament – ‘Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers’.
- UNA-UK’s Chair, Lord Hannay of Chiswick, is a former British Ambassador to the UN. He is now a powerful advocate of UN issues in Parliament, regularly contributing to debates and questioning the government on issues relating to the work of the United Nations.
- The relationship between Britain and the UN is a key focus for UNA-UK. The organisation endeavours to influence British foreign policy in order to advance UN objectives by working closely with government departments and engaging in high-level advocacy.
- ‘Lobby for the UN’ is UNA-UK’s annual campaign to promote dialogue between voters and parliamentarians on UN issues throughout the parliamentary year. The 2009–10 lobby was launched on 27 October 2009 with a focus on climate change and nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

## UNA-UK priorities

UNA-UK carries out targeted advocacy in four main UN policy areas: the Millennium Development Goals and climate change, peace and security, human rights and humanitarian action, and strengthening the UN system. The sample questions in this hustings guide (see Appendix) are grouped according to those themes. The questions are intended to provide guidance and inspiration, in addition to illustrating UNA-UK's own position on the issues.

## Election 2010

It is anticipated that the 2010 general election will result in an unprecedented turnover of MPs in the House of Commons, which will present an important opportunity for UNA-UK to increase engagement with British parliamentarians.

The latest possible date for the election is 3 June 2010. Many political commentators expect it to be held on 6 May 2010 to coincide with the local elections being held in some areas but it could be called at any time, so the sooner you start planning your hustings the better.

## What are hustings?

**Hustings (noun, pl. or sing.) – a meeting at which candidates in an election address potential voters** (The Oxford Compact English Dictionary, 2nd Edition, Revised, OUP 2003).

A hustings is a public meeting where people can listen to and ask questions of the Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) standing for election in their constituency. They provide a valuable opportunity for political debate on neutral territory, and a forum where members of the public can raise important issues. Hustings are non-partisan and do not constitute an official, regulated part of an election, therefore there is no limit to the number of hustings held and no standard form for hustings.

## What can a hustings achieve?

The primary objective of a hustings is to identify where a candidate stands on certain issues. International or foreign policy issues can be overlooked during general election campaigns, so an internationally-focused hustings meeting can prove a valuable way in which to raise

*Foreign policy issues can be overlooked during general election campaigns, so an internationally-focused hustings can prove valuable*

such issues. While it is unlikely that you will change the mind of a candidate at a hustings event, these meetings give organisations and individuals an opportunity to influence the future thinking of both the candidates and the other members of the audience who, by virtue of their presence at the meeting, are likely to be politically conscious.

Hustings therefore present an invaluable opportunity to place an issue on the local agenda and to engage people in the work of UNA-UK. UNA branches can also use hustings to renew their relationship with their existing Member of Parliament or initiate dialogue with a potential new MP, and to find out where he or she stands on international issues.

# How to organise a hustings

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## Contact the candidates

First you need to find out who the candidates in your constituency are. You will find full listings of the PPCs on each of the party websites – web addresses for the six largest national parties are given below:

**Conservative Party**

[www.conservatives.com/People/Prospective\\_Parliamentary\\_Candidates.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/People/Prospective_Parliamentary_Candidates.aspx)

Tel: 020 7222 9000

**Green Party**

[www.greenparty.org.uk/contact.html](http://www.greenparty.org.uk/contact.html)

Tel: 020 7272 4474

**Labour Party**

[www.labour.org.uk/ppc/constituencies/](http://www.labour.org.uk/ppc/constituencies/)

Tel: 08705 900 200

**Liberal Democrat Party**

[www.libdems.org.uk/in\\_your\\_area.aspx](http://www.libdems.org.uk/in_your_area.aspx)

Tel: 020 7222 7999

**Plaid Cymru**

[www.plaidcymru.org](http://www.plaidcymru.org)

Tel: 029 20 472272

**Scottish National Party**

[www.snp.org/people/candidates/westminster](http://www.snp.org/people/candidates/westminster)

Tel: 0800 633 5432

Contact the Returning Officer at your local council for details of any other candidates once nominations have closed.

## Planning

As with the organisation of any event, planning in advance is very important. Ideally you should pencil in a date for the meeting and provisionally book a venue before the election is called. You can then write to the candidates informing them that you are planning to hold a hustings event, explaining the aims of the meeting, giving them the provisional date, time and potential location, and inviting them to participate. When the election date is announced, write to them again to confirm the date and the details of the meeting. It is particularly important to act quickly once the election has actually been called as candidates and their election agents will quickly become very busy.

It might also help to give your hustings meeting a title or a theme, for example:

- 'International affairs, foreign policy and the UN'
- 'Britain's responsibilities in the world and our relationship with the UN'

Make sure you give the title and full details of the event (including which other candidates are being invited) to the candidates well in advance to give them time to prepare. Hustings events usually focus on domestic policy issues so candidates will often welcome the opportunity to discuss international issues and foreign policy.

It is also important to decide well in advance who will chair the meeting. It is crucial that the Chair is not involved or identified with any particular political party. It is also important that they will be able to chair the meeting effectively and firmly, ensuring that speakers stick to time limits and focus on the questions asked.

### More tips

- Sunday evening is a popular time to hold a hustings, ideally during the three weeks immediately preceding the election.
- Make sure you choose a suitable venue with full disability access. A public address system and roving microphones can also be of benefit (but make sure there is a hearing loop in place).
- It can be helpful to have a couple of 'stewards' on standby during the meeting to offer any assistance required, such as passing around the roving microphones for questions.
- Check if any other hustings meetings are being held in the constituency so that you can avoid a scheduling clash. Any of the campaign offices of the main political parties should be able to provide you with this information.

## Who to invite?

You are not obliged by law to invite all candidates to a hustings but in the interests of freedom of speech and impartiality, it should be encouraged. However, consideration should be given to the following factors:

- If there are a large number of candidates standing in your constituency, it may be wise to invite only the candidates representing the main political parties, otherwise the meeting could become unmanageable and time for questions limited.
- The impact that the participation of extremist candidates may have on the meeting, such as discouraging other candidates from attending, or the potential for disruption during the meeting.

If a candidate refuses or is unable to attend, you may wish to offer them the opportunity to provide a short statement to be read out at the beginning of the meeting.

## Publicity

As soon as the election is called, try to publicise the meeting as widely as possible.

Be prepared – make some posters in advance, and draw up a list of all the public places where details of the hustings can be advertised. This will enable you to act as quickly as possible once the election is announced.

### Ideas for places to publicise your hustings

- Public libraries
- Post offices
- Places of worship
- Community centres/notice boards
- Shop windows/supermarkets
- Doctors'/dentists' surgeries
- Local newspaper listings
- Local internet bulletin boards and websites such as Facebook, Meetup etc.

When you confirm the date of the hustings with the candidates, let them know how and where you have publicised the meeting. They may also wish to publicise it themselves through their campaign office.

Send a brief notice about the hustings to local newspapers and radio stations, giving as much notice as possible and including contact numbers and email addresses for further details.

You may also wish to inform the local police that you are organising a public meeting.

## Format

It is important to decide the format of the meeting in advance. Some points to consider are:

- How will you handle questions? You may wish to ask for questions to be submitted in writing before the meeting or, alternatively, you may be happy to take questions from the floor on the day.
- If submitted in advance, will you group the questions according to topic?
- If you decide to take questions from the floor, will you line up the first question in advance to get things moving?
- Will you apply a time limit to each question, and to each speaker? If so, how long will you allow? How will you time each contribution?
- Will you ask candidates to respond in the same order for every question? If not, ensure you rotate the order fairly.

However you decide to run your meeting, brief the candidates on the format beforehand.

## Suggested format

- Welcome by Chair and brief explanation of how the meeting will run (including ‘housekeeping’ announcements such as the location of fire exits)
- Brief introduction of each candidate by Chair
- Short opening statement by each candidate (3–4 mins)
- Questions from the floor – allowing each candidate to answer (a maximum of 2 mins for each question)
- Brief closing remarks from each candidate (3–4 mins)
- Closing remarks by Chair (thanking the candidates and the audience for their participation)

When making his or her welcoming remarks, it is also advisable for the Chair to explain to the audience how the meeting will run.

In addition to answering questions posed by the audience, each candidate should also be given the opportunity to make brief introductory and closing remarks.

## What to ask?

First and foremost, it is important to ensure that your question is clear and concise. Each question should focus on one issue only – a short introductory statement can help to set the scene. It is also important to remember that, while candidates can be expected to have a general understanding of international issues, elections are usually fought and won on domestic issues. It is unfair to expect them to have detailed knowledge of complex UN procedures and issues!

Given that the remit and activities of the UN cover such a wide issue-base, it may be a good idea to liaise with other branch members in advance of the meeting, in order to try to cover as many issues as possible and avoid repetition.

We have included a list of sample questions relating to our four key policy areas and priorities. (See Appendix). However, you could also ask some general questions, such as:

- If elected, would you consider joining the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the United Nations?
- How important do you believe the work of the United Nations is in the world today?
- What role do you think Britain should play at the United Nations?

## Follow-up

If a candidate is evasive and does not really answer the question, do not be afraid to seek further clarification. If you remain unsatisfied, ask the candidate if he or she would be willing to send you a written response after the meeting.

Let us know how your meeting went, especially if a candidate makes a firm commitment to a particular issue or to joining the UN APPG, as this will enable us to follow-up with them, should they be elected.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UNA-UK acts as the secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the United Nations (UN APPG) – an informal cross-party group of parliamentarians whose objective is to raise awareness of the work of the UN among MPs and Peers.

## What else can you do?

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If your branch does not have the capacity to organise a hustings on its own, it may be possible to band together with other local, like-minded civil society organisations. Local Amnesty International, Oxfam or Friends of the Earth groups can make excellent partners.

Alternatively, you and other members of your branch could participate in a hustings meeting that is already taking place. Local newspapers normally carry listings of hustings events, as will community notice boards and local libraries. Churches, mosques, temples and synagogues sometimes host hustings events so it is worth checking their websites or notice boards. The local campaign offices of the candidates should also be able to provide you with this information.

If you attend an 'external' hustings meeting, it can sometimes be helpful to make contact with the organisers in advance to discuss the question you plan to ask. This way you can reassure them that your question is relevant and will add value to the meeting, and you are more likely to get called to speak.

General election campaigns are a great time to engage with the public, as people are more receptive during these periods. However, holding or attending a hustings meeting is not the only way to get UNA-UK's messages across during the election campaign. You can also:

- Write to your local candidates and publish their responses on websites or in newsletters.
- Write to the local press – letters pages are one of the most widely read sections of a newspaper. Politicians monitor them closely to get a feel for local opinion, and to gain an understanding of which issues are of particular concern to their constituents.
- Air your views on one of the many websites set up specifically for the election.
- Contribute to debate through local radio phone-ins.

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## Other resources

### **UNA-UK's website – [www.una.org.uk](http://www.una.org.uk)**

In particular our Parliament page – [www.una.org.uk/parliament](http://www.una.org.uk/parliament)

### **UN system websites:**

The United Nations – [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

UN Millennium Development Goals campaign – [www.endpoverty2015.org](http://www.endpoverty2015.org)

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change – [www.unfccc.int](http://www.unfccc.int)

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights – [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)

UN Office for Disarmament Affairs – [www.un.org/disarmament](http://www.un.org/disarmament)

### **Other useful websites:**

[www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)

[www.guardian.co.uk/politics/general-election-2010](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/general-election-2010)

[www.telegraph.co.uk/news/election-2010/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/election-2010/)

[www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/election\\_2010/](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/election_2010/)

# Appendix

Advocating British support for the UN and an active role for the UK in international forums are ongoing priorities for UNA-UK. In 2010-11, we are also pushing for action to:

- Achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals
- Work towards a world without nuclear weapons
- Strengthen the protection of human rights
- Secure a new global climate deal

Below are some sample questions to put to parliamentary candidates. They are grouped thematically and are also intended to provide a steer on UNA-UK's position. We hope that these suggestions will serve to inspire your own ideas, especially if there is a particular local angle to any of these issues.

## Britain and the UN

- What role do you think Britain should play at the UN? How can the UK best contribute to helping the UN achieve its aims of peace, development and human rights?
- If elected, would you consider joining the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the United Nations? (This is an informal group of MPs and Peers interested in the work the UN)
- What aspects of the UN's work do you believe Parliament should give particular attention to in 2010/11?

## Britain's role in fighting poverty

- Over a billion people in the world live on less than £1 a day and don't know where their next meal will come from. What should the UK do to help achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals – eight time-bound objectives to fight poverty by 2015 agreed by world leaders in the year 2000?
- The government, under both Labour and the Conservatives, has been committed to providing 0.7% of gross national product as official development assistance but we have still not reached this target. In 2008, UK expenditure on development aid was 0.43%. Do you support the draft legislation currently before Parliament to enshrine this 0.7% commitment into British law?

- Many organisations and economists have spoken out in favour of the 'Robin Hood Tax' campaign – an initiative supporting a currency transactions levy to raise money to fight poverty. Do you support such a levy? In what other ways can we secure the much-needed funds to help eliminate extreme poverty?

### Britain's role in furthering peace and security

- Recent initiatives – from US-Russian commitments to reduce their nuclear arsenals to the British Top-Level Group on multilateral disarmament – have breathed new life into efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons. What can the UK do to further the aim of a world without nuclear weapons?
- UN peacekeepers play a vital role in maintaining international peace and security. Can and should the UK do more to support UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts?

### Britain's role in strengthening the protection of human rights

- What can the UK do to further the protection of human rights around the world and to improve the UN's capacity to deal with the worst abuses?
- When the UK was reviewed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2008, some areas of concern were highlighted, including terrorism legislation, violence against women and the prevalent levels of poverty among children and older people in the UK. What should the government do to tackle these issues, and to ensure that the rights of British citizens are protected?
- The UK has signed most of the main international human rights treaties but not the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families. Do you believe the UK should sign this convention?

### Britain's role in tackling climate change

- Do you believe that climate change is happening and that human activity is a cause?
- After the debacle of the Copenhagen climate change conference last December, how can we best work towards a climate deal at the international level?
- What further policies should be implemented at a local level to address the causes and effects of climate change?



**UNA-UK**

For more information visit [www.una.org.uk](http://www.una.org.uk)