

# An advocacy guide:

## Engaging MP's, Parliament and Government

Science and Discovery Centres and Museums across the UK are doing a fantastic job inspiring and engaging millions of children and adults with all areas of science, including environmental science.

However, many MPs, Parliamentary Select Committees and policy makers in Government may be unaware of this excellent work, and how you bring such important science topics to a huge number of people across the UK.

This programme offers an excellent way to celebrate your work with policy makers.

Over the last year, NERC has been growing its engagement with Government and Parliament with the aim of raising its profile with these audiences. NERC scientists have been going into Parliament to talk about their cutting-edge research, engaging directly with selected MPs and building links with important Parliamentary services like POST (The Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology) and the Parliamentary libraries.

The public are such an important part of the decisions we make as a nation for the future and NERC want MPs to know that they are working to engage their constituents with the science they fund.

ASDC also works closely with Government and Parliament, and has shared the work of the UK Science and Discovery Centres on hundreds of occasions over the years with Ministers, civil servants, MPs and Parliamentary Select Committees. ASDC also came up with the idea for the Inspiring



Science Fund and worked with Government to secure £30 million for UK Science Centres.

There are benefits for both the science centres and MPs to work more closely together, including increasing your profile at the highest level, increased media attention when MPs are at events and showcasing how you share the latest science and innovation with a broad spectrum of people.

As a nation and as a global society we have some huge challenges ahead that will take a combination of societal change and technological innovation to solve. In the UK we have an impressive national infrastructure of Science Centres and Museums attracting over 20 million people each year, passionate about sharing the stories and science of the latest environmental research.

Across this programme, ASDC are offering to assist the partnering science centres, should they wish, to engage with Parliament and Government through direct contact with MPs and Ministers and engagement with Parliamentary groups such as Select Committees.



## Getting started

1. Our aim is to give staff the confidence to undertake advocacy, and to make this very time efficient.
2. The first step is to speak with your manager or CEO, to find out if someone in your centre is in charge of working with local MPs, Parliamentary Committees or central government.
3. Find which MPs have been to your science centre in the past year.
4. ASDC is happy to help your centre.

## Drafting your advocacy plan

Having your MP at any event is a win – win situation. They are seen championing an educational charity that inspires children with STEM and raises family science capital, and your organisation shares your great work in a high-profile way. A photo shoot and social media is hugely beneficial to both.

Your advocacy plan will largely be from web research and should take only a few hours to compile. In your plan, answer the following questions and use as much knowledge from colleagues as possible.

### Who are your local MPs?

Create a list, giving their names, their constituency, their party, and their main interests related to your organisation. This information is at:

[www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps](http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps)

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



## Which of your local MPs are on relevant Select Committees?

The Parliamentary Select Committees are made up of MPs. They consider policy, scrutinise the work of Government, and examine proposals for legislation. To find the members of each committee as well as their latest inquiries, use the navigation on the left of their website ([www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk)).

Search online for the following committees:

1. The Parliamentary Select Committee for Science and Technology
2. The Parliamentary Select Committee for Education
3. The Parliamentary Select Committee for Environment, food and rural affairs

## Are there any current relevant inquiries?

Look through the websites above, and list any inquiries that are related to STEM, the environment, education, children, social justice and other areas in which your organisation operates. Use the advice in the following pages to write a submission to showcase the work of your charity. Also look at the Select Committees in the Lords in the areas of Science, Education or Environment.

## Consider inviting Ministers

Find out the name of the Science Minister, Environment Minister and Education Minister, as well as the Secretaries of State for their Departments. Are their constituencies near your centre? Is there any other reason they might visit you? For example, they grew up in your area or are likely to visit something nearby.

## Write a plan of which MPs to contact

Draw up a plan of what you will do. Include which MPs you will contact and what area will most interest them in your work on the environment, STEM and education. Think what would be of most benefit to them.

## How to invite an MP

Consider the following:

- Asking them to launch Operation Earth.
- Inviting them to a busy family event in the school holidays with environmental scientists.
- Inviting them with their family at a weekend, where they can announce something and have photos taken.
- Inviting them to a schools event with a photo opportunity with children.
- Taking Operation Earth out to an outreach event where they will be, and asking for photos.

## Developing a relationship with the MP

Many of you will know your MPs and ministers well. For those who don't, here is a guide. The main point is always use their interests as your starting point and consider what will help them. Keep any invitation short and to the point.

Once you have decided who to contact, find their email or telephone number online. If you are in their local constituency, you can approach their local office to invite them to a specific event, or make an appointment in the surgery to tell them about your great work locally and invite them to visit. Alternatively, phone their office in Parliament and speak with their researcher or secretary, tell them about your centre in or near their constituency and that you would like to invite them to visit to see the work you do with children and families. You will likely be invited to send an email with the details

## What dates and days work for MPs?

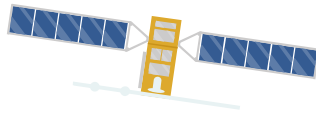
Before issuing an invite, find out which days of the week and times of the year MPs will likely be in their constituency and tailor your request. For example, Parliament sits in a pattern roughly similar to the school terms (with some additional recesses), so your MP will likely be in London from Monday to Thursday in term-times. However, they are often in their constituency working (and thus near your centre) on Fridays, weekends and in school holidays. This is perfect for this family programme. Ask their office when they are likely to be in your region and get back to them with an event.

## What types of events to invite your MPs to?

Raise your profile with them. Tell them what you do and the numbers of people you reach each year. Tell them how you inspire girls with STEM and the programmes you run to engage children from disadvantaged communities with science. Speak to their hearts and offer them things that interest you both. Tell them you are part of a national programme engaging 100,000 children and adults with NERC environmental science.

You could invite them to see what you do on a busy weekend, or suggest a photo shoot with Earthy on Earth Day, or ask them to launch this programme or an exhibition.





### Some key messages for MPs

1. Your centre engages and inspires e.g. 280,000 children and adults each year.
2. You are part of an impressive national network reaching 20 million and we all collaborate and work together (give them the UK ASDC map).
3. You have been selected as one of ten centres to run Operation Earth bringing the latest NERC environmental science to families.
4. Give a summary of the mission and vision of the programme.

### How to submit into Select Committee Inquiry

#### Keep a watch for relevant inquiries

There are many ways to find out about the latest inquiries.

1. Follow the committees on Twitter @CommonSTC
2. Sign up to the ASDC newsletter via [www.sciencecentres.org.uk](http://www.sciencecentres.org.uk)
3. Sign up to the newsletter from each of the parliamentary committees of interest.
4. Look on the Select Committees website.

### The deadline and how to submit

The deadline is given on the Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry page. Sometimes, if you have missed it you can send in a late submission. Phone the Clerk of the Committee to see if this is possible (see 'contact us' on their website).

You need to submit online through their website. Write it as a word document, and upload it along with your contact details.

### What should I write?

This guide aims to make it easy and quick to write a submission, especially if it is your first time.

1. Go to the committee page and find the relevant inquiry. For example on science learning or air quality.
2. Read the 'Terms of reference' i.e. what the Inquiry aims to find out, and see what your organisation does that is relevant.
3. Check no one else in your organisation is writing it - and begin.
4. Keep it very short (few pages) and do not include images, logos or photos (read the guidance).
5. In the first paragraph, give an overview of your centre, what you do, how many people you engage annually, and what topics. Use a standard introduction text, e.g. from your annual report.
6. In the second paragraph, say why your work is relevant to their inquiry. For example, you are running a science engagement programme working with 10,000 people sharing the latest science on air quality, or that each year you engage 250,000 people with STEM and environmental science.





**7.** Use the next few paragraphs to summarise specifically what you want them to know and what is important to their Inquiry. Remember that a programme getting 10,000 people talking about environmental science is quite a big thing to politicians. Many submissions will say they have engaged 200 people.

- Include that your centre does this every day of the year and has expert science engagement staff.
- Include if you reach disadvantaged families and how you do this.
- Close with an offer to invite any member to see your STEM engagement in action, or offer to give evidence in person if the inquiry is very relevant to your work.
- You can use national impact data from the ASDC website if you wish.

**8.** Get your submission approved by your CEO or senior staff.

**9.** Submit it through their website.

**10.** If you have a key point well made, then it may be quoted in the report issued by Parliament. Otherwise it will be published in the evidence section.

## The Key Messages

### The Operation Earth vision

To engage, inspire and involve families with school-age children across the UK with the amazing stories, science and people of NERC's world-leading environmental research, highlighting the relevance of contemporary environmental science issues to their daily lives and to society's future.



### The Operation Earth mission

To deliver an inspirational and exciting national hands-on environmental science programme celebrating the science of the natural environment, the latest research and the scientists who make it happen, through activities and experiments for families and the wider public delivered through the successful infrastructure of the UK's science and discovery centres and science museums.

### The national picture

The UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC) is the national organisation that brings together the UK's major science engagement organisations to play a strategic role in the nation's engagement with science. Within our network are over 60 of the nation's largest publicly accessible science centres, discovery centres, science museums and scientific bodies. Together, our vision is for a society where people of all backgrounds and in all parts of the UK are inspired and fully involved with the sciences.

Every year in the UK, 20 million people of all ages and backgrounds choose to engage with science at one of the UK's science and discovery centres or science museums. This equates to 385,000 people every week who come to our member centres to explore and discuss science in an involving and personal way. Over half (ten million) are girls and women. Over half, are school-age children.