

HOW TO NEGOTIATE WITH UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

BRIEFING

people & planet

If we want to win the Fossil Free Careers campaign, we need to get university management to agree to our demands. Most often, this will involve an element of negotiating with decision-makers at your university: speaking to them in a meeting and trying to convince them to take action aligned with your campaign demands.

Whether your university careers' service offers to meet with you as soon as they're made aware of your campaign, or whether it takes you months of emails and escalatory actions to get a reluctant manager to the negotiating table, negotiations can be an extremely strategic way of securing real change on your campus. This guide will help you prepare for and make the most out of negotiations.

STEP 1: GETTING MANAGEMENT TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE

The first challenge of holding a Fossil Free Careers negotiation is getting anyone in university management to talk to you! Occasionally, sympathetic staff will approach you once they're made aware of your campaign. But most of the time, getting anyone with decision-making power to the negotiating table involves lots of emails, persistence, and back-and-forth liaison, as well as the risk of being ghosted!

Consider strategy

Negotiating with management, like staging a protest, is a tactic within your broader campaign strategy. It is important to know how any meeting or negotiation with management fits within your strategy and to be intentional about why you are going into that room or call.

Identify who you need to talk to

Every university will have a different decision-making structure, and there's no one-size-fits-all approach to who within a university has the final sign-off on an Ethical Careers Policy. Sometimes it's whoever heads up the Careers service (they'll usually have a job title like Head of Careers and Employability). Other times, it may be someone who has a broader remit; often with a job title like Director of Student Services or VP of Student Experience.

University decision-making structures can seem daunting, so we recommend that you start by

approaching senior people within the careers service. Start with someone who has a job title like “Head of” or “Director of”. If you don’t receive a response, try careers service staff with “Manager” in their title.

If you’re in touch with your Students’ Union about this campaign, they may be able to direct you towards the best person to talk to. You may also wish to approach staff who you feel could be sympathetic to the campaign – such as those who work in the sustainability team – for guidance.

Reach out to them

Write an email to the staff stating who you are and why you feel it’s important to speak to them. Wherever possible, tailor this to your university’s context, or to the person you’re speaking to. For example, if your university cites on its website that it is a “world leader in sustainability,” you may want to quote this.

Take a polite and professional tone in your email. Some university staff support the Fossil Free Careers campaign – you might find an unexpected ally!

If you don’t receive a response from your contact, send follow up emails at 2 or 3 week intervals. This helps remind them that the campaign is important, and that it’s not going away. Where your careers department has lots of staff, try emailing multiple people. If you still don’t receive a response, try staff in other roles – for example those working in sustainability.

You might receive a positive response which invites you to discuss the topic further. Alternatively, they may try to shut down or dismiss the conversation. Don’t be disheartened if this happens: many university managers can be dismissive of students, but we still have the power to put pressure on them and make sure they pay attention to our demands. You may want to keep pushing them to meet with you, or you may look at different tactics to get their attention such as passing a students’ union motion or staging a protest.

STEP 2: PREPARING FOR NEGOTIATIONS

Knowing what you want

Get together before the meeting and decide what you want out of it. Write it down and bring it with you – everyone in the room needs to be on the same page about it. It is possible that you will have multiple negotiation meetings with your university throughout the campaign – so you may want different things depending on where your campaign is at and depending on your strategy.

Information gathering

Write down the questions you want answered. Make sure they answer them and don't leave until they do.

Prepare your arguments

Think about what you are likely to be asked during the meeting. Try and pre-prepare answers if you can. Bring them with you in written form. Check out our FAQ resource for common arguments that the university may throw at you and ways to counter them.

Know who you are speaking to

Ideally you would have already done this while power-mapping your institution but it is worth digging up a bit on the people you will be negotiating with. You can look up their public profiles online, social media pages etc. If you think a specific university staff member should or should not be part of the university's negotiation team, raise it although it might not be possible to change that.

Accountability, always!

Publicise the fact that you've got the meeting on social media and on your mailing list if you have one beforehand, AND what you will be asking/trying to get out of it. This brings a greater level of accountability. Update people after.

Agenda-setting and facilitation

Make sure the agenda is set in advance. Ideally you'd fully set the agenda. The minimum is that all the issues you want to touch upon are at the top of the agenda (earlier in the meeting rather than later). Ensure you know how the facilitation is going to be conducted - is it informal or is someone going to facilitate? If so can you pick who that will be? You could ask for facilitation to be alternating (either during the meeting, i.e. one half each, or every other meeting if you know they are going to be regular).

STEP 3: CONDUCTING A NEGOTIATION

Your team

- Bring enough people that you can take detailed minutes and fully participate in the conversation. It is best to have designated negotiators and designated note-takers.
- Write down the points the university is making even if they are not questions.
- Capture direct quotes when someone is saying something outrageous. This will be very useful

later. The more detailed the minutes are the better.

- You can demand to bring silent observers in the meeting. They can take notes and also give you live feedback via messages or on a live Google Docs.
- If more than one person is negotiating on behalf of your group, you could each focus on certain themes / arguments / asks. This means that one person doesn't have to remember all the information. You can also do good cop / bad cop roles (one of you seems more compromising/understanding of the university's argument and the other has stronger hard lines).
- As a group you need to agree before the meeting what can and cannot be decided upon in the meeting. If something unexpected arises - it is always best to say you will bring it back to the group rather than making a decision on the spot.
- Decide in advance as a group in which circumstances you'd walk out of negotiations before the end of the meeting. For instance, if the university shows no good faith, is being dismissive, if the conversation is not going anywhere or keeps on getting derailed etc. This can be a powerful way of being taken seriously, especially if you publicly escalate afterwards. However, it's worth considering how to use this move strategically, as once you've walked out of a negotiation it may be harder to follow up and ask for another one.
- Keep track of time during the meeting and make sure you are not getting derailed.

Questions

- When they ask you a question, it's okay to take a moment to think it through, or write it down. Ask them to repeat it if you want to buy time or clarify it.
- If you are confident and you know the answer – go for it.
- If you are not confident with answering it – say you will get back to them after the meeting. Answer them via email, and make it public : 'We met with X on X date. He asked these questions, we are answering here for transparency.' – put it on social media.

Opening the meeting

- When the meeting starts, be clear with them what you want out of it (or what you want them to think you want). You can decide how warm or cold you want to be with them ("thank you for meeting with us" etc.)

Your demands

- Don't be afraid to say 'We're not here to talk about X, we're here to talk about Y' if the topic is getting derailed. Universities will always try to derail the conversation so be prepared and intervene as soon as possible to bring the focus back on what you want.
- Bring your asks, decide what are the must haves, and what you can remove as concessions.
- If the university is particularly objecting to one thing, you may want to take this out in order to gain something else.
- Return to your key message over and over. When you answer a question, finish by bringing it back to your key ask again. This is really important to keep the conversation on track. Don't be afraid to repeat yourself – the clearer, the better!

FOSSIL FREE CAREERS DEMANDS FOR UNIVERSITY CAREERS SERVICE:

- Refuse all new relationships with oil, gas or mining companies
- Decline to renew any current relationships with oil, gas or mining companies after the contractually obligated period ends
- Adopt a publicly available Ethical Careers Policy that explicitly excludes oil, gas and mining companies from recruitment opportunities

It is highly unlikely that these demands will be agreed to in the first meeting with university management. However, we would hope that the careers service will, maybe over the course of a few meetings, concede to do something. Our negotiating strategy is therefore about understanding which concessions would build a base for the campaign going forward, and which would set the campaign back from achieving its ultimate goals.



FOSSIL FREE CAREERS POTENTIAL CONCESSIONS YOU MAY CONSIDER:

Partial exclusions. At this early stage in the campaign, we have to be aware that we may not achieve all our demands straight away. Any company or industry exclusion can be a positive first step, but that doesn't mean our work is over. For example, a university may agree to exclude fossil fuel companies but not mining companies. Or exclude coal companies but not oil and gas. These may be first steps we are able to accept and then push from.

Exclusions from limited areas of careers service interactions. For example, the university may be willing to exclude oil, gas and mining companies from physical careers fairs, but not from job listings and other things. Rather than refusing this, it could be strategic to accept it as a first step to your ultimate goals. When a university makes a concession like this it often creates a contradiction which you can later exploit. For example: If the university doesn't see extractive industries as appropriate for careers fairs due to ethics and sustainability concerns, why is it appropriate to promote jobs in those industries to the student body through mailing lists?

Common distractions to be aware of

A favourite tactic of universities in negotiations is stalling (delaying your campaign progressing by distracting you or swamping you with unnecessary work).

- They may offer you to create 'working groups' behind closed doors which may or may not include students, but takes the public element of the campaign off the table. You can assess the good-faith of the working group as it goes along, and do not be afraid to resign or go public if you feel like you're being messed around.
- A second way that universities may delay your campaign is by proposing lengthy 'consultations'. This may be with students or with staff or both, but they often take a very very long time. Consultations can be beneficial to prove there is support for your campaign, but make sure the terms to which you agree are fair. Propose a reasonable timeline (never more than 3 months) and try to make sure the outcome of the consultation has university action attached to it. The main issue with consultations is that they do not give students any decision-making power and they often result in your demands being extremely watered down or not met at all.

- Another favoured tactic of university management is to tell you that they don't have responsibility for this area of work, or that they don't have the power to make the changes you are proposing. This may be genuine, or it may be a delay tactic. If they say this, make sure you get them to clearly articulate who they believe does have the power to implement an Ethical Careers Policy. Ask them to put you in touch with that person or committee, with clear timeframes for doing so so that you can hold them to account. If it feels like you're being passed between lots of different departments or staff members, don't be afraid to call them out for sending you round in circles.
- They may try to not address your arguments or gaslight you with other points - make sure to check out our FAQ resource to be prepared!

End of the meeting

- Ensure you have a clear and agreed action plan for taking the conversation forward.
- Read through the list of action points and ensure that each one has a named person identified to do them and a timeline for doing them. This will help with accountability. For instance, if you've noted down "careers team want to review their current policy", make sure you note down "Person X from Careers Team has agreed they will review the current policy within the next two weeks, and share the outcome of this."
- Where possible, agree on a date and time to hold your next meeting. You may want to have one of your team setting up a Zoom link or sharing a calendar invite before the meeting finishes, so that it becomes harder for management to back out of the call.
- Thank management for their time, and remind them that you'll be back in touch soon. Your first negotiation meeting is not the end of the story - it is just the beginning!

STEP 4: AFTER THE NEGOTIATION

Debrief

- Debrief immediately after the meeting. They are really stressful – go and get a coffee and talk it through.
- Write down what you will need to prepare / research for your next interactions with management.

- Make sure you have all the quotes/minutes you need whilst they are fresh in your mind.
- Let us (People & Planet) know how it went!

Follow up with uni

- If the uni agreed to anything at all, send a follow up email to confirm this and attach dates to it.
- The university might have a note-taker as well - make sure you get their version and make amendments where necessary. This can be useful in future talks with management if you need to refer to elements that came up in previous meetings.

Communicate

- If this is part of your plan, publicise on social media the outcome of the negotiation as soon as possible. Feel free to tag us or make a collab request with us!