



Love our ARPS

Notes from the IT member focus group

18 June 2021

1. What are the key issues for IT members arising from the pandemic?

- Homeworking is affecting UCU recruitment of IT members, and the visibility of the union which adds to the sense of isolation people experience.
- Workload has increased through voluntary severance, increased use of Fixed Term Contracts and remote working.
- Casualisation of staff by moving to FTCs.
- Centralisation of IT services away from Schools/Faculties.
- Downgrading of staff roles when replaced.
- Supporting hardware not necessarily supplied by the employer and no further remuneration provided for extra costs of homeworking.

2. Have any staff faced pressure to return to campus due to the nature of the role?

- Depends on role.
- Uni of Manchester IT management have been good at not forcing staff back to campus.

3. What has UCU done to support members with these issues, and what more can be done?

- Active branch mailing list with good, broad discussions.
- Important to have PS members on the branch committee.
- Mapping is happening in branches to understand where the membership is as a result of the Organising4Power training
- Barriers to supporting members – Members expect the branch committee to lead, and they don't realise they need to push on the issues that matter to them; hard to identify IT members with many not in centralised IT team meaning branches don't engage with IT staff based in departments; and tough to prioritise IT concerns when VS has dominated.

4. What are the concerns for IT staff about online and hybrid working?

- Staff not getting the equipment they need, so they are using personal computers which creates cyber-security issues.
- Adds to workloads of IT staff because they have to make remote connections accessible and functional.
- Concern that IT staff may be required to do home visits in future to provide IT support.
- Threadbare services are being stretched thinner because of extended working hours.
- Pressure to work longer hours.
- No consultation with IT staff on IT procurement and purchasing, with the timescales of these accelerated.
- Increased stress because of long hours or trying to fit too much in when working remotely. Fear this could become the norm.
- Staff bearing the costs of working from home not universities.
- What can we do to address these concerns?
- Discussion around the Right to Disconnect - there was concern expressed about the response of employers to this with fears expressed that management will use this as an excuse to push for a return to campus or a more formal agreement around flexible working which won't allow the flexibility people appreciate. If UCU pushed for this, then branches should be prepared for these possible responses from the employers and a negative response from staff. There was a fear that this could individualise things around workload/long hours.
- UCU could produce guidance about what is and isn't reasonable in terms of employer requests.
- We must remember that current hybrid working arrangements are a response to the pandemic and not an ideal.
- We need to encourage older workers to support younger colleagues who are trying to progress their careers and will work longer hours etc without questioning.
- Encourage IT workers to sit on university governance committees particularly those involved in commissioning IT infrastructure.
- Are there positives we can encourage?
- Encourage our members not to undertake work involving others (and thus emails) outside of working hours – send emails when you want them actioned!

5. How can UCU members in IT work with other unions who are active in your area?

- IT members are spread across 3 unions (UCU, Unison and Unite) so this can dilute strength. Also concern expressed that the failure of other unions to share facilities time out often means that fresh voices and perspectives don't come through. Fresh voices key in some UCU branches.
- Uni of Edinburgh branch is working with Unison regarding the use of UniTemps – anti-casualisation reps are leading on this. So find issues you can co-operate on.

- Identify Reps from the other union branches, make contact and share ideas. Meet to agree a unified approach on key issues.
- National and local joint statements for the unions on areas we agree on would be useful to branches.

Participants hoped that this was the start of a conversation and wanted to meet again.