

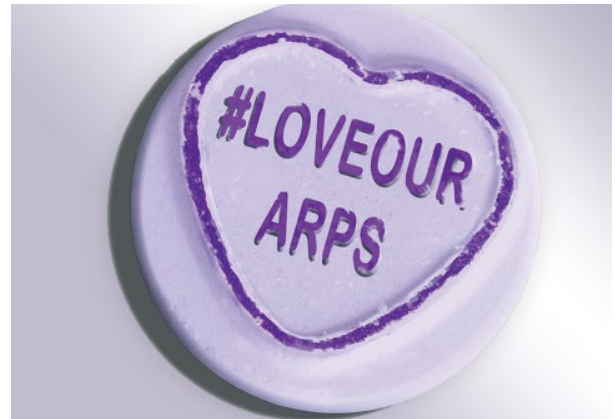
...and related

The Newsletter for Academic Related and Professional Services Staff in Higher Education

Welcome to the Autumn 2021 edition of ...and related

Strike action and action short of strike has been announced at 58 universities, with many academic-related and professional services staff involved in the disputes on USS pensions; pay; pay equality; insecure contracts and workload.

The UCU website will provide updates about the disputes here: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/hedisputes>



Love Our ARPS – Month of activities

Thanks to everyone who joined us during the 'Love Our ARPS – more than just a lecturer's union' month of events in June/July. In particular those who expressed an interest in joining one of our focus groups, and to those who were selected to participate - your input and ideas were much appreciated.

You can read the notes from the focus groups, watch the launch event and see the [webinar on the experiences of professional services staff during the pandemic](https://www.ucu.org.uk/love-our-ARPS) on the website - <https://www.ucu.org.uk/love-our-ARPS>. This section of the website also contains the [ARPS recruitment & organising video](#), [recruitment materials](#), [ARPS manifesto](#) and the [model branch claim](#) which you are encouraged to use to help with building ARPS membership and addressing the issues of yourself and fellow ARPS members.

Feedback from the events has been discussed by the ARPS Committee and will inform the work the Committee undertakes over the year.

We are all UCU: building branch ARPS groups

ARPS members of UCU make up around 10% of the membership, yet unlike academic colleagues, they are often dispersed widely across each University and membership density varies across ARPS departments and functions. It can be hard to find allies under these circumstances and to make ARPS voices heard in branches. If you've ever shouted '*it's not just a lecturer's union*' at the tv or radio then read on, because there is a way of trying to counter this, raise the profile of ARPS members and carve a place for them in your branches.

The University of Sheffield's ARPS group was born out of picket line conversations during the 2018 strikes which discussed these very issues. Isolation, confusion over ASOS and the difficulties of striking dominated the inaugural meeting, which attracted around 40 members from a wide range of ARPS roles. These included Heads of Service, Learning Developers and Library staff, amongst a wide range of others. The meetings provided a space to talk through issues, to discuss approaches to industrial action and to better understand the range of experiences across the University.

Over time the group developed a sense of community, one which is still going strong today, though meetings are currently online. This community of ARPS staff has been important in building confidence both to take action and to become more involved in day-to-day branch activity. Common to many branches, Sheffield whole branch meetings are large and busy affairs, there is not always time to talk about issues that members may perceive as niche or not affecting many of them. By bringing ARPS members of staff together specifically to raise their own concerns, Sheffield UCU aimed to give these staff a voice but also to use the meetings to gain information about university practices and build up a picture of conditions across the organisation.

Similarly, at The Open University (OU), an Academic-related staff member group was formed in 2021. As over 50% of OU UCU members are Associate Lecturers on precarious contracts, formal and informal branch meetings regularly centre around topics which relate to this staff category. Due to this it was agreed by the OU UCU Branch Executive Committee that developing a new Academic-related group would be beneficial so that the non-academic voice from faculties, units and across the UK was better heard.

As the OU is a large distance learning provider with staff based at regional offices or at home, use of online meetings is vital in branch activism. It is common for members to only engage with branch activity remotely due to circumstances such as geographical location. Providing members with a range of options in which they can connect and contribute to the branch is important in ensuring that all member issues are addressed, and a sense of shared cause and belonging is built.

The OU's Academic-related group is a small team of members who perform different roles and are located across the UK. The first Academic-related group meeting was in September 2021. To help inform the direction and strategy of the new group, it was agreed that an all academic-related staff UCU member online meeting should be organised. The meeting took place in

November and members from around the UK participated. Early feedback has been positive, with Academic-related members more confident that OU UCU is there to represent them as well as academic members:

Although I joined UCU several years ago, I was never entirely sure until recently that it was for me as it felt like only academic matters were considered important. The Academic-related members group has been an important part of this change.

The Academic-related group is scheduled to meet regularly in 2022. It is also planned for further all Academic-related member meetings to be organised.

From our experiences in developing ARPS groups at two unique universities, the more opportunities staff have to air grievances and share experiences the better. At Sheffield, we found that case work issues emerged from these meetings, usually initiated by a tentative broaching of a subject in a supportive environment. Sometimes these issues were situations that had been going on for many months, without support or resolution. At the OU it is hoped that the Academic-related group will improve how non-academic related issues are addressed by the Branch Executive Committee as well as increasing branch activism in areas of the university which have been historically hard to reach.

Starting your own ARPS group doesn't have to be difficult or onerous. Whether you take the Sheffield approach of plunging into all-member meetings or set up a smaller working group like the OU, your branch committee will almost certainly be delighted to hear from you and be supportive. The following thoughts might help to organise in the first instance.

- 1. Get together a small group of ARPS members who are keen and speak to your branch committee or executive to see what support they can offer. It can be useful to have a member of branch committee/exec to attend meetings to answer questions.**
- 2. Decide what type of meetings you want to run and offer to run them – they don't have to be formal or time-consuming, think about what will work for your branch.**
- 3. Promote through branch channels, reps, email and social media.**
- 4. Keep meetings regular and encourage members to be in touch in between or if they can't attend. Ask members for agenda suggestions to make sure nothing is missed, offer to voice concerns yourselves if members don't feel comfortable talking in meetings.**
- 5. Have someone to take notes (especially at all-members meetings) to feedback to members and branch committee/executives.**
- 6. Report in when things have made a difference – ARPS issues are discussed at branch committee/more ARPS members raising things at branch meetings etc.**

Collective action works if members feel like they have a voice. ARPS member meetings can help balance the voices in branches and ultimately make them stronger. Good luck!

Amy Ryall and David Conway, Open University

University of Liverpool strikes – working together to stop cuts

If you've been following media coverage of UCU over the past few years, you'd be forgiven for thinking that we are an "academics' union" and our only disruptions are to teaching. I remember in a previous institution, standing in solidarity with our academics at a rally as UCU members withdrew their labour over pay, whilst not realising my eligibility to join this very same union, a union that would go on to fight for the pension I was enrolled in at that time.

These impressions could not be further from representing our diverse and wide-ranging membership, and the number of professional services staff active in the union.

Liverpool University has recently concluded a long period of strike action over proposed compulsory redundancies to our academic staff in the life sciences. I believe it was the joint effort across academic and professional services staff that led to this victory, and that professional services staff support was key to our success.

It is true that we are able to have a big impact on our employer by targeting teaching, and in our recent case this was via a marking and assessment boycott. A democratic vote of our members supported the idea of those who would not be involved in the boycott contributing a portion of their salary in support of the teaching-related staff, should the boycott result in a loss of pay. We as professional services staff, mostly not involved in teaching and assessment, provided the support to our academic colleagues to undertake this disruptive action, sharing the burden of the action, and proving that it's not just an "academics' union".

Professional services staff play key roles in the university beyond teaching, such as in research support and confirmation and clearing activities; we should recognise and be proud of the strength that we give to the union as a result.

Lauren Sandford, University of Liverpool

Fossil Free Careers

People & Planet, the UK's largest student network campaigning on social and climate justice, are keen to work alongside UCU ARPS members on a new nation-wide campaign: Fossil Free Careers.

The campaign seeks to embed sustainability in the operations of UK university careers services in a meaningful way that aligns with the demands of indigenous and frontline communities impacted by resource extraction and climate impacts.

In order to do this, students in the People & Planet network are campaigning to get careers services to adopt an 'Ethical Careers Policy' which explicitly excludes oil, gas and mining companies from recruiting students on UK campuses via careers services.

There is a precedent for this kind of industry-wide exclusion, with 20% of UK universities

excluding one or more of tobacco/sex/gambling industries from student recruitment opportunities.

Whilst 'green careers' fairs are becoming increasingly popular, it is imperative that the industries most responsible for environmental destruction and driving the climate crisis cease to be actively assisted by careers services in recruiting the future workforces that make their damaging operations possible.

This Fossil Free Careers campaign seeks to build upon the successes of the student divestment movement, which has seen 92 UK universities announce commitments to remove fossil fuel investments from their portfolios.

Staff at People & Planet are keen to speak to any and all UCU members in UK universities. In particular, the insight of members working in careers and employability services is welcome.

More information on the campaign, including a draft union branch motion which UCU members are encouraged to pass, can be found at peopleandplanet.org/fossil-free-careers

All interested members are encouraged to get in touch at fossilfreecareers@peopleandplanet.org

People & Planet would like to extend our solidarity to all striking workers in upcoming industrial actions. We are behind you all the way: staff working conditions are student learning conditions. Worker justice is climate justice.

J Clarke, Co-Director: Climate Campaigns, People & Planet

2021-2022 Academic-Related and Professional Services Staff Committee

Chair - Fiona McGarry, Queen's University Belfast

Vice chair - Paulina Hoyos Martin Del Campo, University of Manchester

Amy Ryall, Open University

David Conway, Open University

Derek Keenan, University of Strathclyde

Eleanor Madley, University of Sheffield

Paul Siddall, University of Essex

Chloe Nast, Goldsmiths, University of London

NEC reps - Ann Gow, University of Glasgow and Sally Pellow, University of Reading