

Organising ARPS staff – branch guidance

Many UCU branches do not have the levels of membership they should have amongst academic-related and professional services staff (ARPS staff).

The perception by some of UCU being a lecturers' union hasn't helped with recruitment, but locally there is plenty branches can do to challenge this view, and convince ARPS staff that UCU is the union for them.

Active branches recruit members, and branches that are active on issues that matter most to specific groups of workers will convince those workers to join.

This guidance tries to give branches a place to start with recruiting and organising ARPS staff. Inevitably the more people who support these endeavours, the more successful you will be. Use every opportunity to not just recruit staff, but encourage activists to step forward, building the capacity and effectiveness of branches.

Remember getting involved in a union can be fun, rewarding and an opportunity to meet people you would never normally come into contact with. Make sure you convey this to members and potential members.

If a branch can increase their membership density amongst ARPS staff, this will help strengthen the whole branch.

Building visibility in ARPS teams/departments

Start with the basics – make sure that all the places with ARPS staff have a visible UCU presence. **Use noticeboards to put up posters and leaflets**, and make sure they are refreshed regularly about the different campaigns the branch is involved in. **ARPS-specific materials can be found here, including a poster, flyer and the ARPS manifesto: www.ucu.org.uk/arpstaff**

Physical workspaces have been less occupied during the pandemic. This has led to many ARPS staff becoming home or hybrid workers and visiting campus less frequently, so **make sure you have a presence in the online workspace too**. Encourage members to plug the branch and joining the union in their email signatures, or use a UCU background during Zoom/Teams meetings. Some UCU resources for current HE disputes can be found here, or the branch can develop their own: www.ucu.org.uk/article/11898/resources - they are small things, but sometimes that presence can be enough to normalise union membership and encourage people to join.

Most importantly, **ask people to join the union.** Where you have local reps in ARPS teams, make sure they ask new members of staff, and the longer standing ones too, to join. The single biggest reason people give for not joining a union is that no one ever asked them, so make sure that isn't true in your workplace!

Connecting current ARPS members and building a sense of community

The branch will already have ARPS members, so it is crucial that the branch finds ways to link them up.

Establishing an ARPS email discussion list or Microsoft Team (or other such platform) for your branch could help to link those working remotely and who might not usually attend branch meetings. You will need to ensure that someone takes responsibility for posting regularly on topics of interest and importance to ARPS staff, because this will stimulate discussion. Such lists/teams can be a good way of gathering feedback on policies and procedures that have/are being implemented.

Similarly closed **ARPS groups on social media** are a good mechanism for linking up ARPS members. Again, regular posts on key ARPS-related issues will help to stimulate discussions and gather feedback.

These forums might also help to **identify potential ARPS activists**, who can be the face of the branch in their teams.

Physical or online ARPS events are also important. Not everyone will want to participate in an online discussion, but creating a space for ARPS staff to discuss their issues; share experiences and ideas can be a great way of linking up members.

Organising branch meetings exclusively for ARPS members can provide a safe space in which issues can be raised and heard. Themes in these meetings are more likely to resonate with ARPS staff which could lead to improved member engagement and enhanced ARPS activism. ARPS only meetings can also increase member awareness that there are other members like them in their branch. This can lead to better collaborative networks and working, enhancing solidarity on campaigns.

You can invite along speakers or host them on specific topics which you believe will encourage attendance. Having events on 'hot topics' such as reorganisations or new systems might engage people who wouldn't otherwise attend.

If these are more informal events, you can open them up to all ARPS staff, not just current members, and use them as a recruitment opportunity, by proving the relevance of the union, and encouraging people to feel part of it – the union after all is its members.

Make sure you promote these ARPS-specific events to all members to help identify who your ARPS members are, and reach new potential members.

Ensuring ARPS members have a voice in the branch

Following a decision of Congress, **branches are urged to elect an ARPS rep onto their committee**. The position was created to ensure ARPS members had a clear voice in the branch, and when the committee is involved in any negotiations/discussions with the university.

As well as responding to changes that might impact on ARPS staff, this role is also intended to be a proactive one. The ARPS rep should be involved in/organising ARPS-specific branch activities, hearing from ARPS staff their key concerns, and the issues they want the branch to tackle.

The ARPS rep can ensure that the members they represent aren't forgotten in branch meetings. It is good practice for example to have 'ARPS issues' as a standing item of meeting agendas. Also, when the branch submits a claim to the university on an issue, the ARPS rep can ensure that an ARPS-specific element or a key issue for those members is included.

The committee has put together a **model ARPS claim** (including a suggested campaign plan) which can be read here: www.ucu.org.uk/media/11395/ARPS-model-claim/pdf/ucu_arps-model-claim.pdf

A model ARPS branch survey has been created to help branches to develop the claim locally. To access the survey, contact the ARPS committee secretary: jlennox@ucu.org.uk

Other resources which might be useful to help tackle issues affecting ARPS members can be found here:

- workload campaign: www.ucu.org.uk/workloadcampaign
- fighting casualised contracts: www.ucu.org.uk/stampout
- tackling the gender pay gap: www.ucu.org.uk/genderpay
- hybrid working branch guidance: www.ucu.org.uk/media/12401/Hybrid-working-guidance/pdf/UCU_hybrid_working_guidance_Jan_22.pdf

ARPS reps can use all of this as the basis for a specific claim on issues that matter to ARPS staff, altering the claim to fit with the key issues for ARPS members in their branch.

Identify key leaders in ARPS teams/department

The most effective way to build visibility in ARPS teams/departments is to identify the natural leaders in each ARPS area and seek to get them to join or get active in the union.

Natural leaders are not necessarily the people who shout loudest about the union. They are the people who are already organising and moving ARPS staff – e.g. someone who organises them socially; or has organised a large petition on an issue. These people aren't necessarily in the union, but if we recruit them or get them active, they will recruit and organise others.

This is work that the branch ARPS rep might lead on, mapping the different ARPS teams/departments, and working to identify the natural leaders. Such an approach will help to build membership density amongst ARPS staff and this will of course help to strengthen the power of the whole branch, not just the ARPS membership.

Working with other unions

UCU is not the only union who will have ARPS staff in membership. Unison, Unite, GMB and EIS are the other nationally-recognised unions in HE, and may have members in your workplace. Often an active union member will be effective at recruiting others in their department – like-for-like recruitment is a really useful way of convincing people to join a union.

UCU is the recognised union in pre-92 universities for ARPS staff at grade 6 and above of the national pay scale, but these staff might be members of our sister unions.

In light of this, **it is crucial that the branch, and in particular the ARPS rep, liaises with the other campus unions.** Ensuring that effective communications are always open, and that you are talking to each other before talking to the university.

It is likely that you will be able to build an effective coalition when ARPS members are worried about something. Even when you are being proactive on an issue via submitting an ARPS element in a claim or an ARPS-specific claim, you may be able to get your sister unions to submit it with you, **increasing your power in negotiations.**

Getting support to help with this work

This guidance isn't a comprehensive guide to organising ARPS staff in your branches, but hopefully it will help you to draw up a plan to organise and recruit them. If you need support for these endeavours, do get in contact with your regional office:

www.ucu.org.uk/regionalofficials and if you would like advice or help from the ARPS committee, please contact the committee secretary, Jenny Lennox at

jlennox@ucu.org.uk