



Love our ARPS

Notes from the library member focus group

24 June 2021

1. What should UCU be doing regarding the issue of digital access to academic works?

- Campaign ideas
- Aim – open educational resources?
- Costs of the resources are huge and staff budgets are being cut instead of tackling the issue.
- UCU could back academic book investigation campaign.
- Need to talk to academics about the licences they choose because they often don't understand the cost of the works and the profiteering being pursued by the publishers.
- Decolonisation of resources is required – libraries are being tied into deals with big publishing groups which excludes smaller publishers including in the global south.
- Concerns expressed about the categorisation systems being used – LGBTQ publications under 'mental disorders'.
- Concerns were raised about the ability of students to access digital resources both in terms of technology and digital knowledge, and costs were restricting the plurality of different means of accessing works.
- Also flagged concerns about Digital Rights Management which imposed restrictions on the accessibility of resources.

2. Is there more UCU needs to do regarding the transmission risks presented by physical study space in libraries?

- Do members know about the guidance UCU has already produced?
- How else could we promote this?
- Does this guidance cover all of the issues?
- Flexibility is going to be key – a wholesale move back to campuses is not appropriate.
- Improve dialogue between unions and ensuring all union member meetings take place.
- Managing student expectation will be key.
- Concerns were raised about the poor ventilation in libraries.
- Maintaining social distancing also important.
- Email list for librarians could be promoted by UCU.

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

- All frontline workers have come back at some point.
- Mixed experience of how much pressure people had felt, with some staff told because they were essential workers they couldn't be furloughed! [This is not true]
- Some PS staff were already being treated as hybrid workers with 50% of time on campus, and 50% off campus.

4. What are the key concerns for library staff about online or hybrid working?

- What can we do to address these concerns?
- Are there positives we can encourage?
- Very different roles in the library, with some needing to be in much more than other roles. This creates a perceived unfairness of treatment if not handled carefully.
- Concerns that hybrid working could mean a move to hot-desking, which would impact on academics.
- Home set-up of equipment is a real issue, with some universities saying that hybrid working means they can't have a proper home set-up. This is particularly problematic for lower paid staff, who were less likely to have an appropriate set-up at home and their own office on campus.
- Inequality of resources with some staff being asked to replace their own equipment so it works with university systems.
- Good if UCU could provide risk assessment templates and guidance on library specific workspaces.
- Concerns were expressed about home surveillance being used on people's personal computers and more generally when home/hybrid working.

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

- It is hard but has been working successfully in some institutions.
- Participants emphasised the need to work together to ensure that the moral obligation to share out duties on campus.
- Joint member surveys with the other unions were suggested.

6. Other issues

- Future workload – new services have been provided during the pandemic which students like, so when students return there will be a need to provide old and new services, which means more work for the same, or possibly less people.