

Technician Commitment Steering Group

Wednesday 14 June 2023
15.00 – 17.00
Scale Space, White City Campus

Minutes Meeting #19

Attendees

Present:

Tim Venables	Institutional Lead for the Technician Commitment (Chair, TV)
Ailish Harikae	People & Organisational Development Consultant (AHR)
Naweeda Ahmad	People & Organisational Development Coordinator, POD (NA) <i>Minutes</i>
Joel Abrahams	Biological Research Officer, Surgery & Cancer (JA)
Paul Brown	Mechanical Workshop Instrumentation Manager, Physics (PB)
Claudio Dos Santos	Manchester Metropolitan University (CD)
Allison Hunter	Technical Operations Manager, Life Sciences (AH)
Dr Sharron Stubbs	Senior Laboratory Manager, Infectious Disease (SS)
Angela Williams	Learning and Development Officer, Estates (AW)
Russell Stracey	RSM Workshop Supervisor, Materials (RS) (via MS Teams)

Apologies:

Ellen Pengelley	Technical Operations Manager, Bioengineering (EP)
Rakesh Patel	Head of Maintenance, Estates (RP)

Agreed Actions

- AHR/TV to approach Heads of Department about promoting the acknowledgement of technical staff in research publications in their areas.
- NA to share the link for external tickets for the Technicians' Conference with AH, to be shared with the London and SE Institutional Leads Group.
- NA to find a new date for the White City tours.

Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies (TV)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Ellen Pengelley and Rakesh Patel. The Chair informed members that Okan Kibaroglu had taken up a new role as Director of Customer Success for ICT. He also congratulated SS on her new role as Head of Infrastructure Operations and AH on her planned secondment to the Sustainability team.

2. Minutes and matters arising from the last meeting (TV)

The minutes of the last meeting were deemed to be an accurate record of discussions. It was noted that all actions from the last meeting were completed.

3. Authorship and acknowledgement: survey results & project next steps (AHR)

AHR provided an update on the survey on authorship and acknowledgement, which was distributed between 20 March and 17 April 2023, and had received 119 responses from a good spread of areas. The highlights were that:

- Half of the technicians who responded had experienced being named as an author at least once. For a small minority, being named was a regular occurrence.
- Acknowledgment in research papers was less common. Some respondents saw acknowledgment as a 'consolation prize' but for others it was a welcome gesture.
- Being named as an author was something that respondents referred to in job interviews, job applications and on LinkedIn. Since acknowledgments were harder to index, technicians were making less use of these to support career progression.
- The survey indicated that in some areas, there was a strong culture of giving the right credit. In others, technical staff felt strongly that their contribution to research was overlooked and minimised.
- The survey indicated that far greater clarity was needed on the distinction between authorship and acknowledgement.

AHR advised the group that she was finalising an e-learning resource for technicians that would highlight the benefits of authorship and acknowledgement and clarify the differences. She hoped that this would launch in July or soon after. Professor Mary Ryan (Vice-Provost, Research and Enterprise) had also approved a statement on appropriate recognition of technical staff, which would be announced in Staff Briefing to coincide with the Technicians' Festival. Reaching Principal Investigators and lead authors with this message was key and TV suggested engaging Head of Department to talk about this in their areas.

Members asked whether AHR had been able to identify areas of College where there was good practice. AHR explained that this had not been possible, as the survey was anonymous, but that she would be including some positive case studies with the resources. It was acknowledged that the number of publications would correlate to a technician's length of service and to the route they had taken into their technical career (i.e., authorship was likely to be more common amongst technicians who had undertaken a PhD).

Action: AHR / TV to approach Heads of Department about promote this in the Autumn Term.

4. Update on Technicians' Festival 2023 (NA)

NA reminded the Steering Group that the Technicians' Festival 2024 would be taking place from 10 - 14 July. The programme would incorporate suggestions made by members at the last meeting and included:

- A one-day conference on Tuesday 11 July at White City, to be opened by the President, and featuring Professor Sir Mark Walport as Keynote speaker.
- A troubleshooting session led by the Grantham Institute on real-life problems that technicians could help to solve.
- A series of talks about the White City campus, including perspectives from a Technical Operations and Maintenance manager.

There would also be a series of career and professional development sessions taking place throughout the week, including a session on sustainability led by HEaTED, talks about the College's new PRDP (ARC), the Imperial STAR Framework, and having an impactful career.

Registrations for the event had been steady but there were still internal and external places available, to be promoted by AH amongst members of the London and Southeast Institutional Leads Group. The White City campus tours, for which 12 staff had registered, had been postponed due to a clash with the All-Staff Party, taking place at South Kensington on the same date. It was agreed that these should be rescheduled for a quieter time after the Festival.

Action: NA to share the link for external conference tickets with AH and to find a new date for the White City tours.

It was mentioned that a group of T-level students, who were currently on placements in White City with the Department of Surgery and Cancer, would be joining the one-day conference. This opened up some general discussions about T-levels and apprenticeships, and their importance as pathways into technical careers. It was agreed that this would be revisited at a future meeting.

5. Technicians' Exhibition (AHR)

AHR told the group that she had been approached by Anne Barrett (College Archivist), Miguel Hermida Ayala (Technical Staff Rep on the Artworks Group) and Laboratory Technician Apprentice Katie Giles, who were keen to collaborate on an exhibition to celebrate technicians. At an initial meeting in June, they had discussed:

- Featuring 8-10 technicians from across Faculties and disciplines.
- Arranging some professional photography showing them at work.
- Arranging some videography of them undertaking processes with their hands using wearable cameras – e.g., pipetting, working on a machine, undertaking a repair, etc.
- Working with Comms to capture their stories in written format (their role, their career journey, what they enjoyed about their work, etc.)
- Presenting the stories, with the videography and photography, on the College's long form platform (like *Shifting the Lens* and other similar campaigns).
- Having some of the photographs printed, framed and displayed as part of a physical exhibition, possibly in the College Main Entrance, making use of the big screen for the videography.
- The project working title: 'In good hands'.

There was support from the Steering Group for this proposal.

6. Collaboration with Francis Crick Institute (AHR)

AHR told the group that she and TV had been approached by colleagues at the Francis Crick Institute to participate in a series of cross-institutional networking events involving King's College London, UCL and the Crick. Each Institute would host one event with a networking and social element. As this was a technician-led initiative that aligned with the Technician Commitment, TV and AHR had been happy to support it. Imperial's event would take place in December 2023 and would replace the Autumn Term Forum. PB suggested that Professor Michele Dougherty could be invited to speak about the Juice Project.

7. Update from the London and SE Institutional Leads Group (AH and SS)

AH told the Steering Group that there were now 26 institutions represented at the London and Southeast Institutional Leads Group. Meetings had increased from once a term to once a month and an Apprenticeships Sub-Group had been established. It continued to be a useful form for sharing best practice. Recent agenda items included: the new Institute of Technical Skills and Strategy; collaborative work across the M8 universities; the IST Conference in September; asset management systems; staff-student ratios; engaging technicians with mentoring; and a proposal to reinstate face-to-face assessments for professional registration. Several events for technical staff were coming up across the Group in June and July across.

8. Priorities for next academic year (TV, AHR)

Members were informed that AH would be taking maternity leave from the end of July, returning in June 2024. Interviews were underway for her cover person. This was likely to be someone who was new to the Technician Commitment. Although the current Action Plan ran until December 2023, with impact reporting expected early in 2024, it would be unfair for a new person to have to undertake this exercise so soon after starting their post. As such, an extension had been requested, which would allow time for delivery of some of the outstanding actions such as the technician exhibition, career pathways pilot and work shadowing.

9. AOB (TV)

- The Chair flagged that since SS and AH were moving into new roles, the group might need to think about load-sharing.
- AW told the Group that Estates were looking to build connections with girls' schools to promote careers in Engineering and Maintenance.
- The recent technicians' event at White City, coordinated by technical staff in Bioengineering, had been very successful. The next one would be organised and funded by the Department of Chemistry. There was interest from the Group in more social events for technicians at different campuses.

Next meeting dates

Wednesday 11 October 2023, 10.00 – 11.00 (in person)

Wednesday 21 February 2024, 14.00 – 15.00 (in person)

Thursday 20 June 2024, 10.30 – 11.30 (in person)