

Technician Commitment Steering Group

Tuesday 29 October 2019

14:00 – 15:00

SALC 8, Seminar and Learning Centre, Level 5 Sherfield Building, South Kensington

Minutes

Meeting #8

1. Welcome and apologies

Present:

Nazia Hirjee	Faculty Operations Officer, Natural Sciences (Chair) (NH)
Joel Abrahams	Biological Research Officer, Department of Surgery & Cancer (JA)
Paul Brown	Mechanical Workshop Instrumentation Manager, Physics (PB)
Lindsay Comalie	Organisational Development Consultant (LC)
Ailish Harikae	Apprenticeships Manager, Secretary to the Steering Group (AHR)
Allison Hunter	Technical Operations Manager, Life Sciences (AH)
Ken Keating	Laboratory Manager, Bioengineering
Angela Williams	Senior Learning and Development Officer, Estates Division

Apologies

Gareth Hyde	NHLI Safety & Technical Services Coordinator, NHLI
Rakesh Patel	Contracts Manager, Estates Division
Dominic Spencer	Resource Manager, ICT

2. Minutes and matters arising from the last meeting

NH/AHR

- AHR: As agreed at the last meeting, a small exhibition was organised to accompany the Technicians' Network Summer Event in July 2019. Unite, Student Services, Learning and Development, BCS The Chartered Institute for IT, the Science Council and Clustermarket exhibited. A flyer and poster were produced to help publicise the event.
- JA: I spoke to Laboratory Managers in the Department of Surgery and Cancer in advance of the event, but they were unable to attend; the location and timing may have been a factor. I will continue to try to engage technicians at departmental level.
- AH: My trip to the Technical University of Munich is planned for spring 2020. I will report back in due course.
- **Ongoing Actions:**
 - KK and AHR to meet to discuss the Technical Academy initiative.
 - AHR to engage with HR/Recruitment on including professional registration in job descriptions as part of the careers pathways project.

- JA to continue to engage with technicians within Surgery and Cancer.
- After her visit to Munich, AH to report back on learning from the TUM collaboration.

3. Update on career pathways project and NTDC collaboration

AHR/KK

- **AHR:**
 - An initial meeting with the National Technician Development Centre (NTDC) was held on 30 July 2019. Ian Tidmarsh, Specialist Advisor, provided an overview of the NTDC Higher Education Technician Taxonomy (career pathway). The taxonomy has several entry points and technical staff can progress through management or by becoming a technical specialist. Ian also introduced the accompanying competency framework, which lists capabilities for each NTDC job band. Ian led a high-level mapping exercise of Imperial job levels to the NTDC tool and found that these aligned in many ways. There was also a case study from the University of York, who have adopted the framework and implemented it for their 250 technicians.
 - At the meeting, it was agreed that a sample of technical roles from one area of the College should be mapped in detail to the NTDC tool. It was also agreed that the project team would keep those who attended informed of progress and convene future meetings to call on their expertise.
 - Funding has now been confirmed for College to engage Ian for a further two sessions to continue this work.
- **KK:** I have been engaging with ICT in relation to Lexonis competency framework management software. College has purchased this software centrally and there appear to be 700 unallocated licenses available. We are exploring whether it might be possible to use Lexonis to store and manage the NTDC framework, once this has been adapted for use at Imperial.
- **AW:** Although College has purchased Lexonis software, the consultancy costs associated with setting up the tool can be prohibitively high. For 75 job roles in Estates, the cost quoted by Lexonis was £60,000.
- **NH:** Let's ensure that a cost-benefit analysis is carried out on the use of Lexonis.
- **Actions:**
 - KK to continue to engage with ICT on Lexonis, factoring in a cost-benefit analysis of using the tool for technical services.

4. Naming of technicians in publications

NH

- **NH:** Following our last meeting, I had an initial discussion with Professor Nick Jennings, Vice-Provost (Research and Enterprise), about the naming of technicians in research publications. He acknowledged the need for greater clarity and was open to exploring further after the REF. In the interim, let's start to compile examples of instances where technicians have been named (or where they were not but should have been) and prepare a report to submit to Professor Jennings following the REF.
- **LC:** We can also include examples from other institutions.

- **Actions:**
 - Steering Group members to share case study examples with NH.
 - NH/AHR to pull this together in the Summer Term for consideration by Professor Jennings.

5. Update on laboratory technician apprenticeship

AHR

- **AHR:**
 - The project launch meeting for this strand of activity was held on 9 September 2019. 16 people attended from ten departments. I gave a presentation on how apprenticeships work, what is involved in setting up a scheme and the standards available for laboratory technicians. There was also a presentation from two laboratory technicians from King's College London. Attendees were asked to share the information in their areas and to gauge the level of interest/support for becoming involved in a scheme.
 - A follow-up meeting was held on 9 October. Bioengineering, Chemical Engineering, Chemistry and Life Sciences expressed an interest in an entry-level scheme where apprentices would rotate around laboratories, allowing them to build a range of skills, with salary costs shared by the participating departments. For the Faculty of Medicine, such a scheme was not felt to be of particular value, as research technician posts require a degree and there is already a large pool of suitably qualified graduates. The funding of technicians in Medicine (grant-funded) would also make participation in such a scheme challenging. However, there is an interest in developing an apprenticeship scheme for laboratory managers for the Faculty and we are looking separately at this possibility.
 - It was agreed by Bioengineering, Chemistry, Chemical Engineering and Life Sciences that an analysis of technical roles in these areas and emerging skills gaps should be the next step. We will be working on this in the coming weeks.

6. Update from Technician Commitment Institutional Leads Group meeting

AH

- **AH:** This group meets once a term and includes representatives from Queen Mary University, King's College London, the University of Reading, UCL and other London/South East Technician Commitment signatories. At our most recent meeting, we discussed:
 - the possibility for mini-secondments across institutions, using Outside Insights as a possible framework;
 - technical career pathways, which have been successfully implemented over the past year by a number of institutions including Bristol University, Newcastle University, Reading University;
 - NTDC's technical skills survey tool, which has become more sophisticated (and less onerous) than when Imperial piloted it and has recently been used by Reading University to develop a technical skills database. Lexonis could possibly allow us to do something similar at Imperial.

- **Actions:**

- AH to request examples of what other institutions have done for their career pathways work.

7. Technicians' Network events 2019-20

AHR

- AHR:
 - 63 staff from 17 departments attended the Technicians' Network Summer Event in July and feedback was generally positive. 75% of attendees found the event useful overall and over 90% found the sessions on mental health awareness and career pathways useful. Some negative comments were received in relation to the venue (which was extremely hot), projection and sound quality.
 - Termly Technical Managers' Forum events are planned for this year, with business continuity the theme for this term (with Alastair Lee, Head of Business Continuity, attending as guest speaker) and sustainability the theme for next term (with Paul Lickiss, Academic Leader in Sustainability, as guest speaker).
 - The Summer Event will take place in July 2020 as in previous years and Yvonne Aftyka (Learning and Development Centre) leading on the arrangements. The event could potentially be held in White City rather than at South Ken this time.
 - 10 technicians from Imperial attended IST Conference in Birmingham in September. I would like to arrange for an Imperial group again next year.
 - Following the Technician Commitment feature in the summer print edition of *Health and Safety Matters* magazine, there will be several articles on the Technician Commitment in the winter edition.

8. Awards for technical services staff 2019-20

AHR

- AHR:
 - A new page has been created on the Technicians' Portal detailing the main awards open to technicians and these will be advertised in the newsletter as and when they open for nominations.
 - 22 technical staff and managers received internal awards in 2018 and 16 received internal awards in 2019. The College award window for 2020 has not yet been confirmed, but is likely to mirror last year's timeline, with nominations open from December to early February. This will be promoted in the newsletter.
 - The technicians who have achieved professional registration will all be nominated for the Garden Party.
- NH: It would be good to prepare a formal communication to share with departments to raise awareness. Could the list of award recipients from 2018 and 2019 be circulated to the Steering Group?
- PB: Physics made a nomination this year for the new Institute of Physics Technician Award, but was unsuccessful. We did not make the nominee aware of the nomination for fear of disappointing him.
- RS: Being nominated is in itself an achievement and nominees may appreciate the gesture if they are made aware, provided this is done delicately.

- JA: The animal research technician apprentice in the Department of Surgery and Cancer was nominated for a 3Rs award.
- **Actions:**
 - AHR to circulate the list of internal award recipients in 2018 and 2019.
 - AHR to reach out to departments to encourage them to make nominations.

8. Update from the Learning and Development Centre

LC

- LC:
 - The Learning and Development Centre's programme of professional development and safety courses for 2019-20 went live in September. Two priority areas for the Centre this year are leadership and culture and the *Career Moves* initiative.
 - Careers@Imperial is likely to take a slightly different form to last year and will run over a longer period.
 - The new mentoring scheme for professional, technical and operational staff is not yet live due to delays with the new system. There are very few technical mentors, so it would be good if Steering Group members could encourage technicians in their areas to get involved. We could also consider a mentoring-themed session for the 2020 summer event ('speed mentoring' at Careers@Imperial week worked very well). Briefing sessions for mentors are ongoing, with the next ones scheduled for 14 November and 11 December.
 - The Outside Insight programme, which allows staff to spend up to two days visiting another HEI in the London area, is now open for applications.

9. Update on professional registration

AHR

- AHR:
 - 16 science technicians from 6 departments participated in the pilot programme of *Working Towards Professional Registration*. 14 were successful with their applications for professional registration and two are re-submitting.
 - The course received very good feedback from participants:
 - 93% rated the sessions high or very high in terms of usefulness;
 - 98% rated the sessions high or very high in terms of likeliness to apply what they had learnt;
 - 98% rated the facilitation high or very high.
 - This year's programme launched on 15 October at South Kensington. There are 8 delegates from 5 departments. The next sessions are in November and January, with professional registration assessments planned for early March.
 - I am in discussions with the Engineering Council about putting in place some support for our engineering technicians. This will most likely take the form of a talk, with the Engineering Council and representatives from several relevant professional bodies, who could then be engaged to provide follow-up session(s) depending on the level of interest.
- NH: The Society for the Environment has recently launched its Registered Environmental Technician (REnvTech) accreditation for environmental technicians.

10. Update on Science Museum Technician Exhibition

AHR

- AHR: The curators are narrowing down content for their exhibition and have asked to visit several areas of Imperial again: the Physics Mechanical Instrumentation Workshop, the Physics Electronics Workshop, the Mechanical Engineering mechanical workshop and the Additive Manufacturing Facility. The next advisory panel is planned for December.

Any Other Business

- AH: The Institute of Cancer Research ran a survey recently of their core facilities managers to identify opportunities for training, development and networking. I think there would be great value in running the survey at Imperial, with a view to building a community of facility managers (not all of whom are technicians).
- NH: Let's get a list together to run the survey.
- LC: I met recently with Kelly Vere, who is doing her PhD on the impact of the Technician Commitment, and was getting different points of view on the initiative.
- LC: AHR and I met recently to discuss the *Technicians and Student Mental Health* report. The support and resources recommended are available already at Imperial, but we have discussed ways to increase awareness among technical staff.
- NH: We are halfway through our action plan and will probably be invited to report formally on progress in mid-2020. I suggest that we develop a publication for internal promotion with case studies, photos, etc.
- **Actions:**
 - AH to start to develop a list of Facility Managers, with support from AHR / HR.
 - AH and NH to meet in January 2020 to discuss the progress report.

Summary of Actions

New:

- *KK to continue to engage with ICT / Lexonis for the career pathways project, factoring in a cost-benefit analysis of using the tool for technical services.*
- *Steering Group members to share case study examples of technicians being named on publications with NH. NH/AHR to pull this together in the Summer Term for consideration by Professor Jennings.*
- *AH to request examples of what other institutions in the Technician Commitment Institutional Leads group have done for their career pathways work.*
- *AHR to circulate the list of internal award recipients in 2018 and 2019 to the Steering Group.*
- *AHR to reach out to departments to encourage them to make award nominations.*
- *AH to start to develop a list of Facility Managers, with support from AH / HR, with a view to running a survey.*
- *AHR and NH to meet in January 2020 to discuss the Technician Commitment Action Plan progress report.*

Ongoing:

- *KK and AHR to meet to discuss the Technical Academy initiative.*

- *AHR to engage with HR/Recruitment on including professional registration in job descriptions as part of the Careers Pathways project.*
- *JA to continue to engage with technicians within Surgery and Cancer.*
- *After her visit to Munich, AH to report back on learning from the TUM collaboration.*