

IMPERIAL

Technician Commitment Steering Group

Thursday 17 October 2024

14.00 – 15.30

Meeting Room 504, Level 5 Sherfield Building, South Kensington Campus

Minutes

Meeting #23

Present:

Tim Venables	Institutional Lead for the Technician Commitment (Chair, TV)
Joel Abrahams	Biological Research Officer, Surgery & Cancer (JA)
Naweeda Ahmad	People & Organisational Development Coordinator, POD (NA) <i>Minutes</i>
Ian Day	Maintenance Manager, Property Division (ID), representing Rakesh Patel
Ailish Harikae	People & Organisational Development Consultant, POD (AHR)
Allison Hunter	Technical Operations Manager, Life Sciences (AH)
Kenneth Keating	Technical Operations Manager, Bioengineering (KK)
Russell Stracey	RSM Workshop Supervisor, Materials (RS)
Dr Sharron Stubbs	Head of Infrastructure Operations, Faculty of Medicine Centre (SS)
Angela Williams	Learning and Development Officer, Property Division (AW)

Apologies:

Paul Brown	Technical Operations Manager, Physics (PB)
Rakesh Patel	Head of Maintenance, Property Division (RP)
Ellen Pengelley	Interim Head of Business Operations, Bioengineering (EP)

Agreed Actions

- Continue to engage with efforts to reintroduce face-to-face assessments for Professional Registration (SS/AH/AHR)
- Submit draft Impact Report and Action Plan to University Management Board for review and endorsement (AHR/TV)
- News and updates from London and South-East Technician Commitment Institutional Leads Group to be shared with NA for the Technicians' Network Newsletter (AH)
- Review communication channels and establish a mailing list (AHR/NA)
- Research Support Excellence Paper to be shared with the Steering Group (AH)
- Information on the Sustainable lighting event on 21 November to be shared (AW)

Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies (TV)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Paul Brown, Rakesh Patel and Ellen Pengelley.

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

(Paper 1 - Minutes – 25 June 2024)

The minutes from the last meeting were agreed to be an accurate record of discussions.

Outstanding actions were considered:

Technicians' Festival 2024

The Chair confirmed that all actions related to the Conference/Festival 2024 had been completed.

Request an update on professional registration assessment

SS confirmed that re-introducing face-to-face assessments for technicians undertaking professional registration remained an ambition, and that Imperial would continue to engage with the efforts of colleagues at King's College London and the Technician Commitment Institutional Leads Group to progress this.

Action: SS/AH/AHR

Professional, Technical, Operational & Learning salary scale review

The Chair reported that a formal group was being established to review the Professional, Technical, Operational & Learning (PTO&L) Framework and that Faculties had been approached for their views. Further details on the scope of the work were expected in due course.

3. Technician Commitment Submission: Update and discussion (AHR)

(Papers 1-5)

AHR advised the Steering Group that Imperial's Technician Commitment Impact Report and Action Plan (2025-2027) would be submitted to the UK Institute of Technical Skills and Strategy on 31 January 2025 for peer review. Ahead of that, the submission would be reviewed by the Operations and Infrastructure Committee.

AHR provided a summary of the Impact Report and appendices, which demonstrated steady progress against the four themes of the Technician Commitment. To note:

- University-wide coverage of technical staff and their vital contributions had increased
- Technical staff were themselves feeling increasingly recognised and valued
- The number of technicians receiving internal and external awards had increased
- Imperial had laid the groundwork for technical staff to be systematically acknowledged in the academic record and, where appropriate, to be credited as authors
- Technician engagement with learning and development was increasing, and technicians were feeling significantly more positive about development opportunities
- Imperial had successfully launched a Laboratory Technician Apprenticeship Scheme to complement our established Engineering and Maintenance Technician apprenticeship programmes

The report noted that additional resources would be assigned to the Technician Commitment effective January 2025, and highlighted a number of new external collaborations, notably Techs Today, a programme of cross-institutional networking and enrichment events for technicians with the Francis Crick Institute, UCL and King's College London.

AHR presented the draft Action Plan for the period 2025-2027 (Paper 4), which included 20 actions across the four themes of the Technician Commitment (visibility, recognition, career development,

sustainability). AHR explained that the Action Plan had been informed by a series of five Technician Focus Groups held in October 2024 (three in-person at South Kensington and Hammersmith, and two online), attended by 24 technicians in total. The main takeaways from the focus groups were that:

- Technicians felt their roles were not always recognised or understood by colleagues in the same department, despite improved coverage of technicians at institutional level
- There was a need for a platform to allow technical staff to connect, share information and communicate (MS Teams or SharePoint could provide a solution)
- Technicians involved in research wished to be systematically credited in papers and to have the opportunity to present at conferences
- Technicians were not always represented at committee level, and felt they did not have a say on decision-making processes
- New technicians were not being made systematically aware of the Network or newsletter
- Technicians wished to be more visible to senior leadership

A discussion of the Action Plan followed:

- JA expressed an interest in collaborating with Hackspace and Makerspace (both of which had engaged with the Technicians Festival) on a bite-sized outreach programme for Technicians to volunteer as part of their continuing professional development. Linking participation to professional registration and recognition schemes would be beneficial.
- AHR reported that People & Organisational Development (POD) were reviewing whether a recommended number of development days could be formalised for all Professional, Technical, Operational & Learning staff. It was noted that for postdocs, ten development days per year were protected in the contract of employment.
- There was support from the Committee for an audit to take place of technical staff representation on University-level committees.
- Ideas to raise awareness of the Technicians' Network included hosting a surgery for technicians and having a stand at the in-person Imperial Insights (staff induction) events.
- There was support for a system or platform to be identified to allow technicians to build visibility and allow technicians to connect. AW suggested creating a webpage where technicians could have a profile, like the Mental Health First Aider webpage on the EDIC website, and KK suggested establishing a shared MS Teams channel or SharePoint folder.

AHR drew the attention of the Steering Group to the [recommendations of the TALENT Commission](#) for employers of technical staff. The Steering Group were satisfied that the Action Plan dovetailed with the [recommendations of the TALENT Commission](#) for employers of technical staff.

It was agreed by all that AHR and TV could submit the draft Impact Report and Action Plan to the University Management Board for review and endorsement.

Action: AHR/TV

4. Technicians' Network Events (AHR, NA)

AHR and NA reported that they had reviewed participation at Technicians' Network events over the period of the last Action Plan and found that expanding the offer from a one-day conference to a

week-long Festival (including tours and workshops) had not increased overall participation. As such, they suggested that future efforts should focus on organising a one-day conference and exhibition at the start of the academic year, with a small number of targeted opportunities in between. The Steering Group were supportive of this suggestion.

5. Career Pathways Action Group (AH, KK)

KK and AHR told the Steering Group that they were representing Imperial on a new Career Pathways Action Group, a community of 22 institutions (Higher Education and Research organisations) committed to innovating and creating change in this field, coordinated by the UK Institute of Technical Skills and Strategy. KK and AHR had been assigned to a subgroup focusing on mapping technical career pathways and the first subgroup meeting was due to take place in January 2025. In preparation, KK and AHR were looking into associated activity at Imperial, including work on Research Technology Professionals and the Professional, Technical, Operational & Learning (PTO&L) Framework Review.

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

In the interests of time, AH said that she would share updates with AHR and NA to be included in the next Technicians' Network Newsletter.

Action: AH

7. AOB (TV)

Animal Technologists (AH)

AH said that a communications issue had arisen recently with technical colleagues within Central Biomedical Services, who were not aware of the Technician Commitment. This raised wider questions around how news for technicians was being cascaded. It was agreed that the new Coordinator could identify any gaps in our communications and build a mailing list to complement the Newsletter.

Action: AHR/NA

Research Support Excellence

AH advised that she had been on the Awards Committee for the Research Support Excellence Award, where there had been discussions around making the nominations process more streamlined, and introducing an award for junior colleagues. It was agreed that AH would share the Paper with the Group.

Action: AH

Sustainable Equipment

The question arose on how technical staff could obtain funding for sustainable equipment and whether applications needed to be made via Department Managers. AW informed Members that a sustainable lighting event would be taking place on 21 November at South Kensington campus and that further information would be circulated.

Action: AW

The Chair thanked the Steering Group and closed the meeting.