

IMPERIAL

Technician Commitment Steering Group

Wednesday 26 February 2025

09.30 – 11.00

Meeting Room 504, Level 5 Sherfield Building, South Kensington Campus *and online*

Minutes

Meeting #24

Present:

Tim Venables	Institutional Lead for the Technician Commitment (Chair, TV)
Joel Abrahams	Biological Research Officer, Surgery & Cancer (JA)
Aneesha Bhumber	Teaching Laboratories Technician, Faculty of Medicine Centre (AB)
Prof Lesley Cohen	Associate Provost (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) (LC)
Ailish Harikae	People & Organisational Development Consultant, POD (AHR) (<i>Minutes</i>)
Allison Hunter	Technical Operations Manager, Life Sciences (AH)
Rakesh Patel	Head of Maintenance, Property Division (RP)
Ellen Pengelley	Interim Head of Business Operations, Bioengineering (EP)
Dr Sharron Stubbs	Head of Infrastructure Operations, Faculty of Medicine Centre (SS)
Angela Williams	Learning and Development Officer, Property Division (AW)

Apologies:

Naweeda Ahmad	People & Organisational Development Coordinator, POD (NA)
Paul Brown	Technical Operations Manager, Physics (PB)
Kenneth Keating	Technical Operations Manager, Bioengineering (KK)
Russell Stracey	RSM Workshop Supervisor, Materials (RS)

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 Naweeda Ahmad, Paul Brown, Kenneth Keating and Russell Stracey.

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

(Paper 1 - Minutes – 14 October 2024)

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

There were no matters arising,

3. Technician Commitment Submission: Update (AHR)

(Paper 2: Action Plan 2025-2027)

AHR told the Steering Group that Imperial's Technician Commitment Impact Report and Action Plan (2025-2027) had been endorsed by the Operations and Infrastructure Committee on 12 December and submitted to the UK Institute of Technical Skills and Strategy in January for peer review. The outcome of the peer review process was expected in April 2025. In the meantime, the Action Plan that had been circulated ahead of the meeting would be the focus of efforts over the next three years, alongside emerging needs and opportunities in relation to technical staff.

LC expressed concern that the new Technician Commitment Action Plan did not include an action on encouraging under-represented groups to consider technical careers. It was agreed that AHR would revisit the wording. **(Action AHR)**

4. Athena SWAN: Supporting career progression for female technicians (LC)

LC told the Steering Group that she was reviewing the Athena SWAN RAG Analysis and had noted an action on supporting the progression of female technical staff. This had alerted her to the overlap between the Technician Commitment and Athena SWAN. She recognised that for all technical staff, career pathways could be unclear, and she welcomed the Professional, Technical, Operational & Learning (PTO&L) Framework review. TV told LC that an analysis of female technical staff progression had been undertaken for the last Athena SWAN return, and that the Group was happy to cooperate again. He flagged that technical leadership roles were sometimes categorised as Professional Services, which meant that senior roles were sometimes missing from the data.

In preparation for the meeting, LC said she had reviewed the staff survey data for Technical Services staff. On questions related to development, male and female technicians had responded similarly. However, on questions related to challenging inappropriate behaviour, female technicians scored less favourably. EP made the point that women in Higher Education exhibited imposter syndrome and that this could make them reticent to speak out. A suggestion was made that active bystander training and Imperial's Report and Support tool could be promoted to technicians. LC also requested that the University's new awareness training on neuro-inclusive practices be promoted. **(Action: AHR, NA)**

There was a discussion around the number of development days that technical staff should be able to take each year. LC was supportive of technicians, like postdocs, having a protected allowance. AHR said that there was an action to consider this in the Technician Commitment Action Plan. AH shared a good practice example from the University of Liverpool, where different cohorts of technicians were given space at different times to focus on their continuing professional development (e.g. teaching technicians had five days in July, after teaching ended). LC said she would express her support formally for an allowance of days for technicians **(Action: LC)**.

5. Welcome to Technical Staff Specialist (AB)

The Chair welcome AB, Technical Staff Specialist, to the Steering Group. AB told the Group that she was undertaking a 6-month placement to People & Organisational Development to support the Technician Commitment, funded by Research England 'Enhancing Research Culture' funding. She was working on opportunities to connect technicians across the University and would also represent and advocate for her technical colleagues. Her first project would be to develop a MS Teams channel for technicians.

The Group welcomed Aneesha's efforts and agreed that a cross-institutional platform for technicians to share and connect would be useful. TV said that some teams within Engineering were using Teams channels within Departments and AH said that Natural Sciences technicians were using WhatsApp groups. RP said that he was very keen to engage the Maintenance team and that he would welcome a talk from Aneesha. **(Action: AB, RP)**

Some general discussions followed on how best to engage and involve technical staff. JA suggested that there should be an annual development day when all technicians could be released from duties to participate. EP emphasised the importance of comms. SS suggested a small working group. AW flagged that for staff working shift patterns and who were not desk-based, different approaches were needed.

6. Appointment of new Technical Staff Representatives (AHR)

AHR reminded the Group that they had committed, in the Action Plan 2025-2027, to expanding membership of the Technician Commitment Steering Group to include three non-management technical staff representative roles. There was some support for appointing three new members to the current Group, but concern that this would not give the necessary breadth of representation.

AH suggested introducing a new forum or 'user group' with representation from all areas employing technicians, that could report into the Steering Group. There was support for this idea and it was agreed that AHR would investigate this and report back. **(Action AHR)**

AHR also flagged that there was a vacant position on the Imperial Artworks Group for a Technical Staff Rep. It was agreed that AHR should put out a general call for expressions of interest. **(Action AHR)**

7. Update on Science and Engineering Research for Cultural Heritage (SERCH) Conference 2025

Update postponed to next full meeting (June 2025)

8. Update on Career Pathways Action Group (AH)

AHR reminded the Steering Group that she and KK 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 and defining the technical workforce, and the goal was to better understand the structure, reporting lines, specialisms, and provide insights on career progression pathways. AHR reported that she and KK had started to bring together the data they needed for the project and would be able to provide some insights next term.

9. Technicians' Network Events (AHR)

AHR told the Group that she and NA had focused efforts this academic year on the Techs Today partnership with the Crick, ICR, King's and UCL. The Autumn Term event had focused on 'Day in the Life' and the most recent event, in February, focused on 'Techs as Educators'. There had been an Imperial speaker at each. The next Techs Today event was planned for 9 April at King's on the theme of **Techs Overcoming Challenges**. The final event of this year would be at Imperial on 17 June from 3.30pm on the theme of Lab Services and Operational Efficiency.

Also on 17 June, AHR and NA were planning to organise Imperial's internal annual event (most likely from 12 noon to 3pm). She welcomed input and ideas from the Group on themes or speakers. Suggestions included guided visits, tapping into the work of the Innovations Hub and a 'Hackathon' event to draw on technical staff expertise.

10. Update from the London and SE Institutional Leads ('TCI') Group (AH and SS)

SS made the Group aware that a number of conferences for technicians were planned at institutions across the TCI Group, and that Imperial technicians were welcome to attend. AH shared that the Institute for Technical Skills and Strategy had announced its collaboration fund, and that the TCI Group was looking to draw on this. Recent discussions at TCI Group meetings had included workload models and the RAS Steps Robotics Technicians work.

The Chair thanked the Steering Group and closed the meeting.