

Technician Commitment Steering Group

Tuesday 29 January 2019

11:30 – 12:30

Room 504, Sherfield Building, South Kensington campus

Minutes

Meeting #6

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)
Gareth Hyde	NHLI Safety & Technical Services Coordinator, NHLI (GH)
Ken Keating	Laboratory Manager, Bioengineering (KK)

Apologies

Dawn Beaumont	Faculty IT Support Manager (Natural Sciences and Medicine)
Tim Killip	Head of Maintenance, Estates Division
Russell Stracey	RSM Workshop Supervisor, Materials
Angela Williams	Senior Learning and Development Officer, Estates Division

2. Minutes and matters arising from the last meeting

NH/AHR

- **AHR:**
 - As agreed at the last meeting, an article on Lisa Ingram, a Research Technician at NHLI who won an award for her role in the Territorial Army, was included by Cynthia in the June-July 2018 newsletter, as was a message from the Comms team and a quote from a SLTP participant. Action closed.
 - Current subscribers to the newsletter stand at 729 and 36% of these opened the most recent newsletter, circulated in December 2018. Ad-hoc news emails to the network are opened by 25% of recipients on average.
 - A list of awards (internal and external) has been compiled and promoted in the newsletter.
 - **Actions:** AHR to explore making a small number of printed versions of the newsletter available and to publish the awards list on the Technicians' Portal.

3. Action Plan

AHR

- AHR: A summary of planned activity for the coming months across the areas of visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability has been circulated to the Steering Group for information. Input is sought on the following strands of the Technician Commitment:

Laboratory Apprenticeship Scheme (Sustainability)

- AHR: I would like to launch this project to coincide with National Apprenticeships Week in March, if possible. What would be the most appropriate membership for a sub-group to help take this activity forward?
- NH: As with the established Technician Apprenticeship Scheme, the group would initially scope needs and advise on programme design. Once it was up and running, there would be termly 'maintenance' meetings.
- GH/KK: Laboratory or facility managers would be well-placed to input.
- AH: Academics should also be involved, to help scope future skills needs and provide insight on hard-to-recruit areas.
- GH: Will the scheme focus on research technicians?
- AHR: We will be looking at all laboratory technicians.
- NH: It may be that there will be a college-wide scheme, or we may agree a common structure / provider to meet local needs.
- GH: A shared scheme involving rotation across departments (within and outside Medicine) could potentially work well.
- AH: There is potential overlap between Medicine and the in-vivo work of technicians in Life Sciences.
- **Action:** Steering Group members to nominate people in their areas to join the sub-group.

Expanding the Bioengineering Technical Academy (Sustainability)

- KK: New software might be required to expand the initiative into other disciplines and areas. The current programme of peer-to-peer training is supported mainly by SharePoint.
- LC: Sarah Couter (learning and Development Centre) is currently scoping needs for a new system to support training, so it might be worth connecting with her.
- JA: The idea of technicians learning from each other is a good one, but we need to be mindful of building support from managers for technicians to take time 'off'.
- NH: Yes, we do need to ensure there is buy-in to give people time for development.
- **Action:** KK and AHR to discuss the initiative and the system requirements to deliver this more broadly.

Including professional registration as 'desirable' in job advertisements (Recognition)

- LC: This ties in with the career pathways work. We should also speak to HR/Recruitment.
- GH: It would be useful to have some standardised wording on professional registration that could be circulated for inclusion in job descriptions.
- **Action:** AHR to engage with HR/Recruitment.

Promoting technical role models / champions (Recognition)

- NH: This initiative ties in well with mentoring. Could technicians who become mentors also, if they are willing, become champions?
- LC: LDC is developing a College-wide mentoring scheme for Professional, Technical and Operational staff. The scheme is actively recruiting and training mentors at present. The scheme has been promoted at the last two Technical Managers' Forums and mentoring was the theme of the recent Forum at St Mary's. Briefing dates for mentors between February and May have just been advertised. Twenty people signed up for the first briefing, so momentum seems to be building. Mentors who have professional registration are also being targeted to mentor technical staff who are going through this process. The PTO mentoring scheme will launch to staff in June (as part of Careers@Imperial week).
- GH: I signed up for the Faculty of Medicine's mentoring programme, but I am not sure who else is on the list.
- LC: I will check and see whether this can be shared.
- NH: Has there been much interest from technical staff?
- LH: Our initial focus has been on recruitment of mentors. Once the scheme launches in June we will be able to gauge levels of interest in *being* mentored from different staff groups. In terms of champions, if they don't have time to commit to being mentors themselves, they might be willing to be spokespeople for the scheme.
- JA: People can sometimes be shy about signing up for mentoring. Young technicians in particular might be afraid to ask. There is sometimes a negative stigma around having a mentor.
- NH: We need senior technical staff to advocate for and promote this initiative, so it is seen as something positive.
- LC: There are also reverse mentoring initiatives, where senior College staff connect with more junior employees to understand what life is like for them.
- NH: It would be helpful if the Steering Group could promote mentoring and similar initiatives in their areas.
- AH: Technicians have the will and the desire to get involved in these initiatives, but don't always feel they are 'qualified' to do so. Once a few come forward, there will be a positive impact on others, who will also get involved.
- AHR: We could consider having mentoring as the theme for the next South Kensington Technical Managers' Forum. We could invite Heather Combe, who spoke about mentoring at St Mary's, to be the guest speaker. She was a good speaker and made the point that many technical staff already mentor others (colleagues, students, etc.) without necessarily calling it that – and will probably have benefited from mentoring themselves at some point.
- JA: Heather shared her own story and it was inspiring. It showed that all life experiences are valuable and contribute to our development.
- LC: The career journey aspect of Heather's talk was also very powerful. She analysed what she had gained from the different job roles she had done.
- **Actions:** Steering Group to help promote mentoring in their areas and AH/AHR to invite Heather to speak at the next South Kensington Forum.

Naming technicians as authors of publications (Visibility)

- JA: Technicians make an important contribution to research that is rarely recognised in authorship and that is a shame.

- NH: Is there any guidance available externally that we could draw on here, that makes clear when someone should be cited as author?
- LC: If there are areas where technicians are actively being named as authors, we could learn from the approach taken there.
- AH: There is a professor in Life Sciences who we could engage with.
- PB: Technicians are quite often acknowledged, but not necessarily named as author.
- JA: It might be hard to have an umbrella policy, as it varies so much. But technicians need the kudos of being named.
- GH: Core facilities are often acknowledged in papers, but these have generally been 'bought' as a service.
- NH: There is some work required around what level of contribution constitutes authorship - and what distinguishes it from an acknowledgement.
- LC: Are any research bodies actively promoting this?
- NH: Let's speak to Nick Jennings' (Vice-Provost (Research and Enterprise)) office in the first instance.
- **Action:** AHR/NH to engage with Nick Jennings' Office.

4. Honours and award schemes

NH

- NH: The focus of our efforts this year has been on actively promoting award schemes to technicians through the newsletter and other channels. Could members of the Steering Group let us know of any nominations of technical staff in their areas, so that we can track whether these are successful?
- JA: Lab Managers might be a good conduit for next year's awards.
- AHR: We could also look at running a drop-in for those who would like to nominate but need support with the nomination process.
- LC: If people are aware of any barriers these can be fed back to Suzanne Christopher, Senior Employee Engagement Manager, who manages the process. Perhaps we could profile technicians who were nominated? Matt Jowett in HR will be able to provide information on technicians who have received awards in the past.
- PB: At the end of last year I was invited to an event at Whitehall for people who had received National Honours. Although this did not go ahead in the end, it seems that one of the themes was going to be encouraging more nominations from our sector.
- NH: The College has an honours and awards committee. I will engage with Richard Martin, who is a member, to find out the process/dates and whether our Steering Group can feed into their discussions.
- **Actions:** NH to engage with Richard Martin on National Honours; Steering Group members please provide AHR with details of any technical staff nominated for awards.

5. Update on Science Museum collaboration

NH

- NH: Anne Barrett (College Archivist), AHR and I attended a meeting at the Science Museum about their Gatsby Foundation bid to develop a gallery centred on technicians. They were in the early stages and collating information to send to Gatsby. If they are successful in securing funding, they would like to include our technicians in some way. This was communicated to the Technicians' Network in December and I

received six responses, which were shared with the Science Museum. I am waiting to hear back.

- GH: Will the exhibition focus on the industrial areas, as it didn't seem to fit so well with the work of technicians in Medicine?
- NH: They are planning to cover a broad range of themes and health is definitely key, as are things like core facilities. They are very interested in showcasing the personal stories of technicians and including them as 'living exhibits', who speak about their experiences or run demonstrations. The target audience is younger people. As we are so close geographically, they are very interested in our staff here.

6. Update on career pathways project

AHR/LC

- AHR: The career pathways work was re-launched in January with the stated aim of "developing a clear and communicated framework for technical staff to know where they sit within Imperial, with respect to other roles, and to visualise and work towards a career progression route". This links in with the wider Career Moves project, which encourages a proactive approach to progression.
- LC: The desired outcomes of the project are: an accessible tool on the College website presenting the range of career paths available, a set of case studies to support this and a Career moves workshop for those who manage technicians. The group plans to engage with the National Technicians Development Centre (NTDC), who have done extensive work on this across the sector. The group is mindful of the need for transparency, getting the support of senior stakeholders, compatibility with Hay, and the wider salary scale review.
- NH: It is key that we give good guidance to managers on how to respond to the types of questions that might arise from the project.
- **Action:** AHR/LC to keep the Steering Group up-to-date and to call on them when input is needed.

7. Update on professional registration

AHR

- AHR: the programme of support for professional registration is under development with the Science Council and dates should be announced in late February. Could Steering group members please promote this opportunity in their areas?

8. NTDC affiliate membership

AHR/LC

- AHR: LC and I have spoken to NTDC about affiliate membership. They have advised that this includes:
 - Access to the HE Technical Careers framework and job description templates
 - Consultancy from a specialist advisor on our Career Pathways project
 - Consultancy from the NTDC Centre and Business Development Manager on our laboratory technician apprenticeship scheme and associated skill-gap analysis
 - Skills survey support
 - Access to new initiatives and tools
 - National coverage of our own activity

- All: It would be useful to join, if additional budget can be found.
- NH: I will approach HR in the first instance to see if they can provide any support with the costs.
- LC: Susan Littleson may be able to help, as this supports the careers pathways work.
- GH: If we are having a summer event this year, we could generate some income by charging external organisations to exhibit.
- GH/AH: Could provide lists of potential industry 'sellers'.
- **Actions:** NH to approach HR; AHR to engage with GH/AH on the idea of exhibitors for the summer event.

9. Any Other Business

NH

- NH: How frequently do people feel we should meet?
- All: Once termly is appropriate.
- **Action:** AHR to schedule next meeting.

Actions

- *AHR to explore making a small number of printed versions of the newsletter available.*
- *AHR to add the awards list to the Technicians' Portal.*
- *Steering Group members to nominate people in their areas to help scope needs for the laboratory technician apprenticeship.*
- *KK and AHR to meet to discuss the Technical Academy initiative.*
- *AHR to engage with HR/Recruitment on including professional registration as desirable in job descriptions.*
- *Steering Group to promote mentoring to staff in their areas.*
- *AH/AHR to invite Heather Combe to speak at the next South Kensington Forum.*
- *AHR/NH to engage with Nick Jennings' Office on naming technicians in publications.*
- *NH to speak to Richard Martin about the Honours and Awards Committee.*
- *Steering Group members to provide AHR with details of any technical staff nominated for awards.*
- *NH to approach HR to request funding for NTDC membership.*
- *AHR to engage with GH/AH on potential exhibitors for the summer event.*
- *AHR to schedule termly meetings.*