

## **Developments for Technical Staff in the Higher Education Sector, Republic of Ireland.**

Unite-Amicus have negotiated significant changes in the role and professional status of Technical Staff in the Higher Education Sector of Republic of Ireland. These changes have significantly increased the professional profile and status of what are now call Technical Officers in the Higher Education sector as well as yielding significant salary increases above national wage agreements in the order of 12% to 14%. Payment of increases was backdated from September 2006 to April 2001.

There are a number of drivers for arriving at such changes.

- 1) For some time now the Industrial Relations landscape in the Republic has been dominated by centrally negotiated national agreements. These are agreements between the social partners, Government, Unions, and Employers. The agreements allow for cost of living increases. In the public service wage increased above cost of living are delivered by a benchmarking process. A benchmarking body takes written and oral submissions from Unions and Employers and together with a job evaluation exercise data recommending appropriate increases. It was important that technical staff align themselves with other professions such as Medical Laboratory Technicians for the purpose of benchmarking.
- 2) Universities employ Technical Staff who are graduates of Institutes of Technology applied Science courses. The qualification profiles of these graduates have changed from pass degree to honour degree in the last decade.
- 3) The labour Relations Commission (dispute resolution organisation) recommended the establishment of an Expert group for Medical Laboratory technicians/technologists as part of a set of proposals to settle a pay claim. Based on the pay relationship between university technicians and medical laboratory technicians, it was agreed that an Expert Group would be established for university technicians. The Expert Group comprised of an independent chairperson and four representatives each from the university employers and staff trade unions. The Group reported its findings to the Joint Management and Union Body (Umbrella Group). This body is comprised of representatives of the Universities, 3 Unions (AMICUS, SIPTU and IFUT), The Higher Education Authority, Department of Education and Science and the Department of Finance. The Expert Group Report was agreed in September 2006. Payment of increases backdated to April 2001.

### Main findings of The Expert Group

The following recommendations have now being implemented in the University sector

- 1) The expert group recommended that the education sector moves towards a graduate entry profession for Technicians, and the designated title of the profession should be Technical Officer. The basic structure will have three grades. The three grades will be Technical Officer, Senior Technical Officer and Chief Technical Officer.
- 2) The Expert Group agreed that the role of the profession should be enhanced and expanded to include managerial and supervisory duties, teaching support, continuous professional development, instruction and training, research support and redeployment.
- 3) Entry to the profession will require a relevant Honours degree. Promotion to Senior Technical Officer and beyond will in future require a Masters Degree qualification or equivalent. All technical staff currently in post at an agreed date and who met the existing qualification requirements for progression were deemed to have the necessary qualifications for progression.
- 4) The Expert Group recommended that institutions would need to oversee technical service delivery under these expanded technical roles through the establishment of a relevant Technical Services Committee within each institution. The committee should consist of Chair – President of the University or his/her nominee. Three academic representatives including a Dean and a Head of Department/School from relevant Faculties/Colleges. Three technical representatives. One representative from the Human Resources department.

There are major benefits for Unite Amicus members apart from a significant pay increase because of the implementation of the Expert Group Report. The changes in the role of the profession will raise the Professional Profile of Technical Staff and allow Technical Staff to align with the strategic plans of the

University Sector particularly in Research. The Technical Services committees will promote consultation and communication between academic and technical staff.

The new qualifications and role of technical staff in Universities will allow for increased pay claims under the benchmarking process, in the event of a return to local bargaining it will allow the Union to claim parity with other professional laboratory staff in the Public sector.

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