

Expert Group

Report of the Expert Group on University Technician Grades

June 2005

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Section 1 - Introduction

Background to the Establishment of the Expert Group

The labour Relations Commission (Ref.CC97/566) in May 1997, recommended the establishment of an Expert group for Medical Laboratory technicians/technologists as part of a set of proposals to settle their pay claims under the PCW. The Expert Group issued its report in February 2001.

Based on the pay relationship between university technicians and medical laboratory technicians under PCW, it has now been agreed that an Expert Group will be established for university technicians with the following terms of reference;

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of the Expert Group are to examine and report on:

- The role of the profession: - including, inter alia, the impact of ongoing change across the Universities, with particular reference to student instruction and developments in research.
- Career structures including
 - Qualifications
 - Professional Certification
 - Unified career structure, if appropriate to the institutions within the sector.
 - Training and education requirements including funding and facilities.
 - Designated Title.
- Management structure and development within the profession.
- Development plans for the delivery of services.

The Expert Group comprised of an independent chairperson (agreed by both parties) and four representatives from the university employers and four representatives from staff trade unions. The members of the Expert Group were:

Raymond McGee (LRC) Chairperson from March 2003 until June 2003

Kevin Foley (LRC) Chairperson from November 2004

Ms Marian Burns (DCU) from July 2003

Michael Chapman (AMICUS-MSF)

Olan Dwyer (SIPTU)

Pat Fitzgerald (DCU) from February 2005

Michael Flanagan (UCD)

Colm Flannery (NUIG) from February 2005

Robert French (AMICUS-MSF)

Professor Paul Giller (UCC)

Maria Kelly (TCD) until June 2003

Chris McNairney (NUIG)

Therese Moloney (AMICUS-MSF)

Expert Group Methodology

It was agreed that:

- 1 The Expert Group would carry out its task by way of plenary discussions. Where appropriate local negotiations will take place in individual Universities between management and union nominees on issues relevant to that University. The Expert group will monitor and co-ordinate the local negotiations.
2. The Group would then report its findings to the Joint Management and Union Body (Umbrella Group). This body is comprised of representatives of the 7 Universities, 3 Unions (AMICUS-MSF, SIPTU and IFUT), THE Higher Education Authority, Department of Education and Science and the Department of Finance.
3. The Expert Group may, following consultation with the Joint Management and Union Body or a subgroup of that body as appropriate where such is agreed, consider other relevant issues.
4. All technical staff currently in post at an agreed date and who meet the existing qualification requirements for progression or who subsequently meet those requirements will be deemed to have the necessary qualifications for progression.

The Expert Group commenced work in March 2003 and met seven times during the period March 2003 and February 2005. This Report is based on the agreed minutes of these meetings.

Acknowledgements

The Expert Group would like to express its appreciation to the Labour Relations Commission and to University College Cork for their support in hosting its meetings.

Section 2 – Role of the Profession

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 as appropriate to the grade. Details of the new expanded roles are given in Section 4, titled, "Management Structure and Development within the Profession".

Section 3 – Career Structure

The Expert Group considered the following issues, namely, **Title, Structure and Qualifications**, and agreed to base their discussion on the Report of the Expert Group on Medical Laboratory Technician / Technologist Grades in the Health Sector. It was agreed that similar qualifications and grading structures applying to technicians in the Health Sector should apply to University Technicians

Title

The expert group recommends that the sector moves towards a graduate entry profession for Technicians, and the designated title of the profession should be Technical Officer.

Structure

The Expert Group recommends that;

- The basic structure will have three grades. This will apply in all seven Universities¹.
- The three grades will be **Technical Officer, Senior Technical Officer and Chief Technical Officer**.
- Promotion from Technical Officer to Senior Technical Officer will be the normal career progression within each institution and will in future be linked inter alia to qualifications.
- Entry to the grade of Chief Technical Officer will be on the basis of competition and the existing arrangements in each university will continue to apply.
- Other technical grades that currently apply in individual universities (e.g. experimental officers in TCD) will continue to apply and will be the subject of local discussions in each university.

Qualifications

The expert Group recommends that;

- 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.
- The Universities will have the option of externally advertising posts at all levels.

The Group also noted that in many instances, it would be difficult to establish a relevant Masters degree and indeed Honours degree (for example for technicians working in material testing stations) and each institution would have to consider locally how “acquired experiential learning” combined with other qualifications could be used to determine equivalence to formal qualifications.

The Expert Group makes no recommendations on the issue of professional certification.

1: As per the terms of reference of this report

Section Four – Management Structure

Chief Technical Officer

The Expert group recommends that;

The reporting structure of the Chief Technical Officer will be to the Head of Department (HoD) or equivalent who will be appropriately qualified and be of sufficient academic standing to provide that leadership.² In the event of conflicting demands on the Chief Technical Officer, the matter will be referred to the HoD or equivalent

Chief Technical Officer will have a managerial role including, inter alia, for disciplinary, grievance and performance issues, for technical staff. This will involve a change in the role of the Chief Technical Officer and will require the development of new competencies. These Officers will be recruited internally and externally as appropriate.

Senior Technical Officer

The Expert group recommends that this expanded role would include:

- Enhanced role in the supervision, where appropriate, of technical staff on a day-to-day basis.
- Provide a support role to teaching duties such as demonstrations and general instruction.
- Assist in the design and development of practical classes.
- Assist in the development/training of Demonstrators.
- Mentoring of junior staff.
- Assist in the development of student practical workbooks.
- Commitment to continuous professional development including taking on responsibilities consequent on new technologies.
- Extended role in research programmes to include new equipment training.
- Increased role in general administrative responsibilities including areas such as Health and Safety, budget control, purchasing etc.

Technical Officer

It was agreed that this expanded role would include:

- Support teaching generally and provide “demonstrating” and/or “instruction” as necessary.
- Assist in the design and development of practical classes.
- Assist in the development/training of Demonstrators, subject to experience.
- Assist in the development of student practical notebooks.
- Commitment to continuing Professional Development, including taking on responsibilities consequent on new technologies.
- Expanded role in research, which would involve supporting research activities, or a more inclusive role in Research Programmes and greater engagement in this area. This may involve additional training, for example with particular equipment and/or techniques.
- Increased role for general administrative responsibilities, for example Health and Safety requirements, Stores and the assistance in activities such as budget control and purchasing etc.

Technical staff at all grades may be redeployed along the lines of current agreements in each institution and/or as per attached appendices to this report.

²: Appropriately qualified shall be determined by management at each institution.

Section Five - Delivery of Services

The agreed expanded roles of Chief Technical Officer, Senior Technical Officer, and Technical Officer grades include a range of activities and responsibilities that encompass, managerial and supervisory duties, teaching support, instruction and training, research support, redeployment and continual professional development and administration, as appropriate to the grade. The expert group agreed that institutions would need to oversee technical service delivery under these expanded technical roles through the establishment of a relevant Committee within each institution. This committee would be subject to the procedures for the establishment of committees in each institution.³ As the expanded roles and proposed reporting relationships may well span across traditional departmental boundaries, this committee might also take on a co-ordinating role.

It is essential that the establishment of any such Committee should be fully representative of technical, academic and administrative bodies within the institution. As such, the following Committee structure might apply:

Technical Services Committee

Chair – President 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.

The mechanism for selecting the various representatives should be defined by the academic and technical bodies of each institution.⁴

It is envisaged that the remit of the Committee would vary somewhat amongst the various institutions (depending on their specific configuration and activities) but could include advising on the following:

- Promoting consultation and communication between academic and technical staff
- Policy development issues related to service delivery.
- Monitoring the success of implementation of the expanded roles and activities.
- Evaluation of redeployment and flexibility requirements to meet service delivery and, as necessary, co-ordination of redeployment and flexibility issues.
- Professional development and additional training opportunities.
- Implementation of new technologies.
- Initial consideration of staffing issues, where appropriate, which may arise in relation to technical services delivery.

Footnote: The Group recommends that additional supervisory/management training should be given to staff and in particular to Chief Technical Officers.

^{3, 4}: In accordance with Section 18 subsections (4) & (5) and Section 24 subsection (3) fourth Schedule (5) of the Universities Act 1997.

Appendix 1

PCW agreement 1999 TCD

Co-operation with Change

It is agreed that changes in work practices will be introduced in a spirit of co-operation. It is recognized that the implementation of change will call for the continued commitment from both parties to:

i) Co-operation regarding the introduction of new schemes, the adaptation of existing schemes and other initiatives which may involve change in work practice.

Examples of possible changes in work practice may include:

a) Cross-Departmental Working

Technical staff will cooperate with the implementation of working groups which may include staff from more than one department, and which may involve carrying out work for more than one department. These groups may operate on a temporary, part-time or permanent basis. In all cases appropriate arrangements will be made in advance to ensure that the home department duties of the Technical staff concerned will not accumulate and will be taken into account when allocating their new duties.

b) Inter-Departmental Working

Technical staff may on occasion carry out duties for a department other than their own, subject to the prior agreement of their Own Head of Department. In all cases, appropriate arrangements will be made in advance to ensure that the home department duties of the Technical staff concerned will not accumulate and will be taken into account when allocating their new duties.

Any new inter-departmental arrangements will be made at local level with the full participation of all the Technical staff involved.

Appendix 2

PCW agreement 1999 UL

Patterns of Employment

Technical staff will continue to co-operate with new patterns of work, reporting and recruitment. Where practicable, new patterns of work will take into account the individual's personal and family circumstances. Technical staff agree to be receptive and responsive to working arrangements, reporting relationships, the deployment of staff and attendance patterns as discussed and agreed through the normal Industrial Relations Agreement.

Appendix 3

Productivity agreement 1984 UCD

University College Dublin and the Technicians employed by the College agree to co-operate fully to promote efficiency and productivity and in particular to implement the measures set out below.

Where it does not already apply mobility of all technical staff between departments will be introduced. Technicians will transfer from one department to another on a temporary basis. In so far as permanent transfers would be concerned, these would take place subject to consultation and agreement. Where it does not already apply reasonable flexibility in work undertaken will be introduced when duties of technicians and other grades overlap. The following are examples of mobility/flexibility:

- (a) A technician in a department where the volume of work has declined could be transferred to a more active department.
- (b) A technician could be transferred from one department to another in the event of a shortage of staff there arising from absence because of illness or holidays.

Appendix 4

Redeployment agreement NUIG

- a) Both parties agree and fully support the need for flexibility and co-operation between technicians so that the University can in the most productive manner possible, achieve its objectives.
- b) Technicians may be directed to undertake duties, whether on a full-time or part-time basis, in a department other than that to which they were originally assigned where operation requirement dictate. This to be determined by the Academic Resources Committee on the basis of recommendation from the Technical Staff Advisory Group.
- c) In the event of a permanent transfer to a new department and where there is a subsequent decision to fill the original position within eighteen months, then the technician concerned shall have first option on his/her former position.
- d) There will be prior consultation with the individual and his/her representatives where transfers are required.
- e) Where, due to operational requirements, there is need for a technician with specific skills to be permanently transferred and where more than one technician with particular skills is available in another department, then the most junior technician will be transferred except in the case where the University determines the junior technician concerned has other skills which are essential to his/her existing Department.
- f) Where the individual or the Union consider that either a permanent or temporary transfer is contrary to the terms of this agreement the following procedure will apply;
 - i. The technician will transfer under protest;
 - ii. There will be discussions as soon as possible between the Management of the University and the Union in an effort to resolve the dispute;
 - iii. In the event that joint discussions are unsuccessful the matter will be considered by an Appeals Panel consisting of the VP (HPR), a nominee from the trade union and an independent convenor drawn from an agreed panel as soon as is reasonably practicable.

These provisions, on permanent transfers, shall not apply in the case of Carna or to other distant locations (e.g. outside of the environs of the city of Galway), which may be acquired by the University in the future. In cases where the individual is to be redeployed to Galway from a distant location, the University will reimburse the technician the cost of access miles for a period of two years.