



**Unite Issues Paper for Cabinet Office discussions on Fair
Access to the Professions - Science and Engineering related
occupations.
June 2009**

This paper is prepared by Unite the Union, the UK's largest trade union with 2 million members across the private and public sectors. The union's members work in a range of sectors including financial services, print, media, construction, local government, education, health, not for profit and manufacturing which makes up a substantial component of our overall membership.

Unite is the main union representing Higher Education scientific technicians and academic related staff in the UK and Republic of Ireland. This, along with its considerable membership in manufacturing, makes it a major stakeholder in all decisions around science, technology and engineering related occupations.

Introductory/Background Comments

- 1.1 Unite welcomes the opportunity to provide input into this debate and to provide additional oral evidence if necessary.
- 1.2 One of the Education sectors main problems is in relation to poor identifiable career pathways, as example for our technician members within UK Universities.
- 1.3 We have been working with HEaTED (Higher Education and Technician Education and Development) <http://www.istonline.org.uk/HEATED/heated.htm> who are funded by HEFCE to offer training and development within the sector.
- 1.4 Unite raised the above points, stressing the importance of Technicians within such institutions, with Lord Sainsbury through the TUC's Alliance for Science last year.

Key Issues

- 2.1 There is no clear national structured opportunity within the sector and no systematic process/qualifications to be a university technician, therefore

- no national standards apply. Training and development is piecemeal as well as being dependent on each University or School paying and offering up opportunities. On top of that HEaTED is only open to existing technicians. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are not formally funding HEaTED and accessibility outside of England is more difficult.
- 2.2 There is no structure therefore for school leavers or unemployed to enter technical career training without first entering the actual role. There is some limited opportunity for post graduate students to gain on the job experience but again there is no national structured programme. This approach of plugging gaps with post graduates is short-termist and doesn't benefit the role or the post graduate.
- 2.3 Unite have also been warning via the employers association UCEA to HEFCE that the demographics on technicians shows an ageing workforce population. There was a 2004 report completed at HEFCE's request by Evidence Ltd that showed the main trends at the time which supported our contention that unless proper career planning is put in place the sector will suffer a substantial skills shortage within the next 10 years.
- 2.4 There is no professional body for University Technicians who operate expensive high-tech equipment and assist in the conduct of similarly expensive programmes / courses.

Recommendations

- 3.1 Unite recommends the establishment of a professional body for University Technicians in recognition of their specialist roles.
- 3.2 Unite recommends the establishment of a co-ordinated, cross university training programme for University Technicians which will result in national standards for Technicians being established.
- 3.3 Any provision should be based on suitable access across the UK with support from the devolved administrations.
- 3.4 Finally, Unite recommends more money and resources be put in place to ensure the above issues are addressed in a timely / appropriate fashion so-as access to relevant professions is open and identifiable career paths are established.

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