Unison response to technical review framework.

# Overall Unison response

The Technical Review was presented to staff as a way of encompassing aspects of the Technicians Commitment. None of these changes actually do that. The main purposes of the review were intended to:

* Harmonise job titles across the schools.
* Update job descriptions to more accurately reflect roles currently undertaken.

In attempting to update job titles to “*allow harmonisation and remove the current confusion*,” and rewriting job descriptions “*to ensure they are consistent, and reflect the work currently undertaken by technical staff*” this exercise has actually confused the issue and disappointed staff by not fully representing the skills they bring to their jobs.

The whole of the technical review, both phase 1 and phase 2, seems to be a missed opportunity for the University to address some longstanding problems in the technical roles and grades. It has been undoubtedly clear for some time that many technicians were, and are, working above their grade with little or no prospect of any upgrade. Money was always going to be a constraint, but it seems unfair that in phase 1 when looking at more senior posts the money was found to create upgraded roles at grade 8 in various areas, while at lower grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 our additional responsibilities are just being written into the same grade. Unfortunately, this failure to address the problem for the lower technical grades means the whole process is flawed and will lead to further disengagement and demotivation among technical staff. Staff turnover in technical roles is going up and we are seeing very poor numbers of applicants for vacant positions in various schools.

The overall feeling from members is that this review recognises the additional work they have taken on above their original JD without the opportunity to re-grade that should come with it. We have been shown the exciting new opportunity of Grade 6 specialist but told there are no job opportunities at the moment. Not only this, but upon closer inspection, the Grade 6 specialist role appears to have been written very specifically. It does not represent an opportunity for any of our current Grade 5 Technicians due to it being entirely ‘non-programme based’. The responsibilities in the new JDs are overlapping and the wording is confused, as such there is no clear indicator of what warrants the changes in grades and therefore the new JDs are not fit-for-purpose.

Apart from fulfilling a paper exercise on behalf of Human Resources, this review performs no function in attempting to encompass the Technicians Commitment (the aim of which is to “*ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technicians working in higher education and research, across all disciplines*”). As a result, we at UNISON are not in a position to agree to the proposed changes. We note that the university cannot change an employee’s job description without their agreement, as this would constitute a change to their terms and conditions of employment.

1. With this in mind, what will be the process for individual technicians who do not agree to the new job descriptions?

The timeline for feedback and implementation is very tight, it is clear from the initial meetings and feedback from members that there is a lot of feedback to consider. What hasn’t been made clear is the process when this feedback is received. Below we have collated specific feedback from members, staff have taken a lot of time to carefully consider these new JDs but are concerned that feedback will just be ignored.

1. What is the process for responding to feedback and how will any changes be communicated with staff?

Signed: Ivan Bonsell on behalf of University of Brighton Unison Branch

## Specific feedback - Job titles

Change Technical Instructor (Specialist) to ‘Technical Specialist’ - The main difference between Grade 6 Technical Specialist and the grade 5 ‘instructor’ role is working on “non-programme-based projects”. How can specifically not working directly for a programme make someone more of a specialist than someone working on a programme directly. There are departments in the School of Art and Media where Technical Demonstrators are already non-programme based.

Change ‘team leader’ to manager. - It is clear from the job description that this is about managing people as opposed to the ‘Technical Specialist’ role and so therefore this should be clear in the job title by including ‘manager. (Retain Workshop Manager title)

## Specific feedback - Job descriptions

Grade 3 Technician – ‘To comply and assist with the disposal of waste materials’ Did they mean to comply with waste regs? If not, what are they complying with here? Grade 3 mentions ‘waste’ whereas Grade 4 mentions ‘Hazardous waste’, how are we going to ensure Grade 3 techs in labs don’t handle hazardous waste?

Grade 3 says to support loan system, 4 says to facilitate loan system, what is the difference? Is there enough of a difference here to justify the wage difference? Generally other points move from ‘assist’ in Grade 3 to ‘proactively ensure’ in Grade 4, this should be applied throughout.

Grade 4 Senior Technician – ‘’To supervise and support students and staff…. techniques on a range of topics within identified area(s)” – Where will these ‘identified areas’ be identified? How will staff keep a record of their identified areas if not in their JD?

Both Grade 3 & Grade 4 person spec ask for GCSE/A-level, 4 asks ‘or relevant practical experience’ where 3 does not. Arguably this is more appropriate in the Grade 3 role. Both ask for ‘computer skills including database software’ I doubt many of our current techs have database software experience, this isn’t necessary and should be removed (Excel isn’t database software!).

Grade 5 specialist – ‘To provide specialist subject surgeries’ – what is a subject surgery, will people that don’t currently do this be asked to start doing it?

Grade 6 Technical specialist includes ‘undertake day to day management of your technical team, including approving leave of absences and to review and organise the personal development of your staff’ – This should be ‘Team Leader’ not specialist, it defeats the purpose of the different routes.

The current job description for some Technical Demonstrator roles (and others?) states that staff should “ensure that safe codes of practice are maintained and comply fully with safety legislation and security arrangements.” Additionally, they “Assist School Managers in making assessments of potential risks”, “liaise with “Safety Manager that relevant health and safety regulations are kept up to date. New description calls for Technical Instructor to “**develop** and maintain health and safety documentation to ensure effective controls.” Throughout the Technical Instructor (Specialist) job description there are reference to independently making decisions, planning, and organising. These roles are certainly carried out by staff but have in previous terms and conditions been carried out under instruction. To accept these new conditions can be seen as accepting the increased responsibilities with no option of an upgrade.

## Specific feedback - Additional points

A general point, all JDs need another proofread. There are plenty of typos to be found e.g. advice instead of advise and too instead of to as well as repeated bullet points in person specs in the wrong box (Grade 4) & formatting errors.

How does a Grade 6 Technical Team leader differ from a Grade 6 School Technical Manager? Will current School Technical Managers be moved on to Technical Team Leader JDs?

How will Grade 5 people be assigned supervisor or specialist?

Would like clear indicators of what separates the grades.

Would like to see addition of Grade 7 role descriptors, even if we don’t have those posts at the moment, it gives people something to work towards/compare themselves to. It has already been stated that 6 specialist is a new role with not many people (if any) in it so why not have the extra 7, it doesn’t exceed our current structure.

This review misses the opportunity to create a career pathway into teaching. It also doesn’t acknowledge teaching already delivered by technical staff.

Would like addition of 5/6 role that is neither specialist nor supervisor, some people are generalists.

They’ve mentioned that schools will decide if grades are appropriate, how will they ensure this is done fairly?