

Raising the Professional Profile of Technical/Specialist Staff

One-Day Conference

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at The University of Manchester

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I would like to give a belated welcome to our conference on behalf of the Steering Committee for the HEaTED initiative. It's great to see so many here; an indication I hope of the importance and timeliness of HEaTED.

Why is HEaTED important? I think there are four elements to this argument:

- First, the UK is very good at Higher Education. We would say that wouldn't we? But there is no shortage of independent evidence. For example, the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) in China publishes a ranking of international universities.
- The last overall ranking published in 2007 placed 11 UK universities in the top 100 in the world, second only to the USA and well ahead of other developed economies such as Japan, Germany and other European nations. In 2008, SJTU has published broad subject-based rankings (Engineering & Technology, Natural Science and Mathematics, Life Sciences, Medicine, Social Sciences). The UK is also the second ranked nation (in terms of numbers of universities in the top 100) in all these categories.
- Now, I used to work for someone who was fond of saying "Nobody believes in league tables, but it is nice to be near the top". So, this evidence needs to be looked at with the usual caveats, but there's plenty more to choose from.
- The second component of the argument for HEaTED is that HE is good for the UK. Just in economic terms, universities make a significant contribution to UK plc. In 2004, as part of the preparations for the merger at Manchester, we commissioned a study of the economic impact of the university. The study estimated that £1.4 billion (roughly 3 times the University's turnover) was injected into the North West economy as a result of our activities. With 9000 direct employees and indirect employment for another 15000+ we have a very large impact on the North West employment market. Spin-outs from the University, about 100 at the time of the survey, also contribute, in the case of Manchester in 2004 through investments in these companies in excess of £30M. This kind of impact is mirrored across the sector; UK Higher Education make a very significant and growing contribution to UK plc.
- Third, we would not be achieving all this success without a strong cadre of technical and specialist staff. To be among the world leaders in education and research these days requires specialist equipment and specialist skills which our

professional staff are uniquely placed to deliver. Without them, we would not be where we are today.

- Given the central importance of technical and specialist staff to the success of Higher Education, it is surprising that they are sometimes such a neglected part of the universities' workforce. In conversations in my own Faculty, it is clear that there is often a feeling of isolation and neglect among technical and specialist staff. Their contribution is clearly valued locally by the research and teaching team of which they are part, but the 'reach' of this appreciation is often precariously narrow. In this area, we are also facing the challenge of an ageing workforce, exacerbated by a growing reluctance among young people in the UK (and other developed economies) to consider a scientific or technical career path. Technology is developing rapidly so keeping the skills of technical and specialist staff at the leading edge, which is where they need to be if this sector is to remain competitive, is also a major challenge.
- So, I'm delighted to be able to play a part in an initiative conceived to address key issues for this important component of universities' workforce. It is great that the response from the community, as evidenced by your attendance today, has been positive up to now. We look forward to your continued support. The sector needs us to make a success of HEaTED.