Technician Commitment

Guidance for Completing the Self-Assessment & Action Plan

The Technician Commitment is a university and research institution initiative, led by a steering group of sector bodies, with support from the Science Council and the Gatsby Charitable Foundation's Technicians Make It Happen campaign. The Commitment aims to ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technicians working in higher education and research, across all disciplines. Universities and research institutes are invited to become signatories of the Technician Commitment and pledge action against the key challenges affecting their technical staff.

The themes of the Technician Commitment are: Visibility, Recognition, Career Development, Sustainability and Evaluating Impact. The fifth theme of Evaluating Impact takes the form of a self-assessment process, to be undertaken one year after an organisation becomes a signatory and biennially thereafter.

The self-assessment process enables the Technician Commitment Steering Group to gain an understanding of the position of each signatory organisation and the measures to be put in place to ensure that signatories are making progress against the themes outlined in the Commitment. The self-assessment process asks for contextual information, progress to date and a detailed 24-month future action plan.

The Technician Commitment Steering Group does not seek to dictate how organisations promote a positive culture for the technician community. This is a matter for autonomous institutions and the technician, research and academic community to agree. It is expected that as a minimum, signatories publicly state their Technician Commitment signatory status and institutional action plan on a dedicated and discoverable webpage, along with their named point of contact. The Steering Group would like signatories to evidence that the 'technician voice' is present in the development and formation of institutional action plans. The Technician Commitment is a collaborative endeavour and the Steering Group will support and facilitate the establishment and sharing of best practice demonstrated in the self-assessments and action plans. A vibrant community of Institutional Leads tasked with implementing the Technician Commitment is emerging and the Steering Group aims to ensure a range of forums are available to enable peers to share expertise, good practice and experiences.

To support institutional action planning, please see Appendix A for examples of activities and initiatives that have been successfully implemented in a range of universities and research institutes. Additional details are available on the Technician Commitment's dedicated online resource, available at http://technicians.org.uk/techniciancommitment/. Cross referencing to other sector institutional reviews relevant to technicians is welcomed; for example, institutions may wish to reference Athena SWAN applications, Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) submissions and Research Excellence Framework (REF) environment statements where technicians have been explicitly mentioned.

Please note that finalised Action Plans should be signed off at an institutional leadership level (e.g. Vice-Chancellor/President/Director level).

For any additional queries, please contact k.vere@sciencecouncil.org or tracey.dickens@gatsby.org.uk.

Technician Commitment

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

Organisation:

Comments on organisation of technical structures and the internal scope/reach established for the Technician Commitment at this institution:

Prior to January 1st 2017 the majority of technical staff across Staffordshire University were aligned to and formed part of Faculty structures, reporting to a corresponding Technical Manager under each Dean. A strategic reorganisation that took place in late 2016 heralded the creation of Technical Services, a professional service department bringing together all technical staff from across the university under the leadership of a newly appointed Head of Technical Services, reporting directly to the Deputy Vice Chancellor. This change then allowed Technical staff to have a considerable voice at Executive level of the university, going on to help shape and co-create strategic aims and objectives in regard to the future direction of the institution, it's practical & maker facilities, the development of the service, its staff and their function.

Furthermore, Technical Services was established with a view to carrying out a full strategic and operational review whilst the service was in its infancy. This was completed in two distinct stages during 2018 and led to the creation of five new Technical Hubs which realigned teams and roles to deliver a much more fluid dynamic in regard to support for both students and the organisation in general. A key objective in this transformation was to remove the linear support structures that encouraged closed and siloed working, replacing that with a more horizontal structure based on subjects and themes. Technical Services now provides access and high levels of support to students based on academic requirements, curious inquiry and genuine project need which is no longer dependent on the title of the Award. This approach helps support a broader portfolio of learning & development in a more meaningful and connected way. A significant proportion of technical staff at the university hold first or further degrees, including PhDs and many more benchmark their skills through industry recognised vocational qualifications, accreditations or professional memberships.

Comments on level of initiatives/programmes/activities that were already in place for the technical community within this organisation prior to them becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment:

Staffordshire University boasts a considerable record for supporting its technical staff, both prior and subsequent to the creation of its Technical Services department. Staff have benefitted from access to earmarked funding from which to pursue further academic or vocational qualification, or other appropriate professional development. Since the creation of the Technical Services department, this funding has sat centrally within the department and is available to any member of technical staff

who can provide reasonable justification or grounds for pursuing investment. An example of such activity within Media would be pursuit of professional certification facilitating the delivery of professional vocational training courses in subjects such as Logic Pro and Avid Media Composer.

A number of cross Technical Services groups and initiatives have been set up in the last 12 months to expand the breadth and depth of the technical voice at the university and to bring together a diverse technical community to challenge topics such as Staff Engagement and Wellbeing.

Furthermore, Technical staff have been given a platform to present to colleagues from other institutions across Europe as part of an annual, symposium event aimed at bringing together technical collectives. In 2018, Technical staff from Staffordshire delivered a talk on Diversity & Inclusivity at Glasgow School of Art. This year colleagues delivered a presentation on the evolution of 'The Technical Role' at the symposium hosted at Aalto, Helsinki.

Technical staff have long been able to feed directly into the Capital Bid planning, writing and bidding process and the creation of Technical Services and subsequent desire for co-creation and adoption of the connected curriculum has seen this position reinforced.

Comments on initiatives this organisation has put in place to address the themes of the Technician Commitment since becoming a signatory:

Visibility – as part of the 2018 Technical Services Transformation Project, all Technical staff across the university were issued with an updated job description to match the expectations of the grade and substantive role. Prior to this, a piece of work was carried out by the Technical Management team to determine the key expectations and responsibilities at each of Grades Four, Five and Six respectively. As a result, job descriptions at each of the aforementioned grades are consistent across the service.

Recognition – Technical staff have been supported via the funding necessary to complete vocational and professional certifications relevant to their area of expertise (such as Apple Certified Trainer, NewTek Certified Operator, Adobe Certified Professional), or where appropriate to pursue higher degrees, including PhDs. Technical staff have also been supported in regard to professional registrations where appropriate. The Service also feeds into The university's Recognition of Success Awards and technical staff have been successful in categories such as 'Living Our Values – Brilliant and Friendly' and the 'Connected University Network Award' in the past two years.

Career Development – Technical Services are embarking upon a strategic body of work entitled **'The Technical Role'**. A contributory aspect of this work stream is to identify the scope for and nature of development of the technical role and associated career path beyond the ceiling of the current Specialist Grade. This may involve leading technical modules or simply being more centrally involved in the summative assessment process. The Service is also in the process of developing its Online 'Resource Guide', which will include profiles or biographies for all staff, highlighting their skills and abilities. Recent membership to the HEaTED programme provides targeted management & leadership CPD for preparation and improved performance in roles with line management responsibilities.

Sustainability – The Service has recently completed a Resilience and Succession Planning Report, highlighting areas of strength and weakness in regard to sustainability. This information was also fed

into the Technical Transformation Project in order to support the adoption of more sustainable approaches, leading to greater agility across the service.

Please provide a 24-month action plan, detailing future plans to ensure your organisations addresses the themes of the Technician Commitment and details of how impact will be evidenced: (this may be detailed here or attached to this document as an appendix):
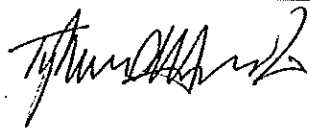
Please see 'Appendix A' below

Please evidence how the 'technician voice' was present in the development and formation of the institutional action plan:

The Head of Technical Services reports directly to the Pro Vice Chancellor – Digital of the University and is a member of the Extended Senior Leadership Team (eSLT) feeding into the development of strategy ensuring there is alignment and flow of communication between university Executive and Technical staff at all levels. The action plan below was discussed at all staff meetings and thoughts, recommendations discussed at Technical Services SMT.

Please confirm that your Technician Commitment status and action plan is published on your organisation website and provide the relevant URL here:

In progress

Signed   (Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead)

Date: 6th December 2019

Signed...(Technician Commitment Signatory – Leader of Institution)

Date:

**Appendix A: Activities and initiatives to address the
themes of the Technician Commitment**

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list, it intends to demonstrate example activities to support
institutions in action planning.

Theme	Activities
Visibility Ensure that technicians within the organisation are identifiable and that the contribution of technicians is visible within and beyond the institution	• Identify how many technicians we employ – Publication of clear reporting structures - complete • All Technician roles to be reviewed then include new, lucid and unified job descriptions - complete • Person specifications updated to reflect changes to role - complete • Celebration of Technical activities at events (mixed understanding of what Technicians do) • A consistent policy where technicians have contributed to research outputs, grants and the REF, ensuring they are named as authors • Technical staff to be involved in all stages of planning and implementation of estate building programmes • Technicians to feature in organisation prospectuses, publications, resource guides and marketing materials for visibility of service • Technical Services to publish regular updates & features alongside other departments on the top level of the University website (similar to other departments) • Technicians specialisms and biographies published to enhance individual and departmental profiles • Technicians to sit on decision making committees where appropriate • Technicians to be consulted and costed in business cases / proposals for new courses, research projects and capital investment programmes • Organisation strategy to include technical representation where appropriate • Technicians to engage more in social media platforms and use the university App to promote student & staff success
Recognition Promote subject & practice through seminars, talks and workshops Support technicians to gain recognition through HEA and professional registration / accreditation to industry Highlight contributions made to curriculum design & delivery, support development of the role	• Present & publish opportunities to deliver talks and workshops (internal and external) • Recognition and support of the development of technician roles through the accreditation of teaching practice through the Higher Education Academy – Professional accreditation programmes • Clear understanding of how Technicians drive and support curriculum change – Technicians voice in revalidation and quality assurance exercises • Celebrating staff success recognising the contribution of technical staff • All Technicians achievements to be promoted on WorkVivo (the university social media app) • Nominations to external award schemes that recognise the contribution of technical staff (e.g. Times Higher Awards) • Technicians to be supported & sponsored to visit other institutions
Career Development Enable career progression opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathways Review of the Technical role	• Technician skills development programme to develop advanced digital skills and raise competency levels • Explore opportunities to introduce new technologies in labs & workshops to support and lead institutional transformation • Professional development opportunities, signposted to technicians and aligned to career pathways • A dedicated section on our internet/intranet showcasing case studies of technician careers • Expansion of technician specific job families in recognition of high-level technical specialisms (Technical Role Review)

	• Introduction of an exchange programme between institutions to further share, learn & develop (in progress with UWE)
Sustainability Ensure the future sustainability of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised	• Appropriate resilience & succession planning for technical roles including the review and analysis of technician profiles to ensure future sustainability of skills within the organisation • Secondment/placement/exchange programmes for technical staff to share best practice, develop new skills and introduce new thinking • A technician trainee/apprenticeship programme • Utilisation of the Apprenticeship Levy to train and upskill existing staff