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: University of Dundee

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To provide some context, please provide a brief profile of your organisation (up to 250 words):

The University of Dundee is a medium-sized civic institution with a compact and thriving city campus and a university hospital. Through collaborations and mergers, the University has evolved into a multi-disciplinary institution spanning medical, health and life sciences, engineering and physical sciences, social sciences, humanities, art and design.

The University's vision is to be a University globally renowned for our social purpose, delivered through our triple intensity and excellence in research, education and engagement. In 2022, we codified this vision in an exciting new strategy focused on priority academic themes:
- Population Health and Wealth,
- Climate Action and Net Zero,
- Equity and Inclusion.

Our strategy and five sub-strategies 2022-2027 were launched in Summer 2022 with one of the sub-strategies dedicated to People and Talent. This clear aim is to build an inclusive culture of empowerment and accountability to create a confident and high-performing community. We will achieve this through investing in our people, inspiring them to be innovative and to maximise the impact of their talent for the benefit of wider society. We will create and nurture a vibrant organisational culture, marked by a deep commitment to equality. We will manage, develop and celebrate our people and their varied contributions and will be accountable to one another for delivery of our key priorities.

Our commitment to translational research through industry partnerships, especially in both basic and applied biomedical research, has earned us recognition as one of Europe's most innovative universities. We are known for major technological breakthroughs from keyhole surgery to space technology, health informatics, new treatments for neglected tropical diseases and design-led innovation. We are globally connected and a member of the European Universities Association whilst locally anchored in the regional growth agenda and being pivotal in bringing the V&A Museum of Design to Dundee.

We have just over 3000 staff delivering research, teaching and professional services support. Around 10% of them are technicians.

We are committed to the principles of the Technician Commitment which we see as fully aligned with our own strategy. Our Action Plan is framed within this context.

Please tell us how your organisation defines its technicians:

The University has around 350 staff in the job category 'Technical', however, this does not account for all individuals who operate in a technical-centred role.

The University has agreed to use HEaTED's (Higher Education & Technician Educational Development) definition:
'A person who is trained and or skilled in the techniques, tools, and technology of their subject, who provides the practical application of knowledge, including hands-on support in directly contributing to teaching and learning, research and enterprise activities.'

How many technicians are there in your organisation? Please provide some information on where they are based and/or how they are structured (in terms of subject/discipline/department):

As indicated above the University has around 350 technicians. About 80% of these are based in academic schools, with the remaining 20% in central support functions. Numbers of academic school based technicians are:

School of Science & Engineering	22
School of Medicine	73
School of Life Sciences	160
Duncan of Jordanstone School of Art & Design	14
Other schools	9

We are conscious that how our HR systems have historically categorised technicians does not align perfectly with our adopted HEaTED definition. As such one of our early actions will be a comprehensive audit to ensure technicians are correctly identified.

We are also conscious that not all staff that we might consider to be technicians self-identify as such. Our approach is to work first to achieve visibility, recognition, development and sustainability with those that wish to be considered technicians, with the expectation that others will self-identify as technicians when they see the benefits others are achieving.

Our underlying premise is that achieving the Technician Commitment goals is mutually beneficial and is simply good management practice.

Please provide details of initiatives/programmes/activities that were already in place for the technical community within your organisation prior to becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment:

Local contribution awards – an annual round where staff from all categories can be put forward for merit awards.

Technical staff have access to all development and activities that professional service staff are eligible for including mentoring schemes, entrepreneurial events and awards, but there have not been any initiatives/programmes/activities aimed specifically at the technical community.

The Technician Commitment aims to ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technical staff across higher education and research. Please tell us of any initiatives your organisation has put in place to address these themes since becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment:

The University has begun a number of initiatives since becoming a signatory. These include:
- Outreach to the technical community
- Invitation to focus groups to contribute to an understanding of the current environment
- Creation of a working group of technicians to directly contribute to this activity and drive meaningful change
- Research into HEaTED and National Technician Development Centre (NTDC) membership
- Undertaken the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey (CEDARS)
- Active consideration of a SharePoint or webpage dedicated to the Technical Community
- Active consideration of a newsletter directed at technical staff and their managers

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):

The action plan is attached as separate document.

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

Technical staff have been engaged since the beginning of this project through focus groups and as the active members of the working group responsible for driving change and consulting on proposed actions.

Our fundamental approach to realising the goals of the Technician Commitment is a bottom up one, led by the technician voice and supported and facilitated by the University's senior team.

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

The Action Plan are published on the University website at https://www.dundee.ac.uk/opd/organisational-development/.

Signed.. (Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead)

Date:

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

Date: 28th June 2022

Appendix A: Examples of activities and initiatives toaddress the themes of the Technician Commitment

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

Theme	Example Activities
Visibility Ensure that technicians within the organisation are identifiable and that the contribution of technicians is visible within and beyond the institution	• Organisations can identify how many technicians they employ • Technician roles have clear job descriptions • A consistent policy that where technicians have contributed to research outputs and grants, they are named as authors • Technicians to feature in organisation prospectuses and marketing materials • Technicians to sit on decision making committees where appropriate • Technicians visible in costing mechanisms for research grants • A mechanism for celebrating technician achievements across the organisation • Organisation strategy documents to include technicians where appropriate • A vibrant 'Technician Network'
Recognition Support technicians to gain recognition through professional registration	• Organisation communicates the opportunity to become professionally registered to technical staff (Science Council, Engineering Council, BCS). Conferment of the organisational level Science Council Employer Champion award in recognition of the support given to technical staff to gain professional registration and engage in continued professional development • Recognition and support of the teaching aspect of many technician roles through the accreditation of teaching practice through the Higher Education Academy • Internal award schemes recognise the contribution of technical staff • Nominations to external award schemes that recognise the contribution of technical staff
Career Development Enable career progression opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathways	• Technician specific professional career paths/frameworks which clearly document progression opportunities • Professional development opportunities, signposted to technicians and aligned to career pathways • A dedicated webpage showcasing case studies of technician careers • Expansion of technician specific job families in recognition of high level technical specialisms
Sustainability Ensure the future sustainability of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised	• Appropriate succession planning for technical roles including the analysis of technician profiles to ensure future sustainability of skills within the organisation • Secondment/placement programmes for technical staff to develop new skills • A technician trainee/apprenticeship programme • Utilisation of the Apprenticeship Levy to train and upskill existing staff

University of Dundee – Technician Commitment Action Plan

The University Strategy is based upon the concept of 'triple intensity' around achieving internationally recognised excellence in the three themes of learning & teaching, research with impact, and engagement & enterprise – all geared towards social purpose. Our technicians are pivotal to all three.

The University employs around 350 technicians. They have expertise that spans a wide range of disciplines, and they make a fundamental contribution towards the University's aim of making a positive difference in the world and improving lives, locally and globally.

There are two versions of the action plan. The version used on a day-to-day basis within the University names owners of actions for year one and the roles currently anticipated to own actions for year two. The published version does not include the names of owners of actions for year one. Owners of actions for year two will be named as year one progress is evaluated, year two actions confirmed and year three actions developed.

Research with Impact

We will recruit, develop and retain high quality, professional technical staff to enable and deliver research of the highest standard on an international stage.

Education & Student Experience

We will recruit, develop and retain high quality, professional technical staff to enable and deliver teaching excellence of a world-class calibre.

Engagement & Enterprise

We will recruit, develop and retain high quality, professional technical staff to enable and deliver enterprise and commercialisation activities. We will also build links with external organisations whose expertise, facilities and equipment provide mutual benefit for technical excellence.

Year 1 (Y1)

Research with Impact Action Plan

We will recruit, develop and retain high quality, professional technical staff to enable and deliver research of the highest standard on an international stage.

Timeline	Action	Visibility	Recognition	Career development	Sustainability	Owner/Lead
Y1	Introduce clear guidance to ensure appropriate costing of technician time, equipment and facility charges so the full costs associated with technical staff and research are quantified in grant applications.	Y	Y			
Y1	Develop and communicate clear and consistent guidance on the inclusion of technical staff as authors on research papers to ensure full and appropriate recognition for all contributions.	Y	Y	Y		
Y1	Investigate opportunity to resubscribe to HEaTED and NTDC.			Y		
Y1	Establish routes and sources to allow technical staff to apply for funding to attend appropriate conferences to both develop and disseminate their expertise.			Y		
Y1	Establish a quarterly Technician Newsletter for updates related to Technician Commitment and emerging opportunities for technical staff	Y	Y			

Education & Student Experience Action Plan

We will recruit, develop and retain high quality, professional technical staff to enable and deliver teaching excellence of a world-class calibre.

Time - Line	Action	Visibility	Recognition	Career development	Sustainability	Owner/Lead
Y1	Better understand who we consider to be a technician ensuring that this is reflected in our HR systems.		Y			
Y1	Provide the opportunity for appropriate technical staff to gain HEA teaching recognition.			Y		
Y1	Representatives of technical staff to be invited to graduation ceremonies as degrees are conferred in recognition of their contribution to student learning.	Y	Y			
Y1	Develop a university wide mapping of technical activity to ensure that Dundee is equipped to deliver our ambitions in terms of excellence in Education & Student Experience and in Research with Impact.				Y	

Engagement & Enterprise Action Plan

We will recruit, develop and retain high quality, professional technical staff to enable and deliver enterprise and commercialisation activities. We will also build links with external organisations whose expertise, facilities and equipment provide mutual benefit for technical excellence.

Timeline	Action	Visibility	Recognition	Career development	Sustainability	Owner/Lead
Y1	Formation of a University Technical Managers committee with appropriate reporting structure and terms of reference to lead the development and delivery of the University's Technical Strategy and Technician Commitment.	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Y1	Periodic recognition of technicians' contributions to be part of the University's Internal Communications and the Message from the Principal	Y				
Y1	Professional Registration/Accreditation to be embedded in recruitment processes for technical positions as a desirable recruitment expectation.		Y	Y		
Y1	Develop appropriate technician specific career development activities, including developing tools and supporting career planning co-ordinated through the Organisational Professional Development Office.			Y	Y	
Y1	Identify Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) priority areas across the University's technician community and put a plan in place to address these as part of the wider University EDI strategy.	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Y1	Liaise with Abertay and St Andrews Universities and the James Hutton Institute to build relationships and networks.	Y		Y	Y	

Acronyms referred to in document:

VPR = Vice Principal Research, Knowledge Exchange and Wider Impact

TOG = Technicians Oversight Group

OPD = Organisational and Professional Development

WG = Technician Commitment Working Group

ADR = Associate Deans (Research)

ADL&T = Associate Deans (Learning & Teaching)

ACG = Academic and Corporate Governance

ASC = Academic Skills Centre

HR = Human Resources

ED&I = Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Year 2

Research with Impact Action Plan

We will recruit, develop and retain high quality, professional technical staff to enable and deliver research of the highest standard on an international stage.

Timeline	Action	Visibility	Recognition	Career development	Sustainability	Owner/Lead
Y2	Promote the inclusion of technical staff as named researchers on internal and external research funding applications where funding bodies allow.	Y	Y	Y		ADR
Y2	Explore the expansion of the eligibility criteria for the supervision of student research projects to ensure that, where appropriate, technical staff can gain formal recognition for supervision roles.		Y			
Y2	Ensure the University has a strategic awareness of technical skills and that it can succession plan effectively at both and School and University level, giving thought to the technical skills it will need to secure its future strategic ambitions by mapping of future technical skill requirements.				Y	Technical Managers
Y2	Ensure technical staff are represented on School and University level research committees in order that the views of technical staff are represented in decision-making processes related to research.	Y	Y	Y		ADR

Education & Student Experience Action Plan

We will recruit, develop and retain high quality, professional technical staff to enable and deliver teaching excellence of a world-class calibre.

Timeline	Action	Visibility	Recognition	Career development	Sustainability	Owner/Lead
Y2	Ensure technical staff are represented on School and University level learning and teaching committees to ensure that the views and expertise of technical staff are represented in decision-making processes related to teaching and the student experience.	Y	Y	Y		ACG
Y2	Students to have increased awareness and appreciation of technical roles at the University by featuring technical staff in future prospectuses and showcasing the expertise of technical staff at open days.	Y	Y			External Relations
Y2	Secure an increase in technical staff leading practical teaching sessions in laboratories/workshops (where appropriate) to ensure opportunities for development in technical teaching roles.		Y	Y		AD L&Ts

Engagement & Enterprise Action Plan

We will recruit, develop and retain high quality, professional technical staff to enable and deliver enterprise and commercialisation activities. We will also build links with external organisations whose expertise, facilities and equipment provide mutual benefit for technical excellence.

Timeline	Action	Visibility	Recognition	Career development	Sustainability	Owner/Lead
Y2	Celebrate and encourage the contribution of technical staff to the University's outreach/widening participation work.	Y	Y	Y		Widening Participation leads
Y2	Explore commercial opportunities for technical expertise through exploitation of scientific and other facilities.		Y	Y	Y	Technical Managers
Y2	Explore how job descriptions might be developed to make the career pathways open to technicians clearer in relation to teaching and/or research.	Y	Y	Y	Y	HR
Y2	Clearer identification of support for the development of leaders and managers from technician roles.			Y	Y	OPD, Careers
Y2	Promote coaching and mentoring provision to technical staff and ensure technical staff have the opportunity to access a mentor/coach.			Y		OPD
Y2	Establish a mentoring/buddy scheme between technical staff.	Y	Y	Y	Y	OPD