

## Technician Commitment

### Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

**Organisation:** Buckinghamshire New University

**Name of Institutional Lead:** Dr Matt Cross

**E-mail:** matthew.cross@bucks.ac.uk

**Contact Number:** 01494 522 141 (ex. 5029)

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

Buckinghamshire New University offers a new breed of University education providing courses in areas such as nursing, aviation, sport, art and design and production and performance. Split across three campuses in High Wycombe, Uxbridge and Aylesbury the University puts a specific emphasis on career-focused and skills-based courses.

The High Wycombe campus is where the majority of services are located along with dance and performance studios, art and design workshops, psychology lab and sports science suites. Some Healthcare simulation is available at this campus location.

The majority of Nursing and Healthcare is based at the Uxbridge campus with a range of specialist medical equipment along with high-tech simulation facilities.

An incubation hub is located at the Aylesbury campus along with additional, brand new, nursing simulation suites, a Cyber Resilience Centre and a VR-equipped engineering design suite.

The University has around 11,000 registered students and around 710 members of staff with a roughly equal split between academic and professional. The University blends teaching and learning approaches such as professional, practical and academic and in 2018 it received a TEF Silver award.

Work is split across 7 Schools, namely:

- School of Art, Design and Performance
- School of Aviation and Security
- School of Business, Law and Computing
- School of Media and Creative Industries
- School of Nursing and Allied Health
- School of Health Care and Social Work
- School of Human and Social Sciences

These Schools are supported by professional service employees based in various centralised Directorates.

**Please tell us how your organisation defines its technicians:**

For the purposes of the initial work on the Technician Commitment, a distinction is made between technicians and maintenance engineers. Maintenance engineers are primarily responsible for the physical infrastructure of the University including electrics and plumbing, they are based in the Estates, Facilities and Services Directorate and do not usually have direct interaction with staff or students when resolving issues.

Technicians and associated technical managers have a broad spectrum of specialisms and have regular and direct interaction with both staff and students. The level of interaction ranges from technical facilitation, request fulfilment, service delivery, demonstration and teaching. Technical staff mainly come under the Digital and Technical Services Directorate (DTS) with a smaller group in the Directorate for Student Success (DfSS) and are the key focus of work regarding the Technician Commitment.

The two teams have very different areas of focus, DTS is responsible for all 'IT' provision and for course-specific specialist equipment and equipment, DfSS is responsible for learning spaces, curriculum planning and pedagogy. An over-arching plan of the University's Impact 2022 strategy is for these 2 Directorates to work more closely together in the design and delivery of the student experience.

**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):**

There are currently just over 50 full-time staff in the Digital and Technical Services Directorate and around 5 in the Directorate for Student Success, these are supported by ad-hoc and contracting staff. Some permanent staff have fractional posts and only work certain days, subject to demand. Not all staff directly align with the definition of 'Technician' given above, some provide finance support, general administrative support or have leadership and management roles which means there is less direct interaction with the student body.

There are currently 4 main teams within the Digital and Technical Services Directorate:

- Infrastructure
- Operations
- IT Transformation
- Technical and Simulation Resources

There are 2 technical teams within the Directorate for Student Success:

- Curriculum Practice
- Integrated Digital Learning Systems

Each team has a head, supported by managers and the Heads report into the Director and has differing levels of interaction with the student body. The team which has the most direct interaction covers a broad spectrum of skills and disciplines such as:

- Art and design
- Media production and performance

- Clinical simulation
- Human performance and sports science
- Psychology
- Aviation simulation

The majority of technical staff are based at the High Wycombe campus. Clinical simulation is split between High Wycombe, Uxbridge and Aylesbury.

**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:**

There are currently pockets of excellence and good practice, current activities include:

- Technicians mentoring technicians internally and externally
- Technicians pursuing professional registration with the Science Council.
- Two Technicians have already achieved RSciTech status
- One Technical Manager has achieved CSi status
- Two members of the team are acting as a voluntary assessors of RSciTech applications through the Science Council.
- One Technical Manager of the team is acting as a voluntary assessor up to and including CSi through the Science Council.
- One Technical Manager is an Executive Member of the Association of Simulated Practice in Healthcare
- At least 7 Technicians have achieved Associate Fellowship status with the HEA.

The intention is to pursue these activities and propagate best practice across all technical staff.

The University is also currently developing a Digital Strategy which will feed into a new programme of Curriculum change over the next 3 years. Part of the Technician Commitment Action Plan is to fully embed technical staff in this process as the University develops a new Curriculum which is:

- Work and Place Integrated
- Integrated and Accessible
- Sustainable and Ethical
- Enquiry-based and Interdisciplinary
- Digitally enabled and digitally enabling

**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:**

Some technical staff already act as mentors for professional registration, supporting colleagues through the process.

Increasingly, technical staff are encouraged to sit in on and contribute to key decision making meetings. Technical managers regularly meet with the Heads of Schools their teams support.

Some technical staff have been nominated for and awarded 'staff achievement awards' as well as

achieving national, external recognition.

A Technical Manager won the Student Nursing Times, Teaching Innovation of the Year award in 2018 for their Dementia simulation. The simulation allows students to become fully immersed, feeling and experiencing what it might be like for patients with failing cognitive function who require support and care from nurses and carers. Since then, the simulation has been delivered to external networks, bringing in funds for the university and raising awareness of the work of the team.

One Technical Manager was nominated and short-listed for the Technician of the Year Award for 2019 and 2020 in recognition of their exceptional practical skills, commitment and vision which has helped to facilitate the highest quality teaching and knowledge transfer at the University.

One Technical team were finalists at the Papin prize awards (2019) in recognition of their technical excellence in academia. This achievement was highlighted to the University to raise the profile of the team and their work.

Work has begun to develop a presence for Technicians on the staff intranet which will be further developed to highlight the work of all teams through case studies and new stories.

Work has also begun to establish a social media presence for the Technician Commitment at the University which will also be further developed to share key information and, raise awareness of the various teams.

Technical staff and associated managers have helped to develop the Action Plan to generate interest in and engagement with the Technician Commitment.

**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

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

Please see appendix

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

The organisation's website is currently being redeveloped. The plan will be included as part of the externally-facing DTS pages. A URL is therefore not available at this stage.

Signed..........(Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead)

Date: 8/12/20

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

Date: 8/12/20

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## Technician Commitment: Appendix

### 'Technician Voice' and Action Plan

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## 1.0 Introduction

Bucks New University became a signatory of the Technician Commitment in the summer of 2019. Since then the initiative has been promoted across the wider University, with specific focus on the IS&T Directorate as detailed in the self-assessment.

A steering group was formed and theme leads were identified to champion the areas of Recognition, Career Development, Visibility and Sustainability. The sections below summarize the key findings in each area and reflect the Technician's 'voice' in the form of responses to questionnaires, general feedback from meetings/discussions and views on next steps.

## 2.0 'Technician Voice'

### 2.1 Career Development

A questionnaire was sent to relevant teams with 4 broad statements covering some of the key issues around Career Development. Staff were given 5 options, 2 being a strong or moderate negative response, 2 being a strong or moderate positive response and one neither positive nor negative. The percentages of positive responses are shown below

	Statement is "very accurate" or "quite accurate" (%)		Statement is "very accurate" or "quite accurate" (%)		Statement is "very accurate" or "quite accurate" (%)		Statement is "very accurate" or "quite accurate" (%)
Technical staff would like protected resources to support continuous skill acquisition through formal and informal training/courses and qualifications for technical staff. Where formal qualifications are not realistic due to financial restraints, internal structured recognition should be made for employees.	85.7	To support the development of staff ensuring they stay current to industry and the employee's field of specialism; it should be agreed to protect time and money to allow the skill-sharing both internally and externally. This could be done through shadowing, conferences and training.	78.6	In order to improve departmental resilience, staff should be able to request to work with teams outside their own in order to improve their performance and open up new fields of interest. There should also be a structure in place which recognizes performance.	64.3	Improved University communication platforms to notify wider departments of changes to processes and systems and update colleagues of potential pending disruption. There should also be a clear structure and process to make a case for performance related pay/additional increments if an employee hits the top of their pay band to prevent loss of skills due to lack of role progression opportunities.	85.7

From these results it's clear that whilst training/CPD is important the key issue is the support which goes alongside that in terms of time allowances and finances. Pay and performance are also important but the key issue appears to be the mechanisms which underpin that and the clear communication around relevant processes. Working outside of the immediate team and work shadowing were important but the responses were slightly less positive in these areas.

### 2.2 Recognition

In discussions with the teams there was a desire to have an annual technical away day including workshops where each team can share their skills, celebrate achievements and network with others. There were suggestions that a workshop on professional registration could also be really useful to answer questions and inform the whole team on the benefits. The application fee was highlighted as the key reason why staff are currently reluctant to engage with this.

The need to highlight technical achievements was also raised so the activities of Technical staff can be promoted both internally and externally across various platforms. Regular meetings of the wider team were discussed although it was acknowledged that availability would be an issue. 2 meetings a year were

proposed at which staff could raise awareness of their activities, promote key achievements and share knowledge to promote collaboration.

Specific questions, relating to recognition were asked of the technical team. The questions and responses were as follows:

**Q: Do you feel that technicians are recognised sufficiently at Bucks?**

A: All responses indicated no.

**Q: What do you think could increase the recognition for technical achievements and hard work?**

A: Being more vocal about achievements e.g. BEN news stories, e-mails from the senior management team and a review into performance related pay increases. Raising awareness about the roles and responsibilities of technicians across the directorate and the range of knowledge and skills. More opportunities funded by the university.

**Q: Do you feel an annual technical away day would be a good idea?**

A: All responses indicated yes.

**Q: What do you think a technical away day should look like?**

A: Outlining what needs to be achieved in the coming year/cycle; understanding what each team does and how we can cross-fertilise teams. An activity or day that is agreed upon so all staff would be willing to participate. Should include sessions that enable the sharing of experiences, approaches, knowledge and good news stories. Also should include activities geared towards professional development. Should be inclusive.

**Q: What are your thoughts on applying for professional recognition with the Science Council or the Institute for Science and Technology (IST)?**

A: Not enough is known about these schemes to comment but anything that brings a technician's value and status up is good, there are far too many times when a technician is seen as helper with no particular skills rather than a professional with training/experience in a field. This as this will allow for broader recognition. This is a good idea which will help raise the profile of the work of the technicians, provide an opportunity to join a national network and help colleagues feel recognised for the good work they do in the University. How would it be funded?

**Q: Any other general comments to make about recognition for technical staff at Bucks?**

A: There's not enough of it, there should be greater focus to actually nurture talent. Better meetings – more meetings for TSR as a whole to share best practice and engage across different specialist areas. These are currently very separate and there may be better ways to collaborate and recognise individual skill sets across new projects.

## **2.3 Visibility**

Teams were canvassed for ideas around visibility using different questions to encourage feedback. The questions and responses were as follows:

**Q: How can we increase visibility as a technician?**

Responses:

- The majority of responses simply highlighted the need for Team promotion
- Some responses emphasized the importance of having a presence on the staff intranet
- To encourage inclusion of technicians when showing round visitors or prospective students.

**Q: How do you suggest we address the visibility of technicians?**

Responses included:

- Self-promotion, using social media
- By changing other staff member's perception of what we do.
- Working on projects together as a team and documenting it.
- Regularly showcase the work being done by technicians on BEN

- Encouraging interdepartmental opportunities, visibility within our own institution is arguably more important to me as an individual.
- Invitations to, and attendance of staff meetings, and staff away days etc.
- Introduce Technicians to students on all courses at the start of the academic year.
- Attendance of departmental team meetings
- Clearer explanation of the technician job roles.
- Holding technician away days that invite members of the academic teams
- Better use of SharePoint or similar to ensure all relevant information is available.

**Q: What does being a Technician mean to you?**

Responses included:

- Being supportive
- Firstly to provide a safe working environment for students, secondly through skills transfer to make them makers rather than just designers and to allow them access to my experience so that they can use the most relevant techniques to produce the best result possible!
- Helping out around the department as much as possible and whenever/wherever I can.
- Being a positive, proactive problem solver with specialist knowledge.
- For me, we are the ones on the ground, with the ability to work hands on with the students, helping them to achieve the outcomes they desire, providing the practical knowledge of the wide range of equipment and facilities we offer. Helping them realise their ideas. I find this hugely enjoyable and rewarding, and it's why I love my job.
- Helping others
- Being an expert in your area and bringing innovation to the table to improve the student experience in HE.
- An expert in the practical and theoretical application of a science, art or craft, sharing knowledge and training people within a technical process. Committed to supporting the Teaching and Learning experience.
- To me it means having pride in the resources and equipment that is available to students and staff at this university. It means transferring enthusiasm and confidence of technical skills to students, and thus enhancing their time at the University.
- Giving support to academics and students to help them better achieve their aims and make life smoother in general.
- Supporting teaching to ensure the sessions can run with ease, correctly and safely.
- Knowledgeable in a specific field. Technical ability, problem solving and confidence. Having a broad understanding of the job, student and staff needs.
- I love being a Technician, never thought I would be in a job like this at all but from day one I fell in love with this role and have not looked back. I do find this such a fulfilling role and I enjoy coming to work (most days) the chances we have to further our own learning are great and the help we can offer the students is amazing.

**Q: Would you be interested in having your image and job role on a dedicated technician's notice board at each campus?**

Responses included:

- The vast majority said they would be happy with this.
- Some responses suggested that context and content would need to be carefully considered.

**Q: How can we promote what we do?**

Responses included:

- Social media, events, display boards
- Tours of facilities
- Creating and distributing flyers and posters
- Showcase what we do across a range of platforms
- Pursue CPD activities in order to be the best in our field to further technical reputations
- Outreach programs such as running workshops with local schools and running evening workshops for university staff



- Working with the communications team to promote activities
- Web page presence on open days, presence on week 0, video introduction.
- Stronger presence on staff Intranet
- Technician away days - to collaborate with other technicians in order for us to build knowledge on other areas to then be able to promote those.
- Newsletters
- Technician 'bulletin board'

**Q: What are your thoughts on Socials and collaborative days for technicians to get the chance to share innovation and projects?**

Responses included:

- Most responses were generally positive
- It was proposed to schedule 2 or 3 per year to encourage technicians to come together and share best practice.
- Good opportunity to learn new skills
- Chance to work with wider teams is good as sharing and self-promotion within the University could potentially aid us as some teams would have experience in certain things which we needed advice/support in.

**Q: General comments**

Responses included:

- Better collaboration with academic staff
- Better training opportunities in peripheral but, necessary skills such as video editing and project management.

## **2.4 Sustainability**

A Technical Manager is on the Senior Leadership Apprenticeship/MBA program. The final research project for this is due to be completed by January 2021 and focuses on the issue of 'Sustainability' in relation to the Technician Commitment. It is exploring the following questions:

- How does a technician at Bucks perceive 'value' in their role?
- How does a technician at Bucks perceive the University 'values' their role?
- What changes would technical staff like to see implemented to improve these perceptions (if required) to ensure sustainability in both the role itself, and an individual's commitment to it?
- What needs to happen to ensure sustainability of engagement with the Technician Commitment initiative?

Activities in this area will be informed by the research and build on key findings where possible.

## **3.0 Action Plan**

Feedback from technical staff, in relation to the themes discussed above, has informed the development of Bucks New University's initial Technician Commitment Action Plan which, is detailed below and will be available via the University website.

Technician Commitment Action Plan (Buckinghamshire New University)			Plan mapped to Technician Commitment Themes			
Action	Timescale	Measure	Visibility	Recognition	Career Development	Sustainability
To ensure relevant technical staff are fully involved in curriculum development & enhancement	Sept 2023	Curriculum 23 is informed by the expertise of the technical staff.	Identifies technical staff and their specific roles within the University	Enables cross-fertilisation of best practice and enables technicians to be a part of key decision-making.	Opportunities for professional development, (DL&THE, Fellowship AdvanceHE, Peer observation)	Increases continued service and helps to ensure appropriate resourcing
To integrate all technical staff in Teaching and Learning delivery.	Ongoing	Closer working relationships between academic staff and technical staff with both working towards a common goal.	Identifies technical staff and their specific roles within the University	Enables technicians to part of key decision making	Facilitates new roles and responsibilities	Increases continued service and helps to ensure appropriate resourcing
To ensure all technical staff receive appropriate CPD	Ongoing	All technical staff members achieve appropriate status according to their grade/role	Identifies technical staff and their specific roles within the University	Enables appropriate qualifications and training	Develops new skills and knowledge for future opportunities (DL&THE, Fellowship AdvanceHE, Peer observation)	Facilitates networking and allows for agile deployment and utilisation of technical team
Work with HR to look at	Initial review during 2021/22 appraisal	Evidence of new PDR processes	Identifies technical	Enables performance reward	Facilitates new roles and	Increases continued

Development Review process in terms of pay, performance and progression.	round (September/October 2021). Ongoing thereafter.		staff and their specific roles within the University		responsibilities	service
Develop and deliver an annual conference, in partnership with GuildHE institutions, including workshops on topics such as professional registration.	Planning and preparation stages Jan – September 2021 with the first conference in Autumn 2021. Ongoing and annual thereafter.	Evidence of conference delivered with feedback on future events.	Identifies technical staff and their specific roles within and external to the University	Opportunities for staff to highlight key achievements and qualifications	Develops new skills and knowledge for future opportunities	Facilitates networking and collaborative projects or initiatives
2 Directorate meetings per year to highlight activities in other teams and to share ideas and best practice.	Easter 2021 and Summer 2021. Ongoing and annual thereafter.	Meetings held with follow-up in cases of non-attendance.	Identifies technical staff and their specific roles within the University	Opportunities for staff to highlight key achievements and projects and provide updates on latest developments	Develops new skills and knowledge for future opportunities	Facilitates networking and collaborative projects or initiatives
Develop and maintain a presence on the staff Intranet (BEN).	Presence to go live end of March 2021 at the latest. Ongoing thereafter	Regularly updated presence on Intranet	Identifies technical staff and their specific roles within the University	Opportunities for staff to highlight key achievements and projects and provide updates on latest developments	Develops new skills and knowledge for future opportunities	Facilitates networking and collaborative projects or initiatives
Develop and	Explore options Jan –	Evidence of best	Identifies	Opportunities for	Alerts staff to new	Facilitates

maintain a technical bulletin board	Feb 2021. Implement best outcome of options, ongoing.	outcome implemented.	technical staff and their specific roles within the University	staff to highlight key achievements and projects and provide updates on latest developments	opportunities and knowledge transfer initiatives	networking and collaborative projects or initiatives
Review structure of team in relation to new and changing curriculum demands	Produce initial report by Summer 2021. Work with senior managers and HR to implement recommendations thereafter.	Delivery of report and implementation of findings.	Identifies technical staff and their specific roles within the University	Facilitates new opportunities, roles and responsibilities to reflect operational delivery	Enables new routes to promotion and progression	Increases continued service
Production and dissemination of posters and marketing materials to showcase the work of the team	Ongoing, with initial material circulating by summer 2021.	Evidence of disseminated material with feedback for future development.	Identifies technical staff and their specific roles within the University	Showcasing work and activities, working in conjunction with internal comms.	Raises profile of staff both within and external to the University	Promotes interest in the technical work of the University and facilitates new opportunities for growth
Technical representation at meetings and events such as open days	Ongoing, targeting key meetings and open days.	Regular attendance at meetings and related events	Identifies technical staff and their specific roles within the University	Enables technicians to part of key decision making	Opportunities for professional development	Increases continued service and helps to ensure appropriate resourcing
Explore and implement Graduate	Explore options during 2021. Implement best	Implementation of best outcome	Identifies technical staff and	Enables cross-fertilisation of best practice	Opportunities for professional development	Facilitates networking and

Technician route to mitigate against knowledge gaps	outcome of options during 2022.		their specific roles within the University		such as mentoring	collaborative projects or initiatives. Allows for continuity planning.
Encourage and support technical staff to apply for role-specific research opportunities and projects	Ongoing	Evidence of technical staff engaging with research opportunities and, related projects	Identifies technical staff and their specific roles within and external to the University	Enables appropriate qualifications and training	Raises profile of staff both within and external to the University	Promotes interest in the technical work of the University and facilitates new opportunities for growth. Technical manager on a University sponsored degree apprenticeship addressing sustainability in the context of the Technician Commitment
Encourage and support technical staff to engage in role-specific external promotion activities and visits to other institutions to share best	Ongoing	Evidence of technical staff engaging in external promotion activities	Identifies technical staff and their specific roles within and external to	Enables appropriate qualifications/training	Raises profile of staff both within and external to the University	Promotes interest in the technical work of the University and facilitates new opportunities for growth

practise where possible.			the University			
Consult with technical staff on new initiatives related to 'hybrid learning' catalyzed by Coronavirus Pandemic	Ongoing.	Feedback from staff in relation to hybrid learning. Evidence of 'technician voice' in solutions. Development and acceptance of "Practice-based Learning" initiative.	Identifies technical staff, specialist knowledge and their specific roles within the University.	Enables cross-fertilisation of best practice and enables technicians to be a part of key decision-making.	Develops new skills and knowledge for future opportunities	Facilitates new opportunities for growth