

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.verre@sciencecouncil.org or tracey.dickens@gatsby.org.uk.

Technician Commitment

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

Organisation: Aston University

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

Aston University is a Higher Education Institution based in Birmingham city centre. Established as a University in 1966, the University employs around 1700 staff and has 11,839 full time equivalent students attending the University during 17/18. The University's mission is to be the UK's leading university for students aspiring to succeed in business and the professions, where original research, enterprise and inspiring teaching deliver local and global impact.

Aston's academic Schools comprise Aston Business School, Engineering and Applied Science, Life and Health Sciences and Languages and Social Sciences, with Aston Medical Science enrolling its first students in the 2018/19 Academic year. Aston was recognised by Times Higher Education as providing the second best teaching quality in the UK in 2016, and for 2018 was ranked in the top 55 Universities by all major domestic and international league tables. Aston's focus is on developing highly-employable graduates as well as producing applied research with impact on business, society and the professions, particularly within the Birmingham and West Midlands region. The University's strategy 2018 to 2023 focuses on its beneficiaries and in gaining an international reputation for delivery of outstanding graduate outcomes and equipping business and communities with the skills for future success.

Please tell us how your organisation defines its technicians:

Aston defines technicians as those carrying out roles which primarily have a technical focus. The majority of technicians are based within the science-focussed academic Schools of Life & Health Sciences and Engineering & Applied Science, supporting either teaching, research or both. The term "Technician" also incorporates staff who provide technical expertise and support to the operation of the University in areas such as IT, AV or Teaching Support.

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):

Technical staff work across different Schools and departments providing technical skills support to students, researchers and to supporting campus operations. Numbers by department are:

- Life and Health Sciences – 27
- Engineering and Applied Science - 17
- Aston Medical School - 2
- IT and AV - 5

Total: 51

Technicians within Life and Health Sciences support research and provision of services within the health clinics (Optometry, Audiology, the Aston Brain Centre) as well as supporting teaching to students on a range of life and health science programmes. The Medical School is not yet open to students and so numbers are currently small but expected to grow as students enrol in 2018/ 19. Technical staff within the School of Engineering and Applied Science also support research as well as teaching in subjects such as electronic engineering, mechanical engineering and chemical engineering. Technical staff within support departments provide IT and AV support to staff and students across the University, including some staff focused on teaching technologies. The University extended the technician commitment activities to any other staff who considered themselves to be technicians in addition to those specifically contracted to technician roles.

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:

The technical workforce at Aston University comprises employees from several diverse Support Departments and Academic Schools with initiatives/ programmes/ activities being led by managers in these areas as well as at an institutional level by Departments such as Human Resources & Organisational Development.

Within Schools, technical team members attend relevant courses provided externally such as NEBOSH general certificates, training courses provided by the manufacturers of technical equipment and courses around Health and Safety. Technical staff would also attend relevant courses provided internally such as manual handling, risk assessment, fire safety, COSHH and IOSH.

Technical staff in each area are also encouraged to attend conferences and CPD events provided by professional bodies and manufacturers. Within the School of Life and Health Sciences for example, these include events run by Fisher Scientific Work and Lab Innovations and seminars on Chromatography and Tissue Culture.

Membership of external professional associations is also encouraged: technical staff working within laboratories for example are part of associations such as University Chemical Safety Forum, University Bioscience Managers Association, Association of Radiational Protection Officers and other professional bodies, where employees can network and undertake CPD to share with the rest of the organisation.

Developmentally, all staff can apply to join internally run leadership and management courses. This includes Aspiring Manager, Optimising Performance and Introduction to Coaching, and externally accredited ILM Level 3 Leadership and Management and ILM Level 5 Coaching and Mentoring. In addition, all staff are able to access professional training provided by HR, OD and Research and Knowledge Exchange to continue their management training and research skills.

Several technical staff have also transitioned into teaching or research roles and so have completed PGCert qualifications provided by the University.

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:

- **Visibility**

We have developed webpages aimed at technicians and this includes interviews with two of our own technicians to raise the awareness of what technical roles involve and the opportunities open to staff. We have framed these technician stories in a similar way to those within the national campaign and provided links to the resources within our own webpages. We will also be linking our technician recruitment to these pages so that job applicants also get a better view of what the role involves. We held an away day to launch the commitment and to bring the technical staff together to begin to share ideas. Meeting other technical staff was something that the group found helpful as they would otherwise rarely meet. Several technicians expressed an interest in contributing their knowledge and experience to student open days. In some areas the technical staff are already involved and included in tours of the laboratories but in other areas technical staff are not currently involved in meeting students who visit for open days. As key contacts who will be available to support students undertaking scientific degrees, this is an opportunity for technicians to contribute which will improve the experience of students deciding where to undertake their studies. The group are planning another away day in early September before term starts to ensure there continues to be focus on the profile of technicians. Technician stories are to be featured in our termly employee magazine, Platform. A video promoting technicians and a poster campaign are planned for 2019. Technicians are also exploring working with student outreach to promote technical roles as a career path and highlight roles available at Aston.

- **Recognition**

Some technical staff have expressed interest in gaining the relevant professional registration although some already hold the appropriate membership. The University has committed to support a number of staff in gaining this external recognition and for these initial staff to help others to follow by providing guidance.

- Career Development

The University has become a member of HEaTED to make use of the expertise and development opportunities on offer via membership. The technicians also identified an interest in shadowing the work of technicians in other parts of the University as a learning opportunity, rather than simply looking at higher graded roles. The technician engagement group has responsibility for making these links and arrangements. The away day in September will be facilitated in part by HEaTED so that the University's technical team can benefit from wider skills development and build a programme of development activities. Technical staff are also exploring working with other local universities to share development events, learning and knowledge. The technician resources pages presents a diagram showing the possible career routes for technical staff. The group at Aston showed most interest in developing and widening skills in technical areas rather than an ambition to move up and out of technical roles, although some technicians are undertaking PG Cert teaching qualification. Given that the majority interest was in cross-skilling, the engagement group took forward an objective to look at shadowing others within Aston as well as externally.

- Sustainability

We have formed a technician engagement group to advise the University on the ways which the staff group find most useful to support their visibility and development. The group includes a diverse range of staff with a technical focus to ensure that the activity has impact and relevancy to as many technical staff as possible. The HR&OD department will continue to support and facilitate the technician engagement group but to ensure sustainability and relevance, the development needed and activities involved will be those identified by technical staff themselves.

We are planning for succession within the technical staff in the School of Engineering and Applied Science by recruiting 2 apprentice technicians. The University recruited 2 apprentice IT Technicians in February 2018, and enrolled a sports grounds technician into an apprenticeship which again will assist with future skills supply and succession.

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 attached appendix

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

The 2016/7 staff survey provided rich data on the employee experience and levels of engagement specifically for those in technical roles. The information from the staff survey as well as the areas of focus within the technician commitment fed into the content of a launch event held in January 2018.

The invitation to the launch event was sent to all staff identified as either employed into a technical role or with a job title which indicated the commitment may be relevant. Managers and Heads of Department were also invited to attend and contribute to the event. The event brought together a range of technicians and managers to explore the best ways to meet the commitment in ways which would be most beneficial and meaningful for the technicians themselves. We have since formed an engagement group to take forward the actions and ideas agreed. We have agreed the principle that the commitment should be led by the technical staff and not Deans or members of HR& OD. HR&OD will facilitate connections and development activity to assist with embedding the commitment. The Deans in the 2 Schools where most technical staff are based have repeated their strong support and encouragement for the role of technicians and the importance of their development. Technicians themselves will be responsible for identifying opportunities to increase their visibility, gain further recognition, identify career development options and to look at ways of creating a diverse staff group

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

<http://www.aston.ac.uk/staff/hr/development/technician-commitment/>

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

Date: 27/6/18

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

Date: 27 June 2018

Technician Commitment – 24 month action plan

Activity	Key Area	Timeframe	Status	Impact evidenced by/comments
Identify technical related job profiles	Visibility	Oct 2018 to Oct 2020	Ongoing	Looking specifically at describing responsibilities and promoting activity of technical staff.
Support up to 5 technicians to go through relevant professional registration.	Career Dev	Sept 2018 initial Sept 2019 follow up	Some initial candidates identified	Registration applications. Those registered will act as mentors. Funding to be provided from central budget.
Further design and develop the technician intranet section.	Visibility Recognition	April 2018	Ongoing	Intranet site live on University web pages. Need to include suggestions/ideas from technicians. Links to the Science Council and Midlands Innovation.
Plan technician development events – away day	Visibility Recognition	Sept 2018 first away day	In planning stage	To bring technicians from across the University together to discuss the Technicians Commitment and the areas of the commitment they want to focus on. The initial date has been determined by the engagement group.
Create technician stories including poster campaign and videos.	Visibility Recognition	May 2018 initial and follow up	Stories live	Stories on intranet pages with more to be added. Submit stories to the national Technician Commitment website to further promote technicians and raise profile.
Map role/career progression	Career Dev Sustainability	April 2018	Ongoing	Initial career map created. Routes and development to be added as an ongoing piece of work. Engagement group to input.
Subscribe to HEaTED membership as an organisation	Visibility Recognition	August 2018	In progress	Aston to participate in regional development events and to benefit from training and networks provided via HEaTED. Subscription starting July 2018.
Vice-Chancellor to be interviewed about the commitment and value of technical staff	Visibility Recognition	Autumn term 2018	Planning stage	Production of a video which is published on the University web pages.
Promote apprenticeship standards for technicians.	Career Dev Sustainability	Began March 2018	Ongoing	Technical managers and team leaders to promote and encourage take up of apprenticeships and follow up career paths
Technician involvement in open days	Visibility	Autumn term 2018	Ongoing	Technicians within areas not already engaging in open days to make contact with Director of Outreach,

Technician Commitment – 24 month action plan

				Admissions and Student Recruitment to input to open days and also to relevant outreach activities.
Development of the technician engagement group	Sustainability	Easter 2018	Ongoing activity to embed	Engagement group to take forward ideas and to take responsibility for implementing development events and activities
Set up of work shadowing within Aston	Career Dev	Easter 2019	Engagement group to establish	Engagement group to arrange exchanges within the University and record this activity, agreeing how this will work.
Make links with technical staff at other local universities for shadowing and group training/development	Career Dev	October 2018 and ongoing	Some links established	Engagement group to use the contacts formed through regional events and meetings.