

Technician Commitment: Stage Two Self-Assessment & Action Plan Guidance

Please note: This guidance and template is for institutions who have already submitted their Stage One Self-Assessment & Action Plan, 12-13 months after becoming an official signatory of the Technician Commitment. This guidance and template refers to the second stage of self-assessment and action planning to be submitted 2 years after the submission of the original submission.

The Technician Commitment aims to ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technicians working in higher education and research, across all disciplines.

The second stage of self-assessment and action planning process asks for reflection on past action plans, progress and engagement and a further 36 month action plan. The self-assessment includes a 'RAG' analysis of previous action plans - a 'Red, Amber & Green' status report.

The Technician Commitment Steering Board 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 plans on a dedicated and discoverable webpage, along with their named point of contact. The Steering Board asks 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 Board 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 has developed since the Commitment's inception and the Steering Board aims to ensure a range of forums are available to enable peers to share expertise, good practice, and experiences.

To continue 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, the Steering Board are keen to learn how signatories are advancing equality, diversity and inclusion for the technical community and institutions may wish to reference Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charter submissions. The Steering Board are also keen to learn of 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

Please note that finalised 3-year Action Plans should be signed off at an institutional leadership level (e.g. Vice-Chancellor/President/Director level).

Technician **Commitment**

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

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Contact Number:

Please provide an overview of technical staff structures in your organisation.

Since signing the Technician Commitment, the University has embarked on several changes to its technical structures. Specifically, within the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE), and Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health (FBMH) as follows:

Faculty of Science & Engineering (FSE) – Review’s findings and outcomes.

The implementation of a new two School structure and the Manchester Engineering Campus Development (MECD) offer unique opportunities to modernise the way in which the Manchester technical resource operates to meet the existing and emerging challenges of research and teaching. This will be achieved by improving the overall effectiveness and agility of technical services while simultaneously working to enhance career prospects and the experience of being a Technician at the University in line with our Technician Commitment.

FSE Direction

An extensive consultation exercise ahead of the implementation of the new structure, evidenced that technical staff felt somewhat disenfranchised, undervalued with limited career prospects, which correlates to the findings across the nation.

FSE has acted on the HEFCE report 2004 regarding the importance of skilled Technicians for the success of research and teaching activities in HE and the danger posed by a projected shortfall in skilled Technicians in the UK. Some of these actions have been part of the review, some will be within Manchester’s Technician Commitment.

The FSE Review will synergise as closely as possible to the other major technical Faculty (Biology, Medicine & Health) in terms of structure, function and resources whilst ensuring Faculty specific needs are retained.

New posts.

Significantly, thirteen new posts have been created for Technical Services:

- Three Heads of Research, Infrastructure & Facilities
- One Head of Technical Skills & Development
- Nine Technical Operations Managers.

Of particular importance to Technician Commitment is the new role of Head of Technical Skills and Development (HoTSD). The role includes:

- ◆ Workforce planning and development, working in close collaboration with the Heads of School Operations.
- ◆ Single point of technical reference providing technical representation on groups across the University and externally.
- ◆ Focus on improving staff capability and staff development and leading the prestigious Technical Apprenticeship Programme for the University.
- ◆ Innovation aiming for a quality overall service based on feedback and continuous improvement in research and teaching support.
- ◆ Motivation and inspiration with a variety of technical career paths and available academic and practical routes to success.
- ◆ Vision – lead on the long-term strategy, set goals, set overall standards, and align with University strategies.
- ◆ Staffing strategy embracing the Technician Commitment themes of visibility, recognition, development, and workforce sustainability.
- ◆ Skills Audit management as a regular assessment of current staff skills, future desired skills, and subsequent skills gap analysis.
- ◆ Training and development to fill skills gaps through a combination of upskilling, re-skilling, and staff selection processes.
- ◆ Technical Apprenticeships to develop Technicians of the future, with the skills needed for the future. To fully utilise the government Apprenticeship Levy, expand the programme, understand, and provide early career skills, and map the available routes to success.

Faculty of Biology, Medicine & Health (FBMH) – Review (recently started).

The Faculty's Technical Services was developed in 2012, and further developed in 2016. From the outset, there was a unified, consistent structure in terms of management, function, and career pathway options. The newly commenced Technical Services Review will look to build on current strengths and improve on any weaknesses.

Specifically, the review aims to improve our agility and ability to adapt to new technologies and new skill requirements, ahead of their need.

Technical Staff development in FBMH will develop greater scope to cover technical disciplines in the other two Faculties, thus facilitating a more diverse range of career pathways. We will also look to identify and develop future skills required and then tailor our University's Technical Apprenticeship Programme to meet our future needs.

The Faculty will ensure that all Technical Staff are supported and encouraged to develop, utilising tailored, bespoke training specifically for Technical Staff, within our excellent University Staff Learning and Development unit, or from external providers.

Whilst more effective cost recovery is a significant driver within the review, more so is the need to ensure that Technical Services remains efficient and highly effective.

The Review will fully embrace and embed both the principles of Technician Commitment and the principles of Equality Diversity and Inclusion, in all that it does.

The FBMH Review will synergise and harmonise as closely as possible with the other major technical Faculty (Science & Engineering) in terms of structure, function and resources whilst ensuring Faculty specific needs are retained. This will then remove perceived barriers, encourage greater scope in terms of careers and development, and improve the sense of community across the entire Institution.

Manchester's Vision

While universities seek to modernise the profession of technicians, an increasing cost base means that institutions must also maximise value and efficiency from their directly related academic support.

Technical support requires an agile workforce of appropriate size with the right skills to support research and teaching. This must be achieved alongside a need to raise the overall performance and professionalism of technical support as a service. We are supporting the sector-wide trend of moving away from technical teams embedded in group/departmental structures, to the formation of dedicated, technical workforces which span across our entire institution.

This approach will create a management structure with sufficient foresight, strategy, and autonomy to address many of the challenges ahead. However, it may also be an indicator of how

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the technical workforce is evolving into a service where its performance must be more directly monitored, against its contribution to research and teaching.

Please tell us about your institution's approach to the Technician Commitment since becoming a signatory. Comments on governance and reporting lines, resources and wider community engagement are welcomed.

The Manchester Approach.

Three steps:

1. Establishing Technician Commitment
2. Formation of a 'Sense of Direction'
3. Actions leading to positive outcomes

1. Establishing Technician Commitment

Technician Commitment is now being talked about at all levels within our Institution: Planning, Strategy, Job role Development. The recent and on-going Technical Reviews demonstrate a change in direction of the University and recognition that we need to develop and maintain our critical technical community, for our future success. Thus, demonstrating that 'Technician Commitment' has already become synonymous with the positive direction of Technical Staff and Technical Services.

2. Formation of a 'Sense of Direction'

We will place our technical managers at the heart of defining local skills needs, skills gaps and creating an agile and adaptable workforce. Training provision will be flexible to suit the local requirements, including on-the-job, off-the-job, shadowing, secondment, to support a change of career focus. Across the Institution, all technical staff will be kept informed about what is on offer through careers support, guidance, and a visible clear route to success in their chosen area.

Since signing in 2018, the University of Manchester Technician Commitment has formed several interlinked groups to help define key issues that need to be addressed, and then identified a set of change proposals for consideration and action over the coming years. These groups consist of members of our technical staff from across the entire University working with senior managers. The pursuit for local initiatives, driven by groups of interested and inspired Technical Staff will ensure we receive good engagement across the technical community, change behaviours and beliefs, and ultimately begin to improve the culture. We have adopted an all-inclusive approach, rather than top-down, providing all technicians irrespective of grade or role, the chance to input their thoughts and ideas, and contribute to a progressive institutional cultural shift.

3. Actions leading to positive outcomes

After holding a series of all Technical Staff engagement sessions across the University, interested parties were asked to form several individual 'Coordination Groups' based on what **they** consider are the key areas to be address.

Currently* the Coordination Groups are:

Development
Recognition
Skills
Support
Communications
Marketing

Leads within each Coordination Group were then tasked with identifying specific topics they wanted to address, to recruit additional members if required, and then organise discussion sessions to determine:

- ◆ What their proposals were.
- ◆ What was the outcome they wanted to achieve.
- ◆ How would success be measured.
- ◆ What support/resource did they need.

Each proposal will be assessed, according to the time and resources required, before being awarded a priority rating.

A high level 'Resources Group' will further assess each submission before being progressed to the Technician Commitment Operations Group.

** The Coordination Groups may change as tasks are completed and the focus moves.*

To ensure we have sufficient skills within our University technical workforce to remain competitive, we will increase development and promote lifelong learning. Reshaping our skills profile will be vital in improving our performance and productivity. We will therefore prioritise a foundational, University-wide Skills Audit in conjunction with the National Technician Development Centre in Sheffield. This Audit will provide sufficient tailored development content and opportunities, enabling staff to up-skill or change direction to support our University's success, economy and to compete on the world stage.

Within this considerable exercise involving all grades of our 920 Technical Staff, and consultation with academic leads, we will identify the current skills gaps which will then feed into the future planning and provision strategy. Rather than a one-off period of adjustment, training and development provision will be developed ahead of need and will form a continuous evolutionary process, aligned to the University research and teaching strategic direction. (e.g., STEM skilled Technicians). At its most fundamental level, we need to ensure each staff member is fulfilled and enriched on a personal level allowing the latent creativity and talent to be fully released.

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Community Engagement

Technical colleagues have been awarded recently our University's Making a Difference (Widening Participation) Award, due to their outreach programme to local schools informing them of the opportunities to become a Technician in Teaching and Research, on *their* doorstep at The University of Manchester.

Please provide a RAG analysis on your institutional 24-month action plan indicating which activities you have undertaken and completed (**green**), which are in progress (**amber**) and which are still to be carried out (**red**). Please provide an explanation for those categorised as red.

1. We will become a National Technician Centre Partner and will work closely with the team there to contribute to several initiatives that will be important for Technicians locally and nationally. [Visibility, Career Development, Sustainability]
2. We will conduct a current baseline skills audit to inform more comprehensively our current understanding of skills held in the University. [Career Development, Sustainability]
3. Shadowing to be promoted and facilitated more widely to provide insight to opportunities that otherwise would remain unknown. [Career Development]
4. Assisting the shaping our Staff Learning & Development programmes to provide more tailored learning for Technical Staff. [Career Development, Sustainability]
5. Technical Staff newsletter for improved communications. [Visibility, Recognition]
6. Improve recognition and acknowledgment of Technician contribution to publications. [Visibility, Recognition]
7. Proposal Validation Process developed to assess and validate new ideas and proposals. [Sustainability]
8. Determine age profile to identify the potential loss of technical skills. [Sustainability]
9. Ensure the visibility and recognition of all Technical Staff and that they can be linked in with the Technical Community. [Visibility, Recognition]
10. **Develop a career guidance pathway to improve clarity of career options and progression. [Career Development]** This career guidance piece is currently on-hold whilst the new taxonomy, technical structures and teams are developed across the University.
11. Mentoring-Coaching-Shadowing opportunities provided and encouraged to Technical Staff. [Career Development, Sustainability]
12. Develop the scope and depth of the Technical Apprenticeship Programme. To feed into a potential skills gap when evidence based. To include Knowledge-Skills-Behaviour's learning. To broaden skills repertoire at different levels. [Career Development, Sustainability]
13. Improvement of cost recovery of Technical contribution to research and education. [Recognition, Sustainability]
14. External networking and engagement facilitated and encouraged. [Visibility, Recognition, Career Development]

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Please tell us how you evidence that your action plan has had/is having impact?

Job descriptions are progressively being based on similar common core principles across the University. Reducing differences and simplifying content to encourage cross faculty movement.

Grade differentials are now clearer than ever before allowing staff to determine specific role differences between grades.

Each of the Faculty Technical Reviews reference Technician Commitment and utilises its principles in taxonomy, job roles, recognition of Technical Staff contribution, improved/clearer career progression, training for change etc. Importantly, our HR Partners for each Faculty are part of the Technical Reviews and part of Manchester's Technician Commitment.

There are less hybrid job titles and more staff within a staff group with the same job title, demonstrating parity in terms of role, responsibilities, and grading.

We now have a designated Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Lead for all Technical Staff at the University of Manchester. This position will work with Technical Staff to ensure not only that we as a community, uphold EDI principles fully, but in addition that the institution recognises Technical Staff using the same principles.

The two Institutional Leads for Technician Commitment hold regular monthly meetings with the University's excellent Staff Learning & Development. The focus is to develop training specifically for Technical Staff, at all levels. This has proved invaluable for our Technical Reviews, but importantly Staff Learning & Development are integrated partners with Manchester's Technician Commitment.

The exciting development of the new role of Head of Technical Skills & Development (described earlier) is a first for Manchester and rare in the sector. This will be a catalyst for bespoke Technician-centric learning and creating development opportunities.

Technician Commitment is part of our language, thinking and a reference point for a more positive progressive ethos for all Technical Staff at Manchester.

Manchester's Technician Commitment has brought together many disparate groups for a common aim and purpose, which may not have otherwise happened.

We have incorporated the principles and knowledge of Technician Commitment to our Technical Apprenticeship Programme, such that some of the Technical Apprentices are part of the Coordination Groups that are informing future change.

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Please provide details of any additional initiatives/programmes/activities aligned to your Technician Commitment that are not covered in your original action plan.

Technical Apprenticeship Programme (TAP) incorporating T-level entry.

We will build on the success we have already achieved in creating a sector leading Technical Apprenticeships Programme, by expanding the disciplines available and incorporating new T-level activities in support of our wider local community. Our intake recognises apprenticeships have been transformed from a second-rate option to a prestigious choice with excellent outcomes, especially when combined with our bespoke multi-rotation methodology.

The levels at which we work within the programme have been increasing and currently our expectation is for apprentices to progress to degree level apprenticeships either whilst they remain in the programme or indeed afterwards when they have secured a permanent position within our technical service.

We have been successful in establishing Technical Staff on Faculty Committees and working groups, overcoming barriers and stigmas both from Technical Staff and other colleagues to be part of these groups.

We have built on a significant wellbeing platform created at the University to ensure that it reaches out to the Technical Community, particularly in areas that can be somewhat more difficult to reach or more isolated.

Understanding Technical Services and its staff has always proved difficult to those outside the service. The staff are all specialists, and all possess different skill sets. They are proud of what they do, dedicated to those they support, but never wanting to promote their successes. We have decided that communications and marketing, both internally and externally to the University, is important. Platforms such as Technicians Make it Happen, World Skills, Making a Difference, Technician awards, all showcase what they do, what they achieve, and their vital and significant contribution made to both teaching and research.

Please provide a 36-month action plan; detailing plans to ensure your organisation continues to address 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 evidence how the 'technician voice' was present in the development and formation of the 36-month action plan.

Whilst the 36-month plan is explicit, the Manchester methodology is such that it is designed to evolve organically, influenced by Technical Staff, frequent review and evaluation, new initiatives born from success and failures, but all the time referencing the four principles of Technician Commitment.

If it changes are made, they will be substantiated.

1. We will work closely with the National Technician Centre Partner to contribute to initiatives that will be important for Technicians locally and nationally. [Visibility, Career Development, Sustainability]
2. We will conduct a current baseline skills audit to inform more comprehensively our current understanding of skills held in the University. [Career Development, Sustainability]
3. Shadowing to be promoted and facilitated more widely to provide insight to opportunities that otherwise would remain unknown. [Career Development]

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4. Assisting the shaping our Staff Learning & Development programmes to provide more tailored learning for Technical Staff. [Career Development, Sustainability]
5. Technical Staff newsletter for improved communications. [Visibility, Recognition]
6. Improve recognition and acknowledgment of Technician contribution to publications. [Visibility, Recognition]
7. Optimise 'Proposal Validation Process' developed to assess and validate new ideas and proposals. [Sustainability]
8. Determine age profile to identify the potential loss of technical skills. [Sustainability]
9. Ensure the visibility and recognition of all Technical Staff and that they can be linked in with the Technical Community. [Visibility, Recognition]
10. Develop a career guidance pathway to improve clarity of career options and progression. [Career Development]
11. Mentoring-Coaching-Shadowing opportunities provided and encouraged to Technical Staff. [Career Development, Sustainability]
12. Develop the scope and depth of the Technical Apprenticeship Programme. To feed into a potential skills gap when evidence based. To include Knowledge-Skills-Behaviour's learning. To broaden skills repertoire at different levels. [Career Development, Sustainability]
13. Improvement of cost recovery of Technical contribution to research and education. [Recognition, Sustainability]
14. External networking and engagement facilitated and encouraged. [Visibility, Recognition, Career Development]

Please confirm that your Technician Commitment status and 3-year action plan is published on your organisation's website and provide the relevant URL here:

<https://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/environment/technical-support/commitment/>

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

Date: 12th April 2021

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

Date: 12th April 2021



Signed (Technician Commitment Signatory – Leader of Institution)

Date: 12/04/2021