

## 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](mailto:k.verre@sciencecouncil.org) or [tracey.dickens@gatsby.org.uk](mailto:tracey.dickens@gatsby.org.uk).

## Technician Commitment

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

**Organisation:** University of Birmingham

**Name of Institutional Lead:** Professor Tim Softley (Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Transfer)

**E-mail:** T.P.Softley@bham.ac.uk

**Contact Number:** 0121 414 3978

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

For more than a century, the University of Birmingham has thrived by being purposeful, pragmatic and pioneering. Founded in 1900, it now employs more than 7,000 staff and has an annual turnover of almost £580 million.

With more than 20,000 undergraduate and 14,000 postgraduates distributed across 5 academic colleges, Birmingham is constantly developing and evolving in its desire to become a leading global university. Characterised by a tradition of innovation, research at the university has broken new ground, pushed forward the boundaries of knowledge and made an impact on people's lives. In the 2014 Research Excellence Framework, 28% of its submitted research was rated as world-leading and a further 53% rated internationally excellent. The University submitted to REF 2014 for an exceptionally broad range of disciplines – only 3 universities entered more. It is a member of the Russell Group of universities and a founder member of the Universitas 21 international network, as well as the Midlands Innovation group of universities.

In September 2018 Birmingham will welcome its first cohort of students to its newly established Dubai campus, becoming the first global top 100 and Russell Group University to establish a campus in Dubai. September will also see the opening of the a new, £40million, Collaborative Teaching Laboratory (CTL) bringing together practical teaching activities across a broad range of science and engineering disciplines, transforming the way STEM subjects are taught at the University.

Please tell us how your organisation defines its technicians:

There are a number of different technical roles required within the academic institution. A technician is vital in supporting the day-to-day running of a research lab, teaching lab, clinical trials unit, maintaining the fabric of the institution's estate, or the lighting of the Bramall Lecture. The roles can also include assisting students with research projects, and maintenance/ repair of complex equipment. Technicians working in laboratories are within the biological, chemical, physical and life science areas and carry out sampling, testing, measuring, recording and analyzing of results as part of a scientific team, this can take place within a laboratory work space or on a field trip. Additionally technicians are expected to maintain and repair equipment and apparatus, ensure equipment is cleaned and chemicals, drugs and other materials are stored correctly.

Teaching technicians are expected to liaise with academic staff to discuss timetables, equipment requirements and work plans. They are also required to provide support to students who are undertaking specific practical techniques and experiment trials within their module/programme of study.

A technician is expected to provide all the required technical support to enable the laboratory, teaching or clinical trial activity to function effectively, whilst adhering to correct procedures and health and safety guidelines.

Senior and lead technicians regularly undertake line management of junior staff and budgetary management of grants and facility activities.

Any members of staff with a technical component to their role are welcome to join the Technical Academy, including those in the Estates, IT, and Hospitality and Accommodation Services.

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):

Within the University of Birmingham, there are 372 technicians across the institution, with the majority in the 3 STEM Colleges of Life and Environmental Sciences, Medical and Dental Sciences and Engineering and Physical Sciences. A number of technicians (n=25) are located within Corporate Services, including Estates, IT and Hospitality Services, all of whom were invited to the launch in November 2017.

There are similar technical staffing structures within the three STEM Colleges, with the opportunity to progress to a Grade 9 Head of Infrastructure and Facilities in all three.

***Engineering and Physical Sciences (Total 130)***

Engineering 48

Chemistry 18

Physics 29 (Includes 2 apprenticeships)

Metallurgy and Materials 34 (includes 1 apprenticeship)

Computer Science 1

***Life and Environmental Sciences (Total 64)***

Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences 10

Biosciences 44

Psychology 5

Sport Ex R 4

***Medical and Dental Sciences (Total 148)***

Institute of Cancer and Genomics Sciences 16

Institute of Clinical Sciences 5

Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences 5

Institute of Metabolism and Systems Research 9

Institute of Inflammation and Ageing 16

Institute of Microbial Infection 7

Institute of Immunology and Immunotherapy 36

***College of Arts and Law (Total 3)***

***College of Social Sciences (Total 2)***

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 Birmingham Professional affirms our commitment to, and our expectations of, Professional Services staff. It is about expecting and supporting all our staff to demonstrate the University's values of excellence, leadership, a pioneering spirit, purposefulness and pragmatism.

The Birmingham Professional is firstly an ethos: it underscores a culture of partnership and trust between academic and professional colleagues working to common goals. It is about pursuing excellence in the services we provide, taking pride in our work, taking personal responsibility for our development, and working well with others.

It creates an identity. We aim for our Professional Services to be integrated across the institution, and this is underpinned by the Birmingham Professional. It helps staff across Professional Services to connect, whether centrally-based or in the Colleges, and it demonstrates their value to the University and the important contribution they make to its ambitions.

Bringing together a range of activities and opportunities and events both at a University and a College level, the Birmingham Professional helps our people to be confident and perform to the highest standards in their current roles, encourages them to improve their knowledge and skills, and supports them where they show a desire to advance their careers.

The Birmingham Professional programme is for everyone who works in Professional Services, irrespective of grade, where they are located in the University, or role. This includes support staff, academic-related staff, senior managers, technical staff, administrative staff, catering, estates, cleaning and grounds staff, nursery staff and security officers across all levels of the University.

The Technical Academy is part of the Birmingham Professional that particularly focuses on the needs of technical staff. There were no specific events for the technical community across the institution before the launch of the Technical Academy in November 2017, if specific training/development was needed it would be requested through the PDR process and funded at a School/College level.

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:***

Launch of the Technical Academy in November 2017

Creation of the Technical Academy website and intranet site for members of staff highlighting technical staff on publications.

“Go the extra mile” award every month for technical staff within Medical and Dental Sciences.

Technical Directory which hi-lights technical expertise in research and teaching across the institution.

***Recognition:***

Creation of a new BUAFTA (Birmingham University Award for Tremendous Achievement) category for Technical Team of the Year for 2019

The Technical Academy Operations group have organised an event on the 27<sup>th</sup> June on how to become professionally registered (Science Council, HEaTED and Engineering Council)

Technical staff are members of the Technical Academy Operations Group and attend the Steering Group when appropriate.

The Papin Prize winner (Matt Mckenzie) was recognised at the launch of the Technical Academy in November 2017 where he was presented with a bottle of champagne by Helen Sharman OBE

The creation of a Technical Academy Twitter account (@UOBTechnicians) promoting activities and successes of staff involved in the Technical Academy eg Charity Cake Sale for St Basils raised £215.00

***Career Development:***

The Enabling Technology initiative is across the 3 STEM Colleges and offers career development for technical staff who provide specialist support for state-of-the art equipment. The opportunities include training, interaction with industry and networking with other HEIs.

Opportunities to attend conferences are promoted through line managers eg: HETS 2019 – Higher Education Technicians Summit – University of Birmingham.

Funding to attend conferences and achieve professional registration is promoted through the PDR process, with individuals assessed on a case by case basis.

***Sustainability:***

Succession plans are being developed within the 3 STEM Colleges to ensure retention of knowledge and expertise. There are 4 apprentices undertaking training and development.

Secondments are promoted across the Colleges, often leading to new jobs for engaged members of staff.

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):

Included in the document is Appendix 1 which highlights the activities and events the Technical Academy Operations and Steering Group has organised for the next 2 years, Appendix 2 illustrates the membership of both groups. As well as these events, both groups are working on the development of generic job descriptions for technicians within the STEM Colleges, building on the work Terry Croft has undertaken at Sheffield.

Career progression, promotion opportunities and career pathways have also been identified as a priority, with a number of technicians achieving promotion from the structures put in place within the STEM Colleges.

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

The Technical Academy at the University of Birmingham was set up to tackle a range of requests by technicians following the outcomes of Personal Development Reviews in 2017 which showed technicians wanted increased support in the following areas:

Help writing CV's and Job Applications

Assistance with Professional Registration

Networking events across campus with other technicians

Software training for technician based equipment

Online Technician database available through the intranet

Dedicated web pages for Technicians

Opportunity to network with other universities

These points were then re-iterated with feedback following the Technical Academy launch in November 2017.

Taking on board feedback and PDR responses, a series of College Forums took place on a Town Hall basis, inclusive of all, to encourage open discussion, in order to fully understand the University of Birmingham's Technicians requirements.

It was clear that technicians needed a voice on campus and it was from this that the Technical Academy Operations Group was founded, after the launch in November 2017. The Group is chaired by Richard Marguerie, who has a prominent and influential position on the Technical Academy Steering group.

The purpose of the Group is to coordinate and deliver the operational aspects of the Academy. To allow for a full representation of the 'technician voice', its membership is made of managers and technicians from various background e.g., Engineering, Estates, IT, life and medical sciences. It is each member's responsibility to highlight any questions, requirements, complaints that their technicians have, as well as promoting the Technical Academy through advertising events and actively encouraging staff or team members to participate.

The Group's role is to deliver the Technical Academy activities and development of skills, and offer representation and communication to the technical workforce regarding the Technical Academy's agenda.

The action plan (Appendix 1) contains a series of events and projects aimed at addressing the Technician Commitments. These were developed by the Technical Academy Operations Group following a survey asking all technicians at the University of Birmingham the following:

What ideas (short, medium and long term) do you have for how the University can help:

To ensure that all technicians within the organisation are identifiable and that the contribution is **visible** within and the beyond the institution?

To support technicians to gain **recognition** through professional registration?

To enable **career progression** opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathway?

To ensure the future **sustainability** of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised?

The survey received over 200 responses, which formed the basis for developing these events.

Technicians can actively get involved with the Technical Academy online, with engagement through Twitter, signing up to our contact list through which events, news and general information gets distributed. We also have an email address that answer comments, compliments and complaints on a more personal level – [technicalacademy@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:technicalacademy@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

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

[www.birmingham.ac.uk/tech-academy](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/tech-academy)

Signed (Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead) – Director of Operations – College of Life and Environmental Sciences.30.6.18



Technician Commitment Signatory – Pro Vice Chancellor Research and Knowledge Transfer  
30.6.18



## **Appendix 1**

### **Technical Academy Plan**

**25nd May 2018:** EPS Technical Forum

**12th June 2018:** Professor Mark Sterling - Technicians Seminar

**19th June 2018:** Summer BBQ for Technical Staff within Life and Environmental Sciences

**27th June 2018:** How to... Register for the Science Council Event

**July 2018:** Technician Tours: Birmingham Energy Centre

**5th September 2018:** Technicians' Poster Showcase Event

**20th September 2018:** IST Conference

**20th September 2018:** Meet the Senior Leadership Team within Life and Environmental Sciences

**23rd October 2018:** Health and Wellbeing- Professor Deborah Falla

**13th November 2018:** 2nd Technical Academy Conference

**19th December 2018:** Christmas Party for Technical Staff

### **2019**

**11th January 2019:** Health and Happiness Workshop

**15<sup>th</sup> February 2019:** BUAFTA Awards – Including new “Technical Team of the year”

**March 2019:** Technicians Tours: The Birmingham Institute of Forest Research

**April 2019:** Technicians Easter Charity Bake Sale

**May 2019:** Technicians' Showcase Event

**25<sup>th</sup> June 2019:** HETS 2019 – Higher Education Technicians Summit – University of Birmingham

**July 2019:** Technician BBQ

**August 2019:** Launch Spotlight on Campaign

**September 2019:** Hands on Technician Event

**October 2019:** Professors Recognition Event

**November 2019:** 3rd Technical Academy Conference

**December 2019:** Technician Christmas Party

## Appendix 2

Professor Tim Softley – Co Chair	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (UoB)
Bronwen Lord – Co Chair	Director of Operations (LES)
Claire Perkins – Minutes	Personal Assistant (LES)
Mark Griffiths	Head of Supply Chain and Compliance (Estates)
Richard Marguerie	Head of Infrastructure and Facilities (LES)
Yvonne Hackforth Williams	Head of Strategic Change at University of Birmingham (UoB)
Anthony Jones	Head of Infrastructure and Facilities (EPS)
Professor Chris Bunce	Head of School Biosciences (LES)
Karen Willis	Head of Infrastructure and Facilities (MDS)
Professor Jon Binner	Deputy Head of the College (EPS)
Catherine Byerley	College Head of Marketing and Communications (LES)
Helen Barlow	College Head of HR (LES)
Hannah Robinson	Director of Operations (EPS)
Professor Philip Lumley	Deputy Head of College (MDS)
Dr Ian Tidmarsh	Head of Operations (Collaborative Teaching Laboratory – UoB)

## Technical Academy Operations Group

Richard Marguerie - Chair	Head of Infrastructure and Facilities (LES)
Ruth Perry	Research Infrastructure Manager (LES)
Carol Benham	Technical Manager (MDS)
Helen Smith	Laboratory Manager (MDS)
Andrew Lees	Deputy Head of Infrastructure and Facilities (LES)
Alison Leese	Laboratory Manager (MDS)
Andy Dunn	Technical Manager (EPS)
Victoria Barnsley	Quality and Health & Safety Manager (EPS)
Daniel Sherlock	IT/AV Support Officer (LRAT)
Avril Rogers	Laboratory Technical Team Leader (EPS)
Mark Griffiths	Head of Supply Chain and Compliance (Estates)
Matt Sutton	Senior Teaching Technician (MDS)
Claire Cooper	Operations Manager Biosciences (LES)
Vince O’Grady	People and Organizational Development (HR)
Dan Smith	Sustainable Laboratories Officer (Estates)
Helen Barlow	College Head of HR (LES)
Claire Perkins	Personal Assistant (LES)

