

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

Technician Commitment

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

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

De Montfort University (DMU) became a university in 1992 following the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. We are a modern university and our vision and mission have developed such that we are committed to the public good and widening access to higher education, supporting students from diverse backgrounds to enable them to achieve their full potential. Nearly 50 per cent of our students are from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background and 18 per cent register as disabled. DMU is about transformational teaching, co-creation, a rich student experience, valuable support services and key strategic partnerships. We aim to transform our students by helping them to develop not only educationally, but also personally and professionally. Our successful #DMUlocal engagement programme builds on our commitment to act as a positive force for change in Leicester, #DMUglobal provides students with overseas experiences to help advance their international outlook and opportunities, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) shows our commitment to inclusive teaching.

With more than 140 nationalities represented in our staff and student body, we are proud to be a global community, and appreciate the considerable education, professional and cultural contribution it makes to our learning and research.

In the REF 2014, almost 60% of DMU's research activities were judged to be world-leading or internationally excellent; the majority of case studies demonstrating the impact which our academics' work has on real-life issues were rated either 4* (world-leading) or 3* (internationally excellent).

The DMU community includes over 25,000 students and 3,000 staff.

Please tell us how your organisation defines its technicians:

Technicians are integral to supporting the university's vision and mission. They demonstrate a passion for their work which creates a professional, inspirational environment for students to learn whilst demonstrating an acute understanding of their practice within the context of Higher Education including teaching, research, enterprise and knowledge exchange.

Technicians are part of the professional services staff grouping at DMU. The 2005 National Framework Agreement (NFA) was established between employers and Trade Union representatives which resulted in the creation of a Single Salary Pay Spine and a series of Role Profiles. Technical staff fall under the profiles grouped in "Student Support (Technical)" and "Technology Support".

The former group, "Student Support (Technical)" includes those staff who are involved in teaching and research within three of the four faculties at DMU – Arts, Design & Humanities (ADH); Computing, Engineering & Media (CEM); Health & Life Sciences (HLS). They comprise between 25 and 30% of each of these three Faculty's professional services support (95 headcount in total).

The latter group, "Technology Support", includes staff in IT systems engineering, applications, IT support, server management, etc. A group of technicians/technical instructors in the Information Technology and Media Services (ITMS) directorate are also involved in supporting teaching in two faculties, ADH and CEM (headcount 19).

It is the technical staff in the three faculties and the group from the ITMS directorate that are encompassed in the Technician Commitment and associated activities at DMU, totalling 114 headcount.

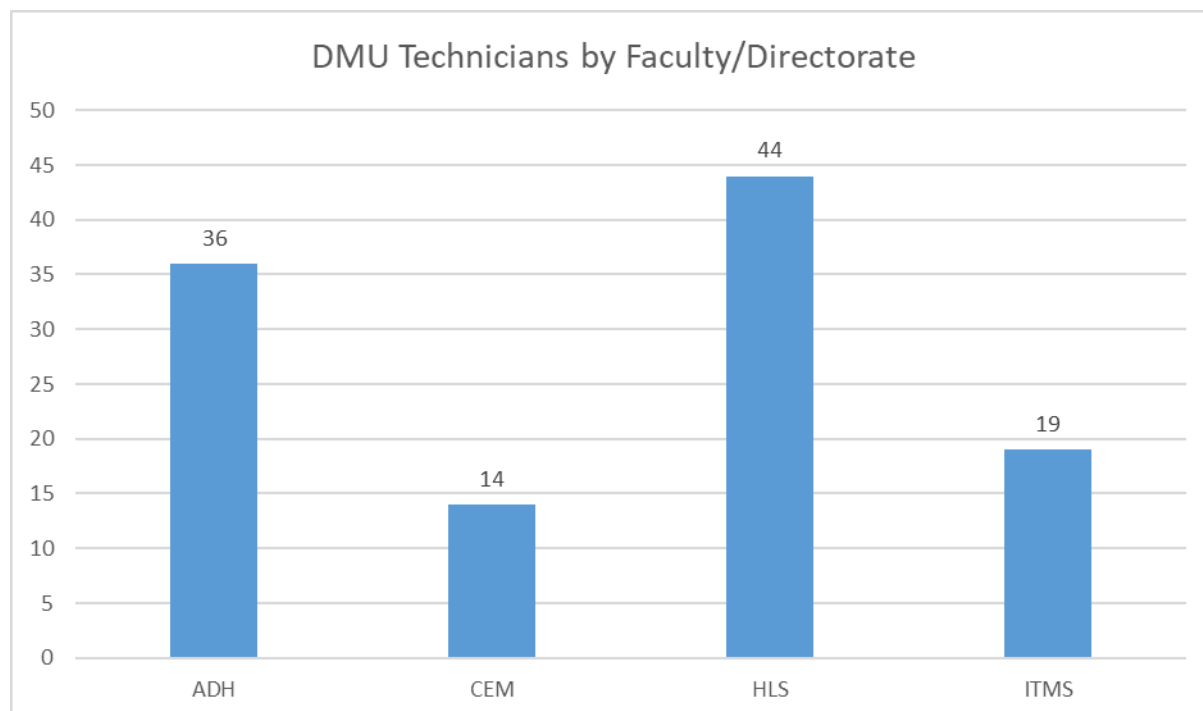
Technicians and Technical Instructors are highly trained specialists, with extensive industry experience and who make a major contribution to the delivery of excellent quality learning and teaching in Faculties across all practice-based subjects. Skills and expertise therefore are varied, and staff are employed on full-time, part-time and term-time only contracts. Involvement in/exposure to teaching and/or research also varies.

The Postgraduate Research Student Survey (PRES), Postgraduate Taught Student Survey (PTES), National Student Survey (NSS), Professional Services Quality Survey (PSQS) and internal feedback mechanisms consistently reference Technical Services teams as making a highly positive, unique contribution to the student experience. They also contribute to non-standard activity (including student showcasing and extra-curricular activity) directly enhancing student employability.

The majority of staff are core-funded as they focus on teaching. Some however may also have their time bought-out to provide significant support to research and commercial enterprise. Many are practitioners within their subjects, often with professional qualifications and sometimes PhDs in their fields of specialism.

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):

It is the technical staff in the three faculties and the group from the ITMS directorate that are currently encompassed in the Technician Commitment and associated activities at DMU, totalling 114 headcount. The 114 are in the following organisational areas:



In ADH, the majority of staff are “Technical Instructors” and they support a range of provision including design technologies, crafts, fashion, textiles, footwear across three schools. Roles cross a range of grades including “Technical Demonstrator”, “Technical Instructor”, “Principal Technician”, and “Chief Technician”.

In CEM the technicians are based in the School of Engineering and Sustainable Development, focusing on electrical and electronic engineering, mechanical engineering, mechatronics and physics. Later in 2019 the team will expand to include both aeronautical engineering and energy engineering. Roles include “Technician”, “Senior Technician”, “Principal Technician” and “Technical Services Manager”.

HLS also has a wide range of grades of technical staff across disciplines including biomedical sciences, forensic science, psychology, pharmacy, speech and language therapy, healthcare science/audiology, nutrition, clinical skills, paramedicine, cosmetic science and radiography. Roles range from “Washer & Laboratory Cleaner”, “Laboratory Technician”, “Senior Technician”, and “Technical Services Manager”.

“Technical Instructors” for video, music, audio and performance make up the majority of the ITMS team plus three management positions.

In the faculties, the technical teams are Professional Services staff; they are managed by a Technical Services Manager/s who report directly into the relevant Directors of Faculty Operations. They work closely with academic staff, any may have their work directed by academics for teaching and research purposes, but they are not line managed by them. The ITMS group are Professional Services staff also, ultimately reporting into the Service Management department within the ITMS Directorate.

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:

Training and development:

Internal training and development has included role-related H&S; specialist skills; DMU mandatory training (e.g. H&S essentials, Equality & Diversity Essentials, General Data Protection Regulations, Safeguarding essentials, Safe & Supported); teaching-related training including gaining HEA recognition; appraisal objective setting.

Line managers undertake Managing Attendance, Constructive Conversations, and Conducting Effective Appraisals. Recruiting Managers must participate in Recruitment & Selection Policy and Process. A "DMU Manager" programme of activity is being piloted and Technical Services Managers have been involved in this.

All faculties and ITMS run staff development events locally to which all staff are invited.

Engagement in external training and development has included opportunities provided by the likes of HEaTED, and other specialist training that we do not have the provision for internally.

Activities:

Technicians are involved in capital and revenue planning to support the activities of the faculties. This includes full involvement in ascertaining requirements needed for teaching and research support, advising academic programme teams, bid preparation and budgetary management.

DMU is teaching intensive and technical staff are generally core-funded; their support featured significantly in our TEF submission in 2017. Some technical staff may be bought-out to provide support to research and enterprise; they have been cited in research papers which contribute to the REF and also work closely with KTP partners.

Managers and Chief Technicians are responsible in some areas for providing and managing student placement opportunities which support student employability, and overseeing work experience students from our partner colleges and other local organisations.

Many of the professional services staff in faculties are involved in local and university-wide activities such as open days, confirmation and clearing, registration (enrolment), graduations. Technicians have always been instrumental to the success of open days, but increasingly staff have volunteered for the other aforementioned activities.

Technical staff are involved in university initiatives such as #DMUlocal and #DMUglobal. The former involves running and supporting events for the local community and young people for example

electronics club, audiology testing, creative arts workshops. #DMUglobal involves staff participating in student overseas trips and experiences for example building homes in India (#DMUIndia - a project supporting a community in Ahmedabad, India which provides #DMUglobal opportunities) and health screening in cities.

Technicians in HLS are members of the Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team for the School of Pharmacy submission (recently awarded Bronze in April 2019). Staff in CEM have been involved in periodic reviews and assessment with External Examiners.

Technical Services Managers are normally involved in faculty management meetings with 1) other professional services managers from the administrative functions, and also with 2) academic managers and school/programme teams.

The university utilises a number of mechanisms by which we ascertain quality and performance of our services. These include the PRES, PTES, NSS, PSQS, DMU Staff survey, Course Level Feedback, Module Level Feedback, Continuous Improvement plans, Service Level Plans, Service Reviews, School Reviews. Action plans are used to monitor developments or enhancements that arise from the feedback mechanisms. Technical staff are involved in these action plans to varying degrees, the Managers taking a lead on actions for their areas. Technical staff have also been involved in running workshops for professional services colleagues in faculties for the Staff Survey action plan.

In terms of monitoring and responding to staff satisfaction, the bi-annual university staff survey was altered so that technicians are grouped separately from other professional services staff in faculties so that we can clearly identify their responses.

Women's and BAME networks - DMU has three networks which focus on supporting and developing women in our community. This includes a university-wide network and a network in HLS; a network in CEM supports and raises the profile of women and also BAME staff with a focus on STEM.

Technical staff participate in these networks. In CEM this is particularly important where one in 14 technicians (7%) is female. Work undertaken to develop Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter Mark action plans has highlighted identified gaps and areas for improvement which we will work into our Technician Commitment action plan and associated activities.

Other activities to note for technical staff already in place, and to which they have contributed, prior to becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment include the following:

Various qualifications including teaching qualifications and specialist skills qualifications; meeting students at open days, conducting tours and demos; undertaking inductions with students including H&S and safe use of tools, equipment, machinery etc.; participation in committees e.g. H&S committee; articles in local newsletters, Cascade (university and local newsletter), weekly updates; Mini Oscars (ITMS); nominations and wins in University Oscars; Cake Fridays; Wellbeing sessions; Science day for staff families; GEM awards (HLS); CEM awards (CEM); Star of the month awards (CEM); End of year exhibition/show; participation in university competitions e.g. bowls; Forensics day; WOW Wednesday showcasing areas in the faculty (ADH); monthly "3 T's" events (tips, tricks and treats) which are workshop-based events open to all (HLS); Participation in #DMUlocal and #DMUglobal.

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:

Activities, initiatives, development and training for technicians have existed at DMU in all faculties and ITMS. However it was increasingly recognised that we were not recognising the critical importance of the work of technicians in support of key university strategic objectives, student learning, research and enterprise. Promotion and profile-raising was piecemeal and inadequate. Moreover, we were not maximising opportunities or did not have appropriate mechanisms in place to promote our staff, identify skills gaps, identify development gaps, capture staff requirements, ambitions and support career development.

Furthermore, the desire to provide specific developmental and advancement opportunities for technical staff arose as a result of requests from technical staff themselves and from those colleagues working with them. Student feedback has also been critical (please see over page).

The Technician Commitment has provided the means to connect together all of this and galvanise an institutional approach. This approach includes the development of a formal strategic project.

Formal university project – “Technician Development and Advancement at DMU” project, the main deliverables of which are: the Technician Commitment self-assessment and 24-month action plan; technician development framework; technicians’ on-line community.

DMU has a portfolio of programmes and projects which conduct activities to support the strategic aims and objectives of the university, and facilitates them to become business as usual. The Strategic Portfolio Board is led by Executive Board members and oversees this portfolio.

Senior management lead five Theme Boards which correspond to the five themes of the DMU Strategic Plan, and report into the main Strategic Portfolio Board. Under each Theme Board there are a number of programmes and projects which are led by senior staff. A programme or project can only commence if it has senior staff buy-in and support.

The project “Technician Development and Advancement at DMU” commenced in autumn 2018; whilst projects at DMU are a way to conduct and facilitate strategic change, providing the infrastructure and resource to this work demonstrates the institutional support, recognition and senior sponsorship and endorsement for our technical community.

Technicians are key members of the Technician Development and Advancement Project Board which is driving the shaping the content of and the implementation of a technician development framework into business as usual, as well as the wider Technician Commitment work e.g. self-assessment and action plan. Following the implementation of the project outcomes to business as usual, the Project Board will transfer its business into an operations group which will conduct operations 'on the ground' and will be led by technicians. Project work streams include: the development of the technician development framework (see below), visibility and vision, an on-line community, external comms, the self-assessment and action plan.

The Development Framework -

The construction of a DMU Technician Development Framework – a key deliverable of the Project – has been informed by extensive consultation with Technicians, Technical Services Managers, Faculty Directors and other key stakeholders across the institution. The framework supports and develops Technicians in six areas of critical importance to the successful execution of their role: Professional Practice, the Associate Teacher Programme, Leadership & Management, Apprenticeships, Personal Effectiveness and (team-based) Organisation Development Consulting. The framework adopts an approach to professional learning and development that incorporates learning from experience, exposure and education, known as the 70-20-10 model (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1996). This recognises the value of learning ‘on the job’ when supported by dedicated learning and training opportunities and forms a thread that runs through the framework, beginning with an institutional Technician Induction (see below) and self-evaluation and continuing with coaching, mentoring and action learning opportunities.

The Professional Practice component offers technicians a variety of routes to support them in maintaining currency in technical skills through partners that include the Science Council, the National Technician Development Centre (NTDC), and Higher Education and Technician’s Educational Development (HEaTED). The Associate Teacher Programme supports the enhancement of a technician’s standing as a facilitator of learning including routes through HEA recognition and training opportunities supporting the enhancement of innovative academic practice. Leadership & Management provides development for technicians wishing to progress their career towards leadership positions. A range of Apprenticeships are relevant to technicians and the framework provides a gateway to information and support for staff wishing to access this route to development. Personal Effectiveness provides opportunities to develop personal and leadership qualities essential to effective functioning in a large organisation. Organisation Development Consulting provides a bespoke service for teams experiencing challenges or seeking optimal functioning.

The framework is being piloted during 2019 and evaluation will include both face to face and electronic feedback opportunities and will seek to determine impact in relation to effectiveness, uptake and improved practice. The pilot will be monitored by the project board for a period of 12-18 months before the project formally closes and the framework becomes business as usual.

Technicians’ induction – We have recently launched a Technician-specific staff induction for new starters which we are piloting on existing staff. This includes an introduction to Higher Education; and introduction to DMU including our strategic aims, culture and values; “The student journey” which explains the standard experience for students at DMU including milestones during a typical year; introduction to the development framework and an opportunity for individuals to begin a self-evaluation/reflective journey.

Workforce planning - workforce planning is a DMU-wide activity which is being undertaken across all faculties and directorates. Specific activity will centre on technicians and include skills gap analyses, job description and role profile review, succession planning, talent management, retention, demographic analyses, understanding our profile and addressing any anomalies or disparities in line with Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter Mark plans.

Staff satisfaction - The University receives feedback from its technical community by way of the DMU Staff Survey and other local mechanisms. Whilst faculties and directorates have existing action plans to address any issues that technicians raise, additional approaches will be established that show clear links to the themes of the Technician commitment.

Network events - DMU launched the Technician commitment and formal Project on 8th November 2018 to all technicians encompassed within the project. The event included workshops with staff focusing on the four pillars of the Technician Commitment. A follow-up event for all staff was held on 28th February 2019 to update staff on progress with the project and included a session on professional registration.

Branding - branding was created for the launch of the Technician Commitment in November 2018 and remains as the "Technicians@DMU" branding to date.

On-line Community / site - One of the work streams/deliverables of the Project has been developing an on-line community for technical staff. This will include a space for staff to communicate internally, promote local events, share best practice, include a database of skills, and will also contain a link to development tools.

All-technician email circulation list - communication with technicians has been enhanced by means of an email circulation list which can be used by the DMU community to circulate news and updates on activities etc.

DMU Website - The Marketing and Communications (MarComms) directorate at DMU is supporting the work of the Technician Commitment by creating an area on the DMU website dedicated to our technical staff.

Profiles and case studies - work had already started on preparing and publishing profiles of technical staff. This will be enhanced with the website and on-line community developments.

Stakeholder engagement - The Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) of the Project has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders at DMU. Technicians themselves are of course key stakeholders and the staff have been involved in our activities for the whole project journey and will continue to be so.

Other stakeholders include the Interim Vice-Chancellor, Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Executive Director of People & Organisational Development (and Technician Commitment signatory), Chief Operating Officer (and Technician Commitment signatory), Pro Vice-Chancellor/Deans of Faculty, Director of ITMS, Associate Deans (Academic), Associate Deans (Research), Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic, Pro Vice-Chancellor Research, Director of Enterprise, Executive Director of Marketing and Communications, DMU Operational Leadership Group (sub-committee of Executive Board), Heads of School, academics and students.

The range of stakeholders demonstrates the importance of the project and thus our commitment to our technicians.

Feedback from students - this is prominent in PRES, PTES, NSS, course and module level feedback and other mechanisms and students' views are valued. Direct discussion with students since becoming a signatory however has proved invaluable. Meetings were held with both undergraduate and postgraduate students from a range of disciplines. Their observations, experiences, and interactions with technicians clearly reflect the themes our Technician Commitment aims to address. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive; for example there is an appreciation of the different methods staff take to instruct or demonstrate, the way the staff can adapt to audiences; clear respect for their expertise and experiences, their approachability and accessibility, and dedication to their role. Other specific feedback will be used to inform our development plan, workforce planning

and talent management. There was an overall agreement that technicians are not recognised or profile-raised enough.

Please provide a 24-month action plan, detailing future plans to ensure your organisations addresses the themes of the Technician Commitment and details of how impact will be evidenced: (this may be detailed here or attached to this document as an appendix):

The action plan details the gaps we have identified that need to be addressed during the next two years. Many of the actions will become business as usual after 24 months. See the Appendix 1, including the Action Plan Steering Group Terms of Reference.

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

Action plan sessions – Specific focussed sessions with staff have taken place throughout the Spring 2019 to consult over the proposed 24-month action plan. Volunteers to participate were invited and sessions were facilitated.

Project Board - The Project Board membership includes technicians from the three faculties and ITMS. Project Board members have engaged their teams consultatively for various purposes e.g. a vision for technical staff at DMU, the action plan, the development framework, the on-line community.

Steering Group - A Steering Group, Chaired by a Pro Vice-Chancellor Dean, has been established to support the implementation of our action plan. Technical staff are members on the group and staff have also been invited to comment on the proposed Terms of Reference.

Feedback - Feedback has been sought from staff following the larger formal network events, and the localised activities, asking for views on the project's progress, ideas, suggestions for future events, volunteers to lead on certain activities, etc. Many of these are captured in the action plan.

Work stream sessions - the project’s work stream leads have sought volunteers to participate in sessions to address the four themes of the Technician Commitment. These have fed into the action plan.

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

<https://www.dmu.ac.uk/technicians>

Signed.....

(Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead)

Date:

Signed.....

(Technician Commitment Signatory – Lead contact of Institution)

Date:

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

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

Theme	Example Activities
<p>Visibility</p> <p>Ensure that technicians within the organisation are identifiable and that the contribution of technicians is visible within and beyond the institution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations can identify how many technicians they employ • Technician roles have clear job descriptions • A consistent policy that where technicians have contributed to research outputs and grants, they are named as authors • Technicians to feature in organisation prospectuses and marketing materials • Technicians to sit on decision making committees where appropriate • Technicians visible in costing mechanisms for research grants • A mechanism for celebrating technician achievements across the organisation • Organisation strategy documents to include technicians where appropriate • A vibrant 'Technician Network'
<p>Recognition</p> <p>Support technicians to gain recognition through professional registration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation communicates the opportunity to become professionally registered to technical staff (Science Council, Engineering Council, BCS). Conferment of the organisational level Science Council Employer Champion award in recognition of the support given to technical staff to gain professional registration and engage in continued professional development • Recognition and support of the teaching aspect of many technician roles through the accreditation of teaching practice through the Higher Education Academy • Internal award schemes recognise the contribution of technical staff • Nominations to external award schemes that recognise the contribution of technical staff
<p>Career Development</p> <p>Enable career progression opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technician specific professional career paths/frameworks which clearly document progression opportunities • Professional development opportunities, signposted to technicians and aligned to career pathways • A dedicated webpage showcasing case studies of technician careers • Expansion of technician specific job families in recognition of high level technical specialisms
<p>Sustainability</p> <p>Ensure the future sustainability of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate succession planning for technical roles including the analysis of technician profiles to ensure future sustainability of skills within the organisation • Secondment/placement programmes for technical staff to develop new skills • A technician trainee/apprenticeship programme • Utilisation of the Apprenticeship Levy to train and upskill existing staff