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

Technician Commitment

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

Organisation: University for the Creative Arts

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

The University for the Creative Arts (UCA) is a specialist arts institution based in the South East of England. The university has a 160-year history of providing creative education and currently offers 110 creative courses for art, business and technology; providing students with the skills and opportunities to work with and have exposure to creative industries.

The university has campuses in Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham and Rochester as well as a number of home and international collaborative partners. In 2016, the university joined with the Open College of the Arts, significantly enhancing its provision of art and design education through online and distance learning.

With more than 6,000 students currently studying at the UCA, creative education is structured within Schools: Architecture; Communication Design; Crafts & Design; Fashion; Film, Media & Performing Arts; Fine Arts & Photography; and Further Education. The UCA is also home to the Business School for the Creative Industries, the first within its kind in the UK. The School builds on the university's long tradition of collaborating with employers to cultivate leadership, entrepreneurial and strategic planning skills.

The UCA has been named Modern University of the Year by The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2019 and highest placed specialist creative university in the top 35 of all UK universities in The Times and Sunday Times league table. The National Student Survey 2018 placed UCA in the top 10 universities in the UK for teaching quality and we are the UK's No.1 specialist creative university for employability in the most recent Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education (DHLE) 2018. 96.9% of UCA graduates are either employed or in further study with six months of graduation

1500 permanent staff are employed at UCA, 131 of which are technical staff.

Please tell us how your organisation defines its technicians:

Technical Services at UCA

At UCA, the practice of 'making' is a way of producing knowledge, enabling students to develop their creative thinking through practice-based activities. The Technical staff are key to this approach, fostering a unique environment in which learning, experimentation and critical thinking are combined with world class resources, technical support and expertise that can enable a student's concept to become a reality. The staff deliver technical information and support students to develop their skills and competencies experientially. The technical staff at UCA are active practitioners and experts in their field. This is celebrated and encouraged at UCA, as it enriches the student experience and promotes an environment where technical information and creative discourse co-exist.

To assist this pedagogic approach, UCA structures its technical staff within 3 defined job families: Assistant Technician, Technician and Technician Tutor. These roles are line managed by Technical Resource Managers.

The summary in Appendix 1 illustrated the key duties and levels of responsibilities across the levels of technical staff:

Grade 4 – Assistant Technician

The role of a Grade 4 Assistant Technician is to provide technical advice and assistance to students and staff and to provide supervision of technical areas. A key aspect of the role is to ensure the technical equipment and environment is safe and maintained.

Grade 5 - Technician

In addition to Grade 4 duties, it is the role of a grade 5 Technician to induct students through demonstration into the safe working practices, processes, tools & equipment, materials and software, and record the achievement of these competencies. The role is defined to impart sufficient knowledge and support to enable safe and competent operation of the resource and equip students with an appropriate level of knowledge and skills to access the resources autonomously where they can further develop competencies and creative practices.

Grade 6 - Technician Tutor

In addition to Grade 4 & Grade 5 duties, the responsibilities of the Technician Tutor are defined around the development and delivery of a programme of instruction that is designed to progressively develop students' engagement with technical skills to advance their work in the context of unit, stage or course learning outcomes.

Grade 9 – Resource Manager

The Technical Resource Managers are responsible for the development, operational management and use of technical staff and technical resources that support teaching & learning. They have line management and overall responsibility for the technical staff and technical resources. Like the technical staff, Resource managers are aligned to subject specialisms and required to works collaboratively across the university to establish common standards of work and practices.

How many technicians are there in your organisation? Please provide some information on where they are based and/or how they are structured (in terms of subject/discipline/department):

There are 131 members of technical staff at UCA, amounting to 99.29 fte.

Based across all four of our creative campuses, the technical staff are aligned to technical specialism within Art, Architecture, Crafts, Design, Fashion, Communication, Graphics, Film, Music, Media and Performing Arts. Appendix 2 demonstrates the number of technical staff and profile of technical specialism on each campus.

Technical staff are embedded with course delivery and support specialist users within their technical areas. They also support the experimentation, enquiry and skills development of non-specialist users for whose creative practice spans multi disciplines. To enable this approach, technical staff are aligned to specialism rather that individual courses. The technical staff are line managed by technical Resource Managers who in turn report in to the Head of Technical Services.

Prior to becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment, the management of Technical Services at UCA was separated by county, Epsom and Farnham were managed by one technical manager, Rochester and Canterbury managed by another.

The academic structure was reviewed and our creative courses defined within schools. As each School has a presence on each campus, the campus-based approach to delivering Technical Services exposed inconsistency in the level of technical support provided within Schools.

In 2018, a unified approach to Technical Services was established reporting in to a singular Head of Technical Services. This has created a single vision and parity to the delivery of technical services, the student experience and the development and enhancement of all technical staff.

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:

Visibility

- Technician exhibitions celebrating and promoting the skills of technical staff. This was not achieved on all campuses.

- Partial representation at School and Course boards – this was reliant on individual course engagement and integration of technical staff in course planning.

- Farnham Resource Manager is a contributing manager and representative of UCA technical staff at the European Technical Heads Organisation (ETHO).

Recognition

- Percentage of technical staff have teaching qualifications and/ or recognition HEA fellowship scheme.

- Technical team for film, media and performing arts 'highly commended' at the Higher Educations Technicians Summit, Papin Prize Award.

- Reward for contribution scheme. One off payment or pay progression and contribution zone established with pay scale.

- Staff suggestion scheme with prize giving for the suggestions with most impact.

Career Development

- Commitment to continuing professional development of technical staff – funding PGCE, MA, ILM and accredited qualifications relating to technical specialism.

- Supporting internal progression within UCA – multiple examples of technical staff progressing in to academic or management roles.

- Supporting sabbaticals and seeking opportunities within technical team to 'step up' to gain experience in more senior roles. In most instances, the technicians progressed on to more senior roles within the organisation.

- Technical staff supported to apply for research funding. This was successful but infrequent.

- Opportunities for technical staff to visit and work with industry partners.

- Embedded support for attendance and networking at technical conferences, exhibitions and trade shows.

Sustainability

- Integrated PDR scheme is used a tool for reflection on performance and to identify training and development needs.

- Professional qualification funding for staff.

- Occasional team building days but this was local initiative rather than planned or aligned to any development strategy.

- Occasional cross campus collaborations, bringing together technical staff to learn about each other and share best practice.

- 2014 – Professional Support Alignment (PSA2) – The creation of technician job families to align the technical roles to the curriculum need. Although technical line management remained in county, job descriptions were unified across the university to ensure consistency of recognition of technical expertise and role requirement across the university.

- Support flexible working requests to enable work/life commitments and personal development.

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

- Technician profiles are included on UCA website.

- Technical staff are recognised and included in UCA prospectus and marketing materials.

- Development of Technical Services brand and Technical Services information on MyUCA.

- Teaching excellence of technical staff recognised at a European conference for Technician's in the creative arts. Hosted by Glasgow School of Art, UCA technical staff presentation on 'Planning for Inclusivity'.

- Technician exhibition scheduled on each campus. Dates scheduled during enrolment and campus tours to ensure maximum visibility and to showcase the skills and talents of technical staff to new and existing students.

- Creation of Technical Services *Workplace* page. This is an internal communication tool that is used to promote and celebrate staff achievements, raise profile of the work carried out by the technical team.

Recognition

- Advancement of technician status through further embedding the HEA Fellowship Scheme.

- Skills, qualifications and recognised in UCA TEF Gold submission.

- Long Service Awards and celebration for staff attaining 20 years of service.

Career Development

- Development of skills matrix for technician role profiles to map skills development requirements and investment planning in the development of technical skills and staff.

- 49% of Technical staff with PGCerts

- Prioritised staff development in budget planning.

Sustainability

- Strategic investment in technical equipment/ resources, leading to investment in technical training and renewal of technical skills and competencies.

- Restructured the approach to internal development events to include peer learning and the development of a unified approach to the delivery of technical information and services.

- Structured *Technician Development Days* – Themes for the events are informed by both university priorities and by the technician voice and feedback on their development needs.

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):

See action plan attached.

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

Including the technician voice is a practice that we strive to embed within the constant development of Technical Services, and has been a key factor in guiding the direction and ethos of development activities.

Technical managers use team meetings and PDR reviews to gather information regarding the challenges and development needs that UCA technical staff encounter within their roles. This information is used to create opportunities and a series of training events based on the needs identified by technical staff. Technician Development Days were created as a platform in which the feedback and needs are addressed.

The technician voice was further utilized within the Technician Development Day to introduce and explore the Technician Commitment initiative. In the event, the technical staff fed back about their experience in relation to the Technician Commitment themes, what it meant to them and areas they feel need to be addressed. This feedback was used and embedded within the action plan.

To ensure that the technician voice is present as we continue to address and embed the Technician Commitment at UCA, actions within the plan are written with the intention that technical staff and the technician voice continue to inform how we move forward and at the center of evaluating impact of our actions.

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

www.uca.ac.uk/about-us/technician-commitment

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

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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
Visibility Ensure that technicians within the organisation are identifiable and that the contribution of technicians is visible within and beyond the institution	• 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'
Recognition Support technicians to gain recognition through professional registration	• 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
Career Development Enable career progression opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathways	• 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
Sustainability Ensure the future sustainability of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised	• 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