

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

Organisation: University of Warwick

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

The University has 248 technicians across the Faculty of Science, Engineering & Medicine including apprentices. This does not include IT roles or technical roles held within Estates and commercial areas. The areas covered by technical staff include Chemistry, Computer Science, Engineering, Life Sciences, Mathematics, Physics, Psychology, Research Technology Platforms, Statistics, Warwick Manufacturing Group and the Warwick Medical School. Technicians are based on main campus and at the University's Wellesbourne Campus. Technicians occupy roles from Levels 1 to 8 and we have created a 'roadmap of technical roles'. Technical resource at Warwick is overseen by departments, in line with each reporting into an Academic Resource Committee.

For each Department, the core infrastructure and teaching technical staff have report lines overseen by a Technical Services Manager (TSM). The TSM typically reports into the Departmental Senior Administrative Officer (SAO). Each of our specialist and core facilities has staff overseen by a facility manager (also a technical role) who reports into an academic director. Where technical staff focus on specific research projects, line management is provided by the PI, with more flexible resource line managed by Departmental SAO or TSM in some instances.

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.

Initially, a Steering Group was formed in order to direct our Technician Commitment work. The PVC (Research) had recently created a new post, Deputy-PVC (Research Infrastructure & Governance), and this post became the Chair of the Technician Commitment Steering Group. The other members of the group include senior members of HR, TSMs from several departments, the Research Technology Engagement Manager and union representation. Meetings of the Steering Group occur every month. These feedback directly into the University Executive Board at appropriate times. The Technician Commitment was also included as part of our [research strategy](#) refresh (work-strand 5).

The Technician Commitment Steering Committee was tasked with producing our action plan for the Commitment, which in consultation with technical staff, was designed as a 10 action point list and published [online](#).

Certain aspects of the action plan have been prioritised, with significant progress such as:

Establishing the Technician Commitment Steering Group and [TechNet webpages](#)

Designed our [Technician Job Family](#) and career progression pathway, with external Hay evaluation

Running high profile internal and external events (such as HETS 2019) to engage with our technical staff and gain input and feedback

Designed and published our [Fair Attribution](#) policy, with dissemination to departments and staff.

Engagement with the technical community across Warwick has been facilitated through events, focus groups, a purpose built website, a newsletter and via social media. This multi-pronged approach has been used to reach as many people as possible and to link the community in ways that hadn't been done before. Uptake at events has been excellent, with ~ 120 present at the launch events and between 60 – 80 attending update events and the Facility and Technician Showcase. The first focus groups were attended by 10-20 technical staff. Subsequent online sessions have drawn a smaller number (5-12) per session. However, the feedback and ideas received in these as an open and safe forum of discussion has been exceptional, with many of the ideas added to the action plan and implemented quickly. One such idea was the establishment of an online coffee morning early in the 2020 lockdown period, which has continued since. This has built a tight knit community of technical staff across multiple departments and led to collaboration and sharing of best practice, in addition to support through a difficult and isolating time for some.

Feedback on, and use of, the webpages has been very successful – a typical month sees in excess of 1000 views from 400 distinct devices. This is due to responding to the needs of the community and ensuring regular updates are provided. Our Twitter presence, suggested at a focus group by technical staff, has grown to 166 followers, many external to Warwick.

In terms of resource, our Technician Commitment has greatly benefited from work by Elizabeth Harrison in our HR Department, who through dedicated time to the commitment, has driven the Technician Job Family and Career Progression Pathway, in addition to work across the action plan such as the developing the work-shadowing scheme. Maintenance of the web pages, social media streams and the organisation of events has been supported by the RTP Officer, Amarjit Gill. Each of the members of the Steering Group have also input a considerable amount of time to drive the progress and engagement with their staff.

Through our Technician Commitment, our staff have also gained a number of opportunities to work and share best practice with technical staff across Midlands Innovation (MI). Our commitment has also hugely benefited from funds from the MI Research Efficiency Committee, with the support of the Director of MI Dr Helen Turner. These funds have enabled us to undertake a pilot soft skills training for technicians scheme in collaboration with partner MI institutions and provided a Technical Placement Programme and funding towards the Higher Education Technician Summits. A programme of work shadowing has been trialled across MI Institutions (where travel and lodgings are funded) and within the University of Warwick. For example, a young technician attended a placement in the microscopy suite at Nottingham through the MI pilot programme. There has also been an internal exchange between Warwick Manufacturing Group (WVG) and the School of Life Sciences where two individuals

visited each other's area to look at and share best lab practice. In addition, a technician from the School of Engineering (Civils) visited WMG's mechanical test lab in MEC to learn about the fatigue and tensile testing equipment and WMG's test engineer visited the School of Engineering to look at their test rigs and set-up. We believe that such activities help to build and strengthen the bonds within the community and we hope to build upon it at Warwick and across MI with the launch of a more formal work shadowing process for technicians in the New Year.

This body of activity led to the successful MI bid to Research England for TALENT, a £5M project led by Kelly Vere at the University of Nottingham, providing significant resource into the future. Warwick have a co-lead on this project, with 0.2FTE of Ian Hancox's time.

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. This may be detailed here or attached to this document as an appendix.

The analysis of our 24-month action plan is attached and highlighted as actions completed (green), on-going (amber) and to be completed (red). The action plan also highlights (in bold and *) a number of suggestions raised in consultation with our technicians, which have been directly fed into the action plan throughout the period. We regard the action plan as a living document, with these additions in response to direct feedback expanding the original action plan. Consequently, there are actions that are currently on-going and will feed into our next 36-month plan. This includes a number of adaptations of the plan in response to Covid-19 and the challenges our technical force has faced. Covid-19 has also led to significant delays in progress for certain elements of the action plan.

There are only two 'red' actions: (i) We need to update the brochure for our Technician Commitment, which will coincide with our 36-month action plan beginning and finalising several of the actions close to completion (amber). (ii) Further investment and growth in our apprenticeship programmes can be pursued. We have pockets of good practice where cohorts of apprentices are regularly trained and a number retained, such as in our Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG). However, we feel more can be done for the institution in this area. Progress has been stalled by waiting for recruitment to a post in Organisational Development with a focus in this area; a lack of apprenticeship standards meeting the needs of other departments; and where local providers are unable to currently fulfil requirements. We are beginning work in these areas, but the current financial climate may further slow progress in the immediate future.

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

We can evidence the impact of the action plan by collecting quantitative and qualitative data, as outlined in our action plan document.

Quantitatively, we can demonstrate that the engagement from our technical staff has been good thus far, with excellent numbers registering and attending update, themed and social events that we have held. Web statistics have shown significant traffic to the TechNet site and online engagement with our Twitter account has grown. One statistical example of success in increasing visibility is that the press release for [Steve Hindmarsh winning the Core Research Facility Papin Prize](#) was viewed 800+ times in less than a month. We are now able to track a 'heat map' of the number of technicians we have, the grades they are employed at and other data such as that around EDI. This will be a powerful tool in the coming years to see what progress our institutional Technician Commitment, alongside work in the wider sector, is having on the progression of our staff. Through our professional registration fund, we hope to monitor uptake and produce case studies that encourage other staff to engage with professional bodies. As part of TALENT, we are now also able to monitor the soft skills learning that our technical staff attend and these trends will also be evaluated. Data such as fair attribution on journal articles has unfortunately been hard to obtain with any certainty.

Qualitatively, as may be expected, the impact can be harder to measure. At a high level, our Technician Commitment has certainly started raised the profile of our technical staff and helped ensure their input is recognised. This has been further propagated by both the positive feedback and sharing of best practice with MI partners and through the high profile of the TALENT project. This impact is evidenced through invited technical representative on a newly formed [Research Culture Committee](#), technical staff being named as both Co-I (awards from EPSRC) and PI (submission to BBSRC) on research proposals, and the successful EPSRC Strategic Equipment Resource only award for the *Warwick Analytical Science Centre*. The latter award has a significant focus on Research Technical Professionals (RTProfs) and their importance in driving our analytical sciences. Our Technician Commitment and the work of our technical staff have been recognised in our recently refreshed [research strategy](#) and captured in our draft REF institutional environment statements.

Progress has been harder to measure for elements such as career progression and sustainability. Feedback from the community has generally been positive, with highlights such as fair attribution and the building of a cross departmental technical community, but longer-term evidence will need to be obtained. Progress to date has been focused on, and therefore potentially favoured, technical staff working on or related to research. In creating and delivering our next 36-month action plan, we will therefore be particularly mindful to consider the needs of each technical role individually and in particular the core and teaching technicians, and how these groups subtly differ.

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

The action plan attached is dramatically different to that originally detailed, as many suggestions and challenges from the technical community have been added. Many of these suggestions have naturally had significant impact as initiatives / activities requested directly by the community.

These additions include, but are not limited to:

- A Twitter account - this has successfully helped us engage and promote activities, as well as stay in touch with best practice across the sector.
- Provided Technician Commitment lanyards – these have been simple but effective in increasing the visibility of our technical staff and stimulate discussion within department about the commitment.
- A Christmas (2019) social event – this was well attended and received, with technical staff widening their networks across campus through a group activity.
- Weekly online coffee meeting - in lockdown we established a weekly, informal, coffee chat meeting. This continues, even with most technical staff returning to work. Topics cover anything from work related issues and concerns to general friendly chat.
- We piloted purpose-built development sessions for technical staff - this was funded by MI and was in partnership with the MI institutions.
- Added to institutional interview panel guidelines, to allow technical staff to be part of a panel even where grading of a role may not normally allow this – it will allow technical staff to directly input their knowledge when we are recruiting to posts.

In addition to the above, we also worked with partners across MI to help secure the £5M Research England funded *TALENT* project. This has already enabled a widening of the soft skills tailored training for technicians and established a technician-led equipment sharing project, which many of our staff have taken part in.

Technician Commitment

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.

We have attached a draft of our 36 month action plan, which is broken down by theme, sub theme and action points. Each has a measure of success and will continually be monitored for progress by the Technician Commitment Steering Group. In order to create this, we held a series of focus groups to obtain suggestions and challenges directly from the technical community. We were pleased that the number and quality of suggestions were high and we began work on some of these with immediate effect. As with the previous action plan, we consider this a living document, which will be updated and added to following regular consultation with our technicians, thus ensuring our Technician Commitment delivers real impact to their daily lives.

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:

[Our Technician Commitment \(warwick.ac.uk\)](https://warwick.ac.uk/our-technician-commitment)

Signed..........Prof David Leadley, DPVC Research

(Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead)

Date: 27/11/2020

Signed..........Professor Stuart Croft, Vice-Chancellor & President

(Technician Commitment Signatory – Leader of Institution)

Date: 08/12/2020