Our Technician Commitment
Introduction

It’s six years since the University of Warwick signed up for the Technician Commitment and we’ve achieved a huge amount in that time.

Warwick became a signatory to the Technician Commitment in 2017 and since then, a huge amount of work has been undertaken on job families and career development.

Of course, there is still much to do; but we are committed to the work that this requires. Now, we are involving the technical community with the project, listening, and focusing on things that are important to our technicians at this time. This is vital and important work in its own right. But there is an added element to this. It has become increasingly clear to all staff, not just those involved in particular , that our technical staff play a massive role in our world-class teaching and research. We aim to build on this visibility and recognition over the course of our action plan.

I hope that you enjoy this brochure and engage in opportunities to help our vision of making things happen for technicians.

Professor Stuart Croft
Vice-Chancellor & President of University of Warwick

Professor David Leadley
Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research

In this brochure, you can read about some of the outcomes since the inception of our Technician Commitment Action Plan and see how to engage further to shape the next phase.

The Technician Commitment is all about increasing visibility, recognition, career progression and staff development. We will build this together as a community through an ongoing evolution of the Action Plan, shaped by WKRVHKQRLWHEQHWPRWVPHWNQIDFHSHQW of technical staff in the life and decision making of the University.

The TechNet@Warwick website has been created to highlight opportunities and celebrate achievements of technical staff – contributions and suggestions of what you want to see there are always welcome. You can also read about networking and development events, especially those provided through the TALENT project that has started to bring together technicians from across the Midlands as well as promoting the technical workforce at a national level.

There has been really positive feedback from those who have attended these events and we hope many more technical staff will benefit from a varied program in the future, but please do tell us if you really want an event focused on something different.

I hope that you enjoy this brochure and engage in opportunities to help our vision of making things happen for technicians.
How is the Technician Commitment being implemented at Warwick?

The work on our Technician Commitment is overseen by a Steering Group chaired by Professor David Leadley, Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research.

Our Technical Services Managers are also members together with the Director of Research Technology and Technical Strategy with membership from HR. Everything is discussed and decided at the 6WHHULQ*URXSDQWUKHQV*URXSVUnRPHG to carry forward the ideas. Input from our Technical &RUPXQLWWDNYSDFWKURXJKRFV*URXSV informal chats, organised update events and a recently formed Technician Commitment Sub-URXSKLVLQSKWLFWFXFLDWRWKHVXFFHVVRINKH project and we will continue to engage in this way encouraging Technicians to work with us on smaller projects in the future.

Our initial Action Plan saw work mainly focussed on the formulation of a career progression pathway and Technical Job Family. Technicians have been mapped onto the career progression pathway (via generic job titles), coming into fruition in April 2021. This enables us to track any turnover and career progression more easily and enables Technicians to see the options that might be available to them in the future, should they wish to take them. A lot of work has also been undertaken on a development programme, placement programme and culminated with the launch of a work-shadowing process for technical staff, accompanied by a commitment from the University to authorise at least two day per annum for development activity to support career development opportunities for technical staff. More recently, we have launched our Technical Specialist Promotions Process Pilot, making Warwick only the second institution to implement a promotional route for technical staff. As a pilot, we are eager to get feedback on this process.

Our next action plan has been divided into key themes/areas as follows:

- Recruitment, progression and enhancing the skills of the Technical Community
- Engaging with and recognising the Technical Community
- Visibility of the Technical Community
- Technicians voice in an HE environment
- Support mechanisms for our Technical Community

The details of this action plan can be viewed at Our Technician Commitment (warwick.ac.uk). This is a living document and we welcome feedback and input into this and anything else relating to the Technician Commitment. There are a number of ways you can provide feedback but the most important thing is that you engage. We need you to help us make a difference.
Career Progression and the implementation of the Career Pathway/use of generic job titles

The career pathway was formulated to demonstrate the career pathways that might be available to our technical staff.

There are a number of routes that your career may take and this can sometimes mean making a sideways move to obtain different skills and knowledge to help you progress. To simplify this we have introduced generic job titles which enable us immediately to recognise where you sit on the career pathway in terms of grade and strand. Our generic titles have been simplified further since the original career pathway was introduced and this is shown below:

We are also formulating a roadmap of roles which aims to give you an indication of the type of roles that are undertaken at each level/career strand in the University. This roadmap outlines the current job titles of technical staff with different career pathways and grades.

We will be looking at the recruitment process for technical staff. It is an area that the University often struggles to recruit into and, according to the Gatsby Foundation, nationally, this is an aging workforce in an area that needs to grow to meet the demand from employers over the coming decade.

We have already started to work with other Universities in the Midlands to advertise technical roles amongst this Midlands Innovation Network of Universities.

PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION – there are a number of professional bodies across the sector offering support and registration at differing levels from Registered Science Technician (RSciTech), Engineering Technician (EngTech) up to Chartered status. Professional registration establishes your proven knowledge, understanding and competence. Whilst this is not a requirement at all levels it demonstrates your level of knowledge and encourages continuous professional development.

We are also formulating a roadmap of roles which aims to give you an indication of the type of roles that are undertaken at each level/career strand in the University. This roadmap outlines the current job titles of technical staff with different career pathways and grades. Understanding what a person does from their job title can be difficult. We will aim to streamline job titles to make them more meaningful.

Representation of technical staff at each level at Warwick, where size of bubble directly relates to number of people in role at that level.
Technical Specialists Promotional pathway Pilot

Following our commitment to enact the recommendations of the TALENT Commission, we are amongst the first UK institutions to pilot a Technical Specialist Promotional Pathway.

This pathway will enable technical specialists to progress based on their own merit against a modified version of the four criteria used for the Academic Progression and Promotional Pathway, enabling recognition for excelling in a role whilst remaining a specialist.

Why open this pathway to technical specialists?

Academic staff have a well-established route and process for promotion based upon a pathway with four core criteria. Increasingly, technical specialists are ‘blurring the boundaries’, through their direct input to research, teaching and training, and knowledge exchange. This is further demonstrated through recent successes with our technical specialists securing funding from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). Therefore, with small modifications to the four criteria used for academic promotions, we are able to reflect the differences in roles between the three academic pathways and a pathway suitable for technical specialists. This includes equivalency in threshold scores at each level to the academic pathway.

We acknowledge that not all technical specialist roles will be in a position to take advantage of the pathway due to the nature of the particular role, and so progression will still be achievable through applying for a new position at a higher level, or where responsibilities, potentially a job re-evaluation. This is in line with all other professional services staff.

The pilot will run alongside the Academic Progression and Promotional Pathway for academic year 23/24, with feedback welcome from all involved or linked to www.warwick.ac.uk/research/technicians/technicalspecialistspromotionalframeworkpilot/
TALENT

TALENT is a Research England funded project which provides opportunities for technical skills, roles and careers in the UK higher education and research.

Knowledge Cafes

www.mitalent.ac.uk/Technical-Placement-Scheme

Technical Placement Scheme

www.mitalent.ac.uk/Technical-Conference-and-Skills-Fund

Technical Conference and Skills Fund

www.mitalent.ac.uk/Technician-Led-Training-Fund

Collaborative Technical Training Fund

www.mitalent.ac.uk/Technicians-as-Partners

Advice about gaining registration, which level would be appropriate, which Professional Body

www.mitalent.ac.uk/TheTALENTCommission

Knowledge Cafes

For the latest courses and to sign up please visit: www.mitalent.ac.uk/Technicians-as-Partners

The team also host Festivals of Learning, with a wide range of bespoke training and funds.

For the latest courses and to sign up please visit: www.mitalent.ac.uk/Learning

Bespoke Transferable Skills Training

TALENT offers a range of funds that you can access, if you are thinking of attending a conference or a course.

Advice about gaining registration, which level would be right for you, and how to fill in the necessary documentation

The following tips may help you when thinking about developing your technical career:

- Discover what you want to do – research career options, think about what you most enjoy doing, create a career development plan
- Take opportunities to try different things – learn a new technique, join a committee, take on a project, you may discover that you enjoy something new
- Make the most of your PDR – this is your opportunity to discuss career goals and development activities that you can undertake with your line manager

The TALENT Commission

In February 2022, the TALENT programme has launched The TALENT Commission report, which has gathered new strategic insights into the UK’s technical workforce in higher education and research. This was the outcome of 20 months of in-depth research, stakeholder engagement and evidence gathering within the sector. The report sets out a vision for the future of the UK’s technical talent and engagement and evidence gathering within the sector.

The TALENT Technical Careers Advisor is Sarah Allen. Sarah is an advocate for technicians and will be working with technicians across the Midlands, QOR YDLRQURXS

You can contact Sarah to discuss any aspect of your career development via email sarah.allen@nottingham.ac.uk.

Advice that you might want to seek may include:

- 1-2-1 career discussions, including exploring career options and developing a career development plan
- Coaching and mentoring
- Options for development activities that can help you advance your career
- Advice about gaining registration, which level would be appropriate, which Professional Body

www.mitalent.ac.uk/Technicians-as-Partners

The following tips may help you when thinking about developing your technical career:

- Discover what you want to do – research career options, think about what you most enjoy doing, create a career development plan
- Take opportunities to try different things – learn a new technique, join a committee, take on a project, you may discover that you enjoy something new
- Make the most of your PDR – this is your opportunity to discuss career goals and development activities that you can undertake with your line manager

Job Family implemented:

Transparent Technician (J/Job Family) implemented:

- Provides what is expected at each grade
- Example roles from across campus
- Proposed career pathway

The following tips may help you when thinking about developing your technical career:

- Discover what you want to do – research career options, think about what you most enjoy doing, create a career development plan
- Take opportunities to try different things – learn a new technique, join a committee, take on a project, you may discover that you enjoy something new
- Make the most of your PDR – this is your opportunity to discuss career goals and development activities that you can undertake with your line manager

www.mitalent.ac.uk/Technicians-as-Partners

Advice about gaining registration, which level would be appropriate, which Professional Body

www.mitalent.ac.uk/Technicians-as-Partners

TALENT offers a range of funds that you can access, if you are thinking of attending a conference or a course.

Advice that you might want to seek may include:

- 1-2-1 career discussions, including exploring career options and developing a career development plan
- Coaching and mentoring
- Options for development activities that can help you advance your career
- Advice about gaining registration, which level would be appropriate, which Professional Body
What is a network/networking?
A network is a group of people with similar interests or skills and networking takes place when there is interaction/engagement between individuals to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts. Networking can take place on a formal or informal basis. For example, you might meet someone external to the organisation who works in a similar area and exchange contact details with them or you might meet someone at an internal meeting who has skills that you would like to learn about or knows someone that does. Networking can sometimes be about who you know rather than what you know.

Why do I need to network?
Being part of a network may help you to develop contacts in other groups or departments which may assist you in developing career opportunities. It might be that you network with individuals occupying roles that you are interested in becoming skilled to undertake or with individuals who may be able to help you in opening up opportunities to progress your career. However, networking isn’t just about career development but is important at work in general. Engaging with others is key in helping to build communities across an organisation and the sharing of knowledge and skills making a difference.

How do I start to build a network?
Think about the people you know and may have lost touch with and the places that you go to, or perhaps should make an effort to go to in the future. Join in webinars or go to events/open days. There are also many online networking opportunities/forums that you can join. Keep up to date with the latest news/technology in your work area and discuss this with other people. Keep a note of individuals you meet and what you discuss. You might not need their information now but this might be useful to you in the future. Importantly, keep in touch with people, don’t just wait for them to contact you.

What might go wrong?
Build up relationships but don’t pester people or waste their time. Show an interest in others and their aspirations, don’t just make it all about what you want. Don’t be shy to ask for help from individuals, don’t assume that they know what it is that you want. Networking and socialising doesn’t come naturally to all of us and it may take time to build up a network of contacts or you might just have one or two.

Where should I do it?
Networking can take place anywhere, in a formal or informal working environment or socially with friends and colleagues.

Are there examples of networking?
There are many examples of how informal networking has helped individuals and also saved time. During the past year there have been several examples such as sharing documentation (rather than starting from scratch), offers of help to deal with equipment emergencies (that would have taken time to sort out), information being shared (that individuals would not have been aware of otherwise).

There is no right and wrong - whatever works for you is fine!
Research Culture

At the Warwick, a positive research culture is at the heart of its research mission to create a fair, collaborative and supportive environment in which to work, inclusive to all faculty - from early career and doctoral researchers, to technicians, research leaders and experienced professors.

People are the central focus and they should have confidence to question and challenge. The University has a Research Culture Forum to discuss the current research culture, share best practice and influence future developments in this area. The Forum recently funded a project directed at ‘Advancing Visibility, Knowledge and Collaborative Opportunities for Research Technical Professionals’. Sitting within this forum is Sarah Bennett, a technical representative, who recognises the importance of visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability of our Technical workforce. Sarah is open to hearing about successes and issues around the Research Culture that Technicians experience, and to feed these back to the Forum. By working with the Research Culture forum and the Technician Commitment we aim to review the feedback and implement any necessary changes.

Technician Led Outreach Demonstrators

Utilising Research Culture funding, we have had teams of technical staff design, build and exhibit outreach demonstrator pieces to inspire young people and the public, and also help highlight the skills a technical career utilises. The demonstrators have been used both on campus and at high profile events such as national science festivals.

To find out more, please visit www.warwick.ac.uk/research/technicians/outreachdemonstrators/

Knowledge Exchange

Knowledge exchange (KE) is defined as ‘a collaborative, creative endeavour that translates knowledge and research into impact in society and the economy’ by the Knowledge Exchange Concordat (KEC). This takes many potential forms such as:

- involvement in the creation of innovation and intellectual property (IP)
- working with industry
- enabling access to facilities or providing analysis
- public engagement
- delivering training and development

Technical staff play an increasingly important role in both the lead and support of the above, and this needs to be recognised and made visible. Alongside existing research and teaching frameworks, the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) aims to measure our KE outputs, with KEC supporting advances in outputs.

To make the fantastic contributions of our technical staff visible and rewarded, we ask that you let us know when you have delivered work that could be classed as contributing to KE (send details to technicians@warwick.ac.uk). We can ensure those responsible for the institutional submissions and strategies for KEC and KEF are aware, and the work is recognised.

1 www.keconcordat.ac.uk/about/
Sustainability

Sustainability is a key topic and improving the sustainability within our laboratories and processes is key to Warwick helping towards a sustainable future.

Technical staff are often in a good position to help identify and implement sustainable changes. Below we hear from technical staff involved with sustainability and our Estates colleagues who have been working alongside them.

The Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) developed at University College London, is a web tool which allows laboratories to work towards a defined standard, bronze, silver or gold. LEAF provides a systematic path to improving lab sustainability. It contains useful additional resources and is versatile enough to allow for future developments and updates.

Our central Sustainability team reached out to my line manager to help promote the green agenda at SLS/WMS and also record any green actions; she then reached out to me to see if it was something I’d be interested in helping with. I joined LEAN (Laboratory Efficiency Action Network) and went to meetings – we heard about the LEAF pilot and signed up.

My line manager’s support was key initially. I really enjoyed getting involved. The main part of my job is supporting the Genomics Facility and specialised equipment within the School of Life Sciences - the technical nitty gritty - so becoming involved in Lab Sustainability has very much added another dimension to my working life.

For those who take part in LEAF, it will help you to think about the lab from the perspective of sustainability. I feel that LEAF can educate and inform your mindset.

Our Technician Commitment

Lesley Ward
Senior Research Technology Support Technician, SLS
I started off in research. I did my Bachelor's in genetics at the University of Leicester and a Master's in molecular biology and pathology of viruses at Imperial College London. From there, I worked as a Research Technician at Leicester where we were studying the interactions between sugar molecules in bacterial cell walls and the host immune response. C-type lectin proteins. I then completed my PhD in the same lab, and after I continued to work there until 2015. I then moved to Warwick as a Senior Research Technician researching sugar recognition, uptake, and metabolism within Mycobacterium tuberculosis. I spent about 7 years managing the lab on a day-to-day basis as well as undertaking research for papers. Having reached Senior Research Technician, which was the peak of where you could really go along that stream at the time due to the absence of promotion pathways, I decided to move sideways across different opportunities. I applied for a role above me to become a Senior Support Technician, which was the peak of the technician role I could be dealing with a gas alarm the next day. I was managing an issue with containment handling or broken equipment and statutory compliance. Having a familiarity in all those aspects certainly helped but I also improved my own understanding around what I was doing. I was taking to our contractors and learning the fundamentals of what they did. I recognised that because as a Senior Research Technician and as a Senior Support Technician, I didn't have any line management opportunities I needed to focus on those skills. As the day-to-day management I was doing, and the statutory testing and preventative maintenance, I will be the departmental point of contact for local exhaust ventilation (LEV), ensuring the university remains compliant with our LEV. I will line manage senior support technicians. We've got a very large containment footprint. I am also reviewing SOPs and risk assessments and responsibilities when it comes to core equipment purchasing, ongoing maintenance & servicing. That's the bulk of the operational nature of my new role as I understand it. I started this role in May, so I'm not fully embodied into it yet. I approach new situations as learning experiences.

How did you get to where you are now?

I'm a Technical Support Manager within our joint team, but realistically the predominant focus of my current role will be containment manager. As a team we will look after the new modular containment level 3 (CL3) labs that have been built and the containment level 2 (CL2) also our satellite sites of CSRL and the Stratford campus. We have an existing CL3 lab that we'll need to transition people from into the new facility when it opens for active research. I'll be managing the statutory testing and preventative maintenance, I will be the departmental point of contact for local exhaust ventilation (LEV), ensuring the university remains compliant with our LEV. I will line manage senior support technicians. We've got a very large containment footprint. I am also reviewing SOPs and risk assessments and responsibilities when it comes to core equipment purchasing, ongoing maintenance & servicing. That's the bulk of the operational nature of my new role as I understand it. I started this role in May, so I'm not fully embodied into it yet.

How did you approach your recent promotion and what was useful in positioning yourself for this?

Even though I have come to this generalist support role sideways from research and the specialist side, there is still a degree of specialism in containment which I am bringing from my previous roles. I approach new situations as learning experiences. In research, when I was often doing the same experiments whereas in my current role our daily routine is very diverse. One day I could be dealing with a gas alarm the next day. I was dealing with an issue with containment handling or broken equipment and statutory compliance. Having a familiarity in all those aspects certainly helped but I also improved my own understanding around what I was doing. I was talking to our contractors and learning the fundamentals of what they did. I understood that because as a Senior Research Technician and as a Senior Support Technician, I didn't have any line management opportunities I needed to focus on those skills. As the day-to-day management I was doing, and the statutory testing and preventative maintenance, I will be the departmental point of contact for local exhaust ventilation (LEV), ensuring the university remains compliant with our LEV. I will line manage senior support technicians. We've got a very large containment footprint. I am also reviewing SOPs and risk assessments and responsibilities when it comes to core equipment purchasing, ongoing maintenance & servicing. That's the bulk of the operational nature of my new role as I understand it. I started this role in May, so I'm not fully embodied into it yet. I approach new situations as learning experiences.

What does your current role entail?

I'm a Technical Support Manager within our joint team, but realistically the predominant focus of my current role will be containment manager. As a team we will look after the new modular containment level 3 (CL3) labs that have been built and the containment level 2 (CL2) also our satellite sites of CSRL and the Stratford campus. We have an existing CL3 lab that we'll need to transition people from into the new facility when it opens for active research. I'll be managing the statutory testing and preventative maintenance, I will be the departmental point of contact for local exhaust ventilation (LEV), ensuring the university remains compliant with our LEV. I will line manage senior support technicians. We've got a very large containment footprint. I am also reviewing SOPs and risk assessments and responsibilities when it comes to core equipment purchasing, ongoing maintenance & servicing. That's the bulk of the operational nature of my new role as I understand it. I started this role in May, so I'm not fully embodied into it yet. I approach new situations as learning experiences.

What would you like to see our Technician Commitment deliver?

What would you highlight as an opportunity related to our Technician Commitment?

From my own personal experience, as we’ve touched on it and I think it’s already currently beginning to deliver, is the idea of promotions. Having this promotion route rather than having to wait for somebody to leave a job. If for any reason I hadn’t got this job, I would have then moved to another university or industry and gone to use those skills there. Because the promotion route doesn’t exist. It’s a very fast way of losing very good talent. If there is a promotion pathway it’s easier to formulate a training programme and personal development around that promotion. If there’s another job somewhere else and you suddenly decide you want to you’ll probably have to go through your line managers are doing, how you’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards. From my own personal experience, as we’ve touched on it and I think it’s already currently beginning to deliver, is the idea of promotions. Having this promotion route rather than having to wait for somebody to leave a job. If for any reason I hadn’t got this job, I would have then moved to another university or industry and gone to use those skills there. Because the promotion route doesn’t exist. It’s a very fast way of losing very good talent. If there is a promotion pathway it’s easier to formulate a training programme and personal development around that promotion. If there’s another job somewhere else and you suddenly decide you want to you’ll probably have to go through your line managers are doing, how you’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards. From my own personal experience, as we’ve touched on it and I think it’s already currently beginning to deliver, is the idea of promotions. Having this promotion route rather than having to wait for somebody to leave a job. If for any reason I hadn’t got this job, I would have then moved to another university or industry and gone to use those skills there. Because the promotion route doesn’t exist. It’s a very fast way of losing very good talent. If there is a promotion pathway it’s easier to formulate a training programme and personal development around that promotion. If there’s another job somewhere else and you suddenly decide you want to you’ll probably have to go through your line managers are doing, how you’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards. From my own personal experience, as we’ve touched on it and I think it’s already currently beginning to deliver, is the idea of promotions. Having this promotion route rather than having to wait for somebody to leave a job. If for any reason I hadn’t got this job, I would have then moved to another university or industry and gone to use those skills there. Because the promotion route doesn’t exist. It’s a very fast way of losing very good talent. If there is a promotion pathway it’s easier to formulate a training programme and personal development around that promotion. If there’s another job somewhere else and you suddenly decide you want to you’ll probably have to go through your line managers are doing, how you’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards. From my own personal experience, as we’ve touched on it and I think it’s already currently beginning to deliver, is the idea of promotions. Having this promotion route rather than having to wait for somebody to leave a job. If for any reason I hadn’t got this job, I would have then moved to another university or industry and gone to use those skills there. Because the promotion route doesn’t exist. It’s a very fast way of losing very good talent. If there is a promotion pathway it’s easier to formulate a training programme and personal development around that promotion. If there’s another job somewhere else and you suddenly decide you want to you’ll probably have to go through your line managers are doing, how you’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards. From my own personal experience, as we’ve touched on it and I think it’s already currently beginning to deliver, is the idea of promotions. Having this promotion route rather than having to wait for somebody to leave a job. If for any reason I hadn’t got this job, I would have then moved to another university or industry and gone to use those skills there. Because the promotion route doesn’t exist. It’s a very fast way of losing very good talent. If there is a promotion pathway it’s easier to formulate a training programme and personal development around that promotion. If there’s another job somewhere else and you suddenly decide you want to you’ll probably have to go through your line managers are doing, how you’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards. From my own personal experience, as we’ve touched on it and I think it’s already currently beginning to deliver, is the idea of promotions. Having this promotion route rather than having to wait for somebody to leave a job. If for any reason I hadn’t got this job, I would have then moved to another university or industry and gone to use those skills there. Because the promotion route doesn’t exist. It’s a very fast way of losing very good talent. If there is a promotion pathway it’s easier to formulate a training programme and personal development around that promotion. If there’s another job somewhere else and you suddenly decide you want to you’ll probably have to go through your line managers are doing, how you’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards.

What tips would you give someone trying to secure a new role?

Having looked for my next role I would start working towards the job I want to do. I would start by understanding what skills are needed and by approaching everything like a learning experience. See what your line managers are doing, how they’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards.

I would start by understanding what skills are needed and by approaching everything like a learning experience. See what your line managers are doing, how they’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards.

I would start by understanding what skills are needed and by approaching everything like a learning experience. See what your line managers are doing, how they’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards.

I would start by understanding what skills are needed and by approaching everything like a learning experience. See what your line managers are doing, how they’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards.

I would start by understanding what skills are needed and by approaching everything like a learning experience. See what your line managers are doing, how they’ve done things, maybe how they’ve not done things and offer constructive criticism upwards rather than just necessarily constructive criticism downwards.
Tell us how you got to where you are now!

I was adamant when I left school that I was never going to sit an exam again because I can’t deal with that kind of stress. So I started looking at apprenticeships and work experience opportunities. My school found these for me and I did a number of interviews which led to a position at Midland Group Training Services.

What does your current role entail?

Working in the Engineering Build Space my role involves teaching and helping others to use the machinery and equipment. The key features are probably the 3D printers. It’s a good job and I really enjoy it, because the people that I work with that I have received great support and there are plenty of opportunities available for technicians.

What are the key features of the Engineering Build Space and what do you do with them (and in supporting students)?

The key features are probably the 3D printers. That’s what draws most of the students in because there’s a lot of them. We have a range of printers which can accommodate different needs. The technicians and students work together to ensure the printers are used safely. We teach them how to operate the machines, including 3D printing, and provide support and guidance.

What development opportunities would you like to see / take (courses, opportunities etc) that our Technician Commitment may be able to help with?

If we had done this like six months ago, my answer would have been the same. My degree might have been more straightforward and I wouldn’t have had to spend as much time on it. However, I’ve always argued that we need more women. I spent a lot of time while I was downstairs in the workshop, kicking off that I was the only woman down there and it was like every other breath I took. There are only two or three technicians who are women in the school. But the students, especially the girls, have come in here and have said that they really enjoy the fact that they feel more comfortable to come in, approach me and ask for help instead of having to go up to a man and I like that. It makes me feel empowered. I didn’t have to do anything to make them feel more comfortable, I just had to be there. So inspiring more women is important. When we had Midland Group Training Services coming here and our job is to provide support to anyone that comes in to use the facilities. Whenever anybody comes in, so that could be students from engineering, students from across campus like technicians and teaching anybody that can come in and ask for help with a job, and that could be just looking over a design, helping them use 3D printers, helping with the machinery and then when we have our off days where there’s not many people coming in, it’s right okay go and train yourself on a machine. Think of a job to do on that machine and go and play on it for a bit.

Overall, I have received great support and there are plenty of opportunities available for technicians.

What skills has it helped you develop?

My current role involves dealing with all of the manual machines at the Engineering Build Space, so this side of the room, EBS1.1 the subtractive side of the Engineering Build Space, is like a little workshop with all of the manual machines such as mills and lathes and that’s where 2 of our computer numerical controlled (CNC) machines are. My people skills, I suffer from anxiety quite badly. When I first moved up here, I wouldn’t say I was comfortable, I just had to be there. So inspiring more women is important. When we had Midland Group Training Services coming here and our job is to provide support to anyone that comes in to use the facilities. Whenever anybody comes in, so that could be students from engineering, students from across campus like technicians and teaching anybody that can come in and ask for help with a job, and that could be just looking over a design, helping them use 3D printers, helping with the machinery and then when we have our off days where there’s not many people coming in, it’s right okay go and train yourself on a machine. Think of a job to do on that machine and go and play on it for a bit.

Overall, I have received great support and there are plenty of opportunities available for technicians.

What development opportunities would you like to see / take (courses, opportunities etc) that our Technician Commitment may be able to help with?

If we had done this like six months ago, my answer would have been the same. My degree might have been more straightforward and I wouldn’t have had to spend as much time on it. However, I’ve always argued that we need more women. I spent a lot of time while I was downstairs in the workshop, kicking off that I was the only woman down there and it was like every other breath I took. There are only two or three technicians who are women in the school. But the students, especially the girls, have come in here and have said that they really enjoy the fact that they feel more comfortable to come in, approach me and ask for help instead of having to go up to a man and I like that. It makes me feel empowered. I didn’t have to do anything to make them feel more comfortable, I just had to be there. So inspiring more women is important. When we had Midland Group Training Services coming here and our job is to provide support to anyone that comes in to use the facilities. Whenever anybody comes in, so that could be students from engineering, students from across campus like technicians and teaching anybody that can come in and ask for help with a job, and that could be just looking over a design, helping them use 3D printers, helping with the machinery and then when we have our off days where there’s not many people coming in, it’s right okay go and train yourself on a machine. Think of a job to do on that machine and go and play on it for a bit.

Overall, I have received great support and there are plenty of opportunities available for technicians.

What skills has it helped you develop?

My current role involves dealing with all of the manual machines at the Engineering Build Space, so this side of the room, EBS1.1 the subtractive side of the Engineering Build Space, is like a little workshop with all of the manual machines such as mills and lathes and that’s where 2 of our computer numerical controlled (CNC) machines are. My people skills, I suffer from anxiety quite badly. When I first moved up here, I wouldn’t say I was comfortable, I just had to be there. So inspiring more women is important. When we had Midland Group Training Services coming here and our job is to provide support to anyone that comes in to use the facilities. Whenever anybody comes in, so that could be students from engineering, students from across campus like technicians and teaching anybody that can come in and ask for help with a job, and that could be just looking over a design, helping them use 3D printers, helping with the machinery and then when we have our off days where there’s not many people coming in, it’s right okay go and train yourself on a machine. Think of a job to do on that machine and go and play on it for a bit.

Overall, I have received great support and there are plenty of opportunities available for technicians.

What skills has it helped you develop?

My current role involves dealing with all of the manual machines at the Engineering Build Space, so this side of the room, EBS1.1 the subtractive side of the Engineering Build Space, is like a little workshop with all of the manual machines such as mills and lathes and that’s where 2 of our computer numerical controlled (CNC) machines are. My people skills, I suffer from anxiety quite badly. When I first moved up here, I wouldn’t say I was comfortable, I just had to be there. So inspiring more women is important. When we had Midland Group Training Services coming here and our job is to provide support to anyone that comes in to use the facilities. Whenever anybody comes in, so that could be students from engineering, students from across campus like technicians and teaching anybody that can come in and ask for help with a job, and that could be just looking over a design, helping them use 3D printers, helping with the machinery and then when we have our off days where there’s not many people coming in, it’s right okay go and train yourself on a machine. Think of a job to do on that machine and go and play on it for a bit.

Overall, I have received great support and there are plenty of opportunities available for technicians.

What skills has it helped you develop?

My current role involves dealing with all of the manual machines at the Engineering Build Space, so this side of the room, EBS1.1 the subtractive side of the Engineering Build Space, is like a little workshop with all of the manual machines such as mills and lathes and that’s where 2 of our computer numerical controlled (CNC) machines are. My people skills, I suffer from anxiety quite badly. When I first moved up here, I wouldn’t say I was comfortable, I just had to be there. So inspiring more women is important. When we had Midland Group Training Services coming here and our job is to provide support to anyone that comes in to use the facilities. Whenever anybody comes in, so that could be students from engineering, students from across campus like technicians and teaching anybody that can come in and ask for help with a job, and that could be just looking over a design, helping them use 3D printers, helping with the machinery and then when we have our off days where there’s not many people coming in, it’s right okay go and train yourself on a machine. Think of a job to do on that machine and go and play on it for a bit.

Overall, I have received great support and there are plenty of opportunities available for technicians.
Tell us how you got to where you are now!

I arrived at Warwick in 1997 as an undergraduate in the Department of Physics then, in 2001, I started my PhD with Professor Pam Thomas, who is currently CEO of the Faraday Institute. In about 2005, I became a Post-Doctoral Researcher in her group. As the group gained a lot of equipment through the Science City Advantage West Midlands capital investment, I started looking after the equipment whilst in that role. That caused issues, because I was meant to do focused research but I was finding more and more time assisting other people and managing the facility in an informal way. Around this time I had applied for promotion whilst on a research contract but when I went to the promotion committee, they said “you’re doing great work, everyone loves what you’re doing, but we can’t promote you because you haven’t got enough independent research”. The promotion criteria was very strict, so they were absolutely right, but they essentially told me that I was finding more and more time assisting other people and had less interest in my own research in some ways. Luckily, in 2014 the Research Technology Platforms (RTPs) were launched and I moved on to a professional services contract as the Platform Manager for the X-ray Diffraction RTP, a step up from what I was doing at the time. Since then, I’ve managed the facility and have 14 machines now covering a whole range of material science ranging from solar cells to organic materials and batteries.

What does your current role entail?

I guess there are many different elements to my role but mainly it’s about managing my staff and training people. Even though I’m also looking after the equipment still, due to the knowledge I’ve built up over my 10-15 years of working with it, I’d say I’ve got less time to do hands-on experiments for our users. Other aspects have been added to the role, like health and safety - which has become much bigger and more important than it was 10 years ago - doing internal and external work, writing business cases for staff/equipment, as well as tendering for and getting new equipment. It’s quite a specialised role, but it’s incredibly varied. We have 14 machines now covering a whole range of material science ranging from solar cells to organic materials and batteries.

Tell us about the EPSRC grant you recently won!

In the summer of 2021, both Rigaku and EDICO launched a new product - an electron diffractometer, which uses electrons to do what we normally do with X-rays in X-ray diffraction to solve crystal structures. The advantage of electrons over X-rays is they interact much more strongly with matter, and so you can look at much smaller samples. The idea is that these machines are designed to have interfaces that allow a non-expert microscopist, e.g. a crystallographer, to easily do investigations. We are focusing less on the technique and more on solving the crystal structure.

I decided that it was a good idea to try and get this technology at Warwick and, because of the recent work that the Technician Commitment has done, we were able to take advantage of the opportunity to be the Principle Investigator on the grant application. We put in a two-page business case for EPSRC Strategic Equipment call. Unfortunately, this was initially sent back to us because EPSRC had received two near identical bids, one from us and one from the University of Southampton. They weren’t sure they had the funding to fund two machines and they wanted to know more about the national demand. Therefore, alongside the National Crystallography Service (NCS) at the University of Southampton, led by Professor Simon Coles, we had a chat and agreed to put in a joint bid focusing on the demand and community needs for the machine to help EPSRC justify funding two machines, one at each site. We also focused on the sustainability aspect of the machine, highlighting that we’d run the National Facility with 50% of the EPSRC funding and then the local part would be funded by the universities, factoring in the personnel needs to look after the machine because it’s quite a labour-intensive technique. In December 2021 we put in the revised joint bid, and in March 2022 we were invited to submit the full bid. By July 2022, we were invited to interview with very positive feedback from the reviewers, and in September we were informed that we had been successful. The grant started on the 1st January 2023, with the instrument arriving in May 2023. The instrument at Warwick is the second electron diffractometer LQX1URSHDGKW.HLVWLQWKH8, which is really exciting!

What tips would you give to others looking at securing funding?

I think in terms of colleagues, building those collaborations with people who can help you and you trust in order to get good feedback is important. You must also think beyond why you want the equipment or the grant. Why do you need it and what it will benefit for the impact be, not just from your point of view, but also from the users of the equipment whilst in that role. That caused issues, because I was finding more and more time assisting other people and had less interest in my own research in some ways. Luckily, in 2014 the Research Technology Platforms (RTPs) were launched and I moved on to a professional services contract as the Platform Manager for the X-ray Diffraction RTP, a step up from what I was doing at the time. Since then, I’ve managed the facility and have 14 machines now covering a whole range of material science ranging from solar cells to organic materials and batteries.

The biggest change from my point of view as it has allowed technicians to apply for funding where appropriate

What would you highlight to others related to our Technician Commitment / what would you like our Technician Commitment to incorporate?

I think where the Technician Commitment has really helped is in recognising the value and work of technicians by raising the visibility of the technical professionals, bringing all the technical professionals across the country as a unit. Allowing them to share best practices has also increased collaboration. Removing those barriers has been a massive help, and that’s probably the biggest change from my point of view as it has allowed them to apply for funding where appropriate - the funding councils being on board has helped massively with this.

I think getting recognition for the work they do in other ways WkUrXkJHrW3kLQsJ is through important papers, making sure that people are actually acknowledged correctly has been important. These changes are shifting the culture, so that the academic staff don’t necessarily look down on technical professionals, on clerical staff, or whoever it is. The number one thing for the future is obviously the promotion pathway as it will really raise the opportunities. Allowing people to have more technical input at senior level, having that technical input is also increased collaboration. And then encouraging things like apprenticeships. Apart from that, the work that the Technician Commitment is doing is exceptional.
Zac Parkinson

Case Study

Tell us how you got to where you are now!
I started my apprenticeship with an
apprenticeship and had served 4
years as an engineering technician, I
wanted to look at what other
career opportunities were available
at WMG. I joined the management
team and a need for the technical
services to WMG. I was assigned to
looking after several different
laboratories and we
so could we offer an improved
service to our customers, and I
could improve my manufacturing
competence. Following training
from the manufacturer, I was
required to create a list of the
health and safety literature that
was required for users to operate the
machine safely. I also decided to
go out to the manufacturer and
speak with them about how we
can maximise on its delivery,
such as improving lead times by
using different work holding and
consumables. I have since been
able to pass on this knowledge
through training to our technical
workforce who now operate it.
As I was now out of my
apprenticeship and had served 4
years as an engineering technician,
I wanted to look at what other
career opportunities were available
at WMG. I joined the management
team and a need for the technical
services to WMG. I was assigned to
looking after several different
laboratories and we
so could we offer an improved
service to our customers, and I
could improve my manufacturing
competence. Following training
from the manufacturer, I was
required to create a list of the
health and safety literature that
was required for users to operate the
machine safely. I also decided to
go out to the manufacturer and
speak with them about how we
can maximise on its delivery,
such as improving lead times by
using different work holding and
consumables. I have since been
able to pass on this knowledge
through training to our technical
workforce who now operate it.
As I was now out of my
apprenticeship and had served 4
years as an engineering technician,
I wanted to look at what other
career opportunities were available
at WMG. I joined the management
team and a need for the technical
services to WMG. I was assigned to
looking after several different
laboratories and we
so could we offer an improved
service to our customers, and I
could improve my manufacturing
competence. Following training
from the manufacturer, I was
required to create a list of the
health and safety literature that
was required for users to operate the
machine safely. I also decided to
go out to the manufacturer and
speak with them about how we
can maximise on its delivery,
such as improving lead times by
using different work holding and
consumables. I have since been
able to pass on this knowledge
through training to our technical
workforce who now operate it.
As I was now out of my
apprenticeship and had served 4
years as an engineering technician,
I wanted to look at what other
career opportunities were available
at WMG. I joined the management
team and a need for the technical
services to WMG. I was assigned to
looking after several different
laboratories and we
so could we offer an improved
service to our customers, and I
could improve my manufacturing
competence. Following training
from the manufacturer, I was
required to create a list of the
health and safety literature that
was required for users to operate the
machine safely. I also decided to
go out to the manufacturer and
speak with them about how we
can maximise on its delivery,
such as improving lead times by
using different work holding and
consumables. I have since been
able to pass on this knowledge
through training to our technical
workforce who now operate it.
As I was now out of my
apprenticeship and had served 4
years as an engineering technician,
I wanted to look at what other
career opportunities were available
at WMG. I joined the management
team and a need for the technical
services to WMG. I was assigned to
looking after several different
laboratories and we
so could we offer an improved
service to our customers, and I
could improve my manufacturing
competence. Following training
from the manufacturer, I was
required to create a list of the
health and safety literature that
was required for users to operate the
machine safely. I also decided to
go out to the manufacturer and
speak with them about how we
can maximise on its delivery,
such as improving lead times by
using different work holding and
consumables. I have since been
able to pass on this knowledge
through training to our technical
workforce who now operate it.
As I was now out of my
apprenticeship and had served 4
years as an engineering technician,
I wanted to look at what other
career opportunities were available
at WMG. I joined the management
team and a need for the technical
services to WMG. I was assigned to
looking after several different
laboratories and we
so could we offer an improved
service to our customers, and I
could improve my manufacturing
competence. Following training
from the manufacturer, I was
required to create a list of the
health and safety literature that
was required for users to operate the
machine safely. I also decided to
go out to the manufacturer and
speak with them about how we
can maximise on its delivery,
such as improving lead times by
using different work holding and
consumables. I have since been
able to pass on this knowledge
through training to our technical
workforce who now operate it.
As I was now out of my
apprenticeship and had served 4
years as an engineering technician,
I wanted to look at what other
career opportunities were available
at WMG. I joined the management
team and a need for the technical
services to WMG. I was assigned to
looking after several different
laboratories and we
so could we offer an improved
service to our customers, and I
could improve my manufacturing
competence. Following training
from the manufacturer, I was
required to create a list of the
health and safety literature that
was required for users to operate the
machine safely. I also decided to
go out to the manufacturer and
speak with them about how we
can maximise on its delivery,
such as improving lead times by
using different work holding and
consumables. I have since been
able to pass on this knowledge
through training to our technical
workforce who now operate it.
As I was now out of my
apprenticeship and had served 4
years as an engineering technician,
I wanted to look at what other
career opportunities were available
at WMG. I joined the management
team and a need for the technical
services to WMG. I was assigned to
looking after several different
laboratories and we
so could we offer an improved
service to our customers, and I
could improve my manufacturing
competence. Following training
from the manufacturer, I was
required to create a list of the
health and safety literature that
was required for users to operate the
machine safely. I also decided to
go out to the manufacturer and
speak with them about how we
can maximise on its delivery,
such as improving lead times by
using different work holding and
consumables. I have since been
able to pass on this knowledge
through training to our technical
workforce who now operate it.
We are pleased to launch the quarterly Warwick Technician Commitment Award for Outstanding Achievement. This celebrates the fantastic work our technical staff do across research, teaching and within our infrastructure, without which Warwick would not operate.

We encourage any member of staff or student to nominate a technical member of staff for achievements big or small, or to celebrate work that is unsung but still immensely important.

Nominations can be made at any time. Four times a year we will select awardees from the nominations and vouchers to celebrate their achievements.

Alongside this, twice a year we will welcome nominations for team awards. The expectation is that a team will have worked on a common goal to achieve success. The team will receive our Team Trophy, and will be rewarded with a congratulatory team lunch at the conference centres on campus.

We have provided eligibility, guidance and further information in the link below, but if you have any questions, please contact technicians@warwick.ac.uk.

www.warwick.ac.uk/research/technicians/tcaward/

Over the coming months we will be working on elements of the action plan, in particular around recruitment and career development. This will involve formulating ideas around how and where we recruit our technical staff, including some video showcasing of the work of our technicians and the departments that they work in. We will be looking at ways of developing our technical staff, not just through attending courses, but through work-shadowing and placements and also secondments to other roles.

Work will be ongoing to update the TechNet website encouraging Technicians to use this as their ‘go to place’ for anything relating to the Technician Community. This will include careers advice pages and links to development programmes and job opportunities.

When ‘normality’ returns we will aim to hold events on campus to update staff on what’s happening, to gather ideas for the future and to engage with you on what the Technician Commitment means and how it can make a different to you in the future. Nothing will change without your input.
Useful information and how to keep up to date

Ask to sign up for our newsletter and you will be sure never to miss any update on what’s happening with Technicians again.

Further useful information can be found at:

- The Technicians Commitment: [www.technicians.org.uk](http://www.technicians.org.uk)
- The Science Council: [www.sciencecouncil.org/employers/technician-commitment/](http://www.sciencecouncil.org/employers/technician-commitment/)
- Warwick’s Organisational Development: [www.warwick.ac.uk/services/ldc/personal](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/services/ldc/personal)
- The TALENT website: [www.mitalent.ac.uk](http://www.mitalent.ac.uk)
- BBSRC: [www.bbsrc.uksi.org/skills/developing-careers/research-technicians-technology-skills-specialists/](http://www.bbsrc.uksi.org/skills/developing-careers/research-technicians-technology-skills-specialists/)

Meet our Technical Talent