

Technician Commitment: Stage 3 Self-Assessment & Action Plan Guidance

Please note: This guidance and template is for institutions who have already submitted their Stage One and Two Self-Assessments & Action Plans, 1 and 3 years after becoming an official signatory of the Technician Commitment. This guidance and template refers to the third stage of self-assessment and action planning to be submitted 6 years after the submission of the original submission.

The Technician Commitment aims to ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technicians working in higher education and research, across all disciplines.

The third stage of self-assessment and action planning process asks for reflection on past action plans, evidence of progress and engagement and a further 36 month action plan. The self-assessment includes a 'RAG' analysis of previous action plans - a 'Red, Amber & Green' status report.

The Technician Commitment Steering Board 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 plans on a dedicated and discoverable webpage, along with their named point of contact. The Steering Board asks 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 Board 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 has developed since the Commitment's inception and the Steering Board aims to ensure a range of forums are available to enable peers to share expertise, good practice and experiences.

Cross referencing to other sector institutional reviews relevant to technicians is welcomed; for example, the Steering Board are keen to learn how signatories are advancing equality, diversity and inclusion for the technical community and institutions may wish to reference Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charter submissions. The Steering Board are also keen to learn of Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) submissions and Research Excellence Framework (REF) environment statements where technicians have been explicitly mentioned. The Steering Board are particularly keen to see activity and plans to enact the recommendations of the TALENT Commission embedded in Stage 3 self-assessments and action plans.

The Technician Commitment Steering Board, through the executive team, will choose a limited number of submissions for active review between the institution and the Technician Commitment.

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 techscommit@gatsby.org.uk

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

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Please provide an overview of technical staff structures in your organisation, along with details of any changes to these over the past 6 years in response to the Technician Commitment.

Organisational Structure

Technical structures within the University follow a decentralised model with technical resources based within Academic Schools or Professional Service Units.

Since 2021, the University of St Andrews have moved to standardise the naming conventions of technical roles across science schools linked to the Higher Education Technical Taxonomy (HETT) naming convention. The University has created a new role of Technical Operations manager in several schools to transition technicians away from academic line management and provide clearer and enhanced opportunities for career development. Where a Technical Operations Manager role does not exist Technician reporting lines are being aligned to a professional services manager such as a School Manager.

Technical apprenticeships have been offered by the University to enable the development of home-grown talent to support future technical needs. This has seen former apprentices progress into senior technical roles within several schools and units over the last 6 years.

Employee headcount

Since our last submission in April 2021:

1. Total number of Technicians in the Technical & Experimental Job Family has increased from 163 to 185. Following professional and technical services reviews within each school, further funds have been allocated for technician recruitment throughout 2024.
2. Gender ratio is unchanged (68% M and 32% F)
3. Encouraging greater career progression for Female technicians remains our ambition, however, the gender split across grades has remained static.

The full breakdown of employees can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Please provide an overview of the governance, leadership and reporting lines of the Technician Commitment at your institution, along with details on how it is resourced, and information on how your organisation has engaged with the wider community within and beyond your institution. How has this developed since you became a signatory?

Governance and Reporting Lines

Organisation and Staff Development Services (OSDS) have been the custodians of the Technicians Commitment Action Plan since the university became a signatory in 2018. Working collaboratively with the Technician Engagement Group (TEG), a network of technical and professional services staff, OSDS reviewed the action plan bi-annually and recorded progress until 2022.

The departure of Lynn Neville, former institutional lead for the Technician Commitment, in 2023 caused momentum to stall. Individual technician-led activities remained active, such the TechNet online community and technical staff away days, but actions driven from central institutional units were paused or not started, which is reflected in the action plan review.

This lack of resilience had been identified by Richard Malham, Head of Research Policy, Integrity and Governance, across several research committees and staff networks. A comprehensive review of the governance processes led to the approval of a new framework for 'the creation, operation, review and disbanding of research-related committees, sub-committees, boards and working groups in relation to the Research Impact and Innovation Committee (RIIC)' in October 2023. The key benefits of the framework, in relation to the Technician Commitment, is the requirement of two chairs per group to avoid single points of failure, guidelines and resources to recruit new members, formalised term limits and a permanent technician representative on RIIC. The terms of reference for a 'Technical Professional Development Committee' were approved in May 2024, and recruitment to this entity will take place in July/August 2024. This group will succeed the TEG in reviewing and disseminating our forward action plan.

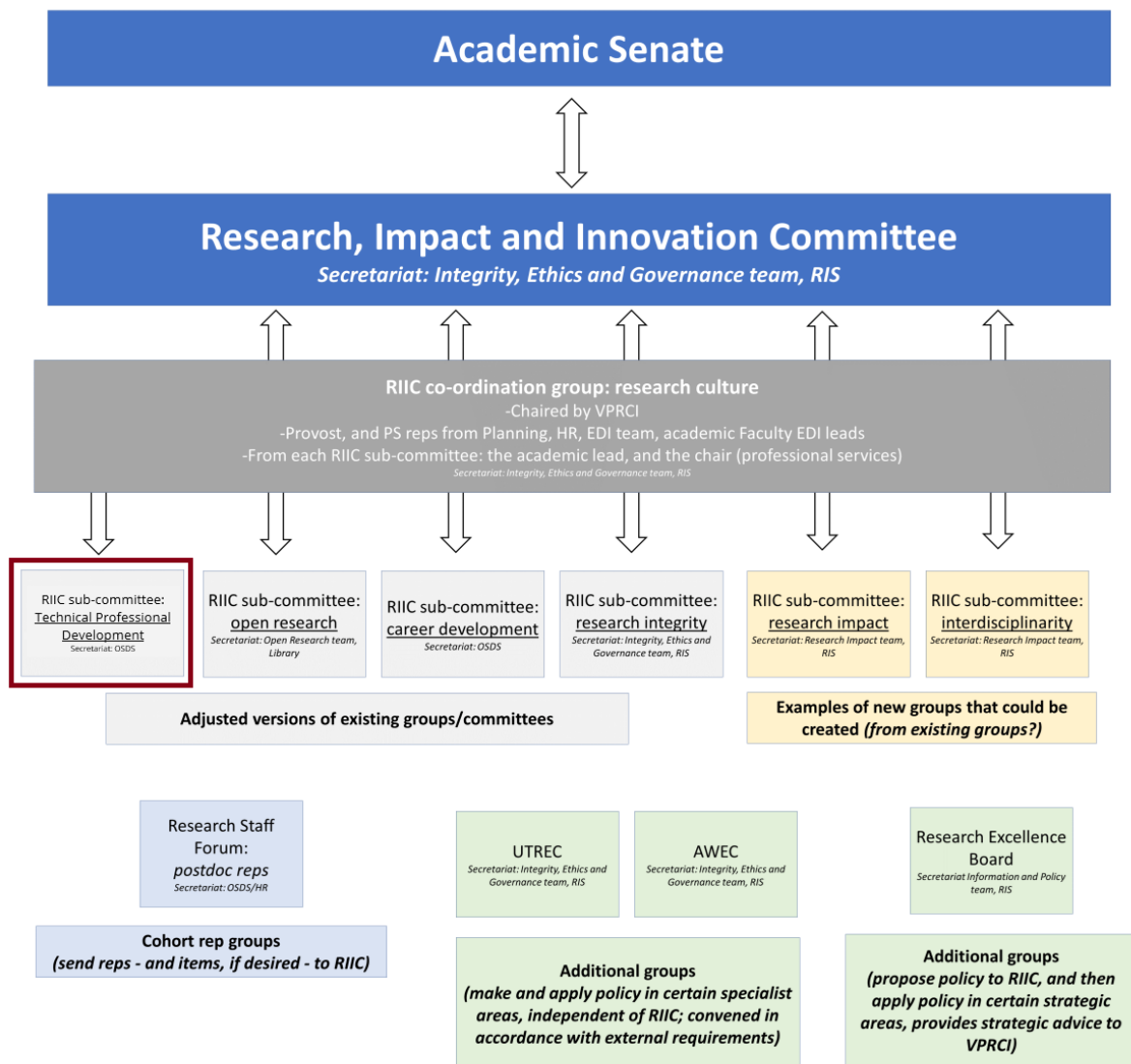


Figure 1: Diagram of Research Governance Structures. A red box highlights where the RIIC Sub-committee: on Technical Professional Development sits within the structure.

Resource

The University continues to allocate funds of £10,000 per year to the Technician Development Fund, co-funding access to conferences and training courses for technicians across disciplines. This has helped our technicians to keep up to date with the latest developments and expand their professional networks (See testimonials in the evidence section).

Membership to Heated has been maintained throughout our signatory status and has been renewed for a further year, with resources shared via the TechNet Teams channel.

In April 2024, the university invested in the National Technician Development Centre's HETT Framework and has ringfenced funds to assess and implement the associated HE technical competency frameworks as part of our forward action plan.

Engagement

The TEG have developed positive, reciprocal relationships with the University of Dundee and the James Hutton Institute, with colleagues from each institution invited to attend events and away days. Most recently, [A group of technicians attended the University of Dundee Technician Commitment event with Dr Kelly Vere in April 2024](#)

The 2021-2024 action plan RAG review highlighted missed opportunities to increase engagement internally. The delayed re-design of technician-orientated webpages has left an outdated onboarding pathway for technicians, where chance encounters with knowledgeable colleagues is the best route to maximising the benefits of our activities. Our forward action plan looks to address this in several ways, including carrying over the existing action to refresh the Technician web hub and introducing new processes for disseminating opportunities to the widest audience.

Please provide a RAG analysis on your institutional 36-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 full RAG-rated action plan can be found in Appendix B.](#) Our self-assessment working group, made up of members of TEG and additional representatives from technical and professional services job families, rated the following actions as Red:

Visibility:

1. Action: Update and develop the Technician web page. An updated look will be available when OSDS moves to the new web format.

Comment:

IT are conducting a systemic review and redesign of all University websites, with student/public facing websites being prioritised. The OSDS webpages remain in the old format and on routine maintenance until the transition takes place.

Learning:

Decoupling this activity from the overall OSDS review and creating a bespoke proposal for these individual pages may have delivered a timelier result. There are precedents across the university of internal pages being re-prioritised and more can be done to articulate the benefits of this.

2.

Action:

Support Technician involvement in Public Engagement through the Public Engagement Portfolio (PEP) which was created with the needs of Technicians and other professional staff in mind.

Comment:

PEP only ran during Academic Year 21/22, with the programme being cancelled due to lack of interest and the departure of key delivery staff. In total 12 technical employees participated in the programme.

Learning:

OSDS is moving away from the longer-form accredited programme model due to time commitment for staff. Targeted and timely learning interventions is the ambition moving forward.

Recognition:

3.

Action:

Develop a clear code of practice for acknowledgement of technician contributions - Head of Research Policy, Integrity and Governance will work on how to enmesh this with wider policies in development e.g. Open Research and Research Integrity, liaising with others as required.

Comment:

This action has been present on action plans since 2018 but has still not been addressed. Whilst the topic has been raised at the Research, Impact and Innovation Committee (RIIC) and in smaller working groups, a consensus on the best approach has not materialised, or a programme of activities to reach one. The current Head of Research Policy, Integrity and Governance has remained committed to achieving this goal, however, they have had to prioritise resources towards other activities during the life of this action plan.

Learning:

A separate short-term working group has been established by Research and Innovation Services, with the ambition of creating a policy by the end of academic year 24/25. Collaboration between the new Technical Professional Advisory Group will be sought.

Better coordination with non-permanent members of TEG/Technical Professional Development Advisory Group is required to ensure the importance of actions are emphasised and reviewed as appropriate. Outside of core TEG members, the action plan has been a static document with progress not communicated as widely as required.

SMART objectives form the basis of the revised action plan, ensuring that the technician community are aware of timelines and success metrics for all activities.

The University has adopted Ardoq enterprise software to better track and report progress across various priority initiatives and live action plans. The software enables better resource management, highlights duplication of activities across units and enables proactive asynchronous reporting on progress. Our 2024-2027 action plan will be uploaded to this platform.

4.

Action:

Continue to publicise external awards and encourage nominations for and by Technicians.

Comment:

Whilst there have been no active barriers to award nominations, the school review process has diverted attention towards continuous improvement of day-to-day delivery. Opportunities have been shared via TechNet but in an inconsistent manner.

Learning:

Better communicate the benefits of technician awards to school and institutional leaders considering the increased importance of Research environment and culture statements as part of the REF2029 process.

Career Development

5.

Action:

Continue to offer the Passport to Management Excellence as leadership and management development to technicians to support aspiring, new, and existing technician supervisors/managers.

Comment:

The Passport to Management Excellence was closed to new registrations in 2023 and will be replaced with a new management training programme from June 2024, open to all staff with line management responsibilities. Whilst in operation, eighteen technical staff participated in the passport programme with only one technician completing the full accredited programme. On average, technical staff completed three units out of the fifteen required for full accreditation. Feedback from technicians who did not enrol in the programme, suggests a lack of understanding of the benefits of the programme in the absence of a clear development pathway for technicians.

Learning:

Adoption of the HE technical competency framework will help OSDS map training opportunities to technical development pathways.

The implementation of the HETT framework helps professional services to identify technicians who manage, which enables targeted support and communications in a timely manner.

The Technical Professional Development Advisory Board will have access to the revised management training materials to feedback on their relevance for the community.

6.

Action:

Ensure the interests of Technicians are represented in the Career Pathways work as part of the new People and Diverse strategies.

Comment:

University-wide competency frameworks and career pathways were not developed within the duration of this action plan. The University of St Andrews has reiterated its commitment to introducing competency frameworks and progression pathways for all staff as part of the [2023-2027 People Strategy](#)

Learning:

SMART objectives form the basis of the revised action plan, ensuring that the technician community are aware of timelines and success metrics for all activities.

7.

Action:

Communicate with and encourage managers to enable technicians to attend development events and activities.

Comment:

There has been no targeted CPD communications to line managers of technical staff throughout the duration of this action plan.

Learning:

The introduction of Technical Operations Managers in our large science schools will help with streamline the communications requirements.

8.

Action:

Continue to ensure access to relevant development initiatives are available to Technicians.

Comment:

Opportunities available through membership to organisations such as HEaTED were not consistently shared in a timely manner or made visible to all technical professionals within the institution.

Learning:

Proactive maintenance of staff distribution lists, TechNet teams channel and webpages has been prioritised by OSDS.

9.

Action:

Run focus groups with female Technicians to identify appropriate career development support/actions.

Comment:

This initiative was not started and the rationale behind including this action was not formally documented. It may duplicate benefits already offered by EDI managed staff networks.

Learning:

Rationale behind the inclusion of actions included in the forward action plan.

10.

Action:

EDI Team to roll-out EDI briefings focused on technicians

Comment:

EDI team engagement has been evidenced on an ad-hoc basis, including during the bi-annual action plan reviews. Feedback from technicians is that no bespoke briefings or service provision has been offered,

Learning:

SMART objectives form the basis of the revised action plan, ensuring that the technician community are aware of timelines and success metrics for all activities.

Sustainability:

11.

Action:

Ensure that the University wide Apprentices Group set up by OSDS continues to provide support to Technical Apprentices and their Managers.

Comment:

This initiative was paused in 2022. A pilot induction for apprentices within estates took place, however, the format was never expanded to technical professionals across schools/units as planned.

Learning:

Establish the appetite within the university for an institution-wide apprentice network.

12.

Action:

Work with the Sustainability Team to identify links and opportunities between technicians and sustainability.

Comment:

A previous action plan review referred to learning objectives that have been agreed for a 'Sustainability Lab' course, however these have not been documented or archived. Feedback from technicians is that additional support around environmental sustainability, will help align their work with strategic priorities of the institution and ensure protection for these job roles.

Learning:

Ensure university policies on document archiving are followed, to avoid corporate memory loss.

Rationale behind the inclusion of actions included in the forward action plan.

13.

Action:

Investigate a role for Technician Champions in Schools/Units to keep profile of TCI high and to cascade relevant information.

Comment:

This initiative was never started, and the benefits anticipated were never documented.

Learning:

SMART objectives form the basis of the revised action plan, ensuring that the technician community are aware of timelines and success metrics for all activities.

Evaluating Impact:

14.

Action:

Carry out twice yearly reviews of the action plan

Comment:

Progress reporting against the action plan by the Technician Engagement Group was sporadic, with the last documented review taking place in July 2023.

Learning:

The formal creation of the Technical Professional Development committee will ensure future plans are updated in a timely manner and circulated publicly across the institution.

15.

Action:

Horizon scan for any new relevant actions which need to be included during the life of this action plan

Comment:

No additional items were added or removed from the action plan during the lifespan of this action plan.

Learning:

The formal creation of the Technical Professional Development committee will ensure future action plans are updated in a timely manner and circulated publicly across the institution.

16. Action:

Analyse responses by Technical Staff in the next Staff Survey which will take place in November 2021.

Comment:

Bespoke analysis of technician responses not created. It is unclear if the survey informed any follow-on activities.

Learning:

Use of Ardoq enterprise software to track and report on progress.

Please provide evidence that your previous action plans are having impact. (For example, you may wish to provide links to initiatives, websites, testimonials, articles/blogs).

Testimonials from Technicians Commitment Fund beneficiaries

“The major benefits were a chance to attend the scientific sessions and remain up-to-date with the latest work, findings and (analytical) developments in the field of geochemistry...and being introduced to new potential collaborators from other labs and universities significantly strengthened and expanded my professional network. This is especially beneficial as we are currently working on establishing a new lab in St Andrews, so it is great to have a range of contacts with expertise in similar facilities to ask for advice when troubleshooting or during method development.”

Technician from the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, who attended the Goldschmidt Conference 2023 in Lyon, part-funded by the TC fund.

I benefitted from networking at the event, which is something that I think is extremely important particularly working in a small facility. Due to the nature of the animal technician role, it can be quite challenging to talk and be open. By sharing experiences with other animal technologists allows us to discuss challenges we face and ways in which these are resolved.

Technician from the School of Biology, who attended the Institute of Animal Technology Congress in March 2023, part-funded by the TC Fund.

Example 'Technicians Make it Happen' Newsletter

[Summer 2023 Newsletter](#)

Please provide details of how your institution is enacting the recommendations of the TALENT Commission (<https://www.mitalent.ac.uk/theTALENTcommission>).

The university can evidence adoption the recommendations of the TALENT commission in the following ways:

1.

Recommendation:

Support and/or deliver the collection, reporting, tracking and analysis of data on employer- and sector-wide technical workforces

Example:

Adoption of HETT allows for greater analysis of recruitment and professional development metrics for technical staff.

2.

Recommendation:

Invest in apprentices and trainee technician positions, hosting placements for qualifications (e.g. T-Levels in England) and work experience placements for local schools and colleges.

Example:

Technical apprenticeships have been offered by the University to enable the development of home-grown talent to support future technical needs. This has seen former apprentices progress into senior technical roles within several schools and units over the last 6 years.

3.

Recommendation:

Ensure representation of technical staff on department-, faculty-, and institution-level decision-making committees, boards, panels, and similar groups, through either a dedicated seat or designated technical advocates within senior leadership and/or existing members. This includes processes and committees to develop institution-wide strategies and long-term goals.

Example:

Technicians are represented on the Research, Impact and Innovation Committee, chaired by the Vice-principal for Research, Innovation and Collections, Tom Brown.

4. Encourage formation of partnerships with organisations and initiatives that can provide technical training and wider technical networks. These partnerships can help to facilitate delivery of more technician-specific training across or within disciplines, and provide further opportunities for placements, secondments, equipment and knowledge exchange, and sharing of best practice.

Examples:

The use of TechNET communication channel and ongoing support for the Technician Commitment initiative.

The remaining recommendations have been considered and woven into the forward action plan, where appropriate.

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 and initiatives resourced: (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.

[The 2024-2027 Action Plan is available in Appendix B.](#)

A short-term working group was established in March 2024 to evaluate progress against existing activities and to develop our 2024-2027 action plan. The working group consisted of eight technical professionals, representative across career stages and disciplines, and three professional services colleagues. The group was co-chaired by Martin Cockcroft, Technical Operations Manager within the School of Biology, who was recruited directly as the most senior manager of the largest technical community within the institution. Three members of the technical membership were co-opted directly from the existing Technician Engagement Group to provide context and rationale for historical decision making. The remaining members were selected from an open recruitment process with a light touch application process that adhered to internal equality, diversity and inclusivity policies. Tom Brown, Vice-Principal for Research, Innovation and Collections, was kept informed throughout the process, as the lead institutional signatory of the commitment.

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:

<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/osds/my-development/professional-staff/technicians-commitment-initiative/>

Signed.....*J S Smith*.....(Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead- Jamie Smith, Organisation Development Specialist (Research))

Date: 25th July 2024

Signed.....Tom Brown (e signature).....(Technician Commitment Signatory – Leader of Institution- Vice Principal for Research, Collections and Innovation)

Date: 30th July 2024

Appendix A: Employee Breakdown

The following information was collated on 1st May 2024 and is subject to change.

	F	M	Total
Faculty of Science			
School of Biology	14	25	39
School of Chemistry	5	11	16
School of Computer Science	-	3	3
School of Earth & Environmental Sciences	1	5	6
School of Geography & Sustainable Development	1	1	2
School of Mathematics & Statistics	-	1	1
School of Medicine	10	8	18
School of Physics & Astronomy	-	13	13
School of Psychology & Neuroscience	3	6	9
SMAU	4	3	7
Faculty of Arts	-	2	2
Academic Support			
CEED	1	1	2
IT Services	6	31	37
Library	2	-	2
Central Support			
Corporate Communications	2	6	8
EHSS	1	-	1
Estates	2	3	5
Planning	2	1	1
Byre Theatre	1	3	4
	57	130	187

Appendix B: Links to Action Plans

RAG-Rated 2021-2024 Action Plan



TCI Action Plan
2021-24- RAG v2.xls>

2024-2027 Forward Action Plan

Double click to open

Technician Commitment Action Plan 2024-2027

[The Technician Commitment](#) is a university and research institution initiative, led by a steering board of sector bodies, hosted by the [UK Institute for Technical Skills & Strategy](#). 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 to tackle the key challenges affecting their technical staff.

The University of St. Andrews is a signatory of the commitment and has developed the 2024-2027 Action Plan to build on previous work directed by the 2018 and 2021 Action Plans. Actions are designed to be SMART, however, we also recognise that some actions focus on necessary process or cultural changes which do not have an easily quantifiable outcome. Some metrics require initial baselining to test assumptions around the current state of play and, where feasible, a baselining exercise will be conducted in academic year 2024-2025.

The 2024-2027 Action Plan was developed by a short-term working group of Technical and Professional Services staff, formed in March 2024. A new internal governance body, the Technical Professional Development Committee, a subsidiary of will become custodians of the Action Plan from October 2024. Members will broaden consultation with staff around the priority actions identified and have reserved powers to review, evaluate and publish iterations of the action plan throughout its lifespan.