

Technician Commitment

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

Organisation: University of Oxford

Name of Institutional Lead: Professor Stuart Mackenzie

E-mail: stuart.mackenzie@chem.ox.ac.uk

Contact Number: 01865 275156

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

The University of Oxford (UoO) has a distinctive collegiate structure in which University departments work closely with 38 independent self-governing colleges to provide internationally leading teaching and research. Employing over 13,600 people, UoO has over 23,500 students of which 47% are enrolled on postgraduate programmes. UoO contributes an estimated £5.8 billion annually to the UK economy and £7.1 billion globally. The Times Higher Education World University Rankings rated Oxford first in the world in both 2017 and 2018 and the most recent (2014) research excellence framework assessed Oxford to generate the largest volume of world-leading research in the UK.

The estimated 1000 technical staff at the University of Oxford make essential contributions to every one of these statistics.

The central University is comprised of around 100 major academic departments plus specialist research centres, arranged in four academic divisions:

Medical Sciences;
Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS);
Humanities, and
Social Sciences.

The majority of technical staff in Oxford are employed within the MPLS and Medical Sciences Divisions reflecting the experimental and laboratory-based nature of their activities. The MPLS Division comprises the Departments of Chemistry, Computer Science, Earth Sciences, Engineering Science, Materials, Mathematics, Physics, Plant Sciences, Statistics and Zoology while the Medical Sciences Division includes the Departments of Biochemistry, Experimental Psychology, Medicine, Clinical Neurosciences, Oncology, Pathology, Pharmacology, Population Health and Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics. Technical support staff are also employed in the University's non-academic divisions, particularly the Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM).

As befits the concentration of technical staff in these Divisions, MPLS and Medical Sciences have been in the vanguard of our efforts towards the Technician Commitment.

Please tell us how your organisation defines its technicians:

The University of Oxford currently has no formal definition of a technician and appreciates that its current job title description of technician does not capture all of those involved in such roles. A complete survey is under way but requires input from individual departments.

For the purposes of the Technician Commitment, we have adopted a working definition of anyone *“providing technical support for those whose role includes teaching and/or research”*.

This definition was chosen to be deliberately wide in order to capture as many people as possible and therefore provide maximum visibility, recognition and career development opportunities in accordance with the aims of the Commitment.

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

The University of Oxford has approximately 1000 technicians across the organisation, with the majority of the specialist technicians based within the Medical Sciences and MPLS divisions.

These include:

- Research Technicians supporting current research in the laboratories
- Teaching Technicians providing support to practical teaching
- Engineers and Workshop Technicians providing specialist support to research groups, designing and developing particular equipment or structures for experimentation, from glass-blowing to mechanical to electrical engineers.
- Animal technicians (*ca.* 80 in Biomedical Services alone) responsible for provision of animal welfare services and support of regulated procedures.
- IT Technicians supporting the relevant area with generic and specialist IT programmes, designed to facilitate both research and teaching.
- Technicians working in other roles e.g. health and safety.

Please provide details of initiatives/programmes/activities that were already in place for the technical community within your organisation prior to becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment:

[Recognition] The University has an *Awards for Excellence* Scheme and a *Reward and Recognition* Scheme for all employees:

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/reward/rewardandrecognitionscheme/awardsexcell/>
<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/reward/rewardandrecognitionscheme/>

These allow for a range of recurrent and/or lump-sum financial awards recognising outstanding performance.

[Visibility] Governance structures ensure that technicians are represented as a staff group on departmental consultative committees providing effective means for two-way communication with senior management. In many departments, technicians are represented on other departmental committees such as Equality and Diversity committees and similar.

All animal technicians are accredited formally by the relevant industry body, the Institute of Animal Technology, at Levels 2, 3 or 4. In addition, Biomedical Services offers Home Office Personal License Training for technicians dealing with animals.

[Career Development] The University has already developed a comprehensive programme of funded and accredited professional training, called *Work, Learn, Develop* to which all staff are entitled irrespective of age, experience or grade: <https://www.apprenticeships.ox.ac.uk/wld>

[Career Development] All University staff are offered annual Personal Development Reviews (PDRs) with line managers.

[Recognition] In the last 5 years alone the University has conferred Honorary Degrees upon at least 2 technicians in recognition of exceptional service. The annual UoO apprenticeship awards regularly feature nominations of apprentice technicians from the science departments.

The Technician Commitment aims to ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technical staff across higher education and research. Please tell us of any initiatives your organisation has put in place to address these themes since becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment:

An **initial survey of technical support across the University** identified a heterogeneous approach to technicians in terms of the aims of the Commitment. In some areas we identified outstanding levels of compliance. For example, partly as a result of legal requirements, all animal and cage technicians within Biomedical Services are accredited with the Institute of Animal Technology and have well signposted career paths.

By contrast many of the large MPLS Division departments (Chemistry, Physics, Engineering, Biochemistry, etc.) have more patchy performance in this regard and find themselves facing similar issues and problems relevant to the aims of the Commitment. Given that these departments employ significant numbers of technicians, a decision was made to concentrate initial efforts towards the Technician Commitment here.

[All aims] In order to assess current provision regarding University technical staff and to help drive the University response to the Commitment, Oxford has formed a **Technician Commitment Forum** with representation from various departments. This forum, whose membership includes technicians, senior management and HR representatives, has met three times to discuss activity and look to the development of the Technician Commitment across the university, and to support development of a Technician Commitment strategy:

UoO Technician Commitment Forum:

Professor Stuart Mackenzie	Head of Physical & Theoretical Chemistry (Institutional Lead)
Phil Taylor	UoO Head of Recruitment
Sue Morris	UoO Personnel Services
Clive Shepherd	UoO Apprenticeships Manager
Johan Fopma	Central Workshops and Small Research Facility Manager, Physics
Rosie Mortimer	Head of Administration, Department of Chemistry
Rita Emberton	HR Manager, Department of Biochemistry
Brian Eade	Mechanical Workshop Manager, Engineering Science
Owen Green	Geological Facilities Manager, Earth Sciences
[xxx]	Deputy Administrator, Biomedical Services
Lynne Thorne	HR Manager, Department of Chemistry

[All Aims] UoO Technician Commitment launch. UoO formally launched the Technician Commitment at an event on Monday 16th April, 2018. Kelly Vere (Technician Commitment Lead at the Science Council) and Martin Dellar (Technical Manager at the University of Nottingham) were guest speakers. Clive Shepherd, University Apprenticeship Manager, also gave an introduction to the University's *Work, Learn, Develop* program of funded professional training and development as well as the University Apprenticeship Program. Nearly 50 technical staff from more than 10 departments attended.

[Sustainability] UoO has for some time operated a cap on total headcount which has restricted appointments in a wide range of categories including technicians. Partly in response to recruitment challenges in technical roles, **the University very recently agreed to remove apprenticeships from this cap.** This has had an immediate and strongly positive effect on some key technician groups by providing the opportunity to help train the next generation of workshop technicians in house thereby provide a stronger career path structure.

[Career development] Encouragement of people to come forward for **further training as appropriate, using the Apprenticeship Levy.** The University's integrated Work, Learn, Develop scheme will be flagged to technicians at PDRs as a means to develop additional skills.

[visibility, recognition] Where possible, the naming of technicians on research papers and in entry in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) is encouraged. In certain circumstances, however, for security reasons, technicians are not named on published papers but rather recognised as a team.

[visibility] Departments applying for Athena SWAN applications are required to include their Technician data alongside research and teaching data, providing additional focus for this group.

[recognition] Since signing the Technician Commitment, a long-standing technician in the Chemistry Department electronics workshop has been nominated for and awarded an Honorary MA degree by the University.

Specific departmental examples include:

[Chemistry] The opening of a new purpose built £25M chemistry teaching laboratory has provided an opportunity for Oxford Chemistry to **develop a new career path structure for teaching technicians** which offers progression opportunities from apprentice level to more senior positions.

[Biochemistry] Biochemistry has recently set up a **network for Professional & Support Staff**, which includes all Technicians. The network has started to organise regular meetings and will invite speakers to present appropriate talks at these meetings.

[Physics] Talks for technical support staff are held about twice a year, giving them opportunities to find out about the science in which they are involved.

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

Attached

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

The Action plan attached has been formulated by the Technician Commitment Forum above on which technicians are directly represented.

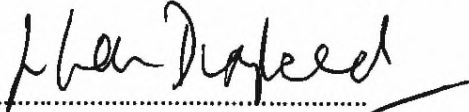
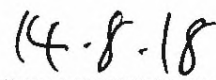
A number of potential departmental technician representatives emerged from the Launch event.

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

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/staffinfo/technicians/commitment>

Signed:  Date: 

Professor Stuart Mackenzie (Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead)

Signed:  Date: 

Julian Duxfield, Director of Human Resources (Technician Commitment Signatory)

Theme	Example Activities
Visibility Ensure that technicians within the organisation are identifiable and that the contribution of technicians is visible within and beyond the institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Technician Commitment Forum developed for the University • Launch of programme with over 50 attendees • Inclusion of science divisions and departments, and the apprenticeship co-ordinator • Development of a Technician webpage on the University website • Promotion of specialist technicians in University press • Apprenticeship awards with a large focus on technical employees
Recognition Support technicians to gain recognition through professional registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reward and Recognition Scheme to recognise all employees, including technicians, annually and monthly • Honorary degree has been supplied to long servicing technicians • Fellowships of professional organisations promoted • Promotion of accreditation and support for technicians interested in pursuing accreditation
Career Development Enable career progression opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund to support staff to undertake courses and qualifications • Restructuring to provide clearer career pathways • Training and development promoted and encouraged, from technical to generic training • Apprenticeships with the aim to move to a full university post • Undertaking teaching where appropriate e.g. training students on the use of specialist machinery
Sustainability Ensure the future sustainability of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of apprenticeship from headcount to enable greater numbers of apprenticeships, many in technical roles • Utilisation of the Apprenticeship Levy to train and upskill existing staff • Dedicated Apprenticeship Manager to oversee apprentices throughout the University • Continued support for development and accreditation