



Technician Commitment

Guidance for Completing the Self-Assessment & Action Plan

The Technician Commitment is a university and research institution initiative, led by a steering group of sector bodies, with support from the Science Council and the Gatsby Charitable Foundation's Technicians Make It Happen campaign. The Commitment aims to ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technicians working in higher education and research, across all disciplines. Universities and research institutes are invited to become signatories of the Technician Commitment and pledge action against the key challenges affecting their technical staff.

The themes of the Technician Commitment are: Visibility, Recognition, Career Development, Sustainability and Evaluating Impact. The fifth theme of Evaluating Impact takes the form of a self-assessment process, to be undertaken one year after an organisation becomes a signatory and biennially thereafter.

The self-assessment process enables the Technician Commitment Steering Group to gain an understanding of the position of each signatory organisation and the measures to be put in place to ensure that signatories are making progress against the themes outlined in the Commitment. The self-assessment process asks for contextual information, progress to date and a detailed 24-month future action plan.

The Technician Commitment Steering Group does not seek to dictate how organisations promote a positive culture for the technician community. This is a matter for autonomous institutions and the technician, research and academic community to agree. It is expected that as a minimum, signatories publicly state their Technician Commitment signatory status and institutional action plan on a dedicated and discoverable webpage, along with their named point of contact. The Steering Group would like signatories to evidence that the 'technician voice' is present in the development and formation of institutional action plans. The Technician Commitment is a collaborative endeavour and the Steering Group will support and facilitate the establishment and sharing of best practice demonstrated in the self-assessments and action plans. A vibrant community of Institutional Leads tasked with implementing the Technician Commitment is emerging and the Steering Group aims to ensure a range of forums are available to enable peers to share expertise, good practice and experiences.

To support institutional action planning, please see Appendix A for examples of activities and initiatives that have been successfully implemented in a range of universities and research institutes. Additional details are available on the Technician Commitment's dedicated online resource, available at <http://technicians.org.uk/techniciancommitment/>. Cross referencing to other sector institutional reviews relevant to technicians is welcomed; for example, institutions may wish to reference Athena SWAN applications, Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) submissions and Research Excellence Framework (REF) environment statements where technicians have been explicitly mentioned. Please note that finalised Action Plans should be signed off at an institutional leadership level (e.g. Vice-Chancellor/President/Director level).

For any additional queries, please contact k.verre@sciencecouncil.org or tracey.dickens@gatsby.org.uk.



Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

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A brief profile of the MRC Harwell Institute

The Institute is primarily funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and has been behind a number of major scientific breakthroughs in mammalian gene function, including X-inactivation and imprinting. The Institute is made up of three units: The Mammalian Genetics Unit (MGU) and Mary Lyon Centre (MLC) on the Harwell campus as well as the Centre for Macaques (CFM) which is based at Porton Down.

The MGU is at the forefront of studies in mouse genetics, functional genomics and bio-computing, investigating a wide variety of disease models and enhancing our understanding of the molecular and genetic basis of disease. The MLC is a national facility providing services for the production and characterisation of mouse models, including world-class expertise and tools to generate and study mouse models of human disease. These services are available for the Institute and the wider international research community. Using mouse models developed within the MLC, the MGU conducts research into developmental disorders and age-related conditions such as diabetes, deafness and neurodegeneration. The Institute is part of various large-scale projects to study mammalian functional genomics.

The CFM is a primate breeding unit for rhesus macaques that are used in some areas of fundamental research where there are no alternative approaches such as studies of primate brain function. The unit itself co-ordinates a number of studies designed to improve the welfare of primates which are used in discovery research within the academic sector in the UK and funded by the Wellcome Trust or UKRI.

How the MRC Harwell defines its technicians

The Institute has 283 staff. To define Technicians at the MRC Harwell Institute, we have been looking at data from a recent staff survey, which we conducted for Athena Swan (Table 1). The vast majority of our technical staff identified their job roles as being either within Technical Support or Research (~70% of staff). We do not intend to limit our definition of technicians to people within specific bands or with specific job titles as we want to be inclusive. We feel that there will be various benefits to working with a broader range of staff. Largely speaking, we will aim all initiatives related to the Technician Commitment at those members of staff who require technical skills and expertise within their role.

Professional Support Staff			Technical Support Staff			Research Staff			Students		
M	F	F%	M	F	F%	M	F	F%	M	F	F%
37	25	40%	35	60	63%	47	53	53%	6	20	76%
Total: 62			Total: 95			Total: 100			Total: 26		

Table 1 Numbers of professional staff, technical support staff, research staff and students in the MRC Harwell Institute (March 2019)



How many technicians are there in your organisation? Where they are based in terms of subject/discipline/department?

We have around 151 technicians (or technical experts) within various disciplines and at different levels of seniority at the MRC Harwell Institute. Job titles vary greatly and often does not include the word “technician”, but for the purposes of this report, we will refer to all relevant staff as “technicians”. Our technicians are spread across the MGU, MLC and CFM with the vast majority of them employed within the MLC and CFM service units where the majority of our core facilities are located.

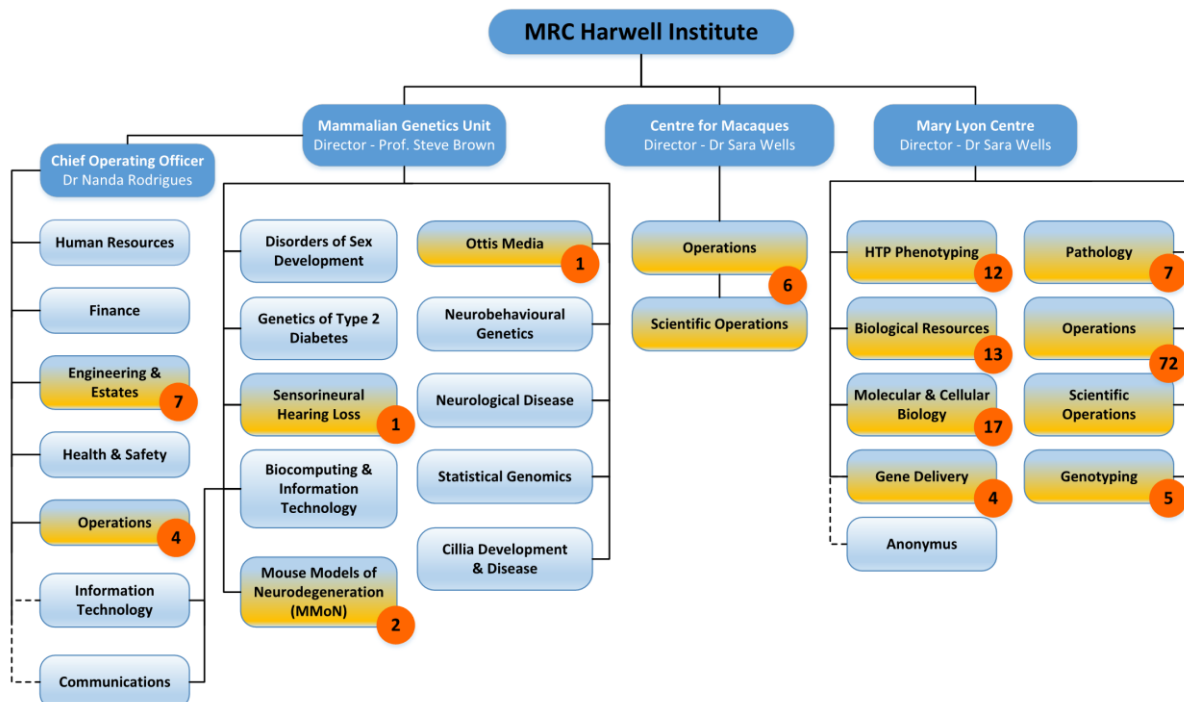


Figure 1 Organogram of MRC Harwell Institute. Departments and core facilities where our technicians are employed are highlighted in yellow with the numbers of technicians indicated in the orange circles.



Figure 2 Staff at the MRC Harwell Institute

Initiatives/programmes/activities* that were already in place for the technical community at MRC Harwell prior to becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment:

**Note that here we list all initiatives that benefit technicians, although some of these were also aimed at and available to other members of staff.*

1. Visibility

- Technicians attend regular (typically every 6 weeks) stock meetings with scientists and external stakeholders
- Technicians attend project planning meetings with external stakeholders present where they advise on logistics and report on progress
- Technicians have opportunities to present work and project updates internally to peers and more senior colleagues at weekly “Wednesday Club” and “Mouse Club” talks
- Technicians deliver short talks and report data and results at weekly team meetings
- Technicians have representation on some key decision-making & advisory committees, e.g. Animal Welfare and Ethics Review Board (AWERB), ISO9001 quality management committees and Athena Swan working groups
- Apprentices are encouraged to attend and present at the MRC’s Apprentice Networking Days
- Animal technicians from MRC Harwell were featured in an educational video about animal technician apprenticeships screened at the IAT Congress in 2015
- Photos of technicians and their work is displayed on posters and screens in reception areas, the workplace and TV’s in corridors and in the staff canteen
- MRC Harwell participated in the “Technicians make it Happen” campaign by distributing literature, “I love Technicians” badges and placing “Technicians make it Happen” stickers in the workplace
- Selected photos of technicians and their work were enlarged for a special poster exhibition that coincided with the Technician Commitment signature event at MRC Harwell in May 2018



Figure 3 Technicians and their work at the MRC Harwell Institute. A poster (A) which is displayed in the reception area of the Mary Lyon Centre and Photos that were displayed as part of an exhibition at our signature event in February 2018 (B & C).



2. Recognition

- Technicians receive occasional acknowledgement in publications and in presentations
- Technicians are included in the Recognition Awards Scheme, Special Award Scheme and the Annual MRC Harwell Institute Awards
- Apprentices in the Engineering & Estates Department have won several awards over the past 5 years, including “CIBSE South West HNC Student of the Year”, “The Engineering Trust’s Mechanical Apprenticeship Award” & “The Bath College Tradesperson of the Year Award”
- Technicians are recognised for long service
- Technicians input into the contents and writing of technical training courses
- MRC Harwell Institute launched a Professional Registration Scheme for staff at all levels in May 2016 and was awarded Employer Champion status by the Science Council in November 2016
- The MRC pays Professional Registration fees and professional body membership fees as well as annual renewal fees for all technical staff on an ongoing basis
- The Science Council was invited to deliver a workshop to facilitate applications for Professional Registration in April 2017
- Face-to-face assessment days for Professional Registration were arranged in September 2016, September 2017 and December 2017
- 40 members of staff (of which 34 technicians) were supported through the professional registration process prior to the MRC Harwell signing the Technician Commitment in February 2018



Figure 4 A flyer which advertised the lunch of the MRC Harwell’s Professional Registration Scheme in March 2016

3. Career Development

- Developmental objectives are set annually for all staff during their performance and development reviews and objectives are revisited through the year
- Technicians have equal access to a range of personal and professional development training courses, e.g. presentation and communication skills
- Technicians have been actively encouraged to record and take ownership of their continued Professional Development (CPD) since January 2016
- In some departments, individual training folders are in place to collate information on training courses attended, collect feedback and assess future developmental needs
- Apprenticeships have taken place in Engineering & Estates, Animal Technology, Histology, as well as development opportunities for existing staff e.g. Management
- A fully funded Institute of Animal Technicians (IAT) L2 & L3 training programme in Animal Technology and Science has been available to animal technicians at MRC Harwell for many years
- Membership of the IAT and the Laboratory Animal Science Association (LASA) has been fully funded by the MRC for all technicians who wished to join
- Technicians have the opportunity to attend meetings (e.g. the Oxford branch IAT events) to network externally
- There are examples of internal promotions of technicians to Team Leader / Ward Manager posts
- Some team leaders and managers have the opportunity to attend the Institute of Learning and Management's Level 2 and 3 management courses
- Some technicians have been funded by the MRC to do part-time degrees through e.g. Oxford Brookes University and The Open University
- The MRC signed up for corporate membership of the Higher Education Technicians Development and Education organisation (HEaTED), the UK's leading provider of professional development and networking opportunities, in 2016
- The MRC Harwell Institute hosted a HEaTED regional networking event in September 2016
- Technicians have opportunities to present training in official training courses to both internal and external trainees
- A number of technicians involved in the delivery of training have attended the Education and Training Level 3 Award course to support them in their role as trainers
- Managers of technical teams at the MRC Harwell Institute chaired the L3 Animal Technologist apprenticeship Trailblazer, were members for the development of the Level 2 Animal Care Apprenticeship, and served on the Department of Education's T Level Employer Panel



Figure 5 (A) A technician providing training on the “Introduction to Histology” course and (B & C) Technicians and other members of staff receive their certificates for the L3 Award in Education & Training in 2017



4. Sustainability

- Experienced technicians are involved in the writing of standard operating procedures (SOP's) and risk assessments and in the training of new members of staff, thereby providing continuity of technical skills and promoting good practice
- Information and advice about possible career progression pathways are available to all staff
- Family friendly policies e.g. flexible working, maternity leave etc., help to retain staff and expertise within teams
- Support is offered to all staff to help address personal and workplace issues to promote resilience and stability within technical teams e.g. Employee Assistance Programme, Mental Health First Aiders
- Changes to our staffing model in some departments have resulted in the employment of fewer full-time and more part-time technicians which has afforded greater flexibility for both our staff and operations

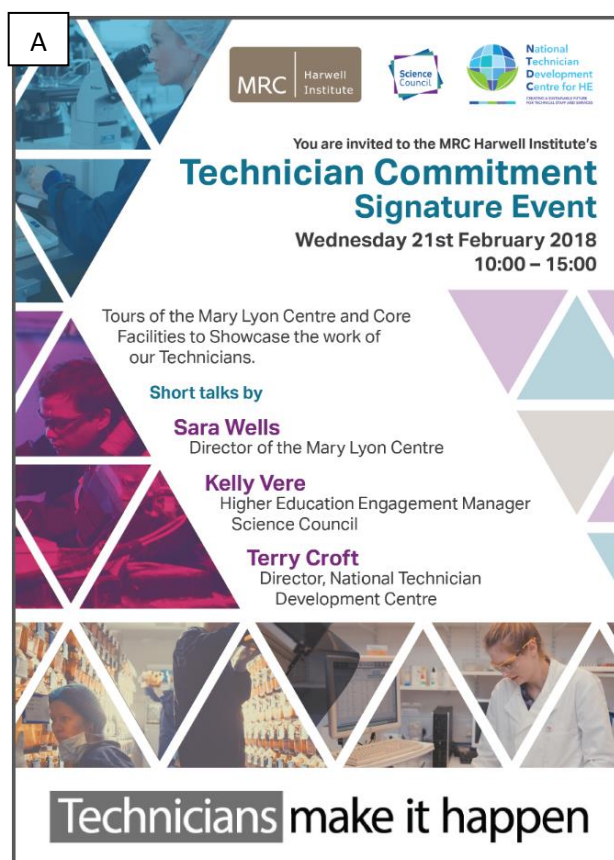


Figure 6 (A) A flyer which advertised the MRC Harwell Institute's Technician Commitment signature event (B) Sara Wells, Director of the Mary Lyon Centre, signing the Technician Commitment in February 2018 with Kelley Vere from the Science Council.



Initiatives the MRC Harwell has put in place since becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment:

1. Visibility

- Technicians at the MRC Harwell Institute were identified by drawing on data from our Athena Swan survey
- Technical & research support staff with alternative career paths have been featured in recent presentations
- The first MRC Harwell Technician Symposium took place in September 2018 and was initiated and organised by our technicians
- During Animal Technician Month in March 2019, individual technicians were introduced to the whole site by emailing out their pictures and short biographies
- Technicians have been given opportunities to attend conferences, e.g. they were invited to register for the Higher Education Technician Summit (HETS 2019)
- Technicians have opportunities to attend symposiums where they can present data, e.g. at the upcoming Inter-MRC Institute Technician Symposium and also the Inter-UK Research Institutes Technician Symposium (RITS 2019)
- Staff from MRC Harwell were interviewed for, and featured in a short film titled “The Technician Commitment – 1 year in” that was launched by Lord Sainsbury at the Tower of London in November 2018, see: <https://vimeo.com/298302279>
- The “MRC Harwell Technician Voice Committee” was established in 2019, giving technicians from all teams and core facilities an opportunity to comment on our action plan, make new suggestions and represent their teams

2. Recognition

- Professional Registration has continually been promoted at MRC Harwell
- Further workshops were arranged to facilitate applications for Professional Registration with the Science Council
- Face-to-face assessments for Professional Registration were arranged for a further 20 members of staff (of which 16 were technicians)
- Guidance for how to progress e.g. from RSciTech to RSci was made available and 3 members of staff (of which 2 technicians) were supported to accomplish progression
- The MRC Harwell Institute hosted a special event to celebrate 60 professionally registered staff in May 2019
- A group of experienced technicians were assigned as “Process Owners” as part of the ISO 9001 quality management systems of the MLC’s Laboratory Services and Operations
- Staff have been nominated for external awards – e.g. for Papin Prizes and the Times Higher Education Awards
- Our recruitment processes now includes reference to Professional Registration – asking all new job applicants at application stage whether they are professionally registered and if so, which level they are registered at
- Professional Registration has been further embedded in our recruitment processes for technical positions where it is sometimes listed as a desirable criterion



Figure 7 (A & B) A special event at the MRC Harwell Institute in May 2019 celebrated the professional registration of 60 members of staff and (C) Staff are encouraged to display their certificates of registration in the workplace

3. Career Development

- Technicians have been signposted to internal opportunities for development, e.g. several more have been involvement in the assembly and delivery of training courses
- Plans are underway for the Inter-MRC and Inter-UK Institute technician symposiums that will present opportunities to attend workshops aimed at career progression
- Discussions were initiated around the establishment of a Technician Exchange Scheme (TES) – between MRC Institutes. This will afford opportunities for placements / training schemes, secondments, external working visits to other organisations for knowledge sharing and allowing technical support staff to align with emerging technologies
- Career progression is further supported by improving access to training courses by making funding available for travel and childcare responsibilities
- Discussions are underway to explore alternative ways to access training through the London and South West Region Technician Commitment Leads Network

4. Sustainability

- An Inter-MRC Institute “Technician Commitment Leads” (TCL) committee was formed with representation from MRC Head Office, the MRC Harwell Institute, the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology (Cambridge) and the MRC London Institute for Medical Sciences (Hammersmith)
- The MRC TCL committee recognised the importance of communicating the Technician Commitment to the managers of the many core facilities across MRC Institutes who manage the vast majority of technicians within the MRC. Their support is essential to identify new opportunities for their teams, enable exchange schemes and training and ultimately change the culture around technical roles and careers.
- The first MRC Core Facilities Managers’ Forum (FMF) was held in London in November 2018 and attended by 42 core facility managers from across three MRC institutes. The afternoon’s workshop focussed on Visibility, Recognition, Career Development & Sustainability for technicians in core services and what our managers require to support their technical teams in those areas
- Key outcomes / recommendations from the 2018 FMF include a new MRC Technical Exchange Scheme (TES) which is currently being developed, the Inter-MRC Technician Symposium (planned for July 2019), and the second MRC Facilities Managers’ Forum (planned for November 2019)
- The MRC Harwell Institute is represented on the Inter-UK Institute TCL committee where various new incentives / opportunities are discussed, e.g. the first inter-UK Research Institute Technician Symposium which is being planned at the CRICK Institute in November
- The building of the new ‘Advance @MRC Harwell’ training centre is now well underway (due to open Spring / Summer 2020) and the consequent ramp-up in training courses offered and delivered on site will present new opportunities for technical staff to expand their experience in the area of training
- The MRC Harwell Institute signed up to be an Affiliate Partner of the National Technician Development Centre (NTDC) in February 2018 - The NTDC’s tool kits were considered to develop a bespoke skills audit to highlight skills gaps, cross-training needs and identify risks



Figure 8 Managers from across three MRC Institutes met in London in November 2018 to network and discuss Visibility, Recognition, Career Development and Sustainability of technical staff in core facilities in MRC Institutes



24 Month Action Plan

*Overlap with Athena Swann

July 2019

- First Inter-MRC Technician Symposium to take place on the 2nd of July at the Royal School of Mines – the programme includes networking, presentations and a workshop titled “Making Great Connections” (there is capacity for 30 technicians from the MRC Harwell to attend)
- A new induction programme will be launched that is consistent and inclusive across all departments within the Institute*
- Information about Professional Registration will be included in starter packs for all new staff
- A ‘Buddy’ system to be implemented for all new staff to ensure a better experience for new starters*
- Pictures to be kept up to date on new starter boards and pictures of new and existing staff are to be displayed outside offices and laboratories*

September 2019

- Development of a central resource to highlight information on training available and an area where staff can record training / CPD activities.* This will help to support the requirements for ongoing professional registration
- The second in-house Technician Symposium to take place at MRC Harwell – organised and hosted by technicians

November 2019

- The second MRC Facilities Managers’ Forum to take place on the 6th of November 2019
- The first Inter-UK Institutes Technicians Symposium to take place at the CRICK Institute on the 18th of November

December 2019

- Investigate and develop methods of support for career progression for all staff*. Develop a Careers section on the intranet*. Determine appropriate site for notice boards for visual, easy to see information on career progression*. Implement an institute-wide mentoring scheme for staff*
- Facilitate wider contribution and participation in committees and review existing demographics of committee membership*. Review length of service on committee with the aim to refresh membership regularly if appropriate*. Add observers on committees to enable staff development and transparency*

March 2020

- Celebrate Animal Technician Month

May 2020

- Facilitate and monitor attendance at Conferences and Meetings to ensure fairness and transparency. Incorporate conference attendance in appraisal objectives where appropriate*



June 2020

- The new Advance @MRC Harwell Training Centre opens, presenting many opportunities for visibility and recognition as part of launch and ongoing opportunities for technicians to advance their careers in the area of training

July 2020

- Second Inter-MRC Technician Symposium - to be predominantly arranged by a team of technicians from across participating institutes

September 2020

- Third in-house MRC Harwell Technician Symposium - to be arranged and hosted by technicians

October – December 2020

- Ensure technical staff have the opportunity to access a mentor, coach or buddy (perhaps include 2 / 3 meetings as part of induction)*
- Explore and aim to put in place new training opportunities through the London & SW Network
- Arrange a special event to celebrate (100?) Professional registrations
- Arrange Third annual MRC Core Facilities Managers' Forum to ensure ongoing input and feedback from technical managers and gather evidence of the impact of the Technician Commitment

2021

Roll out skills-focussed appraisals that contain plans for progression within role*. Develop a Skills Matrix for all roles*. Map skills to training courses*. Identify skills gaps*. Improve description of skills in performance and development reviews*. Review job descriptions as well as the skills, knowledge and behaviours required for each role*

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

Over the past 2 years, technicians at the MRC Harwell Institute participated in the self-assessment team and the various working groups for Athena Swan and therefore directly influenced our Athena Swan action plan. Many of the planned actions are relevant to, and have significant overlap with the Technician Commitment. Each of the service cores and research teams on site were also asked to nominate one technician a year to be part of our Technician Voice Committee. Staff with any level of experience and of any level of seniority is welcomed on this committee. The first committee was formed in 2019 and consists of 11 volunteers. This responsibility will be rotated between technicians in each team on an annual basis. The committee meet twice a year to discuss plans and progress with the implementation of our Technician Commitment action plan. At these meetings nominated technicians can also provide feedback on new initiatives and put forward suggestions on behalf of their teams.



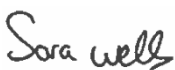
Our Technician Commitment status and action plan is published on our website, see:

<https://www.har.mrc.ac.uk/careers-and-training/athena-swan-technician>

Signed.....

Tertius Hough, Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead

Date: 31st of May 2019

Signed.....

Dr Sara Wells, Director of the Mary Lyon Centre

Date: 31st of May 2019



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

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list, it intends to demonstrate example activities to support institutions in action planning.

Theme	Example Activities
Visibility Ensure that technicians within the organisation are identifiable and that the contribution of technicians is visible within and beyond the institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisations can identify how many technicians they employ Technician roles have clear job descriptions A consistent policy that where technicians have contributed to research outputs and grants, they are named as authors Technicians to feature in organisation prospectuses and marketing materials Technicians to sit on decision making committees where appropriate Technicians visible in costing mechanisms for research grants A mechanism for celebrating technician achievements across the organisation Organisation strategy documents to include technicians where appropriate A vibrant 'Technician Network'
Recognition Support technicians to gain recognition through professional registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation communicates the opportunity to become professionally registered to technical staff (Science Council, Engineering Council, BCS). Conferment of the organisational level Science Council Employer Champion award in recognition of the support given to technical staff to gain professional registration and engage in continued professional development Recognition and support of the teaching aspect of many technician roles through the accreditation of teaching practice through the Higher Education Academy Internal award schemes recognise the contribution of technical staff Nominations to external award schemes that recognise the contribution of technical staff
Career Development Enable career progression opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technician specific professional career paths/frameworks which clearly document progression opportunities Professional development opportunities, signposted to technicians and aligned to career pathways A dedicated webpage showcasing case studies of technician careers Expansion of technician specific job families in recognition of high level technical specialisms
Sustainability Ensure the future sustainability of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate succession planning for technical roles including the analysis of technician profiles to ensure future sustainability of skills within the organisation Secondment/placement programmes for technical staff to develop new skills A technician trainee/apprenticeship programme Utilisation of the Apprenticeship Levy to train and upskill existing staff