

# Durham University - Technical Commitment Phase 1 Action Plan

1 ) Actions relating to Visibility	Time lines	Task, resource and Impact	RAG Rating relating to completion of the action point and comments from Steering group	Action Success rating by DU Technical staff (out of 5* where 1* = has not achieved its aims and 5* = fully achieved its aims)	Future work for next TC Action Plan
1.1 Durham to establish a Steering Group to publicise the Commitment and to work on the action plan addressing the 4 themes of the Commitment Visibility, Recognition, Career Development and Sustainability.	0-24 months impacted by covid 19	This has already had the effect of raising the profile and demonstrating the diversity of technical achievement within our own community.	The Technician Commitment Steering group is well established and is co-chaired by Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research Culture) and the newly appointed Head of Technical Skills. The Steering Group is comprised of technical staff across a broad range of technical roles in both academic and professional services departments and career stages, supported by members of HR, Organisational Development, Marketing and Communications and Health and Safety as required.	3.97	More senior leaders involved in TCSG and Steering group to re branded as 'Technical Professional Committee' and formalised within university governance structures to ensure clear lines of report and accountability to the committee
1.2 Creation of a Durham Technician network enabled initially through the website, but also by use of network events, topic events, workshops, forums, and campaigns, to be informed by analysis of the Technician survey results.	0-24 months impacted by covid 20	Seek administrative support for organisation of networking events.  Research from other Universities the best model for "TechNet."	Durham has created both a Team's channel for Technicians, Experimental Officers, and Research Technical Professionals and one for the Technician's Commitment Steering Group. This enables fast and convenient communication between technicians across the institution and functions as a virtual technical network.  Durham has arranged several 'coffee and catch up' meetings as well as lunch time updates and informal events where technical staff can come along and discuss what is currently happening at Durham as well as the in the wider technical landscape.  Durham has held 3 'Tech Conferences' in 2019, 2021,2023 with both internal and external speakers, networking and the showcasing of technical skills.	3.68	Further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that opportunities are created for technical staff to meet up regularly and exchange best practice on a regular basis.  Admin support for the delivery of events still requires work
1.3 Launch of a dedicated website for technicians to host the Technician Commitment action plan, resources related to the Commitment, career development, the Technicians' Network, as well as celebrating the diversity of technical skills and achievements at Durham. The webpages will provide links to development resources.	0-12 months	Website will include case studies to ensure that technicians across the organisation are visible; it will publicise the success of our technicians and will include participation in outreach activities as well as work in their academic communities.  News and events including external opportunities will be publicised.	During a recent platform change Durham's Technicians Commitment webpages became exclusively external facing. This presented challenges for where to host useful information for access internally. It was decided to create a Technicians Commitment SharePoint site accessible to all technicians to include documents and links to all relevant information and resources. Links to departmental website staff lists function as a technical staff directory.  The SharePoint site functions well as a permanent resource for information that is also often communicated through Teams. It has sections on reward and recognition of our technical community, as well as events, training and development opportunities.	3.68	Create comms plan with marcoms.  Need to consolidate externally facing webpages and ensure clear lines of responsibility for maintaining and updating them.  SharePoint site currently maintained by 2 members of TSCG - need to build resilience into this.
1.4 Establish a regular Technician event for all Technicians to showcase elements of the Commitment and action plan. The events to provide networking opportunities for the technicians to be involved in building and enhancing their own community.	0-24 months impacted by covid 19	Management to identify a recurring budget to support the event.  Engagement with departments and line managers to support this event.  Encourage establishment of special interest networks / Community of Practice on a termly basis.  Attract external speakers to the regular event, whilst maintaining dedicated time for networking and a celebration/display of current work.	In 2020 funding was secured for Durham to hold its Technician Commitment launch event. This included sessions by invited speakers, technicians career stories and an exhibition by technical staff showcasing diverse roles across the University.  Funding was secured to hold a celebration event again in 2022 following the covid lockdown after which it was decided to host the event biannually to facilitate technical staff attending the much larger Technical Partnership Conference held biannually in Newcastle.  2023 Durham established a cross disciplinary Mass Spec Users Group and Teams channel with meetings attended by all interested parties across academic, professional services and postgraduate communities.  In 2023 Durham held its 3rd Technicians Conference funded through Research Culture funding . The event included external speakers, a lunch time networking event, a technical showcase and internal speakers and was well attended.  In 2024 Durham put on a free coach and took 55 technicians to the Newcastle for the Technicians Working in Partnership event	3.97	Secure a permanent budget line for the delivery of these events  Look to expand the development of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) Such as the Mass Spec Users group.
1.5 Technicians will feature on the University website more broadly and in organisation prospectuses and marketing materials following a campaign to gather footage of technicians at work in the University.	0-24 months impacted by covid 19	Production of video footage that will be hosted on the main University website will demonstrate the breadth of technical activity at the University and will be a backdrop for the Commitment webpages.  Budget will be allocated for pop up banners and posters/marketing materials for the Departments' activities for the launch event and subsequent annual events.	We have created a Technicians Commitment folder on the University image bank for all staff to draw upon as required to create publicity materials featuring technical staff. This should help to raise the profile of technicians in university publicity materials and ensure that technicians are featured in TC event publicity.  Audio-visual staff and their line management have been collecting /creating content. Much of the content is included in the new Technician's SharePoint site including video footage from celebration events.  Reusable banners and marketing material relating to the work of the Technical Commitment at Durham have been created.	2.48	Still need to identify a dedicated budget line to support the creation of further marketing material in the future.  Continue work to create additional Technical images available for wider university use via the Image Bank
1.6 Maintain the database of technical staff to ensure that the new route of communication to all technical staff remains effective.	0-24 months impacted by covid 19	HR to establish auto-update to the mailing list when the TRTS Job family structure is deployed.	Durham has created a technical staff mailing list and Teams channel to aid communication to and between all technical staff. Steering group members along with technical managers and HR staff are responsible for updating and maintaining membership of the group/list.  SharePoint site hosts a 'Technical Directory' with links to departmental staff pages for technical staff.	3.58	It is not possible to add new staff easily to the current mailing list. We need to establish clear ownership of list - or look at newer 'outlook' group list creation as done for TCSG to enable easier management of mailing list

1.7 Ensure that the technical strategy is reflected in the overall organisation strategy.	0-24 months impacted by covid 19	Representation at committee level.  Circulation of strategic reports to the technical body.	Newly appointed 'Head of Technical Skills' role created using research culture funding to ensure that the Technical Strategy and the University Strategy are aligned.  Head of Technical Skills co-chairs Technicians Commitment Steering Group and also sits on University Research Committee.  As part of our efforts to increase the visibility and representation of the technical community within DU, a representatives of the technical staff have now been elected to the Science Faculty Research Committee (FRC), the Social Science and Health Research Committee and the Arts and Humanities Research Committee. All of these committees are chaired by the Deputy Executive Dean for Research within each faculty and have representation from the academic departments (usually the Departmental Directors of Research), URIs and RIS (Research and Innovation Services) amongst others.  All of these appointments have increased the visibility of technical staff at senior level and begun to ensure that the technical voice is heard in relation to university strategy. Greater feedback from these committees is required to the wider technical community.	3.71	We still need to increase representation in the Education committee space  Need to imbed the newly created 'Technical Strategy' more formally into the university strategy
1.8 Durham has developed a Job Family framework which gives detailed descriptors for each family and how the family links to the University strategy. The technical roles have been identified at each grade and there are clear and consistent job descriptions.	0-24 months impacted by covid 20	The technical staff are part of the Technical, Research and Teaching Services (TRTS) Job Family. Mapping of former job descriptions on to the new framework is expected to be completed by January 2020. All technicians will have clear role descriptors under the new framework.	All technical staff have been migrated onto Job Families framework with each grade having a generic job description and person specification.	2.71	While this work has been completed it has not been popular amongst technical staff who feel that the new frame work prevents promotion opportunities, This is reflected in the low success score rating  Undertake work to map possible promotional career pathway route at DU
<b>Actions relating to Recognition</b>	<b>Time lines</b>	<b>Task, resource and Impact</b>	<b>RAG Rating and comments</b>		<b>Future work for next TC Action Plan</b>
2.1 Create a consistent policy to ensure that where technicians and technical staff have contributed to research outputs and grants that they are named as authors and acknowledged.	0-24 months impacted by covid 20	Higher University Management to employ an appropriate communication strategy throughout academic departments and facilities, and review that the policy is effective.	Durham has published a Fair Attribution Policy with guidance on types of contribution and attribution to ensure that technicians who contribute to research publications are fairly attributed for the work that they undertake.	3.23	Continue to promote the Fair Attribution Policy
2.2 Promote professional registration Provide technicians with more information about professional registration through inviting the relevant organisations to technician events. Devise a generic action plan for those interested in registration to plan the stages of the process and identify the resources to achieve it.	0-24 months impacted by covid 21	Identify barriers to registration from Technician Survey data.  Find champions inside/outside Durham who are professionally registered to coach others in making their applications.  University to explore supporting the cost of registration/fees.  Departments to support dedicated CPD (Continuing Professional Development) time towards completing applications.	A Science Council representative was an invited speaker at Durham's Technicians Commitment event in 2022.  Technicians Enhancing Research Culture Funding has been set up using funding from Research Culture, and is available for staff to apply to pay for the fees associated with professional registration.  - In 2022-2023 £25,000 was awarded to support technical staff applications for career development opportunities.  - In 2023-24 £22,000 awarded to support 45 applications across 10 departments to enhance Durham's technical community through encouraging career development, professional registrations, and external engagement.  Over the 2 years this has include: 11 training course places 9 Leadership training places 33 Professional registration places  The Technicians SharePoint site contains relevant links and info for in relation to professional registration  Technician-to-technician mentoring has been set up - but uptake has been slow. An internal support group for professional registration has also been set up but uptake has been slow. NTDC skills survey data shows a lack of awareness of profession registration and the benefits it can bring. Suggesting that further work is required to promote the existence of professional registration, its benefits and the assistance available to those wishing to apply / renew their applications.	3.23	Develop this in relation to Teaching recognition and fellowships  Continue to promote this with increasing uptake of prof registration and support network.  Look to identify a permanent budget line for supporting technical staff to undertake professional registration.
2.3 Ensure that technicians associated with successful projects are celebrated in news items and showcased effectively by capturing these stories to the news pages of the dedicated Technician website	0-24 months impacted by covid 22	Establishing a dedicated link with the communications office to ensure that University-wide articles are captured to the Technician website.	We have created a SharePoint Page dedicated to Reward and Recognition for Technical Staff and here we showcase success within our community	2.94	Create a Marketing and Communications Strategy to ensure the consistent capture and wider communication of these success stories  Look to communicate success more broadly to academic / non technical and also the wider external community
2.4 The University will investigate additional options for internal award schemes for recognition of technician achievement.	0-24 months impacted by covid 23	Some department level awards already exist for support staff, and University-based Exceptional Contribution Points exist for all staff across the University.  High level support will be required for establishing and maintaining an award scheme specifically for technicians, and additional resource identified.  Scheme will require transparent criteria for application and for selection.	2023 Durham hosted its first Professional Services Inspiring the Extraordinary awards ceremony which included a Technician of the Year award. This involved a celebration event with each winner receiving a small trophy to keep plus publicity in Dialogue/Web pages with all those shortlisted receiving a certificate of commendation.  In 2024 - 6 technicians were shortlisted across 3 of the 12 categories.  Durham has also instigated an 'Excellence in Teaching and Learning' awards ceremony. Last year technicians were nominated across several categories and won the 'Unsung hero category'.  A "top of the grade" process has been introduced in conjunction with the current DA (Discretionary Award) and ECP (Exceptional Contribution Point) reward mechanisms already in place. The "top of the grade process" provides a framework for line managers to review the roles of staff who have been at the top of their current grade band two years or more to determine if their role holds sufficient responsibility to be regraded. All three are linked to the current ADR system and emphasis needs to be made on the benefits of taking part.	3.35	Continue to promote these awards.
2.5 The University will promote nominations to external award schemes that recognise technical staff by publicising these schemes and events on the website, news page, and at networking events and the mailing list.	0-24 months impacted by covid 24	Technical managers to disseminate information about upcoming awards at management level in the department to ensure that opportunities are not missed. Faculty Offices to maintain a repository for the supporting documents for reference	In 2022 James Fox-Robinson was nominated and highly commended in the THE (Times Higher Education) Outstanding Technician of the Year Award. James is one of a growing number of Technicians who work in areas other than the 'traditional' role within departments and faculty.  Other staff have been submitted but unsuccessfully to the THE.  Geoff Nowell, a technician within Earth Science Won a Papin Prize for 'Contribution to Research' in 2023.	3.1	We need to do more promotion of these external awards  Create a diary within the Share Point site so that upcoming awards / deadlines etc can be more easily visible to the community and more easily communicated
<b>Actions relating to Career development</b>	<b>Time lines</b>	<b>Task, resource and Impact</b>	<b>RAG Rating and comments</b>		<b>Future work for next TC Action Plan</b>

3.1 The University has a policy in place to enable 21 hours of CPD per year for staff members. Promote awareness of this policy through the Technician Website and encourage technical staff to identify their own training and development needs.	0-24 months impacted by covid 25	Dedicated campaign to promote the awareness of the policy through departments by updates from the Organisation Development (OD) Team, with the expectation that 21 hours will be taken up by all. Ensure line management commitment to enabling the training.	All technical managers use the ADR process to discuss CPD opportunities and the provision of the 21hrs of CPD time.  The Technician Enhancing Research Culture fund can be used by technical staff to apply for development, training and conference attendance. This ensures equity and parity between staff within departments and those who are not affiliated with departments. Over the last 2 years we have funded: 11 training course places 9 Leadership training places 33 Professional registration places	3.7	Identify a more permanent funding mechanism for this fund, such as locating the fund within the science faculty budgets.  Look to increase this CPD time from 21 hours to 10 days, in line with the Research Concordat
3.2 Signpost the Pebble Pad self-development workbooks devised by the training team as a key method of individuals planning their personal development and providing evidence for professional registration.	0-24 months impacted by covid 26	Monitor uptake of Personal Development Workbooks on Pebble Pad.  Add CPD briefings/workshops to future technician events.  Awareness sessions for line managers such that development plans can be used as a transparent and accessible mechanism for individuals making a business case for securing internal funding for development opportunities.	This action has become obsolete as Pebble pad no longer used by technical staff and has been phased out at DU.  Membership of NTDC allows tech staff to record their CPD on the NTDC CPD central platform  In 2023 Durham ran the NTDC skills survey which provided a skills report to every staff member who undertook it.  Personal development plans are integral to the ADR process	2.29	Ensure that wider communication is done around the provision of the NTDC CPD platform
3.3 Enable technicians to identify personal development opportunities by publicising upcoming internal and external events, technical conferences, training, and events by use of mailing lists, or subscriber lists, and event section on the website.	0-24 months impacted by covid 27	Identify resource and mechanism for effective gathering of external event notifications for regular update of news/event pages of website.  Encourage different routes to engage with continuing professional development as part of the dedicated 21 hours CPD per year.	New Technicians SharePoint site hosts links to those organisations providing development opportunities, training courses and conferences under internal external development opportunities.  Continued membership of HeaTeD and also NTDC.  Key opportunities circulated internally via email and Teams page	3.73	Continue to add opportunities to the SharePoint site and communicate them via Teams and the mailing list
3.4 As part of the Job Families structure, revised job descriptions, and the "Realising Your Potential Approach" which demonstrates the behavioural indicators for each grade, there will be further development of Career Pathways specific to TRTS.	0-24 months impacted by covid 28	Ensure that clear links to the Career Pathway information is available from the Technician Website.  Provide scheduled briefings for technicians through training booking system for roll out of career pathways.	While we have successfully transferred all technical staff into the Job families framework there has been limited 'further development' to the career pathways specific to the TRTS job family. A draft technical strategy has now been produced which included proposals to revise the current career pathway, Durham has recently become a member of the ITSS Career Pathway Action Group which will hopefully enable further developments in this area.	3.07	Durham needs to explore and pilot alternative career pathways including promotional pathways - links to ITSS careers pathway lab and NTDC working group on educational pathways. This is addressed in Objective 1.1 in our Phase 2 action plan  Feedback suggests the slightly positive response to this action from the community links to the production of the draft technical strategy.
3.5 Explore opportunities for technician secondments and provide a framework for this option for career development and sustainability.	0-24 months impacted by covid 29	Policy guidance from HR and OD team.	At present only the newly appointed Head of Technical Skills has been appointed on a secondment basis. The main challenge with providing secondments either internal or external is back filling technical specialist roles for the duration of the secondment. There also needs to be wider work done raising awareness of this type of role for hiring managers.	2.5	Explore talent pooling within initiatives within HR and Recruitment as a mechanism to back fill roles quickly  Look at developing an internal framework to support short term secondments - links to ITSS careers pathway lab
<b>Actions relating to Sustainability</b>	<b>Time lines</b>	<b>Task, resource and impact</b>	<b>RAG Rating and comments</b>		<b>Future work for next TC Action Plan</b>
4.1 Use sustained career development to nurture and reward talent in the technical body to maintain talent within the organisation.	0-24 months impacted by covid 30	Ensure development opportunities are showcased on the Technician Commitment website.	Development opportunities are showcased on Teams and SharePoint and funding is available through Research Culture funding to support tech career development.  Sustained career development is currently rewarded by DA (Discretionary Awards) and ECP (Exceptional Contribution Point) reward mechanisms both of which offer a financial bonus either by way of a permanent spine point raise or a one off lump sum payment.	3	Head of Technical Skills will lead on a project to explore a promotional career pathway for technical staff at Durham which will aid the retention of specialist technical staff and reward the sustained career development of specialist skill sets  Increase visibility of career progression opportunities  Increase the awareness of development roles  Showcase success stories
4.2 Communication of the routes for leveraging the apprenticeship levy and encourage departments to consider technical apprenticeship schemes when workforce planning in the annual planning round.	0-24 months impacted by covid 31	Add aging technical workforce to the University risk register.  Sustain technician apprentice recruitment and retention to address the age profile of the technical staff.	DU has successfully implemented a large T-level student placement scheme as a pipeline into technical apprenticeships.  We have limited numbers of junior technical apprenticeships across the institution. In part this is because not all technical managers are involved within planning rounds / decision making.  We also need to communicate more broadly the availability of the apprenticeship levy to provide training and development opportunities to technical staff at all career levels  We still need to explore adding the ageing technical work force to the University Risk Register	3	Ensure that technical staff are included within the planning round discussions within their respective departments and divisions  Explore apprenticeship pooling across / within faculties - look at linking this to the existing support staff pool.  Add aging technical workforce to the university Risk Register
4.3 Resource planning and business case skills development for technical managers and leaders linked to organisational plans and objectives.	0-24 months impacted by covid 32	Targeted support for technical managers in responding to organisational change.	Targeted training in Technical leadership at multiple levels is delivered by ITSS. DU has funded using RC funding:  9 staff to undertake technical leadership or project management training.	3.32	we need to identify funding sources to sustain this training moving forward  Work with DCAD and HROD to explore targeting more technical training going forward, particularly in relation to Teaching accreditation
4.4 Maintain a steering group to manage the Commitment. Refresh membership to address the needs of the action plan.	0-24 months impacted by covid 33	Annual review of progress against action log, and review of membership, recruiting new members when needed.	The Steering Group has expanded its membership to become a much more diverse representative of the technical staff. The Steering group also invites expertise when required from H&S, Marketing and Communications and HR/OD.  Steering group has developed a Technical Strategy document which has fed into the Phase 2 Action Plan.  The Steering group now has Terms of Reference to assist in management of the group and membership.	3.87	Look to imbed the Steering group more permanently into the University Governance structures
4.5 Continue to develop the technician commitment in response to changes both internal and external to the university.	0-24 months impacted by covid 34	Establish a scheduled regular review to identify ramifications of any organisational change.  Technician Commitment as scheduled item at Faculty Board Meetings at least annually.	Currently the committee feeds into Research Culture Committee and Research Committee. It is not scheduled at Faculty Boards.  The Action Plan is reviewed annually against progress points	3	Progress draft Technical Strategy  Clearly imbed the TCGS into the existing governance structures