Technician Commitment

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

Organisation: Swansea University

Name of Institutional Lead: Professor Biagio Lucini

E-mail: b.lucini@swansea.ac.uk

Contact Number: 01792 602284

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

Swansea University is a research-led university that has been making a difference since 1920. The University community thrives on exploration and discovery and is dedicated to pursuing both excellent teaching and world-leading research. Currently, the University employs around 1,150 Academics and 2,115 professional service staff. Our multicultural community provides a global perspective, enabling our staff and students to develop skills and knowledge that enable them to develop successful and enriching careers. While we are valued globally as a trusted partner, we are deeply committed to our role as our region's University. Our strategic vision is built upon five key pillars that drive all that we do: Civic Mission, Student Experience, Learning and Teaching, Research, and Enterprise.

The academic activities at Swansea University are organised around three faculties: the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE); the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Science (FMHLS); and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS). Technicians are mostly embedded in the faculties, where they can be in either a teaching or in a research support role. A smaller number of technical staff is housed in other Professional Service Units (mostly Estates and Information Services and Systems).

Please tell us how your organisation defines its technicians:

Until recently, an institution-level definition of technician has not been available at Swansea University. Technicians were mostly identified using job specifications, either directly (if posts were tagged explicitly as technician jobs) or applying best judgement to the job narrative. This has resulted in inconsistencies and in difficulties in tracking long running and subject to change roles.

To resolve this issue, we are currently engaging with our technical community in order to agree an institutional definition of our Technician roles.

Our Technician Commitment Steering Group, and the related working groups, have recognised the HEaTED (Higher Education and Technician Educational Development) definition as a robust definition to centre our thinking on our definition of technicians; this definition is as follows:

'A person who is trained and or skilled in the techniques, tools, and technology of their subject, who provide the practical application of knowledge, including hands-on support in directly contributing to teaching and learning, research and enterprise activities.'

We are also considering the following working definition as an alternative:

"Without discrimination, our technicians are highly skilled, qualified individuals, who are experts in the technical details of their respective fields. They are integral to either directly (e.g. Laboratory teaching, research & workshop technicians) or indirectly (e.g. IT services, Estates) supporting the institutes academic and research endeavours."

Members of the Technician Commitment Visibility Working Group, a subgroup of the Technician Commitment Steering Group, are organising events to facilitate further discussions with the wider technical community on the institutional definition of a Swansea University technician that is satisfactory to the community.

Technicians are currently classified under the following categories in the University's personnel system:

- Technical (TEC)
- Technical Teaching (TECT)

The only differential between these descriptors being whether a member of staff directly contributes to teaching activity; all of our staff members contribute to the University's core business of teaching and research, and therefore to the wider overarching institutional strategy.

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):

An initial assessment of the technician community within the institution based with the current methodology for classifying technical roles identifies **157 technicians**, or technical staff, within Swansea University.

Technicians are employed and categorised within the following areas of Swansea University:

Table 1. Institutional overview of technical roles across the three academic faculties.

Area	Headcount
Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE)	109
Faculty of Medicine, Health, and Life Sciences (FMHLS)	42
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS)	6
Total	**157**

The technicians identified and included in *Table 1* encompass technical roles that are funded via both the University's core pay budget (termed as D-coded) and external/research funding mechanisms (termed as R-coded).

The 109 technical roles within the Faculty of Science and Engineering are split between the following departments and fluctuate in line with staff turnover, work force/business planning and research/grant funding being obtained:
- Biosciences.
- Chemical Engineering.
- Chemistry.
- Computer Science.
- General Engineering.
- Geography.
- Mechanical Engineering.
- Materials Science and Engineering.
- Physics.
- Science and Engineering.

The 42 technical roles within the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences are split between the following departments and fluctuate in line with staff turnover, work force/business planning and research/grant funding being obtained:
- Anatomy.
- Clinical.
- Life Sciences.
- Medicine, Health and Life Sciences.

- Pharmacy.
- Psychology.

The 7 technical roles within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences are split between the following departments and fluctuate in line with staff turnover, work force/business planning and research/grant funding being obtained:

- Humanities and Social Sciences.
- Media.

Technical roles within the University's Information Systems and Services (ISS) and Estates and Campus Services directorates have been excluded from the data included within this self-assessment document. While as an institute we recognise that there are technical roles, and technicians, located within these areas of the institute, internal assessment and engagement continues as part of the technician commitment activity to ensure there is an agreed approach in correlation to our institutional definition longer term planning.

As part of the technician commitment work is continuing to identify all technical roles within the institute while concurrently assessing current processes and procedures. This work is a priority and will develop robust, improved processes which will enable the institution to identify its technical community easily and efficiently; facilitating effective communication and engagement, business analysis and optimum planning as part of our ongoing commitment activity.

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:

- Prior to Swansea University signing the Technician Commitment, our technical staff have been engaged in a range of activities, mostly born out of the initiative and interest of individuals and small groups. For example: in 2019, a group of our technicians attended a technicians' conference at Cardiff University. Other events attended in the same period include the Higher Education Technical Symposium in Birmingham and the HEaTED meetings (Southwest region) at University of Bristol and at the University of Exeter.
- On a wider participative scale, the former College of Engineering (now part of the Faculty of Science and Engineering) has been a member of HEaTED since 2017 and technical staff have attended several HEaTED training courses and regional meetings. In 2018, we hosted a visit from the HEaTED Programme Director, who gave a talk about HEaTED and professional registration to around 30 engineering technicians.
- A longstanding tradition is the organisation of networking events for Engineering's senior technicians on alternate Wednesday afternoons. These have provided an opportunity for technical staff to meet together and share experiences. We have also, on occasion, taken this as an opportunity to visit places or exhibitions of

interest. For instance, a group of technicians visited the Mary Rose exhibition at the Glyn Vivian Art Gallery (Swansea), and various engineering technicians worked on projects associated with the Mary Rose exhibition. This forum of senior technicians, formerly run by Engineering, has now been extended to all senior technical staff in the Faculty of Science and Engineering.

In 2020, Swansea University re-organised into three faculties. As a part of this development, Heads of Technical, Infrastructure & Environment were appointed for each faculty. These three Heads meet monthly to discuss University business while building increased co-operation between faculties. The Technician Commitment now forms a standing item on the agenda, where they look to promote the technical staff agenda across the University and to ensure role parity, consistent working practices and career development.
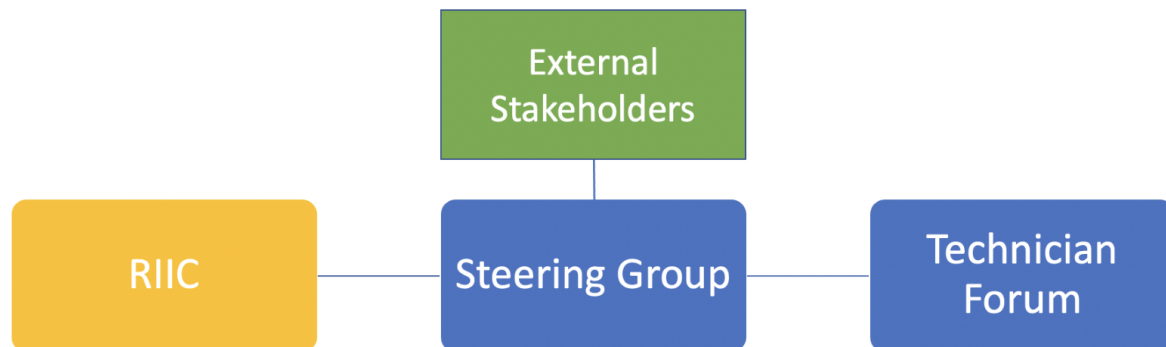
The initiatives that we have undertaken in the past, some of which are still ongoing, have provided evidence and indications that have informed activities in our Technician Commitment action plan. Key goals of the latter include scaling up good practice (e.g., providing Institution-wide HEaTED membership, which we have now achieved) and better engagement with our technician community.

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:

Swansea University became a signatory of the Technician Commitment in January 2022. Our first act after joining the Technician Commitment, from February to April 2022, was to run a survey among our technical staff. The survey asked respondents to put forward ideas concerning actions around the four pillars of the commitment (visibility, recognition, career progression opportunities and sustainability), as well as suggesting measures to assess the effectiveness of those actions. We received 56 responses, which formed the first basis for our action plan.

While the survey was still open, in March 2022, a steering group was created tasked with the delivery of the Technician Commitment action plan. The Steering Group is co-chaired by Professor Biagio Lucini (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research Culture) and Mark Pritchard. Mark has one of the most senior technical roles at Swansea University, being the Head of Technical, Infrastructures and Environment for the Faculty of Science and Engineering, which in turn is the largest faculty in terms of members in technical roles. Having the Steering Group co-led by a senior academic and a senior member of the

technical community ensures strong connections both at the technical level and in high-level committees in the University governance structure, through the Research, Innovation and Impact Committee (RIIC). The Steering Group, which liaises with internal and external stakeholders, draws members across the three faculties and relevant professional service units (for instance, Estates and Information Services and Systems), both at the senior level and within the technical community. The governance structure of the Technician Commitment at Swansea University is outlined below:

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │    External     │
                    │  Stakeholders   │
                    └─────────────────┘
                             │
  ┌──────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐
  │   RIIC   │──────│ Steering Group  │──────│ Technician  │
  │          │      │                 │      │    Forum     │
  └──────────┘      └─────────────────┘      └─────────────┘
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As a result of the survey, in April 2022 we formed the Technician Forum (also shown in the diagram), which provides bottom-up suggestions on the implementation of the Technician Commitment. The Forum, is a venue where all technical staff at Swansea University discuss, in an open and safe environment, matters relevant for the Commitment. It is chaired by Wendy Clark, a Senior Technician in the Faculty of Science and Engineering, and has a Leadership Team consisting of twelve members, who ensure forward communication of relevant topics discussed in the Forum to the Steering Group. The Forum Leadership Team (FLT) has been appointed with an open process following a competitive call open to all members of the technical community and has representatives across teaching and research technicians as well as technical staff in professional units. The Chair of the Technician Forum Leadership Team has been appointed with an open process among the Leadership Team itself.

As Swansea began to take our first steps in developing our Technician Commitment journey, we also began to develop our transformative Ymlaen (Welsh for 'moving forward') programme. Ymlaen is about delivering a step change in organisational effectiveness over a three-year period and embedding a culture of continuous improvement which will endure into the future. Career progression is a central aspect of Ymlaen, and is being advanced in a holistic way in the context of this programme, in order to ensure consistency across the Professional Services. Career progression and development of Technicians are hence part of Ymlaen, but informed by the activities of the Technician Commitment.

Swansea's Research and Innovation Awards are one of the main ways in which we

recognise the contribution and achievements of our research community. In the past, technicians have received recognition via the awards, but a specific category highlighting technical roles was missing. In 2022 we established our Outstanding Technician's Contribution Award. As a part of this award, three shortlisted technicians described their work in a video published on our website.

Since becoming signatories, we have started to engage with events and initiatives of the Technician Commitment. For instance, Pritchard and Lucini participated in the Signatory Event in York in June 2022. The meeting offered an invaluable opportunity to link with technicians across the country and to lean on the experience of institutions that are further along in the delivery of their action plans. In particular, we were able to appreciate the value of initiatives run by the NTDC (National technician development Centre) and of the professional courses delivered by HEaTED. As a result, in July 2022 Swansea University has now subscribed to both.

Another key event spawned from Swansea University joining the commitment took place at our Institution in July 2022: for the first time, we hosted a Technician Symposium, which gave the opportunity to technicians and technical staff in all units to get together for discussion and to share experiences.   This one-day event had a formal session in the morning, with speakers (including two external ones) presenting on topics of general relevance (e.g., professional registration, mentoring, Higher Education Academy), followed by an open debate on relevant issues (such as career progression).

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):

Please see the attached action plan.

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

Shortly after becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment, we surveyed our technician community asking for their views on how the Commitment should be implemented at Swansea University. This work provided a set of first ideas that have then been further developed in the following months by the Steering Group. From July to mid-October, four ad-hoc groups were established, mapping directly into the pillars of the commitment (visibility, recognition, career progression and sustainability), tasked with the development of an action plan for the relevant theme.

Each group had typically around five members, and the membership was strongly dominated by the Forum Leadership Team. From mid-October, a task and finish group formed, including the chairs of the working groups (of whom, three are members of the FLT) and the co-chairs of the Steering Group. This group coordinated the finalisation of the action plan in early November 2022. The action plan was then presented to the Technician Forum for a final round of feedback, which is reflected in the submitted version.

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

We confirm that our Technician Commitment status and action plan are published at the following URL:

https://www.swansea.ac.uk/research/the-technician-commitment-at-swansea-university