

30th January 2019

FAO: Lynn Neville
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Re: Technician Commitment – Self-Assessment & Action Plan

Dear Lynn,

We are delighted to write to Phase Two Signatories of the Technician Commitment following the recent Self-Assessment and Action Plan submissions. Reviews were undertaken by a trained peer review panel, consisting of representatives from the Technician Commitment signatory community. All submissions received have now been assessed and the panellists are delighted to see how positively organisations have engaged with the Technician Commitment, giving it the respect and dedication that it deserves.

Please find below the feedback from the reviewers of the University of St Andrews submission:

1. Technical structures and the internal scope/reach established for the Technician Commitment

The technical staff at St Andrews are assigned to a “Technical and Experimental” Job Family. St Andrews define their technicians by roles which have a particular focus, such as research, teaching, IT, corporate communications, estates and health and safety and management. These roles are diverse and it is wonderful to see that all of these roles are both visible and recognised by the organisation.

Indeed, the submission provided clear evidence that the University knows where its technicians are located throughout the organisation. Of the 155 technicians, 103 are based in academic units, 38 in academic support services and 14 in central support roles. St Andrews also recognises technical support at different levels and in the self-assessment makes references to roles at higher levels. This provides an excellent foundation for St Andrews to progress its Technician Commitment strategies further.

2. Initiatives/programmes/activities that were already in place for the technical community within this organisation prior to them becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment:

St Andrews strongly encourages its technical staff to continually develop themselves by way of study for part-time degrees. It is especially pleasing to see the support (particularly financial) for this at the apprenticeship level (HNC/BSc) and at a higher level (PhD). It is a significant achievement that this is more than an aspiration since technicians have actually followed this development pathway. In many universities the transition from a technical role to an academic role is difficult, however St Andrews are an exemplar and should be commended for supporting such a transition for those wishing to undertake it.

St Andrews have used a number of case studies to evidence how it is supporting CPD opportunities for its technical staff and have a number of initiatives that are worthy of note. The first is the opportunity for technical staff to gain training in management through the CAPOD (Centre for Academic, Professional and Organisational Development). The second is the provision of funding to allow technical staff to attend external events. Such top level support by St Andrews is hugely important. In addition to offering training in management it, might be useful to encourage teaching focused development.

Open days and outreach activities, which engage technicians, are already well established and this is a great way to increase the visibility of technicians across St Andrews.

The integration of technician focussed activities into existing organisational initiatives such as the Athena SWAN submission is welcomed.

3. Initiatives put in place to address the themes of the Technician Commitment since becoming a signatory:

The Technician Commitment Engagement Group (TCEG) has now been established which reports to the Vice Principal. Its purpose is to engage the technical workforce in delivering the Technician Commitment strategy and being chaired by the Vice Principal will ensure the importance of the Technician Commitment is realised across the organisation. The Vice Principal will also provide a conduit for effective two-way communications between technicians and senior management, allowing the 'technician voice' to be heard.

It is wonderful to note that St Andrews have been successful in harvesting the 'technician voice'. They have done this through facilitated focus groups and by a questionnaire. The high response rate of the latter and that a high percentage of technicians were keen to engage further, is indicative of the enthusiasm of the technical workforce to engage in Technician Commitment initiatives.

Although it is not clear from the submission how many technicians had taken up the opportunity of attending fully funded HEaTED courses, having the initiative and opportunities complements existing CPD opportunities at St Andrews. Its pleasing to see that St Andrews have also adopted a job shadowing scheme to share skills and knowledge across the technical workforce whilst at the same time enhancing the visibility and recognition of technicians- this is exemplary practice from which other organisations might learn.

4. Action Plan:

All strands of the Technician Commitment can be identified in the Action Plan. The Action Plan has clear actions which are linked to a defined timeline which will make it much easier for the TCEG to monitor its implementation.

The creation of an in-house technical staff directory and database is a great way to share skills and knowledge whilst at the same time improving the visibility and recognition of technicians. Ultimately this will be invaluable in succession planning and facilitate cross faculty networking, enabling the best use of skills across the University.

Good use of digital systems is proposed in addition to establishing an annual technical staff away day which will increase the visibility of technical staff.

It is very pleasing to see that there is a willingness to identify and include those staff who perform technical roles but currently fall outside the Technical and Experimental job family. Indeed, taken together with the above initiatives St Andrews will gain a deeper understanding of the diverse job roles which fall into this job family.

Reflecting on one's knowledge, skills and competence can be rather daunting and this first step is often a barrier to technicians becoming professionally registered. It is fantastic that there is a plan to establish workshops to provide support and encourage technicians who wish to apply for Professional Registration.

An internal award scheme and including technicians in strategy meetings are an effective way of boosting the recognition of the work done by technicians. Equally establishing a clear code of practice to recognise the contributions made by technicians to publications is a welcome and crucial initiative.

The strategies for improving recognition for technicians at St Andrews are robust and they are supported by an initiative to review the Technical and Experimental job family architecture and role definitions. Together this will start to provide clearer career pathways and opportunities for technical staff. Evidence that technicians are represented appropriately in these discussions will be particularly welcome and fitting for the Technician Commitment.

Whilst initiatives such as apprenticeships, job shadowing and secondments are a way of assisting succession planning, it might be useful to consider a skills audit so that the University has a full and complete understanding of the technical skills coverage within the existing workforce.

Appointing a Technical Lead for the Technician Commitment is essential to facilitate engagement, will give the Technician Commitment credence amongst staff and expedite progress. This is a very positive step forward for St Andrews.

The review and monitoring initiatives which are included in the Action Plan are robust, allow for flexibility in an ever-changing landscape and augment what is already a comprehensive Action Plan.

Overall this is an excellent submission. St Andrews should be commended for building a clear, robust and ambitious Action Plan on solid foundations of existing initiatives. It will be excellent to see St Andrews build relationships with other Scottish HEIs which we are sure will quickly gain momentum.

Congratulations on very positive progress coupled with a clear, ambitious and time-bound Action Plan. In recognition of this submission, the University of St Andrews will be presented with an Award of Submission at the forthcoming Technician Commitment Signatory Event on June 24th 2019 at The Jaguar Experience, Castle Bromwich. Registration and further details are available at <https://techniciancommitment5.eventbrite.co.uk> using the password *Panthera*.

We look forward to working with you as you continue the implementation of your Action Plan and to supporting the on-going development of technicians at the University of St Andrews to further increase visibility, recognition, opportunity and sustainability of this vital community.

Yours sincerely,



Helen Pain CSci CChem FRSC

Chair of the Technician Commitment Steering Board



Kelly Vere MA RSci FHEA

Technician Commitment Lead