Technician Commitment Action Plan August 2024 to July 2027 (last updated 03/07/24)

Introduction

The University of Essex was a founding signatory member of the Technician Commitment in 2017. The Technician Commitment is a national initiative across the HE and related sectors to highlight, support, and promote the role of technicians in the workforce. The Technician Commitment is now managed by the Institute of Technical Skills and Strategy (hosted by the University of Nottingham).

The University implemented Technician Commitment Action Plans in 2019-20 and 2020-23 to support, monitor, and evaluate our actions around the Technician Commitment (TC). These Action Plans are managed and implemented by the University Technician Commitment Working Group (TCWG), currently chaired by the Faculty Dean Research (Science and Health), delegated by the Pro-Vice Chancellor Research.

Reflection on Technician Commitment Action Plan 2020-23

A number of notable successes were achieved between 2020-23, including:

- Standardised job titles and descriptors implemented across relevant technical roles;
- Technician Commitment reach and engagement extended to include central professional service teams and others such as UK Data Archive;
- Increased visibility and recognition through regular blog articles, specific technician awards in internal Excellence awards, nominations for Times Higher Education external awards, and increased representation on University committees;
- Research England "Enhancing Research Culture" funding has provided funding for over 80 different technician-led projects including time buyout for professional development, training, specialist equipment, travel, etc. This work was featured as a case study in the national 7-year report of the Technician Commitment (published May 2024);
- Detailed National Technician Development Centre (NTDC) supported survey of technical workforce undertaken in autumn 2023. Headline results have already informed the development of the 2024-27 Action Plan, but further analysis is ongoing;
- Regular informal catch-up sessions and an end of year celebration specifically for technical staff now implemented;
- Essex hosted the first Eastern Arc technician conference in July 2023;
- Significant award of £1.5m from EPSRC for the Essex-led T-PIKE* programme (*see below), which has a total investment of £3m and will commence in 2024.

However, the TCWG identified a number of areas where progress has been slow or where problems have been encountered:

- Expanding the reach of the TC to non-standard or non-traditional technical roles has led to some communication and engagement issues;
- Significant funds have been allocated linked to research, but funds for education activities have (relatively speaking) been quite limited;

- Lack of backfill options means it has been difficult to release technicians for training or professional development events;
- A clear career pathway for technicians is missing, and this creates difficulties for some individuals to progress to higher grades;
- There is a shortage of new entrants to our technical careers and roles;
- The NTDC survey highlighted (amongst other things) how many technicians involved in teaching lacked training in this area.

Areas of Focus for Technician Commitment Action Plan 2024-27

The Action Plan 2024-27 aims to maintain and develop our earlier TC successes, align with the TALENT Commission Report (TCR) recommendations published 1 February 2022, and include a specific focus on the following four key areas where new or additional actions have been identified as necessary or desirable:

- Successful implementation of T-PIKE* (*see below);
- Improved support for technicians around education (activities, development, and training);
- Improved engagement, communication, and dissemination with technical staff in central professional services (and other areas not fully covered by the TC currently);
- Explore the feasibility of developing and implementing a specific technical staff career pathway, including ongoing engagement with national initiatives in this area.

*Technical Programme for Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (T-PIKE)

The Technical Programme for Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (T-PIKE) is a £3m project funded by EPSRC, the Eastern Arc universities (Essex, Kent, UEA, and more recently, Sussex) and external industry partners, that aims to offer training and development opportunities for technicians to engage with Knowledge Exchange (KE) with external partners around the key themes of AI and net-zero, which will directly or indirectly affect all technicians in the future.

T-PIKE commenced in April 2024 (although a full launch will be in autumn 2024) and will run until 2028. T-PIKE consists of four main work packages:

- WP1 – general training for all technicians across Eastern Arc in the themes of KE, AI, net-zero, and general transferable skills (mentoring, communication etc).
- WP2 – specific engagement activities such as placements, work shadowing, exchanges, etc with external and industry partners.
- WP3 – training and supporting senior technicians to train new "Technician Development Assistants" (TDAs) that will provide cover and backfill so that professional development opportunities can be taken up and new entrants join the technical workforce.
- WP4 – support and mentoring for T-PIKE technician champions who will mentor, inspire, and advocate for technicians and the programme at a local, regional and national level.

Aim	Actions	Success Measures	Time frame	Resources	Responsible	TC Pil'
**Visibility** - Ensure all technicians within the organisation are identifiable and that the contribution of technicians is visible within and beyond the institution.
V1 – To have a formal mechanism for raising challenges affecting technical staff and for identifying best practice and successes.	V1.1 - To continue the termly meetings of the Technician Commitment Working Group (TCWG). V1.2 - To review the TCWG membership and Terms of Reference (TOR) annually. V1.3 - TCWG representatives to keep their department informed of meeting outcomes and how to raise issues/successes. This may be through department meetings, notice boards, and email updates. V1.4 – Continue to identify staff in technical roles as the workforce landscape evolves, particularly in areas such as central professional services teams where staff have not previously been identified as technicians, and where the industry standard language for 'technician' differs from the University's broad inclusive approach, such as for East 15 Acting School.	Regular evaluation shows that the TCWG is effective. TCWG membership representative of all technical staff. Technical staff are aware who their representative is.	Termly meetings. Annual review of TOR in the autumn term.	Administrative support to schedule and minute meetings.	Action owner: TCWG Chair Supported by: TC Lead Faculty Operations Manager (S&H) TCWG representatives	V, S, CD
V2 – Ensure technical staff have effective representation on University committees. [TCR - R12]	V2.1 - Continue to support technicians on committees to utilise their expertise in decision making, such as providing training on committee membership. V2.2 – To regularly review technical representation on committees and explore where further representation may be required.	Consistent or increased committee membership. Technical staff actively participating in meeting discussions.	Annual review in the spring term.	TC Lead time. Annual survey of technical staff.	Action owner: TC Lead	V, S, CD
V3 – Celebrate and promote the achievements of technical staff to raise awareness of the vital work they contribute to the University's mission.	V3.1 - Promote technician successes through newsletter articles, blogs, notice boards, and the website. V3.2 – Encourage technicians to raise their online profile, such as adding details to their UoE website staff profile, to help facilitate networking and building external relationships with funding bodies, industry, and through engagement with T-PIKE KE projects. V3.3 – To encourage nominations for University Awards, such as Excellence in Education Awards and Excellence in Research and Impact Awards, and to support with the application process.	Articles published at least three times per year. Technical staff say the visibility of technicians has been positively impacted by the Technician Commitment Action Plan.	Ongoing promotion. Awards nomination support in line with submission deadlines. Annual technicians / technical staff	TC Lead time. Funding for technician award events. Annual survey of technical staff.	Action owner: TC Lead Supported by: Communications and External Relations	V, R

Aim	Actions	Success Measures	Time frame	Resources	Responsible	TC Pil'
[TCR - R11]	V3.4 – To establish a specific award scheme for technicians / technical staff at the University.	Technical staff are successful in receiving University awards.	awards in the summer term.			
V4 – To improve awareness of the Technician Commitment across the University and wider community. [TCR – R6] [T-PIKE WP2]	V4.1 - Publish the Technician Commitment Action Plan on the website and distribution of an illustrated informative leaflet. V4.2 – Include information on the Technician Commitment as part of the new staff induction process for all staff (technical, academic and professional services) in relevant departments and within relevant internal training courses. V4.3 - Encourage inclusion at outreach and public engagement events e.g., Science Museum volunteering, Open Days, career days, research events, and T-PIKE initiatives. V4.4 – To encourage external Knowledge Exchange (KE) projects through engagement with the T-PIKE project.	Staff feedback demonstrates an awareness of the Technician Commitment at the University. Technical staff participation in outreach and public engagement events. Successful Knowledge Exchange projects by technical staff.	Action Plan published on the website August 2024. Leaflet produced by December 2024. Outreach and public engagement events ongoing. KE projects in line with the T-PIKE project timeline.	TC Lead time. Web team, Media Centre, and Communications and External Relations staff time. Organisational Development. T-PIKE Programme Manager and T-PIKE Knowledge Exchange Officer.	Action owner: TCWG Chair Supported by: TC Lead HR Business Partner T-PIKE Programme Manager	V, S, CD
Sustainability - Ensure the future sustainability of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised.						
S1 – To monitor progress of the Technician Commitment Action Plan and enable agile delivery of its aims through effective management.	S1.1 – Monitoring progress of the Action Plan is a standing item on the TCWG agenda. S1.2 – To recruit a Technician Commitment Lead to manage the Action Plan delivery for the full lifetime of the plan, and to provide ongoing training and support for them to develop in the role. S1.3 – Ensure T-PIKE supports the delivery of relevant actions within the TC Action Plan where aims align, through close collaboration between the T-PIKE project team and the TC Lead. S1.4 – Ensure the ongoing evaluation processes for T-PIKE feed directly into the delivery approach for the Technician Commitment Action Plan, by adapting actions based on evaluation outcomes.	Green RAG rating against actions in meeting progress reports. Technician Commitment Lead recruited and inducted into the role.	Termly reporting to the TCWG Recruitment completed by October 2024.	Funding for the Technician Commitment Lead role via the University's financial commitment to T-PIKE. TCWG Chair and T-PIKE Programme Manager time.	Action owner: TCWG Chair Supported by: T-PIKE Programme Manager	S

Aim	Actions	Success Measures	Time frame	Resources	Responsible	TC Pil'
[TCR - R1 and R3] [T-PIKE WP1, WP2, WP3 and WP4]						
S2 – Develop clear Career Pathways for technical staff to improve career progression opportunities. [TCR - R2, R7 and R9] [T-PIKE WP3]	S2.1 – To review the standardised job description templates and make updates if necessary. S2.2 – Explore potential benefits that can be drawn from the standardised job description templates for central professional services teams. S2.3 – Develop a Grade 3 job description template for technical apprenticeships and Technical Development Assistants. S2.4 – Develop a Grade 9 job description template to extend the Career Pathway. S2.5 – Produce a guidance document for managers on how to use the job description templates. S2.6 – Investigate options for HR processes relating to progression between the standardised job description templates where technical staff have developed the skills required and there is a sustained business need for the work to be performed at a higher level. The outcome will inform our approach to managing the Technical Career Pathway outlined by the job description templates. S2.7 – In collaboration with the T-PIKE project, support the implementation of the Technical Development Assistant (TDA) roles to provide entry routes for new technical staff and support the sustainability of technical teams. S2.8 – In collaboration with T-PIKE, ensure there are clear mechanisms for acting-up and backfilling technical roles, such as through TDAs, and documents outlining the financial and HR processes to facilitate temporary role changes for technical staff. S2.9 – Investigate opportunities for technician entry pathways such as though T-Levels.	Technician job description templates remain fit for purpose and continue to be used. The successful implementation of a new Technical Career Pathway. Technical roles are backfilled when required. Technical Development Assistants are recruited and trained in role.	Job descriptions reviewed and new templates and guidance in place by December 2024. Use of job templates for central professional service teams considered by July 2025. Progression processes investigated by July 2026. Backfilling and TDAs in line with T-PIKE project timeline.	HR Business Partner time. TC Lead time. T-PIKE Programme Manager time. T-PIKE project funding for TDA roles and backfilling. University CareerHub.	Action owner: TCWG Chair Supported by: HR Business Partner TC Lead T-PIKE Programme Manager	**R, CD**

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S3 – Increase research income directly linked to technical staff time. [TCR – R5] [T-PIKE WP2]	S3.1 – Work with the Research Enterprise Office and Faculty Research Committees to make sure technicians are directly costed into grant applications. S3.2 - Ensure funding mechanisms for recovering technician time on grants are clear so that roles can be backfilled. S3.3 – Support technicians to apply for research funding as principal investigators and co-investigators by promoting funding opportunities and providing guidance for writing applications and navigating internal approval processes. S3.4 – Create a network 'pool' of technicians who are interested in contributing to research and research grants to help match them to relevant opportunities. S3.5 - Investigate potential benefits of establishing centrally managed equipment platforms/facilities managed by technicians. S3.6 – Through the T-PIKE project, explore opportunities for research related KE/consultancy work to bring in income from industry and other external partners.	Increased number of funding applications submitted each year with named technicians or technical staff costs included. Increase in successful applications for research funding that includes technical research staff. Technicians apply for, and receive, research funding.	Ongoing promotion work. Funding mechanisms clarified by December 2024. Monitoring progress annually in the summer term. Investigate centrally managed platforms by July 2026. KE/consultancy in line with the T-PIKE project timeline.	REO staff time and Tableau reporting to monitor progress. TC Lead time.	Action owner: TC Lead Supported by: Faculty Deans for Research REO staff T-PIKE KE Officer	V, S, R, CD
S4 - Strengthen networks between technical staff, internally and externally, with shared expertise in order to maximise productivity. [TCR - R13] [T-PIKE WP4]	S4.1 - Investigate options for the management of a technical resources repository, reviewing the benefits of a University-wide or Eastern Arc shared platform for this, and potential links with the online T-PIKE training resources. S4.2 – Continue the twice termly informal coffee mornings for technical staff where they can exchange knowledge across all disciplines. S4.3 – Facilitate engagement with the wider technical, academic and industry communities, such as conferences, T-PIKE placements, sitting on UKRI funding body panels, and sharing best practice with technical colleagues at other institutions.	Resource repository is accessed regularly (if applicable). Consistent or increased attendance for coffee mornings. Survey of technicians identifies an increase in external networking activities.	Resource repository options considered by April 2025. Coffee mornings twice per term. Ongoing engagement with external networks.	TC Lead time. Annual survey of technical staff. T-PIKE project funding for placements and networking events.	Action owner: TC Lead Supported by: T-PIKE Programme Manager	V, S, CD

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S5 – Improve the recruitment processes for technical roles to ensure successful hiring of a motivated and diverse workforce. [TCR – R4 and R8] [T-PIKE WP3]	S5.1 – Review where job adverts are promoted and consider options to increase visibility to a wider audience and identified underrepresented groups, such as women. S5.2 – Evaluate technical staff engagement in wider recruitment activities, such as interview panels and activities, and consider where increased representation can bring benefits. S5.3 – Investigate best-practice for technical team structures within HE, comparing centrally managed teams and department-based teams. Review potential impact on recruitment and retention for each approach. S5.4 – In collaboration with the T-PIKE project team, evaluate the effectiveness of backfill arrangements and TDA roles in facilitating senior technical staff to undertake placements and development opportunities.	The diversity of our technical workforce is in line with national benchmarking. Technical roles are successfully recruited to on the first attempt. Fixed-term roles and secondment opportunities are in place when required.	Review job advert promotion by July 2025. Evaluate technician engagement in recruitment and team structures by July 2026. Backfill and TDA evaluation in line with the T-PIKE project timeline.	HR Business Partner time. TC Lead time. NTDC Survey results to identify under-represented groups. T-PIKE project team time.	Action owner: HR Business Partner Supported by: TC Lead Technical Managers T-PIKE Programme Manager	**V,** **S**
Recognition - Support technicians to gain recognition through professional registration and external awards schemes.						
R1 – Continue to raise awareness of the benefits of professional registration and to provide support for those who which to pursue it. [TCR - R10]	R1.1 – Provide information on the professional registration options for technical staff through the mailing list and at technician events. R1.2 – Support with the application process by ensuring access to information and application writing sessions. R1.3 – Consider funding options for the first year of professional registration for technical staff, assess whether funding could be extended into subsequent years, and if applicable promote, how available financial support for professional registration can be accessed.	Technical staff are aware of professional registration opportunities when surveyed.	Ongoing. Funding confirmed for each financial year in August.	TC Lead time. Application support and resources from registration bodies. Funding for the first year of registration (if applicable). Annual survey of technical staff.	Action owner: TC Lead Supported by: Technical Managers TCWG representatives	**R, CD**
R2 – Improve recognition of the vital role technical staff	R2.1 - Create an understanding among researchers of the importance of including technicians on research papers, through faculty and department meetings, discussions with technician	Increase in the number of technicians included in research papers.	Ongoing culture change.	REO staff time and Tableau reporting to	Action owner: TC Lead	**V,** **S**, **R, CD**

Aim	Actions	Success Measures	Time frame	Resources	Responsible	TC Pil'
play in delivering research. [TCR - R11]	representatives, REO support, and promoting how this links REF and UKRI funding opportunities. R2.2 – Monitor when technicians are authors, co-authors, and where their input is recognised in research papers, identify gaps in recognition and target areas for improvement.		Annual review of research papers in the summer term.	monitor progress.	Supported by: Faculty Deans for Research REO staff TCWG representatives	
R3 – Improve recognition of the vital role technical staff play in delivering education.	R3.1 – Improve awareness across the University of the contribution that technical staff make to education and teaching, through faculty and department meetings, discussions with technician representatives, recognition through awards, and articles in University newsletters.	Leadership, academic staff, and professional services teams engaging with technical staff on education initiatives.	Ongoing.	TC Lead time	Action owner: TC Lead Supported by: TCWG representatives	**V, R**
R4 – To gain external recognition for the achievements of our technical staff.	R4.1 – To facilitate nominations to external awards where relevant, such as THE Awards, Papin Prize, and the Hidden REF, by promoting opportunities and providing help with writing/editing applications. R4.2 – Where technical staff are acting as champions for an area, such as outreach, sustainability, or equity, diversity and inclusion, this will be recognised and commended by senior staff.	Nominations for external awards are submitted. Staff are successfully shortlisted for awards.	Awards nomination support in line with submission deadlines.	TC Lead time Communications and External Relations staff time	Action owner: TC Lead Supported by: Communications and External Relations	**V, R**
Career Development - Enable career progression opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathways.						
CD1 – Provide clear, documented career pathways. [TCR - R2 and R9]	CD1.1 – Produce a guidance document for the Technical Career Pathways, including a flow diagram, information on the differentiation between grades, and outlining the three promotion pathways; research, education, and management. CD1.2 – Include technician specific information in the professional development and training area of the staff directory to share information on how to progress through the technical career pathways.	Guidance and Moodle content available to staff.	Guidance and Moodle content in place by July 2026.	HR Business Partner time. Organisational Development. TC Lead time.	Action owner: HR Business Partner Supported by: Organisational Development TC Lead	**S**, **CD**

Aim	Actions	Success Measures	Time frame	Resources	Responsible	TC Pil'
CD2 – Ensure technicians are given access to training and professional development opportunities. [TCR - R10] [T-PIKE WP1]	CD2.1 – Work with line managers to ensure time is allocated for professional development and training within workload models. CD2.2 – Monitor the implementation of Performance and Development Reviews (PDRs) to ensure they take place annually for technical staff. CD2.3 - Deliver professional development workshops for technicians twice a year to provide training and networking opportunities. CD2.4 – To undertake a detailed review of the training needs identified through the December 2023 NTDC survey. CD2.5 – Enhance the internal training provision offered by Organisational Development to acknowledge and adapt to the identified needs of technical staff. CD2.6 – Provide funding to access to external training and networking events through Department Operating Budgets (DOB) and a designated fund linked to the T-PIKE project. CD2.7 – Facilitate access to coaching and mentoring opportunities, such as through Organisational Development coaching courses, and the Eastern Arc mentoring scheme. CD2.8 – Develop training sessions specifically for technical staff on education delivery, such as teaching practices, preparing teaching materials, demonstration techniques, and student support. CD2.9 – Produce a termly updates on development opportunities and Technician Commitment progress via email. CD2.10 - Undertake a second NTDC survey in conjunction with the T-PIKE project to review progress and identify further training needs.	All technicians engage in some form of training each year. All technicians receive a PDR each year. Sustained or increased attendance at Technician Workshops. Feedback from Technician Workshops is positive. Sustained or increased engagement in external training and networking activities. Technical staff from Essex achieve the T-PIKE Bronze award.	Training ongoing. Annual review of take up of training and completion of PDRs to be completed in the summer term. Technician Workshops to take place each year in December and June. NTDC training review to take place by December 2024. Termly information updates. Second NTDC survey in line with the T-PIKE project timeline.	Organisational Development resource. HR Business Partner time. TC Lead time. NTDC survey resource. DOB training funds. T-PIKE project training funds. HR system reports on training and PDRs.	<u>Action owner</u>: TCWG Chair <u>Supported by</u>: Organisational Development HR Business Partner TC Lead T-PIKE Programme Manager	**S**, **CD**
CD3 – Further develop the management and leadership skills for line	CD3.1 - Provide technical management skills training to those already in line management roles, as well as those interested in developing into the technical management career pathway, through the	Technical managers have completed relevant training.	Ongoing training.	Organisational Development. TC Lead time.	<u>Action owner</u>: TC Lead	**S**, **CD**

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managers of technical staff. [TCR - R9, R10 and R15] [T-PIKE WP3]	University's leadership and management programmes, and external training providers. CD3.2 – Technical managers to complete the Organisational Development session "Ensuring effective PDRs (for reviewers or managers)" CD3.3 – Continue the monthly online technical manager networking sessions to share best practice CD3.4 – In collaboration with the T-PIKE project, secure opportunities for technical staff to gain line management and leadership experience and to engage with the leadership support outlined in WP3.	Technical managers feel supported in their roles and feedback on the networking sessions is positive. Technical staff from Essex achieve the T-PIKE Silver award.	PDR training to be completed by December 2024. Monthly online technical manager networking sessions. New leadership opportunities in line with the T-PIKE project timeline.	T-PIKE Programme Manager time.	Supported by: Organisational Development Technical managers T-PIKE Programme Manager	
CD4 - Facilitate opportunities for career development through Knowledge Exchange. [T-PIKE WP2]	CD4.1 - Enable technical staff to share best practice and improve their skills through Knowledge Exchange projects at industry, third sector, and other organisations and with other universities as part of the T-PIKE project.	Successful KE projects are established and completed.	In line with the T-PIKE project timeline.	T-PIKE project team time. T-PIKE funding for placements.	Action owner: T-PIKE Programme Manager Supported by: T-PIKE KE Officer	V, S, CD