



Technician **Commitment**

Technician Commitment

Stage Two Self-Assessment & Action Plan

Organisation: Open University

Name of Institutional Lead: Julia Barkans

E-mail: Julia.Barkans@open.ac.uk

Contact Number: 01908 59474

Please provide an overview of technical staff structures in your organisation

The Open University's mission is to be open to people, places, methods, and ideas. It provides distance learning and therefore there is not a permanent cohort of undergraduates on site.

Our technical team support research activities, postgraduate students, on campus practical sessions and experimentation for students to access remotely.

The Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) technicians comprise specialist Analytical Project Officers, Technical Project Officers, Laboratory Technicians and Laboratory Managers, all of whom play a vital role in the delivery of research and teaching excellence.

Our remit is extended to support the OpenSTEM laboratories which provides practical teaching in aspects of STEM to the distance learning community. Using remotely accessible hardware for laboratory and exploratory studies ranging from electronics to chemical synthesis and from microscopes to telescopes, students can access the various instruments and other remote-controlled resources virtually anytime from anywhere with an internet connection. <https://stem.open.ac.uk/study/openstem-labs>

We also deliver optional on-site schools to deliver practical skills to students.

Number of technicians in the organisation and where they are based

A team of sixty-two technical support staff: -

Seven in the School of Life Health and Chemical Sciences

Five in Electron Microscopy

Nine in the School of Environment, Earth, and Ecosystem Sciences

Six in the Ecosystem and Geobiology

Seven in Astrobiology

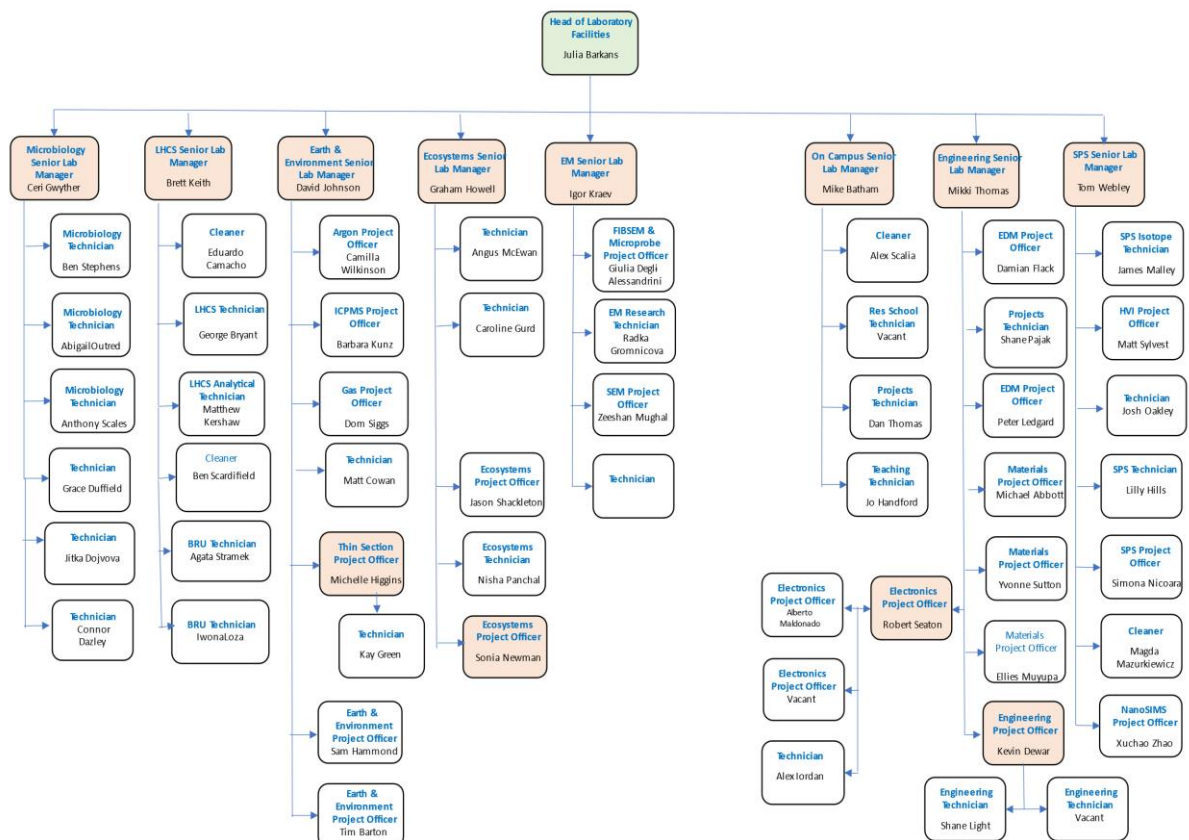
Fourteen in the School of Engineering and Innovation

Eight in the School of Physical Sciences

Five in the Open Science Teaching Laboratories

One Head of Laboratory Facilities

STEM Lab Technical Staff January 2022



Please tell us about your institution’s approach to the Technician Commitment since becoming a signatory. Comments on governance and reporting lines, resources and wider community engagement are welcomed.

Governance:

The University’s Academic Governance Structure is headed by the Senate.

The Head of Laboratory Facilities is a member of

- Senate
- STEM Executive

- STEM Research and Enterprise Committee
- University Health and Safety Committee
- University Recovery Group

The STEM Executive comprise Executive Dean, Heads of School, Director, Head of staffing, Head of Curriculum Delivery, Head of Technical Services, Head of Business Development and Head of Laboratory Facilities. The Exec meets every two weeks to discuss the implementation of Faculty Strategy. In addition, the Exec team have a weekly briefing with the Dean focussing on operational matters, including laboratory facilities.

The Head of Laboratory Facilities has every opportunity to ensure that the ‘technician voice’ is present in the development and formation of institutional action plans.

The Head of Laboratory Facilities meets formally once a month with the Laboratory Managers. Notes from the Executive meetings, Research and Enterprise Committee and the Technicians Steering Group are included in the Chairs report to ensure dissemination.

Regular Team Meetings chaired by the Laboratory Managers for their individual teams encourage discussion which is in turn are fed back into the monthly Lab Managers meeting and if appropriate to Executive Committee.

A Technicians Steering Group meets every month and is made up of representatives from each laboratory area. The Group is tasked with producing the action plan in consultation with the wider technical team

Resources:

In addition to funding technical registration with the Science Council, the faculty also funds ongoing professional fees and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for its technicians. CPD is discussed at annual appraisal and the Head of Laboratory Facilities applies to the Staff Development fund accordingly. Merits and team awards are encouraged as are one off small payment for ‘Going the Extra mile’

As a result of OU staff surveys, feedback from the Schools Support Staff Project, and to fulfil the University and STEM strategy to foster a dynamic and inclusive culture, we have been looking at ways to promote, encourage and support greater staff engagement with each other and the wider faculty, specifically amongst our academic related and support staff. The overall aim was to produce a range of planned forums of engagement activities, which potentially also incorporated other overarching aims targeted for example The Well-Being projects.

Wider Community engagement.

Achievements are highlighted in the weekly STEM all-staff Newsletter and on the occasions the University SharePoint under “Headline News”.

STEM technical staff are engaging in the wider community and examples of this are as follows: -

- “School Listeners”, for members of the School who want to talk to someone independent, without invoking informal or formal University procedure.
- Three members of the team are members of School Athena SWAN panels.
- One member of the team has attended the Aurora ‘Women in Leadership’ Course
- One member of staff was interviewed for a feature in the University SharePoint citing how Athena SWAN had helped his career.

- Apprentice ambassador, one of our apprentices is a member of YAAN and promotes apprenticeships in local schools
- Three apprentices and their mentors were filmed for Apprentice week to promote apprenticeships in the OU
- Outreach, technicians engage in outreach activities at local schools, Brownies and Scouts to promote fossils, magic of oxygen, moon night, Health and Safety, mass spectroscopy and chemistry.
Regular participation at the Edinburgh International Science Festival.
OU open days/evenings. promotional activities. Regular lab internal lab tours to People Services, Unions, administrative staff, associate lecturers.
- Participation in Soapbox Science in Milton Keynes centre
- Poster presentations
- Peer reviewed publications
- Laboratory Manager, shortlisted for 2019 Best Support to Research at the OU Research Excellence Awards
- Research project officer (technician) at The Open University's Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics won the 2019 Times Higher Education, **Outstanding Technician of the Year** category
- Two Laboratory Managers received the Executive Deans Award based on the re-development of the Ecology labs to accommodate the expansion of a 6.7 million Astrobiology grant.
- Podcast interview for the International Day of Women and Girls in STEM (11th Feb 2020) from the Science Council
- Collaboration with Education and Training Foundation to produce workshops and technical talks for teachers.
- Head of laboratory Facilities 2022 winner of Lab Managers international award in 'Excellence in Lab Leadership'.

Please provide a RAG analysis on your institutional 24-month action plan indicating which activities you have undertaken and completed (green), which are in progress (amber) and which are still to be carried out (red). Please provide an explanation for those categorised as red.

24- Month Action Plan	
Theme	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"> • Instigate a consistent policy to ensure that where technicians have contributed to research outputs they are acknowledged or named as authors. Publish and disseminate a Fair Attribution Policy. • Technical conference to highlight expertise and equipment available to research. The pandemic has delayed this activity. • Ensure that the Laboratory Facilities SharePoint is reviewed and current. • Ensure that Faculty Laboratory Facilities Intranet is reviewed and current. • Produce a regular e newsletter. • School photo boards are kept up to date with changes in technical staff. • Technician contributions continue to be disseminated via Faculty/School Twitter and other official social media accounts.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technicians contribute to STEM '#MeetusMondays', short videos produced to give insight into various roles in the University.
<p>Recognition</p> <p>Support technicians to gain recognition through professional registration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nominations to external award schemes that recognise the contribution of technical staff. State in future job adverts that applicant should have or be working towards professional status. Next round of RSci RSciTech submissions.
<p>Career Development</p> <p>Enable career progression opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development opportunities signposted to technicians and aligned to career pathways. CPD is actively encouraged. Line Managers determine each member of the team's requirement at CDSA, and a spread sheet is created, and funds allocated accordingly. Training is offsite but more commonly training is delivered on Site such as NEBOSH, Basic Lab Skills, Microscope care. Technical teams are encouraged to attend inhouse on site lab schools
<p>Future Sustainability of technical skills</p> <p>Ensure the future sustainability of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised</p>	<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 to commence autumn 2018.

Please tell us how you evidence that your action plan has had/is having impact?

Assessing the impact both quantitatively and qualitatively is outlined in our new 36-month action plan. However, qualitatively the OU technical team has been extremely visible throughout the pandemic and present on Site to maintain the research programme on behalf of their academic colleagues. The Technician Commitment has started to raise the profile of the team and ensure their input is recognised. This is confirmed by excellent feedback and authorship/acknowledgment on peer reviewed publications.

Facilities

Please provide details of any additional initiatives/programmes/activities aligned to your Technician Commitment that are not covered in your original action plan.

- Tech Tea at 3 (3pm)
- University tours to showcase labs and technical support
- Technician roles have clear job descriptions
- Technicians present on decision making committees where appropriate
- Technicians visible in costing mechanisms for research grants
- Films/images showcasing technicians
- Technician Open Lab/Workshop

- Nominations to external award schemes that recognise the contribution of technical staff
- Note, record, and publicise the number of citations for Technicians

36-Month Action Plan

Theme	Activity	Evidence /Comments	
Visibility Ensure that technicians within the organisation are identifiable and that the contribution of technicians is visible within and beyond the institution	Technician roles have clear job descriptions	Job descriptions standardised with text added to Desirable Section “Profesionally Registered or working towards Professional Registration.	Green
	Technicians to continue to feature in organisation prospectuses and marketing materials	Featured on OU web site under Facilities and Enterprise. Extend to other material. Further involmnet required at grant proposal stage.	Amber Amber
	Technicians present on decision making committees where appropriate	Ongoing and working with the Research & Enterprise Team.	Amber
	Technicians visible in costing mechanisms for research grants	Continue to encourage the reluctant few to become more involved.	Amber
	A vibrant and active ‘Technician Network’	Prepare a University video showcasing the work of Technicians to promote careers and recruitment.	Amber
	Films/images showcasing technicians Technicians present and active in careers, outreach and widening participation activities	Contiue to do so. Currently working with the Education and Training Foundation	Amber
	Technician exhibition/poster events showcasing skills, talent, and research		


	<p>Apply for funding to support a technical conference to highlight expertise and equipment available to research in the STEM Faculty</p> <p>Continue to encourage Technicians to contribute articles to STEM weekly newsletter</p> <p>Instigate Technical SharePoint Site</p> <p>Promote a Mental Health agenda in the technical community to include sessions on mental health and wellbeing, mental health awareness, mental health first aid</p>	<p>to produce a programme of workshops for T level Science teachers</p> <p>This initiative is carried over from the last commitment. It was not possible due to covid-19 pandemic</p> <p>A really good way to show case contribution to the wider university.</p> <p>Better communication</p> <p>Highlighted over the previous two years. The team whilst on site, support each other through sickness and home schooling. Also supported distressed students.</p>	<p>Green</p> <p>Red</p> <p>Green</p> <p>Amber</p> <p>Amber</p>
<p>Recognition</p> <p>Support technicians to gain recognition through professional registration</p>	<p>Continue to communicate the opportunity to become professionally registered to technical staff (Science Council, Engineering Council, BCS, RSC).</p> <p>Internal award schemes recognise the contribution of technical staff</p>	<p>Refresh Steering Group</p> <p>Instigate a group of mentors</p> <p>Set up a Professional Registration working party.</p> <p>Set aside two hours each week for technicians to work together on their Professional Registration</p> <p>Continue to do so</p> <p>Continue to do so</p>	<p>Green</p> <p>Green</p> <p>Green</p>

	Nominations to external award schemes that recognise the contribution of technical staff	Fair attribution policy ratified by STEM Research and Enterprise Committee	Green
	An institutional policy that ensures that technicians have recognition on research outputs	Continue to promote the newsletter and incorporate more features of interest	Amber
	Technician Newsletter		
Career Development			
Enable career progression opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathway	Dedicated webpage showcasing case studies of technician careers	Develop a source of easily accessible information for the technical community	Amber
	Dedicated technical training provision	Identified at CDSA	Amber
	Mentors for technicians	Support	Amber
	Career development and professional registration workshops	As above under recognition	Amber
	Set up a database of to formally collate and record training and development activity	Set up a sub group	Amber
	Promote secondment opportunities both within the faculty and externally.	Reinstigate as halted during Covid	Amber
	Continue rotation of core technicians within the faculty	Reinstigate as halted during Covid	Amber
	Identify and record development requirements at annual CDSA	Continue to do so	Amber

<p>Sustainability of technical skills</p> <p>Ensure the future sustainability of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised</p>	<p>Utilisation of the Apprenticeship Levy to train and upskill existing staff</p>	<p>Promote more widely. We currently have two members of staff taking advantage of the scheme</p>	<p>Amber</p>
	<p>Retain existing apprentices where possible</p>	<p>Our three apprentices attained distinction in their. One apprentice has subsequently secured a permanent position as a technician within the team. The other two contracts will come to the end of their consolidation year in August 22.</p>	<p>Amber</p>
	<p>Encourage staff to take advantage of the half day training in other areas. This will ensure they have skills beyond their immediate expertise if new positions come up.</p>	<p>Continue to do so. Uptake low possibly due to workload.</p>	<p>Amber</p>
	<p>Promote the STEM apprentice journey during apprentice week.</p>	<p>Continue to do so in the form of articles and videos.</p>	<p>Amber</p>

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

<http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/stem-faculty/laboratory-support/employer-champion-science-council>

Signed:  Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead

Date: 25/02/22

Signed:  Nick Braithwaite Technician Commitment Signatory, Leader of Institution

Date: 18/03/2022