Technician Commitment: Stage Two Self-Assessment & Action Plan Guidance

Please note: This guidance and template is for institutions who have already submitted their Stage One Self-Assessment & Action Plan, 12-13 months after becoming an official signatory of the Technician Commitment. This guidance and template refers to the second stage of self-assessment and action planning to be submitted 2 years after the submission of the original submission.

The Technician Commitment aims to ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technicians working in higher education and research, across all disciplines.

The second stage of self-assessment and action planning process asks for reflection on past action plans, progress and engagement and a further 36 month action plan. The self-assessment includes a 'RAG' analysis of previous action plans - a 'Red, Amber & Green' status report.

The Technician Commitment Steering Board does not seek to dictate how organisations promote a positive culture for the technician community. This is a matter for autonomous institutions and the technician, research and academic community to agree. It is expected that as a minimum, signatories publicly state their Technician Commitment signatory status and institutional action plans on a dedicated and discoverable webpage, along with their named point of contact. The Steering Board asks signatories to evidence that the 'technician voice' is present in the development and formation of institutional action plans. The Technician Commitment is a collaborative endeavour and the Steering Board will support and facilitate the establishment and sharing of best practice demonstrated in the self-assessments and action plans. A vibrant community of Institutional Leads tasked with implementing the Technician Commitment has developed since the Commitment's inception and the Steering Board aims to ensure a range of forums are available to enable peers to share expertise, good practice and experiences.

To continue to support institutional action planning, please see Appendix A for examples of activities and initiatives that have been successfully implemented in a range of universities and research institutes. Additional details are available on the Technician Commitment's dedicated online resource, available at http://technicians.org.uk/techniciancommitment/. Cross referencing to other sector institutional reviews relevant to technicians is welcomed; for example, the Steering Board are keen to learn how signatories are advancing equality, diversity and inclusion for the technical community and institutions may wish to reference Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charter submissions. The Steering Board are also keen to learn of Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) submissions and Research Excellence Framework (REF) environment statements where technicians have been explicitly mentioned.

Please note that finalised Action Plans should be signed off at an institutional leadership level (e.g. Vice-Chancellor/President/Director level).

For any additional queries, please contact k.vere@sciencecouncil.org

Please note that finalised 3-year Action Plans should be signed off at an institutional leadership level (e.g. Vice-Chancellor/President/Director level).

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

Organisation: **University of Liverpool**

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Contact Number: **0151 794 2193**

Background workforce demographics

There are 669 staff in technical roles at the University of Liverpool. The data below present demographic information on the technical workforce. These data provide the background against which we have interpreted a) areas in which we see continued improvements, for example the gender split of our technical workforce and b) areas that will receive additional focus over the next three years, for example enhancing the talent pipeline of technical staff.

Fig. 1 shows distribution by management area. Staff in technical roles are primarily located at our main campus in Liverpool, our Leahurst campus and Ness Gardens in Wirral.
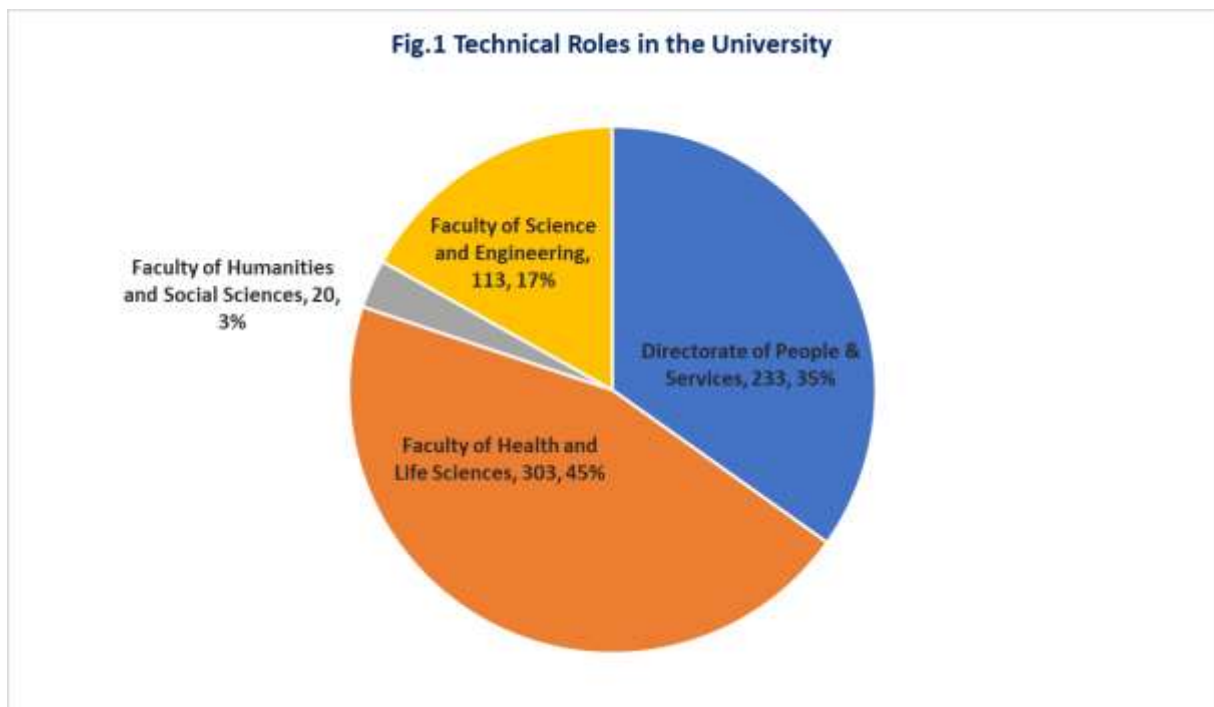
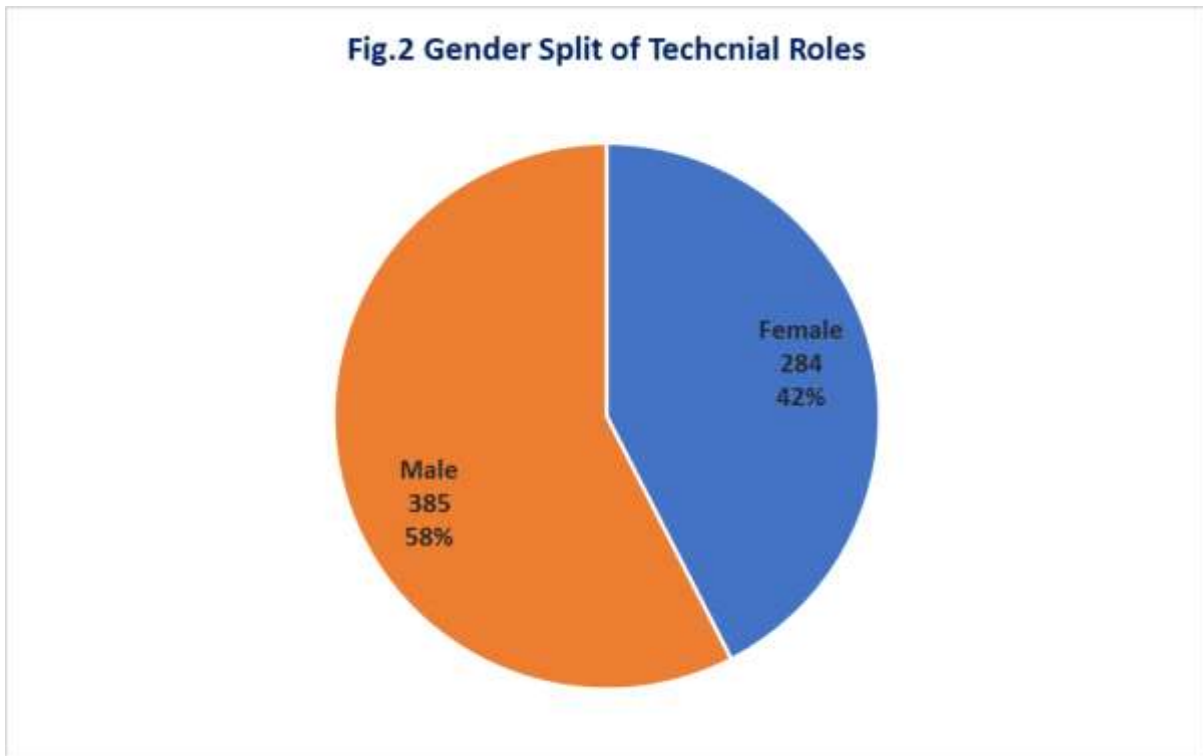Fig.2 shows how the 669 technical roles have a fairly even split by gender.

Fig.2 Gender Split of Techcnial Roles

Female
284
42%

Male
385
58%

Fig.3 shows how the 669 technical roles breakdown in broad categories of ethnicity.

Fig.3 Ethnicity of Techcnial Roles

■ People of colour   ■ White   ■ Unknown / Information Refused

7%   4%

89%
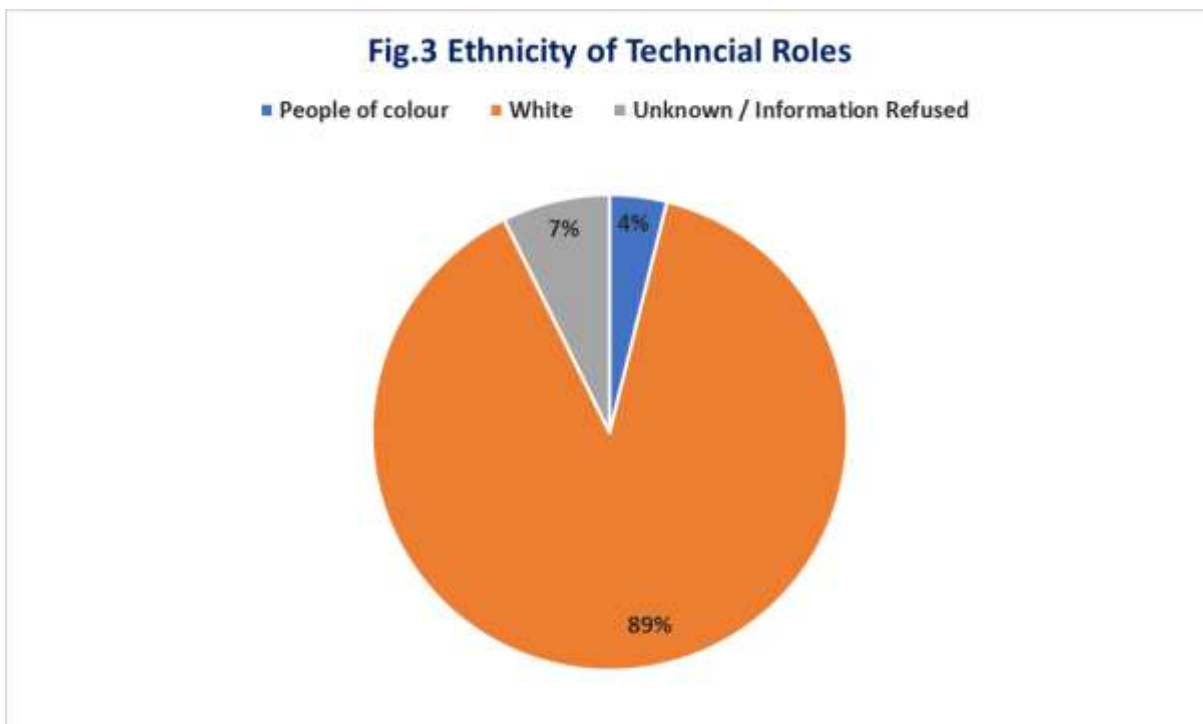
Fig.4 Shows the spread of age ranges across the technical workforce.

Fig.4 Age Range of Technicians
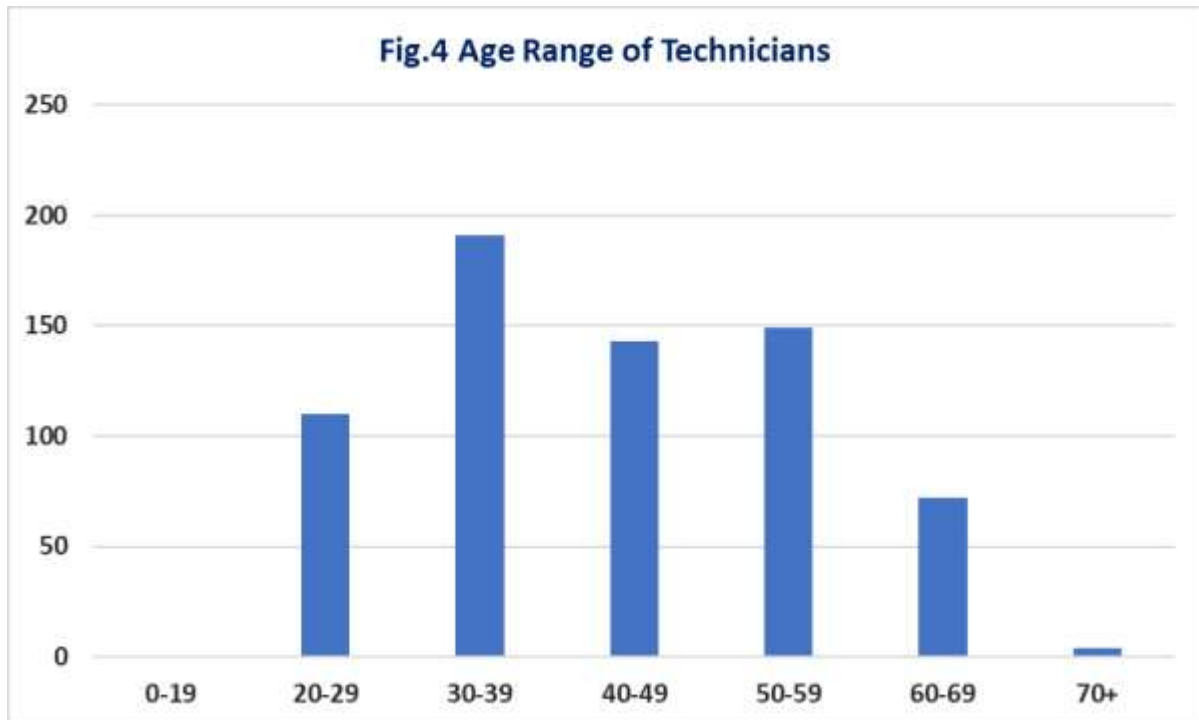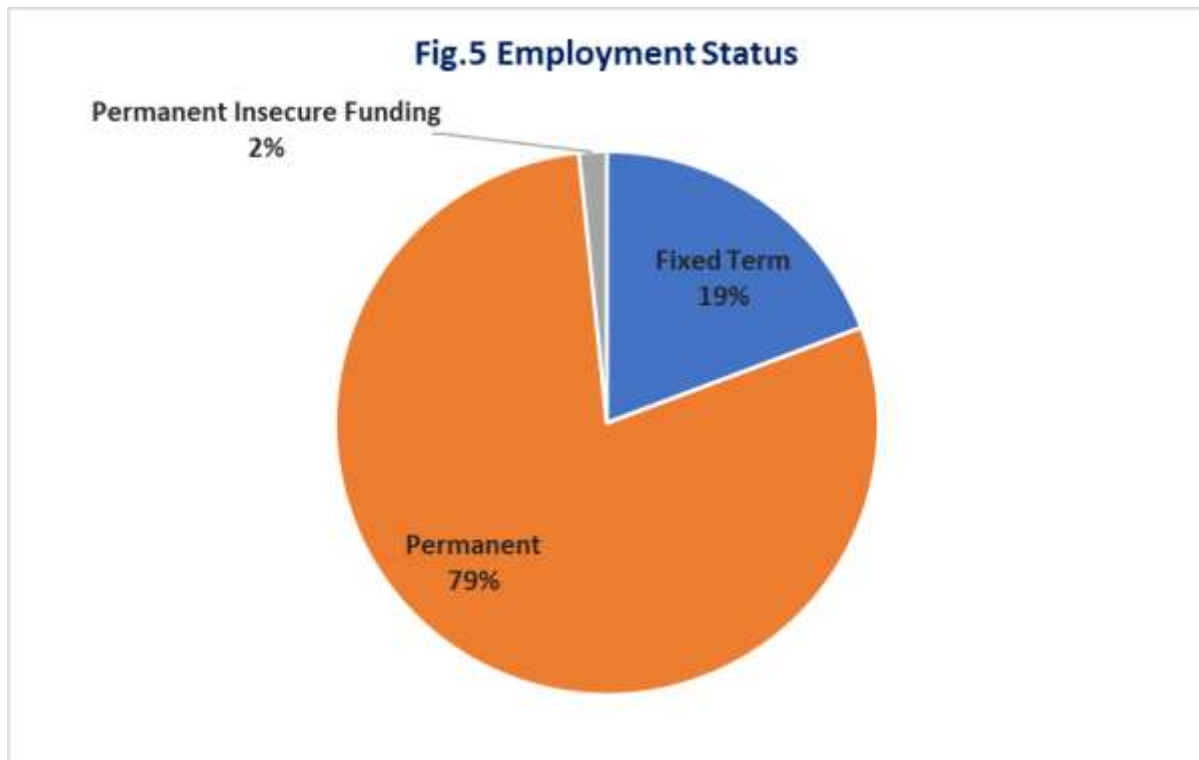

Fig.5 shows the employment status of the technical workforce, the majority being employed on a permanent basis.

Fig.5 Employment Status

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.

The Technician Commitment is now firmly situated as a core institutional agenda and directly used to inform discussions on workforce development and planning.

This focus on the aims and outcomes of the Technician Commitment is reflected in our internal management of the institutional action plan. We have an established Technician Commitment Steering Group chaired by the Director of the Academy, who is the institutional lead for people development. Membership of the Steering Group is made up of senior technical leaders and representatives of technical services across the three faculties and our specialist facilities.

Progress against the action plan and all related issues linked to the support and development of the technical workforce are reported through to the University's Senior Leadership Team, via the Technician Ambassadors established as part of our action plan. The Director of People and Services and Executive Pro-Vice Chancellor for Science and Engineering are the current Technician Ambassadors and ensue issues related to technicians are considered at the highest level.

In addition, the Technician Commitment is now embedded as a core topic within parallel activities, including the formal management of the University's Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and associated HR Excellence in Research Award. A member of the Technician Commitment Steering Group attends the Concordat Steering Group as a representative of the technical workforce, ensuring the clear synergies and common aspirations between these two activities are recognised and addressed.

Significant progress has been made since the University of Liverpool became a signatory of the Technician Commitment. We are proud that this progress was maintained during 2020-21 and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. While we have had to rapidly pivot all of our face-to-face activity to online and design-in hybrid-forms of practice, we have been able to continue to deliver on our action plan. Indeed, many of the activities we have engaged in have become even more valuable, as we have supported the technical workforce through this extremely challenging time in which they played such a critical role.

In this context, details on progress to date are captured below under each of the key themes of the Commitment.

<u>Visibility</u>

- Established a regular *Technical Leaders' Forum* for senior technical staff, to give a voice to this key technical community and ensure strategic engagement with the steering group and Technician Ambassadors. In addition to providing a vehicle for direct engagement with formal TC actions, the Forum operates as a development event, with regular external and internal guests and speakers. An additional key output of the Forum has been the new links and relationships established between members who would previously not have come into contact.
- Launched the *Technicians' Network* as a mechanism for further community building, fostering relationships, enabling communication across the technical workforce and as a route for development activity. Since its inception, the Network has organised several events

including a launch event and workplace tours and is currently supporting a cohort of technicians through the professional registration process.

- Held two flagship *Technical Showcase* events to raise the visibility of the role, impact and expertise of the technical community. These events proved very successful, attracting over 1000 staff in total between the two. To see activities held in our last showcase [click here](#).
- Launched a dedicated web presence, the *Technicians' Hub,* hosted on the University's external website. The Hub provides a single point of access to all information related to the Commitment and associated development and support for the technical community.
- Designed and launched a quarterly publication dedicated to celebrating the achievements of technicians. *Technically Speaking* is distributed across the University and its social media channels and has provided a key mechanism for highlighting the huge value and impact of the technical community. The success of *Technically Speaking* has now inspired a parallel dedicated publication for researchers. To access the publication, see https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/technicians-hub/community/newsletter/
- Formalised advocacy for the technical community at senior leadership level by agreeing the establishment of two *Technician Ambassadors*. Two members of the Senior Leadership Team (one Academic and one Professional Services) have taken up these key roles, which explicitly highlight the significance of the technical workforce and the University's engagement with the Commitment. The Ambassadors act as a conduit through to the Senior Leadership Team, ensuring visibility for technician related activities and agendas. Importantly, the Ambassadors have also directly engaged in the Technical Leaders' Forums, providing updates from the senior leadership team to colleagues.

Recognition

- Established a dedicated fund to support technicians' engagement with professional registration. The fund enables the reimbursement of the first year of fees for any technician who becomes professionally registered with their relevant awarding body.
- Published and communicated *Fair attribution guidance* which outlines how technicians and technical facilities should be recognised as contributors to the research endeavour of the University.
- The university continues to be a 'Science Council Employer Champion'. As such, we actively promote professional registration as a key means of focusing on career development and progression.
- The University recognises the achievements of technical staff in the annual Staff Awards. A new category has been created 'Unsung Hero' to reflect the behind the scenes work of technical staff.
- The impact and importance of the technical workforce is now recognised in parallel processes and workstreams. This is evident in formal representation, such as a senior technician representing the community on the Concordat Steering Group and within cross-institutional projects, such as Research in an Inclusive and Sustainable Environment (RISE). The Director of the Academy actively represents the Technician Commitment Steering Group and wider staff networks as a member of the RISE Project Group.

Career Development

- Created a *Statement of Expectations* which has been agreed by our Senior Leadership Team, communicated throughout the University and published on our external webpages. The Statement outlines the expectations placed on technicians and technical leaders and

captures the commitment the university gives to the development of its technical workforce. The document mirrors the *Statement of Expectations for Researchers and Research Leaders* and stipulates a minimum of 10 days of development time be made available to technicians per annum, regardless of contract length or type.

- The University has begun scoping the development of a professional career pathway for technician. This work is formally incorporated into the University's planning cycle and is picked up in our forward Technician Commitment action plan.

- Created a dedicated *Technicians' Development Fund* to directly support opportunities for individual technicians and technical teams to engage in high-value development. An online process has been established, through which technicians can make a bid for funding, with a turnaround period of 2 weeks. Bids that demonstrate a high return on investment, for instance through their ability to cascade development to a wider population, or which can be articulated directly against the Technician Commitment, or which have match-funding from departments, are particularly welcomed.

- In addition to the opportunities for leadership and management development already available to technical staff, a specific focus on 'Technical Leadership' has been incorporated into the on-going review of the University's leadership development offer.

- Continued investment in our technical workforce through subscription to HEaTED and communication of the opportunities for development it presents.

Sustainability

- Created and currently piloting a skills-sharing app that technicians can use to learn new skills and techniques from fellow technicians within the university.

- Each school and department within the three faculties has been provided with workforce planning data to support managers to actively address talent development and ensure that the sustainability of technical services is being considered.

- Promoted technical careers and University study to school leavers through work experience programmes and aligned outreach activities, though these activities have been affected by the pandemic over the last 12 months.

- Supporting and hosting outreach events for local schools to encourage widening participation, again these activities have been affected by the pandemic.

- A key aspect of our on-going leadership development review focuses on how we identify, retain, and develop talent. Against the backdrop of this work, we are working on identifying potential future leaders within technical services to provide targeted development that equips them for future roles.

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.

This may be detailed here or attached to this document as an appendix.

In our previous action plan two items have been categorised as red. Progress has been difficult, especially in the last 12 months due to the pandemic.

Action 1.6 'to raise the visibility of technical careers across the Liverpool City Region and the North West of England'. During the autumn of 2019 the University was involved in a UK wide outreach programme, with students, academics and technicians from 6 other Universities as featured on the BBC One Show. However, this was cancelled in early 2020 due to the outbreak of Covid-19.

Action 4.5 'To investigate ways to enhance the technical skills of people outside of the University but within the Liverpool City Region'. Our plan was to use the apprenticeship levy to help organisations to upskill their own technical workforce. However, restrictions on how much the government would allow us to transfer to external businesses and the decreasing number of technical apprenticeships due to the pandemic means we have not been successful in reaching a significant number of employers with funding.

 See Appendix A for the full RAG rated document.

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

The core mechanisms for ensuring the impact and relevance of the agreed actions are embodied in the processes outlined above. The Steering Group, Technical Leaders' Forum, Technicians' Network and Technician Ambassadors are used on a continuous basis to iteratively evaluate the effectiveness and fit of any proposed action. Critical pieces of work such as the Statement of Expectation, Attribution of Fair Guidance policy and delivery of the Technicians' Development Fund have all been shaped and informed by the technical community and cohort of technical leaders. Alongside effective communications to the wider University population, through stand-out successes such as the *Technically Speaking* newsletter, we believe this enables the most sustainable and grounded approach to monitoring the impact of work aligned to the Commitment.

In addition, we draw on the outcomes of the institution-wide processes such as the staff survey, often to provide a catalyst for conversations with the technical community. We recently ran a full staff survey in 2019 and followed this in the following year with a pulse survey, the latter designed to measure the impact of the various initiatives at the University in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussion of the results of the surveys with our technicians highlighted that the Technician Commitment related actions initiated so far had helped improve their experience in the following areas:

- Overall experience
- Sense of purpose
- Training and development
- Reward and recognition
- Workload
- Wellbeing and stress

In terms of future development, the technical community focused on effective communication and opportunities for career progression as the two main opportunities for further improvement from the 2019 full staff survey.

During the following 2020 pulse survey, colleagues were asked for their views on priority themes including communication, leadership, wellbeing and change management in the context of the pandemic, as well as their experiences of adapting to working from home.

The survey was open to all staff working from home, on campus or on the furlough scheme. In total, 1,365 surveys were received. It showed a positive shift in the following areas:

- Managing change – staff feel supported through the difficult periods of recent change.
- Communication – Staff feel well informed about what is happening at the University.
- Leadership – Senior leaders are acting as good role models.
- Wellbeing – Staff feel that the University cares about health and wellbeing.

Our forward action plan builds on the insights provided by these survey outcomes. We will continue to seek ways to improve communication to and from the technical community and increase involvement in institutional change activities. We will also create a career pathway for technicians together with guidance on development activities aligned to a chosen route.

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

In 2019 a sector-wide report was launched that detailed the frontline support that technicians provide for student mental health and wellbeing. The report was developed by a collaborative team including the Technician Commitment, Science Council, Institute of Physics, Royal Society of Biology, Royal Society of Chemistry, University of Liverpool, and University of Nottingham. We were proud to be a part of this important piece of work which was informed by the survey responses from over 700 members of the technical community across 49 HEIs. The report can be found here: https://www.technicians.org.uk/assets/technician-commitment/pdfs/report-technicians-student-well-being.pdf

In November 2020 we hosted an online event titled *The University of Liverpool Technicians Supporting Student Wellbeing Webinar* which was attended by over 100 people from across the UK and included a panel discussion with shared experiences from technicians from several different institutions and backgrounds. This was originally intended to be a one-day conference in April 2020 but had to be postponed and then held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, the University of Liverpool was a project partner in the STEMM-CHANGE Changemaker Placement Programme. This is an innovative EPSRC-funded project offering short placements within the consortium for technical colleagues from underrepresented and minority groups. The project was run by the University of Nottingham and, as a project partner, the University of Liverpool was actively engaged in promoting the programme, assessing the applications, and organising suitable placements. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the placements from happening, but it is hoped that these will be rescheduled later this year. Information about the programme can be found here: https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/technicians/documents/stemm-change-brochure-change-maker.pdf

We now have technical representation on several overlapping initiatives: Athena SWAN, the Concordat for Researchers and representation at the Wellcome Trust Reimagining Research Townhall event. We will continue to seek avenues like these in the future where we can ensure the views of the technical workforce are heard.

In 2019 a university technician Bob Read, based in the Institute of Veterinary Science at Leahurst Campus was awarded a university Learning & Teaching Fellowship for his development of 3D resources to aid teaching. Bob was one of only four other winners in that year.

Finally, we are extremely proud that two of our colleagues have won external awards. These are: Paul Gilbert – Papin Prize 2019, John Waters – THE Outstanding Technician of the Year 2020.

Please provide a 36-month action plan; detailing plans to ensure your organisation continues to address 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 evidence how the 'technician voice' was present in the development and formation of the 36-month action plan.

See Appendix B

Please confirm that your Technician Commitment status and 3-year action plan is published on your organisation's website and provide the relevant URL here:
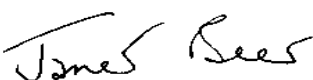
https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/technicians-hub/commitment/

Signed   (Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead)

Date: 30 March 2021

Signed   *James Bees*

(Technician Commitment Signatory – Leader of Institution)

Date: 29 March 2021