



National Technician Development Centre for HE

CREATING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE
FOR TECHNICAL STAFF AND SERVICES

One year of the National Technician Development Centre

By **Terry Croft** MBE, FIScT, CSci, Director
National Technician Development
Centre

We are proudly celebrating one year of the National Technician Development Centre which Lord Sainsbury officially opened on the 13th of February 2018.

Based in Sheffield, our Centre is the first of its kind focusing on the HE sector. Through our one-stop-shop we provide first-hand expertise to both senior management and individual technicians, helping them create and deliver a sustainable future for technical staff and services in line with their institutional strategic priorities.

During our first year in operation, the engagement and uptake of our services has been beyond our expectations. We are now working with over 30 HEIs and Research Institutions, providing expertise and bespoke services, including using the TDM Toolkit to deliver everything from skills audits through to developing new technical structures with new job descriptions.

Our team have also been very busy supporting the Technician Commitment initiative, where our experts have been working in partnership with individual universities and research institutions to deliver their action plans and meet their pledges with great success.

All of this couldn't have been achieved if it wasn't for the Office for Students, the University of Sheffield, Manchester



Metropolitan University and our other partners, who have provided funding and resources to create the UK's National Centre. Their recognition of the need for such a body for the HE sector has helped drive this forward. The way the sector has quickly recognised and engaged with the NTDC and requested our services has been tremendous, allowing us to meet our first year targets.

I must highlight the quality and expertise of the NTDC team in making the first year a great success but also their enthusiasm, dedication and passion shown in delivering our services and support to the technical community and the sector as a whole.

Year two is already off to a flying start with increasing demand for our services and support and our diary is filling up fast. This is excellent news and demonstrates how the sector has embraced their National Centre. The team and I are just custodians as the NTDC belongs to the sector – each individual university and colleague are a key reason for the success to date.

Finally, a big thank you to all the parties involved in reaching our first year milestone. I look forward to serving both the individual and the sector, in 2019 and beyond, in creating and delivering the sustainable future for technical staff and services that our sector demands.

CASE STUDY

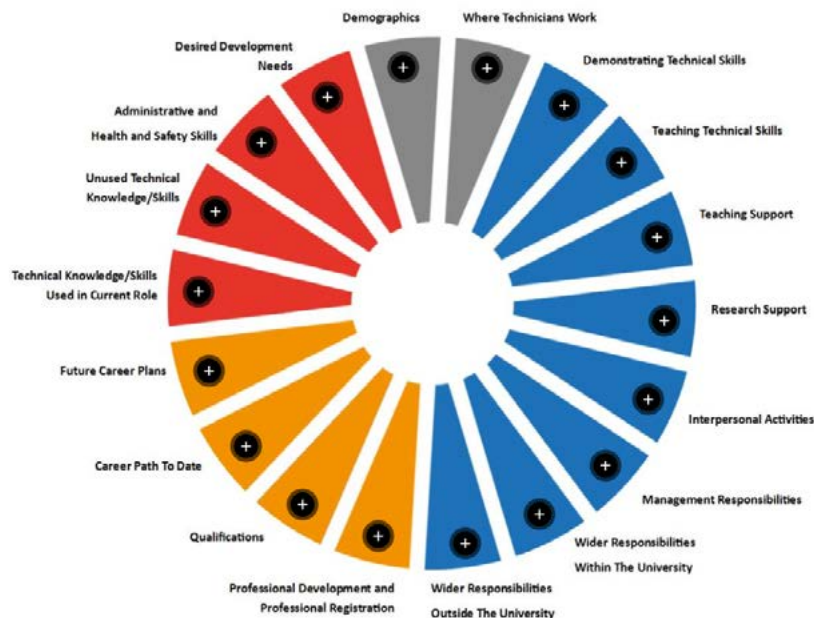
Using the NTDC Skills, Roles and Responsibilities Audit



Author:
Dr Karen Henderson
PhD CSci,
Director of Technical
Services,
University of Reading



**University of
Reading**



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As with most Universities, having a technical workforce that is engaged in diverse disciplines from the arts, sciences and life sciences we recognised that with sustainability of our technical skills in mind, it was important that we had a detailed understanding of our current skills portfolio. Such information gives us a baseline when considering our actions relating to the sustainability pillar of the Technician Commitment. Although we had skills lists that we had garnered from a number of areas it proved difficult and time-consuming to gather consistent levels of detail. The bespoke NTDC Skills, Roles and Responsibilities Audit was the tool that enabled us to achieve our goal. The Audit is a web-based survey that captures all elements of a technician's role, including over 2000 technical skills. It also collects information on the skills that participants would like to acquire.

The Process

When we reached the point of running the survey, the NTDC actually ran it on our behalf and configured all of the subsequent data into the format that we required. Prior to the launch, the NTDC worked closely with us to ensure that the audit was tailored to our needs. Having experience of running this survey at other universities, the NTDC guided us on how to get the best out of the exercise. They highlighted the information that needed to be read and understood by participants before undertaking the survey by providing a survey introduction template. This template explained the purpose of the

survey, how the information would be handled and who would have access to the data, how long the survey would take (40-60 minutes) and contact names should there be any questions. We worked with the NTDC to ensure that the template was refined to reflect our local arrangements, terminology and ways of working. In addition, as with many universities, we have some unique skills and these were incorporated into the skills section. Before the survey was launched, we piloted it with a dozen or so colleagues and feedback was used by the NTDC to tweak the survey further.

The survey was launched and remained open for a month. The NTDC gave updates on response rates and were able to send reminders to individuals of the survey closing date, respond to any queries and resend the survey to those who misplaced the survey link. Some technical staff commented that they enjoyed completing the survey as it gave them the opportunity to reflect on their wide range of skills and responsibilities and give consideration to the skills that they would like to acquire. We had a 100% response rate - all staff completed the survey.

Following its completion, the NTDC configured the information into a number of formats. As is standard, a personal report was generated for each participant for CPD purposes and a full report containing all responses was provided for management purposes. In addition, in response to our specific needs, a bespoke skills report was created that captured the skills and level of capability for each area.

Unexpected Benefits and Future Plans

Already, some unexpected benefits have emerged from the survey as we hadn't anticipated the level of untapped skills that we hold. It transpired that some of our team members hold specialist skills from previous roles that were not generally known. As a result we have been able to fill an emerging skills gap in one area that we had identified as high risk without previously realising that we had the skills elsewhere.

Using the survey has also assisted us in spotting trends in terms of training and development needs and we have already provided training courses in response to common requests that came through in the survey, Mental Health First Aid training for example.

Thanks to the NTDC Survey, we have now captured a significant amount of data and information to analyse and take us to the next phase of our plan. This will enable us to develop more robust succession planning and therefore sustainability of our technical skills.





Staff Development Forum Conference Workshop: Building effective partnerships with the technical community

Authors: *Dr Karen Bailey-Smith, NTDC Specialist Advisor and Chris Turgoose, NTDC Centre manager ran a workshop at the 2018 Staff Development Forum National Conference in November.*

Many HEIs have tasked Staff and Organisational Development Professionals with the delivery of their Technician Commitment Pledges. Work to deliver these pledges and further develop technical services requires partnership working between Staff and Organisational Development Professionals and their technical community. The Staff Development Forum (SDF) Conference provided the perfect opportunity to engage with the SDF community to discuss this.

The workshop title was 'Enabling Effective Partnerships between Technicians and Organisational and Staff Developers to Create Sustainable Technician Services'. Workshop members confirmed that they all had a role in their HEIs Technician Commitment activity, either in a dedicated funded role or where the activity was an 'add on' to their current full time role.

Workshop members outlined a number of points that are all too familiar to us at the NTDC and commented that they and many others within both the staff and organisational development community do not fully understand what technicians do. This has contributed to technicians not being recognised for their roles and feeling undervalued, not having clear career pathways and their being no consistency with regard to role descriptions across the workforce. Workshop members stated that technician staff morale was often low.

When asked about their experiences of working with technicians, workshop members:

- Highlighted some challenges around engaging technical staff in organisational, team and personal development initiatives, recognising that the reasons for these are complex
- Shared some strong examples of how they are achieving engagement with the technical community. Examples ranged from:
 - working in partnership to develop and deliver Technician Commitment action plans
 - direct involvement of technicians in informal and formal events or processes
 - gaining commitment and engagement, top-down and bottom-up, to ensure senior support for a common vision for current and future technical services
 - providing opportunities for technical staff to lead on more strategic projects
- Identified networks focusing on sharing good practice such as the Technician Commitment Working in Partnership group led by Linda Robinson and Mel Leitch at Newcastle University

This workshop has highlighted that the delivery of a sustainable technical workforce is not high enough up the agenda of the organisational and staff development arena, however, there is some significant progress being made in some institutions.

The NTDC regards the Technician Commitment, a national initiative, as an excellent driver to ensure HEIs create the right environment to deliver effective staff and service development to meet current and future need. It stimulates cross-HEI working towards a common goal, which is essential to help ensure changes reflect the HEI's future needs and helps embed improvements into the organisation.

Further details about the workshop and ways in which the NTDC can support HEIs can be found on the NTDC website.



"I was desperate to find a career working with human remains"

Read about Georgina Bond, a technician in Sheffield, and find out why she was "desperate to find a career working with human remains" and why she was angry at being labelled 'just a technician'. This fascinating read will uncover the day to day role of a Dissection Technician in the Medical Teaching Unit of the University of Sheffield and explore the delicate issues of body donation. For the full article go to our website.





PROUD SUPPORTER OF THE
Technician Commitment

In November the Technician Commitment celebrated its first year with an event at the Tower of London. At the event Lord Sainsbury of Turville launched a report, entitled 'The Technician Commitment: One Year In' which covers the impact the Technician Commitment has had in its first year, including the increasing recognition of technicians across the Higher Education and research sectors. Useful case studies from a range of institutions are reported as examples of best practice in the four areas of the Commitment - visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability.

Following the third round of institutions signing up to the Technician Commitment, there are now 75 institutions signed up, which is over half of UK Universities.



A snapshot of technical development at Manchester Metropolitan University

Author: **Natalie Kennerley** CSci,
Technical Services Development Manager,
Manchester Metropolitan University

Manchester Metropolitan became an affiliate partner of the National Technician Development Centre (NTDC) in April 2018. As a Technician Commitment signatory we have made good progress in the way in which we promote, develop and recognise our talented technical staff, aligning to the 4 themes of the commitment. We have created a Technician Commitment 24 month action plan which documents a clear plan of objectives, actions and outcomes for technicians and which is fully supported by our Vice Chancellor, Professor Malcolm Press, and our Chief Operating Officer Professor Karen Moore.

The University has invested in a technical network open to all technicians, which meets regularly with a remit to deliver activities across the University, promoting recognition and visibility of our technicians and providing career development opportunities. We have implemented a level 3 apprentice training programme bringing new talent into our workforce and helping to address recruitment challenges in some specialist skills areas. In-house training of the apprentices by experienced technical staff helps us to retain skills within our workforce, addressing

skills sustainability challenges. We are providing our technicians with opportunities to engage with the Manchester Met in-house degree apprentice programme enabling them to up-skill and study for degree level qualifications while they are in work.

In 2019 we will design and implement a technical services mentoring programme which will give technicians opportunities to learn from one another while undertaking valuable personal development.

We plan to use the NTDC skills audit to give us a greater understanding of the range of skills of our staff and to give technicians the best opportunities to use all of their skills in their daily working lives, benefiting the student experience as well as individual technicians. The skills audit will help us to manage technical skills sustainability issues within our workforce by making sure we have appropriate succession, training and investment plans in place to support our technical teams so they can continue to deliver excellent student experience and high quality research support.



Thank you to all our Partner Affiliates

A full list of NTDC Partners, at time of printing, includes: the University of Sheffield, Manchester Metropolitan University, MRC Harwell, the University of Reading, the University of York, the Institute of Science and Technology (IST), the University of Manchester, De Montfort University, the University of Cambridge, the University of Newcastle, Technical Managers in Universities (TMU), Queen's University Belfast, the University of Bradford, University Bioscience Managers Association (UBMA), Edinburgh Napier University and University of Lincoln.

For the most up to date list please see our website.

A journey to ensure recognition for technical staff at Newcastle University



Author: *Mel Leitch,*
Technical Manager at
Newcastle University's
Institute of
Neuroscience



Like many universities, Newcastle University is currently on a journey to ensure recognition for its Technical Staff. At Newcastle this journey started in 2014 with Professional Registration. Indeed, the success of individual Technicians becoming professionally registered and then mentoring others helped to secure the Employer Champion award from the Science Council in 2016. This award was a key

milestone as it encouraged us to engage with Natalie Kennerley from the Sheffield University-based Technician Development and Modernisation (TDM) project, to start a Technicians Network at Newcastle – NU TechNet. Since then, NU TechNet has grown in strength and has three themed meetings per year which are typically attended by 120 plus Technicians. NU TechNet is without doubt the most active and successful staff networking group at Newcastle University. In addition to the networking meetings, there are five subgroups (Communications, EDI, Teaching and Learning, Future Events, Sustainability and Environment) each

having a focus of technician-led activity often dovetailing into existing wider University initiatives e.g. Athena SWAN.

In May 2017 Newcastle University was one of the founding signatories to the Technician Commitment (TC) and in February 2018 we launched our strategy to deliver on the five key elements (Visibility, Recognition, Career Development, Sustainability and Measuring Impact). The TC strategy at Newcastle is structured around four key themes (Research, Teaching, Knowledge Exchange and People) which encourage inclusivity across a diverse technical workforce. Whilst NU TechNet, along with its subgroups, are the delivery model for much of the TC strategy, several key challenges around career development and recognition remain.

Independent to the TC, a large University-wide project, the NU professional, has been initiated to examine the role of Professional Services (PS), which also includes Technical Staff, as part of the Vice Chancellor's new Vision and Strategy. Feedback from focus groups attended by over 400 PS staff has already identified five key workstreams that are important to us (Career Development and Recognition, Leadership and Management Culture, Service Effectiveness, Establishing a PS Community and Digital Good Practice) as NU professionals within Professional Services. Within the Career Development and Recognition workstream, the main issue raised was that PS staff wanted greater clarity and understanding of their career and, in particular, how they could progress.

How we are working with the NTDC

This brings us to the current leg of our journey. In August 2018 Newcastle University became a Partner Affiliate with the National Technician Development Centre (NTDC). One of the benefits in doing so was to gain access to the TDM toolkit and the staff, who are experts in deploying the tools. The Skills Audit tool and the Career Pathways tool are of particular interest, as they are designed to tackle the issues raised above. Specifically, we need to understand what technical skills we have across Newcastle University, the level of those skills and where in the organisation those skills are located. We are on track to start this skills audit in February 2019. Once the technical skills profile is understood we can use the Career Pathways tool to map out exciting and progressive career structures, which will facilitate technicians in developing their careers effectively. The outputs from these tools will inform the University-wide NU professional project, which will be able to initiate transformational change for PS staff in the area of career development.



NTDC Services

We are a one-stop shop, providing organisations with access to information, expertise and a range of research and tools (including the nationally recognised TDM Toolkit) specifically designed to support the delivery of high-quality technical services across all areas, including Arts, Media, Science, Engineering and Medicine.

We can help your organisation in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to:

- Advising on reviews and restructuring of technical communities and technical services
- Guidance on talent recruitment and retention
- Activities to increase Professional Registration
- Helping to develop technical networks
- Delivering presentations and bespoke workshops
- Supporting your institution's Technician Commitment

By joining our ever-increasing portfolio of Partner Affiliates you will receive a discount on the NTDC Tailored Support Package, a complimentary initial meeting and follow up, exclusive NTDC updates, input into the development of future initiatives, as well as a welcome pack including a Certificate of Partnership and other marketing materials.



National Technician Development Centre

8 Palmerston Road | Sheffield | S10 2TE

0114 222 9773 | enquiries@nationaltechnicianscentre.ac.uk

 @NTDCtweets



www.nationaltechnicianscentre.ac.uk