



## Sector Demand Drives NTDC Expansion



The Centre remains at the heart of the technical community. Our mission is to support and promote our skilled and talented national and international technical workforce, whilst endeavouring to sustain our technical skills and knowledge, aligning to the modern, innovative and reactive pace of today's research and teaching environments.

I am looking forward to working alongside the Centre staff, including Mel Leitch, former Specialist Advisor to the Centre and newly appointed Deputy Director. We would welcome your ideas and suggestions around what the NTDC can offer you as an individual, as well as your organisation.

### The NTDC is Expanding!

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

The last several months have seen a significant increase in demand for access to NTDC services and expertise. This has especially focused on the Skills Audit tool, which allows institutions to gather key data on their staff and service, enabling them to better understand staff development needs; identifying areas of risk where technical skills are being lost through an ageing workforce profile and allowing them to act accordingly.

In addition, the audit allows the individual to be presented with a personal overview of their unique set of skills. Through this work, NTDC are gathering a set of unique national data, which will highlight trends in skills shortages. This will shape the future work of the NTDC in how we overcome these challenges as a sector.

I will now be undertaking the role of Founding Director of the NTDC. This will allow me to give my full attention to developing new partnerships, our portfolio of services and new ways to support the sector in the ever-changing HE environment.

I am proud to announce that this has created the opportunity for Natalie Kennerley (former Deputy Director) to become the new Director of the NTDC.

Natalie is a highly valued member of the team and brings to the Directors' role knowledge of the technical community and experience through her representation on various national boards and committees.

Her previous role as Deputy Director has now been filled by Mel Leitch (Newcastle University). He also brings to the NTDC a wealth of knowledge and experience in both the HE sector and through his previous role as specialist advisor to the NTDC (Technician Commitment engagement and partnerships). We also have several new members of the team including additional specialist advisors.

This is an exciting time for the NTDC and the team and we look forward to continuing to provide our quality services to the sector both locally and nationally.

By **Natalie Kennerley** FIScT, CSci,  
Director National Technician  
Development Centre

Following a long-standing relationship with the National Technician Development Centre, I am delighted to be taking over the role of Director for the centre. I have seen the centre develop from the initial small beginnings of the Technician Development & Modernisation project to what is now the well-known and established National Centre.

By **Mel Leitch** BSc (Hons), MPhil,  
CSci, FIScT, Deputy Director National  
Technician Development Centre

Following the continued success and expansion of the National Technician Development Centre (NTDC) I am delighted to be working alongside Natalie Kennerley and Terry Croft in the capacity of Deputy Director.

The Higher Education (HE) landscape is constantly changing and the drive towards excellence, creativity and innovation is becoming increasingly important for Universities. Many of us are well aware of how technicians partner the academic endeavour and play a vital part in the delivery models of both teaching and research. I am interested in facilitating initiatives which strengthen the academic-technical partnership within Universities and also in seeing it be deployed consistently across the UK HE sector in all disciplines of science, engineering and the creative arts.

Of course, technicians also exist outside of the HE sector and I have a keen interest in fostering relationships to bring technician specialists together from other sectors to strengthen learning, development and innovation.

The role of Deputy Director will enable me to pursue these interests further as the NTDC continues to expand, evolve and facilitate the careers of technicians across the UK.

## CASE STUDY

# How to successfully engage your technicians with the Audit process



*Authors:*  
**Lucy Hudson** BSc (Hons) MRSB MIScT,  
Departmental Operations Manager for the Department of  
Biology at the University of York.



**Dr. Simon Breeden** BSc (Hons) PhD CChem MRSC,  
Departmental Operations Manager for the Department of  
Chemistry at the University of York.



### The Process

Engagement for us is two-way communication, effective internal co-operation, our technicians having a voice and one absolutely crucial element, trust. Without trust, people will not buy into your vision, commit to the cause, accept decisions or contribute to make change happen. Engagement is about culture. Get the culture right and the engagement will follow; it is about technicians knowing that their individual contribution is valued and respected.

An example is the story about a cleaner and the president of the USA, during a visit to the NASA space center in 1962, President John F. Kennedy noticed a janitor carrying a broom. He interrupted his tour, walked over to the man and said, "Hi, I'm Jack Kennedy. What are you doing?". "Well, Mr. President," the janitor responded, "I'm helping put a man on the moon."

When we set out on our journey, as a founding signatory of the Technician Commitment and NTDC Partner Affiliate, we knew the key to successful delivery of our action plan, including inviting technicians to participate in a skills survey, was to take our technicians along with us on the journey to achieving our vision of Developing Career Pathways for Technicians at York.

### Routes to Greater Technician Engagement at York

Our first action was to identify our technicians to ensure we were communicating to all. Compiling a group email of 200+ technicians with more than 100 different job titles was not an easy task. We started with a list from our HR database but getting this

right involved many conversations with colleagues around the institution until we were comfortable that we had iterated to a point we knew our audience.

Listening to the Technician Voice was central to this initiative and so we had departmental technical forums focusing on: visibility, role descriptors, recognition, career pathways and professional registration, to gain insight into the status quo on the ground. We also ensured there was technician representation on the project steering group.

Empowerment is crucial to giving a group of staff the confidence to engage with management and to further develop. To encourage this, and to show that there was strong mutual trust, we handed over the management of TechYork, our technicians network, to a group of volunteer technicians in 2017. TechYork has been active (run by technical managers) since 2006 as a trusted platform, hosting an annual conference for technicians at York. Our volunteers have been much more active, running events, conferences, branching out into organising cross-departmental training, and designing the TechYork webpages. TechYork manages our social media, regularly tweeting York events and retweeting national technician relevant events and articles. TechYork also runs a blog series where technicians write about their personal career journey.

To better understand the skills and abilities of our technicians and also to reflect to senior management just what technicians do, we decided to run the NTDC's Technician Skills, Roles and Responsibilities Audit, which also

fed into our Technician Commitment action plan. For the skills survey to be a success we needed the engagement of as many technicians as possible. We needed our technicians to understand the benefits, both individually and institutionally, of participating in the skills survey. They needed to understand what the driver for this piece of work was, and perhaps more importantly, what it was not.

We began this piece of work in late 2018 with the ambitious completion date of Easter 2019. In February 2019, we took a cold hard look at where we were with our engagement strategy and plan: our judgement at that time was that we were not quite where we needed to be. In some departments we felt confident there was good engagement. In others, less so. We therefore took the strategic decision to delay running the survey. To go live without technician engagement across the institution was unwise as it would ultimately lead to skewed and incomplete data, substantially devaluing the output of the survey and further disengaging technicians. We therefore had to redouble our efforts in widening engagement.

We went about raising the engagement of our technical colleagues across the institution in a number of ways:

### Pre-Skills Survey

- Roadshows where Technician Champions who had piloted the skills survey met with technical teams, both in their own departments and in other departments, to present the skills survey and answer any questions



- We announced that there would be a raffle draw among those technicians who completed the survey - with Amazon vouchers on offer to those randomly selected
- We hosted drop-in sessions where technicians could come along and ask questions about the survey
- We set up an online FAQs page, uploading all questions and answers that had been raised at the roadshows and drop in sessions
- We built trust by letting our technicians know where their information would be stored, who would have access and levels of anonymisation
- A newsletter sent out to all technicians with an update on our Technician Commitment journey

All of this takes time and work. Establishing a team of volunteer technicians to be the voice of the survey was undoubtedly the best decision. Without their enthusiasm, positivity, and excellent communication skills, as well as the respect and trust those technicians had with fellow technicians across the institution, we would not have achieved that level of engagement. We were lucky to have such a superb team.

### When the Skills Survey was live

- Information about the skills survey was disseminated initially by our TechYork colleagues
- The skills survey was advertised via the University-wide Staff Digest, Departmental Bulletins, TechYork Twitter, posters in departments and the TechYork website

- Invitations to complete the skills survey were sent from the NTDC. In the two weeks pre invite, communications from the Dean of the Science Faculty, Heads of Departments and Technical Managers, were sent to our technicians to let them know what to expect, the FAQs and who they could speak to if they had concerns
- Departments booked PC rooms for technicians to come along and complete their survey, with technician champions on hand to help with any questions, and of course, coffee and cakes or bacon butties if it was an early morning session

With frequent updates from the NTDC on completion rates, we could update departments on participation from research groups and individuals, who had either not started the survey, or had part-completed it. This was when the hard work came in, with technical managers taking the lead to engage in areas of lower completion, using various techniques:

- Arranging one to one conversations
- Sending our emails to technicians with the subject heading: "I don't know what you do?" And the first line of the email "If I don't know, how can I and the Technician Commitment Team educate and influence middle and senior management?"
- Joining groups for coffee time chats in common rooms

### Post-Skills Survey

- Within one week of the skills survey closing we presented the percentage participation from each department and a couple of common trends at our annual TechYork event. This information was then circulated to all via email.

Our Skills Survey closed on the 28th June, the survey was sent to 215 technicians and we had an amazing 89% completion rate.

The take-home message from York is that there is unfortunately no one quick simple way to get engagement with the Audit process. Our experience is that electronic communication (emails, websites, tweets, newsletters etc.) is great for sharing information and generating a buzz. However, if you want true engagement, and for people to understand and buy-into the vision of what you are trying to deliver, then in-person conversations with technicians are crucial. This could include one-to-one and team meetings or indeed the dreaded networking.

Increasing engagement takes time and work, so your own important or urgent prioritisation decisions will be tested (we all have a day job), but it is very, very much worth the effort. Your team will feel valued and empowered and you will gain so much knowledge and understanding of just What Technicians Do.

Engagement is a two-way communication, here are some of the comments from our technicians about technician engagement at York.

*"I have met so many more colleagues from across the faculty. I have felt a much greater sense of community across the institute and I know from conversations with others, that I am not alone in that."*

*"I have found that the Technician Commitment, and the TechYork conferences that have been organised as a result, have definitely improved 'visibility' and given me greater awareness of my own place in the University. I think technicians sometimes fall into the trap of seeing themselves as behind-the-scenes, when in fact, we are crucial to the successful running of our units. We're just not very good at blowing our own trumpets!"*

TechYork 2019 feedback, 92% rated the event as Good or Excellent

*"Brilliant day, really enjoyed the speakers, they were very inspiring."*

*"The event was very good and the lectures were both interesting and set at a good level for the diverse range of technicians."*





## The NTDC Skills, Roles and Responsibilities Audit: A Q&A with our Audit team

Authors: **Jared Carnie**, Operations Manager and Skills Audit Officer, and **Jake Green**, Survey Officer, answer the most frequently asked questions we get about running our Skills Audit at a University.

### How does the whole process start?

Once an institution reaches out to express an interest in running the Audit, we usually arrange a video conference between the NTDC Audit team and the staff at the institution looking to run the Audit. This helps the NTDC Audit team gain an understanding of the current situation at the institution, and gives the institution a greater sense of what the Audit process involves. Quite often, we are approached by HEIs that have signed up to the Technician Commitment, so this initial meeting also helps gauge how we can aid their action plans and fit the audit in with their broader goals. If the HEI then commits to the audit, we then have a scoping meeting where costs and timelines are discussed and agreed.

### So what's the difference between the audit and the survey?

The skills audit is the whole process, of which the survey is a part. The entire audit process involves the planning

and the engagement strategy prior to running the survey, as well as the reporting and the resulting follow-up activities after the survey has closed.

The survey refers to the online questionnaire. This is hosted on Qualtrics, a secure and well-respected online survey platform.

### How quickly do universities start running the audit?

The key thing with running the audit is the communication with technicians before the survey goes live. Getting this right ensures that technical staff understand why the survey is being run, what the data they provide will be used for, and what the potential outcomes will be.

This means that while the audit process can begin quickly after an institution begins working with the NTDC, the optimal date for launching the survey itself will depend on a number of different factors, such as the current context at an institution and their plans for the upcoming year. This is why we encourage institutions to get in touch

as early as possible so we can work out the best time to run the audit for everyone involved.

### How long does the survey run for?

While the audit process as a whole varies, we tend to recommend the survey is kept live for 3-4 weeks to allow technicians the best opportunity to complete it. The survey saves a technician's responses as they go, so they can leave the survey and return to it at any point during this period.





### Can universities 'have' the survey?

It's a question we get asked a lot! Every institution runs their own unique version of the survey that has been tailored to their local needs by the NTDC Audit team. There's no off-the-shelf survey we offer.

The survey works best as part of a cohesive Audit process and this requires the expertise and knowledge of NTDC staff.

### What is the rest of the process, and how do you help universities through this?

The NTDC Audit team will guide you through the Audit process.

This includes:

- Scoping out your bespoke audit process
- Tailoring the survey to your institution
- Aiding with your communication and engagement strategy
- Running the survey on your behalf
- Providing access to the data
- Facilitating the sharing of the data and follow up actions.

We're always available for any support a university may need throughout the entire process, whether that's via email, phone, video chats or in person meetings.

### What are the major benefits of running the Audit?

There are a whole number of benefits that come from running the Audit. For your individual technicians, it is a chance to carry out some reflective CPD activity, and make their institution aware of their training and development needs.

For an institution, the Audit allows you to identify upcoming technical skills gaps, unused technical expertise, and areas of support and development that your technical workforce might benefit from.

The entire process also helps with Technician Commitment pledges, by raising the **Visibility** and **Recognition** of technicians, as well as identifying development needs, which supports **Career Development** in such a way that allows you to plan the future **Sustainability** of your technical workforce.

### If there's one thing you'd say is key to making the audit successful, what would it be?

Communication with the wider technical workforce. You need to be clear why you are undertaking the audit and what you plan to do with the data collected. This needs to be communicated clearly to your technicians as the success of the audit process depends on the level of engagement with the survey.

### What are your top tips for increasing engagement with the Audit?

Sessions with food always draw a crowd! Other universities have had a prize draw with a number of vouchers available for those that complete the survey.

The central element of good engagement with the survey is transparency and positive communication. If your technical workforce know why the audit is happening, and what is likely to happen after, the chances of them completing it are high. Having clear channels of communication, through staff websites, forums, Twitter etc makes a huge difference to both raising awareness about the survey and generating engagement with it.

### If an institution is interested in running the audit, what should they do next?

Get in touch at:  
[enquiries@ntdc.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@ntdc.ac.uk)

We look forward to hearing from you.



# Your Technician Commitment - How We Can Help



Photo Credit: [Manchester Metropolitan University](#)

The introduction of the Technician Commitment is a great step forwards in ensuring greater visibility and recognition for technicians in Higher Education. The NTDC are excited to be a resource partner of the Technician Commitment and delighted to be helping institutions meet their Commitment pledges.

Here at the NTDC and in collaboration with project partners, we created a set of bespoke tools and services to support HEIs in achieving a sustainable future for their technical staff and services. Our bespoke tools, services and guidance can help an institution meet each of the five Technician Commitment pledges - as listed below:

## Technician Commitment pledge:

**Visibility** - Ensure that all technicians within the organisation are identifiable and that the contribution of technicians is visible within and beyond the institution

### NTDC Guidance:

Our Technician Skills, Roles and Responsibilities Audit identifies and captures every element of a technician's role, enabling institutions to provide evidence of contribution and impact. While our Career Development Opportunities package provides guidance and signposting for opportunities such as networking, mentoring, secondments and work shadowing to help raise awareness and visibility.

Additionally, the National Centre's engagement activities highlight the importance of technicians and the issues they face.



## Technician Commitment pledge:

**Recognition** - Support technicians to gain recognition through professional registration and external awards schemes

Our Career Pathways tool delivers a technical role structure outlining capability expectations for each level, which are also aligned to professional registration. Our Skills Audit captures detailed information about professional registration and barriers to further engagement. We also work closely with professional bodies such as the Institute of Science and Technology (IST) to ensure greater engagement with professional registration schemes.





#### Technician Commitment pledge:

**Career Development** - Enable career progression opportunities for technicians through the provision of clear, documented career pathways

Institutions are able to align to a nationally recognised role structure using our Career Pathways tool which also provides individuals with the facility to plan a technical career route. Our Technician Development Framework enables institutions to take a more strategic approach to technician development, including identifying clear entry points and opportunities for staff development.

CPD Central is an online tool that enables the effective capture of professional development and CPD to support focused development, career planning and professional registration. While the Career Development Opportunities package provides guidance to support the development and improvement of CPD schemes.



#### Technician Commitment pledge:

**Sustainability** - Ensure the future sustainability of technical skills across the organisation and that technical expertise is fully utilised

The Skills Audit enables institutions to capture detailed workforce data to support informed strategic planning and the management of skills gaps, including the identification and application of underutilised skills.

The Technician Development Framework provides a how-to guide on strategic development and delivery of apprenticeships, traineeships and internships, enabling effective use of the Apprenticeship Levy to bring in new talent and develop existing staff.

The Career Development Opportunities package provides guidance on how to develop and retain staff. This is particularly useful to support staff who have previously felt isolated and unsupported.



#### Technician Commitment pledge:

**Evaluating Impact** - Regularly assess the impact of actions taken in support of the Commitment to ensure their effectiveness

Our tools and guidance are not a static resource. The National Centre team will ensure that the impacts of our services are continually reviewed through feedback and evaluation; updating our tools and services where appropriate.

This will ensure that we are continuing to meet the ever-changing needs of the HE environment and assist institutions in fulfilling the Technician Commitment.



PROUD SUPPORTER OF THE

**Technician Commitment**

## 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, 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
- Undertaking an in-depth skills audit to provide strategic data on the technical workforce
- 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 resources, as well as a welcome pack including a Certificate of Partnership and other marketing materials.



Photo Credit: Manchester Metropolitan University

## Introducing CPD Central

Develop your staff, enhance your organisation and set the national standard.



Log and manage your CPD record and complete tasks set



Template for national standards



Highly secure and fully encrypted



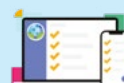
Transfer CPD records to other organisations or personal accounts



Easily upload documents



Assign users to supervisors



Supervisors can set and approve tasks



Supervisors can check CPD



Download your record if you decide to leave

The National Technician Development Centre is working hard to develop this bespoke CPD portal to provide the perfect platform for easily recording professional development and standardising CPD across partner organisations.

National Technician Development Centre  
8 Palmerston Road | Sheffield | S10 2TE  
0114 222 9773 | enquiries@ntdc.ac.uk



**National  
Technician  
Development  
Centre for HE**  
CREATING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE  
FOR TECHNICAL STAFF AND SERVICES

Key partners:



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

