28th September 2018

Terry Croft MBE
University of Sheffield
Western Bank
Sheffield
S10 2TN

Re: Technician Commitment – Self-Assessment & Action Plan

Dear Terry,

We are delighted to write to all founding signatories of the Technician Commitment following the recent Self-Assessment and Action Plan submissions. All submissions that have been received have now been assessed by the Technician Commitment Steering Board which comprises members from a range of higher education sector organisations and stakeholders. The Steering Board are pleased to see that organisations have engaged positively with the Technician Commitment with the respect and dedication that it deserves.

Please find below feedback from the reviewers of the University of Sheffield submission.

1. Technical structures and the internal scope/reach established for the Technician Commitment at this institution:

The University of Sheffield have an outstanding and exemplary commitment to and understanding of the technical community within the University. Technicians are identified within the five faculties of the Universities across the 42 different departments accounting for 9% of the workforce. It is evident that a very thorough analysis of this group has led to the ongoing development of engagement and access to continued professional development which is to be commended.

2. Initiatives/programmes/activities that were already in place for the technical community within this organisation prior to them becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment:

The University of Sheffield has a long history of supporting its technical community and the submission contains details of number of initiatives in place prior to becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment. From the comprehensive list provided, highlights include the well-established technician network at Sheffield ‘TechNet’ and its associated website, the HEFCE Catalyst project and the apprenticeship programme. These sector leading practices should be commended. It is excellent to see that professional registration is funded for technical colleagues, demonstrating commitment to technical career paths and development.
3. Initiatives put in place to address the themes of the Technician Commitment since becoming a signatory:

It is clear from the submission that the University of Sheffield are taking their Technician Commitment very seriously. Since becoming a signatory, the University has ‘doubled down’ on their already-strong approach to supporting technicians. The proposal to establish a formal group to lead on the Technician Commitment is a very positive step to ensuring that the Commitment is embedded in university structures and has clear governance and reporting lines.

Much of the activity appears to have begun before becoming a signatory of the Commitment. The TechNet event attended by senior leadership, along with the recognition of individual technicians and the Science Council Employer Champion award is an example of excellent practice.

It is good to see that the increase in visibility and recognition has led to technician representation on committees that they hitherto did not have any representation on. This ensures that technicians have voice and visibility across the organisation. The University has excellent links with the Institute of Science and Technology (licensed by the Science Council to award RSciTech, RSi and CSci) and is promoting professional registration to all technical staff. It would be good to understand if technical colleagues have the opportunity and support to access professional registration via the Engineering Council and BCS (for example, EngTech, IEng, CEng and RITTech accreditation).

It is pleasing to see that individual technicians have been able to raise their profile via opportunities to extend their external networks – for example, attendance at New Scientist Live and through the National Technician Development Centre.

It would be helpful in future submissions to understand further how the activity to date is impacting individual technicians. For example, increased authorship, increased professional registration numbers, data on career progression. There’s some clearly excellent practice at Sheffield and it would be useful for Sheffield to be able to monitor and demonstrate impact in this way, to show that this work is impacting the environment for technicians at a grassroots level.

4. Action plan:

The action plan is very clear and realistic. It is evident that the University of Sheffield is very dedicated to the Technician Commitment, with significant new activity planned over the next two years. Highlights include the proposed formal group to lead the Commitment and the new induction pack for new technical colleagues. Recommendations include:

- There is a lot of activity from Technician Commitment signatories across the N8 consortium. Given their position of strength, Sheffield may wish to consider how they could drive regional collaboration in this space.
- Expansion of the professional registration opportunities to include the Engineering Council and BCS professional registers.
Consideration on how the University of Sheffield can raise the profile of technical colleagues with its student population.

To consider referencing the Technician Commitment Action Plan in future Athena Swan submissions, along with alignment/inclusion of the Technician Commitment activity to/in future Teaching Excellence Framework and REF 2021 Environment Statements.

The inclusion of success measures and a detailed timeframe would aid Sheffield in monitoring progress and impact. This would showcase further the already outstanding work being delivered at the University of Sheffield.

Overall an excellent submission and a clear action plan which provides a springboard to further build on Sheffield’s excellent progress to date.

Congratulations on very positive progress coupled with a clear and well-developed Action Plan. In recognition of this submission, the University of Sheffield will be presented with an Award of Submission at the forthcoming Technician Commitment evening reception on November 6th at the Tower of London.

We look forward to working with you as you continue the implementation of your Action Plan and to supporting the on-going development of technicians at the University of Sheffield to further increase visibility, recognition, opportunity and sustainability of this vital community.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Pain
CSci CChem FRSC
Chair of the Technician Commitment Steering Board

Kelly Vere RSci FHEA
Technician Commitment Lead