

General

How do we measure impact?

There are numerous ways to measure impact, but no one defined method. Technicians included on REF impact cases and / or outputs (flagged as an organisation's best research work) could be used as a way to measure the impact which Research Technicians make to research. Changes in these measures between REFs can also give some idea of the impact of technician-focussed initiatives.

Indeed the NTDC's Skills Roles and Responsibilities audit may also provide useful data to measure the impact of initiatives and monitor changes in the technical workforce.

The key is to select a robust metric that can be fed into the organisations vision and strategy.

Can we actually measure engagement?

It depends what type of engagement is of interest. One approach would be to define the specific engagement question and then collect data to answer that question. For example, a question around how many technicians engage in a technicians network event might be answered by recording attendees at each event and comparing the names of attendees to establish if its the same cohort each time or if the reach is expanding. In a broader sense, if different elements of the Technician Commitment have been tasked to different committees, and those committees are engaged and producing actions, then that is a positive reflection of genuine engagement.

How do we get our technicians 'on board'?

Gaining the trust of technical staff can be a challenge, often staff are a forgotten crowd with historical grievances. Gaining trust does not happen overnight and takes time, effort and patience. Experience has shown that technical staff respond better if they see support from a very senior level, for example Chief Operating Officer or Vice Chancellor. This support, together with encouraging technical staff to take ownership of such initiatives as; the Technician Commitment, Professional Registration and Networking groups, is fundamental to engagement - being seen as "by technicians, for technicians". As initiatives become embedded and impact is seen, there is a greater probability of gathering momentum. A resulting challenge can often be how to keep the momentum going and the key to continued success is a core team of motivated and inspirational technical champions keeping things moving forward.

A challenging aspect of the Technician Commitment for universities is career progression. What NTDC services are the most relevant to help with this?

We have our Career Pathways tools designed to clarify career pathways for technicians. This is a well-established model with role profiles embedded within the framework to distinguish between different grades and different roles. The framework is designed to be deployed flexibly so it can be easily tweaked to fit individual HEIs.

What are the challenges that face the technical community for the future?

- Gaining recognition for technicians who are key specialists.
- Recognition for the technical community and its impact on the business.
- Pressure on funding means that technical workforces are often the first to see staffing cuts - there is a need to show the positive impact that technicians have in teaching and research.
- Investment in training and development is required to ensure the future sustainability of a highly skilled technical workforce.
- Delivering on the Technician Commitment can be a challenge. Indeed it's very easy for an institution to pledge an initial commitment but much harder to deliver on that commitment due to the challenges of planning and financial investment.

How can the NTDC influence national landscape?

As the NTDC is a national organisation it has the opportunity for substantial cross-collaborative working, building up a clear picture of the technical community landscape. Together with data collected from the Skills Audit, this provides information relating to national trends, for example the ratio of male to female technical roles within Engineering. Working with sector leaders such as the Gatsby Foundation and the Science Council, the NTDC are able to influence positive change through new initiatives created to address these challenges.

How do we balance expectations/aspirations of technical staff to move up the pathway against business need and financial challenges of the university?

Managing the expectations of technical staff who have often been in roles for a number of years and are struggling to progress can be a challenge. The technical career pathway is very unlikely to be linear - very often technical staff can be "waiting" for a vacancy to arise before they feel they have the opportunity to apply. The role of the technical manager is to promote and facilitate career development opportunities to staff in the form of gaining those additional skills which will allow them to progress and become more employable. This could take the form of development training, work shadowing, secondment opportunities. Technical staff may need to take a sideways move in order to progress and in some cases may need to consider what may be perceived to be a backward step in order to achieve their long term goal. This may or may not be within the current organisation.

Universities and managers can develop technicians so they have the skills to apply for jobs at a higher grade. This also requires a willingness to sometimes take a step into the unknown and push yourself to go to the next phase.

There also needs to be a recognition and transparency about job descriptors and doing extra work for CPD.

Career Pathways

Why does the taxonomy split and then re-join?

The Taxonomy splits after the 'Technician' role to deliver a management and a specialist pathway. The Taxonomy converges after 'Technical Manager' and 'Senior Technical Specialist' to reflect that later roles typically have a leadership and management function.

Does a short document that gives an example of a technical career pathway exist? (compared to academic pathway?)

The Taxonomy does allow individuals to plot a potential career pathway. Case studies might be another effective way to illustrate how others have progressed their careers.

Audit.

Is there a summary of different drivers that universities have wanted to get out of the skills survey?

Currently we do not have one single document for the different drivers for universities, although we will be sharing one in the future. At the moment, when we begin work with a university, we do bring our past experiences with other universities and relevant information on different possible drivers to the table to help inform the discussions.

Can you interrogate the survey data to look at responses/trends in specific areas such as faculties/departments/facilities etc?

We can interrogate survey data into faculties/depts/facilities, as well as many other metrics that are captured by the survey.

How do you actually identify a skills gap?

It is widely acknowledged that we have a vast number of skills gaps nationally. The number of new build projects which require highly skilled technical staff is increasing, a lack of technicians nationally means it's hard to find those "technicians for the future". This is further supported by Gatsby who state that by the year 2030, the UK economy will require 700,000 new technicians.

Skills gaps themselves can be identified in a number of ways:

- Difficulty recruiting for vacancies which require technical staff with specific appropriate skills
- Staff retiring who have been in post a long time and built up an extensive depth and breadth of experience which will need replacing
- Organisational analysis in the form of processes such as the NTDC Audit can help identify skills gaps on a local and organisational level. It provides a map of your workforce which, when compared with your future needs, will help you identify potential skills gaps.

Apprenticeships

How do you make the most of your Apprenticeship Levy?

Every organisation who has a pay bill of over £3M/year is required to pay into the "levy pot". This amounts to a considerable sum of money which organisations often struggle to utilise effectively. Getting the most out of the levy needs careful planning to ensure apprenticeship

opportunities are used to their full potential. The levy can be used to fund the training of new apprentice staff as well as those already in post and who are undertaking apprenticeships. All newly advertised posts can be considered apprenticeships if an appropriate standard can be accessed. Organisations can also “gift” their levy to smaller organisations who are considered too small to pay into it.

Apprentices and time away for training

This can often be perceived as a barrier by the host team in terms of extra work. Careful consideration should be given when placing an apprentice, and all concerned need to be committed in order for it to succeed. If apprenticeship schemes are widely used, teams can see the long term benefit of home-grown talent and be more accepting of allocating time for training and supervision.

Guarantee an apprentice a job?

In the majority of cases (but not all) the apprenticeship is a fixed term position which runs the duration of the apprenticeship. At the end of this the apprentice would be encouraged to apply for appropriate roles within (and outside) or the organisation.

Professional Registration

What is the value of Professional Registration?

For technicians who have been in post for a number of years they will have undoubtedly built up a large skill set which is often unrecorded. Professional Registration is a way to record those skills through a competency based document and award. This can be advantageous when applying for jobs and when organizations seek grant income capture - being able to demonstrate competent technical staff is very positive. Professional Registration is a very reflective process, in order for individuals to write their competency documents they need to carefully assess where they are within their career and job role. This reflective process can be beneficial in highlighting areas which need development or training therefore supporting career progression. Being Professional Registered provides a wider networking opportunity with opportunities to attend professional body events. These events often ask technicians to host workshops or provide keynote speeches and thus provide a personal development opportunity.

Do technicians (as a group) see the value of Professional Registration?

There are pockets of engagement - at some universities there is a very good uptake but at others it is less so. Technicians have also expressed a need for help and support with the writing side of applying for Professional Registration.

CPD Central

Are there plans to add multi-factor authentication to CPD Central? Some universities may insist on it if institutional usernames and passwords are used.

Multi-factor authentication is currently set up on the system. As more institutions are asking about this, it will be a feature that we will keep and can talk more about during a demo.

Is there any way of integrating CPD Central with an existing learning management system?

Currently, we have not looked at integrating CPD Central with specific learning management systems, however when we start working with organisations, if this becomes something that would be of benefit to the institution, then we would work with you to enhance the system for optimal learning or to integrate useful learning systems.

Within an organisation who would have ownership of CPD Central? There appears to be a great deal of work in setting up admin/supervisees/supervisors etc.

CPD Central has been enabled by the NTDC. We will set up an organisation which will allow that organisation to add administrators, supervisees and supervisors/team managers. In the first instance, the NTDC will help you set all the users up (a feature for version 2 will be to allow uploads of more than 10 users at a time). Once we have helped to set up an organisation, it is upto the administrators and team managers to 'manage' their organisation by signing up new users, assigning supervisors to supervisees or to make or accept any transfers. We can assist with any of these actions also.

Is the new CPD tool complementary to the requirement for continuous Professional Development for Professional Registration?

Yes, the CPD tool was developed in collaboration with professional bodies and has been designed to compliment the process.