



# The TALENT Commission

*The TALENT Commission report: empowering technical workforces of the future*

Catrin Harris (TALENT Research Fellow)

26 May 2022  
Newcastle University



Funded by



# Overview

1. Introduction to the TALENT Programme
2. Introduction to the TALENT Commission Report
3. Findings from research and community engagement
4. Outcomes and recommendations
5. Looking ahead

# MI TALENT

Leading and influencing change to advance status and opportunity for technical skills, roles and careers in UK Higher Education and research.



# MI TALENT: advancing status & opportunity for technical talent

 <b>Kelly Vere</b> Project Lead - Director of Technical Skills and Strategy	 <b>Helen Turner</b> Co-Lead: Director, Midlands Innovation	 <b>Ian Hancox</b> Co-Lead: Research Technology Engagement Manager	 <b>Carly Dellar</b> Technical Projects Manager
 <b>Lucy Williams</b> Senior Project Manager	 <b>Andrew Noyes</b> Research Mentor	 <b>Francis Wragg</b> Research and Policy Manager	 <b>Sandy Sparks</b> Technical Training Manager
 <b>Catrin Harris</b> Research Fellow	 <b>Denise McLean</b> EDI Project Chair	 <b>Ed Bowerman</b> Technical Training Manager	 <b>Emily Thorpe</b> Technical Training Manager
 <b>Michelle Jackson</b> Technical Careers Manager		 <b>Sarah Howells</b> Marketing and Communications Manager	



Research England



£5million; 2020-2024



04 May 2022

# MI TALENT: 3 main strands



# The TALENT Policy Commission

Strategic insight into technical talent of the future



# The TALENT Board of Commissioners



**Sir John Holman**  
Chair of the TALENT Commission



**Nigel Towers**  
Head of Strategy, Marketing and Sales,  
Thales Alenia Space UK



**Rory Duncan**  
Director, Talent and Skills, UKRI



**Helen Pain**  
Chief Executive,  
Royal Society of Chemistry



**Anne-Marie Coriati**  
Freelancer



**Kirsty Edgar**  
Head of Research for the School of  
Geography, Earth and Environmental  
Sciences, University of Birmingham



**Nishan Canagarajah**  
President & Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Leicester



**Tim Savage**  
Director of Technical Learning,  
University for the Creative Arts



**James Hetherington**  
Director, Centre for Advanced Research  
Computing, University College London



**Dame Athene Donald**  
Master of Churchill College,  
University of Cambridge



**Mat Beardsley**  
Precision Development Facility  
Manager, RAL Space



**Paul Lewis**  
Professor of Political Economy,  
King's College London



**Dobra Humphris**  
Vice-Chancellor, University of Brighton  
and Chair of University Alliance



**Jennifer Allen**  
Business Manager,  
Peridot Partners



**Steven Hill**  
Director of Research,  
Research England



**Nicola Atkinson**  
Isotope Support Scientist,  
British Geological Survey



**Rhys Morgan**  
Director of Engineering and Education,  
Royal Academy of Engineering



**Dame Helen Atkinson**  
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Aerospace,  
Transport, Manufacturing,  
Cranfield University



**Jhoen Ahmed**  
Head of Technical Services,  
Aston University



**Ray Chung**  
Head of University IT Support,  
Loughborough University

Who are they?

Technicians & technical Staff

Academic staff

VCs & PVCs

Directors, CEOs, & sector leaders

Representatives from...

Higher Education Providers

Research Institutes

Funding Bodies

Learned Societies & Academies

Industry

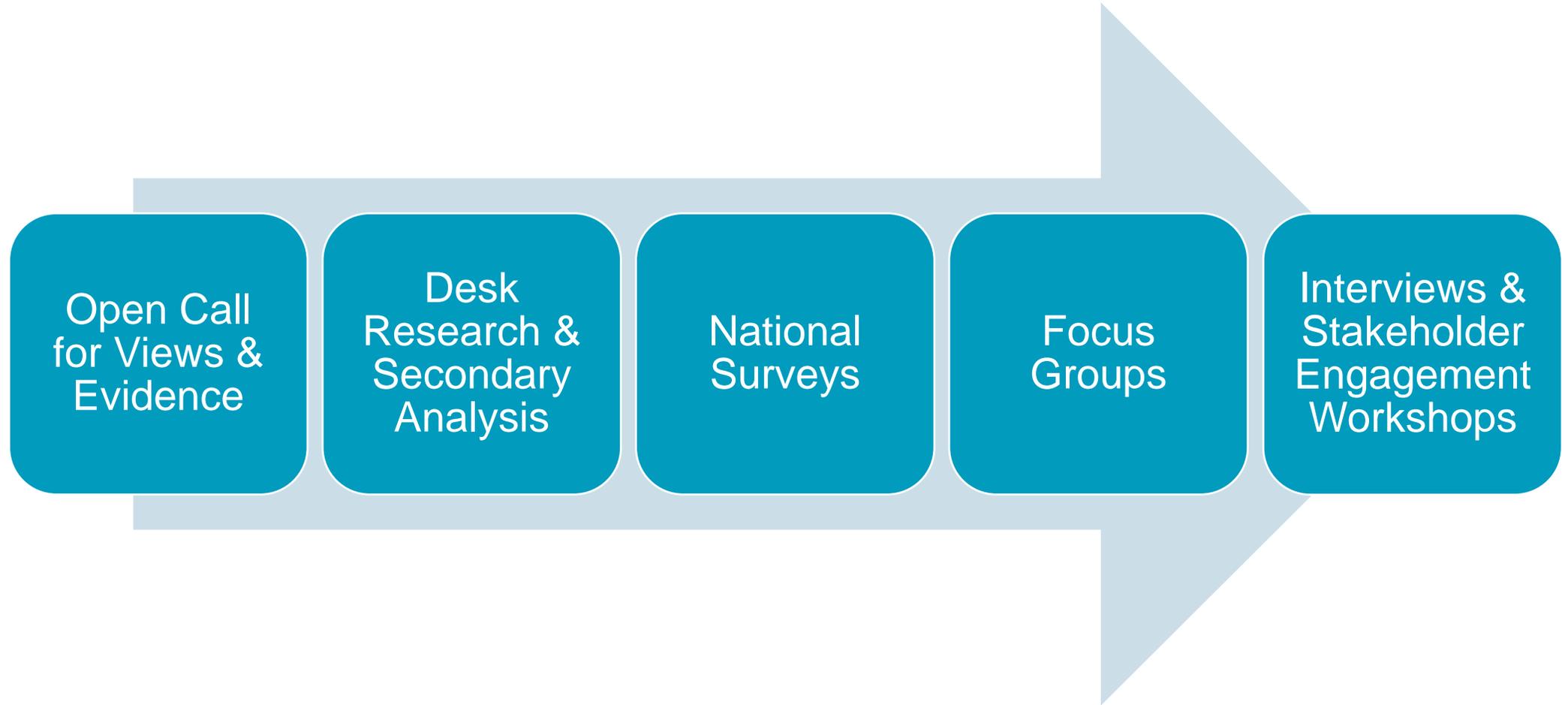
Charitable Foundations

STEM, Creative Arts, IT, etc

# Key Themes Explored



# Key Approaches to Gathering Evidence



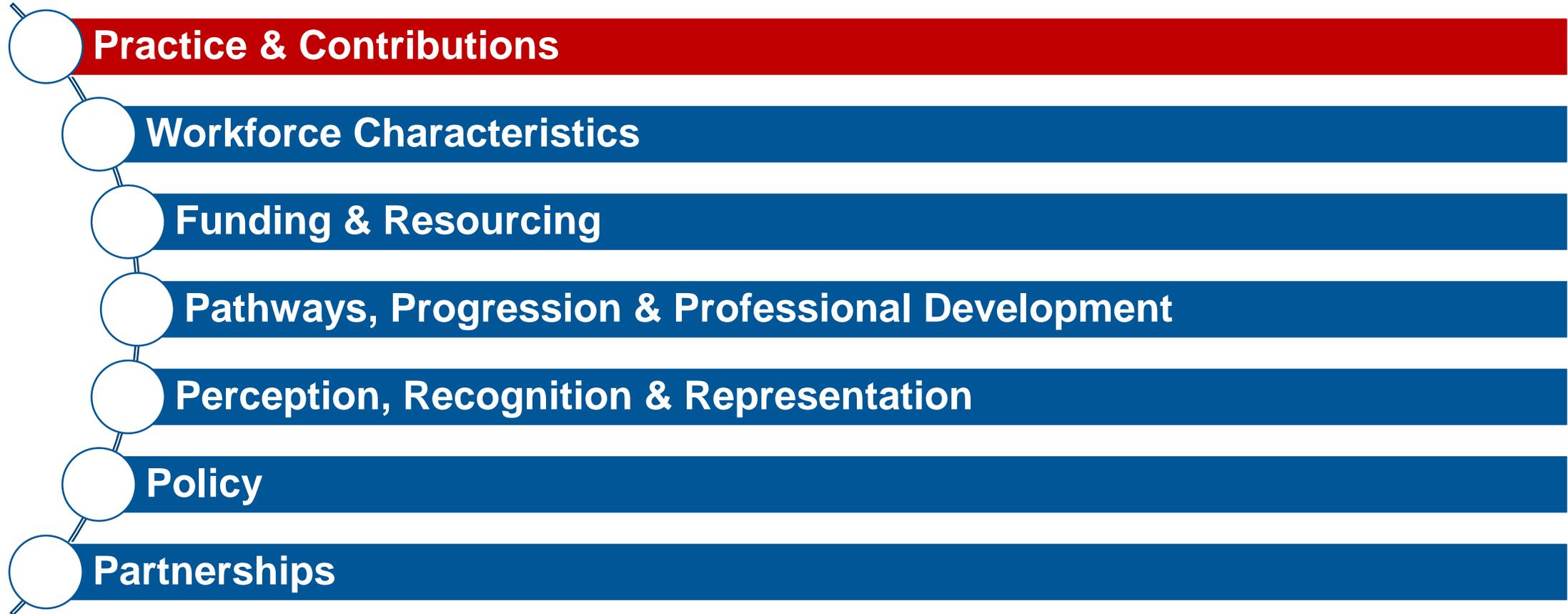
# Findings: Some examples



# Key Themes Explored



# Key Themes Explored



# Practice and Contributions

- Technicians and technical staff play a key role in UK higher education and research
- Vital for current research, and will be vital for future research areas and emerging technologies
- Teaching
  - Teaching contributions often overlooked
  - High proportion of technical staff involved in teaching activities
  - Not simply support: also *delivery* and *design*
    - Blurred lines between academic and technical teaching?
  - Creative arts: extreme case, but perhaps a direction of travel?

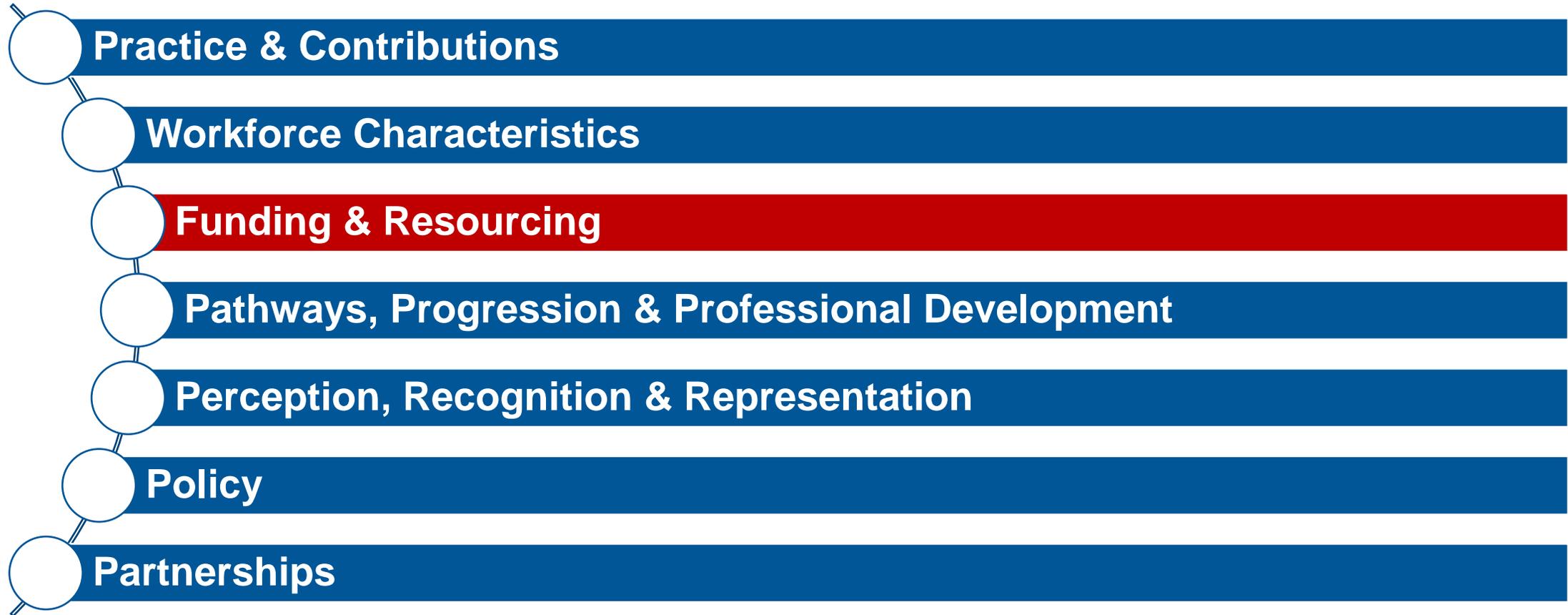
# Key Themes Explored



# Workforce Characteristics

- General technical workforce in UK higher education
  - 60% male, 89% white, 88% UK National
  - 87% work full-time, 81% on permanent contract
  - 30% aged over 50yrs
  - Younger age groups more gender-balanced
- Significant differences according to discipline and region
  - Medicine, dentistry, veterinary sciences: female dominated.
    - All other discipline areas: male dominated.
  - Creative arts: high proportion of part-time workers
  - Chemistry: high proportion of technicians holding PhDs
- In all cases: % of women in senior roles lower than % in junior roles

# Key Themes Explored



# Funding and Resourcing

- Lack of clear guidance and understanding on how technical staff should be included in grant applications.
- Inconsistency in how technical staff are costed
- Evidence that technical staff are under-costed on proposals
  - Often the last cost added and first cost removed when a proposal is perceived as 'too expensive'.
- In some cases: financial disincentives for including technicians on research grants (impact on 'overheads')

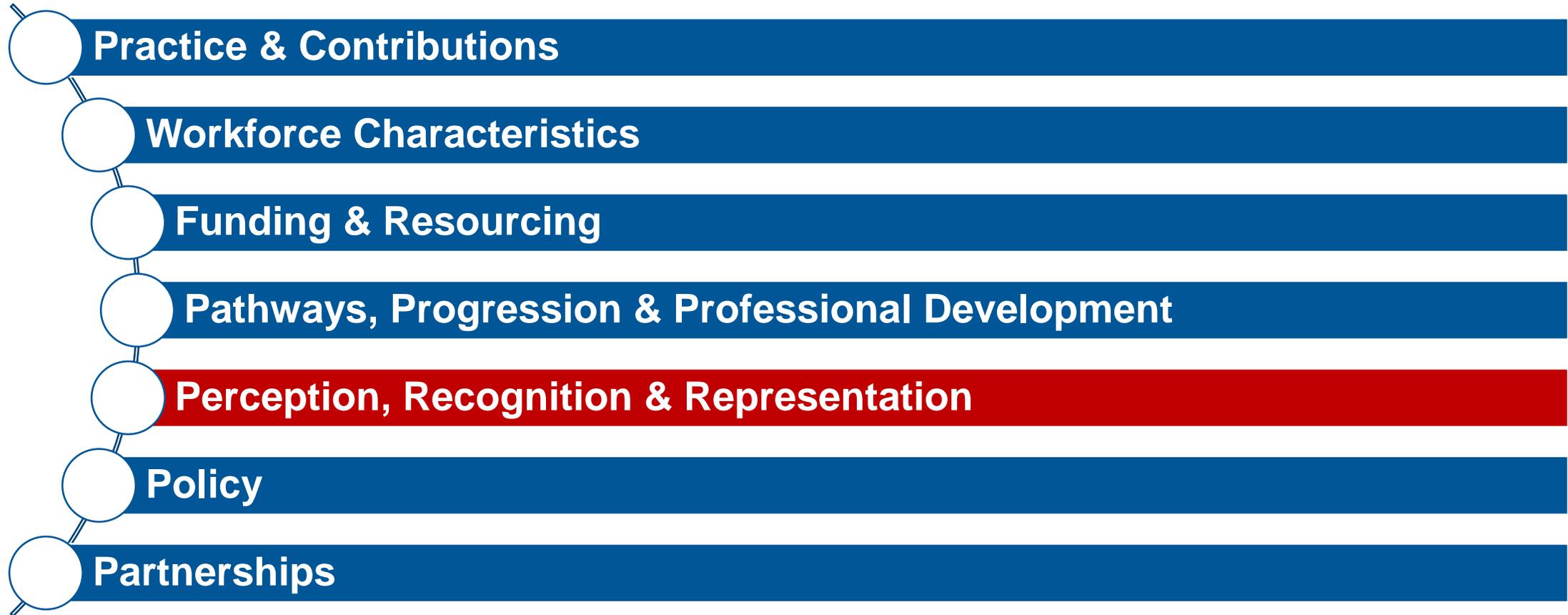
# Key Themes Explored



# Pathways, Progression & Professional Development

- An increasing proportion entering technical careers from academic routes. Is this always appropriate?
  - Desire for better balance between vocational and academic routes
- Career Progression a major barrier and area of concern for technical workforces
  - Desire for better succession planning and sustainability
- Desire for professional development opportunities tailored for technical staff
  - Need for time & space (& cover) to take advantage of opportunities

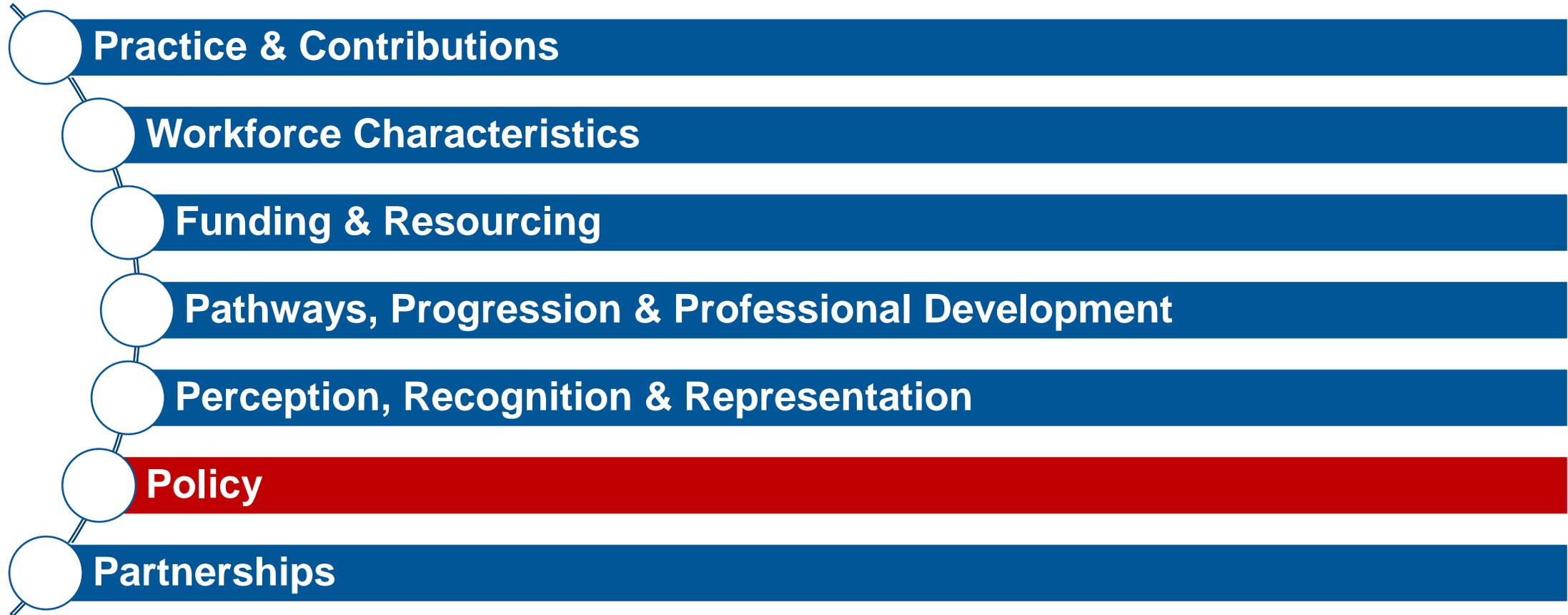
# Key Themes Explored



# Perception, Recognition & Representation

- Technicians feel undervalued by institutional senior leadership and national policymakers
- Often feel unseen, poorly understood, and under-recognised
- Majority felt technical staff are not adequately represented in their institution's decision-making structures

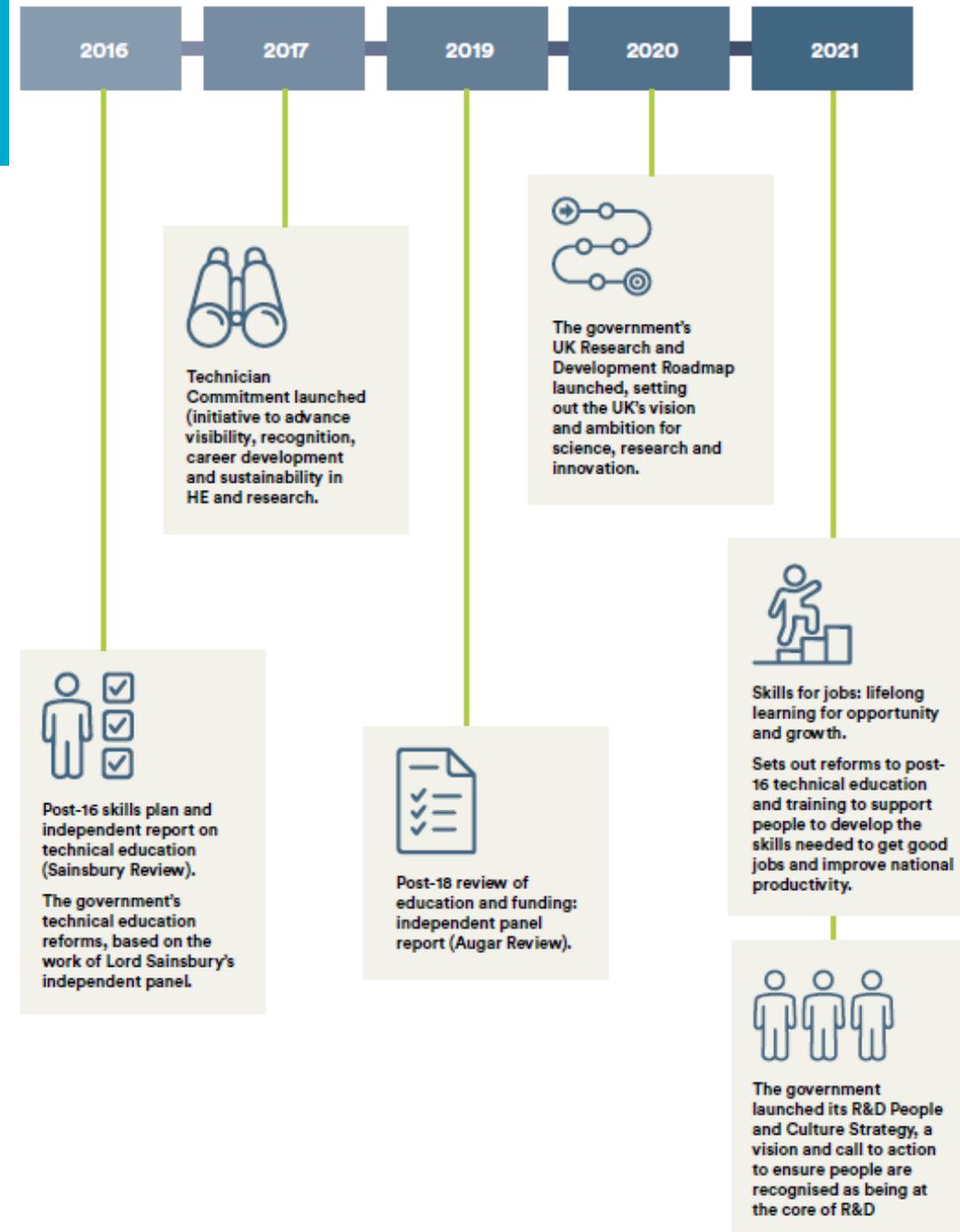
# Key Themes Explored



# Policy

- Some improvement:
  - Increased consideration of technicians in recent policy initiatives
- More to be done:
  - Alignment in terminology and understanding
  - More coherent collaboration needed
  - Earlier consideration and engagement with technical representatives

## Timeline



# Key Themes Explored



# Partnerships

- Potential benefits from organisations and technical workforces forming partnerships and working together
  - Shared development and support opportunities
  - Pooled resources
- Some exist already, but room for more

## N8 Research Partnership (N8)

University of Liverpool  
University of York  
University of Leeds  
Durham University  
The University of Sheffield  
Lancaster University  
The University of Manchester  
Newcastle University

## Midlands Innovation

Aston University  
University of Birmingham  
Cranfield University  
Keele University  
University of Leicester  
Loughborough University  
University of Nottingham  
University of Warwick

## Midlands Enterprise Universities

Birmingham City University  
Coventry University  
University of Derby  
De Montfort University Leicester  
University of Lincoln  
Nottingham Trent University  
University of Wolverhampton

## Science and Engineering South (SES)

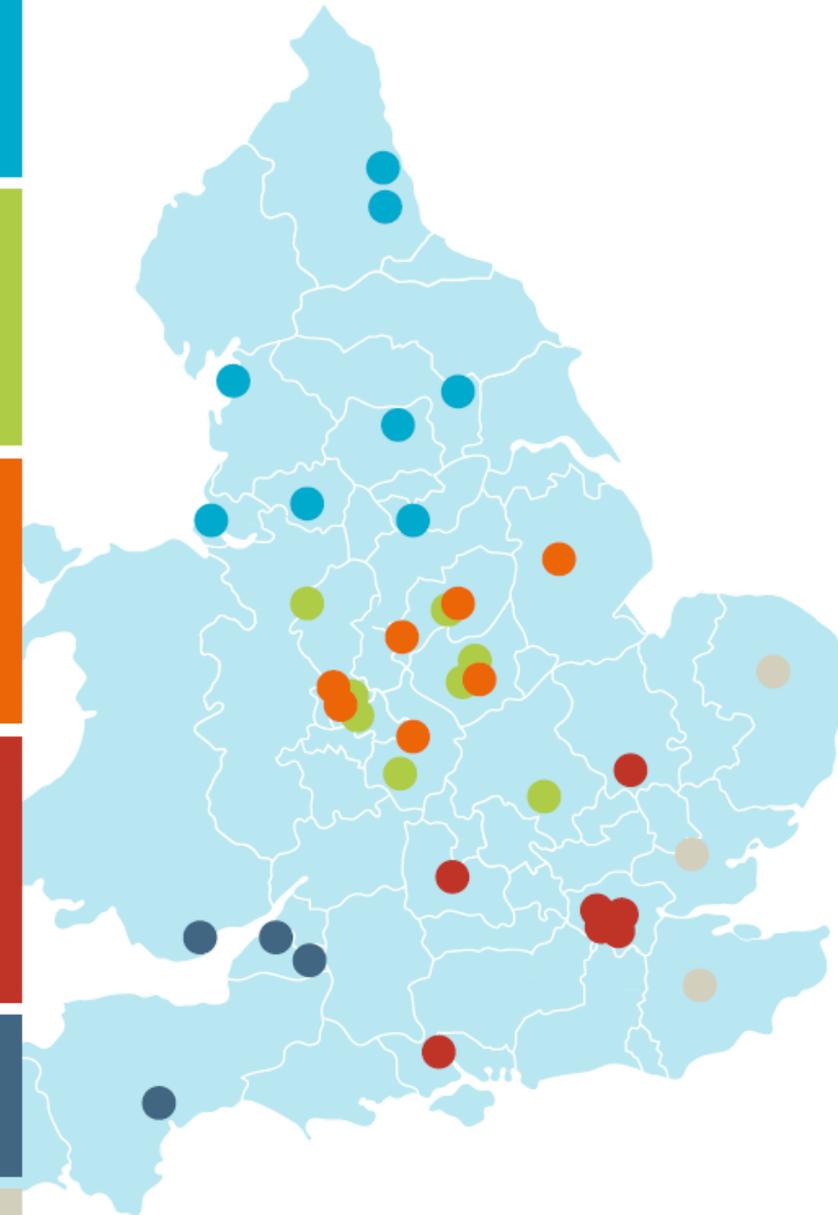
King's College London  
Imperial College London  
Queen Mary University of London  
University College London  
University of Cambridge  
University of Oxford  
University of Southampton

## Great Western 4 (GW4)

University of Bath  
University of Bristol  
Cardiff University  
University of Exeter

## Eastern Arc

University of East Anglia  
University of Essex  
University of Kent



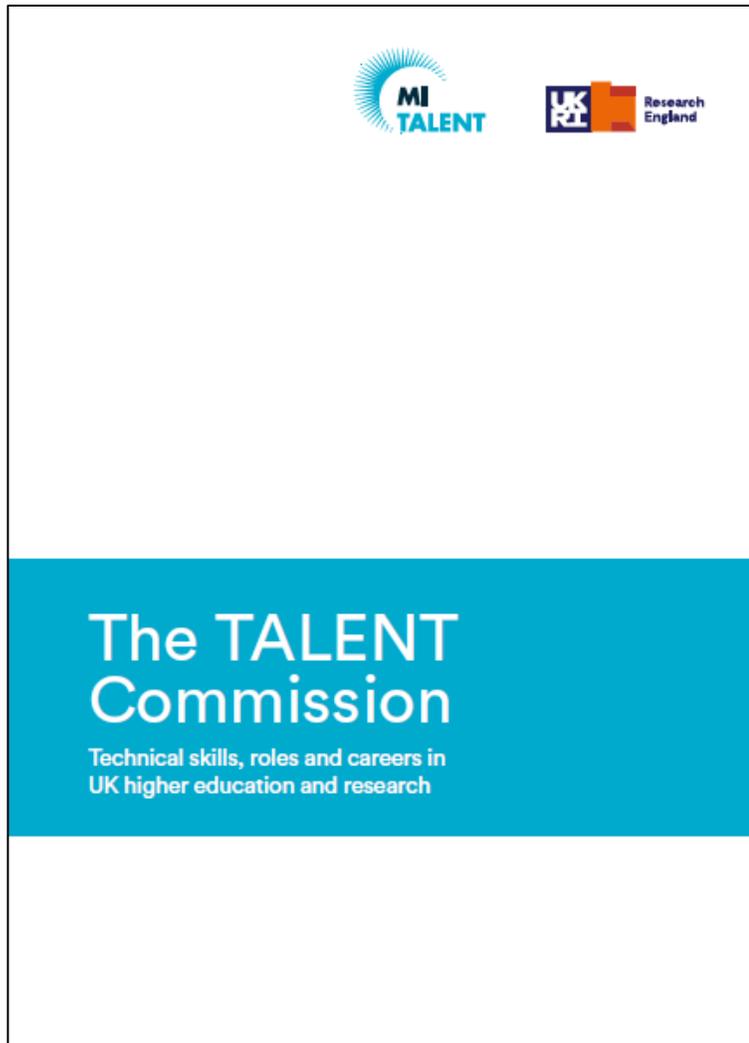
# Some other positives...

- Majority of technicians stated feeling **proud to be part of the technical community**
  - 82% of survey respondents
- Majority said they **would recommend a technical career** to someone who was considering it
  - 68% of survey respondents
- Majority said they **hoped the remainder of their career would be in the technical profession**
  - 58% of survey respondents
- Lots of positives of a technical role:
  - Variety of work
  - Solving problems
  - Creativity and hands-on work
  - Working and engaging with students and staff

# The Outcome



# The TALENT Commission report



- A landmark policy report
- Research findings & evidence based recommendations
- Launched virtually in Feb 2022
- Physical launch event at House of Lords in May 2022

# Reception so far

https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/ukri-research-england-talent-commission-report-technical-skills-70%

AdvanceHE About Us News, Views and Resources Membership Consultancy + Enhancement Programmes + Events Teaching + Learning Leadership + Management Equality, Diversity + Inclusion Effective Governance

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## Governance News Alert

### UKRI/Research England TALENT Commission report: Technical skills, roles and careers in UK higher education and research

Published: 03 February 2022

The TALENT Commission was launched in July 2020 to look at technical skills, roles and careers across UK higher education and research and is part of wider work by Research England to advance the status and opportunities of the technical community. The report is the result of 20 months of research and stakeholder engagement, including the largest survey of UK technical staff working in higher education and research ever undertaken, a range of focus groups and additional commissioned research projects on topics including funding and future technologies. The report outlines a set of principles and 16 recommendations, with further specifics to target stakeholder groups.

The full report can be found [here](#).

At a glance

https://www.ses.ac.uk/the-talent-commission-report/

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## The TALENT Commission Report



https://www.researchprofessionalnews.com/rr-news-uk-research-councils-2022-2-role-of-technicians-in-teaching-and-research-underplayed/

## \*ResearchProfessional News

UK Europe USA Australia & NZ Africa World Opinion Funding Insight Covid-19 Funding Opportunities

https://gw4.ac.uk/opinion/what-do-talent-commission-report-findings-mean-for-the-future-of-technicians-a-gw4-response/

GW4

About Research and Innovation Talent and Skills GW4 Funding Opportunities

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## WHAT DO TALENT COMMISSION REPORT FINDINGS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF TECHNICIANS? – A GW4 RESPONSE /

February 22, 2022



Sabrina Fairchild

Dr Sabrina Fairchild, GW4 Alliance Talent and Skills Manager, welcomes the TALENT Commission report, which has gathered new strategic insights into the UK's technical workforce in higher education and research.

https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/dont-exclude-technicians-decision-making-universities-told



PROFESSIONAL CAMPUS JOBS EVENTS RANKINGS STUDENT SC



## Don't exclude technicians from decision-making, universities told

'Unsung heroes' of UK research are too often denied seat at the table, says major review of technical staff and skills

February 1, 2022

Jack Grove

Twitter: @jgro\_the



UK Europe USA Australia & NZ Africa World Opinion Funding Insight Covid-19 Funding Opportunities

## Role of technicians in teaching and research 'underplayed'

By Chris Parr

Share f t in e



Talent Commission calls for better career opportunities for technical staff

https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/03/10/transforming-the-uk-technical-talent-an-opportunity-for-the-he-and-research-sectors/



The UK's

News Blog Publications Events Lectures

## Transforming the UK's Technical Talent: An opportunity for the HE and research sectors

10 March 2022

By Debra Humphris

Debra Humphris is Vice-Chancellor of the University of Brighton and was one of the Commissioners on the UKRI-Research England funded TALENT Commission, a national policy commission delivering strategic insight into the future of the UK's technical talent.

Collaboration isn't always easy in a competitive sector. But in the current higher education and research landscape, more strategic thinking by institutions, funders and policymakers

# The TALENT Commission report

## **Our overall vision:**

- *The UK will be a global superpower in science, engineering, and the creative industries, enabled by its technical capability and capacity across academia, research, education and innovation.*
- *Technical skills, roles, and careers will be recognised, respected, aspired to, supported, and developed.*

## ■ **Vision**

## ■ **Principles**

- *What this vision will look like in practice*

## ■ **Recommendations**

- *How we can get there*

a) 16 overarching recommendations for the sector

b) Targeted recommendations for key stakeholder groups

# The Recommendations



# Recommendation 1

- **Employers of technical staff, funders, and government departments should employ a strategic approach to ensure the sustainability and appropriateness of technical skills and careers, at both a local and national level.**
  - This includes succession planning in individual organisations, investment in a new pipeline of technical talent and horizon scanning new and emerging technologies and skills.

## Recommendation 2

- **Funders and employers of technical staff in higher education and research should recognise the blurring of boundaries between technical and academic roles. They should provide opportunities and mechanisms to move between career pathways and across sectors.**

# Recommendation 7

- **Employers of technical staff should broaden access to technical careers in the sector by utilising and expanding entry routes to include both vocational and academic pathways.**
  - Invest in apprenticeship and trainee technician programmes
  - Host work placement schemes for technical qualifications where possible (e.g. T-level placements in England)
  - Include new apprenticeship positions on bids for major infrastructure investments
  - Use the Apprenticeship Levy to train technicians
  - Explore pooled Levy sharing across organisations

# Recommendation 9

- **Employers of technical staff should ensure visibility of clearly defined career pathways and progression routes, with accurate and standardised job descriptions for technical roles.**
  - Pilot activity should be considered to explore new opportunities for progression routes akin to those available for academic roles

# Recommendation 10

- **Employers of technical staff, funders, and sector bodies should ensure provision and access to a range of professional development opportunities tailored to technical roles and careers.**
  - For example, technical role-specific training courses, mentor-mentee programmes, placements and shadowing opportunities, and/or professional registration.
  - Equity with other staff groups is key: for example, the Researcher Development Concordat recommends a ring-fenced 10 days' pro rata per year for professional development.

# Recommendation 15

- **Technical staff should engage positively with current and future opportunities that are available to them.**
  - Technical staff and those working with them should raise awareness of opportunities for the technical community.
  - Managers of technical staff should inform and support their teams, encourage participation and celebrate successes.

# Targeted recommendations: specific to key groups



## Government and Policymakers

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Government has a vital role to play in supporting research, innovation, and education for academic and vocational pathways.

Uptake and enactment of these targeted recommendations will ensure that the government delivers on its aim to establish a world-leading technical education system.



Targeted recommendation

Ensure connectivity and alignment between the DfE and BEIS in particular and their workforces, and related policy areas.

Support funders and institutions to improve the sustainability of technical skills and the generation of technical talent. Support scanning of new and emerging technical skills.

Building on the BEIS R&D People and Workforce survey to support the development of a purpose classification for technical roles and innovation at all levels.

Explore the possibility of adjustments to flexibility regarding how it can support organisations.



## Funders

Funders have a vital role in providing the framework for individual employers allocating resources, and assigning responsibilities.

Uptake and enactment of these targeted recommendations will generate impact within research, innovation, and education more successfully. This includes inclusiveness, long-term sustainability, and the ability to attract and retain technical staff.



Targeted recommendations

Provide transparent guidelines for how to fund technical staff on grants.

Ensure the review of Full Economic Costing of technical staff on grants, ensuring an accurate costing of technical staff within research, innovation, and education.

Support and facilitate investment into research and traineeships.

Encourage grant and/or funding applications to include new apprenticeships.

Support outreach and public engagement including technical staff.

Encourage availability and uptake of professional development opportunities tailored to technical staff.



## Professional Bodies and Learned Societies

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Professional Bodies and Learned Societies play a vital role in supporting the wider research, innovation, and education workforce as part of the wider research, innovation, and education workforce. They also represent professional standards, opportunities for professional development, and a representative voice on discipline-specific policy.

Uptake and enactment of these targeted recommendations will ensure that professional bodies and learned societies diversify their membership, ensure representative voice on discipline-specific policy, and actively pursue engagement with the technical community.



Targeted recommendations

Formally support and engage with the Technician Committee, the new collaborative entity (provisionally to be called the UK for Technical Skills & Strategy [working title]), to provide a unit to government when discussing sector and policy developments.

Actively pursue engagement with the technical community.

Work to address equality, diversity, and inclusivity considerations through implementation of targeted technical initiatives and/or their inclusion within sector-wide initiatives. Acknowledge that workforce characteristics of technical communities are often not uniform (e.g. reported differences by discipline area), with different approaches potentially needed for different technical communities.

Support outreach and public engagement around technical staff.



## Employers of Technical Staff

Employers of technicians and technical staff play a vital role in the UK. They develop and create and have impact upon general workforce and influence professional development opportunities.

Uptake and enactment of these targeted recommendations will ensure that employers of technical staff develop short- and long-term strategies by building a strong technical workforce to their full potential to enable excellence in research, innovation, and education.



Targeted recommendations

Work to address any equality, diversity, and inclusivity considerations for technical workforces through implementation of targeted specific initiatives, and/or ensuring inclusion within wider initiatives such as those linked to Athena Swan and the Race Equality Framework. Acknowledge that workforce characteristics of technical communities are often not uniform (e.g. reported differences by discipline area), with different approaches potentially needed for different technical communities.

Review how staff contributions are recognised and reward structures at department- and institution-level, and whether inclusivity is considered across all job families.

Encourage appropriate inclusion of technical staff as authors and presenters at conferences and events.



## The Technical Community

Technicians and technical staff can play a vital role influencing the future of UK research, innovation, and education. They can inspire current and future generations of technical talent to realise their potential within technical careers, and help deliver transfer of knowledge, skills and expertise from one generation to the next, ensuring the UK has the technical capabilities, skills and infrastructure needed to enable world-leading research, education and innovation. They can help create the foundations on which future generations of technical staff will stand.

Uptake and implementation of these targeted recommendations will ensure technical staff can contribute to a positive, thriving, and inclusive working environment, and will help reduce or remove pre-existing barriers. The targeted recommendations support the technical community to take advantage of future opportunities as they arise, and to continue to break down barriers to inclusion and recognition within research, innovation, and education sectors.



Targeted recommendations

Engage with professional development opportunities where available, including both pre-existing and new opportunities for e.g. training, mentoring, professional registration, presenting at conferences and events.

Discuss professional development opportunities with the managers and technical managers, including yearly allowances of days for professional development, and protocols for arranging cover of daily duties if needed.

Participate in and engage with visibility events and local outreach activities where available, including informal department and institution showcases.



Benefits for delivering these recommendations

This will advance development of skills and individual careers, as well as ensure similar opportunities continue to be supported and offered in future.

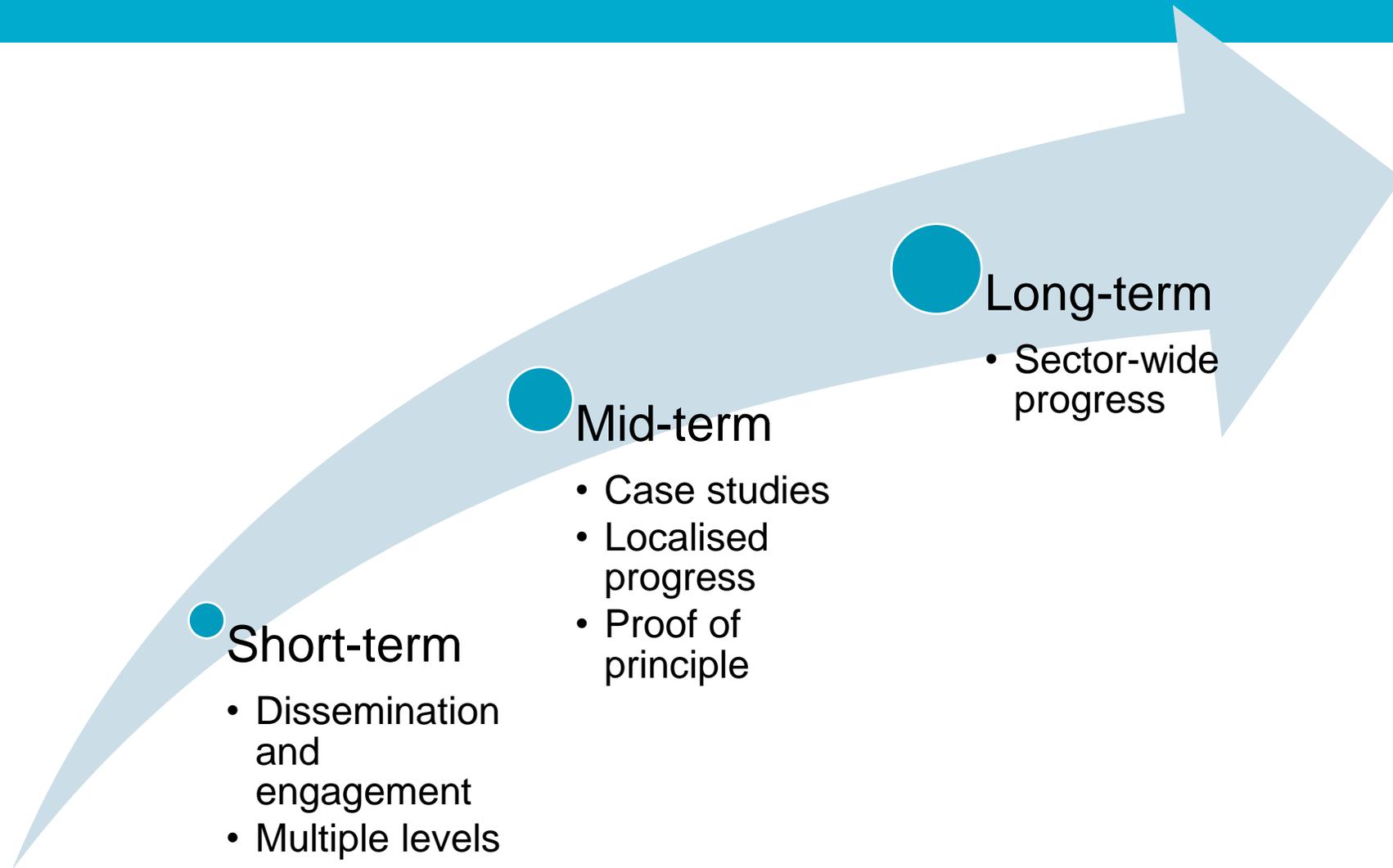
This will help to ensure sustainability of skills within the UK technical workforce at local-, national-, and sector- level.

This will help non-technicians to understand the important and diverse contributions that technical staff make to their institutions and beyond.

# What next?



# What next?

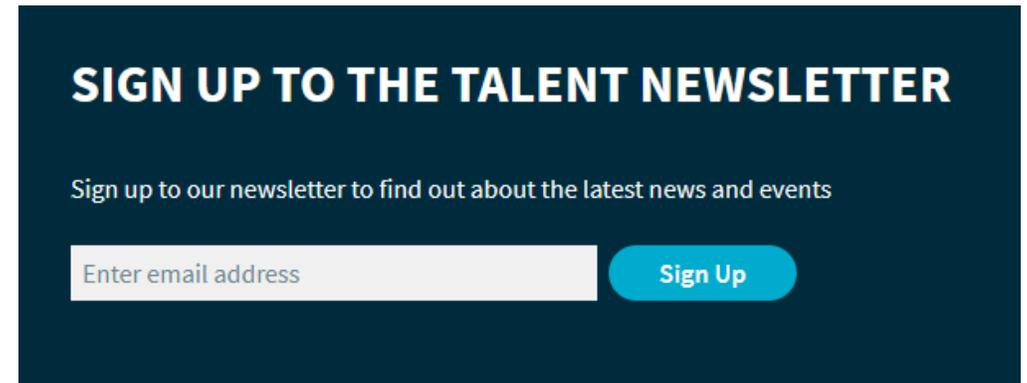


# How to Get Involved & Find Out More



# How to Get Involved & Find Out More

- Read the Commission Report and look out for further publications and/or news from TALENT, via
  1. Our website: <https://www.mitalent.ac.uk/>
  2. Twitter: @MI\_TechTalent
  3. Our newsletter: subscribe via our website



- Spread the word about TALENT & its aims!

# Thank you!



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[@MI\\_TechTalent](https://twitter.com/MI_TechTalent)

# TALENT Commission Launch Video

- <https://www.mitalent.ac.uk/theTALENTcommission>