The TALENT Commission

The TALENT Commission report: empowering technical workforces of the future

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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

£5million; 2020-2024

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MI TALENT: 3 main strands

Policy commission

Culture change projects

Training and empowerment

Strategic insight into technical skills of the future

Driving culture change for the technical community

Career development for technicians through tailored technical training
The TALENT Policy Commission

Strategic insight into technical talent of the future
The TALENT Board of Commissioners

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

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Key Themes Explored

- Practice & Contributions
- Workforce Characteristics
- Funding & Resourcing
- Pathways, Progression & Professional Development
- Perception, Recognition & Representation
- Policy
- Partnerships
Key Approaches to Gathering Evidence

- Open Call for Views & Evidence
- Desk Research & Secondary Analysis
- National Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Interviews & Stakeholder Engagement Workshops
Findings:
Some examples
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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
  o Blurred lines between academic and technical teaching?
• Creative arts: extreme case, but perhaps a direction of travel?
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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
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’)

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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
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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.
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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
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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

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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

https://www.mitalent.ac.uk/theTALENTCommission
Reception so far

Goverance News Alert

UKRI/Research England TALENT Commission report: Technical skills, roles and careers in UK higher education and research
Published 17 February 2022

The TALENT Commission was launched in July 2021 to bring together the technical skills and expertise needed within the research sector to ensure a sustainable and resilient knowledge economy. This report identifies and recommends actions to create a more resilient knowledge economy, with a focus on technical skills and expertise, and to ensure the sector remains resilient in the face of global challenges.

The full report can be found here.

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

Role of technicians in teaching and research ‘underplayed’
By Chris Der

Transforming the UK’s Technical Talent: An opportunity for the HE and research sectors
10 March 2020
By Debbie Ingram

The Commission calls for better career opportunities for technical staff.
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
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.
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.
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.
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

Government has a vital role to play in supporting academic and vocational research, innovation, and ed

Funders

Funders have a vital role in influencing the future of UK research, innovation, and education. They can provide funding to support new initiatives, attract talented researchers, and help drive progress in key areas.

Professional Bodies and Learned Societies

Professional bodies and learned societies play a crucial role in setting standards and providing guidance. Their recommendations can shape the direction of education and research.

Employers of Technical Staff

Employers of technical staff can play a vital role in influencing the future of UK research, innovation, and education. They can provide funding and support to help develop new initiatives.

The Technical Community

Technicians and technical staff can play a vital role in ensuring the future of UK research, innovation, and education. They can support new initiatives and help drive progress in key areas.

Benefits for delivering these recommendations

- Enhance your reputation and visibility in the technical community
- Attract new talent to your organization
- Improve your ability to deliver innovative solutions
-增强您的声誉和在技术社区中的可见度
- 吸引新人才到您的组织
- 提高您交付创新解决方案的能力

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What next?
What next?

Short-term
- Dissemination and engagement
- Multiple levels

Mid-term
- Case studies
- Localised progress
- Proof of principle

Long-term
- Sector-wide progress
How to Get Involved & Find Out More
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- 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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TALENT Commission Launch Video

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