



QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST

# TECHNICIAN COMMITMENT 2024

Photo by Donal Moran

RUSSELL  
GROUP

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# INTRODUCTION

**Established in 2017 and led by the Science Council and funded by the Gatsby Foundation, the Technician Commitment was launched with 36 founding signatory institutions, including Queen's University Belfast.**

Signed by over 120 universities and research institutions to date, it now welcomes three international signatories – a global initiative supporting technicians, now positioned in the new UK Institute for Technical Skills and Strategy (UK-ITSS).

Historically, Technicians have been undervalued and their career development overlooked. The Technician Commitment seeks to address this, focussing on four key areas: visibility, recognition, career development, and sustainability of technical careers. The vision of the Technician Commitment is to create a culture where technical careers are recognised, respected, supported, developed and aspired to as professional careers in higher education and research.

The commitment recognises the vital role that technicians play in supporting research, teaching, and knowledge transfer within these institutions.

Technicians provide essential technical expertise enabling cutting-edge research and high-quality education. Often researchers and educators, they contributing to the development of the future STEAM workforce.



# INTRODUCTION

The impact of the Technician Commitment has been significant, raising the profile of technicians, providing opportunities for recognition and career progression, ensuring the future supply of technical skills. This has helped create a more inclusive culture that values the contributions of all members of the team, from academics to technicians.

The Technician Commitment is a crucial initiative, supporting the vital role technicians play in UK higher education and research institutions, ensuring these institutions continue to thrive and maintain global competitiveness.

The Technician Commitment requires signatory institutions to develop and implement action plans to drive progress in key areas, ensuring technicians are motivated, engaged and proud to be technicians, with others aspiring to technical careers in higher education and research.



# AN INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITY

Recognition of the role technicians play is crucial. Technician Commitment empowers the vital and essential role Technicians play, not just at Queen's but in delivering and enabling knowledge through public engagement and access to facilities and involvement in the creation of Intellectual property.

We are happy to say Technician Commitment is now an institutional priority embedded in the University's Strategy 2030, Technician Commitment, operates across the university's dynamic activities, evolving the ecosphere of a 21st century globally connected university with an overarching commitment to excellence.

These technical skills allow us to continue to achieve our strategic priorities in education, research and innovation and impact, allowing us to further strengthen and widen our local partnerships and global collaborations and, ultimately, our positive contribution to society. Without our technicians, we simply would not be the world-class university that we pride ourselves on, which is why the Technician Commitment is so important to me as Vice-Chancellor."

— President and Vice-Chancellor,  
Professor Sir Ian Greer



## FOUNDING SIGNATORY

Queen's University was a frontrunner, becoming a founding signatory of the Technician Commitment in May 2017 – the first on the island of Ireland. Ulster University followed in 2021, and Munster Technological University joined in 2024.

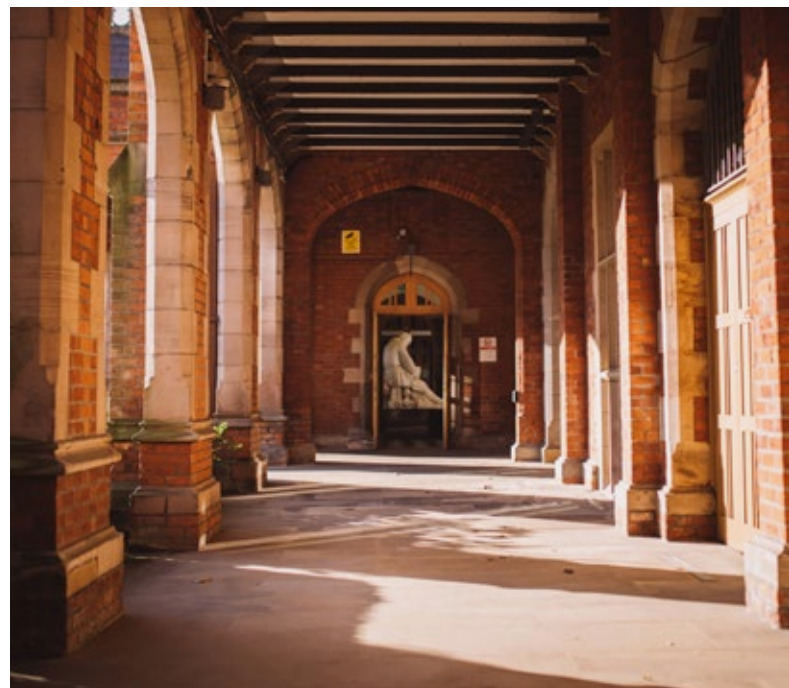
Since then, Queen's University has made significant strides in promoting positive change, particularly in raising the visibility of its technical community. Numerous faculty events culminated in the inaugural all-university Technician Showcase in September 2019, held in the School of Biological Sciences, where the technical community showcased their crucial contributions to education and research.

### Celebrating Impact and Inspiring Progress

In December 2021, Queen's University's commitment was nationally recognized when it became one of 60 institutions to receive the Technician Commitment Impact Award. This accolade celebrated progress in Visibility, Recognition, Career Development, and Sustainability, acknowledging the Technician Commitment's profound sector-wide impact.

“At Queen's, we are committed to supporting, developing and celebrating our technical staff, who are a crucial part of the excellent teaching and research that takes place across the University.”

– Professor Alan Stitt,  
Queen's University Belfast



# A TRANSFORMATIVE INITIATIVE

Over 120 institutions in the UK and elsewhere have signed up to Technician Commitment. This program aims to improve the careers of technicians, giving them better chances for development long-term success and professional recognition.

In Northern Ireland, Queen's University Belfast was an early adopter championing technicians and their contribution to higher education and research.

Adding to the international reach, Munster Technological University became the first member in the Republic of Ireland and the third overall outside the UK to join in January 2024. It is also committed to creating professional opportunities for technical staff to develop long term technical skills and expertise, recognition, and awards.

The Technician Commitment at Queen's is led by Professor Alan Stitt, the Institutional Lead, and Mrs Gillian Riddell, the Technical Lead.

With input from Faculty Technician Committees, Technician Commitment activities are coordinated and agreed by Queen's Technician commitment Steering Group, with Professor Alan Stitt and Gillian Riddell as co-chairs having final oversight.



## TECHNICIAN ENGAGEMENT THROUGH EVENTS

Queen's University prioritises technician engagement by hosting well-attended and well-received events.

### Online Networking Event, April 2021

Nearly 150 technicians participated in this virtual event, with nearly all 94 per cent of participants finding it valuable and expressed interest in attending similar events again.

### Technician Showcases 2022 & 2024

These in-person events each drew over 200 attendees from all areas of the University, recognising the contribution made by technicians across Queen's; facilitating networking; welcoming exhibitors and trade stands; delivering workshops and demonstrations, and providing an opportunity for university senior management to show their support for technicians.

Queen's technicians have also been recognised in external awards, such as Times Higher Education Technician of the Year Award. George Burton, Technical manager of the Glassblowing Workshop, has recently been awarded the prestigious 2024 Technical Excellence Prize, by the Royal Society of Chemistry.





## A KEY SUPPORT NETWORK

Queen's has approximately 270 technicians spanning three Faculties and two directorates. These technicians make up 5.7 per cent of Queen's staff, reflecting the dynamic and diverse activity across our three Faculties:

- Medicine Health and Life Sciences (MHLS)
- Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS)
- Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS)

Technician Commitment is fully supported by all three Faculties, most (53%) work in the Medicine and Life Sciences faculty, with a clear reporting structure for technicians in most schools, but not yet for the whole university, which will be addressed in the near future. Technicians report to School Technical Managers, who in turn report to the Head (or Deputy) Head of School. Technical staff are distributed across 20 Schools and Departments.

15 per cent are based in Finance and Resources (Digital Transformation, IT systems and Services); Student and Corporate Services (Marketing and Communications) and People and Culture. 85 per cent of Queen's technicians work in academic schools.

“Financial backing and engagement with the senior management of the University underscores our commitment to ensuring the visibility, recognition, career development, and sustainability for all Queen's technical staff.”

— Gillian Riddell, Technician Commitment Manager



## VARIED AND DIVERSE

Queen's technicians take on varied and diverse roles, from Apprentice or Trainee positions to Technicians, Senior Technicians, Floor Managers and Technical Managers.

Technicians are funded from several sources although the majority – 72 per cent – are institutionally-funded core technicians, the remainder supported by external grant awards.

Core technicians support educational activities but, in most cases, they contribute to both education and research. We also have several Core Technology Units and a Biological Services Unit – which operates on a cost-recovery model generating funds for research equipment, specialist research services and technical salaries.



## AWARDS

**Queen's technicians have been recognised in both internal and external awards, of which we are justly proud.**

We have had two technicians shortlisted in the prestigious Times Higher Education Outstanding Technician of the Year Award - Aine McGuckin in 2020 and Gillian Riddell in 2022.

Twenty-seven laboratories from across Queen's recently achieved a Bronze and four achieved a Silver LEAF award. Our Technician LEAF team was shortlisted in the 2024 Staff Excellence Awards, in the category of "Commitment to Sustainability"

ATHENA SWAN GOLD Award for ground breaking work on gender equality and only the second UK University, and the first on the island of Ireland, to receive this prestigious award.

At the IST conference in York 2022, Gillian Riddell was awarded the Fellowship of IST.

Technicians have been nominated as part of teams for the Queen's Teaching Award – Excellence in Teaching by a Team. In 2023 we achieved an amazing result with technicians being part of two of only three successful team awards

- The Next Generation Electronics Laboratories Team, EEECS (includes technicians: Jim Norney, Gerry Rafferty, Kieran Rainey and Tony Boyle).
- Centre for Medicine Education and School of nursing and Midwifery (includes technicians: Ray Lam and David Hardy).

### **Queen's University Technician Awards 2024**

Chris Farnan (Education), Glenn Gallagher (Research), Katie Quinn (Newcomer), Kirsty McLaughlin (Outreach), Maria Rea (Sustainability)

### **Queen's University Technician Awards 2022**

Kevin Campbell (Education), Marc Fuchs (Research), Jonny McGuinness (Newcomer)

## QUEEN'S TECHNICIAN COMMITMENT STEERING GROUP MEMBERSHIP

**Queen's Technician Commitment is overseen by a steering group (QTCSG) to ensure it meets its goals.**

This group includes:

- Senior university leaders: A Dean and a Pro-Vice-Chancellor for oversight and connection to the University's governing board.
- Technician representatives: Senior technicians from across the university to ensure technician voices are heard.
- Equality and diversity specialists: To promote inclusivity in the Technician Commitment.
- Faculty representatives: Academics and technicians from each Faculty to tailor the program to specific needs.

This structure emphasises collaboration and ensures diverse perspectives contribute to the success of the Technician Commitment across the entire university.

**Queen's Technician Commitment Steering Group (QTCSG) Co-Chairs**

These individuals provide overall leadership and direction for the Queen's-Technician Commitment initiative.

- Professor Alan Stitt (Technician Commitment Institutional Lead and Dean of Innovation and Impact; MHLS)
- Mrs Gillian Riddell (Institutional Technical Lead/Technician Commitment Manager)

**University Management Board (UMB) Sponsor:**

This role acts as a liaison between the Steering Group and University Management ensuring alignment with broader university goals.

- Professor Archie Clements (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Enterprise)

**MEET THE TECHNICIAN COMMITMENT  
STEERING GROUP**

[qub.ac.uk/sites/technicians/TechnicianCommitment/  
TechnicianCommitmentSteeringGroup/](http://qub.ac.uk/sites/technicians/TechnicianCommitment/TechnicianCommitmentSteeringGroup/)

## BRINGING EXPERTISE TOGETHER

To advance the 2021-2024 Technician Commitment Action Plan, five Action Plan working groups were established to bring together expertise from across the university.

These groups were co-chaired by Steering Group Technician champions and a senior academic. They were also joined by appointees from within the Technical community, Professional Services, the Vice-Chancellor's Office, and Estates Directorate.

Technician co-chairs of the working groups provide regular progress reports to the Steering Group. This proactive approach ensures visibility, recognition, career development, and sustainability as the key pillars of the Technician Commitment.

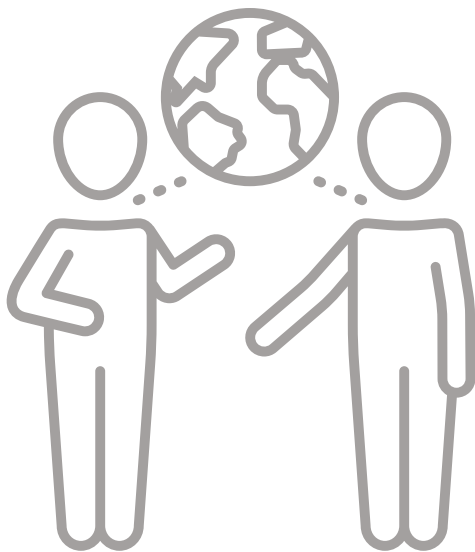
### SUSTAINABILITY

Queen's response to the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) is part of the nationwide standard that seeks to reduce the carbon footprint of laboratories. A group of technicians led the LEAF programme and began embedding the principles of sustainability and efficiency across research and teaching laboratories.



## BRINGING EXPERTISE TOGETHER

We continue to engage with national technician events, with representation at Technician Commitment Signatory events, UK Higher Education Technicians Summit (HETS), Technical Managers at Universities (TMU) and the Institute of Science and Tehcnology (IST) conferences. In 2023, both Queen's University and Ulster University applied for the Technician Commitment Collaboration Fund, with a proposal to create a joint Technician Commitment Action Plan for Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).



### WORKING GROUPS

#### **Communications, Networking and Events**

Co-chairs: Mr Craig Jackson (AHSS) and Dr Kurt Taroff (AHSS)

#### **Professional Development and Progression**

Co-chairs: Mrs Gillian Riddell (MHLS) and Prof Geoff McMullan (MHLS)

#### **Sustainability and Workforce Planning**

Co-chairs: Mr George Burton (EPS) and Prof Adrian Murphy (EPS)

#### **Visibility and Recognition**

Co-chairs: Mr Kenny McDonald (EPS) and Prof Chris Scott (MHLS)

#### **Environmental Sustainability**

Co-chairs: Mr Jim Norney (EPS) and Dr Gary Sheldrake (EPS)

## ENSURING BEST PRACTICE

The establishment of Faculty Technician Committees has facilitated a two-way exchange of information, sharing of best practice, and enabled shared delivery of key projects. In turn, this has empowered technicians to voice their concerns, specific challenges faced and offers a forum for making improvements and developing new, ground-up initiatives.

The introduction of the Technical Managers Forum has provided a platform for institutional-level consultation and information sharing, leveraging the wealth of experience provided by the Technical Managers to inform the actions developed through the Technician Commitment.

We have also taken steps to ensure that technicians are represented on various institutional/Faculty/School committees, such as:

- Health and Safety Compliance and Consultation
- Health and Safety Management Group
- Research and Innovation
- Research and Innovation Professionals Network
- Employee Listening Steering Group
- Staff Forum
- Sustainability Forum
- MHLS Faculty Operation Board
- Electronics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science Education Committee



# KEY IMPACTS

## LOCAL AND NATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Queen's is continually engaged in collaborative efforts at a national level. Through collaboration with Ulster University, we have developed a Northern Ireland Joint Action Plan, with support from the Technician Commitment Collaboration Fund. This joint effort aims to break down historical barriers between the two institutions and create new opportunities.

We have also established close ties with Northern Ireland Regional FE colleges, particularly Belfast Metropolitan College, with whom we introduced our Technical Apprenticeship Pilot in 2023, after several years of negotiation with the Department for the Economy.

Queen's Technicians have also engaged with several initiatives developed by universities in UK, such as the Working in Partnership Forum founded by Newcastle University in 2020.

We continue to attend workshops and conferences to further develop relationships with the N8 universities and made connections

with London and South-East Regional network to keep in touch with other parts of the UK.

A place on the Executive Programme for Strategic Technical Leadership in 2023, has proved to be an invaluable network of like-minded colleagues in universities across the UK.



Individuals act as ambassadors for Queen's while working in niche areas. One of those is Kirsty McLaughlin, who hosted a group from BD Limerick visiting flow cytometry facilities and equipment in the School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences.



## LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING

In 2023, we were delighted to have six female technicians complete the Herschel Programme and are pleased that there continues to be interest in this, with four technicians about to embark on the 2024 programme. The Herschel Programme has proven to encourage development of confidence and skills to prepare our female technicians for these roles.

On the Island of Ireland, and in collaboration with Munster Technological University, we have recently launched the All-Ireland Technical Staff Network to share opportunities with technical colleagues on the island of Ireland.

Queen's investment in the Technician Commitment has not only enhanced visibility and recognition for technical staff but has also empowered them to play a more integral role in supporting the university's research and education activities.

This proactive approach, developing strong relationships with other institutions has not only fostered a more interconnected technical community but has also encouraged greater cross-faculty and cross-institutional collaboration, providing technicians and non-technical colleagues with a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse technical roles.



## STAFF DEVELOPMENT

School Academic plans have made a strong commitment to staff development. This means technicians will have access to a variety of training opportunities.

These opportunities will help them:

- Do their jobs even better
- Meet the specific needs of their department
- Develop new skills to improve research and teaching in their school

While the training may be tailored to specific School needs, the skills learned are valuable across the university, potentially leading to career advancement opportunities for technicians.



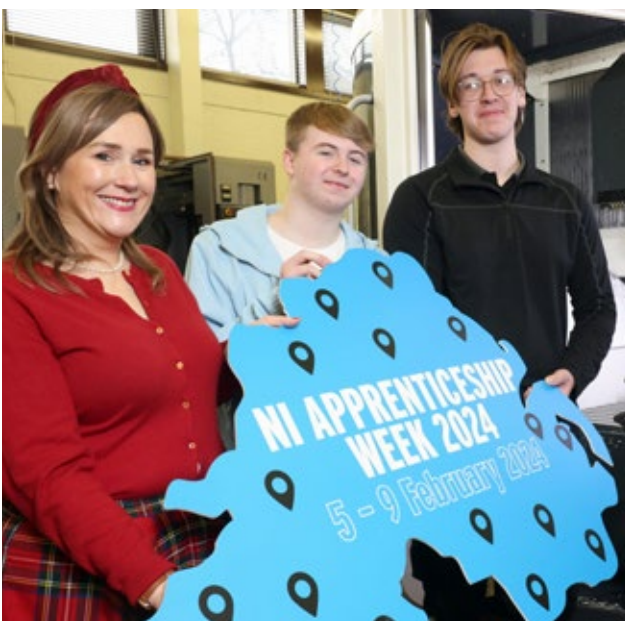
## QUEEN'S TECHNICIAN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME

This commenced in September 2023 through the appointments of apprentices across two Faculties (Medicine, Health and Life Sciences (MHLS) and Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS) and the Information Services Directorate.

Queen's Technician Apprenticeship Programme has been developed in consultation with DfE, and in close partnership with Belfast Metropolitan College as the Further Education provider.



## QUEEN'S TECHNICIAN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME



## TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

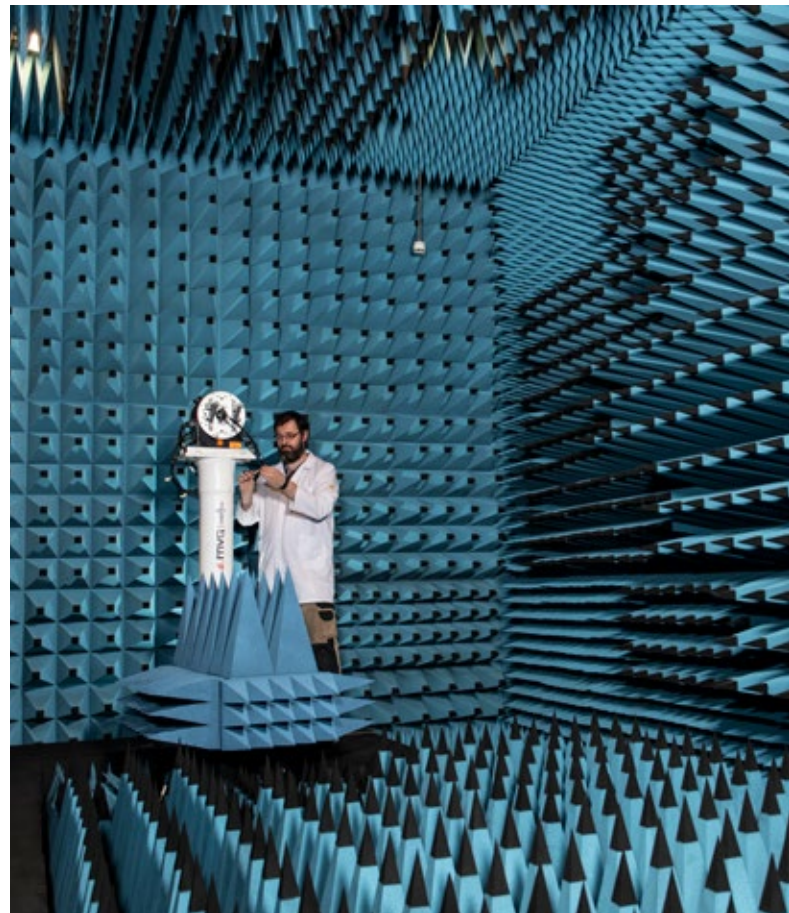
Oversight of training needs continues to be captured through the Technical Managers Forum where dynamic gaps and school needs are rapidly identified. Technical Managers are ideally positioned to keep abreast of changes in research and education requirements in their relevant areas, ensuring any appropriate upskilling or reskilling needs are identified and acted upon.

A proposal has been drafted concomitant with other UK Universities for managerial or technical specialists to progress a career path to Technical Specialists.

*“We want technicians to be positive about their technical line management; feel acknowledged for the work they are doing; that they are able to strike the right balance between their work and home life.”*

— Gillian Riddell, Technician Commitment Manager

In 2022, we appointed a Technician Commitment Manager, and we continue to explore the appointment of a Strategic Technical Lead with overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the Technician Commitment Action Plan: “a strategic approach to ensure the sustainability and appropriateness of technical skills and careers at a local and national level” (as recommended by TALENT Commission Report).



## TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

Queen's regularly returns technicians into HESA – who collect, process, and publish data about higher education – despite there being no requirement in NI Institutions (to better capture technical contribution to research and education).

Based on 'the standardised' technician career framework outlined in the TALENT Commission report we submitted a proposal to support technical career progression through two strands, Technical Management and Technical Specialist.

Many learning and development (LandD) opportunities are available to technicians through People and culture, iTrent, LinkedIn Learning.

Technicians have been nominated as part of teams for the Queen's Teaching Award Excellence in Teaching by a Team. In 2023, we achieved an amazing result with technicians being part of two of only three successful team awards in the School of Electronics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science and in the Centre for Medicine Education and School of Nursing and Midwifery.



## TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

Through Technicians at Queen's online activities bespoke to technical staff at a local and national level are advertised. Engagement is also encouraged through Faculty Technician Committees and the Technical Managers forum, with support from PVCs and Directors of Operations. Schools support technicians to attend discipline specific training and the Technical Development Fund provides a means for funding to attend conferences, workshops, and other relevant activities.

In May 2022 we held our second Technician Showcase:

“I was stunned by the Technician Showcase. This is the best kept secret, and we need to share it with Senate Members and the wider community. The range and diversity of products and services was amazing. It was fascinating to walk around the exhibits and to learn more about the developments and the current work being undertaken.”

— Pro Chancellor  
Dr Stephen Kingon



## EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI)

As a civic university, Queen's contributes to local society by providing opportunities that make the institution more relevant to the wider society. Apprenticeships and entry into employment with vocational qualifications makes technical roles more attractive and achievable.

In January 2024, Queen's launched a five-year Equality Scheme and Action Plan to address identified EDI challenges affecting its staff and student community. Approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, it sets out ways to mitigate against inequalities on the grounds of age, gender, marital status, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, political opinion, and dependant status.

Queen's also received the prestigious ATHENA SWAN GOLD Award for our ground-breaking work on gender equality. We are only the second UK University, and the first on the island of Ireland, to receive this prestigious award. We continue to address crucial issues of gender imbalance with specific actions outlined in our Institutional Athena SWAN Action Plan.

Queen's also supports the Aurora and Herschel programmes. Aurora is Advance HE's leadership development for women and the grade requirement for inclusion on the programme has been changed making it available to female senior technicians. The Herschel for women in technical leadership, is available through the Institute for Technical Skills and Strategy (ITSS).

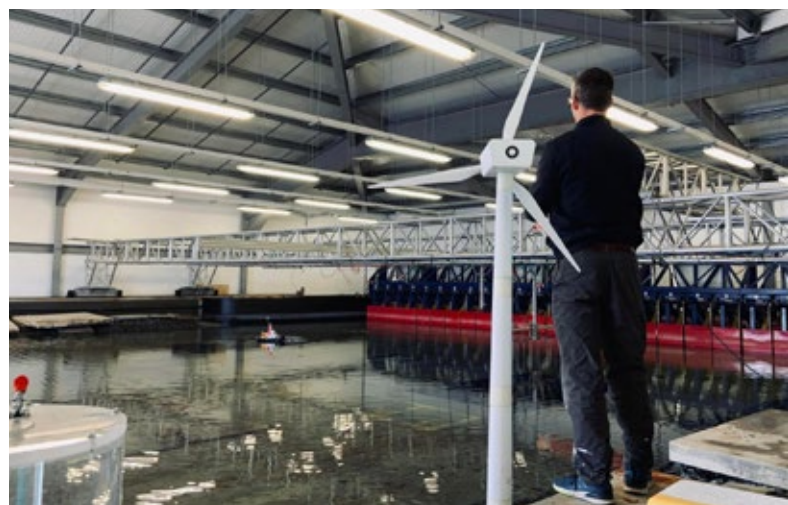




## OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Queen's Technicians are heavily involved in outreach activities. Technicians in Queen's Marine Lab (QML), in the School of Biological Sciences, regularly engage with school pupils from local schools and other member of the public by showcasing their work during open days, community festivals and public shows. Other examples include involvement in the Brian Cox Summer Science Fair, Teachers STEM Placement Programme, and the Northern Ireland Science Festival.

Technician Emma Healey organises the annual lab Open Day which attracts around 400 visitors each year to showcase the research taking place within the lab. This event is run alongside a local rural community festival in Portaferry and is a family friendly event where students can showcase their research, and where we run events to engage children such as model boats in the wave tank facility and small-scale science experiments.



## OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

### WELLCOME-WOLFSON INSTITUTE:

- Participated in the NI Science Festival 2023.
- Offered facilities tours and work placements for students interested in Biomedical Science careers.

### CENTRE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH (MEPH GROUP):

- Organized a charity walk for the Northern Ireland Kidney Research Fund (NIKRF).
- Partnered with NIKRF for an event called “Kidney Canvas.”

### PATRICK G JOHNSTON CENTRE FOR CANCER RESEARCH:

- Technicians actively participate in outreach activities, including planning and conducting laboratory tours during events.
- Recent examples include the NI Science Festival Open Day and the Markets Association Summer STEM Scheme.



## PARTNERSHIPS

A partnership with Belfast Metropolitan College is delivering technical apprenticeships, and we are aiming to work with Belfast MET, NI FE colleges and Ulster University to deliver joint opportunities and technical and vocational training to facilitate current and emerging technologies.

Technicians will play an integral part in the development and delivery of these partnerships and, in doing so, help create unique technician roles transcending more traditional positions.

We envisage dynamic interchanges between the academic and private sector and the creation of opportunities that deliver across all pillars of the Technician Commitment.



# FOUR KEY AREAS

## TECHNICIAN COMMITMENT 36-MONTH ACTION PLAN 2024/27

### VISIBILITY

- To ensure that the delivery of Technician Commitment is visible at all levels of the University, i.e. Technicians, Schools, Faculties, Professional Services Management Group, University Management Board.
- Promote networking: both the Queen's technician network and inter-institution networking with technicians across the other HE institutions locally and nationally.

### RECOGNITION

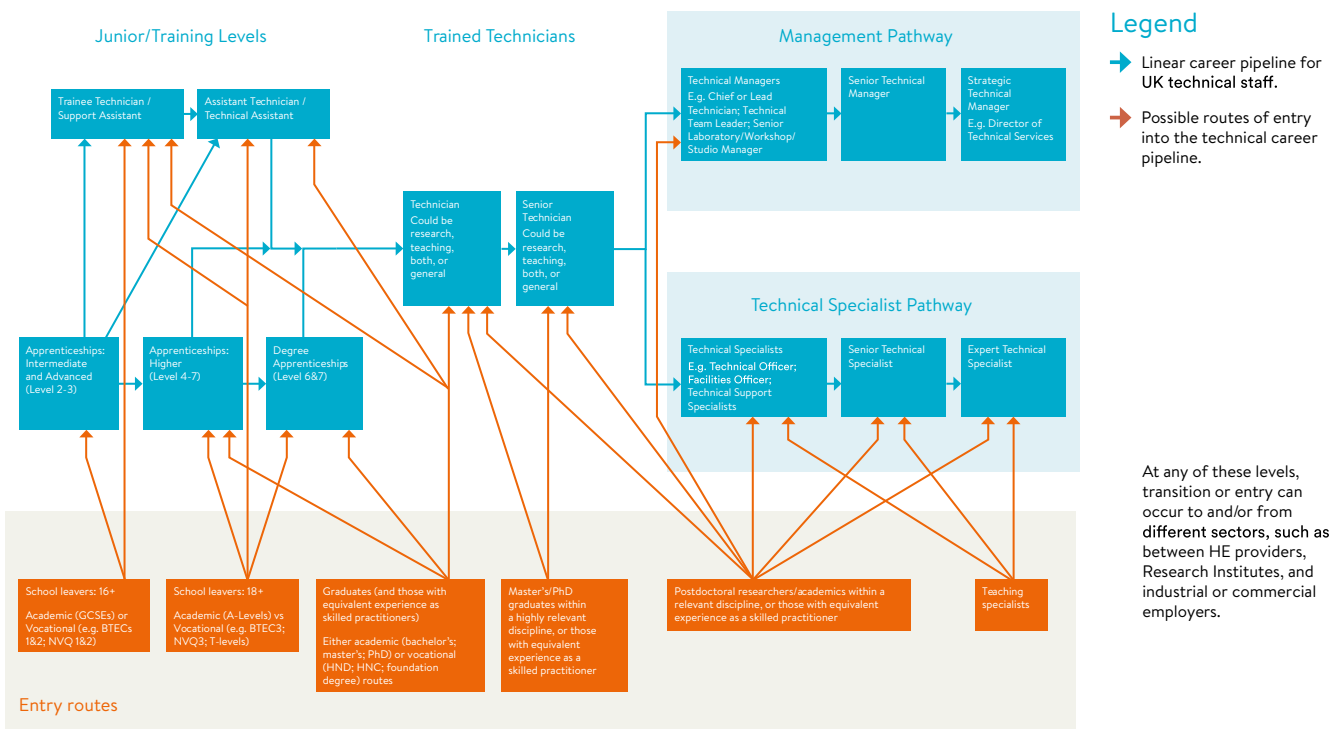
- Ensure that Technicians are actively involved in leadership and decision-making relating to Queen's policies around EDI, Wellbeing and Mental Health.
- Embed Technical Staff within Research Culture initiatives.
- Document how technical staff are costed on research grants and agree a new process.
- Ensure technicians are recognised for their contribution to education.
- Continue to encourage nominations for technical staff for internal and external awards.



# FOUR KEY AREAS

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- Develop clear career pathways that provide clear guidance for development and progression for technical staff.
- Provide career development opportunities to technical staff (mapping onto the agreed career pathway).
- Investigate how technicians contribute to all aspects of Knowledge Exchange (KE) and explore future involvement (KEC, KTPs, AKT21, iCURE, Accelerate to Innovate).
- Identify how technical expertise can contribute to Queen's Belfast Regional City Deal (BRCD) portfolio.



# FOUR KEY AREAS

## SUSTAINABILITY

- Take a strategic approach to development and sustainability of technical staff and skills, considering succession planning and identifying existing and potential skills gaps.
- Further develop apprenticeship opportunities to address the growing need for succession planning for an aging workforce.

[Queen's Technician Commitment Action Plan 2024-2027](#)



Technician **Commitment**



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