

Technician Commitment: Initial Self-Assessment & Action Plan Guidance

The Technician Commitment is a university and research institution initiative, led by a steering group of sector bodies, hosted by the UK Institute for Technical Skills & Strategy. The Commitment aims to ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technicians working in higher education and research, across all disciplines. Universities and research institutes are invited to become signatories of the Technician Commitment and pledge action against the key challenges affecting their technical staff.

The themes of the Technician Commitment are: Visibility, Recognition, Career Development, Sustainability and Evaluating Impact. The fifth theme of Evaluating Impact takes the form of a self-assessment process, to be undertaken 12-18 months after an organisation becomes a signatory and every three years thereafter.

The self-assessment process enables the Technician Commitment to gain an understanding of the position of each signatory organisation and the measures to be put in place to ensure that signatories are making progress against the themes outlined in the Commitment. The initial self-assessment process asks for contextual information, progress to date and a detailed 24-month future action plan.

The Technician Commitment does not seek to dictate how organisations promote a positive culture for the technician community. This is a matter for autonomous institutions and the technician, research and academic community to agree. It is expected that as a minimum, signatories publicly state their Technician Commitment signatory status and institutional action plan on a dedicated and discoverable webpage, along with their named point of contact. The Technician Commitment asks signatories to evidence that the 'technician voice' is present in the development and formation of institutional action plans. The Technician Commitment is a collaborative endeavour and will support and facilitate the establishment and sharing of best practice demonstrated in the self-assessments and action plans. A vibrant community of institutional leads tasked with implementing the Technician Commitment is continually developing and the Steering Board aims to ensure a range of forums are available to enable peers to share expertise, good practice and experiences.

To support institutional action planning, please see Appendix A for examples of activities and initiatives that have been successfully implemented in a range of universities and research institutes. Additional details are available on the Technician Commitment's dedicated online resource, available at techniciancommitment.org.uk. Cross referencing to other sector institutional reviews relevant to technicians is welcomed; for example, institutions may wish to reference Athena SWAN applications, Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) submissions and Research Excellence Framework (REF) environment statement/People, Culture and Environment submissions where technicians have been explicitly mentioned.

Finalised Action Plans should be signed off at an institutional leadership level (e.g. Vice-Chancellor/President/Director level). Kindly export this completed form (and any appendices) as a single .pdf file titled **Institution Name/Month/Year of Submission**. There are two submission windows per year – end of January and end of July every year.

For any additional queries, please contact tc@itss.org.uk.

Once your form has been submitted to the above email address, you will receive a confirmation email from the Technician Commitment team.

Technician Commitment Initial Self-Assessment & Action Plan

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

Organisation: Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences – IBERS

Name of Institutional Lead: Prof Alison Kingston Smith, Director of Research IBERS

Date joined: 28th May 2025

1. To provide some context, please provide a brief profile of your organisation. (up to 250 words)

The Institute of Biological, Environmental & Rural Sciences (IBERS) is a BBSRC Institute embedded in Aberystwyth University, and the staff are employees of Aberystwyth University. The overarching goal of Aberystwyth University is “To change lives for the better”. Aligned with this is IBERS **Vision** ‘to ensure that humanity can sustainably produce the food, feed and plant based industrial resources it needs’. Our **Mission** is to provide a National Capability in Grassland and Plant Breeding Science through its expertise in crop science and ability to translate research into new plant varieties. **Strategy.** To realise our vision and mission, IBERS brings together a unique assembly of grassland & plant breeding scientists, state-of-the-art research facilities, stakeholder relationships, and collaborative networks to address the two linked strategic themes of ‘Sustainable agriculture & healthy food’, and ‘Climate change adaptation & mitigation’. **Overview.** IBERS conducts long-term research into forage, grain, and biomass crops and their value chains. This includes grasslands for ruminant agriculture to increase productivity and decrease GHG emissions, grains for human health including sustainable sources of protein, and biomass feedstocks for GHG removal and the bioeconomy. Grasslands represent 70% of agricultural land, oats are a rich source of beta-glucan fibre proven to lower cholesterol, and biomass with carbon capture & storage is the carbon removal technology most deployable at scale to help achieve net zero.

2. Please tell us how your organisation defines its technicians.

A **technician** within IBERS, Aberystwyth University, is a highly skilled and essential professional who provides technical expertise, practical support, and innovative solutions that underpin and enable scientific discovery, applied research, training, teaching and outreach. This aligns with The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) definition of technical staff as employees who use specialized knowledge of techniques, tools, and technology to make practical contributions to teaching, research, innovation, and enterprise. Technicians contribute across a wide range of disciplines and environments—from laboratories and field sites to digital platforms— bringing diverse skill sets critical to the success of institutional activity.

Technicians are central to innovation, continuity, and institutional knowledge, enabling excellence in science and collaboration across disciplines. At IBERS they apply this expertise within an academic setting through:

Managing and maintaining experiments, equipment, and research infrastructure, including ensuring regulatory compliance and safety

Collecting, analysing, and documenting research data

Supporting digital communications, IT systems, and media related to research activity

Teaching, training, and enabling others to apply technical knowledge.

3. How many technicians are there in your organisation? Please provide some information on where they are based and/or how they are structured (in terms of subject/discipline/department).

IBERS has ~130 staff of which ~45% could identify as technicians according to our/HESA definition. IBERS has five main types of technician based on role and activity:

Laboratory-based Technicians – undertaking research projects within or across research groups to maintain, manage and run laboratory experiments.

Field-based Technicians – undertaking research projects within, and across research groups. Work may involve managing large crop experiments at plot or field scale or working with livestock at plot or field scale.

Specialist – develops and provides specialist expertise to research projects, including teaching others to design and use techniques and scientific instrumentation, application of specific computational approaches and related methodologies.

Technical Services – provide operational support for the researchers including the upkeep and maintenance of shared laboratories, technical equipment, including maintenance of glasshouses and controlled environment systems for research and other related services.

Research support – Management and delivery of large-scale projects, supporting teams directly involved in research activity and research resources.



IBERS TECHNICIAN ALLOCATION

IBERS EXECUTIVE TEAM



0 Technicians

IBERS RESEARCH CLUSTERS



27 Field
15 Lab
1 Specialist IT

IBERS INFRASTRUCTURE TEAMS



5 Field
4 Lab

OUTREACH & IMPACT LEADS



4 Specialist IT



INSTITUTE STRATEGIC TEAM LEADS



1 Research Support

INSTITUTE SPECIALIST AND TECHNICAL TEAM LEADS



1 Specialist IT
2 Research Support

4. Please provide details of initiatives/programmes/activities that were already in place for the technical community within your organisation prior to becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment.

IBERS technicians, through Aberystwyth University's (AU) central provision, already had access to a comprehensive programme of training and development prior to engagement with the Technician Commitment. This included an extensive range of health, safety and compliance training covering key legislative and workplace requirements such as manual handling, COSHH, risk assessment, biological safety, GM awareness, Provision and use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER), fire safety, waste compliance and environmental awareness, alongside specialist health and safety areas including asbestos and *Legionella*. These opportunities ensure technicians are well supported to work safely, compliantly and confidently across laboratory, field and facilities-based environments.

In addition, technicians could access a variety of digital, administrative and systems-based training delivered at an AU-wide level. This included training in Content Management Systems (CMS) and SharePoint use, digital security, and digital accessibility, supporting effective data management, communication and inclusive working practices. A number of accredited or externally recognised courses are also available, such as IOSH Working Safely and contractor management training, further strengthening professional credibility and technical competence.

Alongside centrally provided provision, IBERS fostered a strong internal culture of development, knowledge exchange and engagement. All new staff were supported through an induction process. Technicians are encouraged to participate in regular activities such as the Weekly IBERS Science Forum, which promotes cross-disciplinary scientific awareness and professional development. As part of IBERS Research Culture initiative we established a number of "Voice groups" to represent different sectors within the Institute. The Technicians Voice Group provides a structured mechanism for communication and technician engagement.

Technicians also benefit from job-specific and specialist training tailored to their roles, including tractor driving, operation of specialist laboratory and field equipment, use of analytical instruments, and training on technical software and data systems. Opportunities for knowledge exchange and public engagement are available through KEC activities, workshops and demonstrations, as well as attendance at departmental and cross-campus events. Collectively, these existing strengths meant that IBERS entered the Technician Commitment with a well-established foundation of training, development, engagement and support for its technical community.

5. The Technician Commitment aims to ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technical staff across higher education and research. Please tell us of any initiatives your organisation has put in place to address these themes since becoming a signatory of the Technician Commitment.

The establishment of the Technician Commitment Working Group, in addition to the Technicians Voice Group, has provided an opportunity to reflect on issues which are important to technical staff. A number of potential initiatives have been discussed to address the four pillars of the Technician Commitment. Where possible in the short term, and in compliance with existing AU policy these have been implemented.

Recognition and Visibility

IBERS has taken steps to increase visibility and recognition of its technical staff with the following initiatives to date:

The IBERS Digital Content Manager has encouraged technicians to be featured on the IBERS website and on the social media platforms. This has included a new initiative "Meet the Team" where all staff members have been encouraged to send in their profiles on social media, to highlight expertise and roles. This has been well received and has highlighted several technicians in the department who may have previously not been as visible.

An opportunity has also arisen for nominations to the THE Outstanding Technician Award, encouraging staff to consider nominating outstanding technicians working in IBERS.

A number of IBERS female technicians have also been highlighted on the TC website on International Women's Day, showcasing their skills and research interests.

The TC Working Group identified a desire to recognise continued contribution of staff to IBERS research. In response IBERS initiated the awarding of long service badges within the department.

Career Progression

Career progression is governed by University policies and procedures. All staff are encouraged to develop skills and undertake continued professional development (eg work placement Masters).

Training opportunities have been shared with all staff members, and line managers are being asked to capture what training needs are required.

When opportunities are available to technicians, eg. Training available via the TC, these have been highlighted and shared with IBERS technicians. Technicians have been encouraged to sign up to the TC newsletter to receive notifications of opportunities.

Technicians have been encouraged to represent the technicians on appropriate IBERS and Aberystwyth University committees.

Project leads have been encouraged to include technical training as part of grant applications.

Funding calls where technicians have been eligible to apply have been flagged to technicians.

Sustainability

Technicians have been encouraged to apply for internal research funding.

External funding and training, where relevant has been shared with technicians.

Technicians are encouraged to engage with external networks.

Staff are encouraged to sign up to the TC newsletter and signposted to available training.

- 6. Please provide a 24-month action plan, detailing future plans to ensure your institution addresses the themes of the Technician Commitment and details of how impact will be evidenced. This may be detailed here or attached to this document as an appendix.**

Please see attached below

- 7. Please evidence how the 'technician voice' was present in the development and formation of the institutional action plan.**

Following agreement that IBERS would become signatories to the Technician Commitment, an initial email was sent to all IBERS staff inviting technicians to be part of the IBERS Technician Commitment Working Group. Technicians were invited to self-nominate and representatives from across the technician remit (including field, laboratory, specialist technicians, digital technicians, as well as research support staff) were then invited to be part of the TC Working Group. The IBERS TC Working Group was set up on 01/05/2026. This is chaired by the IBERS Director of Research, Prof Alison Kingston-Smith. As IBERS is a Department within Aberystwyth University, the TC Working Group was supported by a member of HR and reported progress and received feedback from the PVC-Research and Innovation, Prof Angela Hatton.

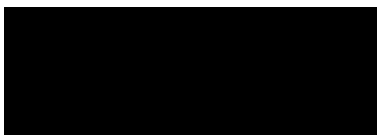
An IBERS TC Microsoft Teams site was set up to contain relevant documents, including templates, examples and drafts, with access granted to all members of the TC Working Group. The monthly meeting agenda and the minutes, including action points, are shared on the Teams site, alongside the working self-assessment documents and the IBERS Action Plan.

The Self-Assessment document and the Action Plan have been co-created by the TC working group during the monthly meetings, with all voices being given the opportunity to feed into the plan either in person at the meetings or through circulation of documentation before or after meetings. The draft documents were presented to staff in a technician facing meeting for comment and agreement prior to being sent for University approval to submit.

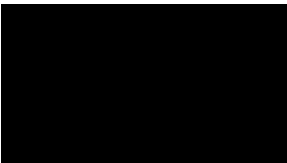
As noted previously, an IBERS Technicians Voice group was set up as part of the Research Culture work, which is ongoing in IBERS, and this was set up prior to the TC working group being set up. This is an opportunity for IBERS technicians to raise concerns in the Voice Groups, which are organised to coincide with the quarterly IBERS Staff & Student meeting. Feedback from the quarterly voice group meetings are then fed into the monthly Research Culture committee and/or monthly Research Committee, which include members of the Executive team. Additional Voice Group meetings can also be self organised by technicians if desired. Representatives in the Technicians Voice Group are also on the Technician Commitment Working Group, allowing information to be fed from the Technician's Voice Group into the TC Working Group.

8. Please confirm that your Technician Commitment status and action plan is published on your organisation's website and provide the relevant URL below.

<https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/ibers/about-ibers/technician-commitment/>

Signed  .. (Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead)

Date: 22/07/2026

 Signed..... (Technician Commitment Signatory – Leader of Institution)

Date:
27/07/2026