CLOSES FRIDAY 23RD APRIL 2021

CALL FOR VIEWS AND EVIDENCE:
UK-WIDE INQUIRY INTO THE HIGHER EDUCATION & RESEARCH SECTOR'S FUTURE NEED FOR TECHNICAL TALENT.

VIEWS AND EVIDENCE SOUGHT:

This is an invitation to submit views and evidence to the TALENT Policy Commission on the higher education and research sector's future need for technical talent.

TALENT is a project to lead and influence change to advance status and opportunity for technical skills, roles and careers in UK Higher Education (HE) and research. It is led by the Midlands Innovation (MI) consortium of eight universities in collaboration with key stakeholder and industry partners. It is funded by Research England, the eight MI universities and several collaborating organisations and was announced by the Science Minister, Amanda Solloway MP in February 2020.

The TALENT Policy Commission is undertaking several approaches to gathering data to inform recommendations and this call for views and evidence is one of those. The Policy Commission will investigate the sector's future need for technical talent (numbers and skillsets); workforce demographics; gap analysis; analysis of changing technologies technicians use (e.g. to support laboratory teaching, increasing digitisation of research); government policy implications; and the impact of the increasing focus on collaboration (business, across universities, multidisciplinary research).

Find out more about the TALENT programme

RESPONDING TO THE CALL FOR VIEWS AND EVIDENCE

The commission welcomes submissions of views and evidence from a wide range of respondents including:

- Organisations who employ technicians including from the private, public and non-profit sectors.

- Organisations that work with or represent current or future technicians.

- Individuals (technicians or people who have previously been technicians with lived experience of the roles) and/or informal groups.

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KEY QUESTIONS

Please submit views and/or evidence on all or a selection of the subjects below as appropriate to you or your organisation. Submissions can include written views, empirical data and qualitative information including case studies.
We are particularly interested in the questions in bold.

POPULATION

- What are the demographic and workforce trends within UK HE and research technical communities?
- What are the potential entry points into technical careers within UK HE and research?
- What do you consider to be the key challenges for recruitment and retention within technical roles in UK HE and research?
- How are technical roles and resources funded?

PRACTICE

- What are the key emerging technologies and research areas that will require future technical skills and expertise?
- **What is the emerging role of the technical community within delivery and support of UK HE teaching? Do technicians undertake formal teaching (e.g. undertaking tutorials, formal practical or classroom-based teaching, marking of exams etc.). We would be particularly interested in examining if there are differences in the way in which technicians undertake teaching in different disciplines so please consider this when supplying any evidence.**

PERCEPTION & REPRESENTATION

- How are technical skills and expertise understood and perceived by staff and students within UK HE and research?
- How are technical staff currently represented on decision-making and/or executive committees within UK HE and research?

PATHWAYS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- **What career and professional development opportunities are available to technical staff within UK HE and research? For example, are there opportunities for them to undertake CPD activities, and if so, are these in the form of a formalised or informal programme.**
- **To what extent do individual technical career pathways display horizontal permeability within UK HE and research? I.e. how easy and/or common is it for technicians to transfer across different groups, institutions, and sectors?**

POLICY & PARTNERSHIPS

- How are technical staff accounted for when proposing and finalising policy decisions relevant to UK HE and research (either Government-level and/or organisation-level)?
- To what extent do different institutions within UK education and research share their technical innovation, skill, and expertise, with each other e.g., through formal or informal partnerships and/or shared training?

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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The deadline for submitting views and evidence is Friday 23rd April 2021.

Please submit views and evidence to:
MITalent@midlandsinnovation.org.uk

We would appreciate if the submission could follow the guidelines below:

- Submit a summary of key information of no more than 1000 words as a Word or PDF format to **MITalent@midlandsinnovation.org.uk.**

- Clearly state who the submission is from (i.e., whether from yourself in a personal capacity or sent on behalf of an organisation). Please include your name, the name of your organisation (if applicable), location and date.

- Try to orient your submission in terms of time/place/policy; provide context so that it is as clear as possible what period or situation the information applies to.

- Any further evidence e.g., documents should be provided as links within the submitted document or as appendices.

- Please indicate where you found out about the call for views and evidence.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any queries or need further information at **MITalent@midlandsinnovation.org.uk**.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION INFORMATION

Information in responses to this call for evidence may be subject to release to the public or other parties in accordance with the access to information law (these are primarily the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs), the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA)).

The Commission may publish the content of your response to this call for evidence to make it available to the public without your personal name and private contact details (for example name and email address).

If you want your response kept confidential, please clearly state what information you would like to be kept confidential and why. This is to help us balance these obligations for disclosure against any obligation of confidentiality. If we receive a request for the information that you have provided in your response to this call for evidence, we will take full account of your reasons for requesting confidentiality of your response, but we cannot guarantee that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances.

Any Personal Data you provided will be processed in accordance with MI TALENT's **privacy policy**.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Technical expertise is critical to the success of UK HE research and is crucial to growth of the UK economy. As a highly skilled workforce, technicians provide the technical excellence essential to enable research, teaching, knowledge transfer and innovation. Many technicians are additionally researchers and educators in their own right, teaching and training students and researchers at every level. Current data estimates over 30,000 technicians work in UK universities and research institutes under a vast range of job titles – including technicians, skills specialists, technologists, experimental officers and laboratory managers. Technicians support students enrolled on postgraduate research programmes in addition to the support they provide for undergraduate teaching and the delivery of research grants and contracts.

Despite their vital role, the technical community is often referred to as an 'invisible workforce' and is a relatively understudied occupational group in UK HE and research. As a consequence, the sector lacks an effective understanding of the technical workforce; roles are ill-defined, and little is known about future technical skills requirements. Career pathways and professional development is lacking and an ageing technical workforce means that large numbers of highly skilled technicians are retiring every year, without appropriate planning for knowledge retention.

The UK faces an identified shortage of technicians across all sectors, which poses a serious threat to innovative strength and global competitiveness. This threat also applies to the UK Government's Industrial Strategy aim to raise UK investment in R&D. Meeting this will require increased technical capacity both within the HE sector and in the private sector, as recognised at the Research England Engagement Forum (September 2019).

Since 2017, the sector's Technician Commitment initiative has generated significant momentum and galvanised activity to ensure increased visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability of technical careers, skills and roles across its 92 signatory institutions. Universities and research institutes are publishing plans to meet the Technician Commitment's core aims and institutional activity is beginning to show evidence of change. There is however, still much to do to address the challenges.

KEY INSIGHTS

- Currently, over 1.5 million technicians are employed in the UK, and it is estimated that there are 30,000 in higher education organisations and research institutes.

- An aging workforce means that 50,000 technicians are retiring every year, and forecasts show the UK will need as many as 700,000 more technicians in the next decade to meet demand from employers.

- The UK Government's Industrial Strategy aims to increase UK investment in R&D and the shortage of technicians poses a threat to achieving this.

- The former Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation said "we need to find at least another 260,000 researchers to work in R&D across universities, across business and across industry".