

Stage Two Technician Commitment Action Plan

Technician Commitment: Action Plan 2026–2029

This three-year action plan sets out Northumbria University’s commitment to our technical workforce. It addresses the four Technician Commitment pillars: Visibility, Recognition, Career Development, and Sustainability and aligns with the MI TALENT Commission’s recommendations for strengthening technical capability in UK higher education and research. It builds on the strong foundations we have built through delivering our first action plan.

Technical staff continue to underpin our research and teaching excellence, however, we need to ensure we have structured visibility, recognition, career pathways, and succession planning, or we risk losing talent, missing funding opportunities, and failing to build the diverse workforce our 2030 Strategy requires. This plan addresses those risks with measurable targets and a clear investment commitment.

PILLAR 1

VISIBILITY

Technical staff are fundamental to our research and teaching excellence, yet their contributions can still remain invisible internally and externally. This undermines recruitment, retention, and institutional reputation. Without clear technical leadership and visibility, we risk losing competitive advantage for research funding and technical talent. Ensuring our technical expertise is recognised and developed as a strategic asset is essential to achieving our 2030 Strategy ambitions.

WORKSTREAM: VISIBILITY, LEADERSHIP AND SECTOR PRESENCE		
YEAR	ACTIONS	KEY TARGETS
Year 1 (2026–27)	- Review and further embed our strategic technical leadership approach with staff and senior leadership (by Dec 2026) - Publish external facing technical staff profiles; launch ‘Technical Excellence’ web pages (100+ staff) - Establish LinkedIn presence (min. 24 posts/year) - Actively promote and secure technical staff participation in University and Faculty research and education events, from planning days through to presenting outputs	- Leadership approach confirmed Dec 2026 100+ profiles live 24+ posts/year - Technical staff active participation at research and education events

Year 2 (2027–28)	• Develop our Communication Strategy; launch quarterly forums (70% attendance target) • Relaunch internal newsletter; deliver campaigns celebrating technical contributions • Create contributions database (publications, research, education, outreach: wider recognition beyond PURE) • Support staff to attend external conferences and full engagement with UK ITSS Technical Specialists Network / UKITSS Capabilities Showcasing Network (equipment sharing across the sector)	• 70% forum attendance • 10 staff at conferences • Database live • Northumbria Facilities showcased by UK ITSS
Year 3 (2028–29)	• Deliver Technical Skills Futures Strategy (aligned to digital/AI landscape and 2030 Strategy and succession planning work 4.1) • Host regional (UNEE) Technical Excellence Showcase (100+ attendees) • Produce Technical Impact Report from contributions database	• 100+ at showcase • 25 co-author credits • Futures Strategy delivered and Technical Impact Report published

PILLAR 2 RECOGNITION

Although improving, professional recognition rates are low, frameworks for naming technical staff on grants are undocumented, and formal recognition schemes are limited. This pillar addresses all three.

WORKSTREAM 2.1: PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION

YEAR	ACTIONS	KEY TARGETS
Year 1	• Partner with three professional bodies to drive participation (e.g. Science Council, RSC, IST) • Run information sessions for 100% of technical staff regarding professional registration • Administer registration fee funding and design a mentoring offer to remove financial and practical barriers to registration.	• 3 partnerships confirmed • 100% staff informed
Year 2	• Launch peer mentoring scheme	• 10 mentoring pairs

	• Deliver two registration workshops annually	• 15 new registrations
Year 3	• Integrate registration into appraisal processes and discussions • Celebrate registered professionals across the university	• 40% registration rate by July 2029

We will support processes for technical staff to be named as co-investigators on research grants and co-supervisors for research students by September 2027, addressing a gap in our research funding competitiveness and provide specialist technical expertise into research supervision teams.

WORKSTREAM 2.2: CO-INVESTIGATORS AND CO-SUPERVISORS, TECHNICAL STAFF COST RECOVERY		
YEAR	ACTIONS	KEY TARGETS
Year 1	• Develop and publish UKRI-aligned costing guidelines for technical staff making these accessible to all PIs at bid stage. • Audit current grant portfolio to establish baseline data on technical staff cost recovery; • Deliver targeted training for PIs and RIS on costing and positioning technical expertise within funding bids	• Guidelines published and in use • Baseline metrics established • PI and RIS training delivered
Year 2	• Establish Technical Co-Supervisor scheme with training via PGCert modules • Actively promote scheme to PIs to drive uptake • Monitor and report on bid submissions to evidence growth in technical co-investigator inclusion	• Scheme live by Sept 2027 • Measurable increase in bids including technical Co-Is.
Year 3	• Track and report cost recovery data against Year 1 baseline, identifying gaps where targets are at risk. • Support and progress a cohort of technical staff through the co-supervisor registration process, providing mentoring and administrative guidance	• Three technical staff co-supervisors registered • Improvement target met against baseline.

WORKSTREAM 2.3: TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS
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YEAR	ACTIONS	KEY TARGETS
Year 1	- Launch refreshed 'Northumbria Technical Excellence Awards' — 6 categories: Innovation, Teaching Support, Research Impact, Early Career, Technical Leadership, Team Achievement - Hold ceremony with VC attendance (100+ staff)	- Awards launched 2026/27 100+ at ceremony
Year 2	- Continue to nominate staff for internal and external awards (THE Outstanding Technician of the Year, Papin Prizes, Shine Awards, Student Awards) transparently sharing our nomination process - Work with Faculty communications leads to embed technical recognition as a standing feature of Faculty reports and newsletters	- Nominations submitted and shared 100% staff reached
Year 3	- Achieve 50 nominations over three years - Publish impact case studies from contributions database	50 cumulative nominations - Case studies published

PILLAR 3 CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Limited career pathways drive disengagement and turnover and limited progression is clearly highlighted in our staff engagement feedback. The sector faces a critical technical talent shortage and narrow entry routes. This pillar provides structured frameworks, diversified entry, and comprehensive development.

WORKSTREAM 3.1: TECHNICAL CAREER PATHWAYS FRAMEWORK

YEAR	ACTIONS	KEY TARGETS
Year 1	- Benchmark with six comparable institutions - Refresh and co-create competency-based Career Framework with 75%+ staff participation - Define progression routes with transparent criteria that match our future activities for research and education activities ensuring we have the roles we need (e.g. research technical professional pathway).	Framework co-created, 75%+ participation

Year 2	• Pilot with one Faculty (40+ staff); provide career coaching • Analyse pilot feedback, revise the framework accordingly, and deliver university-wide rollout by July 2027	• Pilot complete • University-wide rollout July 2027
Year 3	• 100% staff mapped to framework with documented pathways • Evidence career progressions; annual review of satisfaction	• 100% staff mapped • Improved satisfaction evidenced

WORKSTREAM 3.2: ENTRY ROUTES AND APPRENTICESHIPS

YEAR	ACTIONS	KEY TARGETS
Year 1	• Partner with three local colleges for T-level placements targeting at least 10 placements per year. • Introduce new technician apprenticeship pathways at Northumbria (e.g. Higher Education Technician L3) • Recruit cohort of apprentices by Sept 2026	• Three college partnerships • Three apprentices recruited by Sept 2026
Year 2	• Audit and actively deploy Apprenticeship Levy funding to support technical staff development, maximising available resource (e.g. Level 4–5 apprenticeships)	• Higher-level pathways live
Year 3	• Scale cohort to reach a total of 10 apprentices, managing recruitment pipeline to sustain numbers • Monitor and actively manage retention, intervening early where apprentices are at risk • Document completions and progression into permanent roles, and commission diversity case studies to evidence the breadth of the programme	• 10 apprentices total • 90% retention rate • Case studies published

WORKSTREAM 3.3: LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

YEAR	ACTIONS	KEY TARGETS
Year 1	• Complete training needs analysis (TNA) (100% participation)	• 100% TNA complete

	• Maintain and promote internal CPD programme; maintain UK ITSS and HEaTED access • Configure and launch CPD recording functionality within the existing HR portal, enabling staff to log activity • Actively identify and support a cohort of technical staff through the HEA Associate Fellowship application process, providing guidance and advocacy • Facilitate access to postgraduate qualifications for eligible staff, working with academic and HR colleagues to identify appropriate routes	• CPD recording live
Year 2	• Identify and support technical staff with potential for leadership roles, facilitating access to internal and external leadership programmes • Administer and deploy the Technician Commitment CPD fund, enabling staff to attend external courses and conferences • Track CPD hours and intervene where individuals are at risk of falling below the 35-hour threshold	• TC fund deployed and utilised • 85% completing 35+ hours CPD
Year 3	• Administer CPD satisfaction survey and use findings to refine the programme	• 10 HEA Associate / Fellowships • 90% CPD satisfaction

PILLAR 4 SUSTAINABILITY

Technical expertise takes years to build and represents significant institutional investment. Demographic pressures, EDI gaps, and wellbeing challenges all threaten sustainability if left unaddressed. On particular area of focus for Northumbria during the plan period is to address the gender balance seen in technical manager roles.

WORKSTREAM 4.1: SKILLS PLANNING AND SUCCESSION

YEAR	ACTIONS	KEY TARGETS
Year 1	• Conduct a skills audit and gap analysis across technical staff, prioritising those within five years of retirement, using the NTDC Technician Survey as the evidence base	• Audit and gap analysis complete

	• Develop a Technical Skills Futures Strategy, explicitly aligned to the University Strategy and future size and shape ambitions • Establish a Technical Skills Advisory Group, convening quarterly to oversee delivery and respond to emerging skills pressures • Further develop links with UNEE and NECA to understand and respond to regional technical skill requirements	• Advisory Group established and meeting • Technical Skills Futures Strategy drafted
Year 2	• Design and implement succession plans for identified at-risk roles, encompassing structured knowledge transfer, job shadowing, and proactive recruitment pipelines • Launch a technical staff mentoring/shadowing scheme matching experienced staff with those developing into critical roles	• Succession plans in place for identified roles • Mentoring and shadowing scheme live
Year 3	• Evaluate knowledge transfer activity against succession plan outcomes, evidencing that no critical capability has been lost • Map current technical capacity against strategic research priorities and report on alignment to senior stakeholders	• Zero capability loss evidenced • Strategic alignment between technical capacity and research and education priorities demonstrated

WORKSTREAM 4.2: EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

YEAR	ACTIONS	KEY TARGETS
Year 1	• Conduct an EDI audit of the technical workforce, establishing baseline metrics across gender, ethnicity, disability, and age • Deliver targeted outreach activity in partnership with schools in diverse communities, engaging at least 200 students with technical career pathways • Nominate and embed technical staff representatives within university EDI groups, ensuring the technical workforce has a formal voice in institutional EDI work	• Baseline metrics established • 200 students reached through outreach • Technical staff represented in university EDI governance
Year 2	• Design and launch a local 'Women in Technical Leadership' campaign, integrating with the UK ITSS Herschel Programme and the Executive Programme in Strategic Technical Leadership (EPSTL) • Identify and support eligible staff to participate in Herschel and EPSTL, actively managing nominations and providing pastoral support throughout	• Campaign launched

		• Staff participating in Herschel Programme and/or EPSTL
Year 3	• Embed annual EDI monitoring as a standard process producing action plans in response to data and tracking progress against baseline; seek external award recognition (e.g. Athena Swan)	• >30%+ women in technical leadership roles leadership • Annual EDI monitoring embedded with action plans • External award submission progressed

WORKSTREAM 4.3: WELLBEING AND ENGAGEMENT

YEAR	ACTIONS	KEY TARGETS
Year 1	• Staff Survey baseline use targeted promotion to achieve strong participation. • Launch and establish Technical Staff Community Forums (as in Visibility workstream) as a structured channel for ongoing wellbeing feedback and engagement	• 80%+ response rate • Forums live
Year 2	• Lead scoping and implementation of a workload planning model through the university workload group, reducing single points of failure across technical workforce • Commission and complete ergonomic assessments across all technical workspaces acting on findings within the year. • Establish a peer support network for technical staff working with OD colleagues to develop appropriate mental health resources to underpin it	• Workload model implemented • 100% of workspaces assessed • Peer support network live
Year 3	• Follow-on survey: using Year 1 data as the baseline to target measurable improvements in engagement and satisfaction • Analyse turnover and sickness absence data to evidence the impact of wellbeing interventions delivered across Years 1 and 2 and report findings	• 70% engagement • 70% satisfaction • 70% feeling valued

Resource Requirements

ITEM	AMOUNT	TIMING	PURPOSE
Technician Commitment Fund	£20,000/year	Years 1–3	CPD, registration, conferences, awards
NTDC Technical Skills Survey	£10,000 (one-off)	Year 1	Sector benchmarking via UNEE/UK universities
Entry-Level Positions	Within existing envelope	Years 1–3	Apprentices and T-level placements