

About the Modern Technician Class Initiative

When measured against international competitors, the UK is a relatively poor performer in low and intermediate skills and this is projected to get worse:

Skill level	Current international position for UK	Projected international position in 2020
Low (less than 5 GCSEs)	17 th	23 rd
Intermediate (2 A levels equivalent)	18 th	21 st
High (degree equivalent)	12 th	10 th

Ambition 2020, UKCES, 2009

The “**Skills for Growth, the National Skills Strategy**” White Paper (BIS, November 2009) seeks to do something about the gap in Intermediate skills by expanding the numbers of apprenticeships to create a ‘modern technician class’. The White Paper also states

“As with our framework for higher education, Higher Ambitions, we want to build new bridges between the workplace and higher learning, and engage businesses to a much greater extent in communicating the skills students need for the world of work, designing qualifications that deliver real value to graduates and funding the training from which they are one of the biggest beneficiaries. We will do this through new partnerships with employer-led bodies and the Regional Development Agencies and through supporting proposals to strengthen engineering registration schemes and develop similar schemes for science technicians”.

The White Paper goes on:

“At present there is a lack of recognition of the importance of technicians in the economy. Technicians should be confident that the qualifications they obtain carry a status and value that is recognised in the market place and not just by their own employer. We will ask a consortium of partners including [in alphabetical order] the Engineering and Technology Board, the Royal Academy of Engineering, employers and Sector Skills Councils to produce recommendations on how levels of participation in the existing registration schemes for technicians could be increased.

In addition, we will invite Lord Sainsbury to develop proposals covering science technicians and to explore the possibility of a council for technicians which would enable those organising the schemes for engineers, ICT and science to meet and develop a common agenda”.

First steps

Lord Sainsbury has already held meetings of representatives from the engineering, ICT, health and science professions, with a third and final meeting planned. The first meeting quickly identified the need to consider the registration of technicians as a single issue across all relevant sectors rather than considering engineering separately as suggested by the phrasing of the White Paper. The second meeting identified that the professions working in these sectors have three levels within them: the *technician level*, an intermediate *technologist* level (Incorporated status in engineering), the Chartered *professional* level.

An agreed lexicon of terms is needed to distinguish between the role of *technologist* and that of *technician*. This is important as it seems that there are particular communities in the health sector that see themselves as *technologists* and very distinct from *technicians*. It is possible that taking action on an agreed lexicon would mean working with the Privy Council to amend relevant Royal Charters.

As a step towards a common lexicon, the associate-professional levels of *technologist* and *technician* are being mapped across the sectors of health, science, engineering and ICT. This mapping includes consideration of the level of qualifications held - for example the role of *Engineering Technician* as defined by UKSPEC requires the completion of an Advanced Apprenticeship (or holding an appropriate Level 3 qualification alongside suitable work experience) whereas the role of *Incorporated Engineer* requires a Level 4 (Bachelors degree) qualification and work experience.

Alongside this work, the engineering and science communities have been pressing for more data on the number of vocational qualifications being awarded in the UK in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) related subjects. This data is important as vocational qualifications are vital components of apprenticeship frameworks and offer direct access to both employment and further study in higher education.

A role for The Royal Academy of Engineering

The Academy has agreed to act as host to the work on creating a modern technician class. The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has offered the Academy the sum of £300,000 to make a start. This involves looking into issues around a common lexicon, proposals to stimulate demand for technician and technologist registration (a value proposition for a modern technician class) and determining those vocational qualifications that matter most and the current supply of people gaining those qualifications.

Job Description

Full Time (fixed-term 12-months)

1. Job Title	Project Officer, modern technician class initiative
2. Job Purpose	The Project Officer will facilitate this initiative and act in support of the senior figures from business and industry, the NHS, Government and the professions who have pledged their active involvement.
3. Accountability	Accountable to the Education Programmes Director who is the post-holder's supervisor within the meaning of the Health and Safety at Work Act. The Project Officer will be responsible to a working group of senior figures who will steer the initiative.
4. Key Tasks	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To facilitate the creation and launch of a working group of senior figures: a 'Technicians Council'.2. To deliver an agreed Operational Plan for the first 12 months of the initiative and to develop a business plan for an ongoing initiative.3. To manage a contract to survey the vocational STEM qualification landscape.4. To undertake any other duties reasonably required by the Education Programmes Director or the working group.
5. Key Results	<p>The following key results are expected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A working group is established.• The Chair of the working group is well supported.• The data survey contract is delivered.• Key stakeholders are identified and brought into the initiative.• A business plan for an ongoing initiative is prepared.
6. Knowledge/ Skills	<p>The post holder will have the following knowledge, qualifications and experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excellent project management and administrative skills.• An interest in the development of people.• A commitment to widening participation in STEM education and training.• A willingness to travel within the UK.

7. Resources	The post holder will have available all the standard services and supply agencies supplying The Academy.
8. Autonomous Actions	The post holder will be expected to carry out the tasks defined above with initiative and without undue reference to the Education Programmes Director.
9. Terms of Reference and Conditions	The terms of reference and conditions for the post are contained in a personal contract of employment issued and signed separately. The post holder must be willing to attend meetings outside normal working hours and to travel within the UK and overseas if required to do so.