Dear ,

**The importance of the school technician profession**

In Scotland we are very fortunate that we have a well-qualified, knowledgeable, skilled body of technicians who support STEM education in schools.

In addition to preparing practical activities and resources, technicians have a crucial role in health and safety in the school workplace. Compliance with health and safety legislation is, of course, the employer's legal duty. The situation in school science and technology departments is such that many tasks have to be delegated by local authority leaders and head teachers because they do not have the STEM background themselves. The tasks carried out by technicians are essential in ensuring that employers comply with the law. Examples of this include:

* Risk-assessing work activities in preparation areas;
* Assisting teachers with risk assessing classroom activities;
* Carrying out tasks in accordance with their employer’s health and safety guidance (which is almost always based extensively on SSERC guidance);
* Keeping up to date on changes in legislation via the SSERC Bulletin;
* Checking equipment in accordance with, for example, electrical and pressure systems regulations;
* Testing sources of ionising radiation for leakage;
* Preparing microbiological cultures;
* Liaising with SSERC for advice and clarification on health and safety matters;
* Attending training.

The environment has changed for school technicians over the past two decades. Many no longer have the support of a senior colleague or a Local Authority technician service. It is much less common now to have bespoke technicians for physics, chemistry and biology. Indeed, some employers have gone over to employing increasing numbers of whole school technicians who may work across science and D&T, perhaps with a remit for audio-visual equipment as well. This has created a need for professional learning which SSERC has addressed by developing courses in topics including Introductory, and Intermediate Physics, Chemical Handling and the Safe Use of Workshop Machinery. SSERC has also developed courses to meet statutory requirements. For example, to prepare materials for the microbiology sections of the biology curriculum requires a member of staff to be trained to “Level 3”. SSERC runs a course that trains participants to this level. As with many SSERC technician courses, it is assessed and SCQF credited and levelled. SSERC has also designed and runs shorter refresher courses across a range of topics that meet the specific requirements of certain local authorities.

Most technician courses that are delivered by SSERC are either heavily subsidised or supported by a bursary to cover the course fee. It is highly unlikely that other training providers would be able to offer courses as such a competitive cost.

At SSERC we recognise that the demand for some courses can outstrip our capacity to run them. To that end, we are engaging in training partnerships with other institutions. A rigorous quality control system has been developed so that employers and managers can be sure that the standard of a course from a SSERC Accredited Centre will be the same as that from a course run in SSERC by SSERC personnel. We believe that this ‘localised’ training will complement our existing offering from our Dunfermline base.

It is not an exaggeration to say that safe, effective, engaging practical work in STEM subjects could not take place without our highly professional, skilled technician workforce. In some schools, technicians are the drivers for positive change. To support the ongoing professionalisation of the Scottish school technician community, SSERC has facilitated the establishment of the Scottish Technicians’ Advisory Council (STAC) as a formal body, supported and funded via SSERC with the specific aim of developing a Council (with representatives from each Local Authority, SCIS and Jordanhill School), which provides advice to SSERC on all matters relating to the professional development needs of the school technician community in Scotland.

In April 2019, and in partnership with STAC, we will be launching *‘Techne’* (a Scotland wide virtual network for all school technicians) a digital forum to enable professional discussion, dialogue and debate for this important sector of the education community is Scotland.

The team at SSERC will continue to support all aspects of the work of school technicians and we look forward to expanding this support in the future. As a Head Teacher you will know the important contribution that a technician makes to the effective functioning of a school and we look forward to working in partnership with you to support for this vital section of the education community in Scotland.