

Technician Commitment: Stage 3 Self-Assessment & Action Plan – University of Bristol

Evaluating Impact through Self-Assessment & Future Action Planning

Organisation: University of Bristol

Name of Institutional Lead: Fred Hale

E-mail: fred.hale@bristol.ac.uk

Contact Number: 07876662238

Overview of technical staff structures

Faculty based Technical Staff are one of the largest groups of professional services staff in the University. These critical staff and the facilities they support directly enable our practical teaching and research activities to function, interacting directly with students and academic staff at all levels. This is a diverse staff group working in multiple disciplines and at a range of skill levels.

Currently there are c.496 Faculty based Technical Staff covered by this strategy, with 66 more than in our previous submission, and represents around 1 in every 16 people who work at Bristol University.

Technical Staff by Faculty/Division (496 total)

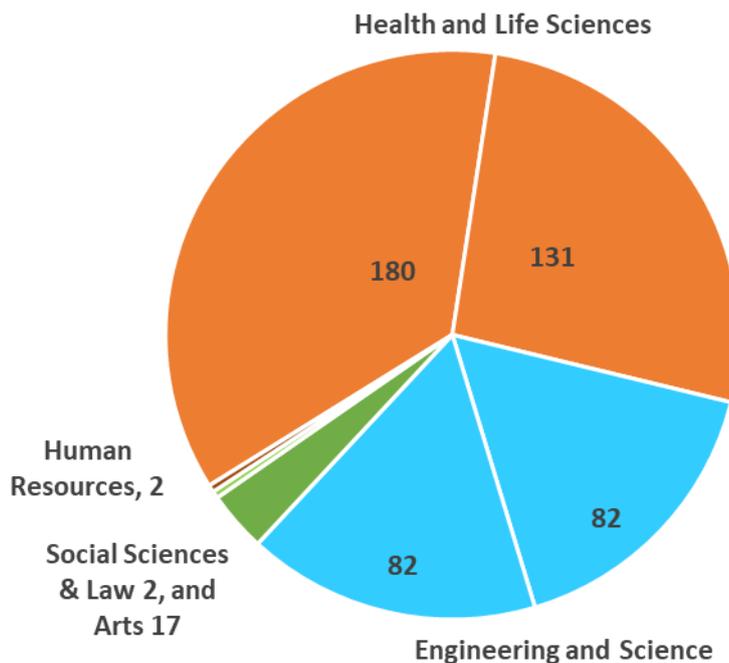


Fig. 1 Bristol Technical Staff by Faculty/Division (July 2023)

Unlike in our support service (Divisions) our Technical Staff are School/Centre/Service and Faculty based. Each Faculty determines the level of Technical Provision necessary to meet its Teaching and Research support needs, through the normal planning processes.

As is common across the sector, technical staff and services are funded from either core budgets or research grants (DI and DA) or a combination of these sources. Whilst the majority are core funded, c.30% of Technical Staff are currently fully or partly externally funded. Our Technical Staff are geographically spread over many sites in Bristol (including at various Hospital locations) as well as at our Campus at Langford in Somerset.

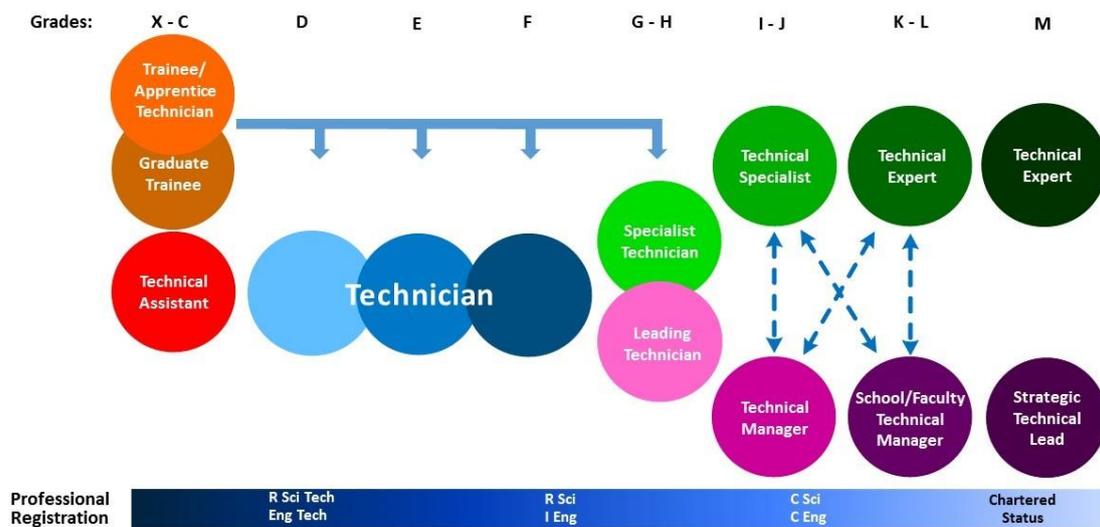


Fig. 2 The Bristol Technical Career Framework

At Bristol we operate an institutional Technical Career Framework, re-establishing a technical specialist/expert pathway and replacing a myriad of individual, inconsistent, and outdated job descriptions with a single suite of evaluated, flexible/generic job roles, mapped to the business need and aligned with professional registration. We continue to refine this framework having added new generic roles covering safety and apprentice roles.

Our technicians primarily report into School and/or Faculty Management, through an appropriate level of Technical Management. The differences in scale and complexity of technical support across our faculties and schools generally align to one of three generic reporting models. These models and a suite of roles descriptors have been developed as part of our overall Technical Career Framework. Our grant funded Technical Staff often have an academic line manager for primary line management and day-to-day tasking, as well as an associate Technical Manager for professional and career management.

The institution has been working to embed its strategic technical leadership into business as usual. We have established mechanisms for close working relationships between the Executive Faculty Manager, Faculty Technical Leads, Faculty Management, and the central Technical HR team.

Governance, Leadership and Reporting Lines of the Technician Commitment and wider engagement

Technical Staff at Bristol are a distinct community within the wider Professional Services staff group. High level leadership sits with the Chief Operating Officer, Registrar and University Secretary and the Executive Director of Faculty Operations who chairs the Strategic Technical Leaders Group. The majority of Technical Staff are Faculty and School based, with smaller numbers based in the Divisions (Campus and IT Services).

Each Faculty has Faculty Technical Management or Lead representatives who report to Faculty Management. Each School has a Technical Manager who manage the Technical Teams and have associate Line Management of grant funded Technicians where they have Academic Line Managers.

People aspects of the Technician Commitment are supported through the University's Career Development Programme with dedicated resources within HR team leading on Technical People Development and Apprenticeships activities (4 staff members equivalent to c.2 FTE).

Bristol has an Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor - Research Culture who works closely with Senior Management and Technical Staff representatives on our 'Team Science' agenda.

Since becoming a signatory our networks have grown considerably.

Bristol University engages significantly with the wider community nationally through representation at Technician Commitment Signatory Events, The Science Council, Technical Managers in Universities, The Higher Education Technicians Summits (HETS), HEaTED membership and the Technician Commitment Institutional Leads Group.

We have worked nationally on the Education Technician Apprentice Standard Trailblazer, where we contributed to the creation and now the ongoing development of the HE Education Assistant Technician Apprenticeship standard.

Recently we have taken on the chairing the GW4Ward steering group, which is a Technical Staff and Research Culture group consisting of representatives from The Universities of Bristol, Bath, Exeter and Cardiff and are also represented on the GW4 Talent and Skills and Steering Group.

We have also successfully piloted a Technical Work Experience week (WEX) for school aged young people who get to experience a week of activities, tours, talks, and interactive fact finding about Technical Careers in HE.

One of our technicians was selected to support the 2022 Royal Institution Christmas Lectures.

Our technicians take advantage of development activities outside of the University, including those offered by MI Talent such as the Herschal Programme, Executive Leadership, and specific development sessions on-line as well as having membership access to HEaTED courses.

We also host external/national speakers and workshop leads at our annual technical staff conferences, including from Institute for Technical Skills and Strategy (ITTS), MI Talent, the Science Council and HEaTED.

We have shared the details and rationale of our Technical Career Framework (as sited in the MI Talent Commission Report 2022) with many institutions across the UK and Ireland including Australia.

Bristol Technicians also contribute as respondents to MI Talent Commission surveys, which are distributed through TMU and to our Technical Leaders group membership.

We have established new channels for sharing information and good practice including a Technical Staff SharePoint site, e-mail distributions lists for all technical staff and for technical managers and an active Instagram account www.instagram.com/@uobtechnicians as well as continuing to develop our 'Technical Matters' newsletters.

Previous 36-month RAG Analysis

Our Stage 2 action plan is included at Appendix A. This includes RAG ratings against the actions in the plan.

Action Plan Impact

Our previous actions continue to have significant impact.

1. Technicians are engaged in decision making as a community and locally.

Faculties and Schools have clearly identified Technical Staff Leads who are engaged with Professional Services and Academic colleagues at all levels in relevant decisions and actions including resourcing, operations, planning, and Health & Safety. This includes representation in the institution's senior management plenary group and on the Professional Services Resource Managers Group as well as locally on Faculty Boards, in School management teams and other decision-making groups including the Research Culture Committee and in leading a specific Technical Staff workstream in our institutional Career Development Programme. [Professional Services Staff Development | Staff Development | University of Bristol](#)

Technicians are also engaged externally and contribute significantly to the activities of our GW4 research alliance with the Universities of Bath, Cardiff and Exeter. [GW4WARD - GW4](#)

2. Technical Staff Visibility and Recognition

Technicians are highly visible, both internally and externally.

We now run our own an Instagram Page – [UoB Technicians](#) highlighting successes, news, stories and events.

We now have a dedicated SharePoint site for Technical Staff with news, resources, development opportunities and links to development opportunities and other relevant resources (access for internal staff only).

Technicians are encouraged to nominate staff in our institution's annual Teaching Awards, and in our all-staff STAR awards with regular finalists shortlisted and recognised; as well as in national awards such as the PAPIN prizes.

Technicians are also recognised regularly for their achievements in our 'Technical Matters' newsletters.

Technical Staff are featured in our 'Career Insights' profiles and in career videos, including technical apprentices both internally and on the University of Bristol YouTube channel. [University of Bristol - YouTube](#)

We now have guidance in place across the institution to ensure that technical staff are properly recognised in research outputs.

Technical Staff at Bristol are in a distinct 'job family' within the Professional Services staff group. All new job roles (and most of the existing roles) are identifiable withing our Technical Career Framework, giving us visibility of the whole community and specific roles within e.g. Technical Leaders, Research Technicians, Teaching Technicians, Specialists/Experts, Core Facility Technicians, Health & Safety Technicians, Apprentices and Sustainability Technicians.

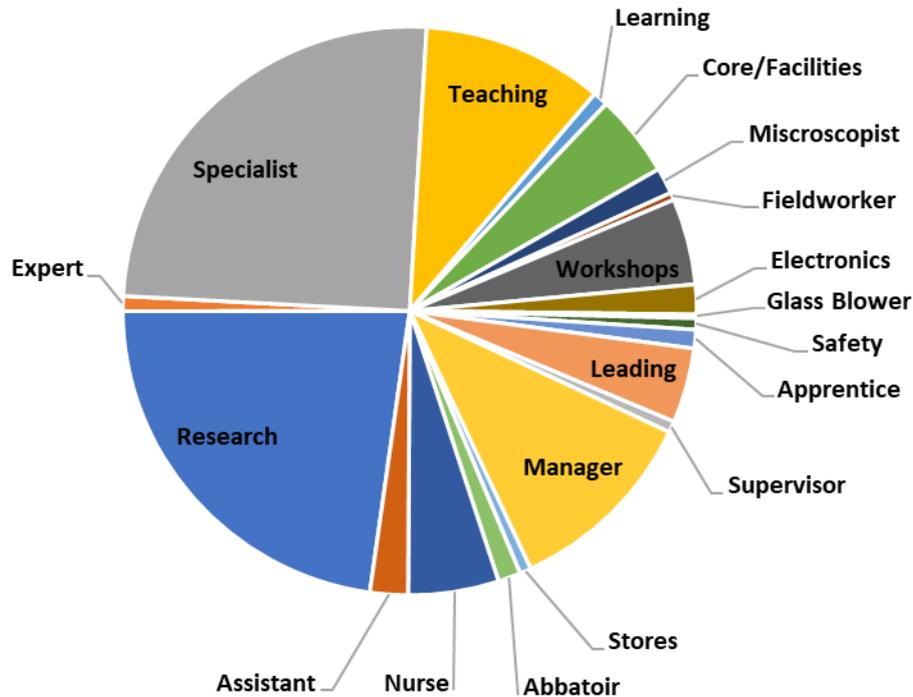
The technical Community can be easily communicated with as a whole or as a technical leadership community through distinct mailing lists.

Technical staff bring the technicians' voice to decision making on relevant committees and working groups including Faculty Boards, Research Culture Committee, GW4 groups, Business Continuity, Essential Training, Safety & Health Committees.

Our Annual Technical Staff conference is organised by a new team of technical staff each year, along with colleagues from Sustainability, Procurement, and People Development. The 1-day conference, now in its 10th edition, attracts c.200 technical staff from right across the institution and has included external speakers covering developments in ITSS/The Technician Commitment, The Science Council, HEaTED, Research Culture as well as hosting speakers from the local community. The conferences have been attended by the Vice-Chancellor, The Chief Operating Officer and Registrar, PVC Research, and the PVC Research Culture and celebrates and highlights the work of the technical community each year.

3. Career Development and Sustainability

Technical Staff Role Types (some overlap in data)



Our Technical Career Framework continues to be used and developed with new generic+ roles being added as the need arises, most recently we have added roles for Technical Safety Officers, Sustainability Technicians and Arts Apprentice Technicians. The Chart above shows the significant proportion of Technical Specialist and some Technical Experts now on our specialist pathway. We now have staff moving into technical roles from academic and professional services roles, up to the highest grades. A trend that highlights progress in the status of being included in the technical staff job family.

Technical staff are recognised as a specific community within our institutional Career Development programme with a clear project lead and specific staff resources within the People Development team focussing on Technical Staff Development. This team works with technical staff at all levels to shape central development opportunities and to provide bespoke interventions, reflecting the direct needs of technical staff. Our series of ‘Technically Talking’ workshops have recently focussed on Technically Teaching, Making effective business cases, Technical Career Development, Technical Resource Planning and Technical Researchers.

3.1. Apprenticeships

We continue to take on new Apprentices, with most moving into substantive posts within the University after completion. This has become vital in meeting our future skills needs and in increasing our diversity within the technical workforce. Many of our ex-Apprentices have moved on into more senior roles in other parts of the organisation and participated in organising the Annual Conference and in supporting our work experience and community outreach activities.

[eXcelBristol Apprentices](#) | [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Team](#) | [University of Bristol](#)

We are part of the team that developed and now maintains the new national HE Technical Assistant Apprentice standard. We now have our first two apprentices now working towards this standard, including our first Arts Technician Apprentice.

MI Talent Commission Recommendations

The core of the MI Talent Commission recommendations (MITRs) aligns closely with our existing 'Strategic Group Report (2018)' recommendations and as such reflect the direction of travel that we have been pursuing at Bristol, as well as being captured in our previous Technician Commitment Action plans. The MITRs have added significantly to our earlier activities and have expanded our ambitions in line with emerging sector good practice.

We have now specifically included the MITRs in our Faculty Technical plans, so effectively have local as well as institutional plans in place to follow the recommendations and are reviewed regularly by the Strategic Technical Leadership team. Each new project is assessed against a range of institutional objectives as well as the MITRs.

We have also mapped our progress against the MITRs with our neighbours in the GW4 alliance (Bath, Bristol, Cardiff, and Exeter), sharing our strategies, ideas and initiatives with each other where we have sought endorsement from the GW4 Board for cross institutional commitment to the MITRs.

There is broad support from GW4 institutions of the TALENT Commission recommendations and recognition of their relevance and importance to our wider technical staff strategies. As such, our GW4WARD steering group (currently chaired by Bristol University) undertook a mapping exercise of our university Technician Commitment action plans against TALENT's Recommendations to better understand the areas that need further development, and to consider how together, our universities might be able to respond more comprehensively. Whilst there is considerable progress being made towards the TALENT recommendations, we recognised that there is more we could explore to further support our technical staff communities. As such, our universities will continue to review our progress against the TALENT recommendations, to nurture and enhance our technical capabilities for the future.

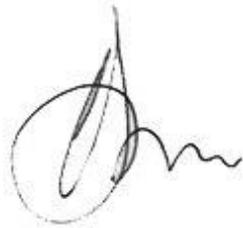
We are also reflecting the MITRs in our work on Research Culture, where the technicians voice is well represented on both the Research Culture Board and the Professional Development Working Group and engaged in setting and implementing actions in partnership with Academic and Professional Services colleagues.

Mapping of the UoB position against the 'People' aspects in the MI Talent Commission Report - as of Nov 2023

Recommendation	University of Bristol
R1 Employers of technical staff, funders and government departments (e.g. BEIS, DFE) should employ a strategic approach to ensure the sustainability and appropriateness of technical skills and careers, at both a local and national level.	UoB is a lead signatory of the Technician Commitment, signed by the VC and championed by the Chief Operating Officer, Registrar and University Secretary and the Executive Director of Faculty Operations who chairs the Strategic Technical Leaders Group. Bristol has appointed an Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor - Research Culture who works closely with Senior Management and Technical Staff representatives on our 'Team Science' agenda. Bristol University is part of the National Apprenticeship Trailblazer group who have developed and now maintain the HE Education Assistant Technician Apprenticeship Standard People aspects' of the Technician Commitment are supported through the University's Career Development Programme with dedicated resources within HR team leading on Technical People Development and Apprenticeships activities (4 staff members equivalent to c.2 FTE).
R2 Funders and employers of technical staff in higher education and research should recognise the blurring of boundaries between technical and academic roles. They should provide opportunities and mechanisms to move between career pathways and across sectors.	The Technical Career Framework includes technical specialist and expert roles at equivalent levels to academic colleagues. We are experiencing increased movement from academic and PS staff into these roles in the technical job family. Our Research Culture Professional Services working group is working on recommendations and actions to increase porosity of academic and technical careers. Technical Teaching specialists/experts in many of our Faculties/Schools lead on practical teaching sessions
R3 Employers of technical staff should collect, report and analyse data on their technical workforce, with careful consideration of those roles at the interface with	We can identify all of our technical job family, their job roles, distribution and other characteristics. We currently analyse the basic data on our technical workforce. The benchmark for this was taken from the data included in the TALENT Commission Report.
R4 Employers of technical staff, funding bodies, and learned societies should undertake targeted and specific action to address the equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) challenges facing the technical community.	Alongside the recent data mapping exercise, we consulted with the Head of Staff Inclusion, so our ethnicity data and other diversity data aligns with that reported on within the university. We are participants in Athena SWAN, looked after by the faculties, and all recruiting staff undergo fair recruitment training. The Diversify Working Group, looks after projects, including Technical Staff: Diversify your workforce. We are engaging with local people through our Diversity Team and through Work Experience activities (see R.6). We are currently reviewing the language used in our generic+ JDs and advertising for inclusivity with the Diversity team.
R5 Funders and employers of technical staff should provide clear and consistent guidance to ensure technical contributions are costed appropriately and eligibility requirements for existing funding opportunities should be reviewed to ensure inclusion of technical staff where	Although Technical Staff are not always included in grant submissions currently; Principal Investigators have the responsibility to include it where necessary. The funding landscape for technicians has recently changed with UKRI making it easier for non-academic staff (including Technicians) to submit grant applications as PIs and Co-Is and encouraging funding bodies ensure technical staff costs are adequately included in submission by panels. We had previously drafted a discussion paper that was accepted in principle by the previous PVC Research on developing our approach to ensure technical oversite of relevant research funding bid and this approach needs further clarification and wider adoption with academic colleagues.
R6 Employers of technical staff, funders, and sector bodies (e.g. professional associations and learned societies) should support outreach and public engagement	We have successfully piloted a Technical Careers Work Experience week (WEX) for local school age children with further weeks in planning. We have a public facing webpage on Technicians Apprenticeships, with an expression of interest contact. We are working with local Careers Adviser networks to ensure our adverts for technical apprenticeships and other roles, reach a diverse audience. We recognise that there is often a lack of representation of the apprenticeship
R7 Employers of technical staff should broaden access to technical careers in the sector by utilising and expanding entry routes to include both vocational and academic pathways.	See above sections R3 and R6
R8 Employers of technical staff should ensure inclusion of technical expertise within end-to-end recruitment processes when hiring for technical roles.	Technical Managers leads on recruitment to technical roles. In the rare cases where line management of technicians is undertaken by non-technician staff; technicians have a technical associate line manager.
R9 Employers of technical staff should ensure visibility of clearly defined career pathways and progression routes, with accurate and standardised job descriptions for technical roles.	Our Technical Career Framework is sited in the MI Talent Commission report and is in use right the university. http://www.bristol.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/professional-services/technical-staff/career-framework/ This Technical Careers Framework – has been shared and now used as an exemplar within the national technical community. We continue to refine the framework and respond to evolving roles, adding them as appropriate to our suite of Generic+ job roles and our role descriptors.
R10 Employers of technical staff, funders, and sector bodies (e.g. professional associations and learned societies) should ensure provision and access to a range of professional development opportunities tailored to technical roles and careers.	We work with technicians to identify professional development priorities/emerging relevant topics and run a bespoke series of 'Technically Speaking' and 'Technically Teaching' workshops, addressing priority skills areas. In addition, technicians can book on all staff workshops and self-directed learning resources. We also promote access to external development opportunities provided through MI Talent, HEATED and other providers. We have a Career Development programme, accessible by technicians: 1:1 coaching, career management workshops and a tool kit of online career resources.
R11 Employers of technical staff, publishers and other sector bodies (e.g. professional associations and learned societies) should ensure the contributions of technical staff are visible and recognised.	We have published new guidelines for recognising technical contributions in research outputs. We engage with the Teaching Excellence award category for group and individual contributions with an ex-apprentice winning the overall Professional Services staff category. Technicians were also nominated in our Professional Services Staff Awards and in the national PAPI Prizes, run by HETS. We highlight Technical Careers in our professional development 'Career Insights' resources. We highlight technical staff achievements through our Technical Matters Newsletters and our UOB Techs Instagram account.
R12 Employers of technical staff, funders and sector bodies (e.g., professional associations and learned societies) should ensure technical staff sit on appropriate institution- and sector-level decision making committees and boards to ensure these groups reflect the community they represent and to provide diversity of views and expertise.	Action is taken to ensure that technical staff representatives sit on relevant groups including Faculty Boards, Health & Safety Committees and topic specific working groups. We currently chair the GW4Ward Steering Group and are represented on the Talent & Skills Steering Group. We engage with the Science Council as Employer Champions for professional registration. We are engaged with the internal Research Culture committees and working groups. Bristol University is part of the National Apprenticeship Trailblazer group who have developed and now maintain the HE Education Assistant Technician Apprenticeship Standard
R13 Employers of technical staff should form partnerships with organisations and initiatives that provide technical and vocational training (e.g. Catapult Centres in the UK	The university partners with the following organisations, and promotes their opportunities to technical staff: GW4ward, HEATED, MI Talent, ITSS, Science Council, TMU (Technical Managers in Universities), IST, NTDC
R14 Government policymakers should ensure the inclusion of technical staff in consultation on sector-level policy, for	External Environment
R15 Technical staff should engage positively with current and future opportunities that are available to them.	We are currently undergoing development of a Technical Staff SharePoint site, with plans for a monthly bulletin. However, to-date opportunities are disseminated via Technical Managers, or those subscribed to relevant mailing lists. Our annual Technical Conference is being led and organised by a group of technicians; and all the technician events we will run internally are available to all technical staff.
R16 The TALENT Commission advises the creation of a new collaborative entity, provisionally to be called the UK Institute of Technical Skills & Strategy [working title] that builds on the multi-stakeholder approach of the Technician Commitment, to represent and provide a conduit to the technical community, advising government, sector initiatives, funding bodies and other organisations.	Supportive and in the circulation loop for communications and engagement

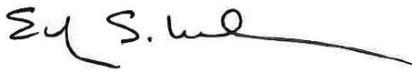
Technician Commitment Action Plan - Stage 3 (3 Year) Action Plan 2024/27

Our Stage 3 Action Plan is included at Appendix B and reflects the further evolution and development of our previous action plans and an alignment with the MI Talent Commission Report recommendations. This action plan has been completely developed by members of the technical staff community and we confirm that our 3-year action plan has been published on our [website here](#)



Signed...(Technician Commitment Nominated Institutional Lead)

Date: 2 July 2024



Signed Institution) (Technician Commitment Signatory – Leader of

Date: 2 July 2024