



Science Technician SOS:

WHEN BEING A TECHNICIAN LOSES ITS SPARK: SUPPORT
AND GUIDANCE FOR SCIENCE TECHNICIANS

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If you're reading this...

It is likely that you are feeling dissatisfied, thinking of making changes to your current job as a science technician, and may be considering leaving the profession altogether.

The Association for Science Education (ASE) have created this guide to support you in making your decisions. We want you to know that we value your decisions. We want you to know that we value you as a science education professional and a champion of the profession. However, we know that although being a science technician can be a very rewarding job, at times it can be extremely challenging.

When science technicians are finding school life particularly challenging, they may consider leaving the prep room for good. This is a non-judgemental and structured guide to help you with your decision making and to help you consider all your options before potentially leaving the profession completely.

This guidance is intended to help you make informed decisions. Avoid being hasty, make sure you have considered everything before making a change.

It is worth remembering the following, although you may not feel it:

- As a science technician, when you are supported to do your job well, you will be having a positive effect on teachers, classes and individual students.
- Science technicians are a precious resource; senior leaders should make reasonable changes to support you in feeling you are able to do your job effectively.
- You are likely to have developed a whole range of valuable, transferable skills that are valued and useful in other roles and schools.

How to use this guide

Part 1 helps you to explore your reasons for considering leaving the profession and takes you through your main options. It includes links to exercises to help you understand the reasons that you are considering leaving so that you can communicate them. It also includes links to additional support and help with making those decisions. Read through this first.

Part 2 offers additional specific advice depending on your experience and role as a science technician.

How do I get help in a crisis?

If you feel you need urgent help contact one of the following 24-hour services:

- The Education Support Partnership have a 24/7 free helpline 08000 562 561
- The Samaritans online or by phone 116 123 (freephone)
- Your local hospital Accident and Emergency will have a mental health crisis team.

Links to additional sources of support and guidance

- Mental Health Resources: www.mind.org.uk
- Education Support Partnership: www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk
- Samaritans: <https://www.samaritans.org/>
- CALM: <https://www.thecalmzone.net/issues/mentalhealth/>
- NHS Mental health charities and organisations A-Z: www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines
- Headroom (BBC): Mental Health toolkit

Why are you feeling this way?

There can be a number of reasons why technicians may consider changing or leaving their job. Use these questions to explore your reasons. The suggestions and activities can guide you to fully understand your reasons for wanting to change or leave...

Questions to ask yourself

What gives/gave you pleasure in your job?

What issues are making you consider leaving?

How is your mental health? Do you feel overly stressed, depressed or anxious?

Are there changes you could make to your own work-life balance?

Are there changes you could make in your work place?

Is it a specific person, your department or school as a whole that is making you consider leaving?

How are things outside work? Do you have any issues that are increasing your stress levels?

Suggested actions

- Write a list of problems, reasons and possible solutions.
- Talk to a trusted colleague.
- Talk to someone in your school about your thoughts. It will be easier if you have identified the issues. If possible, talk to your line manager, but a trusted colleague or peer within the school will also help you to understand the issues and perhaps identify some solutions.
- Talk to someone outside school about your thoughts. A partner, family member or friend may help to give you another perspective on your problems.
- Try exercise A to help you write down and evaluate your reasons for wanting to change or leave.
- Alternatively contact ASE and we can put you in touch with someone to talk to confidentially comms@ase.org.uk

How are you?

How you are feeling can be an indicator of your physical and mental health. When you are unhappy or stressed you can develop changes in your physical health, your mood and outlook. Sometimes, physical and medical health issues can cause stress themselves....

Questions to ask yourself

- Are you looking after yourself properly? Eating, sleeping and exercise?
- Are you getting time to do the things you enjoy? Family, friends, hobbies?
- Are you feeling more impatient or irritable?
- Have you lost your sense of humour?
- Have you seen your doctor recently for a general check-up?

Suggested actions

Making changes to your work- life balance:

- Analyse your work-life balance [Exercise B]
- How might you make changes [Exercise C]
-

Assessing your mental health

The stress and pressure of working in education, when feeling unsupported, can lead to depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions. These conditions can skew our perceptions of the situation and make it difficult to make rational decisions. Discounting or dealing with these can ensure you are making an informed decision. Consider talking to your GP, Occupational Health advisor, the school nurse or counsellor (if you have one). Occupational Health advisors can often provide counselling which may help you with your decisions, as can unions.

- Mental Health Resources: www.mind.org.uk
- Education Support Partnership: www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk

Could you make changes to your current workplace?

Identifying changes that could be made to your current job or workplace. Have you considered working part-time or doing a job share? Some solutions you may be able to change yourself, some would need to be presented to your line manager...

Questions to ask yourself

Are there changes you could make in your workplace?

Is it a particular class or group of students that are making you dissatisfied?

Is it a specific person, your department or school as a whole that is making you consider leaving?

Are the actions of senior leadership making you consider leaving?

Suggested actions

There will come a point where you will need to discuss the issues with your line manager or someone else more senior than you. Having identified the issues, assessed your own mental well-being and analysed your work-life balance, you will be able to present your issues and proposed solutions to them. You may wish to have another colleague with you to support you in the meeting. If appropriate, you may also consider presenting your issues and proposed solutions in an email.

It is worth making your concerns and intention to leave known to your line manager or senior leadership team, to give them the opportunity and time to make changes. If they cannot, it may be time to consider leaving your current workplace.

Ensure your expectations are reasonable by networking and talking to other science technicians in other schools. There is a very active Facebook page called School Science Technicians where you can make contact with people in similar work environments. There are also online forums such as preproom.org and techknow.org where you can find support.

Could you change the school or college where you work?

If you have decided that you no longer wish to work in your current school or college, before leaving the profession, consider working in another school, another phase or another sector...

Questions to ask yourself

Have you considered working in another school or college?

How do you feel about working in a different type of school? State school, academy, free school, independent school?

How do you feel about working in another sector? Primary, secondary, sixth form, further education, technical college?

Suggested actions

Moving to another school:

- Having identified the issues you are facing in your current place of work, can you find a school or college which can better support you, can build on your strengths and is more aligned to your own philosophy?

Moving to another sector:

- There are many types of school and sectors where science technicians are valued. Perhaps consider changing to primary, secondary, sixth form, further education, alternative provision or special needs education. Talk to peers in these sectors.
- Make contact with ASE for advice from colleagues in different sectors or networking opportunities through ASE's many regional events and committee activities www.ase.org.uk/events.

Could you change your career pathway?

Sometimes technicians decide that they do not want to continue to be a science technician in schools, but they still want to remain in the education system in another role.

Questions to ask yourself

What are your reasons for considering leaving the prep room?

What might you miss about being a technician?

What skills do you have that could be put to other roles within education?

Suggested actions

Be aware of your transferable skills as a science technician [Exercise D].

Other opportunities within education include:

- Working as a science teacher
- Working as a science technician advisor/trainer
- Becoming a learning support assistant specialising in science

Technicians new to the role and in their first few years

As a technician new to the role, you should receive support and training to help you achieve competence. It takes some time to be fully conversant and confident with all the knowledge, techniques and tasks a technician needs to master, and in your first few years you are still learning and may require continuing support...

Questions to ask yourself

New Technicians

Are you getting the support and training you need?

Is your workload reasonable?

Are you keeping up?

You are still learning and allowed to make mistakes but, but do you need to ask for support?

Technicians in their first few years

How could you increase confidence in your subject and technical knowledge?

How could you improve your time management?

How could you gain support with your workload?

Suggested actions

- Talk to your line manager or head of department about your feelings and concerns.
- Request training or external CPD.
- Make contact with a local technician in a nearby school or with a local technicians' network. (This is particularly relevant if you are a lone technician.)
- Seek a mentor in the Facebook School Science Technicians group.
- Seek technical ideas or subject guidance from other science technicians or your teachers.
- Attend CPD events run by ASE or other organisations.
- Attend ASE Tech Meets
- Develop strategies for managing your time.
- Analyse your work-life balance – try exercise B
- Contact ASE and we can put you in touch with someone to talk to confidentially (comms@ase.org.uk)

Experienced Technicians

Established technicians can feel undervalued, become disillusioned and lose motivation. After exploring your reasons for considering leaving (Part 1), some of these suggestions may help you become re-enthused and redirect your focus...

Questions to ask yourself

Do you feel your expertise and experience is undervalued?

Are you feeling less motivated or that you are giving more than you get?

What is it about your role that is causing you to feel this way?

What do you really enjoy about your role? What could be done to enhance those aspects?

How can you use your experience to improve your role?

How could you gain recognition from beyond your school?

Can the focus of your role be changed to one in which your experience is better utilised?

Is there some further training or development you could take to re-energise you?

What would make you feel more valued?

Suggested actions

- Apply for Registered Science Technician status www.ase.org.uk/join
- Become more involved with a local technicians' network or start one up.
- Become more involved with other likeminded organisations e.g., RSC, IOP, RBS
- Become more involved with the ASE volunteer for regional event or committees or national committees, contribute to ASE Techmeets.
- Take up a hobby to readdress your work-life balance or change the focus of your situation.
- Consider supporting/helping with Stem Clubs.
- Offer to mentor/support new technicians.
- Contact ASE and we can put you in touch with someone to talk to confidentially (comms@ase.org.uk)

Senior Science Technicians

The role of a Senior Technician can be challenging, with possible extra line management, financial and health and safety responsibilities on top of the practical workload.

Questions to ask yourself

What is making you question your current job? E.g., colleagues, workload, line management, pressure or stress?

What is the longer-term outlook for this issue?

What are you in control of?

What can you influence?

Who can you discuss this with within your school or outside?

How can you work better with what you have got?

What options would be open to you if you left your current role?

Suggested Actions

Working better with what you have got

- Develop your team (training, support, CPD)
- Engage team members
- Delegate specific roles
- Encourage aspiring senior technicians

Considering other options available if you left your current role

- Drop the senior responsibility and stay at your current school
- Same role, different school
- Change of sector
- Part time or job share
- Attend CPD events run by the ASE or other organisations
- Leave education

Exercise A - My reasons for wanting to change or leave

Reasons for leaving...	Possible solutions...

Reasons for staying...	How to maintain or do more of this...

Exercise B - Analysing my work-life balance

Use the codes below to the nearest 30 mins to complete this for a typical week.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
05:00							
06:00							
07:00							
08:00							
09:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00							
13:00							
14:00							
15:00							
16:00							
17:00							
18:00							
19:00							
20:00							
21:00							
22:00							
23:00							
24:00							
01:00							
02:00							
03:00							
04:00							

Key add any significant activities that are missing. Analyse your timesheet using **Exercise C**

Work		Life		Other	
Planning	PI	Sleeping	S		
Prepping	Pr	Cooking & Eating (Food)	F		
Delivering / Collecting	DC	Exercise	E		
Clearing up	C	Hobby	H		
Maintenance	M	Personal Time	PT		
Meetings	Me	Care of dependents	C		
Admin / Emails	A+E	Domestic (Clean & Shops)	D		
Line Management	LM				

Exercise C - Making changes to my work-life balance

Review your timesheet from Exercise B

Calculate your time on each activity					
Work		Hours	Life		Hours
Planning	PI		Sleeping	S	
Prepping	Pr		Cooking & Eating (Food)	F	
Delivering / Collecting	DC		Exercise	E	
Clearing up	C		Hobby	H	
Maintainance	M		Personal Time	PT	
Meetings	Me		Care of dependents	C	
Admin / Emails	A+E		Domestic (Clean & Shops)	D	
Line Management	LM		Other		
Other					

Which activities dominate your time?

What would you like to do less of? How might you achieve this?

What would you like to do more of? How might you achieve this?

You may need help to readdress your work-life balance, so talk to someone:

- A trusted colleague
- A line-manager
- Someone via your ASE regional committee

Exercise D - Transferable Skills

These are just a few of the transferable skills technicians have

Skills	Where Evident
Laboratory skills/ scientific knowledge	Working with chemicals and technical equipment. Following SOP's, protocols and CLEAPPS guidance
Communication	With various stakeholders including teaching staff, premises teams, other support staff, pupils. Written and verbal communication including practical procedures, results reports. Training of fellow technicians and teachers.
Ability to meet deadlines and work under pressure	Planning of practical work. Responding to requests Maintenance and H&S deadlines
Time management	Practical planning and preparation, delivery and collection. Workload management Attending meetings
IT skills	Use of software e.g., word, excel, databases, cloud drives, lablogger style requisition systems. Use of on-line resources
Problem-solving	Identifying issues with practicals. Investigating reasons for failure and modifying methods
Team-working	Working as part of the technician team and the faculty as a whole. Supporting colleagues with workload.