

CEO Introduction

Alastair MacGregor, CEO, SSERC



When I came into post at SSERC as CEO I took the opportunity, at my first SSERC Annual Conference in that role, to state my commitment to ensuring that the organisation would continue to support the role of the school technician profession in Scotland through the provision of quality professional development opportunities and the establishment of a forum that would provide advice to SSERC on the development needs to the profession. I restate this commitment and I continue to be impressed by the enthusiasm, commitment and determination of the technician community in Scotland, despite the ongoing challenges it faces.

There continues to be a wide range of different views within the educational landscape of Scotland as to the nature and purpose of practical work. SSERC recognises the educational value of practical work and believes that it should constitute a significant proportion of a learners time when undertaking a STEM-based curriculum.

We believe that practical work serves the following purposes:

- to motivate and engage students
- to teach the principals of STEM inquiry
- to develop specialist skills, e.g. measurement, observation
- to underpin the theory through practical skills
- to develop other skills and attributes such as communication, teamwork, creative thinking.

Practical work has undoubtedly been a casualty of the pandemic. At times, the guidance and statements issued by national education bodies and agencies in Scotland had the potential to erode further the future contribution of practical work in STEM education. SSERC will work with others to ensure that practical work remains a crucial component of STEM-based education in Scotland.

For the newest cohort of STEM teachers entering the teaching profession, the opportunity to acquire and develop practical skills that could be deployed in the classroom may have been negatively impacted. SSERC has reached out to all Scottish Local Authorities to offer support



and assistance. However, might there already be a partial solution in place and in situ in all secondary schools in Scotland?

The role of the school (STEM) technician in many Local Authorities and secondary schools has been poorly considered to date. This has impeded opportunities to offer essential practical work support for STEM teachers, including newly qualified and early careers. In recent years the school technician profession in Scotland has been marginalised via a combination of actions, including:

- a reduction in the number of employed school technicians
- the movement to part-time or term-time contracts
- an increase in the range and diversity of responsibilities; many now have a whole school responsibility
- diminution of opportunity for career progression within the profession.

It would appear that the school technician profession is an 'easy target' when it comes to cost-cutting initiatives, with decisions perhaps being made based on limited knowledge and understanding of the technician's current role in supporting the broader STEM curriculum in schools. Although the school technician's expertise has been externally recognised by SSERC, the technician's profile and

professionalism have been underrated and unacknowledged by others. This poor regard is frustrating and may also have prevented training and mutually beneficial progression of the role. An untapped pool of knowledge and skills exists that could be further utilised and developed to support practical work.

Technicians tend to have the flexibility to manage workloads, as lesson timings do not confine them, and so may be able to provide training in practical work. STEM technicians can offer help and training to all STEM teachers unfamiliar with practical work in the STEM curriculum and, in many cases, already provide this service. Understanding how school STEM experiments work, their health and safety considerations are the main function of their role. So technicians are in an excellent position to offer training for less experienced teachers

and consequently their students. Much more should be made of the skills that this body of people has to offer.

I hope that the launch of 'The School STEM Technician' demonstrates SSERC's commitment to play its role in re-establishing the school technician profession as a key resource within STEM education in Scotland.

Alastair MacGregor
Chief Executive Officer,
SSERC

Welcome
Sam McFarlane, Chair, STAC



Welcome to this first issue of 'The School STEM Technician', which I am sure you will find interesting and informative, and hopefully stimulates some professional discussion and debate.

The content for this inaugural issue has been devised to ensure that the technician profession in Scotland is aware of the current development being progressed by SSERC and the Scottish Technicians' Advisory Council (STAC) to support the ongoing professional development of the school technician community in Scotland.

As the Chair of STAC, I cannot stress enough the many benefits of Local Authority school technician representatives meeting regularly (4 times per annum) to discuss the state of the profession and work collaboratively to develop a comprehensive package of professional learning and training opportunities specifically designed to meet the needs of all Science, Technology & ICT Technicians who make up this key group of education professionals. As regards specific Health & Safety training opportunities, STAC members are encouraged

to undertake the various IOSH training courses which are available to all technicians via SSERC's courses registration scheme.

It is equally important that all school technicians have access to a network that supports professional discussion and dialogue and allows for sharing knowledge and resources and hopefully some collaborative working that spans school and local authority boundaries. SSERC, STAC, and I hope Techné will fill this role the same way Synapse, Sputnik and Strontium do for science teachers. As the adage goes...! use it or lose it!

'The School STEM Technician' will be a triannual publication dedicated to supporting school technicians' professional development and encouraging professional discussion and debate. We look forward to hearing from the profession via the 'Technicians' Corner' section of the bulletin. Suggestions relating to potential content for future issues will be warmly welcomed, as will the submission of articles for possible publication. You can do this by using the email bulletin@sserc.scot adding Technician in the subject line.