# SETA Advocacy Kit feedback and suggestions

## Background information:

An advocacy kit is a collection of information and resources that will help publicly support, promote or champion a cause.

On 7 July 2015 the SETA Forum was held at the CONASTA conference in Perth, Western Australia. During the SETA Forum an ‘Advocacy Kit’ was suggested which would help technicians to promote their role to others, because the role is not well recognised.

An opportunity for feedback and suggestions was given at the SETA forum as well as an online survey. Technicians are very passionate about their role and are keen to raise their profile. Respect should be given, but it should also be earned.

The following is a compilation of the main ideas expressed. It was not possible to include each response in its entirety, but as there were common themes, these have been summarised according to the target audiences, however to those that contributed, many will recognise your contributions!

Thank you to everyone who has contributed and supports this kit ☺

Today's scientists and researchers all attended a secondary school at some stage. Often the desire to pursue science was born within the school walls. Whether it was a great teacher, an encouraging work space, practical activities that triggered intrigue and questions....scientists and researchers all started in a school laboratory doing set educational practicals. Anything that helps the school science technician create interesting and nurturing teaching environments will assist in getting more students in to the wider science community.

Most Laboratory Technicians are eager to read any resource that will help in doing their job more efficiently and/or safely. Knowledge is power. An Advocacy Kit for Lab Techs by definition will be a valuable tool for all. I think most technicians will be keen to utilise this kit and in the process this will raise the profile of the school science technician

## The Key Messages to be addressed in the kit are:

### Technicians provide valuable support for

* the safety of staff and students
* legislative compliance
* the Australian Curriculum: Science
* the science teaching staff
* technicians in other schools

### The Target Audiences are:

* The Principal and school executive team
* The Science Department
* The technicians
* The wider science community
* Employers/Unions

## The Principal and school executive team

A wide range of **skills, knowledge and experience** are required by technicians in supporting an engaging **science education program** and student learning outcomes. This is a valuable and different skill set from the science teaching staff. The role is often not well understood.

### Technicians would like:

* **Information provided to the principal and school executive** regarding the role and responsibilities that science technicians have, to foster an understanding and appreciation of the complexity and diversity of the role
* **A precise title** which acknowledges the role
* **A precise Job Description/Duty Statement** outlining their duties, identifying the importance of essential science training as a prerequisite, rather than a multiskilling staffing policy.
* **Recognition,** understanding **and acknowledgement** of the skills, knowledge and experience required by technicians
  + in supporting an engaging science education program
  + in assisting schools in their **legislative compliance** for WHS matters
  + in maintaining a safe working environment.
* **Recognition for the WHS issues** associated with the role and the danger associated with appointing untrained people into this position.
* **Adequate technical staff allocation** to facilitate the time consuming administration necessary, especially for chemical safety compliance.
* **Opportunities to upgrade their skills and knowledge** by subsidized financial and time support
* **Training to be encouraged and (financially) supported** as well as time allocated to attend professional development; IT support and training; science conferences: state and national
* **Provision of safe working conditions** and adequate space
* **Pay at the relevant levels** commensurate with the responsibilities.
* **Provide a copy** of the latest union award/Enterprise bargain under which they are paid
* **Proactive support for the all of the above** from both the individual school level as well as in the relevant school sectors (i.e. Government, Catholic, Lutheran and Independent school sectors)

### Technicians, you can support this by

* **Providing resources** from the Advocacy kit such as the national technician documents; example technician role descriptions, collection of newspaper reports of accidents.
* **Using statistics and recommendations** such as listed in Professor Mark Hackling’s report "*The Status of School Science Laboratory Technicians in Australian Secondary Schools*" 2009, the ASE and LTAV for staffing levels.
* **Conferring** with your Principal/Business Manager/HOD often to write and/or update your Job Description
* **Communicating,** have a heart to heart with your Principal to let him/her know of the changing role of a Lab technician over the years and the consequences if proper protocols aren't in place.
* **Getting to know your school’s Leadership Team** – so they know you
* **Being professional** in your dress, manners and attitude; be proud of your part in keeping School /Education labs running smoothly and safely.
* **Always** having a desire to do something innovative and with excellence
* **Sourcing relevant PD** to attend and providing feedback following attendance
* **Consider** gaining/upgrading your qualifications through ‘Recognition of Prior Learning’ (RPL)

## The Science Department

Within a Science Department most staff value the science technician. A Science Department that runs smoothly and efficiently often has an excellent science technician at its heart. Most technicians are the type of people who are givers, and try their utmost to meet the demands being made of them, which gives a sense of achievement and satisfaction of a job well done.

The science department functions best where there is a supportive culture of teamwork, good communication and mutual respect.

### Technicians would like:

* **Recognition and respect** for the role of technicians
  + For the skills, experience and knowledge required by technicians in supporting an engaging science education program and student learning outcomes. That this is a different yet valuable skill set from the science teaching staff.
  + in maintaining a safe working environment
  + in delivering support to a number of science teachers
  + For the additional support they give to preservice and newly graduated teachers
  + For the trialling and management of particular practical activities.
* **Support from the HOD ensuring that**
  + The technician is a recognised and valued member of the science team
  + all safety protocols and WHS guidelines are followed by all Science staff.
  + agreed systems for ordering equipment; associated risk assessments are followed and there is an awareness by all staff of what the technician's job does not include.
  + All newly appointed science staff have a full induction into the science area, providing policies, procedures and necessary safety information and contacts
  + newly appointed technicians are trained and have access to ongoing training
* **To be involved with** and contribute to the Science department faculty meetings and future planning such as budgeting, facilities development and new curriculum.
* **Support for PD** time off to attend PD/technician meetings

### Technicians, you can support this by

* **Being a proactive science team member**
  + Establish professional relationships with your science teachers.
  + Foster effective communication, e.g. face to face communication, have a booking system which encourages teachers to visit you and your area and TALK to you. Be cooperative, friendly and polite. Tactfully monitor and explain WHS issues to staff. When necessary, learn to say no, nicely. Explain **why** technicians need sufficient notice for practical activities, i.e. higher efficiency, less duplication.
  + Be supportive of preservice and newly graduated teachers
  + Alert staff to any new or interesting: equipment, websites, films or new ideas. Sometimes a simple email will do.
  + Attend all science staff meetings: ask to have a permanent technician agenda item, such as lab tech issues/safety/ reports, contribute to planning of units, share your experience and any handouts from your technicians’ meetings and conferences.
  + Manage the laboratory suite proactively, be organized, keep a diary with reminders, events and meetings
  + Trial and test new methods, equipment, practical activities
  + Keep up with current IT changes and continually update your computing skills
  + Keep current with WHS/ OSH legislation and changes
  + Participate/Initiate in Safety Audits or Work Safe Inspections
  + Provide a written report of any external PD, conferences or meetings
* **Communicating effectively with your HOD:**
  + Confirm that you have a relevant Job Description and that they understand your role and current workload
  + Prioitise your work and discuss any issues of excessive or unrealistic workloads
  + Keep an record of the number of practical activities each year; use any annual increase to request an assistant or additional hours
  + Be familiar with the latest WHS and GHS legislation so that you can confidently discuss any concerns
  + keep a diary to record events, deadlines, meetings and any issues relating to staff relationships
  + Request adequate funding within the annual budget to cover all your PD or a new assistant
* **Establishing a good working relationship with all school staff**
  + Be friendly and cooperative to staff in other departments to foster mutual cooperation, collaboration and sharing of school resources.
  + Join the school’s OSH committee or become the school’s OSH Representative
  + Remember to take your lunch and tea breaks, preferably in the staff room so that you have a visible presence in the school. Discuss and promote the activities currently happening in the Science area.
* **Getting involved**
  + Promote Science at every opportunity: the more students enrolled in your school, the more secure your job
  + Get involved with science events such as National Science Week, Primary Science, Science Fairs and Open Days, offer to judge science competitions
  + Take photos of science activities, e.g. for the school newsletter; Keep students engaged, a few quick photos of the experiment etc. displayed in the classroom each week makes for a few 'chuffed' ones - 'here I am doing my eye dissection etc.' This also makes a great resource when prospective parents are looking at the Science labs.
  + Set up displays of science initiatives or equipment in the science department and the school Library, exhibit pictures/posters/newspaper articles/web information on windows/walls Maybe create short, attractive info (posters?) for occasions like Science Week & ES week - "what would your teaching be like without a lab tech?" or similar
  + Try to attend Science excursions and incursions
  + Get involved with other school departments and offer display equipment
  + Be profiled in the school newsletter
  + Ask to be introduced to Year 7 students early in Term 1
* **Suggesting positive ideas such as**
  + Promoting school Science projects in the local newspaper
  + Inviting a prominent Scientist into your school
  + Inviting community involvement such as local government involvement in science projects, or hosting events for special science interest groups
  + Offering your school to host local primary schools for hands on science lessons
  + Suggesting a school Science Education Technician as a career option to students
  + Hosting a Morning Tea in your Science Department to showcase the area
* **Above all respect yourself.** Work within your working hours. Don't get into a habit of working back unpaid (volunteering) or by not taking lunch or tea breaks to meet the requests made of you. Try to achieve a healthy work-life balance. See: <http://www.industryweek.com/leadership/12-key-strategies-achieving-work-life-balance>

## The Technicians

Technicians can feel isolated, especially if they are a sole technician in a school. The sharing of ideas, skills and information is beneficial to not only the technician themselves, but also to science education and the enabling of hands on science activities for students.

### Technicians would like Local Technician associations to

* Provide supportive local networks such as groups/forums/email list servers/ webpage
* Have vibrant regional/state lab tech groups that continually educate its members in areas including lab safety issues, practical ideas, computer literacy and etiquette, laboratory techniques, inventory control, etc.
* Provide information and training sessions that Science teachers and technicians can attend, such as relevant PD including updates on OSH on a regular basis
* Provide training and awareness for technicians regarding the advocacy kit
* Participate in the planning of CONASTA when it presents in their own State
* Support and relay information and news regarding Science ASSIST
* Invite a prominent Science identity to be their Patron/Ambassador
* Promote their group with the State Governor and relevant local M.P.’s
* Form relationships with relevant corporate businesses and industries for recognition/sponsorship/meeting PD’s
* Engage in social medias such as Facebook, Twitter account
* Promote local technician awards, activities for example through an article in a professional magazine/website.
* Source and promote scholarship funds to enable conference attendance or school visits
* Liaise with and maintain contact with their local science teachers associations
* Encourage local Scientists to present at meetings or visit local schools
* Consider providing an ‘Associate’ membership to encourage past members to retain contact
* Consider an ‘Affiliate’ membership to support teachers acting as technicians in schools
* Set up a Relief Register list for schools to utilise when needing temporary staff
* Encourage the exchange of information with other scientific groups
* Where possible, subsidise PD for members unable to secure funds from their school
* Consider establishing awards for technicians
* Contact schools where there are no technicians members of local associations and inform them of the support from a local association. E.g. how to get in touch with the website for more information. This may need a mail out via the post or an email to the administration requesting it be forwarded to the science technician.

### Technicians would like SETA the national technicians’ group to

* Promote the profession of school science technician
* Support CONASTA and seek suitable keynote speakers/informative sessions for technicians
* Continually support and provide advisory input into Science ASSIST
* Secure and advertise links with other state technician groups
* Endorse and publicise state or national awards for school staff
* Promote the ‘Certificate IV in Laboratory Technology (Education)’ being offered nationally
* Update and promote the ‘National Standards’
* Establish professional relationships with other school science professional bodies both nationally and globally, including government departments, educational sectors and interested parties
* Keep networking with science interest groups regionally, state wide, nationally & internationally.

### Technicians, you can support your local and national technician associations by

* Joining your state school laboratory manager/technician association and actively participate in professional development
* Volunteering to take on a committee role in your association
* Networking and maintaining communication with your colleagues in other schools and mutually supporting each other as well as in local regional groups e.g. via email server
* Offering moral support. (Coffee/phone calls with local techs, regional get togethers, online forum etc.) Via Technician Websites/conferences
* Encouraging each other to formalise what we know and obtain the Certificate IV qualification.
* Encouraging/training technicians to refine their skills; give them confidence to contribute to the faculty. Encouraging other technicians to speak up, e.g. Training in Assertiveness
* Sharing knowledge and ideas generously, such as via association list servers.
* Sharing previously learnt commercial/research techniques and procedures with other technicians
* Using, promoting, and supporting ‘Science ASSIST’
* Registering with Science ASSIST to obtain the correct information needed
* Attending state teachers association conferences and CONASTA where possible
* Publicising any technician’s conference or group which is meeting within any school
* Attending as much professional development that is on offer. Never refuse any PD offered even if disinterested, as you may make useful contacts
* Requesting what you need from your state group
* Making suggestions for PD at meetings and technician conferences
* Offering your school as a host for a technician’s meeting/conference
* Finding a mentor who can offer sound advice for both your school position and technical work
* Valuing networking meetings

## The wider science community

Networking with science special interest groups provides a mutually favourable benefit to schools as well as the special interest group

### Technicians would like:

* University, TAFEs, RTOs to provide one-off units to upskill technicians e.g. annual "Chemical Safety" courses, new and developing technologies
* Science teachers associations to liaise with and support technicians associations
* Science special interest groups to connect with and partner with technician groups and schools

### Technicians, you can support this by

* Having a genuine interest in science knowledge and science programs such as citizen science projects
* Connecting with outside science groups and professional associations like special interest groups e.g. astronomical society,
* Networking with local schools, universities, technical colleges and science forums
* Making contacts useful to curriculum needs i.e. excursions, student research, work experience
* Encouraging membership of your state’s professional technician’s group and union.
* Being an ambassador for school science technicians wherever you go

## Employers/Union

Union membership is very important to obtain education and support for employees.

### Technicians would like employers/unions to:

* Arrange for union representatives to visit the schools and Technicians to attend their meetings
* consult non-teaching staff on a more regular basis
* provide strong representation for all its technician members
* assist in explaining Union/Employer agreements, which are sometimes hard to read and understand.
* update the job description within the Award. Assist technicians in developing a clear job description, without the clause that says "and any other duties needed"
* actively support technicians with regard to the specific technician’s needs and rights within the education environment.
* Support the appointment of trained technicians in school science departments
* Fight for fair pay and correct award levels; compile a separate ‘Technician’ award section in recognition of their qualifications and science knowledge
* Offer OSH/WHS advice
* Check all termination and LSL salary calculations
* Advise on travel and professional insurance
* Provide free Will consultations and discounted legal advice
* Provide access to discounted shopping

### Technicians, you can support this by

* Joining your local union, you need to value yourself enough to realize that you need to protect your status, in the same way that teachers have been successful getting what they want over the years from having a high union membership %, so we need to follow that lead
* Having a clear understanding of your union award or enterprise bargain
* Raising awareness to the union of the advocacy kit
* If you are a union member, contact them with any concerns regarding your employment conditions