

Case Study

Mathew
University Research
Facility Manager



1. What does your job involve?

I manage a medical research facility, with responsibility for the animal facility as well as research laboratories. I work closely with two technicians to ensure the care and welfare of the rats and mice within the facility.

On a typical day, I start by working with the team to check all of the animals and environmental conditions, we then have a morning meeting with the animal facility team to talk through the day's work and any other issues that need to be discussed. I then meet with the research teams to discuss their ongoing projects and assist with their work. During the day I also assist as required within the animal facility performing home office licensed procedures and husbandry procedures such as cage changing and cleaning.

In the afternoon I perform health & safety audits of the laboratories and carry out any facility inductions for new team members. I also provide training in procedures and the use of equipment for facility users.

I also host unannounced inspections by the Home Office who are responsible for inspecting to ensure that the requirements of the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA) are applied in all designated research facilities.

2. What do you enjoy about your role?

I enjoy the daily challenges that my job offers and the sense of achievement in knowing that the work that I do could save the lives of millions of people. I like the fact that all of the animals in the facility where I work are well cared for and that their welfare is at the centre of our teams thinking.

I recently became a Named Animal Care and Welfare Officer which is recognised under the A(SP)A and enjoy playing a full role in the Ethical Review Processes – I understand and support the importance of the research being conducted but my priority is and always will be the welfare of the animals – this gives me great satisfaction.

I can't say that I actively dislike anything within my job although when we get into the job we know we will have to work weekends and bank holidays, somebody will work Christmas Day and New Year's Day too.

3. What qualifications do you have (including A levels)?

- GCSEs
- National Diploma in Animal Care
- 9 years working as a contract animal technician working for various pharmaceutical companies and research organizations

4. Are you a member of a professional register such as the Register of Science Technicians, or do you have any other form of professional recognition?

- Institute of Animal Technology Membership and Certificate exams
- Laboratory Animal Science Association
- Ongoing Continual Professional Development

5. How did you get into your career?

I chose to become an animal technician as I always wanted to work with animals and working within a research organisation enables me to make a difference to the lives of not only animals but also the lives of millions of people with the advancement of medical treatments that we are developing. After completing my National Diploma it became clear that there are not many career opportunities working with animals that allowed for progression and I recognised that working with research animals would offer more development opportunities than many other animal care type jobs.

6. What sparked your interest in a career in biology?

From a young age, I always knew I wanted to work with animals but I never really knew exactly what career I wanted to have. I liked the idea of doing a practice, hands on role with animals in which I could have a positive impact on the animal's welfare. Whilst at college we had a talk about using animals in research and how the technicians got involved with research and how it impacted on the welfare of the animals, so this sounded like an ideal choice for me.

7. What has surprised you most about working in your field?

Initially I found it surprising to see that the animals used within medical research are maintained to such a high standard, much higher than animals which are kept at home or in a pet shop. The environment which animals used within medical research are kept in is maintained within strict guidelines for temperature, humidity, lighting, air changes and noise levels, they are also kept in exceptionally clean and specialised caging, all of this I never expected at my start of a career as an animal technician.

8. What advice do you have for anyone considering a similar career to yours?

- Keen interest in working with animals and a desire to want to make a difference.
- Be flexible in your working hours, be willing to help as necessary and have a good work ethic.
- Experience of working with or owning animals is useful but not essential. Training will be provided as required.
- You have got to really want to work with animals – some of the routine tasks like filling water bottles and cleaning out cage changes can be repetitive.

9. About your career/sector in general

What qualifications are required/useful?

- An interest in animals and their welfare and an eagerness to learn
- An animal care/science qualification
- A commitment to animal care and welfare

What is the normal salary range for someone in your position? Over £35,000

3. What career progression opportunities are there?

There are lots of opportunities to progress within the Animal technology industry and lots of different routes available. There are opportunities to become a specialist in surgical techniques working within a specific area of research or become an animal facility director overseeing the whole process within the animal facility from the concept of the research to the publication of the research data.