

Becky
Price

Animal Technician

Working with laboratory animals



Becky Price at work

Your future

*If you thought that in order to have a career in science it would be essential to have a degree then think again. There are many positions available each year for lab technicians of various kinds in many companies in the UK. Often there is extensive training offered with the possibility of getting qualifications such as an HNC or HND, qualifications specific to the field in which you are working, or even a degree. Here **Becky Price**, an animal technician aged 30, describes her career so far.*

Education

I left school at 18 with A-levels in Biology, English Literature and History. Now I have a degree in Animal Science and a job which I love and find really rewarding.

When I finished my A-levels, I did not want to continue on to university; I wanted independence and a break from education. At the same time I knew that I wanted a rewarding career not just a job and that I wanted to work with animals. I saw the position of animal technician advertised in the local paper and applied.

The usual minimum qualifications are 5 GCSEs at A*-C including English, Maths and Science but people with a wide range of skills are taken on. Some have been to university and have a

degree; others do not even have the minimum qualifications but have relevant experience to offer and the right skills and attitude; being passionate about working with animals, having an interest in animal welfare and an understanding of the animal technology environment.

Responsibilities

An animal technician is responsible for all aspects of care and welfare of laboratory animals used in medical research. It is a highly regulated environment and the highest standards of animal welfare must be maintained at all times. The main responsibilities of an animal technician range from day to day husbandry duties such as cleaning out, providing food and water, and carrying out detailed animal observations, through to working alongside the scientists to administer new compounds and support the research process to develop new medicines for both animals and humans. Animal technicians are experts in animal care. We know each of our animals and if they are feeling unwell or show even the slightest change in behaviour we can advise the scientists accordingly.

There is scope to further your work in your own interest areas. One of the areas that I am passionate about is environmental enrichment – ensuring that the animals have an interesting environment to live in by providing items that encourage and promote natural behaviour. This would mean that mice have access to nesting materials, rabbits and guinea pigs receiving hay for example. I head up the enrichment group which identify new items for trial and then run simple studies to assess if the product is beneficial or not. We aim to provide a varied enrichment programme for all animals.

Further training

I have received continual training throughout my career, gaining qualifications from the Institute of Animal Technology and a degree in Animal Science. I am a registered animal technician which required an oral examination in all aspects of animal care and relevant legislation. I have been lucky enough to progress in my career and I am now a manager of an animal facility, managing a team of technicians who carry out the animal care duties. I am very proud of my own achievements



White mice with enrichment materials



Understanding Animal Research / Wellcome Images

A technician removes a white rat from its cage.

and contribution, and now also that of my team in maintaining the highest standards of animal care but also supporting the research effort which delivers new medicines to patients. We have the opportunity to make a difference every day through the care and commitment we show to ensure the welfare of laboratory animals.

This article is based on an interview with Vicky Wong.

Further information

It can be difficult to find information about a career in animal technology so if you are interested you will need to persevere. A good place to start is the Institute of Animal Technology who have a great website and careers brochure. Jobs are usually advertised locally and in job centres and companies will often contact local schools and universities directly. Completion of an animal care course can also be a good start in helping to secure a career as an animal technician.

Look here!

For more information on a career in animal technology, see the Institute of Animal Technology careers page.

www.iat.org.uk/careers/careers.htm

The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry has a section on apprenticeships.

abpi-careers.org.uk/

It is also worth looking at the websites of companies in your local area to find out if they offer any apprenticeship schemes or technician roles.