

Animal Technician

Animal technicians look after the animals used in medical or veterinary research. They may also help scientists with experimental work. Animal technicians are also responsible for ensuring all animal welfare regulations are met.

The Work

You will mostly work with rats, mice, guinea pigs and rabbits, but sometimes other animals too.

You might:

- feed and exercise animals daily, clean out cages and control the lighting and heating
- carry out regular health checks on the animals, such as taking weight and measurements
- calibrate (check the accuracy of), clean and sterilise equipment, and operate it as required
- do routine parts of experiments, such as give injections, and administer medicines
- collect and analyse samples, such as blood or urine
- monitor and record the condition and behaviour of the animals
- ease the animal's pain or distress
- help with scientific and medical research and keep accurate records
- maintain high standards of cleanliness and hygiene throughout all areas of the laboratory.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary depending on:

- where you work
- the size of the company or organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

The starting salaries for trainee animal technicians are normally about £16,000 to £17,000 a year. When qualified, earnings can increase to £20,000 a year. Senior animal technicians can earn up to £28,000 a year and chief or licensed technicians up to £35,000 a year. Facility managers or specialists can earn up to £40,000, sometimes more.

Conditions

- Animals need looking after 7 days a week, so you would need to work shifts covering evenings, weekends and public holidays.
- Work is mostly indoors, sometimes in sterile laboratory conditions.
- It can be hot, smelly and messy.
- You have to wear a lab coat and protective gloves and sometimes a face mask and shoe covers.
- You may have to lift heavy animal cages.
- You are at risk of bites, injuries and infection and you must have vaccinations against various diseases.

You should be aware that:

- procedures on animals are tightly regulated by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 under the Home Office
- people who are against vivisection (experimental surgery on live animals) may be hostile to you.

Getting In

- You can enter at various levels.
- You can apply direct from school. Most employers prefer you to have 5 subjects at National 5 (normally including English, Maths and a science subject) or Highers including a science subject.
- You could take an NC in Animal Care (SCQF Level 5). For entry you might need up to 4 subjects at National 4 or 5, depending on the college.
- You could take an HNC (SCQF Level 7) or HND (SCQF Level 8) in Animal Care. For entry you need 1-2 Highers.
- It is preferable to have experience of working with animals, either as pets or through dog-walking or kennel work.
- You need IT skills to keep records.
- You should have a good level of physical fitness to carry out active work.

You could work in a university research department, a medical or vet school, a pharmaceutical company or a company breeding animals for research purposes. You can look for jobs in 'Animal Welfare' and the 'New Scientist' publications.

What Does It Take

You should be:

- practical and methodical
- committed to the care and welfare of animals
- able to deal calmly with animals that may be distressed or in pain
- aware of the controversy over animal research and assertive enough to deal with any hostility
- good with your hands, for example to give injections
- able to concentrate
- observant, precise and accurate.

You should have:

- good communication skills
- good teamworking skills
- a strong stomach — not be squeamish.

Training

- Training is normally on the job and traditionally involves working towards Institute of Animal Technology (IAT) qualifications.

- The entry level qualification is the IAT Level 2 Diploma in Laboratory Animal Husbandry.
- You could then go onto the various levels of IAT courses in Laboratory Animal Science and Technology – Levels 2-6 Diplomas.
- The Diplomas at Levels 4-6 are higher education qualifications which can lead to degree and postgraduate programmes. The [IAT website](#) has details of the qualifications.
- Learning about the strict laws relating to animal welfare and vivisection will be an important part of your training. You must keep up to date with new laws that come into place.
- You can study for SVQs (Scottish Vocational Qualifications) in Animal Care at SCQF Level 5 and SCQF Level 6. These are recognised by the IAT. Previous experience of working with animals is useful.

Getting On

- You can become a member of the IAT once you have completed the Level 3 Diploma in Laboratory Animal Science and Technology and have at least three years' relevant experience.
- Members can then apply to become a Registered Animal Technologist (RANTech) once they have at least five years' relevant experience, including two years' post qualification experience.
- As a RANTech you are required to complete Continual Professional Development (CPD) to keep up to date with skills and knowledge.
- When you have this qualification you may be able to become a supervisor or manager.
- You could also specialise, for instance in breeding animals, genetic modification or research in perhaps pathology or immunology.
- Before getting involved in the experimental side of this work you must have a Home Office licence, under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. You must be at least 18, have appropriate experience and complete some specific training.

More Information

If you want some further insight into the working environment of an animal technician, you can get a 360° tour by visiting this great link at [Lab Animal Tour](#) provided by [Understanding Animal Research!](#)

Contacts

Institute of Animal Technology (IAT)

Tel: 0800 085 4380

Email: admin@iat.org.uk

Website: www.iat.org.uk/animalwork

X: @InstAnimalTech

Facebook: www.facebook.com/InstAnimalTech

Lantra Scotland

Tel: 024 7669 6996

Email: scotland@lantra.co.uk

Website: www.scotland.lantra.co.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/lantrascotland

Understanding Animal Research

Tel: 020 3675 1230

Email: office@uar.org.uk

Website: www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk

X: @animalresearch

Statistics

Employment Status : Not available this career.

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

Predicted Employment Statistics : Not available this career.