

A day in the life of a science technician



Sebastian Punter received a BSc with honours in Biochemistry from the University of Huddersfield in June 2017. In January 2018, he joined Cape Cornwall School, West Cornwall as a Science Technician Specialist, where he has spent the last 8 months supporting the school science department. He is an associate member of the Royal Society of Biology (AMRSB), as well as an early career member of the Biochemical Society. Peter Wotherspoon (Training & Careers Intern, Biochemical Society) spoke to him about his work.

How did you get into science?

I've always been interested in science, ever since being at secondary school. During my time there, I grew a fascination for the intricate chemical detail found within the human body. I realized I wanted to further my knowledge, so I took both biology and chemistry at A-Level. During this time, I became more interested in the functions and processes at a chemical level, solidifying my belief that I wanted to study biochemistry at university.

Can you describe a typical day?

My day starts with a 6:00 am alarm, followed by an hour's drive to work, arriving at school around 8:10 am, earlier if there are more complicated practicals to set up. Each working day is different, dependent on which practicals I'm preparing; I consult Lab Logger to check my agenda and start from there. Mornings are spent preparing equipment and chemicals for practicals, I work 2 days in advance to prevent last minute problems. In addition to this, I also clear

material used in previous practicals and set up others as the day progresses. After lunch, I might update chemical stocks, answer emails, maintain or order equipment. I then update Lab Logger with general notes regarding the day's practicals from information received from the teachers. My working day ends around 4.00 pm and I then head for home.

What inspires you about your job?

What inspires me about my job is with each practical I prepare and set up inside the classroom, there may be a chance a student will be become fascinated with science, just as I did. I gain satisfaction in knowing the work I do makes the department run smoothly and the students are involved, and interested, when carrying out experiments. I have made the department more efficient by introducing Lab Logger, to help the teachers organize their requirements for lessons and, in turn, this enables me to provide a consistently good service. I have also suggested ideas to make lessons run more smoothly and the department more

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organized, and these have been accepted by the staff and introduced. On a personal note, I feel I have successfully made the transition from university to my first job. I have grown in confidence and am more inspired as to where my future will lead me.

What do most people not realize about your job?

Most people don't realize how much effort and dedication goes into keeping a school science department running. There is so much preparation, thought and organization which needs to take place before a lesson is given. In addition to this, there is huge responsibility for the vast array of chemicals which have to be stored, and disposed of, according to the code set by the advisory service, CLEAPPS. I am responsible for the day-to-day budgeting of the department, and for the purchasing of equipment, chemicals, stationery, supermarket shopping for food used in practicals, and more random items – such as finding a local butcher who is willing to supply pig eyeballs. I am also a Fire Marshall for the whole school and a departmental First Aider. ■

For career information from the Biochemical Society, visit <http://www.biochemistry.org/Education/Careers.aspx>

Job profile

Science technicians can work across all levels of educational institutions including secondary schools, colleges and universities. They support the work of educators by providing practical demonstrations, managing departmental equipment and engaging with students.

Qualifications and key skills

Generally, a strong interest in science, organizational skills and the ability to communicate scientific concepts to different audiences are required. While some science technician posts do not require a degree, only asking for A-level or equivalent qualifications in science subjects, more specialist positions may require a degree in a relevant subject and further progression towards teaching may require a postgraduate certificate in learning and teaching.

Responsibilities

Responsibilities include preparing materials for science teachers, supporting staff and students through demonstrations, managing equipment and chemical stocks and ensuring health and safety guidelines are adhered to. More senior positions may require contribution to the development of their departments, advising educational staff and undertaking teaching responsibilities.

Salary and career development

Starting salaries for technicians depend on the qualifications held at entry, commencing from £15,000. At a more senior level with responsibilities in teaching and demonstrating, technicians can earn up to £30,000. Continued professional development (CPD) is often provided by the employer and events are run by organizations such as the Association for Science Education. Science technicians can also apply for professional registration (RSciTech).



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