

# TECHNICAL CAREERS

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## WHAT LED YOU TO BECOME A TECHNICIAN?

I wouldn't say that becoming a technician was always my dream, I never really knew what I wanted to be when I was younger. The only real exposure to technicians at school was seeing someone in a white lab coat disappear off into a small prep room when the class was starting. I always had an interest in science, in particular doing the experiments, and that interest led me to university and subsequently a couple of lab-based jobs in industry testing food for microbial content and running an experiment called an ELISA which tested blood samples for different viruses.

In both of those jobs the main focus was being in the lab, setting up and running the experiments and then providing the results for the client; in a lot of ways, without even realising it I was doing a technical role.

My first technical role within a university was at Nottingham Trent working in Biochemistry setting up teaching practical classes for Undergraduate students. Initially it was a little daunting, thinking that if I made a mistake 30 students would have no results and it was all down to me but after a while, I became confident in what I was doing. I loved the variation that I could get involved with at the University, where once I was doing an ELISA day after day, now I could be growing cells for a tissue culture class, working with viruses, freeze drying samples or developing new practical classes. I even got involved in some Sports Science studies. From that point onwards I knew that a technical career in higher education was for me.

## HOW HAS YOUR CAREER PROGRESSED (WHERE ARE YOU NOW)?

My current role title is Clinical Skills Centre Manager which basically means that I manage a team who deliver Clinical Skills practical classes for Nurses, Medics, Physio's and Midwives. I am also in charge of the facility where the classes are undertaken and so a lot of my role is making sure that the building and equipment are safe to use and that our teaching is provided in a safe way. In a number of ways, it's quite a departure from my first role at NTU, I don't set the classes up myself anymore and obviously our teaching is clinical based and not particularly centred around science. There are however lots of similarities in technical roles regardless of the discipline and so in my case, there is a need to organise and manage the team to ensure that our practical classes are delivered, Health and Safety principles still apply even if some of the hazards are different and things like securing funding for new equipment are the same discussions regardless of what equipment you want to purchase.

To get into this managerial position I've worked my way up through numerous team leader/managerial roles both at NTU and now at the University of Nottingham. From my own point of view I think I've always had success in managerial positions and although I do miss being in a lab or setting up classes my skills are better suited to where I am now.

## WHAT WERE THE MOST USEFUL ACTIVITIES THAT HELPED YOU PROGRESS IN YOUR CAREER?

I'm not sure I could attribute any one thing or even a group of activities that have helped in my career. I think the main thing that I've always tried to do is get involved in whatever has been put in front of me. Certainly, when working at both universities there are always little projects or opportunities that come along and you have two options; you can say that it's not really part of your job, or you can get involved and make it your own. I've always done the latter and I think it's the single thing that has benefitted me the most. I once went on a training course which wasn't essential for my development but just that I thought it might be interesting and I ended up getting a meeting with the Vice Chancellor of Loughborough University from it. I also took over the organisation of a group of volunteers that supported practical classes when I worked in Pharmacy, due to the person doing that role leaving, and that work ended up becoming relevant to the role that I now have and was something I could discuss in my interview for the position.

You never know what opportunities will come from getting involved in mini projects but if you turn them down because they might be some extra work then you will never even be aware of the benefit. I think the quote is something like "Say yes and then figure out how to do it later" that's certainly something that I've always tried to follow and I think that attitude will always serve you well.

## WHAT ARE YOUR CAREER HIGHLIGHTS AND WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED THE MOST?

When working in the lab I was part of a fantastic group of people who set up a brand new Teaching Lab at Nottingham Trent. I got given a fairly significant budget and was told to source and purchase the appropriate equipment which sounds great until you realise you have such a small amount of time to do it in. We set up new processes for delivering the practical classes and new ways of working for existing technical teams and so bringing all of that together successfully was very satisfying.

From a managerial point of view I'd say the work I did in securing additional funding for staff in a previous role was a highlight. The work I did looked at how three teaching technical teams worked and what they needed to deliver the practical classes required of them. I managed to get the school to agree to a number of additional Teaching Technician posts which reduced everyone's workloads and made things more manageable. I had to present the case to the school board and so getting agreement to that was something that I was very proud of.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY FUTURE CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND IF SO WHAT ARE THEY?

I've moved around in roles quite a bit and so at the moment I am happy in what I am doing. I think in the past 10 years I've been driven by wanting to progress and move into more senior roles. I feel I have the right work/life balance at the moment and want to stay in a position where I can develop the plans I have over a number of years. I think there is great potential for developing what my department currently deliver and so I want to move ahead with these plans and see them through to a conclusion.

## WHAT CAREER ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

As I said earlier over the past 10 years I've been quite driven in wanting to move into more senior positions and that has at times lead me to apply for roles that I wasn't particularly suited for. I applied for a Research Team leader and a Radiation Protection Officer role whilst I was at Nottingham Trent, neither of which I got. Looking back those roles weren't particularly suited to my skills and yet I struggled with the disappointment of not getting the positions.

If I could give myself some advice it would be that the right role will come along at some point that suits the level that you want to work at and will match your skills but that you have to give it time. Try and think clearly about what it is that you really want to do and then match the training you can do in your role with that position.

I had a little experience in Radiation Safety and no experience in Research Technical work and so really, I wasn't suited to those positions at all. My experience is centred around Teaching and so progressing down that avenue has been where I've found the most success.