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Fair Attribution Guidelines for Technical and Specialist Support



PROUD SUPPORTER OF THE
Technician Commitment

The following guidelines were developed as part of the University's response to the [Technician Commitment](#), as part of a national response across the sector.

These guidelines have been developed by the CamTechs Technician development team in collaboration with the Technician Agenda Steering & Technician Commitment Working groups. These guidelines have also been endorsed by the University Research Culture Steering Committee and are issued as institutional guidance.

The University recognises the importance of technicians, equipment, and facilities in conducting research. Users of facilities and services will interact with technicians either during the development of items related to experiments, the preparation of materials, training on equipment, running of routine samples, or during experimental design and analysis of results. It is only fair that the contribution of technicians and facilities to a user's research is attributed in the appropriate manner. Best practice also highlights that payment for a service is not a substitution for a formal acknowledgement.

Where appropriate, we expect research active academic staff to follow these guidelines. We also expect that Post-Doctoral Research Assistants and PhD students agree to follow the fair attribution guidelines below, with their supervisors, in advance of conducting their experiments.

There are five distinct cases in which facilities and services are used*:

- 1. User led experiments within the University, with initial training by technicians.**
- 2. Technician support in experimental design and/or data acquisition and/or data interpretation and analysis.**
- 3. Collaboration with external users in which technicians support experimental design and/or data acquisition, and/or data interpretation.**
- 4. Occasional use, to obtain data for a simple experiment, where technicians perform routine characterisation, sending data to the user to analyse.**
- 5. The preparation of items or materials used during experiments.**

For all five cases, we anticipate that publications and reports will include the following acknowledgement statement: "The Authors acknowledge use of [insert equipment or service used] provided by [insert team or department name], University of Cambridge."

In cases (2) and (3) the research has required intellectual contributions from one or more technicians or specialist staff. Technicians/Specialist staff should be included in the author list when their contribution meets established authorship criteria, any deviation due to journal specific constraints should be transparently justified.

In case (4) the technicians or specialist staff assisting with the experiment should be acknowledged by name:

"The Authors would like to acknowledge the help of [insert name] and the use of [insert service or characterisation facilities] within the [insert team or department name] at University of Cambridge."

In situations where a technician or other specialist staff member feels that they have contributed to the work, or a researcher wishes to engage the support of a staff member; a discussion should be initiated with the researcher on what would be fair attribution in this instance. If the work is published and fair attribution is not followed, the technician/specialist should raise this with their line manager in the first instance or higher if appropriate to the situation. Further information can be found in the supporting document: [Technical Staff: Statement of Expectations](#).

*The RMS Core Facilities Publication Policy is already in use within the University and can be found in the appendix. This document provides extra guidance for acknowledging grants which have funded instruments. It also defines levels of support and assistance and can be used in conjunction with these guidelines.

Creative content

There are many technical roles in the University that produce materials or provide services that may not be acknowledgeable in research papers. Examples may include digital content subsequently used in communications or support from teaching technicians. We would encourage this work to be credited where possible, especially if materials produced are publicly viewable and available.

Key Principles

1. Discuss attribution at the start of every research project and update throughout.
2. Use a decision framework to classify contributions (see attribution table).
3. Encourage staff to maintain ORCID profiles and list publications.
4. Co-authors meet the ICMJE authorship criteria.
5. All acknowledgements must be approved by the individuals named.
6. Where uncertainty exists, consult your line manager, supervisor, or research integrity advisor.

Institutional Good Practice

Supervisors should embed attribution discussions into project planning. PIs should include technicians in funding applications where appropriate. Annual SRDs should include questions about contributions to published outputs. These guidelines apply to all research staff, PhD students, and collaborators at the University of Cambridge.

Acknowledgements

This document was based on the work of several other Institutes and is a result of their combined response to the Technician Commitment. With special thanks to the University of Liverpool who have published their materials publicly and helped adapt these for use at the University of Cambridge. We would also like to acknowledge Frances Marsh and Lucy Woolhouse for their work in developing workshops and guidance for technical staff and academics as well as all UoC staff who have helped develop and implement these guidelines.

Appendix 1

[The Royal Microscopical Society \(RMS\) Core Facilities Publication Policy](#) is already in use within the University. A supplementary graphic is added below for reference.

Imaging Facility Guidelines for Acknowledgement

- 1** All publications resulting from the use of instruments within the facility should acknowledge the facility as a whole, e.g. 'the authors gratefully acknowledge the [core facility name] for their support & assistance in this work' and the facility should be informed of the publication.
- 2** Specific grants that have funded the facility instruments used for the work to be published must be acknowledged if the data was acquired during the active period of that grant. Facility staff will advise users of such grant codes.
- 3** Assistance above the technical or routine level, with any facility staff providing scientific input and expertise in experimental set-up, acquisition or analysis, should be recognised through co-authorship on resulting publications. Please discuss acknowledgements with facility staff prior to manuscript submission.

Example scenarios with baseline recommendations:

Sample Preparation	Fast, routine sample preparation with standard protocol.	Simple acknowledgement
	Development of new sample preparation protocols.	Inclusion of specific facility member on author list
	Optimisation of existing protocols for specific samples.	
Image Acquisition	Training of users to acquire images themselves.	Simple acknowledgement
	Simple acquisition of raw data.	Inclusion of specific facility member on author list
	Operational image acquisition with input and decisions dependent on expertise.	
Image Analysis	Design or re-design of experimental conditions.	Inclusion of specific facility member on author list
	Recommendation of analysis software and tools.	
	Basic data analysis help and advice.	Simple acknowledgement
Image Analysis	Constructive data analysis and interpretation.	Inclusion of specific facility member on author list
	Creation of complex custom image analysis tools.	

Based on the publication policy compiled by Natasha Stephen, Plymouth Electron Microscopy Centre, after discussions with the RMS EM-UK community




Appendix 2

Research culture Community event 2025 highlighting [fair attribution](#) workshop poster and recommendations/feedback.

Who gets credit? Exploring fair attribution for technicians with University of Cambridge researchers



Frances Marsh (fm449) and Lucy Woolhouse (lew48)

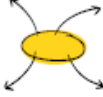


- ### 1 RESEARCH CULTURE FOR TECHNICIANS

Technicians make research happen and play an important role in creating positive research cultures across the University. However, they are an underserved community and often lack acknowledgement for their vital role in research outputs. Fair acknowledgement for technicians is key for their visibility and recognition^[1] but also speaks to a variety of aspects of research culture:

Enhancing **research integrity** by ensuring transparency of methods and acknowledging everyone involved

Promoting **mutual respect** between academic and assistant staff



Supporting **open research** practices by using new tools and platforms for creating open access outputs that have more transparent research information about technical staff and facilities

Promoting opportunities for technicians' **professional development** through involvement in the publication process (whilst recognising the unsuitability of research outputs alone as metrics, indicators or criteria for career progression)
- ### 2




Figure 1: Words technical staff use to describe the research culture where they work.
Source: Survey of UK Technical Staff 2021: Which three words would you use to describe the current research culture where you work, based on your experience as a technician/technical role-holder? n=1766. ^[2]
- ### 3 WORKSHOPS WITH TECHNICIANS

Since 2023, we have delivered workshops on the publication process, acknowledgement vs authorship, and using CRediT and ORCID to map and track contributions.

 - participants since 2023
 - workshops per year in Cambridge University Libraries' Research Skills Series

The workshops have demonstrated:


 - Inconsistent attribution practices across the University
 - Impact of local research cultures and power dynamics
 - Difficulties of finding & tracking technician acknowledgements
 - The need to engage with researchers on the topic
- ### 4 FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS WITH ACADEMICS AND RESEARCHERS

Moreover, as part of our Enhancing Research Culture grant-funded project, we are carrying out focus groups and interviews with researchers at the University of Cambridge. Our research aims to better understand the barriers and enablers of fair attribution for technical staff. The results will then inform the design of interventions to address inconsistent attribution of technical staff in the University.
- ### 5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS


 - What are researchers' authorship and acknowledgement practices for crediting technicians?
 - What factors influence researchers' attitudes toward crediting technicians?
 - To what extent can tools such as the CRediT taxonomy, institutional policies or sector/ discipline-specific guidelines improve research culture by encouraging fair acknowledgement practices?
- ### 6 INTENDED OUTPUTS

 - Recommendations to the Technician Commitment team for implementing Fair Attribution Guidelines
 - Case studies of best practice for peer sharing
 - A workshop plan for engaging with more academics
 - Publish qualitative methods and data openly on Apollo
 - Explore new open research platforms like Octopus.ac to publish as we go
- ### 7

Figure 2: Tools and platforms used to support fair acknowledgement and open research practices in the project. Clockwise from top left: Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT); Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID); Cambridge institutional repository (Apollo); Octopus.ac publishing platform.


- ### 8 WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE INVOLVED?

We are looking for academic researchers affiliated to the University of Cambridge from a range of backgrounds, career stages and disciplines. **Focus groups and interviews** will take place both **in-person** and **online**. Complete our Expression of Interest form, where you can also find links to the Participant Information Sheets.


- ### 9 REFERENCES

 1. About us (no date) Technician Commitment. Available at: <https://www.techniciancommitment.org.uk/> (Accessed: 25 April 2025)
 2. Harris, C. and Vere, K. (2022) Research culture: a technician lens. TALENT. Available at: https://www.mitalent.ac.uk/write/MediaUploads/research%20culture/TALENTResearchCulture_Report_V10.pdf (Accessed: 21 May 2025).