

Imperial College  
London

# Authorship & Acknowledgement of Technicians *Survey Results*

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SUPPORTING  
OUR PEOPLE

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**POD**

People and  
Organisational  
Development

# Background & Methodology

- A short, anonymous survey on **authorship and acknowledgement of technicians** was distributed in Qualtrics between 20 March and 17 April 2023
- The survey was available to **all technicians at the College** (c.650 staff) and was advertised in the *Technicians' Network Newsletter*, the *POD Newsletter* and distributed through members of the TC Steering Group, Vice-Deans Research and Heads of Departments
- The aim of the survey was to:
  - understand whether (and in what circumstances) technicians at Imperial are named as authors or acknowledged in research publications
  - understand the impact of this
  - seek views on how contributions to research outputs can be recognised

## Who responded?

**119 technical staff responded** (18% of the technical community)

Respondents work in the following areas:

Natural Sciences	39	33%
Medicine	24	20%
Engineering	16	13%
Support Services	5	4%
Did not provide	35	29%
	<b>119 responses</b>	<b>100%</b>

Respondents' length of service as technicians in Higher Education varied:

0 - 5 years	31	26%
6 - 10 years	15	13%
11+ years	44	37%
Did not provide	29	24%
	<b>119 responses</b>	<b>100%</b>

# Survey Results

# Enquiry 1: How prevalent is it for technicians at Imperial to be named as **authors**?

Q. *Have you ever been named as an **author** in a research publication while working as a technician?*



Q. *If yes, approximately how many times in your technical career have you been named as an **author**?*

1 - 5 times	64%
6 - 10 times	11%
11 - 20 times	11%
21+ times	15%

## Enquiry 2: How does authorship come about for technicians?

*Q. Did you ask to be named as an author?*

No	80%
Yes	15%
It has varied	5%

*Respondents were invited to make free text comments about how their inclusion as an author had come about...*

There were **positive examples** of technicians being named as authors without needing to ask:

*I was automatically added.*

*There is a strong culture of giving the right credit in the groups I have worked with.*

*The culture of the group meant that my inclusion as an author was a given.*

*While focusing on technical work, I felt like an active and core member of the research team and never felt there was any question as to whether or not I would be included as an author on resulting publications.*

*I am regularly added as an author without asking.*

## Some respondents had to ask:

*I have asked when I contributed substantially to data collection and curation.*

*A couple of times for papers covering research I was involved in I did indicate that this would be something I would appreciate...*

## More clarity on authorship protocols would be helpful for others:

*I was named as an author one time only, in 7 years of constant technical help. The problem is there is no set protocol, at least that my research group apparently know of, to be clear of what and how much work is required in order to name someone as an author, and keeping track of who did what.*



## Enquiry 3: How prevalent is it for technicians at Imperial to be **acknowledged** in research publications?

Q. *Have you ever been **acknowledged** in a research publication while working as a technician?*



Q. *If yes, approximately how many times in your technical career have you been **acknowledged**?*

1 - 5 times	63%
6 - 10 times	13%
11 - 20 times	11%
21+ times	13%

## Enquiry 4: How do acknowledgments come about for technicians?

*Q. Did you ask to be acknowledged?*

Yes	12%
No	81%
It has varied	7%

*Respondents were also invited to make free text comments about how their acknowledgement had come about...*

**Several respondents felt their contribution in fact warranted authorship:**

*I should have been author on this paper with the amount of work I did, though was only acknowledged.*

*I did not ask to be acknowledged- I was just told by a senior member of staff that a previous colleague had published and my name was in the acknowledgements. The senior staff thought this was unfair as the main author should have put my name as in author in their judgement. The person had also already left Imperial at this point so not easy to attempt to make this change.*

**There was one example of acknowledgment being a condition:**

*We now require acknowledgement as part of our services.*

## Enquiry 5: What are the perceived benefits of being named as an **author**?

*Q. How has being named as an **author** been used to support your career progression?*

Mentioned at job interviews	52%
Used to establish professional credibility within the group/department	31%
Listed in job application forms/CVs	28%
Mentioned on a personal webpage, LinkedIn profile or similar	16%
Included in professional membership applications	16%
Not used	31%

## Enquiry 6: What are the perceived benefits of being **acknowledged**?

Q. How has being **acknowledged** been used to support your career progression?

Listed in job application forms/CVs	13%
Mentioned at job interviews	12%
Used to establish professional credibility within the group/department	12%
Mentioned on a personal webpage, LinkedIn profile or similar	2%
Included in professional membership applications	2%
Not used	56%

### Free text comments:

- *It supported my regrading*
- *Helps me feel that my work is recognised*
- *It was used in my salary review application and instrumental in my subsequent promotion*
- *It is nice to be acknowledged but I'm unsure how useful it is as the information is not indexed anywhere*

# Enquiry 7: How should College recognise and value the contributions technical staff make to research outputs?

## Key Themes

Numerous respondents felt that their contributions to research were **overlooked**:

*Even if technicians do not directly contribute to research, we are the ones that order all the items, fix the machines, maintain the machines, keep the lab in order etc. Without that there would be NO research at all!*

*There is, I believe, a strong tendency NOT to credit technicians.*

*I think more recognition of technical staff is needed at Imperial.*

*Many groups don't appreciate the effort technical staff put into their projects.*

*My input is frequently minimised.*

## Key Themes (continued)

There is a strong appetite for more **formalised guidance** on acknowledgement:

*A **clear policy document** stating when authorship or acknowledgement should be used, rather than leaving it up to the PI's discretion.*

*While I accept that the college cannot instruct academics who to acknowledge, **some guidance might help**. I went years without being acknowledged, I just don't think it occurred to the academics.*

***All contributions outside of the normal scope of the role should be recognised**. It doesn't take much to do this and it means so much to technical staff that do not write their own papers. It makes our contribution to research seem more real.*

*Maybe College can offer some **stronger guidance** to PIs.*

## Key Themes (continued)

Some respondents suggested *mandating* acknowledgement:

*This should be mandatory. Technical staff form the backbone of research. We shouldn't have to ask to be put on papers. If we have contributed to the project in a direct (doing assays) or indirect (making chemicals or maintaining equipment or laboratory areas) way, we should be mentioned.*

*There should be a mandate that all contributions to a research paper, specifically the one from the technical staff, to be acknowledge in the Acknowledgement section*

One area has its own local policy on technician acknowledgement:

*We have a document that all users of our facility have to sign up to when they are trained that states that they will give technical staff authorship where required and acknowledgements in papers.*



## **Suggested next steps (for discussion!)**

Build greater clarity among technicians on the distinction between authorship and acknowledgement

Raise awareness of the ICJME authorship criteria

Encourage research teams to systematically acknowledge technical staff contributions (or name as author where appropriate), but not 'mandate' that this should happen

Comms campaign on technical staff acknowledgement geared at Principal Investigators

**E-learning resources**  
*Launch July 2023*

**E-learning resources**  
*Launch July 2023*

**Statement from  
Prof. Mary Ryan & Staff  
Briefing**  
*July 2023*

*Discuss with Mary's office*

# HOT OFF THE PRESS!

## Statement in support of recognising technical staff contributions to research

*Technical staff at the College are a key part of our research teams and make a vital contribution to supporting and enabling our research. Imperial supports technical staff contributions being recognised in research publications through acknowledgement or authorship where appropriate. Imperial has an authorship policy as part of our commitment to research integrity, and the principles of authorship are well-defined.*

*We have developed new resources for technical staff on authorship, acknowledgement, and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) criteria, which are used by most journals. Where contributions to the creation or publication of research do not meet the ICMJE criteria, we encourage lead authors to use the acknowledgement section to recognise the work of technical colleagues or teams formally.*

**Professor Mary Ryan**

**Any thoughts,  
questions?**

