STEM Laboratory Facilities Publication Policy – Fair Attribution of Technical Staff Contributions to Research

Background & Purpose

The scientific community is moving towards creating a more collaborative and inclusive research landscape. This includes ensuring the fair attribution of work of technical staff in scientific outputs. At the OU this is reflected in the Research Code of Practice (section 8). The STEM Laboratory Facilities Publication Policy acts to provide further detail on the fair attribution of technical staff.

The OU recognises that technical staff provide researchers and external costumers with expertise and knowledge that is essential for creating high-quality results and data for research and publications, and that they can:

- Be experts in their field
- Use advanced techniques and state-of-the-art instrumentation
- Have an essential role from idea conception to conducting experiments on specialist equipment
- Perform data analysis and interpretation

Historically, in the scientific community, technical staff have not always been included in discussions around authorship and their contributions to publications. This means their essential and specialised skills are not recognised in a formal way, and their work may be "invisible". Fairly attributing work to technicians does not detract from the work of other contributors; it creates an inclusive working environment, where all contributions are recognised and valued.

Benefits

Including technical staff as co-authors or acknowledging their contributions in publications is beneficial for the individual as well as the STEM Faculty and University.

On an individual level, being a co-author or receiving an acknowledgment provides visibility and recognition for technical staff work, which are two of the key pillars of the Technician Commitment. It can also be used as evidence for Continual Professional Development if individuals are Professionally Registered. Furthermore, it can be used to guide career development discussions during appraisals and provide evidence for prior research experience, for example, if staff are looking for a new role or consider doing further postgraduate qualifications.

On an institutional level, recognising the contribution and support that technical staff provide is also valuable as evidence for the OU's strategy to support research and enable impact, which is also part of the REF 2029 "Strategy, People, and Research Environment" statement. The STEM laboratory facilities are run by highly skilled experts; acknowledging their contributions accurately strengthens the professional reputation of our laboratory facilities and technical staff. This, in turn, delivers financial benefits to the STEM faculty, as research excellence centres and providers of high-quality, state-of-the-art facilities and services are more likely to attract external funding and commercial partnerships. The credibility of these facilities is further reinforced by the volume and quality of peer-reviewed publications they generate, offering objective validation of their excellence beyond internal claims and thus attracts a wider range of customers.
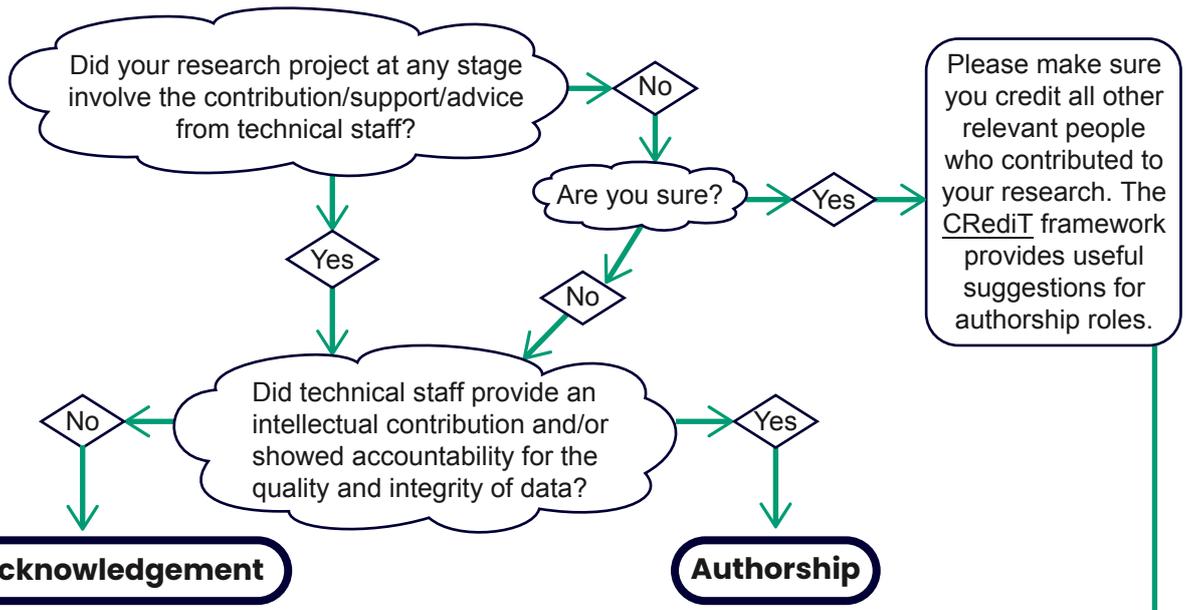
Fair attribution

The appropriate type of recognition varies depending on the technical staff's contribution. It is encouraged to have open and continual conversations about potential authorship early on and throughout any

project. The CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy) framework provides a useful resource for suggested contributor role definitions (detailed in the flow chart below) to help make decisions on acknowledgement and authorship. Through this, authors are encouraged to add contributor information statements alongside traditional attributions into their manuscripts. Furthermore COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) provides abundance information and resources around ethical publishing.

Fair Attribution of Technical Staff in Research Outputs

The Open University

Did your research project at any stage involve the contribution/support/advice from technical staff? → **No**

Are you sure? → **Yes** → Please make sure you credit all other relevant people who contributed to your research. The CRediT framework provides useful suggestions for authorship roles.

No

Yes

Did technical staff provide an intellectual contribution and/or showed accountability for the quality and integrity of data?

No → **Acknowledgement**

Yes → **Authorship**

Acknowledgement

If the contribution from technical staff is not significant to merit authorship they should be formally acknowledged. Examples include but are not limited to:

• Performing routine sample preparation or manufacturing of parts
• Performing data acquisition under instruction of researcher
• Monitoring or maintaining equipment and experiments
• Basic laboratory supervision of research students
• Providing specialised training and competency assessments

Suggested acknowledgment statements:

• The authors acknowledge use of [insert equipment or service] run by [name], at The Open University, UK.

• The authors would like to acknowledge the skill and technical expertise of [name] and the use of [facility], provided by The Open University, UK.

• Experiments were facilitated by [name] at the Open University (UK) [facility].

Authorship

Please discuss authorship with the individual/group. The CRediT framework provides useful suggestions for authorship roles.

• Conceptualisation, design and set-up of experiments, custom equipment, software, or scripts
• Developing new data generation or analysis methods
• Contributing significantly to redeveloping existing methodology or equipment to suit new sample types or research questions
• Generating or interpreting data essential for the work
• Data curation and management i.e., producing metadata, processing data, and maintaining research data
• Providing a bespoke service for a specific project or piece of work
• Facilitating the conceptualisation, design, manufacturing, assembly and testing of custom equipment or prototypes by the STEM Engineering Facility
• Project management e.g., experiment plan and readiness reviews, resource allocation, cost analysis, risk analysis, time management and scheduling, and health and safety documentation

CRediT Taxonomy authorship roles:

• Conceptualisation
• Data curation
• Formal analysis
• Funding acquisition
• Investigation
• Methodology
• Project administration
• Resources
• Software
• Supervision
• Validation
• Visualisation
• Writing – original draft
• Writing – review & editing

I confirm that I have read, and have understood, the STEM Technical Staff Fair Attribution Policy, and agree to abide by it in future publications resulting from my collaborative efforts with the STEM laboratory facilities & technical staff

Name: ....

Signature: .... Date: ....

Version 1 - Ratified by the STEM ACR committee 17th September 2025