Educated and skilled animal technologists are essential to maintain high standards of animal welfare, implement the latest technologies, and support their organisation's scientific endeavour.

The education and continuing professional development of animal technologists, coupled with a clear career pathway, is beneficial for both the employer and the individual, helping to attract and retain staff while helping to maintain a culture of care.

The workshop discussed what training and qualifications are currently available, where there is a need for further developments and how they can be delivered in the workplace. The roundtable discussion was led by Ken Applebee and Glyn Fisher from IAT.

An initial presentation set out the legislative requirements for competency and continuous training of animal care staff. Article 23 of the EU Directive on animals used in research demands that a training framework should meet the following objectives and be:

- flexible;
- available and accessible;
- affordable;
- of agreed quality.

In order to achieve the aims of:

- ensuring competence of staff and
- facilitating free movement of personnel.

Despite this mandate, the proportion of budget spent on training versus staff salaries at animal facilities remains low (3-5 % of a unit's budget).

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is however required as part of annual appraisal process of animal care staff, who have to complete CPD objectives that are recorded by the Named Training and Competency Officer (NTCO).

IAT is an Ofqual awarding organisation and as such no longer act as a provider of courses but accredits Further and Higher Education (FE and HE) courses in Laboratory Animal Science and Technology given by a number of providers across the UK. FE and HE courses span 6 levels, with level 3 including trailblazer apprenticeship standards for animal technology and level 6 qualifying for IAT fellowship and master's degree entry. The College of Laboratory Animal Science and Technology was established in 2015 as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and will deliver IAT HE levels 4-6 qualifications. IAT qualifications are also officially recognised for Laboratory Animal Technology theoretical training in South Africa by the South African Veterinary Council (SAVC). The University of Cape Town has applied to act as a local provider for IAT courses.

The training can be delivered face to face, through on-line learning and through blended modes of learning. On-line learning platforms such as moodle have been adopted by IAT-accredited training providers as they allow for affordable, standardised flexible access to learning materials across wide geographical areas and 24/7 access. They can be used behind bio-security barriers, allow for flexible delivery and assessment strategies and have integrated automatic email feedback and certification.

The apprenticeship based programme is attractive from a financial point of view as it gets funding support from Government but so far has only reached level 3 of the IAT accreditation scheme and employers are interested in expanding it to reach level 5. The participants

discussed the challenges of designing an advanced apprenticeship scheme as it requires at least 10 employers and a minimum number of apprentices per year. Moreover, the apprenticeship levy only applies to England and Wales, as Scotland manages a similar scheme separately.

Apprentices can join the programme from the age of 16. So far, most apprentices are in the 18-20 years old range, which is when they work harder and progress faster through the accreditation levels. The pick-up rate among 16 year olds has been lower than expected.

The group discussed some of the challenges faced at their institutions in rolling out the apprenticeship scheme, which included variation in pay levels and streamlining of relevant human resources processes.

The workshop participants also considered soft and team leadership skills that are essential for more senior animal technologists and facility managers such as excellent interpersonal skills, the ability to interact with researchers, line-management and supervisory responsibilities, ensuring that daily routines are undertaken to the required standards and dealing with confrontation. These set of skills are not sufficiently emphasised in the present CPD pathways for animal technologists and IAT is considering implementing the right training for this.

Finally, the group stressed the importance of regular re-assessment of animal technologists' competency over time, which should apply to all staff members even those who are not necessarily seeking promotions or senior positions.