

University Principal's visit to a Bioresearch and Veterinary Services' animal facility June 2021



Bioresearch and Veterinary Services oversee the animal research facilities at the University of Edinburgh.

BVS was delighted to give Peter Mathieson a tour of one of our animal facilities a few weeks ago. This unit houses mice and small numbers of rats used in biomedical research. Duncan McNeil, one of our Deputy Facility Managers was involved in the tour. We have taken this opportunity to ask Duncan a few questions about the visit and his role supporting animal care and enabling research.

Why was the Principal's visit your facility significant?

It is great to have members of senior management come and see what goes on 'on the floor'. To know they appreciate the reality of day-to-day research and what we deal with every day. Even to experience the amount of PPE/ Health and Safety processes that are in place to protect staff health and that have been added to since COVID. These are all protective changes but they add to the complexity of the tasks we do. It was great that Peter had a background in this area and so the set up was familiar but I think he saw some changes from when he had last worked in a facility!

Tell me a little bit about your background- how did you get to where you are today

I started in a cage wash role 30 years ago in what is now the Hugh Robson Building and was then the Medical Facility Animal Area. Since then I have worked my way up through the different roles, working as an animal technician and gaining experience in animal rooms and with researchers. Now I am in a more management-based role but still working closely with the animals and researchers. I have now worked with 6 different Directors!

What is your job?

I work within a large rodent (mainly mice and some rats) facility as a floor manager looking after 15 trained animal technicians. We oversee all aspects of animal care within research, interacting with multiple researchers and ensuring their requirements are met to a high standard at the same time as ensuring the welfare of our animals. There is a lot of organisation and planning but also thinking on my feet and dealing with the moment-to-moment requests and queries. I am also one of the University's Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers (NACWOs) who have particular responsibility by law for the care of the animals within the facility. This is a vital role in ensuring wellbeing of our animals.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

Meeting the researchers and being able to make the things happen that they need for their research I get a lot of satisfaction from that and from assisting inexperienced new PhD students in finding

their feet. I enjoy guiding them in the right direction and helping them feel comfortable in the facility. It can be very hard to be a new PhD student and work out everything that needs to be done and it is good to be able to assist. They will be the researchers of the future so it is worth making sure they know what they are doing and that they do it well.

I also enjoy being a cog in a very big wheel - we are all part of the same wheel- doesn't matter what grade or role and so support each other, step in to fill any gaps and this is very rewarding.

What is the most challenging aspect?

All of the legislation is critical to ensuring animal research is well controlled and monitored. It can be challenging however to work under such stringent guidance and we work as a large team of technicians, managers, vets and trainers to ensure compliance.

Further information:

To read more about animal research at the university and how the use of animals is controlled and monitored please look at our website <https://www.ed.ac.uk/research/animal-research>

If you have any questions then please contact Dr Lesley Penny, Director BVS lesley.penny@ed.ac.uk