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■ Compiled by Julia Bostock

Summary of the National Technicians' Conference ASE/ NSLC York – 5/6th July 2012

Approximately 160 technicians attended the Conference on both days. The programme included workshops and lectures and was repeated on the Friday, so that technicians who stayed for both days were able to take part in a variety of activities that reflected all areas of science, health & safety and CPD. Sessions included:

- Lab spaces on the cheap
- Dark physics
- Using sensors to extend practical work
- Dissections
- Microscale chemistry
- Practical work with low-level radioactive materials
- Senior technicians – leadership & management
- Going outdoors
- Gadgets and gizmos
- Plant science
- Enzymes
- Keep up-to-date with CLEAPSS
- The Earth and plate tectonics
- Technicians supporting practical work in the classroom
- Registered Science Technician applications

Thursday's lively keynote lecture was given by Kathy Sykes, Professor of Sciences and Society at Bristol University. She explained why scientists and the public should communicate more with each other and build better relationships. She also presented the Grattells School Science Technician awards to three worthy prizewinners (see opposite). Kathy's specialism is physics, but she has appeared on such television programmes as *Rough Science*, *Alternative Therapies & Medicine* and *Brave New World*, as well as Open University programmes.

The concluding lecture was given by David Jenkins, an academic in nuclear physics at the University of York, who lectures in astronomy and astrophysics



'Survival in Space' at the National Technicians' Conference 2012.

and is also active in public engagement, going into schools to talk about physics and astronomy. Using plenty of hands-on demonstrations, and equipment such as vacuum pumps, marshmallows, balloons and liquid nitrogen, David and a PhD student, Andy, together with volunteers from the audience, delivered an entertaining lecture about survival in space. It neatly linked the history of space travel with forces topics, illustrating the effects of extreme conditions on the human body.

On Thursday evening, after a film showing, Timstar kindly provided a buffet with wine for the delegates. We would like to thank Timstar for their continued support of this event.

Friday began with torrential rain and difficult travel conditions. The Technicians' Committee was very appreciative of the fact that so many delegates ventured out to attend the Conference that day. We seriously thought about running an ark-building workshop!

Liz Lawrence, Chair-elect of ASE, gave the keynote lecture and encouraged technicians to apply for the Registered Science Technician awards. Wilson Agnew, with other members of the Committee who had already gone through the pilot scheme and application process, held a session for those interested in obtaining registered status, with tips on filling in the application form. We feel that, in Liz, we have an ASE Chair who will understand our needs and be supportive in our efforts to raise the profile of technicians.

The day concluded with Chris Peel (recently retired from CLEAPSS) giving a talk on his life as a technician and the changes that he had dealt with throughout his long career. Many thanks to Chris for staying in touch with us all.

We must mention the four technician members of NVON who travelled over from the Netherlands to join us for the Conference. Ton van der Vaart, the Chairman, was accompanied by Inneke Koldenhof, Petra Ketelaar and Dafne de

Boer. Petra and Dafne ran an excellent workshop about enzymes, ranging from easy experiments to more difficult ones. As well as bringing along a great deal of apparatus, they also gave out a handbook, in English, with the details of the experiments and notes for technicians.

Ton gave a short speech on the Friday and we hope to continue the relationship between NVON and ASE technicians in the future. We were pleased to return the hospitality that they had shown Julia, Simon and Michelle last November in Leiden.

On the subject of hospitality, the facilities and food provided at the National Science Learning Centre were very good, as were the laboratory facilities – thanks are due to the NSLC staff. The exhibitors filled the atrium with informative stands and demonstrations, and also ran competitions with prizes. The ASE Technicians' Committee hope that all delegates enjoyed the Conference as much as we did and we look forward to going through the feedback, so that we can start to prepare for the next Conference in summer 2013.

Gratnells Award winners at the National Technicians' Conference

Leading manufacturer of tray storage systems, Gratnells, announced the winners of their Science Technician of the Year Award (2011) to a packed audience of delegates at the National Technicians' Conference at the NSLC in York.

The ceremony, now in its third year, took place at the start of the two-day conference and followed the speech by Professor Kathy Sykes on the subject of 'The importance of engaging with the public about science'. Following her speech, Kathy Sykes, with Murray Hudson (Managing Director of Gratnells), presented the three winners of the 2011 Gratnells Science Technician of the Year with their awards and prizes.

The winner for the 2011 Gratnells Science Technician of the Year Award was Eileen Edwards from Saints Peter & Paul Catholic College, Widnes. Nominated by her Head of Science, Darren Forbes, Eileen is the third winner of these prestigious Awards.

The other winners of the 2011 Awards were: Margaret Fillery (2nd place), Senior Science Technician, Bethany School, Curtisden Green, Kent; and Madeleine Buck (3rd place), Head Technician at

Varndean College, Brighton.

Of the Awards, Kathy Sykes said: 'It's a privilege to once again be involved with these Gratnells Awards, which acknowledge just how vital the role of the science technician is in the teaching and learning of the subject in our schools and colleges across the UK'.

Murray Hudson said: 'We are delighted that Kathy Sykes has been able to highlight the important role science technicians – sometimes called "the forgotten heroes of science" – fulfil in our schools. And this year's winners have not only been of an exceptional standard, but also the volume of nominations received show that more and more schools are acknowledging the vital role science technicians play in the teaching of the subject.'

If you are – or know of – a science technician who you think should be nominated for the 2012 Awards, then please download a nomination form from www.gratnells.com. There is no entry fee – but the winners will walk away with a range of generous prizes for themselves and their science department. (The closing date for the Gratnells Science Technician of the Year 2012 is 31st December 2012.)

Professor Kathy Sykes at the Gratnells Award presentation.



Please send your contributions for The Prep Room to **Wilson Agnew** on wagnew737@pc.portadown.ni.sch.uk or **Julia Bostock** on j.bostock@mmu.ac.uk