



Role Overview and Person Specification

Job title	Trainee Technical Specialist	Location - base	NIAB, Park Farm, Histon, Cambridge
Team	Agricultural Crop Characterisation (ACC)	Job group	Technical
Department	Cambridge Agronomy	Post ref.	SV/A1375
Reports to	Technical Manager	Line manages	N/A

1. Team overview

Within the Cambridge Agronomy Centre at NIAB, the Agricultural Crops Characterisation (ACC) Team carry out technical services and contract research relevant to plant varieties and seeds. The focus is the delivery of regulatory services, primarily for the government (Animal and Plant Health Agency – APHA and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - Defra) or international governmental organisations /agencies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Within ACC, these statutory services include:

- The Distinctness, Uniformity, and Stability (DUS) testing of new varieties of agricultural crop plants and ornamental plants for the granting of intellectual property rights (Plant Breeders' Rights - PBR).
- DUS testing for the purposes of Variety Listing (VL) of agricultural species.
- The activities of Seed Certification carried out to ensure compliance with regulatory standards as defined in UK legislation (principally the Seeds Regulations, 2011).
- Providing advice to APHA, Defra and the seeds industry in relation to the activities described above.

Services for clients (both internal and external to NIAB) are primarily focused on the physical characterisation, analysis and/or description of plant materials and plant products, using high throughput systems.

In addition, a wide range of training, both for national and international clients, is provided as commissioned, primarily in the areas around the development or the implementation of the regulatory services mentioned above.

The main crops are cereals, oilseeds, herbage, sugar beet and pulses, although the range of minor crops and ornamental species can vary from year to year.

2. Role purpose

As a Trainee Technical Specialist you will work within ACC as part of the Technical Support Team (TST) responsible for:

- Trial planning, management and maintenance
- Plot assessments and collection of data for all crop species from field and glasshouse trials and laboratory tests
- Crop inspecting after suitable training and gaining appropriate APHA Licences
- Data validation and summarising results
- Communicating both internally and externally with stakeholders and other NIAB departments
- Continuous improvements in methods and procedures

3. Financial authority/responsibility

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No specific responsibility, but all staff are expected to use resources efficiently and within budget and raise Purchase Orders where appropriate.

4. Key relationships

Internal This post is line-managed by one of the Technical Managers, but as one of a team, the post-holder will work across all crop areas at different times, depending on the time of year/tasks required.

The post holder is expected to take an active part in TST meetings where the week's work is organised and provide feedback on progress. After appropriate training, the post holder will be expected to work unsupervised when necessary and undertake individual responsibility for certain tasks.

There is no direct line management although there may be some supervision of student/temporary workers at times.

External: The post-holder is expected to be able to confidently communicate with stakeholders where necessary. After appropriate training, the post-holder will be expected to communicate with either seed growers, variety maintainers, breeders and/or international authorities.

5. Key tasks/responsibilities

	Approx. % of time
Carry out the recording and assessment of DUS and Certification trials using predefined protocols to accurately assess plants. The work is on a range of species, and may include: Oilseed rape, cereals, field beans, peas, sugar beet, linseed, grasses, and chrysanthemums.	35%
Seed crop inspections, throughout at least the South-East of England and beyond where necessary, using valid inspection licences.	5%
Assist in the delivery of trial planning, sample preparation and maintenance of Seed Certification, DUS and NIAB courses trials/field plots.	30%
A share of other Team tasks which may include: lab tests, data analysis and summarising results, database input and management, assisting with training courses and company events, and other trials-related work and administration.	30%

6. Working conditions

Work is split between field, laboratory and office (bench-and desk-based activities), which varies according to the season.

- Work involves a combination of field, laboratory, and office activities, varying by season.
- Regular use of Visual Display Units (VDUs).
- Regular travel to onsite trials at NIAB trial grounds.
- Occasional travel to farm holdings, seed growers, and off-site trials across East Anglia as required.
- Work in Containment Level 1 laboratory conditions with occasional use of laboratory equipment, including microscopy.
- Outdoor work in all weather conditions throughout the year, exposed to sunlight and rain.
- Occasional work in glasshouses and polytunnels in high temperatures.
- Regular exposure to plant material, pathogens, pollen, bees, and other insects.
- Occasional physically demanding tasks and regular minor physical activities such as walking, standing, bending, and manual handling of items up to 25 kg.
- Occasional exposure to dust and chemicals like soil particles, milled seeds, and seeds treated with pesticide and fertiliser.
- Periods of lone working in field and glasshouse environments.

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- Due to workload peaks, holidays may be restricted during certain times of the year unless arranged in advance with sufficient notice

Person Specification

Criteria	Essential	Desirable
Qualifications and Experience		
A minimum of A levels or equivalent in a biological or science subjects (or demonstrable equivalent experience)	x	
Strong English language skills (equivalent to GCSE level or above)	x	
Strong numeracy skills (equivalent to GCSE level or above)	x	
Degree or other professional qualification in agriculture, agronomy or biological sciences.		x
Knowledge and skills	Essential	Desirable
Strong verbal and written communication skills, with excellent interpersonal abilities.	x	
Proficiency in Microsoft Office applications including Outlook, Word, Excel, and SharePoint.	x	
Advanced competency in Microsoft Office 365 applications, including Outlook, Word, Excel, SharePoint, and PowerPoint.		x
Strong numeracy and data handling skills.	x	
Excellent organisational skills, capable of prioritising tasks and meeting deadlines under pressure.	x	
Strong analytical and problem-solving abilities.		x
Experience	Essential	Desirable
Interest in plants and agriculture	x	
Experience in field trials		x
Familiarity with use of data loggers or electronic devices for data collection.		x
Experience of working with protocols.		x
Current APHA Crop Inspection Licences.		x
UPOV (International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties) distance learning courses DL205 and DL305.		x
Attributes	Essential	Desirable
High level of accuracy and attention to detail.	x	
Demonstrated commitment to personal development and enthusiasm for acquiring new skills.	x	
Ability to make impartial and independent decisions, and handle confidential information with discretion.	x	
Flexibility to work independently or as part of a small team, adept at adapting to changing priorities and deadlines.	x	
Proactive and self-motivated, with confidence in working autonomously.	x	
Ability to adhere to precise protocols, maintaining meticulous records with a consistent and detail-oriented approach.	x	
Other	Essential	Desirable
Possession of a current driving licence or access to independent transportation for regular travel to NIAB trial sites and occasional travel across East Anglia for crop inspections. Transport can be provided	x	

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Criteria	Essential	Desirable
Normal colour vision is essential for the role, and this will be assessed	x	
Ability to lift up to to 20kg due to the physical nature of the work.	x	

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