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Technicians help save UEA 60,000 litres of water annually

Technical staff have helped the University of East Anglia (UEA) to save around 60,000 litres of water annually, after developing an innovative adaptation for air condensers that are used in student chemistry and pharmacy laboratory experiments.

Technicians from the UEA's Faculty of Science have developed an adapter that is designed for use with the air condensers used in their labs, after recognising that their experiments could be more sustainable. A prototype was blown in November 2016 by UEA's very own in-house glassblower, and was tested by Senior Technician, Matthew Bennett.

Condensers are used in scientific experiments to cool and condense the vapours produced. Air condensers can replace traditional water condensers allowing chemists to perform the same techniques without using water.

The adapter is designed for use with the CondensSyn, an air condenser which is sold by the company Asynt, who will begin to manufacture and sell the adapter to other universities and commercial chemistry labs worldwide this month.

Matthew Bennett, who is a Senior Technician in the School of Chemistry, said: "Every day millions of experiments take place internationally as scientists continue to make world-changing discoveries. UEA is also making breakthroughs in the development of new technology which helps science experiments to be performed more sustainably.

"This is a momentous step and allows us to fulfil our ambition of becoming completely water-free. With our continued innovation and dedication to sustainability, I believe we can really make headway in further minimising our impact on the environment."

The news comes as the University signed the Technician Commitment earlier this year, signifying its support to technical staff, ensuring greater visibility and recognition of their work.

Prof Phillip Gilmartin, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Science, who also chairs the University Sustainability Board, said: "I'm really proud that the commitment and invention from staff has led to such a measurable impact across the University, which could also change the way other institutions deliver teaching.

"Teaching practical skills, and learning through experiments in our laboratories is integral for students to see the theories and principles of their discipline, really come to life. It's where ideas flourish, inspiration is sought and passion for science is amplified."

The adaptation was developed in consultation with SustainableUEA, who provided initial funding for the laboratory to switch to air condensers and have advised to ensure efficiency throughout the process.

Catrin Darsley, Sustainable Development Manager, said: “Our team is excited to see such benefits from the collaboration between UEA technicians and external industry. This is a fantastic example of the potential for innovation within our labs, and of possible applications of the national Green Impact programme on campus.”

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Notes to editors

1/ For more information or to arrange interviews or photographs, please contact Lauren Burgess in the UEA Press Office on 01603 591205 or Lauren.Burgess@uea.ac.uk

2/ The University of East Anglia (UEA) is a UK Top 15 university. Known for its world-leading research and outstanding student experience, it was awarded Gold in the Teaching Excellence Framework and is a leading member of Norwich Research Park, one of Europe’s biggest concentrations of researchers in the fields of environment, health and plant science. www.uea.ac.uk.