



UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

THE
ACADEMY
Developing Liverpool

Technically Speaking

ISSUE 5 SEPTEMBER 2021





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Foreword

Welcome to Technically Speaking



Dr James Howard
Director of The Academy

Welcome to the 5th edition of Technically Speaking, a newsletter by Technicians for Technicians and the wider university community.

I hope you have all had a good summer with chance for a break away from work.

We have seen over recent months just how fundamental technician's are to the success of the university and the range of research and teaching activities that take place right across the disciplines. As such, we should all be hugely pleased that the University's work to support, recognise, celebrate and develop technician's has been recognised as sector leading by a panel of external experts in our recent submission for the Technician Commitment.

I personally invite all technicians of all types from all parts of the university to study this action plan and feedback to the Steering Group with comments and ideas on how we can all make the next 36 months as successful as possible in relation to the objectives we have set.

Ultimately, the success of these plans is down to the commitment of Technician's from across the University who have come together to develop, deliver and engage with Technician Commitment related activities. E.g. Technical Showcases, Technical Leaders Forums and participation in events by the Technical Network.

This 5th issue of 'Technically Speaking' provides yet more examples of the innovation, dedication and hard work of our technical community from Dr Jade Waller support plant science research to all the team working on the LEAF project to make our labs more sustainable.

If you would like to contact us about anything mentioned in the newsletter, or if you want to get involved with the work of the Technician Commitment, please email us at:

theacademy@liverpool.ac.uk

or

technet@liverpool.ac.uk

#TechniciansMakeItHappen

Technicians Bio

Dr Jade Waller,

Dr Jade Waller is a Senior Laboratory Technician in the Institute of Systems, Molecular and Integrative Biology.



Describe your work area and your role.

I work as part of ISMIB on the third and fourth floor of the Life Sciences and Biosciences Buildings. I work within laboratories, plant growth rooms and also in the three glasshouses on the roof. I also spend time at the Polytunnel at Wood Park Farm on the Wirral.

My core role is maintaining the plant growth facilities at the University of Liverpool, and supporting plant science research.

What does a typical day look like for you?

A typical day for me starts with checking all the plant growth facilities to ensure everything is working as it should. Then I will spend about half of my day carrying out plant care, such as watering, checking for and treating infections, pest control and keeping areas clean and tidy.

The other half of the day is always more varied depending on the time of year - as the plants need a lot more tending to in the summer as they grow so quickly! I take cuttings, sow seeds for experiments, carry out plant tissue culture and help out with research activities when I can.

What's your favourite bit of kit?

MY favourite piece of 'kit' would have to be the Glasshouses. We have 3 glasshouses divided into 5 separate blocks. The glasshouses and associated

software is so sensitive that it allows me to have completely different growing conditions in each block, which are specifically tailored to the growth needs of the plant species we have in there. We are able to automatically control heating/cooling, ventilation, light levels and watering in response to the climate measured both inside and out of the glasshouse.

I recently applied to the technicians development fund, which supported me in gaining further training on the control software. This fantastic opportunity has now enabled me to use the glasshouses to their full potential.

What's your favourite task?

My favourite task has to be helping with research within the department! I have been lucky enough to be involved in some laboratory research, which has so far enabled me to be published on two research papers.

I have also worked on multiple large-scale field trials, which can involve well over 1000 plants at a time that all have to be exposed to a stressor, and then are harvested and have multiple measurements taken. It involves long days, but is really rewarding.

What's the best project you have worked on?

The best project I have worked on is probably when I was project lead for the build of the third



“... I do really enjoy working with the other plant science researchers, helping them gives me immense job satisfaction.”

glasshouse in 2019. I was responsible for getting the initial quotes, working with researchers to design exactly what we needed, and being present to sign off on construction milestones throughout the build. I also had to liaise with the company building the glasshouse, FRCS and University in all health and safety matters.

The glasshouse is now full of plants, and has enabled research capacity to vastly increase for plant scientists. From doing this I was given an exceptional performance award from the University.

Describe your career path. How did you get to where you are now?

I first came to the University of Liverpool as an Undergraduate student in 2008 and in my third year, I was offered a lab based project looking at how plants adapted to desert environments. I adored being in the lab carrying out research, and found the topic of CAM photosynthesis fascinating. This led to me continuing on to complete a PhD within the same research group. I spent four years absorbed in research and writing my thesis and I graduated in 2016. I tried a few different careers after that, but in 2017, the post for a technician to support the plant science department came up, and I have worked here ever since.

What part of your job do you most enjoy or get the most reward from?

The best part of this job is working in a large team on a wide variety of tasks. I work closely with two other technicians on our floor and also I get to work with students, other professional services staff and academics.

What's the best thing about being a technician?

I think it is the variety of tasks I get to do! You can't get bored! One day I can be out in a field in the middle of Ormskirk harvesting Broccoli plants and the next I can be in the laboratory carrying out PCRs and teaching students how to do Western Blots. I do really enjoy working with the other plant science researchers, helping them gives me immense job satisfaction.

TEACHING DURING A PANDEMIC

The School of Life Sciences.

Some photos of undergrads getting used to the covid secure teaching in labs. Our technicians were crucial in ensuring everything was prepared and safe for this in person teaching.



Professional Registration Success!

From application to award.

“we all feel it was worth it to have our skills and knowledge certified to benchmarked standards”



Jan Brett holding her certificate from the Science Council.

Six colleagues in FHLS have been working together since January on their applications for professional registration with The Institute of Science and Technology and The Science Council and submitted their applications at the end of May 2021.

They have been making use of the funding to pay for the first year of registration - being offered by The Academy.

They have met regularly to co-support each other through the process on MS Teams, chaired by Jan Brett in TIED.

Those who have submitted are -

- **Jane Armstrong, Technical Manager in IVES**, who has successfully achieved registration as a Chartered Scientist.
- **Christopher Law, Core Facility Technician in TIED**, who has applied for RSci and is awaiting the outcome.
- **Jan Brett, Technical Development and Planning Officer in TIED**, has successfully achieved registration as a Chartered Scientist.
- **Karen Ryan, Core Technician in IVES**, currently seconded to ISMIB, has

successfully achieved registration a Registered Scientist.

- **Shirley Bonner, Research Technician in IVES** has applied to become a Chartered Scientist.
- **Sandra Pereira-Cachinho, Core Facilities Technician in TIED**, has successfully achieved Chartered Scientist.

The process to apply was lengthy and hard going at times, but we all feel it was well worth it to have our skills and knowledge certified to benchmarked standards which were assessed by trained Science Council reviewers.

Jan Brett is keen to mentor others go through the process of professional registration and can be contacted on Janet.Brett@liverpool.ac.uk. She will soon be trained by The Science Council as an applicant assessor, which will really help our staff when applying in the future.

The cohort will celebrate once all our certificates have been received and we will post more photos in the next issue!



Karen Ryan holding her certificate from the Science Council.

GOING GREEN FOR GOLD!



A small team of Laboratory staff in The University are working on a pilot LEAF project (Lab Efficiency Assessment Framework) to look at making our labs more sustainable.

Staff representing all four Institutes of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, plus a handful of staff from The Faculty of Science and Engineering, are working together to achieve a Bronze level certification for their labs in the first instance, but we are ultimately going for Gold!

The group are working together to help each other through the process, chaired by Jan Brett in TIED and through working closely with Martin Farley of LEAF / UCL. We regularly meet on Teams to discuss issues around the application process. We have ten labs being certified and aim to all achieve bronze by the end of September.

Our experience of working with the LEAF framework with this pilot will feed into the Sustainability board and help shape both future sustainability work at Liverpool. We aim to role LEAF out further in the future.

At the same time this pilot work will also contribute to a national joint Higher Education Institution (HEI)/ LEAF / National Technician Development Centre (NTDC) initiative project. This project will be highlighting and sharing best practice

across the sector and understanding the skill sets technical staff need to deliver on sustainability goals longer term, plus how our technicians can be better supported.

The joint initiative sees Liverpool University working with the NTDC plus four other HEIs; Edinburgh Napier, Manchester Metropolitan, Newcastle and Reading Universities on implementing LEAF pilots in their areas, as described above.

In addition, the project will promote the visibility of ongoing work carried out within the technical sectors of the University and will gather hard evidence to influence both local and national policy.

[Click here for LEAF project](#)

[Click here for Sustainability Strategy](#)

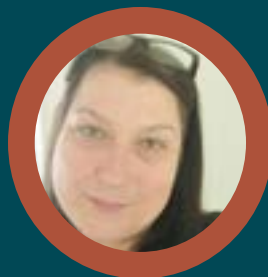


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**Technicians
Make
It
Happen**



Meet your Technician Commitment Steering Group



Jan Brett, Technical Development and Planning Officer (HLS)

I have worked in technical services for over 25 years and I am a registered Chartered Scientist with The Institute of Science and Technology and The Science Council. I currently work in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences as the Technical Development and Planning officer and have been in post since July 2020.

Dr James Howard, Director of The Academy

I support the University's strategic objectives for research, education and professional services, through the development of the University's people and practices. I oversee the work of The Academy's core teams and, as a member of the University's senior leadership, ensure that staff in all roles, at all levels, are able to access sector-leading development opportunities.



Dr Laura Lightfoot, Director of Operations (SE)

I have oversight of the Professional Services staff in the Faculty in addition to supporting the Executive Pro Vice Chancellor in Faculty activities and developing / implementing strategy. As a former Molecular Biologist and PDRA, I understand the research and educational environments and i'm keen to champion the technical / specialist pathway, enabling advancement of technical colleagues in their careers.



Tony Topping, Learning Technologist (SE)

I worked as a technician in the School of Engineering for 16 years supporting various research and teaching activities. In recent years I have been focusing more on teaching allowing me gain HEA Fellowship. I am now working as Learning Technologist to support and develop the school's undergraduate programmes."



Matt Davis, Organisational Developer (The Academy)

I have worked in Learning and Development for 13 years in various roles. I am a keen advocate of providing organisational development initiatives to facilitate powerful and positive change in people and thus the organisation they work for.

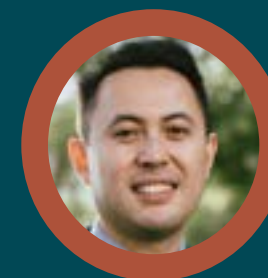


Fintan Dineen, Technical Manager (HSS)

I have worked in Technical Services for 30 years in UK Govt. agencies, private sector industries and in a number of UK Universities. Initially my background was in IT systems support but the last 15 years I've been working mostly in the development and support of creative and design based technical services. I am the Technical Manager and Safety Coordinator for the School of the Arts and a qualified ITIL, PRINCE II, and CBCI practitioner.

Dr Kevin Cham, Technical Manager (HLS)

Technical manager for the Institute of Systems, Molecular, and Integrative Biology (ISMIB). Responsible for the strategic oversight of all technical service support across the Institute. More than 20 years working in laboratory science spanning across different industries. An advocate of the technician commitment.



Stephen Chappell, Technical Supervisor (CTL)

My background is in Physics and I've worked in various teaching technician roles in the CTL and MMU since 2012. I currently manage the technical team of the CTL, where as a team, we facilitate innovative laboratory teaching for Physics, Environmental Sciences, Chemistry and Archaeology.



Paul Gilbert, Technical Manager (HLS)

I have been in technical management roles since 2006 and I am passionate about enabling continued development and career progression opportunities for technicians. As well as my role of leading a team of great technicians, I often represent the University at various national Technician Commitment meetings and volunteer my services as a Technician Commitment action plan peer reviewer for the Science Council.



Dr Chris French, Head of Technology and Infrastructure (HLS)

I lead one of the recently formed directorates in HLS, which (among other things) oversees support and development of the large and diverse technical workforce in our faculty. I have previously held operational and research project leadership roles at the University and am a passionate advocate of Team Science – where the best research and teaching is only possible with a team of diverse roles and skills working together.



A focus on our Mental Health

By Jan Brett

Technical Development and Planning Officer

As we demonstrated in the last Technically Speaking newsletter, all of our Technical staff have given 100% throughout the pandemic, continuing to support the University during shutting down, then re-opening, through supporting our COVID research and all round COVID response or keeping essential areas open. Our technical staff have continued to deliver through unprecedented times of great stress and anxiety.

Unfortunate timing really that during the pandemic we were reaching the final stages of Project SHAPE; a major reorganisation in the Faculty of Health of Life sciences (FHLS).

Despite the fact we know we are superheroes; it was inevitable that this continued stress from multiple directions meant cracks started to show in our FHLS technical workforce. Technical Managers recognised this and wanted to ensure all leaders of technical staff felt equipped to recognise signs and start initial conversations where needed. Working together with The Academy, we organised bespoke mental health awareness training for all technical leaders in FHLS.

This training was delivered by Validium our Employer Assistance Programme. Sixty technical leaders in FHLS received this training over three sessions during March and April and feedback indicated that they found the content useful.

[Click here to email Jan](#)

Photo by Lisa from Pexels

Feedback from the Science Council

Back in March the University of Liverpool submitted its phase 2 self-assessment and 36-month action plan to the National Technicians Commitment Steering Group.

The Commitment continues to aim to ensure visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technicians working in higher education and research, across all disciplines.

We have now received feedback on our submission from Helen Pain CSci CChem FRSC and Kelly Vere MBE of the Science Council which states

“The University has delivered great progress on all Technician Commitment themes and proposes a strong action plan that builds on the excellent work attained so far. Some of the initiatives have had great success and we encourage the University to continue the good work with potential consideration for a) emphasising how the technician voice is captured and contributes to the initiatives taken forward and b) how outcomes can be qualitatively/quantitatively measured to demonstrate impact. Overall this is a sector leading submission – well done to the team behind it.”

Dr James Howard, Director of The Academy, said: “We made some significant achievements in the previous 24 months despite the difficulties of 2020-21. Work completed on the Statement of

Expectations and Fair Attribution Guidance together with the creation of funds for technician’s development and professional registration were highlights.

“Overall this is a sector leading submission – well done to the team behind it.”

We encourage technicians of all types from all parts of the university to study this action plan and feedback to the academy with comments and ideas on how we can all make the next 36 months as successful as possible in relation to the objectives we have set”

For more information regarding the Technician Commitment and the work of the Steering Group go to: <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/technicians-hub/commitment/>

Technician Commitment



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Do you have a story to tell?

If you have a contribution or idea for future newsletters then please email theacademy@liverpool.ac.uk

