



Technically Speaking Issue 6

🎄 Christmas & Technicians' Conference Special Edition! 🎄



Here you will find news & updates from members of the Harper Adams Technical Community.

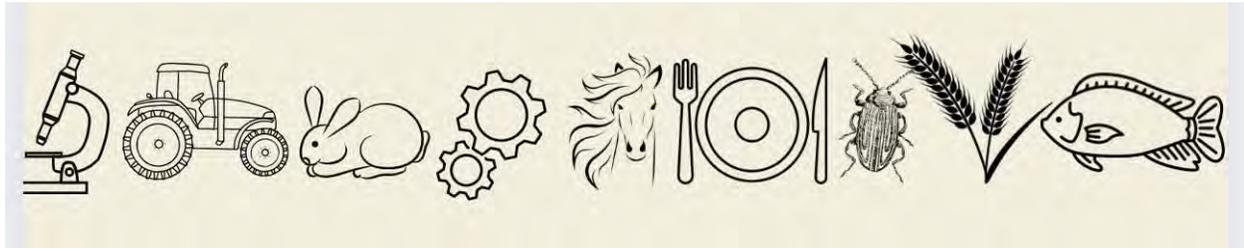
This is a fun, informal newsletter aimed at showcasing our skills & the hard work that is shared by many across campus. Thank you to all those who have contributed to this edition!

Please contact us if you would like to add anything to the next edition. It really can be anything!

Many thanks,

The 'Technically Speaking' Team (Jane Cooper, Eleanor Clowes, Ashlea Hoang, Sarah Icely, Anya Paggett and Katy Eardley)

In This Edition-



-
- *Guest Editor Note*
 - *A look back at the 2024 Technicians' Conference*
 - *The Technicians' Conference 2025 - Summary of the Day, Keynote speakers, Exhibition*
 - *Labs' Nativity Scene and Labora-tree*
 - *Christmas in the Pig Unit*
 - *Festive Farm Update*
 - *Christmas in the Library*
 - *Christmas at the Companion Animal House*

Guest Editor Note

Hello Everyone,

I heard someone at the weekend describe themselves as a "Christmas-oholic"! Well, I'm with them on that!!!

I absolutely love this time of year, and it's one of the reasons that I'm so pleased that the Technicians' Conference is in December just after the end of the undergraduate term. It seems a fitting and suitably festive way to end the calendar year 🍩🎄🍩

There's never been a better time IMO to be a technician. There have been many changes in the sector over the last decade or so and even more so since the launch of the Technician Commitment¹ in 2017.

I'm proud to say, we were amongst the first to sign up to it. Progress was initially slow, but things are now gathering pace and we are starting to make headway in a number of areas.

Earlier this year I was appointed to the position of Head of Technical Development to run alongside that of Laboratory Manager. This is an important strategic role and HAU is one of the very few universities to have such a post. It officially started on 1st April (you can make your own jokes!) and it means that I have a day a week (on average) to spend progressing our Technician Commitment Action Plan², aiming to ensure the visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability of technical skills and expertise here at HAU.

We have a dedicated Technician Commitment Steering Group which I am now honoured to chair, and as well as the conference, the group have been up to a number of key things and making progress.

So... whether you are, or aren't a technician, or are simply not sure (not every technician has it in their job title), please do come to the conference and hear more about what's going on, both here at HAU and in the wider university sector.

There's something for everyone. We have some fab speakers - both internal and external - fun tours and activities, and useful career-focused workshops which you can sign up to. All free of charge! Plus great food, fizz, awards, celebrations and hopefully lots of freebies from the suppliers who are sponsoring the event. Get in there and grab a notebook 😁

¹<https://www.techniciancommitment.org.uk/>

²https://cdn.harper-adams.ac.uk/document/page/1164_Technician-Commitment-Action-Plan.pdf

Do take a look at some of the pics from last year.

And don't forget to **register here: Technicians Conference 2025**³

Victoria Talbot,

Head of Technical Development and Laboratory Manager



1 - Victoria in fine festive form at the 2024 Technicians' Conference. She's made a new friend!

³<https://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/community/1315/technical/technicians-conference>

A look back at the 2024 Technicians' Conference



2 - Future Farm break out session



3 - Companion Animal House breakout session



4 - HEA breakout session



5 - Taking part in the labs stand competition



6 - Entomology pinning breakout session



7 - The winners of the 2024 Technician Awards



8 - Visitors to the lab stand



9 - Networking in the Food Academy



10 - Charlie Wright talking about Rallying the Wright Way!



11 - Paul and Zak from Keele University Anatomy Department.



12 - Ken Sloan presenting awards.

3rd Annual Technicians' Conference 2025

On Monday 15th December 2025, Harper Adams University will host its third annual Technicians' Conference in the Weston Lecture Theatre and Food Academy.

At its core, the HAU Technicians' conference is about empowering people working in technical roles, celebrating their hard work and sharing valuable knowledge. This year's Technicians' Conference is set to be a day full of engaging presentations, workshops and displays brought together by many HAU departments and external suppliers. You can come for as much or as little of the day as you'd like. Everyone is welcome, including those who are not technicians!

If you would like to come along, please register using the link below! This is for catering purposes and also to make your afternoon workshop selections:

Technicians Conference 2025⁴

And, many thanks to the fabulous James Armstrong for creating this amazing Technicians' Conference webpage!

⁴<https://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/community/1315/technical/technicians-conference>



Summary of the day

For full details, see our webpage: Technicians Conference 2025⁵

Morning

09:15- Registration in the RFA- Coffee and Welcome

10:00-11:25- Speakers in the Weston Lecture Theatre:

1. Technician Commitment Steering Group- *Introduction*
2. Prof Michael Lee - *Welcome Address*
3. Prof Simon Hettrick- *The Hidden REF*
4. Dr Simon Breedon- *Technician Commitment (UK ITSS)*
5. Fred Baker- *My Life and Career as a Technician*

11:25- Refreshment Break- RFA conference space

11:40-13:00- Speakers in the Weston Lecture Theatre:

6. Kate Robinson- *My Work as Ruminant Sector Manager*
7. Dr Victoria Talbot- *Technician Commitment at Harper*
8. Prof Ken Sloan- *Annual Technical Excellence Awards*
9. Prof Ken Sloan- *Morning Closure*

13:00 - Lunch (It's Free!)

⁵<https://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/community/1315/technical/technicians-conference>

Afternoon

13:45- Workshop 1 (Choose 1 of 3):

1. Food Academy tour with Dr Lynn McIntyre
2. Professional registration with the Science Council with Laurence Dawkins-Hall
3. Christmas Cultures with Sinead Hall (Elizabeth Creak Building)

14:45- Workshop 2 (Choose 1 of 3):

1. Pig unit tour with Dr Sarah Icely
2. The Technician Commitment – What’s in it for me? Simon Breeden and Declan Axon
3. Empowering Your Tomorrow – Gemma Carter Morris of Next Steps Consulting

15:45- Fizz and Finale- wrapping up the day

Meet our Keynote Speakers



Professor Simon Hettrick

Director of Strategy at the Software Sustainability Institute and a Director of the Southampton Research Software Group. He is also Chair of the Hidden REF campaign.



Dr Simon Breeden

Technician Commitment Associate Lead for the UK Institute for Technical Skills and Strategy.



Fred Baker

Recently retired HAU technician and Interim Companion Animal House Manager in the AHBW team.



Kate Robinson

Ruminant Sector Manager, Harper Adams Future Farm.

The Exhibition



NICKEL - ELECTRO LTD.
Manufacturers of the *Clifton Range*

Jewellery and Glasses Cleaning

We're offering to clean your jewellery and glasses for charity while you visit our stand, using the Clifton Range ultrasonic water bath.

£1

Per person

CASH ONLY

Any additional donations welcome.
All proceeds to go to.

**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

Not all jewellery is safe for ultrasonic cleaning. Delicate gemstones (like opals, emeralds, and pearls), treated or fractured stones, and soft metals may be damaged.
Use at your own risk.

As part of the conference, an exhibition made up of stands run both by different facilities in the university and outside suppliers will be assembled in the Food Academy conference space. This is the perfect opportunity to chat with like-minded people whilst having a go at the fun activities they have to offer.

This year's Technicians' conference is kindly supported by the following companies, many of which you will be able to find with stalls at the exhibition:

- Agri-King Ltd.
- AMPCS/ Calibre Scientific
- Be Scientific
- Dixon Science
- KNF
- Neogen
- Next Steps Consulting

- Nickel-Electro Ltd
- NWUPC
- PHC Europe
- Sarstedt
- Siso
- Tecnilabo (Techniplast)
- Thistle Scientific
- UniGreenScheme
- Wolf Labs
- Don Whitely Scientific

Please do come along and say hello!

Nickel-Electro Ltd. will be offering a jewellery and glasses cleaning service, by way of ultra-sonic bath. This service will be £1 (cash only) and all funds raised go to charity.

Labs Nativity Scene and Labora-tree! 🎄



Next time you visit the labs, be sure to have a look at our Christmas decorations - including our very own Nativity scene, featuring all of the Lab team and some special guests!

We currently have vacancies for shepherds, camels, cows, donkeys, goats and sheep - please let us know if you would like to join the scene and feature yourself!









13 - Ashlea 'Follow that Star' Hoang!





Christmas at the Pig Unit 🐷





14 - Monster joining in the festivities!



15 - Our office is permanently Christmas, it looks too bare without the decorations!





National awards success for University's Pig Unit team



The Pig Unit team on the Harper Adams University Future Farm are celebrating an enviable run of success at the National Pig Awards.

At this year's awards, the team took home the trophies for both Herd Productivity and Indoor Producer of the Year – while Sector Manager Matt Swaine was named Unit Manager of the Year. The latest wins cap more than five years of awards for the team at the event.

Matt said: *“To win the awards is a great honour - winning Herd productivity for the third time in four years is a credit to the Pig Unit team and now to receive Indoor Producer of the year in the same year - everyone should be very proud of what we do and the results the team have all achieved!*

“It’s down to their dedication and commitment to get the best from the animals and is a massive boost to staff morale, recognising the high level of dedication of the team.

“I am enormously proud of them for all their hard work, which makes the unit thrive and succeed to the high level of performance they are achieving. Our success is down to the dedication of the team and the common goal we share - to make the unit the best we can.

“Our sow performance is remarkable and the team’s refusal to settle for ‘good enough’ means we push to get the best results.

“Everyone is highly trained and motivated - which equals enhanced job satisfaction.”

Picture used with kind permission of Pig World⁶ magazine - credit: Jamie Hodgskin

⁶<https://www.pig-world.co.uk/>

Festive Farm Update ❄️



As we wrap up another busy year, the farm has been alive with activity, research, teaching and achievements across all the ruminant enterprises. Here's a look back at what's been happening as we head into the festive season:

Dairy & Research

- Concluded the latest UK Dairy Carbon Network trial, with results now being analysed by Professor Liam Sinclair's team.
- Preparing for a new Phytase study in early lactation cows starting in December — an exciting collaboration between dairy and research teams.
- Student research projects are exploring topics from jazz music and milking behaviour to Johnes diagnosis via milk samples, placental growth in ewes, heifer enrichment, sheep fleece for soil health, and wild birds' impact on calf health.

Sheep & Beef

- Final year of the DEFRA lamb feed efficiency study is underway, with methane capture completed and feed trials concluding before lambing in early 2026.

- Outdoor beef herd and in-calf dairy heifers have moved onto winter grazing with fodder beet, haylage, and grass — carefully managed to avoid nutritional issues.
- Sheep and cattle handling training for first-year vet students wrapped up, ready to restart in January.

Forage & Nutrition

- This year's maize crop delivered strong starch and protein but high dry matter, leading to some nutritional challenges in the milking herd. Plans for a new maize clamp are under consideration to improve feed continuity.
- Fourth cut silage surprised with excellent results despite high lignin, ensuring good forage stocks for winter.
- Straw remains tight, requiring careful rationing.

Young Stock & Herd Management

- Carrie and Erin's outstanding management has produced surplus milking heifers.
- Sales at the local livestock market achieved excellent prices, freeing shed space. More heifers are planned for sale in December.
- Strategic herd decisions aim to reduce replacement rates from 24% to 20%, improving both carbon footprint and profitability.

Winter Challenges

- November brought biting cold, with temperatures down to -5°C. While the chill has tested resilience, chocolate and teamwork have kept spirits high.
- Muddy gateways and heavy rain made grazing management tricky, but careful planning has ensured livestock welfare and feed efficiency.
- Four staff vacancies have put pressure on the team to maintain the commercial, teaching and research complexities of day-to-day routine

Festive Message

British Farming Awards- we were incredibly proud to have been listed as finalists in the BFA nomination for Women in Agriculture. Whilst we didn't win we had a fab evening celebrating the winners across British farming at the ceremony in Birmingham

Kate, was also a finalist for this year's Times Higher Education Awards⁷, nominated for Outstanding Technician of the Year. The ceremony was held in Edinburgh amongst dozens of Higher Education colleagues across the UK and Ireland. Jiteen Ahmed (Aston University) won the technician award. Jiteen is an inspiration in the technician community and was recognised for his nationally significant contribution to technical services.

Harper Adams Future Farm Team — thank you for your dedication, innovation, and teamwork throughout 2025. Despite the cold mornings and busy schedules, your efforts have delivered research breakthroughs, livestock successes, and national recognition.

Wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Here's to a thriving and sustainable 2026 for UK farming! ✨



⁷<https://www.techniciancommitment.org.uk/meet-the-the-outstanding-technician-of-the-year-award-nominees-kate-robinson>













Christmas in the Library





"If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world." J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

 Wishing all colleagues a very Merry Christmas. 

Suggested *Christmas* Reads



Available in the Library:

 ***The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse*** by Charlie Mackesy

“Four unlikely friends - discover their touching story, and their most poignant and universal life lessons.”

 ***Dark rye and honey cake: festival baking from the heart of the low countries*** by Regula Ysewijn

“Explore sweet and savoury bakes from Antwerp to Amsterdam.”

 ***Dancing by the Light of the Moon*** edited by Gyles Brandreth

“For every moment in your life there is a poem. Allow Gyles Brandreth to be your guide through this collection of over 250 best-loved poems.”





Available on Libby:

 ***The Wood at Midwinter*** by Suzanna Clarke

“An enchanting and haunting Christmas short story.”

<https://share.libbyapp.com/title/11110198>

 ***The Cinnamon Bun Book Store*** by Laurie Gilmore

“A Sunday Times bestselling cozy, romantic mystery.”

<https://share.libbyapp.com/title/10058600>

🍪 ***The Easy Christmas Cookie Cookbook*** by Carroll Pellegrinelli

“Celebrate the holiday season with festive, deliciously easy Christmas cookies.”

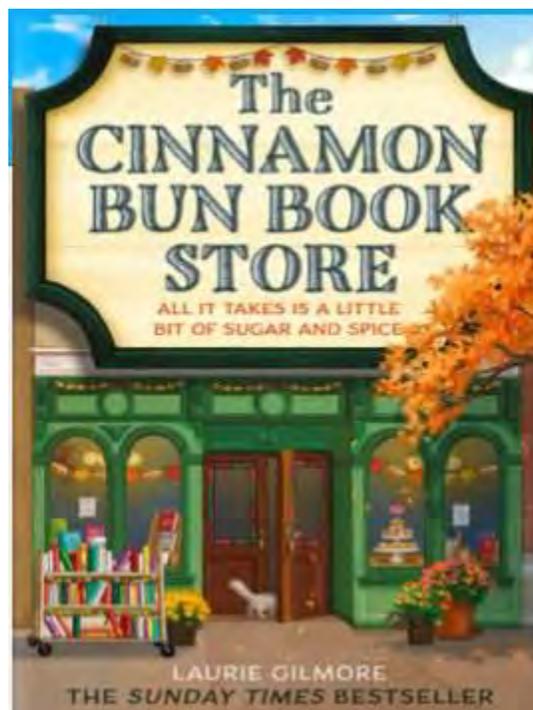
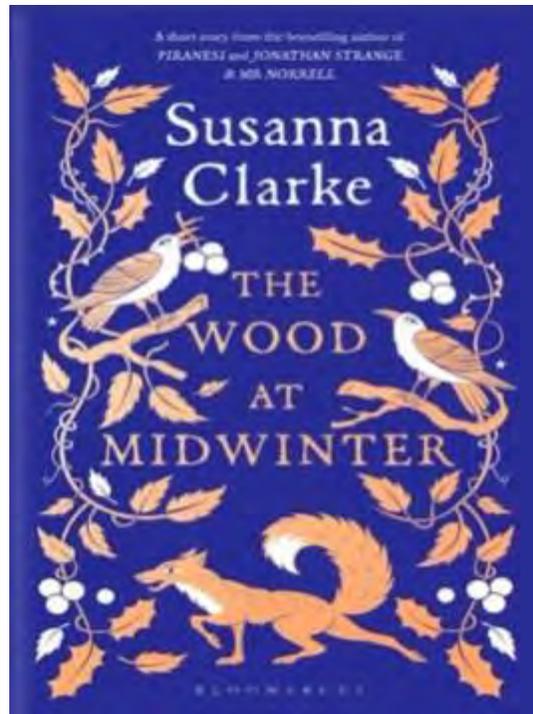
<https://share.libbyapp.com/title/11058613>

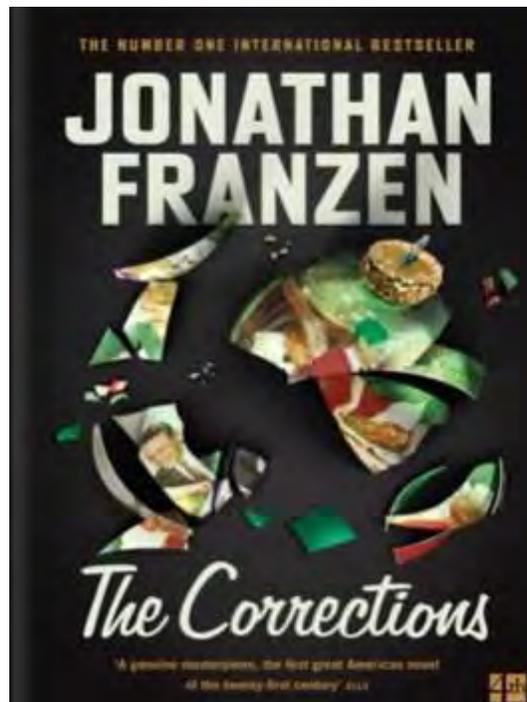
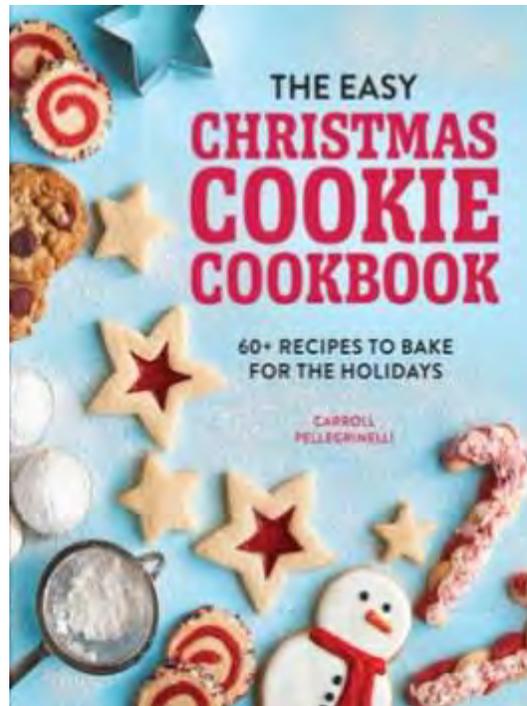
♥ ***The Corrections*** by Jonathan Franzen

“A richly realistic and darkly hilarious masterpiece about a family breakdown in an age of easy fixes.”

<https://share.libbyapp.com/title/461853>







Christmas at the Companion Animal House 🎁

Here's a look back at some of the Christmas fun had over in the Companion Animal House last year!





Brownies Outreach Session



On 20th November members of the Laboratory technician team (Jane Cooper and Rachel Cope) organised and lead an outreach session working with 1st Newport Brownies Group, alongside Brownies leaders Amy Marsh (PhD student) and Nikki Maddock (Estates Administrator).

The children took part in 3 activities:-

1. Looking at a bee. First with their eyes, then looking at each of the body parts under a binocular microscope, and then looking at the bee using a scanning electron microscope (SEM). Using their eyes they could see the hairy body, whilst using a microscope they could see hairy legs and wing patterns, and then with SEM they could see hairs on the bee's eyes.
2. Handwashing challenge. The Brownies used our Glitterbug light box and lotion to test how well they really wash their hands. The Brownies rubbed glo-in-the-dark Glitterbug lotion on their hands and then washed it off at the sink.
3. pH challenge. They tested the pH of different foodstuffs; orange juice, tea, coke, milk, vinegar using pH paper, pH sticks, pH meter and red cabbage indicator. When they were happy with the

abilities the brownies were given 4 'mystery' solutions to determine pH and had to report whether the solutions were the same or different.

All of the Brownies were hugely engaged with the activities and we have had great feedback from the leaders! Thanks also go to Richard Page, for setting up the electron microscope, George Baker for pinning and setting up the bee specimens and Ellie Clowes for helping to develop and set up the event.













🎄 Merry Christmas! 🎄

Thank you very much for taking the time to read the Christmas updates from our technical teams across campus. We hope you enjoyed seeing what everyone has been up to!

All of us here on the 'Technically Speaking' team would like to wish you a merry Christmas!

Would you like to add some news?

Contact us on teams -

HAU Technical Network | General | Microsoft Teams⁸

or email-

- Jane - jcooper@harper-adams.ac.uk
- Ellie- eclowes@harper-adams.ac.uk

⁸<https://teams.microsoft.com/l/channel/19%3Aj5CXP-wKybzqwxlgAbIVUteQMigvqzyLZeFDblTU8Os1%40thread.tacv2/General?groupId=a21e3842-8b5a-437e-a9cb-9c630b6d4dd5&tenantId=>

- Ashlea - ahoang@harper-adams.ac.uk
- Katy - keardley@harper-adams.ac.uk
- Sarah- sicely@harper-adams.ac.uk
- Anya - apaggett@harper-adams.ac.uk