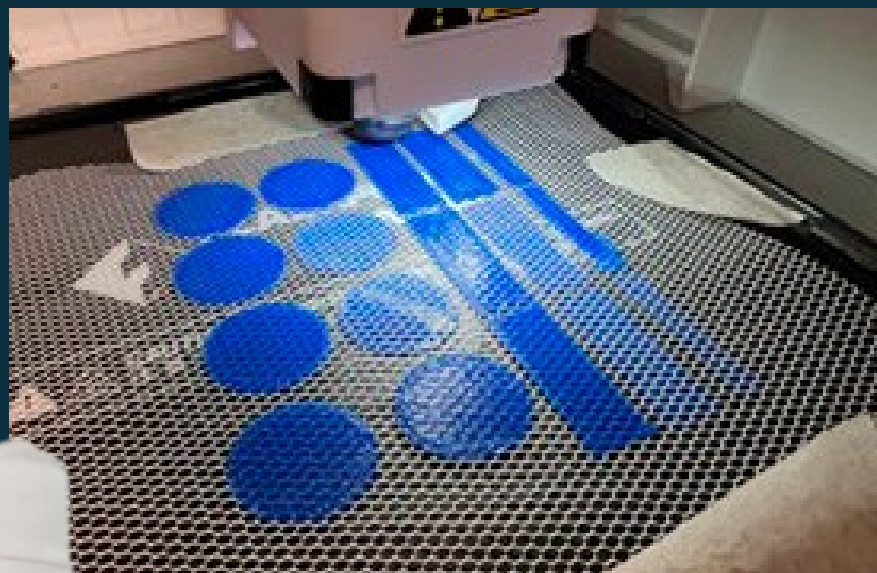


Why I Love Being a D&T Technician!

Charlie Wicks, Technician at Hethersett Academy

From starting out as an 18-year-old technician with no prior experience of Design & Technology, to becoming an award-winning, integral member of a thriving secondary D&T department.



I joined Hethersett Academy's D&T department as a technician having little to no knowledge of D&T at the time. I had no experience working in schools and no industry background, having just finished college at 18. Fast forward to 2026, and I'm still here. The department has more than doubled in size, I've had the honour of winning 'The Nook Pods Excellence Award for Inspirational Support Staff within D&T' at the D&T Association Excellence Awards, and I honestly can't imagine myself anywhere else. I love the staff I work with every day, and I love seeing students succeed and recognise when they've done something amazing.

My Role as a Technician

My role involves research and development, servicing and troubleshooting machines, and preparing materials, equipment, and rooms before and after lessons. I also provide classroom support for practical and CAD lessons. A big part of my job is one-to-one and small group support for GCSE students when they need help using equipment or learning processes they're not confident with such as the laser cutter, CNC router, 3D printers, multi-needle embroidery machine, and the recycling processes I've been developing. I also create the exhibition books we make to give our GCSE students once they finish as a reminder of the amazing work they've achieved.



Nominate for the 2026 Excellence Awards and give someone the recognition they deserve!
tinyurl.com/msjft4ua



Watch our video of the 2025 Excellence Awards
tinyurl.com/5n7yfkdr



Attend the Technicians Summer Conference
Date: 26th June 2026
tinyurl.com/yewht8z3



Charlie Wicks won the Nook Pods Excellence Award for Inspirational Support Staff within D&T.

Recycling Acrylic

One of my favourite research and development projects has been recycling acrylic. Someone mentioned they'd seen amazing sheets of recycled acrylic being made, and I thought: We can do that!

We had a huge amount of scrap acrylic stored from laser-cutting leftovers, so I decided to start making our own recycled sheets. It turned out to be much harder than I expected, it requires a lot of heat, pressure, and time. Different types of acrylic also affect the process, so I had to adapt depending on whether I was using shredded acrylic or offcuts, and whether the acrylic was originally cast or extruded.

After plenty of trial and error, I started producing recycled acrylic sheets that worked for our projects. We use acrylic in many projects, and it can be costly, so this process has saved us a lot of money. It's eliminated waste from unusable offcuts because everything gets reused. It's also improved the quality of students' work because the recycled acrylic is custom-made to their designs, they're more excited about using a bespoke piece they've helped create.

Closing the Loop on Plastics

We don't waste any acrylic. All offcuts and unusable pieces go into a box by the laser cutter, and I collect it when full. I sort the offcuts by colour, shred clear acrylic for

reforming, and store everything ready for when students want to create their own sheet. Even offcuts from recycled sheets get recycled again! I've also developed similar processes for recycling HDPE, HIPS, and other plastics.

Building Skills and Confidence

The one-to-one sessions I run help students understand how machines work and how they can use them in their projects. It opens up a variety of processes and materials they can access for their coursework. These sessions build confidence and independence, and even social skills, because I encourage students to talk through their ideas while we work and to try new processes to improve their designs.

Supporting Vulnerable Students

Working with vulnerable students and those who struggle to regulate in lessons is one of the most rewarding parts of my role. We had a school refuser who hadn't attended for a very long time. We managed to get them to come in for one-to-one sessions with me and my Head of Department so they could complete their D&T GCSE. They came in twice a week, worked incredibly hard, and passed. I've seen hesitant, quiet students who barely made eye contact become enthusiastic, talkative, and full

of personality, and those breakthroughs reinforce why practical learning matters. Being able to offer these interventions is a privilege, and it means a lot to help some of the most vulnerable students achieve their goals.

A Growing, Collaborative Department

Our department now has nine rooms and nine teachers (two for food and nutrition) and one other part time technician for food and nutrition. In my office, there's a little stool next to me where teachers sit to talk about what they need, projects they want to develop, and ask for my thoughts on ideas or plans.

I work closely with teachers to plan projects, test new materials, and make sure everything is ready for lessons. We also collaborate on external initiatives, such as the Rolls Royce Science & Technology recycling project, where we designed a way to create filament from recycled materials. We've worked with Sizewell B and the SNS Conference and Exhibition to show students future career possibilities. I've even been involved with The Big D&T Meet, which my Head of Department started.

I'm lucky to have a department full of teachers that value my input and ideas. Having a team that's enthusiastic and excited about new innovations and equipment keeps my job exciting.