



L-r Northumbria technician Johnny Hayes with senior lecturer Simon Scott-Harden with the Flipflop boat

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Northumbria technicians shortlisted for acclaimed Papin prize

Inspirational technicians from Northumbria University, Newcastle, have just been shortlisted for the UK's only award ceremony dedicated to celebrating technical excellence and innovation in higher education and research.

[The Papin Prizes](#) are among the most highly regarded awards for technicians in the higher education sector, celebrating the varied and valuable role they play in research and teaching. A record-breaking 357 individuals and teams were nominated this year, with 62 being shortlisted across 10 categories.

Northumbria technicians Johnny Hayes, Karen Haggerty and Denise Crawford were shortlisted for their contributions to the knowledge exchange, teaching and outreach community categories respectively. They will now go on to the awards ceremony at the Higher Education Technicians Summit on July 4 at the University of Warwick – an event staged in partnership this year with UK Research and Innovation.

Based in the industrial design team at Northumbria, Johnny Hayes has been recognised for his environmental work and in particular his contributions to the Flipflop Project, a model sailing boat made from 100% recycled plastics including 30,000 discarded flip flops, that is travelling the world to encourage greater sustainability. As part of this he also took part in a major research and knowledge exchange trip to the Kenya in 2022, helping a local community establish a 'Material Recovery, Recycling, and Production Facility' and a 'Heritage Boat Building and Training Centre'. The recycling facilities are the first of their kind in the region.

Applied Sciences senior technician Karen Haggerty has been shortlisted for her contribution to teaching and enhancing the learning experience for students diagnosed with the development disability Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). She developed a series of storyboard scripts for the chemistry lab practicals, providing a visual step-by-step guide helping students with ASD understand what was required. Feedback has been so positive that Karen's storyboard concept is now being offered to other students, including those whose first language isn't English.

Denise Crawford is a senior technician in Northumbria School of Design's fashion department. She was an integral part of the University team who collaborated with the local NHS trust to design and produce thousands of pieces of personal protection equipment PPE during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns. During this time Denise also received news that her grandson was suffering from a brain tumour. To help him, she started altering his T-Shirts to make him more comfortable during his treatment by allowing the nurses easier access to feedlines implanted in his chest. Many of the nurses commented on how innovative her idea was, so in her own time and with her own money Denise began amending clothing for other poorly children at the paediatric ward. She has also brought in iconic fashion brands like Barbour to donate clothing and support the community initiative, and with ongoing help from the rest of the fashion team Denise's project is expanding and making a difference for more children.

Commenting on the shortlistings, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange at Northumbria Professor Louise Bracken, said: “The contribution our technicians make to research and teaching is a fundamental part of the University’s success, and essential to the learning experience, positive outcomes enjoyed by our students and undertaking quality research. Each of our three technicians who have been shortlisted for the Papin prizes exemplify these qualities. They are all truly inspirational and we wish them every success in the awards ceremony next month.”

Dr Kelly Vere, Project Lead for MI TALENT – an organisation that advances status and opportunity for technical skills - said: “The Papin Prizes have fast become one of the most highly regarded awards for technicians in our sector. Many congratulations to all individuals and teams who have been nominated and thank you to the colleagues who nominated outstanding technicians and have helped to raise the profile and status of technicians within the sector.”

Frances Burstow, Director for Talent and Skills at UKRI said: “The Papin Prizes are the only awards wholly dedicated to celebrating the varied role of technicians and the valuable work they do to support teaching and research across all levels and disciplines. Marking the achievements and impact of this valuable community will help to create a more inclusive and dynamic research community.”

The Papin Prizes are named after Denis Papin, a 17th century technician who worked with Robert Boyle. Papin invented the steam digester and was one of the first technicians to publish in his own name.

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