

NEON Awards 2024 Nominations

Category

NEON Widening Access Initiative (Retention and Progression) Award

Name of project and institution

Access & Success Fund, Keele University

Brief Description

Our newly established Access & Success Fund has transformed our approach to financial support, improving the equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, progress and succeed in Higher Education. The fund is proactive in the support it offers and adaptable to emerging priorities, to provide tailored support to those facing barriers. The person at the centre of the application becomes the focus of the bursary and holistic support package, addressing the limitations of traditional bursaries. Feedback from students has been exceptional, with almost all reporting that it allowed them to focus on their studies and improved their university experience.

Why has this project been nominated

Over the last three years, following sector-wide debate on the impact of traditional bursaries on widening access and the overall student experience, and evaluation of our financial support package, we have transformed our approach to financial support for underrepresented groups, with hugely positive feedback from the students involved. We have developed and established an Access & Success Fund to address the limitations of the traditional bursary scheme, which by its nature is formulaic and ineffective, and does not take enough factors into account to provide truly meaningful support. The new fund is not only proactive in the support it offers but can be adaptable and reactive, to provide truly tailored support to those facing barriers to success. Rather than being based solely on low household income, students are asked to identify which key groups they belong to, and to summarise how they would use the fund to enhance their university experience. For example, a student with a mental health condition may benefit from expanding their support network through societies, a student with caring responsibilities may benefit from a streaming service to relax, or a student with a disability may benefit from additional technology to support their studies. The person at the centre of the application becomes the focus of the bursary, rather than the overly simplistic and potentially discriminatory criteria of purely household income. So far this academic year 1,165 students from under-represented groups received an award – around 13% of our undergraduate UK cohort.

How long has the project been running

The project has been running for 3 years. The project was piloted in 2021/22 under the trial name “Support Fund”, with a formal launch of the Access & Success Fund in 2022/23.

Number of participants for each year of the project’s operation

2021/22: 560 students received a financial award. 2022/23: 982 students received a financial award. 2023/24: 1,165 students have received a financial award so far, with the fund due to re-open shortly for a further round of applications.

More details

<https://www.keele.ac.uk/students/studentfinancialsupport/accesssuccessfund/>

