

# The National Education Opportunities Network



Become a part of the largest national network committed to widening access in higher education

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Working to help  
widen access to  
Higher Education.

## ABOUT US

The National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) was founded in early 2012 as the professional organisation to support those involved in widening access to higher education (HE) and social mobility.

At the heart of NEON is a cross-sector approach bringing together HE institutions, schools, colleges, the voluntary sector, professional bodies and employers.

NEON grew from the need for a strong, coherent community of professionals that could support learners from under-represented backgrounds to both enter and succeed within HE. NEON is shaped and led by its members.

### VISION

Access to and success in higher education should not be related to social background but based on ability and willingness to participate.

### AIM

To empower and enable those with a commitment to widening access to HE to affect change in their institutions and communities.

### OBJECTIVES

#### Development

To increase the professionalisation of widening access work through the development and accreditation of practice.

#### Resources

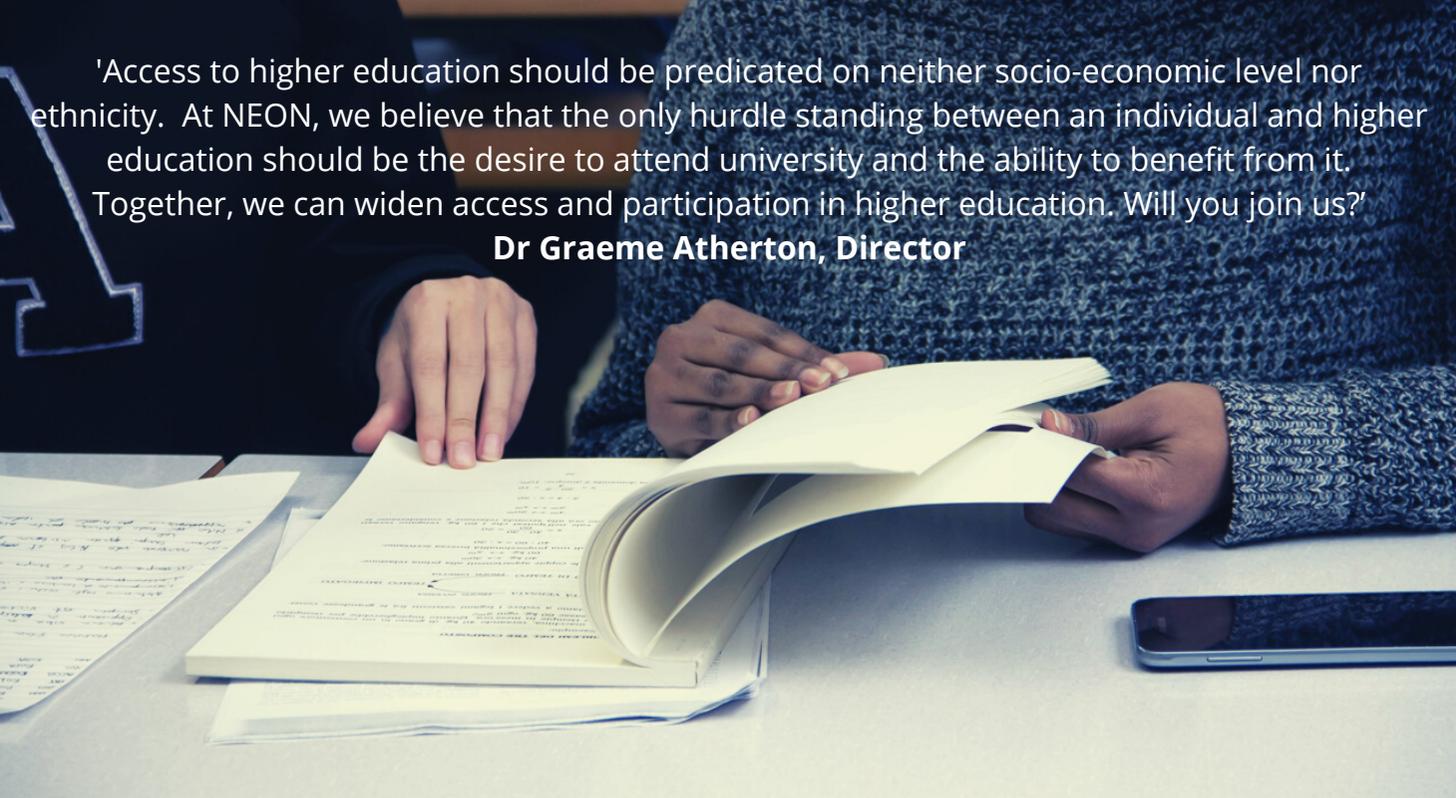
To be a research and advocacy resource for those working in access at the local, regional and national level.

#### Quality

To develop and enhance practice and quality in widening access work throughout the student lifecycle.

#### Support

To offer input and support to policymakers and government from the widening access community.



'Access to higher education should be predicated on neither socio-economic level nor ethnicity. At NEON, we believe that the only hurdle standing between an individual and higher education should be the desire to attend university and the ability to benefit from it. Together, we can widen access and participation in higher education. Will you join us?'

**Dr Graeme Atherton, Director**

## STATUS REPORT

NEON has remained the major voice for widening access professionals during this difficult year. We are proud of the steps the organisation has taken, particularly bearing in mind that NEON had to postpone the NEON Awards and Summer Symposium, key events in the NEON calendar, due to Covid-19. Our success is due to the continued support of our members and the hard work of the executive committee. 2019-2020 was another exciting year for NEON.

- Over 130 HEIs, voluntary organisations and individuals have joined NEON from a range of sectors.
- There were over 20 NEON events in 2019-2020 across the country covering a range of topics and areas.
- Almost 2,000 people attended NEON events in 2019-2020.
- We held 15 NEON Access Academy events, offering training in outreach online, evaluating outreach work, key skills for widening access, and engaging BTEC students to succeed in higher education.
- NEON held two special conferences on 'Taking outreach online: delivering widening access to HE work in the Covid-19 context', attracting over 600 delegates each.
- NEON has created a new initiative 'Uni4Me' that will support HE providers and Uni Connect partnerships to enhance their online provision and support the widening access community to maximise the opportunities online provisions provide.

## AIMS FOR 2021

NEON will lead in research and advocacy on access to higher education nationally, influencing government policy.

NEON will enhance the professionalisation of widening access work by offering at least 14 different activities through our Access Academy Training programme, delivered in partnership with industry experts.

NEON will host 5 one-day summits to supplement its Access Academy Training programme with larger groups of practitioners.

In 2021, NEON will host its eighth annual Awards Ceremony and its ninth annual Summer Symposium.

# NEON PROGRAMMES

## NEON SUMMITS

Our summits are the leading one day conferences in the sector focused on the needs of the widening access community and delivered at a cost-effective rate. We bring together experts from strategy, policy and practice to address the key issues in widening access, participation and success in HE.

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... I found the mixture of research, policy and practical information and sharing was really useful. Lots of information to take in and take back to my institution.

## ACCESS ACADEMY

NEON's Access Academy focuses on the professionalisation of widening access work via skills development. Academy sessions are interactive training days limited to 30 participants led by experts in the field of widening access, education and HE. Since 2015 there have been over 740 participants in Access Academy events.



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The NEON Symposium was a fantastic day. Everything was well organised and I think the sessions system worked really well. I'm so glad the recordings are up and I can access all the things I missed! Looking forward to the next one.

## SUMMER SYMPOSIUM

The Summer Symposium is the largest annual event focused on widening access to HE in the UK, attracting over 250 delegates each year. Since 2012 there have been over 300 papers presented at the Symposium. Recent keynote speakers have included the Shadow Minister for Further & Higher Education, and representatives from the National Association of Headteachers, Office for Students, Hugh Baird College, Social Mobility Commission and the Higher Education Policy Institute.

## WORKING GROUPS

NEON Working Groups are a network of national communities of practice bringing together members to shape their work collaboratively exchanging knowledge, sharing practice and developing materials and resources that help all members make a difference. All members are updated about their progress via our website and our weekly newsletter, NEON News.

The following Working Groups meet four times a year and members benefit from FREE participation in these national communities.

- Access and Outreach for Disabled Learners
- Establishing Evidence and Measuring Impact
- Mentoring to Widen Access
- Widening Access for Mature Learners
- Working at Primary Level
- Addressing Differential Outcomes for Ethnically Diverse Learners
- Supporting BTEC Students
- Widening Participation in Post Graduate Study



*The interactivity with other professionals and chance to discuss has been invaluable.*



Over 2500 delegates attended NEON events in 2019-20.



Can I just take the opportunity to thank you all at NEON for facilitating and organising the Awards. It was still a lovely ceremony that I enjoyed, sitting here in my spare bedroom!

We were very proud to be the recipient of an award. This came as a real boost to our team in these challenging times. Please pass on our thanks to the panel.

## NEON AWARDS

Put your institution forward as a leader in widening access to higher education and social mobility by participating exclusively in the greatly anticipated NEON Awards. The Awards are now in their 8th year with the reception hosted at the Palace of Westminster. Categories include Higher Education Institution of the Year Award, Widening Access Partnership Award, School or College Widening Access Award and the coveted NEON Student of the Year Award.

*The transformative power that HE can have on the lives of its learners is best captured by widening access work and the awards aim to celebrate this.*



By joining NEON you are providing your organisation with a unique chance to shape policy and the widening access research agenda.

## RESEARCH AND POLICY

NEON is the premier membership-based organisation advocating for policies which support greater diversity in the student population. NEON has nurtured close relationships with policymakers and produced a number of influential research reports. These include *'Higher education admissions: The time for change'*, conducted for UCU by NEON, *'Voices: Levelling Up Social Mobility: Why We Need A National Widening Access to Higher Education Programme. Suggestions from Uni Connect Partnership Leads.'* and *'More than luck: enabling access and success in Higher Education for Gypsy, Romany and Traveller (GRT) communities'*, conducted for Sir John Cass's Foundation.

NEON's report, *'Working Class Heroes – Understanding access to higher education for white students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds'* received extensive coverage including: Metro, The Guardian, The Times, Independent to name but a few.

## NEON IN THE NEWS

BBC's 'The 'taboo' about who doesn't go to university ' article:

*'Universities find this a "difficult conversation", Dr Graeme Atherton says, and without pressure from policymakers, it's one they often seem to prefer to leave alone.*

The Independent article 'Oxford and Cambridge have fewer than 3% poor white students, study finds':

*A report from the NEON showed more than half of universities in England admit less than 5 per cent of white students from deprived areas.*

The Guardian article 'Proportion of black school leavers going to university in England falls'

*Graeme Atherton, the director of the university access charity Neon HE, said the decline in black student enrolments was likely the result of a shift in priorities by England's universities regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), meaning that universities have put less funding into working with school pupils.*

Preet Kaur Gill MP discussed NEON's 'Working Class Heroes' report in Parliament last year.

[Click here to view.](#)



# JOIN NEON

BE PART OF NEON AND SHOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S COMMITMENT TO WIDENING ACCESS.

## TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP

Higher Education Institution  
Premium Membership  
£860 per annum

Further Education College  
Premium Membership  
£780 per annum

Charity & Voluntary Organisation  
Premium Membership  
£730 per annum

Premium Membership includes three NEON event credits — worth £169 each.

Membership  
£490 per annum

Membership  
£390 per annum

Membership  
£330 per annum

Private Sector Organisation  
£660 per annum

Local Authority  
£330 per annum

School & Students Unions  
FREE Membership

## MEMBERS RECEIVE

35% off all NEON events

Unique opportunity to be part of NEON's research

EXCLUSIVE participation in the NEON Awards

Weekly updates on the widening access landscape via NEON News

FREE participation in NEON resources

FREE attendance at any of the NEON Working Groups

Discounted attendance at events with NEON partners

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Investment on subscriptions to networks or services that support your access and participation plan can be included in your investment. This might include, for example, membership of collaborative networks, where this is not already available across the provider.

*Office for Students*

