



# The NEON Awards 2020 Nominees

22 October 2020





## Awards

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# Welcome to the NEON Awards 2020

## **Congratulations for being shortlisted for the seventh annual NEON Awards.**

COVID-19 has had a huge impact upon widening access to higher education (HE). It has forced us to reflect upon how we engage with learners and develop new ways of delivery. Therefore, this year, it is more important than ever to not only celebrate the success of this work and the transformative power that higher education can have on the lives of learners, but to consider how we continue to push our work forward to ensure success learners are able to both enter, and succeed within, HE.

We are therefore thrilled to welcome you all to the seventh annual NEON Awards ceremony, and the first that we have held online. With over 60 nominations shortlisting was a difficult process. The featured projects highlight the excellent work being carried out by both organisations and individuals across the UK.

Thank you on behalf of all the learners you come into contact with and who you inspire every day through your dedication and hard work.



**Dr Graeme Atherton**  
Director, NEON

# NEON Widening Access Initiative (Outreach) Award

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## Books & Stories

Bournemouth University

Books & Stories is a reading attainment-raising intervention for primary school-aged children. Over the course of ten weeks, the same readers participate in guided reading sessions and bespoke interactive activities. Pupils' reading ages are assessed before and after the scheme, culminating in an on-campus celebratory event. The main objectives of the scheme are: 1) Support learners to develop specific literacy skills by the end. 2) Record a significant improvement in learners' reading skill between the start and end of the programme. 3) Reduce the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged learners at Key Stage 2 at participating schools, and ensure participants achieve a level of attainment enabling HE progression. 2019–20 marks the third year of delivery. The project has resulted in two thirds of pupils increasing their reading ages. Over a third of pupils who increased their reading age recorded an increase of two years or more.

## Discovery Days

University of Nottingham

Discovery Days give both KS1 and KS2 pupils the opportunity to visit a university campus, meet current students and take part in engaging activities. This enables them to learn more about university life and begin to consider their aspirations for the future. The Discovery Days project has been running for over five years and has been instrumental in increasing awareness and understanding of higher education, engaging children in learning and raising aspirations for the future. Evaluation data collected in 2018–2019 indicated that taking part in a Discovery Day increased: A) awareness and understanding of higher education in 89% of classes, B) pupils' ability to link HE with the concepts of university life, freedom of choice, learning and enjoyment and C) aspiration to higher education in 50% of classes.

## The Access Project

Education is not a level playing field. Young people from low socio-economic backgrounds are six times less likely to attend 'top' universities in comparison to wealthier peers (OFS data 2020). The Access Project (TAP) provides bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds with personalised tuition, and in-school support, to help them get into top third universities. TAP's unique dual programme boosts attainment through one-to-one sessions with trained tutor, so that students get the grades they need. The charity's University Access Officers (UAOs), based in school, develop students' belief in their abilities through mentoring and guide them through the university application process. TAP's programme runs from GCSE to A-Level and is proven to improve students' grades. The latest UCAS figures for 2018/2019 show that TAP students are four times as likely to go to a top university than peers from similar backgrounds.

## York Students in Schools GCSE Tutoring Project

University of York

York Students in Schools GCSE Tutors are trained student volunteers from the University of York. They provide tutoring in GCSE Maths and English to pupils who wouldn't otherwise be able to access the support. They are helping to boost attainment and raise aspirations of learners. Over three years the scheme has doubled in size, with 180 pupils at four secondary schools benefitting. The scheme has received fantastic praise from the pupils, volunteers and teachers involved and the evaluation shows that tutoring is having an impact on attainment. Last year Maths tutees' attainment improved by an entire grade between their mock and actual GCSE exams. Alongside attainment, the evaluation shows it is boosting learners' confidence, developing their study skills and improving attitudes to learning.

# NEON Widening Access Initiative (Retention and Progression) Award

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## GO Wales

Cardiff University

GO Wales: Achieve through Work Experience is part-financed by the European Social Fund by the Welsh Government and operates pan-Wales. The GO Wales team helps students who, because of their circumstances or needs, find it difficult to access work experience and who need more support than they can get from embedded employability provision and other initiatives that are available to all students within the University. The team work with students from disadvantaged backgrounds and meet the students on an individual basis to support them. They then source flexible work experience placements ranging from 3 to 30 days, to fit in with study and circumstances. The adviser continues to work with the student to ensure they get the most out of the opportunity by setting objectives beforehand and meeting them afterwards to ensure they reflect on and learn from the experience.

## Transitions Team

Lancaster University

The Lancaster University Transitions Team supports and empowers students from widening participation backgrounds throughout their university journeys. They offer a suite of pastoral provision supports approximately 500 of the University's most vulnerable students every year, including care leavers, carers, estranged students and disabled students. The Transitions Team offers holistic support spanning the whole student lifecycle. This includes the Wellbeing Programme which comprises of Tea and Chat, Wellbeing Walks, and Wellbeing Events with the aim of fostering a sense of belonging and allowing students to connect with others. Tailored support including one to one meetings and bursaries are available to Care Leavers, student Carers, and Estranged students. The team works alongside the Counselling, Disability, Funding and Accommodation services and academic departments to provide holistic and co-ordinated support.

## Peer Support

The University of Manchester

Transitioning to University can leave students feeling isolated, especially at large institutions like Manchester. The University of Manchester have used their size, one of their challenges, as a lever for change by empowering students to support their peers on an unprecedented scale through their Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) programme, which has helped improve satisfaction, employability and degree outcomes. The PASS programme means that Manchester is the only university nationally to offer a programme of peer support to every first-year undergraduate student on an opt-out basis – made possible by the culture of collegiality they have cultivated amongst their student and staff body. As a result, they have over 800 student PASS Leaders volunteering weekly to design PASS sessions based on the needs of their attendees.

## We Care Team

University of Sunderland

The We Care Team provide tailored support for all estranged students. By engaging directly with estranged students, they have implemented a holistic support package which has had a significant positive impact on retention rates as well as student satisfaction and wellbeing. The team focused on four areas that, according to research, estranged students needed the most support; Finance, Accommodation, Mental health & wellbeing and Outreach & transition. The team identified and engaged directly with estranged students to determine what they feel to be 'high priority' then reflected this in the team's action plan. They introduced personalised support for each student, including a £2,000 bursary and a single point of contact, meaning that students had a relationship built on trust. They also provide a bespoke support package based on each student's individual needs, such as help moving in, applying for part time work.

# NEON Widening Access Partnership Award

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## Explore University

Staffordshire University

Explore University is a unique collaborative primary project run jointly between Harper Adams University, Keele University, Staffordshire University and the University of Wolverhampton. Each of the universities work with two local primary schools which fall under Widening Participation categories. Overall, the project involves eight primary schools located in Staffordshire, Shropshire and West Midlands. Explore University aims to raise the aspirations of young pupils in Years 5 and 6 through multiple interventions and exposure to higher education. Starting in Year 5, pupils engage with four interventions over a two-year period which introduces them to higher education and encourages them to think about potential careers. Pupils visit a university campus in both year 5 and 6, during which they experience subject tasters and get an idea of university life. Explore University has allowed the university partners to reach a larger number of pupils than would have been possible otherwise. Through the sharing of resources, this project has also allowed the partners to engage in sustained primary outreach work which is often not considered an operational priority in the sector.

## Higher Education Progression Partnership (Hepp)

The Higher Education Progression Partnership is a widening participation organisation jointly funded by The University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University. Established in 2011 it provides impartial advice and guidance to stakeholder organisations and individuals working with primary aged students through to adult learner groups. Hepp works proactively across the Sheffield City Region through face to face delivery in all schools, as a convener of partnership groups to tackle specific under-representation and as a host of a digital platform (HeppHUB) for resources, advice and guidance for all stakeholders. Last year Hepp worked directly with 22,000 secondary school pupils and delivered over 750 hours of activities. Hepp categorise schools according to region and need to ensure that schools with the highest number of learners in POLAR 4 Q1/2 receive the most face to face provision.

## The University of Nottingham and IntoUniversity

National education charity IntoUniversity, and the University of Nottingham, have been working together for the past eight years to provide local learning centres in Nottingham, supporting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to gain a university place or another chosen aspiration. IntoUniversity operates a centre-based model and the innovative programme includes after-school academic support sessions that help young people to become curious and independent learners; the FOCUS programme which opens young people's minds to the power of education to transform their lives; and the Mentoring programme which provides students with one-to-one support from a role model who can offer invaluable guidance. This multifaceted partnership includes funding, volunteering and bespoke student opportunities. The charity has provided volunteering opportunities for over 800 students and staff at the University to support the next generation to achieve; and the university has provided tailored opportunities for IntoUniversity students, including bursaries.

# NEON School or College Widening Access Award

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## Bodmin College, The William Clift Academy

The Aspiration Programme at Bodmin College; The William Clift Academy, has impacted massively across all ages through forging excellent links with HE and workplace providers, engaging alumni, the wider community and communicating opportunities effectively to students and parents; this has modelled positive aspirations, resulting in increased student engagement and consequently, social mobility. Bodmin College has addressed the issue of raising aspirations in a unique and innovative way by appointing an aspirations coordinator in 2014. Momentum generated by the aspirations coordinator cascaded throughout the whole college with more staff appointed. There was a real need for this role in Bodmin with its social deprivation demographic; most students are first generation to university being in a town in the lowest quintile of access to HE (HEFC), FSM numbers are above national average and a third of students are Pupil Premium. Aspirations were low, students tended to apply to mainly local universities or not at all. There were few links with apprenticeship providers and partnerships with Higher Education needed.

## Castleford Academy

Castleford Academy is a school in Wakefield, West Yorkshire. They recently achieved QiC gold award for their careers provision and strive to ensure their pupils achieve excellence to prepare them for the world beyond their academy. A key principle for the school is 'achieving excellence for all'. This encapsulates their career provisions, so all their pupils achieve excellence academically, and build character skills for future FE/HE studies, and career. For many years, Castleford Academy has worked with HE providers (HEPs) through projects e.g. University of Leeds Thomas Transition Programme and via the Wakefield Learning Community WP group. Through Go Higher West Yorkshire (GHWY) they have expanded this to include HE activities across all year groups e.g. careers fairs involving HEPs. Links with FE are well established, with annual Taster Days at local colleges and FE contribution to assemblies. Castleford Academy also has strong relationships with the council and employers.

## Southmoor Academy

Southmoor Academy is a co-educational 11-18 school, serving around 1200 pupils in the Grangetown area of Sunderland, Tyne and Wear. Southmoor converted to an Academy in 2012 and is part of the Southmoor Multi Academy Trust along with Sandhill View Academy. The Sixth Form at Southmoor Academy was set up with the explicit aim of increasing uptake of selective university places in Sunderland. So far, 82% of leavers have progressed to university, including one-third of students attending highly selective institutions. This year, three students have been offered places at Oxford University. Southmoor's advocacy has increased exponentially in the past two years, sharing best practice with the wider community and empowering other schools to tackle the challenge of social mobility and a culture of low aspirations. As of 2017, Southmoor became OxNet's (OxNet is an access initiative run collaboratively between participating colleges at the University of Oxford, other HE institutions across the UK and schools) first hub school in the North East. From a hub which consisted of only 4 schools, Southmoor now collaborates with 17 Sixth Forms and Colleges, and 6 Primary Schools.

# NEON Student of the Year Award

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## Christine Browne

King's College London

Chrissie Browne is a mature Traveller student at King's College London. Since September 2018, Chrissie has worked tirelessly to improve the widening participation work at the university for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) students. At that point, there was no set programme or a clear direction. However, Chrissie was not deterred, she attended conferences and made links with third-sector organisations. These connections led to her hosting bespoke visits for students and families. She also created a series of videos, highlighting the experiences of Travellers who had been to university, showcasing role models that already existed from those communities. However, long-term sustained projects are the most effective way to improve access to university. Chrissie therefore worked with King's pre-existing post-16 programmes to ensure GRT students are prioritised for places. In addition to this, Chrissie created a programme for year 6 learners, working with Irish Travellers in one school to enhance their research skills. She aims to develop this further and work with year 7 students next year, helping students with the transition to secondary school. This work has been completed by Chrissie whilst completing a Nutrition and Dietetics degree.

## Declan McLoughlin

Queen Mary University of London

Declan a young carer from a POLAR4 and IMD Q2 household in rural Lincolnshire with an annual income of c. £10,000 and a defined learning need, volunteers as a WP ambassador, Student Adviser in Queen Mary's Legal Advice Centre and has founded a charity providing opportunities for students in rural England. s a Pathways to Law ambassador, Declan openly shares his own experiences, demonstrating that barriers can be overcome. Declan has had a positive impact on the legal situations of vulnerable members of Queen Mary's local community. He worked more cases for the local community than is required and stayed on in the face of the Covid-19 crisis to ensure the most vulnerable local residents got the help they needed before the lockdown. Declan has also set up a charity - Channels - which will provide young people in rural England access to opportunities in elite professions as easily as if they grew up in London.

## Margaret Ojerinde

University of Liverpool

Margaret Ojerinde progressed into university after leaving local authority care and has thrived as an undergraduate at the University of Liverpool. Despite the troubled and traumatic time she spent in care, Margaret was able to make a successful transition into higher education and has excelled within her studies and is on track for a first-class degree within Law. As well as excelling within academia Margaret has also committed her time whilst at university to helping other young people who are attempting to make the transition from care into university. Since becoming a Student Advocate with the Widening Participation and Outreach team at Liverpool, Margaret has dedicated her time to supporting care experienced young people. She has been a role model, inspiring care experienced children to use their time in education to help them to achieve their potential and promote the opportunities that university can provide. Margaret has travelled across the Northwest to work with schools, colleges and Local Authorities to engage with children currently in the care system and recent care leavers. By reaching out to these young people she has been able to raise their aspirations towards university and encourage them to continue with their education.



# NEON Contribution to Widening Access Award

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## Ant Sutcliffe

Higher Horizons  
(Keele University)

Ant Sutcliffe was raised by his single mother in a working-class family. Ant secured a place at Keele University, becoming the first person in his family to access both post-16 and post-18 study. Needing to work while at university, he became a Student Ambassador and fell in love with widening access work. He wanted to help other young people like him – those who had applied to university despite having no family history of higher education, and who now needed help to navigate the higher education system. Ant had a job interview at Keele University just an hour after his final university exam in 2008 - and was successful in getting the role. He has worked in widening access ever since and is now Head of Department. Ant has worked at all levels in widening access, from delivery to strategic leadership. Ant is extremely generous with his knowledge and expertise, mentoring new widening access practitioners within his teams, advising other Heads of Uni Connect programmes who are new to this area of work, sitting on the steering groups for several local and national initiatives, lobbying the OfS over national policy, and regularly delivering best practice sessions at national conferences.

## Enam Haque

The University of Manchester

Dr Enam Haque is Widening Participation lead and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion co-lead for the MBChB programme in The University of Manchester. He founded the National Medical Schools Widening Participation Forum and sits on the committee of Diversity in Medicine and Health. Enam has been the leading force behind the university's 1) Discover Medicine days aimed at year 12. 2) Scrubs days aimed at year 11. 3) Bringing in primary school pupils for a 2-hour exploration of healthcare roles. 4) Doctors in Schools, a programme encouraging doctors to give motivational talks to pupils in Years 7-11. 5) The Royal College of General Practitioners work placement scheme in Greater Manchester. Feedback from Enam's events is overwhelmingly positive. At the most recent Scrubs day, 49 pupils attended from eight schools and 98% of attendees said they were more likely to consider going to university after attending the event. Enam involves students in everything he does and acts as a great role model, being from a WP background himself.

## Peter Riley

Manchester Metropolitan  
University

Peter Riley is Head of Widening Participation at Manchester Metropolitan University. He has worked in widening participation for over 15 years and is dedicated about equality of opportunity – making a significant contribution within the education sector in working towards this goal. From Aimhigher Co-ordinator to Manager, Peter was responsible for developing and delivering a range of initiatives intended to increase progression of under-represented groups into HE and worked strategically to develop the University's Access Agreements. Following the end of Aimhigher, he was instrumental in ensuring WP pupils continued to benefit from university-delivered outreach activity. In 2011 he established Manchester Higher, which owes much of its success to Peter's experience and commitment to partnership working and innovative practice. Manchester Higher later evolved into Greater Manchester Higher. Peter worked collaboratively with neighbouring universities to provide a comprehensive offer to this region, helping to create the NCOP, Higher Horizons. Peter has willingly taken on various leadership roles to ensure Greater Manchester addresses educational barriers, at both institutional and regional levels. He has a deep understanding of educational disadvantage and is consistently forward-thinking and creative in the work he leads.

# NEON Higher Education Institution of the Year Award

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## University of Derby

The University of Derby promise is that 'higher education should be equitable, inclusive and open to all who have the ambition and desire to learn and progress'. Social mobility is one of their strategic priorities – evidenced by a consistently strong record in widening access to higher education, and their leadership of national programmes designed to improve the life chances of people across their region. In 2018-19, 24.3% of young entrants (4th in UK) and 28.3% of mature entrants at Derby (3rd in UK) were from low participation neighbourhoods. For the latter, they have bucked the national decline by increasing head count numbers by 63% since 2015-16 to provide vital opportunities for people to retrain and succeed. The university is proud to lead the Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme (\*DANCOP) – a partnership of institutions working to raise the aspirations of young people and help them to consider their futures. They also drive social mobility through leading the Derby Opportunity Area. This vital partnership seeks to close social mobility gaps by increasing the number of children in Derby achieving a good level of development, improved attainment in schools and benefiting from a broad range of experiences.



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**To contact NEON email:  
[NEON@londonhigher.co.uk](mailto:NEON@londonhigher.co.uk)**

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