



# The NEON Awards 2021 Nominees

10 June 2021





## Awards

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# Welcome to the NEON Awards 2021

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

The following pages demonstrate the outstanding work carried out by the nominees. With over 100 nominations, shortlisting was a difficult process, and it has highlighted the excellent work that is being carried out by both institutions and individuals across the UK.

With the impact of Covid-19 having an immense effect upon widening access to higher education, it is vital to push our work forward to ensure learners are able to both enter, and succeed within, higher education. The NEON Awards provide a platform to celebrate the success of this work and the transformative power that higher education can have on the lives of learners. We are therefore thrilled to welcome you all to today's event.

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.



**Professor Graeme Atherton**  
Director, NEON

# NEON Widening Access Initiative (Outreach) Award

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## IntoUniversity

IntoUniversity provides local learning centres where young people are inspired to achieve. At each local centre IntoUniversity offers an innovative programme that supports young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to attain either a university place or another chosen aspiration. IntoUniversity has grown rapidly, from a stand-alone centre in 2007 to a national network of 34 centres in 16 cities and towns across the UK. The charity has achieved a number of key milestones over the past 17 years, including the development of a multi-stranded, effective, targeted and pastoral programme and the development of a sustainable model for scaling up a neighbourhood service into a network of centres that are locally engaged, but benefit from the strength that comes from the wider charity.

## Mini Medics

University of Sunderland

Mini Medics is a suite of interactive outreach activities designed to engage young people from Early Years to Year 11. These hands-on activities raise aspirations and awareness of medicine as a career route for pupils from a range of backgrounds. The programme also supports those hoping to progress into medical schools – and ultimately the profession. The University committed to recruiting students from widening participation cohorts. A target of 15% widening participation students was set, with the School ultimately attracting 25% in its first cohort. The Mini Medics activity data illustrates the impact the outreach team has had on pupils, raising their aspirations and awareness of medicine as a career. The team has engaged with parents/carers, and a range of pupils from schools in low participation neighbourhoods. The activities have ensured pupils are aware of the role of doctors in their own communities, the breadth of their profession, the personal qualities and skills required, as well as the qualifications needed.

## Orbyts

University College London

Orbyts projects are a partnership between schools and PhD researchers. Its founding principle is to target a widening participation audience, raising aspirations and scientific literacy by enabling secondary school pupils to engage with high quality research projects by partnering with a PhD researcher as a role model and mentor. Orbyts has enhanced the researcher-in-schools model successfully by emphasising the pupil-PhD mentor relationship model as well as the cutting-edge quality of the research. Numerous journal papers have been written with school pupils as co-authors thanks to their original research findings. Since 2016 the team have expanded our geographical reach and projects, and are always interested in partnering with other institutions to continue to offer these STEM opportunities to pupils. As a result, Orbyts is having a profound impact on the inclusivity of physics in partner schools. Schools where Orbyts partners with GCSE students report 100%+ increases in girls taking A-level physics. Our 2019-20 cohort self-identified from more than 30 ethnicities and the 11 Orbyts scientific publications have three times higher percentages of BAME authors than currently active in professional academic physics.

# NEON Widening Access Initiative (Retention & Progression) Award

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## First Generation Scholarship Programme

Manchester Metropolitan  
University

First Generation Scholarship Programme offers a complete journey of support for young people from Greater Manchester whose parents have no direct experience of higher education. It delivers practical support and application guidance to Year 12 and 13 students to help them access and transition to university. Those who progress to Manchester Metropolitan University receive a bursary of £1000 in their first year, and continued support throughout their studies. In addition to providing a support network, mentorship and connections, the programme aims to give students the self-belief to know that university is a place where they will be accepted, thrive and find the confidence to follow their ambitions. The result is a programme that breaks down barriers before, during and after university. First Generation students are outperforming all other students at the university in terms of timely progression. For the 2018 entrants, 90% entering at level 4 successfully progressed to their second year in 2019 (85% for the University as a whole), and 95.6% of them subsequently progressed from Level 5 to Level 6.

## Funded Internship Scheme

University of East London

University of East London has developed its internship provision to support the success of over 120 underrepresented student groups a year in accessing opportunities to positively impact on retention and progression into graduate employability. The internship focuses on providing pastoral and employability support through career coaching, mentoring, accessing quality internships, and after-care to develop confidence and competencies for the graduate market. Retention rates have risen to up to 97% for participants who have accessed the scheme and graduate employability has seen an uplift with 75% moving into highly skilled employment. The university uses robust evaluation and feedback mechanisms including employers and students to continue to tailor the provision to meet the needs of employers and ensure access of opportunity and success to students.

## HE Creative Arts Media Make-Up Industry Collaboration

University Centre Leeds  
(Leeds City College)

The HE Creative Arts Media Make-Up Industry Collaboration project is one that enables work related learning and industry connections from the first week of study through to graduation and beyond. It addresses the challenges students from underrepresented groups face in accessing and benefitting from work experience and industry networks within creative industries, and specifically challenges underrepresentation in the screen industries. The project demonstrates impact on retention and progression through increases in student motivation, engagement, and employability as a result of inclusive access to first hand workplace experience and mentoring from industry professionals. The projects extensive industry links provide unique opportunities for the application of knowledge, skills development, and networking; distributed equally across all students.

# NEON Widening Access Partnership Award

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## The Urban Scholars Programme Partnership

Brunel University London  
& Moody's Foundation

The Urban Scholars Programme is a unique three year sustained widening access intervention programme for secondary school students. Many of them come from challenging backgrounds where their talents may not lead to successful examination results and high aspirations/expectations. Students attend Saturday sessions once a month, evening enrichment sessions and off campus visits. When asked, are you confident in your ability to achieve your goals? 44% of Scholars said yes pre-programme entry, rising to 81% after 3 years. Moody's external 'impact genome' evaluations have awarded the programme an efficacy rate of 84% and 100% in the last two years. Moody's is a global integrated risk assessment firm whose approach to corporate social responsibility is to empower people to create a better future – for themselves, their communities, and the environment. The Urban Scholars Programme is a central component of Brunel University London's Widening Access and Participation Strategy.

## Oldham Parent Power Project

Greater Manchester Higher

Parent Power has engaged with 53 parents of high achieving learners from five Oldham schools. The team have recruited parent leads who have represented the project at international conferences, campaigns and via local and national media. They have received coverage from BBC Radio, the Guardian and the Careers Network. The parents meet once every 6 weeks to campaign on issues of educational inequality, such as the inaccessibility of open days. They have received training on higher education, student finance, mental health, Oxbridge, and HEI access. They have won bespoke open days to universities, organised events with local political figures, and launched a Parent Power podcast, providing a parent voice on key topics such as resilience and creative thinking.

## University of Leeds and IntoUniversity

National education charity IntoUniversity, and the University of Leeds have been working together since 2014 to provide local learning centres in Leeds. The partnership aims to tackle the problem of educational underachievement by supporting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve a university place or another chosen aspiration. Students aged 7-18 participate in a holistic programme of support which consists of: after-school Academic Support which provides a safe and quiet place for students to study; the FOCUS programme which is designed to inspire students to envisage a world of learning and future careers; and the Mentoring programme which pairs students with undergraduates and professionals who act as motivating role models. In 2019/20 87% of Leeds South students reported they were working better at school as a result of IntoUniversity's support and 78% of Leeds East students reported improved school grades as a result of Academic Support. Since 2014, over 8000 students in Leeds have been supported to achieve their potential, creating a tradition of Higher Education in their communities.

# NEON School or College Widening Access Award

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## Barnsley College

Barnsley College is a large tertiary college serving Barnsley and surrounding areas in South Yorkshire. The college is the main provider of post-16 education and the destination for 80% of school leavers in the town and has a large cohort (over 1,700) of eligible students. It is committed to being actively involved in the economic, social and cultural development of its community through collaborative partnership working, innovative engagement and creation of practical opportunities for the communities it serves. The college has seen an increase in students applying to higher education and Russell Group universities. There have been 170 more UCAS applications compared to this time last year, including an increased number of BTEC students being accepted at Russell Group universities. The total number of students applied to higher education (19/20) was 785, including 88 acceptances from Russell Group.

## Kings College, Guildford

Kings College, Guildford is a secondary school with a high proportion of students that meet widening participation and outreach criteria. The leaders, staff, and community work hard to ensure students get opportunities to progress academically and support them to aspire to their chosen future pathway. Through their partnership with the University of Surrey and their 'Finding Our Futures' programme they are able to offer students sustained and embedded aspirations activities that allow students and their families opportunities to experience degree subjects, meet students from the university and engage in cultural activities. All of this ensures, alongside their teaching and learning, that students see higher education as an option and puts access at the heart of the school.

## The Sheffield College

The Sheffield College is a general Further Education College in the Sheffield City Region, providing high quality academic, technical and vocational training to enhance qualifications, skills and employability across the region. It has been a significant partner, contributor and influencer of widening access programmes over many years, including AimHigher, NNCO and Uni Connect (HeppSY). In partnership with HeppSY the college has delivered to date (20/21) 76 distinct activities and engaged with 354 unique students. In response to Covid, the college is a founding member of a regional skills partnership developed to identify positive and practical actions, which can impact the most disadvantaged young people and adults in the region as they enter the post-18 system through education or work.

# NEON Student of the Year Award

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## Christopher Cooper

University of York

Christopher is an outstanding individual who has used his own life experience and challenges to access higher education to make a change for his peers by founding the Community Interest Company, Role Models of Yorkshire. Their Future Leaders Programme – which reached over 100,000 people – aims to support school students in lower socio-economic areas who may find their mainstream school system challenging, raising their aspirations to discover their leadership potential through a variety of engaging sessions aimed at raising attention to the importance of education and positive role models in young peoples' lives. Role Models of Yorkshire growth and development is testament to Chris's work ethic and drive – always positive, and always looking to take the next challenge in his stride. Chris is hugely inspirational and has used his innovation to introduce a variety of widening access initiatives to inspire young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## Shuab Gamote

Manchester Metropolitan University

Shuab has shown an outstanding level of commitment to widening access activity through the voluntary and official roles he has undertaken – most notably through the First Generation Programme and the BAME Ambassador Scheme. He is a selfless individual driven by the desire to enable others to achieve their goals, which makes him a natural leader. In supplementing the University's approach to race equity and decolonisation, Shuab's efforts have provided scrutiny of white leaders, whilst finding the appropriate place for students to contribute and find the confidence to have public conversations about the issues they face. Shuab has found two innovative ways to further the University's attempt to address the awarding disparities for BAME students and has been the single most important factor in making the BAME Ambassador project a success. He has achieved so much in his time as a student at the University, and the impact he has had is influencing real and effective change.

## Yasmin Haque

University of East London

Yasmin embodies the University of East London's commitment of inclusiveness and widening access to university. Combining the knowledge gained from her studies, with a practical understanding of the barriers that many people from widening participation (WP) backgrounds face when accessing Higher Education, Yasmin has consistently supported the work of the WP team throughout the four years of her studies. She is their longest serving Curriculum Ambassador. In previous years, Yasmin has been instrumental in delivering presentations and workshops on campus and in local schools/colleges. This academic year, Yasmin has co-designed and delivered webinars including 'Coping and revising effectively during Ramadan', 'Time management' and 'Critical thinking', all of which have been well received by the young learners in attendance, which is testament to the knowledge, understanding and empathy she consistently brings to her practice. Yasmin's resilience and perseverance has made her an inspirational role model to mature learners considering Higher Education from non-traditional backgrounds.

# NEON Outstanding Contribution to Widening Access Award

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## Hollie Baker

University of Surrey

Hollie is committed to creating a fairer society. She has been a member of the Widening Participation & Outreach Team at the University of Surrey for the last eight years and has greatly influenced the direction and strategy of the outreach initiatives delivered locally, developing close connections with schools, colleges, and communities, whilst sharing best practice with colleagues regionally and nationally. She is dedicated to raising aspirations and increasing opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and is proud to share her knowledge and ideas whilst willing to learn from community and school leaders. Over the past 12+ months, she has demonstrated exceptional leadership qualities in addressing societal issues presented by the Covid-19 pandemic which have received acclaim locally and from across the sector. Her passion for widening access goes beyond her professional capacity through her trustee work with Action for Carers Surrey in addition to contributing to sector research and literature. She embodies the ethos of widening participation and is a credit and asset to the sector.

## Abigail Harrison Moore

University of Leeds

Abigail is Professor of Art History and Museum Studies who has dedicated her 26 years of work at the University of Leeds to ensuring that every young person can find their subject and challenging the rhetoric and educational systems that have increasingly blocked young people from diverse backgrounds imagining a creative future. She has helped develop the school curriculum, written widely on the educational challenges for young people from low social and economic groups, spoken in parliament, and developed and delivered a range of successful, sustained, collaborative projects that aim to address educational inequalities, access to the arts and young people's confidence, including the University's EPQ programme, Discover ARTiculation Challenge, Discovery Days and Plan, Provide, Prepare.

## Wendy Price

University of Sunderland

Wendy has worked in the sector for over 20 years and for the most part, in management level roles with direct responsibility for widening access and participation. Wendy cares passionately about offering those from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity and confidence to embark on a journey into higher education. Wendy empowers the students she works with, building relationships which last beyond the outreach phase; she leads a team who currently support 178 care-experienced and estranged students and many of these relationships form an important (and often the only) constant for these students throughout their time at university, graduation and beyond. Wendy's innovative implementation of support schemes such as 'We Care' (based on valuable input from students with experience of being in care or estranged) has been noted and shared as best practice by regional partners such as North East Raising Aspiration (NERAP), national organisations such as the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL), and even by the Office for Students (OfS).

# NEON Higher Education Institution of the Year Award

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## Lancaster University

Lancaster University is an institution associated with academic excellence. The University has established itself as a top 10 institution in all UK league tables and has a long-standing commitment to widening access. Their motto is 'Truth Lies Open to All' is reflective of an institutional commitment towards offering access to a high-quality education for all. The institution's Chancellor (Alan Milburn) is the former Chair of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission and his involvement with the University is a further reflection of their commitment to social justice. Their institutional commitment to supporting students from under-represented backgrounds is reflected through their 'Student Lifecycle' approach to widening access in which they work to support the access, transition, success and progression of widening participation students at each point in their educational journey.

## University Centre Leeds

University Centre Leeds (UCLeeds) are committed to widening access, adopting collaborative, multi-department, approaches to making a difference throughout the whole of the student lifecycle. UCLeeds perform consistently well in improving access for those from underrepresented group as a result of a progressive programme of outreach activities that support young people to make informed choices, raise/maintain aspirations, and support attainment at key stage 4, FE and HE. The modest Widening Participation and Outreach Team have had demonstrable positive impact on widening access to higher education and continue to work tirelessly with the Student Support Team to support students in transition to HE, supporting students in continuation and attainment, and in supporting students in their progression and transition from student into graduate employment. Of the current cohort, 45.01% of students are from BAME groups, up from 19% in 2013-14, and above sector average. 64.8% are from IMD quintiles 1 or 2, up from 33% in 2013-14 and 46% in 2017-18. 58% are mature students, above sector average. Increases have been a response of deliberate steps taken to increase accessibility, including course timetabling and methods of delivery that allow for other commitments such as work or parenting, and early outreach and support to develop the skills and confidence to succeed.

## University of Southampton

The University of Southampton's mission is to change the world for the better. To support this aim, they have created a fair access and participation strategy - for a fairer future. The University of Southampton believe that to make real positive change, students from socially diverse backgrounds need to be an integral part of their community, so they can learn from their experiences, perspectives, and views. To reach their own potential, they have to help others reach theirs. To achieve this, the University of Southampton build their work on the principles of an institutional effort and commitment; a genuine partnership with students through every layer of their work; a robust evidence approach based on policy, theory and practice and joining up the local, national, digital and international spaces for social progress. Over the last five years 95% of students who participated in Access to Southampton (all of whom come from an under represented category) achieved a 1st or upper second-class award versus 84% in the general population.

# Lifetime Achievement Award

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Emily Hughes was instrumental in creating Kingston University's comprehensive and impactful KU Cares programme, which provides tailored support for care-experienced students, young adult carers, estranged students and asylum seekers. Emily was an advocate and campaigner for students facing significant challenges to access and success within higher education. Under her leadership, KU Cares supported hundreds of young people from marginalised groups to achieve their academic and career ambitions.

Emily was committed to continuous improvement and drove forward several innovative developments including the introduction of sanctuary scholarships, academic staff development, an enhanced graduation package and annual paid work placements for KU Cares students. She ensured that KU Cares support featured prominently in communications to prospective and current students, and as a result the number of students supported through the scheme increased from just 4 in 2006, to over 260 in the current year.

Emily faced her devastating cancer diagnosis with characteristic strength and positivity. She remained committed to her work until the very end of her life and continued to share her expertise through conference presentations and contributions to papers and reports. Following her untimely death at the age of just 35, the testimonials the University continues to receive from those who knew and worked with Emily, including her former students, are evidence of the enduring impact and legacy of her work.

## **Jenni Woods MBE**

Head of Access, Participation  
and Inclusion, Kingston University



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